

Context Oriented Theatre:

**A Theatre-Based Approach to Mindfulness;
a Mindfulness-Based Approach to Theatre.**

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“All there is, is No-thing Being Everything and what appears as part of that everything is the belief and experience of being a separate self — an apparent individual with its own free will, choice and ability to act. This happening is uniquely human and is called self-consciousness. To most people it is the reality.”

Tony Parsons (2006)

*“To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.”*

Macbeth Act 5, scene 5, 19–28

Abstract

Theatre is ontologically concomitant with our illusion of separation and the suffering that arises from this is the source of all drama. The question therefore arises whether theatre might have something to do with healing us of this illusion.

This thesis introduces a third orthogonal input into the funnel of the hourglass which Maex (n.d.) has used as a metaphor for Mindfulness-Based Approaches to Health (MBA) - where the fields of Buddhism and Science meet. Aspects from the field of theatre and drama are fed into the mix in order to make the case that theatre and mindfulness are fundamentally related and that theatre practices can augment MBA curricula and teacher training as additional skillful means or/and as an approach in and of itself.

This approach, called Context Oriented Theatre (COT), is a whole systems approach that uses the distributed aesthetic space of the stage to orient attention towards the context rather than just the content of experience. It works on the premise that theatre is an externalization of consciousness; different modes of theatre represent different metaphors of consciousness; by participating in these different modes we experience different kinds of consciousness and certain modes of theatre are conducive to mindfulness and can lead to what is variously called proprioception of thought, meta-awareness or meta-cognitive insight.

Content

Declaration	2
Acknowledgments	4
Abstract	5
Content	6
1. Mindfulness and Theatre	7
1.1. Introduction	7
1.2. Structure and Process	10
1.3. Key Terminology	11
1.4. Context Oriented Theatre: Background, Premise and Poetics	13
2. Review of the literature	19
2.1. Mindfulness through theatre	20
2.2. Life as drama	22
2.3. Theatre as a metaphor of mind	23
2.4. Conclusion	26
3. Orthogonal Rotation	27
3.1. Theatre through mindfulness	27
3.2. Drama as life	32
3.3. Mindfulness as a metaphor of theatre	36
3.4. Conclusion	39
4. In Practice	41
4.1. Mindfulness as theatre	42
4.2. Working with the drama of life	47
4.3. Metaphors of mindfulness	50
4.4. Conclusion	55
5. References	57

1. Mindfulness and Theatre

1.1 Introduction

“The theatre is the state, the place, the point, where one can apprehend the human anatomy; with the human anatomy, one can heal and direct life.”

Anton Artaud (cited in Schechner, 2002)

“Theatre awakens the process of consciousness previously operating in a sort of unaware, automatic pilot mode, and it reveals the complex location of consciousness within the materialist spectrum.”

Demastes (2002, p.94)

The audience gathers in the auditorium, often chattering expectantly. They take their seat and the lights dim and silence falls. In the darkness eyes gaze soft and open on what is about to appear in a space somewhere in front, and at the same time a subtle awareness arises of a body sitting in the darkness, as the individuals that make up the audience gather themselves inwardly. A moment later a light falls on the stage and the whole attention of the crowd is concentrated with curiosity on the spectacle about to unfold.

This description of the way an audience traditionally gathers itself for a theatre experience is somewhat similar to the way we take our seat and gather ourselves ready to practice mindfulness meditation. As in mindfulness we purposefully pay attention to events unfolding on a stage which, although depicting various periods in time and locations in space, are all happening very much ‘live’ and in the present moment. We do so in a way that calls for a ‘*suspension of distraction*’ (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p.569) where we are “*no longer absorbed in life’s usual preoccupations and mind states*”. We purposefully remove ourselves from the drama of life where “*everything is competing for our attention, assaulting our senses and our minds*” to rest our attention on the drama occurring right here right now on the stage of awareness.

The comparison between theatre and mindfulness might well end there and usually does on casual inspection. This is because theatre and film, television and video games have used drama, more often than not, as something that sweeps us up and takes us away from ourselves: precisely the opposite intention to mindfulness, which gently and persistently ‘*leads us back to our own door*’ (Kabat-Zinn, 2008) to witness in the moment and without judgement the drama that unfolds in the simple process of being.

But theatre, since it was first mentioned with any detail in written history (Aristotle's Poetics, circa 400BC), has had higher aspirations quite consistent with the almost contemporaneous Buddhist practice of Mindfulness. What Singh points out about mindfulness meditation could equally be said about theatre. *"[It] has always been more than a psychological construct that mediates or moderates human behaviour... At its core it is about gaining insight into the nature of our own minds."* (Singh et al cited in Singh 2010, p.3).

That theatre can be an approach to mindfulness is the basic proposal of this thesis. It is not simply an attempt to graft a set of theatre exercises or techniques onto the curriculum of a Mindfulness Based Approach to Health course. Rather, it is making tentative steps towards defining a new theatre approach which is informed and has at its core the same functions as a Mindfulness Based Approach to Health, and which can contribute to the 'skilful means' by which practitioners teach MBA's across all curricula.

A case will be made for a theatre based approach to mindfulness and a mindfulness based approach to theatre by drawing on the references to theatre and drama already occurring in the Mindfulness Based Approaches to Health (MBA's) literature. The themes that emerge from this review of the literature will provide a framework within which to draw parallels between mindfulness and the theatre of innovative practitioners of the last century and drawing also on my own experience working in applied and experimental theatre for the last twenty years.

Before this perhaps a case needs to be made for why we need a mindfulness based approach to theatre and a theatre based approach to mindfulness. Weber states *"If we remain spectators/viewers , if we stay where we are – in front of the television – the catastrophes will always stay outside, we will always be 'objects' for a 'subject' – this is the implicit promise of the medium."*(cited in Lehmann, 2006, p.184). Lehmann uses this quote to illustrate how a *'separation of the event from the perception of the event'* has occurred through our constant exposure to screen media and entertainment on demand, reducing the act of communication to an exchange of information leading to an erosion of the sense of being connected to others.

"Theatre can only respond to this with a politics of perception, which could at the same time be called an aesthetic of responsibility or (response-ability). Instead of the deceptively comforting duality of here and there, inside and outside, it can move

the mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images into the centre and thus make visible the broken thread between personal experience and perception." (Lehmann, 2006, p.184)

The catastrophes *out there* that Watson mentions could equally refer to *'the poignant enormity of our life experience'* (Kabat-Zinn, 1991, p.6) which mindfulness invites us to embrace. Theatre, as well as being a technology of distraction and avoidance can and must reorient our attention to enable us to dance with this *'full catastrophe'* and come to our senses and the intention here is to set out how this might be done. Proposed is an approach called Context Oriented Theatre which is described in detail with practical examples of how it can integrate theatre and mindfulness.

From the perspective of MBA's a theatre approach provides a much greater repertoire for communicating internal emotions and sensations. One of the items which the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (Baer, Smith & Allen, 2004) measures through a self-report questionnaire is the ability to label moment to moment thoughts, feelings and emotions. When Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer & Ton (2006, p.36) tested across a range of self-report questionnaires related to mindfulness, 'describing' had the highest Alpha coefficients value demonstrating better internal consistency than the other facets of mindfulness - observing, acting with awareness, non-reactivity and non-judging. This is surprising considering language is inherently dualistic and, as Baer et al acknowledge, some respected mindfulness teachers discourage labelling of sensations and emotions (Guanaratana, 2002). Theatre, however, because it is the externalization of consciousness can be considered a language of total communication which Artaud recognized had the capacity to act *"directly and profoundly upon the sensibility of the organs and create a receptive state in which all the senses interpenetrate"* (cited in Innes, 1994, p.52). In effect, theatre has the potential to enhance this facet of mindfulness so that describing uncovers insight at a level of consciousness more sublime than words can reveal. Theatre permits access to the experience and expression of meaning and sensation that words can't describe. (Brook, 1972, p58)

1.2 Structure and Process

The function of this section is to lay out the basic premise of this thesis and the process by which a case will be made for the proposals arising from this premise. Section 1.3 explains the particular use of the words Mindfulness, Theatre and Drama as used in this thesis because they are all very active sites of continual discourse. Section 1.4 describes the background, premise and poetics of Context Oriented Theatre. The function of this section is to plant a flag on the map marking the place where it is proposed that mindfulness and theatre meet. This is so that the reasoning behind the way the following sections are oriented can be understood.

Section 2 is the review of the literature. In order to ground this exploration in the field of Mindfulness Based Approaches to Health a review of the literature that contains the terms ‘Mindfulness-based’ and ‘theatre’ or ‘drama’ is the point from which the case will unfold. Admittedly, this starting point is quite a small percentage of the growing bank of papers and books containing the term, ‘mindfulness-based,’ but so vast and varied is the literature related to theatre that from this narrow standpoint we are able to discern the elements that are relevant to the relationship between both fields.

Edel Maex (n.d.) has proposed an hourglass model to describe how Mindfulness Based Approaches derives from the fields of science and Buddhism, with information passing between the two through the narrow funnel, like the transfer of information over the corpus callosum between the two hemispheres of the brain. This thesis proposes an adaptation of this analogy to link science, Buddhism and theatre, adding a third dimension to the hourglass.

While section 2 focuses closely on references to theatre and drama in literature relating to Mindfulness Based Approaches to Health, Section 3 uses the way in which theatre and drama are referred to in the literature to ‘dock’ a funnel through which to input information from the field of theatre. This requires the kind of orthogonal shift in perspective which Kabat-Zinn likens to someone living in a flatland suddenly discovering a third dimension at right angles to the other two. *“Everything opens up, although the two “old” dimensions are the same as they always were, just less confining.”* (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p.350)

This orthogonal rotation in Section 3 will aim to expand a little the field of Mindfulness Based Approaches to Health. Section 4 builds on the theory of Context Oriented Theatre set out in section 1.4, discussing where it belongs in the spectrum of theatre fields and providing some practical examples of how theatre can support mindfulness and how mindfulness can support theatre.

1.3 Key Terminology

1.3.1 Mindfulness is an approximate translation of the pali term *sati* as taught by Buddha and describe in the ancient pali text - *Satipatthana Sutta* (The Way of Mindfulness) (Silananda & Heinze, 1995). Related terms are vipassana, insight meditation, bare attention or choiceless awareness. Kabat-Zinn (Didonna 2008, p.xxix) decided on the term ‘mindfulness’ to describe the active ingredient of the eight week course he developed at the Stress Reduction Clinic of the University of Massachusetts Medicine School to treat patients with chronic pain in the 1980’s. He was inspired to do so because Nyanaponika Thera referred to it *as the heart of Buddhist meditation*. Its operational definition – “*Paying attention to the present moment on purpose and non-judgementally*” (Kabat-Zinn, 2005a) does not and cannot cover the complexity and yet utter simplicity of the term which contains within it the aim, the practice and the consequence all in one.

Mindfulness, in effect, is like a Zen Kōan –questions that cannot be answered by rational thought. Indeed, the non-dual nature of the term, as scientists trying to define mindfulness have found, resists abstract conceptualization. And perhaps so it should be, because we can only really start to begin to understand mindfulness by its practice. Just as the finger pointing at the moon is not the moon and the map is not the territory, the concept of mindfulness is not mindfulness.

Mindfulness will be discussed in this thesis in the context of Mindfulness Based Approaches to Health (MBA’s). These are secular applications of Mindfulness in a clinical context that have been shown in scientific research over the last 30 years to have significant therapeutic value for several pathologies including anxiety disorders, depression and chronic pain (Baer, 2003; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt &Walach, 2006). MBA’s are primarily adaptations of the original Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme developed by Jon Kabat Zinn and colleagues at the Stress Clinic of the

Massachusetts University of Medicine in the 1980's. They include Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT); Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention; Mindfulness Based Childbirth and Parenting, Mindfulness Based Relationship Enhancement and Mindfulness Based Eating Awareness Training. Included also are Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT): psychological approaches which use some of the attitudinal qualities of mindfulness (Crane, Kuyken, Hastings, Rothwell & Williams, 2010).

1.3.2 Drama. The word drama is derived from the Greek word meaning “action” (Classical Greek: δράμα, *drama*); which comes from the Greek word for “to do”. (Classical Greek: δράω, *drao*) (Wikipedia). As Dorothy Heathcote protests, it is a normal thing which... “... has been made into an abnormal thing by all the fussy leotards, hairdos and stagecraft that are associated with it.” (Heathcote cited in Prentki and Preston, 2009, p.204)

Lehmann (2009,p.40) explains how, for Aristotle in the *Poetics*, drama is both a structure that imposes a logical order to the ‘*confusing chaos and plentitude of Being*’ and also a dialectic model, since that order must be achieved through a process of logical but agonistic argument between opposing ideas.

It follows that drama in comparison with theatre is associated more with language and the written word that actors speak (Fortier, 2002, p.4) while theatre is associated with performance, though not necessarily the performance of a script.

In everyday use, drama often relates to an atmosphere of excitement but in Mindfulness literature, as we will see, it is often used with the connotation of stressfulness from being too engaged with the everyday negotiation of opposing ideas, in particular between how things are and how we would like them to be.

1.3.3 Theatre. Theatre by contrast is derived from the same Greek word *theatron* (θέατρον) meaning “the seeing place”; which is derived from *theoria* (θεωρία), from which the English word “theory” is also derived - theory being a way of seeing something. In Eastern Orthodox theology *Theoria* means beholding God (Wikipedia).

Boal uses the term ‘the aesthetic space’ for the performance space in the theatre (Boal, 1995, p.18). This concept is important to introduce along with the definition of theatre because it is the focal point not only of the audience but for our claim about theatre.

The aesthetic space has the special qualities of being able to be anywhere at any time. It can slow down time and speed it up, it can manipulate attention to a small area or to a large area and it exists simultaneously in the 'here and now' where it is imposed and in the 'here and now' which it creates. This is because in addition to the three dimensions of physical space it has the dimensions of memory and imagination. The aesthetic space comes about because "*the combined attention of a whole audience converge upon it; it attracts centripetally, like a black hole.*" (Boal, 1995,p.19) Boal claims that it is inherently dualistic, requiring there to be a separation of spaces, one for the actor and the action and one for the spectator for spectating. Yet, as we shall see later, Boal introduces effective methodologies for democratizing access to this space and demolishing the 4th wall between them, creating the '*spect-actor*'. Central also to the claim made in this thesis is that the aesthetic space can also be distributed by orienting to context, so that it envelopes us, bringing meta-awareness to the systemic but groundless duality of our consciousness.

Another revolution in how we define theatre that has occurred in the last century in the space that has opened up between theatre and drama. Theatre and drama were more or less intrinsically bound together: theatre being the place where drama was performed, or alternatively where dramatic events occurred that place would be referred to as the theatre of operations – as in the theatre of war. However, in the last half century, film and television have surpassed the capacity of theatre as a medium for drama (Lehmann 2009, p.50) and experimental theatre practitioners have tried to develop theatre that does not employ the dramatic logic as an imposition on the chaos of being. The work of some of these practitioners will be outlined and their relationship to a mindfulness based approach explored in section 3.

1.4 Context Oriented Theatre (COT)

Background. Context Oriented Theatre came about when I became aware that the consciousness of audiences to the theatre I was creating was regularly changing: sometimes in some profound and subtle way which they struggled to articulate. Gunaratana (2006 Gaia House Talk) would say that consciousness is constantly changing at speeds beyond our capacity to monitor; yet occurring here was a change that seemed significant.

A small sample of audience feedback from several different productions over the last ten years, written after they emerge from a performance, gives an idea of these ‘changes’ –

“Space for noticing myself”; “I feel purged – ready to star a new life – all existence up to now has been eradicated – ready to start anew in complete innocence as a child.”; “...feel I am complete in some way.”; “Nothing will be the same as before in my understanding of the world and my circumstances”; “I can still feel the tears in my eyes, the beat of my heart, my sweaty hands and a wonderful and magic peaceful feeling ... It was like a dream I will never forget... Each person is unique and different! I am unique and different, and we all exist... I exist! Thank you for this unique experience...Thank you for teaching me to value the most basic daily sensations...”; “I learnt I have inside me emotions often alienated by daily routine. The traffic, rush, work, saving, struggling for material things, makes us lose the importance of what’s essential – the senses. It was no doubt an awakening and a remembrance of what really matters and how fragile we are”; “What a relief to rediscover the source.”

Susan Sontag, in her introduction to Artaud ‘s Selected Works (Artaud, 1988, xxxvii), points out that *“not only does consciousness resemble a theater but, as Artaud constructs it, theater resembles consciousness, and therefore lends itself to being turned into a theater-laboratory in which to conduct research in changing consciousness”*

It appeared to me that I had stumbled upon this laboratory and I recognized the need to research what was happening to people’s consciousness through this theatre, most of all to ensure that I was doing no harm. The kind of attitudinal qualities my company of actors were developing, in response to what was being asked of them from the methods I was using, corresponded with those concomitant to mindfulness – compassion, kindness, non-judging, acceptance, patience and present moment awareness; and it seemed that these qualities were being amplified by the particular performance model I was using so that with each performance of a production the effect on the audience and the actors would become stronger. It occurred to me that in studying mindfulness I might be able to unearth by what mechanism the theatre was having these effects.

Premise. The results of my research have led to me surmise that -

1. theatre is an externalization of consciousness,
2. different modes of theatre represent different metaphors of consciousness,
3. by participating in those different modes we experience different kinds of consciousness.

4. certain modes of theatre are conducive to mindfulness.

Context Oriented Theatre (COT) works with and builds on this premise that theatre is not merely a metaphor but an externalization or extension of consciousness and by changing the model of theatre the way consciousness apprehends reality can change. In COT not only is the aesthetic space distributed differently, attention is also invited to rest on the context rather than be swept away by the content of experience - not only what is seen and heard, smelled, tasted and touched but also that which is hearing and seeing, smelling, tasting and touching; not only what is being felt and thought but also that which is thinking and feeling. In addition, particular attention is brought to bear on sense that is often hidden underneath, which is the sense of being alive, or this quality of 'beingness'. The aesthetic space is a portal to beingness, as is every moment, everywhere. However, because the aesthetic space has the same five dimensions as our consciousness it therefore includes and brings together in one space the inner and outer, the *'full catastrophe'* of being alive. As we will show in section 3 this is not a new initiative in theatre, it might be as old as the Eleusinian mysteries that predate Greek Theatre. COT, incidentally, has been compared to the Eleusinian mysteries by a Greek Cultural Anthropologist that saw a production in Bulgaria.

Poetics. It is necessary to re-frame Aristotle's *Poetics* in order to explain how drama is used in COT.

Catharsis. The purpose of drama according to Aristotle, was a kind of purging or *catharsis* of emotions. Purification of the mind is also one of the aims/effects of mindfulness (Guanaratana, 2002, p.50). Traditional theatre purifies through engaging our attention in the drama happening 'out there' on a stage as we identify ourselves with a tragic hero. Mindfulness, meanwhile, engages our attention on the internal drama of our physical milieu and our fluctuating mental states in response to what is happening in the moment. The effect is to dis-identify or decentre enough from the character we think we are to gain insight and through insight a *catharsis* of habitual or conditioned reactivity.

One could say that theatre like mindfulness invites people to sit with difficult emotions, but while in MBA's this process has been shown to have a transformative effect on mental health in clinical settings by reducing reactivity to internal events (Baer, 2006) the same cannot be said for dramatic catharsis. In the 21st century we have wall to wall

catharsis available on demand but the experience seems to be a palliative and not a cure, or indeed might exercise conditioned reactivity to internal events (thoughts, feelings and sensations).

Hamartia. For Aristotle this is the flaw in the hero's perceptions of himself and the world that lead to the tragedy. One insight that mindfulness proffers, in Buddhist psychology, is into the interdependent relationship between all phenomenon and how our emotional and mental projections onto events both inward and outward as separate perpetuates our suffering and causes our senses to misapprehend the nature of reality. (Ekman, Davidson, Ricard & Wallace 2005, p.60). This misapprehension, that there is a separation between the observer and the observed is the heroic flaw in COT. (Wallace, 1999, p7)

Mimesis. COT uses two interpretations of mimesis that are related. The first is Boal's interpretation: not the traditional '*art imitates nature*' but "*art re-creates the creative principle of created things*" (Boal, 2000, p.3). The second is that art and in particular theatre re-creates or is an externalization of *hamartia*: that is, the illusion of separation between the observer and the observed. This is the key relationship between theatre and our consciousness. The two interpretations are intimately related because the separation is something that is also created in this drama of life, and by placing this drama in the aesthetic space we can become aware of this creative movement within. That is why COT is referred to as a creative movement for awareness of the creative movement of awareness.

Peripeteia and Anagnorisis. The act of perceiving this movement creating a separation is called proprioception of thought by David Bohm. "*Proprioception has two parts 'Proprio' means 'self' in Latin and 'ception' is like perception*". (Nichol & Bohm 2003, p.235) While we have proprioception of our body in space, we do not commonly have the same awareness of thought, neither its origin nor its effects. Bohm proposes the possibility of having proprioception of thought not through reflective thought itself but through what in Mindfulness Based Approaches might be called meta-awareness, meta-cognitive insight or pre-reflexivity. By noticing the moment to moment unfolding of experience in the body we can find "*an approach to experience in which the symbiotic*

nature of idea and energy is suspended and displayed throughout the entire organism, rather than just in the 'mind'".

Bohm tells the story of a woman who is attacked in the middle of the night. The harder she fights back, the harder her attacker strikes her. The unfortunate situation is that she has had a stroke and has lost physical proprioception of her right arm. It is she herself that is the attacker. When her family enters and puts the light on proprioception is re-established but through the sense of sight. *Peripeteia* is the moment when we witness that our actions have the reverse effect to what we expect and *anagnorisis* is the moment when ignorance becomes knowledge. The *catharsis* that COT aspires to bring about is therefore a purification or clearing out of *hamartia* or the error in our perception that the observer and observed are separate.

Metaxis. Theatre has the capacity to do this because its essence is '*metaxis*' - "*The state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different autonomous worlds; the image of reality and the reality of the image*". (Boal, 1995, 43) If we identify strongly with a character then we enter their world, but not to the point of getting completely lost in it. We are both in Dunsinane and in a theatre watching Macbeth. Aristotle is quite categorical that if we were completely lost in the fictional catastrophe of the play there would be no *catharsis*, the fear and pity felt would overwhelm us. This, ironically, is what has happened in the theatre of our consciousness. We have identified so much with the character we call 'me,' this player who '*struts and frets his hour upon the stage*', that a credibility gap like an elephant trap is dug around us to resist the idea that '*we are theatre.*' Nevertheless, COT supports Boal's contention that theatre is the first human invention. We make theatre but we also *are* theatre since we can remember ourselves in the past, and imagine ourselves in the future and also in the act of making and participating in theatre we are witnessing ourselves as we are in the moment, doubled or fragmented as Bohm would say. '*Theatre*' Boal states, '*is the art of looking at ourselves*' (Boal, 2002, p.15).

Summing up, COT utilizes the power of *metaxis* to enable participants to witness themselves in action as a character in the play of being alive. This is by making the object of the drama the moment as it is unfolding, and by 'distributing' the stage so that the attention of the audience member is also on themselves as a person inside this drama, or

indeed the hero of this drama. It seems that this can lead to proprioception – in that audiences can witness that their trying to think their way out of situations has the opposite effect to what they expect (*peripeteia*) and on letting go of that there is a falling away of ignorance (*anagnorisis*) and an encounter with a choiceless awareness of ‘beingness’.

Whether this is lasting or merely a transient experience would need longitudinal research on audiences to COT productions and whether it is an accurate description of what is actually happening would need the design of a testable questionnaire and for that COT would have to be operationalised and its mechanisms identified. This thesis takes the first tentative steps in that direction.

2. Review of the Literature

A search with Google Scholar of books and journals in the categories - Medicine, Pharmacology, and Veterinary Science and Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities with the search terms 'mindfulness AND theatre OR theatre OR drama' produces 2,582 results in May of 2010. It was therefore decided to narrow the search using 'mindfulness-based' in order to focus on papers relevant to the approaches being developed for mindfulness instruction in a secular and clinical context.

Search terms that might also be related to theatre, such as actor, script, play or stage was considered too ambiguous and therefore likely to create more general rather than useful results.

As a comparative result the term 'mindfulness-based' by itself in Google Scholar achieves over 5,000 results while a Medline topic search of the term 'mindfulness' produces 46,000 results: an indication of the huge interest in Mindfulness in the health sector.

A search with Google Scholar of books and journals in the categories - Medicine, Pharmacology, and Veterinary Science and Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities with the search terms 'Mindfulness Based' AND 'Theatre' OR 'Theater' OR 'drama' reports 232 result on May 6th 2010.

Of the 232 results 175 include the terms but they are unrelated - appearing in different places of the paper or referring to a lecture theatre or surgery theatre or a specific theatre building; or using the word dramatic.

The remaining 57 results can be categorised into three broad groups entitled 2.1 Mindfulness Through Theatre; 2.2 Life as Drama and 2.3 Theatre as a Metaphor of Mind. Within each of these there are subgroups entitled 2.1.1 Accompanying Interventions; 2.1.2 Discrete Methods; 2.2.1 Emotional Response; 2.2.2 Lived Experience; 2.3.1 The Image of Reality; 2.3.2 Theatre Making as Metaphor and 2.3.3 Theatre as the World Out There.

The first group (2.1 Mindfulness Through Theatre) relates to drama practices as interventions in relation to Mindfulness Based Approaches. Of these, 14 results refer to drama practices as interventions accompanying Mindfulness Based Approaches in a wider therapeutic programme (2.1.1 Accompanying Interventions) and 2 refer to drama practices as a discrete method of promoting mindfulness (2.1.2 Discrete Methods).

The second group (2.2 Life as Drama), with 26 results, refers to drama as a particular kind of engagement with experience. This group can be divided into two, with eight results which use the term drama to express an overwrought or exaggerated emotional response (2.2.1 Emotional Response), while 18 results refer to the ‘drama’ of lived experience being something in which we are immersed and from which Mindfulness practices help us to disengage (2.2.2 Lived Experience).

The third group (2.3) uses theatre as a metaphor for the mind. This group can be divided into the 10 results that use theatre (almost exclusively the movie theatre) as a metaphor that can be used in mindfulness practice or as a learning tool or as an expression of a paradigm whereby the world is like an image projected onto a screen but which we believe to be reality (2.3.1 The Image of Reality). The second subgroup, with two examples, is not dissimilar to the first, but is different in its overt use of the activity of making and performing theatre as a metaphor (2.3.2 Workspace Metaphor). There is a third subgroup with one result which uses theatre as a metaphor of the ‘world out there.’ (2.3.3 Theatre as The World out There)

2.1 Mindfulness through theatre

2.1.1 Accompanying Interventions. Whilst most results in the first subgroup do not connect the drama practice with the mindfulness practice e.g. Fernros, Furhoff & Wändell, 2008, McBee (2008) draws out a comparison between creativity in general and mindfulness which will become the basis of one of the arguments for employing theatre practices in Mindfulness training.

"The creative experience is often mindful. As we concentrate on creating, our mind, body, and spirit unite. In addition, witnessed creativity may be equally engaging. We can be fully present while reading, listening to music, observing art, drama, or dance. Our sense of time may change. We may feel a new openness and curiosity about the world. We may experience a new perspective on our world and experience new insights." (McBee, 2008, p.97)

McBee states that creativity is a universal human capacity which is not limited to cognition and indeed is often inhibited by cognitive processing, which often acts like a censor or a critic thus limiting the capacity for creative exploration and expression.

2.1.2 Discrete Methods. In the second subgroup are two quite different approaches to using theatre based techniques to bring about mindfulness. Andersson (2009); Andersson, King & Lalande (2010) proposes a new methodology called Mindfulness Based Role Play (MBRP) as a way of supporting the supervision of therapists. Using an adaptation of the gestalt therapy ‘empty chair’ exercise therapists practice playing the role of therapist and client during a remembered exchange, and are supported to bring mindfulness to difficult aspects of the therapy or the therapeutic relationship in order to build empathy and bring insight.

A particular kind of mindfulness is brought into play during this practice, which is called ‘dialogical mindfulness’.

“‘Dialogical mindfulness’ refers to the application of mindfulness in a dialogue between two people, either when they are both present or when one of them is only imagined to be present, as in a role-play. Dialogical mindfulness involves all aspects of phenomenologically observable data in the total field of awareness during the dialogue; the visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory & gustatory, emotional and cognitive”. (Andersson et al, 2010, p.2)

While MBRP is currently applied in a very specific context it’s basic mechanism of ‘dialogical mindfulness’ combined with role play, I suggest, shows scope for wider application within Mindfulness Based Approaches.

In contrast, Joel Gluck (2005) proposes a more comprehensive methodology called Insight Improvisation that incorporates a range of practices to work with groups and individuals for personal development.

"Insight Improvisation is unusual in that it attempts to integrate practices from several different traditions, primarily from the worlds of meditation, theater, and drama therapy. This integration has resulted not only in a series of new and rich experiential exercises, but also in some interesting ways of thinking about the nature of meditation, theater, and therapy." (Gluck, 2005, p.11)

The antecedents of Insight Improvisation are many but Gluck singles out Ruth Zaporah’s *Action Theatre*, Jean Claude-Itallie’s Buddhist based theatre practice and Scott Kelman’s *Mindfulness-Based Improvisation* (Gluck, 2005, p.49). Each of these theatre practitioners have, to different degrees, been influenced by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche’s *Mudra Space Awareness*, a theatre based practice developed by the eminent Tibetan Tulku

combining Tibetan Monastic Dance with Western Avant-Garde Theatre practices in the early 70's (see Trungpa & Gimian, 2004).

Another element common to these practices is the encouragement of free flowing improvisation and authentic movement as a kind of parallel and complementary practice to mindfulness. The logic behind this is that actors will be inspired to creative action and insight if they can accept and let go in the performing moment and if they are entirely present and embodied.

"All that is needed is to open the awareness to what is present, in order to tap into an infinitely rich source of inspiration, wisdom, and potential for insight and transformation. Although this is also true in the act of meditation, Insight Improvisation adds channels of movement and embodiment not available in traditional forms of meditation." (Gluck, 2005, p.21)

2.2 Life as Drama

The second grouping of results in the search, relating to the use of 'drama', is relatively prevalent in discussion of mindfulness.

2.2.1 Emotional Response. The first subgroup uses the word drama to describe a kind of emotionalism, such as in Shapiro and Shapiro (2009, p.66) quoting meditator, Cindy Lee –

"I would have these adrenaline rushes as if I were nervous about something- kind of a little low-grade anxiety -and then I would immediately start to get anxious. It would get all blown up in my mind. By meditating with it, I learned to recognize that I was not anxious, I didn't need to go into drama queen mental mode, I could just let this be, let it rise, and let it pass."

Neff, Rude & Kirkpatrick (2006) illustrate further this use of the term drama as the expression of a kind of behaviour which when present indicates a lack of self-compassion, a quality associated with mindfulness. *"...self-compassion entails balanced awareness of one's emotions—the ability to face (rather than avoid) painful thoughts and feelings, but without exaggeration, drama or self-pity."* (Neff et al, 2006 p.909)

Perhaps this behaviour relates to what Kabat-Zinn (2005, p.123) calls 'unwise attention' – which is 'rooted in a reactive self-preoccupation'.

2.2.2 Lived Experience. While the first subgroup uses the term drama to describe a kind of behaviour, its use in the second subgroup can be said to describe the cause of that

behaviour, which is to be immersed in the ‘drama’ of our lives. This is by far the most common reference to drama in the literature of MBA’s and is a way of framing life as full of drama and mindfulness as a particular stance towards that drama.

"Rather than being immersed in the drama of our personal narrative or life story, we are able to stand back and simply witness it. As Goleman suggests, "The first realization in "meditation" is that the phenomena contemplated are distinct from the mind contemplating them" (1980, p. 146)" (cited in Shapiro, Carlson, Astin & Freedman, 2006, p.5)

Whitesman (2008, p.13) makes a similar point when describing the de-centering or re-perceiving effect through the steady and practiced application of attention to the present moment with the component attitudinal qualities of friendliness, compassion and curiosity.

"This capacity allows an individual to stand back and witness the emergence and passage of thoughts, feelings and sensations without becoming swept up and away by personal drama and narrative. In dis-identifying from the contents of consciousness an individual begins to recognise that what is observed is distinct from the awareness which observes and, as such, makes choices that are less encumbered by cognitive and emotional conditioning."

The picture that emerges from the literature in this group category is of the problematic consequences for our mental health when we over-identify with ourselves as a character or a *personne* in a drama. Not an actor playing a character, but the character itself at the mercy of an unseen scriptwriter.

2.3 Theatre as Metaphor of Mind

The third category of results relate to the use of theatre as a metaphor.

2.3.1 The Image of Reality. In the first subgroup the metaphor is used as an allegory to expand on this distinction between the mind and the phenomenon it observes.

The metaphor in this form often appears, but not exclusively, as a movie theatre. Shapiro & Shapiro (2009) attributes its origin to the Indian sage Sri Ramana Maharishi –

"When you go to a movie theatre, before the movie starts, you see the blank screen. Then the lights go out and the projector goes on, the movie plays and the drama begins. You may feel passion, sad or happy, angry or uplifted – all the emotions in the movie. Then the movie is over, the projector is turned off, the lights go on and there again is the blank screen. Maharishi says how that blank screen is like our consciousness that is empty of content, while the world and all our feelings are the dramas that play in our minds." (Shapiro & Shapiro, 2009, p.29)

The metaphor is also used explicitly as a therapeutic tool (e.g. Baer, 2006a, p387), in order to support reframing of experience so that we can step back from the drama of life. Roberts (2009, p.15) uses the metaphor as a key exercise in observing what he calls 'big deal mind' and to shift the body-mind from a 'sympathetic nervous response' to a 'parasympathetic nervous response'. He proposes that the clients imagine themselves sitting in the dark in their own private theatre watching their thoughts, emotions, memories and sensations as if they were appearing on the screen in front of them. Like a receding homunculus in a Cartesian theatre of the mind they then imagine themselves as a second person sitting further back in the cinema observing the first 'them' who is still watching the screen, and then a third person is imagined observing the second. The Cartesian Theatre referred to above is the term Dennet (1991, p.434) uses to describe the illusion that consciousness creates that there is a central place where 'it all comes together'.

Lejeune (2007) also uses the metaphor within the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy model - a mindfulness based approach initially developed for anxiety disorder that uses metaphors and figurative speech to bring about mindfulness (Varra, Dorssel & Hayes in Didonna et al, 2008, p.111). Lejeune describes how when you rise from your seat to go to buy more popcorn your relationship to the screen and to the theatre changes.

"The shift from being "into" the movie to simply observing the movie as one part of what is going on in the whole theatre is similar to the shift from the content level to the context level of your experience." (Lejeune, 2009, p.85).

Lejeune then goes on to expand the metaphor in a way distinctly different to Maharishi's version.

"This analogy does not imply that your life is not real, only that it is bigger than the specific thoughts, feelings and sensations that you are aware of at any particular moment. You are not a character in a movie. You are the theatre."

In contrast, Bieling & Anthony (2003, p.83) from the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy model, in describing how to work with thoughts to prevent relapse in depression, explains how this shift is not so easy for some and that films can be so emotionally compelling that the characters develop a life of their own and exist outside the theatre 'in the back of our minds'.

2.3.2 Workspace Metaphor. In the second subgroup, theatre as a workspace is employed as a metaphor. Tagini & Raffone (2010, p.12) question the aspect of Baars (1997) Global Workspace theory of consciousness which posits the necessity of a ‘narrative interpreter’ who operates like a stage director in a theatre. They quote Goldberg et al’s (2006) findings using fMRI scans of subjects focusing on demanding perceptual tasks which: “... suggests that self-related brain activities are not necessarily implied during sensory perception and that, on the contrary, they can be suppressed.” (Tagini & Raffone, 2010, p.15)

Tagini & Raffone further develop an argument that mindfulness and meditation might bring about perception that is not self-referential, a state of no-mind as it is referred to in Zen Buddhism.

Boyce (2009, p.64) compares the skill of being able to direct and sustain your attention on a particular experience to a spotlight focusing on a single actor on stage ‘*until it’s time to focus the audience’s attention elsewhere*’. A model of the mind, incidentally, that is not dissimilar to Baars’ Global Workspace Theory (Baars, 1998). This power to gather, direct and maintain steady attention or ‘factors of absorption’ as Buddha called them, are developed through concentration combined with mindfulness meditation: enabling us to escape the usual operation of attention which jumps from one thought or feeling to the next.

2.3.3 Theatre as the World Out There. The third subgroup is where theatre is used not just as a metaphor of the internal aspect or our experience but as a way of seeing the world ‘out there.’ Though there is only one instance of this occurring in the sample of papers reviewed here it is implied in the previous group that equated ‘drama’ with a way of describing and therefore engaging with outside experience, and is perhaps the most prevalent use of the theatre metaphor in literature in general. When Jacque, the melancholy character in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* says ‘*All the world’s a stage*’ it was already a cliché in the 17th century.

Watson (2008, p.140) paints a similar melancholic picture of ‘normative’ perceptions in her comparative account of Buddhism, psychotherapy and modern science.

“From the centre of self-image and possessed knowledge the world is imagined. Alienated from participation, walled in the separated and separative self, the world is out there as adversary or theatre set...It is not only Buddhist thought which tells

us that this alienation is illusory; current Western science is telling us that reality and our perception of it are very different from what we thought”.

2.4 Conclusion

Clearly, theatre and drama do not feature as topics often in relation to Mindfulness-Based approaches (in 0.014% of the literature) and even less as a mode of delivering mindfulness. One could argue that so little has been written about how these two fields relate because it is a tenuous relationship to make. Though in defence one might not expect to find material on theatre in papers relating to Mindfulness-Based Approaches to Health, since MBA's are a clinical intervention, and has staked its territory in scientific literature in order to qualify as such and be made available to patients in the medical mainstream.

The same cannot be said if we replace 'mindfulness-based' with simply 'mindfulness' as the search term alongside 'drama' or 'theatre' or 'theater'. With these terms instead of 200+ results in Google Scholar there are upward of 5,000 results, (whereas mindfulness as the only search term returns 18,000 results) suggesting that outside of MBA literature the relationship is much more visible.

Nevertheless, where theatre and drama are mentioned in relation to MBA's and how it is used provides a framework through which to expand on the relevant topics because the aim here is towards providing a theoretical basis on which to build a theatre based approach to mindfulness and a mindfulness based approach to theatre. We will therefore widen the circle of discussion to approach mindfulness on theatre's terms, adding a third adjunct to the funnel of the hourglass model where science and Buddhism meet and where Mindfulness Based Approaches are traditionally located.

3. Theatre as Orthogonal Rotation

Looking through this small opening made in the funnel of the hourglass of MBA literature, section 3 will map the journey of theatre in the last century towards models and methods employed with the expressed aim of realizing the capacity of theatre as a form of insight meditation on the human condition. It will do this by following the same general themes or signposts that emerged from the literature review but approached at a perpendicular axis, drawing on the work of some of the more notable practitioners in theatre. What these practitioners whose writing we will visit, (Artaud, Brecht, Wilson, Brook, Chaikin, Foreman, Vargas and Boal) have in common is their conscious use of theatre as an orthogonal reality (Kabat-Zinn , 2005, p347)

3.1 Theatre through mindfulness

In part 2.1 it was shown how Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche influenced several practitioners who are using theatre, movement and improvisation to support mindfulness practice. It is also the case that when the Tibetan Tulku started to employ theatre as a method of promoting mindfulness in the 1970, several important contributors to modern theatre such as Robert Wilson, Peter Brook and Joe Chaikin came to meet him (Chogyam & Gimian, 2002, p.65). Common to these pioneers of experimental theatre is the aspiration to create theatre through mindfulness, and by actors embodying this on stage, perhaps bringing mindfulness about in their audience.

Robert Wilson uses theatre as a forum within which to paint with light, sound and movement in a way that creates spaces around experience so that we can really see and hear what is presented, in a similar way to how Kabat-Zinn (2005) talks about mindfulness as being a process of ‘coming to our senses’.

The greatest influence on Wilson is Gertrude Stein, whose work was entirely aimed at reproducing the landscape of what she called the ‘*continuous present*’ and who challenged the prevailing notion that ‘*maintaining abstract distance from existence is the way to make peace with the world*’. (Demastes, 2002, p.50) Wilson’s theatre is one which shifts the dramatic content away from ‘drama’ in the traditional sense - a depiction of the ‘actions’ of characters struggling over different interpretations of the world, to one where drama emerges from the flow of meaning from images created on the stage. His theatre

effects the same state as the use of metaphors commonly used to look at our thoughts during meditation in weeks six of a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction or Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy course (Segal, Williams & Teasdale 2002, p.250). During these important sessions we are instructed, if it is helpful, to imagine our thoughts as if they were clouds passing across a blue sky or if our thoughts are too rapid, as if we were standing behind a waterfall, watching the water pass by. Likewise, meanings arise and fall from the shifting images on Wilson's painterly stage but are outside of any engaging plot or narrative. *"...a column of smoke may be the image of a continent; trees turn into Corinthian columns, then columns turn into factory smoke-stacks. Triangles mutate into sails, then tents or mountains."* (Lehmann 2009, p78)

Richard Foreman is another theatre practitioner who has tried to realize Stein's vision of theatre. He states his aim as awakening the audience from their slumber, (Foreman, 2009) often with the ringing of bells and whistles or lights shining into the audience as framing devices for the audience to notice what effect the images on the stage are having on them.

Herbert Blau like Foreman is *"concerned with perception reflecting upon itself"* (cited in Carlson, 1993, p.516) but his focus is on the moment of creation, just as in MBA's where we are guided to see from where our thoughts arise and to where they subside, his theatre seeks the point of creation and the vanishing point.

For Peter Brook theatre is a vehicle through which to access what it means to be human on the inside. *"For several centuries theatre in the west has held up a mirror to nature, but now the mirror seeks to reflect something else. The empty space, of which Peter Brook has spoken, is in fact the space within."* (Roose-Evans, 1989, p.3)

Brook even proposes a formula for a 'Holy Theatre' that can create this orientation towards our inner experience and make manifest the invisible, and which is reminiscent of Mindfulness.

Theatre= Rra

This stands for the French words *Repetition*, *Representation* and *Assistance*. *Repetition* (rehearsal) recalls how mindfulness practice needs what Guranaratana calls

‘gumption’, “*Week after week, day after day, hour after hour, practice makes perfect. It is a drudge, a grind, a discipline; it is a dull action that leads to a good result*” (Brook, 1972, p.171). “*Meditation is not easy. It takes time and it takes energy. It also takes grit, determination and discipline*” (Guanaratana, 2002, p.7).

Representation balances the mechanistic *repetition* with the idea of something needing to be made always new and present. This is what differentiates say mantra meditation with mindfulness meditation, where rather than the repetition of a phrase to quieten the mind, mindfulness meditation purposefully re-presents to the mind the continuously changing ‘now’ and trains the mind to stay open to whatever arises in this space, difficult emotions included. Brook states that *representation* cannot happen without the third element, ‘*assistance*’, which is the attention of the audience (and the director in rehearsal).

“*With this assistance, the assistance of eyes and focus and desires and enjoyment and concentration, repetition turns into representation. Then the word representation no longer separates actor and audience, show and public: it envelops them: what is present for one is present for the other. The audience too has undergone a change. It has come from a life outside the theatre that is essentially repetitive to a special arena in which each moment is lived more clearly and more tensely. The audience assists the actor, and at the same time for the audience itself assistance comes back from the stage.*” (Brook, 1972, p.174)

Mindfulness practice might not have a direct parallel with this element of *assistance* in theatre. Certainly practice is supported by sharing with the *sangha* or community of fellow practitioners and by reading, listening and being in the presence of teachers. But this multiple-regard of the ‘other’ is something that theatre can help bring to an MBA curriculum and there are examples of this in practice in section 4. However, Brook is quoted here at length because there is one extra element of *assistance* in theatre that he does not address which is central to COT. It is commonly missed because there has been a general obsession with the role of the actor as a kind of shaman since Stanislavsky, who alone is entitled to inhabit the aesthetic space. The nature of the *assistance* that COT makes particular use of is the aesthetic space or as Brook calls it ‘the empty space’ itself. It is a ‘portal to beingness’ that can activate a quality of attention which if distributed envelopes actors and audiences in presence and mindfulness.

Joseph Chaikin, like Brook focused his theatre on the presence of the actor. Unlike Foreman and Wilson for whom the actors are emblematic and whose movements, though mindful, are like puppets or automatons; for Chaikin it is the authentic presence of the actor to himself and to the audience that brings about the transformation sought in the audience.

“The senses must be awake to what's happening and to what's being created, transforming the space, always able to return to the quiet inner starting point. That quiet inner place is always there, whether you are in contact with it or not”.(Chaikin 1980, p66-67)

The actor as embodying a special kind of quality of attention grounded in the present moment, and expressed through a precise voice and physicality, is a common theme in contemporary theatre and actor training, though this has always been the case in Eastern traditions of theatre. This is perhaps best exemplified by the work of Jerzy Grotowski and his student Eugenio Barba and more recently Phillip Zarilli (2002) who have all, like Brook, drawn upon eastern mindfulness practices to train their actors.

Simultaneous to this movement towards a ‘theatre of mindfulness’ as depicted by the small example of practitioners mentioned above, has been the separation of and distancing between ‘theatre’ and ‘drama.’ Part of the reason for this has been the wholesale usurpation of theatre as the ideal medium for drama by film and television, which liberated theatre to experiment with not only different forms but also different functions to simply telling a story (Lehmann,2006, p.50)

Many of the practitioners mentioned above, inspired by Artaud and supported by the anthropologist Victor Turner and Performance theorist Richard Schechner have interpreted this space opening up between drama and theatre as a return to the supposed roots of theatre as ‘ritual’ where the stage becomes not a representation of the world, but a *‘projection of myth or the inner self’* (Innes 1994, p.36). However, there is no evidence that theatre originated from ritual (Roziak, 2002) and their error is perhaps one of the main reasons why new frontiers in theatre became the rarefied pursuit of the avant-garde. As Roziak (2002, p.14) states, *“...theatre's roots cannot be traced; they lie in the very structure of the human psyche.”*

Indeed, perhaps it is this ontological misconception of theatre as a cultural activity rather than as a medium which predates language in our development as a species and as individuals that has masked its utility as an approach to mindfulness. (Three month old infants imitate and enact song-and-dance display before they walk and talk (Whitehead, 2004, p.82)).

The origin of this orienting of theatre towards mindfulness predates Chogyam Trungpa and was probably initiated in the west by Artaud who mythologized the Balinese Theatre he encountered in a revelatory performance at the Colonial Exhibition in Paris in 1931. (Artaud, 1958; Su, 2009) Other contemporary practitioners had drawn upon other cultures to inform their theatre - Craig, Reinhardt, Meyerhold and Brecht (Fischer-Lichte cited in Su, 2009, p.3) but Artaud recognized in these performances not a different kind of theatre but a different kind of civilization (Artaud & Sontag, 1988) and desperately wanted a theatre which would restore what he perceived as a primal state of wholeness and purity. His lifelong struggle with Schizophrenia might have placed Artaud in the perfect position to recognize the capacity of theatre to bring about mindfulness which the performances by the dancers of Bali might have embodied for him. *“What impresses Artaud most is the immediate “metaphysical” presence of the performers.”* (Su, 2009, p.7) That he was aware of Buddhist teaching is apparent before his epiphany with the Balinese theatre since he had written a letter to the Dalai Lama in 1925 expressing his desperate yearning for *“a mind turned entirely toward those perfect summits where the Human Mind no longer suffers.”*

Theatre practitioners since Artaud have been exploring mindfulness approaches to theatre almost as if they were trying to heal his mental illness and the suffering inherent in his view of the world, expressed in his ‘Theatre of Cruelty.’ Its manifesto to *‘overcome literature’* is very similar to the problem as identified in Relational Frame Theory which is addressed by the MBA called Acceptance and Commitment Therapy,

“...human suffering is created by entanglement with the cognitive networks made possible by language. Mindfulness can be understood as a collection of related processes that function to undermine the dominance of verbal networks, especially involving temporal and evaluative relations”. (Fletcher & Hayes, 2005, p.315)

How deep this entanglement with our cognitive networks goes is perhaps why mindfulness requires gumption.

3.2 Drama as Life

Several influential sociologists and social psychologists have equated drama and life: most notably Burke, Berne and Goffman (Carlson, 1993, p.479). Their focus has been for the most part in the roles we play and the duplicity we enact in order to convince others of the credibility of those roles. Drama therefore, in particular for Goffman, becomes a metaphor of life. Schechner articulated this overlap with his Axioms of Environmental Theatre which frame most every human activity as a kind of performance. The dramaturgical perspective as espoused by social psychologists such as Evreinov, Burke and Goffman (Brissett & Edgley, 2005) is seen as a useful metaphor to analyze and discuss behaviours, however drama and theatre has neural correlates and is therefore not just a metaphor but an externalisation or extension of mind into a shared time and space.

Damasio (2000, p.283) describes how feelings emerge, before we are conscious of them, when neural maps register changes in our body state in response to an object of perception. However, these first order neural maps can be triggered by two means or by a combination of both. The first through a *'body loop,'* sensing emotions in the flesh of the body and the second by what he calls *'as if body loops'* which are neural representations of our body that bypass the body proper and which are the mechanism by which 'internal stimulation' is activated. These patterns of neural activity are then mapped by second order neural maps alongside changes in the proto-self - non-conscious representations of the current state of the organism, leading to an awareness of a feeling. These three patterns interacting are what constitute our core-consciousness and sense of self on which the extended consciousness of memory, imagination and the autobiographical self are built over time.

The *'as if body loop,'* Damasio suggests, is uniquely human because it demands *'the sort of meta-representation of aspects of brain processing that only prefrontal cortices are likely to support.'* Of course, *'what if'* is one of the core practices involved in Stanislavsky's acting methodology – where the actor internally stimulates an emotional memory 'as if' it were actually occurring in order to feel and express authentic emotion. Courtney (1990, p.ix) even defines drama as *'Being as if.'*

"Like life itself it is an experience we live through. In life we deal with actual thoughts and acts; in drama we deal with imagined thoughts and dramatic acts.

But life and drama are so alike that contemporary scholars can talk of the drama of life or life as drama”

The distinction between the two body loops cannot be so easily drawn and it is not difficult to see how the maladaptive reactions to stress Kabat-Zinn maps out in his Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Programme (1991, p.265) are related neurologically to hyperarousal of the organism through the ‘*as if body loop*’ responding not to actual stressors but to maladaptive patterns in the autobiographical self that is reacting to internally stimulated objects in core consciousness.

If ‘drama’ through the ‘as if loop’ is part of the hard wiring of our core consciousness, and as Boal (2002) suggest, human beings are distinct by their capacity to project ‘having been’ and ‘becoming’ onto our stage of awareness then perhaps the conscious use of drama ‘applied’ to life can help us create space around this mechanism of the mind, treating like with like.

Brecht recognized the need to distance the audience from being ‘caught up’ in the drama of theatre so that they could analyze critically what was being presented on stage from a political standpoint. He also recognised that it was important to not reward the audience’s vicarious participation in the struggle of characters in a play with a purging of emotions that might otherwise give the energy and volition for them to enact change in the real world. He developed a particular aesthetic for his ‘epic theatre’ which sought to distance or alienate the audience from the automatic identification and desire to ‘lose oneself’ in the drama depicted – the *Verfremdungseffekt* or *v-effect*. That this did not entirely succeed is evidence that ‘identification’ is intrinsic to our cognitive processes (Demastes, 2002, p.9).

The aim of the *v-effect* in theatre is similar to the aim of what in Mindfulness Based Approaches is referred to as distancing, decentering or defusion.

“These terms are widely used in the recent literature on mindfulness-based treatments and refer to an ability to observe one’s thoughts and feelings as temporary events in the mind not necessitating particular responses, rather than as reflections of the self that are necessarily true or important” (Carmody, Baer, Lykins & Olendski, 2009, p.614)

When Segal, Williams and Teasdale (2002, p.58) developed a Mindfulness Based approach for the treatment of depression they encountered a similar problem to Brecht.

Their background was in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and so they had focused initially on the patient noticing and distancing themselves from the ‘thoughts’ appearing in the stage of perception. What became clear as they progressed was that when relating to feelings and bodily sensations decentering instructions needed to be more specific. ‘Stepping away’ or indeed distancing could be construed by patients as an instruction to disassociate from a problematic mental or physical event or develop strategies of coping or avoidance. The key to the dilemma was the ‘mode of mind’ encouraged in mindfulness practice of accepting and indeed welcoming and allowing difficulty onto the stage of perception. This is one of the paradoxes of mindfulness; where we are in some ways employing the v-effect in our mind, yet letting go of resistance to embracing difficult thoughts and emotions.

Brecht wanted to engage his audience in the dialectical nature of drama, to discuss and be critical of what they were witnessing and to educate themselves to change the world for the better (Martin & Bial, 2000, p.7), but they were too taken up by the feelings evoked by the drama to engage with his revolutionary agenda. Despite all the techniques of epic theatre that tried to decenter the audience to the drama occurring on stage; despite actors distancing themselves from the characters they represented - ‘demonstrating’ rather than ‘playing’ them and their actions to the audience, feelings and sensations occluded the intellect and overwhelmed the possibility of a rational Marxist dialectical analysis. Should Brecht have inspired mindfulness dialogue of the kind Bohm proposes (Bohm & Nichol, 1993, p.301) rather than intellectual debate, a revolution at least of the mind might have been possible.

In contrast to Brecht, Becket and Ionesco and many postmodernists since, tried to bamboozle the mind into submission by disorienting our *‘logical faculties and dramatic expectations’* (Demastes, 2002, p.63). For the open minded who are able to let go of the imperative of the intellect to understand, Becket, according to Demastes, can bring about awareness of the unconscious context of our consciousness by *‘violating our expectations’*.

When they introduce the curriculum of Week 6 in an MBCT programme Segal et al (2002, p.244) use a similar violation of expectation with a simple sequence of sentences –

*“John was on his way to school
He was worried about the math lesson
He was not so sure he could control the class again today.*

It was not part of a janitor's duty."

This constant de-contextualization and re-contextualization recalls Wilson's changing theatre landscapes and Foreman's plethora of signifiers and exercises our capacity to witness thoughts not as fact but more like Plato's shadows dancing on a cave wall. "*We are actively 'making meaning' out of the sensory input all the time, and we are barely conscious that we are doing so, until someone comes along and plays a 'trick' on us.*" (Segal et al, 2002, p.244)

From personal experience, seeing a performance of Beckett's *Endgame* in my native language of Welsh had a decentering effect which I had not expected because I had played *Clov* in an English language production of *Endgame* some years before. This suggests that encountering the play in my mother tongue allowed the process of de-contextualization to access preconscious maps set down as an infant.

When people encounter theatre, to a greater or lesser extent, they employ a mode of mind that is welcoming and allowing in a way that is not generally possible when they engage with the drama of life. Obviously this is because the drama is not happening to them or indeed to anyone real! In the vast majority of instances, and in particular in Hollywood blockbusters, drama promotes mindlessness and the '*as if body loop*' is almost continuously exercised to react rather than respond to perceived threat. The long term effect of this, in particular when exposed regularly in developmental stages, is to strengthen the contextualization of consciousness as a Cartesian /Greek theatre whereby our proto-self or observer must defend itself in the face of outside events passing on both the inner and outer stage of our awareness. Now, with the ubiquitous use of 'first person' computer games there is even the undermining of this welcoming and allowing mode of mind in our approach to drama: only the inculcation to slay your enemies before they slay you.

Summing up: There is urgency, therefore, to employ modes of theatre that re-contextualize consciousness in the same way mindfulness re-contextualizes the way we relate to thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations. Artaud articulated and unfortunately for him embodied the problem of consciousness in the context of theatre; Brecht and Beckett started to orient audiences towards this context through distancing and violation of expectations; Grotowski, Barba, Brook and Chaikin drawing on Eastern influences

alongside Stanislavsky's work on attention and Mayerhold's on the body of actors, began to re-contextualize the 'actors body as text' allowing drama to arise from the actor embodying present moment awareness. Becket, Ionesco, Wilson, Foreman and Blau re-contextualized theatre as a landscape of ever shifting multivalent meaning, in order to encourage present moment awareness in their audience.

Nevertheless, the predominant metaphor of consciousness made material in their theatre is one of the Greek or Cartesian theatres, separating spectator from actor and allowing always for the drama to be happening to someone else out there and hiding the realization in the spectator that they *are* theatre.

3.3 Mindfulness as a Metaphor of theatre

"Consciousness isn't played out before a homunculi audience on a Cartesian theatre; instead we are both the playwrights and the actors. Better: we are improvisation artists". (Harding in Humphrey, 2000, p.51)

Theatre, since Plato's shadows on a cave wall, has been a metaphor for describing the mind. Neuroscientists such as Baars (Baars et al 1997), Trehub (2007, p 310) and Damasio, as mentioned above, are finding neural correlates for the theatre in the mind, but in employing the metaphor they impose rather traditional ideas of theatre without recourse to the excuse that Hume and Descartes had of not having witnessed experimental theatre! *"In this respect, the Humean "theatre of the mind" has been a fairly successful metaphor, precisely because it succeeded in structuring a great many minds"* (Holt, 1999, p.195)

One is reminded of a haiku by Kobayashi Issa -

*The man pulling radishes
pointed my way
with a radish.*

By exploring two last theatre practitioners we are able to round off this journey through the development of theatre as approached by mindfulness and propose a model of theatre more in keeping with Harding's version as quoted in the beginning of this section.

Augusto Boal, in his experiments to create a 'people's theatre' in Brazil in the 1980's, stumbled upon a democratised model of theatre that turns the stage into a forum where audience and actors can act out strategies for the overcoming of oppression. In *The*

Theatre of the Oppressed' (Boal, 2000, 2002) the audience are not spectators but spect-actors, who intervene in the play performed by taking on the role of the protagonist and enacting what they would do in the situation depicted; showing to the other spect-actors how they would deal the antagonists.

In giving permission to breach the fourth wall between actors and audience something very interesting happens to the consciousness of audiences. Of course, actors have invaded audiences or invited the audience to invade the stage throughout history from the medieval Mummings plays to Beck's Living Theatre in the 60's (Marrs, 1984). However, in Boal's theatre the drama depicted and the oppression perpetrated is drawn from the real life drama of the spect-actors and the theatre is consciously applied to addressing these problems and overcoming these circumstances. The audience transgress the 4th wall because they identify, recognize or resonate with the character of the protagonist and are drawn to intervene often out of compassion. Indeed, Boal (1995, in person) talks about the Theatre of the Oppressed creating a 'circle of solidarity' and defines solidarity as willing to run the same risks, which is similar to the root meaning of compassion as '*to suffer with*'.

One of the main techniques in the 'armoury' of the Theatre of the Oppressed is called Forum Theatre. A play is performed depicting an unresolved oppression and is re-performed with an invitation to anyone in the audience – who by default become spect-actors not spectators; to intervene and replace the actor playing the person whom they identify as being the oppressed person (the protagonist) in the original play, and show what they would do to resolve such a situation. A kind of dynamic dialogue often ensues where there are multiple interventions and the engagement of precisely the kind of impassioned but reasoned (task-oriented) analysis which Brecht sought.

Having worked with the Theatre of the Oppressed for over fifteen years in cross-cultural context I have come to recognize that there is a universal response in those new to the form when invited to intervene in the drama, which could be described as an orthogonal rotation in consciousness. It is as if people find a true reflection of the way their consciousness functions or has a capacity to function, where indeed they are the improvisers not only of their own life but of their own consciousness, and essentially a compassionate space is created around shared problems in the same way that decentering,

allowing and letting be does in mindfulness. The irony is that this decentering occurs because people are brought closer or immersed in the drama. They gain a sense of agency in relation to it – even if they do not volunteer to intervene they know that they could have. And since the drama often relates directly to issues that are of concern to themselves and their community the line between ‘real’ life and drama is also often crossed, which is entirely the purpose of the Theatre of the Oppressed – to bring about change in the real world.

Why the transgression of theatre convention by The Theatre of the Oppressed should have such universal appeal is, I propose, because it finally empowers theatre to be what it actually is, the medium through which we evolved self-awareness.

“Man is a theatrical species because he has the ability to reflect upon a discontinuous world. Every performance since that date is a replication of limbic system (old brain) responses moderated by human cerebral cortex (new brain) instructions.” (Armstrong, 1997, p.284)

This would suggest that theatre was always meant to be applied, and when it is not it becomes merely a means of distraction, entertainment or aesthetic or spiritual materialism. Theatre is the externalization of the internalized mirror in which we can see ourselves ‘as if’ in the future and ‘as if’ in the past. *“In the psyche/mirror one sees one’s whole body: in one’s body (in theatre) one see’s one’s psyche.”* Boal (1995, p.28)

It is interesting to note that the mirror is also a consistent metaphor used to describe mindfulness.

“Mindfulness is a mirror; it is a mirror that knows non-conceptually what comes within its scope. And, not being two-dimensional, we might call it a field of knowing, a field of awareness, a field of emptiness, in the same way that a mirror is intrinsically empty, and can therefore “contain” anything and everything that comes before it.” (Kabat-Zinn 2005, p.109)

Kabat Zinn could equally be describing here the ‘empty space’ of the theatre stage as Brook calls it or the aesthetic space, which according to Boal is a mirror into which we can step into and out of, and witness ourselves witnessing.

The second modern theatre practitioner is Enrique Vargas, a Theatre Anthropologist from Colombia, who has not written about his work to date, but who has had a huge influence on present day theatre companies and whom inspired me to develop Sensory Labyrinth Theatre. I saw his first production called *‘Ariadne’s Thread’*, also seen by

Kershaw (1999), in 1996 and have since been developing this mode of theatre as an applied theatre. It is the theatre productions using this mode that has brought the profound effect on audiences mention in the section on the Background of Context Oriented Theatre. The reason for this, I propose, is because it is a form that most resembles mindfulness as a metaphor of theatre.

The audience journey one at a time through a three dimensional darkened labyrinth encountering along the way sensory instillations and actors whose role is to use their presence to bring the visitor to the present moment. Thoughts and feelings that might be suggested by the actors are treated in the same way as the sound, smells, sights, touch and taste – as transitory sensory experiences. There is no plot and the drama arises out of the moment to moment encounter with sensory stimuli and in the meetings and bare witnessing that the actors invite the visitor to share. Drama, or suspense (sometimes terror) is also there for the visitor in not knowing what is around the next corner, and yet because the labyrinth is an uni-circular path there is no goal and no wrong turns to negotiate. Gradually fear subsides and is replaced by curiosity and openness. Also, the path has periods of near complete darkness and turning in on itself takes the visitor near sounds and smells that have been experienced or are yet to be experienced so there is a disorientation of temporal monitoring.

Audiences commonly report that they think differently after walking through the labyrinth and experience more space in their cognitive processing.

3.4 Conclusion

Theatre over the last century, perhaps as a reaction to the atrocities in the theatre of war, has to some degree oriented itself towards context, by recognizing the theatre space as a crucible for bringing awareness to this experience of being. We have explored several reasons why it was not entirely effective in this pursuit. Firstly, because the ‘content’ of consciousness occupied as it is by culture, politics, commerce and aesthetic/spiritual materialism tends to distract us from the correct ontological interpretation of theatre. This is similar to the way of ‘mindlessness’, where we get lost in doing and forget the doer. Secondly, the traditional or Greek theatre model, internalized as the Cartesian theatre of the mind, is so strong in the psyche that theatre practitioners (like scientists studying

consciousness), were locked in to models of theatre which inhibited the distribution of attention towards context. A metaphor might be that the theatre has been like a group of people looking at a box and wondering what mystery it held, while the orthogonal rotation COT brings about is the realization that it is **we** who are in the box and we are surrounded by mystery.

COT, because it considers theatre as an externalization of the mirror of the mind, engages and invites the attention of the audience to rest on the drama that is unfolding in the shared moment in space and time, and in particular on the nature of the relationship between the observer and the observed. To do this the mirror must not only be angled so the intense and engaged attention of the audience is reflected back on itself, it must shift what Lehmann calls the 'theatron axis' (Lehmann, 2006, p.127), so that the mirror of the aesthetic space is re-internalized.

4. In Practice

“The whole manifestation that we call life is simply the drama of oneness looking for itself, for all desire is the longing for oneness.” Tony Parsons (2006)

When theatre is applied the fourth wall generally becomes porous, and participation becomes the key word. The kinds of theatre which fall under the umbrella term Applied Theatre include, among others, Community Theatre, Theatre in Prisons, Theatre for Development, Theatre in Health/Education and Reminiscence Theatre (Prentki & Preston, 2009, p.9). Applied theatre practitioners often distance themselves from therapists, and refer to their work as being therapeutic incidentally, the emphasis being on empowering participants to make social changes. Therefore a Mindfulness Based Approach to Health that applies theatre might not sit comfortably under such a banner, because improving the wellbeing of its participants would be its main function.

Dramatherapy, by contrast, would appear at first hand to be more fitting because its domain, which it protects quite vigorously from applied theatre practitioners, is a clinical setting and its function is therapeutic change. In practice both applied theatre and dramatherapy use similar processes and recognize that theatre is *‘infinitely wider than the stage’* (Ereinov cited in Jones, 1996, p.3). Nevertheless, in general terms Dramatherapy emphasises a ‘doing mode’, *“drama in my sense is the doing of life.”* (Slade cited in Jones, 1996, p.89) with participants encouraged to expand their capacity to improvise through role-playing and physical and dramatic expression and communication. It is a gross simplification of a whole field of therapy, perhaps, but implicit in the therapeutic relationship of Dramatherapy is goal-orientation and the motivation to *“reduce the gap between how things are and how we would like them to be,”* which are characteristics of the ‘doing mode’ (Segal et al, 2002). Certainly, dramatherapy employs the decentering capacity of theatre to re-contextualize difficult emotions, thoughts and feelings and increasing the awareness and flexibility of patients to have more choice in how they respond to problematic internal events. But by framing the patient as an ‘actor’ in need of skills to perform better, it requires strong direction by the facilitator which necessitates a power imbalance in the therapeutic relationship which is inconsistent with a Mindfulness Based Approaches to Health. This is shown by the current situation in MBCT where

practitioners making the ‘intervention’ are not called therapists but teachers, in keeping with their role to teach skills to participants in a class that might help them to improve their wellbeing (Crane et al, 2010). The emphasis therefore is more on the pedagogical than the therapeutic.

Neither is COT a theatre sport, or a platform for improvisation – which is the basis of Gluck’s ‘Insight Improvisation’ and Kelman’s ‘Mindfulness-based Improvisation’. Improvisation is implicit when entering the aesthetic space without a script, and stepping into that uncertainty and allowing spontaneity in our actions are congruent with elements of mindfulness. Nevertheless, the possibility arises that emphasising improvisation as the skill set developed by the practice might shift the focus onto performing and improving performance rather than the context which is the ground of being offered by the aesthetic space.

Context Oriented Theatre is therefore a theatre approach and an approach to theatre which can be in any style or can occur in any context simply because that towards which it is oriented is always present. Nevertheless, as we have seen, there are certain models of theatre that are more conducive than others because they manifest the theatre/consciousness relationship in a way that is more consistent with mindfulness.

Using the themes that have emerged from the review of the literature in section 2 and which were used to provide a framework within which to explore the vast field of theatre in relation to mindfulness in section 3, we will now start to set out how the theory of COT can be practiced. First, in 4.1 there is a sample of possible exercises from the COT repertoire which could be used within an existing MBA curriculum, with a description of their added value. In 4.2 we look at how COT as a whole systems approach can integrate mindfulness with several facets of applied theatre. In 4.3 we focus on the sequence of models of theatre which orient participants towards context. A module, a course or a project in COT might use practices, a sample of which are in 4.1, to activate the facets described in 4.2 through a process following the sequence of models described in 4.3.

4.1 Mindfulness as theatre

In order to get an idea of how the COT approach might contribute to an MBA curriculum, below are some practices that address key points within the curriculum. The

practices are described, followed by an explanation of their function and then a discussion of how they give added value to MBA's through the specific properties of theatre that this thesis has re-contextualized. Then there is a suggestion of where in a curriculum it might be useful to use.

A prejudice often associated with theatre and drama activity is that it is for young people and children, and therefore that these practices might be appropriate for MBA's directed at schools or for creative people. It is true children under a certain age are more open to playful approaches, and would perhaps benefit from alternating between sitting and illustrative activities rather than talks. Nevertheless, as McBee states

"We all are creative beings, and yet many of us feel we are not, cutting off the resource within ourselves. Creativity is not limited to cognition; in fact, cognition may inhibit creativity as we screen out "mistakes." (McBee, 2008, p.97)

More creative approaches in MBA's might also help inhibit cognition and favour meta-cognition, and would help MBA's engage with populations of diverse age and ability.

Images of resistance to mindfulness practice. One of the main tools in the armoury of the Theatre of the Oppressed is Image Theatre. Participants create images with their bodies and in some instances sculpt each other to create tableaux in which they can then place themselves. By creating images of our oppression we start to learn the language of theatre and of the body. We start to identify the nature of the oppression, and articulate its context. By dynamizing the image – giving them movement and sound (including speech) we are able to recognize the mechanisms of that oppression and find strategies for resistance. These images can depict external or internal oppressions.

In groups of four or five participants are invited to create images of the barriers they have to mindfulness practice. Each take turns to use the other members of the group to sculpt into images of the barriers and then they place themselves where they feel they are in the scenario. Usually, in the Image Theatre process, these images would be seen by the whole group and interpreted and analyzed. But this takes a long time and the emphasis here is on manifesting externally in the aesthetic space these barriers so that they can be seen. All the groups simultaneously dynamize with slow motion movement and with sounds or words if appropriate, for each image in turn and with the instructions that follow. But before starting this process the teacher must explain to the group the *maieutic* purpose

of this exercise. Boal explains how *maieutic* has the same derivation as midwife and means to give birth to new action or insight (Boal, 2002, p.262). Therefore the antagonist applies the appropriate amount of pressure, exerted neither to be a push over nor to overpower the protagonist, but to empower insight. This is the meaning below in the instructions when the antagonist is asked to ‘do their worst’.

1. The protagonist (the owner of each image) allows the antagonists (the oppressors or barriers) to do their worst.

2. The protagonist can choose to place his/herself in a different relationship to the antagonists before the antagonists are again allowed to dynamize and do their worst.

3. The antagonists are allowed to sculpt and position the protagonist as they please, before dynamizing again.

4. The protagonist is now able to sculpt the antagonists to create the ideal image – the absence of barriers or barriers turning into supports. In this dynamization the antagonists (now supporters) must slowly turn back into their old antagonistic nature.

After each group has explored the image of each participant they can share what they noticed in the process. If there is enough time it might also be beneficial for the protagonist to take on the role of each of the antagonists he/she created.

Function. This process enables us to slow down experience and externalize internal barriers allowing us to bring awareness to “*how we structure our attention in a given situation*” (Hewson, 2007, p.5) Physical embodiment, articulation and confrontation with the barriers allows for there to be a deeper body understanding of their nature and how and in what way acceptance, allowing and letting be is more effective than resistance, or indeed when discipline and gumption is required.

Theatre. This uses metaxis which, as explained previously is “*The state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different autonomous worlds; the image of reality and the reality of the image*”. (Boal, 1995, 43) Though autonomous both worlds correspond on some subtle level and in my experience changing the image of reality changes our relationship with the reality that image depicts. Also by embodying images the feeling tone of that image is released for consciousness to access, allowing insight that is not available through words alone.

Curriculum. This exercise would fall naturally into the second session, ‘Dealing with Barriers’. In MBSR in week 5 and 6 there is the option to use an Aikido pushing exercise which is very useful at embodying the metaphor of mindfulness whereby, rather than resisting a hit one sidesteps and moves in close to a difficulty (sidles up to it). There are similarities between these two exercises but there are two advantages to the method proposed here. The first is that the barriers embodied are ‘bespoke’ to the person creating the image and the second is that the way of working with the barriers is not prescribed, allowing the participant to discover for themselves the mindful path.

Journey to Now. The group sit on the ground in a circle around the edge of a large round piece of paper (this can also be done with sheets of A4 paper; collected and found objects or any material, in fact) The centre of the circle of paper represents ‘this moment’ and where the participants are sitting represents the wombs which they once inhabited. They are invited to draw, paint or sculpt the terrain which they have crossed to arrive here and now.

Once they have all finished their journey they stand at their ‘womb’ and side-step to the next womb and witness the terrain others have traversed in order to come to this point of here and now.

Function: This exercise promotes compassion for ourselves and others, one of the necessary attitudinal qualities for mindfulness. It also creates a sense of community and possibly a sense of a new beginning. Alan Watts (n.d.) has said that the moment we start to define ourselves by what we are doing in the moment instead of what we have done in the past is “*the birth of responsibility*”. This exercise can have such an effect, creating a demarcation point from the past by rendered it in a form where we can see that it is just a story we tell ourselves, while in reality all that exists is the continual present.

Theatre: This exercise uses mimesis. First of all , by the act of making art we are ‘*re-creating the creative principle of created things*’ (Boal, 2000) Secondly, in the act of making art by recalling and mapping our life’s paths we might start to recognize that they too are exercises of mimesis. We are narrative-hungry animals and this exercise, exposes how the past is a continual creation enacted in the present. It also creates a strong symbolic frame, with the person reviewing their life from the standpoint of themselves before they were born but because the map is quite patently not the territory it provides distance (or

decentering). From a Buddhist perspective it could be said that a group is putting on a stage in front of them the wheel of ‘*samsara*.’ When witnessing the journeys of others there is the possibility of “*catching the thread of all sorrows*” and “*seeing the size of the cloth*,” as the lines go in the beautiful poem, *Kindness* by Naomi Shihab Nye states.

Curriculum: This is an excellent for the beginning of a course because there is a certain amount of anonymity in the artistic rendering of their life paths, while also being incredibly intimate to the individual. Also witnessing the other paths, all leading to this point, illustrates how they will continue their journey together in this *sangha*.

The Balloon Exercise. The participants choose and inflate one party balloon each and are given felt tip pens on which to write their names on the balloon. A metaphor is suggested whereby these balloons represent internal events – thoughts, feelings and emotions and a comparison drawn about how in every waking moment we are sustaining these sensations. Left to themselves they arise and fall. However, for some reason we like to keep them ‘afloat’. One reason is that, perhaps if we were to drop these thoughts then our hand would look pretty stupid moving up and down by itself, without any reason for doing so.

Since participants will already be bobbing their balloon up and down the teacher can illustrate this nonsensical hand movement by dropping the balloon, and demonstrate how the balloon therefore gives legitimacy to this movement of the hand.

The group are then instructed to stand up and move around with the express purpose of keeping the balloon up, but they are not allowed to hold on to it. After a minute or two of this they are instructed to try and form a relationship with the people around them to meet them and make good contact with them. Soon enough they realize that meeting with anyone is impossible without dropping the balloon. After some time they return to their chairs, which are ideally arranged in a circle, and are forewarned to keep their balloons aloft. They are told that in a moment they will all drop the balloon at the same time and start a mindfulness meditation practice. During this practice they will bring their attention to the equivalent in the mind of the hand moving up and down, seeking sensations to provoke or keep aloft, in order to legitimise its movement.

Function. ‘Doing’ meditation is a common trap into which mindfulness meditators can fall into, especially when an attachment arises to the initial effort required to strengthen

the concentration ‘muscle’ of the mind. This helps participants let go and allow sensations to arise and fall, and to notice when the ‘doing’ mode arises and indeed how unnecessary it is if there is nothing to ‘keep up’.

Theatre. Theatre provides the only mechanism that allows us to embody a metaphor, and by allowing us to project and identify with even inanimate objects enables us to also instantly embody the insight. There is also the playfulness associated with the exercise and the challenge, which everyone fails to complete, to try and strike up a meaningful conversation, illustrating the point Williams makes that attention is limited and cannot focus on more than two things at the same time (Williams, 2005). Secondly there is the relationship they develop with this inanimate object on which their name is written and this all leads to the dramatic moment when the group let the balloons drop, and after the frantic effort, the colour and movement, like leaves falling on a pond, there is a sudden stillness.

While language as a metaphor, apart from poetry, encourages convergent processing- where a specific interpretation is sought; embodying metaphor allows for divergent processing, where a plurality of interpretations is encouraged or indeed, no interpretation at all but just a feeling tone. Therefore, while the instructions can be directed specifically to explore the themes of allowing and letting be, “Doing” mode and “Being” mode or attachment to thoughts, defining what the balloons and the movement of the arm represent can be left open. So by simply asking what the balloons and the movement of the hand might represent, or what in the mind do they correspond to, might proffer insight that is relevant to the participant at that time.

Curriculum. This exercise might fit in Session 5: Allowing and Letting Be, or Session 6: Thoughts are not Facts in an MBSR or MBCT course. Participants would need to have had some meditation practice before this exercise is introduced.

4.2 Working with the drama of life

All applied theatre and theatre pedagogic approaches could benefit from a COT approach. In order to illustrate this, below is a mandala showing how mindfulness (in the form of an MBSR or MBCT course taught in parallel with a theatre project) can be

integrated into a COT for community development approach, in particular for communities in conflict.

As a whole systems approach COT invites difficulty on many levels into the aesthetic space, the content or the drama of life is welcomed - social strife, religious/cultural antagonism and political oppression as well as our personal struggles. The aspiration here is revolution through proprioception by training creative citizens in mindfulness-based social change, with response-ability rather than the usual reactivity - which is a neural activity that MBA's have been shown to reduce (Den Hurk , Janssen, Barbara, Giommi, Barendregt & Gielen, 2010)

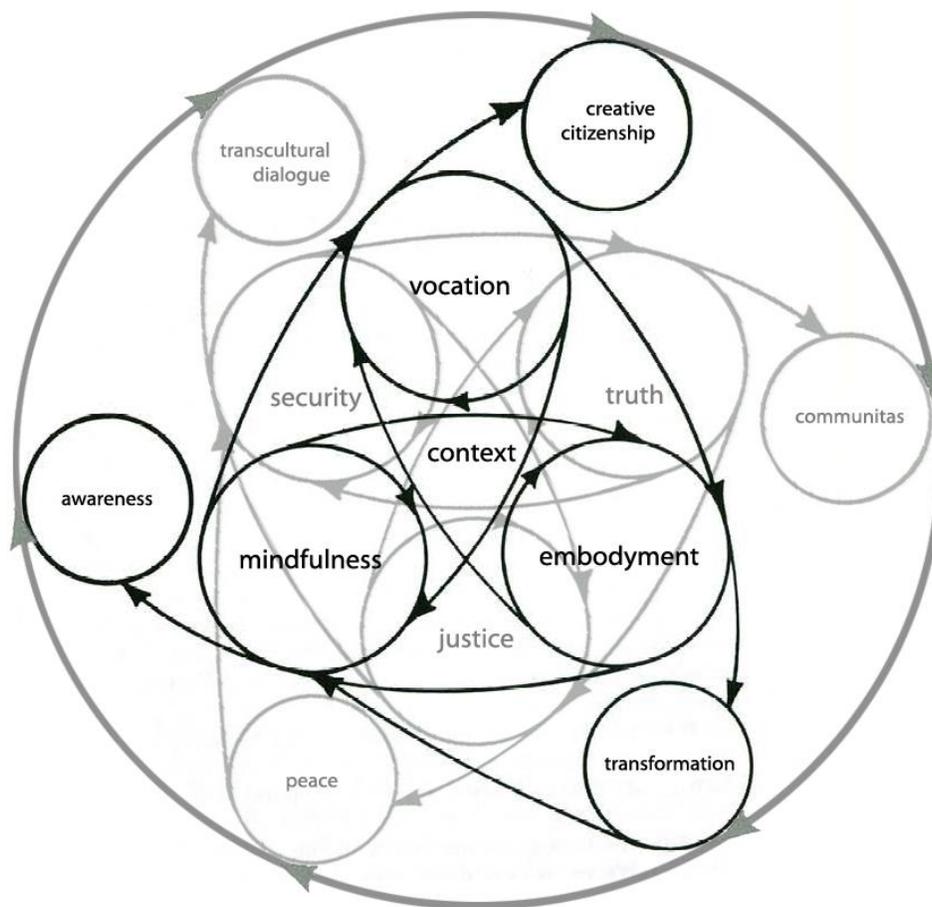


Figure 1. Mandala of Context Oriented Theatre

The terms used will be explained, corresponding to the outer circle of the curriculum mandala. Within these descriptions will be some explanation of the logic behind the movement around the circle and references (in bold) to the significance of the

inner mechanisms (black) and outer goals (grey) displayed in the central part of the mandala.

Creative Citizenship. A creative citizen is a pro-active citizen, rather than just an active citizen. Creative citizens are people within communities who are inspired to envision what they really want from life and the world they want to live in and empowered to shape the future rather than wait for it to happen to them. They do this through all creative, democratic, legal and peaceful means available to them, and they use applied theatre as a method to rehearse those changes with the wider community. Part of this is implicated by the term **vocation** – in finding their voice in society participants will also be encouraged to peruse their true vocations.

Communitas. The first ‘initiation’ into creative citizenship is the experience of ‘communitas.’ This is the glue, articulated by anthropologist Victor Turner, without which a feeling of community does not exist and which is generated by people suspending the identities they have formed around the roles they occupy which are ‘functional’ within society - such as ‘teacher’/‘student’, ‘wealthy’/‘poor’, ‘consumer’/‘provider.’ A community that does not share a ‘sense of community’ is very difficult to develop.

Transformation. The generation of communitas and the suspension of identities predicates a radical shift from modes of consciousness that involve ‘having and doing’, to a mode of simply ‘being.’ This shift is a movement of awareness towards the context of everything – this escapes definitive description but could be called ‘the sense of being alive’, or ‘the present moment’ or simply ‘consciousness.’ It is this orientation towards the **context** rather than the content of experience that is a consistent action of ‘Context Oriented Theatre’ and from where its name is derived. It is also the reason why the transformation sought through the implementation of the activities happen on a fundamental or meta-cognitive level of consciousness rather than simply an intellectual or cognitive level.

Peace. The nature of this transformation in to a ‘being’ mode brings about a sense of peace, because while we operate in the ‘doing’ and ‘having’ mode we have the sense that there is something lacking in our lives, and an expectation that the next moment is going to be better than this one. It is a pattern of behaviour that is the source of conflict on an intrapersonal, interpersonal and social level and truth, justice and security cannot be achieved without awareness of its influence on our actions. Of course peace without truth,

justice and security is not real peace but ‘passivity’ and this is why this inner development happens simultaneously which requires the proactive involvement in envisioning and co-creating strategies for bringing about in society greater democratic accountability(**truth**), social cohesion (**justice**) and community safety (**security**).

Awareness. The longer we are able to '**embody**' a mode of being the more we become aware of the mechanism through which we perpetuate our own and others are suffering, and the more we are able to respond rather than react to difficulties, thus breaking the cycle of inner stress and outer conflict. This growing awareness of the context of our experience allows what is manifest through the theatre work to have lasting value and a wider scope of relevance than would be achieved through discussion based ‘working out’ of solutions. This is because the changes sought in society are embodied in the change in the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of the participants and are multiplied through creative acts with the wider community.

Transcultural Dialogue. With growing **mindfulness** as a basis for development and change, cross border co-operation becomes a crucible in which to explore our conditioning and to celebrate the diversity of culture without being threatened by different perspectives. Thus, with each circuit a deeper sense of creative citizenship, a deeper transformation and a deeper awareness is unfolded in the community.

4.3 Metaphors of mindfulness

Theatre is a metaphor for consciousness and different modes of theatre correspond to different modes of consciousness. What follows are a series of slides which picture the correlation between different models of theatre, Bohm’s (2003, p232) model of the fragmented brain and an adaptation of Barendregt’s Abhidhamma Model of Consciousness (2006).

COT is an approach that works with each of these models in sequence. Under each slide is an explanation of the illustrations and a description of the activities associated with this stage of the process. What is set out here is a sequence which would be the vehicle for working through the mandala described in the previous section. This could be with a community on a project, a small client group in a clinical setting or it could be the basis for a module for Mindfulness practitioners to widen their experience.

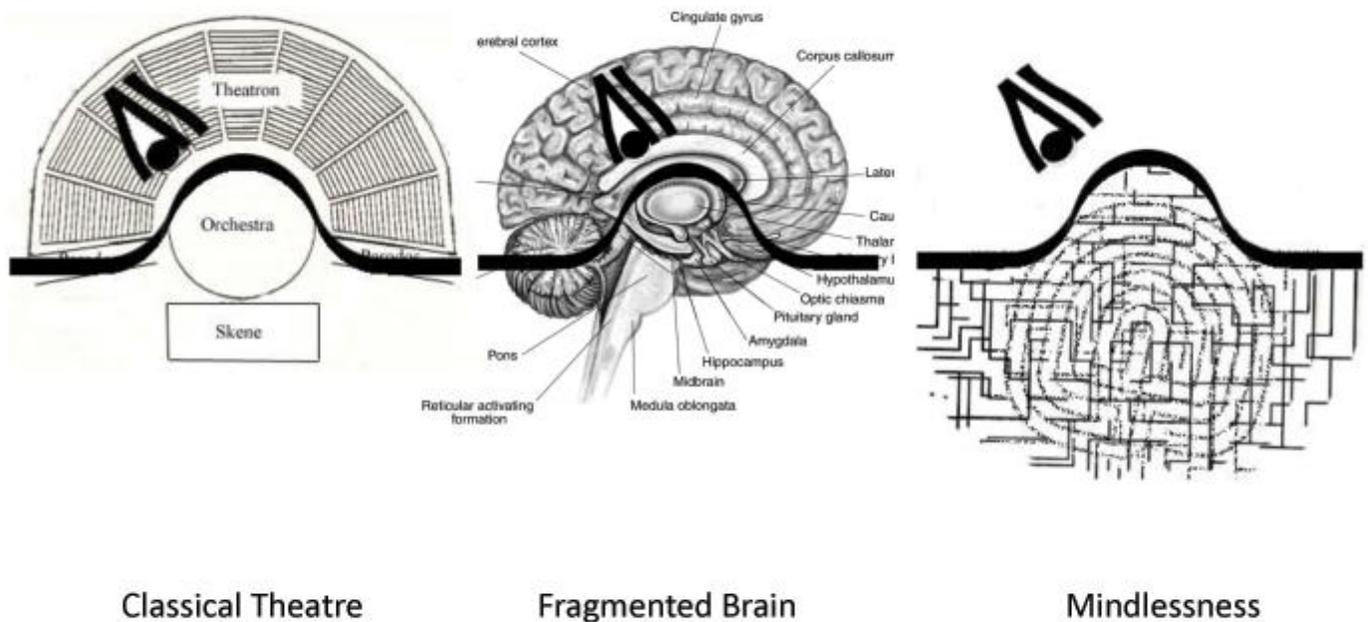


Figure 2. Cartesian/Greek Theatre

First Stage. The first model employs conventional ‘Greek’ or Cartesian theatre that separates actor from audience creating a duality. This corresponds to the idea that the world is out there and happening to us. Neurologically it is similar to the separation Bohm depicted in simplistic terms of the thalamus and the neo-cortex – the later is tasked with entertaining the former with mental projections that support primitive homeostasis (Bohm & Nichol, 2003,p.212). Though in reality fragmented the mind succeeds in creating ‘drama’ – precisely as Aristotle defined the term– by imposing a pattern of logic on the

chaos of thoughts, feelings and emotions, giving continuity and an illusion of agency in relation to the thoughts. This helps us cover up the basic neurosis of mindlessness.

The first stage uses activities in the conventional theatre model to explore self-consciousness, and the aesthetic space. Depending on the context this stage might include activities such as the group being an audience to a play exploring issues of mindfulness; or it might involve the group co-devising and mounting a performance themselves; or in a short course setting it might be improvisation exercises such as those developed by Gluck and discussed in section 2.1 or a Mastery workshop where participants are asked to perform as individuals in front of the group a piece of literature or a song that has touched them in the past (Kimberley, 2010).

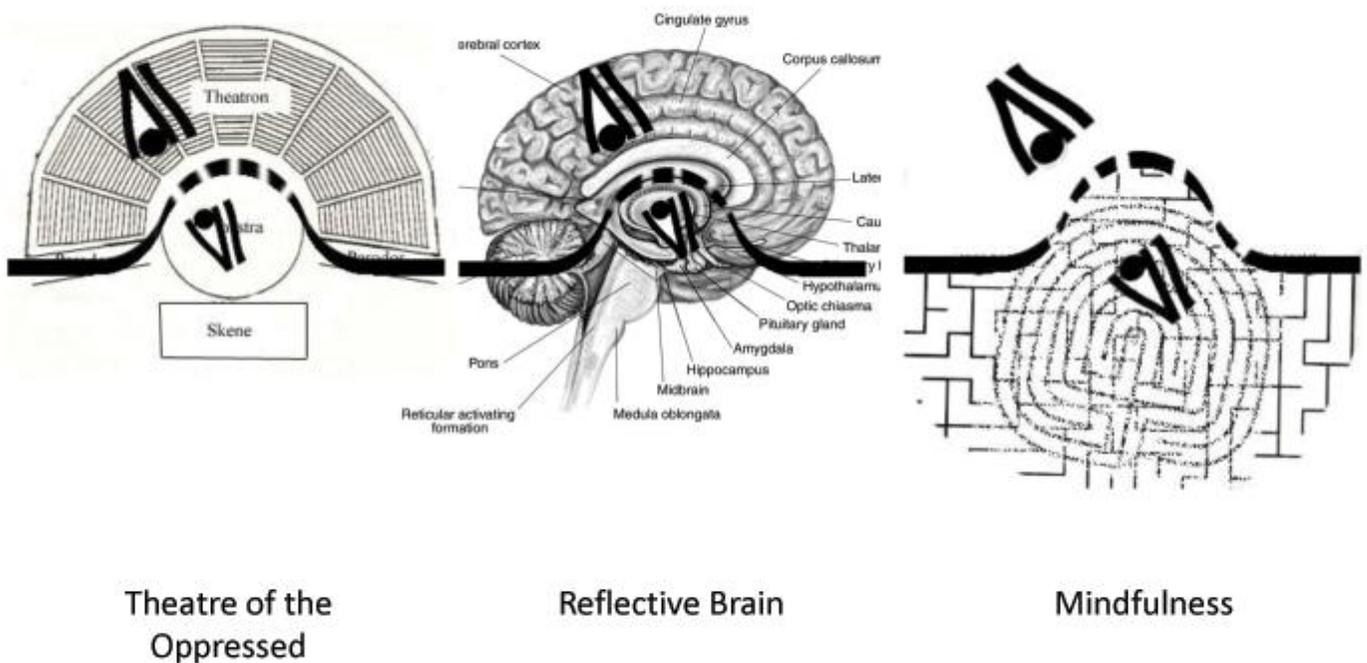


Figure 3: ‘Boalian’/Orthogonal Theatre

Second Stage. The second stage shows the Boal Theatre model which introduces the orthogonal rotation– such as employed in The Theatre of the Oppressed, where the

theatron axis has shifted and where audience can cross the fourth wall into the aesthetic space of the stage. Here dialogue is established between the inner experience and the outer experience and if facilitated correctly we can start to see our role in the way we perceive the world. For this to work Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) needs to follow David Diamond's adaptation of TO as Theatre for Living (Diamond & Capra, 2007, p.38) where the oppressor and oppressed are seen as polarities emerging within a dysfunctional organism (the community is seen as a living organism) and the emphasis is on making whole or healing this organism.

Tasked with creating harmony within a system 'as it is' rather than finding strategies for political revolution, the practice of TO will have to confront difficulty head on as it arises within us. To do this without falling back into patterns of resistance and antagonism, without attachment to dogmas or preconceived ideas or without becoming apathetic and falling into patterns of learned hopelessness requires the embodiment of mindfulness in the facilitator, if not the development of a Mindfulness-based approach to the Theatre of the Oppressed.

The corresponding neurological changes occur because the spect-actor, through metaxis is able to start to witness themselves in the act of perpetuating the dysfunction in society by the activity of the fragmented mind. Seeing that our inner neurosis is creating the outer world which previously we had experienced as happening to us, is a key insight in MBA's. Through TO in this form, we can start to witness that our thoughts are not facts, one of the key aims of MBA's.

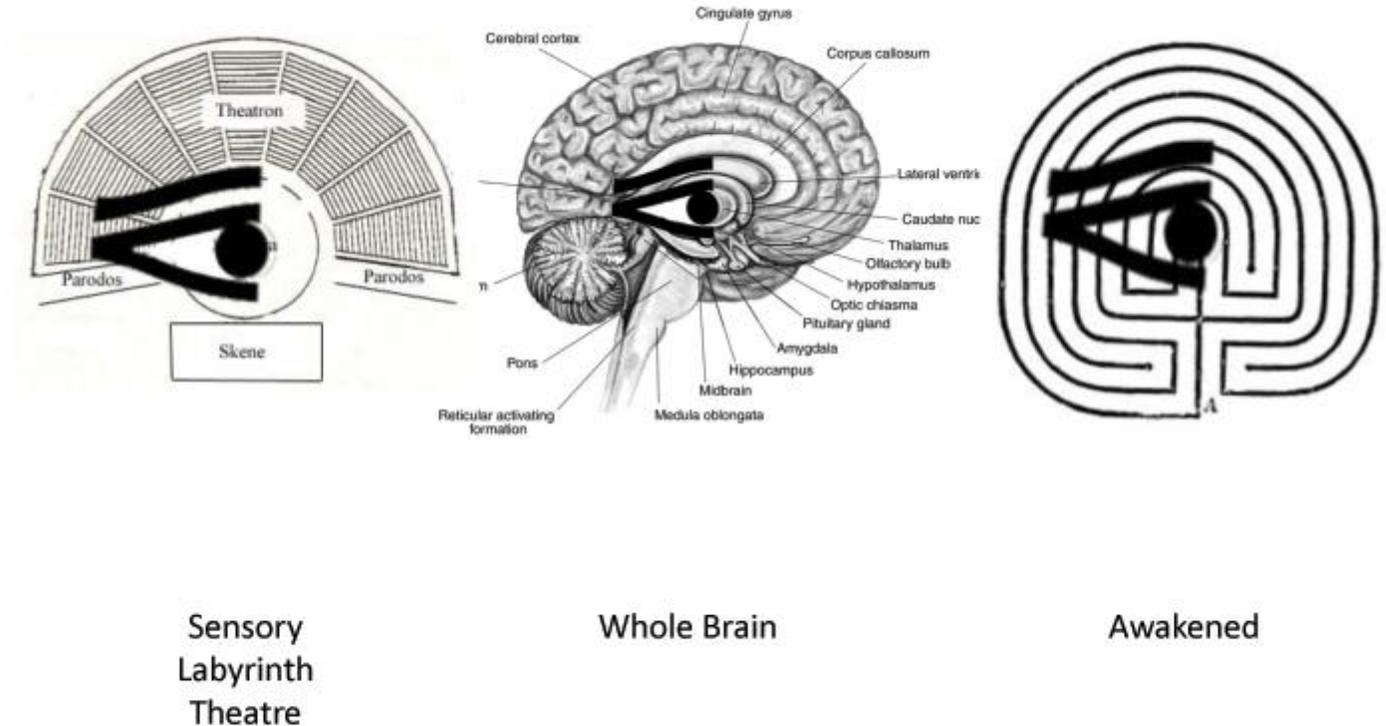


Figure 4. Bohmian/Proprioceptive Theatre

Third Stage. The third stage shows the immersive theatre model, such as Sensory Labyrinth Theatre, where the conditioned theatre/mind structure can collapse through a proprioception of the illusion of separation. The stage and therefore the attention of the audience are distributed. The audience is the hero travelling through a landscape which is aesthetised. They encounter others along the labyrinth path who supports a mindful approach. It can happen that the inner and outer become one and it can happen that the whole fragmented movement of the brain is witnessed, but it is not witnessed by anyone. It is just seen.

How this occurs is not entirely understood but is connected with how the ‘empty space’ as Brook (1972) called it or the aesthetic space according to Boal, suddenly expands and surrounds the audience member as they make their way along the labyrinth. Their thoughts and feelings arising and falling become part of the play and seem as unattached to them as the stimuli to the other senses. Given less importance, the thoughts and fears subside and openness and curiosity to see what’s around the next corner become stronger.

There is a gradual and complete 'coming to the senses' and on some occasions a dissolution of a sense of separation.

4.4 Conclusion

Theatre has been ontologically misrepresented as a cultural activity when it is the embodiment and expression of the consciousness that enables all cultural activity to occur and to be appreciated. It is also concomitant in our evolution with the illusion of a separation between the observer and the observed which arises when there is a self to be conscious of (Bohm & Nichol, 2003, p.287, Gunaratana, 2002, p.101). Arising with this separation is a yearning to be whole again, which we are always in the process of 'becoming.' This becoming is the foundation of drama because while we are becoming there is a conflict or a discrepancy between a here and a there, between what I am and what I should be, between what I have and what I don't have, between what I do and what I should do - which is a cause of suffering.

The metaphysical yearning of Artaud was a kind of clarion call to theatre which for the last century has been trying to create a space between literature/drama and theatre in order to use the 'empty space' of the stage to manifest some kind of transformation through the presence of the actor, or through the distancing or disorientation of the spectator.

However, theatre only started to become useful in this way when the stage and therefore the attention of the audience became distributed or diffused in space and the separation between actor and audience became traversable through the agency of the audience and not the actor alone. This happens in participative and applied theatre and also in dramatherapy. But there is always the goal of change, either therapeutic or social change.

Context Oriented Theatre, invites our attention to rest on what is available in the moment, not with the intention to improvise, but simply to encounter what is there. The proposal therefore is that theatre can be a space in which an awareness of the ground of being can arise – the emptiness from which everything emerges and dissolves (Welwood, 2000, p.57). The aesthetic space has always been such, but it has been cordoned off and designated other, the preserve of the artist or shaman. In Context Oriented Theatre we are invited to recognize that this empty space is not other, it is where we are looking from.

“Have you noticed how easily we get caught up in thinking of ourselves as players on an inert stage, as if the world were only “out there” and not also “in here?”

(Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p.3)

It is time for theatre to be rehabilitated and to be the skilful means of bringing about awareness that the ‘in here’ and ‘out there’ are interdependent ; that the drama we are witnessing is the permanent impermanence of all phenomenon arising from the ground of being and that our natural urge to identify and empathise demonstrate our capacity for compassion towards all people, including ourselves. Krishnamurti (1967, p.106) would say that *“the solution is not separate from the problem, the answer is in the problem, not away from it.”* If, as proposed in this thesis, theatre is ontologically concomitant with our illusion of separation and the suffering that arises from this is the source of all drama then theatre and drama are an externalization of the problem and can be entered into with a view to healing this separation.

From the perspective of MBA’s, this approach could be operationalized through the development of a module for inclusion in a Mindfulness Based Approaches for Health teacher training: enabling teachers to learn, develop and share theatre methods that could augment current MBA curricula. This might begin a process whereby a new mindfulness based theatre approach to health could be developed which would have particular appeal to people who struggle with sitting practice, such as hyperactive patients; people who have difficulty articulating with words; with groups in a cross-cultural context where there is not the proficiency necessary in a common language; or where people are generally in need of a more dynamic, creative and playful approach.

From the perspective of theatre, COT is already developing a training network in Europe (called ‘The Republic of the Imagination’) with the eventual aim of creating a course in COT. MBSR or MBCT will be core modules of this course, alongside The Theatre of the Oppressed and Sensory Labyrinth Theatre. The course will be delivered through action research on community development projects following the mandala of COT. The way the modules inform and interact with each other in the field will bring about the full practical implications of what has been laid out here.

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