

Recently, I had the opportunity to experience two plays: **Six Characters in Search of an Author** by Luigi Pirandello and **Mnemonic** by Simon McBurney and Theatre De Complicite.

Six Characters invites us into a theatre rehearsal where six members of a family in crisis interrupt the surprised actors. The family includes the Father, the Mother, the Stepdaughter, the Son, the Boy, and Rosetta, the Girl, the only one who is named. These six characters are alive, having been developed by the author to different degrees, but are "suspended in limbo somewhere between nothingness and reality... without a life of their own and with untold drama in their hearts" (Pietropaolo, 2001, p. 7). They walk into the theatre looking for an author; looking to the actors to authorize them. All each can do is contribute to the as-yet-untold story, share who each is, in an effort to persuade the actors to act them into a play; into a form that can enable them to achieve fullness of life. But the actors have to agree to engage the Characters.

The word mnemonic is an adjective meaning 'assisting or intending to assist the memory'. The play **Mnemonic** interweaves the language and instruments of archaeology, technology and biophysics to draw us into its world of seemingly infinite empathy; into fully identifying with the characters. It engages us in the curiosity that makes each of us an artist, as we follow fragmented, intersecting stories, the two main ones being: the pursuit of the identity of a 5,000 year old ice man by scientists of both genders, of different nationalities and with conflicting claims, and the second story, a 21st century woman's search for her father and her male partner's experience of that search. Who is this iceman? How did he come to be there? What are the articles found with him? How was he using them? In the other story, a year ago the woman, Alice, suddenly left without indicating why and in the process of finding her father, of whom she has vague childhood memories, she gradually begins to re-engage or engage for the first time, Virgil, the man she left behind.

Hearing these stories reminds us that we can offer accounts of our immediate and ancestral past, but our stories are suspect because memory is mutable. Remembering, a creative and intransitive process, yielding compositions from a sea of possibilities, is illustrated throughout the play in fugue like reprise so that repeated sketches and images have just enough variation to make anything you've seen before questionable.

Six Characters dramatizes the unconscious; the events the characters describe are the discoveries, the realizations, and the awarenesses of the mind. From the events are constructed a drama of experience subtle and lucid, and penetratingly human. The character that is the father asserts, "Each one of us believes himself to be a single person. But it's not true... Each one of us is many persons... Many persons... according to all the possibilities of being that there are within us... With some people we are one person... With others we are somebody quite different... And all the time we are under the illusion of always being one and the same person for everybody..." (Pirandello, 1921/1954, p. 27).

Given that our remembered history engages our creativity, our imagination, McBurney (2001) reveals that his experiences growing up hearing the stories of his father who was an archaeologist are the origin of elements in the play, **Mnemonic**. When he learns "of new archaeological discoveries, new stories, they do not only exert shock of the new, but also a feeling of recognition" (p. 20). They stimulate his sense of memory, are mnemonic.

What stayed with me from these plays were the two words: **author** and **mnemonic**. To author, authorize, be the authority of one's self – this links with the responsibility we have for who we are or in Hans Loewald's (1978) words, "the problem of responsibility for one's unconscious" and what (he) calls "the moral implications of psychoanalysis"(p. 538). For Loewald (1978), an American psychoanalyst, "(t)he psychoanalytic process implies a conception of man's moral nature. Promoting the individual's consciousness, fostering his ego development, means... promoting his taking responsibility for himself. ... Psychoanalysis prominently is concerned with unconscious history"(p. 538). The family of Characters in **Six Characters** insist that their past experience be illuminated, that they be authorized; Alice's mnemonic experience with Virgil is the impetus for the search for her father or for the self that remembers the relationship with her father.

Loewald (1978) continues, "To own up to our own history, to be responsible for our unconscious, in an important sense means, to bring unconscious forms of experiencing into the context and onto the level of the more mature, more lucid life of the adult mind. Our drives, our basic needs, in such transformation, are not relinquished, nor are traumatic and distorting childhood experiences made conscious in order to be deplored and undone – even if that were possible. ... What is possible is to engage in the task of actively reorganizing, reworking,

creatively transforming those early experiences which, painful as many of them have been, first gave meaning to our lives. The more we know what it is we are working with, the better we are able to weave our history which, when all is said and done, is recreating, in ever-changing modes and transformations, our (earlier life). To be an adult means that; it does not mean leaving the (earlier self) in us behind" (p. 545). For example, in **Six Characters** the Son, the Boy and Rosetta, the Girl are the least developed, the least accessible, but it is the revelation of their experience with each other that prompts the actors to become readily engaged with them for the first time. Hans Loewald provides us with a way to consider our history and our responsibility for our life. **Six Characters** gives us a glimpse into possibilities of self; into other elements of self which are waiting for an author; eager to be authorized, to yield to the authority we may desire to claim. But how do we discover, connect with, illuminate, authorize the expression of who we are that at this time may be more a ghost than an ancestor (using Stephen Mitchell's (2000) turn of phrase); more inaccessible than accessible to live out of, claim. Mnemonic experiences may offer the avenue to those places in us, to those qualities that unconsciously long to be.

Reflecting on these plays, I became aware that here, at CTP, we are always encountering those situations that assist our memory and provide the opportunity for access to ourselves; to what's alive; what's had to be asleep, undeveloped, deadened. I wonder what surprise awaits each of us this year in the form of a 'character' fully developed or on the threshold in whatever area of the program we may be. In lectures and seminars the academic material often provides a mnemonic prompt; what we read, hear in lectures, discuss. In these first years we may gain access to more than the intelligences out of which we have consciously lived till now. These varied intelligences, Howard Gardner (1993) says there are seven, are each a language. Some may be familiar; others we may have yet to discover in ourselves. There are those of us who express our intelligence through music (musical), others in poetry or through solving complex puzzles and being methodically organized (linguistic, logical-mathematical). Some of us know the language of dance, woodworking (body-kinesthetic); others the visual arts (spatial). There are those fortunate to be able to be alone with themselves, perhaps in meditation, and others who have keenly honed the intelligence of looking outward perhaps in community service, engaging others (both personal). We may be surprised what we discover in ourselves and experience in other participants: the various ways we express our intelligence, learn; the possibilities.

As we're preparing to work clinically in practicum or a concentration, here too may be a 'story', a tale that opens an as yet unthought, unknown possibility in us; what meaning we give to this potential for being a psychotherapist.

Group presents us with the stories of all the other participants.

Allowing them to reach us, enter, may be a mnemonic key to a place we wish to become more of an authority on in ourselves.

And when working clinically, the allowing of the client's story to awaken or reawaken a story in us, the therapist, may mean that we respond to the client in a manner that enables the client to claim a 'character' as herself or himself that up till now had been a shadow of possibility.

At the end of **Six Characters in Search of an Author**, the actor who is the leading lady says, "What happened is real, they are real!" as she witnesses that significant situation referred to earlier, that involves three of the Characters: the Son, the Boy and Rosetta, the Girl (Pirandello, 1921/1954, p. 68). In the other play, **Mnemonic's** final moments are memorable for their invitation to suspend the distinction between the past and the present. Symbolically, through movement, the actors take us from past to present and to the space between. All are now. May the experience of yourself this year be as real and as encompassing of the past, the present and the space between in whatever context you engage the program.

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