



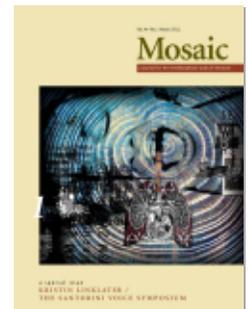
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Crossings: An Interview with Kristin Linklater

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This interview took place between 12 and 16 July 2010 on Kendall Island, Lake of the Woods, Ontario, Canada. *Mosaic* is grateful to Kristin Linklater for taking time from her busy schedule to do the interview, which we are honoured to publish here.

Crossings: An Interview with Kristin Linklater

DAWNE McCANCE

DM Kristin, you were born in Edinburgh but grew up in Orkney: did you know from early on, during your childhood in a very vocal family, that voice would become your passion?

KL Heavens no! My father had a big voice, which he used copiously and sometimes with considerable emotional effect: he shouted at us quite a lot. My mother shouted back, so there was a lot of very articulate shouting in my childhood life. My father was a writer, a novelist; he loved words, and even when he was in the height of rage, for instance, with my mother because she had once again not boiled the potatoes to exactly the right degree of softness, he would throw the potatoes, and then say something extremely elaborate about her inability to cook. So I certainly grew up with language going into my system, as food in a way. As well, growing up in Orkney linked me to the sounds of the sea, the wind, the animals, and the farm—all of that was part of my soundscape.

DM You told me yesterday that you went to boarding school: was that in Edinburgh?

KL It was St. Andrews. It was one of those strict boarding schools modelled on the boys' boarding schools such as Eton, so there were lots of games: hockey, cricket, and lacrosse. But I did not like the atmosphere, I did not like—what was it I did not like?—I did not like *school!* My mother was very understanding and sent me to the school in England where my sister already was. (They thought that I was the tough one and that my sister was more sensitive than I, but of course, I was much more sensitive than my sister.) We both went to this wonderful boarding school in England, Downe House, that had been created by two suffragettes in 1907, Olive Willis and her sister. Do you really want this story?

DM Yes, please, go on.

KL The great thing about the Willis sisters is that they wanted to turn students into young women, not young ladies. They were in love with Italy and would go there every summer, and in the 1920s they came back to England and built cloisters resembling an Italian convent: grass and a beautiful lily pond in the middle, with the cloisters, a little chapel, a dormitory, and the classrooms all around that beautiful centre. This they set up as their girls' boarding school. My mother went there in the 1920s, my sister and I in the 1950s. We were absolutely immersed in music, choirs, and theatre, and a kind of Isadora Duncan style of dancing: Greek dancing around the lily pond. And, oh yes, we did history; while I do not remember anything like mathematics, there was a little science lab somewhere. I cannot say we received a good intellectual kind of education, but we really thrived there. Since we all wore a sort of djibbah—a shapeless green sack with a little purple slash here [points to her chest], a garment that made impossible any competition as to girls' figures—we paid no attention to our figures, and actually loved to wear a really old djibbah that had been passed many times from one girl to the next. The green and purple were the colours of suffragettes, so in a sense we were really going to be out there in the world. We felt empowered, I think you could say.

Miss Willis had retired by the time my sister and I went to the school, which then had a wonderful headmistress, Nancy Medley, who was tall and saturnine, and had a very cutting, sarcastic sense of humour. She could really get us to sit and talk, and our goal was to laugh and entertain her, which we did on Sunday

evenings, when the seniors would go into her drawing room to mend socks and sew on buttons. It was those occasions, when we would tell Miss Medley stories, that I think awakened some of my artistic interest, and my interest in language. I played Romeo at age fifteen, because it was an all-girls school, and I read Antony to Miss Barnsley's Cleopatra in English class: I was kind of a leading actress, actor, because I always read the boys' parts, and I was kind of tough. Yet, I could always make Miss Medley laugh, which did something for me, as did the requirement of making conversation with each other and with the presiding teacher at our round dinner tables. The school did a great deal for my communicative and entertainment abilities.

Right after that, when I was sixteen or seventeen, I went to the Sorbonne: this would be the mid-fifties. It was hard, as I had never lived in a city before, and had only school-girl French. I do not know if you are aware of the Cours de Civilisation Française, which the Sorbonne still runs, a four-month course that brings people from all over the world to learn how the French are, actually, the most civilized people in the world; you learn history from the French point of view, geography from the French point of view, art from the French point of view, music from the French point of view. It is fabulous, the most interesting course! And you also learn to speak French, and you live with people from another country. I lived with a girl from Morocco. It was incredible, but a good punch in the stomach for me, in terms of being on my own at age seventeen. I had almost no money at all, because in those days there was no money, and my father was not selling. As a novelist, he was always up and down, but he did manage to get some money and send it over. And I learned to love yogurt: I lived on yogurt and bread, and an occasional bottle of wine.

As for university: although my sister went to Cambridge, and later my two younger brothers went to Oxford and Cambridge, I had a really big chip, a family chip, on my shoulder. The chip was my father, really. He wanted boys, but had two girls before his two boys. I was the second girl, and the stupid one. At family conversations around the dinner table, he would say, "Alright Kristin, you go get the encyclopaedia and look this up." But I never really felt part of things, and I always thought that my siblings were receiving my father's attention. So they all went to university. With the chip on my shoulder, I was not going to go to university. I completely despised the idea. Since, in those days, I was quite good at music, my mother desperately wanted me to go on in music.

My response to her was that I would go only if I were good enough to win a scholarship at the Royal College of Music—and I just was not. While I was in Paris, I took some lessons, but hated the idea of practicing three hours a day. No, no, no: I could not possibly do that! I did the exam, and failed miserably, thank God! However, I had said to my mother that, if I did not get into the Royal College of Music, could I go to drama school? Since she had been at RADA, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and had wanted to be an actress, she knew the man, Michael MacOwan, who, at the time, was just setting up, just taking over the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA). I think it had been going on for a whole term before I went and auditioned, and I was obviously going to get in, because Michael MacOwan had a very soft spot in his heart for my mother. I was admitted and did a two-year course. I had a wonderful teacher there, Jill Balcon, who sadly just died: she was married to Cecil Day-Lewis and is the mother of Daniel Day-Lewis. She taught poetry and I still remember her prompting me to speak a Laurie Lee poem [“The Edge of Day”], “the dawn’s precise pronouncement,” a poem that is all about the sounds of birds, bouncing off the walls, and everybody waking up and getting the image right into the word as one spoke it.

DM Was this where you made contact with Iris Warren? Can you tell *Mosaic* readers how important that contact proved to be for you?

KL While at LAMDA, Iris Warren was my teacher. She emerged, did some teaching at RADA in the thirties, but she really came to recognition I think in the late thirties when she taught with a group called the London Theatre Studio. But she also had her own studio and people would go in one by one, it was all individual work. And there were legends and myths and stories that would emerge about Iris. There would be someone waiting outside for a lesson and a person would come out [sighs deeply], all beatific and the person waiting would say, “So what did she do with you?” The one coming out would say, “I don’t know, she just made me, she just said to me, ‘lay your head on your bosom and purr like a cat.’” I do not think that could be! I think she must have done some of her other things.

Then Iris was drawn into a very influential, but short lived, actor training place, the Old Vic Theatre School. This lasted for only three or four years (1947–51), but it was set up with great excitement, and the person who was running it, Michel Saint-Denis, was French and had come over to London with Jacques Copeau, who was a huge innovator in French theatre. Jacques Copeau had

done in French theatre what Stanislavski was doing in Russian theatre: he was finding ways to make something real happen on the stage. The Russian theatre was based, in the late nineteenth century, very much on Italian and French theatre styles, because those were the touring companies and the French style had been, in a way, calcified, frozen and calcified by Louis XIV, who said to Molière, “This is how you speak, and if you are going to do serious theatre you have to say ‘pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa,’ like this.” And they still do it at the Comédie-Française, because they handed it down over the years as the way you are meant to speak. Jacques Copeau in the 1920s, with a group of actors, wanted to break all of that apart, so they went off, fifteen or so of them, to a small village outside of Paris, and they spent a year taking the acting process apart, exploring character work through doing animal work, through studying animals—I mean really studying animals, going to the zoo and looking at exactly how the camels’ legs were, and they had to reproduce that and out of that build the characters. They had a writer with them, Andre Obey, who wrote a piece out of this called, obviously, “Noah’s Ark.” That went to Paris and was a huge success and then came to London in the early thirties and just completely blew the London world apart, in the same way that the Moscow Arts Theatre had blown the New York theatre apart in the late twenties. So Stanislavski, in a sense, was the grandfather of American acting, Jacques Copeau, with Michel Saint-Denis, who was also an actor and a co-director with him, was the grandfather of the English actors—each transformed the way actors were trained and influenced the next generations of theatre: Stanislavsky taught acting from the inside out (in America), Copeau from the outside in (in England).

Around 1940, Michel Saint-Denis stayed behind in England to create what I think started as the London Theatre Studio, then became the Old Vic Theatre School, and they did all this Copeau kind of training. Iris Warren was part of that and a man named Norman Ayrton, who then came in and taught movement at LAMDA with Michael MacOwan, who was part of that Old Vic Theatre School. Peter Ustinov—do you remember him?—wrote a very funny book, his memoirs, including a couple of chapters on “being animals” and how ridiculous it was. But the training approach came in and started to change actors.

Michael MacOwan knew Iris’s work because, as a successful director in the West End, dissatisfied with a lot of the actors he had to work with there, he still found some actors who were special, all of whom had been working with a

woman named Iris Warren. What attracted him as a director to these actors had something to do with the truthfulness of their voices—so he found Iris and began talking to her. Michael, who was involved with a group that was studying and practicing and following the work of Ouspensky (a Russian philosopher whose best-known book was *In Search of the Miraculous*), was very interested in the kind of work you can do on yourself to become everything you were meant to be as a human being, and for this reason he tuned into Iris Warren, who had what the Ouspensky people called a “magnetic centre.” Michael wanted to take his dissatisfaction with the actors he had been working with into a school so that he could start to train people the way he felt they should be trained. So he took teachers from the Old Vic Theatre School, he took Norman Ayrton, and he persuaded Iris too.

There are a couple of other stories about how Iris developed her particular way of working on actors’ voices, which is different from the Central School of Speech and Drama that was inaugurated by Elsie Fogerty, who taught voice very much as a musical instrument, as the “voice beautiful.” For example, legend has it that in the late thirties, Iris was in love with a Freudian psychoanalyst in London. This seems to me an unlikely story. However, in one version of the story, this Freudian psychoanalyst was renting rooms in her house. Anyway, although this is not at all historical fact, I like to think that they were having a passionate affair. In any case, they were certainly talking a lot, and he said to her, “you work on people’s voices, but I have some patients who are so traumatized that they cannot speak. They cannot find a voice and they cannot find words at all.” So he invited Iris to come in and work with his patients, and she taught them to relax in their bellies, to breathe, and lo and behold their throats opened up, words rushed out, tears rolled down their cheeks, and they spoke their stories. Great for analysis! What Iris took back to her studio was the conviction that the voice actually depends on emotional freedom, and that is when she began to transform the work of the musical instrument into the human instrument work. Instead of working from the outside of the body in, she started to work from the inside of the body out.

DM May I ask you what you mean by “emotional”? When a person is traumatized, is more than “emotion” required for release from that?

KL The first thing I mean by emotion is to weep, to get angry, probably those two. To be able to say, “I hate my mother!” To be able to say, “I lost my father when

I was three!” The first things are the tears and the rage, maybe take out the word *emotion* and put in *tears and rage*. Then comes some joy and then comes some laughter. By emotion I mean tears, I mean sadness, I mean anger, rage, I mean hate, I mean happiness, joy, I mean love.

DM So this is what Iris learned?

KL What she then saw very clearly is that if you cannot let your rage or sadness out, the breath has been held and the throat has closed, in order to keep that in—the result of trauma. But once you opened up the throat and relaxed the breath, words with tears could come out.

DM The very first a closure . . .

KL A closure, yes, because if you have been traumatized you do not express what you feel, so you hold your breath first of all, because the pain is experienced in the central breathing area, and then you close your throat, because otherwise it might all come out. What she did then was to go back to her studio where she was working with actors who were performing on the West End stage and who came to her because they were straining their voices, pushing: so if they were playing Lady Macbeth or King Lear [gasps], then what Iris began to see was how, in their bodies, they were closed off here [gestures] and holding on in the breathing area. So she would say, “What was Lear feeling? Why is he angry? Is he sad? Can you let out your anger, your sadness, as you speak those words, ‘Blow winds and crack your cheeks’? What is Lady Macbeth feeling? What are they, or even contemporary characters, feeling? What is the emotion in their words?” Then, when the actor found that emotion, which is obviously his or her own emotion, own joy, own sadness, own anger, and deployed that in the service of the character and the play, suddenly their voices would come back.

DM You have to bring your own emotion into the character’s words . . .

KL Yes you have to bring your own passions into the range of the character.

DM I like the word *passions*.

KL Alright, let’s use *passions*. I like the word *passionately*. You do not like the word *emotions*. Okay, I will try to find different words for emotions. You do not like the word *feelings* either, no?



DM It's a difficult word. But tell me more about what you learned from Iris: she was your teacher and then you worked with her?

KL Well she was my teacher when I was eighteen or nineteen. I did her exercises, given to us by an assistant teacher. Each morning at LAMDA, with everybody in one room, we did twenty minutes' movement and twenty minutes' voice. I think I learned the exercises by rote first of all, and we made fun of them and gossiped in the back row: since I wanted to be an actor, I was not much interested in them. Then I left LAMDA. I had been told by Michael MacOwan, a wonderful teacher who got me involved in the Ouspensky group because, he said, I had a magnetic centre (can you imagine how flattering that was for a young person to be told?), "You are not a juve-lead," a juvenile lead, he said. "You are not going to be playing young, beautiful girls on stage. You will come into your own as a character actress in your thirties." Ha ha ha! Imagine the number of young people who get told that! But I did finally get a job in a small company in Scotland and spent six to nine months there, back in St. Andrews, oddly enough, at a tiny seventy-four-seat theatre called the Byre Theatre. And while I was there I received a letter from Michael MacOwan saying, "We need somebody to train with Iris because she is ill."

Iris did not like sharing her work. She was not interested in that. She never wrote anything down because, she said, books will tell lies; everybody will misunderstand them. I was terribly flattered that Michael would ask whether I was interested in coming and training to be Iris Warren's apprentice, however, so I went back to LAMDA, and I think my parents were a bit annoyed because they had still to support me. I must have been paid, and was self supporting for a little bit, but they had to support me for one term. I sat in on Iris's class, that was my training, to sit in and watch her classes. She did have somebody else who was teaching but who was not an actress. Michael MacOwan wanted somebody who was an actress—and actually, I was quite a good actress.

DM And you had a good voice?

KL I had basically a good voice. My whole family has good voices. My voice is largely genetic with some training on top. I attended the classes and watched Iris, and then started leading the mechanical warm-ups and doing silly exercises, and Iris would have me do the piano [sings musical notes]. Then, some days, she would see me waiting outside the room and would say, "Oh Kristin, we are going to do very sensitive work today so I am afraid you cannot come in." She did not like having somebody there, but she also agreed to give me ten private lessons, and that was very good. She did not give them to me as a teacher, but as an actor. There were several moments during those private lessons when I felt a connection deep in my body, and I felt the importance of letting whatever the passion was, anger or sadness, letting that come into my voice on the text. So I started teaching. I was teaching pupils immediately, when I was twenty-one, a wide range of students including a group that came in from America called the D group; they were older, and it was a one year course. It was a way for LAMDA to make money, actually, but they were the really interesting ones, particularly taken with Iris's work. And because I was doing her work and they said that nobody was teaching this kind of stuff in America, I began to think about that. At the time, I also worked with a man named Bertram Joseph, who had a wonderful entry into Shakespeare which was all through imagery, and the meaning in the images, and how that then shifts your voice. I did a lot of work with him and I was strongly influenced by him. So I spent six years teaching and learning at LAMDA.

DM Then you went to the States? Why?

KL In the late fifties and sixties there was an amazing, short-lived flowering of interest in the arts in the United States of America. That had never happened before: it was a golden age, it was Kennedy, it was Camelot, it was the National Endowment for the Arts [founded in 1965]. Politics was opening up the civil rights movement, brotherhood was on the horizon, integration was going to happen. Looking back, I feel myself holding my breath for this wonderful moment. That is what it felt like all over the world, and it is one of the reasons why I wanted to come to America. You felt this, looked at this golden world that was going to change everything.

In the theatre and with the National Endowment for the Arts and the realization of the importance of the arts, America said, “Look at England, they have state-supported theatres, they have the best theatre in the world, they have the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre (the Royal National Theatre, founded in 1963, was just starting then), and every town, every city has its own repertory theatre. We need that in America. We need every city to have an art museum, a repertory company, we need the yeast of the arts in every community.” The Ford Foundation got behind this in a major way, with a visionary man, W. MacNeill Lowry, at its helm, and they put millions of dollars into building museums, arts complexes, symphony halls, and theatres, so that they could replicate the repertory system in England. The Rockefeller Foundation and the Mellon Foundation came in on this as well, and money was raised from local communities. Wonderful theatres were built. They looked at what was being played at the repertory theatres in England—the Greek classics, Shakespeare, Restoration comedy, Shaw, Strindberg, Ibsen, Noël Coward, and whoever—and on this basis, repertory seasons were planned and they went out in search of actors to cast. Well where were all the best actors? They were at the Actors Studio.

I arrived in New York in October of 1963. Six weeks later, Kennedy was assassinated. As I mentioned earlier, we always had American students at LAMDA, and several of them said, “You know, we need this kind of voice work because it has the same language as the Actors Studio work, the Method work, working from inside out and from an emotional base, and you would really have something to give. You would find a job; you would have a wonderful time.” One of these people, an incredible man named William Kinsolving, said, “I will organize it all for you, I will find you a studio, I will find private students for you.” I

replied, “I will try for three months, and if I can make a living for three months, maybe I will stay for a year.”

The day after I arrived in New York City—I was staying at friends of my father’s who were really nervous at having this twenty-seven-year-old girl without a job staying with them, wondering what would happen—their phone rang. My friend Neal picked up the phone to hear: “This is the Lincoln Center Repertory calling. Is there a Kristin Linklater staying with you by any chance?” You can imagine that she almost fell down in a dead faint because the Lincoln Center had been in all of the papers for a year. Newly started, it was planned to be the National Theatre of the United States of America, and it was run by two extraordinary men of American theatre, Robert Whitehead, I think he was Canadian originally, and Elia Kazan, who was a famous film director. Harold Clurman was in there too, and he and Kazan were the artistic directors. Robert Whitehead was the managing director. They were really the aristocrats of American theatre, and, with a temporary theatre downtown at Washington Square, they had put a company together. All of these coincidental connections! A teacher of mine from LAMDA, a Welshman named Powys Thomas, had then gone and taken up a job running the National Theatre School of Canada in Montreal, which had been set up by Michel Saint-Denis, so Thomas was teaching there, and he knew me from LAMDA. The Lincoln Center had got in touch with Powys Thomas, and he had said, “Well I think this woman named Kristin Linklater is just coming to New York.” So they immediately called.

I had no idea who they were but I went down to see them, wearing my little grey skirt and my heels, went in and encountered a charming rather English man in his tweed suit, Robert Whitehead, who invited me into the office. A rude looking man with his feet up on the desk smoking a big cigar said, “So can you show us what you do?” (This was Elia Kazan!) I said, “Absolutely not, no. If you want to get together a group of actors I can do some work.” They said, “well we do not have time for that. We have got this show and people are saying it is hard to hear them. Come down and listen and see if you could help us out.” So, on what must have been my second or third day in New York, I went down to the big theatre and walked around the back of the balcony. The play was Arthur Miller’s *After the Fall*, which is about Marilyn Monroe, and I made a note: “The man playing Quentin needs a lot of work.” Well that was Jason Robards Jr., whose voice was “just like that, thank you very much.” I did start

to work with the Lincoln Center Repertory Company immediately. Then I had the studio set up and was earning my living within two months.

I went to the United States with three hundred dollars in my purse, literally, and I started working right away. In another of those wonderful serendipitous experiences, an American student who had been at LAMDA, Mary Anne Goldsmith, was then the secretary for a new organization just starting with money from the Ford Foundation, the Theater Communications Group, TCG, which had been created to develop a communications network among the repertory companies. Because it is such a big country, the companies were really isolated in those days and, then without computers, needed to share their ideas. A meeting was planned to include all of the directors of all the repertory companies, some of which had been going before and were quite old, companies in places like Cincinnati and Albuquerque. All the artistic directors were going to come for a meeting to talk to each other for the very first time, face to face, in Chicago in February 1964. Mary Anne Goldsmith said to the TCG people, "Look, you are having this meeting with all of the directors, and one of the things they are going to talk about is the training of actors so that they can be heard. It so happens that Kristin Linklater is here. You should invite her to Chicago." I was invited to Chicago, and I went. Talk about culture shock! First, it was freezing cold and deep in snow up to here. Second, except for Zelda Fichandler and Nina Vance, two female artistic directors and amazing forces of nature, the place was full of incredibly exciting men. Third, I was the most popular girl in town! I have never been so popular. Everybody wanted to take me out for a drink and talk about voice and voice training for actors and what I could do. Two men from the Guthrie Theatre were the ones who bought me the most martinis, however, who were the most charming, and, as became immediately clear, who wanted me to go to Minneapolis to the Guthrie Theater, which was run by Tyrone Guthrie, a terribly English man of about six foot five, who had been very active in the English repertory system and who, along with his two administrative directors, had been very successful in raising money across America and in Minneapolis for his theatre.

I think it must have been 1964 or '65 when I went to work with the Guthrie Theatre, then in its second season. It had already opened with *Hamlet* with George Grizzard. The problem this and other repertory companies were having in those early days was that, although they brought in all kinds of actor talent,

fantastic people to do their repertoire, nobody could hear them. Of course, they had been working in intimate surroundings, mostly on contemporary material. Audiences began to say, “I want my money back! I can’t hear!” It just did not work. So there was a real sense of crisis. The situation reminds me of how very lucky I have been in my life, when things have so often come together out of coincidental colliding at just the right point.

As far as I remember, in the first show I worked on, Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy were the main stars, Zoe Caldwell, and then a host of really good actors. I came in and talked to the whole company about what I was going to do. I had a terrible cold, and was coughing and sneezing as I talked to them about voice. But I started work there. We would do a warm-up every day before rehearsal, and I would do individual work and everybody was immediately engaged in that, and it was worked into the rehearsal schedule, and with Guthrie directing, it was a fabulous time. Peter Zeisler was the managing director of the Guthrie at that time. I kept receiving invitations to all these other theatres: they wanted me at the Arena Stage in Washington; they wanted me out in San Francisco; they wanted me down in Dallas, wherever that was, Houston, at the Nina Vance Theatre. And so I realized that I had to train teachers. Peter Zeisler went to the Rockefeller Foundation and said just that, “We have to train teachers.” Within three or maybe six months, there was a grant, in those days a big grant of sixty-five thousand dollars, to set up a teacher-training program. This was less than two years after I arrived.

In other words, I arrived right in the middle of a vortex of activity, artistic activity, and a kind of vacuum in this particular subject. In those days, the *New York Times* ran a little column on Sundays called “On the Rialto.” So we put a notice in the Rialto: “The Guthrie Theater is setting up a year-long voice teacher training program. There will be small fellowships. Led by Kristin Linklater from London, dramatic arts. Send interest, applications.” Wow, there were bags of them! I think we received about fifteen hundred responses from all over the country and had to go through all those CVs and letters and applications, and I think, in the end, I interviewed one-hundred-and-fifty people from whom I was going to choose twelve. The awful thing was that, while we planned to do three months in New York, and then to go to the Guthrie Theatre to do practice teaching, and then out to other theatres for more practice teaching, the grant could not cover twelve people. It was clear in the contract, then,

that at the end of four months, I would drop four people. We would continue with only eight out of the twelve. That was traumatic, dropping four of them, but we did.

We had a studio in New York, where we had practice students. I had someone doing Shakespeare, Barry Boys, who was Bertram Joseph's protégée. I had somebody doing movement, and myself. We did a full program—movement, voice, and Shakespeare—I think five days a week, maybe not, maybe just mornings, because I must have kept my job. By then I was teaching at New York University as well. Anyway, it was a very intensive program, and then I had to drop three or four people who all went on and had a career in voice teaching anyway. To one of them, I said that, because she was so tense, she would never experience a real breath in her body: she went on to have a stellar career as a voice teacher. To another, because he was so up in his head, I said that he would never possibly be able to teach voice: he has become a great star in the speech-teaching world. The people I took on all went to the Guthrie, where we did on-the-job training, using a lot of the Alexander technique. After that, one or two of them stayed behind at the Guthrie; two went up to Winnipeg (John Hirsch, artistic director of the Manitoba Theatre Centre, agreed to take them on); two went to the Arena Stage in Washington, and I think two went out to the ACT (American Conservatory Theater) in San Francisco. I went out to these places to supervise and watch them teach, and to give them feedback.

DM Might you say something about your New York University experience?

KL The NYU graduate theatre program came into being about the same time as the Juilliard School. The NYU program was distinctly American. I was asked by the director of the Juilliard School to teach there, and at just the same time, I was approached to teach in the NYU graduate program. I was attracted by the American-ness of the NYU program, which was the first program to bring conservatory professional training into the university setting, into the academy. For me, teaching in the program was a real eye-opener: working with incredibly talented graduate students, many of them blown out of their minds on pot. Their acting teacher was an eye-opener too, a little man who would punch their rage out of them, punch their fear out of them. He taught me how not to stand outside a class and teach, but to get into the middle; how not to ask students to do anything I was not willing to try myself. It was a huge experience. And then I began to work with the avant-garde experimental theatre in New York, and

this was the golden age of avant-garde theatre. It was exciting, and a lot of difficult work.

DM Was this still in the 1960s?

KL Yes, and there was a lot going on in the sixties, including the enormous influence of the women's liberation movement.

DM Tell me about that influence.

KL One big thing it meant for me was about "getting in touch with my emotional self." I did therapy—every kind of psycho-physical workshop, past-life recall, all of which was a big thing at the time—and found out about myself, and what was involved, for example, in maintaining myself in the face of 600 people.

DM You did these yourself?

KL Oh yes, absolutely, with the result that, although I am a physical coward, I think I am emotionally very brave.

DM What does that mean?

KL If I am working with a student who suddenly has a flashback to being sexually abused by her grandfather when she was four, most people would say, okay let's move out of that, but I can stay with that memory, with that moment, which can be a crucial turn-around in freeing the voice. I developed that emotional muscle in the course of doing a large number of very confrontational workshops. It is useful to my students because they get reflected back to them that this is ok, normal, that this is where you are lucky as actors, because you can say that that rage, that hurt, can be converted to a positive.

DM Always positive? Is it dangerous?

KL I trust honesty. The positive part of the experience is directing the energy immediately into a text—Shakespeare or the Greeks can channel the pain and make art out of it.

DM Do these 1960s experiences belong to your development of a "methodology," what came to be known as the "Kristin Linklater method"? Or do you even know what that is?



KL What I said to myself somewhere in the 1970s was that I needed to write down Iris's work, even though she did not want to write anything on it herself. Her work remains the backbone of everything that I do. So I still teach the progression of exercises that she developed and that I learned from her. What I developed beyond that is much more of the embodiment experience, all the sound and movement exercises to get the voice out of the head and into the body. That would be my contribution. After spending five years at NYU, and having my baby, I went out into the country and developed more and more of these exercises for connecting brain to body. All of this went into my book, *Freeing the Natural Voice* (1976). I have no qualms about having my name on the book, as this work has come a long way. That's why it came to be called the Linklater method and not the Warren method.

DM Could you say something about what you have been doing, around the world, in the past fifteen years?

KL I was twelve years involved with an acting company, Shakespeare and Company in Lenox, Massachusetts, did six years of teaching and acting in Boston, was very involved with Carol Gilligan and her work with the psychological development of girls, and underwent a lot of development of myself as an actor with

The Company of Women, which I created with Carol. I played King Lear. I went to Boston to put my son into a good school, but did not like living there in that stifling community. I have never had any money. At Shakespeare and Company we were all living from week to week, with only enough to pay rent. Once my son graduated I wanted to go back to New York. I have been twelve years at Columbia University now, where I love the intelligence and talent of my MFA students. I spent the first twelve years of my American life in New York City, and now the last twelve years.

So, what has gone on in the past fifteen years? I went to Columbia in 1997. My mother died in 1997. She had been living in Orkney, and the whole family went up to mark the end of our Orkney experience. Two years later somebody in Orkney was in touch to let me know that a beautiful little farm house had come up for sale. I bought it, and renovated it in 2001 but could only be there in the summer, and at Christmas. Teaching those long semesters at Columbia, I began to feel burnt out, so I negotiated to do only a single semester each year. That freed me to do more work in Europe, because up till then my whole professional life had been in America. I have done a lot of work in Germany. The Germans love this voice work because, of course, they have an enormous devotion to literature and their cultural heritage; in Germany, ordinary people, not just actors, will stand up and recite, which is extremely beautiful, and they want to learn how to do it well. Then I was invited to Italy, where the voice work offered an alternative to their conventional training—the Italian style is to be very strong and muscular. Then, finally, England: I begin my first teacher training course in August 2010 in London. They are going to have to learn to bring their passionate lives and their psychological lives into their voices.



DM You say in *Freeing the Natural Voice*, contrasting the British and the American theatre traditions, that at the time you came to New York, when the Americans went searching for technique they found only elocution. This was the voice training I received at school during the 1960s, and I have read about the strong elocutionary tradition that was fostered by three generations of the Bell family in Scotland and then transported to North America by Alexander Graham Bell—very much a theatrical tradition, and one that became politically entangled during the eugenics movement. For *Mosaic* readers, how might you distinguish your work from “elocution” in this sense?

KL I wonder whether the movement of which you speak was an outcome of the discovery of the mechanics of speech, of the anatomical production of speech, and of the great interest in public speaking, and live performance of this in theatres? As a sign of an educated class, a young lady or gentleman would be asked to recite poetry or whatever; families would just do that for home entertainment. And then people who wanted to be upwardly mobile would take elocution lessons. So it may have answered a real need. Elocution lessons were the beginnings of the drama schools in both the USA and England. But elocution had much to do with pronouncing vowels and consonants correctly. It had very little connection to a personal expression. We called it “diction” when I was at drama school. It had to do not with voice, but with correct speech.

I say that I teach, not speech, but voice production, because the voice is the same in all languages, made of breath and resonance. Voice science has become more and more precise, a very recent development: only in the last thirty or forty years has it been possible to use fibre-optic cameras to see what happens with the vocal folds, what they do in the act of speaking. We now see how vocal folds come together to make voice, and that vowels are formed much more internally in the body than the early teachers of elocution ever understood.

Moreover, the voice changes in one person’s lifetime, and in a cultural lifetime, given environmental, familial, and educational influences. So for instance, were I to imagine the very outdoor life of the late Middle Ages, when many people worked in fields, the voice was exercised in an extrovert way, not through the so-much-more introverted self of the twenty-first century. Elizabethan performance, for instance, in an outdoor theatre, was about strong voices. Then the Puritans came in, a cultural influence that I think had a huge effect on the voice: they said, “You may not sing together except in church when your voices are going to go up to the heavens; otherwise singing is dangerous.”

DM I am thinking of the voice as a philosophical, metaphysical construct: the voice as, first of all, pure interiority. Are we in the mind first, in thought, which then becomes voice, and only after that deadened writing?

KL I want to say that the voice is absolutely in the body, is physical. This is a difficult question to treat briefly, but consider how much of children’s learning to speak is tactile, mirroring their mother’s mouth, their mother’s and father’s, so that their learning of language, their acquisition of language, is thoroughly in

the body. Out of that, gradually I think, thought, independent thought, begins to form and probably at that point connects with what was in the brain already, the phonetic forms that, I believe, are preset in our brains, are already there.

A couple of things about what we are beginning to see with MRIs: in a silent dialogue with me, your vocal folds will be moving. You can see that when a violinist is playing the violin, his or her tongue is going up and down. “Thought” is not always a monologue. You can have a dialogue with yourself, a triologue, a quadralogue, and a whole United Nations. I have a conceptual thought with words kind of flying around that, and the thought and the words all belong absolutely together, so that I am thinking and speaking at the same time. What I am saying to you now comes out of my biography, everything I have ever done or read, out of my students, out of Shakespeare: all of this is now caught up in this dialogue with you, which comes from all the dialogues I have ever had, all the different parts of my brain, all activated by the breath. Voice needs breath.

DM Words come from we don’t know where, from memory, from dreams?

KL I always remember a diagram of the mind somebody drew—it was shaped like a pear—a little bit at the top of the pear, that is the conscious mind, the rest is the unconscious.

DM The unconscious—

KL Yes, the brain in the body, yes.

DM That is interesting. Freud says that memory traces are re-inscribed in ways that make it impossible ever to “translate” them into conscious reality.

KL Yes, definitely.

DM I thought that at Santorini you were working with parts of people that had not yet been activated, that they had not known about themselves, and this is very important—

KL Something they had not known about themselves ...

DM Part of me that I was surprised to access is the obvious mouth. I had written a paper about the mouth, but was not thinking at all about the mouth, the mouth that I apparently have.

- KL I don't know how you could think about the mouth without the mouth.
- DM I was thinking about figures of opening—
- KL Well, opening upon opening: would you agree that opening is a metaphor, that mouth is a metaphor, and can you think of the mouth physically as well? I always thought of voice as physical and meta- at once.
- DM What I am trying to discuss here has to do with the cultural construct of voice. In my experience as a teacher, as a woman, and as a woman who does not have a voice, silence would be regarded in our culture as a virtue for the female. I internalized a lot of this growing up, and through my education, and I see many of today's students still suffering from this heritage—that does not connect voice to physical body, at least not without peril.
- KL Nineteenth-century women, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, said, "I will not be silenced." And of course, it is so interesting that Shakespeare gives women voices. At the end of the play, Emilia in *Othello* says, "I will speak as liberal as the north / Let heaven and men and devils, let them all, / All, all, cry shame against me, yet I'll speak." And Constance [in *King John*] says, "O, that my tongue were in the thunder's mouth! / Then with a passion would I shake the world." Somehow, he was listening in to the need of women.
- DM What is the Linklater method? How did the term arise, and how does one become designated as a "Linklater teacher"?
- KL In 1976 my first book came out and was misunderstood by a lot of people. But since that time, many people, some of them actors, having felt a huge life-change in themselves doing the work, wanted to know the basic working exercises not only for themselves, subjectively, but as teachers. Then they began to ask how to become a designated teacher. In the USA, they had to go to Shakespeare and Company and do month-long intensive workshops that brought all the elements of acting together, because I want all teachers to be actors, performers as well, to have the experience of performing. Then, they had to go to New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles, to find a master teacher and to work one-on-one with this private teacher, to absorb the master-teacher teaching for a semester. So every semester at Columbia, I have four people observing. I do nothing with them: they are invisible, but they observe. All of this takes three to five years. Then, when there are enough of them, about fourteen, they have to lead a warm-up in front of me, and

to do an interview. They have to have studied the anatomy of voice. Perhaps only once every five years do I do a teacher designation in the USA. We live/work together for five weeks, all day long; they teach in front of me, I make them do it again, to watch a video of themselves, to watch me working with them—and I am ruthless. I don't like training teachers. Nobody taught me how to teach, but I've seen them do it without training and it is abominable, in no way good enough. This is really hard, because I have to say to somebody, "That is terrible what you just did, you weren't there." It takes ten years to learn how to teach.

DM But your program is developing wonderful teachers?

KL Yes—in Germany, in Italy, England. There are over 120 designated Linklater teachers in the USA teaching in the leading actor-training programs. One of the foremost teachers in Germany is a musician, a choir conductor, doing singing-teaching, making new techniques for singers.

DM To what extent should voice training be required of all teachers?

KL Teaching in general, people who get whatever qualifications they need to teach in schools, don't receive voice training. So they don't know how to bring themselves fully into a classroom. It is a huge problem.

DM Voice training might have a place in the university as well, where teachers stand with their backs to a class, mumbling something, talking to themselves really—

KL I have done work with faculty at Vassar across a wide range of disciplines, mathematics, physics, English, and so on. It was wonderful, really fun to teach them, but hard for them to think about "voice" as well as about their subject matter.



DM Today, I want to begin by addressing some vocabulary that I think might be an impediment to readers who are trying to understand your work. One is "natural," "the natural voice." What do you mean by the "natural" voice?

KL I suppose I am using that controversial word in an oversimplified way, in what has become a cliché, since, of course, we are all formed by both nature and nurture. Is there such a thing as "natural"? Yet I am interested in the voice as it develops and comes through the child's body, first of all, before it is modified

by the environment, by family, culture, or education. So by “natural” I mean a voice that is in direct connection with emotional impulses. The voice of a baby, in this sense, is “natural,” and an infant’s voice continues to be natural until language comes in, modifies it, shapes it, and very often inhibits the fullness of what that natural voice can communicate.

The natural voice, which is built into the body and the “body-mind,” has three to four octaves of speaking notes; that voice is there to express the full gamut of one’s emotional life: from our passions to slight changes in degrees of experience in the inner part of the body, in the subtleties and nuances of our affective existence. Such capability is there, inside us, always. Mostly because of societal needs to shape and form the chaos of our emotional existence into something manageable, the full extent of that capability is limited by tensions in the throat and in the breathing musculature, tensions that defend us from the consequences of full communication: after all, full communication of one’s psychic and emotional life in an everyday situation is really quite dangerous; you do not want people to know everything that you are feeling spontaneously and instantaneously. But my argument is that, if we have shut down on some of that expressivity that is intrinsic to the capabilities of the voice, then we shut down parts of ourselves and limit the fullness and the full expression, indeed the full experience, of who we are as human beings. Human beings have a wide range of emotional life. The passions, which we talked about earlier—sadness, grief, rage, anger, fury, hatred, love, happiness, joy, ecstasy—those are the large passions of which we are capable, and within which there is a myriad of different degrees of feelings that are available to us as full human beings, that we need, in order to live fully in this world—that is, if we want to exchange our experience, our inner psychic experience, with another person. The question is: do we, can we, do so? Do we have the choice of tapping into the capability of the “natural” voice—three to four octaves of speaking notes, huge quantities of range, of qualities of sound, within the voice? Can we tap into that at the moment when we want to express ourselves fully? And can this then come back to the ordinary, and everyday, exchanges in which we usually use our voices?

- DM When we shut down the capabilities, the expressivity that you refer to here, are we also shutting down our body, our own anatomy?
- KL Yes. Indeed, that is how we shut it down. Through holding back in certain very intrinsic, very internal musculature, parts of the musculature. We are made of

layers of muscles, the conscious outer layers and then gradually layers going in. If as a child I am told do not cry, you're a big girl now or you're a big boy now, so don't cry, somewhere in the body something holds back on that desire to cry, on the need to cry, on the sadness and frustration, and that stops the expression of the crying. Then if you said, "Now tell me what that was all about," breath is held on to deep in the body, a little bit of breath comes in and activates the vocal cords just enough and then the muscles around the throat and the mouth start to substitute for that breath and there is a description of what I had been feeling rather than the revelation of what I had been feeling. So it is indeed at the involuntary level, the proprioceptive level of the musculature, that the inhibition, defence, protection comes in, is set in motion to prevent this dangerous emotional expression. You probably see this in your five-year-old grandson, as I see it in my three-year-old granddaughter, and I have been fascinated when she will say, "But I want a cookie now. I want a cookie. I want a cookie now," and her father will then say, "Do not whine. If you ask without whining you might get it." And she can reach into those two possibilities, "Could I have—I want a cookie now," to display something that is quite positive. These possibilities are both positive and negative in a child's development.

DM I am wondering if you can tell us something about this image that we are looking at now? (See Figure 1.)

KL Yes, but I think that before I do, I should outline how the voice works anatomically or neuro-anatomically. There is first the desire to communicate, an impulse from some part of the brain. The desire to communicate travels through the central nervous system and activates the breath. As the breath exits, it meets the resistance of the vocal cords, which are tiny: less than an inch long. They are also answering the impulse to speak, and they, through a complex response in the laryngeal musculature, are pulled from either end so that they come together. As the breath travels through them, the vocal cords oscillate to create a vibration. Now that is simultaneous: the breath response to the impulse, and the laryngeal response to the impulse. It is very, very complex, with hundreds of little muscles involved on the involuntary level in a coordinated dance between the breathing and the larynx. Once the vibration has emerged from this oscillation, it is immediately picked up and amplified by resonating cavities—and for working purposes, we say there are resonating cavities throughout the body. The voice science people will say the resonating cavities exist above the

larynx in the pharynx and in the nose and that is it. For working purposes, however, you get results by saying that resonance comes from the chest, from bones in the chest and lower in the body, all the way through to the skull. So we look at the resonating response in the body that the low part of the voice gets its resonances from, the lower pharynx and the chest cavity. The middle part of the voice gets its resonances from the mouth and the cheeks and the nose and the mid-face structure. The top part of the voice gets its resonance from the top of the skull.

While the sound responds to the desire to speak, the lips and tongue are activated by the speech cortex, a different part of the brain which cuts the basic voice sound into words, into recognizable words. Seems simple, relatively simple. The problem is that there can be an equal amount of inhibition in the impulse to not express, an equal amount of inhibition to the desire. You have the desire and the inhibition of that desire, so that even in the brain the impulse to communicate can be denied by the fear of being thought stupid or saying the wrong thing or whatever it may be. That inhibition communicates to the breathing muscles and the diaphragm which, instead of going down and bringing breath in, just stays rather held by all the surrounding musculature, and the breath does not go deeply in. If the breath does not go deeply in, then there is not the right amount of resistance between breath and vocal cords. The larynx tends to get tight because it is over-compensating, and the voice gets strangled in the throat, rather than travelling into the resonators. The voice gets shut down into two or three speaking notes because of the tension in the throat, in the jaw, in the tongue and through the mouth cavity. Anatomically, that is why the voice does not work as well as our birthright would allow.

The geography of the breathing musculature is complex, but to get a simple picture of it, you might say that there is first the diaphragm, which is the primary responder to the emotional impulse and the need to speak. The diaphragm is a large domed muscle that cuts the whole body in two. It is the floor to the lungs and the ceiling to the stomach. It goes down as the breath comes in and it goes up as the breath goes out. The diaphragm is connected with the *psoas* system, which is a central, involuntary, internal set of muscles that supports the whole body. *Crura* muscles that are part of the *psoas* system are attached from the diaphragm through to the lumbar spine and then on through into the pelvic floor. “Crura” means supports, or pillars, and is the name of supportive muscles

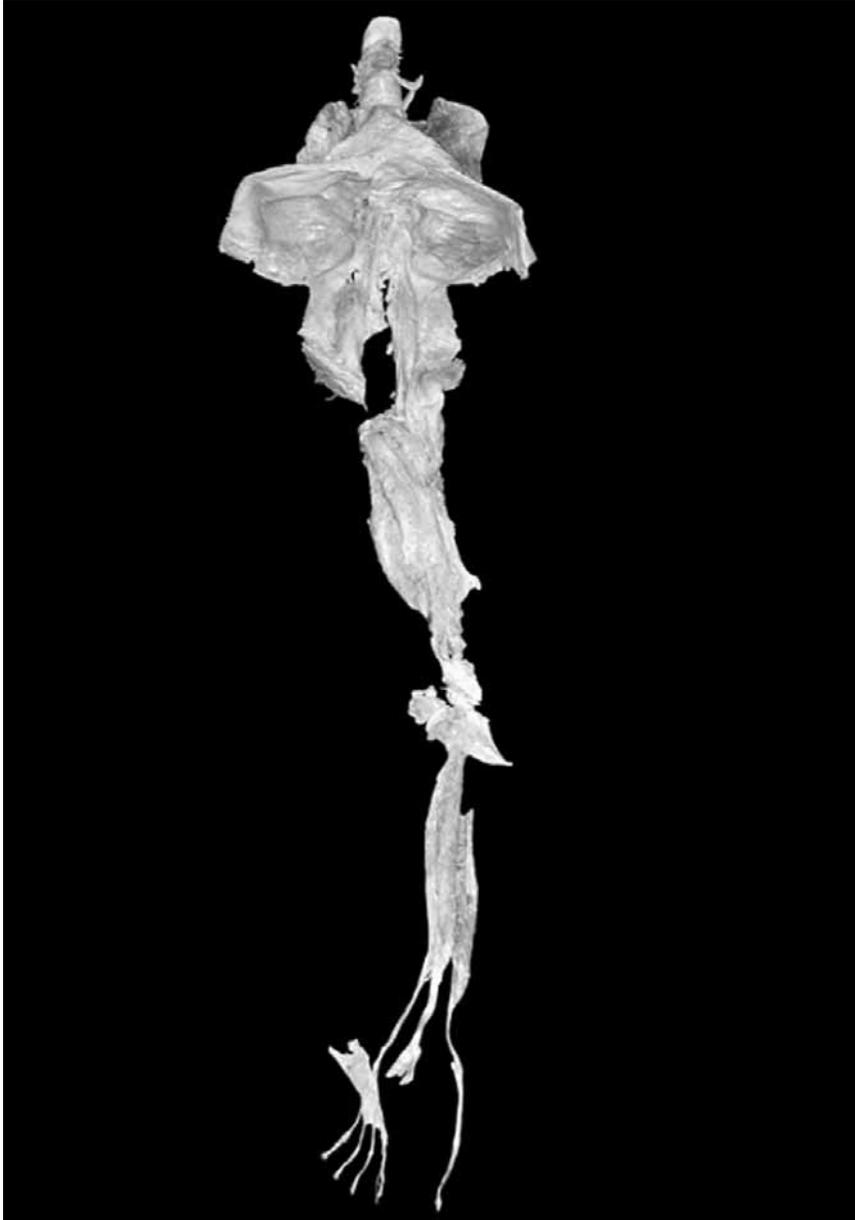


Figure 1: The fascia, which runs from the back of the neck down to the feet.

in many other parts of the body. The crura muscles are responsive to instinctive and intuitive impulse, and lie much deeper in the autonomic nervous system. I refer to them as the inner abdominal breathing muscles. And then the intercostal muscles, the rib muscles, respond or tend to respond more to larger impulses, when we need more breath to express something big. So I look at the geography of breathing as diaphragm/emotional impulse; inner abdominals/instinctive impulse; intercostals/added capacity for big impulses.

There is no one correct way of breathing. Nobody can say, “This is how your breathing should work.” It works according to the demands made on it. So breathing for underwater swimming or for swimming, for speaking, or for yoga are all quite different. Breathing for opera singers can be just an amplification. One of the interesting things about this is that one set of muscles does not just stop while another set of muscles takes over. The whole of the musculature of our bodies is linked and connected by this material, called *fascia*, an image of which we now have before us. The word *fascia*, I think, means bringing together and bundling. The fascia brings the muscles together with the bones and with the flesh. It is connective tissue extended throughout the whole structure of the body. From the image, you can see that, as far as your breathing is concerned, the fascia comes from the tongue through the rib cage to the diaphragm with no disconnect; and it continues on through the psoas system. You can see through the fascia how the muscles of the breathing apparatus are connected, through the pelvic floor on down through the legs to the feet. It is not entirely imagination, then, to say that you breathe from your feet up. The fascia actually connects the breathing musculature all the way down to the soles of the feet—and there are other nice connections. In Chinese medicine, for instance, they say that the meridians for the lungs go down inside of your thighs and into the soles of the feet. The wholeness of the response in the body to the desire to speak, if that then is going to bring in a breath that can genuinely carry through to someone else what it is that you are feeling and thinking, that is the wholeness of genuine communication.

DM That was a wonderful explanation.

KL Was it?

DM Yes. And it appears from this image that the fascia begins below the head. No wonder that, when we are stuck in the head, the voice is strangulating—death in the throat, an asphyxiation.

KL Suffocation is a word that comes into this, and a lot of people, particularly women I have worked with, say that when they look back at their lives, it feels as though they have been underwater all along, unable to breathe. I do not know. But to access the fullness of—can we use the word *self*, or *psyche*—you need the fullness of your breath through your whole body. The breath that comes into your body, that comes from the air and enters your body, oxygenates your blood. So the circulation of blood in your body also carries breath, if you like, *oxygen*. It influences all the different aspects of the organism, the chemistry, the glandular systems, circulation. That is breath, that is me, the word *psyche*, which Freud uses of course. Martha Nussbaum says that psychology is the knowledge of breath and blood, psyche is breath and blood. This embodies psychology for me.

DM Does this understanding of breath and psyche imply life-changes for the people you teach?

KL I am very leery of making claims. I would never say I am helping you to live more fully—because that actually puts the idea in your head. And as soon as you have the idea, “oh that is what I am doing,” you actually will go off on the wrong path. If someone says to me, “I am now living more fully,” I will say, “Ah yes, great, of course, of course you are.” But it is not a claim and it is not an aim. Yet it does seem to be something that happens. I see this particularly in the people I train to teach, and in my Columbia students whom I have for two years, such a transformation in who they bring into the room, the amount, the size of the persona that comes onto the stage. The change is graphic, as with my teachers. The older teachers will say, “You know they become much nicer people,” and it is true. After they train to be teachers I enjoy just hanging out and being around them much more than when they first come in. Now this is not very scientific, and it is not very philosophical, but in terms of change and accessing the fullness of who you are, that seems to be the phrase we are using at the moment, if you embody your sense of self you do actually become a better person. I have never seen anyone deploy that in a destructive way or in an overweening way or in a prideful way, none of them do that. What it brings them to is a sense of empathy, of being able to take in the other, the world. I think that is a very positive, very hopeful, element of the work.

DM May I ask you to go back to vocabulary and to speak about another word, *presence*, which has fallen into disfavour in philosophy because it is associated with

the identification of the essential self with mind, and that is a problem. What do you mean by this word?

KL For us, the idea and the experience of presence is entirely in the body, the sense that I am conscious of the presence of my body in this place now. That sounds ridiculous, for you might say, “Well of course my body is in this place now.” But to have a consciousness of my body in this place is a hundred percent different. I use the word *experience*, again and again, *experience*. This is bringing the mind into the body. You cannot be fully present if you are holding your breath, because you are not fully alive in that moment. Breath is the essential part of full presence in the place. Now it is not only presence—an awareness of yourself and your breath and the place that you are in. Going from the awareness of self, breath, body, from the feet to the head, you expand your awareness to the space which you are in, and then you expand it to the other people in that space with whom you are presumably going to communicate. That is real presence, without loss of your inner consciousness. You have to have the balance: working with actors we talk about being a hundred percent inside and a hundred percent outside, because with real presence you are two-hundred percent alive, and you can talk about that in electrical terms because we are made of electricity, we are made of whatever they are, neutrons, protons, or whatever, made of electrical currents, and most of the time we are operating at a fairly low wattage. When you come to be aware of yourself, more of your circuitry becomes awake and alive between brain and body, things begin to spark more in your brain, and neurons awaken more inside your body, and if you get to the sense of being a hundred percent awake, which would be a very rare state (you’d probably combust), then you are a hundred percent aware of those people there. Then in the space between them and me, the voltage increases; and you can see that with great actors and with what great actors do. Christopher Walken on stage: did you see that? It is ridiculous! I mean his voltage, just standing there, is huge, and he would probably describe it quite differently. He might well say, “Oh, I was thinking about where I was going to go for dinner, and who I was going to meet after the show,” but that is not entirely true because for him it is normal to be so electrically charged. It is his job.

DM It seems to me that you are not only contesting centuries-old beliefs in the essence of the self being dissociated from the body, but also that you are asking us to believe that our bodies command us, that we are essentially bodies.



KL Ok, let us go slowly through that again because this is a big bit of thinking. I want you to say all of that again, but first of all, I do not ask people to believe anything. The exercises bring them to an experience. Somebody said just recently of *experience* that the root, etymologically, means going through danger, and the experience can seem dangerous.

DM It seems dangerous to me. For through your descriptions of the neuro-anatomical process of voice, for example, of breathing, you are asking us to take seriously who we are, as distinct from the ways that we have been constituted by culture and tradition.

KL Why is that so scary?

DM Because of the deep suspicion this culture has of body, the finite body—it seems obvious to me that there is much at stake in this.

KL Yes, our bodies are finite, are deteriorating, and we will die. Meanwhile we are living, and what are we doing about that? Meanwhile we have a lot of living to do. Yes we are caught, always caught in dichotomies, that is what makes the energy of who we are, the dichotomy, for example, between I am going to die, but I am living. The dichotomy—do I think, do I feel, is this dangerous, or is it

exciting? Is that danger real, or is it something I have been taught is dangerous? Probably the latter. I have been taught that to be in the body is dangerous. This teaching has come down through the centuries, and I have no hesitation whatsoever in laying it at the foot of patriarchy. The need to subjugate others, and women in particular: this is how people have ruled. Patriarchy is a model of what we do to ourselves when we internalize the patriarch who tells us how we should behave in order not to rock the boat. I think a bit of deep down breathing will rock your boat, and with any luck it will rock patriarchy.

DM Patriarchy is really alive and well, isn't it?

KL Oh totally alive and well—

DM The cultural pressure to be in a body: what does that mean to young people today if it does not mean Hollywood bodies, manufactured bodies?

KL And if you see capitalism as an instrument of patriarchy, then there you are. It is an oversimplified thing to say. But I do see it, initially in education, where when you go to kindergarten most of your teachers are women, and when you are in kindergarten, you have a nap in the middle of the day, you have your food at a certain time, they make sure you eat something, before they make sure you go out to play. If it is cold, they make sure that you put on a coat, that your shoes are tied, and that you have play time. Then you go to elementary school where you are meant to *sit* silently for rather a long time, even though you are only five years old, or six years old. It's absolutely against all nature to sit in silence. How are you going to manage the wild life force of a five year old or a six year old unless you say, "The rule is you are silent." Still in elementary school, I think the majority of teachers are women, and you go out to play quite a bit, and there's still a sense of the whole child. In high school, where you are suddenly meant to be learning things and passing exams, there are more male teachers. Nobody says, "Did you put a coat on before you went out?" Nobody says (well, they are beginning to say), "Did you have breakfast?" That is the sense of a whole body coming in. But at the high-school stage, things are beginning to move more and more up into the head. And then you go to "higher education"—I don't know what the proportion of male to female faculty in higher education is, but it's still pretty shockingly tilted towards the male. And here, the body is not part of the learning process at all, so you get disembodied, disembodied, disembodied, and that allows for a maintenance of the structures that

then go out into business, governance, and the things that make this world work. All from the head. And women who want to get ahead obviously have to go into the same mode. Anyway, this diatribe is one that I could go on far too long about. But I think it is still dangerous to women, and for women, to experience themselves, highly dangerous.

DM Do you find, then, that there is an essentially political implication to your work? You were showing me a piece in the *New York Times* about work you did recently at Columbia University, and I did not think that the piece grasped the significance of your work in any real way. Is this a hurdle for you?

KL Yes. It makes me really irritated and upset. Because what it says in that piece, and what a journalist will always focus in on is, “Oh, we’re jumping around, we’re getting into the body, and that’s just fun.” And it is not serious; it’s like kindergarten. And then it says by extrapolation that this is training for the theatre, and of course we all know that theatre isn’t *serious*, that theatre is a child-like frill on civilization, sort of female and full of feelings and imagination, which is not serious, and not real. The real stuff is Wall Street.

What we’re talking about with this work is not visible: the importance and the power of a free voice, a whole voice in a whole person. We can talk *about* it, and we are talking about it now, although I seldom have a chance to talk about it. That’s why I’m talking about it so much in this interview: because I don’t get asked these questions. On one level, therefore, I don’t get taken seriously. And yet I am considered a leading exponent of voice training for actors. “Yeah, but I mean heck! Voice training for actors, isn’t that fun?” Well, I think it is more than that. So, yes, my simple answer to you is that it is difficult to find the way to disseminate this into the culture, at least in a way that says, “This is a core element of who we are as human beings, and if we don’t pay attention to that core element—voice, communication, breath, presence, wholeness, embodiment—then anything we do is compromised, seriously compromised.” The medium that communicates is the message. If the medium is tied up and inhibited and talking from its strangled throat, then the message will be distorted and quite often utterly destructive.

We were talking, I guess it was last night, about training teachers. How can teachers not receive voice training? Who are they bringing into that classroom? They’re bringing a small proportion of themselves, a small percentage of who they are, so the students are not going to pay attention, and the students are

going to get an image that says you don't have to use yourself, you can get by with just a little bit of yourself.

DM You were working last week—just tell us a little bit about who those people were at Columbia.

KL Ah, last week was a collaboration between Columbia University School of the Arts and the World Economic Forum, which is based in Geneva and has a huge annual meeting in Davos with heads of state, and heads of huge corporations and global movers and shakers, all of whom get together to talk about the state of the world. They are, they say, and I really believe this, dedicated to improving the state of the world. And the World Economic Forum I *believe* does its very best to be non-partisan, to be non-political, and in the people I met, I felt yes, I can trust you to be looking at the state of the world and all the different ways that the problems could be addressed. The World Economic Forum, although it has been going for the last thirty years, has only in the last five years set up a program to train future leaders of the world. These people are called “young leadership fellows,” or something like that. I call them global fellows. They seem to be changing their title a bit, but young leadership fellows are men and women between the ages of twenty-six and thirty-six who have already had a career in economics, in environmental issues, in climate change issues, in business, in politics, and who undertake a two-year program based in Geneva, two years of very demanding work in all aspects of the world economy, very academically demanding. Some of them actually can earn an MA or a PhD while they do this program, but they also are already connected out to different countries and different NGOs and other operations around the world, and what I understand as their job is to help bring people together around a table from different aspects of the world governance and then bring in the latest, most reliable information on whatever the subject is. This is about having people talk to each other. They don't dictate policy, and they don't say, “this is what you should or should not do,” but they do say, “Would you talk to this person, and this person and this person?” A large number of countries of the world are represented, including Asian countries, a lot of very smart young Asian people, Scandinavia, Europe, India, and so on.

The group met with the Columbia Dean of the School of the Arts, Carol Becker, a very smart woman indeed, who was able to talk about the arts as a serious part of the world and civilization and the future, in a way that I really

admire her for being able to do. Columbia's President, Lee Bollinger, who is very internationally connected and who also has a deep interest in the arts, and is on the board of the Royal Shakespeare Company, brought Carol Becker to the 2009 Davos meeting, and she started to talk with the Dean of the WEF fellowship program. The fellowship program had been going to do a workshop with the Columbia business school, but as soon as they started talking with Carol Becker they said, "Ooh, this is something we are really missing. We are missing the arts in our training. We don't talk about them. We have no idea how the arts intersect with the economics of the world." Then Carol Becker came back, and she and I talked, and I immediately knew I had to do it with Andrea Haring, who is my right-hand woman in voice, but I also wanted them to do some kind of improvisation work, so I brought in Merry Conway, who does basic clown work and also physical presence work, and Brent Blair, who works with the Augusto Boal methods called the Theatre of the Oppressed. I knew that he would be provocative. I was a little nervous about it, however, because he is very political. I said to him, "Don't let your Marxist petticoat show." But he couldn't help it; it was there. But he has a great sense of humour and a great, expansive personality, and everybody had a wonderful time working with him.

So it was so fast, and it was just ridiculous. There were over fifty of them; we had twenty-four to twenty-six people in each group, and I did basic voice work, physical awareness, breathing, progression of exercises through the whole voice, and within two hours I just threw the whole thing at them. I actually had one group do mirrors, which is a very basic acting exercise that was shocking to them. We did it in Santorini, but for them it was horrific. To begin with they were incredibly embarrassed and totally self-conscious. But as always if people are willing just to do the stuff, just to stand there and follow the instructions, something begins to shift in them. And by the end of the first day, they were doing ridiculous things. They stretched. They were very open and very willing, and they leapt into the experiences like leaping into a deep lake of water that they were thirsty for. They kind of knew that they had missed something, that they were missing something in their training. What we all talked about is what a difference it would make in their missions and the various things that they're doing if they could bring more of themselves into the arena, into the field. We have no idea how much of this will last for them. One of them said, "Look, just send me a little regime on my Blackberry, and I'll put it on my Blackberry, and

then maybe after six months, because my Blackberry has told me I should do it, I'll have changed my habit." Nobody has ever asked for that before.

DM This sort of work with teachers would surely be important—

KL It would be one of the most important things. I think some people are doing it. Shakespeare and Company are working with teachers and really making a big difference. They are doing the best work in education that I know of. So I feel in a way that I don't need to do it, that I can continue to work with actors, because somebody else is working with teachers.



DM In your work, Kristin, how do you bring voice and speech together?

KL I begin with voice because that is how babies start. We start with voice unarticulated by lips and tongue into speech. When I start to work with a group of acting students, and with anybody really, I begin with physical awareness so that they know where the tensions, the inhibitions, and the protective habits lie in the body and particularly in the breathing area, the throat area. Then we spend a good deal of time becoming aware of what breathing is, what this tricky word *natural* means, what natural breathing is. The science of respiration has been quite useful because they have done measurements of what the rate of a relaxed breathing apparatus is. Relaxed does not mean asleep, because if you are asleep your metabolism has slowed down, and that is not the kind of relaxation that is useful for observing relaxed, everyday breathing. But if you are in a state of conscious relaxation and you turn your attention to the rhythm of your everyday natural breathing, you find that the outgoing breath is a moment of relaxation inside of the diaphragm, and then is a moment of nothing. Into that moment of nothing comes the need for breath, and all you consciously do is yield to that need so that the diaphragm drops and breath comes back in again in that exchange from the outgoing. It's a very small exchange of breath that keeps you alive from one moment to the next if you are in a state of relaxation. The exchange from breath releasing, through moment of nothing, to breath coming in has been measured, and the norm is four seconds.

It is absolutely from the autonomic nervous system, the ability of the body to stay alive through breath coming in and breath coming out. Anxiety about

bringing the breath in and letting it out, about organizing and controlling my breath, is not necessary, because my body breathes. What my breath wants from me is relaxation. That of itself is a practice, a very deep practice, to be able to observe your natural breathing without interfering with it. You have to tell the mind, the brain, not to know better than the body. So we give a great deal of time to being aware of what that natural everyday rhythm of breathing is. We work on the floor, lying on the back, lying in diagonal stretch, lying in various different adapted yoga postures. When I say adapted, I am not using them for the reasons yoga has developed these postures; I am using them in order to facilitate the release of breath. That is the release of one's self and one's thoughts through the breath.

We explore the experience of sighing a great deal. The body sighs very naturally, animals sigh, babies sigh. Sighing is the body's need for oxygen, oxygenation of some sort, and when we become aware of sighing, if we say, "This is a sigh of relief," then the breath is galvanized by an impulse of relief, pleasurable relief. And that helps a neuro-physiological connection from the beginning, so you are not sitting up in your brain saying, "I am doing good breathing. I am now going to do big breaths and big breaths will do this and that." No, we are, right from the beginning, saying that it is the impulse, the desire that connects with the breathing musculature, and if I can genuinely introduce the impulse of a pleasurable sigh of relief, I will find that my body opens to bring the breath in, deep breath, and then with great, really, really good feeling of healthy pleasure, it lets the breath out again. Even in that consciousness that evokes a basic experience of a deep pleasurable sigh of relief, we are already reconditioning the connection of brain to body, impulse, feeling impulse, to breath.

So we do a lot of deep sighs, deep long sighs, medium sighs, sighs and then just natural breathing rhythm with just a very small exchange of breath. From that we begin to explore how breath connects with the thought of sound, and how sound acts on the body. Here is where I start to use imagery, because it is the image that galvanizes the voice. Any speaking that we do that has any depth to it comes from the imaging part of our memories, experiences, etc. If I slow down now and really pay attention to what I am saying, I will find that there are words that have the images of consonants and vowels in them happening in my brain. There will be an idea behind those vowel and consonants; there will be a whole arc of thought which has to do with how the impulse comes

into breath. With that, if I really slowed down, there is a very clear image of my body: of brain, spinal column, central nervous system. Now, as I am speaking at the rate of ordinary conversation, I am not seeing all those things, but they are there. So in order to hook the voice back into its source of imagery, I start people off in the experience of their voices with the very strong picture drawn from nature, which says, "Picture your spine as if it were a tree." Walter Brogan talks about this in his paper, *Walter as a tree*. Now I don't say, "Imagine yourself as a tree." I say:

See if you can picture your spine as if it were a tree, and on the level of your diaphragm there is a pool, a deep forest pool. And you see the surface of that pool, and the sun is shining on the surface of that pool; the tree is growing beside the pool, and its roots go all the way down your legs and into the ground. The pool is fed by underground springs that come up through your legs and through into the pelvis, and where your pelvic floor is, that is the bottom of the pool, and where your diaphragm is, that is the surface of the pool, and the sun is shining on it. Now see if you can picture a miniature version of yourself standing at the edge of the pool leaning against the tree of your spine looking at your reflection in the pool, and then see if you can have a magic expansion of your face in that pool with the mouth opening upwards; then transform the pool of water into the pool of the vibrations of sound, and it is the pool of your voice. And now the vibrations are going to break the surface of the pool, come out through that picture of your mouth, and come out through your actual mouth.

Well there is a lot of imagery in that, a lot, and it is far too much for most people, but it starts them off. Even if they say later, "I couldn't see any of those things," it doesn't matter. They will come back to the picture again and again, and gradually the imagination, the imaging part of the brain, will become more and more alive, and as that becomes more and more alive it sparks the breath and sparks the voice into a really enlivened expression.

For a start, then, I work with the sense of imagery that is experienced in the body. It is no good having imagination up in your head; that is just invention. It is imagination experienced in the body, and I think that is what sets the groundwork for words, actually, because there are images behind words. So already, even when I am working with the basic voice, there is some neuro-connection which will serve the actual delivery of words. The imagining part of speaking comes from the right hemisphere of the brain. The rational information, logical, lips and tongue part, comes from the left hemisphere. It is pretty clearly differentiated. But the images have to start speaking to the lips and

tongue as well as to the breathing and the voice, so when we start from “ha-ha,” from the basic initial vibration to the lips, and we go “ha-ha-hummmm-ma,” that is already some kind of generalized thought, but with the experience of the vibrations in the body in tandem, connected with thought, so the thought is initial vibration, feeling on the lips, vibration going forward. That is the thought. “Ha-ha-hummmm-ma.” It is not just empty repetition. It is not meant as repetition. My job as a teacher is to keep saying, “Create and recreate impulsive thought. Don’t repeat the sound, create and recreate the impulse.”

Then we come to the experience of vibrations in different parts of the body, from the lips to the whole head to the whole body, under the idea that tension murders vibrations, so that the more we relax the body, the more vibrations will be released. And vibrations love to have attention paid them, and that is where the pleasure, the sensory, sensual pleasure becomes just an intrinsic part of what we are doing with the voice. Voice is pleasure; voice is a sensory fact inside us. And because of the breathing muscles that go right down to the pelvic floor, it is a very sensual and sexual connection of self. Now words too originated from appetite needs, unquestionably. The original articulation of sound was for appetite-related goals such as, “I am hungry,” or, “I need woolly mammoth steak tonight.” And then, “I need to procreate the species,” which did not need quite those syllables, but sex and hunger were probably the first strong impulses to galvanize the voice, and, because they were appetite related, they deployed the lips and the tongue, which up until then had been all to do with eating and slurping and sloshing. And gradually those lips and tongue, appetite connected to the deepest, lowest impulse centres, gradually those started to form words, and in the aural cultures those lips and tongue are much more sensorial, more tied in with the voice than is the case with so-called developed, more literal cultures in which literacy dominates.

Even in the basic voice work, then, you begin to feel your voice in a sensory, sensual way, and then we deal with how you get the channel of your voice open and undone from the strangulation tensions which I referred to before: this is the place where the big protection comes in against expressing what is dangerous to express. We work on loosening the jaw and the jaw muscles, some of the strongest muscles in the body that get deployed to close off against the expression of emotions, so the tension in the jaw muscles is tied directly into emotional defence. Everybody knows this, this isn’t me. Everybody knows this—



grinding the teeth at night, all of that. The tongue muscle also picks up these defensive tensions so that it pulls back from the mouth and closes off the space at the back of the throat and sends the voice up into the nose, such that the soft palate, which is the doorway to the mouth, tends to clamp down onto the back of the tongue, again to close off the throat so that emotional life is not exposed to danger. We do exercises to loosen the jaw, to stretch and relax the tongue to activate the soft palate, to get this whole channel for the voice, alive, ready to open up rather than close down.

Once that happens, we can look at strengthening, developing, the voice through the resonators. We bring our attention to the chest resonator, which strengthens the deepest part of the voice, to the middle face resonators: the mouth, sinuses, cheek bones, nose, and the extraordinary architectural structure of skull in the middle of the face, which gives a wide variety of resonances and can allow extremely subtle expression, of a psychic nature almost. Mood nuance, moods and feelings, come through that middle part of the face. It is a very extrovert part of the voice, the middle voice. Finally, from the eyebrows up to the top of the skull there are resonating cavities of the very upper part of the voice. So once we get to the resonators, we are exploring the whole range of the voice, from the bottom to the top of three-and-a-half to four octaves of speaking voice. At that

point we also start to waken up and strengthen the breathing response, the breathing muscles, which have to get strong and elastic. We play around with that quite a great deal. We use the piano, arpeggios, and triads to stretch the voice, while lying on the floor or playing with arm swings and consciously releasing the whole range of the voice.

Then we do some fairly routine articulation exercises to waken up the muscles of the lips and the tongue so that really the connections between the speech cortex and the muscles of speech are gymnastically alert. They are agile and lively. Now, you have got the whole apparatus ready. Sometimes, for some people, that is it. Their voices free up, and suddenly those voices are at the disposal of their work as actors or their work as speakers and that is it. But as I have certainly found that we have to address the specificities of what words are in order to enliven the speaking of those words, I developed a whole series of exercises called “sound and movement,” which are designed to get the experience of language out of the head and into the body, the em-body-ment of language. We start with breath as communication: we are all lying on the floor, with breath as the sun and radiating the sun as sun-ray breaths that can galvanize any part of the body; and we do communication partner exercises with extreme physical response of the breath, going to another person and receiving back, then with basic sound galvanizing the movement of the body, sound that cannot come out of the body without moving whatever part it travels through. We play with the picture that the body has mouths at every part, from the soles of the feet to the knees: the knees have mouths, each buttock has a mouth, the belly has a big mouth, the chest has a mouth in front, and a big mouth between the shoulder blades, mouths under the armpits, and in the elbows, the palms of the hands and the fingers. Sound starts from the middle of the body, and as it goes out through the long throats of the limbs that lead to those mouths, they galvanize those parts of the body they move, so that the sound activates and animates the body as it comes out. We then bring imaging into that, and emotion into that, by breathing in colours, opening the door between the colour and the emotional response and letting the voice create physical and vocal dialogue with a partner.

When we have done the colours, and we do that in partners, we go to vowels and consonants, not calling them vowels and consonants, however. What I am looking at here are the component parts of words. I go through an elaborate

imaginative thing to say—you know, people are lying on the floor—and I say, “There is a planet, inhabited by sounds, and it is ‘The Planet of Certain Sounds,’ and these visitors come to visit planet Earth and come into your body and they move your body,” and I give them this sound. After we have gone through all of those, I ask them what they are doing. If the exercises worked, they will not know that they have been doing vowels. Rather, they were having an energy experience or an emotional experience or doing colours or something like that. The reason I do that is because vowels and consonants have got caught up in this whole idea of elocution, diction, saying, speech, saying things properly; they have gone right up into the frontal lobes and they have lost their power, their original power that came from the mist of time when language was emerging, probably from sounds in nature. It is a really desperate attempt to get people to rehabilitate their relationship with vowels and then with consonants. Eventually we will say, “Hey, these are vowels, these are consonants.” They are in your body, they are part of your emotional life. Vowels express the emotional part of language, as we might put it in an oversimplified way, while consonants serve the more intellectual part of language. You need the balance to be exact.

Once we have got vowels and consonants, we play around with putting them together with no sense, just as sounds. To enjoy the sounds of language, with their eyes closed, I might say, “Just follow these sounds.” And, “When you see the image that comes from these sounds let the image go through your whole body.” And they will go “O-C-E-A-N.” It is that sense of going from the sounds of the words into the image and then into the word itself. That is connecting the sensory physical response to words with the meaning of the word, but from the body to the brain rather than from the brain to the body. We then put them together in nonsensical ways, as when I might say, “I am just going to say the word *yellow*,” and everyone says “yellow,” and then I might add to that, “ocean,” “yellow ocean,” and that is a surprise, as we did not expect to have a yellow ocean. And I will say, “Hold that image. Yellow ocean giggles.” What can that do to you? Really letting each of these words take you into a [snaps twice] new experience. Instead of saying, as you would grammatically, that “it does not make sense.”

This is for actors, so that when they eventually come to, “When in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes, / I all alone beweep my outcast state,” they will not dwell on the grammar of it, the information of it, but have the vertical experience of

those words and trust the grammar to emerge. In terms of Shakespeare, you know, it works only to a certain extent. It should work better than it does, but you are working against a whole culture which says, “Make sense of that.”

DM This relates to your book *Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice*. What’s the subtitle of the book, which I think is very good?

KL *An Actor’s Guide to Talking the Text*.

DM Yes, talking the text. I want you to tell our readers something of the importance that Shakespeare had for you in your work and why. What Shakespeare was it?

KL Well, I just want to preface this by explaining that the title of the book, *Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice*, should not need any explanation, because what I see when actors are speaking Shakespeare in a cerebral way or a correct way, a way that does not embody, is that they are stifling Shakespeare’s voice. So my sense is—and I’m playing with the metaphor of voice—is that by saying that Shakespeare’s voice is in his text, is in his language, we have to find a way to have our voices big enough and open enough and sensitive enough to let Shakespeare’s voice come to life through our voices, that Shakespeare needs our breath and our range in order to be resuscitated in today’s theatre. And that really is, on a practical level, that really is what Shakespeare does for the actor. It doesn’t matter if the actor is never going to do Shakespeare as part of his profession. If he trains on Shakespeare, if she trains with Shakespeare, she stretches vocally, in terms of breath capacity, in terms of intellectual capacity, and definitely emotional capacity. We talk about Shakespeare as the Olympics of the theatre. Shakespeare is an immense challenge, and I don’t mean that in the diminished meaning of the word *challenged* as is used all the time now. *Challenged* today is used as a euphemism for difficult, difficulty. Things are difficult, we say, “oh no, they’re a challenge.” But the sense of *challenge*, like gladiatorial *challenge* that Shakespeare throws down—can you do this? can you play that?—is what draws the best of the deepest and the fullest out of any actor.

One of the things we have to do, one of the endless things we have to do, is cope with the fact that, in speaking Shakespeare, we are speaking an English that is four hundred years *younger* than the English we speak today. That means it is an English that is muscular, it is full blooded, and it is extrovert and strong, as opposed to the English we speak today, which is somewhat anaemic and is

deteriorating rapidly under the influence of technology. Shakespeare wrote at a time when language was still imbued with the experience of an oral culture, when most people communicated orally rather than through writing. That means that they experienced thought quite differently from the way we experience thought: they listened with their bodies and they spoke with their bodies. That means that when they said a word, they experienced that word very often in the part of the body that seemed to hold that thought and that word in it. So if they said “my heart isn’t in it” it would be “my *heart* isn’t in it,” or if they said “how do you have the gall to say that to me”: “how do you have the *gall* to say that to me,” or if they said “I live for pleasure” it would be a sense of the “liver” that is “living.” Not “I live for pleasure.”

The Elizabethans were on the cusp: they were coming out of the Middle Ages and they were on the cusp of the scientific revolution. But there’s still a lot of a sense of the old Chain of Being that governed the culture for centuries, the hierarchical Chain of Being from God to the king to the nobleman to the landowners to the serfs in the feudal system and then down to the peasant and the beggars, and the same thing with the animals and the plants. That was so much in people’s sense of the cosmos, they were the microcosm of this macrocosm. That didn’t just “go” when there was a different scientific idea that came through, or a different sense of mobility between classes. You can certainly see that possibility of some mobility between classes in Shakespeare, but in people’s bodies it was still pretty clear that “I am made of the same stuff as the world around me. I am made of the same stuff as the trees and the ocean and the earth. I am made of the four elements: I am made of earth, air, fire, and water.” And from those elements come the various properties, the elements, the humours: the phlegm, bile, melancholy, choler. So those humours, which are attached to the elements, are part of my experiential life. And within those humours, I also know that the better part of my makeup, my cosmological makeup, is my heart, where redemptive love lies; and then my soul, which is in my head, corresponds to fire, air, and that those will help take me up towards Heaven. And that the heavier elements, the troubling humours, again fire but in a different place in the body, going down into the animal parts of my body, are the reflection of experiences such as rage, and murderous envy, and ambition, and those will take me down to Hell. So I’m still on a journey which is either taking me up towards Heaven or down towards Hell. You can see that all throughout Shakespeare. In *Macbeth*, that’s the *stuff* of Macbeth, when he says:

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly.

Shall I kill him or shall I not:

Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind.

You can just feel in that speech that he's being pulled between Heaven and Hell, and he chooses not to go on with the ambition. He says:

I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other.

You can feel by the end of that that he's not going to do it, but in comes Lady Macbeth and says "What are you doing? We've made this plan! We've got to go ahead with it!" And in all the plays, many of the plays, there is this struggle, and that's the drama; the conflict is between the pull upwards and the pull downwards. That has to be re-experienced, rediscovered. We might have to learn it with our heads as actors, but then it must be quickly embodied. It's easy for our actors to picture Hell, and the burning fires of Hell. Even if they don't believe in them at all, they can see them very easily, very quickly. They can see God sitting on the throne up there. This is not tough; this is somewhere in our old brains, in the side of the brain that has to take us back to a new old experience of a language which sat in the body absolutely connected with thought and feeling in a way that was threaded out, separated out, in the ensuing centuries.

So for us, for twenty-first century actors, we have to, we keep saying, "You've got to get out of your head!" But that doesn't mean that you have to stop thinking.



You have to stop experiencing yourself as living up behind your face and come into experiencing yourself in your body if you are going to understand Shakespeare at all. Understanding Shakespeare is not done in the pre-frontal lobes. You have to use your intelligence a lot, but actual understanding happens in mind-body thinking, and in body thinking, rather than cerebral thinking. So if we are going to get the thoughts, and the understanding, of Shakespeare out of the head and into the body, we have to do that with the language, with the words. When I first started working with Shakespeare in this country in the early seventies, I was hugely frustrated because it didn't help to say to people, "You've got to get out of your head. You've got to experience this in your body." Gradually, then, I devised the series of exercises which I mentioned earlier. But they have to do with taking words apart into the components of vowels and consonants and then finding the images and how the images interact, so that the understanding of the text arrives out of a series of body experiences rather than "I use my head to try to understand it and then I try to embody the meaning." The meaning emerges out of the visceral experience, the visceral/physical experience.

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