

EMBODIED THINKING_SYNOPSIS

French theatre practice during mid-century Modernism shines a light on a curiously interesting cross-cultural link between two continents. In deference to the Parisian theatre school where, in 1923, the three protagonists met, chapters one and three are called Acts 1 and 2; between them is the Intermission.

Act One: Letters

The author ‘corresponds’ with Suzanne Bing (1885-1967), Etienne Decroux (1898-1991), and Lt. Georges Hébert (1875-1957) who, in 1923 were at the Ecole de Vieux Colombier in Paris. Each was interested in the human body in both culture and performance art. Like artists in several countries, they envisaged a new actor for a new time. Influenced by material from other continents, these French thinkers broke through a hometown mindset and, in the process, took France to the world. The reader is not assumed to be familiar with creative movement. These sixteen letters reveal three people’s ideas on art, poetry, culture, philosophy and society that still resonate today.

Intermission: The Body as Mask.

In 2023 the author responds to an invitation from Bing and Decroux to meet them in Paris and share a big idea. The Body as Mask reflects on approaches and practices by the Bauhaus’ Oscar Schlemmer, Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes*, Japanese Noh theatre, Australia’s Entr’acte Theatre, and Aboriginal contemporary performance.

Act Two: Conversation

In 2023, the Australian government’s new arts policy *Revive* argued: “(O)ur stories connect with people at home and abroad”. They did not expect a public conversation in a television studio of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, where the author hosts her three long-departed correspondents from France! They discuss working in Paris, including during the rise of fascism and under the Pétain puppet régime. How did they keep dreams alive during a crisis? Is there a place for altruism in a society of informants? How did they persevere as they honed a poetry of the body?