

The Deadly Power of the Living Voice



Thorey Sighorsdottir
Sustained Independent Project

MA in Advanced Theatre Practice
Central School of Speech and Drama

20th September 2012

Index

1. The Beginning
2. The Background
3. Methodology
4. The Voice Workshop
5. The Experience
6. The Results

Bibliography

Appendice A Nadine George.

Appendice B Guy Dartnell

1. The Beginning

‘With these battlefield voices, there was no limitation of range, their voices expressed and screamed terror and agony through every range.’ (Wolfsohn: Braggins: Harrow Times book reviews 10th May 2012)

These are the words of Alfred Wolfsohn, describing in writing his experience as a young man, of listening to his fellow soldiers dying in the battlefields of the First World War. A survivor of the war but these sounds hunted him as well as his traumatic experience and he lost his singing voice. This experience led him into exploration of the voice in a totally new way. A life changer for many of his students and a pioneer of the exploration of the phenomenal of the human voice and its expression. The stories of Wolfsohn and his followers Roy Hart and my work with Roy’s follower Nadine George are the inspiration for my interest in exploring the possibilities of *the voice as a creative tool in devising theatre*.

When I started my research for theatre groups that were using the voice in a specific way devising theatre I came across names as The Roy Hart Theatre, Grotowski Institute, Odin Teater, Song of the Goat, Guy Dartnell, TeatrZar, and The Pan Theatre Paris, to name some. Looking into the background of these artists I found that the majority of them had links with the Roy Hart Theatre, either directly or through their work with Grotowski.

The English theatre director and author Peter Brook visited the Roy Hart Theatre’s London studio a number of times and described the work as “full of pith and moment”[...] Brook invited the Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski to a demonstration of the company’s work. Much later in 1979, Grotowski publicly acknowledged his debt to Wolfsohn’s research. (*The Vocal Vision*: 1998:192)

These groups all work with singing the sound, the core of Wolfsohn’s and Roy Hart’s method. There also seems to be a strong sense of longing to break through barriers, aiming to bridge the gap between the mind and the body and connecting with the Self of the actor/performer for total expression.

2. The Background

One's path in life is full of unexpected coincidences that happen and everything changes. I heard Wolfsohn's powerful story in my first workshop with Nadine George in Denmark in 1996. The image of the sounds of the dying men would with me and open a new path in my work with the voice. My vocal training as an actress in Iceland was classical based a lot on methods coming from Cicely Berry¹. I really liked the work and had nothing against this method, but I will never forget the liberation I experienced in my first workshop with Nadine George where she encouraged me to go into the unacceptable sounds, chorded sounds, strange sounds, big sounds I discovered a whole new range to my voice.

Many years later I had the possibility of working with Nadine on a production of *Medea* by Euripides, in Iceland. An adaptation of *Medea* for two actors, a multi-media performance. I was playing more than one character and we worked on the creation of them through the voice in a specific way, which was totally new to me at the time. It was revealing to experience that going through the voice/text in this way, how the shape of the character started to physicalize.

This is the method that I tried to put into practice in my MA SIP project with *Head of a Woman*.²

3. Methodology

My Sustained Independent Project (SIP) work with a group called *Head of a Woman*.³ The group consists of six people from the age of 23 to 46 from six different countries (Iceland, Scotland, England, Israel, Canada and Taiwan). We all have different background in theatre, but we decided that our challenge was to find a language that we would use as a group but never as individuals. "Curricula Vitae"⁴ (our SIP

¹ Cicely Frances Berry CBE is the voice director of the Royal Shakespeare Company and is world-renowned in her work as a voice and text coach, having spent many years as an instructor at London's Central School of Speech and Drama.

² See appendix for more detailed description of the Nadine George Method (NG method)

³ www.headofawoman.com

⁴ *Curricula Vitae* was premiered in Reykjavik, Iceland the 29th of July 2012 as a part of a double bill at the Norðurpóllinn www.nordurpollinn.is, the show then had a run at the Chelsea Theatre in London www.chelseatheatre.org.uk/head-of-a-woman-double-bill/ 27th August-1st September 2012.

project) is the second performance that we devise together. At this point I became interested in the use of the voice in the devising process. “Curricula Vitae” was totally different from e.g. the project of Medea in which we had put the method of Nadine George into practice in rehearsals as well as in the creating different characters. This was a devised piece, where our aim would be to explore new forms, finding our language as a group. Not relying on a traditional linear storytelling or characters as such. So how to work with the voice in that context became quite a challenge and frankly in the beginning it was not clear to me how I might be able to put that into practice in any way. Still the important thing for me was the challenge of raising the question and see what this would lead to.

My goal was to introduce the Nadine George Method to the group. This meant leading a workshop of approximately four times four hours working once through the whole system. In the research I would use mixed method, qualitative; take notes and observe in the process of the workshop as well as in the rehearsal process, and quantitative; having the participants answering questions about their experience. Aiming to answer the research question “Can the voice be used as a creative tool in the devising process.”

The group’s reaction to the idea in general was quite positive but I had the feeling that they didn’t quite get my idea of intergrading the use of the voice as a creative tool in the devising process, it felt more of a put on thing that they were ready to do “for” me or the benefit of training the voice. That got me thinking of directors and actors that share the opinion of finding additional voice work in a rehearsal (unless you have a serious problem) a waste of time. I tried to sense if there was a genuine interest and felt a bit shy about trying to push it forward. I find it quite essential for this kind of approach to the voice work that participants have to share the enthusiasm for the work. Part of my inability to convince them was also that I hadn’t a clear idea of how it would be possible to intergrade the voice in the devising process. Therefore it was quite essential to try and realize the workshop sooner than later. Our initial plan was to do the workshop in June were we had two weeks of continuous rehearsals. When the time arrived I realized they had mistaken my frame for four hours instead of four times four hours. This became the first obstacle since the final performance at the

school, CSSD⁵ were due around the 22nd of June. No one was prepared to spend this amount of time doing voice work when we needed to focus on the performance. The misunderstanding of the time frame for the workshop crystallizes for me the traditional aspect that the voice work is something to train performers, a supporting tool, and one shouldn't spend valuable time on that when she could be creating a performance. As it turned out I gave the first part of the voice workshop in London at the end of June and the other three parts I gave in Bildudalur, our residency for ten days in Iceland in July.

4. The Voice Workshop

We start by working on the breathing in pairs. A breaths B touches different parts of the body to give a sense for the physical connection.

Then we do the breathing standing and walking using the space. Both solo and carrying on working with different partners, holding hands breathing, hugging and breathing. These exercises are really good for building physical connection and presence on stage. Also building listening and trust within the group.

The last part is the singing of the male and female sounds with the piano. First we do the warm up in a group. Then each individual sings in depth (going up and down the 2-3 octaves as possible) one quality at time *male/deep male/female/deep female* which all connect to certain body parts. The group listens to everyone going through their individual journey.⁶

In the physical work and touching in the breathing we build up trust within the participants so they are ready when it comes to working on the sounds with the piano. Singing the individual sounds takes a lot of courage and opening. Also the power of the sustained active listening that we go through listening to the each other. The

⁵ The Central School of Speech and Drama

⁶ See sound files and a detailed description from NG of the work in the appendice.

vibration of the voice of the one who is singing the extended range of sounds, the unacceptable sounds, goes directly into the body of the listener and has a deep effect.

Observing the group working I felt that people surely did take step out of their comfort zone and opened up to new things in the voice through the body. We also talked about the experience as we went through it. That is quite vital to be able to express your experience of the journey with the voice. Emotions do emerge and physical reactions. So the better you understand the process of what is happening through the exercises the easier it is to let go into it and trust what is happening.

5. The Experience

The members of Head of a Woman were asked to answer questions about the experience.⁷

1. Do you think workshop had any implications on the process?

A. Yes. I was thinking: oh that's a singing workshop but then it turned out to be a training of being familiar with your voice, especially as I describe, it's not about singing but to produce a sound. Thus, this different perspective really helped me viewing the working that we're generating, and even though we're out of tune while in the task I: to sing, I still feel confident and found it really interesting of providing information with inharmonious melody.

B. Yes. As you know voice work always terrified me and I held back in discussions of what to do with the "song" part of the show as I didn't want my fears to stunt the development of the work. I kept this very close and didn't share my concerns with the group until the voice workshop was upon us and I suddenly was faced with my worst fear; having to sing alone in front of everyone, progressing into unknown and unpredictable voice registers. The process of going through the building of fear and terror at this prospect, finally sharing my insecurities with the group and then performing the exercise for the first time was hugely transformative for me personally. As a result I was able to contribute more confidently within the group and overall I think the devising possibilities of the song were restored to their full potential. There was a "coming together" to listen to each other (which is always necessary) but there was also a new safety in the rehearsing, trialling and performing of the song which allowed it to grow into what we eventually used in the show.

C. Not on this process, no - although I do see it as a valuable tool for other processes. This particular devising process focused on a more live-art/intellectual approach that displayed cognitive ideas rather than performance. The voice

⁷ I did plan to record the sessions on video or just the sound. But at the time it was too delicate in the group and I felt that it would have disturbed the process. But I have included recordings of me doing the sounds in depth just to give an example of the work.

workshop was suited to a process that embraced performance creation of a different approach.

2. Do you think we could have made more use of the NG method in this process?

A. If it happened earlier, then we may have more opportunity to develop more about sound and voice. And such method may not only be applied to task 1 but also other sections as well.

B. I wonder whether it could be useful earlier on in the process. It came at a point where we already knew we would be singing, and (for me) tension had already built substantially as a result. If we'd begun doing it at the start, when devising was the core objective of our rehearsals, I think I could have perhaps faced my fear surrounding voice work sooner and gone on quite a different journey.

C. Not for this process - this process just wasn't suited to that sort of methodology. Tactics that I often use, from a writing or physical theatre approach, would have been equally out of place. There was a benefit to vocal development in this piece, but I would not consider it to be a part of the devising process.

4. Do you think this voice method has the possibilities of being used as a creative tool in a devising process?

A. It would help performer discover the variations of using his/her own voice, therefore, the voice won't be only used in speech and singing but a wider possibility. For example, I believe that the performer in Einstein on the Beach who was speaking with music didn't speak/sing as usual, and such method might be helpful for a performer to use his/her voice differently.

B. I think so perhaps the voice qualities could influence tasks given or the quality/atmosphere within the rehearsal room. I also think there is a lot to be gained from the listening part of the exercise, and the enjoyment in listening to each other could certainly influence the work created. Learning to listen is one of the first tools a deviser needs, and applying this to the rehearsal space could allow work to be created that utilises this skill, for example, making work that requires real patience and listening from its audience.

C. Yes. It all depends on how you want to explore the source material. I believe strongly in thinking through the body - using our body/mind relationship to explore. This includes voice. Through this approach, we are able to access emotional and intuitive knowledge of the world around us.

5. Any other thoughts you would like to share on the use of the voice in a devising process?

A. It was really nice to have this workshop. I've always been curious about voice, one catalogue of sound, how far can it stretch? How many variations can it be? Once there's a performer on the stage, the issue of voice can never be avoidable. Thus, it's

always good to have such workshop helping performers being familiar with their voice and then knowing how they can use them well.

B. It was really a big learning experience for me. It required an ability to accept whatever sound came out and to listen and appreciate the quality of it. This was a very new and scary idea to me. The process of going through it was terrifying and I found that I required a huge amount of trust in the people in the room to be able to stand up and do it. Trusting the people you are working with is vital to a devising process and as such, these exercises were very important to the way Curricula Vitae developed. The quality of the voice after the exercises was also important, and this was evident in our desire to do the exercises before each show at the Chelsea Theatre!

C. Anything can be used in a devising process. To talk about voice in a devising process is a vast topic - it's really too big to address in general terms.

In my opinion the positive effect from the experience of doing the workshop even though it came into the second half of the process was, that it built greater trust and better listening into the group. The training strengthened the vocal quality of the group in the performance and helped with the presence of the group being on stage. And obviously especially in task 1: to sing. Actually it is mentioned on one of the critics written about the performance of Grey Matters/Curricula Vitae that the group had good voices.

Some elements of the work succeeded rather better than others: a sung list of countries (presumably those that group members knew or had visited) was quite striking as they had good voices [...] (<http://onestoparts.com/review-head-of-a-woman-chelsea-theatre/> accessed 18.09.12)

6. The Results

In the beginning of this paper I asked a question. Can the voice be used as a creative tool in the devising process? According to the members of Head of a Woman the answer is yes. In this process however I didn't manage to integrate my original ideas in that direction. Due to the fact that I was the only one familiar with the method the other members had no platform to be taken on that journey until after they had been introduced to it and had the experience of working with it. The work did in some ways have an impact on the group and our process but was not used as a devising tool generating the material.

“different perspective really helped me viewing the working that we're generating”

“There was a benefit to vocal development in this piece”

“and I suddenly was faced with my worst fear; having to sing alone in front of everyone, progressing into unknown and unpredictable voice registers. The process of going through the building of fear and terror at this prospect, finally sharing my insecurities with the group and then performing the exercise for the first time was hugely transformative for me personally”

“There was a "coming together" to listen to each other (which is always necessary) but there was also a new safety in the rehearsing, trialling and performing of the song which allowed it to grow into what we eventually used in the show.”

This research is an inspiration for me already for my work in the future. Looking at the work of theatre groups using the voice in a powerful ways has opened up a new vision for me about how I would like to intergrate my voice work in devising theatre in a new way. Expanding the training based on Nadine George method I can see the possibilities in taking it to the floor and use in generating material in a number of different ways, both as a director and a performer.

One thing I learned, that the actual work is more helpful than words, especially in multi-cultural context. In explaining ideas it is usually better to go on the floor and explain your ideas in practice to prevent misinterpretation. I am more aware of what circumstances have to be created in order for the group to take on this vocabulary of the voice. It is essential to take it on board from the beginning so the workshop can be a point of referation later. This also builds trust and active listening in the ensamble. Knowing that the workshop is intended to create a platform for devising would inform the listening of the participants. Eventually the vocabulary created out of that could be established and ideas collected on how this can be used in generating material. I already have an image in mind for my future project in which it could be an exciting task to explore that kind of process with people that have enthusiasm for exporing the voice in the devising process.

21st September 2012
Thorey Sigthorsdottir
Reykjavik, Iceland.

Bibliography

- Barfield, S. (31.08.2012) *Multiple Identities: Formal Abstraction and Visceral Realities*, a review of *Head of a Woman*
onestoparts.com/review-head-of-a-woman-chelsea-theatre
(accessed 18.09.12)
- Barnett, L. (24.07.2011) *Cicely Berry, voice coach to the stars* the Guardian an interview
www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2011/jul/24/cicely-berry-voice-coach
(accessed 19.09.2012)
- Dartnell, G. *website*
guydartnell.macmate.me/Various_Guyses/Welcome.html (accessed 19.09.2012)
- Everything Theatre (30.08.2012) *Review of Grey Matters: A Play for Six Brains/Curricula Vitae*, Chelsea Theatre, *Head of a Woman*
everything-theatre.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/grey-matters-play-for-six.html (accessed 18.09.12)
- Farrow, D. Fringe (10.08.2012) *Review of Macbeth (Song of the Goat)*
www.edinburghspotlight.com/2012/08/fringe-review---macbeth-song-of-the-goat-theatre/
- George, N. (2005) *My Life with the Voice essay: Shakespeare around the Globe and other contemporary issues in professional voice and speech training presented by the Voice and Speech Review*: Rees, Mandy: 2005:0-9773876-0-7
<http://www.voicestudiointernational.com/index.php/nadine-george/>
(accessed 19.09.2012)
titles.universityreaders.com/downloadable/download/sample/sample_id/8 (accessed 20.09.2012)
- Grotowski, J (1986) *Towards a Poor Theatre* : Methuen London
- Hampton, M. & Acker, B. (eds)(1997) *The Vocal Vision: views on voice by 24 leading teachers, coaches & directors* New York/London Applause
- Hart, R. *The Rock Video*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqBtZL9pP28&feature=relmfu>
- Hart, R. *Interview*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfhm0-GL93c&feature=relmfu>
- Kumiega, J. (1985) *The Theatre of Grotowski* London New York Methuen
- Mitter, S. (1999) *Systems of rehearsal: Stanislavski, Brecht, Grotowski and Brook* London USA Canada Routledge

Mitter, S. & Shevtsova, M. (eds) (2007) *Fifty Key Theatre Directors*
Great Britain USA Canada Routledge

Oddey, A. (2001) *Devising Theatre a practical and theoretical handbook* London
USA Canada Routledge

Pantheatre website, *workshop, Singing after Roy Hart*.
www.pantheatre.com/gb/2-TT10-gb.html (accessed 19.09.2012)

Pikes, N. (1999) *Dark Voices the Genesis of Roy Hart Theatre*
Woodstock Connecticut Spring Journal Books

Roy Hart Theatre Archives
www.roy-hart.com/ (accessed 19.09.2012)

Roy Hart International Art Center *website*
www.roy-hart-theatre.com/site/en/ (accessed 19.09.2012)

Roy Hart Theatre *voice workshops in France*
www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4H9bYpajz4

Slowiak, J. & Cuesta, J. (2007) *Jerzy Grotowski* USA Canada Routledge

Teatr Zar *website*
teatrzar.art.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=36&Itemid=27&language=en&bgimg=onasglowna (accessed 19.09.2012)

Trueman, M. Review of Head of a Woman Double bill, Chelsea Theatre.
carouseloffantasies.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/review-head-of-woman-double-bill.html
(accessed 18.09.12)

Vocal Training at the Odin Theatre 1972
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S97jHilz6IU> (accessed 19.09.2012)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvdepoSpjJQ&feature=player_embedded#!
(accessed 19.09.2012)

Watson, I. (1995) *Towards a Third Theatre Eugino Barba and the Odin Teatret*
London USA Canada Routledge

Sheila Braggins talks to Rosy Moorhead about her biography of Alfred Wolfsohn, the German voice coach and philosopher
Wolfsohn, A. : Braggins, S. 10th May 2012 *Harrow Times book reviews*
www.harrowtimes.co.uk/leisure/books/bookreviews/9699835.Finding_expression_in_the_voice/ (accessed 19.09.2012)

Appendice A

Nadine George describes her working method

2 Breath Work

The work with the students began with two breathing exercises, which I had learned in France as part of a movement warm up from a dancer, Dominique Dupuis, and I developed and adapted it as I went on working at Birmingham. These breathing exercises were done on the floor with two people: one student lying down and the other working with them. These are the instructions I would give to my students in the first exercise: Student A, lie flat on the floor, on your front, with eyes closed. Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth, and let me hear the breath. Do this for a few minutes, relaxing and working with the breath. Student B, now warm up A's body with your hands – start from the feet and go up the body to the top of the back, and then come down again. Do this in a continuous vibrating movement, while 'A' still focuses on his breathing. Now, B, put both your hands on the base of A's spine, and then open your hands out horizontally across the back on each out-breath, moving the hands up the spine on each in-breath until you reach the top of the spine. Now, put your hands on both of A's shoulders on the in-breath and take them down to the sides of the ribs on the out-breath. Next, put your hands on A's buttocks, wait for the in-breath and vibrate the buttocks with an upwards movement on the out-breath. Now, take hold of one thigh and wait for the in-breath and vibrate upwards on the out-breath. And then do the same on the other thigh. Now, massage the calf muscles one at a time on both the in-breath and out-breath. Finally, take hold of both of A's ankles and bend the knees. Lift the thighs up a short way on the in-breath, shake both thighs downwards on the out-breath, and then lower the legs to the ground on the next out-breath.

The second breathing exercise had two stages. The instructions I gave for the first stage were: Student 'A', lie flat on your back, close your eyes and relax. Student 'B', sit on the floor at your partner's head, and take hold of his head with both hands – take the full weight of the head, and hold it as close to the ground as possible. 'A', start breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth, and listen to your breath. 'B', move A's head from side to side as he breathes, both on the in-breath and out-breath, and help him to relax the weight of his head and neck. Now bring A's head straight again. Next, support A's head with one hand, while with the other hand find the large bone at the base of the neck and place two fingers on either side of the bone on the muscles. Wait for the in-breath, and then slide your fingers along the muscles on the out-breath, helping your partner to relax and giving him the feeling of lengthening the neck from the shoulders. Now, support his head with one hand, while placing your other hand underneath one shoulder with the thumb over the top. Wait for the in-breath again, and gently push the shoulder down on the out-breath. Listen to A's breath, and judge how much to push in relationship to the flexibility of his shoulder. Change the hand under the head, and do the same on the other side. Finally, take the weight of A's head in one hand and put the other hand in the centre of his chest. Wait for the in-breath, and then let 'A' sink the chest downwards on the outbreath, relaxing as much as possible. Now, take your hand away from his chest and lower his head to the ground, checking that it is straight.

The instructions for the second stage of this exercise were: Student 'B', move to your

partner's feet. Student 'A', bend your knees so that both feet are flat on the ground. Now, 'B', take hold of A's knees with both hands from the top and lift his thighs upwards with the thighs in a bent position. 'B', stand with one leg against the inside of each thigh to keep them open, keeping a hand on each knee. 'A', just open and relax the thighs as much as possible, and breathe down into the back – relax the back and the stomach, and bring the breath down to the centre of the body. 'B', don't put any pressure downwards and let your partner find his own relaxation in the back and the stomach. Now, take hold of A's ankles and lift his legs upwards to 90°. Open his legs to the width of the pelvis. Finally, wait for the in-breath, and then lower the legs to the ground on the out-breath.

All the actions in the two breathing sequences, other than the lowering of the legs, were repeated four times. At the end of each of the breathing exercises, Student 'A' was told to open his eyes, thus going from an internal contact within himself to an external contact with the space, and to remain lying down with eyes open and continue the breathing for a few minutes. Then, still with eyes open, he was told to roll over to one side, bring the knees to the chest, roll over and come up on all fours. For this position I wanted the arms to be straight, with the hands placed on the ground parallel with the shoulders; the head down and the neck relaxed; the knees open to the width of the pelvis; and the feet having the toes tucked underneath. Then both students got back on their feet and slowly unrolled the spine, still working with the breathing and having their eyes open. By now they were standing upright, connected to their feet and pelvis, while trying to have the head straight and the neck relaxed. Next, I went to each person and corrected the head position, which was often either on one side or taken backwards. In each case the students were unconsciously separating the head from the body. I then checked that the neck was relaxed and that they were in the centre of their weight. The students would be left to work with their breathing in this position, while focusing their attention forward. Then I would ask them to breathe with more power and, breathing through the vowel AW, to take the in-breath and out-breath more consciously from the stomach and to be more aware of the focus of the eyes.

Following the work in pairs, I asked the students to come into a circle for the following breathing exercise. We would start, focusing attention forward, both feet firmly on the ground. I then asked the students to lift both arms up on the in-breath and take the arms down to their sides on the out-breath, being aware not to lift the shoulders or take the head back. Next, I told them to breathe with more power and to work with being more aware of the focusing of the eyes. Then I asked them to do the same exercise, but to turn the head and look at each person in the group, taking the focus and breath out from themselves and transmitting it to the other students, and to stay open mentally, physically and emotionally in doing this. Then I asked the students to find a place in the room and to work on being very calm.

I would then ask them to walk in the space and change direction, so that they worked with having their own direction for themselves while continuing to breathe in and out at the same time. I clapped my hands to start and stop the walking. In stopping, their aim was to be stable on both feet, with their eyes focused forward, and to still be working with the breath. I then asked them to go into walking again, but at the next stop I would ask them to

have two focuses: one directly forward and one on the wider horizontal plane. Then I asked them to start walking again. I would clap my hands again, but now there would be a change of rhythm, and they would run to each other in twos and take hold of each other's wrists and breathe together, connecting the breath and the focus of the eyes to

each other. I would ask them to walk again, clap my hands, and now ask them to run to each other in twos and embrace each other and breathe together, connecting the breath to each other with the whole body. Finally, they would come into a circle again and breathe together, lifting their arms on the in-breath and lowering their arms on the out-breath, while turning the head and looking at each other as they lowered their arms. I asked them to do all this four times, and then I would finish this sequence by asking the students to be aware if anything had changed since they did the last exercise the first time. This started to become a very interesting piece of research, and not without its resistances from the students. It couldn't have been any other way, as this was the first time they had experienced this work, and the first time I had done this in a teaching context in my own country.

It was clear that the majority of the students were so in their heads that, at the beginning, it was very frightening for them to relax and allow themselves to breathe and feel what was happening in their bodies. I saw myself very clearly in them, at the time when I first started to work with Roy Hart, and I understood exactly how they were feeling. I became aware in the first two weeks that they were very embarrassed whenever they had to make physical contact with each other. At the beginning they couldn't feel the difference between this type of contact and some kind of sexual feeling. After a month this began to change, and they began to feel the difference. They started to relax and realise the value of the breath work. Also, when breathing in the circle, they wanted to close off and protect themselves, but again after a month they gained more confidence and understood how important the exercises were for them. They began to be aware that they were not breathing with the whole of the body, and how important it was for them to work on this. They understood through doing the breathing work, both with each other and by themselves, how important it was for their work with classical text and acting. That if the breath was to be a living thing it had to come from the whole body.

Then the students began to work together more and correct each other. I asked them to do this with respect for the person they were collaborating with. I wanted them to become responsible for what they were doing, and I could see that getting them to work in this way changed the atmosphere and created a higher level of concentration. They had much more courage and respect for each other. It confirmed my own experiences that, without artistic respect for your own work and your fellow students, and without a creative atmosphere built on this respect, it is impossible to work on a deep level with yourself and your peers.

3 Vocal Work

The next stage was to work with the students on their sung sound qualities. I would ask the students to sit on chairs in a semi-circle round the piano and would work with each student individually on his or her voice. As Roy Hart had done, I would take one quality of sound at a time – Bass, Baritone, Tenor, etc – each student making the same sung sound.

It was clear very early on that Bass, Baritone, Tenor, Alto and Soprano didn't have much meaning for them. Further more, it was no longer related to what I was doing. Bass, Baritone, Tenor, Alto and Soprano were terms connected with singing, and I was no longer working with this. I was working with acting and text. So I decided to change the terms to Deep Male, High Male, Deep Female and High Female. These new terms could be understood and applied immediately by the acting students to their work on voice and text. This also allowed me to be clearer and more detailed

about the sound and the voice work. Instead of trying to cover a four octave pitch range like Roy, which I could see clearly wasn't working for the students and was confusing, I was able to focus on a smaller, two octave range and so concentrate on the quality of sound. From this point I started to form the basis of my own technique with the voice. I would start with the women on middle c of the piano and the men on the c below, because the male voice is naturally deeper. So, on the deep male sound, I would go down the piano four notes and then back up to the c; then from the c up four notes, and back to the c. I always brought the sound and energy back to a central point. I would start going down the piano with the deep male because this connected them immediately with their depth and the depth in the voice.

On all the other sound qualities, starting from middle c and the c below middle c, I would go up the piano, as these qualities start in a higher part of the voice and energy. I would start from the c, go up four notes and then back down to the c; then work from the c and go down four notes, and back to the c. I could see in practice that this was working for them.

Up to this point I hadn't given much thought to which vowel would be the best for getting into the quality of sound easily. But now I saw that I needed to be very clear about the vowels I was using for each quality:

On the deep male sound I chose AW, because it goes directly into the depth and the energy connected to the stomach. On the high male sound I chose the vowel AH, because it goes directly into the high male energy connected to the chest. On the deep female sound I chose the sound OO, because it goes directly to the low female energy connected to the chest. On the high female energy I chose the vowel AH, because it goes directly to the high female energy connected to the head.

I realised on working with the students on the high female sound that they tended to go towards something that was on the surface and not very embodied. So I added the following explanation to using this quality: The high female quality connected to the head links with the stomach. With this instruction, I could see in practice that the students understood that the sounds they were making on the high female sound had more of a mix of dark and light in the voice. Therefore the voice was more embodied and dramatic.

I then decided to add phrases of Shakespearean Text to each of the voice qualities, so that the students could see the direct link between the qualities of sound and heightened text. I chose these particular phrases because they connected in a very organic way to each quality of sound.

For the deep male sound in the stomach

Macbeth's line:

Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle towards my hand

For the high male sound in the chest

Lady Macbeth's line:

The raven himself is hoarse that croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan under my battlements

For the deep female sound in the chest

Romeo's line:

But soft what light through yonder window breaks

For the high female sound in the head linked with the stomach

Juliet's line: Gallop apace you fiery footed steeds

What I discovered was that, by working on the same sound with each student, they could begin to really embody their voices. They could listen to the other students making the same sound and learn from this. In standing up and singing the sound with the whole group present, they could sense how naked and exposed they felt, and how much courage and concentration it took to work in this way. I realised that this contributed to a much higher level of concentration in the group, and that they had much more respect for their fellow students' work. With each session, and through doing all the sounds, they began to gain more confidence and to allow themselves to work with greater dramatic power in the voice. At first they were amazed, and a bit afraid of the amount of power they had. But, after about a month's work, they really began to see the connection between their vocal power and the text. I could see in practice that the students were beginning to enjoy and understand the work, and to realise how it related to them as actors.

What was important for me was to see that, after a year under my guidance, the actors could begin to work by themselves with this technique. It had taken me many years to create this simple structure, and so to see that it was effective in practice, and that it could be used by actors in the professional theatre, was very significant for me and gave me the courage to continue.

What I learnt from the students at Birmingham was that it was very important to have feedback from the people you are collaborating with, so that you can see where you are and how you need to develop your approach and yourself. In every course or workshop I give, I encourage discussion of my technique. It is important for me to stay open and learn from the people I am working with.

Appendice B

Guy Dartnell answers my question on his voice work

Guy Dartnell is an artist that has developed a method “VOIC(E)MOTION”

“I am a solo and collaborative artist, teacher and mentor, whose work spans the realms of theatre, music, dance, circus and film. I’m also interested in healing, meditation and Process Work and strive to integrate their influence into my performance work as much as I can.”

(http://guydartnell.macmate.me/Various_Guyses/About_Me.html)

1. Have you ever thought of the voice as a one of the creative tools for devising theatre?

If yes, please describe:

I have.

2. What is your background in vocal training that has been most influential in your approach to your work?

I started off with a traditional actor's voice training as an acting student at the Central School of Speech & Drama in London 1977-80.

However the voice-movement work that I have specialised in for about 25 years is most heavily influenced by the approach to vocal development used by The Roy Hart Theatre, which I initially learned indirectly in the early 1980s through the work of Richard Roberts (aka now as Krishnadhyanam) and then directly in workshops with Roy Hart Theatre members Noah Pikes, Enrique Pardo and Kaya Anderson.

3. Have you made a specific use of the voice in your devising work ?

If yes, please describe:

Most of my early solo shows were devised partly from initial improvisations using vocal sounds, which were then stretched into characterisations or rhythmical 'rants'.

In the solo show 'Unsung' we created an axis down the middle of the stage along which I walked forwards and backwards, singing at the same time as I did so 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' phonetically forwards or backwards according to my walking direction. From this axis if any sound in the 'singing' attracted my interest I would pause on this sound and move sideways at right angles to the axis. I would explore the selected sound abstractly through voice and movement trying to bring out the quality I had noticed in it, also looking for moments where identifiable soundbites from popular songs might emerge through the voice-movement dynamic, enough for them to be recognisable, and then disappear again. The rest of the show was bits of storytelling and lecture around the notion of what singing or un-singing was. These were all glued together by this 'Twinkle' axis down the middle which was returned to every now and again so that some new sound might be spontaneously discovered and

explored - creating windows of voice-movement improvisation in between the more set text based material.

4. Any other thoughts you would like to share on the use of the voice in a devising process?

I realise that part of the problem in answering your questions is I'm not really a voice practitioner. I'm a voice-movement practitioner, which is a different thing I think to some extent. I use emotional qualities as the fuel, inspiration and glue to blend the vocal and physical together. Because of this emphasis on emotional flow I tend to use the process in an improvised form certainly when I'm using it abstractly. I've never found a suitable and satisfying way of setting it, which is it's downfall in relationship to using it in devising. I've met one person who I think has found succesful way of setting 'emotional voice' to some extent. His name is Yvon Bonenfant

(<http://www.beacons-show.com> Yvon.Bonenfant@winchester.ac.uk).