

Shamanic striptease

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Abstract

This article explores a performance called Salvation: Shamanic Striptease. It considers how my co-creation of this spiritual–erotic work with white South African performer Daniel P. Cunningham¹ has elaborated ‘shamanic striptease’ – an emergent practice through which he seeks to discover movement and vocalization (words and song) that yield deep significance for him (as performer) and for those who witness his performance. This is a process in which somatic and semiotic meaning are negotiated. Inspired by the vision of seminal Polish theatre practitioner Jerzy Grotowski (1933–99), shamanic striptease looks for what might be called naïve expression, that is, a close merging of intention and action that generates a dense performance open to multiple interpretations. Our working process opens up considerations of the relationships between performers’ and audiences’ experiences, the multivalence of identity and searches for the transcendental in a cosmopolitan context of London. Special consideration is given in this essay to how the identity politics of postcolonial white settler culture intersect with queer cisgender expressions of masculinity.

Keywords

Jerzy Grotowski
queer
immersive theatre
South Africa
shamanism
striptease

Tonight, my body is a temple and I invite you to come rock inside of me. I said, drink me.
 Drink me. Drink me!

A little before 11pm on a Thursday in late March 2017, my research partner Daniel P. Cunningham and I arrived in Maynooth, west of Dublin, as delegates to a conference entitled *Embodied Monologues* (Cunningham and Hamilton 2017). The National University campus in that town is enfolded around the seminary there. This we discovered as we walked the cloisters passing oil portraits of bishops and popes. Between them hung photo montages of graduating cohorts of priests. At breakfast a catering staff member politely but firmly directed us away from the cordoned area where the current seminarians dine in seclusion. As we ate, Daniel asked me, ‘Do they know what we’re here to do?’. In Maynooth, we presented a condensed version of *Salvation: Shamanic Striptease* (hereafter *Salvation*), from which the quote heading this article is taken.² Here I consider our presentation of this spiritual–erotic work (between September 2017 and September 2018) and its elaboration through our creation of practices and a space in which Daniel can discover movement and words that yield meaning for him (as performer) and for those who witness his performance. Inspired by the vision of seminal Polish theatre practitioner Jerzy Grotowski (1933–99), we look for what might be called naïve expression, that is, a close merging of intention and action that generates a dense performance open to multiple interpretations. Our working process opens up considerations of the relationships between performers’ and audience’s experiences, the multivalence of identity and searches for the transcendental in a cosmopolitan context of London. Special consideration is given in this essay to how the identity politics of postcolonial white settler culture intersect with queer cisgender expressions of masculinity.

Salvation is our first presentation in our new and developing aesthetic–ecstatic practice that we call shamanic striptease. Here, shamanic is used as a term to inspire and conjure into our

contemporary western European practice the transformational power observed in extant traditions elsewhere – specifically those that I have experienced in Kerala (South India) and inside Māori cultural contexts. To our work, I bring experiences from my collaboration with Polynesian artists, using hereditary ritual protocols to facilitate expression of contemporary intercultural concerns. From 1998 to 2011, I worked as the close collaborator of Mika, a seminal queer Māori performance artist. I lived in New Zealand from 1998 to 2011 and am a citizen. My doctorate was awarded by the University of Canterbury (New Zealand) and my thesis explored the interface of *haka* (postural dance performed during Māori rituals of encounter) and popular and sexualized dance in Mika’s work. In London (2011–15), I was a close collaborator of Samoan artist Rosanna Raymond, creating participatory performances as The SaVAge Klub. I have drawn, too, on my training in South Indian practices, through which I have explored tantric perceptions of the synthesis of material and spiritual experience. I trained in *bharatanatyam* (South Indian classical dance) with Priya Srikumar and her guru Paramasiva Menon (1993–2005), with *astanga vinyasa* yoga teachers Jude Hynes and Daniel Nilsson and their guru K. Pattabhi Jois (2000–11), and with CVN *kalaripayattu* (Kerala martial art) master Rajasekaran Nair and his gurukul Sathyanarayanan Nair (2008–11). I have visited Kerala on research seven times since 2004 and lived in the capital (Thiruvananthapuram) for five months in 2011.

I am conscious that citing my history of close intercultural collaborations does not afford me unquestionable license to adapt and employ the practices I have learnt. Nor does it reduce the potentially dissonant (and for some, troubling) gap that separates shamanic striptease from the continued traditions in which I have been educated. In those learning contexts I certainly forged intimate bonds with teachers and fellow trainees. Yet as Sara Ahmed observes these relationships, like all ‘friendships and alliances [took] place in situations of asymmetry of power’ (Ahmed 2000: 58). I embrace her ‘double vision, ‘seeing those who taught me – and those who shared my learning journey – as both “friends and strangers”’ (Ahmed 2000: 62). Shamanic striptease is not a

replication nor imitation of the transformational practices of Kerala or Māori cultural contexts. It is an experimental response, and it is both a friend and a stranger to those older traditions.

There is, too, in our shamanic striptease a crucial awareness of the tension between the overarching idealism we inherit from Grotowski's lineage and our respect for the distinctions and particularity of human experience. Grotowski explored a range of practices from diverse contexts in belief that 'bodies, despite any difference of culture, are similar' (1997c: 261). Jan Kott called such proposition a kind of 'murky mysticism' (1997: 135), and such universalism is difficult to defend when aware of critiques such as that of Donna Haraway, which argue for the limitations of knowledge as always situated and embodied (1988: 583). Lisa Woolford, student and scholar of Grotowski's work, suggests he acknowledged the dangers – artistic and ethical – of 'attempts to combine elements cannibalized from different cultural sources' (1997: 288). Our work with shamanic striptease is disciplined by a constant awareness of slipping into such a mode of violent syncretism.

Our use of the word shamanic – rather than being indicative of our attempt to replicate or appropriate extant hereditary practices – connects to that of Ronald Grimes when describing Grotowski's intention. Grimes called Grotowski's modern urban quest for active and animated embodied culture 'parashamanic' (1997: 275), a hunt for *anima* instead of (tutelary) animals (Grimes 1997: 274). Our shamanism aligns closely with the concepts communicated by Daniel C. Noel. In his book *The Soul of Shamanism* (1998), Noel proposes that much research of shamanic practice has been driven by the deep preoccupations of western imagination, leading to a fusion of ethnographic process and literary craft. The survey from which he builds this claim includes Carlos Castaneda's much scrutinized writings on Mexican shamanism but also signal works such Mircea Eliade's *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (2004). Noel draws from the writing of James Hillman, a Jungian-inspired archetypal psychologist. He argues that the fusion of fact and fiction he finds in purportedly scholarly shamanic studies invites us to reconsider the value of imagination in

relation to a western longing for the shamanic. Noel's writing on this matter encapsulates the spirit in which our shamanic striptease has developed.

As modern Western seekers, we long for 'direct experience' beyond rigid dogma and bureaucratic institutions, even beyond 'book-learning.' It is most of what we mean by preferring 'spirituality' to 'religion' as the designation of our quest for deeper meaning in our lives. But we must realize that, setting aside narcotic experiences, which are variously problematic, in our culture, the only direct experience of nonordinary reality we can claim as Westerners to be truly ours – and recognizably shamanic – is the experience of imagination's power in fictions and fantasies, dreams and reveries, or the arts of literature and the like. (1998: 60)

Our work on *Salvation* began in September 2016, when Daniel asked me to assist him in the creation of his first solo performance. In our first studio session, key elements that have become the performance were present, including his removal of his clothes. The imaginative leap that shamanic striptease explores is that erotic dance can be utilized as an expression of existential longing for liberation through (but not necessarily from) the coordinates of our sexual, gendered, ethnic identities. In *Salvation*, Daniel used native and immigrant movement vocabularies from his homeland of Kwa Zulu Natal (South Africa) to exorcise tensions he carries from his personal and family histories. He used dance and song he learnt while growing-up in a mixed Durban neighbourhood – attending school with blacks, whites and coloureds, learning hip hop in the kitchen from his mother's black domestic help, and Christian liturgy in the evangelical church his family attended. On a sociopolitical level, *Salvation* is an attempt to process the momentous legacies present in Daniel from the conflict ridden *apartheid* order into which he was born and the subsequent inclusive and reconciliatory 'Rainbow Nation' formed under Mandela's presidency in which he came of age. These cultural currents cohabit Daniel's white-African body, where they

intercept his evolving sexuality that has carried him from living a binary straight identity to exploring his multivalent queer being as a gay man.

Commentary from inside communities once colonized propose the possibility of white men contributing to decolonial processes. Brendon Hokowhitu, a Māori scholar of Māori physicality, argues that his people need not forget historic injustices but ought to move ‘beyond the eternal colonized/colonizer mentality’ and ‘live beyond the genealogical scarring inflicted by colonisation’ (2009: 113). Acting on a comparable stance, Rosanna Raymond uses a practice of ‘inclusive tolerance’ (Lythberg 2016: 15) to lead her SaVAge Klub. This is an international collective gathered about the Polynesian culture but recognizing ‘all places and people to be creative and constructive centres’ – including those from the nations that colonized the Pacific, such as myself (Lythberg 2016: 16). On the one hand, Ahmed’s analysis suggests that such intentions may be resisted by the very material of our human being that carries colonial legacies; she says, ‘Bodies remember such histories, even when we forget them’ (2001: 154). But at the same time, she suggests the possibility of alliances that do cross the divides erected by colonial histories; ‘Some bodies, even those that pass as white, might still be ‘out of line’ with the institutions that they inhabit’ (Ahmed 2001: 159). It is of particular significance that South Africa is a context in which white identity is fiercely contested. There, Ross Passmoor argues, multiple forms of whiteness exist, not all being ‘invisible and omnipotent’ and some being ‘subaltern, plural or hybrid’ (2009: 19). He goes on, ‘the former settler has no previous identity to return to in the postcolonial context, and is thus caught between multiple identities that are incongruent’ (Passmoor 2009: 19). April Sizemore-Barber goes further to suggest that white identity in South Africa amounts to ‘a queer form of Africanness’ (2016: 193). It would be presumptuous to propose that *Salvation* was an act of decolonization like those that Hokowhitu and Raymond explore, but it was certainly an exploration of what Sizemore-Barber calls the ‘fractures within any unitary concept of whiteness’ (2016: 194).

In Maynooth, the Catholic context of our conference location led to Daniel’s question at breakfast. He wondered about was about how his performance would be received. *Salvation* is a

prominent exploration of what columnist J. Nelson Aviance calls ‘the gender fluidity of those who have a penis and identify as male’ (2016). The diversity of cultural references and practices in *Salvation* requires me to consider its position in a global discourse about power. In his article ‘The epistemic decolonial turn’, Ramón Grosfoguel stresses that ‘nobody escapes’ occupying a particular ‘locus of enunciation’ – that is, we each live at a juncture in the power structures of the planet (Grosfoguel 2007: 213). As white men, Daniel and I can be seen to access a position of privilege. As queer men we can be seen to live versions of what Jay Clarkson calls ‘alternative masculinities’ (Clarkson 2005: 253) but our whiteness implicates us in racial and colonial continuums that Scott Lauria Morgensen suggests allow us to experience both the marginality and the privilege compounded in white queer masculinity (2013: 542). As South African and British/New Zealand men we can be understood to participate in the mechanisms of ‘coloniality’, which Grosfoguel describes as the ‘continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations’ (2007: 219), and yet we occupy subordinate marginalized positions as queer men exploring non-Christian values (2007: 220). In a later expansion of his article, Grosfoguel uses Kyriakos Kontopolous’ notion of ‘heterarchies’ to describe the ‘entanglement of gender, racial, sexual, and class hierarchies’ that constitute a complex of matrices ‘within a single historical reality’ (2011: 18). Daniel and I work with the understanding that our queerness extends to a queer ontological stance. That is, we approach demarcations – the borders and boundaries of identity, practices and disciplines – as contingent. Moreover, we embrace the diversity of our life experiences, cognisant that our work displays, therefore, an entanglement of hierarchies that may confuse or trouble some witnesses. We understand our work to be provocative, operating in what April Sizemore-Barber (in his/her analysis of key queer male South African performers) describes as a ‘prismatic framework’; that is, we acknowledge that a multiplicity of contradictory meanings and affects are generated by what we create (2016: 194). Daniel and I have layered cultural backgrounds that intersect colonial histories and we live in a highly cosmopolitan context. We understand our performative actions to arise, therefore, in what Guillermo Gómez-Peña calls

‘interstitial zones’ where meaning is fluid and open to dramatically diverse interpretations (Gómez-Peña and Wolford 2002: 85).

The reach of *Salvation* integrates erotic dance with physical and vocal expressions of spirituality (petitionary prayer, speaking in tongues and Biblical scripture from Daniel’s experiences in South African evangelical churches and Orthodox liturgical songs he learnt whilst living in Poland). We configure shamanic striptease as a practice in which ritualized dramaturgy and participatory frameworks (comparable to religious ceremonies) are used to carry those gathered – performer and audience – towards the edge of intimacy. In *Salvation*, the exposure of the Daniel’s body, voice and memories are explored as a healing process. Fundamentally, this healing is for Daniel as the performer. It occurs through our practice that goes beyond concepts of training or rehearsal to operate as a pervasive holistic journey. This healing practice is extended to those who witness his shamanic striptease, through the framework of *Salvation*, which we approach as a potential rite – that is, an opportunity for passage through a transformation for the witnesses. Our work on *Salvation* was founded on our strong connections to the work of Grotowski, through our work with those who collaborated with him and those now charged with sustaining his legacy. Between 1990 and 1992, I trained with Zygmunt Molik of Grotowski’s original Teatr Laboratorium and with Jolanta Cynkutis, performer in the organization that replaced the laboratorium. Daniel was a performer with Teatr Zar, the resident company at the Grotowski Institute (Wroclaw) from 2011 to 2013. Taking up Grotowski’s final research questions, we pursue the possibility of evolving performances that are transformative in comparable but different ways for those who perform and for those who are witnesses.

Writing about *Salvation*, I am converting embodied experience into words. Reading others, to make sense of the arena we have entered, I have consulted Jessica Berson’s monograph *The Naked Result: How Exotic Dance Became Big Business* (2016). Importantly, in recounting narratives from the world of striptease, she says,

We owe it to the moving bodies that we describe to address not only their representational or symbolic functions, or the ways in which they participate in various social constructions, or the inscriptions of power relations upon them, but also their feelings, their movement qualities, their skin, their breath, their touch, their desires. (Berson 2016: 32)

Berson's emphasis on the materiality of dancing bodies inspires and guides me. The indivisibility of human experience as one of fleshly embodiment – ever attended by a shifting complex of needs, desires and reactions – is the core premise of shamanic striptease. It is the baseline from which Daniel and I proceeded and the reality to which we are returned. The key question we carried through the sweaty swirl of practice and our cooler pauses of reflection, is how the material and desiring self can enter the realm of public performance. Moreover, how does the performer's entry into heightened experiences, becoming for the audience a symbolic figure, connect to that individual's intimate life and personal evolution?

Grotowski understood words to be the apex of the performers' process – the culmination of externalisation of their 'biological or physical impulses' (Croydon 1997: 85). This is how we have found the points in *Salvation* when Daniel speaks: he speaks when his dancing body has become animated to its fullest potency. In this way, I have arrived at a moment in our work in which I am so saturated in experience that I turn to words to carry shamanic striptease forward. Writing amplifies our ongoing process of daily translation that movement therapist Sandra Kay Lauffenburger describes as the shift from 'nonverbal affective experience into relational linguistic meaning' (2016: 268). Lauffenburger notes, this process involves moving away from the private terminologies evolved in transformational practices that she (after psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut) terms 'experience-near' language (2016: 264). Making this translation, I remember that Daniel and I seek always to access (in the privacy of the studio and in public presentations) that which lies beyond the prescription and frame of language. Furthermore, in attempting to write about our practice, I recall

Isabelle Ginot's proposal; 'Somatic discourses [...] must be read as performative discourses, situated in a precise context and targeting thereby an equally precise efficacy. In this regard, somatic discourses do not stand apart from the practices that engender them' (2010: 18).

Borrowing a further term from the therapeutic field, *Salvation* (and shamanic striptease) are Daniel and I's co-construction. Charles J. Gelso and Jeffrey A. Hayes explain in their book *Countertransference and the Therapist's Inner Experience* that the term *co-construction* recognizes that in a therapeutic transaction – a holistic structured human interaction comparable to a creative studio partnership – each party stimulates reactions in the other and each (individually and together) contributes to the creation of meanings about these experiences (2007: 10, 131). Gelso and Hayes, quoting Jeffrey Tropic and Robert Stolorow, describe co-construction as 'the field created by the interplay between [...] differently organized subjective worlds' (Gelso and Hayes 2007, cited in Tropic and Stolorow 1997: 282). Devising performance from Daniel's biographical material required us to consider the therapeutic dimension of our interactions. I am not, however, a detached clinician and our interactions were not corralled in discrete hours. Moreover, each of us carries equally responsibility for the field of interplay we co-construct. Yet I am twenty years older and bring a unique synthesis of skills and perspectives from my intercultural and interdisciplinary education that we used to shape *Salvation*. We understand that the resource of my experience affords Daniel particular opportunities through our co-construction.

A key part of my background, which informs my work, is my experiences (since 1993) of participation in the *latihan kejiwaan* (spiritual training or spiritual exercise) from the Indonesian spiritual movement known as Subud. Entry into the *latihan* is via a layered process. The holistic education that it imparts – via surrender to a flow of spontaneous movement, vocalization and accompanying sensations and thoughts – is described as being *received*, as opposed to an action that is deliberately undertaken. The founder of Subud, who first *received* the *latihan*, was Muhammad Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo (1901–87). He explains that everybody has the potential to *receive* because each embodies what he calls 'the power of the Great Life' (Sumohadiwidjojo 1991: 101).

In this way, *receiving* is described as an inherent and innate capacity, awakened rather than invested. Sumohadiwidjojo also states, however, that *receiving* first begins for a person because they are accompanied in the *latihan* by someone who is opened – that is, someone ‘who has been able to receive this great power previously’ (1991: 101). He qualifies that this does not imply that what occurs for the initiate is ‘a replication of what other people do, but a specific form that arises spontaneously and is suited and adjusted to the body and its strength’ (Sumohadiwidjojo 1991: 102). Moreover, he urges, the *latihan* is not a process that can be accelerated or adjusted; what is received is ‘in the right measure to ensure orderly progress’ (Sumohadiwidjojo 1991: 112).

I was introduced to the *latihan* under the guidance of Chiara Schilska, an opened initiate who had chosen to share the process of *receiving* outside of the context of Subud. Schilska led therapeutic group work in which she integrated the *latihan*, which she called ‘free space’, with methodologies from a range of sources. These included her education under the tutelage of Yat Malmgren (1916–2002) whose pedagogy synthesized the psychophysical system of Konstantin Stanislavski (1863–1938) with the movement analysis of Rudolf von Laban (1879–1958) (both systems that I studied while training at the University of Birmingham from 1987–1992). I carried into our work on *Salvation* an understanding of how aesthetic improvisational performance techniques can expand to acquire meditative and ecstatic dimensions, connecting creative practice to fundamental existential considerations. Working with the concept of *receiving* synthesizes creative, therapeutic and transcendental experiences.

Daniel introduced into our work an explicit orientation towards the healing he seeks and I embraced this focus. Supporting his creative journey, I understand that it is an awareness of my own need for healing that allowed me to support him (Gelso and Hayes 2007: 140). Yet, it is, I venture, my state as ‘more healed than wounded’ that allowed me to offer him ‘a lived sense of potential healing’ (Gelso and Hayes 2007: 110–11). Our work together required us to carefully navigate our interconnectivity. Gelso and Hayes use an analogy that is particularly apt to our work. Speaking of

dancing partners they suggest that a healing relationship is one in which the couple ‘remain in contact while not being so close as to interfere with movement’ (2007: 99).

In our experience-near language, Daniel and I speak often about the creative and healing potential of a *permissive presence*. Our term draws on D. W. Winnicott’s (1896–1971) ideas about how nurturing responsive care allows an infant to access vital developmental experiences that arise in what Susan K. Deri (cited by Rosa Maria Govoni and A. Picolli Weatherhogg) calls a ‘transitional space [...] between dream and reality, between inside and outside, between person and environment’ (Govoni and Weatherhogg 2007:113, cited in Deri 1984: 252). Importantly, Deri identifies this transitional space as where we first experience our potential ‘for creative symbol formation’ (Govoni and Weatherhogg 2007:113, cited in Deri 1984: 252). Shamanic striptease requires Daniel and I to sustain a transitional space through an empathic attentiveness to one another – what therapist Lauffenburger calls a ‘resonating physicality’ (2016: 272) and which Sudhir Kakar – in his psychoanalytic reflections on Indian mysticism — calls an ‘ambience of affective acceptance’ (2007: 57). We acknowledge the flow of emotion and sensation that we each experience, and allow it to inform and guide our work. In this way, shamanic striptease unfolds from the ideals Grotowski communicated in the first writings about his work with actors, first published 1968. Grotowski spoke of his support for a performer’s creative journey as a shared renaissance:

His growth is attended by observation, astonishment, and desire to help; my growth is projected onto him, or, rather, is found in him – and our common growth becomes revelation. This is not instruction of a pupil but utter opening to another person, in which the phenomenon of ‘shared or double birth’ becomes possible. The actor is reborn – not only as an actor but as a man – and with him, I am reborn. It is a clumsy way of expressing it, but

what is achieved is a total acceptance of one human being by another.

(2002d: 25)

Salvation pursued Daniel's quest for full and free expression of his identity and experiences as a queer white African living in London and liberation from the restrictive values of evangelical Christianity in which he was raised. My understanding of Daniel's process of shamanic striptease is particularly informed by the African value of *ubuntu*, upon which Mandela's Rainbow Nation was founded, a society in which diversity of all kinds is embraced and protected. Scholars interrogate the breadth of definitions that unfold from the pan-African term *ubuntu*. Timothy Murithi glosses *ubuntu* to mean 'my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in [that of others]' (Murithi 2006: 28). Christian B. N. Gade elaborates *ubuntu* as a shared process of mutual evolution, quoting Truth & Reconciliation Commissioner Rev. Bongani Finca, 'You must heal, and I must assist you to heal, as much as I must heal, and you must assist me to heal' (2012: 493). For Barbara Nussbaum, *ubuntu* is explained by the maxim 'your salvation is my salvation' (2004: 26).

In the book Zygmunt Molik authored with Giuliano Campo, Molik says of studio-work 'you are doing your own research, your quest in the unknown' (Campo and Molik 2010: 105). He expanded that the quest is for contact with the vital undercurrents that course through our lives. This he calls our 'process,' saying it is 'very often only partly conscious, very often it's unconscious [...] It's always something in *statu nascendi*' (Campo and Molik 2010: 106, original emphasis). He states, 'the point is how to get [this process] on the surface of our life' (Campo and Molik 2010: 106). In her essay 'Embodied memory', Dominika Laster revisits Grotowski's description of a performer as a 'man of knowledge'. Laster suggests this is a poor translation of Grotowski's Polish term *człowiek poznania*, which she renders as 'the person who is actively engaged in a continuous search for knowledge and discovery' or (in succinct and evocative literal translation) a 'being of discovery' (Laster 2012: 222). Through shamanic striptease, I offer Daniel my attentive and

permissive presence to support his embodiment of his process. Our prime objective is not a particular performance nor indeed any state of arrival. In her article about the theoretical foundations of Grotowski's methodology, Jennifer Lavy offers a synopsis for his model which we employed. Shamanic striptease is focussed on 'self-revelation not as a fixed value but as direction' (2005: 186). The openness of this venture immerses us in what Kris Salata (a close collaborator of Grotowski) describes as the creation of performance as a means to research 'being with another' (2008: 114). In this way, *Salvation* is a public extension of our private shamanic striptease practice, which is an ongoing quest for a deepening mutuality. Shamanic striptease can be described, in Grotowski's words, as 'an "art" of working' (Grotowski 2002c: 47).

The structure of *Salvation* evolved through Daniel and I's use of deeply complicit interactive partner work exploring a wide range of modes of moving together. Through this partnering work we stimulated Daniel's body, breath and voice to uncover and elaborate his lived experiences – I use this phrase to indicate that the material we accessed reaches beyond explicit autobiography and in this way shamanic striptease moves outside of more considered devising methodologies; shamanic striptease seeks to access embodied memories whose source is not yet (possibly not ever) fully identifiable. Our partner work synthesizes techniques and processes from diverse contexts, including our shared references to Grotowski's processes, my training in Southern Indian forms and Daniel's experiences in South Africa. In addition, I drew upon my training in the marital art forms of *tai chi chen* (from 2000 to 2010), *judo* (from 2007 to 2010) and *capoeira angola* (also from 2007 and 2010). The organizing structure I used to gather these diverse movement modes was developed from Gabrielle Roth's *five rhythms* (Roth 1989), which I connect closely to Laban's *effort-actions* (Newlove 1993). We varied the duration of our partner work from thirty to ninety minutes. Sometimes we were accompanied by live musicians Azi Khatari and Lilac Taie – playing *djembe* drum, *oud* (a kind of lute), respectively – who also accompanied our final performance of *Salvation*. At other times we use recorded music selected for its breadth of rhythm and intensity and its evocation of memories Daniel seeks to explore.

Before we commenced our partner work, I lead us in *kriya* (fluid *yoga* sequences coordinating movement and breathing) and then singing of *karnatic* scales, *mantra* (*Vedic* scriptural chants) and *bhajan* (Hindu devotional songs), learnt during my training in *bharatanatyam*. These activities grounded us in the present, helped us begin mapping the psychophysical connections linking body, voice and mind, and attuned us to one another. This opening phase also oriented our shamanic striptease towards a connection to the South Indian lineages in which I have been a participant for thirty years. The core tenets I learned from these lineages organize my approach to the amorphous wealth of experience that a holistic studio practice can release and they have begun to serve as a scaffold for Daniel to evolve his own means of locating himself in that realm. They provide detailed techniques but also turn our attention to how myths and a speculative horizon can encompass but transcend our personal para-shamanic journeys. Daniel and I move away from the cautiousness about bodily experience embedded in the Christian theology which we acquired through our upbringings in churches. (I was raised a Methodist and attended services at least once a week until I was sixteen.) Instead, we move towards what Grotowski, speaking on camera, called ‘a dimension of life that is rooted in what is normal, organic, even sensual, but at the same time goes beyond all that, that has a kind of axiality, a kind of *axis*, another dimension — a higher one — that goes beyond ourselves?’ (Taviani 2007: 131). Daniel and I feel a particular imperative to follow this trajectory as queer white men seeking to synthesize our personal understandings of sensuality, sexuality and spirituality into a holistic understanding of identity as a matter of soul.

A synthesis of Roth and Laban’s movement schemas undergirded our partner work. We progressed through her *five rhythms* with close attention to his eight *effort-actions* (1) *flow* became *glide* (light, direct, sustained) and *float* (light, indirect, sustained); (2) *staccato* became *dab* (light, direct, sudden) and *flick* (light, indirect, sudden) then *thrust* (heavy, direct and sudden) and *slash* (heavy, indirect, sudden); (3) *chaos* became erratic shifts between *flow* and *staccato* with the addition of *press* (heavy, direct, sustained) and *wring* (heavy, indirect and sustained); (4) *lyric*

became a harmonious combination of *glide, float, dab* and *flick*; and finally (5) *stillness* was our gradual return to the activities drawn from South Indian practices with which we prepared.

The *flow, staccato* and *chaos* sequence carried us from an accommodating rapport into purposeful antagonism. *Flow* is without tension or resistance. We alternated as leader and follower until this distinction was lost. We used varying degrees of contact, from fingertips to full-body. We mobilized all of our joints and pursued a physical, emotional and imaginative opening of ourselves. Our contact developed to vary between a skin-to-skin intimacy to exchanges that stretched across the full extent of the studio. We deepened our confluence and the affective intimacy of our rapport, regardless of any changes in proximity or speed. We then entered *staccato* by introducing careful challenges. The circles and spirals of *flow* were left behind and sharp lines and sudden shifts entered our exchange. We explored erratic rhythms and provocative goading. We used our feet and hands to tease and antagonize one another with *pats, taps* and *pokes* (derivatives of *dab*). We progressed to moving together without contact, introducing explosive impulses from our hips and shoulder to create *thrusts* and *slashes*. Our transition to *chaos* was instigated by the introduction of full resistance, through palms-to-chest contact, gripping shoulders and hips, and shoulder-to-shoulder scrums. We alternated the build-up of pressure with sudden instances of release. The final additions, signalling the climax of our partner work, were *binding* actions. Standing or lying down, we used our arms and legs to ensnare one another in hostile embraces like wrestlers' grappling. The alternating pattern of *heavy–light* became one of *bound–free*. We used our imaginations to prolong the sensations of being held frozen after being released.

In Kerala, I have witnessed *teyyam* in which lower-caste men act as mediums for ancestral and local deities.³ *Teyyam* is an elaborate practice with a complex relationship to the region's contemporary politics and hereditary social hierarchy, but I focus here on the *teyyam* practitioners' experience of being in extremis. *Teyyam* performer Rajesh Komath explains in his interview with Smriti Vohra; 'when in performance the practitioner's psyche is wrought with immeasurably strong emotions [...] It is an exalted state of being, a mode of sublimity inexpressible in language' (2011:

6). He elaborates; ‘It is pleasurable to pose in extreme aesthetic tension [...] in a volatile atmosphere wrought with many possibilities’ and that this pleasure is ‘libidinal’ (Vohra 2011: 18). When Daniel and I froze in our chaos phase, we had arrived at a wholly absorbing state. This is because of our careful attention for each other’s physical safety combined with our acute desire to meet each movement proposition the other made with a creative spontaneity – we responded instantaneously without deliberation or negotiation, and each interaction invited the next. Through our partner work, who we are and what we were in terms of daily personae or disciplinary definitions receded. Because our partner work was so intimate and so demanding we entered the moment in an exceptional way.

At the height of *chaos*, I stopped interacting with Daniel as a fellow player in the dynamics we co-constructed and become a guide supporting him. I offered technical instruction through touch and words helping him sustain and elaborate lingering trace sensations (echoes and reverberations) that our interactions stimulated in him. Forming *Salvation*, his focus settled on cultivating those traces that helped him articulate two imaginary figures. For Daniel, the contrast between these figures was the core aspect of *Salvation*. He identified them as a volatile aggressive man called Jessick and a seductive disorientated woman called Jezebel. His memories of our movement interactions opened his imagination to deeper older memories. I used a synthesis of the methods I learnt from Molik and Nadine George to help Daniel bring his voice into his shamanic striptease. Nadine was a founder member of the company created by voice experimentalist Roy Hart (1926–75), who realized in performance the vision of an extended vocal range pioneered by his teacher Alfred Wolfsohn (1896–1962). For the past 35 years Nadine has worked with theatre companies and drama schools in Iceland, United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and France. I have worked with Nadine since 1987.

Daniel converted whole body movements into gestures to support his singing of open vowel sounds. Slow sustained undulations of his spine and arms captured and converted impulses from his body’s core to become articulations that modulated his breath and created tones we organized as

vibrations centred in different resonant areas of his body – stomach, ribs, sternum and skull. Daniel then made a passage from open sounds into speaking original poetry he composed for *Salvation*. Our emphasis at this juncture was not on deliberately constructing a score for performance but on Daniel *receiving* as Schilka practiced. Holding close to the ideal of *permissive presence*, and with reference to the mover-witness protocols of authentic movement (Pallaro 1999), I offered Daniel my observations of what I saw and heard, indications of what I felt, and revelations of what I imagined. When readying for a coming performance, at this point in our shamanic striptease, Daniel proceeded to a full enactment of *Salvation*, performed for me but as he intended to present it for his next audience.

At the close of each shamanic striptease session, I rejoined Daniel in our partner work. We took on complicit but asymmetrical roles. I encouraged his transition from the configurations of movement that cohered as Jessick and Jezebel into less defined movement patterns. We joined hands or linked elbows and entered into spinning and whirling motions that sent us wandering and meandering in the space. I also used gentle touch to trace lines on Daniel's body from his toes to his fingertips. Our interactions raised his centre-of-gravity towards his solar-plexus and lessened his contact with the floor. Daniel's complete exit from the shamanic striptease session was often secured by my use of massage and manipulation to settle his body and bring to a close (for now) the deep flow of movement, voice and imagination he tapped.

Grotowski explained that the physical exercises he and his performers developed were not the building blocks of their art but were 'like a prayer before something which is to be done' (Grotowski 1997a: 223). He sought to make the performers ready to 'express, through sound and movement, those impulses which waver on the borderline between dream and reality' (Grotowski 2002c: 35). Sumohadiwidjojo says that in order to *receive* one 'must find a way by which the tangled forces of thought present in his inner feeling can immediately be set aside' (1991: 102). Daniel and I used our partner work as means to move beyond an ordinary flow of thought and

feeling. The *receiving* we invoked seemed to access mysterious experience but I understood these phenomena to be forms of embodied memory.

Long before recent research in embodied cognition, Grotowski postulated that the distinction between body and memory ought to be reconsidered: ‘It is not that the body remembers. The body itself is memory’ (1979: 133, cited in Laster 2012: 213). This memory, he elaborates, is always of others – that is, of our interactions with others. Grotowski proposed that an impulse (a motivation to action) does not exist without the ‘partner [of] another human existence’ (2008: 37). In this way, he developed an understanding of our body as ‘a big book, where the presence of other human beings is registered’ (Grotowski 1997a: 222). Daniel explains that his performance of *Salvation* was informed by lingering traces of our exchanges during our partner work. This is especially because we often completed a truncated version of the sequence *flow–staccato–chaos* immediately prior to each presentation of *Salvation*. This rendition of our practice I compare to the preliminary rites of the *teyyam* (called *vellatam*), which serves as ‘a kind of low-key rehearsal for the Teyyam that is later enacted in full power’ (Vohra 2011: 9). In *Salvation*, Daniel recollects what Grotowski calls the ‘corporeality of somebody known’ (Grotowski 1997b: 378). In the opening, he shifts rapidly between three figures; a penitent speaking in tongues and praying for forgiveness; a vivacious chatterer who breaks off to castigate somebody; and a threatening political leader demanding the return of his land. Daniel can trace each to specific people, a man from the church he attended in his childhood, his mother and the erstwhile Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe. He cannot, however, make the same identification for Jessick and Jezebel. In Grotowski’s analysis, perhaps these figures approach ‘the corporeality of the unknown one, the ancestor’ (1997b: 379)?

In their article *The Body Made Flesh*, Evans et al. propose that the ‘meaning potential’ in movement includes both ‘somatic and semiotic’ dimensions (2009: 394). Thus in *Salvation*, Daniel’s embodiment of Jessick and Jezebel becomes a stimuli for his audience, through which they might invest his presence with a symbolic dimension and commence their own imaginative

journeys. Investigating this kind of interplay, Grotowski secluded himself for his last decades in a remote facility in Italy to expressly focus upon the somatic dimension of performance as a vehicle of transformation for performers. He continued, however, to consider how this process might be extended to witnesses, comparable to an audience for a theatre piece. Addressing anew the semiotic dimension of performance he asked, therefore, ‘Can one work on two registers in the same performative structure? On Art as presentation (the making of the public performance) and, at the same time, on Art as vehicle?’ (Grotowski 1995: 132).

Grotowski often spoke of fixed form as a vital balance to free improvisation. Indeed, he suggested that vision of whole engagement that spontaneity implies must include full consciousness to be complete (Fumaroli 1997: 109). Material accessed in the studio, rich with subconscious content, must be canalized, he said, in order to become a useful source from which an affective performance can flow, for both performer and audience (Grotowski 2002a: 128). Grotowski’s dramaturg Ludwig Flaszen observed that though always reaching beyond convention, Grotowski and his company also always arrived at precise forms. He states, ‘The organic pulp, striving for the transgression of all forms [...] solidifies in a poetic composition’ (Flaszen 2013: 109). Flaszen compares a performer in Grotowski’s work to ‘a metaphor in modern poetry, where the content cannot be separated from the sign, because of the multiple energetic connections that happen between these two’ (Flaszen 2013: 107). Flaszen does not suggest a merging of performer and character, such as implemented in *method acting*. Instead, he speaks of performance constituted of the very material experience and affective presence of the performer. The performance arises not as the result of deliberate expression by the performer, but as a consequence and symptom of the deeds performed. This is what Grotowski indicates when he says, ‘A man in an elevated spiritual state uses rhythmically articulated signs’ (2002d: 17). This focus on the indivisibility of the performer’s somatic experience and semiotic value leads Zdenek Horínek to suggest that Grotowski sought ‘naïve expression [...] in the sense of sincerity, genuineness, authenticity, a unity of inner intentions and outer actions’ (2009: 87). *Salvation*, as a work of shamanic striptease, charged Daniel with the

special task of accessing a unique and singular cultural, spiritual and erotic authenticity. It called for a multi-edged naivety – a quality of integrity that seeks to synthesize (and queer) diverse cultural, religious, sexual and ecstatic dimensions in a London cultural context where multiple mechanisms work to demarcate, institutionalize or commodify such a range of experience.

At the climax of *Salvation*, Daniel performs a lap dance for a one audience member. In the preceding moments he says to all gathered, ‘Drink me. My body is a temple, and I invite you to come rock inside me’. This is spoken as a direct address from Daniel in the first person and present tense; he is not in character. Like Grotowski’s performer, Daniel presented what Flaszen calls ‘the literal truth of his spiritual and physical organism’ (Flaszen 2013: 108). Daniel’s removal of his clothes was an outward sign for the removal of less tangible coverings; he performed without the mask of either his daily social self or a stable fictional persona (such as a choreographed and scripted character). Grotowski spoke of the ‘self-penetration’ by which a performer might arrive at a quality of ‘self-revelation’ that Flaszen described as a ‘unique, intensive, solemn ecstatic act’ (2013: 109). Grotowski said such self-revelation is ‘an invitation to the spectator’ comparable ‘to an act of the most deeply rooted, genuine love between two human beings’ (2002b, 256). He said too, ‘Man in his intimacy: such is the last of our temples’ (Fumaroli 1997: 111). Daniel and I embraced the possibilities of Grotowski’s legacy, seeded through his seminal work in post-war Catholic Poland under Communist rule. There is power and promise in his evocative images of penetration, revelation, ecstasy and love. At the same, we locate ourselves concretely as queer men in millennial cosmopolitan London, where the flood of cultural references in circulation expose us to sexualized imagery of mainstream media and the eroticism of gay society in particular. In a sense, we seek through shamanic striptease to literalize Grotowski’s vision and to create material changes interconnecting sexuality and spirituality for ourselves and those who encounter our work.

After his work at the Grotowski Institute, Daniel founded a London collective called Soundboxed who stretched the parameters of immersive theatre. For example, their work called *The Development*⁴ fabricated a religious cult but it led to the company being asked to perform elements

of the ceremonial they created for an audience member's wedding. Aspects of Soundboxed's practice informed *Salvation*. Commentaries on immersive theatre help describe the performer-audience relationship rendered by key moments during Daniel's performance. *Salvation* was premised on witnesses' gradual 'transition from audience member to participant' (Talbot 2016: 24). The audience all sat in a semi-circle, each able to see everyone. Before them was an empty chair facing away from them and towards Daniel. During the course of *Salvation*, two audience members were invited to sit on the chair by Daniel. The first received a blessing from him while he evoked Jessick. The second received a lap dance while he evoked Jezebel. Prior to this second moment, Daniel gave the audience replicas of paper money from the apartheid era and invited them to rub it on a part of their body representative of a burden they wanted to release. The money was then collected up by Daniel and handed to the audience member who is to receive his climactic lap dance. Daniel then performed this dance to a recording of traditional Native American song remixed with dubstep club beats by first nation Canadian musicians (Tribe Called Red 2017). The audience members on the chair inserted the money into the legs, waistband and crotch of Daniel's shorts, or scattered it on Daniel's body in an action that (in strip club parlance) is termed 'making it rain'. At this point, *Salvation* reached the extreme of what Adam Alston calls an 'uneven distribution of participatory opportunity' (2013: 9). The audience watched the money they invested with burden passing to Daniel while he caressed the person on the chair. Alston observes that during such kinds of intimacy, for the audience member on the chair, the participatory rules of what is and is not allowed become unclear (2013: 12). Alston adds that the inclusion of 'intimately erotic encounters' (2013: 5) in immersive performance mean that 'embarrassment, awkwardness, guilt and shame become potential risks for participating audiences' (2013: 12). He notes too, however, that this kind of interaction also creates 'a live participatory encounter'; performers and audience become vividly aware of occupying 'a single shared space' (Alston 2013: 15) – not separate discrete dimensions. Richard Talbot proposes that immersive theatre invites every participant to acknowledge only 'a very fragile membrane' distinguishes the realm of performer and audience

(2016: 16). He adds that the constant slippage between ordinary reality and a ‘constructed world’ makes prominent at all times the question of whether the performers are being their actual selves or fictional characters (Talbot 2016: 19).

INSERT Figure 1 HERE

Figure 1: Mover: Daniel P. Cunningham. Photo: Alla Bogadonovic.

Salvation compounded the complexities Alston and Talbot find in immersive performance by introducing the contradictory form of striptease. Daniel undressed after singing a Zulu lullaby that closed his presentation of the penitent, the chatterer and the political leader. His strip was accompanied by a recording of Haitian drumming. He made no eye contact with the audience and with a ceremonial care he folded and placed his clothes under the chair. Wearing only tight shorts, he then mimed spreading dust from the floor on his skin, from the tips of his feet and hands to his torso, then finally from his throat to his genitals. He appeared contained and withdrawn from the audience though his body was on full display. Later, evoking Jessick, he performed aggressive sexualized movements simulating copulation, and in the climactic lap dance he repeatedly offered himself provocatively to the occupant of the chair and to those looking on from their own seats. Yet, in both instances his dismissive regard and impatient instructions suggest his erotic behaviour was insolent defiance rather than a desire to please. In *Salvation*, Daniel presented as an aggressive flirt.

Georg Simmel’s essay ‘Flirtation’ (first published in 1909) offers his detailed masculinist analysis of female coquettes’ ambiguous interactions. Simmel speaks of

Flirtation as flattery: ‘Although you might indeed be able to conquer me, I won’t allow myself to be conquered.’ Flirtation as contempt: ‘Although I would actually allow

myself to be conquered, you aren't able to do it.' Flirtation as provocation: 'Perhaps you can conquer me, perhaps not – try it!'. (1984: 135)

Alan Radley's 2002 essay 'Flirting' develops Simmel's ideas. Radley proposes that flirtation depends on the person addressed recognizing the messages given as an invitation to play (2002: 83). To paraphrase Gregor Bateson's essay 'A theory of play and fantasy' (1972), flirtation reconfigures sexual actions as expressive gestures, no longer necessarily expressive of the intention that such actions might ordinarily imply. In Radley's words, flirtation results in 'gesture being negated as a symptom of desire' (2002:79). Flirtation is the performance of actions in such a way that they become gestures of ambiguous intent. In Daniels lap dance there are parallels to the staged performances of *haka* (vigorous postural dance) made by Māori men. The gestural codes of *haka* equate erections and penetration with martial power and triumphant dominance. These gestures synthesize notions of sociopolitical self-determination with personal sexual prowess. Daniel was not acting per se during his lap dance; he was present as himself. Through his intensely physical and intimate performance he directly addressed the audience members on the chair. Yet his sexualized actions were rendered ambiguous because of his aggressive flirtation and because the money he received is invested with the audience's burdens, offered up for healing. Moreover, Daniel made an instantaneous volte-face at the end of each the lap dance, contextualizing this sexualized act as part of a devotional arc; kneeling on the floor, note-by-note and with great focus, he caressed the money and rubbed it on his body before arranging it around him. As he finished, he began to intone verses from the Song of Solomon: 'My beloved thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my heart began to pound for him. I arose to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with flowing myrrh, on the handles of the bolt' (Song of Songs 5:4-5). Daniel's erotic dance aligned with the eroticism of these verses. Its sexual drive become intricately connected with a depth of desire that is a longing for transcendental release. Though shamanic striptease pursues a naïve

confluence of intention and action, the multivalence of the integration of sexuality, aggression and spirituality in *Salvation* created a performance that delivered a myriad of processual messages simultaneously.

INSERT Figure 2: HERE - INSERT

Figure 2: Mover: Daniel P. Cunningham. Photo: Birdman Foxglove.

This multivalence is noted by Berson when she writes that striptease and lap dancing are kinds of sexual expression ‘that entertain in the moment but also [promise] that more and better might be available in the future’ (2016: 63). She proposes that their very appeal is their capacity to incite constantly deferred, and thus ever renewed, desire (Berson 2016: 89). She is aware of the contrasting discourses concerning erotic dancers (ordinarily focussed on women in that role), which polarize around perceptions of the dancers’ exploitation and empowerment. Berson proposes that erotic dancers negotiate and navigate the contradictory positions they simultaneously occupy: ‘subject and object, sensing and seeing, agency and abjection’ (2016: 85). She concludes that striptease ‘can both reify *and* resist dominant notions of female subjectivity, suppress *and* express subversive desires – erotic and otherwise’ (Berson 2016: 85, original emphasis).

Daniel’s erotic dancing in *Salvation* is of a different order to that of the women Berson considers. As a queer and immigrant man he might be considered a marginalized person but his whiteness, his masculinity and his higher education, however, sit in contrast to such a bracketing. Moreover, in *Salvation*, Daniel danced on a stage he controlled: he is a self-managing freelance live art maker. He stripped and lap-danced before a paying audience, but not for them per se. In our partner work, Daniel and I explored a doubled focus; we were attentive to one another’s propositions, communicated via touch, tiny gestures and eye contact, and yet at the same time, we attuned to the stream of associations that our interactions stimulate – bodily sensations, emotional resonances, fragments of mental imagery, and snippets of organized thought. Daniel continued this fusion of introspection and action when performing *Salvation*. While he exposed his body to the gaze of an audience he travelled an internal journey. This inner route was not just the immediate the

thrills and trepidations of stripping. Instead, it was a quest of the type Grotowski and Molik describe; Daniel stripped as a *being of discovery* embodying his *process*. Grotowski suggested a performers ‘search must be directed from within himself to the outside, but not *for* the outside’ (Schechner and Hoffman 1997: 40, original emphasis). Daniel’s self-exposure, in all senses of the term, was an invitation for the audience to join him in the healing transitional space he seeks to create. Grotowski said, ‘by casting off his everyday mask, [the performer] makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration’ (2002c: 34).

Salvation was mostly presented in London where widely differing cultural frameworks meet and merge. Operating in such a context allows the performances to generate a multiplicity of meanings that emerge and develop independent of artistic intentions. Additionally, Daniel’s identity is a fluid complex. Like each of us, his selfhood intersects many diverse matrices – sexuality, gender, ethnicity, nationality and class. There was an immediate corporeality in each moment of *Salvation* emanating from Daniel’s moving, sweating, naked body. But this immediate corporeality was in a constant dynamic dialogue with historical, contemporary and efflorescent tropes. Daniel’s corporeal presence was differently received by diverse bodies, gazes and minds. In *Salvation*, references to African, Caribbean and Native American music and dance mean that political currents about colonial legacies fuse with message about queer sexuality through Daniel’s evocation of Jessick and Jezebel. Moreover, the integration of elements of religious practices (that became especially prominent in Maynooth) brought forward spiritual yearnings for a belief structure that can support and inform his (and our?) experiences.

Yoga scholar Mikel Burley offers a useful image for conceptualizing how *Salvation* engaged with multiple dimensions of identity. Refuting simplistic analyses of Hindu cosmology, Burley states that the *self* therein configured is not one comprised of ‘layers of different substance’ but is a mutable whole; it is a ‘single substance in different “stages”’ (2000:178). In shamanic striptease, the diverse aspects of the self are in moving relationship to each other. Unlike clothes, these aspects cannot be removed and folded away, but through shamanic striptease they become creatively

available – to the performer and witnesses – as wavering dimensions. As Berson proposes, ‘even in a space thick with racist, sexist imagery, a body in motion can speak—and speak multiple languages at once’ (2016: 171).

INSERT Figure 3 HERE INSERT

Figure 3: Mover: Daniel P. Cunningham. Photo: Alla Bogadonovic.

Shamanic striptease is configured upon the understanding that the distance between the performer and the audiences’ perceptions is irresolvable. Lavy summarizes Grotowski’s great work as distinguishing the ways in which the associations performers’ actions stimulate in an audience differ from those that the performers experience when performing those same actions (Lavy 2005: 181). Grotowski explains, ‘to some degree the performance appears not on the stage but in the perception of the spectator’ (1995: 120). This understanding promotes an approach to composition that maximizes upon audiences’ potential to create meaning. The performance is developed, says Salata, as a ‘condensed interplay of signs [with] a paradigmatic resonance’ allowing a ‘multitude of meanings’ to coexist (2008: 108). Salata argues that such an approach obliges the audience ‘to face the density of the work in toto in a mode of event as a *witnessed* deed, rather than as a text that unfolds its narrative and “surrenders” itself to the reader’ (2008: 108, original emphasis). A written response by audience member Karl Burrows substantiates the multivalent potency of *Salvation*. He experienced the performance as

asking me to be open to the unknown, the boundless. While structured in dance and rhythm and voice and sound, it seemed beyond and I was not sure if I wanted to venture there or not. And of course I did want to and that is why I came. But it was disconcerting and I didn’t know where to place my feelings in my body sometimes. [...] it opened up such a big space in me that I wanted to respond ritually as my own [Māori]

people would with stylised speech and song to reciprocate what I had felt with something from me. (2017)

In conclusion, I consider what has been revealed through reviewing the relationship of shamanic striptease to the practices modelled by Grotowski. Konstantyny Puzyna observes that Grotowski anchored his work with performers through engagement with their ‘genuine and intimate concerns’ (2014: 19). This instigated ‘a conscious process of release from hidden complexes, memories, bygone experiences, and inhibitions [explaining] the strongly erotic temper of the performance’ (Puzyna 2014: 20). Grotowski argued, ‘the profound stripping bare of the self should [not] be regarded as evil so long as in the process of preparation or in the completed work they produce an act of creation’ (2002b: 257). Franco Ruffini proposes that Grotowski’s capacity was to aid his performers to channel ‘a “normal” personal crisis into an anomalous yet precise journey, and activated an individual’s potential by working on what underlay an immediate difficulty’ (Ruffini 2009: 125).

Salvation captured a pivotal dynamic tension through the evocation of Jessick and Jezebel. Through this configuration Daniel was able to experience access to an extended range of movement qualities. Using movement therapist Janet Kaylo’s observation about gender roles, Daniel has embraced qualities that can be characterized as being hyperbolically male and hyperbolically female (2009: 180). Through our partner work, we moved towards recognition of ways that movements grouped in these polarities have deeper resonance beyond gender tropes. Kaylo’s observations offer a rudimentary map. She suggests,

those movement qualities which bind, dissect, insist, and focus, presenting themselves as invulnerable by closing in Shape, are workings of the ego [...]. Those activities which meander and receive, exposing vulnerability by simultaneously opening in

Shape, on the other hand, spring from the unconscious nature of the soul. (Kaylo 2009: 182)

On another level, shamanic striptease is a work of *kinaesthesia*, which Taviani describes as ‘the physical sensation of self – the inner perception of oneself materially *being there* (Taviani 2009: 134, original emphasis). Shamanic striptease invites us to centre our experience in what Sabine C. Koch and Diana Fischman term ‘kinesthetic consciousness’ (2011: 59). This I understand as an experiential somatic realm through which passage is made towards greater understanding of one’s total self via immersion in the uniqueness of one’s individual corporeality. In shamanic striptease, our bodies are our anchors for self-development. Through close engagement with our materiality we explore our capacity for transformation and our affective potential and reframe personal and collective histories in ways that empower growth.

Koch and Fischman locate an essential complexity of embodied practices when they state that ‘movement is presymbolic but paradoxically full of meaning’ (2011: 61). Through shamanic striptease, noting profound qualitative shifts and affective moments, Daniel and I have found what Uttara Asha Coorlawala calls ‘physical access points to mystical experience’ (1999: 9). The greatest challenge is to make bridges that allow these instances to become integrated into our daily lives. Just as *Salvation* is not an enactment of a predetermined message, so too shamanic striptease is a means towards a sensibility and not an illustration of one. It is, using Grotowski’s terms, leading us ‘to awareness rather than being the product of awareness’ (2002d: 18).

I close by pausing to acknowledge the overarching canopy of belief or faith that may or may not be emergent through shamanic striptease as an all-embracing practice that lies outside of any recognized orthodox tradition. My comparisons to *teyyam* cannot carry to any great length because shamanic striptease works without the clear parameters of a discrete hereditary tradition and without an extended close community of peer practitioners. Flaszen reflects on the complex passage

Grotowski made from the conventions of theatre to research with performers in seclusion (2013: 210). He transformed spectators into active participants in a theatrical ritual, witnesses of a performer's sacrificial self-revelation and finally participants in events that forewent theatrical acting and the social performance. Thereafter, Grotowski concerned himself with tracing in the performer the embodied duality of consciousness that he understood to be *I-I* – that is, the performer in action and in reflection in one and the same instance, in one and the same body. Flaszen asks, could this reflective self be compared to 'a transcendental spectator from another dimension [...] an eye of the Hindu Atman' (2013: 210). Such a question presses from the background into shamanic striptease, leading Daniel and I to frame our work in the studio with *bhajan* that call upon *Adi Para Shakti* – a cosmic mother.

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Contributor details

Mark James Hamilton is senior lecturer in world stages at Regent's University London. He first trained at the University of Birmingham, where Nadine George educated him in her development of the embodied voice work of Alfred Wolfsohn and Roy Hart. Extramurally, Mark was taught the work of Jerzy Grotowski by Zygmunt Molik and Jolanta Cynkutis. He later trained with *bharatanatyam* dancer Priya Srikumar and her guru Paramasiva Menon, with *astanga vinyasa yoga* teacher Jude Hynes and with CVN *kalaripayattu* instructor Rajasekaran Nair. Mark lived in New Zealand for thirteen years, working as the close collaborator of Mika, a seminal queer Maori performance artist. His doctorate was awarded by the University of Canterbury (New Zealand). His thesis explored the interface of the martial arts and dance. During the course of his doctoral studies, Mark trained in *tai chi chen*, *judo* and *capoeira* for four years. He has also practiced *nuad boran* (Thai yoga massage). Mark's on-going research explores the possibility of transcultural principles for performance training and the challenges of intercultural creative collaboration. His closest collaborators are Daniel P. Cunningham (with whom he explores the interface of Polish experimental theatre and queer live art) and Shane Shambhu (with whom he explores the use of *bharatanatyam* to create new narrative drama).

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Notes

¹ Daniel P. Cunningham is a white African performance artist born in Kwa Zulu Natal. He performed internationally in award winning work with Teatr ZAR, resident company of the Grotowski Institute (Wroclaw, Poland), in Paris, Edinburgh and London, and on tours with Zar to Spain, Georgia and Turkey. He led his own collective called SoundBoxed (2013–16) that ran for three years, performing across London at Theatre Delicatessen, Rich Mix, CPT, Barbican and New Diorama. Dan has also performed in works at Southbank, the Barbican Centre and Roundhouse. In 2016, he began a solo performance practice centred on converting the complexities of his intercultural and queer life experiences into a healing work of art for himself and his audiences. Dan's principle collaborator in this work is Mark James Hamilton. Daniel teaches performance preparation at his *alma mater* Rose Bruford College.

² *Salvation: Shamanic Striptease* has been performed on eleven occasions in London: Battersea Arts Centre, 31 December 2016; The Fly Pit, 10 January 2017; Rich Mix, 21 January 2017; Royal Vauxhall Tavern, 7 February 2017; Hackney Show Rooms, 1 April 2017; Battersea Arts Centre, 11–13 April 2017; Rose Theatre, 19 April 2017; Royal Vauxhall Tavern, 20 May 2017; and Camden People's Theatre, 12 September 2017. It was presented twice in Iceland: The Freezer (Rif, Iceland), 21 August 2017; and Club Kiki (Reykjavik), 24 August 2017.

³ Vailoppilly Samskrithi Bhavan, Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala) January 2015. Muthappan Temple, Parassinikadavu (Kerala) 23 December 2015 and 26 December 2018. Kannapuram Puthiyakavu, near kannapuram bridge, Kannapuram (Kerala). Mundappuram Panthirazhi Thamburatty Kshethram and Poonthurutthi Kalari, Velichangool, Pattuvam (Kerala), 27 December 2018.

⁴ The Development, SoundBoxed Collective (Theatre Delicatessen, London, November 2014–February 2015).