

# Drama yoga as spiritual ecology praxis

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*All life is drama.*

Courtney (1980)

*All life is yoga.*

Sri Aurobindo (1970)

In this paper I explore the way that Yoga can balance our energy systems and make us aware of our energy blocks. Then through drama we can express the traumas that caused those energy blocks. Drama Yoga brings these two processes together and results in balancing and freeing up our energy flow and enhances our wellbeing, which is essential for leaders in the contemporary world. In Yoga this energy is called 'prana'. It is the 'chi' of Tai Chi or the 'ki' of Aikido. The French philosopher Henri Bergson (1998) proposed this energy as the 'elan vital' in French, which translates as 'life-force' in English. This influenced Jacob Levy Moreno (in Greenberg, 1975) to develop his psychodrama process as a form of spontaneity training. The paper begins with relating how the drama yoga process can benefit leaders facing 'tough challenges' in our rapidly changing world and then explores the new understandings of life and evolution that support a process of deepening consciousness. Yoga and meditation are shown to be ways of becoming more conscious of our inner world, while drama is a way to become more conscious of the roles we play in the outer world. Psychodrama and playback theatre are given as examples of these forms of drama. Finally the process of drama yoga shows how the bringing together of these processes of deepening can represent a form of conscious holistic leadership so needed in this time when we are moving towards an integral consciousness. Using the social ecology model of beginning with the personal, I will explore these ideas and practices that embody my own developing eco-spiritual consciousness as a leader, as part of an ecology of culture.

**Key words:** drama, yoga, ecology, life, story, spirituality and consciousness

## INTRODUCTION

One of the great dramatists of all time proclaimed that 'All the world's stage, And all the men and women merely players' (Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1971 edn.)). This insight influenced my own thinking in my work as a creative community educator leading me to create the process I call Drama Yoga. Through yoga we can balance our energy system and become aware of our energy blocks. Through drama we can express the traumas that caused those energy blocks. Drama Yoga brings these two processes together and results in balancing and freeing up our energy flow and enhances our wellbeing, which is essential for leaders in the contemporary world.

In a world of 'tough challenges: economic crises, energy crises, climate change, dwindling resources, geo-political meltdown and overpopulation' ([www.slamconference.org.au](http://www.slamconference.org.au), 20/12/09) the Drama Yoga process can greatly benefit leaders. It can help to meet 'these same challenges' and 'also bring opportunities for change – on a personal, organisational and global' level. Facing these challenges on a daily basis, leaders and managers are exposed to enormous levels of stress. While stress can be a motivating factor increasing performance in the short term, it can also lead to burnout if not addressed in the long term as the following quote shows:

Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed and unable to meet constant demands. As the stress

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continues, you begin to lose the interest or motivation that led you to take on a certain role in the first place.

Burnout reduces your productivity and saps your energy, leaving you feeling increasingly helpless, hopeless, cynical, and resentful. Eventually, you may feel like you have nothing more to give. ([http://helpguide.org/mental/burnout\\_signs\\_symptoms.htm](http://helpguide.org/mental/burnout_signs_symptoms.htm), 20/12/09)

The value of the Drama Yoga process for leaders is that it addresses the loss of energy that the very word burnout implies. In yoga this energy is called 'prana'. It is the 'chi' of Tai Chi or the 'ki' of Aikido. The French philosopher Henri Bergson (1998) proposed this energy as the 'elan vital' in French that translates as 'life-force' in English. This influenced Jacob Levy Moreno (Greenberg, 1975) to develop his psychodrama process as a form of spontaneity training.

Through the life-force we can connect with Earth energies that shamans, dowsers and geomancers all work with. The shaman was the spiritual leader of tribal communities. This energy is everywhere in nature – in trees, plants, animals, mountains, rivers, forests, lakes – we can connect with this life-force as indigenous peoples have been doing for millennia. The eco-philosopher Henryk Skolimowski (1994, 1995) has developed his Eco-Yoga as a way to connect with Earth Energies. The Indian Sufi Hazrat Inayat Khan (1999), taught his students to read the sacred manuscript of nature and inspired the American Sufi Samuel Lewis (1998) to create the Dances of Universal Peace, which celebrate the Earth's Energies in the diverse spiritual cultures of the world through meditative circle dances.

In this paper I explore the ideas and practices that embody my own developing eco-spiritual consciousness as a leader, as part of an ecology of culture. My definition of culture comes from the anthropologist Clifford Geertz who states that 'culture is simply the ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves' (in Sardar & Van Loon, 2001, p5). An ecology of culture reminds us of our connection to all life, potentially healing the disconnection from nature that has so plagued modern society since the industrial revolution. It is this disconnection that is a root cause of the challenges of this time, challenges that leaders need to deal with creatively.

This paper briefly tells a story about life and its evolution and how our new understandings of life, ecology and consciousness relate to yoga and

drama. I address Drama Yoga directly only in the last part of the paper, because at first I want to present the reader with an understanding of the source of my practice of leadership in the two separate forms more commonly known as drama and yoga, in which I trained to be a teacher. Bringing together these practices is related to what Otto Scharmer (2003) calls 'illuminating the blind spot' (p. 6). His definition of leadership resonates with my own understanding as expressed in this paper:

leadership is the capacity to *shift the inner place from which the system operates*. Accordingly, the most important tool is the leader's self, his or her capacity to perform that shift. (p. 6)

I argue that this 'blind spot' is a major cause of the stress for leaders that arises from the need to deal with a world of 'tough challenges' and that drama yoga potentially provides leaders with a way to access that place of 'stillness and deep reflection ... to connect to the sources of inner knowing and to the profound journey of discovering who they really are and what they are here for' (Scharmer, 2009, p. 5).

## WHAT IS LIFE?

'All life is drama.' 'All life is yoga.' Both of these quotes make a statement about life. One is by one of the foremost drama educators of the 80s and 90s, the Canadian academic, Richard Courtney (1980) and the other by an Indian sage, Sri Aurobindo (1970), who was called 'a prophet for the 21<sup>st</sup> century' at the recent Parliament of World Religions in Melbourne. Both were leaders in their respective fields. Richard Courtney was a leader in the drama education movement in Canada, which led the world in this form of educational practice. The legacy of Sri Aurobindo's leadership is evident in the intentional community of Auroville in India, now a leader in sustainable living and part of a global network of eco-villages used by the United Nations to teach sustainability. It is also observable in the California Institute for Integral Studies that was based on Aurobindo's educational philosophy, a world leader in the field of integral studies.

When I consider the question – what is life? – I am confronted with a mystery. Attempts to define life scientifically are limited by its mysterious nature. Fritjof Capra (1996, 2002) writes extensively on this in *The Web of Life* and *Hidden Connections*. He draws on the work of cognitive biologists like

Humberto Maturano and Francisco Varela (1992) and others. He states that science can describe the life processes but it cannot tell us what life actually is.

Let me tell a story about a living creature, my cat Shakespeare, to illuminate this point. Every morning Shakespeare would be there at our back door, meowing away, waiting to be fed. I called him Shakespeare because he was a master of play. One day, after a big storm, at the age of 17, he was not there meowing at the back door in the morning. Later that day, I found his lifeless body, lying under the big mulberry tree at the rear of our back yard. It was a sad sight to behold! This playful creature, once so full of life, was now completely still. But what was missing? His body was still all there, as atoms and molecules of cat. Physically he was all there, only now he was dead.

As I reflect on this story, I ask again – what is life? What animated his body; the day before and now is no more? Capra (2002) observes that life is part of an ecology. It is a self-organising system, an example of autopoiesis, which is in relationship with its environment through structural coupling. Ecology is a relatively new field of scientific endeavour that emerged from ‘a book published in Berlin in 1866,’ (Allaby, 1986, p. 11) by ‘the German biologist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919)’ (p. 11) who wrote that ‘each individual living organism is the product of cooperation between its environment and the body it has inherited’ (p. 11). Thus the basis of life is this relationship between the living organism and its home, ‘eco’, a prefix derived from the Ancient Greek word ‘oikos’ meaning house ([http://www.askoxford.com:80/concise\\_oed/ecology?view=uk](http://www.askoxford.com:80/concise_oed/ecology?view=uk), 20/12/09). For a leader of any living organisation, the understanding of life processes is vital. To be a leader one needs to be able to respond to people in the organisation, their ideas and their contexts, which are influenced by their environment and their ecology.

For myself as a leader, it has been the practice of drama, yoga and meditation that have made me conscious of this interactive nature of life. As I sit here writing, I breathe; I hear sounds of traffic, of people, of dogs and of wind; I see a great expanse of green: Caulfield Park over the road, cars zoom by, people and their dogs, trees, tram wires – I am constantly receiving sensory data – the taste of my warm latte is most welcome in the coolness of the morning breeze. Everything around me is moving as day begins at this busy intersection known as Balaclava Junction in Melbourne, where I sit outside the Uffizi Café. But where did all this life come from?

Some contemporary scientists are asking this question and are developing a version of this story that includes consciousness, as the following quote demonstrates:

A new story is breaking into human consciousness, a story so enticing, awesome and wondrous that we can again be held captive, finding meaning and renewed zest for life. This new story, told by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry in their landmark book *The Universe Story*, is not a fairy tale -- although at times it almost sounds like one -- nor just another telling of our biblical story.

Instead, the new story sets the context for all other stories, whether personal, social, cultural or religious. It is a setting so vast it encompasses them all, a ‘context without a context,’ as Berry says, the very universe itself.

Swimme, the scientist, and Berry, the cultural historian, investigate with great care and deep respect the significance of the amazing discoveries being made by modern cosmologists, physicists, biologists, geologists and anthropologists. ([http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1141/is\\_n14\\_v29/ai\\_13441029/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1141/is_n14_v29/ai_13441029/), 20/12/09)

This story is also told by philosopher and scientist Peter Russell (1995) in his *The Global Brain Awakes, Our Next Evolutionary Step*. The elements that were present in that primeval soup were themselves born of the star furnaces that evolved out of the Big Bang or the more poetic ‘flaring forth’ as Brian Swimme (1994) of the California Institute of Integral Studies, names it in *The Universe Story*. Consider this comment by Brian Swimme:

The Universe Story, often called the New Story, is a cosmological narrative that begins with the big bang, which started the whole process, and works through the evolution of the Universe, which includes life on Earth. But more than a so-what summary from a science textbook, this chronology promotes deeper relationships through scientific data. If this sounds implausible, there's good reason.

For centuries now scientific data have presumably had little to do with relationships; science has remained in its own Universe, so to speak, separate from those messy struggles with meaning and consciousness. But not anymore, at least not for this breed of new cosmologists.

Their science-based movement has a unique way of approaching the data; current research on the evolution of the Universe is studied not simply intellectually, but also emotionally and contemplatively. This manner of study, which engages heart and mind together, seems to teeter on the brink of religion. But it isn't religion; it's science. However, the New Story people claim that science, absorbed holistically, can have a soul-shaking impact on people. (<http://www.brianswimme.org/media/excerpts.asp>, 20/12/09)

For leaders to be holistic, this new story allows them to deal with organisations and with the people in them, in a more organic way, rather than the more mechanistic way that has dominated the developed economies over the last two centuries.

## EVOLUTION: A NEW STORY

Peter Russell (1995) draws on the theories of the paleontologist and mystic, Teilhard de Chardin. For him evolution is a process of complexification, which moves towards an omega point, as an evolution of self-reflexive consciousness. As Swimme says in an interview:

His most important achievement was to articulate the significance of the new story of evolution. He was the first major thinker in the West to fully articulate that evolution and the sacred identify, or correlate. Teilhard de Chardin in the West and Sri Aurobindo in India really arrived at the same basic vision, which is that the unfolding of the universe is a physical evolution and *also* a spiritual evolution. I think that's his principal contribution. On the one hand, you have this awesome tradition about God or Brahman, and on the other, you have this tradition about evolution—and adherents of each view tend to be very critical of the others.

Christians said, 'Evolution, that's horrible!' And scientists said, 'Theism, that's horrible!' Aurobindo and Teilhard brought them together. So I think of them both as geniuses who synthesized the two visions. Teilhard attempted to get beyond the fundamental subjective/objective dualism in much of Western thought. He began to really see the universe as a single energy

event that was both physical and psychic or even spiritual. I think that's his great contribution: He began to see the universe in an integral way, not as just objective matter but as suffused with psychic or spiritual energy. (<http://www.enlightennext.org/magazine/j34/swimme2.asp> 20/12/09)

Peter Russell (1985, 1995), Brian Swimme along with Arnold Mindell's process-oriented psychology (1982, 1990, 1992) provided a theoretical basis for my drama yoga process. For each of these authors life and the universe are seen 'in an integral way, not as just objective matter but as suffused with psychic or spiritual energy.'

Now if life is mysterious, as I have argued, consciousness is even more mysterious! Without my self-reflexive consciousness, I would not be sitting here, reflecting, observing, imagining, ruminating, breathing, feeling, thinking, sensing, intuiting, remembering, moving a complex of muscles in my hand, directed by my eyes, my brain, my touch, my nervous system – in short, all the complex physiological, psychological, sociological, cultural processes which motivate my spirit into the creative process of researching and writing this paper.

## INTEGRAL YOGA AND LIFE

Sri Aurobindo developed Integral Yoga. He states that:

In the right view both of life and of Yoga all life is either consciously or unconsciously a Yoga. For we mean by this term a methodized effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence we see partially expressed in man (and woman) and in the Cosmos. But all life, when we look behind its appearances, is a vast Yoga of Nature...(Aurobindo, no date, p. 13)

This integral view influenced the cultural philosopher Jean Gebser (1991) in his formulating of the structure of consciousness that we need to move towards in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, namely 'integral consciousness'<sup>1</sup>, which relates to my theory of an

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<sup>1</sup> In the USA, Ken Wilber's (2007, 1997) work on integral consciousness has been very influential and

ecology of culture. Here I want to address the quote by Sri Aurobindo, with which I began this paper. He explains this as follows:

The true and full object and utility of *Yoga* can only be accomplished when the conscious *Yoga* in man (and woman) becomes, like the subconscious of *Yoga in Nature* outwardly coterminous with life itself. We can once more, looking out both on the path and the achievement, say in a more perfect and luminous sense 'All life is *Yoga*'. (Aurobindo, no date, p. 14)

Sri Aurobindo's writings on integral yoga develop these ideas in great depth. Predominantly integral yoga involves the paths of jnana, bhakti and karma yoga i.e. study, devotion and service. The aim of this practice is an evolution of consciousness, for which Sri Aurobindo developed a number of terms, which are beyond the scope of this paper. However, the question that does concern us here is – what is consciousness?

### WHAT IS CONSCIOUSNESS?

In the Zen tradition, in which I studied for a number of years, it is said that consciousness cannot see itself, just as the eye cannot see itself. How can the eye that is looking see itself? It can see its reflection in the mirror, or in the eye of another conscious being. Likewise consciousness can see itself in the mirror of its actions in the world, such as the words I am typing into my computer that appear as black shapes on the screen. These words reflect back the thoughts I am expressing in a way that you the reader are able to comprehend, so long as you are familiar with the English language in this academic genre of writing.

My consciousness can see itself when I look into the eyes of my beloved, for I can see her consciousness looking back at me. Robert Aitken Roshi, with whom I studied Zen in the early 80s, used to say that 'the other is no other than the self.' (see <http://www.buddhanet.net/masters/aiken.htm>, 20/12/09) This has resonances with the Mayan inspired Dance of Universal Peace, *En Lak'Ech*. The words are a traditional greeting and were gifted to the dances by the Mayan shaman and Daykeeper, Hunbatz Men. They mean: 'I am another you'. The reply is *A Lak'En*, which means: 'you are another me'. The chorus to this dance is *Ah Ol Lil Ah*, which translates as 'awaken to enlightened

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was based on Gebser's ideas. However, for me Wilber is more analytical than integral.

consciousness, universal vibration, awaken' (cited in Sprowls, 2000, p. 121).

Another example of the unity of absolute consciousness is evident in the invocation given by the Sufi Master and classical Indian musician, Hazrat Inayat Khan. Inayat Khan brought Universal Sufism to the West in 1910 and with his message of love, harmony and beauty inspired the American Sufi Samuel Lewis to create the Dances of Universal Peace. The Dances of Universal Peace were brought together in the late 1960s by Sufi Sam, as he was otherwise known. The dances are an example of a process that is very resonant with drama yoga. In this creation, Lewis was deeply influenced by his contact and spiritual apprenticeship with two people: [Hazrat Inayat Khan](#), and [Ruth St. Denis](#), a feminist pioneer in the modern dance movement in America and Europe.

The Dances of Universal Peace have evolved and expanded in practical application to meet the deep felt needs today for rediscovering reverence, creativity, and a body-based connection to the natural world. Teachers share the Dances in schools, therapy groups, prisons, hospice houses, drug rehabilitation centers, homes for the developmentally disabled, retirement villages, holistic health centers, and ecumenical worship celebrations. They continue to be, as Samuel Lewis envisioned them, a way to make life-energy and the peace that passes understanding a reality for all who come in contact with them. (from <http://www.dancesofuniversalpeace.org/about.htm>, 29/8/07)

Each one of these people represents a form of leadership that is conscious and holistic. Each one has been or still is a leader in their field and has led to the formation of contemporary national or in some cases international organisations. This is testimony to the power of these disciplines and their importance to contemporary leaders. For example, the Dances of Universal Peace are now in some thirty countries, with several hundred groups around the world. They have developed a training program for dance leaders and a resource base of books, tapes, CDs and a number of websites. These all grew out of the vision of the leader of the movement, the American Sufi, Samuel Lewis.

### ONE BEING – CONSCIOUSNESS

The invocation with which we begin our dance meetings states that there is only One Being. This is

the unbounded Consciousness that Patanjali's Yoga Sutras refer to as the purpose of yoga. The first four sutras are as follows:

1. And now the teaching of yoga begins.
2. Yoga is the settling of the mind in silence.
3. When the mind has settled, we are established in our essential nature, which is unbounded Consciousness.
4. Our essential nature is usually overshadowed by the activity of the mind.

(Translation by Shearer (1989, p. 49) who notes that we know nothing about Patanjali except that he lived in India, probably in the 3rd century BCE.)

Shearer (1989) argues that, according to yoga, we suffer because we live in ignorance:

- We are ignorant of our true nature.
- Our true nature lies beyond the restrictions...beyond the faintest flicker of thought, it is experienced as an undying and omnipresent vastness.
- It is absolute Consciousness...Yoga calls it the Self (p. 9).

'The activity of the mind' that 'usually overshadows our essential nature' is the drama of life. While we are caught up in the drama, we are 'ignorant of our true nature', that is, we are not able to be conscious of the fact that 'all life is drama' as Richard Courtney (1980) states above. He goes on to say: 'Always we act roles. Our clothes are our costumes, and our setting is the space in which we act' (p. 1). For Courtney as a drama educator like myself, this can then become the very basis of education as he proposes in his highly influential text, *The Dramatic Curriculum*. What better way to understand consciousness or the processes of life than through drama?

## WHAT IS DRAMA?

Drama as theatre is one of the oldest forms of culture. This relates to Augusto Boal's (1999) observation that:

Theatre is the first human invention and also the invention that paves the way for all other inventions and discoveries.

Theatre is born when the human being discovers that it can observe itself; when it discovers that, in this act of seeing, it can see *itself* – see itself *in situ*: see itself seeing.

Observing itself, the human being perceives

what it is, discovers what it is not and imagines what it could become. (p. 13)

Or as the great French director Jean-Louis Barrault observed: 'Drama is as old as man: it is closely linked to him as his double, for the theatrical game is inherent in the existence of any living being' (in Hodgson, 1972, p. 17). Barrault was a major leader in French theatre in the post-war period.

Drama is a form of culture that involves actors playing roles. In my doctoral thesis, I argue that our cultural identity is a role we learn to play as part of learning to live in our culture. One way to become conscious of the roles we play is to practise yoga or some form of meditation. For then we can begin 'to settle the mind in silence' and see that behind the drama, all life is yoga. Thus both yoga and drama are ways to become conscious of the nature of life and this is the basis for drama yoga.

## PSYCHODRAMA AND IMPROVISATION

It was these kinds of ideas that inspired Jacob Levy Moreno to create psychodrama and his theatre of spontaneity. Moreno recognised in the early decades of last century that life is infused with creativity and spontaneity. This affects 'the very roots of vitality'. He was pre-empting the discoveries of more recent biologists like Bateson (1972), Maturana and Varela (1996), with implications for social theory and drama education.

Blatner (1973) and Moreno (in Greenberg 1974) provide a vital element in my theory of drama education. For Blatner (1973), psychodrama is a method, 'in which a person is helped to *enact* his problem instead of just *talking* about it' (p. 1). Psychodrama moved from a process of analysis and verbalization, that formed the basis of Freud's system of psychoanalysis, to a process of 'enactment involving emotional problem solving in terms of one person's conflict; it is 'protagonist centred.' The drama may shift among many facets of the protagonist's life...' (p. 9). However, Blatner (1973) observes that:

In addition to the task of clarifying emotional conflicts, the psychodramatic method can be applied to the challenge of developing human potentialities. Through 'acting-in' the individual can be introduced to many dimensions of personal experience that have been neglected in our contemporary, over-intellectualised society: creativity, spontaneity, drama, humour, playfulness, ritual, dance, body



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movement, physical contact, fantasy, music, nonverbal communication, and a widened role-repertoire. (p. 2)

It is in this development of creativity and spontaneity that improvisational drama reveals its deeper potential. It allows learning to happen at many levels and involves the group in the learning process. Here improvisation is linked with spontaneity and with creating the script for the drama by the actors themselves.

This empowers leaders to act in their world and for this improvisational forms of drama can be particularly useful. Consider Hodgson and Richard's (1974) definition:

Through situations in which we have to improvise, we can be made to draw on our resources, to think out basic principles...Improvisation in drama aims to utilize two elements from everyday life improvisation: the spontaneous response to the unfolding of an unexpected situation, and the ingenuity called on to deal with the situation, both of these to gain insights into the problems presented. (p. 2)

Is this ability to improvise not fundamental for leaders?

### PLAYBACK THEATRE

Playback Theatre is an example of improvisational drama and an especially powerful tool for examining ourselves. In playback, the dramatic action is already a 'reflection' of a story, told by a participant, who can then 'reflect' on that 'action' afresh, as can other people present. As such, it may be regarded as a particular case of Freire's (1975) *praxis* idea, which includes practice and theory or action and reflection.

Playback Theatre, as stated by Sydney Playback Theatre:

An audience member tells a story of something that has happened to them. The role of the actors is to listen with acceptance and respect then to 'play back' this incident in a dramatic form in such a way that the essence or core of the experience is portrayed. The effect of this is to deepen the experience for the teller of the story, and at the same time to connect them with others in the group as it is discovered that many have had similar experiences. This is the beginning of a

sense of community which is built on during a performance as more stories are shared. (From Playback Publicity Material, 1985)

In this form of theatre there is an opportunity to affirm the experience of several individual members of the audience, who are initially 'warmed up' to telling longer stories by the 'conductor', who invites members of the audience to share some 'special' moments from their day, week, or from the conference, if playback is used as part of a conference for community building, for example. In the classic playback form, the four actors and the musician(s) play back the story in movement, mime, sound and dialogue. The performance is followed by a question to the original teller like: 'Is that how it was for you?' The teller is invited to give feedback on what he or she has just witnessed as a spontaneous improvised piece of community theatre. The audience is thus witness to a story, its performance and the feedback by the teller to complete the process. Here we can observe three kinds of leadership – that of the conductor, who facilitates the process; that of the teller, who provides the story; and that of the actors and musicians, who create their performances.

In playback workshops, 'we are not only called to improvise, but also to base this work on the experiences, thoughts, feelings and sensations of the participants of the workshop group as expressed through their personal stories.' (Weiss, 1986, p. 9) The form was originally created by an American psychodramatist, Jonathan Fox (see Salas 1983), who based the form on his experience of psychodrama, and his study of the oral story telling tradition described in Albert Lord's (2000) classic study of living bards in the former Yugoslavia in the 1930s. Jonathan Fox has become a world leader of this creative form of expression that is practised internationally.

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Drama Yoga adapted the playback form as a way to playback the stories that were 'trapped' in the body of the practitioner. At the time I had encountered a number of people who had attended yoga classes for some 2 to 3 years, and then had a deep emotional opening experience in a class and never went back. This was of interest to myself as a yoga teacher, so I began to collect anecdotal evidence of this phenomenon. I was aware of the theories of Wilhelm Reich with his idea of 'body armour' that forms around traumatic experiences and then

protects us from those experiences later on.

Reich decided the patients' body language could be more revealing than their words. He observed their tone of voice and the way they moved and concluded that people form a kind of ARMOUR to protect themselves, not only from the blows of the outside world, but also from their own desires and instincts. Most of us desire something, and immediately set out to find ways NOT to get it! Reich saw this process working in the body. Over the years a person builds up this character armour through bodily habits and patterns of physical behaviour. This being in the days before Kevlar, the armour was presented as a series of corsetry designs in canvas and whalebone, which included a shoulder-straightener for men. Reich called this work Character Analysis.  
(<http://www.catalase.com/bodyarm.htm>, 20/12/09)

Reich like Moreno had developed a more experiential form of psychoanalytic practice. His theory explained the possible reason for an emotional release in a yoga class, especially after a number of years of practice. This also related to Mindell's (1982) idea of a 'dreambody', which can be the chakra body in yoga (see his *Dreambody – The Body's Role in Revealing the Self*).

Chakra is a [Sanskrit](#) term meaning *wheel*. There is a vast literature on chakra models, philosophy and [lore](#) that underpin many [philosophical](#) systems and [spiritual](#) energetic practices, religious observance and personal discipline. Chakras function and relate within the systemic suite of the human [bodymind](#). The philosophical theories and models of chakras as systemic vortices of energy were identified through the [existential mystical](#) practice of [yoga](#) in [Ancient India](#) where they were first codified.  
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chakra>, 20/12/09)

As both a drama teacher and a yoga teacher – both of which are leadership roles – I began to experiment with a process that began with a yoga session, included some form of meditation and reflection on what was alive or what was not alive

in the body and then used 'fluid sculptures', a form of Playback Theatre, to express in sound and movement tableaux the story of the trauma. These experiments led to a number of series of drama yoga workshops over a number of years with some very powerful results for participants and an even more powerful result for my own process. As with any living process, the whole – namely drama yoga – proved to be even more powerful than the processes that it brought together. One form of evolution of the process resulted in me becoming a leader of the Dances of Universal Peace; another led to my doctorate in Social Ecology.

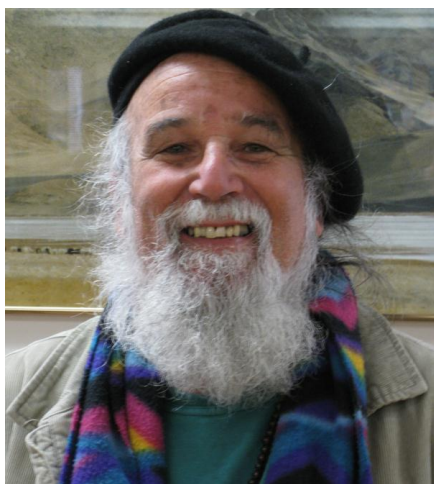
## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper I have argued that the processes of drama and yoga are both ways to deepen our consciousness of our life, our selves and above all ourselves as leaders. I have drawn from the theories of yogis, philosophers, scientists, psychotherapists, mystics and drama educators, who were major leaders in their fields of practice, to discuss the nature of life and consciousness, both of which can be experienced and described to a point and both of which remain deeply mysterious. I would argue that these are essential spiritual practices that can deepen our understanding of life both individually and collectively through our deep interconnections with each other and all life. Mystics, from a variety of cultural traditions have affirmed the fundamental unity of the ground of Being. Here culture and nature are one. As I discovered in my work with indigenous cultures, the ecology and the culture are inseparable. This was very healing for me as a creative community educator and as a leader.

For those of us who have been educated in the world of mental consciousness, which is the basis of the modern world, this may not be our experience. It was not my experience until I practised yoga, meditation and drama, to the extent that I felt I could teach these three disciplines. This was my entry point to a more integral consciousness, through an integral drama yoga process. It is a spiritual ecology praxis, as it can allow leaders to experience that all life is both drama and yoga, which enables a deeper more holistic form of leadership to grow and deal more creatively with the challenges of our time.



## DRAMA YOGA



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