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Towards a Burning Method: how might the contemporary performer build on the legacy of Grotowski's Total Act?

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contemporary performer build on the legacy of
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Abstract

Towards a Burning Method is a practical-theoretical investigation in the context of the contemporary theatre practice of Jerzy Grotowski's ideas, particularly the Total Act from the Theatre of Productions period. The study employs a practice of *confrontation* with Grotowski's ideas rather than *identification*, and text and practice are inseparable, interpenetrating each other. The method of *confrontation* (which is one of Grotowski's ideas) means, in the context of my research, a dialogue which through its dynamics creates a performative situation, stimulates the deepening of knowledge, and seeks its own answers.

The resulting performance *Burning Method - Four Lectures on Conditional Love* is also integral to the theoretical reflections, both representing and containing Grotowski's ideas and my response to them. Other practical activities include video notes of process, classes with students and workshops. One of the important results of the research is to broaden the understanding of what performance is, what kind of forms it takes in relation to the Total Act.

The thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter One introduces the cultural-historical context of the emergence of the Total Act, while the following chapters are a guide to understanding the Act in practice. The final chapter is entirely devoted to my

practical activities through a dialogue on contemporary performance, its lineage of origin and projective reflections for the future.

A reference point or *dialogue partner* on contemporary theatre is mainly Grotowski's book *Towards a Poor Theatre* but also Artaud's *The Theatre and its Double*. The research has helped me understand what performance work might result from the continuation of a distinctly masculine Polish Romantic tradition, and what new possibilities emerge from my perspective as a female performer and theatre-maker. In reading Grotowski (and confronting it in practice) I discover the potential for creative freedom, with the rigour of attention to the execution of ideas. At the same time, working with video projections I verify my thinking about the performer's body and space by finding another dimension of expression in the image in relation to the audience. I also believe that actor training from this tradition has no temporal, cultural or other limitations as its essence is the search for the *living impulse* in the performer's body.

Summing up the research is an opening for further explorations revealing the potential and currency of Grotowski's ideas for today.

Acknowledgment

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to A. E. Stawman

Introduction ¹

My need to confront the idea of the Total Act stems both from the roots of my training and the question if and how this kind of proposal for the actor can be relevant in contemporary performance creation and education.

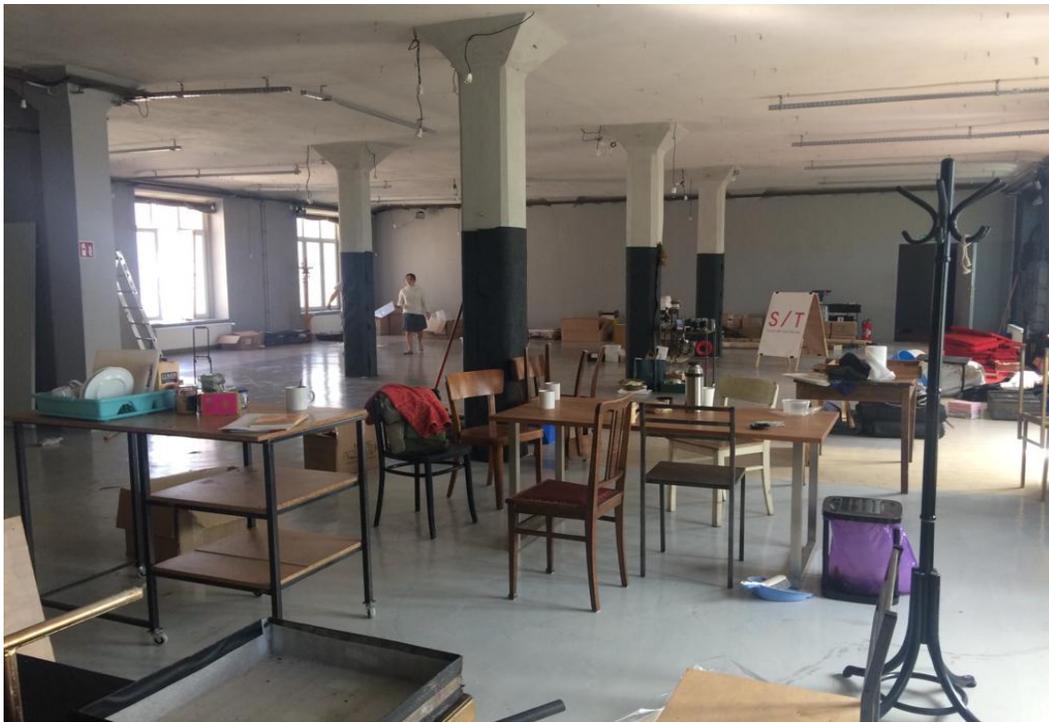
I had the opportunity to participate in one of the last possible projects of a theatre group whose aim was not a significant number of premieres but the education of the actor. In 1995 Piotr Borowski founded Studium Teatralne based in an old factory building in Lubelska Street in Praga-Południe, Warsaw. The group was active on a regular basis, working many hours a day with special attention given to the psycho-physical training of young adepts of theatrical art.

Borowski had just returned from the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in Pontedera (Italy) where he spent 7 years working regularly with Grotowski, Thomas Richards, Mario Biagini and others. The work of the young company Studium Teatralne was based on experiences and inspirations coming from Grotowski's research Art vehicle.² From the very beginning Borowski introduced a rigorous mode of work requiring full participation in terms of both presence and involvement, the

¹ All videos on vimeo are public. If you have any problems with logging in please use: login: magda.tuka@wp.pl password: magdatukavideo2023!!

² Art as vehicle is the final period of Grotowski's work. In the second half of the 1980s, after moving from the United States to Italy, another term – Ritual Arts – was used for a short time. The origins of the term can be found in Peter Brook's "Preface" to *Towards a Poor Theatre*, where he wrote: "For Grotowski acting is a vehicle". p.12.

principle of which was to confront one's own barriers and attempt to transcend them. Daily training sessions lasted several hours. This kind of model does not make money which is why Studium Teatralne was one of the last groups to be able to operate under such terms. I worked in Studium Teatralne, with no breaks, for 10 years (1996 - 2007). The training practised in the framework of Art as vehicle became my training.



Studium Teatralne - moving out, just before demolition of the building, photo
by Gianna Benvenuto, April 2020.³

³ I recognize most of the objects in this photo and the space is very familiar to me. This is where we used to hold training sessions and presentations of performances. Our work was also about taking care of/transforming the space itself, so every change, every appearance of a new object had its meaning.

After such a comprehensive and intensive period of working on the craft of acting, as it were, the third generation working on the basis of principles derived from Grotowski, there was a strong turn in my artistic life that challenged my previous stage language.⁴ Firstly, having found myself without the routine of daily training and rehearsals I started to practise Ashtanga Yoga (which I still do every day). I was aware that without the special fulfilment offered by movement combining energy, flow and precision it would be very difficult for me not to fall into overpowering melancholy - losing the deep relationship between the dedication of action to movement, breath and space at the level of daily practice. Secondly, I decided to completely change my surroundings and leave Poland. The geographical-mental distance gave me a lot of space for reflection on my past practice. Thirdly, I started working with the Slovenian company Via Negativa which has a completely different approach to the exploration process and which works very intensively on individual material. The importance of the VN approach is its focus on communicating to the audience via an "essential" creative message devised from the personal experience of the performers.

On these foundations, I began initiating my own projects. In 2012, with an intuitive trust in the creativity of opposites, I

⁴ I develop a description and analysis of my practice in the last chapter.

launched the organisation Ja Ja Ja Ne Ne Ne [named after Joseph Beuys's 1968 sound work *Ja Ja Ja Ne Ne Ne*] and devised a succession of performances with dancer Anita Wach, in collaboration with sound designer Opaean.

In summary, through the practice of a new movement technique (yoga), moving away from familiar places (including language), a very individualised search for creative material (VN), and collaboration with people from different fields (dance and sound), it became possible for me to create artistic expression at a certain distance from the Grotowski tradition.

From the perspective of my intensive work as an independent performer and teacher, I can see both the enormous positives that come from confronting Grotowski's lineage of work and the nagging questions that require deeper research. For this reason, the last chapter purely devoted to practice is written by two voices in me: the performer/artist/practitioner and the researcher/theorist (more about this approach later in the Introduction).

The need to investigate the roots of this kind of training led me to the very beginning of the activity of Grotowski and his company, namely the 1960s Theatre of Productions (1959 - 1969). Further intensified research narrowed my subject to identify the essence of that period which is the Total Act.

Jerzy Grotowski's (and his collaborators') Total Act as a proposal for the actor's work on craft is an extremely difficult challenge both to define and to translate into practical language (however, the fact that it is a challenge does not diminish the need to work on it - on the contrary). Grotowski himself repeatedly mentioned the importance of, and connection between, his work and the achievements of Konstantin Stanislavsky. However this connection is not simple, or obvious. To actors who have experienced Stanislavsky's method in their training, proposals to work within the framework of Grotowski's method (a term that will be explained later) may not necessarily seem like a clear next step - perhaps even the opposite.

Despite the very large number of texts on Grotowski's work and those written by Grotowski himself, it is very difficult to explain what the proposition of the Total Act actually is and how to apply it in the actor's practice. My research oscillates around this question and tries to give a picture of both the overview, the context and the practical experience confronting the Total Act.

Grotowski was an artist who reached his greatest achievements through, among other ways, a very close collaboration with a chosen actor, later a "performer". Thanks to unlimited trust, a deep level of confidence could emerge between the director and the actor, eliminating the barriers that stood in the way of

discovering a new quality of work. From the beginning, Grotowski's work was process-oriented and followed the logic of the process rather than assumptions or concepts. Thus, the meeting between Ryszard Cieślak (an actor at The Laboratory Theatre between 1961 and 1984) and Grotowski did not result in any immediate changes or discoveries, but was instead the outcome of many years of experimentation by the entire The Laboratory Theatre company (previously the Theatre of 13 Rows) in the field of acting and performance. However, it was the work on *The Constant Prince* (1965) that resulted in the formulation of the Total Act. The Total Act had found its embodiment. Or the embodiment formulated the Total Act.

In this performance, Grotowski and Cieślak created a new quality of an actor through which the work and the idea that goes with it found a place in the canon of European theatre alongside Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Brecht, Artaud. It is important to emphasise here that the idea is about the actor, not, for example, about new performance strategies, although the Act is also seen through the prism of the relationship with the spectator.

When talking about Grotowski today it is impossible to avoid contemporary critical voices originating from the *#Me Too* movement. The issue of unethical ways of working or the abuse of the position of power in the theatre is now also widely

discussed in the post-Grotowski context. However, I believe that it requires serious systematic research which is why I do not so much address this topic directly in my thesis but try, mainly through practice, to bring my voice into the discussion about patterns of behaviour derived from the patriarchal balance of power. As an educator, I feel responsibility coming from the role entrusted to me. I absolutely do not deny the issue of the seriousness of the work on craft and the need to work on quality, but never at the expense of anybody's personal suffering. In addition, what is problematic about Grotowski is the imitation (I write about this in subsequent chapters) of a certain aesthetic that was specific to the work of the Laboratory Theatre. Grotowski himself warned against this imitation [e.g. Grotowski, J. 1968. "The Actor's Technique", p.182]. Unfortunately, although he himself did not work personally with many actors, the path he chose for the dissemination of his ideas provoked a multitude of his successors to follow his aesthetics and method of working. This is all the more reason why I think it is important to look at (and confront) the origins, i.e. the circumstances of the formulation of the Total Act.

Additionally I work mainly as an independent solo artist. I try to confront the topic of gender mostly through my work e.g. creating ambiguously gendered characters. In Grotowski's

formulation of the Total Act, women were not directly involved. Grotowski was working mainly first with Zbigniew Cynkutis then with Ryszard Cieślak and the research had a very intimate, experimental character. And because the Total Act was singular, it occurred once (I write about it more later in the thesis, e.g. pp.95-96) and had a specific performer: Cieślak or Grotowski-Cieślak. There is a specific gendered relationship here, in that it involves two men, but I am interested more in the intimate working relationship between two people. My thesis does not actually go beyond this period, I am instead making a leap to the present and exploring my relationship to this proposal within the craft of acting. The subject of gender would have to go far beyond the specifics of the Act. Over time, as I have mentioned especially regarding Grotowski's successors, there has been a kind of cementing of roles, but this does not directly concern the Act. Here therefore I only refer to the emergence of patterns.⁵

⁵ In his confession/text, long-time collaborator of Grotowski Mario Biagini apologises to his colleagues for abusing his position of power but at the same time stresses that he himself did not experience this kind of behaviour from Grotowski. On the contrary, Grotowski warned him against a lack of patience during the rehearsal process. Biagini M. 2022. "Changes From the Workcenter to the Academy of the Unfulfilled." *TDR* 66:3 (T255) 2022.

"His [Grotowski's] work with them [actors] was both polarised and precise, yet I have never come across in an accusation that it was in any way exploitative. The same cannot be said, unfortunately, for many of those directors who were inspired by Grotowski's work to experiment with high levels of polarisation in the rehearsal space. As Ian Morgan remarks, inexperienced directors sometimes confuse the value of polarisation with licence to exploit (...)" Spatz Ben 2010 "This Extraordinary Power": Authority, Submission, and Freedom in Actor-Director Relationship". *ECUMENICA Performance and religion*. Volume 3, Issue 2. p. 53.

Who was this actor that Grotowski created? An actor who does/performs the Total Act, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say: an actor who is in a state of the Total Act through total self-giving. To describe the state of being in the Total Act, I will use - in further chapters - the criteria of the conditions that guide the actor on the path towards the Total Act, because defining things does not coexist with the spirit of process-oriented work and the organics of listening to intuition, which is very important here.

One of the main challenges is the absence of a formalised Grotowski method. We are dealing here with certain directions, principles and conditions necessary for the quality of the work, not with an answer to the question: how to act. Therefore, when I try to convey the values of this work to my students, I focus mainly on the strategy: via negativa - defining what this work is not, and creating the conditions that allow for maximum involvement in a high level of concentration and trust.

Grotowski is full of contradictions and constantly escapes rules, but principles such as:

- following the impulse of the body
- being aware of the continuity of the flow in movement
- being present with others and oneself
- understanding space through the body

- seeking freedom in the rigour of precision

can be a prelude to meeting with students. However, I rarely (only in advanced conversation with particularly interested students and in intensive courses) mention, or refer to the Total Act.

The complexity of the idea of the Act does not carry over into time-limited practical classes. In order to preserve its value it remains in the background as a creative context. Moreover, I believe (and in the following chapters I try to develop this thesis) that the Total Act happened only on the occasion of the work on *The Constant Prince* and was the result of many years of hard work combined with the text of Calderon-Słowacki's play of the same title.

The particular juxtaposition of the text about the total surrender to faith through the suffering of the body, whose wounds and futility are food for spiritual elevation, with the inner line of Ryszard Cieślak recalling the experience of first love, was a kind of illumination. Illuminating both in terms of the play itself and its performance, as well as its reference to the actor's art. It would be absolutely wrong to repeat this type of experience as some kind of recipe for the heights of acting. This lineage always requires discovery, and Grotowski repeatedly told us not to imitate his way, but to search for our own. However, the Total Act passed into the canon of ideas of

acting craft in the 20th century and there is a need to ask what it is, and whether it still has any value for us - performers, students and researchers - today. My research tries to answer this question.

My proposal will be, following Grotowski, not an attempt to recreate the Act, but identify the conditions and create a confrontation with it. This is a confrontation also with tradition which has its deep roots in Polish Romanticism, the question of freedom, faith, the myth of the man-hero-saviour. I will refer to this more in the Chapters: "Towards a Total Act" and "Towards the contemporary performer - practice of body in crisis". Additionally, as a female performer, I have to conduct a revision, mainly in practice, of the conventional image of the actor in this tradition represented primarily by the male body.

The thesis is divided into four chapters:

- "Towards a Total Act" - focusing on the circumstances of the work on the Total Act, also in a broad cultural-historical context, and trying to describe what the Act is
- "Body in Crisis - remembering Antonin Artaud" - by evoking the ideas of Antonin Artaud, analysing the function of trance and purification through a state of body crisis, I direct my research towards my own experiences as a performer

- "Towards an Empty Space" - mainly devoted to the theatrical space designed by architect Jerzy Gurawski, and how this space influenced the development of the actor's craft in The Laboratory Theatre, consequently towards a formulation of the Total Act and Grotowski's abandonment of the theatre in the context and role of myth, a mythological space
- "Towards the contemporary performer - practice of body in crisis" - is a record of practical experiences towards the idea of confronting the Total Act, including teaching examples and reflections on it.

The thesis also contains Appendices and Margins:

- Appendix No 1 - a brief description of the most characteristic aspects of Jerzy Grotowski's phases of work in the form of diagrams
- Appendix No 2 - a short interview with Jerzy Gurawski, author of the spatial designs in the Laboratory Theatre's productions
- Appendix No 3 - a note on the Reduta company as an important inspiration for Grotowski and his group regarding the assumptions of the work of the theatre as a laboratory for the study of the art of acting

- Margins are a brief reflection outside the mainstream of my research, but they contain important elements of my practice.

One of the biggest challenges for me as a performer has been writing about practical experience i.e. rehearsal, improvisation, the process of working [Chapter: "Towards a contemporary performer - practice of body in crisis"]. For a long time I could not unlock myself and start writing, translating the experience of working into text. What helped me was to discover the strategy Grotowski used to create his texts in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, namely to formulate a question and to conduct a kind of discourse stimulated by this question.

So, for the practical part, I decided to interview myself. The interview form allows me to distance myself and be free to formulate my thoughts. I have introduced two characters talking to each other, who, however, sometimes cannot be separated. This is:

- researcher Magdalena Stawman-Tuka (who mainly conducts the interview)
- and performer Magda Tuka.

In the last part of the chapter, the characters join together to create a performance: *Burning Method: Four Lectures on Conditional Love* [first presentation 22 June 2022, Jarman Building University of Kent].

It should be mentioned here what a Burning Method is. This somewhat poetic phrase came to me with the images of Ryszard Siwiec [1909 - 1968], a Polish history teacher, burning at the National Stadium in Warsaw [September 1968]. Siwiec, in an act of protest against the oppression of the regime then prevailing in Poland and the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia⁶ committed an act of self-immolation during a big public event celebrating the harvest festival. The contrast between the despairing, deracinated individual and the dancing crowd in the stadium contains an element of the quality of the Total Act. It is also telling that there was relatively little publicity about the event, despite the huge number of 'spectators'.

⁶ 20-21 August 1968 Warsaw Pact Countries The Soviet Union, Poland, Bulgaria and Hungary invaded Czechoslovakia to stop the Prague Spring liberalisation reforms. Source IPN [Institute of National Memory: <https://ipn.gov.pl/en>].



Ryszard Siwiec at X-Stadium, photo: IPN [Institute of National Memory], 1968.

In the programme to the performance *Burning Method - Four Lectures on Conditional Love*, the audience can read:

Burning Method - is a method of confrontation, elimination and intuition. The great challenge of the idea of the Total Act concerning the craft of acting must not stop at the level of accepted dogmas. It must be subjected to intensive verification in the context of modernity. As Burning Method is an operation on the living organism of the performer, it also contains the idea of totality. Thus it could be called: Total Burning Method. An important theme of this method is myth and identity. Following Grotowski's thinking, here I confront rather than identify with myths, constantly questioning any formal conclusion. Thus, it is a method of a process in itself.

(Magda Tuka).

The images of the burning Richard Siwiec are not used by me in any way during the performance, but they are an important internal point of reference.

The last chapter also contains directions and examples of my work as a teacher. I have been teaching for over 20 years, particularly intensively since living in the UK. I work on exercises/tasks and change them, adapting them according to new questions and students' needs. However, the pandemic has

influenced the design of the classes in a very significant way. As a teacher of physical theatre (in the broadest sense) this was a big challenge for me. My previous experience of working with a camera helped me a lot to understand how to work with projected image of the body and movement. For me teaching online was not just a pragmatic necessary substitute for studio classes in person but an extension of the language of communication (more on this in chapter four) and a different way of working/thinking about body-based performance.

Of course the subject of the Total Act requires simultaneous theoretical research and practical action. Very often they are almost inseparable, linked one to another. Therefore, in the more theoretical chapters there are fragments of documentation of my performance practice.

I believe that the field which I explore cannot be captured only in words.



Towards a Poor Theatre - the book cover, 1968.

The publication of *Towards a Poor Theatre* and the Total Act form a kind of entirety not just because of Ryszard Cieślak's image in the role of the Constant Prince on the cover. In this 1965 production, Grotowski-Cieślak, and the invaluable work of the whole company achieved a particular moment in the history of 20th-century theatre. The photographs of Cieślak have, with time, become icons. They are universally recognisable images (even among those who are not familiar with Grotowski's work). Following the iconic terminology, they carry something more than the record of a theatrical event. They are a point of reference. They contain a kind of comprehensive information intended for contemplation or reflection on a metaphysical level, referring to our being both individuals and members of a collective, including in the sense of humankind.

Jerzy Grotowski appeared on the international scene thanks to three very important events/ideas which mutually result from and permeate each other:

- the creation and publication of *Towards a Poor Theatre* (Holstebro 1968)
- the international premiere of *The Constant Prince* in Paris 21-25 June 1966 in the prestigious Paris Odéon as part of the 10th Theatre of Nations
- the formulation of the Total Act as a proposal in the field of acting craft.

I would like to begin my practical and theoretical analysis with a brief introduction to *Towards a Poor Theatre*, as it is an important source text for me as a researcher and also as a performer. It acts as a strong inspiration in thinking about contemporary performance. It is also Grotowski's first (and only) book publication, so it represents his theatrical explorations at the time, which had a fundamental influence on the development of his subsequent creative path.

Towards a Poor Theatre (Ku Teatrowi Ubogiemu) was published for the first time in Holstebro in 1968 by Odin Teatrets Forlag (the Polish edition was not published until 2007, by the Grotowski Institute in Wrocław, translated by Grzegorz Ziółkowski). It is a collection of very different texts, some operating almost as manifestos summarising the achievements of the Laboratory Theatre between 1959 and 1968. Grotowski himself is the main author of most texts, but there are also:

- two performance descriptions by Ludwik Flaszen ("Akropolis" and "The Constant Prince")
- one text about performance by Eugenio Barba ("Dr Faustus: Textual Montage")
- two texts-documentations of training (1959-1962 by Eugenio Barba, 1966 by Franz Marijnen)

- interviews between: E. Barba, N. Kattan, D. Bablet, R. Schechner, T. Hoffman - and Grotowski
- the author of the "Preface" is significant: Peter Brook.

On the one hand, this is a very selective compilation - many of the achievements by the Theatre of 13 Rows (from 1962, the Theatre Laboratory of 13 Rows became known as the Theatre Laboratory⁷), did not find a place in the book. On the other hand, this is a kind of artistic manifesto. The main ideas are often repeated in different texts and the repetitiveness has a kind of dramaturgical quality (a brief analysis of the individual texts from a creative perspective will be discussed later).

The person who needs to be mentioned while talking about the creation of *Towards a Poor Theatre* is the founder of Odin Teatret in Holstebro (Denmark) and the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) - Eugenio Barba. Between 1961 and 1964, as a young student of theatre directing (Theatre Academy in Warsaw), Barba became the assistant of Jerzy Grotowski (in Theatre of 13 Rows, Opole).

This meeting was of great importance to both of them. Thanks to Barba, the participants of the 10th ITI Congress (International Theatre Institute) had an opportunity to see Grotowski's work.

⁷The term 'laboratory' was officially added to the name of the Theatre of 13 Rows on 1 March 1962, shortly after the premiere of *Kordian* (premiere Opole, 14 February 1962) and during work on *Akropolis* (premiere Opole, 10 October 1962).

In June 1963, the 'famous bus' took, among others, Jean Julien (the director of Théâtre Des Nations, the festival which every year invited the best international productions to Paris) to Łódź to watch *Dr Faustus*. The performance made a great impression. With Julien's support, the first international success of The Laboratory Theatre came in 1966 with the performance *The Constant Prince* (Paris, Théâtre Des Nations Festival). In interviews, Barba often mentions a kind of responsibility for looking after Grotowski in his first years of international recognition. Thanks to him and Odin Teatret, the first publication of *Towards a Poor Theatre* happened.

Barba reflects in his autobiographical book *Land of Ashes and Diamonds* about his experiences working with Grotowski on the book: "It became an arduous and complicated project" (Barba, E. 1999. p.98). He mentions enormous difficulties, both in working on the text itself (hours spent on translating each sentence) and in selling the first edition. The Odin Teatret team had to borrow significantly to publish 5,000 copies in English and the book was not an immediate success. The decision to publish it in English was dictated by the strategy of reaching a wider audience, which in effect was to help Grotowski grow his international network. Moreover, this was a crucial moment in the formulation of Grotowski's new theatrical direction. Barba recalls:

It was clear there had been a shift in Grotowski's priorities. In Opole, his thoughts were concentrated on the construction of the performance as a 'secular' ritual and the psychic and emotional consequences it must have on the spectator. He used the archetype as a common substratum and point of encounter between actors and spectators, and dialectic of apotheosis and derision as a tool to revive a common nucleus of experiences. He spoke of 'theatre magic', of the actor-shaman, capable of extraordinary feats. The supremacy of the actor was accentuated by the introduction of the training. (...) Now the central concern had become the actor's 'total act' and the process by which it was achieved.

(Barba, E. 1999. pp.98-99).

"Poor Theatre" as a term was coined by Ludwik Flaszen [1930-2020] literary director at The Laboratory Theatre and Grotowski's *personal reviewer* whose essential contribution will be discussed in the next chapter in his article from 1962 on the performance *Akropolis*. Grotowski first used the term when writing an article in 1965 with the title "Towards a Poor Theatre"⁸.

⁸Before being published by Odin Teatret Forlag the article appeared in the monthly magazine *Odra*, Wrocław 1965, in *Kungs Dramatiska Teaterns Program*, Stockholm, 1965, in the bimonthly *Scene*, Novy Sad, 1965, T5, in *Cahiers Renaud-Barrault* Paris, 1966 T55 and in *Tulane Drama Review*, New Orleans, T35, 1967).

When seeking a title for the book it was important to include the essence of the change in Grotowski and his group's direction of exploration. It was less of a "dialectic of apotheosis and derision"⁹ and more of a poor theatre and via negativa (the term via negativa will be discussed in the next chapter). However, the title *Poor Theatre* itself sounded too static. The authors agreed that *Towards* set a dynamic tone, and also made reference to Edward Gordon Craig's *Towards a New Theatre* (1913).

The Book

What is *Towards a Poor Theatre*? - I ask myself this question from the perspective of a performer [Magda Tuka] as well as a researcher [Magdalena Stawman-Tuka].

Many times I have met with the view that *Towards a Poor Theatre* has made a significant impression on young adepts of acting, theatre making, directing:

- that it liberates thinking about what *real acting* can be
- that the [real] act on stage can connect the actor with his/her spiritual development
- that the encounter between actor and audience, through

⁹ An idea formulated by the renowned theatre critic Tadeusz Kudliński in a review of *Forefathers' Eve* [*Dziady*] at the Theatre of 13 Rows in an attempt to comprehend the fascinating duplicity of play and grotesque, on the one hand, and danger and seriousness, on the other, which characterised, in Kudliński's view, this performance.

Source:<https://grotowski.net/en/encyclopedia/dialectic-derision-and-apotheosis-dialektyka-osmieszenia-i-apoteozy>.

total devotion, will lead to a sense of community (communion), transformation, a crossing of the border towards the unknown, making the moment unique and theatre itself a significant place.

Through research both theoretical (the context in which the publication was written, Grotowski's work in the years 1959-1968, and references to contemporary theatrical ideas) and practical in the field of performance (creating text-inspired, performative situations in diverse forms), I will try to answer the question as to what is important to me in this publication. Looking back, I noticed that in moments of creative crisis or when having a feeling of emptiness and purposelessness in working on a performance, *Towards a Poor Theatre* was the text I returned to. Each time, different individual fragments spoke to me. It is one of those texts that is not affected by the ageing process. They are current (at least to a large extent), and worthy of confrontation. The theoretical (almost philosophical) side has always appealed to me much more than the exercise descriptions, but they do need to be considered together.



Eugenio Barba and Jerzy Grotowski in Odin Teatret, Holstebro 1972 -
"The Theatre's New Testament" is a text that created a special bond between
Grotowski and Barba.

"The Theatre's New Testament"

In both Polish (2007) and English (1968) editions we read in the introduction: "Eugenio Barba did this interview [with Grotowski] in 1964" (p.27). However, this conversation had a very controlled (and refined) progress. It is essentially a joint summary of many discussions which the directors held in Opole throughout Barba's 30 month apprenticeship. Often after rehearsals at the Theatre of 13 Rows, they would go either to

one of their apartments or to the town's bar. What was crucial from the very beginning (and which with time seemed to be unchanging), was the relationship between the roles that they assumed towards each other. Barba recalls: "Grotowski was twenty-eight, barely three years older than I, but I considered him my master from the day I decided to interrupt my studies at the theatre school in Warsaw to follow his work". (Barba, E. 1999. p. 33).

Thus, in the interview "The Theatre's New Testament" it is the master who answers the questions of his disciple, from the position of the worked-out certainty of the direction of a creative search, justified by everyday practice. The text was worked out in detail together before it was first published in Barba's book *In Search of a Lost Theatre* (1965 in Italy and Hungary).¹⁰

Another text by Barba is "Dr Faustus: Textual Montage". These are his rehearsal notes prepared in a rather systematic way, containing interpretations of individual scenes, the play text itself (and its translation), as well as the formulation of the most important directions of action, e.g.: "Scene 3. A monologue in which Faustus publicly confesses as sins his studies and exalts as a virtue his pact with the Devil." (Barba, E. 1968. p. 73).

¹⁰ Barba, E. 1965. *Alla ricerca del Teatro Perduto [In Search of a Lost Theatre]*. Padova: Marsilio.

The text has documentary value in its recording of the stage the work had reached by that time in the Theatre of 13 Rows. It was published first in *Tulane Drama Review* (New Orleans, T24, 1964) and then in *Alla Ricerca del Teatro Perduto* (Padova: Marsilio Editori, 1965). The author of the translation was Richard Schechner.

"Actor's Training (1959-1962)" is also documented by Eugenio Barba. The nature of this text may be somewhat misleading due to the introduction by Grotowski himself. It informs the reader that Barba's entry concerns the period of exercises at the Theatre of 13 Rows, which has undergone significant changes over time. Grotowski concentrates mainly on formulating these new changes and on the practice of defining the new direction of *via negativa*:

All exercises which merely constituted an answer to the question: "How can this be done?" were eliminated. The exercises now become a pretext for working out a personal form of training. The actor must discover those resistances and obstacles which hinder him in his creative task. (...), he must know what not to do, what obstructs him. By a personal adaptation of the exercises, a solution must be found for the elimination of these obstacles which vary for each individual actor. This is what I mean by *via negativa*:

a process of elimination.

(Grotowski, J. 1968. p. 101).

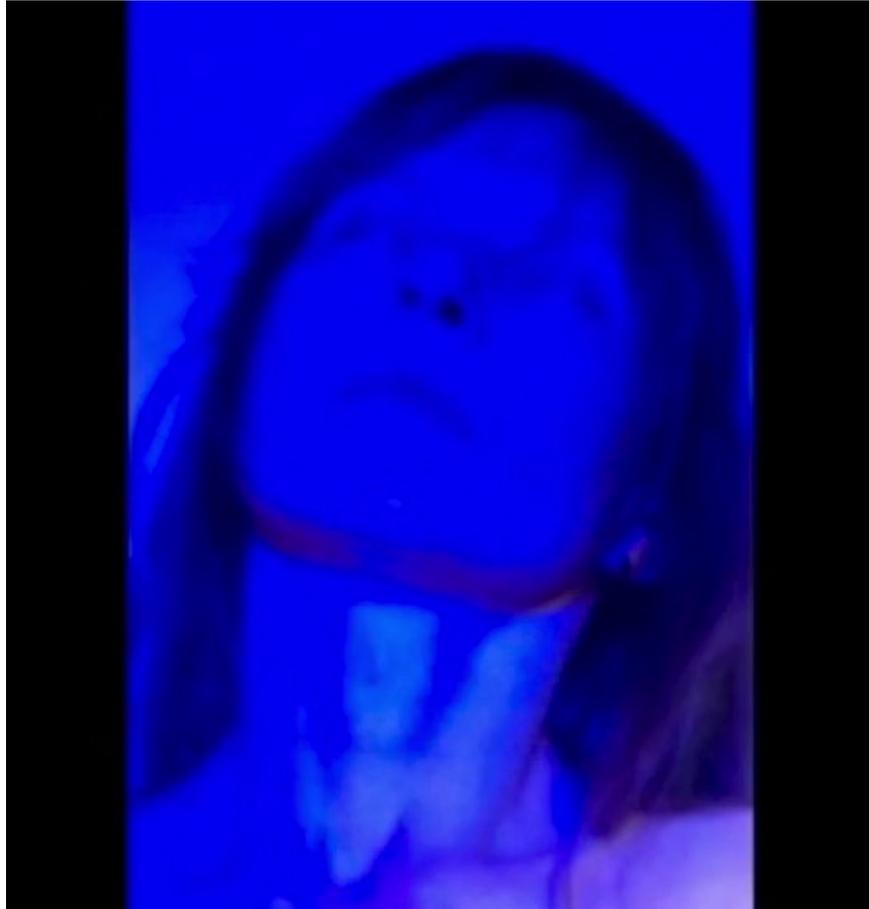
What is this very detailed record and its presence in the book for? Is it the ordering of notes to create a kind of basic database, an archive which becomes a starting point? In "Letter number 12" (from December 1964), Grotowski writes to the young director of Odin Teatret [Barba]:

You are right to revise our exercises. There is no ideal model, as you well know, but everything has to be in a state of continuous change. At the moment we too are going through a phase in the work which is different to that which you observed. Both the way of rehearsing *The Constant Prince* as well as the exercises, are very distant, and also different from what we did before.

(Barba, E. 1999. p. 138).

For many theatre practitioners who did not have direct contact with the Laboratory Theatre, the chapter on exercises had an instructive character which seems contradictory from the perspective of the process-oriented, individualised nature of the work. From my personal position as a practitioner, who had a chance to practise within this theatre tradition regularly, I believe that without the previous physical experience, use of a written record of exercises can lead to confusing conclusions

regarding their sources. Namely, it is impossible to learn the 'Grotowski Method' by using the text. On the other hand, it is possible, through individual experience, to refer to it.



Video note by Magda Tuka <https://vimeo.com/411070303> - one of the tasks in art school painting class is copying the works of old masters in order to understand the work process.

"Actor's Training (1966)" - were notes by Franz Marijnen from "Institut des Arts Spectaculaires" (INSAS) in Brussels made during a course led by Grotowski and Ryszard Cieślak in 1966. The change of the group's place of work (moving from Opole to Wrocław in 1964) was not only a matter of a new address. It also signalled a shift in the essence of the work itself, marked by a corresponding transformation of their name (1 September 1966) to The Institute for Studies of the Method of Acting - Laboratory Theatre. The name was an expression of the fundamental shifts that had taken place within the group in the period before and after the premiere of *The Constant Prince*.

It indicated that for Grotowski and his companions, methodical work on the art of acting and theatrical art carried out according to the principles applied in research institutions had become a more important objective than the preparation and presentation of further performances. The model that Grotowski referred to in this context was The Niels Bohr Institute in Copenhagen.

Grotowski, in his text "Methodical Exploration" is trying to put into words the essence of this transition (first publication, *Tygodnik Kulturalny*, Warsaw, 1967, No. 17) which focuses on the process of 'elimination', 'unlearning' - a via negativa. This is a very significant text in the context of research on the Total Act. Grotowski tries to express in quite a short text the

results of what were actually many hours of work with the company (especially with Cieślak). I will return to it in Chapter One. I do not regard it as a kind of manifesto, rather the precise search for a definition of discoveries that had the character of spiritual development.

In our opinion, the conditions essential to the art of acting are the following, and should be made the object of a methodical investigation:

a) To stimulate a process of self-revelation, going back as far as the subconscious, yet canalising this stimulus in order to obtain the required reaction.

b) To be able to articulate this process, discipline it and convert it into signs. In concrete terms, this means to construct a score whose notes are tiny elements of contact, reaction to the stimuli of the outside world: what we call "give" and "take".

c) To eliminate from the creative process the resistances and obstacles caused by one's own organism, both physical and psychic (the two forming a whole).

(Grotowski, J. 1968. p.96)

"The Actor's Technique" is an interview that Denis Bablet held with Grotowski after presentations of *The Constant Prince* at the 1966 Théâtre Des Nations (published in "Les Lettres Françaises"

in March 1967). This was undoubtedly a vital text due to the growing international interest in Grotowski and his work: "What then is the originality of your position in relation to these [Artaud, Brecht, Stanislavski] diverse conceptions?" - in answering the above question, Grotowski mostly repeats the ideas contained in "Towards a Poor Theatre" and "Methodical Exploration" since his main current interest at the time was: "the most important thing today is to rediscover the elements of the actor's art." (Grotowski, J. 1968. p.183).

In January 1966, Grotowski, together with Rena Mirecka (one of the founding members of the company), Ryszard Cieślak and Antoni Jahółkowski (an actor who worked with The Laboratory Theatre from the outset until his death in 1981), conducted a 10-day seminar at The Theatre School in Skara, Sweden. The participants in the workshop were mainly students. "Skara Speech" is the record of a lecture (despite the ban on any recording) that Grotowski gave at the end of a meeting with students (and which was subsequently edited during work on *Towards a Poor Theatre*). Grotowski takes on a direct, didactic tone. He sums up the experience of several days practical work, speaking about:

- the searching
- refining (exercises)
- growth (individuality) based on the research at that time into the method of elimination (via negativa)

- the score (precision)
- work on the role (referring to personal experience, intimacy)
- the sign (pure impulse)

I have said here several times that the actor must unveil himself, that he must release that which is most personal and always do it authentically. It is a sort of excess for the spectator. But you should not strive for this. Only act with your whole self. In the most important moment in your role, reveal your most personal and closely guarded experience.

(Grotowski, J. 1968 p.196)

- and finally the Total Act.



Video note: <https://vimeo.com/412482268>

Composed exercises for the individual experience of an actor - it all starts in the body: what is an impulse? - a true impulse.

The author of "Akropolis: Treatment of the Text" is Ludwik Flaszen. This is, on the one hand, a relatively detailed description of the performance, and on the other, an interpretation that justifies the search carried out by Grotowski and his company. It has been divided into parts related to:

- the reality of the performance
- costumes
- myths and reality
- poor theatre

- and comments on acting.

It was first published as an article in *Pamiętnik Teatralny* (Warsaw, 1964 No. 3). As a literary director (and as an active journalist and theatre critic), Flaszen had a much freer style of language than Grotowski, full of distinct associations which often had the effect of imposing a particular view of the work on the reader. Even in the fragment "the comments on acting", it is exceptionally rich and far from being technically dry:

the mixture of incompatible elements, combined with warping of language, brings out elementary reflexes. Remnants of sophistication are juxtaposed to animal behaviour. Means of expression literally "biological" are linked to very conventional compositions. In *Akropolis* humanity is forced through a very fine sieve: its texture comes out much refined.

(Flaszen, L. 1968. p.69).

Another text by Flaszen is "The Constant Prince", which was handed out to the audience on the way into the performance.

"He Wasn't Entirely Himself"

Grotowski's attitude to other contemporary theatre artists was generally uncompromising. Above all, he accuses them of being superficial and lazy in terms of perfecting their profession. The second half of the sixties in modern European culture was a return to, or discovery of, the spirit of Antonin Artaud

[1896-1948]. Grotowski often answered questions about the cultural heritage of the Laboratory Theatre and had a fairly established view on Artaud. He considered him to be a great visionary of the theatre, maybe even a prophet, but without any concrete proposal or methodology. Perhaps Artaud's vision could prove itself, or find its personification, through the degree of devotion (completeness), as well as by the rigour of form, but he had this tragic inner break that prevented him from action [in Grotowski's opinion]. Maybe the direction of the search that Grotowski was carrying out with the Laboratory Theatre, that is, the Total Act, could be seen as the fulfilment of this vision:

And yet when Artaud speaks of release and cruelty we feel he's touching a truth we can verify in another way. We feel that 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, and does not hold back before any obstacle set by custom and behaviour. And further when this act of extreme sincerity is modelled in a living organism, in impulses, a way of breathing, a rhythm of thought and the circulation of blood, when it is ordered and brought to consciousness not dissolving into chaos and formal anarchy - in a world, when this act accomplished through the theatre is

total, then even if it doesn't protect us from the dark powers, at least it enables us to respond totally, that is, begin to exist.

(Grotowski, J. 1968. p. 92).

I will explore this connection to Artaud more in Chapter Two.



Video note by Magda Tuka: <https://vimeo.com/414877950> -
work on the role never ends, when there are no more questions for the
character, a funeral should be arranged.

Two interviews from 1967 "Theatre is an Encounter" with Naim Kattan (during Expo 67 in Canada, published in "Arts et Lettres", Le Devoir, July 1967) and "American Encounter" with Richard Schechner and Theodore Hoffman (after a four week course for students at New York University's School of the Arts) summarise the essence of theatre as the value of the encounter. This is both in terms of the text with which the actors and, through the actors, the audience, confront themselves (here mainly in the interview with Naim Kattan) to find the values that are important for individual existence, and to reveal (and structure) deep personal matters:

Our first obligation in art is to express ourselves through our own most personal motives. (...) During this encounter, a particular situation occurs. The actor gives him/herself up completely. He/she creates an opening, to which the viewer also comes as if naked, stripped of any protective masks. But before this happens, the actor searches for an inner partner, a partner of his/her biography, and by exploring the nature of this relationship, the act of rebirth takes place based on experiences of bodily impulses.

(Grotowski, J. 1968. p. 200).

The language used by Grotowski, particularly in his American interview, is directly linked to his four-week experience of

working with students (assisted by Cieślak). The interviewees are therefore in some way initiated (prepared) into terminology that goes beyond the possibility of merely theoretical understanding. The fact of experience is crucial to the encounter.

Texts from *Towards a Poor Theatre* have been a kind of guide - a link to issues related to my theatre practice. They provided nourishment for thinking about the contemporary condition of the performer resulting from practical research. As a performer, this was based on the issues mentioned above in a somewhat parasitic way in order to maintain a sense of continuity of the creative process not only on its own but also in the context of the evoked tradition of Polish Romanticism. The text was also read as literature and even poetry, which also served as literal stage material.

What conclusions can be drawn from the above brief characteristics for the practice-based research *Burning Method*? I will use a radical method of elimination. I have been doing practical research for three years without limiting myself to any creative way of expression.

Working with:

- images, including video notes¹¹ which are often the language

¹¹ The video notes are stimulated by themes around and from *Towards a Poor Theatre*; they are my body-visual-poetic response to it. Video notes create a script and visual direction for further practical research.

of my expression. This is why I put special emphasis on the iconographic value of Cieślak's photographs from *The Constant Prince*. An image can carry the essence of an idea in the context of the unspeakable character which is revealed at some point, triggering my imagination

- the external situation (the pandemic) forced me to turn to work outdoors. A kiln, found by chance, near the town of Pickering in North Yorkshire turned out to be a significant space for forging new performative ideas
- co-hosting events with Myles Stawman, as part of The Horsedonkey Club (THC in vFDalston, London), allowed me to confront these ideas with an audience, which gave me a lot of feedback on further directions to explore
- since January 2022 I have been running regular rehearsals at the Jarman Building (University of Kent) on the collected material
- at the same time, I have been teaching students classes called "Grotowski" or "Poor Theatre", etc during which I had a chance to identify problems related to the transmission of Grotowski's ideas and, most importantly, to find ways of executing them practically that, in my opinion, have a fundamental, transformative value for the education of young actors.

As a practitioner in the field of performing arts for more than 25 years, the biggest challenge for me has been to translate practice into written language. *Towards a Poor Theatre* here has come to my assistance. Grotowski formulates most of his ideas through interviews, sometimes with himself. Thus, he asks a question that allows him to concentrate a stream of thoughts on a subject whose essence is the process of experience. Having created the situation of an interview conducted by the researcher Magdalena Stawman-Tuka with the artist Magda Tuka, I found a form thanks to which I could open up to reflection on my own activities. For me it is a kind of ongoing exploration of the possibilities and strategies of performance, this time transferred to text within the thesis. I believe that Grotowski, especially during his lectures, in similar way to what I have done, created a very complex character thanks to which he could, following the Stanislavsky method¹², master the tools of expression and lead the role with great integrity.

To summarise the above introduction, my practical and theoretical research coexist, which is why I include photos or links to the video notes in all the following chapters. *Towards*

¹² Grotowski from the very beginning of his work in theatre referred to Stanislavski: "I was brought up on Stanislavski; his persistent study, his systematic renewal of the methods of observation, and his dialectical relationship to his own earlier work make him my personal ideal." Grotowski, J. 1968. p. 16. He was talking about the continuation of Stanislavski's work, especially on physical actions.

a *Poor Theatre* is a kind of guide or dialogue partner on contemporary performance. Following Grotowski's idea, I use the method of confrontation, not identification with the notion of the Total Act:

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

(Grotowski, J. 1968. p.23).¹³

I will begin my reflections by trying to understand what the Total Act was in the work of Grotowski and his Laboratory Theatre company, also in a historical and cultural context. The following chapter concentrates on the process of the emergence of the Total Act and the scapegoat as an archetypal figure, crucial, in my view, for understanding the concept of sacrifice.

¹³ The above quotation is significant for the whole thesis. It also appeared in my performance *Burning Method - Four Lectures on Conditional Love* in the scene "Lecture No:1". That's why in Chapter Four dedicated to practise it will be repeated again.



Video note by Magda Tuka: <https://vimeo.com/417358725> -
here ideas are burned and rise again from the ashes: the kiln in Pickering,
North Yorkshire, June-July 2020.

Chapter One: Towards a Total Act

Introduction - towards an act of transgression

- Grotowski's Total Act or Akt Całkowity - Polish and English, differences in translation
- A difficult to define - encounter means discovering
- Total Całkowity ACT

Act of sacrifice *The Constant Prince*

- Purification of society through the act of violence
- *The Bacchae*
- Passion Plays, Mystery Plays and public execution - the role of the saviour
- The Court and the Prince's Body
- Self-sacrifice
- Jesus can only be crucified once
- The scapegoat and preparation for Hamlet's confrontation with the masses

Act of shame *Hamlet Study*

- Political context of the 1968 events in Poland
- *Hamlet* - not fully completed
- *Hamlet Study* by Stanisław Wyspiański
- The Polish Living Dead in the Queen's Bedroom
- *Hamlet Study* - experimental collective work
- Margin : Studium Teatralne about *Hamlet Study*

Act of self-penetration *Dr Faustus (Tragiczne dzieje doktora Fausta . The Tragical History of Dr Faustus*¹⁴)

- Holy Actor
- The Body of Saint Sebastian
- The mediaeval dance of death
- Margin: Encounter with a dead body

Act of banishment *Apocalypsis cum figuris*

- 'Go,' he says, 'go, and return no more'

Summary notes

¹⁴ On the Grotowski Institute website the title in English is in both versions: *Dr Faustus* and *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus*: <https://grotowski.net/en/encyclopedia/tragical-history-dr-faustus> [Accessed on 8 August 2022].

Introduction - towards an act of transgression

"This act of total unveiling of one's being becomes a gift of the self which borders on the transgression of barriers and love. I call this total act". (Grotowski, J. 1969. p. 99).

The following chapter is a study of the process through which Grotowski and his company worked between 1963 and 1968 [Theatre of Productions]. The result was one of the most intriguing proposals in the craft of acting: the idea of the Total Act.

This idea has had a huge impact on thinking (thanks in part to the texts contained in *Towards a Poor Theatre*) about:

- what acting can be
- what the relationship between the actor and the audience can be
- where the boundaries of this relationship lie.

The Total Act, rightly associated with an act of total devotion and self-sacrifice, did not, in a literal sense, have a long continuation in the history of Grotowski's work. The first attempts to approach this process with the aim of culminating in the Total Act took place during Grotowski's work with Zbigniew Cynkutis [1938-1987] on the role of Faust in *Dr Faustus* (*Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, premiere 23 April 1963). The work did not, however, have its 'total' fulfilment. Grotowski then continued his research by working individually with Ryszard Cieślak [1937-1990] on the role of Constant Prince

(first closed premiere 20 April 1965 in Wrocław), and it was then that the Total Act found its full embodiment. The years of work on *Apocalypsis cum figuris* (the first closed performance took place on 19 July 1968, while the official public premiere was on 11 February 1969) and the power of this performance were undoubtedly also the result of work on the Act, here perceived in group rather than individual terms.

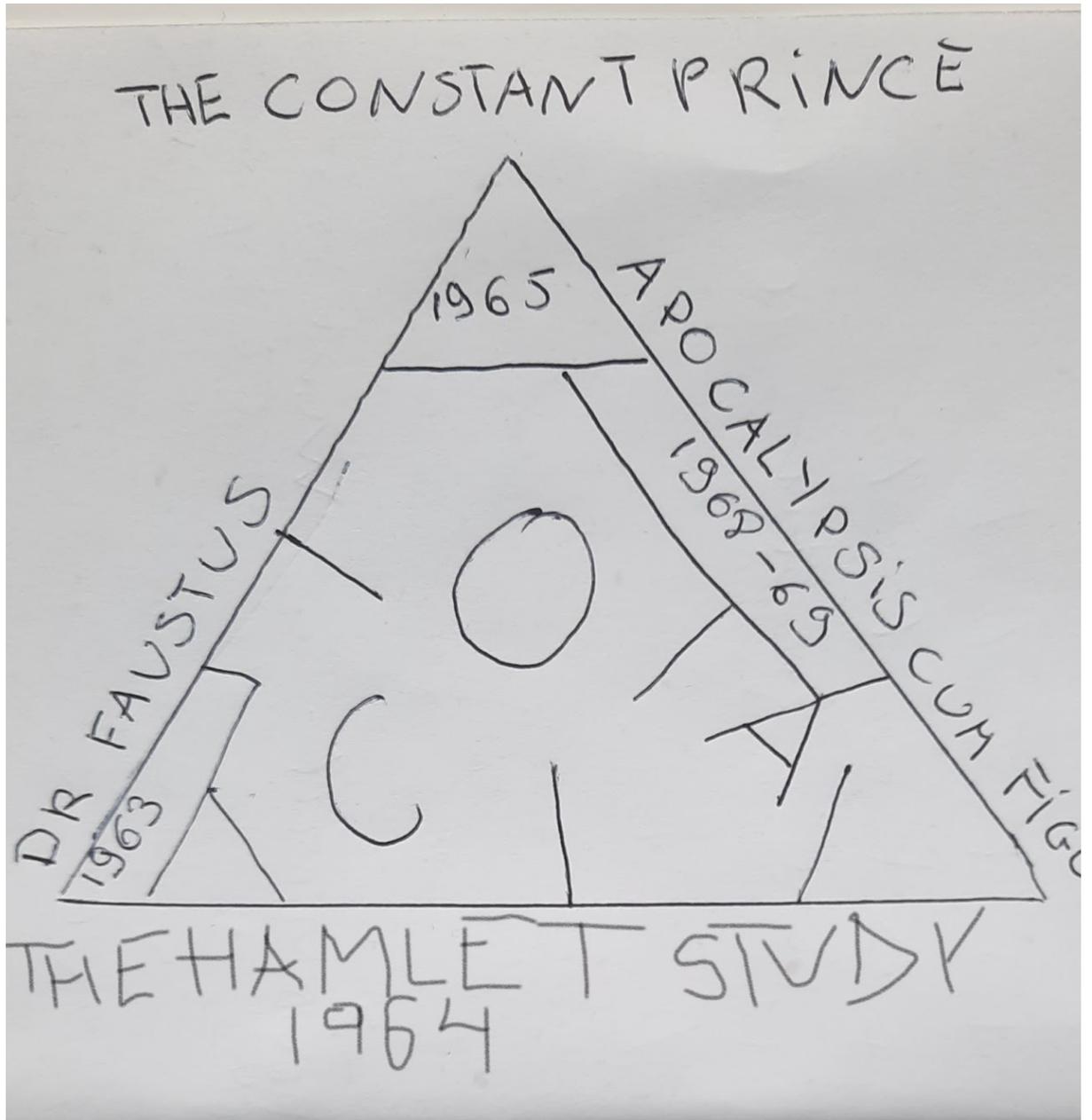
However, the experiments carried out for many years to come were not fully successful in achieving their aim of expanding the experience of the Act, as I will explain. In later phases of his work, Grotowski concentrated on craftsman-like precision and increasing the objectivity of the Act, which led to the creation of *Action*.¹⁵ But, if an audience is necessary for the Total Act to happen, there is no public in the later research on *Action*. The audience is given the role of witnesses to the event.

“‘In performance’, he [Grotowski] clarified, ‘the seat of the montage is in the perception of the spectator; in Art as vehicle, the seat of the montage is in doers, in the artists who do’”. (Wolford, L. 1997. “Introduction” in *The Grotowski Sourcebook* pp. 368-369). There is one more performance, often

¹⁵ *Action* was a type of performance created and developed by Jerzy Grotowski and his collaborators, particularly Thomas Richards; also used in the title of subsequent works created using this approach. It is a key element and example of Art as vehicle. “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’”. <https://grotowski.net/en/encyclopedia/action> [Accessed 10 August 2022].

for various reasons (which I will discuss later in this chapter) passed over by Grotowski himself: *Hamlet Study* (premiere 17 March 1964). However, it is a very important experiment on the way to the Total Act, which is why I want to mention it briefly in this introduction.

The following, very simplified, diagram gives an indicative overview of the years of work and performances on the road towards the Total Act. Each will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter.



Drawing by Magda Tuka [notebook].

The work on the performance of *Dr Faustus* (Zbigniew Cynkutis in the role of Faustus) was a way of discovering an actor who is stripped down and holy, leading (on various levels) to the formulation of the Total Act, which is at the top of the diagram in its fulfilment in the performance: *The Constant Prince*. *Apocalypsis cum figuris* gradually moves away from the Act, concentrating on a different kind of experience, on the borderline of theatre.

In opposition to *The Constant Prince* is *Hamlet Study*. This is a performance about which little is written, but which was fundamental to the formation of the Total Act. The opposition of these two works can also be read through the figure of the Prince: one whose characteristic is inconstant (Hamlet), the other - constant.

For the young Eugenio Barba (he was 28 in the year of the premiere of *Hamlet Study* - 1964), this performance had a revealing, shocking quality: "The actor's performance is a form of blackmail; it is not a daily behaviour, but a physiology of an extraordinary state: sexual climax, agon, torture, rape. Inarticulate shouts and aberrant raucous voices gush forth, controlled and yet free, from a psycho-technique, which permeates every element in the composition of the actors. Their performance does not convince, it terrifies, disturbs, brutally shakes the defenceless spectator." (Barba, E. 1999. p. 81).

Barba continues his reflections like a crime scene report:

The nudity and perspiration, the contorted faces and convulsed bodies reminds us of a reality that is so close, so inherent in us. There is one single semblance of light: the violence and bestiality of the peasant-soldiers are sublimated in a incandescent spiritual force in the final scene. Hamlet continues to spit out the reflections on the necessity for action and talks of wanting to remain with the peasants, sharing their impotence and not outliving them. How can one feel like a victim if there are no longer executioners? But his form of impotence consists in the incapacity to feel, live and die with the others. Because he is unable to, and because the others do not want him to.

(Barba, E. 1999. p. 81).

Helpless in the face of the scale of cruelty, he recognises his passive position as an audience member: "Balancing between these two attitudes, the spectator sinks into a third form of impotence: that of the short-sighted and pragmatic humanist who refuses to recognise what King Ubu's peasants and the Jew-Hamlet have unmasked: the miles, the military man, slumbering within each one of us." (Barba, E. 1999. p. 81).

I believe that Barba's statement above contains a very important element for the communal experience of the Total Act, i.e. the audience and the actors, and that is a shock. A shock is necessary to enter a different level of consciousness, thanks to which, detached from every day, schematic existence, we are able to communicate with a quality reaching archetypal substrates, common to us all, and behind which the experience of truth becomes possible. "What did the work do? It gave each actor a series of shocks." (Brook, P. 1968. "Preface". in: *Towards a Poor Theatre*. p. 11).

Grotowski's Total Act or Akt Całkowity - Polish and English, differences in translation

ENGLISH VERSION: 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 laying bare of once 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 and his instinct, springing forth in a sort of "translumination".

(Grotowski, J. 1968. p. 16).

POLISH VERSION: Wszystko koncentruje się tutaj na procesie duchowym aktora, charakteryzującym się skrajnością, zupełnym огоłoceniem, odsłonięciem w swojej intymności - nie egotycznie, na zasadzie rozkoszowania się własnymi przeżyciami (emocjami), ale przeciwnie - jakby w akcie oddania się. Jest to technika "transu" i integracji wszystkich władz duchowych i fizycznych aktora, wzbierających jakby od strefy intymno-instynktowej do "prześwietlenia".
(Grotowski, J. 2012. p. 246).

As is well known, Grotowski was a very careful editor and proofreader of the translation of his own texts. This, on the one hand, gives the translation the quality of control of what Grotowski wanted to talk about at a given moment, and on the other, in retrospect, may lead to differences in analysis from a purely linguistic perspective.

The above quotation from the article "Towards a Poor Theatre" is very significant for the chapter dedicated to the Total Act. It shows an exemplary clash and decisions to formulate thoughts in Polish and English. The original text was written in Polish, the first publication was published in "Odra" magazine, Wrocław 9/1965, and then as part of a book *Towards a Poor Theatre* in English.

As I mentioned, citing Eugenio Barba in the above "Introduction", the process of translation into English was long, even frustrating. By comparing the two texts and knowing both languages, the difference observed may cause confusion, or... lead to a kind of exercise at an intellectual level, but also at the level of the body's imagination and an attempt to embody ideas.

Some examples:

- *procesie duchowym* [literally *process of the soul* or *spiritual process*] - not in English version, or replaced by 'ripening of'
- *integracji wszystkich władz duchowych i fizycznych aktora* - integration of all the actor's psychic and bodily powers

A difficult to define-encounter means discovering

It seems to me that while reading *Towards a Poor Theatre* in both languages, a question arises about a different kind of translation. It is an attempt to express a very complex, often intimate experience that is emerging at the moment and then transformed into words. The verbal communication has accompanied Grotowski's work from the very beginning. Polemics, manifestos, responses to reviewers, and other ways of formulating critical thought determined the creation of statements that were increasingly precise, sharpened, controlled and highly

individualised.

Terms such as the Total Act, or in Polish: Akt Całkowity require multi level thinking. To begin with, potentially, the translation of words in their broadest sense.

The Total Całkowity ACT AKT

The Total - is related to numbers, the sum, or complete or extreme. It can also mean very great or of the largest degree possible.

Całkowity (PL) is most commonly related to numbers, sums, generally maths. It can also be translated as total, entire, complete. The word act has a dynamic connection: from the Latin *actus* meaning deed and, from the Greek tragedy, a coherent, homogeneous, closed piece of work, comes from the *epeisodion*¹⁶ in Greek tragedy.

The Total Act, via negativa and the poor theatre are perhaps the most important concepts at the time of the publication of the texts in *Towards a Poor Theatre*. Grotowski demands that the Total Act must be *articulated* and *disciplined*. Otherwise, it may turn into a chaotic, unbridled, emotional mumble. The actor's methodical work on recognising and controlling their own body,

¹⁶ *Epeisodion* (gr. *epeisódion*) – an excerpt from a Greek drama (both tragedy and comedy), which includes direct speeches by characters in dialogues or monologues. The epeisodion is the original form of acts occurring in later drama works. Individual epeisodion, of which there were from three to five (most often three), were separated from each other by the songs of the choir - stasimon. Dwight Goodell, T. (1920) *Athenian tragedy. A Study in Popular Art*. Yale University Press.

using the body like a musician uses an instrument, for the conscious guidance of the 'score notes' and for the repetition of the Act. It should not be an individual event dependent on special, suitable circumstances, but an elaborated, careful drawing out of the role by the actor.

Until then, things seem to be fairly clear because they focus on skills. However, Grotowski is always concerned about transgression. The Act of Transgression is like a mantra repeated many times:

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. (...) It must be an objective act: that is to say articulated, disciplined.

(Grotowski, J. 1968. p.99).

How can an actor prepare for a multiple devotional act? What kind of internal decisions does she/he make to face such a

challenge? And is she really always ready to fulfil the sacrifice?

An actor who has to complete an act of stripping down, of offering what is most intimate in him, must be capable of revealing psychic impulses that are still as if 'in statu nascendii', half-born. On the other hand - taking into account, for example, the problem of sound - the efficiency of the actor's breathing and vocal apparatus should be incomparably higher than that of an average person in everyday life.

Moreover, this apparatus must be capable of realising every sound reflex with such speed that no reflection can join it, which would deprive it of spontaneity. (Grotowski, J. 2012. p. 256). [Translation by Magda Tuka]

Thus prepared, or rather ready and open, the actor can experience a kind of state of serenity. "A state of passive readiness for the realisation of an active score. An Act which, if it is complete and reaches a certain apex - a 'climax' - integrates psychologically and gives a solace". (Grotowski, J. 2012. p.259).

In subsequent sections of the chapter I will try to follow the process of formulating the Total Act, and the circumstances of working on particular performances. I will begin with the

climax, the moment when the Total Act found its fullness, namely, the rehearsals and presentations of *The Constant Prince*. I believe that the fulfilment of the Act was not only an intensified work on the secrets of the actor's craft, but was also helped by the very choice of the theme based on the Calderon/Słowacki drama [under the same title *The Constant Prince, Książę Niezłomny*]: self-sacrifice. Therefore, this work will be discussed more broadly from a theoretical angle that can bring us closer to understanding both the essence of the Act and its potential cultural and social roots.

Act of sacrifice *The Constant Prince*

I begin my analysis of the Total Act by presenting the cultural circumstances that form a kind of fertile soil for the emergence of the idea. I start from the motif of the scapegoat, as a complex notion that runs through Grotowski's performances, both those preceding the full formulation of the Total Act and those afterwards.

The iconography of the Passion of Christ was strongly present in Grotowski's work. It created a kind of language of communication with the audience. Poland was, and is, a country identified with the Catholic religion, and the church has a very strong position. In the 1960s it was a space free from the propaganda of the ruling party, and the Church united society in opposing

the oppressive policies of the authorities. However, Grotowski's attitude to religion (and to the church) was not an unambiguous one. Considering himself a non-believer, he drew from iconographic images their function as a myth - as a value unifying society.



Still from a video recording of an excerpt from the solo performance *How The Hare is Dying* by Magda Tuka, taken during the full moon on a meadow in Pickering (North Yorkshire): the hare is associated in its symbolism with themes of self-sacrifice and transformation, particularly active during the full moon, October 2020.

Purification of society through the act of violence

The theatre, when it was still part of religion, was already theatre: it liberated the spiritual energy of the congregation or tribe by incorporating myth and profaning or rather transcending it. The spectator thus had a renewed awareness of his personal truth in the truth of the myth, and through fright and a sense of the sacred he came to catharsis. It was not by chance that the Middle Ages produced the idea of "sacral parody".

(Grotowski, J. 1968. pp.22-23).

Grotowski's thoughts on the living function of myth in society are very important for the idea of the Total Act. The 20th century has lost the possibility of identification with myth. Contemporary man no longer has in himself an organic, through years of practice and through the tools he has acquired, understanding of myth. The only thing that can make a myth 'alive' is confronting it (not identifying with it).

In her *History of European Drama and Theatre*, Fisher-Lichte

conducts a study on the changes in the concept of identity in Europe through a mirror image of theatre and drama. Her *History* is not necessarily a linear ordering of dates and events, but rather a search for cultural and sociological areas that could be combined through meanings and internal influences. The following section is partly inspired by Fischer-Lichte's concept of ritual in European theatre with a particular focus on the scapegoat.

The figure of the scapegoat is essential, in my opinion, when analysing *The Constant Prince* and other performances: starting from *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus*, *Hamlet Study* and finishing with *Apocalypsis cum figuris*. All were fundamental in formulating the Total Act. The relationship between the group, society and the individual seen through the prism of the scapegoat will allow the creation of a historical and cultural background from which Grotowski drew.

The Bacchae

Although *The Bacchae* is not in the iconography that directly inspired Grotowski and his company, Euripides' drama is nevertheless worth mentioning for the link between the scapegoat and the divine figure and the act of tearing the divine body by the crowd (in *The Constant Prince* we are confronted with the act of castration). "all myths must have their roots in real acts of

violence against real victims". (Girard, R. 1989, p.25). Following Aristotle, Sophocles was to say that the difference between them [Sophocles and Euripides] was that he "portrayed men as they ought to be, while Euripides portrayed them as they are" (Fisher-Lichte, E. 2002. p.25).¹⁷ It seems that in *The Bacchae*, Euripides reached a complicated, often painful, level of theatrical experience, which we will continue to observe to this day. Through exposure and reaching states of irrationality, and the subconscious, he opened the stage for the audience's new theatrical experience. Perhaps here we should look for the characteristics of contemporary drama, which explores, among other things, the sphere of the unconscious in relation to the crowd, and the complex position of the protagonist suspended in a state of duty and obligation, in contrast to the lack of understanding by others. "Euripides allows his heroes to fall into critical situations where, in the battle of passions and desires bound to physis, (...). Physis¹⁸ proves to be stronger than reason, intelligence, sense, insight." (Fischer-Lichte, E. 2002. p. 27).

Women play a special role in Euripides' dramas, particularly in *The Bacchae* where they reveal an unbridled, anarchic and creative, but destructive side. They represent the crowd's

¹⁷ Fisher-Lichte, E. after Aristotle's *Poetics*, Chapter 25.

¹⁸ *Physis* is a Greek philosophical, theological, and scientific term, usually translated into English — according to its Latin translation *natura* — as nature. Online Encyclopaedia Philosophy of Nature / Online Lexikon Naturphilosophie, 2019. <https://www.researchgate.net> [Accessed on 10 July 2022]

aspect that we will further penetrate in the context of the relationship to the individual/chosen one/stranger:

First they let their hair fall loose, down over their shoulders, and those which straps had slipped fastened their skins of fawn with writhing snakes that liked their cheeks. Breasts swollen with milk, new mothers who have left their babies behind at home nestled gazelles and young wolves in their arm, suckling them.

(Euripides. 2011. p. 696).

The death of Pentheus through tearing apart by the ritual-possessed Bacchic women, including Agave, and mother and sisters Ines and Autonoë, led to the collapse of the idea of polis: "The end of the polis has come full circle as the necessary and logical consequences of a general bestialisation of mankind". (Fischer-Lichte, E. 2002. p. 31). Dionysus can manifest himself in many forms and his relations with society are variable. He has given mankind the wine that helps in suffering, allows social masks to be torn off, frees the imagination, but he can take the form of an aggressive animal - a bull, a snake, a lion and treats the bodies of his victims mercilessly, reducing man to his physical powerlessness. The level of aggression in *The Bacchae* and, consequently, the crisis of values, can be interpreted as the end of Greek tragedy. "*The Bacchae* can, therefore, be read as a drama on the death of

tragedy". (Fischer-Lichte, E. 2002. p. 33). Dionysus is a god who experienced the violence of the Titans, ripped his body apart and was reborn through the intervention of Zeus. He therefore contains within him the symbolism of death and resurrection - the essence of the idea of the Total Act.

Passion Plays, Mystery Plays and public execution - the role of the saviour

Grotowski's theatre continues a historic line which leads back to the religious plays of the Middle Ages:

During the many days of performance of the Passion Plays of the XV and XVI centuries, a scapegoat ritual was "carried out": Jesus the son of God and Man, accepts the violence done to him on behalf of mankind - the violence which the spectator is afraid to confront.

(Fischer-Lichte, E. 2002. p. 337).

Easter became the motivation and locus for the revival of European drama. Around the 10th century, the dramatised proclamation of Jesus' resurrection became the direct start of it:

Quem quaeritis in sepulchro, o christicolae?

Whom do you seek in the sepulchre, followers of Christ?

Jesum Nazarenum crucifixum, o caelicolae.

Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified, O
heaven-dwellers,

Non est hic, surrexit, sicut praedixerat.

He is not here, he has risen, as he had fore-told; go,

Ite nunciate, quia surrexit.

Announce that he has risen from the sepulchre.

(St. Gall. *Quem quaeritis* c.950. cited in
Fischer-Lichte, E. 2002. p.33).

Recalling the essence of the Catholic faith, which is the act of the mystery of resurrection in a dramatised form, gave the audience a sense of unity with the event. In front of the audience, a moment of revival of faith itself was played out. Therefore, the stage presentation of the resurrection developed very quickly. In the second half of the 10th century in the Benedictine monasteries in England it already had the following structure (under the common title *Regularis Concordia*), apart from 'Visitatio sepulchri':

- 'Adoratio crucis' - reminder of the crucifixion
- 'Despositio crucis' - prayer to the cross, covering it with a cloth and carrying the cross to the altar
- 'Elevatio crucis' - celebration of the resurrection.

They covered the events from the crucifixion (Good Friday) to the resurrection (Sunday).

Until the 16th/17th centuries, the dramatised form of Easter developed throughout Europe taking on different versions enriched with local flavour, gradually moving from church to a secular sphere. The Passion Plays could last for several days or even longer (in 15th-16th century France up to a month) and were an integral part of urban culture. Played in the local language, they attracted crowds of spectators and were an opportunity to celebrate together, which often turned into extensive drinking and even riots.

The role and nature of the court in *The Constant Prince* (discussed in more detail below) is linked to Grotowski's observations of society as a mass that feeds on spectacles of cruelty. The court here being the Catholic Spanish is depicted as black crows feeding on carrion.

Public executions fascinated crowds of onlookers.

I suspect that there is an irresistible, magnetic power in looking at the moment of encounter between life and death. The execution was an important event in the public life of the town. They continued from the Middle Ages to the 19th century, in various forms, depending on local regulations:

At that place he was to be bound upon a high scaffold, in order that he might be more easily seen by the people. First his private parts were cut off, because he was deemed a heretic and guilty of unnatural

practises, even with the king, whose affections he had alienated from the queen by his wicked suggestions. His private parts were then cast into a large fire kindled close to him; afterwards his heart was thrown into the same fire because it had been false and traitorous, since he had by his treasonable counsels so advised the King, as to bring shame and mischief on the land and had caused some of the greatest lords to be beheaded... The other parts of Sir Hugh thus disposed of, his head was cut off and sent to London.

(Royer, K. Froissart, J. 1808. p. 32).

This is similar to the symbolic castration scene of prisoner Don Enrique¹⁹ in *The Constant Prince*. The court, gathered around the defenceless body of Don Enrique performs an operation thanks to which it obtains a trophy, which may be associated with an object of magical power (body parts which, after death, become relics), and Don Enrique - Castrato becomes part of the court.

The public life of Mediaeval European cities was often dominated by superstitions. The altar and mass were associated with protective magical power, and society was clearly pointing out its enemies. Urban architecture reflected the economic and cultural status of its inhabitants. It also provided spaces for

¹⁹ Don Enrique was performed by Gaston Kulig (version one premiere 26 September 1964) and then from the second version (premiere 14 November 1965) onwards by Stanisław Scierski.

excluded groups that did not belong to the dominant majority in terms of religion or nationality:

The era of the great Passion Plays was also a time of segregation and persecution of Jews and witches. As early as 1290, the Jews were expelled from England; from France, from 1394. In German speaking countries, Jews were forced to wear a 'Jew's hat' or 'yellow patch'. (...). Running almost parallel to these events was the spread across Europe of witch-hunts.

(Fischer-Lichte, E. 2002. p.41).

The saviour, at the same time, had the role of a scapegoat. In order to protect society, the victim's role has to be fulfilled. The Passion Plays performed the function of magic thinking in public and, by presenting the torture of Jesus' crucifixion in a particularly drastic way, the witnesses received hope and healing for themselves:

The more cruelly torture is executed on the "scapegoat", the greater the protection accorded the spectator's body in a magical way. (...) The Passion Plays became popular mass events because they were able to give lasting relief from the pressure of the fears burdening the body.

(Fischer-Lichte, E. 2002. pp.44-46).

There were no professional actors in the Passion Plays. The boundary between spectators and performers was contractual, depending on the role they took on at the time. Therefore, they had a dangerous dimension of collective experience. Thus, the church lost control over the content and form of the performances. The collective body and the individual body, the body of the victim through the ritual of execution, whose real presence on the streets of European cities could have escalated the moments of torture of the saviour's body - they mixed dangerously with each other.

With the advent of 16th-century European religious conflicts, unease with liturgical drama in general increased. The Synod of Strasburg of 1549 opposed the religious plays, and the previous year, in 1548, the Parliament of Paris forbade the production of The Mysteries of the Passion of our Redeemer and other Spiritual Mysteries. One consequence was that the secularised plays were separated from the religious ones, and, as Carnival plays, held public favour. The Passion Plays came to be presented more rarely, particularly as the Reformation was inimical to them.

The Court and Prince's Body

My sensations at seeing this remarkable event, for it is all of that, are almost as difficult to describe. At times I had the feeling of being witness to an

Eleusinian mystery. I had a strange mixture of wonder and discomfort, bewitchment and alienation. There were other moments when I felt I was at a passion play such as had never been performed before. The prince, beautifully played by a young actor, Ryszard Cieślak, seemed to me to be Christ enduring and forgiving his torturers. I have seldom seen an actor so completely in control of his voice and body. He issues groans with a volume that is almost symphonic, while the others dance to the rhythm of his pain. He twitches with every portion of his seminude body and has the grace of a fine dancer combined with the talent of a great tragic actor.

(Fragment of review by George Oppenheimer "Polish Show Revolutionary", published in *The Daily Times*, October 17, 1969.²⁰)

The Laboratory Theatre production was based on Juliusz Słowacki's reworking of Pedro Calderón de la Barca's (1600-1681) religious play *El príncipe constante* (1629) [*The Constant Prince*]. Słowacki²¹, himself a poet, created an independent work based on the drama:

²⁰ <https://owendaly.com/jeff/grotows1.htm> [Accessed on 4 August 2022].

²¹ Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849) is considered one of the "Three Bards" of Polish literature — a major figure in the Polish Romantic period, and the father of modern Polish drama.

According to Słowacki's own testimony, in creating his own version he filtered the experience of Don Fernando through himself in a manner resembling the theatrical experience of a protagonist's fate. This process meant his text appeared less as a translation and more as a script depicting the transcription of a dramatic experience.²²

The play is a story of Portuguese Prince Don Ferdinand who was captured by the Moors (based on authentic events from 1437-1438). In return for his release, he was asked to give up the strategic Ceuta to the Moors (who were not Christians). However, the prince decides to die on 9th December 1438 after being tortured and thus becomes a martyr.

The dramatic construction of the performance *The Constant Prince* (premiere 25 April 1965, Wrocław) seems to be based on a relatively simple relation: a court acting together in opposition to the prince. However, either the court nor the prince could exist without each other; their mutual presence defined their sense of existence. The prince's suffering had to have spectators in the form of a court, while the court could only be a court in the face of the stranger's weakness. The court fed on Ferdinand's shaky, exposed body, while thanks to

²² *The Constant Prince* [text] Available at: <https://grotowski.net/en/encyclopedia/constant-prince-ksiaze-niezlomny>

the constant circulation of the court, the attention of its gaze, the prince was illuminated from within. The whole 'event' was observed from above by silent spectators. Thanks to their position, they could have a 'full view' of the dramatic situation taking place in front of them with all its intensity. Due to my age, I did not have the chance to see *The Constant Prince* live. From reports, reviews, and statements, we learn that it was an extreme event that eliminated all conventional forms of recognition, like applause. At the end of the performance, there was only silence. I think that there is no point in interpreting this silence as it was a unique result of both an individual and a collective experience. The audience gathered for the performance were reminded of something, they were confronted with something, and in the theatrical dimension, they completed the act of the sacrifice through their presence. The sacrifice was fulfilled.

According to 'a legend', in 1967 the second version of *The Constant Prince* was recorded by a hidden camera in Spoleto, Italy (then joined with the sound recorded in March 1966 in Oslo). Grotowski did not intend to film *The Constant Prince*, probably because of this type of medium's limited ability, which could cause further misunderstanding of the work by those who never had contact with the live performance.

The first autonomous way of recording/responding (besides the

reviews) to the performance was charcoal and red crayon sketches by Serge Ouaknine²³, made during rehearsals when the performance was already completed after 1966:

First I made sketches from "life", then from memory; I drew the whole course of the play with charcoal and red crayon, trying to bring out what was purely organic in this performance. I was surprised to find that, just as in the performance, also in the drawings, only the Prince absorbed my attention - he created the "white" opposite of the black (group) and red (red matter, which transformed like an actor, being the Prince's mantle, corrida mule, shroud, curtain). Thanks to my inability to recreate the Prince's nature, I discovered the specific, inexpressible in any other language character of his performance technique.

(Ouaknine, S. 2011. p.27²⁴).

²³ Serge Ouaknine - Moroccan visual artist, writer, director, researcher working at the crossroads of many cultures and disciplines. While studying at L'École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris in 1965 he met Jerzy Grotowski and, influenced by this meeting, in 1966 he came to Poland as a scholarship holder at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and, at the same time, an intern at the Laboratory Theatre in Wrocław.

²⁴ All texts from Ouaknine, S. *Książę Niezłomny. Studium i rekonstrukcja spektaklu Jerzego Grotowskiego i Teatru Laboratorium. [The Constant Prince. A study and reconstruction of a performance by Jerzy Grotowski and the Laboratory Theatre]* Wrocław: Instytut Imienia Jerzego Grotowskiego. Translation from French by Juliusz Tyszka, translation from Polish by Magda Tuka.

With his specific method of how to document, Ouaknine provokes the difficult question of documenting a theatrical work. By making full use of the tools he understood from the field of visual arts, he was able to reach a specific translation of the language of acting technique into a system of visual signs. Thus an autonomous work was created. And thanks to the original invention in the field of translation, it gave the performance *The Constant Prince* second life in the form of publication:

I have made a montage from ninety drawings in the form of an uninterrupted unrolling tape. Then, with a French translation of the Polish text used by the actors, breaking the text with my graphic score and taking into account the melodic line of the action, I cut the performance into sequences that can be recognized in a specific space. So I could only recreate and analyse the script and direction from the inside and - linking it to what was my experience of practising the method and the daily search of the Laboratory Theatre - I discovered the acting technique and style of this creation.

(Ouaknine, S. 2011. p.27).

Ouaknine distinguishes two main issues during his insightful observations, which were the technique of the actors of the

Laboratory Theatre:

- **Technique I**

“What made the work on art different (among other things) from other theatre groups was not the analysis of the character through its personality, but the composition of the character's actions, stimulated from the outside:

Stimulation - contact - action - reaction - selection - fixing”.

(Ouaknine, S. 2011 p. 34).

In the above quoted sequence of working on the characters of the court there is an impression of mechanicity in the exploration. What gave the power of expression was precision, dynamics, rhythm, consistency and function in the piece as a whole. The court was an effective and ruthless mass.

- **Technique II**

Ouaknine divides this technique into 3 parts:

“Psychophysical stripping down

Transillumination

The ultimate climax (...)” (Ouaknine, S. 2011 p. 35).

Each of these parts will require in-depth analysis as well as attempts to describe them through different experiences or examples. At the moment, an important conclusion resulting from Technique II is the emergence of the individual. Individuality

emerges from the nature of the rehearsal process; actor and director together follow the line drawn by the Technique II. An actor, working on deepening psychophysical processes based on personal, intimate experiences has become the opposite to the mass. And although we know that the score of Ryszard Cieślak's actions was very precise, as a function in the whole performance it had an open character, sensitive to the vibrations of the inner journey towards fulfilment, towards the Total Act. Through this profound opposition, which began in the idea of *The Constant Prince*, Grotowski achieved archetypal integrity in the subject of the scapegoat and self-sacrifice.

Self-sacrifice



Scene from the performance *How the Hare is Dying*, FNAF - home Online
Festival, December 2020.²⁵

As I mentioned above, the Stations of the Cross and the sufferings of the Lord's Passion were for Grotowski and his group a kind of metadrama to which they repeatedly referred. Jesus Christ combined both the aspect of sacrifice, of being persecuted, and the act of healing humanity by voluntarily taking upon himself the burden of guilt, a guilt which a 'sick', sinful society is likely to realise in the face of the crime being committed. By his act of affirmed efficacy on the way to the healing of society, he establishes a principle of action which turns into a ritual. "(...) phenomena of persecution provided both the model and the countermodel for every religious institution". (Girard, R. 1989. p. 55).

The drama of the Crucifixion of Christ is not the drama of actively resisting violence. Violence from persecution through a death sentence and the act of crucifixion is essential for the fulfilment of the sacrifice and only through the sacrifice can there be a resurrection and with it the hope of a new life for society. There is no opposition, the defencelessness is pure, so the torturers have the blood of an innocent on their hands.

²⁵ Self-sacrifice is the theme of my solo performance entitled *How The Hare is Dying*. The symbolism of the hare is present in cultures almost all over the world. Among other things, it is connected with the motif of transformation, also through self-sacrifice, through self-immolation. Apparently, the hare does not run away from a meadow wildfire, but lies down in its nest called a form and waits for death.

Reconciliation with suffering sublimates and is a way of deepening faith.

Ryszard Cieślak, in his third monologue, is answering the King:

(...) O, nie zaprawdę, że w śmierci,

Oh no, in truth, he places in death,

W śmierci ufa! - Tę ofiarę

It is in death he trusts! - this sacrifice

Zrób ze mnie, panie, o! Proszę...

I ask you, Sir, to make sacrifice of me, please...

Daj śmierć - niech umrę za wiarę!

Give me death - let me die for my faith!

Oto ręce me podnoszę

Here I am, lifting my arms

I o śmierć, panie, cię błagam:

And I implore you, Sir, for death:

Nie dlatego, że się wzdragam,

not so that I can escape from life,

Żyć i cierpieć jestem nierad,

or because I fear suffering,

Że chcę umrzeć jak desperat; -

such that I want to die like a desperate person;-

Nie dlatego u nóg szlocham -

It is not this which makes me sob at your feet -

Ale ja się, panie, kocham

but Sir, because I love
W takiej śmierci męczennika,
such a martyr's death
Co krwawe ciało odmyka
Which opens up the bloodied body
I Bogu uwalnia duszę,
And gives up the soul to God..
Więc choć grzechu prosić muszę,
So although I must ask you to commit a sin,
Miłość mię usprawiedliwia,
Love justifies this for me,
Lecz syp się w proch i zrób mnie prochem!
Become ashes yourself and make me into ashes!
Bo ja nie ulegnę prędzej;
Because I will not yield before this;
Bo im więcej cierpię nędzy,
because the more I suffer from misery,
Im więcej mnie gną rozpacz,
the more my despair drives me,
Im boleśniej w nędzy płaczę,
the more I cry from grief,
Im przed tobą jestem mniejszy,
the more I am small before you,
Im we wnętrznościach głodniejszy,

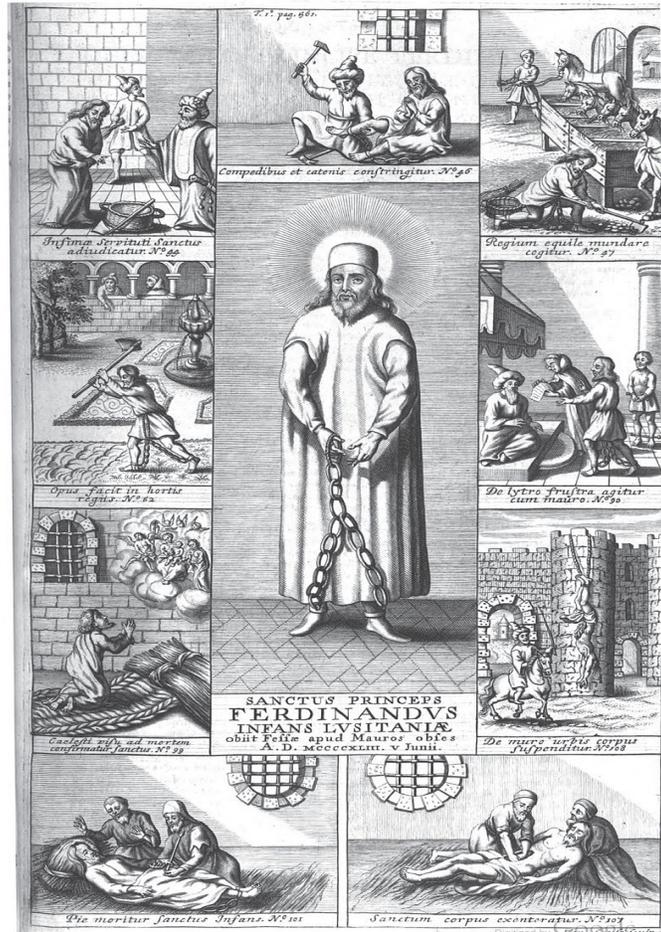
The more I feel hunger inside;
Im bardziej odarty z ciała,
The more I part from my body,
I z nadziei, i z łachmanów:
With its hopes and its old rages:
Choćby ta ziemia gnać miała
Even if this earth had to pursue me
Za mną szczękami kajdanów
With grinding of chains
Nawet - nawet w żywot dalszy;
Even - even into future life -
Im więcej cierpię, tym stalszy
The more I suffer, the more I will be constant (...)
(Ouaknine, S. 2011. p. 99). [draft translation from
Polish by Paul Allain]

Miłość mnie usprawiedliwia,

Love justifies this for me

What unites the victim and the persecutors is an act of love. The act of love is fulfilled in suffering, loss and resurrection - new life. A living Prince has no value whatsoever. On the contrary, his wretched body stinks, he is covered in insulting rags. Only the dead body gains because it becomes a relic. It can be dismembered and then gains value when worshipped - so

that the community has a chance to be reintegrated. The torn body and its individual parts have a new value for society, for its identity, for the continuation of myth.



Scenes from Ferdinand's captivity and death in Fez (from the Bollandist's Acta Sanctorum, 1695). The only known depiction of Ferdinand with a saint's halo.

According to the Catholic Church, holy relics are divided into three groups:

- the most important relics - of the first degree - are the remains of the holy body, e.g. blood, bones, skin, hair, nails
- relics of the second degree are objects related to the saint during his earthly life which he used, having direct contact with the saint: his clothes, prayer book, rosary and other everyday objects
- relics of the third degree are objects that have become relics by touching the appropriate relics - first or second degree. For example, they can be things rubbed against a part of the body of a deceased saint or touched by the saint himself during his life.

What are the relics of *The Constant Prince* of the Laboratory Theatre? In the conclusion to the chapter on the Total Act I will try to answer this question.



Still from video note by Magda Tuka, 2020.

Jesus can only be crucified once

Analysing the materials documenting the process of work by Serge Ouaknine on *The Constant Prince*, especially the preparation part - Technique I and Technique II, the text of the script itself, and the texts by Grotowski "Towards a Poor Theatre" - I believe that the Total Act was Grotowski's insightful work on this performance. The preparation of the actors performing the court and Cieślak's preparation for the role of the Prince were so intensely linked to the text of the Calderon/Słowacki drama that they led the stage situation to the discovery of a new quality in the actor's performance. The Court and Don Ferdinand colliding in the scenes of the performance created both a new quality of acting and a new meaning of the play itself: the quality of transgression. Of course, Grotowski's earlier work, especially on *Dr Faustus* and *Hamlet Study* (which will be discussed further on), was preparing the ground for a new phase. However, it was the text on self-sacrifice that led to the formulation of the Total Act.

I believe that, despite the public acclaim of *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, this act has not been repeated, for it is unique, individual and possible only once. This special event is a borderline, an archetypical situation to which whole future generations will refer. It is impossible to recreate the Act, but it is possible to confront oneself with it, (similar to the

idea of confrontation with myth, not identification). What remains of Cieślak/Grotowski's Total Act is a book *Towards a Poor Theatre* and images of Cieślak's body, which over time have become icons in the theatre field and beyond. And among them I recognise *The Constant Prince* relics.



Still from video note work by Magda Tuka, 2020.

**The scapegoat and preparation for the Hamlet's confrontation
with the masses**

The following quotation from Flaszen relates to the performance of *Hamlet Study* which will be discussed later. I cite it because of the vividness of the motif of the scapegoat in Grotowski's work:

Hamlet - a Jew? The Elsinore court - a Vlassovian commoner? The theme of the play is not really the Jewish question and anti-Semitism. The issue is only a particular, drastically sharpened form of social superstition, stereotypes of hostility ingrained in the collective consciousness and of people who seem to be strangers to one another. *Hamlet* is an abstract reflection on life, a drive for justice and repairing the world, detached from practice. Hamlet in the face of a group, a collective, a mass both predictable and uncontrollable. In Hamlet's eyes, the common people are a group of primitive, coarse-minded individuals, acting with numbers and physical strength, who only know how to fight, drink and die in grim reverie. This is how Theoretical Reason and Vital Strength look at each other, separated from each other and placed in a conflictual situation. They have been transformed into the superstitious imaginations of the masses - and like superstition, they are full of horror and tragic ridicule. We extract them for healing purposes from the cellars of the subconscious.

(Flaszen, L. 2006. p.72²⁶).

²⁶ All quotations In: Degler J., Ziółkowski G., eds., *Misterium zgrozy i urzeczenia. [The mystery of horror and enchantment]*. 2006. Wrocław: Instytut im. Jerzego Grotowskiego translated by Magda Tuka.

These observations by Grotowski's 'personal reviewer' Flaszen again evoke the streets of European cities during the Middle Ages and Passion Plays. Although the religious element is not directly present here, there is a strong friction between the masses and the individual, leading to the emergence of the figure of the scapegoat:

For there is always - on the psychological plane - a need for a Jew to be beaten - and a need for a conqueror who would sin from abstractness. Even when there are no Jews - and no conquerors. And when there is only - in different forms - alienation of culture and alienation of instinct, both at the service of Impossibility.

(Flaszen, L. 2006. p.72).

The symbolism of the scapegoat dates back to antiquity. There are two goats in Judaism: one who is killed and whose blood was sacrificed to God and the other who is banished. Both goats carry the sins committed by the community and, through the act of sacrifice, the community can be purified of those sins:

Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of

someone designated for the task. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness.²⁷

The scapegoat is essential to maintain social integrity. According to the Catholic religion, Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Through a voluntary act of self-sacrifice He purified people of their sins. Confession to the priest of sins is a way of forgiveness and a return to the path to good, returning to the Christian community and its values.

The scapegoat has many 'incarnations' in history. Characteristic is the identification of the 'guilty' (scapegoat) not by an individual person, but by a group, a community. It is the group that identifies the guilty one.

"In most societies belief in witchcraft is not the act of certain individuals only, or even of many, but the act of everyone". (Girard, R. 1989. p. 39). It is interesting, with the 'recognition' process, to link the victim with animal traits. Witches were believed to have a goat's characteristics (which was a devilish animal!) in their bodies. After their execution, 'evidence' of these animal traits was sought in the body. Crossing the border between what is human and the animal

²⁷ New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://nrsvbibles.org>
<https://bible.oremus.org/?passage=Leviticus%2016:21-22&version=nrsv>

world has been associated since ancient times with supernatural forces on the one hand and a great danger threatening human society on the other. The persecuted person is often indicated/seen during moments of crisis, such as a harvest disaster or a plague. It is often the 'stranger', who has come from somewhere else, a religious or national minority. Of course, in history, the persecuted one has often been the Jewish community. "The Jew is also thought to be connected with the goat and certain other animals". (Girard, R. 1989. p. 48). Interestingly, as Girard notes, when considering myths from the point of view of persecution, persecutor and victim, very often the persecuted one, who is pointed out as the culprit of given misfortunes, is responsible for both the disease and the potential power to heal the community. The return to a state of equilibrium, peace, and healing gives the victim the status of sainthood. Thus, the scapegoat itself combines sacrifice and sacredness, mystery. It is also so that the experience of the community's misery is elevated above everyday, trivial mediocrity:

Thebes is not unaware that epidemics strike human communities from time to time. But the people of Thebes ask why our city at this particular time? Those who are suffering are not interested in natural causes. Only magic makes 'corrective intervention'

possible, and everyone eagerly seeks a magician who can put things right. There is no remedy against the plague as is, or against Apollo, as you will. On the other hand, there is nothing to prevent the cathartic correction of the unfortunate Oedipus.

(Girard, R. 1989. p. 53).

In many cultures, the performance of a sacrifice was the only guarantee for bringing the world and humanity out of the primordial condition of chaos. Taking the example of the Aztecs, without the sacrifice of the victim, and the ritual repetition of this act, justified in the myth of creation (the hypnotic role of the example), the world would be plunged into darkness:

The first victims are not enough. (...) the sun and the moon shine in the sky but do not move; to force them to move, first every single god must be sacrificed, and then the anonymous crowds which are substituted for them. Everything depends on sacrifice.

(Girard, R. 1989. p. 63).

Grotowski's theatre from the period of the emergence of the Total Act is full of deep tension, but also movement, which allows the characters and situations to evade conclusion, so that the audience could, although in a physically passive way, participate in the drama.

Act of shame *Hamlet Study*

"We'd be happy if you followed up our *Hamlet Study* with a study of your own soul, ducks". (Flaszen, L. 2006. p. 72).

Hamlet was not fully completed:

Hamlet is the "Jew" and the others are "goyim", the Gentiles. He is different, the others are normal. He philosophises, the others live. He acts with caution, the others acts without hesitation. He dreams of doing, while the others do. No possibility of contact, no tolerance exists between the "Jew" and the "group". Each regards the other as danger. Hamlet is the "Jew" in community, whatever sense we attached to the word: ideological, religious, social, aesthetic, moral or sexual. He is different and is therefore a risk. Every group needs to have its "Jew" for the sake of self-definition, in order to reinforce the awareness of its own value and for the well being of one's own convictions.

(Barba, E. 1999. p. 78).

After its premiere in March 1964, the production of *Hamlet Study* based on Shakespeare's drama and Wyspiański's text (under the same title) was removed from the Laboratory Theatre's repertoire in April of the same year. One of the most important documents (1964) that remained after work on the play was Eugenio Barba's

notes, who after a trip to India (where he had the opportunity to see the theatre and the Kathakali school live) returned to Opole to continue his assistantship at the Theatre. Perhaps because of their unique value, these notes could be included in The Laboratory Theatre's 'inventory' of relics. The author (Barba) had direct contact with the work and felt it to be of potentially extraordinary importance, transcending the familiar boundaries of theatre, facing the new and the unknown:

Let us imagine a festering and foetid wound, covered by a white bandage. Suddenly the bandage is stripped off and the scab gets torn away. Pain mingles with disgust at the pus and the blood. That is Grotowski's *Study on Hamlet*. He has removed the bandage which adorns and controls our conscience and has laid bare the Eros and the Thanatos rooted in the subconscious of the individual and collective imagination. It is a terrifying and horrible vivisection that smells of sweat, blood and sperm - a merciless vision of the individual and the group swept along by instinct. It is a transfiguration of Shakespearian substance. The violence, passion and meanness of human beings are revealed to us among the flashes and visions that appeal to our collective memory.

(Barba, E. 1999. p.81).

Barba suggests that *Hamlet Study* was such a strong proposal, with no compromise, provoking everything and everyone, that the audience was probably not ready for it. And Grotowski himself was not convinced that it was worth presenting more widely. In his much later statements, *Study* was mentioned as a fundamental work on the road to the Total Act, but in 1965, on the last page of the programme for *The Constant Prince*, on the list of most important productions of the Theatre of 13 Rows, there was no *Hamlet*. This 'Study' appears to have frightened the author himself.

In turn, in-depth research into Grotowski's situation regarding the political restrictions of the 50/60s in Poland by Dr Agnieszka Wójtowicz²⁸ suggests also a slightly different, not necessarily artistic, reason for taking the performance away from the public gaze. Wójtowicz scrupulously browsed through the archives of the Security Office (many files have been destroyed) and, in an attempt to look at the events at the Theatre of 13 Rows (later the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows) in the context of the political atmosphere of the time, criticises both the story given by Grotowski/Flaszen concerning the origins of the Theatre in Opole, and her own existing views.

²⁸ Lecture by Dr Agnieszka Wójtowicz as part of the author's term *Political Grotowski*. „J'accuse”, czyli Hamlet i mijalowcy”. [„J'accuse” thus Hamlet and 'Mijalowcy’”].

In the 1950s, Grotowski was an activist of the youth left in Kraków, but the events of 1956²⁹ caused him to break with all political activity, disappointed with the politics of the then authorities. However, like his fellow student activists, he had a potential problem with continuing his theatrical work in a large urban centre, hence the emergence, as Wójtowicz suggests, of provincial Opole. The secret papers regarding Grotowski from the Security Office were sent to Opole. The Theatre (like many other public centres at the time) was under constant control (a wiretapped telephone, one of the theatre staff members was an informer, etc.), every performance was censored, and due to its growing popularity (also abroad), the coming apprentices (like Eugenio Barba) were immediately under observation and regular interrogation.

²⁹ The Polish October, also known as October 1956, the Polish Thaw or the Gomułka Thaw, marked a change in Polish politics in the second half of 1956. Some sociologists call it the Polish October Revolution, which was less dramatic than the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 but could have an even more profound impact on the Eastern Bloc and on the relations of the Soviet Union with its satellite states in Central and Eastern Europe. For the People's Republic of Poland, 1956 was a year of transition. The international situation had considerably weakened the hard-line Stalinist faction in Poland, especially after the death of the Polish Communist leader Bolesław Bierut in March. Three years had passed since the death of Joseph Stalin, and his successor as Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, condemned him in February. In June, protests by workers in Poznan highlighted people's dissatisfaction with their situation. In October these events led to the coming to power of the reformist faction, led by Władysław Gomułka. After brief but tense negotiations, the Soviets agreed to Gomułka staying in power and made several other concessions, resulting in greater autonomy for the Polish government. For Poland this meant temporary liberalisation, but ultimately hopes for full liberalisation proved illusory as Gomułka's regime gradually became more and more oppressive. Nevertheless, the era of Stalinism in Poland came to an end.

Available at:

<https://historia.org.pl/2020/07/06/polski-pazdziernik-1956-czyli-odwilz-gomulkowska-oraz-jej-przyczyny-i-skutki/> [Accessed 9 July 2022].

1964 was a critical moment for the work of the group. The threat of closure was absolutely real, and the subject matter of the *Hamlet Study*, which strongly criticised Polish society, also in the context of anti-Semitism (anticipating the events of 1968), was very dangerous for its continued existence. Additionally one of the company members, who was a government secret security informer (Agnieszka Wójtowicz does not give his name) sent a denunciation to local the authorities based on Grotowski's alleged homosexuality. That kind of statement was potentially very destructive for individuals in Poland at that time. Grotowski decided to focus on the long-term nature of his experimental work, rather than short-term revolutionary actions. This, according to Wójtowicz, was the reason why *Hamlet* disappeared.

Political context of 1968 events in Poland³⁰

Below is a short note about the political circumstances of the 1960s in Poland, which I believe is important for understanding the circumstances of the Laboratory Theatre's work.

The situation of the campaign against the Zionists - as the repressed group was called - was linked both to Cold War policy and the Israeli attack on Egypt in 1967 (the Six-Day War), which

³⁰ Sources: March 1968 Available at: <https://www.polin.pl/pl/marzec-68-informacje-historyczne>
Secret police archives [IPN - Institute of National Memory]:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85_VHtECDy0 [Accessed on 4 August 2022]

was roundly condemned by the Warsaw Pact countries, and also to internal party politics in Poland. A huge role in creating anti-Jewish propaganda was played by Mieczysław Moczar and the group of so-called Patriots. They were a strongly nationalistic faction in the Communist Party. The then First Secretary, Wiesław Gomułka, after the events of the Polish March 1968 (the so-called Students' March, or March events, were a series of major student, intellectual and other protests against the communist regime of the Polish People's Republic) fully succumbed to anti-Jewish rhetoric and pointed the finger of blame for the crisis at students whose parents were of Jewish origin. The protests overlapped with the events of the Prague Spring in neighbouring Czechoslovakia - raising new hopes of democratic reforms among the intelligentsia. The Czechoslovak unrest culminated in the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia on 20 August 1968. A Zionist was presented as hiding under the cloak of pseudo-patriotism as an enemy working for forces hostile to the People's Republic of Poland. Because of their origin, they are an ally of the state of Israel and thus work for a foreign intelligence service. "These Zionists had to be exposed" (hence the mass retrieval of baptismal certificates from parishes by citizens in order to prove their non-Jewishness) and deprived of any influence on the formation of People's Poland. In carefully staged public displays of

support, factory workers across Poland were assembled to publicly denounce Zionism. As a result, more than 13,000 people between 1968 and 1971 were forced to emigrate from Poland, where they lost their jobs, housing and chances for education. Having renounced Polish citizenship, they had no chance of returning. The Gdańsk train station in Warsaw, from where the train to Vienna departed, was the scene of many dramatic separations of family and friends:

While Grotowski's performance might not have been entirely coherent, it nevertheless made an extraordinarily brave incursion into the collective subconscious, drawing out from it images and imaginings concerning Poland, Poles and Polishness. Never before and never again would Grotowski make such direct reference to the realities of his nation. And he never again appeared as perspicacious as he had done in 1964 when he created this performance which seemed to presage the anti-Semitic manifestations and state-provoked aggression towards Jews which came to a head in 1968. Having touched upon something so painful and difficult, he quickly retreated.³¹

³¹ *Hamlet Study* Available at: <https://grotowski.net/en/encyclopedia/studium-o-hamlecie-hamlet-study> [Accessed 18 January 2021].

The reason for the decision to remove a performance from the programme is not entirely clear. Grotowski had a strong vision of his work and was probably not ready to sacrifice himself and the company for one performance in the name of political justice. It was better to focus on a slightly less sensitive topic.

***Hamlet Study* by Stanisław Wyspiański**

Perhaps the group research on the actor's technique while working on *Hamlet Study* was much more collective in its nature. We might venture the thesis that it was the entire ensemble that could potentially experience the fulfilment of the Total Act (which, of course, had not yet been formulated), rather than just a chosen individual.

What is the text of Stanisław Wyspiański's *Hamlet Study*? In this case the Court would be:

grotesque, its characteristics exaggerated - brutal, despicable and ludicrous, terrifying in its stupidity and soulless, lascivious and drunken, impudent and wicked, flat and coarse, filling the castle with empty din and tyranny.

Against this background Hamlet would:

feign madness, hide from the Argus eyes of Claudius' court as it tried to entangle and ensnare him - the dangerous rightful heir to the crown, the son of the conqueror of Norway treacherously deprived of his due rights - possessed of the great love and affection of the general gender in spite of his feigned madness. Over this fortress of crimes concealed by laughter, din, drunkenness and debauchery, night would fall - when the guards and sentries deployed on the towers, terraces, walls and gates... would see the majestic phantom - the phantom of the forgotten yet recent past - the phantom of a king ripped from life by homicidal treason, a conqueror king, the King-Ghost, the father of nation - lamenting the fate of a nation under threat - crying out: REVENGE! (...) This is the tragedy of the Ghost.

(Wyspiański, S. 2019. pp. 81-82).³²

Wyspiański's *Hamlet Study* is one of the essential critical Polish texts on Shakespeare's drama. The text was directly inspired by a conversation between Wyspiański and Kazimierz Kamiński, an actor from the Teatr Stary (Kraków).

³² Wyspiański, S. 2019. *The Hamlet Study and The Death of Ophelia*. London: Shakespeare's Globe. [translated by Barbara Bogoczek and Tony Howard].

Like many actors, Kamiński needs to confront himself with this great, complex role. Wyspiański, who claims to know the play very well because he has read it many times, says that he has to return to the text after the actor's conversation because many issues remain unresolved. *Hamlet Study* is a text that was written immediately after.

In the text, Wyspiański repeats how important the role of thought is in constructing Hamlet's drama or the thought process itself:

The prince's monologues are stages in the development of his thought, Hamlet will never descend from those higher and higher terraces. He can only go higher. He will never step down, the thought speaks out loud. And this is what is most important: when he begins to think at a particular point, he does not know - how he will develop his thought and where he will take it.

(Wyspiański, S. 2019. p. 141).

Wyspiański makes his own translation of these monologues/thoughts. A metadialogue is thus created between the reader, Wyspiański and his translation, Shakespeare and his *Hamlet*.

Thanks to the translation/thought process, the possibility of continuing the dialogue arises. Perhaps the text of *Hamlet Study* read in this way inspired the experimentalist Grotowski and his

actors. Thus, they began to read the drama once again through history. Flaszen's notes from rehearsals are amongst the few remaining documents from the process of working on the performance:

1. The title of the performance - *Hamlet Study* - has a double meaning. We are not 'playing' Hamlet - neither in its classical, Shakespearean version, nor according to the suggestions contained in Wyspiański's famous essay on this drama. Using exceptions from Shakespeare and from Wyspiański's commentary, we give our own version of the story of the Danish prince: variations on selected Shakespearean themes. Study of the motif. The rehearsals concerned not only the subject matter of the play, i.e. the individual in relation to the group, but also the method of acting itself, aiming at The Total Act. (...) The work consists in the collective extraction of what is psychologically hidden and expressively effective - and in organising it around a guiding line that is formulated gradually. This is the second meaning of the word 'study' in the title: a study of acting method and collective direction.

(Flaszen, L. 2006. p.72).

I think that Flaszen's text above may support the thesis of a collective exploration of a new method of acting.

The Polish Living Dead in the Queen's Bedroom

The frame situation in the performance of *Hamlet Study* was the scene in the cemetery. All relationships and characters were determined by this 'absolute' setting. The Gravedigger was the one who 'buries' Hamlet in order to give him new life. As the Living Dead? Perhaps this is where we can look for a relation to this character described by Mickiewicz. Hamlet is buried in the cemetery, but he is not resurrected, he becomes a Living Dead whose destiny is to reside in limbo, the space between the dead and the living. The ghosts of the past haunt the Prince, they 'do not let him live', they consume him with their unspeakable torment and grief. The gravedigger also had the function of the one who knows, the one who knows the past and can predict what will happen in the future. He is a kind of Master of Ceremonies, as well as a director himself.

With the Danish prince (as if he were a director with an actor), he [the gravedigger] contemplates the Hamlet myth using Wyspiański's words, staging and commenting on particular scenes (the order of Wyspiański's argument was generally maintained in Grotowski's work). In effect, what was created was a script for a performance that resembled the later productions of Tadeusz

Kantor's Theatre of Death:

the dead protagonists exhumed by the Gravedigger-Director contemplate their existence at a cemetery and in an uncoordinated and inconsistent manner (such is Wyspiański's labyrinthine commentary, after all) they speak about themselves while all the while trying to comprehend the sense of their existence and experience. Yet, during work on the performance, the script underwent radical transformations while the performance itself was created through collective improvisations by the actors, becoming the first work by Grotowski to be 'written on stage' to such a great extent.³³

Polish scholar Leszek Kolankiewicz in a comprehensive study *Dziady. Teatr Święta Zmarłych*³⁴ emphasises the significance of the figure of the Living Dead, who is the opening persona of Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, PART II, in thinking about Poles and Polishness:

Polish Romanticism began with The Living Dead, Polish Romantic drama evoked The Living Dead and Polish theatre, condemned to this kind of classics, is struggling with the livingdeadness. It struggles with

³³ *Hamlet Study* [text] Available at: <https://grotowski.net/en/encyclopedia/studium-o-hamlecie-hamlet-study> [Accessed 18 January 2021].

³⁴ *Forefathers' Eve. Theatre of the Feast of the Dead*. 1999. Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria.

Forefathers' Eve as with a constantly returning Living Dead.

(Kolankiewicz, L. 1999. p. 233). [Translation by Magda Tuka].

In his divinely inspired lessons/improvisations on Slavic mythology (which today we would probably call a lecture-performance) Mickiewicz in exile creates a picture of spiritual identity (not based on written documents) of Poles, of Slavs. Through folk messages, old customs preserved in the language, unexplained games, plays and images of the Fatherland in the poet's heart, he is led to meet with his forefather. This place is the cemetery. The idea that rituals dedicated to the dead, the creation of a space where the meeting of the living and the dead takes place, where human time is suspended and the place becomes a kind of portal passage is, on the one hand, the foundation of the theatre itself and on the other, a mythical situation.

The Living Dead

The heart is stopped, cold is the breast,

Mouth closed, and eyes as dull as lead;

He's here, and yet somewhere else:

What kind of man is this? - The dead.

(Mickiewicz, A. 2016. *Forefathers' Eve*. p. 145).

As we know, Mickiewicz wrote most of his work at a critical time for Poland (1820-1830). The country was disappearing from the map of Europe, the invaders (Russia, Prussia and Austria) were restricting the freedoms and suppressing all freedom aspirations (the November Uprising in 1830) of Poles.³⁵ Culture and art in exile were the only spaces where Polish national identity could continue to exist and develop. The search for the motifs of national unity leads the bard towards the cemetery. The remembrance of the fathers, but also an active reunion, the evocation of spirits, is a ritual that has survived, that binds, and that goes back to the times before the Baptism of Poland (966 AD). The cemetery is on the one hand a responsibility towards the past, and on the other a space in between, where rationality and social roles can be suspended, transformed, where a performance takes place.

After 1945, Poland again lost its sovereignty.³⁶ Being part of the Eastern Bloc, it was in fact directly subordinate to the government in Moscow. The situation of the division of power in Europe after the Second World War was very complicated in its

³⁵ The Partitions of Poland were three partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that took place toward the end of the 18th century and ended the existence of the state, resulting in the elimination of sovereign Poland and Lithuania for 123 years. The partitions were conducted by the Habsburg Monarchy, the Kingdom of Prussia, and the Russian Empire. Source: Davies, N. 2005. *God's Playground*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁶ Welsh-Polish historian Norman Davies specialises in the history of Eastern Europe. His 2 volume work *God's Playground* focuses on 1000 years of Polish history. The second volume covers the history from 1795 (i.e. the second partition of Poland) to the early 1980s. It is considered one of the best works on Polish history written by a non-Polish-speaking author. First published in 1981.

consequences and there is no point in even trying to describe it briefly, however, one should remember that socialist ideals, for many, including the young Grotowski, were not associated with a situation of oppression. As I mentioned above, in the 1950s he made an active contribution to the discussion on the creation of a socialist Poland, but quite quickly he withdrew from all political activity, as Wójtowicz refers to it, describing this period from a political perspective: "all that was shit".³⁷

It seems that in *Hamlet Study* we find Poland under partition, this time under the sign of the hammer and sickle, and we look at the roles/masks assumed at the cemetery:

Hamlet, inspired by Grotowski's associations, becomes a drama about Slavic, Polish peasants. Or perhaps about Poles as a peasant nation? Not as it is. But as it could be if its archaic spiritual components formed by the collective experience of the past were fully revealed. Components that have the ability to reveal themselves spontaneously - in border situations... The image of the nation that emerges in this way is close to superstitious ideas. It is not the truth about the nation, but fantasising about it; perhaps also a warning, tragicomic in its tone, that superstition -

³⁷ The quote is from a lecture by Agnieszka Wojtowicz. 2020. [video]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIJWX9W7Sr8&feature=emb_logo [Accessed 1 December 2020].

which contains something of the shameful truth -
should not become reality.

(Flaszen, L. 2006. p. 76).

Basing ourselves only on Barba or Ludwik Flaszen's notes, scant hints by Grotowski, fragments of reviews and later analyses by scholars, we can only speculate about *Hamlet*. However, even from these limited sources of information, what emerges is a very complex work that goes far beyond the definition of an 'acting étude', as Flaszen calls it in his reflections in "Hamlet in the Theatre Laboratory".

A work that, by its very nature, cannot be closed, finished, but rather, like Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*), must be reconciled to its 'logical inconsistency', confusion of orders³⁸ and lack of conclusion resulting from its structure. This kind of encounter with the viewer is intended to introduce troublesome themes and to face the inability of their solution. This 'inability' is emphasised by Flaszen himself as a feature of the assembly, incapable of action:

This landscape atmosphere is not so much real as it is
archaic, preserved, not without the participation of
19th century poetry and painting, in the national

³⁸ *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*) consists of *Dziady* part II – from 1823, *Dziady* part IV – from 1823, *Dziady* part III – from 1832, *Dziady* part I – published in 1860, after Mickiewicz's death, unfinished.

imagination. In the inhabitants of this - partly imaginary - land, grim biological vigour goes hand in hand with a yearning, lamenting search for Sense and Deed (necessarily in capital letters!); the Inability lurking everywhere causes human aspirations to be discharged in simple and substitute activities.

(Flaszen, L. 2006. p. 76).





Melancholic and gloomy landscape of Ursynów estate in Warsaw, where I grew up, photo by Agata Tuka, 2021.



How the Hare is Dying, Festival Steakhouse Live, photo by Manuel Vason, Rich Mix in London, 2018.

Returning to the path towards the Total Act, it seems that the character emerging from *Hamlet Study*, that is Hamlet/The Living Dead, is very specifically Polish and perhaps difficult to understand more universally. Hamlet's transformation in the cemetery does not have the desired effect of purifying society of its sins. It is rather another stage in the settling of a burdening memory. Living Dead with its miserable and indefinable body does not feed any idea, but rather plunges us into reflections on the past. Hamlet/The Living Dead is in the search area for the Total Act, but is a rather dangerous spur locate, like suicide graves on the marigins of the cemetery away from larger gatherings.

Another important motif, whose potential power we can only guess at, is that of Ophelia. Wyspiański suggests, and this opens our imagination, a different look at Polonius' daughter than has traditionally been the case in theatre:

An Ophelia - Courtesan! This birth of 'superself' even became the theme of one of the scenes. In the scene, which takes place in the bathhouse, in a collective bath, amidst sensual gasps and coarse games, where only Hamlet, in an anointing inappropriate manner, preserves his otherness through his clothes, Ophelia's death occurs amidst sinful manipulations. The carnality of perversion and the carnality of death

reveal their ambiguous kinship. And the excess turns into a service, the ecstatic fun - into a funeral liturgy.

(Flaszen, L. 2006. p.79).

In this way, we have come dangerously close again to the space of themes related to the origins of tragedy and theatre itself. The already mentioned Leszek Kolankiewicz, following the eminent scholar of Greek culture Károly Kerényi (the author of *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*) links death, resurrection, birth of the god and the mystery of fertilisation as an incestuous act. "The God who dies and is reborn is always associated with a female figure". (Kolankiewicz, L. 1999. p.328). Wyspiański also suggests the queen's bedroom as a place of the secret of life, and links Ophelia with Hamlet's mother.

"The bond between Oedipus and Jocasta is the penetration of the innermost mystery of life". (Kolankiewicz, L. 1999. p.107).

Ophelia's death and the sexual act bring back (by reversing the orders) the thought of ancient rituals dedicated to the dead. Upon returning from war, Hamlet headed to the tavern where he encountered the agents with the King and Queen (Rena Mirecka). He returned destroyed to a destroyed world, like Odysseus in Wyspiański's drama *Powrót Odysa* (*The Return of Odysseus*, 1907) or Henryk in Witold Gombrowicz's *Ślub* (*The Marriage*, 1948), which was at the time key reading for Grotowski. This return was

simultaneously an attempt at returning to the maternal womb:

Through an act of incestuous rape (the scene with Hamlet in Gertrude's bedroom) which ended with the murder of Polonius. This led to the pivotal moment of the entire piece: the bathhouse scene, created entirely through the actors' improvisation (hence there is no script for it). The peasant soldiers strip themselves bare, pour water over each other and make unambiguous advances on one another. Only Hamlet stands alone and is thus subjected to their mockery. Ophelia then enters the bathhouse and is passed from one man to another as part of an erotic game which turns into a rape scene during which she dies. This is the moment when '[t]he carnality of perversion and the carnality of death show their ambiguous similarities.'³⁹

***Hamlet Study* - experimental collective work**

Ludwik Flaszen's texts suggest that the process of working on *Hamlet* was largely based on collective improvisation, with Grotowski, as the director of the performance, stimulating the activities rather than giving them direction:

The verbal scenario was not considered an irrevocably closed whole. The practice made it only a preliminary

³⁹ *Hamlet Study* [text] Available at: <https://grotowski.net/en/encyclopedia/studium-o-hamlecie-hamlet-study> [Accessed 18 January 2021].

draft, a series of directional proposals. Its realised shape emerged gradually. If a fragment of the text did not stimulate the imagination of the actors or the director - it was dropped. Many important literary scenes, whose stimulating power turned out to be insignificant in practice, were removed. Because, let us remember again, the aim of the project was not to play *Hamlet* or to test the validity of Wyspiański's ideas, but to attempt spontaneous creativity in the theatre.

(Flaszen, L. 2006. p.75).

An attempt at spontaneous creativity in theatre - it seems that the principle of exploration emphasised by Flaszen at the time spoke a lot about the value of ensemble work. Perhaps it was also due to the fact that Hamlet was played by Zygmunt Molik, an actor of a completely different energy and character from Cynkutis or Cieślak, tending to coexist with others rather than being the chosen one around whom the action revolved.

It is worth listening to Molik, who, for example, talks about his later paratheatrical experiences and the sessions he conducted called "Acting Therapy" or "Voice and Body". What emerges here is a picture of a man/pedagogue/actor who, through extremely attentive, simple, listening instruction, guides, or basically tries to remove the obstacles blocking the natural

voice in the body. The collective lives and thrives through individuality, and individuality through the collective. Arguably, Molik, as the protagonist, brought an entirely different quality to the work process than, for example, Ryszard Cieślak in *The Constant Prince*.

Zygmunt Molik:

The first step towards studying the body. We put aside all compositions. Until now, our performances have been based on composition. This time we took the first step towards the study of the body, leaving aside any composition. It was a turnaround in our work. Hamlet was for me a very difficult performance, extremely perverse, controversially conceived by Grotowski and Flaszen.⁴⁰

However, it is the rehearsals for *Hamlet* that Grotowski points to (although without elaborating on this) as fundamental in shaping the idea of the Total Act. These procedures serve the purpose of purifying the actor's material - of factors producing resistance. Flaszen mentions the purifying act in public:

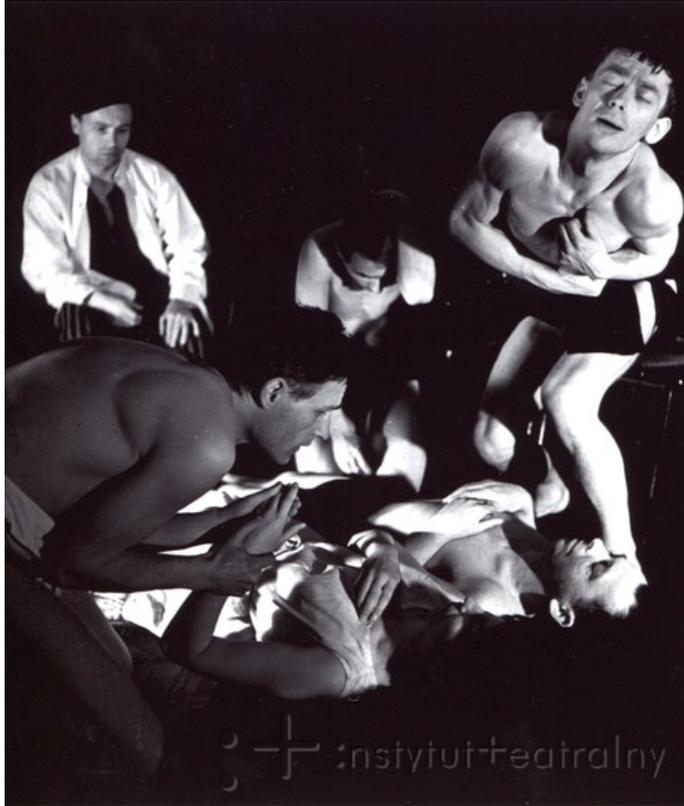
Let him get to know the hidden layers of his being - without the falsehood of premature sublimation; the organic possibilities of his body - without the

⁴⁰ Molik Zygmunt [text] Available at: <https://ewamolik-zygmunt.blogspot.com/2017/01/studium-o-hamlecie-deliberacje.html> [Accessed 18 January 2021]

illusion of culturism. On the basis of the material thus purified, the actor's expressiveness is born, taken to the extreme. Stripped of illusionary and colloquial imagery, the actor has to demonstrate this purifying act - close to a ritual act - in public. This is done in order to force the viewer, by means of an excess, to perform a similar purifying act, although only in his mind, in his imagination. (Flaszen, L. 2006. pp.75-76).

As I already mentioned, very little material remains from the *Study*. A poster, two scripts, a few photos, an amateur documentary film called *Rehearsal* (collective work; production: Akademicki Klub Filmowy Kręciołek; Opole 1964), from which, unfortunately, not much can be derived, because the sound layer is a piece of meaningless background music what could refer us to the audio-visual element in *Hamlet* is non-existent.





Hamlet Study - Theatre of 13 Rows, Theatre Institute Archives, Opole 17th
March 1964.

It was also a moment of crisis for the company. The extremely demanding work with Grotowski, the financial troubles, and a number of other problems that every ensemble faces over time caused much stress, as Ewa Oleszko-Molik recalls on her blog:

There are many indications that it was during the rehearsals for *Hamlet* that the famous scene took place with the enraged Cynkutis⁴¹ swinging a chair at the director after hearing a murderous series of the famous 'I don't believe you'. He left the theatre,

⁴¹ It is possible that it was not Zbigniew Cynkutis but Mieczysław Janowski.

apparently by then 'yes, now I believe you' was not enough. The realisation of *Hamlet Study* seems to have been the apogee of the feuds which were raging in the company, because soon two more actors left; Bielski permanently, Molik for almost two years. Obviously, both of them had many more important, not at all trivial, reasons for leaving the Laboratory of 13 Rows.⁴²

It seems that a crisis on many levels is a necessary experience in the emergence of a new idea. *Hamlet Study* was such a crisis, but I believe that, as a performance, it is also, due to Grotowski's lack of commentary, a very underrated work. Naturally, every artist has the right to make statements about his or her creative path, and as someone immensely preoccupied with an idea, he or she is very subjective in the evaluation.

⁴² Molik Zygmunt [text] Available at: <https://ewamolik-zygmunt.blogspot.com/2017/01/studium-o-hamlecie-deliberacja.html> [Accessed 18 January 2021]



Hamlet directed by Piotr Borowski, photo by Anna Konik, in the photo:
Zbigniew Kowalski, Piotr Piszczatowski and Monika Dąbrowska, Studium Teatralne
in Warsaw, 2005.⁴³

⁴³ Margin : Studium Teatralne about *Hamlet Study*.

One day Jolanta Denejko, a member of Warsaw's Studium Teatralne brought Wyspiański's text as inspiration for the company to confront Shakespeare's drama. *Hamlet's* premiere took place in June 2005 and, like Grotowski's *Hamlet Study*, the performance was short-lived. It disappeared from the repertoire of the theatre before it appeared in Warsaw's cultural program. Yet, it was important. Both for the individual development of the actors, and the maturity of the ensemble (*Hamlet* was followed by *Henryk Hamlet Hospital*, 2006). From my perspective, I can describe the working process as a challenge to confront the new, which was Gertrude's character, while consciously using body language as its expression. It was also the first time working on the bedroom scene that I understood the poetic metaphor of the space we were using (the venue by Lubelska Street) and the scene's potential to refer to myth. The confrontation between mother and son in the mother's bedroom, the mystery of life that Kolankiewicz mentions above, continues to inspire me to this day.

Act of self-penetration *Dr Faustus*

In this section I intend to look at another performance directed by Grotowski in order to trace what work and ideas preceded the formulation of the Total Act.

Rehearsals for *Dr Faustus*⁴⁴ - rehearsals for the Total Act.

The performance, which premiered on 23 April 1963, was important on the way to the formulation of Technique II - the Total Act.



Poster for *Dr Faustus* by Waldemar Krygier.

⁴⁴ *Dr Faustus* a performance based on Christopher Marlowe's drama (c. 1589), with the premiere (which was also the first ever Polish performance of Marlowe's drama) taking place on 23 April 1963 at the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows in Opole. Script and direction: Jerzy Grotowski. Stage design: Jerzy Gurawski. Costumes: Waldemar Krygier. Assistant director: Eugenio Barba. Cast: Zbigniew Cynkutis (Faustus), Rena Mirecka and Antoni Jahółkowski (Mephistopheles), Ryszard Cieślak (Wagner, Valdes, Benvolio), Maciej Prus then later Mieczysław Janowski (Jacob), Zygmunt Molik (Old man, Bartek), Andrzej Bielski (Cornelius, the Cardinal, Emperor Friedrich), Tune Bull (Helen of Troy).

In the text-interview "A New Testament of Theatre" that Barba conducted with Grotowski in 1964, the phrase the Total Act does not yet appear. What dominates is the attempt to define the holy actor in contrast to the actor-courtesan. The holy actor performs an act of self-penetration on himself, a self-revealing offering/giving himself to the audience in an act of love:

The performing of this act we are referring to - self-penetration, exposure - demands a mobilisation of all the physical and spiritual forces of the actor who is in a state of idle readiness, a passive availability, which makes possible an active acting score. One must resort to a metaphorical language to say that the decisive factor in this process is humility, a spiritual predisposition: not to do something, but to refrain from doing something, otherwise the excess becomes impudence instead of sacrifice. This means the actor must act in a state of trance.

(Grotowski, J. 1968, p. 37).



A still from documentary *Letter from Opole* by Michael Elster, <https://vimeo.com/511594488> [On the still we see Cynkutis as Faustus], Łódź 1963.⁴⁵

Here, it is worth trying to have a closer look at what Grotowski considered as a "state of trance" in 1964, it seems that over time, due to numerous misunderstandings, this word disappeared from his statements:

Trance, as I understand it, is the ability to concentrate in a particular theatrical way and can be attained with a minimum of goodwill. If I were to express all this in one sentence I would say that it

⁴⁵ Michael Elster - British film-maker. *Letter from Opole* was Elster's graduation work from the same drama school that Cynkutis attended. <http://archiwum.nina.gov.pl/en/film/list-z-opola> [Accessed on 11 March 2021].

is all a question of giving oneself. One must give oneself totally, in one's deepest intimacy, with confidence, as when one gives oneself in love. Here lies the key. Self-penetration, trance, excess, the formal discipline itself - all this can be realised, provided one has given oneself fully, humbly, and without defence.

(Grotowski, J. 1968. p. 38).

Grotowski refers to the concept of trance as a state of heightened awareness, as if walking on glass, and quoting T.S. Eliot's poetry, consciously and under control, with intense concentration. It is about a conscious exploration of extreme situations/challenges for the actor's body and mind, with no 'shortcuts'. I will return to the actor in a trance state later in "Chapter Two: Body in Crisis - remembering Antonin Artaud" dedicated to Artaud.

Holy Actor



Zbigniew Cynkutis, photo by Z. Nasierowska, Łódź 9th March 1959.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The very favourable 'angelic' appeal of the young Cynkutis was repeatedly highlighted in his performance as Doctor Faustus.

The first information, almost mythical, about the Theatre of 13 Rows came to me through the person of Cynkutis, Zbigniew Cynkutis, when around the year 63-64 news and stories began to reach Toruń at the Nicolaus Copernicus University about a certain actor who, haunted by Satan, in ecstasy, throws out his guts and soul and from whom possessed voices emerge. We, theatrically innocent Polish students at the Faculty of Humanities at the university, listen to some secret recordings of this fragment on tape from the first available tape recorders. The voices are as if from the beyond, the voice of Faustus, Faustus|Cynkutis. *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* by Marlowe. In Opole.⁴⁷

Zbigniew Cynkutis was 26 years old at the premiere of *Dr Faustus*. But he already had a wealth of experience working at the Theatre of 13 Rows. He had been officially employed since 1 May 1961 and his first role was that of Guślarz in *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*), while his second was that of Arka Bożek in *Pamiętnik śląski* (*A Silesian Diary*). He quickly became a leading figure in the company, which was confirmed by his subsequent roles: the title role in *Kordian*, Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*, Laban and Paris in the first and second versions of *Akropolis*.

⁴⁷ Spsychalski, T. 2016 [blog] Available at: teospsychalski.wordpress.com/ludzie-people [Accessed on 11 March 2021].

The role of Faustus marked a completely new stage for Cynkutis as an actor and a man. Rehearsals, as we know, were intensive, individual and intimate, which brought great challenge and risk to the whole work.

As we learn from Cynkutis's *Notes - Diaries*, this extremely exhausting process, both mentally and physically, caused his departure for some time from the company. However, it had a transformative value for both the young actor and the director.

The work on Faustus, which was never finished until the final performance, led me to discover in myself many traits that I hadn't been aware of before. through performing Faustus, I found a great deal of good and evil, weakness and strength within me. (...) I sensed the possibility of delving further within myself and was terrified at the thought. In the autumn of 1963, a state of being 'blocked off' grew within me, the fear of further exploitation in the role of being clay in God's hands.
(Cynkutis, Z. 2017, p. 79).

The Body of Saint Sebastian

The theatre director found in the story of Faust an analogy to the lives of saints. If sanctity is understood as an uncompromising striving for truth, a

love of extreme attitudes which absorb the whole man - then Faust is a saint. His life is modelled by the director according to mediaeval hagiographical patterns. Through baptism, mortification, fighting temptations, performing miracles, and finally martyrdom, Faust heads towards his final apotheosis, ambiguous in its cruelty.

(Flaschen, L. 2006. p. 70).

The figure of the martyr was also invoked by Eugenio Barba when describing the physical characteristics of Cynkutis, in the role of Faustus: "Here we have the archetype of the saint. The role is played by an actor who looks young and innocent - his psycho-physical characteristics resemble St. Sebastian's. But this St. Sebastian is anti-religious, fighting God". (Barba, E. 1968. p. 72).



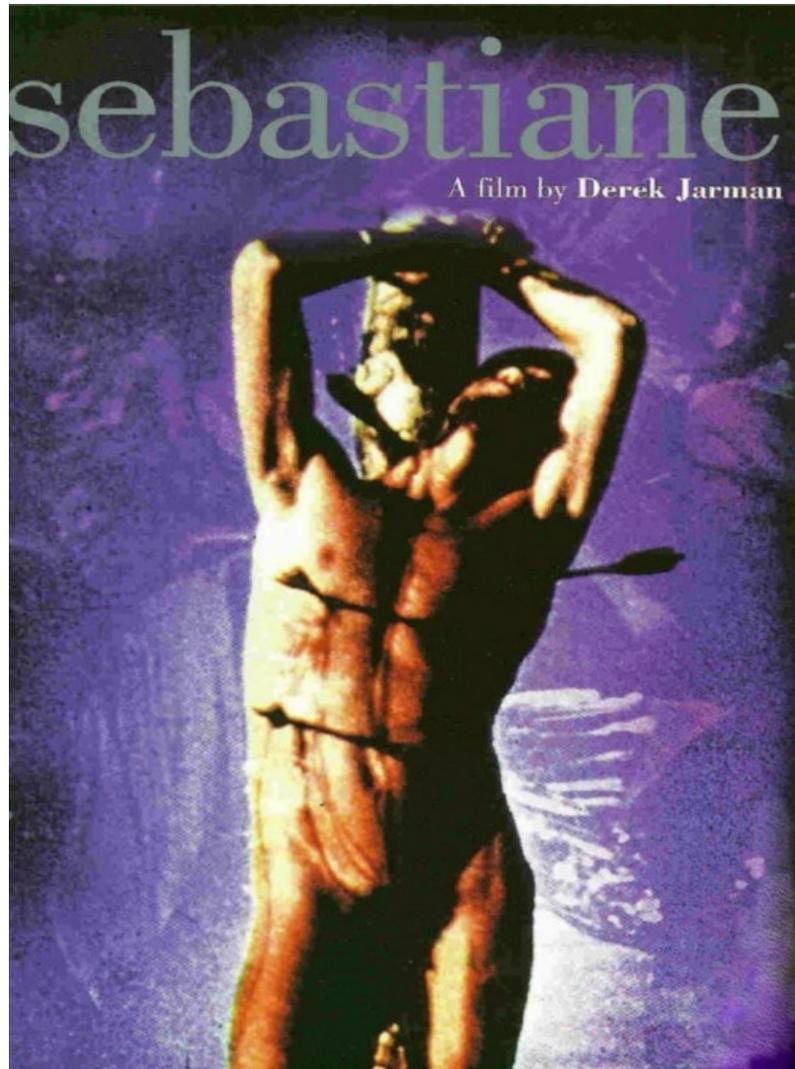
Andrea Mantegna, *Saint Sebastian*, oil on wood panel, ca. 1456

(Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna).

Images of St Sebastian⁴⁸ have always been very controversial in the Catholic Church. Here is a young, well-built man (Sebastian was a soldier of the emperor Diocletian) almost naked, tied to a tree and exposed to an attack of arrows. The image naturally evoked erotic associations, and in the late 20th century the saint became an icon of the gay movement. Some have even interpreted Sebastian's persecution as a sort of coming out narrative, in which the martyr reveals his true self and is punished for it. Artists like Derek Jarman appropriated the tradition story of Saint Sebastian through a queer lens in his homoerotic historical thriller film *Sebastiane*⁴⁹ (1976). The film sexualises Sebastian's torture, as he demands increasingly violent thrills and displays clear erotic pleasure as he is penetrated by the arrows. The forbidden desire of Saint Sebastian's body was a theme of British painter Keith Vaughan (1912-1977) and many others. It is likely that Grotowski, living in communist Poland in the 1960s, had no direct contact with examples of gay art, but his choice of Saint Sebastian as the inspiration for the figure of Faustus is open to this kind of inspiration.

⁴⁸ Interestingly St Sebastian, besides being the patron saint of soldiers and athletes, also protects against the plague. His athletic body exposed to deadly arrows does not give up, Sebastian does not die, which gives hope to the power of life in the body, similarly to the Constant Prince.

⁴⁹ *Sebastiane*, a British film directed by Derek Jarman and Paul Humfress and written by Jarman, Humfress and James Whaley.



Poster from *Sebastiane* by Derek Jarman, 1976.

Eroticism and intense physicality in *Dr Faustus* had both an iconoclastic aspect and could also be a path towards truth, as they operate on other, non-rational levels, entering the realm of the subconscious. Faustus fights with God, Faustus fights for the truth, he is its martyr, and like the exposed Sebastian, he submits to the arrows of the test of faith in the truth, and the ecstasy of physical suffering elevates him above mediocrity.

Deeply intimate associations were the path taken by Grotowski and Cynkutis in their joint creation of the role of Faustus, and even more so in their journey towards the Total Act. This act - as Grotowski himself said - had not yet come to its fulfilment (this is still to happen in *The Constant Prince*). Rather it remained at the stage of exposure, of being stripped bare:

The work on Faustus was a new method that Grot used on me - he prompted me with my most intimate associations, both of us worked for hours on end, I encountered resistance and overcoming them wasn't easy and required time. For instance, the last scene, when Faustus makes his final attempt to attain the truth, and the Devil takes his soul after their pact has expired - Boss [close collaborators called Grotowski Boss] decided to create it as a state of the utmost ecstasy.

(Cynkutis, Z. 2015. p. 76)

The trust and closeness between director and actor became increasingly intense. Cynkutis further mentions intuitive communication beyond the verbal:

We understood each other without words; rarely were whole sentences uttered during rehearsals - I sensed intuitively what kinds of propositions he expected from me. [...] I knew what stimulated the creative

process within Him in the most vigorous way.

The power and universality of eroticism as a source of inspiration during the working process became objective for both of them:

Grot himself, and here I fully agree with him, justifies the use of [erotic] associations in artistic work by saying that this is the domain of the actor's strongest sensations, through which the creative process can be liberated and through which a score of actions - where the composition of signs will in the end not resemble an erotic situation at all - can subsequently be established. However, carried by an erotic impulse, this will appeal to the spectator's own associations related to this area, and, beyond all rationality, stir in them images, feelings, and very intimate psychic states.

(Cynkutis, Z. 2015, p. 77).



Still from *Letter from Opole* by Michael Elster [in still Cynkutis as Faustus], Łódź 1963.

The mediaeval dance of death

"*Dr Faustus* by Grotowski 'takes place' in The Middle Ages. The feeling is that of a mediaeval monastery, and the story apparently concerns only monks and their guests". (Barba, E. 1968, p.71). The audience was invited to a supper, the last one, as Faustus has only an hour of his life ahead of him. In these last moments Faustus makes a public confession (more on the architectural design of the performance itself by Jerzy Guroski in the chapter "Towards a Vertical Space"). Awareness of

inevitability demands that every word and movement, is, in their fulfilment, final, for they will never happen again. Faustus walks the ambiguous line of the score, opening his inner self to the witnesses of his confession. He blasphemes, but his blasphemy stems from a demand for truth, even if that means turning against God. He is a rebel:

Whatever we do - good or bad - we are damned. The saint is not able to accept as his model this God who ambushes man. God's laws are lies. He spies on the dishonour in our souls the better to damn us. Therefore, if one wants sainthood, one must be against God.

(Barba, E. 1968. p. 72).

The Middle Ages, due to among other things the rampant Black Death, breathed with the smell of dead bodies. In *Dr Faustus*, eroticism and death dance together in a very close embrace.⁵⁰ The body of the half-naked Cynkutis was almost in the faces of the audience who are sitting around the tables as guests of Faustus for his last supper on which he moves in an expressive, yet precise holy trance.

⁵⁰ Margin: Encounter with a dead body is a borderline experience. It is an image that invades the soul and mind, and irreversibly remains there forever. It is also a very physical experience. The smell of a dead body is extremely dominant and remains in the living memory for a very long time. It reminds us that we are in fact, already dead to some extent. The generation of Grotowski and his collaborators had direct experience of the Second World War, and their work is marked by contact with death on a scale beyond comprehension. *Dr Faustus* once again confronted still unhealed wound on the body of Polish (and other) society. Grotowski reminds us that death is very present among us - us sitting around the table, invited for the last supper.

I believe that Cynkutis and Grotowski were entering such intense areas that the next stage of the work process developing in this way, in order to 'protect' mental-physical health, had to be 'methodical research'. This was the emergence of a method, that is, some kind of definition of the particular phases of experience. What came from very private material had to be objectified in some way. Perhaps that is why a name was later coined to encompass this very complex experience: the Total Act. An Act which, as Serge Ouaknine described it, had its individual phases and could be re-enacted during the performance.



Still from *Letter from Opole* by Michael Elster [on still Cynkutis as Faustus], Łódź 1963.

The search for the fulfilment of the Act, in the incarnation of a holy actor, continued. In the small role of Benvolio in *Dr Faustus*, Ryszard Cieślak, in a scene of frenzied rage performed an act of transgression in the immensity of physical self-sacrifice. Violently tearing the table tops off, he carried out a self-destruction which seems to have been necessary for the Total Act to happen, and the birth in pain of *The Constant Prince* to take place.

One of the most important was Benvolio in Marlowe's *Faust*, where he transformed into a kind of creature who became more and more and more destructive because he did not feel loved. It was like an eruption of hatred against the world and against himself, for lack of love received. This secondary character in Marlowe's play - achieved a particular importance in the production, and I think from the point of view of the acting work it was Cieślak's first total act.⁵¹

It should be added that Cieślak in the role of Benvolio literally broke bones in his body many times. After the performance he would put on a plaster cast and then break it again. It seems that this destruction was necessary for the process of development, maturation, on the way to something more significant, which was just emerging:

⁵¹ Grotowski, J. "Książę Niezłomny Ryszarda Cieślaka" [The Constant Prince by Ryszard Cieślak], *Notatnik Teatralny Wiosna/Lato*, vol. 10, 1995, p. 21.

[Benvolio in *Dr Faustus*] Why do I talk about madness and demons? It was like an attempt to destroy my body, a bit like a kamikaze. Here was thanatos, but no caritas whatsoever. Here was no spirit in it. It was heading for destruction and towards a determination to do something at any price. His determination lacked any lightness; it was as heavy as a large animal fighting against something.

(Cieślak, R. 2015. p.66).

Act of banishment *Apocalypsis cum figuris*

"Go," he says, "go, and return no more"⁵²

Although *Apocalypsis cum figuris* (the first closed presentations took place on 19 July 1968, with the official open premiere on 11 February 1969) is somewhat outside the time when the texts for *Towards a Poor Theatre* were written, it is impossible not to mention this important final theatrical performance by Jerzy Grotowski and his company when discussing *Hamlet Study* and *The Constant Prince* in the context of the Total Act, the scapegoat and shame motif.

⁵² Dostoevsky, F. [text] Available at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8578/8578-h/8578-h.htm> [Accessed 18 January 2021]. All fragments come from the H. P. Blavatsky translation.

Let's start from the end: *go, and return no more.*

With these words, Grotowski ends the performance. They come from one of the most important literary texts *The Grand Inquisitor* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, part of his last novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. It is a 'poem' by Ivan, one of the four Karamazov brothers [*The Brothers Karamazov* was written between 1878 - 1880].

The poem is a monologue of the old Inquisitor addressed to the very one for whom everyone has been waiting for 15 centuries (the poem's action is situated in the 15th century during the Spanish Inquisition). "For what, then, hast Thou come again to trouble us in our work?" - says the Inquisitor, at whose command the crowd, accustomed to obedience, parted so that the soldiers of the Inquisitor's guard could seize the Saviour and throw him into a cell. At last the question of human freedom was settled, and the people, for the sake of their own happiness, renounced this privilege of freedom themselves:

Man is born a rebel, and can rebels ever be happy? - asks the old man. Man needs to be obeyed, he needs to offer his will if followed by a guarantee, a promissory note for salvation, but above all bread: "Feed us, for they who promised us the fire from heaven have deceived us!" It is then that we will finish building their tower for them. [...] No science

will ever give them bread so long as they remain free, so long as they refuse to lay that freedom at our feet, and say: "Enslave, but feed us!" That day must come when men will understand that freedom and daily bread enough to satisfy all are unthinkable and can never be had together, as men will never be able to fairly divide the two among themselves.

(Dostoevsky, F. *The Grand Inquisitor*).⁵³

The masses in Grotowski's performances are an ambivalent beast: on the one hand full of cruelty, on the other unconscious. The unconscious layer is like an excuse for acts of violence. They are unable to constitute themselves because they are weak and wicked and hungry. They do not grow up with the teachings of freedom and salvation. Such teachings are for the elite, not for the masses. But the church took charge in exchange for limiting the freedom of the weak and wicked. A transaction has taken place. Besides, the need for universality in religion is the torment of every individual man. He must be part of a greater whole, of humanity, of the human family, of the mass, because he cannot bear to be alone, to be isolated. The gift of freedom with which he is born is a burden for him. He needs at the same time to give that gift away and to appease his conscience, he needs in addition to bread, and even above bread, to know what

⁵³Dostoevsky, F. [text] Available at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8578/8578-h/8578-h.htm> [Accessed 18 January 2021]. All fragments come from the H. P. Blavatsky translation.

he has to live for.

There is nothing more alluring to man than freedom of conscience, but nothing more tiresome. To decide what is right and what is wrong in one's conscience is beyond one's strength; the image and example that Christ gives are unsurpassable, so remote. Wonder, mystery and authority - these are the forces that prevail over the minds of men. They are not found in his teachings. But they are in the church to which he has permitted to carry on his work. He is an unsurpassable model and man is not able to follow his way:

Thou hast given him the right henceforth to choose and freely decide what is good and bad for him, guided but by Thine image in his heart. But hast Thou never dreamt of the probability, nay, Thou hast burdened man's soul with anxieties hitherto unknown to him. Thirsting for human love freely given, seeking to enable man, seduced and charmed by Thee, to follow Thy path of his own free-will, instead of the old and wise law which held him in subjection, Thou hast given him the right henceforth to choose and freely decide what is good and bad for him, guided but by Thine image in his heart. But hast Thou never dreamt of the probability, nay, of the certainty, of that same man one day rejected finally, and controverting even Thine

image and Thy truth, once he would find himself laden with such a terrible burden as freedom of choice? That a time would surely come when men would exclaim that Truth and Light cannot be in Thee, for no one could have left them in a greater perplexity and mental suffering than Thou has done, lading them with so many cares and insoluble problems. Thus, it is Thyself who hast laid the foundation for the destruction of Thine own kingdom and no one but Thou is to be blamed for it.

(Dostoevsky, F. *The Grand Inquisitor*).⁵⁴

Apocalypsis cum figuris took a long time to create. The rejection of the first version of the research based on Słowacki's drama *Samuel Zborowski*⁵⁵ months later (the group began work in 1965) exacerbated the research crisis. Grotowski then decided to take a very risky step. Associating the Grand Inquisitor's figure with Antoni Jahołkowski, he chose to use the conflicts concerning hierarchy within the group as rehearsal material. Together [Grotowski and Jahołkowski] they arranged a gathering during which Jahołkowski was to indicate whom he considered the best actor. During this improvisation, Jahołkowski unexpectedly signalled that it was Zbigniew

⁵⁴ Dostoevsky, F. [text] Available at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8578/8578-h/8578-h.htm> [Accessed 18 January 2021]. All fragments come from the H. P. Blavatsky translation.

⁵⁵ First rehearsal of *Samuel Zborowski* took place on 10 January 1966. From October 1966 the company started to work on scenes inspired by Dostoyevski's *Brothers Karamazov*.

Cynkutis before then attacking Ryszard Cieślak, half-mockingly referring to him as if he were Christ. From this first sequence a second emerged which took the tone of a blasphemous procession. As a result of this experience, the group rejected *Samuel Zborowski* and set to work on *Ewangelie (The Gospels)*.⁵⁶

It was a performance that corresponded with the new paratheatrical stage of Grotowski's search, which involved leaving the theatre. Zygmunt Molik in a conversation with young actors of Anatoly Vasiliev⁵⁷ in 1990 in Wrocław, when asked which period of creative experiments he considers the most fulfilling, mentions quite precisely the dates: from 1976 to 1981. And he speaks about the fullness that was given by working in nature while still presenting performances of *Apocalypsis*.

During the 10 years of presentation (1969-1980), the performance changed into a borderland work adapting new paratheatrical experiences. It was a truly open work. With time, the benches for the audience disappeared (there were only a few left for those who could not sit on the floor), the actors, who at first appeared in costumes, later played in their own personal clothes. The whole performance aimed at co-participation. There were presentations where the audience joined the procession and also stayed long after the performance (sometimes even till

⁵⁶ *Apocalypsis cum figuris* [text] Available at: <https://grotowski.net/en/encyclopedia/apocalypsis-cum-figuris> [Accessed 18 January 2021].

⁵⁷ Anatoly Vasiliev is Russian theatre director, artistic director of the Moscow Theatre "School of Dramatic Arts".

early morning!).

One of the critical texts written (and acknowledged by Grotowski himself) about this work is "Powrót Chrystusa" ["The Return of Christ", 1 October 1969] by Konstanty Puzyna. The author primarily draws attention to the work's omnipresent multi-layeredness, which constantly escapes unambiguous interpretation, contradicting itself on the level of text and acting:

Christ's second coming can happen at any time, any place. It is both a universal and an individual encounter, stained with vodka's vulgarity and sanctified with quotations from the Bible or Simone Weil. Actions emerged from emptiness, they could seem random or illogical, they all referred by their symbolism to the space of the archetype which is common to us all.

(Puzyna, K. 1969. "Powrót Chrystusa") ["The Return of Christ"]

Ludwik Flaszen in his "Apocalypsis cum figuris. A few introductory remarks" emphasises the collective aspect of the creation of the performance, but also the method of multiple processing or recycling (which may be important in my further practical research):

Apocalypsis cum figuris was created by the actors

under the director's direction using the method of sketches and etudes. The text was improvised as needed during rehearsals. Once the basic framework of the performance was in place, it was assembled from scenes created by the actors' creativity and then precisely recorded and processed. Once the scenes and the actors' roles were in place, the necessary verbal material was sought to replace the lines or quotations found by the actors during the final rehearsals.

(Flaszen, L. 2006. p.94).

It is interesting that in Flaszen's text one can find a return to the idea of work and the value of the collective, the group, as it was during *Hamlet Study*. The idea seems to become broader and more universal, because it concerns the whole human race:

The idea was that where words were necessary, texts would appear in the form of quotations from writings that could be said to have been written, not by individuals, but by the whole human race. These texts were found primarily in the Bible, in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, as well as in extracts from the poems of T.S. Eliot and the philosophical prose of Simone Weil.

(Flaszen, L. 2006. p.94).

Thus, group exploration found its way into texts written by the human race as a whole. The play had to explore the experience and psychology of collectivity. Right from the beginning, the theme of the birth of a community emerges. Roles are distributed/assumed, randomly without an overarching logic; what is essential is that the community integrates, cements its identity in the face of the stranger, the other. In this case, it was Ciemny played by Cieślak. Ciemny has several meanings in Polish. He is a "Simpleton", a village fool, but also one who has a darkness inside him, a dark side. It is worth recalling here the character of the stern Lizaveta Smierdiasza, a girl wandering half-naked around the town in Dostoyevsky's novel. Although she lived in extreme poverty, she was respected by the locals and seen as a pure saintly soul [holy fool]. And this purity was desecrated by Fyodor Karamazov, the greatest of lusts. From this wicked, shameful act, the fourth brother, Smierdiakov, was born.

In *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, the Total Act appears in the form not of an individual (as in the *Constant Prince*), but of a collective body. In this form, however, the Total Act loses its clarity, its sharpness. Perhaps this confirms the thesis that the Total Act:

- it is an action of the individual against/for the collective

- it is an effort and a clash at the same time of the chosen one, who is the victim, with the community, with society.

At the border of this encounter, the Total Act takes place. This is the essence of the drama, seen as the sacrifice of the individual for the rebirth of the whole.

Summary notes

The summary of the chapter on the context of the emergence of the Total Act goes in the direction of referring to my practical research - mainly through the confrontation with the idea of the Act, and the character of Tarudant [in *The Constant Prince*] performed by Maja Komorowska. I think this very ambivalent creation has qualities of contemporaneity and universality in it. Therefore, from a performer's perspective, I see a direct connection here, which I will explain later in this summary. Grotowski published *Towards a Poor Theatre* in parallel with his greatest discovery of working with the actor at the time. The texts in the book refer either to moments towards the Act, or to thoughts already formulated on the basis of the Act. While watching *The Constant Prince* live, was the audience united, as Grotowski wanted, in an act of confrontation with the myth of sacrifice [scapegoat]?

One of the emerging characteristics of the Act is its individuality, which is born through confrontation, conflict

with society (a group with some common goal) and the will to sacrifice oneself. The group also gains its identity at the moment of this conflict with the individual. This is why, as I mentioned above in the introduction, the image of a burning Ryszard Siwiec at a huge stadium during the harvest festival, filled with a crowd of partygoers - has an essence of the Total Act. Of course, many viewers who experienced the performance of *The Constant Prince* absolutely rejected it. Criticisms were made against the text work, the voice work (difficulty in understanding the words), over-expressiveness, lack of work on the role and many others. However, I believe that despite the disagreement, the performance somehow stayed in the viewer's memory, thus creating a reference point in the perception of reality:

When a performance is over, what remains. Fun can be forgotten, but powerful emotions also disappear and good arguments lose their thread. When emotions and arguments are harnessed to a wish from the audience to see more clearly into itself, then something in the mind burns. The event scorches onto the memory, an outline, a taste, a trace, a smell, a picture. It is the play's central image that remains, its silhouette, and if the elements are rightly blended this silhouette will be its meaning, this shape will be the

essence of what it has to say.

(Brook, P. 2008. p.152).

From my perspective as a female performer, I have to draw attention to a certain schematicity in the treatment of women's roles in the Laboratory Theatre (which later, in my opinion, became characteristic of the subsequent work of Grotowski and his imitators). Reviewing the visual documentation from the period between 1963 and 1968 (the time of the emergence of the Total Act), it is hard to resist the impression that female roles, and with it the proposed embodiment of archetypal figures, oscillate between the whore and Mary Magdalene. Although it is also the case that in performances like *Akropolis* there are no specific gender roles (everyone performs the living dead and in *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus (Dr Faustus)* Rena Mirecka performed Mephistopheles as a metaphysical character. The female character who intrigues me with her ambivalence, perhaps even ambiguity in terms of gender (gender fluid?) is Tarudant, created by Maja Komorowska.⁵⁸ "We all had long boots on, and I was Tarudant. Tarudant who fought... I was searching for associations with the animal world.

⁵⁸ Maria Janina Komorowska-Tyszkiewicz, known as Maja Komorowska (born. 23 December 1937 in Warsaw) - Polish theatre and film actress, in the years 1961-1968 an actress at the Theatre of 13 Rows and the Laboratory Theatre in Wrocław, since 1972 actress at the Contemporary Theatre in Warsaw. She is professor of theatre arts (1991) and from 1991 to 2016 professor at the Aleksander Zelwerowicz Theatre Academy in Warsaw.

At some moments, his lighting brought up associations for me with a cockfight. A cock... a fighting cockerel... Each of the cock's movements in this heavy cloak and long boots became very apparent." (Komorowska, M. 2015. p.55).



Cock fight in Spain.

Komorowska's creation has no face, she is hunched over and moves awkwardly:

He wanted to bring something out of me of which I wasn't aware? The task we're talking about was certainly very challenging for me. At the beginning my back couldn't take it, even though I was young. To perform this part in a half bent-over manner, unable to straighten up even for a moment, with hair falling

down all over my face... At the beginning, I thought it was impossible. But I managed. And suddenly, from that creature, a lullaby could come out, a warm and gentle lullaby... Here was this whole aspect of gentleness which until then had been hidden within this strange 'bird'. Such a contradiction.

(Komorowska, M. 2015. p.56).

A witch? A witch's popular description would be a woman thought to have magic powers, especially evil ones, someone who can, through their knowledge, influence one's health and can heal. Because of their ambivalence, perhaps some kind of direct contact with impure forces, witches were feared. So they often lived outside the community. Their sexuality was also associated with a decidedly unconventional sphere. The witch cohabited with the devil; she exposed her genitals; she was wild and aggressive. Therefore, as I mentioned above, from the 15th till 18th century there were regular Witch-hunts. Any contact with witches was very dangerous and could lead to exclusion from society.

In the Pietà scene in *The Constant Prince*, the pure prince finds himself in the hands of this creature. The situation is doubly risky because not only does it directly invoke iconography, but Tarudant looks like she is performing fellatio besmirching the purity of the constant one.



Maja Komorowska and Ryszard Cieślak in the First version of *The Constant Prince*, photo by Zygmunt Samosiuk, 1965.

In the actress's memoirs, this scene has a more innocent tone:

I associated [the work on *The Constant Prince*] with the Pietà and I think this was how the spectators saw it when I took Ryszard in my arms like a mother, someone taking care. I remember one performance in Stockholm, when Ryszard had a dislocated or broken leg. Before the performances they would take him to the hospital for special injections, without which he wasn't able to walk. At the end of the piece, I would almost be carrying him. Where does such strength come

from? I didn't have a voice and his legs didn't work. I remember that the floor on which we were walking was wet... it was extremely hard work... I will always remember this. Yes, this was the Constant Prince.

(Komorowska, M. 2015. pp.55-56).

Grotowski referred to Komorowska's Tarudant during his Third Collège de France Lecture. He mentions his aunt as an inspiration for the character played by Komorowska. Misunderstanding and lack of social acceptance forced his relative to live on the sidelines and not develop her, according to Grotowski, unusual talents and mental abilities. Finally, frustrated, she committed suicide.

It is possible that through such an ambiguous character as Tarudant, a version of the Total Act could exist in a female creation. This question remains in the realm of speculation, as Grotowski never conducted intensive individual rehearsals with any of the Theatre Laboratory actresses.

Komorowska's role in *The Constant Prince*, through its ambivalence - balanced between both human and animal character, a witch and a knower, a sexual being, but in a very different way - is extremely inspiring to me as a performer. In my practical explorations, I try to look for a kind of body and its expression that constantly challenges the definitions (also by impersonating stereotypical characters) of gender, or the

separation between the animal and human worlds (searching for one's inner animal archetype).



The Constant Prince, version I, on photo from left: Mieczysław Janowski, Antoni Jahołkowski, Ryszard Cieślak, Maja Komorowska; Wrocław 1965.



Still image from *Burning Method - Four Lectures on Conditional Love*, video footage by Ram Nouredine, University of Kent, 22 June 2022.

The word *Wiedźma*⁵⁹ [Witch] in Polish on the one hand, has an insulting character and on the other is associated with the anxiety of confronting forces of an unknown origin. Women with knowledge and skills at the dawn of the institution of the church were a kind of threat and were therefore stigmatised (this links the witch to the figure of the scapegoat described above). And although the figure of the witch is not directly relevant to my argument, nor have I done any practical

⁵⁹ Linguists derive the word *Wiedźma* directly from the Proto-Slavic noun **věďma*, which was formed from the verb **věděti* - to know. A witch [*Wiedźma*] is therefore a person who knows - a Knower. It is presumed that in ancient communities, a witch was a woman with knowledge of medicine and supernatural matters.

research in this area, when discussing the character of Tarudant it is important to mention it.⁶⁰

Do you have to be Polish to understand the process of working towards *The Total Act*? In choices of texts and his research in the 1960s, Grotowski was definitely confronting himself with the question of Polishness, especially in the context of the trauma following the Second World War. Polish Romantic literature was and is relevant to these considerations, as it deals with the question of freedom of a nation that almost disappeared from the map of Europe for 123 years, and then after 1945 found itself in the bloc of communist countries. Thus, it seems that the *Total Act* faced a very individual challenge, but in a very specific, Polish context.

One thing seems to be objective: that the *Total Act* is individual, and the community (if any) around it has a task to support it. *The Constant Prince* was the moment in the work of Grotowski and the Laboratory Theatre when there came a kind of clarity about what the *Total Act* is. This work, preceded by long preparation, brought about an axis around which both the ensemble and the protagonist (Ryszard Cieślak) made a joint ascent towards this value.

⁶⁰ After analysing the Theatre of Productions period, especially the time of formulating the *Total Act* (1962-1965) I do not see Grotowski deliberately avoiding working with women, rather male forms of expressions were possibly easier for him to work with. He was always talking about his mother as the one thanks to whom he became acquainted with the highest quality works of literature and religiosity. She brought him books during the war. His brother, Kazimierz Grotowski, was a well-known professor of physics and he too emphasised the role of his mother in his education.

On the other hand, one cannot ignore the political context in which Grotowski worked in the 1960s. Decisions taken at the time, as in the case of *Hamlet Study*, were determined by the tension which prevailed in Poland. Perhaps it was thanks to The Total Act that in some way this tension could find an outlet. The intriguing figure of the Living Dead is also fundamental here in thinking about a specifically Polish national hero, with his inability to act, his constant longing for the past and his condemnation to wander between worlds.

I believe that the endless repetitions of the Total Act, which took place during the presentations of *The Constant Prince*, made the performance come closer to the nature of a ritual, thus 'recreating' a much older, universal structure, acting on the subconscious of individual and collective viewers.

The Eucharist, holy communion

There is one other thread that needs to be mentioned when summarising the chapter on the Total Act, namely, the religious thread. Grotowski, who was not a Catholic, drew heavily on Christian iconography and motifs (which also made him enemies). One could say that the idea of the Total Act as a collective experience referred to the most important moment during mass in a Catholic church, the moment of the mystery of transformation. The body of Christ into the bread, and the blood of Christ into

wine. The act of the mystery of sacred transformation through voluntary sacrifice was a kind of meta-theme:

54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.

55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.

56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.

57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

John, 6:54-58.⁶¹

The act of transubstantiation that takes place during the Eucharist is the moment in which, by eating the body of Jesus Christ in the form of bread and wine which he himself offers us, we unite ourselves with him and with God. It is only by regularly re-enacting the act of sacrifice that we are in living contact with the mystery of faith, so that it abides in us. Through our individual participation we form a community which,

⁶¹ Source: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+6&version=NIV>.

thanks to the sacrifice, understands its identity.



Agape Feast, 3rd century Christian catacomb of San Callisto, Rome, Italy

In the performance *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, the actor Stanislaw Scierski playing John performs masturbation on bread, the symbol of Christ's body. It is one of the most shocking scenes created by Grotowski. The profanation was not only an act of destruction, but also an awareness of a deep crisis of our values:

Grotowski repeated after the Christian mystic: "Show me your man and I will show you my God". This was a kind of call to follow Christ. Grotowski believed, however, that in the twentieth century man lost his faith and only blasphemy can break the shell that everyone has covered. The secular ritual at the

Laboratory Theatre was an anti-mass. During the performance there was an act of spectacular desacralization of bread, the Eucharistic object. In the finale, the Inquisitor expelled Christ. When the actors finally left, sweat stains and crumbs of bread were left on the floor. Some of the audience, shocked, picked up these crumbs with devotion.⁶²

⁶² Kocur, M. 2008. [blog] *Ciało w teatrze chrześcijańskim*. [*Body in Christian theatre*] Available at: <http://kocur.uni.wroc.pl/ciapo-w-teatrze-chrzebcijakim/>.



Apocalypsis cum figuris in the photo: Elizabeth Albahaca (Maria Magdalena), Stanisław Scierski (Jan), photo by Lorenzo Capellini, Venice 1975.

Perhaps after such a profound act of doubt, the next step for Grotowski had to be a return to the theatre of sources⁶³, and a search for a situation of communality going back to the moment

⁶³ Theatre of Sources is the name of both a project and also a period of Jerzy Grotowski's activities which began around 1976, coinciding with his shift away from paratheatre. "Grotowski, with an international group of collaborators, began a series of experiments which, as he put it, made direct reference to the as yet hidden personal strand in his work. This personal dimension relied on uncovering that which had been present from the outset in Grotowski's ideas, but – to put it as simply as possible – was connected to the fundamental and direct yet also irreligious experience of the immortality of life which emerged as a result of a dramatic, and thus active, 'encounter with the sources'. Grotowski defined this key concept of the source as that which had been given from the start and was therefore common to all people". <https://grotowski.net/en/encyclopedia/theatre-sources> [Accessed 10 July 2022].

of the creation of culture.

For me, at this point, the next stage of exploration begins, precisely the state of crisis as a condition of creation. The next chapter, "Body in Crisis...", is devoted to Grotowski's relation to Antonin Artaud, which provides a very important stimulus in the process of my practical work.



How The Hare is Dying, Steakhouse Live, photo by Manuel Vason, Rich Mix in London, 2018.

Chapter Two: Body in Crisis - remembering Antonin Artaud

- Do Not Try To Understand
- *To have done with the Judgement of God*
- Back to: "He Wasn't Entirely Himself"
- "Theatre and the Plague"
- "An Affective Athleticism"
- The Body in Crisis - a return to the suffering of the prince
- Towards the performer's experience

Do Not Try To Understand

Where the first chapter "Towards the Total Act" was devoted to the idea of the Total Act in the historical-cultural context of the individual's relationship with society (e.g. the figure of the scapegoat) the second chapter "Body in Crisis" focuses on the individual herself and the suffering of the body.

The suffering of the body is an integral part of the experience of the Total Act. Through the figure of Antonin Artaud, I want to build a link between the period of work by Grotowski and his company - from *Dr Faustus* to *Apocalypsis cum figuris* - to my own practical experience as a performer. Moreover, following the thought of Polish scholar Leszek Kolankiewicz, Artaud's life and work, which must be treated inseparably, had the characteristics of a permanent experience of the Total Act from the perspective of his relationship with society. His martyrdom was paradoxical, entangled with many misunderstandings and a general lack of acceptance on the part of his environment. Only his death triggered the need to look at Artaud's oeuvre in a more systematic way and began to have a real impact on thinking about theatre and performance art in a new way. Such an association may lead to a comparison of Artaud with the figure and martyrdom of the Constant Prince, whose sacrifice was indispensable for society in order to reflect on its own condition and spiritual renewal.



Image from the scene by Magda Tuka under the title "Double", 2021.

The terms proposed by Artaud are an inspiration for my research and practical reflection, hence there are many visual elements in the following chapter which I treat as a language of expression, not only as documentation of rehearsals.

TO HAVE DONE WITH THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD

This theatre [Laboratory Theatre] is holy because its purpose is holy; it has a clearly defined place in the community and it responds to a need the churches can no longer fulfil. Grotowski's theatre is as close as

anyone has got to Artaud's ideal.

(Brook, P. 2008. p. 67).⁶⁴

As I mentioned in the "Introduction" of the thesis, Peter Brook was the author of the preface to *Towards a Poor Theatre*. This was a very important voice connecting the Western world and Grotowski. Often readers reach Grotowski through Brook's texts, who saw in the work of the Laboratory Theatre a relationship with the spiritual sphere lost in contemporary Western man.

There are many reasons why Artaud. This subchapter is mainly driven by two issues: "He Wasn't Entirely Himself" (1967) - the only text in *Towards a Poor Theatre* dedicated by Grotowski to another artist, and actor training understood as preparation for the Total Act.

When Grotowski asked whose (if any) portrait of the great theatre artists would hang on his wall, he reportedly replied that it would be Antonin Artaud's. And indeed, after performances in Paris, where the Theatre Laboratory presented *The Constant Prince* (21-25 June 1966 in the prestigious Paris Odéon as part of the 10th Le Théâtre Des Nations), the Laboratory Theatre received from the festival's director Jean-Louis Barrault a portrait of Artaud, which still hangs in

⁶⁴ Peter Brook and Charles Marowitz's Royal Shakespeare Company organised *The Theatre of Cruelty* season (1964), which focused on Artaud's theory of performance. The season contained a series of workshops and productions, including Peter Weiss's play *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the direction of the Marquis de Sade* directed by Peter Brook.

the Grotowski Institute office.

My research is based on the five following source publications and practical experiments in the field of the conscious exploration of the voice coming out of different parts of the body and other creative tasks.

Source texts are:

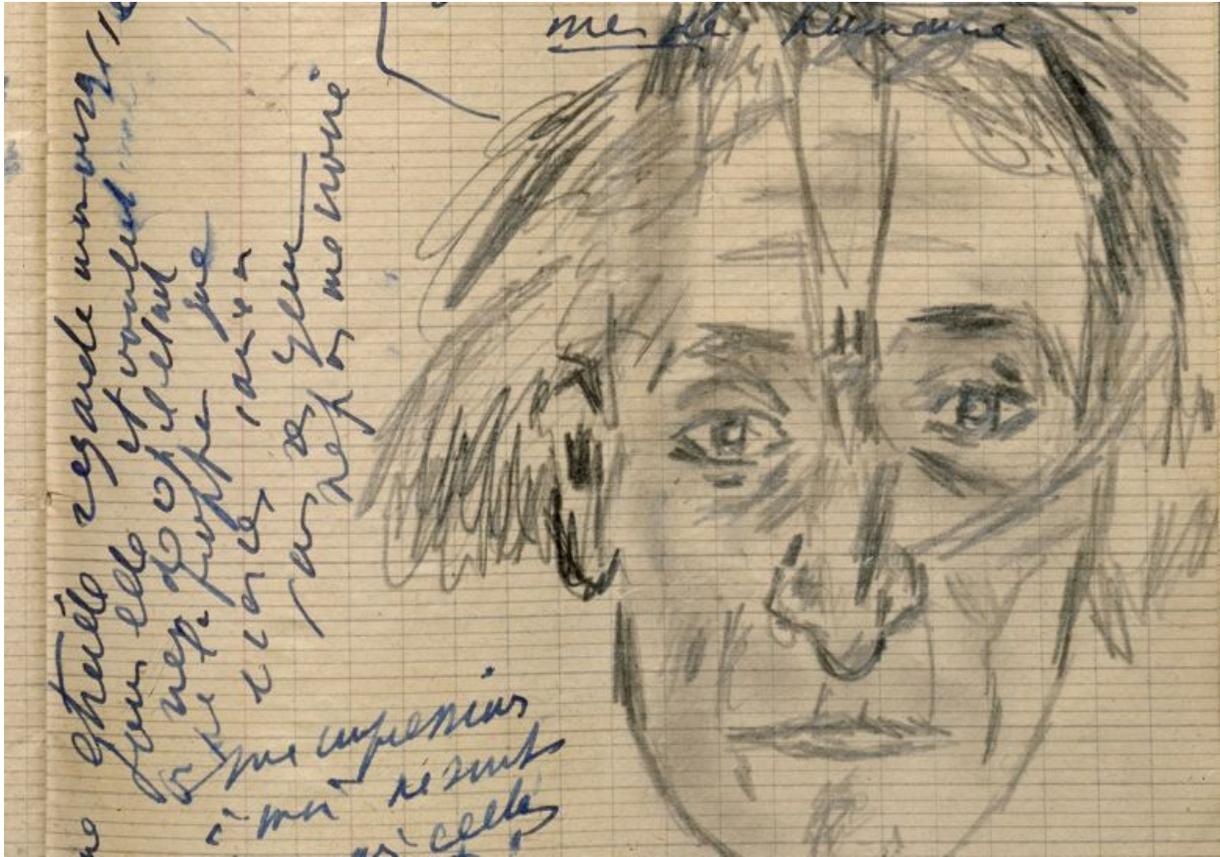
- *Theatre and the Plague* (1932) by Antonin Artaud
- "An Affective Athleticism" (1935) by Antonin Artaud
- "He Wasn't Entirely Himself" (1967) by Jerzy Grotowski
- *Święty Artaud [Saint Artaud]* (first published in *Dialog* 1984) by Leszek Kolankiewicz
- "Breathing's Hieroglyphs. Deciphering Artaud's 'Affective Athleticism'" (2003) by Tony Gardner.

Before reflecting on ideas that link Grotowski and Artaud, I would like to start from listening to a short [4:38] recording:

<https://vimeo.com/591038499> - the sound work (2001) comes from an album entitled *Pour en finir avec le jugement of Deu* (composition: "Tutuguri") by Marc Chalosse, the remix of Artaud's radio work (1947-48).⁶⁵

Here is the link to the version of the actual radio play *TO HAVE DONE WITH THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD* (1947): <https://vimeo.com/245767392>

⁶⁵ Following his release from the Rodez asylum, Antonin Artaud decided he wanted his new work to connect with a vast public audience, and he chose to record radio broadcasts in order to carry through that aim. That determination led him to his most experimental and incendiary project, *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*, 1947-48, in which he attempted to create a new language of texts, screams, and cacophonies: a language designed to be heard by millions, aimed, as Artaud said, for "road-menders." In the broadcast, he interrogated corporeality and introduced the idea of the "body without organs," crucial to the later work of Deleuze and Guattari. The broadcast, commissioned by French national radio, was banned shortly before its planned transmission, much to Artaud's fury.



Self-portrait - drawing by Artaud, a page from Notebook 253, Courtesy
Bibliothèque Nationale de France and Cabinet, London.

Artaud's work, including his texts, has become a critical point of reference in contemporary thinking about performance art, the actor's craft, the performer's act, and the search for the roots of performance, its rituality. There is a conviction that Artaud is a visionary, an inspired poet of the theatre, who did not propose any 'method' for his vision and did not realise his ideas (apart from a few performances, e.g. *The Cenci* 1935). So there is no fulfilment in his proposal. In my opinion, such a thesis is contradicted by the above recordings. I recognize the very conscious, precise work of Artaud as a performer and creator at the same time. Despite their poor quality (like the recordings of *The Constant Prince*), recordings have the value of an intense identification with word, performance and thought, translating in my mind as a way to listen into a vision of the body of the performer united in the act of the monologue. These are not random, disorderly, convulsive words/screams, but clear, razor-sharp, almost three-dimensional words - messages that consciously use screams reminiscent of a sculpture made from vibrations. What is surprising is the range of possibilities of a voice inseparable from the text and the intention and, at the same time, the lack of convention, but rather a constant openness to exploration supported by a solid technique. In the following chapter, I refer to texts that, I believe, are central to thinking about the technique proposed by Artaud. The various

examples will support the research that, in my opinion, encapsulates Artaud's ideas, starting from the condition of the Body in Crisis. Following Artaud's proposals I will try to reflect some of his ideas in the form of practical voice exercises.

Back to: "He Wasn't Entirely Himself"

After presentations of *The Constant Prince* in France, Grotowski was hailed by many critics as the 'son of Artaud', and indeed many saw the performance and the work of the Laboratory Theatre as an embodiment of the vision of the author of "Theatre and Its Double".

The article by Grotowski ["He Wasn't Entirely Himself"] was first published in *Les Temps Modernes* (Paris, April 1967), and in the journal *Flourish* by the Royal Shakespeare Theatre (summer 1967). Since it is the only publication in *Towards a Poor Theatre* devoted to another artist it is of great importance in the study of the actor's technique and the Total Act itself. Grotowski intuitively sees the ties of exploration between the two artists. He speaks of the era of Artaud into which the experimental theatre of the time [the 60's] had entered, immediately formulating a charge of trivialisation against those various groups who transferred Artaud's visions to the stage through reading his poetic postulates as a call for the absence

of any form or even a glorification of the chaos of pseudo-spontaneity. He attributes the young artists with a superficial understanding of ideas, a lack of reflection on meaning, of making shortcuts and a naive focus on shocking the audience. In Grotowski's eyes, only Peter Brook treats the proposal of the author of *Theatre of Cruelty* responsibly. This is not the first time that Grotowski has spoken out very forcefully about his contemporaries' explorations. Artaud is needed by Grotowski for creative dialogue, for a reference point as he himself is in the middle of discovering very important statements about the actor's craft and creative process itself.



Kordian by The Theatre of 13 Rows, Opole, 1962.

According to Grotowski, the moments of connection for both of them are:

The true lesson of sacred theatre; whether we speak of the mediaeval European drama, Balinese or Indian Kathakali: this knowledge that spontaneity and discipline, far from weakening each other, mutually reinforce themselves; that what is elementary feeds what is constructed and vice versa, to become the real source of a kind of acting that glows.

(Grotowski, J. 1968. p.89).

Grotowski speaks about the strategy of combining the potential opposites: the spirit of spontaneity with the discipline of form, which, by colliding in the performer's body, produce a complete, total statement. The mission of this statement, its content, is a myth. However, according to Grotowski, the contemporary audience has lost contact with the practice with myth, so identification with it is no longer possible. It is also impossible to create new myths because these are contents that build up in the social and individual subconscious for a long time. What is possible (as I mentioned earlier) is the confrontation with myth. Thus a myth expressed spontaneously, but in the discipline of form.

Another aspect where the artists 'meet' is the Totality of the

Act. Grotowski warns, however (repeating the argument that Artaud lacks technique, training and practice), that in attempting the proposals contained in "Affective Athleticism" [Grotowski probably read *The Theatre and Its Double* in 1964⁶⁶] "His study of the 'athletics of feelings' has certain shrewd insights, but in practical work would lead to stereotyped gestures, one for each emotion." (Grotowski, J. 1968. p.90). However he sees through Artaud's texts that they both pursue what is at the core of the actor's art, namely that what the actor does, he does with his whole self:

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, J. 1968. p.91).

Leszek Kolankiewicz, in his book *Święty Artaud [Saint Artaud]*, goes further on the question of 'Totality', speaking about Artaud's life as an 'Experience of Totality'. In his thoughtful words about Artaud's illness, Grotowski expresses its symbolic meaning for the artist in the twentieth century: "His chaotic outbursts were holy, for they enabled others to reach

⁶⁶ The Polish translation of *Theatre And Its Double* by Jan Błoński was published in 1966, but fragments were published in *Pamiętnik Teatralny* in 1961 in a translation by Hanna Szymańska. It is possible that Grotowski read those texts in Polish.

self-knowledge." (Grotowski, J. 1968. p. 92).

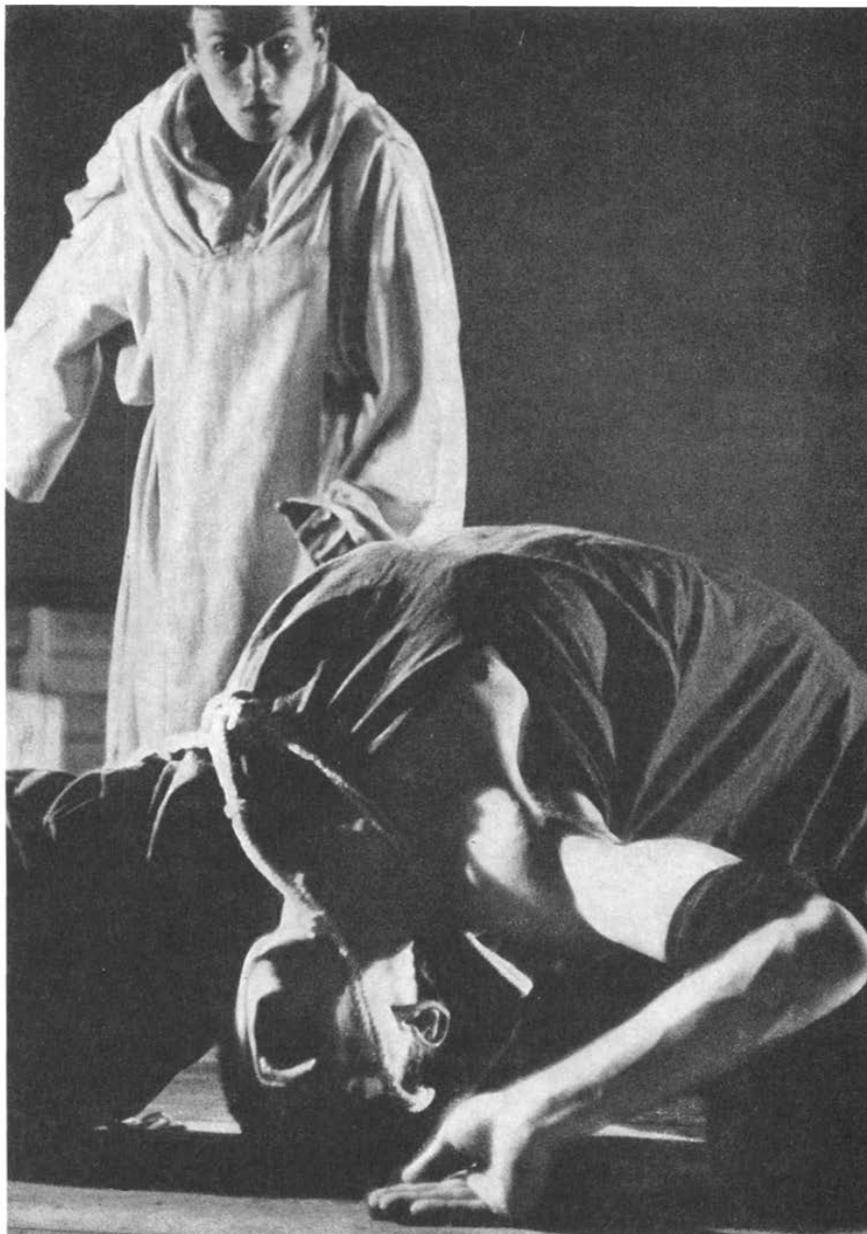
Artaud was a martyr of his ideas in the face of a society that had the means to eliminate content that went too far outside the established norms. While in hospital in Rodez he was subjected to regular electric shocks, harming his concentration and memory, which paradoxically was a desirable effect. Among the undesirable effects was that despite this devastating 'treatment', Artaud continued to create until the very end:

There is both something victorious and vengeful in theatre just as in the plague, for we clearly feel that the spontaneous fire the plague lights as it passes by is nothing but gigantic liquidation. Such a complete social disorder, such organic disorder overflowing with vice, this kind of wholesale exorcism constructing the soul, driving it to the limit, indicates the presence of a condition which is an extreme force and where all powers of nature are newly rediscovered the instant something fundamental is about to be accomplished.

(Artaud, A. 2010. p. 18).

The above quotation could be another 'definition' of the Total Act understood from the position of the suffering man who anticipated an important discovery without any possibility of its realisation. It is as if the thought of the Total Act 'burns

the writer' while it is being formulated on a piece of paper.



22. *Dr Faustus*: Faustus appeases Benvolio (Zbigniew Cynkutis and Ryszard Cieślak).
Photo: Opiola-Moskwiak.

23. *Dr Faustus*: The double Mephistopheles carries Faustus to hell (Antoni Jaholkowski, —>
Zbigniew Cynkutis and Rena Mirecka). Photo: Opiola-Moskwiak.

Ryszard Cieślak as mad Benvolio in *Dr Faustus*, photo by Opiola-Moskwiak.

"Theatre and the Plague"

This is a key text for understanding Artaud's ideas, also in relation to the work of the Laboratory Theatre. Grotowski and his company definitely balanced on the edge of risk both in terms of the craft of acting and the clash, or rather confrontation, with the audience. The element of destruction, and sometimes self-destruction, is present in the performances leading up to *The Total Act*.

"Theatre and the Plague" was originally presented as a lecture at the Sorbonne (6 April 1933); it was revised and published in *NRF*⁶⁷ (No. 253, 1st Oct. 1934). Artaud developed the essay while undergoing acupuncture therapy. He was 'surprised and amazed' at how the treatment pinpointed "with precision and remarkable accuracy the deep, debilitating and demoralising troubles that have afflicted [him] for so long", something he related to 'the exteriorization' of 'latent cruelty' causing 'organic disorder' in plague-victims". (Artaud, A. 2010. p. 20).

Paradoxically, the plague is (according to Artaud) an opportunity for a profound recognition of forces that are truly creative and destructive at the same time. The reversal of order that the plague causes, the immersion of man in the frenzy to do things that in normal times would not cross his mind, confronts (and unites) him with the dark face of nature.

⁶⁷ *La Nouvelle Revue Française*.

The image of this destruction and collapse has strength and beauty in it. Theatre translates these forces into signs, symbols. True theatrical art, Artaud writes, should disturb the peace of our mind, should undermine the social order. Theatre subjects our organism to the plague and completely strips it of its rational order and laws, putting us in a state of primal trance. Here all resistance is pointless, meaningless. What is needed is the open acceptance of a purifying experience through poison, in a dose bordering on death. In this experience, Artaud refers to Greek Tragedy, its cruelty and the extremely important social role of attending theatre festivals. Artaud calls for a revival of theatre in this potential:

If fundamentally theatre is like a plague, this is not because it is contagious, but because like the plague it is a revelation, urging forwards the exteriorization of a latent undercurrent of cruelty through all the perversity of which the mind is capable, whether in a person or a nation, becomes localised.

(Artaud, A. 2010. p. 20).

The experience of myth was a borderline experience, as it reveals the dark force of life; in the theatre of cruelty, a new myth must be invoked to contain the repressed content: "theatre is collectively made to drain abscesses."

(Artaud, A. 2010. p.21). Theatre not only shows the crisis, but is a crisis in itself and has a very important role in society. It gives it a chance through the mirror of reflection to start practising order from the beginning. The plague/theatre let into the social body can be either a cure for it by drastic purification or death. "And finally from a human viewpoint we can see that the effect of the theatre is as beneficial as the plague, impelling us to see ourselves as we are, making the masks fall and divulging our world's lies, aimlessness, meanness, and even two-facedness." (Artaud. 2010. p. 21).

In his article "Towards a Poor Theatre", Grotowski also stresses the importance of removing life-masks. Through the act of stripping away, total exposure is necessary to face the other human being, and to identify the authenticity of the creative process.

"An Affective Athleticism"

The essay, written in 1935, is part of the book *Theatre and Its Double*. After a series of manifestos and theoretical assumptions contained in other texts in this publication, Artaud turns directly to the actor, to the subject of the actor's technique. Jerzy Grotowski in "He Wasn't Entirely Himself" makes direct reference to this text, questioning its 'technical side' and appreciating Artaud's intuition about what acting is. "An

Affective Athleticism" will be an important source for my subsequent practical experimentation. I intend to formulate tasks and exercises that, I feel, relate to the ideas in this text:

the Chinese concept of qi energy stimulated by the acupuncture needles, the Japanese ki, the Sanskrit prana, the Greek pneuma and psyche, the Latin anima and spiritus, all of which are homologues of 'breath' with different inflections, 'air', 'wind', 'respiration', 'spirit', 'mind', 'energy', 'vitality', and so on. They recall, among other things, the etymology of the French word for 'mind': esprit, from the Latin spirare, 'to breathe', which also gives us 'inspiration' and 'spirit'.

(Gardner, T. 2003. p.4).

According to Artaud the actor and the athlete use the same physical points of support. As I mentioned above, the experience of acupuncture therapy was a kind of revelation for Artaud. Physicality, feelings and metaphysics concentrate, complement each other, come together in the actor. "The same pressure points which support physical exertion are also used in the emergence of affective thought." (Artaud, A. 2010. p. 97).

Artaud tried to combine different traditions in his research, starting with the Kabbalah:

The cabala divides human breathing into six main arcana, the first, called the Great Arcanum, is creation (...). Therefore I thought of using a science of types of breathing, not only for an actor's work, but also in preparing him for his craft. For if the science of breathing sheds light on the tenor of the soul, it can stimulate the soul all the more by aiding it to flourish.

(Artaud, A. 2010. p. 95).

As the feeling is accompanied by the breath, the actor can explore the feeling through a conscious way of breathing. Artaud also refers to the Hindu concept of 'gunas' (modalities, modes of existence or components of matter), namely 'sattva' - luminosity and intelligence, 'rajas' - energy and activity, and 'tamas' - inertia and static:

if theatre is the most perfect and complete symbol of universal revelation, an actor bears the principle of this seventh state within him, this bloody artery along which he probes all the others, every time his controlled organs wake from their slumbers.

(Artaud, A. 2010. p. 96).

He stresses, however, that the purpose of the proposed practice is not universal feelings, emotions, but much more subtle ones related to the demands of the soul. And also to the

complementary qualities distinguished by the Chinese tradition - to 'yin' (that which is moist, dark and absorbing) and 'yang' (that which is dry, bright and pressing). "We use our bodies like screens through which will-power and relinquished will-power pass." (Artaud, A. 2010. p.97).

Thus only through the body of the actor, aware of its possibilities, is a total theatre of cruelty possible. The materialisation of feelings and thoughts in the vibration of the body creates theatre in front of the audience. The audience becomes subject to it, unable to deny the effect of the vibration on their own existence.

The Body in Crisis - a return to the suffering of the prince

Both Artaud and Grotowski refer to the condition of the Body in Crisis, although in very different ways. It should be noted, however, that both experienced the daily suffering of chronic illness, which must have influenced their explorations.⁶⁸

The motivating factor of this strategy was the experience of the body in crisis:

a crisis within and of Artaud's own body first of all,
which not only provided a counterpoint to all of his

⁶⁸ As a teenager Jerzy Grotowski fell ill with scarlet fever, which had intense complications. Doctors did not give him much of a chance and so for 66 years he lived with the awareness of a fatal disease. Artaud was diagnosed with meningitis at age five, a disease which had no cure at the time. He was discharged from the Army due to addiction to laudanum and mental instability. In May 1919, the director of the sanatorium prescribed laudanum for Artaud, precipitating a lifelong addiction to that and other opiates.

speculations on the body of the actor that culminated in the writing of "An Affective Athleticism", but also took on a devastating new relevance during the later years of incarceration at Rodez.

(Gardner, T. 2003. p.4).



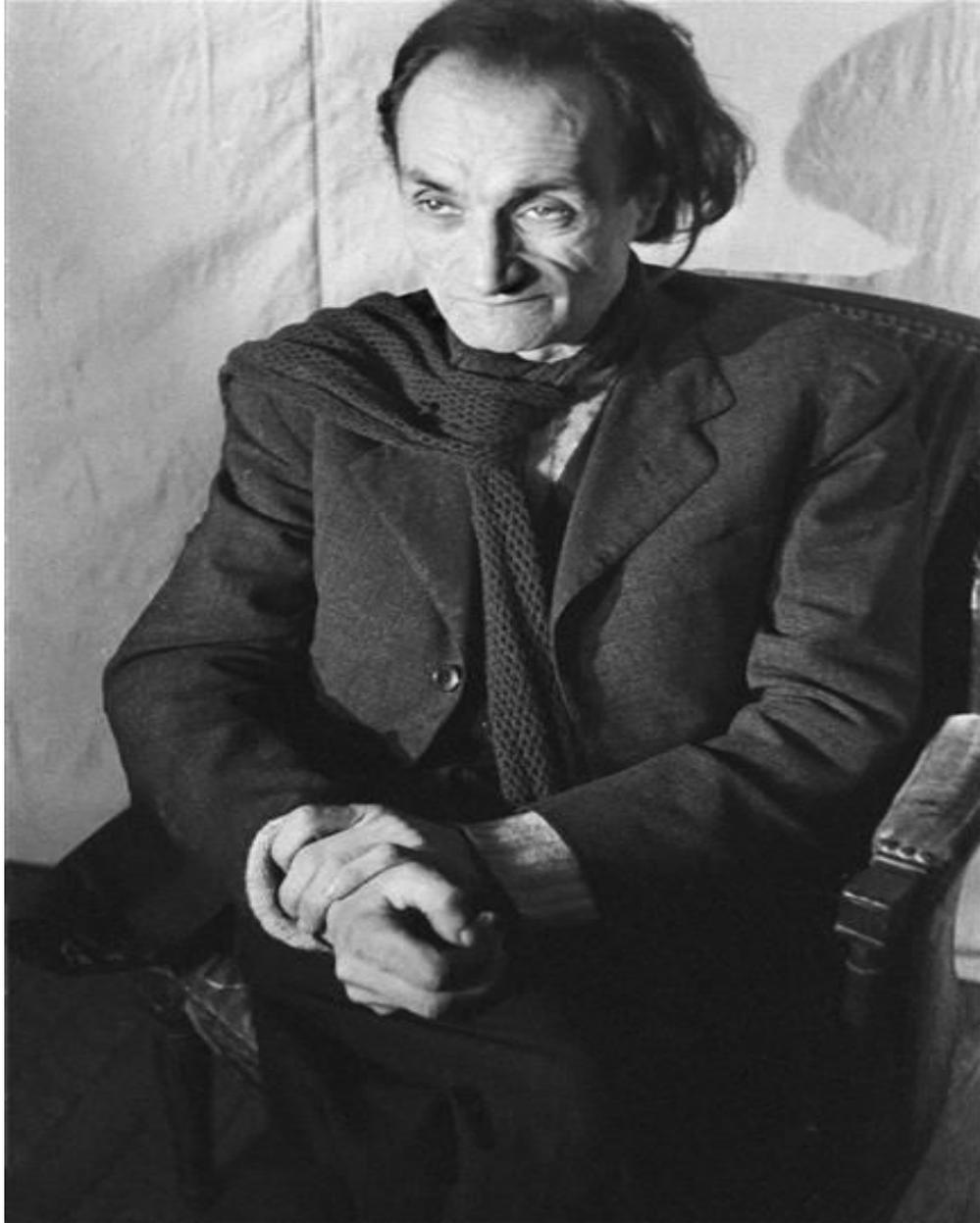
Tadeusz Kantor in *The Dead Class*, photo by Włodzimierz Wasyluk. Kantor was exploring the theme of death and memory in theatre through his biographical performances of which he was a part. The body in crisis, the suffering body here is directly connected with the lost world. Kraków, 1988.

The body in crisis relates to the existing social conditions. It contradicts norms, thus undermining the rationale of accepted standards. The body in crisis finds the metaphysics of its existence through pain, aesthetic principles are irrelevant. The body in crisis experiments, is open to new expression, individualised, but with a sense of belonging to primal impulses, the birth of theatre, the awareness of unity with the cosmos. Here the actor becomes a martyr and the performance (as Leszek Kolankiewicz puts it) a constant burnt offering. "Actors should be like martyrs burnt alive, still signalling to us from their stakes." (Grotowski, J. [after Artaud]. 1968. p. 93). Inevitably, the image of the suffering Constant Prince returns here. His pain was necessary for him to experience the divine presence, to elevate his own existence above mediocrity, so that the ordeal he was going through would lift him out of his misery and become a sacred value. This was the essence of the Total Act: love which is completely devoid of manifestations of the need to possess, a complete offering to the other without any desire for reciprocity - total trust in the other. The court circling the prince needed this purifying sacrifice to have a chance of renewal as a representative of society:

Artaud suggested that, since the actor in training must always face this combined physical and spiritual

crisis, then the effects of this crisis should be extended deliberately into performance as 'monstrosity'. Impropriety should thus be recognized as part of the very culture of acting itself, nurtured as a foundation for that 'culture-in-action, growing within us like a new organ, a sort of second breath' announced at the opening of *The Theatre and its Double*.

(Gardner, T. 2003. p.7).



Antonin Artaud, photo by Denis Colomb, December 1946.

Both Grotowski and Artaud talk about the actor being in a state of trance, in which they refer to ritual as the moment of birth of theatre: ritual as a time of encounter between spirits, the living, the dead, nature and culture in a social context.

What state of trance did the artists have in mind? A trance of getting rid of one's own ego? Or/and the melting of one's own self in contact with the unknown - the primal, universal for all of us? A state of sharpened attention, extraordinary precision open to the stream of changing reality. Pure reaction of the whole organism in a stream of impulses. "Artaud puts forward the idea of great release, a great transgression of conventions, a purification by violence and cruelty; he affirms that the evocation of blind powers on stage ought to protect us from them in life itself." (Grotowski, J. 1968. p. 92).

Art is a space of losing oneself, where the rules of following its unique logic apply. The strategy and methodology of creating a work is individualised.

Towards the performer's experience

I intend to evoke terms embedded in my own practice as a performer which will help to create the language of documentation deepened in the next chapter.

The practical experiments that I carry out simultaneously with the theoretical research oscillate around the theme of the Total

Act. The strategy of my approach to the idea of the Total Act is confrontation with it [rather than identification]: a confrontation that takes place on different levels, both in working with the material that builds performance and in exploring through the question 'what this material is not' the way it is expressed, resulting from its specific organics.

The working method can be at the same time a performance in itself and the exercises turn into dramaturgical situations. I often refer to themes, images, associations or characters that have already appeared somewhere in previous performances. Some of the personas have characteristics of the Living Dead embedded between the past and the present, their unfulfillment demanding a continuation of the work. They demand the creation of stage situations that allow them to exist in a more independent way from the imposed narrative.

So the body in crisis is in my own vocabulary of practical-theoretical exploration. At the same time it connects with the idea of the Burning Method. As I mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, *Burning Method* as a term emerged from the clash of several motives.

Significantly it was inspired by the image of Ryszard Siwiec which could be included in a list of non official national Polish icons and has the potential power of myth:



Harvest Festival in Warsaw, still from Polish Film Chronicle, September 1968.

The poignant juxtaposition of the dancing folk groups in their colourful costumes with the ultimate act of the protestor and the relatively (for political and censorship reasons) little publicity that this event received brings us closer to the idea of individual loss in the total act. The image of the burning Siwiec represents, as it were, an area of the subconscious that is present during the research on the Total Act. The suffering here stems from a sense of radical disagreement with the violence and falsehood of the ruling party. The Total Act demanded from the actor a total burning of self, of ego, a total offering here and now to and for those who shared co-presence in space:

My beloved Marysia! Don't cry! You're going to need your strength. I'm certain, that I've lived all my 60 years of life just for this moment. I'm sorry, there was no other way, or the truth, humanity and freedom would perish. This is lesser evil than the deaths of millions. Don't come to Warsaw, no one and nothing will help me now. We're arriving to Warsaw, I'm writing in a train that's why my handwriting looks bad. I feel so good, I have such peace inside me - like never before! (...).⁶⁹

⁶⁹ The Communist secret services intercepted the letter, so Maria Siwiec learned what he wrote only after the fall of Communism.
<https://przystanekhistoria.pl/pa2/tematy/english-content/42397,Against-the-total-tyranny-of-evil-Ryszard-Siwiec-1909-1968.html> [Accessed on 4 August 2022].

(Letter by Ryszard Siwiec to his wife Maria, September 1968).

The next chapter is dedicated to space inspired by Jerzy Gurawski's designs at the Theatre of 13 Rows (later The Laboratory Theatre). Gurawski explores space as a kind of field of influence, both direct and indirect, which penetrates the regions of the subconscious. Paying special attention to the spaces of the unknown, I will try to return to the idea of myth as a value which unifies the community and connects spatial designs with the body of the actor.



Burning Method: Four Lectures on Conditional Love - rehearsal in Studio 1,
Jarman Building (Canterbury), photo by Magda Tuka, May 2022.

Chapter Three: Towards an empty space

- An introduction or the entry
- Confrontation with myth - in a theatre space context
- Journey to 'the roots' (or return to the bar) - a visit to the Theatre of 13 Rows, Opole, September 2019
- The coexistence of worlds living and dead in one (theatrical) space
- Calling the dead : Noh Theatre and Grotowski
 - *Dziady/Forefathers Eve*
 - *Akropolis*
- *Post - Apocalypse* - performance installation
- Body-memory opens up towards an empty space
- Summary notes: the future practice of an empty space

An introduction or the entry

The following chapter is my theoretical and practical dialogue with the works of Grotowski and his company on space. The design of the space as proposed by the architect Jerzy Gurawski (1935 - 2022) played a huge role in the shape and the reception of the performances of the Theatre of Productions period. Additionally, the theme of working with space in the context of the formulation of the Total Act is somewhat underestimated. It was the direct contact with the spatial architecture designed by Gurawski that led the young Cieślak to actions requiring him to go beyond his comfort zone. As I mentioned in the previous chapter "Towards the Total Act", Benvolio [performed by Ryszard Cieślak] in *Dr Faustus* ripped off the table tops furiously, which in turn ripped off his skin and broke his bones. Gurawski's designs were strongly connected to the idea of the audience-actor relationship in the context of the play's content. It was also a challenge for the actors. They had to adapt their movements and vocal interactions and invent specific body-voice training for Gurawski's creation, which was rather an obstacle, one which, however, did not paralyse but released their creative potential. For some time now I, as a performer and teacher, have appreciated and emphasised the value of the obstacle for creativity: an obstacle that has a chance to confront us, actors and audience members, with the unknown, the

unpredictable.

Certainly, looking at Gurawski's projects is essential in this dimension. The venue of the Theatre of 13 Rows in Opole, and then the Laboratory Theatre in Wrocław at Rynek Ratusz 27 very quickly transformed into something more than walls, a floor, a stage, an audience, etc. A kind of close integration of the search for acting techniques, the idea of performances, the coexistence of the actors and the audience, all gave the space a metaphysical significance. The space was an organic extension of the actor's body, which in itself was an instrument for transmitting content, while at the same time being the 'birthplace' of the impulse/essence of action. Jerzy Gurawski understood this process perfectly well. The dynamic work with space that Gurawski-Grotowski proposed is still an inspiring challenge in terms of thinking about the actor's craft.

This chapter will, therefore, be a kind of map of the space of work immersed in meaning, symbol and myth, where the actor represents a vision of seeking an inner relationship with memory, carried out in physical action. We are entering the sphere of myth here, as the projects created by Gurawski were intended as a kind of metaphysical reference.

The circle, which he repeatedly mentions as a meta-project, is a symbol that encompasses the sphere of the subconscious both when it comes to the audience's and the actors' reception of the

performance. The sphere of the unknowable, the subconscious contained in thinking about the organisation of space was also present in Antonin Artaud's work and concept. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the role of theatrical experience with its purifying power was directly connected with the actor's performance, which, by eliminating the border between the stage and the audience, had an amplified power. This led to a situation of ritual experience, which I will discuss further in the chapter: "Towards a contemporary performer ...".

This chapter will mainly focus on the following theatrical projects by Gurawski for the Theatre of 13 Rows (later the Laboratory):

Dziady/Forefathers' Eve,

Akropolis,

The Constant Prince.

For me as a theatre-maker they are important in understanding the necessity of verifying the space in which I work in terms of the ideas I want to talk about in my performances. Furthermore, I will mention Gurawski's exhibition *Post - Apocalypsis* (2007) as a reflection on *Apocalypsis cum figuris* in a contemporary context.

My practice in the form of creating video notes and images helps me in this chapter bring out meanings that can sometimes lose their full dimension in language. They also function as a script

for further development. It is important to mention that the video notes (resulting, in a way, from the situation of the pandemic and the lockdown) led me to search for other spaces for performance than before. Being in Pickering (North Yorkshire) at the time, I had the chance to work outdoors. The kiln, which I found during my walks, became both a rehearsal and performance space and the idea of the Burning Method found its continuation here:



The kiln near Pickering (North Yorkshire), photo by Myles Stawman, June 2021.

Other spaces I explored were a hill, a river and a meadow (at night).

This experience paradoxically brought me closer to the concept of the subconscious in the spaces designed by Gurawski, as well as to the mythical-symbolic map of the stage in the Noh theatre. At the same time I became aware of my personal imaginary/mythical space embedded in my memory of Ursynów [a housing estate in Warsaw], where I grew up:



Ursynów in Warsaw, photo from the National Collection of Digital Archives, 1982.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ I chose this particular photo of Ursynów, because it is the real space of my childhood (from the window of the blocks of flats where I lived you can see this very church). Besides, the photo itself looks like a theatre set.

The introduction to aspects of Noh Theatre opens up possibilities for interpreting space by saturating it with relation to the memory and penetrating the worlds of the living and the dead.

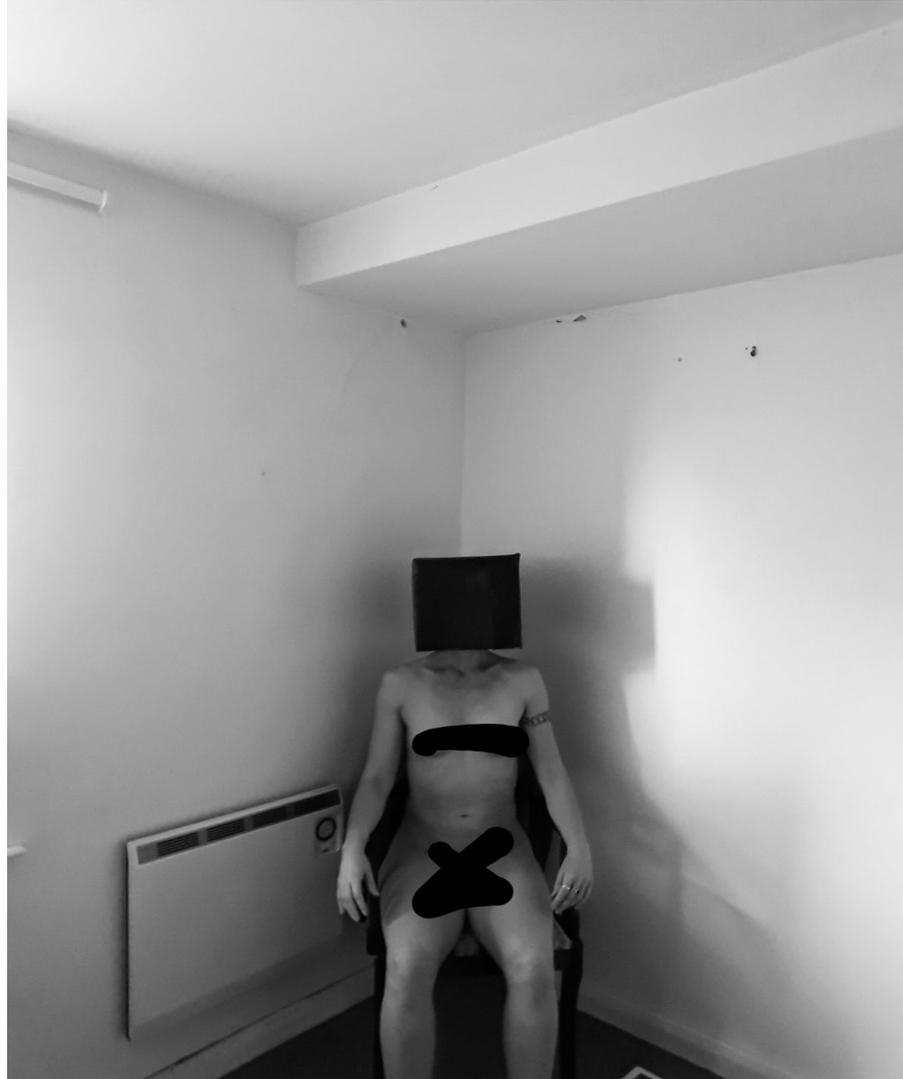
The famous Japanese director Suzuki Tadashi once said that what struck him in the behaviour of Noh actor, Kanze Hisao, during a performance in Paris was his absolute and unshakeable certainty of his relationship with space:

Kanze carried a typical Noh stage space imagined by him as if remembered in his body and applied it to any space - like a technical drawing. The proper technical parameters of Parisian stages, apart from basic distances, did not interest him at all. He was able to perform everywhere.

(Rodowicz, J. 2009. p. 120).

Space is therefore a multidimensional unity in which the audience and the actors have a chance to confront each other, themselves and the value of an older, universal meaning, which Grotowski calls myth.

If I bring to mind a comparison with the drawings by Gurawski describing the idea of theatre (later in the chapter) this chapter should have the form of a circle. The whole context would be defined as a space of intuition, of the subconscious.



Seeking a new performance space - lockdown in Millhouse, Pickering (North Yorkshire), April 2020.

Here I want to recall once again the events of September 1968 with the self-immolation of Siwec, this time in the context of space. Over 100,000 people took part in the Harvest Festival celebrations at the Stadium of The Decade (now The National Stadium) in Warsaw. The largest stadium in Poland was the scene of an individual human protest.



The Stadium of the Decade [now National Stadium] in Warsaw, officially opened 22nd of July 1955. Photo from the National Collection of Digital Archives.

Ryszard Siwiec self-immolation, September 1968:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZZ1rPOHDH0> [Accessed on 4 August 2022]

There is a striking contrast between the sacrifice of the individual (and the series of his preparatory steps; it was a conscious act), the huge 'scene' of the event and the lack of any socio-political resonance. Rather, the character and Siwiec's protest found a response in art. Here the Polish artist, Jurry Zielinski, moved by the event, gives his response (already in 1968). He did not remain silent:



Gorący [Hot] by Jurry Zieliński, 1968.⁷¹

⁷¹ Jerzy Ryszard 'Jurry' Zieliński (1943 - 1980) studied sculpture and painting at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, graduating in 1968 with a diploma in painting. Zieliński was an active opponent of the political administration in Poland. His artistic vocabulary combined pop art influences with those of the Polish Poster School, but above all his subject matter remained rooted in the social reality of the political context of communist Poland.

<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/world-goes-pop/artist-biography/jerzy-ryszard-jurry-zieliński> [Accessed 20 January 2023]

Confrontation with myth - in a theatre space context

The role of myth in the context of the space proposed by Gurawski referred to the creation of such a quality of perception of the performance that would make it possible to potentially reach the audience's subconscious. Gurawski in the documentary *Initials: J.G.* talks about the space of the unexplainable, that which perhaps does not happen directly on stage, but rather between the audience and the theatrical experience. Grotowski, in turn, speaks of the need to confront myth (through theatrical experience):⁷²

Myth was both a primaeval situation, and a complex model with independent existence in the psychology of social groups, inspiring group behaviour and tendencies. (...) But today's situation is different. As social groupings are less and less defined by religion, traditional mythic forms are in flux, disappearing and being reincarnated. The spectators are more and more individuated in their relation to the myth as corporate truth or group model, and belief is often a matter of intellectual conviction. (...) What is possible? First confrontation with myth rather than identification. In other words, while

⁷² Due to the significance of the idea of confrontation, I repeat here Grotowski's words again (first cited in the Introduction).

retaining our private experiences, we can attempt to incarnate myth, putting on its ill-fitting skin to perceive the relativity of our problems, their connection to the "roots", and the relativity of the "roots" in the light of today's experience. (Grotowski, J. 1968, pp.22-23).

Recalling roots has a specific Polish character here, a continually recurring dialogue with Romanticism⁷³ and Polish Mysticism (specially in the Theatre of Productions period). The figure of

- the prophet
- saviour
- madman
- rebel
- saint
- holy fool

⁷³ The special character of Polish Romanticism, and especially how this epoch influenced Polish culture in the 19th, 20th and even 21st centuries. During almost two hundred years from the post-partition era, beginning and ending with martial law and the period afterwards, a fairly uniform style of culture prevailed in Poland. Romantic individualism, radical rebellion of the individual against reality, madness of imagination, rebellion of death or, finally, moral dilemmas had a great importance for the Polish community. Great Romanticism in Poland gradually transformed into a canon. This was because at one point it focused primarily on building a sense of national identity and defending its symbols. The character of a national charisma, organising itself around the values of spiritual communities, such as homeland, independence, freedom of the nation and solidarity of nations. Literature played a dominant role here in terms of establishing and articulating these principles and values. [based on professor Maria Janion, published works including: *Romanticism and Existence* with Maria Żmigrodzka, 2004., *Romanticism and History*, co-written with Maria Żmigrodzka, PIW, Warsaw, 1978.]

in various manifestations exists in almost all Grotowski's performances (*Kordian*, *Dr Faustus*, characters of Don Fernando in *The Constant Prince* and the Simpleton in *Apocalypsis cum figuris*):

Developing his concept of 'poor theatre', Grotowski developed a Christian myth - if I'm not mistaken, in a Gnostic spirit. And that is why the central figure of the most important performances of the Laboratory Theatre, and especially the last two *Constant Prince* and *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, was the archetypal figure - Christian Christus in nobis (Christ in us) or Gnostic ho archôntrapos (archetypal man). (Kolankiewicz, L. 2006. p.276).

According to Mircea Eliade⁷⁴ - through the mythical community and the ritual of eternal return, by recreating the myth, traditional man had a sense of communion with others belonging to a sacred time (the great beginning of Everything). The linearity of time is broken by existing/performing (through ritual) in the space of the eternal return. So the contemporary man who moves away from the community was understood thus: not replacing the permanent emptiness left by the lack of continuation of myth, he/she suffers without really knowing why.

⁷⁴Eliade, M. (1907-1986) was a Romanian historian of religion, fiction writer, philosopher, and professor at the University of Chicago.

This situation causes a state of constant anxiety, a disease of modern man. The myth (and its lack) poses a serious question about identity, a sense of continuation/belonging, the possibility (or again lack of it) to see one's existence from the perspective of the cosmic universe:

In our day, when historical pressure no longer allows any escape, how can man tolerate the catastrophes and horrors of history – from collective deportations and massacres to atomic bombings – if beyond them he can glimpse no sign, no transhistorical meaning; if they are only the blind play of economic, social, or political forces, or, even worse, only the result of the 'liberties' that a minority takes and exercises directly on the stage of universal history?

(Eliade, M. 1977. pp. 151-52).

If the sacred essence takes place in the first revelation, then by imitation of that event we create it anew, evoke and live it. "In imitating the exemplary acts of a god or of a mythic hero, or simply by recounting their adventures, the man of an archaic society detaches himself from profane time and magically re-enters the Great Time, the sacred time." (Eliade, M. 1967. *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities*. p. 23).

Myths are the sacred stories that create a meta-environment of human belonging. In moments of crisis, by referring to myths, man is able to see his suffering differently, and tries to reach the roots of the problem. He is not alone, the narrative gives him a sense of community. Myths are reenacted through rituals and other sacred activities.

The idea of a body in crisis (described in the previous chapter) provokes the question about forgotten/lost myths. And perhaps through awareness of its own crisis it opens itself up to the memory of the myth, or towards its traces. However Grotowski juxtaposes the two words myth and confrontation - which also requires consideration.

Confrontation

According to www.etymonline.com - a website dedicated to the etymology of words, confrontation is:

1630s, "action of bringing two parties face to face", for examination and discovery of the truth, from Medieval Latin *confrontationem* (nominative *confrontatio*), noun of action from past-participle stem of *confrontari*, from assimilated form of Latin *com* "with, together".

From the perspective of the situation of the theatrical experiment that Grotowski and his company carried out, the aim

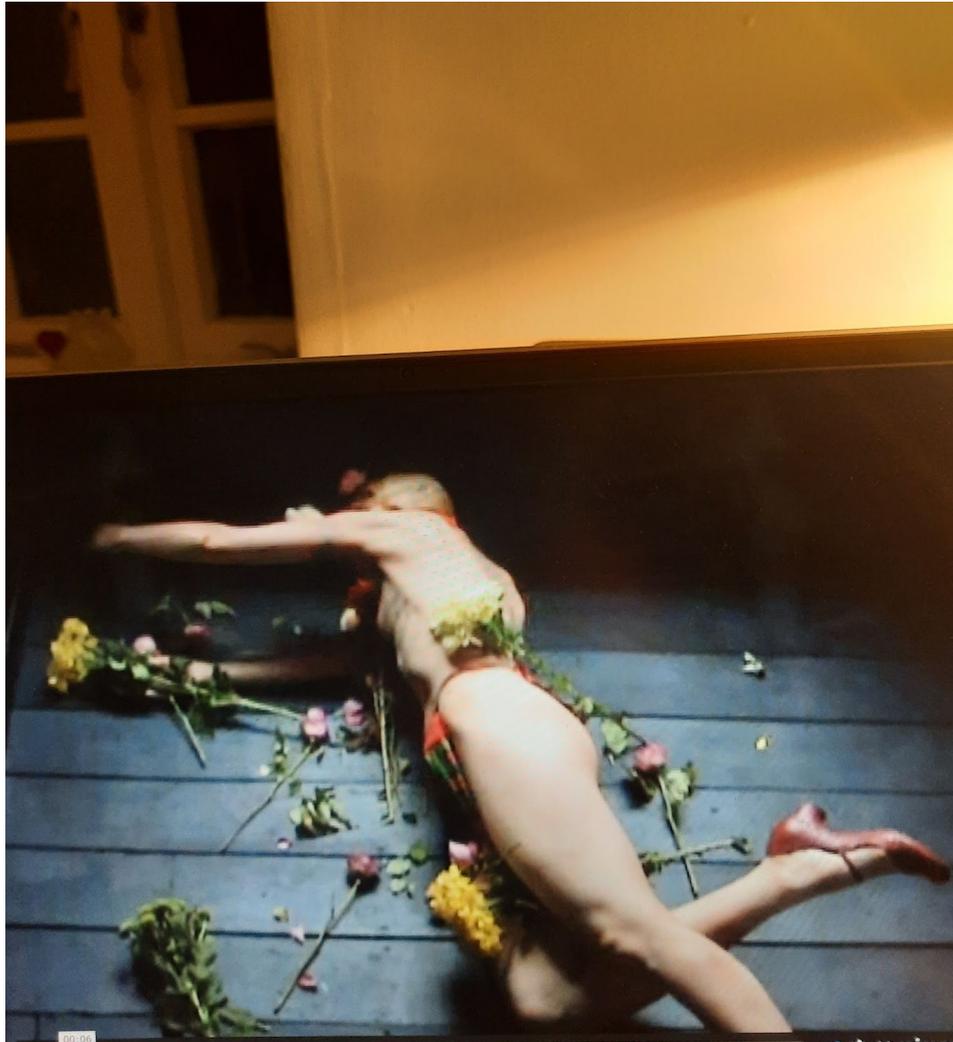
of the confrontation is of particular importance: *to uncover the truth*. The confrontation is generally associated with a dynamic situation, putting us in a position of readiness, even related to the use of force, or rather the fear that this use of force may occur.

It is also the moment of revealing the problem (and again the fear of it) in an open situation, face to face, without the possibility of hiding. Confrontation was a key element towards the Total Act, and the confrontation with myth in the context of the Total Act takes on a dangerous reality. It seems that by confronting the audience and actors with myth, Grotowski created a provocative space. The intensity of the theatrical experience proposed at The Laboratory was intended to renew human relations.

Confrontation is also one of the methods used in psychotherapy. In the context of Grotowski's performances, one can try to understand this situation: confrontation with myth as a kind of shock therapy for the audience and actors. Following Eliade's thinking it would be a return to the universal, archetypal depths in order to find the truth.

The Gurawski-Grotowski meeting and the work of both in a completely new environment (both before coming to Opole were studying and working in Kraków, which was Poland's cultural and intellectual capital) also had a confrontational character.

Opole was a relatively small town in southern Poland on the Oder River of which the most famous cultural event at that time was the annual song contest.



Video note by Magda Tuka: <https://vimeo.com/151827814>⁷⁵, Ravensbourne Studio in London, 2017.

⁷⁵ In this short video (work in progress), I refer to nostalgia for something I have never experienced. The myth of my origin is life in the countryside. My family, as I was told, is of peasant origin. Through my interpretation of folk dance, specifically the 'oberek' I try to refer to this fact. 'Oberek' is a dance based on moving in a circle. After a long time spinning dancers may go into a state of trance.

**Journey to 'the roots' (or return to the bar) - a visit to the
Theatre of 13 Rows, Opole, September 2019**

Theatrical space is not something that exists before, but what is being created is born in the time spent by actors and audience together - this is what the creative act means. The theatre has to create its space anew every time.

(Suzuki, T. 2012. p.30). [translation by Tuka]

This part of the chapter is dedicated to the Theatre of 13 Rows - the place where the first, initiating meetings between individual artists took place. In this rather inconspicuous place the process of the formulation of the Total Act happened. Jerzy Gurawski was an architect and set designer. Born in Lwów (Lviv, now Ukraine), he studied architecture at Kraków's Polytechnic. In his dissertation he analysed concepts of theatrical space at the turn of the century and presented an outline of 'the ideal theatre', one based on the principle of drawing spectators into the action by changing the relations between the audience and the stage (the audience were to be situated between a central stage and a rear stage surrounding it). Grotowski and Gurawski - two young artists, had a lot in common when they met in 1959.

Before Grotowski's arrival in 1959, The Theatre of 13 Rows was managed by two Reduta actors (more about Reduta later in Chapter

Four and Appendix B): Stanisława Łopuszańska-Ławska and Eugeniusz Ławski, who had to resign for financial reasons.

The theatre had a 72m² auditorium with approximately 116 seats arranged in thirteen rows, which gave the institution its name.

Nowadays there is a relatively popular bar: Pub Maska-Laboratorium. On the Facebook page of Pub Maska-Laboratorium at Rynek 4 in Opole, we read that it has been serving Polish cuisine for over twenty years (since 1997). It was here that more than sixty years ago, Jerzy Grotowski began his research in the field of theatre. The pub staff are very well acquainted with the fact of the existence of the famous Teatr 13 Rzędów (Theatre of 13 Rows); they willingly take the role of a guide between the tables and the bar, telling frequently seen theatre pilgrims where the stage, changing rooms, etc. were located.

Once Piotr Borowski [director of Studium Teatralne] mentioned that Grotowski had an aversion to museums because, by their very nature, they are a dead place. Here, in pub Maska-Laboratorium, to the sounds of popular music, talks take place, beer is poured. Here is life.



VIDEO NOTE: <https://vimeo.com/433562511>

I started the *Burning Method* (officially) with a visit to the pub
Maska-Laboratory in September 2019.

And the first significant meeting of Gurawski and Grotowski took
place actually in a bar [in Kraków]:

Between December 1957 and June 1958, Grotowski
organised and led a series of regular, well-attended
weekly lectures on Oriental philosophy in the Student
Club in Kraków.(...) after this lecture that Gurawski
met, drank vodka and talked with Grotowski. Grotowski
reacted enthusiastically to the scenography and
especially to the implications for mise en scène and
performance of Gurawski's diploma project, and urged

Gurawski to go with him to Opole, where he was taking on the position of director of the Theatre of 13 Rows [Teatr 13 Rzędów].⁷⁶

What was their conversation like? It must have had an intensely creative character, for soon after, Gurawski arrived in Opole. In an interview with Chris Baugh, Gurawski recalls:

there was no television around, there were no smartphones. There was only alcohol: vodka and theatre - there was nothing much apart from these two. Kraków was really a city that thrived on theatre, one that lived on theatre. Theatre actors had the status of deities with us, and we had excellent actors, we simply spent all our free time going to the theatre! And young people would talk in cafés, drinking vodka - talking about theatre all the time.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Baugh, C. 2015. "Playing within the space: The scenography of Jerzy Gurawski." *Theatre and Performance Design*. Volume 1. Issue 4.

⁷⁷ Gurawski, J. [Baugh] 2015. Volume 1. Issue 4.

The cultural void of Opole must have been conducive to an atmosphere of intense exploration and experimentation with space, the actor's craft - a new dimension of theatre, if between 1959 - 1965 Gurawski created spatial designs for: *Shakuntalā* (premiere: 13/12/1960, Opole) , *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve* premiere: 18/06/1961, Opole) , *Kordian* (premiere: 14/02/1962, Opole) , *Akropolis* (premiere: 10/10/1962, Opole) , *Tragiczne Dzieje Doktora Fausta* (*Dr Faustus* premiere: 23/04/1963, Opole). *Książę Niezłomny* (*The Constant Prince* premiere: 20/04/1965) was created in a new space in Wrocław.

Gurawski's Theatre of Intuition



Video note by Magda Tuka: <https://vimeo.com/433564110>

Gurawski in the film *Initials J.G.* (1996), says "everything starts with space, here is the Relationship". The architect draws a semi-circle on the planks of the floor with chalk, explains the traditional division between the audience and the stage, and then draws the other half, completing the full circle. He calls the resulting model of space the Theatre of Intuition. What is not visible is behind the stage, behind the

audience - hidden, subconscious, intuitive.

Based on another space design sketch for *Dr Faustus*⁷⁸ Gurawski presents the place of action: a long, high T-shaped table at which the viewers invited by Faust sit for the last supper. It is a visible space. But from behind the audience's backs there were invariably some disturbing noises - the space not accessible by sight, but rather sensed, speaking to the viewer's subconscious. In this case, as Gurawski says in the aforementioned film *Initials J.G.* - Hell itself.



Grotowski - Gurawski - ideal tandem, exhibition in CSP Katowice, 2009.

⁷⁸ One of the actors Andrzej Bielski (Cornelius, the Cardinal, Emperor Friedrich) mentioned that the voice exercises that the group discovered together with Grotowski were the result of working with a very unusual space for the actor. The complicated distance from the viewer caused constant problems with the audibility of the text, so the actors were forced to search deeper by launching resonators and intensive, individual discoveries of new possibilities for opening up the body-instrument-resonator. Bielski underlines a very practical side of the search for the voice and physical training. It was the space that imposed new challenges on actors, not the other way round. [source *Initials J.G.*]

In turn in *The Constant Prince*, the piece was similar to a surgery (like medical students in a former operating theatre) or as though a corrida.⁷⁹ Each interpretation suggests a passive observation of suffering. Both the audience and the actors are determined to play their roles [given by a director]. The spatial solution (watching the action from above) gave the audience a passive character, almost peeping at the victim, who has to fulfil a sacrifice in front of their eyes.

Before the performance started, Leonia Jabłonkówna did not manage to familiarise herself with the detailed description of scenes by Ludwik Flaszen, given to the audience at the theatre entrance.⁸⁰ So she directly describes her own impressions in the review of "*The Constant Prince* in the Theatre of 13 Rows":

The area where the performance takes place - a square of an empty floor, with only one small platform in the middle - is sealed on all sides with a fence made of solid planks. There is no breakthrough here, resulting from the conventional "fourth wall"; none of the walls are conventional here, all are completely real. Their height is calculated in such a way that the viewers placed behind them can only lean their heads out of

⁷⁹ Spanish word for bullfighting.

⁸⁰ Grotowski gradually abandoned the practice of giving viewers detailed descriptions/interpretations of performance scenes, after - rightly - criticism that the work should defend itself and that the audience have the right to their own associations. The review begins with a description of the space itself.

this formwork and follow the course of action from this "top-down" position. Such a place brings to mind strong associations with the situation of impression collectors, impression-seeking tourists, watching some secret rituals from hiding, to which no intruder has access.

(Jabłonkówna, L. 2006. p. 178).⁸¹ [Translated by Magda Tuka]

It seems that the above fragment of the review confirms the direction of Grotowski's and Gurawski's search in the sphere of myth and return to the *primaeval*, mythical situation. The author speaks of a ritual that is created before the audience's eyes, in which they are (albeit passive) co-participants.

Gurawski, years later, in the catalogue to his monographic exhibition in Centrum Kultury Zamek Poznań in 2000, writes about *The Constant Prince*:

The Constant Prince

A fascinating experience of space

Watched differently

Opens up a new world of associations

We're always meeting on

The Plane - and here the view from above

and yet on the torment

⁸¹ Jabłonkówna Leonia (1905-1987) - Polish theatre director, writer, poet and critic.

Close contact - different reception

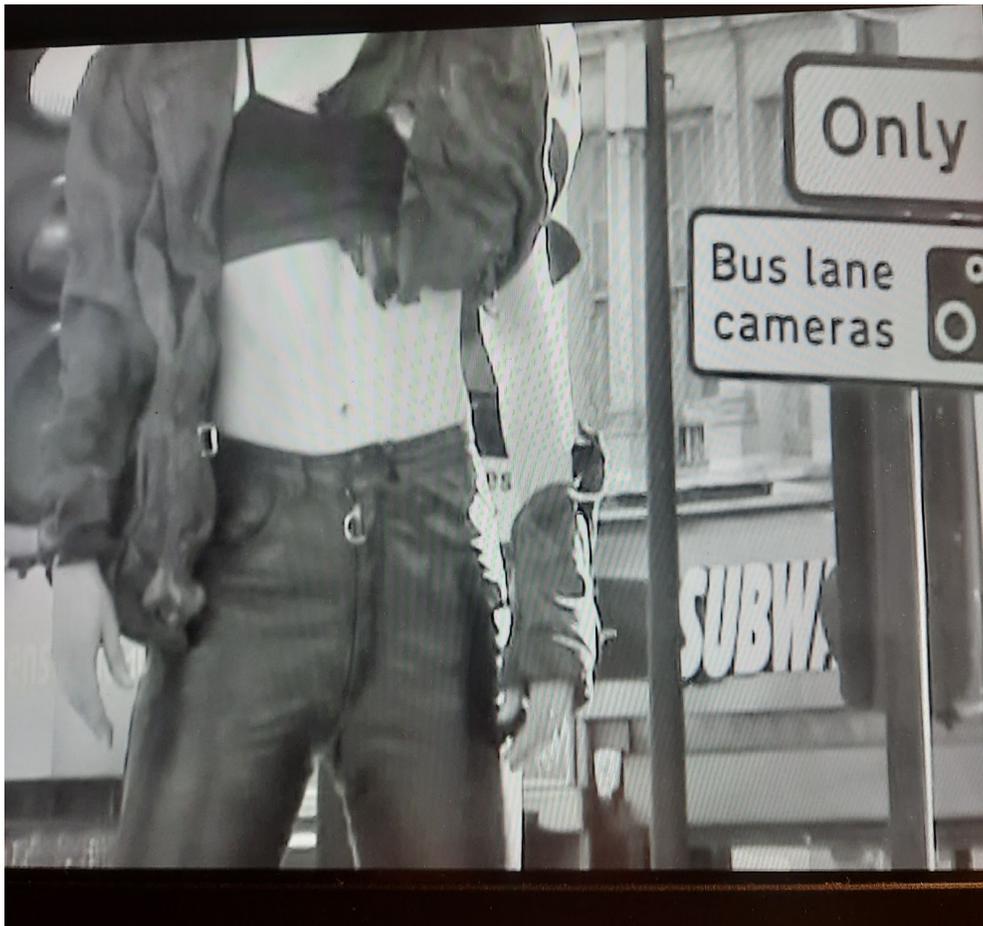
Proximity and seclusion

Embraced by such simple means

(text to the catalogue published by Centrum Kultury

Zamek in Poznań, written by Jerzy Gurawski, 2000)

[Translation by Magda Tuka].



Video note by Magda Tuka: <https://vimeo.com/231553991>

A Polish Romantic hero possessed by a vision, Catford, London, summer 2018.

The coexistence of worlds living and dead in one (theatrical)
space



⁸² *The Kiln* - performance by Magda Tuka, photo by Myles Stawman, June 2020.

⁸² "I remember the body of a woman lying on a bed in a collective room at a retirement home. I was struck by the contrast between the small size of the body, and the impression that it (the body) was as if collapsing, at the same time the body is absorbing all reality around us - time and place became a representative of another dimension. Like a black hole." Note from a *Private Notebook* by Magda Tuka.

The following subchapter evokes the idea of the Living Dead (from the chapter "Towards a Total Act") in the context of theatrical space. The performances *Dziady* and *Akropolis* are dedicated to the coexistence of the living and the dead. Overlapping here are the ideas of the myth of the Polish Romantic hero in his inability to perform the act (perhaps due to his suspension between the world of the living and the dead) and of the ritual itself, its original form connecting the community. A short analysis of the meaning of the stage space in the Noh theatre helps me to understand this coexistence more methodically.

Calling the Dead: Noh Theatre and Grotowski

Noh Theatre will be invoked during my research of translating some of Grotowski's thoughts and ideas into both theoretical reflections and performance practice. Although I have never studied Noh Theatre directly, paradoxically in reaching out to this centuries-old tradition I see very contemporary interpretative possibilities for working on the Burning Method. In the Japanese Noh Theatre, which dates back to the fourteenth century (the patrons of Noh are Kan'ami 1333-1384, and his son Zeami 1363-1443), space does not change from performance to performance. It is permanent, established and symbolic. The only

'decorative' element is the image of a pine tree. The emptiness of the space requires excellent skills and focus on every detail from the actors.

The traditional Noh Theatre stage, called *butai*, is entirely open, without a proscenium and curtain, which maintains the continuity of experience between the audience and the actors. The roof, based on four columns (even inside enclosed spaces), symbolises the sacredness and integration of the place of play. Also, each pillar precisely defines the action and its performer. The four pillars are very important for the actor's orientation in space. The *Shite*, the main protagonist, wears a mask with an extremely restricted view.

Another important architectural element is the *hashigakari* bridge (a suspended bridge), through which the actors enter the main stage. It symbolises the connection between two worlds: ghosts and people. Jadwiga Rodowicz-Czechowska,⁸³ in an interview about Noh, underlines its specificity: its focus on the issue of an enigma and, by suspending the narrative, on the transformation process itself. The mask, costume, and stage are the elements to which the actor adjusts his movement, his existence, and not vice versa. It is an existing space, preserved by hundreds of years of tradition and focused on every detail. Spirituality manifests itself in the presence of the

⁸³ Jadwiga Maria Rodowicz-Czechowska – Polish scholar specialising in the history of Japanese drama and theatre studies.

souls of the dead on stage. For a long time in the history of Noh, the boundary between the afterlife and the reality of the living was blurred. The separation of ghost stories and living stories is relatively new. The awareness of performing with the presence of ghosts and its disappearance is the essence of Noh. Supernatural forces can take the form of spirits, or madness, which power has a spiritual quality. Certainly, Noh Theatre is very different from the theatre of the West, but its elements in the twentieth century penetrated Europe. In his article "Treasuring the secret within: Grotowski and the flower", Jason Arcari points out a number of important similarities between Noh tradition and Grotowski's directions formulated during the period of the creation of *Towards a Poor Theatre*:

Zbigniew Cynkutis and Ryszard Cieślak sit side by side with a Japanese Noh mask [in Barba and Savarese's publication "The Secret Art of the Performer", 1991, p. 118]. In a subsequent section Antoni Jahołkowski (also a member of Grotowski's company) is captured in a strenuous position from the training exercise 'the cat'. This photograph of Jahołkowski is in close proximity to a picture of the fundamental body position kamae used in Noh and Kyogen. In an earlier chapter an image showing the technique of walking used by the actors in Grotowski's "Akropolis" is preceded

by a series of photographs of the sliding step (*suriashi*) common to several forms of Japanese theatre.

(Arcari, J. 2013. p. 4).

In his article "Towards a Poor Theatre", Grotowski mentions techniques that had a significant impact on the search for the Total Act: "Also particularly stimulating to me are the training techniques of oriental theatre - specifically the Peking Opera, Indian Kathakali, and Japanese Noh theatre". (Grotowski, J. 1968. p.16).

However, he points out that the exploration was not aimed at collecting various exercises, forms of expression, but:

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 the laying bare of one's own intimacy - all this without the least trace of egotism or self-enjoyment.

(Grotowski, J. 1968. p.16).

The fragment above is significant again because of the Noh Theatre. Grotowski required from his actors, as in Noh, an approach of total dedication to the character/act, excluding any egotistical motivations:

Strict adherence to a life of numerous austerities as part of training is characteristic of the early Noh

performer. Self-denial and abstinence were commonplace. Such rituals serve as a form of 'self-mortification' and a means by which to purify the body in preparation for the performance. Similarly, "Towards a Poor Theatre" has many allusions to the spiritual path. In the chapter entitled "Statement of Principles" Grotowski [1991, p. 215] states: "Order and harmony in the work of each actor are essential conditions without which a creative act cannot take place. Here we demand consistency. We demand it from the actors who come to the theatre consciously to try themselves out in something extreme, a sort of challenge seeking a total response from every one of us."

(Arcari, J. 2013. p.8).

The profound work experience of the Laboratory Theatre (mainly between Cieślak and Grotowski) formulated as the Total Act, brings to mind also the actor's transformation in the Noh Theatre. Though in a completely other context, with very different aesthetics, it recalls the existence of a borderline, the encounter between the living and the dead.

Dziady/Forefathers' Eve

I think that behind the vitality of the "Polish

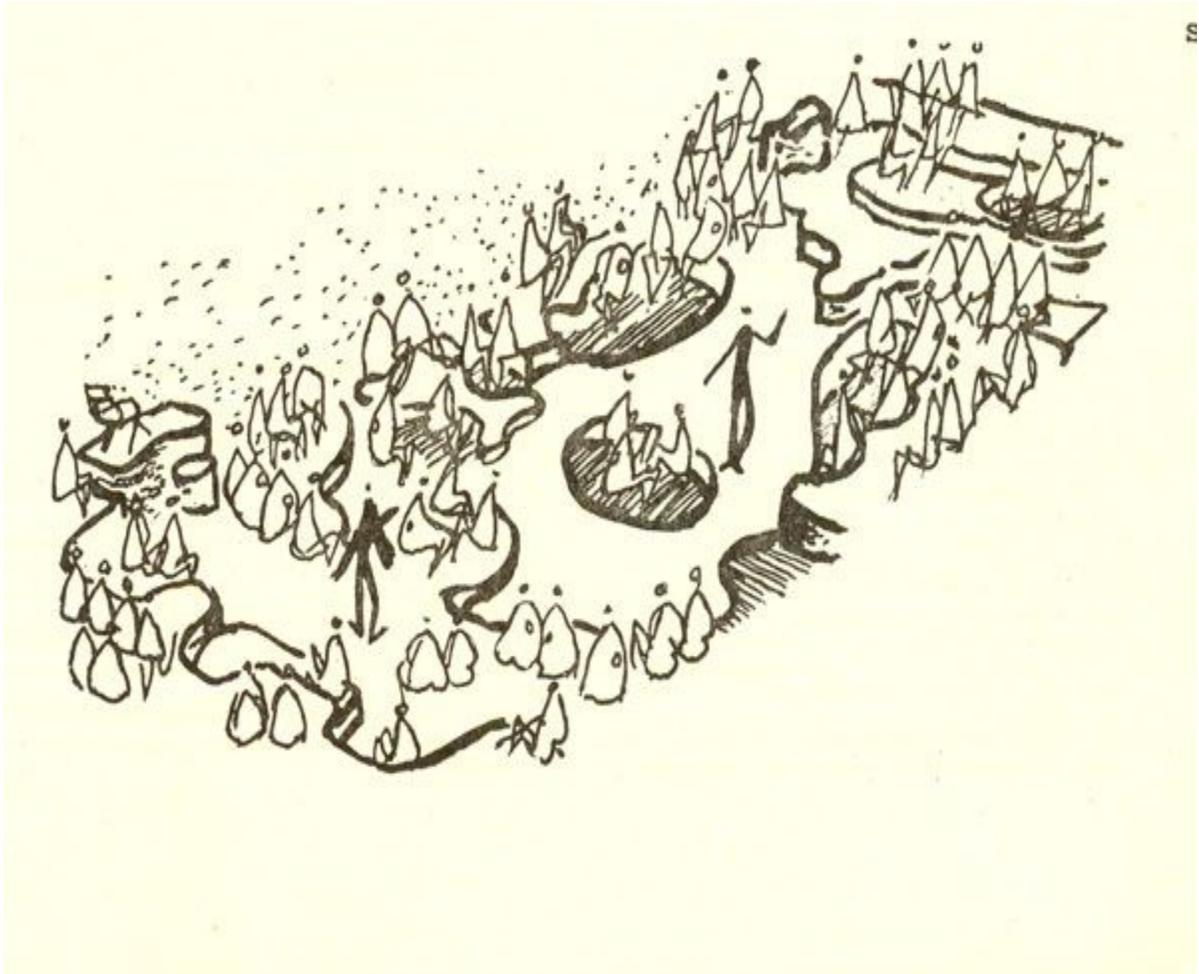
Theatre of Transformation" there is (...) an extremely close link between art and religion, making 'artistic' activity is a kind of spiritual practice, and "spirituality" manifests itself primarily in action and the pursuit of numinous experience. "The Spiritual and the artistic" create a dynamic balance, transforming each other in such a way that talking about religion is a misunderstanding and talking only about art is a diminishing narrowing down.

(Kosiński, D. 2007. p.532). [Translation by Magda Tuka]

Although the performance *Dziady* is somewhat far from the period of the formulation of the Total Act, it is nevertheless worth mentioning because of its exploration of the relationship with the audience through a space, as well as the theme of confrontation with myth. *Dziady* is a work-myth in itself, with which Polish artists have confronted themselves over the centuries, each time reading *Dziady* in a new way.

In 1961 (premiere 18th June), Jerzy Grotowski and his actors were calling out for the Spirits in the performance *Dziady* in a space designed by Gurawski. And although the primary purpose of the performance was to create a ritual community through play, the essence was to call up the spirits of the dead and their coexistence with actors and spectators.

"We built something strange, something that wasn't in any way associated with *Dziady*, but was a system of some kind of stacking platforms." (Gurawski, J. 2017. [text online]).



Jerzy Gurawski, Drawing of space for *Dziady*, Opole 1962.

Ludwik Flaszen emphasises the coexistence of audience and actors in the theatrical space by completely abolishing the division between stage and audience:

The space, deprived of the division between the stage

and the audience helped in this: In light of this, the configuration of space acquired fundamental significance. Jerzy Gurawski completely abandoned the division between stage and audience, creating instead a multilevel site of performance, where the spectators' seats were positioned at various angles and at different heights. In effect, audience members, depending upon where they were seated, had a different, sometimes quite limited, perspective. What was important was that they could also see each other. A comfortable and untroubling viewing of the action was also denied by the fact that the actors performed not only in the 'central space', where the most important actions took place, but also in amongst - or even with - the spectators.

(Flaszen, L. 2006 p.41).

In the aforementioned catalogue to the monographic exhibition in Poznań (2000), Gurawski emphasises his search for the ritual element of *Forefathers' Eve* and his attempts to translate it into a new stage situation:

In *Dziady* we were thinking about something that could be called a ritual theatre. In the ritual, as we know, there is no division between the stage and the audience. The ritual is built on Unity between those

who attend it and those who lead the ritual. The position of the audience not only in relation to the actors, but the audience in relation to the audience made them cross their gazes, forcing them to perceive and in a way confirm their existence.

(Gurawski, J. 2000. Catalogue published by Centrum Kultury Zamek in Poznań).

I must mention here that there is some kind of intense need for young groups to confront *Dziady*. Mickiewicz's poem published in 1823-1860⁸⁴ has the current spirit of the individual's rebellion against authorities and imposed conventions. *Dziady* was my first performance in Studium Teatralne and was called by the critic Roman Pawłowski from national newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*: "Young *Dziady*". The evocation of ghosts in this performance had not so much a national as a personal dimension. One of the themes that guided the performance was the suicide of a friend of one of the actors.

Akropolis

In this performance, evoking the dead has perhaps reached its fullest dimension. What happened in *Akropolis* - based on

⁸⁴ *Forefathers' Eve Part II* - drama from 1823.

Forefathers' Eve Part IV - drama from 1823.

Forefathers' Eve Part III - drama from 1832.

Forefathers' Eve Part I - drama published posthumously in 1860 (unfinished).

Stanisław Wyspiański's dramatic epic poem, first presented at the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows on 10 October 1962 - is a very conscious division between the world of the living and the dead in one space. Wyspiański's poetic drama, written between 1903 and 1904, is set on the night of Easter Saturday with works of art in the Wawel Cathedral in Kraków coming to life. In Act I, statues from tombs become animated, in Acts II and III it is figures from tapestries, while in Act IV the carvings from the choir come alive. All the acts are set on Wawel Hill, a significant site of Polish historical consciousness, which is effectively visited by all the grand Judeo-Christian myths. The main theme of *Akropolis* is, then, resurrection, considered both as salvation from death, inertia, and forgetting, but also a task beholden upon each human being.

However, this was not the Wawel Castle in Kraków space that represented the Polish Acropolis. Instead:

They clash in an extreme world in the midst of the polyglot confusion where our century has projected them: in an extermination camp. The characters re-enact the great moments of our cultural history; but they bring to life not the figures immortalised in the monuments of the past, but the fumes and emanations from Auschwitz.

(Flaszen, L. 2006. p.53).

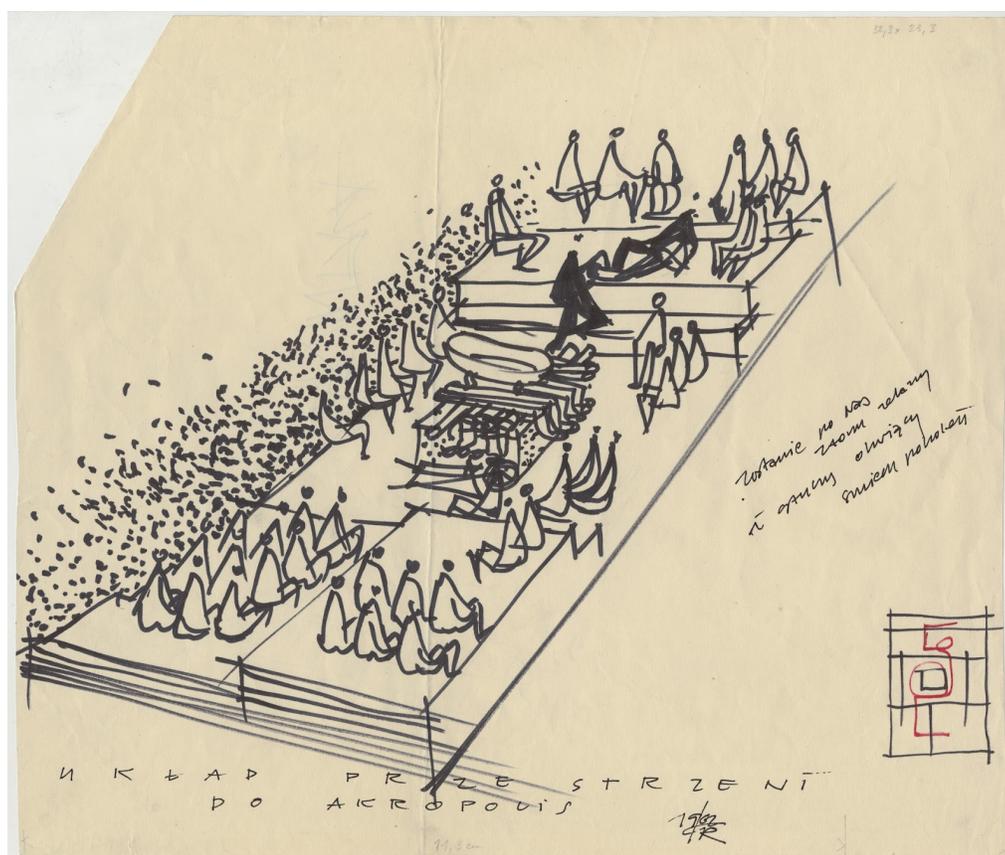
The action of the performance, as in *Dziady*, takes place all over the whole space amongst the audience. However, they are not drawn here to play together. On the contrary. By looking into the audience's faces as if through glass, the actors emphasise the distinctiveness of the worlds: between the living and the dead. The costumes and set design were created by former Auschwitz prisoner, Józef Szajna, in collaboration with Gurawski (on spatial architecture). During the course of the action, the space undergoes a significant transformation.

As Flaszen⁸⁵ writes: "The reality of the props is rust and metal. From them, as an action progresses, the actors will build an absurd civilisation; a civilisation of gas chambers, advertised by stovepipes which will decorate the whole room as the actors hang them from strings or nail them to the floor. Thus one passes from fact to the metaphor". (Flaszen, L. 2006. p.53). Both *Dziady* and *Akropolis* have had a significant influence on my own theatrical explorations. I repeatedly refer to evoking symbols connected with death, with the coexistence of the living and the dead through working with the memory of the performer, with evoking the state of the body in crisis (which I mentioned

⁸⁵ Ludwik Flaszen himself was from a Jewish family. He described himself: "of Jewish descent, of Polish nationality". Kolankiewicz, L. *Kaddish Remembering Ludwik Flaszen (1930–2020)* [translated by Mirosław Rusek]

in the previous chapter). The character, the hero, the archetypal: the Living Dead is the leitmotif linking the different characters I embody during my work.

The memory of the Holocaust was still very much alive in the 1960s. The actors of the Laboratory Theatre were born before the war, so the period of their childhood was marked by the real experiences of that period.



Drawing by Gurawski, Architecture of Space for Akropolis, Opole 1962.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ On the drawing by Gurawski there is a fragment of the poem *Song* by Tadeusz Borowski (1922-1951).

Translation by Tuka:

After us scrap iron remains

And the dull, mocking laughter of generations.



Towards a Silent Dance - image from the video note: translation of exercise
'Balance in Space' (more about 'Balance in Space' later in the next chapter)
into new experience.

***The Post-Apocalypse* - performance installation**

This part of the chapter makes a leap forward in time to the installation titled *The Post-Apocalypse*⁸⁷ presented during the Prague Quadrennial in 2015.

Gurawski was the author of the first proposals for the organisation of space in *Apocalypse cum figuris* (1968) however, the direction taken by Grotowski and his actors while working on it did not need any elements apart from the collective presence of the audience and the actors. The fact that Gurawski dedicates the exhibition (2015) to this very performance (despite its scenographic emptiness) may also be significant in the context of a conversation taking place beyond temporality. Jerzy Grotowski died in 1999, and *Apocalypse cum figuris* was at the same time his exit from the theatre towards other explorations, so the meeting between director and architect came to a definite end. Perhaps the architect's faith in theatre was stronger than the director's. In the aforementioned catalogue to the 2000 exhibition, Gurawski writes:

The theatre space is a unique place. Everything that was visible in traditional theatre was happening in front of us. An opening curtain, beautiful decorations, tragedy or comedy.

⁸⁷ Curator: Agnieszka Jelewska, Space Design: Jerzy Gurawski and ARPA, Experience designer: Michał Krawczak, Sound designer: Rafał Zapała, Interaction designer: Paweł Janicki, Interactive system engineer: Michał Cichy, Producer: Anna Galas-Kosil (Theatre Institute), Coordinator: Edyta Zielnik (Theatre Institute).

We built another theatre: the Theatre of Space. It is surrounded by a completely mysterious circle. It is an intuitive space where the most important things open up. Voices, noises of tapping. Strange and hidden. It is a space that changes. It is more intriguing for the theatre than the visible one - directly experienced. What happens is what moves. It is more important for it - it is a proof that the theatrical space is still alive since the mystery theatre. We are constantly building a new theatre.

(Gurawski, J. 2000. Catalogue published by Centrum Kultury Zamek in Poznań).

The Post-Apocalypsis: in a white, sterile enclosed space, hollow fragments of tree trunks are placed at various heights. The viewers, through physical contact (often with the forehead) by a kind of attached whistle, triggers a sound. I have not seen the exhibition live, only the archive material, but I am struck by the quality of physical contact with the tree. There is a unique level of intimacy and respect for the tree trunk in the posture, the physical awareness of the audience member, and the focus on listening - it all gives the impression that we are in a special, dedicated place.

Curator, Agnieszka Jelewska, in the introduction to the exhibition describes it thus:

The Post-Apocalypse installation projects a precise contemporary vision of the networked and global world. Viewers enter directly into a condensed space of real-time, weather-data streams, including those from places of energy-related threats and disasters on Earth (Chernobyl, Los Alamos, Fukushima). The constantly updated data is processed artistically through sonification - in this way, the installation is filled with a changing audiosphere, active towards human presences. Energetic communicational switches can be experienced also within the framework of surprising, designed interaction with technologically transformed elements of nature. Any previous romantic visions of nature, presented as a landscape and background for human events - once so crucial for the development of theatre stage design - are radically revised.⁸⁸

The installation is a testament to the living continuation of a process initiated in 1968.⁸⁹ By using a completely different form of expression, it involves the audience anew in the questions raised by Grotowski and his group about our contemporary

⁸⁸ Jelewska, A. 2015 [text online] Available at: <http://grotowski-institute.art.pl/wydarzenia/post-apocalypse-2/> [Accessed 11 June 2020].

⁸⁹ 1968 is also the moment that initiates the idea of Burning Method. As I have already mentioned, the act of self-immolation perpetrated by Ryszard Siwiec at the National Stadium became one of the beginnings of reflection on the nature of the Total Act.

spiritual condition, its crisis and the consequences of losing internal integration. In this way, Gurawski continues his vision of a theatre of intuition, a space which has an ambiguous impact on audiences and which perhaps triggers a dormant subconscious coexistence. Here the idea of "Confrontation with Myth" may find its continuation:

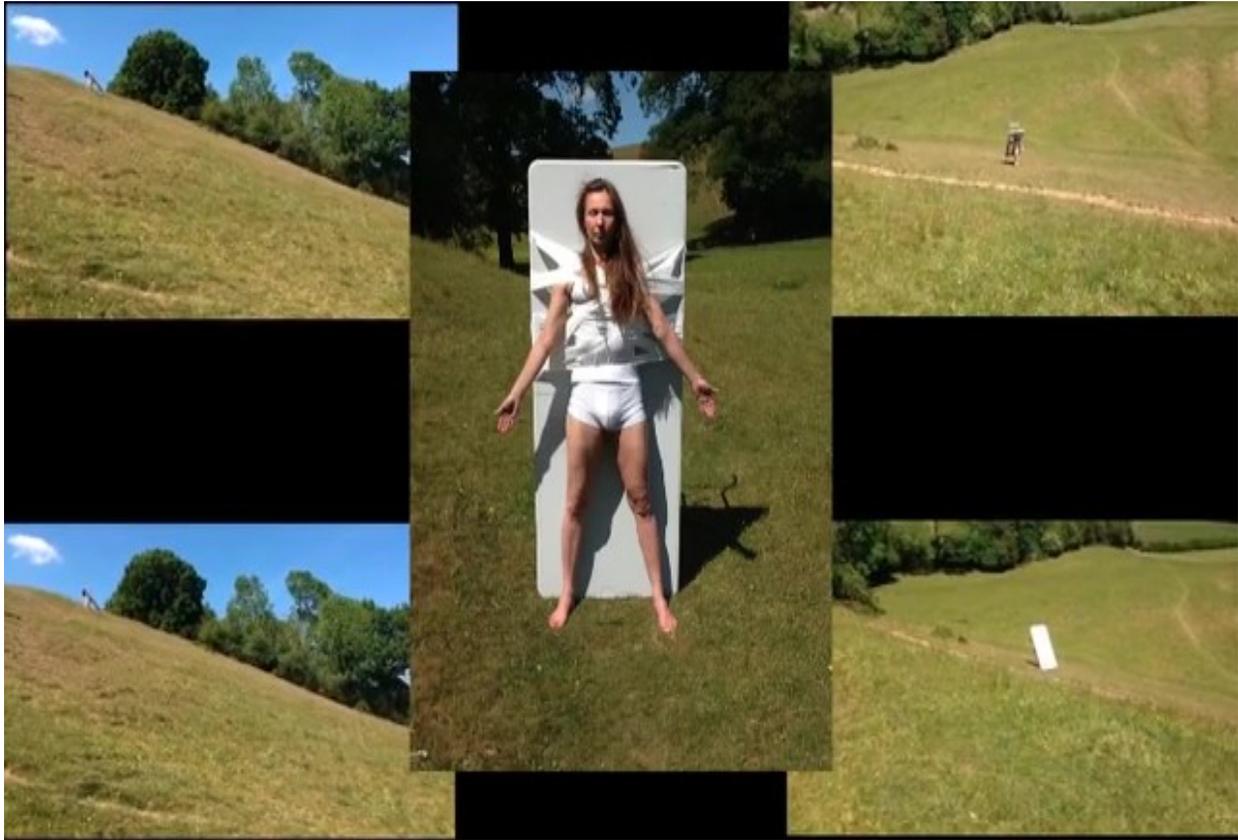
The Post-Apocalypsis Installation is an attempt to indicate complicated assemblages created by contemporary men with techno-nature, which does not actually surround them but co-shapes the contemporary space with them for the survival of life on Earth. From the perspective of that project, weather is an audio-somatic aura, shaped by endless performance, taking place between human and nonhuman actors. (Jelevska, A. 2015. [text online]).



POST-APOCALYPSIS - photo from interactive installation/ national exhibition /
PQ2015, 2015.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, *Apocalypsis cum figuris* took place and was presented already during the time of paratheatrical search (1969 - 1976), a departure of the company from the theatrical space, coming into the contact with nature and working with the space of the forest, mountains, elements etc. Thus, the theme of ecology appearing in the exhibition and contact with the matter of trees reads *Apocalypsis* in its broader context.

Body memory opens up towards an empty space



Video note by Magda Tuka:<https://vimeo.com/425813449> -
another attempt to encounter a myth: *a controlled element of pain is
essential*, Pickering, North Yorkshire, June 2020.

In the case of artists such as Grotowski, it is basically impossible to conduct linear studies. Rather, the inspirations, events, and the work with the actors itself form a kind of widening circle that is in constant relation to one another. Studies can be more like observations of these circles spreading on the surface of water due to a stone thrown into it. What would that stone be? Axis Mundi. A kind of prototype, an

original thought, a vision, a seed?

I assume it could be, for example, the Total Act. The Total Act as the moment, the event, the revelation from which these circles spread. As far as time is concerned, in the sense of events arranged in a certain chronology, they obviously help to establish a kind of order of ideas that built up the Act, as well as the awareness of what the later creative work is in relation to the manifestation of the Act.

A later period of Grotowski's work called Art as vehicle refers to the idea of verticality. However, I believe that the idea of verticality already had its place in the fulfilment of the Total Act. It is as if the Total Act guided Grotowski and his collaborators; as if it illuminated a certain research path. And yet, as I mentioned in the previous chapter without the possibility of repeating it:

It is work which almost literally places itself 'outside history'. It can be conceived only as a 'becoming' along vertical lines, a decadence of 'knowledge' or 'light' in man, and a re-emergence of sparks or fragments of this 'knowledge' through man. When I talk of art as a vehicle, I refer to verticality. Verticality as a phenomenon of energy: there are heavy but organic energies (linked to the forces of life, to instincts, to sensuality), and

there are more subtle energies. The question of verticality means to pass from, shall we say, a rougher level in a certain sense one could refer to them in inverted commas as 'day-to-today' energies, a more subtle energetic level, or even to the higher connection.

(Grotowski, J. 2009. p. 130).

Grotowski's last theatrical performance *Apocalypsis cum figuris* closes the period of Theatre of Productions (1958-1969). In the Encyclopaedia on the Grotowski Institute website, under the letter: W [English version L], there is a separate article devoted to 'leaving the theatre' event:

Grotowski 'leaving the theatre' should, at the same time, be considered in the historical context: on the one hand, in its relation to counter-culture, and on the other hand, in its relation to the historical understanding of the concept of theatre, which in the 1970s was still strongly connected to the forms established in the nineteenth century. The deeds carried out by Grotowski, together with its consequences, were a significant event in the history of the theatrical revolution taking place in the final decades of the twentieth century and heralded the

performative turn.⁹⁰

From the perspective of experimental work with space, it was an essential step towards the radical resignation from any form of scenography. An empty room, which by the performer's action becomes alive, with just a few objects, simple clothes (already in *Apocalypsis cum figuris* the actors performed in daily clothes, and the stage was a simple room and two lights):

In the empty room is the 'process', the living stream of impulses; in the big house there is performance with its craft and skill (not performances of the rich theatre, but performances nevertheless). To liberate one's 'process' means staying within it. In the contrast between 'process' and the house around it, we do not only see two different ways of conceiving performance rich or poor; we also see a contrast between two different ways of conceiving the theatre itself, and the different ways of practising it after *The Constant Prince*: theatre either as a context also for the creation of performances, or theatre only as yoga, as a vehicle for the spiritual realisation of the individual practising it. The empty room takes its leave from public performances, and already introduces The Workcenter of Grotowski's final years.

⁹⁰ Leaving Theatre [text] Available at: <https://grotowski.net/en/encyclopedia/leaving-theatre>

(Ruffini, F. 2009. p.110).

The performer moves according to the inner memory map, which has a precise relation to the outer action in space. They direct their concentration vertically, thus trying to find the thread connecting them with the essence of the action. In *Apocalypsis cum figuris* Gurawski tried to work with the idea of the cross in the centre of the space but the simplicity of emptiness was much more powerful. Later on, Grotowski's search, although at different stages, was transferred to the value of the connection itself, whether this is a connection with another human being, with oneself, or with the vertical energy mentioned above.

This empty room, as I know from my own experience of working for ten years in Studium Teatralne, is filled with detailed thoughts (and its execution) to reach the essence of its emptiness, so that nothing in the space interferes with the focus on action. The floor is of great value, and it is where tears (of joy and suffering) mix with the sweat during many hours of struggle with material that is impossible to grasp. So we washed it at least twice a day.

Summary Notes: the further practice of an empty space

Mythic space is always associated with a particular place or object that emanates mythic meaning. It is e.g. a holy pillar *kauwa-auwa* which for the Arrente (Arrunta, or Aranda) people

[Australia] performed the function of communication between their shaman and the beyond with its presence denoting a mythical space; or Crete's Eileithyia Cave in which from the Neolithic to Roman times childbirth was worshipped. Grotowski and Gurawski sought a connection through the space and body of the actor with the sphere of the subconscious and the community, which had its reference to the primal situation. In the chapter "Towards a Total Act" I mentioned iconic images mainly from *The Constant Prince*, which in the art of XX century theatre are a kind of reference point, a stimulation for the practice of the actor's craft. Gurawski's designs definitely contributed to the creation of these icons. The specific conditions in which the actors operated brought them into special contact with the idea of the performance and the audience. Through the creation of a specific quality of space (Gurawski's spatial design) and the process of working on the Total Act, it was possible to create performances that have entered the iconographic, and perhaps mythical, canon. I think that since the beginning of the Grotowski-Gurawski collaboration, this very physical co-existence of the actor's body, the idea and the architecture of the space has given the search for the actor's craft particular character. The special emphasis on feeling the space opened up actors and audience to embody the idea of being a particular character. The special emphasis on feeling the space

opened up actors and audience to embody the idea of being a community. The transformation of space thus took place in an act of active participation, and perhaps the embodiment of the Total Act approximated in its artistry the actor in Noh theatre. At the same time, a characteristic of Western theatre is transience and constant change, the search for a new form. The Theatre of 13 Rows/Laboratory, after more than 10 years of work within the framework of a non-standard, but nonetheless a stage, abandoned the creation of space in favour of a journey towards the sources of culture/religion.

I presume that this new [1969] direction was not the result of a joint decision on the part of the actors and the director, but still after Grotowski's announcement of the death of the theatre and the need to leave its building, the group continued to work together for over 10 years (the official dissolution of the Laboratory Theatre took place in 1984).⁹¹

⁹¹ The process of closing began in 1982, when Jerzy Grotowski sent a letter to the members of the Theatre in which he informed them of the continuation of his activities outside Poland and proposed an end to activities associated with his name in the country. The activities of the group were continued by the Drugie Studio Wrocławskie (Second Wrocław Studio) under the direction of Zbigniew Cynkutis, who did not support the decision to dissolve the Laboratory. Following the death of Cynkutis (1987) and the end of the Second Studio, the Centre for Research into the Work of Jerzy Grotowski and for Theatrical and Cultural Research was established at the Laboratory Theatre's headquarters in Wrocław, which today is known as the Jerzy Grotowski Institute.



Laboratory space at the Grotowski Institute in Wrocław, photo by Irena Lipińska.



Studium Teatralne, Warsaw, Lubelska 30/32 street [the building does not exist any more].⁹²

⁹² Studium Teatralne was located in the building at Lubelska 30/32 Street since 1995. Following a decision by the city authorities about problems with the roof construction, Piotr Borowski's company had to leave the premises in April 2020. Thanks to my ten years of experience of working with space through the body at the Studium Teatralne with a very specific training - aiming at active observation of the space, listening to it, and consciously intervening - I hope that I have developed a sensitivity for reading the quality of the environment in which I work.

In the Burning Method we are working often with rented or found space. It is no longer about directness and looking for a connection with the place, but rather a strategic assessment of the situation through the performer's body, with space also having a digital presence. Any 'survival' must be immediately challenged and the overall 'devotion' in the sense of physicality is confronted with experimentation on the body itself, on its surface concerning internal, often intuitive directions of action. Also, the space created by video projection has opened up for me. I try to integrate the projected image with the space and the actor's body.

The space designed by Jerzy Gurowski at the Laboratory Theatre sought a new relationship with the audience and had a hand in the creation of the actor's technique, becoming increasingly simplified over time (*Apocalypsis cum figuris*) before leaving the 'theatre walls' altogether. The integrity of the space, the idea and the actor's body lead to thoughts of a symbolic, mythical space, which will be developed by Grotowski in further stages of his work, but with a focus on the actor's body as a space of memory (body memory). The next chapter is devoted to my own explorations in the context of the Total Act. The experience of space is a primordial element of this search.



International Platform for Performer Training (IPPT) photo by Stacie Lee Bennett-Worth, Canterbury, 2020.

Margin

One of my most interesting creative space experiences was attending the FNAF Festival in Prague (Festival of naked forms, September 2019). Kasárna Karlín is a former army barracks from the 19th century converted into a cultural centre in 2007. The FNAF Festival lasted 3 days and took place basically in the entire Kasárna Karlín area. The invited artists, mainly with a background in the visual arts, responded directly to the space. The effect was above all a sense of creative freedom and energy from being together through the proposed performances. I see

here a kind of combination of the specificity of the theme, in this case due to the diversity of the artists, and the community as an area of the active culture.

I am not talking here about the quality of the proposed performances, but about active work with the existing reality. It is not literally working with public spaces, because the barracks are isolated from the street, it is more kind of art garden space. Thanks to the quality of the space, the boundaries of the performance experience definitely blur and the viewer without any formal guidelines becomes a participant. I must mention here that I hope to create this kind of space-experience in a future performative project. A project-space which has the quality of an active creative potential, where things happen, which is a real time-space alternative to life.



Kasárna Karlín, Prague, organisation's archives:

<https://www.kasarnakarlin.cz/en/o-nas>



FNAF - photo: Festival's archives. <http://www.fnaf.fun/>, 2018.

Chapter Four: Towards the contemporary performer - practice of body in crisis

- Introduction
- From *La Taranta*, the pogo dance and the loop to the bull, the concept of KA and the Double - experience of vibrations
- Balance in Space - fundamental exercise
- BURNING METHOD - performance archives
 - *The Kiln* - question of origin
 - *Burning Method: Four Lectures on Conditional Love* - notes from the performance
- From Grotowski to the contemporary performing body
 - teaching notes



Still image from the performance *Burning Method..* - Jarman Building University of Kent, June 2022.

Introduction

This chapter will be devoted to the documentation and attempted analysis of my performance activities in the broadest sense. From video notes, photographs, or sketches, to writing texts and audience demonstrations, to practical classes with students. What I am constantly grappling with is trying to capture something that is inherently ephemeral, and creating and following a method that is in state of motion. The only thing that remains constant is the collection of material, which is then subjected to a method of elimination, following Grotowski's

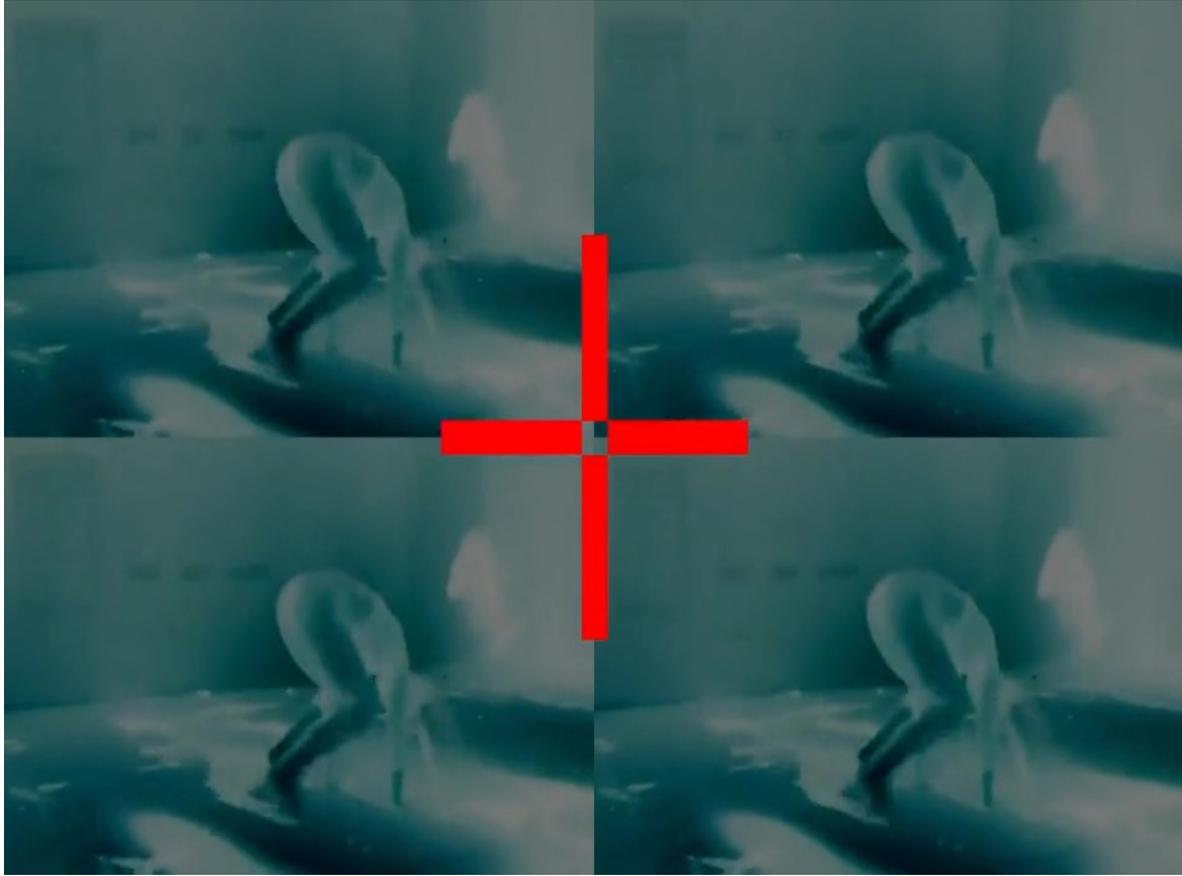
idea of recognizing what a given proposition is not and thus getting to its essence. It is a 'method' that combines spontaneity and rigour of decision. Grotowski called his method: *via negativa*. I am still working on the right name for the process that leads me. Certainly one of the themes would be the search for unity by combining opposites and balancing the intimate, the subjective with objective principles. I am also interested in playing with form and avoiding closed concepts (not avoiding concepts but more underlining moments of their formulation).

Establishing what the Burning Method is in practice, or rather what it is not, requires going back to the beginnings of my work as an independent performer (after I left Piotr Borowski's company Studium Teatralne in December 2007). In 2009, I saw an exhibition dedicated to Joseph Beuys. It was for me, artistically, a very important event. Beuys, as we know, draws on his autobiography to create his own mythology. Through an extremely varied form of expression (from sculptures, sketches and photographs to performances, performative lectures and social actions: *social sculpture*), he creates narratives that require a very comprehensive study, so here I will focus on a thread that directly influenced my artistic path. His 1965 performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* in particular stuck in my mind. The intriguing performance opened up many

questions. The figure itself, the Hare, a symbol, who offers itself of its own free will without grand ideologies or loud slogans, as if through its own gentleness, which creates an image of deep empathy. This is in stark contrast to the exalted, costumed chosen one's self-sacrifice of e.g. the Constant Prince. The topic is the same but the hero is very different. I think creating the character of the Hare helped me to understand my own version of confronting the idea of self-giving.



How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare by Joseph Beuys, 1965.



Video work by Magda Tuka from the performance *How The Hare is Dying*

<https://vimeo.com/258648766>, 2017.

Another layer in the creation of the Hare figure was the work of Sarah Lucas and her trash aesthetic combined with deep subtlety.



Bunny by Sarah Lucas⁹³, 1997.

The continuation of working on the thesis and work outdoors during the lockdown helped me to formulate the need to “burn Grotowski’s legacy” and the empty kiln (I will discuss this later in the chapter) was a perfect space for formulating this poetic idea. ‘The Act of Burning’ in the North Yorkshire Kiln means the ashes left over from the process will make the creative earth more fertile. This for me is the only way to find oneself in the post-Grotowskian zone. First of all, to find a space where I feel inspired, a space where I could think creatively and then metaphorically. The kiln had the quality of

⁹³ Sarah Lucas (born 1962) is an English artist. She is part of the generation of Young British Artists who emerged during the 1990s.

isolation, safety and rawness. 'The Act of Burning' is both an action and a reflection on this action. The kiln thanks to its function (burning) and the form of the cave gave the possibility to act/create and think/reflect. The body in the space of the kiln created an image that for me was a starting point, a seed for opening a way of thinking about the Total Act from the perspective of images.

Reflecting on one's own practice or even an emerging methodology is not a familiar area for me as a performer. Therefore, I decided to adopt a form that contains an element of performativity in itself. The following chapter is an interview that student and researcher Magdalena Stawman-Tuka (MST) conducts with Magda Tuka (MT):

Performer

Producer

Teacher

Maker

and occasionally vice versa (MT with MST).

In the interview I try to avoid questions of personal biography and focus only on the working process. Following the classification proposed in *The Art of Living* by Dominic Johnson,⁹⁴ the interview will include models of questions from the range:

1. Narrative questions *Can you tell me about...*

2. Theory prompts *Why or how...*

The main purpose of the interview is to conduct analysis through questions about my practice: *how might the contemporary performer build on the legacy of Grotowski's Total Act?*

"Through oral history, as a 'grassroots' or otherwise resistant practice, the subject of an interview - the 'respondent' - is empowered as a 'narrator', 'tradition-bearer', and 'witness', and endowed with the privilege to speak as an expert on a history to which they were party." (Johnson, D. 2015. *The Art of Living*. London: Palgrave. p. 12).

Interview preparation and guidance is twofold, based on knowledge of Magda Tuka's work, as well as spontaneously arising from a conversation on the topic. The interview was conducted in written form from October 2021 till July 2022. All texts were edited and confirmed by both parties of the interview. Subsequent parts will take the form of audio/video recordings

⁹⁴ Johnson, D. 2015. *The Art of Living: An Oral History of Performance Art*. London: Palgrave.

and written text. The interview focuses on Magda's current work, but also goes back to the roots of her training.

"Our aim - Magdalena Stawman-Tuka and Magda Tuka - is on the one hand to verbalise the process and practice of work and on the other to confront us with Grotowski's ideas. We hope that through this textual experiment we will understand our relation to Grotowski's heritage in the context of contemporary performance".

The final part of the chapter consists of reflections on the training, exercises with students (with examples) and a list of questions (and an attempt at answers) formulated by first-year East 15 Physical Theatre students to Jerzy Grotowski.

In *Towards a Poor Theatre* the texts very often take the form of an interview with Grotowski, or, as in the text "Towards a Poor Theatre", Grotowski derives his thoughts from the questioning/provocation:

"What are the sources of your experimental work in theatre" - and directs the answer to the potential interviewee/reader.

Before starting the interview about the performance practice I would like to introduce the kind of directions that guide my practical search.

From *La Taranta*, the pogo dance and the loop to the bull, the concept of KA and the Double - experience of vibrations

The following sub-chapter is intended to introduce the motifs that constitute, on the one hand, a kind of inspiration for practical research and, on the other hand, a theoretical background. They also refer to the chapter "Body in Crisis" in relation to practical experiments.

Magdalena Stawman-Tuka (MST): Before we start talking about your practice, could you Magda outline the ideas, directions, and practices that are a reference point for you in the area between practice and theory?

Magda Tuka: I am interested in balancing on the border of illusion, suggesting the multidimensionality of space, interpreting trivial images in collision with a certain recognisability of universal themes. I believe that contrast is important in theatre, otherwise it can turn into a didactic lesson on one's worldview, not asking questions, but writing in ready answers. There is indeed something of a confrontation with a kind of obsession that can border on a loss of a sense of reality. I believe that a certain degree of losing oneself is essential in creative work. Later in the text I will recall examples of completely 'losing oneself' on purpose for the recovery of internal integration under crisis conditions. They

are not intended to be presented in front of an audience, although the presence of other watching witnesses helps the trance journey. At the same time these examples are, in my opinion, Artaud's theatre and perhaps they could be considered to closely encapsulate the ideas of "Theatre and the Plague".

MST: In the 1962 documentary *La Taranta* by Gianfranco Mingozzi, women (this ritual refers to women) are in a state of deep trance and act in an unpredictable yet very precise way. What directly puts them into this state are the vibrations induced by the live music. The musicians are in very close physical proximity to the bodies dancing the tarantula dance. Would you say that you see a connection here between your practice, specially in working with sound artist Opaean?

MT: Yes, definitely. Opaean's method of creating compositions for performance is very reminiscent of Grotowski's direction: simulation - reaction - impulse. Opaean follows the performer very closely, reacting to what is happening in the space, so that together a vibratory quality is produced.

The second example can be Pogo dance practised during the Rock Music Festival Jarocin in the 80's in Poland.

MST: There are some constantly recurring motifs in your work such as the figure/archetype of the bull, do you see a connection here with, for example, Artaud's research on the meaning of the Double?

MT: Yes, it's like areas of unresolved obsessions, originating in the subconscious. Presumably the search for relevant references in art is your domain Magdalena. My focus is on action.

MST: Yes, sometimes it is difficult to separate these two spheres: theory and practice. And define what action is. Indeed, I see a link here: the motif of the figure of the Bull and the Double proposed by Artaud combine in the form of the hieroglyph KA (also following Artaud) to provide an archetypal reference point for my search. I will develop this idea later in the chapter.

MT: Another of the recurring themes that requires in-depth reflection is the beginnings of my work as a performer. I will therefore touch on the subject of a particular exercise Balance in Space as a fundamental idea for my training. The particular conditions in which I had to work for 10 years in the company of Piotr Borowski's Studium Teatralne have their roots in Grotowski's idea of group work, and these in turn were inspired by the ideas of Reduta's work (Osterwa/Limanowski). I would therefore suggest to you, Magdalena, to mention briefly, in due course, what Reduta's ensemble was.

MST: My introduction will certainly not exhaust the themes that form the basis for practical research. It is, of necessity, a selection, above all in terms of the main topic of research,

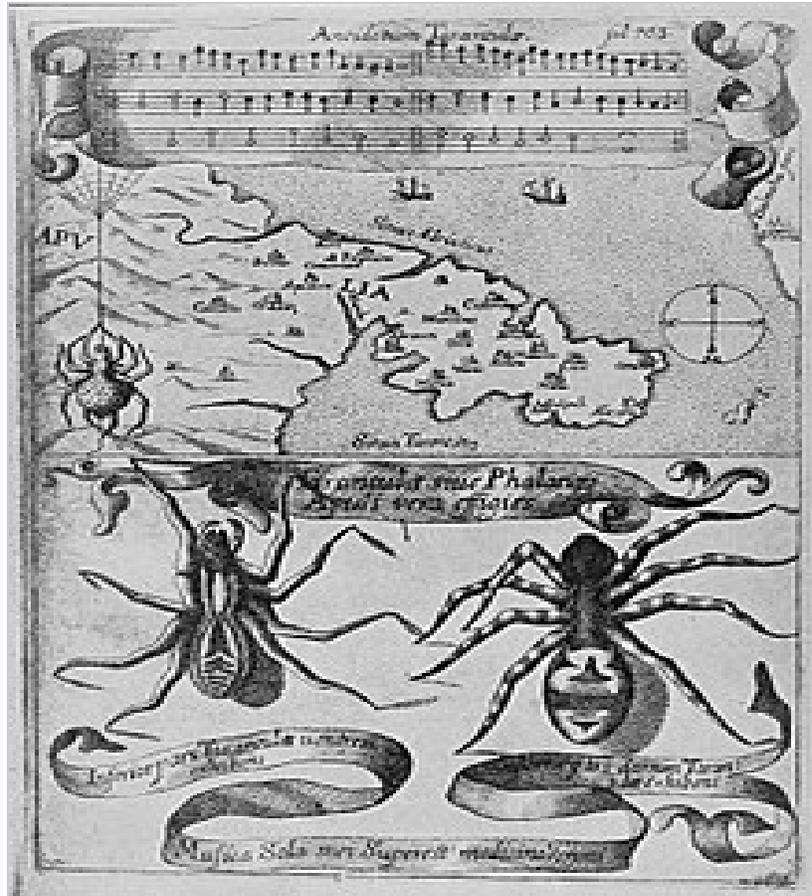
namely the confrontation of the contemporary performer with the idea of the Total Act. I hope, however, that the following outline will serve as a guide to this confrontation. I will start with *La Taranta*, the 1962 documentary on tarantism, the Polish Rock Festival Jarocin (1980) and their relation to the body in crisis.



Still from *Tarantula (La Taranta)* by Gianfranco Mingozzi, link to 18 minute
documentary *Tarantula (La Taranta)*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmbXOdI1yhE>, 1962.

La Taranta can be considered the first filmed document on tarantism shot by the Bolognese documentary filmmaker Gianfranco Mingozzi, who travelled the region of Salento for a long time in the 1950s and 1960s. The ritual of Tarantism refers to the condition of the body in crisis due to the spread of poison. The only antidote to the deadly threat is prolonged dancing in a trance, screaming and opening to intense vibrations coming from the music. As we learn from the documentary, the women who take part in the ritual suffer from a kind of mental crisis, depression, the result of which is powerlessness and unwillingness to do anything constructive, like everyday work. Such a state is often caused by prolonged and unbearable heat which takes away strength and motivation. Internal inertia is associated with the tarantula venom, which spreads throughout the body, overpowering it. Embodiment by imitating the movements of a spider is a direct confrontation with a threat that can be followed by recovery or death (similar to Artaud's idea in "Theatre and The Plague").



Antidotum tarantulae, a curative musical score from Athanasius Kircher (c. 1660).

Tarantism originated in Southern Italy, popularly believed to result from the bite of the wolf spider *Lycosa tarantula*. The dancing is placed under the sign of Saint Paul, whose chapel serves as a 'theatre for the tarantulas' public meetings. *La Taranta* document is probably the last record of the ritual, which, increasingly restricted by the church and local authorities, died out over time. It is interesting to note the intense coexistence of the worlds of the women possessed by the

dance and the audience watching them in rapt attention. It seems that the vibrations emanating from the jittery bodies of the women in the trance are passed on to the community, which thus participates in the madness controlled by the boundaries set by the architecture of the church and the security guards. Communing in such proximity with a body open to impulses that could be described as hysteria could give insight into the nature of human beings unbridled by order. Paradoxically, the interior of the church was the place where this disorder and wild cries could take place.⁹⁵ It was a unique world that (like so many others) we lost in the name of so-called development.⁹⁶ Which is not to say that we are not dealing with 'poison' any more, rather we are not giving the antidote a chance and space.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Karen Lüdke in her book *Dances with Spiders* describes how complex the ritual was, differentiated from ritual and court dances. The ritual of tarantism was specifically related to healing and women: "Tarantism has worked both to liberate and to oppress. It has been a channel of release and resolution when there was no other perceived way out. In these terms, it has been safety valve and golden cage all in one. Nevertheless, for the purposes of anthropological research it is valuable to accept the belief system of tarantism as one possible reality, as one possible epistemology of healing. For those afflicted by the tarantula spider, its poison was real in its effects even in the absence of an actual bite. Apparent contradictions in empirical terms dissolved as different notions of reality came into play."

Lüdke K. 2008 *Dances with Spiders*. New York: Berghahn Books. p.11.

⁹⁶ Although the ritual does not exist any more there is a lot of research about its past. The phenomenon of neo-tarantism has also emerged. In addition, the music that accompanied the dancers (ritual and court dance) still exists in dance and music festivals. Officially, but not quite in practice, tarantism became nothing but a memory, shamefully dismissed or happily relegated to a distant past. However, in the 1990s, the pizzica resurfaced, turning into a local craze mesmerising masses of dance and music enthusiasts. Reinvented and revitalised, this music has come to attract crowds and sponsors, fabricating and marketing a unique sense of regional identity on the basis of its captivating rhythms and powerful mythic origins." Lüdke, K., p.2.

⁹⁷ During my research around the documentary *La Taranta*, I contacted Gianna Benvenuto, with whom I had the pleasure of working in Studium Teatralne (Warsaw) for 10 years. It turns out that the physical resemblance to one of the women featured in the film is no accident. Gianna's grandfather came from the southern Italian region (he emigrated to Uruguay). Here I would like to quote her reflection on La Taranta dances: "I feel the dances very much like this: they release those impulses that cross within us and which we do not let flow in our everyday life. The best way to go further in spiritual development". [interview conducted 19 May 2021].

When one is in the hold of this ill-wished beast, one has a hundred different feelings at a time. One cries, dances, vomits, trembles, laughs, pales, cries, faints, and one will suffer great pain, and finally after a few days, if unaided, you die. Sweat and antidotes relieve the sick, but the sovereign and the only remedy is Music.

(Cancellieri, F. 1817. *Letters of Francesco Cancellieri to the ch. Signore Dottore Koreff, Professor of Medicine of the University of Berlin, about Tarantism.* p.6).



Still from *Tarantula (La Taranta)* by Gianfranco Mingozzi, 1962.

The fact that this ritual was cultivated by women refers to an area that was rather alien to Grotowski and his explorations in the 1960s. However, since it is a female ritual, I consider it important to evoke it here for the purposes of my own practice. Research on Polish Romanticism and its continuation in Grotowski's work reveals a decidedly masculine image of the hero and the theatre itself. In order to understand this hero, in order to try to translate him into my own experience, I have to resort to external instances.

Another example, this time relating to purification dances from the world of my own experience. The festival in Jarocin was founded in 1980. The 80's were a very difficult period in Poland. The country was under martial law⁹⁸ 1981 to 1983, which had a huge impact on the prevailing mood of society and a great economic crisis. The colour grey dominated and defined those times.

⁹⁸ Martial law in Poland (Polish: *Stan wojenny*) refers to the period between the 13th December 1981 and the 22nd July 1983, when the government of the Polish People's Republic drastically restricted everyday life by introducing martial law and a military junta in an attempt to counter political opposition, in particular the Solidarity Movement. Thousands of opposition activists were imprisoned without charge, and as many as 91 killed. Although martial law was lifted in 1983, many political prisoners were not released until a general amnesty in 1986. Institute of National Remembrance <https://ipn.gov.pl/en> [Accessed 10 July 2022].



A butcher shop from *Dziennik Polski* [Daily Polish] PRL archives, 1980.

Maybe the festival in Jarocin was a so-called safety valve⁹⁹ and was monitored by the government, but the bands found a way around the censorship (e.g. we know that when they sent in their applications they never gave the whole content of the songs that were later played on stage). With time Jarocin became a place - a symbol of freedom. And not only in terms of sharp political commentary, but also in terms of musical experiments that had a culture-creating potential. This niche, wild, dusty festival represented more than cool music. It had spiritual, authentic potential. It is interesting to watch black and white shots of people dancing pogo in front of the stage during the performances of one of the most important bands of that time:

⁹⁹ Safety valve was a space where people could express their thoughts, desire for freedom. It was still carefully observed by the secret police. It belonged to the government's strategy to show its pseudo-democratic values and give society space to express frustration in a controlled way.

Siekiera [The Axe]. In my opinion, the bodies under the influence of vibrations of sharp sounds in clash with a poetic, very visionary, pictorial text, are in a state of trance.

The band Siekiera¹⁰⁰ took young people, ailing in everyday life and seeing no future for themselves, and gave this body in crisis a strong antidote in the form of the pogo. It's like a return to primordial, spontaneous gatherings whose purpose was deep purification.

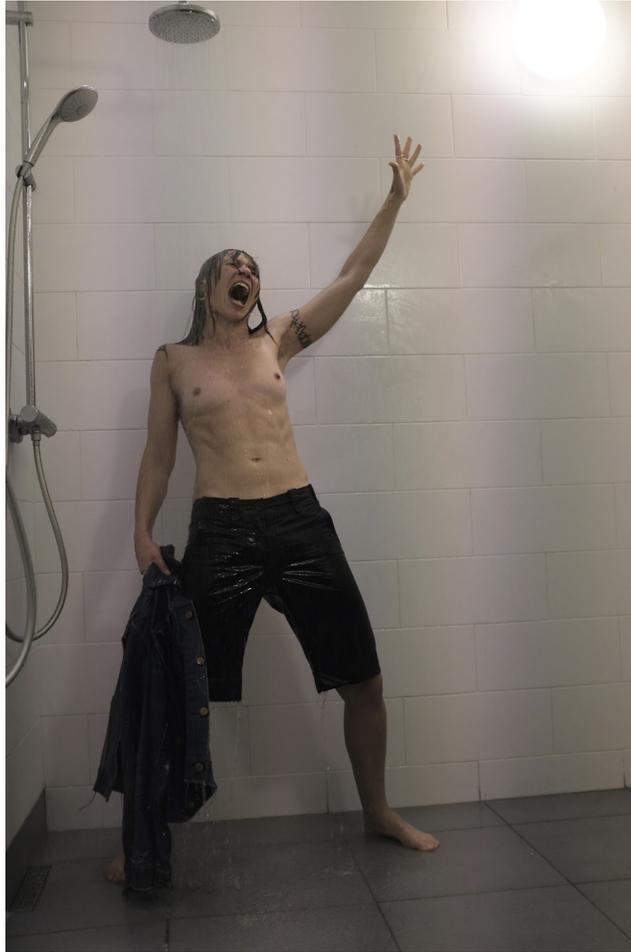


Siekiera at the Jarocin Festival

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zq6d92oFMRg>,

Jarocin, 1984.

¹⁰⁰ Siekiera (Polish for "Axe") was a Polish post-punk band. With fast, aggressive music and lyrics filled with obscenities, the band was a sensation at the 1984 Jarocin Festival. After lineup changes, the band switched to new wave and dissolved in 1988. Siekiera <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/siekiera> [Accessed 10 June 2022].



Residency in Thor Studio in Brussels, scene inspired by *On Anarchism* by
Noam Chomsky, September 2019.

The body in crisis in Jarocin's pogo dancing crowd has for me the value of losing oneself without consciously formulating reasons for participation. It is a trance into which the participants go spontaneously, with an organic and unpredictable character. The only determinant of the beginning and the end of the ritual is the music of the band on stage. There is no structure here, only readiness for intensive coexistence with other bodies. Working as a performer with memory images in my case is very often set in the 1980s and early 1990s.

This is both the time of political transformation in Poland and the formation of my own identity. These were very turbulent years, full of accidents which potentially threatened the health of a young person. I must also mention my personal experience of the death of a loved one, an event which has had a definite influence on my work. In fact, each of my subsequent works refers to the death of my mother, who died very young (32 years old), and I was 11 at the time. The theme of death, as well as the theme of love, is the theme of the Total Act, so in this (among other) area my own creation meets the experiences of Grotowski and The Laboratory Theatre.

Another important element that would need to be developed more fully in a thesis specifically dedicated to this topic, is growing up and working in Poland - a very Catholic country. As we know, Grotowski drew on Christian symbolism, while he did

not describe himself as a Catholic and even had problems with the church. Cardinal Wyszyński¹⁰¹ publicly criticised *Apocalypsis cum figuris* as a harmful work.

MT: Yes, I think a similar process is taking place with me. i.e. a fascination with images and Christian symbolism, but a lack of trust in ecclesiastical institutes. Growing up in a communist country we didn't have religion classes at school (nowadays they do) while most of the people around me were practising Catholics. My parents said (rightly, I think) that the question of faith would be my individual decision, so my sister and I were not baptised. Which was something generally omniscient, but not a burden on my relationships with my peers. I think that nowadays the question of being Catholic or not is much more divisive now than it was then.



¹⁰¹ Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (1901 - 1981) - was created a cardinal on 12 January 1953 by Pope Pius XII. He assumed the title of Primate of Poland.



Pogo Dances with Anita Wach, residency in Studio Thor Brussels,
<https://vimeo.com/572261723>, 2019.

Metaphysics of method: KA¹⁰²



The Ka statue, here that of pharaoh Hor, provided a physical place for the Ka to manifest.

¹⁰² The ancient Egyptians believed that the soul (*kʿ* / *bʿ* ; ... Egypt pron ka / BA) consisted of many parts. In addition to these components of the soul, there was a human body (called *ḥʿ* , sometimes plural *ḥʿw* , which means roughly "the sum of the parts of the body"). According to ancient Egyptian creation myths, the god Atum created the world from chaos using his own magic (*ḥkʿ*). Since the earth was created using magic, the Egyptians believed that the world was imbued with magic, as was every living thing on it. When humans were created, this magic took the form of the soul, an eternal force that resided within each person. Most ancient Egyptian funerary texts refer to the many parts of the soul: Khet or "physical body", Sah or "spiritual body", Ren or "name, identity", Ba or "personality", Ka or "double" , Ib or "heart", Closure or "shadow", Sekhem or "power, form" and Ach or the combined spirits of a deceased person who has successfully passed into the afterlife .

https://www.egyptologyonline.com/the_afterlife.htm [Accessed 4 August 2022]

MST: The following text introduces the idea of the double to which Artaud referred. From the perspective of a methodological proposal, this is a very important one, which will be developed in further practical reflections:

All true effigies have a double, shadowed self. And art fails the moment a sculptor believes that as he models he liberates a kind of shadow whose existence will unsettle him. Like all magic cultures displayed in appropriate hieroglyphics, true theatre has its own shadows. Furthermore, of all languages and all arts, it is the only one whose shadows have shattered their limitations. From the first, we might say its shadows would not tolerate limitations.

(Artaud, A. 2010. p. 7).

KA



ka

D 28

**"usually translated as 'soul' or 'spirit'",
"an aspect of the human being which
came into existence when the
individual was born"**

Wilkinson's "Reading Egyptian Art"

Artaud's "Affective Athleticism" refers to the ancient Egyptian concept of the Ka soul, giving the Theatre of Cruelty actor the chance to indulge himself completely in expressing the dark side of life without losing his senses: "To use his emotions in the same way as a boxer uses his muscles he must consider a human being as a Double, like Kha of the Egyptian mummies, like an eternal ghost radiating affective powers." (Artaud, A. 2010. p. 94). Becoming aware of the presence of the double inside oneself allows the actor to work with difficult material without exposing themselves to madness.

MT: Thank you Magdalena. I have some notes/reflections from the rehearsals that link the practical search to the idea of the Double you spoke of. I will try to present them in as structured a way as possible.

The concept of the double is the inspiration for my current work *Burning Method: Four Lectures on conditional love*. The work progresses from video notes through web-performance to projection with live action and finally full-length presentation.



Image 2 from the scene "Double", Pickering, 2021.

"Whatever is imperceptible demands precision." (Grotowski, J. 1968. p. 86).

The narrative of *Burning Method: Four Lectures on conditional love* (as well as other performances) finds its logic and its fulfilment through the careful guidance of the sound created by Opaean. A characteristic of Opaean's creative work is simplicity and searching in repetition. One could say that using the method of elimination - via negativa, the artist looks for a suitable motif and bases his composition on it. The work is always the result of joint rehearsals and observations of movement, the dramaturgy of space, which the proposed sound not only completes but also stimulates. From my perspective as a performer who has been working with Opaean compositions for years, I think it's a kind of vibration that my body is subjected to. I react to the impulse coming from the stimulation of the loop.

Opaean explains how he is looking for a loop: "Opaean is scoring performance with Ableton Live digital audio workstation. Samples are from any source, music, song, speech, field recording, etc., that has meaning relevant to the work. Loops are processed repeatedly during rehearsals into something other and distinct. Final mixes are made live in accompaniment to the performance."

(Opaean. 2022. jackpixley.com/opaean [Accessed 7 July 2022])



In Club Ziemia in Gdańsk, from left: Anita Wach, Opaean, Magda Tuka, photo by
Anna Steller, June 2018.

The rehearsals also oscillate around the theme of identity, cultural roots on the basis of an intense dialogue with my own relation to my artistic heritage. I identify myself with the tradition of Polish Romanticism and with the figure of Grotowski. However, this is not an 'easy' statement to accept, it requires constant comments and research. I understand the encounter with the Bull as an example of confrontation with a myth, about which you wrote in the chapter "Towards an empty space".

I began to confront the figure of the bull symbol in the performance *Deus ex Running Machina* (2019 - ongoing).



Still from *Deus ex Running Machina*, Eindhoven, March 2019.

The performance begins with a scene in which I am running on a running machine whilst behind me (depending on the performance space) a projection of a huge bull's head is displayed and the whole space is filled with its roar. The scene was inspired by a dream from a few years ago, in which the figure of a bull in the bushes was on the one hand calling to me and on the other overwhelming me with fear.



Image projected during the performance *Deus ex Running Machina*.

In the current rehearsals for the performance *Burning Method - Four Lectures on conditional love* the figure of the bull appeared again. This time through identification with it through my voice and body which finally led to the scene: "Lecture No 3/ Great Improvisation". I will come back to this performance later in the text.

Regular physical encounters (March 2020 - October 2020) with a group of young bulls grazing in meadows near the town of

Pickering (North Yorkshire) played a big part in my research:



Bulls in Pickering, North Yorkshire, May 2021.

Additional research led me to ancient Egypt, where the Ka and the bull share the same symbolism:

In Egypt, the bull was worshipped as Apis, the embodiment of Ptah and later of Osiris. A long series of ritually perfect bulls were identified by the god's priests, housed in the temple for their lifetime, then

embalmed and encased in a giant sarcophagus. The bull was also worshipped as Mnevis, the embodiment of Atum-Ra, in Heliopolis. Ka in Egyptian is both a religious concept of life-force/power and the word for bull.¹⁰³

MST: So Ka and the bull are The Double? Perhaps, for example, the figure of the bull finds its way into your personal iconography? One of the obsessive recurring motifs in Grotowski's work was the idea of self-sacrifice. I would like to briefly recall here the figure of the Constant Prince, as it links to the concept of the icon. This idea [self-sacrifice] encapsulates the concept of practising the craft of acting. Ludwik Flaszen notes:

The performance [*The Constant Prince*] is also a kind of exercise that makes possible verification of Grotowski's method of acting. All is moulded in the actor: in his body, in his voice and in his soul.

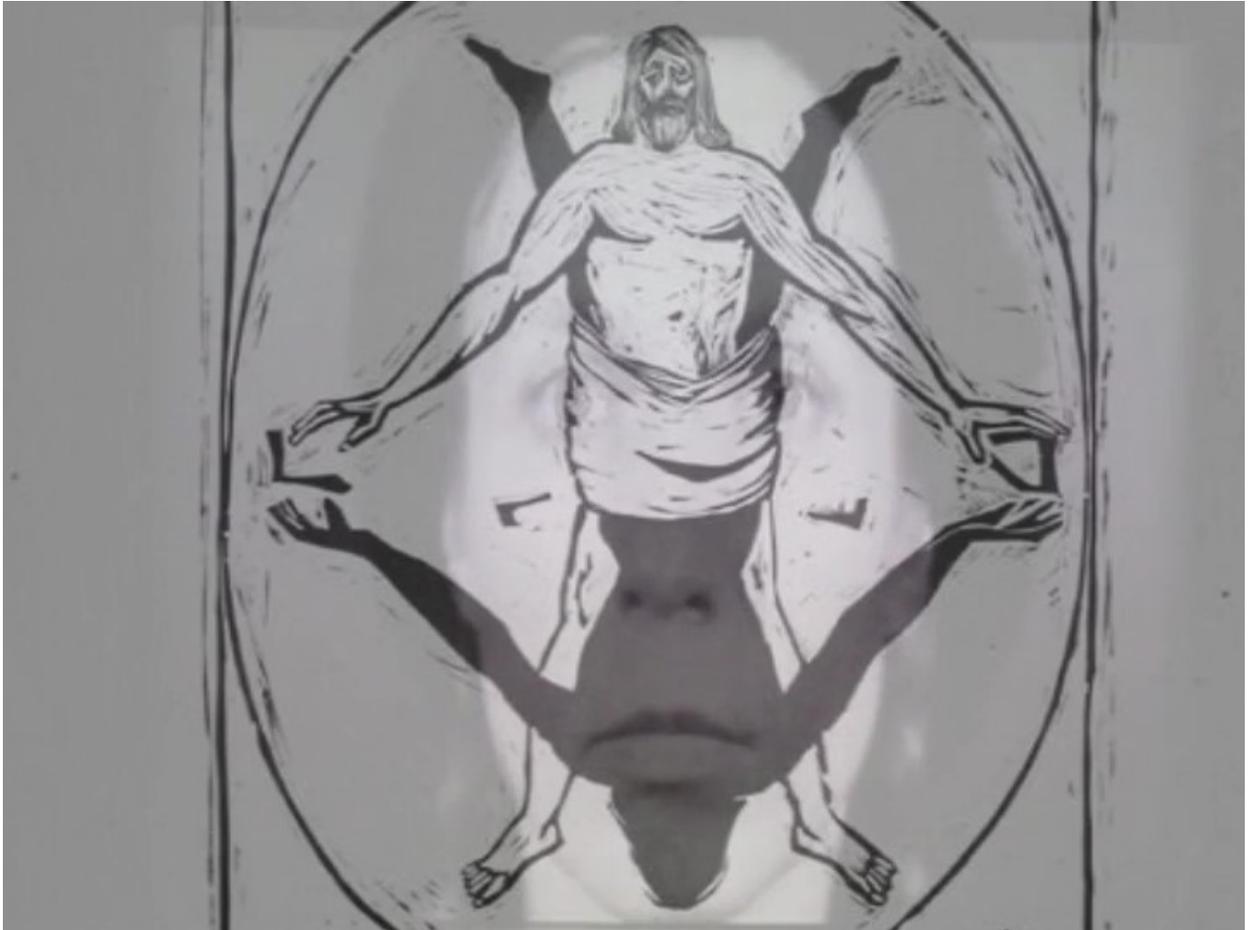
(Flaszen, L. [Grotowski]. 1968. p. 83).

The situation of the crucifixion, the way of the cross, the destiny of the saviour, the image of suffering on the cross in the face of those for whom the saviour makes this sacrifice - these themes are very strongly inscribed in the tradition of Polish Romantic theatre. Romantic Theatre, according to

¹⁰³ Bulls [text] Available at: https://www.osirisnet.net/docu/veaux/e_veaux.htm

Professor Kosinski, is specific to Polish dramaturgy, and Grotowski is a continuation of this lineage.

MT: From December 2019 I am trying to create situations, images referring to these aspects.



Still from video note: *Torch One* by Magda Tuka, January 2020.

In the above image from a relatively early exploration (November/December 2019), one can find traces of both: the confrontation (here with the poster by Waldemar Krygier for the performance of the *Constant Prince*) and the idea of the Double.

Discovering Antonin Artaud in the context of *Towards a Poor Theatre* is important to me because of my work as a performer. Paradoxically, although Grotowski in his text "He Wasn't Entirely Himself" emphasises the lack of practical solutions in Artaud's vision, for me, it opens up the possibility of re-verification while working in the studio. Working with the breath, looking for the relation of the idea to the particular parts of the body and the voice can influence the dramaturgy of the performance from a 'new' side. The question of the double and its 'function' in the process of the actor's work is, as I mentioned above, a motif and an inspiration in itself.

MST: At the same time I see here a relation to the Living Dead character described earlier.

If the Total Act was in principle strictly connected to a certain period of work of Grotowski and his company, the return of this term in theoretical and practical research gives the possibility of confronting a very important moment in theatre. Perhaps even that it was very much related to the particular circumstances of Poland in the 1960s but, I think, it is translatable into the potential universal language of art. The Total Act as a theme acts as a 'red rag to a bull'. In this case the bull is the contemporary performer, who cannot ignore the existence of the challenge.



*Burning Method - Four lectures on conditional love - rehearsal, Pickering
(North Yorkshire), April 2021.*



Video note *Performing The Poster* (in dialogue with Waldemar's Krygier poster of the performance *The Constant Prince*):

<https://vimeo.com/453381961>.

Ensemble and the laboratory work

"Isolated material particles are abstractions, their properties being definable and observable only through their interaction with other systems." (Bohr N. 1934. *Atomic Physics and the Description of Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 57).

MST: This sub-chapter introduces the context and idea of the ensemble. The following quote is taken from Studium Teatralne's statement. Like Grotowski, Borowski was very careful and thoughtful in composing published texts so that they were

thoughtful in composing published texts so that they were a genuine reflection of the work ethos.

The company [S/T] has set itself the goal of deepening and spreading the sense of artistic truth, putting particular emphasis on reaching the young generation with this message.

Already from the first performance Studium Teatralne has attracted the attention of critics and authorities of the theatre. (...) Commenting on the performances, people spoke of Studium Teatralne's sincere, non-opportunistic concern for contemporary problems, in the centre of which there always remains a human being searching for higher meaning; of Studium's special work ethic based on teamwork and systematic, dedicated effort.¹⁰⁴

MT: The idea of laboratory work conveyed to me by Piotr Borowski [director of Studium Teatralne] referred to the work ethos of Grotowski and his collaborators. In a nutshell, I can define it as total dedication to the process of work and to the questions that this process generates, without thinking about the final effect.

MST: However, Grotowski himself also drew on examples from the past. Reduta had for Jerzy Grotowski great importance. It

¹⁰⁴ S/T website: www.studiumteatralne.pl

influenced his ethos and the research of a laboratory nature. Reduta, a theatre company, was active between 1919 and 1939 in Warsaw, as well as Vilnius and Grodno (1925-1929). The founders of Reduta were Mieczysław Limanowski and Juliusz Osterwa. Their goal was to create a special, Polish theatrical style through pioneering laboratory experiments, pedagogical activities and the preparation of performances. Osterwa and Limanowski were the heirs of romantic and modernist esoteric concepts that viewed art, especially theatre, as a field and tool of spiritual development, complementing religion, as Osterwa put it in the aphorism: "Theatre was created by God for those who are not satisfied with the church". (Osterwa, J. 2004, p. 109). Their aim was not to create performances, but to build a team based on the principles of the new type, to work on the art of acting in the studio, to work out innovative rules for staging and directing, to plan the repertoire in the long term and to shape the human ethos of theatre. Reduta was to be a community of people ready to devote themselves entirely to theatrical work, as well as to working on themselves on

- self-education
- spiritual development
- and social service.

The tradition of Reduta was one of the most important ones to which Grotowski referred, and in his declarations, he pointed

out above all the work ethic and perseverance of Reduta's quests, while at the same time distancing himself from its aesthetics or ideology.

Balance in Space - a fundamental exercise



Video note: <https://vimeo.com/433609101> -

work in process on the exercise: Balance in Space/Silent Dance.

MST: You have mentioned many times that the foundation of your training is the exercise *Balance in Space*. What is *Balance in Space* and why do you think it is so important for you as a performer and also as a teacher?

MT: *Balance in Space* has the quality of precision and openness to change, so that it coexists with the participants both in terms of their individual contribution and the body of the whole group. It is a very complex and demanding sequence and requires a certain maturity. Therefore, for the first year in Studium Teatralne (from 1996), I could only observe *Balance in Space* and prepare myself psychophysically for this exercise. It is an exercise which prepares for an encounter with space - in a creative sense - with a group, with a partner and, with oneself. It is different every day and requires creation always from the beginning, through deep concentration. It is a kind of meditation in movement. During the exercise we want our senses to become more and more acute, for every movement to have its resonance in space, and on the other hand for the body and mind to experience a sense of freedom.

MST: Where does this exercise come from? What are its roots?

MT: *Balance in Space* was practised by members of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards during the period of their search for Art as Vehicle. It was continued - among others - by Piotr Borowski together with the Studium Teatralne group from 1995 to 2007. In its simplicity - the movement of a group of people in space to continually fill empty spaces - *Balance* has so many complementary aspects that it can be a source of long and intensive practical research. The essential components

are: balance in space - silent dance - exercises/connections - second balance.

Each element has a different character, but it is the special, unique result of the previous movement. It is a group task, but its interpretations are also translated into an individual exploration. Particularly interesting is the very beginning of *Balance*, as the whole potentiality is there. It is a moment when everything is possible when the concentration of participants is increased, and the space becomes clear. This moment of unity of the still stationary movement-intention has an intense connection with the awareness of the body in space on an intuitive level.

MST: I know that you have been teaching regularly in drama schools, mostly in the UK for over 10 years. Do you practise *Balance in Space* with your students?

MT: After several attempts at doing *Balance in Space* with students, I have come to the conclusion that it is only possible after prior sessions and introductory exercises. I have created a series of different exercises to work with space, to become more sensitive to the partner, to eliminate hesitation, to be open to reacting to what is happening around, to the process of expression. It is only after several months of working together that *Balance in Space* becomes possible. Otherwise it is too complex. I think it is better to look at this exercise from a

different angle, to guide students carefully and when they are ready to start introducing the elements of *Balance*.

MST: Is it possible to see this exercise somewhere? Are there any recordings?

MT: Piotr Borowski was very sensitive to any film or photographic recording. Photographic sessions for performances were always precisely discussed in advance. However, he never allowed (despite it being proposed) the recording of *Balance in Space*. He believed that the presence of the camera could disturb the integral development of *Balance* and introduce an element of showing off instead of concentration on what is happening here and now.

MST: You left Studium Teatralne at the end of 2007. Is *Balance in Space* still part of your own training?

MT: I believe it is. Just on a different level. First of all, a sensitivity to working with space. Since I left Studium I haven't really had the opportunity to work regularly in one space. Due to the nature of contemporary funding we are basically constantly condemned to temporary, rented spaces. But I find this an interesting challenge, which does not paralyse the working process. Also, knowing that by not being able to practise regularly in a group setting I might lose touch with the craft over time I decided to start practising Ashtanga Yoga. In a way, the flow inherent in the transitions between the

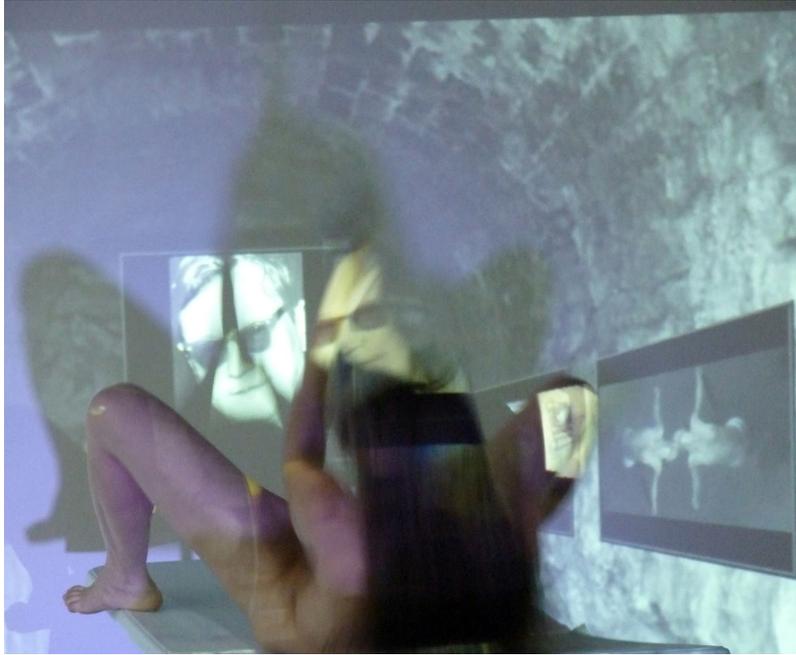
asanas and the deep concentration are for me a continuation of *Balance in Space*.



Image from workshop led by Magda Tuka in Žilina (Slovakia), March 2014.

BURNING METHOD - performance archives





Double in Performance Platform, photo by Ian Whitford, June 2021.

***The Kiln* - question of origin**

Link to the video installation *Kiln*: <https://vimeo.com/680949355>

It takes eight minutes for the light to travel from the Sun to the Earth, at any moment, as it existed eight minutes ago. (Capra, F. 1982. p. 186).

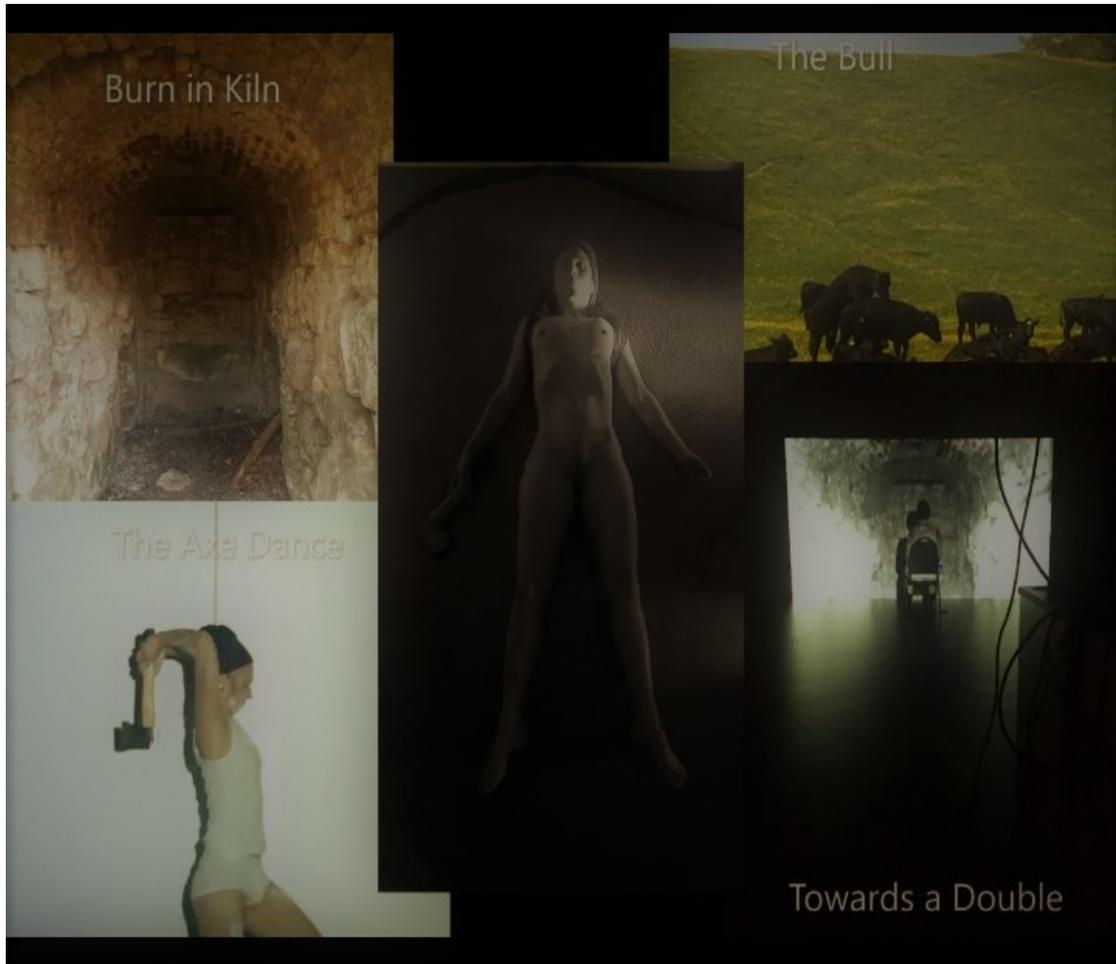


Getting ready for the rehearsal, Pickering North Yorkshire, 1st of September 2021.

MST: I began conducting an interview relating to *The Kiln* project with Magda Tuka in October 2021. Magda had just been showing fragments of the work as part of The Horsedonkey Club at vFDalston (23rd September 2021, Hackney in London). Magda then

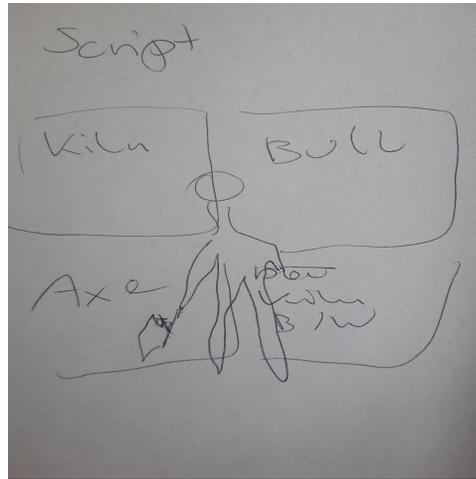
explained to me the main idea behind the whole performance, of which *The Kiln* is a part. The main concept explores the theme contained in the title of the doctoral thesis *Towards a Burning Method: how might the contemporary performer build on the legacy of Grotowski's Total Act?* Magda says: "essentially, everything relates to the Total Act. As a kind of destiny, a point of reference both in terms of my identity as a performer, and perhaps especially my Polish origin."

In August 2021 Magda conducted a series of rehearsals at Jarman Studio (University of Kent) during which she improvised within a strictly imposed time frame, and in relation to four different images/themes/chapters. She decided to follow this structure of four chapters in her performance work.



Four Chapters: Burn in Kiln or The Kiln, The Bull, The Axe, Birth of The Double [Titles still work-in-progress].

First Chapter: *The Kiln* - the place where the performance *is burned*. The work combines text (improvised), video projections and live actions. The place and form of presentation is still unknown. Probably in between gallery and theatre space where the audience member can freely move, find their own spot.

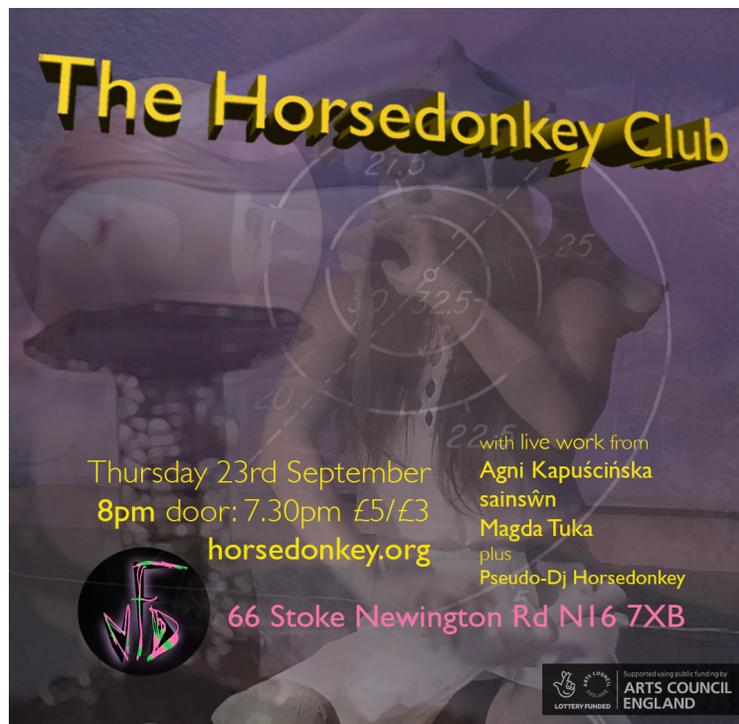


Drawings by Magda Tuka, August 2021.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Very simple drawings help me during the rehearsal process. They represent ideas related to space, characters, dramatic situations and choreographies.

MST: I know you are still working on this project, so the work is unfinished, it can still change. But can we talk about what has happened so far? I know you've already presented the material publicly...

MT: Yes, there were several presentations during which I tested the material. Not having regular access to the studio I introduce an element of working under the pressure of the spectator's eye. This is quite risky as often the material is very fragile, difficult to defend, but I gain a lot of valuable information about the next step. Besides, I like creating a performance dedicated to a specific event. That is, a kind of uniqueness.



Poster by Myles Stawman from The Horsedonkey Club (THC) event in London, September 2021.

MST: I have had the opportunity to see three recent presentations in which similar elements were present, but they were three completely different performances. Do you play with configurations, repetitive elements and, as a result, meanings?

MT: Yes, it was three different presentations, although, as you say, there were similar themes running through them all. In fact, I don't think I'm talking about the playing with elements themselves, but the search for the resonance of the material. For example, at the Performance Platform event in June 2021, the performance, although very much enjoyed by the audience, was, in my opinion, too literal. I didn't believe myself, moreover, I had the impression that I had already been there, that I wasn't taking any real risks, I was reaching for the expressions I knew and which came easily to me. So the conclusion was a lack of potential development. So in preparation for September 2021 at The Horsedonkey Club I changed everything.

MST: I want to ask you about the rehearsal process, how it changed recently?

MT: It depends on what stage the material I'm working with is at, how deeply embodied it is. For example, for the October (21.10.2021) presentation at The Horsedonkey Club, I was preparing an excerpt from the performance of *How The Hare is Dying*, which was created a few years ago. The performance is so

deeply embedded in my body memory that basically rehearsals consisted of meditation/recalling the subject and sketching out strategies for moving through the space. I think that precise rehearsals could prove to be a trap here, as they would not include the unpredictable elements of interaction with the audience, the space and the whole event.



Poster by Myles Stawman from The Horsedonkey Club (THC) event in London, October 2021.

MST: You talk about body memory, I know that this term was also used by Grotowski. What does it mean to you? And are there any differences between you and Grotowski?

MT: What is body memory to me... It is a lived experience that connects me with the development of my individual path, and

looking at this path in a wider context, in the context of questions about origins. Whether it is the origin of an idea I am working on, or an impulse in the body that 'gives birth' to a character, a persona, an idea. It is like looking at the world through the eyes of this character, understanding the character through their physicality, but understood from the inside, as if from the very moment of their birth. So, if this moment of birth really took place and the birth had its stages, then the character has its own body memory in my body. It is already there and it will be there. It's as if one had a 'Double' in one's body (in Artaud's terms).

I think that Grotowski developed the term body memory more in the direction of thinking about us as human beings, about the value of community, about common origins, about the myth that unifies the mystery of our existence, about the archetype that marks the path of man. It is also a space thanks to which we are not completely lost, detached, because it contains continuity, thanks to which the question of our common origin can arise.

MST: You talk about impulse. In Grotowski's work 'impulse' has a huge meaning, as a place in the body where everything starts, which at the same time contains the potential of what will happen, how the movement will develop. Movement not only in the physical but, rather in the psycho-physical sense. Does 'impulse' have a similar value for you?

MT: I have to say that when I first heard from Piotr Borowski about the impulse and the focus on recognising the impulse - I had a big problem with it. It even aroused a kind of rebellion in me. Intellectually I thought I understood what he was asking of me, but in my body I felt false. It still somewhat seems superficial (in my case) to focus on the search for ideas in a particular body part. Somehow it doesn't agree with my 'nature' as a performer. On the other hand, I am able to direct my imagination towards a body part so as to trigger a system of associations, a character, a narrative, an idea or an image. Where does history awaken, where is the place from which the journey begins? Is it one place or a map of points? Or, as in the case of the impersonation of The Hare [*How The Hare is Dying*], is it the first glimpse towards the audience? Often the impulse involves recalling an experience in memory. And through that recall an understanding of where it is 'embedded'. It seems to me that this kind of 'term' has to be discovered by oneself, because it is a very individual process of understanding what creation is and, in effect, an act towards the audience. One thing I certainly agree with is that it requires a high level of concentration, very careful action and following through with decisions taken without hesitation.



*Lecture No2: How The Hare is Dying, The Horsedonkey Club, vFDalston in London,
photo by Agni Kapuscinska, 21 October 2021.*

MST: You mentioned Artaud and the idea of the double. How do you explain this idea in your work?

MT: I have to say that I was fascinated by the idea of the double in the context of methodology, but also in translation into the language of performance itself. I know that in your research described in the previous chapter you disagree with

Grotowski about the lack of any methodology in Artaud. This helped me a lot in terms of thinking about what a methodology on the subject of performance embedded in the Grotowski tradition could be. We can't limit ourselves to physicality, that's obvious, but thinking in terms of associations is not quite enough either. The proposal of creating a double inside oneself who takes on the work with difficult, dark energies has a spiritual quality to it, but still in the sense of working on performance. I think that this topic requires in-depth further research in practice. I hope it will result in discoveries for me as an artist.

MST: Is there a theme that particularly 'troubles you', that you return to in your work?

MT: Probably my long-time collaborator (and husband) Myles Stawman is right in saying that one recurring theme runs through all my work: death. As I think has already appeared somewhere in the previous chapter, my mother's death has for me an ineffable character unsupported by any rationality (in the sense of a child unable to explain her sudden passing). So I see myself all the time in a state of this incomprehensibility and loss which can never be forgotten. Yes, it seems to me that this is the axis mundi of my work. Another theme is sex as a force of creation and destruction. It too has to do with personal experience, of a very ambivalent nature. So if Grotowski talks

in "Towards a Poor Theatre" [article] about Eros and Caritas in terms of the actor's work and relationship to the audience, I could talk about death and sex.



Double - Magda Tuka & Myles Stawman during the Performance Platform London,
photo by Ian Whitford, June 2021.

MST: Are death and sex present in video installation: *The Kiln*?

MT: Definitely yes. Albeit from the perspective of thinking about overlapping attributes of sexuality (penis) in juxtaposition with a clown-like character. In creating the image

of the character I was rather moving in the area of via negativa, rejecting all the elements that are not the character. There comes here a direct confrontation with the tradition of Polish Romanticism in theatre, whose continuator is Grotowski. Polish Romanticism is a hero, a man who takes it upon himself to feel, to truly feel the Spirit, the Spirit which is Polishness itself. This hero speaks in poetry, is himself 'singing to himself'. Konrad, the hero of Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, the master-poem, says this:

KONRAD /after a long silence/

Solitude.

'The people.' Ha! Do I sing for the crowd?

Show me the man who's grasped

My song's thoughts whole -

Unblinded by the sun-flash of its soul!

Wretched is he who jabbars for the rout:

Tongue belies voice, voice belies thought,

Thoughts springs from the soul, then is broken, caught

In words, swallowed by words brooding, aquiver,

Like the earth above secret river.

From topsoil trembling, can men sound the stream's
depths?

Or whence it's rushing - can they even guess?

Feeling courses in the soul, catches fire, radiates
Like the blood in its dark narrow, rushing along;
And just how much the blush one can tell on my face,
So much feeling can be pulled from depths of my song,
(...)

(Mickiewicz Adam. 2016. *Forefathers' Eve*. "Scene II
Improvisation." Translation by Charles S. Kraszewski).

The poet - misunderstood but admired, lonely but glorified by
the nation. He is almost like a prophet. It is he who has access
to the *self*. And that is why he must suffer. I am very
interested in the process of improvisation of the text/prophecy.
However, out of a kind of contemporary perversity, distance,
auto irony, the sublime content is and has to be contrasted with
clownery. Such a mix of the 21st century.

MST: You mentioned improvising the text, is the theme improvised
too?

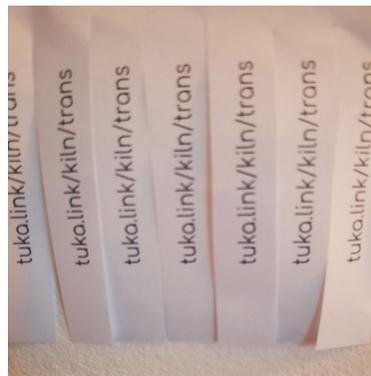
MT: The text is improvised but has a definite dramaturgy. For
myself, I call it the dramaturgy of the act of labour.

MST: The dramaturgy of the act of labour? Could you explain
that?

MT: It is probably about seeing the creative act as a series of
tasks to be performed. Here perhaps a potential opposition to
the Total Act as a kind of spiritual fulfilment. A kind of

understanding of presence in space that has a task to perform, rather than a mission.

Below is an example of what could appear during the improvisation: Burn in Kiln.¹⁰⁶ Text partly improvised. In Polish. Translation into English is probably only some 'key' words. Rest of the text should be delivered through the 'feeling' channel.



Links to the translation of text below in Polish.

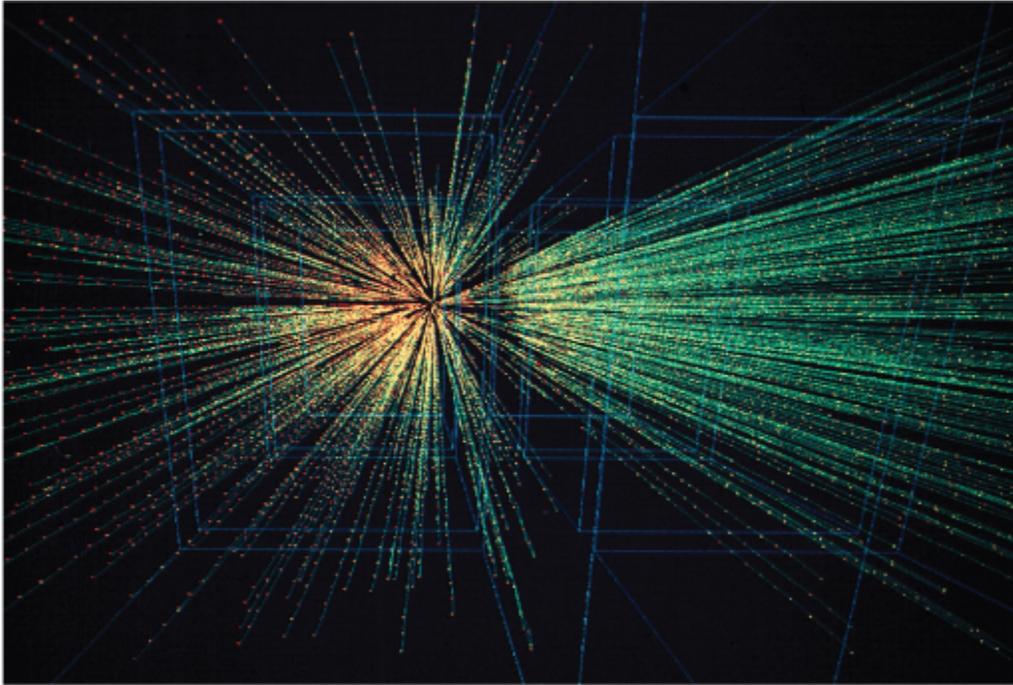
"The relation between the virtual particles and the vacuum is essentially a dynamic relation; the vacuum is truly 'a Living Void', pulsating in endless rhythms of creation and destruction." (Capra F. 1982. p. 247).

Pulsating process of creation and destruction.

Moim jedynym doświadczeniem porodu jest poród w wyobraźni. Jestem w stanie wyobrazić sobie pracę ciała

¹⁰⁶ After the performance starts, the audience receives links to a page <https://tuka.link/kiln/trans/>

które przygotowuje się do akcji. Aktu porodu. Całe jakby się koncentruje, mobilizuje. Następuje mobilizacja skoncentrowana. W centrum. Ale jej siła obejmuje całe ciało. Tak więc zaczynają się od kurczenia wewnętrznego po to by napęcznieć i po to by sprowokować ruch. Ruch kurczenia i rozkurczania. Stresu i relaksu. Pulsacji. Podążania za akcją wdech i wydech. Coś wewnątrz ulega intensywnemu ukrwieniu. Wręcz zmienia kolor. Purpurowieje. Purpurowieje i pulsuje. Impulsy rozchodzą się po całym ciele. Ciało podlega fali. wdechu i wydechu. Przypływu i odpływu i tak staje się rozedrgane. I tak się otwiera. jak jakaś jama, jaskinia jakaś. Krwawia wrota. Łzy i ból rozrywanego na kościach szkieletu włókna mięśniowego. I więcej pulsacji i skurczów i rozkurczów i skurczów i rozkurczów... Skurcze porodowe można rozpoznać po tym, że są regularne i cykliczne. Na początku odczuwa je co 10 minut, a każdy z nich trwa mniej więcej 40 sekund. Z czasem czynność skurczowa macicy nasila się, dlatego skurcze pojawiają się coraz częściej. Zwykle dochodzi do tego, że obserwuje się je co 2 minuty. (Text by Magda Tuka).



Tracks of particles coming from an 'ultra-relativistic' inelastic collision at CERN. "The whole universe is thus engaged in endless motion and activity; in a continual cosmic dance of energy." (Capra F. 1982. p.249).

MST: The visual side in *The Kiln* is very important. How were the projections created?

MT: It's a combination of a very specific site discovered near Pickering (North Yorkshire), a disused kiln situated inside a small hill and the idea of Burning Method. From this collision, short video performative notes began to emerge. Jack Pixley, web designer, helped me to bring the space into the virtual world. He created a website based on my videos which is a performance in itself. A web performance. We are in the process of exploring

the possibilities of this combination. For now it is part of a video installation: *The Kiln* [link above].



Link to short video from performance *Kiln*: <https://vimeo.com/621440508>

VFDalston in London, photo by Agni Kapuscinska, September 2021.

MST: You were talking in the Introduction to this chapter that the kiln became a space for 'burning Grotowski's legacy'. Can you explain more please?

MT: I see the symbolic burning here as an opportunity. Grotowski's legacy is very complex and my aim was to go back to its roots, especially directly to Grotowski's texts (mainly *Towards a Poor Theatre*) because here I see the space for myself for creative dialogue. Thanks to leaving Studium Teatralne in 2007, in a way I came back to an area which was always very important for me: working with/through an image. I started to study more performance artists (and there is still a lot to be done!). In 60s and 70s Poland, the world of visual art was very progressive. Female artists like Ewa Partum¹⁰⁷, Natalia LL¹⁰⁸ or Zofia Kulik¹⁰⁹ deserve separate studies devoted to feminist perspective in the art of that time. But I was directly inspired by Marina Abramović's early work. I first encountered her work during my collaboration with Slovenian company Via Negativa. Marina's figure was very present in our discussions also because of the topic of the Balkans. Her fearless, consistent and

¹⁰⁷ Born in 1945, a Polish concrete poetry artist, performance artist, film maker, mail artist and conceptual artist engaged in linguistic activities in an attempt to discover a new artistic language.

¹⁰⁸ Natalia Lach-Lachowicz (18 April 1937 – 12 August 2022) was a Polish artist who worked with paint, photography, drawing, performance, and video art: a pioneer of feminist avant garde image making.

¹⁰⁹ Zofia Kulik (born 1947 in Wrocław, Poland) is a Polish artist whose art combines political criticism with a feminist perspective.

uncompromising art revised my thinking about presence during the performance. And although I have a more ambivalent attitude towards her now, I am still full of respect for her achievements.

In Via Negativa's performance *Shame* (2011) I created a fictional character of a missionary: Elżbieta Maria Poluszko from Kielce in Poland, who travels from country to country and believes that by the act of "revealing oneself" in public space the world will be better. It was very much inspired by the work of Marina Abramović.

MST: Can you say a bit more about Abramović's influence?

MT: Looking back at the work on *Shame* and the very intuitive search for inspiration, on the one hand I was looking very intensely within myself, on the other hand I was open to new artists, especially visual ones. In Abramović's work, I saw a kind of thoughtful uncompromising nature encapsulated in imagery that really spoke to me. Her early performances were extremely physical, but here the body was treated as an instrument to convey and contemplate an idea. Very demanding for the viewer, not allowing for a moment of relaxation. At the time, I had an urge, stemming from the theme we were working on [shame], to make a crossing of familiar boundaries in performance. To expose myself to the audience with the potential risk of failure.



Shame by Via Negativa, photo by Marcandrea, 2011.

MST: Is Abramović influencing your teaching?

MT: Not directly. Although often students talk about her work in relation to our classes. In terms of teaching there was another woman whom I met and who influenced my pedagogical thinking. Lisa Nelson is a dancer, videographer and maker, one of the precursors of contact improvisation, creator of Tuning Scores - an improvisational composition practice and performance research format that is a performance in itself. I had a chance to work with Lisa for 6 weeks in Poznań in Poland and although it was a brief encounter it changed a lot of my thinking about space, listening, improvisation and image.¹¹⁰ Lisa's work is very conducive to the search for coexistence in space. The actions that result from the technique she proposes are not invasive,

¹¹⁰ Lisa Nelson works also with movement and stillness through video recording and editing. I started to develop ideas of the extended body by contemplating Lisa's idea of body as a camera and frame as an experience.

they do not try to oppose or negate, but rather, by listening, build a kind of intuitive trust of the existence of the body in space. It is a kind of deep, active acceptance.



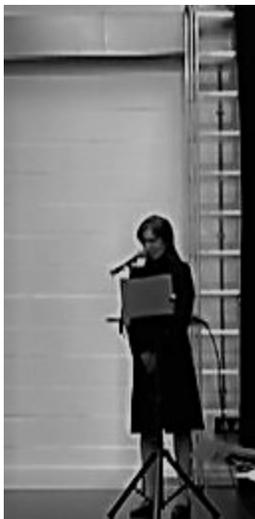
Tuning Scores by Lisa Nelson on the photo: Katarzyna Sitarz, Magda Tuka, Anette Ko, Kaya Kołodziejczyk, 2015.

Her work, coming from a contemporary dance background, was extremely different from Abramović's, who was a visual artist. From a broad outline perspective, the differences can be described as working with a state of rebellion, a discordant need for upheaval in Abramović's, and meditation in movement, in a state of acceptance of the environment, self and others in Nelson's. But both are pioneering in their fields. And probably my need for joining opposites in work drew me to both artists.

MST: Here, I think, we go back to the necessity of spending some time in an empty kiln - to obtain the ashes to fertilise the soil.

Burning Method - Four Lectures on Conditional Love - notes from the performance

In the performance, which is the result of the above research and rehearsals, the figures of the researcher Magdalena Stawman-Tuka and the performer Magda Tuka meet and merge with each other, so the following text no longer takes the form of an interview. The presentation of the performance is a summary and answer to *Towards a Burning Method: how might the contemporary performer build on the legacy of Grotowski's Total Act?* - thesis.





Still image from the performance *Burning Method ...* - Jarman Building
(University of Kent), 22 June 2022.

Full video documentation: <https://vimeo.com/732486533>

On 22 June 2022 the first public demonstration of *Burning Method - Four lectures on Conditional Love* took place in Studio 1, Jarman Building at the University of Kent. The gathered audience received the following programme before the performance:

Programme Note:

Burning Method - is a method of confrontation, elimination and intuition. The great challenge of the idea of the Total Act concerning the craft of acting must not stop at the level of accepted dogmas. It must be subjected to intensive verification in the context of modernity. As Burning Method is an operation on the living organism of the performer, it also contains the idea of totality. Thus it could be called: Total Burning Method. An important theme of this method is myth and identity. Following Grotowski's thinking, here I confront rather than identify with myths, constantly questioning any formal conclusion. Thus, it is a method of a process in itself.

The performance *Burning Method: Four Lectures on Conditional Love* consists of four parts which contemplate a section of four of Grotowski's ideas contained in *Towards a Poor Theatre*.

The part titled: "Lecture No3" - is an improvisation with a text born in the body, in movement. As it is of an intimate creative nature, the words that are born from me are in Polish. I hope that for viewers who do not know Polish the vibrations of the sounds and the theme of the improvisation - 'birth as a creative act' will fill the gaps of their own interpretation.

Special thanks to: Prof. Paul Allain, Dr. Angeliki Varakis-Martin, Tim O'Grady, Ram Nouredine.

More about Magda Tuka on www.magdatuka.com

More about Opaeon on www.liveart.work/2022

During the performance Magda uses: original 16mm film from 1971 by Odin Teatret recorded in Holstebro (Denmark), and fragments of *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968 Odin Teatrets Forlag).

The performance was composed of four parts/lectures inspired by four quotes from *Towards a Poor Theatre*:

Lecture No1:

I quote: Grotowski Jerzy, "Towards a Poor Theatre" 1968, page 23:

is much more difficult to elicit the sort of shock needed to get at those psychic layers behind life-mask. Group identification with myth - the equation of personal, individual truth with universal truth - is virtually impossible today.

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

Lecture No2:

I quote: Grotowski Jerzy, "Skara Speech", 1968, page 185.

Stimulations, impulses and reactions. That is the whole secret. Stimulations, impulses and reactions.

Lecture No3:

I quote: Grotowski Jerzy, "Methodical Exploration" 1968, page 96.

In our opinion, the conditions essential to the art of acting are the following, and should be made the object of a methodical investigation;

- a) To stimulate a process of self-revelation, going back as far as the subconscious, yet canalising this stimulus in order to obtain the required reaction.
- b) To be able to articulate this process, discipline it and convert it into signs. In concrete terms, this means to construct a score whose notes are tiny elements of contact, reactions to the stimuli of the outside world: what we call "give and take".
- c) To eliminate from the creative process the resistances and obstacles caused by one's own organism, both physical and psychic (the two forming a whole).

Lecture No4:

I quote: Grotowski Jerzy, "Towards a Poor Theatre" 1968, page 25

There is something incomparably intimate and productive in the work with the actor entrusted to me. He must be attentive and confident and free, for our

labour is to explore his possibilities to the utmost. His growth is attended by observation, astonishment, and desire to help; my growth is projected onto him, or rather, is found in him - and our common growth becomes revelation. This is not instruction of a pupil but utter opening to another person, in which the phenomenon of 'shared or double birth' becomes possible. The actor is reborn - not only as an actor but as a man - and with him, I am reborn. It is a clumsy way of expressing it, but what is achieved is total acceptance of one human being by another.

In my choice of quotations I was guided by both the material of the scenes and the original idea of the project, that is, to read *Towards a Poor Theatre* as a performative text. I was looking for the kind of interaction with the text that would stimulate an impulse leading to a reaction, i.e. a creative act. After the presentation, I had the opportunity to talk about performance with one of my fellow students, who remarked that the theme of performance was breaking concepts. I think this idea captures the essence of the Burning Method. The Burning Method is a search for completeness in a given time and space.

From Grotowski to the contemporary performing body - teaching notes

Composed Exercises/Ćwiczenia naprowadzające

But true theatre, because it moves and makes use of living instruments, goes on stirring up shadows, while life endlessly stumbles along. An actor does not repeat the same gestures twice, but he gesticulates, moves and, although he brutalises forms, as he destroys them he is united with what lives on behind and after them, producing their continuation. (Artaud, A. *Theatre and Its Double*. p.7) .

The following interview that I conducted with Magda Tuka between March 2021 and January 2022 is a reflection, with examples, on aspects of actor training in the context of the texts contained in *Towards a Poor Theatre*. The actor's training at first at the Theatre of 13 Rows and then the Laboratory was extremely important on the complex path towards the Total Act.

Towards a Poor Theatre contains two chapters dedicated to the training:

1. "Actor's Training(1959-1962)" recorded by Eugenio Barba

In the introduction to the text by Barba, Grotowski briefly describes the main principles of the training and the following differences in relation to the later text.

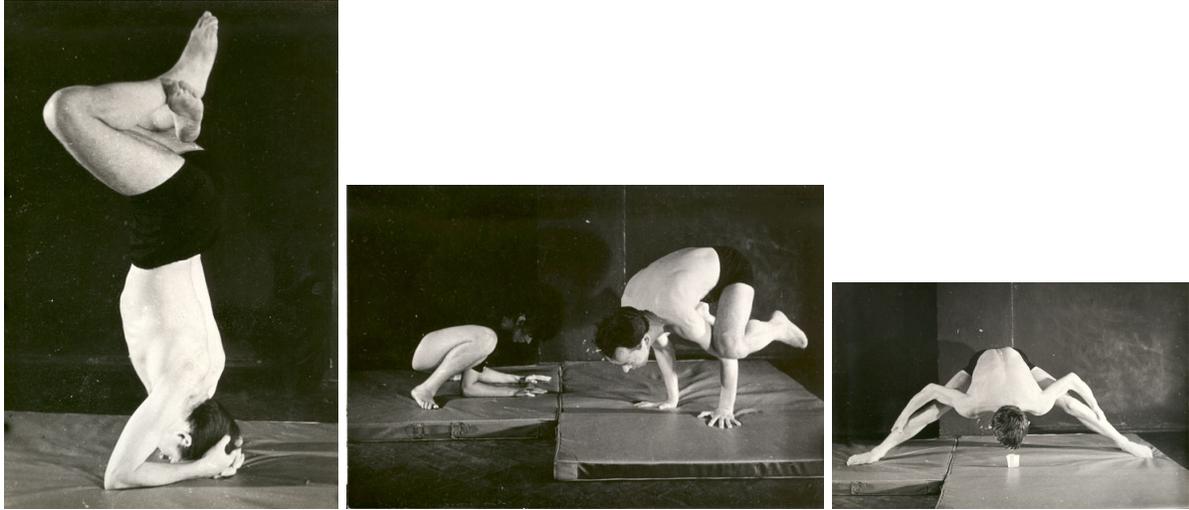
"During this time I was searching for positive technique or, in other words, a certain method of training capable of objectively giving the actor a creative skill that was rooted in his imagination and personal associations". (Grotowski, J. 1968. p. 101).

and

2. "Actor's Training (1966)" recorded by Franz Marijnen

"The exercises have now become a pretext for working out a personal form of training". (Grotowski, J. 1968. p. 101).

Both texts are essentially the only practical documents concerning the working method of Grotowski and his company in the years 1959-1968 (the period covering the texts contained in *Towards a Poor Theatre*), and so they may mistakenly provoke a question and a possible answer: *HOW?* How did the actors work, what exercises did they use to perfect their voices and bodies? And not: *towards what, why...?* Which does not give a simple answer, because it is rooted in the current moment of the working process. There is also a photographic record of the exercises from 1964. It proves how much the Laboratory Theatre training was rooted in yoga:



In the photo: Ryszard Cieślak, Rena Mirecka, Gaston Kulig
Opole, 1964.





In the photo: Magda Tuka, Pickering, 2021.

MST: How long have you been working on your actor training and what forms does it take?

MT: I have been working on the actor's training for over 20 years. Firstly as a young student of Piotr Borowski's company Studium Teatralne (1997-2007), then as an independent performer and regular workshop leader. I have worked regularly as a teacher in UK drama schools (mainly in London) for over 10 years.

MST: I understand that you teach the so-called Grotowski Method?

MT: Yes, unfortunately for lack of better naming often classes are called: Grotowski. Which forces me to make a number of explanatory introductions that no student remembers anyway. So, for the duration of the class, I try to talk about referring to certain values that Grotowski's work proposed and not to the method, because, in my opinion, the method is created here and now based on certain principles. However, there are some

objective goals that I try to meet within the course. In short these are: creativity through the body (which does not mean that everyone has to be extremely physically fit), concentration, which helps to objectify the value of events in space, coexistence in space from the individual participant to the whole group. The consequence of coexistence is listening, seeing, reacting, giving and taking.

MST: There's a lot of talk about discipline in training, do you introduce strict rules for being in the workspace?

MS: Yes and no. Of course, young people must more or less know their place. But making rules is not my domain. Rather, I try to infect students with passion and let the rules of fulfilment develop by themselves. I rather go down the organic road of eliminating means via negativa, i.e. to answer what prevents students from achieving the desired degree of concentration and creativity.

MST: Do the exercises you propose change over time, and if so, what determines this change? Could you give us some examples?

MT: In spite of many years of experience, I have to constantly revise the exercises and tasks. Because I believe that the moment the training I propose becomes formalised and detached from its original purpose - which is to prepare the actor for the kind of concentration that releases their creative potential

- a kind of ossification will occur, leading to the disappearance of creative thought.

In fact, my main goal is to provoke an experience on which will enrich the actor, that will give him/her/them information about themselves, that will stimulate the imagination and that will find its reference in a Grotowski tradition.

It is particularly important to understand the working conditions and therefore the adequate, real possibilities that open young people up to the need for experience.

Working conditions

It is extremely rare for classes to go beyond the format of the allotted time. Running through the woods all night long, or polishing a single jump for 2 hours is impossible here. What we have is, for example, 75 minutes, once a week for 5 weeks. What can we 'achieve' in such a limited time, which is not compatible with the format I personally experienced (working on training 5-6 days a week, at least 2 hours a day), process-oriented, without thinking about the effect. Certainly you have to work 'shortcuts', but what to give up and what to focus on to have a sense of not losing sight of the concept of practice and training?

Experience of 75 minutes

After a basic introduction about who Jerzy Grotowski was, and the recommendation to read (after the practical experience of several sessions) "Towards the Poor Theatre" (the chapter) we move through the space intuitively maintaining balance, i.e. by dynamically finding empty places. This is an important moment as it will establish a focus (without verbal communication) on the constantly changing relationship to the space, the partners and the group as a whole. It is also a kind of introduction into the state of being alert and following the body responding to the successive propositions in space.

This is how each of the following sessions will begin. By returning to the formula of moving together in space, we deepen our experience of what its balance can be, how the dynamics and character of movement are shaped under the influence of changing stimuli.

Another important element is play. Children learn most by playing. As time goes by, we lose this opportunity, we forget the freedom of relationship that playing allowed us. It is important to bring this back and to propose common, not infantile, but simple tasks that move us through play.

Example:

Exercise with a partner - the hand and the top of the head are linked together by a magnetic force, follow with your top of the head (with time adding other points like feet,

chest, hips etc) the movement of your partner's hand. The exercise very quickly breaks down the barrier of embarrassment and resistance to movement. In addition, the spine is constantly provoked to move. Potentially a new and different way of movement opens up for the participants.

Another example:

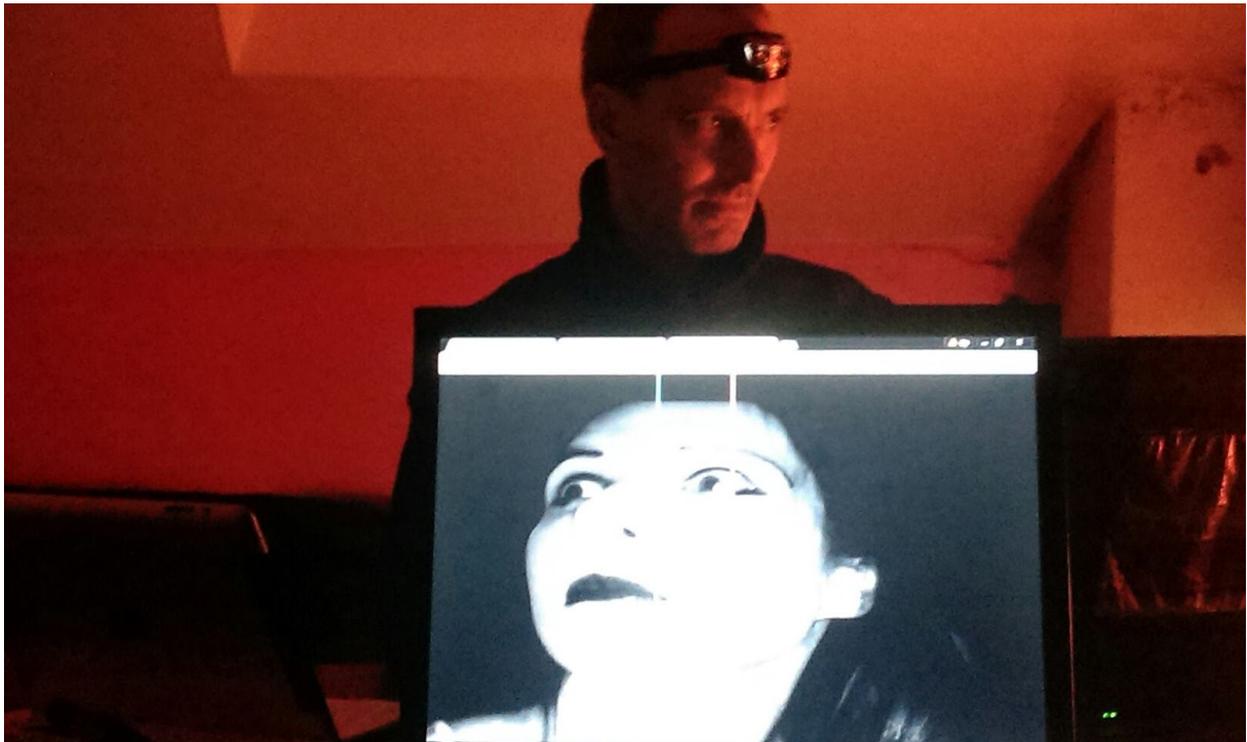
Again with partner *A* and *B*. Stand at a distance that allows you to see the whole body. First *A* copies *B*, change, *B* - *A*. *A* makes a movement in contrast (however interpreted) to *B*, change *B* - *A*. Finally an improvised simultaneous dialogue between *A* and *B*. In this exercise it is important to react immediately, to eliminate the process of hesitation. We have a chance to get to know each other through inspiring differences in the way of moving, the character of the body.

Individuality in expression enriches the session, the individual and the group experience. From the beginning, it is important to introduce criteria that appreciate and emphasise the importance of being different from each other. The training must be open to each participant and alive in the process. It is not a military camp.

Online experience

The events of the global Covid-19 crisis in 2020 and 2021 have exceeded the expectations of most of us (as I write these words

I realise that the crisis is still ongoing). The consequences of lockdown have, among other things, affected education. Unable to meet in the studio we had to move to the internet. How to translate the experience of a working process so rooted in the intuition of the body both individual and group? Hours spent in front of a computer screen, in often very small rooms, technical problems, lack of intimacy and many other problems naturally reduce the quality of concentration, followed by difficulty in finding a spontaneous creative response which can open participants to new experiences.



1923.webcam - image from the rehearsal, London 2016.

First of all we have to be aware of the presence of the camera, the presence of the screen, the small space in which the participants are, the rather limited possibility to work with the voice and movement, and to integrate these qualities into the proposals for exercises and tasks. The screen naturally suggests possibilities to work with images and thus sets the scene for exploration. Focusing on the image and deepening the performative use of the webcam, I believe that it is important not to try to create a film, but actually a live composition within the computer screen. How does this composition differ from the film? First of all, in film, control over the image dominates. The post-production phase is as important as the recording of the images. In the case of live composition, we are constantly dealing with an element of not knowing, an element of something we can't plan, something that can happen between the performer, the material, and a given moment in time and space. A kind of uniqueness creates a quality of special contact with the viewer.



1923.webcam - Studium Teatralne, photo by Pat Mic, Warsaw 2016.

Body and screen

What kind of exercise might make sense in the situation at hand?

Example:

During your individual warm-up, pay attention to one place in your body, provoke an impulse coming out of that place and follow it. Then create a fighting style whose secret power is this point. Together with a partner on the screen fight a battle.

This exercise is somewhat inspired by computer games, which introduces the aforementioned element of playfulness. It

definitely involves the whole body, which reacts to the 'punch' impulse of the opponent from the screen.

The Internet has many archival sources. The exercise described below uses a 5-minute training from 1972 conducted by Ryszard Cieślak for the actors of Odin Teatret:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRyLLTvs00c>

The instructions to the task are very simple:

invite Cieślak to your room and practise together. It should be noted that Cieślak led the workshop very clearly, so following his suggestions, even when the quality of the document is not high - is not a problem. The participants, those from 1972 and those from 2021, commune with the elaborated and at the same time organic quality of Cieślak's movement, which in a very subtle way leads students to develop the flow (the exercise starts with an impulse of the hand, passes to the shoulder, then the whole body). For a moment, while working with Cieślak, we are suspended in time and we focus on looking for an impulse, the origin of movement.

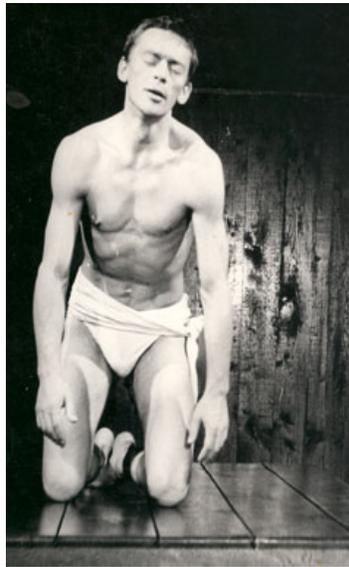
The experience of working with images from the Laboratory Theatre's performances is an important moment in combining the theoretical approach to Grotowski and his work with practical examples that can find their possible fulfilment in the participant's private space.

As I mentioned in the sub-chapter on *The Constant Prince*, the images of Cieślak's body in the role of the Prince have, in my opinion, the quality and value of 20th century theatre icons. Their power is rooted in the experience of the Total Act. They are peculiar relics of the Laboratory Theatre, which determine its importance in the context of experimental theatre. They have the value of a point of reference (even if Grotowski and the Laboratory Theatre can be negated due to the process of work).

Embodiment of the martyr looking for a universal forms



Human Plank by Myles Stawman/Jack Pixley, photo by Edgar Oliveira, Area 10 in Peckham (London), 2004.



The Constant Prince, in the photo: Ryszard Cieślak, Maja Komorowska and Rena Mirecka; source: Theatre Laboratorium/Grotowski Institute Archive, 1965.

Example:

Class participants are asked to look closely at the images above and then try to copy the body forms. After several attempts to embody the forms, freeze in them for at least 1 minute. What kind of associations came to your mind? Based on this information, create a 3 minute sequence, a physical

narrative taking into account the three forms, as well as the specifics of the room you are in.

Each session ends with a kind of sharing. This time the participants are divided into two groups that can observe each other. The presentation of the 3 minutes sequences will be done with music. In an online working environment music can help with creating a sense of spaciousness. I suggest *Rite of Spring - Opening* by Igor Stravinsky from a performance by Pina Bausch.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOTjyCM3Ou4>

The fact that we can hear the steps, the breaths of the dancers helps to maintain a relationship with the theatrical aspect of our work.

The piece lasts about 8 minutes, so participants repeat the structure about 3 times.

The repetition is a very valuable experience during the sharing. It offers a chance to understand organically, from the inside, what the proposed material is, what kind of quality of movement provokes a lively continuity, what is unnecessary, what requires further exploration. It gives viewers the opportunity to look carefully at the proposals, to return to the elements that attract attention, to deepen their reflection on the interpretation of images, movement, space and the idea of repetition itself.

Repetition work is also carried out during normal studio classes.

The Art of Copying

The prototype of icons were (probably, because there is no certainty among art historians) tomb portraits from the Phaum¹¹¹ or early Christian catacomb painting.¹¹²

So, in their definition icons have a reference to the original. What would the original be in the case of paintings of the Constant Prince? As we know, Grotowski and Cieślak worked on the role outside the group. In his intimate associations Cieślak reached back to the first love encounter, the first experience of what love is. And he translated the memory of this into the body of the suffering prince. Thus love and suffering meet in Cieslak's body. It is eros and caritas. Christ died on the cross out of love for humanity. By his act he embodies the essence of love and suffering. He is therefore a prototype image. By copying the images from The Prince, even unconsciously, we refer to their original.

¹¹¹ Fajum Portraits - a group of about 700 portraits on wood that were deposited with embalmed corpses in graves.

¹¹² The art of the early Christians, expressing their religious affiliation, created in the Mediterranean basin. The accepted temporal range varies. In the broadest sense, early Christian art covers the period from the second to the seventh century.



Magda Tuka *ICONS* - rehearsal in Pickering 2020.

The experience of deep body tension - *Akropolis* (1962)

Another example of an online session can be the work inspired by *Akropolis*.

After a general introduction to the performance with particular emphasis on the idea of the performance space - a concentration camp - and the person of Józef Szajna, who designed the space and costumes himself as a former prisoner of Auschwitz concentration camp, participants are asked to have a closer look at 30 images:

<https://grotowski.net/mediateka/ikonografia/akropolis-1962>

It should be noted that the above images from the performance are stills for the camera. Thus, they have the quality of a theatrical composition in the frame.

After an exchange of reflections on the archives, the participants are asked to choose one of the body positions from images and to copy it carefully and as precisely as possible. The use of objects to guide the body into the form is allowed. Then we build together a collective image (on screen) from the individual live stills. It is important to add the following 'body' images one by one and to experience aspect of duration (around 5 minutes).¹¹³

A characteristic expression of the actors in *Akropolis* is a great tension of the whole body, including the face, frozen in a grimace-mask. Naturally, after 1-2 minutes the body begins to feel this tension, to resist it, to tremble. This is also the experience of the online class participants. Through the intensity (and very specific forms) of the work of the body, which is enslaved in the rigour of the form, they have a chance to understand the idea of Grotowski's performance.¹¹⁴

The whole task-construction lasts about 5-6 minutes. It is incomparably shorter than the performance by Grotowski, however, during later reflections, students emphasised the connection

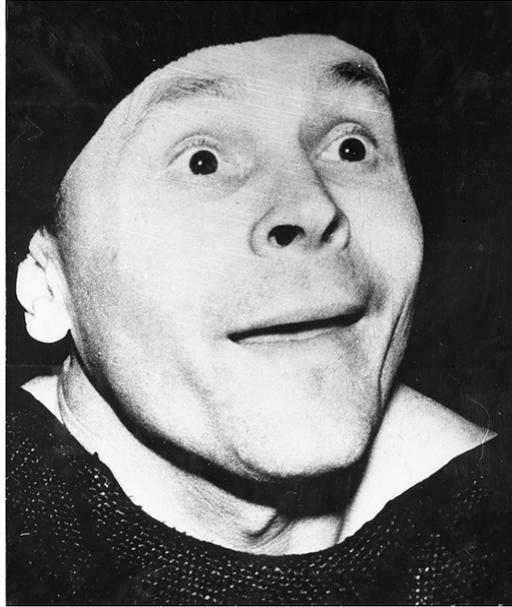
¹¹³ During the online activities we mainly used the zoom program. One of its options is the 'gallery view', which is a screen of up to 25 participant windows.

¹¹⁴ This was a direct reflection of the participants after the task, not my top-down assumption.

between the effort of trying to maintain stillness in a difficult position for the body, and the effort of actors during a performance in the 1960s. I believe that through this experience there was a thread of communication, a lively reflection of Grotowski's legacy.



From the left: Rena Mirecka, Andrzej Bielski, Antoni Jahołkowski.



Akropolis, from the left: Ryszard Cieślak, Zygmunt Molik; source: Theatre
Laboratorium/Grotowski Institute Archive, 1962.

Summary

This kind of psycho-physical training is the result of a living impulse which, thanks to its vital energy, can be developed. However, if it turns out that we do not produce energy for creative work, we should verify where and which exercises stop developing actors and just produce rules that are unnecessary for anyone, distancing the training from the living essence. Grotowski was a creator with extremely rich experience, drawing inspirations from many theatrical traditions, respecting them but without paralysing distance.¹¹⁵ He was looking for his own

¹¹⁵ In his search for a new voice and physical training, Grotowski drew on the traditions of Yoga, Kathakali theatre, Noh theatre, as well as European ones such as Dullin, Meyerhold, Stanislavsky, Delsarte and others. Experimenting with the body, with form, was paramount. With time, the Laboratory Theatre actors created their own exercises following the idea of *via negativa*, that is, the elimination (through recognition) of obstacles to the expression of ideas.

language which did not imitate, but included these elements in order to create a new quality.

Students in the sessions emphasise the experimental nature of the classes, which I think, is a good direction for development through continuity.¹¹⁶

From Grotowski to Contemporary Performing Body - short course (1st, 8th, 15th June 2021, 19.00 - 22.00 2021)

MST: Out of so many workshops and lessons you have given, why do you choose this one: *From Grotowski to Contemporary Performing Body* conducted as part of the short courses offered by Fourth Monkey in London?

MT: The management at Fourth Monkey have a lot of confidence in me and kindly agreed to a more 'authored' course, so that I had much more freedom, at least I felt, in proposing the nature of the evening meetings. It's very important in a creative approach to teaching, to have a space really open to experimentation, even a kind of failure. Of course I understand that institutions have to be guided by the marketability of proposals, but it's worth taking a risk from time to time, to enter a niche, because new creative dialogues are possible here.

MST: What did the course look like in outline?

¹¹⁶ Since 2012 I have taught classes at London's Actor Training School Fourth Monkey.



Poster for the short course at The Fourth Monkey.

MT: The short course concentrated on exploring the possibilities of artistic expression through the body. We were experimenting by improvising, experiencing task-based exercises both individually and in a group. Creative work must be a living, exploratory process that maintains an awareness of theatrical traditions. During the session, we referred to selected aspects of Grotowski's work.

The encounter, the process and the body of the contemporary

performer was the subject of our practical experiments in the field of performance.

Each participant had experience working on performance in different forms and found constructive feedback while sharing the material. And all in a friendly and playful atmosphere!

Day 1 - language

Day 2 - memory

Day 3 - experience

Day 1 LANGUAGE Short introduction plus what you are looking for in this course? Creative warm-up movement improvisation in/with a specific part of space with partner movement from a specific part of the body then connected with voice space - partner individual choose an image from the book: *Grotowski's Laboratory* (1979 by Tadeusz Burzyński and Zbigniew Osiński. Warsaw: Interpress Publishers) - a source of inspiration to build 2-3 min solo performance. Sharing with feedback from each participant (guided by me).

Day 2 MEMORY Discussion about what 'sacrifice' of the actor means. Creative warm-up: movement in space in relation to a secret partner. With a partner: copy each other then opposite to each other. With a partner one minute voice and movement improvisation. Repeat 'essence' of the 1-minute observed performance. In trios, respond by a movement to the given adjective. Create a short performance based on a memory of work

you saw last week. It can be one particular moment or a combination. Sharing with comments from the performer.

Day 3 EXPERIENCE Creative warm-up: observing the origin of an impulse and its length, as meditation in space. Emotions: from *Towards a Poor Theatre*, your feet are crying while hands are laughing, what other contrasted emotions can be expressed by different parts of the body we can experiment with. Work with a partner. Choose a few physical movements from the first day's performance. Structure in 1-2 minute fixed sequence. Loop it—durational experience in the form of an exhibition in space. On-screen fragments from *Constant Prince*, performed in one spot in space, viewers can move, watch them work and space from any position. Duration around 15 minutes. Discussion: about what kind of performance we are looking for now and how contemporary work can be in relation to or inspired by Grotowski.

**Intensive week "Poor Theatre" with East 15 BA Year One students
Physical Theatre course, University of Essex (6 - 10 December
2021)**

Act of Exteriorization

The following interview is a kind of collective experiment. Magdalena Stawman-Tuka - researcher, Magda Tuka - the artists and 17 Year One students of Acting and Physical Theatre course at East 15 (University of Essex) have combined their efforts to

evoke the figure of Jerzy Grotowski within the framework of questions in the contemporary technique of the actor in relation to the heritage of the Poor Theatre. Before we move on to the questions and the search for ways to answer them, I want to quote an excerpt from the interview Denis Bablet¹¹⁷ conducted with Grotowski in Paris after the 1967 performances of *The Constant Prince*.

Denis Bablet: But what do you mean by the actor's "total act"?

Jerzy Grotowski: It is not only the mobilisation of all resources of which I have spoken. It is also something far more difficult to define, although very tangible from the point of view of work. It is the act of laying oneself bare, of tearing off the mask of daily life, of exteriorizing oneself. Not in order to "show oneself off", for that would be exhibitionism. It is a serious and solemn act of revelation. The actor must be prepared to be absolutely sincere. It is like a step towards the summit of the actor's organism in which consciousness and instinct are united.

Magdalena Stawman-Tuka: I have highlighted two formulations that, in my opinion, call for a broader explanation. What did Grotowski consider to be: *the exteriorization of oneself*? And

¹¹⁷ "The Actor's Technique" published in *Les Lettres Françaises* (Paris, 16/22 March 1967).

how to understand: *consciousness and instinct are united*. Both in the context of an actor's work.

According to basic definitions, exteriorisation is the act of stepping outside the physical body, looking at one's physical existence from outside the area of the body, as if 'from above'. What would such a state be in the case of Ryszard Cieślak performing Constant Prince? Trying to imagine such a situation I have to use the experience of Magda Tuka - a performer.

Magda Tuka: The act of exteriorisation occurs when (and lasts a very short time) the actor's increased efforts, concentration and integration with the source material become one. Then the actor leaves their body for a moment and, acting in a trance, immeasurably penetrates all the notes of the score, all of them vibrating within them. The body vibrated in this way is freed from its physicality and becomes, for a moment, non-physical.

MST: It sounds like Grotowski himself is speaking. Are these your words or a quote?

MT: I must admit that ... I do not know. I am at the stage of preparing for the 17 questions posed to Grotowski by East 15 students and perhaps the texts in *Towards a Poor Theatre* are seeping into my subconscious.

MST: And what do you mean by *consciousness and instinct are united*.

MT: Perhaps it is the moment when, on the one hand, the actor is in a different state, a trance and on the other, he/she/they act extremely precisely and all their movements are purposeful, economical. He/she/they find themselves in control of a character, a score, or ideas and are no longer themselves. The actor then evokes the figure of Artaud's Double.

MST: I think we are ready to invite young voices to our conversation. I understand that you, Magda, will be performing Jerzy Grotowski?

MT: Yes, that's the idea...





Audio/video file (29 minutes): <https://vimeo.com/661796492>

Questions by E15 students - answers by 'Jerzy Grotowski' (character performed by Magda Tuka). Audio recorded on 9th December 2021 in Southend (UK) and on 2nd of January 2022 in Canterbury.

Questions & answers in writing:

1. When working with actors for a prolonged period of time what sort of abilities do you see in them changed either physically or what kind of differences mentally did you see like progress throughout working with them?

Working with an actor is an encounter. A meeting that has many stages, but whose objective must be to build trust, to open up to each other. When I work with an actor, I meet a human being. It's simple and complicated at the same time. With time, the veils fall between us and what remains is pure contact, pure impulse,

untainted by attempts to please or fear of being judged. It is a very long process, not always successful and not an easy one. The actor's body of course becomes more efficient, but efficiency is only a tool. What we are looking for is full sensitivity, devotion and dedication to something that is beyond ourselves.

2. Were there any like permanent repercussions from your practice when it came to working with actors?

Through the encounter with the actor I probably begin to understand what the primordial nature of myth is, that is the value that unites us all, something that somewhere far in the past gave us our identity. Thanks to this, I can find the sense and meaning of my own existence.

3. Would you say you have perfected your process or is there something you would like to develop further and what would that be?

After more than 10 years of working, first in Opole, then in Wrocław, I realized that the theatrical space is not enough for me, that it's starting to limit me, because we start to focus on perfection together with the company and we don't take up any real challenge, that the questions we ask ourselves start to become duplicated, sterile. That's why, despite what some consider success, I left the theatre. I left the theatre in a

direction completely unknown to me, with new people, on completely new terms. What is important is to recognise the moment when routine, that is death, threatens us. Routine is anti-creative and has nothing to do with the creative process.

4. While training actors did you find that any actors didn't take to the training? Would quite keep up with intensity or didn't want to. How did that impact your training methods?

Very early on in Opole I noticed that individual actors, through intensive work, were becoming 'experts' in particular areas of training. For example, Zygmunt Molik started to take interest in voice very early on and with time his exercises and understanding of how resonators work in the body, how the voice can work with the imagination led to regular Voice and Body workshops, Ryszard Cieślak proposed plastiques exercises, semi-acrobatic, so he honed his skills in this direction. I always try to follow the actor's natural predispositions and to recognise and eliminate obstacles in his creative process. We call this method via negativa.

Not a method of collecting tools, but of eliminating the obstacles that stand in the way of an actor's ability to express himself fully. As I mentioned above, the most important thing is to have an encounter, and this can only happen if both parties express a deep desire for it to happen.

5. Over time, obviously different actor methods in training start and stop get taught. Do you think 'poor theatre' is endless or do you think it will stop being taught?

Let's go back to the question of what 'poor theatre' is? So theatre can exist without the so-called 'theatre machinery', the actor doesn't need make-up, complicated costumes and so on. It cannot exist without one thing: the audience member and the actor. And it is to the essence of this encounter between an audience member and an actor that the poor theatre aspires. The actor without any curtains behind which he can hide in front of a listening audience. I don't know whether it belongs to the subject of teaching in drama schools, but I know that without this relation there is no theatre.

6. When it comes to your method, when do you know when you should stop pushing your boundaries and when should the actor become aware when enough is enough?

What interests me in theatre is the value of truth. It doesn't mean that I have the answer to the questions of how the world was created or what morality is. It's about the truth of relationships between people. In my work I aim to eliminate obstacles that obscure the truth. I always follow the actor, I am with him/her with all my being if they allow me to. We don't make any assumptions. We meet for rehearsals, regularly, and we follow

their process. We look for a balance of spontaneity and precision. This balance is very important. Without spontaneity the actor's movements are dead, and without precision they are shapeless. Every actor has different conditions, is different, and this has to be appreciated, exalted. Then there is life on the stage.

7. How did the poor theatre develop over time? Was there a difference at the beginning when you started to create it and was there a difference near the end? How did you develop your training? How did you come up with the different skills and ideas?

Poor Theatre belongs to a specific period of my work related to research in the context of theatre: Theatre of Productions. At that time we focused on the creation of productions, on the search for acting tools that would meet the challenges we imposed on ourselves. The phrase 'poor theatre', which comes from my long-time collaborator Ludwik Flaszen, defines very well both the relationship between the audience and the actor, as well as the reliance on the quality of the actor's craftsmanship, who being exposed, naked as it were, has to perfectly navigate the score of the role. This is a difficult task. But even more difficult is the moment we have called the 'total act'. The actor not only moves with great precision around the score of the role, but also performs an act of sacrifice towards the audience. What follows

is a very intense, almost intimate moment of confession, of exposing oneself, of offering oneself to the audience. This is a very special situation and it happened only during the performance of *The Constant Prince* and Ryszard Cieślak's creation of the role of the Prince. This performance was followed by *Apocalypsis cum figuris* and my farewell to the theatre in the direction of the search for roots: a man and creation, a myth of community. From that moment I stopped being interested in the audience. I recalled a witness.

8. When it comes to creating and devising ideas what do you like to take inspiration from, for a place of start and then what is that process like?

The dramatic text was often a starting point for us (I'm talking about the Theatre of Production period). Taking, for example, the text of *Hamlet* or *Kordian*, I never changed the text itself, but I performed editing operations, drastic cuts, shifts and adding texts from outside the original. The editing was also done at the layer of arranging the scenes themselves, a bit like in Eisenstein's film, for example, where scenes are edited in such a way that their meaning is made in the viewer himself, without telling everything, in order to reach the layers of the viewer's subconscious. We also worked a lot with improvisation and picking out moments that interested us, fixing them in the direction of building a precise score. Simultaneously, I worked with the

architect Jerzy Gurawski, whose stage designs had a huge impact on the relationship between the idea, the text, the actor and the audience (e.g. in *Dr Faustus*, the Last Supper, to which the audience is invited to large tables). Sometimes the search for a performance takes years and is fraught with moments of frustration (e.g. in the case of *Apocalypsis cum figuris*). You have to give space to failure, as it were, and keep asking relentlessly: do I believe? Or do I not believe?

9. Why did your work change so dramatically throughout the years?

I feel that my work has not so much changed as become more precise. Of course, there are many aspects that I have definitely moved away from, for example I am not interested in the paratheatrical period, I think there were many distortions then, but what has always interested me is the other human being and through them belonging to the human race. Their story, their myth, their song. For some political reasons, I worked outside Poland already in the 1980s, until 1999 (the year of my death). This is most of my 'professional' life. This simple fact has a huge, complex meaning. Of course, this is the fate of an emigrant, a "wanderer", a very painful one; on the other hand, distance allows one to follow one's own questions, unburdened by the history of relations, on a much more universal level, to the extent that they become really mutual to all of us.

10. What do you think about the theatre of today?

It seems to me that theatre today (more than 20 years have passed since my death) is at a very interesting moment. The methods of teaching in some drama schools put more emphasis on the experience and creativity of the young student of the art of acting, there are no more strict canons, there is more searching. This can lead to a lack of quality, so I ask the theatre today how to retain this quality without imposing aesthetic forms or formal solutions from above. Of course, theatre is looking for new spaces, for example the Internet, video, etc. - here, too, there is a danger of lack of ideas and shortcuts in the sense of process. On the other hand, there is a lot of talk about the value and need for a process of work, not quick results - here I see a natural chance to discover new qualities. I consider copying the aesthetics of e.g. Teatr Laboratorium or later my search for Art as a Vehicle a great danger. Each generation, group, and artist has its own individual, specifically conditioned aesthetics. I think that one should reach for the questions we have been asking ourselves rather than create pseudo-orders. Of course a big barrier today is the lack of regular access to rehearsal space. We generally didn't have a question about the price of renting a room per hour. This is a real problem, the consequences of which can be seen in the quality of theatre productions.

11. Why do you think Grotowski is so important to the world of theatre?

I am one of the most important theatre artists of the 20th century. At the same time I am a continuator of the already existing theatrical traditions stemming from, first of all: Stanislavsky, then Meyerhold, Dullin, Artaud, oriental theatre etc. What we proposed together with the Laboratory Theatre company is the method of work *via negativa*, which can be developed on many levels, and the emergence of the Total Act. The Total Act has created a real challenge for the world of theatre. You can disagree, dislike, etc., but you cannot ignore it.

12. When you were working did you ever have a moment when you felt satisfied and accomplished with your work?

These are probably very brief and rare moments. But they occurred. They gave a kind of illumination of the path that we, together with the group, or the individual actor, were following. These moments were rather not related to the performances. It was, for example, the night rehearsals, which were like intimate meetings with another human being, a kind of opening up without any preconceptions, expectations, devotion to the work, pure love.

13. How do you feel that many people seem to believe your work is purely emotional and physical torture? Do you think they've missed understanding it or is there truth in that?

This is probably one of the big misunderstandings when it comes to the implications of, for example, teaching my working method. What has always interested me is the kind of event that gives life on stage, not only in the sense of intense physical expression, but also in understanding the complexity of life. Take, for example, the situation in *The Constant Prince*. The court, which is cruel and mistreats the Prince, is also caricatured, exaggerated, even comic! And the Prince himself, who speaks of loving torture and desiring death, built his inner role on a very intimate evocation of the memory of his first love, something extremely beautiful in his life. If we do not have this contrast we are faced with one-dimensionality, e.g. cruelty, and this is no real experience for the viewer. We are looking for a shock, but a shock of the realisation of certain ideas, truths about ourselves. I am afraid there has been a lot of distortion of my ideas, hence a very superficial kind of interpretation. Another difficult issue is my wording: body memory. It is very often treated as a way of building scenic situations. It is a very delicate matter, which, if taken up at all, has to be discovered on one's own during the working process. To discover one's own truth.

14. How do you want people to view your work and methodology in the future? And how do you feel about it being changed by other people?

First of all, before people refer to my work, I would like them to make the effort to read some of the texts that I have written. I have always worked very carefully, precisely on the texts I publish, some even think obsessively. Perhaps. But I had a goal: to convey a thought, an idea as accurately as possible. I don't understand how, for example, one can teach my 'working method' without trying to get close to my thoughts in the original (i.e. not other people's interpretations). Then it is important to treat sources very consciously and not to copy them as a method. It's just an aid to discovering one own path. I hope that discovery and creative process prevail when my name is invoked during rehearsals or acting classes.

15. Are you happy with how current students use your work to learn and grow and how much have you seen changed and how much do you like or dislike those changes?

In general, I am very happy that there is a kind of bond between us. As you know I started studying and working in theatre in the 1950s. That's a very long time ago. But the fact that we are still talking to each other, that I exist in your consciousness as a potential partner to talk about theatre is very important to

me. I hope that my ideas, for example those described in 'Towards a Poor Theatre', can intrigue and even provoke young actors, so that their craft of acting can become more refined. On the other hand, I can't allow the lack of any exploration of my thoughts while invoking my name. I consider myself a continuation of Stanislavsky, although the results of my work are completely different. This continuation (and opposition) could only come about after a thorough study of Stanislavsky's work. I sometimes have the impression that my name is a pretext for the development of certain institutions which, unfortunately, do not offer programmes that are truly creative, that take risks, where completely new qualities could be created. They are like strange open-air museums of the craft of acting.

16. How would your work have been affected by social distancing and covid?

I worked in very different conditions, aware of the temporary nature of these conditions, so I tried not to let them affect my work, in terms of compromises. For example, in the 1960s I often had to enter into dialogues with my superiors, which were not easy for me. But internally I always felt free, because I knew that I was following a very important path with my colleagues, which had to be protected. Sometimes difficult conditions force us to be more focused. Covid and its problems are temporary. The

theatre even existed during the Second World War, which is on the other hand a really extreme situation.

17. How would separate creation from society at the farm house impact the way that you and the actors worked?

It is very interesting that the paratheatrical period has attracted more interest recently. As I mentioned above it was not a period I particularly valued. However, from a distance I can see that leaving the theatre for the forest was both a consistent and radical move. We needed to experience the real touch of nature, wood, water, fire, night, in order to get closer to ourselves, in order for this closeness to become even more unlimited. This does not mean that we ran around in the woods and practised free love. Our meetings have always had a structure, only it was moved to a setting very different from the theatre. We needed this reality in order to separate completely, to be able to farewell.

Dziękuję. Thank you.

Conclusion

- Roots and the context
- Protagonist and the relics
- Translation in performance
- Training
- Space
- Past and future

The following photographs - the first depicting Cieślak and Grotowski taken by Andrzej Paluchiewicz most likely in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the second one is me from 2010 in the performance *Casablanca Therapy* by Via Negativa - open the text summarising *Towards a Burning Method: how might the contemporary performer build on the legacy of Grotowski's Total Act?*

I have chosen these two particular photographs because they represent the end and the beginning of a certain phase of creativity. In Grotowski's case it was the end of the Theatre of Productions associated with the emergence and manifestation of the Total Act, and in my case the beginning of individual work outside the structure of a regular ensemble (and the sense of security associated with it). In *Casablanca Therapy*¹¹⁸ by Via Negativa this was the first time I was fully responsible for the idea and its execution in my individual scenes, which consisted of a group performance directed by Bojan Jablanovec. The character of the Sleeping Beauty which I created was about the need to wake up.

¹¹⁸ "It [the performance *Casablanca Therapy*] exploits theatre as a group therapy; performance culminates with the invitation to the audience to come on stage and touch performers following the instructions on their laptops. *Casablanca therapy* is a performance desperately needing to be touched by the audience and risks to be disappointed again and again".
<https://www.vntheatre.com/projects/collaborations/casablanca-therapy/> [Accessed on 15 August 2022].



On the photo from left: Ryszard Cieślak, Jerzy Grotowski - WRO ART CENTER,
photo by Andrzej Paluchiewicz.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ For ten years Andrzej Paluchiewicz took pictures of Grotowski and actors of the Laboratory Theatre in different situations – training, performances and travels.



Magda Tuka as Sleeping Beauty in the performance *Casablanca Therapy* by
Via Negativa, photo by Marcandrea, 2010.

Burning Method - through the method of confrontation, intensively verifies the ideas proposed by Grotowski during the Theatre of Productions period, especially the concept of the Total Act. By conducting a dialogue with the texts contained in *Towards a Poor Theatre* as well as visual archival materials from that period, I can see both a line of continuation of the theatrical work and the emergence of completely new aesthetic qualities.

Roots and the context

The three-year study of the Total Act confirmed my conviction that Grotowski was an extremely up-to-date creator (also by verifying his thoughts during classes with students) but that he cannot be copied in any way because this can lead to the ossification of the method. In order for the method to live it has to be deepened and challenged at the same time. Working on the aspects very much related to Polishness from the perspective of some linguistic and cultural distance (I have lived in the UK for over 14 years), I have the opportunity to reflect on it from a position which is 'inside and outside' at the same time.

I believe that with such an intensely engaging technique for the actor, with such a multifaceted matter as Grotowski's work, this distance offers a chance for individualised proposals for the continuation of the lineage. In the Burning Method, historical and cultural contexts are combined with intensive practical research. In this kind of work a comprehensive look at the sources of problems is essential, hence the many references to Polish history and the relationship of Grotowski's work to myth or archetype, all through the experience of hours of searching for the quality of movement in unity with the voice. The actor's training proposed by Grotowski goes far beyond expanding vocal or movement capabilities. It is a question of the human being,

the artist, completely devoted to what they do. The Total Act, in my opinion, is about creating special conditions for the actor to encounter the audience and herself. It is, at the same time, a kind of immediacy, an exposure, a closeness that requires total dedication. As Grotowski has already pointed out, it is a very fine line between exposure and exhibitionism - so the performer has to be very aware of the danger of potentially becoming intoxicated with himself/herself, the situation, the aesthetic composition. The state of complete devotion or even trance that Grotowski mentioned is paradoxically linked to a sharpened awareness. It seems that during the Total Act, (or on the way towards the Total Act), the actors experienced the energy and power of the universality of myth and the archetype (the described archetype of the scapegoat and the space of the Theatre of Intuition as a mythical space). A strict, repetitive form contrasted with intensity of expression creates a situation on the verge of destruction (of form by the intensity of expression). And it is through the clash between destructive and restrictive elements that the situation of risk, and even shock necessary for the Total Act is produced:

In the moments of fullness, what is animal in us isn't only animal, it is the whole nature. Not human nature, but the whole nature in man [człowiek]. Then simultaneously the social heritage, man as *homo*

sapiens, is actualized. But it is not a duality. It is the unity of man. And then, not the 'I' does, 'it' does; not the 'I' accomplishes the act, but 'my man [człowiek]' accomplishes the act. I myself and the *genus humanum* together. The entire human context, social and any other, inscribed in me, into my memory, into my thoughts, into my experiences, into my upbringing, into my formation, into my potential. (Grotowski, J. "Reply to Stanislavsky" *TDR*, Summer 2008, pp. 31-39, p. 36. Translated from Polish by Kris Salata)

Protagonist and the relics

The protagonist of Grotowski's performances from the 1960s is a hero and a man from the Romantic tradition. He suffers, and through suffering forges his identity; he is individual and alone, as he lives in conflict, or confrontation with his environment, with forces trying to exert some influence over him. His struggle is lost, while his suffering becomes iconic: *love justifies him* [like the Constant Prince who is willing to suffer and die in the name of love to God]. In Grotowski's work, the space of the female protagonist is mainly limited to the characters of a *mother* and *courtesan* (Tarudant from *The Constant Prince* performed by Maja Komorowska stands out) so it was

important for me to verify this situation in practical actions. In my creations I am interested in ambivalent characters, eschewing a definite affiliation whether in terms of gender or nature (human world/animal world), comic and serious while being constantly in relationship with the audience, the space, precise and improvising.

A specifically Polish character derived from the Romantic tradition (which referred, among other things, to the search for lost, specifically Slavic roots) is the Living Dead [*Upiór*]. The Living Dead exists in the worlds between the living and the dead (this is the kind of space Gurawski was looking for - the in-between, the space of the Theatre of Intuition living in the subconscious of the audience) and is doomed to sing his song/lament without leaving us, reminding us of suffering, love and death. And these three values are inseparable from each other in the explorations of the Laboratory Theatre in the 1960s.

The images of the suffering prince (performed by Cieślak) have gone down in the annals of 20th century theatre history. Along with, among the others, the performance space in Wrocław or the bench from *Apocalypsis cum figuris* in Brzezinka, they are relics of the Laboratory Theatre. As relics, they continue to attract theatre pilgrims from all over the world. The status of a relic is born on the one hand out of the need for 'devotees' to

interact with it, and, on the other is held up by an institution interested in the benefits of 'pilgrimage' (in this case the Grotowski Institute in Wrocław).

Translation in performance

Grotowski uses a rather hermetic language in his precise, thoughtful texts (and their translations) as he undertakes to translate practical experience into written text. I think that without experience and continued practice of the performance (in the broadest sense) it is very difficult to understand these texts. A discovery for me was the poetic value of *Towards a Poor Theatre*. For this reason I used text from the book in the performance *Burning Method - Four Lectures...* and as themes/inspiration for video notes.

The search towards the Total Act has opened up new forms of performance such as:

- the interview with oneself (researcher and student Magdalena Stawman-Tuka with the artist Magda Tuka)
- the interview conducted by physical theatre course students (East 15) with a fictional character of Jerzy Grotowski (performed by myself)
- performances in public space like: kiln, meadow, hill, beck etc

- recordings of performances in public spaces, private space and a club that make up a web performance
- use of the web performance in the form of video installations with live action
- performance lecture - using all of the above elements, among others, in creating *Burning Method - Four Lectures on Conditional Love*.

Training

Another challenge for me was to break the assumption that this kind of work can be practised only at a young age. In archive photos we see the magnificent, young, muscular bodies of the Laboratory Theatre actors which can lead to a misleading understanding of their theatre. I am interested in observing, exploring and expressing the body at any age, and I believe that the search for a *living impulse* is not limited to physical conditions. The living impulse is probably undefinable, individual in nature, whereas its revelation is objective. It requires the creation of conditions of concentration to work and a balance between tension and relaxation.

Space

If we consider Jerzy Gurawski's spatial designs as a kind of coexistence with the actor's body, the idea of performance and

the establishment of a unique relationship with the audience, for me the video projections also have this kind of value. They are at the same time an extended aspect of space and the performer's body. During the research I was exploring different spaces of performance following Artaud's connection through vibration between the performer's body and the environment. I was trying to follow the quality of vibration filling the time and place.

Performing body

Antonin Artaud's wonderful texts on the creative power of breath, words and its vibrations and thinking of the crisis as an inspiration, helped me to break through blocking thoughts about the performer's body. It must be added here that I do not fully agree with Grotowski that Artaud was only a great visionary of the theatre. I believe (and I give examples in Chapter Two) that Artaud proposed an integrated technique which expressed itself not only in acting but also in texts and drawings.

Burning Method is a process of emergence of concepts from seemingly unrelated elements like:

- the image of Siwec's self-immolation at the 10th Anniversary Stadium in Warsaw

- the ceramic kiln (natural, hollowed out hillside) near Pickering, North Yorkshire, as a space for performative action during the pandemic
- breathing exercises inspired by Artaud's texts.

These make up the formulation of the body in crisis, as a reflection on Grotowski's line of work and a unifying acceptance of the condition of doubt and alienation. The idea of the body in crisis is linked to the roots of theatre, particularly the origin of Tragedy derived from the suffering of Dionysus. The 'birth of tragedy' (after Friedrich Nietzsche) is closely linked to the pain - this idea was used by me to create the improvisation ["Lecture No 3"] scene in *Burning Method...* The stimulation to search for the word born in the body is to imagine the act of birth as an act of creation. Essential to the creative act is a state of losing oneself, which does not involve a loss of control. On the contrary - it is a state of intense concentration, the elimination of distractions. It is an act of *via negativa*. I think that in the contemporary situation oriented more towards the product than process, verifying the quality of work through the number of tickets sold, Grotowski's uncompromising attitude can be extremely inspiring and an important point of reference.

Past and future

The Total Act as an acting technique is additionally controversial as, in my opinion, it has fully emerged only with productions of *The Constant Prince*, due to the unity of the play's theme, the structure of the relation between characters, actors and audience, and the way of acting/offering oneself. Previous productions and particularly *Dr Faustus* were a path towards the Act, whereas the later *Apocalypsis cum figuris* was in relation to the Act.

The Total Act represents for me a reference point in the performer's practice. Its 'unattainability' is a challenge in terms of a constant search, asking questions, verifying the relationship with the spectator and with oneself. Paradoxically, I do not think that Grotowski was merely proposing the path of a *closed monastery* (perhaps the post-paratheatrical search was heading in this direction). He rather proposed The Institute for Studies of the Method of Acting - Laboratory Theatre (the official name from 1 September 1966) and thought of theatre in terms of a laboratory which had experimental, creative and process-focused intentions. During the Theatre of Productions period Grotowski proposed a creative freedom centred on high quality performance, deep consideration of the subject matter expressed in an original form.

I think that studying Grotowski and the poor theatre is essential for young drama students because it teaches discipline and consistency with freedom and individuality of exploration. Reading original texts, e.g. from *Towards a Poor Theatre*, with simultaneous practical studies has a chance to stimulate the development of artistic intuition.

My dialogue with Grotowski is not exhausted with my research on the Total Act. The next stage will be to focus on the theme of anti-Semitism particularly in the second half of the 1960s in Poland in the context of Grotowski's aborted *Hamlet Study* performance. I want to create a performance dealing with the themes of exclusion, manipulation and propaganda based on relics about the events of 1968 in Poland and remains of the 1964 performance by the Laboratory Theatre itself.



How The Hares are Dying by Magda Tuka - on the photo from left Magda Tuka, Anita Wach, photo: Museum of Contemporary Art in Ljubljana, 2018.

Margin - the end of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski in Pontedera [later the Worcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards] and Studium Teatralne in Warsaw¹²⁰

A collective email dated on 1st of January 2022 from Mario Biagini [in the Workcenter from 1986] reads that at the beginning of the year [2022] his collaboration within the Worcenter with Thomas Richards as associate director came to an end. The decision came after many years of reflection and difference in artistic work and exploratory methods. The Open Program [started in 2007] led by Mario closed.

Thomas Richards sent an open email dated 31st January 2022 about the end of financial support by The National Theatre of Tuscany for the Workcenter's workspace in Vallicelle. In his email Richards emphasises the need to reflect on the work going forward (after 35 years of working within the Workcenter) also to distance himself from Grotowski's name (with all due respect to the work practice handed down to him by Grotowski). He decided to close the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards.

11th June 2022 Gianna Benvenuto from Studium Teatralne called a special company meeting to confirm the official closing of the Studium Teatralne Association (the work space by Lubelska street has been closed earlier, as I mentioned in the Introduction).

¹²⁰ Neither Studium Teatralne or The Workcenter announced their closing on their websites. [Checked on 23 August 2022].

The Covid-19 pandemic has left a very serious mark on the activities of niche arts organisations. The effects associated with more than two years of various restrictions will be seen in the long term. Arguably, the notion of transmission so central to Grotowski's work is changing in meaning and scope. I believe that in the current crisis situation it is necessary to refer to sources (e.g. Grotowski's writings) and verify them through individual practice. The student - teacher (or even guru) relationship is changing and these changes should not be underestimated, but one should try to understand their origin in the current socio-cultural context.



Arunachala in India, photo by <https://archive.arunachala.org> [Accessed 23 August 2022].

From 1968 to 1970, Grotowski travelled to India where he visited the shrine of Ramakrishna, the Himalayas, and Bodh Gaya (where the Buddha received enlightenment). He met spiritual teachers like the famed Mother of Pondicherry and a Baul master with whom he exchanged ideas about the actor's craft. In December 1976 he made his last journey to India with his mother [Emila Grotowska 1897 - 1978] and together they visited Arunachala, the mountain to which Maharishi had retreated. Grotowski died on 14 January 1999. Several months later his ashes were strewn on Mount Arunachala.¹²¹

¹²¹ Lecture by Professor Tsu-Chung Su (National Taiwan Normal University & IAS) IAS Talking Points Seminar: Passages to India: India and the Making of Jerzy Grotowski's Theatre... <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/institute-of-advanced-studies/events/2022/apr/ias-talking-points-seminar-passages-india-india-and-making-jerzy-grotowskis-theatre> [Accessed 23 August 2022]

Appendix No 1

In addition to video notes I often use very simple drawings that translate more complex ideas into visual language.

One way of carrying out a kind of bridge between my initial experience as an actor rooted in Art as vehicle and the early work of Grotowski's Theatre was to understand the development of the actor/performer training proposed by Grotowski between 1959 and 1999. Of course, it is impossible to go into a deep analysis of this great project here, so I used a graphic summary that helps me to see the continuity of the idea. The following diagrams of my authorship definitely do not go into details but they give a certain picture connecting the various phases of the work.

- 1. Theatre of Productions - in my opinion, the most important, most characteristic and radiating into further stages of the work was the formulation of the Total Act:*

THEATRE OF PRODUCTIONS 1959-1969
TEXT: TOWARDS A POOR THEATRE
CHARACTER: MARTYR
BODY ILLUMINATION
EXERCISES: PLASTIQUES AND RESONATORS



THE DIVERGING CIRCLES REPRESENTS THE INFLUENCE OF THE IDEA OF THE TOTAL ACT ON THE PATH TAKEN BY GROTOWSKI AND HIS COLLABORATORS AS WELL AS AACTOR'S CRAFT.

ACTOR ↔ AUDIENCE
ENCOUNTER

WHERE - INDOOR SPACE: SPACIAL ARCHITECTURE

2. Paratheatre - active culture was a very important, and for many incomprehensible, step towards Grotowski's independent research. Leaving the theatre, leaving the mentality associated with the production of performances had its beginning in the forest base of the Laboratory Theatre in Brzezinka near Wrocław:

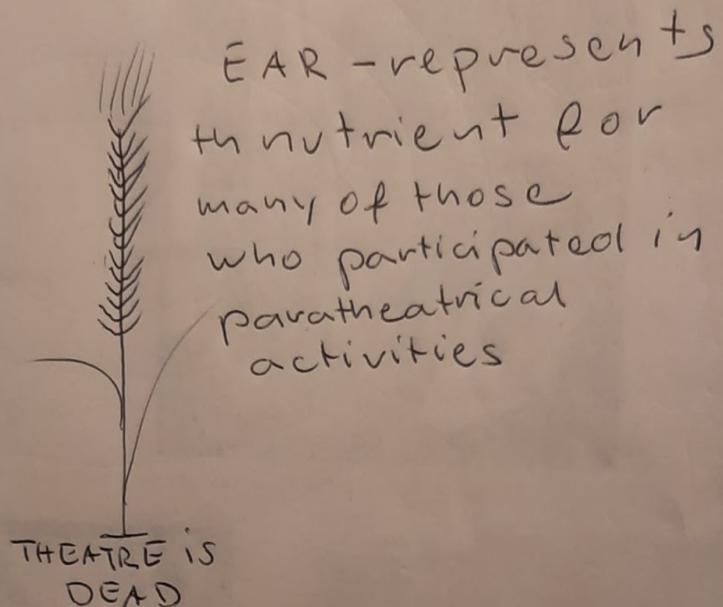
PARATHEATRE / ACTIVE CULTURE
1970-1978

TEXT: HOLIDAY [ŚWIĘTO] THE DAY THAT IS HOLY

CHARACTER: COLLECTIVE

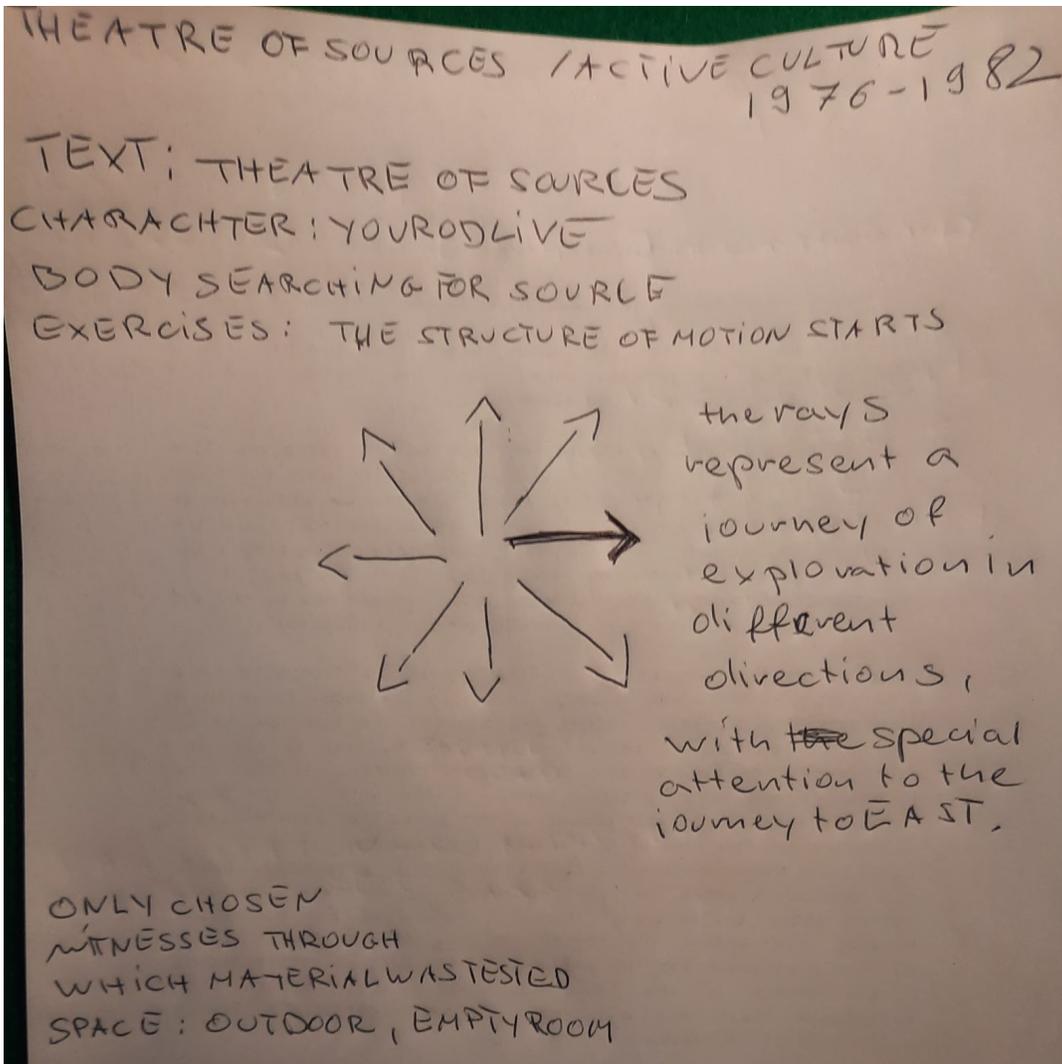
COLLECTIVE BODY

EXERCISES: VIGIL; WATCHING



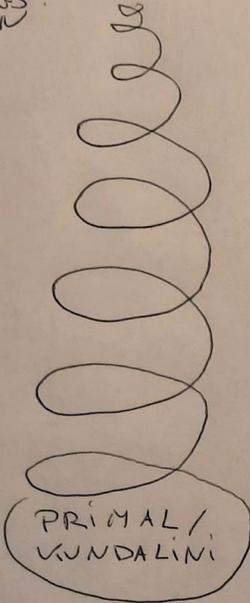
PARTICIPATION - NO AUDIENCE
WHERE; FOREST, BARN

3. The Theatre of Sources can be likened to a journey into the unknown necessary for further development. It is a period of formulating questions, through the still living traces of past traditions, about our common cultural identity:



4. Objective Drama - is a period of practical testing of materials, directions of exploration and formulation of tools that can guide participants towards source experiences:

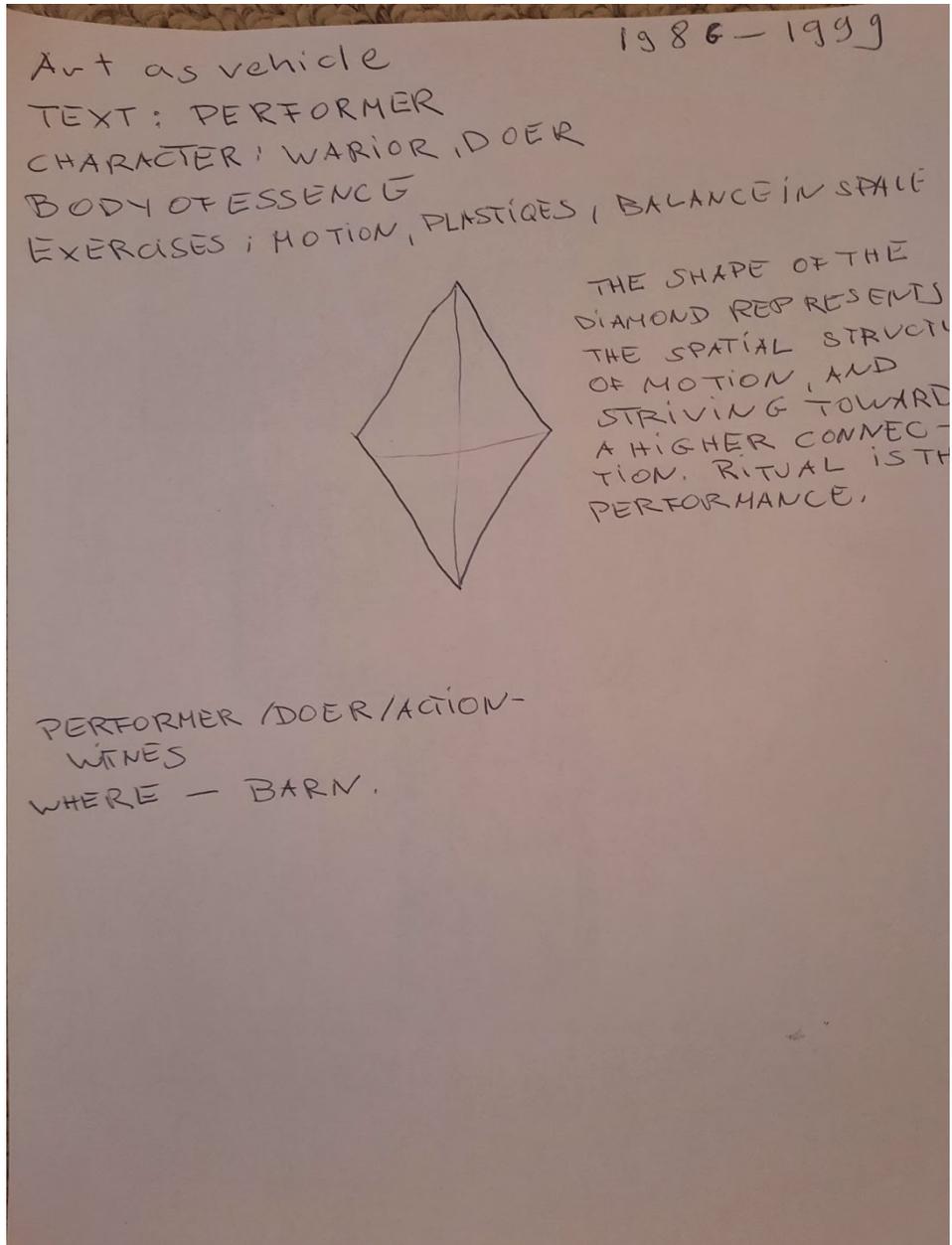
OBJECTIVE DRAMA 1983-1986
TEXT: TUES LE FILS DE QUELQU'UN
CHARACTER: HUNTER
REPTILE BODY
EXERCISES: MOTION, WATCHING, YAMVALOU,
VIBRATION SONGS:
-YANTRA AND ORGANON



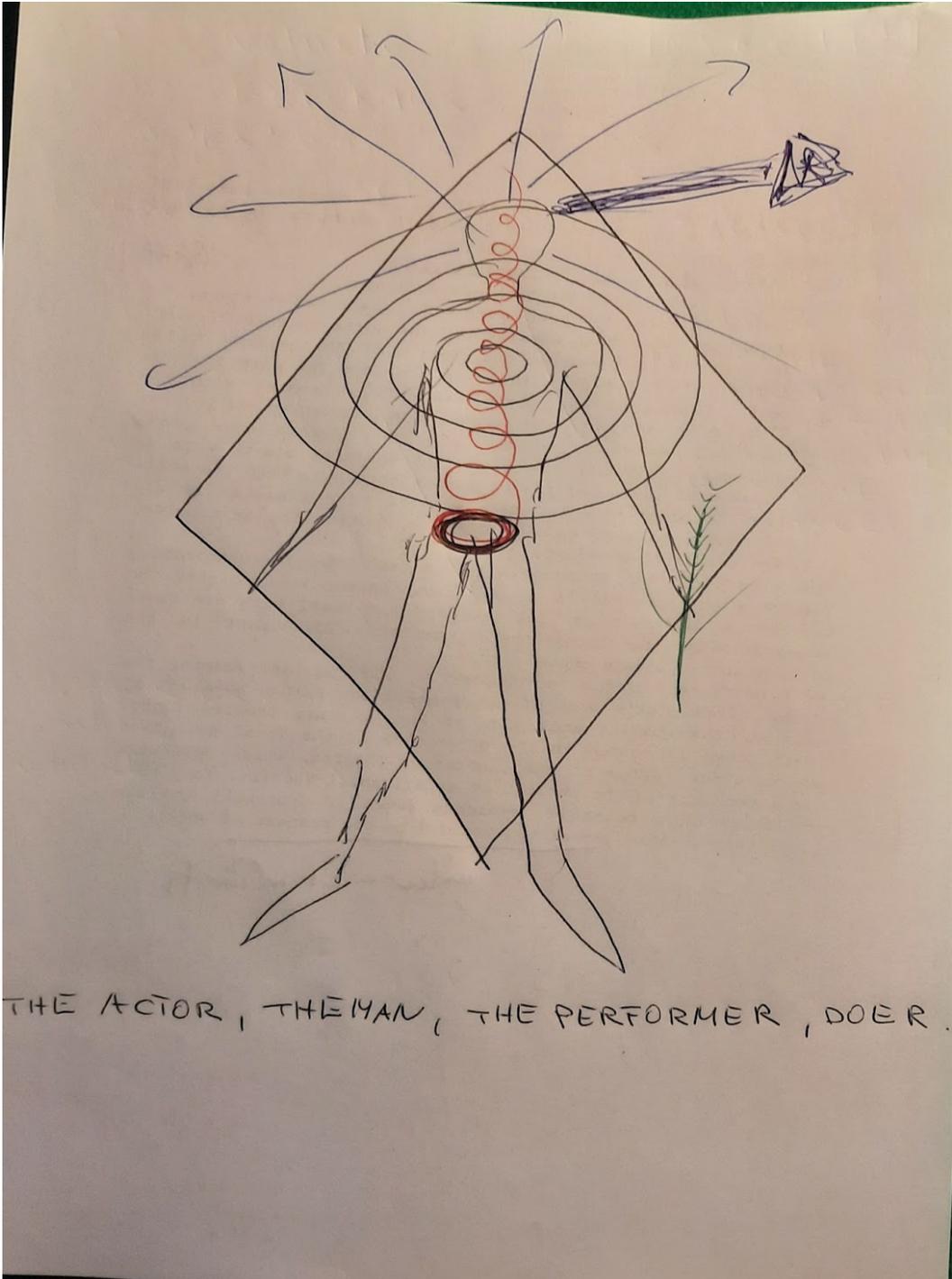
THIS SPIRAL
REPRESENTS THE SPINE
ON ONE SIDE AND THE
TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE
ON THE OTHER.
THE VIBRATIONS ARISING
AT THE BASE ASCEND
TOWARDS SUBTLE
ENERGIES.

INVITED WITNESSES
WHERE: YURT, BARN, FIELDS

5. Art as vehicle - is a development of the previous stages and a focus on the active search for the moment of experience of vertical energy connecting the performer to the spiritual realm:



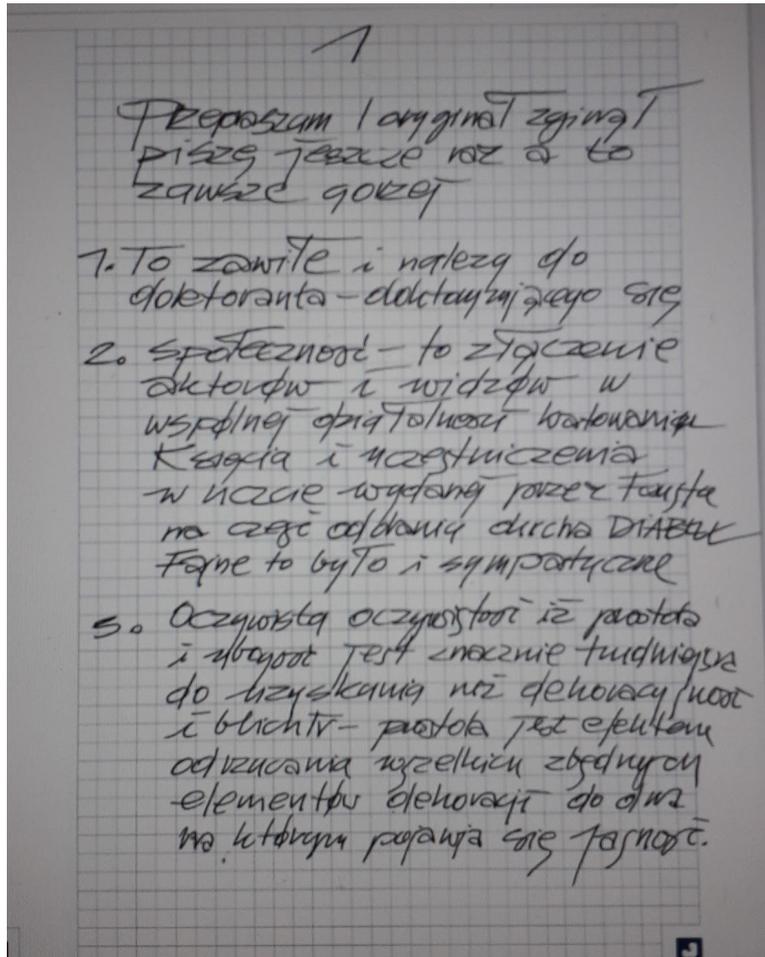
6. Actor, Performer, Doer - the last drawing shows a man experiencing Grotowski's work through all (5) periods:



THE ACTOR, THE MAN, THE PERFORMER, DOER.

Appendix No 2

Below is a short interview with Professor Jerzy Gurawski,¹²² which I managed to conduct via e-mail between April and July 2020. The professor answered my 11 questions and sent me a pdf document, the photos of which are below. I believe that it is important to place this document in the original, because it has a visual value. Below is my translation of the professor's questions and answers.



¹²² Jerzy Gurawski died 10 March 2022. Probably my 'interview' was one of the last he gave.

1. In *Towards the Poor Theatre* Jerzy Grotowski frequently talks about the importance of the myth and archetype. However, he believes that it is no longer possible for contemporary man to identify with the myth. Rather have to confront it. Confrontation with the myth. Did this idea come true in your thinking about space in the performances of the Laboratory Theatre?

J.G.: It's complicated and belongs to a doctoral student.

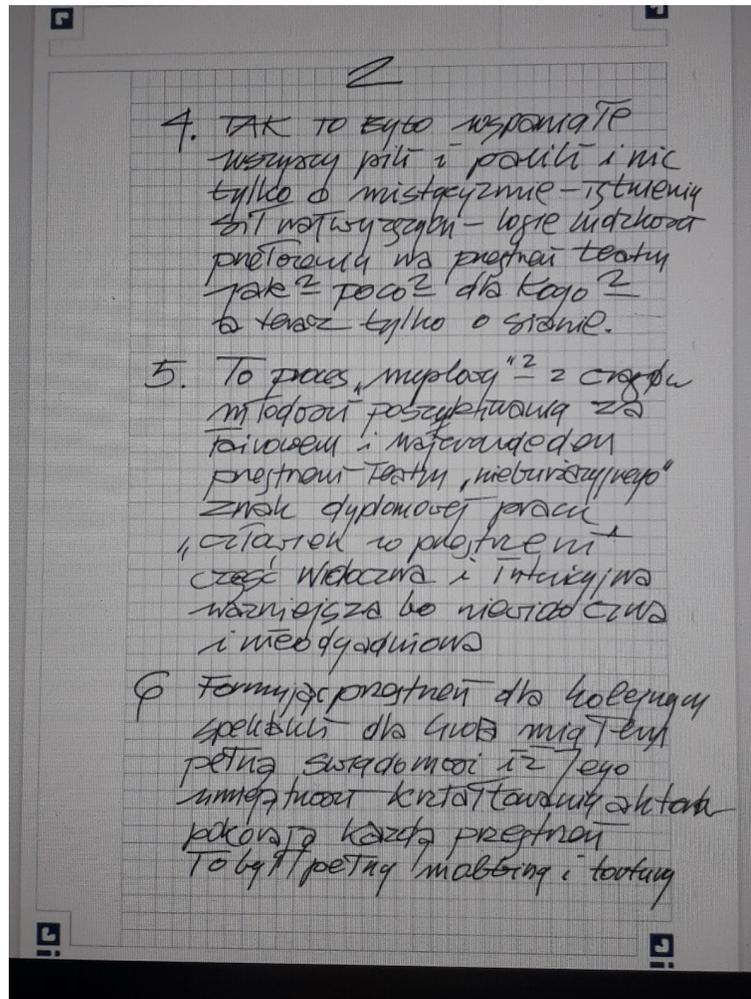
2. The community, the encounter often appears in your statements about the designed space. What was the community during the encounters during the performances of *The Constant Prince* or *Dr Faust*?

J.G.: The community is the union of actors and the audience in the joint activity of execution of the Prince and participation in a feast celebrated by Faustus in honour of giving the soul to the DEVIL. It was nice and cool.

3. Maybe it's a silly question, but I always feel that simplicity is much more demanding. You often talk about the beauty of a circle or a square. Why is contemplation of such a model a challenge?

J.G.: It is obvious that simplicity and poverty are much more difficult to achieve than decorativeness and glitter - simplicity is the result of rejecting all unnecessary elements of decoration to the bottom where the CLARITY [or LIGHT]

appears.



4. In the 1963 documentary film Letter from Opole in a small cigarette-smoked room meet: you, Ludwik Flaszen and Grotowski. This short fragment always makes a big impression on me. I have the feeling that we have lost something important that was then connecting people. The passion with which experimental activities happened seems to be not from today's times. Would you agree with me?

J.G.: YES, it was wonderful that everyone drank and smoked and nothing about mysticism - the existence of supreme forces - the fate of humanity translated into the space of the theatre. How? What for? For who? And now just about hay [informal word in Polish for money M.T.]

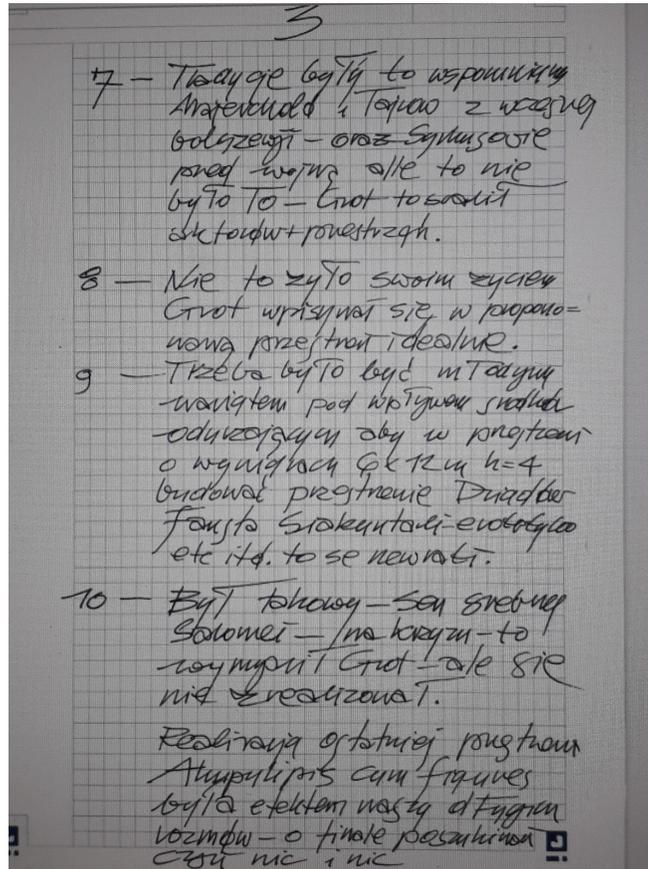
5. In the film Initials you are drawing with chalk, on the wooden floor, a circle which introduces us into the term of subconscious space in the theatre. A space that the audience may not be able to see, but rather feel, that resonates in them, even after the performance. How was this idea created?

J.G.: It's the "meplosa" process - from the circles (Craig's) of the search behind Tairov and Meyerhold for the space of the "not bourgeois" theatre, the sign of the thesis The Man in Space - Part Visible and Intuitive more important because it is not visible and unknown.

6. In one of the interviews, Theatre Laboratory's actor Andrzej Bielski mentioned that the development of voice exercises over the resonators, was often the result of working in a very specific theatre space for the actor. While thinking about space for the next performance, were you inspired by the development of acting technique in the Theatre Laboratory?

J.G.: While creating space for the next performances for Grot [Jerzy Grotowski], I was fully aware that his skills of forming an actor would conquer any space. It was full of bullying

and torture.¹²³



7. In *Towards the Poor Theatre*, Grotowski mentions many different traditions and theatre techniques from which he drew in the process of experiments at the Laboratory Theatre. Are there any theatrical traditions that inspired you in terms of space while working with Jerzy Grotowski?

¹²³ I am not able to ask Professor Gurawski what exactly he meant by saying *bullying and torture* in this context. He died 10 March 2022.

J.G.: Traditions were the mentioned Meyerhold and Tairow from early Bolshevik - and the Siris before the war, but it wasn't IT - Grot has lost it, actors + space.

8. While working on the space (each time completely different), did you apply any changes [into your design] after observing the rehearsals?

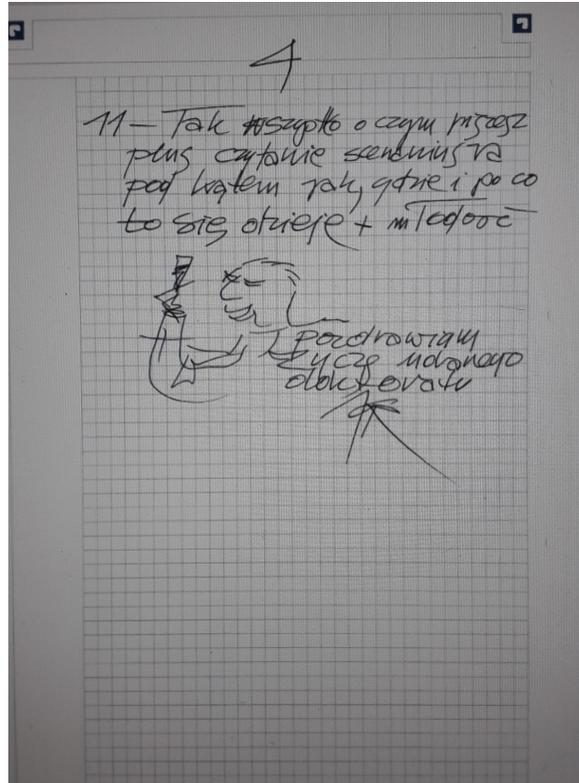
J.G. No, it has its own life. Grot perfectly adapted to the proposed space.

9. Did the Opole's venue itself, which housed the Theatre of 13 Rows (first residence), influence you in an inspiring way? And (if so) has it been so from the very beginning?

J.G.: You had to be a young madman and under the influence of drugs to build the spaces of Dziady, Faust and Shakuntala - erotic etc. - into a space of 6x12m h=4. It will never be back.

10. Is there any unrealized idea from the period of your collaboration with Jerzy Grotowski, which you would like to realise in some form, or pass on as an inspiration to others?

J.G.: There was one - Salomeia's Silver Dream [by Juliusz Słowacki] - on the cross - it was proposed by Grot, but it didn't come into existence. The realisation of the last space [design] in Apocalypsis cum Figuris was the result of our long conversations - about the final of the explorations, that is nothing and nothing.



11. How was the unique space design created? Was it a kind of vision, reflection, listening, seeking inspiration in the text, in conversations?

J.G.: Yes, everything you write about plus reading the script from an angle to where and for what it's happening + the youth. greetings and good luck with your doctoral.

Appendix No 3

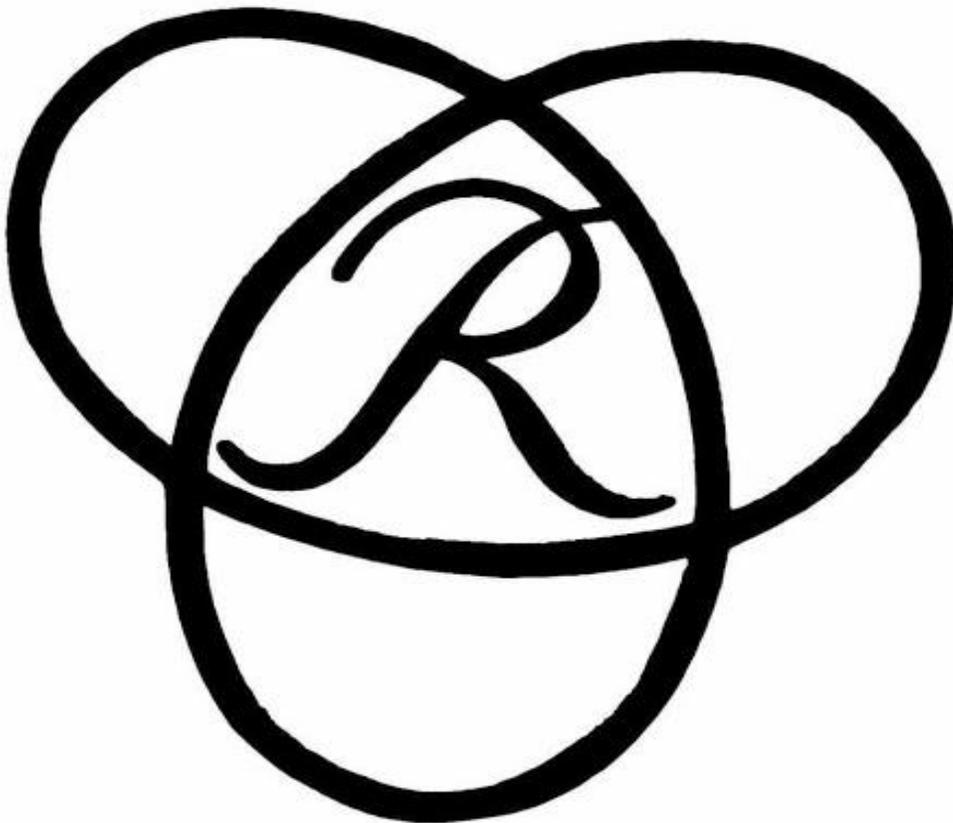
The symbol of Jerzy Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre was inspired by that of the Reduta Theatre. The current logo of the Jerzy Grotowski Institute refers to the previous ones. All symbols form a circle.

Mathematician Abraham Seidenberg theory that the circle is a ritual staging of the myth of creation and cites a series of myths including that of Tezcatlipoca, the Aztec god of beauty and war, who lost his right leg and so was compelled to walk in a circle.

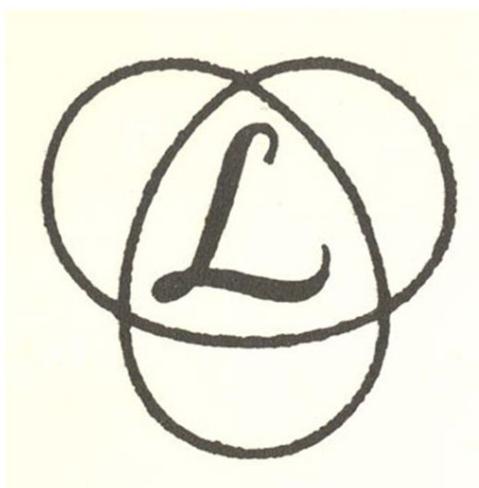
The mythology of the founding of the cities also invites us to consider practices going back thousands of years. When Romans founded a city, they gave it the generic name „urbs“, from the verb urvo, meaning to plough. From this verb comes „orbis'', the circle, which also means the world. The story of the foundation of Rome tells of a furrow traced out to delimit the space within which the inhabitants would live, the sacred (sacer in Latin = separated) space, a circular space detached from the rest of the world, which enables a group to live according to the rules of its own culture. This sacredness makes the circle a symbolic figure common to many cultures.

(Barba, E. Savarese, N. 2019, p.92.)

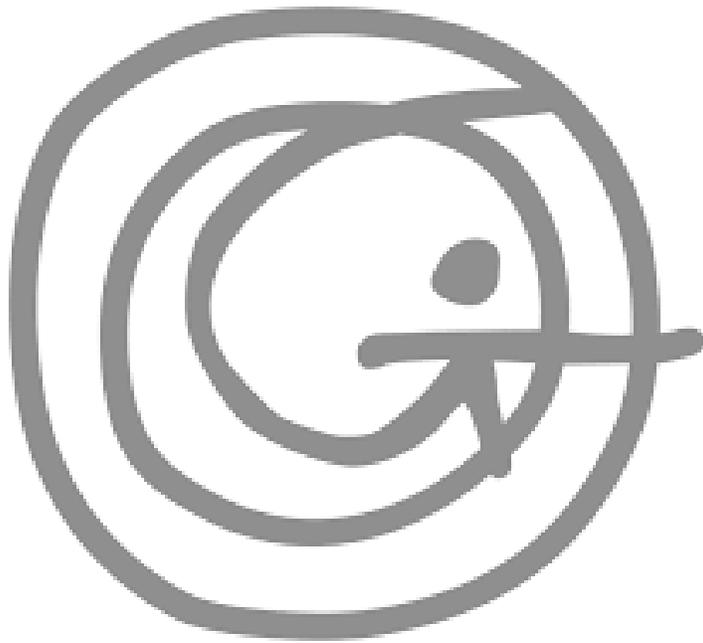
The symbol below is the emblem of Reduta, a theatre company operating between 1919 and 1939. The author of the 1920 emblem is Wojciech Jastrzębowski, professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. Intersecting ellipses according to the co-founder of the group Mieczysław Limanowski were: symbol of fertility, multiplication of ideas, a symbol of constant pursuit of perfection:



The external expression of the relationship between the Laboratory Theatre and Reduta was the adoption in late March and early April 1966 of the sign of Reduta - three interconnected loops symbolising infinity and, at the same time, perseverance in searching as a sign of the Laboratory Theatre (the letter 'L' was inscribed in the centre instead of the Reduta's 'R'):



Teatr Laboratorium (logo)



*The Grotowski Institute's
logo*

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List of videos by Magda Tuka (links)

All videos on vimeo are public. If any problem with login please use:

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VIDEO NOTES

1. <https://vimeo.com/411070303>
2. <https://vimeo.com/412482268>
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4. <https://vimeo.com/417358725>
5. <https://vimeo.com/151827814>

6. <https://vimeo.com/433564110>

7. <https://vimeo.com/231553991>

8. <https://vimeo.com/425813449>

9. <https://vimeo.com/453381961>

10. <https://vimeo.com/433609101>

11. <https://vimeo.com/621440508>

Link to the video installation *Kiln*: <https://vimeo.com/680949355>

Burning Method: Four Lectures on Conditional Love Full video

documentation: <https://vimeo.com/732486533>