

Geddy Aniksdal

Time to Celebrate

Now, more than twenty years later, I wonder whether it was fate or coincidence that brought us to that table by the lake, that table that to me represents the beginning of the Magdalena Project. I went home that evening to the school where we were staying, with two small seeds inside, that of the Magdalena Project, and that of my first child, and I did not know of the existence of either of them; the beginning of life long relationships and networks.

I have just come back from a journey to Thailand and Cambodia to study theatre and to extend the network of the Magdalena Project. Travelling helps one gain perspective. Seeing hundreds of young girls practising their classical dance at the University of Performing Arts in Phnom Penh made an impression on me, and helped me re-remember the beginnings, the simple basic pleasure of work.

Now, in the first days of January, I find myself at Odin Teatret, where we, the editorial board of *The Open Page* have met for the last ten years, in the cold, snowy or rainy days of winter in Scandinavia. As often we are behind with work, as often we ask ourselves if we can go on making the journal, as each of us has more than enough to do with our own work, and we end up yet again deciding on the theme of the next issue and when to meet, and that we will try to find more time for the work and so on.

We work and work, and enjoy it, because we enjoy each other's company, and the feeling of doing a rewarding piece of work. We laugh a lot.

My heart is in it, is one of our sayings... Being a part of the Magdalena Project is one of my life-stones, and who would have known that when we were just mouthing off at a café table by Lago Bracciano in 1983? Theatre brought us there, we, the then young European theatre groups. My group, Grenland Friteater, had not been on extensive tours in Italy before and it was all new, exciting and exotic.

During the September days of 1983, taking part in *Il Segreto di Alice*, a collaborative festival, we got to know the other groups, it was the beginning of many networks. At the café tables at night we often met and talked. I remember the particular night when one of us said: "You know girls this will only mean trouble?" It was a response to the suggestion that only we, the women of the groups, should come together and work.

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That the founder of the Magdalena Project Jill Greenhalgh's initial rage should provide work and opportunities for hundreds of women in theatre was something we did not know, but with hindsight we might like to think that we all took part in a vision whilst drinking our wine and smoking our cigarettes at the café table that evening.

Jill's righteous indignation has given many of us a lot of work and challenges and, more importantly, has woven our often disparate activities into a strong network that is now almost worldwide, as the project has grown (and hopefully we with it) and its ripple effects are multiple.

The young and wild women from that café table are now being called the grandmothers of the Magdalena Project, and going with the modern times that means even more work for us, and still no place in the sun. But as our late colleague Pernille Anker said: "Everything after compulsory school is voluntary."

The constructive feedback that we get at *The Open Page* gives us the incentive to go on, and it means a lot to have a young actor struggling with an article for a long time and finally have it printed. The actor's craft being so transient it is valuable to have some record of our work there "forever", as we like to think of printed material.

To encourage a stronger percentage of women artists to leave traces behind is still an important motivation for our work. And this year we celebrate the fact that we are in the process of publishing the 10th

issue of this journal. An older colleague has reminded us that ten editions are a little milestone in itself. The journal had a difficult start, but that made us more determined to control as many aspects of the work as possible, just as we control our theatre work in general, a production that we follow from idea to first night, which then goes on to live its own life.

Self-appreciation can also come from the heart. There, it is said, it is in the Open (Page).

Do we have champagne?

Yes.

Will we drink it?

Yes.

Grandmothers can do as they please!

If Virginia Woolf could see us now, I hope she would be proud too. We have made rooms of our own.

Cheers!

GEDDY ANIKSDAL (Norway) is a performer and director at Grenland Friteater and a teacher of actor's methods for creating their own material. She has been active with the Magdalena Project from its beginning. She is also on the editorial board of *The Open Page*.