



Jarley in Compassion (2023). Photo: Francesco Corbelletra

Julia Varley

A Mosaic of Memories

Two years ago, I heard Parvathy Baul singing *Karuna* during her concert in Ayllón, Spain. It was the closing performance of The Magdalena Project Festival organised by Viviana Bovino and Residui Teatro in 2023. We were all together in the small church, which was illuminated by candles. The beautiful song cradled me and took me on a journey. As Parvathy twirled endlessly following the regular beat of her drum, I was filled with a longing mixed with memories. Parvathy sang *Karuna* at the end of Odin Teatret's ensemble performance *The Tree*, which we performed for the last time in October 2021 in southern Italy. While singing, Parvathy would first undo her long hair and use it to caress the body of the child soldier puppet, which lay in front of the severed heads of victims and perpetrators united by a white sheet, and then she would twirl moving along the space between the spectators and a big artificial bare tree. I had just finished a scene of desperate bird-sound cries. Parvathy's last word was *karuna*. She addressed it to the sky, as if help could come from above. Then she calmly translated *karuna* into the language of the spectators. *Karuna* means 'compassion', which is the title of my most recent solo performance. Her tone of voice transmitted hope in the face of history's cruelty. I had recently finished the new solo and I wondered how Parvathy's voice could accompany me along my next journey. I know she always does in my body's memory, although I had forgotten how strong the feeling was for me.

In *Compassion* I recall my characters from three of Odin Teatret's ensemble performances: Serafino, the Yazidi monk who plants a tree in the desert to bring back the birds in *The Tree*; Nikita, the Chechen refugee from *The Chronic Life*; and Tiresias, the blind seer of *Thebes at the Time of Yellow Fever*. In *Compassion* I say: "Memory is what is left when we have forgotten" and "I don't want to remember, but memory hides in the depth of oblivion". The sentences spoken by my characters have different meanings for each of them and for me. When I think of these sentences, I realise that I exist because of memories submerged in my body, soul, mind, without me consciously remembering. My identity depends on memories made of an infinite quantity of events and lives that I could call experience, genes, inheritance, ancestors, parents, visions, necessities, knowledge, and intuition. The memories appear and disappear, jump and glide, hurt and heal, allow me to travel through time and keep me concentrated on the here and now. They reveal the past in front of me and introduce the future hidden behind me.

Denise Hurst

Denise Hurst was buried in Codiponte, Italy, on the 21st of July 2023. Denise was an actress who had worked with Peter Brook. I cannot find any reference to her on the internet. She died on my birthday and a Dutch neighbour, my father and his wife, two social workers and I accompanied her to the cemetery. Her husband had dementia and did not understand what had happened. He was not present at the burial. Denise, a foreigner who had never been to the local church and had not paid for a place in the graveyard, was buried in a wooden box, placed in one of the cubicles in a side wall of the Catholic cemetery. No name indicated that she was there. Her husband had a son from a previous marriage, who only visited his father very rarely. As far as I know Denise had no family or close friends who would want to be informed of her death. I asked myself where a life goes, when nobody remembers.

In *Seeds of Memory*, Ana Woolf's performance that I directed, referring to the *desaparecidos* during the military dictatorship in the 1970s in Argentina, a Mother of Plaza de Mayo says: "As long as one woman or one man remembers them, they will keep on living". But I am sure memory must live on despite nobody remembering. Memory belongs to the world's evolution; it is written in the stones, in the trees, in the stars and in our bodies.

Learning and repeating

Students, scholars and spectators often ask me to explain my technique for remembering. I have a bad memory for texts. It takes me a very long time to learn words and the only way I can succeed is to fix their intonation and musicality and synchronise them with physical actions. When I learn a text, the first thing I do is to handwrite it. The action of writing and my visual memory help me remember. The handwriting style, the capital or small letters, when I make a new line or where the text is on the page, are all elements that get fixed in my mind more than the meaning of the words.

When I improvise during work demonstrations and have to fix what I have done immediately, simple images help me remember together with the direction in space and details of the floor or walls or ceiling I look at while improvising. I do not try to be original or express feelings, but I concentrate on the physical tensions in my body. I remember what my hands touch, where I am looking, how my feet are placed on the ground. Most of all the contrasting tensions in my back help me reconstruct the precision of what I improvised the first time.

At Odin Teatret we have developed a procedure for improvising a few actions step by step, repeating them and then moving forward. If we improvise for a long time without stopping, other actors can take notes, or we can film. But I dislike looking at myself on a screen and often don't understand the comments given from outside. What is best for me is to write down as quickly as possible all I remember, with simple words that describe the actions, places and images. Then I repeat.

During a session of *Arte Secreta do Ator* in Brazil, my director, Eugenio Barba, asked me to demonstrate how to segment a score. To do this I stood behind a

chair, pulled it backwards towards the floor, looked to the side, straightened the chair, and lifted it. Then I repeated the sequence without the chair. After the score was fixed, Eugenio asked me to improvise all its possible variations: changing the rhythm, the quality of energy, the direction, reducing the actions in space, giving an extrovert or introvert quality, transposing to only one part of the body, finding equivalent possibilities, dancing, opposing a resistance, marking the beginnings and ends as in gymnastics, as if I were a character, in a continuous fluid sequence. I improvised for about twenty minutes. The improvisation was filmed and Eugenio asked me to learn it for a scene in *Ave Maria*, a performance which we were rehearsing. I felt it was impossible to learn. All I was doing was moving a chair. I had no images to help me remember the differences. The solution I found was to learn the sections of the improvisation in general and then to repeat them always as if I were improvising for the first time. I didn't rely on memory but on the quality of precision determined by the necessity of the actions. Slowly, the sequence sedimented in my body, and I was able to adapt it to music, to text, and to tearing a photograph in eight pieces and then into smaller bits.

I can use music, sounds, paintings, shapes in the room to stimulate reactions or invent actions. The impulses come from outside rather than from within me. I can concretely see and listen to what provokes my reactions, and this is much easier to remember than relying on a reality that belongs to my biography or imagination. Performing becomes a dance, and consequently memory is rooted in a concrete way of thinking which places my awareness in my feet and in my body.

Hidden memories

Ave Maria is a ceremony made by Mr Peanut, the skull headed character representing Death, in tribute to the Chilean actress, María Cánepa. I wanted to do something to keep María alive, so that people would remember her voice, the way she interpreted texts, and her own memories of Pablo Neruda and Salvador Allende and how she spoke about her country before and after the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. The memory of what had happened still touched the spectators, especially when they recognised the typical Chilean accent. The memory of María, her playfulness and generosity, gave me the motivation to work for years on the performance before it was ready.

In *A Character that Cannot Die* I present a film of Mr Peanut. The adventures and journeys over so many years move even me as I remember the people we met and the places we visited together. One scene in the film shows Mr Peanut driving a red tractor. This makes me think of Anna Stigsgaard. She asked me to drive the tractor in the performance she was organising for the Festive Week in Holstebro. Then, as one memory leads to another, Camille and Manolo, from Théâtre du Centaure, Marseille, appear in my mind. They were part of the same performance. I remember how we crossed the fields and woods together to reach the village and ate apples for lunch. Nobody can see these details in the film, but they are hidden there. They are part of the memories that give another dimension to the present.

My mother

I now feed the birds when I am at home in Denmark. I place the balls of seeds in the fitted containers hanging outside my sitting-room windows. My mother used to spend hours there, looking at the birds, noting their different habits, the colour of their feathers, distinguishing males and females, remembering their names. Now I feed the birds to remember and honour her. Something of her lives on in me. Every day I recognise what my mother used to do in me. How we cook, clean, make a bed, write letters, where we put the wooden spoons in the kitchen, how we use the grey eyeliner for our brown eyes. A lot has always been shared. I learnt from her, day by day: how to walk, drive, look at a view, take care of plants. Now that she has gone, I have become much more aware of how much of my behaviour, my values and habits belong to her. I notice how I brush my hair, and I even adjust my collar before going out as she would do for me.

We both liked champagne. Her passion goes back to when her father sent a crate of champagne to the boarding school, where her teachers had complained that she would not drink milk. I have heard this story many times. The last two weeks we spent together, as there were no bottles of normal wine in her flat in Naples, we drank champagne every evening with our supper. Those bottles had been kept for important occasions. Our being together was definitely important and has been immortalised in happy Christmas and New Year messages sent to our families and friends. My mother liked beer as well, but not as much. If I want to smile, it is enough to think of my friend, Geddy Aniksdal, offering a second beer to my mother who replied cheekily “F off!”. Geddy didn’t understand until I explained it was an elegant way of saying “Fuck off!”. My mother and I laughed for a long time at Geddy’s bewilderment.

On the 4th of January 2024, a year after my mother’s death, I went to Rue Notre Dame des Champs 70 in Paris. My mother was born in Paris and lived in that house until she was seven years old. As a child she only spoke French, even though she was British. She had to flee with her mother when the Germans were approaching the city after the fall of the Maginot line of defence during the Second World War. This is another story I have heard many times. My mother’s father was away fighting. My mother and my grandmother escaped by car alone to the south of France. There they had to abandon the car to continue through Spain by train to reach Portugal, where they boarded a plane that landed in London while the city was being bombed. Apparently, it was then my mother heard her mother swear for the first time. They spent the first night of the escape in a French farmhouse, with another family who carried their grandmother’s corpse rolled up in a carpet on the roof of their car. My mother remembered sleeping in a room at the end of a corridor. They had to leave before dawn to travel in the dark. She also remembered her fear, especially when her mother responded contemptuously to German soldiers at the border, who were appreciating her beauty.

Living in London during the war, my grandmother drove an ambulance as a volunteer. The house they moved into was bombed while my mother was in hospital having her tonsils out, so they were lucky and survived. Later they



Julia's mother, Sarah Duthie, and Julia Varley in Denmark (13.4.2022). Photo: Eugenio Barba

moved to a country mansion belonging to the Cunard family. There they had a kitchen garden with fruit and vegetables to eat, chickens that gave eggs, ponies to pull a cart and dogs to keep guard. They were a family of five children then, because my grandmother had promised her best friend, who died of cancer, that she would look after her four children. That is how I came to have aunts and uncles and many cousins. My mother's pony threw her off into a pond and, to hide this, my mother dried her clothes in the aga oven. She was afraid that if her mother found out she would get rid of the pony. One day when my mother came back from school on a bicycle with her feet on the handlebars, her dog did not come running to meet her. Nobody had the courage to tell her that her dog had been run over. To be alone, she took refuge in the treehouse she had built and, as she jumped down, she hit her chin with her knees. Another day a black American soldier wanted to ask her the way, but my mother ran away petrified. I remember all of this even though I was not there. I have embodied the memory through my mother's stories. In her old age she repeated them endlessly, as if to hang on to her past and to the memory of her parents and step-brothers and sisters.

My own brothers and I had promised her that we would scatter her ashes over Paris. She loved the city. I always brought her with me whenever I was there on tour: she loved the French windows, the smell, the artists' milieu, the food, the accent, the Luxembourg Gardens, the exhibitions, the Seine, Notre Dame. Now I had taken a part of her back to her childhood home to mark the anniversary of her death. The house is no longer lived in and looks different from how I

remembered it from when I visited it with my mother some years earlier. Still the house number is clearly marked on the street: 70. My mother told me that she used to play in a sandpit beside a famous sculptor's atelier at the bottom of the garden. His name was Ossip Zadkine, and his atelier is now a museum with the entrance on a parallel road. Has the entrance changed? Or has memory changed the entrance?

After being at rue Notre Dame des Champs with my brother and his family, I visited Zadkine's Museum. I needed to be alone. There was an exhibition centred on the friendship between Ossip Zadkine and Amedeo Modigliani. I bought a book of the exhibition thinking of sharing it with my painter friend, Dorthe Kærgaard, who was also very fond of my mother. I looked at the Museum's garden and wondered why my mother remembered it at the bottom of her house's garden. I thought of my mother as a little girl playing with the sculptor and wrote down the story on a postcard to my niece and brother. I needed to remember how we marked the day, and all my mother had taught us, and I wanted them to remember too. Maybe my niece will one day tell her children the story. The Museum had a book for comments and messages. I thought of writing all the memories in there, but I didn't. Once full, the book will probably be kept in a deposit for a period and then eventually thrown away. We cannot keep all the pieces of memory. There is not room in the world for all the history of humankind.

Performing memory

When creating, rehearsing and performing a theatre piece, different kinds of memories are present within me, helping and fighting each other. Life experience gives me references for creation. In rehearsal I focus on what comes next, on the changes the director has asked for, on the slight variations of rhythm in the words or in the sequence of actions. When performing images come and go and stories visit me suddenly, memory is forgotten and becomes rooted in what I do.

I thought a lot about this during the rehearsals for *Compassion*, because the characters belonged to previous ensemble productions. Their actions and behaviour had been embodied through years of repetition. At the same time, I was learning new sequences of scenes and actions, a different montage of texts, songs and behaviour. Needing to remember the new changes, my mind fought with my body which already knew the 'what' and 'how to do'. My mind tried to remember while my body immediately acted and reacted without having to remember. The combination of these two memories was difficult.

The most interesting thing was how the voices, music and actions of all the other actors in the ensemble versions remained in me even though I was now alone. I could still hear the sounds, the songs, the instruments of all my colleagues in the original performances, even though the context, the space and partly the costume were now different. The order of the scenes had changed, and three different performances had melted into one. This happened for me on stage, but also for those seeing *Compassion* for the first time: they saw and heard the ensemble performances that still lived in their memory so concretely it was as

if they believed in ghosts. Only after seeing or performing *Compassion* many times did the ghosts start to vanish into the background to let the present take the lead both for me and the spectators.

Compassion, started with the title *Remembering Thebes*. I had a strong ambition: to keep the memory of a whole performance alive. *Thebes at the Time of Yellow Fever* had a very short life, only three months after five years of continuous yet intermittent rehearsals. The injustice of this production not being presented for as long as would usually happen at Odin Teatret made me sad at first and then angry. It gave me the will and energy to do the impossible: repeat the actions of all the five actors of *Thebes at the Time of Yellow Fever*.

The process of this production had started with the question of where languages go when they die and with a choice of happy love stories. I had worked during the Covid quarantine restrictions on Lu Hsun's short story about a madman, who was afraid of people being cannibals. In my sitting-room at home and on the lawn, I fixed scores and ways of saying the text in Italian and English. Then the performance developed into the story of the city of Thebes after the plague and the war between the two sons of Oedipus, and all the texts and songs had to be learnt in ancient Greek. I was Tiresias and the other characters were the ghost of Oedipus, the Sphinx, Aglaia who believed she was Antigone, and Creon.

During this process: two actors left the production; one joined, another became pregnant; Eugenio Barba retired from being Director of Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium to concentrate on Odin Teatret, ISTA and the Odin Teatret Archive; I left my responsibility as Artistic Coordinator of Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium and founded the association Transit Next Forum to continue my Magdalena Project activities autonomously; and Eugenio and I started the Barba Varley Foundation in Italy. The life-changing memories around *Thebes at the Time of Yellow Fever* are enough to fill a book that perhaps I will write one day.

The many memories of *The Dead Brother*

I will use the work demonstration *The Dead Brother* to give an example of memories that travel through my body and mind while I am on stage or rehearsing. I don't *think* of all these details, I am not aware of them, but they belong to the process, and they feed what I do when I present the demonstration and determine the particular rhythm that makes my presence believable for the spectators. As I quoted before, one way of explaining is to say that memory hides in the depths of oblivion, but in my experience events can also unexpectedly come to the surface so that I suddenly remember places, people, dates, feelings. Some memories can seem insignificant, but all of them contain details that determine the sense of a story.

One day at the beginning of the 1990s, I went up the wooden stairs to Eugenio's office at the theatre. He was sitting at his desk, a wooden table painted black, sorting out papers and writing letters. I told him I wanted to create a work demonstration that showed how we work together as actor and director to answer a recurrent question put to us, and I wanted to choose a political theme,

as politics were no longer fashionable. He gave me a piece of paper with a type-written poem by the contemporary Norwegian poet, Georg Johannesen. "Start with this", he said. I went down the stairs again and immediately translated the poem into English and Italian, the languages I use at the beginning of a work process.

Eugenio was busy with many projects, and it was difficult to lure him into the rehearsal room. My strategy became to sell public sessions in which he would work in front of an audience as director on the actor's material I presented to him. He could not refuse. But first I had to prepare something to show him.

In 1991 I travelled for two weeks with Miguel Rubio, the director of the Peruvian theatre group Yuyachkani, and Rosalba Marchese, the granddaughter of a Uruguayan president. She had helped us organise a tour in her country with the ensemble performance *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus*. I was showing my solo performance *The Castle of Holstebro* in different Polish cities. We travelled in my car, squeezed in with the set. Miguel and I had agreed to work together during the tour so he could get to know how we created and elaborated actor's material at Odin Teatret. Rosalba was interested in visiting the country of origin of part of her family and she offered to help if she could come along.

The Berlin wall had fallen in 1989, and Poland was still in a state of political transition. Miguel could not fit his Latin American communist ideals into what was happening in Eastern European countries. After hearing that a Beer Party was standing for elections in Poland, he gave up trying to understand.

In the free time from travelling, setting up and performing, Miguel and I worked on composition and on improvisation. I wanted to share the different quality of material that originated from the two different procedures. I composed different positions sleeping and waking up while sitting on a chair, and then I transposed the same sequence to a standing position. Based on two different verses from Georg Johannesen's poem, I made two improvisations which I fixed. One improvisation referred to images of the moon I had used before. The other followed more personal memories: the softness of the summer air, lying on the beach, the waves coming and going, offering my heart, someone smelling of alcohol harassing me. The first step of the work demonstration *The Dead Brother*, was a montage of scenes with a blindfold and a knife. The knife was later changed for a rose. At first, my initial political reference had made me choose a red carnation, symbol of the revolution in Portugal, but then, to avoid being too direct, I opted for a red rose which could awaken other associations.

In Wrocław, in the famous room where Grotowski's Teatr Laboratorium had performed, Miguel asked me to be less cold and calculating when improvising. He wanted me to show passion. I was improvising with a pair of boots and, responding to the task, I threw the boots very violently up in the air. The boots hit a lamp and broke it. Miguel went white in the face. How could this happen in Grotowski's sacred space? After we had cleared up the glass, he said that never again would he ask an actor to be passionate. Unintentionally, I had given him a lesson: directors should be careful of the consequences of their words because actors may take them seriously.

In Bialystok, near the Russian border, someone broke into my car to steal music cassettes, and for a few days we had to travel with plastic covering the window. Along the thick woods around the city, people were selling mushrooms. The memory of the Chernobyl disaster and the consequent pollution was still fresh. We wondered who dared to buy the mushrooms. Many cars carried barrels of petrol on the roof, because people sold petrol at the border. At the local puppet theatre, where I was programmed to perform, we heard that the actors did not know how to continue in their profession. Until then, the socialist state had provided them with a salary, and they had never been confronted with the challenge of making a living from box-office earnings. The only requirement had been to make theatre for the working class.

Driving away from Poland towards Frankfurt, where I had to take an aeroplane to Mexico and where I managed to leave my favourite red coat in a hotel cupboard, I stopped in Berlin to deposit Miguel at the house of a mask-maker friend. On the way there, while driving, I rehearsed the Spanish text of *The Castle of Holstebro*. The performance's music played in the background from the car's cassette player. I turned to look at Miguel who was crying. The music reminded him of the last scene when Mr Peanut, Death, dances with a girl dressed in white and then is transformed into a baby held in the girl's lap.

In Padova, Italy, we were gathered for a session of the University of Eurasian Theatre. In addition to Odin Teatret, the local Teatrocontinuo was there together with Italian and foreign university lecturers. We had been challenged to stage a short story by Frans Kafka, *Before the Law*, which later would be a starting point for Odin Teatret's ensemble performance *Kaosmos*. In my free time, I continued to think of *The Dead Brother*. In the demonstration, I needed to show how I could create material using images. I asked for some books of paintings and one of our hosts appeared at the restaurant in the evening with many issues of *I maestri del colore*, an Italian magazine that printed slim books dedicated to great painters. I knew of this magazine because my mother also had them at home. I looked through the various copies and chose three paintings by Eugène Delacroix. When asked what guides my choices, I answer that I rely on intuition or the actor's intelligence. Afterwards I can give more rational explanations and say that I chose Delacroix because he awakens political references and because the composition and dynamics of his paintings are helpful in inspiring stage actions.

Miguel had given me a music album by a Nicaraguan group. I used the first melody to create actions following the impulses of the music. The building of a continuous rhythm provoked running steps, the entrance of a high-pitched instrument lifted my arm, the words about a butterfly created an embrace, the tone of expectation extended the tension in my back, the last beats stopped my steps. I was working alone in a hotel room, which restricted the volume of what I could do.

Eugenio and I were in Rio de Janeiro, invited by our friend Aderbal Freire Junior. He called his group Centro de Demolição e Construção do Espetáculo (Centre for the Demolition and Construction of Performance), based that year at Teatro Glauco Gill, close to the beach of Copacabana. Other friends,

Abraxa Teatro from Rome, were performing in the theatre in the evening, and Eugenio and I had to make our public demonstration on the stage in front of a set covered with a black cloth. Eugenio worked with me turning my actions backwards as if seeing, touching and caressing the black wall. He imagined that at the end he would ask me to pull off the black cloth to reveal the hidden metal structure which could give the association of a prison and surprise the spectators by giving another meaning to what I was doing and saying. That same day some actors had all their money stolen as they were walking near the theatre. They were not hurt, but I decided not to go near the beach in the evening.

Aderbal and his famous actress partner, Marieta Severo, invited us again several times to another theatre, the Teatro Poeira. Once we worked on what would become the solo *Ave Maria*. Aderbal suggested covering Mr Peanut's head with the newspaper that reproduced articles on María Cánepa's second marriage and her death. When I lay down on the floor beside the newspaper, Aderbal cried. He told Eugenio that he did not know why tears came to his eyes. The last time we saw Aderbal, he took us to a shopping centre to buy a suitcase. Other memories of Aderbal and Marieta include a restaurant that made wonderful *bolinhos de bacalhau* (salted cod fish-balls), and their moving theatre performance of Soha Behara's story, as told by Lebanese Wajdi Mouawad in his play *Incendies*.

I had been given two more poems to continue *The Dead Brother* demonstration, one by Mexican Octavio Paz and another by Turkish Nazim Hikmet. Both included the word 'road' in their texts, and this also occurred in Georg Johannesen's poem. I was in Naples, directing a performance with Lorenzo Gleijeses and Manolo Muoio, and while walking from my mother's flat to the theatre every day, I repeated the poems to learn them. I had the feeling that I was understanding the meaning of the words and the connections between the poems as I walked through the crowds of Neapolitans going shopping. But that feeling soon disappeared.

Loud music was playing from one of the shops along the pedestrian street in Londrina, Brazil. It was a happy melody that made one want to dance. Eugenio and I entered the shop and bought the cassette by Luiz Gonzaga. Later we got to know a lot about this musician who was from the northeast of Brazil, a poor dry region. On the cover of the cassette, Luiz Gonzaga wore a *cangaço* hat, like the ones we used in *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus*, representing a band of outlaws. I chose three melodies that I liked from the cassette to fix the musicality with which to speak the dramatic poem by Nazim Hikmet. Only afterwards could I explain that the music functioned because it went in the opposite direction from the text, helping me not to be tautological or, as we say, put fat on butter.

Driving from Ouro Preto to Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, I passed a second-hand shop that had a man's grey suit hanging outside. It was exactly how people would dress in Eastern Europe, I thought. I stopped and bought the suit. Strangely enough it fitted me, even though male clothes do not usually conform to the shape of my body.

In 1992, a Turkish participant at the ISTA session in Brecon, Wales, gave a poem by Ahmed Arif to Eugenio and a colourful dress to me. I have

never worn the dress, but we built the final scene of *The Dead Brother* around the poem. After years of slowly building the different stages of the demonstration, we worked at the theatre in Holstebro for a week to fix the ending. Eugenio and I spent a long time discussing the words I would use to explain the process. My terminology is different from Eugenio's, but the demonstration needed to present both points of view, the actor's and the director's, which made the text difficult for me to learn. To avoid making mistakes, I wrote down the sentences which included Heiner Müller's opinions on the interpretation of text in theatre on a postcard so I could read them out. Heiner Müller had expressed his need for the text to have autonomy from the actors' psychological interpretation, during a workshop on dramaturgy organised in Copenhagen. After a couple of years, I put a pair of glasses in the pocket of the suit jacket where I kept the postcard because I could no longer see the words I had to read.

The objects underwent a transformation in the last scene: the blindfold became both handcuffs and the lump of earth where I planted the rose; after avoiding squashing the rose on the floor many times, I finally trod on it on purpose so that when I picked it up red petals remained on the ground and only a few on the stem; my hair was loose to indicate that I was the dead brother's sister and not the brother himself.

One of the first times I presented the demonstration was in Bellusco, a small town close to Milan. I had been invited by Teatro dell'Aleph. Amongst the spectators was another theatre group, the Polish Osmego Dnia, whom I had seen performing in a large underground cave in Southern Italy. There, an actor with long blonde hair and wearing a long heavy coat had waved a big red flag over a heap of chairs and tables. In Bellusco, I was still insecure about the sequence of the explanation, and I mixed up the order of the training examples. The mistake worked better than what had been decided, so Eugenio fixed it.

In 1999 I was at the Magdalena Aotearoa Festival in Wellington, New Zealand. There I bought a new pair of trousers for the man's suit and had to alter the waistline. In 2018 I was in New Delhi at the Theatre Olympics Festival. There I had a new version of the woman's pink skirt and shirt made by a tailor I found at a market close to the hotel where we were staying. He promised to make everything in a couple of hours. In 2024 I had the pink skirt and shirt made again. Eventually I went back to using the original shirt which Mrs Skød had made in 1990 in Denmark. Mrs Skød had explained to me how difficult it was to sew a collar that fitted properly. Since I was going to use a tie, I needed the collar to fit. The very first pink shirt belonged to John Hardy, a musician from Cardiff Laboratory Theatre, who came to Odin Teatret in the early 1980s to teach the actors how to play their musical instruments in tune. He had forgotten the shirt, not imagining it would be useful to me one day.

Now, in 2025, I still perform *The Dead Brother*. Memories keep accumulating feeding the sense of my making theatre. More and more stories are deposited in my personal living archive; they surface now and then to whisper messages that I do not always understand, like the vague reminiscences of a dream.

A living archive

At the end of 2022 Odin Teatret left its umbrella organisation Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium and the theatre venue we had built over decades in Holstebro. I had to leave the rooms where I had worked since 1976 and pack up my dressing room: costumes, photographs, paintings, carpets, props, diaries, notebooks, ornaments, documents, chairs, tables, lights, make-up, toothbrushes, books, journals, hairbrushes, mirrors, and the hundreds of presents that I have received over the years.

All these memories were put into boxes and sent to LAFLIS - Living Archive Floating Islands at the Bernardini Library in Lecce, Italy. Juliana Capilé, Tatiana Horevicht and Antonia Cioază helped me with the process of making lists and numbering the boxes. In Lecce my dressing room was built again, in a slightly smaller version. I spent a week placing everything in the new space, finding solutions for the reduced measurements. I put Dorthe Kærgaard's original Transit painting in what was supposed to be the window, I cut one table in half and piled the books on different shelves. Some people who visit LAFLIS are deeply moved. Their imagination seems to touch deep inside without knowing what is kept there.

People asked me if it was a terribly hard experience. It wasn't. It is strange how quickly a place can lose its soul and how we realise that our roots are actually in the relationships with the people we have met, worked and shared memories with, especially when preparing for a new itinerant existence. I asked myself what I really needed from all I had collected in my dressing room, and I realised that what I need now is either in my computer or in my body. Of course, I kept all the costumes and props from the performances still in repertory and I took my diaries home because I needed to read them to reconstruct scenes for new productions or to write new books. But everything else was packed and sent to Lecce.

When I visited Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel's house in Berlin, now turned into a museum, I became even more convinced that walls preserve memories of what has been lived in the space. It was one of the reasons that made me fight years ago to maintain Odin Teatret Archive at our theatre. Eugenio told me not to be naïve, that when the place was no longer used as a theatre, nobody would be interested in paying to keep the place open as a memorial. Then events took an unexpected direction, and we had to abandon our professional home. Can the walls conserve memories when the activity they host is totally transformed?

As an actor, I could say that my body is my archive. All the information stored over the years is there and, as long as I am alive, I can say that it is a living archive. But what happens when I am no more? In what form can I leave my knowledge and experience behind so that it will continue to be a place for constructive misunderstandings and a stimulus for other women whom I will never meet?

Ever since the beginning of The Magdalena Project in 1986, my personal obsession has been to give voice and visibility to the history of women in theatre.

I would like this to happen without following the established academic rules and historiographical traditions. I search for a memory in which recognition is given to personal experience, to the opposing forces of the body, to the living contradictions of practice, to the need for sharing questions and empathy. My aspiration for a history that includes women wants to avoid being right or wrong, good or bad, clever or stupid, theoretical or practical, strategic or immediate. I want to pass on our theatre experience integrating all the positions, remaining alive through a continuous transformation.

In our digital era the importance of photographs has become overwhelming. I have seen women of all ages on the beach, in front of monuments, at a party, posing to be photographed. Even children cross their legs, smooth their dresses, put their chins up in the air, let their hair flow to one side. I wonder how they learned to do this. It is as if some people think that they no longer exist without a photograph to prove it. I have also been told that in certain apps as soon as a message or a photograph is sent, it is deleted. I imagine that the alternative to the fleeting moment is the accumulation of memories that are both forgotten and remembered in our bodies. I hope that my energy lives on in my actions on stage, and that they convey energy for the spectators to perceive.

Life stories transmit energy to me. Women's stories from the past give me the courage to confront the difficulties of today and believe in the possibilities of the future. They are examples of strong women who share their vulnerability. I need to make sure that women like my mother, or like Sanjukta Panigrahi, Sally Rodwell, María Cánepa, Margaret Cameron, and so many others are kept alive by remembering their incredible beauty. Memories of their lives should infuse a sensorial experience through a process which we have learnt through our theatre practice: the art of creating relationships.

In the past, theatre history was mainly based on records of written plays and buildings. Today, aware that theatre is a lot more than text and venues, women are contributing important points of view for the building of memory. Sharing our prospects in the first person, writing, giving lectures, gathering documents, taking photographs, filming, publishing books, building installations, inventing memorials, making new performances out of old ones, using Artificial Intelligence and not being used by it... Our task is to pass all this on to allow other generations to imagine their own history. Our personal struggles and truths should be our legacy, a living archive that shares a mosaic of memories.