

The Centre for Study of Jerzy Grotowski's Work and of Cultural and Theatrical Research in Wrocław.

A Program Proposal

Many consider Jerzy Grotowski's creative experiments as "a margin of modern theatre," but the opposite opinion, especially held outside Poland, indicates that — Grotowski is the one who is at the centre of world theatre, and his importance seems to increase with time.

It is realised, more often nowadays, that Jerzy Grotowski "not only has made an original contribution to world culture, but also, has acted as a very influential ambassador of Polish theatre, Polish Romanticism, and Poland itself (Tadeusz Burzynski, "Grotowski – wielkosc nieurojona" [Grotowski – A Non-imaginary Value], *Sprawy i Ludzie*, May 12th, 1988).

A known and – more importantly – competent publicist from Wrocław offered this opinion regarding Grotowski's role in contemporary theatre:

It is a clownery to classify the great and settle them on a particular place in the pantheon. The certainty that among the most outstanding European creators, there will be at least one Polish name – Grotowski – is nowadays neither an exaggeration, nor abuse.

It obligates us to something, and opens something!

It is known that twenty years of Grotowski's work with Ludwik Flaszen – Teatr Laboratorium (1959-1984) – is directly connected to Wrocław. The city gratefully remembers the times of the Laboratory's full bloom and splendor, marked by visits of world-great theatre artists, as during The Theatre of Nations season in 1975. Thus, it seems obvious that Wrocław is the city predestined to be the site for an authentic centre of documentation of Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre studies, named "The Centre for Study of Jerzy Grotowski's Work and of Cultural and Theatrical Research."

Contrary to popular belief, the documentation of Teatr Laboratorium is incomplete and scattered all around the world. The Wrocław collection has only pieces of it, and lacks many documents of principal importance (e.g. director's scripts). The archives must be re-developed and restructured (especially the period of the 1980s, which holds tremendous gaps due to a loss of contact with the outside world).

In 1973, the American Institute for the Research and Study of the Work of Jerzy Grotowski was established, but it became inactive three years later after the death of its founder – Ninon Karlweiss. Other countries are preparing similar research-archive institutions; Italy is first among them.

The situation remains positive as long as the members of Teatr Laboratorium stay alive and active – first of all Grotowski himself, Ludwik Flaszen, Rena Mirecka, Zygmunt Molik, Ryszard Cieslak, and others.

In these circumstances, creating an institution that could become the world centre of documentation and research is needed here and now. If we do not do it, others will – outside of Poland, and outside of Wrocław.

Primarily, such a centre must be autonomous in name and in practice. Connecting it with ongoing or occasional theatrical or paratheatrical activity cannot

be good for either side. Let me recall the opinion of Tadeusz Burzynski, who very accurately pointed out the real and potential danger if there were to be lack of autonomy.

The archives may become a psychological weight on the theatre—its curse, as is the *Apocalypsis* room for anyone who prepares his/her own performance there. The theatre itself may also be a curse for the archives, not only because it can make the area of work limited by annexing even its only room for rehearsals and plays – which still happens – but also because the Grotowski archives at a theatre seems unfortunate, if not plain wrong. It would be a common abuse.

The only solution – to repeat again – is the complete, meritorical and organisational autonomy of the Centre. It will help avoid abuses and conflicts of interest, which arise between a theatre and an institution of research and creation.

Assignments of the Centre:

The Centre is going to gather, and systematically work upon, the documentation on Grotowski, his group, apprentices, followers, successors, and those who were his personal cultural and theatrical tradition and the tradition of Teatr Laboratorium. This documentation will draw from all types of activities and documents in languages and cultures from around the world. In this way, the Centre can acquire the role of a world centre for information, as well as a place for working sessions for those interested in the subject from different points of view, and in different aspects. The Centre will conduct *internal activities*, which will remain closed to the public, and activities addressed *outside* and open to anyone interested.

Internal activities will focus on:

- the building and on-going analysis of our collection, and preparation of catalogues: archival materials, books, magazines, photos, film and videotapes, audiotapes, etc;
- preparing to print a full bibliography on Grotowski and Teatr Laboratorium;
- preparing a personal directory of Teatr Laboratorium, including trainees;
- composing a daily calendar detailing Teatr Laboratorium's activities, 1959-1984;
- hosting classes and consultations with members of the Centre and invited guests.

Public activities will include:

- preparing and organising exhibitions;
- initiating and organising seminars and open meetings – nationally and internationally. Meetings should serve as an opportunity for artists and scholars representing various disciplines to exchange and compare ideas; these meetings could include film and/or other document demonstrations, or, for example, the presentation of a theatrical technique;
- organising sessions of the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA), led by a former apprentice of Grotowski—the outstanding director, Eugenio Barba;

- publishing autonomously and in co-operation with the University of Wrocław, for example, within the framework of the central program of basic research *Polish National Culture, Its Development Tendencies and Perception*;
- public screenings of documentary films accompanied by lectures, in Wrocław and other centres in Poland and abroad. (A recent symposium in Jelenia Góra organised by their C.K. Norwid Theatre on the 30th anniversary of Teatr Laboratorium under the direction of Grotowski and Flaszen showed a great need for such presentations not only in our country, but also abroad, especially for the younger generation.);
- lectures and conversations about Grotowski and Teatr Laboratorium for acting students and others interested in the topic;
- maintaining constant openness for initiatives from the outside, under the condition that they meet, or at least correspond with, the interests of the Centre.

We intend to invite creators from abroad, e.g. those associated with Odin Teatret, Centro per la Sperimentazione e la Ricerca Teatrale di Pontedera, Peter Brook's Centre (CIRT) in Paris, and have a stable relationship with the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA).

However, the basic aim of the Centre is to stimulate, organise, and lead research, as well as collect and analyse documentation related to its primary interests. The Centre's status will be of *an artistic institution focusing on research*, situated on the edge of scholarship (in the wider sense of the word), and art (also in a wider meaning, not limited to "artistic products"), serving specialists from various fields, who would be interested in co-operation with the Centre and its work.

To accomplish this, it will be necessary to make use of Teatr Laboratorium's base in Brzezinka near Olesnica, where some seminars and workshops would take place. We are also interested in using buildings in Zmigrod and Dominice after fitting them to our demands.

The Centre's goals will be:

- Joining the tasks of a particular type of university and "museum." Although some circles assume museums boring, dead institutions when compared to theatres, in real life, it often occurs that some museums (e.g. A. Mickiewicz Literature Museum in Warsaw) lead lively activities, satisfying people's needs, while many theatres seem stale;
- To be interdisciplinary, with a focus on theatre art;
- To be international, but with an inclination towards Polish culture and Wrocław's art circles;

The Centre will not:

- remain in a permanent relationship with any theatre group;
- organise its own theatrical or paratheatrical projects;

- be a continuation of Teatr Laboratorium, which as we know dissolved in 1984. However, Teatr Laboratorium and its activities will remain the Centre's focus.

The Centre's administrative structure:

- The management will consist of a director and vice-director. They carry the responsibility for all work done in the Centre. The director hires and fires the Centre's workers;
- There will be the Advisory Board closely connected with the Centre's management. At present, the councillors are Tadeusz Burzynski; Janusz Degler, Ph.D.; Jozef Kelera, Ph.D. The Centre's program must always be discussed with the Advisory Board. The Advisory Board will also mediate between Wroclaw's art circles and the Centre's management. The management, together with the Advisory Board (or with its representatives) and a worker of the archives, will undertake acquisitions;
- The establishment of an International Advisory Board is expected. It will assemble researchers and artists who share interest in the Centre's work;
- Permanent departments are expected to be created:
Archival Documentary Section (national and international),
Scholarly Publication Section,
Public Exhibition Section,
Library and Information Section,
Film Section,
Foreign Section.

Final Remarks:

The formulated program for the Centre, especially the specific proposals about its structure and staff composition, can be verified only in practice. It is important to accomplish the main goals, to which all other issues must be subordinate.

Introduced structure and staff composition will remain and be tested and verified in the first year. In time, they will be modified if needed.

Obviously, every program – from a practical point of view – only makes sense if it can be realised through everyday work. If not, it remains only evidence for a proposed public need. Undoubtedly, such programs exist as a 'sign of the times' – the times express themselves not only through great achievements, but more so, through public needs which 'hang in the air.'

Probably two or three years will be necessary to select a stable staff and achieve visible effects.

The work of the Centre for Study of Jerzy Grotowski's Work and of Cultural and Theatrical Research in Wroclaw is planned from a 21st-century perspective, unmarred by amateur improvisation.

I would like to end with a personal remark. Since 1962, the creative work of Grotowski has been a subject not only of my respect and admiration, but also my research and activity in publications and my university work. Up until now, I have worked alone. It may now be time to make it a public value and to reach and involve

those, who in Wroclaw, in Poland, and in other countries, head in similar directions. In this light, the problems of the so-called director's job (and all that is connected with it), do not matter. Only those things which can be done together have importance. And here, everything is to be done – starting with the very basic. Only then, can one begin to build.

Undoubtedly, someday we will be evaluated for what we have done and what we have not. And justifiably so.

Zbigniew Osinski
Wroclaw, June 21, 1989.

The above text was presented to the city of Wroclaw and province authorities half a year before the Centre was established. It was an internal document, never published before.

The language of this text belongs to the times and conditions in which it was written. Some of the assumptions and demands were verified by time itself, but the main target and some particular tasks have been with us for the last ten years and have remained (as a task or tasks to be realized). Because this document has not only historical character, it seemed sensible for us to make it public.

Zbigniew Osinski
Wroclaw, December 20, 1999.

Translated from Polish by Kris Salata with Kamil Piwko, proof-reading Teresa Kelley,
translation edited by Grzegorz Ziolkowski. Wroclaw 2004.