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Dancing in the dark : forging a new approach to actor training

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**DANCING IN THE DARK: FORGING A NEW APPROACH TO ACTOR
TRAINING**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Television, Radio, Film and Theatre
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Gwen Templeton

May 2004

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "David Kahn".

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ABSTRACT

DANCING IN THE DARK: FORGING A NEW APPROACH TO ACTOR TRAINING

By Gwen Templeton

This thesis addresses the apparent mind-body split found in modern American actor training through the research and development of an exercise called Dancing in the Dark. The exercise is a guided journey of dance and music designed to induce trance states in its participants. This thesis examines the origins and development of this exercise and its subsequent employment in which the participants provided survey responses to test the success of trance induction. Building on the research gathered from the Dancing in the Dark workshop participants, the exercise was then employed repeatedly with a cast of actors in San Jose State's production of The Crucible. Research gathered from the actors' journal entries chronicle the use of the exercise in rehearsal. The journal entries also provide the litmus test for evaluating how the actors' perceived the altered states of consciousness affected their ability to perform.

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Chapter One: Actor as Shaman

New Approach to Physical Action and the Training of the Actor

In American actor training there is a strong sense of genealogy of method, a philosophy of theatre that is passed on to students. Although the genealogy of American actor training stems from the work of Konstantin Stanislavsky, the original concepts of the renowned Russian artist have been greatly Americanized over the years. The Americanization of the Stanislavsky “System” polarized into two distinct approaches: the first emerging out of the early theories of “emotional recall” and the second from the later theories of “physical action.” (This polarization in American actor training will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.) Both branches of the Stanislavsky System strive to create truthful organic emotion on stage: one through a highly intellectual approach and the second through a more physical approach. This thesis explores an actors’ training exercise called “Dancing in the Dark” which I developed in order to lessen the divide between mind and body in American actor training. The exercise attempts to bridge the mind-body gap kinesthetically through the use of trance induction, deep concentration techniques, and plastic exercises.¹ This thesis will not only investigate the origins of the Dancing in the Dark exercise and its subsequent use in rehearsal with actors but will endeavor to answer the central question underlying the exercise: does the application of trance inducing practices affect actors’ perceptions of

¹ “Plastic exercises” is taken from the French term, *Plastique*; it translates to mean exercises specifically targeted to develop one’s awareness of bodily parts. Plastic exercises tend to isolate different parts of the body to heighten awareness of their movement possibilities. Grotowski utilizes the term plastic exercises in his work and for the purposes of this thesis I will follow his convention.

their ability to perform, and if so, in what ways? The Dancing in Dark exercise evolved out of a combination of trance-inducing techniques of Neo-Pagan Shamans and the understanding of emotional connection to physical movement found in the theories of Stanislavsky, Meyerhold and Grotowski. Before discussing the development of the Dancing in the Dark exercise, it is important to have a general understanding of the development of American actor training, starting with Stanislavski's "System," its polarization and how the Dancing in the Dark exercise came into existence

Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863 – 1938), founder of the Moscow Art Theatre, is widely considered to be the father of realistic acting. Stanislavsky was one of the first acting teachers "to systematically investigate the notion of motivation in acting and to advance the concept that every move on stage must be seen to correspond to what a character is striving to achieve" (Cohen 179). Stanislavsky, very much a product of his time, was developing his physical action approach to actor training simultaneously in the world with the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud, and amidst the biomechanics work of Vsevolod Meyerhold. Stanislavsky's system of physical action had a ripple effect that took the American Theater by storm. Robert Cohen talks about this Russian Theater invasion in his book Acting One:

No country – not even Russia – has been as influenced by Stanislavsky's teaching as the United States. By 1920 two of Stanislavsky's disciples, Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya, moved to New York and founded the American Laboratory Theatre, bringing Stanislavsky's new 'System' to the attention of American Actors. Among their converts was an Austrian immigrant, Lee Strasberg, who headed the Actor's Studio in New York from 1951 until his death in 1982. Strasberg's ensuing 'Method', derived from an early version of

Stanislavsky's System, and included emotional recall as a principal technique, proved most influential actor training theory in America during the 1950's and 60's. Perhaps because it privileged actors over the script, making their own feelings as much the "Subject" of the play as their character's actions. [. . .] Other American acting teachers, some of whom, like Stella Adler and Sonia Moore, had studied with Stanislavsky at a later point in his career, preached the Russian master's later creed of Physical Actions rather than emotional memory. To this day, almost all American acting teachers pay homage to Stanislavsky, often framing the debate on acting theory as opposition of his early teaching with his later ones. (Cohen 180)

During the final two decades of his life, Stanislavsky, in order to avoid the harsh censorship imposed by the Stalin regime, left the Moscow Art Theater and choose to work out of his own home with a handful of young actors. In the freedom of a private ballroom in his own house, Stanislavsky codified his system of physical action. He was stirred by the writings of the nineteenth century French psychologist Theodule Armand Ribot whose theories asserted that memories of past emotional experiences are recorded in the nervous system and can be triggered by the right physical stimulus, and he became convinced that remembered emotion lead to the most truthful performances. The emotional recall, or affective memory, whereby an actor substitutes his or her own memory of a past event into the moment of the character in hopes of reaching a deeper emotional level on stage, "proved to be unreliable in practical usage" (Cohan 180).

In the later part of his career, Stanislavsky returned to Ribot's theories of emotion being "stored in the muscles" and began to explore releasing organic emotional responses through specific physical action (Cohen 78). This later system of physical action resembles more readily Meyerhold's biomechanics system. Meyerhold's early theories

in biomechanics relied purely on action of the body; it was not until later when he began to “take into account the thought process” and “began to agree with Stanislavsky and accept the fact that there must be a reason you do a certain action” (Sacharow 99). Both Stanislavsky and Meyerhold settled on the notion that by doing a specific physical action an emotional response would follow. For example, to pound one’s fist against the wall repeatedly will bring forth anger. The actor can rely on this learned physical action and work toward crafting this physical action score into his or her character, thus producing a consistent and emotional realistic performance on stage.

The later Stanislavsky System combined the inner psychological understanding of character motivations with an active physical score, which consisted of specifically chosen actions that carried “the inner rhythm and make available to the actor the energy level and impulses of the character” (Sacharow 34). Lawrence Sacharow describes the similarities between the later Stanislavsky and later Meyerhold Systems in the American Theater magazine’s recent collections of articles on *Approaches to Theatre Training 2004*. Mr. Sacharow describes how both Stanislavsky and Meyerhold in their later lives felt that the body could “retain emotional memory” and that the “psychophysical score was [the] most effective way to elicit truthful and spontaneous results” (Sacharow 34).

Although Americanized Stanislavsky actor training is considered by many to be “the most sought after system in the world,” the current state of Actor training could be

improved (Diamond interview).² In a recent debate over acting training between Kristen Linklater, an iconoclast voice and text instructor and chair of the theatre division of Columbia University, and Linklater's colleague Anne Bogart, who heads the directing Department at Columbia and is the renowned artistic director of the Saratoga International Theatre Institute (SITI) company, both women remarked on the startling lack of physical integration of the body into the intellectual systems of actor training. Over the past thirty years teachers of the Americanized Stanislavsky System have adopted a rather intellectual approach to achieving organic emotion through physical action. Anne Bogart was quoted as saying "Stanislavsky was strangled, mostly by Lee Strasberg" and now actors are "strangled by the psychoanalytical structure of the system; they get lost in homework, forgetting to the most important aspect of perusing actions" (Diamond interview). Kristen Linklater added, "The actor's duty, as far as I'm concerned, is to have a free and open body without tensions and a voice that can express the full gamut of human emotions and an intellect that will channel those emotions, and the balance between voice, body, emotions and intellect has to be exact; otherwise, you're going to get a skewed communication" (Diamond interview). "I actually don't care for most American actor-training," stated Bogart, "as the years go by I feel more and more militantly against the Americanized, misunderstood version of Stanislavsky we seem to suffer under" (Diamond interview).

² This citation refers to a debate between Kristen Linklater and Anne Bogart in January of 2001 and published online through the Theatre Communications Group.

Bogart's SITI Company, steeped in highly physical training of Suzuki³ and Viewpoints⁴ currently relies heavily on physical training for actors. Anne Bogart describes the rigorous physical training :

My company does two separate kinds of training-Suzuki training and Viewpoints. The Suzuki is like a "barre class" for a dancer, and the Viewpoints is a way to practice creating fiction using time and space. One is vertical; the other is horizontal. One is you and God; the other is you and the people around you. (Diamond interview)

However, the Suzuki training with its rigid combination of martial art poses and Kabuki gestures can divide the actor's mind from the actor's body. Only in the Viewpoints exercises does the actor begin to engage the psychological understanding of architecture and his or her relation to their surroundings.

Kristen Linklater discusses this isolation of training of the body as a handicap to training the whole actor. "I could not train young actors in voice work if they were doing equal amounts of time in Suzuki, [because] Suzuki involves building muscular control, and the work I do involves *giving up* external muscular controls"(Diamond interview). Linklater continues to assert "if an actor's psycho-physical system is constantly being thrown in one direction and then another, it won't learn as fast" (Diamond interview).

Bogart herself remarks that her system of training tries to "trick" the actor into achieving emotional states:

³ Suzuki Training – a highly physical actor training techniques combining rigid martial arts poses and the ancient pose found in Japan's Kabuki Theatre. Tadashi Suzuki founded the system of actor training.

⁴ Viewpoints – Originally derived from dance choreography, it is now used in Actor training and is a intensely physical approach concerned with concepts of space, time, distance and the relation of performer to the audience.

I choreograph everything. I set moments of imbalance-- sometimes it was just something that was really hard to do, like, "Can you get your elbow over here on this word and make sure you're looking behind you?" So that the actor then was actually straining *against* something and that made the juices go. When you watch artists work, you watch them throw themselves off balance and then fight for balance. And that is a heroic act. After all, great plays start when something goes wrong, so that the characters have to scramble to recreate harmony inside an imbalanced state. (Diamond interview)

This kind of detailed choreography can become reliant on a specific director and although extremely powerful under the masterful eyes of Anne Bogart, the system may not translate well into other theaters. Anne Bogart and the many of actors SITI Company have collaborated artistically for over 15 years, creating a working language of movement in performance. The actors of SITI Company have a symbiotic relationship to Anne Bogart's artistic vision, when one or more of those elements are removed from the equation the ensuing performance can be lost in translation.

The same loss in translation problem has occurred in several theater titans over the development of modern American actor training. Jerzy Grotowski became one of the most misunderstood and yet commonly replicated acting gurus of the late twentieth century. Grotowski, a Polish director who came to prominence in the early sixties, "shared a deep understanding of the research Stanislavsky did with physical action in those final ten years and it had a profound influence on his own work" (Sacharow 39). Grotowski also understood "that the main principles of Meyerhold's biomechanics system were to help the actor the actor utilize his entire body" (Sacharow 99). In reaction to seeing actors performing as "talking heads" Grotowski strove to develop an intense physical training system for the actor that would transform his or her ability to inhabit his

or her body in performance. Some people “saw this as opposition to Stanislavsky’s system, but in fact it is simply the implementation of the physical action theory developed in his later life” (Sacharow 102).

Valery Forkin, the artistic director of the Meyerhold Center in Moscow, stated in his interview with Lawrence Sacharow that “Stanislavsky endowed Grotowski with everything that has to do with the human spirit and inner life” (Sacharow 101). Forkin went on to point out that “Americans have made a myth of Stanislavsky” and tried “to tell everybody, ‘that is the only way, nothing else’ while forgetting that Stanislavsky was someone who was very much alive, and very flexible, always experimenting – he was an artist” (Sacharow 101). Grotowski’s system of actor training defined in Towards a Poor Theatre seems a logical extension of both the later work of Stanislavsky and Meyerhold. In fact Grotowski’s system of actor training tries to address some of the shortcomings experienced by actors using the Stanislavsky ‘System’.

Stanislavsky proposed that the actor employ his notion of the “magic if” whereby the actor imagines him or herself in the given circumstances of the scene. The emotional connection to the character is therefore linked back to the performer by her imagining “if I had all the life experiences of this character and was placed in this situation how then would I react?” This way of mapping out the character’s emotional reactions can be effective in developing deeper psychological understanding of human motivations. But Stanislavsky’s elaborate system of analysis of text can also be time-consuming to many actors. In addition, the emphasis on developing physical action out of psychological motivation can create an intellectual feedback loop for the actor. That is, the actor can

become trapped in the analysis homework of rehearsal and present a highly conceptualized but dispassionate performance.

The American version of the earlier Stanislavsky System, which principally employed the use of emotional recall as further developed by Lee Strasberg tried to remedy this intellectual trap for the actor. Strasberg's Method of actor training built on the psychoanalysis concepts of Stanislavsky's System and deepens the use of emotional recall in the process. Through his reading of Ribot, Stanislavsky had found the memories of past trauma of an actor to be important in influencing the emotional reactions of a character. Strasberg took this notion a step further in concluding the substitution of a personal emotional memory by an actor into the performance of a character would be perceived as more realistic or more truthful by an audience. In later years, Stanislavsky advocated arriving at emotional connection with a character through physical action, while Strasberg sought to manufacture emotion from direct recall of past traumas in the performer's life. Performers are coached to remember and relive past traumatic experiences in order to allow the body to bring forth real emotion. For example, during a sad moment in a play actors are instructed to remove themselves from the given circumstances of the scene and try to feel a sad moment from their own past. This direct recall of traumatic experience can at times produce riveting emotional results in the performer, but it can also distract the performer from being fully engaged in the play.

Anne Bogart refers to the question of emotional recall as "this business of contacting an emotional memory and using that in relationship to a text causes a sort of narcissism that I find unbearable" (Diamond interview). The actor can get lost in the

vivid recall experience and lose track of the play happening around him or her. Kristen Linklater said, “the emotional memory stuff is dangerous and leads you down memory lane into some dark place” and “that has to do with neurosis, not free emotion” (Diamond interview).

Jerzy Grotowski recognized these blocks in which the actor gets in his or her own way, the inability of an actor to quiet his or her own mind and simply feel what the character feels in the moment of the play. Attempting to bridge this gap, Grotowski created unique individualized exercises designed to open the actor to feeling real emotion as the character, while performing all the practical aspects portraying the character on stage. The exercises Grotowski employed were geared for his small company of actors and engineered specifically for each of the performers and the roles they were playing. This required Grotowski’s acting company to spend several months in rehearsal before each performance. During months of rehearsal Grotowski’s actors were subjected to a rigorous regimen of physical, vocal and improvisational work. This intense routine of rehearsal was meant to open the actor and remove the blocks; which distract the performer from inhabiting the character.

In his book Towards a Poor Theater, Grotowski talked about this kind of complete immersion into characterization in his theory of the “holy actor” (48). He theorized that real organic characterization requires such a deep commitment from the actor that the actor must live and breathe as the character, to act from a trance state, a state of “idle readiness” (50). Grotowski worked for years training actors in reaching this trance state,

this position of “idle readiness” in their work. Grotowski found that in order for an actor to transverse freely the gulf between mundane thought and trance states needed for deep characterization, the actor strives to fully develop his or her awareness of the body, mind and spirit. Grotowski describes this kind of actor training in the following way:

The actor makes a total gift of himself. One must give oneself totally, in one's deepest intimacy, with confidence, as one gives oneself in love. Here lies the key. Self penetration, trance, excess, the formal discipline itself – all this can be realized, provided one has given oneself fully, humbly and without defense. This act culminates in a climax. It brings relief. [. . .] This technique of the “trance” and of the integration of all the actor's psychic and bodily powers which emerge from the most intimate layers of his being and his instinct, spring forth in a sort of “translumination.” Years of work and specially composed exercises (which, by means of physical, plastic and vocal training, attempt to guide the actor towards the right kind of concentration) sometimes permit the discovery of this psychic process. (Grotowski, 50)

In the quote above, Grotowski theorizes that truthful performances arise out an actor's ability to completely inhabit the character physically, emotionally and spiritually on the stage. His company of actors worked intensely to develop their physical and emotional range in order to better approach the total commitment Grotowski strived to affect in his theatrical performances. Grotowski proposes, “none of the exercises in the various fields of actor training must be exercises in skill” (50). He presents that isolated exercises of the voice and body furthers the mind-body split in actor training; advocating instead that exercises should be synthesized to “develop a system of allusions which lead to the elusive and indescribable process of self donation” (50). Grotowski states, “the actor who, in this special process of self discipline and self sacrifice, self penetration and

molding, is not afraid to go beyond all normally acceptable limits, attains a kind of inner harmony and peace of mind” (50).

In his book Stanislavski and the Method, Charles Marowitz states, “the greatest hazard of all acting is Consciousness” (44). Beginning with the conscious awareness of self, the actor is also constantly aware of the auditorium, the set, the lights and all the mechanisms; which go into a play’s performance. The actor functions in this practical yet mundane world of performance technicalities while simultaneously inhabiting the imaginary world of the character. The practical functions of performance become distractions to the actor, tearing him or her away from the deep self-penetrating work needed to create an emotional connection to character.

Grotowski uses the term “self-penetrating” consistently through his work to refer to guiding an actor to push beyond the habitual boundaries of mundane or surface-level performance. Grotowski strives to teach performers to break through their personal limits of comfort in the use of their bodies, emotions, minds and spirits. In order for an actor to maneuver into this uncomfortable zone he or she must set aside self-conscious concerns. How does the actor avoid this fatal consciousness and keep him or herself engrossed in the world of the play? Grotowski describes the use of “psychic penetration, or trance” where by the performer learns to concentrate on a deeper level, allowing fluid movement between the mundane and mystical worlds of performance, (37). This “psychic-penetration demands a mobilization of all the physical and spiritual forces of the actor who in a state of idle readiness, a passive availability, which makes possible an active acting score” (Grotowski 38).

Only through quieting the mind⁵ and removing the distractions of the active consciousness can the actor hope to possess the character fully. Many of the exercises Grotowski developed with his acting company were intended to move the performer to this higher state of consciousness and awaken his or her ability to act in a state of trance. However, they had their limitations, Richard Schechner discusses Grotowski's deficiencies in universal translation of his work in The Grotowski Sourcebook:

[Grotowski's] method – derived from Gnostic and Hermetic sources and modeled to some degree on Hasidic and Gurdjievan closed circle communities – forecloses open discussion. As in the Hindu guru-shishya relationship, knowledge is transferred from teacher to learner with scant chance for disclosure, debate and challenge. [. . .] There is no debate between different Grotowski influenced individuals and groups; no discussions open to the scholarly or general public. (492)

The privacy Grotowski sought to develop his work also served to make his experiments difficult to repeat. He strove to have the actors spiritually possess the characters and to explore this he required the privacy of a closed environment. For the most part these exercises were specific to the actors in his company and did not translate into universal use. It is true that the months of intense rehearsal exploration under Grotowski produced powerful portrayals of character on stage “creating a shock across the world because of their quality” (Schechner 38). Peter Brook describes Grotowski's work as “a lamp, a lighthouse, demonstrating that in any theatre it is possible to reach a higher standard, a deeper and more intense one, on condition that the actors reach a level of

⁵ To “quiet the mind” refers not to the silencing of all sound – but rather to remove the bombardment of distracting thought. Quieting of the mind, a term used by many in talking about trance induction can be done through chanting, drumming, music or silent meditation - the quieting refers only to removing distracting thoughts from the mind.

dedication, sincerity, seriousness, and understanding of their own means, which does not exist at the mediocre level of normal production” (Schechner 38). However, the average American theater cannot afford to employ actors in such an extended rehearsal period. In fact a theater must negotiate with Actors Equity, the actor’s union, for special permission to rehearse for longer than four weeks. Many American theater companies cannot afford to keep a stable of actors on retainer.

So while Grotowski’s work with actors produced the deep emotional connections with character, the systems time-consuming process makes it impossible for the majority of theaters to employ. Even Kristen Linklater discusses the inability to for most theaters to employ actors in longer rehearsal blocks for in-depth training in her interview with Theatre Communication Group:

But the dreadful, awful thing is that in this country there are so many undergraduate actor-training programs turning out people who think they are actors--it's drowning the profession in mediocrity. Any art that's achieved a high level has gone very, very deep into its disciplines. I think there are parts of the brain that get engaged when you go long and slow and demandingly.

(Diamond interview)

An intriguing question arises: how can one develop an exercise that would utilize the work of Grotowski’s acting training within a format that fits into the limited rehearsal schedule of most modern theater companies?

While searching for a way to distill Grotowski's concepts I became aware of the work being performed in Neo- Pagan Public Rituals. The San Francisco Bay Area produces a surprising array of Neo-Pagan Public Ritual performances in which the religious leaders perform spiritual possession. These performances are presented theatrically with all of the production mechanics expected in a theater piece. The sacred performances employ costuming, set and lights and require the religious leaders to perform as shamans for the viewing audiences taking on scripted roles in the performance. Here in these public rituals is a concrete example of performers being possessed by character.

The notion of a character spiritually possessing an actor has been used in ritual performances for centuries. The origins of theater sprang from ritual performances in which the Shaman or High Priest / Priestess inhabits deity. Grotowski talks about this spiritual possession of a performer:

The theatre, when it was still part of religion, was already theatre: it liberated the spiritual energy of the congregation or tribe by incorporating myth and profaning it or rather transcending it. Through the performance of the high priest the spectator has a renewed awareness of his personal truth in the truth of the myth, and through fright and a sense of the sacred he came to catharsis. [. . .] Ritual forces us to cross our frontiers, exceed our limitations, fill our emptiness – fulfill ourselves. This is not a condition but a process in which what is dark in us slowly comes transparent. In this struggle with one's own truth, this effort to peel off the life mask, the ritual, the theatre, with its full-fleshed perceptivity, has always seemed to me a place of provocation. (Grotowski 23)

Because theatre finds its roots in the spiritual possession work performed in early sacred rituals, the idea of linking actor training back to the contemporary ritual practices of

shamans became intriguing to me. I believed that utilizing the training techniques employed by shamans might benefit actors in theater performances. Shamans are continually expected and trained to work from within the trance state. From this state of altered consciousness the shaman acts as a vessel for deity. By quieting the mind, relaxing the body and removing the distractions of the mundane world he or she opens to the spirit. The spirit then pours into the shaman's body and possesses it. The shamans become possessed by deities that require similar attention to intellectual, physical and emotional qualities of a character in a play, and these deities are portrayed in front of a ritual audience, a comparable performance to that found in theatre.

There are two schools of thought on this possession: the first is that while possessed the shaman has no control over his or her mind or body and his or her actions are entirely controlled by the deity. This kind of possession can only take place with the "dispossession of the shaman's soul" (Lewis 40). The Belgian anthropologist Luc de Heusch argued that spiritual "possession may only occur with the eviction of the victim's soul" (Lewis 40). The ejection of the "self" or "soul" is referred to by anthropologists as the "soul-death" and is classified as "Mediumistic Trance" (Lewis 41). This "soul-loss" allows the deity to control completely all the physical and verbal functions of the shaman; the shaman becomes a puppet to the deity, lacking any bodily control of his or her own. This lack of control presents a difficult problem for performance, and since most spiritual possession work takes place in ritual as "a sacred performance," a second school of thought has developed.

The second school of thought on spiritual possession asserts that the shaman maintains a small amount of bodily control in order to function properly as the religious leader of the ritual performance. John Curtis Gowan refers to this kind of spiritual possession in Trance, Art and Creativity:

Shamanistic Trance while similar to Mediumistic Trance differs in several ways:

1. Whereas the Medium is entirely under the control of the possessing spirit, the Shaman seems to be in control of his spirits.
2. Where as the Medium generally loses consciousness in trance and has no memory of the incident, the shaman is able to remaining some state of control, remember and recite some of his experiences during trance.
3. Whereas Mediumistic Trance is usually induced through quiet meditation, the Shamanistic Trance is induced through physical movement, dance, drumming and / or chemical alteration. (Gowan 61)

Because the shamans must perform duties crucial to the ritual while possessed of spirit they have developed training techniques to quiet the mind, relax the body and achieve trance states while retaining the performer's practical awareness of their surroundings.

Neo-Pagans, especially the NROOGD⁶ tradition, have adopted this second view of spiritual possession in the performances of their public rituals. The High Priestess / Priest in NROOGD public rituals are required to exist in the two worlds of performance: the first being the practical performance needs of the

⁶ NROOGD – New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn is a tradition of Wiccan religious practice that has been the primary producer of Public ritual performance in the San Francisco Bay Area for the past 35 years. The origins and more information about these rituals will be outlined in later chapters.

production and the second more mystical world of spiritual possession. The Neo-Pagans refer to this dualistic existence as “walking between the worlds”⁷ and believe achieving this dual state occurs only in the deeper concentration levels found in trance states.

Observing the ritual practices of Neo-Pagan shamans and their ability to use spiritual possession in their performances spawned the idea of developing an exercise that would synthesize the training concepts of both actors and shamans. Developing an exercise that could be employed in actor training to teach performers how to reach the deeper levels of concentration while retaining the ability to execute the practical aspects of performance would have the advantages of Grotowski’s work without its shortcomings. The actor works psychologically to possess the character, while the shaman searches for a deeper connection to the deity he or she portrays in performance through spiritual possession. Shamans work to quiet their minds and eliminate external distractions in order to allow the spirit / character to take possession of their body in performance. The shamans strive to have characters possess them.

If one could combine the consciousness-altering techniques of the Neo-Pagan shamans with the physical techniques found in Grotowski’s actor training, then one might codify a repeatable exercise to teach performers to use the deep concentration found in altered states of consciousness in their performances. Learning how to produce trance

⁷ A common Neo-Pagan term referring to the dual existence of Shaman in both the mundane world of practical functioning and the mystical or magical world of spiritual possession. Traversing these two worlds is considered a critical training element for the High Priest / Priestess performing in public rituals.

states might give actors the ability to embody characters in similar ways to shaman who embody deity in spiritual possession. An exercise designed to elicit this kind of deep characterization on demand might be a valuable tool in actor training.

The direct use of trance state induction in characterization work of an actor is a new and original concept in modern American actor training. Although the landscape of actor training has always incorporated radical theories designed to improve certain aspects of performance (including many of the theories put forth by those named previously in this chapter); none of the available literature puts forth the direct use of trance states as an actor-training tool. Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Grotowski, Bogart, and Linklater first presented theories that were considered radical by their peers. The research and development of the Dancing in the Dark exercise may seem radical to some, but it developed out my personal experience in the theatre. It was my ten years of experience as an actor in the professional theater that first formed the questions for developing the exercise. Out of the deficiencies in my own actor training and the desire to create deeper connection to my own characterization work in performance, the Dancing in the Dark exercise was born.

The following chapter will examine the trance state and define it according to popular scientific theory concerning the electrostatic waves of the brain⁸. The popular scientific theory on trance induction has linked the actual speed of brain waver per minute to physiological conditions that can be monitored through external behaviors without an electrocephalograph or other complicated scientific equipment. The following

⁸ Definition of these brain waves and the markers used by scientists to discern them will be outlined in the following chapter.

chapter will examine the external behavior markers used in determining trance induction among the submissions of the participants.

Chapter Three will explore the exercise itself, decoding the practical form of the script and movement. Through a detailed description of the movement and its relation to the four principles of trance induction, the chapter analyzes form and function of the Participants Journey through the exercise. The chapter includes data collected in the form of survey responses from over 240 participants in the Dancing in the Dark workshop. The research gathered from the participants is analyzed qualitatively to investigate if the exercise can induce trance states.

Chapter Four brings the use of the Dancing in the Dark exercise into rehearsal with a cast of actors at San Jose State University. The chapter examines the actors' experience with the exercise through their journal responses. The research data collected from the actors' journals is assessed to determine if the actors were operating within a trance state during the exercise and if that trance state affected their perceptions of their characterization work.

Chapter Five builds on the research data of the actors' observations and examines how the actors' perceived the use of the exercise affected their performances. The actors' journal entries are evaluated to provide the evidence for determining the usefulness of the dancing in the Dark exercise as a rehearsal tool. Finally, the chapter concludes with an analysis of how actors perceived the use of trance state affected their performance and a discussion of how this research could be furthered in other productions and/or actor training classes.

Chapter Two: The Neo- Pagan Way Drumming, Dancing and the Origins of the Exercise

In the late 1960s there was a marked rise of interest in Witchcraft not only in the United States, but also throughout the world, reflecting a growing feminist awareness and global concern for the environment. Surrounded by the magnificent beauty of Northern California's spectacular scenery and the free thinking climate of the late 1960s, the San Francisco Bay Area emerged as one of the epicenters for the rise of Witchcraft in the United States.

Witchcraft is a life-affirming, earth- and nature-oriented religion, which sees all of life as sacred and interconnected, honors the natural world as the embodiment of divinity, immanent as well as transcendent, and experiences the divine as feminine and often as masculine, as well. Like the spiritual worldview and practices of Native Americans and Taoists, Wiccan spiritual practices are intended to attune humanity to the natural rhythms and cycles of the universe as a means of personally experiencing divinity. Rituals, therefore, coincide with the phases of the moon, the change of the seasons, solstices and equinoxes and days, which fall in between these such as May Day and Halloween. This calendar of celebrations is referred to as the *Wheel of the Year*. Most Witches consider their practice a priest/priestesshood, akin to the mystery schools of classical Greece and Rome, involving years of training and passage through life-transforming initiatory rituals. (Covenant of the Goddess⁹ website).

One of the more public offshoots of the Wiccan religion in the Northern California Area was the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn, or NROOGD. Formed by a group of graduate students in an alternative religions class at San Francisco State

⁹ Covenant of the Goddess is an international organization, founded to provide legal recognition for witches.

University in 1967, NROOGD was born out of a class assignment to create and perform a religious ritual. Using the printed sources available at the time, primarily the authors Robert Graves, Gerald Gardner and Margaret Murray, the students recreated a Witch's Sabbath.¹⁰ After performing the ritual several times they began to feel the effects of what they had created: the group had stumbled into a spiritual awakening and decided collectively to continue their ritual exploration by forming a group, which they named the New Reformed Orthodox Order of the Golden Dawn. The name itself was a play on their own attitudes toward the new ground they were breaking and upon their spiritual antecedents. According to Glenn Turner, a NROOGD elder, owner of Ancient Ways, an occult bookstore and founder of Pantheacon, one of the largest Neo-Pagan Conventions held in the United States, "the name was a joke, the kind of satiric humor only a grad student could have come up with . . . [containing both humor and a deeper level of seriousness about the rituals they were creating] if we had known what we were exploring would develop into a formal tradition of Wicca, we would have named it something else" (Turner interview).

The mother circle of NROOGD hived off¹¹ daughter and granddaughter covens, which trace an unbroken line of initiation and share a common liturgy. Covens¹² are autonomous and recognize each other's initiates. The tradition worships a triple aspected

¹⁰ Sabbats are the Wiccan sacred holidays; these days follow the major movement of the yearly solar cycle.

¹¹ "Hived off" is a specific Wiccan term describing the formulation of NROOGD covens. NROOGD covens form when a single member opts to break away from their original coven and form a new 'daughter' coven. The founding member of the new coven maintains a link to the elder coven. NROOGD keeps detailed records of how all new covens form so that this family lineage can be traced back to the original coven.

¹² Covens- a group of Wiccans, usually initiatory, who privately perform rituals.

Goddess¹³ and various forms of the God derived from ancient Greek and British and other mythologies. Coven esbats¹⁴ are often held skyclad¹⁵, and focus on the working of ethical magic and the celebration of the divinity of each participant.

The core NROOGD ritual, written by Aidan Kelly and others, is made up of poetry and charms, and begins with a line dance in the form of a spiral inwards and then outwards, representing death and rebirth. The ritual is sometimes led by three priestesses and a priest. NROOGD covens in the Bay Area cooperate to present public ritual celebration on most of the Sabbats¹⁶, for the benefit of the greater Pagan Community. (NROOGD website)

Over the next 35 years NROOGD grew in numbers and presence. These NROOGD public rituals were presented much like theatrical performances, requiring costumes, props, lighting and sometimes elaborate preparations. According to Alison Harlow, a founder of the Covenant of The Goddess, one of the oldest and largest Wiccan religious organizations:

NROOGD single handedly developed public ritual to an art form in the Bay Area. It was NROOGD's public performances of ritual, which educated the public about our religion and gave seekers a place to go and meet those of like mind. You have to

¹³ Refers to the three aspects of Maiden, Mother and Crone associated with the Goddess.

¹⁴ Sabbats and Esbats held in accordance with the cycle of the moon. Sabbats are celebrated on the full moon while esbats are celebrated on the dark of the moon. These celebrations are ongoing and are considered different than the eight high holy days celebrated in the Wheel of the Year.

¹⁵ Taken from the "Charge of the Goddess" by Charles Godfrey Lealand, in which is stated, "Ye shall be naked in your rites, both men and women," (Adler 58). Skyclad is the practice of performing ritual without clothing, it serves to humble the circle in front of the gods and to develop a sense of vulnerability and trust among the coven. Skyclad is usually only utilized in private closed circles.

¹⁶ Great Sabbats are the Wiccan sacred holidays, these days follow the major movement of the yearly solar cycle. This calendar of eight holy days is called the Wheel of the Year and starts with Samhain (October 31st), Yule / Winter Solstice (December 21st), Bridgid (Feb. 2nd), Ostara / Spring Equinox, (March 21st), Beltane, (May 1st), Litha / Summer Solstice (June 21st), Lughnasad (August 1st), and Mabbon / Fall Equinox (Sept. 21st).

remember in the late sixties the pagan community was scattered and isolated. As far as most of us knew, we were alone in our spiritual beliefs. Back then it was very difficult to find others who practiced the Craft, and it was nearly impossible to locate a teacher. NROOGD's public rituals gave everyone a common meeting place to exchange ideas and create a growing community. Their rituals were highly theatrical, filled with dancing, drumming, singing and poetry. Attending them was an exhilarating experience, like creating art in spiritual form. Their work was vital in developing the Wiccan community in the Bay Area and in many respects the United States as well. (Harlow interview).

NROOGD presents public rituals at each of the eight Sabbats, throughout the year. Although each ritual centers on a different holy day, containing different mythology in the working or teaching section of the ritual, the essential ritual script always remains the same. This use of a standard or basic script harkens back to theatrical performance providing the celebrants with many of the textual elements actors employ on stage. The elements of casting a circle, creating sacred space, calling the guardians, invoking the gods and grounding the circle are similar in each ritual. Annette Mischke, a NROOGD elder and practicing witch for over 20 years explains that:

In public ritual it is vitally important that the basic script remain constant. In public ritual you have a mix of people who are old and new members of the community. By keeping the ritual script the same each time, it brings everybody into the same space and same level of consciousness more efficiently. When the words and actions are familiar, it allows you to forget the extraneous distractions of the mundane world. The words become habit, repetitive and begin to move you to an altered state of consciousness faster. Once these lines are memorized, you can focus on the energy of the circle and your purpose for the ritual. (Mischke interview)

In each NROOGD public ritual the religious leaders or High Priest and Priestess perform spiritual possession, by “drawing down the moon,”¹⁷ meaning that they invoke the presence of the Goddess and God into him or her and the circle. The priest invokes the presence of the Goddess into the body of the priestess, and vice versa. Through the invocation, the audience witnesses the priest and priestess each becoming possessed by the deities. This differs from many theatrical performances, where the audience is not usually privy to watching the actor become the character. In the NROOGD public rituals, the participants watch the celebrants¹⁸ take on the characterization of a deity before their very eyes. What the priestess does “internally during this process is – either purposely or instinctively alter her state of consciousness, to take on the persona of the Goddess, whom she will represent [or even, in some senses be] for the working part of the ritual” (Kelly 198). This is the most shamanistic portion of the ritual and can be a genuinely transforming experience. The priest kneels or stands in front of the priestess placing his hands over her womb and speaks:

Priest: Threefold Lady, Queen of Night,

Lady black and red and white,

Lady dark and full and new,

Hear us calling unto you,

Here your altar waiting stands,

¹⁷ Wiccan term for spiritual possession by a deity, to draw down the moon is to bring a deity down into your body.

¹⁸ “Celebrant” is a Wiccan term that denotes the performer in a public ritual, these performers are considered sacred actors and encompass not only the High Priestess and Priest in a ritual but all of the performers portraying all of the roles in the ritual performance.

Here your circle hand in hand,
Here your stone and here your sword,
Here your brim full cup is poured,
Here your wand and scourge of will
Here your vessel waits to fill,
Come down Lady, Come in come through.
Lady, join us in the work we do.

[priest stands to face the priestess]

Come down lady, She is near.

She is coming. She is here.

Welcome Lady. [priest kisses the priestess and they embrace]

Priestess: [facing the priest, moving her hands over his arms and shoulders] Lord of harvest, hunt and feast,

Lord of forest, field and beast,

Lord shadowed, green and gold,

Hear us calling as from old,

Here your altar waiting stands,

Here your circle hand in hand,

Here your sword and here your staff,

Here your vine and here your loaf,

Here your horns and here your wheel,

Here your vessel waits to fill.

Horn'd Lord come, come in , come through,

Lord, join us in the work we do.

[priestess stands to face the priest]

Come down Lord, he is near.

He is coming. He is here.

Welcome Lord! [they kiss and embrace], (Dark Forest Basic Ritual Script).¹⁹

From this point on the priest and priestess speak and act as the human embodiment of the deities. The poetry of these invocations is impregnated with lush language and sensuous imagery of male and female essences. The NROOGD basic script has used the invocations quoted above for 15 years now. The script itself is considered to be an aid towards altering the consciousness of the priest / priestess who over time, with repetition, form a conditioned response to the words themselves. The words of the invocation serve to remind the priest / priestess of the physical characteristics and spiritual essences of the God and Goddess. The words simultaneously inform the audience of the deities they are about to see before them. For audience members who have never previously attended a ritual the speaking of the invocations is their first introduction to the God and Goddess.

¹⁹ It should be noted that NROOGD is mostly a non-oath bound tradition of Wicca, meaning that a large part of their liturgy and ritual scripts are available for public view. All of the inclusions of sacred materials have been provided with full knowledge and permission for its use in the research of this Thesis. Dark Forest is a NROOGD coven active in presenting public rituals.

When invoking the Goddess the language from the passages above allude to the phases of the moon “dark and full and new”²⁰ and refer to the altar tools which are deemed to hold a feminine aspect as in “brim full cup is poured”²¹ and “wand and scourge of will”²² (Dark Forest Basic Ritual Script). The invocation to the God utilizes language, which harkens back to the images of Cernunnos²³ the ancient horned lord with the passages “Lord of harvest, hunt and feast, Lord of forest field and beast” (Dark Forest Basic Ritual Script). As the words of the invocations are spoken the participants follow along, the poetry is meant to fill the participant’s heads with visualizations of the deities. This brings the audience into the summoning of the gods, allowing the participants to lend their collective energy to conjuring the deities. All at once the participants are both a part

CERNUNNOS
from the Gundestrup
Cauldron, 2nd century A.D.

Fig 1. Cernunnos, in Walker, Barbara G. The Women’s Dictionary of Myth and Symbols. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988.

²⁰ The colors black and red and white in the ritual script refer directly to the Three faces of the Goddess, Black being the Crone and Dark moon, the Red being the Mother and Full moon and White being the Maiden and New Moon. These colors are important identifying aspects of the threefold goddess and often are repeated in the costuming of the Priestess in the Ritual. With in the ritual specific duties are required of the three Priestesses according to which color they are wearing.

²¹ “To medieval pagans, witches and alchemical mystics the cup was the universal symbol of the mother element, Water. In the Tarot deck the suit of cups represents the same water element and was replaced later in modern card decks with the suit of hearts,” (Walker 132).

²² The wand is associated with the element of Air. “The wand is a tool of transformation, therefore the wand invokes the power of the mother spirit, the Goddess who constantly transformed everything in the universe into something else: she who was called Heart of transformation, ‘from which all things arose,’” (Walker 32).

²³ The Horned Lord, or Horned One refers to the male aspect of deity. “Commonly thought of as the ancient Celtic God, Cernunnos. There are numerous images of Cernunnos dating from the Iron Age. The Latin term for Horn is *cornu*, and as the Romans civilized the ancient Celts, they had a habit of changing local names to fit Roman custom: most Roman names end in *us*. So Cernunnos is most likely a Roman name meaning *Horned One*. The ancient images of Cernunnos are unusually consistent. His main attribute is his horns, those of a Stag,” (Lugodoc website).

of the performance and separate from it, watching the act and willing it to happen, acting and reacting to the spiritual possession happening before them.

Two of the most crucial roles in Neo-Pagan public ritual are those of the High Priestess and Priest. These two performers personify the notion of actor as shaman in their performance duties in the ritual. The High Priestess and High Priest anchor the ritual both in the way in which they function as narrators to the performance and in their spiritual possession of the God and Goddess. In this state of spiritual possession by the Goddess and God, the High Priestess and Priest attempt to completely embody the deity. Once possessed the actors assume the physical, emotional and spiritual characteristics of the deity. They cast off their own personae and adopt those of a Goddess and God. Often while under this spiritual possession the performers are required to speak as the deity and as an oracle for the ritual participants. Unlike in theatre, these moments in the ritual are rarely scripted and the performers are assumed to be in such a deep state of characterization that the words of the deities will simply flow from their mouths. These actors in ritual are required to go beyond the normal bounds of performance and enter into a deeper state of characterization. To ready themselves for this deep characterization the performers focus their concentration, alter their consciousness and enter into a state of trance. The High Priestess and Priest, through their embodiment of deity, open the gateway to the realm of altered consciousness by “drawing down the moon,” “walking between the worlds” and existing “within and without”. Drawing down the moon refers to the Wiccan practice of the priestess/ priest drawing down the power of the deities into their physical bodies. The High Priestess will become spiritually possessed by the great

Mother Goddess, while the High Priest will become spiritually possessed by the Horned Lord. Margot Adler a leading researcher in Neo-Pagan ritual, describes the Wiccan practice of spiritual possession:

The phrase 'Drawing Down the Moon' originates from antiquity [. . .] and perhaps are the most extraordinary parts of the craft ritual, as preformed in covens. For here, in the true shamanistic tradition, the priestess (or priest) can become the Goddess (or God) and function as such within the circle. (168)

The High Priestess and Priest alter their consciousness and enter into a trance state in order to achieve this spiritual possession. They embody the deity and then must portray that depiction to the participants in the ritual, much in the same way an actor is expected to embody a character in a play. Just as in Grotowski's approach to actor training, this kind of deep immersion into his or her character, or spiritual possession of a deity require the performer to push beyond the comfortable boundaries and utilize the full range of the body, mind, and spirit. Given how difficult it can be to navigate those uncomfortable zones of emotion for those actors performing the roles of the High Priestess and High Priest, it follows that teaching some of Grotowski's techniques for developing the actor might benefit those performing in Neo-Pagan Public ritual.

One needs first define this elusive trance state and clarify how and when it occurs in the human body. In order to teach a person how to achieve this state of altered consciousness, we need to understand the technique, and how one arrives at it. Once the process of altering consciousness is identified, then an exercise can be developed to teach it. In Neo-Pagan practices the techniques for accessing trance states vary depending upon

the traditions and individual teachers. Some students go through several teachers and/or traditions until finding a technique that works for them. For many Neo-Pagans learning a codified technique for accessing trance states might be sought after and beneficial. But before one can alter consciousness, it needs to be defined.

Consciousness itself can be measured in the rhythmic vibrations emanating from the brain and nervous system. Throughout our lives, our state of consciousness is governed by the rate of these vibrations. Scientists, using electroencephalographs, can measure the number of energy waves per second pulsing through the brain. Scientists have developed a system of classification differentiating states of consciousness according to the rates of these brain waves. Edain McCoy describes this neurological classification system:

This Neurological Classification is defined by the speed of waves per second: Beta waves occur at between 15 –21 pulses per second, and denotes normal wakefulness, alertness, study and conversation, the person is aware of all physical sensations and bodily needs. Alpha waves occur at between 7-14 pulses per second, and denotes light to medium meditation, focused concentration, daydreaming, drowsiness, light sleep, the person finds waking from this stage mildly annoying, but not difficult. Theta waves occur at between 4-6 pulses per second, and denote deep meditation, deep sleep, light unconsciousness, start of REM state and the person finds waking from this level moderately to very difficult. Delta waves occur at .5-3 pulses per second and denote very deep sleep, coma, deep unconsciousness and the person has little or no consciousness of physical sensation or bodily needs. (283)²⁴

²⁴ Although this Neurological Classification definition is being cited from a non-scientific source book – the decision to use it as the primary definition was made because of the concise and accurate language of the quote. The scientific manuals can be obtuse and this definition from McCoy remains the most clear and concise statement on neurological classification among the sources of the literature review.

The state of active, waking attention focused on external everyday activities is governed by the presence of beta waves, vibrating between 15 and 21 cycles per second. These beta waves are associated with active concentration in adults and dominate in most humans past the stage of puberty.²⁵ Beta waves are evidenced during states of anxiety, tension and fear and vibrate at the upper end of the spectrum. Contrary to the beta waves rapid speed, the alpha waves vibrate at a much lower rate of between 7 and 14 pulses per second. This slower alpha state indicates a relaxed internal focus and sense of well-being: this is the threshold of the trance state. The slower vibrations start to allow more connection across the corpus colossus from the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Leyne Redmond discusses the importance of synchronizing the hemispheres of the brain in her book, When the Drummers Were Women: A Spiritual History of Rhythm:

Neurological studies indicate that the brain is divided into two hemispheres that share control of mental activity. The right brain functions as the creative center. It is the seat of visual, aural, and emotional memory, and processes information in holistic, intuitive terms, relying on pattern recognition. The left-brain is the administrator, or the rational mind. It proceeds in a logical, analytical, verbal, and sequential fashion. Incoming information is identified, classified and explained. In ordinary consciousness, either the left or the right brain dominates. We shift from one side to the other depending on the skills we require. (78)

Not only do the “two hemispheres of our brains operate in different modes, but they usually operate in different rhythms”(Johari 145). The right hemisphere of our brain may be emitting alpha waves while the left side generates beta waves. In states of deep

²⁵ The external indications of beta or alpha wave production are taken from the experiments performed by Andrew Nehar. Nehar is the scientifically recognized authority on trance induction experiments.

concentration, intense creativity, or under the influence of rhythmic sound, both hemispheres may begin operating in the same synchronized rhythm. This state of “unified whole brain functioning is called hemispheric synchronization” (Redmond 223).

As the rhythms of the two sides of our brain synchronize, there is a sense of clarity and heightened awareness that occurs. Feelings of self-consciousness and separation fall away. The individual is able to draw on the right and left hemispheres simultaneously. This hemispheric synchronization at the alpha state can induce feelings of euphoria, expanded mental powers and intense creativity. This may be the neurological basis of higher states of consciousness.

Many ancient religious practices seem to have originated out of attempts to induce the transcendent experience of hemispheric synchronization. Because each hemisphere controls the motor skills of one half of the body, rhythmic movement can facilitate hemispheric synchronization. The right hemisphere controls the motor skills of the left side of the body, while the left hemisphere controls the motor skills of the right side of the body. The very nature of moving our bodies in rhythm to music can move the brain into a higher state of consciousness. Rhythmic dancing accompanied by music and chanting, was an integral part of pre-Christian religious experiences, often bringing the dancer into a trance-like state of ecstasy. Andrew Nehar conducted a well-known series of experiments showing that the “rhythms of drums act as an auditory driving mechanism, (Nehar 125). Eliot Chapple elucidates the findings of Nehar’s rhythm experiments in his book Culture and Biological Man as:

Laboratory research by Nehar has demonstrated that drumming produces changes in the central nervous system. The rhythmic

stimulation affects the electrical activity in ‘many sensory and motor areas of the brain, not ordinarily affected, through their connections with the sensory area being stimulated.’ This appears to be due in part to the fact that the single beat of a drum contains many sound frequencies and accordingly it simultaneously transmits impulses along a variety of nerve pathways in the brain (51).

These auditory mechanisms could drive or entrain the subject’s brain waves into alpha or theta patterns. This ability of one rhythm to draw another into harmonic resonance with it is called entrainment. Entrainment is considered to be one of the great organizing principles of the universe “as inescapable as gravity, driving the planets in their orbits” (Chapple 77). Practitioners of Nada Yoga use the entrainment principal: through the use of movement and music they align their minds with what they believe is the “*unstruck sound*” that vibrates the world into existence. The unstruck sound refers to the use of Kundalini exercises. Kundalini, the Hindu serpent goddess, sleeps coiled at the base of the spine in the root chakra. As the serpent crawls up the spine through the different charkas, the individual aligns all the vibrations in their body to one harmonious frequency. When Kundalini has traveled through all the chakras, and the spine, heart, brain and breath are all in alignment the individual is said to have achieved ultimate enlightenment, being as one with the rhythmic vibrations of the universe. In archaic communities, the shaman used the drum to entrain the consciousness of initiates with the divine rhythms of the earth. In some ancient religions, “oracular priestesses, temple priestesses and maenads²⁶ were skilled at drawing from the skin head of the drum,

²⁶ “Maenads” refers to priestess who specialized in spiritual possession of single deities – often employed in oracle positions in a single temple. Maenads tend to represent animalistic qualities of the deities.

rhythms that entrained the minds of worshippers, moving them inexorably toward a state of ecstatic union with the Divine” (Redmond 223).

If trance states can be measured scientifically by EEG machines, then these altered states of consciousness can be repeated, recorded and even rehearsed. The science of neurological function tells us that hemispheric synchronization can induce euphoric sensations, and that this synchronization can be achieved through rhythmic movement. Then it follows that use of specific rhythmic movement can be applied to map out a journey from beta wave production into alpha wave patterns in the brain. But without the measurements of EEG machines, how can one determine if their state of consciousness has been altered? Gowan describes the general characteristics of trance states in the following chart:

**Ten General Characteristics of Altered State of Consciousness
of the Prototaxic Mode of Trance:**

1. Alteration in thinking – acceleration of thought process
2. Increased alertness or mental involvement
3. Increased awareness of external stimulus – increased sensitivity to light, sound or touch. Fascination with stimulus
4. Alteration in emotional expression
5. Change in body image
6. Disturbed time sense
7. Increased motor skills or capacity for physical endurance
8. Distorted perception
 - A. Visual - hallucinations or visions
 - B. Auditory – hearing voices
9. Hyper suggestibility, change in meaning of significance
10. Pain reduction, feelings of rejuvenation. (40)

Gowan states, “presentation of one or more of any of the ten general characteristics indicates that the subject has experienced an altered state of consciousness,”(41). Gowan

describes the trance state as “transitory, a temporary state which most human beings operate within on a daily basis” (43). Rouget affirms, “daydreaming while driving a car, tuning out of a conversation or fixation on an object outside the window are all examples of how human beings progress through trance states through out their daily lives”(117). Nehar had proved through his well-known scientific experiments that inducing trance states could be done “through rhythmic entrainment” and that this “trance induction could be repeated time and time again”(Nehar, 47). By following the general characteristics set forth above, one can develop a set of markers for determining when and if a person has moved into a state of altered consciousness. These general characteristics then become the markers by which trance state induction will be measured by this experiment.

Utilizing Gowan’s definition of altered states of consciousness, if at any time any of the participants in either the survey responses or the journal entries present one or more of the above markers, it will be considered that they have entered into a trance state during the exercise. All of the survey responses and journal entries will be evaluated with a qualitative approach, meaning the data will be read for the presence of one or more of the ten general characteristics set forth by Gowan. At no time will any of the participants be provided with the list of the above markers. Therefore if the writing responses present any of the Ten General Characteristics of Altered States of Consciousness in the Prototaxic Mode of Trance than it shall be considered that the participant experienced a trance state for the purposes of this research. In previous passages we have determined what constitutes an altered state of consciousness or trance state, and now we have a way to measure whether or not one has entered into this elusive condition. In a sense we have

laid out the goal of the exercise and a way to measure its results but still missing is the formation of the exercise it self.

To begin to formulate an exercise we need to first understand what forces alter the consciousness of human beings. There are many methods of trance induction including meditation, chemical alteration or drug use, and physical exertion. In the interests of developing an exercise that can be used in the rehearsal process of actors it was decided to forgo using any of the induction techniques that involved chemical alteration or quiet meditation. Searching for physical cues that would mimic the plastic²⁷ exercises of Grotowski, the methods of trance induction were limited to the realm of physical exertion. Starhawk, the renowned Neo-Pagan writer and researcher, asserts that there are four basic principles of trance induction; “relaxation, sensory restriction, rhythm and boredom” (162). These four related principles are echoed in one form or another in most of the literature on the subject of altered states of consciousness and serve as the basis for the creation of the Dancing in the Dark Exercise. The following chapter will outline these four principles of trance induction and their relation to the structure of the exercise. The following chapter will begin to examine some of the survey responses gathered from participants who experienced the Dancing in the Dark exercise in order to determine its success in attempting to induce altered states of consciousness.

²⁷ As previously mentioned in Chapter One – “Plastic” exercises is taken from the French term, “Plastique” it translates to mean exercises specifically targeted to develop one’s awareness of bodily parts. Plastic exercises tend to isolate different parts of the body to heighten awareness of their movement possibilities. Grotowski uses the word Plastic to describe his set of physical movements of the body. For the purposes of this Thesis, I too shall employ the term Plastic to refer to isolation of the body in structured movement.

Chapter Three: Dancing in the Dark **Teaching Trance State Induction through Movement Improvisation**

Some years ago I began work on developing a workshop designed to guide people into trance state utilizing movement and music. Borrowing from the exercises of Jerzy Grotowski, Nada Yoga,²⁸ and the principles of Kundalini Chakra work, a movement-based exercise that would induce trance states was formulated. This exercise, *Dancing in the Dark*, was taught at Pantheacon in February 2003 and again in February 2004. Pantheacon, one of the largest Neo-Pagan conventions held in the United States, is a gathering held over five days. It includes workshops, scholarly lectures and religious seminars geared for those interested in Neo-Pagan Studies. The convention has been in existence for over 15 years and currently attracts people from all over the world. Teaching this workshop at such a large convention served as an appropriate forum for determining the answer to whether trance states could be taught in such a way. Unlike previous *Dancing in the Dark* workshops, I would not work solely with actors who were already somewhat familiar with the deep concentration work of Grotowski. The participants were Neo-Pagans without any formal actor training. They might have some familiarity with some of the yoga concepts but for the most part, these people would be fresh to Grotowski's ideas. This workshop would be an indication of whether or not trance states could be taught to actors without formal training, utilizing some of Grotowski's actor training concepts.

²⁸ Both Nada Yoga and Kundalini Chakra work will be described in greater detail later in the chapter.

The following is a description of how the workshop was taught with details given to the form and function of the exercise and summarized experiences taken from personal accounts of participants in the workshop. The personal accounts of participants from the Dancing in the Dark workshop were gathered in the form of survey responses collected immediately following the workshop. All participants were asked explicitly to give their permission for me to quote directly from their survey responses in order to facilitate the research of this thesis. The participants were asked to sign an Agreement to Participate in Research form to confirm their permission to have their responses included in the publication of this thesis.

There are many methods by which one can alter consciousness, Starhawk in her book, The Spiral Dance, describes, “the four related principles to trance induction as: relaxation, sensory restriction, rhythm and boredom” (Starhawk 162). The first of these principles: relaxation, may be the most important. In order for a participant to feel relaxed and able to commit to the exercise one must provide a safe and secure environment. Any distraction brought on by worries of bodily injury, outside interruption or personal commentary will keep the participants from fully exploring the exercise. At the beginning of the workshop the rules are always clearly defined. I ask the group (in this case 150 people), to gather in a circle in the center of the ballroom. The ballroom is a large open space; chairs line the walls and at each end there is a table with pitchers of drinking water and cups for the participants. The security monitor is asked to shut and guard the door. From this point on no new participant is allowed to enter the space. Once the group has moved into the circle, the workshop ground rules are explained:

Instructor: Welcome to Dancing in the Dark, we are here to explore entering into altered states of consciousness through movement. But before we start there are three rules we must all agree to. Please repeat after me. One, NO BODILY INJURY!

The Group: No bodily injury.

Instructor: No bodily injury: this means no injury to yourself, to others or to any inanimate object in the room. I need you to commit fully to this exercise but you must keep an awareness of yourself and your environment as not to hurt yourself, others or this lovely hotel ballroom. You know your bodies better than I do. Do not attempt to do anything that you know would cause you injury. Those of you with physical ailments please monitor yourselves and avoid moving in such a way that would cause you injury. Agreed?

The Group: Agreed.

Instructor: Two, SAY YES TO THE EXERCISE! (motions for the group to repeat after her)

The Group: Say yes to the exercise.

Instructor: For this exercise to work, I need you to say YES! I need you to commit with your full body to the movement. I need you to release the worries about what you look like, to let go of the nagging self-conscious voice in your head that limits your participation. All of us will be moving and I need you to focus on your movement. I will be speaking throughout the entire journey and I need you to hear my voice in the back of your mind. Just listen to my voice and focus on the movement I ask you to do. Agreed?

The Group: Agreed.

Instructor: Three, JUST KEEP MOVING! (motions again for the group to repeat)

The Group: Just keep moving.

Instructor: You will be dancing for quite a long time, but I need you to keep moving. Not to the point of heart attack, but to the point of real commitment. Just keep moving. You will get tired, you will get sweaty, and you will get warm. If you find it a physical necessity for you to slow down your movement to maintain your health, then do so. If you must sit – there are plenty of chairs. But as you slow your movement, or sit, try and stay connected to the music by doing small movements while you regain your stamina. Just keep moving in some way so that you stay connected to the music. Trust me, it is in the exhaustion of your body that will allow your mind to let go and your journey into the trance state will arise. So keep moving. Agreed?

The Group: Agreed.

Instructor: Ok then. If you will all spread out and find a space in the room in which you can move freely we shall begin.
(Templeton DnD Script)

With that, the lights are dimmed. The room is dark enough to obscure the details of the other participants' faces. The darkness allows the other bodies to disappear into shadow, becoming figures moving around and about. As the participants dance they can see just enough to avoid collision but not enough to discern detail and become self-conscious of their own movement. The setting forth of ground rules and dimming of lights sets up a safe environment for all to work and play in without fear of ridicule. Setting up the safe and "sacred space" for the participants to explore allows the beginnings of relaxation, the first principle towards trance induction. For Neo-Pagans the notion of creating a sacred space in which to work is a common practice in ritual.

Casting a circle²⁹ to create a sacred and safe place in which to work, is a practice utilized in many Neo-Pagan rituals. Starhawk describes the casting of a circle in her work entitled Spiral Dance, as the “formal beginning of the ritual, the complex cue that tells us to switch our awareness into a deeper mode” (Starhawk 72). Casting a circle is an enacted form of meditation. In ritual, the participants “suspend disbelief” just as an audience does when watching a play, and this allows the critical and analytical functions of intellect to relax so that the intuitive nature of the subconscious can respond fully and emotionally to the events happening within the circle. Securing the doors, establishing ground rules and dimming the lights sent a psychological cue to the participants that this exercise both honored their usual ritual practices and provided a safe environment in which to explore.

The darkness of the room limits the visual stimulus of the participants, and helps direct their focus internally according to the second principle of trance induction.

Sensory restriction has been explored in research described by Robert Ornstein in The Psychology of Consciousness:

When subjects stared at a fixed image, after a time it seemed to disappear. At the same moment, [the subjects] alpha waves showed on their electroencephalograms. The alpha rhythm has been shown to be characteristic of meditation and deep relaxation. One consequence of the way our central nervous system is structured seems to be that, if awareness is restricted to one unchanging source of stimulation, a turning off of consciousness of the external world follows. The common instructions for concentrative meditation all underscore this. (163)

²⁹ Neo-Pagan rituals almost always begin with some sort of circle casting or creation of sacred space. This is considered to be a vital part of ritual and a function that many Neo-Pagans would be expecting in my workshop.

The dimming of the lights and restricting of visual stimulation automatically focuses the participants on their own movement. The very nature of the movement begins to turn their perspective inward.

Next the music starts. If the goal of this exercise is to guide the participants into a trance state, then the music used in the movement exploration is the pathway towards entraining the brain into altered states of consciousness. According to Gilbert Rouget author of Music and Trance “music holds remarkable power over our senses” (93). The music informs movement of the body almost unconsciously, for “physical actions and emotional stimuli that arise from listening to music are deeply conditioned responses” (120). Music moves us, “from the unconscious tapping of your toes to the alteration of pulse rate under a heavy bass beat” (120). Rouget states that “music is the essence of movement,” and in return, “music is the incitement to movement” (121). Music incites the listener to dance, and it is in the dance that the right and left sides of the body fully engage in the rhythmic stimuli and that, the hemispheric synchronization of the brain starts to take place. Rouget describes the power of this hemispheric synchronization as follows:

To dance is to inscribe music in space, and this inscription realized by means of a constant modification of relations between various parts of the body. The dancer’s awareness of his body is totally transformed by this process. Insofar as it is a spur to dancing, therefore, music does appear capable of profoundly modifying the relation of self with itself, or, in other words the structure of consciousness.
(121)

The soundtrack for this workshop is case specific, with careful selection of musical tracks designed to evoke emotional reactions from the listener. The melodic journey of this workshop is 63 minutes long: 63 minutes of non-stop dancing, non-stop moving, non-stop exploration of the body. Careful consideration went into in the length of the movement portion of the workshop. To keep a participant moving non-stop for over an hour does several things. First it exhausts the dancer. The pure exertion of the physical movement distracts him or her away from self-conscious concerns. Second, the length of time spent dancing serves to entrain the brain waves in the continuing pulsation of the music's rhythm. Third, the physical exertion and commitment required to dance continuously for over an hour begins to release endorphins into the blood stream; the dancers begin to experience the equivalent of a "runner's high".

The first track is designed to excite the participants, to get them up and moving with their whole body fully engaged. This track has a heavy rhythmic down beat at a moderately fast tempo. The musical tracks then follow a progression: each track is geared to help the participant connect with a different part of the body. This rhythmic progression through the musical journey is designed to entrain the brain's natural tendency to be moved by rhythm, the third of Starhawk's principles of trance induction.

As the participants dance, their bodies naturally respond to their increased need for oxygen. This autonomic response from the respiration system is the first physical step the dancer will take towards trance state induction. The simple act of breathing connects the dancer back to his or her body. Joseph Heller and William A Henkin discuss the importance of breath as inspiration in their book Bodywise:

Breathing is the very first act we must perform on our own. It is our proclamation, the single event that signifies we are alive. In the physical act of breathing, the upper part of the torso acts as a bellows mechanism, with the rib cage, lungs and diaphragm functioning together essentially like an air pump. At a gross level the purpose of breathing is to take in oxygen from the environment. Breathing literally energizes turns-on the body. (104)

The physical connection between breath and energy is also a “manifestation of the metaphysical qualities of breath, whose influence we experience quite tangibly in the body” (Heller 113). In many ancient Eastern systems of thought, breath is called the “energy of life” or the life force, also being referred to as “*chi* or *prana*” (Heller 114). The word inspiration speaks directly to “bringing spirit into the body, and a central concern of breathing well is to fully express the body’s ability to integrate and manifest spirit effortlessly” (Heller 114). This first section of the individual dance is designed to reconnect the participants to the awareness of his or her body through the very nature of breathing.

During all the dancing, the participants hear my voice guiding movements, giving directions to how and where their movement should center in the body:

Instructor: Allow all your movement to be centered in your feet. Your full body is still engaged but all of the impulse for moving is coming from your feet. Your feet are highly flexible. With a ball and socket joint at the ankle and the full articulation of the bones of the toes, you feet can move in all kinds of ways. Explore that freedom, that range of motion. . . Let the movement of your feet influence the rest of your body. Let your feet lead the rest of your body. Let your feet move you through the space. Begin to explore how your feet contact the ground. Is it light? Is it heavy? Can you alter how you contact the earth? Can you find a way of moving to let your feet find air? Maybe lie on the floor and let your feet explore the

realm where your hands normally move, (Templeton DnD script).

With each new musical track³⁰ a new area of the body is explored through movement. Starting with the feet the guided isolation of movement center works up from the feet to the legs, knees, and thighs. The decision to start initiation of isolation of the body movements with the feet is a calculated one. Tadashi Suzuki, creator of the Suzuki Method of physical actor training describes the “grammar of the feet” and its importance in his book The Way of Acting:

A performance begins when the actor's feet touch the ground, a wooden floor, a surface, when he first has the sensation of putting down roots; it begins in another sense when he lifts himself lightly from that spot. The actor composes himself on the basis of his sense of contact with the ground, by the way in which his body makes contact with the floor. The performer indeed proves with his feet that he *is* an actor. Of course, there are many ways in which the human body can make contact with the floor, but most of us make contact with the lower part of our body, centering on the feet. The various pleasures that an actor feels as he comes in contact with the ground – and the growth in the richness of change in his bodily responses when he is in contact with the ground – constitute the first stage in his training as an actor. (8)

Most human beings first contact with their environment is with their feet. Walking, standing and even sitting usually require a person's feet to connect with the floor.

Dancing is no different and requires no less of a connection of foot to floor. The body part conditioned to initially feel rhythm is also the foot. Human beings unconsciously tap

³⁰ The music selected for the Dancing in the Dark exercise comes from a variety of genres: including classical, folk, techno, rock, jazz, and various cultural sources. Music heavy with lyrics is avoided, so most tracks are instrumental with a strong down beat.

their feet with the beat of music. Even if the rest of the body is disengaged one can catch a person absently tapping his or her foot along with the rhythm. Knowing how important the “grammar of the feet” and their connection to the ground can be for most people, it is logical to start the physical isolations there.

Next the guided movement changes focus to isolate the hands, arms, and shoulders. By isolating the physical movements of the body the participant’s awareness of each of the body parts is heightened. Exploring the range of movement of individual body parts forces blood flow into those muscles and chemically connects their nerve endings back to the brain in a “finely tuned sense.” This process of starting with the outer extremities of the body warms up the mind’s connection to each individual part. Once the appendages are warmed up and connected to one another, the movement focuses into the core of the body. The dancer is directed to center the movement into the chest, abdomen and back. By making the axis of movement come from the core of the dancer’s body, the participant begins to explore his or her awareness of the spine.

Working in the core of the body or the spine synthesizes some of the energy transference concepts developed in Eastern religious theories. This notion that energy can be built, released and received through the human body exists in a variety of cultures and religions and takes many forms, including “faith healing, psychic healing, laying on hands, calling up spirits and varieties

Fig. 2. Chakras, in Walker, Barbara. The Women’s Dictionary of Myth and Symbols. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988.

of shamanism” (Heller 65). The energetic tradition appears in some form in many of the mystic religions, “most systematically to contemporary Westerners are those based in the Eastern Indian notion of charkas and the Chinese idea of acupuncture meridians” (Heller 66). The Hindu chakra system is best known as Kundalini yoga, which was translated for “Western understanding nearly sixty years ago by Charles W. Leadbeater” (Heller 66). The chakras are seven primary energy points following up the length of the spinal column. Each chakra is considered to be a focal point for a particular kind of energy “associated with its proximate body part” (Heller 67).

Table I - Chakra System

Chakra	Corresponds To	Energy/Function
Seventh	Crown of head	Enlightenment
Sixth	Brow / Third eye	Insight & intuition
Fifth	Throat	Communication
Fourth	Heart	Love & compassion
Third	Solar Plexus	Emotional & mental energy
Second	Genitals/Spleen	Sex
First	Base of spine	Survival

Source: Heller, Joseph and William A. Henkin. Bodywise. Berkeley: Wingbow Press, 1986.

The tempo of the exercise’s music, which up to this point has been more upbeat, slows as the guided dance moves into the pelvic girdle. There are two reasons for this change in tempo. The constant barrage of tempo and rhythmic beat of the music helps to alter the dancer’s consciousness. All of the music designed to connect with the body’s appendages have been at a higher tempo, and the dancers has been moving at a rapid pace

for more than 25 minutes. The dancers are beginning to feel tired, their cardiovascular system is fully engaged bringing air into their lungs, and blood pumps furiously from their heart to give the needed stamina to the body. This physical exertion helps heighten the dance's awareness of their core -- their chest, abdomen and spine. At the same time the exertion helps focus the mind onto the deeper concentration of the movement, the dancers can't help but release some of the worries about outside distractions. At this moment the movement is guided down into the pelvis.

The pelvic girdle is a very vulnerable part of his or her body. This is the seat of the sexual organs and the focus of shame for many people. To allow people to explore moving in this region is a frightening experience for many people: the movement exploration involving the "pelvic region feels highly vulnerable, and may be the seat of great tension -- particularly tension associated with the other nearby deep structures of the pelvic floor such as the genitals and buttocks" (Heller 155). "Indeed, tension in the pelvic area is all but universal: almost no one is entirely free from it, because in nearly all societies it appears with the onset of toilet training, when we are all first asked for our first measure of self-control" (Heller 156). The Neo-Pagan community is remarkably open in terms of discussing sexuality and Wiccan religious principles teach that sexuality is a primal creative force that is sacred and revered, and thus not so much a source of shame. Still, society tells us not to move in a suggestive way in public. So the physical exertion of the previous movements and the consequent release of mental distraction serve to free the dancer to move more fluidly in this region of the body.

This exploration of pelvic movement exploration is supported by the musical choice for this part of the exercise. The music here is slower in tempo with a strong sensual beat. The music evokes passion in a sexual sense and encourages the dancer to explore a more sensuous level of movement.

Instructor: Now let your awareness travel down into your pelvic girdle. This is one of the most flexible points of your body . . . where two ball and socket joints join the full articulation of the lower spine. Explore how these joints allow freedom and full range of motion through space. Feel the connection down your spine into your pelvis. Let your pelvis lead the rest of your body. Feel the beat of the music, connect to that sensual beat, and allow that awareness to lead you through the space. As the fire of your belly begins to burn it moves up through your body. Feel the sleeping serpent at the end of your spine awaken, and crawl up through your body and awaken each part of you as she goes. (Templeton)

The sleeping serpent refers to Kundalini, the Hindu Serpent Goddess. In the Tantric³¹ tradition, the spine is believed to be the central axis staff of the human body, around which the Kundalini serpent is supposed to twine upward through the chakras. After the serpent has been awakened from her coiled sleeping position in the pelvis, she is drawn up towards the head by yogic exercises. In Hindu tradition, Merudanda, or mystic spine, is an inner echo of the cosmic Axis Mundi, just as the heartbeat is an inner individual echo of the perpetual world-sustaining dance of Shiva.³² The Kundalini energy was supposed to coil around the Merudanda in a double spiral, one solar

³¹ "Tantric" refers to Tantrism: a doctrine of enlightenment as the realization of the oneness of one's self and the visible world; it combines elements of Hinduism and paganism including magical and mystical elements such as mantras and mudras and erotic rites; especially influential in Tibet.

³² One of the principal Hindu deities, worshiped as the destroyer and restorer of worlds and in numerous other forms. Shiva is often conceived as a member of the triad also including Brahma and Vishnu.

(rightward) one lunar (leftward). These were known as Pingala and Ida. The resulting design was remarkably like, “the hermetic caduceus with its twin serpents twining around a central staff – of the double helix of DNA” (Walker 26).

The dancer should now be fully aware of his or her entire body from fingers to toes. Now the movement shifts up the spine, up their neck and into their head. The head remains the last to be included for a reason. The head is “the top of the body’s core, and it is the seat of reason according to most Western civilization” (Heller 199). Many people are quite comfortable engaging their heads (their minds) in their everyday life, but it is exactly this emphasis on conscious intellectual thought that may inhibit the participant’s ability to reach an altered state of consciousness. Heller and Henkin discuss the notion of release and control of the head:

In our society we have accepted logic and reason as the correct modes of apprehending to such a degree that one of the worst things you can say about another person is that he or she is irrational, whereas rational is only one definition of sane in most dictionaries. The notion that everything can and should be organized according to reason is a basic principle of most Western societies. This view is promulgated by people who believe that the physical aspects of being human are less important than mental or emotional ones, and who seek to help us rise above the beastly part of our nature. Accepting that our fundamental unity can somehow be so split, they attribute what are supposed to be good qualities – those our culture deems desirable because they are least animal – to the highest most visible place, the head, and our worst aspects – those seen as undesirable because they are most animal – to the pelvis, the lowest, most hidden end of the physical pole. To free the muscles of your neck and in a sense lose your head, then, is to free this final portion of your body’s anatomy from muscular rigidities, and simultaneous to take a step towards freeing yourself from rigid patterns of thought and belief. (201)

Thus by waiting to engage the head until after the rest of the full body exploration has occurred and the participant is physically exhausted (the participants have been dancing for over 40 minutes at this point); the dancer is emotionally and mentally prepared to find a new awareness.

The level of physical exertion during this exercise rivals that of the most strenuous aerobics class. The sheer energy and stamina it requires to move continuously over the long course of the exercise focuses the dancer on the action itself, releasing thoughts of self and other distractions. The dancers are too sweaty, too tired and too out of breath to worry anymore about how they look. In addition, the physical exertion has triggered the brain to release adrenaline, and dopamine; chemicals which cause mind-altering reactions. These are the very chemicals that, when released, can create intense feelings of euphoria. For centuries, shaman have “employed the use of drugs or herbs to facilitate entering into a state of altered consciousness” (Rouget 305). “In the case of the Sufi Dancer’s” the shamans stimulate trance induction “corporeally through exhaustive exercise, responsible, no doubt, for a certain loss of consciousness” (Rouget 319).

After 40 minutes of continuous dancing, the participants may begin to feel a slight sense of boredom. Though the movement has constantly emphasized different parts of the body, it has still been constant movement and the bored mind can start to wander into the daydream state, which is exactly where the dancer’s brain waves need to go. Starhawk refers to this boredom as “an important way of inducing trance – it creates a state of security and familiarity, where the mind tunes out the repeated stimulus and tunes in on another channel” (163).

Until this point the dancers have traveled a solitary journey, exploring the movement of their own bodies. Now they are instructed to find a partner and begin to explore moving with another person. The participants are instructed to connect to their partner through the hands, to stay physically connected through their hands and continue to explore how they can move through space with a partner. Connecting through the hands is a fairly conventional way of touching another person and a comfortable place to start. Getting the participants to move from solitary to partner movement exploration can be difficult. It is done slowly and with great care so as not to jar the dancers back to self-conscious distraction. This is why the partner section always starts with connection through the hands. Then the dancers are guided to connect through their elbows, and then through their shoulders, backs, feet, knees, and legs. Once the partners have explored connecting through all of these points, the dancers are directed to connect to any part at will. Here is where the energy of connection between human beings begins to flow. The connection between the dance partners moves beyond the physical and into the emotional as they communicate non-verbally³³ through movement. Then the partners are asked to form quartets, octets and so on, until the entire group (in this case 150 people) is moving en masse in a giant amoeba of dancing bodies, each body connected to another with a part of its own body and undulating rhythmically in the center of the room. The non-verbal communication between the participants heightens through the close physical contact required in the group portion of the exercise. During the individual portion many of the participants have no trouble staying 'tuned in' to the music. However, when the

³³ For the purposes of this study, non-verbal communication refers to the physical cues given through movements of the body in an attempt to communicate with another person.

participants are guided to start connecting to other dancers, some exhibit signs of discomfort. This is the point in the exercise where some of the participants begin to talk, giggle and use their voice to attempt to gain distance from their dance partners. As the instructor, I watch the interaction and guide the dancers to avoid talking and laughing and ask them simply to make eye contact with those they are dancing among. Eye contact creates vulnerability in some people, especially prolonged eye contact in combination with rolling physical contact among a large group of people. Thus, during the group interaction I watch how the participants react physically to one another and help guide them to stay connected to one another through the music.

As the music ring to its final crescendo, many of the dancers exhibit intense emotional releases: some giggle uncontrollably, some sway, rocking back and forth while still embracing one another, while others have tears streaming down their faces. All of the dancer's faces show a new sense of body awareness and emotional openness; their emotions were displayed on the surface, raw and untamed. One woman remarked in her survey:

I feel joy. Joy spiraling up my legs and nestling in my pelvis.
It ripples up my torso, a lover's touch. As joy breathes
throughout my body, the opening begins. My ribcage is being
sprung open, peeled back like a ripe fig, my pelvis bursting
forth, a red rose unfolding. Now the gates of knowing open.
The knowing pushes through, must be transmitted, flowing out
in every gesture and movement of my body, directly from my
body to those around who witness it. And I was changed.
(Survey)

The survey results of the participants begin to indicate an altering of

consciousness at this point in the exercise³⁴.

One of the 10 general characteristics of trance state induction is a change in visual perceptions. This participant's description of how she felt her rib cage open and peel back like a ripe fig, gives some indication that she was experiencing an alteration in consciousness. This particular participant in this one comment manages to hit many of the general characteristics of trance state induction: first, a change in visual perception; second, a change in body image: and third, hyper-suggestibility. The mention of visualizing her rib cage open and

a red rose unfolding from within her is a clear sign of distorted perception in the visual realm. Further more in describing the opening of her pelvis, and the energy flowing between her and other dancers while she moved, the participant indicates a change in body image. She ends her survey response with "I was changed" which can be read as an indication that her own sense of her body and or movement had altered. She expresses

Ten General Characteristics of Altered State of Consciousness:

1. Increased alertness or mental involvement
2. Increased awareness of external stimulus – increased sensitivity to light, sound or touch.
3. Fascination with stimulus.
4. Alteration in emotional expression
5. Change in body image
6. Disturbed time sense
7. Increased motor skills or capacity for physical endurance
8. Distorted perception,
 - A- Visual - Hallucinations or visions
 - B- Auditory – hearing voices
9. Hyper-suggestibility, change in meaning of significance
10. Pain reduction, feelings of rejuvenation. (40)

Fig 3. Altered States of Consciousness Markers, in Gowan, John Curtis. Trance, Art and Creativity. Northridge California: California State University Press, 1975.

³⁴ For the purposes of this thesis, all surveys were read in a qualitative manner in presenting one of the ten characteristics of trance induction. In regards to visual perception – if a participant expressed the seeing, or visualization of any object, person, color, light or etc. which was not a actual part of the workshop room, then his or her survey response would be read as a positive presentation of the visual perception marker. All other markers were evaluated in a similar manner, again on a qualitative analysis of the statements made by the participants on their surveys.

evidence of hyper-suggestibility in her statement “now the gates of knowing open”. The participant is no longer simply describing visual or sensory stimuli but a shift in experience, which has assumed a mystical significance. Through her comment she exhibits a change in thinking, a change in body image, alteration in emotional expression and feelings of rejuvenation. This survey response presents evidence in the form of several of the markers of trance induction to indicate she experienced a trance state during the exercise.

Learning to open into trance states requires that one also learns how to return from them as well. Instructing the group to find a place on the floor and lie down on their backs, the participants are asked to close their eyes and listen to a guided meditation. This meditation is designed to reconnect the participants to the real world. By participating in specific visualizations, which move progressively from the abstract into the concrete reality of the room,³⁵ the dancer’s minds are given the psychological cues to return to normal active thinking. At the end of the meditation the participants are instructed to stretch gently. This connects them physically to the room: they even run their hands on the carpet. The guided meditation grounds their excess energy, and allows their minds to resume the normal active state of consciousness. Slowly the dancers are brought from the very relaxed state of the guided meditation back to standing, awake and alert in the room. The dancers are then instructed to drink water to replenish their bodies from the physical exertion and to re-enforce their return from the trance state. The act of

³⁵ The Participants are guided through a script of visualizations that focus on relaxation of the body and the return of breath. The visualizations start abstract in instructing them to imagine their bodies among the stars and then the participants are slowly guided to drift back to the room. The final series of visualizations are an actual description of the room; this is to reconnect their awareness to the concrete world of the room.

drinking water, a mundane, everyday activity and one that engages the digestive system of the body, helps the participant has return to his or her normal state of consciousness.

After the group had been successfully grounded,³⁶ the participants are asked to fill out surveys detailing their experiences in the workshop. Of the 150 people in attendance over two thirds of them filled out surveys: 95 participants described “losing sense of their bodies and moving without feeling self conscious,” while 67 others described, “losing their selves into the music and moving in ways they never had before” (Survey). These two statements are examples of responses that present evidence of one or more of the markers of trance state induction. These two statements indicate the presence of marker five (a change in body image) and marker seven (as increased motor skills or capacity for physical endurance). In all, 91 participants’ surveys stated that they began to have visions while they were dancing. The following are examples of survey responses that were read as indications of evidence of marker eight (distorted perception with vision and/or hallucinations). One man wrote, “I felt like I was flying, soaring around the room, my arms became wide stretched wings of golden feathers and I was free floating high above the room and earth” (Survey). A woman spoke of her visions of being “a ball of colored ribbon, as I moved and touched people, tendrils of brightly colored ribbons of red, gold and purple would pour out of my hands and entwine around who ever I was moving with” (Survey). One of the participants described feeling an overwhelming, “energy connection flowing between all of us, like we were all melding into one being, at one with each other and in sync with the universe” (Survey). These

³⁶ Grounding is a common term used in Neo-Pagan rituals and is a way of releasing the excess energy built up in the circle. This is done before the circle is opened to help the participants reenter the mundane world.

kinds of statements were read both as an indication of marker nine (hyper-suggestibility or change in significance) and as marker four (an alteration in emotional expression). When asked whether work like this would help them in their own spiritual and ritual practice, one woman remarked, “this kind of work is invaluable for ritual, this is the very essence of what it means to draw down the moon, to inhabit the Goddess³⁷ and know her beauty to be able to express it to the circle”(Survey).³⁸

At no time were the ten characteristics of trance induction discussed with the participants; further, the questions on the survey were purposefully worded as to not direct the participants to formulate answers,³⁹ which would point to the ten general characteristics of altered states of consciousness. Rather, the questions on the survey were open-ended and asked the participants to share their own opinions of the workshop. For example, they were asked “Which part of the workshop would you improve” or “What did you like best about the workshop?” If any participants present one or more of the markers of the ten general characteristics in their survey responses, then it was read as an indication of successful trance induction in the subjects. If a participant describes an alteration in body image, or seeing a vision, then it was assessed as a marker indicating successful induction into a trance state. All of the participants surveyed stated they would take this workshop again and were highly interested in exploring further trance work training of this sort.

³⁷ To inhabit the Goddess – refers to the act of spiritual possession the High Priestess undertakes within ritual.

³⁸ Circle – refers to the audience of a ritual, or the ritual participants.

³⁹ A copy of the actual survey questions is included in the appendix.

The survey responses indicate one can teach people to alter their state of consciousness by building on the plastic exercises Grotowski employed in his actor training and incorporating music and dance. Nearly all of the participants in the workshop felt they had altered their consciousness and that this trance state produced intense emotions, feelings of euphoria and even dream visions in some of them. Since presenting the Dancing in the Dark workshop at Pantheacon I have been approached to teach at many other conferences and conventions. It seems the teaching of trance states is a much sought after endeavor, especially in the Neo-Pagan community. In the Ancient Ways Newsletter, April 2003, a summary of the experiences of Pantheacon was included: Dancing in the Dark was rated as, “one of the favorite workshops of the convention by attendees,” (Pantheacon 3).⁴⁰ Dancing in the Dark was asked to return to Pantheacon and be presented in multiple time slots so that more convention goers could attend. In 2004, I taught the Dancing in the Dark workshop again at Pantheacon. The workshop was very well attended and was asked to return in 2005. The best answer to my question of whether or not trance states could be taught using acting exercises to Neo-Pagans to help them in their own ritual practice came in one of the survey responses of one of the participants of the Dancing in the Dark workshop:

⁴⁰ This version of the Dancing in the Dark workshop, taught at Pantheacon in February 2003 was restructured from its original format. Originally the workshop was taught to actors, utilizing common vocabulary and terminology from the theater. While in the Neo-Pagan version of the script many of the acting terms were replaced with terminology more common to the pagan community. Thus, more emphasis was placed on the Kundalini Yogic exercises and the use of Chakras. These terms are much more familiar to the pagan community and can induce deeper meaning inside the exercise. When teaching this exercise to actors the use of ‘actor’ terminology serves to induce a greater reaction in the participants. Thus, it is important to structure the language of the workshop script to accurately address the group of participants.

I have been in the craft⁴¹ for over fifteen years. During that time I have experienced spiritual highs and lows, but never had I felt the true presence of the Goddess, never felt divine ecstasy. I have been meditating, chanting and drumming for years but was never able to reach that ever elusive trance state. I always thought IF I could meditate longer, IF I could chant louder, IF I could drum faster I would someday reach that ecstatic moment. That was 'til I attended your class. I felt the presence of the Goddess, I saw her shining face, and I danced in her love. Your class made me understand that it was no longer IF I could ever reach divine ecstasy but WHEN, (Survey).

The Dancing in the Dark workshop was given on two occasions collecting a total of 274 survey responses from the participants. Of the original 274 survey responses, 26 were thrown out due illegible handwriting or incomplete forms. The remaining 248 surveys were

evaluated on a qualitative basis, to see if any of the responses revealed one or more of the 10 general characteristics of altered states of consciousness. Of the 248 surveys

Fig. 4. Pantheacon Survey Data Chart. February 2004.

⁴¹ Craft refers to those who are practicing witchcraft, the spiritual and religious studies of Wicca.

responses 96.4% of those who participated in the workshop displayed one or more of the markers from the ten general characteristics of altered states of consciousness: while 3.6% of the surveys did not present any of the markers. In the survey responses that presented one or more of the markers: 37.1% presented at least one marker, 28.6 % presented two markers, 19.4% presented three markers, 6.9% presented four markers and 4.4% present five or more markers.

As stated in the previous chapter, this way of evaluating the survey forms is not meant to be a true scientific determiner for whether the participant's brain waves altered from Beta to Alpha states. Rather this evaluation of the survey responses is meant to be a qualitative overview of whether the exercise was inducing trance states in some people and how the exercise could be improved in future workshops. After review of the survey response data it was determined that the Dancing in the Dark workshop did induce altered states of consciousness in some of the participants. In two separate tests, at Pantheacon in both 2003 and 2004, the Dancing in the Dark exercise had proven successful at inducing trance states in the participants. Now it was time to employ the exercise in rehearsal with actors. It was decided to employ the use of the Dancing in the Dark exercise in the rehearsal process for the San Jose State University's production of The Crucible. The Dancing in the Dark exercise would be used in rehearsal with the cast for nine weeks and the actors would be asked to keep a journal of their rehearsal experiences in order to evaluate their perceptions of how working in trance states affected their ability to perform.

Chapter Four: The Crucible Bringing Dancing in the Dark into Rehearsal

The rehearsal process for San Jose State University production of Arthur Miller's The Crucible began in late September 2003 with a cast of 25 actors. Because this production was mounted at a university, the actors were students; rehearsal had to function not only as the foundation for building a production, but also as an advanced acting class. Actors received course credit for their participation and were expected to keep a journal of rehearsal experiences as part of their grading assessment. The journal assignment spanned the entire length of the rehearsal process and required the actors to examine their personal experiences regularly throughout that process. The journals were evaluated at three points during the rehearsal process to monitor how the actors were responding to use of the Dancing in the Dark exercise.

As a director, I determined that these actors on the whole had little movement training, so guiding the cast to become more aware of their bodies became essential to the rehearsal process. The young actors were being asked to play characters with different life experiences from those of their own. The characters of The Crucible range in age from 12 to 84 and inhabit the harsh world of early frontier America. My well-fed modern actors had to learn to embody characters who faced death in the form of starvation, hostile invasions, and illness on a daily basis. The dramatic nature of the script demanded that the actors engage their bodies to the fullest extent of their physical range.

The characters in The Crucible inhabit a small rural village and know each other intimately. The script called for the actors to develop a keen sense of non-verbal communication among them. Part of the dramatic structure of The Crucible is the

communication among them. Part of the dramatic structure of The Crucible is the frenetic storm of terror that overtakes the village and clouds the reason of the courts during the time of the Salem witch trials. The courtroom scene in act two of The Crucible is a prime example of how non-verbal communication among the characters drives the emotion in the scene as the girls start to mimic Mary Warren and as if bewitched, reacting to unseen spirits simultaneously. There are historical documents describing these kinds of reactions in the actual witch trials in which the girls were reported as acting and speaking in unison. Arthur Miller studied these historical documents and fashioned the action of the courtroom scene to highlight the way the girls acted in unison. In order for the actors to portray the characters in The Crucible, the cast needed to learn how to communicate and react in unison, spontaneously reacting en masse in scene after scene. This same kind of group non-verbal communication develops among the participants in the later portion of the Dancing in the Dark exercise. If as a director I sought to develop the same kind of communication and energy exchange in the cast that is found in the Dancing in the Dark, then using the exercise with the actors might be beneficial to rehearsal. The Dancing in the Dark exercise was employed with the cast of The Crucible throughout the entire rehearsal process.

The exercise remained much the same as described in the previous chapter. With one notable exception, the cast was exposed to the exercise on 15 occasions over the course of six weeks. The script guiding the movement through the individual parts of the body remained the same. The music, however, was changed: selections were picked for their relevance to the show and to the characters. On the first day of rehearsal the actors

were assigned to bring in a track of music, which they believed represented the emotional life of the character they were playing.⁴² Asked to pay particular attention to musical scoring, tempo and lyric, the actors searched for a song, which represented their vision of the characters. These songs then were edited into a soundtrack for the exercise along with other selections that would be used in the production of the show. Forcing the actors to find and deliver the songs that would be incorporated into the exercise soundtrack encouraged the actors to engage with at least one of the musical tracks. Incorporating many of the tracks; in the actual production soundtrack, provided the actors with a psychological and emotional link to their rehearsal experiences and exploration. The music used in the exercise served a dual purpose; it would progressively entrain the actors into a trance state in rehearsal and it would provide a conditioned response to recreate that trance state in performance.

As in the workshop version of the Dancing in the Dark exercise, the structure of the rehearsal exercise followed Starhawk's four principles of trance induction: "relaxation, sensory restriction, rhythm and boredom," (162). To ensure the safety of the rehearsal space the theater was closed to all outsiders, only those intimately involved with the production were allowed to participate or observe. This allowed the actors to develop a sense of freedom in their exploration of movement. The lights dimmed to focus the actors' attention inward and away from the self-conscious thoughts of their appearance to others. The actors could see just enough to avoid collision but not enough to distinguish

⁴² The music brought in by the actors spanned a wide range of popular rock music including songs from such artists as: Metallica, The Beatles, Macy Grey, Fiona Apple, King Crimson, and the Goo Goo Dolls. Two actors brought in instrumental jazz pieces, while another actor brought in Celtic folk music: all three of these selections were used in the performance soundtrack.

features or facial expressions. Removing the sensory stimuli of the eyes forced the actors to begin to communicate non-verbally by means of physical connection. Gowan states “depriving the average person of sensory stimulus, and the ordinary state of consciousness is replaced by an altered state” (98). He further asserts that “darkness, defuse light or an unvaried visual environment were equally effective in producing reported visual sensations, and hallucinations ranging from imagery of a simple nature to full-blown scenes” (99). The actors’ visual stimulus was limited to dim light through out the exercise. They could not see their forms moving through space; rather, the actors had to begin to feel their limbs moving through space; a new kind of bodily awareness for most of the actors.

Some actors are hypercritical of their appearance and aware of how others perceive them aesthetically. Heller describes how “many human beings operate with a level of self-consciousness around their appearance, and this can limit their physical exploration” (19). Actors need simultaneously to be aware of how they look to an audience while on stage and to remain fearless enough to explore the extremes of emotion and physicality in performance. Therefore limiting the visual stimuli by dimming the lights was intended to give the actors more freedom to explore movement that might bring up feelings of vulnerability. Steven Waugh cites Grotowski’s wisdom on this need for safety in rehearsal in his book An Acrobat of the Heart:

The essential problem is to give the actor the possibility of working in safety. The work of the actor is in danger, continuously supervised and observed. One must create an atmosphere, a working system, in which the actor feels that he can do anything, and nothing he does will be mocked,

that all will be understood . . . Often, the moment the actor understands this, he will reveal himself. (Waugh 8)

Waugh goes on to point out that the feeling of safety in the rehearsal space links directly to the actor's ability to reach the deeper levels of concentration because "external physical action is directly linked to our inner state" (11). Thus this process of creating a safe space is the first step towards connecting the actor's conscious and unconscious awareness. The physical movement inherent in the dancing utilizes the conscious external actions to stimulate inner awareness and, in turn, uses this new inner awareness to initiate clear, physical actions in performance. And that is exactly what the physical exploration of this exercise is about: "not physicality for its own sake, but physicality because the body serves as a pathway into our emotional life and as a means of knowing and expressing what we feel," (Waugh 12).

From the first day of rehearsal the actors were exposed to the exercise and asked to write about their experiences with the exercise in their journals. As in the original *Dancing in the Dark* exercise the same ten markers of successful trance induction cited by Gowan and discussed in chapter three would be used to evaluate the responses in the actors' journal entries. From their very first exposure to the exercise, many of the actors began to express experiences that presented one or more of 10 general characteristics of altered states of consciousness. Many of the actors wrote of dancing freely, moving in ways they would previously not have felt comfortable doing. One actor reported, "I hate dancing, always have . . . I never dance in front of people cause I hate the way I look, but I didn't care what people thought of me... I just got lost in the music and danced as if

nobody else was there,” (Journal entry). This kind of response indicated the presence of marker five (the change in body image). Not only did many of the actors experience a change in their body image, but many of them reported increased physical abilities, marker seven of trance induction. One actor stated, “I never thought I could move like that... jumping so high it felt like I was flying” (Journal entry). While another actor exclaimed, “my arms were like fifty feet long, reaching out and touching the walls on all sides” (Journal entry). This last entry presents multiple markers, seven (increased motor skills or capacity for physical endurance) and eight (distorted visual perception with visions). Some of the actors had begun to express their visions through drawings; a few of the journals became outpouring of creative expression through sketches and paintings as seen in figures five and six.

Many of the actors also experienced changes in their visual perception, the eighth marker of trance induction. Many of the journal entries cited visions of colors and tracing lights while the actors were dancing. One actor wrote about seeing, “streams of bright golden light,” emanating from her palms while she danced (Journal entry). These visions of colored lights seemed quite common with entries that included such observations as, “I saw a ribbon of purple and green light swirling around our heads” or “all of a sudden everyone was dancing in the egg shaped orbs of different

Fig. 5. My Doodlebug. Journal Entry. The Crucible Cast. January 2004.

colors and the egg colors would merge and blend as they bumped up against each other” (Journal entry). Some of the actors reported hallucinatory visions: “I saw the ceiling peel away to reveal fiery stars and the misty rings of planets” and “my back ripped by the wings . . . as I spread my wings over the room I shadowed the group in dark shadow” (Journal entry). Clearly these journal entries indicate the presence of marker eight and indicate that many of the actors were experiencing an altered state of consciousness even in this very first expose to the exercise.

A few of the actor journal entries did not exhibit any of the general characteristics of trance induction after the first exposure to the exercise.

However, by the third round of participation in the exercise all of the actor journals entries reported at least one of the markers that could be interpreted as an indication of trance induction. The markers reported in the actor journals were primarily visual distortions or hallucinations⁴³ and increases in motor skills or capacity for physical stamina. By the third week of rehearsal (in which the actors had been exposed to the Dancing in the Dark exercise six times) the journal entries were reporting

Fig. 6. Colors and Lights. Journal Entry. The Crucible Cast. January 2004.

⁴³ “Hallucination is an old word, from Latin *allucinatio*, which means a wandering of the mind. It has been used in English since the Middle Ages for the medical phenomenon of seeing or hearing percepts which did not occur in nature, hence the delusion of the senses” (Gowan 120).

two or more markers in over 82% of the cast.⁴⁴ It is important to note that, as with the Neo-Pagan participants discussed in the last chapter, at no time were the general characteristics of trance induction that would be used for evaluation discussed with the actors. These characteristics were purposely kept private in order to ensure that anytime an actor reported an experience that signified an altered state of consciousness under the markers, that the journal entry could be evaluated as spontaneous and a true indication of trance induction. The instructions to the actors on how to write journal entries were also purposely focused on the actor's personal experiences with rehearsal so as not to lead any of the actors to produce entries that would falsely indicate trance induction. The actors were instructed to write entries explaining their personal reaction to rehearsal, along with other character analysis and character observation entries each week.

Early in the rehearsal process the actors' journal responses indicated that many of them were indeed experiencing an altered state of consciousness during their participation in the exercise. Nevertheless simply experiencing a trance state was not the goal of the rehearsal. How could I guide these actors to use this altered consciousness outside of the exercise in their characterization work in the play, in relation to their ability to perform? As rehearsal progressed the actors started to notice that the time it took for them to fall into trance shortened. Many of the actors cited that "hearing the first notes of the music would transport me into another place . . . away from where I was before

⁴⁴ As stated the previous chapter the actors' journals were also read in a qualitative manner in terms of presenting one or more of the ten characteristics of trance induction. The readings rely on the direct quotes of the actors. For example in terms of change in visual perception, if the actor expressed in his or her response seeing, visualizing or any other visual verbiage describing any object, person, animal, color, light, etc. that was not actually physically in the rehearsal room, then his or her response was read as a positive indication of the visual perception marker.

rehearsal” (Journal entry). Gowan describes the same phenomena in shamanic practice: “the trance can be learned and with repeated practice the shaman can begin to alter his consciousness at will, in less time” (227). The actors were reaching deeper states of concentration in shorter and shorter amounts of time. The actors were learning the process of trance induction much as they were learning their lines and blocking and as the days of rehearsal continued they assimilated and equated these trance states with rehearsing the play.

The exercise itself breaks into two parts: the first consists of individual exploration of movement and the second is devoted to group exploration. The individual exploration of the body is where the actual trance induction is supposed to take place during the exercise. The dancer is guided to explore the different parts of the body in order to access the trance state, so that by the end of the individual journey the participant is in an altered state of consciousness. The second portion of the exercise requires the dancers to start connecting to other people physically. This second portion is designed to make the participants perform within the trance state. The very nature of having to find and merge with other people forces the participants to begin to explore non-verbal communication. In order to stay physically connected to their dance partners the participants enter into an ongoing non-verbal conversation. The actors begin listening with their bodies: sending and receiving physical cues to their dance partners. The lack of light in the room removes the actors’ ability to read the facial expressions of their partners. Without these familiar facial expressions, communication with a dance partner becomes more difficult and the actors develop new ways of conversing with them. The

statement that actors to start to “*listen with their bodies*”, is not meant to be figurative; in this case it is a literal description of the communication which begins to take place among the dancers. Deprived of visual stimulus the actors engaged with one another through the sense of touch. To maintain connect with the group while dancing, the actors had to transmit and receive information needed to keep moving en mass through touch.

The actors described their connection with their partners in many ways, some wrote of full imaginary conversations in which the words of their partner “popped into his head” (Journal entry). Other actors described taking on the emotions of their partners through touch: “as we moved together I felt a deep sadness coming up through where my shoulder blades touched his back” (Journal entry). Here the actor is not only describing a non-verbal conversation, but also relaying a heightened significance in the emotional content transferred within that communication. One actor described an empathic “ping pong match” in which her emotional state changed as she moved through the group, experiencing a new feeling with each person she contacted (Journal entry).

As stated in a previous passage, halfway through the rehearsal progress the actors were falling into the trance state in shorter and shorter times. To maximize the time that the actors spent working within the trance state, the first individual portion of the exercise was shortened. Thus the actors began spending longer times in the group section of the exercise. This change in the exercise was engineered to develop the actor’s ability to maintain practical function while still in this altered state of consciousness. From the journal responses of the actors it was clear that they had little trouble falling into the trance state in the individual journey, but in the beginning of working within the trance

state in the partner portion of the exercise, many of the actors expressed that having to connect to another person “threw them out” of the altered states of consciousness, (Journal entry). Gowan states “physical contact with individuals in an altered state of consciousness can cause anxiety [. . .] a catalyst to move the individual into a more active state consciousness” (164). Gowan points out as training develops the shaman[s] can learn to perform fantastic physical feats within the trance state in Hindu fire walking or Haitian poison consumption” (176). As the cast continued to explore the exercise in rehearsal, fewer actors reported losing the deeper concentration when they moved into the partner section. During the later half of the rehearsal process an interesting phenomena began happening during this partner and group portion of the exercise. As the actors continued to use the exercise the group portion was elongated, and the actors would partner and group according to the social strata of the play. At first the actors tended to partner in their external social groupings; that is friends would gravitate to one another. The actors split into two social groupings: the first being comprised of those characters who accuse their neighbors of practicing witchcraft, and the second being those characters that are accused in the play. By week four of the rehearsal process, however, the actors began to routinely partner with the actors playing their wife or husband or parent in the play. They began coupling and grouping similarly to the way characters were grouped in the village of the play. This change in social grouping also played out in the actors’ journals. The actors began to write about their partnering experiences utilizing the character’s names rather than the actors’ names. This switch in referring to other cast members by character name indicated that a deeper significance

was being placed on the characterizations than it had been earlier in the rehearsal process. The actors were identifying personally with the characters they were portraying in the play and forming deeper associations to those characters both in rehearsal and in the writings in their journals.

This revelation came as a surprise; one would expect this exercise to help the actors bond as a cast and maybe eventually that bond would translate into their reactions on stage, but no directions to “dance with the people your character would associate with in the play” were ever given. The actors started grouping this way naturally within the confines of the exercise. The actor playing a lead role discussed in one journal entry the difficulty he was having in the partnering section. He repeatedly found himself partnering with the actor who played his wife and when asked to merge with another group, he would make efforts to merge with the actor who played his mistress in the play. In this journal entry he describes how “uncomfortable” it was to try and dance between these two women and how he always felt the need to “get in between” the women (Journal entry). In this journal entry this actor did not use the actors’ names but instead the character names in describing the dancing experience: in essence this journal entry reveals that his experience as an actor in the exercise with two other actors replicated the emotional dynamic of the relationship among these the characters they portrayed. This journal entry read like a metaphor for what was happening between these very characters in the play. In the same entry this actor described, “feeling her [his wife in the play] burn a hole in his back while he turned and danced with [his mistress],” (Journal entry). He

did not describe this in terms of acting in a scene in the play, he was simply recounting an experience he had while participating in the Dancing in the Dark exercise.

In later journal entries from this same actor he wrote of this same woman, who played his wife, “shooting him looks” and “burning a hole in his back” while they were playing the scenes in the play (Journal entry). The same reaction he had first experienced in the exercise had reoccurred while he was acting. The actors in performance of the play were now using many of the non-verbal communication cues, which had first developed in the exercise. Indeed the social dynamics of the play began bleeding into this acting exercise, and vice versa.

The experiences of the Dancing in the Dark exercise slowly began inking their way into the portrayals of characters in the play. Another actor expressed finding the psychophysical gesture of his character within the exercise in one of his journal entries. Stanislavsky first introduced the notion of a psychophysical gesture in his book An Actor Prepares. Stanislavsky believed that emotion could only arise, through the truth of physical action” (151). Michael Chekhov clarifies the psychophysical gesture as a movement that can “entice, provoke, and coax our feelings by indirect means” (63). If emotion is triggered from physical action, then by refining a specific physical gesture an actor can expect to develop a movement, which could produce an emotional reaction upon demand. This is the primary idea behind the psychophysical gesture. An actor described his discovery of his psychophysical gesture in his journal:

I was dancing . . . kinda stompin around really banging my feet on the ground and pounding my fists against the air. Then I opened my fists and shook my hands in front of my face in this ‘why me’ gesture and I felt so frustrated . . . so

out of control. I let that hand shaking, feet stomping movement carry me around the room. As I would cross the paths of others I would point my hand shaking to them. Sometimes they would react to me. Some pulled away and ran from me. Other seemed to try and comfort me. I just kept doing it and I felt so out of control, like no one understood me or what I was feeling. They just ran from me or felt pity for me. I think that is how [my character] feels most of the time. I don't think people understand him. They blow him off or worse pity him. I want to bring that hand shaking gesture into my scene work. I want to see if I can get that same sense of frustration again in the scene. (Journal entry)

To take an emotional experience from the exercise and connect that emotion back to the physical gesture is a notable break through for an actor. However, this actor took it one step further, and began to understand that the gesture, which sparked emotion in him in the exercise, might also spark that same emotion in acting the scene. He also began to realize that this gesture could be employed at will, and in so doing would reconnect him emotionally to the discovery he made in the altered state of consciousness. Here was the first concrete bit of evidence that the actors were indeed making discoveries in the trance state that would impact their performances. This same actor remarked in another journal entry that he had always had "trouble feeling any emotion" while performing (Journal entry). He had previously pretended or represented emotion in his work but never actually "felt real emotion as a character" (Journal entry). He reported that all that changed in this show and "for the first time I felt like this guy [his character] and would get really angry in the scene" (Journal entry). This new found emotional connection was difficult for this actor and he found it daunting to try to discard it every evening after the show.

He was not the only actor who was experiencing an emotional opening on stage. An actor playing an older character also described a difficulty with “feeling true emotion on stage” (Journal entry). She described in her journal how she had created a powerful emotional connection with one of the songs used in the Dancing in Dark exercise soundtrack and used later in the production of the play. She saw this track of music as her character’s song and she developed her own psychophysical gesture while dancing to it during the exercise. This gesture was distilled into a slight swaying motion she described as “being rocked by the hand of god” (Journal entry). She described how every time she would begin this rocking motion in time with the music it would elicit tears from her. She experienced this reaction first in the exercise and then later while listening to the song in her car and eventually while in the final scene of the play. This actor had developed a powerful psychophysical gesture while in the trance state. She had, in a sense, created a conditioned response to this movement and music. Rouget discusses “a condition reflex, which means that every time a specific stimulus is applied, there is a corresponding reaction, the individual having been accustomed to behave in this way in response to an agreed-upon signal” (177).

This actor described how during the final scene of the play, when her character is being led to the gallows, she would sway and hum the song in her head and “she would feel the love of God wash over her and hear him tell her ‘take heart you shall be with me soon’” (Journal entry). The statement was a direct link to the vision she first had in the exercise while dancing, and each night in performance she would feel such a powerful wave of sorrow that she would weep for almost the entire scene. The actor described in

later entries how difficult she found it to shake off the sorrow from the final scene after the performance. “I would be like walking around in this daze, like in another world or something . . . people would talk to me and I would be like ‘huh? Were you talking to me?’,” (Journal entry). This might be an example of the hazards of working in trance states, but again it shows how the actors were connecting discoveries found in the exercise back to their work in the play.

Several other actors in their journals recounted experiences similar to the ones described by the actors in the previous responses. By the final weeks of rehearsal most of the actors in one way or another were reporting exploring movements or gestures that had been discovered in the exercise and incorporating them into their character work in the play. Not every actor had emotional epiphanies while in rehearsal, however. There was one actor in particular who continually expressed in his journal that the Dancing in the Dark exercise was a waste of rehearsal time for him. Although he found the exercise “fun . . . it seems like a waste to spend an hour of rehearsal on this dance party all the time” (Journal entry). However although he complained that this exercise “was doing nothing” for him, he was nevertheless beginning to make psychophysical gesture discoveries in the exercise which he would later employ in the show. In one particularly frustrating run of the exercise for him, he began exploring a snorting movement. He would violently snap his head and snort at people in an almost animalistic way. In his journal he described the movement as his “getting rid of annoying people move” (Journal entry). Later he reported wanting to bring a smaller, distilled version of this gesture into the scene, and this crisp nose wiping gesture became a stock move of his character. In

one of his final journal entries he declared that this nose wiping gesture was “the essence of [his character]” and more than any other piece of costuming or character choice made him “feel like [his character] was being brought to life on stage” (Journal entry). The thing that brought this character to life on stage was a little physical movement first explored in the exercise that this actor proclaimed was a waste of his rehearsal time.

The actors did not always react positively to the emotions stirred up in the exercise. Working intensely in movement can stir many emotions within the participants. Those emotions feel magnified while the participant is operating inside the trance state. Typically the continual physical movement of the exercise leads the participant out of the deeply intense emotions and on to a feeling of calm. The sense of quiet or calm is similar to the relief felt after a strong cry. Nevertheless, sometimes these intense emotions scare the participants, especially young actors who have yet to experience “real emotion” in their stage work. For these actors real emotion has only occurred for them in real-life situations. Thus experiencing intense feelings of sadness or rage in their acting, can induce fear in the participant.

The dancing, especially the group portion, requires people to make physical contact with other people. This contact is made not just through the hands, but through the feet, knees, hips, back, elbows, head, etc. To physically connect to another person with your back or hip or shoulder, one must be in very close proximity. Combine that close proximity with the undulating movement inherent in dance and it become easy to see how certain feelings of sensuality or sexual energy might arise between the dance partners. This sexual energy is perfectly natural and in most shamanic traditions is

viewed as a source of great power. In performing an actor who can harness and wield this sexual energy is highly prized, and is said to possess “chemistry” with other actors. But to younger inexperienced actors feelings of sexual energy are something that is only done with a lover in private situations, not something experienced with multiple people during rehearsal, some of whom might even be the same gender. This can be quite alarming.

In the beginning of the rehearsal process, just as in the Dancing in the Dark workshop, ground rules were clearly defined. One of the rules deals specifically with physical contact and with what is considered appropriate touch versus inappropriate touch. Physical contact with the areas of the body immediately surrounding genitalia on both men and women, as well as the chest area of women is considered inappropriate and is not tolerated. Still, physical contact is encouraged through the extremities (arms and legs), back, shoulders, hips, head and feet. The expectations for appropriate physical contact were discussed before the exercise was introduced to the cast. As the director and instructor, during the exercise, I moved continually throughout the room and the group, watching the ways in which actors were physically contacting one another. This constant monitoring of the group combined with the audio commands given to guide the exercise helped keep the physical contact between participants appropriate.

At the beginning, for the most part, these actors had difficulty in staying in close proximity with each other. In fact, they would go to great lengths to maintain distance between their bodies: to the point that I had to encourage proximity among them through my vocal instructions. However, fairly early on in rehearsal one actor started exhibiting

just such a fear reaction to the exercise. Upon the first read of this actor's journal it became very clear that the exercise stirred deep feelings of fear within her. She felt as if the other actors, particularly the males were using the movement in the exercise to exert their sexual desire upon her. In her journal she remarked, "I guess the guys were the predators, and maybe some girls, who decided to see how far they could get" (Journal entry). As the instructor and director leading the exercise I retained constant observation of the movement, watching and monitoring how the actors were contacting one another. Having taught the exercise on several occasions I have become adept at monitoring group portion and avoiding inappropriate behavior. One of the four principles for inducing trance states is creating a safe environment; if at any time the participants feel unsafe they will "pull out" of the exercise. Keeping physical contact between participants appropriate and safe becomes crucial to facilitate successful trance state induction through the exercise. Nevertheless, this young actor's fear of the predatory males in her cast deeply concerned me. (It should be noted that none of the other actors, male or female ever expressed a fear of inappropriate behavior during the dance, and I witnessed no such behavior).

In the same long journal entry I refer to above, she reported that she, "gets so upset and borderline hates men . . . they always get up on me . . . when men touch me it makes me want to throw up," (Journal entry). These disproportionate feelings of rage and fear were keeping the actor from participating fully in the exercise and match with what Ken Graber, an experienced family therapist, describes as a phenomena of "transference" experienced by survivors of abuse or other forms of trauma (88). "In

survivors of abuse or patients suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder” the introduction of physical contact may elicit a “reaction of acute anxiety, where by the patient transfers the residual fears of past traumas onto present conditions which may be entirely innocent of abusive behaviors” (Graber, 89). This actor was reporting serious fear and distress for her personal boundaries in her journal entries. Her fears, perhaps grounded in her life experience beyond the rehearsal process, made the exercise unsafe for her; regardless of the male actors’ actual behavior, those fears caused her to perceive the actors as predators. As the director I was concerned with helping the actor alleviate these fears and felt the need to pull the young woman aside and help her find ways to feel safer within the movement. In a private one-on-one meeting we discussed her fears and how some of the movement in the exercise made her uncomfortable. I explained to her that these feelings were not uncommon and that she could take control of the situations in the way that she moved her own body.

As stated in Chapter Two, the Shammanic Trance mode allows the participant to remain in control of his or her body. During the exercise at all times the participants are in full control of their bodies, and I reiterated this concept to the actor who was experiencing fear during the exercise. Physical connection with another person did not require placing her body in uncomfortable positions, and she had the ability to control her body at all times: she could choose simply to move her body to a more comfortable distance and still stay connected. I attempted to convey my own insight into how to remain connected to an ensemble and not lose your own personal boundaries. I demonstrated a technique of movement with her, helping her learn to move her body into

positions that felt more comfortable. She seemed relieved that I could hear her fears and validate them. I concluded our meeting by asking her to try to continue exploring the exercise in rehearsal. She consented to continue exploring in rehearsal, and we agreed that if at any time she felt too unsafe during the exercise, she could step out of the group and remove herself.

This young actor continued to explore the exercise and in that process she began to feel a sense of empowerment in her own control of the movement of her body. In later journal entries she reported, “afterward I felt a little guilty, like maybe this had been my own baggage” (Journal entry). As this young woman continued to work through the movement of the exercise she changed her view of it and, more importantly, of the men in the cast around her. In one of her final journal entries she stated:

Quite honestly this exercise has been really good for me, no matter how much I hated it before it taught me about the way I learn and how I play my character. I learn best by allowing myself to step outside my self and spontaneously physically react on stage. But I think I get in my own way all the time [. . .] too worried what I look like to just be in the moment, reacting naturally to what is there in front of me. I think I spend too much time judging myself and others and trying to hide my feelings. This keeps me from being able to really connect to other people on stage. I think I’m learning how to let go of that now. That connecting or running energy with guys does not have to be so scary. So maybe this exercise was really, really great for me, it forced me to be honest with myself. (Journal entry)

This journal entry shows a remarkable turn-around for this young actor, who just three weeks earlier was entirely paralyzed by her fear. Now, she was actively working through that fear and beginning to make connections between her discoveries in the

exercise and how she approaches creating characters on stage. This was a far cry from the woman who expressed how having “a man touch [her] would make [her] throw up”. By the end of rehearsal she was learning things about her emotional reaction both in life and on stage. This young actor had made one of the most important connections in terms of acting. She was beginning to understand that the distractions of self-conscious fears and judgmental reactions to others keep the actor from experiencing emotional connection with his or her character and the other characters on stage. She was discovering that only when she quieted the nagging voices of these fears could she begin to react spontaneously with real emotion. For this actor working with the exercise had changed her ability to connect with others on stage.

Fig. 7. Reflection. Journal Entry.
The Crucible Cast. January 2004.

In her final journal entries she stated, “I learned through rehearsal that when I let go of the fears that get in my way, I am capable of feeling intense raw emotions [as my character] in the moment” (Journal entry). What she had learned through the use of the Dancing in the Dark exercise had allowed her to begin to experience “intense raw emotions in the moment”. In her journal she expressed the same concepts that Grotowski had articulated about the ways in which an actor’s self-conscious fears block his or her ability to achieve real emotion on stage.

According to their journal entries, the actors had experienced altered states of consciousness, and working or performing inside these trance states had produced significant discoveries in both their acting process and personal lives. Many of the actors had made emotional breakthroughs, allowing them to experience real emotion while portraying a character for the first time. Some actors had developed finely tuned psychophysical gestures that illuminated the physical actions of their characters. At least one of the actors had made personal discoveries about her interactions with people that changed her perspective on personal relationships and provided opportunities for personal growth. The deeper levels of concentration found in altered states of consciousness are believed to foster creativity. Gowan states that, “the evidence from research [on trance states] is so persuasive that it suggests that the presence of alpha waves might be regarded as the boundary marker between normal cognitive function and the higher states of creativity” (320). The entire transcendental meditation movement is based on this principal of achieving greater intellectual, physical and emotional abilities through the use of altered states of consciousness. Gowan affirms “a direct correlation between alpha-theta output and creativity” (319). Evidence of “lower metabolic rate, decreased muscle tension, increased emotional and sensory reactivity and increased mental health” has been explored through numerous psychological studies (Rouget, 225).

All of the actor journal entries presented one or more of Gowan’s ten general characteristics of trance induction. So it was determined that all of the actors experienced an altered state of consciousness at least once during their participation in the Dancing in the Dark exercise in rehearsal. The presentation of one or more markers in the actor’s

journals is important to establish that the cast had experienced a trance state while in the rehearsal process. However, the focus of the research of this thesis remains on the actors' perceptions of the how the use of trance states affected their ability to perform. In the final weeks of rehearsal as the cast moved into performance, the actors were asked to answer the following question: what did they learn about themselves as actors through the rehearsal process? The following chapter focuses on the final weeks of rehearsal, as well as the performance phase, and on the journal entries that addressed what the actors learned with attention given to the actors' perceptions of how the use of trance state induction affected their performances.

Chapter Five: Dancing in the Footlights Actors' Perceptions of Performance

As the days of rehearsal drew to a close and the company of actors moved away from the exploratory nature of the process and into the technical preparations leading into the performance of The Crucible, many of the performers had already begun to synthesize the discoveries made during the Dancing in the Dark exercise into the character work they were doing in the play. A few of those actor discoveries were highlighted in the previous chapter. Many of the actors were finding specific psychophysical gestures through their movement exploration in the exercise, and they were actively employing them in their performances. The actors were linking these psychophysical gestures to strong emotional experiences first found in the exercise and these gestures were producing equally moving emotional reactions in their characters in performance. They had, on the whole, begun to create their own conditioned emotional responses and learned to employ them in their acting work. During the intensely stressful days of transition from rehearsal into performance it was the actors' psychophysical gesture work that anchored them as the set, costumes, and lights swirled around them in the ever-changing tempest of technical rehearsal.

"Tech week" is routinely referred to as the "lost week" during the rehearsal process by most directors because of the way that the technical requirements of a production take over, becoming the focus of all rehearsal time. Many times actors have to stop the acting exploration and stand idle in pools of light while the director's attention is focused squarely on the aesthetics of the production. During this portion of the

technical rehearsal actors function much like stand-ins on a film set, providing the bodies around which to model the lighting, costume and scenic elements around. The actors spend long, frustrating hours of technical rehearsal as meat puppets, standing in lights, modeling costumes or maneuvering scenic changes. Inevitably tech week comes at the height of the actors' discoveries in rehearsal. Just as the actors are ready and eager to show their work to an audience, they are required to stop and wade through some of the longest most frustrating hours in the entire rehearsal process. Actors and directors refer to technical rehearsal as "hell week" for these and other reasons.

The Crucible cast proved no different; many of the actors hit remarkable epiphanies in their characterization work in those last few days before tech week. As the director, I was extremely nervous about what the long, frustrating hours of tech week would do to the creative momentum that we as a company had built up in rehearsal. The worst fear entering tech week is that the actors will take steps backwards in their performances. It was my observation that The Crucible cast not only held onto the discoveries they had been making in rehearsal just prior to tech week, but a few of the actors actually managed to continue their acting exploration through the tech rehearsals and emerged with stronger portrayals in the first performance. The actors' ability to hold on to the level of performance they had achieved in rehearsal during tech week were due to the time spent in rehearsal evolving deeper concentration through the use of the exercise and through their development of psychophysical gestures. Even in the most mind numbing sections of the technical rehearsals the actors could drop back into their characters on demand, by doing his or her psychophysical gesture. Thus, performing a

simple action in the form of the psychophysical gesture triggered an emotional response that the actor used to connect him or herself to the character. As the director, I watched this time and time again: as actors would begin to tune out on the fourteenth or fifteenth time we were running a scene change. The actors would quietly start their psychophysical gesture, whatever that small movement was for them, and on the next cue the actors would reconnect to their character. The same psychophysical gestures the actors had described in their journals⁴⁵ were being consciously employed to help the actor reconnect to their character and maintain their focus during tech week.

Tech week concludes in a series of dress rehearsals in which all of the production elements are in place and the actors begin to learn their performance in runs of the show. During the dress rehearsals the only thing missing in the performance of the show is an audience. All of the lighting, costuming, scenic and prop elements are in place, and the actor has full use of all these elements in putting the finishing polish on his or her character before opening night. The dress rehearsals help the cast learn the show, not only the character's emotional journey but the practical performer's journey as well. The actors learn how to navigate costume changes, scene changes and the minutia of practical elements to the performance.

The Crucible the cast not only accomplished the task of learning their practical actions in the performance but also further their acting work. One actor speaks of how the real emotions of her character were heightening during these last rehearsals in her journal:

⁴⁵ See the actor journal entries cited in the previous chapter.

Last night as we started the courtroom scene, I felt different. I had such a strong connection to everyone in the room [on stage] one that I have not necessarily felt before. During the exercise in rehearsal I always felt connected to people but more as performers than characters. But now I was in the court... really felt in it, I looked around and saw everyone in costume and for a moment it felt so real. I could feel them staring at me. I felt like something released in me, down in my stomach and a hot wave radiated out through my body to my extremities. It was so frightening. I could not stop shaking and everyone was just staring at me. I was crying, I felt naked and vulnerable, like someone had stripped my flesh away to reveal my most private thoughts. I'm in the scene and freaking out and thinking 'holy shit why am I so scared?' This is totally what [my character] feels. I walked off stage after the scene and I was still shaking and crying. I have never felt such intense emotions on stage, never. (Journal entry)

This actor continued in a later journal entry to describe the "intense emotions" she was feeling on stage as her character "every night I would walk into the courtroom and see the girls glaring at me and my body would start to shake" (Journal entry). Another actor described reacting viscerally she to a gesture made by her husband in the play.

This gesture the triggered this actor to cry. In the final scene, the actor describes her emotional reaction, "as I was saying how everything was my fault and that 'I was so plain and poorly made,' he would touch my shoulder as if to say 'no your [sic. Or you're] beautiful and I love you' and I would start to cry every time" (Journal entry). Here the actor is not only describes experiencing an emotional reaction, but she is also ascribing non-verbal conversation between her and the other character in his gesture of touching her neck. This same kind of non-verbal

Fig. 8. "So Plain," *The Crucible*, by Arthur Miller. Dir. Gwen Templeton. San Jose State University, Nov. 2003.

Fig. 9. "Courtroom Scene," *The Crucible*, by Arthur Miller. Dir. Gwen Templeton. San Jose State University, Nov. 2003.

communication that transpired between the actors in the Dancing in the Dark exercise was occurring in the performance. Another actor writes of this phenomenon in his journal:

I would always try and plead with him with my eyes. I know I could not say anything in the courtroom but I tried like hell to reach him through my body make him feel, know I wanted this all to stop. Like when we were dancing [in the Dancing in the Dark exercise] you could just feel people from across the room. You could feel their bodies, their presence and you could talk with them, tell them what to do or where to go through your movements. (Journal entry)

In the statement above the actor is articulating how he was trying to employ the same non-verbal communication he had explored in the exercise into his character work on stage. This same actor continued by writing "we were so connected in that [courtroom] scene, everyone just hooked into each other and reacting and acting at the same time" (Journal entry). Many of the actors commented on how "connected" they had felt in that particular scene. One actor wrote, "you could just plug in and ride the wave in the

courtroom” (Journal entry). While another actor discussed “[in the court room scene] it was like the end moment in the dancing [Dancing in the Dark exercise] when we were all moving together as one, and we just knew how and when to react cause you could totally feel it” (Journal entry). It is clear from these entries that the actors were making conscious connections to experiences they had in the exercise and choosing to attempt to recreate those experience on stage.

Another scene in which the actors felt a clear correlation to the Dancing in the Dark exercise was the opening moment of the play. The play opened with a dramatic representation of the “conjuring” described in the first scene of the play. The music used in this moment came right from the Dancing in the Dark soundtrack so the actors had

Fig. 10. “The Birds,” The Crucible, by Arthur Miller. Dir. Gwen Templeton. San Jose State University, Nov. 2003

become very familiar with dancing to this song. Furthermore the choreographed section of the conjuring featured dance move that the actors had first discovered in the exercise. Those dance moves were taken directly from what the actors had explored in the exercise. By using the same musical track and borrowing the same dance movements, as a director, I was trying to create a conditioned response among the actors in this opening scene. Several of the actors describe experiencing an emotional reaction to this opening moment in their journals. One actor wrote, "I was so nervous [opening night] but as soon as the music started it calmed me down and I just fell back into the dance like we always did" (Journal entry). Another actor referred to the show's opening dance in her journal, "No matter where my head was before the show, I knew as soon as we started dancing I would be right there in the moment . . . all I had to do was just dance and it would happen every night," (Journal entry).

Fig. 11. "Opening Dance," The Crucible, by Arthur Miller. Dir. Gwen Templeton. San Jose State University, Nov. 2003

The movement in the opening scene is meant to elicit reactions from the audience. I wanted to convey that sense of emerging power the girls were experiencing in their experiments with witchcraft. In the same moment, as the director I wanted the actors' movements to startle and disturb the audience with their primal sexual content. The dance was choreographed to unnerve the audience. However, getting the actors to feel comfortable with the highly sexualized movements, I drew on the conditioned response they had built in the exercise. The time spent dancing in the non-threatening physical exploration of the exercise gave the actor a sense of freedom in their movement. That sense of freedom allowed them to explore the more sexual content of the opening scene. "It is so powerful to dance together," writes another actor, "I have never felt that kind of sexual power and freedom and it feels like we are conjuring some spell" (Journal entry). While another actor stated, "it is like the dance just takes over, I can feel the warmth pull up from my pelvis and wash over my body and it feels so good... like you can't stop moving, like you're caught up in the wave" (Journal entry). Another actor discussed that sense of being "caught up" in her journal:

I used to worry what everyone was gonna think about me out there shaking all my goods for everyone. I was scared people would think I was a freak for getting so into the dance, but I can't help it. The music starts and I have to move. We all do, everybody says the same thing, it feels so good to bust out and go for it in the dance. I have never felt so free to dance, it is almost like having an orgasm on stage. What is so cool about it is that it totally sets up everybody's character. Everyone is dancing like they would in character and it totally colors the rest of our interactions in the show. The dance totally brings me into [my character]. The dance rocks... it is such great fucking way to start, it is what drives me from the top to the bottom of the show. (Journal entry)

Fig. 12. "Drinking Blood," The Crucible, by Arthur Miller. Dir. Gwen Templeton. San Jose State University, Nov. 2003

This response shows again the actors were actively linking their physical exploration in the Dancing in the Dark exercise to their characterization work in performance. The cast had created a conditioned response to the opening moment that served to reconnect them to their characters and help focus their attention on to the performance.

Throughout the run of the show the cast continued to utilize psychophysical gestures. Several of the actors talked about how the use of their own psychophysical gestures anchored them in their characters, especially if something unexpected happened on stage. One actor on opening night, nearly overtaken with nerves, dropped his lines during the middle of a pivotal scene. "All of a sudden I just went blank... couldn't come up with one line," he observed (Journal entry). In the moment of his own stage panic, this actor reverted back to his psychophysical gesture unconsciously and simply began

performing the motion. The conditioned response inherent in his performing this gesture connected the actor back to the altered state of consciousness when it was first formed and the deep levels of concentration there-in. That connection to the trance state jump started his mind and allowed him to recover his lines and continue on with the scene. This actor moved through panic through the use of his psychophysical gesture and was able to regain his composure. It was the actual actor's journal entry that confirmed my observation: "I started moving my hands like always and dropped right back in to him [his character]" (Journal entry). This entry indicates that the actor had some sense that the use of the psychophysical gesture would help him regain his composure and recover his characterization and continue with the scene. This actor was using a gesture he first developed in the Dancing in the Dark exercise to recover his composure and enhance his performance.

Time and time again actors used movement and gesture to "drop in" to the characters. Several of the actors found the movement work essential to navigating technical blunders, audience distractions or lapses in focus. On one night the actors were faced with a rather disruptive group of teenagers in the audience. The teenagers were loudly conversing with one another during the play and even tossing candy. The actors remarked how this distraction angered them and that this anger pulled them out of the scene. One actor said in her journal:

I wanted to kill those kids, just kill 'em. They were all I was thinking about. I caught myself. I was so wrapped up in hating those kids that I was no longer in the scene. And that made me hate 'em more cause they were stealing all the work we had done [. . .] so I just looked into his [another actor's] eyes and tried to connect with him again

like we always do. When I looked at him he was angry just like me, and like me his rage kept him from connecting to me. And I just kept thinking about what you [the director] said, that if we ever lost it to just look in each others eyes and breath and reconnect to each other like we did all those times in rehearsal. We kept eye contact and started breathing and connected and [it seemed as if] we were back in rehearsal away from those damn kids, just us. At that moment I knew we would be ok. (Journal entry)

Here the actor describes directly using some of the connections found in the trance work in rehearsal to help her regain an emotional bond to their character in a scene. Again, the statement above points to how the actors were actively choosing to use some of the tools they had learned in the exercise to enrich their performances. They were employing psychophysical gestures, non-verbal communication, and conditioned responses first experienced in the trance induction exercise.

Numerous journal entries from the actors confirm these findings and present evidence that the actors were making these choices of physical gesture out of an awareness of their ability to induce those trance states experienced in rehearsal. Many of the actors described these movements as the “essence” or “core” of their characters and believed that these gestures enabled them to feel “real” emotion while portraying these characters on stage. The actors found the use of these psychophysical gestures beneficial enough to their characterizations to actively employ them in performance of the show. Indeed, the actors began to rely on the emotional connections these psychophysical gestures produced in performance as a way of safeguarding against technical blunders, audience distractions and lapses in concentration.

In their final Journal entries the actors were asked to sum up their experience in both rehearsal and performance and write about what they had learned. Few of the actors had ever worked this physically in rehearsal before nor had they been exposed to performing within trance states. Out of the 25 cast members, 23 of the actors commented that the exercise used in rehearsal taught them “a new awareness of their bodies” in performance and a deeper understanding of “how physical movement could elicit an emotional response” (Journal entry). Some of the actors remarked that the use of the exercise in rehearsal gave them insights into their own personalities and a greater understanding of their own emotional responses, and this new awareness helped them “map out the emotional journey of the character” that they were playing (Journal entry). “I learned how to create a real living breathing person on stage, with real emotion,” one actor wrote, “I have never done that before” (Journal entry). One actor stated “this changed my whole perspective on what acting really is... it is far deeper than I ever thought and you [the director] helped me discover what was possible in my own acting” (Journal entry).

Several of the actors found the use of the exercise “life changing” in the way that they discovered how to reach “real” emotion in their portrayals of character (Journal entry). For these actors the exercise had a profound effect. Previously their knowledge of acting consisted of representing emotional response on stage instead of actually experiencing emotion, and this new sense of performing felt intoxicatingly powerful to these young actors. One actor referred to this new sense of performing in his journal:

This kinda acting is the real deal, you're in the moment,
feeling what they feel, real tears, and real anger and is it

incredible. There is nothing else like it, nothing. Nothing even close to really feeling it. It is a whole new world, a new level of acting for me and I never want to ever go back to the old way. It feels so damn good to act like this. After this, the old way just feels wrong, like a half ass attempt, and I never, never, never want to do that kind of cheap acting again. Now that I know how real it can be, how real it can feel . . . that old way just seems all wrong. (Journal entry)

All of the actors who had discovered how to produce “real” emotion⁴⁶ in their portrayals of character described this new form of acting as superior to their previous style of performing and expressed a desire to continue this emotional connection in their work. Two thirds of the actors found the Dancing in the Dark exercise not only to be beneficial to their performances, but also to be a precious and necessary component of their characterization process. Overall the actors (23 members of the cast) found value in learning to produce altered states of consciousness; more-over, they found that the physical discoveries made within the trance state enhanced their own performances. According to the journal entries, the Dancing in the Dark exercise had helped the actors integrate their minds and bodies in their performances through the use of the psychophysical gestures.

Did the actors perceive the use of trance induction beneficial to their performances? A resounding yes comes in the form of the actions taken by two cast members in a subsequent production. Under a different director, two actors from The Crucible cast felt the strong need to continue their individual use of the exercise in their

⁴⁶ Refers to the eight actors who reported to have never felt “real emotion” on stage previous to their work in The Crucible. These same eight individuals subsequently reported experiencing “real emotion” in their performances.

preparations for the new production. Each actor, individually, without consulting the other, burned a soundtrack for his or her character in the new production and began exploring movement to be used as a psychophysical gesture. These actors found the use of trance induction so helpful that they were continuing the use of the exercise all on their own in their next rehearsal process. When asked why they felt the need to continue the use of the exercise one of the actors replied that “the exercise had completely altered his perception of what was possible in his acting” and they wanted to further this newly found technique. The other actor indicated that the movement work and psychophysical gesture were now crucial to her process of creating a character, and that the exercise would be a staple of her acting technique for all future performances. The Dancing in Dark exercise by these performers, in conjunction with the previously discussed data from the journal entries produced during the production of The Crucible, is a strong testament to its beneficial affects on actors and inspires me to continue to study and refine the exercise in future rehearsal.

To answer the questions put forth in the first chapter, a majority the cast of The Crucible perceived the use of the Dancing in the Dark exercise as beneficial to their performances. The form and function of the exercise proved it usefulness to the cast in this production and would be easy to employ in future productions. The exercise can be utilized with any cast (assuming there are two or more actors) and with any play. The versatility of the exercise makes it easy to employ in classroom training situations. Further study and evaluation of the effects of trance state induction on actors in rehearsal and performance needs to be pursued in terms of answering the greater question of

whether this exercise can address the mind body split apparent in modern American acting training. What remains evident from this research is that the Dancing in the Dark exercise can be utilized in rehearsal and actors reported beneficial effects from its use there in. Whether or not this one exercise can bridge the mind-body gap in American actor training is not the final conclusion of this thesis. The conclusion is that actors' from The Crucible cast reported that the Dancing in the Dark exercise positively affected their ability to perform. Regardless of the findings of future research on trance induction with actors, the Dancing in the Dark exercise proved itself to be a potent tool for rehearsal.

Future research on the use of the Dancing in the Dark exercise would help to determine the usefulness of employing trance induction techniques into the greater landscape of American actor training. It is doubtful that this one exercise can completely bridge the mind-body gap present in current actor training. However, the Dancing in the Dark exercise may prove to be a useful tool in reconnecting actors to their bodies while performing. If the reactions to the exercise from The Crucible cast are any indication, then the use of trance state induction help the actors to form psycho-physical gestures and develop emotional responses to those gestures during performance. This exercise could prove effective in teaching actors the concept of psychophysical gesture work in actor training. Thus, the exercise should be studied further for use in both educational and professional theaters.

Significant to future research on the Dancing in the Dark exercise is the realization of the importance of the instructor. During the research for this thesis, I served as the instructor for the Dancing in the Dark exercise at all times. Before teaching

the exercise I had done extensive research into the formulating concepts of trance induction and movement training. Knowing these concepts helps me as the instructor to guide the participants through the exercise. However, simply knowing the script is not enough. Participants can experience strong emotional reactions to the exercise, as evidenced by a few survey and journal responses noted in previous chapters. These emotional reactions happen during the exercise and can cause real disturbances to the workshop as a whole. It is the responsibility of the instructor to monitor these reactions and guide the participants accordingly during the exercise. The purpose of the verbal instruction during the Dancing in the Dark exercise is to both monitor the safety of the participants and guide them to move in ways that will help induce the trance states. Therefore the instructor “tunes-in” to the group and in some respects operates much like the Shaman description from Chapter Two. Throughout the Dancing in the Dark exercise the instructor, “walks between the worlds” of the trance state and the reality of monitoring the participants. While guiding groups through this exercise, I found that many times I would drop into a deeper state of concentration to attempt to empathically feel or sense the emotions of the group. Much like the learning curve of the participants in the exercise, I too found myself dropping into that deeper state of consciousness or concentration in shorter and shorter amounts of time. As the instructor I too developed my own conditioned response to the exercise in the way I, myself reached deeper levels of concentration while teaching the group. This kind of guidance takes a person with insight into psychological behavior, and an intuitive ability to read the emotions of the participants. An instructor without the ability to read the “emotions and energy” level of

the participants might compromise the effectiveness of the Dancing in the Dark exercise. This sets up an interesting question: can other instructors teach the Dancing in the Dark exercise? The answer most likely is that with proper training, other individuals who would be qualified to teach this exercise. This training might prove to be extensive, but certainly could be taught and passed on to other instructors. By the responses from the journal entries of the actors and the simple fact that some of those same actors actively continued to use the exercise on their own accord; shows that the Dancing in the Dark exercise could develop into a valuable actor training tool. I plan to continue to employ the exercise in both my professional and educational work.

Appendix A
Pantheacon Survey Form

Pantheacon Survey
Templeton – Trance States Research
Dancing in the Dark Workshop
February 2003

1. Did you feel your state of consciousness alter during any part of the exercise? If so, can you describe this alteration?

2. What part of the exercise did you most enjoy and why? Please describe.

3. What part of the exercise would you change and why? Please describe.

4. Would you attend this workshop again for further exploration?

5. Would you be willing to be interviewed at a future time about your experience and your survey responses to help further the research? If so please provide your contact information.

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

Appendix B Annotated Bibliography

Acting Texts:

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Kumiega, Jennifer. The Theatre of Grotowski. New York, Methuen Inc., 1985.

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Moffitt, Dale. Bewteen Two Silences: Talking with Peter Brook. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1999.

Shaman Texts: Scholarship among Neo-Pagan texts can at times be dubious, in order to solve this dilemma, I broadened my research to encompass a wide scope of the available literature. I have included annotation of the following texts to assist the reader is reviewing this literature.

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