**On Being Suzi Gablik:**

**Ruth Jones**

When Fern asked me to be one of the Suzi’s for her project “7 Conversations before the end of time”, my first thought was I’m not a performer! Whilst I sometimes orchestrate public events, I generally work with others who are experienced and comfortable with performing. The project intrigued me though, I had read one of Suzi’s books as a student and it had made an impression on me, and the themes of the project felt in alignment with my own preoccupations, so I agreed. Fern sent me the script for the dialogue that we would be performing and I was delighted that it was Thomas Moore’s conversation, as I had read his book ‘Care of the Soul’ the year before. With my interest in art as a vehicle for liminal experience, I found his approach to art and its social and soulful function overlapped with my own, at least to a significant degree.

When it came to performing the dialogue at Small World, I was excited and a little nervous. I’d practiced the process of speaking the words of Suzi as I was simultaneously hearing them through headphones, and was curious to see how this would in fact work in front of an audience, and wondered whether I’d be able to sustain it for over 35 minutes. It felt like the process went quite smoothly, I was very aware of needing to engage a high level of focus and concentration to keep the dialogue fluid. This was different from practising alone, I was used to hearing Fern’s recorded voice in-between my Suzi’s lines, but I now had another voice to listen to, that of Fern speaking her part of Thomas Moore live as well. This initially threw me a little, which voice should I listen too? I realised quickly that I had to listen to both, so that I could know when my cue was, as well as respond gesturally to what the live Fern was saying. My brain felt like it was being asked to do an impossible task, but somehow it rose to the occasion.

I was aware at times of feeling transported to another time and place where this conversation had first taken place, I found myself imagining what Thomas Moore would have sounded like, his passion and enthusiasm for this subject was palpable in the text. I also found myself at times trying to formulate my own response to his words, forgetting that Suzi had already replied many years ago, and my job was simply to re-enact that.

After the enactment was over, we spent some time discussing the content with the audience. Moore had advocated that art should be a vehicle by which we can ‘vacate’, or allow the soul to be vacant for a while, to contemplate. Although I wouldn’t use the same language as Moore, I felt that what he was evoking was similar to my own thinking about the need for regular access to liminal space, and my practice as an artist and curator has been focused for many years on finding the most effective ways to open up this space for audiences and understanding better how people respond to this experience. With the audience at Small World, we talked about different artworks that might have had this effect for us in the past, Bill Viola’s video installations were mentioned as well as James Turrell’s light installations, both of which have profoundly moved me in the past, as have Mark Rothko’s paintings. There were some deep silences in this part of the evening, as we all pondered our own relationships with art and our desires and expectations from it.

I left exhausted, and at the same time stimulated and reawakened. For me currently it is a rare and precious thing to be amongst a large group of people intent on deep thinking. I drove home to my sleeping children and hermetic life with a sense of renewed purpose to engage with liminality and its capacity to transform.

***Ruth Jones is an artist and director of Holy Hiatus***