

# Geddy Aniksdal

## Sunflowers are Yellow and Dark Brown

*Sunflowers are yellow and dark brown. I also have sunflowers. They are in a vase in the living room. We hardly ever stay in the living room. We are in the kitchen, where we eat and talk: sunflowers, autumn, death, the death of a grandfather. Sunflowers played a part. Before it was Van Gogh's sunflowers: his madness, the sun on his naked head, the yellow, burning sun. Can one - strong - impression be replaced by another? Or am I merely transforming the essence of the first to the latter?*

I am looking at photographs of my daughter: accompanying me on tour in Poland - eating oat-meal porridge in a hotel room in Lodz; on tour in Russia - sitting on a friend's shoulder, walking the Kremlin; at a Magdalena meeting in Italy - at the beach in Santa Maria al Bagno, surrounded by admirers. She is.

I am looking at another photograph of my daughter at our summer camp at Jomfruland. I do not remember her. That summer, we were together for many weeks without interruptions from work. I did not go away. She might be three years old, she is occupied licking the last pieces of ice-cream out of a box. She looks as if she is concentrating. Neither happy nor unhappy. She is sitting outdoors, on a wooden bench by a table. There is an adult by her side, not to be identified. I have no memory of her like that.

Any day I can go into the workspace and remember most of my actions, my scores from performances I have participated in. I can remember fragments of text, montage, the fabrics of my costume, the smell of our bodies, the stretching of muscles.

I can remember my aunt's telephone number from twenty-five years ago. I can remember the first time I heard the poems of Sylvia Plath, sitting by the docks in Porsgrunn with Tor Arne (Ursin, director and actor at Grenland Friteater), sharing a bottle of wine and reading:

*You do not do, you do not do  
Any more, black shoe  
In which I have lived like a foot  
For thirty years, poor and white  
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.  
(Daddy, 12th of October 1962)*

Years later these verses made me decide to use her poems for my first solo performance. But I cannot remember my daughter's face that summer.

Humans are always dangerous when by themselves. Old proverb, maybe true.

I wonder about time, I look out for a particularity in time that can help alter the chronological time we are facing. "Time is not succession or transition but the perpetual sound of fixed time in which all times, past and present are contained". I found this quote in an album by Arvo Pärt, dedicated to the Russian film-maker Andrej Tarkovsky. The words belong to Octavio Paz. I do not know much about him, but in my head he is connected with Jorge Luis Borges, and since I know more about him, I think of him and his work. All these thoughts keep wandering in and out of my head, it is like an improvisation. How come it is so much easier to improvise in the space, than to operate with the same organised chaos here? In my head?

I am in Oslo, I am in Bø, I am at home in Porsgrunn. Home. How come Porsgrunn is suddenly home? It is where we are, it is where our theatre is, where we work. Time has passed, I have lived here fifteen years, I have a house here, I have two children who live and go to school here, who have never lived permanently in any other house than this. They call it home, so I call it home. Time made it home. Sometimes I am home on a train, a plane, in the dressing room.

I can get home in two minutes. If I want to, need to. I can also feel the need to be homeless, at times.

*Home is where your heart is, home is so remote.*

*Home is aggravation, sticking in your throat. Lets go to your place.*

(Pattie Smith)

Timing. We have been touring a cabaret show - in mountain villages, in prisons, at cafes with people only dressed in grey or black, or at cafes where the ladies bring nice shoes in a bag, to put on before going to the table. Middle class, working class. No nights are the same. New rules. What worked yesterday might be useless

today. Direct communication. The audience being the pen that draws my movements, increases or lowers my voice, lets me go towards them or withdraw a little if coming on too strongly. One body, one will.

Rules. No rules. No fixed rules. A daring game, rewarding when a direct flow and communication is established, an open line, where neither I as the performer nor the audience knows how and where the next step will take us. No safety net. Greater risk?

When entering,  
when taking  
the first step  
the fiftieth time  
renewing my actions  
my work.

I went up to the University in Bø, together with Trond (Hannemyr, actor at Grenland Friteater) and Tor Arne to meet the students of the Forfatterstudiet (a writing course at the University) so as to perform their dramatic texts and give them theoretical and practical feedback. Their characters seldom had names. They were usually sitting around a table or lying in bed. They were talking. One play out of ten had movements and physical actions written into it. We tried to help them. Help me. So I make their words come alive with my work. It is different from what they imagined. What they imagined did not come through. They did not know what they imagined. They hardly knew that each actor speaking their words would make different meanings come through. Human touch, one point.

*Most of the time, I am half way content. Most of the time, I am not sure where it all went.*

(Bob Dylan)

Earlier this year I directed *Krapp's Last Tape*, by Samuel Beckett. Still searching for words to go in the programme, I was late for the deadline. I had no mind to

sit down and contemplate and was seeking refuge in a book about Samuel Beckett, written by Torstein Ekbohm. I later mostly used his words to go in the programme. A colleague remarked that most of the programme consisted of quotations from this book, and that this seemed to be my new style. I did not know what to answer and felt a bit embarrassed. I am not a writer, and I get stuck, but usually I get around to producing a piece or two in my own words.

We worked strictly with *Krapp's Last Tape*. We decided to be even stricter than Beckett himself. We followed the guidelines to the extreme, doing what the texts told us. For us - who usually work from scratch, finding a theme, making improvisations around that theme, creating a personal score which later mingles and meets with others, to eventually become almost fixed scenes in a structured performance - to put up a play was to be our experiment. This time "us" was Håkan Islinger (actor previously at Institutet för Scenkonst) and I.

Whilst thinking about not being able to write my own words I noticed two things. Firstly I was not really concerned about the words being "mine" or not. Isn't that just one of those conventions that sneaks up on you even though we really are old enough to know better? Secondly, I found a literary review, discussing the impossibility of having a voice of one's own in today's world. It is like a new literary genre, daring (caring) to not even have your own voice, in fear or hope that you might do wrong. Is it safer, with no risk involved, to rely on what others, already dead, have lived and said before you? Fighting the meaningless world. Create a new meaning, points, worthwhile. Work. Pointlessness is there, sneaking up to catch you. Mr. No-Meaning is hiding in your closet, keeping you busy. Welcome Mister Chance.

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kitchen, where we eat and talk: sunflowers, autumn, death, the death of a grandfather. Sunflowers played a part. Before it was Van Gogh's sunflowers: his madness, the sun on his naked head, the yellow, burning sun. Can one - strong -impression be replaced by another? Or am I merely transforming the essence of the first to the latter? How many variables can I operate with?

The shape and form of the sunflower is - rather - constant. The light is not. Neither is time. I like to say these words even if they are banal. It tastes good. The valleys of Andalucia, Spain - coming over a hilltop, looking into nothing but sunflowers and sky.

Mind-memory. Body-memory. On and under my skin. Recalling salt stinging my tongue when thinking of sea-water. Sweat.

While remembering a gesture from an earlier work, staying with it in time, exploring, varying speed, rhythm, intensity, my body starts to reawaken memories and I am taken into a series of movements, actions.

I have continuity. I am autonomous. I have the possibility of going beyond what was before. No replacement. Addition. Addition that adds onto what was before and slightly changes, as I slightly change. (We do not really change much, but can we change some structures?)

Pacing, pacing. No, not the essence, but what I believed to be the essence of an earlier memory which - in the mind or in the body - might not have ripened. In view of what has passed. How could I forget? How could I remember?

*I am I, because my dog knows me.*  
(Gertrude Stein)

I just had a thought: I do remember my daughter from that summer, riding on a horse, wearing a jumper as blue as a summer's sky. Our summer-sky blue. Summer Sky Blues. I was wrong. It was from the year

before. What happened to that jumper? The horse is still there.

Today, the other day, does it matter? I went into the workspace to work on my own. I worked on material from our last ensemble performance. The text of the performance comes from the Norwegian writer Georg Johannesen. Also included and important are his re-creations of the poems by the Chinese poet Tu Fu.

*Blue is the smoke of war  
White the bones of men.*  
(Tu Fu)

I live and work with Grenland Friteater, we are based in a small industrial town in southern Norway. Together we have eight children and more to come, and over the years it has become more difficult to achieve the "everybodytogetherforaverylong-time" tour. In this field our ensemble work tends to be the loser. This results in each and everyone building work and networking on her/his own. This has - also - made me present fragments, études and solo performances based on material from ensemble work.

I often need to stay with the material longer. I am slow. Parts of me do not even begin to understand until we have played the performance many times, and I do want to add this new layer onto my work. When making a collaborative performance, there are some compromises to be made. The phrase we use to describe this is having "camels to swallow". Most of them turn out all right after some time of adaptation/digestion, some do not. Ever. They are few, but true. After some time, I know if have to work on it. This was certainly the case after having read and worked on Tu Fu's poetry.

Tu Fu lived from 712 to 770 AD during the High Tang literary period. His poems are dependent on their historical/biographical context and I got to know much about this wise, stubborn man and the times he lived in. He amazes me: his will, his

spirit, his voice, his wanderings. The wars - not his. His humanity. This man, serving as an example. It has been said about Tu Fu that he resembles everybody, but that nobody resembles him. I wanted to do, to be Tu Fu. Only. To not have to scatter. It was a paradox, because if I hadn't met Tu Fu I would have insisted on what my director had indicated: that this was to be a performance where we needed to be swift and work and change directly from one character to the other with a no-nonsense attitude. This also included change of costumes. It was tempting and encouraging work for me, as in most of my work I do not even use the words figures or characters. I am just doing "stuff". I am.

We were approaching a rougher working method, where instructions and thoughts were given out even-handedly. We tried to adapt to what we call acting-non-acting, direct-indirect and we applied this to our work. I ended up with four characters: Tu Fu (or close to Tu Fu), the Cabaret Man, the Teacher and the Woman in Epicurus' Garden. But I lost my heart to the old, sick, wise man.

The need not to compromise on Tu Fu did not leave me. Some time later I went to a symposium at the Magdalena Project, *Mothers of Invention*, where I took the opportunity to present an étude with solely Tu Fu poems, based on my material, mixed with some new poems, translated into English. Alone. The goat (me) needed her corner.

I realised after doing it that the strong need had left me, I was calmed, I could continue working, I could hear and see other voices and figures from Georg Johannesen's books emerge. Weighing up needs and responsibilities against my own autonomy restored balance. Some sort of balance. Mine, I suppose. The goat found her corner. My corner.

After many years within our theatre I have learned that the protest, the reaction against some of the compromises concerning

a work, often carries the first seed towards a new work. If ever a work is new. Isn't it all questions and muffled answers about this truly paradoxical situation of being alive and able to think? Or the work seen from another angle, a shade of grey?

Where is my daughter now? Has she finished her ice-cream? How many ice-creams in how many different countries has she eaten?

*This is the old, disguised as the new.*  
(Bertolt Brecht, text used in our performance *Besatt, Disasters of War*)

Something which tries to build a bridge between what was and what will come, something that gives me the possibility of research. Variation, new questions and no answers this time either. No conclusion, satisfaction though. Enough time spent. Never say we have time to kill. Time to grasp. Timewise.

Whilst wondering how to write I have walked around in my house. Found a photo-album, on its back cover it reads "Summer 1990". It is not such a long time ago. It is a long time ago. It is her before knowing how to read, write, bicycle, skate. It is her before knowing what time it is. My daughter's shape and way of walking escapes me. I do not have an imprint of her in my mind. I do remember the fact that we went biking, that we fell asleep under a birch tree, that we woke up and saw a squirrel, that I took a photograph of the squirrel, that it was raining, that my daughter managed to sleep in the rain, the vertical rain of that summer.

We went to Poland on tour, I have her imprint on me, it is no big thing really, it just strikes me as odd not being able to recall a thought, a sensation of how she shaped herself in my mind, on my body.

Waiting for this imprint, waiting for her, waiting, is to experience the influence of time, which consists of continuous change. Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for Godot. They do not have an appointment with him.

They are not at all sure what they are waiting for, what they wish for, their hopes. Neither am I but I do realise that while I am waiting and trying to grasp, I do change, not much, a tiny change. *As time goes by*. Old Song.

*Estragon: Well, shall we go?*

*Vladimir: Yes, let's go.*

*(They do not move).*

(Samuel Beckett)

GEDDY ANIKSDAL (Norway) is an actress and director at Grenland Friteater and an experienced teacher in actors' methods of creating their own material. She is a member of the International Advisory Group of the Magdalena Project.



Geddy Aniksdal. Photo: Stefano Lanzardo