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September 2006

Personal Portfolio

Actor Training Enquiry

Getting to Grips With Grotowski

To what extent is it possible to identify Grotowski's main principles and practices, (a) in each phase of his practice, and (b) running throughout all phases of his practice? To what extent might it be possible for a modern British actor trainer to successfully incorporate any of these principles and/or practices into his/her own work in a mainstream drama school environment?

Introduction

Jerzy Grotowski is widely acknowledged as a protagonist in the field of drama, yet there is widespread uncertainty as to the nature of his role. His work is "well known and obscure simultaneously" (Schechner, 1997d: xxv). The question: "What is Grotowski actually doing?" seems to recur" (Wolford, 2001: 118), or more specifically: "What are the essential characteristics of Grotowski's approach to actor training?" and "What elements can be seen as consistent throughout the various phases of his work?" (Wolford, 2003:193). Despite these questions having been asked, "we are still after Grotowski in the sense of tracking him down and working out the value of his reflections and practices" (Allain, 2005: 58). Answers are still sought. Moreover, as a

'fledgling' contemporary British actor trainer with a background in Polish theatre, it is crucial that I 'get to grips with Grotowski'; i.e., that I identify his essential principles and practices, and, on the basis of this, analyse the extent to which Grotowski might play a role in my own future practice. With his emphasis on individual exploration, Grotowski would agree that a thorough personal investigation is justified. But would he agree that his work could be 'used' at all?

Grotowski featured (as one would expect) in my undergraduate studies in Theatre Studies and Polish at the University of Glasgow and the Jagiellonian University, Krakow (albeit relatively briefly). However, Grotowski did not seem to feature - at least not by name - in my training at LAMDA or in classes I observed at the PWST Theatre Academy in Warsaw. Miroslaw Kocur, who participated in the paratheatre phase of Grotowski's work agrees that Grotowski was completely unrecognised in Polish theatre schools. He points out that whilst Grotowski's work was gathering international acclaim, no-one invited him to do a workshop in Warsaw.¹

Yet over the course of my studies at Central School of Speech and Drama, Grotowski has come back 'into frame'. The international significance of his work was reiterated in the History of Acting classes on my MA course. A surprising number of presentations at the Central Postgraduate Conference made reference to Grotowski and/or other Polish theatre practitioners/groups (such as Gardzienice and Piesń Kozła). Whilst on a placement with a second year BA Acting class at Central, I observed elements of Grotowski exercises being used. Our MA Actor Training and Coaching class had a one day

'Grotowski' workshop. With due respect to the actor trainers, in each of these situations, I questioned the validity, worth (and sometimes the ethics) of the use of these exercises. I asked myself whether the work could (or should) claim to be 'Grotowski', and whether it had any real connection to the rest of the work being done. I had seemed to 'meet' a different Grotowski in each of these situations and at times I didn't recognise him. I began to ask what he really 'looked' like. I felt that with my background in Polish theatre, I ought to be sure about Grotowski, but my uncertainties began to mount. I questioned whether it was possible, or desirable, to 'teach' Grotowski (a) at all, and (b) as part of a general actor training programme. All this forms the motivation and justification for this study.

As I began to explore Grotowski's work further, I was relieved to find that I was not alone in my confusion. This actor training enquiry will firstly set out evidence from a variety of sources to support the notion that there is widespread ambiguity, uncertainty, and sometimes disagreement surrounding Grotowski's work. I will highlight the main causes of this confusion. Next, I will give some brief biographical information on Grotowski. I will then outline the main phases of Grotowski's work, before going on to look at each phase in detail. I will examine the principles and practices of each phase (assessing the extent to which it is possible to uncover them), and continually question the extent to which these principles and/or practice may be of use to the modern British actor trainer in a mainstream drama school context. I will then summarise and assess what I see as the main principles and practices running throughout the phases. I will then consider critical opinion on the

relevance of Grotowski's work to other practice and discuss remaining arguments for and against the incorporation of Grotowski's work into modern British actor training. I will then present my conclusions.

Uncertainties and Ambiguities

Grotowski's work has an "admittedly esoteric dimension". (Wolford, 2001: 193). Peter Brook states that:

"around the name of Grotowski – like a rolling stone – have come to attach themselves, to graft themselves, all kinds of confusions, excrescences and misunderstandings" (Brook, 1997: 379).

Brook describes Grotowski as "...a deeply simple man, who carries out research which is profoundly pure", and he asks:

"[h]ow is it possible, then, that over the years, the result of this simplicity has been to create both complications and confusion?" (Brook, 1997: 381).

As Thomas Richards strongly and clearly puts it, these confusions have been spread through 'Grotowski workshops',

"conducted by someone who studied with Grotowski in a session of five days, for example twenty-five years ago. Such 'instructors', of course, often pass on grave errors and misunderstandings." (Richards 1995: 4)

There is always the danger that any theatre practitioner's work may be misinterpreted, but this seems particularly pertinent in the case of Grotowski given the esoteric and at times deeply personal nature of his work. Again, Peter Brook refers to an "ultra-rapid diffusion" of Grotowski's work which "has not always gone through qualified people" (Brook, 1997: 191).

As Richards states, this misrepresentation means that

“Grotowski’s research might be mistakenly construed as something wild and structureless, where people throw themselves on the floor, scream a lot, and have pseudo-cathartic experiences.”
(Richards, 1995: 4).

Unfortunately, those (relatively few) people who studied with Grotowski in depth have rarely documented their experiences. This is particularly problematic when researching the later ‘post-theatrical’ phases of his work, as we shall see later. “The people who know aren’t talking – at least not openly, at least not now, and possibly not ever.” (Wolford, 1997a: 4).

Grotowski himself chose to be very selective as to how he disseminated information about his work once he realised, after the publication of *Towards a Poor Theatre* in 1968 that people were beginning to misinterpret and misrepresent his practices. He decided to stop recording the exercises of the Laboratory Theatre, and towards the end of his life he was careful to formally and publicly pass on responsibility for continuing his work to Thomas Richards.

There is also a fundamental question here: why should any researcher conducting his/her own private study publicise his work before s/he has drawn his/her conclusions? Perhaps Grotowski did not feel he had reached his conclusions until the last years of his life – he never stopped investigating. Perhaps he was constantly refining his work until it was ready, and maybe he has a right to privacy over the earlier stages. However, the publication of *Towards a Poor Theatre* rendered that impossible, and this book is one reason why Grotowski is mainly known for his Poor Theatre phase.

One can surmise already that Peter Brook, Lisa Wolford, Richard Schechner and Thomas Richards all have doubts over the extent to which Grotowski's work can effectively and authentically be incorporated into other people's practice. Grotowski himself shared these concerns, and preferred to pass on his work directly rather than allow it to become diluted or distorted.

It is clear that there is some difficulty in establishing exactly what Grotowski's work entailed, both in terms of his principles and practices. In fact, "...even his immediate colleagues at times had difficulty in understanding what he meant " because he was so "frequently enigmatic" (Benedetti, 2005: 231). New research projects leading up to "the Year of Grotowski" in 2009 may provide some new insight into Grotowski's work. Paul Allain, for example, is currently heading a research project investigating Grotowski's reception and influence in Britain. For the meantime, however, this uncertainty leads me to believe even at this stage that any modern actor claiming to 'teach Grotowski' or even to 'use Grotowski's techniques' ought to do so with caution, and with a thorough understanding of each of the phases of his work and their socio-historical context. It is possible only to a certain extent to identify the principles and practices of each phase, though this is possible to a comparatively far greater extent with the first phase. All the phases will be outlined after a brief biographical framework is presented.

A Brief Biography

Born in 1933 in Rzeszow, Eastern Poland, Grotowski remained in Poland throughout the Second World War. In 1951, whilst Poland was caught in the

stranglehold of Stalinism, Grotowski began studying as an actor at the PWST Theatre Academy in Krakow. From 1948 until 1953 Socialist Realism was the official artistic doctrine governing all media in Poland, and stringent censorship prevented artistic freedom. Art of any kind had to endorse the ideals of Socialist society. With Stalin's death in 1953, the stranglehold began to weaken, having a significant impact on Polish culture although the censor continued to exert power. Grotowski graduated in 1955 and then attended a directing course at the State Institute of Theatre Arts (GITIS) in Moscow. In 1956 he travelled to Central Asia and became interested in Eastern philosophy.

From 1956-1959 Grotowski trained as a director in Krakow, and had his professional directorial debut at the Stary Teatr in Krakow with Ionesco's *The Chairs*. The Stary Theatre is one of the main traditional, proscenium arch theatres in Krakow. This may come as a surprise to those who associate Grotowski mainly with his 'Poor Theatre' phase, which rejected traditional staging, props, make up and so on, along with the notion of theatre as entertainment. The Stary Teatr is essentially a mainstream venue, where Grotowski worked as director 'in the classical sense'. It seems to me that this aspect of Grotowski's working life is either not known about by some, or is forgotten or overlooked by many. Grotowski stated that he moved away from this kind of theatre because he felt his work was beginning to become automated; that he was constantly thinking about the next project. He began to search for a greater truth, as we shall explore later. He chose to break out

of the traditional structures of the theatre industry, in terms of both the form and content of his work.

In 1959, Grotowski met Marcel Marceau in Paris and was impressed by his work (Mackey, 2000: 332). One might suppose that this had some influence on Grotowski's emphasis on the use of the actor's body to create sets and props. Other influences will be highlighted throughout this study, as will further biographical details as relevant. Grotowski left Poland when Martial Law was declared in 1981, and he died in 1999.

The main stages of Grotowski's work – an overview

As with all scholarship around Grotowski, establishing the main phases of his work is not straightforward. There is some inconsistency over the names, dates, and number of phases. Since we are aiming at clarity here, we will focus on points of agreement and take *The Grotowski Sourcebook* as an authority in the matter of names and dates of the phases of work.

In *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford give the first of five stages as “**Theatre Of Productions**”, **1957-1969**. Sally Mackey calls this the “Theatre of Performance” and gives the dates as 1959 – 1969, but we can assume that they are talking about the same work. This is the work at the Theatre of 13 Rows, and (with the same company under a different name), the Laboratory Theatre. This phase is also referred to by some as the Poor Theatre phase.

The second phase has been referred to as the Theatre of Participation, but is widely known as “**Paratheatre**” (1970-1975). This was followed by “**Theatre of Sources**” (1976-1982), “**Objective Drama**” (1983-1986), and “**Art as Vehicle**”, from 1986 onwards (Schechner and Wolford, 1997).

We will now look at each stage in detail, establishing the extent to which it is possible to identify the main principles and practices of each phase, and asking to what extent a modern British actor trainer might be able to make use of any of these principles and/or practices in a mainstream drama school context.

“Theatre Of Productions”, 1957-1969

This first stage of Grotowski’s work is undoubtedly his best known. It was during this phase that Eugenio Barba joined the Laboratory Theatre company as Grotowski’s assistant, in 1961. Barba later edited *Towards a Poor Theatre*, which was first published in Denmark in 1968, near the end of this phase. In 1965, the company moved to Wrocław and changed its name to ‘Laboratory Theatre: Institute of Research into Acting Method’. In this same year, actor Ryszard Cieslak received international recognition for his performance in the Laboratory Theatre’s production based on Calderon’s *The Constant Prince*.

In 1966, Peter Brook invited Grotowski to conduct a workshop with RSC actors whom he was directing in a production of *U.S.* The result “was profoundly disturbing to actors trained in the English tradition”, says Sally

Mackey, but unfortunately she doesn't elaborate. (Mackey, 2000: 333) This would, however, suggest that Peter Brook didn't foresee that it might not be possible to successfully use Grotowski's work (and here it is clearly the genuine article), with people from a mainstream British drama school background.

In 1967, Grotowski gave workshops at New York University's School of the Arts, where he met Richard Schechner and Joseph Chaikin, whom he influenced greatly.

Now we will investigate the main principles and practices of the Theatre of Productions phase. Richard Schechner states that over the twelve years of this first phase, Grotowski "evolved a way of actor training, a style of mise-en-scene, and a method of textual montage". He cautions that "one ought to be careful not to confuse or conflate" these three – they are "in conversation with each other, but are distinct." (Schechner, 1997b: 26). One should also be aware that Grotowski's opinions and practices changed over these twelve years as he experimented and found what worked and what didn't.

One of the main, clearly discernible principles of this first phase was that the actor was at the core of the theatrical event. Grotowski believed that theatre should not try to compete with film or television, but to focus on what makes it unique – the live 'communion' between audience and spectator. This relationship is a key concern throughout the phases of Grotowski's work.

We will now look in more detail at Grotowski's actor training (including the role of the body, the self and character). We will also consider the approach to text, the audience-performer relationship, and staging. The principles and practices of these areas can be identified relatively clearly, allowing us to consider the extent to which they might be of use to a modern British actor trainer.

Grotowski's actor training is famously physical. However, it is not just physical, it is psycho-physical. After improvisations and during physical exercises, actors were always encouraged to note not only what they did, but also what associations came to mind. Grotowski warned against focusing only on the physical and omitting the associations. I would suggest, however, doing the exercises without the psychological associations could be considered one of the main misuses of Grotowski's work. It should be noted:

“The purpose of the work with memories and images was not to play them out...as a type of internal projection, but rather to arrive to a state in which one does not anticipate or prescribe what details will emerge” (Wolford, 2003 :203).

One particular practice that Grotowski used was that of structured improvisation. He believed that actors needed to know where the improvisation was going to go before it began, i.e. that they knew certain points of contact they had to make with others. Without this, the work would descend into chaos, he felt. He said that such a 'score of actions' was also necessary for an actor playing a role using a traditional text. This will be returned to later. This practice of structured improvisation is one that I believe could survive out of context and could be applied very simply.

Grotowski's "holy actor" was one whose body was capable of impressive physical feats, and who would reveal his true, most intimate self on stage:

"If [the actor's] body restricts itself to demonstrating what it is – something that any average person can do – then it is not an obedient instrument capable of performing a spiritual act" (Grotowski in Wolford, 2003: 197).

The principle behind this was that the actor would set an example to the spectator, provoking them to see themselves as capable of change. By extension, this would inspire the spectator to think politically and to make changes in society. As Shomit Mitter confirms, Grotowski's theatre had a social and moral mission. It was "committed to progress, proposing a new secular and rational ethic" (Mitter, 2005: 80).

Grotowski's psychophysical acting and highly developed vocal technique

"synthesises Stanislavsky's "work on the self", Meyerhold's bio-mechanics, French and Polish mime, yoga, tai chi chuan, and original movements devised by Grotowski and his actors during long hours and months of workshop research." (Schechner, 1997b: 26).

Grotowski amended the physical exercises he used for each individual, giving them prescribed, specific exercises just outside of their abilities, so that they constantly had to challenge themselves. A modern British actor trainer does not have the privilege of working with actors on one technique over a long period of time. This is one of many things preventing us from using Grotowski's techniques honestly and successfully – they require a lot of time and focus on one way of working. Also, in today's society, one has to consider the safety issues surrounding pushing people to their physical limits

(let alone their psychological limits). Grotowski's physical training does not seem suited to a weekly slot on a busy, varied timetable. However, we can share the principle of the importance of having an expressive body, and the belief in the effectiveness of psycho-physical methods.

Richards explains the principle of self as it is in Grotowski's practice, at least at the start of this phase:

“The underlying theory proposes that what is most intimate and hidden in each individual, what is core or deep or secret, is the same as what is archetypal or universal. In other words, to search out the “intimate, most personal self” is to find the Universal Self.”
(Schechner, 1997b: 27).

This is extremely interesting, however there would be huge ethical considerations around asking drama students to reveal their “intimate, most personal self”. However, although

“the work of the actors concerned intimate materials about themselves...this material was not expressed in a personal or psychologically naturalistic way (as in some of the actor training exercises of Lee Strasberg). Rather Grotowski and his colleagues moved...closer to archetype”. (Schechner, 1997b: 25).

Deciphering the exact role of character in Grotowski's early work is difficult.

Whilst on one hand Wolford (1997a: 7) says that “actors in the Laboratory Theatre were not concerned with questions of character or with placing themselves in the given circumstances of a fictional role” sb7, Mitter says that his actors had to first embody their role in a Stanislavskian sense.

(Mitter, 2005: 87). Grotowski himself offers clarification, as seems to be the case with many points of confusion.

Grotowski said that an actor playing Hamlet “must not illustrate Hamlet, he must meet Hamlet. The actor must create within the context of his own life and being”, and “one asks the actor who plays Hamlet to recreate his own Hamlet”. (Grotowski in Hoffman and Schechner, 1997: 53).

Similarly, in the production *Akropolis*, set in Auschwitz, “the actors did not play prisoners, they played what they were doing – people plunged into absurd, detailed routine”. (Grotowski in Hoffman and Schechner, 1997: 52).

This illustrates the principle and practice of finding comparisons between one’s own life and the role or the text. This is extremely useful to a modern British actor trainer and is widely used in a number of approaches to acting. From this point of view, this element of Grotowski’s work can be successfully used to a very large extent. However, in Grotowski’s theatre “the locus of significance is...not the character but the self.” (Mitter, 2005: 86). The role is “primarily a tool for self-exposure”, making possible “a greater understanding of the self”. From our point of view, whilst greater self-knowledge might occur as a result of playing a particular role, it is certainly not the principle aim.

One psycho-physical practice developed in this stage is that of ‘via negativa’. Rather than trying to equip actors with a number of skills, Grotowski came to the conclusion that it was necessary for an actor to “know what not to do, what obstructs him...this is what I mean by via negativa: process of elimination” (Mitter, 2005: 95). I agree with this notion to an extent, and in my own experience Alexander Technique can be extremely effective in helping

actors to eliminate psycho-physical blocks, so I would hope that Alexander would form part of the training of any student actors as I was working with. Turning now to Grotowski's attitude to text: just as the actor meets the role, Grotowski meets the text. He developed a practice of creating textual montages. Literary and dramatic texts were taken as the starting point for creativity. He made "text-collages" from Polish and Greek classics and from the Bible. He said that his stagings were "scalpels with which to operate on and dissect both the souls of the performers and the condition of European society and culture". Any parts of the text with which the company could neither agree nor disagree were cut.

Akropolis, by Wyspianski, is a classical play "organised around a Polish sanctuary: the Royal Palace of Krakow". The Palace was no longer a 'sanctuary' for the members of the company, "it is not what it was for Wyspianski in the 19th century: the cemetery of our civilization. That's why Wyspianski called the Royal Palace the Akropolis: it was Europe's ruined past." (Grotowski in Hoffman and Schechner, 1997: 50). Grotowski and the company asked themselves "painful and paradoxical questions: What is the cemetery of our civilization?...Auschwitz", came the answer, and so *Akropolis* was translated to a prison of war.

Kordian, a Polish classic by Słowacki, was set in a psychiatric institution, and "the greatest myths of Poland were analysed as the myths of craziness":

"Kordian's motivation – to give his blood for the nation – was the kind of motivation that was real to everyone...certain very deep national

values were attacked in order to revalue them” (Grotowski in Hoffman and Schechner, 1997: 48).

As Grotowski says,

“...it might be difficult for a foreigner to understand the associative mechanism which operated in *Kordian*. My nation has been faced for centuries with the question of heroism and sacrifice.”
(Hoffman and Schechner, 1997: 49).

It is clear that Grotowski’s poor theatre was set in a social context very different from our own, and that this inevitably shaped its principles and practices. The practice of creating textual montages is one that could well be experimented with in a modern drama school context. It would encourage creativity and a real connection with the text, requiring actors to make clear personal connections with the text, and to boil the story down to its central themes as they saw them.

The final element of practice to discuss in this phase is the audience-performer relationship and the staging. These were, as we shall see, inextricably linked. This area of his work is, again, well documented and it is therefore possible to identify its principles and practices to a large extent.

Grotowski took “a constructivist, then environmental approach to space”, bringing spectators and performers into very close contact with each other, (Schechner, 1997b: 27 and expressing themes of the production through the use of space. It is often assumed that the poor theatre used no props or set at all, but this is not the case. They simply stripped these elements down to the bare minimum and incorporated them into the action. Jozef Szajna

worked with the company as a dramaturg. His design for *Akropolis* is shown as Appendix 1.

Forefathers' Eve (Dziady) by Poland's national bard Adam Mickiewicz was the first Laboratory Theatre production to use "wholly environmental theatre staging, bringing actors face-to-face with spectators." (Schechner, 1997b: 24).

Rather than people being divided into viewers and actors, they were "participants of the first and second order." (Schechner, 1997b: 24).

However, for *The Constant Prince*, the audience and performers were kept strictly apart. The audience was

"almost hidden behind a wall. They watched something much lower down – as medical students observe an operation...there was no relation whatsoever between the actors and spectators. None. They were watching something prohibited." (Grotowski in Hoffman and Schechner, 1997: 53).

By now Grotowski had concluded: "it is not essential that actors and spectators be mixed. The important thing is that the relation between the actors and the spectators in space be a significant one." (Grotowski in Hoffman and Schechner, 1997: 53).

Grotowski's beliefs on how to treat the audience changed significantly throughout this phase. At first he was "tempted to treat the spectators as actors." In *Kordian*, "the entire space became a big room in a mental hospital" and some of the spectators were treated as patients by the 'Chief Doctor'.

This left some of the spectators "furious". (Grotowski in Hoffman and Schechner, 1997: 48).

Grotowski felt it problematic that spectators had been 'cast' but could not react naturally. He felt he had "simply disturbed their natural function as observers". The group felt that they were "exerting pressure, tyranny of sorts", and that the spectators "simply be as they are, that is to say witnesses, witnesses of a human act." (Mitter, 2005: 100). In Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Grotowski

"found a direct word-for-word situation. The dramatic function of the spectators and the function of the spectators as spectator were the same. For the first time we saw authentic spontaneity" (Grotowski in Hoffman and Schechner, 1997: 50).

It would only be possible to implement in performances which require 'witnesses' of some sort as an integral part of the story.

Whilst staging is not the domain of the actor trainer, it is the actor trainer's responsibility to prepare an actor to play any space. This particular aspect of Grotowski's work lends the idea of experimenting in class with different spatial relationships between performers and spectators.

It was the exploration of the performer-spectator relationship that took Grotowski into the next phase of his work:

"Examining the nature of theatre...we came to the conclusion that its essence lies in direct contact between people. This in mind, we have decided to go beyond art into reality, since it is in real life rather than on the artistic plane that such contacts are possible" (Grotowski in Mitter, 2005: 101)

In some ways Grotowski is here rejecting theatre completely. Indeed, Grotowski confirms that he "found it necessary to eliminate the notion of theatre (an actor in front of a spectator) and what remained was a notion of meeting." (Mitter, 2005: 102).

From our point of view, we have to continue to strive for direct, genuine contact between actors and honest communication with the audience.

At the end of this phase, Grotowski:

“began to think in terms of ‘another, hitherto unknown, form of art beyond the traditional division of onlooker and active person’...Encounters with the public now took the form of communal events in which the guests were encouraged to take the initiative” (Grotowski in Mitter, 2005: 102).

He also began to search for truth, and:

“if one is looking for truth then there are certain things one cannot do with a clear conscience: for instance, mount a rostrum and pretend, perform a tragedy or a comedy in order to be applauded.” (Schechner, 1997c: 209).

He moved away from theatre, as we shall go on to discuss. Before doing so, we can conclude that it is possible to incorporate certain elements of this first phase of Grotowski’s practice into a modern British actor training context without trying to replicate or distort Grotowski. It is possible to borrow from his ideas around environmental staging. It is possible to share his belief in psycho-physical training and his principle of tailoring the training to the individual. It is also essential to share his belief in the pursuit of truthful acting. It is interesting to consider the possibility of applying his notion of archetypes to traditional texts, and experimenting with the idea of ‘meeting’ the character. However, we should not be tempted to use ‘Grotowski exercises, especially not in isolation and especially not without the use of associations. These exercises were designed to prepare actors for specific performances. They cannot be replicated exactly as the conditions cannot be replicated that shaped them.

“Paratheatre” (1970-1975)

It is far more difficult to ascertain what were the main principles and practices of this second phase. Indeed, “the scarcity of documentation from the work of the paratheatrical and Theatre of Sources periods presents enormous complexities”. (Wolford, 1997:197).

In the Paratheatre phase, the principle of prioritising the ‘communion’ between the audience and spectator, and the emphasis on the self both remained key, whilst the practice changed entirely. In this phase, Grotowski moved away from theatre towards a ‘life experience’ for all involved (Mackey, 2000: 333). Grotowski “ turned to the forests and fields of south west Poland and an isolated, semi-derelict lamb barn in Brzezinka” to engage in a practice “beyond theatre with no observers or audience – led by actors of Teatr Laboratorium but with a new team including Wlodzimierz Staniewski (later of Gardzienice)...”(Allain, 2005: 48). Paratheatre “welcomed any and all of good will who could act on their desire to become “open.” (Schechner, 1997c: 211). Interested people were invited to submit their details to Ryszard Cieslak.

Paratheatre grew to involve hundreds and later thousands of people, culminating in the Theatre of Nations in June-July 1975 in Warsaw and Wroclaw in an event at which 4500 people were present.

The structure of the work differed greatly from that of the Poor Theatre. The work of the paratheatrical phase was based on “improvised activities involving spontaneous contact between a team of experienced workleaders and a number of outside participants” (Wolford, 1997a: 9). Grotowski continued to push the boundaries of audience-spectator relationships, and in the paratheatrical work “participants are no longer spectators, but are repositioned as co-actants”. This integrated group would “meet for several days outside the city without division into the active ones and spectators”. (Findlay, 1997: 181).

During this phase, people other than Grotowski began to lead subsections of work, including Meditations Aloud and Acting Therapy. None of the practices in this phase could be called performance or theatre, and Grotowski said it was not even necessarily art. He stressed that the work should not be seen as actor training, or as psychotherapy of any kind as some critics suggested. Grotowski described this work as a series of experiments which presented “a means of allowing creative individuals the possibility of ‘meeting’ in an atmosphere that had been carefully structured for such encounters.” (Findlay, 1997: 174).

The self was also important in this phase of work. Here the emphasis was on dissolving “the masks of imposture most people wear as their ordinary social selves”, and communicating directly with others. (Schechner, 1997c: 211).

Whilst the practice of the second phase differs greatly from the first, the principles of work on the self and of seeking genuine communication between individuals runs through both phases, albeit in very different form.

From this phase, a modern British actor trainer can take the continued importance of genuine communication and openness. One can also take from it the idea that it is important for an actor to recognise social 'masks'. It is also interesting to consider the notion of theatre as therapy from a modern British perspective. This leads to ideas about including individual counselling as part of drama training in order to facilitate self-knowledge and to help actors to eliminate blocks. However, this is another research project in itself. Paratheatre reiterates some of the principles of the Theatre of Performance, which we can borrow to some extent, but one could argue that the practices of this phase could not be used at all by a modern British actor trainer in a mainstream drama school context. A director could perhaps choose to set a performance in a rural setting and to involve the audience as participants, but one could argue that for a modern British audience to consider it a performance, there would need to be more set action than improvisation. Taking the rural setting and the notion of no physical division between the performers and audience, a promenade performance in a forest comes to mind. A director could therefore use the principles and practices of this phases as inspiration, but it would be impracticable (and probably inadvisable) to try to copy them.

“Theatre of Sources” (1976-1982)

As with Paratheatre, a lack of documentation renders an accurate description of the principles and practices of the ‘Theatre of Sources’ phase very difficult. However, we can identify them to some extent.

Sally Mackey says that during this phase “An intercultural group study yoga, voodoo, Sufi whirling, meditation, martial-arts training”. (Mackey, 2000: 333).

Grotowski explained before the work began: “Theatre of Sources will deal with the phenomenon of source techniques, archaic or nascent, that bring us back to the sources of life.” He stated that there would be a

“complete closing, en-closing, that is to say two years. I will go and close myself up with very few people. After two years...there will be a period of opening which will include a greater number of people” (Grotowski in Schechner 1997c: 214).

The closed nature of this phase distinguished it clearly from the more open nature of the paratheatrical work. The number of people involved was also much smaller. Its closed nature defined it in part, and in a sense this was both a practice and a principle – to isolate a small group, to work intensively and to keep the work private.

Obviously we cannot replicate this in a drama school environment. However, there is something to be said for a group exploring together without the pressure of performance. It is also useful to consider the basic reasons for performance. However, in terms of direct influence, I would argue that this phase cannot offer anything more to the modern British actor trainer. Nor, I would venture, would it want to.

“Objective Drama” (1983-1986)

We can only identify the principles and practices of this phase to a certain extent. In his previous explorations of self, Grotowski emphasised the importance of finding the universal. This theme continues in this phase, in which he seeks forms of theatre “composed of those characteristics found to be common to the ritualistic practice of many diverse cultures, and perceptible to members of all” (Mitter. 2005: 105).

According to Eugenio Barba, this phase can be compared to an anthropological expedition that “goes beyond civilised territories into virgin forest.” (Mitter, 2005: 205). Grotowski stated that one of the principle aims of this phase of the work was to:

“discover a type of performance in which “poetry is not separated from the song, the song is not separated from the movement, the movement is not separated from the dance, the dance is not separated from the acting”;

he saw this as being a type of performance associated with ancient rituals, rooted in the period “before the separation between art and rite, and between the spectator and the participatory”. (Grotowski in Wolford, 1997b: 289).

One could argue that an investigation of performative ritual practices and the roots of theatrical traditions would enrich any contemporary mainstream actor training. However, the reality is that there is little time even on a three year acting course, and what time there is tends to be spent on the development of practical skills rather than theoretical study.

Towards the end of this phase, in 1984, the Laboratory Theatre was dissolved. Perhaps this timing is unsurprising, as the practice of this phase seems worlds away from the initial Laboratory Theatre work.

“Art as Vehicle”, from 1986

This phase of work was developed at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski in Pontedera, Italy. In this phase, Grotowski “fundamentally challenges contemporary, secular notions of performance as entertainment.” (Wolford, 1997a: 12).

The practice of this phase is in some ways specific and therefore possible to identify, but it is also arguably esoteric. The work centres on an exploration of

“very specific vibratory songs connected to Afro-Caribbean ritual practice, and on the process of energy transformation that can occur within the doers as a result of working with these tools”. (Wolford, 1997c: 12)

According to Grotowski.

“...the basic elements of Art as Vehicle are the same as those of the actor’s craft...tempo-rhythms,... composed movement,...contact,...the word, and above all,...the ancient songs with their vibratory qualities” (Wolford, 2001: 123)

Thomas Richards (who continued Grotowski’s work after Grotowski died), relates the work of Art as Vehicle to that of the Bauls, “yogic bards of India whose spiritual practice takes the form of songs and dances that can be appreciated on an aesthetic level” (Wolford, 2001: 127).

Wolford asserts that Art as Vehicle is not an enactment of ritual performance, “*it is ritual*, even if it is possible to discern the seams where Grotowski’s practice is grafted on to the roots of ancient tradition”. (1997a: 15). Peter Brook states that Art as Vehicle can “allow man to have access to another level of perception”. (Brook in Wolford, 1997c: 368).

This work is interesting but does not have an obvious place in modern British actor training, partly because (as with so many of Grotowski’s practices) it does not sound as though it would lend itself to an eclectic, broad based training programme. We can borrow from this phase the idea of using music to stimulate movement and imagination and to affect energy and alertness, but we can neither identify nor use practices or principles from this phase to any great extent.

“People of the theatre have tended, by and large, to view the post-theatrical phases of Grotowski’s work as...having more to do with therapy or alternative spiritualities than with art...its primary purpose is not to communicate with an audience...the work does not culminate in a publicly-accessible production” (Wolford, 2001: 130). It is interesting to note at this stage that the current practice at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards has entered a new performance phase. According to Paul Allain, the reasons for this are complicated and partly financial (Allain, 2005, 50).

We will now go on to underline concerns that run through all the phases of Grotowski’s work.

Themes Running Throughout All the Phases

According to Schechner,

“work on oneself led from theatre to Paratheatre; searching for what is transcultural and essential led from Paratheatre to Theatre of Sources; distilling those sources into patterned behaviour led to Objective Drama and Art as Vehicle” (1997c: 213).

The various phases of Grotowski's work differ greatly in terms of practice (and, from our point of view, the extent to which it is possible to identify that practice). However, Grotowski maintains that there is a through-line to his work:

“in appearance, and for some people in a scandalous or incomprehensible manner, I passed through very contradictory periods, but in truth ...the line is quite direct...[although] the emphases shift” (Grotowski in Wolford, 2001: 118).

I would agree with the notion that the first phase, the Theatre of Productions phase, can be kept distinct from the other 'post-theatrical' phases. According to Wolford, the later phases,

“while by no means identical in terms of their goals and objectives, are united by a shared emphasis on performative behaviours derived from the ritual traditions of various cultures.” (2001: 119).

As has been shown, the search for truth, the pursuit of self knowledge, relationships between people and how to frame them have been key concerns throughout Grotowski's work. We have not yet fully highlighted the importance of Stanislavsky in Grotowski's work.

Throughout his life, Grotowski maintained a firm belief in the worth of Stanislavsky's teachings. However, as Richards states, Grotowski's link to Stanislavsky "run[s] the risk of being completely forgotten or not taken into account." (Richards, 1995: 4). In particular Grotowski stressed the value of physical actions, whereby the actor composes a score of what s/he does and why – points of contact with others are set so that the emotions are freed.

Grotowski claimed that if an actor says the text

"with feeling...he frees himself from the obligation of doing anything himself. But if...he works with a silent score – saying the text only in his thoughts – he unmasks this lack of personal actions and reaction" (Grotowski in (Hoffman and Schechner, 1997: 43).

Grotowski felt that Stanislavsky would have progressed even beyond the discovery of physical actions had he lived longer. According to Wolford, Grotowski in a sense

"implied that his own research could be seen to mark the continuation of Stanislavsky's investigation, taken up from the point to which it had evolved at the time it was interrupted by Stanislavsky's death." (Wolford, 2002: 193)

Wolford defines Grotowski's principles and practices as a "combination of an esoteric agenda with an overtly Stanislavskian approach to performance craft" (Wolford, 2001: 129).

One might argue that if a modern British actor trainer wanted to successfully incorporate Grotowski's practice, or at least his influence, s/he could do that best by encouraging actors to use the method of physical actions. Is there

anything else we can take from Grotowski? I will now consider critical opinion on this point.

What the critics say – can we/should we use Grotowski's work?

According to Polish writer Kazimierz Braun, there is no reason why anyone would want to use Grotowski's work in any shape or form. He sees Grotowski as "a has-been who left no trace in the collective cultural memory or the current theatre practice." (Braun in Wolford, 1997a: 5). Whilst there is some truth in the idea that Grotowski was better known outside Poland, we can refute this Braun's total dismissal since we know that Grotowski has had an influence in Britain.

I would, however, agree with Paul Allain, that: "Questions surface as to what value Grotowski's ideas and practices might have if they lack the rigour that he always exacted" (Allain, 2005: 47).

With regard to the post-theatrical phases, I would agree with Wolford, that we have to ask "...what – if anything – does this work have to do with theatre as it is normally practised?" (Wolford, 2001: 118). I would agree that it does seem that particularly during these phases,

"Grotowski and his collaborators apparently presume that artists working in public theatre have other goals in mind than those towards which their own practice is aimed (the activation of a yogic or transformational process by means of performance)." (Wolford, 2001: 126).

However, Grotowski suggested that:

“basic principles of craft and scenic presence are a common concern for all types of performing artists, despite differences in style, genre, and conditions of production” (Grotowski in Wolford, 2001:126).

I would agree with this, but considering our question as to the usefulness of Grotowski’s training to a mainstream actor trainer, I would go as far as to suggest that a ‘poor theatre’ actor might be able to step into a mainstream theatre, but not the other way around. I would also argue that Grotowski himself would not have thought it possible to incorporate his work successfully into an eclectic training. Firstly, he was adamant he had not developed any ‘method’ which could be followed, and secondly, he did not believe in the type of actor training in which:

“it is believed that various disciplines, applied to the actor, can develop his totality; that an actor should, on one hand, take diction lessons, and on the other hand voice lessons and acrobatics or gymnastics, fencing, classical and modern dance, and also elements of pantomime, and all of that put together will give him an abundance of expression.”

As Grotowski states, “this philosophy of training is very popular. Almost everywhere they believe this is how to prepare actors to be creative”. But, he argues firmly, “they are absolutely wrong.”

Grotowski agrees that actors trained in this manner might display “virtuosity or technical skill”, but he feels that their performances

“almost always lack any line of living impulses. ...a seed of living action born inside the actor’s body which extends itself outward to the periphery, making itself visible as physical action.” (Grotowski in Wolford, 2003: 199).

Grotowski stresses the importance of finding one’s own methods, stating that

“there exists a challenge, to which each must give his own answer. ...The experience of life is the question, and the response is simply through true creation. It begins from the effort not to hide oneself and not to lie. Then the method – in the sense of a system – doesn’t exist. It cannot exist except as a challenge or as a call.”

I have always disagreed with the notion that acting is lying. For me, it has always been about honesty. Grotowski's belief in the importance of truth and honesty as expressed here can certainly be carried through into modern British actor training.

Harold Clurman strongly states that whilst Grotowski's methods of training,

“chiefly designed as preparation for his productions, may prove stimulating and constructive for student actors and other professionals, they do not constitute the essence of his art.” (Clurman, 1997: 161).

Clurman also believes that if we try to 'teach' someone else's work,

“superficial characteristics of the original model are mistaken for their meaning and value... Thus a new “manner” is contrived”.

In the case of Grotowski, Clurman stresses in particular the importance of the social context in which his work was developed, citing this as a reason why others cannot borrow from the work successfully. He reminds us that

Grotowski was a

“witness and heir – as are most of his actors – of his country's devastation. The mark of that carnage is on their work. It is an abstract monument to the spiritual consequences of that horrendous event”.

Clurman believes therefore that “most productions done a la Grotowski must be largely fraudulent”, and reminds us that Grotowski's theatre “has its roots in a specific native experience”. (Clurman, 1997: 161-164).

I deduce from these comments that Clurman does not endorse a separation of Grotowski's actor training methods from his theatre. Perhaps this is the key

issue when discussing someone who was first and foremost a director and whose work in actor training has been taken out of context.

Kocur agrees that Grotowski's method of actor training was firmly set within its own social context. He feels that under communism, Grotowski's emphasis on searching for the authentic self made sense. For Kocur, as soon as the repression of communism was lifted, self-searching of this kind ceased to have a point. He states that the values that Grotowski proposed in the Laboratory Theatre were inextricably linked with the communist period. ⁱⁱ

One can confidently surmise that there is strong feeling amongst the critics cited here that Grotowski's work should serve as an inspiration rather than a blueprint. Peter Brook says that if you try to follow in Grotowski's footsteps, you will not succeed without having the same level of understanding as Grotowski. (Brook, 1997: 382).

Conclusion

It is clear, then, that it is possible only to a certain extent to identify the principles and practices of Grotowski's post-theatrical phases. It is unlikely that a modern British actor trainer could successfully incorporate any of the practices from these phases into his/her own work in a mainstream drama school context. However, the principles of searching for truth, the universal, and genuine interpersonal contact run throughout these phases and can be seen as three of the fundamental tenets of dramatic art.

It is possible to a far greater extent to identify the principles and practices of the Theatre of Productions phase, although there still remains a certain

degree of ambiguity and a sense that some of the work was difficult to verbalise (Osinski, 1997: 395) or did not lend itself to documentation. Grotowski made a conscious decision not to continue documenting the exercises of the Laboratory Theatre for fear that they would be seen as a 'recipe'. This may be taken as a signal that the exercises were not to be used out of context, or at least without consideration of their original context. As I have suggested, the work of the Poor Theatre phase requires time and dedication and I don't feel that any aspect of the work can be successfully squeezed into a busy drama school timetable. Nor do I feel that using selected exercises from Grotowski's Poor Theatre, taken out of context, can be particularly justified or fruitful. Tempting as it is to do so, the danger of misrepresentation is great.

Given the socio-historical context of Grotowski's work and the length and intensity of his actor training, I would conclude that his work taken out of that context is immediately reduced to something less than the original. However, actor trainers are free to experiment with techniques as they desire. Should one choose to use any of Grotowski's physical exercises or structured improvisations, one should always include the practice of the actor noting the psychological associations that occurred, as this is an integral part of the psycho-physical work.

As Schechner said, "a wide-ranging indirect influence is probably not what Grotowski wanted." It is "too haphazard...too fraught with misuses and misinterpretations" (1997d: xxvii).

However, he did hope that people would be inspired by his work and that they might see it as a starting point on their own path to creativity. I would conclude that Grotowski's work could be highly inspirational to modern British acting students, and that they should certainly be made aware of all the phases of his work, as well as his connections to Meyerhold and Stanislavsky and his influence on the likes of Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba and Włodzimierz Staniewski.

There remains an "exasperating elusiveness" (Filipowicz, 1997: 405) around some of Grotowski's principles and practices. Perhaps the 'Year of Grotowski' in 2009 will shed some light on some of the shadier areas. It has nevertheless been possible to an extent to identify and analyse the principles and practices of each phase of Grotowski's work, with those of the Theatre of Productions phase being discernible to a comparatively far greater extent. A modern British actor trainer could arguably not incorporate any of the post-theatrical practices. From the first phase, the practices of encouraging actors to challenge themselves by adapting training to meet individual needs, as well as experimentation with text and staging, could successfully be translated to a drama school context. The principle of self exploration in order to remove social masks is also transferable and indeed central to the craft of acting, but there are huge issues surrounding how best to facilitate this. Perhaps it should happen outside of the classroom entirely. The notion of archetypes can be usefully applied to textual analysis and performance.

The principles of true 'communion' with spectators are central to acting. As Grotowski says, "the problem is always the same: stop the cheating, find the authentic impulses. The goal is to find a meeting between the text and the actor." (Grotowski in Hoffman and Schechner, 1997: 43).

Grotowski also said that we must find our own way, and that exercises should be developed to meet the requirements of particular productions. I conclude then that both actors and actor trainers may be greatly inspired by Grotowski's work: not as something to 'do' or 'use', but as a point of departure towards ones own answers. I would agree to a large extent with Lisa Wolford's conviction that it is

"more productive for artists interested in developing their own independent practice to look for inspiration in the *ethos* and fundamental tenets of Grotowski's work than through importing codified exercises". (Wolford, 2003: 195).

Grotowski agreed, saying "if a pupil senses his own technique...then he departs from me...Every other technique or method is sterile (1980)" (Benedetti, 2005: xxv).

Finally, I would take from Grotowski the notion that acting students must be encouraged to make their own work as much as possible as well as working on text-based roles. Introducing students to a practical exploration of a selection of Grotowski exercises would, I feel, be reductive. It would not do Grotowski justice, nor would it best serve the students. The idea arises that 'doing some Grotowski work' in class is akin to 'doing a bit of Gardzienice' – which most would agree would be impossible. I conclude that Grotowski offers quality of principles over quantity of replicable practical methods.

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Endnotes

ⁱ "...zupelnie nierozpoznany...nikt nigdy nire poprosil Grotowskiego, zeby zrobil jakis workshop w Polsce, w Warszawie." (My translation). Mirosław Kocur, 2004, in an interview entitled Prawda I Mit for the Instytut Teatralny. http://www.institut-teatralny.pl/index.php?id_page=36

ⁱⁱ "Moj problem z Grotowskim byl taki, ze dopoki komuna byla pewnym zagrozeniem, to rozmowa o autentyzmie, o esencji rzeczywise miala sens. ... Natomiast w momencie, kiedy komuny nie ma, nie ma po co esencjonalnie sie wyrazac. Wyszlo mi, ze czlowiek definuje sie w relacjach s innymi, za kazdym razem wlasciwie tozsamosc jest egocjowana. W tym momencie poszukiwania radykalne okazaly sie dla mnie bezcelowe I nie mowiac o nowych czasach" (My translation)....

"...wartosci ktore proponowal Grotowski w Teatrze Laboratorium byly bardzo zwiazane z epoka komunistyczna" (My translation). Mirosław Kocur, 2004, in an interview entitled Prawda I Mit for the Instytut Teatralny. http://www.institut-teatralny.pl/index.php?id_page=36