



INTRODUCTION

Gemma Wilcox is an award-winning actress who tours and performs internationally; primarily solo theatre pieces. She has become known for her multi-character works. She was born and trained in the UK and lived in Boulder, Colorado when we first met in 2005. We both worked with a mutual mentor Paul Oertel. As we went our separate ways, we stayed in touch. This interview was done in May of 2012 via Skype.

PART I:

**BACKGROUND AND
TRAINING**

EARLY LIFE RELEVANT TO
SUPERNORMAL FUNCTIONING

JW: So would you like to start with a short biography or personal history ... specifically around what made you a performer. A personal biography of what got you to be an actor or performer.

GW: It's funny I haven't thought back to my childhood so much in relation to what *made* me a performer... when I think about my theatre history I usually think of the last ten years or so. I grew up in inner city London and definitely always wanted from a young age to be an actor. My uncle was an actor; in an actor in Australia, and he would come over from Australia, and was funny and fun and larger than life, and I just looked up to him and adored him. And I was also part of a dance, theatre, acting, singing group that...I loved.

JW: Did you ever see your uncle perform?

GW: Yeah, actually he starred in a big production of "How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying" in Sydney, Australia. And I went over when I was like...fourteen. I was already sort of acting. I was doing it at school at that point. And, well, I attended all the rehearsals in Sydney. And saw that whole world in a very professional way. I loved it!

JW: You sat in on the all the rehearsals.

GW: Yeah.

JW: So you flew out just to visit him?

GW: No I had other family there too... so I went to all the rehearsals and then went to the big opening night a few weeks later.

JW: You saw the opening night too?

GW: Yeah. Yeah. And you know, that's a whole other thing... you know the exhilaration of musicals. You know, I don't really sing and I've never been in a musical....hold on, let me plug in my computer....But there was some seed in watching that musical that um... brought me alive I guess...and every time I've seen musicals they've brought me alive. I also recall a time when I was about 5 years old where I went to the rehearsal of a fairly large pantomime production of "Jack and the Beanstalk" in London. My best friends' father was in it and we attended the rehearsals for a week. That was also a hugely significant experience for me... you could say that the 'seed' or 'magic beans' of my love of theatre began to grow from then too! I could definitely sense the fun of co-creation, and the exhilaration of it all: All the adults prancing about in costume with big bright costumes, happy in their bodies and appearing to play and have immense fun... and I was attached to that way of living and working in the world.

JW: So you know... the methodology at CIIS is very progressive and one of the things we talk about is a transformative process for the researcher as well as for the participant. What I've been experiencing, is that the process of being interviewed, and telling your story, is... and the way that I ask questions tends to give people a new perspective or reveal things that they haven't thought about in a long time... and the narrative of people's lives is sometimes is either refreshed or put into new perspective. So it makes sense that if you haven't thought about this stuff in a while or in this context... then my hope is that there is some positive result that comes from this and that is for you to go, "oh, wow" ... and something clarifies; or something resonates or connects or dots get connected that haven't been for a while.

GW: Yeah, yeah. Actually I just flashed on something that came to me in a dream, about three or four years ... no, it would have been two or three years ago because I was with my ex-boyfriend... with Lucian. And I had this really fucking intense dream one night. And I woke up and he was there with me. I was on tour at the time in Canada performing one of my one woman shows, but I had this really intense intense dream, or feeling that came through my dream, of suddenly realizing or getting a sense of why I was a performer and it linked back to feeling my parents were going to abort me... apparently I was an unwanted pregnancy and they procrastinated and then finally it was too late. And there was this really strong sense, and I'd never felt it before, of my spirit somehow knowing I was about to be aborted and not wanted, before I was born, and I got this really strong sense... and there was this deep well of grief around it... and I was crying in Lucien's arms and the through it all I got this really strong sense that this was one of the reasons why I had sought out

performing and that it has been a real dharma, or feeling or my dharma, or deep need.... or...

yeah... a deep need to perform... if that makes any sense.

JW: To somehow counteract the sense of not being

GW: Yes; of "not being wanted" or something. It is a humbling sensation to feel because I wouldn't necessarily want to say that out loud. I wouldn't want that to be a *driving* force for why I perform.

And it certainly isn't a conscious driving force. And I do think there are many other reasons... the dream also brought up the thought/fear of not being in this world and not being able to connect and relate to people. And it brought out this drive in me in this lifetime to make sure I'm connecting... with a lot of people very directly through performance. And being seen. Really being seen.

JW: That makes a lot of sense given the form your artistry has taken now: live theatre and solo performance - being seen in every possible color and iteration that you can manifest.

GW: Exactly. And I mean again...yeah I definitely haven't ... at the time when that dream happened it was much more a visceral emotional release of some sort... but it felt very... I didn't go into full analysis about it... this is the first time I've actually spoken about it in any length.

JW: Was that ... your parents actually told you that you were unexpected and that possibly might be aborted.

GW: Yeah, yeah.

JW: Really?!

GW: And I believe I must have known or picked that up in the womb. I don't want to put too much story on it. But whatever this dream was... and this feeling... it was more than a dream... it was just hitting this deep place, this memory or flashback or something.

JW: That's great.

GW: And somehow it just felt directly linked.

JW: Just a moment ago you said that when you think about performing you don't think about your childhood but just about the last ten years... or something to that affect. But it sounds like the experience of, my words here, this adored uncle and returning to rehearsal over and over again, and it sounded like from just snippets that you were doing performance even before that.

GW: I mean Yeah! I mean I was *definitely* doing performance as a kid. Doing little shows for family at dinner times and at my grandparent's house especially as they had a little raised step are that acted as a little stage... but when I feel of the more spiritual aspect of performing, or me realizing it as my path and my dharma and what I want to give in the world; that's mostly since university.

JW: And that makes sense given the age and the need to decide on or emerge into one's work in the world. I find this stuff very interesting and I find that many actors do that... and in terms of the actualization of one's art... those early inklings... and the next question I will get to is a little bit about training and background about if you were given some sort of formal training at some point... but I find that early stuff is very important and it seems like nothing but it seems those building blocks are all along the way and it is what allows someone to emerge twenty years later with some a certain facility and uh, yeah.

GW: (laughing) You're right, you're right and I'm definitely getting little flashes now of different things from my childhood now... I was just actually talking to one of my best friends about this... there was definitely something about performing as a solo artist as a ten year old or a nine year old... I did a Michael Jackson dance in front of the whole assembly gathering at my school. Playing both the characters... Michael Jackson and the girl he was dancing with.

JW: Playing all the characters even back then. Even that early on.

GW: Do you remember Bananarama?

JW: No.

GW: Just a cheesy three woman 80's pop band in the UK and I wanted to do some kind of dance performance thing, and for some reason the girls I was doing it with dropped out and I ended up doing a whole little theatre scene before I did the dance... this whole thing about why these girls in the band didn't show up... and then ended up doing the whole thing myself... again in front of the whole school or something. Even back then there was a very strong "I'm going to do this whatever it takes... even if I do it alone... this is important to me and important to give and I won't give up" kind of vibe". Again, I was just tracking back a little bit the multi-character stuff before I had any training in that realm. But I always felt so alive when I did any kind of performing, for sure. And it was also always an edge for me.

JW: Yeah, I find that people often take that kind of stuff for granted... but it is very particular and peculiar... the impulses in you to do that sort of thing, even from very early on. I'm struck by that.

GW: My high school was fantastic too. It was a real inner city London school: seventy different languages in the school and refugees and various different cultural mixes. And it was a fucking awesome school. And the theatre department was amazing and the guy who ran it was phenomenal. And for my A-level - which is sixteen to eighteen years old - there were only four of us in the class. So we got a lot of one on one time.

JW: Sounds like quite an intimate thing.

GW: Yes, very intimate. And there were two guys and two girls. And the teacher specialized in Brecht so we did a lot of Brecht stuff. He was a director at the NYMT (National Youth Music and Theatre) and brought in Jude Law at one point, before Jude Law became famous, to narrate some show we were in... and all the girls had a crush on him. Anyhow, I had some great experiences in that school... and we had an actual public studio theatre, with a hundred seats... so whenever we got to do performances we got to do it in the theatre and got involved in the sound and lighting and so forth.

JW: That's a lot of early experience. And then you went off ... did you do any formal training like a conservatory or something?

GW: No, I didn't do that.

JW: Sounds like you had a full and rich experience at your school.

GW: Yeah, yeah. He brought in many great theatre companies and practitioners to work with us too; like Théâtre de Complicité. And we'd go and see so many great shows in London all the time with him. I mean, that was the training.

JW: He brought in Complicité. What did you do?

GW: We just did games. And I remember doing something with sticks and doing a lot of ... like bamboo and stuff and creating ensemble kind of pieces.

JW: So they came in and created a piece with you or?

GW: No, they just came in and did some training or workshop.

JW: Did you see their work?

GW: Yeah, I've seen a number of their productions; "Three lives of Lucie Cabro", "The Street of Crocodiles". They did a production of "Mother Courage" with one of my favorite actresses, Juliet Stevenson.

JW: That's always fun for me too, those formative things... either performances or productions that trigger something. Make us think, oh my god, that's possible or changes the way we pursue our work.

GW: I mean... we saw some incredible stuff now that I think about it.

JW: That whole formative part of your life you were in London and going to theatre.

GW: Exactly.



TRAINING

JW: Did that inform how you moved forward and how you wanted to study?

GW: Yes, I was totally clear that I wanted to do theatre. But I didn't go into an acting school... I did Theatre Studies and English literature at University of Leeds, but was definitely more interested in Theatre Studies. But in the ... let me think for a second... before I went to university I took a year out... and my aunt at the time - me and my aunt passed back and forth some amazing teachers and mentors in our lives - introduced me to a teacher of hers called Jonathan Kay. Have you heard about him or have I told you about him before?

JW: Interesting... was this Aunt close to you in London?

GW: Yes, very close. She's an actress now, and teacher, and a director and founder of a company called "Authentic Artist Collective"... she was an academic but she dropped out of academia to pursue theatre. But yeah, she's really really close. She introduced me to this guy Jonathan Kay... and he was basically a professional Shakespearian fool... and he did these amazing workshops; week long residential workshops in Scotland. And I did one before I went to university. I did a handful over several years... when I was eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old. And they were hugely formative and massively inspiring to me; that was basically the multi-character work training and the gestalt-type work. He does these amazing one man shows where he just comes on stage and does a different show every time.

JW: Completely improvised?

GW: Yes, completely improvised and often does a lot of interaction with the audience and is incredibly heart connected and confronting and he'll play all these different characters and he'll marry people and get everyone to be sheep and he'll take people out of the theatre and do whatever he feels like doing basically in order to open the room and keep people present. I saw him perform a few times and then did these workshops with him where he basically... he's not really training anyone to do anything in particular...or in a particular style in per se... but in order to be spontaneous and to do something of real substance and authenticity he would get us to draw on our past experiences, or get us play out our dreams and play out all the characters in our dreams... you know, I'd play my mother, and then I'd play the cat, and then I'd play the table, and then I'd play

myself being told off by my mother and then I'd play the emotional synthesis of what was happening in the room. Or -

JW: And was he influenced by Gestalt in his work? Was that forming a lot of his -

GW: You know, I don't know, *exactly* what he would call it. I don't think he ever even used that word "Gestalt". I think I use that word to describe his work to people knowing what little I know about Gestalt. But I think it was more esoteric, Shakespearian, universal concepts that he was working with.

JW: And were you satisfied with the training at university when you got there? Or did it become too academic for you? Or were you not thinking about it much; just involved in being a young person in college or whatnot.

GW: Uh, was I satisfied? It was definitely too academic for me. During university, in the summer holidays, was the first time I did the fringe festivals with my aunt and her acting partner, who at that time were in a theatre company called "The Wild Girls", and I was getting hugely fed by that whole scene ... and it was completely blowing my mind open. Seeing how to... you know... being in North America and working with a successful company. And they were doing multi-character work that was inspired by our mutual teacher, Jonathan Kay. And I was getting to help them help out with things they were working on and promoting and flyering and doing the sound and lighting and getting to see tons of fringe theatre shows for free... but then I would have to return to university,

and it was good program, but definitely too academic for me. When I went back for my third and final year of my BA that was when I had my kind of break down. I went back to university after having this highly expansive time in Canada... touring for three months, falling in love, doing little open mic stuff, and got introduced to a satsang spiritual teacher call Gangaji. And then coming back to cold gray England academia, and was just like, "what the fuck is going on here. This is dull and cold and disconnected and lifeless!!?". I spent eight weeks trying to stick with it. And I had always been a good student. And suddenly a little voice in my head said, "You don't have to be here", and I just freaked out. It just blew apart all my perfectionism, and the identity I had of myself as a great student and that this was the track I was on... well, I just couldn't relate to it anyone. It felt like no one had any of the expansive experiences I'd been having and I just felt more and more alone... and I ended up leaving, going to Australia, and meeting David Deida.

JW: So, you left University and...

GW: Yeah, I dropped out. I basically took a "year-off" ... but at the time I just got a note from the doctor saying I was depressed and having panic attacks and I left.

JW: When you say you met David Deida, you mean you just met him on the streets, or someone said hey, you gotta come with us to this workshop, or...

GW: No, no. So, I went out to Australia to be with another aunt - she's not the actress - she is the sister of the actress aunt, but she is a little more on the spiritual side of things. This aunt has

introduced me to various different spiritual things and teachers in my life.... and ... at very peak and potent times; at age fourteen, twenty one, and twenty eight.

JW: Wow, right on schedule.

GW: Yeah. I was 21 at the time I freaked out and left school. So she invited me to come out to Australia and look after her husband's mother who had Alzheimer's disease, and I just pretty much left everything and flew out to Oz... and that kind of got me out of my shit for a while because that was pretty intense living and looking after a woman with Alzheimer's. Anyhow, my aunt and uncle were hosting David Deida out there in Byron Bay. I went to a talk... one of his two hour intro Friday night talks before the weekend workshop. And it just blew my mind. And I realized, instantly I was very clear: "oh my God, this is the missing piece. This is the embodied piece that I need." I wasn't thinking in terms of an actor, but just in my life. Especially after being introduced to Gangaji who is an amazing teacher, but my experience at the time with those teachings was that I went back to university and couldn't integrate it. The openness I felt from the teaching was disembodied and I didn't have the tools to integrate that kind of expansion into reality or ground it. And I felt like that was part of why I freaked out. And yeah, so I just felt this really strong piece and intuition and knew I wanted to explore more of the masculine and feminine in my life. And um... ended up getting to do some of David Deida's work and then helping to edit a couple of his books and then getting to work

with him more intimately.

PART 2: STORIES

SUGGESTIVE OF

SUPERNORMAL CAPACITIES

IN PROFESSIONAL ACTORS

TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE

JW: Was this the beginning or a major piece of the transition to the transformative practice part of the story. Were you involved in sincere transformative... were you exposed ... sounds like you were exposed to teacher in Canada, but before that... when did that piece come in... like spiritual practice or really going into yourself.

GW: I would say when I was 14 I did a course called 'Avatar' which was all about deliberate creation. That was definitely my shift. I remember very clearly, the exact night when my aunt introduced me to that work before I went to do the workshop. And my whole paradigm shifted.

JW: At 14 you did that work?

GW: Yeah. I went from thinking that "life happened to me" to "oh, there's something more going on and I'm a part of this creation." That was a huge piece. When I was 14 I went and did this workshop. And some significant things happened for me... I mean, I was young... but it shifted my

entire life. I remember I cried for the first time out of joy. There were different and really new experiences. And I went home to the UK and personally shifted for my entire school life –from an unhappy one to a happy one with the tools I had learned.

JW: When you started doing that kind of work was it an occasional workshop or was it weekly; not church but something you would go to every week?

GW: No. I mean it was a ten day workshop in Amsterdam.

JW: Wow, at 14?

GW: Yeah. I wasn't smoking anything (laughter). It still goes on this work; the Avatar courses. And I definitely used the tools when I came home. But I also continued to be a teenager too.

JW: What sorts of tools did they use?

GW: A lot of stuff around affirmation work and creation: deliberate manifestation work. You would feel something you wanted to create in your life and then you'd create a "primary", which is like a positive affirmation. Then you'd go through what they called the 'secondaries' which were all the doubts and the fears and the twitches; anything that was throwing you off of being able to say the primary with full relaxation and presence. So in a way it was performative because we'd exaggerate

the secondaries and you know, get them out of your systems. And there were lots of other things... you could dis-create things too.

JW: But it was all in some way related to this process of manifestation or conscious creation; making a decision to set about doing something and all these tools around what gets in the way or that or what will empower the intention.

GW: And I still use those tools around my performance to this day. If I want to create something or when I go on tour and I AM on the plane I do a little process where I'm like "Okay, I'm gonna sell out five shows... and have a successful and enjoyable tour" and I'll go through the whole process and then set about doing it. It doesn't always work... (laughter) but it often does... it's a lot about that intentionality piece and about getting really clear about what I want to create.

JW: Yeah, but a lot of it has to do with getting clear about your own energy... it's not about magically manipulating the world out there so much as it is ... about getting yourself into alignment. Right?

GW: Yes. And I would say that it often did work actually... and often if it didn't it was because... you know... I had skipped over the practice a little bit or something. But yeah, that Avatar experience was a peak and pivotal thing at aged 14, and then the stuff with Jonathan Kay, and then touring with my aunt and her partner.

JW: And then the piece with David Deida at 21...

GW: Yeah, and that experience with David I would say is when I started to bring more 'practices' into my life; more yogic practices and more sexual practices and when I started to learn more about masculine and feminine in a certain way... I went back to university for my final year and treated the whole of academia and university as the masculine (as a masculine structure) with a much stronger understanding of my feminine and what I needed ... I actually went back and fucking kicked ass and probably did better than I'd ever done beforehand by treating university as my masculine partner, with me as the feminine that created and danced with that partner. And, I was doing a lot of practices then, and it worked, it really worked. And then, the final presentation at university in our theatre studies degree was to create a twenty minute piece of theatre... which was a summary of where we were at as theatre practitioners. That, I would say, was when I started to do my work... that was when I started to work in a certain way that I would say I'm still working in. I realized I wasn't going to compromise myself and I wasn't going to try to do something that I thought that people would like. It had to absolutely resonate with my heart... and spirituality and really sticking clear to what I believed in. It was pretty "out there", but they seemed to like it. But it was intense. It was a two woman show. And the woman I worked with ... I think she was pretty challenged by the process, as I was pretty intense and edgy bare-bones, no hiding kind of theatre... and I remember that the day we had to do the show, she couldn't even look me in the eye. And that was very painful, but that was part of the process... I was like "okay, we still have to do this". But I think it was just a little too ...

JW: Is that one of the reasons you've continued to work solo?

TWO STORIES SUGGESTIVE OF SUPERNORMAL

FUNCTIONING IN ACTORS:

A LIFE OF IT'S OWN...

GW: Yeah. Yeah. And so over the past ten years I've been doing these one person shows which I've loved. Loved, loved, loved. And we can talk about those later... but it got to certain point where I was starting to feel like I was too comfortable doing these multi-character pieces. And people were very impressed and I was doing well ... but I started to feel, a little bit... kind of -like I don't know, like I was lying. A little bit of a con artist that I was getting people to appreciate my work. And I loved the work I was doing and bringing myself to it, but I knew there was other stuff I wanted to do and that I wasn't doing it. So it became difficult for me.

JW: A friend of mine calls that the Wayne Newton Syndrome.

GW: Oh yeah?

JW: Because Wayne Newton is sort of famous for doing the same show for a decade in Las Vegas... and you know it works and he's good at it and he gets paid a lot of money to do it and people clap but artistically it's kind of a dead zone.

GW: Completely. What happens- and I think this might be the case for anyone who is a true artist – is that if you get stuck in that rut you could seriously get sick and/or depressed. And ... it's dangerous. And it's not to say that you have to throw the baby out with the bathwater and not ever do that great show that works consistently and pays well, but you've got to be doing something, that's putting you on your edge too. And I've had this experience. I was performing my solo-show 'the Honeymoon period is officially over' in Houston... and it was a sold out house and I was being completely produced, which was a real luxury, because I could just show up and do my show. And I had the weirdest experience ... I've never had this experience before. But literally, I'm doing the show... and it felt like the *entity* of the show started talking to me, and it literally said something to me like "what the fuck are you doing"? And I'm like trying to do the show! And in my head I started having a conversation with the entity of my play as I'm performing it. Going like "can you just let me get on and do the show"? And it's like "no, what the fuck are you doing...you need to be doing something else?" (laughter) It was totally weird! I've never had that experience before.



Gemma Wilcox in *The Honeymoon Period is Officially Over*

JW: What was the resolution of the conversation?

GW: The play said to me something like, "okay you've got to do this thing you've been sitting on ...that you've been sitting on for ten plus years. You've gotta do it. You've gotta take that risk. You are not going to be satisfied just doing what you have been doing", and I was like, "Okay, I'll do it, I'll do it! Now can you just let me get on with the this show as best I can?"

JW: Interesting, so the show in your experience, in my own words, just trying to paraphrase, but the show was telling you "you're leaning on me too much, you're overusing me or something and there is this other thing you're supposed to do and why aren't you doing that."

GW: Yeah. It was as if it became a life of its own and it wouldn't let me be completely present anymore with that piece I was doing... because in a way, in a way it was done. But not 'done' like I can never do it again... I definitely got that clarity... but I had to be challenging myself more – I had more to give...

JW: Like breaking up with you or maybe we need a trial separation.

GW: Exactly, it was like an ultimatum... if you don't this, then I'm not gonna.

JW: I think it's a wonderful story, because I did a period of work with Antero Alli up in San Francisco, and we spent two sessions of that paratheatre with the theme of approaching the muse. Courtship of the muse. And a lot of the work he does is around these archetypes, what he calls numinous energies that are autonomous... they are not ... the muse is not an idea in my head, it's not necessarily a psychological experience or an intellectual concept... it's a force as real as autonomous and distinct as Gemma and James... you know, I didn't make you up... you're your own being over there and I interact with you and I learn about you and I can have a conversation with you. So we did all this work to initiate some sort of conversation with the Muse. That was very formative work for me now. More and more for me now I am approaching characters as autonomous beings... and in many ways the show has energy all its own. And all I can do is participate in it and serve it. And then my work is about making myself available to be of service to it... which is a little bit different than someone like you who is writing their own material and creating it from scratch. But that tickles me that the play itself might be like, "You know we've been dating for a while and this just doesn't seem like... this is the best thing for you right now"

GW: Yeah "This is a little codependent."

JW: Yeah, "And it feels like you're leaning on me or using me to avoid your life." So in that sense it doesn't seem strange at all. It seems like that's very much the experience of the muse. I would enter into the presence of the muse and they would boot my ass out if my shit wasn't in order. If I was there for the wrong reasons or I had my own agenda, or if my ego was somehow trying to usurp that energy, I would get fried and I would literally get burned up and melt down and slapped in the

face and kicked out. So, anyway, that's a great story. Is that what instigated you to pick up with this split stage piece?

DANGEROUSLY SAFE

GW: Yeah, yeah. James, I don't know if we've ever spoken about this. Actually it was picking up where I left off with the piece I did as my final project in college that I mentioned earlier. And developing the concepts of that piece... which were... well, we put the audience on two sides facing each other with a curtain down the middle; and with one actor on each side. And it was really very much exploring connection and separation and wholeness and duality and the themes that I am extremely... that are very important to me. And in a certain way it's my life's work...these themes... at least for now. I knew I wanted to work with this staging and these themes for a long, long time and I knew I wanted to develop these themes and then I knew that I really wanted to break out of the multi-character work too. You know, the Gemma Wilcox style' not really my style, but you know... what people link to me as a performer and had come to expect from me. But also to break out of any expectation around whether theatre should be linear or narrative based. Which was totally freaky to me, you know I was like, "Are you kidding, really?" like... it's gonna be one of *those* plays? My fear was that it was going to be one of these self-masturbating, you know, self-indulgent...

JW: Meandering weird thing where people would go, "I don't get it, what is that? "

GW: And that was a constant conversation between me and Liz (Elizabeth Baron who co-created and performed in the piece) around you know, is this relevant? Can people transpose onto this? Can we

create something that is definitely arising from the deeply personal and trust that it can be transposed on? Can we create a piece that we can take to a universal level through being so deeply personal and honest and follow what is arising for us, and trust that then our understanding of theatre and how to offer that and not curl inward as performers... uh...well, will it work?

It was called *Dangerously Safe*. And it was speaking to that thing in myself that it's too dangerous to play it safe. And it was playing with the audience on two sides and curtains and veils and illusion, and we split the audience up and people who came together we split up onto the two sides. There were elements that came from some trance work I had done with Liz, and there was some mythical stuff in there too... and there were these pieces that I called "authentic improvisation" where we would just come out and meet, and "be" with, the audience... which was very "Living Theatre", you know, not that it's never been done before, but it was pretty potent and confronting and what seemed to come up was this kind of play and exploration of constantly aiming to stay authentic ... which is a bit of a trap really because you can't really *try* to be authentic, you kind of just *are* authentic... so it became this interesting dance of how to come out and be completely transparent and connected and feeling the audience and acting in the moment and realizing that you are somehow just subtly trying to be something or manipulate something, so then we would expose *that* and then we would try and get to a state of being authentic again... lots of stripping away... it was almost like aiming for those peak experiences that you were talking about at the beginning... exploring how to find them, and it was showing the struggle as a performer, or as a human actually... showing the struggle of that as a human being through theatre... of how to find those absolutely...maybe not peak experience as in it having to be some explosive thing... but like pure, very, very, very, very pure in the moment authentic, whatever that might look like. It could be

very simple and peaceful or if could be angry or sexual or whatever. And we would try to follow those threads, energetically, based on what we were feeling in the audience... which sometimes was people not even wanting to look at us because it was too intimate. Or some people, since we're in Boulder Colorado, being very open and receptive. And we would just be playing off those energies and hopefully be open enough to be mirrors ... and our intention and how was that by being so receptive to what was going on in the room then that would be useful to someone who was in the audience. Does that make sense?

JW: I think so... and I think you're talking about not so much the spiritual fireworks, but the value I hear underneath there, or the intention is... presence.

GW: Yeah.

JW: And um... and in a little overly cliché, but that sort of moment to moment, being in the truth and reflecting the truth... but also there seems to be a yogic aspect as well, I just mean in terms of the energetic union with the audience... and then the ritual dynamic... and there are practices you can do like what you've learned from David Deida where you sit with another person, it can be sexual practice or other kinds of relational practice that can cultivate that kind of connectivity and presence and freedom of energy between two people... but how to you find those forms in the theatre. How do you find a performative structure for that?

GW: Yes, we were kind of trying to do that... but doing it in a very theatrical way with the metaphor of the whole set up with the staging. For me, it was exploring the connection and separation between actor and audience, actor and actor, and where we draw those lines; where we do that as human being and where we do that in theatre... and theatre is just a constant metaphor for that. It was setting up a whole dynamic of splitting people up so they would want to know what was going on over there on the "other side" and not being present with themselves where they were sitting. There were lots of layers going on all at once, and some people were very receptive and open and pretty blown away by it.... and some people were like "What the fuck!?" and, hated it. Which actually I felt was a kind of an achievement...and it was the first time I didn't read my reviews for three months... Usually I'm really on that kind of thing. And there were people who either loved it or hated it and that felt really cool. I felt like I was onto something. Not that I *wanted* people to hate it, or aim to be that provocative... but it just felt like, "Oh, I'm riding it into some deep territory here" ... and my experience of work in theatre that is really transformational is that it tends to have that effect on people. It either blows audiences out of the water... literally blows them out... either they close down or walk out or they shut down emotionally... or they are drawn in and resonate and open up because they're completely ready. And they perhaps experience more truth and aliveness and awareness than when they walked in.

JW: Especially if your intention is not just entertainment but transformation.

GW: Yeah... and I'd definitely say that's my intention. Though, I'm also not averse to entertainment and accessibility...

JW: No, but my experience is with a lot of transformative work, at least within myself... when you're peddling in Truth as it were... a lot of people aren't interested in it. They don't want to hear the truth. And it has nothing to do with the fact that you're telling the truth... it has to do with them not being interested in the truth. They have some investment in maintaining various kinds of illusions, or whatever, protection mechanisms from the truth, control mechanisms, whatever it is... it's usually some sort of self-protection... and often if my experience of the truth is offered to someone who is somehow invested in that, there is often a violent reaction. You know, of "please get that love and truth away from me because I want no part of it." I could see how given... if you're performing to a whole audience, and not a selective individual... well, in some work I've done the individual is either up for it or not... and if not they leave... and if they are then they come in and engage in that sort of spiritual warfare. And um, it would make sense to me that if you were bringing a whole group of people randomly, and most people's experience of theatre is not that kind of practice or process in which they have to participate and risk... I can see a lot of people being really upset about ending up in that situation... or just not wanting to hear and not being willing to face themselves in that.

GW: Uh hum. And as a theatre creator I also am interested in how not to be so scared of that reaction that I hold back creating something that might cause that reaction... but also how can you get skillful and kind of you know, slip in... or, you know, maybe even trick those that may close down or walk out or judge before you've gotten into something for five minutes... and how can you be skillful as a performer to slip in your ideas and your truth and what you want to offer to the world ... offering beauty, truth, love... the classic things. You know, how can you do that and get past

people's resistance where they don't even realize that you're doing that. So yeah... that last piece was a two person show, and it was a different experience with Liz... (laughter) she was able to look me in the eyes through the process and meet me 100% as a co-practitioner which was so wonderful. Though, funnily enough during the whole piece we are not actually looking in each other's eyes because we are on opposite sides of the curtain.

JW: I guess I just could imagine the intensity of your process and where your process... where your work is leading you and the ... at least for me, I have found at times, difficult to find partners in crime.

GW: Abso-fucking-lutely. And I'd say that's the main reason I've done solo pieces so much. I have a very strong desire to work with co-practitioners who I feel very met by and who challenge me and who I can challenge... and I've often said that it is just as if not more important for me to find this quality with other artists than it is to find it with my romantic partner... life partner...-definitely as important. And it's been a real yearning and I can't compromise on it... it is so painful if I am not met in that way. And I've spoken to Paul Oertel – another of my theatre teachers - about that over the years and I struggled with that a lot more a few years ago. But I'd say that since doing "52 Pick-up" (an exciting piece written by my friend TJ Dawe) that started to shift for me. I worked with Sam Elmore on that piece. Through working with Sam (who is frickin' amazing) and with Elizabeth Baron (who worked on *Dangerously Safe* with me and who was the director of "52 pick-up") I finally found some people my age...not that it has to be the same age, but you know...in our same peer group, who were also working around being deeply embodied on stage and being deeply present, working

with all sorts of sensitivities and energies and um ... continually aligning with authenticity but who can also work with script and can absolutely understand theatre on many levels. It was one of the healthiest most incredible theatre experiences working with them on 52. That wasn't my work; which was fine. I mean, somebody else wrote that script; and then... um... I'm jumping way ahead.

JW: That's fine. It doesn't have to be all in order. We're dancing around here...

GW: I feel like we only just got into the good stuff; took me a while to warm up. It's hard sometimes to speak to what the fuck I do and what I do.

JW: This is part of the reason for the project... because there is often not a culture or language to talk about what we're doing it... and hopefully this project will help the culture and community to see a vision for what's possible.