

## Lilicherie McGregor

# Te Kore<sup>1</sup>

*I have learnt through doing, acting and directing, and through the process of the work, of learning together in rehearsal.  
As a director I learn from the actors I work with and in the process they learn together and with me.*

*"Look upon the world as void, O Mogharagan", said the Buddha "being always wakeful, having destroyed the view of oneself as really existing, one may overcome death, the king of death will not see the person who thus regards the world."*

From *The Sutta-nipata*

How to begin to remember? Out of the chaos of change comes growth. My life in the theatre began when my marriage of fifteen years ended in 1986. Love at first sight - the man is a director with a European tradition and I sit in rehearsals night after night for three years before I begin to dare to study theatre. This transmission of knowledge was from my watching (looking and listening) and then testing in practice. My director, Peter Falkenberg, has been my teacher, my teacher has been my director. I was studying acting with no thought of directing, but suddenly, my first necessity to direct came from reading Antonin Artaud - he was inspirational - and the work to direct was *Woyzeck* by Georg Büchner. Next was a play by Megan Terry, *Approaching Simone*, about the French philosopher Simone Weil (contemporary of Simone de Beauvoir) who wrote about the void, the *via negativa* and Acceptance.

I am from Aotearoa-New Zealand, a small island in the South Pacific, where there is really no concept of physical training for the actor. In my studies at the university, my teacher and director introduced me to the work of Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Brecht, Artaud, Grotowski and Barba. With two others, I chose to work for one year on a project studying the work of Jerzy Grotowski. I read everything that I could find that was written in English about Grotowski and we trained using the exercises that we read about and attended Aikido martial art classes. We three women trained together without a teacher, but with a passionate desire to do it. I was seduced by Grotowski's book *Towards a Poor Theatre*. We all wanted to go to work with



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1. *Te Kore* is the Maori word for void.

Grotowski! At the end of the year we performed a short piece, "in the style of" Grotowski, and gave a class on Grotowski training/philosophy. We ended with the students in the Botanical Gardens at sunset performing *The Motions* exercise, on a little hill surrounded by a circle of pine trees.

Aotearoa-New Zealand is a long way from Europe and can feel very isolated from the performances and training that we read about in theatre journals. Two years ago Jill Greenhalgh of the Magdalena Project in Wales came to my Pacific island and opened the page for me to have the courage to write to the famous. I asked Julia Varley of the Odin Teatret if I could come to study directing and was invited to participate in the ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology) Conference in Portugal in 1998. I spoke my dream and a dream came true. In this way new teachers have entered my life.

How else have I learnt? I have learnt through doing, acting and directing, and through the process of the work, of learning together in rehearsal. As a director I learn from the actors I work with and in the process they learn together and with me. I have worked with youth at risk, people in recovery from drug abuse and young people who were not trained as actors, who struggled with the confrontation of the discipline of the work: punctuality, repetition and daily work on the body and voice. From the work of rehearsal a group dynamic is born. The experienced actors teach the less experienced and generosity is fostered, a sharing of knowledge gained through the doing. In the last production about Maori land rights many of the actors knew little about the politics and history of their country. They read books and brought them to share with the others, excitement and commitment were born, anger was expressed at atrocities committed in the name of justice. The mate-

rial was digested, physicalised, vocalised, abstracted and performed. The daily physical training was begun with a military cadet coming along to rehearsals to teach the actors the discipline of military marching, standing to attention and presenting arms. This discipline was used as part of the training and extended into the performance itself. A cross-cultural exchange was experienced where the inner fears (hidden in the politeness of daily life) between different races were exposed and faced with (sometimes frightening) honesty. *Songs to the Judges* was presented at Nga Hau e Wha National Marae (a Maori meeting house), where an exchange took place between the actors and spectators in a form of barter, with responses from spectators who told stories and sang songs in return. This way of teaching or directing is for me a method of facilitating a process of exchange and change.

In Aotearoa-New Zealand there are very few performance groups who work together over time and they do not always have a space in which to rehearse daily. There is not a tradition of learning from a master or from an experienced actor in a group situation. However, in Maori culture (the indigenous people of Aotearoa-New Zealand) there is the tradition of learning from a master. After a generation or two of urbanisation many young Maori are returning to their home towns to learn from their elders, the repositories of ancient knowledge, in the oral tradition. Much of this knowledge is not available in universities.

Acting in this country is taught in theatre schools and in universities. In reality, this acting is for film and television more than for the stage. Now I am a lecturer in a university and I am supposed to know. What? The answers! I think I only know questions. But to ask the right questions is maybe the answer. Of course the students

and actors want to know now! To trust in the process of rehearsal and not know now can be terrifying, there is an element of risk. How do I teach? How to pass on to the younger generation what I have learnt or find valuable? This is my first year as a lecturer and I am still learning how to teach, but I think to create courses where I can tell of my teachers and influences in theatre and to pass on my enthusiasm for my ancestors is one step of the way.

One of my dreams for the year 2000 is to gain financial support from the university for the work of "physical training as research" in recognition that the training of the actor is work, is experimental and is research. This work will begin to explore a different tradition from the current way of transmitting theatre practice in Aotearoa- New Zealand.

*How joyful to look upon the awakened  
And to keep company with the wise.  
Follow then the shining ones,  
The wise, the awakened, the loving,  
For they know how to work and forbear.*

*But if you cannot find  
Friend or master to go with you,  
Travel on alone -  
Like a king who has given away his kingdom,  
Like an elephant in the forest.*

*If the traveller can find*

*A virtuous and wise companion  
Let him go with him joyfully  
And overcome the dangers of the way.*

*Follow them  
As the moon follows the path of the stars.  
From The Dhammapada*

LILICHERIE MCGREGOR (Aotearoa - New Zealand) is lecturer in Theatre Studies at the University of Otago. Her research interests include inter-cultural and post-colonial theatre and the training of the actor. She has recently directed *The Tempest* (a Shakespeare adaptation, 1999), *Glass Beads* (a multi-media production, 1999), *Songs to the Judges* (a bi-cultural production based on Maori land rights, 1998), and *Taste* (a community documentary theatre production, 1997).