

**TRANSCENDING THE INDIVIDUAL SPHERE:  
THE WORK OF JERZY GROTOWSKI**

**FU-PING LEE**

**Submitted in fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Drama Department**

**Goldsmiths College, University of London**

**September 2007**

## ABSTRACT

Jerzy Grotowski's lifelong work can be divided into three stages. The first (1957-63) can be summarized as the theatre of collective introspection, which was to bring together people in Polish society by means of adapting ritual spectacle, Durkheim's view of the renewal of social solidarity and Jung's notion of collective unconscious. The second stage (1964-77) starts with the shift of Grotowski's focus from shaping collectivity in performance to achieving individual initiation – the liberation from social conditioning – during the theatre process, especially during actor training. In 1970 Grotowski stopped producing performances and innovated a series of events subsequently known as paratheatrical activities through which he hoped to achieve the liberation of participants more effectively without the burden of making productions. During the third stage of his work (1978-99), Grotowski separated the essential elements of certain traditional practices such as ritual songs and dances so as to establish gatherings in which a sense of collectivity could be experienced among the participants from different social and cultural backgrounds. He ultimately concentrated on work around selected traditional songs preserving the corporeal impulses of the singer in their vibratory quality. The work around these songs, which made the precise

transformation of states of being possible was converted, by linking a sequence of songs, into a piece with a complete structure that could be taken as the potential central component of the proposed gathering Grotowski had been after. Grotowski's work throughout can be summarized as the restless effort to revive ritual in modern society. He pursued the performance shaping Polish social solidarity, the process towards individual initiation as defined above, and the gathering of people together regardless of their social and cultural differences. Yet, what was achieved in his work is the transcendence of the self beyond its ontological, physical, psychological, social and cultural limitations.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Maria Shevtsova who has profoundly guided, inspired and supported me throughout my research. Without her, the completion of this thesis would have been impossible. I am grateful to the three-year scholarship offered by Overseas Research Student Awards Scheme, which financially supported this study. I wish to thank people who helped me with my research, especially Mario Biagini for his generous offer of unpublished articles, the members of Theatre OX from Singapore for their help during my field trip to Pontedera, Tadeusz Pogonowski for his invaluable assistance with my translation of Polish materials, and Jean York and Áine Sheil for their proof-reading of my writings. I am in debt to Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in Pontedera and The Centre for Study of Jerzy Grotowski's Work and for Cultural and Theatrical Research in Wrocław. Both institutes allowed me access to precious materials that were essential to this research. Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family members in Taiwan who have always supported me.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	8
<b>PART I. SHAPING COLLECTIVITY .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>1. THE AUTONOMOUS INTELLECTUAL MISE-EN-SCENE INCORPORATING RITUAL SPECTACLE .....</b>	<b>36</b>
1.1 PERFORMING IN THE POLITICAL ARENA.....	36
1.2 SALVATION THROUGH THE INTELLECTUAL MISE-EN-SCÈNE.....	45
1.3 DIRECT CONTACT BETWEEN THE STAGE AND THE AUDIENCE.....	57
1.4 THEATRE INCORPORATING RITUAL SPECTACLE .....	67
<b>2. THEATRE OF COLLECTIVE INTROSPECTION .....</b>	<b>86</b>
2.1 ARCHETYPE AND SACRILEGE.....	88
2.2 THE UNIFORM FORMULA.....	98
2.3 POETIC ALLUSION .....	110
2.4 THEATRE AS SECULAR RITUAL .....	122
<b>PART II. INITIATION THROUGH INTERPERSONAL COMMUNION..</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>3. ALLOWING ORGANICITY THROUGH THE METHOD OF ELIMINATION .....</b>	<b>134</b>

3.1 ACTING BASED ON VOCAL AND PHYSICAL SIGNS .....	138
3.2 ALLOWING ORGANICITY THROUGH THE METHOD OF ELIMINATION .....	161
<b>4. PERSONALIZATION FOR ORGANICITY AND FOR INITIATION ...</b>	<b>179</b>
4.1 PERSONAL ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED IN PERFORMANCE.....	179
4.2 TRAINING PERSONALIZATION.....	196
4.3 INITIATION INTO A COMPLETE STATE OF BEING .....	224
<b>5. TOWARDS COMMUNION FOR INITIATION .....</b>	<b>233</b>
5.1 SHAPING PERSONAL PROCESS AS PERFORMANCE.....	233
5.2 COMMUNION AND INITIATION.....	250
<b>PART III. BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL.....</b>	<b>289</b>
<b>6. CROSSING THE BOUNDARY .....</b>	<b>290</b>
6.1 DE-CONDITIONING .....	290
6.2 SEEKING COMMUNION ACROSS CULTURAL AND ONTOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES .....	312
<b>7. TRANSFORMATION OF BEING VIA CORPOREALITY.....</b>	<b>327</b>
7.1 PANORAMIC AWARENESS AND THE AUTONOMOUS BODY.....	327
7.2 TRADITIONAL SONGS AS TRACES OF BEING .....	343
7.3 TRANSFORMATION OF BEING THROUGH TRADITIONAL SONGS .....	356

**CONCLUSION** ..... 393

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** ..... 408

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a dedicated study of the work of Jerzy Grotowski (1933-99), an innovative theatre director, an adventurous artist who traced the origins of theatre art and a wanderer in search of his own self. Grotowski was born on 11 August 1933 in Rzeszow, Poland. During the Second World War, he lived with his mother and older brother in the small village of Nienadówka. In the summer of 1955 he graduated from the Theatre School in Kraków with an actor's certificate. Between autumn 1955 and summer 1956, he studied directing in Moscow under Yuri Zavadsky's supervision in the State Institute of Theatre Arts (GITIS). After his return to Poland from Russia, Grotowski was actively involved in political activities and witnessed the Polish October and the reaction afterwards. In 1959, he became the artistic director of the Theatre of 13 Rows – the precursor of the Laboratory Theatre. In 1968, Grotowski's renowned anthology *Towards a Poor Theatre* was published, and it has become the major source for the public to understand his theoretical framework of theatre making. Grotowski ceased directing any new productions after 1970. From then onwards, he initiated a series of research projects including paratheatrical activities (1970-77), Theatre of Sources (1978-80), Objective Drama (1983-86) and Art as Vehicle

(1985-99). Although different from each other, all these projects were related to the theatre process one way or another, but none of them involved making theatre productions. These projects often caused confusion and raised controversy and aspirations alike. The significance of them is yet to be determined. Grotowski died on 14 January 1999 in Pontedera, Italy. His work – theatre productions as well as various research projects – challenges, renews and revitalizes the nexus between art and life.

There have been a number of accounts of Grotowski's work during various periods, as well as attempts to formulate a consistent theoretical framework for his work. Raymonde Temkine's *Grotowski* was originally published in French in 1968, and its English translation appeared in 1972. Temkine's book is the first to present Grotowski's work in its early stages. In her book, Temkine introduces Grotowski, his troupe and his productions, and lays out Grotowski's innovations, such as the re-definition of the relationship between theatre and literature, the unconventional treatment of the playtext, the conquest of scenic space, the participation of spectators in performance, the novel actor training methods and the idea of the holy actor. She reviews and assesses Grotowski's work up to 1965. However, her analysis tends to flatten the various uneasy dimensions of Grotowski's work into an

accomplished static system. It does not reveal the dynamics of the restless progress intrinsic to Grotowski's work.

In the first part of his book *Grotowski i jego Laboratorium* (in Polish), Zbigniew Osiński gives a painstaking chronological account of Grotowski's work from the early 1950s to 1976 by moulding together the writings and lectures of Grotowski and his collaborators, journalistic reports and Osiński's own observations. In the second part of his book, Osiński summarizes Grotowski's work in a 70-page analytical essay. The first part of this book, which was translated into English and published as *Grotowski and His Laboratory* (1986), proves to be a rich source for researchers following Osiński. However, it offers a faithful account more than a perspective with which to grasp the essence of Grotowski's work.

Jennifer Kumiega's *The Theatre of Grotowski* (1985) is an attempt to record and analyze Grotowski's work. She offers a chronological account of Grotowski's productions in the first part of her book, and in the second, analyzes his training, performances and transition from theatre performances to paratheatrical activities. In the third part, Kumiega reports Grotowski's post-theatre activities up to 1984, and dedicates one chapter to the translation of some of Grotowski's interviews and lectures of particular significance. In

the appendix, Kumiega records the details of the actions and the actor's lines in *Apocalypse Cum Figuris*, which is of great help to further analysis of this production. In addition, the bibliography in Kumiega's book is quite extensive and well-organized, which is very useful to the researchers who follow her. Kumiega's analysis basically follows Grotowski's own theoretical ground. Through examining Grotowski's successive productions, Kumiega attempts to trace the development of certain presumed themes such as the emergence of the principle of 'poor theatre' and spatial construction in performance. Yet, to focus only on the end products of Grotowski's work tends to simplify the complexity of its uneasy evolutionary process and overlook his restless struggle.

Eugenio Barba's *Land of Ashes and Diamonds* (1999) invaluable records certain details of Grotowski's life and work from 1962 to 1964, such as how Grotowski behaved in front of the actors, how his reading helped to shape his vision of theatre and how political circumstances affected his work. Also included in Barba's book is a collection of Grotowski's letters to Barba up to 1969. These letters precious preserve Grotowski's reactions to the various results that had unexpectedly emerged from his practical work. Hence, these letters, distinctive from Grotowski's published writings, present the specific

problems Grotowski encountered in his work as well as his solutions to them during those years.

Lisa Wolford's *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research* (1996) records the Objective Drama research led by James Slowiak in California from 1989 to 1990. Grotowski was in direct charge of Objective Drama research from 1983 to 1986. After 1986 Grotowski was present in this research only for two weeks each summer. However, the working content and method recorded by Wolford is still a precious source with which to comprehend Grotowski's work in Objective Drama from 1983 to 1986. Besides giving a detailed account of the practical work, Wolford also investigates the possible conceptual framework behind Grotowski's research, such as the difference between corporeal experiences and discursive thinking, and the objectivity of corporeal experiences transmitted through traditional songs and dances. However, Grotowski's research in Objective Drama was rooted in his Theatre of Sources project and flourished in his ensuing work known as Art as Vehicle. It is necessary to contextualize Objective Drama research into a broader picture of Grotowski's work so as to evaluate fairly this transitional work in California.

In his *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions* (1995), Thomas

Richards, Grotowski's close collaborator from 1985 onwards, reveals his encounter with Grotowski's work from 1984 to 1986. Richards presents his understanding of Grotowski's work during this period by drawing out its close connection with Stanislavsky's method of physical actions, that is, action with live impulses. By so doing, Richards provides a fresh look at the method of physical action and reveals an essential point of contact between Grotowski and Stanislavsky. Richards' book gives us a hint of how we can understand the last phase of Grotowski's work through the perspective of physical actions. It provides an insight into Grotowski's last work, and could contribute significantly to an understanding of Grotowski's work as a whole.

*The Grotowski Sourcebook* (1997) edited by Lisa Wolford and Richard Schechner is the most comprehensive collection of essays on Grotowski's work ranging from 1957 to 1997. It covers, according to the editors, four phases of Grotowski's work throughout his life, that is, 'Theatre of Productions (1957-69)', 'Paratheatre (1969-78) and Theatre of Sources (1976-82)', 'Objective Drama (1983-86)', and 'Art as Vehicle (1986-)'. Grotowski was also involved in the selection of essays for this book. Furthermore, he revised some of his own essays for it. Thus, this selection also reflects how Grotowski perceived his work in the last stage of his life. It is not so much an

attempt to crystallize Grotowski's work in its totality, as an attempt to present the multi-faceted, even paradoxical, dimensions of his work. Hence, although it portrays Grotowski's work 'from the beginning to the end', it is not a substitution, but a call for a much-needed overall study of his lifelong work. Despite their multiplicity, the studies mentioned above fail to give a complete picture of Grotowski's work as a whole.

Grotowski's work has often been divided into two categories: theatre work and post-theatre work. This dichotomy does not reflect the nature of his enterprise but the lack of a comprehensive understanding of it, since Grotowski's theatre work is much more recognizable for theatre practitioners and critics than his post-theatre work, which is not clearly defined or generally conclusive. What is more, the understanding of Grotowski's theatre work mainly relies on his idea of 'poor theatre' conceived as a static paradigm. It prevents insight into the underlying dynamic process which leads to his subsequent work. To break down such a long lasting dichotomy and the stereotypes involved in the understanding of Grotowski's work, a comprehensive study is absolutely necessary, and this is precisely the undertaking of this thesis.

The lack of a comprehensive study can undermine the foundation of

broader studies. All theatre studies involving Grotowski's work are based on existing partial studies, which are incomplete, as I have pointed out. They may catch certain features of Grotowski's work in particular periods from a particular perspective, but they involuntarily contribute to those widely accepted stereotypical views of Grotowski's work, and damage the possibility of understanding it as a whole. In his *Avant Garde Theatre 1892-1992* (1993), Christopher Innes exposes a paradoxical aspect within the development of avant-garde theatre, that is, that the driving force of modern theatrical experimentation is primitivism. It is the attempt to revive ritual in the theatre that links together the various works of many founding figures of modern theatre such as Strindberg, Artaud, Brook, and so on. For Innes, this primitivism becomes the key to understanding both the political and aesthetic aspects of modern theatre. It affects theatre practice in two complementary ways: the exploration of dream states or the instinctive and subconscious levels of the psyche, and the quasi-religious focus on myth and magic, which leads to experiments with ritual and the ritualistic patterning of performance in the theatre. In this context, Innes discusses Grotowski's work in the chapter 'Secular Religions and Physical Spirituality'. Innes points out that Grotowski's emphasis is on ritual forms (instead of mythical material), and

that this emphasis becomes an exclusive focus on drama as a process rather than a production. He further demonstrates that Grotowski's attempt to achieve the secular sacrum and communion in theatre results in Grotowski's complete withdrawal from public performance. Innes acutely points out that secular ritual is the core of Grotowski's theatre. Nevertheless, he summarizes all of Grotowski's work after the production phase as paratheatrical therapy, in an oversimplified manner which involuntarily reinforces the dichotomy of Grotowski's work, as mentioned above.

Shomit Mitter takes the process of rehearsal as the subject of his book *Systems of Rehearsal* (1992), and sets out to develop a means of elucidating the essences of different acting methods. Mitter compares the rehearsal techniques used by Peter Brook at various periods of his career with those developed by Stanislavsky, Brecht and Grotowski. Through his study of various relationships between the actor's self and the character, Mitter offers a frame of reference to compare Grotowski's acting and directing with that of Stanislavsky and Brecht, two other major practitioners in the twentieth-century theatre. Mitter embeds Grotowski's practice in a broader context of various theatre practices. However, his comparative study contributes more to the understanding of various acting styles than to the understanding of

Grotowski's work, which is concerned with more than acting in the theatre. In *The Theatre Event: Modern Theory of Performance* (1980), Timothy J. Wiles refers to the creative interaction of the literary text, the actor's art, and the spectator's participation as 'the theatre event' and examines Stanislavsky's, Brecht's, Artaud's, and Grotowski's conceptions of it. Wiles further examines in his book how these practitioners map their innovations regarding acting techniques onto the larger context of the theatre event and how they accordingly propose different notions of catharsis. Both Mitter and Wiles perceive Grotowski exclusively through the framework of his 'poor theatre', which reinforces the dichotomy of Grotowski's theatre and post theatre work.

The lack of a comprehensive study also leaves the practical side of Grotowski's legacy in danger, and, what is more, makes the so called 'Grotowskian method' dangerous. There are all kinds of systems of training and practice under Grotowski's name, most of which are simply straight imitations of the external forms of Grotowski's practical work without consideration of his deeper intentions and purposes. These misunderstandings and misuses can only be fully brought to light once a comprehensive study has been done. This is what my research intends to provide.

Grotowski's work should be understood as a dialectical process. By

presenting his practice, lectures, articles, interviews and talks in chronological order, I am able to trace the evolutionary course of his practice as well as his thinking. Instead of incorporating all aspects of his doing and thinking into one coherent work, I will especially pay attention to the significant inconsistencies and inadequacies that are the driving force in his work. This is the key to overturning the static and stereotypical view of Grotowski's work.

In order to gain access to the original sources, I made field trips in 2000 to where Grotowski conducted his work in Poland and Italy. I visited the premises of Grotowski's troupe in Wrocław, which had been turned into The Centre for Study of Jerzy Grotowski's Work and for Cultural and Theatrical Research. In the archive of The Centre, I reviewed Grotowski's articles published in local newspapers in the 1950s and 60s, collected some original production programmes, and watched films on Grotowski's practice such as *List z Opola (A Letter from Opole)*, *Akropolis*, *Książę Niezłomny (The Constant Prince)*, *Training at the "Teatr Laboratorium" in Wrocław*, and *Acting Therapy*. I also visited the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski in Pontedera, where I met Grotowski's close collaborators Thomas Richards and Mario Biagini, and saw *Action*, the most important opus in Grotowski's last

period of work. Moreover, I attended the conference 'The Energies of the Beginning: The Teatr Laboratorium from Opole to Wrocław, 1959 – 1969', held in Pontedera from 12 to 14 October 2001. Through the seminar sessions of this conference, I was able to ask members from Grotowski's troupe, including Ludwik Flaszen, Eugenio Barba, Jerzy Grotowski, Zygmunt Molik, Rena Mirecka and Elizabeth Albahaca, about Grotowski's theatre work. On the 6th and 7th of January 2005, I attended the 'Presentation of Documentary Films from Workcentre' held in Canterbury. I watched the film documentation of *Downstairs Action*, which was entitled *Action* and filmed at the workcenter by Mercedes Gregory in 1989, and a film documentation of the opus *Action*, which was shot in Istanbul in the summer of 2003. I also discussed the making of these opuses with Thomas Richards and Mario Biagini in an open session. All these have significantly contributed to my study in this thesis.

The main sources of my research are writings and lectures by Grotowski and his collaborators, documentation and accounts of Grotowski's practical work and analyses by other academics. The firsthand materials from Grotowski and his collaborators are the most important sources. They reveal what Grotowski's initial plans and thinking were as well as how he dealt with

unexpected outcomes in his work. They provide insight into Grotowski's work as a dialectic process. Especially precious among them are those of Grotowski's writings that appeared only in Polish newspapers and journals during the late 1950s and early 1960s and are still not easily accessible to academic circles outside Poland. The majority of these articles are not translated into other languages, although they are essential to a comprehensive understanding of Grotowski's work from its very beginning. In order to come to terms with Grotowski's roots in Poland, I have learnt Polish to an adequate level to review these Polish sources directly. Several of Grotowski's essays from this early period cover his reflections on how theatre can be revived to survive the severe challenge from television and cinema. They include the published articles 'Twórcze ambicje teatru' (Creative Ambitions of Theatre) (1958), 'Wokół teatru przyszłości' (About the Theatre in the Future) (1959), 'Śmierć i reinkarnacja teatru' (The Death and Reincarnation of Theatre) (1959), 'Co to jest teatr?' (What is Theatre?) (1959), 'Dziady jako model teatru nowoczesnego' (*Dziady* as A Model of Neo-theatre) (1961) and the unpublished pamphlet *Możliwość Teatru* (*The Possibility of Theatre*) (1962). Of these pieces, *Możliwość Teatru* is possibly of the greatest importance since it can be considered the conclusion of

Grotowski's experimental work up to 1962. In *Możliwość Teatru*, Grotowski systematically depicts his vision of theatre at the time, namely, that it should incorporate in production the archetype as the central motif and bring the actors and spectators together into one ensemble in terms of the theatre space and role-playing. It proposes a prototype of Grotowski's ideal theatre and thus foreshadows his subsequent productions. *Możliwość Teatru*, which is overlooked by researchers, deserves far more attention than it has received.

Apart from the firsthand materials from Grotowski and his collaborators, film recordings, reports and accounts of Grotowski's practical work are also important sources for my comprehensive analysis of his work. These materials allow me to analyze Grotowski's practical work directly, which makes it possible to cross-reference his ideas and their realization. There are several film recordings of Grotowski's work, such as *Akropolis*, *The Constant Prince*, *Training*, *Acting Therapy*, the recording of the work *Downstairs Action* entitled *Action*, and the recording of a piece of work named *Action*. It is unfortunate that I was not able to see the recording of *Apocalypse*, which is in private hands. In addition to film recordings, there are also accounts and reports of Grotowski's productions, workshops and activities, such as Serge Ouaknine's detailed account of the actor's lines and the performance of *The*

*Constant Prince* in 'Le Prince Constant', *Les Voies de la Création Théâtrale*  
Vol. I (1970).

To scrutinize Grotowski's thinking through digesting his writings and lectures is a difficult task. First, his writings were originally in different languages, including Polish, French, Italian and English. The issue of translation can further complicate his writing. What is more, Grotowski tends to explain his abstract but crucial ideas in personal and metaphorical language. Without clear definitions, the meanings of his terms can deviate, diverge, drift and differ incessantly. Some examples of such terms are 'collective unconscious', 'associations' and 'impulses'. What is worse, he uses different terms for the same idea in different contexts. For instance, what Grotowski called 'archetype' is not significantly different from what he called 'collective representation' on many occasions, and the meanings of his ideas 'sources', 'beginnings' and 'essence' overlap with each other. By following Grotowski's terms chronologically and interpreting them through the original textual and ideological contexts, I can narrow down, if not pinpoint, the meaning of his terms and comprehend his overall view. This is of great importance for the analysis of a dialectic process that is constantly evolving.

Many, including Grotowski himself, have pointed out that ritual is the important reference for his work, and the focus has always been placed on certain affinities between ritual and Grotowski's work. However, how Grotowski's perception of ritual affected his work has not yet been thoroughly discussed. In this thesis, I will argue that the renewal of collectivity, initiation of the individual and the phenomenon of possession in ritual are the most important references for Grotowski's work.

Accordingly, I divide Grotowski's work into three stages in this thesis, instead of the widely accepted four stages, as in WOLFORD and SCHECHNER's *The Grotowski Sourcebook*. This three-stage view casts new light on the principles underlying Grotowski's intention of realizing secular ritual in modern society. It reflects the nature of a dialectic process in Grotowski's work, and offers a new way of thinking about his work as a whole.

The first stage of Grotowski's work (1957-63) started when he became a theatre director in 1957. As a political activist in his twenties, Grotowski started his professional career with a strong social-political consciousness influenced by aspects of Polish Socialism, such as the rejection of exploitation, the breaking down of social classes and the idea of living in brotherhood. Refusing the conventional view of theatre as an imitation of

reality, he set the basic tone of his theatre as intellectual *mise-en-scène* designated to inculcate social and political awareness into the audience. Accordingly, he adapted, or even paraphrased, the playtext to support his arguments iterated through intellectual *mise-en-scène*. This basic tone of Grotowski's theatre persisted even after he was forced to play down the political implication in his productions due to the contemporary political climate in Poland.

In 1959, Grotowski took charge of Theatre of 13 Rows, with which he conducted long-term systematic research into the realization of his ideal theatre. Meanwhile, inspired by the participatory spectacle of ritual, Grotowski imposed a specific spatial arrangement and role-playing process in his productions, in order to foster a spontaneous form of conversation between the stage and the audience. He arranged the theatre space in such a way that the actor and the audience were physically mingled together in performance. He also involved the audience in the role-playing process, which would diminish the psychological distance between the actor and the audience. Through such devices, Grotowski expected the inculcation of the audience in his theatre to be more effective. However, his theatre as intellectual *mise-en-scène* did not receive ardent reaction from the audience.

(See Chapter 1.)

It was not until he produced *Forefathers' Eve (Dziady)* in 1961 that Grotowski recognized how to mesmerize the audience in his theatre of inculcation. Based on the audience's response to his challenge of the vision of the Polish Messiah in this production and inspired by Jung's notion of the archetype, Grotowski envisaged that to challenge an archetype was the key to the audience's emotional and intellectual involvement in performance. This reshaped his vision of theatre, which then crystallized into a pamphlet *The Possibility of Theatre (Możliwość Teatru)* written in 1962. By means of challenging an archetype (an idea rooted in the collective unconscious) in his production, he attempted to elicit collective introspection from spectators. All other elements in the performance were arranged around the central motif of challenging an archetype, in order to foster collective introspection among spectators: the whole theatre space was set according to the central motif of the production; spectators were cast in minor roles and expected to interact with the roles played by actors in the context of performance. Meanwhile, when co-directing *Akropolis* with Grotowski in 1962, Józef Szajna, a designer-turned director, made extensive use of poetic allusion in his directing strategy, which elaborated the realization of Grotowski's theatre of

collective introspection. The application of poetic allusion allowed a prop to be a signifier capable of conveying several meanings and evoking the interplay between them. Poetic allusion could also epitomize the intricate correlation between the actors and their characters, in which the actors could signify different characters, separately or simultaneously, by means of their extensive use of physicality. This had a profound influence on Grotowski's theatre thereafter. All these characteristic elements of the theatre of collective introspection set up a model on which the ensuing development would be based. Inspired by Durkheim's view of how ritual can renew social solidarity through regular re-enactment and re-experiencing of common beliefs, Grotowski recognized the potential of his theatre of collective introspection as a secular ritual to bring people together promoting the solidarity of Polish society. Shaping collectivity had been Grotowski's major concern in his ensuing productions up to *Doctor Faustus*, premièred in 1963, which I consider to be the end of the first stage of his work. (See Chapter 2.) The first stage of Grotowski's work was intended to create a sense of collectivity in Polish society, through adapting in his theatre the participatory spectacle of ritual, Jung's notion of the archetype and Durkheim's view of the renewal of social solidarity.

Although Grotowski's productions after 1963 still bore the same formal features of the theatre of collective introspection, other issues had emerged in his theatre making and became more and more dominant in his work. The second stage of Grotowski's work (1964-77) started at the preparation of the production *The Hamlet Study* premièred in 1964. In this stage, the focus of his work shifted from shaping collectivity among spectators in performance to achieving individual initiation into a complete state of being through the theatre process, especially through actor training.

In the beginning of the second stage, Grotowski concentrated on seeking a specific acting method, which utilized organic signs, that is, the rhythmic actions revealing the actor's impulses. He devised various exercises, such as physical and plastic exercises, to train his actors for achieving organic acting as such. Through practical work, Grotowski realized that the method of elimination, or *via negativa*, would be a better strategy to elicit organic signs from actors, since this method allowed him to outwit the actors' discursive manipulation of their bodies by diverting their attention away from themselves. In other words, the purpose of training was not to create 'acting vocabularies'. Instead, Grotowski manipulated exercises to locate and dissolve the actor's physical blockages which intervened in the actor's natural

organic process of expression. This method of elimination became the fundamental principle in Grotowski's actor training. This method also significantly influenced other aspects of his theatre making and brought about his perspective of revitalizing theatre by means of eliminating unnecessary factors – what he called 'poor theatre'. (See Chapter 3.)

By means of his work with Cieślak in *The Constant Prince*, Grotowski recognized that the actor's personal association was the key to organic acting. He then systematically introduced the actor's personal process in training and performance. In addition, he envisaged that the real potential of this change in his work did not lie in the perfection of acting skills, but in the initiation of actors into a complete state of being, in which the actor's inner impulses were not hampered by social conditioning. Hence, personal initiation became an objective of Grotowski's work, and he considered actor training, which fostered the actor's personal initiation, as significant as performance. It was at this transitional phase that Grotowski had his renowned anthology *Towards a Poor Theatre* published, which set the stereotypical view of his theatre held by many. This explains why an extensive part of this anthology is dedicated to actor training (a theatre process), instead of to acting (a skill of performance). However, as Grotowski's work proceeded, the balance between

theatre process and theatre performance eventually tilted towards the former.

(See Chapter 4.)

As he shifted his focus towards the theatre process, Grotowski paid more and more attention to the actor's personal initiation into a complete state of being. He even shaped the actor's personal process as the plot of performance in *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris*. Despite the fact that he had pushed his theatre making to its limits, he still could not find a means to achieve in performance both the revival of the actor's personal experience and the communion between the actor and the audience. This led to his departure from theatre, and he stopped directing any new productions hereafter. In 1970, Grotowski envisaged a new form of work to replace theatre performance, which was epitomized in his text 'Holiday – The Day That Is Holy'. He then initiated a series of one-off events, subsequently known as paratheatrical activities. In this new work, participants would follow the lead of a group of Grotowski's collaborators to go through certain devised activities such as running, jumping and making music together in a secluded place, such as a forest, for a period of time, possibly up to several days and nights. Paratheatrical activities took many different shapes, including Special Project, Research University, the Mountain Project and other minor activities. These activities

were devised to create communion among participants through their collective experience in unusual situations. By doing so, Grotowski intended to liberate participants from social conditioning and initiate them into a complete state of being. (See Chapter 5.) After six years of work, Grotowski was dissatisfied with the outcomes of paratheatrical activities, owing to the lack of enduring results which could accumulate and be further developed into a mature form of work. After the Mountain Project concluded in 1977, the second stage of Grotowski's work ended, and he then moved on to a new direction to continue his research into the realization of a secular ritual.

To start the third stage of his work (1978-99), Grotowski studied various traditional practices such as yoga and ritual songs and dances around the globe as part of his project Theatre of Sources. He composed a group of international practitioners to investigate these practices, in order to separate their 'objective' elements which would have the same effect on people regardless of their cultural backgrounds. This cross-cultural study of traditional techniques aimed to distill techniques of work on the self, which would help people to surpass their habitual perception and action. Grotowski's perspective of work on the self was jointly influenced by the Indian sage Ramana Maharishi's teaching of self-enquiry and the Jewish

philosopher Martin Buber's idea of 'I-Thou'. Grotowski anticipated this work to be instrumental in creating the gathering which would bring people together across their social and cultural differences. However, he did not succeed in achieving a gathering as such in this project, and the introduction of martial law in Poland in 1982 interrupted his further attempts to elaborate this work. He then left his country and moved to the United States. (See Chapter 6.)

From 1983 to 1986, Grotowski continued his research in a new project, Objective Drama, based in California in the United States. In this new project, he extensively worked on various traditional techniques and particularly took up traditional songs as the focus of his research. In 1986 Grotowski inaugurated his Workcenter in Pontedera in Italy, where he concentrated exclusively on the work around 'vibratory songs' – certain traditional songs with vibratory quality preserving the corporeal impulses of the singer. The work on vibratory songs provided a tangible way towards the transformation of states of being. In other words, one could get into certain states of being through executing the precise physical actions built around vibratory songs. Grotowski asked Thomas Richards to compose an opus *Action*, whose main structure consisted of a sequence of vibratory songs. By

means of the extensive study of techniques of work on the self throughout the third stage of his work, Grotowski intended to fulfill a kind of gathering which could bring about genuine communion across social and cultural boundaries. He expected that *Action* could serve as the central component of a gathering as such. However, the lack of proper recognition from the public limited the impact of this work, which became not so much a secular ritual capable of shaping society as an esoteric teaching appealing to a restricted elite. Grotowski died in 1999, which is considered the end of his work in this thesis. (See Chapter 7.)

Grotowski's work as a whole was the restless effort to revive secular ritual in modern society. He pursued the secular ritual in the first stage of his work in order to renew social solidarity in Polish society, in the second stage to bring about individual initiation into a complete state of being and in the third to bring people together in a deep sense of communion regardless of their social and cultural backgrounds. Whether Grotowski succeeded in reviving ritual as such is debatable. He had some achievements in his work, but he was not always satisfied with the outcomes. However, through his restless and persistent work, Grotowski profoundly explored various possibilities of the self. His notion of the self was mainly influenced by Carl

Jung's collective unconscious, Martin Buber's 'I and Thou' and Ramana Maharishi's self-enquiry, as will be analyzed in the main body of this thesis. Grotowski believed that the self, if enlightened, can be the conjunction of the subjective and the objective, which encompasses everything. Ultimately, however, it is more significant and relevant to analyze how Grotowski shaped his understanding of the self through examining his practical work, which was not so much an implementation of his notion of the self as an empirical exploration to dissolve or get around all limitations preventing the enlightened self from coming into being. In the first stage of his work, Grotowski attempted to shape collectivity in Polish society by examining the Polish roots within the self (of Poles) in his theatre productions. In the second stage, Grotowski concentrated more on personal initiation into a complete state of being, in which the body could be liberated from the manipulation of the mind conditioned by social codes, and become organic. In the third stage, he investigated various traditional techniques which would lead the self towards its original state prior to cultural differentiation. He then developed the work on vibratory songs, through which the transformation of being could be achieved. His work constantly subverted the isolated and confined self, and opened up a new possibility of what the self could be.

To sum up, in the core of Grotowski's work on reviving ritual lies a series of re-discoveries of the self in various dimensions. It is an exploration of the self in a general sense as well as Grotowski's search for his own self, such as confronting his Polish roots through contemporary perspectives, searching for the self in its original state prior to cultural differentiation and social conditioning, broadening selfhood through engaging oneself in communion with others, and the transformation of the state of being through physical actions. All these aspects of Grotowski's work demonstrate that the self is able to transcend 'the individual sphere' – the habitual conceptions of the individual bounded by its ontological, physical, psychological, social and cultural limitations. As a result, Grotowski's work as a whole can be considered to be a trajectory of transcending the individual sphere, and it provides a vision of the self overriding the dualism of the interpersonal and the intrapersonal, or the dualism of the corporeal and the spiritual.

The language in this thesis is intended in a non-sexist sense. However, not all confusions can be avoided, owing to the lack of appropriate non-sexist nouns in the English language. Without gender bias and simply for the convenience of writing, the term 'the actor' is used in this thesis for both genders, unless otherwise specified.

## **PART I. SHAPING COLLECTIVITY**

# 1. THE AUTONOMOUS INTELLECTUAL MISE-EN-SCÈNE INCORPORATING RITUAL SPECTACLE

## 1.1 Performing in the Political Arena

Around 1955, Grotowski, then a university student, was directly involved in the political arena. It therefore seems quite natural that, while proposing his own scheme of making theatre, Grotowski paid particular attention to the social and political potential of the theatre for bringing about significant change in real life. Grotowski put forward his vision of what constituted an ideal theatre in an article, 'A Dream of Theatre'.<sup>1</sup> What interested him was how a performance might induce an emotional response in the audience, which evokes 'evolutionary passion, respect for love, brotherhood between classes, a belief in heroism and dignity and hatred of exploitation'. He was not convinced that the close imitation of everyday life, which was considered to be the key to socialist realism, could achieve any of these ends. Nor did he subscribe to 'the dry intellectual approach to art'. For Grotowski, neither of these methods could possibly inspire 'epoch-changing acts'. He called for a 'Theatre of Great Emotion' (*Teatr Wielkich Uczuć*) in their place.

Grotowski's ideal theatre firstly required a reduction of the plot of a playtext to what he considered its core moments, or those responsible for producing 'great emotion'. Grotowski considered this reduction of the plot 'a poetic composition of the episodes in a drama - something not separate from, but indivisibly related to the playtext'. Moreover, he emphasized the importance of the romantic repertoire, which included dramatists such as Shakespeare, Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Wyspiański, Vishnevsky and Pogodin, as well as their appropriate interpretation in terms of evoking the potential emotional impact of given texts. He believed that the romantic repertoire was fertile ground for the nurturing of 'great emotion', and that a 'positive' interpretation of dramatic texts was the right means to cultivate such emotion. Taking *Hamlet* as his example, Grotowski argued that the Danish prince could be played either as a man who was eventually destroyed by his obsession with revenge, or as one who had sacrificed everything, even his life, to fight 'corruption, intrigue, hypocrisy, villainy, exploitation and the unscrupulousness of those in power'. The latter interpretation is the 'positive' one, where the protagonist's decision to act against iniquitous forces is made manifestly clear. Grotowski contended that only this kind of 'positive'

---

<sup>1</sup> Jerzy Grotowski, 'Marzenie o teatrze,' *Dziennik Polski*, 1955 No 46 (no page number). All remaining quotations in this section are from this article unless otherwise specified. Translations are my own.

interpretation of romantic repertoires could arouse 'great emotion' in the audience.

Secondly, he believed that all real-life details 'not absolutely necessary for evoking emotion or clarifying action should be abandoned' although by accentuating this he did not completely renounce naturalistic acting. In the same article, Grotowski stressed that 'the actor should live on stage and act, rather than put on an act or simply declare or feign the emotion'. He also wrote that 'the naturalness of an action and the conscious structuring of it are not exclusive, but the successful blending of the two is a measure of the actor's capacity'. In other words, the ideal method of acting for Grotowski's 'Theatre of Great Emotion' is a conscious or 'poetic' editing or modification of naturalistic action embedded in non-naturalistic circumstances.

Thirdly, Grotowski listed three 'emotional artistic expressions' which he believed would evoke the required 'great emotion': metaphor (*metafora*), generalization (*uogólnienia*) and monumentalization (*monumentalizacji*). This means he used scenic metaphor to reinforce action.<sup>2</sup> He multiplied the image

---

<sup>2</sup> Grotowski used the following example to explain his technique of the metaphor: 'For example, a plotter, who is not up to becoming a revolutionary, backs away at the prospect of an uprising. Let us imagine it as a scenic metaphor: with weapon in hand, he is heading towards the place where he must make his final decision. Through the black abyss of the night sky the first rays of dawn are visible. In the thin light of dawn his weak, pale fingers open and the weapon falls out, thumping to the ground and rolling away.'

of an individual character in order to give a social perspective,<sup>3</sup> and he portrayed characters at points of crucial action as monumental statues to provide a historical perspective.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, Grotowski emphasized that 'the music, light and color... should be realized not naturally...but in a way which would reinforce the emotional impact of the action'.<sup>5</sup> All these suggest the directing should not be naturalistic. Instead, it should emphasize the 'poetic' to arouse 'great emotion' in the audience.

To sum up, these three stock traits of the 'Theatre of Great Emotion' allow us to conclude that Grotowski hoped to renovate theatre mainly by offering a new perspective on directing, including selection, adaptation and interpretation of the playtext, 'poetic' editing of naturalistic action and conscious use of the artistic, non-naturalistic scenic expressions. The paramount importance of the director in these multiple roles in Grotowski's

---

<sup>3</sup> Grotowski gave two examples of the artistic generalization of a main theme: 'A Nazi soldier is keeping guard. His shadow falls across a map of Europe and covers the centre. The rhythm of marching army boots can be heard; a remote sound of "heili, heila" can be heard in the distance. The shadow on the map of Europe grows steadily and darkness spreads across the entire continent. Alternatively, a freedom fighter is standing in the middle of an execution field under the gallows; he is proud and unbreakable. From behind the curtains huge mirrors appear and suddenly we see not one but countless tens of gallows, not one but countless tens of convicts, proud and unbreakable.'

<sup>4</sup> Grotowski explained 'Monumentalization simply means halting the flow of action and portraying the characters in monumental, motionless enlargement by a play of light on a backdrop of an empty space. This is the moment when the voice of history speaks out loud on stage.'

<sup>5</sup> To illustrate his idea, Grotowski provided some oversimplified examples: 'night is redolent of the malice of evil doing; moonlight is associated with the confession of secret love; the colour red is reminiscent of revolution; a collective and monotonous rhythm suggests the sheep-like submission, and a lie goes together with musical dissonance'.

new vision of theatre cannot be over-emphasized. Beyond all these formal innovations lay Grotowski's ambition to arouse 'great emotion' in the audience in order to change society, which dominated his vision of the theatre.

Grotowski's 'Theatre of Great Emotion' was not simply an invitation to experience an emotional response to a theatrical scenario. Contrary to its name, the 'Theatre of Great Emotion' was intellectual, since its emotional effects were subject to the director's intellectual commands, which aimed at socialist reform. Yet, it is also clear that Grotowski rejected socialist realism from the outset. Nevertheless, although socialist realism and the 'Theatre of Great Emotion' may have approached their goal from different starting points, they still occupied much the same political ground. Both aimed to inspire people to change society.

From 23 August 1955 to 15 June 1956, Grotowski was in Moscow, where he studied directing at GITIS (State Institute of Theatre Arts) under the supervision of Yuri Zavadsky, an influential disciple of Stanislavsky. Zbigniew Osiński points out that Grotowski, known as 'a fanatic disciple of Stanislavsky', was already familiar with 'the method of physical actions' when he left for Moscow. Unfortunately, there is no further information about

what aspect of Stanislavsky's work particularly interested Grotowski at that time. However, one can hardly find any affinity between Stanislavsky's work and Grotowski's vision of theatre as proposed in his 'Theatre of Great Emotion' or his productions immediately afterwards, since Grotowski clearly objected to theatre naturalism. It is possible that, as Osiński has suggested, Grotowski still took Stanislavsky as a role model because of the Russian director's persistent renewal of his own system. This is further confirmed in a 1964 interview, in which Grotowski depicted Stanislavsky as a 'saint' among theatre practitioners who committed himself to the 'successive stages of awakening and renewal in the theatre'.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, while staying in GITIS, Grotowski unexpectedly discovered Meyerhold and started to study his legacy, especially the documentation of *The Inspector General*.<sup>7</sup> Meyerhold's theatre remained an influential factor in Grotowski's early period of reformulating his ideal theatre, especially Meyerhold's adaptation and re-interpretation of the text and the intrusion of the stage action into the auditorium in his theatre, elements which can also be easily recognized as defining characteristics of Grotowski's theatre in its early stages. This will become clear as this chapter progresses.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>7</sup> See Zbigniew Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, translated and abridged by Lillian Vallee and Robert Findlay. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1986, pp. 17-18.

In June 1956, Grotowski left Moscow, travelled in central Asia for two months, and returned to Poland in the late summer of 1956. He witnessed the Polish October of 1956 – the zenith of anti-Stalinism and the process of ‘the thaw’ in Poland. The crucial event launching the Polish October was the workers’ riot in Poznań in June. The Poznań uprising, together with other minor riots and demonstrations, made the regime unstable. The Party thus sensed the urgency to elect a new leader who would be more convincing to the public. On 20 October 1956, General Władysław Gomułka (1905-82), who was a former Party leader before the consolidation of Stalinism and who had been detained by the Stalinists for his ‘nationalist deviation’ from 1951 to 1954, was appointed as the new Party leader. Poles considered the Polish October a bloodless ‘revolution’. They believed that the new leader’s ‘Polish way to socialism’ and cessation of slavish subservience towards the Soviet Russian model would bring a new era which, in some sense, would end the control by Soviet Russia and allow a domestic autonomous Polish regime to come into being.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> See M. K. Dziewanowski, *Poland in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, pp. 167-186; R. F. Leslie *The History of Poland since 1863*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, pp. 349-354; Kathleen M. Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland 1954-1989*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996, pp. 15-19, 53-56.

The months following the Polish October saw liberation from censorship and the secret police. In April 1957, as an activist in a youth organization, Grotowski exhorted people to fight for their own life. He said: 'We must make bread, just as we must make freedom and civilization happen. It's not true that one can hide away in one's private little world and go on living'.<sup>9</sup> With his own passion, Grotowski intended to arouse people's passion to move and to fight. During this period, he was, in fact, not so much a theatre practitioner as a young political activist. But in May 1957, the newly elected Party leader Gomułka publicly degraded the revisionism and began to tighten the censorship. Though the situation was not worse than under the Stalinist regime, this retreat truly shocked Poles out of their revolutionary illusion. In the autumn of that year, Grotowski was criticized by the authorities for his participation in the active revisionist youth organization, the Union of Socialist Youth (ZMS).<sup>10</sup> At the end of that year, the Party renounced its revisionist members and the Polish October revolution officially ended. The climate after 1957 turned out to be dull and monotonous. In 1960, a foreign political scientist William E. Griffith, who had lived in Poland, observed: 'Poland today is a country of spent passion. Apathy, hopelessness,

---

<sup>9</sup> In Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> See Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 23.

indifference to politics, rejection of any ideology and retreat into private life dominate the scene'.<sup>11</sup>

It was after the end of the Polish October that Grotowski curtailed his political activities. From then on, he concentrated exclusively on the realization of his theatre. This apolitical stance seems, at a glance, a total retreat. However, critic Jan Kott's observation gives us a clue as to what really happened underneath the surface. As he puts it:

The renunciation of material goods, given conditions in Poland, was probably the easiest decision. Far more difficult was the renunciation of the theatre of politics. ... Grotowski took the heroic decision to be uncompromising. But under the conditions of repression, such a decision exacts the price of supplanting politics with metaphysics.<sup>12</sup>

From this point, Grotowski became not a political activist but an active theatre practitioner with the vision of reshaping theatre. Yet, the Polish context as has been examined above still played an important part in Grotowski's subsequent work. In 1957 he started his career as a theatre director and published several statements on his new vision of the theatre. It was his first step towards the realization of his ideal theatre.

---

<sup>11</sup> In Kathleen M. Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland, 1954-1989*. London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996, p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> Jan Kott in Lisa Wolford and Richard Schechner, ed. *The Grotowski Sourcebook*. London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 132-3.

## 1.2 Salvation through the Intellectual Mise-en-scène

From late 1958, a central concern of Grotowski was continuously mentioned in his writings and interviews until August 1959 at least. It is best expressed in an interview conducted around December of 1958, in which he said:

I have chosen the artistic profession because I realized quite early that I am being haunted by a certain 'thematic concern,' a certain 'leading motif,' and a desire to reveal that 'concern' and present it to other people... I am haunted by the problem of human loneliness and the inevitability of death.<sup>13</sup>

Grotowski's preoccupation with loneliness and death was not only a reflection of his personal disposition, but also an issue for those who had survived the cruel events of the Second World War. It was an era, according to Grotowski, in which 'the myth of "life after death" became powerless (at least for the greater part of society)', and in which the shelter or consolation offered by Catholicism was no longer convincing. This pressing need to re-establish the meaning of ephemeral life was metaphorically related to Grotowski's aspiration of acquiring the Grail, as explained in an article entitled 'Theatre and the Grail', in which Grotowski stressed that 'Man is full of anxiety and fear' because of an awareness of his inevitable transience.

---

<sup>13</sup> Grotowski in Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, pp. 26-7. Osiński does not give the precise date of this interview.

Hence, 'Man searches for the Grail, a chalice molded out of infinity, which delivers man from weakness and death'.<sup>14</sup> Where was the 'Grail' to be found? Grotowski gave his own solution when explaining his 'leading motif' in the interview quoted above:

...a human being (and here begins my 'leading motif') is capable of acting against one's own loneliness and death. If one involves oneself in problems outside narrow spheres of interests, ...if one recognizes the union of man and nature, if one is aware of the indivisible unity of nature and finds one's identity within it, ...then one attains an essential degree of liberation.<sup>15</sup>

The same idea was reiterated in another article by Grotowski published in May 1959.<sup>16</sup> What he called 'nature', or 'the world' incorporating nature and the people in other contexts, was not a replacement of the God of Catholicism, nor was it a supreme being of any form in pantheism. It appeared to be the territory left to individuals in an era when God and heaven were in doubt. This unity of the self and the world seemed, for Grotowski, a consolation in place of religion. 'Modern man', said Grotowski, 'placed by science in a cosmos without heaven, gods, and demons... can find some hope, psychologically rooted in the unity and immortality of nature'.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>16</sup> See 'Wokół teatru przyszłości', *Ekran*, No 21, 24 May 1959.

<sup>17</sup> Grotowski in Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 27.

The unity between the self and the world was actually the extension of the selfhood, which demanded the osmosis of the subject and the object.<sup>18</sup> Grotowski expected his theatre to be the medium between himself as an artist and his audience, when both extended their narrow selfhood into a broader scope embracing each other. Grotowski explained the role of art in this context:

Metaphorically speaking, art is a (more or less conscious) way of getting to know the world in its relation to us, humans. It is a way of getting to know ourselves in relation to our unity with the objective world (that is, with people and with nature). While talking about the world, the artist talks about his own self. Watching and getting to know the world through a masterpiece, the viewer gets to know himself.<sup>19</sup>

Through art as such, the self could find its connection with others. In other words, this unity of the self and the world meant the opening-up of the individual self to a broader scope incorporating the world. Grotowski expected this transcendence of the narrow selfhood to be the cure of the menace of loneliness and death.

To sum up, Grotowski believed that the unity of the self and the world could 'give mankind hope, ethical consciousness' and 'restore the meaning of

---

<sup>18</sup> Grotowski's idea of unity of the self and the world was inspired by the visions of the self in Hinduism and Hasidism. These sources had a direct impact on Grotowski's later work, and they will be fully analyzed in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

<sup>19</sup> 'Co to jest teatr?', *Dziennik Polski*, No 200, 23, 24 August 1959.

existence'.<sup>20</sup> The Grail, which leads to eternity, symbolizes the mission of Grotowski's theatre at the time. This idea of unity between the individual and the world was not totally irrelevant to Grotowski's concern about the realization of Polish Socialism. Nevertheless, Grotowski had played down his political stance, and addressed his concern in a more personal tone, which did not directly refer to any specific contemporary political or social issue. Grotowski's political disposition at this point was either muffled or disguised. On examining the political climate in Poland during this time, we find that it roughly followed a series of events in General Gomułka's 'retreat from October'.<sup>21</sup> The shift in Grotowski's thematic concerns and the changes in the reigning political climate were not purely coincidental. Although the political involvement was implicit in what Grotowski tried to achieve through his theatre, the contemporary political climate in Poland definitely played a significant part in Grotowski's theatre practice since it had become omnipresent in what he chose to avoid.

How did Grotowski convey his central motif, the unity of the self and the world, to the audience in his theatre? At this point in his career, Grotowski

---

<sup>20</sup> Grotowski, 'Twórcze ambicje teatru', *Współczesność*, No 29/19, 16-30 November 1958, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> 'Retreat from October' refers to General Gomułka's actions to cool down the revolutionary fervour during the Polish October. See M. K. Dziewanowski, *Poland in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, p. 186.

envisaged that the future of the theatre should be 'the development of the philosophical, intellectual, and anti-naturalistic mise-en-scène'.<sup>22</sup> In such theatre, the director's intellectual and philosophical ideas could be directly revealed. In this thesis, I will simply refer to it as 'the intellectual mise-en-scène'. Grotowski considered this intellectual mise-en-scène to be the essential and significant factor in distinguishing the theatre of the twentieth century from that of the nineteenth. Through the notion of the nineteenth-century mise-en-scène, which 'incorporated nothing more than the festivity of costumes, display, decorations, technique, their efficacy and pace of change', a more or less deformed illusion of reality was presented in the theatre.<sup>23</sup> The twentieth-century notion of the mise-en-scène, that is, the intellectual mise-en-scène, was not intended to present any illusion of reality.<sup>24</sup> It spoke directly to the audience 'without concealing that it consciously or even provocatively attacks the audience with its ideas'.<sup>25</sup> The intellectual mise-en-scène was not the representation of reality but the means whereby Grotowski

---

<sup>22</sup> See Grotowski, 'Wokół teatru przyszłości', *Ekran*, No 21, 24 May 1959.

<sup>23</sup> Grotowski, 'Twórcze ambicje teatru', *Współczesność*, No 29/19, 16-30 November 1958, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* Grotowski considered that this intellectual (and philosophical) mise-en-scène was theoretically and most of all practically developed in the first half of the twentieth century by 'Craig, Schiller, Reinhardt, Meyerhold, Tairov, Brecht and, from amongst living directors, Burian and Piscator'.

<sup>25</sup> Grotowski, 'Twórcze ambicje teatru', *Współczesność*, No 29/19, 16-30 November 1958, p. 3.

made his point, the necessity of the unity of the self and the world, to the audience in his theatre.

The intellectual *mise-en-scène* required a renewal of the relationship between theatre practice and the playtext. For Grotowski, the idea of faithful interpretation or even adaptation of a play was never the issue. What he put on stage was not the play itself, but his own perspectives, arguments or speculations on the issues which he picked up in the play. Jerzy Falkowski described how Grotowski dealt with the playtext:

He is aggressive toward the play he is working on, tearing it apart, stitching it together, touching it up, transposing, supplementing, etc... Grotowski wants to say a great deal in the theatre.<sup>26</sup>

Grotowski's treatment of the playtext can be examined through his productions at the time, including *Gods of Rain* (*Bogowie deszczu*, 4 July 1958), *The Ill-Fated* (*Pechowców*, 8 November 1958) and *Uncle Vanya* (*Wujaszek Wania*, 14 March 1959).<sup>27</sup> It was not coincidental that Grotowski included Meyerhold's epigraph in the programme of *Gods of Rain*: 'To

---

<sup>26</sup> In Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> Before *Gods of Rain*, there were another two productions co-directed or directed by Grotowski: the first one was *The Chairs* (*Krzeseła*) by Ionesco, which opened in June 1957. He co-directed *The Chairs* with Aleksandra Mianowska. It was indeed the first stage production of this play in Poland, translated and published in April 1957. Since this production was co-directed by two directors, I exclude it from my discussion here. The second production before *Gods of Rain* was *The Woman is a Devil* (*Kobieta jest diabłem*) by Prosper Mérimée. Grotowski directed this production as his master's project at school. However, little is known about this production. See Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 24.

choose a play does not necessarily mean to share the playwright's views.' As far as the adaptation of the playtext was concerned, Grotowski was indebted to Meyerhold. Moreover, Grotowski's productions usually included more than one literary source. Apart from the playtext, he also adapted poems and novels. He assembled elements from different sources to support the arguments in his intellectual *mise-en-scène*. For example, in *Gods of Rain*, beside the playtext from *The Ill-Fated Family* (*Rodzina pechowców*) by Jerzy Krzysztoń, Grotowski used many different minor sources, including poems by Andrzej Bursa, Bohdan Drozdowski, and Tadeusz Różewicz. He also used quotations from Shakespeare's plays, and newspaper stories by Jerzy Lovell and Stanisław Manturzewski. In addition, there was a filmed prologue constructed from scenes in Tadeusz Makarczyński's experimental film entitled *Life Is Beautiful* (*Życie jest piękne*) together with other films and newsreels.<sup>28</sup> Another example of how Grotowski assembled elements from different sources can be seen in his next production *The Ill-Fated*, which was also based on the play *The Ill-Fated Family* by Jerzy Krzysztoń. In this production, Grotowski interwove Krzysztoń's script with fragments of memoirs entitled *Tortures* by the Algerian journalist Henri Alleg. Each act of this production began with a reading of different fragments of Alleg's

---

<sup>28</sup> See the programme of *Gods of Rain*.

reminiscences of his tortures in prison.<sup>29</sup> Here we see the variety of the sources Grotowski utilized in one production. In the case of *Uncle Vanya*, it was not mentioned whether Grotowski incorporated other texts into Chekhov's play, but he rearranged its original structure. Zygmunt Greń reviewed Grotowski's *Uncle Vanya* and accused him of turning the original play 'upside down'.<sup>30</sup>

Grotowski raised the autonomy of theatre by regarding theatre as the art of mise-en-scène, and re-defined the relationship between theatre and literature.<sup>31</sup> On the one hand, he freed theatre from its conventional position as subordinate to literature. On the other hand, he also emphasized that theatre and drama were not mutually exclusive 'because they belong to two different areas of arts' and that 'creative theatre forms its artistic result not so much on the frame of literature but on the literary topic'.<sup>32</sup> According to this

---

<sup>29</sup> See Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 25.

<sup>30</sup> 'It deprived Chekhov's bitter drama of all meaning... The structure of the play was turned upside down by the arrogant director...'. See Osiński, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> The call for the autonomy of theatre and the treatment of the playtext as a alterable part of the performance prevailed in Polish theatre practice during the period 1945 to 1949. Among the directors working at this time, Leon Schiller, considered by Grotowski as 'the apostle of the autonomous theatre', was an exemplary figure. Although this trend faded in the following years, it revived again after 1954. Therefore, Grotowski's treatment of the playtext was not the sole example in Polish theatre practice at the time. See Konstanty Puzyna, 'Approaches to Staging', *Dialog*, Special Issue, 1970, pp. 135-41; see also Eugenio Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, Trans. Judy Barba, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 1999, p. 159.

<sup>32</sup> Grotowski, 'Twórcze ambicje teatru', *Współczesność*, 16-30 November 1958, No 29/19, p. 3.

approach therefore, literature could only offer the theatre topics.<sup>33</sup> It is better to understand Grotowski's attitude towards the playtext as one component necessary for the realization of the intellectual mise-en-scène rather than as disrespect for the playwright. Grotowski's view that the intellectual, philosophical and anti-naturalistic mise-en-scène was the essence of the theatre, was certainly reflected in the three productions produced at this time. Although it is impossible to know exactly what their shaping was like, the scenography can give us a clue. The main issue of Grotowski's *Gods of Rain* was the problem of those who survived the Second World War when they were in their twenties – 'the difficult generation', as it was known. In this production, Grotowski divided the stage into three areas. The central area, which was called 'the action of the play' (*Akcja sztuki*), was where main scenes from Krzysztoń's drama took place. There were also two side areas where all the other texts were presented. One of them was called 'the problem analysis' (*Analiza problemu*). The other one, used for intimate reflections, was called 'the tower of longing' (*Wieża tęsknot*).<sup>34</sup> The division of the stage

---

<sup>33</sup> Notably, starting from *Gods of Rain* to *The Constant Prince*, Grotowski put in each programme 'według' the playwright, which means 'after' or 'according to' the playwright, rather than 'by' the playwright. He even thought of creating a spectacle based entirely on authentic court cases rather than literary texts. See Grotowski, 'Z Jerzym Grotowskim o teatrze,' *Współczesność*, No 30/20, 1-15 December 1958. However, except for the last production *Apocalypse Cum Figuris*, each of Grotowski's productions was mainly based on one play. Even in *Apocalypse Cum Figuris*, the topics were still from the Scriptures and several literary texts.

<sup>34</sup> See Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 25.

also suggested that some scenes, which did not belong to the action of the play, functioned as the analysis of the main issue or as individual reflection. In *Uncle Vanya*, there was a revolving stage with two settings which represented 'nature' and 'construction' respectively and embodied Grotowski's main argument: 'the conflict between "nature" and "construction", between those who "participate in nature" and "help create it" and those who, alienated and lifeless, poison themselves and others'.<sup>35</sup> This not only demonstrated the nature of Grotowski's theatre as the intellectual *mise-en-scène*, but also recalled Grotowski's concern about the unit of the self and the world.

In both the productions mentioned above, costumes were 'an imitation of present-day dress' and the setting was quite simple, even symbolic. Neither suggested a specific time or place. Apparently, the intention was to turn individual issues into universal ones. Grotowski edited the pieces from different sources, applied a 'forum' to the stage where arguments drawn from various sources could be made, and deprived the make-up, costume and setting of their specific reference. All these aided Grotowski in conveying to the audience his reflections upon the various subjects he treated, that is, in achieving his idea of the intellectual *mise-en-scène*.

---

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Grotowski offered the audience his reflections on the play more than the play itself. It resulted in a theatre dominated by the monologue of the director, who was keen on presenting his own perspectives on stage. It left the audience less room to contemplate the play than to confront the director's opinions directly. Staging his own speculation on the play, Grotowski did not offer an open debate but a closed discourse with a pre-arranged conclusion. Consequently, the audience was merely a weak recipient. Also, the audience's responses to these productions were by and large negative. Grotowski's approach attracted severe attacks, especially his treatment of the playtext. Take *Uncle Vanya* as an example. Some critics accused Grotowski of depriving Chekhov's bitter drama of all meaning.<sup>36</sup> Others were not impressed by his theatre, which transmitted only pure, intellectual ideas. Henryk Vogler reviewed the production:

Grotowski presents conflicts of ideas, not conflicts among people. In this closed world, structured with almost mathematical precision, there takes place an intellectual discussion, not a moving drama.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, Ludwik Flaszen, a then famous critic who subsequently became Grotowski's collaborator, characterized Grotowski's *Uncle Vanya* as 'a rational discipline of thought, alien to all emotionalism and psychological

---

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

acting'. He also pointed out that the protagonists were no longer characters but 'carriers of pure extracts of human attitudes to life' and 'the very essence of thought'. Flaszyn sarcastically commented that Grotowski had turned Chekhov into 'a young village teacher from the positivist era' and concluded that 'Chekhov should be played the way it ought to be played, or it mustn't be played at all'.<sup>38</sup> These negative responses may reflect the audience's reactionary attitudes towards the avant-garde theatre, but may also reflect the deficiency of Grotowski's embodiment of the intellectual *mise-en-scène*. One can present the idea itself on the stage, but the audience may not appreciate the ready-made answers. If one wants to affect the thoughts of others, the last thing to do is to tell them how to think. Grotowski might have been eloquent through the stage, but it is doubtful whether the spectators were affected by his discourse. In other words, as far as the one-way dictatorial inculcation ascribed to the director is concerned, the audience was probably impressed more by Grotowski's formal innovations than by his arguments as transmitted in the productions. Thus, to realize his idea of the intellectual *mise-en-scène*, Grotowski had to find another strategy for dealing with the audience. About two months after the première of *Uncle Vanya*, he proposed a more interactive

---

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

form of theatre in which the responses of the audience were anticipated. This was developed when Grotowski was in charge of the Theatre of 13 Rows.

### **1.3 Direct Contact between the Stage and the Audience**

In the beginning of spring 1959, Ludwik Flaszen was approached by the authorities with the proposal that he take over the Theatre of 13 Rows (*Teatr 13 Rzędów*) in Opole, which had just closed down due to financial problems. Since Flaszen did not specialize in theatre directing, he contacted Grotowski and offered him the directorship. Based on their consensus on pursuing an alternative theatre to replace the conventional theatre, Flaszen and Grotowski proposed an experimental theatre and won the financial support of the authorities. In May 1959, Grotowski became the artistic director of the Theatre of 13 Rows, with Flaszen as the literary director.<sup>39</sup> Grotowski's long-term collaboration with a more or less consistent group of actors began at this stage, and this helped to further his steady exploration of reshaping theatre. Because he was not satisfied with his previous productions, Grotowski began to pay more attention to the interaction between the stage and the audience so as to implement the proposed intellectual *mise-en-scène*.

---

<sup>39</sup> For more detailed information about the inauguration of the Theatre of 13 Rows see Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, pp. 36-7 and Jennifer Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*. London: Methuen, 1985, pp. 7-9.

In his article 'About the Theatre in the Future' (24 May 1959), Grotowski emphasized that the approach to the theatre in the future should be, on the one hand, 'the development of the philosophical, intellectual and anti-naturalistic *mise-en-scène*' and, on the other hand, 'an increase in the amount and variety of direct contact between the stage and the audience, a gradual metamorphosis of the spectacle resulting in its becoming more of a dialogue and less of a traditional spectacle'.<sup>40</sup> Obviously, the latter, that is, direct contact between the stage and the audience (*bezpośredniego kontaktu pomiędzy sceną a widownią*), was his new task.<sup>41</sup> About one month later, Grotowski reiterated the same idea in another article 'The Death and Reincarnation of Theatre' and introduced the term 'neo-theatre' to his new scheme of theatre, by which he meant 'a direct contact, communion of attitudes, between the audience and the stage'.<sup>42</sup>

Grotowski legitimated his neo-theatre by predicting the decline of the conventional theatre which he ascribed to the birth of cinema and television. He believed that the death of the theatre was inevitable if the theatre

---

<sup>40</sup> 'Wokół teatru przyszłości', *Ekran*, No 21, 24 May 1959.

<sup>41</sup> In an interview published in December 1958, Grotowski mentioned many ideas that influenced his theatre. Among them was the idea of theatre being a dialogue between stage and audience. It had caught Grotowski's attention, but obviously had not yet become central to his practice at the time. See Grotowski, 'Z Jerzym Grotowskim o teatrze,' *Współczesność*, No 30/20, 1-15 December 1958. It was not until Grotowski's neo-theatre scheme that direct contact between the stage and the audience appeared among Grotowski's central arguments on reshaping theatre.

continued to function as 'the art of the fact' (*sztuki faktu*), that is, the imitation of real life. Grotowski then claimed that the survival of the theatre lay in the 'direct contact between the viewer and the individual actor, this real-life contact, non-existent in the cinema or TV'.<sup>43</sup> By regarding direct contact as the defining formal characteristic of theatre, Grotowski significantly distinguished theatre from cinema and television, which he saw as the art of fact.

Direct contact between the stage and the audience involves two aspects. The first concerns the staging which is intended to make contact with the audience. This part can be arranged during rehearsals. The second one is undoubtedly the live response of the audience. Obviously, this is much more difficult to manipulate than the first part. While characterizing the neo-theatre as direct contact, Grotowski wrote:

Theatre has kept its last two aces... The first is the advantage of a real person as an actor, a real living person who can spontaneously respond to the reactions of the audience... The second is the advantage of modern props which, relying on and using the fact that there are real people at each end of the stage, can lead to their direct contact. Thus, the unplayed ace of theatre, its last chance (and at the same time the message of neo-theatre) is this unique possibility of direct contact between the audience and the stage.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> 'Śmierć i reinkarnacja teatru', *Współczesność*, No 13, 1-15 July 1959.

<sup>43</sup> 'Wokół teatru przyszłości', *Ekran*, No 21, 24 May 1959.

<sup>44</sup> 'Śmierć i reinkarnacja teatru', *Współczesność*, No 13, 1-15 July 1959.

Both the living person responding to the audience and the interactive use of modern technology could be incorporated into the *mise-en-scène* as an invitation for direct contact between the stage and the audience. In addition, Grotowski pointed out that these means of facilitating direct contact had occasionally appeared in contemporary theatre, for example, 'in Brecht's songs, as a director-host in Piscator's work, the audience as an element of the staging in Meyerhold, the projection of the text directly into the audience in Tairov, etc.'<sup>45</sup> He claimed that his neo-theatre would take advantage of these means 'consistently and with a specific cognitive plan'.<sup>46</sup>

While formulating the idea of direct contact, Grotowski also took the response of the audience into account. By audience responses, Grotowski meant 'hand-clapping, whispering and tension in the air – things almost unidentifiable yet so obvious and meaningful in the theatre', which remained within 'the realm of non-verbal communication'.<sup>47</sup> To manipulate the audience's response, Grotowski proposed 'the possible direct conversation between the stage and the audience, with the partly pre-planned yet still improvisational response of the stage'.<sup>48</sup> Grotowski thought up a series of

---

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

possible responses from the audience so that he could prepare his actor's response to them. This half-planned improvisation was not entirely spontaneous but it helped to establish contact between the stage and the audience. Although Grotowski had developed quite substantial ideas to facilitate direct contact between the stage and the audience, it is more important to see how these ideas were realized in his practice. Grotowski's neo-theatre scheme mainly covered the period from May 1959 to May 1960, during which he directed *Orpheus* (*Orfeusz*, 8 October 1959) and *Cain* (*Kain*, 30 January 1960) at the Theatre of 13 Rows, and *Faust* (13 April 1960) at the Polski Theatre in Poznań.<sup>49</sup> Essential to Grotowski's practice during this period was his creative attitude towards the playtext, which he saw as instrumental in revealing his ultimate concern with the unity of the self and the world. Grotowski even directly addressed his concern to the audience in the concluding epilogues of *Orpheus* and *Cain*. *Orpheus* was after the playtext by Jean Cocteau (1889-1963). By altering the prayer ending in Cocteau's text, Grotowski revealed his own concern:

We thank you...world, that you dance your order, the order of your laws and the order of our intellect, which is capable of absorbing your laws... We thank you, world, that we possess consciousness which permits us to overcome death: to understand our eternity contained in

---

<sup>49</sup> More details about these productions can be found in Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, pp. 38-43, and Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 19-25.

your eternity. And that love is the tutor... We thank you, world, that you exist.<sup>50</sup>

This passage so straightforwardly reflects the idea of unity that it sounds like a direct citation from Grotowski's statement. The production *Cain* was based on Byron's playtext. Grotowski argued that he chose *Cain* 'because it was as if the whole world and the entire life of mankind were contained in it'.<sup>51</sup> According to Flaszen, Grotowski transferred the theme of *Cain* from a religious level to a purely secular one:

The place of God is taken by Alpha – the impersonation of the Elements, of the automatism of Nature's forces, which act blindly and relentlessly; the place of Lucifer is taken by Omega, the impersonation of Reason, of the restlessness of human awareness.<sup>52</sup>

The final act of Grotowski's *Cain* was a dance celebrating 'the world of unity', in which 'Alpha turned out to be Omega, and everyone then put on Alpha-Omega masks'.<sup>53</sup> This ending also signifies the unity of the self and the world.

There are very limited references to Grotowski's next production *Faust*, which was his only production outside the Theatre of 13 Rows after he

---

<sup>50</sup> In Kumiega, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>51</sup> In Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 39. Flaszen also pointed out that *Cain* had seemed to them important 'not because of its solutions, or rather the lack of them, but because of the range of the problems it raises'. See Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 22-3.

<sup>52</sup> Flaszen in Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 23.

<sup>53</sup> Osiński, *op. cit.*, p. 39. Also see Bolesław Taborski, *Byron and the Theatre*. Salzburg: University of Salzburg, 1972, p. 357.

became its artistic director. Maria Kofta described Grotowski's *Faust*, as 'a radical unhistoricization of the costumes, intellectual brevity, loading the Goethe text with contemporary philosophical problems (Freud, existentialism), and the elimination of mythology from the heavens'.<sup>54</sup> It seemed that the theme of this production still followed Grotowski's attempt to find a secular replacement for religion.

Bearing in mind the continuation of Grotowski's central concern in his productions, we are ready to examine how and to what extent Grotowski realized his idea of direct contact between the stage and the audience in his productions. Unfortunately, reviewers of *Orpheus* and *Faust* did not mention any conscious arrangement to facilitate direct contact between the stage and the audience. However, Bolesław Taborski noted that the actors in *Cain* 'often address their questions and answers directly to the audience'.<sup>55</sup> This was deliberately done by casting the audience in the role of the descendant of Cain.<sup>56</sup> By so doing, Grotowski intended to involve the audience in the conversation between the actors. Moreover, the 'stage curtain was not used and two of the actors (playing Cain and Omega) made brief and limited forays

---

<sup>54</sup> In Osiński, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>55</sup> Taborski, *op. cit.*, p. 363.

<sup>56</sup> According to Eugenio Barba, the audience was assigned the role of the descendant of Cain – 'present but remote and difficult to approach'. See Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 24.

into the spectator areas'.<sup>57</sup> Here Grotowski attempted to blur the spatial separation between the stage and the audience so as to facilitate direct contact between the two. Nevertheless, these arrangements were unilateral and hardly systematic. What is more, although acclaimed by Grotowski as the 'last chance' of the theatre to overcome cinema and television, direct contact between the stage and the audience was still subject to his idea of theatre as the intellectual *mise-en-scène* advocating the unity of the self and world. It is not until the later phase of Grotowski's work that direct contact in its own right became a central element of his theatre.

Another characteristic feature of Grotowski's productions during the neo-theatre period was the alternating sequences of the tragic and the grotesque. Osiński summarized the reviews of *Orpheus* and pointed out the dual rhythm in this production: 'grotesque sequences alternated with very serious moments'.<sup>58</sup> The same arrangement could also be found in *Cain*. According to Osiński, 'Byron's poetry was treated variously: sometimes fragments were handled seriously; at other times they were parodied'.<sup>59</sup> The first time Grotowski mentioned this peculiar dual rhythm in his production was in an interview two weeks after the première of *Orpheus*:

---

<sup>57</sup> Kumiega, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>58</sup> Osiński, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

We have no wish to perpetuate absurdism, we see and want to find some kind of hope. Translated into the terms of theatre this hope can be found between the two extremes of reality: the tragic and the grotesque. We undertake this search in our own name, and not that of the author, which by no means implies a disrespect of playwrights.<sup>60</sup>

The same point was reiterated by Flaszen in the programme of *Cain*: ‘*Grotowski’s production... proposes solutions decidedly polemical in relation to existentialism and its absolute pessimism*’.<sup>61</sup> (Flaszen’s italics.) Flaszen continued to explain that ‘the pathos of absolute pessimism’ deserves as much mockery as its polar opposite, and he concluded that ‘[f]or this reason, the form of the production is changeable, flickering: from seriousness to mockery, from tragedy to grotesque’.<sup>62</sup> Both Grotowski’s and Flaszen’s explanations suggest that this dual rhythm came from their intention to mock the pessimism of existentialism, behind which was the aim to re-establish the audience’s faith in the future in spite of the depressed mood in Poland after the retreat from the Polish October in 1957.

In fact, the alternating sequences of the tragic and the grotesque originated from Grotowski’s re-interpretation of the classical text, especially his disagreement with the playwright’s view, which he expressed by mocking the playtext. For instance, in an article published three months before the

---

<sup>60</sup> Grotowski, ‘11 pytań o “13 Rzędów”’, *Echo Krakowa*, No. 248, 25 October 1959. The translation here is Kumiega’s. See Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 21.

<sup>61</sup> Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 22-3.

<sup>62</sup> Taborski, *Byron and the Theatre*, p. 353.

première of *Orpheus*, Grotowski criticized the presentation of heroic despair on the stage and accused it of being a substitution for real action in life. He suggested that heroic despair would not help an audience to live, but would offer the audience 'a kind of unhealthy satisfaction', which saved them from real action.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, to prevent the audience from succumbing to pessimism, Grotowski mocked the passive tragic themes in the playtext in order to indicate his disagreement or, in Osiński's words, to create 'a debate' with the playwright.<sup>64</sup> In Grotowski's later work, the alternating tragic and grotesque sequences evolved subsequently into a more subtle version which turned out to be a characteristic feature of Grotowski's productions. I shall return to it in Chapter 2.

Grotowski believed that direct contact between the stage and the audience could make the theatre a unique autonomous form distinguishable from other artistic categories, that is, literature, television and cinema. Although seen by Grotowski as the crucial element of his neo-theatre, direct contact between the stage and the audience was a practical device instrumental in the realization of the intellectual *mise-en-scène* advocating the unity of the self and world. That is, the central structure of Grotowski's

---

<sup>63</sup> Grotowski, 'Śmierć i reinkarnacja teatru', *Współczesność*, No 13, 1-15 July 1959.

<sup>64</sup> Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 38.

theatre was still the intellectual *mise-en-scène*. In 1965, Grotowski commented on his work during this period, showing how he made a breakthrough which brought his work to the next phase of development:

For several years, I vacillated between practice-born impulses and the application of **a priori** principles, without seeing the contradiction. My friend and colleague Ludwik Flaszen was the first to point out this confusion in my work... Since 1960, my emphasis has been on methodology.<sup>65</sup>

The fact that Grotowski put aside his idea of the intellectual *mise-en-scène* as a dogmatic principle of his practice and concentrated on the realization of direct contact between the stage and the audience significantly contributed to the subsequent development of his work.

#### **1.4 Theatre incorporating Ritual Spectacle**

Grotowski's pursuit of a new form of theatre was motivated by his intention to revitalize the social function of the theatre so that theatre would bring about social change. From this point of view, the primitive ritual, which played a pivotal part in consolidating tribal societies and was regarded as the first form of theatre, served as a model for Grotowski's ideal theatre. Grotowski not only showed in his writings his profound interest in ritual, mystery and shamanism, but also his desire to obtain access to the relevant

materials.<sup>66</sup> Grotowski was keen on introducing interactive participation into his theatre. Yet, he avoided the religious reference in ritual, such as the evoking of the deity, spirit and any other form of supreme being. Grotowski referred to his ideal theatre with ritual-like active participation as 'ritual theatre'. What Grotowski referred to was specifically the theatre in which performers and spectators were mixed and mingled so that they occupied the same space without any separation, just as happened in ritual. For the clarity of my argument, I refer to it as the theatre with ritual spectacle instead of using Grotowski's term. By ritual spectacle I mean that the whole space is not divided by establishing the theatrical illusion in any part of the space to represent somewhere else, despite there still being an allocation of different spaces for the performer and for the audience respectively. Moreover, when referring to the ritual spectacle, I also imply that every participant in the spectacle is supposed to play a part, either actively or passively, and that nobody is allowed to watch from a hidden corner exempted from involvement. In the theatre with ritual spectacle, the performance is not an imitation of

---

<sup>65</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*. London: Methuen, 1968, p. 18. The boldface is Grotowski's.

<sup>66</sup> In a conference on Grotowski's work from 1959 to 1969, held in Pontedera in October 2001, Flaszen pointed out that Grotowski's interest in the rituals from different cultures was initiated by a book, *The Original Theatre* (Leningrad, 1959), in which ritual is considered as the primitive form of theatre. Also according to Bruno Chojak, the technician who worked in Grotowski's troupe, a documentary film on rites in Haiti, entitled *Divine Horsemen*, had attracted Grotowski's attention. In the following years Grotowski became acquainted with many works on ritual, myth and shamanism by contemporary psychologists and social anthropologists, such as Jung, Durkheim, Mauss, Eliade and so on. See Section 2.4.

reality. Grotowski insisted that the essence of this theatre should be no more than play (*zabawa*) in the sense of a role-playing game, where the audience is constantly aware of the actor's overt role-playing trick. To avoid ambiguity, I refer to this essential requirement proposed by Grotowski as the game.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, Grotowski believed that the audience should be prompted to join in the role-playing game together with the actor. He also re-arranged the theatre space in order to diminish the physical distance between the stage and the audience, and even to mix up the actor and the audience. Grotowski's effort to incorporate ritual spectacle into his theatre was clearly reflected in his productions *Mystery Bouffe* (*Misterium Buffo*, 31 July 1960), *Sakuntala* (*Siakuntala*, 13 December 1960), and *Forefathers' Eve* (*Dziady*, 18 June 1961). By studying these productions and focusing on their formal evolution, we shall be able to understand how Grotowski gradually elaborated his theatre in the light of ritual.

Grotowski's *Mystery Bouffe* was a parody of mystery plays. It was mainly composed of two plays by the Russian futurist poet Vladimir Vladimirovich

---

<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Grotowski's idea of the game to demolish the theatrical illusion may well have been presented in his essay 'Between "Game" and the Attitude Toward Reality' (*Między 'zabawą' a postawą wobec rzeczywistości*), which Grotowski submitted, together with other essays, to the State School of Dramatic Arts in October 1960. However, without access to this unpublished essay, I shall examine Grotowski's idea of game through his productions. See Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 49. (The title was translated as 'Between "Play" and the Attitude Toward Reality' in the English translation of Osiński's book. However, for the consistency of my terms in this thesis, I have translated it as 'Between "Game" and the Attitude Towards Reality'.)

Mayakovsky (1893-1930), *Mystery Bouffe* and *The Bath House*, with the latter dominating. Besides, Grotowski also included some fragments of the Polish medieval mystery plays into the prologue and epilogue. Mayakovsky's *Mystery Bouffe* is a parody of the Biblical story of the ark. Seven pairs of the Clean, who are various bourgeois characters, and seven pairs of the Unclean, who are the workers, are on the ark searching for refuge from the flood. The Unclean throw overboard the Clean, who try to command them. They journey through hell, where they leave the Clean, and then travel to heaven. Nevertheless, they feel disgust for heaven and claim: 'We ourselves are Christ and Saviour.' Finally they arrive at a communist promised land, the true paradise for the proletarians. Mayakovsky's *Mystery Bouffe* is indeed a communist version of a medieval mystery with, in addition, elements of farce and blasphemy. Mayakovsky finished the play in 1918, and it was dedicated to the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. He revised the play in 1921 to keep the issues of the play alive and stimulating. By contrast, *The Bath House*, Mayakovsky's last play written in 1930, is an unconcealed satire on Soviet bureaucracy. An inventor of the time machine brings back the Phosphorescent Lady from the future. She praises some glorious deeds which will lead to a communist future and comments pointedly on contemporary

bureaucrats. The play ends with rejection of the bureaucrats by the future, that is, the time machine. *The Bath House* was severely attacked by the communist party for its overt criticism of communist bureaucracy and Mayakovsky committed suicide shortly afterwards.

Compared with his previous productions, the theme of Grotowski's *Mystery Bouffe* was undoubtedly more specific and contemporary. It is possible that Grotowski disguised his own discontent with the Polish bureaucrats behind Mayakovsky's plays, especially *The Bath House*. Osiński considered this production as 'an overt thrust against opponents of the Theatre of 13 Rows', who attempted to close down Grotowski's theatre.<sup>68</sup> Yet, without knowing how Grotowski altered and staged Mayakovsky's text, it is not possible to pinpoint further his attitude towards the specific issues raised in the original plays. However, in terms of its form, this production was intrinsically a parodic game. Each actor played more than one role and sometimes even represented the object. Also, the props were used in an emblematic way to represent different objects and could even represent characters. Jerzy Falkowski reported on the production:

The actress who begins her part as the Lady, will return in a moment as the rebellious Unclean; she will also be the Devil, and the Angel, then a Secretary, and at the same time... a typewriter and a telephone. A tin

---

<sup>68</sup> *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 48.

bath-tub, according to its position on stage, can perform the function of the ark, a desk, a table in the theatre foyer, as well as an element of the 'time machine'. It is enough to turn around and grasp the shield, which serves to present characters in a certain way, and it becomes a rifle or a painter's palette. When the passage of time is to be marked, for instance a night that has passed, the shields are swayed rhythmically over the prostrate actors, to signify their sleep...<sup>69</sup>

According to Flaszen, 'the actor does not impersonate the performed character, but rather acts as if "beside" the role'.<sup>70</sup> Through the cabaret-like parody, or an overt game, Grotowski intended to shatter the aesthetic division between the stage and the audience, fostering the illusion created on the conventional stage. In other words, the stage in this production was meant to be aesthetically identical to the auditorium, in spite of their spatial detachment.

Meyerhold had staged in 1921 the revised version of *Mystery Bouffe* 'with the focus of action moved from the stage to the center of the auditorium'.<sup>71</sup> Meyerhold's and Mayakovsky's vision of how the theatre spectacle could be was well presented in the prologue of the 1921 version staged by the former:

... But then what makes you go to see a show? / You do it for pleasure – / isn't that so? / But is the pleasure really so great, after all, / if you're looking just at the stage? / The stage, you know, / is only one-third of the hall. / Therefore, / at an interesting show, / if things are

---

<sup>69</sup> Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 27-8.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>71</sup> Edward J. Brown, *Mayakovsky: A Poet in the Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 199.

set up properly, / your pleasure is multiplied by three. / But if the play isn't interesting, / then you're wasting your time / looking at even one-third of what's happening. / For other theatrical companies / the spectacle doesn't matter: / for them / the stage / is a keyhole without a key. / 'Just sit there quietly,' they say to you, / 'either straight or sidewise, / and look at a slice of other folks' lives.' / You look – and what do you see? / Uncle Vanya / and Auntie Manya / parked on a sofa as they chatter. / But we don't care / about uncles and aunts: / you can find them at home – or anywhere! / We, too, will show you life that's real – / very! / But life transformed by the theater into a spectacle most extraordinary!<sup>72</sup>

By mocking Stanislavsky's *Uncle Vanya* as an illusion created on the stage, Mayakovsky criticized the naturalistic stage which had turned the audience into peeping Toms, who gaze upon other people's lives. This excludes the audience from involvement in the stage process. Meyerhold's and Mayakovsky's vision of extending the stage action towards the auditorium can be regarded, if not as a direct spur, then as a relevant source for Grotowski's reflections on the possible relationship between the stage and the audience. However, in terms of the theatre architecture, Grotowski still adopted the conventional stage in this production. It is not until his subsequent production *Sakuntala* that he started to challenge the conventional spatial arrangement of the stage and the auditorium.

---

<sup>72</sup> *The Complete Plays of Vladimir Mayakovsky*, Trans. Guy Daniels. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968, pp. 45-6.

*Sakuntala* is an ancient Indian dramatic poem by Kalidasa (ca. 5<sup>th</sup> century AD).<sup>73</sup> Kalidasa's original text is, in Flaszen's words, 'somewhat naïve, a poeticized story of love'.<sup>74</sup> Grotowski adapted Kalidasa's text in his production and added texts from the *Kama-sutra*, an Indian sex code, and the *Book of Manu*, an Indian conventional book of customs, together with other ritual texts. Through the 'repeated confrontation between the sublimated poetry of love and the plain prose of ritual injunctions, customary laws and the sexual code', what Grotowski expressed in this production was the 'eternally valid paradoxes of love'.<sup>75</sup>

While staging this Indian romance, Grotowski introduced not only the Indian notions of the dualistic facets of love as the content of the production, but also considered the myth of Shiva, the god of dance in Hinduism, as the 'guideline' of his methodology. In his essay 'Playing Shiva' (*Gra w Sziwę*), which was written during the rehearsals of *Sakuntala*, Grotowski revealed how Indian aesthetics influenced his vision of the theatre.

If I had to define our scenic research in a single term I would refer to the myth of the Dance of Shiva... It is the dance that shatters every theatrical illusion, every 'verisimilitude with life' and at the same time

---

<sup>73</sup> Before this stage production, Grotowski had produced a radio version of *Sakuntala* in 1958. Grotowski's fascination with this scenario is definitely related to his interest in Indian philosophy, which played an indispensable role in his work as well as in his life. See Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, pp. 23-4.

<sup>74</sup> In Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 29.

<sup>75</sup> Flaszen in *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

nourishes the ambition (never satiated, of course) to retreat into oneself, absorbing and embracing human destiny in its totality... Ancient Indian theatre, like ancient Japanese and Greek theatre, was a ritual which identified itself with dance, mime and acting. The performance was not a 'presentation of reality' (the construction of an illusion), but a 'dance' of reality (an artificial construction, similar to a 'rhythmic vision' that recalls reality).<sup>76</sup>

The Indian theatre offered a distinctive model of how a theatre could be if it did not imitate reality, and hence became an important reference for Grotowski's exploration of the ritual spectacle. In fact, *Sakuntala* could be regarded as the realization of what he called 'the dance of reality'. In the programme notes to the production, Flaszen wrote:

For the theatre of the East is one of ritual, where performance constitutes a ceremony communicating with the spectator through conventional signs, and in which the division between stage and audience does not exist. The ritual theatre is the opposite of the theatre of illusion, in which there is portrayed on stage an ostensible picture of life, while the spectator views apart.<sup>77</sup>

Flaszen characterized the oriental theatre by its use of conventional signs and its lack of segregation between the stage and the audience. Both of them were the major objectives which Grotowski wished to achieve in *Sakuntala*. The conventional signs are, according to Grotowski, 'a kind of language, an ideogram of gesture and behavior', which was 'set by tradition' and repeated in the same way with each presentation.<sup>78</sup> Yet, he did not intend to

---

<sup>76</sup> Barba, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-5.

<sup>77</sup> In Kumiega, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>78</sup> In Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 51.

appropriate the conventional signs used in Indian theatre but, based on the same principle, to create new ideograms of gesture and movement as signs which did not imitate life-like action and could be repeated like dance in the performance. For example, as Flaszen pointed out in the programme notes, Grotowski used 'grotesque adaptation of yoga postures' and some movement considered to be 'graceful and formal'.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, the idea of adapting such conventional signs in this production was later considered as a failure by Grotowski himself and he retreated from this idea in the following production. The influence of established signs on Grotowski's vision of acting did not arise again until the later phases of his work.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, it would be more appropriate to discuss this issue later in this thesis, and here I will only focus on how Grotowski brought together the stage and the audience.

With *Sakuntala*, Grotowski started his collaboration with Jerzy Gurawski (1936- ) on the scenic arrangement. In this production, the main stage was located at the center of the space and the audience sat on two opposite sides of the main stage. On each side, a seat for the 'yogi-commentator' was placed behind the group of spectators and it was connected to the central main stage

---

<sup>79</sup> See Kumiega, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>80</sup> For more discussion on Grotowski's acting style inspired by the conventional signs in *Sakuntala*, see Chapter 3.

with an aisle directly passing through the auditorium. On the main stage the set consisted of a hemisphere and a phallic pillar.<sup>81</sup> *Sakuntala* was a further development of the realization of the ritual spectacle in the theatre, far more than *Mystery Bouffe*. The stage in *Sakuntala* was located 'within the auditorium'. It was to merge the stage and the audience physically into one, thereby attempting not only to renounce the verisimilitude of the naturalistic performance but also to blur the physical division between the stage and the audience.

In addition, Grotowski assigned some passive roles to the spectators, and the actors addressed spectators as if they were characters in the performance.<sup>82</sup> Grotowski considered 'the living, immediate presence of the viewer' as 'part of the playacting'.<sup>83</sup> By doing so, he introduced a role-playing game into his production, where both the actor and the audience had their characters to play and were to interact with each other through these characters during the performance. Moreover, the design of costumes and makeup was based on children's imaginary portraits of oriental knights, princes and ladies, decorated with various ingenuous graphic patterns in

---

<sup>81</sup> See illustrations of these designs in *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, pp. 47, 56 and 57.

<sup>82</sup> In Grotowski's *Sakuntala*, the spectators were treated as a crowd of monks and courtiers. See Eugenio Barba, 'Theatre Laboratory 13 Rzedow', *Tulane Drama Review* Vol.9, No.3, Spring 1965, p. 162.

<sup>83</sup> Grotowski in Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 49.

different colours.<sup>84</sup> This also made the production reminiscent of a children's game. Overall, Grotowski's *Sakuntala* could be seen literally as 'an invitation from the director to a game' and his troupe was literally 'playing' at oriental theatre.<sup>85</sup> The fact that this production was essentially a game cannot be overemphasized.

The involvement of the audience in a role-playing game and the incorporation of the stage into the auditorium were intended to shatter the aesthetic difference separating the stage and the audience, and to engage the audience in the proposed ritual spectacle. However, even though the stage was situated among the spectators, its physical, or architectural, confinement remained solid. It formed a theatre-in-the-round, but did not entirely destroy the idea of the stage separated from the audience. Thus Grotowski, together with Gurawski, made a radical design change for the subsequent production *Forefathers' Eve*.

Grotowski's production *Forefathers' Eve* was organized around the text by Adam Mickiewicz (1793-1855), who occupies a paramount position in the history of Polish literature and theatre as well as in the formation of the

---

<sup>84</sup> See Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 31. For the costume design and makeup see the illustration plates 10, 11, and 12 on pp. 28, 30 and 31 respectively.

<sup>85</sup> Flaszyn in Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 29.

Polish national identity.<sup>86</sup> Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, probably his most influential work, was based on a pre-Christian rite of ancestor worship in Lithuania, which consisted of evoking the spirits of the dead and offering them sustenance.<sup>87</sup> Through his dramatic poem, Mickiewicz intended to create a national 'Slavic Drama' which 'should unite all the elements of a truly national poetry'.<sup>88</sup> He considered ritual, especially the ritual concerning the spirits of the dead, as an indispensable aspect of his ideal drama which could 'transport us into the supernatural world'.<sup>89</sup> He also emphasized that the 'Slavic Drama' could only be realized on the stage in the future. Contemporary staging conventions, inadequate technology and the current theatre architecture were not able to provide what was required for such a ritual and poetic form of theatre. Hence, Mickiewicz required that 'Slavic

---

<sup>86</sup> Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* (*Dziady*) was written in four parts: parts I, II, and IV were written in 1823 and part III, probably the most influential part, was written in 1832, notably after the failure of the Polish November Insurrection in 1830. The theme of *Forefathers' Eve* has undoubtedly become the national myth of Poland: the state will be redeemed by a Messiah figure, and the sufferings of Poland, analogous to the crucifixion of Christ, will indeed save all the European countries from their hardship. See Harold B. Segel, *Polish Romantic Drama*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997, pp. 3-22. Also see Kathleen M. Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland 1954-1989*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996, pp. 6-9.

<sup>87</sup> The Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania formed the union The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569, which was one of the largest and most populous countries in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. The Commonwealth dissolved in 1795, shortly after Mickiewicz was born. Certain Polish and Lithuanian traditions were shared.

<sup>88</sup> Adam Mickiewicz 'Lecture on Slavic Literature: Lesson 16: 'Slavic Drama', 4 April 1843', Trans. Daniel Gerould, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (T111), Fall 1986, p. 93.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

poets who are creating drama must completely forget about the theatre and the stage' so as to achieve the 'Slavic Drama' for the future.<sup>90</sup>

Although he considered ritual to be a promising form for his theatre, Grotowski had no intention of using ritual as a channel to the supernatural world, as Mickiewicz had suggested. Instead, taking ritual as a model, Grotowski developed a physically and psychologically more interactive spectacle to continue his exploration of the ritual spectacle incorporated into theatre. In the programme of *Forefathers' Eve*, Flaszen wrote:

Why *Forefathers' Eve*? Because it shows how theatre is born of ritual... We do not want to show a world separated from the spectator by the frame of the stage, but instead we want to create the world anew *with* the spectator.<sup>91</sup>

This central idea was realized in *Forefathers' Eve* partly through the extraordinary arrangement of 'the stage' and 'the auditorium'. As the stage architect, Gurawski designed a very different space from the usual conventional one in that he scattered spectators around the whole space, but not necessarily in groups. Most of them faced different directions from each other and some were even isolated from each other.<sup>92</sup> On the floor were irregular shaped platforms of different heights so that all spectators could see

---

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>91</sup> In Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 53. The italics are Flaszen's.

<sup>92</sup> See the illustrations by Gurawski in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 125-9.

the actor. The actor performed in the space between the audience, which mingled the actor and the audience together. There was no 'solid' area can be defined as stage in conventional sense. This spatial arrangement, in Grotowski's words, 'eliminated the stage'.<sup>93</sup> In other words, Grotowski intended to shatter the spatial division between the stage and the audience by 'eliminating' the stage itself.

For Grotowski, the spectacle involving the audience was meant to be achieved not only through the spatial arrangement, but also through dissolving the audience's mental distance from the stage. He also set a role-playing game in *Forefathers' Eve*, as he had done in *Sakuntala*, to involve the audience. Grotowski pointed out that the duality of the ritual and the game was another aspect of Mickiewicz's text that most interested him. He said:

We want to expose the relationship between ritual and play: the actors begin the magic lore [*gusta*] as a kind of entertainment. From amongst the circle of spectators and actors they 'number out' [*wyliczają*] – according to the Mickiewicz text – the first leader of the chorus [who becomes the protagonist Gustav-Konrad later]... This game grows into something sacral, the participants call up the dead and immediately take their parts.<sup>94</sup>

Although Grotowski seemingly followed the same approach as Mickiewicz, the role-playing game in his production mainly functioned as the beginning of

---

<sup>93</sup> See Osiński, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>94</sup> In Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 37. The Polish originals are from Osiński, *Grotowski i jego Laboratorium*, pp. 91-3.

a participatory spectacle rather than the revival of the rite, as Mickiewicz had proposed. Moreover, Grotowski even demanded that the audience join in the action. In other words, the actors in roles not only directly talked to the spectators in roles, but also forced them, sometimes against their will, to act accordingly. Barba recalled what happened during the performance: three spectators, in their roles of shepherdesses and as the prey to the spirits of the dead 'were dragged out of the room by the actors amid the embarrassment and laughter of everyone'.<sup>95</sup> Meanwhile, the actors wore obviously 'fake' costume, including rugs, quilts and window curtains,<sup>96</sup> just as in a children's game. That is probably why Barba was struck by its 'unpolished' quality, when he saw this production.<sup>97</sup> The role-playing game in Grotowski's production was intended as a means of breaking down the audience's psychological detachment by dissolving its mental distance, a strategy which can be seen as a counterpart of the spatial arrangement eliminating the physical division between the stage and audience. One can say that theatre in general is intrinsically a matter of role-playing games. However, what should be emphasized here is that Grotowski consciously took advantage of the role-

---

<sup>95</sup> Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 20.

<sup>96</sup> According to Osiński, 'the actors wore seemingly makeshift garments: Gustav-Konrad in a cheap rug draped like a romantic cape; the Priest in a quilted comforter instead of a cassock; the men in trousers, shirts, and cravats from Mickiewicz's time, but in suspenders, without frock or dress coats; and the women with curtains draped over their shoulders like romantic mantles'. See *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 55.

playing game to formulate a participatory spectacle fostering his attempt to abolish the stage.

From his *Mystery Bouffe* and *Sakuntala* to *Forefathers' Eve*, Grotowski gradually introduced into his theatre active participation, which was for him a principal formal feature of ritual. On the one hand, he intended to shatter the aesthetic distance between the stage and the audience through parody and role-playing games. On the other hand, together with Gurawski, he diminished the physical distance between the stage and the audience by incorporating the stage into the auditorium in the case of *Sakuntala*, and attempting to abolish the stage in *Forefathers' Eve*. By these means, Grotowski intended to bring together the stage and the audience aesthetically as well as spatially to create a ritual spectacle in his theatre.

To sum up the very beginning of Grotowski's theatre work, it is important to note that the realization of an ideal Socialist society was in Grotowski's mind before he started his career as a theatre director, and it shaped how his theatre came into being. Contrary to the tradition of theatre as the imitation of reality, he saw the core of his theatre as the intellectual *mise-en-scène*, designated to inculcate ideas into the audience that would eventually lead to social change. However, in the political climate after

---

<sup>97</sup> Barba, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

Polish October, Grotowski toned down his appeal for Polish Socialism in his theatre and replaced it with the quest for the unity of the self and the world, which necessitated the liberation of the self from a confined individual sphere and encouraged the communion with others. It was how Grotowski got around politics to survive the hostile circumstances and to incorporate his concern about social issues in his work with an a-political gesture. In other words, this Polish context always played a part in Grotowski's work, one way or another, and it should not be overlooked.

In terms of the formal features of his theatre, Grotowski looked for a spontaneous form of conversation between the stage and the audience, which could effectively change the spectators' thoughts and feelings. Inspired by the theatre innovators of the twentieth century such as Meyerhold, Piscator and so on, Grotowski regarded direct contact between the stage and the audience as the key to the fulfillment of the intellectual *mise-en-scène*. Furthering this idea, he devised a series of experiments to incorporate certain formal features of ritual in his productions, so as to elicit the audience's active participation. Through these experiments, Grotowski realized that inculcation alone, even done through an interactive means, was inadequate for reshaping the spectators' collective consciousness. It was better not to inculcate personal

views directly but to reveal them in relation to, subject to or against, collective beliefs. This new development was ignited by a crucial incident which happened in Grotowski's dealing with the last part of his production of *Forefathers' Eve*, as will be analyzed in the next chapter.

## 2. THEATRE OF COLLECTIVE INTROSPECTION

The most famous and passionate scene in Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* is 'The Great Improvisation' (*Wielka Improwizacja; Forefathers' Eve* part III, scene ii), in which the protagonist Gustav-Konrad appeals with lines full of pathos to God for the fate of Poland and even challenges God when he receives no sign. In the later scenes, the suffering of Poland is justified as the necessary sacrifice for the welfare of the whole of Europe. Mickiewicz further expanded this vision of Poland as the Messiah of other European nations in his work *Books of the Polish Pilgrimage and Nation* published in 1832, the same year as *Forefathers' Eve* part III. This vision of the Polish Messiah has always been deeply rooted in Polish society. However, Grotowski challenged this vision in his production and considered 'The Great Improvisation' as 'good material to demonstrate the tragic and naïve qualities of Salvation, its Don Quixotism'.<sup>98</sup>

The protagonist (played by Zygmunt Molik), while delivering the passionate speech in question from 'The Great Improvisation', circled around the space weighed down by a broom on his back which mocked Jesus Christ carrying the cross on the way to Golgotha. In this same scene, the

protagonist's lines, which asked questions of God, were sung to the tune of a popular Polish hymn *Godzinki*, and the fall of the protagonist coincided with the sound of bells rung for mass.<sup>99</sup> Grotowski explained:

His [Gustav-Konrad's] pain is supposed to be authentic, his mission of salvation sincere, even full of tragedy; but his reactions are naïve, close to a childish drama of incapacity. ... We concentrate the entire meaning of the production in the scene, *The Great Improvisation*. In a narrow sense, one could talk about how suffering gives birth to the supernatural world or how lone rebellion encompassing everything is hopeless.<sup>100</sup>

Grotowski's treatment of 'The Great Improvisation' embodied his opposition to the idea that the sacrifice of one individual could save all others from suffering. In other words, Grotowski questioned Mickiewicz's vision of the Polish Messiah by playing on both its tragic and grotesque aspects. Grotowski said:

Through Mickiewicz's text we tried to illuminate the awkwardness of human judgement, absurd and thus tragi-grotesque behavior, as represented in superstition. The opportunity to show how a community creates its beliefs about the supernatural and how it acts these images out for itself, leads to an understanding of the truth of human ignorance and suffering.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Grotowski, 'Dziady jako model teatru nowoczesnego', *Współczesność*, No. 21, 1-15 November 1961, p. 8.

<sup>99</sup> See Grotowski 'Dziady jako model teatru nowoczesnego', *Współczesność*, No. 21, 1-15 November 1961, p. 8.

<sup>100</sup> In Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 54.

<sup>101</sup> 'Dziady jako model teatru nowoczesnego', *Współczesność*, No. 21, 1-15 November 1961, p. 8.

Taking into consideration how the vision of the Polish Messiah was deeply rooted in the Polish social consciousness, one can easily understand that Grotowski challenged not only Mickiewicz's vision but also a perception extensively accepted in Polish society. Grotowski confronted the spectators by questioning the national myth which justified and rationalized the suffering of Poland. He aimed to make the spectators aware of the fact that the suffering of their nation should not be accepted as a necessity and that the future of their nation would not be saved by the sacrifice of any individual as a saviour. The staging of 'The Great Improvisation' inspired Grotowski to reformulate his vision of the theatre, and he started to analyze the merits and inadequacy of this staging with an attempt to seek an ideal model of his theatre.

## **2.1 Archetype and Sacrilege**

Inspired by his dealings with 'The Great Improvisation', Grotowski realized that challenging common beliefs or traditional values in his production could be the key to the intellectual and emotional involvement of the audience. As a result, Grotowski proposed a new type of theatrical reform in a twenty-two-page pamphlet, *The Possibility of Theatre (Możliwość teatru)*

in February 1962, some eight months after the première of *Forefathers' Eve*. Since *The Possibility of Theatre* is probably Grotowski's most systematic revelation of his vision, it is worth taking a closer look at it. Grotowski first of all reiterated that he considered the characteristics of a performance to be:

- a) live and immediate contact between the spectators and the actors;
- b) the collective act; the actors and the spectators as a co-operative group or community;
- c) the lack of existence of any recording (in print, on tape, on material); growing from the meeting of the spectator [viewer] and the actor.<sup>102</sup>

Grotowski believed that all these characteristics had already begun to be established unconsciously in the early twentieth century, when forerunners such as Meyerhold, Piscator and others allowed their actors to intrude into the auditorium in performance and make direct contact with the audience. Grotowski intended to take advantage systematically of these characteristics in the type of theatre he envisaged. Notably, these characteristics closely followed his idea of theatre during the previous phases of his work, that is, when he experimented with direct contact between the stage and the audience. Grotowski's switch of 'the stage' to 'the actors' was a reasonable substitution made after his attempt to abolish the stage in *Forefathers' Eve*. In order to sustain the contact between the spectators and the actors, Grotowski believed

---

<sup>102</sup> Grotowski, *Możliwość Teatru*. Opole: February 1962, p. 2. There is no pagination in the original pamphlet. However, for the convenience of referencing, I numbered the pages.

that a central motif rooted in Polish society, such as the image of the Saviour in the last scene of his *Forefathers' Eve*, should be well established from the outset in order to foster the uniformity and consistency of the performance.<sup>103</sup> To elaborate and justify his belief, Grotowski took on Jung's notion of the 'archetype' to denote the collective beliefs or traditional values such as the image of the Saviour in 'The Great Improvisation'. Yet, Grotowski's notion of the archetype was different from Jung's.<sup>104</sup> Its meaning would be better understood through the context of Grotowski's writing, rather than through Jung's theory. Grotowski saw an archetype as 'a symbol, myth, motif, or vision rooted in national or cultural traditions etc., which preserves a value as a certain metaphor, a model of human destiny, or the human situations'.<sup>105</sup> Grotowski gave the following examples of archetypes embedded in Polish society:

The archetype of self-sacrifice, of the individual sacrificed for the community: Prometheus, 'God's lamb', Winkelried; the archetype of human-shaman, which is subject to demoniac power and appreciates the gaining of it: Faust, Twardowski, Einstein (in the popular image). An archetype was also partly manifest in 'the holy fool' [*Głupiego Jasia*],

---

<sup>103</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>104</sup> Grotowski was aware of the fact that his usage of Jung's term 'archetype' was very imprecise. He stressed that he used the word 'in a narrow meaning without the philosophical background', and that he did not consider the archetype as something which 'cannot be learnt or exists outside the history.' See *Możliwość Teatru*, p. 3.

<sup>105</sup> *Możliwość Teatru*, p. 3.

and 'the Knight-errant' [*blędnego rycerza*] – Don Quixote (as a symbol rather than literary work).<sup>106</sup>

Furthermore, Grotowski believed that an archetype was 'the symbolic form of a human's knowledge of himself, of which he is not... aware', and argued that the archetype is buried in the realm of the collective unconscious.<sup>107</sup> Although the archetype was to be, in Grotowski's words, 'distilled from' the playtext, he believed that an archetype did not exist objectively in the playtext and nor was the playwright always aware of it. In other words, the unearthing of the archetype in any playtext was reliant as much on the collective vision of society as on the playtext itself.<sup>108</sup>

Along with his contention that the central motif of a spectacle should be established around an archetype, just like the scene of 'The Great Improvisation' arranged around the vision of the Polish Messiah, Grotowski re-formulated the significance of performance as:

revealing the function of the archetype in the 'collective unconscious', 'striking' it, uncovering it in the movement and in the vibration, to secularize it, to regard it as a certain model – a metaphor of common

---

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Again, Grotowski did not intend to assume Jung's whole theory, and simply borrowed the term 'collective unconscious' from Jung for his own use. Grotowski explained: 'The term 'collective unconscious' does not denote here (distinct from the Jungian school) the sphere beyond-individual psyche, but it functions as a working metaphor; it is about the possible effect on the subconscious sphere of human life on the collective scale.' See *Możliwość Teatru*, p. 3.

<sup>108</sup> Grotowski believed that it is also possible to unearth several archetypes within one playtext, although he preferred to choose only one main archetype for each production. See *Możliwość Teatru*, p. 3.

human destiny, and to draw the archetype out from the 'collective unconscious' into the 'collective consciousness'.<sup>109</sup>

By 'striking' the archetype, Grotowski meant to challenge the accepted traditional perception of the sacred, lofty aspect of that archetype by unveiling its opposite aspect – its grotesque, absurd aspect. This was a further application of the alternating sequences of the tragic and the grotesque in his earlier productions, as has been pointed out in Section 1.3. However, Grotowski adopted the phrase 'the dialectics of derision and apotheosis' (*diaktyka ośmieszenia i apoteozy*) from Kudliński's review of Grotowski's treatment of 'The Great Improvisation', and used it to describe his method of exposing all the contradictory aspects of an archetype hidden inside the collective unconscious.<sup>110</sup> Grotowski quoted Flaszen in *The Possibility of Theatre* to explain how his method would work:

Theatre ceremony is a certain provocation which aims at striking the collective unconscious, that is, enacting the contradiction: laying out the clownish from the lofty as well as the noble from the vulgar... It guts one's common ideas and lets the audience perceive their relativity

---

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>110</sup> Barba suggested that *Sunyata* in Indian philosophy might be the source of Grotowski's dialectic method, which he first defined as 'the dialectic of affirming and surpassing' and which later, following Kudliński, he changed to 'the dialectic of apotheosis and derision'. See Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 49. The dialectic of derision and apotheosis is clearly originated from the dialectic of the tragic and the grotesque, a featuring characteristic of Grotowski's productions in the previous phase of his work. However, the distinction is that the dialectic of derision and apotheosis was consistently and systematically applied to one central issue, that is, the archetype presented in that production.

and oddness as well as the fact that, in spite of that relativity and oddness, they are not destined.<sup>111</sup>

By means of this complete exposure of the various aspects of an archetype, Grotowski urged his spectators to re-conceive things through those angles which they, or their collective unconscious, avoided 'on purpose'. In other words, Grotowski intended to establish the performance as an occasion of collective introspection, a process of unveiling something from the collective unconscious. Grotowski expected that the spectators be more mentally prepared for their action leading towards social reform. By introducing archetypes into the performance, Grotowski effectively brought together the spectators and the actors to undergo collective introspection.

Grotowski rephrased his notion of the archetype in the following years to avoid unnecessary confusion with Jung's. In a 1964 interview, Grotowski pointed out that his theatre had to count on a 'common ground' upon which the actors and the spectators could 'either dismiss in one gesture or jointly worship'.<sup>112</sup> He continued:

Therefore the theatre must attack what might be called the collective complexes of society, the core of the collective subconscious or perhaps super-conscious (it does not matter what we call it), the myths which are not an invention of the mind but are, so to speak, inherited through one's blood, religion, culture and climate. I am thinking of things that are so elementary and so intimately associated that it would

---

<sup>111</sup> *Możliwość Teatru*, p. 11.

<sup>112</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 42.

be difficult for us to submit them to a rational analysis. For instance, religious myths: the myth of Christ and Mary; biological myths: birth and death, love symbolism or, in a broader sense, Eros and Thanatos; national myths which it would be difficult to break down into formulas, yet whose very presence we feel in our blood when we read Part III of Mickiewicz's 'Forefathers' Eve', Słowacki's 'Kordian' or the Ave Maria.<sup>113</sup>

The 'collective complexes of society', 'the core of the collective subconscious' and the various myths 'inherited through one's blood, religion, culture and climate' all imply Grotowski's notion of the archetype although he avoided this term in the interview cited. On the other hand, Grotowski clearly clarified the relativity of his terms in his essay 'Towards a Poor Theatre' (1965):

When I speak of 'roots' or 'mythical soul,' I am asked about Nietzsche; if I call it 'group imagination,' Durkheim comes up; if I call it 'archetype,' Jung. But my formulations are not derived from humanistic disciplines, though I may use them for analysis.<sup>114</sup>

Grotowski incessantly rephrased his notion of the archetype to avoid the erroneous transfer of the notion from other disciplines to his own thoughts. His readers, then, had to be aware of the restricted meaning of his terminology, and it is in this restricted sense that the word 'archetype' is used to analyze Grotowski's work in this thesis.

---

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Since Grotowski's production *Kordian* (14 February 1962) was premièred in the same month as the printing of *The Possibility of Theatre*, it is reasonable to consider this production as a complementary source for examining Grotowski's vision at the time.<sup>115</sup> Grotowski's production was based on the romantic poet Juliusz Słowacki's play, which is arguably second only to Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* in the Polish canon of literature and theatre. Słowacki's *Kordian*, written in 1834, questioned the messianic ideal in Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*. In Słowacki's play, the protagonist Kordian (a near anagram of Konrad, the name of the protagonist in part III of *Forefathers' Eve*), who had an opportunity to assassinate the czar and become thereby a national redeemer, ultimately turned out to be an impotent figure. Słowacki was skeptical of the notion that a country might be saved through one hero's deed.<sup>116</sup> As Grotowski pointed out, the archetype in *Kordian* was a

---

<sup>115</sup> In *The Possibility of Theatre*, Grotowski reviewed his previous productions *Cain*, *Faust*, and *Sakuntala* in the light of his notions of archetype and of the dialectic of derision and apotheosis. For example, he retrospectively pointed out that the assumed archetype in *Faust* was human-shaman and that the dialectic of derision and apotheosis implemented in this production lay in the collision of archetypes with its contemporary mythological incarnation, scientist-shaman, Faust-Einstein. Yet these were actually reviews of Grotowski's previous productions from his new perspective instead of the actual working guidelines during the rehearsals. However, he definitely bore these ideas in mind when rehearsing *Kordian*. Hence, my focus would be on *Kordian* as an example of how Grotowski realized his new vision of theatre. See *Możliwość Teatru*, pp. 6-11.

<sup>116</sup> See Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, p. 234.

variant of the Polish Messiah, which can always be traced back to *Forefathers' Eve*.<sup>117</sup>

Grotowski built the main theme of his production solely around act III, scene vi of Słowacki's play, in which the protagonist is sent to a mental hospital. That is, in Grotowski's production the hospital became the backdrop for all acts of Słowacki's play. Thus, Kordian, the protagonist, gave his moving speech on the suffering of Poland, with full pathos, while undergoing serious surgery, rather than on Mont Blanc, as in the original play.<sup>118</sup> In this way, the lofty heroism exhibited in Słowacki's play collided with the cold and brutal surgery suggested by Grotowski's set, and Grotowski put the central figure into a paradoxical perspective: 'the one who is noble is most ill'. The juxtaposition of the heroic deed and the abnormal behaviour of mental obsession exemplified Grotowski's dialectic of derision and apotheosis, which questioned the protagonist's deed, and the way it was accepted in Polish society as purely noble and heroic. Barba, as a member of the audience at the time, perceived in Grotowski's production both 'a situation of heroism and abnegation' and 'a mocking irony'.<sup>119</sup> Another critic Jerzy Kwiatkowski described Grotowski's *Kordian* as a 'drama made of contrasts, contradictions,

---

<sup>117</sup> See *Możliwość Teatru*, p. 10.

<sup>118</sup> See Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, pp. 63-4.

<sup>119</sup> Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 28.

and clashes', which 'strives to achieve maximum aesthetic effect and to create maximum experience through shock'.<sup>120</sup> The shock of blasphemy was intended to disturb the audience no matter whether they agreed with the director's viewpoint or not. Thus, to challenge the audience's perception of a sanctified value effectively involved the audience emotionally and engaged them intellectually in that they were obliged to re-think their position. It confronted spectators with the shocking question whether the idea of the Polish Messiah was a heroic vision or a hallucination, and stung them into collective introspection analogous to a session of psychoanalysis.

In fact, Grotowski's revision of theatre practice dominated his subsequent productions, and informed his repertoire of productions as such. This meant that his subsequent productions adhered to those playtexts closely linked with Polish romanticism, in which traditional values, especially national myth, were explicitly enunciated and moulded. It was not until he recognized how the introduction of an archetype as central motif in performance could have such a great impact on the audience that he recognized the significance of including *Kordian* in his repertoire. Nevertheless, before examining further how archetypes operate in Grotowski's subsequent productions, it is necessary to discuss how

---

<sup>120</sup> In Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 65.

Grotowski's staging was closely bound up with his idea that theatre should challenge the audience's perception of an archetype.

## 2.2 The Uniform Formula

After his production of *Forefathers' Eve*, Grotowski enhanced the importance of the spectators' literal participation in the action by regarding such participation as a defining characteristic of his ideal theatre. In an interview published in November 1961, Grotowski reflected on the essentials of spectacle as exemplified by *Forefathers' Eve*:

...we arrange the collectivity, which is not divided into viewers and actors but rather into participants of the first and second order. The point is to have a collectivity subordinated to the rigors of ritual.<sup>121</sup>

The 'collectivity subordinated to the rigors of ritual' can be well understood as a rephrasing of Grotowski's earlier attempt to incorporate ritual spectacle in the theatre. This idea was further developed in *The Possibility of Theatre*, where Grotowski argued that the performance should be essentially an interaction between actors and spectators, or in his own words, 'a spark jumping between the two ensembles: the ensemble of the actors and that of the spectators'.<sup>122</sup> What is more, Grotowski understood that simply mingling

---

<sup>121</sup> In Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 54.

<sup>122</sup> *Możliwość Teatru*, p. 12.

the two groups together was inadequate, and called for the 'uniform spatial formula for two ensembles' (*wspólnej formuły przestrzennej dwu ensemble*) as a key to the staging of a production, which would prevent the contact between the two groups from being discretionary.<sup>123</sup> At first glance, the 'uniform formula' can be understood as the spatial arrangement which eliminates the boundary between the stage and the auditorium, as Grotowski had realized in *Forefathers' Eve*. Nevertheless, what Grotowski emphasized in this formula was not the spatial arrangement itself, but on what the spatial arrangement should be grounded. In order to foster an intensive and consistent interaction between the actors and the spectators, the whole theatre space, no matter whether it was a conventional stage architecture or not, should uniformly provide the same playing context, that is, no part of the theatre space, including the auditorium, should be assumed absent in the playing context during the performance. The 'uniform formula', although named by Grotowski as a spatial formula, actually connotes a role-playing process for both the actors and the spectators through which both are drawn into the playing context without distinction. In other words, the spectators are required to play the supernumerary in the performance. Accordingly, the

---

<sup>123</sup> In *The Possibility of Theatre*, Grotowski referred to his formula as 'the shared (*wspólnej*) spatial formula for two ensembles', or 'the uniform (*jedno*) spatial formula for two ensembles'. However, I refer to it as 'the uniform formula' for my convenience in the succeeding writing. See *Możliwość Teatru*, pp. 12-3.

director has to direct both the actors and the spectators, and the actors have to treat the spectators as their fellow actors. Although Grotowski frequently gave roles to spectators in his preceding productions, it is the consistency of the roles designated to the spectators throughout the performance and the director's systematic manipulation of them that is required in the 'uniform formula'.

Grotowski claimed in *The Possibility of Theatre* that the 'uniform formula' itself could bring about 'the "ritualistic" and "magical" effect, which appeals to the "collective unconscious" of the participants' and that this is where the 'uniform formula' converges with the introduction of an archetype in the theatre, which also appeals to the collective unconscious of the participants.<sup>124</sup> It is doubtful that the 'uniform formula' alone could appeal to the collective unconscious of the spectators and the actors. Nevertheless, the 'uniform formula' could be well understood as a requirement for staging that aims to foster the idea of collective introspection by means of the performance. To be more specific, the spatial and scenic arrangement, as well as the designated roles of the spectators, were closely linked with the chosen motif of the production to renew the audience's perception of an archetype. Again, Grotowski's *Kordian* serves as a good

---

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

example. The setting of this production was a hospital, as has been discussed in the preceding section. Consequently, its spatial and scenic arrangement was realized literally as a hospital with beds spread out all over the space. The actors' actions took place here and the spectators were seated here as well.<sup>125</sup> Also, the spectators were treated throughout the performance as patients. All these arrangements were intended to interrogate the notion of the Polish Messiah by juxtaposing Kordian's heroism and a madman's hallucination. It is not difficult to identify the considerable coherence and compactness in Grotowski's staging of *Kordian* compared with that of *Forefathers' Eve*, which was proposed as a participating game. This qualitative change in Grotowski's staging proclaims the significance of the 'uniform formula', through which all components of the staging are unified around the archetype introduced in the production.

Grotowski also claimed that the 'uniform formula', although derived from his attempt to abolish the stage, could also be applied to the conventional stage or the central stage if one could take advantage of the innate spatial tension inherent in such stages. Grotowski gave the example of setting a Baroque play in a theatre with a conventional stage. The architectural distinction between the stage and the auditorium, that is one is

---

<sup>125</sup> See illustrations of this scenic arrangement in *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, pp. 60-1.

literally higher than the other, could be utilized to demonstrate the social hierarchy in the sixteenth century.<sup>126</sup> Another example of the conscious use of the innate spatial tension of the conventional stage was to establish the confrontational relationship between the roles played on the stage and those held by people in the auditorium. Hence, the 'uniform formula' actually implies a wide variety of possible spatial and scenic arrangements, as long as the arrangement conforms to the chosen motif of a given production. In fact, this is well demonstrated by the various spatial and scenic arrangements used in Grotowski's subsequent productions, which can be immediately recognized as we encounter them.

The role-playing process thrust upon the spectators in the 'uniform formula' can be considered as an attempt to manipulate the spectators' psychology. It necessitated the spectators' devotion to their roles so that the director could direct their roles effectively to manipulate their reactions. Thus it was insufficient to propose a role-playing process simply as a participatory game, like those in Grotowski's earlier productions, and Grotowski now demanded the spectators' consistent participation in the action. As a result, the role-playing process in Grotowski's *Kordian* was realized not so much as a participatory game but as a compulsory duty which demanded the

---

<sup>126</sup> See *Możliwość Teatru*, p. 17.

spectators' cooperation. Grotowski even used drastic means to force the spectators into the action. For example, on one occasion during the performance, Zygmunt Molik, who played the Doctor, compelled all the other actors and the spectators to sing along with him, and the disobedient were sought out and threatened with a cane.<sup>127</sup> However, the spectators' physical submission to the action did not necessarily mean that they identified with the roles imposed upon them by the director. In other words, to put the audience physically in the position of a character did not necessarily arouse the audience's sympathy with that character.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, coercion brought about, if not antipathy, scant sympathy, which restrained Grotowski's manipulation of the spectators' psychology. Hence, while maintaining the basic idea of 'uniform formula', Grotowski modified his implementation of the role-playing process in his productions after *Kordian*. Instead of coercing the spectators, he attributed to them the role of witnesses, which allowed them to maintain their identity as spectators. To put it another way, although there were roles thrust upon them, the spectators observed the action without being asked to intervene in the action during the performance. That is to say, the spectators' physical detachment from the action was restored, no matter

---

<sup>127</sup> See Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 63.

<sup>128</sup> In fact, Grotowski had already pointed out this potential problem when he formulated his 'uniform formula'. See *Możliwość Teatru*, p. 14.

what kind of roles they were asked to take and how closely to them the actors performed. Grotowski's following production *Akropolis* serves as a good example of this. Besides demonstrating how he manipulated the spectators' psychology without demanding they join the action, I will also illustrate how in this production he realized his idea of challenging collective perceptions as well as how he furthered his 'uniform formula'.

Grotowski's *Akropolis* (10 October 1962) was based on Stanisław Wyspiański's play first published in 1904. The play's action is set in Wawel cathedral within the Wawel castle complex in Kraków, the royal capital of Poland for over five hundred years. On the night before Resurrection Day, the characters in the tapestries in the cathedral relive scenes from Homeric epic and the Bible, including the Trojan war, Paris and Helen, Jacob's wrestle with the Angel, and Jacob and Esau, and the play ends with the resurrection of Christ-Apollo, which leads to the redemption of both Poland and Europe. The Wawel castle, the very symbol of the great achievements of Poland, was conceived by Wyspiański as the Acropolis, the symbol of the peak of a civilization, and Wyspiański gave it the name of 'cemetery of the tribes'. Grotowski revisited and renewed Wyspiański's vision of the Polish Acropolis, which had been widely accepted, by contrasting it with Auschwitz, the largest

Nazi concentration camp which is only about sixty kilometers away from Kraków.<sup>129</sup> While Grotowski juxtaposed the lofty idea of the Acropolis with the brutal massacre in Auschwitz, the phrases 'our Acropolis' and 'cemetery of the tribes', which were repeated constantly by his actors, incessantly questioned the audience: what does Acropolis, the achievement of our civilization, mean? Is it the glorious Wawel castle in Kraków or the gas chamber and crematorium in Auschwitz? Here lies the central motif of this production, which suggests Grotowski's chosen archetype in this production and his method of the dialectics of derision and apotheosis.

The staging of *Akropolis* closely followed the chosen motif of this production, that is, a collision between Wyspiański's vision of the Polish Acropolis and the cruel reality of Auschwitz. Grotowski collaborated with Józef Szajna, an ex-inmate of Auschwitz and a distinctive designer, for the costume and props as well as the direction of this production.<sup>130</sup> The actors wore berets, heavy wooden-soled shoes, and sacks full of holes 'lined with material which suggests torn flesh'.<sup>131</sup> This costume design was 'a poetic

---

<sup>129</sup> Grotowski's idea of taking Auschwitz as the backdrop of his production was inspired by the concentration camp stories *World of Stone* by Tadeusz Borowski, an ex-inmate of Auschwitz. See *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 67.

<sup>130</sup> Szajna's contributions to *Akropolis* cannot be overlooked. Instead of specifying the director of the production, it was mentioned on the poster that the production was 'realized by Józef Szajna and Jerzy Grotowski'. See *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 72.

<sup>131</sup> Flaszen, 'Akropolis: Treatment of the Text', in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 64.

vision of the camp uniform'.<sup>132</sup> The actors' action was emotionless and mechanical when they were involved in their monotonous building work, which symbolized the harsh labour in the concentration camp, on the one hand, and, on the other, it was literally the construction of the scenery.

The spatial and scenic design by Szajna faithfully reflected the motif of this production. In the center of the space lay a square box, upon which metal junk, including rusty stovepipes, a bathtub, and a wheelbarrow, were piled up. The spectators were seated around this arrangement. During the performance, the actors hung the stovepipes on the wires crisscrossing the space, or nailed them to the floor to build an absurd complex among spectators, which, on the one hand, symbolized the pinnacle of civilization and, on the other, reminded spectators of the crematorium and gas chamber built in Auschwitz by the prisoners under the command of SS men.<sup>133</sup> At the end of the performance, the actors descended into the square box, which, together with the stovepipes spread across the space, expressively alluded to the crematorium in the concentration camp. The spectators were assigned the role of the living who dreamed the resurrected dead in Auschwitz, and the actors played 'all over the theatre and among the spectators' so that they threateningly surrounded

---

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> For this scenic design, see the illustrations in Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 131.

the spectators.<sup>134</sup> The staging of *Akropolis* closely followed Grotowski's 'uniform formula', as proposed in *The Possibility of Theatre*. However, the spectators in this production were denied any physical or verbal involvement in the action. Flaszen explained the intention of this arrangement:

For **Akropolis**, it was decided that there would be no direct contact between actors and spectators: the actors represent those who have been initiated in the ultimate experience, they are the dead; the spectators represent those who are outside of the circle of initiates, they remain in the stream of everyday life, they are the living. This separation, combined with the proximity of the spectators, contributes to the impression that the dead are born from a dream of the living. The inmates belong in a nightmare and seem to move in on the sleeping spectators from all sides. They appear in different places, simultaneously or consecutively, creating a feeling of vertigo and threatening ubiquity.<sup>135</sup>

This is a good example of how to manipulate the spectators' psychology – without demanding their physical involvement in the action – by means of attributing the role of witness to the spectators which is indistinguishable from their being spectators in the theatre. In other words, the spectators were not to 'play' any roles, but the coercive action demanded by the roles coincided with the 'action' of being spectators. By becoming witnesses, the spectators were put into the shoes of those inmates who witnessed the other inmates' death. From here on, the spectators' role of witnesses remained

---

<sup>134</sup> Flaszen, 'Akropolis: Treatment of the Text', in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 63.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* Please note that Flaszen uses the boldface, as I quoted here.

influential in Grotowski's staging and became a characteristic of his subsequent productions.

Beside the context of the concentration camp, Grotowski implanted the second context, the Biblical and Homeric epics, into his *Akropolis*. The actors, who played prisoners in Auschwitz, re-enacted a deformed version of Biblical and Homeric figures, which contradicted the vision proposed in Wyspiański's play. The deformed version of the Biblical and Homeric stories in Grotowski's *Akropolis* was treated as the 'transmutation through the dream, a phenomenon known to communities of prisoners who, when acting, live a reality different from their own'.<sup>136</sup> The prisoners incarnated the myths in the reality of the concentration camp. According to Ludwik Flaszen:

Prisoners walking in procession and singing celebrate the wedding rites, but their bride is an iron tube [a stovepipe] covered, as if with a bridal veil, by a plastic rag. This is the wedding of Jacob and Rachel: the substitute for the prisoners' lyrical dreams of inaccessible happiness.<sup>137</sup>

The re-enactment of the various myths has to be understood as the daydream of the inmates, which alleviated the harsh labour they endured in the concentration camp. Furthermore, Grotowski interwove different contexts in such a way that the boundary between dream and reality became blurred. In

---

<sup>136</sup> 'Akropolis: Treatment of the Text', in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 65.

<sup>137</sup> Flaszen in the English-French program of *Akropolis* version 1967.

other words, the re-enactment of the mythical reality could be a dream of those inmates played by the actors, or the whole context of the concentration camp could be the spectators' nightmare. This strategy can be traced back to Grotowski's *Kordian* in which he was to interweave multiple contexts within the hospital setting through the proposed ambiguity between hallucination and reality. Flaszen explained the idea behind the setting of *Kordian* in this way:

The play [Grotowski's *Kordian*] is thought of as a mutual penetration, a mutual play of reality and fiction. The action is played out on three levels. The theatre is reality in a literal sense: there is the auditorium into which the audience comes to see the play. The first level of fiction is constructed on that theatrical reality: the role of psychiatric patients is thrust on every member of the audience, not just the actors. Another layer of fiction then is constructed on the hospital reality: the actions of *Kordian* become the collective hallucinations of all the people who are ill.<sup>138</sup>

By juxtaposing the lofty perceptions of an archetype with a hallucination or an escape dream of the protagonists situated in a brutal reality, Grotowski degraded the former so as to change the audience's perceptions of that archetype. The interweaving of multiple contexts served as a mirror through which the spectators could see that someone who shared their perceptions actually lived miserably in an escapist dream so different from their reality. The spectators were to understand that the mirror reflected them, and they were forced to re-consider their perceptions of heroism, salvation, and

---

<sup>138</sup> In Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 63.

individual noble deeds. The spectators were to understand that the future of society would not be determined by any one individual and the expectation of redemption was futile, after all.

### 2.3 Poetic Allusion

It is worth taking a closer look at how, in *Akropolis*, Grotowski, together with Szajna, was able to refer to different contexts simultaneously by utilizing the free association of dreams whose logic is different from the logic of waking. Flaszen pointed out that 'the reality of the extermination camp is created poetically, from allusions, short-cuts, and metaphors'.<sup>139</sup> The actors did not act out the prisoners' story in Auschwitz, but made actions that recalled the concentration camp. Costumes were a poetic vision of concentration camp uniforms, the actors' building of the scenery was an allusion to the prisoners' slave labour in the camp, and the scenery itself was a metaphor of the gas chamber and crematorium. The Biblical and Homeric myths were re-enacted in a symbolic way, which Flaszen described in the program in the following way:

Two prisoners, both men, sit together like a couple in love, and give themselves up to the sweet cooing, which is suddenly interrupted by the vulgar, cynical chuckling of their fellow-prisoners. This is the love

---

<sup>139</sup> In *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 67.

scene of Paris and Helen. - Prisons are standing in the double row on a platform; this is the roll-call. A woman prisoner jumps out of the row and in a hysterical paroxysm [paroxysm] foretells the future extermination. This is Cassandra's prophecy of the ruin of Troy.<sup>140</sup>

This special way of referencing to different contexts in *Akropolis* can be described as 'poetic allusion', which does not represent but alludes to the action through analogy and metaphor. Hence, it is better to describe this production as episodes about the Polish Acropolis and Auschwitz interwoven together poetically, instead of as story-telling on either subject.

The poetic allusion embodied in the staging of *Akropolis* can be well exemplified by the very use of props.<sup>141</sup> Flaszen made the following remark on the props as well as the scenic arrangement:

There are no 'sets' in the usual sense of the word. They have been reduced to the objects which are indispensable to the dramatic action. Each object must contribute not to the meaning but to the dynamics of the play; its value resides in its various uses.<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> The English-French programme of *Akropolis* in the version from 1967. Mainly due to changes in casting, there were five versions of *Akropolis*. The fifth version was produced in 1967.

<sup>141</sup> Józef Szajna, as the designer of the props, substantially contributed to the poetic allusion used in the staging of *Akropolis*.

<sup>142</sup> Flaszen, 'Akropolis: Treatment of the Text', in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 67.

In fact, there were two ways of using these objects corresponding to the two contexts set in this production.<sup>143</sup> In one context, the props were used as metaphors for the concentration camp. For example, the bathtub alludes to the one in which human bodies were processed for the making of soap and leather. The stovepipes are part of an oven, suggesting the crematorium where the bodies were burnt. The wheelbarrow is a tool for the transportation of heavy stuff, which was reminiscent of the inmates' labour as well as the tool for the transportation of dead bodies. These objects were genuine, and they did not represent anything else. Yet, the functions of these objects can be linked with some essential aspects of the huge mechanism of the concentration camp. In other words, these objects did not represent, but alluded to the concentration camp.

The second context of the performance is that of the Biblical and Homeric myths. The objects in this context allude to things very different from themselves. The meanings of the objects in performance are determined by the actors/characters in terms of how the actors/characters perceive them.

---

<sup>143</sup> Among the objects used in this production, the violin played by the actor Molik during the performance was an exception to what I am going to discuss in the following paragraphs. In this case, what significantly contributed to the *mise-en-scène* was not the violin itself but its sound played by Molik. In the setting without SS men, the sound of the violin functioned as a metaphor of the command or the camp rule. This idea may well come from the fact that in Auschwitz, a camp orchestra was ordered to play marches as prisoners left the camp daily to work, and also when they returned. The prisoners were even expected to march through the camp's main gate. See *Auschwitz: A History in Photographs*, edited and

For instance, the bathtub suggests, in one scene, Jacob's nuptial bed. Also, one stovepipe is regarded as Jacob's bride during the wedding scene.<sup>144</sup> The wheelbarrow suggests Priam's and Hecuba's thrones, or is simply considered as a metaphor of the predicament in the wrestle between Jacob and the Angel:

One is kneeling and supports on his back a wheelbarrow in which the other lies, head down and dropping backward. The kneeling Jacob tries to shake off his burden, the Angel, who bangs his own head on the floor. In his turn the Angel tries to crush Jacob by hitting his head with his feet. But his feet hit, instead, the edge of the wheelbarrow. And Jacob struggles with all his might to control his burden. The protagonists cannot escape from each other. Each is nailed to his tool; their torture is more intense because they cannot give vent to their mounting anger. The famous scene from the Old Testament is interpreted as that of two victims torturing each other under the pressure of necessity, the anonymous power mentioned in their argument.<sup>145</sup>

Hence, the objects used in both contexts operated not in a representative way but in an allusive way, exemplifying the idea of 'poetic allusion' for the staging of *Akropolis*.

Furthermore, the same object can possibly allude to different matters in different contexts simultaneously. And the divergence between the original and various potential meanings of the same object can create a tension which is essential to Grotowski's method of the dialectic of derision and apotheosis. For instance, a headless dummy, which 'represented' a corpse in the

---

compiled by Teresa Świebocka, English edition prepared by Jonathan Webber and Connie Wilsack, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 83.

<sup>144</sup> See Flaszen, 'Akropolis: Treatment of the Text', in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 68.

performance, was treated as Saviour by the prisoners.<sup>146</sup> Wyspiański's play ends with the resurrection of Apollo-Christ, while Grotowski's production ends with a procession of chanting inmates who followed the dummy as their Saviour and descended into the crematorium, which Flaszen described in this way:

As for hope, the group of human wrecks, led by the Singer, finds its Saviour. The Saviour is a headless, bluish, badly mauled corpse, horribly reminiscent of the miserable skeletons of the concentration camps. The Singer lifts the corpse in a lyrical gesture, like a priest lifting the chalice. The crowd stares religiously and follows the leader in a procession... The Singer lets out a pious yell, opens a hole in the box, and crawls into it dragging after him the corpse of the Saviour. The inmates follow him one by one, singing fanatically.<sup>147</sup>

The meaning of the dummy as a lifeless and powerless object, or as a headless corpse as it is represented in this production, contrasts and collides with its meaning as the inmates' Saviour. This prompts the spectators to re-consider their notion of Saviour. By the direct juxtaposition of contradictory meanings of the one object, a straight impact on the audience is created deliberately so that the confrontation and negotiation of different values or perceptions can take place instantly during the audience's perception of the performance. This

---

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>146</sup> This dummy was the only prop in this production which was used in a representational sense. It is an inevitable exception to the principle of the poetic allusion since it is unthinkable to bring a corpse into the theatre.

<sup>147</sup> Flaszen, 'Akropolis: Treatment of the Text', in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 66-7.

characterizes poetic allusion and differentiates it from the illusionist representation extensively used in the conventional theatre.

It is clear from the foregoing that the principle of using props in *Akropolis* was not so much the manipulation of an object itself as the manipulation of an object as a signifier capable of conveying several meanings. Props in *Akropolis* can be better understood as multi-signifiers which evoked several different meanings and, more importantly, created an interaction between its different meanings. Furthermore, the relativity between an object and its meanings reflected the fact that the meaning of that object depended on how it was perceived by the actors as well as by the spectators. In other words, the meaning of an object is not innate, but related to the recipients' perception of it, which echoes the idea that the revelation of an archetype depends on how it is perceived.

The principle of poetic allusion was not applied to Grotowski's production until *Akropolis*, and the props in the preceding production *Kordian* were used in a quite different way, as described by Osiński:

Costumes were hospital gowns and uniforms, and props were quite literal: a scalpel, a straight-jacket, bowls, mugs, towels. But there were also objects that looked as if they had been taken from the prop room of the Great Theatre: a crown for the Czar, a tiara for the Pope, etc.<sup>148</sup>

---

<sup>148</sup> Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 63.

On the one hand, the props and the costumes relating to the hospital were used in a literal sense and Grotowski did not exploit their potential meanings in the performance. On the other hand, the fake crown and tiara had to be introduced halfway through the performance and their existence in the theatre ceased to make sense once the related scenes about the Czar and the Pope ended. Compared with *Kordian*, the poetic allusions of *Akropolis*, especially the strategy regarding props, demonstrates a more consistent and coherent staging subordinated to Grotowski's 'uniform formula'. Also, it matches the practical demands in a theatre without a curtain, where everything is visible and the necessary absence of one object or any change of set during the performance becomes a challenge.<sup>149</sup> Therefore, poetic allusion offered an appropriate solution to the realization of Grotowski's notion of a 'uniform formula'.

---

<sup>149</sup> A similar challenge was posed when Grotowski eliminated the stage in *Forefathers' Eve*, but Grotowski managed to orient the audience's attention by utilizing the lighting to indicate a restricted area of focus during the performance. While proposing his 'uniform formula' in *The Possibility of Theatre*, Grotowski again expressed his concern about the possible inadequacies of such a spectacle, given that nothing would be invisible during performance. See *Możliwość Teatru*, p. 14.

Poetic allusion also diminished the number of the props required. It is not a coincidence that Flaszen introduced the term 'poor theatre' to epitomize the restricted number of props in *Akropolis*.<sup>150</sup> He explained:

The production was constructed on the principle of strict self-sufficiency. The main commandment is: do not introduce in the course of the action anything which is not there from the outset. There are people and a certain number of objects gathered in a room. And that material must suffice to construct all circumstances and situations of the performance; the vision and the sound, the time and the space.... The poor theatre: to extract, using the smallest number of permanent objects – by magic transformations of object into object, by multi-functional acting – the maximum of effects. To create whole worlds, making use of whatever is within reach of the hands.<sup>151</sup>

Although the limited number of props was an essential characteristic of the staging of *Akropolis*, more crucial is the fact that the meaning of each object was determined by the actors' various uses of it in different contexts. Sometimes one object contained several meanings all at once, thus eliminating the need for more props. The reduction of props in what Flaszen called 'poor theatre' actually stemmed from the multiplicity and attendant richness of their meanings.

---

<sup>150</sup> In 1965, Grotowski took on Flaszen's term 'poor theatre' to indicate his theatre where its essential elements – the actors and the spectators – were emphasized and all other additional elements were lessened. He also adopted this term as the title of his essay 'Towards a Poor Theatre'. They will be clarified in Chapter 4. Barba also pointed out that Grotowski's use of the term 'poor theatre' was distinctive from Flaszen's which referred to props above all else. See Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 30.

<sup>151</sup> In Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 61-2.

Poetic allusion can also be an appropriate notion to pinpoint the intricate correlation between the actors and their characters. In other words, the actors in *Akropolis* could be better understood as multi-signifiers which signified different characters, sometimes simultaneously. The protagonists were a group of prisoners without names. They were not any specific individuals, but the representatives of the millions of victims of Auschwitz. Molik played 'the leader of the dying tribe' as well as Jacob.<sup>152</sup> In addition, he delivered the monologue in the prologue, which recalled Wyspiański's vision of Acropolis. He also played the violin, the tune of which was used 'as a lyrical and melancholy background to a brutal scene, or as a rhythmical echo of the guards' whistles and commands'.<sup>153</sup> Molik 'functioned' as several characters separately or simultaneously in *Akropolis*, which is very different from his doctor character in *Kordian*, who on some occasions disguised himself as the Pope or the Czar. Grotowski's next production *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (*Tragiczne Dzieje Doktora Fausta*, 23 April 1963) demonstrates well Grotowski's development of the practice of poetic allusion applied to the role-playing.<sup>154</sup> This production was based on Christopher Marlowe's play. Although this play does not belong to the Polish classics, its

---

<sup>152</sup> See *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 61.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>154</sup> For convenience, I will refer to this production as *Doctor Faustus* in the rest of my thesis.

Faustus motif coincides with the image of a historical Polish hero Twardowski who was transformed by the Polish popular tradition into a national Faust.<sup>155</sup> According to Barba, Faust showed Grotowski an archetype of 'the shaman who has surrendered to the devil and in exchange has received a special knowledge of the universe'.<sup>156</sup> This perception dominates Grotowski's vision of the Faust legend in this production as well as in his 1960 production of Goethe's *Faust* at the Polski Theatre in Poznań.<sup>157</sup> In *Doctor Faustus*, Faust was depicted as someone who confronted the absolutes of the universe at the cost of selling his soul, and became a saint and a martyr. Hence, the episodes of Faust's life were arranged in the form of a hagiography: 'baptism, mortification, struggle with temptations, miracle working, martyrdom, to the point where Faustus reveals the inhumanity and indifference of God'.<sup>158</sup> Grotowski again adopted a polemical attitude towards the accepted vision of Faust as someone who deserves condemnation and punishment.

Grotowski made Faust's last supper before his condemnation the backdrop of his production. The spatial and scenic arrangement resembled a

---

<sup>155</sup> See Barba, 'Theatre Laboratory 13 Rzedow', *Tulane Drama Review* Vol. 9, No. 3, Spring 1965, p. 155.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> See Section 1.3.

<sup>158</sup> Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 71.

refectory in a monastery with two long tables on the sides of the room for the spectators as Faust's guests and another smaller table for Faust himself. Faust sat at the smaller table, 'which represented the present'.<sup>159</sup> The episodes about Faust's past life were re-enacted on the two long tables as his confession to his guests. The actors and the spectators were incorporated in one spectacle and the whole was enclosed by wooden partitions in a box-like structure where, on some occasions, the actors could hide. All the actors, except two, wore cassocks or habits. Faust was in a white habit and two Mephistopheles, played by an actor and an actress simultaneously, were in black. Two actors wearing everyday clothes were planted among the spectators, and during the performance they challenged Faust to justify his decisions and tempted him to recount his past. Obviously, they also played Faust's guests, which were the roles the spectators were called upon to play by their very presence. There was no further physical or verbal involvement required from the spectators, who were cast as silent observers at Faust's last supper. Therefore, the role allocated to the spectators perfectly matched the identity of the spectators in the theatre. From the spatial and scenic arrangement and the role-playing process in *Doctor Faustus*, one can easily recognize the embodiment of Grotowski's 'uniform formula'.

---

<sup>159</sup> Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 67.

Remarkably, all the contexts and even the objects in *Doctor Faustus* were alluded to by means of the actors' acting, and there were no props in this production. The actor was to be a signifier which could allude to various characters, objects, or even circumstances. For instance, the double Mephistopheles could be two dragons which transported Faust to the Vatican. Or they could be both the chair and the food in one scene where the Pope was at dinner. 'Frequently, the actors turn into animals: wild beasts, Benvoglio in his destructive crisis – owl and soul, the two personalities who argue over Faustus. Faustus and Mephisto pursue each other like two mice in the darkness of the monastery...' <sup>160</sup> Also, actors utilized their vocal effects to allude to the related circumstances. For example, Zbigniew Cynkutis, who played Faust, imitated the gust of wind, the tumbling of leaves, and the cries of nocturnal animals in the forest scene. Raymonde Temkine precisely characterized the actor's position in the *mise-en-scène* when she says that 'no props are used; the actors can represent everything needed, and in this way they appear only as signs.' <sup>161</sup>

As it emerged in Grotowski's collaboration with Szajna in *Akropolis*, the poetic allusion casts a new light on Grotowski's use of props and sets as well

---

<sup>160</sup> Raymonde Temkine, *Grotowski*. Tran. Alex Szogyi. New York: Avon Books, 1972, p. 130.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

as the acting. However, Grotowski is not so much a master of props and scenic design as a distinctive director. He hardly used props in his productions after *Akropolis*. The notion of poetic allusion mainly became, for Grotowski, an underlying principle of setting up the correlation between the actors and the characters, and of the scenic arrangement of the theatre space, as will become clearer in the following chapters.

## **2.4 Theatre as Secular Ritual**

When Grotowski proposed the theatre of collective introspection in *The Possibility of Theatre*, he simply aimed to equip his theatre with the proper elements, so as to inculcate his views in the audience effectively. Although Grotowski had been interested in ritual for a long time, he mainly absorbed its formal features to intensify the interaction between the actor and the audience in his theatre. He did not intend to create a ritual in his theatre. It was not until his acquaintance with sociological and anthropological studies of primitive ritual that Grotowski grasped how his theatre of collective introspection could act like a ritual to shape the social solidarity. The works of certain scholars, such as Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Lévi-Strauss, Roger Caillois, Gaston Bachelard and Mircea Eliade,

played a major role in Grotowski's awareness of the potential social function of his theatre.<sup>162</sup> Among others, Durkheim's concern with social solidarity in modern society and his notion of collective representation were particularly influential in Grotowski's work. The notion of society as an organic entity rather than as a group of individuals was shaped by Durkheim and several others in the nineteenth century. Durkheim's lifelong concern was to seek or even establish a foundation for the solidarity of modern society. In his early work, Durkheim considered the economic reciprocity as the foundation of social solidarity in modern society characterized by the division of labour.<sup>163</sup> However, during the last period of his life, Durkheim turned to religion and religious phenomena, including various rites and rituals, so as to extract from their forms a common denominator for his further analysis of the essential force consolidating society. Based on the anthropological data on aboriginal tribes in Australia, Durkheim believed that the solidarity of 'primitive' society was generated and sustained by the repetitive collective rituals, which were the vehicles of collective memory and collective representations, rather than by common (religious) beliefs alone. In his book *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim argued:

---

<sup>162</sup> See Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 50.

<sup>163</sup> This is best represented by Durkheim's first major work *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893). Trans. W. D. Halls. London: Macmillan, 1984.

...it is not enough that we think of them [religious ideas]; it is also indispensable that we place ourselves within their sphere of action, and that we set ourselves where we may best feel their influence; in a word, it is necessary that we act, and that we repeat the acts thus necessary every time we feel the need of renewing their effects. ... The cult is not simply a system of signs by which the faith is outwardly translated; it is a collection of the means by which this is created and recreated periodically. Whether it consists in material acts or mental operations, it is always this which is efficacious.<sup>164</sup>

According to Durkheim, the common beliefs activated through ritual serve as a social bond to bind individuals together. Religion, however, no longer played an essential part in modern society. Durkheim believed that the social groups in modern society could gradually mould their own common beliefs through secular cult, which could form the new basis of social solidarity. This vision of how the modern society could be made cohesive through relocating common beliefs in secular matters casts a new light on Grotowski's vision of the theatre. In 1964, Grotowski explained in an interview what he expected his theatre could bring to society:

I do not think that the crisis in the theatre can be separated from certain other crisis processes in contemporary culture. One of its essential elements – namely, the disappearance of the sacred and of its ritual function in the theatre – is a result of the obvious and probably inevitable decline of religion. What we are talking about is the possibility of creating a secular **sacrum** in the theatre. The question is, can the current pace in the development of civilization make a reality of this postulate on a collective scale? I have no answer to this. One must contribute to its realization, for a secular consciousness in place of the religious one seems to be a psycho-social necessity for society.<sup>165</sup>

---

<sup>164</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, p. 464.

<sup>165</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 49. The boldface is Grotowski's.

Grotowski's intention to create a 'secular sacrum' echoed Durkheim's main concern about the unsettled solidarity of modern society. I will refer to Grotowski's theatre with this social aspect as 'theatre as secular ritual', which does not necessarily limit itself to the theatre incorporating ritual spectacle or the theatre of collective introspection.

How did Grotowski define the theatre as secular ritual? In his article 'Towards a Poor Theatre', Grotowski reveals how he approached this problem. He first examined the psychological mechanism behind the social function of the primitive ritual, and then modified a feasible version of a collective psychological process under the given circumstances of the modern world. Grotowski conceived myth, the common beliefs in primitive society, as 'both a primeval situation, and a complex model with an independent existence in the psychology of social groups, inspiring group behavior and tendencies'.<sup>166</sup> Hence, myth contains, as Grotowski understood it, both the universal situations and the archetypal collective reactions of society to those situations. Grotowski also believed that ancient theatre, which was not yet separate from ritual, 'liberated the spiritual energy of the congregation or

---

<sup>166</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 22. G. S. Kirk briefly reviewed in his book various views on the relationship between myth and ritual. Durkheim believed that both myth and ritual represent, although in a different way, the collective ideas of the social group. He considered myth as the *legomenon*, the thing said, ritual the corresponding *drōmenon*, the thing performed. See G. S. Kirk *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, p. 23.

tribe by incorporating myth and profaning or rather transcending it'.<sup>167</sup> 'The spectator,' Grotowski continued, 'thus had a renewed awareness of his personal truth in the truth of the myth, and through fright and a sense of the sacred he came to catharsis'.<sup>168</sup> In the primitive ritual, the participants act out what is forbidden and experience the awe of this transgression through which the participants' identification with the myth can be reinforced. Yet, people in modern society are 'more and more individuated in their relation to the myth as corporate truth or group model', and belief has often become 'a matter of intellectual conviction'.<sup>169</sup> Thus, myths could no longer function as collective beliefs in modern society. He concluded that 'group identification with myth – the equation of personal, individual truth with universal truth – is virtually impossible today'.<sup>170</sup> Since it is not feasible to re-consolidate modern society through re-confirming myths, or even traditional values, then, Grotowski suggested, let the spectators confront 'together' in the theatre the myth in question under the light of the circumstances in modern society, what Grotowski called 'performance as an act of transgression'.<sup>171</sup> Thus:

---

<sup>167</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 22.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-3.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>170</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 23.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

What is possible? First, **confrontation** with myth rather than identification. In other words, while retaining our private experiences, we can attempt to incarnate myth, putting on its ill-fitting skin to perceive the relativity of our problems, their connection to the 'roots,' and the relativity of the 'roots' in the light of today's experience. If the situation is brutal, if we strip ourselves and touch an extraordinarily intimate layer, exposing it, the life-mask cracks and falls away.<sup>172</sup>

By exposing the dissonance of traditional values and contemporary perspectives, Grotowski's theatre became a passage connecting the past and the present. In the interview 'The Theatre's New Testament' (1964), Grotowski also mentioned the same idea:

Even though we often use classical texts, ours is a contemporary theatre in that it confronts our very roots with our current behaviour and stereotypes, and in this way shows us our 'today' in perspective with 'yesterday', and our 'yesterday with 'today'. ...every classical performance is like looking at oneself in a mirror, at our ideas and traditions, and not merely the description of what men of past ages thought and felt.<sup>173</sup>

Can the breach between traditional values and contemporary perspectives constitute a common ground on which a uniform collective psychological process can take place? Several years later, in his lecture on 'Theatre and Ritual' held on 18 October 1968, Grotowski pointed out that this attempt to resuscitate the secular ritual in theatre proved to have been in vain.<sup>174</sup> He claimed that the dialectics of apotheosis and derision in his theatre did not

---

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>173</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 51-2.

work, since 'some spectators took it as a kind of apotheosis, others took it as a kind of derision'. In other words, not both ends of this supposed dialectic worked on each individual spectator. Even in the case that apotheosis and derision could work on the same individual, they could hardly work simultaneously. Grotowski explained:

In terms of direct reaction, the spectators reacted with fascination, that is, the apotheosis worked effectively, but on the level of their thoughts, – when the spectators analyzed the structure of the production – the derision worked.<sup>175</sup>

Hence, the dialectics of apotheosis and derision 'did not produce the wholeness of the reactions, and it worked on different levels and in different way in each individual spectator'.<sup>176</sup> Grotowski thought that this was owing to the lack of a uniform system of values in our society as well as inside each individual, what he called the 'Tower of Babel deep inside our being'.<sup>177</sup> Hence, Grotowski concluded, 'it would not be possible to resuscitate the ritual in the theatre due to the absence of an exclusive belief, a sole system of mythical signs, and a sole system of primary images'.<sup>178</sup> To sum up,

---

<sup>174</sup> The transcription of this lecture has been published under the title 'Teatr a Rytuał' in *Dialog* 1969, No. 8, pp.64-74. My citation of this lecture was translated from the Italian translation published under the title 'Teatro e rituale' in *Il Teatr Laboratorio di Jerzy Grotowski 1959-1969*, pp. 132-53.

<sup>175</sup> *Il Teatr Laboratorio di Jerzy Grotowski 1959-1969*, p. 140.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

confronting myths with contemporary perspectives, or the transgression of traditional values, did not effectively constitute a secular ritual as Grotowski envisaged, although it did arouse the spectator's attention and led to controversy.

In 'Towards a Poor Theatre', Grotowski proposed an alternative solution to the realization of secular ritual in the theatre in modern social circumstances. He wrote:

Secondly, even with the loss of a 'common sky' of belief and the loss of impregnable boundaries, the perceptivity of the human organism remains. Only myth – incarnate in the fact of the actor, in his living organism – can function as a taboo. The violation of the living organism, the exposure carried to outrageous excess, returns us to a concrete mythical situation, an experience of common human truth.<sup>179</sup>

Grotowski believed that the conflict of ideas would be better perceived by the audience through its incarnation in the actor's unsettled state of physicality. He turned to the actor's physicality as the foundation of the psychological process of collective introspection. Again, whether 'the violation of the living organism' and 'the exposure carried to outrageous excess' could effectively activate a psychological process as the basis of secular ritual was yet to be tested. However, this direction of work proved productive in that it led Grotowski's theatre away from inculcation in which ideological discourses

---

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

were uttered in performance. It made him believe that the conflict expressed through the actor's physicality would be more appealing to the spectators' collective unconscious. This eventually led Grotowski's attention to the practical work on the actor's vocal and physical capability as the basis of the acting in his theatre, which will be the focus of examination in the ensuing chapter.

The theatre of collective introspection, as revealed in *The Possibility of Theatre*, marks a milestone in Grotowski's vision of the theatre. It lays out the basic formation of Grotowski's ensuing productions, including the construction of performances around an archetype through the dialectics of derision and apotheosis and the 'uniform formula' for unifying all the elements of his staging. By means of devices as such, Grotowski expected to establish genuine participation and interaction between the actor and the audience. Furthermore, thanks to Durkheim as well as other sociologists, Grotowski started to understand society as a living organism, which constantly shaped, adjusted and developed itself through its internal dynamic processes such as ritual. This significantly affected Grotowski's vision of theatre. Unlike the theatre of intellectual *mise-en-scène*, which he proposed as inculcation to advocate social change, the theatre of collective

introspection eventually sought to realize secular ritual as an integrating part of the social dynamics through which society could renew its collective unconscious and hence reinforce its solidarity. The theatre of collective introspection served as a prototype of Grotowski's ideal theatre to which the subsequent development of his theatre could always be traced back.

Grotowski's theatre of collective introspection recalled Polish Romanticism, not only because a series of his productions, such as *Forefather's Eve*, *Kordian* and *Acropolis*, were all adapted from the Polish Romantic classics but, more importantly, because the central motif in these productions revisited, with contemporary perspectives, how Polish identity had been moulded by the Romantic poets' patriotic works. In other words, Grotowski confronted the spectators in his theatre with the question 'Who are we?' and challenged its presumed answer rooted in collective unconscious. The collective introspection in Grotowski's theatre might not result in a unanimous conclusion among the spectators, but it compelled them to rethink their identity instead of accepting what had been put onto them. Moreover, the confrontation with the question 'Who are we?' also constituted an essential part of Grotowski's attempt to solve his personal question 'Who am I?'. He sought his personal identity through his national awareness. By

consolidating the bond with his country fellows – what he called ‘brotherhood’, Grotowski re-asserted who he is. In other words, Grotowski’s theatre of collective introspection also reflected, among other things, his longing for a sense of belonging – a form of transcending his lone self. Although kept to a personal level at this stage, Grotowski’s aspiration of transcending his lone self was an underlying motivation of his work and it would gradually surface in the subsequent development, which will be clarified as this thesis proceeds.

**PART II. INITIATION THROUGH INTERPERSONAL  
COMMUNION**

### 3. ALLOWING ORGANICITY THROUGH THE METHOD OF ELIMINATION

When Grotowski proposed the theatre of collective introspection in 1962, acting and actor training were still marginal issues in his work. However, they became more and more essential to his theatre practice in the later stages of his work. In the long term, the development of acting and actor training catalyzed a qualitative change in Grotowski's vision of theatre, and foresaw the emergence of his post-theatre work. To understand how Grotowski's acting method and actor training evolved, it is necessary to trace them back to the beginnings. When starting his career as a director in 1957, Grotowski formulated his theatre by means of a new perspective of the *mise-en-scène* which appealed to the audience's emotional and intellectual involvement with the action on stage. He did not specify any particular acting style for his theatre. Although Grotowski constantly denied that performance was an imitation of life, the acting in his early productions such as *Gods of Rain*, *The Ill-fated* and *Uncle Vanya* was stripped of specific reference to any individual in any time and place. Nevertheless, during his subsequent neo-theatre period starting in 1959, a more stylized acting style appeared in Grotowski's productions. Reviewing *Orpheus*, Aleksandra Korewa described the action as

'formulated like in a musical score' and noted that the movement as well as the pace of the action was 'subject to a precise discipline'.<sup>180</sup> While reporting on Grotowski's production *Cain*, T. Kudliński observed the 'constant shifts in the acting' between different genres, ranging from philosophical discussion, parody, satire and pantomime to ballet.<sup>181</sup> The formation of this 'constant shift' in the acting style owed much to alternating tragic and grotesque sequences in performance, one major feature of Grotowski's productions at the time.<sup>182</sup> By and large, the issue of acting had not yet been central to Grotowski's work up to this point.

After the neo-theatre period of his work, Grotowski intended to incorporate ritual spectacle in theatre and break down the division between the stage and the audience. Meanwhile, he drew inspiration from oriental theatre, which, he believed, still kept its close ties to ritual. In *Sakuntala*, which was Grotowski's first attempt to achieve a ritual spectacle in theatre, he consciously made a decision regarding its acting style in order to stage this Indian epic 'in an oriental way'. He based the acting in *Sakuntala* on the construction of signs which are analogous to the conventional signs used in oriental theatre. Grotowski explained:

---

<sup>180</sup> In Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 20.

<sup>181</sup> In Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 39.

<sup>182</sup> See Section 1.3.

We noticed quite early that one could seek the sources of ritual acting in this play [*Sakuntala*], a ritual acting still existing in some countries. Where? Mainly in the Eastern theatre. Even a lay theatre like the Peking Opera contains a ritual structure, developing a ceremony through articulated signs set by tradition and repeating these in the same way with each presentation. This as a kind of language, an ideogram of gesture and behavior.<sup>183</sup>

Instead of presenting 'life-like' actions on stage, Grotowski adopted what he called the 'dance of reality', 'an artificial construction, similar to a "rhythmic vision" that recalls reality'.<sup>184</sup> The actors' gestures in *Sakuntala* were 'composed and artificial'.<sup>185</sup> The actors' movement was 'extremely precise and dance-like', and resembled 'the whole score of sound'.<sup>186</sup> Also, the lines, which were 'emitted' by the actors in an artificial way, were not only the carriers of meaning and intention, but also acted with their own 'sonoric value'.<sup>187</sup> In addition, no mechanical or recorded music was used, only the sound made by the actors, for example, the rhythmic clapping of the body and the echoes of footsteps.<sup>188</sup> As Flaszen pointed out, this production was intended to create a counterpart to oriental theatre through 'a convention of gesture, a way of talking, through the creation of an entire alphabet of

---

<sup>183</sup> In Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 51.

<sup>184</sup> Grotowski in Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 54.

<sup>185</sup> Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 50.

<sup>186</sup> Flaszen in Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 31.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>188</sup> Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 50.

conventional scenic signs'.<sup>189</sup> Grotowski's attempt to construct performance with a flow of signs was inspired by the myth of Shiva, the god of creation and dance in Hinduism. In his essay 'Playing Shiva', written shortly before he started the rehearsal of *Sakuntala*, Grotowski explained how the myth of this Hindu god inspired his vision of theatre:

There is a mythological quotation in which Shiva says: I am without name, without form, without action. I am pulsation, movement and rhythm (*Shiva-gita*). The essence of the theatre for which we are searching is 'pulsation, movement and rhythm'.<sup>190</sup>

This dance vision of theatre was the premise for the acting in *Sakuntala*. However, the outcome was not satisfactory for Grotowski. In 1968, he talked about the inadequacy of his creation of signs:

But I saw that it [the acting in *Sakuntala*] was an ironic transposition of stereotypes, patterns. Each gesture, composed of a specially constructed ideogram, became what Stanislavsky called a 'gesture pattern.' This was not 'I love you' with a hand over the heart, but in the end it came down to something similar. It became clear that this was not the way...<sup>191</sup>

In the ensuing production *Forefathers' Eve*, Grotowski put aside the issue of acting method and continued his exploration of ritual spectacle in theatre. However, Grotowski did not discard the idea of regarding signs as the foundation of acting, but revisited it in different ways in his later work.

---

<sup>189</sup> In Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 29.

<sup>190</sup> In Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, pp. 54-5.

### 3.1 Acting Based on Vocal and Physical Signs

After *Forefathers' Eve*, Grotowski re-formulated his vision of theatre and proposed the theatre of collective introspection to renew the collective perception of an archetype, as discussed in Chapter 2. Accordingly, the idea of a consistent acting system gradually took shape in Grotowski's mind. In an interview published in November 1961, five months after the première of *Forefathers' Eve*, Grotowski said:

We concentrate the meaning of the production [*Forefathers' Eve*] in the Great Improvisation... In a broader and more important sense, one could identify the suffering with the object of our constant searching - what Władysław Broniewski has described as our 'feeling our way into the texture of human fate with our voices and bodies'. [*wczuwanie się głosem i ciałem w treść ludzkiego losu*] <sup>192</sup>

The idea of unearthing 'the texture of human fate' through the voice and body, reflected Grotowski's belief that typical human situations could be adequately expressed through the actor's physicality. This vision became the underlying principle of Grotowski's study of acting in the years to come.

---

<sup>191</sup> Grotowski in *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 51.

<sup>192</sup> 'Dziady jako model teatru nowoczesnego', *Współczesność*, 1-15 November 1961, No. 21, p. 8. This translation is from *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 54. However, Barba translated Broniewski's description as 'the expression by the voice and the body of the very substance of man's destiny'. See Barba, 'Theatre Laboratory 13 Rzedow', *Tulane Drama Review* Vol.9, No.3, Spring 1965, pp. 155-6.

Grotowski further elaborated his ideas regarding acting method in the Appendix of *The Possibility of Theatre* printed in February 1962. First of all, he laid out the basic requirements for the acting in his theatre as follows:

The acting in theatre practice which I mentioned, is founded on:

**There are no canonized methods. Every method is permitted if:**

- it is functional [practical]. (justified by the logic of the performance as a whole; standing on one's feet demands a degree of justification equal to standing on one's head; the logic of life is not identical with artistic logic.)
- it is fixed. (consolidated, with the exception of the highlight of the play designated for partial improvisation.)
- it is constructed. (composition, arrangement; methods of creating a certain structure, individual elements are unconvertible.)<sup>193</sup>

These requirements constituted the ground on which Grotowski would build up his acting method. Although without clear explanations, these requirements still revealed certain features of Grotowski's ideal acting. He emphasized that the acting should conform to 'the logic of the performance as a whole' which could be different from 'the logic of life'. This can be understood as meaning that the acting style should be considered case by case for each production and that it is not necessary to be naturalistic as an imitation of life. Although he pursued the spontaneity of acting, he basically objected to improvisation, and insisted that the actor's actions had to be fixed, except during the climax of the play. He also noticed that it was

---

<sup>193</sup> Grotowski, *Możliwość Teatru*, p. 20. The boldface is Grotowski's.

necessary to compose the actor's actions on stage with consideration of his/her 'individual elements'. After laying out the fundamental requirements which depicted a general picture of his ideal acting, Grotowski continued his argument in the Appendix and recapitulated his vision of acting with two 'stipulations' – the necessity of artificial expression and the actor's internal involvement.

In the first stipulation, Grotowski emphasized that '**what is artistic, or what is art, is artificial**, that is, efficient, spectacular or maybe something considered as pure effect (physical or vocal)'.<sup>194</sup> For example, he treated the lines of the actors not only as carriers of meaning, but also purely as a series of vocal sounds. This stipulation, conforming to Grotowski's dogmatic insistence on anti-naturalistic acting, reflects his attempt to compose the vocal and physical 'effect' as the foundation of his ideal acting, which in turn echoes his emphasis on the actor's voice and body in acting. Yet, in the second stipulation, Grotowski emphasized, '**What is artistic is intentional**'.<sup>195</sup> He explained:

I have been convinced through practical experience that there is some truth in the actor's training 'experiencing' [*przeżywania*]. The effect created by the actor in theatre, which I am talking about, is artificial. But, for this craft-like effect to be performed dynamically and

---

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.* The boldface is Grotowski's.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21. The boldface is Grotowski's.

suggestively, some kind of internal involvement is essential. There is no effect, or simply a wooden effect, if there is no conscious intention in the actor's action (during the realization, not just during the composition), if the action is not 'supported' by the actor's own intimate associations, psychological 'batteries' or internal accumulators. Of course, here I am not talking about the 'experiencing' as in Stanislavsky's method. I am rather talking about the 'trance' of the actor. However, it is hard to set any rules here. What is possible, and even convincing, is the actor's 'tricks' based on counterpointing a word by movement (intentional movement – up to the limit of naturalism – artificial words – up to the limit of lifelessness, or vice versa) etc.<sup>196</sup>

From his experience in *Sakuntala*, Grotowski was aware of the danger of falling into mechanical acting and owed his understanding of the necessary spontaneity behind the actor's external expressions to Stanislavsky's method of 'experiencing'. Sharon Marie Carnicke dedicates a whole chapter in her book to the notion behind the term 'experiencing' (*perezhivanie* in Russian) in Stanislavsky's system. She points out that the Russian root of 'experiencing' conveys many different nuances: 'to experience,' 'to feel,' 'to live through,' 'to survive', and she gives a brief explanation of the term in the glossary of her book:

The ideal kind of acting, nurtured by the [Stanislavsky's] System, in which the actor creates the role anew at every performance in full view of the audience; the actor's creative process itself. Such acting, however well planned and well rehearsed, maintains an essentially active and improvisatory nature. ... Stanislavsky adapts the term itself, however, from *What is Art?* (1897), in which Lev Tolstoy argues that art communicates felt experience, rather than knowledge, 'infecting' the audience with the artist's emotion. Stanislavsky also uses 'to infect'

---

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

in Tolstoy's sense; the actor 'infects' the audience with the character's emotional experience.<sup>197</sup>

Through Carnicke's clarification of 'experiencing' in Stanislavsky's system, we can have a better understanding of Grotowski's intention behind his second stipulation that actions should entail the actor's internal involvement. However, Grotowski's solution to avoiding stereotypical acting was not identical with Stanislavsky's, since Grotowski's acting style was based on vocal and physical 'effects' instead of naturalistic actions. Grotowski's solution was based on what he called 'the trance of the actor' which, he believed, could be achieved through the actor's concentration on contradictory vocal and physical expressions. As a deeply engaged internal process, this 'trance of the actor' could help the actor to perform artificial vocal and physical expressions 'dynamically and suggestively'. Grotowski's second stipulation supports his first. It plays an essential *supporting* role in his vision at the time to achieve the acting composed of vocal and physical signs with spontaneity.

To conclude his passage on acting method in the Appendix of *The Possibility of Theatre*, Grotowski further points out the potential of the actor's vocal and physical expressions:

---

<sup>197</sup> Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998, p. 173. Also see pp. 107-23.

I am interested in certain areas of acting worthy of attention but hardly explored: the association of a gesture or of intonation with a certain sign – a gestural or vocal model (for example, the cooing of pigeons, or the movement associated with what usually means, with the image, say, captured in certain phase of movement from the old drawing presenting a light-cavalryman in attack). I mean the acting – through allusion or association, communicated by gesture or intonation – appealing to the model moulded by the imagination of the society.<sup>198</sup>

It is clear that Grotowski intended to compose gestures or intonations, which visually or acoustically allude to some typical models, or more specifically, archetypes, in the audience's imagination. To sum up, Grotowski's idea of acting as revealed in this Appendix, aimed to support the realization of the theatre of collective introspection. For the sake of convenience, I will refer to Grotowski's acting technique at that time as 'acting based on vocal and physical signs', which can be considered as his first systematic approach to acting technique. Since the actual working process is always more tangible than the working guidelines, Grotowski's acting technique would be better understood through his actor training, in particular through the intentions behind his training, as will be the focus of my analysis in the following passages.

The very idea of actor training in Grotowski's work can be traced back to his preparation of *Sakuntala* in 1960, during which he led his actors to compose the desired vocal and physical signs demanded in this production.

---

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

For the first time, an independent vocal training session was introduced because of the special need to create vocal signs.<sup>199</sup> This training session was specifically for the acting style chosen for *Sakuntala*, and no further training of this kind would be necessary once the rehearsals finished. In 1962, Grotowski drew out the fundamental principles of the acting technique for his theatre of collective introspection in the Appendix of *The Possibility of Theatre*, as has been indicated above. This paved the way for the establishment of a training system to facilitate the actor's creation of vocal and physical signs. This emphasis on the actor's vocal and physical capacity did make an immediate impact on training and acting in the ensuing production *Kordian*. Barba observed that during the rehearsal of *Kordian*, Grotowski's actors searched for a composition of actions that would reveal the archetype:

When I [Barba] arrived, the actors were already used to looking for theatrical solutions, physical or vocal 'signs' which could unveil an archetype. This term was never used, but a word which often recurred was 'composition': the way in which the actors rendered their actions theatrical and concentrated.<sup>200</sup>

This brought about a discernible change in the actor's physical expressions, which had become more disciplined and acrobatic. As a spectator of this

---

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>200</sup> Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 43.

production, Barba observed that 'in *Kordian* there was no longer that arbitrariness which had seemed to me to characterize the actions of the actors in *Forefathers' Eve*'.<sup>201</sup> Writing about the acting in *Kordian*, the critic Kudliński described the actors as 'a cast of striking efficiency and physical fitness' and paid attention to 'the mastery of memorized material when one considers the frenetic pace of the actors' speeches', 'the unusually complex staging situation' and 'the scaling of the voice from shout to song to whisper'.<sup>202</sup> As we can see from the above, the emphasis on the actor's vocal and physical capacity in training was beyond question.

In the rehearsal of the next production *Akropolis*, Grotowski established a separate training session called 'exercise' (*ćwiczenia*), during which he guided the actors to create their individual facial masks according to their own personalities. Remarkably, this session continued even when the rehearsals ended and other exercises were gradually included. Therefore, these training sessions became totally independent of rehearsals. According to Osiński, Grotowski entrusted each actor with the responsibility of instruction in one specific area of exercises:

Mirecka was instructor for plasticity of gesture and movement. Molik taught breathing and vocal exercises. Cynkutis taught rhythm exercises,

---

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>202</sup> In *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 65.

and Ryszard Cieślak taught acrobatics and mastery of the body. In addition to this, Grotowski conducted so-called 'études' or vocal composition exercises.<sup>203</sup>

These exercises can be divided into two main categories of training. The breathing, vocal and vocal composition exercises obviously belonged to vocal training, while the other exercises belonged to physical training. The vocal training was to create, in spite of the meaning of the words, various vocal expressions with a wide variety of pitch, magnitude and intonations; the physical training was to prepare for various gestures or movements.<sup>204</sup> Here Grotowski's training system started to take shape in practical terms.

When first formulating his training method in 1962, Grotowski simply adopted and adapted existing actor training systems, such as the introverted and extroverted expressions from François Delsarte, the association with plants and animals from Charles Dullin, physical expressions from traditional mime training, vocal training from Peking Opera and eyes, facial muscle and gait training from Kathakali. He also adapted training methods from other disciplines, including the polyrhythm exercise from Emile Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics, headstand and breathing practice from Hatha yoga and

---

<sup>203</sup> Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 70.

somersault and jumps from gymnastics. Instead of mixing all the training methods together, Grotowski gradually converted them for his own purposes.

Substantial parts of the exercises practised in 1962 were recorded in the essay 'Actor's Training (1959-1962)' under Barba's name, which came into being as part of Grotowski's anthology *Towards a Poor Theatre* published in 1968.<sup>205</sup> Barba arrived in Opole and joined Grotowski's troupe at the end of January 1962. This meant that he recorded the exercises mentioned in this essay exclusively in 1962, even though the title of this article refers to the period from 1959 to 1962. Included in the essay are Grotowski's selections from Barba's descriptions of the exercises in 1962 and Grotowski's notes and comments on these exercises. Grotowski obviously left out some of Barba's account when he included it in his anthology. This is because Grotowski reviewed these exercises from his perspective in 1968, which had moved away from the understanding of training he had in 1962. Therefore, to understand the training of 1962 through this essay credited to Barba, one has to be aware of the distortion in Grotowski's selection and editing of Barba's

---

<sup>204</sup> Barba points out: 'Through practice and modification the exercises changed character and name. In 1964, the different sectors, with their respective instructors, were defined as follows in *In Search of Lost Theatre* (page 117): physical and rhythmic exercises – R. Cieślak; plastic and eye exercises – A. Jahołkowski; vocal and respiratory exercises – Z. Molik; facial exercises – R. Mirecka.' See Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 57. However, the division of Grotowski's training into vocal training and physical training still applies appropriately.

<sup>205</sup> See Barba, 'Actor's Training (1959-1962)', in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 101-41.

account, due to the shift of Grotowski's vision of training. Despite this, Barba's descriptions of the exercises, which can reasonably be assumed to be unaltered, still offer certain clues to Grotowski's actor training in 1962.

In Barba's essay, four categories of exercises were recorded, including 'Physical Exercises', 'Plastic Exercises', 'Exercises of the Facial Mask' and 'Technique of the Voice'. 'Technique of the Voice', attached at the end of 'Actor's Training (1959-1962)', consists of empirical knowledge, advice and suggested exercises for projecting a powerful voice, such as 'Carrying power', 'Respiration', 'Opening of the larynx', 'Resonators' and 'Placing the voice'. It also includes some advice on obtaining better diction or exploiting personal vocal defects to depict the role. According to Grotowski's supplement to Barba's account in 'Actor's Training (1959-1962)', the physical exercises, the plastic exercises and the exercises of the facial mask make up 'a rough outline of a day's training', but the vocal training is, somehow, not included.<sup>206</sup> This, nevertheless, does not faithfully reflect the situation in 1962. In fact, it was after 1965 that Grotowski started to consider the actor's voice and respiration as an organic process requiring the least conscious control, which should be subsumed within physical or plastic

---

<sup>206</sup> See *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 102 and 114.

exercises.<sup>207</sup> However, Barba showed a glimpse of the true priority of vocal training in 1962 in another article:

The cornerstone of this technique is breathing control, mastered through daily exercises borrowed from Hata-yoga [Hatha yoga] and Chinese yoga. The actor then learns how to control his voice and to expand and strengthen the range of its sounds. Next comes the control of the body.<sup>208</sup>

This alternative source indicated the priority of different training sectors in 1962: breathing exercises came first, and then the vocal exercises; the physical exercises came last. As a result, the vocal training in 1962 was definitely an important sector of exercises which deserved a separate training session. The vocal training in 1962 can be simply understood as an attempt to produce the vocal 'effect', that is, 'sounds and intonations that the spectator is incapable of reproducing or imitating'.<sup>209</sup> Unfortunately, 'Actor's Training (1959-1962)' does not provide enough information on how Grotowski composed vocal signs by means of the actor's extraordinary vocal capability.

According to Barba's account in 'Actor's Training (1959-1962)', the physical exercises included a general warm-up and some exercises inspired by Hatha yoga and mime. They involved general training of the limbs and torso,

---

<sup>207</sup> The details of Grotowski's training after 1965 will be discussed in Section 4.2.

<sup>208</sup> Barba, 'Ritual Theatre' in 'A Theatre of Magic and Sacrilege', *Tulane Drama Review* Vol. 9, No. 3, Spring 1965, p. 172.

<sup>209</sup> Barba in Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 115.

and research into rhythm and body organism. Although there are quite solid descriptions of the training in 'Physical Exercises', the physical exercises in 1962 mainly served as a foundation for further research into the actor's physical expressions. Instead of looking into the details of various physical exercises, I will scrutinize the plastic exercises, which were dedicated to the composition of the physical signs, and which can be considered the core of Grotowski's physical training at the time.

The plastic exercises initially followed Delsarte's introverted and extroverted gesture exercise in order to create expressive gesture or movement as effective physical signs. However, Grotowski found Delsarte's rules of physical expressions obsolete, and he introduced some of Dalcroze's eurhythmics into the plastic exercises. It is this phase of the plastic exercise that Barba recorded in 'Actor's Training (1959-1962)'. Barba's account of the plastic exercises consists of the elementary exercises and the composition exercises. The elementary exercises, which were mainly based on the polyrhythm exercise in Dalcroze's eurhythmics, were to move different parts of the body simultaneously with different rhythms and possibly in opposite

directions.<sup>210</sup> In these elementary exercises, Grotowski particularly emphasizes 'the study of vectors of opposite movements (e.g. the hand makes circular movements in one direction, the elbow in the opposite direction) and contrasting images (e.g. the hands accept, while the legs reject)'.<sup>211</sup> Based on these elementary exercises, Grotowski further developed the composition exercises for his own purposes. One defining characteristic of Grotowski's acting, as reflected in the composition exercises, was his attempt to realize his idea of the dialectic of contradictory factors in the actor's physical expressions. Grotowski utilized Dalcroze's polyrhythmic exercises, which the actors had practised during the elementary exercises session, to compose multiple physical expressions simultaneously. Barba's descriptions of some of the composition exercises serve as good examples:

Walk barefoot, imagining you are walking on different types of ground, surface, matter (soft, slippery, rough, smooth, wet, inflated, prickly, dry, on snow, on burning sand, at the water's edge, etc.). The feet are the centres of expressiveness, communicating their reactions to the rest of the body. Repeat the same exercise wearing shoes and try to retain the expressiveness of bare feet. The same exercise is next applied to the hands which feel touch, caress specific materials and surfaces (still

---

<sup>210</sup> See Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, 'Rhythmic Movement, Solfège, and Improvisation', in *Rhythm, Music and Education*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1921, p. 99. Researcher Patsy Ann Clark Hecht termed the aspect of this specific exercise 'isolation'. She explained: 'Dalcroze's techniques stress the importance of being able to control each part of the body independently. The right arm must be capable of beating one tempo, the left another, and the torso or feet a third. Often parts of the body are exercised with opposing movements or in syncopated rhythms.' See Patsy Ann Clark Hecht, *Kinetic Techniques for the Actor: An Analysis and Comparison of the Movement Training Systems of François Delsarte, Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, and Rudolf Laban*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Wayne State University, 1971, pp. 196-7.

<sup>211</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 107.

imaginary). Now make the hands and feet react simultaneously, often to opposite impulses.<sup>212</sup>

Choose an emotional impulse (such as crying) and transfer it to a particular part of the body – a foot, for example – which then has to give it expression... Express two contrasting impulses with two different parts of the body: the hands laugh while the feet cry.<sup>213</sup>

These composition exercises are designed to construct contradictory physical signs which could convey opposite impulses simultaneously through different parts of the body. This specific way of composing physical signs brings about the kind of acting which helps to realize the challenge of an archetype in Grotowski's theatre of collective introspection.

Through training, Grotowski asked his actors to develop vocal signs and physical signs respectively, and intended to combine them together in performance. In his letter to Barba in November 1963, he wrote:

The exercises from one domain should be executed contemporaneously with those from a different domain (for example, the physical and vocal ones together), in order then to develop into an acted sequence on a theme – scene or sketch – making use of the physical, plastic or vocal elements that one wants to exercise on that particular day.<sup>214</sup>

The vocal and physical signs in Grotowski's acting technique were not so much two integral components of one single expression, as two juxtaposed parallels which kept their own individual expressions respectively. By doing

---

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>214</sup> Grotowski in *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 124.

so, Grotowski could create additional contrast between the vocal and physical signs.

In addition, Grotowski also attempted to stimulate the actor's internal involvement by using the actor's imagination and association in some plastic composition exercises. His intention was to avoid stereotypical gestures or movement. For example, in one composition exercise, the actor had to associate himself/herself with a tree:

By means of association with people, situations, memories, metamorphose yourself into a tree. The muscles react, expressing the personal association. To begin with, one concentrates these associations on one particular part of the body. As the reactions increase in intensity, the rest of the body is included. The vitality of this tree, its tensions, relaxations, micro-movements are nourished by the association.<sup>215</sup>

In this exercise, Grotowski sought, in his own words, 'a certain method of training capable of objectively giving the actor a creative skill that was rooted in his imagination and his personal associations'.<sup>216</sup> Grotowski believed that to incorporate imagination and association in acting technique could draw out the actor's personal energy from his subconscious and induce the actor's internal involvement in acting. As a result, it is not difficult to

---

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111. The 'association' or 'personal association' mentioned by Grotowski during this period means the actor's spontaneous thoughts or images around the given situation. Thus, the actor's 'association', or 'personal association', was not necessarily related to biographical events. Nevertheless, the 'personal association' mentioned in his later writings after 1965 always means a specific association to the exact events or experiences from the actor's personal life.

recognize in these plastic exercises how Grotowski realized his acting method through constructing (contradictory) physical signs, and how he facilitated the actor's internal involvement by evoking his/her imagination and association.

What is mentioned in 'Exercises of the Facial Mask' in Barba's essay is simply some basic principles without any description of the exercises, and it is relatively sketchy compared with Barba's account of other exercises. In fact, these facial mask exercises, which were based on Delsarte's study of facial reactions, were a crucial part of Grotowski's training in 1962, when the actors were asked to fix their facial expressions like masks for their roles in *Akropolis*. However, the later development of these exercises, which aim 'to control every muscle of the face', can be seen as a parallel of the plastic composition exercise.<sup>217</sup> Barba's account reveals the essence of the facial mask exercises:

It is very important to be able to set in motion simultaneously, but at different rhythms, the various muscles of the face. For example, make the eyebrows quiver very fast while the cheek muscles tremble slowly, or the left side of the face react vivaciously while the right side is sluggish.<sup>218</sup>

---

<sup>216</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 101.

<sup>217</sup> Barba in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 114

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

The point made here is identical to that of the plastic composition exercises, which emphasize simultaneous and contradictory expressions between different parts of the body. Therefore, the later version of the facial mask exercises can be understood as a parallel training to the plastic exercises, which were specifically applied to the actor's face.<sup>219</sup> Although it is not clear when the facial mask exercises were transformed into their later version, their focal point does not negate the central position of plastic exercises in Grotowski's physical training in 1962. Grotowski abandoned these facial mask exercises in the following years. Through careful selection of the materials in Barba's article 'Actor's Training (1959-1962)', I have sketched the different sectors of Grotowski's actor training in 1962. Basically, both the vocal and physical training were to widen the range of the actor's capacity of expression or, in Grotowski's words, create the desired 'effect'.

The establishment of this systematic training to compose vocal and physical signs encouraged Grotowski to make use of more and more physicality in acting as well as directing. This can be seen in his following production *Doctor Faustus*. According to Osiński, Grotowski began

---

<sup>219</sup> In his note on the facial mask exercises, Grotowski mentioned the influence of the facial musculature training in Kathakali. However, the training from Kathakali was not introduced by Barba until his visit to India in 1963. Hence, the Kathakali influence came only after 1963, and at least in 1962, the main sources of the facial mask exercises should be Delsarte and Dalcroze. See Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 53.

rehearsals of this production at the end of 1962, which were temporally very close to, or even overlapped, the period when the actors practised the exercises recorded by Barba in 'Actor's Training (1959-1962)'. The vocal and physical signs adopted in *Doctor Faustus* were not only stylized human behaviour, but, more importantly, kinds of signifiers which could allude to objects or circumstances in the dramatic context. In fact, no props were used in *Doctor Faustus* and almost all of the visual and acoustic elements in performance were created by the extensive use of various vocal and physical signs, that is, solely by the actor's physicality. For example, in 'Actor's Training (1959-1962)', Barba described the 'Vocal Imagination' exercises in the following way:

The actor must learn to enrich his vocal faculties by uttering unusual sounds. An extremely helpful exercise in this respect consists in the imitation of natural sounds and mechanical noises: the dripping of water, the twittering of birds, the humming of a motor, etc. First imitate these sounds. Then fit them into a spoken text in such a way as to awaken the association of the sound you wish to convey ('colouring' the words).<sup>220</sup>

These exercises were literally realized in one scene, among others, of *Doctor Faustus*, when the protagonist indicated his wanderings in the forest at night purely through his virtuosity in creating various vocal signs:

---

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

Faustus in the forest. By imitating a gust of wind, the tumbling of leaves, the noises of the night, the cries of nocturnal animals, Faustus finds himself singing the same religious hymn invoking Mephistopheles.<sup>221</sup>

These vocal signs do away with the necessity of a forest setting. In 1964, Grotowski summarized this trend of development as 'an ascetic theatre in which the actors and audience are all that is left', and concluded that all the visual elements should be constructed by means of the actor's body, and the acoustic and musical effects by the actor's voice.<sup>222</sup>

The extensive use of vocal and physical signs in *Doctor Faustus* meant more than the diminishing use of props and settings. For instance, the internal struggle of Faust at the moment when he decided to rebel against God and take up the devil's magic was represented by 'a conflict between an owl, who symbolizes the erudite personality, and a donkey, whose stubborn inertia is opposed to the owl's learning'.<sup>223</sup> This could be realized through the application of the 'animal image' exercise in the plastic composition exercises recorded by Barba: 'One does not "act" an animal but attacks one's subconscious, creating an animal figure whose particular character expresses an aspect of the human condition'.<sup>224</sup> In addition, through the use of vocal and

---

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>222</sup> See Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 33.

<sup>223</sup> Barba in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 73.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110-1.

physical signs, Grotowski asked his actors to transform themselves from one character to another or even to an object. For instance, one actress transformed herself into a baby in one scene:

Upon the urging of a friend he [Faust] conjures up Helen of Troy, unmasking by comic allusions the female biological functions. Helen begins to make love to him – immediately she gives birth to a baby. Then, while in this erotic position, she becomes the wailing infant. Finally she is transformed into a greedy baby at suck.<sup>225</sup>

More than simply coincidental, this transformation from a woman to a baby demanded by this scene, could be well prepared by the session ‘Analogy with a new-born baby’ in the plastic composition exercises recorded by Barba.

This session is composed of three parts:

- a) Observe a new-born baby and compare its reactions to those of one’s own body.
- b) Search for any vestiges of infancy in one’s own behaviour (e.g. someone smokes like a child sucking at its mother’s breast).
- c) Find those stimuli which reawaken in one the needs of infancy (e.g. a person who gives a sense of security, the desire to suck, the need for a feeling of warmth, interest in one’s own body, a desire for consolation).<sup>226</sup>

This connection between training and performance offers a good example of how the exercises in Grotowski’s training could be applied to performance. Some of Barba’s observations on Grotowski’s directing methods further confirm Grotowski’s extraordinary demands on the actor’s physicality:

---

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

- how to get the actor to carry out a multiple composition passing rapidly from one character to another;
- how to induce the actor to become a multiform Proteus, a shaman who can change from a living person into an object, slipping instantaneously from one reality to another, vanishing or flying *before the very eyes of the spectators*<sup>227</sup>

Moreover, Grotowski composed signs alluding to archetypal images or tunes.

One example is the physical sign which alluded to the Pietà after Faustus's baptism, that is, his symbolic death/rebirth. Barba described this scene:

Faustus's baptism. Before signing the contract, Faustus is almost drowned in a river (the space between the tables). Thus he is purified and ready for his new life. Then the female Mephistopheles promises to grant all his wishes. She comforts Faustus by rocking him in her lap (the Pietà).<sup>228</sup>

Barba also described the last scene, in which Faustus is dragged away by the male Mephistopheles, 'The female Mephistopheles follows humming a sad march which becomes a melancholy religious song (the Mother of Sorrows following her Son to Calvary)'.<sup>229</sup> All these vocal and physical signs are metaphors for some typical notions inherited in the collective consciousness which are instrumental in the operation of collective introspection in Grotowski's theatre.

---

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111-2.

<sup>227</sup> Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 68. The italic is Barba's.

<sup>228</sup> Barba in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 74.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

Grotowski's use of poetic allusion to which I referred in Section 2.3, can also be an appropriate notion within which to pinpoint Grotowski's use of vocal and physical signs in *Doctor Faustus*. Through the use of poetic allusion in the preceding production *Akropolis*, one object could signify various different objects respectively or simultaneously, and one actor could indicate many different characters in the same manner. Yet, Grotowski's application of poetic allusion went even further in *Doctor Faustus*, in which almost all the objects and circumstances were evoked through the actor's usage of vocal and physical signs. Raymonde Temkine precisely characterized the actor's position in the *mise-en-scène* when she said that 'no props are used; the actors can represent everything needed, and in this way they appear only as signs'.<sup>230</sup>

Grotowski made use of the actor's vocal and physical signs to evoke certain associations from the audience so that he could manipulate the audience's perceptions leading to collective introspection. The stimulation of the actor's internal involvement occupied a secondary position in the composition of signs. That is, the pursuit of spontaneity in acting was second to that of the effective external shapes of vocal and physical signs in the *mise-en-scène*. Although Grotowski utilized imagination and association to

---

<sup>230</sup> Raymonde Temkine, *Grotowski*, p. 129.

draw out the actor's personal energy, he realized, in subsequent years, that acting based on vocal and physical signs still lacked spontaneity. The idea of achieving spontaneity in acting by 'incorporating' the actor's internal involvement in pre-determined external forms of expression, proved to be an idea that was too naïve. The relationship between the required external forms of signs and the actor's spontaneous reaction in acting was re-considered in the ensuing period, and it brought about an unexpected change in Grotowski's work.

### **3.2 Allowing Organicity Through the Method of Elimination**

In the subsequent period, a radical change in Grotowski's approach towards his actor training took shape. Unfortunately, there is no detailed documentation of Grotowski's practical work in transition during this period, which makes it impossible to examine his work directly. However, in his 1969 lectures, Grotowski recalled, although not in detail, certain crucial events contributing to the transition of his training. These lectures were later transcribed and adapted into two articles 'Exercises' and 'Voice'.<sup>231</sup>

---

<sup>231</sup> The transcriptions of Grotowski's lectures were first published in French. ('Les Exercices' in *Action Culturelle du Sud-Est*, supplement to No. 6 *Marseille* 1971, and 'La Voix' in *Le Théâtre* No. 1, 1971, pp. 87-131.) Both were then translated into Polish and published in *Dialog* in 1979 and 1980 respectively. ('Ćwiczenia' *Dialog* No. 12, 1979, pp. 127-37, and 'Głos' *Dialog* No. 1, 1980, pp. 109-23.) James Slowiak made unpublished English translations entitled 'Exercises' and 'Voice', which were proofread by Grotowski. My analysis will rely on Slowiak's translations.

Grotowski did not specify in these articles the date of each significant breakthrough in the development of his vision of acting technique, which is rather inconvenient for me when examining these articles in relation to other sources. Yet, these articles, especially 'Voice', still provide us with a glimpse of a critical moment of his work, which presumably took place in 1963, before Grotowski started to rehearse *The Hamlet Study*.

Although the painstaking training in Grotowski's troupe since 1962 had brought about an astonishing effect in his productions in terms of the actor's vocal and physical agility, Grotowski noticed that the actor's voice was still 'automatic' and 'not alive'. In 'Voice', Grotowski recalled how this problem arose in vocal training:

We applied the vibrators with complete premeditation. The actors themselves touched the vibrators and they looked for how to obtain the physical vibration. ... Afterwards, I had certain doubts. I observed that the actor's voice was stronger, that he could produce effects like Yma Sumac: the voice very high, very low, a voice very diversified, as if it emanated from different people and different animals. And, at the same time, it was hard, mechanical – I don't want to say cold, but rather, automatic, it was not alive.<sup>232</sup>

Despite the fact that the actors could produce extraordinary vocal effects, their sound could still be mechanical and gave the impression of being nothing other than a stereotypical response. This problem became even more

---

<sup>232</sup> Grotowski, 'Voice', p. 26. There is no pagination in James Slowiak's translation. However, for the convenience of referencing, I numbered the pages.

acute when the actors worked on their larynxes. Grotowski noticed that if the actors consciously used their larynxes as resonators, they became hoarse. However, if they were engaged in a game of playing different wild animals, their voice naturally came out and was 'a lot less hard and automatic'.<sup>233</sup> Grotowski then recognized that there naturally exists an organic vocal process and that conscious control of the resonators would indeed intervene in this organic vocal process. The reason why the actors would become hoarse in the training mentioned above was that their conscious manipulation of their larynxes violated this organic vocal process. Thus, Grotowski tackled this problem by directing the actors' attention away from their bodies in order to stop their conscious manipulation of their larynxes. The same strategy was eventually applied to other resonators such as the chest or abdomen. In other words, the focal point of Grotowski's vocal training shifted from how to make the actors produce extraordinary vocal effects to how to facilitate the actors' organic vocal process.

To activate vibrators inside the actor's body without turning the actor's attention towards them can be quite tricky. Grotowski developed some tactics to overcome this difficulty. For example, in training, the actors were asked not to listen to their voices from within but to the echoes of their voices.

---

<sup>233</sup> Grotowski, 'Voice', p. 27.

I [Grotowski] observed that if you wanted to create an exterior echo, you could put the vibrators in action without any forethought. If you begin to speak toward the ceiling, at this moment, the skull vibrator is going to set itself free by itself. ... In this case, our attitude, our attention, is not oriented towards ourselves, but towards the outside. Because we are going to listen for the echo. The echo must be real and, at the same time, the voice must be directed towards the ceiling. ... Your attention is turned towards the exterior, you make the echo – the exterior phenomenon, and, at the same time, you hear the echo, the exterior phenomenon – that's what's natural.<sup>234</sup>

This emphasis on exterior phenomena aimed at directing the actor's attention away from his/her body so that his/her organic vocal process would not be interrupted. In other words, Grotowski pursued the actor's organic expressions through getting rid of his/her self-consciousness. In a 1964 interview, Grotowski called this new tactic the 'inductive technique' or 'technique of elimination', and he summarized it in the term '*via negativa*' in 1965.<sup>235</sup> However, I will call this underlying principle 'the method of elimination' because it refers not only to a new perspective on actor training but also to its future development as the principle of *mise-en-scène* as well as the postulation for re-defining theatre.

Although the method of elimination emerged simply as a new approach in vocal training, it had a direct influence on Grotowski's perspective of training in a broader sense. This can be seen in 'The Theatre's New Testament', an

---

<sup>234</sup> Grotowski, 'Voice', pp. 28-9.

interview with Grotowski conducted by Barba no later than May of 1964.<sup>236</sup> Grotowski stressed in the interview that the method of elimination could apply to 'movement, the plasticity of the body, gesticulation, the construction of masks by means of the facial musculature and, in fact, for each detail of the actor's body'.<sup>237</sup> In other words, he had applied the method of elimination not only to vocal training but to all sectors of his actor training.

Grotowski's method of elimination echoes the neo-platonist concept of God, in which God is believed to be beyond our understanding, and hence can only be defined through negation (*via negativa*). However, his method of elimination was mainly inspired, among others, by *Sunyata*, the Void, which is the main doctrine in Nagarjuna's teaching.<sup>238</sup> As far as practical work was concerned, the method of elimination specifically originated from

---

<sup>235</sup> The 'inductive technique' and 'technique of elimination' were mentioned in 'The Theatre's New Testament' written before May 1964. See *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 35. Yet, Grotowski used the term '*via negativa*' in 'Towards a Poor Theatre' published in September 1965. See *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 17.

<sup>236</sup> According to the note on page 27 of *Towards a Poor Theatre*, the interview 'The Theatre's New Testament' was conducted in 1964 and first published in 1965. However, in his letter dated 12 May 1964 to Barba, Grotowski mentioned a translation of this interview. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that this interview was conducted before May of 1964. (See Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 127.) Since it is very close to the period I am examining in this section, 'The Theatre's New Testament' serves as an important source for my discussion of the metamorphosis of Grotowski's work during this period.

<sup>237</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 37.

<sup>238</sup> Barba pointed out Grotowski's deep interest in and profound understanding of Nagarjuna's teaching of *Sunyata*. See Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 49. Through Madhyamika, the School of the Middle Way, Nagarjuna provided the most important philosophical formulation of *Sunyata*, which can be defined as the conjunction between existence and non-existence, but is neither existence nor non-existence. His view of *Sunyata* was to liberate the mind from its tendencies to cling to any set idea of the truth. For more details about Nagarjuna and his teaching, see Nāgārjuna, *Nāgārjuna's philosophy*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978.

Grotowski's tactic of directing the actors' attention away from their bodies to cease their intervention in the natural vocal process.

Apart from its influence on training, Grotowski's recognition of the organic process achieved through the method of elimination also brought about a new perspective on the actor's craft. The discovery of the fact that the actors' conscious manipulation of their bodies blocks their organic process of expression made Grotowski reconsider the process of human expression. As mentioned in 'The Theatre's New Testament', Grotowski considered the psychic impulse as the initiator of the process of human expression. He believed that the psychic impulse which reveals the innermost self is prior to our consciousness. Hence, the externalization of psychic impulses can be understood as the revelation of the subconscious. Grotowski called this self-penetration, which could cast off one's everyday mask.<sup>239</sup> He explained:

The actor who undertakes an act of self-penetration, who reveals himself and sacrifices the innermost part of himself – the most painful, that which is not intended for the eyes of the world – must be able to manifest the least impulse. He must be able to express, through sound and movement, those impulses which waver on the borderline between dream and reality. In short, he must be able to construct his own psycho-analytic language of sounds and gestures in the same way that a great poet creates his own language of words.<sup>240</sup>

---

<sup>239</sup> See *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 34.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

In the same interview, Grotowski considered that the untrained body, which appeared as the slave of discursive thoughts, could block the externalization of psychic impulses. Hence, the purpose of training was to free the body from the conditioning of discursive thoughts. Grotowski envisaged that the actor should 'not exhibit his body, but annihilate[s] it, burn[s] it, free[s] it from every resistance to any psychic impulse'.<sup>241</sup> Thus, the purpose of the training was to eliminate this (untrained) body as the advocate of discursive thoughts. For example, by means of vocal training, the actor's vocal apparatus was supposed to 'produce sound reflexes so quickly that thought – which would remove all spontaneity – has no time to intervene'.<sup>242</sup> In other words, the vocal apparatus should become a direct outlet of psychic impulses rather than being like a puppet manipulated by discursive thoughts. Accordingly, the actor's craft was supposed to unveil the innermost impulses which were oppressed by our consciousness. It ought to be an act of self-penetration.

Grotowski considered the actor's self-penetration not as a means of, but as the purpose of, the actor's preparation of his role in performance. In 'The New Theatre's Testament', Grotowski unveiled the idea of role as a pretext of self-penetration.

---

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

He [the actor] must learn to use his role as if it were a surgeon's scalpel, to dissect himself. It is not a question of portraying himself under certain given circumstances, or of 'living' a part; nor does it entail the distant sort of acting common to epic theatre and based on cold calculation. The important thing is to use the role as a trampoline, an instrument with which to study what is hidden behind our everyday mask – the innermost core of our personality – in order to sacrifice it, expose it.<sup>243</sup>

Here Grotowski no longer considered that the actor should impersonate the role but that the role was the chance to unveil the innermost being of the actor. Furthermore, the actor's self-penetration was not an auxiliary technique to make his/her acting more organic. The role, as well as the dramaturgy, was enriched, challenged or questioned by the actor's self-penetration. This is parallel to how he unblocked the actor's organic vocal process by means of suspending predetermined manipulation. Hence, the method of elimination and the recognition of an organic process in training also contributed to a change in Grotowski's vision of theatre making.

Moreover, when clarifying in the same interview his concept of archetype and how archetype functions in theatre performance, Grotowski expressed his belief in the fact that the actor's self-penetration would lead to acting that appealed to 'collective representation':

If we start working on a theatre performance or a role by violating our innermost selves, searching for the things which can hurt us most deeply, but which at the same time give us a total feeling of purifying

---

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

truth that finally brings peace, then we will inevitably end up with **representations collectives**. ...<sup>244</sup>

To determine the archetype, or 'representations collectives', as Grotowski put it in the excerpt above, through the actor's self-penetration, marks the revision of the approach towards the realization of the theatre of collective introspection. In other words, Grotowski no longer intended to realize collective introspection by evoking archetypes in the audience's imagination through the suggestiveness of the actor's vocal and physical effect. Instead, he presented the actor's undergoing self-penetration in front of the spectators and considered it an exemplary act for them. As Grotowski observes:

This [the actor's self-penetration] is an excess not only for the actor but also for the audience. The spectator understands, consciously or unconsciously, that such an act is an invitation to him to do the same thing...<sup>245</sup>

Although Grotowski's concept of theatre as a collective introspection still dominated his work in this period, the way Grotowski implemented his concept had changed, due to his new approach to dramaturgy initiated by his pursuit of the organic process through the method of elimination.

Grotowski's production *The Hamlet Study* (*Studium o Hamlecie*, 17 March 1964) was rehearsed around the same period of time, and it serves as a

---

<sup>244</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 43. Boldface is Grotowski's.

<sup>245</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 37.

good example of how he realized collective introspection in his theatre through a new perspective inspired by the method of elimination. *The Hamlet Study* was based on Shakespeare's play and Stanisław Wyspiański's essay of the same title as this production. In his essay, Wyspiański 'analysed and commented upon some of the key scenes from Shakespeare's play in the light of his own theatrical theory'.<sup>246</sup> *The Hamlet Study* was produced under difficult circumstances. The managers and the actors had no guarantee of their next month's salaries and some left the troupe. Grotowski, together with the remaining actors, insisted on a 'public rehearsal'. It was played 'in a completely empty room, with spectators seated around the walls'.<sup>247</sup> There was no stage or costume design, nor any programme for the production.<sup>248</sup>

Basically, *The Hamlet Study* still followed Grotowski's idea of the theatre of collective introspection. However, the dramaturgy and the direction of this production was very different from Grotowski's preceding works. As the performance was billed: 'The scenario and direction: the troupe under the direction of Jerzy Grotowski', Grotowski did not prepare the scenario and dramaturgy all by himself. Instead, the main theme was moulded during

---

<sup>246</sup> Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 72.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>248</sup> See Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, pp. 77-80, and Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, pp. 81-3.

rehearsals by his actors as much as by himself, which had never happened in previous productions. Flaszen explained Grotowski's exploration of the processes of collective creation:

The director makes suggestions as to the direction. But only enough to arouse the creative impulse in the actor. The actors in rehearsal improvise entire scenes, thus stimulating both the director's inventiveness and their own. The work relies upon a collective drawing out of what is psychologically hidden and expressively effective and in organizing these discoveries around the main thought which gradually forms itself.<sup>249</sup>

Grotowski's tactic to unveil what was 'psychologically hidden' in the actors was again an indirect strategy. In order not to encourage the actors' conscious manipulation of their bodies, Grotowski avoided giving any direct instructions to them in rehearsals. Instead, he evasively prompted, suggested and waited, to let the actors' prohibited psychic impulses and organic processes be revealed. This was the incarnation of the method of elimination. Molik, one of Grotowski's actors, recalled the atmosphere during rehearsals as 'the terrible quietness left by the once dictator director Grotowski', which he had never experienced before.<sup>250</sup> Through his new strategy of dramaturgy and direction, Grotowski incorporated the actor's self-penetration in shaping the motif of the production.

---

<sup>249</sup> In *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 77.

<sup>250</sup> Molik mentioned this at the conference on Grotowski's work from 1959 to 1969, Pontedera 12-14 October 2001.

Under the collective drawing of the protagonist, Hamlet appeared in this production as 'an intellectual who stood in contrast to the mob: the production juxtaposed his attitudes, behaviour, and reactions to the attitudes, behaviour, and reactions of those surrounding him' and 'Hamlet's otherness was underscored throughout'.<sup>251</sup> The contrast between the attitude of the helpless intellectual and that of the blind crowd was emphasized by Barba in an introductory article:

Hamlet is the 'Jew' and the others are the 'goyim', the Gentiles. He is different, the others are normal. He philosophises, the others live. He acts with caution, the others act without hesitation. He dreams of doing, while the others do. No possibility of contact, no tolerance exists between the 'Jew' and the 'group'. Each regards the other as a danger.<sup>252</sup>

According to Barba, Hamlet was depicted as an impotent figure who, like Kordian, was unable to act:

He [Hamlet] wants to remain outside, not to surrender to the collective madness. The others grab him and oblige him to torture, to 'act', to participate in the brutality and contempt which unites the group.<sup>253</sup>

This motif was the outcome of the actor's self-penetration and it was presented to the spectators as a challenge to their stereotypical thoughts on this renowned character Hamlet. Grotowski expected that the spectators

---

<sup>251</sup> Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 78.

<sup>252</sup> Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 78.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

would undergo their own self-penetration to follow the actor's deeds. This new approach to the realization of collective introspection appeared 'unsuccessful' as far as reactions from the audience were concerned. The performance of *The Hamlet Study* had a short run and was considered a failure by most reviewers. Even Grotowski himself rarely mentioned this production in his lectures and writings. However, this production marks a significant change in Grotowski's dramaturgy and directing.

The influence of the method of elimination on Grotowski's work did not limit itself to actor training. In addition to his method of preparing a production, Grotowski's vision of how theatre could be was also reshaped in accordance with the method of elimination. It was in his 1964 interview 'The Theatre's New Testament' that Grotowski started to define his ideal theatre by eliminating its secondary elements. Grotowski skipped all those 'perhaps necessary, but nevertheless supplementary' elements of theatre, including costumes, sets, music, lighting effects and text, and concentrated his theatre exclusively on 'what takes place between spectator and actor'.<sup>254</sup> Although the live contact between actors and spectators had always been one important feature of Grotowski's theatre since 1959, it did not become exclusive until Grotowski took up the method of elimination. In the same way, Grotowski

---

<sup>254</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 32-3.

refined the definition of his ideal theatre 16 months later in his renowned article 'Towards a Poor Theatre' (September 1965), in which he adopted Flaszen's term 'poor theatre' and recharged it with the new meaning of a negative approach towards, in his view, the core of theatre as such.

By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous, we found that theatre can exist without make-up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc. It cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, 'live' communion.<sup>255</sup>

In practice, the first step towards the realization of Grotowski's 'poor theatre' was 'finding the proper spectator-actor relationship for each type of performance and embodying the decision in physical arrangements'; and this echoes the 'uniform formula' proposed in Grotowski's theatre of collective introspection.<sup>256</sup> Secondly, the visual elements in performance were, Grotowski stressed, mostly constructed by means of the actor's body, and the acoustic and musical effects by the actor's voice.<sup>257</sup> Through physicality, the actor could transform himself 'from type to type, character to character, silhouette to silhouette – while the audience watched – in a **poor** manner, using only his own body and craft'.<sup>258</sup> Moreover, through his gesture, the

---

<sup>255</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 19.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20. For detailed discussion of Grotowski's 'uniform formula', see Section 2.2.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-1.

actor could transform 'the floor into a sea, a table into a confessional, a piece of iron into an animate partner'.<sup>259</sup> This theatricality was achieved through the actor's physicality and Grotowski's extensive application of poetic allusion, both of which made the minimal use of theatrical elements feasible.<sup>260</sup> Grotowski's idea of poor theatre can be seen as a further elaboration of his idea in 'The Theatre's New Testament', and both reflect the intensive influence of the method of elimination on his vision of the theatre.

The method of elimination brought an ascetic tendency to Grotowski's theatre so that all supplementary elements were stripped away. The actor and the audience became not only the most important elements, but the only essential elements of Grotowski's theatre. Furthermore, in order to give way to the actor's self-penetration during rehearsals, Grotowski had to renounce his dominance during the preparation of a production and adjust his own position from the creator to a 'midwife'. His role as director began to disappear into the background, as was the case in *The Hamlet Study*. He appeared simply as an agent who organized the outcome from the actor's self-penetration which was initiated by the situations set in the playtexts. The actors as themselves were to be the flesh of the performance. In his interview

---

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>260</sup> For more discussions about the poetic allusion used in Grotowski's productions, see Section 2.3.

'The Theatre's New Testament', Grotowski credited the actor's self-penetration as self-sacrifice. He emphasized that the actor's work was to offer his/her body publicly and hence the art of acting borders on prostitution if it is exploited for money. However, if the actor, Grotowski argued, 'reveals himself by casting off his everyday mask', and 'makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration', then the actor 'does not sell his body but sacrifices it'.<sup>261</sup> Giving his interpretation and justification to the actor's self-penetration with a spiritual connotation, Grotowski praised such an actor as the 'holy actor'. Grotowski further explained his idea of the 'holy actor' in this way:

The difference between the 'courtesan actor' and the 'holy actor' is the same as the difference between the skill of a courtesan and the attitude of giving and receiving which springs from true love: in other words, self-sacrifice. The essential thing in this second case is to be able to eliminate any disturbing elements in order to be able to overstep every conceivable limit. In the first case it is a question of the existence of the body; in the other, rather of its non-existence. The technique of the 'holy actor' is an **inductive technique** (i.e. a technique of elimination), whereas that of the 'courtesan actor' is a **deductive technique** (i.e. an accumulation of skills).<sup>262</sup>

Here Grotowski characterized the 'holy actor' with the technique of elimination. In addition, he further emphasized that the actor's self-penetration should be executed 'in a state of idle readiness, a passive

---

<sup>261</sup> See *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 34.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35. The boldface is Grotowski's.

availability' and 'the decisive factor in this process is humility, a spiritual predisposition: not to **do** something, but to **refrain** from doing something...'<sup>263</sup> This indirect means as the decisive factor in self-penetration is again an application of the method of elimination.

The same idea that inspired Grotowski's notion of the 'holy actor' is developed further in 'Towards a Poor Theatre'. In his article, Grotowski pointed out that the second defining characteristic of his ideal theatre was 'an act of transgression'.<sup>264</sup> Thus:

Why are we concerned with art? To cross our frontiers, exceed our limitations, fill our emptiness – fulfill ourselves. This is not a condition but a process in which what is dark in us slowly becomes transparent. In this struggle with one's own truth, this effort to peel off the life-mask, the theatre, with its full-fleshed perceptivity, has always seemed to me a place of provocation. It is capable of challenging itself and its audience by violating accepted stereotypes of vision, feeling, and judgment – more jarring because it is imaged in the human organism's breath, body, and inner impulses. This defiance of taboo, this transgression, provides the shock which rips off the mask, enabling us to give ourselves nakedly to something which is impossible to define but which contains Eros and Caritas.<sup>265</sup>

Here Grotowski assumed that the actor's self-penetration, or casting off of the life mask, undergone right in front of the audience's eyes, could provide a shock which would cast away the audience's life mask. In the heart of this 'act of transgression' was the 'holy actor' who went through self-penetration

---

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37. The boldface is Grotowski's.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

and offered himself as a sample for the audience's examination. It is clear that Grotowski's 'performance as an act of transgression' closely followed the same idea which initiated the idea of the 'holy actor'. To sum up, Grotowski's idea of poor theatre, in which he defined theatre through the elimination of the secondary elements, as well as his idea of the 'holy actor', which demanded the technique of elimination for the actor's self-penetration, had radically reshaped his vision of theatre. Although initially being a new strategy in acting and actor training, Grotowski's recognition of the natural organic process of expression and his development of the method of elimination gradually permeated other dimensions of his work, including his working tactics, training methods and his aesthetics of the theatre. From 1963 onwards, Grotowski's work took a route distinctively different from the one he envisaged at the first stage of his work.

---

<sup>265</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 21-2.

## 4. PERSONALIZATION FOR ORGANICITY AND FOR INITIATION

### 4.1 Personal Association Incorporated in Performance

From 1963 onwards, Grotowski made use of the method of elimination to free the actor's impulses from conscious control so that actors could express themselves spontaneously and induce organic expression in the context of training. The key to the method of elimination lies in the principle of the elimination of the actor's premeditated thoughts concerning the actor's actions. Yet, in performance, the actor's actions have to be fixed so that they can be repeatedly performed. This means that the actor has to execute premeditated actions, which, in principle, contradicts Grotowski's method of elimination. Thus, although Grotowski had found an effective method to foster the actor's organic expressions *in training*, this did not guarantee that the same method could secure the actor's organic expressions *in performance*. This was one of Grotowski's main tasks in his ensuing production *The Constant Prince* (*Książe Niezłomny*, 25 April 1965).

By means of the method of elimination, Grotowski opened one actor's

resonators through this actor's associations with his ex-lover. Regarding this case, Grotowski writes:

Then I did a study where an actor re-found a relation, not sexual but, all the same, carnal, with a woman from his life whom he had re-found as an imaginary partner. I said to him: 'Sing for her, she has put her hand on your head.' And, at that moment, his voice was set free at the skull vibrator. After that, 'she touches your chest' and these resonators were also set free. Point after point, through the association, different resonators worked in the organic sense, not automatically.<sup>266</sup>

It is certain, when cross-examined with other writings of Grotowski's, that the actor mentioned in the excerpt above is Cieślak rehearsing the principal role in *The Constant Prince*.<sup>267</sup> Before Grotowski and Cieślak started work on the role, together they read the *Spiritual Canticle* by John of the Cross, in which, according to Grotowski, the relation between the soul and the Truth, or between Man and God, is analogous to the relationship of the Bride with her beloved. It is this analogy that led Cieślak to the memory of his first love. Cieślak was carried away by the recall of his most intimate and private experience so that Grotowski could take advantage of this association to release Cieślak's conscious control of his resonators. This was the method of elimination materialized through the application of personal association. However, Grotowski was stunned and deeply moved by what Cieślak had

---

<sup>266</sup> Grotowski, 'Voice', p. 30.

<sup>267</sup> See Grotowski, 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle' in Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*. London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 122-3.

achieved, not only by his organic expressions but also by the revelation of his profound personal process. Grotowski then transplanted Cieślak's personal association into performance by asking Cieślak to focus on his intimate experience with his ex-lover when delivering his lines in the Prince's monologues. In other words, Cieślak's personal association applied in his role-playing was not related to the protagonist in the drama of *The Constant Prince*:

His long monologues were linked to the actions which belonged to that concrete memory from his life, to the most minute actions and physical and vocal impulses of that remembered moment. It was a relatively short moment from his life – we can say some tens of minutes, a time of love from his early youth. This referred to that kind of love which, as it can only arrive in adolescence, carries all its sensuality, all that which is carnal, but, at the same time, behind that, something totally different that is not carnal, or which is carnal in another way, and which is much more like a prayer. It's as if, between these two sides, appears a bridge which is a *carnal prayer*. The moment of which I speak was, therefore, immune from every dark connotation, it was as if this remembered adolescent liberated himself with his body from the body itself, as if he liberated himself – step after step – from the heaviness of the body, from any painful aspect. And, on the river of the memory, of its most minute impulses and actions, he put the monologues of the Constant Prince.<sup>268</sup>

This intensive use of personal intimate experience as the actor's internal accompaniment to his external actions marks a new direction in Grotowski's acting technique. The application of the actor's personal intimate experience in training was initially no more than one variation of the method of

---

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*

elimination. However, Grotowski's intensive and consistent use of the actor's personal intimate experience in performance distinguished the application of personal associations from other variations of the method of elimination. It was no longer simply an arbitrary trick to draw the actor's attention away from his/her body, but a systematic construction of the connection between the actor's physical actions in performance and the precise memory of his/her life in the past. It eventually became an acting technique in its own right. In January 1966, about eight months after the première of *The Constant Prince*, Grotowski refined his idea of associations in the following way:

What is an association in our profession? It is something that springs not only from the mind but also from the body. It is a return towards a precise memory. Do not analyse this intellectually. Memories are always physical reactions. It is our skin which has not forgotten, our eyes which have not forgotten. What we have heard can still resound within us. It is to perform a concrete act, not a movement such as caressing in general but, for example, stroking a cat. Not an abstract cat but a cat which I have seen, with which I have contact. A cat with a specific name – Napoleon, if you like. And it is this particular cat you now caress. These are associations.<sup>269</sup>

Grotowski bestows a much more specific meaning to the term 'association' here. It is distinct from the same term in his earlier writings, which mostly means 'free association'. Despite the fact that Grotowski still called it 'association' on many occasions, this elaborated version of the method of association for performance was distinct from those association exercises in

---

<sup>269</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 185-6.

1962 because of its specific appeal to the actor's personal intimate experiences. For the clarity of my argument, I will refer to it as 'personal association' in this thesis.

Notably, as far as Grotowski's Stanislavskian background is concerned, his technique of replacing the original plot by the actor's personal intimate experience can be considered an adaptation of Stanislavsky's method of creative ideas. Stanislavsky used the term 'creative ideas' (*vymysel* in Russian) to indicate any fictional idea introduced into the rehearsal of a scene in order to activate the actor's imagination, which can offer new impulses and a renewed approach.<sup>270</sup> However, Grotowski pushed this idea to its limit. In *The Constant Prince*, the plot for the actor predominated, and the plot for the audience was vaguely suggested.

In addition to Grotowski's insight into the nature of organic expression, Cieślak also played an essential role in Grotowski's development of the method of personal association as an acting technique. After the difficult period in 1964 concerning *The Hamlet Study*, actors Molik and Cynkutis, who played the main characters in Grotowski's previous productions, left the troupe temporarily. Cieślak was chosen to play the protagonist in *The Constant Prince*, the rehearsals of which began in June 1964. Among the

actors in Grotowski's troupe, Cieślak was not a master of voice. It was Cieślak's vocal deficiency that demanded Grotowski's further use of Cieślak's personal association to open the actor's resonators. The method of personal association was developed *for* and *through* Cieślak. It helped to open his resonators during training and to achieve organic acting in performance. Cieślak's contribution to this method of evoking personal intimate experience cannot be overlooked.

Through his work with Cieślak, Grotowski recognized personal association as the most promising acting technique for securing the actor's organic expression. It can be seen in a letter dated 1 September 1964, about three months into the rehearsals of *The Constant Prince*, in which Grotowski writes: 'My tendency towards individuation increases – almost every week it brings me a new illumination on the craft'.<sup>271</sup> The term 'individuation' has a Jungian overtone. Jung used 'individuation' to describe the process of individual mental development from the personal and collective unconscious:

Individuation means becoming a single, homogeneous being, and, in so far as 'individuality' embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could

---

<sup>270</sup> See Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, p. 172.

<sup>271</sup> Grotowski in *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 131.

therefore translate individuation as 'coming to selfhood' or 'self-realization'.<sup>272</sup>

Grotowski applied Jung's term to emphasize his growing trust and dependence on the actor's personal experience in his pursuit of organic acting. Grotowski recognized the actor's personal process and his organic expressions as two inseparable parts of one entity, reflecting the very existence of the actor as a human being. None could be achieved without the other. In order to foster the actor's organic expression in performance, the actor's personal process should be present in performance as an integral part of it.

*The Constant Prince* proved to be an innovation in Grotowski's repertoire. Even before its première, Grotowski had already recognized it as 'a distinctive production, different from the others', due to its training and rehearsal 'at a higher level'.<sup>273</sup> In a letter to Barba dated 29 December 1964, Grotowski explained the distinctiveness of this production in the following way:

Both the way of rehearsing *The Constant Prince* as well as the exercises, are very distant, and also different from what we did before. This does not mean a step back, rather that we are resolving the questions of method at a higher level. In the exercises this involves individualising the training and making the 'task', the actor's line of

---

<sup>272</sup> Carl G. Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* Vol. 7, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 171.

<sup>273</sup> Grotowski in *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 143.

motivation, emerge. In the psychic technique the process of concretisation has progressed considerably.<sup>274</sup>

Although Grotowski did not clearly explain 'the actor's line of motivation' or 'the process of concretisation' in the actor's 'psychic technique', I assume that these developments came into being owing to his application of the method of personal association. Before moving on to further discussions of Grotowski's method of personal association, it is necessary to give a brief introduction to *The Constant Prince*, which is based on Juliusz Słowacki's adaption of Pedro Calderón's play. Grotowski removed the geographic referencing and Spanish-Moorish characteristics of the original play and presented through allusion a simple theme about a group of persecutors and two prisoners. The first prisoner surrenders to the persecutors' torture and then is assimilated into the group. However, the persecutors are unable to conquer the second prisoner in the same way. They are fascinated by the second prisoner and fail to defeat him by means of increasing insults and torture. This discernible sacrificial motif was, among others, associated in the mind of spectators with the contemporary history of Poland.

The staging of *The Constant Prince* conforms to Grotowski's 'uniform formula'. There is a platform in the centre of the theatre space surrounded by

---

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

high fences behind which the spectators have to look down to see the performance.<sup>275</sup> Grotowski's account of his production indicated that the scenic arrangement was organized to reinforce the proposed relationship between the actor and the audience, and that there was coordination between the roles allocated to the spectators and their identity as spectators:

The spectators are removed from the actors and placed behind a high fence, behind which one can only see their heads. From there, from above, from this especially crooked perspective, they follow the actors as if they were animals in a runway at the zoo. They are like spectators at a *corrida*, like medical students who watch an operation, or, finally, like those who eavesdrop and thereby impose a sense of moral transgression onto the action. In *The Constant Prince*, the spectators are relegated to the role of students carefully observing an operation, a mob watching a bloody spectacle, collectors of impressions, tourists demanding sensations, or eavesdroppers on some secret ritual which they watch from a safe corner and to which no intruder is allowed access.<sup>276</sup>

The small platform can be associated with a prison bed, an executioner's platform, an examination table, or a sacrificial altar, according to the needs of the action. The scenic space is, as Grotowski suggested, analogous to a *corrida*, the bullring, or a surgery room. This concept behind the scenic space echoes Grotowski's idea of presenting the actor's self-penetration under the gaze of the audience. The designated audience involvement is realized in a deliberate way. What Grotowski entrusted to the spectators was not so much a specific role as a special angle or perspective of observation in favour of

---

<sup>275</sup> See the illustration of this scenic design in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 132.

moulding the spectators' psychology. This process and how it affected spectators is best described by Raymonde Temkine during the production's tour to Paris in 1966: 'voyeurs, shameful accomplices, looking at one another mutually looking at something they shouldn't be seeing'.<sup>277</sup>

The costumes in this production were quite symbolic. The persecutors wore cloaks, breeches, top-boots and, in one case, a crown – all symbols of power. The prisoner/Prince wore the white shirt of purity, a loin-cloth symbolizing nakedness, and a red cloak of martyrdom, which was to become a shroud.<sup>278</sup> In addition, the poetic allusion was an underlying principle of Grotowski's staging. The implementation of 'the uniform formula' based on the generalized theme of this production allowed broader interpretations of the scenario.

In order to scrutinize how Grotowski's method of personal association was implemented in performance, it is necessary to take a closer look at the acting in *The Constant Prince*. The reviewers were mostly impressed by the distinctive acting in this production. Among them, Jan Kreczmar observed:

I want only to share the thought that this *novum* in the art of acting depends on, for me, the eliciting of primal and elementary, beyond-the-

---

<sup>276</sup> In Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, pp. 84-5.

<sup>277</sup> Raymonde Temkine, *Grotowski*, Tran. Alex Szogyi, New York: Avon Books, 1972, p. 30.

<sup>278</sup> See Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 80.

rational instincts, passions, and human emotions, conceived in the strict rigor of sound, plasticity, and rhythmic harmony.<sup>279</sup>

In his review, critic Józef Kelera praised Cieślak's acting as the most impressive part of this production:

In my opinion the force and moreover, the success of **The Constant Prince** are mainly due to the principal character. In the actor's creation, the essential elements of Grotowski's theory take precise tangible forms which can be verified not merely in the demonstration of his method, but also in the beautiful fruits it produces. The essence of this does not in reality reside in the fact that the actor makes amazing use of his voice, nor in the way that he uses his almost naked body to sculpt mobile forms that are striking in their expressiveness; nor is it in the way that the technique of the body and voice form a unity during the long and exhausting monologues which vocally and physically border on acrobatics. It is a question of something quite different. ... A sort of psychic illumination emanates from the actor. I cannot find any other definition. In the culminating moments of the role, everything that is technique is as though illuminated from within, light, literally imponderable. At any moment the actor will levitate... He is in a state of grace.<sup>280</sup>

Both reviews stress the profound psychic process illuminated through the rigorous vocal and physical signs. On the one hand, the introduction of the actor's personal association brought about the unprecedented quality of the acting. On the other hand, it was not done at the cost of the rigour of the external forms of the actor's actions, although the actors were to focus on their personal associations when performing. How the documentary film of *The Constant Prince* came into being was a testimony to the rigorous structure of the actor's actions in performance. One performance of this

---

<sup>279</sup> In Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 86.

production was illegally filmed, with a hidden amateur camera using silent film, during its tour to Spoleto in Italy in July 1967. Three years later, this silent film was overlaid with the sound recording which was most probably taken during the stage performance in the Polytechnics of Oslo in March 1966. Despite the twenty months' difference between the recordings, a virtually perfect synchronization of the picture and the sound occurred. This signifies strictly fixed rhythm and tempo in all of the actor's actions. Hence, by no means did Grotowski abandon his request for strictly fixed external forms of the actor's expression in performance, despite his emphasis on organic acting brought about by the method of personal association.

For Grotowski, the rigorous structure of the actor's actions which curbed the actor's internal process could be turned into an advantage in sustaining the actor's personal association. If the actor could reach his/her limit and challenge the impossible, the actor's internal process would radiate through its struggle against the external form. Namely, personal association could find its own way to flow through a series of predetermined movements and gestures. This is how the method of personal association worked in performance and Grotowski usually referred to it as the mutual reinforcement of spontaneity and discipline in many of his writings. This issue will be

---

<sup>280</sup> Józef Kelera in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 64. The boldface in this quotation is original.

further investigated in Section 4.2 through my analysis of the plastic exercises Grotowski used towards the end of the 1960s.

Personal association may be an effective method of stimulating organic acting for each individual actor, but it can lead to self-indulgence, which does not favour interaction with other actors. To keep this interaction organic, Grotowski asked his actors to project their personal associations onto their fellow actors. Firstly, the method of personal association is always to establish an association with someone or something, which can be considered an imaginary partner. This partner must be fixed outside the actor's body, in the space or projected onto another actor. Thus, the actors focus their personal associations on something outside themselves, which conforms to the method of elimination. Secondly, even in acting that does not involve the actor's personal associations, the actors direct their vocal and physical signs towards an imaginary point in space, or towards a real partner, such as a fellow actor or someone in the audience. In his 'Skara Speech' (January 1966), delivered eight months after the première of *The Constant Prince*, Grotowski analyzes how his actors reacted to each other's signs:

Thus during the performance where the score – clearly defined text and action – is already fixed, you should always have contact with your partners. Your partner, if he is a good actor, always follows the same score of actions. Nothing is left to chance, no details are changed. But there are minute changes within this set score such that each time he

plays in a slightly different way, and you should watch him closely, listen and observe him, responding to his immediate actions. Every day he says 'Good morning' with the same intonation, just like your neighbor at home who always says 'Good morning' to you. One day he is in a good mood, another day he is tired, another he is in a hurry. He always says 'Good morning' but with a slight difference every time. This you must see, not with the mind, but just see and hear. In reality you always give the same response – 'Good morning' – but if you have really listened it will be a little different each day. The action and the intonation are the same but the contact is so minute that it is impossible to analyze it rationally. This changes all relationships, and it is also the secret of harmony between men. When a man says 'Good morning' and another replies, there is automatically a vocal harmony between the two of them. On the stage we often detect a lack of harmony because the actors don't listen to their partners. The problem is not to listen and ask oneself what the intonation is, only to listen and answer.<sup>281</sup>

Grotowski asks his actors to listen to each other and to reply, and the whole process of interaction is done in a 'musical way', regardless of the meaning of the spoken lines. From Grotowski's explanation, we can catch a glimpse of how he achieves harmonious group acting within his strictly choreographed structure. In brief, the method of elimination is also an essential element incorporated into Grotowski's acting technique in 1965, which is best represented by Grotowski's request for his actors to react to a real or imaginary partner, or even an imaginary point located in space. This device helps to achieve organic acting for each individual actor. It also helps to build up an organic connection between each actor's acting whether the actors were concentrating on their personal associations or on their vocal and physical signs or not.

---

<sup>281</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 187.

If we take a closer look at the documentary film of *The Constant Prince*, it is not difficult to notice that most parts of the performance were primarily dominated by strictly choreographed vocal and physical signs. That is, the lines spoken by the actors were rather like chants or mantras deprived of words. Similarly, the actor's gesture and movement was like dance. However, on many occasions in the performance, especially the moments when the actors delivered their monologues, the actors were engaged in a deep internal process while executing their 'choreographed' actions. It is during these moments of climax, especially during the monologues, that the actors evoked their personal associations. For the scenes between the moments of climax, the actors' actions were swiftly switched from one state to another, which did not allow a gradual evolution in the internal process they underwent. They simply went through the vocal and physical signs. Thus, the whole performance, including those highlighted moments where the actor's personal associations were scrupulously evoked, was constructed on rigorous external forms. The actor's inner process was engaged in personal matters, which had no explicit link with the themes of Calderón's play. Yet, Grotowski's adaptation and arrangement of scenes, together with his design of the actor's signs, was to give audiences the impression of a story of martyrdom

'according to Calderón/Słowacki', that is, a story of the prisoner surrounded by his persecutors, who look to crush him, but are, at the same time, fascinated by him. As a result, Grotowski had to deal with both the actor's personal association to elicit the actor's organicity and the actor's external actions for the audience's receptions, and he had to bring them together in the performance in disguise. Grotowski clearly pointed out that 'the cycle of the actor's personal associations can be one thing, and the line that appears in the perception of the spectator another thing'.<sup>282</sup> He further emphasized that 'between these two different things there must exist a genuine relation, a single deep root, even if it is well hidden'.<sup>283</sup> Nevertheless, the connection between the two could still be arbitrary, that is, the choice of the actor's personal association for each scene could be random. In Cieślak's case, this hidden connection was the metaphoric analogy of love for a bride and love for God in *Spiritual Canticle*. This connection was important in rehearsals, but played no role in performance. It was better for the spectators not to know of this connection since it would distract them from understanding the scenario of the performance. Also, when performing, Cieślak did not need to remember how his personal associations could be related to the scenario of the prince.

---

<sup>282</sup> Grotowski, 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle,' in *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p. 123.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

All he needed to do was concentrate on his personal associations with his ex-lover at the right moment in performance. Thus, there are deliberate differences between the actor's personal association and the scenario presented to the audience.

In a 1966 workshop, Grotowski pointed out that since actors are often asked to play roles beyond their own experiences, they are bound to replace the original plot in the play with their related personal experiences so as to achieve convincing acting. For example, an actor who has no experience of killing a person can be asked to play a scene in which he kills his mother. He can then draw on his experience of killing a cat if he happened to have done so. Also, Grotowski emphasizes that the personal experience on which the actor draws should be a powerful experience so that the actor can be 'disarmed and relaxed' during this task.<sup>284</sup> Thus, the replacement of the plot allows the actors to evoke their personal associations in performance, which can enhance their organic acting. Meanwhile, Grotowski still based his performance on signs, which, together with his arrangement of scenes, enabled him to maintain the scenario presented to the audience. With careful calculation on both aspects, Grotowski managed to juxtapose these two heterogeneous parts together in the performance of *The Constant Prince*.

---

<sup>284</sup> See *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 191-2.

Grotowski believed that to evoke the actor's personal experiences was the key to organic acting, even in a non-naturalistic acting style. Through the device of replacing the original plot with the actor's personal experience and through the device of the choreographed signs, Grotowski found a way of ensuring the actor's organic expression in performance. After *The Constant Prince*, Grotowski acknowledged that the method of personal association held the key to the actor's organic acting. As a result, the actor's personal process had turned out to be the most important issue in his training since then.

#### **4.2 Training Personalization**

Grotowski's actor training since 1963 had become more and more specific for each individual actor. During the rehearsals of *Doctor Faustus* which premiered on 23 April 1963, Grotowski started to work individually with one actor at a time so that he could approach each actor with a tailored working method to break through the actor's psychological disguise.<sup>285</sup> By September 1963, Grotowski's actors had started to develop individual versions of the exercises according to their own characteristics and traits, which indicates Grotowski's increasing emphasis on the individual characteristic of each actor in training. In a letter dated 21 September 1963,

---

<sup>285</sup> See Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 43.

Grotowski mentions that this 'radical reform of the exercises', as he called it, is based on:

- 1) the individualisation of the exercises starting out from a defect that cannot be eliminated, from errors that can be eliminated and from the capabilities belonging to a particular person, and this in every domain of the exercises. *Everyone becomes their own instructor.*
- 2) *the introduction into all the exercises of the imaginative factor* (stimulation of the subconscious). A concrete change in the exercises is already visible.<sup>286</sup>

As this letter suggests, besides adjusting exercises to the actor's individual capacity, Grotowski also began to utilize the actor's imagination in all exercises, which he regarded as a stimulus to the actor's subconscious to facilitate organic expression. Encouraged by 'the concrete change in the exercises' that he had observed, Grotowski believed that he was on the right track towards the discovery of an acting technique enriched by the actor's subconscious. Grotowski further expressed, in the same letter, his confidence in this new direction: 'I believe that this most recent research (self-exploration, psychic anatomy, psycho-analysis of the "non-private") can, if developed, open up inexhaustible prospects and possibilities'.<sup>287</sup> He assessed his new discovery as 'a concrete form of knowledge *that it can be studied and verified on one's own organism*'.<sup>288</sup> In training Grotowski approached his

---

<sup>286</sup> Grotowski in *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 122.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122-3. The italics are in the original.

actors on a case-by-case basis, so as to deal with the actor's psychological disguise individually. This principle was then elaborated into further development.

After the première of *The Constant Prince* in which the actor's personal associations were incorporated in performance, Grotowski extensively adopted the method of personal association in training to avoid the actor's mechanical execution of exercises. In his letter to Barba dated 20 June 1965, Grotowski described the change in his training:

We too are now adopting the principle of connecting the exercises by means of a thread of continual improvisation. In this way, I obtain hours of training within which the flow of individual associations changes every day, and from which all the gymnastic-like elements (i.e. those which risk falling into perfectionism through mechanical repetition) are eliminated.<sup>289</sup>

Although the personal associations drawn upon in training are not as precise and specific as those operating in performance, the basic ideas behind both cases are the same. The free continual improvisation of the actor's personal associations attached to the exercises brought about the actor's organic expression and this has since become an integral part of training. I will refer to this tendency of utilizing personal associations, in training as well as in performance, as personalization. This tendency of personalization comprised

---

<sup>289</sup> Grotowski in *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 150.

not only the application of the actor's precise personal experiences in the highlights of the performance, but also the actor's personalization of his/her vocal and physical signs in other parts of the performance. He explained this in the 'Skara Speech' (January 1966):

I have said here several times that the actor must unveil himself, that he must release that which is most personal and always do it authentically. ... In the most important moment in your role, reveal your most personal and closely guarded experience. At other moments only use signs, but justify those signs. That is enough.<sup>290</sup>

To 'justify' the signs means the actor's personalization of them. Grotowski emphasized the same issue on another occasion by asking the actor to 'personalize' those exercises introduced as vocal and physical signs in the performance:

On stage you have to be individual. The exercises adapted to the situations of the play must have a personal cachet, and the coordination of the various elements must also be individual. That which comes from the inside is half improvised. That which is outward is technique.<sup>291</sup>

For those parts of acting, in which no precise personal associations are evoked, the actors have to personalize their vocal and physical signs in order to keep them organic. To sum up, personalization had become Grotowski's exclusive approach to organic acting after *The Constant Prince*. It naturally

---

<sup>290</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 196.

<sup>291</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 161-2.

became the focus of Grotowski's training thereafter, as can be well demonstrated in his workshops abroad after 1965.<sup>292</sup>

To gain insight into the importance of personalization in Grotowski's training as well as his acting method, it is necessary to understand his contemporary perception of the organic process of human expression, from which all his training methods are derived. Originating in his growing belief in personalization as the essence of organic acting, Grotowski considered the process of stimulation, impulse and reaction as the condition of organic expression. Grotowski summarized the significant transition of his training from 1962 to its version after 1965:

The exercises have now become a pretext for working out a personal form of training. The actor must discover those resistances and obstacles which hinder him in his creative task. ... Most of the basic elements of the physical exercises have been retained, but they have been orientated towards a quest for contact: the receiving of stimuli from the exterior and reaction to these (the process of 'give and take' mentioned elsewhere). The resonators are still used in the vocal exercises, but these are now set in action through various types of impulses and contact with the exterior.<sup>293</sup>

Thus, no matter which part of the body they focused on, all exercises were to facilitate the complete organic process of stimulation, impulse and reaction. This stimulation-impulse-reaction process, or 'give-and-take', or 'contact' as

---

<sup>292</sup> Grotowski with his actors gave actor training workshops abroad during The Laboratory Theatre's foreign tours. The first workshops took place in Sweden in February and March 1966. The foreign tour and workshops of this kind became the major activities for Grotowski and his troupe until 1967. See *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, pp. 95-109.

Grotowski called it on various occasions, seems to have a Pavlovian overtone. However, none of these terms was clearly defined. To understand their meaning, it is better to examine the contexts in which Grotowski used them.

First of all, it is important to point out the shifting of the meaning of 'sign', a term constantly used in Grotowski's analysis of acting. In 1962, Grotowski regarded a 'sign' as the abbreviation of the 'vocal and physical sign', which connotes the external form of the actor's action in performance. However, in Grotowski's speeches and writings after 1965, 'sign' means the *impulse* expressed through external vocal and physical forms, and he refers to the external details of the actor's expressions as a 'score'. This subtle change in Grotowski's discourse can be perceived in his 'Skara Speech' (January 1966):

When playing the role, the score is no longer one of details but of signs. I do not wish to explain now what a sign is. Ultimately it is a human reaction, purified of all fragments, of all other details which are not of paramount importance. The sign is the clear impulse, the pure impulse. The actions of the actors are for us signs. If you want a clear definition, it is what I have said earlier: when I do not perceive, it means there are no signs. I said when I 'perceive' and not when I 'understand', because to understand is a function of the brain. ... The test of a true impulse is whether I believe in it or not.<sup>294</sup>

The shift of the connotation of Grotowski's term 'sign' signifies the shift of his emphasis from the external forms of the actor's actions to the actor's

---

<sup>293</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 101.

internal process. In other words, the 'impulse' occupied a more central position than the 'score' in Grotowski's new vision of acting after 1965, which emphasized the organic process of expression. According to Grotowski's explanations on various occasions in his 1966 Brussels workshop, the term 'impulse' suggests both the psychological and the physical phenomena.<sup>295</sup> It can mean the psychological cause of an action and/or the first physical symptom of that action. Its psychological connotation prevailed when Grotowski used this term to analyze acting. Take a look at how he addressed the pupils in this workshop:

Everything we undertake must be done without too much haste, but with great courage; in other words, not like a sleep-walker but in all consciousness, dynamically, as a result of definite impulses.<sup>296</sup>

Here 'impulse' is related to such psychological aspects as 'courage' and 'no haste'. Yet, 'impulse' can also be a physical description when used in the context of a training instruction. Let us take Grotowski's instruction in the same workshop as an example: 'The impulse, however, must precede the movement itself. This impulse must visibly come from the body. it originates

---

<sup>294</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 192-3.

<sup>295</sup> In October 1966, Grotowski and Cieślak conducted a series of workshops at the École Supérieure des Arts du Spectacle in Brussels. The notes on these workshops taken by Franz Marijnen described Grotowski's training sessions in detail and they serve my analysis of Grotowski's training after 1965. Marijnen's notes were included in Grotowski's book *Towards a Poor Theatre* under the title 'Actor's Training (1966)'. See *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 143-72.

<sup>296</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 160.

and develops in the loins.’<sup>297</sup> This double meaning of ‘impulse’ indicates that the physical and psychological aspects of the impulse are, for Grotowski, interwoven and inseparable. It implies that the impulse, which gives rise to organic physical expressions, is always related to personal psychology. In fact, the way Grotowski stimulates impulse through the actor’s personal experience was evident in his training after 1965. The 1966 Brussels workshop is a good example of this, where he asked pupils to associate the physical exercises they learned in previous sessions with something personal. Even when his pupils lay stretched out on the floor as part of the exercise, Grotowski asked them to ‘be conscious all the time of having a reason for doing this’, that is, to ‘associate it with something’.<sup>298</sup> Through these personal associations, the pupils could evoke impulses which were the origins of organic actions. This clearly indicates the increasing tendency of personalization in his training method.

The stimulation of impulse is the initiation of the organic process of stimulation, impulse and reaction, but it is also essential to clear the obstacles which prevent this organic process from its completion. Grotowski believed that an impulse did not spring from the whole body, but from a certain point

---

<sup>297</sup> Marijnen in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 160.

<sup>298</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 163.

inside the body. In his notes on Grotowski's 1966 Brussels workshop, Marijnen points out the following law of Grotowski's exercises:

The vertebral column is the centre of expression. The driving impulse, however, stems from the loins. Every live impulse begins in this region, even if invisible from the outside.<sup>299</sup>

To become a perceivable expression, the impulse originating from this point inside the body has to be transmitted to the exterior. If the body dilutes, interferes or even impedes this impulse, the subsequent expression is not going to be natural or organic. Thus, it is essential to ensure the unconditional transmission of this impulse through the body, so as to complete the whole organic process. In other words, it is necessary to work out a 'transparent body' which can faithfully transmit the impulse. To achieve such a 'transparent body', Grotowski mainly relied on the method of elimination, as he points out:

The education of an actor in our theatre is not a matter of teaching him something; we attempt to eliminate his organism's resistance to this psychic process. The result is freedom from the time-lapse between inner impulse and outer reaction in such a way that the impulse is already an outer reaction. Impulse and action are concurrent: the body vanishes, burns, and the spectator sees only a series of visible impulses.<sup>300</sup>

---

<sup>299</sup> Marijnen in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 159.

<sup>300</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 16.

Also, Grotowski reiterates the importance of this 'transparent body' in another text 'Statement of Principles', which was an introductory reading for those who wished to join Grotowski's troupe as actors:

... it [body] should be trained to obey, to be pliable, to respond passively to psychic impulses as if it did not exist during the moment of creation – by which we mean it does not offer any resistance.<sup>301</sup>

The last part of the organic process of stimulation, impulse and reaction is to project the impulse towards an exterior objective. As Grotowski emphasized in his 'Skara Speech', 'contact is not staring, it is to see', namely, to build up a genuine connection with someone or something exterior.<sup>302</sup> Even when contact is made with an imaginary partner, 'this imaginary partner must also be fixed in the space of this actual room', or one's reactions will remain within oneself.<sup>303</sup> Drawing the actor's attention away from his/her body is to clear any blockage in the body that would interfere with the transmission of the impulse towards the exterior. It is worth noting that the method of elimination alone is not sufficient to foster the complete organic process of stimulation, impulse and reaction, since it does not stimulate the impulse from the actor. As a result, the actor's personal process remains essential to the actor's organic process of expressiveness.

---

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

To foster a complete organic process of stimulation, impulse and reaction is the key issue in Grotowski's training after 1965. The two objectives of Grotowski's training were the stimulation of the actor's personal impulse which initiates the organic process, and the actor's 'transparent body' which ensures the completion of this process. The understanding of the organic process provides an insight into the underlying rule of Grotowski's training, despite the ramification, interfusing and evolution of his various exercises. It forms the foundation for further analysis of various sectors of his training.

Although sharing the similar formation and even the same names with their precursor exercises practised in 1962, Grotowski's exercises in 1966 had significantly changed. On the surface, the structure of Grotowski's training in 1966 followed, by and large, the structure he developed in 1962: vocal, physical and plastic exercises. The purpose of these exercises were significantly different. In 1962, the physical exercises were designed to enhance the suppleness and agility of the actor's body, preparing it to compose physical signs in the plastic exercises. The plastic exercises in 1962 were meant to compose physical signs (gestures and movement) involving two contradictory physical expressions, which at the time, Grotowski considered to be essential to expressiveness. The essence of the physical and

---

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*

plastic exercises in 1966 did not lie in what kind of movement or gestures could be produced, but mostly in locating and dissolving the physical obstacles which hampered the impulses originating inside the body.<sup>304</sup> The 1966 Brussels workshop provides an example of this. The physical training in that workshop was composed of headstand, somersault and other physical exercises, as well as hand-finger exercises from the group of plastic exercises. Grotowski and Cieślak firstly sorted out the physical blockages which caused the participants problems. After the participants were familiar with the physical details of these exercises, they were asked to attach their personal associations to them. Franz Marijnen noted regarding the workshop:

When you master these exercises so that you can execute this cycle without too much technical hindrance, you can begin to combine them with an improvisation. The exercises are then only pretexts or, in Grotowski's words 'details'. While performing the exercise Cieślak linked all these details into an improvisation without any preparation.<sup>305</sup>

'Improvisation' here means infusing these exercises with personal association while maintaining their external details. The introduction of personal association in the exercises was meant to initiate the organic process of

---

<sup>304</sup> The physical obstacles that hamper the actor's impulses can be the result of psychological causes. When dealing with the actor's physical obstacles, Grotowski did not only pay attention to the problems related to the actor's body, but also tackled the actor's psychological obstacles by demanding strenuous, sometimes even unreasonable, physical work from the actor. In other words, Grotowski's training was always intended to operate on both the actor's physical and psychological levels, despite the fact that he communicated with the actor only on physical matters.

<sup>305</sup> in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 161.

stimulation, impulse and reaction. If the organic process was somehow not activated, Grotowski had to determine what hindered the process, where the obstacle was and how to dissolve it. The purpose of this physical training was far from teaching the pupils certain movements or positions.

The vocal exercises, which were formerly one of two major parts of Grotowski's training in 1962, had become secondary to physical training in 1966. Although there was vocal practice to test or to open various resonators in the body, no one 'correct' method of emitting voice was imposed on the actors. Under Grotowski's new vision of training, the organic voice was regarded as an extension of the body's capacity to convey impulses. For him, the voice prior to the body's reactions belongs in the realm of conscious thoughts, and it can by no means be organic. The organic voice will come when the actor reacts with his/her whole body and without any forethought. Grotowski emphasized: 'Do not think of the vocal instrument itself, do not think of the words, but react – react with the body. The body is the first vibrator and resonator.'<sup>306</sup> He also emphasized: 'Bodily activity comes first, and then vocal expression.'<sup>307</sup> 'In the vocal process, all the parts of the body must vibrate. ...we learn to speak with the body first and then with the

---

<sup>306</sup> Marijnen in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 153.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

voice.’<sup>308</sup> Grotowski tried to set free different parts of the body as resonators in order to make the whole body one vibrator from which the voice emanated. The vocal exercises in 1966 were not used for routine training, but as diagnostic tests to locate the actor’s physical difficulties, which blocked his/her organic process. Then Grotowski could deal with these physical blockages case by case. For instance, in the Brussels workshop, he made use of the pupil’s imagination to tackle blockages in different parts of his/her body. Marijnen recounted this session of training in the following way:

**Grotowski:** ‘Imagine you are lying in a warm river and the warm water is flowing over your body. Remain in silence for a little while, then sing.’ In the meantime, Grotowski touches with his hand the parts of the body that come into contact with the warm water. The pupil must simply react.<sup>309</sup>

In this way, Grotowski directed the pupils to react with different parts of their bodies when they sang. On another occasion in the same workshop, Grotowski touched the pupils’ bodies as they kept on speaking. He simply used his hands to ‘knead’ certain parts of their bodies so that the tensions in those parts, which caused vocal problems, could be released.<sup>310</sup> Both vocal exercises not only involved the resonators inside the body but, more importantly, the complete organic process of stimulation, impulse and

---

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>309</sup> Marijnen in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 150.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

reaction. In other words, it is not the opened resonators that can produce the organic voice. It is the organic voice, the definite result of a clear impulse, that can open up the resonators.

In the same workshop, Grotowski also suggested that the opening of one's voice could start from a totally opposite direction, that is, by imitating an artificial voice, such as the voice of a dog:

You can begin – and this method is all right for many people – with what can be called artificial voices. But as a development of these exercises you should seek another voice, your natural one, and through different impulses of your body, open this voice.<sup>311</sup>

This trend of vocal exercises is the residue of Grotowski's 1962 vocal training which was to produce extraordinary vocal effects. This type of vocal exercise did not evoke the complete organic process, but focused only on vocal shape and the resonators. Hence, this type of exercise could be helpful or harmful to the actor's organic vocal process, depending on how the instructor used it. In this workshop, Grotowski considered it as an alternative starting point for opening up the pupils' voice. The imitation of artificial voice was to break down the pupils' habitual use of their voice before moving on to the work on organic vocal process. This exercise alone was by no means sufficient, since it did not engage the complete organic process of the actor.

---

<sup>311</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 188.

To get a better insight into Grotowski's training in 1966, it is necessary to scrutinize not only the content of the exercises, but also Grotowski's manipulation of them. To take the training session in the 1966 Brussels workshop as an example: Grotowski asked one pupil 'to recite a text and sing a song while standing on his head'.<sup>312</sup> He took advantage of the demanding headstand exercise, which was part of the physical exercises undertaken, to challenge the pupil's physical limit so that the pupil could no longer hold on to conscious control of the larynx. In this way, there was a better chance to open the pupil's closed larynx. Hence, in this context, this headstand exercise, which originally belonged to the category of physical exercises, was no longer a typical physical exercise to enhance physical suppleness or compose any physical gestures. It became a device for vocal training. Also, most of the vocal exercises in the same workshop were not intended to practise the ability to produce extraordinary voices, but simply to reveal blockages in the actor's body so that further exercises for each individual could be determined. In other words, these vocal exercises were actually diagnostic tests, and it would be a total misunderstanding to consider them as part of the daily training routine. Thus, apart from the exact content of the

---

<sup>312</sup> Marijnen in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 149.

exercises, Grotowski's manipulation of them was also an important factor in determining the real purpose behind the exercises.

It is not an exaggeration to claim that all of Grotowski's exercises during this period worked on the organic process of stimulation, impulse and reaction, one way or another. In order to gain insight into Grotowski's exercises, it is crucial to keep in mind this organic process as a whole even when analyzing those exercises focusing partially on parts of this process. In fact, Grotowski eventually dropped those exercises which concentrated so narrowly on one part of the organic process that they eventually proved harmful to the completion of the whole organic process. For example, the respiration exercise was an important part of vocal training in 1962, but this exercise was no longer part of the training after 1965, since Grotowski believed that people could naturally 'adapt their respiration according to their human activities'.<sup>313</sup> To impose a specific respiration method on the actor became an unnecessary intervention against the actor's organic process, and was thus to be avoided. Another example is the facial mask exercise. This exercise helped actors to produce some extraordinary facial expressions, but it also induced the actors' conscious manipulation of their faces and risked

---

<sup>313</sup> Marijnen in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 151.

preventing the actors from reacting with their whole bodies. Hence, Grotowski eventually skipped this exercise.

Towards the end of the 1960s, Grotowski focused more and more on the organic process of stimulation, impulse and reaction. He noticed that most vocal exercises involuntarily narrowed down the pupils' attention solely to their resonators and vocal shapes, which proved harmful to the realization of the organic process as a whole. Grotowski then radically dropped all vocal exercises, except those diagnostic tests to locate the blockages inside the pupils bodies. He even warned his pupils, 'if you want to do vocal exercises, you are only going to create difficulties'.<sup>314</sup> He believed that there should not be any vocal training in its own right, and that the organic voice would come naturally if the actor was physically engaged in the organic process of stimulation, impulse and reaction. In other words, vocal training had totally faded into the background of physical training towards the end of the 1960s.

On the other hand, personalization became more and more important to the plastic and physical exercises towards the end of the 1960s. The plastic exercises were to achieve what Grotowski called the *conjunctio oppositorum*, namely, the mutually supporting incorporation of spontaneity and structure. Grotowski explained the gist of the plastic exercises in 1971:

Finally, after applying different kinds of plastic exercises [*sic*] from well-known systems (Delsarte, Dalcroze, and others), step by step, we began to envisage these plastic exercises like a 'conjunctio oppositorum' between structure and spontaneity. Here, in the body movements, there are fixed forms, details, which can be called forms. The first essential thing is to fix a certain number of these details and make them precise. Then, to refind the personal impulses which can embody these details; by embody, I mean, to transform them. To transform them, but not to destroy them. The question is this: how to begin by improvizing only the order of the details, by improvizing the rythmn [*sic*] of the fixed details, and then, to change the order and the rythmn [*sic*], and even the composition of the details, not in a premeditated [*sic*] fashion, but with the flow dictated by our own bodies? How to refind this 'spontaneous' line in the body which is embodied in the details, which surrounds them, which surpasses them, but which, at the same time, maintains their precision? That's impossible if the details are 'gestures', if they involve the arms and legs and are not rooted in the body's totality.<sup>315</sup>

The focus of these plastic exercises was how to integrate the fixed score of actions and personal impulses together. He believed that the body's spontaneous flow could be 'embodied in these details'.<sup>316</sup> Based on Grotowski's understanding of the organic process, the body is the medium which transmits the impulses to the exterior. The impulses which happened in the past can have residue in our body. Therefore, the body becomes a reservoir of the impulses. It is then possible to relive our experience in the past through reviving what has been imprinted in our body, or what Grotowski called the body-memory. He emphasizes that, 'the body does not

---

<sup>314</sup> 'Voice', p. 34.

<sup>315</sup> Grotowski, 'Exercises', p. 13. I am quoting James Slowiak's unpublished translation of Grotowski's text. There is no pagination in Slowiak's translation. However, for the convenience of referencing, I numbered the pages.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

have memory, it is memory'.<sup>317</sup> Thus, what should be achieved in the method of personal association is to unblock this body-memory. Grotowski further explains,

But if you maintain the precise details, and let the body determine the different rythmns [rhythms], constantly changing rythmn, changing the order, almost like taking the details from the air, then who's giving the commands? It's not the mind nor does it happen by chance, it is in relation with our life. We don't even know how it happens, but it is the 'body-memory', or else the 'body-life' (since it even goes beyond memory). The 'body-life' or 'body-memory' determines what to do in relation with certain experiences or cycles of experiences from our life. So what's the possibility? It's one little step toward the embodiment of our life in impulse. For example, on the simplest level, certain details of hand and finger movements will transform themselves, while keeping the precision of the details, in a return to the past, to an experience where we touched someone, maybe a lover, to an important experience which was or could have been. That's how the body-memory/body-life reveals itself. The details exist, but they are surpassed, reaching the level of impulses, of the body-life, the level – if you prefer – of motivation (but motivation already implies a certain premeditation, a dictate, a plan, unnecessary here and even harmful). The rythmn changes and the order. And one after the other, the body-life 'eats' the details – this happens by itself – which still exist in the exterior precision, but it's as if they explode from inside, from the vital impulse. And what have we achieved? We haven't achieved anything. We have freed the seed: between the banks of the details now flows the 'river of our life.' Both spontaneity and discipline at the same time. This is decisive.<sup>318</sup>

Body-memory is the key to the plastic exercises. It suggests how Grotowski incorporated the actor's personal associations in stylistic acting, and his firm belief that spontaneity in the action and the fixed external forms of the action

---

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-6.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-7.

could mutually support each other. All these reflect Grotowski's emphasis of personalization.

Towards the end of the 1960s, the physical exercises, or the corporal exercises as named in the following excerpts, were not so much about training the body as challenging the habitual perception of the body. At the time Grotowski recognized that most of the physical 'deficiencies' which blocked the organic process were mainly caused, not by the actors' lack of physical capacities, but by 'their attitude towards their own bodies'.<sup>319</sup> He explained:

As if all our defeats and imperfections in life were projected onto the body, and it is held responsible. You want to accept your body and, at the same time, you don't accept it. Maybe you want to accept it too much and, therefore, a certain narcissism appears. So, actually, you don't accept it at all. ... Your existence is constantly divided into 'me' and 'my body' – like two different things. For many actors, the body does not give a feeling of security. With the body, with the flesh, they are not at ease, but, rather, in danger. There is a lack of trust in the body which is, in fact, a lack of trust in one's self. That's what divides the being. ... Not to be divided is the basis of self-acceptance. ...it is possible to surpass ourselves if we accept ourselves. ... all that's needed is to not prevent yourself from taking the risk. ...The corporal exercises are the groundwork for a kind of challenge to surpass ourselves.<sup>320</sup>

Grotowski manoeuvred these exercises to challenge the limits set by the actor's mind so as to encourage the actor's personal impulses and their exteriorization through the actor's body. By so doing, the actor would be

---

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-20.

more prepared for revealing personal intimate experiences in rehearsals and performances. For example, Grotowski overloaded the actors with extraordinary physical demands during training and exhausted them in order to let their psychological defences slip away so that they could 'begin to act with truth'.<sup>321</sup> In an interview conducted in December 1967, Schechner asked for further explanations regarding Grotowski's abstract instructions in his training such as 'surpass yourselves', 'have courage' and 'go beyond'.

Grotowski answered:

There are certain points of fatigue which break the control of the mind, a control that blocks us. When we find the courage to do things that are impossible, we make the discovery that our body does not block us. We do the impossible and the division within us between conception and the body's ability disappears. This attitude, this determination, is a training for how to go beyond our limits.<sup>322</sup>

While in the 1967 workshop at New York University, Grotowski told the pupils, 'the real value [of the exercises], lies in [your] not being able to do them'.<sup>323</sup> This seemingly paradoxical statement can be perfectly understood from the perspective of transcending oneself. The exercise was meant to be an almost impossible task, which demanded the trainees to work on the edge and to transcend their limits. In this way, their psychological defence dissolved,

---

<sup>321</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 196.

<sup>322</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 204-5.

<sup>323</sup> It was taken by Stephen Wanh from Tom Crawley's journal of this workshop. See Stephen Wanh *An Acrobat of the Heart*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000, p. XX.

and so did their habitual perceptions of themselves which limited the true capacity of their bodies.

Personalization was emphasized in both the physical and plastic exercises to foster the organic process. This was demonstrated in the 1971 workshop at the Odin Theatre, which was filmed and released as *Training*.<sup>324</sup> In this workshop, Cieślak led the plastic and physical exercises in two separate sessions. Although various exercises were practised in these two sessions, all of them were actually based on the same principle, that is, the exteriorization of personal impulses. As shown in the film, there were no simultaneously contradictory physical signs on different parts of the body in plastic exercises demonstrated by Cieślak. Instead, he projected only one clear impulse towards his hands or to a point in the space throughout the exercise.<sup>325</sup> He also instructed the pupils to stop the current impulse before they intended to start another one.<sup>326</sup> These were significantly distinctive from the plastic exercises practised in 1962. During the improvisation of the plastic exercise, Cieślak asked the pupils to locate their associations in the space. His verbal instructions to them during the improvisation were revealing. 'FOR sun, rain

---

<sup>324</sup> *Training at the 'Teatr Laboratorium' in Wrocław*, dir. Torgeir Wethal, b&w, 90 min, in English, Odin Teatret Film, Holstebro, 1972.

<sup>325</sup> See *Training at the 'Teatr Laboratorium' in Wrocław*, 21'20"-25'00".

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 27'25"-27'35".

or sand.’ ‘Do not dig into oneself, always FOR!’<sup>327</sup> ‘Do not play! Play WITH them!’ ‘Do not play emotion!’ ‘Play WITH!’ ‘Always Look FOR!’<sup>328</sup> These ‘FOR’ and ‘WITH’ were emphasized to help the pupils to exteriorize their impulses initiated by associations, so as to facilitate the organic process. At the end of this session, Cieślak joined in the improvisation. He carried out the plastic exercises clearly with his own associations, and his physical actions became very expressive.<sup>329</sup> This perfectly illustrates how organic an expression can be once the complete process of stimulation, impulse and reaction has been activated.

The same underlying principle can also be perceived in the physical exercise session of the same workshop in the film. The pupils had to learn difficult exercises such as headstands, shoulderstands and somersaults, which proved to be enormous physical and psychological challenges for them. Then they were asked to ‘improvise’ on these exercises, that is, to attach personal associations to a sequence of movement composed of these exercises. Again, the personal associations had to be directed towards the exterior. For example, two pupils improvised with each other as if they were making a

---

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 34’40”-34’50”.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 37’10”-37’20”.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 38’00”-38’10”.

‘conversation’ through their movement.<sup>330</sup> Cieślak gave instructions to them, ‘For HIM!’ ‘Help HIM!’ ‘For HER!’ ‘Help HER!’ ‘Use the WHOLE BODY, not the face!’<sup>331</sup> His instructions were intended to direct the pupils’ associations towards each other and to activate their whole bodies as the means of expressiveness. At the end of this session, Cieślak joined the improvisation with his own associations clearly present.<sup>332</sup> This shared the same principle as the plastic exercise – in that it maintained the necessity of personal associations.

In a nut shell, Grotowski’s training after 1965 cannot be naïvely seen as a training to enhance the capability and flexibility of the actor’s voice and body. His creative use of various exercises and his emphasis on the actor’s personal associations attached to the exercises, were exclusively to foster the actor’s organic process of stimulation, impulse and reaction. Personalization had become the core of Grotowski’s training. What is more, it is better to think of training personalization rather than personalization as a training method, more so towards the end of the 1960s.

It is worth noting that Grotowski spent more time on the work on ‘transparent body’ in training, especially in those workshops abroad. Also,

---

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 1h 14’15”-1h 24’25”.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 1h 17’15”-1h 17’25”.

the stimulation of the pupils' personal impulses in these exercises was mostly arbitrary, serving simply as a device to help the pupils discover and conquer the blockages in their bodies. It did not engage profound personal associations. This does not mean that Grotowski considered the request of the 'transparent body' to be more important than the stimulation of impulses. On the contrary, personal impulses, usually elicited from personal associations, are so precious that Grotowski does not operate them in training but in rehearsal. To explain this, it is necessary to clarify the altered relationship between training and performance.

The autonomy of exercises resulted from the need to create vocal and physical signs independent of productions. This originated in 1960 from Grotowski's idea of creating a system of signs analogous to that in oriental theatre. As a result of Grotowski's new vision of acting in 1965, actor training no longer functioned as a study of 'acting vocabularies' which would be a source for every production. Instead, it became a study of how to activate, for each actor, the process of stimulation, impulse and reaction in varying circumstances. The actors' blockages against this organic process were revealed and dissolved during training so that they were familiar with the whole process and would be more prepared physically and

---

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 1h 22'25"-1h 22'35".

psychologically in rehearsal. Although some outcomes emerging during training could be transposed to rehearsal and performance, the training did not function as direct preparation for them, but as a process 'parallel' to them.

To work in rehearsals, the actors' impulses are no longer arbitrarily given as happened during training, but deliberately formulated through their encounter with the motif of the production. The actors' profound personal associations are the effective impulses which can activate the organic process of expressiveness. Grotowski's experience of working with Cieślak made him believe that a profound personal association could induce an impulse so intense that all physical and psychological blockages would be dissolved automatically. This is the reason why at the end of the 1966 Brussels workshop Grotowski tried to persuade his pupils that to give oneself totally was the most crucial thing in training, despite the variety of the exercises:

If you start on something, you must be fully engaged in it. You must give yourself one hundred per cent, your whole body, your whole mind and all its possible, individual, most intimate associations.<sup>333</sup>

---

<sup>333</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 172.

For Grotowski, it was always the revelation of an actor's intimate experiences or guarded personal secrets that would stimulate profound impulses out of the actor and dissolve all physical blockages.

However, to cherish these precious personal sources, Grotowski saved the actor's personal intimate associations for performances instead of using them up in training. When explaining the personal associations utilized in training, Grotowski emphasized that intimate personal associations should be saved for the creative process during rehearsals:

However, so as not to empty ourselves, we should not engage in exercises during research which are too intimate. ... In principle, intimate confession is only necessary during the creative process. If you do exercises, you should only penetrate into intimate regions if those regions open up by themselves.<sup>334</sup>

Grotowski made use of the actor's personal associations in training, but he exploited profound personal experiences only in rehearsals and performances. This implicit connection between Grotowski's training and his productions adds another dimension to his already complicated training methods.

Grotowski's idea of actor training has inspired numerous theatre practitioners who attended his workshops or simply read his essays on training. However, this transmission of Grotowski's training easily ended up

---

<sup>334</sup> Grotowski, 'Voice', p. 32.

in misunderstanding and misuse. The most common mistake was to practise exercises without understanding Grotowski's intentions behind them. The exercises themselves were not as important as Grotowski's manipulation of them for different purposes. For example, he could use his headstand exercise to enhance the pupil's physical skills or to open up the pupil's larynx, as mentioned earlier. Mistakes could also come from exclusive emphasis on exercises from a specific period, without an awareness of the constant evolution of Grotowski's training. For example, the physical exercises practised in 1962 functioned significantly differently from those practised in 1966, despite the similarity of their appearances. People could mistake Grotowski's diagnostic vocal tests for routine vocal training, or misunderstand how training could support acting by implanting the exercises directly into performance. To avoid all this misuse and misunderstanding, it is, therefore, crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of Grotowski's training before any of its application.

### **4.3 Initiation Into a Complete State of Being**

Personalization utilized in the actor's acting was more than an acting technique. It also initiated the actor into a complete state of being in which

psychic impulses were fully expressed through the actor's body, that is, psychic impulses and physical expressions accorded with each other. In the end of his article 'Towards a Poor Theatre', Grotowski slips his argument on poor theatre into how his theatre has brought about a mutual rebirth between himself and his actor, presumably Cieślak:

There is something incomparably intimate and productive in the work with the actor entrusted to me. He must be attentive and confident and free, for our labour is to explore his possibilities to the utmost. His growth is attended by observation, astonishment, and desire to help; my growth is projected onto him, or, rather, is **found in him** – and our common growth becomes revelation. This is not instruction of a pupil but utter opening to another person, in which the phenomenon of 'shared or double birth' becomes possible. The actor is reborn – not only as an actor but as a man – and with him, I am reborn. It is a clumsy way of expressing it, but what is achieved is a total acceptance of one human being by another.<sup>335</sup>

This rebirth as a human being, taking place during the preparation of *The Constant Prince*, struck Grotowski and brought him into further reflection on his theatre practice. Inspired by the potential initiation of individuals through the theatre process, Grotowski reconsidered the significance of his work as well as the actor's place in this work, in his letter to Barba dated 6 February 1965, after about eight months of rehearsing *The Constant Prince*:

Here [Wrocław] we have the official status of institute of theatre research with special emphasis on the actor's creative techniques... All this partially defines us, even if it is mainly with respect to conventional theatre and its obligations. But how are we to define ourselves to ourselves? And how should the actors see themselves? As

---

<sup>335</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 25. The boldface is in the original.

artists like any other? As artists different to the others? Scientists? Guinea pigs? Apostles? Or something else altogether?<sup>336</sup>

What was somehow missing in this letter was Grotowski's affirmative tone which used to prevail in his previous writings. Instead, what was shown here was his uncertainty about his work which had started to take on a new direction. Everything was still done in the name of theatre, but the focus of the work had shifted from shaping collectivity in performance to nurturing the personal initiation in rehearsals, which can be clearly sensed in Grotowski's development of his training method towards the end of the 1960s. It was also reflected in his lectures and writings at the time, in which he talked less about his ideas of what a theatre performance should be, but more about the initiation of the actor into a complete state of being through training. In his letter dated 26 April 1965, Grotowski pointed out that his work on *The Constant Prince* was conducted on the frontier between two different areas:

First: this [*The Constant Prince*] marks the beginning of a new period in the aesthetic of our 'firm'. Second: this production represents an attempt to do research on the frontier between *tantra* and theatre of which I spoke to you some time ago. This demands an extreme technical precision, particularly with respect to the actor's spiritual technique; everything is attached to a single thread and can easily snap. ... There is the possibility that this kind of work can develop further. Both from the point of view of the actor's method and that which could be defined as the spirit of the work, I feel that this is the

---

<sup>336</sup> In Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 140.

most significant artistic experience I have had up to now. And not just artistic.<sup>337</sup>

*The Constant Prince* inspired Grotowski to formulate his work 'on the frontier', which resulted in theatre performance and practice for self development, like *tantra* practice in Hinduism. It is, consequently, understandable that Grotowski thereafter considered both 'the personal and scenic technique of the actor as the core of theatre art'.<sup>338</sup> In other words, the personal technique of the actor, namely, the method of personal association which brought about the actor's initiation into a complete state of being, had become as important as shaping collective introspection among spectators through the actor's scenic technique in performance.<sup>339</sup>

The initiation into a complete state of being emerging in Grotowski's work can be clarified through the organic process of stimulation, impulse and reaction. Once the organic process has been achieved, external expressions accord with internal impulses, and the person acts in a state of completeness

---

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145. Barba explained the meaning of *tantra* mentioned in Grotowski's letters to him: 'Ritual techniques of Hinduism, involving the transmutation of energy from a biological to a spiritual level. The various currents of Tantrism use the *mantra* – sacred formulas – and the *yantra*, symbolic representations of the divinities and their cosmic forces. Grotowski refers to the particular current of Tantrism defined as being "of the Left Hand".' See *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 117.

<sup>338</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 15.

<sup>339</sup> However, Grotowski's practice in the following years tilted more and more towards the seeking of personal initiation instead of moulding the collectivity.

and totality, free from duality. Grotowski referred to this deed in totality as the total act:

This human phenomenon, the actor, whom you have before you has transcended the state of his division or duality. This is no longer acting, and this is why it is an *act* (actually what you want to do every day of your life is to act). This is the phenomenon of total action. That is why one wants to call it a total act.<sup>340</sup>

As its name suggests, the total act can be understood as the act which engages the whole being, the psychic and the physical. Grotowski explains:

...what the actor achieves should be (let's not be afraid of the name) a total act, that he does whatever he does with his entire being, and not just one mechanical (and therefore rigid) gesture of arm or leg, not any grimace, helped by a logical inflection and a thought. No thought can guide the entire organism of an actor in any living way. It must stimulate him, and that is all it really can do. Without commitment, his organism stops living, his impulses grow superficial. Between a total reaction and a reaction guided by a thought there is the same difference as between a tree and a plant. In the final result we are speaking of the impossibility of separating spiritual and physical.<sup>341</sup>

The whole body as one entity, reacting to impulses without the interruption of discursive thoughts, is what Grotowski was after. 'The actor who has completed the total act reaches the wholeness. ...he has been renewed, he has found again his original integrity and new sources of energy have been activated in him.'<sup>342</sup> This is what Grotowski meant by the rebirth of a human

---

<sup>340</sup> In Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 86. The italics in this quotation are original.

<sup>341</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 91.

<sup>342</sup> Grotowski, 'Teatro e rituale', in *Il Teatro Laboratorio di Jerzy Grotowski 1959-1969*, p. 149. Translation is mine.

being. The total act, which demands the engagement of all 'psycho-physical resources, from the most instinctive to the most rational', is, for Grotowski, 'a step towards the summit of the actor's organism in which consciousness and instinct are united'.<sup>343</sup>

The theatre process to achieve the total act can then function as a therapy to dissolve our duality of being in everyday life. Grotowski recognized that the intense rhythm of civilization had brought people more psychic problems than ever before, and this was 'intimately connected' with the fact that 'contemporary man does not act himself out wholly in the world'.<sup>344</sup> It caused 'a rupture between intelligence and feeling, body and soul' – a kind of schizophrenia, as Grotowski called it.<sup>345</sup> Grotowski further pointed out that the significance of Antonin Artaud's madness was his awareness of and his struggle against this sickness of the whole civilization. He believed that his theatre practice to achieve the total act would be the cure for such 'schizophrenia'. When the total act has been achieved, the organic process of stimulation, impulse and reaction is no longer hampered by our discursive thoughts immersed in social conditioning, and 'the division between thought and feeling, between body and soul, between conscious and unconscious,

---

<sup>343</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 177-8.

<sup>344</sup> Grotowski, 'Contemporary Perspectives', *The Theatre in Poland*, No. 2-3, 1967, p. 45.

<sup>345</sup> Grotowski, 'He Wasn't Entirely Himself!', *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 91.

between vision and instinct, between sex and brain vanishes'.<sup>346</sup> It is the state of 'a psychic integration rooted in the living reaction and in the living impression of the human being'.<sup>347</sup> Thus, the initiation brought about by Grotowski's theatre practice could still be a matter beyond a personal level and could resolve certain social issues.

In essence, the total act is the revival of the actor's intimate experience through discovering/recovering the related impulses inside the actor's body.

Grotowski explains this in his essay 'Theatre and Ritual' (1969):

This [total] act can be attained only out of the experience of one's own life, this act which strips, bares, unveils, reveals, and uncovers. Here an actor should not act but rather penetrate the regions of his own experience with his body and voice....<sup>348</sup>

In other words, the total act comes only from personal experience. What is more, it is not an experience retold but revived physically as well as psychically. Grotowski further explains,

At the moment when the actor attains this [total act], he becomes a phenomenon *hic et nunc*; this is neither a story nor the creation of an illusion; it is the present moment. The actor exposes himself and... he discovers himself. Yet he has to know how to do this anew each time....<sup>349</sup>

---

<sup>346</sup> Grotowski, 'Teatro e rituale', in *Il Teatr Laboratorio di Jerzy Grotowski 1959-1969*, p. 149. Translation is mine.

<sup>347</sup> Grotowski, 'Contemporary Perspectives', *The Theatre in Poland*, No. 2-3, 1967, p. 46.

<sup>348</sup> In Osiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, pp. 85-6.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

The total act can be regarded as a revival of an event which happened or could have happened in the past. It is achieved through reliving the stimulation in the past to evoke genuine impulse and reaction in the present. Grotowski compared this revival of personal experience with confession. Yet, the actor's confession of his personal intimate experience, was not done through words or gestures indicating that experience, but through living that experience again. This 'morality' of expressing the truth in one's work was regarded by Grotowski as the core of his work.<sup>350</sup> Grotowski asked his actor to be 'absolutely sincere' in this 'act of laying oneself bare, of tearing off the mask of daily life, of exteriorizing oneself'.<sup>351</sup> He considered the achievement of the total act as a moment of truth against the lies in daily life. Subsequently, his theatre practice in pursuit of the total act would be the redemption of life from hypocrisy.

The total act is always a revival of a profound interpersonal relationship. That is, the actor's personal experience which induces the total act is always the actor's experience of communion with someone special. This implicit connection between the total act and interpersonal communion persuaded Grotowski to believe that there might be a way to incorporate both the pursuit

---

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

of personal initiation and the pursuit of collectivity among people in his work. Yet, he had to face many difficult questions: Can the personal process of initiation function as a pretext for communion among people? Or, can this process of initiation take place on a collective scale? Can theatre performance, when taken as a gathering, function as a 'rite of initiation' for the actors and the spectators? Ultimately, can personal initiation and communion among people be achieved simultaneously in a way which means that they can support each other? In the following decade, Grotowski's work, despite its great variety in appearance, mutates around these key issues.

## 5. TOWARDS COMMUNION FOR INITIATION

### 5.1 Shaping Personal Process as Performance

The systematic introduction of the actor's personal association in acting dramatically enhanced the quality of performance in *The Constant Prince*. Thereafter, the actor's personal process became the focus of Grotowski's training and played an even more central role in the ensuing production. In December 1965, Grotowski planned to stage Słowacki's last dramatic poem *Samuel Zborowski*, so as to construct the central motif of the performance from the actor's personal experience and perspective regarding the vision revealed in this poem. As a literary work, *Samuel Zborowski* is in rough drafts, and its poetic vision and unshapely plot arouse as much fascination as confusion. Grotowski began to work with his actors on several of its themes, but these themes were gradually abandoned as the actor's improvisational work developed. The actor Stanisław Scierski described the evolution of the work:

There was a starting outline, a rough draft of a text based on *Samuel Zborowski* written by Grotowski himself. In it were suggestions concerning the division of roles, and there was even something of a discussion of the rough draft itself: What is this for us? What of each of us is contained in this? What vital thing does it give me? What vital thing can I bring to it? When we began to do the *étude* work, both

collective and individual, not even using the text of the rough draft, not even 'basing' ourselves on it, but preserving it only on the outskirts of memory, it turned out that the seed, the essence of these études, led in a direction away from *Samuel Zborowski*, namely to *The Gospels*, as they were present in us not in any literary or religious way, but simply as they lived in us, as time lives in us, in our humanity. So we headed in that direction.<sup>352</sup>

Grotowski prepared a rough draft as the pretext for the actor's improvisational work, which in turn would eventually constitute the performative structure of the production. This working strategy was to allow the actor's personal process to determine the central motif of the production. When the actor's improvisation gradually deviated from the initial draft, Grotowski abandoned his original plan for *Samuel Zborowski* and re-structured the actors' improvisational work. The new performative structure was later recognized as a piece echoing certain themes from the Gospels. It was then re-named *The Gospels*.<sup>353</sup> Elizabeth Albahaca, who joined the troupe during the development of this new structure, described how Grotowski worked with her through improvisation:

At the beginning, usually Grotowski gave a little theme and asked me to do it in five minutes. It was improvisation. I noticed that the improvisation could result in stereotypes, but it also opened one's subconscious and fantasy. The process was joyful for me. After that, we re-constructed my improvisation. Here started the real task: to repeat it and to keep it alive. The work is not easy during the rehearsal of *The*

---

<sup>352</sup> *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 111.

<sup>353</sup> Scierski pointed out: 'The progress of what we were about was entrusted to Grotowski. He helped develop études and often inspired them. In other words, he kept watch over the course of the production. One should note that many of the études were improvised. This is how the production with the working title of *The Gospels* came into being.' See *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 111.

*Gospels*. One has to give life to the form, or the dance, that is, to attach one's own imagination and association to the form. On the other hand, one has to stick to precision. I once said to Grotowski, 'We do not need the training [the work on improvisation]. We can build the structure through our imagination and association'. Grotowski insisted that the independent training alongside the rehearsal is necessary. We were constantly doing the training from 1965 to 1969. Grotowski even used the word 'surpass'. I believed that by doing so, he was trying to provoke me, to stimulate something inside me.<sup>354</sup>

Instead of setting the plot of the performance by himself, Grotowski shaped the score using actions from the promising pieces emerging from the actor's improvisational work. Once the score was finalized, its precision was strictly observed. Even the lines spoken by the actors were initially improvised. It was only at the final stage of rehearsal that Grotowski and his actors looked for texts from literary sources to replace the lines they had improvised.

Through the process of collective creation mentioned above, *The Gospels* was shaped by Grotowski as 'a new, theatrical *Life of Jesus* of the kind written by Renan'.<sup>355</sup> Although this production was finally ready for performance, the première was put off several times and did not actually happen. Sciarski disclosed the reason behind the decision:

There were even a few closed performances [of *The Gospels*]. After one of these, we and Grotowski came to the conclusion that even though this was an entirely new structure, it was based on a certain familiar

---

<sup>354</sup> My notes on the conference 'The Energies of the Beginning: The Teatr Laboratorium from Opole to Wrocław, 1959 – 1969', Pontedera, 12-14 October 2001.

<sup>355</sup> In *Life of Jesus*, Joseph Ernest Renan (1823-92) 'denied the Nazarene's divine descendance, and portrayed Jesus very much as a Palestinian conditioned by his times and environment, but full of charm and power and motivated totally by the value and ideal of love'. See Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 89.

region we had already explored (we could see traces of all our achievements up to then).<sup>356</sup>

Flaszen also acknowledged that *The Gospels* lapsed into a repetition of the preceding productions, that is, 'playing out illustrations of the myths'.<sup>357</sup> He recalled how this crisis was turned to their advantage:

I think the problem was that we had escaped from ourselves. We had allowed the myth its own autonomy. By presenting the Gospel, we had withdrawn ourselves. The solution was to depart from the myth to discover a point of reality – this being the awareness of the consequence of the myth. What would have happened to Christ if he revealed himself nowadays? In a literal way. What would we do with him? How would we see him? Where would he reveal himself? Would he be noticed at all? With the help of these questions, the crisis was resolved. And then it turned out there is a passage in the Gospel: 'I have come and you haven't recognised me'.<sup>358</sup>

That is, Grotowski and his actors composed another new structure based on their genuine reactions to the mythical themes of the Saviour. By doing so, not only the acting score but also the central motif and main scenario of this production were collectively shaped by Grotowski and his actors. This meant that they would compose their own version of the themes around the Saviour, which were not necessarily the same as those in the Gospels. Sciarski described how this work kept on evolving and was later crystallized as *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris*.<sup>359</sup>

---

<sup>356</sup> Grotowski and His Laboratory, p. 111.

<sup>357</sup> In *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 87.

<sup>358</sup> Flaszen in *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 91.

<sup>359</sup> For my convenience, I will refer to this production as *Apocalypsis*.

We decided, therefore, to discontinue it [*The Gospels*], keeping everything that had been fruitful for us. It was then that we saw the real possibilities which, as it later turned out, led us to *Apocalypsis* [*Cum Figuris*]. From the études that we performed for Grotowski, and the ones he co-created with us from the beginning, he built a new whole. If there were études which needed a text, both we and Grotowski made some proposals. In addition to Dostoevsky, he added excerpts from Eliot and Simone Weil, writers known and close to all of us.<sup>360</sup>

In *Apocalypsis*, Grotowski composed a structure to reveal the actor's spontaneous work as it was: there was no distribution of roles at the early stage of rehearsals and the plot did not take shape until the last stage. The actor's improvisational work was not based on any given role but mainly on the actor himself/herself. Grotowski then incorporated various related literary texts, which would epitomize the actor's creation, in the actor's personal process presented without any disguise in performance. The evolution of this production, from *Samuel Zborowski* to *The Gospels* and then to *Apocalypsis*, bore witness to Grotowski's restless attempt to shape the actor's personal process as performance. This will be clearer still if we scrutinize the final structure of *Apocalypsis*.

*Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* (première 11 February 1969) was Grotowski's last theatre production. Despite its title, this production is not the dramatization of the Revelation of St. John, in which the Second Coming of Christ is foretold. It allows, among other things, the interpretation that Christ

---

<sup>360</sup> Grotowski and His Laboratory, p. 111.

appears in the form of a simpleton. According to Osiński, the title *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* comes from Thomas Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus* and it contains an allusion to the last work of Mann's character Adrian Leverkühn, who, 'as a thirty-five-year-old man under the influence of the first wave of euphoric inspiration, composes his main work or his first great work, *Apocalypsis cum figuris*... in an incredibly short time'.<sup>361</sup> *Apocalypsis* can by no means be understood as a play in the conventional sense of the word. Kumiega gives a painstaking account of *Apocalypsis* in her book *The Theatre of Grotowski*.<sup>362</sup> Konstanty Puzyna also gives a concise account of this production in his review 'A Myth Vivisected: Grotowski's Apocalypse'.<sup>363</sup> Readers who would like to know more details of this production can consult these two sources. Here I will only succinctly recapitulate certain scenes and features of this production, which concern my analysis of it.

Before the performance of *Apocalypsis* begins, the spectators enter the room and see actors as they are. That is, the actors are in the same time and place as the spectators, with no character-playing involved. The performance starts when the actors wake up and arise from the floor. They find an idiot among them and decide to play a game at his expense. In front of the

---

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111-2.

<sup>362</sup> See *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 239-71.

audience, the 'investitures' begin and roles are assigned amidst mirth, and assumed, rejected or fought against. The actor Antoni Jahołkowski, who assigns roles to his companions, is associated, later in the performance, with the First Apostle Simon Peter, who first recognizes Jesus as the Saviour Christ, as specified in Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21. Jahołkowski names Rena Mirecka (who alternates with Elizabeth Albahaca) as Mary Magdalene, and Zygmunt Molik as Judas. Stanisław Scierski is chosen to play John. Jahołkowski initially assigns the role of the Saviour to Zbigniew Cynkutis, who later assumes the role of Lazarus. Molik in his role of Judas also recommends Cynkutis as the Saviour. But eventually Jahołkowski assigns the role of the Saviour to Cieślak. According to the programme, the role played by Cieślak is that of the Simpleton, or *Ciemny*. The Polish word *Ciemny*, which literally means 'the dark one', suggests certain associations: an innocent, an idiot, who lives outside convention and is deformed but is also in mysterious communion with the supernatural. The demonic figures as village idiots are familiar in the Slavic tradition: they tend cattle, beg in church doorways, are a butt for children's jokes and evoke

---

<sup>363</sup> *The Drama Review*, Vol. 15, No. 4, Fall 1971, pp. 36-46.

superstitious fear in old people. This is the medium through which saintliness, perhaps even Christ himself, can be revealed to the peasant.<sup>364</sup>

Although the names of characters from the Gospels are used in *Apocalypsis*, 'to call someone Simon Peter or John', Flaszen emphasizes, 'need not be a biblical allusion', since 'these names exist everywhere'. For this reason, Jahołkowski is called Simon Peter rather than St. Peter. Although there does exist an analogy between *Apocalypsis* and the Gospels, these names are not used solely to evoke biblical characters. From the way the actors start their performance, an impression is deliberately given that these actors 'emerge' from the crowd of spectators. In a nutshell, this naming of roles in front of the audience in the opening scene is a deliberate tactic to relate the scenario in performance to a present event taking place among spectators in real time. What is more, the actors do not always assume their roles throughout the performance. For instance, in one scene associated with the funeral of Lazarus, Mirecka (or Albahaca), Molik and Scierski sing a dirge in the procession. However, it makes no sense on this occasion to consider that they assume their roles as Mary Magdalene, Judas and John.<sup>365</sup>

---

<sup>364</sup> See the French version of the *Apocalypsis* programme.

<sup>365</sup> See *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 253.

This is reminiscent of the role-playing process in Grotowski's uniform formula, as has been clarified in Section 2.2.

The lines spoken by the actors appeared, to quote Flaszen, 'in the form of quotations from sources which could be regarded as the work not of one writer but of the whole of mankind'.<sup>366</sup> They include extracts from the Bible and *The Brothers Karamazov*, supplemented by passages from the work of Simone Weil and T. S. Eliot. However, there are some lines which are not taken from any source, for example, the last words of the performance: 'Go and come no more!'. In addition, the quotations used in this production hardly function as dialogue between characters. These jumbled texts from different sources are not stitched together into a compact plot. On some occasions, they can even be regarded as a vocal collage happening alongside the actors' actions. For example, Jahołkowski (Simon Peter) in one scene takes the Simpleton's staff away and pulls him towards the spotlight, as he recites the following text from the Gospels:

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.<sup>367</sup>

---

<sup>366</sup> See the French version of the *Apocalypsis* programme.

<sup>367</sup> See *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 254.

This text does not provide the lines spoken by the character Peter in performance, but is a Biblical story retold by Jahołkowski, which comments on his action. This usage of text is very different from that in conventional theatre, which is to re-enact a plot.

The narrative of *Apocalypsis*, as the audience perceived it, ultimately springs from the interplay between the actors' actions, the quoted texts and their partial allusions to certain themes in the Bible, including The Last Supper, the resurrection of Lazarus, the Betrayal, Golgotha, the Crucifixion and so on. Although the playground of *Apocalypsis* lies crucially in the Biblical context, this production is not a dramatization of Biblical stories. *Apocalypsis* can be better understood through the simultaneous multiple allusions in its narrative, whose aim is to allow multiple interpretations. What happened in front of the audience can be a foolish game imitating and revisiting Biblical stories by a group of people, and/or the Second Coming happening among the crowds. On the one hand, it is in the present and in front of the audience that the actors lay down, run, or tremble in sweat. That is, the audience witnesses the actors' actions happening here and now. On the other hand, the actors' actions and the quoted texts evoke in the audience's imagination a critical review of Biblical themes, which provides an additional

perspective on what happened in front of the audience. Therefore, these multiple allusions can effectively enable the audience to revisit a theme without illusionary theatricality.

Grotowski incorporates the actor's personal process in the plot of *Apocalypsis*. For instance, the final words in performance, 'Go and come no more!', epitomizes the actor's true reactions to the Saviour, and it would seem that these words slipped out from the subconscious of spectators who watch the image of the Simpleton/Christ disappearing in the dark as the last candle goes out. This is the painful truth revealed by Grotowski and his actors as they reconstruct their materials from *The Gospels* to create *Apocalypsis*. In other words, *Apocalypsis* is a performative structure composed of and for the actor's personal process which, for Grotowski, unveils spectators' concealed reactions to the central motif of this production.

In the earlier version of *Apocalypsis*, the costumes were simple clothes with symbolic implications. All the actors were in white except the Simpleton, who was in black. In mid-1972, these costumes were replaced by everyday clothes. The objects involved in performance included a cane, a loaf of bread, a pail of water, a knife, a towel and several candles. There were no fake props. The lighting was simply two spotlights and the candle light. The

idea behind all these choices was to avoid theatricality in this production. The same idea also determined Grotowski's choice of venue for the production. The performance took place in a room without any stage or scenery. The audience sat on benches placed against the walls of the room, or, in a later version of the production, sat on the floor. The crucial point regarding the venue for the performance lay in its simplicity and genuineness. To repeat Flaszen,

What is essential is the architecture of the room itself, which forms a living part of the performance. Here, our demands are great. It can't be a modern, elegant, neon-lit room, or a gym, etc. it could be a church, basement, attic – whatever, it must be real. No cosmetic changes or artifice are allowed. In other words, we don't pretend it's something it's not.<sup>368</sup>

These criteria for the venue explain why Grotowski disregarded all established theatres and insisted on the Washington Square Methodist Church as the right venue for his 1969 tour to New York. To sum up, Grotowski's desire to dismiss all possible theatrical devices in costume, props, lighting and the venue of the performance cannot be overemphasized. This was intended to highlight the actor's personal process as it is. By so doing, Grotowski expected that the performance would not be a show piece but a sharing of genuine personal perspectives, in which the audience could viscerally experience the actor's personal process.

It is important to point out the shift in position of *Apocalypsis* within the context of Grotowski's work as a whole in the following decade. In 1970 Grotowski inaugurated a series of experiments to explore a new form of work, later known as paratheatrical activities. Although paratheatrical activities took over the central position in Grotowski's work, the performance of *Apocalypsis* still continued until September 1981 when Jahołkowski, one actor in the cast, died. During this period of co-existence of these two genres of work, Grotowski screened participants for paratheatrical activities from spectators of *Apocalypsis*.<sup>369</sup> This production gradually became a pretext for paratheatrical activities and was eventually marginalized. I will follow the development of *Apocalypsis* until its end before turning to my analysis of paratheatrical activities in the subsequent section.

As the performance of *Apocalypsis* continued throughout the 1970s, the production was implicitly influenced by paratheatrical activities in that more and more room was allowed for spontaneous interactions between the actor and the audience in performance. In June 1971, the first rehearsals of a new version of *Apocalypsis* took place. In this new version specifically for younger audiences, the benches were removed so that more spectators could

---

<sup>368</sup> In *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 101.

<sup>369</sup> See *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 146 and 157.

fit in the space.<sup>370</sup> The original version with benches was shown for the last time in December 1972.<sup>371</sup> The new version created a more intimate aura and diminished the psychological distance between the actor and the audience so as to pave the way for possible interaction between them. For the same reason, after June 1972, the actors no longer appeared in their white costumes, but in their everyday clothing. The Simpleton remained in a black coat, which had never had the appearance of a theatrical costume. Moreover, the Simpleton's white cane was replaced by an ordinary wooden one.<sup>372</sup> Besides these external alternations to the production, there was also an internal shift in its spirit. Cieślak observed:

I think that the most essential part was and is the search for ways of transcending, of getting away, from what is dark in the *Apocalypse*, an effort to move toward light and also to see, to sense the direct and close presence of the people around us which produces something that is most important (that cannot be expressed in words), something sincere that happens between the individual who still is in some small part a spectator and the individual who still is in some small part an actor. Although one yearns that the old 'spectator-actor' relic give [gives] way to another human relation. The score of the *Apocalypse* is in effect as permanent as a river-bed, only the water that flows in it is new and unknown. *Apocalypse* is a kind of sketch that always remains open to new experience, a cross between theatre and experiment beyond the theatre.<sup>373</sup>

---

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135-6.

<sup>373</sup> Cieślak in 'No Play-Acting', *The Theatre in Poland*, No. 8, 1975, p. 6.

In a way, the actor was encouraged to interact with the audience while maintaining the score of actions in performance. This was further confirmed by Cieślak's approach to acting, which he explained in the following way:

The score is like a glass inside which a candle is burning. The glass is solid; it is there, you can depend on it. It contains and guides the flame. But it is not the flame. The flame is my inner process each night. The flame is what illuminates the score, what the spectators see through the score. The flame is alive. Just as the flame in the glass moves, flutters, rises, falls, almost goes out, suddenly glows brightly, responds to each breath of wind – so my inner life varies from night to night, from moment to moment. ... I begin each night without anticipations: this is the hardest thing to learn. I do not prepare myself to feel anything. I do not say, 'Last night this scene was extraordinary, I will try to do that again.' I want only to be receptive to what will happen. And I am ready to take what happens if I am secure in my score, knowing that even if I feel a minimum, the glass will not break, the objective structure worked out over the months will help me through. But when a night comes that I can glow, shine, live, reveal – I am ready for it by not anticipating it. The score remains the same, but everything is different because I am different.<sup>374</sup>

Here Cieślak no longer focused exclusively on his personal association, but waited and reacted to possible stimulation from the audience, while maintaining the scores of his actions in performance. What is more, Molik's experience also confirms this spontaneous internal flow in acting. When asked how he reacted to the same role played by Mirecka and Albahaca in turn, Molik explained: 'I watched their work. I reacted to the new vibration. It was different each time.'<sup>375</sup> Mirecka's personal associations were different

---

<sup>374</sup> In Ferdinando Taviani, 'In Memory of Ryszard Cieślak', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 201.

<sup>375</sup> My notes on the conference 'The Energies of the Beginning: The Teatr Laboratorium from Opole to Wrocław, 1959 – 1969', Pontedera, 12-14 October 2001.

from Albahaca's even though they shared the same score of actions. Molik, while maintaining his own score of actions in performance, had to react anew to the actress each time. In a nutshell, as the performance of *Apocalypsis* evolved, the actors no longer adhered to their initial associations with which they worked out the score during rehearsals. While maintaining their fixed score of actions in performance, the actors' internal flow of associations could change from time to time, which would allow certain spontaneity and improvisation.

As the evolution of *Apocalypsis* continued, the actors were even allowed to improvise their scores as a response to the audience's reactions in performance. During the tour to Philadelphia in 1973, the spectators were allowed to participate in the actions in *Apocalypsis*, with the stipulation that they would not destroy the structure of the performance. Also, during a performance in Australia 1974, a girl from the audience entered the action to console the Simpleton, which was identified as a Pietà by Flaszen.<sup>376</sup> Cieślak recognized that as the performance developed, *Apocalypsis* had become 'only a title, a certain stream of associations' which was 'open to the unexpected' and conjured up 'the unpredictable in us and outside of us'.<sup>377</sup> This new

---

<sup>376</sup> See *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 104-5.

<sup>377</sup> Cieślak in 'No Play-Acting', *The Theatre in Poland*, No. 8, 1975, p. 6.

dimension of allowing the actor's spontaneous reactions to the audience, even at the cost of the fixed score of actions in performance, was an influence from paratheatrical activities.

*Apocalypse* was a unique production which concluded Grotowski's theatre work, fostered his departure for paratheatrical activities, and was then in turn influenced by paratheatrical activities. The uneasy process of how *Apocalypse* came into being bore witness to Grotowski's restless attempt to shape the actor's personal process as performance. Through this production, Grotowski recognized that theatricality, which prevented genuine communion from taking place, was intrinsic in theatre performance. Hence, it was necessary for Grotowski to abandon theatre performance and devise paratheatrical activities to realize the communion which would initiate the individuals into a complete state of being. The analysis of the making and evolution of *Apocalypse* is the key to unveiling the dynamics beneath the transition of Grotowski's last theatre production to his first non-theatre research project. This is essential to our understanding of Grotowski's work as a whole.

## 5.2 Communion and Initiation

Despite its quality 'acting' and the profound implications which were widely acclaimed by the audience, *Apocalypse* fostered Grotowski's departure from theatre. The main reason was that the dissonance between reviving the actor's personal experience and creating communion between the actor and the audience persisted in this production, regardless of Grotowski's efforts to mediate between them. To be more precise, the method of personal association was to revive the actor's contact with a partner from the actor's life in the past. The actor then concentrated on this moment in the past and, through imagination, projected this partner onto the fellow actor or a point in the space in performance. Meanwhile, the communion between the actor and the audience demanded live contact, and the actor was supposed to adhere to the present moment in performance. However, between a moment in the past and the present moment, the actor was only able to concentrate on one from the two at one time. Thus, conjuring personal experience and responding spontaneously to the audience did not work together. No matter how Grotowski innovated his idea of theatre making and manoeuvred his skill of *mise-en-scène*, to revive the actor's personal process in performance still disaccorded with the spontaneous interaction between the actor and the

audience. After producing *Apocalypse*, Grotowski seemed to accept that this dilemma was an inevitable result originating from the nature of theatre performance, and it would not be dissolved or bypassed through devising new means of theatre making. This understanding significantly contributed to his decision to continue his work in a different direction than that of theatre.

By the time he figured out how to reshuffle his work, Grotowski had spent six weeks travelling in India and Kurdistan during July and August 1970. What happened to him during this journey remains a mystery, and his appearance changed dramatically thereafter. He grew long hair and a beard, lost a considerable amount of weight and wore casual clothes instead of his ever present black suit and sunglasses. What is more, he started to use the past tense for his theatre practice: 'I look back towards it, towards theatre. It is the past. I am speaking about what was. What I sought in that life.'<sup>378</sup> It seems that, during these crucial six weeks, Grotowski had made up his mind to take a new direction in his life and work. In the following years, he developed paratheatrical activities – a series of innovative activities to experiment with the various possibilities of shaping a new art form in place of theatre performance.

---

<sup>378</sup> Grotowski in *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 100.

Before moving on to the scrutiny of paratheatrical activities, it is necessary to analyze Grotowski's idea of seeking a new art form to replace theatre performance. In December 1970, Grotowski gave a series of talks at New York University, in which he clarified his current research for a new art form vis-à-vis theatre art. These talks were edited in a Polish text and subsequently known as '*Święto*'. The Polish word *święto* refers to holiness, the holy and pure. It sounds like the Polish words for 'light' (*światło*) and 'world' (*świat*). This text was translated into English and given the title 'Holiday – The Day That Is Holy'.<sup>379</sup> The subtitle emphasizes that 'holiday' etymologically means 'holy day' in order not to be confused with the contemporary meaning of the term as 'free day'. Grotowski uses 'holiday' to indicate the occasion of a genuine communion between people who feel the need for complete openness to others. He envisages the essential elements of such communion:

...what do we need? First of all, a place and our own kind; and then that our kind, whom we do not know, should come, too. So what matters is that, in this, first I should not be alone, then – we should not be alone. But what does *our kind* mean? They are those who breathe the same air and – one might say – share our senses. What is possible together? Holiday.<sup>380</sup>

---

<sup>379</sup> Grotowski, 'Holiday – The Day That Is Holy', *The Drama Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (T58), June, 1973. For my convenience, I will refer to this text as 'Holiday' elsewhere in this thesis.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

The meeting between people is crucial since complete openness only makes sense when it occurs in front of others. Grotowski believes that complete openness to another person is an essential ingredient of genuine communion. Thus, the communion proposed in the text 'Holiday' is designed for those people who are ready to open themselves completely. In addition, it is also important to meet the right people who are open to whatever is going to be revealed, so that reciprocal acceptance can take place. Therefore, essential communion can take place.

And every essential experience of our life is being realized through the fact that there is someone with us. And it does not matter whether that other person is present now, at this moment, or was present once, or will only be; that person either is actually, tangibly there, or exists as a need actualizing itself – 'he,' that other who is coming, is emerging from the shadows, is pervading our life – in us embodied, of flesh and blood.<sup>381</sup>

As Grotowski understood it, the essential experience of our life is always a profound relationship with someone. Grotowski envisaged that his new work would foster such a relationship to take place in the present rather than revive a relationship from the past.

Moreover, the crucial thing in this essential communion is whether one opens oneself unconditionally for that special person or not. It is not about expressing oneself in words, 'but revealing oneself, wholly, *incarnate*, the

---

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

uncovering of one's human existence to the skin, to the tissue, to the life-pulse; totally and directly'.<sup>382</sup> Unlike the revival of personal experience, the proposed communion involves only the present. Grotowski affirmed that:

In that case this [communion] would be contemporary. Contemporary in the literal sense, because it happens when it is happening. It is not past history being told, or an illustration of something which happens somewhere else. This happens where it is happening. You are present, I am present. I am coming forward to meet you, you are coming forward to meet me.<sup>383</sup>

Through this communion in the present, Grotowski expected that all participants would engage in their organic processes of stimulation, impulse and reaction, and enter into a complete state of being.

As proposed in the text 'Holiday', the communion took place first within a smaller group, and then it was followed by the participation of more people from outside. These two stages of involvement were analogous to the two phases of work in theatre performance – the rehearsals among the actors and then the performance involving actors and spectators. However, the participants in paratheatrical activities were not passive observers. Grotowski introduced the concept of 'active culture' to emphasize the essence of active participation in paratheatrical activities. 'Active culture', Grotowski

---

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

explained, 'is cultivated, for instance, by a writer when writing a book'.<sup>384</sup> Paratheatrical activities were to 'extend the sphere of active culture' by engaging all participants in the process of creative activities.<sup>385</sup> In this way, the participants were not passive receivers of a cultural product, such as readers of a book or spectators in a conventional theatre performance. Instead, they were actively involved in the process of creation of a cultural product.

Grotowski accepted that it was very difficult to be completely open to others all the time, but he expected that the openness could start to grow from one corner and gradually affect life as a whole.<sup>386</sup> He emphasized the need for such a corner in life in the following way:

...Maybe one must begin with some particular places; yes, I think that there is an urgent need to have a place where we do not hide ourselves and simply are, as we are, in all the possible senses of the word.<sup>387</sup>

To foster complete openness, Grotowski set up his activities in a remote, secluded place which allowed the de-conditioning of social roles. For him, the forest was the right place. Or, an alternative choice was a sealed-off bare

---

<sup>384</sup> *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 96.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>386</sup> See 'Holiday – The Day That Is Holy', *The Drama Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (T58), June, 1973, p. 133.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

room. Most of his paratheatrical activities were conducted in these two types of environments.

During his lecture in Royaumont (France) on 11 October 1972, Grotowski reiterated that the meeting named 'holiday' was meant to be a genuine communion among people to replace theatre performance:

It is not theatre that is indispensable but something quite different. To cross the frontiers between you and me: to come forward to meet you... Not to hide, to be as I am. For a few minutes, ten minutes, twenty minutes, an hour, at least. To find a place where a communion becomes possible. ...it will destroy in the future what we have hitherto defined as theatre. It will rather be a meeting; not confrontation, but – how shall I put it – common-holiday.<sup>388</sup>

This 'common-holiday', or 'holiday' as Grotowski called it elsewhere, is his solution to the replacement of theatre art. To understand how he realized his innovation, it is necessary to scrutinize the exact content of paratheatrical activities.

Among various paratheatrical activities conducted in the 1970s, the most central activity is Special Project, which closely reflects Grotowski's vision unveiled in his text 'Holiday'. In September 1970, after Grotowski's mysterious expedition to India and Kurdistan, he made a public invitation called 'Proposal for Collaboration' in popular youth periodicals and on Polish Radio to the youth in Poland. It was addressed to those 'who – because it is

quite simply a necessity for them – leave their inner comfort, and seek to reveal themselves in work, in meeting in movement and freedom'.<sup>389</sup> A subsequent meeting, which lasted for four days and nights, was held early in November 1970, with 70 people selected from the 300 or so who responded to Grotowski's open invitation. As a direct result of this meeting, ten participants stayed and formed a new group working with Grotowski. This new group which worked separately from his old group was led initially by Grotowski and then by Zbigniew (Teo) Szychalski. By the end of 1970, only four group members, including Irena Rycyk, Wiesław Hoszowski, Zbigniew Kosłowski and Aleksander Lidtke, remained. They were later joined by Teresa Nawrot, Jerzy Bogajewicz and Włodzimierz Staniewski. The details of their work were not accessible to the public. According to a newspaper report which appeared at the end of March 1972, Grotowski's new work was 'created through the collective participation of group members, who are sharing their life's experiences', and there was no dramaturgical text or any written words involved in this new work.<sup>390</sup>

On 15 November 1972 these seven new members finally started to work with the old members, including Grotowski, Albahaca, Cieślak, Jahołkowski,

---

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 133-4.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>390</sup> In *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 134.

Molik, Paluchiewicz and Spsychalski. For three weeks in Brzezinka near Oleśnica, about forty kilometers from Wrocław, they renovated some old farm buildings and a water mill to construct their working environment. From December 1972 to mid-January 1973, the thirteen-person group (Spsychalski temporarily left the group) worked in Wrocław. The group then moved again to Brzezinka and lived there for a period. For every few days spent there, a rest period was allotted, and each person could return to the city. According to Grotowski, life in the forest had 'the characteristics of life in a community'.<sup>391</sup> He further emphasized that to work in the forest helped 'to establish a rhythm of work different from life in the city, which is more inhibiting'.<sup>392</sup> This closed group work among the team members marks the first phase of the realization of the proposed communion, that is, the meeting among 'our own kind' to materialize the postulation that 'I should not be alone!', as mentioned in Grotowski's text 'Holiday'.<sup>393</sup> The subsequent phase was to focus on the meeting between the team members and those people of 'our kind' to materialize the postulation that 'we should not be alone!'.<sup>394</sup> The second phase started in June 1973 when a meeting was held in Brzezinka in

---

<sup>391</sup> *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 140.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>393</sup> 'Holiday – The Day That Is Holy', *The Drama Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (T58), June, 1973, p. 114.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*

which selected people from the outside were invited to join. The meeting which lasted three days and three nights had the working title 'Holiday', and it was later called the first 'Special Project'. The new generation of team members at this stage were Irena Rycyk, Zbigniew Kozłowski, Aleksander Lidtke, Teresa Nawrot, Włodzimierz Staniewski and Jacek Zmysłowski (the last having been invited to remain with the group after participating in the first Special Project). Up until then, Grotowski and his team members had accomplished a working model. Based on this model, they further conducted more Special Projects in Pennsylvania in September 1973, in France in November 1973, in Australia from March to June 1974, and then in Brzezinka again from late November of 1974 to March 1975, before these types of activities were eventually developed into other distinctive shapes.<sup>395</sup>

The exact content of Special Project as it was conceived in 1973 is not clear due to a lack of documentation. However, some accounts by participants of Special Projects after 1975 give us a contour of the later version of this activity. Polish journalist Tadeusz Burzyński described his experience as a participant of the Special Project held in Brzezinka in April 1975.<sup>396</sup> Richard

---

<sup>395</sup> All these realizations of Special Projects abroad were accompanied with performances of *Apocalypse*, theatrical workshops and other paratheatrical activities, which will be explained later in this section. The participants of these Special Projects were selected from the spectators of *Apocalypse*.

<sup>396</sup> See Tadeusz Burzyński, 'Jerzy Grotowski's Special Project', *The Theatre in Poland*, No. 8, 1976, pp. 11-7.

Mennen also gave his account of another Special Project held in 1975.<sup>397</sup> In addition, Dan Ronen gave an account of what he called the 'Theatre of Roots' workshop led by Cieślak in Pennsylvania in May 1978. In fact, this workshop shares a similar structural pattern with Special Project and has less resemblance to Grotowski's subsequent project known as Theatre of Sources, with which the title 'Theatre of Roots' associates. Therefore, Ronen's account can also be helpful to our understanding of the activities undertaken in Special Project.<sup>398</sup> Finally, Leszek Kolankiewicz wrote and edited an unpublished brochure *On the Road to Active Culture*, which also epitomizes the activities in Special Project. My account and analysis of Special Project is based on the general features of these recorded Special Projects regardless of the minor differences adapted for specific environments or situations.

Before the team members started to work with outside participants in Special Project, they first worked together among themselves, which would serve as the seed of the complete openness of the enlarged meeting in Special Project. Usually the outside participants of Special Project were screened from the spectators of *Apocalypse*, on the basis of conversations with team members after performances. Some other acceptances were made in certain

---

<sup>397</sup> Richard Mennen, 'Grotowski's Paratheatrical Projects', *The Drama Review*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1975, pp. 58-69.

meetings during various workshops. Only a limited number of people were selected to participate in Special Project.

There were two phases of the realization of Special Project. The first and longer phase took place in a smaller group, whose task was, according to Kolankiewicz, 'to find, as it were, milestones – situations releasing activity, a simple act of life, and to join these situations in a kind of cycle'.<sup>399</sup> Then a shorter, second phase took place in a larger group with more participants from the outside. Special Project could last for several days up to one week or so. There were no observers allowed and every participant was actively involved. What was expected to be achieved was the induction of complete openness passed from the team members to the smaller group, and then to the larger group.

Special Project usually took place in a secluded space that was undefined in terms of its social function. The participants rallied at a meeting point in the city and were transported to the remote location where the activities would be held. The selected space for Special Project was usually located in a natural environment with water, fire, wood and earth, such as a forest beside a brook or a lake. There were also buildings to serve the domestic needs of

---

<sup>398</sup> See Dan Ronen, 'A Workshop with Ryszard Cieślak', *The Drama Review*, Vol. 22, No. 4, December 1978, pp, 67-76.

the participants, such as sleeping and eating. The buildings, however, were sealed off and bare. They were literally transformed into a kind of den, a shelter in its simplest form. The participants were asked to bring a change of clothes and probably a musical instrument. Excessive personal belongings were prohibited. For example, the participants were asked to leave their watches in a storage space to which they did not have easy access. To sum up, the intention was to create an environment which was temporarily cut off from normal life so that social roles could be put aside.

On their arrival, participants were asked to do some domestic work, such as preparing food or cleaning up the location. This was a practical need and, not less important, a chance to get to know the environment and other participants since there was no formal introductory session. According to its function, the space where various activities took place could be fitted into two categories: the working space and the resting space. The resting space was usually around an indoor fire, and all the other spaces, including some indoor space and the woods, brook, or fields, could be the working space. However, even resting around a fire, the participants remained vigilant and there were still some less physically demanding activities. Musical instruments were placed near the resting space, which was an obvious

---

<sup>399</sup> *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 21.

suggestion for the participants to improvise music together. Usually, the participants would play instruments or chant simple tunes in a relaxed mood. However, the music playing could eventually become quite active. Thus, what happened in the resting space could not be taken as a break between two working periods. The resting periods were incorporated into the working periods to form a smooth continuum without breaking the participants' internal flow. Although potential working space could always be explored throughout the available space during the activities, the domestic area was unlikely to be an ideal working place due to its specified practical function. The resting space which had been distinctively associated with the resting periods was also naturally disassociated from the working periods. Thus, all other space, which was unidentified and unspecified in terms of its function, became an ideal working space in which to explore various possibilities. Subsequently, all activities were amalgamated in real life and there was no division between them in terms of time and space.

Following the physical suggestions made by Grotowski's team members as leaders, the participants were often involved in vigorous physical activities such as running, jumping or shouting during working periods. The leaders guided the participants during the activities only through suggestion and did

not give any instructions to 'correct' them. Almost all activities were conducted collectively and they usually demanded the participants' physical or vocal (but not verbal) interaction with each other. None of these activities could be related to the actions of daily life. The activities were devised to foster significant events happening spontaneously among all participants which could then result in a moment of communion.

Verbal communication among participants was inhibited. Unusual emotional overflow which was prohibited in ordinary life was allowed and accepted. Fatigue was a constant companion for participants owing to these demanding activities. It is not difficult to recognize that Grotowski's methods of actor training at the end of the 1960s were embedded in both the designation and the guiding strategy of such activities in Special Project as the breakdown of the participants' physical resistance by means of fatigue, or prohibition of their discursive thoughts by demanding silence during the course of activities. However, the activities in Special Project were not intended to enhance the participants' vocal or physical capacity, but to foster the participants' complete openness. Grotowski believed that the significant moment of communion necessitated the complete openness of participants. As the direct realization of Grotowski's ideas revealed in his text 'Holiday',

Special Project served as a prototype model, on which further development of paratheatrical activities could be based.

Happening alongside Special Project were various peripheral projects conducted by Grotowski or his team members to explore other possibilities for further development. In the summer of 1973, right after the first Special Project took place in Poland, Grotowski travelled abroad extensively to negotiate further foreign tours. The first foreign visit was realized in September and October 1973 in Pennsylvania where Grotowski and his team presented performances of *Apocalypsis*, Special Project and actor training workshops. The events were wrapped up under the title 'Complex Research Programme'. The second foreign tour was realized in France in late November 1973. This French tour followed the pattern of the Complex Research Programme in the United States, and two sessions of Special Project were conducted. Grotowski continued this Programme in Australia in May and June 1974. The Australian programme was, according to Osiński, composed of four different workshops led by Grotowski, Cieślak, Flaszen and Cynkutis respectively, including two paratheatrical ones: 'Narrow Special Project' devoted to the individual work of participants and 'Large Special

Project' geared to group work.<sup>400</sup> However, no further details of these two paratheatrical activities are available.

Further paratheatrical activities were devised in 1975. In 'The Laboratory Institute: Program 1975-1976', published in late December 1974, Grotowski set out the focus of his activities in the coming year. Besides workshops for actors, theatre critics and researchers, also included in the programme are 'The Laboratory of Group Theory and Analysis' designed for group reflection on problems bordering on art and life and 'The Laboratory of Collaboration with Psychotherapy' for professional therapists interested in collaborating in group experiments. Grotowski summarized his statement with the following words:

The work of the laboratories, connected indirectly with the creative processes in the field of theatrical arts, is not understood as a relic of our theatrical past; we are now interested in how much paratheatrical experiments can apply to the creative processes (or in professional therapy), which we understand as a form of human contact and expression.<sup>401</sup>

Here Grotowski clearly indicates a broader scope of paratheatrical activities. After a further Special Project realized in Poland in 1974 and 1975, Grotowski and his company directed the project 'Research University of the Theatre of Nations', or simply the 'Research University' in Wrocław from 14

---

<sup>400</sup> See *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, pp. 145-7.

June to 7 July 1975. It was the first time that paratheatrical activities became open to the public without screening the participants. The activities in the Research University consisted of the general programme, the specialized programmes, various consultations in areas directly connected with acting, lectures given by foreign theatre artists, as well as performances and film exhibitions by various groups and artists.<sup>402</sup>

The general programme of the Research University was made up of various types of exercises and consultations – the so called Beehives (*Uls*). Beehives took place every evening and night on the premises of the Laboratory and were open for everyone who wanted to be physically involved rather than to observe from the side. They were conducted by members of Grotowski's company and also by other artists such as André Gregory. In all, 21 Beehives took place and 1824 people attended.<sup>403</sup> The activities conducted in the Beehives could be very different from night to night, and it was up to the group leader to determine the content of the activities. The following is an account of one Beehive conducted by Cieślak and his group.

Every fifteen seconds a new person entered in darkness the biggest room on the Theatre's premises. One only felt that the space had

---

<sup>401</sup> In *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 148.

<sup>402</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>403</sup> *On the Road to Active Culture*, edited by Leszek Kolankiewicz, translated by Bolesław Taborski, 1978, p. 46.

already been full of people. Someone led the newcomer by the hand. 'What is your name?', he asked. 'Repeat it loud now. Let it fall among the breathing, that darkness, that silence.' A little light appears. Someone distributes boxes of matches. ... People light matches, walk round the room, stop in front of one another. Some look, others do not know 'how to look'. For some that gesture, so human and impersonal at the same time, is not easy. ... One feels every move, every flicker of the people around. Windows to the street are opened. It is very early bluish dawn. 'Listen to the city now', says Ryszard Cieślak. There is silence, so characteristic of all these meetings, pure silence.<sup>404</sup>

However, there were other Beehives with different characters conducted by other members. They could be 'more geared to verbal contact – as was one conducted by Małgorzata Dziewulska and her group; or more impulsive – as was one conducted by Stanisław Scierski when people from all over the world sang sad songs'.<sup>405</sup> In another Beehive, a group of people who did not know each other were packed in a dark and quiet room. Gradually the almost inaudible sound of a flute could be heard and people began to chant as the flute grew louder. In another Beehive, participants danced and shouted on a sheet. People would run up and grab the torches and run around the room, singing, yelling and dancing.<sup>406</sup> Without screening participants and set in a sealed-off room inside the city, the Beehives were designed to be easily accessible to the general public in an urban environment. The Beehives can be understood as a broadened and urban version of Special Project.

---

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 57-8.

Unlike the general programme, the specialized programmes of the Research University were meetings with small groups of participants, ranging from five to thirty. These programmes lasted twelve to twenty-four hours, and took place both in the city and the forest. The specialized programmes were conducted by members of the troupe, including 'Working Meetings' led by Scierski, 'Meditating Aloud' led by Flaszen, 'Happening' led by Cynkulis, 'Acting Therapy' led by Molik, and so on.<sup>407</sup> The objectives of these programmes could be very different and they were determined solely by their leaders. The various consultations for participants in the Research University were conducted by doctors and psychiatrists. For instance, professor Kazimierz Dąbrowski consulted with participants on the subject of 'positive disintegration' in creative development.<sup>408</sup> In addition to these programmes and consultations, there were workshops conducted by other directors such as Peter Brook, Joseph Chaikin and André Gregory. To sum up, the Research University was composed of activities of great variety, which involved as many as thousands of people.<sup>409</sup> Yet, among all the activities, the general and specialized programmes were the most essential ones, and were carried out in

---

<sup>407</sup> See *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 152.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.* Also, Richard Mennen gives a brief description of some of these programmes in his article 'Grotowski's Paratheatrical Projects', *The Drama Review*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1975, pp. 66-9.

<sup>409</sup> In October and November 1975, Grotowski and his troupe conducted another series of activities in Venice, which extended the Research University experience to Italy.

the spirit of Special Project. Despite the increasing complexity and multiplied dimensions of paratheatrical activities after 1973, Special Project, with its clear objectives, remained the most crucial activity among them. Most of the other activities were intended to give Special Project different dimensions such as its intellectual and psychological ones.

Besides Beehives, the adaptation of Special Project in urban surroundings was further tested in the experimental activity called 'Openings – the City of Wrocław', or simply 'Openings' (*Otwarcia*), held from February to April 1976.<sup>410</sup> Openings was conducted by Scierski in February, Cieślak in March, and Spsychalski in April, respectively. It took place mainly in a sealed bare room in the theatre buildings in Wrocław, but with occasional excursions into public surroundings such as the Wrocław Railway Station. It was freely accessible without limiting the number of participants. The only requirement demanded of them was their active participation, and the participants were free to leave at any time during the activities. This direction of the experiment, however, did not lead to any significant breakthrough in the development of Special Project.

Another attempt to refine Special Project can be seen in Acting Search conducted by Cieślak in 1976. Acting Search took place in isolation for many

days in the urban milieu and then in the countryside. It started with 'physical efficiency training, voice exercises and etudes to stimulate imagination'.<sup>411</sup> Its aim, however, was not to achieve any acting merit but, through transcending these exercises, to arrive at 'creative actions originating in active reaction to other people and to the surrounding world'.<sup>412</sup> A workshop given by Cieślak in Pennsylvania in May 1978 follows the same pattern as Acting Search, and hence can serve as an example of this kind of activity. In the Pennsylvania Workshop, seven-day indoor activities incorporating physical exercises, plastic exercises, making music and chanting during rest time, were followed by three-day outdoor activities of the Special Project kind in the woods.<sup>413</sup> This direction of experiment was to incorporate the actor training session in Special Project activities as a preparatory session for further activities. This preparatory session intended to locate and eliminate the participants' physical blockages and open them up before they joined in Special Project activities. Nevertheless, like Beehives and Openings, Acting Search did not play a major role in the subsequent development of Special Project.

---

<sup>410</sup> See *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, pp. 157-8.

<sup>411</sup> *On the Road to Active Culture*, pp. 87-8.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>413</sup> See Dan Ronen, 'A Workshop with Ryszard Cieślak', *The Drama Review*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 1978, pp. 67-76.

These paratheatrical activities certainly gave people a new way of seeing and hearing, but they also caused doubt among some participants. Richard Mennen pointed out that 'Beehives raised a great deal of controversy among the participants', and he warned that people could be led into 'excess and falseness of the worst kind'.<sup>414</sup> Participants did nothing but clap their hands, snap their fingers or hum along with a simple tune. The activities could be turned into revelry, and the intended complete openness was far from being achieved nor was the proposed communion among participants. In fact, this problem was not confined to Beehives alone. It implied a potential crisis rooted in the nature of Special Project. The live interaction among the participants brought about, apart from spontaneity, chaos in the work, and hence these paratheatrical activities could easily end up in a shape that Grotowski least wanted. He simply had to continue experimenting with other possibilities to realize the communion which would genuinely inspire people.

The most significant development of Special Project came along with the realization of the Mountain Project in 1976 and 1977. Early in June 1975 Grotowski made a proposal, which was entitled 'Project: the Mountain of Flame'. The subtitle 'Mountain of Flame' was probably inspired by the Arunachala Mountain in India. Legend has it that Shiva once appeared as a

---

<sup>414</sup> In *On the Road to Active Culture*, edited by Leszek Kolankiewicz, translated by Bolesław

flame of fire on top of the Arunachala, and local traditions assert that the gods put the mountain in its position to mark the spiritual centre of the world.<sup>415</sup> What is more, the Indian sage Ramana Maharishi (1879-1950), whose teachings of self-enquiry had a great influence on Grotowski, lived in the Virupaksa cave on the hill of the Arunachala Mountain.<sup>416</sup> While explaining the Mountain Project, Grotowski emphasizes the significance of the Mountain:

The Mountain is something we aim towards, something which demands effort and determination. It is a kind of knot, or central point, a point of concentration – but focal, not divergent. ... The Mountain contains a sense of distance, but from which you return. The Mountain is a kind of test. You must remember in all this that we have in mind a real, existing Mountain and not some kind of image.<sup>417</sup>

From May to July 1976 Grotowski and his team conducted in France a paratheatrical project *Vers un Mont Parallèle* which was composed of ‘explorations in space, in close touch with the visible and tangible world’ and examinations of ‘the problems of human relationships through constant movement in open space lasting for many hours at a time’.<sup>418</sup> *Vers un Mont Parallèle* can be considered the first attempt to realize the project The

---

Taborski, 1978, p. 74.

<sup>415</sup> See *A Search in Secret India*, p. 138 and 147.

<sup>416</sup> For more details of how the Maharishi’s self-enquiry influenced Grotowski’s ensuing work, see Section 6.1.

<sup>417</sup> In *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 187.

<sup>418</sup> *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 86.

Mountain of Flame, as Grotowski proposed in 1975. From September 1976 to July 1977, a further developed Mountain Project took shape and Jacek Zmysłowski was the main leader of this plan which lasted for ten months. During the French tour in the year preceding Mountain Project, Zmysłowski comprehended that the most important element which could foster genuine communion among people was the preparation of the place and that other attempts of stimulating people could only encourage forced emotions:

It suddenly became clear that the only essential thing is the special preparation of a place – and that ‘props’ directing or inspiring action are meaningless: there were too many objects and too much calculation. What is left is only what is essential, but literally, essential to life. It became possible to eliminate everything artificial and leave the most simple of relationships: an individual/space – in fact an individual in space and us in the face of ourselves.<sup>419</sup>

This new direction led the work to its simple and pure form without excessive devices, which could be considered to be a response to the problems emerging in Special Project.

The Mountain Project took place in and around Wrocław, and it was realized in three stages: Night Vigil (*Nocne Czuwanie*), The Way (*Droga*) and The Mountain of Flame (*Góra Płomienia*). Night Vigil, devised by Zmysłowski, was an open session of work lasting several hours which was conducted regularly during 1976 and 1977 in the work room inside the theatre

---

<sup>419</sup> Jacek Zmysłowski in *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 193.

premises in Wrocław. Night Vigil served pragmatically as a means of selection for participants in the following stages of the project.

Night Vigil was later adapted as an independent activity, Vigil, which was practised alone until 1981, long after the Mountain Project had ended. Owing to the lack of a detailed account of Night Vigil, my analysis will be based on the record of Vigil, which can be reasonably assumed to share the same format as Night Vigil.<sup>420</sup> Night Vigil was conducted by a group of guides with Jacek Zmysłowski as the main leader. There was no selection of the participants for Night Vigil. Before Night Vigil started, participants were led into an empty room one by one. They scattered in the space, leaving passages among them so that the guides could move around, if necessary. Night Vigil started as the guides commenced movement among themselves without any verbal communication or instruction. This movement 'was not directed toward the participants', but 'existed among the members of the guiding group through their reciprocal contact'.<sup>421</sup> In other words, the guides created 'a type of net spun through movement', suggesting the participants enter into action.<sup>422</sup> Once the participants started to join in the action, the

---

<sup>420</sup> In his article 'The Vigil [Czuwanie]', Francois Kahn quotes extensively Grotowski's and Zmysłowski's analyses of Vigil, which is very helpful to the understanding of Night Vigil. See *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, pp. 224-8.

<sup>421</sup> In 'The Vigil [Czuwanie]' by Francois Kahn, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 226.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

guides adjusted their movement accordingly to create the net of movement among all the people involved. The movements were never fixed and the rhythm changed in relation to the group of participants. As the main leader Zmysłowski explained:

Seen from the outside it can seem simply that they are moving, sometimes in a way so delicate that even old people are able to do it. But it is very different from everything that we are in the habit of doing in our daily lives.<sup>423</sup>

This was the first phase of Night Vigil. If the movement did not deteriorate into chaos, Zmysłowski would enter the second phase of Night Vigil. He would find among the group one, two or three participants who were more alive, or more organic (not necessarily more active), and adapt his movement towards these chosen participants. Through the net of movement, the whole group would gradually move in relation to these chosen participants. By doing so, the net of movement could concentrate on its most alive component. Night Vigil ended when the net of movement reached 'a point of saturation'.

Grotowski explained the last phase of Night Vigil:

The end of the action was never structured beforehand, but always was in silence. It was not a 'spiritual' silence, not silence simply in the sense of not talking – but from the intensity of the movement always the action arrived to a point of saturation.<sup>424</sup>

---

<sup>423</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

Here lies the responsibility of the main leader Zmysłowski, who had to sense the precise moment of silence when 'everything was saturated'. In that moment, he would finish Night Vigil by leading the first person out of the space.<sup>425</sup>

The crucial point of Night Vigil is its simplicity. Allusions or metaphors of any kind were avoided. Grotowski affirmed the significance of this simplicity:

Jacek [Zmysłowski] always insisted on the fact that what counts in the work [Vigil] are the extremely simple things: the movement and the space – the body and the space – the body and the movement. Nothing more, really nothing more, no miracle, no mystery, no metaphysics, no spirits, only the most simple things. In his explanations to his collaborators he always underlined the fact that it is necessary to accept certain limits and especially physical limits; for example we know that we cannot fly, so we don't speak about how to fly.<sup>426</sup>

The personal associations required to stimulate the organic process of expressiveness, which had been crucial to Grotowski's actor training, became completely irrelevant in Night Vigil. Zmysłowski had brought a new perspective into the paratheatrical work, which sharply contrasted with Grotowski's earlier approach. This is also a defining characteristic of the whole Mountain Project, which will be clarified as my analysis proceeds.

---

<sup>425</sup> Kolankiewicz extracted and edited one participant's account, which depicts some activities conducted in Night Vigil. See *On the Road to Active Culture*, edited by Leszek Kolankiewicz and translated by Bolesław Taborski, 1978, pp. 105-11.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

The Way, the second stage of the Mountain Project, took place in the summer of 1977. In essence, it is a journey to the projected destination, the Mountain of Flame. The participants, selected either through Night Vigil or through other previous work abroad, departed from theatre buildings in Wrocław in small groups of about eight, at regular daily intervals and under the guidance of two experienced 'leaders'. The group was transported into the countryside by van and left to find their way on foot without knowing the duration of the journey. Again, silence was demanded from participants throughout the course of the journey. The Way usually involved one or two nights in the forest and was physically demanding. It contrasts heavily with our daily life in society. Given the title 'The Way', this second stage of the Mountain Project was devised not only as a passage to the final destination, but, more importantly, as a process of transformation from everyday life to a socially undefined state. It was the cast-off of social roles realized by means of a literal journey through the forest which demanded a concrete physical endeavour throughout the journey. There was no intention to involve any metaphor, suggest any allusion or evoke any association with pilgrimage.

The final stage of the Mountain Project, Mountain of Flame, took place in a hilly area north-west of Wrocław, literally in a mountain. This mountain

is deeply wooded and it is surmounted by an ancient castle, partly in ruins. A section of the castle's interior was extensively repaired and refurbished with a rough stone wall, wooden floors, a fire place and toilet and kitchen facilities. The indoor space was completely bare and sealed off from the outside. There were two rooms in the castle. The lower room was more intimate, with an open log fire and low ceiling. It was here that the participants were received and fed before being led upstairs. The upper room, massive and lofty, led through an archway into a smaller annex used exclusively as a domestic area, where participants ate, rested and slept beside a log fire. All domestic activities, such as eating and sleeping, were dictated by the random pattern of the working periods, and they were not controlled in any way by the organizing group, but happened spontaneously in the main room. The activities conducted in work included running, jumping, dancing or fighting, all restricted to movement without intended metaphorical meaning. There was always the possibility for any participant to initiate, join or leave a session. During work, there was absolute vocal silence. In addition, it was possible for a group to leave the castle temporarily and work in the surrounding countryside for several hours. Although there is no available record of the activities in Mountain of Flame, it is reasonable to assume that artificial

stimulants or associations were avoided in accordance with the distinctive features of the whole Mountain Project. There was no predetermined period of time for any individual's sojourn on the mountain. It was decided for each by the leader Zmysłowski. As the cycle of work came to a close, the participant was led with others to retrace their journey out of the castle and down the mountain, until they were picked up and transported back to Wrocław.

As Grotowski pointed out in his text 'Holiday', the meetings in paratheatrical activities were to construct a special place and environment in favour of genuine communion. Grotowski expected what happened in this special place could affect what would happen to them when the participants went back to their normal life. The remoteness and seclusion of the chosen place for the Mountain Project was not created artificially, but mainly formed by the nature of its location. The introduction into this special place was a literal journey from society, through a forest, to the destination in a secluded mountain. Thus, the metaphorical associations and artificial stimulation, which had been so important in Grotowski's preceding work, were avoided in the Mountain Project. This was to diminish the participant's forced emotions so that what happened in this special place would not be watered

down to a revelry, as was the crisis of Special Project and its variations. This was mainly Zmysłowski's contribution to Grotowski's work.

Shortly after the Mountain Project ended in the summer of 1977, Zmysłowski and his group began a new season with a series of openly accessible participatory work sessions called Vigils (*Czuwania*), a development based on Night Vigil in the Mountain Project. Zmysłowski was preparing a sequel to the Mountain Project – the Earth Project, which included three parts: Vigils, Doing (*Czynienie*), and Village (*Wioska*). Vigil continued regularly until late spring of 1978, but the last two parts of this new project have never taken place due to unforeseen interruptions.<sup>427</sup>

After the Mountain Project, paratheatrical activities gradually shifted to the periphery of Grotowski's attention, while further attempts to develop paratheatrical work were made by Grotowski's collaborators. Cynkutis announced a project called Tree of People in November 1977 and considered this project to be the first step towards a concrete realization of 'active culture', which would be fully accessible to all those wanting to take part (up to 400 people at a time). Tree of People envisaged abandoning the division into leaders and participants, which had been a feature of previous

paratheatrical work. Cynkutis further characterized the Tree of People as a 'work-flow' in which there were no set times to distinguish working periods from ordinary periods, and the most intense activities as well as the most banal everyday activities were indiscriminately included. Both the commonplace and the extraordinary became the living substance of 'work-flow'.<sup>428</sup> The first realization of the Tree of People, which lasted seven days and nights, took place in the theatre building in Wrocław on 5 January 1979, involving about sixty participants. As a participant, Robert Findlay observed that the leadership in Tree of People was sometimes passed to the participants. At the beginning of the activities, the members from Cynkutis' team functioned as leaders by creating 'physical images and vocalized sounds' which the participants would follow. As the process progressed, they retreated from their leadership roles, which the participants gradually took on. Ultimately, everyone functioned as a leader and a follower simultaneously when the whole group functioned creatively together.<sup>429</sup> The Tree of People was another direction of developing paratheatrical work.

---

<sup>427</sup> Zmysłowski's group members were involved in other activities conducted by Grotowski and Cynkutis in 1978 and 1979. Thus, the Earth Project was halted for two years. However, it never resumed, since Zmysłowski went to America for medical treatment in spring 1980 and he died afterwards. See *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 203-4.

<sup>428</sup> See Grotowski, 'Wandering Toward Theatre of Sources', *Dialectics and Humanism*, No. 2, 1980, p. 23.

<sup>429</sup> For more details, see Robert Findlay's description in *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 206.

Apart from Zmysłowski's and Cynkutis' paratheatrical projects, other members conducted workshops for actors on various occasions, and performances of *Apocalypsis* continued throughout 1979. In the winter of 1980 several members, without Grotowski, prepared a new work called 'À la Dostoyevsky', collectively constructed by Antoni Jahołkowski, Rena Mirecka, Stanisław Scierski, Irena Rycyk, Teresa Nawrot and Zbigniew Kozłowski under the direction of Ryszard Cieślak. The first public presentation took place in February 1981 with the title *Thanatos Polski*. There are limited poetic texts in *Thanatos Polski* and the action is less precise than preceding theatre productions such as *Apocalypsis*.<sup>430</sup> This attempt to achieve a structure of actions, bordering on both theatre performance and paratheatrical activities, was explained in its programme:

*Thanatos Polski* is not conceived of as a theatrical performance, although there is a fixed structure and programmed regions of association (the 'theme'). It is possible for those present – without constraint – to enter the action. Your participation in the particular life of this group may be active, vocal, or simply by being with us.<sup>431</sup>

*Thanatos Polski* was another way of developing paratheatrical work. In brief, work took many different directions after 1977, but there seemed to be less conscious effort to produce compactness and consistency in the various

---

<sup>430</sup> Kumiega described the structure of *Thanatos Polski* in details. See *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 208-12.

<sup>431</sup> *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 208.

sectors of the work. All the projects mentioned above were mainly conducted by members of Grotowski's team, but Grotowski himself was not deeply involved in them. What he was directly engaged in at that time was a new project called Theatre of Sources, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

To sum up, despite their uncertain shapes of great variety, paratheatrical activities were to realize what Grotowski failed to achieve through theatre performance. They aimed to bring about communion in the living moment to initiate the participants into a complete state of being, in which their physical expression would conform to their psychic impulses. This paratheatrical work can be considered a continuation of Grotowski's long lasting attempt to realize secular ritual through his work, with extra attention to the initiation of participants.

To get more insight into paratheatrical activities, it is worth introducing Victor Turner's concept of liminality. Turner explored Arnold van Gennep's threefold structure of rites of passage, that is, separation, transition and incorporation, and developed his concept of liminality to elaborate the process of transition, or liminal phase, in rites of passage. A liminal phase is a threshold between the more or less stable phases of the social process. Individuals in a liminal phase do not belong to the society that they were

previously part of and they are not yet incorporated into a new society. They are 'betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial'.<sup>432</sup> For example, the teenager undergoing an initiation rite is neither recognized as an adult nor as a child. During a liminal phase society is 'unstructured or rudimentarily structured a relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders'.<sup>433</sup> Turner envisaged that this liminal phase is essential for society to reshape itself towards its future development.

Turner's concept of liminality perfectly defines Grotowski's paratheatrical work, which is characterized by its secluded locations, unusual allocation of time schedules, activities undefined by customs and unmasking of participants' social roles, as has been demonstrated throughout the analysis in this section. However, as Turner pointed out, Grotowski's paratheatrical work is short of the phase of incorporation when compared with rites of passage in which initiands 'may be released from one set of status-roles but only in order to be more firmly imprinted with another'.<sup>434</sup> Participants going

---

<sup>432</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, p. 95.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>434</sup> Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, p. 120.

through paratheatrical activities are left in a dangerous state of chaos and confusion, without a proper process to incorporate them into society again. This deficiency prevents paratheatrical work from becoming an effective shaping force of society.

During its development, paratheatrical work took many different forms and involved thousands of people. However, it lacked consistent clear achievements, and received a mixed response from its participants. Some people found the activities inspiring. Others were bewildered and even irritated. Leszek Kołodziejczyk considered that paratheatrical activities could be summarized as 'an attempt to build a kind of genuine meeting among human beings', and that they released participants' 'simplest, most elementary inter-human expression'.<sup>435</sup> In sharp contrast, Maciej Karpiński was critical that this innovation of Grotowski's was 'based on individual, incommunicable experience', and he accused Grotowski's work of 'mystification'.<sup>436</sup>

Beneath the surface, Grotowski's various attempts in paratheatrical activities did not always go as planned. Participants could temporarily release themselves from social conditioning, and they could also exaggerate

---

<sup>435</sup> In *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 8.

<sup>436</sup> *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 156.

themselves, act pretentiously and repeat banalities and clichés such as playing savages or imitating trances. In other words, paratheatrical activities could degenerate into banal fun, which did not help to achieve the desired communion capable of initiating the participant into a complete state of being. As a result, ‘genuineness’ emerged as a key issue in paratheatrical work. This can be seen in Grotowski’s 1985 retrospective assessment of paratheatrical activities:

When we bring up the word paratheatrical, in reality we’re dealing with the question of participatory theatre and we face two very important questions. First of all, what is the difference between acting/pretending and being? And secondly, what is a real meeting? What must there be in common between people who don’t know each other for a real meeting to take place?<sup>437</sup>

The fact that both questions in the above excerpt reiterate the necessity of ‘genuineness’, further emphasizes this crucial issue in paratheatrical work.

When Grotowski started to ponder the next step of his work after the Mountain Project concluded in 1977, he turned his attention to various traditional practices for self development such as yoga, Dervish whirling and so on. The thinking behind this move was that communion cannot be unilaterally achieved through devising the interaction among participants in unusual environments, and that for ‘genuine’ communion to take place, the

---

<sup>437</sup> Grotowski, ‘Tu es le fils de quelqu’un (You Are Someone’s Son)’, *The Drama Review* Vol. 31, No. 3, 1987, p. 32.

participants have to act out their 'genuine' selves first. This new perspective eventually led Grotowski's work to its next stage of development.

## **PART III. BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL**

## 6. CROSSING THE BOUNDARY

### 6.1 De-conditioning

Following the Mountain Project, the highlight of paratheatrical activities in the summer of 1977, there were many initiatives for new directions of work led separately by several individuals from Grotowski's team. Jacek Zmysłowski and his group were preparing the Earth Project, but could not realize all of it due to unforeseeable interruptions. Cynkutis initiated the Tree of People in November 1977. Both developments follow the line of paratheatrical work, as indicated in Section 5.2. In addition, Cieślak and several members developed a performative structure *Thanatos Polski* whose aim was to find a common ground for theatre performance and paratheatrical activity. However, Grotowski's involvement in these projects was very limited due to his new project Theatre of Sources, which primarily took place from 1978 to 1980, and can be traced back, according to Grotowski, to as early as November 1976.<sup>438</sup>

In *On the Road to Active Culture*, a pamphlet prepared for participants in the symposium which took place on 4 and 5 June 1978, the editor and author

Leszek Kolankiewicz mentioned The Global Programme conducted abroad in the 1976-1977 season, which was roughly concurrent with the Mountain Project in Poland. Many creative centres were inaugurated alongside various research and cultural centres. The team members took turns in conducting 'activities in the sphere of "active culture"' and 'sometimes focused their attention on problems somewhat closer to traditional creative art'.<sup>439</sup> The work in The Global Programme, which was different from paratheatrical work, was further developed thereafter. On 5 June 1978, Grotowski gave a talk on his contemporary work in the symposium organized by the International Theatre Institute (ITI), which was later published under the title of 'Wandering toward Theatre of Sources'. It was Grotowski's first public mention of 'Theatre of Sources' (*Teatr Zródeł*).

Despite the fact that its author was not specified, 'Theatre of Sources 1977-80', published in *International Theatre Information* in winter 1978, can be reasonably assumed to be the project proposed by Grotowski for seeking the sponsorship of the International Theatre Institute before the project commenced in autumn 1977. Hence, an analysis of 'Theatre of Sources 1977-80' would be helpful to our understanding of Grotowski's intentions before he

---

<sup>438</sup> See Grotowski, 'The Laboratory Theatre: 20 Years After – A Working Hypothesis', *Polish Perspectives*, May 1980, p. 38.

<sup>439</sup> Leszek Kolankiewicz, *On the Road to Active Culture*, pp. 102-3.

realized this programme of research. In 'Theatre of Sources 1977-80', Grotowski clearly defined the two related objectives of his project: distilling the so called 'techniques of sources' and examining the primordial elements of active participation in gatherings such as tribal rituals, both of which could be found in various cultural traditions. It was mainly international practitioners with practical skills in traditional techniques who were involved in Theatre of Sources. All of them were chosen by Grotowski during his expeditions around the globe. Theatre of Sources was planned in three stages to go from autumn 1977 to summer 1980. Each stage, which lasted one year and ended with an intense programme during the summer months, was the progressive continuation of the preceding stage of work. Both of the objectives mentioned above were also the focus of investigation throughout all three stages. The concluding programme during the summer of 1980 was intended to gather participants from the public as well as from practitioners influenced by the long-term work on techniques of sources.<sup>440</sup> Adapting elements distilled from various traditional forms of gathering, Grotowski aimed to establish a new form of gathering which the cultural differences among the participants were able to cross.

---

<sup>440</sup> See 'Theatre of Sources 1977-80', *International Theatre Information*, winter 1978, p. 3.

One of the two objectives of the Theatre of Sources is to explore what Grotowski called the 'technique of sources' which can be better understood when his notion of 'sources' is clarified. In 'Theatre of Sources 1977-80', Grotowski explains his notion of 'sources' in three dimensions: 'the original found anew through analogy, or transmitted through the continuity of what is known; the presence of man, a source in himself through his own reality (that of his body and his action); presence and experience of vital sources to find again the immediacy lived'.<sup>441</sup> These explanations are far from helpful to our understanding of Grotowski's notion of 'sources'. It is possible that Grotowski himself was unable to verbalize what he meant. I will narrow down the possible connotation of 'sources' by examining how Grotowski used this term in various contexts. Grotowski related the 'sources', which can be found in each individual, to something in the self which is original, primordial and prior to what was socially and cultural acquired. Grotowski's notion of 'sources' can be traced back to his notions of archetype and collective unconscious, as has been discussed in Chapter 2. However, he claimed that the collective unconscious was not sufficient to explain 'sources'. He had in

---

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

mind Mickiewicz's concept of the 'complete man'.<sup>442</sup> Yet, this part of the self is usually not apparent due to social conditioning. Grotowski further explained that to get access to 'sources' means to be in the original state of being, or to be 'in the beginning'. To be in the beginning is like being a child, who perceives everything as if it happens for the first time: 'So to be in the beginnings is to be in reality part of the perception and of what one does.'<sup>443</sup> One has to renounce one's constant thoughts lingering around in the past or the future, and simply be in the present, that is, in the here and now. 'To be in the beginning means *hic et nunc*, or rather, *hic stans* and *nunc stans*.'<sup>444</sup> To be in the beginning is 'a renouncement of *absence*'.<sup>445</sup> To be in the beginning, or to be in the original state of being, means to stay in relation to what one encounters, instead of the discursive re-cognition of what one has encountered.

---

<sup>442</sup> See Grotowski, 'Wandering Toward Theatre of Sources', *Dialectics and Humanism*, No. 2, 1980, p. 16. Also, Kolankiewicz pointed out that Adam Mickiewicz's idea of the 'complete man' is the objective of Grotowski's work. In Mickiewicz's work and lectures on Slavic Literature delivered at the College de France in the early 1840s, he talked about the 'complete man' transformed from the banal man. He meant by the 'complete man' a concrete existence, which is not divided into body and psyche, using the organ of feeling as the basic instrument of direct perception. Such existence was characterized, according to Mickiewicz, by the free immediacy of reactions, continuous movement and action, and above all, through deed. See *On the Road to Active Culture*, pp. 115-6.

<sup>443</sup> Grotowski, 'Wandering Toward Theatre of Sources', *Dialectics and Humanism*, No. 2, 1980, p. 13.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*

What is more, 'sources', for Grotowski, also suggests the original state of the world beyond the human organism. He explained:

In fact I am talking rather of an original state. And this, the original state, is something that it is dangerous to speak of: it goes beyond conditioning, it appears inhuman. It is like arriving at self-evidence of being which is close to that of the forces of nature, of original powers, one of the powers of the original world. One appears to act in self-evidence and without premeditation, as if it were inevitable.<sup>446</sup>

Thus, to be *in* the original state of being means to be *within* the original state of the world. Grotowski believed that one can get access to sources by 'reclaiming through action of direct connections between people and what is recognized as being life-giving in the world'.<sup>447</sup>

There are also other foundations in Grotowski's notion of 'sources'. What should be noted first is Ramana Maharishi's self-enquiry. Maharishi is a hermit who lived in Arunachala Mountain in southern India.<sup>448</sup> In his childhood, Grotowski read about Maharishi in Paul Brunton's book *A Search in Secret India*. Grotowski mentioned this Indian sage in one of his lectures on Theatre of Sources:

...this old man [Ramana Maharishi] was repeating that if one is investigating 'Who am I?', then this question will send you somewhere back and your limited 'I' will disappear, and you will find something

---

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>448</sup> See Paul Brunton, *A Search in Secret India*, pp. 134-63. Grotowski and his mother visited Arunachala in December 1976. See *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 54.

else, *real*. Later I learned that this something else he was connecting with *hridayam*, etymologically: heart-is-this.<sup>449</sup>

It is necessary to scrutinize the Maharishi's approach towards enlightenment. Instead of renouncing the world and retreating into secluded jungles or mountains, Maharishi pointed out that 'giving up the false self is the true renunciation':<sup>450</sup>

You have to ask yourself the question, Who am I? this investigation will lead in the end to the discovery of something within you which is behind the mind. Solve that great problem, and you will solve all other problems thereby.<sup>451</sup>

The point of this self-inquiry is not to find its answer. It is a path leading towards the renunciation of thoughts. Maharishi believes that apart from thoughts, there is no such thing as the mind. Apart from thoughts, there is no independent entity called the world. That is, thoughts create a false image of the self as the subject and an illusion of the world as the object. After negating all of the possible 'I' thoughts defined by the body, the five cognitive senses and the conscious thinking mind, the remaining ultimate awareness is the true self. When the mind, which is the cause of all cognition

---

<sup>449</sup> Grotowski, 'Theatre of Sources', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 252.

<sup>450</sup> *A Search in Secret India*, p. 156.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

and actions becomes quiescent, the world will disappear and the true self will shine.<sup>452</sup> Thus, according to Maharishi:

The first and foremost of all thoughts, the primeval thought in the mind of every man, is the thought 'I'. It is only after the birth of this thought that any other thoughts can arise at all. It is only after the first personal pronoun 'I' has arisen in the mind, that the second personal pronoun 'You' can make its appearance. If you could mentally follow the 'I' thread until it leads you back to its source, you would discover that, just as it is the first thought to appear, so is it the last to disappear. This is a matter which can be experienced.<sup>453</sup>

Therefore, the self-inquiry 'Who am I?' holds the key to the renunciation of thoughts. The persistent self-inquiry 'Who am I?' can destroy all other thoughts. Thus, when other thoughts arise, one should inquire: 'To whom do they arise?' The answer that would emerge would be 'To me'. Thereupon, if one asks 'Who am I?', the mind will go back to its source; and the thought that arises will become quiescent. By not letting the mind go out of the self, the 'I' thought which causes all other thoughts will eventually disappear and ultimate awareness will shine.<sup>454</sup> Through the Maharishi's self-inquiry, Grotowski clarified his notion of 'sources':

'Who-am-I?' which was not a mental investigation, but rather as if going more and more towards the source from which this feeling of 'I'

---

<sup>452</sup> The Maharishi's self-inquiry can be better understood through the document 'Who am I? – (Nan Yar?)', a collection of questions put to Maharishi by Sivaprakasam Pillai together with the sage's answers around 1902. See [www.allspirit.co.uk/whoami.html](http://www.allspirit.co.uk/whoami.html)

<sup>453</sup> *A Search in Secret India*, p. 159.

<sup>454</sup> See 'Who am I? – (Nan Yar?)', [www.allspirit.co.uk/whoami.html](http://www.allspirit.co.uk/whoami.html)

appears. The more this source seems to be approached, the less the 'I' is.<sup>455</sup>

Both men believed that the true self, which is usually concealed by false ideas about the self, can be reached only through the renunciation of thoughts. Grotowski believed that many acquired ideas of the self, especially the one shaped by social conditioning, block the revelation of the true self. This true self does not limit itself to the individual self, but incorporates the external world, a state without the dichotomy of subject and object. For the clarity of my argument, the term 'Self' will be used subsequently to indicate this true self – what Grotowski meant by 'to be in the original state', 'to be in the beginning', or 'to be in the sources'.

Grotowski's approach to Self was not through self-inquiry, as advocated by Maharishi, but through achieving the inevitable deed, or self-evident action, which, for Grotowski, was a symptom of the renunciation of thoughts. Grotowski did not rely on introverted investigation, as in the Maharishi's self-inquiry. He directed attention outwards, and sought a communal relationship between the subjective self and the objective world. Grotowski's approach to Self was inspired by Martin Buber's idea of 'I and Thou'.

---

<sup>455</sup> Grotowski, 'Theatre of Sources', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 253.

In his book *I and Thou*, the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (1878-1965) provides a dialogical approach to the relation between man and God, man and man, and man and nature. According to Buber, human beings have a two-fold attitude towards the world indicated by the primary words: I-It and I-Thou. The I-It relationship is characterized by the objectification of the world and by the 'I' isolated and alienated from the source of life. This is crucial to the acquisition of objective knowledge. However, I-It, which predominates in the industrial world, is only one part of a two-fold attitude, and should not dominate our life. The I-Thou relationship allows a meeting not only of minds, but of souls, of wills and of what resides at the core of one's being. It is only in this I-Thou relationship that a genuine and immediate meeting can occur. This relation is interpersonal, and can be expanded to relations between the whole of existence and even to the ultimate Thou – God. Unlike the Maharishi's introverted self-inquiry, Buber's dialectical approach provides a more feasible platform for Grotowski's practical work, which involved extroverted expression.

To avoid confusion, Grotowski preferred the word 'body' to 'self' or 'I'. However, he stressed that 'when I speak of the body, I speak of the human being'.<sup>456</sup> With this in mind, he explained what the self could be:

My body has its fourth dimension. But it is also what we call the 'outer world'. In order to discover my body it may be good to discover your body. But I can't discover your body if I won't have some love for you. After all, when I discover a body I discover the body of a tree, the body of the sky, the body of the earth, I discover the body of every single thing. This dimension which is not built from my circulatory system... it's like the dimension in which we find ourselves when we face the astronomer's sky and the stars look down on us.<sup>457</sup>

Thus, to cut oneself off from others was not an option for Grotowski. Everything in his work had to be done within a relationship to others. The 'I' was among a flow of things, and could only be revived through restoring its original relation to others. For Grotowski, Self was the awareness enclosing not only the physical self, but everything in the here and now. Moreover, when explaining the relationship between 'I' and the surrounding world, especially 'Thou', Grotowski involuntarily fell not only into Buber's notion of I-Thou, but also into his distinctive terminology and discourse:

Me-You? I-thou. Is it only a double person? I-thou. It is not at all one who is two, neither two who are one. *I-thou. It is the experience where everything is included.* If one arrives at this point, the earth, the star,

---

<sup>456</sup> 'Wandering Toward Theatre of Sources', *Dialectics and Humanism*, No. 2, 1980, p. 14.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*

the sun, the wind, the cries of birds, the light from within, the big tides, everything is present.<sup>458</sup>

This I-thou relationship depicts the self in the original state of being – in the beginning. In Grotowski's view, this relationship holds the key to his practical work in Theatre of Sources. The influence of Buber's dialectical approach on Grotowski's practical work cannot be overemphasized.<sup>459</sup>

Although inspired by the Maharishi's introverted self-inquiry and Buber's philosophical framework, Grotowski's approach was distinct from theirs because of his emphasis on physicality. It is through physicality that Grotowski's expertise in physical and vocal work could be utilized to outwit people's discursive mind, which led one away from Self. To ponder what the genuine self should be leads one to false ideas about oneself, which are composed of nothing more than one's imagination, acquired images, or ideal idols. Therefore, the key to Self does not lie in thinking, but simply in be-ing. One must stop thinking about any idea of the self and be in the present, be where one is, do what one does and meet whom one meets. One should not anticipate the goal ahead during the course of doing.

---

<sup>458</sup> Grotowski, 'The Art of the Beginner', *International Theatre Information*, spring-summer 1978, p. 9.

<sup>459</sup> Buber's dialectical approach and Grotowski's directing of the actor's attention towards the exterior during training around 1964 are mutually supportive. Thus, Buber's influence on Grotowski's work may be traced back as early as Grotowski's theatrical work in the 1960s.

Unlike his work in paratheatrical activities, Grotowski did not invent activities, techniques or training of any kind in Theatre of Sources. Instead, he concentrated on certain traditional techniques in various cultures. He intended to extract essential elements from these relevant traditional techniques, which, he believed, lead to the sources. By doing so, Grotowski envisaged 'objective' techniques which would be effective for everyone, regardless of his or her cultural background. Grotowski referred to techniques which could lead one back to sources as techniques of sources. Yet, his criteria for the techniques of sources were ambiguous because of his personal way of identifying the techniques. Nevertheless, what Grotowski considered techniques of sources always involved, or could be turned into, the work on oneself or, in his words, 'a way of dealing with self'.<sup>460</sup> Thus working on the self might be a better criterion for recognizing what Grotowski called the techniques of sources.

Grotowski believed that certain aspects of our being precede cultural differences. Yet, to tackle directly what our intrinsic being is beyond cultural differences is not feasible. Grotowski thought that these 'daily, habitual techniques of the body are – as analysed by Marcel Mauss – the first cultural

---

<sup>460</sup> Grotowski, 'Wandering Toward Theatre of Sources', *Dialectics and Humanism*, No. 2, 1980, p. 18.

differentiation'.<sup>461</sup> Thus, to reveal aspects beyond cultural differences demands the suspension of habitual thinking and deeds in daily life. Grotowski asked the question: 'What happens when the daily-life techniques of the body which are habits in a definite cultural circle are suspended?'<sup>462</sup> He recognized that almost all techniques of sources aim to reveal these intrinsic aspects of our being through suspending our habitual thinking and doing in daily life. For Grotowski, there are numerous types of cultural and religious practices which could be considered techniques of sources – for instance, mystery techniques, various types of yoga, a dramatic musical form of yoga called Baul, Sufi Dervish whirling, phenomena from the fringes of Japanese Zen and Noh theatre, processes of 'possession' in black cultures, some Indian techniques touching on 'ecological consciousness', that is, allowing oneself to be integrated in nature, and so on. The techniques of sources can be very sophisticated or very simple, but all of them remain, Grotowski emphasized, 'extremely precise'.<sup>463</sup>

Among these traditional techniques of sources, many work directly on renouncing the illusion in our mind to reveal the true self. The best example is the introverted sitting meditation in certain kinds of yoga. As Grotowski

---

<sup>461</sup> Grotowski, 'Theatre of Sources', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 257.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

pointed out, this type of yoga belongs to what Mircea Eliade called 'the techniques of de-conditioning'. It suspends the cultural conditioning and reveals one's true self simply through working exclusively on the mind. Yet, this type of meditation technique only involves a static position such as sitting, and hence it is almost impossible for an observer to examine the essence of the technique. In other words, to pass on this type of technique extensively relies on verbal communication, which always causes misunderstanding owing to the incommunicability of personal experiences. Thus, Grotowski did not consider this type of introverted technique as the subject of his investigation. Instead, he concentrated on extroverted techniques involving movement and action. He referred to these extroverted techniques as 'dramatic' techniques, which are 'related to the organism in action to the drive, to the organicity', or one might simply say 'performative' techniques.<sup>464</sup> This type of technique is suitable for investigation, since its movement or action is self-evident, which diminishes the necessity of verbal explanation and lessens investigators' misunderstanding of each other.

In addition to the 'dramatic' aspect of the techniques, Grotowski pays attention to what he calls 'ecological techniques'. He explains:

---

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

Ecological in the human way means that they are linked to the forces of life, to what we can call the living world, which orientation, in the most ordinary way, we can describe as to be not cut off (to be not blind and not deaf) face to what is outside of us. And I should underline that this aspect is the same whether we are in a natural environment or in an indoor space.<sup>465</sup>

The ecological aspect of the techniques facilitates our constant awareness of the surroundings. It obliges one to adhere to the relation to others, which is, for Grotowski, essential for access to 'sources'. However, single-minded attention towards one specific object is not at all encouraged in the 'ecological techniques', which demand that practitioners do not narrow down their attention to any specific objective in order to maintain their connection with the whole surroundings.

Grotowski sought dramatic and ecological techniques of suspending daily habitual thinking and doing. The result was, in Grotowski's words, 'the movement which is repose'. When engaging in these techniques of de-conditioning, our movement, Grotowski observed, 'even if full of energy, is in point of fact a repose'.<sup>466</sup> The movement which is repose leads to de-conditioning of our perception and hence the suspension of our habitual thinking and doing. As a result, Grotowski considered that in terms of the device of the techniques, the 'movement which is repose is perhaps the

---

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

crucial point where different techniques of sources begin'.<sup>467</sup> He further explained the movement which is repose in terms of external silence. The requirement of external silence in movement necessitates internal silence of the mind, which is the sign of de-conditioning. Thus, the requirement of external silence in movement can draw one towards de-conditioning. This is why movement which is repose can be work on the self. Grotowski explained the experience of moving as a repose:

You feel as if everything is part of the great flow of things and your body begins to feel it and begins to move quietly, serenely, almost floating, as if your body were conducted by the flow. You can feel that it is the flow of all things around that carries you, but at the same time you feel that something is coming out of you too.<sup>468</sup>

This movement which is repose leads one back to the 'sources'. On the contrary, 'babbling' in movement indicates the 'babbling' of the mind, which is the sign of restless habitual thinking. Through these extroverted techniques of sources, the internal state of being can be revealed through the quality of external movement, which can be examined by careful observation.

What happens after our habitual thinking has been broken and our mind has settled in repose is that we regain immediate perception of the surrounding world. Grotowski explained:

---

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

When we are moving, and when we are able to break through the techniques of the body of everyday life, then our movement becomes a movement of perception. One can say that our movement is seeing, hearing, sensing, our movement is perception.<sup>469</sup>

For example, by applying a peculiarly slow rhythm, walking could be turned into 'the movement which is repose'. The walk of extremely slow rhythm, almost standing still, can break down one's habitual way of walking, which is normally 'directed towards an aim', that is, one's mind is already where one is walking towards before one actually gets there. When walking in an extremely slow rhythm, one might feel irritated in the beginning by unrestful thoughts going around. However, if one can manage to keep attentive, this slow walk gradually leads one's mind to where one is – in the process of walking in the present. Therefore, one's perception can constantly open up to the surroundings instead of indulging in one's restless habitual thinking.<sup>470</sup>

To sum up, Grotowski concentrated on these dramatic and ecological techniques of sources in his work. The dramatic aspect of the techniques reveals the practitioners' state of being in external actions, which can then be examined by others. Meanwhile the ecological aspect of the techniques demands practitioners' constant seeing and listening which keeps their connection to the external world. People combining these two aspects would

---

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>470</sup> See *Ibid.*

be prepared for genuine gatherings, in which they have to act and perceive simultaneously.

After targeting appropriate techniques for investigation, Grotowski still faced other difficult tasks. First of all, his investigation of various traditional techniques did not involve analyzing or interpreting the techniques from a detached position. Nor did practical work entail an exchange of opinions with practitioners through discussion. It was done through physical learning and experiencing by practitioners from different cultural backgrounds with a minimum of talk. It can take years, even a life time, to manage certain traditional techniques physically. Grotowski was aware that his work on these techniques risked being watered down into poor imitations, or being merely a collection of different techniques in the name of synthesis. This is what he called 'dilettantism'.<sup>471</sup> So as to prevent his work from falling into dilettantism, Grotowski sought 'what precedes the differences' in various techniques.<sup>472</sup> He sought their primordial elements so that they could be used by people from different cultural, social or religious traditions. This involved both working on techniques from different traditions and having them investigated by practitioners from different traditions. As a consequence,

---

<sup>471</sup> See Grotowski, 'Tu es le fils de quelqu'un (You Are Someone's Son),' *The Drama Review* Vol. 31, No. 3, 1987, p. 33.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Grotowski, together with different international practitioners each time, made several expeditions to Haiti, Mexico, Nigeria, Bengal, India and a rural area in Poland so that he could discover and work on techniques of different origin with practitioners from different cultures.<sup>473</sup> Most of the practitioners were experts in the techniques of sources of their own traditions. Grotowski then invited some of these international practitioners to join his Theatre of Sources research in Poland.

Grotowski gave an example of this cross-cultural investigation where a Latin American, a Hindu and a Japanese could work together. They did not directly communicate with each other verbally, since there was no common verbal language between them. They did nothing belonging to only one tradition, but looked for some simple action 'evident in its consequences' for all three. Based on his/her knowledge of traditional Indian practices, the Hindu would initiate a simple action – probably one simple element taken from an Indian practice. The Hindu then taught this action to the Latin American and the Japanese, to test whether it could work on them or not. The international practitioners worked together to separate the essential elements of traditional techniques, which precede other secondary elements developed subsequently by social, cultural or religious circumstances. Grotowski gave

---

<sup>473</sup> For the exact regions Grotowski visited in each country, see *Notatnik Teatralny*, pp. 142-

an example of how he identified the essential elements among various techniques of different origins, noting that in many oriental traditions, certain ways of breathing were used to control the involuntary nervous system. Nonetheless, breathing techniques varied from one tradition to another. For instance, Hindus might concentrate on the interval between breathing in and out, but Japanese Zen practitioners might concentrate on a particular attitude towards breathing in or out. To locate the simple and primary elements among various breathing techniques, Grotowski concluded that one could access the involuntary nervous system simply by observing one's breathing.<sup>474</sup> Grotowski's conclusion in this example may be arguable, and breathing techniques were not the main subject of investigation in Theatre of Sources since they are neither dramatic nor ecological. However, it gives us some insight into the working methods used in Theatre of Sources.

Grotowski's recognition of 'the primary position' serves as another example of how he identified the simple elements which precedes cultural differentiation. He observed that the African hunter from the Kalahari, the French hunter from the outskirts of Saintes, the Bengali hunter and the Huichol hunter from Mexico, despite their cultural differences, all adopted

---

57.

<sup>474</sup> See Grotowski 'Tu es le fils de quelqu'un (You Are Someone's Son),' *The Drama Review* Vol. 31, No. 3, 1987, p. 34.

the same body position when they went hunting. It is what Grotowski called 'the primary position' 'with the spinal backbone leaning slightly forward, and the knees slightly bent in a position that is sustained at the base by the sacrum-pelvis complex'.<sup>475</sup> In this primary position, people can walk without making any noise and move very slowly without stopping. It is an advantage for hunters to walk in this way so that certain animals remain unaware of their presence. Grotowski then concluded that 'there exists a certain primary position of the human body' for all members of *Homo sapiens* despite the variety of their cultural backgrounds.<sup>476</sup>

The work of seeking what precedes differences through cross-cultural research ended up as the 'distillation' of various techniques of sources. Certain aspects of the traditional techniques were separated and formed new techniques. These 'distilled' techniques could be managed with minimal cultural-based knowledge within a relatively short period of time. They were not to be presented to someone who watched from the side. Nor were they to be activities for participating in a gathering. They were approaches to the de-conditioning of the self, effective for people from various cultural

---

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*

backgrounds. Although emphasized by Grotowski as ‘an investigation about what the human being can do with his own solitude (next to the other, or to others)’, this work on techniques of sources was not exclusively for the sake of the individuals concerned.<sup>477</sup> This ‘work on individual’, as Grotowski called it, was a preparation for subsequent work on participatory group gatherings.

## 6.2 Seeking Communion Across Cultural and Ontological Boundaries

According to Grotowski’s initial plan, unveiled in ‘Theatre of Sources 1977-80’, ‘the rediscovery of the original form of the dramatic phenomenon’ was the other objective of Theatre of Sources besides the work on techniques of sources.<sup>478</sup> In Grotowski’s words:

Finding, in practice, the primordial form of the dramatic phenomenon predating its division into actor(s), spectator(s) and action, seizing those points – tangentially – between what preceded theatre and what

---

<sup>476</sup> Grotowski ascribed the existence of this primary position to the appearance of human beings. Thus, this primary position is not only for *Homo sapiens* but also for *Homo erectus*. See Grotowski ‘Tu es le fils de quelqu’un (You Are Someone’s Son)’, *The Drama Review* Vol. 31, No. 3, 1987, p. 34. In fact, Grotowski incorporated this ‘primary position’ in one of his distilled techniques, which was later developed into Motions. For details of Motions, see Section 7.1.

<sup>477</sup> See ‘Theatre of Sources’, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 259. In this self assessment, Grotowski indicated that the whole project Theatre of Sources focused solely on the work on the individual. However, this was not the case when Grotowski initiated the project, as will be shown towards the end of this chapter.

<sup>478</sup> ‘Theatre of Sources 1977-80’, *International Theatre Information*, winter 1978, p. 2.

arises from modern cultural research, settling down at the limits of theatre.<sup>479</sup>

Taking its etymological meaning, 'dramatic' in the above excerpt means involving direct actions, but not necessarily acting. In other words, 'the dramatic phenomenon' does not necessarily mean theatre but those forms which can be considered as the precursor of theatre. The term 'primordial' here means pre-given and elementary, which does not necessarily imply 'primitive'. It clearly indicates that this project was not concerned so much with the archaeological facts of 'the dramatic phenomenon' in the past as with the essential constitutional elements of 'the dramatic phenomenon' at all times. To investigate 'the primordial form of the dramatic phenomenon' is to distill the essential elements of dramatic phenomenon, which precede cultural differences. Grotowski especially paid attention to those elements concerning improvisation, movement, rhythm, incantations, musical-chants, spontaneity, reactions and impulses.<sup>480</sup> The purpose of investigating 'the primordial form of the dramatic phenomenon' was not to seek a means of cultural exchange or to create a hybrid of performances from different cultures. Its aim was to seek a way of gathering people together so that all were active participants and could participate effectively across cultural boundaries.

---

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*

Grotowski planned to gather researchers and practitioners with practical knowledge of techniques from various traditions to form the 'trans-cultural village' as the team of investigation.<sup>481</sup> During the second stage of Theatre of Sources (1979), the members of the 'trans-cultural village' were responsible for investigating 'the primordial form of the dramatic phenomenon', along with their work on the techniques of sources. They were divided into several subgroups called 'cells of creativity', which were 'groups for the realization of the meeting as "work processes" based on the active participation of all persons present'. By 'work processes', Grotowski meant that work should be built into life, or be part of life. The properties, the space and surroundings of the proposed gathering should not be fictional. That is, there should be no 'theatrical settings'. Every aspect of the gathering should be real. The members in each 'cell of creativity' had to work out their own solutions to participation beyond cultural differences. Grotowski planned that the 'cells of creativity' would 'give rise to at least three different modes of active participation furnishing materials necessary for the analysis of the attributes of the primary dramatic phenomenon'.

During the last stage of Theatre of Sources (1980), Grotowski put together the research carried out previously. The international members of the

---

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, and the same for all the quotations in this paragraph.

'trans-cultural village' would be joined by visitors from the outside, from time to time. Grotowski expected that the international members, who had experience of working on techniques of sources, would help to shape this gathering across cultural boundaries. The active participation in this gathering would be 'work processes' arising from the life shared by all the participants in the village rather than from fictional designations. It was to incorporate 'the organic "rites" of life, of contact, of the process of creativity in life'.<sup>482</sup> This open 'village' was the ultimate test for the entire project. This concluding part of Theatre of Sources was named Journey to the East when it was realized in 1980.<sup>483</sup> Journey to the East was conducted in the summer of 1980 at Brzezinka (under Grotowski's direction) and Ostrowina (under Spsychalski's direction). Over three months, 220 people from the public joined in. This concluding event was slightly different from Grotowski's original plan, proposed in 1977. Firstly, two sets of work, techniques of sources and active participation in the gathering, were not interwoven together, as planned. Secondly, Grotowski included conventional forms of gatherings

---

<sup>482</sup> See 'Theatre of Sources 1977-80', *International Theatre Information*, winter 1978, p. 3.

<sup>483</sup> Grotowski named this concluding event as 'Journey to the East'. See Grotowski, 'The Art of the Beginner', *International Theatre Information*, spring-summer 1978, p. 11; and 'The Laboratory Theatre: 20 Years After – A Working Hypothesis', *Polish Perspectives*, May 1980, p. 35. 'Journey to the East' is an allusion to Hermann Hesse's short novel of the same title, which was first published in German in 1932 as *Die Morgenlandfahrt*. Hesse's novel is a metaphorical story of the journey of 'The League' to 'the East' in search of the Truth.

from Haiti and India in the event, instead of proposing 'the primordial form of the dramatic phenomenon'.

Four groups participated in Journey to the East, including the invited participants, Grotowski's international collaborators, part of a community from Haiti, and a small group from India with a Baul, which will be clarified as my analysis proceeds. Anthropologist Ronald Grimes was one of the invited participants and he recorded the activities he attended. Grimes first worked with Grotowski's international collaborators on the techniques distilled from various techniques of sources. Participants were initially asked to imitate all the techniques precisely, from which they could then choose one on which to concentrate. On the one hand, the participants worked on their selves through these distilled techniques of sources. On the other hand, they served as verifiers of these techniques, as developed by Grotowski's international collaborators. Because of the nature of the programme, no one was able to attend all the activities. Grimes recorded several techniques he encountered in turn. In one technique, participants were asked to imitate the guide through a long walk, during which they 'paused at transitions of terrain or foliage, honored the sounds of animals, hugged trees, lay on the earth, crawled under dense pines, watched fish, ran through thickly entangled forest

during the night, and walked under waterfalls'.<sup>484</sup> Participants were required to keep silent and not disturb the forest life. Any sentimental attachment to these activities was, to repeat Grimes, 'clearly and overtly discouraged'.<sup>485</sup> Another technique was 'a stylized step done clockwise around a tree to the rhythms of solid log drums'.<sup>486</sup> Participants repeated exactly the same monotonous step without improvisation for very long periods during the daytime. Although some participants were bored by this monotonous technique, Grimes pointed out its meditative potential. Following this technique were often several indoor sessions in which participants were instructed 'to find and repeat some simple gesture to a slightly more complex beat'.<sup>487</sup> These sessions were also repeated for long periods.

Whirling in the forest was another technique that Grimes encountered. Participants whirled on one spot or during the course of running in the woods. It was not formal Sufi Whirling, but more extroverted. Another technique was composed of a series of movements and gestural sequences. While practicing this technique, participants were asked to keep their eyes 'open yet

---

<sup>484</sup> Ronald Grimes, 'The Theatre of Sources', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 270.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*

unfocused'.<sup>488</sup> Vision was always to be outward, mobile and flowing. The movement oriented the participants to the surrounding horizon. This technique, later known as Motions, would be further developed in the decade to come. All the techniques that Grimes encountered concerned work on the self without interaction with other participants. They were techniques of sources without touching the issue of interpersonal interaction. Grimes considered this work as a hunt for 'the self/other nexus'.<sup>489</sup> He explained:

It is a hunt for a way of moving that allows earth, sky, foliage, animal and "other" to appear as subjects. The self that is hunted is not just my own private, ego-constituted self, but a selfhood that surrounds me.<sup>490</sup>

Grimes observed that the work on these distilled techniques of sources, although valuable for its own sake, was ultimately to prepare the participants for a meeting with the Haitian community.<sup>491</sup> His observation rightly reflected Grotowski's intention. This part of the work was to test the distilled techniques of sources and to work on oneself as preparation for subsequent work on active participation. The work on techniques of sources did not directly contribute to the formation of the proposed gathering, in which all participants were active, not passive recipients. It led the individual to

---

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

achieve the state of Self, not through symbiosis with another person, but alone. By means of creating such an experience of the state of Self, the work on techniques of sources indirectly prepared participants for what would happen in the gatherings.

The work with the Haitian and the Indian groups in *Journey to the East* was to explore various possibilities of participatory gatherings. During his expeditions in previous years, Grotowski, with a small group of international collaborators, had encountered 'the most simple forms of participation in performative elements linked to "grains of ritual" in Haitian voodoo' and 'confrontations with Bauls, yogin-bards from Bengal in India'.<sup>492</sup> By means of 'following' the practice inside themselves without any visible exteriorization, Grotowski and his collaborators reacted to the most elemental components of what was happening in these gatherings, and certain streams of impulses were evoked throughout their organisms. They believed that there were some objective elements in these traditional forms of gatherings which would work on people regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Consequently, Grotowski invited a Haitian community and an Indian group to the event *Journey to the East*, so as to test these conventional forms of gatherings outside their original social and cultural contexts.

---

<sup>492</sup> See 'Theatre of Sources', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, pp. 265-6.

Instead of an assembly of distinctive individuals, the Haitian group was intended to be a small scale community. It was composed of a significant portion of a community from Saint Soleil in Haiti, except for the very old and very young. The leading members were Tiga (Jean-Claude Garoute) and Maud Robart. (Both worked again with Grotowski later in the United States in 1983.) This encounter between the invited participants and the Haitian community became a participatory gathering. Present in the meeting were 'ritual elements such as meditative waiting, ritual painting, and burning of paintings, singing, dancing, veneration of the sun, and other actions'.<sup>493</sup> Most of this 'ritual' was performed in a barn which had been converted into a sacred place by the Haitians. The participants sat and danced on a large mat sewn with voodoo spirits, a symbolic holy ground for the Haitians. Participants were asked to participate in the ritual by 'seeing without looking, hearing without overhearing'.<sup>494</sup> They kept their eyes open, usually in a circular pattern toward the horizon, and did not focus on any single object around them. What is more, participants were 'allowed, even encouraged, to enter tentatively – with a questing, questioning attitude'.<sup>495</sup> At a certain point, participants were taught songs which they did not verbally understand, and

---

<sup>493</sup> Ronald Grimes, 'The Theatre of Sources', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 274.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

dances which they could not name. The teaching and learning did not rely on verbal explanation but on immediate vocal and physical imitation.

Grimes described the meeting with the Haitians as 'a ritual greeting of the sources'.<sup>496</sup> Since cultural division between the participants and the Haitians was inevitable and could not be overlooked, the encounter between the two groups, which was designated to be a trans-cultural gathering, turned out to be a greeting of 'the others' in terms of cultural and social differences. In a way, Grimes' phrasing implies that the meeting could not go beyond the level of 'greeting', and that the crossing of cultural boundaries was not achieved in this meeting.

Unlike the Haitians, the members of the Indian group did not belong to one community. The major contribution from the Indian group was the work with a young Baul from Bengal, for whom all the other Indians served as a supporting group.<sup>497</sup> The work with this Baul was to sit with the spine erect, listening to his sacred music and watching his dance. Obviously, Grimes was less impressed and did not spare many words for the details of this work.

---

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>497</sup> It is possible that the Baul in this Indian group is the one Grotowski first met in 1969. In his letter to Barba dated 10 August 1969, Grotowski wrote that he met a Baul master during his travels in India: '... I also met the most important Baul master (yoga through song and dance), who devotes himself to many of the same things as I do – the anatomy of the actor. It is amazing to see how certain aspects of the craft are objective.' See Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 169.

However, Grotowski's understanding of Baul can cast some light on it. Thomas Richards, Grotowski's main collaborator in the last phase of his work since 1986, retold in an interview the story about the singers/performers known as Bauls, to which Grotowski often referred in their conversation: these Bauls had a number of traditional songs in their repertoire and 'with these songs they made a work on themselves related to something "inner"'.<sup>498</sup> In an isolated way and for a long period of time, the young Bauls learnt from the old the technique of singing which is related to a kind of yoga. After mastering the technique, they would then go from village to village to perform their singing and doing with these songs, in front of local peasants. For the majority of the locals, the Bauls' singing and doing is a performance with high artistic credibility, a beautiful piece of art to appreciate. But for those who were ex-Bauls or simply had some receptivity for this Bauls' yoga, the singing and doing could stimulate the same inner process in them. That is, by listening and watching the singing and doing, they were able to experience the Bauls' internal process.<sup>499</sup>

Based on Grotowski's understanding, it is then reasonable to assume that the Baul work in *Journey to the East* was a test of how it was possible to

---

<sup>498</sup> See *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 445.

<sup>499</sup> For Grotowski's story about the Bauls retold by Thomas Richards, see *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, pp. 445-6.

stimulate a specific internal process in those who simply watched and listened, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Although their meeting with the young Baul demanded no physical involvement, the participants were not treated as onlookers. However, it is difficult to propose this type of participation without physical involvement. The Baul work in *Journey to the East* easily fell into mere appreciation of Indian music and dance, which is how Grimes reacted to it.

As far as the work with the Haitians and the Indians was concerned, Grotowski's proposals for gatherings in *Journey to the East* still extensively relied on existing forms of dramatic phenomena in various traditions. Grotowski and his collaborators did not so much achieve the distilled form of gatherings as the distilled techniques of sources. Grotowski's exploration of various gatherings did not bring about any fertile result throughout this research and he hardly mentioned it in his later reassessment of *Theatre of Sources*. As a result, the work on techniques of sources was depicted as major research in *Theatre of Sources* in Grotowski's postmortem analysis, although it was to prepare the ground for the final realization of gatherings that would cross cultural boundaries in Grotowski's initial plan. Nevertheless, Grotowski's incessant research concerning various forms of gatherings cannot

be overlooked.

Grotowski's investigation of traditional dramatic phenomena was to seek a kind of participatory gathering, which would work for people regardless of their cultural backgrounds. In addition, this gathering would bring about the communion as Grotowski envisaged, in which the boundary of limited selfhood of the individual would be broken down. In other words, the communion would lead participants in the gathering to the state of Self – the union of the self and others, the notion of which echoes the Maharishi's teaching of the ultimate awareness encompassing the world and Buber's idea of 'I-Thou'. Grotowski believed that symbiosis was the key to Self. This gathering would make the participants cross their individual ontological boundary. It was supposed to create communion among participants and lead them to the state of Self. Yet, judging from the work with Haitian and Indian groups in *Journey to the East*, Grotowski did not succeed in producing a gathering as such.

After the public event *Journey to the East* in the summer of 1980, Grotowski disbanded his international group of collaborators and went on solitary travels. On his return, he planned to continue his work in *Theatre of Sources*. He proposed that the space for activities, a field outside Wrocław,

should be renovated for another period of long-term work, and that he would conduct more field studies in different countries and assemble another international group with whom he could start systematic work in the course of the 1981-82 season. He also proposed that some outside participants should be invited to join the programme on a small scale in 1982 and on a broader scale in 1983 or 1984.<sup>500</sup> Unfortunately, Grotowski was unable to carry out his plan due to the drastic change in the political situation in Poland at that time. Since the autumn of 1980, there had been protests and strikes across the whole country.

In September 1980, the Independent Trade Union led by Lech Wałęsa was renamed as Solidarity (*Solidarność*) and confrontation between Solidarity and the authorities was increasingly tense. In May and June 1981, supporters of Solidarity clashed with the authorities and many were arrested and wounded. There had been constant riots, food shortages and rationing since the end of 1980. Despite the political tension at the time, Grotowski still arranged another opening of Theatre of Sources in the summer of 1981, regardless of the difficulties of organization and getting food supplies. The political situation in Poland became even worse when Martial Law was declared by general Wojciech Jaruzelski on the 13th December 1981.

---

<sup>500</sup> For Grotowski's plan of Theatre of Sources after 1980, see Grotowski, 'The Laboratory

Thousands of people, including Wałęsa, were arrested. There was a curfew and intensified food rationing. Theatres and cinemas were closed. People were forbidden to gather in large groups or leave town without permission. It became impossible to continue Theatre of Sources in such conditions.<sup>501</sup> In the autumn of 1982, Grotowski went to the United States and sought asylum there. Hence, the project of Theatre of Sources was permanently interrupted.<sup>502</sup> From then on, Grotowski was separated from his colleagues in the Laboratory Theatre and he had to continue his work with new collaborators in an unfamiliar land under a totally different political system.

---

Theatre: 20 Years After – A Working Hypothesis’, *Polish Perspectives*, May 1980, p. 39.

<sup>501</sup> For more details about the political situation in Poland in 1980 and 1981, see ‘In Memory of Ryszard Cieślak’, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, pp. 194-5, and *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 212.

<sup>502</sup> It was declared in a local Wrocław newspaper *Gazeta Robotnicza* on 28 January 1984 that the Theatre Laboratory would be officially closed down on 31 August 1984 by its founding members who had remained in Poland. See *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 212-5.

## 7. TRANSFORMATION OF BEING VIA CORPOREALITY

### 7.1 Panoramic Awareness and the Autonomous Body

After seeking asylum in the United States in the autumn of 1982, Grotowski stayed in New York where he held a position at Columbia University during the 1982-83 academic year. Cut off from his native soil and his long-term colleagues, Grotowski was not able to resume his work until he seized an opportunity on the West coast in 1983. The University of California, Irvine (UCI) offered Grotowski a full-time position, two premises as workspaces and considerable funds, under the project Focused Research Program in Objective Drama, known as Objective Drama.<sup>503</sup>

Objective Drama commenced in 1983 on the southern edge of the UCI campus, an isolated area of rolling hills in Orange County. The indoor work was conducted in two buildings, an old historic building known as the barn

---

<sup>503</sup> With the help of Robert Cohen, Grotowski worked under a 'drama-dance-music-art-anthropology-linguistics program' with 105,000 US dollars funding from the university over three years. This programme also received funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Shubert Foundation, and from Andre and Mercedes Gregory. See Robert Cohen 'Putting a Tree in a Box,' *Slavic and East European Performance*, Vol. 20, No. 2, Summer 2000, p. 19. According to a newspaper report, Grotowski got 283,000 US dollars sponsorship for the first year of his project Objective Drama. See Sylvie Drake, 'Grotowski to Set Scene at UC Irvine', *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 1983, p. 1.

and a hexagonal one-room building, especially built for Grotowski, called the yurt. Both buildings had wooden floors and many windows. At night indoor activities were conducted under the light of kerosene lanterns, even though electricity was available. The nearby hills served as an outdoor workspace where much of the group work took place.

It was planned in Objective Drama that six 'traditional practitioners' in liturgy and ritual from non-Western cultures would be involved annually. Also planned were at least three kinds of workshops: closed workshops for students and performing artists, advanced workshops as an extension of the closed workshops, and finally, public workshops open to a limited number of 'visitor-participants' specializing in related fields, such as the performing arts, anthropology, literature, psychology and history of religion. These 'visitor-participants' would be encouraged to 'test' the work 'at their own level, within the framework of their capacity, without violating their limitations'.<sup>504</sup> The subsequent realization more or less followed this initial plan.

Osiński pointed out that the term 'Objective Drama' could be associated with the 'objective art' used by Juliusz Osterwa, one of the founders of the

---

<sup>504</sup> Grotowski in Sylvie Drake, 'Grotowski to Set Scene at UC Irvine', *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 1983, p. 5.

Teatr Reduta.<sup>505</sup> At the beginning of the 1990s, Grotowski once showed Osiński some passages from Osterwa's 1921 diary, the so called *Keivan Diary*: 'Architecture... was an objective art – the most objective of the arts. Then comes music. Then painting, then the word... and literature.' 'Suppose theatre is like architecture. ... Architecture is the most refined... moves the experts and the observer to a state of rapture – while it affects everyone in such a way that they are not even conscious of it.'<sup>506</sup> According to the 'Research and Development Report' of 1984:

'Objective Drama' is Jerzy Grotowski's term for those elements of the ancient rituals of various world cultures which have a precise, and therefore objective, impact on participants, quite apart from solely theological or symbolic significance. Mr. Grotowski's intention is to isolate and study such elements of performative movements, dances, songs, incantations, structures of language, rhythms, and uses of space. Those elements are sought by means of a distillation process from the complex through the simple and through the separation of elements one from the other.<sup>507</sup>

Lendra, one of Grotowski's assistants, pointed out that this project was 'to isolate the performative expressions of several traditional cultures and

---

<sup>505</sup> Founded by Juliusz Osterwa in 1919, Teatr Reduta was an experimental theatre-community in which all events of life and artistic activity were communal. With this establishment, Osterwa set out to realize his belief that theatre should be an inter-human process. Teatr Reduta had a significant influence on the development of Polish experimental theatre in the following decades. See Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland, 1954-1989*, p. 12.

<sup>506</sup> In Zbigniew Osiński, 'Grotowski Blazes the Trails: From Objective Drama to Art as Vehicle', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, pp. 383-4. It is more than a coincidence that Grotowski gives an example of the objective effects produced by the architectural structure of cathedrals when explaining the objective effects in his work. See 'Tu es le fils de quelqu'un (You Are Someone's Son)', *The Drama Review* Vol. 31, No. 3, 1987, p. 37.

<sup>507</sup> 'Focused Research Program in Objective Drama' in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 310.

introduce them to performers outside of their original cultural contexts'.<sup>508</sup> Grotowski extracted objective performative elements from various traditional techniques by means of cross-cultural investigation, which closely followed his work in the Theatre of Sources period. These objective elements in traditional techniques were crucial to Grotowski's formulation of the 'objective' techniques which could be the means of working on the self for people from different cultural backgrounds.

Objective Drama was a more elaborate attempt to achieve what was supposed to be done in Theatre of Sources. Firstly, Grotowski continued to examine and elaborate on various techniques of sources in Objective Drama research, despite the fact that he did not mention the word 'sources'. Secondly, he explored certain traditional texts and songs which could be instrumental in the realization of a participatory gathering. The second part will be discussed in the subsequent section, while the first part will be the focus of my examination in this section.

Several practitioners were employed for the different periods of Objective Drama: Tiga (Jean-Claude Garoute) and Maud Robart, who had joined Theatre of Sources earlier, stayed for the first year teaching Haitian

---

<sup>508</sup> I Wayan Lendra, 'Bali and Grotowski: Some Parallels in the Training Process', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 310.

ritual practices; a karate master from Japan and a master of the Sufi dervish tradition stayed for shorter periods. Continuously and consistently involved in the programme were four technical specialists, including Jairo Cuesta from Colombia, I Wayan Lendra from Bali, Du Yee Chang from Korea, and Wei Cheng Chen from Taiwan. They 'learned and recorded the materials of the traditional practitioners and helped Grotowski formulate new exercises'.<sup>509</sup> They were also responsible for teaching traditional techniques and the newly developed work to selected participants and to some students from UCI.

The work in Objective Drama was done through the traditional means of interpersonal transmission. Four technical assistants were responsible for examining, identifying, learning and teaching various techniques. They were competent performers capable of bridging Western and non-Western cultures. These four assistants, who were permanently attached to the Objective Drama project, worked with practitioners from non-Western cultures, 'preserving the precision of the work and at the same time, making it accessible to Westerners'.<sup>510</sup> These four technical specialists served as intercultural conduits, as technical assistants, as analyzers and recorders of specialized techniques and body knowledge and, eventually, as instructors. The most

---

<sup>509</sup> I Wayan Lendra, 'Bali and Grotowski: Some Parallels in the Training Process', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 311.

important thing was their 'capacity to break down ritual into components, such as rhythm, sound, movement, concentration, without teaching ideology'.<sup>511</sup> Thus, techniques were learnt, transmitted and analyzed mainly through the bodies of these four specialists.

How did Grotowski work with the technical specialists? He first asked Lee, Cuesta or Lendra to discuss the plan for the session. He would specify 'what needed to be corrected, who would be correcting whom, where the work would take place, and approximately how long it would take'.<sup>512</sup> Grotowski never discussed the meaning of or the idea behind any practical work. The work was always conducted through physical embodiment first, and even the discussion or verbal analysis afterwards was strictly restricted to practical matters such as – did a specific routine work or not? Changes or adjustments occurred based on re-evaluations. All the practices were learned directly through the body. According to Lendra, Grotowski believed that the body could 'record and later recall movement patterns and emotion in a seemingly instinctive way when stimuli are given'.<sup>513</sup> This kind of kinesthetic learning demands 'both the physical precision and the emotional quality of the

---

<sup>510</sup> Grotowski in Sylvie Drake, 'Grotowski to Set Scene at UC Irvine', *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 1983, p. 5.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 321.

action'.<sup>514</sup> The learning process included observation, physical imitation, and repetition. It was through repetition that the body gradually internalized the physical experience.

The work in Objective Drama involved many traditional techniques such as Haitian dance and songs, dervish dances, Korean shamanistic dance and songs, Balinese incantation and mantra, Hatha yoga, and Japanese karate. In addition, certain techniques developed during the Theatre of Sources period, such as Motions, were also included.<sup>515</sup> Grotowski identified and distilled their objective elements, such as movement, sonorities, or rhythms, which had precise effects on the practitioners. He explains:

These techniques involve extremely precise, almost physical, actions. They have a relation to some kind of pre-psychology, and they are very simple. A precise moving or incantation gets a precise result.<sup>516</sup>

The work on these techniques clearly resumed the work on the self set up in Theatre of Sources, and it remained the major focus of the work in Objective Drama during the first two years. Here I will introduce several typical techniques of working on the self developed in Objective Drama: Watching, Motions, and Haitian dance *yanvalou*.

---

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>516</sup> Grotowski in Dan Sullivan, 'A Prophet of the Far Out Comes to Orange County', *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 1983, p. 42.

Watching is a cycle of dynamic physical games which took certain elements of its external structure from Vigil, as developed by Jacek Zmysłowski during the Mountain Project. Watching, which has a precise but loose structure of simple sequences, was led by a group of selected individuals, appointed by one main leader. Yet, the participants positioned throughout the space were told not to imitate the leaders but to respond to the tempo of the leaders' action in their individual streams. The purpose of Watching was 'to watch', as Slowiak explained it.<sup>517</sup> However, it did not mean passive observation from an isolated position. The participants were required to keep a watchful eye on what happened within and around them while they were engaged in intense physical work. It proved a huge challenge during the course of the energetic activities in Watching, which were designated to confront the participants with their physical limits. The activities in Watching were composed of various demanding movements such as running and dancing. A section called 'pulsations', for example, involved running back and forth from the periphery of the space to the centre point, following the leader's rhythm. In another session called 'half-moons', the participants described arcs at various distances from the centre point, moving like spiders constructing a web. There was also physical dialogue between

---

<sup>517</sup> See 'Subjective Reflections on Objective Work', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 331.

pairs of participants.<sup>518</sup> These intensive movements in Watching could go on for a long period of time.

While engaged in the intensive action in Watching, the participants had to observe the rules: 'no verbalization, no touching, no collisions, no daily life activity, no imitation of animals and no crawling on hands and knees'.<sup>519</sup> The whole event was to be silent, and neither the foot stepping on the floor nor breathing were exceptions to the rule. It became absolutely necessary to keep attentive all the time, closely following the leader's tempo, and not making any noise while doing intensive movements. The rule of being silent helped to keep the working members in a state of constant alertness.

Beside Watching, there were also some other activities whose aim was to enhance the participants' sense of the surrounding world while they concentrated on doing their actions. Sculpting and Diving is an outdoor activity during which the participants had to adapt their actions to the terrain. Fire Action is a type of movement/dance rhythmically corresponding to the motion of the flames in an outdoor fire. Both activities demanded that the participants keep their attention constantly on one specific aspect of their surrounding environment while they were in action. Watching, Sculpting and

---

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*

Diving, and Fire Action were primarily led by Cuesta.<sup>520</sup> These game-like activities were not performative structures. They were the techniques of working on the self. They helped to keep one's attentive awareness when engaged in intense physical actions.

The Motions is an extremely precise exercise which began to be developed during the Theatre of Sources period. Motions was also intended to enhance panoramic sensibility, that is, to keep attentive to everything inside and outside, in all directions. Yet, unlike Watching and the other activities mentioned above, Motions is a predetermined routine sequence which can be repeated precisely. At the inauguration of Objective Drama, Magda Zlotowska, who collaborated with Grotowski during the period of Theatre of Sources, taught Motions to Grotowski's technical assistants. However, the structure of Motions had been constantly in progress since 1979 and was not finalized, in terms of its minute details, until 1987.<sup>521</sup> Motions was in part an exercise for the 'circulation of attention', so a new level of precision had to be added to keep the pupils' attention when they could easily execute this exercise. A continuous line of attention was demanded from people doing

---

<sup>520</sup> See *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 285.

<sup>521</sup> See Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p. 52.

Motions. The primary purpose of Motions was, according to Lendra, 'to train the body to be sensitive and the mind to be alert'.<sup>522</sup>

Motions was usually practised outdoors at sunset and sunrise. The exercise always began facing the sun. The duration of Motions was originally about ninety minutes, but was later reduced to forty-five. Four leaders stood at the four corners of a diamond shaped formation so that the participants within the formation could always see one of the leaders no matter which direction they were facing. Motions is a series of stretches in various positions, which prevent the body from doing static postures and constantly demand a clear intention towards the exterior. There are three sequences of stretches in various positions, each of which is repeated four times, once toward each of the four cardinal directions. A slow turning is used to reach the four directions. Separating each sequence is a stretch called nadir/zenith, a quick stretch down followed by a quick one up.<sup>523</sup> All sequences of stretches in Motions started with the primary position, the spinal backbone leaning slightly forward and the knees slightly bent in a position that is sustained at the base by the sacrum-pelvis complex. The primary position is 'a position of readiness from which the body can move immediately in any

---

<sup>522</sup> I Wayan Lendra, 'Bali and Grotowski: Some Parallels in the Training Process', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 322.

direction'.<sup>524</sup> Grotowski distilled this primordial element of position from the way hunters in various cultures walk during hunting, as has been discussed in Section 6.1.

Practitioners were asked not to disturb the life around them when doing Motions outdoors. They had to keep attentive to their surroundings. During the execution of Motions, the eyes had to see a panoramic view and the ears had to hear all sounds at once. Grotowski's technical specialist Lendra spoke of his experience of doing Motions in this way:

Typically, when performing this slow and meditative exercise, our brain begins speaking – a variety of thoughts will come. If thoughts come we must not react to the thoughts or continue to develop them, but instead simply observe them and let them pass by in the same way we observe what we see and hear. While seeing and hearing, the body must be in the correct position and we must remember the sequence of the action. During this action, the body often slightly changes its position without our awareness. Because of this, Grotowski insisted that we strive always to be aware of the precision of the body position and make self-corrections from time to time. ... The brain is occupied with monitoring the minute details of the physical action, thus freeing the inner mind, the subtler consciousness, to 'come out' and merge with the environment.<sup>525</sup>

Motions is a technique to enhance the participants' attentiveness while observing a predetermined routine. Motions involves no narrative structure, and it would be inappropriate to consider Motions as a performative structure.

---

<sup>523</sup> For more details about the routine of Motions, see I Wayan Lendra, 'The Motions: A detailed description', *The Drama Review* Vol. 35, No. 1, 1991, pp. 129-38.

<sup>524</sup> Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p. 53.

From the techniques of de-conditioning, or the movement which is repose, Grotowski developed activities, such as Watching and Motions, to enhance the practitioner's panoramic awareness. This work closely followed his work on the 'ecological aspect' of techniques during the period of Theatre of Sources, which was to enhance the practitioner's panoramic sensibility, or the 'circulation of attention' in Grotowski's own words. This work concentrated on the practitioners' connection with their surroundings. For example, Grotowski asked his pupils, when walking in the fields or woods as a technique of working on the self, not to pick up anything, not to disturb nature, not to make any noise with their feet or hum. In order not to disturb, one had to be aware of nature and the environment panoramically and constantly. To keep panoramic awareness is to be connected with the world and to keep present in the here and now.

During the Theatre of Sources period, Grotowski had noticed in several traditions the primary position which links to our ancient 'reptile body', as Grotowski called it. This 'reptile body' is very much connected with organic physical actions. Grotowski paid attention to how people evoked this 'reptile body' through their various traditional techniques, including the complicated dance of the Black Africans in the Kalahari desert, some traditional

---

<sup>525</sup> I Wayan Lendra, 'Bali and Grotowski: Some Parallels in the Training Process', *The*

techniques in the voodoo tradition of the Yorubas in Nigeria, and certain yoga techniques practised by the Bauls in India. Grotowski discovered that all these techniques were too complicated and very much dependent on their cultural or religious contexts. Thus, they could hardly apply to someone from a different culture, and it was difficult to extract any simple element from them, which could serve as an objective technique effective beyond cultural differences. However, among various techniques leading to the 'reptile body', the Haitian voodoo ritual dance *yanvalou* was recognized by Grotowski as a technique with such a simple form that it could work beyond its original cultural context.<sup>526</sup> When practicing *yanvalou*, the dancer assumed the primary position, body angled forward slightly from the hips, and the knees were bent. According to Wolford:

The stepping pattern of *yanvalou* calls for the dancer to touch the ground once with the flat of the foot, almost as if caressing the ground, then lift the foot before placing it down again and transferring the body's weight, alternating right and left feet in a gentle, repetitive motion. With each step, the dancer's upper body moves in a soft, almost serpentine wave, the impulse of the movement coming from the base of the spine.<sup>527</sup>

---

*Grotowski Sourcebook*, pp. 323-4.

<sup>526</sup> The simplicity of *yanvalou* in Grotowski's eyes was probably due to the fact that it is a relatively young technique. Voodoo practice in Haiti is a creative cultural synthesis of Yoruba, Christian, and Arawak symbols. In the eighteenth century, the French imported slaves from Yoruba to colonial Haiti. The voodoo tradition brought by Africans was amalgamated with Christianity brought by Europeans to this small Caribbean island. Compared with its root in Yoruba, voodoo practice in Haiti is a relatively young practice.

<sup>527</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 498.

Grotowski observed that the 'reptile body' could be evoked solely through doing the physical actions in *yanvalou* – the precise steps with a tempo rhythm involving waves of the whole body. These physical actions are so literal that people can grasp them without any knowledge of voodoo culture. He further noticed that if *yanvalou* was done with Haitian songs related to the snake-divinity *Dambhala*, 'the manner of singing and of emitting the vibrations of those songs helps the movement of the body'.<sup>528</sup> Thus, it is possible for people from different cultures to acquire these effects simply by studying the technical elements of dance and singing which do not depend so much on a Haitian cultural or religious context. Thus, Grotowski asked Tiga and Robart to stay in California and teach the walk-dance *yanvalou* and Haitian ritual songs accompanied by traditional drums, for the first year of Objective Drama. These Haitian practices became one of the primary lines of investigation, which was still conducted by other practitioners after the departure of Tiga and Robart. The *yanvalou* and the songs for *Dambhala* were adopted in every effort to keep their original form. The practitioners were asked not to alter any details of the originals. They were only allowed to

---

<sup>528</sup> Grotowski 'Tu es le fils de quelqu'un (You Are Someone's Son),' *The Drama Review* Vol. 31, No. 3, 1987, p. 35.

improvise the displacement in space and the contact between them while doing the dance and songs.<sup>529</sup>

Different from *Watching and Motion*, Grotowski's work on *yanvalou* and *Dambhala* songs was not to enhance panoramic awareness. It was to mobilize the instinctive corporeal aspect of the self which was free from conscious manipulation of the mind and could bring about organic physical actions. In other words, instead of being the slave of the mind, the body could be an autonomous entity with its own logic of operation, which shall be referred to as 'the autonomous body' in the following analysis. In the case of the work on Haitian dance and songs, Grotowski envisaged that one's 'reptile body' can be activated through practising them. The formal details of the Haitian dance and song had to be precisely observed and executed in an organic way so that they would set in motion the practitioner's reptile body. However, there was, Grotowski warned, a potential danger of losing oneself when the autonomous body was set in action. To avoid this danger, whoever practised *yanvalou* and *Dambhala* songs had to keep panoramic awareness which watched over but did not disturb what the autonomous body was going through. This panoramic awareness could be prepared through practising *Motions and Watching*.

---

<sup>529</sup> See Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p. 21.

Panoramic awareness and the autonomous body were two objectives of Grotowski's work on the self in Objective Drama. The notion of these dual aspects of the self could be traced back to 'the ecological and dramatic techniques' in Grotowski's Theatre of Sources project. However, the mobilization of the autonomous body was not intended to be the work towards de-conditioning of the self as in Theatre of Sources. It fostered the possibility of reviving a set score of physical actions, such as a traditional song, without disturbance from the conscious mind. This helped to uncover the original impulses encoded in the score of physical actions. Yet, the mobilization of the autonomous body in the track of a set score would not be secured without panoramic awareness which watched over what the body was to go through. Panoramic awareness and the autonomous body provided the essential conditions on which Grotowski's subsequent work on traditional songs could be based. They would be further elaborated in what Grotowski later called the 'I-I', a term inspired by Buber's 'I-Thou'. This will be clarified as my analysis proceeds.

## **7.2 Traditional Songs as Traces of Being**

Despite a considerable amount of work dedicated to techniques of

working on the self, as was mentioned in the preceding section, Grotowski's project Objective Drama was never a programme solely for individual enlightenment. He also explored the gatherings which would bring people together through common values that cut across cultural boundaries. From the very beginning of this project, Grotowski pointed out that performance nowadays 'can be an expression of the contemporary spirit but not of culturally traditional, inherent higher values'.<sup>530</sup> Wolford repeats Grotowski's view in his proposal for Objective Drama:

While contemporary performance can effectively communicate personal emotional and psychological states, 'it is failing, by and large, to develop its function as a cohesive force expressing the shared human needs for values, identity and continuity. More and more these are made into a purely individual search [...] and society, as a result, fragments'.<sup>531</sup>

This was the reason why Grotowski turned to certain traditional songs and texts as potential narrative structures of the proposed gatherings, instead of innovating new forms of gatherings. One of the objectives of Objective Drama was, according to Grotowski, to discover a type of ritual/performative structure in which 'poetry is not separated from the song, the song is not separated from the movement, the movement is not separated from the dance,

---

<sup>530</sup> In Wolford, 'Introduction – Objective Drama, 1983-86', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 283.

<sup>531</sup> This is Wolford's paraphrase of Grotowski's Focused Research Program in Objective Drama in a grant proposal for the Rockefeller Foundation. See Lisa Wolford, 'Introduction – Objective Drama, 1983-86', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 283.

the dance is not separated from the acting'.<sup>532</sup> Grotowski continues that such a type of performance is rooted in the period 'before the separation between art and rite, and between the spectacular and the participatory'.<sup>533</sup> This is the core of the Objective Drama project, as Grotowski pointed out in an interview:

To re-evoke a very ancient form of art where ritual and artistic creation were seamless. Where poetry was song, song was incantation, movement was dance, Pre-differentiation Art, if you will, which was extremely powerful in its impact. By touching that without concern for its philosophical or theological motivation, each of us could find his own connection.<sup>534</sup>

Grotowski sought the performing art in which the content and form could not be separated. He expressed his intention, 'Each ritual carries within it its own content. If I can identify the form, I will discover the content.'<sup>535</sup> This is the key to Grotowski's work in Objective Drama, especially to his work on traditional songs, which was to become the focus of his subsequent work. What Grotowski did in Objective Drama was to identify and isolate certain elements of traditional practices which still effectively work on the practitioners, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Through studying the

---

<sup>532</sup> This quotation is taken from Lisa Wolford's 'Introduction – Objective Drama, 1983-86', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 287.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>534</sup> Grotowski in Dan Sullivan, 'A Prophet of the Far Out Comes to Orange County', *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 1983, p. 42.

<sup>535</sup> Grotowski in Sylvie Drake, 'Grotowski to Set Scene at UC Irvine', *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 1983, p. 5.

formal features of these effective elements, Grotowski intended to distill their related contents. For example, Grotowski believed that encoded in each ancient song is one unique way of moving. In one session of work, he asked his pupils to search, through physical instincts rather than thinking, for the encoded unique movement of certain Haitian songs. He asked his pupils to dance and move according to a predetermined cycle of Haitian songs sung repeatedly by his assistants.<sup>536</sup>

The subtle corporeal form of expression in traditional practices has been eroded through transmission utilizing modern recording technology, which cannot preserve the subtle details of the practices. According to Wolford,

Grotowski observes that sophisticated technological means of recording artistic knowledge have replaced the traditional transmission of cultural heritage through 'oral interpersonal handing down from one generation to another.' As a result, many ancient performative/ritual practices, the subtleties of which cannot be adequately communicated except through direct personal interaction, are dying out or becoming distorted through partial transmission.<sup>537</sup>

To avoid losing the subtleties of the practices, Grotowski mainly focused on those practices which were handed down through traditional ways of interpersonal transmission. Moreover, when facing certain eroded practices such as traditional songs with 'decayed' forms, Grotowski even intended to

---

<sup>536</sup> See Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p. 22.

recover 'the beginning of the song' by exploring its possible primary incantation and original words, its codified space and surrounding, as well as the motivation behind the singing.

How Grotowski recovered the 'content' of traditional songs was not entirely archaeological research. Besides his effort of recovering the original subtle details of the songs, he also utilized the practitioner's personal associations to enrich these details. This is clearly shown in his work on Mystery Plays, the acting proposition around one traditional song. Mystery Plays were directed by Grotowski himself, and, as he pointed out, Du Yee Chang's contribution to this line of work was particularly significant. Mystery plays were short pieces composed and presented by one person with a repeatable structure around a song related to this person's childhood memory, most often associated with the person's family. For example, one could compose a Mystery Play on a lullaby sung by one's mother. To compose this Mystery Play, one was first asked to find a song of particular importance which was connected to one's childhood. A song as such could usually be seen as 'an old song linked with one's ethno-religious tradition', and the Mystery Plays became 'like an ethnodrama in the traditional

---

<sup>537</sup> This is Wolford's paraphrase of Grotowski's Focused Research Program in Objective Drama in the Rockefeller Foundation grant proposal. See Lisa Wolford, 'Introduction - Objective Drama, 1983-86', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, pp. 282-3.

collective sense'.<sup>538</sup> To work on these songs, one had to remember more completely both the song and the attached personal associations, such as one's memories of who sang the song and what the surrounding environments were. Then one had to create individual actions based on all these details of both the song and the personal associations. The work on the physical actions around a song, in a sense, resembled that of composing acting propositions in Grotowski's theatre productions. In both cases, the performer asks himself/herself questions such as: Was there any imaginary partner with me? Where was this partner in the space? What exactly did I do with this imaginary partner?<sup>539</sup> However, unlike that of Grotowski's theatre productions, the acting proposition in Mystery Plays had to be composed in such a way that it accompanied the singing of the predetermined song.<sup>540</sup> Although personal association was applied to the composition of the acting proposition, it too had to be subjected to the structure of the song. Grotowski treated the traditional songs as if they 'potentially contained a totality of

---

<sup>538</sup> Grotowski 'Tu es le fils de quelqu'un (You Are Someone's Son),' *The Drama Review* Vol. 31, No. 3, 1987, p. 38.

<sup>539</sup> Thomas Richards gives a vivid account of his struggle while working on Mystery Plays, which gives an insight into this work. See Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, pp. 33-48.

<sup>540</sup> For more details of how Grotowski edited the acting proposition in Mystery Plays, see Grotowski 'Tu es le fils de quelqu'un (You Are Someone's Son),' *The Drama Review* Vol. 31, No. 3, 1987, pp. 38-9.

movement, rhythm, everything'.<sup>541</sup> This work on these songs was to discover in their melodies and rhythms 'a coded potentiality of organic presence for the human being'.<sup>542</sup> In other words, Grotowski considered traditional songs as traces of being. They were materials recording the living traces of being in a certain state. Through reliving these traces, one reincarnated another person in that particular state of being. For instance, when one worked on a song sung by one's grandmother, one had to reincarnate all the details of her singing. This song became the living traces of one's grandmother in a certain state of being. So, Grotowski asked a crucial question: Who is the person singing when one 'relives' the song as traces from one's grandmother? He then explained:

Is it you? But if it is a song of your grandmother's, is it still you? But if you, with your body's impulses, are exploring your grandmother, then it's neither you nor your grandmother who is singing: it's you that's singing as you explore your grandmother, that is to say, you exploring your grandmother/singer.<sup>543</sup>

Based on the same approach of reliving the song as traces of being, Grotowski pushed his work further to explore how this song was sung 'for the first time', that is, how this song began to take shape. Grotowski insists that,

---

<sup>541</sup> Grotowski 'Tu es le fils de quelqu'un (You Are Someone's Son),' *The Drama Review* Vol. 31, No. 3, 1987, p. 38.

<sup>542</sup> Richards, *The Edge-Point of Performance*, p. 9.

<sup>543</sup> Grotowski 'Tu es le fils de quelqu'un (You Are Someone's Son),' *The Drama Review* Vol. 31, No. 3, 1987, p. 39.

'[s]pace is codified even in the manner of singing itself'.<sup>544</sup> Even the motivation for singing can be revealed. He explains,

You have the song, you must ask yourself where it began. Perhaps at the moment when a fire was tended in the mountains, where someone was looking after animals, he began repeating the opening words, to keep warm. It wasn't the song yet, rather an incantation, a 'mantra' – a primitive incantation that someone repeated.<sup>545</sup>

Thus, through reliving the song as traces of being, one could possibly reincarnate another person despite the segregation of time and space between the two. Grotowski pointed out:

But if you possess the ability to go toward the beginning of the song, then it's no longer your grandmother singing but someone from your ancestry, your country, your village, your parents' village, or your grandparents'.<sup>546</sup>

This was how Grotowski recovered the content of traditional songs as traces of being. This work, involving the reincarnation of another human being, naturally constituted a simple narrative structure which would be a promising solution to the gathering Grotowski was after.

Occasionally, certain of these songs from childhood, initially explored by individuals, were taught to other group members in an experiment to see whether it was possible for a particular song to have impact beyond the

---

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*

context of one person's memory. However, this direction of experiment did not lead to any significant breakthrough. Grotowski also tested the possibility of developing group work based on the foundation of individual Mystery Plays. Occasionally, songs were explored simultaneously by different participants. For example, an American man working with a Gregorian chant would be juxtaposed against an Iranian working with a Sufi song. In such instances, participants not only tried to work in such a way that they did not disturb one another, but to arrive at some sort of harmony between them. These experiments paved the way for the development of group work.

In addition to various traditional songs, Grotowski also worked on traditional texts. He believed that certain ancient texts could also be seen as traces of being. The investigation of ancient texts had been a minor direction of research in Theatre of Sources, which was then conducted 'only within the limits of the very narrow nucleus of the group'.<sup>547</sup> It involved work on 'archaic, initiatic texts of which the place and circumstances of arising are questionable, and which in some way related to those, let's say, living experiences of the sources'.<sup>548</sup> For Grotowski, it was as if the ancient texts he chose were carrying in themselves the roots of Mediterranean Culture.

---

<sup>547</sup> Grotowski, 'Theatre of Sources', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 265.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*

Grotowski's collaborators studied these texts 'simply through singing them – through looking for the melodies which could carry them'. 'Sometimes it is linked to an organic flow of movement.'<sup>549</sup> While in the Objective Drama research, 'literary texts such as the Gospel of Saint Thomas and some literature from Hinduism were used in the newly created songs'.<sup>550</sup>

Grotowski chose ancient texts which he considered the direct transcription of oral expressions. He treated this kind of ancient text as if every performative element had been coded inside the text itself in terms of its meaning and the sonority of reciting it. As Grotowski envisaged, it was possible to work out the encoded incantation from reciting the text, then the related singing from the incantation, the related rhythmic movement from the way of singing, the related action from the movement and singing, and finally the related state of being from the action. The work on ancient texts followed that on traditional songs, but it pushed the starting point of the work even further back. The representative work of this was *Main Action*, a group structure built around ancient texts which was composed during the third year of Objective Drama (from October 1985 to June 1986). A team of nine members, including Thomas Richards, Jairo Cuesta, Pablo Jimenez and

---

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>550</sup> I Wayan Lendra, 'Bali and Grotowski: Some Parallels in the Training Process', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 310.

others, worked on *Main Action*. Every team member selected two small fragments from an ancient text given by Grotowski, worked them out into two songs and then into two individual structures, respectively. This individual work on fragments of the ancient text was done in a similar way to the work on traditional songs in Mystery Plays. Yet, each team member had, first of all, to 'restore' the songs from the texts as their lyrics.

When all team members had finished their individual structures, Grotowski then directly worked with Cuesta, Jimenez and Richards on their individual structures to create the central motif. Meanwhile, Grotowski asked James Slowiak, who was trained as a theatre director and worked as Grotowski's assistant on the creation of *Main Action*, to organize all other members' work into a group structure. Utilizing *Watching* as a pretext, Slowiak sketched the group structure.<sup>551</sup> He regularly presented the structure in progress to Grotowski and received comments for further development. Although its entire first draft had taken shape within two months of effort, this group structure constantly evolved day by day until its final version one year later.

*Main Action* had a precise structure. For instance, the members had to internalize the precise positioning in the space, since there was no marking on

the floor. The structure of *Main Action* was mainly composed of individual structures from each member. However, the associated personal stories from the members would not necessarily be revealed in the group structure. For example, several moments of the drafts, in which Cuseta, Jimenez and Richards associated themselves with cowboys, were incorporated in the structure of *Main Action*. However, Grotowski did not want these cowboy associations to be perceived by someone watching from the side. Moreover, because of their proximity and their precise coordination in timing and rhythm, the individual actions were to be perceived as one group action involving all members. The final version of *Main Action* could be perceived as a young man (Thomas Richards) in a tribal situation, going through a rite of passage into manhood by accomplishing various tasks and challenges, in which he was confronted by other members of the group.

The individual work was to reconstruct certain states of being from the fragments of ancient texts. The group structure in *Main Action* was, in essence, the coordinated juxtaposition of individual work from several people. It gave the impression of a young man passing through the rite of passage as its central theme, which was probably more related to Grotowski's understanding of the chosen ancient texts than to the team members' personal

---

<sup>551</sup> For more details of Watching, see Section 7.1.

associations with the texts. Grotowski still relied on the narrative of the ancient text that he chose to be the focal point of the proposed gathering. *Main Action* was open to limited visitors on several occasions that Grotowski considered as tests, but this work was never opened to the public. Maybe Grotowski himself was not convinced that *Main Action* had reached what he intended to achieve.

From his work on traditional songs in Mystery Plays to his work on ancient texts in *Main Action*, Grotowski left some important questions unanswered. Are the personal associations of any individual reliable and faithful materials with which to restore the content of traditional songs or ancient texts as traces of being? How much can we rely on personal associations? If certain associations from an individual do have broader implications in collective matters, how can one distinguish them from those personal associations which have no broader implications? These open questions, to which nobody can give certain answers, cast serious doubts on the credibility of Grotowski's 'objective' work. This work would have a more solid foundation if it concentrated more on the subtle details of the songs or texts and less on personal associations drawn from individuals. In fact, this was the direction of work taken in Grotowski's subsequent development.

After 1986 Grotowski moved to Pontedera in Italy and continued his work there. However, the Objective Drama research in California continued without Grotowski's close supervision. From 1986 to 1992, the day to day practical work was put under the guidance of James Slowiak and Grotowski would comment on the ongoing work during his regular two-week visit each summer. This later development of the Objective Drama project followed the track of its preceding work.<sup>552</sup> Meanwhile Grotowski continued his innovative and experimental work in Pontedera, which was later known as the Art as Vehicle period of Grotowski's work.

### **7.3 Transformation of Being through Traditional Songs**

After three years of intensive work in California, Grotowski left the United States and established a new centre of research in Italy. Thanks to support from Roberto Bacci, Carla Pollastrelli and others, the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski, sponsored by the *Centro per la Sperimentazione e la Ricerca Teatrale* of Pontedera, was inaugurated in August 1986.<sup>553</sup> Grotowski settled down in this Italian town until his death in 1999, and here he

---

<sup>552</sup> For more discussion on the Objective Drama project after 1986, the readers can consult *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research* by Lisa Wolford.

<sup>553</sup> The opening of the Workcenter was announced on 15 July 1985, while its programme ran from August 1986. See Osiński 'Grotowski Blazes the Trails: From Objective Drama to Art as Vehicle', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 386. Notably, the name of Workcenter was changed into Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in 1996.

conducted the final phase of his work, known as Art as Vehicle. This title was taken from Peter Brook's phrase 'art as a vehicle' in his Florence lecture given in March 1987. Brook used 'art as a vehicle' to indicate the defining character of Grotowski's last period of work, which, despite its engagement with performative elements, was not oriented towards theatre performance. As Brook understood it, Grotowski's final work was to find in the art of performance the vehicle which 'allows man to have access to another level of perception'.<sup>554</sup>

The group work during the first year in Pontedera was subject to the practical demands of establishing a working institution. This included the training of new collaborators under the leadership of assistants selected by Grotowski. The training usually included work on traditional Haitian, African and Afro-Caribbean songs, *yanvalou*, Motions, Mystery Plays, physical training on the organic stream of movement, and the half improvised and half structured 'games in movement' derived from Watching.<sup>555</sup> The work involving group members during the first year in Pontedera basically followed that of the Objective Drama project, and this was later fixed as preliminary work for all newcomers. However, it was not the most inspiring

---

<sup>554</sup> Brook, 'Grotowski, Art as a Vehicle', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 381.

<sup>555</sup> See Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p. 73.

part of Grotowski's work at the time. It was Richards' individual work with Grotowski on traditional songs of African origin that led to a major breakthrough, pointing to the direction the work was to take.

During the first year in Pontedera, alongside the group work, Grotowski worked alone with Richards on certain traditional African and Afro-Caribbean songs. Richards referred to this individual work as *Song Action*, which should be better understood as the result of the symbiosis between Grotowski and Richards. *Song Action* was probably never open to visitors and there is no documentation available. It was not until about one year later that other members were chosen to join in the work of developing *Song Action* into a group structure. To pinpoint the quintessence of *Song Action*, which was later developed into the major work of Art as Vehicle, it is necessary to understand Grotowski's perspective on these traditional songs of African origins. Before moving to Pontedera, Grotowski had Richards learn, through oral transmission from I Wayan Lendra, the Haitian songs on which Grotowski was working during the period of Objective Drama in California. After moving to Pontedera, Grotowski worked with Richards first on these Haitian songs, then on West African, then African and Afro-Caribbean (but not Haitian) songs, and then on an entire line of some African and Afro-

Caribbean ones.<sup>556</sup> All these songs were practised in their original languages.<sup>557</sup> Grotowski especially focused on what he called ‘the vibratory quality’ of these songs. To explain the vibratory quality of a song, Grotowski pointed out that in addition to its melody, there were also other important qualities of singing such as ‘the quality of the vibration of the voice, the resonance of the space, the body’s resonators, or the way in which breathing out pushes vibrations’.<sup>558</sup> All these could be summarized as the vibratory quality of the song. Ignoring the vibratory quality of a song was like ignoring the difference between the sound of a piano and that of a violin when they played the same tune. Grotowski believed that the vibratory quality of singing was precise and fixed and that it contained precious messages on how the song was sung and should be sung. He called these traditional songs with significant and distinctive vibratory quality in their singing the ‘vibratory songs’, as was the case for those songs of African origins. Thus the work on these vibratory songs was to figure out not only how to sing these songs in

---

<sup>556</sup> As Grotowski understood it, Richards’ family background was an essential contribution to the work upon vibratory songs. Richards’ grandmother’s line came from the Caribbean. During his work with Grotowski on *Main Action* in California from 1985 to 1986, Richards was persuaded by Grotowski, through practical work and through conversations, to accept his African roots as the source for organic movement, and to unleash the potential aspects in his body such as fluidity of movement and flow of vitality through the movement. See *The Edge-Point of Performance*, pp. 13-5.

<sup>557</sup> See ‘Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards and Action’, *The Drama Review* Vol. 43, No. 2 (T162), Summer 1999, p. 13.

<sup>558</sup> Grotowski ‘Tu es le fils de quelqu’un (You Are Someone’s Son),’ *The Drama Review* Vol. 31, No. 3, 1987, p. 36.

tune, but also how to sing 'the tempo-rhythm with all of its fluctuations *inside* the melody', or its 'proper sonority'.<sup>559</sup>

To explain the significance of these African and Afro-Caribbean songs, Grotowski compared them with the mantra in Hindu or Buddhist culture. As he understood it, the mantra is a very elaborated sonic form 'which englobes the position of the body and the breathing, and which makes appear a determined vibration in a tempo-rhythm so precise that it influences the tempo-rhythm of the mind'.<sup>560</sup> He recognized that the mantra is not an organic form since it is dissociated from natural impulses inside the body. By contrast with the mantra, certain traditional songs utilized for sacred or ritual purposes in a long arc of time are 'rooted in organicity'.<sup>561</sup> He explained,

It's always the song-body, it's never the song dissociated from the impulses of life that run through the body; in the song of tradition, it is no longer a question of the position of the body or the manipulation of the breath, [as is the case in mantra,] but of the impulses and the little actions. Because the impulses which run in the body are exactly that which carries the song.<sup>562</sup>

---

<sup>559</sup> Grotowski, 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle' in *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p. 126. To understand Grotowski's work on verticality built upon vibratory songs, Grotowski's text 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle' based on his lectures given in Modena in October 1989 and UC Irvine in May 1990, offers a comprehensible analysis.

<sup>560</sup> Grotowski, 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle' in *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p. 127.

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*

Through a long period of time, the subtle vibratory qualities of traditional songs and the live impulses inside the singer's body while singing were naturally interwoven together. In effect, the vibratory qualities of the song carried the singer's live impulses. In other words, these traditional songs could be considered traces of being which could be acquired through the vibratory quality of the songs. Even if one did not understand the words of the song, reception of the vibratory qualities of the song alone was, for Grotowski, enough to grasp the live impulses encoded in the song. Hence, Grotowski concluded, 'the sonority and the impulses *are* the meaning [of the song], directly'.<sup>563</sup>

It is after moving to Pontedera that Grotowski focused exclusively on these vibratory songs of African and Afro-Caribbean origins. The Afro-Caribbean songs were developed by slaves in the Caribbean from their West African roots. They belong to voodoo tradition, a relatively young tradition which had taken shape only since the end of the seventeenth century. Grotowski even recognized that certain African and Afro-Caribbean songs may go back to ritual sources, not limited only to West Africa, but linked to the ritual traditions of ancient Egypt. Grotowski saw these traditional songs as the living heritage of ancient civilizations which had been transmitted for

---

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

thousands of years.<sup>564</sup> He acknowledged that the key to these impulses encoded in this heritage is the vibratory quality of the song. Compared with the work in Mystery Plays, this work on the vibratory quality of the song went through more details of the song as traces of being. It was then a more 'faithful' reincarnation of the state of being encoded in the song.

In *Song Action*, Grotowski led Richards to 'rediscover the process hidden in the work on the ancient Afro-Caribbean and African songs'.<sup>565</sup> Grotowski suggested that 'reconstruction', rather than 'improvisation', better depicted his way of working on vibratory songs. That is, 'we use an aspect of a song to reconstruct the personality and circumstances surrounding the song'.<sup>566</sup> Grotowski intended to explore such aspects of vibratory songs as: Who is singing? Where does one sing? At what time of the day does one sing? With whom does one sing? For what or for whom does one sing?<sup>567</sup> Grotowski believed that all these conditions around a vibratory song would be, to some extent, codified in the formal features of that song, and they can be rediscovered by means of recovering the impulses in the singing through acquiring the vibratory quality of the song. This process was corporeal rather

---

<sup>564</sup> See *The Edge-Point of Performance*, p. 16.

<sup>565</sup> Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, pp. 91-2.

<sup>566</sup> J. Ndukaku Amankulor, 'Jerzy Grotowski's Divination Consultation – Objective Drama Seminar at U.C. Irvine', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 357.

than cerebral. In other words, these corporeal impulses, which could hardly be named or described, were not to be analyzed, but stimulated and experienced during the course of work.

During the period *Art as Vehicle*, Grotowski referred to the person who engaged in the work on vibratory songs as the doer. By using this term, he emphasized that what the doer was doing was to accomplish the act instead of mimetic action or acting. This term 'doer' obviously distinguishes itself from the word 'actor' or 'performer', and it helps to clarify the essence of the work on vibratory songs. Starting the work on a vibratory song, the doer had to figure out and fix its precise melody and rhythm first. With its subtle details of vibratory quality observed, the song could function as a springboard through which the doer could tune himself/herself to the corporeal impulses encoded in this song and allow himself/herself to be transformed into the related states of being. The doer then further developed physical actions based on personal associations attached to this song. This score of physical actions was composed of small actions and impulses distilled and edited from real-life physical action.<sup>568</sup> Once the score had been worked out and absorbed

---

<sup>567</sup> See 'Tu es le fils de quelqu'un (You Are Someone's Son),' *The Drama Review* Vol. 31, No. 3, 1987, pp. 39-40.

<sup>568</sup> Richards explained this by giving a hypothetical example of how he might apply his experience of attending his grandmother's funeral to his work on an ancient funeral song. See *The Edge-Point of Performance*, pp. 38-41.

by the doer, the technical part of the work to support the inner actions was ready. Then what had to be done would be that the doer had to allow himself/herself to be transformed while singing the song and doing the score.

As Richards understood it, this was so

...because your acting score naturally begins to have its way of contacting certain associations, awakening something in you from your life and memories, the song begins to enter that and do something with it.<sup>569</sup>

The score of physical actions and inner action were coded together so as to support each other.

The concentration on the vibratory quality of a song allowed Grotowski and his collaborators to discover more subtle details of the impulses encoded in the song, which could be understood as traces of being. Through this perspective of working on its vibrations, the traditional song can be treated as a being. Grotowski actually perceived 'the traditional song, with the impulses linked to it,' as 'a person'.<sup>570</sup> He even discovered that a song of such could be specifically perceived as a woman, a man, an adolescent, a child, or an old man. He further noted: 'a song of tradition is a living being, yes, not every

---

<sup>569</sup> *The Edge-Point of Performance*, p. 41.

<sup>570</sup> Grotowski, 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle' in *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p. 127.

song is a human being, there is also the song-animal, there is the song-force.'

571

Grotowski emphasized that the important issue in these traditional songs was their objective effects on the doers. In other words, these traditional songs could be, for Grotowski, 'the instruments to work *on the body, the heart and the head of the doers*'.<sup>572</sup> Through the repetition of singing vibratory songs with precise melody and rhythm, the resonance inside the doer's body would gradually change and the doer's inner action be activated.<sup>573</sup> These vibratory songs could have the same objective impact on the doers regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Also, each of these vibratory songs had its specific impact on the doers. For instance, one song could be stimulating, but the other one could be calming. Therefore, through a proper arrangement of a series of vibratory songs to develop a continual flow of states of being, their effect on the performers could be elongated and multiplied. This was an important aspect of Grotowski's work on vibratory songs.

---

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>573</sup> Richards described his inner actions when he worked with the vibratory songs. Keeping the precise rhythm and melody, he could then feel the energy gathered in his plexus and then channeled to somewhere near the heart in a subtler form, and then around the head and beyond. See *The Edge-Point of Performance*, p. 94.

In *Song Action*, Grotowski and Richards worked on ‘the development of performing structures with and around these songs, and – which is the main issue – on a process that can happen let’s say, inside the human being through all this work’.<sup>574</sup> Together they created two precise performative structures, each of which lasted about an hour and a half and was ‘related to the flow of the songs from one to the other, with a precise score of impulses related to them’.<sup>575</sup> The essence of *Song Action* consisted in the verticality built upon a series of vibratory songs. These serial vibratory songs were considered tools which could transform the doer from one state of being to another, or transform the quality of the doer’s energy – from the coarse to the subtle level and vice versa – what Grotowski called the itinerary of verticality.<sup>576</sup> It was also necessary to take into account the ‘logical’ order of a series of songs so that the transformation could proceed smoothly. For example, after a hymn of a highly subtle quality, it was better to continue with a more instinctual song while maintaining the quality of the hymn inside.<sup>577</sup> By means of this ‘logical’ arrangement of work on these vibratory songs, Grotowski was able to build up a series of transformation of states of being.

---

<sup>574</sup> *The Edge-Point of Performance*, pp. 17-8.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>576</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 17-8.

<sup>577</sup> See Grotowski, ‘From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle’ in *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p. 128.

*Song Action* was a crucial breakthrough, which led Grotowski to his work on the transformation of states of being. By the time he asked Richards to develop *Song Action* further into the group work *Downstairs Action*, Grotowski gave a lecture on his ongoing work in a conference held early in 1987, in which he envisaged the potential of this work on the transformation of being. There was no detailed account of this lecture, but a short edited text based on it, entitled 'Performer'. Grotowski re-elaborated Georges Banu's 'personal-toned' notes of his lecture and added a final fragment in which he interwove two separate sermons by the mystic Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327). This was how 'Performer' eventually came to be.<sup>578</sup> Grotowski envisaged an idealized being, Performer, who is able to transform himself/herself to a precise and predetermined state of being repeatedly and precisely simply through objective ritual art, or the vibratory songs in Grotowski's work. This transformation achieved by Performer is not any kind of acting skill through which an actor can pretend to be someone else (playing a role). Performer transforms himself/herself to another being through reviving and reliving the corporeal impulses of that being encoded in vibratory songs. Performer is, according to Grotowski, 'a doer', 'a man of action' and 'a state of being'. This is the key to distinguishing the deed of

---

<sup>578</sup> See Wolford, 'Introduction, Art as Vehicle, 1986-', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 372.

Performer from that of an actor as well as the key to distinguishing ritual from theatre performance as show. Grotowski further pointed out: 'Ritual is performance, an accomplished action, an act. Degenerated ritual is a show.'<sup>579</sup> For Grotowski, this transformation of states of being is essential to genuine ritual. This is the connection between ritual and Grotowski's work during the Art as Vehicle period. It also unveils Grotowski's perception of how theatre originated, as well as degenerates, from ritual.

In 'Performer', Grotowski further described the trajectory of how Performer initiates his/her transformation of states of being. The first state of being Performer has to enter is like that of a warrior. A warrior is the one who fights, kills and 'is conscious of his own mortality'.<sup>580</sup> A warrior is the one who confronts danger and is ready to fight. To be a warrior, one has to be prepared to be extremely aware of any situation, since danger can come from anywhere. Grotowski believed that during these moments of danger, or 'moments of great intensity' as he called it, human expressions tend to become rhythmic:

---

<sup>579</sup> Grotowski, 'Performer', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 374.

<sup>580</sup> *Ibid.*

... the pulsation of life becomes stronger and more articulated in moments of great intensity, of danger. ... In a time of challenge appears the rhythmization of human impulses.<sup>581</sup>

Just as happens to a warrior confronting danger, the rhythmic corporeal impulses are also evoked inside Performer's body during the course of ritual which is, for Grotowski, a moment of great intensity too:

Ritual is a time of great intensity; provoked intensity; life then becomes rhythm. *Performer* knows to link body impulses to the song. (The stream of life should be articulated in forms.)<sup>582</sup>

Yet, instead of being dominated by these rhythmic impulses, Performer can handle them and express them through articulated forms, such as vibratory songs. In a moment of great intensity, one's impulses would become rhythmic, and one's body could act in a way close to the representation of what Grotowski called 'essence'. He clarifies: 'Essence: etymologically, it's a question of being, of *be-ing*.'<sup>583</sup> He emphasizes that essence is not learned but simply innate. In other words, essence is independent of the process of socialization or social conditioning. For instance, a moral code is shaped by a society, but conscience is innate and hence belongs to the realm of essence. Essence is closely related to Grotowski's ideas of 'source' or 'the beginning'

---

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*

in his work during Theatre of Sources period. However, in his text 'Performer', Grotowski refers to it as 'essence'.

Grotowski claims that 'for the warrior with organicity in full, the body and essence can enter into osmosis: it seems impossible to dissociate them.'<sup>584</sup> He refers to this state as 'body-and-essence'. Yet this channeling towards essence is 'not a permanent state; it lasts not long.'<sup>585</sup> The moments of intensity only constitute a small part of a full cycle of life, and nobody can 'be' a warrior all the time. Grotowski believes that this transient state, if taken in a proper way, leads to something even more:

When the warrior is in the transient state of *body-and-essence*, he should catch his process. Adjusted to process, the body becomes non-resistant, nearly transparent. Everything is in lightness, in evidence.<sup>586</sup>

In other words, through the state of body-and-essence, the body can go beyond the individual to become the 'body of essence', as Grotowski calls it. The key to the 'body of essence' is not any kind of skill to manoeuvre the body, but an awareness which does not intervene in what comes to the body. Grotowski explains this in terms of his idea of 'I-I':

There is an I-I. the second I is quasi virtual; it is not – in you – the look of the others, nor any judgment; it's like an immobile look: a silent

---

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*

presence... The process [from body-and-essence to body of essence] can be accomplished only in the context of this still presence. I-I: in experience, the couple doesn't appear as separate, but as full, unique. ... I-I does not mean to be cut in two but to be double. The question is to be passive in action and active in seeing (reversing the habit). Passive: to be receptive. Active: to be present.<sup>587</sup>

This can be made even clearer in Grotowski's description of the crucial moment when working on a vibratory song:

When we begin to catch the vibratory qualities, this finds its rooting in the impulses and the actions. And then, all of a sudden, that song begins to *sing us*. That ancient song sings me; I don't know anymore if I am finding that song or if I am that song. Beware! This is the moment in which vigilance is necessary, not to become the property of the song – yes, *keep standing*.<sup>588</sup>

Performer has to submit his/her body to the impulses and actions around the vibratory song, and at the same time keep an extraordinary awareness in order not to be carried away. Performer is then able to commence from the state of body-and-essence to that of body of essence. Grotowski notes that,

The point is not to renounce part of our nature – all should retain its natural place: the body, the heart, the head, something that is 'under our feet' and something that is 'over the head.' All like a vertical line, and this verticality should be held taut between organicity and *the awareness*. *Awareness* means the consciousness which is not linked to language (the machine for thinking), but to Presence.<sup>589</sup>

The demand for awareness of organic corporeal impulses can be demonstrated in an incident in *Pool Action*, one of two structures in *Song Action* created by

---

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.

<sup>588</sup> Grotowski, 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle' in *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p. 127.

Grotowski and Richards. *Pool Action* is named as such simply because Richards had one fragment of score in a plastic pool for children.<sup>590</sup> In *Pool Action*, Richards would be singing and simultaneously doing in the whole space, a very dynamic physical score to accompany his 'inner action'. To keep Richards' awareness so that he would not be overwhelmed by his intense inner action, Grotowski once scattered in the space many objects such as chairs, shoes and brooms. He then asked Richards to do the same score in *Pool Action* and to adjust to all these objects as obstacles in the space without breaking his inner action or external score. As Richards concludes regarding this incident:

It was the teacher putting the apprentice into a trap – either be attentive or fall down! So it was needed to find the way to go deeply toward the 'inner action' rooted in the songs, and also know clearly what's around, what's happening, two lines of attention which in our work go hand in hand.<sup>591</sup>

This gives us a concrete picture of the state I-I, through which Performer would be able to commence from the state of body-and-essence to that of body of essence. Grotowski often compared his idea of I-I with an ancient text: '*We are two. The bird who picks and the bird who looks on. The one will*

---

<sup>589</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>590</sup> See *The Edge-Point of Performance*, p. 49.

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

*die, the one will live.*'<sup>592</sup> He concluded that the one busy with picking and 'drunk with life inside time' will die, but the one who looks on will live and last regardless of time.

This state of body of essence can sometimes act as a kind of physical recall. Through it one can discover in oneself 'an ancient corporality' to which one is 'bound by a strong ancestral relation.'<sup>593</sup> One can reincarnate the corporeality of one's mother or grandfather by recalling her or his physical details in certain moments and by following the process leading to the state of body of essence. Grotowski goes so far as to believe that one can even reincarnate an unknown ancestor through working on traditional songs and entering into the state of body of essence.<sup>594</sup> He envisages, 'You can arrive very far back, as if your memory awakes. That is a phenomenon of reminiscence, as if you recall *Performer* of the primal ritual.'<sup>595</sup> From this perspective, memory can be something more concrete than thoughts reminiscent of the past. It can be the residue of corporeal impulses in or beyond personal life:

---

<sup>592</sup> Grotowski, 'Performer', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 376.

<sup>593</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>594</sup> Grotowski gives more descriptions of the embodiment of ancient corporeality in 'Tu es le fils de quelqu'un (You Are Someone's Son)', *The Drama Review* Vol. 31, No. 3, 1987, pp. 39-40.

<sup>595</sup> Grotowski, 'Performer', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 377.

Is essence the hidden background of the memory? I don't know at all. When I work near essence, I have the impression that memory actualizes. When essence is activated, it is as if strong potentialities are activated. The reminiscence is perhaps one of these potentialities.<sup>596</sup>

The value of Grotowski's approach towards memory is that it is conveyed solely through a physical phenomenon, and is not a matter of ideas. The transformation of states of being in the work on vibratory songs can operate like the reminiscence of the corporeality of one's ancestors.

Included in 'Performer' was neither an account nor an analysis of the work in Workcenter, but Grotowski's personal vision of the significance of his work involving what is usually categorized as a spiritual or religious deed. This personal vision was unveiled through metaphorical language with limited explanation, as can be seen throughout my analysis above. 'Performer' raised more questions than solutions, more confusions than clarifications, and more controversies than resolutions. Although Grotowski later gave a much clearer analysis of the practical matter in his work on vibratory songs, he still kept this highly controversial text in the brochure distributed by Workcenter.<sup>597</sup> 'Performer' unveiled the spiritual aspect of Grotowski's work on verticality which complemented the technical analysis of his work revealed in his later

---

<sup>596</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>597</sup> Grotowski clearly explained the verticality in his work through the perspective of energy transformation in his lectures given in 1989 and 1990, which were edited into the text 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle'. See *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, pp. 113-35.

lectures and writings. For instance, in his article 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle', Grotowski explained verticality in terms of the transformation of different energies, such as the coarse but organic energies linked to instincts and sensuality, the more subtle energies, or even, to repeat Grotowski, the energies 'toward the "higher connection"'.

It is important to point out that verticality is a process of the transformation of states of being. It is to avoid spiritual or religious concepts that Grotowski explained the transformation of states of being in terms of its practical and technical aspects – the transformation of energies. Thus, in order to grasp the whole picture of Grotowski's vision and his work, one should be aware that the physical phenomenon in Grotowski's work was always the corporeal materialization of his spiritual quest. Therefore, despite being metaphorical and idealized, 'Performer' is still crucial to our understanding of Grotowski's work in Art as Vehicle.

Based on his vision as revealed in 'Performer', Grotowski intended to develop *Song Action* into group work. On the one hand, incorporating individual actions in group work helped to consolidate them. On the other hand, the projection of one's own individual actions onto partners reinforces the panoramic awareness demanded of a person in this work. This can be

understood through the test Grotowski imposed on Richards in *Pool Action*, mentioned above. *Song Action* was developed into the group structure *Downstairs Action*, which, in turn, was further developed into another group structure *Action*. *Downstairs Action* and *Action* are the major works during the Art as Vehicle period. In 1987 Grotowski directed two teams working on group structures. One team led by Maud Robart worked exclusively on Haitian songs and texts. The other one led by Thomas Richards worked on African and Caribbean songs. Robart's team worked upstairs in the Workcenter building and the work-in-progress was accordingly named *Upstairs Action*. Yet, the work of Robart's team was interrupted in 1993 due to a shortage of funding.<sup>598</sup> Richards' team worked downstairs in the Workcenter building and its work was named *Downstairs Action*. *Downstairs Action* continued despite the difficult financial situation in 1993, and it was further developed into *Action*, the representative work of the Art as Vehicle period.

After one year of working on *Song Action* with Richards alone, Grotowski experimented so as to develop it into a group structure. First, two other members joined one piece of *Song Action*, in which Richards' score had already been completely fixed. Then Grotowski asked Richards to extend this

---

<sup>598</sup> There was a severe financial crisis in Italy in 1993. As a result, the funds to subsidize the

work to four more members and to pass them 'the transformation of energy' around vibratory songs.<sup>599</sup> On the one hand, other members could learn the transformation of energy from Richards. On the other hand, to put Richards in the shoes of a leader was the best way to enhance his mastery of this work on verticality. Thus Richards worked as the creator and the main doer of this newly developed group work, which was later called *Downstairs Action*.

This work-in-progress, developed by the group led by Richards from 1988 to 1993, was sometimes presented to occasional visitors to the Workcenter. There were one female and four male doers in *Downstairs Action*. Men were in white shirts and trousers, and the woman in a white long skirt. The traditional songs used in *Downstairs Action* were exclusively African and Afro-Caribbean, with one song composed by a contemporary Greek composer as the only exception.<sup>600</sup> These traditional songs were reworked by Richards, but the vibrations of the songs were carefully preserved. Quite often, two or even more different songs were synchronized in a harmonic way. There were also fragments of text in English either spoken or sung. The movements and actions derived from personal associations were

---

Workcenter were drastically cut. See *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 366.

<sup>599</sup> See *The Edge-Point of Performance*, p. 23.

<sup>600</sup> This contemporary song by a Greek composer is an exceptional case in Grotowski's extensive application of traditional songs. Yet Grotowski maintains that this contemporary song can evoke objective impacts on the singer, which he associates with traditional songs. See Wolford, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 497.

to match the impulses coded in the songs. For example, in one piece, Richards attached a kind of bouncing walk to a song of light and joy, and he behaved like a child cheerfully playing some kind of game. Also incorporated in *Downstairs Action* was the Haitian walk dance *yanvalou*. Richards' state of being was transformed during the course of *Downstairs Action*. His inner actions within the songs were clear, but it was difficult to spot his inner action between the songs.<sup>601</sup>

This group work was the montage of each individual work on vibratory songs. First of all, it was necessary to fix the precise melody and rhythm of the songs and to sing in tune by the whole group following the leader. Then, while singing, the doers began to go toward their inner action. Once the transformation of energy took place, the doers started to develop and absorb the acting score based on personal associations around these songs, which could form strong support to their inner actions. Then, each time, the doers went through their score and allowed themselves to be transformed by the

---

<sup>601</sup> *Downstairs Action* was filmed by Mercedes Gregory in 1989. Quite confusingly, Gregory's documentary film of *Downstairs Action* was given the title *Action*, which is, however, not a documentary of the work created by Richards and his colleagues after 1995. During the filming of *Downstairs Action*, Grotowski asked the photographers to shoot from the side and not intrude in the space or move around. The work would not stop for filming. The result is that two 16mm static cameras from different angles around the room shot simultaneously once a day for eight days. The final film was made from the edited pictures shot during these eight days and the sound recording of one day. Just like the making of the documentation of *The Constant Prince*, the sound recording of *Downstairs Action* was accurately synchronized with its pictures shot on different days. It testifies to the rigorous precision of the score of *Downstairs Action*.

vibratory songs. During the construction of *Downstairs Action*, each doer looked for his/her own inner actions, worked out an acting score around the same songs, and established points of contact with each other by projecting an imaginary partner from precise memories onto each other. It is in this way that the inner actions of each member were juxtaposed together in one score. In other words, the team members simultaneously went through their individual inner actions around the vibratory songs, and projected their personal associations onto their working partners. Hence, the inner actions of each member were still individual matters, even though all members joined in one group structure. There was no interaction between the inner actions of different team members. Richard's individual structure was incorporated in this group structure as its central component. Observed from the side, *Downstairs Action* did not suggest any solid story line, but some short thematic pieces. For example, in one piece, the female member sang and did a kind of ritual with a bowl of rice, while the male doers sang in tune into the female doer and did their own actions. In another piece, all doers in a diamond formation chanted towards each other in worship in four directions respectively. They even performed a 'ritual' in front of a table where one doer lit up a bowl of incense. However, these short pieces, one after another,

did not constitute a significant overall scenario.

Despite the fact that *Downstairs Action* was a work-in-progress, which constantly evolved, Richards still felt the need to discard its whole structure which could no longer hold on to the richness of its content. In 1994, he decided to develop a new structure from the old materials. This new development which took shape in January 1995 and continued evolving afterwards was subsequently known as *Action*. The structure of *Action* was not consciously predetermined in advance, but formed through practical work. *Action* was a precise and repeatable structure created mainly by Richards and his team members advised by Grotowski. It is Richards who served as the primary doer, led the day-to-day work with other members, and assembled the structure of the score as well as the textual montage. There were songs, dance-like movement, and physical actions with certain themes in *Action*. Many components of *Action* followed those in *Downstairs Action*, including African and Afro-Caribbean songs, a contemporary song composed by a Greek composer, the fragments of traditional texts translated into English and the Haitian dance *yanvalou*. Also included in *Action* were a small number of Haitian songs. Although Grotowski did give his advice, *Downstairs Action* and *Action* were created and constructed by Richards. Grotowski deliberately

disappeared into the background of the work in order to establish an autonomous working group, with Richards as its leader. It was more so towards the end of Grotowski's life.

When composing *Action*, Richards took into consideration the presence of possible witnesses, for example, where they would be sitting, and how to avoid blocking anybody's view. Moreover, *Action* was constructed in a way so that someone watching from the side could, to some extent, perceive a simple story. It was 'oriented toward the creation of a comprehensible performing structure through the montage of a series of basic little reactions and actions'.<sup>602</sup> In other words, *Action* was to be both a structure supporting the doer's inner action and a performative structure oriented towards someone watching from the side. Richards described it as the primary performance, or the 'edge-point of performance', which lay on the border between a self-contained work and a theatre performance orientated towards its audience.<sup>603</sup> Yet, the major concern in composing *Action* was still the flow of the doer's inner actions rather than the witnesses watching from the side. Richards described the consideration for a look from the side as a consciously constructed 'window' in the opus, through which people could grasp a simple

---

<sup>602</sup> *The Edge-Point of Performance*, p. 30.

<sup>603</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

narrative. Even so, people were still told, before their witness to *Action*, that 'it would be more pertinent not to look for a story – the analogy would be rather poetry than narrative prose'.<sup>604</sup>

*Action* was done in a room with an open space, approximately 40×25 feet. Usually, no more than ten witnesses were allowed in each presentation of *Action*. Before watching *Action*, the witnesses were asked not to sing alone, clap hands, or move in the rhythm of the songs. They were asked to watch and listen only.<sup>605</sup> At the beginning of *Action* the door to the space opened and the doers entered the room silently. *Action* was performed by one woman and five men. Richards was in a white shirt and white pants, other male members in white shirts and black pants. The woman was in a red long skirt. As pointed out earlier, these vibratory songs could be seen as traces of being, through which the transformation of states of being could be achieved. In *Action*, Richards allowed himself to be transformed by the vibratory songs into the state of an old man, a young man and then a baby. Richards' line of actions was clearly the main axis of *Action*, which was assisted by other members' lines of actions. They all performed attentively with bare feet touching the floor. *Action* was an opus constantly in progress. In '*Action*, The

---

<sup>604</sup> This is emphasized in the text distributed before witnessing *Action*. See 'Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards and Action', *The Drama Review* Vol. 43, No. 2 (T162), Summer 1999, p. 13.

Unrepresentable Origin', Lisa Wolford gave her account of *Action* based on her observations-five times in July and August 1995.<sup>606</sup> The major structure of *Action* which I witnessed in 2000 is basically not different from that in 1995 described by Wolford. Based on Wolford's painstaking account, here I concisely describe its main structure.

In the beginning part of *Action*, considered as a prologue, Mario Biagini played the role of a presenter in a very theatrical way. He spoke about coming from the Origin, and about being the child of the father who lives and its sign is – the movement which is repose.<sup>607</sup> A cycle of life was then shown: a small child, a young man and then an old man were acted out respectively. Then the actor alternated between the character of a Sphinx and that of the soul of the person. It was like the Last Judgment. The person claimed that he was coming from the Origin and that its sign was the movement which is repose. But the Sphinx denied him.

The first episode of *Action* then followed. In a song of great intensity, Richards, with a cane, slid on his back, passing through the legs of the woman whose abdomen involuntarily trembled. Richards was born as an old man.

---

<sup>605</sup> See Wolford, 'Action, The Unrepresentable Orgin', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 408.

<sup>606</sup> See Lisa Wolford, 'Action, The Unrepresentable Origin', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, pp. 407-29.

<sup>607</sup> Grotowski referred to the techniques of sources as 'the movement which is repose' in his Theatre of Sources project. See Section 6.1.

Richards and Biagini entered into eye contact with each other. They spoke a fragment of a text about being awake with full awareness, about a gift that was offered and ignored or refused, and about people living their life in a drunken stupor without seeking alternatives. One doer played a corpse which arose in a song and enticed Richards to go out of the space. This seemed to suggest the menace of death. As the song continued, Richards gained the upper hand and drove the enticer back to the central space. Then the role of the enticer in that doer dissolved.

Biagini led a song of reconciliation to calm Richards down, and then a song of transformation. He took the cane from Richards and Richards abruptly became a young man. This started the second episode. They spoke some text about the importance of looking for Origin when one is still alive. Richards as a young man explored various possibilities of his movement, running cheerfully around the space, and starting a song full of joy. Then the female doer began a song of great intensity and gradually began to dance *yanvalou*. Other doers (except Richards) joined the *yanvalou* dance and formed a line. After concluding his song, Richards finally joined *yanvalou* in a slightly detached position from the line. Biagini started the song of transformation and, as the song came to an end, Richards became a small

child.

In the third episode, Richards, as a small child, began a song like a lullaby. He opened a bundle on the floor and revealed a dried gourd. Evoking his physical memory of being a child, he played with the gourd. Alternating between the inarticulate sounds of an infant and a clearly spoken text, Richards spoke about entering the place of Origin, and about the condition of entering Origin. He described the condition as high merged with low, male with female, and inner with outer. Biagini and other doers began a song of light, and then formed a turning wheel around Richards who was sitting on the floor looking at people around him with excitement. Richards then gradually stood up and he was no longer a baby. Biagini started a song of blessing to end this episode.

In the last part of *Action*, which was considered to be an epilogue, Biagini questioned Richards about how life would end. Biagini crossed toward the witness, acted out the withering of his body, and gave his answer: the Beginning and the End are conjoined. On the floor, he assumed the position of the crucified Christ and delivered the text about blessing and evading death. Then as if awaking from a nightmare, Biagini sat up and looked at his hand as if looking to see whether there was a wound on his

palm. He said 'No!' Richards and other doers chanted the same text about the union of the Beginning and the End. When the last word ended, the doers swiftly exited the space together.<sup>608</sup>

Compared with *Downstairs Action*, *Action* was much more 'theatrical'. Certain elements of *Action* were clearly intended to convey a specific meaning to the person watching from the side. Grotowski guided Richards to construct *Action* in such a way that it could work on two levels simultaneously. On one level, *Action* was the structure to support the doer's inner action. On another level, it was deliberately constructed to allow the witnesses to sense and follow the doer's inner actions in this work.<sup>609</sup> Yet the narrative of *Action* was so loosely drawn that it allowed much space for interpretation. The central motif of *Action* was revealed through the ancient text used in this work. This ancient text, which appeared in Coptic language and in Greek, came from 'a very remote source of the Judeo-Christian tradition'.<sup>610</sup> It was translated word by word from Coptic into English by Biagini. The translation kept the syntax formation of the original text instead

---

<sup>608</sup> My brief account of *Action* serves for my analysis in this thesis. It is, however, unable to convey the complexity and texture of this work. To gain a comprehensive picture of this work, readers should consult Wolford's detailed account 'Action, The Unrepresentable Origin', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, pp. 407-29.

<sup>609</sup> This strategy of constructing *Action* is probably inspired by Baul, an Indian performing art which especially interested Grotowski. See Section 6.1.

<sup>610</sup> 'Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards and Action', *The Drama Review*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 1999, p. 13.

of producing a text in correct, formal English.<sup>611</sup> The English translation was then put into incantations by Richards based on his practical experience of working on traditional songs. Richards felt that these fragments of text were related to the inner action of the doers. However, the text was not utilized as a tool to transform the doer's state of being as the vibratory songs did. Instead, it was treated as 'statements-half-sung/half-said, precise incantations'.<sup>612</sup> It could be considered a simple statement for the observers. The prologue and the epilogue of *Action* were the making and the conclusion of this statement articulated in a theatrical way by the 'presenter' Biagini. In between were three episodes, in which the doers, especially Richards, went through their inner actions, as the enactment of this statement. Yet, to understand *Action* only in its narrative structure would be a mistake. The real content of *Action* consisted in the doers' inner actions – the transformation of being. The narrative structure of *Action* was simply a discourse parallel to this content.

*Downstairs Action* and *Action* were the montage of individual inner actions. The doers went through their individual inner actions with

---

<sup>611</sup> An English translation of this text was briefly shown to the witnesses before they watched *Action*. However, this document is not available. Both Wolford and I have to recall the content of the text for further analysis. The idea of going back to Origin in this text echoes Grotowski's notion of 'sources' prevalent in his work during the period of Theatre of Sources.

<sup>612</sup> See *The Edge-Point of Performance*, p. 94.

projections onto their working partners. Basically, there was no interaction of inner actions between the doers in *Downstairs Action*. Likewise, *Action* also very much depended on individual inner actions. Yet, there appeared to be some interaction of inner actions between Richards and Biagini in later development of *Action*. Richards referred to this interaction of inner actions as 'induction'.<sup>613</sup> Richards pointed out that certain moments of contact between Biagini and himself in *Action* were more than projections of mental images onto each other. This induction allowed two people to go through their inner actions together, instead of separately in a simultaneous way. Richards explained,

...the leader initiates the process, the 'inner action', and the other follows and then is also fully going inside himself while keeping the acting score and the song. This can create a strong energy reservoir between the two people, and what we can call the transformation of energy can seem to be no longer existing just in one or in the other, but in both and between.<sup>614</sup>

One person led the process, and the other person was in a state of extreme openness to follow the process. Keeping the contact closely, both could support each other towards the transformation of energy. It was like going in tandem, as Richards suggested. Richards felt that the quality of the space between two people could also change. In other words, the 'inner action' was

---

<sup>613</sup> See *The Edge-Point of Performance*, pp. 43-6.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

not only inside the doers, but also between them. For Richards, it was almost the space between them that ascended and descended in terms of the quality of energy. When in this kind of induction, Richards had the impression: 'where your "I" begins and ends is not so clear'.<sup>615</sup> What happened in one doer could also pass to the other. For someone in this situation, his subject 'I' would be much more expansive so that it could englobe not only himself/herself, but also his/her partner as well as the space between. The phenomenon of induction was the interpersonal communion which allowed the self to transcend its physical limitation.

In addition, the ultimate goal of the work on vibratory songs was to build a process for the transformation of states of being in order to realize the transformation of being. When analyzing various traditional practices around the globe in the late 1970s, Grotowski had paid attention to the phenomenon of possession in certain tribal rituals, in which the priest reincarnates God.<sup>616</sup> For him, the phenomenon of possession involving genuine transformation of being, was significantly different from acting as role-playing in performance. The phenomenon of possession certainly inspired Grotowski's work on vibratory songs to transform the doer's being. Yet, it is inappropriate to

---

<sup>615</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>616</sup> See Grotowski, 'Wandering Toward Theatre of Sources', *Dialectics and Humanism*, No. 2, 1980, p. 17.

consider this work on vibratory songs as a phenomenon of possession. The work could be better understood as a route which allowed the self to go through states of being beyond the physical, psychological and ontological limitations of the individual. It was the corporeal reincarnation of other people's experience through a series of physical processes.

Can the work on vibratory songs, especially *Action*, be instrumental in the realization of a gathering Grotowski had sought for decades? Grotowski might have thought about this possibility. This can be seen in his vision of Performer as a 'priest' to channel the witnesses into the intensity of ritual. He explained:

Ritual is a time of great intensity; provoked intensity; life then becomes rhythm. *Performer* knows to link body impulses to the song. (The stream of life should be articulated in forms.) The witnesses then enter into states of intensity because, so to say, they feel presence. And this is thanks to *Performer*, who is a bridge between the witness and this something.<sup>617</sup>

Simply through perceiving Performer's articulated reincarnation of certain states of being, the witnesses could go through the same state of great intensity. As Grotowski envisaged, the doers in *Action* could be the 'priests' and the presentation of *Action* to the witnesses could be the ritual as a gathering of people, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless,

---

<sup>617</sup> Grotowski, 'Performer', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 375.

without a proper historical and social context such as ritual has, *Action* was often regarded not as a potential ritual but as a show. It did not have the social function of ritual. To indicate *Action* as a potential ritual, Grotowski suggested a re-definition of the performing arts in such a way that he could find a proper position for his work. In his essay 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle', Grotowski defined a grand family of performing arts with Art as Presentation and Art as Vehicle as its two extremities. The typical genre in Art as Presentation was theatre performance, and ritual practices were included in Art as Vehicle. He clarified that the significant distinction between these two extremities consisted in the different orientation of the montage structure of the work. The montage in Art as Presentation was always orientated towards the audience's perception by means of certain story and characters. Yet, the montage of the work in Art as Vehicle was orientated towards the doers – 'the artists who do'.<sup>618</sup> In addition, this kind of work functioned as a vehicle to transform the doer from one state of being to another. Grotowski included his work on vibratory songs in this category of Art as Vehicle, which cunningly emphasized the close association of *Action* with ritual rather than theatre performance.

---

<sup>618</sup> See Grotowski, 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle' in *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, pp. 119-20.

Grotowski's re-definition of the performing arts may have established on a conceptual basis a justified position for his work on vibratory songs, but it was not enough to switch the opinion of the general public in the way he wanted. The denial of *Action* as a theatre performance and the emphasis on its link with ritual did not significantly change how people understood this work. The public still recognized *Action* as a special kind of performance which was intentionally placed out of the context of theatre performance: it did not tell any story; it was not performed in a theatre; it was not accessible to all the people who wanted to see it; its creators did not want it to be considered as a theatre performance. In a nutshell, Grotowski could build up *Action* as a potential framework for ritual, but he could not shape a proper social context around *Action* to elevate its social function to ritual itself. Therefore, despite its admirable quality, *Action* simply stayed a laboratory experiment. This was the glass ceiling which restrained Grotowski's work from becoming a fully functioning secular ritual in modern society.

## CONCLUSION

Grotowski's work from 1957 to 1999 can be considered a restless effort to revive secular ritual in post-industrial society, his ideal model being ritual with a broad social and psychological function in archaic societies. To realize secular ritual in modern society, Grotowski adopted different approaches at different stages of his work. In the first stage (1957-63), his intention of shaping collectivity in Polish society dominated his theatre practice exclusively. This was the result of complex historical, political and social events, involving the historical struggle for an independent Polish nation, the political struggle against neighbouring powers, especially Russia and thereafter the Soviet Union, and the Socialist idea of breaking down social classes. Through his theatre, Grotowski aimed to revive ritual with a social function on a national scale, which could consolidate society by reinforcing Polish identity. In order to achieve this, he set as the central motif of performance the interrogation of archetype, an idea inspired by Jung's psychology, and then arranged other elements in performance around this central motif, including the adaptation of Polish romantic classics, the involvement of the audience in role-playing and the abolition of the separation between stage and auditorium. By doing so, he expected that the

audience would come forward to join the proposed collective introspection in performance, and revisit people's common belief in certain archetypes. Performance of this kind, Grotowski supposed, would function as secular ritual which was able to shape collectivity among people, a perspective inspired by Durkheim's study of ritual. This theatre of collective introspection attracted attention and interest on the part of spectators, but it did not create the anticipated sense of collectivity among them. Grotowski simply had to continue elaborating his work in order to find a means of leading his theatre to secular ritual.

To start the second stage of his work (1964-77), Grotowski devised various exercises such as physical and plastic exercises; these were intended as a means whereby his actors could achieve organic acting. Through the method of elimination, Grotowski manipulated exercises to locate and dissolve the actor's physical blockages which intervened in the actor's organic process of expression. He also systematically introduced the actor's personal process in training and performance, so as to stimulate the actor's organic process of expression. Apart from perfecting the actor's acting skills, Grotowski's training method proved to be instrumental in the actor's initiation into a complete state of being, in which inner impulses were not

hampered by social conditioning. This was regarded by Grotowski as the potential merit of his work. Hence, he considered his training method not as a preparatory step towards performance but as a significant process deserving its own place in his work. This was reflected in *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968), an extensive part of which is dedicated to actor training (a theatre process), instead of to acting (a skill of performance). As the focus of his work shifted, Grotowski eventually envisaged his theatre to be ritual incorporating both the process of personal initiation and the communion among people. Despite pushing his theatre making to its limits, he still could not realize ritual as such in his production *Apocalypse*. After 1970 he stopped making new productions and continued his work in the form of paratheatrical activities – various devised activities which aimed to create communion among participants, liberate them from social conditioning and initiate them into a complete state of being. However, after years of experimentation, Grotowski was unable to develop paratheatrical activities into a mature form, owing to their shapeless and chaotic outcomes. He then turned to various kinds of ritual and traditional practices around the globe so as to unearth a feasible means of reviving ritual in his ensuing work.

In the third stage of his work (1978-99), Grotowski directed research

projects – Theatre of Sources, Objective Drama and Art as Vehicle. Behind all these projects was a painstaking effort to separate objective components in various traditional techniques – those elements which were effective outside their original social and cultural contexts. Grotowski expected that this study of traditional techniques would help him to devise a form of gathering as a secular ritual which would elicit the genuine self from participants and create for them communion across social and cultural boundaries. In the Theatre of Sources project, Grotowski cooperated with practitioners around the world to investigate techniques of work on the self, which set the tone for his work throughout this stage. He further developed work on the self in the following Objective Drama project and narrowed down his attention to the singing of certain traditional songs, which then led to elaborate work on vibratory songs in the Art as Vehicle period. Through the precise singing of vibratory songs and the rediscovery of associated actions by means of personal experience, the singers/doers could transform their state of being. A hint of this transcendence of the self beyond the limit of the individual could be grasped in Richards' work in *Action*. However, throughout the last stage of his work, Grotowski was still unable to realize a form of gathering that could adequately function as secular ritual.

Grotowski's work throughout all these stages, theatre or non-theatre, can be summarized as an attempt to revive secular ritual in modern society. He intended to create a ritual which could shape a sense of collectivity in Polish society, a ritual which could initiate the self into a complete state of being, and a ritual which could bring about communion across social and cultural boundaries. However, the various turns in Grotowski's work, as analyzed in this thesis, indicate that the revival of ritual as such seems quixotic.

Despite the fact that Grotowski's attempt to revive ritual might not have been successful, his work offered a series of rediscoveries of the self in various dimensions and opened up various possibilities of transcending the self. His early productions, which aimed at shaping collectivity in Polish society, worked on the revitalization of the connection between the self and others through revisiting group identity, such as national identity. His training, which was designed to free the actor's body from the manipulation of the mind, illustrated a means of liberating the self from social conditioning and initiating it into a complete state of being. His work on various traditional techniques was to discover a state of the self prior to cultural differentiation. Meanwhile, his work involving traditional songs demonstrated that transformation of being could be achieved through following physical

actions arranged around vibratory songs. To sum up, Grotowski's work subverted the idea of the self as an isolated and confined individual. It constantly challenged the individual sphere taken for granted socially, psychologically and ontologically, and opened up new possibilities of what the self could be.

Grotowski's work, especially his theatre work, is still influential in the twenty-first century. His emphasis on autonomous *mise-en-scène*, actor's physicality in acting, collaborative ensemble work and exploration of spatial arrangement in performance, as examined in this thesis, all contribute to the shaping of theatre today. For example, the exclusive use of the actor's physicality in Grotowski's productions has helped to mould a trend of so called 'physical theatre'. The term 'physical theatre' has never been adequately defined by practitioners or critics. It is generally used to describe a mode of performance relying extensively on the actor's physical expressions. Physical theatre may be associated with several distinct traditions of performance, such as mime, contemporary dance and theatrical acrobatics. However, contemporary physical theatre, such as DV8 Physical Theatre and Theatre De L'ange Fou, is widely considered the 'descendent' of both Meyerhold's and Grotowski's theatre, with influences from

contemporary dance, *commedia dell'arte* and mime. This is one example of Grotowski's influence on contemporary theatre. It was through his workshops, lectures, publications, touring productions and collaborations that Grotowski inspired many theatre practitioners to develop their own works which have become part of the theatre today. Barba created Odin Teatret in Scandinavia shortly after his two-year residence in Laboratory Theatre from 1962 to 1964. Włodzimierz Staniewski, who worked with Grotowski in paratheatrical activities from 1971 to 1976, subsequently founded Gardzienice in Poland.<sup>619</sup> James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta, who collaborated with Grotowski on the Objective Drama Project, inaugurated New World Performance Laboratory in the United States.<sup>620</sup> These are just a few among many contemporary practitioners who have been inspired or influenced by Grotowski's work. Grotowski's contributions to theatre today cannot be overlooked, and the analysis of his work in this thesis is instrumental in our understanding of how contemporary theatre came into being.

Another dimension of the significance of Grotowski's work can be revealed through contextualizing his work in the debates of interculturalism,

---

<sup>619</sup> For more details of Staniewski and his work in Gardzienice, see Paul Allain, *Gardzienice: Polish Theatre in Transition*.

<sup>620</sup> Wolford described some of the work of the New World Performance Laboratory in her book. See Wolford, *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, pp. 141-47, 158-64.

the critiques on cross-cultural negotiations.<sup>621</sup> Like Grotowski, a school of European theatre practitioners also worked across cultural boundaries and sought inspirations from Oriental theatres from the 1970s on. Among them were Brook and Barba. In 1971, Brook set up his CICT, Centre International de Créations Théâtrales, in Paris and started to work with a multi-cultural group of actors, European and non-European, in an attempt to create a 'universal' theatre which could communicate with audiences regardless of their cultural backgrounds. In 1979 Barba founded ISTA, the International School of Theatre Anthropology, to study the 'pre-expressive' scenic behaviours which, he believed, could form a common denominator for all performative genres regardless of their cultural varieties. He worked with traditionally trained performers from various cultures, including India, Indonesia, China, Japan, Korea and Europe and sought common 'recurring principles' in their performative techniques.<sup>622</sup> Such work involving elements or techniques of performative genres from other cultures has been accused of cultural exploitation and misrepresentation of other cultures. For example, Brook adapted a wide variety of musical and visual elements as well as

---

<sup>621</sup> For discussions of interculturalism in theatre/performance, see Phillip B. Zarilli, Bruce McConachie, Gary Jay Williams and Carol Fisher Sogenfrei, *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, pp. 485-504, and Patrice Pavis, 'Introduction: Towards A Theory of Interculturalism in Theatre?', in *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (edited by Pavis), pp. 1-21.

<sup>622</sup> For more details of Barba's Theatre Anthology, see his book *The Paper Canoe*.

performance styles from India and other non-European cultures in his production *Mahabharata* (1985), a nine-hour adaptation of the Indian epic, in an attempt to create a work 'which carries echoes for all mankind'.<sup>623</sup> Rustom Bharucha fiercely criticized Brook, arguing that he misrepresented the epic *Mahabharata* by depriving it of its original mythological, social, religious and cultural context and trivializing its complex meanings. He regarded Brook's *Mahabharata* as 'one of the most blatant (and accomplished) appropriations of Indian culture'.<sup>624</sup> Such critiques of interculturalism have raised the awareness of political and ethical issues of cultural exchange as well as cultural autonomy in intercultural practices.

The third stage of Grotowski's work, including *Theatre of Sources*, *Objective Drama* and *Art as Vehicle*, all of which involved traditional practices from different cultures, has been drawn into the debates about interculturalism.<sup>625</sup> However, it is inadequate to accuse Grotowski's work of cultural exploitation. Most of his work during this period was research within

---

<sup>623</sup> Jean-Claude Carrière, *The Mahabharata: A Play Based Upon the Indian Classic Epic*, trans. Peter Brook, New York: Harper and Row, 1987, p. xvi.

<sup>624</sup> Rustom Bharucha, *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 68.

<sup>625</sup> Despite the fact that Grotowski adapted actor training exercises from Oriental theatres, such as Kathakali and Peking Opera, he transformed these exercises for his own purposes and did not directly implant them in performances. Also, all of Grotowski's productions, except *Sakuntala* (1960), were based on European playtexts. Hence, the first two stages of Grotowski's work did not become the focus of debates in interculturalism. My discussion here will mainly concentrate on the third stage of his work.

a closed circle and he did not manipulate traditional practices to compose any performance through which he could profit. What is more, reciprocity among cultures was essential to Grotowski's research, which depended on the cross-cultural examination of various techniques through a group of multi-cultural practitioners. Although Grotowski organized the projects and indicated the directions of researches, he intentionally avoided intervening in the working process, adhering to his method of elimination, and it was the multi-cultural practitioners who collectively made most of the decisions in the practical work. This working process could prevent any specific cultural practice or perspective from becoming the dominant one, and hierarchy among cultures could hardly take shape. Therefore, Grotowski's work is not a case of cultural exploitation. In addition, cultural representation (or misrepresentation) is irrelevant to Grotowski's research, which was not intended to produce any performance, but to distill 'objective' elements from various traditional practices, that is, the elements that could work on people regardless of their cultural backgrounds.

The relevant issue regarding Grotowski's cross-cultural research is not cultural exploitation or misrepresentation, but whether the realization of the trans-cultural practice beyond cultural differences is feasible or not. This

is also crucial to other practitioners' work on intercultural performances, such as Barba's study of the 'pre-expressive' scenic behaviour, which subscribes to the same assumption of the 'universal' practice beyond cultural differences as Grotowski's trans-cultural research does. Bharucha questioned this vision of the 'universal' practice in Barba's Theatre Anthropology. He emphasized that the specific cultural and social conditions of each practice should not be reduced after all. Despite the fact that there might be some objective laws of the performer's expressions in various performative genres owing to the common physiological traits of human beings, these physiological laws, Bharucha argued, only make sense when they are manifested in a specific performative context which is always related to specific society, culture and history. He, therefore, concluded that Barba's attempt to seize these physiological laws was no more than diffusing 'the potentialities of the body' and 'their possibilities of rendering multiple meanings'.<sup>626</sup> For him, the pursuit of the trans-cultural 'universal' practice was nothing but a process of decontextualization which would eventually lead to trivialization and misrepresentation of source cultures. Apart from Bharucha, feminist critics also had serious doubts in the trans-cultural practice which presumed the belief in universal values common to all human beings and totally left out the

---

<sup>626</sup> Bharucha, *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*, p. 57.

gender issue.<sup>627</sup> Although all these critiques were directed at Barba's Theatre Anthropology, they could also rightly be used to question Grotowski's trans-cultural research.

Victor Turner's last work offers another angle to examine the feasibility of trans-cultural practice. In his article 'Body, Brain, and Culture', Turner paid attention to the findings and studies in neuroscience, especially Paul MacLean's model of the triune brain, and questioned the assumption that all human behaviours are solely the result of social conditioning.<sup>628</sup> Instead of conceiving of it as a unity, MacLean considers the human brain as three brains in one, that is, the reptilian, pelo-mammalian and neo-mammalian brains, which respond to three stages of the evolution of the brain. Each of these brains has its own special intelligence and functions. The reptilian brain, or R-complex, a feature shared by all vertebrate creatures, is the oldest part of the brain in terms of evolution. In lizards and birds this brain dominates all their behaviours. The reptilian brain is in charge of autonomic functions, such as breathing and heartbeat. It also controls muscles, movement, balance as well as instinctive behaviours such as emotional

---

<sup>627</sup> Feminists' doubts in trans-cultural practice can be well exemplified by Peggy Phelan's response to the ISTA congress on 'The Female Role as Represented on the Stage in Various Cultures' in 1986. See Peggy Phelan, 'Feminist Theory, Poststructuralism, and Performance', *The Drama Review* Vol. 32, No. 1, Spring 1988, pp. 107-27.

<sup>628</sup> See Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, pp. 156-78.

displays, territorial defence behaviours and nest-building. It corresponds to 'the stream of movement', which is mostly genetically inherited.<sup>629</sup> The pelo-mammalian brain, or limbic system, arose with the evolution of the earliest mammals. It is concerned with emotions and instincts, feeding, fighting, fleeing and sexual behaviour. It corresponds to 'the stream of feeling'. The neo-mammalian brain, or neo-cortex, is the major part of the brain in the primate mammals including human species. It is in charge of the higher cognitive functions, and corresponds to 'the stream of thought', which is closely related to socioculturally transmitted information. In human species the neo-mammalian brain takes up two thirds of the total brain mass. In other animals it is relatively small and with few or no folds, which indicates the lack of complexity and development. Based on the model of triune brain, naïve movement which mainly involves the use of the reptilian brain is mostly genetically determined. Thinking which mainly involves the use of neo-mammalian brain is mostly culturally determined. Yet most of human behaviours are between these two extreme types of behaviours. Turner considered ritual as a process of negotiation between these two, or in his own words, 'a series of symbiotic co-adaptations between what might be called

---

<sup>629</sup> According to Turner, neuroanatomist James Papez defines the reptilian brain as 'the stream of movement', the pelo-mammalian brain as 'the stream of feeling', and the neo-mammalian brain as 'the stream of thought'. *Ibid.*, pp. 161-2.

culturetypes and genotypes'.<sup>630</sup> Although what kind of and to what extent behaviour is culturally or genetically determined is still debatable, the assurance that certain human behaviours are not culturally determined but genetically inherited provides firm ground for Grotowski's and Barba's work based on the universality of the physicality of all human beings.

The debate whether trans-cultural practice is feasible or not still goes on today. Both camps have their points and cannot completely rule out the other. It seems down to people's opinions of the exact relationship between the body, self, society and culture. Yet, these opinions, no matter whether they are in favour of or against the trans-cultural practice, often depend on people's cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the debates among these opinions can lead nowhere near the realization of the trans-cultural practice. The significance of Grotowski's work lies in the fact that it is not so much an embodiment of ideas, thoughts, opinions or concepts as an operational exploration in practice which demands seeing and hearing on a primordial level – a less culturally dependent process prior to reading or interpreting. In his work, the predetermined thoughts, which are already complicated by cultural differentiation, are prohibited so as to allow doings on a very primordial level to happen. To simplify the matter, Grotowski stripped his

---

<sup>630</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

work of performative context to avoid the complicated issue of whether trans-cultural representation and reception in performance is feasible or not. He concentrated on a more radical issue of whether the self can reach a state prior to culture differentiation. His exploration in practical work constantly transcends the limitations of the self, which are caused by presupposed, and usually culturally determined, notions of the self. Through this way of working, Grotowski is at least heading towards the realization of the trans-cultural practice instead of arguing about possibilities without achieving anything. His work is not intended as a final answer but as a restless and elaborate process of transcendence in practice towards that possible answer.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### I. Texts by Jerzy Grotowski

'Marzenie o teatrze', *Dziennik Polski*, 23 February 1955, No. 46.

'Twórcze ambicje teatru', *Współczesność*, 16-30 November 1958, No. 29/19.

'Z Jerzym Grotowskim o teatrze', *Współczesność*, 1-15 December 1958, No. 30/20.

'Wokół teatru przyszłości', *Ekran*, 24 May 1959, No. 21.

'Śmierć i reinkarnacja teatru', *Współczesność*, 1-15 July 1959, No. 13.

'Co to jest teatr?', *Dziennik Polski*, 23 and 24 August 1959, No. 200.

'11 pytań o "13 Rzędów"', in *Echo Krakowa*, 25 October 1959, No. 248.

'Dziady jako model teatru nowoczesnego', *Współczesność*, 1-15 November 1961, No. 21, p. 8.

*Możliwość Teatru*. Opole: February 1962. (Unpublished pamphlet of Theatre of 13 Rows)

'Teatr: Godzina Niepokoju', *Odra*, No. 6, 1964, pp. 55-8.

'Doctor Faustus in Poland', *Tulane Drama Review*, T24, 1964, pp. 120-33.

*Towards a Poor Theatre*. London: Methuen, 1968.

'Holiday – The Day That Is Holy', *The Drama Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (T58),  
June 1973, pp. 113-35.

'Holiday', *Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 3, No. 10, April-June 1973, pp. 19-24.

'Tu es le fils de quelqu'un (You Are Someone's Son)', *The Drama Review*  
Vol. 31, No. 3, 1987, pp. 30-41.

'Around Theatre: The Orient – The Occident', *Asian Theatre Journal* Vol. 6,  
No. 1, 1989, pp. 1-11.

'Pragmatic Laws', in *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: the secret art of  
the performer*, ed. Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese. London:  
Routledge, 1991, pp. 236-7.

## **II. Secondary Sources**

Allain, Paul *Gardzienice: Polish Theatre in Transition*. London: Harwood  
Academic Publishers, 1997.

Amankulor, J. Ndukaku 'Jerzy Grotowski's Divination Consultation: Objective Drama Seminar at U.C. Irvine', *The Drama Review* Vol. 35, No. 1, 1991, pp. 155-63.

Aristotle *Aristotle's Poetics*. Trans. S. H. Butcher. New York: Hill and Wang, 1961.

Artaud, Antonin *The Theatre and Its Double*. Trans. Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Press, 1958.

Aston, Elaine *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

Auslander, Philip 'Holy Theatre and Catharsis', *Theatre Research International* Vol. 9, No. 1, 1984, pp. 16-29.

-- -- -- -- -- "Just Be Your Self": Logocentrism and Difference in Performance Theory', *Acting (Re)Considered: Theories and Practices*, ed. Phillip B. Zarrilli. London: Routledge, 1995, pp.59-68.

Barba, Eugenio *The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*. Trans. Richard Fowler, London: Routledge, 1995.

-- -- -- -- -- *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*. Trans. Judy Barba,

Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 1999.

Barba, Eugenio and Nicola Savarese ed. *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: the secret art of the performer*. London: Routledge, 1991.

Benedetti, Jean 'A History of Stanislavski in Translation', *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 23, August 1990, pp. 266-78.

— — — — — *Stanislavski: A Biography*. London: Methuen, 1988.

— — — — — *Stanislavski and the Actor*. London: Methuen, 1998.

Bentley, Eric ed. *The Theory of the Modern Stage*. London: Penguin Books, 1990 (1968).

Bharucha, Rustom, *Theatre and the world: Performance and the Politics of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

Blakney, Raymond B. *Meister Eckhart*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1941.

Błoński, Jan 'Holiday or Holiness? – A Critical Revaluation of Grotowski',  
Trans. Bolesław Taborski, *Gambit*, Vol. 9, No. 33-34, 1979, pp. 67-76.

Braun, Edward *Meyerhold on Theatre*. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1969.

-- -- -- -- -- *The Theatre of Meyerhold*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1979.

-- -- -- -- -- *The Director and the Stage*. London: Methuen, 1982.

Braun, Kazimierz *Nowy Teatr na Świecie 1960-1970*. Warszawa:  
Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1975.

-- -- -- -- -- 'Where is Grotowski?', *The Drama Review* Vol. 30, No. 3,  
1986, pp. 226-40.

Brockett, Oscar G. *History of the Theatre*, 5th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon,  
1986.

Brockett, Oscar G. and Robert R. Findlay *Century of Innovation: A History  
of European and American Theatre and Drama Since the Late Nineteenth  
Century*, 2nd ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991.

Brook, Peter *The Empty Space*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968.

-- -- -- -- -- *The Shifting Point: Forty Years of Theatrical Exploration,  
1946-87*. London: Methuen, 1988.

-- -- -- -- -- 'Grotowski: art as a vehicle', *The Drama Review* Vol. 35, No.  
1, 1991, pp. 92-4.

Brown, Edward J. *Mayakovsky: A Poet in the Revolution*. Princeton:

Princeton University Press, 1973.

Brunton, Paul *A Search in Secret India*. London: Rider & Co., 1934,

Buber, Martin *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, Trans. and Ed. Maurice Friedman. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957.

— — — — — *I and Thou*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1970.

Burzyński, Tadeusz and Zbigniew Osiński *Grotowski's Laboratory*. Trans. Bolesław Taborski, Warsaw: Interpress Publishers, 1979.

Carlson, Marvin *Theories of Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.

Carnicke, Sharon Marie 'Stanislavsky: Uncensored and Unabridged', *The Drama Review*, Vol.37, No. 1 (T137), 1993, pp. 22-37.

— — — — — *Stanislavsky in Focus*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998.

Chen, Ming Tsai (陳明才) 'The First Physical Action': *A Case Study for a Paratheatrical Activity* (「第一種身體行動」：一個類劇場活動個案研究). BA Thesis, Taipei National University of the Arts (台北藝術大學),

1988.

Chen, Wei Cheng (陳偉誠) 'Running in Silence – A Work Session with Grotowski' ('寂靜地奔跑——與葛羅托斯基工作的過程'), *Performing Arts Review* (表演藝術). No. 76, April 1999, pp. 86-9.

Cioffi, Kathleen M. *Alternative Theatre in Poland, 1954-1989*. London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996.

Craig, Gordon *On the Art of the Theatre*. Chicago: Browne's Bookstore, 1911.

Csato, Edward *The Polish Theatre*. Warsaw: Polonia Publishing House, 1963.

Czerwiński, Edward *Contemporary Polish Theatre and Drama (1956-1984)*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.

Davies, Norman *God's Playground: A History of Poland*. Vol. II. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Derrida, Jacques *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

Drake, Sylvie 'Grotowski to Set Scene at UC Irvine', *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 1983, p. 1, 5.

- Drozdowski, Bohdan ed. *Twentieth Century Polish Theatre*. English translations edited by Catherine Itzen, London : John Calder, 1979.
- Dukore, Bernard F. *Dramatic theory and criticism: Greeks to Grotowski*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974.
- Durkheim, Emile *The Division of Labour in Society*. Trans. W. D. Halls. London: Macmillan, 1984 (1893).
- — — — — *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Trans. Joseph Ward Swain. New York: Macmillan, 1965 (1912).
- — — — — *Durkheim on Religion*. ed. W. S. F. Pickering. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975.
- Dziewanowski, M. K. *Poland in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.
- Eliade, Mircea *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958 (1954).
- — — — — *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. London: Penguin, 1964 (1951).
- Filipowicz, Halina 'Where is Gurutowski?', *The Drama Review* Vol. 35, No.

1, 1991, pp. 181-6.

Findlay, Robert 'Grotowski's Akropolis: A Retrospective View', *Modern Drama* Vol. 27, No. 1, 1984, pp. 1-20.

Findlay, Robert and Halina Filipowicz 'Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre: Dissolution and Diaspora', *The Drama Review* Vol. 30, No. 3, 1984, pp. 201-25.

Flaszen, Ludwik and Carla Pollastrelli ed. *Il Teatr Laboratorio di Jerzy Grotowski 1959-1969*. Pontedera: Fondazione Pontedera Teatro, 2001.

Forsythe, Eric 'Conversations with Ludwik Flaszen', *Educational Theatre journal*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 1978, pp. 301-28.

Fowler, Richard 'The Four Theatres of Jerzy Grotowski: an Introductory Assessment', *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 1, No. 2, 1985, pp. 173-8.

Friedman, Maurice *Martin Buber and the Theater*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1969.

Fuchs, Elinor 'The Death of Character', *Theatre Communications*, No. 5, March 1983, pp. 1-6.

Gerould, Daniel ed. *Twentieth-Century Polish Avant-Garde Drama*. Ithaca:

Cornell University Press, 1977.

Gladkov, Alexander 'Meyerhold Speaks: Observations on Acting and Directing', *The Drama Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (T63), September 1974, pp. 108-12.

Goodman, Lizbeth and Jane De Gay ed. *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

Gorchakov, Nikolai M. *Stanislavsky Directs*. Trans. Miriam Goldina. New York: Greenwood Press, 1973.

Gordon, Mel 'Meyerhold's Biomechanics', *The Drama Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (T63), September 1974, pp. 73-88.

Grimes, Ron 'The Rituals of Walking and Flying: Public Participatory Events at Actor's Lab', *The Drama Review* Vol. 22, No. 4, 1978, pp. 77-82.

Halecki, Oscar and A. Polonsky *A History of Poland*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.

Hecht, Patsy Ann Clark *Kinetic Techniques for the Actor: An Analysis and Comparison of the Movement Training Systems of François Delsarte, Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, and Rudolf Laban*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Wayne

State University, 1971.

Hume, Robert A. *An Interpretation of India's Religious History*. New York:

Fleming H. Revell Company, 1911.

Hunt, Albert and Geoffrey Reeves *Peter Brook*. Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 1995.

Hübner, Zygmunt *Theatre and Politics*. Trans. Jadwiga Kosicka. Evanston:

Northwestern University Press, 1988.

Innes, Christopher *Holy Theatre: Ritual and the Avant Garde*. London:

Cambridge University Press, 1981.

— — — — — *Avant Garde Theatre: 1892-1992*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Jaques-Dalcroze, Emile *Rhythm, Music and Education*. Trans. Harold F.

Rubinstein. New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1921.

Kelera, Józef *Grotowski wielokrotnie*. Wrocław: Ośrodek Badań Twórczości

Jerzego Grotowskiego i Poszukiwań Teatralno-Kulturowych, 1999.

Kirk, G. S. *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.

Kolankiewicz, Leszek ed. *On the Road to Active Culture*. Trans. Bolesław

Taborski, Wrocław, 1978. (unpublished)

Kott, Jan 'Grotowski: Or, The Limit', *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 6, No. 23,  
1989, pp. 203-6.

-- -- -- -- -- *The Theatre of Essence and other essays*. Evanston:  
Northwestern University Press, 1984.

Kumiega, Jennifer *The Theatre of Grotowski*. London: Methuen, 1985.

Landy, Robert J. *Persona and Performance: The Meaning of Role in Drama,  
Therapy, and Everyday Life*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1993.

Leach, Robert *Vsevolod Meyerhold*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,  
1989.

Leiter, Samuel L. *From Stanislavsky to Barrault*. New York: Greenwood  
Press, 1991.

Lendra, I. Wayan 'Bali and Grotowski: Some Parallels in the Training  
Process', *The Drama Review* Vol. 35, No. 1, 1991, pp. 113-28.

-- -- -- -- -- 'The Motions: A detailed description', *The Drama Review*  
Vol. 35, No. 1, 1991, pp. 129-38.

Leslie, R. F. *The History of Poland since 1863*. Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 1980.

Lukács, Georg *The Theory of The Novel*. Trans. Anna Bostock. Cambridge:  
MIT Press, 1971 (1920).

MacLean, Paul *A Triune Concept of Brain and Behaviour*. Toronto:  
University of Toronto Press, 1973.

Martin, Carol ed. *A Sourcebook on Feminist Theatre and Performance: On  
and Beyond the Stage*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

Mayakovsky, Vladimir *The Complete Plays of Vladimir Mayakovsky*. Trans.  
Guy Daniels. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968.

Mennen, Richard 'Grotowski's Paratheatrical Projects', *The Drama Review*  
Vol. 19, No. 4, 1975, pp. 58-69.

Micińska, Anna *Witkacy: Life and Work*. Trans. Bogna Piotrowska. Warsaw:  
Interpress Publishers, 1990.

Mickiewicz, Adam 'Lecture on Slavic Literature: Lesson 16: "Slavic  
Drama", 4 April 1843', Trans. Daniel Gerould, *The Drama Review*, Vol.  
30, No. 3 (T111), Fall 1986, pp. 93-7.

Miłosz, Czesław *The History of Polish Literature*. Berkeley: University of

California Press, 1969.

Mitchell, Steve 'Therapeutic Theatre: A Para-theatrical Mode of Dramatherapy', *Dramatherapy: Theory and Practice II*, ed. Sue Jennings. London: Routledge, 1989, pp. 51-67.

Mitter, Shomit *Systems of Rehearsal*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Mykita-Glensk, Czesława *Materiały do Historii 'Teatru 13 Rzędów' w Sezonach 1958/1959-1961/1962*. Opole: Nakład własny, 1963.

-- -- -- -- -- *Życie Teatralne Opola*. Opole: Instytut śląski w opolu, 1976.

Nāgārjuna, Siddha. *Nāgārjuna's philosophy*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978.

Núñez, Nicolás *Anthropocosmic Theatre*. Trans. Ronan J. Fitzsimons, Ed. Deborah Middleton, London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996.

Osiński, Zbigniew *Grotowski i jego Laboratorium*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1980.

-- -- -- -- -- *Grotowski and His Laboratory*. Translated and abridged by Lillian Vallee and Robert Findlay, New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1986.

-- -- -- -- -- 'Grotowski Blazes the Trails: From Objective Drama (1983-1985) to Ritual Arts (since 1985)', *The Drama Review* Vol. 35, No. 1 (T129), 1991, pp. 95-112.

-- -- -- -- -- *Teatr '13 Rzędów' Opole 1959-1964*. Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 1997.

-- -- -- -- -- *Grotowski: źródła, inspiracje, konteksty*. Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 1998.

Otto, Rudolf *The Idea of the Holy*. Trans. John W. Harvey, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923 (1917).

-- -- -- -- -- *Mysticism East and West*. Trans. B. L. Blacey and R. C. Payne, New York: Macmillan, 1932 (1926).

Ouaknine, Serge 'Le Prince Constant', in *Les Voies de la Création Théâtrale* Vol. I, Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1970, pp. 19-129. (Introduction by Jean Jacquot)

Pavis, Patrice, ed. *The Intercultural Performance Reader*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Phelan, Peggy 'Feminist Theory, Poststructuralism, and Performance', *The*

*Drama Review* Vol. 32, No. 1, Spring 1988, pp. 107-27.

Puzyna, Konstanty 'Approaching to Staging', *Dialog*, Special Issue, 1970,  
pp. 135-41.

Richards, Thomas *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*. London:  
Routledge, 1995.

— — — — — *The Edge-Point of Performance*. Pontedera: Workcenter of  
Jerzy Grotowski, 1995.

Ronen, Dan 'A Workshop with Ryszard Cieslak', *The Drama Review* Vol. 22,  
No. 4, 1978, pp. 67-76.

Segel, Harold B. *Polish Romantic Drama*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic  
Publishers, 1997.

Shawn, Ted *Every Little Movement*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. New York: Dance Horizons,  
1963.

Shepher, Bella 'Theatre as Community Therapy: An Exploration of the  
Interrelationship between the Audience and the Theatre', *Dramatherapy:  
Theory and Practice II*, ed. Sue Jennings. London: Routledge, 1992, pp.  
181-93.

Shevtsova, Maria *Theatre and Cultural Interaction*. Sydney: Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture, 1993.

Singer, Isaac Bashevis *The Magician of Lublin*. Trans. Elaine Gottlieb and Joseph Singer. London: Penguin Books, 1996.

Stachura, Peter D. *Poland in the Twentieth Century*. Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999.

Stanislavsky, Constantin *My Life in Art*. Trans. J. J. Robbins. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1945 (1924).

— — — — — *Stanislavski's Legacy: A Collection of Comments on a Variety of Aspects of an Actor's Art and Life*. Translated and edited by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1968.

Strasberg, Lee 'Lee Strasberg's Russian Notebook (1934)', *The Drama Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (T57), March 1973, pp. 107-21.

Sullivan, Dan 'A Prophet of the Far Out Comes to Orange County', *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 1983, p. 1, 42.

Świebocka, Teresa ed. *Auschwitz: A History in Photographs*. English edition prepared by Jonathan Webber and Connie Wilsack, Bloomington and

Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Taborski, Bolesław *Byron and the Theatre*. Salzburg: University of Salzburg, 1972.

Temkine, Raymonde *Grotowski*. Trans. Alex Szogyi, New York: Avon Books, 1972.

Topkis, Maggie 'A Ritual Called a Conference', *Theatre International*, No. 3-4, 1981, pp. 43-8.

Toporkov, Vasily Osipovich *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*. Trans. Christine Edwards. London: Routledge, 1979.

Turner, Victor *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969.

— — — — — *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982.

— — — — — *The Anthropology of Performance*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1987.

— — — — — 'Are there Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?', *By Means of Performance*, ed. Richard Schechner and Willa

- Appel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 8-18.
- Tyszka, Juliusz 'Stanislavsky in Poland: Ethics and Politics of the Method',  
*New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 20, November 1989, pp. 361-9.
- Wangh, Stephen *An Acrobat of the Heart*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.
- Watson, Ian 'Training with Eugenio Barba – Acting Principles, the Pre-  
expressive and "Personal Temperature"', *Twentieth Century Actor  
Training*, Alison Hodge, ed. London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 209-23.
- Watson, Ian ed. *Negotiating Cultures : Eugenio Barba and the Intercultural  
Debate*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.
- Wiles, Timothy J. *The Theatre Event: Modern Theory of Performance*.  
Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Willett, John trans. *Brecht on Theatre*. London: Methuen, 1964.
- Winterbottom, Philip 'Two Years before the Master', *The Drama Review*  
Vol. 35, No. 1, 1991, pp. 140-54.
- Witkiewicz, Stanisław Ignacy *Country House*. Translated and with an  
introduction by Daniel Gerould. London: Harwood Academic Publishers,  
1997.

Wolford, Lisa 'Subjective Reflection on Objective Work: Grotowski in Irvine', *The Drama Review* Vol. 35, No. 1, 1991, pp. 165-80.

— — — — — *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996.

— — — — — 'Grotowski's Vision of the Actor – the Search for Contact', *Twentieth Century Actor Training*. ed. Alison Hodge, London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 191-208.

Wolford, Lisa and Richard Schechner, ed. *The Grotowski Sourcebook*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Worrall, Nick 'Meyerhold's Production of *The Magnificent Cuckold*', *The Drama Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (T57), March 1973, pp. 14-34.

Zarrilli, Phillip B. ed. *Acting (Re)Considered: Theories and Practices*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Zarilli, Phillip B. and Bruce McConachie, Gary Jay Williams, Carol Fisher Sogenfrei, *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

### **III. Production Programs and Project Pamphlets**

*Krzesa (The Chairs)*

*Bogowie deszczu (Gods of Rain)*

*Wujaszek Wania (Uncle Vanya)*

*Teatr 13 Rzędów (program of Orfeusz)*

*Teatr-Laboratorium 13 Rzędów*

*Akropolis (Version 1967)*

*Acropolis (Version 1967) in English and French*

*The Constant Prince (Version 1968) in English*

*Apocalypsis Cum Figuris in French*

*Góra Płomienia (The Mountain of Flame)*

*Holiday – The Day That Is Holy*

### **IV. Documentary Films**

*List z Opola (A Letter from Opole)*, dir. Michael Elster, b&w, 30 min, in

Polish, 1963.

*Teatr Laboratorium*, dir. Michael Elster, b&w, 19 min, in English.

*Was Socrates a Pole?* dir. Jean-Marie Drot, b&w, 54 min, in French.

*Akropolis*, dir. James Taggart, b&w, 82 min, in Polish. Introduced by Peter Brook (in English, 25 min.)

*Akropolis*, b&w, 60 min, in Polish. Introduced by Peter Brook (in English), Arthur Cantor Films, 1968.

*Książę Niezłomny (The Constant Prince)*, b&w, 48 min, in Polish.

*Training at the "Teatr Laboratorium" in Wrocław*, dir. Torgeir Wethal, b&w, 90 min, in English, Odin Teatret Film, Holstebro, 1972.

*Acting Therapy*, dir. S. Sejaud and Pierre Rebotier, colour, 60 min., in French, 1976.

*Divine Horsemen*, dir. Maya Deren, b&w, 52 min., in English, 1954.

*'The Total Actor' - Reminiscences of Ryszard Cieślak (1937-1990)*, dir. Krzysztof Domagalik, colour, 66 min., in Polish and English.

*'Full of Sorcery Sacriligious Rite...' - On Teatr Laboratorium*, dir. Krzysztof Domagalik, commentary Zbigniew Osiński, colour, 60 min., in Polish

and English, 1979.

## **V. Conference Reports**

Conference 'The Energies of the Beginning: The Teatr Laboratorium from Opole to Wrocław, 1959 – 1969', Pontedera, 12-14 October 2001.

'Presentation of Documentary Films from Workcenter', Canterbury, 6-7 January 2005.