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Ph. D Thesis

**Grotowski: Ecstasy and Initiation in Performance**

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## ABSTRACT

By examining the work of the theatre director Jerzy Grotowski, this thesis seeks to define how Grotowskian performance becomes an initiatory process through ecstasy. Despite several transitions in his work, from 1959 till after his death in 1999 to the present time, its aims and underlying principles have remained unalterable. In the Grotowskian tradition the performer builds up the psyche, in contrast to other acting methods that stress the importance of the role. What Grotowski sought to achieve was the self-development of the performer through transcultural performing and ritual techniques.

Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach was elaborated for the analysis of Grotowski's methods. After contextualising Grotowski in the post-War Polish society, his work is examined in relation to other disciplines. An overview of theories from anthropology and sociology indicates how Grotowski's work relates to traditional and archaic ritual. Thus, his work can be further elucidated by the theories of Theatre Anthropology, which examine performances that borrow artistic elements from ritual and non-Western theatre. Yet, Grotowski refused to adapt unedited ritualistic or theatrical fragments and gestures to his work. Viewed concomitantly with anthropological and psychological theories, his work appears to have developed a special affinity to ecstatic and healing ritual, the methods and principles of which were applied by his performers. To elucidate this special affinity, parallels are drawn between Grotowski's work and the Greek ecstatic ritual of Anastenaria. This thesis indicates the way the mental and physical perception of Grotowski's performer functions in an ecstatic or liminal context beyond bipolarisation. In other words, body and mind, impulses and gestures are harmonised. Taking into account studies on ancient Greek civilization, it further

draws parallels between Grotowski's performer and the ancient Greek performer, as both embraced a multilevelled/liminal approach to acting. The Greek actor participated simultaneously in the social institutions of the city-state, among them the tragedy, and in the religious practices, possibly the Eleusinian mysteries. By having considered post-war Polish history, as well as Grotowski's relation to the politics of his time, it becomes clear that Grotowski's concept of the performer was not just spiritual caprice, but was strongly influenced by the politics and religion of his country, as was the ancient Greek concept of the performer.

A final consideration of this work is to show that Grotowski's performer seeks to perceive yet transcend the duality of human nature.

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**To my son, Orpheus**

# INTRODUCTION

## *An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Study of Grotowski's Work*

This thesis examines the use of ecstasy and initiation, processes studied primarily in the field of anthropology, throughout the theatrical work of Jerzy Grotowski. His adoption of techniques of self-definition and personal development, as revealed through ecstasy and initiation, bring out the developmental aspect of theatre that in many other cases is imitative. The argument of this thesis begins with a contextualisation of Grotowski's life and work. This requires an analysis of the historical, social and political conditions in which Grotowski lived. The thesis examines how Grotowski transcended the artistic currents of his day. In other words, through interdisciplinary and transcultural techniques Grotowski stepped beyond the norms of theatre and set liminal conditions for the performer. The thesis, therefore, considers the way the liminal, trance state is achieved by Grotowski's performers. Grotowski's activities are compared and contrasted with an ecstatic rite. This discussion leads to an examination of the self-developmental and healing aspects of Grotowski's practices and how these relate to the initiatory Greek mysteries of Eleusis and to the themes of ancient Greek tragedy. The final step in the argument presents a social contextualisation of Grotowski's work by comparing his cultural background to the social realities of Athens at the time of the emergence of democracy. Consequently, Grotowski's notion of the 'holy' performer develops through modern initiatory practices.

Despite the fact that the studies on Grotowski are mostly descriptive in character, they provided a solid basis for a critical analysis of Grotowski's ultimate objectives. More precisely, Zbigniew Osinski's *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, focusing on specific bibliographical details which concern Grotowski's life and work both in the Theatre of Productions period and in Paratheatre, underlines the transcendental character of Grotowski's performances and the developmental intentions of the actor's training. In turn, *The Theatre of Grotowski* by Jennifer Kumiega reveals similar considerations. The vivid descriptions of the performances and activities in Paratheatre suggest Grotowski's intention of initiating the actor into a higher level of consciousness. Lisa Wolford, in *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, explores the similarities between the activities of the Objective Drama Research project and the initiatory mysteries of ancient Mediterranean civilizations. Thomas Richards' *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions* is concerned with the same period of work and also with the next, the period of Art as Vehicle. It is an account of Richards' personal experiences during work in the Objective Drama Research and how he collaborated with Grotowski in Italy, where the work was transferred after 1986. *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, a compilation of articles written during each period of Grotowski's work, is rich in participant's personal experience of the work. In I Wayan Lendra's article, for instance, Grotowski's work in the Theatre of Sources is compared to an ecstatic Bali dance, while in another article, Osinski directly compares the activities of the Art as Vehicle project in Pontedera with the Greek initiatory mysteries of Eleusis, a comparison that is also apparent in the *Edge-Point of Performance*, written by Richards. Eugenio Barba's *Land of Ashes and Diamonds* is primarily a personal account of the years he spent in post-war

Poland with Grotowski and a collection of the letters he received from Grotowski during the same period. Here, Barba explains in detail a point that the historian and theatre critic Jan Kott had made earlier about Grotowski—the ability to join politics with metaphysics in his theatrical work.

The current studies on Grotowski as well as my own experience of Grotowski's work in conferences and visits to Italy after his death provided me with the cognitive background for analysing and defining Grotowski's aims. This thesis intends to indicate the way Grotowski's interest in ritual developed into ritual-like activities with an initiatory character that soon abandoned the restrictions of theatre by incorporating the knowledge of other disciplines. For this reason any attempt at analysing how Grotowski overcame the boundaries of existing disciplines requires an interdisciplinary approach.

In his article 'Towards a Poor Theatre', which is included with other articles in a book of the same name, Grotowski himself explains his interest in a theatre that, apart from the actor, also trains the performer as a human being. Here he stresses his respect for the discoveries made in the humanities and the social sciences, notably anthropology, sociology, ethnography, psychology and the history of religions and cites them in his methodology. Grotowski's interdisciplinary approach to theatre, which started with his intense interest in the developmental aspects of ritual, seems to correlate with a wider current that first appeared in the sixties in the United States and promoted the idea that theatre should be approached in an interdisciplinary manner. The field of theatre, with its potentially broad range of interests in human activity from many cultures and many historical periods, has a natural relationship with intercultural research.

By incorporating the works of the anthropologist Victor Turner and the sociologist Erving Goffman, both of whom analysed the performative aspects of human activity, especially those found in ritual, the Professor of Theatre Studies Richard Schechner developed the concept and eventually the programme of performance studies, as opposed to theatre, in the United States in the 1990's. Marvin Carlson, who has done considerable research in the field of performance studies, asserts that there is a much closer relationship of performance studies to the social sciences, particularly to anthropology, ethnography and sociology. He explains:

With the growing recognition that human culture is in large measure performative, that is, activity consciously carried out and presented to others to have some effect on them, performance studies seemed positioned to provide just the sort of neutral ground for interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary work that many academic researchers were seeking as the twentieth century drew to a close.<sup>1</sup>

Performance studies abandoned the idea of theatre as the embodiment of a literal text and looked beyond the popular forms of theatre to all sorts of folk activities, such as rituals, sporting events, parades and every manner of public event and ceremony.

Schechner collaborated with Grotowski in New York and, along with Turner, was inspired by the Polish director's work to develop certain aspects of his performance theories. Turner constructed the theory of liminality, which proposes a common essence between theatre and ritual, and this concept was further analysed by Schechner. One aspect of this theory attributes to theatre a developmental aspect, such as the one practiced by Grotowski. The difference

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<sup>1</sup> 'Theatre and Performance at a Time of Shifting Disciplines', *Theatre Research International*, Vol. 26, no. 2, 2001, p. 141.

between these theoreticians and practitioners and Grotowski is that the latter, by taking into account the shared performative aspects between ritual, traditional theatre and modern theatre, attempted to cultivate a new performative art. Grotowski wished to discover the driving forces behind the gestures and to develop these forces into a new genre.

When applied to performance sciences, the methodology of interdisciplinarity analyses each cultural event as a multifaceted action that nevertheless stands autonomously as an integrated activity. While this methodology developed some decades after Grotowski's appearance on the European theatrical stage, it is still appropriate for defining Grotowski's work in this thesis. This choice is justified by the fact that Grotowski's activities were constructed through a multilevel approach to human activity and thus they maintain a plurality of explanations. After all, theatrical performance is by definition a multilevel activity. Compared to other fields in the humanities, such as history, anthropology and psychology, Theatre Studies is a relatively new discipline. Consequently, the general reader reaches a better understanding of an artistic activity when it is approached through the studies with which he or she has been acquainted since childhood.

Furthermore, in the Theatre of Productions period, Grotowski continuously introduced the symbolism of Christ into his performance. This was an idea which he did not cast aside when he abandoned the staged theatre. On the contrary, for him, this concept formed the archetype of the ever-developing human being. Thus, the study of religious symbolism is required to elucidate Grotowski's methods. In addition, Grotowski encouraged the performer to work in conditions of trance. For this reason, Paratheatre and the Theatre of Sources period

included practices identical to those of ecstatic ritual. Here, ethnographic research provides a rich source for the study of ecstatic rites and shamanic practices and can elucidate and put Grotowski's activity into perspective. Moreover, the fact that Grotowski preferred to work directly with people from different cultures and traditional groups, who personally practiced the performative forms in which they were called on to instruct Grotowski's performers, invites anthropological interest and considerations of the effect each culture may have on the West. Additionally, the cooperation and often symbiosis for long periods of time of people with different social and cultural backgrounds and the aim of performing and expressing the most intimate aspects of themselves necessitates the methodology of social anthropology for an understanding of Grotowski's objectives.

Moreover, the theories of psychology provide a background for the elucidation and explanation of the developmental aspects of Grotowski's work. Yet, since Grotowski placed great importance on the training of the body, believing that the persistent training of the body and the voice may stimulate the nervous system of his performers, a study of the fundamental theories of psychiatry validates Grotowski's choices. In addition, Grotowski's preference for approaching the human body by traditional techniques, such as Yoga, calls for enquiry into religious practices. In this same context, classical studies should be applied in order to evaluate the bibliographical references which compare Grotowski's work to the Greek mysteries. Finally, this thesis not only intends to demonstrate that Grotowski constructed an artistic genre that surpasses the boundaries even of performance studies and inhabits the realm of philosophy, but also to show how Grotowski was profoundly affected by the political and cultural

environment of post-war Poland. In fact, the study of Grotowski's relation to politics and history contextualises Grotowski's work and proves that, despite his romanticism, Grotowski remained an activist with sound ideas and actions that apply, not to eccentric practitioners, but to the questioning performer.

The core of Grotowski's acting methods compares with the traditional, ritual process of ecstasy. In other words, Grotowski invited the performers to abandon the social personae that had developed after years of taming their physical and mental behaviour to adjust to familial and/or social standards. Grotowski looked for the 'naked' personality, that is, the untamed impulses and forces of the human psyche and the ways it could be expressed in respect to both discipline and spontaneity. Thus, the performers, trance-like, had to concentrate all their psychic forces and to stand outside their ordinary personae. This process of transcendence is also observed in traditional ecstatic ritual, which does not include a conscious search for human expressivity as Grotowski's method does, but evokes traditional experience and wisdom in its practices. Taking this in account, this thesis compares and contrasts Grotowski's methods with the ecstatic rite of Anastenaria.

This rite is performed in Greece, an advantage for ethnographic analysis since the researcher comes from the same area in which the rite is practiced. Moreover, Anastenaria seems to belong to the wider sphere of the Dionysian cult, as well as the Eleusinian mysteries, which appear to have strong philosophical and practical connections with Grotowski's activities. Because Anastenaria is still observed, it provides a direct experience of the practice of ecstasy. The experiential character of Grotowski's work is also a barrier for one who wishes to define it. Therefore, for the development of the argument of this thesis, my

reading was closely followed by personal observation of the present form of Grotowski's work in parallel to other still existing practices with similar methodologies.

The lack of sufficient information on the philosophical aspects of Grotowski's work that would be necessary to elucidate the argument of this thesis, as well as the absence of texts in which Grotowski's work relates to other disciplines should be noted. For these reasons, the study of living information along with the current studies on Grotowski is adopted from three sources. Firstly, the activity of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards up to the present time is recorded and interpreted; secondly, scholars' and collaborators' annotations and interpretations on Grotowski are available; and thirdly, the experience of the work of traditional groups, as they appeared at certain conferences, are reported.

The present thesis comprises six chapters and a conclusion. Each chapter develops a subject autonomously and yet is closely connected with the subject of the next chapter. In most cases, the discussion in each chapter advances in two ways. Firstly, the subject is defined and analysed according to the texts on Grotowski. Secondly, it is elucidated by practical examples found either in the bibliography or by personal contact with Grotowski's collaborators with whom the researcher discussed and/or worked. The discussion in each chapter, apart from exceptional cases which are referred to in advance, respects the chronological sequence of Grotowski's periods of work. That is, where practical examples from his work are used, they conform to the following: the Theatre of Productions, Paratheatre, the Theatre of Sources, Objective Drama Research and, finally, the Art as Vehicle project.

The first chapter of this thesis provides a contextualisation of Grotowski's life and work in post-War Polish society. The chapter explores how Grotowski was influenced by the politics of his time and also by Catholicism. The disciplines of history and, at certain points, psychology are employed in this chapter to shed light on the development of Grotowski's work. Roy Leslie's *The History of Poland since 1863* furnishes information about the artistic life in this society and also places importance on the social influence of Catholicism in Poland. Leslie's perspective is combined with Norman Davies' historical approach to modern Polish history, which appears more rational and less sentimental than Davies'. Patrick Michel's work provides a further focus on the role of Catholicism in Polish society. The extended analysis of history in the first chapter attempts to avoid an over-simplification of the dynamics of the events in Poland and to elucidate the impact these events had on the artistic work of Grotowski. Since one can never know the exact influence of historical events on Grotowski, in the first chapter the facts are set out for the most part in chronological order, paralleling Grotowski's life and work. The purpose of this parallelism is to suggest the way Polish political events might have influenced Grotowski, while attempting to avoid the arbitrary assumptions of a biographer.

Parallel to the wider historical background, the biography of Grotowski and the immediate historical events that had guided his choices are considered. The work of the historian Osinski, who wrote the only detailed biography of Grotowski's life in Poland, and also Barba's testimonies of the political events in Poland which directly influenced Grotowski situate the Polish director in his society. Kott outlines Grotowski's theatrical choices and concludes, along with Osinski, that it was the social pressure and censorship in communist Poland in

combination with the impact of the Catholic Church in Polish society that fired Grotowski's political activism and, apparently, led to the development of metaphysical elements in his performances. During this period Grotowski maintained a *sui generis* relation to politics and also to religion, which was to a certain extent responsible for the social cohesion of the Polish society in a period of intense social pressure, as Leslie and Michel have pointed out. The distant historical events become familiar and better relate to the individual when a psychological profile is taken into account. Therefore, the psychologist Carl Jung's theories about the attributes of mob psychology, modulated either by religion or politics, make Grotowski's choices clearer to those who have no experience of this period. The chapter concludes that, even if Grotowski was influenced by the politics and the religion of his society, his theatre surpassed the boundaries of its day and incorporated transcendental meanings to acquire a timelessness of its own.

Attempting to point out the sources of transcendental elements involved in Grotowski's practices, the second chapter focuses on the ritual dimensions of Grotowski's work. The fundamental relation between traditional ritual and Grotowski's work is the common manner in which both elaborate the myth. This chapter borrows the work on myth and ritual from the discipline of anthropology. Anthropological and sociological theories represented by Emile Durkheim, Mircea Eliade, Claude Levi-Strauss, Erving Goffman, Clifford Geertz and other distinguished scholars are employed to analyse the meaning and the significance of myth and ritual. Moreover, more contemporary scholars on anthropology, such as Catherine Bell, are referred to in order to make the meanings of older theories more accessible in today's terms.

It appears that there are two schools regarding myth. One argues that ritual is the reenactment of myth, while the other asserts that myth develops through ritual. Similarly, Grotowski brought specific myths into his performances during the first period of his work, while subsequently in his career he trained the performers in certain activities so that each performer developed his or her own myth. In fact, the myth of the ever-developing man emerged. In both cases, Grotowski is found to have believed that collective myths do not exist in modern society. Thus, he applied the theory of 'apotheosis and derision' to his work, for each myth should not be taken as the ultimate truth, but as a container of archetypal principles. Since these principles are brought out in the performance, the two groups, that is, the audience and the actors, may realise an intimate form of communication. According to Grotowski, the methods to reach this end are the concepts of 'via negativa' and the 'total act' as well as the idea of a musical language, borrowed from Antonin Artaud. Artaud can be described as Grotowski's forerunner in the idea of borrowing ritualist methods and principles and thus reading him contextualises Grotowski's choices in the history of theatre. Apart from 'via negativa', these principles also appear in ritual. Finally, in this chapter, the above ideas are traced in Grotowski's performances of *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* and thereafter in the opus of *Action*.

It was the author's choice not to describe a specific ritual in the second chapter but rather in the third and fourth chapter of this thesis. In any case, the anthropological theories presented in this chapter are extracted from the observation and registration of a variety of ritual activities. Thus, a direct comparison between a ritual and Grotowski's work at this point would have

prejudiced the mind of the reader before all the theories that modulated the meaning of Grotowski's work had been elaborated.

The third chapter examines the liminal aspects of Grotowski's activities as a special concept of ritual that Grotowski exploited in his work. The first concern here is establishing the validity of using anthropological and sociological terms to analyse Grotowski's work, which is rooted in theatre. This echoes the ideas of the second chapter. The theory and methods of interdisciplinarity as elaborated by Maria Shevtsova are considered. A major concern in this chapter is how Grotowski's work relates to and contrasts with the theories of Theatre Anthropology, a term first coined by Barba, yet developed by both Turner and Schechner. Theatre Anthropology is the theatrical activity which practices gestures, forms and ideas from performative genres interculturally. Specific examples from Grotowski's training in each period indicate that he also wished to join opposing ideas and methods, but not by transferring transcultural techniques per se. He was mainly concerned with the principles and the primal concepts on which each technique had developed. In between the boundaries of techniques and of disciplines, Grotowski applied the process of liminality to theatre. First defined by Arnold Van Gennep as a ritual process, liminality is common to Grotowski's work and to ritual, as it appears in Turner's and Schechner's analyses of the subject. In this chapter, Grotowski's choices are once again situated historically. As pointed out by Kott, the Hippy movement of the sixties coincides with Grotowski's development of the idea of liminality and trance. However, it becomes evident that Grotowski transcended his historical positioning during the era of the Flower Children.

The fourth chapter refers to the way the concept of liminality is practiced in Grotowski's work. For methodological purposes, the chapter is divided into two parts. The first examines the position of ecstatic techniques in Grotowski's activities. Psychological and anthropological theories on the process of ecstasy presented by Abraham Maslow and by Gilbert Rouget are analysed. Both scholars are relevant because they analyse the attributes of ecstatic experience and, more precisely, the second focuses on trance experiences in ritual. Through psychology and anthropology the reader gains a more individual understanding of the phenomenon of trance. Thereafter, examples from the ecstatic aspects of the practical work in each period of Grotowski's work are provided. Since the previous chapters provided a firm theoretical background for Grotowski's affiliation to ritual activities, the second part includes a detailed account of the ritual of Anastenaria. The ritual is initially positioned in history through the writings of Loring Danforth. Next, the ethnographical, sociological and psychological background of the ritual is analysed according to the work of other scholars. The symbolism of Anastenarian ceremonies is also underlined. In parallel to the analysis of the ritual, the form and significance of the ceremonies of the rite are compared and contrasted with Grotowski's work.

The fifth chapter develops the idea that training which includes ecstatic techniques may also have healing potential. This is achieved by comparing Grotowski's techniques to the traditional shamanic methods as discussed by Eliade, Merete Demant Jakobsen and Michael Taussing, followed by a discussion of theories of anthropology and psychology developed by Sue Jennings, Claudine Herzlich, Janine Pierret and also Danforth, which are concerned with the shamanic phenomena of tribal and traditional communities. In

the light of these theories, Grotowski's work appears to have also respected the deficiencies of the performer as the main source of the acting training. In other words, a difficulty in expressivity with the physical body, yet not however a disability, often indicates a psychological 'illness' and vice versa. This attitude can be found in Grotowski's work, albeit that his is not concerned with pathological cases, unlike psychiatry. On further examination of shamanism, it also appears that the idea of illness is culturally defined; from the intercultural framework that Grotowski developed it can be assumed that he, too, accepted this belief. By examining the parallelism between shamanism and Grotowski's work, it appears that his practice exhibited a clear self-developing character which manifested itself in several ways throughout the different phases of the work. It is indicated that Grotowski sought to develop equally the right and left hemispheres of the human brain, with their complementary properties. The theory of the two hemispheres, as developed by Joseph E. Bogen, Joseph Hellige, and Eleni Savaki, supports this argument. It justifies Grotowski's belief that the actor's body includes all the information necessary for sincere acting. The chapter concludes with an account of a personal experience of a theatrical project with intense healing potential conducted by the Canadian theatre director Ryszard Nieoczym, Grotowski's former collaborator. How the self-developing process progresses becomes evident from this example.

The sixth chapter examines how the healing aspects of Grotowski's work relate to the developmental aims of the initiatory mysteries of Eleusis. In this chapter, the last two phases of Grotowski's work are more suitable for the construction of the argument since all the practices and theories of the previous periods had matured by this time. The chapter includes the history, the myth and

a reconstruction of the sequence of events in the mysteries from the material provided by the classical studies of Eliade and Karl Kerényi, who were chosen because of their credible analyses of the Greek mysteries. What comes to light here is that the mysteries involved a three-stage pattern of the birth, death and resurrection of the hero, a pattern that was also embodied in Grotowski's work. Yet, for Grotowski, the dying and reborn hero, an idea also developed by Jung under the concept of the archetype of rebirth, takes the form of Christ, who is both benevolent and malevolent, that is, Christ and anti-Christ at the same time. This aspect of Grotowski's pattern brings his work closer to the philosophical concept of Dionysus as initially formed by the Cambridge ritualists, such as Jane Ellen Harrison, Gilbert Murray, Francis M. Cornford. Thereafter, in this chapter the concept of Dionysus is further developed using the theories of Walter Otto, Marcel Detienne, Carl Segal, Kerényi and others, who are particularly troubled by the idea of the Dionysian. It is shown that the mysteries belonged to the wider context of the Dionysian cult and that Dionysian characteristics can be encountered in Grotowski's work in every stage of its development. While the mysteries were included in Greek religious practice, the Dionysian model of the dying and reborn hero was also elaborated by tragedy. Despite the fact that Grotowski never denied the religiosity of his work, he shunned the idea that his activities could be considered part of any religion. This stance brings the elaboration of the archetype of the dying and reborn hero closer to the practice of tragedy, which, having been derived from religion, nevertheless stood beyond it and served politics, as Jean Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet have indicated. Their work proves the most suitable from the field of classical studies, since these authors are the first to focus on the social impact of Greek Tragedy.

Their studies shed light on how Grotowski's model was first conceived in the political intensity of post-war Poland.

While the emergence of his art from the politics and religion of his times is clarified in the first chapter, Grotowski's art is further compared and contrasted in the sixth chapter to the social context in which tragedy has developed. Given the performer's social positioning, as analysed in the first chapter, as well as the developmental aspects of the performer's individual and group training, as analysed in the fourth chapter, it becomes evident that Grotowski's work managed to join mysticism with politics. This conclusion is further strengthened by Friedrich Nietzsche's criticism on the rationalism of ancient Greek society questioned by tragedy. Nietzsche's wish for the resurgence of such a genre from antiquity provides Grotowski's activities with a new perspective—that of a new genre which once more questions the validity of evolution through the rationalism of modern civilisation and develops initiatory activities for modern people.

This thesis maintains that Grotowski believed that the performer's body was the main vehicle for transcendental art and concludes that initiation in Grotowski's activities proceeded through the harmonisation of the oppositional tendencies of the human mind.

As mentioned above, an interdisciplinary and also a cross-disciplinary approach are required to define an activity of such multiple character. Grotowski's activity evidently combined theatrical with anthropological elements and developed practices of both psychological and sociological significance. Indeed, the perplexity lies in the obscurity of the boundaries between the disciplines. Since the general issue of any interdisciplinary approach has been raised, numerous concerns can be found in this thesis. For instance, the question of

Grotowski's relation to the mysteries requires a historical positioning and social contextualisation of the mysteries, and then an anthropological explanation of the significance of the institution to the participants and a psychological analysis of the effect such a practice had on the minds and behaviours of the novices. Nevertheless, the conclusions should remain unified, whether their explanations embrace anthropology, sociology and so on. Such an attempt has been made in this thesis so that the conclusions of each chapter stand beyond the social sciences and humanities, in the sphere of philosophy. Yet, in the majority of the cases, each conclusion falls short of an interdisciplinary outcome and reflects the perspective of the discipline underlying each chapter.

Another issue at hand is that an experiential process, such as Grotowski's work, is by definition highly subjective, a fact that seems to defeat the objectivity of the argument. In order to achieve a more objective analysis, this thesis focuses on the contact the researcher made with Grotowski's collaborators at various conferences, the works shared with some of them at workshops, and, most importantly, the experience of *Action* in Italy, the culmination of Grotowski's methods. Nevertheless, the researcher is aware of the fact that many of her conclusions will be the subject of contestation by other scholars, a process considered essential for further research.

## CHAPTER I

### ***Considering the Context: the role of politics and culture in Grotowski's work***

Jerzy Grotowski's youth was marked by the politico-religious direction Poland took after the Second World War. Poland's geographical position between Germany and the Baltic petrol resources that Hitler coveted, the mixed population concentrated in the eastern and western borders of the country, as well as its even landscape, made it one of the most crucial areas during the war. Grotowski was born in Rzeszow, a city in southeastern Poland, six years before the war broke out. With the outbreak of the war, Grotowski's mother retreated to a small village, where she single-handedly raised him and his brother throughout the years of the Occupation.<sup>2</sup>

The historian Roy F. Leslie records that the German invasion of Poland began on 1 September 1939.<sup>3</sup> A few days later, Britain and France declared war on Germany but, since no offensive was forthcoming from those countries, Poland bore the brunt of Nazi aggression. Poland's dire financial situation coupled with Hitler's fierce determination led to the virtual collapse of the Polish state. The Polish government not only failed to raise an army superior to the German army, but it also failed to anticipate the Soviet's intervention in Poland, an event made inevitable by the signing of the Germano-Soviet pact. In this context, Leslie remarks that 'If Poland had been allied with the USSR, Hitler might have been deterred from attacking her, but association with Russia,

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<sup>2</sup> Zbigniew Osinski, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, New York: PAJ Publications, 1986, p. 13. Grotowski was to remain fatherless for the rest of his life. His father fled to Paraguay for political reasons. The effect of this aspect of his upbringing has yet to be explored.

<sup>3</sup> *The History of Poland since 1863*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 209.

whether communist or not, was a psychological impossibility for the rulers of Poland in 1939'.<sup>4</sup> In an attempt to anticipate any of Hitler's intentions for expanding his conquests over its territories, the Soviet Union moved into the territory designated in the Germano-Soviet pact and occupied the eastern areas of Poland. Most of the inhabitants were Byelorussians and Ukrainians, and the Soviets feared that Germany would use these areas, which included mixed nationalities, as a base for promoting discontent in the Byelorussian and Ukrainian areas within the USSR. The Poles considered the Soviet invasion of 1939 as an act of treachery. Now there were two enemies: Germany and the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup>

During the war Grotowski attended grade school, which he completed with honors. The theatre historian Zbigniew Osinski remarks that during this time Grotowski's mother possibly protected him from the anxiety of the war by introducing him to various folk rites and beliefs. She gave him a book called *A Search in Secret India*, by the English journalist Paul Brunton.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the young boy was exposed to the character of an inspired prophet and from this seems to have created an ideal for himself.<sup>7</sup> In addition, in High School, which he attended in Cracow, Grotowski received an award for his dedicated volunteer work; this seems to indicate that he possessed an intense interest in social matters even at an early age.<sup>8</sup>

There is no doubt, however, that the youngster could feel the war's reverberations. In the areas annexed by the Germans, the Poles were deprived of their human rights; the Germans controlled all businesses and the workers

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<sup>4</sup> *The History of Poland*, p. 212.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>6</sup> *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

were reduced to the status of helots. All Polish cultural and educational institutions were closed, apart from Polish elementary schools.<sup>9</sup> In central and southern Poland, including Wroclaw and Cracow, the intelligentsia and the Jews were destined for extermination by the Germans. By 1944 over 300 temporary concentration camps existed in Poland. The Jews were eventually sent to the death camps while the rest of the population was reduced to merciless exploitation.

Galicia, the region where Grotowski was born and raised, was heavily populated by German speakers. It was no stranger to German aggression. Rzeszow, the town where Grotowski was born, Cracow, where he studied, and Opole, where he worked, were all under German occupation until the end of the war. Although young, Grotowski must have been aware of the ferocity of the war; his father had served in the Polish army as an officer in Poland and later in England. The magnitude of the atrocity of concentration camps remained alive in Grotowski's mind for years after the end of the war until he was able to address it in his performance of *Akropolis*.

The Soviet Union also suppressed the civil rights of the Poles, and any Polish member that was considered politically and socially 'dangerous' was deported to Siberia or Asiatic Russia. The Poles were reduced to second-class citizens and dismissed from official positions. The official languages became Ukrainian and Byelorussian, while Russian became a compulsory language at schools. Moreover, the teaching of religion was forbidden. After the Polish Communists' efforts to persuade Stalin to change his attitude towards the Poles of those areas, he allowed them to re-establish a Polish Communist Party, some

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<sup>9</sup> Leslie, *The History of Poland*, p. 215

members of which were admitted to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, but not before 1941.<sup>10</sup>

The repercussions of the decline of the Polish Communist Party caused by Soviet Communism continued to affect the Polish society for decades after the war. It was probably this confusion about the communist ideal that the Polish people felt when controlled by those with an alleged common political stance that was, among other political allusions, in Grotowski's *Kordian*, *The Constant Prince*, and *Apocalypsis cum figuris*. In these works, as in the Poland of Grotowski's time, those who were supposed to be allies became the enemies. In these performances the hero, who supposedly shared the same convictions with the crowd, was left alone and later destroyed by the authorities.

A closer look at Polish history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is necessary to comprehend this apparent paradox of friends being enemies. After the unexpected defeat of France by the German army, British-Polish policy was kept in line with the British aim of winning over the USSR for a joint struggle against Nazi Germany. Under General Sikorski, Commandeer-in-Chief of the Polish armed forces and Prime Minister of the Polish Government-in Exile, Poland agreed to seek rapprochement with the USSR, yet criticism of this policy by Polish politicians in exile was intense.<sup>11</sup> For Sikorski to reach a satisfactory understanding with the Soviet Union, he would have had to solve the entrenched problems of the Soviet-Polish frontiers. In June 1941, Germany launched Plan Barbarossa and invaded the USSR. In July of that year, a Soviet-Polish agreement was signed in London which provided for the restoration of diplomatic relations, military co-operation, the raising of a Polish army in the USSR and an

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<sup>10</sup> Leslie, *The History of Poland*, p. 220.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223-225.

amnesty for all Polish citizens detained in Russia. Yet, the question of the eastern borders of Poland was not clarified. Although the British agreement on the principle of non-recognition of the territorial changes that had taken place in Poland since 1939 was secure, Britain gave no guarantee of frontiers. At the same time, other Polish political personas voiced their doubts about Sikorski's decision, maintaining that it would be impossible to obtain guarantees once the Soviet military position began to improve.<sup>12</sup> Sikorski seemed to have played an important part concerning the position of Poland in international affairs. The plain truth, however, was that the Great Powers maintained the final decision. At the same time, the government-in-exile, situated in London, opposed the German policy as much as the Soviet Union's policy of insisting on the frontiers of 1939.

In 1942, the Polish Worker's Party was formed and soon appointed Wladyslaw Gomulka as its head. Gomulka presented the Polish Worker's Party as an independent Marxist-Leninist party, without affiliation to the Comintern, the Soviet Union's political instrument. The Party advocated national independence and the establishment of socialism by constitutional means.<sup>13</sup> Despite these tensions with the Soviets, Sikorski continued his policy, hoping that diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union might be resumed, and believing that the Western allies would support the Polish side. Sikorski died in July 1943 in a plane crash. In the same month, a new government was formed under Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, the leader of the Peasant Party.<sup>14</sup> He continued to pursue Sikorski's policy, seeking an understanding with Stalin which would allow the government-in-exile to assume power in Poland. Yet, he was aware that the

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<sup>12</sup> Leslie, *The History of Poland*, p. 225-226.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229-239.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

Western powers would not clash with the Soviet Union over the Polish eastern frontiers. His predictions were not far from reality.

After the Russian winter ravaged the German troops, Stalin became more confident. He declared that until the Polish government withdrew its claims on Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Lithuanian regions, there could be no question of a resumption of diplomatic relations.<sup>15</sup> In 1943 the Polish Worker's Party established the National Council of the Homeland in Warsaw and by 1944 it was recognised as the only legal representative of the Polish nation. By this time, Gomulka was the secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish Worker's Party and their agenda had shifted to the view that the task of building democracy could not be entrusted to the government-in-exile, but to a provisional government that would move toward social reforms and solve the agrarian problem on the basis of the expropriation of private estates. Although Gomulka's plans would have benefited the peasants, he failed to win over the Peasant Party and attracted mainly Communists. Even in this respect, he did not keep in line with Moscow. The Allies, however, did not want to irritate the 'big giant' of Europe and, therefore, put pressure on the Polish government at the end of the war to withdraw from the eastern areas and become immersed in recapturing the western areas previously occupied by the Germans. As a result of the conditions set at Yalta, the Polish borders were reduced by 1/4 of the pre-war size, to the Russians' benefit. The Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Lithuanian regions were politically annexed to the USSR, the reason being the Soviet concern for rebuilding these countries after the war. The real reason, however, was Russia's desire to strengthen its power at the onset of the Cold War.

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<sup>15</sup> Leslie, *The History of Poland*, p. 249.

From 1944 onwards, Poland's political instability continued under governments directed by the Soviet Union which included only an insignificant number of representatives from the Peasant Party and little support from the government-in-exile. Norman Davies observes that the Stalinisation of Poland was realised and thus Gomulka and his non-Stalinist, Communist stance had to be abandoned.<sup>16</sup> The result was the triumph of Gomulka's rival, Boleslaw Bierut, a replica of Stalin in an otherwise Stalinised Poland. The main premise of Stalinist policy was that the countries of the previously so-called Soviet bloc were about to be attacked by the forces of American imperialism, armed with the H-bomb.<sup>17</sup> Within the context of this policy, absolute priority was given to heavy industry, and agriculture was turned over to compulsory collectivisation. At the same time, in order to break the people's traditional attachment to religion, the Roman Catholic Church was openly attacked.

Having experienced the reverses of history, Grotowski insisted in his performances on the idea that there was no external danger or unanticipated fate that destroyed peoples' destinies. Believing that bastions fall from inside, he implied that human fate was controlled by humans. The development of human consciousness necessitated the feeling of religiosity, that is, not following an organised religion, but believing in human spirituality. A society such as Poland during the war, which was officially deprived of both political institutions and a practicing religion, remained voiceless in the face of the ferocities of the war. Furthermore, the social core was weakened to the point where every act of heroism would be condemned because it jeopardised social cohesion. The

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<sup>16</sup> *Heart of Europe: a Short History of Poland*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, p. 5-6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

events that followed had a deep effect in Grotowski's idea about the coexistence of politics and religion in the same society.

In 1950, when Grotowski was only seventeen, all Church property was confiscated and priests were arrested. Two years later, Archbishop Stephan Wyszynski was deported to a remote monastery. The Vatican aggravated the situation between the Church and the state even further. As Davies recounts, in 1949 the Vatican barred Catholics 'from supporting or participating in communist parties and reading communist press or publications'.<sup>18</sup> Because the Church community was made up of such a vast number of Polish citizens, such a decree was dangerous for the cohesion of the state. Therefore, the state suppressed many of the existing privileges of the Church. Church land that was not included in the reform was nationalised after the Vatican's decree and the income of the land paid for the salaries of the priests and bishops. Equally, Catholic press and publications were restricted in number as well as censored. At the same time, the Communist Party sponsored an association of 'patriotic priests' who were willing to collaborate with it. Despite the effort made by the Church over subsequent years to acknowledge the supreme authority of the state in exchange for its autonomy in the religious sphere, by 1950 the agreement had failed to improve the relationship. Furthermore, the Stalinist policy contravened the importation of foreign, capitalistic ideas, and thus a climate of xenophobia was encouraged. In this environment, the Poles were encouraged to think 'communally—a person did not belong to himself or herself

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<sup>18</sup> *Heart of Europe*, p. 328.

as an individual, or to their families, but to their work force, to their regiment and so on.<sup>19</sup>

In 1951, Grotowski graduated from the Fifth High School in Cracow and then took the entrance examinations for the Theatre School, while continuing to cultivate his interest in Oriental philosophy. His first recorded interest in politics can be traced in the written examination he took for the Theatre School in 1951, where the candidates were asked to write an essay from several specified topics. Grotowski chose to write on 'How can theatre contribute to the development of socialism in Poland?'—the only subject with political connotations. In a period dominated by Stalinist ideology, theatre appeared to be an instrument of the Party that advanced social realism and strengthened the Party's power. Grotowski, perhaps playfully, as Osinski suggests, or prompted by a political urge as indicated by his later political activity, chose this subject and received an 'A'.<sup>20</sup> In his second year at the Theatre School, Grotowski became president of the Students' Research Club. His need for romanticism and idealism appeared at the outset of his short political career, when in 1954, at a meeting of the Arts Council in Warsaw, he exhorted the authorities 'to be more supportive of the young generation of the theatre artists'.<sup>21</sup> Grotowski's appeal was motivated by the moral cynicism, careerism and the pursuit of material values that existed in the professional theatre. In the Art Council's meeting, Grotowski proclaimed romantic and heroic ideas. He maintained this attitude in early 1955, when he called for the establishment of a Young Artists' Club in Cracow, whose aim was to cultivate an art that wished to influence people and the world. During this period, he was criticised by some of his contemporaries for

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<sup>19</sup> Davies, *Heart of Europe*, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

being abstract and professing meaningless ideas. They argued that Grotowski's passion and his position in the Polish Youth Union did not guarantee that his statements had any clear objectives.

In 1952, Grotowski must have witnessed the more violent reactions of the Party towards the Church. Many bishops and priests were arrested and, after being accused of spying for American intelligence, were sentenced. These actions provoked sympathy for the Church from even citizens who were non-practicing Catholics. The repressive measures succeeded in strengthening the traditional loyalty of the Polish Catholic masses to the Church. Consequently, these actions resulted in important changes in the Party's relations with Catholics. Grotowski knew how the restriction of people's free conscience strengthened their longing for a divine or transcendental power. It is possible that he experienced the same need himself, since in his performances he insisted on a spiritual leader, a Christ-like figure, such as the leading characters of *Kordian*, *The Constant Prince* and *Apocalypsis*, who were destroyed by the authorities and/or rationalism. Being as much human as divine, Grotowski's theatrical figures embodied attributes from both Christ and the Indian prophets who Grotowski had admired since childhood. Yet, it was through the symbols of Catholicism that Grotowski searched for the idea of a political leader who also respected people's religiosity and spirituality.

During this period, socialist realism was the only acknowledged style in art. The press and the radio, like art and science, became anti-capitalistic, anti-Western and anti-American. Therefore, in the theatre the classical repertoire of Polish, Russian and certain Western European plays flourished, it being believed that they did not include any allusions against the regime. In literature,

the publishing policy was of selective nineteenth and twentieth century writers, and those works of Western literature that promoted a critical view towards their own societies. Folk culture was considered necessary to the strengthening of the regime, and so it was protected, studied and encouraged. Despite the limited choices, the literature that was approved by the Ministry of Culture was mass-produced and thus the intellectual horizon for the average Pole was broadened. Also, opportunities to study art or to learn it as an amateur increased.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, the Party was unable to curb the influence of the Church, which encouraged Catholics to form a vital community.<sup>23</sup> Leslie underlines the status of the Church in 1953:

The political prestige of the papacy, the hierarchy and the clergy might have suffered, but the influence on mass attendance, religious practices, church weddings and christenings were slight. Even Party members secretly married in church and had their children baptized, confirmed and instructed in religion, yielding to tradition and social pressure rather than to the Party's orders.<sup>24</sup>

With the death of Stalin in 1953, Stalinist policy weakened in Poland and a minor literary revival followed the liberalisation of the Party line. The artists argued the impossibility of finding a creative area between the despotic conception of the political terms 'socialism' and 'realism'. The relaxed cultural policy had a similar effect on the theatre, cinema and visual arts and a critical attitude began to flourish. These were clear indications that the Polish Party leaders were losing their unquestioned authority.<sup>25</sup> In 1956, Bierut died of heart failure, or so it was announced in Moscow. Gomulka, who had been released from detention in 1955, was the obvious person to assume the position of power, especially after

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<sup>22</sup> Leslie, *The History of Poland*, p. 323-325.

<sup>23</sup> Davies, *Heart of Europe*, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Leslie, *The History of Poland*, p. 330

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333-4.

the worker's mobilisation for 'Bread and Freedom' in the city of Poznan. In October 1956, the Soviet army departed, the Soviet Fleet disappeared from Gdansk, and Stalinism fade away.<sup>26</sup> Yet, the Polish October did not mean that Poland stopped being a Soviet satellite, or that government censorship vanished from social and artistic activity. As Robert Findlay states, it was in this period that student and cabaret theatres began to develop in Poland.<sup>27</sup> It was also in this same period that the significant work of the Polish film director Andrzej Wajda began to appear. This was the social and political context in which Grotowski made his first steps into politics and, through this experience, formed his theatrical principles.

Furthermore, according to Leslie, Party leader Gomulka 'always stressed that close Soviet-Polish co-operation was essential to Poland's existence, but he rejected the idea that she should become a replica of the USSR, believing that the Poles should pursue their own road to socialism'.<sup>28</sup> Motivated less by idealism than his desire to protect his party, Gomulka knew that a collaboration between Poland and the USSR would prove ineffective because of the sensitive feelings of the Poles after the war and, more importantly, of the significant economic and social differences in the structure of the two countries. Gomulka rejected the slavish imitation of the Soviet model and demanded a specifically national brand of Communism for Poland; it was generally well known that the communist regime in Poland rested on Soviet power. After his visit to Moscow in 1956, Gomulka made some strategic concessions to satisfy the popular demands for an independent Catholic Church, a free peasantry and political

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<sup>26</sup> Davies, *Heart of Europe*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford, eds., London: Routledge, 1997, p. 176.

<sup>28</sup> Leslie, *The History of Poland*, p. 295.

pluralism. Despite his strategies, it was, however, only the Church that really became stronger. The Polish Church enjoyed free contact with the Vatican, full control over ecclesiastical appointments, property, and finance, and absolute freedom of worship. Even though sociologists had predicted that industrialisation and urbanisation would break the traditional bonds between the society and the Church, they were proven wrong.<sup>29</sup> The new industrial proletariat was as devotedly Catholic as the old peasantry. As far as the peasantry was concerned, even though collectivisation had been halted and collective farms were maintained only in the large, former estates of the recovered territories, the Communists had no great appreciation for the peasants, whom they considered as having antisocial tendencies. The farmers' position was gradually undermined by the state's monopoly on farm prices. As a result, the productivity of state farms failed to rise and by the mid-sixties Poland was on the brink of starvation:

The six years from the beginning of 1957 to the end of 1963 were a period of comparative stability. The upheaval caused by the twin processes of destalinisation and desatellisation subsided rapidly after 1957, and the country settled down to life under Gomulka...This stabilization proved short-lived. It was to be undermined by harsh economic policies to which Gomulka resorted when the political crisis was over. These in turn were caused by the inefficiency of the unreformed economic system, which was incapable of achieving high growth rates and rising living standards at the same time.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, the multi-party system proved bogus since all non-party candidates had to be evaluated and checked by the Party's electoral commission before being invited to stand. Consequently, no independent political bodies were permitted to function.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Davies, *Heart of Europe*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>30</sup> Leslie, *The History of Poland*, p. 367.

<sup>31</sup> Davies, *Heart of Europe*, p. 13.

Between the years 1955-1956, Grotowski received a scholarship to study directing at the State Institute of Theatre Arts (GITIS) in Moscow. Thus, he did not work at the Old Theatre of Cracow, where he had been employed just after his graduation from the Theatre School. He returned to Poland in the late summer of 1956 and was accepted as a fifth-year student in the directing programme at the Theatre School in Cracow. For Poland, the years 1956-1957 were a period of radical political change. A massive anti-Stalinist movement had developed and 'the main drama was taking place outside the theatre', as Osinski remarks.<sup>32</sup> In 1957, the Polish Union, consisting of Leftist-orientated, anti-Stalinist youth activists, was dissolved and some of its members joined the Provisional Central Committee of the Union of Socialist Youth with Grotowski as its Secretary; from this merger the Union of Socialist Youth (ZMS) was founded. Grotowski, having witnessed Soviet Union's position during and after the war and possibly being a 'child' of the 'Polish October', argued that ZMS should be allied to the anti-Stalinist movement and that it should form an organisation where people would be taught to think politically and claim their rights for freedom and civilisation. However, in the very first days of the establishment of ZMS, Grotowski withdrew from the position of Secretary because of differences of opinions.<sup>33</sup> As Osinski argues, Grotowski entered Polish public life as an activist of a national youth organization, rather than as an artist.

When referring to this period, Grotowski admitted that he wanted to be a political saint, having been fascinated by Ghandi's actions. Yet his own insecure nature did not allow him to assume a priori that people's intentions were good.<sup>34</sup> Grotowski stressed that he chose the artistic profession because he was

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<sup>32</sup> *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15-20.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

haunted by the concern to reveal to other people the problem of human loneliness and the inevitability of death. He meant to promote the idea that, despite his uncertainties, human beings were capable of acting against human loneliness and death; by realizing their identity in the confraternity of all living things, people might attain a certain degree of liberation.<sup>35</sup> Between the years 1957-1959, Grotowski started some independent projects in the theatre and also worked for the Polish Radio Theatre. At the same time, he gave lectures on Oriental philosophy. In 1957, Grotowski made his directorial debut with Ionesco's *The Chairs*.<sup>36</sup> Translated for the first time into Polish, *The Chairs* was a big step for the Polish literary community, which was now trying to catch up with Western culture after years of isolation. The production was unsuccessful, although some, like the theatre critic Ludwick Flaszen, thought it was a great theatre of moral and political allusion. Grotowski's social concern had been mirrored in work since his early activities in theatre, a fact that was recognised by Wladyslaw Krzeminski, the dean of the directing programme at the Cracow Theatre School and director at the Old Theatre of Cracow. Having in mind Grotowski's 1958-59 production of *The Ill-Fated*, Krzeminski stated that Grotowski was 'fond of synthesis and aggressive means of expression, but he uses them not to conform to a new fad but to infuse the audience with his own socially passionate and intellectually fascinating attitudes on life'.<sup>37</sup> The performance described a writer's reminiscences of his torture in prison during the war between France and Algeria.

Against the background of Gomulka's socialism, a regime that despite its liberal intentions continued to use censorship in art with the excuse of securing

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<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Osinski, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 27.

<sup>36</sup> Osinski, 'Grotowski Blazes the Trails', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 383.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Osinski, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 26.

social coherence, Grotowski and Flaszen founded the Teatr 13 Rzedow (Theatre of Thirteen Rows) in 1959 in Opole. According to the theatre director Barba, Opole was 'a working-class town in Silesia, whose conspicuous German minority had been expelled after the war and replaced by Polish refugees from the eastern territories which Russia had annexed'.<sup>38</sup> Barba, who became Grotowski's closest comrade during the early years in Opole, developed a great admiration for Poland, especially after watching Andrzej Wajda's film, *Ashes and Diamonds*. The film was based on the social tensions within Poland after the end of the war, which further motivated the desperation of the individual who had witnessed the ferocity of history.<sup>39</sup> For Barba, the Polish were admirable for their resistance to the Germans during the war, for their hard life under the Stalinised regime, and for their success in placing the liberal Gomulka in power and partially liberating themselves from the dogmatism of the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup> Barba's first encounter with Grotowski happened through a friend who suggested that Barba visit the small theatre in Opole, which he did in June 1961.

At that time, Barba had the opportunity to watch the performance of *The Forefathers' Eve*, which he found lacking in taste. Despite the fact that he felt that the ideas were communicated only on an intellectual level, he noted that some political allusions had been imbued with religious connotations. For example, the lead actor Zygmunt Molik walked bent beneath a broom as though it was a cross. Barba explains that 'such an image aroused ambiguous and conflicting resonance in the Polish spectators: on the one hand the profanation of a well-known drama, and on the other the allusions to Tsarist Russia that were still valid under the Soviet oppression. Until recently that fragment of the

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<sup>38</sup> *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 23.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.16-18.

text had been censored'.<sup>41</sup> Over the months Barba's initial admiration for Poland started to fade. He had gone to Poland because he believed that Communism could produce a social revolution and instead he realised that socialism was an obscene caricature, even a nightmare.<sup>42</sup> Polish theatre, which he had admired so much, seemed to him a politically commandeered art; the theatres had full houses because the workers were forced to attend the performances that reinforced the ideas of the regime. His fascination having turned into criticism, Barba explains:

The theatres were crowded because the workers were obliged to go there. The interest in poets whose books were selling like hot cakes was proof that freedom was only attainable through literary fiction. Privileges for artists were proof of the discrimination and the unjust conditions in which the workers lived. Poland was a prison, where you could neither have a passport nor travel abroad as could citizens in capitalist Europe. The secret police were omnipresent and the friendliness of a girl could conceal the interest of an informer.<sup>43</sup>

In this phase of disappointment, Barba and Grotowski met again by chance in Cracow. Realising Barba's disappointment, Grotowski invited him to work at his theatre as his assistant. Between the years 1962-1964, Barba became Grotowski's privileged companion.<sup>44</sup>

During these years political censorship was rife not only in the texts, but also in the performances. So, the theatre that wished to employ criticism and social comment had to do this surreptitiously in order to receive government subsidies. Thus, as mentioned above, the romantic and classical texts, which were considered by the Party to be 'harmless', were widely used on theatre

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<sup>41</sup> *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

stages. Through these texts, Polish directors explored national politics as Shakespeare had done. Under the cover of the romantic repertoire, they illuminated the hard facts of history.<sup>45</sup> Grotowski maintained that the classics contained certain archetypes and key situations, such as contested love, or the individual who sacrifices himself or herself for the group, which are inherent in every culture. The actors involved in the performance had to develop the attributes of shamans so that they could reveal the relationship between their own personal experience and the collective archetypes contained in their theatrical texts. Like Flaszen, Grotowski believed that:

The performance originates from the contact between two ensembles, that of the actors and that of the spectators; the director had to 'direct' both these ensembles, consciously molding their interaction in order to reach an archetype, and thereby the 'collective unconscious' of the two ensembles; these become aware of the archetype through a dialectic of apotheosis and derision which is applied to the text.<sup>46</sup>

In *Kordian*, based on Juliusz Slowacki's text of 1834, for instance, the main character wants to liberate his country from the Tsar and decides to assassinate him. The attempt fails and Kordian is sent to a psychiatric hospital. After being diagnosed as healthy, he is put to death. According to the theatre scholar Jennifer Kumiega, Grotowski appropriated the text and set the whole play in a psychiatric hospital.<sup>47</sup> Thus, Kordian's patriotic speeches and his liberating urge became the outbursts of a sick mind. In post-war Poland, the face of the Tsar could easily be compared with that of the Secretariat of the Party. Especially during this specific period, when Gomulka appeared as the liberating

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<sup>45</sup> Catherine Itzin, *Twentieth Century Polish Theatre*, edited by Bohdan Drozdowski, London: John Calder, 1979, p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 27.

<sup>47</sup> The performance premiered on 13 February 1962. See Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, New York and London: Methuen, 1985, p. 55.

political persona, yet brought the country to the verge of starvation, the archetypal idea of the person who sacrifices for a group had to be challenged. By deifying and, simultaneously, questioning this pattern of action, Grotowski derided the stereotype and opened ways for the archetype to be viewed from multiple perspectives. Thus, he questioned the community's images, myths and social choices. Having Grotowski's direction in mind, the Polish theatre critic Jan Kott says that a revolution is impossible in a consumer society and that a rational revolutionary tactic does not exist. In harsh conditions, however, Utopian thought recovers its lost attraction and dignity. The only thing that can be acted out is rebellion, which is an instant Utopia.<sup>48</sup> Kott draws parallels between Utopia and the theatre, possibly because of the ephemeral nature of both, and argues that as Utopia can be acted out in the form of rebellion, thus theatre should also. In Grotowski's theatre, as Kott argues, liberation only comes through death, the torture of the body, and the humiliation of the spirit.<sup>49</sup>

In *Akropolis*, Grotowski altered Stanislaw Wyspianski's play of 1904 to serve as a metaphor.<sup>50</sup> In Wyspianski's text, faces from sixteenth century tapestries are resurrected and classical and biblical scenes re-enacted. Wyspianski meant to reveal the sum total of all civilisation's contributions to humanity and to confront this with contemporary experience.<sup>51</sup> This is what he called the 'cemetery of the tribes'. Grotowski and Flaszen took the main theme of the play and its title, *Akropolis*, and created two axes around which the action revolved. The performance was based on improvisations that demonstrated the

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<sup>48</sup> Jan Kott, 'Why Should I Take Part in the Sacred Dances?', *The Theatre of Essence*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1984, p. 144.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>50</sup> The performance premiered on 10 October 1962. See Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p.

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

strenuous labour of the Auschwitz concentration camp and the rhythm of this labour. The mythic elements of the performance were evident. Scenes from the Trojan War and the Resurrection were integrated with the dying bodies and corpses of the camp. The terror that accompanies the savagery of the war was conveyed by the actors as if they were in a dream. There was no contact with the audience and the actors moved around the space as if figments of a sick imagination. Wyspianski ended his play with the resurrection of a Christ-Apollo figure signifying hope. In Grotowski's version there was no hope, a situation that resembled the contemporary Polish political scene. Political corruption on all sides condemned the Polish people to poverty and instability. When people lose their origins, mistrust develops among them. The only way forward for Poland, therefore, was religion, which for years had seemed the only protector of Polish roots.

Grotowski's *The Constant Prince*, based on Juliusz Slowacki's adaptation of Calderon's text, and *Apocalypsis cum figures*, texts from the Bible and Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, T.S Eliot and Simone Weil, presented the passion of Christ, yet each play viewed the passion differently.<sup>52</sup> The former focused on the inner process of Christhood and the latter on Christhood's social impact. In *The Constant Prince*, liberation comes from the suffering of the body and the humiliation of the spirit. The Prince is tortured by the unrelenting social order and by blind authority, yet he dies remaining pure, without renouncing his feelings of love. He is a Christ figure, more in the sense of a mythic Savior than of the Christ of Catholicism. Grotowski presented a subject that contradicted itself. On the one hand, he mocked the 'saviors' of a Church or a party that

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<sup>52</sup> *The Constant Prince* premiered on 25 April 1965 and *Apocalypsis* in 1968. See Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 74 and 87

condemned individual freedom, and on the other hand, he implied that individual freedom only comes through suffering. Grotowski chose a very similar method to portray a Christ-like figure in *Apocalypse*, where the Catholic Mass was represented.

In Poland, during May the festival of the Black Madonna, Queen of Poland, is celebrated annually. At this event, not far away from a monastery there are market stalls where people sell a large variety of products, from bread to religious baubles. On this occasion, where holiness is mixed with trade, as well as with a longing for community, alcohol is usually present and large amounts of vodka are consumed on these occasions, as on so many others in Poland. *Apocalypse*' action started with a woman who placed a loaf of bread on a handkerchief and then drank straight from a bottle. Then she passed the bottle to a man. Eventually, a Christ figure appeared with wounds on his body and somebody licked his wounds. Some joined in this activity while others derided him. This character lay between Christ and a village idiot whom the community derided and, in the end, banished.<sup>53</sup>

The symbol of the scapegoat, that is, the one who is deported for apparently overstepping the bounds of convention, is found in every society and thus constitutes an archetype, a concept that will be dealt with in depth later in this thesis. The Poles could remember how their lack of resistance, no matter how justifiable, had encouraged Hitler's anti-Semitism. The distance of the concentration camps from populated areas was short enough for people to know the real character of the camps. Yet, fear for their own and their families' and friends' lives prevented them from protesting against these camps. Barba's

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<sup>53</sup> Kott, *The Theatre of Essence*, pp. 141-2.

experience exemplifies the Poles ineffectiveness in countermanding concentration camps and human exploitation. Not in a wartime but in a communist state, he remembers how the police interrogated him in 1964 in Opole. With no provocation on his part, the Polish police questioned him about his friends in Warsaw. Barba was very careful about his answers until he eventually realised that they already knew everything about him and the people whom he had met. He was greatly disturbed by the opacity of the reasons for such interrogation. This event, which lasted for seven hours, had no further implications, but made Barba wonder about the position he would have taken in Auschwitz. 'Would I have collaborated and survived as a kapo? ...Or would I have joined the resistance?'.<sup>54</sup> Decades after the war, in the so-called liberal period of Polish Communism, the authorities continued to guide the society in dictatorial ways, thus, inhibiting any rebellion. Another example of repression comes from Lech Raczak, the director of the Theatre of the Eight Day, who was deprived of his passport and not allowed to leave the country until 1976, because of the political allusions in his productions.<sup>55</sup>

In these social and political conditions, which lasted for almost thirty years after the war, the citizen was encouraged to betray his or her fellow citizen. In Poland, where the policy of isolation or deportation was synonymous with the Party's, Grotowski's performances shocked the spectators, who understood the 'meta' meaning and were indirectly asked to confront themselves regarding the possible implications of their own behaviour. Since it was only the church that promoted ideas of solidarity, the use of the symbolism of Christ in Grotowski's performances intended to create in the spectators the dilemma between their

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<sup>54</sup> *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 112.

<sup>55</sup> Noted by Kermit Dunkelberg, Paratheatre and the Theatre of Sources (conference), Saturday 28 September 2002, Brzezinka, Poland.

conditioned behaviour, directed by politics, and their suppressed feelings, which could be released through religiosity.

Grotowski adopted the image of Christ in his performances, not as a fixed, benevolent figure, but as a perpetually self-developing archetype. Christ was not used as a Catholic symbol, but as an archetype that blurred the clear line between good and evil. Since 'Christhood' can be considered as belonging unconsciously to all human beings, it was used as a metaphor for the realisation of the self. To be more precise, even if pulled in opposite directions, human beings may find the most suitable way for them to experience self-fulfillment. Completeness only comes through contradictions. The science of psychology sheds more light on this wholeness. Carl Jung argues that this merging of contradictions, 'can only be understood as a paradox, since a union of opposites can be thought of only as their annihilation. Paradox is a characteristic of all transcendental situations because it alone gives adequate expression to their indescribable nature'.<sup>56</sup> This annihilation acquires a collective character, that is, it is accomplished within society.

According to Jung, the human collective unconscious belongs to humankind equally, even if different people realise different aspects of the archetypes. Yet, Jung stresses his hesitations about group psychology. He explains that a group experience takes place on a lower level of consciousness than the experience of an individual, because the psychology of the crowd inevitably descends to the level of mob psychology.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, Jung acknowledges the fact that in mass psychology there are also positive experiences, such as feelings of human solidarity. In this case, Jung traces

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<sup>56</sup> 'Christ: a Symbol of the Self', *Aion: Researches into Phenomenology of the Self*, London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959, p. 70.

<sup>57</sup> *The Four Archetypes*, p. 59.

people's tendency to enjoy effortlessly the vested interests of the group which one would not have possessed as an individual. Jung sees the roots of Communism where people start taking 'gifts' for granted. According to Jung's psychoanalytic explanation, Communism starts when people demand everything from the state, without reflecting that the state consists of those individuals who make the demands. In Communism, Jung explains, each individual enslaves the community, which consequently is controlled by a dictator; the Communist State is nothing other than an absolute monarchy in which there are no individual citizens, but only subjects.<sup>58</sup> Mass psychology develops because the presence of so many people together exerts great suggestive force on one another. Thus, the individual in the crowd easily becomes the victim of his own suggestibility. Jung believes that the psychological regression within the group is partially counteracted by ritual, that is, through a cult ceremony which makes the performance of archetypal events the center of group activity. Thus, the crowd is prevented from relapsing into unconscious instinctuality.<sup>59</sup> Jung concludes that 'if there is no relation to a centre which expresses the unconscious through its symbolism, the mass psyche inevitably becomes the hypnotic focus of fascination'.<sup>60</sup> Grotowski's political urge, which was transformed in his work into symbolism, suggests that he would have respected Jung's ideas.

Having had the experience of living in a socialist state, and realizing the Catholic Church's misappropriation of the symbolism of Christ— both of which encouraged mob psychology—Grotowski must have acknowledged Jung's principles for controlling society. Indeed, Grotowski knew that his performances were addressed to a society that, when dissatisfied with the Party, turned to

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<sup>58</sup> Jung, *Aion*, p. 61.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60-1.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

religion and then oscillated between the two, attempting to define an ideal that proved incomplete. Thus, in his performances, he promoted the idea that existential answers could not be found in either a political party or a religion, unless the individual consciously moved towards self-realisation.

The themes of Grotowski's productions included a politically explicit subtext, all connected to Polish history. For example, in *Forefathers' Eve* by Adam Michiewicz, published in 1823 and *Kordian*, he elaborated the notion of the individual who wants to revolt. In Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, it was suggested that the individual set himself against a stronger will.<sup>61</sup> *The Constant Prince*, as Barba stresses, portrayed, on the one hand, the Prince's total rejection of society and its values, and on the other, the community's fury with the outsider who wants to remain loyal to his principles.<sup>62</sup> Barba expresses the disappointment he felt during that time in Poland when he 'read and listen[ed] to the accusations of the "committed" artists who charged Grotowski with being non-political. This sort of attitude revealed a total blindness to the rebellious extremism of his way of thinking and of his theatre practice'.<sup>63</sup> During the period of Productions, Grotowski made an enormous effort to defend his own truth and protect himself from being removed from the Polish theatrical and social proscenium of the sixties.

One has to appreciate the extreme circumstances in Opole and the external pressures that were imposed on Grotowski not only as a director, but also as a citizen. Grotowski and Barba were aware of the fact that hidden microphones recorded all their conversations. Their theatrical effort was in fact a

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<sup>61</sup> *Forefathers' Eve* premiered in 1961 and *Doctor Faustus* in 1963. See Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 33 and 66.

<sup>62</sup> Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 82.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

wider effort of learning to play chess with the authorities: censorship, informers, secret police, politicians and more. Over the years, Grotowski developed strategic moves to secure his spiritual peace. He could play on Polish patriotism in order to be 'ideologically correct' without creating problems with the Polish authorities. For instance, on May 1963, 'the whole theatre, led by Flaszen and Grotowski, participated in the procession of blue- and white-collar workers carrying huge placards promising to increase production and filing past the platform where the local communist party bosses stood smiling and waving'.<sup>64</sup> Grotowski's theatrical method of 'apotheosis and derision' had thus become an active stand. By 1964, political pressures had become intolerable and subsidies had been suspended.

Under these conditions, special terminology had to be used in their discussions and especially in the performances. Every word had to reflect the intended meaning, yet avoid the accusation of holding 'idealistic' or 'mystical' ideas that threatened the regime. Despite the fact that they monitored their terminology and did not even attract a large audience, Grotowski's theatrical attempts irritated Opole's authorities. In socialist Poland, the use of religious terminology was welcome since people openly professed their religion. The regime had succeeded in finding a compromise with the Catholic Church, otherwise its power would have been seriously threatened by the massive number of Catholic followers.<sup>65</sup> Censorship was applied to anti-religious feelings when the Party wanted to be on good terms with the Church, or to anti-Soviet allusions, idealism and worldliness when the party did not want to irritate their Russian inspectors. Therefore, when the authorities eventually recognised

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<sup>64</sup> Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 42.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Grotowski's special use of Catholic representations, the director was accused of anti-religious allusions in his performances on the basis of the symbolism of Christ.

Another instance that shocked both the authorities and the friends of Grotowski's theatre was his *Study on Hamlet*. The performance presented notions of existential revolt, political dissent and questioned the norms of Polish socialism. The protagonist was an intellectual who spoke Polish with a Jewish accent and stood among peasants who spat on him while they were singing patriotic songs. In this performance, Grotowski directly implicated the Polish people in the atrocities of Auschwitz through their ignorance. Thus, he presented the other facet of a deeply Catholic Poland—entrenched anti-Semitism. By this time, Opole's authorities were extremely irritated by Grotowski's activity, both inside and outside the theatre, and subsequently the Polish Ministry of Culture decided to send a commission to Opole to evaluate the activity of Grotowski's theatre. They watched *Hamlet*, but fortunately Grotowski had many friends in the commission and for the moment the threat of closure dissipated.<sup>66</sup> Grotowski was deeply concerned with the survival of the Theatre of Thirteen Rows and the effectiveness of its work. Barba explains that in socialist Poland, the regime had succeeded in finding a *modus vivendi* with the Catholic Church. Yet, to be defined a 'mystic' or an 'idealist', as mentioned above, meant that one was the Party's opponent. Wanting to avoid any conflict with the Party, Grotowski changed the name of the theatre. Barba records:

In January 1962 the Polish Ministry of Culture sent forms round to every theatre inquiring which genre they practiced: dramatic, musical, for children, puppet theatre, opera, operetta, laboratory,

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<sup>66</sup> Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 83

etc. Grotowski indicated the last of these since none of the others applied to the 13 Rzedow. He immediately realised the value of the term: it allowed him to justify research into what was 'essential' in theatre craft, the lengthy process involved in the preparation of a production, and the restricted number of spectators. What is more, the term made reference to a historical precedent, to the laboratories of Stanislavski, the artist who was the model for Soviet theatre and therefore, like it or not, for the entire socialist block.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, the Teatr 13 Rzedow became Teatr-Laboratorium 13 Rzedow.

Grotowski's adaptability guaranteed the continuation of his work.

Despite the plethora of restrictions, among them travelling abroad, Grotowski became better known in the West than in his own country, thanks to Barba, who traveled throughout Europe promoting Grotowski's work. As mentioned previously, in the days of socialist Poland, foreign travel was restricted—getting a passport and procuring foreign currency were immensely difficult. The only possibilities for those who did not belong to the Party to travel were either to receive a scholarship, as members of an official delegation, or to travel on the formal invitation of somebody from abroad who would guarantee to cover the cost of the travel and to provide accommodation. Despite all these obstacles, performances of *The Constant Prince*, *Akropolis* and *Apocalypsis* were staged in the United States, where they made an especially great impression.

Some of the press critics are indicative of the impact Grotowski's performances had in the West. The professor of Theatre Studies Richard Schechner refers to two of the most representational assessments. The first is by Jerry Talmer of the *New York Post*, who reviewed *The Constant Prince*. Talmer stresses that Grotowski's company in discipline and sheer poetic brilliance surpassed U.S theatre groups and those abroad, for instance the Living

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<sup>67</sup> *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 45.

Theatre, which claimed common origins. Talmer specifically says: 'It [the Laboratory Theatre] starts on a dime, stops on a dime, and seems to have access to everything: chanting, whispering-chanting, birdcalls, seagull cries, the Kyrie eleison of liturgical ritual, instant switches from terrible sobbing to natural conversational tones'.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, Clive Barnes in *The New York Times*, commenting on *Akropolis*, was impressed by the performance's environmental setting, that is, actors responding to one another across the audience. He was also fascinated by the stylised acting, where by their familiarity even day-to-day things like wheelbarrows drew the spectator into a sense of participation. Regarding the acting, Barnes stresses the importance of mask-like images of misery and acceptance, the dehumanised voices. The actors' entire manner, Barnes, claims, 'represents humanity in such a condition of degradation that the humanity itself is flickering like a guttering candle'.<sup>69</sup> Grotowski's fame abroad influenced the Polish authorities to his benefit, despite the fact that his importance in Poland was insignificant. Facing an artistic saturation point, and perhaps with Polish political instability and financial pressures affecting theatre on his mind, Grotowski announced *Apocalypsis* would be his last performance.

During the same period Poland experienced another attempt at political change. In 1970, Gomulka was replaced in government by Edward Gierek, whose good will and modern approach to governing Poland was not enough to help the country rise above its economic doldrums. Gierek secured huge loans from the capitalist West to buy expensive modern technology to revitalise Polish industry. Poland intended to repay the interest on these loans by selling products to the West, but this scheme failed because the West did not welcome

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 113.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

the substandard Polish products. Gierek's first reaction was to raise food prices overnight, even though at the beginning of his career he had frozen untenable food prices and raised salaries, thus creating a false prosperity. Instead of bringing industrial benefits to the country, Gierek further burdened the economy by taking out even more loans. Thus, the accelerated foreign debt and the pathetic attempt in 1980 to raise food prices without consultation or preparation led to several workers' strikes, which were illegal and had been avoided until then.<sup>70</sup> Both Gomulka and Gierek 'convinced their subjects that the communist regime was only playing with political liberalization, and had no serious intention of granting lasting concessions'.<sup>71</sup> Poland's political instability continued.

In contrast to the climate of xenophobia, the overtones of which could still be heard in Gierek's policy, Grotowski opened his work to foreign visitors during Paratheatre. He seems to have believed, in agreement with theories of the collective unconscious, that only 'otherness' can help the 'local' develop and vice versa. Having no political or local character, Grotowski's work used the terms above as metaphors. Grotowski's Paratheatrical activity suggested a new way of confronting life. Far removed from the Flower Children, yet so close, Grotowski organised a 'meeting' beyond nationalities and political and financial affairs. Paratheatre sought those 'who, simply because they need to, would choose to leave behind personal comfort and seek exposure in work, in an encounter, in movement and freedom'.<sup>72</sup> The activities were underscored by principles of self-motivation and spirituality. The participants lived together for a few days, worked for their daily needs, which were limited to basic necessities, and participated in ritual-like actions. Grotowski introduced the notion of the communal by practicing

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<sup>70</sup> Davies, *Heart of Europe*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>72</sup> Osinski, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 123.

it, not by expounding a theory on it. He suggested that once people became aware of basic human needs, then the divisions between them would disappear to give way to a cooperative community, the distant dream of Communism. In Paratheatre, people from different nationalities were called upon to abandon artificiality, to take off their cultural masks. These masks had been created unconsciously within their specific social context so were unessential for transcultural co-living. By confronting other nationalities that used different masks, the participants were motivated to question the validity of their behaviour, particularly under certain circumstances where sharability was the subject of research. The 'cemetery of the tribes' of *Akropolis* became a successful Tower of Babel in Paratheatre. Put differently, in Grotowski's words, 'one thing is certain, that in order to select one another democratically, one has to select one another mutually'.<sup>73</sup>

Even if he had withdrawn from theatre, Grotowski's theatrical methods did not remain unappreciated as the history of The Theatre of the Eighth Day proves. Students in the Polish Department at Adam Mickiewicz University founded this theatre in Poznan in the mid-sixties.<sup>74</sup> The leader of the group was a Polish major named Tomasz Szymanski, and two other founding members were Stanislaw Baranczak and Lech Raczak. Until 1967, The Theatre of the Eighth Day had been a typical 1960's Polish student theatre. The nature of the theatre started to change in 1967 with the production of *La Varsoviennne*, directed by Osinski, who introduced the working methods and some of the imagery of the Laboratory Theatre. This resulted in a crisis which led to Baranczak's and Szymanski's resignations in 1968, when Raczak assumed the

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<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Jan Blonski, *Twentieth Century Polish Theatre*, p. 69.

<sup>74</sup> Kathleen Cioffi, *Alternative Theatre in Poland*, Singapore: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999, p. 121.

artistic direction of the theatre. In the same year, Teo Spychalski from the Laboratory Theatre came to The Theatre of the Eighth Day to lead exercises in Grotowski's acting technique. According to Raczak, with the events of 1968, the members of the theatre realised that 'it is necessary to deal not only with what's going on in the arts but also with what is happening in society. We wanted to make a theatre relevant to people living here and now, a theatre that would deal with everyday problems, with the simple facts of political and social reality'.<sup>75</sup> Grotowski's methods were integrated into The Theatre of the Eighth Day with overt political intentions.

Having observed Grotowski's 'exit' from the theatre, Raczak held strong reservation about Grotowski's activity in Paratheatre. At a conference in Brzezinka in 2002, Raczak explained why in the mid-seventies he had criticised the artistic and political stance which Grotowski held after the sixties.<sup>76</sup> At that time, he had questioned Grotowski's attempt to make people realise themselves in contact with others, since this is what happens in everyday life. He stated that Paratheatre, not having permeated daily life, left people disarmed and unable to struggle in daily circumstances. Thus, Paratheatre only repeated stereotypes, and was empty of any significance. He explained that Grotowski abandoned the actor-spectator relationship to develop the guide-participant relationship, which, in Raczak's eyes, did not differ from the initial, authoritative relationship. Moreover, the lack of full exchange of information, as proclaimed in Paratheatrical rules, reminded him of bad classical theatre, where the director demands certain movements from the actors without any justification. Thus,

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<sup>75</sup> Kathleen Cioffi and Andrej Caynowa, 'An Interview with Director Lech Raczak', *The Drama Review*, 1986, p. 82.

<sup>76</sup> Paratheatre and the Theatre of Sources (conference), Saturday 28 September 2002. Personal notes from the panel.

Raczak assumed that Grotowski had no clear political stance in his theatre. While Grotowski's theatre, which could have been an effective instrument for protest turned into Paratheatre, Raczak was preparing performances in factories. He viewed Grotowski's activities as being deprived of significance and if one considers Grotowski's later choices, Raczak's assumptions appear to have been justified. It is possible that Paratheatrical experiments led Grotowski to the realisation that the direct confrontation of the self within an international community required tight-knit groups and a prolonged period of work. Thus, in 1978, Grotowski withdrew and personally conducted smaller-scale activities. His 'political stance' stood beyond politics in personal psychology, resonating Jung's theories that tended to explain politics through group psychology.<sup>77</sup>

Forty years later, at the aforementioned conference in Brzezinka, Raczak himself reconsidered his criticism of Paratheatre and the position of theatre in modern Poland. He explained that during the seventies he was fighting for a Communist as opposed to a capitalist market. Nowadays, he is only trying to find a place in the capitalist market. The theatre receives money only when it respects the principles of capitalism. Raczak did not claim that socialism would have been the right solution, but he is certain that capitalism is not. Thus, he said that today, he has no grounds for criticism, as he had done back in the seventies when he questioned Grotowski's choices. It seems that Grotowski had soon realised the futility of political revolution. Believing that social change starts within the individual, Grotowski continued his special 'political reformation'.

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<sup>77</sup> As Jung states, 'The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate. That is to say, when the individual remains undivided and does not become conscious of his inner opposite, the world must perforce act out the conflict and be torn into opposing halves', *Aion*, p. 71.

Grotowski, in the subsequent phases of his work, continued to attempt to join seemingly contradictory ideas, such as politics and personal psychology, by engaging in the practice of a diversity of techniques. He had the firm conviction that personality and also the psyche are modulated by contradictory impulses, desires and urges which harmonic coordination may develop into self-completeness. He had perhaps taken into account that dissolution of personal relationships, or political affairs, conflicts or war, do not happen accidentally. They are just the effect of an unconscious human cause. In short, it is the people within the society who rule their own destinies. The more Grotowski developed his work, the more he made clear that his aim was to make the participant in his activities the master of himself. This was a kind of freedom far from political or artistic models, which are, in any case, ephemeral. Grotowski seems to have been reflecting a more general political fermentation which became the political change in Poland of the late seventies.

Throughout the years of Paratheatre, the financial crisis in Poland led to social changes with international repercussions. Until 1978, the Church had played a leading role in Polish society. Regardless of the suppression it suffered in Poland, the Polish Catholic Church was the only 'truly independent Church in the whole Soviet Bloc'.<sup>78</sup> Yet, the restrictions placed on the Church made the Polish Catholics proclaim the Church's independence, thus indirectly declaring a political plurality. The scholar Patrick Michel claims that 'religion becomes a synonym for freedom, since fighting for religious freedom becomes a fight for all freedoms'.<sup>79</sup> It is this aspect of the Polish Church that *Solidarnosc* (Solidarity) found compatible with its values. Solidarity was the movement that grew out of

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<sup>78</sup> Davies, *Heart of Europe*, p 12.

<sup>79</sup> *Politics and Religion in Eastern Europe: Catholicism in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991, p. 174.

the 1970's strikes. The strike committee of Gdansk rejected a favorable agreement with the government in exchange for the settlement of their strike, claiming that in this way they would betray their fellow workers elsewhere. A series of negotiations resulted in the workers' recognition of the Party's leading political role, in return for which the Party 'formally accepted a long list of concessions, including the worker's right to strike, their right to organise themselves into free trade unions, their right to construct a monument to colleagues killed in 1970, and a relaxation of censorship'.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, representatives of several strike committees formed the National Co-ordinating Committee under the name of Solidarity. Lech Walesa, a thirty-seven-year-old electrician, who had climbed over the wall of the Lenin Shipyards to lead the crucial strike in Gdansk, was elected as chairman. Solidarity's independent co-operation with the Party seemed to open new horizons for Polish politics.

Representing almost every family in Poland, Solidarity remained faithful to non-violent ideas up to the very end. Rejecting the idea that his movement should take the Party's position, Walesa suggested a new state, where the Church, the Party and Solidarity could all be represented. The election of Cardinal Wojtyla as Pope John Paul II in 1978 signified the ultimate triumph of the Polish Catholic Church and Walesa had the Catholic Church on his side. Walesa, another product of applied socialism, recognised the necessity of spirituality and intended to include the Church in the politics of his country, thus seeking not only material, but also spiritual well-being. Walesa wanted to bring the Church 'out of the museum' and have it play a significant part in people's lives, implying that faith in Catholicism and politics could exist concomitantly. On

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<sup>80</sup> Davies, *Heart of Europe*, p. 18.

this level, Marxist and Catholic ideology appear compatible and productive. During Solidarity, Poland enjoyed a spontaneous social, intellectual and artistic life for the first time. Even if the Church's real objectives for this coalition were to consolidate its traditional position and gain new ground while Walesa's aim was to secure Solidarity's position, it must be stressed that for the first time, however brief, totalitarianism had been replaced with true secularisation in Poland.

The parallels between Walesa's social guidelines and Grotowski's artistic approach to society should by now be apparent. Walesa meant to strengthen the individual's freedom by consolidating his or her traditional values and by altering the state's totalitarianism to secularisation. During this same period, Grotowski suggested that self-growth is only achieved through the consolidation of tradition, adopting the Jungian sense of a collective tradition and insisting on work with mixed groups, that is, with people from different cultural background. The advantage Grotowski had over Walesa was his conviction that a quick, observable result ran the danger of being short-lived. Grotowski was not concerned with the visibility of the results of his work in his own life-time. Grotowski's principle for 'craft and spontaneity' differed substantially from Walesa's choices. Walesa remained faithful to his rules for spontaneity and transparency to the end, thus he took no steps to provide Solidarity with the means of self-defense. 'When on 13 December 1981 it was attacked by the communist security forces', led by General Jaruzelski with tanks and guns, Solidarity 'had no arms, no independent communication network, and no plan of campaign'.<sup>81</sup> Jaruzelski was promoted to the post of Prime Minister by the Party, which at that time had no notion of the impact of such a decision. Acting as a

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<sup>81</sup> Davies, *Heart of Europe*, p. 19.

'Moscow man' within Poland, Jaruzelski forced martial law on the country. After several attempts to gain independence from the Soviet Union, modern Poland was humiliated. Because of the events in Poland, Grotowski did not have enough time to realise his dream in the Theatre of Sources. When martial law was imposed, Kumiega explains, there was a curfew, intensified food rationing, theatres and cinemas were closed and people were forbidden to gather in large groups or leave town without permission. Thus, Kumiega continues, 'the only work that took place was private, closed work within the theatre buildings in Wroclaw'.<sup>82</sup> Unable to continue his work, Grotowski left for Denmark in January 1982 and in autumn 1982 for the United States. Finally, in 1986, he moved to Italy, which became his final place of residence. Grotowski only returned to Poland for brief visits, never to live, even after the collapse of Communism in 1989.<sup>83</sup>

As previously stated, Grotowski's theatre was born in a period of intense political unrest. Even if they showed strong opposition to the Soviet Union's supervision, the post-war Polish governments failed to form an independent Polish regime. Thus, the social institutions of Poland in the 1950s, by seeking social coherence, seem to have implemented an unstable social utopia. The general working policy where all businesses and land belonged to the state thus making all citizens civil servants encouraged the workers to serve the common interest. Theatre, on the other hand, was considered to serve political interests and, thus, was fully subsidised. To attract all citizens theatre tickets cost the same as cinema tickets. Nevertheless, the securing of this otherwise imposed communal life was achieved by limitations on travel abroad and by bans on

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<sup>82</sup> *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 212.

<sup>83</sup> Schechner, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 212.

importation of foreign capitalist ideas and life styles. The belief that true socialism existed in the fifties and sixties seemed absolutely ungrounded. The workers were not just encouraged to attend, but politically guided to, the theatre. The price for this state-sponsored art was severe censorship and direct interference in the theatrical choices, as well as in the performances, which were prohibited from including the slightest mention of anything considered offensive to the regime.

Within the sociocultural framework described above, Grotowski modulated his 'subject'. In other words, he formed an adherence to the development of individuality in the context of his work. Grotowski's innovative approach to art was permeated with the historical events of his time yet it transcended them by considering human action on a philosophical level. To be more precise, the fact that Polish society was crushed in the Second World War by its accidental position on the map of Europe and that neither European nor Soviet diplomacy truly acted on Poland's behalf, seems to have produced in the governments such as Gomulka's, as well as in individuals, like Walesa, an idealism that the hard facts of Poland's political history rendered ineffective. In this same period of 1959-1969, Grotowski's performances struggled with unanswered questions about the boundaries between spiritual prosperity and social/historical factors. The only deliverance was found in his continuous belief and in his idealistic urge that should have been crushed by historical circumstances, but triumphed on the level of spirituality; the Catholicism in Poland expressed the spiritual anxiety of Polish people and made their material poverty endurable. The 'poor theatre' was not only a solution for Grotowski's insufficiently subsidised theatre, but a space where the distinction between

physical freedoms, be they bodily or mental, and the independent life of spiritual existence wrestled.

Kott notes that in the second half of the fifties the Polish theatre, including Grotowski's, was perhaps the most political in the world. In the period just after Stalin's death in 1953, Poland dreamt of an independence from Soviet oppression, a dream that seemed to come true in 1956 with the Polish October. Yet, the serious financial problems and the food shortage caused intense social instability and motivated arbitrary and unlimited political repression, unavoidably affecting the theatre. Kott observes:

In conditions of arbitrary and unlimited political repression, every public activity is a compromise. In the theatre, a political compromise is always ultimately an artistic compromise. Grotowski made the heroic decision to be uncompromising. But under the conditions of repression, such a decision exacts the price of supplanting politics with metaphysics.<sup>84</sup>

Kott states that after Grotowski's appearances in England and the United States, some critics noticed that the greatest artistic success of a so-called socialist country was the mystic theatre of obscure religious experience. He further claims that the actor's task in Grotowski's theatre was to experience and incarnate archetypes. Despite his doubts about the applicability of archetypes to contemporary theatre, Kott recognises that by embracing a diversity of meanings, archetypes are politically harmless. Yet, Grotowski's subsequent career, as well as the Workcenter's continuing work, proves that Grotowski's choices were not merely directed by conventional politics. The Polish director was convinced that the incarnation of archetypes in performance had a political

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<sup>84</sup> *The Theatre of Essence*, p. 140.

dimension that encompassed the realm of philosophy and was not ruled by history.

## CHAPTER II

### *Ritual Dimensions: ritualistic elements in Grotowski's work*

Grotowski envisioned theatre as a distinct form of performance, standing apart from other categories of performance and spectacle, such as traditional European theatre or oriental theatre. Consequently, he refused to accept theatre as merely a collection of aesthetic disciplines, and he investigated the actor-audience relationship, citing the personal and stage technique of the actor as the measure of his theatre art.<sup>85</sup> In the performances from *Kordian* to *Apocalypsis*, between the years 1962 to 1968, at the time when his experimentation led to the development of a method, he was compelled to scrutinise theatre in relation to other disciplines, such as psychology and anthropology. He consequently came to regard the origins of theatre in the religious enactments of tribal societies, namely rituals. He considered ritual as the mechanism for transmitting a myth to the tribe: in this process the spectator experiences a renewed awareness of his or her personal truth through the truth of the myth. For Grotowski, the myth was 'both a primeval situation, and a complex model with an independent existence in the psychology of social groups, inspiring group behaviour and tendencies'.<sup>86</sup> In other words, myth is viewed as both a pre-historical and modern unit which modulates social action.

Grotowski's consideration of myth and ritual echoes the anthropological theories of both Mircea Eliade and Emile Durkheim. Eliade views myth as the

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<sup>85</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, London: Methuen, 1968, p. 15. 'In the first place, we are trying to avoid eclecticism, trying to resist thinking of theatre as a composite of disciplines. We are seeking to define what is distinctively theatre, what separates this activity from other categories of performance and spectacle. Secondly, our productions are detailed investigations of the actor-audience relationship. That is, **we consider the personal and scenic technique of the actor as the core of theatre art**'.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

exemplary model for all human activities.<sup>87</sup> For him, the identification of human acts with the divine models preserved in myth enables people to experience the ontologically real and meaningful, to regenerate cyclical notions of time, and to renew the prosperity and fecundity of the community. Ritual initiates this identification. Rites, he argues, are reenactments of the deeds performed by the god in the primordial past and preserved in mythological accounts.<sup>88</sup> In many cases, ritual activity includes formalised acts, culturally defined gestures and other aesthetic forms, such as dancing, singing and reciting.<sup>89</sup> From the perspective of social anthropology, Durkheim further extends the notion of myth and ritual, viewing myths as 'collective representations', in other words traditions existing independently of the individual and to which he or she respectfully conforms his or her thoughts.<sup>90</sup> In contrast, rituals are explained as 'rules of conduct' governing how people should act in the presence of sacred entities.<sup>91</sup> Durkheim sees ritual as the means by which the individual members of a community are brought together as a collective group. Thus, ritual functions to strengthen the bonds that attach the individual to the society. Ritual creates this situation not by means of a conscious act of affiliation, but by the experience of

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<sup>87</sup> *Myth and Reality*, New York: Harper and Row, 1963, pp. 5-6.

<sup>88</sup> *The Sacred and the Profane*, New York and London: Harcourt Inc., 1957, pp. 99-100.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77-8.

<sup>90</sup> *Durkheim on Religion*, edited by W. S. F. Pickering, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994, pp. 92, 111. Durkheim claims that 'Religion is something pre-eminently social. Religious *représentations* are collective *représentations* which are the expression of collective realities. Rites are ways of behaving which only come into being at the heart of assembled groups and whose function is to create, maintain and to re-establish certain mental states within these groups', p. 111. Durkheim further explains that collective representations are obligatory religious practices known as myths and dogmas, p. 92.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88. Durkheim specifically focuses his studies on archaic societies (see footnote 10) which define themselves as a group in regard to a totem, that is, an ancestor, be it a human or not, from which each member of the group and the group itself believe to originate. The totem can be either benevolent or malevolent, and the religious practices of totemic groups seek to attract the benevolent side of the totem. Durkheim observes that this idea has transcultural validity as it can be observed in all religious practices which may or may not belong to a known religious system. Thus, his statement that 'ritual is the totality of practices concerned with *sacred things*', is of particular significance.

the collective representation as a simultaneously transcendent and immanent commonality. A. A. Goldenweiser furthers Durkheim's analyses by examining ritual in modern psychological terms. He explains that divinities are considered by the natives to be external and objective, that is, divinities exist only to the extent to which they are believed in. Such a belief is practiced in ritual and thus constitutes a social experience.<sup>92</sup> In modern terms, it can be argued that in ritual enactments, the personal unconscious consolidates traditional knowledge.

Despite the fact that Grotowski attributed this commonality inherent in myth and ritual to an archaic and to a traditional period, he clearly declares a different situation for industrial societies.<sup>93</sup> Accordingly, social groupings are gradually less defined by religion; traditional mythic forms are in a state of fluctuation; they periodically disappear and reincarnate. Thus, he maintained that the spectators are increasingly individuated 'in their relation to the myth as corporate truth or group model, and belief is often a matter of intellectual conviction.... Group identification with myth—the equation of personal, individual truth with universal truth—is virtually impossible today'.<sup>94</sup> Grotowski appreciates 'confrontation' rather than identification with myth as the only possible way to incarnate these values at a particular moment in history. He suggested that those 'archaic situations', that is, group identification with myth, sanctified by tradition, should be confronted with the modern experience of the individual, which is itself determined by the collective experience of his or her times. This concept is what Grotowski calls 'the dialectics of apotheosis and derision', a proposal for

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<sup>92</sup> *Durkheim on Religion*, pp. 220-222.

<sup>93</sup> 'Archaic' is a pre-literate society, whereas 'traditional' is a literate society, yet in both the religious and the social life are interdependent.

<sup>94</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 23.

perceiving those values simultaneously as a sense of interior restlessness and a temptation to blaspheme.<sup>95</sup>

Grotowski's idea corresponds better to Claude Levi-Strauss' theory of the inconstancy and fragmentation of myth. Borrowing the terminology from the science of chemistry, Levi-Strauss defines myth, as 'an intermediary entity between a statistical aggregate of molecule and the molecular structure'.<sup>96</sup> He explains that a tribe may preserve a myth in a variety of accounts, yet he confronts myth as a unit, consisting of all its versions. The hypothesis that constitutes the core of his argument about the substance of the myth is that 'the true constituent units of a myth are not the isolated relations, but bundles of such relations, and it is only as bundles that these relations can be put to use and combined so as to produce a meaning'.<sup>97</sup> In their attempt to perceive the totality of reality, people develop the mythic thought to which, according to Durkheim's theory, each generation projects its own account of understanding. Therefore, myth turns away from the continuous to segment and split the world by means of distinctions, contrasts and oppositions. In contrast, ritual process attempts to take these 'discrete units' created by mythical thinking and pull them back into an experience of reality, that is, continuous and seamless. Ritual is viewed as a reaction to what thought and myth have caused in the world, a rather hopeless attempt to restore continuity to experience.<sup>98</sup>

Levi-Strauss views this theory as a diachronic human issue while Grotowski, with his notion of the contemporary loss of a 'common sky of belief', sees the lack of universally accepted values and the fragmentation of myth as a

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<sup>95</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 22.

<sup>96</sup> *Structural Anthropology*, New York: Basic Books, 1963, p. 229.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>98</sup> Levi-Strauss, *The Naked Man*, vol. 4 of *Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, New York: Harper and Row, 1981, p. 679.

modern problem. Yet, he has the firm conviction that there are 'webs of significance', to borrow Clifford's Geertz's famous phrase, which the performance via the actor can communicate to the audience. Geertz concurs with Max Weber's theory that human beings are suspended in webs of meaning, incorporated in myth and ritual, which they themselves have spun.<sup>99</sup> Yet, Geertz implicitly contrasts his approach with functionalists, like Durkheim, who view ritual as the means for expressing collective representations in the guise of religious beliefs, when Geertz argues that religion is socially interesting not because it describes the social order, but because it shapes it.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, for Grotowski, the actor can shape diachronic, multidimensional myths and communicate their values to the modern participant. The only way to such a realisation, he claims, is the myth, which is incarnated in the fact of the living organism of the actor.<sup>101</sup>

Schechner further clarifies Grotowski's conviction by explaining it as a theory which proposes that what is most intimate and hidden in each individual is the same as what is most archetypal and secret. In other words, to search out the intimate, most personal, Schechner claims, is to find the 'universal self'.<sup>102</sup> This assumption echoes Jung's definition of the collective unconscious and the archetypes. He defines archetypes as the definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present diachronically in the myths of every culture.<sup>103</sup> In addition, Jung states that the collective unconscious is 'a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a

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<sup>99</sup> *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, p. 5.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>101</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 23.

<sup>102</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 25.

<sup>103</sup> *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959, p. 42.

personal acquisition'.<sup>104</sup> The personal unconscious, that is, Jung's interpretation of Sigmund Freud's subconscious, is essentially constructed of contents which had been conscious, but which have disappeared from consciousness by being forgotten or repressed. On the other hand, the collective unconscious consists of contents which have never been in the consciousness, and therefore, never individually acquired; they owe their existence exclusively to the inheritance of traditional knowledge concentrated in sacred pictures or myths. The representation of these myths in rites can be the path for the recipient to experience this ancient wisdom.<sup>105</sup> For Jung, the personal unconscious consists of complexes, while the collective unconscious is made up of archetypes.

Levi-Strauss breaks with Jung's theory by postulating that the latter's idea about a given mythological pattern that possesses a certain meaning—the so-called archetype—is a long supported error.<sup>106</sup> For Levi-Strauss, myths may seem to include corresponding symbols transculturally yet their meaning is found in the structure and the relation of these symbols with each other, which is determined culturally and reads differently in each culture. Levi-Strauss' assumption appears ungrounded, however, when Jung's opposition to the arbitrary importation of religious practices is taken into account. Jung condemns the theosophical tendency to import Eastern religious practices because they belong to a legacy of which Westerners are not the legitimate heirs. He claims that this mythology is very difficult for Westerners to communicate at anything other than a superficial level. He asserts that Europeans and Americans are the heirs of Christian symbolism, but have been somehow prodigal with this

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<sup>104</sup> *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p. 42.

<sup>105</sup> Jung, *The Four Archetypes*, London: Ark Paperbacks, 1972, p. 64.

<sup>106</sup> *The Savage Mind*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 65.

heritage.<sup>107</sup> Despite the fact that he is aware of the different meaning that myth carries across cultures, Jung believes that there are common archetypes in the myths of all cultures.

Whether Grotowski embraced Jung's proposal or was forced to such a solution because of his social and political background is a subject analysed in the first chapter of this thesis. Grotowski denied, however, the unrefined adoption of foreign religious practices while, at the same time, espousing Christian symbolism in his practice. He believed that religious practices are 'key situations' from human destiny which are inherent in every culture and can only be read through the 'dialectics of apotheosis and derision'. Barba explains that Grotowski and Flaszen believed that the director had to mould the interaction between the actors and the audiences in order to realise an archetype, and thereby, the 'collective subconscious' of these two groups.<sup>108</sup> This was accomplished through the process of idealisation and mockery. According to Barba, Grotowski maintained that the classics contained certain archetypes such as contested love or the individual who sacrifices himself or herself for a group.<sup>109</sup> In this way, the performance would be a collective introversion that confronts the spectator with those situations, which are treated in the performance both as ideals and trivialities, and which constitute the essence of individual and collective experience.

For Grotowski, myths and archetypes included in the texts might become the connection to the past, equally for the actors and for the spectators, when the actor, through the text, externalises his physical impulses. This idea developed into two concepts that were fundamental in Grotowski's period of Productions:

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<sup>107</sup> *The Four Archetypes*, p. 15.

<sup>108</sup> *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 1999, p. 27.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

'via negativa' and the 'total act'. In both cases, Grotowski accorded primacy to the actor over aesthetic disciplines.

The Polish director concluded that he could produce theatre without make-up, traditional costumes, a separate performance area, special lighting and sound effects, but he could not do it without the actor-spectator relationship. Furthermore, the director cannot train the audience; he can only train the actor. But education in Grotowski's concept of theatre was not a matter of teaching something to the actor; it was an attempt to eliminate the resistance of the actor's organism to a type of acting which is a psychic process. The result of such a process was the elimination of the time-lapse between inner impulse and outer reaction in such a way that the impulse and the outer reaction are concurrent. Thus, Grotowski suggested a 'via negativa' training—'not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks'.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, each actor is uniquely confronted, for each can embody different archetypes, the correlation of which can shed light upon interhuman principles.

In terms of formal technique, Grotowski suggested cutting out those elements of conventional behaviour which obscure pure impulses. In other words, the actor must overcome what is usually considered 'normal'—smiling to express happiness, frowning to express sadness—and discover an individual expression in his or her acting. The result of this feat is what he referred to as a sign. To elucidate the structure of the signs, he adopted the technique of *contradiction*: gesture challenges voice, voice the word, word the thought, and so on. All this is achieved through the process of 'via negativa'. Grotowski further explained that 'this method of acting evokes by association images deeply rooted in the

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<sup>110</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 17.

collective imagination', that is, a type of acting which associated gesture and intonation with a definite image.<sup>111</sup>

By looking for signs Grotowski intended to realise archetypal symbols. Edmund Leach's classification of symbols and signs might be helpful in understanding this practice. According to Leach, a symbol evokes a metaphorical, paradigmatic, or synchronic relationship between itself and what it refers to, while a sign involves a metonymical, syntagmatic, or diachronic relationship between itself and its referent. Signs, as opposed to symbols, do not occur in isolation; they are always contiguous with other signs that together form part of a set; it is only as a part of a set that a sign can communicate information.<sup>112</sup> As the anthropologist Catherine Bell explains, a metaphorical relationship is one of asserted similarity or resemblance between two things that are arbitrarily connected and otherwise quite unrelated. For instance, a serpent is a symbol of evil in the Book of Genesis, although the relationship between serpents and evil is metaphorical. In a metonymical relationship, she continues, part of something is taken to stand for the whole of it. For example, a crown stands for sovereignty. Eventually, she clarifies the paradigmatic associations as those based on a type of structural resemblance that can be transported to different situations. For example, the relationship of a feudal lord to his vassal is paradigmatically replicated in the medieval notion of the relationship of God to the believer. Syntagmatic associations, on the other hand, are chainlike relationships among elements in a series, such as the relationship among letters that make up a word. To conclude, she underlines the opposition between diachrony and

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<sup>111</sup> Grotowski, quoted in Barba, 'Theatre Laboratory 13 Rzedow, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 75.

<sup>112</sup> *Culture and Communication: The Logic by Which Symbols are Connected*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp. 9-16.

synchrony, patterns of changed as opposed to unchanging structure of relationships.<sup>113</sup>

Grotowski sought to transform the signs into symbols. As seen in the previous chapter, in his performance of *Akropolis*, Grotowski elaborated a historical subject—the hardships of the inmates in Auschwitz—which involved a metonymical, syntagmatic, or diachronic relationship between itself and its referent. Yet, his aim was to manifest the metaphorical, paradigmatic, or synchronic relationship between the performance and a historical theme, which turns out to be a symbol of all people's hardships that take place under despotism and arbitrary authority. Thereafter, Grotowski intended to challenge the collective imagination of the spectators with signs in an attempt to let symbols emerge in their collective unconsciousness.

Grotowski's 'via negativa' method, considered the body as the ultimate source for elaborating such symbolism. Victor Turner's and Mary Douglas' speculations that the human body is a source of symbolism might prove enlightening. Turner, for instance, finds that the human body is the area where information about the symbols can be received. He further argues that this perception of the symbols is then extended outwards to organise and understand the social world.<sup>114</sup> For the anthropologist Douglas, the human body is also the most important symbol for social and ritual purposes. She claims that the way the body is handled, presented, decorated, or contorted is a fundamental indicator of more embracing social values.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 64-5.

<sup>114</sup> *Forest of Symbols*, Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 90.

<sup>115</sup> *Natural Symbols*, New York: Vintage Books, 1973, pp. 32-35.

Examining ritual practice, Bell cites the importance of individual agency in ritual as an arena for cultural mediation. Basic to this concern is a focus on the physical mind-body holism as the primary medium for the deployment and embodiment of everyday schemes of physical action and cultural values that are the means by which culture is reproduced and individual categories of experience are forged.<sup>116</sup> In ritual, the emphasis may be on the careful choreography of actions, the self-control required by the actor, or the rhythm of repetition.<sup>117</sup> Yet Grotowski did not intend to reproduce a culture, nor did he hold with the slavish repetition of formalised activities that occurs in ritual. Instead, in his performances he respected certain aspects of ritual, for example the control of the actor's body. This control is present when the actor makes a total gift of himself, thus performing the 'total act'.

According to Grotowski, the 'total act' is a technique of trance, an integration of all the actor's psychic and bodily powers which emerge from the most intimate layers of his being and his instinct.<sup>118</sup> The actor who submits to the technique of the 'total act' is the 'holy actor'. Having closely studied Grotowski's theatre, Osinski explains that the 'total act' is a training of the personality through organic action. In terms of training, it is not just the actor who performs the exercise, but the actor as a human being.<sup>119</sup> This notion is extended to the scope of performance, which becomes a 'total act' when all fragments of a situation are temporarily joined together, including human activity, ideas, and images.

Fundamental to this attempt is Grotowski's special use of a language, which was influenced by Antonin Artaud's ideas on language. Grotowski

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<sup>116</sup> Bell, *Ritual*, p. 83.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>118</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 16.

<sup>119</sup> *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, New York: PAJ Publications, 1986, pp. 87-88.

employed a language with ritual attributes in his performances. This mirrors Artaud's attempt to develop a language which would stand between gesture and thought.<sup>120</sup> Artaud defines this language as an expressive, dynamic spatial potential, and he contrasts it with the expressive spoken dialogue potential. 'Theatre', for Artaud, 'can still derive possibilities for extension from speech outside words, the development in space of its dissociatory, vibratory action on our sensibility'.<sup>121</sup> Artaud does not intend to do away with dialogue, but to give words something of the significance they have in dreams.<sup>122</sup> Similarly, Grotowski explained that the actor, in the elevated spiritual state of the 'total act', uses rhythmically articulated signs and begins to dance and/or to sing.

Flaschen further observes that the language used in the work is one of images, not a language that calls objects by their names. 'It is a search', he goes on, 'for such a language which in itself is a chain of associations that don't refer to the mind, but the whole of our being'.<sup>123</sup> Thus, the actor's impulsive associations are translated into an associative language that more closely relates to a melody—a sequence of musical tones—than to prose.<sup>124</sup> Levi-Strauss' comparison between myth, music and language, a combination that appears in ritual, relates to Grotowski's practices. Levi-Strauss asserts that language is constructed of phonemes, words and sentences, music by phonemes and sentences and myth by words and sentences. Thus, it appears that both music and mythology are included in language, yet, according to Levi-Strauss, the music emphasises the sound aspect already embedded in language, while mythology emphasises the sense aspect, the meaning aspect, also embedded in

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<sup>120</sup> *The Theatre and its Double*, London and New York: Calder, p. 68.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>123</sup> Quoted in Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 46.

<sup>124</sup> Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 68.

language.<sup>125</sup> In the same line of thought, Stanley J. Tambiah, long before Levi-Strauss, formulated the idea that ritual language is intelligible, rational, and logical in the way it exploits the properties of language in general. Ritual language, he argues, works by addressing participants, not the gods, 'using a technique which attempts to restructure and integrate the minds and emotions of the actors'.<sup>126</sup> Accordingly, Grotowski, searching for a direct communication, elaborates in his performances a language which appears with both musical and mythic attributes and which penetrates the conscious understanding of the spectators.

Kumiega's and Osinski's commentaries on the performance of *Apocalypsis* demonstrate how these ritual aspects of Grotowski's theatre were manifested. The official premiere of *Apocalypsis* took place on the eleventh of February 1969 in Wroclaw, where Grotowski's theatre had moved in 1965, and was repeated for the next twelve years. The performance in Wroclaw was held in the theatre space of the Laboratory Theatre, but when it opened in New York in 1969, Grotowski insisted on performing in the Washington Square Methodist Church. He wanted to create the conditions in which the performance could achieve the theatrical equivalent of modern poetry.<sup>127</sup> The performance did indeed attain a poetic quality that included both myth and history. The work was initially undertaken on Juliusz Slowaski's *Samuel Zborowski*, but concluded in the *Gospels*. The performance was inspired by Ernest Renan's interpretation of the New Testament. Renan, in his book *Life of Jesus*, denies the Nazarene's divine origins, and portrays Jesus very much as a Palestinian conditioned by his times

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<sup>125</sup> *Myth and Meaning*, New York: Schocken Books, 1979, pp. 52-53.

<sup>126</sup> 'The Magical Power of Words', *Culture, Thought, and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985, pp. 17-59.

<sup>127</sup> Quoted in Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 92-93.

and environment, but full of charm and power and motivated totally by the value and idea of love.<sup>128</sup> Thus, Grotowski incarnated the most fundamental religious myth of the West in a violently literal manner. Stanislaw Scierski, one of Grotowski's actors in *Apocalypsis*, enumerates the questions on which the improvisations for the construction of the performance were based: 'What is this for us? What of each of us is contained in this? What vital thing does it give me? What vital thing can I bring to it?'.<sup>129</sup> For Kumiega, who witnessed it in 1975, the performance was an art form closer to poetry than anything else, that is, associations were condensed into rich metaphors or naked imagery.<sup>130</sup> This performance included a Simon Peter, a John, a Mary Magdalene, a Judas, a Lazarus and a Simpleton—a medieval idiot unknowingly holding the powers of light and darkness. The starting point for the action was a situation, more than a plot, in which a group of contemporary individuals woke up exhausted with hangovers as if it were after a party. In their midst, they found an idiot and decided to engage in play-acting at his expense. Roles were cheerfully assigned, then rejected, and finally assumed. Near the end, the action moved swiftly, following the *Gospel* sequence of events more closely. The actors finally acquiesced to their roles. The plot was clearer: the Last Supper, the Betrayal, Golgotha and the Crucifixion. The idiot was portrayed as an unwilling victim, invited into the group's games and then elected to be their Savior. Desperate for their love and acceptance, he was gradually consumed by the power of his own role, and struggled helplessly towards the ultimate extinction.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 89.

<sup>129</sup> Quoted in *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 111.

<sup>130</sup> *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 92.

<sup>131</sup> Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 93-4.

This method of 'apotheosis and derision' is apparent in Grotowski, since, according to him, the performance departs from myth to discover a point of reality.<sup>132</sup> The questions the performance introduces are: 'What would have happened to Christ if he revealed himself nowadays? Literally, what would we do with him? How would we see him?'. In this respect, Grotowski's perception of the construction of a performance relates to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of ritual dynamics. Bourdieu believes that the rites of plowing or marriage among the Kabyle of Algeria 'have the function of disguising and thereby sanctioning the inevitable collision of two contrary principles that the peasant brings about in forcing nature'.<sup>133</sup> When that which nature has divided or united must be changed or reversed, it is ritual that can neutralise the dangers associated with such sacrilege. Among the Kabyle, deflowering the bride, plowing the first furrow, cutting the last thread in weaving, all presuppose an ordered set of cultural categories that on the one hand should not be violated and on the other must be done. Bourdieu finds that ritual licenses these violations even as it reinforces a sense of order that violation transgresses.<sup>134</sup> He also affirms the differences and boundaries between the sacred and the profane, the divine and the human, as found in religions. Yet, in ritual these differences and boundaries are allowed, for a few careful minutes, to break down. Accordingly, Grotowski adopted the principle of challenging a taboo, something that underlies ritual practices. Barba stands in agreement with Grotowski. Often ritual, as Barba states, is the only way to break a taboo.<sup>135</sup> In ritual, a taboo situation is challenged, for instance killing, which is culturally forbidden, yet it is committed in

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<sup>132</sup> Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 91.

<sup>133</sup> *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 133.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 136-7.

<sup>135</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 72.

the context of sacrifice. Similarly, Grotowski intended to 'attack' situations sanctified by tradition, that is, mythical values, which are taboos.<sup>136</sup>

Grotowski used blasphemy and profanation to confront the mythic substructure of modern society. The performance also respected Grotowski's notion of 'via negativa'. Costume, both simple and symbolic, was eventually abandoned, and properties used were limited to the most basic and elemental of objects: bread, knife, white cloth, candles, bucket of water. Furthermore, lighting was deceptively simple, with two spotlights and candles used to full and dramatic advantage.<sup>137</sup> The adoption of 'via negativa' in acting resulted in a 'total act'. The actor Molik explains that during the performance he felt full of life and this gave him the power to endure everyday life. Similarly, Scierski claims that *Apocalypsis* was an overwhelming and dramatic experience for him, involving an awareness of that particular community in which closeness can provide unexpected hope and strength.<sup>138</sup> The language of the performance is characterised by Osinski as 'having no author', as being 'the language of the human race'.<sup>139</sup> In total, the language of the performance, as Kumiega notes, 'was a poetry of body complementing a poetry of sound, in which the reverberations of each action or word were inexhaustible'.<sup>140</sup> The actor was like an instrument capable of registering a variety of tones and octaves. He or she could take the place of a powerful symphony orchestra, and himself or herself perform the symphony.<sup>141</sup> In the initial stages of the presentation of *Apocalypsis*, the audience sat around the acting area and was treated like a witness, that is, not allowed to interfere, yet

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<sup>136</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, see, p. 22.

<sup>137</sup> Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 95.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>139</sup> *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 112.

<sup>140</sup> *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 92.

<sup>141</sup> Leonia Jablonkowna quoted in Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 96.

also cautioned 'not to forget', no matter what the cost.<sup>142</sup> As *Apocalypsis* evolved internally for the performers, there was a gradual move towards greater physical and psychological closeness with the audience.

Grotowski assumed that a ritual attribute is the ceremony of living collaboration, an authentic response between two groups that participate, namely the actors and the leaders. Believing that theatre had initially derived from ritual, he intended to rediscover this value in his own theatrical work. To this end, Grotowski experimented with the different aspects of theatre, such as the arrangement of theatre space, the manipulation of the physical and psychological aspects of the actor/spectator relationship, and the anarchic use of text and literature. From *Kordian* (1962) to *Dr. Faustus* (1963), he believed that these texts embody powerful and universal myths and images which function as archetypes and penetrate the apparently divisive and individual structure of the Western psyche. Furthermore, they evoke a spontaneous, collective, internal response.<sup>143</sup> Later, especially in the performances of *The Constant Prince* (1965) and *Apocalypsis* (1969), Grotowski abandoned the search for a ritualistic co-participation of actor and spectator. On the one hand, the realisation of the absence of a 'common sky of belief', and on the other, the recognition that his work falls into stylization, that is, the conscious imitation of mythic images, imbued him with the conviction that the solution could only be found in the actor. At this time, the Laboratory Theatre developed daily, physically exhausting training sessions, which took place separately from the performance. Grotowski envisioned an actor 'as an individual capable of divesting her or himself of the social, conditioned layers of the psyche, and revealing themselves at a level

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<sup>142</sup> Grotowski quoted in Osinski, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 112.

<sup>143</sup> Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 130.

beneath the individual or personal'.<sup>144</sup> Grotowski assumed that the exposure of this process during the performance would enable the spectator to reciprocate internally. Thus, the personal and the collective converge and the act of exposure functioned in the place of the communal beliefs of archaic and traditional societies which permit ritual to take place.<sup>145</sup> In other words, the members of these communities, through their total participation, were liberated from unconscious accumulated material.<sup>146</sup>

Between 1969-1982, Grotowski reconsidered his conviction about the existence of universal mythological patterns, which could be socially realised within the theatrical process, namely the actor-spectator relationship, and accorded primacy to ritual-like practices over mythological patterns. Situating his activities outside the city, in the forest of Brzezinka, Grotowski developed practices that attempted to elaborate I-Thou relationships, by enhancing intense experiential occurrences. Emancipated from any role, whether theatrical or social, the participants, led by the members of the Laboratory Theatre, or other qualified individuals called *guides*, strove to achieve a 'meeting' behind the 'masks' of their habitual behaviour. The activities, as Schechner testifies, involved discovering and revealing personal themes, finding new ways of behaviour, alone or with others. Included were physical actions, such as dances around fire and the passing of fire from person to person, group chanting, singing and storytelling as in rites, running through the forest at night, as well as sudden immersion in water.<sup>147</sup> The notions of 'total act' and 'via negativa' continued to affect this phase in the sense that the person was to submit whole-heartedly to this task and also

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<sup>144</sup> Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 131-2.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>146</sup> Barba, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 72.

<sup>147</sup> Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 105.

that the task itself was to be simpler than a rite. Grotowski insisted that the activities could not be a ritual in the sense of a structural one. The attributes of these activities were the recognition of someone through the rejection of everyday pretence and professionalism and also sharing elements such as those with the ancient meaning of shared space, shared fire, and shared water. The participants sought to become themselves and to overcome differences of nationality, race, culture, tradition and language.<sup>148</sup>

During this period, two sub-phases emerged, namely Paratheatre and the Theatre of Sources. It is almost impossible to assign dates to these phases because the activities overlapped at certain period. Roughly speaking, Paratheatre can be situated between 1969-1978, while the Theatre of the Sources dates between 1976-1982. For the sake of the present argument, the distinction between the two phases has been based on the assumption of two different characteristics that appear in each period respectively—the primacy of the group and the primacy of the individual.

A distinctive activity of the Paratheatrical projects was the ‘beehive’.

Rustom Bharucha describes it as follows:

A ‘beehive’ is not a production that has evolved through a process of training, rehearsal and performance. By its very nature, it can occur only once, and therefore, is not constrained to repeat itself like theatre. ‘Beehives’ are about *participating* in an immediate process, not seeing or judging a consciously crafted representation on stage. Besides, their significance is essentially personal perhaps spiritual, and there are no words to describe the experience ‘from outside’.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Grotowski quoted in Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, p. 254.

<sup>149</sup> *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 45.

Richard Mennen, who participated in a 'beehive', provides a vivid example of this experience.<sup>150</sup> Within a group led by a guide, he entered a room. In the centre of the room, they found a girl sitting in front of something resembling a hibachi burner. After quite a long time, a previously organised group of people entered the room with flaming torches. In the darkness, fears were enhanced, but subsequently faced and overcome. During the Special Project, the initial activity of Paratheatre, the removal of the 'daily mask' was an important consideration. Grotowski made the main building light-proof so that complete darkness was possible at any time and exercises that included running in complete darkness took place in this building.<sup>151</sup> Mennen continues to narrate the event, describing how eventually in this exercise, and in the darkness, some people arrived holding lit round charcoal-discs contained in incense burners. A few people began to blow on the coals and created sparks which spread throughout the room. Gradually more and more people followed the example and a ritual developed where people took a piece of charcoal and met another person holding a piece of lit charcoal. The latter blew and lit the first lump of charcoal.<sup>152</sup> This ritual-like activity refers to the transcultural mythological pattern of the gods sharing fire with humans. As such, it relates to Eliade's notion of 'exemplary model of behaviour'. It also relates to Durkheim's concept of traditions existing independently of the individual, what he calls 'collective representations'. According to Durkheim, these representations turn into 'rules of conduct', which guide human ritual activity. Believing like Levi-Strauss in the fragmentation of myth, Grotowski did not relate the 'beehive' to specific myths, but shared ideas with many of them. He concurred with Jung's 'collective unconscious' and was convinced that humans

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<sup>150</sup> 'Grotowski's Paratheatrical Projects', *The Drama Review*, vol. 19, December, 1975, p. 63.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

carry a shared knowledge since they share a common body. Having the same needs of subsistence and reproduction as well as the necessity of partaking in a community, the human organism may develop a shared symbolism when it is appropriately challenged.

Subsequently, during the aforementioned Paratheatrical ritual, somebody dipped his fingers into a jar of honey and passed it to another person, who took it and at the same time licked the honey from the hands of the previous person, an act reminiscent of Christian Holy Communion. Both Holy Communion and the 'honey beehive' metaphorically suggest the transcendence of a physical sharing to a spiritual level. In Holy Communion, the bread and wine represent Christ's flesh and blood respectively. By receiving the sacrament, the communicants partake of Christ's nature and thus become a community. Denuded from any specific religious connotation, the honey sharing in the Paratheatrical 'beehive' was an occasion for experiencing a common action which made the participants relate to each other directly, at least for the duration of the activity, without the intermediary of religious symbolism. The participants were solely responsible for the development of a community without the imposition of an awesome figure of fear.

In Louis Malle's film, *My Dinner with André*, the theatre director André Gregory reveals his own experience of a 'beehive'.<sup>153</sup> He describes the learning of a song that took place in this context. A girl in his group knew some fragments of the Song of St. Francis. The group sat in the room and started to sing. Then people who began to arrive in twos or threes sat around and sang with them,

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<sup>153</sup> *My Dinner with André*, by Wallace Shawn and André Gregory, (screenplay for the eponymous film directed by Louis Malle), New York: Grove Press, 1981.

learning the song.<sup>154</sup> Thus, a pattern emerged that resembles the oral transmission of tradition. In such an instance, contact is direct and not disturbed by technological media. The song, initiated by the person who knows it already, is perpetuated and carries within it the traditional experience. In this way, the product is not cut off from its source, that is, the people that produce the song. Gregory's experience in the Paratheatrical forest concluded with a christening, a baptism that the whole group had organised for him. It was a simple ceremony, with a godfather and a godmother, in which Gregory was given a new name. While some took the event very seriously, others saw the humor in this action; Gregory himself felt that he actually had a new name. In the film Gregory explains to his dinner partner, the actor Wallace Shawn, that the purpose of Paratheatre was the same as in theatre, except that in Paratheatre, one was playing the role of oneself.

In the Theatre of Sources Grotowski brought together masters of various performance disciplines from different cultures. The activities did not involve training per se. They just put people, both theatrical and non-theatrical, in direct contact with performers from Haiti, India, and other non-western cultures.<sup>155</sup> The American anthropologist Roland Grimes, who participated in the activities, explains that the action consisted of long walks, during which they paused at transitions in terrain or foliage, imitated the sounds of animals, clung to trees, lay on the earth, watched fish, ran through thickly entangled forest at night and walked under a waterfall. The ethos of participation required silence, light

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<sup>154</sup> Gregory, *My Dinner with André*, p. 28. Gregory was invited by Grotowski to lead some workshops during Paratheatre.

<sup>155</sup> Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, p. 253.

footedness, no polluting, careful imitation of the guide, and no movements disruptive of forest life or the group.<sup>156</sup>

At a conference concerned with the second period of Grotowski's work held in Brzensinka in September 2002, Peter Rose, a participant in the Theatre of Sources, recounted exercises in which he had taken part. Firstly, he described a type of walking, which he called Mexican-American, that his group performed around a tree for many hours to the point of exhaustion. Secondly, he gave details about an exercise that concerned the eyes, a method inspired by the eye-training in Kathakali theatre, during which the participants had to focus on specific spots. Thirdly, he cited an activity in which the participants whirled themselves around like the whirling dervishes of the Sufi tradition and, finally he depicted the way they learned to sing a song with the traditional group of Indian Bauls, in which singing is transmitted from the one generation to the other. Rose's group, like many others, was advised to keep the descriptions to themselves and they were reminded that the work was not a social activity. Renata Molinari, who attended the same conference, explained that in the Theatre of Sources each participant was in a group, yet each was alone.<sup>157</sup> The participants were not even allowed ordinary phatic communication. The only exceptions were when, for instance, the participants were sitting at the table, and someone needed something; one could ask for it or even just take it. They were told that they were not there to be kind to each other or to have a pleasant time as a group. Thus, the use of language was reduced to the most essential and the participants were asked to imitate the actions of the guides in their (the participants') own unique way, without asking questions. Molinari remarked, however, that she could see

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<sup>156</sup> Grimes, 'The Theatre of Sources', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, 1982, p. 270.

<sup>157</sup> Molinary, Saturday 28 September 2002, Brzezinka, Poland.

the Poles speaking in the intimacy of their own language and she felt that, despite Grotowski's desire for a meta-semantic mode of communication, she missed her own, culturally determined language.

Jairo Cuesta, another participant and in fact a guide, asserted that this silence should turn into an inner silence via one's withdrawal of attention from the objects. Through this method, he continued, he found some quietness. The requirement in the Theatre of Sources was for the inner material to emerge and to stand for itself. Thus, each action was literal, not symbolic, and also interdependent on the surrounding environment, whether human or not. The aim was the enhancement of a peripheral awareness, the quality of which can be found in hunting. The hunter is not sure when the critical moment will arrive to entrap the victim; he or she expects not to assume anything. Sources, as Cuesta explained, are the origins of oneself; they are the essence of wisdom.<sup>158</sup> In other words, the Sources are a state where the person evaluates without external criteria which may condition his or her ethicalness. This suits Grotowski's notion about the body's knowledge according to which human organism includes all necessary information which would make the person reach a level of fulfillment.

Maud Robart, another guide in the Theatre of Sources, taught the finding of the origins through Haitian Voodoo singing. She explained that these songs transmit a guiding value, which she claimed is wordless.<sup>159</sup> When decoded, these songs translate the participant's relation to life. This code can be decoded when it becomes a life task, in which heart, body and spirit are totally engaged. And it all starts from the body; the power of the beat appears when rhythm is evoked.

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<sup>158</sup> Friday 27 September 2002, Brzezinka, Poland.

<sup>159</sup> Saturday 28 September 2002, Brzezinka, Poland.

It is true that Paratheatre was strongly criticised for its lack of theatrical validity and also, for its side effects on the participants, who, according to Schechner, were prepared neither for theatre nor for living in terms of a particular culture.<sup>160</sup> What remains unquestioned in Grotowski's second phase of work was his denial of the authority of the written text and his pursuit of the cultural flexibility found in oral societies. Bell states:

In an oral society the embodiment of tradition can flexibly change to keep pace with the community and win people's assent as remaining true to tradition and appropriate to the current climate. In literal societies with written models, however, change itself easily becomes a problem that is viewed as a threat to tradition and authority.<sup>161</sup>

Bell further declares that literacy never displaces orality, and vice versa, and many aspects of social life remain predominately oral. In the subsequent phase of his work, Grotowski attempted a renewed reading of the text with new rules and alphabet.

In the next two phases, namely the Objective Drama Research and the Art as Vehicle, between 1982-1999, Grotowski attempted to approach fragments of myths, abandoning his initial assumption of commonalities in the mythologies of the cultures that can de facto communicate interculturally. More specifically, in the first sub-period, the work was more individual and Grotowski experimented in elaborating personal mythologies that could have an impact interindividually. In the second, the individual work developed within a group to be presented to other external practitioners or selectively invited witnesses.

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<sup>160</sup> *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, p. 255.

<sup>161</sup> *Ritual*, p. 204.

In 1982, in response to the dictatorship in Poland, Grotowski asked for asylum in the United States, a country in which the staging of his performances in the late sixties and the Paratheatrical projects in the early seventies brought him worldwide fame. During the academic year 1982-83, he worked for Yale University. Because of lack of subsidies, he left for the University of California at Irvine, where he developed the Objective Drama Research. Grotowski, as quoted in Lisa Wolford, expressed concern that the ancient function of art as a cohesive and stabilizing force within a culture was being eroded by an increasing dependence on technological means of recording artistic knowledge, which had replaced the traditional transmission of cultural heritage through oral transmission.<sup>162</sup> As a result, many subtleties of performative/ritual practices were eliminated or distorted by partial transmission. He maintained that each ritual carries within it its own content, and, in the case that one identifies the form, the content will be discovered. Grotowski reconsidered the idea of common ground between cultures, and focused on the differences that cultures develop in their songs. Once they are taught or practised by an individual, who is related to this culture, this actor sets off a 'chain of events' which may have an 'objective' result on whomever else practices them. Grotowski worked on long-term programmes, either for a few months or for a whole academic year, and placed great importance on the time commitment of the participants to the seminar. There was a daily programme of exercises taught by traditional practitioners (Maud Robart and Tiga Jean-Claude Garoute from Haiti) and technical specialists (Du Yee Chang from Korea, Jairo Cuesta from Colombia, Wei-Cheng from Taiwan and I Wayan Lendra from Bali) who had previously collaborated with Grotowski in the

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<sup>162</sup> 'Introduction: Objective Drama Research, 1983-86', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 282-3.

Theatre of Sources. The training included the Haitian walk-dance *yanvalou*, as well as a number of Haitian rituals.<sup>163</sup> Other exercises included the ‘motions’, a body stretching-in-movement exercise as well as training for mental endurance.<sup>164</sup> In addition there was also the ‘watching’, a cycle of dynamic physical games, and finally, outdoors activities such as the ‘sculpturing and diving’, which involved moving in adaptive relation to the terrain and ‘fire action’, a type of movement/dance done in relation to a fire, using the motion of the flames to create the rhythm, as a kind of music.<sup>165</sup>

Wolford and Thomas Richards, who both worked with Grotowski on the Objective Drama Research, bring out another aspect of the work in which the participants were supposed to use ancient vibratory songs and create a ‘mystery play’ with them. A song of particular importance from the participant’s childhood was included in the context of the ‘mystery plays’. At first, they just sang the song and eventually they started creating individual actions on the basis of the song, sometimes connected to their memories of who first sang the song and the context of surrounding events. At times, certain of these songs were taught to other group members in an experiment to see whether it was possible for a particular song to have impact beyond the context of one person’s memory.<sup>166</sup> Richards notes: ‘Improvisation meant we would keep the specific song and dance without alteration, improvising only our displacement in the space and the contact between persons’.<sup>167</sup> The ‘mystery play’ had to address meanings and values relevant to the life of the tradition from which it was drawn. More specifically, the

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<sup>163</sup> For more details on the form of *yanvalou*, see Wolford, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, note 4, p. 498.

<sup>164</sup> I Wayan Lendra, ‘Bali and Grotowski’, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 322.

<sup>165</sup> See Wolford and also I Wayan Lendra, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 285, 322.

<sup>166</sup> Wolford, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 283.

<sup>167</sup> *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 21.

final result was supposed to be an undisturbed expression of the way the song vibrated in the practitioner. Esoteric texts were also used, some with defined origins, like *The Book of the Dead* or *Indian Tales by Jaime De Angulo*, and others without a given tradition, such as certain Gnostic texts.<sup>168</sup> The requirement in this case was the way the participant might personally relate to these texts which were considered to include ahistorical concepts. Grotowski intended to introduce an art that, together with rituals, was a vehicle for access to the most profound human concerns.<sup>169</sup>

In 1986, without stopping his visits to the United States, Grotowski moved to Pontedera, a small village in Italy, forty miles from Pisa. There he remained until the end of his life (7 January 1999). Here his work continues to this day under the supervision of Richards. In Pontedera, the work on the ancient songs has focused mainly on Afro-Caribbean and African culture from which Richards originates. Grotowski also maintained collaboration with Robart from Haiti. Besides songs, both Richards and Robart used very ancient texts from Egyptian and Middle Eastern culture.<sup>170</sup> In Pontedera the training seems to have exceeded the limits of art or artistic representation to reach Grotowski's vision of a new art: an art as vehicle 'which looks to create the montage not in the perception of the spectators, but in the artists who do'.<sup>171</sup> This, he assumed, already existed in the past in the ancient mysteries. In an interview with Wolford, Richards makes this statement more overtly:

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<sup>168</sup> Wolford, *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1996, pp. 40-55.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114-5.

<sup>170</sup> Wolford, 'Introduction, Art as Vehicle', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 365.

<sup>171</sup> Grotowski, 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle', *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p. 120.

It was the way that Grotowski was dealing with these songs: testing around them and through them something which seemed to me very ancient and at the same time very new; looking through them—as if—in their background might be hidden something comparable to Greek or rather Egyptian antique Mysteries.<sup>172</sup>

The work of the group builds an opus with performative qualities called *Action*. The aim of the general work is the ‘transformation of energy’, that is, the doer seeks to access different states of consciousness, for instance that of a child, without imitating any external or even internal image, but by becoming literally transformed into this state. Richards has been conducting this work since its conception. Grotowski was there like an advising elder. In the initial stages, the work was only for those who practiced it and for some people invited expressly by Grotowski. As the work developed in the consciousness of the doers, they presented it to other performing groups and to specially invited spectators from around the world.

*Action*, as I witnessed it on 17 May 2002, took place in the old part of Matera, a small town of 60,000 people in the south of Italy. Richards’ message to the people on the mailing list of the Workcenter reads:

During our upcoming residence in Matera, professors and theatre lovers, scholars and young actors will be invited to witness *Action*, the opus created at the workcentre in the domain of art as vehicle. *Action* is a material linked to performing arts, is composed of lines of actions elaborated in detail, constructed with and around ancient vibratory songs. In *Action* we do not look to tell a story. It’s not an opus in the domain of art as representation, but in the domain of art as vehicle. It’s something very ancient, rather forgotten. For the persons doing, the doers, the opus is a kind of vehicle for the work on oneself, in the sense that, as in certain old traditions, the attention for art goes together with the approach of the interiority of the human being.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 431. See also Wolford, ‘General Introduction: Ariadne’s Thread’, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 16.

<sup>173</sup> Richards, April 2002, Pontedera.

The producers of *Action* accepted only a limited number of people, who were asked to reserve a place in advance. The audience, which the organisers prefer to call a 'group of witnesses', gathered at a small café at the centre of the old district of the town at around eight pm.

There were twenty-one people, all of whom, but myself, were citizens of Matera. While still at the café, the visitors were asked to switch off their mobile phones and an atmosphere of preparation for something intimate pervaded. At about nine o' clock, the witnesses walked silently in the darkness to the old Catholic church of San Pietro Barisano, a few metres away from the café. The Workcenter had been granted the use of this church, no longer the venue for Catholic services and now primarily an historical monument, for this special event. Luciana, the representative of the Teatro dei Sassi, which had organised the event, headed this modern procession and led us to the church, where she knocked on the imposing Gothic door. Mario Biagini, as if our host, opened the door and shook the hand of each member of the audience, who reciprocated by introducing himself or herself. The temple stood open in front of the visitors, yet they were first led to a smaller room on the left of the nave, which seemed more like a cave than an ordinary room. The visitors sat around a rectangular table and were allowed to smoke. Biagini sat at the head of the table and after expressing his gratitude for our presence, he briefly explained the kind of event that we would be attending.

Biagini emphasised that *Action* was not a performance nor made to be seen, though it could be watched. *Action*, he said, did not display the clear lines of a story, yet it was not an improvisation. In a way, it was strictly structured so that it could be repeated. It was based on the sequence of the actions, which, in

turn, were derived from inner impulses developed in the context of the traditional songs (all of these are the 'inner actions') of those involved in the performance.<sup>174</sup> Next, Biagini handed the visitors the text of the performance which was written (as well as spoken) in English and not even a page in length. Repeating that there was no story line in the performance, he pointed out that the text provided a sense of the intentions of the performance. This text was a literal translation of some Coptic religious texts that had been translated from the Aramaic; it was rich in Greek words. The text immediately reminded me of phrases related to the Eleusinian mysteries. The subjects mentioned in the text clearly displayed an existential dimension and revolved around the philosophical origins of humanity, the justification of human actions, the search for a condition where happiness is allowed. The text contained lines that if paraphrased would read: if they ask you who we are, say that we are the children of light; notions such as the beginning and the end are identical; it is this moment that stands beyond death; it is the moment that is repose.<sup>175</sup>

Biagini asked the people to leave their belongings in the room and to move to the nave of the church. There the seats were arranged in special positions and they would remain that way. The place resembled the arrangement of the audience in the Italic proscenium. There were seats on one side of the rectangular hall, closer to the entrance, in two rows that allowed a small corridor between them. The centre of the nave as well as the apse faintly resembled a stage. This area could be approached from the side corridors of the church and also from the corridor in between the audience's chairs. The people sat down and Biagini stood in front of them. He announced that the *Action* would begin in a

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<sup>174</sup> Biagini, Friday 17 May 2002, Matera.

<sup>175</sup> The text was translated literally by Biagini and, according to the policy of the Workcenter, is not available for publication of any kind.

matter of seconds, then immediately turned around, and abruptly walked to the apse, where he knelt down. The performance had started.<sup>176</sup>

*Action* was performed by four men, dressed in black trousers and white shirts, except for Richards, who was all in white, and a girl in a dark red top and a long, full skirt of the same red colour. These 'doers' were unseen at the beginning of the performance. The properties in use were simple; they included a clay bowl with candles, a cane, and a bucket of water. The lighting, minimalist as well, consisted of some ordinary floor lights and the candles. The action was impossible to understand in a linear manner because it was a precise exercise that found its primary meaning among those who performed it. Thus, any attempt to describe it from the outside can only assume a subjective character.

Biagini had his back to the spectators. His actions communicated a sense of a fanatical prophet speaking to his fold. He told about coming from the place of origin, about being one of the elected people. He played with his fingers above the candles. He touched the flame, then pulled his hands back as if startled to find himself burnt. He snuffed out a candle childishly, while reciting the text. Next, he turned into a young man, a warrior, while extinguishing the second candle and eventually an old man, who in his final exaltation put out the third candle. He ended by lying on the floor, as if in a grave. From behind a song was heard. Richards approached the nave from the atrium. His bodily impulses, connected with the song, determined how he moved. The other doers, including Biagini, accompanied the song and entered the centre of the temple from different sides. They acknowledged one another's presence as a matter of fact, merely by

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<sup>176</sup> Having had the chance to observe the *Action* only once, I consulted Wolford's description of an earlier version of *Action* in 1995, in 'Action, The Unrepresentable Origin', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, pp. 407-424. There are certain observable differences between the two versions. I must, however, acknowledge that in the present description, many details have escaped my memory.

looking at each other. The action was mainly led by Richards, while other songs from West Africa and the African diaspora tradition followed. The rest of the group responded to it, assuming a variety of reactions. The girl cleared away the clay bowls containing the candles and then stood firmly rooted with her legs apart. She started singing a song in a high register. Richards lay on the floor behind her and quickly slid through her legs while lying on his back, emerging from under the hem of her dress with a cane in his hand. Richards was born as an old man of eighty, thus establishing a connection with Biagini, while the others continued their actions silently at the back. Richards and Biagini spoke a fragment of the text—antiphonous, chanted, incantatory. Then Biagini lay on the floor, as if a corpse, and Richards mourned. The corpse started to rise and became Richards' enticer, attempting to lure him away from his colleagues and his life's path, but Richards drove him back and the group was reunited. Richards then sang a song that called for reconciliation. At this point, Biagini removed the cane from Richards, who was transformed into a young man and the singing followed his mood. The girl began to move in the serpentine rhythm of *yanvalou*, bending forward from the waist, to the tunes of a song which had been started by Richards. The rest of the doers followed. The song concluded and the *yanvalou* continued in silence. Eventually, Richards became extremely young, taking on the physical traits of a child. He perceived Biagini as a brother and the girl as a mother. He sang a Creole song and played by himself with the water and also interacted with the others, who had moved further away and were singing another song. In the final scene, the water had been removed and Biagini was lying on the floor. Each of his limbs flailed in turn until he assumed the position of a crucified Christ. His body jerked as the nails pierced first his hands and then his

feet. As the sequence unfolded, he continued reciting a text that spoke of blessing, and of evading death. Biagini sat, facing first one of his hands and then the other, and then emitted one simple, ironic syllable: 'No'.

After that, the group was rejoined and in singing they all left the room, except for Biagini, who turned to the audience and, continuing his role as host, expressed his gratitude to us for being present. We returned to the room where we had left our belongings. Once more we sat around the rectangular table. Biagini came in, sat down and just said, 'Well, this is *Action*.' A long pause followed. Everyone seemed impressed and confused. Nobody said anything. The visitors collected their things and moved to the exit. Biagini wished us all goodnight and closed the Gothic door behind us.

Having watched *Action* on another occasion (see footnote 176), Wolford notes that in the first sequence the witnesses perceived a being (Biagini) who experienced a natural process of ageing and decay. Juxtaposed to this was the journey of another (Richards), who was born old and progressively attained the state of a child.<sup>177</sup> According to Grotowski, the elements of *Action* provide the means for the work that the group intends to make on the body, the heart and the head.<sup>178</sup> Narrative derives from the sequence of the songs. As the verbal crystallization of the impact of the songs, it is used as a tool for passing from the coarse to the subtle. The order of the songs is determined by the leader and the doers, who seek to ascertain what can best serve them in the transformation of energy. What might be considered plot or myth in *Action* is not the essential element, only a 'window' that allows the witnesses to perceive.

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<sup>177</sup> See Wolford, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 422.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 423.

In a way of speaking, *Action* is the development of *Apocalypsis*. The work is permeated with the notions of ‘apotheosis and derision’, ‘via negativa’, ‘total act’, in the form of the ‘transformation of energy’, and the approach to the language, enriched with clear singing. The pattern of life as initiation structures both performances, yet in the first case the performance is rehearsed on this pattern while in the second the rehearsal concludes with this pattern. In *Apocalypsis* the roles are assumed from the beginning, while in *Action* there are no roles, just bundles of relationships, by virtue of ‘family’ lineage—the older leads, the younger follows, as in tribal ritual. The distance between those who act and those who watch is kept the same in both instances. Yet, in *Action* the gathering afterwards was not intentional as in *Apocalypsis*, seeking members for Paratheatrical projects. It could have developed into a discussion only if something urgent needed to be expressed by a witness. Yet, the final non-discussion was not alienating. Biagini’s presence may have been one reason for this. He was an ordinary person when he introduced *Action* to the witnesses, and then he jumped in and out of an ineffable acting (doing), returning to his ordinary persona again, suggesting perhaps that anyone can belong to this process merely through one’s own choice.

In this third and last period of his work, Grotowski acknowledged the importance of the repetitive character of ritual, on which tradition is built, either by rerunning the same daily exercises, or by reiterating the enactment of *Action*. In accordance with this choice, Grotowski required consistency in participation, which is translated into a few months or a year in terms of Objective Drama Research and at least a one-year commitment to work in Art as Vehicle. This attitude belies a wider vision for the enhancement of a type of culture which

compares to the mechanisms that construct culture at large. For culture is a 'patchwork' of transmitted or absorbed traits elaborated in the closed system of social relations powered by the internal dynamism of each culture.<sup>179</sup> More specifically, the repetition of *Action* year after year creates a rhythm that can balance the constant historical change with tangible experiences of cyclical renewal and continuity.

For more than forty years, Grotowski was troubled by the possibility of defining and transmitting atemporal human values to contemporary man. He started by discovering an Ur-myth, that is, an ahistorical 'monomyth', which for him proved to be a task beyond actual historical experience. He continued with random activities inspired by ritual which, having non-performative structure, proved inefficient. During his life, Grotowski had the elevation of human consciousness firmly in mind. His career concluded with the practice and repetition of personal actions inspired by traditional songs that led to the construction of a 'bundle of events', to use Levi-Strauss's term, which was presented to a group of witnesses longing for a definite impact on their unconscious. Grotowski was convinced that there are two types of societies, the traditional and the secular. In the former, there is no such thing as religion per se since religious beliefs and practices cannot be separated from how people organise their families, govern themselves, engage in hunting, agriculture, or trade and so on. By contrast, a secular society lacks this degree and type of coherence. By virtue of what can be called 'institutional differentiation', the religious system becomes independent of the political, and both are apt to separate from the educational system, the economic system, and perhaps even

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<sup>179</sup> This description stems from a comparative approach of the theories on culture as described by the myth-ritualists and the functionalists. On this, see Bell, *Ritual*, p. 28.

the family and lineage system. Perceiving these differences, Grotowski orientated his work towards the construction of a 'secular sacrum', tangible at the present moment of history.

Wolford describes the quality of the song of Richards' entrance in *Action* as follows: 'The resonance is spatial, concrete; it strikes my skin in a particular way. There is something...almost inhuman about it, not like anything I ever imagined a human voice could do...so unique, that it is as if I experience *song* for the first time'.<sup>180</sup> Yet, personally, when I witnessed *Action*, this song struck me as a brave attempt to achieve the quality of a traditional song, something I had never witnessed in theatre, yet it remained only an attempt. However, I could use Wolford's words to describe the song I heard in September 2002 in Brzezinka from the master of the Bauls, the traditional group of Indian singers who are 'born to sing' and whose origins are lost in time. Without any special preparation of the space, or of the audience, in the course of a conference, after an interval with eating and smoking and mobile phones turned on, the master of the group just sang. At this point words fail and language cannot properly serve to describe the experience. Personally, I felt a strong sense of belonging to myself, without any logical justification. I cannot speak for the rest of the audience. However, when the song finished, nobody clapped. The atmosphere was heavy and the people remained silent and perfectly still for at least three minutes. I was left wondering about the timelessness of Grotowski's vision and how I would feel if I were to witness *Action* a thousand years from now.

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<sup>180</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 411.

## CHAPTER III

### *Liminal Aspects: incorporation of oppositions in Grotowski's work*

As suggested in the previous chapter, Grotowski intended to define the standards of an activity which became not only the conglomeration of scientific theories and transcultural techniques, but also a liminal method where differences are transcended to be unified. Barba openly recognises the legitimacy of approaching Grotowski's work with the lenses of interdisciplinary perception. He stresses that, working closely with Grotowski in Opole in the early sixties, they attempted to integrate the theories of alchemy, shamanism and also trance and ritual into the theatrical process. More specifically, having been inspired by the theories of Jung, Durkheim, Levi-Strauss, Eliade and others who had worked in the fields of anthropology, culture and religion, Grotowski and Barba integrated those theories with their personal experience and beliefs to produce a new theatre.<sup>181</sup>

Their venture correlates with a wider movement towards the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries that had developed in European and American academies in the second half of the twentieth century. As the theatre sociologist Maria Shevtsova comments on the issue, this current 'involved academics rethinking the relations among themselves, the institution and their discipline, which entailed, as well, the interrogation of the very idea of a discipline as an authoritative, self-contained entity'.<sup>182</sup> This reconsideration of academic values, which had been established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,

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<sup>181</sup> *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 50.

<sup>182</sup> 'Social Practice, Interdisciplinary Perspective', *Theatre Research International*, vol. 26, no. 2, U.K, 2001, p. 129.

Shevtsova claims, did not happen everywhere, nor to unanimous approval. Interdisciplinarity was born in between the arguments. 'Its more refined variation' Shevtsova continues, 'could best be described as a dialectic of disciplines, that is, an interchange and interinfluence between bodies of knowledge...which would expand horizons instead of delimiting them, as was reputedly the vocation of disciplines'.<sup>183</sup> Where the study of theatre is concerned, Shevtsova points out that the social anthropologist Jean Duvignaud, having incorporated the theories of Durkheim, designated a relation between aesthetic theatre and traditional ritual, ceremonies and festivities. Duvignaud was concerned with the significance of these performances in their daily-life context and also with their ulterior relationship to the formalised theatre of modern societies.<sup>184</sup>

While this approach was initiated in France in 1965, a decade later in the United States, Schechner, being inspired by the works of Turner and Goffman and guided by the social sciences, further examined the meaning of theatre underlying the resemblance between different concepts of performance, such as ritual, festivities, formalized activities, traditional theatre, aesthetic theatre, and also, games and sports. According to Shevtsova, scholars like Goffman, Turner and Schechner concomitantly provided a number of tools for interdisciplinary work in Theatre Studies and also facilitated a reassessment of their disciplines.<sup>185</sup> Through the works of such anthropologists the different performative genres emerged as deceptively clashing and, thus, the object of research lost its definition. As Shevtsova argues, the problematics of the science of anthropology

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<sup>183</sup> 'Social Practice, Interdisciplinary Perspective', p. 130.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

'no longer focused on the object of study, the ceremonies of a given people, say, but on how the construction of the object was *constructed*'.<sup>186</sup>

Grotowski was the one who established the idea of a 'new object' of research in the context of theatre. His theatrical activity functioned as an intercultural and interdisciplinary laboratory where anthropology, religion, psychology and theatre were fused. Grotowski's practical work influenced Turner and Schechner, who appear to have had already been interested in the analogies between theatre, anthropology, sociology and psychology as mentioned above, and they used Grotowski as an example in their theoretical work. In turn, Barba, whose activities show a vital interest in the application of the converging factors between theatre and anthropology in his performances, could not have remained unaffected by the work of his teacher Grotowski. The careers of these people crossed several times and they influenced each other. Schechner collaborated with Grotowski on several occasions, not only in an academic context, and was of great help to Grotowski during the transitional period of 1982, while Turner's ideas were close to Grotowski at a theoretical level. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Barba had worked as a student with the Polish director while the former was living in Poland for four years and appeared to have been Grotowski's main bridge to the West before the latter moved there for good.

Schechner, Turner and Barba agree that there are common, intercultural factors between all performative manifestations of human activity. Their descriptions indicate that Grotowski's performer carry common underlying principles to the present by experiencing tradition first-hand and by taking in account the relativity of the various dramatic forms. More recent collaborators of

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<sup>186</sup> 'Social Practice, Interdisciplinary Perspective', p. 131

Grotowski seem to have the same conviction. Considering the nature of Grotowski's work, Wolford suggests that the use of 'I', that is, the subjective recording of the fieldwork, cannot be identical to the use of 'I' who first entered into investigation of the culture. The researcher's perception, both of the object of study and the outside world, is tangibly and irreversibly altered by the experience of 'life' in dialogue with the 'other'.<sup>187</sup> Wolford's observation was influenced by the ideas of the anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup, who argues that social anthropology must find a way to come to terms with the empirical experience in order to avoid transforming life into genre.<sup>188</sup> Hastrup notes that in the process of fieldwork, researchers become simultaneously members of their cultures of origin and of the culture of study.

According to Barba, Grotowski was initially drawn to the idea of compromising the conflicting positions of subjectivity and objectivity by three influences: Patanjali's texts of Hatha Yoga, Mahayana's interpretation of Buddhism with its Ch'an and Zen currents, and, especially the New School of Wisdom, which exhorts the doctrine of Sunyata. The doctrine of Sunyata, which translates as the Void, promotes an ideal condition of non-duality in which the object does not differ from the subject. Sunyata is the ultimate negation of the mundane world by means of a technique based not on rational thought, but on experience. It is a practice which stands midway between affirmation and negation, between action and the renunciation of action.<sup>189</sup> Apart from Hindu philosophy and its practices, such as the different genres of yoga, Barba testifies that Grotowski had been moved by a variety of influences, such as the yogi poet-saint Milarepa, the guru Marpa the Translator, George I. Gurdjieff and P. D.

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<sup>187</sup> Wolford, *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, p. 108.

<sup>188</sup> 'The Challenge of the Unreal', *Culture and History*, vol. 1, 1987, pp. 53-4.

<sup>189</sup> Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 49.

Ouspenski, as well as some of the aforementioned modern sociologists and anthropologists. During the early stages of the Theatre of Thirteen Rows, Grotowski and Barba commented on the texts of the above authors, paraphrased them, using themselves and their own experiences to investigate the 'archetypes' and the 'collective representations', of 'wild thought'. These texts, as Barba explains, were the sources they tapped in an unceasing reformulation of a vision of theatre.<sup>190</sup>

If one takes into account Grotowski's later career and his continuous pursuit for 'true' acting, Shevtsova's conclusion about the issue of constructing the object of research in humanistic sciences appears relevant. 'While a matter of methodology', she says, 'it embraced something larger still, namely, the philosophical problematics of "truth". How, indeed, did one know if something was true if that something was filtered through subjective perception and reflection, and built, conceptually and verbally...with subjective help?'.<sup>191</sup> While Shevtsova cites the interdisciplinary work of Turner, Geertz and Clifford as principal examples, 'not least in respect of concepts of performance', Grotowski's aspiration offers an example, at least in respect to the concept of performance.

The negation of a defined object of research is evident in the versatility of Grotowski's acting training techniques during the years 1959-1966. His main concern in the physical exercises was to bridge the gap between the body and the actor's psyche while at the same time initiating a training adversary to the daily activity of the body. Even during the warming up exercises, which mainly consisted of walking to different rhythms and in different positions, Grotowski marked the significance for the actor of a justification of every movement with a

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<sup>190</sup> *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 50.

<sup>191</sup> 'Social Practice, Interdisciplinary Perspective', p. 130.

precise image, whether real or imaginary. Some exercises, such as the headstand, were in accordance with Hatha Yoga. Grotowski explained that they were positions, that is, communication between the actors' body and their psychology, not sterile acrobatics. Other exercises sought to transplant into the human body the physical attributes of animals, such as the flexibility of a cat, a bird's ability to fly or the impulsive movements of a tiger. A further aspect can be found in the 'tiger' exercise, where the actors imitated the battle between two tigers that cross one another in the air at different heights. To assimilate this situation, the exercise took place to the vibrations of a drum, tambourine or other object. There, both the performer of the exercise and the drummer improvised and provided reciprocal stimuli.<sup>192</sup> Plastic exercises were based on Emile Jaques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics and other European methods and particularly studied the vectors of opposing movements. For instance, the hand makes circular movements in one direction, while the foot moves to the opposite direction. These exercises also sought to bring together contrasting images, such as 'the hands accept while the legs reject'.<sup>193</sup>

Grotowski equally respected traditional theatre forms. Thus, a combination of exercises was invented according to the process of the formation of gesticulatory ideograms such as those in ancient and medieval theatre in Europe, as well as African and Oriental theatre. For Grotowski, there was no question of reproducing fixed ideograms like those in Peking Opera, in which the portrayal of a flower is signified by the actor through an unchangeable gesture inherited from centuries of tradition. The quest was for new ideograms, the realisation of which would appear immediate and spontaneous. In these exercises plant images and

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<sup>192</sup> Barba, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 102-107.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

virtues were added to the animal images.<sup>194</sup> A significant part of the training process was the exercise of the facial muscles, such as the movement of the eyebrows, the eyelids, the eyelashes, the lips and so on, based on various suggestions made by Francois Delsarte. The aim of this exercise was the close correspondence between the face and the reactions of the entire body. In addition to Delsarte's prescriptions, Grotowski incorporated into the training the facial musculature used by Kathakali, the classical Indian theatre.<sup>195</sup>

In terms of breathing exercises, Grotowski searched for 'total respiration', a combination of thoracic and abdominal breathing, by adopting techniques from Hatha Yoga and classical Chinese theatre. He recognised the ability of children and animals to breathe this way and considered it the healthiest and most functional type, although he acknowledged the fact that each actor's breathing depended on his or her physiological make-up. In terms of the body's resonators, Grotowski trained the chest and nasal resonator known in European acting training, the laryngeal resonator known in African theatre, the occipital resonator known in classical Chinese theatre and the maxillary resonator, which is located in the area at the back of the jaws. Yet, he stressed that the most fruitful possibility lay in the use of the entire body as a resonator.<sup>196</sup>

After 1966, Grotowski developed the physical and the vocal exercises in combination with the presentation of a text which was spoken out loud by the pupil. During this process, Grotowski challenged the actor to breathe in different ways, such as a fat heavy cow, or to fight with someone who had become a tiger attacking its prey.<sup>197</sup> Thus, the exercises resembled a circus performance in

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<sup>194</sup> Barba, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 110-11.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115-123.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145.

which the actor combined the use of the body, the voice, the thoughts and the text in total concentration. In addition, laughter was restrained and, even during the break, the actors were not allowed to speak or whisper amongst themselves, as in monasteries.<sup>198</sup> To some extent, Grotowski's exercises sought to develop the same abilities of those in the non-Western theatre, for instance Kathakali, where the actor's education relies on strict discipline and the simultaneous, multilateral development of his or her expressive means.

Grotowski's intentions are further elucidated by Barba's individual work. Barba recognised the validity of ritual-like activities which intend to transform the participants without addressing this result to any further purpose, like the favour of a god. Nevertheless, Barba, even in this case, observes that the participants are obliged to change their daily behaviour, including their body manners, that is, other muscles were trained apart from those used in ordinary, daily activity. One of the artistic principles that he detects transculturally is the use of the actor's body on stage. This varies depending on the performance, but it is always involved in stage work worldwide. Evidently, in ritualistic or theatrical conditions, the participants use extraordinary gestures and specific codes of communication. Even in the most realistic forms of theatre, the actors have to move differently to be seen and heard by each and every member of the audience. In tribal rituals, the participants move in a certain way that sometimes resembles dance, that is, they adopt a pre-established movement. In the theatre as well, movements may be performed intentionally in order to make the symbolic meaning of the action clear to the spectator.

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<sup>198</sup> Barba, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 143, 149.

Barba notices that the actors have to re-learn how to walk on stage all over again from the beginning. This training cannot leave their daily body behaviour unaffected.<sup>199</sup> Barba calls this process 'extra-daily' and he explains it as the 'extra-daily techniques that do not respect the habitual conditioning of the use of the body'.<sup>200</sup> Clearly, the person involved undergoes a change as a result of this training. In Grotowski's work, people were trained with a diversity of foreign techniques on purpose. In other words, the habitual limited movements of everyday life or even the special movements found in each culture are enriched with particular motions from foreign traditions. The encounter with foreign gestures brings momentary doubt to the practitioners, yet it could be a motivation to broaden their expressive capacity. This could be a process of self-awareness in a context of ambiguity, that is, instability and insecurity experienced when faced with foreign methods.

The notion of transition, or the passage from daily to extra-daily, is also stressed as a common underlying principle between performance activities such as ritual, theatre, sports and games. Schechner observes a variety of transitions that functions either on a superficial level or expands the person's consciousness.<sup>201</sup> The first level is the one that provides the base for the second to occur. Associated with the first level are the specific, proclaimed and limited time and space in which all the performance activities occur, the special use of objects, the carrying out of the activities under given rules and the non-productive character of these activities.

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<sup>199</sup> Barba, *Paper Canoe*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 21.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>201</sup> *Performance Theory*, London: Routledge, 1988, p. 6 and also *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 125.

The time of these events is no longer clock time, but, according to Schechner, is 'adapted to the event' and therefore susceptible to numerous variations and creative distortions.<sup>202</sup> Moreover, time is not only special, but concentrated as well. In rituals, for example, the novices' status, like a player's status in a game, changes in an instant (in comparison to his daily life). The same holds for performance. Personas 'grow up', 'interact' and may eventually 'die' during a performance. Grotowski indeed appears to have had a special relation to time. Evidently, he did not respect any official hours of rehearsal and in many cases turned the day into night. Especially in Paratheatre and the Theatre of Sources, he preferred to work with the participants during the night. He was convinced that when the body works contrary to normal biorhythms, psychological defences recede and subconscious material emerges.

Space, for Schechner, is another unifying factor among performance activities. There, space ceases to carry only a functional significance and is loaded with metaphysical and symbolic meaning. Great arenas, stadiums, churches, and theatres unlike office, industrial, or domestic spaces are used on an occasional rather than a steady basis. During large parts of the day or even for days they are not in use and yet when the show or the ceremony starts they are used intensively and attract large crowds.<sup>203</sup>

From the period of Productions and after, space for Grotowski was of great importance, for it was the first step for the actor and in particular the audience to set themselves in another reality, that of the performance. It was combination of the sets of the architect Jerzy Gurawski, Grotowski's set designer and close collaborator, along with the actors' training that prompted the critics to

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<sup>202</sup> *Performance Theory*, p. 6.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

characterise the performances as transcendental. In the belief that the space contributes to the quality of the performance, even when touring, Laboratory Theatre chose churches or historical sites to perform.<sup>204</sup> In Paratheatre, the natural environment was chosen as the only environment where the participants might experience their natural rhythms of their organisms. Even today, *Action* takes place in churches, or historical sites.

All performance activities take place under certain rules, which the participants should follow step by step. As Schechner states, '[w]hat rules are to games and sports, traditions are to ritual and conventions are to theatre, dance and music'.<sup>205</sup> Even in improvised pieces of theatre, except in extreme forms of experimental theatre, there are certain pivotal themes for improvisation. Similarly, Grotowski imposed a very strict discipline on the acting training during every period of his career. For instance, the rule of silence and the non-verbalisation of the experience accompanied him throughout his career. Yet, the notion of 'rule' in terms of performance took on a different meaning because each performer had to find and obey personal rules, that is, those rules that helped his or her body and psyche to transcend convention.

Another interesting and unifying factor of performance activities is the significance of objects. Their meaning is determined by their use and not really by their material value. During performance activities these objects are of extreme importance, often the focus of the whole activity. 'Sometimes', Schechner stresses, 'as in theatre and children's play, they [objects] are decisive in creating the symbolic reality'.<sup>206</sup> For instance, in Holy Communion the chalice contains the wine which represents the blood of Jesus Christ, while the priest distributes the

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<sup>204</sup> Schechner, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 113.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>206</sup> *Performance Theory*, p. 9.

bread signifying Christ's flesh. These objects are considered sacred and used only for the purposes of the sacrament. Each one serves a specific role. However, on the stage these objects, whether or not they are used in an obvious symbolic manner, look 'real' yet are 'less real' since they are not imbued with religious or material significance.

With the notion of 'via negativa', Grotowski diminished the use of props to the very basic. In his performances, props had only a symbolic character. For instance, as mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, in the performance of *Forefathers' Eve* received in 1961 in Opole, Molik carried a broom in place of a cross.<sup>207</sup> In *Apocalypsis*, the loaf of bread took on the meaning of Holy Communion. For Grotowski, it was the actor's performance which would bring out the significance of the objects, similar to sports and games and in contrast to ritual, where objects are sacramental.

Finally, the idea of non-productivity in terms of material goods is a common principle of performance activities. The benefits are playfulness and psychological euphoria similar to what is experienced in sports and games. In the case of ritual, and less often theatre, the benefit is healing. In ritual the participants pray to their God either to protect them from something or to lead them to prosperity. Similarly, in theatre, the motivating factor for people who visit the theatre or become actors is entertainment or the chance to experience an imaginary world, or even the possibility of getting to know themselves better. In other words, financial profit is not the primary concern.

The special consideration of time, space, objects, the pre-established rules and the principle of non-productivity form a context in which the audience may

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<sup>207</sup> Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 21.

pursue ephemeral joy and euphoria and the agents financial benefit. In the case of ritual, the benefit is the favour of the god, or healing. Ignoring any material reward, Grotowski searched for a transition with long-term effects, like the cognition of being, rather than for the ephemeral alteration of behaviour with the purpose of joy. Grotowski respected the necessity of a first-level transition in order to pass through to a second, inner level. More specifically, he sought to transform the psyche by setting the performers in a non-conventional training programme in which they were required to become familiar with seemingly contradictory exercises and notions, for instance, the acting methods of Constantin Stanislavski and the practices of Yoga, great pieces of literature and personal improvisation on the ideas included in the texts.<sup>208</sup> Grotowski wanted to create an 'unsafe' environment where self-awareness followed the abandonment of convention.

Schechner, like Grotowski, stresses the internal rather than the external transformation of the actor, which is more often the case in sports and games. Schechner's interest in internal transformation is turned towards ritual and theatre. He explains:

I call performances where the performers are changed 'transformations' and those where performers are returned to their starting places 'transportations'—'transportation', because during the performance the performers are 'taken somewhere' but at the end, often assisted by others, they are 'cooled down' and re-enter ordinary life just about where they went in.<sup>209</sup>

Schechner claims that the performers, and sometimes the spectators, are changed permanently, as in initiation rites, or temporarily, as in aesthetic theatre

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<sup>208</sup> Although well known, the concepts and the methods of Stanislavski are briefly analysed in Chapter IV and in the Conclusion.

<sup>209</sup> *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, p. 125.

and trance dancing. He considers that the actor in mainstream theatre is 'transported', whereas the novice in initiation rites becomes 'transformed'.

For Schechner, transported people are those who while involved in a process are changed externally, but, when the process is finished, come back to their initial condition. For example, an actor who portrays a hero might have adopted the costume and the body manners of this character during the performance, but after the performance is over the actor's psychology remains unaffected by the hero's personality. One could characterise an action either as 'transformative' or 'transportative' only after the performance is finished. During the course of the theatrical performance or the ritual, the participant's or the actor's behaviour is restored to a new one, which differs from that which they had before they entered the theatrical or ritual event. It only becomes apparent afterwards whether the change can affect the person permanently or temporarily.

Schechner defines the general alteration of the personality as 'restoration of behaviour'. He describes it as "'me behaving as if I am someone else' or 'as if I am 'beside myself' or 'not myself,'" as when in a trance. But this 'someone else' may also be 'me in another state of feeling/being', as if there were multiple 'me's' in each person".<sup>210</sup> Schechner claims that the transformation of the actor communicates in the same way to the spectators of pre-industrial ritual, for example, the spectators of Balinese trance dancing, as to the spectator of Western theatre.<sup>211</sup> Restored behaviour signifies an exceptional, extra-ordinary aspect of human activity, which takes place in a specific time and space. It uses symbols and manifests metaphors, and the person involved is transformed, at least temporarily. The restoration of behaviour should not be confused with the

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<sup>210</sup> *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, p. 37.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

loss of the actor's self. When the actor 'becomes another', multiple selves coexist in an unresolved dialectic tension.<sup>212</sup> Schechner claims that this type of work is not much different than what Grotowski, influenced by the non-western techniques of Yoga and Kathakali, asked from his performers.

Grotowski asked that theatre be the platform where the actors' potentials could be achieved or actualised. For him, the actors should enter a process of self-awareness, and sacrifice the most valuable and painful parts of themselves, which are not normally intended for the eyes of the audience. In this way, the actor undergoes a profound and permanent change in consciousness.<sup>213</sup>

Grotowski sought to make acting a transcendental process. This effort, which started in the mid-sixties, culminated in the performance of *The Constant Prince*. As previously shown, the Laboratory Theatre searched for techniques that would allow the actors to overcome the resistance of their bodies.<sup>214</sup> The Polish critic Josef Kelera had strong reservations about the attainability of such a task until he watched *The Constant Prince*. He specifically explains that even as he followed the incredible technical achievements of Grotowski in his work with the actors, he was skeptical about accepting Grotowski's desire for the actors' creative work to be a psychic act of transgression, an exploration, sublimation, and transfer of deeply buried psychic content. Nevertheless, after Kelera encountered Cieslak's creation, he described Cieslak's acting as luminosity and explained that, at critical points, all that was technique became illuminated from within. In this performance, Kelera found that philosophical terms, such as the 'lay holiness', 'act of humility', 'purification', had become practice, which made

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<sup>212</sup> *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, p. 6.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>214</sup> See also, Osinski, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 87.

this performance stand beyond theatrical criticism.<sup>215</sup> Grotowski explained Cieslak's acting as the 'total act'. This act, he says, 'can be attained only out of the experiences of one's own life, this act which strips, bares, unveils, reveals, and uncovers. Here an actor should not act but rather penetrate the regions of his own experience with his body and voice'.<sup>216</sup> In this case, acting is neither a story nor a representation of an illusion and, thus it stands for its present moment. The actor exposes and, simultaneously, discovers himself or herself. Grotowski stresses that, at those moments, Cieslak transcended the state of his division or duality. That is, Cieslak did not react or accept the discoveries of his subconscious, but unquestionably experienced them. He also allowed this process to be transparent, and thus, allowed the audience to communicate with it.

In the scope of anthropological research, Grotowski's idea of introducing acting as a transitional process shares elements with traditional ceremonies, where the novice passes not only ceremonially from one social status to another, but also psychologically from an old life to a new one. Likewise, the actor carries out not only a role, but lets an up-to-then unknown part of himself or herself emerge. Both in traditional rites of passage and in Grotowski's theatre this chaotic moment is a remedial process which seeks to restore order. In terms of anthropology, the moment or the period of this transformation, where the participant oscillates between contradictions is what Turner, inspired by Arnold Van Gennep's notion of the 'liminal stage', calls *liminality* and explains and extends it to the theatrical field.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Kerela in Osinski, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, 85.

<sup>216</sup> Quoted in Osinski, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 86.

<sup>217</sup> 'Are There Universals of Performance?', *By Means of Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 11.

Genep's famous work, *The Rites of Passage*, focused on those rituals that accompany life crises, those critical moments in social life when individuals move from one status to another. He observes that there are rituals for each occasion of human activity like birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, enthronement, ordination, funerals, travels of sacred personages, vegetation rites and assumes a common underlying order. According to Genep, initiation rituals provide the clearest examples of this three-stage pattern, although they particularly elaborate the liminal aspects of the transition stage. Each ceremony had its own symbols and performative actions, yet Genep's 'interest lies not in the particular rites but in their essential significance and their relative positions within ceremonial wholes—that is, their order'.<sup>218</sup> For this reason, Genep includes some lengthy descriptions in his book in order to demonstrate:

How rites of preliminary or permanent separation, transition and incorporation are placed in relation to one another for a specific purpose. Their positions may vary, depending on whether the occasion is birth or death, initiation or marriage, but the differences lie only in matters of detail. The underlying arrangement is always the same. Beneath a multiplicity of forms, either consciously expressed or merely implied, a typical pattern always recurs: *the pattern of the rites of passage*.<sup>219</sup>

Through this sequence of activities, rituals effect the person's removal from one social grouping, dramatise the change by holding the person in a suspended 'betwixt and between' stage for a period of time, and then reincorporate him or her into a new identity and status within another social grouping.

Among other lengthy examples, Genep describes the initiation of several Australian tribes into the totem groups.<sup>220</sup> This specific ceremony refers to the

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<sup>218</sup> *The Rites of Passage*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960, p. 191.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

young male population of the tribe and lasts from their tenth to their thirtieth year. The first phase of the ritual includes the separation of the novice from his previous environment. The young boy is taken away from his mother and the other women of the tribe, as well as from the children. The novice is secluded in the bush or in a special place, for example a hut and so on. Genep seizes the chance to compare this seclusion with the isolation of pregnant women from the social milieu. For instance, the theme of separation is underlined in another chapter of his book where Genep gives examples of pregnant women from the Todas of India who, during this transitory period of their lives, undergo rites that separate the pregnant woman from the community, her family group and sometimes even from her own sex.<sup>221</sup> Continuing with the initiation rites in the Australian tribes, he stresses that these seclusion rites often have a dietary nature. Genep explains that the boy's separation from his mother occurs deliberately with a violent action to become a momentous change in the boy's life. The aim of this action is to create a gulf between him and his maternal environment and domestic ties, so that henceforth he becomes attached to men. In some tribes, this act of separation is imbued with the metaphoric meaning of death. The novice is considered dead by the rest of the society for the duration of his novitiate. This phase consists of a physical and mental weakening, which for Genep is intentional and makes the novice lose all recollection of his childhood existence. The following phase, which Genep describes metaphorically as resurrection, consists of the novice's instruction in tribal law and a gradual education as the novice witnesses totem ceremonies, recitations of myths and so on. The final phase is a religious ceremony and a special mutilation. Some

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<sup>221</sup> Genep, *The Rites of Passage*, pp. 41-42.

examples are the removal of a tooth, or circumcision. Gennep adds that the phases of the initiation may occur either all at once or in stages.

In short, the order of the pattern that the novice passes through is: the *separation*, during which the novice is secluded from his cultural group or is removed from his previous social status; the *transitional* stage, where the initiate goes through the ordeals characterised primarily by ambiguity, as he or she is not the same as before, yet not changed; and the *incorporation* stage, during which the participant re-enters society with a new personality and possibly with new duties.<sup>222</sup> Gennep views ritual as passing a threshold and calls the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminal* rites; the rites performed in the transitional stage, *liminal*; and the ceremonies of incorporation, *post-liminal* rites.<sup>223</sup> Liminal signifies a state where the novice wavers between two worlds. Having been persuaded to leave his old position, the initiate is not sure about the kind of experience he or she will meet in the coming stage.

Turner discusses the attributes of *liminality* and liminal personas in the following way:

[They] are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualise social and cultural transitions.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> *The Rites of Passage*, p. 21.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>224</sup> *The Ritual Process*, New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1969, p. 95.

Basically, Turner enriches and extends Genep's notion of the 'liminal stage', which he observes in the rites of passage. Genep describes the liminality in life's ambiguity as follows:

For groups as well as for individuals, life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn. It is to act and to cease, to wait and rest, and then to begin acting again, but in a different way. And there are always different thresholds to cross.<sup>225</sup>

Turner takes these conclusions on rituals, extends them and finds that the theatrical process appears to have great similarities with the ritualistic one.

Turner's observation starts in society where conflicting characters, interests or ambitions may lead to a crisis which threaten the group's unity and its very continuity. Such crisis can be sealed off by a 'redressive' public action, that is, the restoration of social balance. Turner argues that this action is often ritualised, and may be undertaken in the name of law or religion. Even if the redressive action fails, it includes the important aspect of social metacommentary, namely of a transvaluation of values.<sup>226</sup> Reflecting Durkheim's theory, Turner attributes the dynamism of the social system to the oscillation between crisis and redress, that is, the balance between crime and law, sin and dogma that fires consciousness and self-consciousness, and, thus, social life avoids being passive and inert.<sup>227</sup> Turner notes that theatre derives from the redressive process which appears in the ritualistic social dramas and not from the judicial, military or political redressive processes. Redressive rituals include divination into the hidden causes of misfortune, personal and social conflict, curative ritual and initiatory rites. Turner calls these rites 'life-crisis ceremonies' and indicates that they

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<sup>225</sup> *The Rites of Passage*, p. 189.

<sup>226</sup> Turner, *By Means of Performance*, p. 8.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

involve a therapeutic element. This aspect of ritual, namely the redressive, occurs in places detached from mundane life and it is characterised by ‘the presence of ambiguous ideas, monstrous images, sacred symbols, ordeals, humiliations, esoteric and paradoxical instructions...maskers, clowns, gender reversals, anonymity’ and so on.<sup>228</sup>

Theatre, according to Turner, is one of the many inheritors of that multifaceted system of preindustrial ritual that embraces opposites and places duality in perspective. Theatre asserts ideas and images of cosmos and chaos, brings together fools with gods, and uses all the sensory codes to produce symphonies of symbols and metaphors. Thus, he considers:

Theatre is, indeed, a hypertrophy, an exaggeration, of jural and ritual processes; ...there is, therefore, in theatre something of the investigative, judgmental, and even punitive character of law-in-action, and something of the sacred, mythic, numinous, even “supernatural” character of religious action—sometimes to the point of sacrifice.<sup>229</sup>

Turner is aware of the natural distance between ritual and theatre and distinguishes between *liminal* and *liminoid*. The attributes of both are the same, yet the context in which they appear differs. The difference is that *liminal* refers to traditional rites whereas *liminoid* refers to the development of ritualised circumstances outside their natural environment, on purpose.<sup>230</sup>

In Turner’s view, novices, as well as actors, are marginal personae, who strive to achieve a balance between formalities and duties; they try to understand the world by means that cannot be conceived by logic. The meaning of sacrifice is crucial. The person subjects himself or herself to liminal conditions in order to

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<sup>228</sup> Turner, *By Means of Performance*, p. 11.

<sup>229</sup> *From Ritual to Theatre*, New York: PAJ Publications, 1982, p. 12.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

'die' in an old world and be reborn in a new one. The transition is permanent and transformative. At the moment of transition, the liminal entities that had abandoned an old personality to adopt a new one, have no social status and are all equal to each other with regard to the ordeals of the ritual. Therefore, there are no controversial interests developed between them. On the contrary, bonds are encouraged because of the position of weakness in which they all find themselves. This provides them with a unique code of communication which is developed by the peculiarity of the given circumstances.<sup>231</sup> Using the same concept, as for *liminal* and *liminoid*, Turner calls the former case *communitas*, where the participants are unified, and distinguishes it from the latter by giving it the conventional name community. *Communitas*, according to Turner, 'stress personal relationships rather than social obligations'.<sup>232</sup> A spontaneous connection is developed between the members of *communitas*, as personal interest is identified with the group's interest. Turner compares the attributes of *communitas* to those of theatre. With Grotowski's Paratheatrical phase in mind, Turner stresses that 'Grotowski hit off this aspect well with his terms, "holy actor", and "secular sacrum"'.<sup>233</sup>

For Turner, Grotowski's work belongs to a wider theatrical effort to join the separated genres of ritual and theatre at the present historical time.<sup>234</sup> Turner notices that theatre functions as a prism of the innumerable alternative meanings that societies produce as a result of their different classes, ethnicities, regions, neighbourhoods, groups of different ages, and genders. There is a continual spiralling exchange between social drama and stage drama. Science, politics,

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<sup>231</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 169.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112. See also, Turner, *Drama, Fields and Metaphors*, Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1974, pp. 23-35 and 38-41.

<sup>233</sup> *From Ritual to Theatre*, New York: PAJ Publications, 1982, p. 12.

<sup>234</sup> *By Means of Performance*, p. 12.

economics, philosophy and art feed each other and vice versa. Thus, the members of society, the society itself, and the perception of the cosmos all form and evolve. Through the lenses of perception provided by Turner, Grotowski's Paratheatrical work attempts to re-incarnate the redressive character of social dramas and to introduce theatre as a social record, a vehicle of explanation for multileveled individual and social life.

James Roose-Evans' description of a Paratheatrical ordeal that he underwent compares to transitory rites. Roose-Evans indicates that, during the project *The Way* in the mid-seventies, the participants were taken by truck to an unknown destination in the depths of the countryside and there they were left to make their way on foot.<sup>235</sup> No one knew how long the journey would take or had certain prior knowledge of what to expect. The event involved at least one night spent in the forest, regardless of weather, and the possibility of Paratheatrical work sessions in the countryside. The entire process could take up to forty-eight hours and was very demanding physically and emotionally. Similarly, Gennep collected many examples of rites in which changes in spatial location are used to designate the changes in social identity. Moving people from one marked place to another, often passing through doors, arches, or gates, appears to be a common way both to signal and to effect a change in social status.<sup>236</sup>

Gregory, who participated in the Paratheatrical activities as the leader of a group, presents a more spiritual dimension of Grotowski's activities. He explains:

[I]f you find yourself in a forest with a group of forty people who don't speak your language, then all your moorings are gone... What we do is just sit there and wait for someone to have an impulse to do something. Now, in a way that's like a theatrical

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<sup>235</sup> *Experimental Theatre*, London and New York: Routledge, 1984, p. 156.

<sup>236</sup> See Bell, *Ritual*, p.36.

improvisation...[S]aying and doing what their character might say and do in that circumstance. Except that in the improvisations in these workshops the theme is oneself.<sup>237</sup>

Paratheatre was concerned with building up situations that were spontaneous and eruptive, and was motivated by individuals within the group or by the group as a whole. Apart from the tough living conditions, another difficulty of the method was the lack of instructions as mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis. There were the 'guides', but they were there to help the group surpass boredom or anxiety of 'what should I do now' and translate it into spontaneous creativity via adventure or game-like activities. Nevertheless, organised activities, if they were a product of the group's spontaneity, were also welcome.

Findlay, participating in one of the Paratheatrical projects in 1979 in Poland, tells how the members of the Laboratory Theatre functioned as leaders in improvisational activities.<sup>238</sup> They created physical images and vocalised sounds that the rest of the group would follow. Eventually, the members of the group started functioning both as leaders and followers, particularly at moments when the group was functioning creatively together. Findlay finds difficulties in describing these activities and attributes them to the title of collective activities, with a clear beginning, extended middle, and definite end. These activities remind him of a jazz ensemble, an improvisation that is not only acoustical, but also kinetic. The people who made up the group did not necessarily have a theatrical background. Yet, the creations had an intense artistic interest. Findlay explains that the most significant aspects of these experiments belong to a third realm of creation, a realm that is neither art nor life, but rather something else that

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<sup>237</sup> *My Dinner with André*, pp.24-5.

<sup>238</sup> 'Grotowski's "Cultural Explorations Bordering on Art, Especially Theatre"', *Theatre Journal*, vol. 32, no. 3, October 1980, p. 352.

partakes of both, without really being either.<sup>239</sup> These activities are a temporal culture enrichment of poetic images and metaphoric connections. He asserts that the witnesses, who at the same time were participants in the actions, were not present in a piece of art within life, as in Grotowski's previous theatrical phase, but in an experiment where life became artistic. What Findlay obtained from these activities was a measure of mental catharsis and a feeling of euphoria that was achieved because of the faith he eventually had in the project.

Gregory describes his experience of a similar feeling of catharsis and transformation to Wallace Shawn. These emotions were developed in a christening ritual, which was organised by the group that he animated. It was a complete ceremony with candles, baptism and a feast with music and food at the end. 'See, what I think I experienced was for the first time in my life to know what it means to be truly alive', he says after this experience.<sup>240</sup> Findlay and Gregory felt revitalised for they motivated themselves psychologically by transforming a conventional activity into a sincere experience.

In the Theatre of Sources, Grotowski, attempting to prove the common ground among transcultural techniques, travelled to Khardar, amongst other places, in West Bengal of India, and worked with Bengali actors. His aim was to find their 'sources', that is, to teach them about their inner selves. His interest focused on the development of the practitioners' psycho-physical resources not as actors, but as human beings. The group was asked to maintain exterior silence for almost three hours, so the practitioner could feel their inner silence. Eventually, there were sojourns to secluded areas, where Grotowski's associates guided the Bengali actors to re-experience their own landscape. As it appears in

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<sup>239</sup> 'Grotowski's "Cultural Explorations Bordering on Art, Especially Theatre"', p. 353.

<sup>240</sup> *My Dinner with André*, p. 38.

Rustom Bharucha's writings, the conception of a difference in ontological status between the natural environment and human beings is for Grotowski a cultural value, not the natural order. Thus, by performing for instance a fluent movement in the countryside, or by respecting silence, the actors could reach new self-perceptions.<sup>241</sup> Bharucha, who originates from India and first came into contact with Grotowski at Yale University in the early 1980s, professes the naivety of Grotowski's practices towards the Bengali actors. Considering Indian theatre as a highly spiritual practice, Bharucha cannot explain what Grotowski could teach those actors about themselves that they did not already know. He stresses Grotowski's extravagant concern about nature when he forbade them to throw a matchstick on the ground, claiming the holiness of the grass. Bharucha seems to be concerned with the aimlessness of these practices. He explains that the only reason for the actors to remain in the project was that Grotowski intended to select three actors to spend time with him in Poland. Grotowski's financing such an expedition was their only possibility of going abroad.<sup>242</sup>

Schechner is another scholar who, after observing Paratheatrical practices, believes that something was lacking in them. He draws this conclusion by having posed the question of the functionality of para-theatrical activities, that is, activities during Paratheatre and also the Theatre of Sources, in the absence of a performance. He proposes the following argument:

The tendency to transform entertainment into ritual by means of theatre has been present in Grotowski almost from the beginning...Much of the Paratheatrical work involved invited participants working intensively, bringing about an intimacy and quasi-religious solidarity—"spontaneous communitas"—by means of exercises, group-encounter techniques, and the submission to

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<sup>241</sup> Bharucha, *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*, London Routledge, 1990, p. 50.

<sup>242</sup> For Indian Theatre see pp. 43-44, whereas for Bharucha's criticism on Grotowski see p. 50.

the will of strong leaders.... What the paratheatrical experiments lack is the final phase of reintegration. Too often the newly initiated person is left hanging, betwixt and between, disorientated. Only the strongest personalities can effect a successful reintegration on their own.<sup>243</sup>

After almost twenty years, Robart's disagreement with the structure of Paratheatre and the Theatre of Sources echoes Schechner's hesitations. At the conference in Brzezinka 2002 concerning this phase of Grotowski's work, Robart explained that in the weekends or weekly seminars, which were conducted during the period of Paratheatre and the Theatre of Sources, people came and went, not having received concrete knowledge of any activity. Most of the non-western exercises require discipline, devotion and long-term training to become constructive and meaningful. She concluded that if she were asked to do the same now, she would have refused.<sup>244</sup>

A response to these comments is found in the writings of Wolford. She argues that Paratheatrical activities should not be considered as a reproduction of initiation processes, since in the latter the initiates have 'a coherent social fabric, a cosmology and world view to which the participant is conditioned from early childhood'.<sup>245</sup> In any case, Grotowski himself did not openly express his desire to generate modern initiation processes. Therefore, the analysis of Grotowskian activities in ritual terms appears ungrounded. Even if some scholars of considerable esteem, such as Osinski, argue that Grotowski generated modern initiation activities, they use this characterisation metaphorically. For example, Osinski concludes that Grotowski encouraged activities in Pontedera that assimilate the Mysteries of Eleusis, but stresses his affirmation that in

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<sup>243</sup> *Performance Theory*, New York and London: Routledge, 1977, pp. 144-145.

<sup>244</sup> Paratheatre and the Theatre of Sources, (conference), Friday 27 September 2002, Brzezinka, Poland. Personal notes from the panel.

<sup>245</sup> *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, p. 21.

Pontedera such rituals were not replicated.<sup>246</sup> These Mysteries were initiatory processes within the context of a certain religion. Because Osinski is aware of the intense character of the mysteries and the effect they had on human psychology, he compares them to the result of Grotowski's activities. Turner's comments seem to be motivated by the resemblance between Grotowskian ritual-like experiences and tribal ceremonies. He claims that Grotowski's activities 'bear a striking resemblance to the instructions and hazards typical of the successive phases of boys' and girls' puberty rites in Central Africa'.<sup>247</sup> Yet, this was not Grotowski's direct intention.

Wolford claims that the short period of participation in Paratheatrical activities, in addition to the participants' lack of a common worldview, does not allow for initiation experiences. It is only in the opposite case that the projects could have left the participants 'hanging', having failed to provide them with a reintegration period. She asserts:

One can look for initiatory parallels in the experiences of the 'guides', individuals who consciously chose to participate in Grotowski's work over a long period of time. In this context the ritual model cannot be regarded as incomplete, since these individuals were integrated into the stable structure of the research group, a community in which they remained for extended periods.<sup>248</sup>

Wolford also criticises Turner for implying that Grotowski's activities were an effort to 'erase personalities'.<sup>249</sup>

By reading Turner, however, such a conclusion seems misplaced. Turner claims that the masters of experimental theatre, like Grotowski, tried to eliminate

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<sup>246</sup> 'Blazes the Trails', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 394.

<sup>247</sup> *From Ritual To Theatre*, p. 117.

<sup>248</sup> *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, p. 21.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

the 'picayune personae of the office, factory, or classroom'.<sup>250</sup> Grotowski would have, presumably, agreed with this point since he consciously wanted to erase the identity that is developed by convention and not by choice. Turner was a researcher of theatre anthropology who believed that theatre was derived from rituals and respected Grotowski's work, viewing it very much as the embodiment of his theories. He, therefore, has the tendency to consider Grotowski's activities as an extensive ritual product. Grotowski, however, did not state that he wanted to re-establish traditional rites per se. It is the aggregation of the fundamental principles, not merely a part of those principles that make a rite a rite of passage. The liminal phase cannot independently form a rite of passage. It is the entire sequence of a rite that serves the person as a citizen. The sequence is a vehicle for the novice's new social position or status. According to Flaszen, Grotowski would not necessarily disagree with the above comments. Grotowski's dramaturgist explains retrospectively how Grotowski felt in later years somewhat ashamed of this period of work. For this reason, when the text of 'Holiday' was about to be published in *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, he refused to give the initial text, which was composed in the 1970's, for publication before he revised it to balance the utopian concepts of the first script.<sup>251</sup>

It seems to have been at the end of the Paratheatrical period when Grotowski realised that the person should practice on liminal levels only for a limited time, thus respecting the order of ritual. Grotowski explains the reason for this decision as follows:

Because he [the participant] should keep his settlement in his normal daily life; he should not cut himself off from it and become,

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<sup>250</sup> *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 116.

<sup>251</sup> Flaszen and Osinski, Paratheatre and the Theatre of Sources, (conference), Friday 27 September 2002, Brzezinka, Poland. Personal notes from the panel.

let's say, some kind of professional of Theatre of Sources, which in any case is only a project with a limited span of duration. The second reason is that it is favourable for the group member to keep some kind of autonomy face to me, that is, let's say, face to the person who is programming this work in a firm way.<sup>252</sup>

While Grotowski respected the ritual pattern, he ignored a fundamental attribute of this pattern. That is, the novice, at the end of the ordeal, remains as a member of the society which sets the ordeals and which functions under the specific premises of a certain cultural framework that is equally respected by all its members.

Objective Drama Research, which drew on culturally traditional techniques and narrative material, frequently religious in origin, is poised at the intersection of performance, ritual studies and cultural anthropology. The practice of liminal and redressive activities remained in Grotowski's subsequent phase of work, but took the possibility of undesirable consequences more seriously. A liminal dimension of the Objective Drama Research is hidden in Wolford's interpretation of a single action as a transitory process. Upon entering the workspaces, participants were required to remove their shoes and at times to put on special clothing. According to Wolford, they were instructed to minimise discussion and social interaction in the workspaces. Speech should only facilitate activities of work. On the one hand, such instructions had a strongly practical foundation, for instance shoes caked with mud as a result of work in the nearby fields were removed. On the other, they helped the actors to make a more complete transformation from daily-life behaviour to the comportment appropriate to the

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<sup>252</sup> 'Theatre of Sources', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 257.

work. Observances of this type could help practitioners to mark a passage between one world and another.<sup>253</sup>

In these circumstances objectivity was attained by means of subjectivity. As Wolford explains, in the work session of 1989, the participants were asked to learn a number of songs from musical notation and then teach these songs to other members of the group. Once the words and the melody were learned, Slowiak guided them towards discovery of the song's patterns of vibration and resonance. These are elements that cannot be conveyed by standard notation and, thus, the participants attempted a process of trial and error that continued until the 'objectivity' of the song, that is, the energetic impact of it, seemed to have been realised.<sup>254</sup>

Observing Grotowski's work in this period, Schechner suggests that the emphasis on technical/performative aspects of traditional material, as these were analysed in the second chapter of this thesis, might supply the constructive reintegrative phase of process, an issue strongly criticised by Turner and himself in the period of Paratheatre.<sup>255</sup> Schechner explains that when the performer finished with the training, he or she had consolidated the methods of Noh, for instance, of Kathakali or ballet and, in this way, he or she had been incorporated into the tradition of these genres.<sup>256</sup> Taking Schechner's argument into consideration, Wolford affirms that Grotowski's work had a similar effect on the participants. According to her, despite Grotowski's reservations about a 'Grotowski method', there are undeniably distinctive principles, in other words perpetually revised collection of 'bits of good advice', that characterise the work

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<sup>253</sup> Wolford, *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, p. 36.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>255</sup> *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, pp. 256-7

<sup>256</sup> *The Future of Ritual*, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 257.

and can be described as 'Grotowskian tradition'.<sup>257</sup> Following his work closely, Wolford suggests:

Grotowski's work continues to presuppose that the human being is, to a large extent, capable of reconstructing himself. The degree of self-responsibility with which each individual is confronted in Grotowski's work is truly extraordinary. One learns quickly not to make excuses for shoddy efforts, nor to expect negligence to go unremarked. Any attempt to dialogue about psychological difficulties encountered in the context of the work is tacitly discouraged; each participant is expected to resolve her conflicts independently.<sup>258</sup>

It appears that the primary principle of 'Grotowski's tradition' was the sense of self-responsibility, which would concomitantly extend to a mature collaboration with others.

In *Art as Vehicle*, the combination of a diversity of techniques, which can convey an impartial, reconstructive effect on the performers, was achieved in an even more concrete way—the opus of *Action*. Grotowski's desire for encouraging I-Thou relationships had developed by the end of his life to the concept of I-I, which, according to Osinski, can be explained as a search for self in self.<sup>259</sup> Practically, this relationship is discovered through one's spiritual heritage as this is received from his or her forebears, yet stands beyond the realm defined by one's ancestors. In his special philosophical language, Grotowski explains that people get drunk with 'life into time', that is, conventional life in daily rhythms, and forget to give life to the part in them which 'looks on', or, in esoteric terms, to the silent observer, which is not defined by time and culture.<sup>260</sup> Thus, the second I assimilates to an immobile look, to a silent presence that illuminates things from

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<sup>257</sup> *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, p. 130.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>259</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 393.

<sup>260</sup> 'The Performer', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 376.

inside. It should not be confused with the perception and judgement of others upon oneself. When I-I becomes a consolidated experience, then the deceptive 'couple' appears as a unit. Grotowski stresses that the performer is required to be passive in action and active in seeing. Passive means to be receptive and active to be present. Towards this end, the performer must refrain from training a muscular, athletic body for the sake of it, but to develop an organism-channel through which the energies circulate, and transform so as to touch the 'subtle', that is, the 'silent observer'. Therefore, the performer should ground his or her work in a precise structure, for persistence and respect for details are the rigor which allows I-I to become present.

What Genep, Turner, Schechner, and other scholars on the symbolic traditional ceremonial progressions managed to put into theory, Grotowski developed in practice—liminality was the principle for the search of individuation. Through the years, Grotowski became aware of the dangers implicit in such a project when not motivated in a protected, limited scale and in a realm of discipline. Grotowski had experienced the force towards individuation which flourished beside the person's traditional and social obligation that had burst forth in the 1960s. The social experience of the 1960's inevitably influenced Grotowski's thinking.

The generation who grew up during the post-World War II-Cold War period and became known as the Baby Boomers seemed to flout authority and disparage tradition. Inspired by the music of Elvis Presley in the United States and that of the Beatles in England, many young people rejected their parents' choices and opted for non-conventional modes of behaviour. Their preferred music, dance and style of dress expressed a rejection of traditional Western

values. With more women working and the number of college students the status quo was being called into question. This generation held Che Guevara as an icon.

The focal point for much of the discontent was the war in Vietnam. Some were passionate in believing that such a war would be a blow to Communism, which they believed threatened social freedom. For others, however, this war was morally unjustifiable. The 'hippy' movement grew out of the disappointment that many of the younger generation felt at being unable to affect social policy. The hippies advocated dropping out of organised society and returning to what they saw as natural conditions of living. In 1968, the opposition to the war in Vietnam culminated in the demonstrations in Paris. Students joined by several labour unions held a protest in which 300,000 people participated. In the United States, similar demonstrations took place. However, the students and the labor movement never truly united so the great revolution never happened. In the United States, those who had gone to Vietnam believing they were serving their country returned to find people their own age protesting against the war's atrocities; many of the veterans joined in the demonstrations and symbolically threw away their medals.

In the meantime, the hippies were discovering that "flower power" was an empty dream. Kott explains the reasons for the failure of this movement, and considering Grotowski's principles and practices, assumes that he regarded the life and death of this movement as an experience to avoid in his own work. Kott explains:

The story of the flower children and the Haight Ashbury neighbourhood in San Francisco is widely known... Very young girls in loose, wide dresses down to the ankles like gypsies

entwined by beads, with bracelets above their bare feet, handed flowers to the passersby. The boys distributed herbal brews... Within a few months Haight Ashbury became San Francisco's most dismal and dangerous neighbourhood. Heroin replaced marijuana, and the boys handing out thirst-quenching beverages from natural herbs turned into pimps, while starved girls sold themselves cheaply and haphazardly.<sup>261</sup>

The flower children seem to have failed to place sufficient importance on the fact that communal life carries its own great dangers. Obedience is not necessarily a drawback, but a platform for social well-being. The movement of the flower children has proven to be an extreme reaction to the bourgeoisie, an attempt to go back to the unconcerned social life at the origins of humanity, an Eden-like society, which is probably a figment of the imagination and never really existed. Though this generation undoubtedly influenced social mores, for instance 18-year-olds were given the vote and the authority of parents and governments continues to be questioned, the hippies failed to establish a society with no rules and obligations. Influenced by events of his generation, Grotowski kept a critical eye on them. He was not aiming for an impossible theatre that would have been based solemnly on spontaneity. He meant to attack the theatre of the bourgeoisie, but not just for the sake of rebellion. He sought to awaken in his participants a knowledge with which they could rediscover their suppressed self in order to be more creative and useful to themselves and others.

The resonance of Grotowski's work, despite its flaws and the criticism it might have received, is recorded in the examples of theatre directors who had collaborated with Grotowski in their youth. The most well-known example is Barba's with his institution of Theatre Anthropology that conducts research under

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<sup>261</sup> 'After Grotowski: the End of the Impossible Theatre', *Theatre Quarterly*, vol. X, no. 38, Summer 1980, p. 28.

the aegis of the Odin Teatret in Denmark. His work transfers gestures, patterns and training techniques of non-Western theatrical forms into a performance which is addressed to Western audiences. Other examples are Cuesta, who participated as a practitioner as well as a guide in Paratheatre and the Theatre of Sources, and Jim Slowiak, Grotowski's closest associate in the Objective Drama Research. In a joint effort, Cuesta and Slowiak have established the New World Performance Laboratory in the United States, which pursues rigorous training methods and work techniques in the context of American university theatre and alternative performance. The search for a *new theatrical object*, which Grotowski conducted under principles of liminality, continues in these people's work and sets new perspectives.

## CHAPTER IV

### ***Ecstatic Explorations: 'objective' subjectivity in Grotowski's work***

The process of ecstasy is essential to the concept of liminality, and it is this process which makes the concept usable by, and effective for, the actor/doer. Ecstasy is a versatile state that includes either a vibrant emotional expression, possibly accompanied by movements constituting a form of dance, or it can be an experience of the sublime that results from an apparent tranquility, a relatively motionless stance.<sup>262</sup> According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, *ecstasy* derives from the Greek word *ekstasis*, ek-stasis, ('out' + 'to place'). In other words, the ultimate result of the process of ecstasy is the deliverance from mental obstacles, namely anxieties, which prevent people from living untroubled in emotional and mental security. On an ideal level, ecstasy could be considered as the mystical notion of immersive connectedness, an epiphanic integrative union. On a personal level, ecstasy appears as alertness—the person's struggle for overcoming duality.

Eric. R. Dodds, the American scholar on ancient Greek civilization, states that ecstasy implies an overwhelming feeling of joy and rapture and could mean anything from 'taking one out of his or herself' to profound alteration of the personality.<sup>263</sup> Furthermore, Dodds explains that the psychological function of ecstasy in ancient Greece was to satisfy and relieve the impulse to reject responsibility, an impulse which can become an irresistible craving under certain social conditions. More analytically, ecstasy is a spontaneous and eruptive moment during which knowledge that was hidden is revealed to the person.

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<sup>262</sup> Though certain citations in chapter IV use the word *trance* instead of *ecstasy*, I shall use the latter to refer to the state described above. In English these tend to be used interchangeably.

<sup>263</sup> *The Greeks and the Irrational*, California: University of California Press, 1951, p. 77.

Ecstatic experiences are self-ending and lead to the identification of one's self. The object of knowledge is not given in advance as it lies within the person who undergoes the experience, and as such is unique for each person. Even though ecstasy signifies a specific moment, this specific moment is reached through an eliminating process that Grotowski characterised as '*via negativa*', outlined in the second chapter of this thesis.

Modern psychological studies on ecstatic experiences carried out by the psychologist Abraham Maslow, who uses the term 'peak experiences', appear to be in accordance with Grotowski's perception of acting which achieves self-awareness. Maslow concentrates on the contemporary psychological attitude of not-having instead of having, striving rather than fulfillment, seeking joy rather than having attained joy.<sup>264</sup> Such duality gives rise to a creative urge, not to agony, and as such encourages an everlasting broadening of the person's mental horizons. Similarly, Flaszen describes Grotowski's attitude towards theatre by using the metaphor of a person being in a waiting room, that is someone who is constantly alert.<sup>265</sup> Grotowski did not consider his destiny to be that of a person 'at home'. In Grotowski's notion of the acting process, self-knowledge via ecstasy is a process of elimination rather than an obtainable state. Grotowski explains:

One must resort to a metaphoric language to say that the decisive factor for this process is humility, a spiritual predisposition: not to do something, but to refrain from doing something, otherwise the excess becomes impudence instead of sacrifice. This means that the actor must act in a state of trance.<sup>266</sup>

With the word 'humility' he assumes that people refrain from taking for granted the knowledge of their own personal reactions. Thus, those who submit to the

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<sup>264</sup> *Towards a Psychology of Being*, New York: Penguin, 1962, p. 73.

<sup>265</sup> Personal communication, Pontedera, Friday 12 October 2001.

<sup>266</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 37.

process of 'via negativa' refuse to hold on to the reactions they might have had if placed in the position of the character, an attitude suggested by Stanislavski. In the Stanislavskian system the actors assume what their own reactions in similar circumstances would be, or recall their own actions in equivalent situations in their past. Nevertheless, in both cases, the actors' imagination or even habit constrains their present, spontaneous reaction. What is important, however, for Grotowski is the *present* condition of the person under his or her given circumstances. According to Grotowski, any other attitude is 'impudent' because the actor does not allow the present to support itself. Grotowski suggests that the actor should give the present its value by setting aside actions motivated by habit. Thus, the actor sacrifices security which comes from stability and enters into a new form of certainty derived from continuous mobilisation.

In terms of acting, ecstasy emerges when the one who acts finds himself or herself in disciplinary accord with his or her repressed impulses. Accordingly, the actor establishes a reality of a different order both in acting and in life, which even if not conventional can be socially acceptable. The endless emotional and mental mobilisation also applies to the actor's body and the performance score. Therefore, the actors in Grotowski's performances base their acting on a continuous rhythm that is also apparent in their bodies, while the performances resemble a musical score with peaks, valleys, actions and pauses. Even when their bodies give the impression of not moving, a rhythm is respected and thus there is no gap created in the score. As in nature, every element seems still, yet within its structure the components move. This kind of rhythm drives a person out of *stasis* and allows him or her to penetrate other dimensions of

being. Thus, ecstasy removes the barriers and permits a multilateral perception of the self.

In examining the ecstatic experiences, Maslow refers to the process of individuation and concludes:

The goal of identity (self-actualization, autonomy, individuation, Horney's real self, authenticity) seems to be simultaneously an end goal, a rite of passage, and a step along the path to the transcendence of identity. This is like saying its function is to erase itself.<sup>267</sup>

To paraphrase, the goal of identification is a simultaneous process of revealing the self while erasing it. According to the psychologist, during peak experiences, people are closest to their real selves and most idiosyncratic.<sup>268</sup> These experiences are euphoric moments of happiness including love, parental joy, mystic experience, creative moments, therapeutic or intellectual insight and fulfillment.<sup>269</sup> Being aware of the psychological implications of the ecstatic instances as self-contained experiences that provide the person with a channel to identify himself or herself, Grotowski continued to develop these ideas concerning ecstasy throughout his life and these different perspectives will be considered in this chapter.

The characters in *Akropolis* are a group of human wrecks with nothing and nowhere on which to base a feeling of stability and security. Their Savior is believed to be a headless corpse carried by the leader whom they follow religiously. In order to honor the Savior, they start singing a Christmas hymn. Their singing turns into an ecstatic lament; the characters enter into an ecstatic

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<sup>267</sup> *Towards a Psychology of Being*, p. 114.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

dance and the procession concludes in a state of supreme ecstasy.<sup>270</sup> It is depravation that brings the crowd to a religious frenzy or trance-like state that defines ecstasy.

In another theatrical example, the character of the Prince was based on and further developed from Cieslak's first experiences of erotic love. These true-life sensual occurrences permeated both the rehearsal and the performance and brought the actor into a trance-like state. In Flaszen's introduction to the Polish programme, he explains that the performance intends to go beyond the tragic pose of a Prince condemned against his will—the Prince being trapped by fate, as in Greek tragedy. Nevertheless, the Prince preserves his independence and purity to the point of ecstasy while submitting to his enemies' evil actions. Flaszen explains that the Prince, in his suffering, experiences ecstasy and, therefore, can endure offering himself willingly to the truth as if in an act of love.<sup>271</sup>

From a psychological perspective, Maslow allows us to gain insight into this argument. He asserts that the lover is able to recognise realities in the beloved to which others are oblivious; he or she can be more acutely and penetratingly perceptive.<sup>272</sup> In love, as in ecstatic experiences, a special intimacy is developed between the subject and the object of desire, whether human or not, that usually identifies the two components of such a relationship. So too, in the performance of *The Constant Prince*, the main character does not submit to an unconquerable external power, but is motivated by an inner force. In both *Akropolis* and *The Constant Prince*, trance alternates with the sublime as shown by the characters' passive acceptance of fate and the outright expression of their condition which blur the clear line between suffering and deliverance.

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<sup>270</sup> Flaszen, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 67.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>272</sup> *Towards a Psychology of Being*, p. 73.

The same motif also appears in the performance of *Dr Faustus*, where the eponymous character moves from one manifestation of ecstasy to another. At first, his ecstasy is transformed into his passion. He is ready to accept his conviction. At this moment he 'is in rapture, his body is shaken by spasms. The ecstatic failure of his voice becomes at the moment of his Passion a series of inarticulate cries'.<sup>273</sup> Then, just before Mephistopheles enters and takes Faust to hell, he falls silent. Once again ecstasy and the sublime are joined.

So it appears that during the process of ecstasy, the person comes into direct contact with a part of the self that momentarily provides the subject with supreme fulfillment. In the period of Paratheatre, Grotowski extended his search for ways of reaching this point outside the theatrical stage. Possibly, Grotowski's elimination process also included the elimination of the matrix, that is, the theatre, hoping to examine a broader spectrum of ecstasy. For this purpose, Grotowski points to a 'meeting' with others. He explains that a 'meeting' cannot not be effective unless one person loses himself or herself before another, like in the act of love which is not gymnastics, but embraces the people involved as a whole.<sup>274</sup> Furthermore, this 'meeting' occurs in the framework of otherness, including human beings and nature simultaneously. During Paratheatre, Grotowski talked about a 'brotherhood' that is not limited to interpersonal affairs, but also included notions like: 'the brother of earth, the brother of senses, the brother of sun, the brother of touch, the brother of Milky Way, the brother of grass, the brother of river'.<sup>275</sup> This type of brotherhood is a love experience, where the people ecstatically embrace multiple manifestations of the world in an effort to complete themselves. Also included in this feeling of 'oneness' is the feeling of the 'likeness

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<sup>273</sup> Barba, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 78.

<sup>274</sup> 'Holiday', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 217.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

of God' since God can be considered not only this supreme part of oneself but that which binds all existing forms as well. With his work on trance, the scholar Gilbert Rouget contributes to this argument by claiming that ecstasy, trance or possession 'is a process through which the individual is reinserted into the whole that surrounds him'.<sup>276</sup> In this condition the activities of a person, who is otherwise in trance, do not necessitate external approval. In terms of acting, one would say that such acting needs no audience. Communication is only possible between those who participate because they, and only they, share the same experience.

An ecstatic phenomenon that can elucidate Grotowski's notions of brotherhood and godlikeness is the perception of trance in Bali. Malgorzata Dziewulaka, who participated in Paratheatre, gives the example of the Balinese dance as it was displayed to her group by Barba on video. She explains that 'in Bali, trance is understood as something given by God. A man in trance carries God in himself. In this way he participates in holiness and communicates with the supernatural world. None of the "actors" gave the impression that they were performing, showing something, acting'.<sup>277</sup> It is not necessary to personify God as a specific deity of a certain religion when one transcends acting and achieves ecstasy. In fact, oneness could easily be all these mental and emotional states that a person wishes to reach, all the values that one wants to manifest, all the energy that sleeps within him or her. From time to time, all of the above demand

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<sup>276</sup> *Music and Trance*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980-5, p. 212.

<sup>277</sup> 'Brook, Ronconi and Others—in Wrocław', *Dialogue*, no. 12/136, p. 111-118, Warsaw, 1975, *On the Road to Active Culture*, editorial arrangement and press documentation by Leszek Kolankiewicz, Wrocław 1978, unpublished, p. 36. The writer places the word 'actors' in quotes. This choice implies that the Western word 'actor' is unsuitable to describe the participants in Bali dance. Their action surpasses the realm of theatre through the use of ecstasy and reaches an artistic form with transcendental attributes.

to be satisfied. The psychological profile of peak experiences, as recorded by Maslow, expresses the same notion:

The person at the peak is godlike not only in senses ... but in certain other ways as well, particularly in the complete, loving, uncondemning, compassionate and perhaps amused acceptance of the world and of the person, however bad he may look at more normal moments.<sup>278</sup>

This godlikeness results in a creativity that stems from the joy of the depths of the unconscious and turns into love, play, and humour.

Leszek Kolankiewicz's personal experience in the Special Project elucidates the condition of unison attained in an impulsive expression, similar to what Maslow portrays. Kolankiewicz describes a night when, after many exhausting hours in the forest, he and the group gathered in a small room. He explains that on that night he forgot the pain in his fingers and the fatigue of his muscles and managed to participate with his whole being, giving his entire soul to the waves of the rhythm created within the group, which developed into a song. Initially the music was born and then the lyric, which included the trees, the earth, water, fire—all the elements to which the group had been close when living in the forest. He also explains that that song was *their song* and it would never be repeated anywhere else since it was the product of those specific moments. He also relates his experience to the notion of creativity found in the writings of Maslow. Kolankiewicz concludes that what is important is the live process, the vibration flowing from a gift which is shared by all participants.<sup>279</sup> Grotowski went on in Paratheatre conducting internal work leading, in his own words, to

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<sup>278</sup> *Towards a Psychology of Being*, p. 92.

<sup>279</sup> Kolankiewicz, 'Human Wholeness and Human Family', *Odra*, Wroclaw, no. 5/183, 1976, p. 64-67, *On the Road to Active Culture*, pp. 23-24.

'experiences of direct perception, with the whole self, literally', notions that he maintained in the consequent phases of his career.<sup>280</sup>

A special aspect of Paratheatre that attracted Grotowski's attention was ordeal by fire. Some examples indicate that ordeal by fire furthers Grotowski's attempts to achieve a process of self-realisation that results in unmotivated action with others. Grotowski describes a Paratheatrical activity during which someone goes through fire and then invites another to follow by calling his or her name. Grotowski explains how a special intimacy develops between the two people that makes the second person traverse the fire even though he or she has never done this before. He also attributes further psychological dimensions to this action and argues that the people involved take risks without restricting themselves.<sup>281</sup>

Mennen, another participant in Paratheatrical activities, also highlights this same notion. He compares a 'beehive' conducted under strict directions by Cieslak, where he was not present, to one conducted later but with some of the participants from the previous occurrence.<sup>282</sup> In the first instance, a fire was placed in the centre of the room and the participants jumped and rolled through it. In the second instance, when Mennen was present, the participants exchanged a hibachi of burning coals. Mennen was told that the earlier session had been more satisfying to the people than the one they had just participated in because it had been more intense and structured. The intensity of Cieslak's 'beehive' was a result of the participants' direct involvement and confrontation with the element of fire.

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<sup>280</sup> Quoted in *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 30.

<sup>281</sup> Quoted in James Roose-Evans, 'Grotowski and the Journey to the East', *Experimental Theatre*, London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989, p. 158.

<sup>282</sup> 'Grotowski's Paratheatrical Projects', *The Drama Review*, Vol. 19, December, 1975, p. 64.

According to Gregory, Grotowski was the first among the participants to challenge his own limits. Gregory describes Grotowski placing his hand over a candle without getting burnt while inviting Gregory to do the same. Gregory was amazed that he did not get burnt and marvelled at Grotowski's conviction about the relation between not being burnt and self-realisation.<sup>283</sup> When asked about his personal role in the Paratheatrical groups, Grotowski stated that he felt close to people who crossed frontiers at the risk of not knowing how to return.

Furthermore, Margaret Croyden describes the symbolism of fire inspired by her participation in Paratheatre. She says that 'fire was perhaps the most impressive image, fascinating in its flickering self and symbolizing as it does enlightenment, warmth, and life as well as the Christian belief that to reach Paradise one must pass through fires of purification'.<sup>284</sup> To reach this goal, that is, to cross the frontier, one must conquer fatigue. According to Grotowski: 'The goal to be reached demands the passing of the limits of fatigue, being stronger than one's own strength'.<sup>285</sup>

During the Theatre of Sources, Grotowski made the same claims for ecstasy as he had previously. Here, however, he applied it across cultures to body language. Thus, he suggests that his participants should submit to others' cultures as if they were their own and asserts that 'in order to discover my body, it may well be good to discover your body. But I can't discover your body if in my own way I don't love you'.<sup>286</sup> This process is analogous to that of a child. Grotowski assimilated the openness of a person in ecstasy to the innocent perception of a child, a state that people begin to lose as they become

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<sup>283</sup> *My Dinner with André*, pp. 32-3.

<sup>284</sup> 'New Theatre Rule: No Watching Allowed', *Vogue*, December, 1975, *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 65.

<sup>285</sup> Quoted in Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre*, p. 158.

<sup>286</sup> Quoted in Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 229.

incorporated into society and conform to its conventions. Grotowski claimed that over time people forget the emotional receptiveness they had as children because of the years of taming their body and, in the process, their mind. Grotowski felt that people must rediscover this hypothetical child and its 'ecstasies', which they had long ago 'abdicated'.<sup>287</sup> He acknowledged, however, that the uncritical and undisciplined perception of a child and its easy and indifferent adjustment to new circumstances was not a conscious process and, therefore, was lost in every adult. The discussion with Cuesta, who worked with Grotowski, provides us with an indicative example of this process.<sup>288</sup> Cuesta made it clear that for him the experiences during the Theatre of Sources had a predominately personal rather than a group character. More precisely, his primary concern was the individual reaction to solitude. Cuesta lived in the Polish forest throughout the entire seven years he spent in Paratheatre and the Theatre of Sources. His response was to run through the forest for hours on end. He neglects to explain this response, not because he intends to hide a personal experience, but because there is nothing to be explained. What is required is the direct experience and not the explanation of it. He says, however, that what he achieved during those years was a perception of the forest as it really was, as a living being and not as how one wants to see it, based on preconceptions about the forest. Cuesta was personally involved in the dynamics of the forest and developed an emotional attachment to them similar to the one between relatives in a nuclear family, or, even more, between a person and his or her needs. Cuesta's experience gives the impression that his realisations transcend the physiological level and reach mental and spiritual levels, where answers to cause

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<sup>287</sup> 'The Theatre of Sources', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 258.

<sup>288</sup> Personal communication, Pontedera, Saturday 13 October 2001.

and effect can be found. The comprehension of the forest in a conscious ecstatic process may relate to the pre-industrial perception of the forest. Yet, for modern people, in other words the participants in Paratheatre, the survival in the forest is optional and intentional.

In the case of Cuesta, then, the distance between the subject, that is, Cuesta, and the object, that is, the forest, has been bridged. This is characteristic of peak experience as described by Maslow

Grotowski's approach to the subject of ecstasy remained unalterable in the Objective Drama Research. In his text 'Tu Es le Fils de Quelqu'un', Grotowski explains his approach to rituals during that period.<sup>289</sup> He says that by working with songs and dances, a participant tries to discover the 'old' body inside the 'actual' body of the actor. The distinction was made between a body that reacts impulsively (old) and a body that reacts out of habit (actual). In this period, Grotowski chose songs and dances from great traditions because the fact that they had survived indicated that they represented people's unchangeable experiences. Consequently, Grotowski's participants used them to find what necessity might lead somebody to sing a particular song. They were not interested in what necessity prompted a person in the traditional past to sing it. Their own present was the only reality at issue. Participants refrained from having control over the song. They were *taken by* the song. This process was also followed by the discipline that the vibrations of the song or the dance provided. Nevertheless, Grotowski was aware of the fact that 'one can get lost in a sort of primitivism: One works on the body's instinctual elements *losing control of*

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<sup>289</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 297.

*himself*.<sup>290</sup> To be more explicit, in Grotowski's scheme the ordinary preoccupations with performing a traditional song were eliminated, while participants remained aware of their actions.

In the final phase of his work, Grotowski also emphasised that it was important for the performer to link bodily impulses to song. Grotowski explained that the performer was a warrior who acted with intensity because he or she had faced fear. This was an internal process in which the person confronts the unexplored sides of his or her personality. In times of great challenge, such as in this process of confrontation, Grotowski claimed that human impulses were expressed as physical rhythmical actions.<sup>291</sup> In *Art as Vehicle*, he created this intensity through various methods, similar to rites of passage, knowing that a person's mental capacity and critical faculties give way to instinctual reactions in situations of intensity. During this period there was an open exchange between the 'warrior' performer and a group of witnesses, which differed from that group of witnesses in the period of the Theatre of Productions. In *Art as Vehicle*, the performer and the witness were properties that were mutually interchangeable. Thus, while the performer experienced his or her journey into ecstasy, he or she created the bridge for the witness to follow along the same path. This was not an act of obligation, but rather a participatory process.

Throughout his artistic pursuits, Grotowski was aware of three requirements for the ecstatic process. The first was discipline. The second was the necessity of approaching and extending one's limits. The third requirement was the creation of the circumstances in which direct communion could be encouraged.

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<sup>290</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 297.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

More specifically concerning discipline, Grotowski paid special attention to the necessity of structure because he realised that non-channeled ecstasy could lead to hysteria. In his speech on Haitian Voodoo, he describes ecstasy as a trance 'which infects the participant', yet the actor is able to control this trance.<sup>292</sup> Modern research in psychology carried out by Albert Rothenberg refers to the relation between creation via ecstasy and the ability to control the anxiety developed in such a process. According to the author, a creative process requires the person involved to be able to tolerate high levels of anxiety and to present a relative lack of defensiveness in order to proceed.<sup>293</sup> However, this 'lack of defensiveness' should not be confused with pathological reactions, like hysteria, which are uncontrolled. It is only ecstasy, a disciplined process, and not hysteria that leads to creativity. Therefore, Rothenberg claims that '[a]lthough creative people may be psychotic at various periods of their lives, they cannot be psychotic at the time they are engaged in a creative process'.<sup>294</sup> Where acting is concerned, Grotowski shares the same ideas. He insisted on the idea that the total unveiling of one's being should be controlled to avoid 'chaos, hysteria, exaltation'.<sup>295</sup> So the performer, should, on the one hand, go into trance, yet on the other, be in control of it.<sup>296</sup> Grotowski's reasoning for a combination of discipline and of spontaneity is as follows:

That's why a search for discipline and structure is inevitable as a search for spontaneity. Searching for spontaneity without order always leads to chaos, a lost confession because an inarticulate voice cannot confess.

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<sup>292</sup> Quoted in Kott, 'Grotowski or the Limit', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 305.

<sup>293</sup> *Creativity and Madness*, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, p. 36.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>295</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 99.

<sup>296</sup> Kott, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 305.

One cannot achieve spontaneity in art without structuring of detail. Without this one searches but never finds because total freedom gives a lack of freedom. If we lack structured details we are like someone who loves all humanity, and that means he loves no one.<sup>297</sup>

Grotowski suggests that discipline and spontaneity are those merits which provide an artistic form with the ability to stand *by* itself but not *for* itself. The artistic form should be communicable to others and, therefore, he relates a structured artistic form to an articulate voice that can convey meaning clearly. He also explains that 'total freedom' defeats dedication. It is a kind of evasion that a person uses to avoid becoming engaged with a goal. In his text 'Performer', Grotowski personifies the above notion in the 'warrior'. In order to reach his or her target, the 'warrior' uses not only a personal desire for this target, but also a well-structured plan. The fact that a 'warrior' is self-motivated allows flexibility in the choice to 'cause death' to those factors that keep him or her from his or her aim. Viewed from the psychological perspective, the 'warrior' 'causes death' in an ecstatic manner, this is to say with discipline and yet with flexibility. In any case, Grotowski does not imply that the performer should become a mercenary, that is, a soldier who executes orders in a paranoid way, that is, he or she 'kills' for the sake of death and not for the fulfillment of a personal vision.

In the second requirement mentioned above, that of approaching and extending one's limits, one needs to consider many similar notions, such as death, endurance, danger, fighting, and fatigue. Gregory refers to the metaphor of death in his reminiscences after returning from Poland, where he experienced the Paratheatrical events. He admits that despite the fact that his experience

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<sup>297</sup> 'Interview with Grotowski', by Schechner and Theodore Hoffman, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 53.

made him feel truly alive, it was quite frightening because this feeling of aliveness implied an immediate awareness of death. He explains that 'they go hand in hand... that feeling of being connected to everything, means to also be connected with death'.<sup>298</sup> This also seems to be Maslow's conclusion about peak and plateau experience, which he calls a 'little death'. Maslow explains that the less intense experiences of this type can be pure enjoyment and happiness. But the more intense ones signify a rebirth in various senses of the word.<sup>299</sup> As in the liminal phase of initiation, the novice 'dies' in one condition to be 'born' into a new social status. For Grotowski, the participant dies at a superficial level and reaches a higher level of self-consciousness.<sup>300</sup> So, ecstasy is not an attempt to deny death, but rather a reconciliation with it, as one can understand its necessity. As Maslow indicates, what dies is the fear, anxiety, inhibition, defense and control, renunciation, delay and restraint.<sup>301</sup> The fact that these conditions have negative connotations does not make it easier for the person to abandon them since over the years they have become habit and, therefore, second nature. Thus, for the person to be detached from this routine, being able to endure high levels of anxiety is required, while at the same time stamina must be developed. This is similar to the ordeals of the initiatory rites where the novice attains personal and social maturity. Grotowski suggests that danger and change go together, and unless one has faced danger, one has no character. He explains that the warrior gains knowledge by fighting. He says that 'the pulsation of life becomes stronger and more articulated in moments of great intensity, of danger'.<sup>302</sup> Thus, further knowledge is the result of this activity. In addition, he explains that 'in a time of

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<sup>298</sup> *My Dinner with André*, p. 38.

<sup>299</sup> *Towards a Psychology of Being*, p. 15.

<sup>300</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 53.

<sup>301</sup> *Towards a Psychology of Being*, pp. 82, 94.

<sup>302</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 375.

challenge appears the rhythmisation of human impulses'. As for the issue of transferring this pattern to the training of a performer, Grotowski argues that an environment which respects ritual structures is the most effective because ritual is a time of great, provoked intensity, where life becomes rhythm. Therefore, the performer who undergoes a process with ritual attributes becomes aware of his or her bodily impulses, and, moreover, projects those impulses to the song that Grotowski uses as a vehicle in his work to further the participants' self-realisation.

Grotowski's early concern for the attributes of a warrior can be found in Tadeusz Burzynski's narration of a Paratheatrical project.<sup>303</sup> He describes some fragments of an activity where, among other processes, the group walked in the night for a long time, gradually accelerating the speed of their steps until they started running. He explains that he responded to the shouting of another person in the darkness and how they started rolling on the ground, having exceeded the limits of effort and fatigue. Eventually the movement was transformed into a stillness, where a 'tune' developed. They continued walking in shallow water. During those moments, the few drops of water that splashed on his face were perceived as an extraordinary experience, as if he were feeling rain for the first time. Analyzing his experience afterwards, Burzynski acknowledges that his reaction to the water, having been rationally explained, might be categorised as deranged. Yet, during those moments what he in fact experienced was ecstasy, in harmony with the given conditions. Grotowski's exercises motivated the performer/warrior, physically, mentally and emotionally.<sup>304</sup> As previously mentioned, the warrior goes beyond his or her limits to a place where exhaustion

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<sup>303</sup> 'Special Project', "Scena", Warsaw, no. 4, 1976, *On the Road to Active Culture*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>304</sup> Grotowski, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 257.

brought on through physical exertion can be a way to induce psychic reactions, a method in which spontaneity and sharing can flourish.

Finally, the notion of communion is essential to Grotowski. According to Burzynski, the group found each other in the darkness by the sound of their voices. When he explains how he responded to somebody's shouting, he does not refer to him by name, but instead uses the pronoun 'he'. This suggests that under conditions of great intensity and fatigue, conventional modes of communication are replaced by immediate, simple terminology. At this level the participant can slip into the group as a 'whole being' or at least he or she enters a process of becoming. Grotowski wanted to bring people together with themselves and with others. He would certainly hold with the theory proposed by Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet that 'after all, trance is collective: it occurs in a group, in the setting of a thiasos'.<sup>305</sup> Grotowski embraced this same idea starting with the period of the Theatre of Productions. Flaszen, motivated by the performance of *Kordian*, further clarifies Grotowski's aims: 'The director analyzed the meaning of an individual act in an era where collective action and organization are the guarantees of success. Today, the man who tries to save the world alone is either a child or a madman'.<sup>306</sup> Burzynski indicates that collectivity is found at the core of Grotowski's intentions during the period of Paratheatre. He argues that its aim is the search for and try-out in practice of the conditions in which people acting in unison with others could act simultaneously and with their whole selves, thus liberating the potential of their personality and realizing their creative needs.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, New York: Zone Books, 1971 and 1986, p. 392.

<sup>306</sup> Quoted in Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 58.

<sup>307</sup> 'Exit from Theatre', *Kultura*, Warsaw, 16 March 1975, no.11/613, *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 7.

Maslow's research into the area of psychology and, in particular, the field of peak experiences elucidates the validity of Grotowski's intentions and justifies his choice of ecstatic methods. More precisely, Maslow's findings indicate that in the peak experiences of average people, perception can be relatively ego-transcending, impersonal, desireless, unselfish, and object-centred rather than ego-centred. Furthermore, in peak experiences one may even speak of identification of the perceiver and the perceived, a fusion of what was two elements into a new larger whole, a super-ordinate unit.<sup>308</sup> In some reports, especially of mystic, religious, philosophical experiences, the whole world is seen as a unity, as a single, rich, live entity, while in other peak experiences, most particularly in the love experience, one small part of the world is perceived as if it were for the moment all of the world. Whatever the case may be, the perception is of unity.<sup>309</sup>

An anthropological as well as a psychological analysis of a specific ecstatic ritual which contrasts and compares with Grotowski's activities is pivotal for the development of the argument of this thesis. Anastenaria, the Greek ecstatic ritual, has been chosen because it displays properties that recall Grotowski's activities, and therefore, provides a rich ground for comparison. More precisely, Anastenaria respects the performative value of ritual practices without depriving them of their sacredness—a sensitive balance that Grotowski greatly respected. Moreover, the Anastenaria rites are firmly interwoven with trance-inducing music, ecstatic dance and ordeal by fire, activities with which Grotowski experiments in his post-theatrical work. Furthermore, this ritual transmits the culture from where it originates to the younger members of the community, and also to foreigners. The

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<sup>308</sup> Maslow, *Towards a Psychology of Being*, p. 79.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

transmission of tradition is equally fundamental for Grotowski, a fact that is evident in his preference for traditional songs and dances. Finally, the ultimate factor that motivates the use of Anastenaria as a canvas for the elucidation of Grotowski's choices is that both activities consider the participants' self-definition as their primary intention. In this analysis, Grotowski's work will be considered in its entirety, not as a progression through periods as was done in the previous part of this chapter.

#### ***IV a. Affinities of Grotowski's Theatre with Anastenaria***

The custom of Anastenaria becomes comprehensible once viewed through the prism of anthropology and the anthropological study of religion. The tradition of interpretive anthropology has adopted a fundamentally semiotic approach to the study of culture. According to Geertz, culture consists of socially established structures of meaning embodied in systems of symbols. It is to be remembered from the second chapter of this thesis that, through these structures of meaning, these 'webs of significance', people order their experience and make sense of the world.<sup>310</sup> Furthermore, Geertz argues that the power of religious symbols lies in their ability to transform experience by constructing a sacred reality upon which the realities of everyday life are grounded.<sup>311</sup> From this aspect, Anastenaria can be interpreted as a ritual system that provides its participants (anastenarides) with a context where behaviour, which can be defined as *divergent*, that is, incompatible with the current social codes or the result of a temporary psychological imbalance, is interpreted as the result of the influence of

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<sup>310</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, pp. 3-30.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87-125.

a supernatural power. In this respect, Anastenarian activities are an effort to secure the benevolence of God by the establishment of a relationship of mutual responsibility between each participant and the saints. Anastenaria recognises the inability of humans to approach the divinity directly. Therefore, the system of Anastenaria maintains a hierarchy that lies between the divinity and humanity. Anastenaria regards the saints Constantine and Helen as the agents of God while the anastenarides are the agents of the saints. The saints are embodied in the icons and are called *papoudes*, which in Greek means ‘grandfathers, ancestors, old men’. The carrying of the icons or of a kerchief transmits the powers of the saints to the participants and provides them with the ability to dance ecstatically and to step on burning coals (photo 1, 2). Their dance, which is strictly guided by the leader of the group (archianastenaris), is considered to be the descent of the divine message. The ritual preserves a hereditary character and addresses the local community. However, today people from other social groups also take part.

According to the anthropologist Loring Danforth, since the end of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) the ritual has occurred in such villages in Northern Greece as Aghia Eleni and Kerkini in Serres, Lagada in Thessaloniki, Mauroleuki in Drama, and Meliki in Veria (see the map at the end of the thesis).<sup>312</sup> The ritual came to Greece with the refugees of Eastern Romilia, mainly from the village of Kosti.<sup>313</sup> Before the Balkan Wars, Anastenaria took place in Northeastern Thrace, which at that time belonged to Turkey and today is on the border between Turkey and Bulgaria. Approximately twenty villages, both Greek and Bulgarian, celebrated Anastenaria. Kosti, however, was at the centre. With the outbreak of

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<sup>312</sup> *Firewalking and Religious Healing: The Anastenaria of Greece and the American Firewalking Movement*, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1989, page 151-156.

<sup>313</sup> Katerina Kakouri (1963), *Διονυσιακά, (Dionysiaka)*, Athens: Ideotheatron, 1999, pp. 9-30.

the Balkan Wars in 1912, the area around Kosti fell under Bulgarian control. When the Balkan Wars ended in 1913 and the boundary between Bulgaria and Turkey was redrawn to its present position, the Northeastern portion of Turkish Thrace, including Kosti and the surrounding villages, became Bulgarian territory. At that time, the Greek schools were closed, Greek teachers and priests were expelled and replaced by Bulgarians, and speaking Greek was forbidden. When the Bulgarian refugees who had been driven out of Turkish Thrace arrived in search of homes and land, the Greeks were finally forced to leave. In 1914, they came to Greece and settled around the city of Thessaloniki. In 1924 the majority of the Kostilides (people from Kosti) came to live in Aghia Eleni and other villages of Macedonia.<sup>314</sup> Although the historical evidence about the roots of Anastenaria can be traced to medieval times, there are scholars who claim that the roots of this ceremony are much older. According to many of them, the ceremony originated in the ancient worship of Dionysus in Greece.<sup>315</sup>

The fieldwork on which this research is based took place in Aghia Eleni in the southern part of the district of Serres. The village, situated near the river Strymon in Macedonia, has approximately 600 people yet the custom of Anastenaria made it known internationally. The reason for choosing this village and not any other is firstly that the ritual is better preserved here. The customary phases are strictly structured and the role of each participant is especially defined and related to the other participants. Secondly, the most recent bibliography on the subject of Anastenaria has been written by scholars who did their research in this village. The importance of this bibliography is based on the fact that it

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<sup>314</sup> Macedonia is the northeastern region of Greece whose main city is Thessaloniki. There should be no confusion between this region and the territory called F.Y.R.O.M (Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia).

<sup>315</sup> Chourmouziadis (1872), E. R. Dodds (1951), Henry Jeanmaire (1951), Katerina Kakouri (1963), Iason Euaggelou (1994).

includes references to the historical context; it relates the ritual to other disciplines and depicts the everyday life of the village, the people's relation to the ritual and to their community. Thus, it enriches the individual fieldwork and illustrates the subject from different angles.

The ritual occurs twice a year, in January on the feast day of Saint Athanasios, and in May on the feast day of Saints Constantine and Helen, though the latter are honoured on both occasions. Anastenarian firewalking annually embodies the legendary adventures of the two saints and also the legendary past of the anastenarides ancestors. The oral tradition of Kostilides preserves several stories, two of which are dominant. The first story tells how after Helen and Constantine brought the True Cross from Jerusalem to Constantinople, they kept it in the palace until the city fell to the Turks, who lit a great fire around the city wall. Holding the True Cross in his hands, Constantine stepped into the fire. Wherever he walked, the fire was extinguished and, thus, he opened the way for all the Christians to leave the city unharmed. The second story claims that the Kostilides jumped into the burning church of Kosti to save the icons, which were crying out for their help. Since then, the anastenarides commemorate these miracles every year by walking through fire themselves. Despite the fact that the ritual honors two Orthodox saints and that the participants regard their involvement to be included in their religious duties, the Church does not recognise Anastenaria in its dogma, considering it a pagan rite. The main differences between the winter and spring versions of Anastenaria is that in the former the ceremony culminates mainly indoors and lasts for three days, while the latter takes place over four days and mainly occurs outdoors. The events of the spring version of the ritual are more relevant to this study because there are

more rites in this than in the winter version. Where necessary, either in this chapter or below, information from the winter version will also be used.

Anastenaria in the spring starts on the twentieth of May. This first day is the preparatory day. In the evening, anastenarides along with the visitors gather in the *konaki* (photo 3, 4).<sup>316</sup> The ceremony starts with the procession to collect the icons from two houses in the village (photo 5). The houses belong to the people who brought the icons with them from their fatherland, the village of Kosti. The procession is accompanied by music and candlelight. When the processioners come back to the *konaki*, music and dance commences. At the beginning the dance is quiet and eventually develops ecstatic, trance-like characteristics, though all the participants do not always reach this state (photo 6). The twenty-first of May is the main day of the big *panegyri*.<sup>317</sup> Around noon of that day in the side yard of the *konaki*, to the rhythms of music and dance, the anastenarides slaughter a young ram adorned with flowers (photo 7). In the evening of the same day, the anastenarides begin to dance in the *konaki* and soon afterwards move in a dancing procession towards the *aloni* (photo 8, 9), opposite the *konaki* to perform their dance on a thick bed of burning coals (photo 10).<sup>318</sup> On the third and the fourth day, the anastenarides walk around the village, blessing the houses with their icons (photo 11). In exchange, the housewives give them dried fruits and sweets, which the anastenarides will distribute on the

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<sup>316</sup> *Konaki* is a building where all anastenarian ceremonies start and finish. Sometimes, especially during the winter, some of the outdoor activities are also limited to this room. Until the early eighties, the *konaki* was a room in the house of the previous archianasteneris. Since then it is a separate building, which belongs to the folklore society of Aghia Eleni and it is situated near the present entrance of the village from the main road. The name is derived from the Turkish word *konak*, meaning 'mansion' or 'government house'. The word was used by the Greeks who lived in areas under Turkish rule and referred to the building that housed the local administrative authorities.

<sup>317</sup> *Panegyri* means fiesta, a celebration dedicated to a local Orthodox Christian saint.

<sup>318</sup> *Aloni* is a circular area with bleachers for the spectators, constructed specifically for the needs of the *panegyri*.

last night to those present in the *konaki*. On the evening of the third day, they perform the anastenarian dance in the *konaki* without fire, as on the first day, and on the fourth, they dance again on burning coals.<sup>319</sup> Then they count the money that was collected from the sale of candles during the *panegyri* (photo 12). The *panegyri* culminates in communal eating and drinking (photo 13), as well as Greek folk dancing.

Anastenaria is a typical example of a ritual, which, among other things, is used by the participants as a step towards incorporation into the social milieu. The ritual, as it exists in modern times, originates from an agricultural society. Even these days, the main core of the anastenarian team consists of farmers who live in the village. Most of them have not received an education beyond elementary level. The social occasions in the village are few, as are the opportunities for leisure activities. Their daily routines are limited to ordinary chores and interest is concentrated mostly on each other's lives. Thus, the border between personal and public life is often violated. In these social conditions, Anastenaria serves two purposes that normally go together. It helps anastenarides to realise feelings of anxiety that have developed through their relations with the community, where tradition can sometimes be misused and despotic. At the same time, it gives them a distinctive, almost sacred role not only during the ritual, but also during the whole year. Danforth, who carried out his fieldwork in Aghia Eleni, concluded the following after living there for one year:

The Anastenaria...provides people with a framework for interpreting and dealing with guilt and other emotions in a socially acceptable manner.

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<sup>319</sup> Although the anastenarides claim otherwise, they have been observed holding a dance on the coals throughout the entire four days.

The Anastenaria does empower people. It provides them with access to the supernatural power of Saint Constantine, which enables them to participate in the dramatic public performance of the firewalk, to speak forcefully in public meetings dealing with ritual matters, and to restructure their important social relationships to their advantage.<sup>320</sup>

The main social need fulfilled in this ritual is the one of recognition; being an anastenaris makes somebody admirably different. This, however, does not reduce the meaning of the ritual to something that serves vanity even if the reputation of Anastenaria worldwide might encourage such behaviour here and there among certain individuals. On the other hand, the fact that Anastenaria has a functional role in its society does not lessen its religious, or even therapeutic, character. Most of the stories that are told or can be heard about the condition of a person before he or she enters the anastenarian circle include suffering from anxiety, social suffocation, family problems, general interpersonal conflicts and so on.<sup>321</sup> It is to be underlined that there are anastenarides who were born far from the area where the ritual originates and, even if they have a respectable social status, chose the practice of Anastenaria to release their anxiety.

In these communal environments, people always experience ecstasy within a traditional framework, without resorting to artificial means. So, the *panegyri* is placed within a religious context and addresses a specific superhuman power, namely a saint of the existing tradition. It occurs among relatives and the ecstasy is induced by the participants' faith in religious and communal principles. Consumption of hallucinatory substances, including excessive amounts of alcohol or drugs, is strictly forbidden. Despite the fact that Anastenaria is recorded annually in the mass media, the anastenarides avoid

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<sup>320</sup> *Firewalking and Religious Healing*, p. 90, 103.

<sup>321</sup> Danforth, 'The Role of Dance in the Ritual Therapy of Anastenaria', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 5, 1979, p. 146.

giving details to the reporters, preferring to protect the knowledge that is orally bequeathed to them by their ancestors and which is responsible for the liminal character of the ritual. The hereditary character protects this knowledge that is orally transmitted by means of personal, agnatic contact of the ancestor with the descendant. Thus, hereditary is preserved as the special, unique attribute of all similar rituals that only human contact is able to secure. The anastenarides regard the days of the *panegyri* as something very special that they have inherited from their ancestors. This attitude provides them with the strength of being the possessors of a timeless tradition. At the same time, this acceptance reduces their ability to recognise themselves as the creators of this situation and, therefore, to introduce innovations with a personal character into the rite.

Possibly motivated by the knowledge of the essence of traditional rites similar to those associated with Anastenaria, Grotowski insisted on the Polish notion of the word *swieto* (holiday), the day that is holy, a day when something special happens.<sup>322</sup> Although the word has strongly sacred implications, it does not have any religious connotations for Grotowski. It is also used in a secular sense. It is relevant that Grotowski uses this word in Paratheatre for the first time when he openly calls for an encounter where people seek to share the most intimate reaches of their individuality. The parallels between the ritual of Anastenaria and Grotowski's practices are palpable. The projects of Paratheatre took place in a natural environment in the Polish mountains and the participants formed small *communitas*, Turner's term, in each project. The word *communitas*, rather than group, is more accurate for Paratheatre as the participants not only took part in exercises, but also spent most of the day working on activities for the

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<sup>322</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 213.

common interest, just as those who participate in Anastenaria. The *communitas* also accepted ethical rules for the period of time spent on the project. The participants could join on the condition that they eliminate 'everything associated with a family-erotic commune and alcohol'.<sup>323</sup> The fact that such ethics are preserved in an activity which does not belong to any special religious framework makes people who do not participate suspicious about the nature of this activity.

Janina Dowlasz, a psychologist who participated in Paratheatrical activities, explains that describing her experiences in Paratheatre to others who had not taken part immediately evoked suspicion. She explains that 'it is enough to mention being together, abandoning the role one plays, for it to be immediately associated in the listener's minds with .... alcohol'.<sup>324</sup> The fact that an external factor can induce ecstatic-like states does not mean that these same stages cannot flourish in an appropriate environment supported only by human will. Since Grotowski was well aware of the fact that the consumption of alcohol inhibited an individual's capacity to reach the state of ecstasy independently, he forbade the use of all drugs in his work. He wanted the participants to be fully conscious during the process. Nowadays, Anastenaria is not accused of creating an 'erotic commune'. However, in the past, this was the case. The conservative mentality of the Orthodox Church, to which the anastenarides adhere, has a crucial effect on the general spirit of the ritual so that such behaviour is out of the question. Although on the final night the celebration concludes with drinking, the amount of alcohol distributed is symbolic and should be viewed as an integral part of the ritual. To be more precise, one or two bottles of ouzo, the traditional

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<sup>323</sup> Kolankiewicz, *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 16.

<sup>324</sup> 'Psychologist at Grotowski's', *Zycie Literackie*, no 38/1538, 18 September 1977, *On the Road to Active Culture*, pp. 113-114.

Greek alcoholic drink, are distributed among sixty or more people. Moreover, this drinking is done after the dance is finished and not before. Of course nobody can guarantee that the individual refrain from alcohol in private. However, the only medium that anastenarides use for reaching a state of ecstasy is their belief. Saint Constantine serves as a vehicle for articulating important aspects of an individual's psychological condition. Danforth explains that Saint Constantine 'can be seen as the counterpart, in a spirit idiom, of what would be called the superego or the conscience in a psychological idiom'.<sup>325</sup> In this sense, the anastenarides consider any confusion between their ability to reach an ecstatic state through the establishment of a relationship with the saint, which requires a combination of talent and devotion, and the effortless access to ecstasy through the use of hallucinatory substances to be an offense.

Regarding this issue, one of the female participant's reaction reflects the anastenarides' fear of being accused of overuse of hallucinatory substances. She grudgingly accepted a glass of wine from her son at a lunch before the evening firewalking on the 21 May 1998. She explained that she wanted to avoid people saying that when anastenarides dance, they are drunk and, therefore, fanatical.<sup>326</sup> Her reaction shows that she is well aware of the accusations against the anastenarides concerning alcohol. At the same time, she does not want the observer to question the strength received through religious belief or belief in the saint with the reduction of fear induced by the consumption of alcohol. Nevertheless, the confusion concerning the motives of ecstatic dance is the main source of conflict between those who have experienced ecstasy without recourse

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<sup>325</sup> *Firewalking and Religious Healing*, p. 90.

<sup>326</sup> The testimony is by Hero Chatziantoniou, a Greek woman around 75-80 years old, who is a painter and lives in Athens. This report is based on the writer's personal encounter with the participant at the event.

to drugs and those who use artificial means. Even the word *ecstasy* can be confusing concerning the distinction between a drug-induced state and one that is not.

The misinterpretation of a situation by those who have no personal experience oversimplifies this situation that is otherwise ongoing and viable. In other words, the aspects of an event are limited by subjective perception. The idea, for instance, that ecstasy is the product of addiction to a substance, like alcohol, is a quick, effortless conclusion that does not always represent reality. Grotowski was concerned with the way a false rumor is spread, how it misrepresents the truth and to what extent this affects the quality of the ritual or ritual-orientated activities. Therefore, he protected his activities from becoming the subject of journalistic texts, considering that the majority of these texts run the risk of being mere consumerism. Thus, in 1974-5, he made his work accessible only to those journalists who demonstrated a non-professional readiness to take part in the Paratheatrical experiences.<sup>327</sup> One observes the same attitude in the participants in Anastenaria. Anastenarides, for instance, do not answer journalists' questions about their emotional situation while they dance, or about the motive that leads them to cross the fire for the first time. In Anastenaria, the reporters may only enter the room and record just the sequence of events. Anastenarides claim that their behaviour stems from the archianastenaris' instructions, which do not allow personal information to be given outside the circle of the anastenarides. The aim is to protect the rite from exploitation and to preserve the bonds of the community. An indicative example of this attitude was observed in May 1999 when the archianastenaris excluded an anastenarissa (a

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<sup>327</sup> Kolankiewicz, *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 17.

female participant) from the dance on the coals because she agreed to be interviewed by the Greek television channel, Antenna. For this participant, who has emotional and spiritual affiliations to the ritual, his decision was disheartening and hurtful, yet it protects the character and the continuation of the rite.

Ecstasy in Anastenaria is induced spiritually by faith in the saints and the ancestors, and physically by the trance-inducing music and the primal rhythm of the dance. When the relationship to the saint is undeclared, in other words the participant does not acknowledge his or her strength as derived from the saints' power, there is an emotional or mental state that the participant wishes to reach. It is also important that, even without spiritual motivation, the physical stimuli, such as the recurring motif of minimalist music and the monotonous beating of the floor during the dance, are irresistible even to the newcomers. Many observers, who are better called witnesses, can be seen beating their feet to the rhythm.

Grimes, who participated in some exercises during Grotowski's Theatre of Sources period, also argues that the ecstatic state was induced by a repeated pattern. He explains:

Another kind of action was a stylized step done clockwise around a tree to the rhythms of solid log drums. One might call it a dance. We moved for very long periods, always in the daytime, always without innovating or improvising. The sense of monotony was profound. Some found it grounding; some found it boring. The sameness and repetitiveness of the step, like the simple monotony of the drums, provided meditative potentialities once the techniques had been learned. The "dance" was neither freeform nor creative. While doing it, our feet replaced our eyes in feeling the ground before stepping.<sup>328</sup>

This dance consisted of austere and concise motions, which had a target different than a well-structured performance, where the intentions of the performer should

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<sup>328</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 271.

be clear to the spectator. The ecstatic dance is used as a platform for the participant to reach higher states of consciousness. The anastenarian dance is also very simple. Feet beat the floor while hands twist around the body. During the four days of the celebration, the sound of drums occupies the major part of the day. This music constantly surrounds the area around the *konaki* and the village. It helps the listener to forget the multiple thoughts he or she may have and to concentrate on the here and now.

In Paratheatre, the role of music was essential as it was an inseparable piece of the 'beehive'. An account of these activities provides a vivid description of the effect of the music on the participant:

Someone began to play the flute. In the prevailing silence the tiny, almost inaudible sound focused attention on itself, it began to help in not thinking, and in getting rid of embarrassment and involuntary stiffness. Slowly the sound of the flute grew louder and I began to sing something with my eyes closed. I like singing and I was not ashamed of it, and so singing was therefore the simplest form of action, joining the community that was emerging in that particular place.<sup>329</sup>

Apparently, the activity described in the above fragment was not a forced result. It was born spontaneously. As was noted earlier, this type of music functions as a medium for another state which, apart from its expectations on individuals, strengthens the bonds of the community. In this process the only thing that can be disciplined and orderly is the dance itself, which is why ecstatic dances remain minimal. The broadening of the participants' awareness and transcendence cannot come by command, yet the person in this process needs a vehicle in

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<sup>329</sup> Agnieszka Bzowska, 'A Somewhat Different Account of the "Beehives"', *Dialog*, no. 3/239, Warsaw, 1976, *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 57.

order to go through this procedure. This vehicle is an austere dance. In the dance, the participant remains open to *receive* this new realization.

During the Objective Drama Research period, this notion was greatly respected. Wolford notes how the group had to repeat a song many times until the song 'arrived'. As she explains: 'To "arrive" is a specifically textured word in the lexicon of Objective Drama Research, one of a number of linguistic units layered and recodified in an attempt to refer to a specifically localised aspect of ineffable experience'.<sup>330</sup> Equally, in Anastenaria, although the sequence and the form of the activities are set, nobody feels the obligation to participate in them until one is 'seized by the saint' as the native participants describe this profound feeling which motivates a person to dance. To 'be seized by the saint' is desirable for anastenarides, but no one forces it nor do they like to be forced to justify and guarantee their personal response to the dance. Such an example is the reaction of an anastenaris from the younger generation who, in May 2000, expressed his annoyance at being asked questions concerning the development of the ceremony.<sup>331</sup> He explained his reaction as follows: 'How should I know what will happen. I do not even know about my self. I will go there [to the *konaki* while the ceremony starts] and we will see'. What is implied by this answer is that he is not an actor or a puppet. His participation in the ritual is urgent and existential. His answer might seem quite unjustified as the visitor had merely asked him the time of the gathering in the *konaki*.<sup>332</sup> However, because the anastenarides receive so many different questions every year, they have become oversensitive. The reactions of the anastenarides are based on the fact that they avoid

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<sup>330</sup> Grotowski's *Objective Drama Research*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>331</sup> The anastenaris is Panagiotis S. who comes from a neighbouring village and studies Fine Arts in Thessaloniki.

<sup>332</sup> Personal experience at the event.

contaminating their *panegyri* in such a way that the ritual turns into an illustrative, folkloric activity. Grotowski shared the same concern for his work. He condemned the tendency of modern people to reduce transcendent experiences to a level of banal understanding.<sup>333</sup>

Anastenarides protect their intimate relation to the ritual as well as the sublime character of the celebration from the visitor, who is unfamiliar with the historical background, custom and meaning of Anastenaria. This attitude is also depicted in the behaviour of the aforementioned anastenaris, who, when asked by a visitor about the opening of the dance, refused to answer. The reason for the tension created by the visitor's question to the young anastenaris was their different perceptions about time. The notion of time during the *panegyri* is traditional. Every action takes into account the daily circle of the sun. There is no announcement, for example, of the time they will meet again the next day. To questions about the time of the opening of the dance the answer is ambiguous, like 'when they are gathered', referring to the anastenarides, or 'after lunch', or 'when the sun sets'. So, the first time the researcher attends, he or she is obliged to stay for almost twenty-four hours round the *konaki*, as this is the centre of the action and where one can get into the local rhythm. When the processions start, for instance, the one who wants to follow them has to search for the anastenarides all over the village because nobody knows exactly where they will be. Of course the village is small and they can be traced relatively easily by the sound of the music. The point is that the group of the anastenarides, or whoever wants to follow the group, has to measure time not by artificial means but by sensing the inner rhythm of the village and the group. The measurement of time

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<sup>333</sup> Wolford, *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, p. 61. See also, Richards, *At Work with Grotowski*, p. 20.

using a watch or a clock limits the perception of natural time and the person's familiarisation with the natural rhythm. Similarly, in Paratheatre, time pieces and alarm clocks were collected from the participants before the seminar began so as to make it easier for them to relax in the natural environment. Grotowski took the procedure even further. Seeking to break down the daily rhythm with its set forms of communication, he turned night into day, and most of the exercises were done during the night. Sometimes the participants did not sleep at all.

By establishing a common rhythm, non-verbal communication develops. In *Anastenaria*, the concept of time can be described as a collective or shared perception. The life of the whole of the village revolves around the events of *Anastenaria*. By socialising with the villagers or with those who dance, the observer gets accustomed to the local rhythm. Nevertheless, the exact time of the opening of each customary phase is not so obscure. It may vary by a couple of hours. The main point is that there is a non-linguistic communication that is developed by the structured activities and the familiarity evolved by the common life in the village.

The *anastenarides* preserve these same concepts of communication during the ceremonies. The *archianastenaris* has the role of the overall coordinator. The phases of the ritual are fixed, and are repeated in the same way every year. But the exact time, as well as any innovation, is communicated by the *archianastenaris*. Commenting on this phenomenon in 1998, a villager who does not belong to the community of the *anastenarides* said: 'pay attention to their eyes. They communicate with their eyes'.<sup>334</sup> He seemed to imply that this group of people deliberately tries to hide something. Nevertheless, the purpose of this

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<sup>334</sup> Mr. Aggelopoulos, owner of rooms-to-let on the occasion of the *panegyri*, Aghia Eleni, Friday 21 May, 1998.

type of communication is the flexible and concise co-ordination of the group. Thus, apart from the connection developed because of family ties between its members, the group of the anastenarides develops a special contact when they are all about to dance.

In an exercise called *Watching*, which belongs to the Objective Drama Research period, the same experience developed within the members of the group. Grotowski has always searched for the purest contact between the members of his groups. Thus, he introduced exercises that induced this experience into the activities: 'As with certain elements of the training structure, *Watching* develops receptivity towards others in the space, not only in terms of others' placement and motion, but also in regards to group energy and a sense of tempo-rhythm'.<sup>335</sup> Wolford underlines the importance of the 'acceptance of the present moment and the nearness of the other'.<sup>336</sup> A sense of recognition that cannot be described in words blossoms in these conditions. It could be a realization of one's self as a serene individual and an inalienable member of a group, all at the same time. At this very moment the capital 'I' is transformed into the small 'i'. The self-centred being gives way to the one who serves the needs of the community.<sup>337</sup> This is how Wolford describes the feeling she gained while recording the group which performed the exercise of the traditional Shaker song with dancing. The individual had not disappeared, but was transformed into a more flexible and objective social persona.

When one watches anastenarian dance, which on most days occurs in a very small room, one is impressed by how the dancers use the space. Objectively, the room is not extremely small, but when the visitors enter it

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<sup>335</sup> Wolford, Grotowski's *Objective Drama Research*, p. 45.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

becomes crowded. So, the space left for approximately ten to fifteen people to dance in is only just fifteen square metres! Not to mention how packed the spectators are, a situation that creates a tense atmosphere. The spectators enter the room under the unspoken condition that they are there like witnesses of a ritual act and not as unaffected observers. The elder members of the community usually provide the model behaviour. However, there are exceptions to the rule, a fact that does not escape the archianastenaris' attention since he is the one responsible for restoring order. He strives to construct the right context in which the anastenarides are allowed to develop their inner focus.

The anastenarides, concentrated on their task, dance in a passionate way, which sometimes can be defined as ecstatic. Their motion respects a sense of tempo-rhythm, thus one dancer does not bump into another. The anastenarides take it as a bad omen when they are not synchronised. The impression they give is that each of them dances alone and for his own reasons. Yet, they take into account and they are aware of the group they dance with. It is as if they have a common external goal to which they try to address their dance. In anastenaria this 'goal' is to reach the Saints Constantine and Helen or the participants' ancestors, or whatever they individually have in mind, which is never questioned or enforced by anybody. One of the anastenarides stated that each of them (anastenarides) has his or her own reasons for dancing.<sup>338</sup> Usually these reasons are related to anxiety motivated by the imprisoning social order of the community, family tensions and personal insecurities. What is dominant in anastenarian dance is not the individual problems but the release of personal

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<sup>338</sup> Faedon X"antoniou, personal communication. *Dancing* has the general meaning of participation.

anxiety through a dancing which must remain in accordance with the group dance.

The archianastenaris co-ordinates almost everything; except the ecstatic feelings that stir people into dancing. Before the dance begins, he blesses the icons, and then with a glance, commands the music to start. After the anastenarides dance for a while, the archianastenaris again calls on two of them with his eyes to hold the holy icons. When he feels that it is time for them to stop, he first makes eye contact with the participants who have been honored with the icons to return the icons to him. One by one, they bow to the icons and go back to their place. For the archianastenarides it is significant to hold the icons as they symbolise all the power that gives the participants the charisma to dance. When he holds the icon, the anastenaris comes closer to the source of inspiration than at any other moment in his dance.<sup>339</sup> With the deliverance of the icons to the archianastenaris, the dance stops for a while to start up again.

The archianastenaris is responsible for the coordination of the tempo of the rites throughout the day. The initiation of the dance or the coordination of any other rite within the ritual is communicated by the archianastenaris to the other anastenarides by his movements and the signs made with his eyes. This notion of coordination, which comes more from necessity for order than from the preservation of a typical hierarchy, can also be found in Grotowski's workshops. In his work, the role of the coordinator was usually played by himself as a director in the Theatre of Productions, or by the guides in Paratheatre, or by his associates in each of his other phases. The encouragement of self-developing activities requires the supervision of someone who ensures that structure is

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<sup>339</sup> In the ceremony, only men are allowed to hold the icons. Women are permitted to hold the coverings of the icons, *podies*, when they dance on the coals.

maintained. This does not necessarily imply a hierarchy, or an axiological distinction. It is simply the nature of this 'getting-rid-of' journey that requires a Bedouin to show the way. The leader of a ritual, or of a ritual-like activity that respects the traditional principles of ritual, protects the rite or the activity from degradation. He aims to remove all those actions that, according to his intelligence and experience, adulterate the archetypal quality of the ritual. During Grotowski's work in the Theatre of Productions, he adopts the role of the guide in the instant before the performance is staged.

The role of the leader is the induction of harmonic rhythm that facilitates the assimilation of a musical score into the performance. This rhythm is initially suggested during this period as the platform on which the actors realise their ecstatic sacrifice and invite the audience to become motivated in the same process. The main anastenarian rite, which includes dancing and music, has an intense performative aspect. Although it is not appropriate to be judged as performance, one should evaluate it with the same qualitative standards used to evaluate a Grotowskian performance. In Grotowski's performances, the event on the stage is a live representation of the actor's generosity and not a replica of a rehearsed product that, after the process is finished, is presented on stage. The process continues on the stage. Similarly, the anastenarian dance is a process, and the attendants are not an audience, but a group of witnesses with liminal characteristics. That is, they affect the performative event with their visceral, yet inactive participation and, simultaneously, they stay outside, observing the occurrences. Each member of the anastenarides dances to the same rhythm of the music, yet each of them has his or her own tempo and style of dancing. Still,

the 'aesthetic' result is unified, not only by music, but mainly by the familiarisation of the members of the group with each other and with the dance.

In January 1997, during the winter version of the anastenarian rite, a young woman who did not belong to a traditional anastenarian family participated in the dance. This woman was unsuccessful in keeping to the given rhythm of the music. She could have found it later on if she had let herself be affected by the group. But even ten or so minutes later not only had she failed to synchronise her movements with the tune, but with the others as well. At this point, the archianastenis, who had been keeping an eye on her from the time she had entered the dance, signaled to her with his eyes to exit and sit at the side. This was not the first time she had danced and would not be the last. There is tolerance even for people who do not descend from anastenis. However, lack of rhythm, which unavoidably disturbs the general dancing communion and forces an alien and inconsistent tempo on the group, is not allowed. An elderly woman and descendant of an anastenarian family was also prevented from continuing to dance when she lost the rhythm and proceeded to shake another female relative in the audience back and forth.

In Paratheatrical activities there is also a respect for the same unwritten rule. A scholar of Grotowski's Paratheatrical activities explains that 'in this meeting man does not refuse himself and does not impose himself. He lets himself be touched and does not push with his presence'.<sup>340</sup> Perhaps Grotowski had this principle in his mind in an instance that impressed his collaborator Richards. Richards recalls the selection of candidates that took place upon his and Grotowski's arrival in Italy. When Grotowski saw one's woman 'acting

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<sup>340</sup> Kolankiewicz, *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 15.

propositions', as the exercises in those preliminary workshops were called, he told Richards that 'this actress had structured her line of physical actions so clearly that he could follow every one of her associations'.<sup>341</sup> He also suggested that the rest should take lessons from her example. Nevertheless, when it was a question of whether or not to accept this actor, Grotowski decided that this actor was not destined to look through her acting directly for inner discoveries. She was destined for the big world of the theatre. Her presence in the Workcenter, Grotowski concluded, would not be of any benefit to either her or to them. The case of this woman and the one in *Anastenaria* are similar. The woman in the *Anastenaria*, despite her well-crafted movements, gave the impression that the effort she put into her dancing was not for personal, but for public consumption. She was looking to claim an identity or individuality by having a role in *Anastenaria*, whereas the *anastenarides* re-recognise their identity through the ecstatic dance. In other words, discretion provides ecstasy with a healthy character and protects it from artificiality and chaos.

In terms of *anastenaria*, this girl's lack of rhythm should not be blamed on the fact that she did not belong to the strict circle of the *anastenarian* family. There is flexibility as to who participates, which mainly depends on how attracted the person is to the events. It can happen that a witness crosses the threshold, being inside yet remaining outside, and considers himself or herself a part of the action. The strict tradition of the ritual and the family succession makes spontaneous involvement in the action rare for the foreigner. This self-motivated crossing of the threshold can be characterised in initiatory terms, as it requires both confidence and discretion. Grotowski searched for such a possibility in the

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<sup>341</sup> *At Work with Grotowski*, p. 80.

contemporary Western world and was very careful not to create a superficial scheme that serves a sterile imitation of a ritual activity. He introduced the idea of the witness into his performances, then the direct participation of the people in his Paratheatrical workshops, and finally the mutual exchange of ritual-inspired experience in Italy. Nevertheless, his desire for the arousal or awakening of the people remained imprinted on the Laboratory Theatre's performance even after his departure for the United States. In 1981 in Wroclaw, after the end of the Theatre of Sources, the people of the old Laboratory Theatre staged a performance under the title *Thanatos Polski* (Polish Thanatos), a play inspired by Dostoyevsky's writings and directed by Ryszard Cieslak. Their communal views about the theatre appeared on the programme: 'Thanatos Polski is not conceived of as a theatrical performance, although there is a fixed structure and programmed regions of association (the 'theme'). It is possible for those present—without constraint—to enter the action'.<sup>342</sup> Participation is a right and not an obligation. Even today, the Workcenter's selection session, which occurs once a year or every couple of years in Pontedera, does not require a degree in acting from the candidates. A letter of recommendation, a curriculum vitae and a personal performance are what is needed.<sup>343</sup>

As was maintained in the first part of this chapter, discipline to the given structure is an essential tool of expressiveness which Grotowski deeply respected. He believed that the craft transmutes spontaneous action into a powerful condition. An account from the Paratheatrical activities describes how

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<sup>342</sup> Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 208.

<sup>343</sup> The letter of recommendation and the CV help the organisers decide whom they will invite. Yet, the personal performance is the ultimate criterion for whether or not a person is accepted. Any objective standard for evaluating such a performance falls short, since the acceptance depends on how the new person's acting fits in with the ethos of the previous group of people, to which the organisers belong.

the participants transformed their visceral dynamism into concrete motions. Thus, 'all impulse—for expression, contact, physical endeavor, disarmament, exposure—was channeled into dynamic physical action, according to the needs of those taking part'.<sup>344</sup> Even the most powerful dance requires a framework to turn it into an activity that communicates its dynamism. Grotowski looked for the dynamism of primary energy, the primal rhythm of traditional dances. He was fascinated by some of the dances he observed in the Kalahari Desert in Africa. The technique of the people of the Kalahari Desert consists of what they call a 'boiling energy'. The participants construct a concrete and powerful dance with an extremely precise form.<sup>345</sup> Through years of experience Grotowski observed that the emotional experience alone without a matrix diminishes the result. Richards explains that at the very first exercises he did with Grotowski in California (1984) he made the mistake of concentrating on the emotional experience at the expense of the craft. Therefore, the result was vague and weak. A clear aesthetic result is a goal that can also apply to a ritual and requires contact with the partner and a general perception of the surrounding environment. These should be accompanied by a craft that in Objective Drama Research exercises are the 'strips of action', whereas in the ritual the craft is defined as the strips of the ceremony.<sup>346</sup> Therefore, the body somehow moves of its own will. An anastenarissa remembered that once she felt like the saint had *grabbed* her and *thrown* her into the fire to dance. So too, Richards felt that his body started to dance by itself. It was the body itself that led the way for his movement.<sup>347</sup> Continued discipline to a structure develops an automatic response of the body

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<sup>344</sup> Kumiega, 'Laboratory Theatre/Grotowski/The Mountain Project', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 242.

<sup>345</sup> Grotowski, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 296.

<sup>346</sup> Richards, *At Work with Grotowski*, pp. 67, 81, 87.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

that makes the person assume that the body has attained its own memory. This memory is crafted by the conscious mind to acquire independence through discipline.

The urge for an inner journey, individual responsibility within the group, humility, becoming an example for others and discipline are described as principles of the ritual of Anastenaria and also of Grotowski's activities. The same components make up the idea of sacrifice, an archetypal act found in all ritual. Kumiega maintains that the act of sacrifice holds the central position in Grotowski's performances. She claims that *Kordian*, *Dr. Faustus*, *Hamlet Study* and *The Constant Prince*, all deal 'with the image of one individual, isolated from the surrounding environment and social milieu because of a particular set of ethics or a principle adhered to—and the ultimate sacrifice through death of that individual'.<sup>348</sup>

Flaszen, explaining the occult aspect of the Laboratory Theatre's performances at the conference 'Theatre Laboratorium, from Opole to Wrocław' in Pontedera, 2001, described the way the act of sacrifice was developed by the actors. The Laboratory Theatre's work was a process towards the endless confrontation of the impulses of the inner self. The theatre was the vehicle for such a journey. In those performances, the actors were faced with the challenge of self-exposition. They eliminated every tendency for pretension. Thus, Flaszen stressed at the conference that the actors at the Laboratory Theatre, 'if they were to perform sacrifice, actually sacrificed themselves'. The simplicity and intensity of this line of thought makes its meaning vulnerable to misunderstanding and, thus, it requires an explanation in accordance with Grotowski's theatre. To be

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<sup>348</sup> *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 54.

consistent with the Laboratory Theatre's terms, the object of sacrifice is a significant amount of daily action that provides one with comfort.

Rena Mirecka claims that her work in the Laboratory Theatre was a special journey of opening up. Grotowski had the capacity to touch and penetrate her silence. As she made her first steps in the theatre, her movements were embarrassed and, thus, appeared artificial. She trusted Grotowski and let herself sacrifice actions of daily life to enter a process of discovery triggering personal motivations. That was her sacrifice as an actor. When Mirecka was asked how that work affected her personal life, she talked about the abandonment of ordinary daily activities and insisted on the following:

In order to be accepted by oneself, one has to have discipline. One has to subordinate every temptation of life. Everything else [but her work in the theatre] of my private life was subordinated to my inner life. Everything else was sacrificed. I had no personal life. I limited my other activities for fear that I would not meet the challenge to meet the impulses as I did the day before. It might sound dramatic, but it is now all right. This self-giving brought me to an encounter with myself. In my solitude, I am not alone.<sup>349</sup>

Mirecka was aware of the life outside the theatre, but soon realised that she had to give something to cover the journey and to reach personal associations. On the basis of a defined theme, the actors had to go back to personal motives that were not always pleasant. It was a process in which one took the responsibility to touch one's own limits, a kind of voluntary abandonment, which can be viewed as a metaphor for death.

The notion of ecstasy governs the sacrificial act, as the sacrificial victim is an item that, in a way, stands apart from the conventional order of society. When

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<sup>349</sup> Theatre Laboratorium: From Opole to Wroclaw (conference), Pontedera, Sunday 14 October 2001. Personal notes from the panel.

examining the subject of ritual sacrifice, the scholar René Girard notices that a unifying factor can be detected between a large number of sacrificial victims. He claims that the sacrificial victims stand either outside or on the outer fringes of society. Even when the victim is a king, the king's position at the centre of society and the top of its hierarchy isolates him from his fellow men.<sup>350</sup> Girard also argues that the act of sacrifice is a deliberate act of collective substitution performed at the expense of a victim. This action absorbs the entire internal tensions imprisoned in a community. The role of sacrifice is to redirect communal violence into specific channels so as to avoid internal violence that turns against the entire community. This special attribute of the sacrificial act tempted Grotowski. Barba explains:

The rituals were repetitions of archetypal acts, a collective confession which sealed the solidarity of the tribe...Grotowski uses archetypal images and actions to unleash his attack on the audience...It [archetype] is a metaphor and model of the human condition. For example, Prometheus and the Sacrificial Lamb correspond to the archetype of the individual sacrificed for the community.<sup>351</sup>

On an acting level, the actors were, in a very precise way of speaking, the chosen sacrificial victims. This was probably what Grotowski meant by characterizing his companions as an elite and also explains why his work refers to an elite group. This kind of elite does not choose its new members. Instead, the candidates chose themselves, estimating their endurance to endless pain caused by the non-stop widening of their own limits.

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<sup>350</sup> Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1977, p. 12.

<sup>351</sup> 'Theatre Laboratory 13 Rzedow', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 72.

The expansion of the limits is also dominant in the ritual of Anastenaria. Their path to the spiritual world goes through the pain of the material. Fire, a great power and as well as a great danger to the human species, appears as the ultimate ordeal for the anastenarides. Stepping on the coals is a transgression of human limits. But also the ecstatic dance is a sacrifice of the conventional rhythm of the body and the mind. Yet, the observer draws the conclusion, especially as regards the older generation who dances, that this endless process of transgression has stopped long ago and that their dance has turned into a technique. Anastenarides *sacrifice* themselves by going into fire with ecstatic exclamations in the belief that evil, and all its manifestations, will be burnt in the fire. 'May it turn to ashes': they spit the words from their mouths as if expelling all physical and psychic diseases.

In Paratheatre and the Theatre of Sources, there were exercises in which Grotowski challenged the participants' relationship to the element of fire. An account from a 'beehive', conducted by Gregory and recorded by Malgorzata Dzieduszycka, refers to how 'every person who enters is snatched at the entrance by two people. They rush and hurry him on up the stairs. On some steps there are barriers of fire. One has to make a running leap over the flaming obstacles'.<sup>352</sup> The confrontation with fire is quite extremely traumatic as fire is considered the most terrifying of the elements. The Canadian theatre director Ryszard Nieoczym, Grotowski's former collaborator, who participated in the early years of Paratheatre, relates how during one happening, after they had run into the forest and through the water, they danced on burning coals.<sup>353</sup> The ordinary limits of human ability were surpassed. For Croyden, fire was the most

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<sup>352</sup> Malgorzata Dzieduszycka, 'To Fly?', *Kultura*, no. 32/634, August, 1975, *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 59.

<sup>353</sup> Thessaloniki, May, 2001. Personal communication.

striking phenomenon. She describes how the group gathered around the fire. Their games with fire and burning coals created the impression of satyrs playing with their fire toys after a night on the mountaintop.<sup>354</sup>

The actual sacrifice of an animal symbolises the spiritual sacrifice of the anastenarides. The animal victim is chosen on the twenty-sixth of October, on the feast day of Saint Dimitrios, to be sacrificed on the twenty-first of May. The group of anastenarides who are led by the archianastenaris and accompanied by the musicians brings the ram to the sandpit made beside the *konaki* for this purpose. The animal, blessed and covered with incense, is slaughtered by an anastenaris, while the rest of the anastenarides dance around the pit in ecstasy. The sacrificial victim is offered neither to a god, a saint or a demon. The animal is killed in a ceremonial way and eaten by the anastenarides and the visitors because it has a beneficial power that strengthens the well-being of the community. The ram is cut into small pieces, a portion of which is distributed to the houses of the village, and the rest is cooked for the communal dinner on the last evening of the ritual. Nowadays there are many visitors and everybody must eat on the evening of the twenty-first of May, so there is a greater need for meat, which is satisfied by slaughtering two smaller lambs.<sup>355</sup>

Anastenaria is transferred from generation to generation and originates from the saints, that is, Anastenaria is an imitation of St. Constantine saving the icons from the fire. The continuation of the ritual is also secured by its effectiveness to the people/witnesses who will continue visiting Aghia Eleni. 'May you always return', are the archianastenaris' last words before the very end of the *panegyri*. 'Papoudes need your footprints', he says to the people, reminding them

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<sup>354</sup> *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 65.

<sup>355</sup> Kakouri, *Dionysiaca*, p. 21.

of their obligations to the saints. Still today, the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Richards invites people to witness *Action*, the Workcenter's latest work, asking them to distribute this information to whom it may concern.

## CHAPTER V

### *Healing Potentials: Grotowski's acting as a psychic process*

Barba, when characterizing the features of Grotowski's theatre during his first encounter with it in the early sixties, compares this new theatre to 'an anthropological expedition, performance as psychomachia, as a clash between, on the one hand, the psychic process of the actors as they lay themselves bare and, on the other, the spectators who want to defend their certainties and psychic well being'.<sup>356</sup> Barba describes the actors as 'shamans', mediators between two worlds, able to reveal to the spectators the relationship between their own personal experience and the collective archetypes contained in the text.<sup>357</sup> In practice, Barba and Grotowski were concerned with opening the way to regions known to shamans, yogis and mystics, where all the individual psychic forces are integrated.<sup>358</sup>

In *Sakuntala*, a performance held in 1961, Grotowski invited the viewer to 'take part in the "shamanism" in which the living, immediate presence of the viewer is part of the playacting'.<sup>359</sup> In his book, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, Osinski draws a parallel between the theatre magician, namely Grotowski, and the primitive shaman and wizard. He also points out that Grotowski preserved the same theme for all the leading roles in his productions, from Cain (*Cain*) to Simpleton (*Apocalypsis*). At the same time, the leading role of *Apocalypsis*, that is, the character of the Polish romantic seer and savior is identified as a 'fool of

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<sup>356</sup> *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 50.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>359</sup> Osinski, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, New York: PAJ Publications, 1986, p. 49.

Christ' or a folk saint.<sup>360</sup> Grotowski attempts to engender similar virtues in his actors. While he was developing the Laboratory theatre, he argued that there were three kinds of actor. The first is the 'elementary actor', like the one in the academic theatre. The second is the 'artificial actor,' 'who composes and builds a structure of vocal and physical stage effects'.<sup>361</sup> The third is the 'archetypal actor' who can 'enlarge on the images taken from the collective unconscious', and this is the actor Grotowski preferred to train. Barba claims that in the Laboratory Theatre the actor appears with shamanic attributes and, thus, calls him or her actor-shaman. This type of actor searched for new forms of theatrical magic, for new alphabets to be used.<sup>362</sup>

According to Barba, Grotowski was willing to create secular rituals in which the total bodily and mental participation of the actor would liberate accumulated unconscious material. This was achieved by certain principles that Grotowski instilled in his actors. Costumes, props and make up, for instance, were unnecessary because the actors must have direct contact with the audience in order for its unconscious to be 'attacked', in Grotowski's terms. The actors' emotional and mental state was concretely expressed through physical and vocal actions. For the actor 'to make the effect properly suggestive, it must be done in a trance (concentrating all the psychic energies)'.<sup>363</sup> Trance has always played an essential role in the liberation of the self. Grotowski's actors were like shamans because they transformed their trance into ecstasy: not only could they bring out their impulses, but they could also govern them as well. The important fact for a shaman remains his 'ability to bring on his epileptoid trance at will', as Eliade

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<sup>360</sup> Osinski, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 64.

<sup>361</sup> Barba, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 75.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

states.<sup>364</sup> Both the shaman and Grotowski's actors motivated the occurrence of such crises in order to extract subconscious material to work with.

As a shaman, the actor must create a magic action and entice the spectator to participate in it. Barba points to the secular role of the actor while he reminds the reader that 'the shamans were masters of the sacred ceremonies, in which every member of the community had a part to play'.<sup>365</sup> Some of the elements of this ritual play are fascination, suggestion, psychic stimulation, magic words and signs, and acrobatics; all these compel the body to go beyond its natural, biological limitations.

According to Merete Demant Jakobsen, the term 'shaman', although widely applicable, belonged initially to a specific culture:

Shamanism is *strictu sensu* pre-eminently a religious phenomenon of Siberia and Central Asia. Although the concept derives from the Tungrus of Siberia, the role of the shaman as a mediator between the human world and the world of the spirits is known worldwide and therefore justifies the use of shamanism as a more general term.<sup>366</sup>

The shaman, then, apart from exerting political power, also uses religion as a means of serving the community. A shaman takes care of the mental health of his or her society, of the bonds between the members of the society, and the connection of this society with its traditions. A shaman is 'the spiritual leader of the society, with his knowledge of mythology and healing' and, thus, serves the community.<sup>367</sup> The main way a shaman brings out his or her capacities is through ecstasy, leaving everyday human reality for a time to perceive the reality of the

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<sup>364</sup> *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964, p. 29.

<sup>365</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 72.

<sup>366</sup> *Shamanism: Traditional and Contemporary Approaches to the Mastery of Spirits and Healing*, n.p: Berghahn Books, 1999, p.1.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

world of the spirits. In short, he or she leaves behind one condition to enter a new one, but always remains in control. The shaman may face serious illness. This shamanic ability, however, makes one confront this illness as the vehicle to reach spheres that are inconceivable under ordinary circumstances.

Mental and physical illness is the most common indicator of a future shaman. Eliade maintains that psychopathic behaviour is a true indication of future shamans. He cites the psychopathological phenomena in Arctic Siberia and underlines how the extreme cold, the long nights, the unrelenting [desert] solitude and the lack of vitamins influence the nervous constitution of the Arctic people and prompt mental illnesses, such as Arctic hysteria, or shamanic trance. In these societies, shamanic ecstasy is a spontaneous and organic condition. The soul of a shaman in a real cataleptic trance is supposed to have left his or her body in order to journey to the sky or to the underworld. The equation of shamanism with mental disorder can also apply to other shamanic phenomena outside the Arctic region. Other examples are found in the traditional societies of Indonesia, South Asia and Oceania. Originally in the ancient societies of Indonesia, sickness had not been related to transcendental ability. It was only later, when a person could control a genuine trance that the institution of shamanism appeared.<sup>368</sup> For some traditional societies the shamans come from particular families in which nervous instability is hereditary. Epileptics and neuropaths are candidates for magic, but must undergo a long initiation before being qualified for their profession, while any successful approach to the supernatural is attributed to the medicine men's epileptoid or hysteroid psychic structure. Eliade's use of the terms 'epileptoid' and 'hysteroid' instead of

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<sup>368</sup> Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 25.

'epileptic' and 'hysteric' highlights the important distinction between a shaman and a common patient.<sup>369</sup> It is only after a person successfully recovers from an illness that he can be considered a shaman. Having received inspiration through the religious cosmology of one's society, shamans are people who are capable of healing others; this occurs only after they have managed to cure themselves. Shamans control hysteria and epilepsy in order to use them as tools for healing. They are people who not only manage to pass through illness, but also place their adventure at the service of their community. As Eliade explains:

[that] such maladies nearly always appear in relation to the vocation of medicine men is not at all surprising. Like the sick man, the religious man is projected onto a vital plane that shows him the fundamental data of human existence, that is, solitude, danger, and hostility of the surrounding world. But the primitive magician, the medicine man, or the shaman is not only a sick man: he is, above all, a sick man who has been cured, who has succeeded in curing himself. Often when the shaman's or the medicine man's vocation is revealed through an illness or an epileptoid attack, the initiation of the candidate is equivalent to a cure.<sup>370</sup>

In order to distinguish the difference between an ailing patient and a shaman further, Eliade declares that, apart from ecstatic experiences, the shamanic initiation includes a course of theoretical and practical instruction that is too complicated to be comprehended by a neurotic. Thus, when cured, the shamans can cure others because they are aware of the mechanism of illness, or rather, in Eliade's term, they know the 'theory of illness'.<sup>371</sup>

Similar to shamans who were masters of two realms—that of ecstasy/epilepsy and the healing and preservation of the social unity—Grotowski's actors were equally trained in spontaneity and discipline. The actors

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<sup>369</sup> *Shamanism*, p. 23-32.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

had to let their impulses lead them in the construction of a role yet, at the same time, they had to observe themselves and to remember precisely what they had discovered during the rehearsals so that these discoveries would be repeatable and also freshly re-discovered during the performance. Discipline and structure should not be confused with rigidity or suppression, nor impulses and spontaneity with caprice or accidental discoveries. An example can be found in the 'tiger' exercise as recorded by Franz Marijnen in 1966.<sup>372</sup> Participating in the exercise himself, Grotowski assumed the role of the attacking tiger, while the pupil was the prey. They both became involved in a physical (attacking) and vocal (roaring) improvisation. This exercise was intended to make the pupil leave himself or herself completely, and at the same time to set the guttural resonator in action. Yet, the exercise was not only a question of roaring. The sound had to be based on a specific text, the continuity of which was important in this exercise. Thus, the body became unblocked through a structured context, that of the text. This idea of the merging of discipline and spontaneity remained one of Grotowski's strongest convictions throughout his entire career. Richards explains: 'The stronger your creativity is, the stronger your craft must be, in order to arrive at the needed equilibrium which will let your resources flow fully'.<sup>373</sup> Otherwise, creativity is replaced with vagueness and disorder.

Grotowski's insistence on standing beyond rationalism and intuition yet incorporating both in his practices, and his belief that this method was the only way to 'total acting' are further validated by the medical theory of hemispheric asymmetry, a theory that further elucidates the anthropological concept of shamanism. According to this theory, each of the two human cerebral

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<sup>372</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 145.

<sup>373</sup> *At Work with Grotowski*, p. 7.

hemispheres is in control of different operations. Joseph E. Bogen records that the first accounts in the field of cerebral duality can be traced to the early nineteenth century.<sup>374</sup> As Joseph Hellige stresses, particularly vivid demonstrations of hemispheric asymmetry were provided in the sixties and early seventies in studies with so-called split-brain patients, that is patients who had had the corpus callosum and other connecting fibers between the left and the right hemisphere surgically severed in order to overcome the repetition of epileptic seizures.<sup>375</sup> More recently, the studies were extended to those whose brains were intact. In these instances, psychological tests, such as dichotic-listening tests, half-field studies, blood flow studies and so on, addressed one or the other hemisphere.<sup>376</sup> Bogen argues that the duality of the brain does not imply disunity in ordinary consciousness. Yet, ordinary human consciousness is insufficient for the person to perceive himself or herself as a whole. The full realisation of human potential requires that each person is devoted to a better understanding of his or her own dual brains.<sup>377</sup>

Eleni Savaki, Professor of Physiology in the Department of Medicine at the University of Crete in Greece, recorded the different functions of the left and right hemisphere by enriching Bogen's hemispheric chart. According to this:

Left hemisphere controls:

1. Right half of the body aesthetically and kinetically
2. Perception of time
3. Speech, reading, writing, symbolism

Right hemisphere controls:

- Left part of the body aesthetically and kinetically
- Perception of space
- Perception of metaphoric meanings, and humor, correlation, synthesis of oral/aural

<sup>374</sup> *The Dual Brain*, London; New York: The Guilford Press, 1985, p. 28.

<sup>375</sup> *Hemispheric Asymmetry: What's Right and What's Left*, Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, (first printing 1993), 2001, p. 1, 9.

<sup>376</sup> Bogen, *The Dual Brain*, p. 29.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

4. Mathematics, grammar	speech, emotionalism and melody in speech Artistic expression, fantasy, creativity (singing, dance, music), sensitivity to colours
5. Verbal memory	Visual memory
6. Sequential—analytic thought with words (rational sequence in succession from the partial to the whole)	Holistic—synthetic thought with sensory pictures (intuitively thought in random order)
7. Communication with words in literal sense	Communication with: voice tune, facial expressions, non-verbal kinesiology
8. Processing of abstract information	Processing of stimulus perceived with touch
9. Perception of details	Holistic type of recognition, i.e. faces, complicated designs
10. Controlled behavior	Impulsive behavior
11. Incidental interpretation of behavior rational explanation	Primary interpretation of behavior emotional explanation. <sup>378</sup>

Such categorisation is not definitive, but rather indicative of the hemispheric function in a startling percentage of people. For instance, studies have led to estimates that the left hemisphere is dominant for speech in approximately ninety-five percent of right-handed adults, with the right hemisphere being dominant for speech in the other five percent of right-handed adults.<sup>379</sup>

According to the theory of the left and right hemisphere, there is a strong connection between epilepsy and the coordination of the two hemispheres, since it is the severing of the hemispheres that releases the patients from crises. Without attempting to draw any medical conclusion, it could be that the right coordination of the two hemispheres may result in the control of epileptic crises. Accepting this, it can be suggested that traditional societies may have found a system of education which transforms some epileptics into shamans. Grotowski,

<sup>378</sup> *Οι Παράλληλοι Εαυτοί μας* (Our Parallel Selves), Πανεπιστημιακές Εκδόσεις Κρήτη (University Publications of Crete), Ηράκλειο (Heraklio), 1997, pp. 82-3.

<sup>379</sup> *Hemispheric Asymmetry*, p. 9.

on the other hand, evidently approached acting as a versatile process which exploits all features of Savaki's chart. Both verbal and physical expression, logic and fantasy, rationalism and intuition, were practices included in Grotowski's acting training. Grotowski intentionally tried to balance the oppositional tensions within the human organism and to harmonise the expressivity of the performer not only as an actor, but also as a human being. Having said this, it does not seem possible that Grotowski just practiced some pre-established theories. The most likely is that he, like others before or after him, perceived the unalterable characteristic of the duality of human nature.

On the issue of shamanism, Michael Taussig, an anthropologist who conducted extensive research on Southern American shamanism, claims that 'folk healers and shamans embark on their careers as a way of healing themselves'.<sup>380</sup> Taussig considers shamanism to be almost identical to a return journey from death. He states that during a crisis a shaman encounters and confronts spirits from the other world, a fight that he has to win to gain control over the situation. This is the end of his crisis and the beginning of his career as a shaman. The experience of this otherness, for which a personal disease is usually the cause, empowers the person and brings out his or her healing capacities.<sup>381</sup> The sickness of a shaman, as Taussig maintains, or the shaman's initiation that is often identified with his illness, as Eliade underlines, is always equated with a passage through death. The person with such a vocation enters into death with questions of whether and how there will be a return.<sup>382</sup> In analyzing the initiation of shamans or medicine men, Eliade describes ordeals

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<sup>380</sup> *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1987, p. 447.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 449-455.

<sup>382</sup> Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, p. 448.

that lead to physical death and the destruction of the body, a condition of dismemberment in which the shaman has to revitalise his or her physical body and ultimately himself or herself as a whole.<sup>383</sup>

Taussig indicates that most of the time the person who becomes a shaman will have been self-taught. To support his argument he refers to individuals from shamanic societies in Colombia, who trained themselves with drugs in order to obtain transcendental abilities. Thus, the initiate deliberately exposes himself to physical and mental destruction to touch the threshold of death. By passing this ordeal successfully, he opens up the way to healing simultaneously for himself and others. Santiago from South America is such an example of someone who trained himself without any shaman-teacher, but with *yage*, a hallucinatory drink that helps one ascend to a supernatural reality.<sup>384</sup> Santiago's action was beyond the expectations of his society as no shaman learns to control *yage* alone. His family believed that the death of Santiago's father was caused by the envy of the shaman-teacher of his community when he was informed that Santiago had tried to educate himself into the use of *yage* and the powers it confers without the shaman's help. Santiago, having stepped outside his society, in a manner of speaking, had, after the experience with *yage*, reentered the social world as a divine trickster. Taussig explains that Santiago's 'navigation of the space of death and his navigation of envy are existentially matched, and his role as a mute visionary and creator of visions for the patients he ministers is steady and sure'.<sup>385</sup> Thus, it follows that shamanism can transcend its socio-cultural tradition without demeaning the values of its society.

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<sup>383</sup> *Shamanism*, p. 34, 44-5.

<sup>384</sup> Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, p. 461.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 461.

Sue Jennings, the English anthropologist and dramatherapist with a profound interest in the performative and healing aspects of ritual, cites the case of Senoi Temiar, a pre-industrial community that still thrives in Malaysia, where two methods are equally respected in the education of a shaman. The first is that the future shaman becomes an apprentice to an established shaman and works with him as his assistant. In the second case, the future shaman follows the way of self-teaching until he gradually builds up a reputation.<sup>386</sup> The Temiars believe that each individual has healing powers and that it is a matter of choice whether or not to develop them.

Grotowski's acknowledgement of shamanic techniques is more specifically related to his devotion to yoga. He was drawn by the fact that the techniques of yoga involve the transmutation of energy from a biological to a spiritual energy. In other words, yoga seeks to attain a spiritual dimension by physical means. It works on the energy centres of the organism (chakra).<sup>387</sup> The ultimate purpose of yoga is deliverance; that is, to set the practitioner free from any mundane conditioning.<sup>388</sup> Indian philosophy had found that a human being's physiological, social, cultural, familial, and religious conditioning were comparatively easy to delimit and hence to master.<sup>389</sup> These conditionings define the different states of consciousness in yoga. Yoga undertakes to eliminate the different groups, species and varieties of 'states of consciousness' believing that there is a condition that stands beyond these states and even beyond any type of duality. In yogic terms this condition is contained in the doctrine of *Sunyata*, or else the

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<sup>386</sup> *Theatre, Ritual and Transformation*, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 138.

<sup>387</sup> See Barba's notes on Grotowski's letters one and two, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, pp. 117 and 119.

<sup>388</sup> Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958, p. xvii.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

Void, the not nothingness, the non-duality in which the object does not differ from the subject, as explained in the third chapter of this thesis. The main obstacle for the yogi to reach this condition is the self. As Barba explains:

The self and belief in the self are the causes of error and pain. The way to escape from pain is to eliminate the self. This is the Perfect Wisdom, the enlightenment that can be attained through a *via negativa*, denying worldly categories and phenomenons to the point of denying the self and, by doing so, reaching the Void.<sup>390</sup>

Hence, as Eliade says, it is useless to try to change states of consciousness as long as the 'psychomenta' latencies have not also been controlled and mastered.<sup>391</sup> The goal of all Indian philosophies and mysticisms is to emancipate oneself from suffering.<sup>392</sup> Eliade adds that the wretchedness of human life is not due to divine punishment or original sin, but to ignorance.<sup>393</sup>

Yoga techniques consist of concentration, meditation, and ecstasy. The point of departure of yoga meditation is concentration on a single point (*ekāgratā*).<sup>394</sup> The practice of *ekagrata* attempts to control the two generators of mental fluidity: sense activity and the activity of the subconscious. *Ekagrata* can be obtained through the practice of numerous exercises and techniques, in which physiology plays a role of primary importance. One cannot obtain *ekagrata* if, for instance, the body is in a tiring or even uncomfortable posture, or if respiration is unrhythmical. Thus, yogic techniques imply several categories of physiological practices and spiritual exercises such as: restraint from specific activities, disciplines to certain ethics, bodily attitudes and postures, rhythm of respiration, emancipation from sensory activity in the domain of exterior objects,

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<sup>390</sup> *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 49.

<sup>391</sup> *Yoga*, p. 44.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

concentration, yogic meditation, the highest concentration (*samādhī*).<sup>395</sup> Grotowski greatly respected the doctrines of yoga and was inspired by its principles in his exercises. He sought to find a state midway between affirmation and negation and between action and renunciation in order to achieve theatrical precision. The requisite state of mind for Grotowski is a passive readiness to realise an active role, a state in which one does not *want to do something, but rather cannot help not doing something*, the movement which is repose.<sup>396</sup>

Grotowski's preference for this yogic approach by the actor is confirmed in his letters to Barba. In 1963, Grotowski assures Barba that he is in a position to initiate Barba into 'the psychic exercises', 'anatomy of the subconscious', psychoanalysis of the 'non private', in general, into what Grotowski calls the 'Patanjali of theatre'. In this instance, Grotowski metaphorically uses the name of the author of a classic perspective of yoga, expounded in Patanjali's book *Yoga-sutras*, to indicate his own methods in a yogic system of theatre. Grotowski further explains that these exercises demand a commitment to one's very limits.<sup>397</sup>

Barba's enumeration of some of these exercises includes:

1. Diction, vocal work, artificial pronunciation (incantation). They shift from one timbre to another, chant, and whisper. These exercises are always accompanied by breathing exercises. The secret of good diction is breathing. The experiments at the Laboratory investigated the part played by the brain in the formation of sound; the importance of the throat muscles for an appropriate opening of the larynx; how to determine the proper pause for a specific role; harmony between breathing and the rhythm of a sentence; breathing as a dramatic effect (where it is not a physiological necessity); complete breathing from the abdomen and chest (usually only the abdomen is considered necessary);

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<sup>395</sup> Yoga, pp. 48-49

<sup>396</sup> In italics Grotowski's words from *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 17.

<sup>397</sup> 'Letter 2', *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, pp. 119-20.

simultaneous use of the cranial and thoracic sounding boards; loss of voice as a result of psychological problems or faulty breathing.

2. Plastic motion following the Delsarte method and others. Simultaneous activity of different parts of the body, each at a different rhythm (the arms move fast, the legs slowly, the actors speak at different speeds); muscle control; instant relaxation of the muscles not engaged in motion.

3. Study of mime, both artificial and naturalistic.<sup>398</sup>

In these types of exercises, Grotowski sees a concrete form of knowledge that can be studied and verified through one's organism. Grotowski's ideas for the initiation of his pupils are remote from the unified system of yoga, which contains certain exercises for everybody and are taught by a master (guru). In another letter to Barba, in September 1963, Grotowski explains that the recent form of his exercises is based on 'the individualization of the exercises starting out from a defect that cannot be eliminated, from errors that can be eliminated and from the capabilities belonging to a particular person, and this in every domain of the exercises'.<sup>399</sup> Everyone becomes his or her own instructor both in life and on stage.

Grotowski took for granted that each person has the capacity of behaving in many different ways if they can unblock their own complexes and, much more importantly, comprehend the mechanics of how those complexes work. Osinski testifies to just this when he states that 'psycho analytic therapy and the complete control of one's physical capacities are areas of unceasing toil for the small group of actors of the Theatre of Thirteen Rows'.<sup>400</sup> His conclusion is verified by Mirecka's personal testimony.<sup>401</sup> In answering how the work in the Laboratory Theatre affected her personal life, Mirecka, as mentioned in the fourth chapter of

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<sup>398</sup> The *Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 79.

<sup>399</sup> 'Letter 3', *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p.122.

<sup>400</sup> *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 89.

<sup>401</sup> *Laboratorium Theatre: From Cracow to Wroclaw* (conference), Pontedera, Saturday 13 October 2001.

this thesis, explained, among other things, that when she started working there, she embarked on a special journey of opening. Grotowski had the capacity to see, to touch, and ultimately, to penetrate her silence. She managed to progress by making a commitment to the process of self-penetration, a process that required discipline. After the Laboratory Theatre closed and she was on her own, she confessed that the psychological steps she took during those years helped her to continue to face herself. By forming herself as an actor, she also sculptured her private life.

Grotowski called for his actors to dissociate themselves from their personalities, to open up deeper layers of their unconscious. In this process, 'the deficiencies of the actor are used, not hidden. An actor's handicaps are as important as his qualities'.<sup>402</sup> Modern therapy also views illness as a beneficial factor for self-growth and liberation. Claudine Herzlich and Janine Pierret explain:

[P]sychoanalytic theory tells us... [that] illness brings 'fringe benefits', it allows us to escape from the sometimes unbearable constraints of everyday life...In 1960 a young teacher, thinking of the meaning illness could have in childhood, expresses an even more subtle view: illness gave one access to an exceptional world, much more satisfying than the everyday one; it also enabled him to find himself.<sup>403</sup>

In the same vein, Grotowski seems to have believed that blind spots in the actor's psychology were an enormous force that, once unblocked, could release rhythm and dynamism and create a performance that resembled a musical score. The actor gives concrete expression to his desires, passions, and thoughts. In this way, people in the acting process act on their 'deficiencies' to 'cure' the 'traumas' caused to their bodies.

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<sup>402</sup> Barba, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 75.

<sup>403</sup> 'Illness: from causes to meaning', *Concepts of Health, Illness and Disease*, edited by Caroline Curren and Margaret Stacey, Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1986, p. 95.

For Grotowski, sickness and health are matters of culture and each case is translated and confronted differently. The boundary between sickness and health is very narrow and is determined by the traditions of a given community. As Danforth concludes, 'healing, like becoming sick, is at once a cultural, social, psychological, a physiological process'.<sup>404</sup> Along the same lines, the cultural anthropologist Jakobsen observes:

In the initial stages of apprenticeship the person exposes himself to spirit possession without having any control over the actions of the spirits. He experiences mental and physical dismemberment and through letting himself undergo the destruction of his human power, he gains the supernatural power that is necessary for him to fulfill the role of mediator between the world of humans and the world of spirits. Without this transformation no shamanism can take place. In this phase he might be in a state of 'insanity' and therefore be equated with any other mentally unstable member of society but his actions are perceived differently; if not he might be killed. It is only by taking control of this process that he can achieve the role of shaman.<sup>405</sup>

In modern Western psychological terms, such a crisis would be characterised as sickness. On the contrary, in shamanic terms, it is considered an opportunity for self-development and consequently healing. This reaction to suffering can also be observed in Cieslak's interpretation of the character of the Prince. Watching Cieslak in the performance of *The Constant Prince*, one understands that the actor suffered mental and bodily pain. It could be characterised as hysteria, yet it was ecstasy because Cieslak did not give in to the pain; he was in control of it. Therefore, he made his unblocked energy work for him instead of being drawn into it. Equally 'the only difference between a shaman and an epileptic is that the latter cannot deliberately enter into trance' as Eliade states.<sup>406</sup> So the difference

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<sup>404</sup> *Firewalking and Religious Healing*, p. 52.

<sup>405</sup> Jakobsen, *Shamanism*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>406</sup> *Shamanism*, p. 24.

between health and sickness in shamanic societies is defined by the person's will not to submit to his illness, but make the best of it.

Grotowski focused on the unblocking of the actor's psychology via the unblocking of the body, probably believing in the idea that the body is the mirror of the soul. His ideas also resonate in the modern theories of Herzlich and Pierret who, writing on the issues of healing and health, recognise the intimate relation between mental and physical disease. They maintain that 'at the present time, perhaps more than any other, "morale" and the psyche are thought of in connection with organic disease. The slightest thing is thought and readily admitted to be "psychosomatic".<sup>407</sup> Every complex consists of an interaction between mind and body. When a person is confronted with a conflict or a situation that is too much to bear, then it is usual for a physical reaction to occur. This can vary from muscular tension to serious illness. In any case, illness should be confronted as an ally instead of an enemy as it warns people of something unbalanced in their life, enabling them to take action and avoid a worse situation. Instead of considering such a physical reaction as a defeat, it should be embraced.<sup>408</sup> A kind of therapy that takes into consideration the psychosomatic nature of physical blockages is, therefore, necessary to unblock the human psyche and promote expressiveness.

Grotowski achieved this by gradually releasing the participants' accumulated anxiety, a process that also occurs in Anastenaria as was indicated in the previous chapter of this thesis. It is to be remembered that, according to Danforth, Anastenaria 'is above all a system of ritual therapy concerned with

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<sup>407</sup> *Concepts of Health, Illness and Disease*, p. 94.

<sup>408</sup> Claudine Herzlich and Janine Pierret, *Concepts of Health, Illness and Disease*, pp. 94-5.

diagnosis and treatment of a wide variety of illnesses'.<sup>409</sup> Danforth's documents indicate that this ritual, where physical movement is central, is the Greek version of modern shamanism. The idea that contradictory feelings within the same person, which are not shared by others, might be the cause of his or her illness and, at the same time, the motivation for artistic expression, like dancing, can also be observed in Anastenaria. There is a testimony by a female anastenarissa who talks about how, after bitter arguments with her mother-in-law, she would go and lie down; her body would be shaking and trembling like a fish. It was as if her 'body were dancing'.<sup>410</sup> Anastenarides emphasise the cathartic outburst or the release of tension while they are dancing. So the body either shakes because of tension or the person dances to release tension before it accumulates to a harmful degree. Although the anastenarides are not really concerned with the artistry of their dance, their dance is a disciplined one, developed in a certain rhythm and with specific steps. The role of dancing as a performance of an inner emotional state is also underlined by Eliade. He refers to a shaman who, 'ill at the age of twenty; he began to sing and felt better. Up to his sixtieth year he could display tireless energy. If necessary he could drum, dance, jump all night'.<sup>411</sup> Also, amongst the Tumbuka, a Bantu-speaking people of Southeastern Africa, Lussemba, a woman healer of the community, when she [divines], 'dances her disease'. Like all prophets-healers 'she dances to transform an initiatory illness into a divinatory trance blessed with diagnostic power'.<sup>412</sup> Likewise, Danforth explains that 'Anastenaria [...] provides the anastenarides with an opportunity to

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<sup>409</sup> Danforth, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 5. 1979, p. 144.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>411</sup> *Shamanism*, p. 28.

<sup>412</sup> Steven Friedson, *Dancing Prophets*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 9.

experience a cathartic release of anxiety into a state of joy, power, and health'.<sup>413</sup> When this is done, the anastenarides can suggest treatment for others who ask for their help.

It was not Grotowski's intention to work directly on illness, but he realised that physical blockages stood in the way of undisturbed artistic expression. Therefore, he viewed therapy as a vital part of the practical work within the wider realm of the theatre. The actor is the person who initiates such a process of self-development, while the spectator is invited to follow the actor's example by becoming activated. This type of spectator leaves the theatre in a state of harmony, while the one who resists taking part in the process of unveiling and keeps the mask of lies intact at all costs leaves the performance even more confused. Grotowski was convinced that 'on the whole, even in the latter case, the performance represents a form of social psychotherapy, whereas for the actor it is only a therapy if he has given himself whole-heartedly to his risk'.<sup>414</sup> Accordingly, Grotowski views two aspects of the therapeutic role of the theatre: the spectator's point of view and the actor's. In the first, the audience identifies with the behaviour of one character or the spectator relates to several patterns of behaviour that are incarnated by more than one character and evaluates his or her own behaviour. In the second, the actor sets out to explore the role through his or her own self.

Using these elements, Grotowski wished to attack and progressively awaken the audience's unconscious so that they would be motivated to join the same process for themselves. As Shevtsova observes:

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<sup>413</sup> *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, p.141.

<sup>414</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 47.

The religious, or better still, mystical dimension of Grotowski's work with actors, derived from a vocation no longer conceived primarily in professional terms. The vocation is for a way of life. Paradoxically, the actor's journey inwards towards a heightened inner state is repeated publicly in performance.<sup>415</sup>

Shevtsova's 'journey inwards' indicates that the real value of the insight into oneself is redeemed only if shared. Roger Grainer, in his comparison between drama and healing, echoes the same meaning: 'It is in the reaching out that healing lies'.<sup>416</sup> This is an aspect that is found equally in Grotowski's work, shamanism and psychoanalytic therapy.

For Grotowski, the actor who works in isolation can only create artificialities, that is, sterile imitation of actions which lack innate quality and focus solely on the audience's recognition. As a director, Grotowski made clear his preference for group work since he believed it was the only way for the actor to achieve insight and sincere artistry. The only time that he worked alone with an actor for months was during the initial stages of building up the character of the Prince. He wanted to work with very sensitive layers of Cieslak's psychology. Grotowski worked with Cieslak on the latter's first love, an experience that wavered between sensuality and longing, but did not include sexuality. They searched and found the most intimate impressions and incentives of that period of Cieslak's adolescence. It was as if the experience of that period, which the actor recalled, emancipated him from the body's weightiness through physical tasks. Thus, there was no weight or pain any more, but everything happened through stimulation and small physical movements that appeared in his memory. They based the delivery of Calderon's text on this experience. When Cieslak was ready, they started connecting his part

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<sup>415</sup> *Theatre and Cultural Interaction*, Sydney: Sydney Studies, 1993, p. 31.

<sup>416</sup> *Drama and Healing*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1990, p. 20.

with the other actors' parts, but slowly, so that Cieslak did not lose the connection with his personal experience. It was only after some time that the actor was ready to perform in front of an audience.<sup>417</sup> Grotowski and Cieslak worked together in an environment of mutual trust. A premature exposure of the actor to the group might have made his work superficial.

Despite the fact that the Prince was 'born' in a protected environment, he 'grew up' and 'communicated' within the 'risky' environment of the group. It was the whole group that consequently attempted to communicate the sacrifice of the Prince to a wider social environment, that is, to the audience. Thus, the actors made a total gift of themselves to the spectators.<sup>418</sup> Similarly, in terms of group psychotherapy, where therapy develops among a group of patients, healing is mainly based on the feeling of belonging, of being a part of something wider and more secure than oneself. The groups in this type of psychotherapy take the form of a community within the community, but the rule of the game in these cases is 'sharing' without *ex parte* advantage. The following passage by the psychologists Sidney Bloch and Eric Crouch further clarifies this idea:

It is most probable that a patient will derive benefit from a sense of being valued by his fellow group members. The experience of feeling cared for, supported, and understood by his peers brings in its turn a sense of belonging and comfort with a distinct potential for the bolstering of self-esteem.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> Grotowski, in an interview with Margaret Croyden, directed and produced by Merrill Brockway, CBS, 1970.

<sup>418</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 16.

<sup>419</sup> *Therapeutic Factors in Group Psychotherapy*, Oxford, New York, Tokyo: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 2.

This suggestion can be more precise if we consider some factors of the individual's therapy within the framework of a group.<sup>420</sup> Bloch and Crouch argue, moreover, that one of the factors of group psychoanalysis is the feeling of acceptance, that is, the individual gains the sense of being valued by the members of his or her group. By listening to other members' personal issues, people do not feel isolated any more, for they discover that there are cases similar to their own. The importance of this factor is increased when a member of the group can practically help others by consulting the members of the group. This strengthens the belief that people, involved in this process, are useful to themselves and others by exchanging consultation. Therefore, the people in a group learn together. They learn from each other's development and from the ways in which they confront their issues. On the same lines, Jennings claims that dramatherapy, a psychotherapeutic system in which the patients assume roles through which they express their psychological issues during the sessions, is more effective when practiced within communities of people, although she agrees that dramatherapy can be applied individually.<sup>421</sup> Healing is not found in isolation, but in our relationships with others. It is the bridged distance between I and Thou.

In Paratheatre, Grotowski introduced the role of the guides, as being those people who, after having experienced the journey of self-exploration for themselves, initiated others into the same process. In the very late sixties, the group of the Laboratory Theatre was joined by the newer group of actors who had worked with Grotowski in the mid-late sixties, and started preparing themselves for the Paratheatrical seminars. At first, the members of the group started organising seminars for a small number of people, with Grotowski as

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<sup>420</sup> Bloch and Crouch, *Therapeutic Factors in Group Psychotherapy*, p. 246.

<sup>421</sup> *Introduction to Dramatherapy: Theatre and Healing—Ariadne's Ball of Thread*, London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, p. 35.

supervisor.<sup>422</sup> It was only in the late seventies that a vast crowd of people participated in Paratheatrical activities and most of the references, such as *On the Road to Active Culture* and other articles, are from this period. It was then that each member of the former Laboratory Theatre took the role of guide, the one who organised seminars with specific tasks. They mainly worked as the initiative force for the group, so that the group avoided inertia, which would have destroyed its rhythm and crushed its creativity. In the processes in Paratheatre, the guides shared their animating capacity with the participants, since the purpose of the activities was to stimulate the participants to learn how to become self-motivated.

According to the psychiatrist Irving D. Yalom, the instillation of hope and the motivation of the participant are the main factors in psychotherapy, as in all types of therapy.<sup>423</sup> Psychotherapeutic methods require that the psychiatrists and psychotherapists not only try to clarify the patterns of the patient's action and to realise the real nature of the problem in order to solve it, but also to be themselves subject to therapy.<sup>424</sup> In this respect, therapy also encompasses healthy people. In therapy sessions, the therapist, either by undergoing psychoanalysis or by working out problems with the supervisor that have developed as a result of sessions with their patients, re-evaluates his or her own self.<sup>425</sup> The purpose of this psychotherapeutic method appears in the following passage: 'the therapist's self-knowledge plays a role in every aspect of therapy. An inability to perceive countertransference responses, to recognise personal distortions and blind spots, or to use one's own feelings and fantasies in one's

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<sup>422</sup> Francois Kahn, 'The Vigil', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 224.

<sup>423</sup> *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, New York: Basic Books, 1995, pp. 1-16.

<sup>424</sup> Bloch and Crouch, *Therapeutic Factors in Group Psychotherapy*, p. 29.

<sup>425</sup> Not every psychiatrist is obliged to ascribe to this type of therapy. This therapy is just highly recommended for the psychiatrist.

work will limit the effectiveness of any therapist'.<sup>426</sup> Consequently, therapists also dislocate themselves from their behavioral patterns in order to observe them and to unblock their actions. First for themselves and then for others, therapists follow the ecstatic procedure in which they let old, unconscious forms go in order to engender behaviours over which they have more control. This does not imply that their behaviour necessarily changes. It means that they are more aware of what motivates their behaviour and, therefore, choose their actions rather than being held hostage by them.

Grotowski opened up his activities to others besides actors and, thus, introduced self-exploration as a necessity for everyone. In the Paratheatrical projects the participants, led by the guides, 'aimed at self exploration and exploration of another person in the course of intensive common action'.<sup>427</sup> This innovative 'social' behaviour describes some of the Paratheatrical activities. Grimes, who participated in Paratheatrical projects, maintains that some of the activities in the forest constituted a parashamanic form of hunting. They were 'postindustrial parashamans', where killing was not the goal of this type of hunting. Grimes shares his experiences of this ceremony:

The hunting is symbolic insofar as no animals are killed, but quite concrete inasmuch as one's social self is drastically curtailed and one's body pushed to its limits and beyond. In shamanism one hunts for an animal or power. In parashamanism one hunts for the best way to hunt.<sup>428</sup>

The participants explored themselves, free from any type of antagonism or competition, in games reminiscent of children's games that were addressed to adults. Narcissism was not the goal, and Grimes did not feel that he was the

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<sup>426</sup> Yalom, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, p. 526.

<sup>427</sup> Kolankiewicz, *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 86.

<sup>428</sup> 'Route to the Mountain', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 272.

centre of either social or cosmic attention. The composition of the group was varied, comprised of people of different ages, social status, occupations, and nationalities, facts that helped people to view their possible 'deficiencies' in a multicultural perspective. In other words, what is considered a 'deficiency' in a culture could be acceptable behaviour in another. Grimes comments on the way Grotowski confronted cultural and ceremonial gestures. He says that 'Grotowski does not encourage the importation of techniques, especially those imbedded in long, rich cultural traditions. Rather, staff persons coming from those traditions are encouraged to find some new action, which is then tasted for its shareability with others'.<sup>429</sup> As disease and health were a matter of cultural context for Grotowski, he challenged this idea by bringing together Euro-American people in transcultural groups with a different cosmic perception. The participants received training that helped rid them of voice blockages and also of energy-physical blockages, which were strongly 'connected with the life of a man that he has to be acted upon as an entity'.<sup>430</sup> 'Beehive', the group exercise, was based on the spontaneous reactions of the group with the help of a group leader, worked out as a 'psycho – and auto-psychotherapy, which can have an essential importance in practice'.<sup>431</sup> With this exercise, Grotowski tried to 'counteract the fact that people do not understand one another and cannot cope with their own lives, even though they want to understand each other and live as fully as possible'.<sup>432</sup> The widening of human consciousness cannot exclude the development of an environmental consciousness, as seen in the fourth chapter of this thesis. It was

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<sup>429</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 271.

<sup>430</sup> Kolankiewicz, *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 18.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

no accident, therefore, that Grotowski located his Paratheatrical activities in the Polish countryside.<sup>433</sup>

The respect for nature as a functional part of human psychology is also present in ecstatic rituals. Anastenaria occurs in the Greek countryside, especially in May when the firewalking takes place on a prepared area in the fields. In addition, there are shamanic societies whose pre-industrial character locates them in a natural environment. Furthermore, the shaman develops a contact with the spirits of nature, like the spirit of the mountain, the river and so on. The human body's rhythms are in harmony with the rhythms of nature. The dislocation of human beings from their natural environment is usually the main cause for anxiety. The return to it under the concept of self-realisation could have therapeutic effects, a fact that Grotowski seems to have taken into serious consideration.

In the Theatre of Sources, Grotowski's work becomes more focused on the idea of the Void, the yogic notion, which Grotowski considered the place where one's origins could be found. The goal, which is one's self, is achieved through exercises that aim at tranquility of mind. Cuesta testifies that, as part of a group of different cultures, he was confronted with a great challenge: life itself.<sup>434</sup> The subject of the research was the creative process. Grotowski's research into creativity and expressiveness resonates with the suggestions of psychologist Albert Rothenberg on the common attributes among people with a creative nature. Firstly, Rothenberg claims that there is no special personality type associated with outstanding creativity.<sup>435</sup> A creative personality does not imply a

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<sup>433</sup> Kolankiewicz, *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 1.

<sup>434</sup> Paratheatre and Theatre of Sources, (conference), Brzezinka, Poland, Friday 27 September 2002. Personal notes from the panel.

<sup>435</sup> *Creativity and Madness*, p. 8.

childish or erratic behaviour in human relations. Secondly, creative people are not necessarily characterised by exceptionally high intelligence as understood in I.Q tests. Nevertheless, Rothenberg concludes, that there is only one characteristic of personality and orientation of life that is present across the board in all creative people: this is motivation. Creativity, as Cuesta explains, emerged once he had withdrawn himself from the material objects and found tranquility. Thus, the internal material emerged. The ways to it were, first, to let the internal material stand by itself and, the second, to be interdependent with the surrounding environment. Thus, on one hand, he was not supposed to make presumptions about what was around him, be it a human being, a condition, or a place and, on the other, he was encouraged to have peripheral awareness. Both methods, as Cuesta discovered, required a high level of trust; like Grimes' hunter, who waits until the critical moment comes. This theory, along with the demanding activities in the forest, as outlined in the second and third chapter of this thesis, 'burned' off his ordinary energy to allow space for serenity. At those moments, Cuesta felt that something 'came out of him'.<sup>436</sup>

Molinari, who also participated in the activities of the Theatre of Sources, explains how inner silence was secured by an external silence. She further shows how the immersion of the inner material was achieved by extended periods of waiting. She calls the guides 'the guardians of silence and solitude'. Even though, during the activities of the Theatre of Sources, she belonged to a group of people, they were told that they were not supposed to socialise with each other, nor to share or explain their experiences. They were together, yet apart. The goal was the personal consumption of the activity and not the translation of the event into a

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<sup>436</sup> Paratheatre and Theatre of Sources, (conference), Brzezinka, Poland, Friday 27 September 2002. Personal notes from the panel.

social event. Even though she states that she did not feel that she had been initiated in the slightest degree, she admits that her experience was a journey through perception, similar to school.<sup>437</sup>

As in shamanism, Grotowski's suggestions for self-realisation are a life-time activity. The shamans developed their shamanic skills throughout their lives. The same holds for Anastenaria. Once people enter the Anastenarian circle, they ideally remain there for the rest of their lives. So too for psychotherapists. Their science requires them to continue this process for their entire life. Even for a patient who visits a psychologist, the process is not accomplished in one session. It can take years for the patient to get into the habit of self-observation and individuation. Today, most of Grotowski's former collaborators conduct their own work, as mentioned in the third chapter of this thesis, which, enhanced by their personal innovation, transmits experiences that are governed by the same principles.

In the subsequent phase of the Objective Drama Research, Wolford notes that, under the guidance of Jim Slowiak, a precise physical training was designed to recondition the body of each participant, acknowledging the specific blockages of each individual. In designing a training regimen, the participants were instructed to consider their own areas of particular weaknesses.<sup>438</sup> The same attitude is underlined by Wolford in the work of Action, where Grotowski's 'work with individual participants frequently aims at something beyond the level of technical competence, subtly pushing an actor to confront aspects of his or her personality of habitual expression that obstruct artistic and/or human

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<sup>437</sup> Paratheatre and the Theatre of Sources, (conference), Saturday 28 September 2002. Personal notes from the panel.

<sup>438</sup> Wolford, *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, p. 37.

development'.<sup>439</sup> Grotowski sought to awaken in the actor's actual body what he metaphorically called the 'ancient body' or the 'reptile body', reminiscent of the swift reactions of the body of reptiles.<sup>440</sup> Having been influenced by the theories of the neuroanatomist Paul MacLean, Turner explains the reptile brain as the brain stem, that is, an upward growth of the spinal cord and the most primitive part of the brain, which people share with all vertebrate creatures and which has remained unchanged throughout the innumerable years of evolution.<sup>441</sup> The reptile brain, whether in reptiles, birds or mammals, is concerned not only with the control of movement, but also with the storage and control of what is called 'instinctive behaviour', that is, the fixed patterns of action and innate mechanisms of release.<sup>442</sup> Richards attributes the lack of contact with this part of the brain and, consequently the inactivity of the human body, to the overestimation valuation of discursive versus embodied knowledge.<sup>443</sup>

On this issue, Lendra, who taught Balinese dance during that period, explains that the inner conscious can only be awakened when the brain is engaged in some directed thinking, which occurs when the brain is occupied with monitoring the minute details of the physical action, and so does not interfere with inner consciousness.<sup>444</sup> Grotowski's demand for silence during and outside the class, discouraging socialisation and casual behaviour or avoidance of discussing one's social problems, seeks this goal. The demanding precision of physical training keeps the mind concentrated and awakens innate physical power. This physical power, which the Hindu tradition refers to as the 'sleeping power'

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<sup>439</sup> *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, p. 91.

<sup>440</sup> 'Tu es les Fils de Quelqu'un', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 296.

<sup>441</sup> 'Body, Brain and Culture', *Zygon* 18 (3), 1983, p. 226.

<sup>442</sup> See *The Future of Ritual*, London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 250-1.

<sup>443</sup> *At Work with Grotowski*, p. 5.

<sup>444</sup> 'Bali and Grotowski', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 324.

(*kundalinī*), or in Grotowski's terms as the 'reptile brain', is located at the bottom of the spine. Lendra testifies that Grotowski, during the Objective Drama Research training, 'wanted to investigate and find a way to wake up this energy centre which, when awakened, can increase our awareness, sensitivity, and perception'.<sup>445</sup> In the Balinese tradition, an artist who is able to awaken this innate physical power and to invoke this energy is considered to have *taksu*, which can be referred to as 'genuine creativity'. It is an ability acquired through education, practice, and the experience of both worldly and spiritual insights. Lendra states that in Bali, apart from artists, 'highly spiritual practitioners such as priests, priestesses, diviners and traditional healers [...] are also considered to have *taksu*'.<sup>446</sup>

The specific series of actions that derive from the process of awakening of this energy is probably very close to what Richards describes as 'inner action'. Similar to the Objective Drama Research, in the Art as Vehicle work the practitioner continues to train himself or herself with songs of tradition. Richards explains that when the practitioner begins to sing the song and to initiate something of the inner process, the song and the melody start to descend into the body.<sup>447</sup> This is a metaphor for the process of activating the energy centres of the body, of which Richards gives three examples. One is the solar plexus, the area around the stomach, which corresponds to vitality, the next is the area of the heart, and last is the area around and above the head, which relates to a more subtle, spiritual energy.<sup>448</sup> Richards suggests work on the energy centres as a personal model of the way the songs work in his organism. It seems, however, a

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<sup>445</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 325.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>447</sup> 'The Edge-Point of Performance', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 435.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 435.

model, which has a lot in common with the Hindu model of the elevation of *Kundalinī*, which is depicted as two serpents which revolve around the spine towards the area of the head to the area in between the eyes. When Grotowski sensed that Richards had walked a long distance along this path of transformation of energy, or rather 'inner action', he said: 'Now, Thomas, you begin to look to pass something which is appearing in your work to your colleagues', repeating the shamanic or the guru tradition, where innate knowledge, when acquired, should be transmitted.<sup>449</sup>

Aware of the traditional and modern forms of therapy, Grotowski took upon himself the role of a new type of 'healer', who vaccinates traditional and modern theories of therapy with the 'virus' of theatre. Neither a shaman nor a leader of a particular society with a specific religion, mythology or tradition, Grotowski borrows elements of therapy from all religions and philosophical genres to find their principles and transfer them to the modern world. He did not attribute human suffering to external supernatural powers, that is, spirits of demons or spirits of ancestors, but traced the source of suffering within the person who is subject to, or can be subject to, such a crisis. The 'fight with the spirits' is translated into psychotherapeutic terms as the subconscious elements which take the form of images in one's fantasies that disturb one's well-being and are translated as mental illness. Grotowski transmuted the participants' fantasy into creativity. He did not rely on the accident of such a crisis to befall the actor as is the case with shamans or traditional medicine men. Instead, he induced a type of crisis in the participants of his work and used that crisis as a tool to free their artistic expression. Grotowski sought to disarm 'healthy' people, and his projects were

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<sup>449</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 436.

organised for just such people. He explains that sometimes there were cases in which 'the blockages require[d] medical help, or psychiatry or else it would take too long to counteract'.<sup>450</sup> Grotowski excluded pathologically ill cases from his practices because they required medical treatment that he was not qualified to provide, even though he took into consideration the fact that long treatment might replace medication. This becomes apparent from his phrase 'or else it would take too long to counteract'. He had possibly realised that the work with those cases in a mixed group would affect the homogeneity of the group and, consequently, the concurrent psychological evolution of its members. People with severe difficulties in coping with their blockages, or who were unable to cope with them for pathological reasons, would have condemned the group to slow down to the rhythm of its weakest member.

Grotowski's position also differs from modern psychotherapy. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Freud introduced the theory of psychoanalysis and formulated the notion of the subconscious, in a method which promoted systematic self-recognition through the analysis of a patient's familial patterns. In the middle of the same century, Jung extended Freudian methods to include data from the collective unconscious, as analysed in the second chapter of this thesis, where the patient may extend the process of individuation, Jung's term for mental development, with data that goes beyond the patients' limited familial preconditioning. While Freud and Jung were developing their theories, the theories of group psychoanalyses were also developing. The patients' analyses within a group of other patients with similar issues were of great significance. These methods of psychotherapy are mainly based on the verbal communication

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<sup>450</sup> Quoted in Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 187.

of the patient's self-destructive and socialising tendencies with a therapist and this is the point where Grotowski's practices differ. In traditional methods, the therapist provides the patient with a base to develop his or her own solutions to his or her issues by means of discussion. The psychotherapeutic sessions, whether they concern a one-to-one procedure or take place in a group, employ the verbal utterance of the patient's problem and/or the verbal exchange of the patient's emotional state, notions and ideas with the therapist or the group. In contrast, Grotowski considered the body to be a quicker vehicle than the mind, as it has simpler modes of expression. An anxiety that has many different mental expressions might take only one form in the body. For example, blocked sexual energy can lead to a variety of behaviours, such as aggressiveness towards the object of desire or communication problems with parents. Problems such as this may result in a tightened pelvis, for instance, or difficulty in speaking. As soon as the blockage thus expressed has been removed and the person involved has recognised his or her problem, he or she is free in the short term.

It is to be emphasised that the Paratheatrical Acting Therapy project is not to be confused with the practices of dramatherapy. Although they both have similar purposes, their methods stand far apart. Dramatherapy is a psychotherapeutic method in which, as referred to above, a group of participants experience other realities by entering different roles or personas in order to cure themselves. Some of the specific aims of dramatherapy are 'enabling communication, stimulating new thinking, providing means of resolution, developing new skills, transforming unhelpful experiences, looking at choices, enacting new journeys, understanding gender issues, exploring politics and so

on'.<sup>451</sup> In dramatherapy there is a desire for harmony and beauty. There is the common goal of creation, for a result that might concern the problems of each member of the group and yet, transcends individual problems.<sup>452</sup> The role is used as a way of releasing and experiencing emotions and at the same time as a mask to protect the individual's interaction with the group. Dramatherapy places great importance on the use of costumes or masks.<sup>453</sup> In this way, the distance between the person who acts and the character who is employed to express what the person is afraid of doing directly is guaranteed. Whatever artistic result may be derived from the experience is secondary.

From a historical point of view, the science of dramatherapy started to take shape after the 50's, approximately the same period that Grotowski started his career. Dramatherapy took its first steps then, yet was not an established method as it is today. In Grotowski's Paratheatrical projects, never did the participants adopt any other personality but their own. When Grotowski passed to the phase of Paratheatre, dramatherapy was much more developed as a genre, but it is doubtful whether Grotowski considered its methods to enrich his activities. Of great interest is Molik's reaction when he was asked in 2001 about the relationship between dramatherapy and the work he conducted during the Paratheatrical projects. In 1976, Molik conducted a project under the name of Acting Therapy project, which sought to open the body's resonators and develop the participant's vocal capacity. According to Grotowski in an article in *Le Monde* of the same year, with reference to the Acting Therapy project, he emphasised that 'in particular, we know how to determine the origin of certain vocal and

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<sup>451</sup> Jennings, *Introduction to Dramatherapy*, p. 33.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>453</sup> Jennings and Eise Minde, *Art Therapy and Dramatherapy: Masks of the Soul*, London: Kingsley Publishers, 1993, p. 17.

respiratory blockages, blockages of muscular response, and we can pinpoint the cause of the particular trauma'.<sup>454</sup> This statement confirms the fact that the project was far removed from any medical therapy. Grotowski's approach required vocal exercises or exercises that included songs and dancing. Thus, when Molik was asked whether this work had any relation to dramatherapy his immediate reaction showed that he had no clear idea about how dramatherapy worked. Then, when he tried to think of a possible relationship between the two, based on his limited knowledge of dramatherapy, he denied that any existed. He assumed that in dramatherapy people take different roles out of the human or animal kingdom, and use them as 'masks' in order to express emotions and complexes that they would otherwise be too inhibited to reveal. The mask assists in this process by establishing a sense of security and safety that Molik consciously wanted to avoid. He insisted that the title given to the project at that time should lead not to confusion since, to his mind, it did not invite comparison with dramatherapeutic methods.<sup>455</sup> In the period of Productions, the role was used as a vehicle for exposition instead of protection and, as mentioned above, in Paratheatrical projects the notion of 'role' was not at issue. Grotowski believed that to protect people from exposing their weaknesses, an exposure which would alter the status of those weaknesses, would contradict his aim of eradicating conventional behaviours.

Grotowski's theatrical and post-theatrical work appears to be troubled by therapeutic methods on a transcultural basis. It is a practice that combines the equal development of both the body and the mind in the here-and-now, despite the sociocultural background of the individual. In this respect, one can trace

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<sup>454</sup> Quoted in Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 187.

<sup>455</sup> Laboratorium Theatre: From Cracow to Wroclaw, (conference), Pontedera, Saturday 13 October 2001. Personal communication

similarities between Grotowski's views and the theories of a relatively recent school of psychology called Transpersonal Psychotherapy. The content of this branch of psychology is outlined in the following passage:

The term 'transpersonal' literally means 'beyond the personal' or 'beyond personality'. Those who subscribe to transpersonal psychology feel that when human beings identify only with the body, the ego, or the personality, they have an extremely limited view of themselves. Consequently, transpersonal psychology has expanded the domain of investigation to encompass the spiritual dimension of human beings.<sup>456</sup>

This approach to psychology cannot consider human beings without their transcendental powers, like meta-needs, collective consciousness, peak experiences, ecstasy, mystical experience and many others. One of the results of the field of transpersonal psychology is the recognition of the transcendental unity that exists between almost all ancient traditions. They consider personality to be merely the ephemeral form of human beings. If only this aspect of being human is acknowledged, then the transcendental needs to which all traditions refer are ignored. In this respect, 'health is seen as primarily involving a disidentification from personality rather than modification of it'.<sup>457</sup> Grotowski appeared uninterested in modifying a participant's personality in terms of social or cultural conventions. Presumably, he believed that people make their own culture and thus they have the power not to remain trapped in it. People can revolt against the givens of their culture, starting with changes in their own personalities.

An example that combines and, at the same time, elucidates the healing effects of Grotowski's activities, mainly from Paratheatre onwards, appears to be the practical work of one of his former students, who subsequently became his

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<sup>456</sup> Anees A. Sheikh, Katharina S. Sheikh, *Eastern and Western Approaches to Healing: Ancient Wisdom and Modern Knowledge*, New York: Wiley Publications, 1989, p. 224.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

collaborator in the Paratheatrical activities in Poland and Canada, Ryzcard Nieoczym.<sup>458</sup> Originally from Poland, Nieoczym lives and works with his family in Toronto. Along with his work in mainstream theatre as a director, his main interest is concentrated on activities that resemble Paratheatre. The Wilderness is one of his major activities, which takes place in the Canadian countryside and lasts for one month each session. People who take part in it are usually chosen by Nieoczym after he has met them. During the workshop, the participants all live together in tents and work throughout the day, and sometimes into the night. They carry out daily tasks and exercises that encourage the unblocking of the respiratory system, the body and the artistic expression of the people involved. Nieoczym also organises workshops lasting only a few days, which have the same focus: the release of the human body and expression. Having worked with Grotowski during the very last phase of the Laboratory Theatre and for the first years of Paratheatre and having shared many ideas with him, Nieoczym suggested the use of the Greek prefix 'para' next to 'theatre' to indicate activities that were beside yet beyond theatre. His collaboration with Grotowski continued in Canada.

By means of theatre, Nieoczym seeks to develop a special kind of therapy comparable to Grotowski's. His methods, which I experienced in three workshops in 2001, have given me an understanding of Grotowski's practices. In a five-day workshop in Thessaloniki, in February 2001, Nieoczym focused on the relaxation of the muscles and the development of the voice to its full capacity. The workshop was organised by the Institute of Dramatherapy in Northern Greece. Nieoczym's group consisted of eight people, five of whom had taken part as a

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<sup>458</sup> After studying under Grotowski, Nieoczym himself began conducting workshops rich in post-theatrical Grotowskian elements. These workshops take place mainly in Canada, but also in the United States and Europe.

group in other workshops with him in the past. The group was comprised of three psychologists, one trainee doctor, one psychiatrist, one teacher, one actress, and one businesswoman who had studied psychology in the past. Nieoczym invariably addressed his seminars to those concerned with the development of the expressive capacities of their body and voice regardless of their theatrical background, as Grotowski had done.

The aim of the workshops was therapeutic in a wider sense. The group focused on the unblocking of the sounding boards (vocal and respiratory resonators) of the participants. His approach was generally based on ecstasy. His exercises focused on increasing the physical urge of the participants to become involved in the exercises by exceeding their limits. The exercises were either physical with no verbal communication or physical with verbal communication, which used an ancient text as a code, like *The Bacchae* or fragments of the *Song of Songs*, or a traditional Greek song. One of the basic exercises aimed at eliminating the inhibitions people may have felt towards physical contact. In one of the sessions I attended, the participants lay on the floor and came into physical contact with one another, simply recognising each other with our bodies. We also sought to exchange human physical energy, involving only the senses and not the emotions, though nothing sexual was implied. One of the exercises that followed was the breaking up of the group so that Nieoczym could concentrate on each person separately. Each of us was then asked to open up his or her body to a given rhythm without imitating any stereotypical movement. The requirement was that the person should allow the music to enter his or her body, leading it to pulsatory movement.

The main focus of the seminar was the delivery of a fragment of *The Bacchae* and the *Songs of Songs*. We worked with *The Bacchae* as a group and then as individuals but the purpose, established by Nieoczym, was always that the experience gained in the individual work should be shared and applied in the group. When the individual work was completed, the group reconstituted itself. Nieoczym encouraged each participant to deliver the text in a recitative rhythm while he tapped the rhythm with his feet. It was a monotonous rhythm, which forced the feet to beat the floor monotonously. It was the same rhythm that Anastenarides use for their dancing. After this rhythm was established in the bodies of the participants, Nieoczym encouraged moving to the next step, which was the alteration of the tension of the body and the tonicity of the participant's voice, always preserving the same rhythm. In successful cases this exercise turned into an ecstatic dance.

In the *Song of Songs*, we participants were asked to find the rhythm of the text ourselves, putting ourselves into demanding physical movements (rolling on the floor, moving in four directions, jumping up and down) while we recited the text. When the time for the song arrived, we were called to change recitation into singing and sing one out of a possible number of three traditional Greek songs from Asia Minor. The group chose one. Again we worked as a group, as well as individuals, who always kept in mind their return to the team.

Two conclusions can be drawn from these exercises. The first is the fact that the blocked resonators of the participant's bodies were a result of our inhibited creativeness. When we allowed our bodies to go into a specific rhythm, the movements were very limited and stereotypical. Most importantly we did not communicate with our partners in a couple of exercises or with the rest of the

group in group exercises. Monotony is not necessarily limiting when it is through choice. When it is the result of resignation, then it is fruitless. Respiration was found to be very short and limited to daily habits and conventions. Some of us, when asked to deliver a vocal sound, found our voices either very soft or very hard, with a limited range for variation. When Nieoczym helped us to relax some muscles and open up the chest by lifting it up so that we could breathe fully, the range of our voices expanded. Day by day, we increasingly trusted the group and the group us. The result was that we allowed ourselves to develop our capacities more effectively. The second conclusion was that when the blocked participant entered into an intense rhythm, that is, into a trance, then his or her reactions were closer to hysteria than to ecstasy. The participant in this case was overwhelmed by the rhythm, which he or she was unable to control and turn it into freedom and creativity. Instead, the rhythm broke down and released uncontrolled emotions that overwhelmed the participant.

As a participant in this group, I tried to discover new variations in the given rhythm of *The Bacchae*. At first I managed to slow down the delivery of the text or to deliver it quicker than I had started it. My body followed and the exercise resulted in an ecstatic dance with recitation of the text. Nevertheless, when I tried to speed up the text whilst simultaneously extending the range of my voice, I felt my heart start beating very quickly. At first I thought of controlling this palpitation, but it was impossible. I started having thoughts of despair, not because I was afraid of physical death, but of emotional hopelessness. I was in a condition of mental chaos where I had nowhere to stand. I saw Nieoczym encouraging me to take it even further. I was afraid. I lowered the tonality of my voice and slowed down my rhythm. I did not want to stop abruptly. When later I asked him to

explain what went wrong, he was reluctant to answer. This is his attitude to every exercise. His premise privileges personal experience over verbal analysis. He told me, however, that when after a point I started doing projections I lost the coordination of the rhythm with my inner state. My explanation for this is that when my voice reached a level that no longer felt comfortable, I too became uneasy and all my fears surfaced because I did not dare, at that moment, to risk taking it further. More simply, I just did not relax. Therefore, at that moment, every undesirable outcome came into my mind based on my past experiences and I projected them onto the present time; I did not let the present time become an arena for unique creativity. The next question, which came from another participant, was about the difference between hysteria and ecstasy. Nieoczym suggested that hysteria leads to a trance that is not pleasant, whereas ecstasy brings about euphoria. 'The only difference', he said, 'that we are missing after Freud is that hysteria is the first step to ecstasy'. Along Grotowski's lines, Nieoczym maintained that verbal psychoanalysis is not enough to release human anxieties. He called for the psychologists of the group to draw away from ideas of medication and focus on the unblocking of the body by means of physical exercise, and the development of a 'feel' for acting.

Observing the healing aspect of Grotowski's work, Osinski suggests that, during the Art as Vehicle period, Grotowski created actions which served the same purpose as the Eleusinian Mysteries served in Ancient Greek society.<sup>459</sup> The social institutions of ancient Greek society, in which the mysteries are included, and the way they may relate to Grotowski's work is the subject of the following chapter.

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<sup>459</sup> 'Grotowski Blazes the Trails', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 395.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Initiatory Mysteries: parallels between Grotowski's work and the cult of Dionysus*

According to Osinski, Grotowski's activities resemble a particular type of initiatory shamanic practice—the Eleusinian mysteries. As a result of having witnessed *Action* as a part of the daily activity in Pontedera in 1988, Osinski asserts that this opus is a composition of archetypal elements simultaneously related to several traditions. He explains that the context of *Action* is consciously developed, and so it is a strict composition whose sense, significance, and possible narrative motifs have a common coordinate in the consciousness of the doers.<sup>460</sup> Osinski also observes that the artistic 'explorations' in Pontedera are carried out in silence and seclusion.<sup>461</sup> Citing Peter Brook's comments on Grotowski's work, which suggests that from time immemorial there have been centres similar to the one conducted by Grotowski in Pontedera, Osinski compares these centres to institutions for mysteries, that is, centres for work on oneself.<sup>462</sup> For him, the work in Pontedera should be placed in a larger context of sources, cultural roots and traditions and may have analogies with the ancient Greek mysteries.<sup>463</sup> On this point he comments:

I think that here, in that Tuscan village, emerges something similar to what the Eleusinian mysteries were, for example, in the life of ancient Greece. It appears that the cultural and social context is completely different now than it was a thousand years ago. Man too is different, and yet the question arises: what do we have in common with those people?...I am not claiming that what Grotowski does with his group is the Eleusinian mysteries, but that in our culture it can have a similar function...I am also aware that in

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<sup>460</sup> 'Grotowski Blazes the Trails', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 390.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 393.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 393.

Grotowski's present research, which strives to tap hidden and forgotten knowledge of thousands of years ago, what is at stake is not a performance or its evaluation...For Grotowski, the game is played for different stakes. Surely the highest possible.<sup>464</sup>

Osinski observes that the search for a 'forgotten knowledge', an urge that modern people might have 'in common with those people', is satisfied in what Grotowski symbolically calls the 'I-I' relationship. This is a relationship that can be found in the discovering of the self within oneself and through one's forebears. However, Grotowski seeks a spiritual ancestry that is more than just a genealogical descent. Moreover, he wonders whether his work can touch something which is no longer linked to the beginnings, that is, a certain historical moment, but to *the beginning*, a moment that stands beyond time.<sup>465</sup>

Wolford further clarifies Grotowski's intentions. She specifically claims:

Grotowski has repeatedly stated that his goal in approaching ritual art is not to formulate new methodologies or tricks of performance, but rather to discover "something which is so old that all distinction between aesthetic genres is no longer of use" (1988:36). He speaks of a type of performing art 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"-a type of performance associated with very ancient ritual traditions. Grotowski posits that such forms of performance are rooted in the period "before the separation between art and rite and between spectacular and participatory"... a time before artistic creation was separated from its ritual function.<sup>466</sup>

Grotowski calls this pre-separated activity 'art as a way of knowledge'.<sup>467</sup>

According to Wolford, the Eleusinian or the Orphic Mysteries might be seen as examples of such ancient traditions in which sacred knowledge was preserved

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<sup>464</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 395.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 377.

<sup>466</sup> *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, p.115.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115

and transmitted through performative means. An overview of the institution of the Eleusinian mysteries might shed light on the intentions of Grotowski's work.

Eleusis, twenty-three kilometres from Athens, appears to have been colonised between 1580-1500 BC, but the first sanctuary was built in the fifteenth century BC. It is in this same century, as well, that the mysteries were inaugurated. They were celebrated in Eleusis for nearly two thousand years.<sup>468</sup> There were the Lesser mysteries, the rites of the Greater mysteries and the final Epopeteia, the ceremony where the mysteries were carried out. Their practices revolved around the myth of the goddesses Demeter and Persephone.

The myth of Persephone and Demeter preceded Homer, yet the myth that was manifested in the Eleusinian mysteries was the one described by him. According to Karl Kerényi's version, Persephone leaves her mother Demeter for a remote place where she plays with the daughters of Oceanos and picks flowers.<sup>469</sup> There, the god of the Underworld appears and offers her a flower that thrills and surprises her. Immediately the earth opens and the girl is taken to the realm of Hades. When Demeter hears Persephone's sobs, she tears the diadem from her head, wraps herself in garments of mourning, and wanders about for nine days, without eating or bathing, bearing two burning torches. On the tenth day she meets with the goddess Hekate and they go to the god of the sun, Helios, from whom Demeter learns the identity of her daughter's ravisher. Her grief turns to anger; she leaves the gods and goes among humankind. In order not to be recognised, she assumes a hideous form.

Thus, she comes to Eleusis and sits by the communal well. This well is close by the palace of Keleos, the King of Eleusis. Queen Metaneira comes to

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<sup>468</sup> George Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, London: Princeton, 1962, p. 41.

<sup>469</sup> Karl Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967, pp. 34-44.

the well with her daughters, having left her little son Demophoon at home. He is still in need of a nurse and after meeting Demeter at the well, the Queen agrees to accept her services in this capacity. Without being recognised as the great goddess, she is invited to the palace. As the days go by, the child grows and thrives like a god, though he has been given nothing to eat. Every night Demeter lays him in the fire, like a log. This she does secretly. But the Queen, being curious about the way her son has become godlike, interrupts the strange action of the goddess. The boy is then taken away. Demeter turns round angrily and makes herself known. Her admonition is addressed not only to the Queen, but to all humankind: 'Unknowing are ye mortals and thoughtless: ye know not whether good or evil approaches'.<sup>470</sup> By her action, Metaneira has prevented Demeter from making the Queen's boy immortal.

Thus, all humans are condemned to mortality. Demeter demands a sanctuary for herself and withdraws, allowing no plants to grow on the earth. The gods receive no more sacrifices until Zeus sends Hermes to Hades to bring the Kore [Persephone] back to her mother. Hades feigns wholehearted obedience, yet secretly gives Persephone a tiny pomegranate seed to eat. This makes her return to him for a third of the year, when she reigns as the Queen of the Underworld. After Demeter sees her daughter, she hastens to the King of Eleusis to initiate his people and to show them the sacred rites by which an ineffable secret is solemnised. The Homeric myth concludes 'with the praise of the two blessings of the goddesses: the inner blessing, the vision which confers beatitude

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<sup>470</sup> Kerenyi, *Eleusis*, p. 41.

[sic], and the outer blessing of wealth, which the Two Goddesses pour forth on those who love them'.<sup>471</sup>

The mysteries were separated into the Lesser and Greater mysteries. Kerényi notes that the Lesser mysteries, which took place on the banks of the Illysos River at Agrai in the beginning of Spring, served the purpose of instruction, which suggests preparation for what was to occur at Eleusis.<sup>472</sup> It is assumed that the Lesser mysteries had a more physical character. Kerényi indicates that two preparatory actions took place in the mysteries of February/March. One is that the initiates, known as the *mystae*, had to wash themselves in the winter waters of the Illysos and the other is that they were required to sacrifice a pig to Demeter. When the initiates were clean and ready, they were allowed to receive instruction, for which there are no references to date.

The Greater Mysteries began on the sixteenth of Boedromion, in other words mid-September. On that day the initiates bathed, in the sea this time, which Kerényi assumes also occurred in Eleusis. On the seventeenth of the same month, the peasants offered a sow to Demeter. It is likely that the initiates had previously sacrificed an animal on whose fleece they were to sit in silence. On the eighteenth, the initiates are said to have stayed at home. It was possibly on this day that *kykeon*, a mixture of barley, water and mint, was prepared.<sup>473</sup> The nineteenth had the special name of *agyrmos*, which means 'gathering'. In the morning of this same day, the procession, which included the initiated, the candidates (i.e. those about to be initiated) and the crowd, moved towards Eleusis via the *Hiera Hodos*, the Sacred Road, where it arrived in the evening.

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<sup>471</sup> Kerényi, *Eleusis*, p. 44.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49-60.

<sup>473</sup> About *Kykeon* see Kerényi, *Eleusis*, p. 40.

The initiates spent the night there and the night of the twentieth was the holy night of the Epopeteia.

A well-known aspect of this ritual is the special attire of the procession. Dressed in white garments, the people held sprigs of myrtles and wore it in the hair. They carried the statue of the young god, which is assumed to have been a personification of Dionysus with his finger to his lips, calling for secrecy. The initiates also carried torches to reach their destination. The procession was eventually met at a bridge by people mocking and playing strange games, called *gephyrismos*, or 'bridge jests'.<sup>474</sup> These episodes relieved the participants of their mourning. This was also the moment for them to drink the *kykeon*, after having fasted for nine days. The women carried the drink in amphorae on their heads, and Kerényi assumes that it was at this moment that the joyous cries of *lakchos*, another name for Dionysus, were emitted. Another bridge is also discussed where the participants had to identify themselves with words that have come down to the present as their password and sign of recognition, or *synthema*.<sup>475</sup>

The officials of the Epopeteia, and in general of all of the mysteries, were: the Hierophant; the Dadouchos, the one who held the torches; the priestesses; and the Hierokerykes, the mystery heralds. The initiates were led to the *telesterion*, the main initiation room, by the Dadouchos, the second priest of the rite, who had lit the way for the procession on its ascending path the previous night.<sup>476</sup> During the classical period, the *telesterion* was a square building, fifty-eight by fifty-eight metres, and was supported by forty-two columns. It had six entrances, two on each of three sides. Against the walls there were marble stairs on which the

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<sup>474</sup> According to one report, the 'bridge jests' were performed by a female hetaera. According to another report, a man who was masked as a woman performed the jests.

<sup>475</sup> Kerényi, *Eleusis*, p. 60-65.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

initiates probably stood at various points in the ceremony. In the middle of the room there was a smaller, rectangular room, the *anaktoron*, in front of which stood the Hierophant. Before entering the *telesterion* and probably near the sacred precinct of Pluto, the procession performed a dance under the torchlight. The people in the procession and a group of dancers transformed themselves into a festive community. The entire procession did not enter the *telesterion* mainly because of lack of space. While the procession consisted of initiates of the Lesser Mysteries and possibly of people that were already initiated into the Greater Mysteries, repeated participation in the Eopteia was not forbidden. In particular, only those who had prepared themselves with special sacrifices and fasting were allowed to enter.<sup>477</sup>

The references indicate that a huge fire was lit in the *anaktoron* that gave light to the dark night. The throne of the Hierophant was turned towards the opening of the *anaktoron*. There, in a loud chanting voice, the Hierophant proclaimed that the Queen of the Dead, namely Persephone, had given birth in fire to a mighty son.<sup>478</sup> This son appears to have incorporated all the characteristics of a young Dionysus.

According to Kerényi: 'At Eleusis it must have been the Hierophant who intoned the call for Kore. He beat the *echeion*, the gong-like instrument with the voice of thunder. The Eopteia began; ineffable things were seen'.<sup>479</sup> Kerényi also mentions a vision of the underworld goddess that 'appeared', rising above the ground. He continues by explaining that 'in the second phase—how much later we do not know—the Hierophant, silent amid profound silence, displayed a

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<sup>477</sup> Kerényi, *Eleusis*, p. 88.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

mown ear of grain [a sheaf of wheat]'.<sup>480</sup> Kerenyi seems to believe that the nature of this vision, which engendered bliss in the initiates and assured the continuation of life after death, was not the effect of mass delusion. It is also possible to conclude that the context in which this experience was perceived could not have been a conventional theatrical performance, for the density of the columns in the sanctuary did not allow those standing on the marble staircases a clear sight of the events in the *anakton*. In fact, there are no sources for the specific nature of the events. However, there are references to ineffable, holy phantoms.<sup>481</sup> Something similar to the phantoms of Eleusis was discovered in one of Aeschylus' plays, perhaps in his tragedy *Oedipus*, but this play has not survived. Aeschylus was accused of divulging the secrets of Eleusis, but he was acquitted because he was able to prove that he had not been initiated and consequently could not be guilty of intentional imitation.<sup>482</sup>

It seems plausible that the initiates transubstantiated into the nature of the Goddess Demeter. They were themselves personae in their own drama. They entered the role of the goddess searching for her daughter, not in a theatrical, but in a religious way.<sup>483</sup> The *mystae* appear to have entered into a process of deliverance from the ambiguity of their mortality. In any case, the word *myisis* (initiation) conveys the same meaning as the Latin *initia* 'beginning' or more accurately 'entry'.<sup>484</sup> This process seems to have been a kind of introduction to happiness that was not based on the achievements of ordinary tasks. Pindar, the ancient Greek poet, has left us a very significant fragment, 'happy he who has

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<sup>480</sup> Kerenyi, *Eleusis*, p. 94.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 95-102.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 244-5.

<sup>484</sup> Kerenyi, *Introduction to the Science of Mythology: the Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951, p. 193.

seen this [the secret rites] before descending underground... he knows the end of life! He also knows its beginning' (Thnetoi, frag, 10). On the same subject Sophocles remarks, 'Thrice happy those among mortals who, having seen those Mysteries, will go down to Hades; only they can have true life there; for the rest, all there is evil'. (Dindorf, frag, 719, Didott, frag, 348). Nevertheless, there are no references that can encourage the assumption that the initiates in the mysteries of Eleusis believed they would obtain immortality.

It seems well established that through this initiation, as Eliade claims, human perception was modified.<sup>485</sup> To what extent and exactly how this happened cannot be proven, but it can be assumed. Scholars of high esteem, such as Kerényi and Eliade, having studied the myth of Eleusis, and the corresponding anthropological facts, agree that as the Goddess Demeter looked for her daughter (Persephone), so, in a symbolically related way, the initiate searched for his or her soul. Thus:

Eleusis was a place of *εὕρεσις*, the finding of the Kore. In this finding something was *seen*—no matter through what symbols—that was objective and subjective at once. Objectively, the idea of the goddess regaining her daughter, and therefore *herself*, flashed on the experient's [sic] soul. Subjectively, the same flash of revelation showed him his own continuity, the continued existence of all living things.<sup>486</sup>

Similarly, Eliade recalls Paul Foucart, who considers that the rituals involved 'a peregrination in darkness, various terrifying apparitions, and the sudden entrance of the mystes into a lighted meadow'.<sup>487</sup> In the Greater Mysteries the experiences of the soul after death are compared to the ordeals of the initiate. *Death* does not signify an end, but a transition. At first, the initiate wanders in darkness and

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<sup>485</sup> *A History of Religious Ideas*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 292.

<sup>486</sup> Kerényi, *An Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, p. 196.

<sup>487</sup> Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, p. 296.

undergoes all sorts of terrors; then he or she is struck by a marvelous light and discovers pure regions and meadows, hears voices, and sees dances.<sup>488</sup> There he or she experiences genuine happiness.

However, it is difficult to accept that all these people, for thousands of years, were solely concerned with life after death!<sup>489</sup> First of all, the initiates in the mysteries did not form a 'church' or a secret association in order to develop a unique way of confronting life. When they returned home, the initiates, as well as the masters of the ceremony, continued to take part in public activities. Eleusinian initiation, therefore, must have made a fundamental impact on their present life. As was noted, the initiate wanders in darkness, undergoes all sorts of terror and, finally, becomes enlightened. The initiates must have derived some benefit to their present life, which can be assumed by the pattern of the initiation: peregrination in darkness, subjection to all sorts of terrors and enlightenment/bliss. In psychological terms, the initiates underwent a personality crisis in order to achieve self-revelation. This is in fact suggested by the words written above the entrance to the temple: 'Know Thyself'. The initiate becomes a 'new' person. According to Kerenyi, 'A birth in death is something that must be termed "mystic" in the ancient sense since the mysteries revolved around such birth'.<sup>490</sup>

It is true that Grotowski's experimentation with ancient vibratory songs seemed to Richards a very ancient and at the same time a very modern process

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<sup>488</sup> Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, p. 296.

<sup>489</sup> In a different context, nevertheless expressing the same meaning, Vernant considers the maenads: 'The undeniable desire to be free, to escape into the elsewhere is expressed not as a hope for another, happier life after death, but within the present life, through the experience of an extra dimension, an expansion of the human condition, which thereby accedes to a blessed otherness'. Jean-Pierre Vernant, 'The Masked Dionysus', the *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, New York: Zone Books, 1986, p. 388.

<sup>490</sup> Kerenyi, *An Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, p. 108.

and gave him the sense that beneath the vibratory songs might be hidden something very old, comparable to the Eleusinian or rather Egyptian mysteries.<sup>491</sup> While references to the Eleusinian mysteries are few, those to the Egyptian are almost non-existent. As reconstructed and interpreted by Kerényi, the structure and the significance of the Greek mysteries, however, are similarly respected in Grotowski's work; *Action*, in particular, provides clear examples. Starting from Paratheatre, Grotowski's work was situated in the countryside, away from big cities. Consequently, the work of Art as Vehicle was located outside the small city of Pontedera, similar to the sanctuary of Eleusis. Sanctuaries of great significance in ancient Greece were situated away from the town, signifying the out-of-the-ordinary, sacred character of the ceremony that took place there. Remote from daily routine, the participants perceived divinity in peace. The first chapter of this thesis pointed out that *Action* occurred in a temple, instead of a theatre, and only a limited audience was invited. The witnesses were only those who had come in contact with the organisers well in advance. These twenty-one people, having walked in a modern procession from the café to the church, instead of meeting directly outside the church, were 'prepared' as a group with a common goal: to witness *Action*. Still, the group had *to be accepted*, a fact realised by the group when the leader knocked on the Gothic door to ask for admission. Biagini appeared in a special role, as both Herald and Hierophant. That is, he prepared the group for the event and started the event himself. In the chanting tunes of the group, the girl, all dressed in red, a color that often symbolises fire, gave birth to a child, thus embodying a type of Persephone who gave birth to a 'mighty son'. Richards, all dressed in white, as the initiates in the

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<sup>491</sup> *The Edge-Point of Performance*, Pontedera: Documentation Series of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski, 1997, p. 9.

mysteries, was the one who was initiated into the mystery of life and death, while Biagini, as if the Hierophant, led him amidst chanting to this process. The lyric of the performance signified that there is a condition that stands beyond death, that is, the moment when opposites merge, when the *beginning* and the *end* are identical. Here it might be appropriate to recall Pindar's words about the mysteries: 'happy he who has seen this [the secret rites] before descending underground... he knows the end of life! He also knows its beginning' (Thnetoi, frag, 10).

According to Osinski, the difference between the mysteries and *Action* on the one hand, and a classical theatrical performance on the other, is that in a production, the spectators' minds are the place of the montage of what is 'said' and 'done', while in the mysteries and *Action*, the montage takes place in the minds of the doers. To avoid limiting this process to the personal perspective of the doers, in his explanation of Gurdjieff, Osinski indicates the differences between 'subjective' and 'objective art'. 'Subjective art', he argues, relies on a randomness or individual view of things and phenomena, and thus it is often governed by human caprice. 'Objective art', on the other hand, has an extra- and supra-individual quality, and it can, thereby, reveal the laws of fate and the destiny of humans.<sup>492</sup> It seems that for both the mysteries and *Action* the goal is the elevation of the consciousness of all who participate, that is, both the performers and the witnesses, to a higher level where oppositions vanish. In a way, in the mystical process the left hemisphere of the human brain, that is the master of logic, and the right hemisphere, that is the master of fantasy, are coordinated so that structure does not create chaotic confusion of disorder.

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<sup>492</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, pp. 383-4.

Performative art appears to be a genre which, by including both structure and fantasy, can achieve such a transformation.

Why has so little information survived about such an important institution that functioned for more than two thousand years? Simply because participation in the mysteries required an oath of secrecy. The penalty was death if the initiated made the rites public knowledge. Aristotle states that Aeschylus, as noted above, was in danger of being executed because the Athenians thought that he had revealed certain secrets in his tragedies.<sup>493</sup> Additionally, the nature of such an ineffable experience, as this was perceived in the mysteries or in Grotowski's post-theatrical work, is diminished when analysed verbally, and so remains secret. For Grotowski, such experience stands beyond words, or, in other words, in *Logos* (cause) and, therefore, reaches *the beginning*. Wolford highlights the value of silence when she describes the silence of Grotowski's practitioners:

Long-term practitioners and work leaders in these projects [Grotowski's post-theatrical period] have tended to be silent about the precise details of the activities with which they were involved. Seen from the vantage of the practitioner, it is easy to understand how premature translation of nonverbal processes can threaten the life of a creative work as the practitioner then falls prey to the temptation to reduce the new experience to the category of what is already known, imposing familiar formulas that fit badly or not at all.<sup>494</sup>

Grotowski himself claims that an exterior silence can result in an inner silence.<sup>495</sup>

This inner silence was mirrored in the symbol of the young child in the Eleusinian mysteries. The young child or the young *lakchos* (Dionysus) had his finger to his lips, a gesture that demands that the initiates remain 'silent'. In fact,

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<sup>493</sup> Kerenyi, *Eleusis*, p. 99.

<sup>494</sup> *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, p. 5.

<sup>495</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 260.

etymologically the word 'mystery' signifies 'demand for silence'. It derives from the Greek verb *myo*, which means 'remain silent'.<sup>496</sup> This silence is empty only for those who have not had the experience. For those who have, the silence is inescapable, since no words can make the experience sharable.

Having committed himself to the goal of training the actor/doer to be a warrior in daily life, Grotowski suggested that 'heroism' should become a daily task. This training was included in a process that exploited ecstatic elements and had therapeutic aspects, as explained in the third and fourth chapters of this thesis respectively. The pattern of this process encompasses three main stages: intense training, loss of habitual references, and creativity. These stages are a modern application of the phases of ecstatic-shamanic ceremonies, or at least of the rites of passage. The Grotowskian process can be paralleled with the suffering, death and resurrection phases of the rites of the Eleusinian mysteries or with the separation, liminality, re-integration of the rites of passage or even with the phases of psychotherapy, emotional discomfort, individuation, and re-evaluation of the person's position in the social milieu.

In the initial stages of his work, Grotowski used the Christ figure to embody the symbolism of the dying hero, or, in Jung's terms, the archetype of rebirth. According to Roose-Evans, Grotowski was influenced by the annual Christian festivals in Poland, which reenact portions of Christ's Life and Passion.<sup>497</sup> Grotowski used Christ as the one who bridged mind and matter and flesh and spirit through his example. Similarly, Grotowski's concern for sincerity focuses on the unblocking of the body. He chose the symbolism of Christ believing, like

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<sup>496</sup> According to Jean-Pierre Vernant, 'The first meaning of *muō* is "to shut" or "to shut itself or oneself". In the context of Eleusis, it may have referred to the shutting of one's eyes or mouth', *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, New York: Zone Books, 1988, p. 386-7.

<sup>497</sup> *Experimental Theatre*, pp. 156-7.

Jung, that Christ is still a living myth of modern culture.<sup>498</sup> According to Jung, Christ exemplifies the archetype of the self whose suffering concludes in resurrection. He explains this process as the 'renewal' of the mind which 'is not meant as an actual alteration of consciousness, but rather as the restoration of an original condition, an apocatastasis'.<sup>499</sup> Jung's 'restoration of an original condition', that is the reconciliation with the material of the subconscious and the acknowledgement of the unconsciousness, is echoed in Grotowski's 'to touch something which is linked to the beginning', a process which Grotowski considers to be a purely human task. In a discussion quoted by Findlay, Grotowski himself admits that 'the example of Christ, as a living human being only, is very important to me'.<sup>500</sup> In *The Constant Prince* the main character is a Prince, albeit a human being who is subject to mundane loneliness and, therefore, to pain. Likewise, for Grotowski, Christ was simply a human being who realised that he was solely responsible for his own life and suffering. A Polish reviewer comments on this: 'He [the Prince] towers above the others in his simplicity. He is the Lord of creation: he is a human being'.<sup>501</sup> It is simplicity that characterises the archetypal figure of Christ and which deifies him. Yet, he is a human being, who, through his simplicity, can modify human perception.

The main figure in *Apocalypsis* was also Christ. The story, a combination of many great texts, 'has to do with the return of Christ, a Second Coming, here and now, in our midst... In *Apocalypsis*, God or Christ need not necessarily mean the Judaeo-Christian personal deity. It may signify a great many, very different,

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<sup>498</sup> Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959, p. 36.

<sup>499</sup> *Aion*, p. 40.

<sup>500</sup> 'Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 178.

<sup>501</sup> Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 80.

human concerns'.<sup>502</sup> Christ is not viewed as a spotless figure whose divinity is taken for granted. In contrast to Christian dogma, Jesus possesses the attributes of fear, hesitation, fallibility, and evil. Each of these attributes, however, is included in the archetype of Antichrist. Jung claims that the Christian Church 'cannot omit the shadow that belongs to the light figure, for without it this figure lacks body and humanity'.<sup>503</sup> The shadow is a functional part of such an archetype since it is the battle between the shadow and the light that lets divinity arise.

Friedrich Nietzsche was the first to replace the Christian mystery of the Mass and Resurrection of Christ with the myth of Dionysus-Zagreus, dismembered by the Titans, who ate from his flesh. The god was eventually restored to a new life.<sup>504</sup> In terms of anthropomorphism, Kott, echoing Nietzsche, regards Christ as the descendent of Dionysus.<sup>505</sup> Taking into account Euripides' version of the Dionysian myth, where Dionysus is the son of Zeus and Semele, the princess of Thebes, Kott compares this to Christ's conception by a mortal woman impregnated by the Holy Spirit, and thus he implies that both deities possess a human and a divine nature.

However, one should always remember that an impersonation of Dionysus is a modern interpretation of God, not necessarily consistent with the ancient Greek concept of God. Albert Henrichs notes that the interpretation of Dionysus as a mere personification of powers located within the individual psyche or in the social environment began with Nietzsche and was continued by James Frazer

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<sup>502</sup> Konstanty Puzyna, 'A Myth Vivisected: Grotowski's Apocalypse', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>503</sup> Jung, *Aion*, p. 42.

<sup>504</sup> *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, New York: Black's Readers Service Company, n.d., p. 317.

<sup>505</sup> *The Eating of the Gods: An Interpretation of Greek Tragedy*, New York, 1974, pp. 186-230.

and the Cambridge Ritualists.<sup>506</sup> Nietzsche's discovery of the 'Dionysian' versus Dionysus, that is, he perceived Dionysus more as a human concept than as an independent god and this aspect was further reinforced by the advent of Freudian psychology. In turn, Freud's legacy has had an effect on the terms of the modern discussion of Dionysus by scholars such as, Erwin Rohde, Henry Jeanmaire, Eric Dodds, Charles Segal, Walter Otto, Marcel Detienne, Jean-Pierre Vernant and others.<sup>507</sup>

For Henrichs, Dionysus is the god of wine. He is also the god of the mask, who presides over dramatic performance. In addition, he is believed to have inspired the maenads, his female followers, who led them to the mountains for their dancing and sacrificial rites. Finally, he recruits his followers not only among the living, but also among the dead. Even if Henrichs objects to the post-Freudian impersonation of Dionysus, this thesis, including these scholarly comments which consider Dionysus to be the divine impersonation of human drives, appetites and behavioral and social patterns, does not seek to define Dionysus either as a pure deity or as a conglomeration of human projections. In this thesis, the god of ecstasy is considered as an archetypal philosophical concept incarnated in a variety of cultural activities, such as the mysteries, or tragedy as will appear later in this chapter. In any case, as Vernant says, Dionysism 'is not a piece of actual

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<sup>506</sup> 'Human and Divine in Dionysus', *Masks of Dionysus*, Edited by Thomas H. Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993, pp.13-43.

<sup>507</sup> Henrichs indicates how these scholars perceived Dionysus. According to Rohde (*Psyche*) the worshippers of Dionysus became one with their god at the height of their ritual ecstasy. Thus, Dionysus had to share his immortality with the mortals who were hoping to achieve immortality in this life rather than the next (*Masks of Dionysus*, p. 28). Similarly, for Detienne (*Dionysus at Large*), Dionysus' divine identity 'is interchangeable with the human identity of his worshipers—the ultimate goal is oneness with the deity, whether the supposed union is understood as psychological or sacramental' (p. 29). For, Dodds (*Euripides: Bacchae*), 'to resist Dionysus is to repress the elemental in one's own nature', while, for Segal (*Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*), Dionysus is "'the principle that destroys differences", a definition that is inspired by Otto's (*Dionysus: Myth and Cult*) fundamental notion of Dionysus as the god who is made up of polarities' (p.25).

evidence: It is a product of the history of religions produced, from Nietzsche onward, in our modern age'.<sup>508</sup> In Vernant's reading of Euripides, Dionysus is seen to combine the aspect of Lysios, deliverer, the god of joy in the fiesta where evil is forgotten, with that of the revenger, the destroyer of family and society who turns against those who deny his worship.<sup>509</sup>

Grotowski himself seems to seek to assign the nature of whatever is called 'Dionysism' to something even beyond the myth of Christ. Konstanty Pozyna indicates that the main hero in *Apocalypsis*, Simpleton, displayed attributes of both the archetypal figures of Christ and Dionysus. It was the ecstatic dance of the main character that motivated Pozyna to compare him with Dionysus:

Sure enough, the Simpleton goes berserk. He tosses Simon Peter to the ground and careers off on his own, writhing and twitching with ecstasy, his bare feet thudding out a syncopated rhythm, as though his cavorting were some kind of dance, both Dionysian and despairing. It is a dance; and he is Dionysus... and all time Christ.<sup>510</sup>

As previously mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, Grotowski through 'apotheosis and derision' elaborated a special Christ-like figure, exhibiting attributes of both creation and destruction. This Christ and anti-Christ can be compared to Dionysus.

In Paratheatre the Dionysian references are more marked. Margaret Croyden discusses a twenty-four-hour trek in the forest, led by Cieslak during the Special Project in Paratheatre. During this hike, the group underwent a series of ritualistically performed ceremonies that were conceived of and controlled by Cieslak and his assistants. Croyden notes that the events occurred in a

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<sup>508</sup> *Myth and Tragedy*, p. 383.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 399.

<sup>510</sup> Pozyna, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 93.

sequential and cyclical order and took place without words. She also explains that the activities were a fusion of rites that are associated with primitive, pagan, Western and Oriental myths, and they were adapted to Western sensibilities by the leader of the group. She recounts:

During the course of the night, it became clear that a metaphysical system, theatrically translated into stunning visual configuration, was at work. Its leading theme was the human drama as lived and described by men and women through ages and handed down by mythic stories, archetypal figures, and symbols found not only on the world's religions and literature, but [also] in our individual dramas.<sup>511</sup>

The ritual-like activities included events that involved natural elements—water, earth, air, or fire. These activities reminded her, among other things, of ‘the festivals and celebrations of Demeter and Dionysus, the worship of Eleusinian Mysteries...the Death and rebirth myths of all cultures’.<sup>512</sup> Croyden stresses that her ‘holiday’ in the woods was a very deep personal experience, very primitive and lasting. In fact, she says that ‘those of us who came out of the woods knew we had experienced pure, ritualistic sacred theatre—as it must have existed ages ago. And may very well exist again’.<sup>513</sup> It is possible that in these activities Croyden experienced the model of the dying hero who in his suffering perceives ‘truth’ through illogical perceptions similar to those in the Eleusinian mysteries.

The Dionysian spirit was brilliantly manifested in the Eleusinian mysteries. Jeanmaire explains that the philosophical movement known as the Orphics promoted a myth in which Dionysus appears to be both Persephone’s husband and child. The Orphics presented Dionysus as the son of Zeus and Persephone.

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<sup>511</sup> ‘New Theatre Rule: no watching allowed’, *Vogue*, December, 1975, *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 64.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

For them, Dionysus could not have been the son of a mortal woman, since they had developed a system that stressed the cosmic role of the god who existed before humanity.<sup>514</sup> For the Orphics, Dionysus was not merely a fertility god, but rather a god of renaissance—one who suffers a violent death of dismemberment by the Titans, and is thereafter born again. In other words the pattern formed in the myth of Dionysus is ‘the idea of the necessity of grief, of progress by struggle, of the purification of the soul by suffering’.<sup>515</sup> This version was manifested in the Mysteries, with all its eschatological connotations.<sup>516</sup>

Kerenyi concurs that the institution of the mysteries belonged to the cult of Dionysus. He explains that some vase painters of the classical period portrayed the official version of the myth at Eleusis and that in their representations of the Eleusinian myth they give the old wine god the gentler attributes of Pluto, the god of the underworld and the giver of wealth.<sup>517</sup> This version of the myth is not mentioned in Homer, whose hymn to Demeter provides the modern reader with the mythology of the Eleusinian mysteries. Yet Kerenyi observes that in the Homeric version, when Demeter, tired from the search for her daughter, sits in Queen Metaneira’s quarters, she refuses wine. Kerenyi comments that: ‘we readily understand her words once we know the identity of the ravisher who had snatched her daughter off into the realm of the dead, once we know to whom the cover name of Hades or Pluto refers’.<sup>518</sup> According to Homer’s myth, the rape occurred on the Nysan Plain, which was named after the Dionysian mountain of

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<sup>514</sup> Persephone is in symbolical terms the female equivalent of Dionysus. She comes to earth for the spring and summer and the ground is fertilized. She goes back to Hades for autumn and winter. Analogically Dionysus shares the year with Apollo and rules the spring and summer period.

<sup>515</sup> Edouard Schure, *The Genesis of Tragedy*, London: Rudolf Steiner Publishing, 1936, p. 57.

<sup>516</sup> Henry Jeanmaire, *Διόνυσος, Ιστορία της Λατρείας του Βάκχου*, translated into Greek by Artemis Mertani-Lisa, Patra: Kleio, 1985, pp. 466-516. Original title: *Dionysus: Histoire du Culte de Bacchus*, Paris: Payot, 1951.

<sup>517</sup> *Eleusis*, p. 35.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Nysa. Kerenyi cites Heracleitos, who declared that Hades was the same as Dionysus. Thus, Demeter, who was angry with the subterranean god, could not have accepted his gift of wine. For this reason, Kerenyi claims, Demeter invented another beverage to be drunk before the initiation—*kykeon*. Dionysus symbolises regeneration and as such is always *neos*, meaning young. Indeed, in the myth used in the mysteries, Dionysus is forever a child.

Echoing Nietzsche, the Cambridge Ritualists have postulated the idea that the model of the dying and reborn hero, as is depicted in the Dionysian fertility rites, provides the structural models for Greek drama.<sup>519</sup> For Otto, the fate of tragic Dionysus is not to be found in the myth around which the mysteries revolve. Rather, the tragic hero is torn between human and divine law and so the god of tragedy has to be by birth a native of two realms.<sup>520</sup> Thus, for Otto, the tragic Dionysus is the son of Zeus and Semele. According to this myth, Hera, forever jealous of Zeus' conquests, persuades the pregnant Semele to ask Zeus to appear to her in his real form. Zeus responds by coming to her in all his glory as a thunderbolt. Semele is burnt to death, but Zeus manages to sew the premature baby into his thigh and lets it live. Therefore, Dionysus is a demi-god, born of a divine father and a mortal mother. There are, in addition, stories about the god as an adult, which again indicate the same pattern of suffering, death and resurrection. Whether divine or demi-god, Dionysus, nevertheless, incarnated for ancient Greek culture the archetypal hero present in tragedies who suffers, dies and is resurrected.

According to Vernant's reading of Greek drama, the tragic hero is 'disunited', a fact that is the cause of his martyrdom. In the context of the Greek

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<sup>519</sup> Bell, *Ritual*, p. 6. See also Henrichs, *Masks of Dionysus*, p. 27.

<sup>520</sup> *Dionysus*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1965, p. 73, 78.

tragedy, the hero emerges as the 'tragic subject', that is, in order to understand himself, the hero takes up his position in relation to the world, the gods, other people, himself, and his own actions.<sup>521</sup> The true meaning of human action, Vernant continues, is only revealed when, in the course of tragedy, the hero becomes a part of an order that is beyond people and escapes them.<sup>522</sup> Within the framework of tragic representation, the hero is no longer put forward as a model, as previously in epic or lyric poetry. The hero becomes the subject of a debate and interrogation that implicates the fifth century spectator. From the point of view of tragedy, Vernant claims, human beings and human actions are seen not as realities to be pinned down and defined in their essential qualities, but as problems that defy resolution, riddles with double meanings that are never fully decoded.<sup>523</sup> For Aristotle, who states that the character accomplishes 'by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions', it seems that the actor shares the tragic fate of the dramatic hero.<sup>524</sup>

So, too, Grotowski acknowledges the same experience: 'This is not instruction of a pupil but utter opening to another person, in which the phenomenon of "shared double birth" becomes possible. The actor is reborn—not only as an actor but as a man...'.<sup>525</sup> Grotowski's practitioner, like the initiate in Eleusinian mysteries or the tragic hero (and actor), is the subject of a continuous process. In other words, the practitioner passes through the same 'martyrdom', which includes demanding training, loss of clarity of senses, abandonment of

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<sup>521</sup> *Myth and Tragedy*, p. 240.

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>524</sup> Aristotle *Poetics* I with *The Tractatus Coislinianus* A Hypothetical Reconstruction of *Poetics* II The Fragments of the *On Poets*, Translated with notes by Richard Janko, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987, p. 7.

<sup>525</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 25.

uncritical inherited behaviours and development of a *present continuous* artistic expression.

Suffering, in mythical terms, is the first stage of the pattern of the dying and reviving hero, in which the subject endures a physical, mental, or emotional pain or effort. The cause could be undefined, brought about by physical or external circumstances, which exhaust the body. Yet, for Grotowski, training is not a supplementary or optional process. The physical training is the only way for the elevation of human consciousness. Long hours of training were well-known not only to the Laboratory Theatre actor, but also to the participants in Grotowski's post-theatrical work. Croyden recalls how hiking in the forest to the point of exhaustion was 'reminiscent of the rebirth cycle in which the body is subdued and the ego broken down, thus the soul opens to serenity'.<sup>526</sup> She also remembers how the participants in Paratheatrical meetings began 'to feel their muscles ache from the effort, to feel their bodies like an athlete feels at the end of the match. There is in it a joy of physical fulfillment and a joy of fatigue'.<sup>527</sup> Grotowski was persuaded that in the limits of fatigue the body's resistance is abandoned and, thus, it reacts impulsively.

Likewise, the Dionysian rites, in many cases, involved considerable physical discomfort, and even risk. Dodds cites Pausanias, who recorded that during the Dionysian rites at Delphi, women climbed to the very summit of Parnassus (over 8,000 feet high), and Plutarch describes an occasion, apparently in his own lifetime, when these women were cut off by a snowstorm and a rescue party had to be sent.<sup>528</sup> The aim of these rites was to submit to a special religious

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<sup>526</sup> *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 67

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>528</sup> *The Greeks and the Irrational*, California: University of California Press, 1951, p. 14.

experience where the psyche, through physical exhaustion, found its origins. In other words, as the classicist William K. Guthrie concludes:

No man can submit without a struggle to the experience of having his distinctively human faculty of reason, and all that connects him with the normal world, overwhelmed and submerged by those animal elements which, normally dormant or at least in subjection, are released and made dominant by the irresistible surge of Dionysian power.<sup>529</sup>

It cannot be overlooked, however, that there is joy in the exhausting Dionysian trance dances. Therefore, Dionysus is also the god of entertainment and festivals. The recipients celebrate in an effort to reconcile the irrational part of human personality with the rational and, thus, to expand their consciousness.

So, too, there is joy in Paratheatrical activities, as participants have acknowledged. One of the most important aspects of such training is the exercise to a primal rhythm, a repetitive stepping movement. Lydia Koniordou, a famous Greek actress acclaimed for her portrayal of tragic roles, recalls an exercise she did with Flaszen in Athens in the mid-1980s. She remembers how Flaszen asked them to run in a circle to a fast rhythm for more than half an hour.<sup>530</sup> She said that she would not normally have been able to do this, despite her training as an athlete, but, because the group shared a common rhythm, individual limits were surpassed and the activity became possible. The power of the group empowers the individual, and vice versa, in a geometric progression.

The Haitian dance *yanvalou*, practiced since the Theatre of Sources and now a days included in the daily Workcenter's training, is another example of a similar practice believed to have a transcendental impact on the practitioner.

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<sup>529</sup> *The Greeks and Their Gods*, London: Methuen, 1935, p. 172.

<sup>530</sup> Lydia Koniordou, personal communication, Athens, 1999.

According to Wolford, who personally experienced this form of dance in the Objective Drama Research, *yanvalou* is characteristically performed for a relatively long duration by a group of dancers moving in a line. The dancer's body is angled forward slightly from the hips, and the knees are bent. The steps of *yanvalou* call for the dancer to touch the ground once with the sole of the foot, almost as if caressing the ground, then lift the foot before placing it down again and transferring the body's weight, alternating right and left feet in a gentle, repetitive motion. With each step, the dancer's upper body moves in a soft, almost serpentine wave, the impulse of the movement coming from the base of the spine.<sup>531</sup> In this dance, the practitioner can reach higher states of consciousness, where individuality surpasses its limits to perceive experiences from the collective unconsciousness and, thus, to meet with the group.

The induction of exhaustion by the exertion of the feet is also stressed in the descriptions of the *maenads'* movements. The *maenads'* ecstatic motion is closely identified with jumping. In Dionysian rites the use of the foot was of great importance. Recounting Dionysus' manifestation as Pan, Marcel Detienne describes the god of ecstasy as the one 'who jumps' like a goat. Etymologically, Detienne explains that 'in leaping Dionysus the foot (pous) encounters the verb to leap (pedan) and its form "to jump away from" (ekpedan)...'.<sup>532</sup> Ekpedan, according to Detienne, is a technical term of the Dionysian trance, referring to the moment when the leaping force invades the body and takes control of it, carrying it irresistibly along. Moreover, Euripides describes the quick forward thrust of the

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<sup>531</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p.498.

<sup>532</sup> *Dionysus at Large*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 47.

foot as the 'bacchic step'.<sup>533</sup> In *The Bacchae*, Dionysus, aiding Pentheus' in his fatal transformation into a *maenad*, shows him the maenads' step:

Pentheus: But to be a real Bacchante, should I hold the thyrsus in my right hand? Or this way?  
Dionysus: In your right hand. Raise it as you raise your right foot.<sup>534</sup>

In the Euripidean play, *Bacchae* describe themselves as dancing in ecstasy with flying bare feet, leaping, performing all-night dances, tossing their heads for joy.<sup>535</sup> In *The Bacchae*, the *aggeliophoros*, the messenger, proudly announces that the maenads are so wild that they carry fire on their heads: 'Flames flickered in their curls and did not burn them'.<sup>536</sup>

Grotowski searched for a re-conditioning of human relations to other people through the body. He claimed that one should begin by finding these scenes that give the actor a chance to research his or her relationships with others. The actor, Grotowski claims, must penetrate 'the elements of contact in the body'.<sup>537</sup> On the verge of the limits of fatigue, in addition to the induction of fear, the individual loses clarity of the senses on which he or she depends. By assuming the 'ancient body' of a dance, meaning the archetypal ritualistic gestures, and by finding the real rhythm, meaning the waves of the 'old body' in the actual body, then the participant can get 'lost in a sort of primitivism: one works on the body's instinctual elements *losing control of himself*'.<sup>538</sup> Tadeusz Burzynski, who participated in Paratheatre, maintains that unusual forces appeared in him and the other participants. He describes these forces as

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<sup>533</sup> *Dionysus at Large*, p. 46.

<sup>534</sup> *The Bacchae*, in *Euripides V*, translated by William Arrowsmith, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1959, p. 197.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161 and 193.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>537</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 38.

<sup>538</sup> Grotowski, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 297.

animistic, irrational, those that can only be grasped intuitively. Grotowski created this liminal space by teaching his participants not to take things for granted. Fatigue helped them, for example, to develop a new feeling when the rain fell on them.<sup>539</sup> This was also encouraged by the fact that conventional communication, speaking, was at most times forbidden.<sup>540</sup> In this empty space, created by the loss of habits, the participant became creative, released from the desire for public acknowledgement. Thus, the participants were relaxed, acting like children or madmen.<sup>541</sup>

This precise kind of madness is indicative of the Dionysian cult. Dionysus symbolises among other things the human dilemma that enhances a state of madness. In *The Bacchae* 'Dionysus' realm blurs the clear line between conscious and unconscious, sanity and madness, exalted purity and wild abandonment, strength and weakness'.<sup>542</sup> If one takes into account the public character of the Dionysian rites as indicated in *The Bacchae*, this 'blurring of the clear line' may suggest that in Dionysian ecstasy the social conventions are transformed into personal obligations for which the individual has a clear rationale. Self-discipline is the result of a revelation, very similar to the symbolic character of the Eleusinian mysteries and the revelation of the Kore, which is translated as the initiates finding their soul. In the symbolism of the flaming rhythm of ecstasy, or over an actual fire, as in Eleusinian mysteries, exhaustion leads to a symbolic death, which opens the doors to rebirth. Through this type of death, a person becomes Grotowski's actor/warrior.

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<sup>539</sup> 'Special Project', *Scena*, Warsaw, no. 4, 1976, *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 29.

<sup>540</sup> Bzowski, *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 57.

<sup>541</sup> Dziewulska, *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 32.

<sup>542</sup> Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982, p. 14.

Death is used here as a metaphor. It is a state of transition, where the individual abandons the undesirable elements uncovered in the state of madness. In this instance, death abolishes barriers, classes, and exclusions, not by syncretism, as Roland Barth says, but by simply getting rid of this old spectre: logical contradiction.<sup>543</sup> Ecstasy is reconciliation with death, an understanding of its necessity. For Grotowski what one should 'kill' are the dressing, the covering, and the possessing, that is, the social persona. The term is borrowed from Jung, who explains that social beings have a face never shown to the world because they cover it with the persona or else the 'mask of the actor'.<sup>544</sup> Grotowski's idea for the actor's metaphysical transition has its origins in Artaud's manifesto regarding the position of cruelty in theatre. For Artaud, cruelty means strictness, diligence, unrelenting decisiveness, irreversible and absolute determination.<sup>545</sup> For him, there can be no spectacle without an element of cruelty as the basis of every show. Seen in theatrical practice, cruelty is the overturning of preconceptions.<sup>546</sup> Thus, it becomes apparent that Artaud suggests a poetic articulation of an erasure of everyday identity, using the metaphor of self-immolation. Metaphysics, he explains, must be made to enter the mind through the body.<sup>547</sup> In other words, the body when cruelly, or rather tenaciously, trained becomes able to create non-verbal signs for communication. Artaud further clarifies that:

Practicing cruelty involves a higher determination to which the executioner-tormentor is also subject and which he must be *resolved* to endure when the time comes. Above all, cruelty is very lucid, a kind of strict control and submission to necessity. There is

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<sup>543</sup> Quoted in Segal, p. 9.

<sup>544</sup> *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p. 20.

<sup>545</sup> *The Theatre and its Double*, p. 79.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64-5.

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

no cruelty without consciousness, without the application of consciousness, for the latter gives practicing any act in life a blood red tinge, its cruelty overtones, since it is understood that being alive means the death of someone else.<sup>548</sup>

For Artaud, cruelty is not sadistic or bloody, at least not exclusively.<sup>549</sup> Cruelty should be used as the mechanism for shocking the audience, projecting social cruelty on stage. For Grotowski, cruelty is totally replaced by a metaphor. Cruelty is turned towards all the physical and mental obstacles that obstruct the performer's expressivity. Thus, for Artaud and also for Grotowski, actors should be 'burned alive' like martyrs. Death is not a condition, but a process in which, as the Polish director says, 'what is dark in us slowly becomes transparent. In this struggle with one's own truth, this effort to peel off the life-mask, the theatre, has always seemed to me a place of provocation'.<sup>550</sup> Grotowski's desirable 'meeting' can only be achieved when one loses himself or herself in front of another person.<sup>551</sup> A participant in the Paratheatrical workshops explained that this happens when the person rids himself or herself of fear and distrust.<sup>552</sup>

Wolford analyses this notion on a more practical level. She describes how one of the songs the group worked on refers to an enemy that the person has to overcome. She quotes Slowiak to explain the nature of the enemy in a metaphor: 'the enemy can be a number of things which drag you down...heaviness, laziness, narcissism'.<sup>553</sup> In Grotowski's case, as well as in the Dionysian cult, death is approached metaphorically. Writing about the characteristics of the Dionysian cult, Otto concludes that 'death is not to be sought first at the end of

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<sup>548</sup> *The Theatre and its Double*, p. 80.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79.

<sup>550</sup> *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 21.

<sup>551</sup> Grotowski, 'Holiday', *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 217.

<sup>552</sup> Leszek Kolodziejczyk, 'The theatre of human expression', *Polityka*, Warsaw, January, 1974, no. 4/882, *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 8.

<sup>553</sup> *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, p. 78.

life but at its beginning, and that it attends all of life's creations'.<sup>554</sup> For Otto, Dionysus combines the fullness of life and the violence of death. Ecstasy, for him, is this moment when life and death meet, the moment of release where creativity starts.<sup>555</sup> In the Eleusinian mysteries, the initiates seem to have experienced a type of 'death' as the ceremony manifests the Persephone/Dionysus resurrection cycle. According to mythology, both deities descend to the underworld only to come back in the spring.

In 'Holiday', Grotowski explains that although one develops skills or depends on a method that might make communication successful, this does not necessarily imply that the person has disarmed himself or herself. What is implied, however, is that the person has created a safe haven, where the method can relieve one's doubts. But the real act, meaning the act of endless quest, is restricted. In a talk at the ITI conference on 5 June, 1978, Grotowski succinctly described the danger of exaggeration and the benefits of balanced discipline. Using an example from Japanese martial arts he explained:

When a Samurai has mastered all the skills and it appears that he has arrived at the optimum of practical—let's say technical – knowledge, he is obliged to let it all go, to discard everything and to behave as a beginner. It is said that if he is unable to discard a warrior's knowledge, if he cannot become as a fool, a madman, and a child, as an animal or a force of nature—then he will be killed.<sup>556</sup>

According to this observation, order remains, yet it is not an obligation; it is a bed of the stream: 'what is that which we have found and what one must not abandon in order to go on doing?'.<sup>557</sup> According to Grotowski, the actor/warrior should risk total defeat in order to overcome the ideal self. This is an active process of

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<sup>554</sup> *Dionysus*, p. 138.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 137-141.

<sup>556</sup> Quoted in Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 228.

<sup>557</sup> Grotowski, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 222.

disarmament. This process, in which the person involved lessens his or her defenses, presumably cannot happen simultaneously to every aspect of the person's individual and social life, as it may be difficult for the person to bear such instability. Yet, even if it happens at particular points and stages then, eventually, it will slowly filter through all of the person's life.

In this process, Grotowski claims that 'there is something like cleansing of our life. And it even makes me think very literally, tangibly, as an action of cleansing'.<sup>558</sup> Grotowski openly relates death to catharsis. Likewise, Artaud relates cruelty to mental purity and believes that, in any case, this is the cost one pays in life.<sup>559</sup> This 'defeat of one's self' is a type of madness, but one that opens the way to catharsis since fears are defeated. Equally, as Detienne asserts, 'Dionysiac madness or mania unhinged its victims, separating them from themselves and others, it contained elements of impurity'.<sup>560</sup> According to the myth, the people who were struck by Dionysus' divine madness, from Lykourgos to Agave, became murderers. After this death, however, Dionysus reveals his purifying dimension in the person of Dionysus Lyssios, the one who liberates. Therefore, 'the more insanity is unleashed, the more room there is for catharsis'.<sup>561</sup> Otto relates this state of catharsis to the act of creation. He maintains that 'no one ever creates anything great without a dash of madness'.<sup>562</sup> Creativity exists side by side with psychosis and it is a process of high risk. It requires from the person involved an ability to tolerate high levels of anxiety and 'a relative lack of defensiveness in order to proceed'.<sup>563</sup> Thus, people embrace

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<sup>558</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 219.

<sup>559</sup> *The Theatre and its Double*, p. 81.

<sup>560</sup> *Dionysus at Large*, p. 20.

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>562</sup> *Dionysus*, p. 136.

<sup>563</sup> Rothenberg, *Creativity and Madness*, p. 36.

the whole of themselves, with their strengths and weaknesses. As Grotowski says, the participants no longer hide from their own selves. They allow themselves to experience a river of reactions, an outburst of impulses. This is what Grotowski describes as the 'creative material'.<sup>564</sup>

This disposition, where craft is respected, yet the impulses are allowed to spring spontaneously without fear and awe, resembles the situation of a child's mind imbued with an adult's psychological maturity. The same sense seems to have informed the goal for those who participated in Grotowski's seminars, a kind of simultaneous calmness and playful energy. This type of transformation results in childlike behaviour, since children have the flexibility to discover new things endlessly. The psychologist Dowlasz, who participated in the Paratheatrical project Night Vigil, maintains that the Vigil prompted people into feeling as they had done in childhood: 'The possibility is created for experiencing oneself and others without psychic assurances, without manipulating the adversary to achieve one's ends'.<sup>565</sup> The difference between a child-child and a child-adult stands at the point where the adult has experienced the pain spontaneous sharing might cause and when he or she submits to such a task he or she is aware of the possible cost, which often means the sacrifice of egoism on the altar of community. Referring to the actor, Grotowski says that, 'when he begins to penetrate, through a study of his body's impulses, the relationship of this contact, this process of exchange, there is always a rebirth in the actor'.<sup>566</sup> For Grotowski, this process results in immediacy, drive and joy. Thus, referring to adult consciousness, he says:

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<sup>564</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 220.

<sup>565</sup> *On the Road to Active Culture*, p. 112.

<sup>566</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 39.

We forgot about this state through the years of taming our body and with it our mind. It is necessary to re-find this hypothetical child and his “ecstasies”. Which, long ago, we “abdicated”, as Baudelaire said, if I well remember. It is something tangible, organic, and primal.<sup>567</sup>

Grotowski does not suggest that the actors/warriors imitate a child or that they become childish. In explaining Grotowski’s idea about ‘child perception’, Osinski argues that adults are culturally conditioned and thus prevented from experiencing the world directly. For children, however, experience is primary for they see everything freshly, purely. As adults, people are closed off by their ‘computer-like memory’ when they enter a new experience.<sup>568</sup> Grotowski’s idea of a child attitude is merely based on the fact that a child is full of energy and impulses, a notion on which he placed great importance without ignoring the necessity of awareness and discipline. That is to say, that the performer reacts spontaneously, like a child, to the external and/or internal stimulus of the text or the improvisation and preserves this freshness throughout the performance in every performance. On the other hand, Grotowski’s performer’s could respect a craft which enabled them to repeat their spontaneity the same way in every performance, unlike a child whose spontaneity is unconscious. This child-adulthood aspect is what Grotowski calls ‘organicity’.

As a result of organicity, rebirth becomes the final stage in the Dionysian pattern. The resolution of Dionysus passions comes simultaneously with the convulsion of nervous excitement and the childish attitude that moderates anxiety for everything supernatural, into playfulness. In ancient times this process was presented in enactments, called *παιδιά*, that is, *childishness*. According to Plato,

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<sup>567</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 258.

<sup>568</sup> *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 172.

this included sacrifice, dances, games and acrobatics. Tragedy is considered by Aristotle to have originated from, *childishness*.<sup>569</sup> As in carnival, the participants in such games abandoned their conventional behaviour to experience spontaneous reactions and to play around with things that were 'not important', yet of extreme importance since they reiterated the fullness of the experience that only art could offer. Similarly, in the Eleusinian mysteries Persephone gave birth to a child, not in the literal manner, but figuratively. So, too, the initiates experienced their own rebirth both in the present life and beyond. By analogy, Grotowski introduced the actor who, by diving into the 'underworld' of his or her personal unconsciousness, joins with the other practitioners and spectators in the realm of the collective unconscious.

Inspired by, yet surpassing, Christian dogma as well as the religious origins of the rites of passage, Grotowski employed the three-stage pattern, birth-death-rebirth, in his artistic endeavors which, in any case, were not limited to art. In other words, simply by the fact that Grotowski pursued the nursing of the performer's psyche, his work could not have left the performer's social behavior unaffected. Similarly, in the Dionysian cult, especially in tragedy, the model transcended the realm of religion, where the mysteries belonged, to serve a social/political purpose.<sup>570</sup> This chapter is concerned with the fact that an inner

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<sup>569</sup> Jeanmaire, *Dionysus*, p. 404.

<sup>570</sup> Since it is known that thousands of people, both citizens and non-citizens, participated in the mysteries, the social character of the mysteries, even if it cannot be defined because of the lack of sources, cannot be denied either. (see Kerényi, *Eleusis*, p. 8) Although it is common knowledge that in the city-state in ancient Greece women and slaves did not have any political voice, surprisingly, however, they were all accepted in the mysteries. Kerényi concludes from a myth that foreigners were accepted in the mysteries and also gives two examples, one of a woman and one of two slaves who were equally accepted. (Kerényi, *Eleusis*, p. 53). He says that, Lysias, the famous stylist, being in love with a slave girl, wished to give her an impressive present, but he knew that her mistress took all his presents away from the girl. So, he decided to have her initiated into the mysteries of Eleusis, which appeared to be quite an expensive gift. In addition, there are other accounts that indicate that since the necessary work at Eleusis was done by

process may also be a political stance. That is, the Dionysian archetype, or, in more general terms, the archetype of rebirth is, apart from a personal matter for the initiate, also a social and political process. Thus, Grotowski's use of the archetype relates to the political role of the tragic aspect of Dionysus. Therefore, a brief contextualisation of tragedy puts Grotowski's work into another perspective—the political which will be analysed in the sixth chapter of this thesis.

### ***VI a. The Political Aspect of the Dionysian***

According to the historian Christian Meier, in the age of Pericles, Athens emerged from the Persian Wars mindful of the necessity for cohesion of the Athenian alliance.<sup>571</sup> After the sea battle of Salamis in 480 BC, the alliance did not have an imminent military objective. Nevertheless, the members continued to pay taxes to Athens. Within Athens, social tensions existed, albeit under the surface, and these, combined with the tensions within the alliance, were a threat to domestic and foreign policy. With the weak army and an exhausted maritime force, Athens found that employing democratic methods was more expedient than maintaining its political power as it had previously done by military means. One strategy included the utilisation of the alliance's money in extravagant architectural works, such as the Parthenon, that would decorate the 'capital' of the alliance. Moreover, the people of the alliance could participate in the public Dionysian festivals and, more precisely, in the Greater Dionysia. The festivals included in total: the rural or Lesser Dionysia, between December and January;

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slaves belonging to the state, these slaves had to be initiated since the non-initiated were not permitted in the sanctuary (Kerenyi, *Eleusis*, p. 59).

<sup>571</sup> For details about the political and social situation of Athens in the beginning of the fifth century, see Meier, Translated by Andrew Webber, *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1993, pp. 1-43.

Linaea, between January and February; Anthesteria, between February and March; and the urban or Greater Dionysia, between March and April. The 'instruction' (*didaskalia*) of tragedy occurred during Linaea and Greater Dionysia, though in Linaea comedy assumed a prominent position. The character of Linaea was less cosmopolitan than the Panhellenism evident in the Greater Dionysia because during the winter sea transport was interrupted, making it difficult for foreigners to reach Athens. Thus, a prize won in the Greater Dionysia was of a higher value.

Domestic policy was developed through democratic means which empowered the lower social ranks through the institution of the Council of the five hundred, as well as the people's Assembly.<sup>572</sup> Internal social cohesion and the notion of citizenship were furthered by these public Dionysian festivals, especially within the institution of tragedy. Meier quotes Aristophanes, who suggested that tragedies existed to teach the citizens.<sup>573</sup> Meier argues that this step was necessary for the development of a democracy because the citizens were not equipped with the spiritual resources with which modern societies balance their psychological tensions. In other words, for the Greeks, tragedy on one hand, and the Council and people's Assembly on the other, represented the institutions of schools and public services respectively. Tragedy can be seen as a vehicle for public education, considering that a large percentage of the citizenry partook in the events of tragedy. The actors of one year were the spectators of the next and so on.<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> The Council had been designed to represent the general will in Athens and to prepare motions for the Assembly, Meier, p. 13.

<sup>573</sup> *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy*, p. 61.

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-61.

Through tragedy, the Athenians were historically positioned as a community. With the development of secular myths, they witnessed how man should be responsible for his own fate within, and yet beyond, divine law. All citizens stood equally before this challenge. On a political level, the festivals in which the contest of tragedy belonged diminished the tension between the different classes. Despite the fact that the richer citizens sponsored the festivals, every citizen had the right to take part actively in these lavish ceremonies and reaffirm his citizenship. In addition to this, one should consider that since the debates of the Council and the people's Assembly were rational and utilitarian, a gap was created between religion and morality on the one hand and politics on the other. In other words a gap appears between traditional and modern perceptions. Thus, the only forum where these philosophical questions were open to debate was the institution of tragedy. After the end of the Great Dionysia, a public gathering was convoked where the ceremonial activities, the contest of tragedy, the management and the organization of the festivals as well as any complaints were discussed.<sup>575</sup>

Vernant defines this specific moment for Athenian society as the 'tragic turning point', which occurred when a gap developed at the heart of the social experience. That is to say, the oppositions between legal and political realms, on the one hand, and the mythical and heroic traditions, on the other, stood out quite clearly.<sup>576</sup> Vernant argues that the Athenians' consciousness changed because the public institutions changed; archaic structures were replaced by democratic ones. Consequently, with regard to human responsibility towards the establishment of law, a similar situation developed. Since the human and the

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<sup>575</sup> Meier, *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy*, pp. 213-15. The importance of comedy in social criticism should also be underlined.

<sup>576</sup> Vernant, *Myth and Tragedy*, p. 27.

divine level were distinct and often opposed, but not entirely separated from one another, the individual cultivated a 'tragic consciousness of responsibility'. In other words, human action became the object of reflection and debate while still not regarded as autonomous enough to be fully self-sufficient, a question around which tragedy revolves.<sup>577</sup> In tragedy, the true meaning of human actions, unsuspected by those who initiated them and/or took responsibility for them, was revealed when it became part of an order that was beyond people.

Similar to 'tragic responsibility', Grotowski's performers carried out a 'mythic responsibility', that is, in their performances they incarnated archetypes. Thus, Vernant's 'tragic responsibility' relates to Grotowski's responsibility to history. The latter realised that every attempt at innovation in art lacked significance if it did not convey archetypal notions. Thus, the actor's freedom was 'limited' to the discovery of eternal values within himself. The Polish director was persuaded that human conflict between unexamined consciousness and that which focuses on the archetypes was the cornerstone of civilisation and the ultimate component of true social cohesion. Yet, in general, his attitude was not a decisive political stance, but a philosophical belief with political leanings. For Grotowski, truth was only born in the conglomeration of oppositions.

In other words, Grotowski combined realism with romanticism by seeking the attribute of musicality in his work, that is, the orchestration of often contradictory notions, rhythms, and gestures all harmonised to a unified result, an idea borrowed from Artaud. According to Artaud:

There is no question of putting metaphysical ideas directly on stage but of creating kinds of temptations, vacuums, around these ideas... Obviously it [the language of the performance] uses

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<sup>577</sup> Vernant, *Myth and Tragedy*, p. 27.

moves, harmonies, rhythms, but only up to the point where they can co-operate in a kind of pivotal expression without favouring any particular art.<sup>578</sup>

Kumiega, taking as an example the performance of *The Constant Prince*, explains that Grotowski chose texts from the Polish Romantic period to show how the intellectual aspect of the text is integrated with poetry. Grotowski adapted the text to better serve his purpose of combining the poetic aspect with the mythic associations of it. In Peter Feldman's criticism on the same performance, Kumiega finds the appropriate description of the situation. Feldman says: 'The effect of this theatre's unique use of vocal rhythm, pitch, dynamics, tonality and careful orchestration is to enhance the word, to restore it from idea to image'.<sup>579</sup> Grotowski maintained this idea throughout his career, till the last opus of *Action*, where metaphysics were embodied in a well-crafted performance. Similarly, the oral transmission of poetry in ancient Greece was replaced by the visual representation of it in tragedy. Thus, the words acquired a physical vibration to have a more direct and unified influence on the participants and the audience.<sup>580</sup> Both Grotowski's work and ancient tragedy consisted of a combination of oppositional notions, where rational thought and metaphysics were blended and visually presented in order to achieve a unified effect on the audience.<sup>581</sup> Grotowski was convinced of the limitations of rationalism and the despotism of metaphysics just like the creators of tragedy had suspected twenty-five centuries before him.

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<sup>578</sup> *Theatre and its Double*, p. 69.

<sup>579</sup> Quoted, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>580</sup> In oral presentation of poetry the audience's mind creates a variety of images for those said, while the visual presentation of the same poem specifies the images.

<sup>581</sup> Even in the periods when Grotowski allowed no audience to watch his work, the participants had the opportunity to watch one another's work.

In the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche observes that at the same time as the development of tragedy, Socratic argumentation was developing. Both marry the plastic, Apollonian arts to the non-visual art of music, encompassing rationalism and idealism.<sup>582</sup> More specifically, when arguments prove insufficient, the element of myth may be used, as Socrates did, to strengthen them. Nietzsche claims Socratic approach to thought to be the turning point of Western civilization. Socratic perception moves to encompass the whole world of phenomena in ever widening circles, with the desire to complete this conquest, to weave the net of knowledge absolutely tight. Yet, this idea that thought guided by the thread of causation might plummet to the deepest abyss of being and correct it proved to be an illusion since idealism was eventually excluded from scientific thought. Indicating that the Socratic model was partly imitated by the science of his times, Nietzsche observes that modern science approached its limits, for the periphery of science has an infinite number of points. When the inquirer, having been pushed to the circumference, realises how logic curls about itself and bites its own tail, he is struck with a new kind of perception: the 'tragic perception' which develops into a 'tragic resignation'—people undermined by the deficiency of rationalism. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Nietzsche conjectures that if the immense store of scientific knowledge is used, not for the purpose of knowledge, but for the practical, egotistical ends of individuals and nations, then people may readily see the consequence: universal wars of extermination and constant immigrations of peoples will weaken their instinctive zest for life and will

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<sup>582</sup> About the Apollonian and the Dionysian spirit, see *The Birth of Tragedy*, London and New York: Anchor Books, 1959, (1870-1), pp. 19-24.

turn against their own species and themselves—an issue that for post-war populations has become a fact.<sup>583</sup>

Explaining art as the medley of the Apollonian and the Dionysian spirit, that is, as the transcendence of science (rationalism) and religion (idealism), Nietzsche considers it as the only 'remedy' which may 'cure' the 'tragic resignation' of modern man. Therefore, he envisions that tragedy could be reborn only when science has been pushed to its limits and, faced with those limits, been forced to renounce its claim to universal validity.<sup>584</sup> Just after the Second World War, when science was definitely forced to renounce its universal validity, Grotowski explored the possibilities of artistic expression as a means of approaching ineffable experience. According to Wolford, he sought to apprehend and articulate the intersection of the timeless moment, the awareness of the Eternal accessible to the creature within time.<sup>585</sup> In Grotowski's art, human blockages, via the three-stage pattern which equally respects craft and spontaneity, appear to be artificial and people leave them behind.

Nietzsche's vision of the resurgence of the spirit of tragedy seems to be manifest in Grotowski's work since it embraced so many of the features of Greek tragedy. To summarise, the ancient Greek tragic spirit constituted by the rhythms of primal Dionysian dances can be traced in Grotowski's methods. In addition, the rationalism of the dramaturgy of the fifth century BC, as well as the desire to question this rationalism, Greek politics and religion, is also evident in Grotowski's philosophy. Finally, the capacity of tragedy to motivate man to question his responsibility towards the communal and the individual life is found throughout Grotowski's work, as Kott observes. Even if Kott questions whether

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<sup>583</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy*, pp. 91-6.

<sup>584</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 104.

<sup>585</sup> *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, p. 106.

modern theatre can attempt to substitute for theatre its 'delusive doubles', that is, revolt, confrontation, counter-culture, the archetypes, rituals, and metaphysical trances of paradise lost, he still finds an answer in Grotowski's work.<sup>586</sup>

After considering Grotowski's period of Productions, which attempted corporality of the sounds and semiotics and managed a performative effect of a language, both oral and corporal, where the meaning signifies simultaneously what is meant by it, Kott stresses Grotowski's attempt to establish a theatre-like activity where the clear line between the actor and the spectator is blurred. Despite his hesitations about the effectiveness and the success of such a performance, Kott acknowledges Grotowski's intension to embody in his performances notions like revolt, confrontation, counter-culture, the concretisation of archetypes and so on, that is attributes that relate to tragedy. Considering these two genres—Greek tragedy and Grotowski's experimental theatrical performances/activities—as two peaks on the same mountain of human art, and not as two ends of a linear road, one can draw parallels and examine more efficiently the political aspects of Grotowski's work.

In this respect, Grotowski's work relates to the ancient Greek Tragedy, which, by embodying mythical, archetypal actions, educated its audience. Analysed in its sociocultural context, tragedy, as examined in the previous chapter, served a direct social and political purpose, like Grotowski's work did indirectly. Despite the social differences between the city-state of the fifth century Athens and post-war Poland, one has to appreciate the similarities between the way politics and religion in both cases influenced theatre and vice versa. Consequently, an overview of the development of tragedy through religion

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<sup>586</sup> 'The End of the Impossible Theatre', *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. X, No. 38, Summer 1980, p. 32.

and politics and the comparison between this and Grotowski's theatre, which appears to have emerged from a similar process, show how Grotowski's contribution relates to the timelessness of tragedy.

#### ***VI b. Grotowski and Tragedy: politics and religion in art***

It is to be remembered that Athenian Tragedy appeared just after the Persian wars, during a period of adjustment by the state to the newborn democracy. Tragedy flourished as a bridge between religion and politics. Literally, it accompanied the passage from tyranny to democracy and made the transition from a magico-religious to an anthropocentric society, where the citizens became directly responsible for their community, comprehensible for Athenian citizens. Even if his *Epitaphios* Thucydides argues that the Athenian regime of Pericles was not the democracy of the majority, but government by the best man, he does not imply that this city-state was totalitarian. In a pluralist political system, the citizen is not deprived of his right to participate to the matters of public interest. No matter how exhausted the city was when it emerged from the Persian Wars, Athens was politically autonomous. It is interesting to note how, instead of ensuring an unrivalled world position by constraining freedoms in individual life, like Sparta had done, the Athenians strengthened individual participation in public affairs in order to avoid internal strife, possibly motivated by the difficult post-war conditions. Pericles achieved social coherence despite the political tensions inherent in a pluralistic society. Under these circumstances, tragedy, drawing on its themes from mythology, encouraged the citizen to speculate on his individuality and his citizenship in an

archetypal context. Thus, all citizens, including the authorities, re-evaluated themselves and their actions in regard to an archetype, constructed within tradition. In the city-state, the newly born idea of the individual was always considered in regard to society, promoting a balance between the two entities, that of the individual and that of society.

As in ancient Greece, theatre in Poland during Grotowski's years was directly connected to the political life of the country. This post-war Polish art, born in a state that privileged social group activity over individual activity, hid the suppression of the individual. The Party used the theatre as an instrument to affect social life directly, but the theatre's criticism of the Party was perceived as a threat and it was, therefore, unwelcome. In Greek drama, however, political criticism was not censored. Aristophanes was able to question contemporary politics and social institutions in his comedies. For instance, in *Lysistrata*, where the women take power and oppose the war, two institutions are criticized; the government that denies women power, and the military that continues the war despite the democratic politics of the city-state. In addition, in *Antigone* Sophocles questions the value of human law versus divine law and finds the former unfair in a period when human institutions lay the foundations for democracy, despite the fact that religion was still very strong. However, what was not accepted in drama was the disturbance of the citizens' psyche, a situation which could have threatened social coherence. For example, Phrynicus' *The Fall of Miletus*, staged in 494 BC, revolved around the disastrous defeat of the Greek army by the Persians at Miletus three years prior to the performance. The audience was so shocked that the authorities fined Phrynicus and shut down his performance because he had reminded the Athenians of a

national calamity that touched them so deeply that they could not objectively look at the events presented.<sup>587</sup>

With respect to the differences in the magnitude of the comparison, Laboratory Theatre was confronted with a similar situation, that of censorship, which directed its choices. Therefore, the introduction of transcendental subjects in Grotowski's productions, which drew as much from religion as from politics, secured the continuation of the work. Nevertheless, in Athens limitations on the themes of tragedy had a protective intention, not an inhibitory character such as in Poland. The Athenians were concerned with the maintenance of social cohesion and not the retention of the party in power, which was the concern of the Polish Communist Party.

Thus, it is incorrect to assume that Athenian democracy was more concerned with its own survival than with the honest confrontation of burning political issues for two reasons. First, as already noted, criticism of political institutions and choices was generally welcome. Second, concerning the case of Phrynicus, the Athenian citizens were not familiar with historical subjects being used in tragedy, but with subjects taken out of mythology. In the mythological context, in contrast to a historical context, personal actions and social events assumed a symbolic character. In other words, legend could acquire a general significance, whereas history was limited to the particular.<sup>588</sup> Thus, the writers could use myth to question the politics of Athens without threatening the social security of the individual. The idea that the individual and the society could be ruled, not by the gods and nature, but by itself, was novel in fifth century Athens, and thus, needed to be nurtured. By means of art and especially tragedy,

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<sup>587</sup> Vernant, *Myth and Tragedy*, p. 244.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

Athens, a powerful city-state, managed to balance the Church's authority with the political and the judicial authority for approximately fifty years. In contrast, the historical circumstances of post-war Poland did not allow latitude for such an accord, except for a very limited time during Solidarity. Western indifference coupled with Soviet domination oppressed the Polish people and left them few choices. In Poland, the Party tried to make religion and art work for the good of the Party, but it was not really successful in suppressing the Church since the latter owned real estate and could, therefore, feed its bishops and priests.<sup>589</sup> Whereas in the case of the arts, there were no choices because the arts were fully sponsored by the state and thus dependent upon it.

The only possible resistance art could have shown in the Poland of the fifties and sixties was found in Grotowski's choice—the development of transcendental subjects—like tragedy had done for other reasons. In a totalitarian state, Grotowski actively exploited the 'harmlessness' of mythological subjects and took this 'harmlessness' even further. Unable to represent contemporary political or religious figures of Poland on the stage directly, Grotowski used a Christ-like figure as a timeless and transcultural archetype to express objections to the regime without appearing offensive, like the ancient Greek poets before him. In a matter of speaking, Grotowski attacked the regime metaphorically, for example, when he suggested in *Akropolis* that the inmates of Auschwitz were simultaneously victims and victimisers, mirroring the Polish Party that had once been amenable to the German occupation and was now suppressing its own people under Soviet hegemony. In this context, the 'Grotowskian subject' incorporated a human pattern that dominated his work and

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<sup>589</sup> Davies, *Heart of Europe*, p. 11. Furthermore, Davies explains that 'by 1946, in consequence of the murder of the Polish Jews by the Nazis and the expulsion of the Germans and Ukrainians, Polish Catholics formed no less than 96 per cent'.

held politico-religious aspects, preserving the characteristics of the 'tragic subject' of Athenian tragedy, as defined by Vernant (see chapter five of this thesis). Both 'subjects' are torn between personal choice and social demands, or personal will against divine will, and both always come to grief, no matter what the choice.

In tragedy, the myth, incorporating historical knowledge with scientific discoveries, metaphysical intuition with political rationality, personal occurrence with social and communal experience, is manifested through the arts. As Aristotle states: 'Tragedy is a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements [used] separately in the [various] parts [of the play]; [represented] by people acting and not by narration; accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions' (square brackets in Janko, Bekker number 1449b).<sup>590</sup> Similarly, for Grotowski, art sought to achieve a complete action, or in Grotowskian terms, an inner action which is 'serious' since it consists of the most profound impetus of the performer which seeks impulsive, yet structured, expression. The language of this action is 'embellished' with musical intonations and stresses the importance of the metrics. Even if most of the sounds of this language are ordinary words, the language per se is still perceived with the *affect*.<sup>591</sup> In Grotowski, the character and the actor are identical. Therefore, the performer works on his or her Achilles heel, both physical and emotional, to achieve through personal 'pity and terror' a sincere artistic expression and, thus, a depth of character.

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<sup>590</sup> Aristotle *Poetics* I with The *Tractatus Coislinianus* A Hypothetical Reconstruction of *Poetics* II, p. 7.

<sup>591</sup> *Affect* is a psychological term, first coined by Aristotle, which includes both impulses and emotions.

## VI c. Epilogue

Even before the founding of his theatre in Opole, Grotowski claimed that theatre would only survive as an art born of immediacy. Thus he asserts:

At its best, the art of *mise-en-scene* has partially freed the theatre from the form of docudrama. Possibly not quite intentionally it has provided a chance for the theatre to become a place of direct contact between artists and spectators, where the attention, thought, and will of the participants are united in a communal “plunge” into existential problems of human fate, interpersonal connections, and the relationship of man to [the] Cosmos in order to find a seed of hope.<sup>592</sup>

Thus, later in his theatre he claimed that the actor/doer should be the creator who builds bridges between the past and himself.<sup>593</sup> Barba’s perception of *Akropolis* indicates the success of such an attempt:

Sometimes, in *Akropolis*, while watching a scene with its contrasting rhythms or its cruel details, my vision became double and an invisible veil of tears turned my gaze inwards, towards a secret and unknown part of me... I heard voices, I answered them, and while I was lost in this dialogue, the performance was no longer there. I was in its centre and I had gone beyond its limits, I was somewhere else... The flame sprang from the actor, illuminating a hidden part of me. It spoke, became *mythos-soma*, shook me and led me along a shadow path, holding my hand and helping me to overcome my hesitations and fears.<sup>594</sup>

Grotowski claimed from theatre an experience of directness and togetherness that can develop into what he calls ‘neo-theatre’. He envisioned a genre that would cease being theatre in the present meaning of the word and

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<sup>592</sup> Quoted in Osinski, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, p. 30.

<sup>593</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 51.

<sup>594</sup> *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 35-36.

become a new branch of the arts.<sup>595</sup> Grotowski focused on this end till the last stages of his career, during which, as Wolford states, he explored the possibilities of artistic expression as a means of approaching ineffable experience. He sought to apprehend and articulate 'the intersection of the timeless moment', that is, the awareness of the Eternal accessible to the creature within time.<sup>596</sup> In ancient Greece, the use of myth for direct personal growth was used in the mysteries, while in tragedy myth was used for social growth. To repeat, both tragedy and the mysteries held an existential, non-illustrative significance, but tragedy exhibited a secular aspect whereas the mysteries displayed an initiatory character. Through the medium of theatre, Grotowski eventually created an activity which was not as open as theatre, yet not as restricted as the mysteries. It encouraged people to confront their lives without mysticism, but with devotion. Grotowski's doer became simultaneously the fire and the wood, the actor and the spectator. Thus, theatre and mysteries were, for the first time, joined into one activity—an activity that created the rites of passage for contemporary human beings and their society.

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<sup>595</sup> Barba, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, p. 31.

<sup>596</sup> *Grotowski's Objective Drama Research*, p. 106.

## CONCLUSION

Man expresses himself through song and dance as the member of a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk, how to speak, and is on the brink of taking wings as he dances. Each of his gestures betokens enchantment. He feels himself to be godlike and strides with the same elation and ecstasy as the gods he has seen in his dreams... No longer the artist, he has himself become a work of art.

(Nietzsche on the Dionysian rites, 1870-1, pp. 23-4)

The unconscious is the psyche that reaches down from the daylight of mentally and morally lucid consciousness into the nervous system that for ages has been known as the 'sympathetic'. This does not govern perception and muscular activity like the cerebrospinal system, and thus control the environment; but, though functioning without sense organs, it maintains the balance of life and, through the mysterious paths of sympathetic excitation, not only gives us knowledge of the innermost life of other beings but also has an inner effect upon them. In this sense it is an extremely collective system, the operative basis of all *participation mystique*, whereas the cerebrospinal function reaches its high point in separating off the specific qualities of the ego, and only apprehends surfaces and externals—always through the medium of space. It experiences everything as an outside, whereas the sympathetic system experiences everything as an inside.

(Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, pp. 19-20)

As indicated in chapter six, Grotowski's performances combined the political with the metaphysical. Kott asserts that during the Theatre of Productions period such a choice was driven by necessity.<sup>597</sup> However, a brief look at *Apocalypsis*, a performance structured during the reign of communism in Poland at the end of the sixties, and *Action*, an opus organised in liberal Italy in the mid-eighties, provides strong evidence that Grotowski's choice to merge politics with metaphysics was a product of the social and political influence of his country, yet this choice remained independent of society and politics.

In *Apocalypsis*, the main Christ-like figure is derided and finally driven from the community. According to Flaszen, the aim of the performance was to depart from the myth to discover a point of reality.<sup>598</sup> In other words, how would people react if Christ revealed himself again? The Polish audience immediately understood the political allusion and also the implications for the Church. The

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<sup>597</sup> *The Theatre of Essence*, p. 140.

<sup>598</sup> Quoted in Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 91.

questions became who should be chosen to lead the crowd either politically or spiritually; who was deified and who was derided. Politically, the Party leader had to protect the idea of communism and to 'safeguard' the Poles from Western 'corruption'. Yet, was this the real issue? Or was it the preservation of political power? To what extent were the Polish people responsible for such choices? The performance may also refer to the Church, which, under the Pope's influence, may have sought to liberalise Polish society—not because it embraced the 'different' and wished for a 'welfare society', but because the Pope needed to be on good terms with the West. Thus, the Church, too, protected the sensitive balance of its authority. The preservation of authority and the crowd's unwitting participation in it seemed to be the concern of *Apocalypse*.

The political situation in Poland at the end of sixties could not allow any performance to convey such meanings overtly. For Grotowski, the myth of Christ could replace politics, because Christ, or for that matter any dying and reborn hero as seen in chapter five, died having tried to save his people spiritually and possibly politically from its foreign rulers. Grotowski used this myth not only to avoid censorship, but also to lend transcendence to his performance, thus imbuing it with a timeless and universal validity. Grotowski's performance encompassed two levels of understanding. The first was the literal meaning of the performance, that of the derision and deportation of someone chosen by the crowd to be the scapegoat. The second was the transcendental meaning that underlay as well as went beyond the text in the personal, social and collective unconscious of the audience within and outside Poland.

*Action*, too, revolved around the myth of the dying and reborn hero incarnated by two different actors who shared the human (Richards) and the

divine (Biagini) nature of the hero. In Italy in the year 2002, the meaning of *Action* was not much different from the meaning of *Apocalypse* in the sixties. Although the metaphysical rather than the political meaning of the performance was at issue, one could still observe some common themes, for instance, the borders between good and evil, since both were incarnated by the same person (Biagini), or the independence of the crowd's opinion (Biagini either seduces or leads Richards and the rest), the force of free will and to what extent it can be manipulated. In this respect, the performance acquired both a psychological and a political character. Although in *Action* the structure of the myth is not as 'rational' as in *Apocalypse*, the action is tight and repeatable and the archetype of the suffering and dying hero is clearly embodied by five people, all sharing an aspect of the same archetype. Yet, the meaning cannot be perceived by rational thinking. The plot could be characterised as chaotic, though not disordered, that is, it requires a multidimensional—mental, emotional and intuitional—approach for its meaning to be perceived.

Grotowski intentionally set his performances on a liminal level, or in other words his performances were read both sequentially and intuitively, both objectively and subjectively. Therefore, each participant who appreciated the performance perceived a different aspect of the meaning of the performance. Also the performance, though always preserving the same structure, vibrated differently to different audiences. It was as dynamic a system as those described in physics by Einstein, where, according to the theory of relativity, the observer and the subject of observation are bound together.

Grotowski's actor, or rather doer, was trained to perform under the same rule of liminality—at the edge of subjective and objective perception. To be more

precise, Grotowski surpassed his spiritual teacher Stanislavski, whose 'as if I were' was transformed by Grotowski into 'I am'. More specifically, Stanislavski introduced the diary of the role into theatre, that is, the role's hypothetical activity before and after the play—it's familial, personal, social and professional affairs—thus setting the basis for realistic theatre. From the outset, Grotowski confronted the idea of the role with suspicion. He appreciated the chaotic reality of everyday life so that for him realism appeared within, yet, beyond every day activity. Consequently, from Kordian to the Prince, the roles were heroes in a myth rather than roles in a play that required everyday personae to transcend to the level of symbolism. For Grotowski, the actor did not just incarnate a role, but he or she transformed his or her personality into a hero for the duration of the performance.

The development of the role was mainly based on physical exercises, on the one hand sequential and on the other impulsive, according to the actor's discoveries during the rehearsals. Eventually, Grotowski's work developed the physical exercises into physical/inner actions and the performer acquired a more personal training. Grotowski privileged the kinesthetic exercises and physical training over verbal training without undermining the latter, because it was the former that could have a developmental effect on the performer.

As indicated in the fourth chapter of this thesis, this dual-faceted training compares to the theory of the duality of the human brain. Savaki underlines the validity of the memory of kinetic exercises and suggests that the memory of kinesthetic experience could be more easily consolidated even if the person could not remember later on when or how he or she memorized or learned the exercise.<sup>599</sup>

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<sup>599</sup> *Our Parallel Selves*, pp. 132-3

What science articulated at the end of the twentieth century seems to be ancient wisdom. Lendra stresses the importance of kinesthetic learning in Balinese traditional training, which was also adopted by Grotowski.<sup>600</sup> She further explains:

Verbal communication, describing what is being learned, is not a part of the training process. This is an ancient way in which the novice learns through the body directly rather than through a preliminary mental process. Grotowski says that “the body itself functions like a brain”; it can record and later recall movement patterns and emotion in a seemingly instinctive way when stimuli are given. Learning kinesthetically incorporates both the physical precision and the emotional quality of the action.<sup>601</sup>

Grotowski’s choice of timeless physical training without extensive verbal explanations can be explained scientifically and thus refutes the accusations of despotism, ‘guruism’ and authoritarianism. Savaki explains that the early experiences of a child are stored in the subconscious system of the right hemisphere, in a way that is not approachable by the language of the left hemisphere.<sup>602</sup> Thus, the person also develops an ‘ultra-verbal’ consciousness, which is what Grotowski sought to approach through the ancient vibratory songs (stimulating the right hemisphere), which he believed could arouse very old and deeply buried experiences.

One should not ignore the fact that Grotowski was convinced of the duality of human consciousness, not only by personal experience, but mainly by the doctrines of Yoga. The philosophical genre of Yoga observes the duality of the phenomenal world and more specifically regards this duality in terms of the human body. Yoga posits the notions of *Idā* and *Pingalā*, which are depicted as

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<sup>600</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 321.

<sup>601</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 321-22.

<sup>602</sup> *Our Parallel Selves*, p.134.

two channels that bear two opposing and supplementary energies starting from the bottom of the trunk in the area of the tailbone. Traversing the backbone, passing over each other and embracing the *chakras* (see chapter four), *Idā* and *Pingalā* reach the human head. Hindu philosophy asserts that the right (*Idā*) and the left (*Pingalā*) are ‘pitfalls’, and thus must be aligned for the person to reach the ‘Great Way’ or, in Yogic terms, to activate *Susumnā*, the channel that includes both *Idā* and *Pingalā*.<sup>603</sup> It is the way for the passage of *Kundalinī*, the fired energy, that when awakened by means of Hatha Yoga quickly traverses all the *chakras*.<sup>604</sup> The Yogi’s aim is the unification of the opposing energies that circulate within *Ida* and *Pingalā* and that all occur in *Susumnā*. The conjunction of opposites represents for Yoga a transcending of the phenomenal world, elimination of all experience of duality. The way to ‘Great Bliss’, as indicated in the mystic texts of Yoga, cannot be known dialectically; it can only be apprehended through actual experience.<sup>605</sup>

Grotowski wanted to investigate and find the way to awaken this energy centre which can increase a person’s as well as an actor’s awareness, sensitivity and perception. In terms of physical training, Grotowski introduced the term ‘energy centres’ (instead of the term ‘chakras’) which are possibly located in the physical body, but can also be located in a ‘body’ that is more complex.<sup>606</sup> Referring to Yoga, Eliade calls this ‘body’ the ‘subtle body’.<sup>607</sup> Grotowski recognised the Yogi theory of *chakras* as the source of inspiration, but he stressed that the same notion existed under different names in other non-

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<sup>603</sup> Eliade, *Yoga*, pp. 236-41.

<sup>604</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>605</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

<sup>606</sup> Grotowski quoted in Richards, ‘The Edge-Point of Performance’, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 449.

<sup>607</sup> Eliade, *Yoga*, p. 239.

Western and also Western cultures, each treating the subject differently. Respecting Hatha Yoga and having adopted a variety of its exercises in his training, Grotowski was cautious about the work around the energy centres. He stressed that 'if one starts to manipulate the centers (centers in the sense of Hindu *chakras*), one begins to transform a natural process into a kind of engineering, which is a catastrophe. It becomes a form, a cliché'.<sup>608</sup> Grotowski's aim was not to arouse *Kundalinī* and thus, according to Hindu doctrine, to make the actors immortal. Grotowski's aim was to awaken in the participants a multilevel awareness of themselves and the cosmos, to limit their conventional, socially-determined behavior and to expand their consciousness not to be ruled by, yet to respect, personal, social, political and historical circumstances. Respecting on the one hand the validity of precision, structure, craft, discipline and symbolism, while on the other non-verbal communication, metaphor and impulsive reaction, Grotowski trained the 'holy actor'—the 'actor shaman' of his youth or the 'doer' of his later years. Liminality was for Grotowski a principle, as it has been a principle in the rites of passage and the mysteries of every culture. It is possible that in the mysteries, and more precisely in the Eleusinian mysteries as seen in chapter five, the initiate accepted the same challenge of harmonizing the left and the right hemisphere, of moving towards a catholic consciousness.

Grotowski began his career with deriding the tragedy of a Christ-like figure, thus reconsidering the ancient Greek tragic hero or the suffering hero of any myth. In *Action*, however, the hero loses his or her tragic character, accepts the fate of suffering, death and resurrection and stands beyond it, not in the realm of gods, but in the realm of 'doers'. By accepting the fact that Grotowski sowed the

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<sup>608</sup> *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, p. 449.

seed for what might be termed 'modern mysteries', one can easily understand the reason why *Action* was seen by only a selected few, who were strictly invited by Grotowski. Therefore, one cannot avoid commenting on the intensive 'touring' of *Action* in the last two years. Will the esoteric dynamics of *Action* be able to resist such secularisation?

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## FILMS

- Akropolis* Based on scenes from the play by Stanislaw Wyspiński; staged and directed by Jerzy Grotowski, directed by James Mac Taggart, Arthur Cantor Films, 1971 (location: Goldsmith's college Audio/Visual Desk).
- Jerzy Grotowski* An interview with Grotowski by Margaret Croyden, Creative Arts Television, produced and directed by Merrill Brockway, CBS, 1970 (location: Goldsmith's College Audio/Visual Desk).
- Jerzy Grotowski* Documentary (in Polish); includes extracts from Plastic exercises, *Apocalypse* and Acting Therapy Project, realised and introduced by Krysztof Domagalik, TVP, n.d (location: Goldsmith's college Audio/Visual Desk).
- My Dinner with André* Directed by Louis Malle, written by Wallace Shawn and André Gregory, The André Company in association with Michael White, 1981 (location: Goldsmith's college Audio/Visual Desk).
- The Vigils* Paratheatrical project with participation of Mercedes and André Gregory, Atlas Theatre Corporation, 1981, (archives of Grotowski's Centre in Wroclaw).
- The Way* Rena Mirecka's Laboratory Research in collaboration with Mariusz Socha and Ewa Benesz, realization by Maciej Stawinski, production: Andrzej Popowicz, 2001 (archives of Grotowski's Centre in Wroclaw).
- Training at the "Teatr Laboratorium" in Wroclaw: Plastic and Physical Training* Directed by Torgeir Wethal, Odin Theatre Film, 1972 (location: Goldsmith's college Audio/Visual Desk).

## ILLUSTRATIONS