

Editorial: Voices from Within

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Dedicated to all our collaborators, past and present

Theatre can never be a solitary process. Yet so often what comes down to us as a history of the theatre, however recent this history may be, is singular, the vision of one person, usually a man, and most often a director. This also applies to the work of the Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski. Celebration of his achievements often overshadows the work of his many collaborators. This isolation is only entrenched further by the fact that much of this history has not made the big leap from Polish into English-language publication. For non-Polish-speakers, materials that place his work in a broader nexus (personal and work-based as much as contextual) have simply not been readily available. This is something that is changing, a shift of which this collection is a vital part.¹

In this *Polish Theatre Perspectives* collection we hope to address this misalignment by presenting the voices of Polish collaborators of Grotowski from different phases of his work; to use the taxonomy he left us in *The Grotowski Sourcebook* (1997), these range from Theatre of Productions to Art as vehicle. Some contributions are located in one phase alone: for example, Andrzej Bielski in Theatre of Productions or Przemysław Wasilkowski in Art as vehicle, though in both cases we also learn the story of what they did before they met Grotowski and afterwards. Other texts, such as those of Ludwik Flaszen and Rena Mirecka, range across the twenty-five-year period of activity of the Teatr Laboratorium (1959-84). With the exception of Zbigniew (Teo) Sychalski's interview, prepared especially for this edition, all these texts have been published in some form in Polish, and, as far as we know, none have previously been available outside Polish-language circles.² Until now, such views have only been presented partially, for example in excerpts of interviews and talks cited briefly in Jennifer Kumiega's *The Theatre of Grotowski* (1985). These voices have never been heard before in such a systematic way.³

¹ Ziółkowski, as programme director of the Grotowski Centre and then the Grotowski Institute (2004-2009), and Allain, as part of his Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded British Grotowski project (2006-2009), have made sustained attempts to address this situation. See items 78-81 in the Selected Bibliography in English, below.

² A Polish publication which has a particular relevance to this issue is a selection of Tadeusz Burzyński's articles on Grotowski's and his collaborators' work, *Mój Grotowski* (My Grotowski), ed. by Grzegorz Ziółkowski and Janusz Degler (Wrocław: The Grotowski Centre, 2006). Burzyński was a journalist who followed Grotowski's work closely and wrote regularly about it over many years. His special position is confirmed by the fact that he was the only journalist invited to the first presentation of *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* in 1968, half a year before the official premiere. Several of the interviews translated here were conducted by him.

³ The bibliography at the end of this issue includes already available English texts and interviews by Grotowski's Polish collaborators.



In focusing on Polish collaborators we have no desire to deny or undermine the importance of others' contributions. However, in reality, many non-Poles have had a better chance of getting their voices heard internationally. Of other crucial, long-term collaborators such as Jairo Cuesta, James Slowiak, Maud Robart, Thomas Richards, and Mario Biagini, only Robart's voice is almost unheard in English (whereas in Italian a whole special issue of *Biblioteca Teatrale* was devoted to her work).⁴ This situation was partly addressed by the 2009 UNESCO-designated Year of Grotowski programme *Tracing Grotowski's Path: Year of Grotowski in New York*, which hosted a meeting with Robart on 19 February 2009.⁵ But published texts clearly have a different impact, status, and longevity than such meetings. There is still more work to be done to enable the full range of Grotowski's partners to become audible.

Whilst we have tried to provide a historical sweep in this collection with a range of timbres, we have inevitably been constrained both by the distance of time and by what is materially available. There is little information on or analysis of Theatre of Sources except in Spychalski's piece which ends this issue, and Objective Drama is not even mentioned,

From the left:
Ludwik Flaszen,
Mieczysław Janowski,
Antoni Jahółkowski,
Rena Mirecka,
Jerzy Grotowski,
Ryszard Cieślak,
Maja Komorowska,
and Stanisław Scierski
in Paris (1966).

Photograph: Andrzej Paluchiewicz,
courtesy of the archives of the
Grotowski Institute.

⁴ See *Biblioteca Teatrale*, 77 (January-March 2006). The Haitian Robart was particularly active in Theatre of Sources, Objective Drama and subsequently Art as Vehicle, as discussed in Spychalski's interview.

⁵ This was organised by the Polish Cultural Institute in New York and the Performance Studies Department, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, and was curated by Richard Schechner.

as no Poles took part in this phase which took place in the United States from 1983-86. Even in Polish, the voices of many of Grotowski's collaborators have scarcely been heard. Flaszen, as the official spokesman of the theatre and one who influenced the reception of the performances through published programmes and what might almost be considered manifestos, is the main exception to this. Apart from the material gathered in this issue, there are just a handful of interviews and texts from the time of the Laboratorium's activity, these mainly by Ryszard Cieślak and Zbigniew Cynkutis.⁶ This may be interpreted as arising from a 'rule of silence' that held sway in this special order of theatre craftsmen. Or it may simply be that they had little inclination or time to speak.

We use the term 'craftsmen' here with some hesitation, for it should be noted that of the sixteen texts here, four are by women. Although this is still a small proportion, it is an accurate representation of the gender balance of Grotowski's Polish collaborators, the majority of whom were men. Importantly, this issue also gives voice to other perspectives on a theatre company's daily life outside the rehearsal and performance studio, such as the often invisible administrative support and expertise, without which such organisations would grind to a halt. Much of this is frequently done by women, which may be one reason for its relative marginalisation. In Stefania Gardecka's interview with Ziółkowski, updated for this issue and thus placed as the penultimate piece, we see clearly how Grotowski's demands for absolute professionalism affected all aspects of the group's activity. The interview with Maja Komorowska, now one of Poland's leading theatre, film, and television actors, reveals just how hard it is to balance family life with such intensity of hours and frankly unsocial and varied commitments as work with Grotowski necessitated. We need to remember this, as theatre histories can all too easily erase such apparently minor considerations to focus on the bigger picture – innovations in staging or acting technique. We well know how much Grotowski achieved on this front, but need also to be reminded at what personal cost such revolutions can occur. Interestingly, however, regret is rarely expressed in these texts; the collaborators place their personal sacrifices outside the workplace in an almost exclusively positive context.

In spite of the many demands Grotowski made on all these collaborators, in reading these texts we come to appreciate the love and respect they felt for him – feelings that, invariably, were held mutually. Perhaps this is because Grotowski asked as much, if not more, of himself. This special edition gives us both an intimate and a panoptic vision of Grotowski and his work. Whilst we may already know or understand that the director's task is one of synthesis and coordination, contributions here – from his 'architect of spaces' (Gurawski), his literary director (Flaszen), an early co-director (Krygier, who also subsequently became a poster and costume designer with the company), cultural

⁶ See: 'Aktor – marzenia, myśli, rozterki' (Actor: Dreams, Thoughts, Dilemmas), Leonia Jabłonkówna talks to Ryszard Cieślak, *Teatr* 14 (1971), 4-7; Zbigniew Cynkutis, 'Ku znalezieniu...' (Towards Finding...), *Dialog*, 12 (1973), 132-135; Zbigniew Cynkutis, 'To ludzkie miejsce – teatr' (This Human Place – Theatre), in *Sztuka otwarta: wspólnota – kreacja – teatr* (Open Art: Community – Creation – Theatre) (Wrocław: Biuro Wydawnictwo Akademickiego Ośrodka Teatralnego 'Kalambur', 1977), pp. 156-165; Zbigniew Cynkutis, 'Drzewo Ludzi i Teatr Źródeł. O programie i zamierzeniach Teatru Laboratorium' (*Tree of People and Theatre of Sources: On the Laboratory Theatre's Programme and Plans*), *Odra*, 11 (1978), 83-86. Inevitably more voices could be heard after Grotowski's death on 14 January 1999.

animateurs (Spychalski and Zmysłowski), administrator (Gardecka), as well as the core of the acting ensemble – reinforce how much a laboratory director-researcher like Grotowski needs to be a multi-limbed Kali. Through the collaborators, inevitably we learn about the ‘egregor’ himself.

We hope also that this collection can help to redress the narrowness of the conception of Grotowski’s ‘living tradition’ presented in the recent *TDR* issue ‘Re-Reading Grotowski’ (summer 2008).⁷ Whilst it is clear that Grotowski considered the essence of his work to have passed to Thomas Richards – in an act of ‘transmission’, as they themselves have described this process – the framework of much of the *TDR* issue, and Lisa Wolford Wylam’s article in particular, all but ignores the fact that many collaborators of Grotowski from earlier periods of his life are also part of a living tradition – even if this grows out of different kinds of collaboration than the more specific and singular transmission.⁸ Figures such as Cieślak, Cynkutis, Mirecka, and Molik were creative partners and often long-time work leaders in the Laboratorium, whose contributions to the ethos and development of the company’s actor training and performance process Grotowski continued to highlight in his public lectures throughout the 1980s and 1990s.⁹ Each of these collaborators continued their own lines of research and teaching following the Theatre of Productions. In Wolford Wylam’s piece, the long-term members of the Teatr Laboratorium are mentioned in passing, in one or two lines only. Paratheatrical collaborators are dismissed as ‘enthusiasts’, their work equated with ‘efforts by students, amateurs’.¹⁰ When we re-read Grotowski through this edition of *PTP*, and learn how both Spychalski and Zmysłowski were being considered as continuators, and given increasing



Jerzy Grotowski and Ryszard Cieślak during rehearsals for *The Constant Prince* (1965).

Photograph: Marek Czudowski, CAF/PAP.

⁷ See *Re-Reading Grotowski*, ed. by Kris Salata and Lisa Wolford Wylam (= *TDR: The Drama Review*, 52.2 (2008)).

⁸ See Wolford Wylam, ‘Living Tradition: Continuity of Research at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards’, in *Re-Reading Grotowski*, 126-149. However, it is worth noting that one of Grotowski’s own contributions in this issue of *TDR* (‘On the Genesis of *Apocalypsis*’, trans. by Kris Salata, 40-51), highlights the collaborative partnership at the heart of the Laboratorium research and of the creative process that led to the seminal production of *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*.

⁹ For Grotowski’s discussions of the actor’s contributions, see, among others, Grotowski, *Tecniche originarie dell’attore* (The Actor’s Originary Techniques), an unpublished partial transcription of Grotowski’s lectures at the University of Rome 1982, ed. by Luisa Tinti (Rome: Università degli Studi di Roma ‘La Sapienza’, 1987); Gabriele Vacis, *Awareness: Dieci giorni con Jerzy Grotowski* (Awareness: Ten Days with Jerzy Grotowski), (Milan: Holden, 2002); and Grotowski, *La ‘Lignée Organique’ au Théâtre et dans le Rituel* (The ‘Organic Line’ in Theatre and in Ritual), (Paris: Le Livre qui Parle, 2008; mp3 audiobook). On the continuing research of certain of the Laboratorium actors, see for example, *Podróż. Rena Mirecka – aktorka Teatru Laboratorium* (Journey: Rena Mirecka – Teatr Laboratorium Actor), ed. by Zbigniew Jędrychowski, Zbigniew Osiński, and Grzegorz Ziółkowski (Wrocław: Grotowski Centre, 2005), and Giuliano Campo and Zygmunt Molik, *Zygmunt Molik’s Voice and Body Work. The Legacy of Jerzy Grotowski* (London, New York: Routledge, 2010).

¹⁰ Wolford Wylam, ‘Living Tradition’, p. 128.

responsibility for the work – a process that was partly confounded by the difficult social and political circumstances in Poland at the beginning of the 1980s – we see how limited this perspective is. Singular transmission is clearly significant, a process made evident by Grotowski in the renaming of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski to the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in 1996. But the broader collaborative elements of Grotowski's whole trajectory should also be recognised. Poles have certainly had enough historicising from monocular perspectives, the condition under communism. And Poland's history has never been an easy one. We hope the breadth of this issue is welcomed inside Grotowski's country of birth as much as it is outside it.

This edition thus creates an alternative narrative and broadens the picture, joining a host of recent materials about and, to a lesser extent, by Grotowski, several of which were mentioned earlier. It is a shame that it has taken this long and the spur of the Year of Grotowski to bring this particular collection to fruition, but at least it is now in good company. Whilst we cannot prevent ongoing mythologising of Grotowski, an issue Seth Baumrin highlights in a recent article in *New Theatre Quarterly*, we might help reduce it.¹¹ Mythologising can only begin to be undone through making materials available, such as the perspectives collated here. These can become the 'files' that Flaszen speaks of for academics and practitioners to pore over, though his reference also reminds us of the files that were, under communism, kept on countless Polish citizens, and inevitably Laboratorium members too. Many of the texts here have the nature of being very personal testimonies, but are no less valid for that. Where Grotowski was so cautious with words in publications and statements about his practice, here we reveal his other sides, playful or flippant, and when daily necessity demanded more normalised contingencies. We also learn how people came to Grotowski or were chosen by him, what happened after he left Poland in 1982, and then when the Teatr Laboratorium officially disbanded two years later in 1984 (in fact the company ceased working as a group in 1982). We hear stories. In translation we have tried to keep the informality of the conversations, whilst also ensuring precision about professional, theatrical, and specifically 'Grotowskian' terms.

The order of the texts is mostly chronological, in terms not of when the text was prepared or the interview made, but in relation to the subject matter under discussion. This is with the exception of the last two interviews, which have been reworked or specially conducted for this issue (Gardecka and Spychalski, respectively). Thus the issue's first text by a collaborator is an interview with Flaszen, the co-leader of what was the Teatr 13 Rzędów and what later became the Teatr Laboratorium.¹² As he himself describes it,

¹¹ Somewhat ironically, Baumrin's article overlooks initiatives, events, and publications that might begin to help us out of the trap of ongoing mythologising. See 'Where is my Grotowski? The Masquerade Plays on', *New Theatre Quarterly* 25.4 (November 2009), 360-362.

¹² At first the theatre operated under the name Teatr 13 Rzędów (the Theatre of 13 Rows) given by its founders: the couple Stanisława Łopuszańska-Ławska and Eugeniusz Ławski, actors from the Państwowy Teatr Ziemi Opolskiej (the State Theatre of the Opole Region). The theatre opened officially on 16 May 1958 with *Freuda teoria snów* (Freud's Dream Theory) by Antoni Cwojdzinski. Soon after, Łopuszańska invited Grotowski to direct Jerzy Krzysztoń's play *Pechowcy* (The Losers). The performance premiered on 8 November 1958. Then the finance department of Miejska Rada Narodowa (the municipal authorities) in Opole accused the founders of running a private enterprise and taxed their activities accordingly, which forced them from Opole to Katowice in 1959. After a gap of

this is material from the beginning, from 'Genesis'. The collection then progresses from Opole to Wrocław, before moving to the countryside outside that city to focus on Brzezinka and Ostrowina, where rural and forest spaces and buildings became key 'collaborators' in enabling a range of post-theatrical activities. It then stops briefly in Pontedera, with a recollection by Wasilkowski, a Polish performer who worked with Grotowski during the phase of Art as vehicle.¹³ This piece has been especially elaborated for this issue from the original Polish publication, to give more insight into Grotowski's continuing connections with Poland and Polish artists – after his emigration.

The whole collection is prefaced by a reproduction of Grotowski's brief text prepared for the Laboratorium's foreign tours. It was distributed to the public at open events such as the performances during the company's 1969 visit to New York, in order to stress the collaborative nature of the ensemble's work and to redress what Grotowski saw as an imbalance in how the authorship of the Laboratorium's work was perceived. In between the pieces and sometimes within them, we learn something of collaborators' histories, most movingly in relation to the premature deaths of Jaholkowski (1 September 1981), Zmysłowski (4 February 1982), Scierski (11 July 1983), Cynkutis (9 January 1987), and Cieślak (15 June 1990). The difficult years of the early 1980s for the group, for an ailing Grotowski, and for an embattled country (Martial Law was declared on 13 December 1981) haunt several of the pieces, as the interviewees share their sense of loss, grief, and exile. The closeness of the group inevitably fuelled much mourning when life's vicissitudes took over. Krzysztof Domagalik's 1979 film, *Sacrilegious Rite, Abounding in Sorcery*, included here, captures the period just before this tragic time. Though this DVD physically ends the book, bound as it is into the back cover, it may be a good place to begin, especially for those coming fresh to this work, to see and hear the collaborators talking in relation to moments of practice. The film provides invaluable insights into the Laboratorium's activities and processes, as we encounter Grotowski struggling to articulate the newest phase of Theatre of Sources.

four months it was announced that Jerzy Grotowski and Ludwik Flaszen were to take over the theatre. On 1 September 1959, the Theatre of 13 Rows began its new season under Grotowski-Flaszen's directorship. On 1 March 1962 the word 'Laboratory' was added to its title and the theatre functioned as the Teatr Laboratorium 13 Rzędów (the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows), until the group moved from Opole to Wrocław in January 1965, when 'Instytut Badań Metody Aktorskiej' (the Institute for Studies of the Acting Method) was added. At the beginning of 1967, '13 Rows' was dropped from the title. In 1970, the title was abbreviated to Instytut Aktora – Teatr Laboratorium (the Actor's Institute – Laboratory Theatre). In the mid-1970s there were plans to abbreviate it further, to Instytut Laboratorium (the Institute Laboratory), but these were never formalised. We have used the Polish terms Teatr Laboratorium for the Laboratory Theatre and Teatr 13 Rzędów for the Theatre of the 13 Rows, except in certain articles or book titles, or other instances where another variant is already well established.

¹³ We approached another collaborator from this phase, Piotr Borowski, but he felt his work had moved on to such an extent that he did not want to be included within the framework presented here. More can be read on Borowski and his work in Pontedera in Allain's chapter 'Piotr Borowski and Poland's Studium Teatralne: where process becomes performance' in *Contemporary European Theatre Directors*, ed. by Maria Delgado and Dan Rebellato (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 165-184.



Top: Brzezinka (2008).
A key 'collaborator' and the site of many of the Laboratorium projects in the 1970s and early 1980s.
Photograph: Grzegorz Ziółkowski.

Below: Ostrowina (2009).
Spychalski's work milieu from 1975-1980 and Grotowski's work space for Theatre of Sources in 1982.
Photograph: Grzegorz Ziółkowski.

We are reminded in Gardecka's interview that Grotowski, referring to Jean d'Ormesson's *The Glory of the Empire*, suggested that his collaborators 'Just tell the world what we were and what we did'. Grotowski only hinted at this indirectly, one of his many coded and cryptic games, not giving them anything as easy as the specific page references. Of course, what they were should become apparent as you read the interviews and statements, albeit only as a snapshot of those specific times; what they actually did was very difficult to describe, especially in the depths of exploration of a collaborator like Cieślak or in the searching and the vagaries of paratheatre. Nevertheless, much more directly, in our own Anglo-Polish collaboration, this 'telling' is what we have tried to enable here. Here speak the 'voices from within'.

Technical Notes

We have included information about first publication or when an interview was held before each contribution, in order to orientate the reader better.

We occasionally follow the original Polish texts where some authors or editors have chosen to use capital letters (for example Cynkutis, Mirecka, and Flaszen). Their purpose in doing so is not always evident but this technique may have been employed for emphasis. Where footnotes are unascrbed, these are from or by the editors of the original Polish texts.

As well as brief biographies of all Grotowski's collaborators placed before their texts (those of the interlocutors are gathered separately at the end), we also include a selected bibliography of texts in English. This focuses as much as possible on those texts that are more widely available as well as those we consider the most important, including other publications pertaining to Grotowski's collaborators. This list is presented chronologically, and although it is by no means comprehensive, it should be a useful starting point for further research.

We have chosen a mix of photographs of the collaborators, including the collaborators when young if applicable, to give some sense of when they were working with Grotowski.

All translations have been worked up in close consultation and collaboration with the issue editors, often through several iterations.

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