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The Importance of Sufi Traditions to Jerzy Grotowski's Practice

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Abstract

Considerable research has emerged on the influences of the late Jerzy Grotowski, the eminent Polish theatre reformer who is famous for his ideas on the Poor Theatre. Among his many contributions to the theatre, his early focus on the primary importance of the actor – as opposed to the trappings of stage design – led him on a path of systematic transcultural experimentation and concentrated actor training using “source techniques” from ancient rituals to achieve “organicity” in his “Holy Actor” and his “Total Act”. There has been some disagreement surrounding the extent of the inspiration he drew from particular traditions, including some Sufi orders, the form of esoteric Islamic mysticism practised in many of the regions he visited in Central Asia, India and Iran. This study provides a number of the Sufi-like elements of Grotowski’s Productions and Post-Productions career phases, in parallel with a thorough examination of primary and secondary sources indicating both direct (Sufi) and indirect (Sufi-inspired) influences from his practices, studies, collaborators, and travels. A number of inferences are made based on historical and geographical clues, due to several factors underlying the incomplete records of his experiences. Findings include a number of robust similarities with Sufism and clear connections with both Sufi and Sufi-inspired people. This thesis contributes to studies on the broad range of cultural and ritual influences Grotowski drew from for his practices by compiling and highlighting their numerous references to Sufism, and it credits Sufism as one of his major sources of inspiration.

Keywords: Grotowski, Sufism, rituals, psychophysical, psycho-physical

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Introduction and Literature Review

“Everything in the Universe is within you. Ask all from yourself.” – Rumi

“You are a mirror reflecting a noble face.
This universe is not outside of you.
Look inside yourself;
Everything that you want,
You are already that.” – Rumi

“You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean, in a drop.” - Rumi

“One access to the creative way consists of discovering in yourself an ancient corporality to which you are bound by a strong ancestral relation. [...] First, the corporality of somebody known, and then more and more distant, the corporality of the unknown one, the ancestor. [...] That is a phenomenon of reminiscence [...] Discoveries are behind us and we must journey back to reach them.” – Grotowski, 1988, pp.378-379

Jerzy Marian Grotowski, born 11 August 1933 in Rzeszow, Poland, and died 14 January 1999 in Pontedera, Italy, was an innovative Polish theatre theorist and director who left a significant mark on experimental modern theatre. Due to his extensive research into a myriad of cultures’ theatrical, religious, spiritual, and ritual practices, much interest has centred on his influences, as people have been very keen to know what could have inspired his ground-breaking, inventive, and often controversial ideas.

Disagreements over the nature of his later work have led people to ask whether it should even be characterised as theatre, or whether it is more like psychotherapy. In the course of his search for fundamental human truths still present in traditional cultures of his day, Grotowski made many discoveries – or as he termed them recollections or remembrances of primordial truths – which he implemented as tools for his actor training. (Grotowski, 1988, p.379) Grotowski became famous early on for his ideas on Poor Theatre, recorded in articles and interviews included in his book

Towards a Poor Theatre (1968), which called for the removal of all visual and auditory distractions to allow for an intense focus on the actor, him- or herself. In the course of my own research, I have uncovered another disagreement: whether Sufism played a substantial role in Grotowski's life and work, alongside other spiritual and cultural practices like the voodoo of Haiti and Nigeria, Pentecostalism of Poland, the Huichole rituals of Mexico, and the Baul traditions of West Bengal, to name a few. (Grotowski.net, 2012a)

Western scholars on the life and legacy of Grotowski have given insufficient credit to the extent to which elements of Islamic mysticism may have been an important template for his work. Indeed, several academics who have studied Grotowski's theatre and post-theatre phases of research explicitly downplay Sufism's potential significance to his theories and practical work. While some do acknowledge isolated instances of Sufism's impact on Grotowski's research, no one has assembled all of the jigsaw puzzle pieces to put together a bigger picture that would suggest certain aspects of Sufi beliefs and rituals may have substantially influenced his experimental activities.

It is not appropriate or accurate to allege that Western scholars have any inherent bias against Islam that prevents them from seeing the profound role a specific spiritually-based cultural phenomenon quite possibly played in all the phases of Grotowski's work; rather, researchers are oftentimes subject to personal predilections due to their familiarity with the subject matter. Furthermore, most writers on Grotowski's life and work have not been positioned to launch an extensive investigation into the key research variables that suggest there are remarkable parallels between elements of Sufism and Grotowski's research.

The privilege of being an academic means that one has the time and resources to devote to following a line of inquiry that follows one's personal interests. In my case, I seem to have stumbled upon this topic through a combination of luck, circumstances, and fortunate access to resources. Under the guidance of my open-minded and expert PhD advisor, I initially undertook to learn about the impact Grotowski's work has had on theatre in my native country of Jordan. My theatre contacts

there helped me shift perspective and turn the question around to ask about the impact the Muslim world had on Grotowski. Unlike previous writers on Grotowski, I was in the perfect position to both see the potential for this research topic and to devote the time to learning about it. Whereas other writers on Grotowski saw Sufism as one small factor in his work, I suspected that it was only small because nobody had taken the time to elaborate on it. In a personal email correspondence wherein my advisor sought input on my thesis from an esteemed authority on Grotowski's life's work, Zbigniew Osinski, the latter admitted to not knowing enough about Sufism to be able to comment. This news helped confirm my belief that most writers on Grotowski have a near-blind spot with respect to this research topic due to their limited knowledge of Sufism. While a few authors have given some credit to Sufism's impact on Grotowski's work, I have come to think that the impact is greater than they would have us believe.

American theatre scholars and professors, Lisa Wolford and Richard Schechner, editors of *The Grotowski Sourcebook* (1997), tell us of Grotowski's connection to Sufism. Wolford acknowledges that Sufism impacted Grotowski and gives us an insightful explanation of Grotowski's captivation with the East, bringing to light the East/West dichotomy that Edward Said expounded on in his seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978), wherein he argues that the East represents ascension and the West epitomizes decline and demise. (Wolford, 1996a)

Likely Sufi parallels with Grotowski's work are even more compelling when considering the Sufi concept of the Orient. In *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism* (1971), Henry Corbin interprets the Sufi concept of the "suprasensory, mystical Orient, the place of the Origin and of the Return [...] at the heavenly pole" as an eighth dimension, a vertical one unlike the seven horizontal dimensions, and he tells us that "The Orient sought by the mystic, the Orient that cannot be located on our maps, is in the direction of the north, beyond the north. Only an ascensional progress can lead toward this cosmic north chosen as a point of orientation" (Corbin, 1971, p.2). Grotowski's interest in the Orient of the East is described by Wolford in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, and as I describe later in chapter

three, his work also reflects an interest in the Orient of the “cosmic north” in topics such as ascension and “vertical energy” (Slowiak and Cuesta, 2007, p.116).

Schechner writes that Sufism was “another strong presence within the Grotowski-body (not his own so much as those he has trained most intently: [Zbigniew] Cynkutis, [Ryszard] Cieslak, [Thomas] Richards). If Sufism (and all it refers to and synthesizes) is a key ingredient in Grotowski's work, his way of working is Hasidic” (Schechner, 1996b, p.483). Here Schechner seems to distance Grotowski himself from Sufism and allege that any Sufi influence on Grotowski was via his close collaborators: Cynkutis¹, Cieslak², and Richards³. Even if Sufism was only “another strong presence” in these three collaborators’ work, not in Grotowski’s own work, they were so close to him that it is likely that Sufism did influence Grotowski and his work in this way and in others.

British theatre director Peter Brook, who wrote the preface to Grotowski’s seminal work on the deconstruction of traditional theatrical performance conventions and actor training techniques, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968), also drew a parallel between Grotowski’s research and Sufism. “Brook, a Gurdjievan of the highest rank”, a self-professed follower of the Sufi-inspired spiritualist, George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, once stated while examining Grotowski’s work that it resembled Gurdjieff’s teachings. (Schechner, 1996b, p.478)

Ludwik Flaszen, a Polish theatre critic who became an authority on Grotowski’s earliest influences and ideas and even coined the phrase “poor theatre” in 1962, met Grotowski in 1959 when they co-created the Theatre of 13 Rows, following which they then developed what is described as a “relationship between an artist and an intellectual, a director and a theatre critic” (Grotowski.net,

¹ Zbigniew Cynkutis (1938–1987) was a Polish actor and director who at one point “became

² Ryszard Cieslak (1937-1990), who “is considered Grotowski’s model actor and indeed personified Grotowski’s creative approach to actors”, met Grotowski in Krakow and became employed at the Theatre of 13 Rows in Opole in 1961 until its dissolution in 1984. (Grotowski.net, 2012d, n.p.)

³ Thomas Richards (b. 1962), who met Cieslak at Objective Drama workshops while an undergraduate at Yale, also worked with Grotowski directly on *Main Action* in 1985 and the next year moved to Italy where “in a relatively short time [he] came to be considered [Grotowski’s] ‘essential collaborator’” and later “Grotowski’s successor and artistic heir” who “took over as director of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards” following Grotowski’s death in 1999. (Grotowski.net, 2012e, n.p.)

2012m, n.p.). As I discuss later in chapter two, *Ancient Traditional Ritual and Thought in Grotowski's Work*, Flaszen reflected on Grotowski in a 2007 interview on *Poor Theatre*, where he described Grotowski's ideas on self-transformation as being “somehow connected to [G. I.] Gurdjieff (sic), and so on” (Flaszen, 2007, n.p.).

Gurdjieff (1866—1949) was a Sufi-inspired Armenian Christian mystic whose work resembles Grotowski's in many ways; I describe him in further detail in chapter one under *Cultural climate*, and later in this thesis in chapter five: *Grotowski and Gurdjieff*. Because Flaszen was a close associate of Grotowski's and an early authority on him, his comparison of some of Grotowski's ideas to Gurdjieff's is of noteworthy significance, therefore I will revisit this association again later in the context of other similarities between Grotowski, Gurdjieff, and Sufism.

Flaszen's observation of Grotowski's work is also significant because it was a statement made about Grotowski's period of *Productions*. We see progressively stronger indications of Sufism's potential presence during Grotowski's post-theatre phases of research, as indicated throughout this thesis. However, Flaszen's mention of Gurdjieff, a well-known Sufi inspired spiritualist, in the context of Grotowski's *Theatre of Productions*, provides us with the earliest known view of a Sufi-based connection to elements of Grotowski's work.

These four writers on theatre, Schechner, Wolford, Brook, and Flaszen, knew Grotowski personally, wrote or spoke of his connections with Sufi concepts, and have authored and edited books and articles on the man, but none has published anything solely dedicated to his interest in and encounters with Sufism. I am the first to compile all of the indications of Sufism's impact on Grotowski, and do so with certainty that Sufism is more than just “another strong presence” or “key ingredient” in Grotowski's work. During the course of my investigation, I have compiled convincing evidence to support my assertion that Grotowski's work with the human body in all his phases of research resembles key elements of Sufi principles and practices.

Not everybody will agree with my certitude of the weight of Sufi influence on Grotowski. The emphasis I place on Sufi influences has already been questioned by several people, including the prominent scholar and writer, Richard Schechner, who I interviewed for this thesis in 2011; Osinski, as I mentioned above; and researchers and librarians I spoke with personally at the Grotowski Institute in Wroclaw, Poland, in 2014. This Institute, which “serves as a kind of vehicle that facilitates work on oneself”, exists in its current version as “an institution which combines artistic and scholarly research projects that correspond to the challenges laid down by Jerzy Grotowski’s creative practice” (The Grotowski Institute: Principles, n.d., n.p.). In 2006, it was renamed and expanded from its predecessor, the Centre for Study of Jerzy Grotowski’s Work and for Cultural and Theatrical Research, founded in 1989, thus, “The Grotowski Institute continues the lines of work run by the Grotowski Centre, whilst placing more emphasis on education, promotion, producing and publishing” (The Grotowski Institute: Principles, n.d., n.p.).

I visited the Grotowski Institute in Wroclaw, both to increase my knowledge of Grotowski more generally, and as part of my targeted research for this thesis to access resources and experts on his connections to Sufism. I was surprised, but not deterred, to learn that my thesis was met with skepticism by the experts at the Grotowski Institute, just as by Schechner and Osinski. Like others, the aforementioned skeptics of my thesis are aware of periodic and sporadic references to Sufism by Grotowski himself and his colleagues, contemporaries, and biographers, but perhaps Sufism was not “on their radar”, so to speak, as it has been on mine, so they did not see this overarching theme as clearly as I did.

Even though I was born and raised as a Muslim in a Middle Eastern country, I, myself, had to expend great effort to learn about Sufism in order to be able to recognize its evident reflection in Grotowski’s practice, as Sufism is largely misunderstood and stigmatized by mainstream Muslims who largely consider Sufis to be blasphemers who contradict several precepts in the Qur’an,

especially with their attempts to meet Allah (SWT⁴) (God) while still alive. This is in direct conflict with mainstream Muslims' belief that one can only meet Allah (SWT) in Heaven. All the same, my cultural background and familiarity with the Qur'an undoubtedly gave me a relatively closer view of Sufism, the first step in identifying its basis in Grotowski's work.

Again, as any responsible scholar will admit and attempt to defend, all researchers bring their own biases to their work; I merely suggest that my aforementioned biases might be considered advantageous, whereby they grant me an additional window into Grotowski's work that is not easily accessible to Western non-Muslim scholars. Of course the reverse is also possible, that my background predisposes me to overestimating Sufism's impact on Grotowski's work. My undertaking in this thesis is to assert that Grotowski drew upon Sufism, or Sufi-inspired individuals, as a model for key components in his Theatre of Productions (1957~59-1969), Paratheatre (1969-1978), Theatre of Sources (~1976-1982), Objective Drama (1983-1986~92), and Art as Vehicle (1986~1992-) phases of research.

Theatre of Productions (Theatre) (1957-1969)

The link between certain Eastern principles and practices and Grotowski's work appears to be evident beginning with his work as a theatre director. During his period of theatrical productions, which spanned over ten years near the very beginning of his career, he crafted a dramaturgy that would provide for intensely direct emotional and psychological interaction between the spectator and the actor. In a commentary on Grotowski's work as artistic director of the Theatre of 13 Rows (1959-1965), Krystyna Konarska-Losiowa describes the "indispensable part" that spectators play in "the drama that is being acted", and she acknowledges the actors' undertaking of "Psychoanalytic therapy and the complete control of one's physical capabilities [...] [with] unceasing toil", in

⁴ Islamic practice dictates that every written or spoken mention of Allah (SWT) (God) be followed immediately by the words "Subhana Wa Ta'Allah", abbreviated to SWT, and which translates to "The Most Glorified/High".

response to “Superficial humanists [who] are outraged at the cruelty of this theatre [...] [and who] do not understand what belongs to the wisdom of the Far East: that the good spirits, in order to effectively battle the demons, must sometimes borrow their monstrous masks” (1965, in Osinski, 1986, p.89). In Osinski’s words, she “underscored the fact that this understanding of the aims of theatre is closer to the traditions of the Far East than to the traditions of Western culture” (1986, p.89). On both points, i.e. the creation of a communal experience wherein spectators are “part of the drama” and the development of actors’ seemingly extreme “psychoanalytic” and physical measures, Grotowski’s work in this stage introduced Far Eastern methods and concepts that are similar to Sufism and that exemplify his concept of what he called the “total act”.

In the chapter of his book *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968) titled “Methodical Exploration” Grotowski describes what he means by “total act”:

It is a question of the very essence of the actor's calling, of a reaction on his part allowing him to reveal one after the other the different layers of his personality, from the biological-instinctive source via the channel of consciousness and thought, to that summit which is so difficult to define and in which all becomes unity. This act of the total unveiling of one's being becomes a gift of the self which borders on the transgression of barriers and love. I call this a total act. If the actor performs in such a way, he becomes a kind of provocation for the spectator. (Grotowski, 1968, p.131)

The total act is when the performer achieves a kind of creative expression that is unimpeded by mental and emotional associations that prevent the flow of organic impulses. This can only be achieved, according to Grotowski, through the “annihilation” of one’s ego, which stands in the way of this process of organicity. This idea is similar to the Sufi concept of renunciation, in which a person must rid themselves of ego-driven actions and reactions to achieve a spiritual state of transformation.

For Grotowski, the process of “annihilation”, which parallels the Sufi idea of renunciation, begins with employing a set of psycho-physical actor training exercises which are intended to remove the “blocks” or resistance that negate organic responses. In a similar way, Sufis, Muslim mystics who strive for “the ecstatic experience of union with the divine”, use specific psycho-physical practices within their rituals to achieve spontaneous moments of illumination. (Pellegrino, 2017, n.p.) Additionally, in discussing his exercises, Grotowski uses such phrases as “an elevated spiritual state” and “spiritual process” to describe the dynamics of the inner techniques of his exercise methods. (Grotowski, 1968a, p.17) By definition, this reasoning is quite in line with ancient traditional ritual psycho-physical exercises for spiritual purposes. Also, as a result of this psycho-physical process of organicity, there is a type of concentration that occurs in the performance itself that has a “trance-like quality”, which is also a central component of Sufi psycho-physical activity.

Archetypes and myths

Early in the development of his ideas on poor theatre and in his Laboratory Theatre productions, Grotowski discovered the utility of archetypes to build rituals upon. In Grotowski’s words, he felt that archetypes, or myths, or whatever term in reference to “the collective representation or the primitive thoughts”, were key to “[...] establish[ing] what could be the base of the ritual” (Grotowski, 1968b, p.138). Richie reiterates the connection between archetypes and rituals: “The ritual, in ordinary definition, is the repetition of an archetypal act. It is, in itself, a collective convention and its re-enactment has a social purpose” (n.d., p.144). *The Cambridge English Dictionary* defines archetype as “a typical example of something, or the original model of something from which others are copied”, which closely mirrors Grotowski’s definition inasmuch as “collective representations” are “typical example[s]” and “primitive thoughts” are “the original model”.

Another term Grotowski used often was myth, defined by *The Cambridge English Dictionary* as “an ancient story or set of stories, especially explaining the early history of a group of people or

about natural events and facts”. In the above quote from Grotowski, he used the terms myth and archetype interchangeably. Both concepts will be developed further in chapter two on specific ancient rituals Grotowski used in the Theatre of Productions phase.

Post-Productions (Post-Theatre) (1969-)

Paratheatre (1969-1978)

After 1969, Grotowski’s research no longer involved working on an actor-spectator relationship. His work took on the quality of a Sufi dervish: the performance of dance or activity not for the benefit of an audience, but rather the transformation of the “actor”. While spectators may enjoy watching the ritualistic or ritual-based process of psycho-physical activity, Grotowski cared more about the actor’s ability to access what he called fundamental truths at their core. Similarly, Mawlana Jalal al-din Rumi (1207-1273), the world’s preeminent Sufi Muslim writer of Islamic mystical poetry, interpreted the Qur’an by authoring many *ghazals*, or Persian poems, on the topic of the source of truth, which he believed exists within every individual. Through disciplined mental and physical activities, the Sufi and Grotowski’s actor shed cerebral blocks to achieve an intuitive state where their actions are guided by instinct and impulse. These resemblances are not merely metaphorical; rather several concrete similarities are evident.

Schechner traces the earliest appearance of Sufi aspects to Grotowski’s Paratheatre work in the late 1970s, coinciding with the transition to his next stage, Theatre of Sources.

During the late 1970s, Paratheatre continued to develop new aspects, even as Theatre of Sources was preparing to replace it. Some of the later paratheatrical events, *Vigil* (1976-77), *The Mountain of Flame* (1977), and *Tree of People* (1979), already took on a different tack. These were participatory events, but their focus began to shift from ‘meetings’ and face-to-face encounters to attempting to uncover what was abiding, archetypal, old: the ‘sources’ of performativity. Movements affined to Sufi dancing began to appear; song and chanting augmented the movements. (Schechner, 1996a, p.212)

Theatre of Sources (1976-1982)

After his Paratheatre work, Grotowski's next phase of research, Theatre of Sources, focused on research that investigated traditional ritual techniques of various cultures. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing*, Christopher Innes and Maria Shevtsova name Sufism as one of the source techniques Grotowski looked to in his Theatre of Sources phase from 1976-82, alongside Shamanism, Haitian voodoo, and yogic practices such as those of the yogi-bards of Bengal, India. (2013, p.234)

Ronald L. Grimes, one participant in the Theatre of Sources activities in Poland during the summer of 1980, wrote about his experiences with Grotowski's activities. He attests that

Grotowski does not encourage the importation of techniques, especially those imbedded in long, rich cultural traditions. Rather staff persons coming from those traditions are encouraged to find some new action, which is then tested for its shareability with others. (Grimes, 1981, p.273)

Grotowski was interested in the discrete elements of techniques, the specific actions, which could be useful to and shareable with others. Therefore, scholars have to look closely to find hints of inspiration reflected in Grotowski's work. According to Grimes,

Grotowski is not interested in imitating or syncretizing archaic disciplines but in finding simple actions to carry on the 'work with oneself,' the 'opus-process.' Grotowski refers to his project as a 'journey to the East,' but 'East' does not mean that he intends to borrow either Asian or so-called 'primitive' mystical techniques. It means rather that he wants to find out how any action begins. East is the direction of sunrise, of any culturally originative zone. (Grimes, 1981, pp.271-272)

In speaking of the East as a metaphor, Grimes veers away from literal language, insisting that Grotowski didn't search for techniques to "imitate or syncretize", instead he looked to a variety of sources for general inspiration. However, it appears that concrete similarities can be found between Grotowski's work and Eastern traditions (especially in Art as Vehicle). Whereas Grimes explicitly

denies that Grotowski imitated “archaic disciplines” in the Theatre of Sources phase, Grotowski himself named Sufi Dervishes as one example of a source in Theatre of Sources:

Many people in the West today are speaking about some of the Sufi techniques. When we focus that way, it is more or less clear what exactly we are talking about. What we are saying here is that there are ‘source’ techniques known in our part of the world as Dervish techniques. (Grotowski, 1980, p.258)

On the next page of the book Grotowski goes on to list other examples of “techniques of sources” found in Zen Buddhism and martial arts, but clarifies that he is only interested in those that lead to action:

Therefore, the techniques that interest us have two aspects: first, they are dramatic, and second, in the human way, they are ecological. Dramatic means related to the organism in action, to the drive, to the organicity; we can say they are performative. 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 (sic) 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. (Grotowski, 1980, p.259)

The point that Grimes makes is to discourage a superficial reading of Grotowski’s source techniques, because they were only the tools he sought, paradoxically, to “untrain” his actors, in order to reveal the source underlying everything. Grotowski sought not only to transcend the confines of orthodox religions, but to transcend every extant spiritual discipline, a quality he extolled in real and literary characters he labeled *yurodivy* (also spelled *yorodiviy* or *yurodiviy*, from the Russian word for a “holy fool” “who in our cultural context would probably be judged as a simpleton or even a crazy person” [Grotowski, 1980, p.254]):

I dedicated a thread of life to contact with such persons, direct contact, and without hiding that it was a matter of the conquest of knowledge, and not in some Romanesque way, like in the beautiful novels, but through real confrontation, when an actual transmission is received or stolen – as almost every true teacher is looking to be robbed by somebody of the next generation. (Grotowski, 1980, pp.255-256)

Like the *yurodivy* characters he sought out, Grotowski refused to be confined by convention or culture and wanted to dig deeper.

In ‘The Art of the Beginner,’ Grotowski [...] sketches [his] understanding of the process of reaching below the ‘techniques of sources’ - that is, spiritual disciplines such as zazen, yoga, Sufi dancing or shamanic healing - to the ‘sources of the techniques of sources.’ By facilitating an interaction among representatives of old and young culture, he aims to incubate a sensibility nourished at the well from which springs meditation, celebration, and healing. He is searching for an original, precultural sense of beginning. This source or beginning is present here and now, not hidden away in some primitive culture. It is no lost golden age but is a capacity for a perpetual sense of discovery. (Grimes, 1981, pp.271-272)

In other words, Grotowski was in search of the Source (capital “S”) of sources. Any resemblance between his Theatre of Sources techniques and the cultural and spiritual disciplines he gathered inspiration from were perhaps coincidental, as Grotowski’s actor training techniques were the unadulterated, pure forms of self-discipline, not those spiritual practices coloured by culture.

Grotowski admitted plainly that his goal was to find the Source. He did not think that any culture held this fundamental truth in its pure original form, therefore he gathered source techniques from all of them, or those, mainly Eastern ones, that most closely resembled the Source. The fact that so many of Grotowski’s hand-picked techniques reproduce or approximate Sufi rituals indicates that Sufism held a special significance for Grotowski.

To put Grimes' distinction into practical terms, he writes of his first-hand encounter with actions he participated in during the Theatre of Sources, in the summer of 1980 in Poland. One such activity involved whirling, but a kind qualitatively different from that employed by the Sufi dervishes:

Whirling was another of the actions. We whirled at a crossroads in the forest. Some fell, some vomited, some got up again. We whirled in one spot. We whirled while running in the woods. Sometimes we whirled in one direction; at other times we alternated directions. We had to attend to both centrifugal and centripetal forces while whirling and running in a group. Clinging with one's eyes or attention had disastrous consequences. The whirling was not of the formal Sufi kind. It was more extroverted, rougher, exploratory. (Grimes, 1981, p.273)

This example illustrates how Grotowski urged his participants to "put their own spin" on the techniques they drew from. So their whirling was less refined than the "formal Sufi kind". Again, Grotowski was such a *yurodivy* that he dissected, rearranged, and adjusted even the nonconformists' traditions. Sufis were not rebellious enough for Grotowski, the ultimate *yurodivy*, the biggest rebel of all of them. At the same time, Grotowski was sensible enough to know not to start from scratch or reinvent the wheel, which is why he knew to look for and study certain traditions that held facsimile remnants of the original Source.

Objective Drama (1983-1986)

In his next phase of research, Objective Drama, Grotowski continued to explore elements of ancient rituals that, like his Theatre of Sources work, brought together people from multiple cultures who were experts in traditional forms of dancing, singing, and rhythmic movements. Grotowski sought to investigate how certain elements from each of these ancient practices, within a performance structure, could affect the internal energy of participants. The Objective Drama Project was "a transitional project, a practical passageway between the Theatre of Sources and Art as a

vehicle” wherein Grotowski recruited Traditional Practitioners and Technical Specialists from different countries (e.g., Bali, Korea, China, Colombia, Haiti, Japan, Poland, and the U.S.) to train practitioners in various elements of ritual arts (e.g., Voodoo songs and dances, Buddhist meditation, Karate, and Sufi Mevelvi practices). (Grotowski.net, 2012f, n.p.)

Grotowski started his Objective Drama work while a visiting professor at Columbia University but the main seat of the Objective Drama program was at the University of California at Irvine (UCI), which offered him a full professorship (1983-84 and 1984-85, and several more summers) and substantial resources, including “exclusive access to a building that was prepared according to his instructions on the edge of the campus together with a specially-constructed wooden yurt” (Grotowski.net, 2012f, n.p.). According to I Wayan Lendra, one of the technical specialists on Objective Drama, “The project took place [...] in an isolated area of rolling hills populated only with horses, cattle, and field rabbits [...] The hills behind our studios were as much a part of the workspace as the buildings, and much of our group work took place outdoors” (Lendra, 1991, p.313).

After moving to Italy in 1986, Grotowski “visited California just once a year (usually in May), in order to advise his assistants on their activities” (Grotowski.net, 2012f, n.p.). Lisa Wolford witnessed several of these activities at Grotowski’s University of California at Irvine work space during the Objective Drama phase. In one example she writes,

Certain ancient songs were explored simultaneously by different participants (in one example, an American man working with a Gregorian chant juxtaposed his memory action to that of 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 to some sort of harmony between them. (Wolford, 1997a, p.287)

Among the various collaborators in this phase of research, Iranian director and actor Massoud Saidpour contributed an extensive amount of work to Grotowski’s Objective Drama project. Saidpour, an expert in Persian music and mystical writings, worked on the “adaptation and

performance of traditional Sufi texts” throughout much of the Objective Drama research period. (Wolford, 1996c, p.168)

Equally important to Sufism’s presence in the Objective Drama research, there are a specific set of physical exercises which he began to develop earlier in Theatre of Sources (Wolford, 1997a, p.287), that both practically and theoretically parallel the Sufi-inspired spiritualist G. I. Gurdjieff’s work, and which also resemble Balinese dance as we will see in chapter two: Ancient Traditional Ritual and Thought. In the case of the former, Grotowski’s Motions exercises are characteristically similar in form and intent to those of Gurdjieff’s Movements. The theoretical foundations for Grotowski’s use of Motions, such as the notion of developing an exercise routine that would allow one to act and react in a more spontaneous manner, is closely aligned with Gurdjieff’s idea of the “sleep” vs. “waking” states of consciousness. These concepts and parallels will be discussed in greater depth in later chapters, in particular the final one on Gurdjieff.

Art as Vehicle (1986-)

In 1986 Grotowski moved to Pontedera, Italy, and established the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski, which he renamed the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in 1996. Thus began his final phase of research, Art as Vehicle, which was briefly known early on as the Ritual Arts period and which has continued after his death in 1999 under the supervision of Thomas Richards. (Grotowski.net, 2012g) This phase of work coincided with activities at the Workcenter of Pontedera, Italy, but has only involved that “work which directly deals with the process of energy transformation from ‘heavy but organic energies (linked to the forces of life, to instincts, to sensuality) [...] to a level of energy more subtle’” (Grotowski, in Wolford, 1997b, p.368).

Having previously discovered the wisdom of the ritual arts, he employed time-tested techniques of music, dance, and chanting to achieve the transformation of the inner mind and the outer body during Art as Vehicle. He found that listening to vibratory ritual songs allows the performer to move with a fluid tempo-rhythm. Richards describes songs as “tools for the human

being to make a work on himself. They can become tools that help the organism in a process of what we can call a transformation of energy” (Richards, 1996, p.436). With extreme precision, participants develop mastery of the details of the songs, including:

[...] the melodies, the tempo-rhythms, the sonic vibrations, [...] the syllables of the words precisely, their pronunciation. To be able to sing in tune [...] then we look for them to discover what the song can do to them as they sing, and of course, after, there is the whole question of developing the performing structure, the line of actions, the elements of acting. (Richards, 1996, p.445)

While Richards emphasises the use of songs for “inner action” and energy transformation, other tools of Art as Vehicle work include precise chanting and physical movements. Chanting, or repeating traditional mantras or chants with emphasis on certain sounds, prepares the performer to undertake corresponding physical actions, as those certain sounds have a special quality that guides the body’s movements. Whirling as the Dervishes do produces precise impulses that guide one’s movements. (Richards, 2008, p.9) Grotowski also took inspiration from the Bauls of Bengal, India, who practised “a kind of yoga” and used:

[...] songs, [and] they made a work on themselves related to something ‘inner.’ [...] the Bauls would do something that was like performing, but it's not just that they were doing theatre - they did have some precise doings with these songs, some way of behavior with these songs, which was artistically on a high level - but what they were doing really was related to the work with their teacher, to this something ‘inner.’ (Richards, 1996, p.447)

The example of the Bauls illustrates the inextricable link between auditory, vocal, and physical components of the exercises conducted at the Workcenter, with the intended result of a change to one’s “something ‘inner’”.

Wolford quotes Grotowski’s definition of Art as Vehicle as work which

[...] focuses on 'actions related to very ancient songs which traditionally served ritual purposes, and so can have a direct impact on - so to say - the head, the heart and the body of the doers, songs which can allow the passage from a vital energy to a more subtle one'. (Wolford, 1997b, p.368)

Also in her chapter titled "Introduction: Art as vehicle" in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, she tells us that Grotowski set up Art as Vehicle as a concept on the other extreme end of a continuum ("chain") in contrast to Art as presentation. (1997b, p.368) In another text, she clarifies that, while these are quite standardized and communal activities, the internal work is personalized to the individual undergoing the energy transformation. (1996c, p.144) Through the use of ritual arts, Grotowski sought to develop a system of strategic and repeatable actions, not improvised ones, which could be used to achieve a state of performance, action or doing, with the purpose of rediscovering an essential truth.

In a time of challenge appears the rhythmization of human impulses. 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. In this sense, *Performer* is *pontifex*, maker of bridges.

Essence: etymologically, it's a question of being, of *be-ing*. Essence interests me because nothing in it is sociological. It is what you did not receive from others, what did not come from outside, what is not learned. [...]

That is a phenomenon of reminiscence, as if you recall *Performer* of the primal ritual. Each time I discover something, I have the feeling it is what I recall. Discoveries are behind us and we must journey back to reach them. With the breakthrough - as in the

return of an exile - can one touch something which is no longer linked to beginnings
but - if I dare say - *to the beginning?* I believe so. (Grotowski, 1988, pp.377-379)

Here Grotowski articulates a search for a profound truth or essence, which he ties to the active verb “*be-ing*”, denoting action, and he references “the primal ritual” as a means of reminiscence, discovering what was forgotten through actions. As I describe later in chapters, this resembles a major concept in Sufism, wherein it’s believed that all truth lies within each person, as we see in the quote by Rumi: “Everything in the Universe is within you. Ask all from yourself” (Heath, 2013, p.171). Even mainstream Islam’s labeling of “reverts” as opposed to “converts” to Islam reflects this concept of “reminiscence” in the above quote by Grotowski. Muslims believe that every human is born as a Muslim, and so people who were raised in other religions and “come back to” the one true religion, Islam, should be called “reverts”, not “converts”, to emphasize this rediscovery of their original state. (Knight, 2013, p.83) Grotowski’s notion of “reminiscence” in the above block quote also indicates the Sufi and Islamic notion of rediscovery of and return to one’s original state or essence.

As an introduction and review of the literature, giving a brief overview of the five phases of Grotowski’s work, I have begun to introduce chronologically the aspects of his work that most closely resemble elements of Sufism. First, his Theatre of Productions work resembled elements of Sufism with its emphasis on a communal experience with an “indispensible role” assigned to spectators; the development of actors’ seemingly extreme “psychoanalytic” and physical measures; and the elimination of “blocks” to “organicity” akin to the Sufi’s “annihilation” of the ego. Then, we saw his Paratheatre stage with its emphasis on the transformation of the “actor/doer” through continued work on shedding of “blocks” to achieve the “total act”, and with the use of “Movements affined to Sufi dancing” (Schechner, 1996a, p.212). In Theatre of Sources, more clearly identifiable Sufi techniques began to appear. Objective Drama saw the incorporation of ancient practices with specialist trainers including Massoud Saidpour, who worked on the “adaptation and performance of

traditional Sufi texts” (Wolford, 1996c, p.168), and the appearance of Sufi-inspired Gurdjieviaan elements. Finally, we saw the ongoing work Grotowski initiated in *Art as Vehicle* to find the essence within the actor/doer, using verticality and transformation of energy from coarse to fine forms. This chronological introduction to Grotowski’s work shows a deepening approach to actor training, from early efforts to involve and impact audience members through experimentation with the actor-spectator relationship, to a later focus exclusively on the actor using ancient ritual arts, including Sufi practices.

List of Key Concepts in the Discussion on the Parallels between Sufism and Grotowski

Naming the units of analysis in this undertaking will be useful in clarifying the research question and key topics amidst the expansive body of knowledge and numerous other subjects that overlap any comprehensive study of Grotowski’s life and research. Below, I will briefly summarize the specific concepts I address in this thesis, including Gurdjieff; Verticality; Trance/ “organicity”/ “inner action”/ “spontaneous impulses”; Vocalisation; Dance; Music/traditional songs; and Mantra.

Gurdjieff

The Armenian spiritualist G. I. Gurdjieff was a Sufi-inspired mystic who revived ancient philosophies and teachings of the East and West, and who found followers in many 20th century Western artists and writers. Schechner writes that Gurdjieff was “a spiritual leader Grotowski says was only ‘somewhat important’ to him, but in whose life and practices I find many compelling parallels” (Schechner, 1996b, p.471). Several comparisons and links have been presented by Richard Schechner and Michel de Salzman to explain the resemblances between Grotowski and Gurdjieff, including evidence to suggest that Grotowski had read, adapted and adopted Gurdjieff’s works. For example, Gurdjieff and Grotowski both saw sacred dance and movement as central to the transmission of oral tradition, and they both maintained tight-knit inner circles with whom they employed techniques such as utterances, songs, and intimate encounters. They also went to many of the same places, including “interior central Asia, China, India, Tibet – threading the ancient silk-

route into areas where Sufis danced, where Buddhism, Lamaism, Hinduism, and Islam feed each other” (Schechner, 1996b, pp.478-479).

Grotowski and Gurdjieff both believed that intense physical and mental exertion was necessary to unlock one’s inner impulses and enable spiritual transformation, a concept found in Grotowski’s “rigidly structured” Motions (Wolford, 1996c, p.44; also see Richards, 2008) and plastiques exercises, Gurdjieff’s Movements (Slowiak and Cuesta, 2007), and Sufism’s *jihad* (effort toward achieving spiritual union with God) (Nasr, 1972). For Gurdjieff, spiritual transformation occurs when one ascends a ladder, starting at a low, coarse, dense energy level and rising to a high, fine, and light energy. (Needleman, 1996; Nascimento, 2008)

Triangulating Sufism with “both Gs”, in Schechner’s words (1996b, p.479), reveals some striking similarities. We find in the triad of Sufism, Gurdjieff and Grotowski, very similar concepts albeit with different labels, namely with respect to the concepts of verticality, trance, vocalisation, dance, music, and mantra. For Gurdjieff, we know the arrow in our triangle points directly from Sufism; but to diagram the influences on Grotowski, sometimes the arrow comes directly from Sufism, and at other times it comes through his direct or indirect connections to Gurdjieff. In chapter five, titled “Grotowski and Gurdjieff”, I discuss the strong evidence from multiple sources (e.g., Brook, Michel de Salzman, Flaszen, Khetaguri, Schechner, and Wolford) that say he was influenced by Gurdjieff’s ideas either directly or indirectly through close collaborators such as Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba, and dance teacher Jeanne de Salzman, as early as his Theatre of Productions work. The parallels among Sufism, Gurdjieff, and Grotowski are so striking that I devote that entire chapter to this topic at the end of my thesis, just after an entire chapter on Sufism which describes the root doctrines and practices from Sufism that are reflected in Gurdjieff’s and Grotowski’s works. In other words, just as other writers have established strong parallels between the Sufi-inspired mystic, Gurdjieff, and Grotowski, my discussion of the Sufi influences on Grotowski would be incomplete without understanding Sufism’s prominent role in the works of “both Gs” (Schechner, 1996b, p.479)

because as I explain in chapter five, Gurdjieff's work was a conduit for the Sufism-Grotowski connection.

Transformation

The concept of transformation (also self-transformation or energy transformation) is of particular importance in Sufism and other esoteric traditions explored by Grotowski and Gurdjieff. Ludwik Flaszen connects Grotowski's concept of re-birth and self-transformation to Gurdjieff. (2007) Thomas Richards writes of Grotowski's use of ancient ritualistic songs for their ability to initiate an "interior process of energy transformation" to elevate performance craft. (2008) Lisa Wolford relates that Grotowski's central aim of the Art as Vehicle phase was to work on "the process of energy transformation from 'heavy but organic energies [...] to a level of energy more subtle'", and that he used ritual songs to transform "the body, the heart and the head of the doers" (1996e, p.17 and p.139). Grotowski's focus on actor development in his post-production phases involved training that would enable his practitioners or doers to achieve "verticality" and "organicity" through a process of transformation/self-transformation/energy transformation.

Verticality

Grotowski identified his work on Art as Vehicle as those activities that work to convert the doer's energy from a grounded, heavy, coarse, organic form to a higher, more subtle, refined energy. (Wolford, 1996c, pp.16-17) Brook and Richards write that the doer's heavy energy originates in the body's "vital pool", and it ascends upwards, changing into a lighter, luminous form of energy, "touching something [...] above the physical frame" (Richards, 2008, p.8). "Verticality", through the transformation of energy in one's inner core, allows the doer to achieve a spontaneous flow of actions and reactions. Gurdjieff's take on verticality is very similar, as he also spoke in terms of ascending a ladder. In Sufism, a similar thing happens when the Sufi goes up to meet God, travelling up seven levels of Heaven to find Him.

Trance/ “organicity”/ “inner action”/ “spontaneous impulses” / “psycho-physical/psychoenergetic”

Through what Peter Brook termed “inner action” (Brook, 2009, p.13), part of the experience of Main Action is that the “doer” achieves organicity whereby his or her bodily movements are directed by an inner flow, a “stream of impulses”, instead of the mind. (Richards, 2008, pp.4-5) This experience of the inner flow of impulses which direct the body has also been reported by “doers” like Thomas Richards (2008); “witnesses” like Lisa Wolford (1996c); and scholars like Kumiega (1985); individuals who paint a picture of “inner action” (Brook, 2009, p.13) as being a type of trance-like state wherein free-flowing movements, “spontaneous impulses”, overtake intentional movements. (Grotowski in Slowiak and Cuesta, 2007, p.92) *The Cambridge Dictionary* defines trance as “a temporary mental condition in which someone is not completely conscious of and/or not in control of himself or herself”. Indeed, the experiences described in “inner action” can be considered a trance-like state, as the individuals reported they were completely focused on the one action, in an experience that Grotowski termed “spontaneous impulses”. The Plastiques and the corporeals exercises are all intended to remove physical and mental “blocks” such as self-consciousness, ego, and concern for self-image, that don’t allow for spontaneous impulses. (See *Towards a Poor Theatre* for Grotowski’s discussion of training exercises to remove mental blocks.) Grotowski’s concept of trance is defined as a state of complete concentration, with complete focus on a specific objective. These concepts also relate to *via negativa*, the process of removing blocks to achieve organicity.

Vocalisation

Sufis promote the verbal, audible invocation of God’s ninety-nine (99) Arabic names aloud. Only those who have practised the longest and attained the closest connection to God should invoke his names silently. They recognize that the spoken voice has a great impact on one’s focus and concentration, whereas silence allows the mind more freedom to wander. Furthermore, Sufi disciples or congregants are considered weaker than their well-trained spiritual leaders in terms of resisting the devil’s influences; therefore they require a stronger, more overt, audible approach than their sheikhs,

who are freer to take a quieter, subtle approach to worship as they are better-trained in concentrating and focusing their attention.

Similarly, Grotowski's training methods employed vocal techniques that help focus the practitioner's attention. He used the vocal resonance of vibratory sounds and ancient songs to impact the doer's "tempo-rhythm" in their mind and body during an action. (Wolford, 1996c; Richards, 2008; Brook, 2008)

Dance

Although some Sufi orders, such as the al-Kadiriahs, do not believe that music and dancing are permissible, for they evoke emotions in the practitioners, most Sufis do employ music and dance in their worship practices, though some do define which body movements are allowed and which are forbidden. The most famous of the Sufi dances, the whirling of the Sufi Dervishes, was incorporated by both Grotowski, as mentioned previously, and Gurdjieff, who wrote a musical titled *The Struggle of the Magicians*, which used whirling sacred dance movements to represent the orbiting of the planets. (Ouspensky, 1949, p.24 of 396) Other clear examples of dervish ritual movements and movements from the Muslim prayer are found in several of Gurdjieff's works. (Lefort, 1966; Moore, 1994; Shirley, 2004)

Music/traditional songs

Traditional vibratory ritual songs were a cornerstone of Grotowski's Art as Vehicle research. They were one of the "concrete techniques" he employed to achieve the transformation of energy from the lower, coarser form to the higher, more refined form. (Wolford, 1996c, p.7) Grotowski sought songs with a "vibratory" quality, in particular traditional Afro-Caribbean songs, whose "sonic vibrations" produce internalized reactions when the "syllables and the melody of these songs begin to touch and activate [...] energy seats in the organism" (Richards, 2008, p.6).

Additional to the Afro-Caribbean songs and dances, Grotowski's Art as Vehicle research included songs and performances of the Bauls in West Bengal, India, a group with a strong connection to Sufi practices and literature from the 1200's with the arrival of Turkish-speaking

immigrants. (Eaton, 1993; Mamoon, 2008) Baul songs contain Sufi words and motifs, such as the “caged bird” featured extensively in the poetry of Jalaluddin Rumi, the Persian Sufi poet. (Bhattacharyya, Douglas, and Slinger, 1993, p.39) Many of the Bauls’ spiritual practices also likely came directly from the Sufis, including “the chanting of God’s name and His praises, known as *sama*”, “the practice of *dhikr*, or remembrance (of God), often accompanied by intoxicating whirling ritual dances [...] and musical compositions, especially the melodies” (Bhattacharyya, Douglas, and Slinger, 1993, p.41). Therefore the Baul influence on Grotowski was another conduit for Sufi melodies, movements, and practices to enter his work. Importantly, the rhythmic movements and vibratory songs are psycho-energetic elements that produce a *tajaly* (trance) leading to *wajdan* (ecstasy), features common to both Baul and Sufi rituals.

Gurdjieff also relied on music, preferring often “real Eastern music”, but as well as American Indian music and Armenian music, he composed operas based on these. (Petsche, 2015, p.28) His Sufi Islamic-inspired compositions and musicals include “Sacred readings from the Koran”, “The Bokharian Dervish Hadjii-Asvatz-Troov”, and “Sayyid No. 1”, whose titles give clear indications of Sufi elements in his work. (Challenger, 2002, p.13) Thomas Alexandrovich de Hartmann (1885-1956) was a Russian composer who transcribed and co-wrote much of the music in Gurdjieff’s movements exercises while a prominent student at Gurdjieff’s Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, including “Rituals of a Sufi Order”. Music was so central to Gurdjieff’s system that he developed an enneagram – a nine-pointed geometric figure within a circle, with one octave assigned to each point – representing everything from the various pitches in a musical scale to the vibrations which compose the universe and a corresponding “law of octaves” based on the Naqshbandi Sufi Dervishes. (Challenger, 2002; Shirley, 2004; Ouspensky, 1949)

Mantra

Wolford acknowledges the function of mantra in producing psycho-physical results in the doer by changing “the tempo-rhythm of the mind”, sometimes stimulating, at other times bringing

calm. (1996, pp.205-206) Grotowski recognized the benefit of employing traditional ritual songs' vibratory traits to solicit specific internalized reactions, "inner actions", bringing about transformation whether or not one understands the words. (Wolford, 1996c, p.208) We find examples of mantras in Sufism, too, whose *dhikr* ("remembrance") and *sama* (elaborate *dhikr* ceremonies) practices employ repetitious, rhythmic, and melodic chanting of words to concentrate on Allah (SWT).

In the arts and humanities, there is often a secular-religious dichotomy that relies on the assumption that humanistic endeavours are purely human works, which produces a corresponding rejection of anything to do with religion. Indeed, Wolford articulates a reticence among researchers and academics in the study of performing arts to use religious terminology.

In my doctoral dissertation (1996), I referred to Art as vehicle as a form of embodied prayer, citing as analogues traditions such as Mevlevi dervish dancing, in which a codified artistic form becomes the visible container for an intention directed elsewhere. Given the volatility of religious terminology and the anxieties to which it gives rise, allow me to instead propose 'dynamic meditation' as a (hopefully) less fraught articulation of the Workcenter's exploration of alternative potentialities of performing arts. (Wolford Wylam, 2008, p.136)

Even scholarly writing is susceptible to the restraints of semantics, which demands the adaptation of language to respond to the "anxieties" of the audience, which includes many readers who have a visceral reaction to the connotations of religious terms; therefore we are left with subjective language and the most palatable terms based on the prevailing status quo at the time of the writing. This then perhaps explains why a review of the literature reveals only sporadic references to Sufi influence on Grotowski's practice.

A closer investigation of the research on Grotowski's work reveals a more prominent role of Sufi and dervish practices than others have shown. As a consequence of this avoidance of religious terminology, perhaps only partial credit has been given to the actual impact of Sufi traditions on Grotowski's practice. A review of the research shows few direct references to Grotowski's encounters with Sufi practitioners, despite the long list of commonalities between Grotowski's practices and Sufi traditions.

In a series of interviews with Michel de Salzman titled "A Kind of Volcano", Grotowski spoke of his need to "develop a new terminology" for his work on ancient songs because of his reluctance to "verbalize" this fluid work; so, in an act to avoid "freezing language" he created an "'intentional' language" (Grotowski, 1991, p.3). Getting Grotowski to pinpoint his influences was difficult in part because of his caution not to limit or reduce his work to narrow terminology, methods, or a belief system.

Grotowski knows that different cultures, at different periods, have different terms for the same system. He finds analogous theories and practices of the upward and downward flow of energy in Gurdjieff, in the theory of chakras, in India, China, and Europe. Still he resists 'naming,' reducing to discourse. (Schechner, 1996b, pp.482-483)

While we bear in mind that writers avoid using religious terminology for the "anxieties" it provokes (Wolford Wylam, 2008, p.136), we must also recognise that Grotowski himself avoided "naming" using cultural discourse. This two-fold influence on the subjective terminology we are analysing points to the potential that the probable full impact of Sufism on Grotowski's work is hidden beneath layers of language.

We need a spotlight directed at Sufism that can see beneath the subjective naming and obfuscating terminology that Grotowski warned us of. My task is solely to shine light on the Sufi

elements of Grotowski's work, which would explain why I am the first to suggest that Sufism had a more significant impact on Grotowski's work than others have acknowledged.

The line between originality and plagiarism is not always clear in art, where ideas are adopted and adapted with varying degrees of credit given to their sources. Many people have questioned who Jerzy Grotowski's influences were, for while he spoke with many about his interactions with the people and cultures he encountered throughout his life, he did not name those that ultimately entered his art and practice. Therefore we are left to deduce his influences by analyzing his travels, interviews, works, and collaborators.

A lover of the spoken word and oral traditions, Grotowski preferred to give interviews rather than write his own articles. He has been described as a disciplined changeling who continuously reinvented himself and absorbed new ideas throughout his lifetime. From the start, his upbringing was unique as he learned to entertain multiple world views at the same time, being raised in a Catholic country (Poland) primarily by a Catholic mother who simultaneously exposed him to Eastern philosophies, planting the seeds for Jerzy's lifelong study of performing arts and search for the true essence of human existence.

As a testament to the widespread curiosity on the life and learning of Grotowski, his foremost biographers, including Richard Schechner, Lisa Wolford, Zbigniew Osinski, and Thomas Richards, have written extensively on the sources of inspiration for Grotowski's innovative and influential ideas. Varying levels of influence have been attributed to Sufism, with the most credit coming from Wolford, Schechner, Osinski, Brook, and indirectly via the conduit of G.I. Gurdjieff, from Michel de Salzman in his 1991 interview with Grotowski, *A Kind of Volcano: An interview with Jerzy Grotowski*. Unequivocally, these biographers have established Grotowski's contact with Sufi practitioners, traditions and rituals through his travels in Sufi regions of India, yet they disagree on the extent to which these Sufi influences permeated Grotowski's practices.

In denying a direct, significant, and obvious influence of Sufism on Grotowski, writers have nearly overlooked the myriad of subtle yet definite ways that Sufism is reflected in Grotowskian tools, techniques, and practices, even those most obvious likenesses during *Art as Vehicle* (1986-). To be sure, nobody has given sufficient credit to the preponderance of Sufi and Sufi-like elements in Grotowski's work that were, not coincidentally, present in every stage of research that coincided with and followed his travels to Afghanistan in 1956, Sufi regions of India in 1969, and Sufi parts of Iran in 1967 and 1970, and his contact with followers of Gurdjieff such as Peter Brook and, according to Levan Khetaguri (2008), Eugenio Barba – specifically *Theatre of Sources* (1976-1982), *Objective Drama* (1982-1986), and *Art as Vehicle* (1986-).

Without question, the large corpus of writings on the mosaic work Grotowski produced over his dynamic career are a testament to his originality. To be sure, it is not possible to “forge” a “simple causal chain [...] to explain [Grotowski's] work or personality” as he was such an avid learner who conducted a lifelong process of integration and iterative research. (Schechner, 1996b, p.489)

This thesis does not suggest that Sufism was *the* dominant source of inspiration for Grotowski, but it aims to give light to the seminal influence of Sufism on the totality of his work, from his formative years when he read ethnographic literature on Sufi regions, to his personal experiences and travels to those same regions in later years. Life's early experiences are like the water, sun, minerals and soil that contribute to the growth of a plant. Just as a scientist can look for physical signs on the plant that point to the quality or presence of certain elements in the plant's growth, so can we look to tangible features in Grotowski's work that indicate important Sufi influences from which his work drew nourishment.

One recurring element in Grotowski's life and work was Sufism, a spiritual discipline that he first witnessed personally as a young man in poor health, travelling through Central Asia to find healing, when he stumbled upon a Sufi master named Abdullah, a seminal moment in 1956 that

would have a significant impact with residual effects seen in his future life and career. (Osinski, 1986) Slowiak and Cuesta write that Abdullah's performance ("a mime 'of the whole world'" (Osinski, 1986, p.18)) recalled imagery of nature that Grotowski read about in his childhood, and together with its ritual aspects (i.e. repetition from generation to generation of storytelling for the purpose of maintaining and transmitting social and religious values), the experience resonated so strongly with him that it culminated in his concept of the "total act" (2007, p.7).

Over a decade before meeting Abdullah, Grotowski was impressed by another Sufi, a solitary Indian hermit he read about at around the tender age of ten, in a book by Paul Brunton, *A Search in Secret India* (1935). Grotowski termed these men and other individuals who "transcend" the bounds of "exclusive religion" as *yurodivy*, a Russian word for "holy fool", citing one Indian who was "behaving in a totally crazy way. His craziness was full of meaning" (Grotowski, 1980, p.255).

Grotowski extolled the qualities of those who can rise above the limitations of religious restraints. Around the time of his discovery of the *yurodivy* on the side of the Arunachala Mountain in India described by Brunton, the approximately-ten-year-old Grotowski recognized the need to dig deeper, to go beyond the individual and his ego and find the source, a process which he describes as traveling up a river to find its source, where perhaps the river itself disappears:

Anyway, from this time on I started to try, practically, to make this investigation: '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' appears. The more this source seems to be approached, the less the 'I' is. It is as if a river would turn and flow towards its source. And in the source, there is no longer a river? (Grotowski, 1980, pp.254-255)

The region that Grotowski visited in the predominately Turkish area of Afghanistan in 1956 is known for its followers of the Naqshbandi Order of Sufism and the Turkish Mawlawi Order of Sufism. Several Islamic and Sufi concepts and practices he encountered in this environment are

reflected in his later works, including psycho-physical movements and *zuhed*, or self-sacrifice and shedding of one's ego. Sufism is the name for the diverse groups categorized under Islamic mysticism. *The Cambridge English Dictionary* defines mysticism as “the belief that there is hidden meaning in life or that each human being can unite with God”. Mystics can follow any religion or no religion.

Because Sufis come from all over the Muslim world, there is great variation among the several groups, which can be found in many geographical locations around Africa, the Middle East, the Near East, and Central Asia. The total number of orders and followers worldwide cannot be known as they are not always tolerated by the Islamic orthodoxy. Some scholars say that Sufi sects exist outside of Islam, but, by definition, Sufism is generally considered to be a part of Islam with its origins in Islamic asceticism and evolution in contact with Christian hermits and influenced by classical philosophies. By tracing the locations Grotowski visited in relation to their local Sufi groups, we find features common to both Sufism and Grotowski's work, including verticality, trance, vocalization, dance, music, and mantra. According to Schechner,

Dervishes, The Movements, Motions, Downstairs Action, Action are linked by the kind of movement used, the sources of that movement, and by purpose and function. Not to reduce Grotowski to Sufism, but to indicate Sufism as another strong presence within the Grotowski-body (not his own so much as those he has trained most intently: Cynkutis, Cieslak, Richards). If Sufism (and all it refers to and synthesizes) is a key ingredient in Grotowski's work, his way of working is Hasidic. To find Sufis, yogins, and other Asian knowers, Grotowski had to travel. (Schechner, 1996b, p.483)

And travel, Grotowski did. The following examination of Grotowski's travels in search of techniques for finding the Source reveals a long list of Sufi landmarks, Sufi practitioners, and Sufi “souvenirs” that he encountered and picked up along the way.

Chapter one, titled Biographical Information and Rebirth of Theatre Rituals covers his personal background, including family life and early influences, higher education, and early travels to Moscow, Central Asia, and Iran, experiences that led him to encounter Sufism. As well, the political climate and cultural climate of Grotowski's youth are presented to help explain his background and better understand his later professional trajectory and his developing ideas. Section two of this first chapter, titled The Ritual and Aesthetic Dimensions of Grotowski's Theatre of Productions, helps to introduce the reader to Grotowski's early work in the theatre before his shift away from performance to a focus on actors' self-transformation.

Chapter two, Ancient Traditional Ritual and Thought in Theatre of Productions, continues the discussion of Grotowski's Productions phase, with more focused attention on the specific traditions and practices that would become fundamental building blocks in his actor development. The incorporation of elements of Hindu practices and Balinese dance into Grotowski's theatre is presented to show his interest in religious traditions, followed by the development of his ritual-based concepts of the Holy Actor and the Total Act. Altogether, this chapter emphasises Grotowski's early Productions work using archetypes and ancient religious and traditional rituals.

In chapter three, Sufi Roots in Grotowski's Art as Vehicle, the focus is on his Post-Productions period of work with the clearest reflections of Sufism. Rather than devote a chapter or chapters to Paratheatre, Theatre of Sources, and Objective Drama, the emphasis is on the development and continuation of a common thread through these phases, each of which had different goals, culminating in Art as Vehicle as the pinnacle of his work on self-transformation. Because the intended reader will have already had a greater awareness of Art as a vehicle because of their background in drama and Grotowski, the framework of Art of vehicle will be used as a vehicle to introduce Sufism in a gradual manner before the next chapter.

Chapter four, Sufism, is an in-depth investigation of the Sufi doctrines and practices which were already paralleled with Grotowski's work. Specifically, part one, The Theological Basis for

Sufi Beliefs and Traditions: The foundations of tasawwuf (Islamic mysticism), is a look at the Quranic basis for major Sufi tenets, including “The night journey”, the mystical path to the ultimate Reality, and the journey’s end: Al-tawahud (union with God). Part two, From doctrine to practice: Aspects of Sufi rituals in particular, with emphasis placed on the psycho-physical dimensions of Sufi practices, investigates the psycho-physical nature of Rumi’s poetry, and looks at the ritual *sama* ceremony with its impact on the heart. Through this chapter, we gain a deeper understanding of Sufi rituals that transform the practitioner’s energy. This chapter on Sufism is a bridge from Sufi-like elements of Grotowski’s Art as Vehicle phase into a discussion of parallels between Grotowski’s work and that of the Sufi-inspired spiritualist Gurdjieff.

Finally, chapter five, Grotowski and Gurdjieff, looks at Sufi foundations of Gurdjieff’s work on sacred dance and his Movement exercises, followed by a discussion of parallels with the practical and theoretical work of Grotowski. As Gurdjieff is widely known for his connections with Sufism, the similarities between his concepts and Grotowski’s comprise another side in the triangle-shaped model of Sufism, Gurdjieff and Grotowski, whereby Sufism’s influence may have entered Grotowski’s work either directly through his encounters with and knowledge of Sufis, or indirectly through his Gurdjieffian ideas.

This thesis culminates in a conclusion with a discussion of the approach to thesis method and design; aims of each chapter; findings of Sufi inspiration by Grotowski’s phases of work; strengths and limitations; and recommendations for further research. When all findings are taken into consideration, it is clear that Sufism had a major influence on Grotowski’s work, additional to other influences.

Chapter One: Biographical Information and Rebirth of Theatre Rituals

Throughout his career as a director of theatre, Jerzy Grotowski work involved using specific principles and practices of traditional transcultural rituals that could be adapted to performance craft. As will be more fully discussed in this chapter, his family, education, and cultural contacts outside his Eastern European environment collectively contributed to Grotowski's theories, and their application to his practical work. This being said, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a contextual understanding of Grotowski's research, and its potential link to ancient Sufi traditions, by presenting a biographical account of his work that specifically examines the importance of traditional beliefs and rituals beginning with his Theatre of Productions phase of research.

There is a certain degree of anxiety in suggesting Grotowski's Production phase relied on elements of transcultural ritual, since people such as Richard Schechner, who co-edited *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, have stated that Grotowski's application of traditional ritual came after his Theatre of Productions work. (Schechner, 1993, p.246) However, as I will point out in the second section of this chapter and throughout this thesis, the use of ritual within performance art is linked to Grotowski's theatre and post-theatre work.

The first in five phases of experimentation, Theatre of Productions (1957-69) highlights the significant role traditional rituals played from the beginning, until the end of his career. I will examine the importance of traditional ritual-based techniques to various phases of Grotowski's work in each chapter of this thesis, as well as explain these phases in detail. In fact, by examining the development of Grotowski's Theatre of Productions, and its relationship to his early life experiences, one could reasonably suggest that this phase of his research was a precursor to what would follow, since each phase of his work was an "extension" of other phases of his research. (Schechner, 1996a, p.207)

Being biographical in nature, this chapter is divided into two sections that provide information about the origins and development of Grotowski's Productions phase of research. In the

first section, I will provide an account of Grotowski's earliest known exposure to transcultural practices and beliefs, and explain the impact these experiences would have in the development of his Theatre of Productions phase of work. For example, a book provided to him by his mother during his adolescent, *In Search of Secret India*, is considered the touchstone for Grotowski's interest in traditional transcultural rituals. I will explain the significance of this book as it relates to Grotowski's work in the opening parts of the first section. In addition, as will be discussed in the first section of this chapter, Grotowski's academic career and experiences abroad formed the basis for his life's work. Academically, Grotowski was interested in oriental studies; his travels through Central Asia would be his first transcultural experience, and would have a marked impact on the direction Grotowski would take in developing his work on performance craft.

Importantly, the first section of this chapter relies heavily on source information taken from T Burzynski Z Osinski's book *Grotowski's Laboratory* (1979). Considered an important writer on Grotowski's life and work, Osinski provides a remarkably detailed account of Grotowski's period of theatre work, and the influences that shaped his Theatre of Productions phase. Grotowski himself passed on his ideas and work to others close to him through oral transmission rather than written texts. (Schechner, 1996b, p.468) Therefore, it is mostly through interviews and first-hand accounts and observations, such as those found in Osinski's book, that one can examine Grotowski's life and work.

Having examined his family and educational background, along with specific cultural influences that formed the basis for Grotowski's artistic ideas and research, the second section of this chapter discusses Grotowski's early theories and practical work. The second section will focus attention on Grotowski's early traditional ritual-based theories, and how they were implemented in the development of his theatre. This being said, the overarching purpose of the second section is to demonstrate the importance of traditional ritual to Grotowski's Theatre of Productions phase of research. For example, one finds that the notion of myths as the basis for ritualized activities has a

strong presence in how Grotowski develops a form of experimental theatre that creates a “communal” encounter between spectators, and spectators and performers.

Again, as stated earlier in this introduction, like his post-theatre phases of work, the centrality of ritual in Grotowski’s Productions period is aesthetically evidenced by the fact that the use of space itself within his theatre produced a kind of collective psychosocial experience. In some respects, this structural-functional aspect of Grotowski’s theatre resembles what occurs during the course of partaking in an ancient traditional ritual often performed within a sacred space. In fact, both in theory and practice, one could say that Grotowski’s Poor Theatre is simply a rebirth of theatre within the context of its ancient traditional ritual purpose, where the community as a whole is organically engaged in the activity. I will elaborate on Grotowski’s Poor Theatre and its connection to ritual in later portions of the second section of this chapter.

It is not only the structural-functional aspect of physical space, and its relationship to a ritual-type activity that will be discussed in the second section of this chapter, but also how the performers themselves are employed by Grotowski in such a way as to project themselves as “holy” with the objective of achieving a “total act”. The second chapter of this thesis, entitled Ancient Traditional Ritual and Thought in Grotowski’s Theatre, will more thoroughly explain these two concepts in relation to ancient traditional beliefs and practices.

In Grotowski’s theatre, the actor undergoes a type of emotional and psychological “purification” during the course of their performance that is akin to what occurred during an ancient ceremony. Indeed, Grotowski referred to his actor as a “shaman”, because through their “sacred ritual” of “self-sacrifice”, “the audience participated in the ritual by witnessing [...] the holy actors” (Cioffi, 1997, p.85).

Again, there are strong elements of ancient traditional beliefs and ritual which permeate Grotowski’s earliest phase of work, which is indicative of their importance to every aspect of his practical work in its totality. As such, section two will also examine the physical exercises used by

Grotowski to achieve the shaman-like quality in performance. As with the purpose for Grotowski's unique use of physical space, and the role the actor plays within that space, the physical exercises are themselves directly linked to transcultural techniques grounded in ritual. As will be discussed further in section two of this chapter, actors such as Ryszard Cieslak achieved a "holy" act by using exercise methods employed by Grotowski that are taken from "traditional systems of training" (Grotowski in Kumiega, 1986, p.115).

To understand the trajectory of Grotowski's life's work, it is important to have an idea of his background, influences and interests. Indeed,

Jerzy Grotowski's family tradition, his experiences related to war, his school years and college days, his long-lasting illness, his experiences of 1956 and 1957 ['...The brief period of liberalization and the end of Stalinism...'], the books he read, the people he met, his openness to other cultures, his countless journeys, and, finally, almost fifty years of professional work – in many ways related to theatre – had a decisive impact on shaping his attitude towards the world, nature, people, and values he subscribed to and practised, or [...] on shaping his worldview and attitude towards life. (Osinski, 2014, p.22)

Section 1: Biography

Family life and early influences

Jerzy Grotowski was born in Rzeszow, close to the eastern border of Poland, on the eleventh of August 1933. His father, Marion Grotowski, was originally from the Krakow area, and later became a forest ranger, painter and sculptor. His mother, Emilia Kozłowska, was from Lwów, Poland (now part of Ukraine), and she became a school teacher. Both parents came from educated families with some relatives holding university professorships, and both were interested in literature, music, and science. Neither parent was particularly religious. (Osinski, 1986)

His father had relatives who were involved with science, whereas those on his mother's side

worked in literature and held interests mostly in the Orient. His only brother, Kazimierz, was three years older than him, and he became a professor, teaching nuclear physics at a university in Krakow. (Osinski, 1986)

Grotowski's ethnic origin was mixed: on his father's side, Lithuanian and German, and on his mother's side, Czech, Austrian and Polish. Grotowski spoke of his mother's ability to speak German. (*With Jerzy Grotowski*, 1980) His great-grandparents lived in France, Germany and Austria before finally settling in Poland. Although he was of mixed ethnic origin, Grotowski and his family were passionate in their patriotic feelings toward Poland, his beloved birthplace. French theatre critic and academic Raymonde Temkine, who met Grotowski for the first time in Finland in 1962, confirms the family's patriotism:

Among the traits common to both sides were a strong national sentiment; resolutely progressive family traditions; the acceptance of responsibility; a readiness to fight for Poland, its independence, and its liberties; university affiliations; great affinities for science, literature, and music; few religious beliefs, despite religious practices and a distant cousin who is an orthodox priest. (Temkine, 1972, p.47)

Grotowski's strong sense of national pride was directly influenced by his maternal relatives who expressed intense patriotism and love for Poland. His maternal grandfather had special influence on Grotowski, teaching the young Jerzy that the sacred is not exclusive to religion, a belief we see reflected later in his use of terms such as *holy actor*. (Temkine, 1972)

It is important to note that the family in which Grotowski was raised had roots in different countries in Eastern and Western Europe, for this freed him to form and build his own personality, and opened the window for him to be receptive to other cultures. It set the foundation for him to become a multicultural person interested in other cultures, not limited to his own Polish culture. Perhaps this strong foundational grounding and assured sense of Polish identity also contributed to this freedom to explore others. Additionally, both of his parents were creative at different levels

within their respective careers, and that creativity impacted and influenced Grotowski in ways clearly visible in his later life and work.

Nienadowka

Until the age of six, Grotowski lived with his family in Przemysl. When World War II broke out in 1939 and Poland was invaded by the Nazi army, Grotowski's family was suddenly uprooted. His father left home to be an officer in the Polish army, but left the country for Paraguay following the Soviet occupation, never to return to Poland. Grotowski's mother and her two sons moved to Nienadowka, marking a moment of total disruption in his family life. Grotowski talked about this period in Jill Godmilow's 1980 film, *With Jerzy Grotowski, Nienadowka 1980*, as a difficult time when he and his family lived a secluded and sheltered life seeking safety and refuge during the Nazi occupation. In this film, the adult Grotowski personally returned to the exact locations from his life of refuge as a boy on the farm in Nienadowka, to reconnect with the images, sounds, people and places that were reflected, indeed indelibly engrained, in his later work and art. These childhood experiences that were marked by such distressing moments of danger later led Grotowski to challenge us to uncover and rediscover our original joy, what he calls "the movement within the repose" (*With Jerzy Grotowski*, 1980).

Grotowski at the age of sixteen became very ill and he was diagnosed with a kidney disease, therefore he was hospitalized for some time between dying people. His doctors believed that he wouldn't live for very long and he wouldn't recover, and recommended him to rest and not to do any physical work. Grotowski spent his time reading stacks of books, including Brunton's *A Search in Secret India* (1935), and he applied to his work the knowledge that he gained from such books and early experiences. Grotowski imposed on himself a very strict discipline. Temkine tells us in *Grotowski* that "He decided to devote himself to art, but if he had to choose between beauty and truth, truth would be his choice" (Temkine, 1972, p.48). Grotowski didn't let his health problems and limited physical ability stop him, he pushed himself to go on and focus on the things of which he

dreamt and to achieve his ambitions because he had the strength that he developed and that was born inside him. (Temkine, 1972, pp.56-57)

Despite the awful conditions under the German occupation and his challenging health problems, Nienadowka was a special learning place for Grotowski. It is where he enrolled in the elementary school where his mother taught. His educated mother played an important role in providing her two sons with the knowledge that they needed to succeed in their future by selecting and giving them books that she ensured they read. The most important book she provided to her younger son was Paul Brunton's book entitled *A Search in Secret India* (1935), Grotowski's first exposure to Central Asian culture, and a book which was to have a profound effect on him. (Osinski, 1986) As an early source of knowledge about the ancient rituals of other cultures, this book can be viewed as a touchstone for Grotowski's later involvement with Asian studies as a student and lecturer in Poland. As with Brunton, Grotowski became interested in the physical and mental exercises used in the practice of Yoga in particular.

Although it would be impossible to know exactly what Grotowski thought when he first read *A Search in Secret India*, Brunton's work provides the reader with vivid details about the Yogi, and the bodily and mental exercises he practises to attain spiritual discipline. One chapter in particular, *The Anchorite of the Advar River*, gives a compelling description of these exercises that Grotowski himself must have read with a great deal of interest and fascination.

[...] the Yogi sits with extended legs, raises both arms over his head and crooks the first fingers. He bends his trunk forward, exhaling the breath while doing so, and grasps the big toes of his feet inside the hooked fingers. The right toe is caught by the right index finger, and so on. Then he slowly bends his head forward until it falls between his outstretched arms and the forehead lies flat against his thighs. (Brunton, 1935, p.82)

Brunton's description of his encounter with the Yogi provides a useful degree of insight into

Grotowski's early impressions about Central Asia as a result of reading through this book. He also received other seminal books from other sources. The village priest gave him a copy of the Gospels. Also, he read *The Life of Jesus* by Renan, the Qur'an, and various writings of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. (Slowiak and Cuesta, 2007)

Polish biographer of Grotowski, Zbigniew Osinski, tells us in *Grotowski and his Laboratory* that "Grotowski himself admitted the Nienadówka years were an important formative period for him" as it was during this time that he was first exposed to other cultures, religions, folk rites, beliefs, and historical figures. (1986, p.13) Grotowski was particularly struck by one such inspired prophet who Brunton highlighted in his book:

My mother went to town [...and] brought back a book titled *A Search in Secret India*, written by an English journalist, [Paul] Brunton. He talked about the people he met in India, mainly about some unusual man, who in our civilization would be called 'yurodivy'. He lived on the slopes of Arunachala, a mountain considered as holy - the Mountain of Flame. His name was Maharishi. He had a peculiar custom. When someone came to him seeking an explanation about what is essential in life, how to bring meaning to life, or what is meaningful in general, [Ramana Maharshi] would ask him: 'Who are you?' But he would say it in the first person: 'Ask yourself "Who am I?"'. (Grotowski, Interview with a. Bonarski, *Kultura* [1975], in Osinski, 2014, p.13)

Grotowski would later become closely connected with the places mentioned in this book gifted to him by his mother; the holy hill in India which he mentioned above, Arunachala, is where he wished for his ashes to be scattered, because "India was a very important experience for him. [...] What he experienced in India had fundamental meaning for his life and his understanding, so it's a natural consequence that this was his last wish" (Brook, 2009, p.61).

This is but one example of the instrumental role Grotowski's mother played in exposing him to knowledge and ideas that formed the basis of his inspiration and work. This fact is further evidenced by his visit to Nienadowka for the film *With Jerzy Grotowski*, which was largely meant to highlight her influence on him by evoking his vivid images and memories of her. (Osinski, 1986)

Krakow

In 1950, the Grotowski family moved to Krakow, where his mother, Emilia Grotowska, found work filing insurance claims at a district court; and because Kazimierz Grotowski, her older son, had just received the post of an assistant in the Faculty of Physics of the Jagiellonian University. (Osinski, 1986) In the meantime, Grotowski helped his mother financially when he got a scholarship while he was still in high school. During his years of secondary education, the young Grotowski had already manifested an intense interest in literature, giving frequent poetry recitals and entering and winning poetry contests not just in Krakow but also in Rezeszow and nearby towns. (Osinski, 1986) It is remarkable that Grotowski at this stage was already showing confidence and an artist's sensibilities, and also reflecting the knowledge and experiences he gained from his Nienadowka period. His character and achievements were recognised by his high school teachers, as well, who described him in a letter of recommendation as a “diligent, very talented, and dedicated volunteer worker” (Osinski, 1986, p.14).

In 1951 Grotowski applied to the State Theatre School in Krakow to study an acting program. He expressed his writing skills and vision for art when he wrote an essay titled “How can theatre contribute to the development of socialism in Poland”, required for the entrance examination to the Acting School, and got an “A” which allowed him to enter. (Osinski, 1986, p.14)

Grotowski spent almost four years in the acting program at the Theatre School in Krakow. (Osinski, 1986) Throughout this period he continued to develop his concerns and interest in Eastern philosophy. He was studying on his own as he did before and going to lectures, including one such lecture on the “Philosophy of Yoga”; interacting with professors and experts on Eastern philosophy;

and attending meetings and participating in discussion groups; all of which served to enhance his understanding of Oriental studies. (Osinski, 1986; Kumiega, 1985) Jennifer Kumiega, in her book *The Theatre of Grotowski*, wrote, “It was an interest that he also brought to bear in later years, in ways both manifest and implicit” (Kumiega, 1985, p.5).

Grotowski’s interest in Eastern philosophy continued throughout his University studies. He participated in various meetings concerning his interest, and enhanced his understanding following a specific system; meetings he attended were usually regarding Eastern issues. Among his many contacts was Professor Helena William-Grabowska (1870-1957), a lecturer at the Jagiellonian University, an Ideologist and an Iranist. Another was Rev. Franciszek Tkarz (1879-1973), a well-known expert in Indian philosophy. Both of them played a vital role in shaping the mature personality of Grotowski. While a theatre student at Krakow, according to Osinski, Grotowski seriously considered transferring to the East Asian program or to the medical school. (Osinski, 1986)

In 1955, after finishing his acting diploma, the mature Grotowski was armed with the knowledge and experiences that he had been through: related to poverty, moving from one town to another, the people he met, the observations he made earlier, the school years, the self-learning, his illness, his opinion on other cultures, the books he read and the meetings he attended and other things; all these shaped and developed his approach toward people, nature and values, and he wanted to have an impact on them. Grotowski expressed his opinion on many issues at first through his writings. His first article as a freelance writer was “The Red balloon” (1955), which was published in the Krakow daily newspaper *Dziennik Polski*, wherein he called for the establishment of a young artist’s club in Krakow:

We must pay tribute to tradition with actions, not words. We must cultivate the seeds of the past, which may flourish into new values on modern soil [...] We wish to influence man and the world with our art. We've got the courage to fight openly and fervently the most important issues, because only such issues are worth fighting for.

(Grotowski in Osinski, 1986, p.15)

Here, Grotowski showed his artistic vision and desire to share his own style of communication with others through his writing, to have an impact and inspire them and open their awareness to the right path that they need to take in order to make the difference in their lives, telling them that they need to go back to their traditions to develop new values and that they must take actions to achieve the changes.

Grotowski's arrival on the acting scene drew mixed reviews. Critic and playwright Jan Pawel Gawlik wrote responding to Grotowski's artistic vision, "I don't know Grotowski personally, but I know that his head is on fire. In his article, there's plenty of nonconformism, bragging, and clichés, and a pinch of complacency, typical of youth. But there's also something that commands attention" (Gawlik in Osinski, 1986, p.15). Also, Lezek Herdegen, an actor and writer, criticized Grotowski by stating:

It's not enough to have a firm ideology, it's not enough to be a member of the Polish Youth Union, it's not enough to be a volunteer worker in order to be an artist [...] You must have your own, unique artistic program [...] You've got to know what you want to accomplish as an artist. (Herdegen in Osinski, 1986, pp.15-16)

It seems that the ideas and thoughts in Grotowski's article grabbed the attention of even more critics, for what he tried to say, suggest and what he wanted to achieve. Many of these critics didn't believe in Grotowski or his ideology, and his ideas were not clear to them as they needed more clarification about what he wanted to say. Grotowski was not known to them and they did not know his background and some of them demanded answers from him. Playwright Slawomir Mrozek attacked Grotowski, aggressively demanding answers:

Let's assume that Grotowski is really on fire. Unfortunately, nobody really knows what's burning there. Pray, Grotowski, why didn't you give us some specific

examples? You signed yourself a theatre student but there's not even a small mention, for example, of what you're trying to accomplish in the theatre. Grotowski, you want to knock something over or go somewhere, you shake your fists at someone, but pray, tell us what, where, who. (Mrozek in Osinski, 1986, p.16)

Grotowski took these criticisms into consideration and responded in his article “Dream of the theatre” (1955) in the same daily newspaper, *Dziennik polski*. He explained his type of theatre which is the theatre of the grand emotion that he developed:

A performance may be well acted and directed, yet the audience feels there's something missing. We must, then, thoroughly revise the very idea, style, and artistic impact of the theatre [...] To us, the strength of the theatre lies in action, in the enactment of life in front of us [...] Therefore we need means especially suitable for producing an emotional effect [...] I'm talking about the poetic structure of a theatre work not in isolation from, but in close connection with, the dramatic text. The theatre of grand emotions [...] requires the great romantic repertory: from Shakespeare, Mickiewicz, and Slowacki to Wyspiański, Vishnevsky, and Pogodin. (Grotowski in Osinski, 1986, p.16)

Grotowski felt that the existing theatre of his time was too contrived and forced in terms of the type of acting being performed. Actors needed to express emotions that provided a sense of realism.

Grotowski spoke about what he called the *theatre of grand emotion* when referring to changing the way actors expressed themselves on stage. (Osinski, 1986, p.16) As a follower of Russian stage director Konstantin Stanislavski, Grotowski insisted that the single most important element of theatre was the actor himself. Additionally, as with Stanislavski's acting method, Grotowski believed realism was essential to the actor's art, which required the actor to express emotions that are not contrived or forced. To achieve this, the actor must reach within their inner self and follow a natural course of emotions that flow from the core of their being. These aspects of the

theatre of grand emotion were vital to Grotowski's earliest work as a director.

Grotowski made clear what he wanted to achieve with his style of theatre by saying, "In my theatre, emotions are not artificial, tears are not faked, and pathos is not pitiful" (Grotowski in Osinski, 1986, p.25). What, then, was Grotowski's point of reference in achieving natural emotions from his actors? Grotowski would not have the pivotal experience that inspired his future path of inquiry until later, on a trip to find healing in Turkmenistan, amidst a two-month sick leave from his next programme of study in Moscow.

Higher education and early travels

Moscow 1955-1956

Following the completion of his studies at the State Higher School of Theatre in Krakow with a degree in acting in 1955, Grotowski then enrolled at the Lunacharsky State Institute for Theatre Arts (GITIS) in Moscow (1955-1956) after he received a scholarship to study the directing techniques of Russian theatre greats Stanislavsky, Vakhtangov, Meyerhold, and Tairov, under Yuri Zavadsky's supervision. As a young director, Grotowski was mostly interested in Russian director Konstantin Stanislavski's method of "physical actions". Stanislavski felt that specific physical exercises needed to be used in order for an actor's movements and emotional expressions to be as realistic as possible. Referring to Stanislavski's importance to him, Grotowski once reflected that upon leaving for Moscow, "I was obsessed with Stanislavsky: I was a fanatic: I thought that this was the key opening all doors to creativity" (Kumiega, 1985, p.110).

Grotowski went to Moscow determined to gain a deeper and more thorough knowledge of the Stanislavsky method "at its source", but upon his arrival there, he discovered Vsevolod Meyerhold's legacy and studied it with fascination. (Osinski, 1986, p.18) Grotowski was especially interested in Meyerhold's method of biomechanics. According to biomechanics, in order for an actor to fully release their emotions, they must have a complete awareness of their bodily movements.

Meyerhold introduced a series of physical exercises intended to create control of the body that would allow the actor to perform movements which amplified emotional expressions.

Raymonde Temkine wrote on the significance of Meyerhold to Grotowski, "It is through Meyerhold that Grotowski understood that staging a play is but an answer to the play; not a submission but a reaction—this is the meaning of creation" (Temkine, 1972, p.50). Rather than replace his interest in Stanislavsky with interest in Meyerhold, Grotowski was developing and growing a multi-dimensional perspective. Grotowski's mentality was not to treat creative ideas as delicate relics to be handled with reverence or "piously reserved, rather a flame capable of lighting a new hearth" because they were durable and could withstand challenge, growing into something new. (Temkine, 1972, p.138) He was not afraid to wrestle with ideas, which is why he developed a deeper respect for Stanislavsky even after finding points of disagreement. Grotowski appreciated Stanislavsky for asking the "fundamental questions", though he "did not subscribe to his master's answers... [Yet] In spite of artistic differences, Stanislavsky remained a model for him" (Temkine, 1972, p.49). After grappling with the ideas he encountered in Moscow, he used the experience to form the basis of his future practices. Both Stanislavsky's method of "physical actions" and Vsevolod Meyerhold's method of biomechanics were to later become Grotowski's primary sources for his actor training exercises.

Throughout Grotowski's directing career, some observers have described his training techniques as oriental in nature. However, Grotowski did not rely on any one method for his theatre or the physical exercises he employed for training his actors. Grotowski himself insisted that there was no one "method". It is equally important to bear in mind that the prevailing methods used during his early years as a drama student were those taken from Western theatre personalities.

Grotowski himself was deeply interested in Stanislavski and Meyerhold's methods, which he used to bring about a theatre that moved away from traditional forms of acting. However, what separated him from other students of drama was the value he saw in examining other cultures as a

source for creating a theatre that would change all the rules of the actor-audience relationship. In the context of the 1950s, while many students of drama relied on prevailing acting methods, Grotowski was already laying the theoretical foundations for what would become his critically acclaimed *poor theatre*. It was his vision and philosophy, grounded in part by his appreciation for Eastern philosophy.

Central Asia 1956

His experiences in Central Asia, including Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan in 1956, have been identified by some as a crucial influence on his approach to actor training. In their book, *Jerzy Grotowski*, authors James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta have suggested that Grotowski's encounter with an Afghan mime provided him with a deeper insight into the development of the actor's art. (2007)

Between 1955 and 1956, around the age of twenty-three, Grotowski attended the first Faculty of Directing course at the Lunacharsky State Institute for Theatre Arts (GITIS) in Moscow, Russia. During his studies abroad, he took two months to travel to Central Asia for health reasons. While not much has been documented in English about his experiences and encounters in Central Asia, we do have a series of his letters from Central Asia as well as a published newspaper report about his travels.

From a health resort in Bayram-Ali in present-day Turkmenistan (then the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic), Grotowski wrote letters to his professor at GITIS, Yuri Alexandrovich Zavadsky, and his wife Irina Wulf; this professor left such an impression on Grotowski that the latter's mother, Emilia Grotowska, wrote from Krakow to "The Much Respectable Yuri Alexandrovich" thanking him for his generous involvement in her son's travels and health. (Osinski, 2014, p.30) On 26 May 1956, Grotowski sent two postcards "on the way through Kazakhstan" to actress Irena Jun. The first read:

'For three days and two nights I have been going West, to the shores of the Aral Sea

[Lake]. Yesterday the heat was awful, it was hitting my head like a heavy hammer. Today I woke up in a chill, the air crisp and cold. Perhaps it is still early morning and it will get warmer during the day. Nevertheless I have certainly left the subtropical climate. The scenery is changeless: steppe, deserts, sometimes rice fields, auls [a colony of yurts, or a type of fortified villages], the banks of the Syr Darya. Yesterday I passed ruins of old mosques and palaces'. (Grotowski in Osinski, 2014, p.32)

The second postcard Grotowski wrote to the same actress on the same day read, "Western Asia; soon I will enter Europe" (Osinski, 2014, p.32). Other places visited by Grotowski included some in Turkmenistan (the city of Mar, the Kara-kum desert oasis, the ruins in the city of Merv, and the capital city of Ashgabat [Ashkhabad]), and others in Uzbekistan (Bukhara and Samarkand). Upon his return home to Poland, Grotowski's report on his journey was published in two issues of *Dziennik Polski*, Krakow's newspaper.

Uzbekistan is a real Babel Tower. A small territory between the Aral Sea [Lake], the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya rivers and The Tian Shan range and the Pamir-Alay Mountains is inhabited by: Uzbeks, Russians, Tajiks, Eastern Iranic peoples, Persians, Afghans [Pashtuns], Armenians, Arabs, Turkmens, Kazakhs, local Bukharan Jews, Polish Jews (named simply 'Poles'; there are plenty of them there, they settled in Uzbekistan during the war). Particular nations have stratified through centuries – with consecutive conquests. Tradition of each tribe was shaped in confrontation with other nations; from the fights emerged heroes praised in songs and epic folk poetry. Social relations were invariably shaped in accordance with the scheme 'the winners and the defeated,' with a proviso that the winners of one century would become defeated in the next one. However, quite opposite phenomenon could be observed at the same time: mutual fights did not exclude mutual assimilation of nations. Great scholar Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) is considered Persian by the Persians, and Tajik by the Tajiks; also Uzbeks

seriously consider him their own. Navā'i⁵ – a great local poet of the past wrote in Persian, Tajik, and Uzbek. In such situation the so-called national problem [...] is especially difficult. (Grotowski, 1956, pp.2-3)

Grotowski's knowledge of the region's politics and history is evident in this excerpt. Though he only stayed in Central Asia for two months, he had a rich experience in that short time. The powers of observation he developed as a child enabled him to understand and analyse this complex and “difficult” region full of both contradiction and harmony, with fluid and ever-changing dynamics. His experience in Central Asia served as field research where he found the path of return to the tradition he had been calling for, as exemplified in the traditional songs and folk poetry he heard there.

Grotowski led an interesting life full of danger and action and had several extraordinary experiences. His nature made him search for answers that were born inside himself from the knowledge he had gained earlier in his life. Grotowski searched for the objectivity of his knowledge, which led him to take several trips to Asia, Africa, Europe, North America and South America, travelling from one country to another, inserting himself in the cultures there and discovering and exploring these vast regions. With a determination to gain a deeper understanding of his initial impressions about the rituals and rites embedded within these cultures, he sought interactions which would bring him up close with a variety of cultural currents, in sincere pursuit of the truth. One of these cultures was Central Asia. In 1956 he travelled to Central Asia for two months for the purpose of recovering from physical complications due to health problems. Grotowski's trip to that region was his first direct exposure to Eastern culture and Central Asian Philosophy. There, he developed a fascination and curiosity with a part of the world that many people in the West considered

5 Nava'i, translated as “melodic” in Persian, was the pen name of Nazam-al-Din Ali-Shir Herawi (1441–1501), a Central Asian politician, mystic, linguist, painter, and poet who served as a vizier (public administrator and adviser) of a sultan Husayn Bayqarah. He wrote in Chagatai (extinct language related to modern Uzbek and Uyghur), and Persian.

mysterious.

Soon after Grotowski returned home to Kraków from Central Asia in 1959, he wrote the following reflection on his journey to Afghanistan for the daily newspaper *Dziennik Polski*, and several years later he republished it in the monthly magazine *Ekran*:

During my expedition in Central Asia in 1956, between an old Turkmenian town Ashkhabad [Ashhabat] and the western range of the Hindu Kush Mountains, I met an old Afghan man named Abdullah who performed for me a pantomime ‘of the whole world,’ which had been a tradition in his family. Encouraged by my enthusiasm, he told me a myth about pantomime⁶ as a metaphor for ‘the whole world’. ‘Pantomime is like the world at large, and the world at large is like pantomime.’ It occurred to me then that I was listening to my own thoughts. Nature – changeable, moveable, but permanently uniquely itself at the same time – has always been embodied in my imagination as the dancing mime, unique and universal, hiding under the glittering of the multiple gestures, colors, and grimaces of life. (Grotowski in Osinski, 1986, p.18)

Clearly, this encounter mesmerized Grotowski, and would become an important source for how he would eventually train his actors in the art of expressive movements through what he observed in the perfectly coordinated physical and mental activity of the mime. Perhaps one reason Abdullah's performance had such a great impact on Grotowski is that it fulfilled his search for answers to his pressing and longstanding questions: “[...] could the actor incarnate the whole world, nature itself? And could nature itself, with all its unpredictability, uniqueness, and constancy, reveal itself in the actor?” (Slowiak and Cuesta, 2007, p.7) Grotowski sought actors who embodied a phenomenon he called *organicity*. Instead of merely behaving “naturally,” Grotowski felt that actors should be able to reveal their own – and humanity's – organic natures. Abdullah was perhaps the first actor to exemplify this phenomenon of organicity for Grotowski, and the latter would continue to

⁶ In reality, pantomime is a misnomer here; actually, we understand it was a mime.

search for others with this ability – and work to help his actors cultivate this ability – throughout the remainder of his career. (Slowiak and Cuesta, 2007)

A deeper discussion of Abdullah, the Afghan Muslim man Grotowski described in this life-changing moment, is crucial for a better understanding of the significance of this encounter, lest we misconstrue the nature of Central Asian Muslim mime. The mime Grotowski described above was not akin to Western theatrical mime. Instead, Mircea Eliade describes the Central Asian Muslim mime as someone who is “poet, musician, seer, priest and doctor [that] seems to be guardian of the popular religious traditions, *the custodian of legends several centuries old*” (1967, p.78).

On this journey to Central Asia, Grotowski stayed among the Kazakh and Kyrgyz people, whose name for such a spiritual leader is *baqça, bakşa, or ozan*. *Baqça* were half-shamanised, one-actor, theatrical performers who told “heroic and epic tales, legends and stories” to people in accordance with the tradition of Central Asia. (Łytko, 1995) Unlike autonomous Western mimes such as the well-known Marcel Marceau who perform theatrical shows, mimes from Muslim countries in Central Asia, like Abdullah from the region between the old Turkmenian town and the Hindu Kush Mountains, perform a more mythic ritual function as transmitters of centuries-old legends and popular religious traditions. It is more understandable, then, why Abdullah's mime was such an enriching and instructive experience that Grotowski carried it into the physical and mental exercises of his forthcoming actor training. This mime “of the whole world” was a special performance and experience in Afghanistan that made a deep and lasting impression on Grotowski. The geographical location of Abdullah and his meaningful performance of the mime suggest that he was a Sufi spiritual leader.

Given the limited amount of documentation on Grotowski's first-hand experience with Sufism, inferences can be drawn to explain the possible presence of Sufi elements in Grotowski's practice (to be explained in the next chapter). The Inner Circle, mentioned above as a feature of both Sufi tradition and Gurdjieff's Fourth Way (see Gurdjieff section, below), featured in the practices of

both Grotowski and Gurdjieff. According to Schechner, “Even at the start of the Theatre of 13 Rows, Grotowski, like Gurdjieff, worked from a close inner circle, transmitting knowledge directly by means of dance, song, utterance, and intimate encounter” (Schechner, 1996b, p.478).

Both Grotowski and Gurdjieff apparently witnessed the power of the inner circle system in Central Asia, where they saw the Sufi practice of transmission using the oral tradition. As will be explained later in the Sufism chapter, in true esoteric form, Sufis distinguish themselves from orthodox Muslims through their self-identification as chosen people who receive direct, concentrated, intense “transmission” of the divine experience through initiation by a master, a uniquely profound experience. The aforementioned connections – Gurdjieff with Sufism and Central Asia on the one hand, and Grotowski with Central Asia on the other – establish the earliest evidence of the importance of Sufism to the development of Grotowski's practice.

Iran 1967, 1970, 1976

As a child, Grotowski became fascinated with the Kurds he read about in *Through Wild Kurdistan* (1881), a book of adventure stories by German author Karl May (1842-1912) whose “work inspired enchanting vistas into romantically conceived distant lands” (Bédé and Edgerton, 1980, p.526), and who was “one of the authors of initiation writings for the whole of Grotowski’s life. [Grotowski’s] dreams about exotic peoples and cultures – about which mysteries he was always curious – that he had dreamt of as a child and teenager were fulfilled in a perfectly literal form” (Osinski, 2014, p.48). The protagonist of *Through Wild Kurdistan*, a German named Kara Ben Nemsi, travels with a local tour guide, Nemsi’s “friend and servant” named Hajji Halef Omar, and the two engage in religious debates wherein the protagonist debunks many of Omar’s flawed arguments in defence of his orthodox understanding of Islam. (Michalak, 1999, p.v) One such exchange is about the so-called “Devil Worshippers”, or “cult of the devil” as referred to by Grotowski in his remark about the Kurds he encountered in Central Asia in 1959 (Grotowski, 1959, in Osinski, 2014, p.45):

“I tell you, Hajji Halef Omar that you do not need to fear the ‘Devil Worshippers’. They do not pray to *Shaitan* [Satan], they don’t even call him by name. They are clean, faithful, grateful, brave and honest; these traits you rarely find among the ‘True Believers’. Besides, you will not lose your soul, for they will not force their belief upon you.”

“They will not force me to pray to the Devil?”

“No. I assure you!”

“But they will kill us!”

“Neither you nor I.”

“But they have killed many others; they did not kill Christians though, only Moslems.”

“They defended themselves during an attempt to annihilate them. That is why they kill only Moslems, for they were attacked by them and not by Christians.”

“But I am a Moslem!”

“They are your friends because they are mine.” (May, 1881, as translated by Michalak, 2002, pp.6-7)

In this example where the protagonist debunks the guide’s depiction of the Kurds as “Devil Worshippers”, we see an enthralling image of the Kurds as good people who are misunderstood and persecuted by their Muslim brethren. They are even depicted by Hajji Omar as the sort of *yurodivy* characters we know that Grotowski was so interested in; Hajji Omar says of the Kurds, “In their holy house stands a rooster or a peacock to whom they pray – that is the Devil” (May, 1881, trans. by Michalak, 2002, p.5). This fictional account of the Kurds, based on their reputation as a type of *yurodivy* or “holy fools”, gives us a glimpse of the ideas Grotowski might have had about the fascinating stories and people in Kurdistan, which could explain why he was interested in meeting them and getting his own first-hand impression of the real places described in the exciting novel that

so deeply interested him as a child. It would appear that Grotowski either intentionally or inadvertently attempted to retrace May's protagonist's well-researched and imaginative travels, as he later visited "wild Kurdistan" on several occasions and had encounters of such importance that he did not recount them in any detail. Indeed, Ludwig Flaszen writes that Grotowski did indeed go to Kurdistan because he was inspired by Karl May's book. (Osinski, 2014, p.48) Additionally, we have further information from Eugenio Barba and Zbigniew Osinski about Grotowski's trips to Kurdish and Shiite areas of Iran.

Grotowski in "Wild Kurdistan"

In the chapter of *Jerzy Grotowski's Journeys to the East* (2014) titled "Iran", Osinski writes about the scant information available to us on Grotowski's first visit to Iran in August 1967: "It is highly probable that he wanted to keep this experience exclusively to himself. At that time, he used to say that talking about something important usually dissipates it" (p.46). The clear implication here is that this trip was of great significance to Grotowski, which is why he did not speak of it. Eventually, he told Osinski twenty-one years later that he was allowed to participate in a Kurdish ritual in the Iranian mountains. (Osinski, 2014, p.46)

Not knowing more about the particular Kurds Grotowski met in Iran, it is impossible to identify their religion. We do know, however, that

An overwhelming majority of [...] Kurds are followers of one of many mystic Sufi orders (or *tariqa*). The bonds of the Muslim Kurds, for example, to different Sufi orders have traditionally been stronger than to orthodox Muslim practices. Sufi rituals in Kurdistan, led by Sufi masters, or *shaykhs*, contain so many clearly non-Islamic rites and practices that an objective observer would not consider them Islamic in the orthodox sense. [...] Anyone may follow a shaykh, but to actually join the order of a specific shaykh, he/she must go through a process of initiation. These members

(*murids*) then participate in many rituals, including the Sufi dances, chants, and prayers. (Izady, 1992, p.158)

In that case, we may venture to guess that the “Kurdish ritual” Grotowski kept quiet about was quite possibly a Sufi-based ritual. Of course there are several religions practised by Kurds, but the majority are Muslims, with minority groups of Christians and Jews, and some followers of, Yezidism, Alevism, Babism/Baha’ism, and Zoroastrianism, among others, all mostly with a mystic bent. (Izady, 1992)

We also do not know the exact geographic location Grotowski visited in 1967, as we simply know that he told Osinski he “participate[d] in a ritual of the Kurds in the Iranian mountains” (Osinski, 2014, p.46). To locate Kurds in the “mountains of Iran”, one would have to look in either Northwest (Kurdistan) or Northeast Iran (closer to Ashgabat [Ashkhabad], Turkmenistan, where in 1956 he had met Abdullah, the mime we have posited to be a Sufi master).

Omar Khayyam

After Grotowski’s first trip to Iran in 1967 he corresponded with Eugenio Barba about his trip, a correspondence which Osinski cites as his only knowledge – at that time – of Grotowski’s time in Iran (until Grotowski mentioned it to Osinski in a meeting in 1988). (Osinski, 2014, p.46) Barba asked him, “‘How was your stay in the land of Omar Khayyam?’ [...] Grotowski answers: ‘I returned safely from Iran and went immediately to Yugoslavia’” (Osinski, 2014, p.46). Osinski tells us, “Besides the mention in these letters, there are no written traces of Grotowski’s [1967] visit to Iran” (2014, p.46). Since we lack other clues about his stay there, and since we know this trip was of special significance to Grotowski, we must ask ourselves, who is Omar Khayyam and why did Barba reference him when asking Grotowski about Iran? Upon closer investigation, we find that he was an 11th-12th century Persian poet, philosopher, scientist, and scholar with strong Sufi-leanings who was widely known in the West and in Iran in the 19th-20th century. By asking about “the land of Omar

Khayyam” instead of “Iran”, Barba was implying a great deal of cultural information and personal interest about this uniquely Persian figure.

Abu'l Fath Omar ibn Ibrahim Khayyam was born in Eastern Iran circa 1048, where he died sometime between 1124 and 1129. Despite his poor beginnings, he was well educated in Arabic, religious sciences like the Qur'an, mathematics, astronomy and traditional cosmology, but he is mainly renowned for his poetry (*Ruba'iyat* or quatrains). (Aminrazavi, 2005) Thanks in large part to English translations by Edward Fitzgerald, Khayyam's poetry became famous in the 1870s to the 1950s, first in the West and later in Iran. From different perspectives, his work has been read by the Christian West as a warning of the perils of inviting foreign ideas into American society, and alternatively by the secular West as a new humanism and a challenge to religious doctrine and orthodoxy. He “advocated freethinking, rebellion against religious thought and establishment, spiritualism and living in the here and now” and he “is also significant for his scientific views” (Aminrazavi, 2005, Introduction).

Although Khayyam is said to have struggled with faith because of his scientific tendency to doubt and question everything, he wrote that, compared to the other three types of religious belief (the scholastics, philosophers, and Ismailis), Sufism is “the best way of all” because “The Sufis [...] do not seek knowledge, but try rather to purify the heart and refine the morals. By ridding the rational self of the corrupting accretions of nature, purifying it and placing it beside the angels, they reveal its true forms” (Khayyam in Dashti, 1971, pp.89-90). Dashti says, “on the whole [Khayyam] was inclined to see in Sufism the most likely path to the truth” (1971, p.92).

Did Grotowski go to “the land of Omar Khayyam” also in search of “the most likely path to the truth”? Did he intentionally seek out Sufi people and their lands? The clues we are given into Grotowski's heart and mind by Barba and others would indicate his plausible interest in Sufi and Sufi-inspired people and cultures, especially when taken in context of the pattern of Grotowski's ideas, travels and work.

Ta'ziyeh

Three years after his first visit, Grotowski returned to Iran in 1970 with the Laboratory Theatre to perform *The Constant Prince* at Shiraz's Annual Festival of Arts, then at a palace in Beirut, Lebanon, and back in Teheran, Iran. (Osinski, 2014, pp.46-47) Peter Brook has given us some information on his and Grotowski's time in Iran, writing about their encounter with the Persian theatre form known as ta'ziyeh, the Shiite passion play re-enactment of the tragic death of Imam Hussein, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW⁷). In Peter Brook's words,

‘I saw in a remote Iranian village one of the strongest things I have ever seen in theatre: a group of 400 villagers, the entire population of the place, sitting under the tree and passing from roars of laughter to outright sobbing – although they knew perfectly well the end of the story – as they saw Hussein in danger of being killed, and then fooling his enemies, and then being martyred. And when he was martyred, the theatre form became truth – there was no difference between past and present. An event that was told as remembered happening in history 1,300 years ago, actually became a reality in that moment’. (Brook, 1979, in Mottahedeh, 2008, p.60)

Brook elaborated on the common-knowledge element of this ritual theatre performance, whereby theatre “‘must always be a religious action and its action is very clear: it is that by which fragments are made whole’” (Brook, 1979, pp.50-51, in Mottahedeh, 2008, p.60). Mottahedeh continues, “*Ta'ziyeh* is a sacred theater and, like all ancient performance traditions, it relies on its audience to know the story and grasp its references and gestures as shorthand for much larger happenings” (2008, p.60). When Grotowski noted, “Group identification with myth – the equation of personal, individual truth with universal truth – is virtually impossible today”, he was telling us that modern conventional theatre could not rely on performances to achieve the same results (such as *ta'ziyeh*) as

⁷ Islamic practice dictates that every written or spoken mention of the Prophet Mohammad (SAW) be followed immediately by the words “Sallallahu Alayhi Wa’Sallam”, abbreviated to SAW, and which translates to “May Peace and Blessings Be Upon Him”.

we lack the homogeneous audiences who have common-knowledge and we do not share emotional connections to such great extent. (Grotowski, 1968a, p.23)

Chelkowski tells us that Brook and Grotowski both borrowed from ta'ziyeh and adapted it to their productions, Brook in his 1979 adaptation of, *The Conference of the Birds*, a mystical tract from the 12th-century, and Grotowski in his Laboratory Theatre work:

Jerzy Grotowski also borrowed from the ta'ziyeh tradition to fuse dramatic action with ritual as a means of uniting actor and audience. However, his productions for the Laboratory Theater carefully controlled the dynamic between the players and the spectators by imposing limits on space, audience size, and seating placement. Ta'ziyeh, in contrast, actively retains a fundamental principle of intimacy without placing any constraints on the size of the performance space or the number of spectators. This is *le theatre total*. In the words of Benjamin, the first American envoy to Iran, 'ta'ziyeh is an interesting exhibition of the dramatic genius of the Persian race'. (Chelkowski, 2005, p.26)

The sources above indicate that both traditional practices, the Kurdish ritual in the Iranian mountains and the Shiite ta'ziyeh passion play, had an impact on Grotowski. The former, as evidenced by his near-silence on the experience and sentimental comments to Osinski, and the latter, as evidenced by his incorporation of ta'ziyeh elements in his work, albeit with his own "limits on space, audience size, and seating placement".

The same theme of martyrdom depicted in ta'ziyeh also resonated with Iranian spectators of *The Constant Prince*.

'*The Constant Prince* got a surprisingly enthusiastic reception in Iran. [...] the audience understood it as a mystery play about their holy martyr. [...] Thus the piece that functioned in Europe as the passion of a sacrificial victim, a Christ-like man, tormented to death by the Muslims, became here the story of a Muslim martyr...

Perhaps the audience associated the scenes of the Prince's whipping and self-flagellation with the sacrificial rituals of the Shi'ites, celebrating the anniversary of Ali's death'. (Flaszen, mid-1970s, in Osinski, 2014, p.49)

Grotowski's second trip to "Wild Kurdistan"

Because of the great interest in *The Constant Prince* after the Shiraz Festival, the Laboratory Theatre earned an extended invitation "to spend several weeks in Teheran" (Flaszen, mid-1970s, in Osinski, 2014, p.48). On his own, "Grotowski went to Kurdistan. He wanted to meet real Kurds, by whom he had been fascinated since his childhood. Karl May's novel *Durchs wilde Kurdistan* [*Through Wild Kurdistan*] was one of his favourites" (Flaszen, mid-1970s, in Osinski, 2014, p.48). He was welcomed as "a kinsman, [...] a quasi-sheikh – a spiritual master [...] And they even initiated him into some rituals normally inaccessible to foreigners" (Flaszen, mid-1970s, in Osinski, 2014, p.48). The only "information about [this] completely unknown episode of Grotowski's encounter with dervishes in Iran's portion of Kurdistan" comes from Flaszen's account, which does not go into detail. (Osinski, 2014, p.47) True to his word, Grotowski did not betray their trust; he did not speak of this secret initiation in detail with Osinski or anyone else, as far as we know. Nonetheless, the facts being that he met with "dervishes" and was "initiated into some rituals normally inaccessible to foreigners" clearly indicate that he met Kurdish Sufis and experienced Sufi rituals in 1970.

Grotowski made a third trip to Iran in March 1976 to attempt to bring the Laboratory Theatre back to the Arts Festival in Shiraz to perform *Apocalypsis cum figuris* and paratheatrical workshops, but several critics and artists organized "a boycott protesting the terror that was taking place in Iran", and the group never attended despite Grotowski having already made preparations there. (Osinski, 2014, p.51) Those in favour of attending the Festival cited the hypocrisy in boycotting Iran while performing in Western cities like Paris and turning a blind eye to cases of institutionalised injustice, police brutality, and political oppression in the West.

Political climate and activities

Grotowski, his family, and his work were profoundly impacted by the repressive political

climate in Poland. When he was six, the Germans and Soviets invaded Poland and occupied it from 1939 until 1945. From its Soviet domination after World War II to the easing of restraints after 1956, then the imposition of new restrictions in 1968 followed by a period of gradual easing, then the activation of Martial Law in December 1981 soon after which (1982) Grotowski left Poland, there were drastic fluctuations in Poland's political environment until the democratic removal of the Communists from power in 1989. (Brockett and Hildy, 2008, p.494) He grew up under Nazi and Soviet occupations and became exceptionally skilled at "Ketmanship" and navigating the varying degrees of government control that existed while he resided in Poland. (Baumrin, 2009; Milosz, 1981) The idea of Ketmanship will be explained more fully shortly.

Because of external circumstances and disruptive political conditions, from an early age Grotowski became accustomed to uprooting himself and moving to new places. His family spent most of the time without his father Marion, including the hardest times and conditions under the Nazi occupation, when Grotowski's father served in the Polish military. The last time Grotowski saw his father was when he was six, outside Lviv, close to Nienadowka. After a train carrying Grotowski's family was bombed outside Lviv, his father and other soldiers went to check on their families. Grotowski's father then moved out of Poland and finally settled in Uruguay and died there in 1968. After the Nazi occupation, Poland was under Soviet occupation and "the Soviet system was to be the model for Poland" (Braun, 1996, p.221).

Emilia Grotowski strongly believed that self-education was not just important for the knowledge one gained but that it also served as a patriotic act. She provided Grotowski and his brother with several books including Mickiewicz, Slowacki, and Krasinski, known as the trinity of Polish Romantic poets/prophets, along with other foreign authors such as Daniel Defoe, Jack London, Conan Doyle and the most influential author Paul Brunton with his book *A Search in Secret India*. (Baumrin, 2009, p.60)

In 1947, after his family went back to Rzeszów, Grotowski witnessed the brutality of the

secret police first-hand when they threw a naked female neighbour from her window. This action lit the fuse for Grotowski to establish his own movement against the Communists. His brother Kazimierz described the founding of his anti-Communist movement:

He had no members, but first he had to get a stamp [emblem]. He went to a workshop that produced stamps and asked the proprietor to make such a stamp. But clearly this would be an illegal organization. Terrified, the stamp-maker went to the UB [Secret Police under Soviet control]. Our mother was immediately summoned and interrogated. She said, you know, 'This boy is a stupid boy.' I don't know why, but nothing happened. (Kazimierz Grotowski, 2008, in Baumrin, 2009, p.60)

Following this period of destruction, the mid-fifties saw a renewal of the Polish theatre due to a lifting of the previous restrictions on it. From 1953, a gradual process of de-Stalinisation began in the Soviet Union and spread outward, bringing decentralisation to satellite countries such as Poland and allowing for greater artistic and creative freedom by 1956. This period of de-Stalinisation brought the illusion of democratisation with relative increase in freedom and an explosion of the Polish October or the October Thaw movements led by artists and Party intellectuals, which collectively resulted in the release of political prisoners, softening of censorship, and opening of the borders with the West. Theatre also benefited from these movements because the Communists promised to refine their policies, re-open theatres, give more space for artists, and allow the establishment of a theatre festival. The State sought ways to allow individuals to remain active, yet still stop the process of democratization as Soviet authorities maintained a strong influence over popular movements and public activities. Although people were allowed to participate publicly in political and artistic movements, Soviet authorities worked behind the scenes to ensure they retained control. Albeit under close supervision from the authorities, the relaxing of previous restrictions allowed for the encouragement and reinforcement of regional ambitions, and enabled Grotowski to pursue the personalised research he had envisioned for his institute from 1959 onwards.

In 1956, Grotowski returned to Poland after two months in Central Asia for treatment for his health, and he started his fifth year in the directing program at the Theatre School in Krakow, where he received an assistantship. He continued his political activism, but he began to express his belief in the need for internal transformation or change from within the individual. In April 1957, as a member of the ZMS Political Centre of the Academic Left, Grotowski gave a speech calling for a "system in which civilization, democracy, and justice have a common denominator", which he said would require the following:

People must understand that if they don't stop pouting, join in the life of the country, and work for the common cause, then we may expect a catastrophe, bloodshed and destruction, and a takeover of despotism. [...] No one can give us bread, civilization and freedom. 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. [...] In our country, young people look forward to civilization, to a decent standard of living, to justice, to decision-making about their own lives, to technological progress. Ours is a road to civilization and freedom. (Grotowski, 1957, in Osinski, 1986, p.20)

As a foreshadowing of his theatre and post theatre career, these remarks show his lifelong desire to inspire individual change from within oneself, rather than affecting societal-level changes from institutions or governments. This speech depicts him as a mature leader with vision who talked directly to young people and opened their thinking to their country's potential and called for the future aims of civilisation and freedom. Grotowski was a pragmatic and logical thinker. He was idealistic in the sense that he saw a bright future for his country, but he came back from Central Asia a changed man, and his focus began to turn inward as he saw that real change would have to come from something inner within people themselves.

His political activity was to be short-lived, as the aforementioned influence and pressure from the authorities proved to be too strong and he left behind his political activism in early 1957, likely due to pressure and threats he faced from the authorities. (Slowiak and Cuesta, 2007, p.8) Kumiega marks this time as a shift from his young, political self to a more mature, apolitical self. (1985, p.6) In an interview years later, Grotowski reflected on his internal shift and transformation from wanting to be a “political saint” like Ghandi, to the realisation that he was not actually capable of this due to external and internal factors:

In another period of my life, let's call them the October and post-October years, I wanted to be a political saint, one of the foremost. And I was so fascinated by Ghandi that I wanted to be him. I came to the conclusion that not only was this improbable for objective reasons, but incompatible with my nature—although equal to fair play I am incapable of a total and generalized assumption of everyone's good intentions [...]

If I were ever to build the self-portrait of my dreams—at the very center would be a liberated life, the original state, freedom [...] For me, freedom is connected with the supreme temptation. It exists for the individual, even if unaware of it [...] Freedom is associated neither with freedom of choice, nor with sheer volunteerism—but with a wave, with giving oneself up to a huge wave, in accordance with one's desire. And when I speak of desire, it is like water in the desert or a gasp of air to someone who is drowning. (Grotowski in Kumiega, 1985, p.6)

Here we see how Grotowski's internal ideology shifted from his being a young activist focused on political reforms to a mature man focused on a deeper understanding of the human condition.

After the October Thaw Grotowski and the theatre community were optimistic, because theatre had awoken from its coma, and a new theatrical attitude was established, where prohibited plays were produced and theatre in general flourished. Grotowski moved to Opole in 1959 where he met Ludwik Flaszen, a theatre critic who I briefly introduced above. They had many things in

common including rejecting traditional theatre and together they established the Theatre of the 13 Rows. Grotowski knew that the new period required new methods, new means of expression, and a new style of production. He used his experimental group to explore a new style of theatre. Also, Grotowski knew that his theatre work required him to be diplomatic and sly, because of the constraints placed on him by the secret police. He wanted to encourage his spectators, but as we saw from his early mistake of trying to start an underground anti-Communist movement at age 14, he had learned to be careful. He knew that he now needed a new way to show his political skills and deliver his message.

In Central Asia, living in a Muslim community under the same Communist conditions, Grotowski had learned a new way of surviving under these conditions. Czeslaw Milosz in his book from the early 1950s, *The Captive Mind*, describes this concept as “Ketmanship”, which is an artist’s ability to deceive or mislead the authorities. In it, he describes it as “the art of 'acting in daily life' in Muslim medieval society to assure political and professional survival” (1981, p.55).

The people of Mussulman [Muslim] East believe that, ‘He who is in possession of truth must not expose his person, his relatives, or his reputation to the blindness, the folly, the perversity of those who it has pleased God to place and maintain in error.’ One must therefore keep silent about one's true convictions if possible. (Milosz, 1981, p.57)

When this term is applied to Grotowski, Milosz's concept of Ketmanship explains Grotowski's activities in Opole as a strategy for operating his theatre within the constraints of the secret police. The very etymology of the word “Kitman” indicates its Islamic origins, as it comes from the Arabic language of the Qur'an. Even though the Muslims Grotowski met in Central Asia did not speak Arabic, they read the Qur'an in Arabic as is required by Islam, and they understood the Qur'anic Arabic because of their oral tradition of transmission of meaning. After living in Central Asia, Grotowski developed the ability to disguise his true thoughts, a strategy he adopted from his

surrounding culture, and then in 1956 he returned to Poland where he continued this lifestyle of Ketmanship.

Grotowski's history and action in Krakow helped him to have a good profile with the Soviet secret police, who believed he was "their man". The secret police had several reasons for placing greater trust in Grotowski. They knew Grotowski as someone who supported them and was agreeable to and accepted Soviet views based on his involvement in ZMS in Krakow. It was also known that during his year of study in Moscow in 1955, he became interested in the Russian theatre and its famous director Constantin Stanislavsky, a fact that did not escape the secret police in Poland.

Grotowski used the Communist system in order to circumvent it because he realised it was his only option so as to operate within the strict measures the secret police used to control theatre groups at that time. He used Ketmanship to protect himself and his group. To minimize exposure and reduce the amount of attention he received from the secret police, he focused his efforts mostly on closed-door rehearsals rather than public performances, where he limited audience numbers. At one time, he had to cancel an entire production of *Hamlet* to protect his co-founder Flaszen, a last-minute change he explained to the authorities as the result of myriad problems including one of the member's injured hands.

There were several factors contributing to the decision in the summer of 1964 to move from Opole to Wroclaw. It may have been because Wroclaw was a bigger city than Opole, meaning it was less constricted by Communist Party control and had fewer Party members. The move would get the theatre off the secret police's radar. Although he "admitted to his theatre having benefited at the early stages of its development from the lack of pressure, [he] now welcomed the move to an academic centre such as Wroclaw" (Kumiega, 1985, p.43). Wroclaw's academic setting would bring new connections with specialists in academic fields such as cultural anthropology, psychology, psycho-analysis, and physiology.

Grotowski worked on and used his theatre through his productions and beyond as a political stage, a way to inspire his spectators to think politically so that they can make the necessary changes in their lives and then in society. He restricted his theatre to moral and social themes and decided it was “built on a core of intellectual values, committed to progress, proposing a new secular and rational ethic” (Mitter, 1992, p.64).

It was clear throughout his work that Grotowski's key concerns were the search for truth, self-knowledge, and the relationship between people and how to shape it. In *Jerzy Grotowski*, James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta describe Grotowski's Paratheatre as “one example of freedom within the tyranny of the surrounding society” (2007, p.9). Grotowski wrote on his politics and support for freedom in a 1985 article, “You are someone's son”:

I work, not to make some discourse, but to enlarge the island of freedom which I bear: my obligation is not to make political declarations, but to make holes in the wall. The things which were forbidden before me should be permitted after me; the doors which were closed and double-locked should be opened. (Grotowski, 1989, in Slowiak and Cuesta, 2007, p.7; emphasis from source)

Through his work, Grotowski strove to weaken barriers between people, bringing them hope and inspiring them to work for their freedom.

Given Grotowski's early years under miserable conditions in Poland, it would seem only natural that he often chose to express real human suffering through his actors' vocal and physical expressions, using their sounds and gestures to convey his productions' themes of persecution in believable ways with sincere authenticity. Grotowski through his actor training adjusted the physical exercises he used for each individual, giving them prescribed, specific exercises just beyond their abilities, so that they constantly had to challenge themselves. Through his theatrical productions, and using realism to highlight human suffering and sacrifice, he seemed to make political statements that were grounded in his formative experiences of living under harsh conditions.

All of Grotowski's productions were clearly political and contained multiple allusions to the human cost of political chaos. One example can be found in his production *The Constant Prince*, where the characters were not dressed in elaborate clothing. The physical semi-nakedness of the prince throughout the production was itself a "costume" that worked to express the symbolic nature of the martyr. (Richie, n.d., p.148) Again, the emphasis was on the actor and his art, and how this led to a higher level of interaction with the spectator. He believed that this was central to his theatre; "Grotowski feels that the core of the theatre is an encounter between actor and spectator" (Richie, n.d., p.150).

After finishing his Theatre of Sources (1976-1982) project, Grotowski left Poland during the Martial Law period of 1982. He landed in the USA, where the University of California Irvine allowed him to work on his project of the Objective Drama (1983-1986). On a few occasions, he went back to Poland on brief visits, to receive an Honorary Doctorate from Wroclaw University in 1991, and again in 1997 to present *Action*, "a fully-formed realisation of the idea of Action" which is the performative structure whose focus is the "total act", or in Leszek Kolankiewics's words, the embodiment of "a transformation of 'the natural, mortal human body into a divine body', supernatural, immortal" (Grotowski.net, 2012n, n.p.). This project is "not aimed at audience members [...] rather it is directed at the doers", and is "a key element and example of Art as vehicle" (Grotowski.net, 2012n, n.p.). *Action* also gives us an indication of Grotowski being influenced by Gurdjieff, the Sufi-inspired spiritualist whom I expound upon in chapter five:

The essence of *Action* is not the communication of meaning but, rather, the transmutation of doers, which Grotowski defined – using Gurdjieff's terms – as a transition 'from the body-and-essence to the body of essence', which is possible 'in outcome of difficult evolution, personal transmutation, which is in some way the task of everyone'. (Grotowski.net, 2012n, n.p.; with quotations from Grotowski)

From a close investigation of Grotowski's political activism in the context of his upbringing –

having read extensively about other cultures, having survived under authoritarianism, and having travelled to Central Asia and Iran where he encountered Sufis who made great impressions on him – we have a better picture of the ways in which his studies and experiences interweaved to help guide him on a path in search of inner truth. We also see how this personal philosophy led him through phases of transformation throughout his career in the performing arts.

Artistic and cultural climate

Eugenio Barba summarizes the theatrical culture of the twentieth century, an important frame of reference when contextualizing Grotowski's work.

We need to remember that the first thirty years of the twentieth century were marked by the work of the first generation of modernizers of theater (Stanislavski, Craig, Appia, Meyerhold, Copeau), figures who seemed very strange in the theatrical landscape of the day. Nazism and Stalinism destroyed the second generation (Le Cartel, Brecht, Artaud), the culture of doubt and research.

The only country that had preserved this culture was Poland, where artists worked with figures who had known Russia and its theater, just as they had worked with the great names from Germany such as Piscator and Bertolt Brecht. (Barba in Banu, 2013, pp.66-67)

Theatre in Poland after 1956 was dominated by the dramatic mode of absurdism with a satirical and didactic quality. (Brockett and Hildy, 2008) The incorporation of myths into theatrical productions was also in vogue with many Western creative artists, Grotowski included. (Innes, 1993)

Grotowski himself acknowledged that, like other artists, he was influenced by many factors, whether or not they realize or admit it.

I do not claim that everything we do is entirely new. We are bound, consciously or unconsciously, to be influenced by the traditions, science and art, even by the superstitions and presentiments peculiar to the civilization which has molded us, just

as we breathe the air of the particular continent which has given us life. All this influences our undertaking, though sometimes we may deny it. (Grotowski, 1967, p.36)

Before launching into Grotowski's production work in the next section of this chapter, it will be useful to examine a few of the most obvious artistic and philosophical influences on Grotowski, amidst the artistic climate and theatrical culture of his time.

Gurdjieff

I devote two sub-sections of my thesis and the entire last chapter to Gurdjieff because the famous Armenian spiritual leader was greatly inspired by Sufism, and because much has been written about the undeniable similarities between him and Grotowski. Grotowski was just sixteen when Gurdjieff (1866-1949) died. He first started reading about him after learning about him in Ouspensky's book *In Search of the Miraculous*. (Needleman and Baker, 1996, p.87) Along with forty-two other contributors, Grotowski spoke about the significance of Gurdjieff's work in a 1992 compilation of essays and interviews titled *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings*. (Needleman and Baker, 1996) Examples from the life and works of Grotowski and Gurdjieff reveal numerous parallels and similarities, from common travels to similar ideas and influences.

The first of the parallels is the common experience of travelling to areas of Central Asia where Sufism had a strong presence, and meeting with spiritual leaders who had enormous influences on their lives. In his 1955 article titled "The Red Balloon," Grotowski wrote, "We must pay tribute to our traditions with actions, not words. We must cultivate the seeds of our past, which may flourish into new values on modern soil" (Osinski, 1986, p.15). Grotowski's active tribute was to take a spiritual journey in search of esoteric knowledge and techniques to bring back this knowledge of what Gurdjieff called "ancient science", which focuses on working on one's self. (de Salzmann, 2010, p.295) As mentioned earlier, Grotowski and Gurdjieff both took several journeys to

the same regions, including Central Asia, and both focused on self-discipline, oral tradition, and precise and exact physical movements (see *Parallels in the Practical and Theoretical Work of the Two “Gs”* in chapter five).

According to Richard Schechner, these similarities were not the result of mere coincidence. Rather, “The similarities can be explained in two ways. Either Grotowski took something from Gurdjieff or both Gs drew from the same sources” (1996b, p.479). Therefore, it is important to emphasize the significance of Central Asian culture in the development of Gurdjieff’s practice, as this informs our examination of the significance of Central Asian culture to Grotowski’s practice.

It is widely known and has been established with certainty that Gurdjieff’s travels to Central Asia and his encounters with Sufism made an indelible impression on his practices, teachings, and writings. Examples of Central Asian Sufi influence on and parallels with Gurdjieff’s practices include training in arts and trades (e.g., music, dance, calligraphy, carpet-weaving, and carpentry) (Lefort, 1966); ritual feasts (Bennett, 1973 & 2002); the transfer of *baraka* (blessing) and spiritual energy from teacher to student (Lefort, 1966); connecting breathing techniques with mental exercises (Bennett, 1973 & 2002); his famous “Stop Exercise,” which came from the Mevlevi dervishes (Challenger, 2002); pastoral and group work (Omer, 2013); movements including sacred gymnastics and dance (Challenger, 2002); and the use of costumes (Welch, 1924), among others. With respect to Gurdjieff’s writings, examples of Central Asian Sufi literary influence include rhetorical devices such as inversion of logic and time, non-linear narration “in the tradition of oral literature,” exaggeration, imagination, humour, contradiction, and obfuscation of personal identity to instead focus on the message (Challenger, 2002, p.26); direct parallels to seminal Sufi classical texts like Hakim Sanai’s *The Walled Garden of Truth* (Lefort, 1966); and literary style and content, namely Gurdjieff’s use of teaching stories in his books *Beelzebub’s Tales* and *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (Bennett, 1973 & 2002; Shah, 1984).

Lastly, many of Gurdjieff’s teachings bear striking resemblance to Central Asian Sufi

teachings, as attested to by his pupils (Bennett, 1973); evidenced in his tenets such as “conscious labour and intentional suffering” (LePage, 2008, n.p.); and exemplified in his direct allusion to the Naqshbandi Sufi studies of the same name, the “Fourth Way” (Bennett, 1973 & 2002; Yagan, 1995). Therefore, it is no secret that Gurdjieff's practices, teachings, and writings were directly influenced by the Sufi practices, teachings, and writings he encountered on his travels to Central Asia.

The most secretive order of Sufis in the region of Central Asia that both Grotowski and Gurdjieff visited is named the Naqshbandi. It has been suggested that Gurdjieff was accepted into the Naqshbandi school and that he learned their secret teachings. The Naqshbandi Sufis likely inherited the knowledge of one of the esoteric schools of the “Inner Circle” Khwajagan or Masters of Wisdom who flourished from 950-1450 CE in Central Asia. (Bennett, 1973; Yagan, 1995) It is therefore believed that, as heirs to this ancient knowledge, the Naqshbandi Sufis are connected with an “Inner Circle of Humanity” that is behind humankind's evolutionary development. (Bennett, 1973) It has been suggested that this particular highly secretive Naqshbandi Sufi order was one of the Central Asian Sufi groups that clearly influenced Gurdjieff's practices, teachings, and writings.

The Sufis in Afghanistan are closely connected with these People, but no one will tell an outsider anything more than that these monasteries exist. They say that the only outsider to have penetrated into the outer ring of monasteries was a Russian-Greek, George Gurdjieff, whose contacts enabled him to be accepted as a pupil [...] Said to have been trained by Bahauddin Nakshband, one of the 'outer masters', Gurdjieff mastered some of the teachings and tried to teach them in the West. (Scott, 1983, p.168)

One of the teachings common to both the Sufi tradition and to Gurdjieff's Fourth Way is the concept of an “Inner Circle of Humanity”. Gurdjieff's connection with Naqshbandi Sufism is clear and established, and the influence of this particular order of Sufism is reflected in Gurdjieff's writings, practices and teachings.

While it is clear that both Gurdjieff and Grotowski were influenced by Central Asian

philosophies and cultures, the importance of Sufism is less certain in Grotowski's case because of the limited amount of documentation on his influences. In Central Asia, Grotowski found the connection with the past that he had been looking for, as he expressed in his search for the forgotten. Therefore, it can be suggested that Grotowski's early exposure to central Asian philosophy and culture, including Sufism, had a central role to play in the creation of his style of experimental theatre. It is not surprising then, that in 1959 his fledgling theatre company began the process of introducing actor training techniques that sought to achieve the organicity he saw in Abdullah in Afghanistan.

It is quite plausible that Grotowski's earliest theatre, based on his existing knowledge of Central Asian culture, was exploring aspects of actor training centred around methods such as the inner circle that were employed in Central Asian cultural – including Sufi – practices. Indeed, the Central Asian influence that one sees in much of his work at the earliest stages of his Theatre of Productions was the direct result of his exposure to spiritual leaders like Abdullah in the 1950s, a striking and well-established parallel with Gurdjieff.

Artaud

Grotowski first learned about Antonin Artaud (1896 – 1948) in 1964. Artaud was a French theatre director and writer who “changed the course of modern theater and still inspires radical thinkers of many stripes” (Lauerman, 1996, n.p.). Christopher Innes writes that “[Grotowski's] Laboratory Theatre has been seen as the realization of Artaud's vision” (Innes, 1986, p.278).

Artaud is famous for his ideas on the Theatre of Cruelty, wherein he “puts forward the idea of a great release, a great transgression of conventions, a purification by violence and cruelty”, from which according to Grotowski, “an actor reaches the essence of his vocation whenever he commits an act of sincerity, when he unveils himself, opens and gives himself in an extreme, solemn gesture” (Grotowski, 1968a, p.124). Grotowski would later develop his idea of the “total act” as “an alternative to ‘the theatre of cruelty’” (Grotowski, 1968a, p.125).

In Grotowski's 1968 book, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Grotowski describes Artaud as "an extraordinary visionary, but his writings have little methodological meaning because they are not the product of long-term practical investigations. They are an astounding prophecy, not a program" (1968a, pp.23-24). Grotowski clarified his opinion in an article which he wrote about Artaud the previous year, titled "He Wasn't Entirely Himself", specifically that because Artaud did not have "at his disposal the necessary material" to develop a methodology (or perhaps because "he had given up everything orderly, and made no attempt to achieve precision or mastery of things", due to his mental illness (Grotowski, 1968a, p.123)), "it is impossible to carry out [Artaud's] proposals [...] [because] Artaud left no concrete technique behind him, indicated no method. He left visions, metaphors [...] [and] He spoke of the magic of the theatre" (Grotowski, 1967, in Grotowski, 1968a, pp.120 and 118).

Grotowski appears to have drawn a great deal of inspiration from Artaud and to have evolved his ideas on the role of myth in theatre from his critique of the Frenchman. In Grotowski's opinion,

Artaud intuitively saw myth as the dynamic centre of the theatre performance. [...] He also knew that transgression of the myth renewed its essential values and 'became an element of menace which re-established the derided norms' (L. Flaszen). He did not however take account of the fact that, in our age, when all languages intermingle, the community of the theatre cannot possibly **identify** itself with myth, because there is no single faith. Only a **confrontation** is possible. (Grotowski, 1968a, p.121)

The next section of this chapter addresses Grotowski's views on myth in the theatre, and his call for confrontation with it. A further discussion on Artaud can be found in Chapter Two: Ancient Traditional Ritual and Thought in Grotowski's Theatre.

Stanislavsky

Another of Grotowski's influences was Russian theatre practitioner Konstantin Stanislavski (b.1863 – d.1938), "founder of the first acting 'System', co-founder of the Moscow Art Theatre (1897-), and an eminent practitioner of the naturalist school of thought, [who] unequivocally

challenged traditional notions of the dramatic process, establishing himself as one of the most pioneering thinkers in modern theatre” (Bishop and Jones, 1999, n.p.). In Stanislavski’s words,

The program for our undertaking was revolutionary. We protested against the old manner of acting and against theatricality, against artificial pathos and declamation, and against affectation on the stage, and inferior conventional productions and decoration, against the star system which had been a bad affect on the cast, against the whole arrangement of plays and against the poor repertoire of the theatres. (Stanislavski in Bishop and Jones, 1999, n.p.)

Stanislavski’s method in pursuit of authenticity greatly appealed to Grotowski, who would later exhibit the same discipline and search for truth.

Section 2: The Ritual and Aesthetic Dimensions of Grotowski's Theatre of Productions

By 1970, Grotowski had ended the first phase of his work on the poor theatre and then “set out to eliminate ‘the idea of theatre’” and “sought to develop means for leading participants back into the elemental connections between people and their bodies, the natural world, and each other” (Brockett and Hildy, 2008, p.496). To get a big picture view of the phases of Grotowski's work, we look to Lisa Wolford, who breaks his work down into two main phases, theatre and post-theatre:

Indeed, despite Grotowski's division of his work into five separate phases, from an outside perspective the relevant distinction appears to boil down to only two: his work in the theatre, which received an enormous amount of international recognition, and the work he began after ‘leaving theatre behind,’ which has been perceived as becoming progressively more isolated and obscure. People of the theatre have tended, by and large, to (mis)interpret the post-theatrical phase(s) of Grotowski's work as somewhat suspect, self-indulgent, and elitist, having more to do with therapy or alternative spiritualities than with art. (Wolford, 1996d, p.5)

In the previous section I gave a summary of Grotowski's early life and influences, so in the remainder of this chapter I will describe his early work and ideas in his Theatre of Productions phase (1957/1959 until 1969). Later chapters will go into his post-theatre work, but first it is helpful to set the groundwork explaining his early work in the theatre, so we can see later that Sufi elements already entered Grotowski's works in his production/theatre phase. By devoting the first portion of this section to Grotowski's views on the importance of rituals and myths for his production phase, it will then be possible to establish the ritual-based foundation of his production-phase theatre aesthetics in the second portion.

Ritual and myth in Grotowski's theatre

In the scholarship on theatre and the literature from anthropology based on “cultural Darwinism”, it is generally agreed that, at its inception, ancient theatre was born out of religious

rituals that revolved around myths. (Brockett and Hildy, 2008, pp.1-2; Rea, 1999; Hartnoll, 1976, p.7) Other theories on the origins of theatre exist, such as storytelling and narrative dance and song, while still other theorists put forth multiple origins. (Brockett and Hildy, 2008, pp.4-5) Author Eli Rozik questions the most commonplace assumption, the “theory of ritual origin”, although he recognises and lists several prominent theatre scholars who have furthered it in their texts, including Phyllis Hartnoll in *A Concise History of the Theatre* (1971), Jack Mitchley and Peter Spalding in *Five Thousand Years of Theatre* (1982), and Oscar G. Brockett in *History of the Theatre* (1999), and several other intellectuals, including Richard Schechner. (Rozik, 2002, pp. ix-x) While Rozik has presented several evidence-based and common-sense arguments for his “theory of roots”, against the “theory of origins”, he acknowledges – or rather laments – that general consensus endorses the “ritual origins” theory.

Disagreements over the definitions and history of the original theatre aside, various creative artists have argued for the contemporary reinterpretation of myths and rituals in the modern theatre, that is, they have seen a need for integrating ancient myths and rituals into present-day productions. In *Avant Garde Theatre: 1892-1992* (1993), Christopher Innes refers to this as theatrical primitivism, more precisely:

The idealization of the primitive and elemental in theatre, together with the rediscovery and adapting of remote or archaic models [...] [wherein] the primitive is almost always seen through a western, contemporary prism; and creative artists freely reinterpret primitive models to serve aims that would be alien to the original culture [...] [in] an attempt to replace the dominant modes of drama—and by extension the society of which these are the expression—by rebuilding from first principles. (Innes, 1993, p.3)

Innes lists Grotowski among several others who took this approach of primitivism, one he defines with

[...] two complementary facets: the exploration of dream states or the instinctive and subconscious levels of the psyche; and the quasi-religious focus on myth and magic, which in the theatre leads to experiments with ritual and the ritualistic patterning of performance. (Innes, 1993, pp.2-3)

Notwithstanding the negative connotations Innes uses, for example when he refers to “Antonin Artaud’s pretentious claim to a ‘Holy Theatre’”, his categorisation is convincing and provides an informative context for Grotowski’s place in this “network of cross-fertilization” (Innes, 1993, pp. 3 & 2).

Additional to Grotowski’s likely influences by peers and predecessors in the “primitivism network” as named by Innes, his own opinion on the role of ritual and myth in modern theatre evolved largely through a process of trial and error. In 1968, near the end of his first phase of work known as “poor theatre”, he explained this shift in his book *Towards a Poor Theatre* (Grotowski, 1968a) and in his lecture on 18 October in the Parisian seat of the Polish Academy of the Sciences, transcribed as “Theatre and Ritual” (Grotowski, 1968b).

To summarize his evolving views on the role of myth in the broadest sense, we read that early on he used myths to relay fundamental existential truths to his audiences; after finding that myths no longer hold relevance for modern audiences, he then undertook a strategy Tadeusz Kudliński termed “the dialectic of derision and apotheosis” to “profane” and attack the archetypes (i.e., the symbols, myths, images, leitmotifs) engrained in a culture so as to reveal them and bring them back to life (Grotowski.net, 2012b, n.p.); but when this approach failed to work on the majority of his audience members, he realised he needed to go deeper than myths to an even more primordial approach, to find the Source of Truth – even more basic, fundamental, and therefore true than those human truths found in myths. The first and second approaches will be explained further below, while the third approach unfolds throughout the greater part of my thesis. That is, by the end of my thesis, I hope I will have demonstrated that the chronicles of Grotowski’s journey on a path to find the Source of

Truth in numerous traditional cultures over several decades indicates a significant emphasis on Sufi wisdom, one which I intend to bring into clearer focus. To understand better why he subsequently undertook such an effort in search of Truth, we must first appreciate why the first two approaches to theatre and ritual, namely the revival of myth and then “the dialectic of derision and apotheosis”, both failed to satisfy him.

Grotowski, and other theatre exponents involved in the revival of Western Theatre including Antonin Artaud and Peter Brook, have credited the ideas behind their universally-renowned theatrical experiments to ancient forms of ritual arts and theatre concepts. Either directly or indirectly, Grotowski’s work and philosophy on elements of theatre such as actors, spectators, and the use of props, lights, music, costume and space were influenced by rituals. (Wolford, 1996d; Schechner and Wolford, 1997; Georges, 2002)

According to Grotowski, ritual was unique for it gave “the spectator [...] a renewed awareness of his personal truth in the truth of myth”, and he was determined to revive it for modern audiences. (Grotowski, 1968a, p.22) Grotowski viewed “the theatre as a secular ritual to which spectator-witnesses were admitted [...] to make the actors and the audience confront themselves in something analogous to a religious experience”, and he “searched in a script to find archetypal patterns that have universal meaning for audiences today” (Brockett and Hildy, 2008, p.495). In other words, because of the distinctive historical and cultural contexts within which myths are situated, he realised that theatre’s ritual function and archetypes, or myths, would have to be adapted in order to appeal and relate to his contemporaries.

Although in varying degrees, every person and academic discipline is vulnerable to the subjectivity of selective memory, nostalgia, and biased history (Lowenthal, 1985), sociological literature on shared “social facts” indicative of the “hive mind”, “group mind”, “mass mind” and “social mind”, regarding cultural homogeneity and collective group consciousness (Emile Durkheim, 1893) indicates that culturally homogeneous groups have common understandings or shared

awarenesses. (Lukes, 1973) “Traditional” (as opposed to the more derogatory term “primitive” [Schechner, 1994]) theatre’s birth in the age of antiquity came at a time when communities’ shared experiences and collective consciousness allowed for audiences’ communal identification with myths. Grotowski recognised that, in that context, people shared beliefs and experiences to a much greater degree than they do today.

[...] we evidently sought to establish what could be the base of the ritual. Perhaps it is the myth, perhaps the archetype, according to the terminology of Jung, or – if you want – the collective representation or the primitive thoughts, that can be used here as any definition. Since – deep in our mind – we were not keen on resuscitating the religious theatre, it was rather a ritual attempted for the layman. (Grotowski, 1968b, p.138)

With the advent of individualisation, however, beliefs and identities became much more differentiated from one individual to another. (Grotowski, 1968a, p.23) Whereas congregations or tribes who attended ancient ritual theatre performances felt in unison the liberation of their spiritual energy resulting from their shared identification with myths or transcendence beyond them, modern societies are much more diverse and heterogeneous in spiritual experiences and religious beliefs. For Grotowski, this proved problematic, as

At a certain moment we arrived at the conclusion that it was necessary to abandon this conception of the ritual theatre. Since today it is not possible, because of the lack of beliefs practiced universally. (Grotowski, 1968b, p.139)

Social and religious changes have meant that traditional mythic forms have also been changed, disappeared, and reincarnated. As a result, “Group identification with myth – the equation of personal, individual truth with universal truth – is virtually impossible today” (Grotowski, 1968a, p.23). Grotowski repeats this belief in his 1968 lecture,

From the point of view of the theatrical phenomenon, it is necessary to realize that the

reconstruction of ritual today is not possible [...] Therefore, I retained that it would not be possible to resuscitate [in] theatre the ritual for the absence of an exclusive belief, of a sole system of mythical signs, of a sole system of primary images. (Grotowski, 1968b, p.140)

As further explanation for why Grotowski gave up on using myths in his theatrical works,

The axis of the mythical representations has vanished today, there does not exist a true participation, therefore it is necessary to abandon the idea of the ritual theatre. And step after step, we were away from this idea. (Grotowski, 1968b, p.141)

Or as Wolford says,

Grotowski realized that identification with myth was impossible in an era no longer united by a “common sky” of belief and that confrontation with myth was the only means to penetrate beyond superficial acceptance of religious beliefs; by means of such confrontation he invited the individual (both actor and spectator) to explore his or her own sense of truth in light of the values encoded in the myth. (Wolford, 1996d, p.2)

Since people in modern times no longer give deference to ubiquitous myths, and since he predicted the “inevitable decline of religion”, Grotowski called for a new “secular sacrum” in lieu of the religious sacrum of antiquity, to allow for the restoration of the ritual function of theatre. (Grotowski, 1968a, p.49) He looked to “great works”, historical works of literature, for secular myths to replace the religious myths of ancient ritual theatre, because, “In the perspective of art, the works are always alive” (Grotowski, 1968a, p.59). His productions tended to focus on the myths, themes and archetypes that are ubiquitous throughout humankind’s history by stripping them of any identifying elements of specific times or places and instead focusing on the core confrontation. (Grotowski, 1968a, p.58) Therefore, his characters and events symbolised the universal conflicts common to different societies. In his words,

The strength of great works really consists in their cataclysmic effect: they open doors for us, set in motion the machinery of our self-awareness [...] the author's text is a sort of scalpel enabling us to open ourselves, to transcend ourselves, to find what is hidden within us and to make the act of encountering the others; in other words, to transcend our solitude. (Grotowski, 1968a, p.57)

Grotowski went further to suggest possible routes for a return to ritual in theatre: confrontation with myth and “the violation of the living organism” (Grotowski, 1968a, p.23). The former suggestion arose because, as explained above, the individualisation of modern societies precludes the possibility of group identification with myth. Despite this loss of group identification, Grotowski believed that basic truths about the human condition lay in the content of myths, even if those myths no longer held enough significance in contemporary societies to command any belief or allegiance. Therefore Grotowski advocated confrontation with and derision of these myths, or archetypes, “which might become something conventional or dead [...] something deeply rooted in a civilisation’s culture”, and thus to strike at core truths of the human condition (first derision) and instigate primal human reactions in spectators to elevate or bring the myths back to life (then apotheosis). (Grotowski.net, 2012b, n.p.) Additionally, confrontation with myths serves as a point of reference, or “root”, with which to relate private experiences and modern problems. For Grotowski, these primordial myths could be located in classic texts that had stood the test of time for their universal truths. Although the specific details of classic texts and “great works” do not equate in modern times, their myths and themes provide perspective with which to understand contemporary issues. In practice and reality, however, this confrontation with myths had mixed results, according to Grotowski, as certain spectators reacted with derision and others with apotheosis, and only few were able to synthesize the two, as he had intended. (Grotowski, 1968b)

Grotowski’s work with ritual and myth carried over from his production phase to his later post-production work. In the summer of 1975, just before the start of his third phase, Theatre of

Sources, he organized a “research university” at Wroclaw, which included activities such as going “through ritualized myths and archetypal experiences involving fire, air, earth, water, eating, dancing, playing, planting, and bathing [...] to rediscover the roots of theatre in pure ritualized experience, as well as to discover their own true being” (Brockett and Hildy, 2008, p.496). Clearly ritual and myth were of great importance to Grotowski throughout most of his life’s work, a truth which manifested early on in obvious and tangible ways in the aesthetics of his theatre, particularly his work on actor training, staging, and the role of spectators.

The aesthetics of Grotowski’s theatre

In this portion of the second section of chapter one, we will look at the aesthetics of Grotowski’s theatre, with emphasis on the basic importance of myth and rituals and their application. Grotowski’s approach to theatre was complete and encompassed every possible element of performance, from the rigors of his actor training, to his take on staging, and the role of spectators. As Schechner tells us in his article “6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre”, there are three related transactions which comprise the theatrical event in Environmental Theatre:

Among performers.

Among members of the audience.

Between performers and audience. (1968, p.44)

Grotowski experimented with various configurations and interactions in these transactions, in order to test out different ways to handle his actors, staging, and spectators, culminating in the overall aesthetics of his theatre. Schechner tells us that Grotowski’s strategy was to employ these variables to create a variety of “contrasts”:

Grotowski has carried to the extreme the idea of competing elements, contradictory statements. ‘There must be theatrical contrast,’ he says. ‘This can be between any two elements: music and the actor, the actor and the text, actor and costume, two or more parts of the body (the hands say yes, the legs say no), etc.’ (Schechner, 1968, pp.59-

60)

Grotowski even played around with the text itself in an approach he referred to as "‘montage’: re-arranging, extrapolating, and eliminating portions of the text", all in a "confrontation" with the text. (Schechner, 1968, pp.63-64) Confrontation, contrast, and the application of rituals and myths underlie the three aspects of the holistic aesthetics of Grotowski's theatre: his actor, staging, and spectators, with a final comment on his Eastern ritual influences.

Grotowski's actor

One of Grotowski's most important strategies for the recovery of myth in theatre is pursued by and through the actor himself, whom he distinguishes as either a "courtesan actor" or a "holy actor" (Grotowski, 1968a, pp.34&35). The "courtesan actor" is he who exploits his body onstage for money or the adoration of the audience, and is therefore unable to recapture myth because of his superficial concerns. However, if this actor,

[...] through excess, profanation and outrageous sacrilege reveals himself by casting off his everyday mask, he makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration. If he does not exhibit his body, but annihilates it, burns it, frees it from every resistance to any psychic impulse, then he does not sell his body but sacrifices it. He repeats the atonement; he is close to holiness. (Grotowski, 1968a, p.34)

Therefore, even a courtesan actor can become a holy actor if he embarks on the necessary process of sacrifice, purging himself of his external layers and masks, although it will never be possible to remove "all traces of the 'courtesan' in the 'holy' actor" (Grotowski, 1968a, p.48).

Grotowski's "holy actor" training (to be explained more in the next chapter, Ancient Traditional Ritual and Thought in Grotowski's Theatre) employs a rigorous system of physical and mental exercises aimed at removing any barriers to one's purest form of expression. (Grotowski, 1968a) One goal is the eradication of any heavy cognitive load or intense concentration on thought

processes, which only serves to impede the expression of one's purest psychic impulses; therefore Grotowski went so far as to interrupt his actors when he noticed them thinking. (Grotowski, 1968a, p.176) The result of this physical and mental training is that the body "ceases to exist", moving spontaneously on reflex and impulse "so quickly that thought – which would remove all spontaneity – has no time to intervene" (Grotowski, 1968a, p.35).

Rather than acquiring a set of techniques or moves, Grotowski's actor takes the *via negativa* (to be explained fully in the next chapter) to sacrifice himself; that is, to remove all physical and mental barriers to expression. According to Grotowski, this "violation of the living organism, the exposure carried to outrageous excess, returns us to a concrete mythical situation, an experience of common human truth" (Grotowski, 1968a, p.23). For only through sacrifice and making a "total gift" of oneself – which Grotowski called the "total act" – can the actor convey the common human truth of suffering and mortality. (Grotowski, 1968a, pp.16 & 131) These "holy actor" physical exercises are something of a ritual purification and self-sacrifice, though not in the prescriptive sense of undertaking some formal ceremony. Rather, it is the goal of achieving a state of decontamination, free of barriers to expression.

The complexity of restoring mythical truth to theatre involves more than merely selecting the appropriate historical works of literature. (Georges, 2002, p.26) As Monique Borie states, there must be a clear distinction between ritual drama and daily life; indeed, this break is a necessary aspect of dramatic representation. (Georges, 2002, p.26) Likewise, Hartnoll writes that "according to Aristotle a play is 'an imitation of an action, and not the action itself' [...] Before we can talk of theatre we must wait for something a little further removed from reality" (Hartnoll, 1976, p.7). An example of this delineation between reality and theatre is the chorus in the Attic tragedy, which according to Jasper Griffin, served several functions, including the collection of a group of "others", usually foreigners, to set apart from both the audience and the sacred space of the stage:

Perhaps two of the thirty-three surviving tragedies have choruses composed of Attic

citizens [...] Again we might not have thought it so obvious that the purpose of all those exotic groups of characters was to represent, in any simple and straightforward way, the collective citizen body. (Griffin, 1998, p.43)

This “otherness” of the chorus is supported by Georges, who writes that one important function these chorus member actors served was to embody the truths of the work and sacrifice their bodies to reveal the “secular sacrum” to the spectators, using physical representations free of consciousness of or attention to the “norms” of human behaviour. Indeed, these physical representations have been likened to trance movements, “strange behaviour” that emphasises the departure from ordinary life. (Georges, 2002, p.27)

The Psychotherapeutic Aspects of Grotowski’s Work

Participating in one of his performances as a spectator or actor was to take part in a therapy session, or “spiritual psychotherapy” (Innes, 1986, p.279). Performing as an actor in his theatre allowed one to wrestle with themselves by way of the character. Schechner writes: “This is what Grotowski calls ‘psychic penetration,’ the performer using ‘his role as if it were a surgeon’s scalpel to dissect himself” (Schechner, 1994 [1973], p.225). Through a merciless process of sacrifice and renunciation, actors undertake to peel off the layers of their social identities, resulting in self-discovery, communication and artistic creation. The actor’s purification leads him to his “universal truth”, free from the bonds of social labels and façade. In turn, to understand the actor and participate as receivers in the act of communication, spectators consent to witness this act of climactic sacrifice at the height of purification. By witnessing the actor’s sacrifice, the spectator feels the shock of their exposure when their “essence” is revealed, and is thus “enable(d) [...] to reciprocate internally” (Kumiega, 1985, p.132). It is clear then why Grotowski likened his theatre performances to psychotherapy sessions.

Schechner took inspiration from Grotowski’s theme of confrontation in relation to therapy for his actor training. In a chapter titled “Therapy”, Schechner describes The Performance Group’s

(TPG) use of “encounter group therapy” and “‘confrontations’ (a term taken from therapy and Grotowski) [whereby] Two or more people face each other and say/do what they feel about each other” (Schechner, 1994 [1973], p.201). This method was not done in front of spectators, but as part of their training and rehearsals.

According to Innes, Grotowski’s approach to achieving his contradictory ideal of a Holy Theatre is “messianic” and the very notion of the Theatre of Grotowski is “ironic” (Innes, 1986, pp.279 and 280). After Grotowski’s “progressive discarding of all illusionary elements in the Laboratory Theatre work”,

What remains is the interaction between performer and spectator, Grotowski's primary focus from his earliest productions. But this irreducible basis is not specifically theatrical. In place of developing techniques for effectiveness in stage presentation, actor training was designed to free performers from inhibiting repressions, while the aim of public performances was to have an equivalent effect on spectators. The premise is 'authenticity'. Removing the distinction between actor and audience becomes the logical conclusion. The end result: spiritual psychotherapy. (Innes, 1986, p.279)

Body-Memory as a Ritual Concept

Although the above process of developing ritual performers involves conscious and deliberate effort, the result is an automatic, natural, effortless expression of performance-sequences that have come to be programmed into the entire body and all of its parts as a memory. This is what Grotowski referred to as body-memory, the product of an intensive and systematic process of training to develop an ability to move without conscious thought, a body that reacts and moves spontaneously on impulse and reflex, “not through conscious manipulation but through a submission, a letting go, the cessation of struggle” (Laster, 2012, p.227). One cannot possess body-memory, they *are* body-memory: “‘It’s you unrepeatably, singular, you in the totality of your nature; you carnal, you stripped

bare. And at once also: it's you the embodiment of all others, all beings, all of history” (Grotowski, in Laster, 2012, p.227).

To Grotowski, body-memory was the result of a transformation whereby the entire body becomes a memory of the performance-sequences embedded in the body. Achieving body-memory means that one's impulses can be released more readily and freely, as it is not necessary to call upon the brain for conscious control of bodily movements. According to Grotowski,

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. (Grotowski, 1968a, pp.185-186)

With the emphasis being on physical reaction and impulse, there is no room for the brain to interfere. In fact, the body takes over the function of the brain. Rather than subduing thought and mental capacity, the ritual process works on the ritual performer's psyche to expand their body's function to take on the role and function of the brain, thus becoming what Grotowski called “a body of essence” (Laster, 2012, p.227).

Transformation and transporting in Grotowski's actor

The ritual performer's transformation depends on having a ritual atmosphere infused with belief in and devotion to the performance. This interplay between the inner self and outer environment reflects what Grotowski called the element of “flow” that he endeavoured to cultivate in his performers through exercises. Within every actor's nature, Grotowski saw an impulse, an organic flow of creativity that materialises in sound, expression, and artistic creation. In order to effect an atmosphere conducive to this transformation, the ritual performer must make others believe and “buy in” to the performance. That is, the ritual performer has to cultivate an atmosphere of ritual.

At their root, Grotowski's actor training exercises were designed to dissolve the blockages within, free the impulses, and thus allow for the creation of a “flow” from within. The ritual process requires that the actor surrender to this transformation so as to allow for the flow of action.

Csikszentmihalyi, a Hungarian psychology professor, refers to this “flow” as “the merging of action and awareness. A person in the flow has no dualistic perspective, he is aware of his actions but not of the awareness itself” (Schechner, 1990, p.124). Whereas self-consciousness inhibits “flow”, discarding awareness of awareness allows “flow” to move freely. The moment of action betrays the immense amount of preparation that went into training the ritual actor for this performance.

One example of such a ritual actor is Ryszard Cieslak, who trained himself to experience this “flow” yet was not aware of how he was transported back to his starting point, *i.e.* how he “cooled down”. Cieslak often drank vodka, engaged in long discussions, and smoked to “get out of the role”, a process he found more difficult than getting into it. Schechner writes that Cieslak’s experience is typical of performers in ritual arts. Ritual performers must sometimes go to great lengths to come out of their roles, as with the cooling-down rituals in Bali, like sprinkling with holy water, inhaling incense, massage, or even animal sacrifice and blood sprinkling. (Schechner, 1983, p.97) These sometimes extreme measures are indicative of the magnitude of the transformation ritual actors and ritual performers undergo to reach their desired states of being. Ritual acting therefore entails a great degree more work and self-sacrifice than learning scripts for conventional theatre, but to Grotowski these were necessary steps in releasing the actor’s energy, creativity, and “flow”.

Grotowski’s staging

In addition to his actors’ unconventional bodily movements, Grotowski set his dramas apart from daily life through innovations in the use of props and space. Whereas conventional theatre utilises decorations, props, and costumes to imitate scenes from real life, Grotowski’s omission of these items from his stage productions underscores the distinction between ritual drama and daily life. The absence of everyday items like furniture, and sometimes mere clothing, where they would normally be expected in everyday life, makes a strong impression on spectators, forcing them to re-evaluate their meaning and function.

To Grotowski, theatre was completely different to cinema, therefore it should not try to

emulate cinema with lights and audio but it should focus on the spectator's challenging and confronting experience. Unlike cinema's image-based design, theatre is distinctive in its use of live actors. Schechner tells us that Grotowski downplayed the role of technology in the theatre and quotes Grotowski from his book *Towards a Poor Theatre*:

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. This is an ancient theoretical truth, of course, but when rigorously tested in practice it undermines most of our usual ideas about theatre. [...] No matter how theatre expands and exploits its mechanical resources, it will remain technologically inferior to film and television. (Grotowski, 1968, in Schechner, 1968, p.63)

Rather than attempt to emulate the technological advancements of cinema, Grotowski wanted to rediscover essential human truths through primitive rituals and myths.

Grotowski's studies of traditional rituals led him to revolutionise theatre in calling for a re-evaluation of the very notion, existence and purpose of modern theatre. For example, his idea of the "poor" theatre, one where the relationship between the actor and audience was emphasised over the costumes, props and audio- and visual-effects, hearkened back to ancient rituals of simple, stripped-down performances. (Schechner and Wolford, 1997) He regarded stage materials as unnecessary distractions from the central essence of theatre; although they might enhance the audience's experience, they confuse the message. In other words, "'Poor Theatre' gives up the trappings used in the other visual arts" (Croyden, 1969, p.83), resulting in a "stripped" stage with only a vulnerable actor. Implementing this philosophy in his "laboratory" in Poland meant that actors wore plain black rehearsal clothes instead of costumes, and that staging was stripped back to the bare minimum. (Schechner and Wolford, 1997) The complete emphasis on the actors meant that they needed to have

full control over their bodies and voices, which necessitated rigorous exercises. In rejecting elaborate staging and effects, Grotowski reversed the trend from the 19th century for gorgeous costumes and staging. Any lighting or sets that Grotowski used was minimal and secondary to the actors. Furthermore, by extension from his concept of the sacredness or “priesthood” of the actor, Grotowski likened the performance space to a sacred place, the performance itself to a religious ceremony or event; he saw a holy relationship between actors and spectators; hence the parallels between religious and theatrical terms. (Schechner and Wolford, 1997)

Another technique Grotowski employed was the unexpected repurposing and positioning of ordinary objects such as dining tables, tubs, and stovepipes. (Georges, 2002) His innovations in the use of space and physical objects, combined with the “strange behaviour” of his performers, have the combined effect of distancing his dramas from ordinary life.

Section 3: From Theatre of Thirteen Rows to Laboratory Theatre, and Environmental Theatre

For the same reason Grotowski reorganised everyday objects into unexpected configurations, he also started every production afresh with a new theatrical set and stage design. In speaking of the controversy over his stage design of *The Constant Prince*, wherein he separated actors from spectators (“The room was constructed so that the audience was almost hidden behind a wall” (Schechner and Hoffman, 1968, p.52)) Grotowski stated:

I am always ready to be a traitor to any exclusive rule. It is not essential that actors and spectators be mixed. The important thing is that the relation between the actors and the spectators in space be a significant one.

If the spectator and the actor are very close in the space, a strong psychic curtain falls between them. It's the opposite of what one might expect. But if the spectators play the role of spectators and that role has a function within the production, the psychic curtain vanishes. (Schechner and Hoffman, 1968, p.53)

In 1959, Grotowski accepted the role of stage director in Ludwik Flaszen’s small Theatre of

13 Rows in Opole. (Schechner, 1996c; Grotowski.net, 2012m) Two years later, in 1961, Grotowski premiered his “first wholly environmental theatre staging”, whereby actors performed up close to spectators who were clustered into small groups and sat upon moveable chairs. (Schechner, 1996c, p.24)

Though Richard Schechner identified Grotowski’s work with environmental theatre as early as 1961, the term “environmental theatre” wasn’t popularized until the early 1970s, thanks to Schechner’s writings on the non-frontal, spectator-incorporative theatre, as well as the works of “his company The Performance Group, and the practices of other innovative makers such as Jerzy Grotowski” (Allain and Harvie, 2006, p.148).

Under one of Schechner’s six axioms of environmental theatre, “[...] if scenery is used at all, it is used all the way, to the limits of its possibilities. There is no bifurcation of space, no segregation of scenery, and if equipment is exposed it is there because it must be there, even if it is in the way” (Schechner, 1968, p.50).

But Grotowski did not believe that merely removing the physical space between spectators and actors could necessarily bring about direct participation.

As if by mingling the actors and the spectators, we could bring about direct participation! Experience proves that by putting a distance between the actors and the spectators in space, one often rediscovers a [psychical] (parenthesis in original) proximity between them; and, inversely, the best means of creating a sort of abyss between them is to have them mingle in space.

Together with Jerzy Gurawski, my chief collaborator in this area, we have studied this problem over many years. After so many explorations, experiences, and reflections, I still doubt the possibility of direct participation in today's theatre, in an age when neither a communal faith exists, nor any liturgy rooted in the collective psyche as an axis for ritual. (Grotowski in Fumaroli, Grotowski, and Reavey, 1969,

p.177)

In 1962, the Theatre of 13 Rows was renamed the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows. (Schechner, 1996c, p.24) Grotowski employed an architect, Gurawski, to redesign the theatre and rearrange the spaces for spectators and performers, such that even spectators who had already attended a production at the Laboratory Theatre of Thirteen Rows would be uncertain of where they should sit when entering a new production. By reorganising the theatre space, Grotowski and Gurawski challenged spectators' assumptions and perhaps made them feel uncomfortable or uncertain of their expected behaviour, thus reconfiguring their conceptions of their environment and instigating a fundamental psychological and physical break from their ordinary lives. Sometimes the seating arrangements integrated all occupants of the theatre, while sometimes they made them physically close yet psychologically distant. (see block quote above, Grotowski *in* Fumaroli, Grotowski, and Reavey, 1969, p.177) The effect of this reorganisation was to contribute to the division between the profane and the sacred and allow for ritual to enter the dramatic space. By separating the sacred and profane realms, Grotowski and his theatre architect sought to highlight the boundaries between the two, sometimes to eradicate the profane altogether, and always simultaneously they hoped to break down and rebuild spectators' connections both with each other and with the performers. But for Grotowski,

The elimination of stage/auditorium dichotomy is not the important thing - that simply creates a bare laboratory situation, an appropriate area for investigation. The essential concern is finding the proper spectator/actor relationship for each type of performance and embodying the decision in physical arrangements. (Grotowski, 1967, p.33)

Dispensing with convention, breaking down barriers and reconceptualising the sacred and profane allowed for the entry of new ways of thinking and experiencing the ritual aspects of drama. The physical arrangement of his Environmental Theatre design became more and more like ritual performances and less like traditional theatre.

From the mid-1960s on, Grotowski found it more and more difficult to do theatre as such. Performances drew closer to a direct involvement with spectators even as the work of the actors on themselves concerned intimate materials about themselves. But this material was not expressed in a personal or psychologically naturalistic way [...] Rather Grotowski and his colleagues moved closer and closer to archetype and ritual. (Schechner, 1996c, p.25)

Grotowski's spectators

Although his actor training was rigorous and he placed great emphasis on both his actors and stage design, to Grotowski, theatrical performances were not acting for the actors' sake. Rather, like Artaud and Stanislavski, Grotowski's ultimate goal was to employ the theatre's moral and spiritual capacity to instigate a fundamental change in the spectators. To that end, when actors were given the difficult task of struggling with themselves onstage, it was to compel the spectators to do the same. The theatre and his actors were instruments to produce a spiritual shift in the spectators, and as such, he geared his work toward those spectators who were receptive to transformation. Grotowski was not interested in catering this type of theatre to audiences merely interested in recreational distraction, entertainment, or cultural fulfilment. Instead, he wrote,

We are concerned with the spectator who has genuine spiritual needs [...] who does not stop at an elementary stage of psychic integration, content with his own petty, geometrical, spiritual stability, knowing exactly what is good and what is evil, and never in doubt [...but] whose unrest is not general but directed towards a search for the truth about himself. (Grotowski, 1968a, p.40)

Such a spectator, he believed, was well-suited for the challenge of analysing, questioning, and confronting themselves, willing to look within for their own truth. Such an undertaking required that the spectator be able to relate to the actor. In order to be inspired by the performer to tackle the inward struggle with the self, the spectator must feel connected to the performance. So, Grotowski,

like Artaud, saw the theatre as a locus of provocation, but Grotowski also insisted that successful incitement required common ground between the spectator and the actor.

In a review of Kumiega's 1985 book *The Theatre of Grotowski*, Christopher Innes gives us a critique of Grotowski's highly selective process of spectator selection.

Even in his more conventional productions, the coalescing of physical presentation and dramatic theme into a motif of 'sacrifice' and the stress on intensity implicitly required total commitment from spectators as well as actors. Performances became in a real sense inaccessible to anyone not directly involved. Audiences were restricted in numbers, at one point to fewer than thirty, placed in the acting area and assigned 'roles' to facilitate integration. The production toured from 1968 on and was used as a tool to select suitable spectators for para-theatrical workshops with the company [...]. Complete participation being the basic principle, objective assessment became practically impossible. Achievements could only be analysed, as here, from within a group that was both self-selective and restricted to those with similar aims. In addition, Grotowski's rejection of intellectualizing, his search for a non-verbal language and his stress on subconscious, spontaneous response repudiated the language of criticism. (Innes, 1986, p.278)

This excerpt was selected to highlight the evolution in Grotowski's theatre from productions for public consumption, to extremely limited public consumption, to closed sessions focused on active culture and participation in his second phase, the post-theatre phase. It is clear that even in his theatre phase ending in 1969, Grotowski designed his productions only for small groups of qualified spectators with "genuine spiritual needs".

Grotowski's productions were an instrument of social change for challenging biologically-, religiously-, and culturally-imbued myths. He targeted "the collective complexes of society, [...] the myths which are not an invention of the mind but are [...] inherited through one's blood, religion,

culture and climate” (Grotowski, 1968a, p.42). As shown previously under Ritual and myth in Grotowski’s theatre of chapter one: section two, modern societies have lost their reliance on myth-based social narratives, but they do retain shared fundamental human truths, which can be found in myths of great works and classical literature. It is these traditions that formed the basis of Grotowski’s modern critiques and served as the shared and common links between spectator and actor that Grotowski exploited for transmitting provocation to his spectators. From a modern perspective, spectators were led to analyse their own selves and the universal human truths using a contemporary lens to interrogate shared myths.

Instrumental to the successful provocation of his spectators was their proximity to other spectators and actors. In order for members of the audience to receive the message to challenge their myths and internal truths, they had to be situated in a three-dimensional environment that amplified this message through close proximity to both the action of the drama (ie, to the actors) and to other spectators. (Schechner, 1994)

Traditionally, spectators experience a two-dimensional perspective in the conventional theatre orientation, with the usual clear division between actors on the stage and spectators in the audience who tend not to see one another, as convention dictates they look straight ahead at the stage. Conversely, Grotowski employed a triangular spectator-spectator-actor design, experimenting by varying the degrees of distance between spectators and performers and by enabling spectators to see one another.

To a greater extent than the traditional two-dimensional theatrical environment, Grotowski’s theatrical architecture allowed for up-front confrontation with the action of the drama by embedding spectators as virtual characters within the action. When seated so close to the actors, spectators had a different feeling and experience of the drama. At other times, spectators were seated at a great distance from the action with only a skewed line of sight toward it. Besides the seating arrangements, the actors’ treatment of spectators further influenced the latter’s experience. Actors either spoke

directly to spectators in intense fashion, or conspicuously ignored them with awkward effect due to otherwise close proximity.

In addition to the spectator-actor dimension, Grotowski manipulated the confrontation between spectators using lighting, direction, and distance. By illuminating the spectators' space and placing them facing one another, he put some spectators on display by enabling others to see them. After attending the first international presentation of Grotowski's *The Constant Prince* at the Theatre of Nations Festival in Paris in 1966, French theatre critic Raymonde Temkine described the effect this had on some audience members as, "shamefaced participants [...] communing in uneasiness [...] looking at one another mutually looking at something they shouldn't be seeing" (Temkine, 1972, p.30). Further influencing the audience members' experience, Grotowski experimented with clustering. Sometimes arranging spectators into two opposing groups or into various small clusters, and other times into one or two larger groups; each type of grouping had a different impact on the audience members.

Grotowski's manipulation of the theatrical architecture resulted in spectators experiencing varying degrees of confrontation with one another, with the actors, and ultimately with their inner selves due to the resulting feelings of uneasiness. To a greater degree than conventional theatre architecture, Grotowski's three-dimensional design increases the spectators' sense of involvement, commonality, and community. The same is true of any ritual event, where participants are included in a ceremony at least as part of the contextual setting, if not in more active roles. As with rituals, Grotowski's handling of dramatic space engaged individuals to find meaning both within themselves and within a collective community of spectators.

As mentioned earlier in the section on Artaud, parallel ideas can be found in both Grotowski and Artaud's works, yet Grotowski claimed he had not read the latter's work until 1964. Grotowski developed these ideas even further, choosing to completely eradicate the proscenium arch and the "fourth wall", thus intensifying "the affective relationship between actor and spectator" by placing

the spectators amidst the performers as part of the cast of characters, who filled the nonspeaking, albeit front-and-centre, role of background actors. (Gordon, 2006, p.288)

Two of Grotowski's productions exemplify these concepts, Slowacki's *Kordian* (1962) and *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* (1968). In the former, he put the spectators in the position and role of being visitors to the mental hospital where most of the story took place, sat them adjacent to patient beds, and made them uncomfortable, wondering if they might face treatment from the psychiatrists. In a similar fashion, the other production, *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*, had spectators situated as witnesses to the torture of the Simpleton/Christ, transporting them across time and space to allow them to feel the encounter intimately and intensely. According to Gordon, this arrangement meant that the spectator was faced with the decision and responsibility of whether to

[...] accept or reject the role assigned to him by the structure of the *mise-en-scène*, but, however he chose, he would have been responsible for deciding the nature of the spectatorship – by being there either as a genuine witness or merely as a detached observer. (2006, p.288)

This technique can be seen as handing greater power, control, and autonomy over to the spectators, in the hopes of reducing their passivity in life beyond the theatre, inculcating in them a sense of agency that would remain with them long after the performance.⁸ In the early developmental stages

⁸ Other producers have taken these ideas even further. At his participatory performance depicting the massacre at My Lai by American troops in the Vietnam War, *Commune* (1971), Schechner put even more control in the audience's hands by tasking them with the responsibility and decision to take action in order to continue the performance. At every performance, *Fearless*, played by James Griffiths, called for fifteen audience members to come into the central performance space, where they represented the villagers who were victims to the killing. He took off his shirt and proceeded to announce the stopping of the performance and the spectators' four options for either continuing it or not: continue the performance by either entering the circle or finding anyone in the room to take their place; keep it on hold by remaining where they are; or leave altogether, in which case the performance would resume in their absence. (Schechner, 1994, p.49)

Although the company set the rules, they handed significant power over to the spectators and allowed them to determine whether to commence with the play or not. Given these choices, the spectators had some interesting reactions. While most took an immediate decision to step in, choose replacements, or leave, on one occasion the show was put on hold for over three hours

toward empowering spectators, Grotowski first shifted the definition of a spectator and forced a re-evaluation of their role in a production.

Grotowski continued to redefine the role of spectators while increasingly focusing on the opportunities theatre affords for confrontations and meetings among all participants in attendance, rather than allowing theatre to remain an end in itself. As mentioned previously, in “paratheater” he further reduced the physical and notional distance between performers and spectators. Gordon describes this radical shift in which

The structures of theatre were dissolved to permit an equal collaboration among participants, so that freer and more spontaneous investigations of the nature of human relationship might take place in a context of ‘meeting’ rather than theatrical performance. (Gordon, 2006, pp.300-301)

By removing theatre’s traditional barriers between actors and spectators, Grotowski worked to achieve a free-flowing interaction among all participants. Rather than be beholden to a set script, all those involved would have the chance to make natural and spontaneous contributions to the experience.

Eastern ritual influences

Here a special note on the profound impression Eastern theatre made on Grotowski is in order, for it permeated the above aspects of his theatre aesthetics. Grotowski wrote that he found

while four spectators simply refused to do anything. As Schechner observed, these four “objectors”’ emotional states evolved, changing from fear and anger to enjoyment and empowerment as,

“It seemed that for the first time in a long while they were the center of attention in a matter concerning their ability to make a decision. They were not in the spotlight because of some sudden accident or disease. There were no lawyers or doctors to serve as intermediaries. They were in control, able to keep the play stopped or to license its resumption.” (1994, p.51)

Daily life presents people with many opportunities to make changes and decisions, although oftentimes change is difficult and scary. As such, these four spectators felt fear and anger at the beginning stage of their decision, only later enjoying the empowerment they felt over the three hours when everything hinged on their decision. Schechner borrowed Grotowski’s ideas by forcing the spectators to act on the power that he gave them.

inspiration in several Eastern traditions: “Also particularly stimulating to me are the training techniques of oriental theatre – specifically the Peking Opera, Indian Kathakali, and Japanese No theatre” (Grotowski, 1968a, p.16). The eastern actor’s morality, gained through a traditional system of training, greatly impressed Grotowski who noted that, whereas the western actor training methods merely taught skills, in the East actor training was ““a means to go out of one’s self, to meet life; in fact it is life, a way of existence”” (Grotowski in Kumiega, 1985, p.115).

When considering the limitations of western actor training and comparing them to the extensive system of training he saw in the East where ritual art is a way of existence and produces performers with a unique moral essence, he decided to try to expand his actor training at the Theatre of the Thirteen Rows by adopting many aspects of the culture of oriental arts. By removing them from daily life and exposing them to this extensive training, he hoped to inspire them with the sincerity and devotion that characterised the oriental arts.

As well, he admired the eastern actors he met for their flexibility as they displayed a seemingly paradoxical mix of both discipline and spontaneity; two traits which apparently contradict yet actually strengthen one another. Because he had not encountered such actors in the West, perhaps due to the erosion of value-systems and beliefs there, Grotowski was so impressed by the eastern actors’ abilities to devote themselves so fully to the ritual arts, to integrate their personal truth with the “universal truth”, and to remain so flexible. The eastern actor’s morality and more fully developed abilities inspired the evolution of Grotowski’s holy actor concept, a process through which he sought to create a paradigm of human kind from the most basic and emphatic parts of his actors.

By stripping away all of an actor’s inessentials and facades, they evolve into a universal spiritual essence, akin to the personal-universal truth connection in eastern actor training. Grotowski developed this morality concept of the purification of the actor as a direct result of his exposure to eastern theatre.

Some physical aspects of Grotowski’s actor training also came from eastern practices. He

undertook experiments on actor training with the aim of achieving an organic response in their body. His findings indicated what he termed the organic base point of bodily reaction, the source of the actor's creative impulse, and located it "at the base of the vertebral column and the lower pelvic area of the abdomen [...] By nature of their derivation [the corporels] owed much to Grotowski's enthusiasm for Far-Eastern philosophies" (Mackey and Cooper, 2000, p.340). Here we find a clear parallel with the eastern concept of Kundalini Yoga. The active seeking of the life-energy source is a very deep ritual concept in Grotowski's theatre and is one reflection of eastern theatre's impacts on him.

Throughout this first chapter on Grotowski's biography and the overview of the ritual and aesthetic dimensions of his productions phase, I have attempted to demonstrate his lifelong learning, experiences, and his strong orientation toward eastern philosophies. Like relatives on his mother's side, Grotowski developed a strong interest in the Orient early in life which only grew through his time in university and after. As later chapters will show, a major influence on his work was Sufism, among other eastern influences.

Chapter Two: Ancient Traditional Ritual and Thought in Grotowski's Theatre

In the previous chapter, I discussed relevant biographical information about Grotowski, including significant experiences, contacts, influences, and important concepts that he developed in his Theatre of Productions phase. My intention in the previous chapter was to provide a contextual understanding of Grotowski's interest in ancient ritual practices that would become an important component in the development of his research. This chapter continues the investigation of ritual traditions in Theatre of Productions, with particular emphasis on Grotowski's interest in Hindu Practices and Balinese Dance, and the religious foundations for his conceptualizations of the Holy Actor and the Total Act.

I will begin by investigating the elements of ancient ritual practices and thought that most interested Grotowski, with particular emphasis on the ancient religious motifs that are directly related to his concept of the "holy actor", and their application to his Productions phase of work. I will address this aspect of Grotowski's work by examining the ritual foundations that broadly explain how they intersect with the sacred symbolic imagery he applies to performance. This will include a discussion of Grotowski's "total act", and its relationship to the concepts of *via negativa* and spiritually-based notions of negation. I will also discuss elements of Antonin Artaud's theatre, and how they parallel Grotowski's theatre as a "communal" encounter. Another reason to focus on Artaud is Grotowski's dedication of a complete chapter of *Towards a Poor Theatre* to his thoughts on Artaud's work as it relates to authenticity in performance.

One cannot examine Grotowski's and Artaud's work as ritual in nature without discussing the importance they placed on introducing the non-textual elements of vocalized sounds and body movements as the primary forms of communicating thoughts and feelings. Like Artaud, Grotowski's theatre minimized the element of representational performance, with its explicit reliance on scripted monologues and dialogues.

For Grotowski, theatre was a physical art form, in which expression is made manifest in the unwritten articulation of emotions and ideas via the interplay of the mind and body. This psychosomatic approach to performance bears some semblance to Grotowski's interest in creating a theatre that reflects ancient rituals that orally transmit messages and beliefs through gestures, facial expressions, and vocal resonance, all of which are manipulated by the internal process of the actor. This will require an understanding of the element of trance and its application to Grotowski's notion of "self-sacrifice" as it relates to the "total act".

Within Grotowski's eclectic methodology, he often took a quasi-spiritual approach to performance, in the sense that he frequently employed sacred themes as part of his performative setting. (Wolford, 1996d, p.14) Two of his most widely acclaimed productions, *The Constant Prince* (1965) and *Apocalypsis cum figuris* (1969), clearly projected religious imagery in the form of the suffering martyr who sacrifices his life for a high moral cause.

In *The Constant Prince*, one is confronted with the montage of a crucified Christ figure, whose lifeless body lies gracefully on a cold wooden table. Likewise, in *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, we see an archetype of the "Christ myth" in actor Ryszard Cieslak's role as The Simpleton. (Puzyna, 1971, p.91) Even as early as 1962, there are clearly understood religious motifs. Grotowski's first adaptation of Stanisław Wyspiański's *Akropolis* on 10 October 1962 was based on the extraordinary evils taking place within an extermination camp, where the metaphorical martyr is reflected in "a procession of dancing inmates who carry a dummy corpse [of Christ] triumphantly. The corpse is their savior and a symbol of their desperate hope" (Osinski, 1986, p.68).

The integration of sacred archetypes in Grotowski's theatre might lead one to believe his themes of persecution were intended as part of a religious commentary, but more likely they were actually representations of visionaries' universal struggles in the way of enlightenment and personal transformation, against all odds and in the face of great external opposition and fierce internal striving. Personal stories can be likened to ubiquitous and universal themes like extreme slash-and-

burn techniques to start fresh and achieve rejuvenation and renewal; religious archetypes of grand-scale renewals like the Biblical great flood hold individual significance for fundamental human change through re-birth or “new birth”. According to Ludwik Flaszen, who had a long history with Grotowski having been close to him from the Production phase, the recurring image of the Christian archetypal Christ figure in Grotowski’s Laboratory Theatre performances demonstrated Grotowski’s interest in aspects of religious rituals that could be used within a secular context to represent an existential search for self-transformation, akin to Gurdjieff’s ideas on transformation:

Imitatio Christi, the imitation of the passion, the carrying of the cross. The carrying of the cross is an initiatory experience – this is how it can be interpreted. And I believe that this is how great mystics interpreted it, and how stigmatics did – those who suffered enormously and were happy because of these sufferings – because they believed that this would lead them to see God face-to-face. And what transpires is – as you wrote – metánoia. [...] St. John of the Cross called it transformación: a transformation. This is simply an act of new birth. In order to fulfil oneself, one needs to be born again. This is somehow connected to [G. I.] Gurdjieff (sic), and so on. (Flaszen, 2007, n.p.)

Perhaps here, Flaszen was referring to the fact that, like Grotowski, Gurdjieff also talked about transformation in terms of Christianity, calling his own teaching “esoteric Christianity” and basing his “Fourth Way” teaching about self-transformation on many of Christ’s experiences and sayings⁹, in addition to other sources¹⁰. The parallel between Gurdjieff and Grotowski in terms of their views

⁹ Despite Gurdjieff’s self-identification with “esoteric Christianity”, I demonstrate in Chapter five: “Grotowski and Gurdjieff” that he is widely associated with Sufism. Furthermore, his interpretation of Christianity was broad: “Although he said his teaching could be called ‘esoteric Christianity,’ Gurdjieff noted that the true principles of Christianity were developed thousands of years before Jesus Christ” (de Salzmann, 2010, p.xiv).

¹⁰ In the Biographical Information appendix about Gurdjieff in his book *In Search of Being: The Fourth Way to Consciousness*, we read, “He did not reveal the sources he investigated, and only spoke vaguely of having been in Christian and Tibetan monasteries, as well as Sufi schools in

on transformation and “new birth” was clear to Flaszen from as early as Grotowski’s Productions period when the two met to build the Theatre of 13 Rows. In my final chapter, “Grotowski and Gurdjieff”, I will cover additional parallels between “both Gs” (Schechner, 1996b, p.479).

Furthermore, we find that from this religious practice of suffering, self-sacrifice, and extreme divestment of one’s personality, one becomes transformed and “born again”. In light of the importance of Flaszen’s statement about Grotowski’s use of religious suffering archetypes, we see that Grotowski was attuned to the theme of self-transformation. Similarly, as Lavy notes, “notions of transcendence are critical to Grotowski’s concept of *via negativa* and the *total act*”, and as such, the objective is:

[...] to eliminate from the creative process the resistance and obstacles caused by one’s own organism, both physical and psychic (the two forming a whole). This process of elimination, while very clearly focused on facilitating a creative process, depends upon a union of the mind and body. (Lavy, 2005, p.182)

In his analysis of the significance of Grotowski’s use of the Christ figure in his early work, Konstanty Puzyna, like Flaszen, suggests that the religious motifs in Grotowski’s performances:

[...] need not necessarily mean the Judaeo-Christian personal deity. It may signify a great many very different human concerns [...] For instance, it could denote a certain unconscious psychic need, collective as well as individual, for parental care, or universal human love, or higher justice, or expiation of guilt. (Puzyna, 1971, p.91)

eastern Persia. Indeed, he disclosed few facts about his journeys and experiences” (Grant in Gurdjieff, 2012, n.p.). Notwithstanding Gurdjieff’s own vague accounts, I demonstrate the clear connection between Gurdjieff and Sufism in Chapter five: “Grotowski and Gurdjieff”.

According to both Flaszen's and Puzyna's commentaries on Grotowski's productions, the use of sacred symbolism functioned as an archetype that speaks to how an individual relates to the human condition on its most fundamental level.

Notwithstanding the secular contextualisation of Grotowski's sacred motifs, the "initiatory experience" Flaszen refers to in interpreting the religious imagery in Grotowski's productions is usually associated with ceremonial acts that are liminal encounters which are viewed as significant, life-changing events intended to cross over from one phase of life to the next to achieve spiritual perfection.

In 1961, Italian director and performance researcher Eugenio Barba obtained a UNESCO grant and travelled to Poland to study directing, then became one of Grotowski's closest collaborators and interned as an assistant director at the Theatre of 13 Rows. (Grotowski.net, 2012h, n.p.) Through his interest in theology, Barba found elements of self-sacrifice and elimination of one's ego in the Nagarjuna's Doctrine of Sunyata, a spiritual tradition of Madhyamika Buddhism which he and Grotowski saw applied to Grotowski's ideas on *via negativa*. Barba

[...] discussed how the concept of Sunyata fit into Grotowski's theories at the time:

The self and belief in self are causes of error and pain. The way to escape from error and pain is to eliminate the self. This is the perfect wisdom, the enlightenment that can be attained through a *via negativa*, delaying the worldly categories and phenomena to the point of denying the self. (Lavy, 2005, p.185)

Grotowski's work therefore drew upon spiritual and sacred traditions outside of Christianity and Islam, including a branch of Buddhism.

Throughout this chapter, indications are given that Grotowski's work was a movement away from traditional theatre that was aesthetically representational in form. Grotowski predicated his notion of theatre on the belief that "the theatre is a vehicle, a means for self-study, self-exploration; a possibility of salvation" (Brook, 1968, p.59). The personal introspection of the spectator is

encouraged by the performer, who, through the use of his body and voice, exposes the most intimate parts of his inner self as a “sacrifice” that could become a shared experience with the spectator; the spectator becomes a participant by committing their own act of “self-penetration”. This interaction between the actor and spectator has a highly ritual quality, in the sense that this type of theatre is “communal” in nature, and is a reflection of what Grotowski has called a “tribal” encounter. These concepts of sacrifice and “self-penetration” will be explained in further detail in this chapter under the section entitled Grotowski’s Holy Actor and the Total Act.

First, we look at Hindu practices and Balinese dance, for Grotowski also drew great inspiration from them with respect to sacrifice. In particular, Grotowski identified the Hindu dance of Shiva as the quintessential example of his theatrical quest, for “It is the construction of opposites: intellectual play in spontaneity, seriousness in the grotesque, derision in pain” (in Osinski, 1986, p.49).

Grotowski and Hindu Practices

Another example of inspiration for Grotowski’s quasi-spiritual themes of self-sacrifice is the Hindu practice of *moksha* (liberation). During the final stages of his life, the practitioner of *moksha* goes into seclusion without possessions and engages in acts of self-denial in order to succeed in freeing himself from the cycle of reincarnation.

The abandonment of temporal attachments in order to travel along the path of an inner spiritual journey is a commonly practised ritual among many religions that view suffering as a rite which must be embraced as a way to progress spiritually. We find the same elements of this ancient ritual pathos being used by Grotowski in establishing his protagonists as the suffering character who attains high moral status by undergoing extreme forms of persecution to the point of being confronted with death itself. It is quite plausible that Grotowski understood the value of integrating religious-based ritual practices into his dramaturgy as a model for parts of his research that attempt to resuscitate the “past”. Discussing his production of *Akropolis*, Grotowski explained:

Myth or archetypes link us to the past [...] the past is the source of our creative efforts [...] When we produced *Akropolis* I was forced to confront my roots and, at first, I discovered that I wanted to crush the mirror of the past. I knew it was impossible; my image was reflected in that mirror. Consciously I said ‘yes’ to the past, and realized the past was not annihilated but reinforced. (Grotowski in Croyden, 1969, p.85)

Grotowski’s preoccupation with ancient ritual traditions, such as the “initiatory experience” in *Akropolis*, is quite evident, and it is reflective of his earlier examination of religious motifs and sacred practices in his 1960 adaptation of Kālidāsa’s fifth-century CE drama, *Sakuntala* (also *Shakuntalā*). (Grotowski.net, 2012i, n.p.) Based on an Indian fairytale, *Sakuntala* is considered a religious drama that expresses the Hindu concept of karma, and uses mythical figures to convey moral lessons about the connections between the mundane activities of the temporal world, and the sacred underpinning of human relationships.

Aesthetically, Grotowski’s adaptation of *Sakuntala* predominantly relied on ancient traditional dances, chants, and expressive body movements to give meaning to the motifs being presented. Grotowski used this play, rich in mythology and ritual ceremonies, as a model in formulating the techniques he would later use in developing a theatre that reinforced the notion that theatre is a sacred and communal activity by making the body and voice the most important elements of theatre. For example, in Grotowski’s discussion of the Indian god Shiva, who was an important figure in *Sakuntala*, one catches a glimpse of Shiva’s relationship to what would characterize his “Poor Theatre” objectives:

If I had to define our theatrical quest in one sentence, in one term, I would refer to the myth about the dance of Shiva [...] This is a dance of form, the pulsation of form, the fluid diffusion of the multiplicity of theatrical conventions, styles, and acting traditions. It is the construction of opposites: intellectual play in spontaneity,

seriousness in the grotesque, derision in pain. This is the dance form which shatters all theatrical illusion, all 'verisimilitude of life'. (Grotowski in Osinski, 1986, p.49)

For Grotowski, the dance of Shiva was a point of reference in creating a theatre distinct from the pre-edited, formulaic approach to performance. In his Productions phase of research, Grotowski pares down the aesthetic elements of conventional theatre to achieve an "intellectual play in spontaneity" that would become the "total act", in which the spontaneous movements of the body and organic resonance of the voice express "seriousness in the grotesque" and "derision in pain". As well, the god Shiva, with his rhythmic dance, provides the kinds of archetypes that Grotowski would apply to the sacred symbolism often used as overarching themes in his Productions period: a quest for salvation from a world of lunacy, and self-sacrifice as the highest moral virtue.

Grotowski and Balinese Dance

Whereas the influence of Hindu practices on Grotowski, such as the dance of Shiva, was apparent earlier in the Productions phase, the impact of Balinese dance was somewhat delayed until Theatre of Sources and Objective Drama. (Wolford, 1997a) Grotowski presumably learned of it earlier however, perhaps through his knowledge of Artaud, because we see early indications of Balinese aspects even in "poor theatre" aspects of his actor training in Theatre of Productions.

Although Grotowski himself "denied any direct inspiration and distanced himself from Artaud, whom he considered a visionary lacking precision and concrete methodological proposals", "In the West, Grotowski was considered a continuator of Artaud and was often compared to him" (Grotowski.net, 2012j, n.p.). One such similarity was the fascination with Balinese dance. For Artaud, "A pivotal moment for his ideas of the theatre came when he saw a performance by dancers from Bali as part of the Paris Colonial Exposition in 1931", and he later employed Bali-like rites and rituals in his experiments. (Grotowski.net, 2012j, n.p.) Indeed, Artaud's seminal experience witnessing ethnic Balinese theatre for the first time filled him

[...] with growing amazement. These eastern dancer–actors offered him a vision of the kind of theatre he had been seeking, but had only been half able to articulate. Suddenly his most profound ideas and his most outrageous demands seemed to have found expression. The show liberated him spiritually and artistically. [...]

The Balinese theatre performance which so inspired Artaud was a barong dance, featuring the barong, a lion-like dragon figure who aids people by opposing the evil Rangda. By putting those who depend on it into a trance, the barong shows its power, which is further demonstrated spectacularly when those entranced turn their swords and knives on themselves, but do no harm. (Leach, 2004, p.160)

Likewise, exposure to the ritual process in Balinese dance was a seminal moment for Grotowski, as it sparked his imagination and inspired some fundamental developments in his ritual theatre. Three parallels between Balinese rituals and Grotowski's ritual theatre suggest three ways in which the former influenced the latter. Firstly, a focus on nature is evident in both systems. Just as the Balinese are deeply connected with and intimately attuned to nature, Grotowski preferred to conduct his work in natural settings. Secondly, Balinese culture is centred on religious rituals and customs that pervade most aspects of life and artistic expression; similarly, Grotowski's methods of discipline and training are all-encompassing, systematic practices that are very close to Balinese rituals and customs. Thirdly, both strive for ascendance to a higher state of being; for the Balinese, art connects people to gods by enabling worshippers to express their inner selves; for Grotowski, the aim of performance was to achieve higher levels of being and expression by reaching an awakened state of maximal awareness, sensitivity, and perception. In order to accomplish these goals, Grotowski looked to Balinese rituals for physical exercises that are designed to release ritual dancers' intrinsic physical power, as we learn from I Wayan Lendra, one of the expert performers in Objective Drama:

This physical power, which the Hindu tradition refers to as the 'sleeping energy' (kundalini) lies at the bottom of the spine. This innate energy can be awakened through a variety of physical and vocal exercises. Grotowski described what I call innate physical power as the 'reptile brain,' the spinal cord and brain stem, with the 'sleeping energy' at the very bottom of the spine.' This unawakened energy source exists in every human being. Grotowski wanted to investigate and find a way to wake up this energy center which, when awakened, can increase our awareness, sensitivity, and perception. [...] Like the Motions, these [...] exercises have a powerful effect on the body. In Bali, the study of gaining spiritual energy is still a strong tradition practiced by trancers and diviners. (Lendra, 1991, p.327)

Grotowski felt that his performers could also awaken their energy-centres and reach ascendance and expression by following these movements. Indeed he felt that this was the way to develop his ritual performers. In addition to the influence of Balinese dance, Grotowski's Motions exercises also hearken back to Sufi-inspired Gurdjievan Movements, as mentioned earlier in the literature review. Even earlier than Theatre of Sources and Objective Drama, we saw evidence of Balinese dance's influence in the Production phase. For Grotowski's Poor Theatre, the abandoning of the trappings of distracting stage designs depended on a corresponding increase in intense actor training to develop spontaneous motions full of organic impulses that come from chakras and other centres of energy within the human body.

Grotowski's Holy Actor and the Total Act

We can trace the genesis of Grotowski's concepts of the "holy actor" and the "total act" from his early interest in using myth and ancient ritual ceremonies as models for his style of experimental theatre productions. In my chapter one section on Grotowski's actor, I introduced these concepts, and indicated that they would be developed further after a contextualised discussion of the ancient traditional rituals and thoughts, such as from the Hindus and Balinese, that influenced his

Productions phase. In his 1968 book, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, he explains his ideas on holy actors in contrast to courtesan actors. One can also see Grotowski's use of sacred motifs of self-mortification as integral to his conceptualization of the "holy actor" who simulates martyrdom as an "initiatory experience", which leads to the transformation of the human being, as Flaszen also mentions in his commentary on Grotowski's Poor Theatre. (2007, website)

From a strictly aesthetic perspective on the martyr figure, the actors become "holy" in their performance "when they can successfully 'reincarnate' the role of the paradigmatic individual. The inner life of the paradigmatic individual is reached through the discipline of imitation" (Haberman, 1988, p.152). In some respects, Haberman's description of what makes an act "holy" through replicating an archetype would suggest taking a formulaic approach in expressing the ideas being presented. To Haberman, defining an actor as "holy" is not synonymous with a religious connotation. Rather, the actor is made holy by "successfully" embodying the essence of a particular character being presented.

As previously mentioned, the sacred motifs in Grotowski's work were not a religious commentary on the human condition. Grotowski himself, referring to his use of the word "holy actor", made clear that "one must not take the word 'holy' in the religious sense. It is rather a metaphor defining a person who, through his art, climbs upon the stake and performs an act of self-sacrifice" (Grotowski, 1968a, p.43).

Grotowski's holy actor is one who removes the "mask" of ego-driven actions and reactions, emotionally revealing, through the organic pulsations in his voice and body, the most private chambers of his innermost being to the world. In this way of viewing the holy actor, one can find compelling correlations between the holy actor who "reveals himself" so "the spectator" can "undertake a similar process of self-penetration", and sacred notions of communion and spiritual transformation. (Grotowski, 1968a, p.34)

Unlike Haberman, Grotowski rejects mimesis. Grotowski's actor achieves a genuinely personal physical and psychic change that has a seemingly ethereal dimension which impacts both the actor and the spectator. In *The Empty Space* (1968), Peter Brook explains Grotowski's holy actor in terms of a spiritual guide whose solemn act of "sacrifice" engages others in a kind of collective spiritual encounter:

[...] the actor does not hesitate to show himself exactly as he is, for he realizes that the secret of the role demands his opening himself up, disclosing his own secrets. So that the act of performance is an act of sacrifice, of sacrificing what most men prefer to hide – this sacrifice is his gift to the spectator [...] here there is a similar relation between actor and audience to the one between priest and worshipper [...] the priest performs the ritual for himself on behalf of others. Grotowski's actors offer their performance as a ceremony for those who wish to assist. (Brook, 1968, pp.59-60)

Contextually, Brook uses religious metaphors to put forth the notion that theatre in and of itself, as Grotowski constructs his, takes on the quality of being "holy". If, for example, we considered the aesthetic distance as it applies to the use of space within Grotowski's theatre, there is a very real sense of communalism both physically and psychologically because they collectively share a unique proximal experience of being in direct contact with the performer; Grotowski's theatre becomes a reenactment of ancient rites that were intended to "transform its participants and reorder their lives" (Gerould, 2008, pp.182-183). In one respect then, Grotowski's theatre appears to be an archeological investigation that seeks to resurrect the meaning and purpose of performance by exhuming what accrued "before the division":

I was of the opinion that it was in fact primitive rites that brought theatre into being, so through a return to ritual – in which two groups participate [...] the actors or leaders, and the spectators or indeed participants – may be rediscovered that ceremonial of direct, living collaboration [...] a direct, open, free and authentic

response...if the actor through his action in relation to the spectator motivates him, incites him to participation, even provoking him to precise ways of behaving, of movement, song, verbal replies etc., that should enable the restoration of that primitive, ritualistic unity. (Grotowski, in Kumiega, 2015, p.129)

Grotowski's observation of what he called the "roots" of artistic expression succinctly reveals that he was primarily interested in creating a theatre that would be characteristically "tribal" in the sense that it would function with the same degree of authenticity as "primitive rites", where the actor becomes a kind of shaman who invokes powerful feelings of collective identity. The spectators who enjoin one another to involve themselves in the shaman's ecstatic dance thus become active participants through the shaman's rhythmic movements and symbolic gestures.

In Grotowski's theatre, there is an emphasis placed on metaphorically viewing the actor as the personification of a "priest". This is consistent with Grotowski's insistence on treating performance as a mirror image of "primitive rites" that were intended to be shared activities initiated by witnessing the actions of the shaman figure. Indeed, explaining the goal of his early performances, Grotowski says: "We do not demonstrate action to the viewer...we invite him...to take part in the 'shamanism' in which the living, immediate presence of the viewer is part of the playacting" (in Osinski, 1986, p.49). As well, in this relationship the actor becomes the incarnation of an ancient spiritual guide who encourages others to participate in such ritual acts as "self-penetration" and "self-sacrifice". In essence, we find a very real utility in Grotowski's concept of the holy actor. Explaining the significance of the "holy actor", Kathleen Cioffi explains:

As Grotowski noticed that induced audience participation in the sacred ritual of the theatre had an artificial quality to it, his vision began to metamorphose into one where the audience participated in the ritual by witnessing an act of self-sacrifice by the holy actors. (Cioffi, 1997, p.85)

Of particular interest in Cioffi's analysis on Grotowski's development of the actor- spectator relationship is the evolution of theatre as a genuinely inclusive activity that negates passive observation. The holy actor carries the burden ("self-sacrifice") of transforming his performance from strictly a personal one into one that becomes a shared psychic experience with the spectator. This, of course, is not an easy task, and requires a level of performance that would remove the barrier between these two opposing entities with their own self-contained sets of thoughts and feelings, and make them an organic whole.

To reiterate and emphasize, the core of Grotowski's theatre had always been the "actor and his art". Through his body and his voice, the actor becomes the basis for communication between himself and the spectator. Christopher Innes, discussing the purpose of the methodology used for this interaction states:

Following this line, techniques were developed to project archetypal emotions directly in physical terms through rhythms of movement, posture and symbolic gestures. In an approach Grotowski was to develop to its limits in the 1960s, the actor's body becomes an expressive instrument, literally incarnating his spiritual being (Innes, 1993, p.42)

As a manifestation of "his spiritual being", the "actor's body" is the central element of Grotowski's production phase, and is the catalyst for the "total act", as witnessed in Ryszard Cieslak's portrayal of the martyred nobleman in *The Constant Prince*. In this performance Cieslak is confined in what could be viewed as a dungeon or torture chamber. It is a dark and foreboding space with a single, unforgiving, ray of light that serves to amplify the relentless flagellation of Cieslak's body. Without the stoppage for breath – without the slightest pause – the unnatural trebling vibration of his voice articulates his unfathomable pain; from limb to limb, his body is contorted in a seeming unholy manner. There are moments where he appears to be delirious; the movement of his head and the rolling of his eyes suggest he is moving in and out of consciousness as he is being relentlessly

brutalized by his captors. There are also moments when one could suggest Cieslak is in a state of “trance”. It is this trance-like quality of concentration that perhaps explains how Cieslak could sustain such painful movements of the body, and achieve such abnormally high vocal pitches throughout his performance.

Every aspect of Cieslak’s performance is representative of what can only be described as a “total act”. Paralleling Innes’s understanding of the total act being literally an incarnation of the performer’s “spiritual being”, Grotowski explains the dynamics of the total act as demonstrated by Cieslak’s performance in *The Constant Prince*:

Here, everything is concentrated on the ‘ripening’ of the actor which is expressed by a tension towards the extreme, by a complete stripping down, by a laying bare of one’s own intimacy – all this without the least trace of egotism or self-enjoyment. The actor makes a total gift of himself. This is a technique of the ‘trance’ and of the integration of all the actor’s psychic and bodily powers which emerge from the most intimate layers of being and his instinct, springing forth in a sort of ‘translumination’.

(Grotowski, 1968a, p.16)

Grotowski’s description of the “technique of the ‘trance’” reveals his recognition of its utility in theatrical training as a way to concentrate. As Lavy explains of Grotowski’s take on trance,

First, the actor who achieves self-revelation through via negativa sacrifices not himself but his obstacles. For Grotowski, this means that ‘the actor must act in a state of trance,’ defined not as a loss of consciousness or will or presence but, rather, the ability to concentrate in a particular theatrical way. (Lavy, 2005, p.186)

To better understand Lavy’s description of Grotowski’s take on the actor sacrificing “not himself but his obstacles”, we can look at it in opposition to Copeau’s theory on divestment of personality. Jacques Copeau (1879-1949) was a French theatre director and theorist who

[...] felt that the actor should divest herself of her own personality in order to assume a role; the actor's self-sacrifice lies within this willingness to deny herself for the sake of achieving unity with the audience through a representation. The Grotowskian actor's process is the reverse—the role functions as a means by which the actor may achieve self-exposure and revelation. (Auslander, 1997, p.22)

In other words, Auslander writes that Grotowski's process is the opposite of Copeau's. Whereas Grotowski's actors strip away obstacles to "achieve self-exposure and revelation", Copeau's actors sacrifice or deny their very selves, two "reverse" processes with "similar spiritual purpose: the denial of worldliness" (Auslander, 1997, p.22). To reiterate, Levy and Auslander show us that Grotowski's use of trance was a way to sacrifice one's obstacles, but not his personality or self.

Throughout the period of his production phase of research Grotowski was, as previously explained, mostly interested in creating a truly authentic theatre experience partly founded on a ritual view of performance. This being said, he primarily focused his attention on developing an exceptionally unique series of physical exercises that were intended to transform the actor's performance into a purely personal expression of the innermost part of their being "by a laying bare of one's own intimacy".

In discussing the purpose for the methodology used to reach this level of performance, Ralph Yarrow asserts that

The theatrical and paratheatrical activity of Jerzy Grotowski is described in a number of texts which employ fairly overtly religious discourse, including *via negativa*. The intention behind his practice is to instigate a wholeness or holiness of physical and psychological functioning in performers and spectators. (Yarrow, 1997, p.25)

Among Grotowski's approaches to training, such as *exercices corporels* and *exercices plastiques*, the guiding principle behind these exercises was *via negativa*, which involved overcoming – or, more precisely, "eliminating" – what Grotowski referred to as physical and mental

“blocks” which prevent the actor from approaching his score organically. From the Latin for “by way of denial”, *via negativa* has been tirelessly expounded upon in terms of its association with being the pinnacle of Grotowski’s Production phase objective in this period’s training techniques. At the centre of these discussions, like Yarrow’s view that there is a certain sanctity to what occurs to the actor, associations are made to *via negativa* being a process that is analogous to, or indeed resembles, the notion of negative theology.

As a commonly practised technique used in mysticism, the realization of divine engagement requires seeking God through the “annihilation” of the ego-driven self. Similarly, within Sufi thought as conceived by Jalal al-din Rumi,

The function of the first purgative practice is to enable man to rid himself of the main impediment to mystical perfection, that is, the nafs. Among other concepts, Rumi particularly refers to this practice by the concept of fanā’ (‘passing-away’ or ‘annihilation’), a concept with a long history in the Sufi tradition. (Zarrabi-Zadeh, 2015, p.290)

Like Grotowski’s actor who undergoes “a complete stripping down” of the mental and physical obstructions that stand in the way of attaining a totally organic expression, so too the mystic reaches a total state of harmony with divinity by practising such acts as self-denial, or mortification of the body. This aspect of *via negativa* found within the ontology of mysticism is eloquently expressed in author Barry Ulanov’s examination of the religious text, *St. John of the Cross’s Ascent of Mount Carmel*:

[...] John elaborates the advice he had inscribed in his diagram of the mystical way, the ascent of the mountain of perfection which ends at ‘the summit of union.’ It is a dialectic of *via negativa*: in order to arrive at having pleasure in everything, at possessing everything, at being everything, at knowing everything, one must desire to have pleasure in nothing, to possess nothing, to be nothing, to know nothing [...] and

[...] one must go by way of dispossession: ‘in order to arrive at that which you are, you must go through that which you are not.’ And, finally, says John, ‘in order to pass from all to All, you must deny yourself all in all totality.’ (Ulanov, 1973, p.412)

As a necessary condition for entering into a higher state of spiritual awareness, a person must relinquish his egoistic attachments. With its predisposition to dominate its exterior and interior world, the ego is viewed within religious philosophy as being an impediment to attaining freedom from temporal attachments that diminish the individual’s spiritual essence. The value of the ethos we see in the sacred motif of “the mountain of perfection” is one that entails a negation, or “annihilation”, of the individual’s perception of self by ritual purification in the form of ascetical practices that are intended to eliminate the ego. This principle of self-denial within religious discourse is also discussed by Barba in examining aspects of Grotowski’s theories of performance. In reference to a statement by Barba on the Hindu Doctrine of Sunyara, Lavy writes:

The self and belief in self are causes of error and pain. The way to escape from error and pain is to eliminate the self. This is the perfect wisdom, the enlightenment that can be attained through a *via negativa*, denying the worldly categories and phenomena to the point of denying the self. (Lavy, 2005, p.185)

By the divestment of “egoism”, there is the possibility for the actor - much like the practitioner of religious asceticism who eradicates self-indulging activities that impinge upon spiritual perfection - to remove the psycho-physical impediments that “block” organicity in his actions. The ego, in Grotowski’s view, is an obstacle that stands in the way of creating a completely organic score that is devoid of expressions merely based on self-centred motivations.

The physical exercises at the Laboratory Theater were principally meant to eradicate the actor’s ego-driven actions. French Grotowski scholar Raymonde Temkine, referring to the purpose of Grotowski’s training exercises says that “through this submission of the mind, through this liberation, external actions evolve to create the ‘score’ of the work. One gives up leading in order to

be led; through this position of rejection and acceptance, all traditional blocks to total creativity, fall away” (Temkine, 1972, p.105).

Again, in relation to the physical exercises, we find clear associations with Grotowski’s *via negativa*, and negative theology as it applies to the intent of the physical exercises. (Yarrow, 1997) This understanding of Grotowski’s work being linked to religious beliefs is more fully explained by Richard Schechner:

He denies that his theatre is mysterious in the religious sense. But obviously his speech, his interviews, writing, and the writings of those close to him is larded with religious terminology of a very particular kind. For example: ‘offering’, ‘spiritual act’, [...] ‘holiness’, [...] ‘if he does not exhibit his body, but annihilates it, burns it, frees it from every resistance to any psychic impulse, then he does not sell his body but sacrifices it’, ‘atonement’, ‘holy actor’, ‘self-sacrifice’, ‘self-penetration’ [...] ‘a mobilization of all the physical and spiritual forces of the actor who is in a state of readiness, a passive availability, which makes possible an active score’ [...] ‘the actor must act in a state of trance.’ These quotes (and they are not wrenched out of context) all come from five pages of Grotowski’s 1964 dialogue with Eugenio Barba, ‘The Theatre’s New Testament’. (Schechner, 1996d, p.158)

The similarity between Grotowski’s concept of *via negativa* and negative theology is perhaps due in part to the suggestion that Grotowski’s work has an ancient ritual type quality to it. It is quite plausible, given Grotowski’s extensive understanding of multiple traditional ritual practices, that he developed his idea of *via negativa* by applying religious-based principles of negation to his Productions phase actor training exercises.

The movement of the actor’s body which gives expression to a particular thought or feeling is directly linked to the performer’s internal disposition. It has already been mentioned that the underlying goal of the physical exercises Grotowski developed, which “are almost always of a

psycho-physical nature”, were intended to initiate “a process of elimination” (Grotowski, 1968a, p.134). For example, in his early actor training, Grotowski employed a variety of repetitious physical, vocal, and breathing exercises that would foster organic impulses in a performative score.

Among several of the training activities, his psycho-energetic exercise called “Flight” provides us with one example of the body-mind paradigm within the Laboratory Theatre’s work on performance craft:

IV – Flight

- 1) Squatting on the heels in a curled up position, hop and sway like a bird ready to take flight. The hands help the movement as wings.
- 2) Still hopping, raise yourself into an upright position, while the hands flap like wings in an effort to lift the body.
- 3) Take off in flight with successive forward movements somewhat similar to the action of swimming. While the body is carrying out these swimming movements, there is only one point of contact with the ground (e. g. the ball of one foot). Take swift leaps forward, still on the ball of one foot. Another method is as follows: recall to mind the flying sensation one experiences in dreams and spontaneously recreate this form of flight.
- 4) Land like a bird (Grotowski, 1968, p.137)

This exercise, as is the case with the vocal and breathing exercises, was intended “to eliminate from the creative process the resistance and obstacles caused by one’s own organism” that “depends upon a union of the mind and body” (Lavy, 2005, p.182). In the “Flight” exercise there is interplay between a physical action and personal mental associations that allow for spontaneously simulating the movements of a bird. In addition to this, the repetitiveness of this psycho-energetic exercise is intended to put the actor in a complete state of concentration, which allows for “making the impulse spontaneous” (Ruffini, 1998, p.101). It is the element of concentration in Grotowski’s

training exercises that is of crucial importance in achieving organicity in performance, and is often associated with being a “trance-like” form of cognition as pointed out by Ronaldo Morelos in his examination of trance in performance:

Jerzy Grotowski was most explicit in describing his performance work as a set of techniques that employ the principle of trance and the idea of ‘springing forth’ into a state that he describes as ‘translumination’. In proposing a technique for the ‘holy actor’ he considered the necessity for an ‘inductive technique’ or technique of ‘elimination’ that the performer can utilize in order ‘to refrain from doing’ – quite simply, Grotowski believed that ‘the actor must act in a state of trance’. (Morelos, 2009, p.138)

Indeed, Grotowski “highlights the significance and value of trance”, a state which is prompted by the “inner process” of the actor. (Ruffini, 1998, p.107) Ruffini, examining elements of trance in Cieslak’s performance in *The Constant Prince*, explains that “trance is fully realized” when “the body is cancelled out and no longer presents an obstacle to the living stream of impulses in a precise action” (Ruffini, 1998, p.104). As well, speaking about the “process” at work in Cieslak’s score, Grotowski says it is “corporeal, but not really. There is something that is revealed, like life which runs through the body, which traverses the body; it is like a runway, but what is taking off is not really anything physical” (Ruffini, 1998, p.104).

Grotowski’s description of what is occurring has associations with a performer who is in an altered state of consciousness; he is clearly implying there indeed is a psychic phenomenon taking place that transcends the actor’s body. It is this aspect of the actor’s performance – the degree of concentration that rises to the level of what could be considered trance – that has a remarkable commonality with the shamans who themselves “are often regarded as the first actors; the first storytellers”, who “assisted the community to commune with spirit using song, prayer, drum and dance” while in an ecstatic state. (Floodgate, 2006, p.6)

Like the ancient ritual significance of the shaman figure, Grotowski's actors to some extent took on the role of "priests"; through the giving of their body in a "total act" of sacrifice, the actors become agents for self-introspection and healing among those witnessing the genuinely expressed disclosure of the performer's most personal thoughts and feelings. In the same way, the shaman, through an ecstatic experience brought on by trance, acts as an energetic focal point in attempting to move the participants of ritual activity past normative types of mental perceptions to reach a spiritual transformation. The actor, like a "shaman", also reaches a "trance-like" state that is intended to emotionally and psychologically encourage the spectator to commit their own personal act of "self-penetration" to bring about a type of spiritual "healing".

These aforementioned elements of Grotowski's Productions phase work bear some semblance to the aestheticism in Antonin Artaud's (1896-1948) Theatre of Cruelty. In his book, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Grotowski commits a complete chapter to discussing aspects of Artaud's work which he found applicable to his own performance objectives, and states that – referring to the themes being played out on Artaud's stage – "when Artaud speaks of release and cruelty we feel he's touching a truth [...] that an actor reaches the essence of his vocation whenever he commits an act of sincerity [...] when this act accomplished through the theatre is total [...] it enables us to respond totally" (Grotowski, 1968a, pp.124-125).

In essence, Grotowski draws an important parallel between his notion of theatre and what Artaud had been working on decades earlier: that drama should be centred on the actor's body. The actor has the ability to use his body and voice in such a way as to form a symbiotic relationship with the spectator by conveying a sincere stage presence that taps the spectators' emotions. (Innes, 1981, p.9) Indeed, Artaud's theatre mirrors Grotowski's concept of the "Total Act". This being said, Chantale Potie's description of Artaud's theatre bears a remarkable resemblance to the dynamics of the actor's performance in *The Constant Prince*:

Artaud's scripts had little dialogue and focused more on human noises such as screams, grunts, moans, sighs, yelps, and gasps. Accompanying, and thus reinforcing these noises, the actor would perform an array of overpronounced gestures and movements. (Potie, 2013, n.p.)

Artaud believed that theatre should have its own language distinctly different than the scripted monologues and dialogues used in traditional drama. The texture of his dramaturgy was highly visceral, using the actor's body and voice to convey the inner volatility of human feelings and emotions that project ("anti-social") hostility. Artaud's actor expresses a raw, nihilistic, view that man's base impulses are intrinsically wedded to the human condition, and that spectators must resign themselves to this supposition.

Despite Artaud's philosophical objectives that were intended to "shock" the consciousness of the spectator into a state of hopelessness and despair, Grotowski seems to have been most impressed with the idea of Artaud's actors' bodies and voices having the ability to express feelings of pain and suffering in a spontaneous way:

[...] he does touch on something which we may be able to reach by a different route. I mean the very crux of the actor's art: that what the actor achieves should be [...] 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. (Grotowski, 1968a, p.123)

Grotowski saw in Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty the full potential for the actor to transcend the limitations of contrived forms of expression. In some respects Artaud's theatre is similar to Grotowski's "total act", in which the actor "strips away" all traces of banality.

Artaud, like Grotowski after him, looked to examples of traditional transcultural practices as techniques to achieve a type of performance that would transform theatre into a highly personal

encounter on a psychological level in which the gestures and movements of the actor would communicate directly with the spectator.

The case for spiritual inspiration and religious sources being underlying factors behind Artaud's and Grotowski's secular work is supported by the example of Artaud's apparent misinterpretation of the previously mentioned secular Balinese dance as a sacred or spiritual performance. Artaud saw in the gestures and body movements of the Balinese dancer a form of nontextual performance that he was most interested in creating. Moreover, he was also drawn to the seemingly spiritual presence of the Balinese dancers, and "their ability to reach a state of ecstasy, delirium, intoxication, and trance and to propel their audience into this same mood of spellbound alertness" (Bermel, 1997, p.16). What should be pointed out, however, is that Artaud attached a mystical interpretation to the "oscillations of the sonorous body" that was in actuality a "secular dance" and a Balinese form of entertainment. (Savarese, 2001, pp. 67-68) According to Sorgenfrei,

[...] many of the genres that inspired him were highly codified and formal, despite the presence of trance, [and] were actually elite forms of royal entertainment. Artaud misread these performances as primarily secret roads to esoteric, spiritual mystery and pathways out of entrapment in the intellect. (Sorgenfrei, 2005, p.157)

Furthermore on the subject of Artaud's perception of the Balinese dance, to him it may have appeared to demonstrate moments of ecstatic movements of the body and the dancers' expressions may have appeared metaphysical in form, which may have influenced the "esoteric" texture of Artaud's theatre.

By the 1930s cruelty in Artaud's thought had taken on metaphysical and cosmic dimensions [...] he wished to return to language's 'etymological origins', so that he could define cruelty as 'strictness, diligence, unrelenting decisiveness, irreversible and absolute determination'. Cruelty was [...] 'hungering after life, cosmic strictness, relentless necessity [...] The physical cruelty, the blood and gore which is perhaps too

often associated with Artaud's theatre, should therefore be seen as a kind of image for metaphysical cruelty which Artaud fights to define. (Leach, 2004, pp.169-170)

Artaud's experience at the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition witnessing Balinese dance for the first time was one of the foundations for his theatrical concept Theatre of Cruelty, the same name he used for his theatre company years later, whose only production, *The Cenci* (1935), was a "catastrophe" and a "failure" "financially as well as artistically" (Leach, 2004, p.162). Those who were familiar with Artaud's work would have noticed in Artaud's production of *The Cenci* that there was something highly metaphysical in its patterning, and at times there was something quite ecstatic in the physical movements and gestures of the actors. These same characteristics of his actors' actions, being both deeply psychological in content and spiritual in symbolism, were also important aspects of Grotowski's Productions phase work.

In *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Grotowski describes Artaud as "The One Who Was Not Entirely Himself", and he points out clear differences between their respective works. He mentions that there were others before Artaud who had already explored theories of theatre as a "creative art form" similar to his. However, the ritual, mythical, and actor-centred elements of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty appear to have had some degree of similarity with major aspects of Grotowski's performance craft research.

It is quite plausible that Grotowski's Productions phase of research was not exclusively a secular enterprise. We find that Grotowski relied heavily on the use of archetypes that were directly associated with religious beliefs, and he embedded sacred motifs in all of his major productions. Knowing this, one is tempted to assign a label of "holy" to his theatre in its literal meaning.

As Schechner aptly points out in a quote earlier in this section, Grotowski often used religious terminology to explain his actor training techniques and performance, which would suggest there is a spiritual purpose behind Grotowski's work. How else can we understand the meaning of his theatre when Grotowski says, "In the final result we are speaking of the impossibility of separating

spiritual and physical. The actor should not use his organism to illustrate a ‘movement of the soul’, he should accomplish this movement with his organism” (Grotowski, 1968a, p.123).

There are others as well, including Wolford, Brook, and Richards, who often describe certain aspects of Grotowski’s work as having the quality of a spiritual encounter. These individuals were all directly associated with Grotowski during various phases of his research and they all see a religious-type theme that repeats itself throughout his career as demonstrated through his repeated use of religion-based archetypes. Indeed, Grotowski himself seems to accept that an “element of our productions has been variously called [...] ‘religion expressed through blasphemy; love speaking out through hate’” (Grotowski, 1968a, p.22).

Grotowski had always been interested in exploring traditional rituals of non-Western cultures that were invariably linked to ancient religious practices, and integrated various kinds of sacred practices into his work on performance. There is in fact a secular spiritualism in Grotowski’s work guided by multiple forms of religious ontologies that are used as conceptual frameworks to actuate the “inner process” of the performer. As such, this chapter’s focus on Grotowski’s Productions phase of research was to provide us with an understanding of the important role religious principles and practices played in shaping each phase of his work that came afterwards.

Although Sufism was not emphasised in this chapter, it also shares ritual elements that Grotowski explored in his Productions phase, including the element of “self-sacrifice” in the “total act”. In chapters three and four, Sufi Roots in Grotowski’s Art as Vehicle and Sufism, respectively, we will explore the concept of *tasawwuf*, “the way of the woolen-clothed”, a label for Sufism that connotes “self-sacrifice” and “purification of the heart”. We saw these concepts reflected in Flaszen’s discussion of Grotowski’s “poor theatre” and “total act” in relation to “the great mystics”, with their initiatory rituals and acts of self-mortification, or, like the “Christ myth”, masochistic-like experiences intended to purge the self of its worldly predisposition. (Flaszen, 2007, n.p.) The Sufi’s quest for direct contact with Allah (SWT) requires a passage away from the material world of ego-

based endeavours, through practising acts of self-deprivation. Thus, as an initiatory activity, we find symbolic significance in the Sufi's practice of wearing a woollen cloth, as "The practice of wearing wool, a form of 'self-deprivation and self-marginalization as a moral and political protest', was most certainly bound up with social and cultural negotiations that took place around the concepts of renunciation" (Karamustafa, 2007, p.6).

Chapter Three: Sufi Roots in Grotowski's Art as Vehicle

This chapter will examine Grotowski's final period of research, Art as Vehicle, which exclusively concerns an investigation into how certain ancient ritual songs could be used as "tools" designed to initiate an "interior process of energy transformation" in the physical activities being conducted that could elevate performance craft to the level of a deeply personal encounter. (Richards, 2008, p.7) This broadly defines what Peter Brook, one of Grotowski's most important collaborators, called the "Art as Vehicle" phase of Grotowski's work. (Grotowski, 1995, p.119) Art as Vehicle is the culmination and epitome of all the aspects of Grotowski's work, as it represents and encompasses the main ideas that were there throughout all phases of his research. Despite his evolving themes from stage to stage, he held onto all of his exercises and concepts, the totality of which is comprehensively represented by Art as Vehicle, therefore this chapter covers aspects that can be traced to every phase of his experimentation.

Unlike his period of Productions that functioned within the framework of representational performance directed towards developing a "communal" encounter between the actor and the spectator, the Art as Vehicle research is a departure away from the theatrical element of an actor-spectator relationship. Instead, this phase of Grotowski's work strictly focuses on constructing a creative composition in the form of ancient songs and accompanying dances that were intended to "work on oneself" (Pollastrelli, 2009, p.335).

Although there are clearly defined distinctions, as mentioned above, between Grotowski's period of Productions and his Post-Theatre research, there is a link. As Lisa Wolford writes, Peter Brook explained that Art as Vehicle is a "continuation rather than a contradiction of what came before", and he stated that "if you look at this new work closely, you can see that it was the old direction that continued to develop" (Wolford, 1996d, pp.12-13).

With Brook's linear explanation of Grotowski's totality of research in mind, we can suppose, as Brook does, that there is a common thread that binds all phases of Grotowski's work together. In

both his Productions/Theatre and Post-Theatre phases of work, Grotowski employed rigorous exercise methods intended to remove what he called “blocks” that stood in the way of the “organic” flow of impulses. Additionally, just as the “holy actor” and the “total act” were intended to achieve an authentically personal experience with self-transformation, so, too, do the ancient songs employed in Art as Vehicle attempt to achieve a transformative effect on the “doer” through a process of “energy transformation”. I will discuss in detail the “doer” and “energy transformation” as they relate to the use of ancient songs in later parts of this chapter.

As already indicated, Art as Vehicle exclusively dealt with introducing techniques that were intended to impact the internal processes of the participant and thus achieve energy transformation. With this said, those performing a particular action in this phase of Grotowski’s research were not working in the capacity of an actor, whose purpose was to entertain an audience. In Art as Vehicle, the performer is transformed into a “doer”, and those observing the doer’s actions are “witnesses” to what is being done in this phase of Grotowski’s research. I will provide a clearer text-based understanding of these two components of Art as Vehicle in later portions of this chapter.

Although Art as Vehicle is not identified as a theatre of presentation, it still retained elements of what could be associated with having the basic structural arrangements that are commonly parts of a theatrical framework. For example, in describing his Workcenter research, which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, Grotowski explains,

[...] as far as technical elements are concerned, everything is as it is in the performing arts; we work on song, on the vibratory qualities of song, on impulses and physical actions, on forms of movement; and even narrative motifs may appear. All this is filtered and structured up to the point of creating an accomplished structure, an Action as precise and repeatable as a stage production. (1991, p.88)

Indeed, alongside these “technical elements” of Art as Vehicle that follow the basic principles of theatre craft, we also find that there is montage, textual motifs, and what Thomas Richards refers

to as a “story-non-story” in Action. (2008, p.27) Additionally, Peter Brook and Thomas Richards often described the Workcenter research as being in the form of an “opus” that is also usually associated with being a structural component of theatre. Even with the presence of what would appear to an outside observer as elements of the “performing arts”, Grotowski informs us that this phase of his work is not a “production”. To reiterate, Art as Vehicle is a non-spectator based activity. Rather, its purpose is to allow the “doer” to undertake a journey of self-exploration that reaches into the depths of one’s being, and it becomes a uniquely personal experience. It will be important, therefore, to examine montage, opus, and Action as non-theatrical aspects of Art as Vehicle from the perspective of a “spiritual inner search” (Shevtsova, 2014, p.338).

Although Grotowski relied heavily on traditional rituals and their accompanying archetypes during previous phases of his research, Art as Vehicle involved developing performance techniques grounded in ancient ritual traditions that are “known to produce certain energetic results in those who practice them” (Osinski, 1991, p.387). Invariably, most of the traditions Grotowski explored were primarily grounded in religious practices. This is an important component in Art as Vehicle in attempting to explain Sufism’s role in Grotowski’s work. Another crucial aspect in the development of Grotowski’s Art as Vehicle phase is the influence certain cultures, such as specific regions of India, may have had on his work; those that are linked to Sufi practices in particular.

First, it will be important to provide a brief understanding of what Art as Vehicle is in terms of its structure and purpose, as well as to identify aspects in this phase of Grotowski’s work that make it distinctly different from his previous experimental endeavours. Since Grotowski’s emphasis was to use multicultural elements of traditional practices in developing performance techniques, I will also examine specific ethnographic sources that lend support to Sufism’s impact on his work. The Bauls of West Bengal, India, are of particular interest because Grotowski used their songs and movements to achieve “something ‘inner’” (Richards, 1996, p.447). Finally, there are key concepts

found within Art as Vehicle, such as “verticality”, “energy transformation”, and “inner action” that correlate to psycho-physical practices of Sufism, which will also be discussed.

The small village of Vallicelle would become the capstone of Jerzy Grotowski’s directing career. Just east of Pontedera, Italy, Vallicelle was a rugged and remote landscape when Grotowski arrived there in 1985-86 to begin work on a project known as his Art as Vehicle phase. (Grotowski.net, 2012k) Uniquely situated for the purposes of his research, Art as Vehicle took place in an abandoned building called the “Workcenter” that was converted into a workspace used by a select group of participants that travelled with Grotowski to Pontedera. The workspace itself was of a “monastic” quality, reflective of the Grotowskian theory of minimization within theatre. “The cold rooms, almost absent of furnishings”, with their “bare white walls and uneven stone floors” functioned as spaces where the Upstairs Action and Downstairs Action¹¹ would take place within the Workcenter. (Wolford, 1996e, pp.114-115) Additionally, the location Grotowski chose for his research was completely isolated from the outside world, with curtains pulled over the Workcenter windows throughout the day. Toiletries and other personal effects were limited to what was necessary, and social conversations among the participants were limited to brief discussions on the work at hand. From a structural-functional perspective, the reason for this highly controlled environment was to ensure the purposes of Grotowski’s research would not be compromised by extraneous distractions. Referring to the “strict discipline” of the Workcenter, Wolford explains that

The principle at work is another version of Grotowski’s famous *conjunction oppistorum*, the relationship between structure and spontaneity: the further one

¹¹ A note on “Upstairs” and “Downstairs” groups: “[...] from 1987-1993, the main activities of the Workcenter were conducted by two separate research teams [...] pragmatically referred to as ‘Upstairs’ and ‘Downstairs’ in their use of different portions of the two-storey workspace [...] The group then referred to as ‘Downstairs Group’, led by Richards, focused on the development of performing structures around songs from African and Afro-Caribbean traditions [...] [whereas] the ‘Upstairs Group’ [...] concentrated on actions based on Haitian songs and text with their roots in Egyptian and Middle Eastern culture” (Wolford, 1997b, p.367).

chooses to venture into the depths of one's being the more important that a structure be in place to function as a safeguard on the journey. (Wolford, 1996c, p.103)

The participants themselves, being from various ethnic and racial backgrounds, were mostly professional actors selected to be collaborators in the Art as Vehicle research. Among these artists, American actor Thomas Richards functioned as a team leader in Downstairs Action, and he was a central figure in developing the tools that defined Art as Vehicle. I will discuss the instruments of this phase of Grotowski's work in later portions of this chapter. Additionally, using traditional ritualistic source materials in Art as Vehicle, each group employed chants, songs and dances indigenous to particular regional cultures, as central components of their workspace activities.

With respect to the activities themselves it would be important to briefly discuss the meaning of "Main Action"/ "Action", "Opus", "doer", and "witness", all of which are used to describe the workspace activities of the Workcenter. The overarching structural composition of a particular workspace activity was described using the Downstairs Action and Upstairs Action framework. For example, in explaining "Downstairs Action", Richards, who first introduced this concept, states, "In our present terminology, the word Action with a capital letter refers to the totality of a performing structure [...] called Downstairs Action" (2008, p.8). From 1994, Richards continued work on Action, whose "opus is composed of lines of actions elaborated in detail, constructed with and around ancient vibratory songs" (TheWorkcenter.org, n.d.). As that example demonstrates, the opus in Art as Vehicle is an exactly scored set of repeatable physical actions, along with precise tempo-rhythms from the songs and dances that accompany these actions which form a unified whole. Additionally, since the opus is not directed towards the spectator, the actor role is replaced with that of a "doer" in performing Action, and those few who watch the workspace activities are "witnesses" selected "to attest to what they have seen and felt and, when necessary, to give a reliable testimony" rather than be entertained by the Workcenter activity. (Osinski, 1991, p.395)

As mentioned earlier, the workspace at the Workcenter was characteristically minimalistic, with only a few objects placed within the workspace. In *Downstairs Action*, for example, four candles are placed on one side of the room; there is also a bundle wrapped in red cloth, a basin filled with water and child's rattle used in the performance. (Wolford, 1996e, pp. 160 and 173) It should also be noted that dialogue was briefly interspersed with the actions taking place. Song and dance were the primary forms of communication between the group participants.

In order to examine the purpose of *Art as Vehicle*, it is important to provide an understanding of what is meant by this phase of Grotowski's directorial endeavours. *Art as Vehicle* is multi-layered in its definition. Perhaps this is due in part to what some critics have said is its "esoteric" nature. (Wolford, 1996c, p.130) As with all previous phases of his work, Grotowski pushed the boundaries of performance by redefining the meaning of theatre in *Art as Vehicle*.

I would suggest that the horizon of expectations with which individuals approach Grotowski's work has altered over the years, and that persons familiar with the more recent stages of his research have acquired a very different set of expectations, expectations that presuppose a disruption/interrogation of theatrical structure [...] the cultural markers that determine what constitutes performance have been repositioned again and again, usually in ways that provoke anxiety and resistance [...] This level of anxiety is further intensified in regards to Grotowski's work. (Wolford, 1996e, p.130)

As Wolford suggests, most followers of Grotowski's earlier work would have viewed *Art as Vehicle* through the prism of Grotowski's *Paratheatre* (1969-78) and *Theatre of Sources* (~1976-82) phases of his research. Like these phases, *Art as Vehicle* reconfigures performance as representational, moving away from the montage intended to create images in order to cause an internalized reaction in the spectator. Instead, the images being expressed through song and dance are directed towards the one engaged in a particular set of physical activities, which makes the

montage in Art as Vehicle markedly different in purpose, as explained by Maria Shevtsova in her examination of the “theatre of presence” as it applies to Grotowski’s final phase of research:

It is on the basis of such a distinction that Grotowski separated the theatre of presentation from the theatre of presence, where the performer replaced and superseded the actor. The performer made no effort whatsoever to present (or represent by standing for) anybody else, and so had neither character nor narrative to sustain. Second, the performer wove performances from each and every step of the ‘spiritual inner search’, and did so to such an extent that the flow of these steps was the very content of the performance itself: the performance was the process. Further, it was the process of activated energies that took shape and form, and this – now in Grotowski’s words – looked ‘to create the montage not in the perception of the spectators, but in the artists who do it. [...]’. (Shevtsova, 2014, p.338)

Because the montage found within Art as Vehicle was nonrepresentational, some observers of this work question whether this phase should have even been considered performance, since public accessibility itself was limited to a small group of outside observers who acted as “witnesses” rather than spectators being entertained. This aspect of the Workcenter research only seemed to reinforce its “esoteric” nature. Grotowski, in an interview with Peter Brook, explained what makes Art as Vehicle distinctly different from what people became accustomed to experiencing in his prior work:

It is not participatory theatre, nor Paratheater, nor is it Theater of Sources. It’s not that. It is necessary to solve all the problems of technical precision, and finally reach a point that is like the radical nature of dangerous forces [...] dangerous in the sense that they cannot directly serve the spectator. Rather, they push him away, but they serve the actor, they can serve the people who work on art. (Grotowski in Brook, 2009, p.102)

According to Grotowski, *Art as Vehicle* is a complete departure from what the followers of all his previous work had grown accustomed to. This phase of his research detaches itself from spectacle, altogether eliminating an interactive relationship between a performer and the spectator. This, again, is perhaps the reason for the “anxiety” Wolford mentions. In *Art as Vehicle*, the research revolves around the artist and his/her craft. Peter Brook explains that the performer is the “essence” of theatre and describes this phase of Grotowski’s research as an investigation into the internal mechanisms that create artistic expression in the doer:

So let us take a closer look at what we really want to know. First of all, let’s take the point of view of theatre. Theatre is an abstract word and to be concrete needs a vehicle. The vehicle which is the strongest in all the forms of theatre is the human being. This individual, this human being, is always an unknown quantity. And it is an absolute necessity that somewhere there should exist exceptional conditions in which this strange unknown being – the actor – can be explored. (Brook, 2009, p.33)

This phase of Grotowski’s work which dealt exclusively with the doer was not so extraordinarily different than what he was examining during earlier phases of his research. Grotowski’s productions, *Kordian* (1962), *Dr. Faustus* (1963), *The Hamlet Study* (1964), and *The Constant Prince* (1965 in Poland, and 1965-1970 abroad), marked a gradual shift away from concentrating on the spectator’s relationship to performance. Instead, “They were still assigned a nominal ‘role’, but all that was expected of them was that they be silent witnesses. The focus of the Laboratory Theatre research process became the actor” (Kumiega, 1985, p.54). Ryszard Cieslak, who appears as the quintessential martyr figure in these performances, represented the attention that was given to what was being “molded in the actor; in his body, in his voice and in his soul” (Kumiega, 1985, p.76). The concept of the total act, which was made manifest in Cieslak’s role in *The Constant Prince*, exemplifies Grotowski’s earliest inclination to place the actor at the centre of what typifies one of the most important elements in *Art as Vehicle*.

There have been multiple interpretations given of what is meant by Art as Vehicle. Kris Salata, author of *The Unwritten Grotowski: Theory and practice of the encounter* (2013), defines Art as Vehicle as “performance of the oral tradition” that reaches “back to pagan practices and multinarrative relationships with the supernatural, to the world before the division” (Salata, 2013, pp.3-4). Similarly, Wolford prefers to cite what Grotowski himself defines it as being:

According to Grotowski, Art as vehicle concerns ‘actions related to very ancient songs which traditionally served ritual purposes, and so can have a direct impact on – so to say – the head, the heart and the body of the doers, songs which can allow the passage from a vital energy to a more subtle’ [...] Grotowski clarifies that the term Art as vehicle does not directly refer to all the activities of the Workcenter, but only the work that deals with the process of energy transformation from ‘heavy but organic energies [...] to a level of energy more subtle’. (Wolford, 1996e, pp.16-17)

Central to the meaning of this phase of his work, Grotowski identifies “energy transformation” as his focal point in this period of research. As mentioned earlier, Grotowski’s final phase of research primarily dealt with work on utilizing techniques “that could alter the psychological state of the practitioner” (Wolford, 1996e, p.7). Accomplishing this objective required the channelling of energy within the doer’s body that would have both an internal and external impact on the doer. Brook, in discussing Grotowski’s objectives in Art as Vehicle, states:

He wanted to attain pure impulse, an impulse, he knew, is not visible, it has to be ‘carried’ by something and this ‘carrier’, this vehicle is the human body. Through an intonation, through movements and gestures, he wanted to find, in a more detailed manner, the relation between the internal energies of body and their external expression. (Brook, 2009, p.67)

The process of energy transformation is the means by which the doer converts what Thomas Richards describes as energy that is characteristically “coarse”, into a form of inner vitality and intensity that is much more “subtle” (Richards, 2008, p.7). For Grotowski, performance was never simply taking on a role and demonstrating a series of actions. In *Art as Vehicle*, the doer’s body becomes an instrument of expression, with each gesture – every physical action – part of a profoundly internal process of self-transformation that is made manifest in an organically “external expression”. Thomas Richards, himself a group leader at the Workcenter, provides an insightful examination of the effects energy transformation has on the “doer” during the course of a performative action:

In certain fragments of Main Action [...] It became as if my body began to conduct me – absolutely by itself – in a flow of movement that was coming from inside, a stream of impulses running through my body [...] My mind was no longer manipulating my body, telling it to go here, go there; now my body was conducting me [...] the totality of Main Action became [...] the aspect of organicity. (Richards, 2008, pp.4-5)

One fundamentally important aspect of Richards’ experience is what he describes as the “flow of movement that was coming from inside”, which Peter Brook refers to as “inner action” (Brook, 2009, p.13). This is the intrinsic predisposition of actions that have been manipulated by impulses that are generated through channelling energy into the core of the doer’s being. Although Richards’ seemingly metamorphic experience in Main Action is characteristically one that involves a psycho-physical dynamic, the transference of energy that causes an organic action at some point negates the mentally deliberative use of physical expressions, and is replaced with what Grotowski would have described as “spontaneous impulses” (Slowiak and Cuesta, 2007, p.92). Perhaps this may explain the point at which Richards felt he no longer was relying on a specific set of intentional movements of the body to perform his action. In an almost anatomical description of energy transference, Richards refers to this energy as a force that originates from a person’s essence:

What is in the vital pool begins to flow upward into this other resource and transform itself into a quality of energy that is more subtle. When I say subtle I mean lighter, more luminous. Its flow now is different, its way of touching the body is different [...] touching something that is no longer just related to the physical frame, but is as if above the physical frame. (Richards, 2008, pp.7-8)

Both Brook and Richards describe this “inner action” as a phenomenon in which a specific type of energy – subtle energy – is conducted upwards from its place of origin within the body, and initiates a higher state of consciousness in the doer. More precisely, this ascension of energy occurs through the process Grotowski called “vertical line”, a concept which can also be explained by the process of trance. (Słowiak and Cuesta, 2007, p.116) In performing Action, Richards describes verticality as being “from one quality of energy, dense and vital, up and up towards a very subtle quality of energy, descending back into the basic physicality” (Richards, 2008, p.8). In some respects, the initial ascension of “subtle” energy appears to have properties of trance-like states of consciousness. As mentioned earlier, it was at this higher level of energy during the course of Action that Richards states “my mind was no longer manipulating my body [...] now my body was conducting me” (Richards, 2008, p.5). We find that Richards had experienced a different field of consciousness through the transference of energy that led to spontaneous, free-flowing movements of his body.

In the doer, there is a moment when a given physical action eclipses the mental awareness of the body’s movements. However similar “subtle” energy is to reaching a trance-like state of concentration, the process of internalized impulses is intended to produce precisely scored sets of external actions that takes this energy from its sublime form, and is recycled into a tangible physical action.

In Art as Vehicle a distinct set of tools are used as techniques that act as the “vehicle” for inner action and energy transformation. Grotowski employs songs and dance grounded on ancient

ritual practices as techniques for his work on Actions in this phase of his doer-specific research. In Downstairs Action, he relies exclusively on traditional Afro-Caribbean songs and dances, which are the requisites for engaging the doer in an intensely organic expressive activity, as Wolford explains concerning the use of songs in Art as Vehicle:

Grotowski's work is founded on the premise that certain songs can serve as a tool for activating a process of transformation [...] Grotowski posits that these special songs [...] 'have the capacity to aid the doer in pursuing an itinerary of verticality,' something that might be described as a work of self-transformation or a journey toward a higher state of being. (Wolford, 1996e, p.192)

Wolford puts forward the notion that specific ritual songs were being used at the Workcenter to raise the doer's mind and body to a more metaphysical level of activity. These songs, according to Wolford, were intended to "affect an individual's psycho-energetic state in physically objective ways" (Wolford, 1996e, p.205). Grotowski placed primary importance on rituals and traditions as a means to transform performance into an intimate, symbiotic relationship between the doer and his/her craft. This could only be achieved by altering the way the mind thinks and the body moves while in a performance space. We find, therefore, these songs were used to provide "concrete techniques" for achieving a totally organic action. (Wolford, 1996e, p.7)

What is particularly interesting is the "vibratory" nature of the ritual songs Grotowski relied on in his research. As was mentioned earlier, traditional Afro-Caribbean songs were the primary means of Downstairs Action. They carried very distinct intonations which are characterized as "sonic in form" and having "a determined vibration in tempo-rhythm" (Wolford, 1996e, p.205). Multiple explanations are given as to the significance of the sounds generated from the songs. Speaking about these Afro-Caribbean songs and the effect they have on energy transformation and its relationship to verticality, Richards notes:

These songs coming from the ritual tradition can work as tools for this transformation of energy [...] I call this ‘inner action’ [...] the doer begins to let the song descend into the organism, and the sonic vibration begins to change [...] the syllables and the melody of these songs begin to touch and activate something I perceive to be like energy seats in the organism. (Richards, 2008, p.6)

Richards points out that “sonic vibration” is a mechanism that effectuates an internalized reaction in the person performing with these ritual songs. Again, as Wolford observed, these vibratory songs have psycho-physical properties intended to “alter the psychological state of the practitioner” that facilitate mental concentration and completely spontaneous movements of the body. (Wolford, 1996e, p.7) The psycho-physical collaboration between vibratory ritual songs and the expressions of the doer is intrinsically part of the “vertical line” Grotowski intended to achieve in *Art as Vehicle*. This is reflected in Richards’ explanation of the importance traditional songs have in soliciting natural expressions of the body:

[...] the traditional songs (like those of the Afro-Caribbean line) are rooted in organicity. It’s always the song-body, it’s never the song dissociated from 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, but of impulses and the little actions. Because the impulses which run in the body are exactly that which carries the song. (Richards, 1995, p.128)

Fundamentally, the body is the primary source of phonation and resonance of the songs being introduced into a particular set of actions. The internal components of these ritual songs used in *Art as Vehicle* have a metaphysical quality outside the physical dynamic at work, and they affect the body’s spontaneous movements and impulses, which provides the basis for examining elements of spiritual influences used in the *Workcenter* activities.

In *Art as Vehicle*, the ritual songs and dances used by the doers are distinctly religious in nature, and were used to produce internal transformation within the doer. Richards, referring to Grotowski's use of ritual traditions in *Downstairs Action*, draws an association with the Bauls of West Bengal in discussing the Afro-Caribbean songs and dances being used for Grotowski's research:

Grotowski, when speaking about our work now, often refers to some similarity with the tradition of the Bauls that still survives in Bengal [...] He said that some time ago (in his story he was speaking about four generations, because he met four generations of Bauls) there was a tradition in India of singers/performers [...] With these songs they made a work on themselves related to something 'inner'. (Richards, 2008, p.28)

It is important to note Grotowski's reference to the Bauls as a point of reference in the work he was conducting, which demonstrates a potentially major influence in selecting ancient songs and dances for *Art as Vehicle* to create "inner action". Grotowski travelled extensively in India, and familiarized himself with the various regional traditions throughout the country. One such area was in West Bengal. In 1980, during the *Theatre of Sources* phase of his research, Grotowski held two workshops in the Indian villages of Kenduli and Khardaha that primarily focused on what Deepak I Majumdar identified as "exercises for acquiring psychophysical energy from the primary elements", 'wrestling with oneself' and work on 'the biomechanics of internal theatre'" (Grotowski.net, 2012l). The area where Grotowski conducted his research was well known for the presence of a distinct religious sect, called the Bauls¹². It is the village of Kenduli in particular, where this group of mystic minstrels have gathered from across India for centuries to collectively hold annual religious

¹² The Hindu name for Baul is 'Baur', meaning "crazy", while in Arabic they are called "Aul", which is translated as meaning "friend" or "devotee". The Bauls are a distinct nonsectarian group of mystics that come from the lower classes of Hindu and Muslim society in India. Known as "traveling minstrels" who sing and dance while using stringed instruments, lutes, and drums, the Bauls "perform at sacred shrines and temples, in courtyards of palatial mansions, at fairs and festivals, on trains, under the trees, and among the mud huts of villages – anywhere, anytime" (Bhattacharyya, Douglas, and Slinger, 1993, p.2).

activities. (Dalrymple, 2009, p.226) It would be quite plausible that Grotowski and his Theatre of Sources collaborators had been exposed to the psycho-physical religious practices of the Bauls, especially as “six Bauls were invited to Poland in order to participate in a Theatre of Sources seminar (30 May – 31 August 1980)” after their stay in West Bengal (Grotowski.net, 2012l); they would have seen the Bauls’ ecstatic singing and dancing, and they likely observed their way of life during their visit to Kenduli. It could also be posited that Grotowski’s work on “exercises for acquiring psychophysical energy” while in Kenduli, India, would have an impact in formulating his Art as Vehicle research on techniques used for energy transformation. In fact, Wolford mentions the Bauls as a point of reference in explaining the Workcenter project as being similar to “the Baul practice of song and dance” that emphasizes “some type of internal work related to self-transformation” (Wolford, 1996e, p.144).

Because of the clear and significant influence of Baul practices on Grotowski’s work, it is important to understand some of the major sources of Baul traditions. The Baul spiritual way of life is rooted in multiple religious practices and beliefs which primarily include Tantra, Vaishnavism, and Sufi Islam. The esoteric practices of the Bauls demonstrate the application of various religious practices and beliefs in their spiritual way of life, not just one religious school of thought.

Firstly, the Bauls are known for practising certain sexually-oriented religious rites that correlate with the belief in “sacred sexuality” found within Tantra mysticism. Emerging in India between 300 and 400 CE, Tantric theology was based on a series of Sanskrits (“discourses”) of erotic writings known as *Kama sutra* and *ananga ranga*, that were intended to explain how the union of the masculine and feminine energies in the form of sexual intercourse are pathways to oneness within the cosmos. This particular religious sect focuses on using sexually-orientated yoga techniques that are used to enhance the level of erotic contact between a male and female, leading to the collision of two energy forces that have the capacity to create life through a “sacred union”. We find elements of

Tantric religion in some of the Bauls' "elaborately ritualistic sexual rites", as observed by William Dalrymple in his book, *Nine Lives*:

The Bauls [...] seek to channel the mysteries of sexuality and the sexual urge – the most powerful emotional force in the human body – as a way to reaching and revealing the divinity of the inner self [...] so the Bauls use their Tantric sexual yoga as a powerhouse to drive the mind out of the gravity of everyday life. (Dalrymple, 2009, p.247)

Additional to the absorption of certain Tantric religious rites, the Bauls also embraced elements of Vaishnavism philosophy. Vaishnava, derived from *Vishnu*, meaning "one who is all prevailing", refers to Krishna as the supreme deity of the universe. Considered to be the largest Hindu institution in India, followers of Vaishnavism acquire spiritual enlightenment by worshipping Krishna and his multiple incarnations with the sacred practice known as *bhakti-yoga*. Along with purifying the mind through the repetitive chanting of Vishnu's name and giving temple offerings to Krishna, the various physical positions used in *bhakti-yoga* are designed to create points of energy within the mind/body that facilitate spiritual enlightenment. For the Bauls, the religious writings of Vaishnavism that centred on love for the divine source of life were most appealing. In *The Path of the Mystic Lover: Baul songs of passion and ecstasy*, Bhattacharyya, Douglas, and Slinger point out that "Most Bauls are identified with the Hindu sect of Vaishnavism. In their songs the Bauls not only borrow religious images directly from Vaishnavism, but also incorporate the poetic forms of its literature" (1993, p.14). With Vaishnavism's emphasis on developing an intimate relationship with a supreme being, this same religious principle was central to Baul philosophy, which suggests they gravitated to this Hindu sect's theology and the lyrics of their songs that emphasized love and devotion to Vishnu.

Thirdly, the Bauls have a strong connection to the practices of Islamic mysticism in particular. As early as the 1200's the Indian population of West Bengal was exposed to Sufi practices

by a large influx of Turkish-speaking migrates. In *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, author Richard M. Eaton provides an account of a Muslim inscription that details the earliest presence of Turkish Sufis in Bengal:

[...] written on a stone tablet found in the Birhum District and dated July 29, 1221 [...] the inscription records the construction of a Sufi lodge (knanaqah) by a man described as a faqir – that is, a Sufi [...] the building was not meant for this faqir alone, but for a group of Sufis. (Eaton, 1993, p.71)

Some scholars place a greater weight on Sufism's influence on the Bauls than other religious traditions. The presence of Sufism marked the beginning of a cultural change-over in Bengal, with mass conversions to Islam over a period of several hundred years¹³. The infusion of Sufism within Bengal society created a dramatic shift away from the prevailing religious institutions, and altered existing cultural norms associated with local spiritual beliefs. To some extent, the spiritual practices of Sufism appealed to a Bengal population that was largely a disaffected peasant class. According to Stanley Wolpert:

Sufism, Islam's mystic thread, which evolved primarily as a legacy of Persian influence upon Islamic orthodoxy, struck a responsive chord in the mass of Bengal's population, especially among the lowest caste of the Hindu outcastes and former Buddhists, who were left without a priesthood to turn to for spiritual guidance after 1202. (Wolpert, 2004, in Mamoon, 2008, pp.136-137)

Although the Bauls did not exclusively attach themselves to any one theological belief system, some historians identify the Bauls as being directly linked to the Sufi Order, Ba 'al from Persia. (Mamoon, 2008, p.143) For example, one universal Sufi custom, the "traveller", parallels the

¹³ Mamoon writes: "The conversion in India to Islam was simultaneously the result of both coercion and of free acceptance. [...] the message of Islam promoting equality, that had been very successful in spreading Islam among other indigenous societies with a rigid social hierarchy, when spread by Sufi mystics, found a receptive audience" (2008, p.137).

association with the Bauls as “travelling minstrels”. Within Sufi thought, the traveller (*salik*) is one who completely detaches themselves from temporal luxury by living a transient life. For the Sufi, wandering from place to place esoterically symbolized the *fanna* (“passing away”) of the human ego, by practising *tasawwuf* (“to give up everything”). Also, *salik* symbolically represents taking a journey down a path that leads to the attainment of spiritual union with the divine. As already mentioned, this requires separating one’s self from mundane human affairs. Similarly, the Bauls seek the attainment of spiritual enlightenment by disassociating themselves from dependence on domiciled attachments, instead relying on the local villagers to provide them with food and other necessities as they wander from place to place singing and dancing. Even in observing them, they “resemble their fellow ‘madmen’ of Afghanistan, Iran, and other Middle Eastern countries, with their patchwork robes, lutelike instruments, and riddle-bound songs” (Bhattacharyya, Douglas, and Slinger, 1993, p.41).

Further connecting them to Sufism, Mamoon notes that the “Bauls, akin to the members of the Sufi ba’al order, reject worldly life and devote their lives to the search of their beloved [...] singing and wandering like love-struck devotees” (Mamoon, 2008, p.143). Additionally, there are particular instruments the Bauls use with their songs of “love” for God. The *ektara* (“one-stringed”) is the most widely used instrument that accompanies the Bauls’ ecstatic singing and dancing. This instrument is also used by Sufis.

In terms of the Baul songs themselves, it was mentioned earlier that Vaisnave literature substantially influenced Baul thought. However, as indicated by some scholars who have analysed the various forms of songs by the Bauls, there are “several Sufi words being employed” in the lyrics, and “Baul literature has been largely influenced by Sufism” (Islam, 2004, pp.118-121). With respect to Baul literature being connected to Islamic mysticism, we find that “it was the love-mysticism of the Sufis that attracted the Bauls, and the rich symbolism of their poetry that inspired them” (Bhattacharyya, Douglas, and Slinger, 1993, p.39). For instance, it has been noted by Bhattacharyya,

Douglas, and Slinger that the “image of a bird is used extensively in Baul songs”, and is related to writings from the Persian Sufi poet, Jalaluddin Rumi, who used the idea of a “caged bird” to express the mystical notion that the divine source of life resides within the interior of every human being. (1993, p.39) There are also other Baul ritual traditions in their songs and dances that are linked to Sufi spiritual practices as well:

Among the most important Sufi spiritual practices which the Bauls incorporated into their traditions are the chanting of God’s name and his praises, known as *sama*, and the practice of *dhikr*, remembrance (of God), often accompanied by intoxicating whirling ritual dances [...] It seems likely that the Bauls’ whirling dances and musical compositions, especially the melodies, came directly from Sufi tradition. (Bhattacharyya, Douglas, and Slinger, 1993, p.41)

The *sama* and the *dhikr* are intended to alter the conscious ego by bringing the practitioner to a self- induced state of trance. The psycho-energetic songs and dances used in these ritualistic activities, creates a reaction in the form of *tajaly* (trance), leading to *wajdan* (ecstasy). As psycho-physical exercises, the rhythmic movements to vibratory songs produce organic expressions of mystical states of consciousness. Observing the swirling Dervishes, one can see the completely relaxed body acting as a vehicle for self-transformation; the harmonious and spontaneous movements of the body originate from an inner energy that produces a completely organic physical reaction.

Paralleling dance as a psycho-physical exercise, singing songs and chanting sacred words facilitates complete mental concentration by emphasizing controlled breathing. The *dhikr*, an intrinsic ritual practice of Sufism, is a sustained repeating of the name of God, vocalizing each syllable without pauses in breath over several hours. This psycho-energetic exercise, as with songs and dancing, initiates a gradual stripping away of the spatiotemporal relationship to conscious reality, and alters the practitioner’s state of consciousness. Richards provides an interesting corollary

analogy of the internal impact repetition has on the practitioner during the course of performing dhikr:

Let's imagine there is a prayer in which the mind has a specific function, to ask something again and again [...] the prayer needs to be done without interruption [...] then something from the way of asking can begin to descend in one's being, as if the place of prayer now was not only in the mind but also somewhere deeper in one's self. During this process you might encounter moments in which you lose yourself [...] when you are no longer doing what you intended to do [...] it begins in the mind as verbal formula [...] Then other parts of you gradually begin to participate in the repetition [...] the prayer is now not linked only to the mind, but to the 'heart' too. (Richards, 2008, p.71)

The repetitiveness in these ancient ritual practices is intended to cause the simultaneous attunement of the mind and body by the energy created from very precise techniques used for soliciting internal impulses, which thus transforms ritual into an organic activity. As sets of repeatable activities, singing, dancing, and chanting are mechanisms used to facilitate, in a tangible way, spiritual expression. The psycho-physical dynamic associated with these Sufi ritual customs lends itself to examining Grotowski's use of ancient traditions as a means for achieving organicity within performance craft.

Through his observation of ancient rituals, Grotowski discovered "tools" that could have a potential impact on his work in Art as Vehicle. Much of Grotowski's research at the Workcenter in Pontedera, Italy, involved formulating structured techniques designed to "activate the inner process of energy transformation", leading to organic actions. In terms of its relationship to theatre, traditional rituals are a form of performance that uses the body as a vehicle. What makes ancient ritual performance particularly unique is the psycho-physical energy leading to spontaneous gestures, intonations, and rhyme-tempos. It is this "inner" vitality, as Smith and Narayan point out, that most

interested Grotowski in selecting ancient ritual songs as techniques for his research on performance craft in *Art as Vehicle*:

When Grotowski spoke about ‘*la lignee organique au theatre et dans le ritual*’ [The ‘Organic Line’ in Theatre and in Ritual] [...] he established a link between aesthetic and ritual performance practices, suggesting that theatre and ritual were related because of the live process they had in common and that may be described as a transformation of energy. (Smith and Narayan, 2012, p.171)

As part of his investigation into “the relationship between the internal energies of the body and their external expressions” (Brook, 2009, p.67), Grotowski relied on ancient songs in particular because of their vibratory quality. One of the central objectives of the Workcenter activity was to achieve a level of physical presence that is qualitatively organic in nature. In a psycho-physical way, the vibratory songs used in *Main Action* alter the doer’s conscious perceptions that block the stream of organic impulses while performing a series of actions. By definition impulses are natural occurrences within the body which are spontaneous without forethought. This would suggest that the vibratory songs were intended to encourage improvised sounds and negate deliberative movements of the body. However, as Richards explains, their function is to create a kind of template that provides constancy to the sets of physical actions being performed by Grotowski’s collaborators:

Our work is not only related to very special songs, but also to the creation of lines of little beats of human behavior, lines of performing details, an acting score with its specific tempo-rhythms, to the discovery and structuring of points of contact between acting partners, to the work on organic but structured flow impulses, to forms of movement. It deals with the ‘living’ word (the approach to text). (Richards, 2008, p.13)

Although the ritual songs provide the axis to structure elements such as scoring and physical actions, they also function as a mechanism that actuates a form of internal energy which transforms

“the body, the heart and the head of the doers” (Wolford, 1996e, p.139). In this mind/body process of what is called “verticality”, Grotowski points to the structural characteristics of the mantra within ancient ritual songs as a source for influencing, in a transformative way, what is being internally absorbed through the vibratory qualities of the songs:

The mantra is a 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 [...] each of these songs, which were formed in a long arc of time and were utilized for sacred or ritualistic purposes (I would say that they were used as an element of vehicle), brings different types of results. For example, one result is simulating, another brings calm (this example is crude; not only because there are a great many possibilities, but above all because among these possibilities there are those which touch more subtle domain). (Wolford, 1996e, pp.205-206)

In his analysis, Grotowski explains that the unique vibratory trait of the ancient ritual songs is intended to solicit a specific internalized reaction, which is characteristic of what one would experience while performing a mantra. For example, the mantra’s practitioner focuses on the utterance of particular sounds, whose vibrations are arranged specifically in order to activate various forms of energy. Similarly, Grotowski refers to the “subtle domain” or the activation of the doer’s “inner action” using specific vibratory sounds from these ancient ritual songs. Grotowski had learned the wisdom of the ages, that the production of specific sounds creates a kind of energy that affects cognition in an intuitive way:

[...] it is a question of something that constitutes the proper sonority, vibratory qualities which are so tangible that in a certain way they become the meaning of the song [...] the song becomes the meaning itself through the vibratory qualities, even if

one doesn't understand the words, reception alone of the vibratory qualities is enough.

(Grotowski in Richards, 1995, p.126)

Grotowski applied this same principle to his actor training in *Art as Vehicle*, which also takes the vocal resonance from distinct vibratory sounds to directly affect the “tempo-rhythm” that takes place in the mind and body of the doer while performing an action. The interpretation of a specific vibratory intonation allows the doer's actions to correlate with the sounds being created. The dialogue between the doer and the traditional songs is one that allows for an organic, yet consciously precise and repeatable, “opus” in *Main Action*. This raises a question about the mutually exclusive nature of what is a completely “organic” performative action, and an action that is simultaneously “precisely-scored”, as the two seemingly opposing qualities are simultaneously integral to doers' actions. Grotowski's *Workcenter* activity required years of preparation, and each action, as described by Richards, was “a precise performative structure” (Richards, 2008, p.3). It can be suggested that the ancient traditional songs and rituals used in *Art as Vehicle* produce “organic impulses” within the doer by virtue of the reliable constancy of a ritual song's sound arrangement. This aesthetic, according to Wolford, is at the heart of Grotowski's reason for the sources he used in this phase of his research:

He suggested that [using] traditional songs from various cultures [...] exerts a discernible impact on the physical and energetic state of the doer through precise patterns of vocal vibration. (Wolford, 1996c, p.119)

Throughout this chapter, the concept of transformation of energy has been a constant theme in discussing Grotowski's research on performance craft using traditional vibratory songs as a technique in achieving predictable results. Grotowski was particularly interested in elements of religious rituals, such as ancient songs, dances, and chants that would facilitate the achievement of “inner action”. This is not to say that he was embedding sacred symbolism into his research. As Wolford suggests, “Grotowski journeyed in search of different types of ‘traditional practitioners’,

keepers of ritual/performance knowledge related to embodied forms of religious practice” (Wolford, 1996c, p.7). Among the many cultural contacts Grotowski made during the course of his career, his experiences in Iran and West Bengal, India, exposed him to ritual traditions that can be linked to Sufi psycho-physical practices from the regions he visited. In this paper, parallels were drawn between performance technique in Art as Vehicle and the psycho-physical practices of Sufism such as the *sama* and the *dhikr*. Music, dance, and chanting are interwoven in these ritual traditions to bring the performer to an altered state of consciousness. Through these psycho-energetic instruments of sacred ritual, the body and the mind simultaneously engage in an “inner” and “outer” process of transformation. The following is a popular *sama* and *dhikr* ritual that provides a salient example of psycho-physical activity performed by the Dervishes, which can only be appreciated by describing this practice in its totality:

After finishing all the preparatory steps, all the disciples join the ritual’s atmosphere, where they all sit in a row just on the right side of the Sheik who normally sit in the middle-upper side of the field. The Sheik of the hearing is normally the last one to enter the field, and when he enters the field all the disciples welcome him by prostrating to him while repeating the name of God (Howa), stressing the last letter of the word, lengthening and expanding its sound. At this minute one disciple will be clicking a special instrument which signals the beginning of the ritual. Post the beginning of the ritual, a soft sound of flute will be heard then a few Quranic verses will be read. After finishing the required verses, the musical instruments (Al-rababa, flute, and the background individuals who keep repeating the Sheik’s words) play and all the disciples stand up and commence circumambulation around the field with slow-moving motions, starting with a move by the right leg following the left leg after four seconds of having the right leg in front, a so-called ‘freezing the move’. This step keeps on going in a systematic way, creating a type of rhythmic sound when doing this process seven times

in a row (circumambulation around the field seven times, the significance meaning to copy the process of circumambulation around Al-Kaba'a by Muslims [during the pilgrimage in Mecca]). At this stage all disciples will be in the position of arms folded, having the right hand on the top of the left hand. After finishing this procedure, all of the disciples will stop at the places they started from, and all of them will take off the black overcoat covering their bodies and will immediately go towards the Sheik in order to bend in front of him showing him the maximum respect possible. The disciples will carry on moving towards the Sheik until they cross the invisible border, which can be done by a long footstep with the right leg, and then detouring towards the other disciples and bending in front of them as well.

After all of this, all the disciples will begin circumambulation in the field with arms outstretched, the right hand fully opened and directed towards the sky and the left one directed to earth. At this point the hearing will properly begin. The Sheik remains in place, his black overcoat covering his body. Without circumambulating, his role is to ensure that all movements are done appropriately, and everything related to the hearing is done correctly. Whenever the music stops, everybody stops dancing and circumambulating which means that the first hearing has finished. A second hearing might be done if necessary and the same steps applied in each hearing. At the end of the hearing session, verses must be read from the Quran. (Bayatly, 2007, pp.66-67)

This whirling dance typifies the structural elements of the traditional songs and dances employed by Grotowski to effectuate transference of energy within the doer. As previously discussed, the songs used at the Workcenter possessed unique psycho-physical characteristics that could be used for purposes of Grotowski's research. Among these, the vibratory songs allow the performer to achieve a fluid tempo-rhythm. Similarly, the Sufi's repetitive chanting of "Howa", phonetically emphasizing an "expanding" of sound, sets the pace for the physical actions that follow.

As Richards points out, the “quality” of a specific sound in the traditional song guides the pattern of the body’s movements. Similar to the Dervish ritual described above, in Art as Vehicle Grotowski relies on the meticulously formulated sequence of physical actions and a highly “precise score of impulses” guiding the movement of the body. (Richards, 2008, p.9) More importantly, both the Dervish dance and the Main Action of the Workcenter are directed towards the doer themselves. Wolford draws a parallel between Art as Vehicle the Dervish practices of *sama* and *Dhkir*:

Art as Vehicle is a form of embodied prayer in a manner analogous to *sama*, the ritual dance of the Mevlevi Dervishes, described by Kassim Bayatly as a practice in which ‘the body functions as a vehicle that, through action and articulated symbolic movement, manifests an act of love towards the Totality’ [...] Action is much more closely allied with traditional ritual and meditational prayer than to any form of contemporary, secular performance. (Wolford, 1996c, p.200)

There is a degree of concentration in the Dervish ritual and Main Action that specifically functions as a form of self-introspection, making the ritual/performance a highly personalised engagement of the mind and body. In the cases of the Sufi-inspired Baul traditions and Main Action, dancing, chanting, and singing are cumulatively directed towards a “type of internal work related to self-transformation” of the practitioners themselves. (Wolford, 1996d, p.15) This would suggest that the body, as a material entity, acts as a “vehicle” to express spiritual ideas while in a transcendental state. In the case of Main Action, the psycho-physical properties of traditional practices allow for the “embodiment” of the internal experience occurring during energy transformation. Likewise, ancient ritual traditions of song and dance use the body as a tangible form of spiritual expression.

Grotowski’s post-theatrical phase of research was primarily an investigation into how the application of ancient ritual practices could be used as “tools” to achieve complete organicity within performance craft. It has often been said by Grotowski that the actor is the theatre. In this sense, Art as Vehicle focused attention on conducting research that would utilize techniques used for the

purpose of facilitating an internal transformation in those who participated in the Workcenter research. To some extent, the activities of the Workcenter had a spiritual, if not altogether metaphysical, quality to them. We find, for example, that the songs and dances being used as tools to activate a process of self-transformation were directly linked to traditional religious activities. Grotowski, through years of examining the customs of other cultures, observed that the degree of internal vitality being created from these religious-based songs, chants, and dances of other cultures had a quality of energy which significantly changed the practitioners' external expressions. Grotowski was not so much concerned with understanding the philosophical bases for any one ancient ritual custom. His primary interest was to understand how certain traditional practices can be used to produce organicity in a person engaged in his research activities. For example, the Bauls of India – known for their psycho-physical rituals – were extensively mentioned throughout this chapter to explain the importance certain activities have on achieving energy transformation in the doer. Like the Bauls, by using ritualistic songs and dances the doers within Grotowski's research groups elevated themselves psycho-physically to a state that transcended the barriers of the mind and body, rising ever higher to a perfectly fluid plane of expression. This being the case, Art as Vehicle clearly demonstrated the value certain psycho-energetic practices of a spiritual nature had in achieving the goals of the Workcenter.

This chapter on Grotowski's Art as Vehicle phase primarily involved an investigation of the effects specific ancient traditions have on developing a level of performance craft that could propel the mind and body of the actor into a profoundly organic sphere of what has been called the "the subtle domain" of self-transformation. I pointed out that the songs, chants, and dances used at the Workcenter in Pontedra, Italy, were essentially psycho-physical techniques that parallel particular religious-based ritual practices intended to alter perceptual states of consciousness. While developing this chapter, indications were given of the transcultural influences forming the basis for the work being conducted during Grotowski's post-theatrical phase of experimentation.

With this in mind, I advanced the possibility that Grotowski's direct contact with the mystics of Bengal, India, were an important source in configuring his approach towards actualizing what he described as a "transformation of energy" during the course of the psycho-physical activities he employed in Art as Vehicle. Indeed, Grotowski, Richards, and Wolford all make poignant references to the Bauls in explaining the Workcenter research. With respect to this connection, we find the external techniques that focused on attaining precise sets of "organic scores" were borrowed from ritual songs and dances that served a fundamentally spiritual purpose among those who practised these traditions. (Zarrilli, Daboo, and Loukes, 2013) Although this period of Grotowski's work is viewed by some as a radical departure from his previous phases of research, the traditional ritual patterning in Art as Vehicle was a consistent by-product of his life-long interests in primeval practices, including sacred ceremonies and their accompanying ancient archetypes.

As I attempted to point out in the previous chapters, there are clearly defined distinctions between each phase of Grotowski's research. Like Paratheatre and Theatre of Sources, Art as Vehicle is identified as Grotowski's "post-theatre" work. Therefore, one may ask oneself how this period of his research relates to the next chapter's emphasis on Grotowski's production phase. After all, as some observers have suggested, Grotowski appeared to have abandoned the theatre altogether in his last phase of research. In explaining that Art as Vehicle is "a continuation rather than a contradiction of what came before", Peter Brook states that "if you look at this new work closely, you can see that it was the old direction that continued to develop" (Wolford, 1997a, pp.12-13). With this linear explanation in mind, we can suppose there is also a common thread that binds all phases of his work together: types of specifically identifiable ancient ritual practices, such as the psycho-physical elements of sacred rites found within Sufi mysticism that were used as templates for Grotowski's research, and how the application of these practices advanced his work on performance craft.

Chapter Four: Sufism

This chapter will present an analysis of specific ritual traditions practised within Sufi Islam that are of a psycho-physical nature, and how these ritual activities are used as passageways towards achieving self-transformation in the practitioner. This chapter is arranged into two complimentary parts. The first part provides an overview of the theological basis for Sufi beliefs and traditions. Since Sufism developed as an embodied form of religious beliefs centred on Islamic doctrine, I will discuss particular aspects of Quranic exegesis that are the basis for Sufism's traditional rituals. Therefore, it will be necessary to draw expansively from Quranic verses, and explain how these verses relate to Sufi doctrine and practice. While discussing Sufism in the context of its religious underpinning, I will also explain and examine specific ritual traditions. This will include a discussion about the practice of *dhikr* and the *sama* – previously elaborated on in Chapter Three of my research - in the first and second parts of this chapter.

The second part of this chapter focuses on aspects of Sufi rituals in particular, with emphasis placed on the psycho-physical dimensions of Sufi practices. As Jalal al-Din Rumi is considered one of the foremost Sufi scholars of ancient Islamic mysticism, I intend to briefly examine his life and poetic works as they pertain to the esoteric traditions within Sufism. Indeed, Rumi is credited with establishing the Mevlevi Sufi order that is known for its “ritual turning dance” (Lewis, 2014, Foreword). Also known more commonly as the “whirling Dervishes”, this particular order founded by Rumi is an important unit of analysis for examining the psycho-physical dynamic of Sufi ritual practices. To that end, the second part of this chapter will make reference to the Mevlevi order Rumi created, “whose dances and music [...] are among the best known of the manifestations of Sufism” (Burckhardt, 2006, p.19). The primary purpose for examining Rumi's work is to provide a template for discussing the cosmological side of Islamic mysticism, and its application to the esoteric traditional practices of Sufism. Additionally, after having introduced the Sufi practice of *dhikr* and

the *sama* ceremony in the first portion of this chapter, I will provide a more detailed description of these ritual traditions and their psycho-physical properties in the second part.

It should also be pointed out that there are several fraternities, or “brotherhoods” which practice their own unique forms of Islamic mysticism from region to region. For example, some orders focus their attention on exercising subdued types of spiritually-based activities that exclude the ecstatic or psycho-energetic bodily actions we see performed in fraternities such as the Christi order in the Indian subcontinent, or the Mevlevi order. For their relevance to this paper, I have selected Sufi rituals that are most widely practised in Iran, India, and other parts of Muslim Central Asia.

The overarching reason for focusing attention on Sufism in this chapter is due to the fact that Grotowski travelled to such places as areas of Central Asia, parts of India, and Iran, and the Middle East during the various stages in the development of his work. (Schechner, 1996b, p.481) As these regions have a rich tradition of Sufism, it is therefore important to provide a concise overview of Sufi principles and practices to better understand the cultural contexts of the Sufi regions Grotowski visited.

One example of Grotowski’s possible contact with Sufi practices would have been during his visit to the region of Turkmenia, which borders Afghanistan, where “Some of the earliest and greatest Sufi centres were” located. (Akiner, 1986, p.326) It was in the Turkmenian town of Ashkhabad [Ashhabat] in 1956, where Grotowski had seen a “dancing mime” performed by an Afghani “named Abdullah” (Osinski, 1986, p.18). It is quite conceivable this “mime” Grotowski had witnessed was one of his earliest exposures to an esoteric psycho-physical ritual, a ritual or performance that was practised in a predominantly Islamic region of the world. Especially since Grotowski himself recalled and mentioned Abdullah years later, from this we can extrapolate that this special performance had a significant impact on Grotowski, whose contacts with Islamic culture would most certainly have been an important point of reference in the development of his artistic

work. Indeed, as suggested by James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta, Grotowski's encounter with the "dancing mime" during his visit to Central Asia would be the template for his concept of "organicity" from his Theatre of Productions work to his post-theatre periods of research. (2006, pp.7-8) Potential Sufi influences on his work, like those during his contact with Central Asian culture, were previously examined in portions of chapter three of this thesis. Grotowski referenced his contacts with the Bauls of West Bengal, India, in describing the nature of his Art as Vehicle research. The Bauls in this region of India which Grotowski had visited are known for their esoteric psycho-physical rituals, which have been directly linked to elements of traditional Sufi practices.

Further advancing these potential influences on his research, we know that much of Grotowski's life-long work drew upon techniques used within transcultural ritual activities that would be integral to parts of his research that involved the human body and its relationship to "organicity". As Lisa Wolford points out in discussing Art as Vehicle, "Grotowski journeyed in search of different types of 'traditional practitioners', Keepers of ritual/performance knowledge related to embodied forms of religious practice" (Wolford, 1996c, p.7). This is also true with his Objective Drama and Theatre of Sources phases. Grotowski's Objective Drama project exclusively focused on using "the practitioners of ancient ritual arts of various cultures" (Wolford, 1996c, p.9); and in his Theatre of Sources phase of research, he visited Haiti, West Bengal, India, and Mexico, to conduct what were described as "transcultural experiments" based on traditional ritual customs that were unique to those regions. (Grotowski.net, 2012a, n.p.) Even during the earliest stages of his directing career, we can observe Grotowski's interest in ancient ritual with the production of *Shakuntala* (1960), which was rich in traditional dancing and chanting taken from Indian religious mythology and customs.

Again, since there are indications of elements of Sufism having potentially influenced Grotowski's work, it is necessary to provide a thorough and lucid understanding of Sufism, which has thus far been discussed in a cursory manner. As such, in order to draw connections between

Grotowski's research and Sufism, it is important to discuss the substance of Sufi thought and practice.

Part One: Theological Basis for Sufi Beliefs and Traditions. The Foundations of *Tasawwuf* (Islamic Mysticism)

“The night journey”

The derivation of Islamic mysticism is said to be from Islam's Prophet Muhammad (SAW), who is considered the father of Sufism. As such, those who practice *tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism) are considered heirs of the “words”, “actions”, and “inner states” of the Prophet (SAW), having received a

[...] communal patrimony passed on by the Prophet himself to certain elect amongst his companions through the mechanism of initiatic transmission, thus coming to form [...] ‘chains’ of transmission through which Sufi masters, generation after generation, perpetuate the inner, esoteric dimensions of the Islamic revelation to their own companions, dimensions which when attuned to properly allow for the kind of fulfilment in the here and now of what other members of the wider confessional community, who as members of that community otherwise simply maintain adherence to the sharī‘a alone, anticipate achieving in the world to come at an undetermined point in the future. Not content to wait, however, the Sufis necessarily move beyond the sharī‘a – this simply so as to be able to realize in the present what is otherwise promised in the future. (Ohlander, 2014, pp.61-62)

Whereas mainstream Muslims rely on just the Qur'an (the Muslim holy book which was given to Muhammad through divine revelation) and *Hadith* (expert-authenticated written records of the words and actions of the Prophet (SAW)) as the basis of their practices and beliefs, Sufis go even further than *shari'a* to also embody the “inner states” of the Prophet (SAW), an additional dimension of emulation beyond “words” and “actions”, possible only through intense, direct initiation by a master.

It is a more profound practice of Islam that requires more intense training in order to achieve “transmission” of the divine experience while alive.

In his comprehensive examination of Sufism, Nile Green maintains that “all the doctrines they profess, and all of their actions, customs and usages are based on an interpretation of the Quran and the Prophetic tradition” (2012, p.4). This is especially true when one considers that several of the important classical Sufi writings, such as *Advice and Observation of Rules, A Description of the Way of the People of Sufism*, and *The Treatise*, were written within the context of Islamic laws. (Gulen, 2004, p.xviii)

The basis for the Prophet’s (SAW) position as the first Sufi is found within the text of the Qur’an that gives an account of divine revelation, which Sufis point to as “the Prophet’s supreme mystical experience” (Arberry, 2008, p.28). According to Sura (verse) 17:1 of the Qur’an, God “[...] took his servant [the Prophet Muhammad] by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him Our signs. Indeed, He [God] is the Hearing, the Seeing”. In what is referred to in Islam as the “night journey”, Muhammad (SAW) was transported by spiritual forces from Mecca (al-Masjid al-Haram) to Jerusalem (al-Masjid al-Aqsa). (Colby, 2008, p.15) It is through this celestial experience that Muhammad (SAW) is first given the Qur’an, whose verses the Prophet (SAW), vis-à-vis *Hadith*, would relay and elucidate upon to his immediate friends and companions over time. Thus, a chain of transmission of the Qur’an’s esoteric meaning – such as that of the “night journey” – would develop alongside its literal and metaphorical exegesis. Within the context of mysticism itself, the Sufi is one who possesses spiritual knowledge that is only accessible to God’s “elect”:

[God] has honored the elect (*asfiya’*) among his servants by [granting them] the understanding of his subtle secrets (*lata’ if asrarih*) and his light so that they can see the secret allusions and hidden signs contained therein [in the Qur’an]. He has shown their innermost souls hidden things so that by the emanations of the unseen which He

has imparted solely to them they can become aware of that which is concealed from all others. (Al-Qushayri, 2007, p.xxiii)

Just as Muhammad was given a revelation which included divine knowledge that he taught to a small number of people, the Sufis believe themselves to be the bearers of “secret allusions and hidden signs” embedded within the verses of the Qur’an, as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). As such, the mystic focuses on the inward dimension of Islam’s text that is hermeneutically articulated as “subtle secrets”.

The mystical path to the ultimate Reality

Muhammad’s night journey, which precipitated his encounter with divinity, is the preliminary model for several key Sufi themes, such as using the Qur’an’s account of Muhammad’s ascension to the presence of divinity as being analogous to their experiences of rapturous spiritual ecstasy. (Schimmel, 1975, p.219) As a greater sublimation of the spirit, the state of ecstasy (*faqd*) which I will discuss in more detail in part two of this chapter, brings the Sufi to a point of experiencing personal contact with ultimate “Reality”. As stated by Kabir Helminski in his work, *The Knowing Heart: A Sufi path of transformation*, “Reality” is used within Islamic ontology to describe its synonyms for “God”: “the Source of Life” and “the Most Subtle State of Everything” (Helminski, 1999, p.4). For the Sufi, “Reality was expressed [...] by means of asceticism or through practices leading to ecstatic rapture” (Schimmel, 1975, p.24).

Another Sufi theme that is directly linked to the Prophet’s (SAW) ascension is the *dhikr* (remembrance) which comes from Sura 2:152: “So remember Me, and I will remember you. And thank Me, and do not be ungrateful”. The *dhikr* (remembrance) is the hallmark of Sufi principles and practices, which is based on what is called the “primordial covenant” (Baldick, 2012, pp.38 & 92):

And whenever your sustainer brings forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam, He (thus) calls upon them to bear witness about themselves: Am I not your Lord? To which they answer: ‘Yes, we do bear witness thereto’. [Of this we remind

you]. Lest you say on the Day of Resurrection: Verily, we were unaware of this.

(Qur'an, Sura 7:172)

As Schimmel states in her work on Islamic mysticism, the primordial covenant, as expressed through the principle of *dhikr*, is the “starting point” in the mystical path towards a “return to the experience of the Day”: the beginning of time, before man’s creation. (1975, p.24) Thus, the Mystic begins “a long journey” on a path that leads them to direct contact with the source of life through first remembering (*dhikr*) God. (Gulen, 2004, p.xxii) The Naqshbandi, which is the most prevalent of Sufi orders, and whose influence started in Central Asia, regard the *dhikr* as the most important part of their spiritual practices.

[...] at the heart of the Naqshbandi teachings, as that of other Sufi orders, lies the practice of the remembrance and invocation of God (*dhikr* Allah). The goal of the whole of the spiritual life is a remembrance which transforms, consumes, annihilates, and finally resurrects the follower of the Sufi path in the Divine Reality. (Kabbani, 2004, pp.v-vi)

The importance of the *dhikr*, as a form of meditation, is that it is considered a gateway one can enter through to have direct contact with God. As stated by Ram Ramakrishnan in his discussion on the tenets of Islam,

Prayer is the most direct path to God [...] It purifies the mind and can lift one to great contemplative heights or transform a person’s character. The highest form of prayer culminates in union with God. The Prophet Muhammad summed up the importance of prayer in the following words: ‘The key to paradise is prayer...’. (2009, p.85)

Although prayer is a central aspect of most religions, and different forms of *dhikr* are practised by all Muslims who remember God in their words and deeds, *dhikr* is actualised by the Sufi through embodied forms of mystical beliefs. All Sufi rituals are linked directly to the invocation of God’s name (*dhikr* Allah (SWT)). I will write in further detail about specific Sufi ritual practices as a means

of actualizing spiritual beliefs in the second part of this chapter. Sufis have elaborated on the *dhikr* with a ritual called the *sama* (hearing), which is a mystical dance ceremony that is also referred to as a “spiritual concert” of *dhikr* as it often combines the recitation of mystical poetry, musical instrumentation, and singing in combination with sustained whirling movements of the body.

More elaborate than the basic *dhikr*, the *sama* is used as a practice directed towards actualizing the Quranic injunction to meditate on and remember God’s name, which culminates in ecstatic or trance-like states of consciousness. I will discuss the psycho-energetic dimensions of Sufism in part two of this chapter in greater detail. In his work, *A Psychology of Early Sufi Sama: Listening and altered states*, Kenneth S. Avery points out that “it is the listener’s response which constitutes an essential aspect of *sama*”, and that an “altered state of consciousness which ‘listening’ can bring about and the ensuing spiritual benefits are vital elements for the Sufis’ engagement in the activity” (2004, p.16).

The *sama*, which terminates with a sustained change in one’s mental and emotional disposition, is an esoteric activity involving musical instruments whose purpose is to facilitate a spiritual journey of ascension, with the goal of experiencing a divine encounter of oneness with God. Doctrinally, as stated by the prominent Sufi master al-Ghazali (c. 1056-1111) in his *Revival of the Religious Sciences*, the auditory element of the *sama* “helps purify the heart and the purification of the heart leads to revelation [...] When hearts are inflamed with love for Allah an unfamiliar *beyt* (a distich chanted) excites in them what the recitation of Quran might not do” (Stepaniants, 1994, p.62).

Al- Qushayri (b. 986 – d. 1074), author of the ancient manual, *Epistle on Sufism* (1045), explained that the mystical *sama* practice, as also expressed by al- Ghazali, has a much different impact than the standard Islamic practice of reading from the Qur’an itself. Relating various conversations concerning the *sama*, al-Qushayri writes:

I heard Muhammad b. al-husayn say: I heard Abu Bakr al-Razi say: I heard Abu ‘Ali al-Rudhbari say, when asked about listening: ‘[It is] the unveiling of the innermost selves for a vision of the Beloved’. When someone asked [Ibrahim] al-Khawwas, ‘Why should anyone be stirred by listening to anything other than the Qur’an, whereas this does not happen to him when he listens to the Qur’an?’, he answered: because listening to the Qur’an is but a shock (*sabma*), so that no one is capable of moving during it due to the strength of its overpowering force. (2007, p.350)

This dialogue concerning the importance of the *sama* ritual suggests that the use of musical instrumentation (which is what is being *listened* to during the *sama* “hearing”) has a quality of spiritual receptivity that is quite different than the standardized practice of reciting from the Qur’an. According to adherents of Sufi orders that allow music, listening to music in the context of a religious activity is considered acceptable because “listening to music excites the heart [to seek] God”; it is also believed that “[Divine] mercy (*rahma*) descends upon the poor [...] when they listen to music, for they hear it only through a true aspiration and speak only out of an ecstatic encounter [with God]” (Al-Qushayri, 2007, p.347).

As an embodied interpretation of Sufi doctrine, the *sama* can itself be viewed as a form of spiritual ascension, since the reading of poetry, the playing of musical instruments, and physical whirling movements all progressively take the participant to a point of entering within the sphere of sacrum. The focal point of this process is the heart itself, which functions as a kind of “ladder” that is used to achieve direct interaction with God. The imagery of a ladder in Islamic mysticism is related to the Prophet Muhammad’s (SAW) “nocturnal Ascension (*mi raj*) up to the divine Presence” (Geoffroy, 2006, p.52). Using this Quranic point of reference, the heart in Sufi cosmology is a faculty associated with a metaphysical process of “verticality”:

In virtue of being the centre of the body, the heart may be said to transcend the rest of the body [...] in other words, while the body, as a whole is ‘horizontal’ in the sense

that it is limited to its own plane of existence, the heart has [...] a certain ‘verticality’ for being the lower end of the ‘vertical’ axis which passes from Divinity [...] through the Centres of all degrees of the Universe. If we use the imagery suggested by Jacob’s ladder, the bodily heart will be the lowest rung and the ladder itself will represent the whole hierarchy of centres or ‘Hearts’. (Lings, 1975, p.48)

The heart is the main point of connection between the physical level of being and a higher spiritual realm. Thus, it is capable of transmutation by going from the corporeal level of flesh and blood, to a higher state of divine contact by using such rituals as the *sama*. Within Sufi cosmology, the heart functions as a central facility because it can negotiate the spatiotemporal barriers of human functioning through “spiritual ‘verticality’ thanks to which the Sufi transcends terrestrial conditions” (Meadows, 2011, p.158).

It is a path towards divine unity, which is the underlying purpose of the *sama* ritual, that designates the Sufi as a “traveller”, because he “sets out to seek God” in “slow stages along a ‘path’ to the goal of union with ‘Reality’” (Nicholson, 2006, p.1). Additionally, through “stages” of spiritual transcendence, Sufis seek to achieve the same level of God realization the Prophet (SAW) experienced by detaching themselves from the material world. As stated in *Hadith*, “Be in this world as if you are a passer-by, with your clothes and shoes full of dust. Sometimes you sit under the shade of a tree, sometimes you walk in the desert. Be always a passer-by. For this is not your home” (Vaughan-Lee, 1995, p.8).

According to the Sufi idea of “stations” which originated from Sufi master Abū Sa’id-i Abū'l-Khayr’s (d. 1049) text, *Forty Stations*, there are “forty stations” the Sufi must proceed through on his path. (Nasr, 1972, p.77) However, in *Hadith*, it is said that the Prophet (SAW) spoke of specifically five stations: “The road thither passes through your interior. There you must proceed through five stations: sense, perception, imagination, the heart and the soul” (Ritter, 2003, p.28). Although the Prophet (SAW) identifies five means of spiritual enlightenment, the stations introduced by Khayr are

said to symbolize “forty days of withdrawal” that Muhammad imposed upon himself in order to attain spiritual enlightenment. (Ritter, 2003, p.18) As part of their esoteric system of beliefs, “forty days of withdrawal” is in reference to the period of time the Prophet (SAW) spent in complete isolation in the Cave of Hira, where he received his divine revelation. (Kabbani, 2004, p.430) Each day of the Prophet’s (SAW) seclusion presents, to the mystic, a “station” that must be traversed in order to progress forward in the “journey of the soul towards God” (Nasr, 1972, p.76).

In connection with the idea of emulating Muhammad’s forty days of seclusion, it is also significant to note that the name Sufi is derived from the root word *suf* (wool), based on the Islamic mystic’s practice of wearing a simple wool garment. It not only ascetically symbolized humility and purity of heart, but also signified poverty, since the Sufi is known for abandoning all worldly possessions and attachments. (Arberry, 2008, p.5) Again, as with all their practices, the Sufi looks to the Qur’an and *Hadith* as primary sources for the esoteric significance of wearing wool garments. Accordingly:

The Prophet used to suggest that his disciples wear patched wool robes as a sign of spiritual poverty (*faqr*). ‘Wear wool’, he is reported to have said [...] this positive aspect of *faqr* is based on the Koranic verse: ‘O ye men, ye are the poor in your relation to God, whereas He is the Owner of Praise’ (Koran 35:15); it consists of ‘ridding oneself of everything but God’. (Geoffroy, 2010, p.5)

The patched woolen cloth had both a physical and spiritual dimension. It signified a non-attachment to worldly matters and desires, and communion with God, as is stated in the above *Hadith* and Quranic verse. Thus, the wearing of wool, in its sublime spiritual meaning, is an act of symbolic separation from temporal existence and fusion with God.

The journey’s end: *Al-tawahud* (union with God)

Sufism stresses that attaining esoteric or hidden knowledge and communion with God through one’s heart are the essential meaning and purpose of life. Through the heart, the mystic

achieves direct contact with God. The spiritual centrality of the heart is considered by some major world religions to be the source of spiritual mediation between the human being and God. There is, for example, an underlying belief in Christian theology that the heart is where emotions have a transformative effect on the individual: “love is an actively receptive movement of the heart that creatively enhances the value of both the lover and the beloved through union that affirms their respective dynamism” (Vacek, 1994, p.66). In the Hindu faith, Brahman (the God of all creation) “moves about, becoming manifold, within the heart, where the arteries meet, like the spokes fastened in the nave of a chariot wheel” (Torwesten, 1991, p.67).

Many of the Sufi texts and practices emphasize the centrality of the heart, “which is the seat of emotions produced by love”, similar to the way the Christian and Hindu religions do. (de Bruijn, 1997, p.66) For the Sufi, the heart acts as a conduit for reaching transcendental heights of celestial bliss; it is a bliss often referred to in mystical terms as union with the “beloved”. Sufi poems such as those of the great Sufi teacher Shams-ud-din Muhammad Hafiz (c. 1320-1389) often use the motif of “lover” or “beloved” to metaphorically describe the emotional relationship they have with God, as one of many of Hafiz’s poems indicates:

Let thought become the beautiful Woman.
Cultivate your mind and heart to that depth
That it can give you everything
A warm body can.
Why just keep making love with God’s child—
Form.
When the Friend Himself is standing
before us
so opened-armed
My dear,

Let prayer become your beautiful Lover

And become free,

Become free of this whole world

Like Hafiz. (Hafiz, 1999, p.110)

Quoting Hafiz's poem in its totality, *Let Thought Become Your Beautiful Lover*, serves to demonstrate the overarching Sufi theme of a "lover" who seeks union with the "beloved". To the Sufi, one of "the last stations on the mystical path" is "love", and "was praised as the highest possible state" of unification with God, as indicated by the Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) supplication when he said, "O God, give me love of Thee, and love of those who love Thee, and love of what makes me approach Thy love, and make Thy love dearer to me than cool water' (G 4:253)" (Schimmel, 1975, p.131).

We find that Hafiz's poem reflects the above *Hadith's* recurring theme of divine intimacy, which could be considered like a marital relationship that is inextricably tied together by common bonds. Thus, it reflects an emotional state of longing for unity of being:

The mystical experience of God is a state of oneness with God. This *unio mystica* is the goal of the traveller, or wayfarer, on the mystical path. Within the heart, lover and Beloved unite in love's ecstasy. The wayfarer begins the journey with a longing for this state of oneness [...] The spiritual journey is a journey that takes us back Home from separation to union. (Vaughan-Lee, 2012, p.i)

The analogy of the Sufi's relationship to God as being that of a "lover" has a great deal of significance. It articulates a moment of human merging with a supreme force of creation: the "Beloved". Reaching this degree of spiritual contact is what the Sufi strives to achieve in all their ritual practices, such as the use of *dhkr* and the *sama* ceremony, both mentioned earlier in this part of the chapter, to achieve a spiritual state of transcendence.

Part Two: From Doctrine to Practice. Aspects of Sufi rituals in particular, with emphasis placed on the psycho-physical dimensions of Sufi practices

The psycho-physical nature of Rumi's poetry

Widely considered the most prolific writer of Sufi thought, Mawlana Jalal al-din Rumi (1207-1273) is often accredited with authoring some of the greatest collections of mystical poetry in existence. As suggested by some, "All of Rumi's poems may be heard as love poems" (Barks, 2005, p.xxiii). To the casual reader, his lyrics are rich in sensual imagery, and colored with metaphors that express recurring themes of love and longing. However, as will be discussed more thoroughly in this part of the chapter, Rumi's works are of a profoundly sacred nature, and provide us with a primary example of psycho-physical practices that are the embodiment of the Sufi's spiritual beliefs.

Rumi, like many Sufi Muslim mystics, was a scholar in Islamic theology, with much of his poetic odes and quatrains referencing Quranic verses and *Hadiths*, "either by direct quotation or allusion" (Virani, 2002, p.100). Most often, Rumi's writings emphasized a "longing" for an intimate encounter with the divine source of life, as we read from one of his thousands of poems:

Love is not condescension, never
That, nor books, nor any marking
on paper, nor what people say of each other. Love is a tree with
branches reaching into eternity
and roots set deep in eternity,
and no trunk! Have you seen it?
The mind cannot. The longing you feel for
this love comes from inside you.
When you become the Friend, your
longing will be as the man in
the ocean who holds to a piece of
wood. Eventually, wood, man, and

ocean become one swaying being. (Rumi In Barks, 2005, pp.121-122)

The above poem, entitled, “One Swaying Being”, not only demonstrates a symbolic expression of a desire for spiritual union with God, but it also provides us with an example of Sufi doctrine embedded within Rumi’s poetry. This ghazal, which is similar in form to an ode, articulates “Love is not condescension”, the recurring theme of *fana*, as it relates to the *nafs* (ego). *Fana*, or, “annihilation”, is a central requisite in attaining *tawhid* (union) with divinity, according to Sufi theology. In order for the individual to recognize and embrace their connection to the source of creation, they must divest themselves of ego-driven “condescension”. Thus, as a guiding principle within Sufi ontology, to experience an intimate relationship with God one must take “a path of annihilation”, which is Rumi’s focus in much of his poetic works. (Barks, 2005, pp. xv & xxii)

Contextually, according to the Sufi mystics, the twenty-first station in the progression towards divine unification “is annihilation”, in which the Sufis “melt their carnal souls in the crucible of annihilation and become annihilated from all that is below Him” (Turner, 2003, p.224). Additionally, the concept of unification through the nullification of the ego in Rumi’s poetry is also connected to the mystical discourses of Bayazid al-Bistami, who is said to have introduced the notion of annihilation into the Sufi belief system, as reflected in one of Bistami’s spiritual writings:

I divorced the lower world three times in order that I would not have to return to it, and I moved to my lord alone, without anyone, and I called on him alone for help by saying, ‘O God, O God, no one remains for me except you’. At that time I came to know the sincerity of my supplication in my heart and the helplessness of my ego [...] this opened to me a vision that I was no longer in existence, and I vanished completely from myself into Him. (Kabbani, 2004, p.131)

Notwithstanding Rumi’s poetry’s connection to Sufi principles of faith, Franklin D. Lewis points out that the roots of Rumi’s theme of annihilation can best be understood by his upbringing. Rumi’s father, Baha al-din Valad, was himself considered to be a leading Sufi cleric who lived in

Khorasan, which was “the homeland of classical Iranian Sufism” (Lewis, 2014, p.53). Lewis, showing a glimpse into the origins of Rumi’s “theosophic system of thought”, provides us with a remarkable excerpt from one of Rumi’s father’s diary entries:

I obliterated myself, stripping myself of all forms so that I could see God. I told myself I would obliterate God and strip God of all forms to see God and attain his blessings more immediately. I chanted ‘God’ and my consciousness joined to God [...] The world of God is something other than this, I reflected, for his realm of phenomena and personality [...] when my consciousness is busied with God, I move beyond the world of existence and decomposition and have my being not in space or in a place, but I wonder through the world beyond modality and look (bi-chum) and look. (bah: 1:169)’. (Lewis, 2014, p.177)

Comparing Rumi’s *ghazal*, *One Swaying Being*, to that of his father’s spiritual reflections from the above diary entry, we can observe the overarching theme of *fana* (annihilation) in Rumi’s poetry is guided by his early exposure to Sufi doctrine transmitted to him by his father. Indeed, referring to Valad’s mystical writings, Coleman Barks poignantly states that “the *ma’arif* was one of Rumi’s most treasured texts after Baha al-din’s death” (2005, p.xxv). Supporting Barks’ assertion about the importance Rumi placed on *ma’arif* (mystical knowledge), Lewis reminds us that the “entries from Baha al-Din’s spiritual diaries reveal the mystical concerns which pre-occupied him. They also show how much Rumi’s thinking owes to his father [...]”, and Lewis notes that there is a chain of esoteric knowledge passed from one follower of Islamic mysticism to the next. (Lewis, 2014, p.56)

One of the most persistent mystical traits within Rumi’s poetry is the esoteric image of intoxication that is used by Sufis to describe a transcendental state of absorption in divine “union” with God. *Tawhid* (Oneness), in Sufi theology, is differently linked to an important Islamic tenet

which suggests that a person's ultimate spiritual goal should be to amalgamate their own self-referencing perception of reality with a supreme Reality. As is often expressed in Rumi's works, *Tawhid* is one of his primary preoccupations:

You Are My Soul [...]

I am drunk on union with you, I need and want and care about no one else.

Since I am your prey, what do I care about fate's bow and its arrows?

I live at the bottom of the stream, why would I go looking for water? [...]

What abandon! What drunkenness! You hold the cup in your hand [...]

My heart has become ecstatic; O my soul, hand me this brimming cup,

Do not weigh pain and misery, contemplate love, contemplate friendship [...]

(Harvey, 1996, pp.70-71)

The sensual nature of this poem describes an ecstatic state of mystical consciousness that is analogous to being "intoxicated"; all physical perceptions are replaced with a kind of cosmic awareness. Equally important, it should be mentioned that this poem, with its reference to "drunkenness", also reflects the Quranic underpinning of Sufi ontology, as mentioned in Ibrahim Gamard's translations of Rumi's works:

The mystics of Islam (also called Sufis, dervishes, and Faqirs) maintain the practice of Islam as their foundation [...] They also seek to attain deeper levels of understanding of the wisdom of the Revelation and to have 'tastes' of paradise in this lifetime.

Thus, when they speak of wine-drinking they refer not to alcohol [...] but to experiences of spiritual blessing, divine grace, and spiritual ecstasy, which are 'tastes' of the 'rivers of wine delightful to those who drink it' mentioned in the Qur'an (47:15) as a symbol of heavenly bliss. (Gamard, 2004, p.xxiii)

Examining this phenomenon of ecstasy in Rumi's poetry as being likened to "drunkenness", the question arises about how this transcendental state of inner transformation takes place, since the

lower plane of spatiotemporal reality must be breached in order to reach a spiritual dimension of consciousness. Toshihiko Izutsu provides an explanation of this enormous feat:

The ‘worldly state of being’ is the way the majority of men naturally are. It is characterized by the fact that man, in his natural state, is completely under the sway of his body, and the activity of his mind impeded by physical constitution of the bodily organ. Under such conditions, even if he tries to understand something and grasps its reality, the object cannot appear to his mind except in utter deformation. (Izutsu, 1983, p.15)

So in man’s “natural state”, our conception of reality is limited to that which is physically observable because our bodily constraints and the linear space and time continuum restrict human consciousness to a horizontal plane of human conscious reality. However, it has been suggested that “the barriers which separate one level of reality from another, including the separation of the physical from the spiritual, exist only in our minds” (Needleman, 2008, p.31). According to John Renard, the bounds of the corporeal world are overcome through ritual activities. Using psycho-physical techniques, one is capable of traversing terrestrial limitations to reach an alternative reality. For example, referring to the role religious rituals play in reaching altered states of consciousness, Renard states:

The notion of sacred time, sacred space, and the state called liminality are useful in describing the goal of these excursions. (Derived from the Latin word *limen*, ‘threshold’, the term liminality suggests a dramatic change in one’s condition.) When religious persons mark off and intentionally enter upon a ritual undertaking, they must commit themselves to a change of mind and heart. They signify this commitment by certain physical and behavioral changes, such as [...] performing specific bodily actions prescribed by the ritual in question. Such controlled change (sometimes called separation) introduces the participant into a state of liminality. In that state the

individual is cut loose from the accustomed moorings of everyday life [...] to drift for a while in sacred time and space [...] the devotee thus enters into a condition of heightened receptivity to the powerful symbolism of the ritual [...] Various kinds of ritual differ in both content and emotional tone. Some provide catharsis through tears [...] others offer release through ecstasy or trancelike states. (Renard, 1996, p.36)

At this point it is worth pausing to reflect on the shared techniques but disparate goals, contrasting the Sufi devotee's spiritual aims with Grotowski's secular ones. Whereas Sufis perform their rituals for the purpose of undergoing inner transformation and direct contact with Allah (SWT), Grotowski used elements of ritual as a method to transform the mind, body, and heart of the participants of his research. Grotowski himself had no spiritual agenda in the religious sense of the word. For him, the state of organicity was the goal. When he looked within for the source of truth, it was not to send his practitioners away on a path toward closeness with divinity. Instead, he sought to summon or bring out the essential truth within his practitioners to an observable, embodied form of authenticity, or organicity.

Connecting Renard's observation of "liminality", above, to Islamic mysticism in particular, we find, through a mystical state of altered forms of conscious reality, the Sufi overcomes the obstacle of horizontal presence, which can be understood by viewing Rumi's poetry not only from a cosmological understanding of Islamic mysticism, but also from a psycho-physical dimension "that conduct[s] and transform[s] energies", which facilitates a transcendental experience in the form of *hulul* (indwelling). (Barks, 2001, p.11) In explaining Rumi's poetry as a reflection of Sufi ritual traditions that are psycho-physical in nature, Coleman Barks observes,

I am told that at the end of a Mevlevi initiation, which consists of various kinds of physical work, zikir ('remembering God'), fasting, abstinence, and long retreats, a condition of entrancement called *hulul* is reached. Rumi's poetry gives a taste of that trance, as well as other stations. (Barks, 2001, p.11)

According to Barks (2001), the following *ghazal*, or Persian poetic structure consisting of rhyming couplets and refrains, entitled, “The Dance of Your Hidden Heart”, provides a particularly descriptive understanding of Rumi’s poetry being an important element of Sufi traditions:

Move your hair in the light.
Let it scatter amber,
As the souls of Sufis begin
To dance, sun, moon, and stars,
Around us in a circle.
We are dancing their dance.
A slight melody
Enters the great wheel
And helps it turn... (Barks, 2001, p.92)

Earlier in this chapter, it was mentioned that Rumi was the founder of the Mevlevi order, and he introduced the ritualistic whirling dance as part of this fraternity’s spiritual practices. In reading this poem, one can easily interpret, “the souls of Sufis begin to dance”, as a direct reference to this ritualistic practice of the Dervish. Referring to Rumi’s interpretation of verse 2:115 of the Qur’an, “[...] whichever way you turn, there is the face of God [...]”, Ibrahim Gamard has suggested that this verse “may have been the inspiration for a number of Islamic Sufi spiritual practices, such as whirling prayer movements” (Gamard, 2004, p.xvii).

Unlike Ibrahim Gamard and other scholars who unreservedly proclaim the Islamic and Quranic roots of Rumi’s poetry and Sufi practices, Coleman Barks, the prolific author of many renderings of translations of Rumi that are employed widely and in this thesis, downplays the Quranic foundation, instead focusing on the “universality” of Rumi’s work.¹⁴ Even so, we

¹⁴ Here it is worth mentioning that Ibrahim Gamard and other scholars have been critical of some Western translators of Rumi’s Persian poems into English, including Coleman Barks who does not speak Persian and uses literal English translations but is perhaps the foremost author of

acknowledge that psycho-physical exercises such as those practised by the “whirling” Dervish are the embodiment of Quranic doctrine, as the Qur’an’s verbal recitation is full of rhythms, music, vibration, and “poetry”¹⁵, which even enable many to memorise it in its entirety. (Gamard, 2004) This symphonic characterization of the Qur’an can be observed in such ritual activities as the *dikhr*, which consist of rhythmic chanting in the form of a highly melodic mantra, and the Dervish *sama* with its kinetic expression of planetary bodies as a physical activity that esoterically articulates such Quranic verses as 64:1, “Whatever is in the sky or on earth invokes God [...]”.

The *sama* and the heart

The *sama* (“audition” or “hearing”), as indicated above, is a vehicle that conveys mystical notions of the cosmos as “a symbol of the spiritual world” in which “celestial bodies” are a reflection of “oneness” between the human being and the source of creation. (Needleman, 2008, p.111) Often combining music and dance, the *sama* ceremony is a highly choreographed ritualistic practice wherein, “The body is the perfect instrument”, which is a physical articulation of religious principles. (Erzen, 2008, p.5) For example, the following excerpts from Antoon Geels’ examination of a *dikr* (“rememberance”) ritual within the *sama* ceremony, provides us with his eyewitness account of the psycho-energetic dynamic of the *sama*, as practised within most dervish fraternities to express Quranic exegesis:

Rumi’s poetry in English. (Pittman, 2012) Critics charge that such “renderings” or “versions” have distorted and watered-down Rumi – and therefore Sufism – for non-Muslims by both distorting the original meanings and removing many references to Islam and the Qur’an, and “The result is a New Age poet, devoid of Islam, the 13th century, or the themes and images of the golden age of classical Persian poetry” (Thornton, 2015, n.p.). Barks has defended such charges in the following:

“I am not interested in placing these poems in a particular religious tradition. Rumi was a devout Muslim, a Sufi. Many of these poems are glosses on passages from the Qur’an. But he has also been heard as a more universal voice [...] beyond belief and beyond a specific sacred text [...]” (Barks, 2014, p.ii).

¹⁵ Chapter 1 of Navid Kermani’s book *Between Quran and Kafka: West-Eastern affinities* (2016), gives a clear explanation of why the language of the Qur’an is not poetry in the traditional sense, though many people refer to its unique language as such, for lack of a better descriptor.

In a slow tempo, the whole group sings the first part of the *shahada*: *La ilaha illa-llah* (there is no God but God), and as a sort of accentuation, they repeat the name Allah three times. For almost ten minutes, the dervishes sing these words of divine unity, over and over again, in a melodious way. Then [...] they increase the speed, mentioning the name Allah only once after the formula of unity. At the same time they turn their bodies to the right when pronouncing the negation of the formula: the words *la ilaha* (there is no God). When uttering the affirmative part of the formula, the words *illa llah* (but Allah), they turn their body to the left, the direction of the heart [...] After this song of unity, the proper *dhikr* starts. In a monotonous way, the words *La Illaha Illa-LLah* are repeated over and over again. The rapidity of the prayer does not permit large body movements. Instead, the dervishes turn the head to the right and left, in the same symbolic manner as before. The singers play an important role in the ceremony...they stimulate the participants to perform a good *dhikr* [...] More specifically, the song indicates when the *dhikr* has to change to a higher or lower tone [...] After only 2 ½ minutes, the sheikh claps his hands as a signal to increase the speed [...] the sheik, after a little more than 5 minutes, again claps his hands to increase the speed of the *dhikr*. After about 1 ½ minutes, the sheik signals again, this time changing to a slow speed [...] the lower speed enables the participants to sway and simultaneously bow the bodies to the right and the left in large movements. The eyes are still closed. The speed of this *dhikr* increases twice, first after about 3 minutes, then again after 1 minute and 40 seconds. Half a minute later, the sheikh announces the end of this part of the *Dhikr* [...] The next divine name in the ritual is *Hu*, for example He. When repeating this holy name, the dervishes make minor movements of the head toward the left. It is a short exercise, lasting only 1 minute, without accompaniment of singers [...] when ended, one of the singers recites four

verses from the Koran...the singing of the name *Hu* lasts for hardly 1 minute [...] We are now approaching the end of the second phase of the *dhikr*...The third phase is quite different from the first two, at least as far as the position of the dervishes is concerned. Instead of a circle, they are now standing in rows opposite each other [...] one of the dervish's starts repeating the name *Allah* in a rather slow, singing manner. Soon they all join in, as the singers and the sheikh in the middle sit down between the two rows. When seated, the singers start an *ilahi*, which intermingles with the larger group, singing their devotion Allah, bending their bodies rhythmically to the right and to the left. After hardly 2 minutes, when the name of the poet is mentioned, the sheikh gives the signal to change to another divine name. In a slightly higher speed, and with strong commitment, the dervishes praise their creator with the words *Allah hay* (Allah-the living one), life, keeping their right hand on the chest. The bodily movements are somewhat different now. The dervishes still bend their bodies to the right and the left, but the difference is as follows: After bending the body to the right, they stretch up, lean back to the left and turn their head 90 degrees to the right, repeating the same movement in the other direction, over and over again...after 1 ½ minutes, shortly after the name Yunus has come, the dervishes change *dhikr* to the word *Hayy*, strongly exhaling and with a short 'eh' before—*eh-hayy*, *eh-hayy*. The speed is about 48 repetitions in 1 minute. The sound of drums keeps the rhythm of the *dhikr*. Many of the dervishes are smiling. A solo singer expresses his love for Allah with a *qasida*. When he finishes, the group of singers take over and sing a new *ilahi*, followed by another solo singer. Poems are usually sung by a solo singer, and they are spontaneous. (Geels, 1996, pp.238-242)

The *sama* ritual as witnessed by Geels is an embodied form of *dhikr*, and is composed of three phases, the final stages including the singing of poetry, the beating of drums, and increased

energetic body movements. Quoting Geels' description of the *sama* ceremony at length provides us with a more complete picture of this central Sufi practice. What is important to understand about this ritual activity, from a psycho-energetic perspective, is that it facilitates an internalization of the particular sounds and movements that brings the practitioner to a heightened stage of spiritual transformation.

To demonstrate the significance of music and song in the *sama* ceremony, Jean-louis Michon quotes from the writings of ancient Sufi master Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali:

Hearts and inmost thoughts, song and ecstasy, are treasuries of secrets and mines of jewels. Infolded in them are their jewels like as is infolded in iron and stone, and concealed like water is concealed under dust and loam. There is no way to the extracting of their hidden things save by flint and steel of listening to music and singing, and there is no entrance to the heart save by the antechamber of the ears. So musical tones, measured and pleasing, bring forth what is in it and make evident its beauties and defects. For when the heart is moved there is made evident that only which it contains like as a vessel drips only what is in it. And listening to music and singing is for the heart a true touchstone and a speaking standard; whenever the soul of the music and singing reaches the heart, then there stirs in the heart that which in it preponderates. (al-Ghazzali in Michon, 2006, pg. 162)

Examining this passage, one finds that the music and singing in the *sama* ritual are what Michon calls a “tool” that activates in the participant of this ceremony an internal progression towards “self-knowledge and interior improvement” (Michon, 2006, p.162). We also find that the energy being internally absorbed through these repetitive auditory and kinetic activities is intended to be a form of “attunement” in achieving a transcendental experience, as pointed out by Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, who states, “[...] just as a violinist, cellist, or harpsichordist will tune to a certain pitch before playing, meditation is a matter of calibrating one’s emotional and mental vibrations” (Khan,

1999, p.69). From Khan's observation, we can posit that the various psycho-energetic rituals we have mentioned in this chapter are intended to produce a level of concentration that leads to transformation. Furthermore, the heart is the focal point of these aforementioned practices, which are used as forms of "attunement" in Sufi rituals.

In describing the impact ritual songs and music have on achieving a transformational experience, al-Ghazzali's previously quoted discourse on the *sama* makes references to "jewels" as being metaphorical spiritual objects located within the heart, accessible only via the ears and dislodged only with the gentle persuasion of music, or for the Sufi, through such spiritual exercises as the chanting of the *dhikr*, or the singing and whirling movements used in the *sama* ritual, which altogether act as a conduit for self-transformation.

[...] an essential point in the heart, equivalent to the pupil in the eye which is the locus of vision [...] if there is rust in the heart the existence of this stone will not be manifest. All of the spirits (arwah) which are in the human being, such as intelligence and others, anticipate the witnessing of this point. Thus, when the heart becomes polished through meditation, *dhikr*, and [Qur'an] recitation then this point will become apparent. When it manifests that in it which parallels the essential presence of God, there spreads out from that point a light because of the theophany, and it flows to all corners of the human body and perplexes the mind and more. Then the light and its rays fill this stone, dazzling them. (Hermansen, 1988, p.15)

According to Sufis, there are "subtle spiritual centers" that are described as "a nonmaterial component of the person which can be influenced or 'awakened' through spiritual practice" (Hermansen, 1988, pp.1-2). The most vital of these spiritual centres is the *qalb* (heart), which is the primary focus in psycho-physical activities such as the *sama* and various forms of *dikr* mediation. We find that the use of the word "heart" is broad in its meaning, and is often associated with being a conveyor of emotion and sentimentality. In Islam, the *qalb* signifies the spiritual dimension of human

life, and is also where, metaphysically speaking, spiritual transmutation takes place. In discussing the etymological connection between *taqallub* (fluctuation) and *qalb* (heart), and its relationship to Sufi ontology, William C. Chittick states:

One of the words employed [...] as a synonym for transformation was *taqallub* or ‘fluctuation’. From the same root we have the word *qalb* or ‘heart’. As a verb noun, *qalb* is more or less synonymous with *taqallub*. The dictionaries define *qalb* as ‘reversal, overturn, transformation, change’ and *taqallub* as ‘alteration, transformation, change, fluctuation, variability, inconstancy’. Thus the Shaykh sees the heart as a place of constant change and fluctuation. He finds the divine root of the heart’s nature mentioned in many hadiths [...] In many hadiths God is called the ‘Turner of hearts’ (*musarrif al-qulub*) or ‘He who makes hearts fluctuate’ (*muqallib al-qulub*). (Chittick, 1989, p.106)

Not only is the heart a point of “transformation” and “change”, it is also considered the “center of our being” (Helminski, 1999, p.11). Additionally, according to Sufi belief, the heart is a spiritually cognitive faculty:

According to Sufi psychology, the heart contains our deeper intelligence and wisdom. It is the place of gnosis, or spiritual knowledge. The Sufi idea is to develop a soft, feeling, compassionate heart, and to develop the heart’s intelligence. This is a deeper and more grounded intelligence than the abstract intelligence of the head. (Frager, 2013, p.2)

Based on this Sufi concept of where knowledge resides, it would seem quite plausible that such ritual traditions as the *dhikr* are intended to channel one’s psycho-energetic qualities in one particular internal direction, where the external sounds and bodily movements are being processed and refined by an inner source of receptivity; in turn, as we see from psycho-physical practices used by the Sufis, there is a simultaneous transformation that occurs mentally and physically.

In conclusion, the overriding purpose of this chapter was to provide a closer examination of how certain ritual practices are used to facilitate a process of self-transformation. First, it was necessary to discuss the religious basis for both the doctrine and ritual activities of Sufism. Both the Qur'an and *Hadith* are used by the mystic as the sources of their esoteric beliefs and practices. For example, Muhammad's "night journey" played a central part in the development of the Sufi idea of following a "path" towards "Divine Presence". The Sufi replicates the night journey, i.e. ascension, by constructing elaborate rituals such as the *sama* ceremony, which is intended to bring them to an ecstatic state of consciousness. This embodied type of religious belief is a tool to achieve a kind of consciousness or awareness that reaches beyond mundane thinking.

Breaking away from the physical reality of practical, earthly concerns is a necessary step towards spiritual self-transformation. As both the Sufis and Grotowski recognized, the ability to transform oneself requires that one abandon the physical and mental norms and strictures of everyday life that keep most people entrenched in the here-and-now. For Sufis this physical relocation means practising their *sama* ceremonies together in congregation or withdrawing to a monastery (see Biographical Information section on Grotowski's travels for his experience at a Sufi monastery in Iran); and for Grotowski this meant taking his participants to a remote location in the forest or a minimalistic, humble, sparsely-furnished Workcentre. In both cases, mental norms also must be broken to achieve self-transformation. For Sufis this means *fana*, or annihilation of one's ego (*nafs*) in order to attain *tawhid* (union with God); and for Grotowski this meant obliteration of one's cognitive or deliberate physical controls in order to attain "organicity" or natural impulse-driven movements. Just as we see similar goals in both cases, i.e. annihilation of conventional mental states of being, we also find parallel practices or techniques.

What is particularity intriguing in analysing Sufi practices such as the *dikhr* and the *sama* ceremony is that singing, dancing, and chanting are used for the same purposes as explained by Grotowski in his implementation of traditional ritualistic songs. These traditional rituals have the

ability to bring about a transformational change in the participant of these activities, by using specific psycho-physical techniques. According to Grotowski, ancient traditional ritual practices were used in his later phases of work to achieve purely organic movements on the part of those who were involved with his research. In *Art as Vehicle* for example, there is a great deal of emphasis placed on the use of ancient songs to stimulate a heightened level of “inner action” that mirrors the effect a mantra has on its practitioners. Grotowski’s interest in ancient traditions, such as the psycho-energetic ritual activities of the Bauls from the sub-continent of India, was primarily based on using the same technical components of ritual activity that were responsible for producing an internal degree of energy which changes the way a person acts and reacts physically, emotionally, and mentally. Additionally, the Sufi concept of “verticality” bears a remarkable resemblance to the notion of “verticality” used by Grotowski to explain the process of energy transformation that takes place within the “doer” in his *Art as Vehicle* research.

Through interviews with Grotowski, biographies on him, and scholarship about Islamic Sufism in the regions he visited, we have found detailed information to establish concrete links between Grotowski and Sufism. Although Devin A. DeWeese describes a dearth of scholarship on Islam in Central Asia in the 20th century, and claims that “the amount of scholarly attention devoted to Central Asia’s political, social, cultural, and religious history decreases the closer one comes to the present” (DeWeese, 2009, website), we have learned enough about the areas Grotowski travelled in the 1950s and 1960s to show there was a strong Sufi representation in those places, specifically Iran, India, and other parts of Muslim Central Asia. The esoteric Sufi brotherhoods Grotowski encountered there are rich in psycho-physical, psycho-energetic and ecstatic rituals such as *dhikr* and *sama*. The works of Gurdjieff and Grotowski echo loudly in our review of these Sufi practices, particularly the goal of self-transformation and the very techniques to achieve it, like the use of mantras and music; “verticality” or spiritual ascension via a ladder located in the *qalb* (heart); and physical movement toward attainment of special knowledge just as the Prophet Muhammad travelled

on his Night Journey on a mystical path to receive hidden knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. Even when consulting written traditions such as the poetry of Rumi, the Qur'an, and *Hadith*, we see Islam and its Prophet Muhammad (SAW) reflected prominently in Sufi practices, which also appear in Grotowski's practices.

Chapter Five: Grotowski and Gurdjieff

In the previous chapter, entitled Sufism, I examined elements of ancient traditional rituals, and how they are used by the practitioners of these religious-based activities as routes for spiritual enlightenment. Particular attention was given to specific Sufi psycho-physical/psycho-energetic rituals, where the body serves as a medium for expressing esoteric knowledge, and a means for self-transformation. Contextually, the previous chapter was intended to more closely examine the validity of Grotowski's post-theatre work, in which he states there are "elements of the ancient rituals" that "have a precise and therefore objective impact on participants" in his research. (Research and Development Report, 1984, in Lendra, 1991, p.312) Although this assertion by Grotowski was made in reference to his Objective Drama phase of work, it fundamentally characterizes all of his post-theatre phases in general, which emphasized the use of traditional transcultural techniques as sources to produce a "subtle" form of energy in the participant that leads to a purely organic physical action.

In chapter three, entitled Sufi Roots in Grotowski's Art as Vehicle, I made particular references to the possibility that Grotowski's research could have been conceptually grounded in the traditional practices used by Sufis to attain forms of spiritual self-transformation. This assertion is based on Grotowski's journeys to areas of Central Asia before he began his career as a director of theatre. In this chapter, I will further explore this possibility of Sufism's influence on Grotowski's work by examining how Grotowski's Theatre of Sources, Objective Drama, and Art as Vehicle phases of research are closely aligned with the metaphysical teachings of the spiritualist G.I. Gurdjieff, whose concepts were primarily linked to the practices and beliefs of Sufism.

The rationale for connecting aspects of Grotowski's theories to Gurdjieff's philosophy is based on multiple sources that suggest there is a remarkable signature pattern that runs in common

between Grotowski's and Gurdjieff's work¹⁶. That is, there are theories and techniques introduced by Grotowski and Gurdjieff in their respective work that are nearly identical; these will be more fully elaborated upon in later portions of this chapter. By corollary and a process of triangulation, I aim to establish the commonalities among Sufism, Gurdjieff, and Grotowski.

In order to explicate the parallels between Grotowski and Gurdjieff, I will first examine Gurdjieff's central teachings, and discuss how his pedagogy is directly influenced ontologically by the esoteric principles of Islamic mysticism. It will be necessary, therefore, to provide sources that familiarize one with the widely agreed upon link between Gurdjieff's writings and Sufism. One important source that will be included in this chapter is Russian philosopher Pyotr Demianovich Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an unknown teaching* (1949). This particular writing encapsulates Gurdjieff's views, and is considered "the most widely used text of Gurdjieff's teachings" for understanding Gurdjieff's work. (Ginsburg, 2005, p.1) Complementing this source will be materials from Gurdjieff's own writings that provide autobiographical information, and give insight about the origins of his theosophical teachings that are primarily derived from his contact with ancient traditions of the Far East, including *Life is Real Only Then, When "I Am"* (1978), *Meetings With Remarkable Men* (1963), and *The Herald of Coming Good* (1971). Additionally, extensive cross-referencing of author Anna Challenger's *Philosophy and Art in Gurdjieff's Beelzebub: A Modern Sufi Odyssey* (2002) will be made in order to provide a contextually lucid understanding of the role Sufism played in the development of his life's work. Finally, after examining the basis for Gurdjieff's belief system, I will introduce key concepts in the context of his "Sacred Movements" including the "Fourth Way" teaching, "ascending and

¹⁶ Grotowski himself denied any awareness of Gurdjieff until later in his life, but the weight of evidence indicating similarities between the two would lead one to doubt Grotowski's truthfulness. Schechner expresses his scepticism of Wolford's report that "'Grotowski [...] had never so much as heard the name of the Armenian master before that day'. (Wolford 1996c:225) Grotowski repeats the denial in a 1991 interview (Grotowski 1996a). 'Is trickster Grotowski to be believed?'" (Schechner, 1996b, p.478).

descending energy”, and “efforts”, as these apply to Grotowski’s notions of “objective consciousness”, “awakening”, and, “authenticity”. After explaining Gurdjieff’s teachings and practices, and their link to Sufism, I will examine aspects of Grotowski’s research that parallel Gurdjieff’s work. This will include a comparative examination of Gurdjieff’s Movements and Grotowski’s Motions exercises, and the theoretical similarities between these two practical aspects of their work. Establishing the strong possibility that Grotowski applied his knowledge of Gurdjieff’s teachings to his own research lends itself to further supporting evidence of Sufism’s role in Grotowski’s research in general.

Sacred Dance: The origins of Gurdjieff’s work and its relationship to Sufism

Born in the Russian-Armenian city of Alexandropol in 1866 to Greek and Armenian parentage, G. I. Gurdjieff’s eclectic teachings and practices are considered some of the 20th century’s most unique forms of both art and philosophy. In a letter published in the *New Yorker* magazine shortly after his death, Janet Flanner wrote that Gurdjieff was “one of the most mysterious, eccentric, and discussed modern mystics” (1949, pp.88-89). Additionally, according to Levan Khetaguri in *Gurdjieff and Twentieth Century Culture*, Gurdjieff influenced such prolific intellectuals as theatre directors Eugenio Barba, Peter Brook, Antonin Artaud, and dance teacher Jeanne de Salzmann, all of whom also intersected with Grotowski’s life; as well as Jerzy Grotowski himself. (Khetaguri, 2008, p.5) As another example of the flow of influence, in his influential book, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Grotowski refers to Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty as a form of authenticity by the actor who “does whatever he does with his entire being, and not just one mechanical [...] gesture of the arm or leg, not any grimace, helped by a logical inflection and a thought” (1968a, p.119). Brook, who made important contributions towards a critical analysis and interpretation of Grotowski’s Art as Vehicle research, was also an avid fan of Gurdjieff and reflected on Gurdjieff’s teachings in his 1977 screenplay, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*. (Kustow, 2005, pp.249-251) Then there is Barba, who according to Khetaguri (2008) was influenced by Gurdjieff, and who was also

“Grotowski’s disciple” and edited Grotowski’s book, *Towards a Poor Theatre*. (Roose-Evans, 1989, p.155) Also, Michel de Salzman, a faithful follower of Gurdjieff who was president of the Gurdjieff Foundation from 1990 until his death and was also the son of Gurdjieff’s pupil, Jeanne de Salzman, interviewed Grotowski in 1991. In the interview entitled *A Kind of Volcano: An interview with Jerzy Grotowski* (1996), de Salzman addresses commonalities between Grotowski’s and Gurdjieff’s work. Furthermore, as I previously discussed in my second chapter, “Ancient Traditional Ritual and Thought in Grotowski’s Theatre”, Grotowski’s long-time collaborator Flaszen has noted that Grotowski’s ideas about “initiatory experience[s]” involving great suffering and “transformation” or “new birth” that “would lead [those who suffered] to see God face-to-face” were “somehow connected to [G. I.] Gurdjieff (sic), and so on” (2007, n.p.).

The processes of energy transformation and self-transformation were significant aspects of both Gurdjieff’s and Grotowski’s work. As we’ve seen, multiple writers and authorities on Grotowski have established parallels between his ideas and those of Gurdjieff, including Flaszen (2007), Michel de Salzman (1996), Brook (Schechner, 1996b, p.478), Wolford (1997a, p.286), and Schechner (1996b, p.461, pp.463-4, p.471, p.473, pp.477-8). So strong are the parallels between the two G’s that Dr. Levan Khetaguri even wrote in his aforementioned paper titled *Gurdjieff and Twentieth Century Culture* that Grotowski was a direct follower of Gurdjieff:

Remarkable artists, such as Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, Sam Shepard and many others, are followers of Mr. Gurdjieff. Many other creators and artists who are not his direct followers have been inspired by Gurdjieff’s study and his mystic imaginary universe. (Khetaguri, 2008, p.1)

Based on the work of other writers and authorities on Grotowski I cited above, it’s more likely that Grotowski was not a direct follower of Gurdjieff. Those other writers actually agree that Grotowski

was indirectly inspired by Gurdjieff through his close collaborations with Gurdjieff followers such as Peter Brook and Eugenio Barba

Gurdjieff's career spanned from 1913 until his death in 1949. In her analysis of Gurdjieff's connection to Sufism, entitled *Philosophy and Art in Gurdjieff's Beelzebub: A Modern Sufi Odyssey* (2002), Anna Challenger suggests there are "three phases" in the genealogy of Gurdjieff's philosophy and practices. (2002, p.3) The first of these phases, from 1913-1924, included Gurdjieff's establishment of the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, in Moscow in 1913; and later in 1922, his re-establishment in a chateau near Fontainebleau, France. The intention of this institute was "to give effect to the plan [Gurdjieff] had long entertained of founding a training establishment [...] for the study of his ideas and in order to put into practice his system of training" (Driscoll, 2004, p.2).

In some respects, this phase of Gurdjieff's work was a reflection of the Russian Silver Age culture (1890-1914), in which "the idea arose that culture – secular, ecclesiastical, and especially artistic – had a sacral role", and it was also considered the "age of mystics, who were ready to turn towards any spiritual path as yet unexplored" (Lunkin and Filatov, 2000, p.136). According to Maria Carlson, author of *No Religion Higher than Truth: A history of the theosophical movement in Russia*, such personalities as Gurdjieff were impacted by a time in Russian history when theosophy became a popular cultural phenomenon among the "creative intelligentsia" who gravitated towards the "history of religious thought, especially by mystery cults and ancient rituals" (Carlson, 1993, pp.3, 6, and 8). Johanna Petsche, author of *Gurdjieff and Blavatsky: Western Esoteric Teachers in Parallel*, goes one step further in examining the Silver Age's impact on Gurdjieff by suggesting "Gurdjieff capitalized on the popularity of Theosophy", and was directly connected to "reviving occult traditions [...] and introducing Eastern religious and philosophical ideas to the West" (Petsche, 2011, p.98).

It was during the period of the “Silver Age” when the *Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man* became a centre for Gurdjieff to import “to others the fruits of his twenty-year-long odyssey”, where he acquired knowledge of the ancient esoteric traditions from Asian and Middle Eastern regions he had visited. (Challenger, 2002, pp.2-3) In what is considered one of his semi-autobiographical writings, *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1963), Gurdjieff provides a detailed account of his contacts with various ancient traditions and teachings in the regions of Central Asia and the Middle East that were the genesis of his teachings and practices. In one such encounter with a mystical order, the Sarmoun Brotherhood, there is a glimpse of the impact ancient traditional rituals would have in the development of his work at the institute. Referring to the “purity of execution” of a Sarmoun sacred dance he had witnessed, Gurdjieff observed:

These dances correspond precisely to our books. Just as is now done on paper, so, once, certain information about long past events was recorded in dances and transmitted from century to century to people of subsequent generations. And these dances are called sacred. (Gurdjieff, 1963, pp.164-165)

This observation of his encounter with sacred dance is what Gurdjieff viewed as an embodied form of knowledge that is kinetically transmitted nonverbally through precise and exacting movements of the body.

Ouspensky wrote of one particularly important example of an embodied type of knowledge, the use of the Dervish whirling ritual which Gurdjieff employed as a primary component in his ballet, *The Struggle of the Magicians: Scenario of the ballet* (1957):

An important place in the ballet is occupied by certain dances [...] Imagine that in the study of the movements of the heavenly bodies, let us say the planets of the solar system a special mechanism is constructed to give a visual presentation of the laws of these movements and remind us of them. In this mechanism each planet, which is

represented by a sphere of appropriate size, is placed at a certain distance. From a central sphere representing the sun, the mechanism is set in motion and all the spheres begin to rotate and to move along prescribed paths, reproducing in a visual form the laws which govern the movements of the planets. This mechanism reminds you of all you know about the solar system. There is something like this in the rhythm of certain dances. In the strictly defined movements and combinations of dancers, certain laws are visually reproduced which are intelligible to those who know them. Such dances are called sacred dances. (Ouspensky, 1949, p.23)

As understood by Gurdjieff in discussing the significance of this particular ancient traditional dance in his ballet, ritual movements are intended to connect with or convey sacred esoteric beliefs, as demonstrated by his thematic articulation of esoteric Sufi cosmology within his *Struggle of the Magicians* (1957). This aspect of Gurdjieff's artistic work, which emphasized embodied knowledge of a sacred nature, is further explained by Gurdjieff in discussing an important philosophical dimension to his Movements at the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man:

The ancient dance was a branch of art; an art in those early times served the purpose of higher knowledge and of religion [...] Thus the ancient sacred dance is not only a medium for an aesthetic experience but also, as it were, a book containing definite knowledge. (Moore, 1994, p.5)

Gurdjieff's observation that sacred dance is a vehicle for the somatic expression of specific mystical ideas and beliefs can be evidenced as a common element of various types of esoteric religious practices that use the body for the manifestation of mystical teachings. In his book, *The Hindu Temple: An introduction to its meaning and forms* (1988), George Mitchell draws a parallel between "figural" temple art, and the corporal movements of Hindu sacred dance in terms of their mutual religious objectives. Mitchell states that, "like the different postures of the body these

gestures also relate to dance, where every hand and body movement is imbued with meaning to create a language of motion by which the sacred myths and stories are communicated” (1988, p.38). Again, Mitchell points out that the kinesthetic dynamic at play in Hindu ritual dances, such as the temple dance of Shiva, serves the purpose of articulating, via the body, what also can be interpreted as a “structured movement system”:

Structured movement systems are systems of knowledge [...] these systems of knowledge are socially and culturally constructed – created by a group of people and primarily preserved in memory [...] they can be visual manifestations of social relations, the subjects of elaborate aesthetic systems, and may assist in understanding cultural values and the deep structure of the society. (Kaepler, 2000, p.117)

In part, Kaepler’s analysis suggests that dance is a rhetorical form of communication, whereby the body is a conduit for teaching and reinforcing norms within various sets of cultural and social contexts. This being said, Mitchell and Kaepler’s examination of dance reflects the notion of physical movements being like a “text”, akin to Gurdjieff’s view of sacred dance being a “book of definite knowledge” (Vasquez, 2011, p.15). Sacred dance, as embodied knowledge, was the main subject matter of Gurdjieff’s practical philosophy that primarily centred on specific esoteric Sufi traditional rituals that are the basis for his notions of “authenticity”, “awakening” and the “fourth way”, as they apply to his Movements. I will discuss these concepts and their link to Sufism in later portions of this chapter.

There are several significant indications of Sufism’s influence on Gurdjieff’s work, including sacred dance and traditional forms of spiritual music. Challenger writes that Gurdjieff “openly acknowledged his association with the Sufi path and attributed a number of his teaching methods, such as the use of sacred dance [...] to Sufi sources” (Challenger, 2002, p.13). Challenger further substantiates this by pointing to several of Gurdjieff’s musical compositions, including, *Sacred*

Readings from the Koran, The Bokharian Dervish Hadji-Asvatz-Troov, and Sayyid No. 1, as examples of Sufism's influence on Gurdjieff's artistic work. (2002, p.13) In *The Teachers of Gurdjieff* (1966), Rafael Lefort's examination of influences on Gurdjieff's work supports Challenger's observation by stating, "The connection between Gurdjieff and the dervishes is apparent throughout his writings. Some of the movements of his dances are dervish ritual movements, while others are movements from the Moslem prayer" (1966, p.9). Additionally, in another of his autobiographical writings entitled *The Herald of Coming Good*, Gurdjieff gives an account of going "to a certain Dervish monastery" where he would "study" the various aspects of the esoteric knowledge he had acquired during his time in Central Asia. (1933, p.20)

Challenger and Lefort identify Sufism as a primary source for Gurdjieff's teaching, a fact confirmed by Gurdjieff's own writings that embrace Sufi cosmology. In one of his main books, *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson*, which Pittman referred to as a "Sufi teaching tale", Gurdjieff symbolically conveys aspects of his esoteric philosophy. (Pittman, 2012, p.1) In Chapter 41 of this tale, a conversation takes place with a dervish, Hadji Asvatz Troov. According to Challenger, the character of Troov "is characterized as a highly conscious human being who has dedicated life to the study of the science of vibrations" that focus on "the power inherent in the musical octave" (Challenger, 2002, p.15). Symbolically, the relationship between a dervish and the musical octave is an allusion to a part of Gurdjieff's system of cosmology in the form of his well-known enneagram, which is said to have originated with the "Naqshbandi sufis, one of the most profoundly mystical schools of Sufism" (Shirley, 2004, p.107). In one portion of his book, *In Search of the Miraculous*, Ouspensky discusses what is referred to as the "law of octaves", a "system of symbols" associated with Gurdjieff's esoteric enneagram; he states that "All knowledge can be included in the enneagram" (Ouspensky, 1949, pp.283 and 294). A nine-pointed geometric figure inscribed within a circle, each point is assigned an octave, which represents the various pitches in a musical scale.

According to Ouspensky, Gurdjieff claimed that “each cosmos [...] is an enneagram” which reflects “the universe as consisting of vibrations” (Ouspensky, 1949, pp.122 and 294).

The octaves within Gurdjieff’s enneagram, as it relates to music, demonstrate the metaphysical notion of the universe as being in constant motion through vibrations that fluctuate between various levels of energy moving from one form to another. This aspect of Gurdjieff’s teachings is consistent with ancient spiritual traditions that presented music as part of cosmological principle, and was, as stated by Randell McClellan, “the foundation upon which all musical practice of the ancient world was formed” (McClellan, 2000, p.4):

The musicians, the shamans, priests, prophets and philosophers held one philosophical concept in common - that music presents a microcosm of the order of the universe and follows cosmic laws and that through the practice of music one could better understand these laws [...] The rhythm of music, for example reflected the movement of the galaxies, stars and planets, of the sun and the moon, the cycle of the seasons, day and nights, the tides of the seas, and birth and death of our own cells [...] the fluidity of energy changing and merging with energy, the primordial force of the universe. (McClellan, 2000, p.4)

McClellan’s view suggests to us that ancient music, like sacred dance, was the expression of the cosmos as being a living organism that is in a constant state of transformation by the “fluidity of energy” permeating all of existence on both a macro and microcosmic scale. This principle of ancient cosmology, transformation through the harmonious motions in the universe, quite likely was the theoretical basis for Gurdjieff’s “movements”, or what he also referred to as “sacred gymnastics” (Whitall, 2001, p.21). For example, according to Ouspensky, Gurdjieff explained in his discussion of his metaphysical “law of octaves” as it relates to the “cosmic order” that

[...] energy follows an ‘ascending’ and ‘descending’ pattern: [...] nothing in the world stays in the same place, or remains what it was, everything moves, everything is going somewhere, is changing, and inevitably either develops or goes down, weakens or degenerates [...] it moves along either an ascending or descending line of octaves. (Ouspensky, 1949, pp.136-137)

Another record of Gurdjieff’s visualization of energy in a straight-up and –down pattern is found in Jacob Needleman’s essay entitled “Gurdjieff, Or The Metaphysics of Energy” (1996). Here, Needleman points to Gurdjieff’s “Law of Seven” as the basis for what constitutes ascending and descending levels of energy that are likened to a “ladder”, in which “every developing process passes through steps between a higher or finer quality of energy and a lower or coarser quality” (1996, p.70).

As mentioned in prior sections of this chapter, Gurdjieff incorporated aspects of sacred dervish ritual into both his practical work and philosophy, which has its basis in the cosmological concept of ascending and descending forces of energy. For example, referring back to his ballet, *The Struggle of the Magicians*, Gurdjieff provides us with a thematic explanation for his ballet by saying, “what is above is similar to what is below, and what is below is similar to what is above” (1957, p.16). This quite likely refers to the notion that what occurs within the expanse of the universe also takes place in the lower world of earth, and both are therefore “one and the same” (Conger, 1922, p.5). As such:

[...] motion is an essential of existence. The stars wandering across the sky are born and die. They wax and wane, some colliding with others [...] everywhere there is change. This ceaseless motion throughout measureless space and endless time has its parallel in the smaller motions of shorter duration that occur on earth. Even inanimate things, crystals, rivers, and clouds, islands, grow and dwindle, accumulate and break up, appear and disappear. (Moore and Yamamoto, 2012, p.6)

The microcosmic elements of existence have the same properties of motion as does the macrocosm, a fact which “is interpreted and comes out in movement and posture” that are in rituals intended to express the commonality between humanity’s physical environment, and the greater happenings in the universe. (Moore and Yamamoto, 2012, p.6) It is from this cosmological principle of harmony (i.e., “what is below is similar to what is above”) that Gurdjieff further explains the significance of the dervish dance in *The Struggle of the Magicians*, and how this ritual effectuates specific mental, emotional, and physical responses in the practitioners of this ancient tradition:

[...] these ‘sacred dances’ are considered to be one of the principle subjects of study in all esoteric schools of the East, both in ancient times and at the present day. The movements of which these dances consist have a double purpose; they express and contain a certain knowledge and, at the same time, they serve as a method of attaining a harmonious state of being. Combinations of these movements express different sensations, produce varying degrees of concentration of thought, create necessary efforts in different functions and show the possible limits of individual force. (1957, p.16)

Gurdjieff’s artistic works, such as his ballet, were an aesthetic expression of his philosophy directly linked to ancient traditional epistemology and rituals. This is most certainly the case from his exposition on *The Struggle of the Magicians*, which shows the “esoteric schools of the East” were a primary source for his “Movements” that “are adapted from temple dances Gurdjieff saw in the East...and are the somatic codifications of ancient teachings. Some of them refer to the movement and transformation of energy within us, a choreography of workings of the enneagram” (Shirley, 2004, p.185).

Again, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the notion of a “transformation of energy” involved with Gurdjieff’s Movements is premised on the idea that the practice of sacred movements have the potential to produce a certain form of energy, leading to an inner transformation. To a large

extent, Gurdjieff's Movements were the manifestation of his central teachings of the "objective consciousnesses" as being the "fourth way" towards "awakening" that leads to "authenticity". In their totality, all of these processes are the bases for Gurdjieff's aesthetic work which he developed to facilitate self-transformation in the practitioner of his Movements.

Movement Exercises as a Means Towards the Realization of One's "Essence"

Among the "seven discrete categories" of Gurdjieff's Movements or "sacred gymnastics" were "ritual exercises...women's dances; men's ethnic dances ('dervish' and 'Tibetan'); sacred temple dances and tableaux" (Moore, 1994, p.3). According to Mark Sedgwick, author of, *Western Sufism: From the Abbasids to the New Age*, Gurdjieff's Movements "were partly inspired by" the whirling ritual of the dervish. (Sedgwick, 2017, p.179) Sedgwick implies that Sufi ritual practices did not play an overarching role in the development of Gurdjieff's sacred exercises, as others familiar with his work have indicated. To some extent, Gurdjieff's public presentations of his sacred dances and gymnastics supports Sedgwick's position. For example, Gurdjieff's 1924 stage presentations of his work included movements adapted from various esoteric schools, including monasteries in Chinese Turkestan, Kafiristan, and "ritual prayer movements from Sari, Tibet" (Taylor, 2001, p.35).

Although Gurdjieff integrated multiple ritual practices into the development of his Movements, it could be argued that Gurdjieff's contact with Sufi practices in Central Asia in particular, "where he acquired much of the knowledge which was to form the basis of his teachings", would become "an important component" in his work. (Wintle, 2002, p.115) Furthermore, Challenger's examination of Movements suggests that Gurdjieff's sacred exercises were largely influenced by his knowledge of the dervish whirling ritual connected to the Sufi poet and teacher, Jelaluddin Rumi. (Challenger, 2002, p.13) In further support of both Beekman and Challenger, Michael S. Pittman's discourse on Gurdjieff's work also indicates that Sufism was a significant source in the maturation of Gurdjieff's theories and practices, which is indicated in Gurdjieff's semi-autobiographical work, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*. (Pittman, 2012, p.1) According to Pittman,

Gurdjieff's enneagram is considered to be linked to the Naqshbandi Sufi order, and was used as part of his sacred Gymnastics/Movements activities. Referring to exercises that took place in Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, Pittman relates Ouspensky's description of how "Gurdjieff showed the students exercises connected with the movement of the enneagram":

On the floor in the hall where the exercises took place a large enneagram was drawn and pupils who took part in the exercises stood on the spots marked by the numbers 1 to 9. Then they began to move in the direction of the numbers of the period in a very interesting movement, turning around one another at the points of meeting, that is, at the points where the lines intersect in the enneagram. (Pittman, 2012, pp.17-18)

Overall, the movements themselves were typically conducted in different dance formations, often requiring participants to move in various types of rows with an "overall symmetry" and "precision" of a well-choreographed series of postures, symbolic gestures, and movements. (Shirley, 2004, p.185) Each of the movements was executed multiple times, in which "Everything must be rigorously exact. Each gesture, each attitude, each sequence has its place, its duration, its proper density" (Moore, 1994, p.6). The long duration of the movements, in combination with their technically strenuous exactitude also reflects Gurdjieff's notion of "efforts" of which he says:

You imagine, you believe that you shall go directly to paradise. No, here there must be efforts above the ordinary [...] It is necessary here to make efforts. You are accustomed to performing as before in life. Before, this want, now already it is not enough. The effort must strain all your muscles, all your nerves, all your brain even. A similar concentration must be yours. (*Transcripts of Gurdjieff's Meetings, 1941-1946*, 2008, p.25)

Various other accounts corroborate his characterization of "the work" that was being done at his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, all describing the nature of Gurdjieff's "efforts" as being harsh and exceptionally painful. One such description was given by Jeanne de

Salzmann, one of Gurdjieff's main pupils at his Institute who also became the standard-bearer of Gurdjieff's work after his death:

Gurdjieff worked on our functions in a relentless way - continual pressure, greater and greater demands, put on us in horrible situations, shocks of all kinds. Not only did he not attract us but, in punishing us to extreme limits, he forced us to resist him [...] and he did this without mercy. (de Salzmann, 2010, p.4)

de Salzmann's account of what consisted of Gurdjieff's efforts, as it applied to practising his movements, highlights Gurdjieff's belief that the individual must "make a super effort" that goes beyond normative types of physical and mental endurance to achieve a given purpose. (*Transcripts of Gurdjieff's Meetings, 1941-1946*, 2008, p.25) Indeed, as Gary Bryant writes in *The Sickness of Effort*, "efforts" are done "in order to attain valued aims or goals, and we formulate objectives that need to be met along the way" (2016, preface). In Gurdjieff's work, the sustained physical exertion of each movement was intended to facilitate a transformational change in the participants of these exercises. Gurdjieff spoke on this in an interview with Pauline de Dampierre, entitled, *The Role of Movements*:

The Movements show us the profound effect that efforts can have [...] when seemingly insurmountable difficulties are overcome, the inner state of being changes. Fatigue and other obstacles vanish. Then one could say that effort itself has had a truly transforming power. Feeling becomes more confident. Thought clearer, the body lighter [...] when the experience is over, the body retains a trace of it [...] it is in a state of balanced well-being. (de Dampierre, 2004, p.290)

The physically and mentally demanding nature of Gurdjieff's movements creates the conditions for "balanced well-being", which is characteristic of Gurdjieff's "Fourth Way" teaching as it relates to his movements:

The method of the Fourth Way consists in doing something in one room and simultaneously doing something corresponding to it in the two other rooms—that is to say while working on the physical body to work simultaneously on the mind and the emotions; while working on the mind to work on the physical body and the emotions; while working on the emotions to work on the body [...] A whole parallel series of physical, mental and emotional exercises serves this purpose. (Ouspensky, 1949, p.49)

The “method of the Fourth Way”, as described by Gurdjieff, is indicative of the “Fourth Way” teaching found within Sufism, which emphasizes self-development by creating a balance in the central elements that make up the human being. Drawing a link between Gurdjieff’s concept of the “Fourth Way”, and a distinctly Sufi-based principle of the same name, Challenger observes:

The Naqshbandi Sufis and Gurdjieff both refer to their teaching as the ‘Fourth Way’, a term that designates a method of spiritual growth effected by means of a balanced development of the physical, emotional, and intellectual faculties in conjunction with the will. This emphasis on balanced development distinguishes the Fourth Way from other paths of spiritual transformation, such as the ways of the faqir (physical mastery), the monk (emotional devotion), and the yogi (development of intellectual prowess)---all of which concentrate on mastering a single faculty...the Fourth Way cultivates all human faculties simultaneously and harmoniously. (Challenger, 2002, p.21)

The movements, tools of the Fourth Way, are intended to create a harmonic exchange, in which the body, mind and emotions are collectively participating with each complicated head, arm, and leg movement. As well, Gurdjieff’s movements involved a high degree of “effort” in order to create an “objective conscious” state of being through an act of “self-observation”, which is linked to a philosophical aspect of the Fourth Way. According to Gurdjieff, “man is a machine” with “four

centers”: intellect, emotions, movement and instinct. (Ouspensky, 1949, p.ix) Gurdjieff believed that each action from these centres is a response to external stimuli, which would suggest that human beings are reactive organisms whose consciousness functions as though in a state of “sleep”, and therefore impedes on the self-actualized unification of all one’s centres:

Man’s possibilities are very great. You cannot conceive even a shadow of what man is capable of attaining. But nothing can be attained in sleep [...] A man realizes that it is precisely because he is asleep that he lives and works in small parts of himself. It is precisely for this reason that the vast majority of his possibilities remain unrealized, the vast majority of his powers are left unused. (Ouspensky, 1949, p.145)

To a large extent, according to Gurdjieff, the individual has a great deal of potential for personal development, but is prevented from doing so because they are in a “sleep”- like state of consciousness: a state of consciousness that functions without an awareness of each of the “centers” activities. The harmonization of the centers, through Gurdjieff’s movements, was intended to bring the individual to an objective level of consciousness through the “efforts” made from exercising them. As such, “objective consciousness” suggests that “the more a man understands what he is doing, the greater will be the results of his efforts. This is a fundamental principle of the Fourth Way. The results of work are in proportion to the consciousness of the work” (Ouspensky, 1949, p.49).

The “work”, or efforts, involved with Gurdjieff’s movements were intended to facilitate “self-observation” that allows for a full awareness, an objective consciousness, of their internal and external actions and reactions. Gurdjieff’s concept of self-observation is reflected in his noteworthy “Stop Exercise”, which is an important element in his methodology. The following is a detailed description of this exercise as practised at Gurdjieff’s institute in Fontainebleau, France:

At the command ‘stop’, or at a previously arranged signal, every student must instantly stop all movement, wherever he may be and whatever he may be doing. Whether in the middle of a rhythmic movement or in the ordinary life of the institute, at work or at the

table, he not only must stop his movements but must retain the expression of his face, smile, glance and the tension of all the muscles of his body in exactly the state they were in at the command 'stop'. He must keep his eyes fixed on the exact spot at which they happen to be looking...and he must concentrate the whole of his attention on observing the tension of the muscles in various parts of his body, guiding the attention from one part of the body to another...the stop exercise gives us the possibility of seeking and feeling our own body in postures and attitudes which are entirely unaccustomed and unnatural to it. (Gurdjieff, 1933, pp.155-156)

The "Stop Exercise", as described above, is said to be linked to a ritual practice Gurdjieff had witnessed during his stay at a Sufi monastery in Central Asia. (Lachman, 2006, p.157) Peter Brook, in his film adaptation of Gurdjieff's *Meetings with Remarkable Men* also includes Gurdjieff's autobiographical account of having "witnessed the 'stop' exercises of Sufi tradition" (King, 2014, p.159). Challenger specifically traces Gurdjieff's Stop Exercise to the Mevlevi Sufi order, and provides a detailed description of this ritual practice, as it relates to his sacred dance movements:

Part of Gurdjieff's dance repertoire included the Mevlevi "stop exercise", wherein, at a signal given by the sheik, the dervishes instantly stop whirling, their bodies and facial expressions abruptly arrested, fixed in the positions they held at the moment of the signal. (Challenger, 2002, p.14)

The primary aim of Gurdjieff's adaptation of this Sufi-based "Stop Exercise" was to elicit a specific state of awareness of the individual's own body rhythms. Additionally, the practice of self-observing one's physical, emotional, and intellectual centers, as demonstrated by the "Stop Exercise", served a profoundly internalized purpose. It draws attention to what Gurdjieff referred to as one's personality versus their essence. The individual goes from a level of a "completely mechanical" existence by a "personality" that is a reflection of external forces, to an "intimation of presence" in the sense of being "an observation of oneself by one's self":

He who observes himself in this way quickly comes to see that as he ordinarily lives, he himself (that is, his personality) is the worst enemy of his self (that is, his essence, his being). This is precisely what is wrong with us as we are the major obstacle to being ourselves. Personality, built up by the environment in which we live, constantly interferes, and prevents the expression of our being. The functions supported by the body, are at the service of the personages that we have acquired, and not of our inner being, our real self, which can no longer make itself heard. (Vaysse, 1979, pp.46-47)

From an existential point of view, Vaysse observes that external influences impinge upon the realization of one's own unique character traits, hindering the ability to tap into the intrinsic qualities of a person's individuality. Gurdjieff taught that "the most basic requirement for 'work on the self' comes from 'essence'" (Cusack and Norman, 2012, p.276). Thus, one of the central aims of Gurdjieff's concept of self-observation in his movements was to achieve authenticity in the practitioners of his work that could liberate them from a false sense of self:

What do we find out about ourselves, if we engage in self-observation? We'll see patterns of behavior that surprise us—we'll see ourselves without the 'buffers', the blinders that hide our mechanicality; our sleep, our selfishness from us [...] seeing ourselves as we are, with cool detachment, it becomes possible to see also what else we might become. Real freedom becomes possible. (Shirley, 2004, p.28)

Essentially, it is only through an objective state of consciousness that a person is capable of transcending the barriers placed by the personality, which is incapable of seeing and knowing one's authentic self, or their "essence". Thus, as Gurdjieff explains concerning a central objective of his exercises: "the key to everything – remain apart. Our aim is to have constantly a sensation of oneself, of one's individuality, this sensation cannot be expressed intellectually, because it is organic" (*Transcripts of Gurdjieff's Meetings, 1941-1946*, 2008, p.2). The Movements, although practised within groups of participants, were uniquely personalized in nature, and characteristically a type of

“work on oneself” through the practice of self-observation. (Shirley, 2004, p.274) It should also be emphasized that Gurdjieff’s use of the word “work”, in relation to his method of self-observation in particular, has a very specific meaning in terms of itself being a concept applied to the practice of self-examination. It is defined as a sustained exercise in self-study that identifies areas a person needs “to work on” in order to achieve what Gurdjieff says is “a sensation of one’s self”:

Now you cannot work on yourself unless you have observed yourself and realized for yourself where you need to work on yourself. Through observation from the Work standpoint you begin to realize where some things are wrong in you from the angle of the Work --- i.e. you see where you need to work on yourself. If you have not, by means of observation from the angle of the Work over a long period of time, seen where you need to work on yourself, you will never actually be working on yourself. (Nicoll, 1996, p.1356)

This observation of Gurdjieff’s “Work” from a psychological perspective is clearly reflected in Gurdjieff’s aforementioned psycho-transformational “Stop Exercise”, whereby attention is turned inwards so as to observe oneself. By an act of self-observation it is possible to see oneself as they really are, thus allowing the individual to make “consciously objective” decisions for their personal/spiritual growth.

Parallels in the Practical and Theoretical Work of the Two “Gs”

From examinations of Gurdjieff’s teachings and practices and their connection to ancient esoteric traditions of the East, it has been suggested that practical and theoretical elements of Gurdjieff’s work can also be found in Grotowski’s own research. For example, Richard Schechner, after comparing the Movements of Gurdjieff to the Motions used as physical training exercises by Grotowski, came to the conclusion that “either Grotowski took something from Gurdjieff or both Gs drew from the same sources”, and further states that “The Movements, Motions [...] are linked by a kind of movement used, the sources of that movement, and by purpose and function” (Schechner,

1996b, pp.479-481). In an interview with Grotowski, Michel de Salzman, Gurdjieff's son by Jeanne de Salzman, also noted that the "corporal aspects" of Grotowski's physical exercises are similar to Gurdjieff's Movements. (de Salzman, 1996, p.87) I will discuss the practical and theoretical components of Grotowski's Motions in later portions of this chapter. Additionally, Peter Brook, one of Grotowski's closest collaborators in *Art as Vehicle* and "a Gurdjieffian of the highest rank [...]" thought the Pole 'was the emissary of a lost branch of Gurdjieff's school'" (Wolford, 1996, in Schechner, 1996b, p.478) and also stated that "Grotowski knew all of Gurdjieff's writings, he knew many people directly related to Gurdjieff's teaching" (Brook, 2009, p.75).

Among those familiar with Grotowski's research, there is the collective observation that his work, such as its "purpose and function" Schechner speaks of (above), correlates with concepts found within Gurdjieff's esoteric teachings and practices. To begin with, both Gurdjieff and Grotowski structured their practical and theoretical activity around resuscitating ancient traditional rituals of a sacred nature that could have a direct impact on the mind and body of those who participated in their respective work. For example, discussing the central purpose of Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, Ouspensky says that "Gurdjieff and I have reached our present stage of knowledge by long and hard work in many lands", and further states:

Long ages ago there existed great civilizations and profound knowledge, traditions of which still exist. What remains of the knowledge has often become petrified [...] As at the tomb of Tutankhamen, mountains of rubbish have to be cleared away before the treasure is revealed. (Ouspensky in Bowyer, 1923, p.2)

It is from this kind of archeological investigation of ancient traditions that Gurdjieff wanted to reveal and put into practice ancient activities such as sacred dance and ritual gymnastics in the form of "a series of new Movement-Exercises" intended to bring about a spiritual transformation among those who participated in his practical work. (Phillpotts, 2008, p.247) Similarly, Grotowski's

post theatre research in Theatre of Sources, Objective Drama, and Art as Vehicle focused on examining elements of ancient ritual practices that could be used by the participants of his work as a “vehicle” for the development of their inner essence.

In the same way as Ouspenski explains the purpose for Gurdjieff’s examination of ancient traditions, Peter Brook also conveys the importance attached to exploring ancient traditional rituals and their relationship to Grotowski’s Art as Vehicle research:

It seems to me that today we face something which existed in the past but was forgotten over centuries and centuries; that is that one of the vehicles which allows man to have access to another level and to serve more rightly his function in the universe is – as a means of understanding – the performing art in all its forms. (Brook, 1988, in Wolford, 1996c, pp.182-183)

In accordance with Brook, Nascimento writes that accessing the aesthetic transcultural practices of ancient rituals, such as the use of traditional chants in Grotowski’s Art as Vehicle research, allows for one “to reach the human essence” (2008, p.153). Again, just as Gurdjieff’s teachings and practices drew from ancient traditions, Grotowski’s emphasis on ancient ritual as primary source material was the hallmark of his last phases of research such as his Theatre of Sources, in which Grotowski’s “investigations” and “expedition” were based “on witnessing some performative approaches and on possibilities for entering into direct contact with the strong human examples of ancient tradition” (Grotowski, 1980, p.267).

Like Gurdjieff, Grotowski sought to uncover and explore the rituals and practices of ancient traditions and applied the same technical aspects of these traditions found in Gurdjieff’s sacred dance movements to his own research. For example, examining the use of traditional songs as a primary source technique in Art as Vehicle, we find the “structural element” of these ancient songs is highly calibrated in form and function:

The songs too are a very powerful [...] they are absolutely precise. The melody is precise, the rhythm is precise, the resonance, the words, so precise that they require continuous attention from the person who leads the song and from those who follow. You must continually adjust tonality in a very subtle way in order to be always perfectly in tune with the leader of the song. You should follow exactly the fluctuations of the tempo-rhythm so as to be in perfect synchrony. (Biagini and Wylam, 2008, p.164)

This “structural” aspect of Art as Vehicle is consistent with ancient ritual practices that are characterized by the employment of strictly defined or formalized forms of rules used to ensure the desired impact on the participant of a ritual activity. This being the case, in *Grotowski’s Objective Drama Research*, Wolford points out that the “structured physical activities” of Motions “represents the most rigidly structured” form of Grotowski’s exercises. (1996, p.44) Thomas Richards gives us a detailed description:

It is an exercise for simple and not so simple stretches of the body, and for the circulation of attention. The exercise is done with more than one person, and everyone should be in absolute synchronization – every movement – every angle of the body, each turn, step, executed at the same moment. So a very continuous line of attention is required from the people doing Motions. (2008, p.46)

Described as having “similarities to hatha yoga”, the Motions exercises share the same technical properties as Gurdjieff’s Movements in that they are choreographed, requiring multiple participants to execute precisely timed changes in the positions of their bodies through a series of repetitive physical actions. (Słowiak and Cuesta, 2007, p.126) Importantly, Motions also has the same objective as Grotowski’s plastiques exercises which emphasized the removal of what is

referred to as “blocks” by intense physical and mental exertion. In a 1967 interview with Richard Schechner, Grotowski explains:

When I say ‘go beyond yourself’ I am asking for an insupportable effort. One is obligated not to stop despite fatigue and to do things that we know well we cannot do [...] there are certain points of fatigue which brake 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. (Grotowski, 1967, in Schneider and Cody, 2002, p.239)

As with the plastiques exercise, Motions is intended to remove resistance or “physical blocks”, thereby allowing for a “flow of impulses” by virtue of “insupportable efforts”. The more the participant of these exercises strains their mental, physical, and emotional capacities, the more lucidity there is in the flow of movements that liberates the individual from “mechanical” sets of physical and behavioral sets of actions. As such, the participant of these exercises undergoes an internalized transformation in the way they think, feel, and act that is uniquely owned by them as a result of each motion’s “insupportable efforts” put forth. Thus, Grotowski’s Motion exercises are nearly identical to what Gurdjieff refers to as “super efforts” in explaining how a person’s spiritual transformation is only achievable by the intensity of energy expended by the body and the mind in performing a series of demanding movements.

The parallel between Gurdjieff’s “super efforts” and what constitutes Grotowski’s Motion exercises is more clearly demonstrated by the master Bali performer I Wayan Lendra, who wrote about his participation in Grotowski’s Objective Drama phase of research:

The work itself was very rigorous. It required not only physical dexterity and stamina but also mental perseverance. Grotowski imposed uncompromising discipline. There

were many requirements that we had to perform [...] In addition to all these, he proposed to work long hours. Most of the time we worked between five and six days a week. Each exercise would last approximately two hours or longer depending on the development of the action. Our sessions [...] often extended for eight hours, sometimes through the entire night. (Lendra, 1991, p.115)

Lendra's characterization of the Motion exercises mirrors Jeanne de Salzman's account of Gurdjieff's Movements that was included in an earlier portion of this chapter, in which she described the "work" being done in Fontainebleau, France, as "relentless", with "greater and greater demands" placed on Gurdjieff's pupils. (de Salzman, 2010, p.4) Also, British intellectual John G. Bennett, another participant in Gurdjieff's practical work, describes the mode of "work" at Gurdjieff's institute in much the same way as Lendra's Objective Drama experience with Grotowski's Motion exercises. Referring to a particular category of Movements, Bennett states:

The rhythmic exercises were often so complicated and unnatural that I despaired of learning them [...] the work in the Study House always continued until midnight and often much later, so that we seldom had more than three or four hours' sleep before starting the morning work. (Bennett, 2002, webpage)

With the aforementioned commonalities between the corporal aspects of Motions and Movements in mind, it should also be pointed out that Gurdjieff's concept of "efforts" as part of his spiritual teachings is consistent with "effort" (*jihad*) being "the twenty-sixth station" in the Sufi path of spiritual union with divinity. (Nasr, 1972, p.80) According to this Sufi principle, self-transformation can only be achieved by "exertion and effort that allows the individual to overcome the lower self and its mundane desires" (Neale, 2016, p.49). This being said, each "effort" in Movements was intended to "shock" one from a mechanical state of "sleep", an autonomic form of consciousness, to an awareness of one's authentic self with its own unique fingerprint. (Ouspensky, 1949, p.155) Similarly, in his preface to Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Peter Brook

introduces the dynamic of the actor's experience in Grotowski's theatre by saying the "work" produced "a series of shocks" that led to a personalized transformation. (Brook in Grotowski, 1968a, p.11)

Interestingly, Grotowski uses the same terminology and language as Gurdjieff in his discussion with Schechner in 1967, which may suggest that one could conceivably trace Grotowski's earliest knowledge of Gurdjieff's teachings to Grotowski's Theatre of Productions. With respect to "efforts" and their intended purpose, for example, Grotowski states in his book, *Towards a Poor Theatre* that "the actor who [...] is not afraid to go beyond all normally acceptable limits, attains an inner harmony and peace of mind. He literally becomes much sounder in body and mind" (1968a, p.45).

Fundamentally, Grotowski's training exercises, such as his plastiques and Motions, were characterized as being mentally and physically demanding to the point of "exhaustion"; the precision within a given set of movements and attention to the smallest details required a high degree of concentration and awareness, simultaneous with energetic motor coordination. (Grotowski.net, 2012a) Characteristically, this technical aspect of Motions is very much identical to the mathematical-like structure of Gurdjieff's Movements. From the beginning, to the end, each movement of the body has its assigned place and duration.

However similar the corporal component is between Motions and Movements, Gurdjieff's practical work was fundamentally different in intent to that of Grotowski. As was previously pointed out in this chapter, Gurdjieff's Movements were an adaptation of temple dances. (Needleman, 2008, p.xix) As such, Gurdjieff's exercises were used as a vehicle to communicate his esoteric teachings. Each gesture, posture, and rhythmic movement was intended to convey some form of spiritual meaning that could lead the individual towards inner growth. In Grotowski's latter periods work, such as his Objective Drama, Theatre of Sources, and Art as Vehicle phases of research, ancient

traditional ritual was used as a primary source technique to achieve a “heightened awareness of one’s own psychophysical presence” (Middleton, 2001, p.52).

This being said, Motions, first developed during Grotowski’s Theatre of Sources period of research, did have a spiritual quality. Just as Grotowski observed there was “something religious” in Gurdjieff’s work, those who have examined Grotowski’s research also see a spiritual dimension to his work as well. (Sinclair, 2005, p.43) Richard Schechner, taking into account his exposure to Eastern and Central Asian esoteric practices, suggests that Grotowski’s work is “fundamentally spiritual” (Schechner, 1996b, p.464); and this dynamic of Grotowski’s research is also discussed by Lisa Wolford, who states that “Brook explicitly positions Grotowski’s work within a long line of spiritual traditions” (Wolford, 1996c, p.183). This is clearly the case when one considers the role that ancient ritual practices played in the latter phases of Grotowski’s work. For example, Wolford, referring to Grotowski’s Theatre of Sources, states that “Grotowski cited the dances of the Mevlevi order as a clear example of a source technique with a precise psychophysical efficacy” (Wolford, 1996c, p.8). As well, during Grotowski’s Objective Drama work, Iranian Director Massoud Saidpour, whose work focused on “sacred material and themes”, introduced *Exile Occidental*, which was a performative structure that included traditional Sufi ritual. (Wolford, 1996c, p.168) Additionally, Grotowski’s Art as Vehicle work was structured around ancient vibratory songs that “can work as tools for the transformation of energy” in the person who participated in this aspect of Art as Vehicle research. (Richards, 2008, pp.6-7)

The spiritual component of Grotowski’s work that others have spoken about is echoed by Teo Spsychalski, who collaborated with Grotowski Between 1967 and 1981. Spsychalski states that the Motions exercise “inclined towards the Sacred”, and continued to be one of the “essential elements of Grotowski’s later work” as well. (Spsychalski, 2014, p.158) I Wayan Lendra, a master Bali teacher who participated in Grotowski’s Objective Drama project, which was an “extension” of Grotowski’s Theatre of Sources, supports Spsychalski’s characterization of Motions. Lendra relates that his

collaborative work with Grotowski in Objective Drama research “had a spiritual dimension”, and states that the Motions exercises used in this work produces “alertness and awareness of physical impulses”, and “leads to a sensitivity of the body and, consequently, a spiritual experience” (Lendra, 1991, pp.116 & 122).

There is also another profound theoretical aspect to Grotowski’s Motions in his post-theatre phases of research that parallels Gurdjieff’s notion of “mechanicalism” and its relationship to the state of “sleep” versus “waking”. Explaining the use of the Motion exercise during his Theatre of Sources phase of research, wherein one of his objectives was the “deconditioning of perception”, Grotowski states that:

Habitually, an incredible amount of stimuli are flowing into us [...] but we are programmed in such a way that our attention records exclusively those stimuli that are in agreement with our learned image of the world. In other words, all the time we tell ourselves the same story. Therefore, if the techniques of the body, daily, habitual, specific for a precise culture, are suspended, this suspension is by itself a deconditioning of perception. (Middleton, 2001, p.55)

Remarkably, Grotowski’s use of the term, “deconditioning” in explaining his Motions, has a theoretical pattern paralleling that of Gurdjieff’s “Stop Exercise”. Challenger, in discussing this component of Movements, describes it as a process of “deconstruction” and states:

The braking down of fixed postures and gestures as a method of self-study was a key purpose behind Gurdjieff’s use of movements in general; the ‘Stop Exercise’ highlighted and crystalized what the gymnastics as a whole aimed to achieve. In ordinary life, every person is limited to a handful of mechanical movements and gestures, each of which is connected with unconscious ways of thinking and feeling. (Challenger, 2002, p.14)

As mentioned early in this chapter, the “Stop Exercise” was one of the primary methods used in Gurdjieff’s Movements to impose a moment of self-observed examination. The purpose of this technique was to develop an objective awareness of a person’s emotional, mental, and physical centres that are typically governed by “mechanical” actions and reactions. Comparing Challenger’s observations of Gurdjieff’s “Stop Exercise” as a form of “deconstruction”, to Grotowski’s use of Motions as means of “deconditioning”, there is a striking similarity between the two theories.

Furthermore, Motions was a difficult series of exercises that could bring the participant to a heightened state of personal points of contact with their mind and body outside of what is familiar to them “during years of taming” (Grotowski, 1980, p.260). Like Gurdjieff, Grotowski focuses his attention on using certain exercises that would disengage a person’s tendency towards thinking and acting on a mechanical level. Accordingly, we are reminded of Gurdjieff’s teachings from this analogy about consciousness by Grotowski:

[...] we habitually prepare ourselves for going to sleep. We look for the bed, we cover it, we disrobe, we prepare an alarm clock, and when we wake up, we are already thinking about what we should do next. In this way we liquidate a time of awakening.
(Grotowski, 1980, p.267)

Grotowski’s depiction of a specific state of consciousness that is reactive in nature and reference to an “alarm clock” are remarkably similar to Gurdjieff’s discussion about the role a “teacher” plays in helping guide an individual towards Gurdjieff’s teachings of the “Fourth Way” that leads the individual away from their mechanical state of existence:

[...] rules can never be either easy, pleasant, or comfortable [...] otherwise they would not answer their purpose. Rules are the alarm clocks which wake the sleeping man. But the man, opening his eyes for a second, is indignant with the alarm clock and asks: can one not awaken without alarm clocks? (Ouspensky, 1949, pp.225-226)

Beyond mere coincidence, the aforementioned examples of exactly the same terminology used by both Gurdjieff and Grotowski (eg, sleep, wake, and alarm clock) would quite plausibly indicate that Grotowski integrated portions of Gurdjieff's concepts into his own work. Furthermore, both Gurdjieff's and Grotowski's work focused attention on the primacy of "essence", or what could also be called the "authentic" self. According to Richards, in discussing his collaboration with Grotowski in *Art as Vehicle*, essence is an aspect of our inner being which is disassociated from what has been learned and practised from external influences. (2008, p.138)

Grotowski's work involved tapping into essence through a process of "deconditioning". He recognized what is "mechanical" is a form of "sleep", or habit, that does not allow for an organic flow of impulses that are uniquely owned by the individual. As such, Grotowski focused much of his attention in his post-theatre phases of research on the rediscovery of essence, through techniques designed to work on one's self. In the same way, Gurdjieff referred to "sleep" as being "mechanical" in that many of an individual's actions and feelings are governed by the same forces of habit that Grotowski speaks about.

Additional to the potential link in the works of Grotowski and Gurdjieff as it relates to the similarities between *Movements* and Grotowski's *Motion* exercises, there are other theoretical concepts within Grotowski's research that suggest a strong Gurdjieffian signature pattern as well. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Gurdjieff's practical work centred around using ancient traditions as a technique to bring about self-transformational changes in the participant, traditions which included the Sufi teaching of the "Fourth Way" and its relationship to energy transformation. An examination of key aspects of Grotowski's *Art as Vehicle*, in particular, demonstrates a clear conceptual parallel between Gurdjieff's writings and Grotowski's final stage of research.

In *Art as Vehicle*, we see a strong indication of Gurdjieff's metaphysical teachings having been applied as a theoretical framework for Grotowski's work. To begin with, the premise of *Art as*

Vehicle was based on an “understanding that the body is not severed from other aspects of the doer’s being” (Laster, 2012, p.223). Although the body itself had always been the focal point of Grotowski’s past performative work, the element of corporality in Art as Vehicle is used as a kind of conduit for an internalized “flow of movement” that simultaneously affects the body, mind, and emotions of the doer. (Richards, 1996, p.433) Similar to Gurdjieff’s “Fourth Way” teaching, Grotowski sought to engage and harmonize all of what Gurdjieff refers to as the human being’s “centres”. As such, for Grotowski, the ancient songs were used in a technique to “work on the body, the heart, and the head of the ‘doers’” (Schechner, 1996b, p.480).

In the course of harmonizing these “centres”, there is a transformation of energy in which the vibratory nature of the ancient songs produces energy along a descending and ascending line of quality, which Grotowski referred to as a “vertical ladder”:

Art as Vehicle is like a very primitive elevator: it’s some kind of basket pulled by a cord, with which the doer LIFTS himself towards a more subtle level of energy [...] when I speak of the image of the primordial elevator, and therefore Art as Vehicle, I refer to verticality—we can see this phenomenon in categories of energy: heavy but organic energies [...] and other energies, more subtle [...] the question of energy is to pass from a so-called coarse level [...] to a level of energy [...] more subtle.

(Nascimento, 2008, p.147)

In Grotowski’s Art as Vehicle concept of “verticality”, energy is transformed from a low, coarse form to a higher, more subtle form, by way of an elevator. Likewise, Gurdjieff spoke in terms of ascending and descending lines of energy among octaves along a “ladder”. Comparing the transformation of energy through what Grotowski referred to as a process of “verticality” to Gurdjieff’s teaching, we find that Gurdjieff explains that the energetic quality from octaves that govern motions in the universe are ascending and descending lines of energy similar to a “ladder”. In

other words, Grotowski and Gurdjieff spoke in synonymous terms and described the same phenomena. In his essay entitled “Gurdjieff, or the Metaphysics of Energy”, Jacob Needleman wrote:

For Gurdjieff, humanity’s role on earth, like that of all living beings, is as a transformation of energy, principally the energy of the sun and the planetary worlds. The diagram of the ‘ray of creation’ [...] depicts the place of the earth as a rung on a ladder of energies ascending and descending [...] this movement of energy, according to Gurdjieff, obeys the law of developing motion [...] according to this law, every developing process passes through steps between a higher or finer quality of energy and a lower or coarser quality. This notion of a ladder of energies was generally more recognized in traditional teachings than it is today. (Needleman, 1996, p.70)

Gurdjieff’s description of awakening and energy transforming and refining in an upward movement along a ladder of octaves echoes loudly in Grotowski’s work which employed traditional rituals and music to achieve an awakened state of consciousness and transformation via a primitive elevator to lift oneself to a higher energy. It would appear that strong evidence exists for link between the two, suggesting that Grotowski was influenced by Gurdjieff’s Sufi-inspired work.

What further attaches Grotowski’s work to that of Gurdjieff’s is his emphasis on the oral transmission of knowledge. Like Gurdjieff, Grotowski relied mostly on the use of oral presentation to communicate his theories because “He disliked putting his thoughts on paper” (Slowiak and Cuesta, 2007, p.55). This is particularly true when one considers that Grotowski never used or produced written materials as a teaching tool. As Richard Schechner observed, “Grotowski lives and works within the oral tradition [...] One finds Grotowski not in a collection of texts, a film vault, or anywhere other than in the people he engaged with, poured himself into” (Schechner, 1996b, p.468).

What is of particular importance to the non-textualised nature of Grotowski's work, as pointed out by Schechner, is that Grotowski preferred to pass his knowledge on without the use of written materials. As such, there was a chain-of-custody-like transference of his ideas that would be orally communicated to a select few. Thus, information would be passed on from teacher to the student, who would themselves become a "master teacher" conveying Grotowski's work to a select few others. (Schechner, 1996b, pp. 468, 469, and 470) This method of instruction is not unlike that of Gurdjieff, who also taught a handful of individuals within his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, who would then in turn function as teachers of his work. In his last conversation with Jeanne de Salzman, the "chosen heir" of his teachings, Gurdjieff stresses the importance of maintaining a group of people who would be responsible for preserving and communicating his ideas:

The essential thing, the first thing, is to prepare a nucleus of people capable of responding to the demand which will arise...so long as there is no responsible nucleus, the action of the ideas will not go beyond a certain threshold. (Schechner, 1996b, pp.471-472)

For Salzman, "Gurdjieff was the teacher, the master" whose objective at his institute was to have his work "carried on by an 'esoteric inner circle'" (Sinclair, 2005, pp.26-27). Grotowski, as already mentioned, followed the same mode, for the same purpose, as Gurdjieff in the transmission of his theories and practical work. Crucially, the "master teacher" is of primary importance to both Grotowski and Gurdjieff in terms of its connection to their respective work and emphasis on oral tradition. For example, referring to the collaborative role Thomas Richards played in *Art as Vehicle*, Grotowski states:

The nature of my work with Thomas Richards has the character of 'transmission'; in the traditional sense – in the course of an apprenticeship, through efforts and trials, the

apprentice conquers the knowledge [...] from another person, his teacher. (Grotowski, 1993, in Schechner, 1996b, p.468)

We find that the teacher-student relationship, being central to oral transmission, was one of Grotowski's main tools used in his practical, as well as theoretical, research which emphasized one-on-one interaction between himself and his collaborators. The connection between non-textualised communication and personal points of association in Grotowski's approach to teaching is also spoken about by James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta: "Grotowski insisted that his knowledge be transmitted through direct contact. One to one interaction. He privileged the oral tradition, especially a direct master-apprentice relationship" (2007, p.42). With this in mind, this interpersonal relationship, which is a characteristic of oral transmission, serves a practical purpose, which is similar to Grotowski's "master-apprentice relationship". Similarly, Gurdjieff elaborates:

Personal directions can only be individual. In this connection again a man cannot find his own chief feature, his chief fault, by himself [...] the teacher has to point out this feature to him and show him how to fight against it. No one else but the teacher can do this. (Ouspensky, 1949, p.226)

Recalling Gurdjieff's Movements, his Stop Exercise in particular, it was necessary for there to be guidance in performing this exercise. It could not be performed without someone giving a command to freeze in the course of practising a movement. In fact, every aspect of his practical work was personally directed by Gurdjieff who acted in the capacity of a "master" teacher objectively observing the Movements participants' spiritual development on an individualized basis. This functional aspect of Gurdjieff's work is consistent with his Sufi-based knowledge and follows the same formula for the initiation process within esoteric schools:

As for initiation in Sufism, this consists in the transmission of a spiritual influence [...] and must be conferred by a representative of a 'chain' reaching back to the Prophet. In most cases it is transmitted by the master who also communicates the

method and confers the means of spiritual concentration that are appropriate to the aptitudes of the disciple. (Burckhardt, 2008, p.7)

It is not only the role of a “master” to provide guidance in the proper way to perform a specific set of spiritual-based activities. It was also the responsibility of the teacher to pass his knowledge on so there would be a living, unbroken “chain” of wisdom memorized orally, and transmitted from one person to the next. This was one of the primary objectives in Grotowski and Gurdjieff’s use of oral tradition, a central component paralleled in their respective work.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to further examine Sufism’s potential influence on Grotowski’s theories and practical work. Some observers of Grotowski’s research have suggested there are similarities between Grotowski’s work, and the spiritualist G. I. Gurdjieff’s teachings, which were founded on the cosmological principles of Sufism. It was necessary to use an approach that could test the validity of this premise by adopting a comparative examination, drawing parallels between Grotowski’s research and Gurdjieff’s teachings. In doing so, it was first demonstrated that Gurdjieff relied on Sufism as his primary source in the development of his teachings. Secondly, it was demonstrated that there are elements in Grotowski’s research that are strikingly similar to Gurdjieff’s practical and theoretical work.

One particular unit of analysis used to establish Gurdjieff’s possible influence on Grotowski’s research was an examination of Gurdjieff’s Movements/sacred gymnastics and Grotowski’s Motion exercises. Both exercises were structured to be physically and mentally rigorous, with the purpose of bringing the participant to a heightened state of awareness of their own “body rhythms”. Additionally, the central concept of “efforts” was used by both Grotowski and Gurdjieff to explain how the degree of physical and mental force exerted from their respective exercises would eliminate

“mechanical” or “habitual” ways a person reacts physically and mentally. Thus, both the Movements and Motions focused on connecting the individual to their “essence”. It was also pointed out that the notion of “efforts”, used by Gurdjieff to explain a central component of Movements, was a principle of spiritual enlightenment found within Sufi ontology.

In addition to drawing a parallel between Gurdjieff’s and Grotowski’s practical work, I also demonstrated that there appear to be theoretical aspects of Grotowski’s work which strongly resemble some of Gurdjieff’s central esoteric teachings. For example, Grotowski’s idea that ancient traditional ritual could be used as a technique to simultaneously impact “the body, heart”, and the “head” of those participating in his research is theoretically similar to Gurdjieff’s use of sacred Movement exercises that were intended to harmonize the human being’s “mind”, “emotions”, and the “physical body”. This balancing of one’s “centres”, which Gurdjieff called the “Fourth Way”, is also a Sufi concept of the same name, used to promote spiritual self-development. Again, Gurdjieff’s Fourth Way teaching is very similar to Grotowski’s use of ancient traditional ritual that sought to achieve the attunement of the individual’s centres.

In the process of harmonizing one’s centres, there is also a transformation of energy that takes place, which Grotowski and Gurdjieff describe as “ascending” and “descending” in nature. Examining this key concept of energy transformation, Grotowski specifically explains this phenomenon of internalized activity in the same way as does Gurdjieff. While Gurdjieff describes this occurrence as being like a “ladder” that is related to his Sufi-inspired notion of the “law of octaves”, Grotowski sees the transference of energy as being like a “vertical ladder”.

Taking these parallels into consideration, it can be suggested that there is a practical and theoretical nexus that would suggest some aspects of Grotowski’s research were connected to his knowledge of Gurdjieff’s Sufi-based teachings. This is not to say, however, that Grotowski’s research was motivated by a conquest for spiritual enlightenment, as was the case with Gurdjieff’s

work with Movement exercises. Grotowski's later phases of research focused on ancient traditional sources that were spiritual in nature that could have a "direct impact" on the development of one's "essence" and energy transformation, in a way that had no religious objective. However, since the focus of Grotowski's attention was using elements of ancient ritual as source techniques for his research, it is quite plausible that Gurdjieff's esoteric teachings would have been appealing to advancing Grotowski's work, as has been suggested by discussing the aforementioned parallels.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding Grotowski's "aversion to 'interpretation'" (Salata, 2014, p.7), his interviews and writings have stimulated a large body of research in an attempt to define his influences and better understand the genesis of his work. Despite initial scepticism from some people about my research question, I felt there was sufficient information to pursue this thesis on the basis of preliminary findings that supported my hypothesis that certain aspects of Sufism were a significant source of inspiration for Grotowski. Over the course of my research, I have discovered additional sources and materials to confirm and strengthen my initial hypothesis. It is with confidence that I can affirm the strong presence of Sufi-based thought and practices in Grotowski's work. However, because of Grotowski's reluctance to name his preferred influences I can only speculate whether he intentionally drew from Sufism for his work, or whether the striking similarities are merely coincidental. All the same, this thesis has demonstrated that Grotowski was significantly influenced by Sufi thought and practices, as evidenced by his travels, contacts, techniques and ideas.

In this conclusion, the central findings with respect to the research question are summarised and general conclusions are made based on the findings of the materials presented in the thesis. Additionally, both the strengths and limitations of this thesis are taken into consideration and suggestions for further research are presented.

Approach to Thesis Method and Design

The sources and materials presented in this thesis centred on the degree to which Grotowski's theoretical and practical work was substantially influenced by components of Sufi Islam. As a qualitative and descriptive study, this thesis cannot pretend to prove causation, at best correlation. Many other writers have looked at Grotowski's influences, but none has begun with the premise that Sufism was a significant source. All students and scholars who are familiar with Grotowski's work agree that his research centred on transcultural experimentations. Additionally, Grotowski insisted that he did not rely on a particular method or theory for his work. Nonetheless, through a

comprehensive reading of first- and second-hand sources, I have focused on the significant role Sufism may have played in Grotowski's work with a thorough compilation of its Sufi and Sufi-like aspects. This is not a comparative study as I did not set out to weigh Sufism's influence on Grotowski's work against the other sources of his inspiration. In other words, I did not attempt to diminish the influences of other ritual traditions in order to promote Sufism's importance. For instance, I showed that early in his career Grotowski was interested in Indian traditions, e.g., *Sakuntala*, the ancient Indian play based on a famous Indian myth was one of his first productions; also Haitian and Hindu traditions were used in Objective Drama, as well as the transcultural experimentation in Grotowski's Theatre of Sources phase of research.

Ancient traditional ritual was of particular interest to Grotowski's transcultural projects, so he went to and explored places where these traditions still exist, for instance, Iran, Haiti and regions of India, in addition to many others. As such, I examined the degree of importance Grotowski placed in using elements of ancient traditional ritual for his work. Based on the materials presented, I showed that Grotowski took certain elements of rituals found within ancient traditions that could be used as "tools" to conduct his performative and non-performative work with the human body. Grotowski's emphasis on spiritual traditions' rituals was an indicator in measuring the likelihood that Sufism was a potentially significant part of Grotowski's phases of research.

It appears that the major inspiration for Grotowski's overall research was his visit to Central Asia years before his travels to India, Haiti, Mexico, and other countries. It was in Turkmenia, a predominately Islamic region of Central Asia, where he saw a spiritual leader perform an esoteric type of "dance". It is worth mentioning in this conclusion, as it has been repeated several times throughout this thesis, that this experience would be the template for Grotowski's research approach to performance craft. This was explicitly stated by Grotowski himself, as well as others who were familiar with Grotowski's work.

The Aims of the Research Chapters

Chapter one: Biographical information and rebirth of theatre rituals

In the biographical information on Grotowski's background in chapter one, and the discussion of the ritual aspects of Grotowski's early theatre, the aim was to establish Grotowski's *early* interest in ancient traditions and therefore to explain his possible predisposition to learning about and adapting ritual practices such as Sufism into his work.

Chapter two: Ancient traditional ritual and thought in Grotowski's work

This chapter was as a practical examination of his previously demonstrated interest in traditional practices, specifically in the context of his plays. As well, I explored the theories that relate back to ancient traditional ritual such as his spiritual-based motifs of the Holy Actor and the Total Act, the origins of concepts like annihilation, and self-mortification that correlate with spiritual-based principles and practices.

Chapter three: Sufi roots in Grotowski's Art as Vehicle

With the likely audience in mind, the reader was probably already familiar with Art as Vehicle, so it was used as a framework to introduce Sufi aspects of Art as Vehicle, also as a continuation of the previous chapter which covered ancient rituals within the framework of Grotowski's work.

One aim of this chapter was to show how certain elements of his work matched up with Sufism, in terms of influences on this project. I also found direct references made by cited sources that there was a correlation between Art as Vehicle work and Sufism.

Chapter four: Sufism

This chapter covered Sufism more in-depth, both to reinforce the previous chapter's connection between Sufism and Art as Vehicle, and in preparation for the next chapter on Gurdjieff, the Sufi-inspired mystic. This helps forecast the applications of Sufi concepts in Gurdjieff's practical and theoretical work, for example verticality and spiritual centres that create transformation in

Gurdjieff's Fourth Way. This chapter references the Naqshbandi Sufis, whose whirling Dervishes, and famous poet Rumi, directly influenced Gurdjieff's teachings and practices.

Chapter five: Grotowski and Gurdjieff

The chapter on Gurdjieff was a comparative analysis with the aim of demonstrating that Grotowski used theories and methods in his work that are based on Sufism. Since Gurdjieff's work was based on Sufism, and Grotowski was aware of Gurdjieff's work, and there are remarkable parallels, it only follows that Sufism was likely a major factor in the total body of Grotowski's research projects. When taking the numerous assertions of a Gurdjieffian influence on Grotowski by authors such as Khetaguri, Flaszen, Michel de Salzman, Brook, Wolford, and Schechner, in combination with my descriptions of Sufi doctrines and practices and their reflections in both Gurdjieff's and Grotowski's practices, I sought to demonstrate a pattern of Sufi influences on Grotowski. The Gurdjieff factor is a major element in my argument that Sufism influenced Grotowski's work because the Sufism-Gurdjieff connection has already been well established, as has the Gurdjieff-Grotowski connection; therefore Gurdjieff is a conduit of Sufism's influence on Grotowski. Taken together with the previous four chapters, chapter five adds weight to my argument that Sufism was a significant influence on Grotowski's work.

Findings

Using both primary and secondary sources, such as existing commentaries, or scholarly examinations of Grotowski's work, I looked at the writings of some of the most prominent figures who wrote about and/or participated in Grotowski's work. I showed that they all saw a spiritual type quality to his work, and made direct references to aspects of Sufism in particular in describing his theoretical or practical work, or both, in every phase of his work, increasing in influence through his last phase. I also showed the initial signs of Sufi influence in Theatre of Productions, with more developed concepts in later Post-Theatre phases.

Theatre of Productions

There was an examination of the regions he had visited which were Islamic, or had Sufi influences, beginning with his earliest contact with Islamic culture in Central Asia, to India, Iran, Afghanistan. The same areas Grotowski visited were already visited by Gurdjieff. Most of these travels took place in his Productions phase, in the '50s and '60s, and these experiences inspired his theatre.

Even with Productions, the inspiration came from his contact in Askhebad with Abdullah the mime, amidst a major Sufi centre. Everything in Productions launched from there, including the focus on the body and the minimization of text. He even cited Abdullah and his time in Central Asia as a reference point for his theatre work.

Sufi influences can be found in Grotowski's earliest stage of work. In his 1968 book, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Grotowski describes the "total act" as the revealing of one's being by peeling away one's layers of personality and annihilating one's ego. I showed that this resembles the Sufi concept of renunciation to achieve a spiritual state of transformation.

Additionally, here was the first appearance of concepts like intense trance-like concentration to achieve organicity in Grotowski's work. I parallel this to Sufism, wherein trance is a central component of psycho-physical activity.

Paratheatre

This stage saw a change in intent, with a corresponding change in approach. In the progression away from theatrical performances for the benefit of a group (spectators/audience), Grotowski began work on transforming the individual ("actor/doer"). This was akin to Sufi dervishes who do not perform for the benefit of spectators, but rather use the dervish as a technique to transform themselves. Similarly, Grotowski employed this technique and others to enable the actor to access the fundamental truth buried within their core.

As I noted, Schechner's earliest attribution to Sufi elements came in the late 1970s, just before the next phase. It was at this time when he first noted Sufi-inspired movements, accompanied

by song and chant. He also comments that these were still “participatory events”, but instead of “encounters” and “meetings” they emphasised the rediscovery of old “‘sources’ of performativity”.

Theatre of Sources

In this stage, Grotowski conducted research into various cultures’ traditional ritual techniques. Sufism was one of these sources, alongside others. Indeed, Grotowski specifically named Sufi Dervish techniques as one of his source techniques.

Objective Drama

Here, Grotowski deepened his investigation of Sufi techniques when he invited a Mevelvi Sufi practitioner to train participants by incorporating Sufi songs and texts.

During this time, Grotowski developed his Motions exercises, which closely mirror Gurdjieff’s Movements. Both use intense exercises to waken the body from a default state of sleep in order to achieve self-transformation. This is based on the Sufi technique of the whirling dervishes; whereby physical activity enables spiritual enlightenment.

Art as Vehicle

An entire chapter was devoted to the Sufi influences in this stage, which was a continuation of Grotowski’s previous stages. The aim of this chapter was to demonstrate a more direct link between Sufism and Grotowski’s work. Chapter two of this thesis provided fewer clues to Sufism’s influence on Grotowski’s research, whereas Art as Vehicle shows a stronger correlation between Sufism and Grotowski’s work. Similar to Sufi ritual practices like *dhikr* and the *sama* ceremonies, Art as Vehicle employs listening to vibratory ritual songs, chanting of mantras, and whirling, all with the goal of achieving “energy transformation”. In Art as Vehicle Grotowski used traditional Haitian songs as a research technique to achieve a “vertical” line of energy in a person’s inner core.

Grotowski referred back to the Bauls of West Bengal, India, as his point of reference in his use of traditional Haitian songs in Art as Vehicle because the Bauls used mystical songs as part of a psycho-physical activity that Grotowski observed while in India. The Haitian songs Grotowski employed in Art as Vehicle had the same psycho-physical impact internally as the Bauls’, but I

highlighted the case of the Bauls' influence on Grotowski because Baul psycho-physical activities exclusively originated in Sufism, not any of the other sources upon which Baul religion or culture is based. With this in mind, I provided a closer historical examination showing that the Bauls' psycho-physical practices were directly borrowed from the Sufis when the Muslims invaded India and infused Islamic culture into Indian society. Besides Sufism, several other religions and cultures also influenced the Bauls, but only the Sufi influence contains the psycho-physical dynamic that so impressed Grotowski and inspired his work at a fundamental level from his core notion of selfhood. From my historical examination of the roots of Baul traditions, I traced the psycho-physical connection along a Sufism-Baul-Grotowski link, and I thus attributed the source of Grotowski's Baul-inspired psycho-physical work to Sufism.

With the Bauls' connection to Sufism in mind, there were many references from different sources that what occurred in Grotowski's Art as Vehicle research was similar to Sufism. Therefore, the Bauls of West Bengal, India, whose psycho-physical activities were adapted from Sufi practices, were quite plausibly the template for his work in this phase. Additionally, the reason why he was so impressed by the Haitian songs was that they reminded him of the internal impacts from Bauls' Sufi-based psycho-physical practices. Therefore, Sufism's psycho-physical principle of transformation from within, achieved through deliberate and systematic physical activities, was the fundamental basis for Grotowski's psycho-physical inner work for producing visible physical results. Especially when Grotowski's interest in the Bauls' songs and dances is taken into consideration, it's apparent that the Sufi connection underlies Grotowski's work on inner transformation. Grotowski believed that the potential for inner transformation exists within our essential, primeval human code and he wanted to bring back or reawaken what has been forgotten.

Gurdjieff

Triangulating Sufism with Gurdjieff and Grotowski showed striking similarities that could be the result of Grotowski's travels to Sufi-influenced Iran and Central Asia and his probable

knowledge of Gurdjieff and Sufism. Citing parallels between Gurdjieff's and Grotowski's work supported what other figures have said or described as possible Sufi-based ideas and practices. In other words, the Gurdjieff factor in Grotowski's work – i.e. Grotowski's connections to Gurdjieff from his awareness of Gurdjieff and from his close collaboration with followers of Gurdjieff from early on, in his Theatre of Productions phase – supports the argument that Grotowski's work was inspired by Sufism. Combining the evidence by Flaszen (2007), Michel de Salzman (1996), Brook (Schechner, 1996b, p.478), and Wolford (1997a, p.286) of a Gurdjieffian influence on Grotowski's work with the clear Sufi elements of Gurdjieff's work cements my other findings in this thesis of a strong Sufi influence on Grotowski's work. The Gurdjieff connection makes an even stronger case for Sufi influence on Grotowski's Productions and Post-Productions work.

Strengths of This Thesis

Strong Sufi-connections contribute to the robustness of this thesis. Demonstrations of Sufi elements in Grotowski's work by authors such as Schechner, Wolford, Brook, and Flaszen provided a launching point from which to deepen the investigation, reinforced by Grotowski's own mentions of Sufi practices and striking similarities to Gurdjieff. Additionally, Grotowski's itinerary of travels to Islamic countries and regions and his notable secrecy about his experiences with Kurdish Sufis and Dervishes in Kurdistan provide particular weight to the thesis.

Limitations of This Thesis

Some limitations of this study are the result of language differences and the nature of the material available to us. Language differences and lack of translations presented one limitation for this thesis. Some primary and secondary materials were only available in Polish, Italian, Portuguese, or Spanish, which thus reduced my access to some information. Of course, a large number of sources had been written in or translated to English, and in one case I was able to translate an Arabic source, which enabled me to gather enough materials without excessive gaps in information.

My incomplete access to information was more so due to Grotowski's reluctance to name his influences, often remaining even more silent on the more significant topics. As Schechner writes, Grotowski "resists 'naming,' reducing to discourse" (Schechner, 1996b, p.483). Because he was concerned with the objective, discrete, elemental ancient practices that have survived through the ages preserved within traditional rituals, he avoided using culture-specific terminology as he felt that it risked subjectivity, inaccuracy, and interpretation. In a personal correspondence to Osinski, Grotowski wrote that he was losing faith in the ability of words to sufficiently capture significance and meaning:

[...] something is changing in me and I increasingly perceive some devaluation of words, that is, that words are insufficient to express what is important, and, in many cases, I prefer to communicate through silence, gesture, short allusion, rather than by, say, ideas formulated through words. (Grotowski, 1966, in Osinski, 2014, p.46)

This reminds us of Abdullah the mime who used his body to express "the whole world" through only bodily movements, not relying on any language. Another recollection comes to mind of Grotowski's reputation for shredding and rearranging the lines of plays he produced; his irreverent approach to text and words was evident from his Productions phase. His preference for the oral tradition over the written word is well known, as well as his fondness for the apprenticeship-model of transmission of knowledge. Therefore most of his values and beliefs survive in the writings of colleagues, participants, and witnesses of his work.

Schechner also writes that Grotowski was inclined to privacy and "reclusivity" (was this possibly a result of growing up under Communism, a repressive regime which refined his skills of "Ketmanship"?). Grotowski himself guarded his speech, thus limiting my access to primary sources of information on his work:

Grotowski has never been open about his work. He is a reclusive person, and increasingly so. Unlike most theatre workers who seek a home in the capitals — New

York, Tokyo, Paris, London, Warsaw, Moscow — Grotowski works in out-of-the way places: Opole and later Wroclaw, a barn in a far corner of the Irvine campus of the University of California, a village outside Pontedera, Italy. Along with this reclusivity is a reticence in speaking directly about his work. [...] But from what Grotowski says in talks or interviews (his favored modes, placing him in an oral tradition) as well as from the writings of participants in his recent work, a fairly consistent picture of his recent work emerges. (Schechner, 1993, pp.245-246)

Indeed, although Grotowski did not detail or elaborate on all of his activities and contacts during his travels and workshops, preferring to keep some things private or obscure, it is still possible to glean information from his talks or interviews as well as secondary sources, such as participants who had close contact with him.

Despite a review of Grotowski's first-hand materials, talks and writings, and second-hand sources from colleagues and writers, I was left with several questions. What did he do in Iran and Central Asia? Aside from the scant paragraph's-worth of information on his stay with a Baul family in India, what else did he do and learn there? When he witnessed the Bauls' psychoenergetic exercises, which he credits for their use in *Art as Vehicle*, did he know that the Bauls had been heavily influenced by the Sufi missionaries who came in the Turkish invasion of the 1200s? Would Grotowski have preferred not to know about the historical, political, and social dimensions of the adoption of Sufi mystical practices by the Bauls, choosing instead to focus on the concrete, discrete elements of practice? Did he intentionally seek out the same regions Gurdjieff visited to find more Sufi inspiration, or was it a coincidence?

Furthermore, Grotowski clearly mentioned being impressed by the "old Afghan man named Abdullah" he met "During [his] expedition in Central Asia in 1956, between an old Turkmenian town Ashkhabad [Ashhabat] and the western range of the Hindu Kush Mountains", but he did not relate him to Sufism. (Osinski, 1986, p.18) Using independent geographic and historical sources, I

was able to infer that Abdullah was a Sufi spiritual leader because the town of Ashkhabad is within a region of Sufi shrines and temples and because the actions Grotowski described match Sufi practices. In other words, the close proximity was considered sufficient evidence to make an educated guess based on the triangulation of information to fill in gaps in Grotowski's reports.

As he did not elaborate much on these travels and his thought processes, I really do not know for certain whether he consciously selected for Sufi practices in his work. Indeed, he did hand-pick Sufi masters for his Objective Drama and Art as Vehicle work, alongside ritual masters of other cultures, so I know that he consciously intended for Sufism to play at least a proportionate role equal to other traditions. Perhaps he did not focus on or target Sufism to the extent that Gurdjieff did, but the products of Grotowski's work do reflect the undeniable presence and prominence of Sufi and Sufi-inspired ideas, consciously or unconsciously sought out and implemented.

Considerations and Recommendations for Further Research

To sufficiently research the importance of Sufi traditions to Grotowski's practice, a great deal of creative thinking and time would be required. There has been no in-depth investigation of the specific cultural contacts he made during his time in Central Asia, Egypt, or Iran during the periods he visited. It might be interesting to examine the regions in greater detail that could provide a window into specific cultural practices and norms of these places Grotowski had visited.

Also, someone fluent in Kurdish could retrace Grotowski's steps in Iran to gather any possible existing stories of a Polish man who made such an impact on a shaykh that he was initiated into an order and allowed to participate in their secret rituals. Flaszen and Osinski have already told us that Grotowski remained silent about the Kurdish rituals he participated in Iran in 1967 and 1970, so no further information could be obtained by Western sources, but it is possible that tales of Grotowski, a Polish man taken for "a kinsman, [...] a quasi-sheikh – a spiritual master", are being passed along in Kurdish circles to this day. Given the amount of fascination Grotowski has sparked in the West, is it unreasonable to think he is a legend in the East, too?

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