

Working at The Polish Lab Theatre

APOCALYPSIS CUM FIGURIS

AKROPOLIS

HAPPYTOWN

MONOLOGUES & SCENES

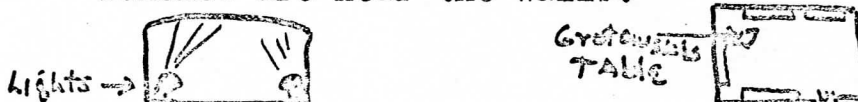
Joseph Slowik's Personal Note
Wroclaw Poland - 1969

APOCALYPSIS CUM FIGURIS

January 23, 1969

Observed First Rehearsal at Lab Theatre

Setting: The same room in which we do our exercises. It is about 30'x50', painted entirely black-except for a white streak on the ceiling from which beams of light below reflect and dimly illuminate the room. The floor is parquet and hard. A few simple black benches are near the walls.



The directors small table is in the corner. A lamp with a goose neck, ash tray and a pot of boiling water are on top the table. Grotowski in a black suit, tinted sun glasses sits behind the table. Before him is the only prop in the show. A loaf of dark rye bread on top of a white towel lies on the floor. Symbolic of the "poor theatre".

Entrance: Of students and actors. We enter and see Grotowski, he is smoking his pipe- he does not acknowledge us. We were told by Andziej to spread ourselves around the room. We do this and wait in man astic silence. We carefully observed the large SILENCE sign which hangs in the dressing rooms through which we entered the room. The sign is obeyed. It is a demand respect

After a few minutes the stage manager Andrzej pulls aside the curtain and the actors enter one by one from the dressing room which adjoins the hall. The enter in silence. They all wear white and stand out in sharp contrast to the pitch surroundings.

Warmup : Not a word is spoken for several moments. Then a few actors begin pacing about mumbling to themselves- almost inaudibly as if reciting text while solidifying positions.

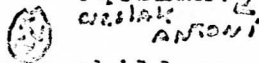
Beginning: Grotowski, who has just finished re-lighting his pipe, claps his hands and says "Begin." They do. He will watch one segment of the play, make notes give them, take the scene four times and finally ask us to leave the rehearsal room.

Action : Zbyszek lies on the floor.
He pulls his white undershirt over his head.
He is a corpse.
Rena and Elizabeth move toward him.
Rena sits on his thighs and moans
Suddenly they all begin a mournful wail- they grieve
They are hard to understand- it is slobbering speech

Cieslak moves toward them from across the room.
 He taps the cane he carries near Zbyszek.
 The girls stop their wailing.
 Zbyszek peaks over his undershirt. laughs at Cieslak.
 Takes Cieslaks bread from him and begins to back
 Cieslak against the opposite side of the room.
 Zbyszek seems upset and scolds Cieslak. The words are
 almost whispered.
 He continues his tirade pulling the bread apart and
 throwing bits of it at Cieslak.
 At one point Zbyszek forces the bread into Cieslaks
 mouth.
 Cieslak retaliates- grabs Zbyszek by the back of the
 neck. Cieslak speaks softly.
 Zbyszek falls to the floor.
 Antoni, dressed in white, white boots, sheet like
 cape over his shoulders, summons Cieslak
 toward the reflectors on the floor near the
 entrance of the hall.
 Elizabeth in near reflectors.
 When Cieslak arrives there figure point toward Elizabeth
 Cieslak grabs her while others gather around:



The others make wind like noises.
 A series of positional changes symbolize the sexual
 attack by Cieslak on Elizabeth.
 Her hair is grabbed by Cieslak and pulled- an accented
 moment and his other hand is released as if
 he had shot an arrow and Elizabeths hair was
 the bow string- or arrow.
 Stanley begins a slow accelerating run which reaches
 its climax when the arrow is shot. The climax.
 Stanley stiffens with glee after the climax. And
 Zbyszek yelps like a dog- an animal.
 Position change- Elizabeth is handled by Cieslak.
 Breasts touched. He hits her between her legs
 she stiffens without sound. Stanleys run and
 climax.
 Elizabeth is dropped.
 The white figure comes toward Cieslak and the others
 form within an imaginary circle.
 Antoni says to Cieslak: "Dzien dobry krulu Lulu."



Cieslak, like a child repeating a nursery rhyme, says:
 "Where have you been and what have you been
 doing. ?"
 This is the cue for the group who begin the "obscene
 scene." Cieslak watches them walking in dif-
 ferent rhythms around them.
 During the "obscene scene" each actor spoke to each
 other and to the audience.
 The middle finger gesture was used. Zbyszek sat
 on the floor and invited Rena to sit on top
 of him. Stanley milked Elizabeth and drank it
 from his cupped hand. Zygmund tried to hide
 an erection.

During all this, Cieslak walked around them in a broken rhythmic gait. At one time, he pulled his black raincoat over his head and walked faster -- seemingly headless. Suddenly he is confronted by Stanley, then Molik, then Zbyszek and finally Elizabeth as he seeks to escape them. He finally manages to break away and begins to whistle.

Antoni, in the white cape stands near the floor reflectors (the only two light sources in the room) and spreads his cloak over them causing them to dim out. Everyone freezes as the light fade out.

The scene described above was done 4 times during the six hour rehearsal period. We are five days before opening and it was the only scene rehearsed this day. The entire script (though I havent seen it) is only 23 pages long.

Grotowskis Comments:

Technical: Make the grouping of the four during the obscene scene smaller. Rena, who kept out of the circle and had to be reminded repeatedly to make the circle smaller, wasnt able to do this simple task. So Grotowski asked Andziej to get some chalk and make a magic circle around the group. All waited in silence while this was done.

Elizabeths reaction to Cieslaks hitting her between the legs should begin as soon as the blow is struck and should have more impulse

The stage manager should time the fading of the lights with Antonis cape.

Some of the words were not understandable. Grotowski couldnt get what was being said and to whom it was being spoken.

Rhythm: The obscene scene should vary in intensity and volume. Dont lose energy in the valleys, but you must have valleys in order to have peaks.

Phases : You actors are not playing from phase to phase (Grotowskis word). Clearly end one phase and begin the other. I assume he means "beat"..He told them to take ten minutes and think of the "Phases."

After The Break :

The scene was played once again after which he said the following: "What are you doing? To whom are you speaking." The actors couldnt give him a complete answer. They paraphrased, gave him motivations etc..but they couldnt answer his question. He said they couldnt answer the question because they never asked it. They were told to take their scripts to

the dressing room and work on the answers.

It was at this point we were dismissed.

We saw but four of the six hour rehearsal period though we were scheduled to see it all.

Breaks: Every hour and a half a fifteen minute break was taken. The actors needed it after the physical workout of the "obscenity scene".

Actors Behavior During Notes

Absolute silence.

They never talk to one another.

No whispering.

The minimum of distraction.

Grotowskis Mannerisms During Rehearsal

The first step in giving the notes he had taken on small pieces of paper, was to ask the actors if they had any problems, physical, technical or emotional they would like to bring up.

He remained seated during the entire note giving session- except where he got up to show the actors where to confront Cieslak.

Speaks with an intensity- pauses frequently - thinks speak again...cleans pipe.

"To znaczy ze"= He will explain something and then give an example prefacing it with TO ZNACZY ZE .

When he is emphasizing a point he gestures like a priest from the chest. The TRUMAN GESTURE from the chest.

Fingers gesture in different rhythms- wrists bent.

Hands folded over his stomach like an obese Bishop of Cardinal.

What others in Wroclaw say of Grotowski :

"He tells us he is beyond Stanislawski. I sneer."

"He is suffering from a grand malady."

Some people just gesture when they speak of Grotowski-- their index finger to their temple

"He makes those who work with him as crazy as he is himself."

Some dont comment- but a smile crosses their lips- not of contempt or jealousy- but as if they were talking about a poor madman.

"Have you ever been to his home ? Everything is black. Furniture, walls ceilings..everything

Notes taken on the physical action of the play
during my fourth viewing on Sunday February 23, 1969

APOCALYPSIS CUM FIGURIS runs 1 hour and three minutes.

MAN. WOMAN & BREAD

Stanley and Elizabeth wake, speaking simultaneously. He makes a sign on the floor where she puts the bread, white towel and the knife. He dips into his pocket to eat something- he feeds her. She slobbers it from the palm of his hand. She asks for some bread- he pushes her away. He takes bread moves to the corner, erotically places bread on his lower regions. She takes knife and steal the bread from his crotch. She stabs the bread twice. He writhes- she has emasculated him..The staff of life (bread) and the staff of life- penis.

ASSIGNING THE ROLES

Antoni makes Zbyszek a child. He kneels to him. We kneel to our children (in a communist country the only privileged class are the children). He assing the role of Christ to Cieslak who is blind:

You are a child. You will die on the cross for us!
(slight pause- derisive laughter)

You died for us but we didnt recognize you.
(Laughter, Christ looks innocently bewildered- he doesnt understand.
Zbyszek lies on chesk in mock crucifixion- buttocks in air.)

Gives PETER ~~CHRIST~~ A FREE RIDE

Cieslak jumps on Antoni- who is Peter and is given a free ride and dropped near the bread. Stanley sings " Jesus hangs on the cross for us."Harbinger of the crucifixion. Christ now looks anguished.

STRUTTING OF PETER

Another warning given Christ. After crowing three times (as the rooster did when Peter betrayed the crucified Christ) Peter struts like a proud peacock. A warning of Christs coming Apocalypsis.

CHRISTS FIRST SPEECH

Rapidly spoken. He doesnt understand. Said to himself.

PETER MOCK CARRYING THE CROSS

Peter speaks to Jesus and carries the cross in mock style. Christ finds this engaging and joines like a child playing a game. He literally translates the mocking comment into a game. Cieslak bounces forheads with Antoni at games end.

SUCKING THE BLOOD

They all gather on the floor at Christs feet. He lifts his black raincoat. He wears only exercise black trunks. They each having his turn suck blood from his side and fall back on their rears like children wriggling after feeding.

FIRST PROCESSION

A solemn (though always with a touch of mockery) procession circles Christ. Christ listens. He stares at the wall with angelic simplicity. He bathes in the song. The procession stops- they look at this goof. Can he be so naive not to know what all this means ?

THE DANCE

Christ watches as they do a dirty dance. He takes it to mean something else. He does a brutal but rhythmic dance himself- his face all smiles..The dance is tiring.

PETER FALLING- PETER SAVED

Peter is the church. But his parishoners do vulgar things. He is comically astonished. Elizabeth forces him to maul her. Stanley rams him. They all descend on him. Christ to the rescue--but not heroically! Cieslak walks over calmly and taps the face of Peter. Peter gets up- is lifted by Christ and like a horse and a rider they run around the hall. Peter whips Cieslak with his cloak. Yippee sounds. Before the ride Christ polishes Peters boots...From the boot polishing position Peter sits on Christs shoulders, for the ride. After the ride Christ falls exhausted.

THE COMING OF AGE

Christ rises. After the ride he walked hunched using his cane. He speaks in a hoarse voice to which no one listens.

THE LAZURUS JOKE

Explained in the rehearsal section. Christ is taken in as Lazurus really never did die.

LAZURUS' REPAYMENT

Bread is thrown in Christs face by Lazurus. Christ loses patience for a moment and throws Lazurus to the ground.

CHRIST MATED

At this weak moment in his life, Christ is offered a woman by Peter. He feels the first stirrings of manhood. Myth of Christs imperfection gone as he makes Mary Magdeline commit orally--and he climaxes a holy number of times = 3! Stanleys climax runs accompany. After this Christ is ashamed and faces the wall.

FILTH DANCE

Describes in rehearsal section as the "obscene scene". He whistles trying to get them to stop. He feels the weight of their sins as he circles them. He tries to ignore them by placing his black raincoat over his head. They force him to see- he tries to escape but cannot....Darkness.

THE LAST SUPPER

Peter brings the light. A number of candles. Judas is lying on top of Mary Magdeline. Christ says "one of you will betray me". Judas, still on Mary Magdeline, says " me Jesus ?"..... Christ snuffs out a candle with his index finger and thumb and then puts the mark on Peters forehead.

FANATIC FRIGHTENING LITANY

With candles they circle Jesus singing "Chwala swietego i sprawiedliwmu.".....This becomes a fanatical song..They poke the candles on the bewildered Jesus. He falls back in crucified position.--dies.

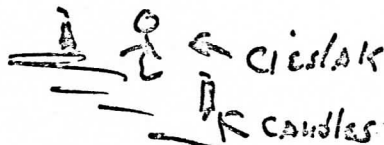
BEATING OF THE FAITHFUL

Peter begins to chant the mass. Ugly asides from the parishoners
More chanting. Christ rises. He cant take it. He gets up and
whips them with white towels. The whipping is proving ineffective.
He beats them until they leave the room- he is exhausted- they
get sensual enjoyment out of it..He is alone with Peter. He
collapses staring at at Peter from across the room.

Antoni



CANDLES



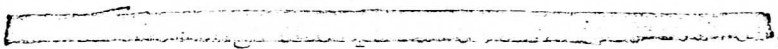
Candles

MOCK RESSURECTION

Molik and Elizabeth come out. They are going to annoint the
dead Christ. They prepare. They wash their feet in water-
huge pail for Elizabeth into which she steps-Molike comes
with little pan and emptys three sprinkles into it. The
sound is like urine splashing in a tin cup. They put on their
robes- and shoes and go. HE FORGOT THE OILS!--the main reason
for going to the sepulchre. They chant until they get there.
Elizabeth holds up a white cloth (very similar to the one
worn by Christ when he rose from the dead). They exit after
a short exchange by Peter and Christ.

JERUSALEM - Koniec

Peter denies Christ! We dont follow you- we follow another."
Peter slowly puts our the candles snuffing them out in a variety
of ways. Digging them into the hard floor, pushing them into
each other. Christ sings Jerusalem--darkness---more singing
--silence...then a voice says " Go and come no more."
The two "poor" reflectors are lighted and audiance leaves
in silence.

 The paper I
worked on was submitted to Grotowski contained part of the text on the
next two pages. 