

## **‘The Story’**

### **An historial account of my path to the idea of ‘Magister Ludi, the Master of Play’ by Francis Batten**

**This article is an extract from the thesis Francis has written for his qualification as a psychodrama director. He finished the thesis earlier this year (1992) after gathering material over a ten year period. This longer process has therefore influenced the content of the project, making it a highly personal expression of his integration of a number of experiences over time. The paper has developed into a well researched subject through his sustained and dedicated focus within the one subject area.**

**This portion of the thesis was selected because it reveals something of Francis’ ongoing journey over several years. Through the reading, we may be assisted to realise or re-realise the strength and power that can be inherent in gradually and steadfastly working to achieve long term goals.**

**The complete thesis is available for reading. The overall focus of the thesis is on a role profile of the ‘Magister Ludi/Playwright’ and its application in the areas of Creativity and Spontaneity Training, and additional professional areas, such as in organisations as the role of the Creative Manager, the Strategic Leader, and within Playback Theatre as the Conductor.**

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#### **The story.**

I am born on January 12th, in England into a family of sea-farers who have ably served a disappearing society. January 1940 is a limbo time that is neither peace nor war – the “phoney war”. I am thus a member of no recognisable generation, neither pre-war, war-baby, or baby-boomer; and am to be educated to play roles in a conserved culture that only

persists in nostalgic illusions of an Empire that no longer exists.

There are positives and negatives to such a liminal birthday. The positive of being born into such a noticeable unreality is that I will have to create my own roles and place to play, perhaps it will also be easier to see the world as a Play and not to swallow hand-me-down realities. The shadow of this will be a nagging sense of anxiety and nomadic rest-

lessness of identity. These are some of the base metals I need to learn how to turn into gold.

So later I become actively interested in the role of co-creator of my life's story. I say co-creator because I move towards consciously wishing to match the needs of my private world with those of the social world in a positive way. My circumstance and environment also influence and co-author my story with me. Within them I will try to create suitable places, and to find appropriate people (auxiliaries) with whom to enact the roles that satisfy my being and the growing of my story.

We are all similarly engaged in our own great Plays, trying to play right, and playwright our own story.

The director or conductor of this play and the intermediary between its various elements I later come to call the Magister Ludi, the Master of Play.

But in my trapped teens in the stagnant 50's in England I become fascinated with the theatre and film. It is like smelling exotic flowers. Exotic because it brings me to the boundaries of gardens no-one has told me of; gardens that I sense but do not yet know how to unlock the latch and enter. These scents are the tantalising and compelling perfumes that intimate alternative worlds beyond those staked out by my native espalier.

I read Plays avidly. Even written they are fresh and exciting; no analysis, no explanations; just the names of the characters and what they say. So much is inferred as relationships are fleshed in the imagination, a bare skeleton upon which muscle and movement is imagined.

Later on I will attempt to "act" by repeating the "lines" laid down by someone else, for someone else, and will find the experience unsatisfying.

My entry point into drama will not to be through the 'conserve', or via the written word, but through moving and making.

Time passes and it is 1959. I am nineteen and Harold MacMillan has been winning elections by telling the English they have "never had it so good". It does not feel right. I try wearing a duffle coat, being an 'existentialist', and marching for unilateral disarmament, but it is not my Play. I want to find another play and alternative identities, so I exit this stage to hitch-hike around the world and look for another.

I lose my passport in Iran; learn I need to rename myself in one syllable in timber mills in Western Australia; and at University in New Zealand discover I am not the fool I had been taught I was at school.

In the early 60's I make alternative starts at being a writer, painter, potter or sculptor; the paths of art historian or an anthropologist also flicker briefly in the firelight. For a while I become a school teacher, but that is not my right play-ground – there is too painful a rift between the educational ideal and the social reality.

The start of the next Act is triggered by seeing the film "Les Enfants du Paradis" (The Children of the Gods). This is a film about Gaspar Debureau, the famous 19th Century Czech Mime. Debureau lived life passionately and as an artist succeeded in translating both the figures of his private life and the public events of his times directly onto the stage in a way that touched so many of his contemporaries from all walks of life. The film contrasts his life to that of his friend and rival, who performed the 'great' literary theatre for 'educated' audiences.

The lead part is played by Jean-Louis Barrault, another man with a poetic spirit, a deep passion for life.

And a loving intelligence. He too believes that the people of the streets are the 'children of the gods', and sees their concerns as of the highest value. "The Gods" is also theatre parlance for the cheapest seats, where the roughest, poorest and least well-behaved used to sit. The seats are the 'highest' in the theatre. This revolutionary licence for the theatre to set things upside down, is one of its strongest attractions for me. That is to say the theatre as a laboratory in which to experiment with alternative realities and explore new worlds.

The theme of the film also embodies elements of immediacy, spontaneity and physicality that inspire me; and especially a belief that theatre is about love of life, empowerment and that it is for everyone.

Both through his theatre work and through his writings on the theatre Barrault is to become one of my inspirers.

And the Mime fascinates me. As a result of seeing Barrault in this film I start to explore and experiment with Mime. I discover I have a gift for it, and I take this doorway into new and wordless worlds of experience and imagination. I also enjoy the disciplines of Mime, a mime needs to look very closely at what is really happening; only then can he or she create the illusions that create a reality.

So it is 1967 and I move on from teaching to explore theatre and the languages of gesture and action. Within a short time I am touring New

Zealand as a solo Mime artist. Soon after that I am studying theatre in the student ferment of Paris 1969, at the Lecoq School.

### **Ecole Jaques Lecoq, Paris.**

1969 and Jacques Lecoq, bless his foxy heart, is usefully ruthless.



FRANCIS BATTEN (right)

For him Mime is not aping the anecdotes of Marcel Marceau but a route to the heart of experience and expression. He writes of his own teaching:

*"Often people ask me, 'What is it you do in your school, is it mime?' I always feel that the one who asks the question limits the school to wordless formalism. The word "mime" already is restricting. One sees a performer who does not speak and who makes stylized gestures to show imaginary objects, or makes faces to have you understand that he laughs or cries. Then I answer that I don't do mime, not that kind. For me, the mime to be learned at the school is at the root of all man's expressions, whether gestural, constructed, modelled, sonorous, written, or spoken. That mime*

*which I call fundamental is the greatest school of the theatre; it is based on movement. It is in the gesture behind the gesture, in the gesture behind the word, in the movement of material objects, in sounds, colours, and lights, that the school finds its origins. Man understands that which moves by his ability to "mimic" it; that is, to identify himself with the world by re-enacting it with his entire being. Beginning in the silent body of man the impulses toward expression take shape – dramatic impulse and then dramatic creation. The fire that I look at blazes within me. I can know that fire by identifying with it in action; I give my fire to that fire. The impressions of the body give life to words. But if, when the words leave the body they wander about, comfortably defined, they then harden and die, bearing only emptiness. Therefore our approach begins with the body."*

"Everything moves" Lecoq says; and he teaches me to look for the truth and essence of that movement, be it act or emotion; be it within me, in another, or in nature. How does it stir? "See it as it is", unbarnacled by conventional emblems of meaning. Role reverse and invent new signs to communicate the truth of the other. "The cry searches for its sign".

Lecoq's unerring eye for falsity develops the aesthetic sense in all of us, nothing to do with moral or with rational rights and wrongs. Is what you sense in front of you, or in you, at this very moment truth or sham?

"Un arbre c'est un arbre" is all he has to say one day in class after someone has striven mightily to manufacture a beautified reality. "What's he mean, What's he mean?" presses an Englishman beside me

wanting a translation. "A tree is a tree" I translate rapidly; but it will take me much longer to come to know it; and live it myself.

By 'chance' in a break as I write this I come across a quotation from Herman Hesse in a tree calendar that captures some of the essential simplicity Lecoq taught us to seek out and create.

*"For me, trees have always been the most penetrating teachers. I revere them when they live in tribes and families, in forests and groves. And even more I revere them when they stand alone. They are like lonely persons. Not like hermits who have stolen away out of some weakness, but like great solitary (people), like Beethoven and Nietzsche. In their highest boughs the world nestles; their roots rest in infinity, but they do not loose themselves there; they struggle with all the force of their lives for one thing only; to fulfil themselves according to their own laws; to build up their own form; to represent themselves"*

Herman Hesse. "Wanderings"  
Trees for Life Calendar July '89

## **'Theatre Action', New Zealand.**

In 1971 I return to New Zealand to found The Theatre Action troupe. Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brooke and a dream of "total theatre" are my catalysts. Grotowsky in "Towards a Poor Theatre" wrote of an untrapped theatre of truth with the actor as shaman; in fact at this time Grotowski is already leaving the theatre for para-theatrical rituals and journeys into 'Self' taking place in the Polish forests. Peter Brooke dreams the new Shakespearian dream of finding a universal dramatic language that will be understood by everyone, every-

where. He and his troupe journey and experiment in France, Iran and Africa. Both Brooke and Grotowski work to escape conserved formalism, and to find immediacy, connection and transformation.



In the Theatre Action group we do whatever we need to do, and by whatever means, style or art-form to reach our audience; and we take our theatre to them where they are, be that in the theatre or street, shopping mall or bar. Twenty years later it will all sound normal enough but in 1971 there is an incredulous look on the face of the Director of the Mercury Theatre in Auckland when I suggest his actors might perform in the new St. Lukes Centre Shopping Mall.

We use the richness of collective creation and research improvisation to develop our own finished works. Sometimes we touch it. Ironically our last performance given at the 'Sonic Circus' in Wellington 1975 is such a moment. It is a strange and surrealistic piece, but audience and performers understand each other in this moment. The piece becomes the vehicle for another order of event: a combustible moment of communion and ecstatic jubilation.

We come together.

A moment dreamed of, remembered and waited for through the days spent rehearsing in blackened theatres, planning, writing, arguing, travelling.

But such fragmentary glimpses do not answer the driving questions I have about why I feel drama to be so central to human health and wholeness, and yet current 'mainstream' theatre is so marginal to contemporary society.

Where was Debureau's market place?

Was I looking for it in too literal a way?

I have come to know there were other needs also I sought to satisfy in the theatre. The attraction of the Theatre as a place of escape and licence for example; or as a place in which to express, to create, to be heard; or in which to be idolised and applauded. But even massive doses of applause from many hundreds at 10.30 in the evening does not leave me feeling satisfyingly loved for very long, or answer the question;

why am I here and what am I doing?

That kind of play on that kind of stage never really played-right.

Around this time, 1977, my friend Deborah Pearson tells me about Psychodrama. I overcome my political prejudices about the cost and go to my first Psychodrama workshop which is run by Max Clayton.

I come to respect and love this earnestly stooped, shuffling, idiosyncratic and powerful man; and the power of the method he is to teach me as I move onto my next stage.

This first workshop is a challenge, not that every one since will not be also, but here in front of my nose and in contemporary form is much of what I had been striving for: a popular, profound and participatory drama.

Here is Debureau's market place.

People of different walks of life, ages and cultures meet, and give, and haggle, and love, and harangue, and trade roles.

We swap our stories and we play

a hundred roles within them; we change, and grow and transform ourselves.

We understand ourselves more fully.

We feel less alone as we share our stories and take 'part' and take heart in each other.

I have insight, I am moved, I am changed. I see others change in ways that I know are essential and possible in the theatre but have so rarely experienced.

Here it is.

It is risky and play-full.

### **Jacob Levy Moreno.**

Thus through Psychodrama I encounter its founder J.L. Moreno, (born 1889, died 1974). He was a physician and dramatist. Psychodrama originally emerged from his passion for the possibilities of the theatre, in particular his 'Theatre of Spontaneity' (Die Stegrieftheatre), which built on his early theatrical experiments in Vienna including the 'Living Newspaper', (1921 onwards).

It is interesting that almost ten years prior to this, in 1966, I was involved in some 'living theatre' performances at the Mercury Theatre in Auckland. I think at the time we thought we had invented it ourselves. Anyway it was part of my intensifying search for physical, improvisational theatre; a theatre not of texts but actions; a theatre of the instant that had an immediate relevance to the real life concerns of the audience. So it is exciting at this point in 1975 to discover Moreno as I read his works and experience his philosophy-in-action.

Like children's play the basic design of Psychodrama is beautifully simple: people take parts in a group ritual in which they enact their own story in the group. They and other members of the group themselves

play all the required roles. By swapping, or reversing, roles new perspectives on old situations may be obtained and new solutions can be tried out. The implications are far reaching. I let Moreno speak for himself:

*"The playwright of the conventional drama is, in this scheme, replaced by a more complicated mechanism. The community in which the subjects live – they may be mental patients or normal people – it is explored, and by direct interviews or other means the dominating ideologies, emotions, or illusions of the community are determined. The more thorough this preliminary investigation is, the better. In addition, many of the subjects may have been able to supply pertinent material about themselves. All this material is then studied carefully by the auxiliary egos, and the design of one or more psychodramas is worked out. These psychodramas are so constructed that they may reach the depth levels of as large a portion of the subjects as possible. They may even be assisted in this process by some of the subjects themselves. ... The actors of the conventional drama are replaced for this psychodrama by auxiliary egos ...*

*In contradistinction to the conventional theatre, the spectators of this psychodrama are then witnessing a performance which is expressly intended to relate (and which, in fact, does relate) to their specific individual problems. The reactions of the spectators during and immediately following the performance can be made the basis for individual psychodramatic treatments. Thus is Aristotle's concept of catharsis*

brought to its rightful, logical culmination.

*The therapeutic aspect of psychodrama cannot be divorced from the aesthetic aspect, nor ultimately, from its ethical character. What the aesthetic drama has done for deities like Dionysius, Brahma, and Jehovah, and for representative characters like Hamlet, Macbeth, or Oedipus, the psychodrama can do for every man. In the therapeutic theatre an anonymous, average man becomes something approaching a work of art – not only for others but for himself. A tiny, insignificant existence is here elevated to a level of dignity and respect. Its private problems are projected onto a high plane of action before a special public. ... The world in which we all live is imperfect, unjust, and amoral, but in the therapeutic theatre a little person can rise above our everyday world. Here his ego becomes an aesthetic prototype – he becomes representative of mankind. On the psychodramatic stage he is put into a state of inspiration – he is the dramatist himself ...*<sup>1</sup>

The gauntlet that Moreno throws down to traditional theatre is that with its emphasis on rehearsal, expertise and perfection it worships an aesthetic of the morgue. It can be made up to look beautiful but it is dead.

In the traditional theatre the work of the Playwright is seen in its completed form, not in the process that lead up to its creation. The recreation of past spontaneity and creativity pre-empt the vitality of the “here and

now”. The actors are subservient to a script which they had no part in creating. (In film they are even required to act fragments out of sequence).

Audience members assume the role of passive consumers of the knowledge, beauty or entertainment doled out to them by inimitable experts, whom they are encouraged to idolise. The product may be magnificent but it is by definition “finished”.

Moreno proclaims that this kind of theatre overlooks the *status nascendi* – the birth process of an idea, a feeling or an event. This is what is important. Moreno’s Theatre of Spontaneity gives primacy to the essential vitality of the creative process:

*“It is exactly at this point that our theory of spontaneous creativity is able to take a stand against what Beethoven, himself, did – and probably was trying to do. If we imagine a Beethoven who would remain permanently in that initial creative state – and would not allow that state to weaken – and who would refuse to give birth to musical conserves, a Beethoven, however, who would be just as determined as ever in his efforts to create new musical worlds, then we can grasp the true meaning of pure spontaneous creativity in other spheres – dramatic, cultural and religious.*

*Man has created a world of things, cultural conserves, in order to produce for himself a semblance of God. When man found himself failing in his struggle for maximum creativity,*

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<sup>1</sup> From *Mental Catharsis and the Psychodrama, Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama & Sociometry* 28 (1975), p. 32. Other versions appear in *Sociometry* 3 (1940), *Psychodrama*, Vol.1 (1946); Quoted in *The Essential Moreno*, ed. Jonathan Fox; pp. 58-59.

*he divided from his 'will-to-create' a 'will-to-power' using the latter as a devious means by which alone to achieve the aims of a god. With the eagerness of an eagle which is wounded and unable to fly with its own wings, he grasped the opportunity opened to him by the cultural conserve and machines, with the deification of the crutch as a consequence. The cultural conserve has become, therefore, the expression of a being who has but a limited amount of spontaneity at his command."*<sup>2</sup>

With his Theatre of Spontaneity Moreno began a process of creating an environment that encourages and supports "birth process", the bringing to be of the present. There is no script, but what emerges out of the present moment. There are no professional actors, or passive audience, since all who attend are active participants in the action. All contribute and all are part of the group as it warms up to the spontaneity state that first sets in motion a living drama, then explores its dynamics and arrives at a catharsis of growth and healing. Participants go away not merely with answers, ('conserves' and therefore in danger of obsolescence), but with an enhanced capacity to call upon the spontaneity they will need to meet their own life's dramas as they unfold.

I discover that Moreno has also created a form that can reconcile the needs of society with those of the individual.

In his book the "Theatre of the Oppressed" Augusto Boal argues that Aristotle's concept of tragedy is an instrument of social coercion. This is

because, though it is the tragedy of a great hero, this hero has some fatal flaw that puts him outside a social and moral order, and that order *must* be re-established. We experience tragic pity and fear because we have identified with the protagonist, and yet we watch this inevitable restoration of social order over individual deviance, mistake or failing.

Moreno does not take sides, nor is he only interested in the heroism of kingly heroes. I discover in Moreno someone who creates a theatre in which "anonymous, average man becomes something approaching a work of art" and "a tiny, insignificant existence is here elevated to a level of dignity and respect".

By way of contrast at the other, counter-social, extreme to Aristotle, nearer to our own times and one of the seminal inspirers of men like Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowsky, is Antonin Artaud (1896–1948). He experienced himself as an individual so entombed and suffocated by the mores of bourgeois France that it could only be cut through with a "theatre of cruelty". He saw society as so imaginatively and spiritually moribund that by inversion theatre should be like the plague. Only in the plague-fever remained any vitality.

In his book "The Theatre and its Double" you can find his manifesto on the "Theatre of Cruelty". Cruelty is the closest English word to the French '*cruauté*', which does not mean sadism in this context but rather uncompromising and unflinching reflection of the truth. Cruel because it refused to be flattering. (This is an attribute the Lecoq also had, but without Artaud's fury). Artaud's vision was so raw that he ultimately lost himself in it, and ended his days as an inmate of an

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<sup>2</sup>J.L.Moreno, *Psychodrama*, Vol.1, p.113



asylum rather than a healer.

Up to this time in my life I have tended to play the 'lone wolf' and side against society in this debate. Now Moreno shows me another way.

*Moreno physician and dramaturg finds a healing way for the drama of the individual and the group to be explored. In my experience this interaction between the group and the individual is one of the great struggles of our times and with Psychodrama Moreno creates a form strong enough to hold it.*

Though he has the passionate spontaneity of Artaud, even some of the 'madness', Moreno exhibits compassion rather than Artaud's rage. He is sufficiently anchored in his experience of the connection between God and man, between man and his society to hold these tensions and create a drama for our times. A drama for the 'Children of the Gods'; our drama.

"We don't do the hospital here" Lecoq would say in class dismissively. It worked for him and it worked for me at the time; but not everyone. There was a 75% attrition rate over my two years in Paris. Moreno does "do the hospital here", right now and right here. He pursues the links between drama and healing, and between the individual and society

further.

Moreno physician and dramaturg finds a healing way for the drama of the individual and the group to be explored. In my experience this interaction between the group and the individual is one of the great struggles of our times and with Psychodrama Moreno creates a form strong enough to hold it.

Other things I come to admire in Moreno are; his dynamic view of the world as an interactive system of constantly shifting patterns as we reach out towards, or away from, significant others around us (our social atom); his view of man as a role player; and the primacy he gives to action, to the inter-action of role and counter-role in a dynamic system, to being "engaged" in this encounter with each other, and to being aware of the psychodramatic roles (myth roles) seeking expression within us.

These are his gifts and these are the gifts that excite me as I encounter him at this time.

Above all through Moreno I see Psychodrama as a warm up to a state of spontaneity and as an invitation to self-liberation.

*"But this mad passion, this unfoldment of life in the domain of illusion, does not work like a renewal of suffering. Rather it confirms the rule: every true second time is the liberation from the first. ... One gains towards one's own life, towards all one has done and does, the point of view of the creator. ... The first time brings the second time to laughter."*

(From 'Theatre of Spontaneity', p.91)

## The Wasley Centre, Perth.

It is 1977 and I am in Perth, Western Australia, in a converted church called the Wasley Centre, training to be a Psychodrama Director. Sometimes I wish to bale out, but I keep going because I know training to be a Psychodramatist takes me to boundaries of myself I need to step beyond. It still does, so I still do it.

One of the difficulties in Perth at this time is experiencing a split between the artist and the therapist. I knew this split was in me because it troubled me when I encountered it in others, including my trainers. Sometimes they spoke as though wisdom could not have existed before psychology, or as if the dramatic imagination was paradoxically both powerfully risky and light-weight. (Clinical psychodramatists themselves encounter these same attitudes from academically trained psychologists, as the latter sense themselves at the edges of their 'knowing style').

What then is the connection between theatre and therapy, or perhaps it's more pertinent to ask what are the differences between *theatre* and *therapy* at a practical level; and what are the links between *drama* and *healing* at a core level.

Where is the role of the artist in this?

Amongst Psychodramatists in Australia and New Zealand these attitudes have greatly changed. There now is a much greater awareness and integration of the role of the 'artist' and of artistry in all levels of our living.

By 1979 I have completed the practical requirements for accreditation as a Psychodramatist. In my work I am increasingly involved in linking the areas of Theatre, Education, Therapy and Re-creation.

Though some people trained in these disciplines still behave like mutually suspicious separatists I am heartened by knowing that a growing band of practitioners and colleagues are working to create this middle ground.

So what is it that we could call ourselves?

Landing in a foreign country I still wonder what 'profession' to make on my customs declaration.

Is there a word that is both accurate, and in common usage, that describes what we do?

What is the name for it? What is the role?

In my own story, mediating between the roles of artist and healer, between my private and my social worlds, between creating new worlds and breaking down old ones will have much to do with what I will come to call the role of "Playwright", and later the "Magister Ludi", the Master of the Play.

## The Drama Action Centre, Sydney.

I know that I learn by doing; so with the benefit of ten years hindsight I can now say that I co-created the Drama Action Centre in Sydney to help myself discover the answer to the question, 'what is it that I do?' – by doing it.

The Drama Action Centre is established in Sydney in 1980 to run what becomes a two year course which the first brochure says *"offers a range of training and personal development activities related to theatre, drama, communication and education"*. The course is open *"to anyone interested in developing their personal, professional or artistic expression"*. The stated aims of the course at the time are:

1. *To provide training in Drama that draws together theatre,*

*education and health, and provides an integrated basic training for workers in these fields.*

2. *To provide training for those who want to create their own theatre, drawing on themes from themselves and their environment, and are interested in a physically based theatre where the body and the whole person is the expressive instrument.*
3. *To develop spontaneity and creativity; and make available a coherent training in spontaneity and creativity that can be applied in both our personal and professional lives.*
4. *To provide training for those intending to work with others as facilitators in theatre, education, recreation or health, in practical ways using "action methods".*
5. *To explore participatory modes of theatre and social communication that are healthy and empowering."*

(Drama Action Centre brochure 1980)

Each year around twenty people enrol. They invest considerable money, time and effort in an unsubsidised two year course. Who are they?

Why do they come and what do they have in common?

Ages range from early twenties to sixties; professions include performers, teachers, health professionals, unwaged searchers, doctors, town planners, secretaries and nuns.

They come with a balance of professional and personal needs. Some come to acquire professional

skills, sometimes for the theatre, but often for other professional work with people. Often they are at a life-point where they have run dry in their work and want fresh input to develop new roles that will re-invigorate their metier when they return to it, or equip them to try new career directions.

Some come to re-moisten parts of themselves desiccated by the dedicated work roles they have been performing for society; others to make a space for self-discovery. Because we use the medium and metaphors of communicating through drama, it is called a drama centre.<sup>3</sup>

*There is always a challenging transition from the risking but charmed circle of a workshop back into the world. So much more so after a "workshop" that lasts two years.*

Compared to the graduates of many other types of 'school', I believe that ex-trainees are more adaptable than most and more able to create a satisfying marriage between what they want for themselves and what society offers, or can be stimulated to offer them. (This ability to match inner personal and outer social requirements will become seminal for the role of the "Playwright").

It is around 1986 now and I am pondering again how to encourage students bridging between two years of exploration with their need to create a work-niche for themselves in

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on the background, participants and work of the Drama Action Centre see "On the Edge of Peril – a brief history of Drama Action Centre", by Julie Fuad.

society. What roles need to be developed to value both worlds, and to mediate between them?

There is always a challenging transition from the risking but charmed circle of a workshop back into the world. So much more so after a "workshop" that lasts two years. We try setting up post-course special projects and performance teams, but find this contributes to dependent and counter dependent dynamics and a tangled transition.

We start to do more within the course to prepare participants towards their lives after the course.

We get clearer about when we move into a more protected private world and when we open out to meet the social world; how to make these distinctions and develop the appropriate roles.

Our society is addicted to diplomas and paper-rites.

Knowing the sclerosis that sets in around institutional learning I have prejudices to overcome to do with the formalisations of paper qualifications. But if a diploma conveys a cachet of distinction, why not enter the game, but make it meaningful? Play it well and play it right. The challenge is to create a piece of paper which has external validity and which also provides useful inspirational and practical goals for the trainee.

Part of the challenge of building the bridge is finding a language that means something on both banks of the river. Old words convey old ideas; but buzz-words and neologisms convey nothing to the unconverted. So I play with old words and nudge them forwards towards new meanings, or backwards towards their ancient ones, hoping

that in time new practices will re-define them.

I develop a Diploma in Dramatic Arts for the Drama Action Centre and write the following as part of the introduction to the Diploma:

*"A Diploma in Dramatic Arts may be awarded to trainees who complete the two year course (or equivalent training), who undertake some further specific studies and who meet the required standards of training outlined here.*

*The term DRAMATIC ARTS is used because it is an ancient term capable of covering the breadth and depth of training. For example, a course in Dramatic Arts enables us to draw on the wisdom embodied in the tradition of Drama as an ancient human activity, as well as on the more recent rediscoveries of J.L. Moreno and other developments seeking to answer the contemporary need for creativity, enactment and exploration in our lives and community. It also allows us to embrace rather than exclude experience and learning from the interweaving realms of the theatre, education, therapy and the spirit".*

Well this gives me a name for the Diploma: but this is for the thing but not for the living role, for what Moreno calls *"the functioning form the individual assumes in a specific moment he reacts to a specific situation in which other persons or objects are involved."*<sup>4</sup>

I try and discard many words but the one I like best at this time is the "Playwright".

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<sup>4</sup> One of Moreno's definitions of a role; Psychodrama Vol. 1, 1946. Reprinted 1964, p. 1V. Another is "a unit of synthetic experience into which private, social and cultural elements have merged"; Psychodrama Vol. 1, p. 184.

## What is a Playwright?

I think that it is not someone who merely *writes* plays? Let's open it up much more than that. Plays have only come to be written down in some cultures, and in them only comparatively recently. Playing was happening long before that.

Rite preceded write.

Play in its multifarious forms is an essential and immemorial activity for mammals.

As humans have evolved so has their capacity to play with alternative or metaphoric environments with alternative rules. Today a football association board discussing a change in the rules is discussing how to make a better Play. A child playing with her toys may be an actor in the drama later but first she is a Playwright – she sets the stage and assigns the roles in the drama of which she is a part and plays all the roles; playing and mimicking God and Creator in her personal universe.

In the case of groups of humans, it usually needs someone to read the situation and then create a form, container, rules, so the participants derive something satisfying from it.

So I spell the word Playwright not Playwrite. A *wright* is a maker, as in Plowwright, Shipwright or Cartwright or Wainwright. I enjoy the earthiness of a craft implied in the word *wright* – the Maker of Play, the Master of Play.

In the spiritual domain we can join with and play our part in co-creating the cosmos with the "Master of the Great Play" beyond normal naming.

At a personal level we strive to attain mastery and artistry in our living and be the Playwrights of our own story.

At a professional level many of us also play this role with others in the social arena. We might be in the role

of facilitator, teacher, theatre director, psychodramatist, sports organiser, recreation officer, festival organiser, community worker, therapist, actor, artist, musician, child, lover or fool. We create an event, we create a play, a form in which there is learning, celebrating, experimenting, escaping or transforming. These forms are the matrix of spontaneity, and the '*playwright*' is the midwife.

In play

- we invoke the god-role within us;
- we balance the dilemmas of form and freedom, of structure and spontaneity;
- we resolve pleasure, pain or paradox in play;
- we imagine, practice, rehearse, act, listen and act again.

As we work with others and encourage them in this process we set up rites that are accessible and effective and many of us more and more knowingly traffic between the previously fenced off fields of the arts, therapy, education and organisational development in order to set up situations in which we, and others, can enact and incarnate ourselves more and more fully into life. We do it in so many different ways, but I call us all "*Playwrights*".

Playwright

play rites

play right

the right to play

the rightness of play

the rites of play

the maker of play – the master

the player (of play

the actor

The Creator

My next step is to formulate what is required for this "Diploma" and in doing this I am hugely helped and stimulated by the Training and

Standards Manual published by the Australian and New Zealand Psychodrama Association Board of Examiners. The role profile outlined in this thesis owes an acknowledgment of example and inspiration to the A.N.Z.P.A. Training and Standards Manual and its authors.

Originally I developed this role profile as part of a specific curriculum for the 'Playwright' designed for the Drama Action Centre course. But my own story involves me in leaving the Drama Action Centre in 1988, moving to a new city and applying action methods in new areas of work and in different parts of the world. I am freer to consider the role profile of the "Playwright" in a wider context.

My hope is of now developing a role Profile for Training that will be useful for practitioners of Psychodrama and Sociodrama, but also can serve as a model for defining personal training goals that can be negotiated in many different professions.

### **Development of the concept of "Magister Ludi".**

It is 1989 and I move to Brisbane. My work here gives me the opportunity to work as a Sociodramatist and Sociometrist in organisations – to watch and work with the "play" of organisational groups; to assist in their playing right (in terms of their own cultures and criteria); and to assist managers and staff to see themselves as re-shapers and co-creators of their environment (rather than victims of circumstance).

In this culture they talk of corporate goals, re-structuring, strategic planning, implementation and evaluation. I do not see these as different in spirit from the work many others of you perform in your own spheres of practice – though we need

to develop language and practice that plays right for our different metiers.

In organisations for example practice and language need to be practical and efficient in relation to specific tasks and outcomes. Nevertheless most people spend a large percentage of their time at "work" and would wish it to be fulfilling and a satisfying expression of themselves. It certainly provides an arena for the enactment of many psychodramatic roles, often at an unconscious level. This dimension of corporate culture is as present as the more overt concerns about clear procedures, strategic planning, structural efficiency, communications and a healthy group culture.

In some of these new areas of work the term 'Playwright' is not immediately understood. Words like 'Creative Manager' or 'Strategic Leader' are more accessible, and to my mind cover the same role configuration, but in a different metier.

By interesting synchronicity, shortly after my move to Brisbane, Jonathan Fox, founder of Playback Theatre and an organiser of the 1989 Moreno Centennial Conference in New York phones to ask if I will present at that conference, and what would I like to do? I know what I would like to do, but not what to call it.

The next day on a friends bookshelf I come across "The Glass Bead Game" by Herman Hesse I open it and I see *'Magister Ludi'*. I ring Jonathan back from a too-hot-to-touch glass-boothed Telecom goldphone at a beach on the Sunshine Coast near Noosa. As the beads of sweat rolled off me, he comes in from clearing snow from his door to answer the phone.

'Magister Ludi'! The 'Master of the Play'! I have my title.

I like the way it links opposites.

It links mastery and play. It is both self-importantly latinate and playful; status-ful and fun. It has respectability. The roots are good. The word *Magister* tracks back to the a source 'mag-' which also gives us magi, wise ones and *magic* (mage-ic = master-ful). *Ludi* shares its ludic roots with *Lido*, a place of play and re-creation; and with *illusion*, *illusory*; with the *lewd* and the *ludicrous*. When we are fearful and seek to control (to normalise), we use these play-ful words derogatorily. Conversely, deriving from a fearful role state "mastery" may become negatively arrogant, or an abuse of power.

But by balancing Mastery with the Ludic we can get it right and get it light, (enrightenment and enlightenment).

The great masters of spontaneity and liberation of all traditions tell us that life is an 'illusion'. If we misinterpret illusion to mean a moderns sense of empty meaninglessness, then we will feel abandoned and deprived. With this 'construct', through these spectacles, we may well see the world as a bleak and cruel joke. But other great teachers I have met along my journey remind me that the word means play and that everything is the play of consciousness – Gods play – created for our mutual delight – a cosmic game of hide and seek.<sup>5</sup>

*"He for whom you look is the same as he who is looking."*

(St. Francis)

*"The Self is the Actor, the Self is also the Stage"*

(Shiva Sutras)

So for me the term "Magister Ludi" links our everyday work into the universal play, so I will use it also.

So in this thesis I will often use the names 'Playwright' and 'Magister Ludi' interchangeably. I have asked myself if this creates confusion but I have decided to do so nonetheless. They are interchangeable, and also others of you already do use other terms for a similar role; ('Participant Observer', 'Creative Manager', or the 'Conductor' in Playback Theatre). But 'Magister Ludi' and 'Playwright' also have differences from each other in timbre and connotation that I wish to retain as I refer to in my opening.

We come now to the thesis.

The purpose of this preface has been to provide a background to the evolution of the roles of 'Playwright' and 'Magister Ludi' a warm up to the Role Profile that now follows.

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<sup>5</sup> cf. Swami Muktananda; **"Play of Consciousness"**, San Fransisco: Harper & Row, 1978.