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Of Rabbit Holes and Aquamarines (Cabbages and Kings)

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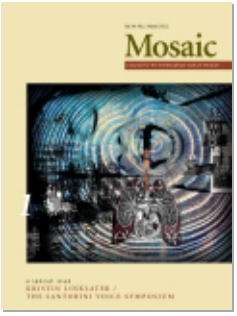

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SALOMÉ M. KRELL

As our world becomes more and more interconnected, a key to moving forward and evolving is to encourage collaborations. Meaningful (creative) collaborations have the capacity to foster a sense of community and partnership as well as to create the space for new ideas, advancements, and solutions to "old" problems. At the root (and core) of collaboration is *communication*: without this, collaboration would be all but impossible. This, for me, was a central idea behind the Santorini Voice Symposium, although it has taken many months since the event for me to see and state the idea clearly.

During the conception, planning, and event, I was operating on instinct, that is, on the basis of a deep curiosity about bringing together these two worlds (the artistic/creative and the academic/intellectual), both of which hold profound personal meaning for me. In retrospect, the fact that the mission was somewhat unclear, and that the event was lovingly labelled "an experiment without an hypothesis," is likely

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what made it so successful. There was no agenda. There was no goal, as such. There was merely the desire to bring together two groups of wonderful people in one of the loveliest places on earth. These were people I believed needed to meet. I knew Kristin Linklater's work would resonate deeply with the philosophers (as it had done and continues to do with me). Mainly I was confident that these two groups of people (actors and philosophers) would love getting to know one another and that *something* would happen. As it turns out, together we fell down (or first created and then fell down) a rabbit hole of sorts, and while I can attest to the fact that the symposium had a profound impact on me and on all those involved, I believe it also has deep ramifications and importance for our world(s).

I began to get a hint of this potential worldwide impact a few days after the symposium ended. An incredibly strong, wild, crazy(-making) wind swept over Santorini. The windstorm lasted about four days and the locals joked about clothes being torn off clotheslines and ending up in Crete. Perhaps it was not a joke: the wind was strong enough to knock me over! It is known as the Meltemi, and is famous for seeming to blow from (and to) all directions at once. In the same way that a strong, deep sigh of relief can clear out feelings and experiences to make way for what is next, I felt that this wind was taking the intense work we had done together and blowing it far and wide! It was both spreading the word and clearing space for whatever was to come next. I relaxed into the idea that though I was desperate somehow to share what we had done with as many people as possible, this would happen quite naturally without my having to push. And (thank you, Meltemi!) that seems to be the case.

As I reflect on this extraordinary experience these many months later, I see, for myself, three distinct phases of the project: Phase 1, the conception, the dream, and the planning; Phase 2, the event itself, the realization, the *doing*; Phase 3 (the one we are in currently), the describing of that doing, the distilling, and the telling, in order to disseminate our experience to others. I will address each of these in what follows. But first, a preliminary note: while I have a deep respect for the written word (and, admittedly, fears about not being a good writer), I also have a strong bias in favour of the spoken voice as the best medium for communication. I *believe* in the voice as a medium and am much more comfortable speaking than writing, more confident that I am better able to make myself "heard/understood" when speaking than when writing. Luckily for me, it is clear that there are those who believe that their "true" voices are revealed in their writing. As an actor, for example, I am grateful to the playwrights who have expressed themselves deeply and fully and given me fantastic characters to study. I wish so much, however, that I could be having a conversation with you (the reader) about this event. I miss seeing your facial expressions, and your questions are

important to me. I will endeavour to proceed without them, however, perhaps trying to imagine them for myself. And if in this collection of papers and reflections we can evoke even a slight sensory response in you, it may someday lead to a face-to-face meeting and conversation. I can only hope so!

This particular journey to the Greek island of Santorini began with an off-the-cuff comment several summers ago. It was early June and we were gathered for dinner at a long wooden table in the garden. The *we* at the table included an international group of actors, among them the Italian director Alessandro Fabrizi and Linklater voice teacher Susan Main. We had met to do a Linklater voice and acting workshop in Stromboli, a wildly beautiful volcanic island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea (in the Aeolian islands north of Sicily). I looked around the dinner table and said: "This is *it!* I need to find a way to get grants-in-aid to work in the most beautiful places in the world!" Though this was met with warm laughter, to me it was no joke; it seemed not only logical but absolutely possible.

Soon after that, my father (David Farrell Krell, a professor of philosophy, who had come to see the performance we created during the Stromboli workshop) and I found ourselves travelling through Sicily and scheming about the future. He was fascinated

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with the vocal warm-ups and rehearsals he had observed, and we proceeded to have long, rich discussions about the voice and philosophy. Our task was clear: to gather a group of philosophers (from all over the world) and actors/voice professionals (from just as many corners of the world), put them together, and see what happens. The setting would be key, and I immediately thought of Santorini (another volcanic island) and our dear friends at the Pension Carlos. There it was: an intriguing idea, an experiment without an hypothesis, and the perfect family-run hotel in one of the most beautiful places in the world—off we go!

I returned to New York and drafted a proposal that Susan Main forwarded to Kristin Linklater, just on the off chance that she might be interested. Two days later I received Kristin's response: "This is really upping the ante and I'd love to do it." Imagine! This crazy dream was now truly starting to take shape, and Kristin Linklater herself was on board! I am not too proud to say that I literally jumped up and down in my living room! The giddiness continued as a few days later we secured a grant from DePaul University, thanks to the generosity of DePaul Provost Dr. Helmut Epp, and slowly but surely all the pieces started falling into place. The challenge of organizing the symposium taught me a tremendous amount about tenacity, patience, holding the space during moments of chaos, and eventually celebrating the success!

It was a thrill to meet everyone at the airport and to see their faces as they took in the beauty of Santorini on our drive to the Pension Carlos. I felt like the proud hostess sharing her home. The one serious commitment I had made to myself, however (being all too familiar with my "eldest child" instinct to take care of, or perhaps even control, everyone and everything), was to let go of the hostess role once the symposium got underway. I wanted to be truly present and fully enter the experience of the symposium. I knew everyone would take care of him/herself and that I could be free of that responsibility if I so chose. And so I chose! But part of entering the experience that I had not anticipated was a short, intense period of mourning. It was through the Linklater exercises that I realized and acknowledged my need to say goodbye to the dynamic year of dreaming, planning, and preparing. While others arrived in Santorini with fresh thoughts, feelings, hopes, and fears, I had been living with the symposium for many, many months. In some ways, the event coming together was the dream come true, and now that it was actually underway, I felt what can only be described as an odd sense of loss. This "thing" was taking on a life of its own and didn't need me to hold it together anymore. It was a tricky transition that I had not anticipated. Above all, I could neither believe nor accept that I was feeling upset rather than enjoying myself!

I have always had either the great fortune or the skill to surround myself with stellar people, and Santorini was no exception. I assigned myself two amazing roommates who did not (and never would) let me off the hook: one of them, the exquisite actress Nina Hesse Bernhard, the other, my aforementioned teacher and colleague Susan Main. Susan and Nina could see that I was frustrated and they finally got me to admit it. It was not that they helped me solve or fix anything, but the very act of putting my thoughts and feelings to breath and vibrations and *expressing* them allowed my preoccupation to begin to shift. Yes, in my experience it sometimes is just that simple: fully revealing my thoughts and feelings can shift me from one experience into another. By giving some attention to this sense of loss during our work with Kristin and expressing it through the breath ("fffff")[1] or through "the touch of sound" ("huh"),[2] I finally began to enter the experience of the symposium itself. To me, that is one of the most remarkable and revolutionary things about Kristin Linklater's work. And I am here to tell anyone who has any doubts that the constant practice of revealing my thoughts and emotions through my voice (*not necessarily through words*) has been absolutely life-altering.

At an early age I mastered the skill of almost always saying the "right" thing in the "right" way, being diplomatic, nice, good, smart. While I have benefited a great deal from this skill, much of that mastery came at the expense of my *voice*. But in life, as in the theatre, to be a passionate actor, philosopher, or philosophactor (as we dubbed ourselves during the symposium), requires the ability to be a complete, integrated person, replete with impulses and the capacity to voice every run of emotion and nuance of thought. For me, the journey truly has been about *exercising* the capacity for free vocal expression. Kristin teaches that the end result is not important, in the sense that one cannot approach vocal freedom by focusing on or controlling the sound that is created. Our job is to trust the sound and get out of its way! As actors we are fortunate because we have texts to merge this sound with (especially fortunate when we are working with brilliant playwrights). I grant that it is more challenging not to focus on the end result, the sound, when what is being revealed is one's own thoughts and feelings through one's own words. I have found that exercising my capacity for full vocal expression has unequivocally made me more whole, and thus a better actor. This was in full evidence during the Santorini Voice Symposium: the more people exercised their ability to use their voices and express freely, the more of themselves they revealed and in some ways *became*. And, while expressing and revealing so fully often engenders an experience of vulnerability for the speaker, it is also the ultimate act of generosity and display of empowerment.

I am aware that this flies in the face of a long-standing philosophical tradition that hails the "pure and true self" as existing in the mind before any outward expression

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occurs (and indeed, it is generally believed that upon expression the "pure self" is lost). I am painting with broad brushstrokes here. Certainly there is much more to this argument than I know or understand, yet I do have my experience to draw on, both my personal experience and that of observing others during my professional life. Breath is life. Breath oxygenates our blood, helps pump the heart, and it is by connecting thought and impulse (the desire to communicate) to breath,[3] and by daring to introduce vibrations of sound, employing the articulators to articulate the thought-breath-vibration into intelligible speech, that communication happens: it is this act of *communication* that endows us with ever greater access to ourselves and to each other. It is through this kind of willingness to communicate that true collaboration is possible.

Again, broad brushstrokes here! Obviously, one cannot express oneself fully all the time in all circumstances. However, having the *ability* to do so, having the *choice* over whether or not to do so, is where empowerment lies. Many people who want to express themselves fully in a moment of deep rage, passion, pain, or joy are hindered by something: shallow breath, tight jaw, tense tongue, rigid body, constricted throat, all embodying a sense of "I shouldn't say/do/express this." This closure cannot be opened and the voice freed without access to our bodies and our breath, without the capacity to employ our bodies and our breath, both of which enable us to be present: aware of ourselves and our bodies, aware of others and of our surroundings, in this moment. For those who still argue that the body is sinful and a cause for shame, or that, because the body is finite and deteriorating, dying, it is not essential to who we are, I will simply quote a beautifully wise thing Kristin Linklater once said: "Yes, our bodies are dying. We're all on our way to dying, but in the meantime we're alive! What are we going to do about *that*?"

It was magnificent to see over the course of the symposium everyone becoming more boldly him/herself, more alive! The philosophers embraced their bodies, voices, and creative impulses, while the actors embraced their intellects. Surely *balance* is of the essence here: if we are to move the arts forward and uphold the importance of the arts in our world, we need the intellect to express and fight for them; and perhaps if philosophy is to move forward, it needs to move a lot closer to the breath and the body. In the evenings, after a delicious home-cooked meal, the philosophers joined the "crazy actors" in post-dinner songs and dances. It was a celebration of life and community in the deepest sense, the kind of community that is born out of creative collaboration. As we learned in the closing lecture by Professor Kevin Miles, quoting Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle, "Common are the things of friends." These thinkers expressed what we experienced. Our curiosities, our desires to communicate and to deepen our knowledge, proved that we had more in common than we had imagined.

A more personal aspect of the Santorini Voice Symposium for me is that, aside from co-conceiving and implementing the idea for the event, I did this with my father. It was mid-morning on our third day and we were on a break from working with Kristin. The hot sun had begun to creep into the schoolyard, replacing the cool shade we had been working in. We took a break to move indoors into the quaint, one-room schoolhouse, and as I stood in line for the bathroom I overheard one of the philosophers, who had tears streaming down her face, say to Susan Main, "Phew! I don't know what just happened!" Kristin had just led us through some spine exercises (working on alignment and flexibility) during which rivers of tears are a common consequence. Susan replied, "Welcome to our world!" Upon hearing those words my heart sank, about down to my knees, and I felt sick to my stomach. I slipped out of the bathroom line hoping no one would stop me to chat and I went into the schoolroom. I tried to make myself invisible but Kristin's sharp eye and keen sense had caught something. We made eye contact. I walked over to her and told her about the conversation I had overheard and that upon hearing "welcome to our world," I realized that maybe, after all, this had all been about bringing my father into my world. I tearfully explained: "I think I really needed my dad to experience how I sense and understand things, and I don't think I was brave enough to do it myself, and so I created all of this and got all of you

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to help me!" I was devastated and humiliated and felt suddenly ashamed. Kristin smiled and said: "This is a huge thing you've done and I can't even imagine what you're feeling. But I've been thinking about you for the past few days and hoping that this experience was meeting your expectations." She gave me a warm, reassuring smile, and then it was back to work! I felt lighter. I had confessed my hidden motive (which up until then had been swimming around in my subconscious, furiously floundering, no doubt) and revealed my plot, and Kristin's acknowledgement and entirely sympathetic but ultimately "Okay! Back to work!" response was exactly what I needed. Though I realized (eventually) how desperately I had wanted my father to experience (and perhaps somehow validate) my artistic world of emotion-sensation-body intelligence, something in me knew I also needed to experience his philosophical world, because in truth I knew little about it. And as the symposium would reveal, there was an aspect of myself, indeed an aspect of my *voice* (my intellect) that I had neglected for many years.

My father is one of the most deeply curious persons I know, and I am grateful that we were bonded by a mutual curiosity about each other's professions. What came as a delightful surprise to me was the discovery that this curiosity is also *part* of his profession, that philosophy is all about asking or finding the next question, the next thing to explore. That quest, to me, is deeply creative and closely linked to my own desires as an artist. If "common are the things of friends," it should come as no surprise that mine and my father's friendship became stronger through the symposium. Perhaps, because I grew up surrounded by philosophy and philosophers but I "didn't get it" and decided "it wasn't for me," I lacked confidence in my intellect, even if I excelled in school. During our first group dinner in Santorini, Professor Walter Brogan said something along the lines of his being intimidated giving a paper in front of the daughter of David Krell. "You grew up with this stuff," he added. I am still uncertain as to what exactly he meant, but I know he meant it sincerely. I immediately replied, "Oh, Walter, don't worry. Back in that day I would just tune you all out as soon as you started talking philosophy!" Everyone laughed. Luckily. They seemed to sense how sincere I was too. I am delighted to say that my big "philosophical breakthrough" came during Walter's paper later that week. Poetic justice.

On our second-to-last day I asked Professor Kevin Miles if we could have lunch together. After our meal and a lovely, long conversation, Kevin politely excused himself saying, "I have to go and prepare for Water's paper." I was thoroughly confused, but a spark of excitement quickly ensued. "What do you mean? How do you prepare to listen to a paper? Sit back down!" I exclaimed. And being the generous person and consummate teacher he is, he obliged. It had never occurred to me that people *prepared* to

listen to papers, but Kevin explained, "Well, I'm going to take some time to think about Walter's work and some things he might say about the voice or connections he might make. It's mostly to get me in the right frame of mind." Wow! "Okay," I said, "but what if I haven't read any of Walter's work and have no idea what he might talk about?" Kevin replied, "Then just listen carefully to his framing question—" I interrupted, "His *what*?" Once again, I found myself fortunate enough to be with exactly the right person. I realized that while the philosophers had the luxury of going back to the very basics with Kristin on how the voice works—(re)discovering breath, posture, and tensions, etc. in order to experience the free and the natural versus the familiar or habitual[4]—I had not given myself that same luxury. Why not go to the very basics in also listening to a philosophical paper or in learning how to prepare to follow a talk? Why not learn some steps toward exercising my intellectual muscle instead of deciding beforehand that I couldn't do it, or wouldn't understand?

That afternoon Walter had many of us in tears within the first three minutes of his philosophical paper, which he began with a powerful personal story and song, his voice revealing deep emotion and passion. I felt proud and moved and awed. It was one of the bravest things I have ever seen. I recognized how incredibly lucky I was to be in that schoolhouse, because Walter's openness had been preceded by the willingness and bravery of all the other philosophers who had given their papers earlier that week. It was such a gift. And indeed it was their bravery that forged the way for many of the actors (myself included) to take the risk to "sound dumb" and to give voice to our intellects in any event.

As Walter continued with his talk I heard him say, "My question is . . ." Following Kevin's earlier guidance, I jotted down Walter's framing question and proceeded to take notes on things that stood out as potential answers or benchmarks along the way. To say that I was able to follow everything would be a boldfaced lie! But it was the first time I felt as though I knew *how* to listen and what to listen *for*. My childhood love of mysteries was engaged as I gathered the clues Walter presented. It was fun and exciting. *A philosophical paper was fun and exciting!* The world just shifted on its axis! And it gets better.

During his paper Walter mentioned the "silent voice." As an actor and a diligent student of the voice, I was intrigued by that idea but not entirely sure what he meant by it. Was that in reference to an inner voice? Instincts? Intuition? Perhaps the "pure self" mentioned earlier? I drew a big question mark in my notebook so I would remember to ask Walter at the end of his talk. I was delighted to have a question to ask, as opposed to sitting there dumbfounded as I was accustomed to doing. Lo and behold, as Walter's paper continued, he spoke about Martin Heidegger's writing on

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the "silent voice," or rather, "the voice of silence," and the kind of listening that is a "hearkening." I could not believe it! The impossible had just happened: Martin Heidegger just explained something to me! He answered my question and deepened my desire to investigate and learn more. To say that this moment was wondrous does not come close. Even knowing that my father and Heidegger had worked closely together and that my father had translated much of his work into English, the nearest I had come to reading anything of Heidegger's is the birthday card he sent me on the day I was born, only a few months before his death. To experience a connection with the work and thoughts of this man whom my father knew and admired and studied felt prodigious.

During the symposium my father and I shared many glances as we admired the astounding community of people we had gathered. We knew we had built something truly wonderful together. The day after the symposium ended we found ourselves on a terribly crowded bus. My father offered me the one empty seat and stood in the aisle next to me. We were on our way to Oia, a dazzling town on the other end of Santorini, renowned for its world-famous sunset views and beautiful artisan shops. As the bus rolled along the curvy cliff-side roads, he told me that he wanted me to pick out something special at the jewellery store to commemorate our time in Santorini.

He placed his hand on my shoulder, and as I looked up into his face I saw his eyes welling up with tears. Rather than retreating from the emotion, I observed him taking a deep breath and as I smiled, knowingly, he simply said, "I'm so proud of you. And I want to thank you. You made this happen and it was absolutely amazing." My father is never short on loving, supportive words, and he often writes beautiful letters, but there was something different on that bus. His voice revealed his full emotions and resonated deeply with me. I can honestly say that I have never felt so connected to him as on that hot, crowded bus.

My gratitude for this collaboration, for this community we created through communication, for Kristin Linklater and her work, for everyone who participated in the symposium and their willingness to jump right into the thick of it, my gratitude for all of this and all of them is profound. In closing, a short story:

I fell down the rabbit hole even though I dug it myself. I'm good at digging and I enjoy it. I like the ache in my muscles after a long day's work. I like to sweat. I also like others to appreciate my labours. Then I was joined by a group of brilliant, inspiring people and together we dug deeper. Together we dug deeper and faster than I could ever have imagined. We worked, we talked, we laughed, we danced, we sang. Many of them will remain life-long friends. All of them have changed me. We fell down the rabbit hole, and I emerged on the other side, altered, awakened, in awe, filled with gratitude and with a beautiful aquamarine ring that will forever hold more memories and emotions than words could ever express. "F ffffff fff ffff f ffff fff."

NOTES

1/ On a loose "ffff" the breath releases from the centre of the body and passes through the front of the mouth, which is what happens with a free sound. See Kristen Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice,* 48.
2/ "The touch of sound" refers to the feeling of vibrations in the body. It is possible to express and reveal fully without words, with open, unarticulated sound. (For more on "the touch of sound," see Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice,* 65).
3/ One of my favorite Linklater exercises involves telling a one-minute story purely on "f"'s (breath). The story is told to another, but instead of sounds and words, only "fff ff fffff" is expressed. In that communication I always discover the images and feelings in the story rather than just the facts/words. It is astounding how much the listener understands and/or perceives just from another's breath. What is communicated is below (or perhaps inside) language; the feelings, pictures, thoughts that are in/behind/under words. This bears mention because I believe this exercise is the act of engaging the breath that gives this true self life. Without the breath, the images, thoughts, and feelings would not flow as freely and the self would suffer loss.
4/ For more on this, see the introduction to Linklater's *Freeing the Natural Voice*, page 7.

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