

From an Interview by Kathleen Cioffi with Matt Mitler, for Theatre Journal

KC: What aspects specifically of Grotowski's work and thought have inspired Dzieci's work?

MM: I cannot say that there is anything in Grotowski's work and thought which have not been inspirational. I was, and still am, specifically attracted to his aim, which was to use theatre as "a vehicle", a path towards a self-realization. The Dzieci workshops are very much in keeping with the para-theatrical work the Teatr Laboratorium did in the 70's and 80's. We too are non-verbal in the workshops and seek a ritualized group creation, which is quite beyond theatre. My initial interest in Grotowski came out of a search into therapeutic forms. While studying psychology, I happened upon a theatre group that was utilizing methods of Gestalt Psychology and Experimental Theatre. This led me deeper into the world of experimental theatre, which soon led me to Grotowski and his company in Poland. By this time, an intensification of my search had brought me to questions of a more spiritual nature. The work in Poland gave me almost exactly what I was looking for, but not quite. I returned to studies of psychology, sought out rituals and shamanic rites, returned to Poland, and then proceeded to experiment on my own while still continuing a search. About 17 years ago, I became involved with The Gurdjieff Foundation and this has been my specific practice since that time. I did continue to explore many other forms of work and had the good fortune to work intensively with Ryszard Cieslak here in New York up until his death. It was a pleasant surprise to find, many years after first encountering Grotowski, that he had a relationship, himself, with the Gurdjieff Work and was one of the most articulate people to speak about the man and his methods.

KC: Specifically, how do you go about creating a new work (what are the steps you typically follow)?

MM: There is no map. What begins a search and what then leads it on, can be two very different things. Essentially, every project is an individual with its own demands. Every piece we create will be created in a different way and will take a different form once manifest. We now have two theatre pieces, "The Devils of Loudun" and "Fool's Mass". We began by working on "The Devils", but then ended up creating "Fool's Mass" as a stepping-stone. We have been doing "Fool's Mass" for five years; "Devils" is just now coming into its own. The only constant is a firm focus on ensemble training, which certainly includes the development of body and voice, but even more importantly focuses on a method of approaching art as a work of service. All of what we do is informed and supported by the work we do in hospitals and other institutions. It is this work which most clearly keeps us on our path; it bonds the group and shows us a need to develop something infinitely more valuable than physical skills, and that is: Attention.

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