

7-31-2014

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Recommended Citation

Cioffi, Kathleen (2014) "Introduction: Grotowski's Evolving Influence in Poland," *Mime Journal*: Vol. 25, Article 2. DOI: 10.5642/mimejournal.20142501.02

Available at: <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/mimejournal/vol25/iss1/2>

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Introduction: Grotowski's Evolving Influence in Poland

Kathleen Cioffi

Along with [Constantin Stanislavski](#), [Vsevelod Meyerhold](#), and [Bertolt Brecht](#), “Grotowski is one of the four great directors of Western twentieth-century theatre,” declares Richard Schechner in the preface to the paperback edition of *The Grotowski Sourcebook*.¹ Despite the fact that [Jerzy Grotowski](#) “left the theatre” in the early 1970s and died in 1999, he has continued to fascinate theatre artists right up to the present day. During his rather short-lived “Theatre of Productions” phase (1957–69), he managed to propel himself and his company, at first called the Theatre of Thirteen Rows and later the Teatr Laboratorium (in Polish) or the Polish Laboratory Theatre (in English), from near-anonymity to international fame. He then rejected that fame, opting instead for an existence “well known and obscure simultaneously,” in Schechner’s formulation,² and never again created another production. But his influence grew, and it continues to grow both worldwide and in his native country.

For historical, linguistic, and social reasons, as well as for reasons having to do with Grotowski’s own personality and the personalities of those who worked with him at various stages, the nature and the trajectory of that influence have differed somewhat in Poland from in the rest of the world. This special issue of *The Mime Journal* in part explores that difference. It also reminds us of the important role that Grotowski’s Polish collaborators and followers had and continue to have in carrying forward his legacy. Grotowski was an innovator and a genius, ahead of his time in many ways, yet he was also in other ways a man of his own time and culture. His impact on the Polish theatre has not always been acknowledged, but it has been complex, ever-evolving, and profound.

A Physical Approach

Grotowski based his practice, both in his Theatre of Productions period and in his post-theatrical periods, on physical action. As he often said, including in his address at the 1996 International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) conference that Juliusz Tyszka has described in “Jerzy Grotowski in Copenhagen,” he started out by wanting to invent “a new kind of yoga,” and almost accidentally found himself in drama school. There he discovered Stanislavski, and even became, according to Zbigniew Osiński, “a fanatic disciple of Stanislavsky.”³ After graduating, he managed to get a fellowship to study the Stanislavski method at its source, in Moscow, where he worked with [Yuri Zavadsky](#), an actor who had performed under Stanislavski’s direction. Much of Grotowski’s work with the Laboratory Theatre actors, as well as with those who participated in later stages of his work, built on and extended Stanislavski’s “[method of physical actions](#),” that is, the later, less well-known formulation of the Stanislavski method that the Russian director was working on in the last ten years of his life.

Grotowski and [Ludwik Flaszen](#) established the [Theatre of Thirteen Rows](#) in 1959, and during the period of 1959–62, Grotowski and his actors worked on seven different productions while developing a system of vocal and physical exercises described in Grotowski’s book *Towards a Poor Theatre*.⁴ [Zygmunt Molik](#) was given responsibility for vocal exercises as early as 1960, but the physical exercises called the

Plastiques and Corporals (*exercices plastiques* and *exercices corporels*) emerged somewhat later. According to [James Slowiak](#) and [Jairo Cuesta](#), the Plastiques, which [Rena Mirecka](#) was responsible for from 1963 on, as she describes in her “Notebooks,” were “developed from well-known systems, such as [Delsarte](#), [Dalcroze](#), [European pantomime](#), and others.” The Corporals, on the other hand, were developed from “several *asanas* (especially the upside-down positions) of hatha yoga.”⁵ By the time the actors were rehearsing their seventh production, *Akropolis* based on [Stanisław Wyspiański](#), which was first produced in 1962, the exercises had become a way for each individual actor to “discover those resistances and obstacles which hinder him in his creative task. Thus the exercises become a means of overcoming these personal impediments.”⁶ Grotowski called the overcoming of these physical and vocal impediments the *via negativa*, the following of which was necessary for the actor to achieve a “total act” of self-cognition and revelation.

Grotowski and his Polish collaborators continued to teach and develop this physical approach throughout the [Paratheatre](#) (1968–78) and [Theatre of Sources](#) (1976–82) periods. In 1971, Grotowski wrote, “All true reaction begins inside the body,” and “Our entire body is one big memory and in our body memory originate various points of departure.”⁷ During this period, Zygmunt Molik (with the assistance of [Antoni Jahółkowski](#)) began conducting a cycle of “Acting Therapy” workshops, one of which was filmed in the 1976 film [Acting Therapy](#) (directed by Pierre Rebotier), where we can see a workshop with Molik using physical and vocal exercises to “unblock” the participants; [Stanisław Scierski](#) also leads [part of the workshop](#), and [Rena Mirecka demonstrates the Plastiques](#). In the mid-seventies, [Jacek Zmysłowski](#) conducted a series of paratheatrical projects that culminated in work called [Czuwania](#) (Vigils), which consisted of participants’ moving and interacting in a room together without verbalizing. Grotowski said about *Vigils*, “The different possibilities of this action, like the number of participants or the duration of the event, were explored, but always keeping certain rules as a base: no selection of participants, no verbal communication, no spectators or passive observers.”⁸ During the Theatre of Sources phase, Grotowski, together with Magda Złotowska, began to develop an extremely precise exercise called the Motions, which was developed further during the [Objective Drama](#) phase (1983–86) in California.



Rena Mirecka and Zygmunt Molik at a training session, Opole, 1964. Photo by Fredi Graedl, the Laboratory Theatre. Reproduced courtesy of the Grotowski Institute Archives.



Ryszard Cieślak and Gaston Kulig at a training session, Opole, 1964. Photo by Fredi Graedel, the Laboratory Theatre. Reproduced courtesy of the Grotowski Institute Archives.

The Theatre of Sources also saw Grotowski broadening his physical and vocal vocabulary by working with “representatives of an old tradition, of a source technique of an old tradition.”⁹ It was during this period that he began working with Tiga (Jean-Claude Garoute) and Maud Robart, the leaders of the Haitian group Saint Soleil; from this collaboration arose Grotowski’s interest in Haitian ritual songs and in the walk-dance called *yanvalou*. This work on the physical and vocal “old traditions” continued into the Objective Drama phase when Grotowski brought Tiga and Robart, along with other so-called traditional practitioners and “technical specialists” from Colombia, Bali, Korea, Taiwan, and elsewhere, to the University of California at Irvine to work with the students there. During this period, Grotowski wrote in the essay “Tu est le fils de quelqu’un,” “We have in our body an ancient body, a reptile body, one can say. . . . I began to ask myself how all this is related to the primary energy, how – through diverse techniques elaborated in the traditions – access to the ancient body was looked for.”¹⁰ His practice continued to make use of many of these traditional vocal and physical elements, including the *yanvalou*, right through the final, [Art as vehicle](#) (1986–99), phase.

During the Art as vehicle phase, Grotowski and his designated heirs, [Thomas Richards](#) and [Mario Biagini](#), continued to work on what Grotowski felt was a continuation of the work that Stanislavski started but didn’t finish. However, there are some differences between the two methods. Stanislavski, in Grotowski’s and Richards’s view, was working on “physical actions within the context of the common life of relations: people in ‘realistic’ daily-life circumstances, in some social convention. Grotowski, instead, looks for physical actions in a basic stream of life, not in a social and daily-life situation.”¹¹ The crux of the difference between Stanislavski’s work on physical actions and Grotowski’s is work on “impulse,” which “for Grotowski, is something that pushes from ‘inside’ the body and extends itself out toward the periphery; something very subtle, born ‘inside the body’ and which does not come from uniquely a corporeal domain.”¹² By this stage in his work, Grotowski no longer referred to “actors,” but rather to “doers,” and he wanted the doer not merely to reconstruct daily life, but to enter into “a living stream of impulses,” without observing his (or her) own behavior.¹³

Grotowski Controversies in Poland, Then and Now

The physical basis of Grotowski’s work was recognized early on by his non-Polish admirers and has continued to be his greatest impact on theatre practitioners outside of Poland. Within Poland, despite the advantage of having audience members and critics who could actually understand the Laboratory Theatre’s performances better than non-Polish speakers could, Grotowski’s productions initially met with skepticism and even outright hostility. This was partly because the Theatre of Thirteen Rows was located in Opole, a small, provincial city completely unaccustomed to avant-garde theatre. Also, Grotowski’s earliest productions at the Theatre of Thirteen Rows, even to sympathizers such as [Eugenio Barba](#), seemed amateurish and strained. In addition, Grotowski’s project had little in common with what was going on elsewhere in Polish theatre at the time: the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s witnessed mainstream Polish theatre’s embracing of the theatre of the absurd, and Grotowski’s productions had little to do with that trend, in some ways running in an antithetical direction to it.

The main feature of the Laboratory Theatre’s work that upset Polish critics, however, was the element of [blasphemy](#) that Grotowski eventually adopted as a defining principle. Beginning with his production of *Forefathers’ Eve* ([Dziady](#)) based on [Adam Mickiewicz](#), Grotowski regularly blasphemed not only against the Catholic Church in his oftentimes sacrilegious use of religious symbolism, but also against the cultural sacred cows of Polish Romanticism. In Grotowski’s worldview, blasphemy was a necessary component of the [dialectics of apotheosis and derision](#), which were the building blocks of his productions. While some critics appreciated these dialectics (indeed, the term “dialectics of apotheosis and derision” was actually first used by a Polish critic, Tadeusz Kudliński, in his review of *Forefathers’ Eve* and then embraced by Grotowski), many others rejected and were repulsed by them. In addition, the Church and certain devout intellectuals in overwhelmingly Roman Catholic Poland were particularly upset by Grotowski’s overt mockery of its most sacred symbols in [Apocalypsis cum figuris](#): Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński, the then-primate of Poland, even denounced that production from the pulpit as demoralizing to the nation.



Akropolis version III, Opole, 1964. Antoni Jahółkowski, Ryszard Cieślak, Rena Mirecka, Mieczysław Janowski, and Gaston Kulig. Photo by the Laboratory Theatre. Reproduced courtesy of the Grotowski Institute Archives.

Grotowski did not put an end to the backbiting when he left the theatre. By this point, after several tours abroad where the Laboratory Theatre was acclaimed, mainstream critical reception in Poland was generally good, and Grotowski and his group were recipients of several official awards for promoting Polish culture abroad. However, some noticed an apparent disjunction between Grotowski's growing status as a countercultural icon who had created a space for free artistic experimentation and his and his actors' membership in the Communist party.¹⁴ Director [Kazimierz Braun](#), himself dismissed as artistic director of the Contemporary Theatre in Wrocław for his political productions, wrote about Polish attitudes to Grotowski in his post-theatrical phase: "It is a fact that Grotowski and the Laboratory Theatre at one time defined their positions in the official Polish system and gained support and help. This created some kind of 'shadow' (as Joseph Conrad would have said) around Grotowski and the Laboratory. And this 'shadow' had an impact on the attitude of some Polish circles toward him."¹⁵ As the seventies progressed and the

political climate among the intelligentsia grew increasingly more and more overtly anti-regime in the lead-up to the formation of the Solidarity trade union in 1980, this “shadow” deepened.

Even after his death, Grotowski has remained controversial in Poland. In 1990, while Grotowski was still alive, the [Center for the Study of Jerzy Grotowski's Work and for Cultural and Theatrical Research](#) (Ośrodek Badań Twórczości Jerzego Grotowskiego i Poszukiwań Teatralno-Kulturowych) was established in Wrocław, intended in large part as a research facility that was to collect and archive documentation about Grotowski and his collaborators and heirs. Despite this fact, Grotowski requested before he died that his papers and other archival materials collected after his leaving Poland *not* be left to the Center, but to the Institut Mémoires de L'Édition Contemporaine (IMEC), an archive in Caen, France. Thomas Richards and Mario Biagini, Grotowski's designated heirs, naturally feel bound by his wishes, but Polish scholars argue that Grotowski should not be allowed to have his way in this. Leszek Kolankiewicz, a scholar who collaborated with Grotowski during the Theatre of Sources period, said in an interview, “Grotowski alone chose a master for himself – Constantin Stanislavski (who at that time was no longer living). He also chose a pupil for himself – Thomas Richards. But this perhaps means that in making Richards his true and spiritual heir, Grotowski took away freedom of choice from him. Question: Can heirs rebel? Can they not become hostages to the inheritance?”¹⁶

Recently, authors involved with the field of gender studies have started to critically analyze Grotowski's writings and performances from a feminist and queer studies perspective. Agata Adamięcka-Sitek (a scholar and dramaturg who works at the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute in Warsaw) and Weronika Szczawińska (a director, dramaturg, translator, and cultural critic) argue that “The patriarchal hierarchy, the mechanisms of exclusion and gender oppression, and the vast misogynist imaginary are resurrected in Grotowski's performances and statements.¹⁷ Adamięcka-Sitek and Szczawińska subject [The Constant Prince](#) to a close gendered analysis, showing that the role of Feniksana (played by Rena Mirecka in Grotowski's staging) has been altered from Juliusz Słowacki's play, turning her from a somewhat sympathetic character into an animalistic, castrating Other. By contrast, [Ryszard Cieślak's](#) Don Fernando in his “total act” embodies a masochistic fantasy that joins together male suffering with female ecstasy. This analysis, as well as another article by Adamięcka-Sitek entitled “Grotowski, Women, and Homosexuals: On the Margins of ‘Human Drama,’”¹⁸ which subjects *Apocalpsis cum figuris* to the same trenchant gendered analysis, argues that while Grotowski may have been radical in subverting some cultural archetypes, his theatre and many of his statements reinforced those archetypes related to gender.

Adamięcka-Sitek and Szczawińska are not the first to notice Grotowski's sexism. Their critique uses as one of its jumping-off places Schechner's statement on Grotowski's “Hasidic” view of women in *The Sourcebook*:

[W]omen have been a tiny minority as performers and absent as inheritors. . . . Grotowski's “structural sexism” stems from his belief in archetypal differences between the genders and his almost reverential regard for his mother. This attitude fits the Hasidic treatment of women and their view of the Shekhinah. But there is also more than a small dose of Polish Catholicism in Grotowski's treatment of women. In his artistic work, women are cast along the polar opposition of the Virgin Mary or Mary Magdalene.¹⁹

Grotowski was, as Adamięcka-Sitek and Szczawińska, as well as Schechner, point out, not atypical of males of his generation in his gender attitudes. While Schechner attributes this failure to Catholicism, the key to its cause might be more productively located in the Polish Romantic tradition. Although Grotowski blasphemed against both Catholicism and Romanticism, he nevertheless used the imagery from Catholicism and the literary works from Romanticism as the raw material for his blasphemies. A decade ago, Szczawińska published an article about the treatment of women in Polish drama and film where she states, “The model of Polish culture, developed from the nineteenth century (especially from Romanticism and its modernist reconsideration), does not allow a ‘hero of the Polish people’ to be a woman.”²⁰ Grotowski's imagination – as radical, shocking, and innovative as it was – was still partly bound within the confines of the nineteenth-century-derived cultural model of Polish society in which he was raised.²¹



The Constant Prince, version I, Wrocław, 1965. Rena Mirecka, Ryszard Cieślak, Maja Komorowska, Mieczysław Janowski, Antoni Jahołkowski, and Gaston Kulig. Photo by the Laboratory Theatre. Reproduced courtesy of the Grotowski Institute Archives.



The Constant Prince, version I, Wrocław, 1965. Maja Komorowska, Ryszard Cieślak. Photo by the Laboratory Theatre. Reproduced courtesy of the Grotowski Institute Archives.

Grotowski's Influence in Poland

Nevertheless, despite all the controversies that Grotowski's work has stirred up in Poland, Schechner's statement in *The Grotowski Sourcebook* that "Grotowski would always be better received outside Poland than within"²² ignores the evolution of Polish reception from not taking Grotowski seriously to regarding him as a kind of well-established institution that must be debunked. Even by the end of the Theatre of Productions phase, influential Polish tastemakers were already coming round from their initial antagonism. For example, in an article in the magazine *Teatr* in 1968, the well-known actor Jan Kreczmar wrote about the Laboratory, "I want to draw attention to this very important thing happening in our midst and to say this is needed by each of us who still has the strength and health to enhance his craft."²³ By the end of the Theatre of Productions period, Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre had become much better accepted in his home country than it had earlier, at least in part because it was so acclaimed abroad. And in the subsequent periods of his activity, even those that occurred after he left the country, Grotowski became almost a cult figure in Poland.

Grotowski had always been interested as much in education and research as in performance. In his interview with Eugenio Barba, "The Theatre's New Testament," originally published in Italian in 1964, he claimed that a "renewal" of theatre should come from "people who are dissatisfied with conditions in the normal theatre, and who take it on themselves to create [poor theatres](#) with few actors, 'chamber ensembles' which they might transform into institutes for the education of actors."²⁴ During the last few years of the Theatre of Productions period, the transformation of the work of the Laboratory Theatre had already been effected: it now became a quasi-educational institution that conducted numerous workshops, especially abroad. But some of the educational efforts of the Laboratory Theatre were directed homeward as well. For example, starting in 1962, the Laboratory Theatre began to cooperate with one educator, Zbigniew Osiński, then an assistant professor of Polish at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. In addition, [Teo \(Zbigniew\) Spsychalski](#), a student at Copernicus University in Toruń, made contact with the Laboratory Theatre when he was researching his master's thesis on the group. He was accepted as a trainee actor in the troupe in the fall of 1967, after his graduation. In 1967, Osiński directed a production at a Poznań student theatre, the [Theatre of the Eighth Day](#), where he introduced the members of the group to Grotowski's methods, and in 1968 and '69, the Eighth Day also worked with Spsychalski, who led training workshops there and codirected one of the group's productions.

As already mentioned, Grotowski decided at the end of the 1960s to completely transform the nature of his and the Laboratory's enterprise. This new practice, Paratheatre or "active culture" (as Grotowski also called it at the time), was intended to open up the work that the Laboratory Theatre had done among themselves to as wide a group as possible. Now, instead of a few "holy actors," large groups of people could participate in various paratheatrical trainings, vigils, and special projects, often held at the Laboratory Theatre's forest refuge at Brzezinka. Grotowski was mainly interested at this time in interhuman contact, in meetings between people that would go beyond superficial interactions such as those between performers and audience members, or for that matter, between people playing their everyday social roles.

During the 1970s, various paratheatrical workshops and events involved thousands of people, and were especially influential in the Polish student theatre or "young theatre" movement at that time. In her study of Polish young theatre of the 1970s, sociologist Aldona Jawłowska writes about the influence of Grotowski's group during the Paratheatre phase: "It is important to remember that training periods of various types and actions led by the group in this period included over ten thousand people. The extent of the interaction both of the idea of active culture and of the method of the actor's work as well as other forms of the Laboratory's creative training was very great."²⁵ Through these encounters, Grotowski during the 1970s influenced not only theatre practice in Poland, but also the development of a counterculture. Sociologist Elżbieta Matynia in an article published in 1980 writes, "It's worth remembering the immensely mobilizing role of Grotowski in Polish intellectual life in the last years of the decade. And the kind of example he gave others: transcending, going outside the pattern of work, life, and creation for the educated in our culture."²⁶



Theatre of the Eighth Day, *Miracles and Meat*, 1984. Photograph by Krzysztof Furmanek. Reproduced courtesy of Teatr Ósmego Dnia.

Grotowski's leaving Poland in 1982 did not end his influence there. First of all, there were still some members of the Laboratory Theatre who remained in Poland and continued to conduct workshops and training sessions there (although they refrained from doing so during the period of Martial Law, December 1981–July 1983). Second, there were people left in the country who had collaborated in some way with the Laboratory Theatre – either they themselves had been members of the Laboratory Theatre but left the group before its dissolution in 1984, or they had participated in paratheatrical events or training sessions held by the Laboratory Theatre members. [Maja Komorowska](#) is perhaps the most famous of Grotowski collaborators who left the Laboratory Theatre; she left the group in 1968 but became one of the most renowned Polish film and theatre actresses and a professor in the Aleksander Zelwerowicz Theatre Academy in Warsaw.

In addition, after the dissolution of the Laboratory Theatre in 1984, efforts were made to continue some kind of activity on the site the Laboratory Theatre had occupied in Wrocław's main square. In 1985, [Zbigniew Cynkutis](#) was offered the opportunity by the city administration to direct a successor organization, the [Wrocław Second Studio](#) (Drugie Studio Wrocławskie), which he accepted. This company had an ambitious agenda, both artistic and educational, but was unable to achieve its aims in the short time (four years) in which it existed, hampered in part by Cynkutis's untimely death in a car accident in 1987. In 1990 it was succeeded in the same space by the Center for the Study of Jerzy Grotowski's Work and for Cultural and Theatrical Research, which was directed by Zbigniew Osiński. The Grotowski Center was originally intended to be more of a research facility than a producing organization, and it also hosted guest workshops by former members of the Laboratory Theatre and others, as well as film screenings, conferences, and invited performances. In 2006, the Center changed its name to the [Grotowski Institute](#) and expanded its brief to host the theatre company [Teatr ZAR](#), in addition to engaging in larger-scale collaborations with international groups, some of whom are either housed at the Institute or visit it on a regular basis. It has also continued its workshop, conference, film screening, and publishing activities.

Anthropological Theatre

The ex-member of the Laboratory Theatre who had the greatest influence on the subsequent evolution of the alternative theatre movement in Poland after Grotowski's emigration was [Włodzimierz Staniewski](#). Grotowski invited Staniewski in 1971 to join the closed paratheatrical group, that is, the small group that initially worked on Paratheatre in the early 1970s before the work was opened up to much larger groups. In the later work, those who had been in the small group became leaders or guides of the large groups. Staniewski quickly became integral to this work and led some of his own projects. However, in 1975, Staniewski decided that he wanted to do theatre rather than Paratheatre, so he left Grotowski and moved to Lublin, on the other side of Poland from where Grotowski was working. In 1977, he founded his own company, the [Gardzience Center for Theatre Practices](#), a group that in turn has spawned several other companies led by former members of Gardzience.

Grotowski and Gardzience, as well as several Polish theatre groups that have worked with them, tend to be lumped together in Poland under the rubric of "anthropological theatre."²⁷ This concept, as used in Polish discourse about theatre, differs somewhat from Eugenio Barba's definition of [Theatre Anthropology](#): "Theatre Anthropology is the study of the performer's pre-expressive scenic behaviour which constitutes the basis of different genres, roles and personal or collective traditions." Theatre Anthropology, as defined by Barba, seems akin to what Grotowski was trying to investigate in his Theatre of Sources, Objective Drama, and Art as vehicle phases, namely the study of the impulses that precede action. Gardzience, on the other hand, especially in its early expeditions to remote villages in eastern Poland, collected folkloric material such as songs and dances; in other words, it was actually doing a type of anthropological research and then using that research to create performances. Since the mid-1990s, Gardzience's research has been related to ancient Greek theatre; it has treated song fragments recorded on ancient Greek papyri and dances recorded on vases, as well as surviving folk music from the Balkans, as the raw material for reconstructing the sources for performance. We might say, then, that Grotowski engaged in Theatre Anthropology while Gardzience makes theatre based on anthropological research.



Ewa Wójciak in the Theatre of the Eighth Day's *Wormwood*, 1985. Reproduced courtesy of the photographer.

Gardzienice has continuously existed as a theatre and “center for theatre practices” since 1977, and quite a few alternative theatre companies and other cultural organizations that are currently active in Poland have been founded by its ex-members. Offshoots of the Gardzienice strand of Polish alternative theatre include [Chorea Theatre](#), founded by Tomasz Rodowicz (Gardzienice member for twenty-eight years); the [Music of the Borderlands Foundation](#), founded by Jan Bernad (nine years); the [Borderland of Arts, Cultures, and Nations Center](#), founded by Krzysztof Czyżewski (four years); [Węgałty Theatre](#) and the [Schola of Węgałty Theatre](#), both cofounded by Wolfgang Niklaus (one year); and Teatr ZAR, founded by Jarosław Fret (one year). All of these organizations share some artistic preoccupations with one stage or another of Gardzienice’s work, and most of them with Grotowski’s work as well. For example, many of their performances are intensely physical, so much so that they can almost be better appreciated as dance than theatre. Others are interested in what Grotowski calls in Tyszka’s article “anonymous chants from ancient times,” and base their performances on ethnomusicological research. Still others focus on exploring and preserving the culture of Poland’s multiethnic borderland regions, using music and theatre as tools to do so, which was a focus of Gardzienice in its early years. These groups are at pains to distinguish themselves from one another, and also to emphasize their differences from both Grotowski and Gardzienice.

“Grotland”

The “anthropological theatre” rubric doesn’t fit all these groups very well, although it is in common use in Polish discourse about them. In an article in *Slavic and East European Performance* in 2008, I suggested that rather than thinking of these groups as producing the same type of theatre, we think of them as all inhabiting the same artistic territory, which I named “Grotland.”²⁸ Grotland does not exist only in Poland but also outside of Poland, for example, at the [Workcenter](#) of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in Pontedera, Italy; at Eugenio Barba’s [Odinteatret](#) in Denmark; and at the [New World Performance Laboratory](#) in Ohio. It encompasses groups that are called “anthropological theatres” in Poland, and groups

that are seldom if ever mentioned in the same breath as those theatres. The post-Grotowski groups whose work is profiled in this issue of *The Mime Journal* are all inhabitants of Grotland—or at least visitors there.

The Theatre of the Eighth Day, mentioned several times earlier, is the subject of “Madness and Method” by Lech Raczak, the company’s artistic director from 1968 until 1993. Raczak wholeheartedly adopted the Grotowski methods that Osiński introduced to the company and Spychalski trained them in during the late sixties. The physical exercises—the Plastiques and Corporals—became the basis for the Eighth Day’s own training, which the members continue to use today. This training enables the Eighth Day actors to perform in a very physical style that theatre historian Magdalena Gołaczyńska calls acting “with their whole bodies, emotionally, with a manifestation of feeling characteristic of the ‘Eighth’ style.”²⁹ Raczak’s staging methods were also based on Grotowski’s principle of the dialectics of apotheosis and derision. The main difference between the Eighth Day’s productions and Grotowski’s is the subject matter: Raczak has stated that at the time they were investigating Grotowski’s methods, the Eighth Day also felt “a kind of duty—to cut ourselves free from those mythical concerns and move towards our contemporary problems.”³⁰ This resulted in dynamic physical theatre that also makes political statements, and hence, is thought of in Poland as being the polar opposite of the “anthropological theatres.”

Also not very “anthropological” but sometimes included among the anthropological theatres is Studium Teatralne, the subject of Katharine Noon’s article “Challenge, Chaos, and Collaboration: Two Weeks with Studium Teatralne.” Studium was founded by Piotr Borowski, who took part in one of Grotowski’s paratheatrical projects led by Staniewski during the early 1970s and then joined Gardzienice, where he was a member for six years, participating in the creation of Gardzienice’s first two productions; he then worked for seven years at the Workcenter in Pontedera, before returning home to Warsaw to found Studium Teatralne in 1995. Like the Theatre of the Eighth Day, Studium is a dynamic physical theatre that bases its work on physical actions. Although they are not political in the sense that the Theatre of the Eighth Day is, they take as their subject matter themes that resonate in Poland today.



Rehearsal for a student presentation of Teatr Pieśń Kozła’s MA class of 2009–10. Photo by Arkadiusz Susidko.



Rafal Dziemidok and Leszek Bzdyl in Teatr Dada von Bzdülów's *Several Witty Observations (à la Gombrowicz)*. Photographers: Iwona and Jarek Cieslikowscy

Another group that split off from Gardzienice is the Song of the Goat Theatre (Teatr Pieśń Kozła), the subject of Anna Zubrzycki's article "Actor Training and Techniques in Pieśń Kozła Theatre." Zubrzycki was a member of Gardzienice for fifteen years before leaving and founding Song of the Goat with Grzegorz Bral, who had been a Gardzienice member for five years. The Song of the Goat was first housed in the Grotowski Institute, and they take their educational mission as seriously as Grotowski did, even collaborating with British institutions of higher education to bestow master's degrees in their technique. Song of the Goat's intense physicality as well as their musicality is derived from Grotowski by way of Gardzienice. As Zubrzycki describes in her article, the group has moved from their eponymous production, which was based on Greek mythology (very similar to what Gardzienice was doing at the time), first to an ancient myth from another culture, and then to their own musical-and-movement-inflected adaptations of Andrzej Szczypiorski's novel *A Mass for Arras, Macbeth, Lear, and The Cherry Orchard*.

Studio Matejka, the subject of "Searching for Something a Little Visionary," is another inhabitant of Grotland. It is an offshoot of Teatr ZAR, the resident company of the Grotowski Institute. Matej Matejka still continues to perform with ZAR, a company that shares an intense physicality and musicality with Song of the Goat. Studio Matejka is housed in the Grotowski Institute, where it is considered part of the Institute's "educational program." The members of Studio Matejka are principally engaged in physical training, a training based in part on Grotowski's methods, and in developing their own physically rigorous performances.

Finally, we have the work of Dada von Bzdülów, the subject of "Between Body and Spirit." Dada stands on what I would say is the boundary of Grotland. It is really a modern dance company, but one that is heavily influenced by experimental theatre. In part this results from the consequences of the peculiar funding methods for the arts under Communism, when there was fairly ample funding for theatre, including student theatres. The student-theatre milieu provided the social incubator from which both Theatre of the Eighth Day and Leszek Bzdyl emerged. There was virtually no funding, however, for modern

dance, so dance companies, such as Tomaszewski's Pantomime Theatre in Wrocław, which was also a dance company, had to call itself a theatre. Bzdyl claims that his dancers' bodies have been influenced by "a Grotowski sensibility"; however, he rejects "anthropological theatre" and thinks that European dance theatre (except for Dada) is "indebted too much to the Grotowski method."

Bzdyl also says in the interview that Polish dramatic theatre "has always been very physical and psychological." In my opinion, however, the physicality of Polish theatre—whether of those theatres discussed in this special issue, of other so-called anthropological theatres in Poland, or of mainstream Polish repertory theatres—can be at least partly attributed to Grotowski. In other words, it hasn't *always* been so physical, but it is now. Grotowski belongs to the world, not just to Poland, but in Poland he has moved if not totally into the mainstream, a lot closer to it than he is in the rest of the world. The work of the Grotowski Institute has gone a long way toward legitimizing Grotowski as a master acting theoretician and a thinker intimately connected with both world theatre and trends in Polish theatre. We can in part thank the various directors and programming directors of the Institute, from Zbigniew Osipiński to Jarosław Fret and Dariusz Kosiński, for not only keeping Grotowski front and center in theatre discourse in Poland, but also for making connections between Grotowski's collaborators, such as Mirecka, and those who are interested in Grotowski's way of thinking about theatre and life.

Schechner's statement, "Grotowski's influence and importance is deep, wide, abiding, and growing,"³¹ probably holds true even more for Poland than it does for the rest of the world. This special issue of *The Mime Journal* brings to the English-speaking reader two texts that chronicle the work of Grotowski directly: the notebooks of Rena Mirecka and an account of three Grotowski talks at the 1996 ISTA conference. Mirecka's diary is an invaluable record of the earliest days of the Laboratory Theatre, where we can see the "Grotowski method" and Mirecka herself developing into what they eventually became. Tyszk's description gives us an insight into Grotowski's own thoughts about the various stages of his work just three years before his death. In addition, the issue gives us a sampling of Grotowski-inflected work in Poland today: evidence of Grotowski's "deep, wide, abiding, and growing" influence on the theatre and performance art of his home country.

Notes

¹ Richard Schechner, preface to *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, ed. Lisa Wolford and Richard Schechner, paperback ed. (London: Routledge, 2001), xxv.

² *Ibid.*

³ Zbigniew Osipiński, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, trans. and ed. Lillian Vallee and Robert Findlay (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 17.

⁴ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. Eugenio Barba (1968; repr., London: Methuen, 1975), 101–41.

⁵ James Slowiak and Jairo Cuesta, *Jerzy Grotowski* (London: Routledge, 2007), 138–39.

⁶ Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, 101.

⁷ Quoted in Slowiak and Cuesta, 124.

⁸ Quoted in François Kahn, "The Vigil [Czuwanie]," in Wolford and Schechner, 227.

⁹ Quoted in Wolford and Schechner, 214.

¹⁰ Jerzy Grotowski, "Tu es le fils de quelqu'un," in Wolford and Schechner, 298.

¹¹ Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions* (London: Routledge, 1995), 99.

¹² *Ibid.*, 95.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁴ For a discussion of Grotowski's tactics of accommodation with the Communist regime, see Seth Baumrin, "Ketmanship in Opole: Jerzy Grotowski and the Price of Artistic Freedom," *TDR: The Drama Review* 53, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 49–77.

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- ¹⁵ Kazimierz Braun, "Where Is Grotowski?" *TDR: The Drama Review* 30, no. 3 (Fall 1986): 236.
- ¹⁶ Aneta Kyzioł, "Mistrz i igrarz: Rozmowa z prof. Leszkiem Kolankiewiczem, badaczem teatru Jerzego Grotowskiego" [Master and Liar: A Conversation with Prof. Leszek Kolankiewicz, Scholar of Jerzy Grotowski's Theatre], *Polityka*, June 27, 2009. My translation.
- ¹⁷ Agata Adamięcka-Sitek and Weronika Szczawińska, "The Gender of the Performer," [Didaskalia: Gazeta Teatralna, English issue, no. 1 \(2012\)](#): 49.
- ¹⁸ Agata Adamięcka-Sitek, "Grotowski, kobiety i homoseksualiści. Na marginesach 'człowieczego dramatu,'" *Didaskalia: Gazeta Teatralna*, no. 112 (2012): 94-105.
- ¹⁹ Richard Schechner, "Exoduction: Shape-shifter, Shaman, Trickster, Artist, Adept, Director, Leader, Grotowski," in Wolford and Schechner, 486.
- ²⁰ Weronika Szczawińska, "Poza celą Konrada" [Beyond Konrad's Cell], *Dialog* 47, no. 10 (October 2003): 131. My translation.
- ²¹ Leszek Kolankiewicz and Adamięcka-Sitek have published a series of letters in *Didaskalia* in which they debate the extent of Grotowski's sexism and whether *Acropolis* should be regarded as a "great gay manifesto." See Agata Adamięcka-Sitek and Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Korespondencja," *Didaskalia: Gazeta Teatralna*, no. 114 (2013): 93-102.
- ²² Richard Schechner, "Introduction: Theatre of Productions, 1957-69," in Wolford and Schechner, 23.
- ²³ Quoted in Osiński, 110.
- ²⁴ Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, 50.
- ²⁵ Aldona Jawłowska, *Więcej niż teatr* [More Than Theatre] (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1988), 36. My translation.
- ²⁶ Elżbieta Matynia, "Życie teatrem" [Life by Means of Theatre], *Dialog* 25, no. 9 (1980): 107. My translation.
- ²⁷ For example, in Tadeusz Kornaś, *Between Theatre and Anthropology: Two Strands of Polish Alternative Theatre*, trans. Caryl Swift (Warsaw: Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute, 2007), 4.
- ²⁸ See Kathleen Cioffi, "ZAR and Other Microcultures of 'Grotland,'" *Slavic and East European Performance* 28, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 20-29.
- ²⁹ Magdalena Gołaczyńska, *Mozaika współczesności: Teatr alternatywny w Polsce po roku 1989* [A Mozaic of Contemporary Life: Alternative Theatre in Poland after 1989] (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2002), 116. My translation.
- ³⁰ Quoted in Tony Howard, "'A Piece of Our Life': The Theatre of the Eighth Day," *New Theatre Quarterly* 2 (1986): 292.
- ³¹ Schechner, preface to Wolford and Schechner, xxv.