

Psychomagic Theatre

A surreal approach toward Emotional Education

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ABSTRACTS

Psychomagic Theatre

A surreal approach toward Emotional Education

This research aims to look at the possibility of preventing mental health crises by educating people on emotional meanings that talk directly to the Unconscious mind.

Introduction: The Absurdity of Life

This introduction looks at the Theatre of the Absurd as a starting point to understand and explore how to translate the language of the Unconscious mind to create a theatrical format that allows psychological healing.

Chapter 1: The Path of Theatrical Enlightenment

This chapter explores how Theatre has been used as a medium to enhance perception and spiritual research from religious traditions and spiritual seekers alongside scientific and psychological research.

Chapter 2: Wu Wei means non-doing or 'doing nothing'

Looking at Theatre makers and Zen Art, this chapter explores the possibility of using the language of Theatre as a medium to expand Consciousness with the effect of the practice from the audience's point of view.

Chapter 3: Create the space for Enlightenment

Using scientific and psychological principles, this chapter gives a practical example of using Archetypes to create an immersive experience that can influence the Unconscious mind.

Conclusion: Love is the answer

The evidence suggested that it could be possible to educate people on the importance of acknowledging emotions and how they function in life using Psychomagic Theatre to prevent mental health crises.

Fig.1 : Svachchanda Bhairava, Rajasthan, India , c. 1850-1875.



“Drama is like a dream, it's not real but it is really felt”

(R.Abhinavagupta & R. Gnoli, 2017)

Introduction: The Absurdity of Life

This dissertation explores the possibility of creating a theatrical approach that can bring the audience on an emotional journey where states of unconscious feelings are open, allowing self-reflection of inner reality. This research aims to look at the possibility of preventing mental health crises by educating people on emotional meanings that talk directly to the Unconscious mind. In the mid-1940s, a new philosophical movement was enquiring about the purpose of life. In the view of Existentialism, the way we live life is meaningless, and the world is illogical and doesn't have any higher meaning.

The Philosopher Albert Camus wrote:

'There is only one serious philosophical question, and that is suicide.'

(Della, 1989)

Camus viewed the question of suicide as arising naturally as a solution to the absurdity of life. A paradox shaped a new form of drama: The Theatre of the Absurd. In this Theatre style, the plays focus primarily on ideas of Existentialism and express what happens when human existence lacks meaning or purpose and communication breaks down. The narrative structure is typically a round shape, with the finishing point the same as the starting point. Critic Martin Esslin coined the term in his 1960 essay *The Theatre of the Absurd*, which begins by focusing on the playwrights Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, and Eugène Ionesco. Esslin says their plays have a common denominator — the Absurd (Esslin, 2014).

According to the Psychologist Carl G. Jung, when Artists create work, they intuitively investigate unresolved questions held within the Self. In Jung's vision using archetypal images in Arts, it is an action taken by the Unconscious mind who desires to heal itself. Through symbolic meanings assigned to feelings, the Unconscious creates a process to revisit those conflicts held into the deeper state of the Self. Creating symbolic meaning means spontaneously connecting the Unconscious with Consciousness in a creative process that follow on a natural flow—Art functions in the same way as dreams. Art is an active meditative process that tunes the Artist with higher sources of Consciousness that can be reached through emotions, a process part of the survival instinct tool kit that Mother Nature gave to us alongside the burden of awareness (Jung et al., 2013). Existentialism was born amongst the two world wars, and it could be suggested that the absurdity of that time put humanity in a sense of despair. The Theatre of the Absurd gave voice to those

feelings and ideas, creating the possibility for collective healing. The symbolism used in the plays tells stories behind the logical definition of intellect but talks to an emotional dimension of Consciousness, like dreams. The audience wonders about reality's meaning in narratives that don't fulfil everyday logic. Still, the experience can be emotionally understood and help to reach new awareness (Biswas, 2020).

Antonin Artaud, in his book *The Theatre and its double*, says :

'To practise Art is to deprive a gesture of its reverberations throughout the anatomy, whereas these reverberations if the gesture is made in the conditions and with force required, impels the anatomy and, through it, the whole personality to adopt attitudes that correspond to that gesture.'

(Artaud, 1993)

Artaud suffered from mental health issues and spent a long time in psychiatric hospitals. He was aware of his conditions but wasn't mindful of the possibility of using Theatre's beneficial effects on his well-being. He followed the knowledge on Psychology available in his time without knowing that his intuition could have been applied differently and played an essential part in his mental illness (Esslin, 1999).

Suppose we follow the structure of the Psyche according to Jungian psychology. In that case, we can recognise how in Artaud's work, characters and the narrative are constructed to express those internal conflicts that couldn't be liberated intellectually. Archetypal figures give us a strong feeling of his struggle. For example, in Artaud's 1925 play *Jet of Blood*, a female figure delivers scorpions from her genitals as a symbolic battle of an unconscious wound concerning motherhood or possibly his femininity. Being part of a misogynistic society, there is the probability that he was internally fighting all those feminine feelings and characteristics that usually were allowed just to women and forbidden to men, but typically characteristic very vivid in male Artists. His vision was a natural response to his inner reality. The need for a violent message became the centre stage of his mindset (Artaud, 1993). There is an emotional truth in the human condition that dictates most of our lives and how we perceive ourselves. We can analyse other options related to the Artaud case, and thousands of possibilities can be shaped, but just Artaud could have known what it meant for him. In his experience of what meant for him to be himself (Esslin, 1999). Alexander Lowen' was a Psychologist who developed a therapeutic approach called Bioenergy Psychotherapy. Based on the concept that people experience the world through their thoughts and emotions and simultaneously through their bodies, he understood that the human mind has an unresolved depth that, through the intellect alone, will never be

fully resolved. The intellectual mind will never fully satisfy the need for complete internal healing. In some psychological practises, we can see how the focus on analysis takes the patient into a long and intense process but never reaches an end. According to Lowen, analysis is a process that doesn't involve the body, and traumas are trapped in the muscle memory. To liberate the Unconscious mind, the body has to discharge the emotional energy with symbolic acts or precise movements that will re-train the muscle on healthy and functioning feelings (Lowen, 1993).

As Artaud writes in his book, there is a point where words become empty, and the only way to get that physical awareness it's through gestures. Theatre is a suitable space for this transformative process. Artaud was rising from the Unconscious, the conflicts within himself in his work. Unfortunately, he never found that peaceful ecstatic sense that gives natural joy to life (Artaud, 1993).



Fig.2: *Seans: hommage á Antonin Artaud*, Percival, 1977.

Chapter 1: The Path of Theatrical Enlightenment

This chapter will explore how Theatre can be a medium to enhance perception and spiritual research alongside entertainment purposes. The central question is about looking at the possibility of entering the Unconscious mind for psychological healing. In the book, *Two views of mind: Abhidharma and brain science*, Christopher Decharms explains how the brain is commonly believed to be the centre of the human mind and plays a central role in awareness. However, neuroscientists are looking into this concept and rediscovering what Yogis and Chinese Medicine seem to have known for centuries. The Unconscious mind structure is into the nervous system: our body is the container of a large part of the Psyche. A newborn child doesn't have any cognitive form; initially, it functions just using the nervous system and responding to the evolutionary memory that gave us the shape we take. The Frontal Cortex, the part of the brain containing cognitive features, develops and finalises its structure around twenty-five years old with time. The logics that children follow in their development are primarily emotional, and just lately in life, slowly began to gain awareness and other cognitive characteristics. The emotional truths learned in the early stage of life become the blueprint of surviving. Of course, life is complex, and things change when we grow up. Life requires individuals to challenge themselves through the entire journey. Certain events can hold back emotions into the body, that is, the temple of the Unconscious mind. If the memory is 'traumatic', the Unconscious will repeat itself to solve the pain creating a pattern of behaviour that will not let the subject grow and walk through the journey of living joyfully and peacefully until resolved; this is what the Hindus call Karma (R. Christopher Decharms et al., 1993).

Eric Berne was a Psychiatrist who created the theory of Transactional Analysis to explain human behaviour. In his book, *'Games people play'*, he illustrates how the emotional dimension plays a central role in people's development and dictates people's behaviour. According to this Psychology approach, people create internal masks to act in life. Suppose a child learns to be aware of what emotions are taking place within themselves. In that case, they will function peacefully and build healthy relationships as they know their state of mind and reality. If this doesn't happen, their emotional state will stop developing, and their perception of reality will be stuck in an emotional pattern connected with the time that traumatised the subject. To progress further in emotional development, a person has to come to terms with wherever emotion doesn't let them move on from the trauma and accept the emotional truth connected to the event that traumatised them. Then new

emotional logic will form, and a new meaning for the symbols that triggered the memory that traumatised the subject will become the new reality, enabling them to change their inner perception of themselves and build healthy relationships (Berne, 1964).

Psychology approaches suggest that the human mind has acting skills as an essential function. According to Jung, the need for an identity, also known as Ego, develops naturally into the human mind; the Ego is an actor of the Self (Jung et al.,2013). Some religious traditions worldwide are aware of the opportunity behind the aesthetics, and spiritual seekers are using Arts to follow the path of self-discovery. Zen Artists are not interested in a photographic representation of an object but in interpreting its symbolic meaning. The Zen Artist tries to suggest by the most straightforward possible means the inherent nature of the aesthetic object. The basic premise is that the highest truth, the first principle, or Tao, is not expressed in words but intuitively understood. Anything that may be painted or communicated in poetry, or any sounds that may become music, can reach a higher state of Consciousness. Nature is the main subject of Zen Art, and the job of the Artist is to suggest the essence and the eternal qualities of it. Art isn't studied for Art's sake but for spiritual Enlightenment (C. Alexander Simpkins, 2012).

Another interesting example is the symbolism used in dance gestures in India. Dance gestures, called Mudra, have developed from a simple representative system to a highly abstract linguistic symbolism that can express non-physical states of being.

Abhinavagupta (c. 950 – 1016 CE) was a philosopher, mystic and aesthician from Kashmir. He was also considered an influential musician, poet and dramatist - a polymathic personality who exercised strong influences on Indian culture. In his vision, Art and drama are vehicles to enhance perception. In his book *Tantraloke* he says about using Theatre to reach Enlightenment:

'The Self is an actor, the subtle body is the stage, and the sense organs are the spectators. As the commentaries further explain, the Self is identical to the godhead or consciousness, who enacts a play called the phenomenal world.'

(R.Abhinavagupta & R. Gnoli, 2017)

According to Yogi tradition, the four dimensions of the mind are Intellect, Identity, Memory and Consciousness. We build our sense of reality through these dimensions and shape meanings of ourselves. Existence is observed through the lenses of who we are. We see the world according to our sense and experience of it. The challenge of transcending is a balance found between these four dimensions. The emotional script is built according to

our memories, specifically during childhood when the cognitive mind doesn't fully develop the intellectual sense. The memories stored in our body fix the identity, and to break through, we have to experience through our understanding to be aware and free from negative Karma (R.Abhinavagupta & R. Gnoli, 2017).

Alejandro Jodorowsky is a contemporary example of the use of Theatre for psychological healing. Inspired by shamanic practice, the Theatre and Film Director works to liberate the Unconscious mind from traumas. In his book *Manual of Psychomagic : the practice of shamanic psychotherapy*, he says that the Unconscious mind can be released if fully satisfied. Achieving satisfaction means expressing those trapped feelings and receiving a constructive symbolic response to those unresolved questions in action. Like in Shamans rituals, symbolic objects are used to heal the soul and liberate people from unwanted spirits—a theatrical set to manifest subtle feelings in a surreal shape—making sense where there is no sense. The illogical became the reality of emotional truth. This inner truth belongs to the Director, who, in the attempt to heal his soul, leaves the audience witnessing and contemporary resonating in a personal internal narrative, believing that it will resonate in the world around him if he heals within. In his approach, Jodorowsky combines knowledge of Psychology with his strong desire to solve his family karma and leave a legacy for future generations. He was part of the Surrealist movement, got a degree in Psychology and learned how to assist a Shaman. He applied all the knowledge acquired from these experiences to his films (Jodorowsky, 2015).

It can be suggested that the symbolic meaning connected to the expressive forms of Theatre allows viewers to unconsciously mirror themselves through the narratives presented, enabling them to witness emotional logic to comprehend themselves from a new perspective. Through the abstract shapes, the hidden gestures and the unexplained verbal communication, the audience discover new ways of feeling through, form ideas and connections to function, individually and collectively. The emotional truths presented in Theatre talk to an understanding of reality that, like in Alexander Lowen theory, is held in the body's muscle memory. It seems possible to enter the Unconscious mind like Zen Artists, where the ultimate truth can be discovered through a symbolic gesture.

Chapter 2: Wu Wei means non-doing or 'doing nothing'

The easy connection we make when discussing psychological healing and Theatre is Psychodrama. Psychodrama is a psychotherapy approach in which people use dramatisation and role-playing. In a Psychodrama session, one person of the group becomes the protagonist and focuses on a particular, personal, emotionally problematic situation to enact on stage. Used in clinical and community-based settings, other group members are the audience and become therapeutic agents to populate the scenes (Baim, 2007). Although Psychodrama seems to require the audience to be somehow actively involved in the action, in the previous chapter, we look at some spiritual approaches that allow people to gain awareness without breaking the fourth wall. One of Zen Taoism's most important concepts is Wu Wei, which is translated as "non-doing" or "non-action." It refers to the state of being in which actions are effortlessly in alignment with the flow of the elemental cycles of the natural world. It means "going with the flow" (C. Alexander Simpkins, 2012).

With these concepts in mind, the question arises: can we start imagining the possibility of using drama for psychological healing just from the audience point of view? Theatre Director Peter Brook, in his book *The Empty Space* - 2008 , says:

'I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space while someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of Theatre to be engaged.'

(Brook, 2008)

Immersive Theatre differentiates itself from traditional Theatre by removing the stage and immersing audiences in the performance itself. Passionate about Immersive Theatre, Peter Brook emphasises the space's critical role and how silent gestures can be compelling into the narrative. With Immersive Theatre, the audience becomes a fully integrated part of the story, and the perception of the narrative may penetrate further into their experience (Brook, 2008).

The Hypnotic Cinema is a unique experiment with three exclusive screenings. In February 2022, at the Gothenburg Film Festival in Sweden, without breaking the fourth wall, they explored the boundary between Conscious and Unconscious using cinema as a medium to penetrate the mind. Before the film started, a hypnotist performed mass hypnosis that should have transformed the audience's state of mind following the mood and theme of the

specific film. The selected films were all suggestive, and in different ways, they should have brought the audience on an emotional journey where other states of consciousness are explored. Unfortunately, the results are not yet available. Still, it is interesting to see how communicating with the Unconscious mind is becoming more and more a tangible possibility for contemporary Artists (Goteborg Film Festival, 2022). Alejandro Jodorowsky claims that he talks the language of the Unconscious in his films. Using Archetypes in symbolic gestures, his narrative aims on responding to the Unconscious mind needs and the intention is to liberate him from frustrating and damaging feelings. The absurdity witnessed in his work directly talks to the subtle energy connected with the archetypal emotional truths within the human experience. The use of symbols and the absurdity of the visual language should leave the audience on a subconscious active perception of the dynamic reality witness. Without acting into the drama, the audience should gain the possibility of enhancing perception and personal thinking. However, in his Psychomagic practice, Jodorowsky uses Psychodrama to enact the traumas, which seems to be the most effective process for people (Jodorowsky, 2015).



Fig.3: *The Holy Mountain* (Film poster), A.Jodorowsky, 1977.

Chapter 3: Create the space for Enlightenment

The immersive experience of Theatre is a fully engaged practice that requires the audience to be present with all the senses. It is a body experience that fully absorbs the narrative in all aspects of humanity. We know how different Arts can have a direct physical impact on the brain. We have already analysed the therapeutic effect of acting drama, but how can we use this knowledge to create a functional space that allows psychological healing?

In his book, Alejandro Jodorowsky, talking about the use of images to create a response in the Unconscious mind, says:

'What I am trying to do when I use symbols is awaken some reaction in the Unconscious. I am very conscious of what I am using because symbols can be very dangerous. When we use ordinary language, we can defend ourselves because our society is a linguistic society, a semantic society. But when you start to speak, not with words, but only with images, the people cannot defend themselves.'

(Jodorowsky, 2015)

In the book *Zen Meditation in psychotherapy: techniques for clinical practice*, Alexander Simpkins explains that in the earliest traditions of Zen, there was no fixed method or formula for teaching meditation, and all instructions pointed to the true nature of the mind, also known as *Buddha-Nature*. The Flower Sermon is a story of the origin of Zen Buddhism in which Gautama Buddha transmits direct wisdom to the disciple Mahākāśyapa. In the story, the Buddha gives a wordless sermon to his disciples by holding up a white flower. No audience understands the Flower Sermon except Mahākāśyapa, who smiles. Mahākāśyapa was one of the principal disciples of Gautama Buddha, considered to be the first patriarch in many early Buddhist schools and continued to have an essential role as patriarch in Zen traditions (Alexander Simpkins, 2012).

To begin the process, it may be helpful to explore Archetypes and how they function to create a narrative that talks to a group of people. In Jungian psychology, an Archetype is a collectively-inherited unconscious idea, a pattern of thought or an image universally present itself in symbolic meanings. We must investigate the common symbols shared amongst the culture. For example, if we take the Devil's Archetype, an idea immediately forms in our head, representing evil. In western culture, we usually picture the Devil as an evil spirit, with horns surrounded by fire and red light, and the emotions attached to this

Archetype are fear, anger, guilt, and disgust. Sexuality is strongly affected by this idea, as western religious Institutions have been punishing sexual impulses, using this Archetype as a threat for certain behaviours. The Devil takes full charge for the wrong. At a first impression, the Devil seems to embrace all the forbidden, of what humanity is reluctant to accept about themselves. However, if we take a step back, we can quickly realise that the world is about actions and consequences, and the idea of evil and good is an immature vision of existence (Jung et al., 2013).

It could be suggested that the first emotional reaction to this Archetype is an imprinted idea that doesn't consider what the Devil can represent in reality. People's experience of this image doesn't allow the viewer to take ownership of personal empowerment and responsibilities. In Jungian psychology, the Devil represents the Shadow. The Shadow is an unconscious aspect of the personality that the conscious Ego does not identify. It is essential for the individuation process learning to accept the Shadow as part of the Self. With the total acceptance of these aspects of the personality, the individual can allow the Individuation process to progress and make peace within the Self (Jung et al., 2013). The narrative around the Devil is subject to the context observed. In *Paradise Lost* by the 17th-century English poet John Milton (1608–1674), Lucifer is portrayed as a rebel against the tyranny of the monopoly of God (Milton, 1667). Many have used *Paradise Lost* as a metaphor for their time. Milton scholar John Leonard interpreted the epic poem as a metaphor for civil war:

'Paradise Lost is, among other things, a poem about civil war. The term 'impious war' implies that civil war is impious. Satan raises 'impious war in Heaven' by leading a third of the angels in revolt against God. Milton applauded the English people for having the courage to depose and execute King Charles I.'

(Milton and Leonard, 2016)

As we can see, the narrative around an Archetype can be shaped and transformed according to its context and meaning. In an immersive experience, the shape of the Archetype would open a direct connection of the personal sense. To change the emotional truth attached to that image, an impersonification of the Archetype may shake the Unconscious mind in what it knows about it. The possibility to experience what has been feared could change the emotional truth of this Archetype. Every aspect of the Archetype seems to have a meaningful connotation; however, the person witnessing the images has to find the emotional truth that will bring a new conscious meaning to it.

The Theatre setting and environment can play an essential role in allowing the healing process to occur, as, in space, other unconscious elements can be placed to influence the mind. Studies concerning the effect of light and music on the brain suggest that these effects can be used strategically to influence the process.

Light therapy—or Phototherapy, is a method recognised by scientific medicine to treat various diseases. It includes exposure to outdoor daylight or specific indoor artificial light sources. It is popularly used in Northern European countries to care for patients with depression as they are exposed to long winters, and the lack of natural light creates emotional dysfunction. Chrome Therapists claim to be able to use light in the form of colour to balance energy lacking from a person's body, whether on physical, emotional, spiritual, or mental levels (M. Shafii and S. Lee Shafii, 1990). Cymatics is the study of wave phenomena and their visual representations. In Cymatics, it is proved how the vibration of sound can actively influence the shape of physical form. If sand is placed in a copper plate, the vibration of certain sounds can reposition the sand on the plate creating a geometrical pattern that changes with the change of the sound. Cymatics is also a therapy in which sound waves are directed at the body with the aim of promoting health (Jenny, 2007). A study by the University of Leicester found that slow music can mitigate stress in cows and increase the amount of milk they produce by 3%, with anecdotal evidence from several dairy corporations (Hooton, 2014).

These scientific principles suggest that there is a physicality in the vibration of light and colour that communicate directly to the Unconscious mind without cognitive analysis. In Yogi culture, the root chakra is visualised with red light. It is the chakra connected with creativity and sexual energy. In our example, the red light that usually characterises the Devil image also symbolises sexuality. On an Unconscious level, the body recognises this colour intuitively as sexual energy. Using the correct vibrations of light and music, it may be possible to stimulate into the body a vibration that will shake the muscle memory attached to the emotional experience. If the conditions are right, the Unconscious of the audience can be open to receiving a new narrative that may allow them to re-experience the topic that creates unbalance in their life. The difference with the hypnosis technique is that this kind of Psychomagic Theatre doesn't want to enter people's unconscious minds but creates the conditions for people to allow themselves to reach a better state of awareness.

Conclusion: Love is the answer

The Theatre of the Absurd wanted to show humans' unresolved paradox within themselves. The emotional logic attached to the narrative created was an attempt by the Absurdist Playwrights to highlight the emotional state of mind that doesn't always follow the clear vision of analytical thinking. This dissertation explored how the Psychomagic Theatre, in its physical experience, can open possibilities to make sense of those paradoxes, as taking advantage of absurd narrative allows the Unconscious mind to be immersed in emotional logic. This research suggests that it may be possible to reprogram the Unconscious mind and allow people to expand their vision of reality. It can mean naturally finding a way to overcome the personal challenge without critically analysing, as the story talks to traumas trapped in the body in its unconscious state. The idea is that using this type of visual narrative will go with the flow and let go of what it is not needed to function, allowing the person to develop and live peacefully (Jodorowsky, 2015).

In 2020, 4912 suicides were registered in England, and the number of cases for mental health issues is exponentially rising, especially with the impact of the Covid pandemic (Samaritans, 2020). The intrusion of technology in our lifestyle negatively affects many people, especially amongst youth. Never before have we been overwhelmed by information and knowledge. The experience of this new lifestyle that is all filtered by screens, and we are not physically experiencing our reality anymore. Our life behind a screen is not a complete human experience; we imagine living without experiencing life in the body, which doesn't let us taste the real meaning of life. As much as the use of technology is helping us to progress in the way we communicate with each other, its abuse is creating a detachment from the person and an emotional experience of living (Philo and Glasgow University Media Group 1996). Suddenly, the absurdist's paradoxes staging last century are becoming the new normal, taking humanity questioning the meaning of life once again.

The need to look further into what life means is becoming an absurd consequence of an economic and political system that blind itself in the name of exponential growth that doesn't take any progressive steps into our societies, into humanity (Azhar, 2021). As evidenced in this discussion, Psychomagic Theatre can open the possibility of changing the inner vision that affects thinking and exploring feelings in a Zen sense. A gesture may help to rediscover what life means on a deeper understanding. It could be possible to

educate future generations on the importance of knowing emotions and how they function in life and in our relationships. I would argue that the importance of experiencing and being aware in our body of the emotional vibration is a necessary fundamental journey that we have to take if we want to avoid a Mental health pandemic. I aim to create a Psychomagic Theatre to promote Emotional Education. Without emotions, without real experiences in the body, healthy relationships, healthy food, air and water, and Nature at the basis of who we are, there is no future.

Love is the answer.

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Fig.1: Rajasthan, *Svacchanda Bhairava* , c. 1850-1875, India

Fig.2: Percival, *Seans: homage á Antonin Artaud*, 1977, Sweden

Fig.3: Jodorowsky A., *The Holy Mountain*, 1977, Mexico