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Excerpts About Grotowski

and his
Theatre....London Times
Herald Tribune
The Financial Times
London Times

BIG CATCH FROM POLAND..London Times..August 24, 1969

"appearance of Jerzy Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre is by far the Edinburgh Festival's biggest catch."

"Grotowski enjoys a God-like status among the experimental groups in the west"

" the execution of the degradation is of extreme beauty. Its basic property is iron precision. If you stopped the action at any point you would have fine plastic composition, equally, while in motion, you notice its rhythmic delicacy under the brutal force."

"The discipline of the company may be rigorous, but it conveys an intensely private sense of what it feels like to be at the breaking point."

"The voices of the actors, croaking or falling into sing-song cadences, take you back to the experiments of infancy and the self-comforting regressions of sickness."

"I can think of few more potent images in the modern theatre than that of Jacobs wedding procession with his scrap heap bride and the final singing descent into the ovens. At such moments, even to a foreign spectator Grotowski seems rather to be creating a myth than exploiting it."

ACROPOLIS at Cambridge Street-by Terry Coleman- Manchester Guardian
August 22-1968

"Grotowski's company must have done more than any other in recent theatrical history to irritate and harass its audience.."

" When two wheelbarrows , said to essential props, were lost in transit, the company absolutely refused to go on without them. All offers of Scottish wheelbarrows were declined. So the Festival authorities had to cancel the first night just like that. The theatre of experiment was crippled by the absence of two props. Pity about the people who had booked and turned up, but the integrity of the drama had to be saved. Two substitute wheelbarrows were flown in, work continued on them until 4 a.m. and last night the company was ready. The audience turned up on the second "first night" only to be told they would not be allowed in the theatre until five minutes before the performance. No reason was given. So they sweltered in the foyer and were then let in all at once only to find the numbers on their tickets were meaningless because the seats were not numbered. The two famous wheelbarrows looked like ordinary barrows!"

"It all had a kind of an obscurity which Mr. Peter Brook
yet achieve. He might consider the advantages to be gained
by putting on plays in a foreign language, so that the
might already be unintelligible without him having to make
them so."

GROTOWSKI vs. TRADITION

Polish Theatre Group Impressive in Paris—by Thomas Quinn Curtis
International Herald Tribune—European Edition
October 3, 1968

"Peter Brook believes Jerzy Grotowski has wrought the most significant changes in histrionic technique since Stanislawski."

"The voltage of the Polish Laboratory's Theatres theatrical electricity, the trance-like comportment of its performers and its bold attempt to root out and expose the emotional well springs beneath the poetic imagery of Wyspianski's text are not forgotten."

"Mr. Grotowski does not stage the play but dramatizes the spirit that lies at its heart."

"Grotowski evoked terror with a sudden theatrical flash, and then distills pity from Wyspianski's dark drama accomplishing tragedy's second mission with equal skill aided by his brilliant company."

"This ACROPOLIS of Mr. Grotowski's is an imposing achievement of the modern stage, a work that will have wide and beneficial influences."

"Grotowski and his company were to visit the United States this season, but their visas were suddenly and mysteriously cancelled two weeks before the Czech crisis. The American passport authorities now claim this action was taken because of the crises, but whatever the reason the arbitrary move has been a blow to the troupe costing them \$13,000 as they had made commitments to visit Mexico as well during their American tour. Mr. Grotowski lectured as guest professor at New York University last year and his American admirers have protested his being refused entry this year. Certainly it is a loss to American playgoers."

"Grotowski is a calm, scholarly man, soft-spoken and extremely cordial. He is only 36 but his original productions of classical drama, his training of actors and his theatrical vision gained him an enormous reputation when he was still in his twenties."

GROTOWSKI SEEK THEATRE ...The London Times—September 21, 1968

"Jerzy Grotowski and his company (13 in all) have arrived in London from Mexico. They have been refused a visa to tour in the United States, because of a cultural boycott against the Warsaw Pact nations after the Soviet occupation of Prague—refused in spite of a committee in support of Grotowski including America's leading playwrights, directors and actors, among them Arthur Miller, Edward Albee and T. S. Eliot. Committee members will come to London to see the performances because they cannot see the company in New York. But there is no place for them to perform in London. They do not need a theatre but a large room which could seat up to 80. If a place is not found they will have to go back to Poland and we shall lose the chance of seeing them for a long time."

"Grotowski is one of the most audacious and original experimenters at large today. Watching a production of his is an upsetting and disturbing experience: it is an assault on established theatrical value, and one delivered with all the force and conviction of a new Messiah.

"Grotowski's actors are impeccably trained."

"Although his is a very pietistic approach, tending occasionally to puritan excesses, the technical and emotional results Grotowski achieves with his company are remarkable."

"Grotowski has come along and put order and discipline in the place of Artauds chaotic Theatre of Cruelty outbursts."

Excerpts from the article PARCDIA SACRA by Andrzej Krasinski
printed in the January, 1969 monthly POLISH PERSPECTIVES

"It is a mistake to treat the "13 Rows" as an experimental theatre. Such a description is at the very least misleading when applied to a group which for many years has been putting into practice a fully thought out programme supported by a copious fund of theory. If we can we should use the word " search" for what the theatre is doing- it is in the sense that every genuine art is a continuous quest. But it would be hard to find any of the usual symptoms in its work of what we usually mean by experimental—a sense of groping in the dark, of progress by trial and error to make up for the lack of theoretical bearings. They are a Laboratory and their very nature is addressed to a minority audience and makes no claims to setting up as a universal model of contemporary theatre."

" He is a fanatic of the theatre . He assault traditional forms of production and hammers out his own approach. Traditional theatres try to keep in the race with TV and the movies by borrowing elements from the other arts. Grotowski thinks this is a misguided direction as well as a futile one since TV and the movies are far better equipped. So Grotowski is utterly indifferent to the practical aspects of this competition. The rise of TV and the films interest him only as they throw into relief the pure essence of the theatre stripped of all the accretions it has amassed in its long history. He is bent on sublimating and purifying those functions which are unique and irreplaceable. (some people thought that film would prove a danger to the art of painting- but the development of photography served only to provide a clearer idea of the direction in which painting ought to go--freed it--allowed it to concentrate on purely painterly problems.)

"Grotowski finds the unique quality in the theatre the line between spectator and actor. The supreme object of his company is to make this relationship as authentic, direct and intimate as possible."

"The box set is abolished. Grotowski goes so far as to eliminate everything that might stand in the way of immediate contact between actor and audience. Thus in his designs there is no place for decor in the traditional sense of the word--we have a bare arrangement of the hall modified to suit the needs of each play. Other "synthetic" devices have also been scraped, such as lighting, music and make-up. Costume and properties have been reduced to an absolute minimum. This asceticism, which has disowned practically the whole varied lexicon of theatrical convention, is called by Grotowski the "poor theatre". "Acceptance of the poverty of theatre" he has written, "denudation of everything that is not theatre, concentration on its germinal, primary elements, have revealed the richness lying in its very nature, that is in the craft itself."

"The intrinsic elements---the actors function. He does not enact a role but creates it anew--He has only his own skill, his physical and mental powers...the part he is cast in in no more than a frame for his personal statements. Just as he has been deprived of all accessories and props, he must also liberate himself from traditionally accepted stereotypes and throw off the mask forced upon him by society and civilization. He must expose himself before the audience and reveal the most intimate reaches of his personality and his subconscious--in this way connecting with the spectator...The actor is invited to brutally "penetrate himself"--to overcome his own inhibitions.. thus the actors role is that of a sorcerer or exorcist freeing the spectator from the evil forces of conformism suppressing his inward life. The theatre is therefore, a magic rite in which, by means of a process which Grotowski calls "collective introversion" the spectators responses are stimulated and the inhibitions stifling and deforming them are released. As in primitive magic, here too the essence of this act lies in the breaking of the taboos set up by society to keep in check any excess of individualism which might menace community convention. But as we know violation of taboos is always ambivalent, combining as it does both revolt and fascination which are two poles of one and the same phenomenon."

"Demands put on the actor are incomparably greater than in traditional theatre. To equip him for this great role a detail system of exercises has been prepared. Several hours are spent each day doing acrobatic, mime, voice and breathing exercises. Apart from its own discoveries, the theatre draws on various training systems ranging from Hatha Yoga and Chinese Yoga to Meyerhold's bio-mechanics. It is also interested in such varying cultural phenomena as Chinese opera, Indian Katha Kali and the Japanese No Theatre..The results are outstanding and astounding.....The actors command abilities which allow them to ignore physical limitations and give them enormous freedom of expression. This freedom is the main goal, for it makes it possible to overcome obstacles standing in the way of spontaneous, personal expression.....The small company of the Theatre of 13 Rows is unique and amazing. It resembles a monastic order with a very strict rule, deeply absorbed in its work and utterly dedicated.

"It is difficult to predict how big an audience this kind of corporate experience can attract. They have their own permanent following in Wroclaw--many coming back to see the performance many times in order to follow its crystallization of form and expression. Rehearsals last as long as the play is performed. As soon as the company decides they can do nothing to improve the performance, they simply take off the play."

" The best sign of success is the attitude of the audience. when the lights go up at the end, the audience sits on, silent and motionless for some time. To clap is felt as a breach of taste.

To praise the theatre seems equally inappropriate. In relation to this phenomenon both criticism and praise lose their sense. This theatre which wants to shake and move, arouses both opposition and approval. And opposition for them is an equally valuable means of making contact with the audience. Whatever individual reactions may be, any encounter with the Laboratory Theatre leaves one with a deep conviction that it is one of the most ambitious coherent efforts ever undertaken to revive the modern theatre."

OUTLINE Talk of Lab & Grotowski

(use material from Polish Perspectives)

Experimenter

Differs from most experimentors

They are amateurs- by change, groping in the dark

Grotowski is a professional's professional!

For many years putting into practice a fully thought out program

Supported by an iron clad- really believed in theory and point of view!

It is a place for search.

Chaos leads to anarchy

Improvisation only good if in form

Conjunction of opposites: spontaneity and discipline

Assaults tradition

TV - movies--do it better

Put art of theatre into its proper perspective

Like photography placed art.

He is hell bent on sublimating and purifying those elements that make theatre indispensable

Strips it of all it has amassed during its long history

Only actor and spectator remain

Make that relationship authentic, direct and intimate as possible.

Box set abolished...Never before anyone carried this experiment as far as Grotowski---

Lights only for illumination--the actor lights from inside the audience should see one another.

Other synthetic arrangements scrapped--costume, properties reduced to absolute minimum.

We only then see the richness that lies at the very nature of theatre.

Assaults text---(feed in other notes here)

Actor: see notes on page 17 plus Grotowski's own rules to the actors. Holy actor

Audience: notes on page 17..

MAY 1st. I was asked to march in the parade with the Lab theatre people, but I refused. This is the GREAT communist celebration. I am an American. They keep on calling us imperialists, murderers etc. I cannot march in a parade for them ever.

Viewed the parade from the balcony of a 4th floor apartment of people Mrs. Joniak knew. The city fathers marched first past us and on to the viewing stands called the Tribunal. They would view the whole parade from there. It lasted 5 hours. Banners glorifying socialism were carried by marchers as were thousands of red flags. One group of marchers were young Viet Namiese children, and as they marched past the Tribunal, the man who keeps speaking over the public address system called out " Long live Viet Nam and the Viet Nam people who are victims of American murderers.

The Lab marched by. The entire zespól was there including Flaszen, but excluding Grotowski and Cieslak who were in France. Dombrowski and his fellow worker carried the Lab banner, and Cynkuntis carried the red flag.

At night in the square facing the apartment house I live in, music was played and a throng gathered to dance. The music was alive, electric guitars, noise and all. The dance ended at 10:00 p.m....They lived up their wonderful May 1st day. Stanislawa told me all the decorations would be down tomorrow so that not a flag should remain for May 3rd which is the independence day of Old Pre-War Poland and the one celebrated in Humboldt Park in Chicago annually. She was right! All came down for the REAL holiday.

DECLARATION

Pani Stefa asked me to write out a declaration which everyone who became a "starzyst" at the Lab would sign. I handed her this declaration:

DECLARATION

I do hereby agree not to describe or publish any information relating to the professional work during my stay at the Laboratory Theatre. I also declare that I will in no way quote Jerzy Grotowski or his assistants unless I receive special permission from Mr. Grotowski and the theatre director.

I affirm I am in good health and capable of participating in the work of the theatre. I assume full responsibility and will not file claims against the theatre should any kind of accident occur in relation to the work.

Name