Towards a Theatre of the Heart

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Abstract

In this article I have written about a set of experiences with theatre productions over the last few years that have appealed strongly, in different ways, to the heart. To contextualise the phenomenon, I have coined the phrase theatre of the heart, and have provided an analysis of its manifestations with reference to non-linear theatre, atmosphere, love, and wisdom and age. I have provided examples for each of those contexts from recent theatre practice. In sharing this experience and my interpretation of it, I hope to enable other spectators to make sense of experiences they have encountered but may not be able to place, or to open them up to such experience in the first instance. My considerations may also support theatre artists to be courageous and develop the theatre of the heart further.

Keywords: theatre of the heart, chakra, regulation of emotions, aesthetic experience.

Introduction: The Heart

The conventional paradigm of science, with its predominantly positivist and materialistic contexts, seeks to exclude the subjective by definition. As a result, the methods and concepts of science have been unable to capture the subjective, and have therefore ruled it out in favor of objectivity. Nonetheless, in recent years, science has begun to incorporate subjectivity in the form of first person approaches, especially in the context of consciousness studies (Varela and Shear 1999). A number of new research methods have evolved to emphasize

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the value of alternative, participatory modes of knowing, e.g., Intuitive Inquiry, Organic Research, and Heuristic Inquiry (Anderson 1998, Clements 2004, Moustakas 1990). Tart advocated the development of state-specific sciences, suggesting that non-ordinary states of consciousness are likely to yield new insights not accessible by conventional methods (1972). This development owes much to the emphasis on subjectivity in non-Western traditions, and on the basis of research into that dimension, the recognition that subjectivity has existed in the Western context as well, making the alleged and assumed West/non-West binary opposite obsolete.

In my book Observing Theatre: Spirituality and Subjectivity in the Performing Arts 2013b), I introduced the philosophy of German geo-biologist Hans Binder as the basis for discussions of aspects of theatre as varied as nostalgia in theatre, intuitive collaboration, praise of acting in theatre criticism, practice as research, digital performance, theatre and philosophy, the canon, applied theatre and aspects of acting including helping actors cope with stage fright. In this article I want to continue this discussion with some thoughts on the nature of the heart in the context of theatre practice.

The relatively recent cognitive turn in theatre and performance studies (McConachie and Hart 2006) highlights an existing emphasis on ratio, on reason, on the biochemical and electro-physiological processes in the brain of theatre and performance makers and their audiences. Emotions, hitherto the major domain of the theatre, have been subsumed under the cognitive regime, and, in line with the materialistic paradigm characteristic of the scientific approach of cognitive science, have been reduced to brain activities.

Apparently in contrast to this emphasis on the brain is the endeavour to foreground the heart as much more than merely an organic pump, and to understand it in terms of the seat of the soul, and a core centre for human spiritual contexts (where spirituality is understood as relating to human nature in both religious and non-religious terms). In this article I want to explore the heart in relation to spirituality in general terms, and then consider the relevance of the insights of that exploration for theatre and performance practice. The purpose of this consideration is to re-assess the nature of the experiences of creating theatre and of
watching a performance in a way that does not seek to reduce it to brain activities, but allows a wider perspective that in turn can be shown not to rule out the dimension of brain activity as mutually exclusive. For the science-minded, the argument I present in this article can be operationalised, and turned into a set of hypotheses, which can be tested empirically.

The Heart Chakra

In the context of knowledge from a range of knowledge traditions, subtle energy is circulating in and around our physical body. Chinese medicine is aware of these energies in terms of the meridians of acupuncture, while in Indian philosophy there are the concepts of *prana* and of the *chakras* – centres in the body that serve as hubs for subtle energies flowing in up and down the spine. The heart serves as one such chakra. In Sanskrit it is called *anahata chakra*, its colours are green, pink and gold, it is associated with the element of air, and with the sense of touch. It is also referred to as twelve-leaved lotus. It is further associated with the heart, the upper back with ribcage and chest cavity, the lower area of the lungs, blood and blood circulation, and the skin. The associated gland is the thymus, which regulates growth and the lymphatic system, and stimulates and strengthens the immune system. In terms of astrology, the heart chakra is associated with leo/the sun, for warmth of feelings, geniality and generosity, with libra/venus for contact, love and striving for harmony, and with Saturn relating to overcoming the individual ego as the basis for making selfless love possible in the first place.

As the fourth of seven chakras, the heart chakra forms the centre of the chakra system, connecting the lower three emotional-physical chakras (root, sacral, solar plexus) with the higher, mental-spiritual chakras (throat, forehead, crown). The symbol of the heart-chakra, the hexagon, demonstrates vividly how the energies of the three lower and upper chakras intertwine in the heart chakra. The heart chakra’s relation to the element of air is what gives the heart flexibility. The heart is what gives us the ability to empathise and be attuned to one another, to resonate with each other, and to experience beauty of nature, in the
harmony of music, in the performing arts and in poetry. In the heart chakra, images, words and sounds are transformed into feelings. The main task of the heart chakra in human life is unification through love. Any yearning for unity, harmony and love is expressed through the heart chakra. In its purified and fully opened form, the heart chakra is the centre of pure, unconditional love, which exists only for its own sake and which you cannot own or lose. The path of the heart leads from the loving and understanding “yes” to ourselves as the condition to the “yes” to the other and to life. This kind of “yes” creates a vibration that does not allow negative feelings to take hold – they dissolve. Loving ourselves, in the sense of lovingly accepting our very essence from the depths of our hearts can thus fundamentally transform and heal us – thus creating the basis for a fulfilling love for others, for compassion, understanding and deep enjoyment of life.

When the heart chakra is developed and open, people will radiate natural warmth, geniality and cheerfulness, which opens the hearts of those they interact with, creates trust and gives joy. Compassion and readiness to help others are, of course, matters. The feelings of such people are free from inner tumults and conflicts, of doubt and insecurity. They love for the sake of love, from the joy they feel when they give, without expecting anything in return. They feel secure and at home in all of creation. They do not know fear, and engage in all they do with their whole hearts.

People whose heart chakras do not function in harmony might want to be there for others and want to give, but without being in tune with the source of love, they still, even unconsciously, expect to receive something in return (recognition or appreciation) and find themselves disappointed if those do not come. Sub-function of the heart chakra renders people easily vulnerable and dependent on the love and affection of others. If such a person is being rejected, they feel deeply hurt, especially if such rejection comes after they had had the courage, for once, to open up. This then leads to sadness and fear of further hurt. If the heart chakra is closed completely, people will come across as cold, unresponsive and heartless. Opening the heart does not mean to approach everyone carelessly with open arms and to hug everyone – it means employing the tools of intuition and wisdom to separate the wheat from the chaff.
The Heart and Non-Linear Theatre

According to St. Germain, one of the Ascended Masters in theosophy and other esoteric traditions, the balance of feminine and masculine values is the purpose of spiritual development across a long sequence of a living being’s incarnations. Beings, whose masculine side is over-developed, are incarnated as humans on earth, since earth is considered, in this context, as an essentially feminine planet. Thus the purpose for souls to be incarnated as humans on the planet earth is for them to be able to develop the feminine side of their nature, irrespective of whether they are born as man or woman (2004). For this development, the heart has a crucial role, as does a proper balance between heart and mind. The heart works through love, and vice versa. In the course of human development, the feminine, the heart and love will become more and more evident and foregrounded in all areas of life, including the arts and theatre. This means that art and theatre will deal more and more with these subjects and the contents will become more and more genuine (as opposed to the superficial nature of many romantic films, for example). New forms of expression of theatre will come into existence. The nature of theatre of the heart, for example, will be non-linear and multi-dimensional in presentation and reception.

Precursors

According to the psychology of the senses, although we may develop an ability to process sensory impressions as if they were simultaneous, and develop, therefore, considerable skills of multi-tasking, in fact our sensory perception is ultimately linear, we can process only one input at a time. “Multi-tasking” is therefore a misnomer. The theatre has sought to develop modes of perception that allow true multi-dimensionality. Peter Brook’s rehearsal exercise, which he demonstrated at a National Theatre platform performance (5 November 1993), is an example. From the stage, he asked the 1200 members of the seated audience in the semi-circular auditorium of the Olivier theatre to stand up. After a lot of shuffling, when everybody had stood up, Brook instructed the audience to sit down. Then he alerted them to the need to be prepared for standing up,
for this activity to become more efficient and faster. The next time around he asked the audience to get up, speed and efficiency indeed improved. Then he alerted the audience that they had in fact at least 180-degree vision, and instructed them not to look only at him at the centre of the stage, but to become aware of the full range of vision, of the other spectators. With that visual awareness, the impulse for getting up, and subsequently sitting down again, was to come from among the audience, not from him. This worked, a little hesitantly at first, and more and more in synchrony as Brook repeated the exercise four or five times. He concluded this part of the Platform session with the information that he did this exercise with his performers at his Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris for 45 minutes to an hour at the start of each rehearsal, so as to create synchronicity among the performers.

Different modes of perception were also central to the work of David Freeman with Opera Factory Zurich, where he staged a production of Mozart’s opera *The Marriage of Figaro* in such a way that in addition to the main (and usually only) focus on stage, on the singers currently singing, the audience could also see other characters going about their business: for example, while Susanna and Figaro measure their new bedroom, Basilio is composing, the maids are baking bread, Marcellina has a cold and is helped by Bartolo by administering a hot foot bath, Antonio is tending to his garden, the Countess is having her breakfast, the Count is chasing after the maids, as is Cherubino. Freeman’s London two-part production of *Morte d’Artur* started off in the Lyric Hammersmith theatre. During the interval of the first part, the audience walked across to the church in Hammersmith, where the first part ended and the second part started. For the second half of the second part, the audience returned to the theatre. In the church, the pews had been removed, and the action of the play continued simultaneously on at least five pageant wagons arranged across the space of the church. I have discussed this in more depth elsewhere (Meyer-Dinkgräfe 2006a).

*Aurelia Baumgartner’s Catch Me if You Can: Euridice 2012 Reloaded*

This kind of experimental performance can, I would like to suggest, trigger an experience that is different from that of conventional sensory
experience. The implication is that it might in fact be the experience of genuine simultaneity that these performances enable, which should yield different results in psycho-physiological terms. In the remainder of this section, I discuss two more recent examples of such performance, which achieve a similar impact in quite different ways. The first is dancer/philosopher Aurelia Baumgartner’s performance of Catch me if you can: Euridice 2012 Reloaded, presented on 11 June 2015 at the 6th International Conference on Consciousness, Theatre, Literature and the Arts at St Francis College, Brooklyn Heights, New York, and developed into a performance installation for the 2015 annual conference of the Theatre and Performance Research Association (TaPRA). The second is the four-part production of the Illiad, by Mike Pearson and Mike Brookes, presented at the Ffwrnes Theatre, Llanelli, Wales, from 21 September to 3 October 2015.

At the beginning of Baumgartner’s Catch me if you can: Euridice 2012 Reloaded, the auditorium lights go off, there is darkness. A projection on to the large screen at the back of the stage shows buildings behind trees, accompanied by a sound reminds me of cicadas, but may also be high-pitched radio or electrical interference – it lacks the pulse of the cicadas’ voices. The camera short shifts from the row of houses to a large building, with trees in front, with the camera driving past, hand-held, a little shaky. The camera shifts to capture different city images, including car traffic, less trees. A female voice-over on the video, speaking in English with a German accent, speaks individual words or phrases – fragments which may or may not relate to the images. The word “predestination” appears on the screen, top right, while the scene captured by the camera shifts to interiors, with words “café”, “Kasse Kaufkarten / ticket office” providing some orientation. The soundscape reflects the noise of many people speaking at the same time. The female voice-over meshes with recording referencing train announcements over a tannoy at a railway station. Meaningless sequences of small and capital letters now fill the screen, their ordered appearance from top to bottom jarring with the impossibility of making sense of the letters in terms of words. This description covers only about a minute of the 69-minute performance. The first human appears on stage after around four minutes – Flamenco Puro dancer Jairo Amaya appears in silhouette in a
round beam behind a screen, launching into a flamenco number – the rest of the screen remains in darkness, the screen is dark as well, no more projections for the moment.

Aurelia Baumgartner’s father was a highly respected professor of philosophy in Germany, and Baumgartner is a philosopher. Her work is philosophy, both what she has to say and what she does in her practice. In what she has to say, she has referenced the philosophers that she thinks about, thinks in terms of, and that have guided her thoughts. All that thinking is interwoven with her practice. For her, practice is thinking, and takes the shape of her performances. It is philosophy in practice, just as much as it is possible to understand the history of philosophy as practice – as the writings about personal experience. Philosophers encountered their own revelatory experiences, and wrote about those experiences to make sense of them for themselves, and to share them with others to make sense of their respective experiences, and to enable others to have the same, or a similar, experience. For many, the first encounter with such experiences was new, unexpected and life-changing. Sadly, this experiential aspect of philosophy was marginalised in the writing of the history of philosophy, leaving philosophy to be considered speculation (Meyer-Dinkgräfe 2013b, 125-9).

Baumgartner’s performances seek to bring philosophy back to the realm of experience, reclaiming it from the context of mere speculation. Perhaps she has found the key in performance that fine artists and musicians appear, or claim, to have found in their understanding of Practice as Research, which has left the restrictions of verbal language behind.

The components of Eurydice interweave and interact, mediated from prepared audio and video material, and immediate components, unmediated through the live body on stage, and the arrangement of the live space. Module art adds to this diversity, which, despite, or, actually, because of the disparate nature of its components, coalesces into a whole that constitutes a new dimension. The performance moulds this new dimension and explores its facets, nuances and external textures. The formation of this new dimension is given to the recipient’s experience – I am using this term because the term “spectator” is restricted to the visual, and the term “audience” to the auditory senses. These terms do
not do justice to the more comprehensive experience aimed at, enabled and taught by *Eurydice*.

Either gradually, or in a sudden phase transition, the new dimension opens up to experience. While we know the sudden transition from the sudden shift that allows us, with Rubin’s vase, for example, to see either a vase or two faces in profile, but never both at the same time, in *Eurydice*, in the new dimension we are able to experience all aspects simultaneously.

We can think and talk about this experience, as I and you are doing now, in academic terms, but that is not the same as the experience itself that we try to capture in this way. The performance has become embodied thinking, body-thinking, which is a more holistic way of experiencing the world – a performative idea of utopia. If only we could encounter the real world, whatever that is, in such a way. In that sense the performance, which we cannot grasp fully through words, has a didactic nature because, the performance is not limited to the verbal “dimension”.

The *Iliad* by Mike Pearson and Mike Brookes

*Iliad* was the third production for National Theatre Wales by Mike Pearson and Mike Brookes, following on from their 2010 production of *The Persians* by Aeschylus in xx, and their 2012 production of *Coriolanus* by Shakespeare, in xx. For *Iliad*, Pearson and Brookes used the poem *War Music* by Christopher Logue (1926-2011). Inspired by Homer’s *Iliad*, Logue’s poem at the centre of the Pearson/Brookes *Iliad* begins at the moment when Achilles refuses to continue fighting, until the point when he does resume. The production was presented in four parts, each lasting between 90 to 120 minutes. The four parts were presented on consecutive nights, and over two marathon performances of all four parts across 12 hours, one daytime (10.30am to 9.30pm) on 26 September, and one night-time (6pm to 6am) on 3 October.

The main hall in the arts centre in Llanelli was stripped of seating, the floor covered in beige-coloured tiles of flooring, not carpet, but softer, and hence more comfortable to the feel than laminate. There were stacks of plastic garden chairs, which spectators were invited to use and
place wherever they chose if they wanted to sit. Many used car tyres were located in different areas of the space, and what appeared to be stage hands, but turned out to be fully trained actors, shifted those tyres, piled them up and placed large plywood sheets on to them, thus creating make-shift performance platforms. Sometimes, spectators were instructed to move away from certain areas, which were then used for and by the actors. Sometimes, the plastic chairs were used as part of the performance, to shape the space, to represent a mountain range, or to allow for the cast to express emotions such as anger by throwing the chairs, on one occasion throwing chair after chair, what must have hundreds of them, high into one corner of the venue, to reach almost to the ceiling. Microphones hung down on their cables from the ceiling, and the actors used them to recite their lines. Monitors around three sides of the space projected the text in autocue format. At other times, the characters of the Greek gods appeared on the monitors – they were pre-recorded, played by adolescents from the area. The gods, this dramaturgical device suggested, were teenagers, with all the stereotypical assumptions about adolescent emotional inconsistencies and vulnerability – leading to arbitrary support or punishment of the humans at their mercy.

I am still impressed by the clarity of the vocal presentation by the actors, the decision to have trained actors as the “stage hands”, who in the end did so much more than just shift people, tyres, chairs and so on, to contribute to the overall atmosphere of the production. The multi-layered nature of the event, with actors, stage hands, the auto-cue monitors, the gods on monitors, the landscape film in the background with its very slowly shifting image, the audience on the move, the text in itself, the rendering of the text by the actors, the Welsh accent, and the layer of distance between the audience and the performers despite relative physical proximity – too many layers to even try to make sense of them intellectually, and always approximating, and sometimes gaining, the nature of new dimensions of experience. All of this suffused with, permeated, informed, carried and sustained by something as yet not really theorised, but more and more frequently the essence of great theatre: a very deep quality of the heart, an unconditional love for the art and its expression in the performance space, which includes the audience.
The Heart and Atmosphere in the Theatre

In the introduction to her 2012 anthology on atmospheres, editor Christiane Heibach points out that atmospheres are omnipresent, and their existence can, therefore, not be doubted. Nevertheless, they evade analytic, scientific consideration predominantly because of their diffuse nature and because they resist categorisation. Etymologically, Heibach explains, the word originates from Greek *atmós*, steam, mist, and *sphairos*, globe, and this situates the word within the discipline of physics. This kind of atmosphere is central to climate research. The enveloping, invisible and nevertheless perceptible nature of atmosphere as subject of physics is then transferred to human life, where it is currently not measurable (Heibach 2012, 9). Heibach differentiates first-, second- and third-order atmospheres. First order atmospheres are occurring naturally, they are those described by physics. Second-order atmospheres are anthropocentric: atmospheres that come into being in and through interaction of people with other people, and with spaces, things, and environments. Third-order atmospheres are intended atmospheres as parts of societal and cultural reality: planning of buildings and cities, environments of consumption and wellness, mono- or multi-medial forms of art, and theatre and performance (Heibach 2012, 11-12). Totalitarian regimes are cut off to the outside and manipulate people internally in their spaces of living and thinking to create toxic atmospheres (Sloterdijk 2004, 189).

I propose to understand atmosphere as the result, and experience of, interactions of subtle energy. I have explained what I mean by subtle energy as follows.

The entire universe, according to Binder, can be understood as an energy field that integrates smaller units also as energy fields and interacts with the parent field, and other fields, since they are in turn connected to each other. Each planet has therefore its own energy field and is connected via the “unified field of natural law” again with the great whole. On Earth, there are then earth energy fields at each level of manifestation, for all plants and each plant, and for all animals and for each animal, and for all people and every individual. The deepest and most important energy field of each person is that of their very own life.
plan. “Since this plan of life for every human being is different and individual, according to their own primordial tasks of learning and *karma* from previous incarnations, each individual has the opportunity to change the past by living in the present and by addressing the tasks resulting from her life plan in daily life. (…) Everything that people have ever created and create, have manufactured and manufacture, in what form and with what material whatsoever, and what people have ever thought and think at this very moment, also represents energy fields within the unified field of natural law, brought into being by the respective activities of manufacturing, creating and thinking. All levels of complex energy fields now interact with each other and react to each other, in the sense that like attracts like in turn.” (2013b, 105-6)

I have also proposed that physics has developed a model allowing to explain and understand these subtle energy interactions (2006b). These subtle energies come together in the experience of atmosphere. For example, if people are happy, they build up energy fields of happiness which resonate with all existing happiness in the universe, tapping into that universal field of happiness energy, and receiving nourishment from that universal field, as well as in turn further nourishing that universal field of happiness with the energy of their own happiness. This energy field is first and foremost experienced, and then describable and communicable, as atmosphere. This is why “atmosphere” can relate to the experience of one person, or more people who are together. If a person’s heart is well developed, he/she will have an organic, natural atmosphere of that quality, and that quality, that atmosphere, will also characterise his/her work, whatever it may be. The principle of resonance is important in this context. I described it, from Binder’s perspective, as follows:

Our emotionally substantiated and stored beliefs generate a tremendous resonance field and everything that oscillates within this resonance field is taken up by this resonance field and cannot help but resonate, just as all the strings on a guitar resonate when a string is plucked. The law of resonance teaches us how everything in the universe communicates with one another via resonance. All things and beings in the universe have a natural oscillation and communicate with each other, as well as all the cells and organs of our body and of matter vibrate with each
other, usually in different frequencies. Other people, beings, things or events cannot escape the resonance field that we generate, when they resonate with our generated frequency, for like always attracts like. (2013b, 110)

Based on this principle of resonance, a person whose heart is open will attract other people who have similarly open hearts, or are ready, in their spiritual development, for impulses that allow their hearts to grow.

**Peter Brook’s Theatre**

I propose considering Peter Brook’s theatre, his productions and the Théâtre des Buffes du Nord, the actual theatre space that was his from 1974 to 2010, and which remains the venue that continues in his spirit and where he still presents his productions, as representative of the theatre of the heart. The heart is certainly at the centre of Brook’s most recent production, *Battlefield*, which is a 70 minute “continuation” of his 1985 epic 9-hour *Mahabharata*. The programme for the performances at the Young Vic in London provides a poignant quote from the play: Yudishtira, who becomes King after the end of the war that is central to the *Mahabharata*, is shown in conversation with Krishna, the god:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Krishna</th>
<th>You won’t have a choice between peace and war.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yudishtira</td>
<td>What will be my choice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krishna</td>
<td>Between a war and another war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yudishtira</td>
<td>The other war, where will it take place?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In the battlefield or in my heart?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krishna</td>
<td>I don’t see a difference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Brook and Estienne 2015)

The theatre space that has been Brook’s for nearly four decades carries his atmosphere, which is characterised by a deep, heartfelt love, awe towards, and veneration, reverence and respect for the art (form) of the theatre. This atmosphere originates from Brook’s work and permeates, saturates, and pervades it. In a more neutral performance space that has not developed this particularly unique atmosphere, Brook’s productions lose some of their impact. In such venues, they
have to create the atmosphere of the theatre of the heart afresh with each performance, which takes more effort, and the intensity of the atmosphere will be less. In comparison, performances at the Théâtre des Buffes du Nord, in which the atmosphere of the theatre of the heart has been established very strongly over the years, the performances are carried by that atmosphere and increase it further. Atmosphere transforms a mere, and neutral, space, into a place that is characterised by its atmosphere.

The Heart and Love

According to Binder, there are three levels of love, related to the heart and the heart chakra: interpersonal love, partnership love and universal love of the heart. Ultimately, Binder argues, the first two categories of love have not much to do with universal love – they are predominantly bonds that serve specific purposes, such as an increase of economic/financial and social security, to live one’s ego, to get mutual recognition, and not to have to live alone. On that basis it is possible to consider interpersonal and partnership love as “needy love”, which is based on a deficit, and can lead to people manipulating each other for their own gain. Two people in a “needy love” relationship can easily, when the needs are not met as expected, ruin each other’s freedom and respect, leading to hatred and jealousy.

Universal love of the heart, on the other hand, never tries to change the other in line with our expectations, accepting him or her as he or she is. It is self-sufficient, and allows those who live universal love of the heart to be able to forgive. Universal love of the heart structures an aura, a complete energy field, for each person that can radiate inside or outside, as needed depending on the situation we are in.

Under the Covers and Blueprint by Zoo Indigo

Zoo Indigo was founded in 2002 and is based in Nottingham. The company describes itself as an “Anglo-German contemporary performance company”. Its founding members are Rosie Garton and Ildiko Rippel.
Garton is a lecturer in drama and performance arts at De Montfort University, and in creative writing at the University of Nottingham. Rippel, originally from Germany, is senior lecturer in drama and performance at the University of Worcester. Thus, both combine their performance practice with careers as academics. In 2008/9 they premiered Under the Covers, in which they had a live skype link to infra-red cameras in their homes filming their infants in their cots. That footage was shown live during the entire duration of the performance. The framing device was for Garton and Rippel to tell the audience that as young mothers they had failed to find babysitters for the night, but not to worry, as the audience was now taking on the collective role of the babysitter – the audience would now have to watch the children on screen while at the same time also watching Garton and Rippel perform, and would have to become active when they noticed the children waking up, or crying, by singing a lullaby to them, or embarking on any other activity suitable to calm the child/children in question. I would like to argue that the performance of Under the Covers represents theatre of the heart in so far as the material comes immediately and without mediation from the heart – the performers both open up and frame what comes out (pure love of the mother for the child) in the artistic context of the performance. There is utter fullness there, and the performers as mothers can give as much of that as they like without feeling any depletion. The fullness comes from their shared love for their children: as the video clip of excerpts demonstrates. In Zoo Indigo's 2012 Blueprint, the mother-child relationship is expanded: Garton and Rippel, and, in one version of the production two other performers on stage, are linked by skype with their respective mothers, with whom they playfully interact. The performers introduce their mothers, ask them to show us their environments at their homes, ask questions about their mothers and about themselves as children, and they play themselves as children, and they play biographical monologues as their mothers about the mothers and their own younger selves.

The Heart and Age / Wisdom in the Theatre

In current Western society, in general (with some minor regional differences), the norm is defined by people aged 25 to 45, give or take a
few years. Any person below that age or above it runs the risk of being considered, by those that define the norm, as not within the norm. Anyone who does not fit within the norm is not fully understood and therefore considered at best with surprise or suspicion. The position outside the norm, which those below 25 or over 45 have not chosen for themselves, makes them vulnerable. Society has realised this to the extent that it provides funding for, or at least tolerates the existence, on the basis of charitable donations, of organisations that protect the young and the old from the norm (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, NSPCC, and Age Concern in the UK). The young are considered predominantly in terms of what they need to do to achieve well when they have reached the norm, without much attention to their here and now during those years. The old are considered predominantly in terms of what they have, or could have achieved while they were the norm. Hope, the frequent attitude towards the young, is replaced by sadness that not much may have been achieved, or sadness that in comparison with all that has been achieved, the status quo of the aged person assumed to be so much less than that achievement. From the perspective of the norm, youth is considered in terms of growth towards a goal, while older age is considered in terms of deterioration. Goal and deterioration are not within the grasp of those defined by it. The here-and-now of the young and the old does not count on its own terms, as the terms of comparison and judgment are that of the norm, and youth and age both deviate from the norm.

There are some alternative approaches to youth, for example that developed by Maria Montessori, and while there are many laudable attempts to bring such innovative approaches to bear on public opinion, they have not become mainstream in the sense that they determine policy that schools have to follow. There is some recognition that an increasingly ageing population will bring challenges with it, buzzwords have been created and are circulating, and research funding bodies have latched on to this development and have made funds available for research to study well-being and dignified ageing, for example.

In attempts at shifting perceptions about ageing and the aged, frequently the idea is referenced that old people are wise and younger people should acknowledge and respect that wisdom. The concept of
wisdom goes back to Greek times in the Western context, and to comparably early times in other cultures. With this strong history of wisdom in our lives and culture, we all seem to know the word, and have an idea of what it means. However, writing in 1997, leading wisdom researcher Monika Ardelt pointed out that wisdom research has been a relatively recent addition to sociology and psychology, and that after well over a decade of research, there is no uniform definition. The range of wisdom definitions reaches from wisdom as “an expert knowledge system (expertise)” (Baltes & Smith 1990, 87) and “a form of advanced cognitive functioning” (Dittmann-Kohli & Baltes 1990, 54) over wisdom as the art of questioning (Arlin 1990) and the awareness of ignorance (Meacham 1990) to an elaborate description of wisdom as a two dimensional model with intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal aspects on one dimension and the domains of personality, cognition, and conation on the other (Orwoll & Achenbaum 1993, 1997, 15). Ardelt emphasises that wisdom is not merely a different form of descriptive knowledge or the accumulation of facts: “Wise people do not necessarily know more facts than other individuals, but they comprehend the deeper meaning of the generally known facts for themselves and others” (1997, P16).

More recently, Ardelt defined wisdom as “as an integration of cognitive, reflective, and compassionate personality characteristics” (Kallio 2015, 34). The cognitive wisdom dimension relates to the search for the true and deep meaning of phenomena and events. To do this, wise persons are able to look at events from a multitude of perspectives; they are not merely stuck on their subjective preferences, and they are able to ponder the questions deeply (the reflective dimension of wisdom). Finally, deeper understanding and less self-centeredness are supposed to lead to compassion for others (the compassionate wisdom dimension) (Ardelt et al. 2013). Lee et al. address the debated issue of whether wisdom is a universal or culturally-specific construct, by comparing USA and Korea (2015).

Conventionally, growth of wisdom is associated with increase of age – the older the person, the more wisdom they have gained and exhibit. Psychological research sometimes confirms this, sometimes not. A 2013 study by Thomas and Kunzmann, for example, “suggests that any phase of life offers opportunities for the attainment of wisdom-related
strengths as long as an individual is willing and able to actively engage in life’s ongoing challenges” (2013). Other studies suggest that middle-age correlates more highly with wisdom than young and older age (Webster, Westerhof and Bohlmeijer 2012). Studies of wisdom also consider aspects of gender. Ardelt found that women “tended to score higher on the affective dimension of wisdom than men. By contrast, men tended to outperform women on the cognitive wisdom dimension only among the older cohort” (2009, 9). Vladimir Soloviev used to equate holy wisdom with beauty and the principle of feminine divinity (McCannon 2004, 458).

In this construction, it is the woman who – as if pregnant – bears wisdom and nurtures it. It is left to man to make wisdom manifest and active. This effectively parallels not just Jung’s pairing of anima and animus, but any of the female/male dualities whose unions are considered to reflect cosmic revitalization and spiritual perfection. Sophia and Logos. Shakti and Shiva. The Church with Christ as her bridegroom² (McCannon 2004, 475-6).

The aim of development is integration of masculine and feminine, which is then the peak of wisdom. In line with this, Ardelt concludes that the “results might reflect gender-specific socialization practices and changes in those practices for the younger cohort. As predicted, no significant differences between men and women were found in the three dimensions of wisdom among the top 25% of wisdom scorers, suggesting that relatively wise persons have integrated the cognitive and affective dimensions of wisdom” (2009, 9).

Zacher, McKenna and Rooney found that “the effects of composite wisdom on life satisfaction and positive affect were fully explained by composite emotional intelligence” (2013, 1711). Zacher et al. describe several dimensions of emotional intelligence.

The first emotional intelligence dimension is appraisal and expression of emotion in oneself (self-emotions appraisal), that is, “an individual’s ability to understand his or her deep emotions and to be able to express emotions naturally” (Law et al. 2004, 484). The second dimension is appraisal and recognition of emotion in others (others-emotions appraisal).

² For more on Soloviev and the female divinity, see Galtsin 2015.
appraisal), defined as “an individual’s ability to perceive and understand the emotions of the people around them” (Law et al. 2004, 484). The third dimension is use of emotion to facilitate performance (use of emotion), defined as “the ability of a person to make use of his or her emotions by directing them toward constructive activities and personal performance” (Law et al. 2004, 484). Finally, the fourth dimension is regulation of emotion in oneself (regulation of emotion), that is, “the ability of a person to regulate his or her emotions, enabling a more rapid recovery from psychological distress” (Law et al. 2004, 484).

If we understand these dimensions as dimensions of the heart, we can argue the link between wisdom, the feminine, and the heart.

Public opinion lags far behind, however, and is still dominated by the norm in terms of growth and deterioration, associated with, ultimately, hope regarding the assumed potential of the norm, and fear of the decline associated with age. Drama and theatre, in this context, most certainly have held the mirror up to nature. Do they recognise, acknowledge and take seriously their potential of bringing real change in the minds of the spectators? The 2013 production of *Much Ado About Nothing* directed by Mark Rylance, put that question to the test in a major way by casting Vanessa Redgrave (b. 1937) as Beatrice and James Earl Jones (b. 1931) as Benedick. The production ran from 6 September to 30 November 2013 at the Old Vic theatre in London. The majority of critics panned the production, in some cases in worryingly ageist terms.

David Benedict considers the casting choice an “interesting notion that collapses in execution”, qualifying that this is “the least of the show’s problems”. He does come back to the age of the two leading actors later in the review, however, arguing that “casting actors this old renders numerous lines and situations preposterous”. He provides as an example the impression that “Redgrave’s Beatrice is old enough to be Hero’s grandmother. Why do they share a bed?” Benedict is even more dismissive of Jones, referring to his “rambling, shambling Benedick”, who “looks wholly detached from all his scenes, using his bassoon-like voice more as narrator of his thoughts than as a man engaging with

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3 See also Law et al. 2013, 1698-9.
those around him” (2013). Brown (London Theatre Guide, 2013), Coveney (The Stage, 2013), Norrington (London Evening Standard, 2013), Billington (The Guardian, 2013), Spencer (The Telegraph, 2013), Hemming (Financial Times, 2013), and Letts (Daily Mail, 2013) have similar concerns in relation to the ages of the lead actors. To expect, as those comments seem to imply, for Redgrave and Jones to appear on stage as they would have at, say, the ages of thirty-eight or forty-one respectively, is strange. They were not trying to play a younger age, or to hide their age, but they both performed in full awareness of their capacities. It is those capacities that reviewers should have focused on, rather than resorting to irrelevant belittling and insults. It may have been the very subtlety of their acting that was beyond the critics’ vocabulary to describe, assess, or perhaps even to perceive in the first place.

Redgrave’s and Jones’s tremendous achievements as actors across a long and distinguished career are not in doubt, and critics of Much Ado acknowledge their appreciation of those actors’ work elsewhere and up to now. To do justice to the critics, some of them have some words of praise to say about Redgrave and Jones in this production as well. Coveney finds that Redgrave: “delights sporadically”. She is “buoyant and that familiar, penetrating voice casts its spell” (Norrington). She has “odd moments of unpredictable magic” (Billington) and a “still-potent charisma” (Coghlan). She is “great on her character’s fierce independence and eccentricity (... and can be poignant” (Hemming). She “carries great dignity on stage. Her voice is these days almost Shirley Williams” (Letts). She is the “expected reliable class act, energetic and sprightly” (Lee Tomlinson). “Jones brings twinkly charm and a lovely tenderness to Benedick” (Norrington). He is good “when he puts on a silly voice or gurns” (Express), and brings “tender warmth to the part” (Hemming). Only Sadler in the Huffington Post has only praise: “The playfulness and mischief they bring adds so much to the comedy in the production. And both of them have such wonderful tones to their voices as well as acting talent that you really could just listen to both of them spouting Shakespeare all day” (2013).
Conclusion

In this article I have written about a set of experiences with theatre productions over the last few years that have appealed strongly, in different ways, to my heart. To contextualise the phenomenon, I have coined the phrase *theatre of the heart*, and have provided an analysis of its manifestations with reference to non-linear theatre, atmosphere, love, and wisdom and age. I have provided examples for each of those contexts from recent theatre practice. I sharing this experience and my interpretation of it, I hope to enable other spectators to make sense of experiences they have encountered but may not be able to place, or to open them up to such experience in the first instance. My considerations may also support theatre artists to be courageous and develop the theatre of the heart further.

REFERENCES


