

# Step out of the Story

**Step out of the Story (method)** is a brandnew idea and a logical follow-up to the professional artistic career of Eva Bergerová, who is its primary sponsor and creator. She has under her sleeve over twenty years of experience with numerous techniques that incorporate work with the body and the mental and emotional facets of man. Together with the skills she has honed as a drama director a vision of a **new working system bordering on theatre, dance, an event/happening, and ritual at once. Paratheatrical research.**

The concept of European theatre is built on conflict. A clash of two contradictory powers induces tension/energy which is conveyed to or shared with the audience through a story. In case of both a compelling storyline and its effective execution where the audience is touched internally, there is a possibility of purification ensuing – of **catharsis**.

The Step out of the Story (S.O.S) poses the question of whether it is possible to achieve catharsis by any other means free of conflict. What is it about discord that makes it so irresistible it has become the leading feature of drama? Is it not the energy it creates? The motion? Does it bring the experiencers into an **"altered state of consciousness"**? And what is the obstacle in conflict? Any kind of clash, especially the subconscious kind, possesses a **subconscious** energy, and along with it turmoil, fear, and misunderstanding. If we want to achieve true catharsis, **consciousness** – and conscious action, i.e. action of the body, word, and deed – is required. If catharsis is our goal, then **ritual** becomes a convenient tool. Theatre developed from ritual when one whole was divided into two parts – active and passive participants.

What is a **ritual**? According to Eliade, it is a "**reenactment of mythical acts and stories**. When man finds sustenance like a god or a mythical hero, he mimics their behavior and shares their presence in a certain way." What does it have to do with theatre? To **Aristotle**, theatre is also a form of mimesis. "**Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious**, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish

its *katharsis* of such emotions." Ritual and theatre have this in common – the imitation or mimesis. The difference lies in what is being imitated.

A ritual imitates mythical acts and stories. What is a myth? "Myths uncover the structures of reality and the uncountable ways of life in this world, therefore they are exemplary of human behavior: they reveal the true stories which seek to connect to these realities. There is no myth that does not disclose any such 'mysteria' or refer to a primordial event which became the basis for a structure of reality or human actions." (Eliade) In short: Myths are true stories which occurred at the beginning of time and serve as a precedent for the way men act.

It is in the ritual where we can find the purpose of human existence – thorough experience of humanity on an individual, social, and even a cosmic level. Existence is also where we can find an extension of ourselves. One of the goals of a ritual is to experience **sanctity**. The advantage of the ritual lies in the fact that it reaches out to the very roots of the purpose of being and its inability to be transferred or expressed intellectually.

**Step out of the Story method** is looking for the roots and boundaries of theatre. It seeks that which lies beyond art. **As Jerzy Grotowski says – the seeks innate need for interpersonal association and sharing.**

**Other themes found in the S.O.S. research:** The need for a story – The situation and its importance – Character analysis – Is ritual transferrable to a passive audience? – The audience's sensory perception and its participation in a communal act – Does catharsis require conflict to occur when it is only achieved via sympathy (eleos) and awe (fobos)? – Conscious conflict.

**What do people need nowadays? Not what they want; what do they need?**

The S.O.S. ultimate goal is to analyze these questions and come to acceptable conclusions.

## **The Title**

Why "**Step out of the Story**"?

We inhabit eclectic space which can be impossible to convey to someone who has no own experience of a journey **inside**. Despite its clear-cut structure it can also be difficult to describe. One's own body and soul are the subjects of research through techniques and exercises that differ vastly in their structure. A precise

structure but also faith in emptiness, the present moment, tension of the body, and release of emotion are present. It is a play of seeking the core of vividness. It is an external form but most importantly an internal connection and surrender. The project hauls us continuously into a space where residing for us is **uncomfortable**. We cannot cling to the same movements, reliable reactions, and model situations. We cannot afford to believe what we see. We cannot embrace the illusion that we can describe ourselves the way we've been used to until now, because what we thought comprised our character and what we identified with is in reality nothing more than a fast-paced sequence of thoughts, images, feelings, a waterfall of reactions stemming from our mental state and our histories. In one minute we experience countless impulses, none of which we can stop and catch, none of which are stable. They are like waves in the sea – one second they're here and the next they are gone, replaced by others just like it. It is impossible to discern one among all these impulses. A new identity of ours, new scenery, the depth of the ocean emerges from beyond – eyes wide open staring into the universe of the heart, seeking the truth and a body that can personify it.

To conduct such an experiment/research it is necessary to gather performers who possess a conscious body, who are capable of conscious alteration of emotion and most importantly who are willing to venture on this journey into their own **intimacy**.

### **Practical training – The 3 Columns**

Man has a body, emotions, and a mind. And a spirit/soul. The Studio's work focuses on the whole and begins with the body.

We work with the Chinese martial art called Wushu, which has a tradition and philosophy that goes back thousands of years. **The Wushu martial techniques** (column 1) serve to develop the human body. There are few other ways to get to know and make use of all its abilities (its dynamics, flexibility, volatility, balance, coordination of its individual parts) as thoroughly and improve its physical strength and increase the amount of energy it has at the same time. These techniques also work with the body's intelligence and memory. The performers learn a way of moving both individually and with a partner, which they can later develop while improvising on the stage when the body accepts the movements as its own. The most important asset they gain is the so-called conscious body. The goal is not to make the performers masters of martial arts but to use this

technique to improve their psychosomatic/artistic/message-conveying abilities. Specifically the goal is to teach the performers the basics of martial arts – the basic strikes, kicks, and blocks, how to stretch the body, improve one's coordination, and wake up the muscles. All this serves to create a new level of orientation inside the body and in space. It teaches a different stance, different gait. Coordination, a conscious body, the center of gravity, reflexes, volatility, speed, the strength and form of movement. A clear structure. Later on the actors learn the so-called trigrams, which are incorporated in a structured system of offense and defense and working with your partner, which comes from the Chinese school of the Yao family. The principle lies in **learning to deal with the body**. The body thinks in principle, making every partner or thing become a tool. Thanks to this technique, the actors learn to improvise dances, fighting scenes, themes, perhaps whole stories, and to awaken their life force. Martial arts then also become the subject matter of dance – **spontaneous improvisation**.

**The Conscious dance** (column 2) is a technique developed by Eva inspired by 5Rhythms, Movement Medicine, Open Floor Movement, Embodied Anatomy and Qigong. This practice teaches no special way of movement, but instead teaches to use its principles through perceiving the body in various ways. It teaches to realize the extent of the body and to use it as a conscious tool. It opens people's minds to their own experiences and reactions. One learns to listen to their body and to be receptive of it at any given moment; to exist inside their body and thus exist in space. They learn to be present within it. The next step is conscious work with emotion and the mental states of man. The next step is to open energy gates and feel/guide energy/qi through the body/partner.

It's a method which teaches to express individual levels of bodily consciousness and to live in awareness through dance.

Except for **bodily consciousness** this technique also teaches **how to consciously manipulate emotions and mental states**. The performers take part in workshops where they learn to advance through all the rhythms/melodies/situations so that they are comprehensible for their inner being but also conveyable to the audience as a closed unit.

### **Trials – Research – Experiments (3<sup>rd</sup> column)**

The third part of the program consists of unification of martial arts with dance. The individual wu-shu fighting styles are reflected in the individual rhythms. Trials have the performer learn a certain wu-shu technique and then after some time has passed they must use it in a specific rhythm, which they further develop through improvisation. The goal is to awaken a certain energy where the actor no longer creates movement but instead is led or “moved” by the energy. When the performers succeeds there they bring about a perceivable experience. Topic-based improvisation is the next step. The principle lies in the fact that the performer, while acting, is simultaneously aware of their own incorporeal identity. The mind, emotion or mentality the actor then projects are only characters created by them, to which they are not consciously bound.

### **THE PROCESS AND CODE OF THE BIRTH OF A PRODUCTION**

By incorporating the Conscious dance into martial arts we get the necessary physical and mental means to create a production. After gathering the materials and experience, structural, topic-based improvisation is the key to do so through examination, search, experiment, the breaking of theatre tropes, subversion of stereotypes and both mental and physical paradigms. Our long-term goal is to create our own working system.

The process leading up to the birth of a production is based on Aristotle's “yes and no” or “I claim and I deny” logic. It defies Aristotle's ideas of exclusion of a third entity – “There is no “third man” besides the ideal one and the particulars.” There is no third entity between the existence and non-existence of the same factual connection. In Plato's time, there was an “I do not know” postulate in between “yes” and “no”. **“I do not know”** as the point of departure for every step that follows. **“I do not know” as existence in the present moment.**

Present-day civilization, which pressures us into knowing even when we do not, has forced us into a state of permanent pretence, a chase for power and efficiency. We seek to maintain respectability in the eyes of others, no matter what it takes. Society has left us lost in a labyrinth of thoughts and forgotten about the body, emotion, and feeling. The S.O.S. work aims to return to our roots, to the body and its knowledge, to theatre in the form of a ritual. Therefore the conception of a production develops on the basis of painstaking previous

preparations and subverts the concept of a director who knows, and knows better, how to build up a situation and the whole story.

**During the making of the production itself, after a period of training we base our decisions on our own previous open solo, double, or group improvisation both on a given topic and freeform.**

## **THE REASON**

The reason behind the project is also rooted in the reality that often we see performers on stage who feign their emotions and are not in sync with their body – they succumb to pretence and an unconscious body.

How often and how consciously is it possible to work with both body and mind? How independent is the actor and to what extent is the actor's personality reflected in the character? Of course the questions we pose are neither new nor groundbreaking. Theatre has had to face them since its beginnings. What matters is the search for and research of new possibilities, a rebirth of the old truth that tells us how to not pretend, but to achieve physical existence on stage or in another space, because the body is where it all begins. The body is the source and repository of all man's stories. Emotions surge from the body, which gives off energy. Even intangible realities such as personality come from the body first and foremost. To examine all of it means to transcend theatre, but on the other hand, without telling and analyzing man's stories and looking for the reasons for human existence therein, theatre has no purpose.

Training, preparation, discovery of new ways of expression, and exploration of the possibilities of the body and the whole psychophysical system and reaching Divine – that is the 'Step out of the Story' method.