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"On the occasion of exploring relational aspects in Playback Theatre through the PSP (Process-Stage-Praxis) approach"

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Summary.

In the beginning of this article is presented its motivation, central idea and aim. Then, what follows is some basic information about the theoretical core of the article. This core refers to some fundamental concepts of the dynamic systems theory and of different areas of the Gestalt philosophy (which is the basis of PSP).

For example, we shall see what is a "whole", how the parts of a system develop interactions between them and between each part and the system as a whole, what is the feedback and the self-organization skills of a system, what is the philosophical idea of the "middle-point" and the dynamic theory of Self in Gestalt.

And then, all this information is connected to the Playback Theatre, in order to explore its relational aspects, device new conceptual areas that will make even more solid its theory, and enrich the flexibility of its methodology and training. Of course, here, we cannot advance much in this direction. We can only indicate some of the numerous the possibilities that are opening if we just start thinking of Playback on a firm philosophically relational context. Within the boundaries and the scope of this article, we cannot examine in details these possibilities.

However, in any PSP conception of any Playback idea, there is a similar way of approach both theoretically and methodologically in practice.

Contents.

1. Why is there a need to explore the possibility of a relational perspective on Playback?

Since I met with Playback at 2000, I felt it as an area that took me to the depths of human experience, with security, simplicity, and warmth. The Playback idea seems to me modestly simple and clear, as well as extraordinarily cohesive and powerful. However, as in art the praxis usually precedes the theory, I believe that Playback is still fermenting its theory through its constantly developing praxis. My personal opinion is that Playback's theory is just in the beginning of such a development - and I of course do not mean the Playback's technical aspects but mainly a solid philosophical structure that would be able to support safely the very nature of Playback.

I am under the opinion that Playback today is at the very beginning of this phase. No matter some brilliant theoretical studies already existing in Playback, I see its theory appearing in a more global view rather fragmented (always in terms of a unified philosophy) as still being in "puberty"; appearing periodically and not systematically, involving isolated aspects of Playback, discussing and not defining terms, being composed of often scattered references in various approaches, and finally, not forming a central and clearly philosophical core (see, 19-??).

Of course, by underlining the need for a central philosophy in Playback, I do not at all mean that there should not be multiplicity. On the contrary, I very strongly believe in the necessity of multiplicity in all aspects of Playback. Fe Day (1999) notes that what we see depends on the window from which we see it. But we can not know the shape of the window we use while looking through it. That's why, Fe Day emphasizes, Playback needs many such windows, precisely so its potential and prospects don't get trapped in the shape of a single dimensional approach, whichever this may be.

However, on the other hand, I also believe that it is equally needed some kind of central philosophical "meeting area" of the multiple points of view. Otherwise, there will be problems regarding several fundamental questions, like: "what exactly does it mean to 'respect' the teller", "what is a story, its meaning and its essence", "how and why do we do this and this and not that and that during the performance", "how and why does Playback work", "what do the terms 'spontaneity' and 'authenticity' on stage mean", "what are the features of the aesthetic experience of the spectator, the actor, the conductor", "how strict should the Playback ritual be and, above all, according to which of Playback's points and in which way is the word 'strict' meant", "can we talk about only one 'correct' and 'rightful' Playback, and if yes, how can we support such an idea", "what are the nature and peculiarities of improvisation in Playback", "to what exactly do the three key Playback skill areas (social, artistic and ritualistic) refer", etc.

The problems that may arise if there is not created a central "meeting area" of working on such questions, have to do with many things. Answers may be restricted just to rather arbitrary, empirical and generalized advices. Then, answers may be contradictory in many senses, depending on the point of view of each answer, something that may create serious confusions to trainees. Moreover, theoretical fragmentations and important gaps in some answers may create even further confusion; or, sometimes, may result to a performance ending up in a pantomimic and superficial mimesis just of the mental contents of the events described in the stories. Here are some indicative examples.

… Two important Playback points are: "we respect the narrator" and "there are no good or bad stories". Both points are extremely important - but why? (beyond some general and abstract humanistic principles).

… Or, "the actor is like an empty vessel on the stage" - what exactly is meant by this metaphor, how this state can be reached, and what happens with the actor's personal sense of reality?

… Or, let us focus on the topic of the essence (or the heart) of the story. For Salas (1993), the meanings of a story exist in a successive layering, and all together compose its essence. In a beautiful metaphor, she sees these meanings as a chord from a piano's keys, as a result of all the tones participating in the chord. Yet, sometimes, in the Playback world, I get the impression that for some Playbackers the "quest" of this essence acquires an almost "mystic" character, as if it were something pre-existing, alive, "fleeting" and elusive that knows very well how to escape and hide, while we must chase it and "reveal" it through thinking: "if I were the narrator, why would I choose the story that is being heard", "what important message is hidden underneath the narrator's words", etc. As an attempt for an elementary approach to the story, the above is probably useful. However, in these phrases, I personally see the meaning of the story to appear as something objective, consolidated and pre-existing, with the conductor or the actor becoming a "hunter" in a compulsion to "find" it. Moreover, such an approach risks to objectify and de-personalize the teller, bring to front an interpretative mentality. In other words, I think that such approaches emerge in Playback basically because is missing a fundamental theoretical conception of how a "story" and its "meaning" can be defined.

… Or, the topic of "how" Playback functions is sometimes invested with too much mystery, and I think that still the reason is a missing global philosophical/theoretical conception (not interpretation or explanation of) of the basic Playback contact processes interweaving the performance. At the same time, for the same reasons, some relevant concepts and terms in the existing Playback theory, such as the "shamanic" element in conducting, the "ecstasy", the "awareness", the "animal state", may sometimes remain not clearly defined or vaguely described.

I believe that exploring the relational nature of Playback may possibly contribute to the formation of a clear central philosophical general basis, able to "contain" and hold the necessary multiplicity of perspectives regarding any aspect of Playback. The book, from re-worked excerpts of which is composed this article, and of course this article itself, are both a contribution to the solidity and depth of developing of such a central and flexible Playback theoretical basis. Besides, Jonathan Fox always insisted on theoretical work on Playback; also, in various publications on Playback, the need for research is emphasized (Fox, 1994, p. 198), as well as the multilevel use and development of the theory (Fe Day, 1999), while various research hypotheses are also suggested (Dauber, 1999).

2. Maybe enriching the Playback theory would "damage" the Playback idea?
or: opening an discussion on what could be a "correct" Playback.

Some may think that new theory or philosophy for Playback is a kind of "threat" to its original conception. I think that this is a necessary discussion, that sometimes is in a way discarded because of our natural need to protect a wonderful art that we love practicing. On the other hand, even our childhood could not last for ever. And on the occasion of my proposal to explore what has to offer a relational perspective on Playback, this section is mostly an invitation and a motivation to enrich one's view in Playback, even if one decides that one does not need at all to listen about theory and philosophy in pLayback.

To start the discussion, let us not forget that Playback is a complete and integral idea, that however arises from the convergence of two separate elements, which already existed before Playback was devised: one is the art of improvising on stage, and the other is the sharing of stories through oral narrations and on stage enactments. In essence, the brilliantly "new" in the Playback idea has been (and is) "how" these two elements are brought together through some especially designed just for this goal "principles". And this is why any improvisation that somehow connects audience and actors is not, cannot and should not immediately be named as "Playback".

This way that Playback was born, means that though Playback's central concept has to remain intact, Playback as a theatrical outcome can be approached from many directions. In fact, Playback was offered to the world as a precious gift. Many people embraced it, it progressed, and by now it is spectacularly developing. And "developing" has inevitably to do with reconsidering frames, simply because evolving, staying alive and not dying, by axiom means changing at least something (or acknowledge change already happening). However, the fact that Playback is "escaping" from the frames of its original conception, does not at all mean that it has to alter its original principles and coral idea. This idea can be maintained fresh and shinning in whatever new frames Playback might be experimenting with.

So, I believe that even though there IS a central Playback idea, there cannot be only one "good" or "rightful" or "proper" Playback in practice and in training. The only kind of "heretic" Playback is the one that endangers the Playback's central conception and inspiration, and not the one that develops its philosophy and methodology. Bringing together improvisation and oral narration in order to produce Playback has for sure to be realized in a way through which a specific and concrete "Playback result" has to be reached; but nobody can claim that there is only one "correct" way to teach improvisation or to understand the theory of narration or that there is only one "proper" way to approach what is philosophically meant by the idea of "improvising on stories". Thus, there cannot be a "right/wrong" Playback - as I noted above, such a characterization could be meaningful only regarding if, how and how much Playback's central conception is respected or not.

Any universal claim of validity or "correctness" in Playback is monopolizing something that in order to stay alive has to breathe. All ages in things change, and an adolescent cannot wear the clothes of his childhood. Besides, I believe that identity is not kept alive on the level of non-changing frames but on an invisible, deep level of personal truth and originality that manages to give life to any frame. This is why I think that a respectfully suggested philosophical frame of a relational Playback as a possible enrichment for its growing, is not at all a "threat" for Playback's originality and brilliance.

Of course, which new ideas offend the Playback essence and which do not, is another big issue. We can only be certain that today no one can make such decisions "objectively", monopolizing some "proper", one and only approach in training and practicing Playback. Besides, there is only the effectiveness of such new ideas in time, as an indication of their functionality.

3. Some indicative definitions on the theoretical background for a relational Playback.

3a. The concept of wholeness.

What does the "word" wholeness exactly mean, and why it implies a relational sense? Is it simply a numeric sum of some elements? And by "self-organization" do we simply refer to some structure? To understand the deepest nuances of these important relational terms, we may orient towards system theory and the concept of the "system".

For Antonios Arkas (2015), we may think that a "system" is any organized unified whole of interacting and interdependent components, considered to form a whole; this whole is an individual entity existing, moving and developing by its continuous transformations in a wider environment. A system interacts with its environment, it develops a "behavior", is characterized by spatial and temporal boundaries as well as by structure. A system's components are interdependent through structural and behavioral relationships, they can be material or non-material, and they can form sub-wholes of more elementary structure (sub-systems). Each component and each subsystem has its own individual functions, identity and behavior, while maintaining its interdependence form the other components and sub-systems. Thus, every change in any area of the system is reflected to all its components, transforming them. An open system communicates with its environment through its components, while it changes and is changed by the environment.

System theory was developed partly as a response to reductionism, through which we study a system (a whole) by viewing its components independent between them, while their wholeness is their numeric sum. So, we can study them separately, put together our observations, and we shall have the description of the whole. In contrast, system theory exists in the broader philosophical area of holism.

In contrast, an holistic perspective claims that all components are relationally interdependent while keeping their autonomy. Moreover, the whole as an entity is different from the simple numeric sum of its components - it is something "more". This means that the whole develops its own behavior and identity, interacting with all its components, transforming them, and being transformed by them. So, we can never get to "know" a system just by studying its parts and summing up our observations. More precisely, holistically speaking, we should never attempt to know fully the wholeness of a system, since the system, as an entity, acquires an ontologically autonomous and ever changing not static at all character. And, studying a system does not mean to explore only static structures; it means rather to study the relational dynamics (the interactions) between its components, between the components and the whole, and between the whole and the environment.

Also, for the authentic development of a system its components must have the full possibilities of interaction between them as well as with the wholeness of the system. If such communication channels are closed, that is, if some components remain isolated by loosing their communication possibilities with the other areas of the system, the system cannot grow naturally; its next step will not represent the energetic needs for balance of all its components.

3b. The concept of self-organization.

The science of complexity studies complex non-linear systems (systems that develop unpredictable behavior). A fundamental concept used in complexity is the "feedback": the reorienting of any system's output or mechanism as a new input - while we listen to our voices the brain recaptures the audio signal as a feedback and adjusts the tonality, volume and overtones of our voice).

Moreover, Ilya Prigogine (1917-2003, a leading figure in the science of complexity), in his experimental work with other scientists, underlined the huge importance of another concept used widely in complexity: the self organization capacity of open, non linear macroscopic complex systems, consisting of several components. The self-organization phenomenon could be very briefly described as follows.

While such a system manifests a random behavior, all of a sudden, it gets in a state of structural organization. We can see this phenomenon of order emerging out of chaos in bird or fish flocks, but also in inorganic matter, like it happens in many cases of systems of chemical reactions or of gas molecules interactions, in the ways that our neurons group their functions, etc. It is as if the wholeness of a system explores possible patterns for the passage to its next state, suitable for the functions of its components, and then "chooses" one of these patterns; or, it is as if, at the critical point where the whole is to step in its next phase of evolution, the whole suggests to its components possible choices.

Let us consider a system in a chaotic state, in which we have random interactions between the components of the system and between each one of them and the wholeness of the system. At some point, random cores of order start to appear instantly ere and there. Then, through random feedback loops and energy fluctuations, these cores of order become larger and larger, staying in a structural balance more and more. And finally, at some instant, the whole system pass at its new state, which can be of an astonishing and unpredictable structural order. Through the self-organization process, the system develops what is called "emergent properties": new features, new possibilities, that we could never imagine for this system and its components.

Such emergent properties are the result of collective interactions, they did not characterize any part of the system, and they cannot be attributed to any one of its components when considered just by itself.

Today, it is believed more and more that nature improvises every next step through the dialectic co-operation between the self-organization capacities of the natural systems and their tendency to disorder and higher values of entropy (entropy is a physical quantity associated with disorder).

3c. The "middle-point" philosophy.

If we consider how our life moves on, we will maybe see that in all our moves there exist opposite and compensated energies. According to Salomo Friedlaender (1871–1946), even in the most complex of relationships, one can discern pairs of related opposites, and a phenomenon can be perceived only if it appears to be the opposite pole of something else (Frambach, 2003) - noise of any loudness can be perceived only with respect to its opposite, i.e. silence. Those pairs are not isolated points. According to Friedlaender, they exist as a core, as a unity, thus transcending their differentiation. As in Tao, this unity of opposite poles has a kind of absoluteness, and lies at the "middle point" of the line which joins the polar opposites, a position called "creative indifference" by Friedlaender (ibid).

Such a unity doesn't mean that on this middle point +10 and -10 equals zero, but rather that +10 and -10 coexist at the same time, like a possibility. So, the "middle point" itself of any situation isn't perceivable and never experienced. Following this idea which is very important in the Gestalt philosophy, let us see any entire polar duality as a continuum, integrated into a single core of potentiality defined by the duality's two opposite expressions. Then, we may be able to move smoothly along this continuum toward this or that direction: we become whole again. So, my impulsiveness is not any more "fighting" my more thoughtful ways of being, and I may express myself according to the each time situation.

Parlett (1991) notes that, since everything (the "field") keeps changing, since our perception is constantly recreated, and since balance and stability can only be dynamic, no absolute dividing lines can exist. Nothing can be dichotomized from something else (according to which it was defined as "opposite"). Polarities, too, are unified wholes of dialectically opposite points (e.g. yin/yang).

3d. The Gestalt dynamic conception of the "Self".

We organize our personal world through the various ways with which we accomplish the contact processes with whatever we sense as "not-Me", that is what we would call the "environment"; the external one (the Others, the physical reality, etc), or the internal one (consisting of our inner universe: phantasies, thoughts, memories, feelings, etc). In Gestalt, all these ways for contact are described with the concept of the Self.

In Gestalt, the Self is a process and not something still and pre-existing, a sum of solidified characteristics. So, the Self is meant only as we get interrelated through an endless dance of getting close and distancing with whatever is sensed as "not-Me". The Self is constantly "becoming", since it is the ways that we invent to move and creatively adjust in the ever changing field of our lives: it is, according to Goodman, "the artist of life" (Perls et al., 1951).

The Self, in PSP, can be seen as a system consisting of an infinite potentiality of aspects that I employ during my contact processes. And we can see such aspects "arranged" in infinite opposite poles: I can be logical-spontaneous, timid-brave, energetic-passive, and so on. So, I can develop any aspect of "Me" according to the situation in which I am synthesizing my here and now experience, and this aspect will be the opposite pole of another aspect (being logical can be seen as the contrary of being spontaneous).

The important thing in this conception of Self, is not to consider only extreme poles in my palette of potentiality. What is important is rather our flexibility to move freely and smoothly along the continuum of any two poles and not "jumping" from one extreme to the other (now I can be very logical, but some other time I can be less logical - tending to the other pole, spontaneity). In other words, if I manage to move smoothly along the continuum of a polarity, I can say that my Self moves towards its "middle-point" (or "middle-mode").

Practically, this means that I do not exclude from my behavior anyone of the two poles of the polarity, because I sense and I can use all the intermediate possibilities offered by the continuum unifying them. And in system theory language, when I say that my Self tends towards its "middle-mode", I mean that my Self as a system develops authentically, because something very important happens. What happens is that my components (my infinite possible aspects) communicate freely between them, so that my wholeness (my Self as an infinite potentiality) may "decide" (or, better, improvise) its next step as a result of multiple interactions and processes of its compounds. Whereas, if we suppose in an example that for any reason I do not permit myself to become angry when someone has just insulted me, my process flow "limps". In the self-organization process of the

next step of my wholeness, the angry aspect of "Me" is inaccessible, it remains silent, it does not participate. And then, I can very easily fool myself with a thought, or a mental projection, to excuse my silenced aspect and my decision in a situation: "a!, no, I am not angry at all with him, because I know that he had no other choice… besides, I am a person that would never degrade on such a low level of behavior". And, in such a case, all the silenced anger would suffocate inside me creating stress, irrational aggression, depressive feelings, etc.

And as we move with our infinite ways along the continuum of each one of our infinite possible polarities (as we move towards the "middle-mode" of our Self), we are endlessly developing our potential.

4. Introducing the concept of a "relational Playback".

Now, let us attempt to apply all this in Playback, as a possible philosophical basis. On such a basis, we may sketch some possible ways of thinking of Playback as a relational process, and also, we may have a brief look at what such a way of thinking in Playback may mean for the Playback practice and training.

4a. The "voices" of the Playback performance.

We could possibly see the Playback performance as a self-organizing short-lived system of people (Playback group and audience). Its components are persons interacting between them and with the whole of the performance. So, these persons are engaged in multiple relational processes; they are, interweaving the performance relational web, while expressing feelings and behaviors, their "voice" (no matter if they are actually "talking" or not, they all do affect the performance event just by being there with their vital energy). But how could be meant in Playback the "voices" who tend to spontaneously manifest as well to authentically interact during the performance? In PSP we see two kinds of such "voices". One kind of "voice" has to do with each one individual person; and another kind of "voice" has to do with the whole of the performance-organism (by the word "organism" we describe the totality of the performance). Let us clarify more this PSP perspective.

In Gestalt the Self is a process, the way in which I develop my contact processes (Spagnuolo-Lobb, 2001), so in every contact process there is reflected one of the inherently infinite Self aspects. Whether we narrate, or improvise, or watch the enactment, there is always a contact process in which the Self is portrayed. My "hesitant", "cynical" or "romantic" Self are nothing more than ways with which I introduce my Self aspects in my present interactions. For example, as an actor, I got angry in that story. As a teller, I was shy in the beginning of the performance but now I yearn to narrate my own story. That story of this man made me think vividly a tender moment I had long forgotten and I could not practice an effective conducting. Or, as an actor, I hesitated to stretch my hand towards that other actor, and I affected badly the most critical moment of that enactment. Usually I am not very expressive on stage, but I was impressed with the easiness I enacted in that a difficult story. When in this part of the story I describe a brave action, I refer to my own brave part of my Self. When I say that "thunders were crashing around us so we perched in panic," I express my scared aspect. (It is underlined that we use the terms "part" or "aspect" not to dichotomize the unity of our existence but only to indicate the several possible manifestations of the Self).

Following that, we could say that in every sentence of the oral story or in every minute of its enacting, are reflected aspects of the narrator's, the actors', the conductor's and the audience's Self. Such Self aspects are expressed in the performance relational web, no matter if they are talked out loudly in public or if they remain silent in private. In PSP we see these aspects as a version of the performance "voices", considered on the scale of each one person.

But in the holistic Gestalt perception, we may consider all the persons of the performance (Playback group and audience) as a unified "multi-bodied" organism, the Self of which consists of several alive "compounds" - persons. Each one of these persons is a potential "voice" of the whole performance. In such a collective scale, we could say that the various Self aspects of the performance-organism are all the individual persons composing it (as each potential aspect of Self was the "voice" of one individual person).

So, in PSP, the performance "voices" are meant in two scales, affecting each other and referring to a similar way of thinking. In both cases we have one whole, one system (one person with all the Self aspects as her "voices", or one performance-organism with all the persons as its "voices"). On this whole, we consider the expressions of its constituent parts without disrupting its unity. Metaphorically, the performance-organism is a human body which consists of torso, head, arms and legs (each body part would be a person being in the performance), while each body part consists of several cellular groups (each person potentially expresses different Self aspects).

4b. The self-organization of the Playback performance "voices".

In PSP, all the "voices" of the performance as a system, tend to self-organize towards their "middle-mode". In other words, we could say that the "middle mode" of the Playback performance is a dynamic balance state, where the multidimensional "voices" are expressed spontaneously and interact authentically in both the scales that we have already defined. This "middle mode", to which in the PSP perspective the Playback performance tends, has nothing to do with the occurring number of narrators (besides, only a limited number of stories can be told during the performance). It has to do rather with stimulating (energizing) the maximum possible performance "voices", no matter how many stories are literally heard. What is important is rather how many people (actors and audience) are energized to "feel"..

When a person is "touched" by the performance, it is not important whether this manifests by words, or by an oral or stage narration. As the person is "touched" (that is when she participates authentically), the person gets angry, sad, or joyful. These Self aspects become active "voices" tending towards the "middle mode" of the Self of the person and affecting the performance, regardless the person's role in the performance.

And it is so because such "voices - Self aspects", create interactions on two levels. On one level, they interact with the rest of the parts of a person's individual sense of reality - when I have a feeling, I am inevitably affected in my wholeness, whether I am a narrator, a spectator, or an actor. On a second level, they interact with other persons, on a deep intersubjective scale of the performance-organism - whatever happens in my "inner" universe, even if I remain silent, affects explicitly and mainly implicitly the other persons, even when we do not exchange loudly between us not a single word.

So, it is the interaction of all kinds of the performance "voices" that shapes the channel of the evolving narrative ground on which the stories are following one another, as the performance tends towards its "middle-mode". And in PSP, the concept of a "relational Playback" means that the whole event of the performance is a self-organizing event, allowing multiple interactions in successive states of dynamic balance.

From such a point of view, the goal of a Playback performance in PSP is not limited at all to improvise on stories. Narrating and enacting stories is not a goal per se. It is the skeleton, the structural composition, the mean, through which can emerge a wider and deeper goal of the performance. No matter if Playback cannot be considered to be psychotherapy, this goal is literally of great value (and I believe describes perfectly the deeper meaning of the Playback Theatre as a "gift": it extends towards a self-organized co-creation of an ephemeral relational web between persons, stimulating: (a) "horizontally", rich and precious interpersonal interactions, and (b) "vertically", deep renovating vibrations in each person's individual universe.

4c. A brief reference to the experiential levels in Playback and its intersubjectivity.

Finally, two points remain to be underlined. The first one, is that in the holistic perspective of systems, the interactions of the components happen on all the three levels on which human experience gets engraved in life: the mental, the sensory-embodied and the emotional ones. In fact, the mental level (what we "understand" cognitively), is just the 12% of the human experience, whereas the rest 88% has to do with the body and the feelings, and it is non verbal and non conscious (Stern, 2004). This embodied aspect of the human contact processes involve complex and only recently detected neurophysiological systems (for example, some of the so called "mirroring systems", involve the functions of special groups of neurons, called "mirror neurons"). So, in the Playback performance, all people, even the audience, develop not only mental but basically embodied and emotional experience, while co-creating the evolvement of the pulsating relational network of the Playback performance.

The second point that needs to be underlined, is that we could describe the co-creation of such a relational space during the actual human encounter, as an "intersubjective field". This "field" (or this "intersubjective space") is a complex interweaving of contact processes, an interplay of relational forces between persons "meeting" each other. During the development of this "field", often occurs a state of consciousness that could be called "expanded", because the system of the persons involved contains more info and is more complex than the individual state of consciousness of each one person (as cited by Staemmler, 2007, p. 59). So, in the intersubjective field of the Playback performance seen on a relational basis as a whole, it is emphasized a very special kind of "knowing". Not at al on the level of cognitive knowledge, but rather on the level of an intuitive, embodied knowledge, provided by the intersubjective field of the Playback performance.

5. An indicative note on the implications of a relational perspective on Playback.

This article is based on my belief that a relational perspective to Playback can significantly contribute to the building of a coherent yet flexible enough philosophical basis that I consider potentially useful to this unique form of art. However, a necessary step in this direction, is to discuss thoroughly the implications of such a perspective, because they embrace all the

levels of Playback: the theoretical, the practical, and the training ones. Here, we are only going to note a few relevant "titles", just to stimulate possible further thinking. All the following points actually refer to whole chapters of thinking on their contents.

… In a relational perspective, the structure of a performance cannot be strictly predefined, as it risks to inhibit the self-organization of the performance as an evolving system. This creates several issues around the definition of what is the performance structure, the warm-up of the audience, the entrance of the actors, even their sharing after the performance.

… The goal of the performance shifts from the enactment of the stories itself, to the co-creation of a collective relational network. This means that the conductor attempts to enable the "voices" of the performance to emerge and interact (and for this scope, she has definitely to follow some special training pathways, apart the basic rules of the interview with the teller). It also means that all the six actors (the musician is included) act on stage as a sub-system of the performance system. Each one of them is a "voice" of the collective "actor-organism" engaged to create the stage version of the oral narration. However, each one of them has many "voices" (many Self aspects). So, training and rehearsing in Playback are processes enabling the individual "voices" of each actor to emerge, as well as to teach her how to participate to the self-organization of the sub-system of the collective "actor-organism". From this point of view, the PSP Playback training does not include only technical issues; it includes also fundamental principles of group-life and group dynamics (presence, responsibility, developing dialogue with the Other, etc), especially if the training involves people decided to form a group, and not just occasional participants of a seminar. Finally, such a relational philosophical basis, should call for very special attention concerning who, when and under what terms and training experience attempts to form and/or train a Playback group.

… The relational orientation of the performance creates the need to reconsider carefully what and how is meant by the social, ritual and artistic aspects of Playback.

… The holistic nature of the self-organizing process means that the performance self-organizes on all three levels of the human experience: mental/cognitive, sensory/embodied, emotional. If we neglect one of them, the vitality of the performance is immediately crucially affected. A serious problem is that the mental level of the human experience is only 12%, whereas the other two involve a lot of non verbal and even non conscious processes. This calls for a full reconsideration of what exactly is the "red thread" in Playback, on what levels it is created, on "how" the stories and the enactments "talk" creating implicit interconnections (apart their contents and their cognitively understood meanings). It also creates the need to systematically include in the training topics that have to do with the performance rhythm, the rhythm of each enactment, the rhythm of the interview, and how these structural areas articulate to form the global "breathing" of the performance.

… I strongly believe that a crucial point in approaching relationally the Playback Theatre, is to redefine radically, literally from scratch, what is a "story", what is the "form" of a story, and what is meant by the words "meaning" and "essence" of the story. A possible horizon is to see the story also as a process and not just as a sequence of events, and to study deeply the nature of this process. Similarly, a relational perspective implies to study the complexity that accompanies the meaning of both the oral and the stage narration. And this, because in a relational approach, the meaning develops not only on a cognitive level of contents (events that make up the story) but also (and mainly) on a process level (emotional fluctuations and embodied responses). Furthermore, it is absolutely important for both the actor and the conductor to understand how these parallel streams of "meaning" evolve and interweave to form the final sense of the "meaning of any story".

… I believe the same regarding improvising and acting in Playback. A thorough look on the art of improvisation is needed, able to deal with issues like "what is more important: the 'meaning' of the teller for his story or my own view on it", "how can I find ideas to use in my improvisation", "what if I do not have the slightest idea or inspiration of what to do before stepping into the stage".

About all the above and many other implications resulting from viewing the Playback in a relational perspective, several theoretical and methodological ideas and tools can be designed for people who do Playback or train others in Playback. In PSP, such ideas are based either on a broader perception of the Gestalt philosophy, or they are simply invented from scratch. Just indicatively, I mention a few concepts like "the phenomenological acting", "the personal film", the "motif", "the body intention", etc. Each one of such concepts is a fully relational look at several issues regarding a relational Playback approach. However, for sure, they are not at all the best or even the only ones to provide a firm yet flexible philosophical basis to Playback. But still, they can be seen as a small contribution to the need for enriched theoretical fundaments; besides, opening more windows, always keep fresh air in the house and reveals new aspects of the garden or even the distant horizon itself.

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