

A red line and a grey line intersect at a silver sphere. The red line starts from the bottom left and goes up to the right, passing through the sphere. The grey line starts from the top right and goes down to the left, also passing through the sphere. The sphere is positioned between the two lines, acting as a focal point.

Texts FROM
THE HEART

Grzegorz Ziółkowski

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Translated by the author with Paul Allain

Poznań 2021

Dedicated to Marta Steiner – theatre anthropologist and expert on Chinese classical theatre, who has been courageously fighting Guillain-Barré syndrome which paralyzed her in December 2012.

And to Ewa Guderian-Czaplińska, Maciej Kaziński and Izabela Młynarz who passed away prematurely.

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Introduction

True words are not beautiful
Beautiful words are not true

Laozi *Tao Te Ching*, 81.1

This publication contains a handful of reflections which created the intellectual background for theatre work led in STUDY || ROSA from 2012–17. These thoughts took shape in anticipation of the practice, during its course and during its aftermath.

Since these texts owe their existence to the practice, they are preceded here by basic information about STUDY, its ATIS seminar and its theatrical *Duet ON SILENCE*. As a postscript I share two poems. I wrote the first of them during work with Agnieszka Pietkiewicz on her dramatic miniature *The Leaden Ball*. The second I penned when ideas for another duet – ON LOVE – were emerging.

Hopefully these reflections may turn out to be useful for others and help them to see more clearly their own pathways.

Acknowledgements ---

From the bottom of my heart I would like to thank Maria Bohdziewicz (Witczak), Agnieszka Pietkiewicz and Maciej Zakrzewski, as well as Maria Kapała, Paulina Krzeczowska, Magdalena Mróz and Marta Pautrzak for our work together.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude for the support provided by my wife, Iwona Gutowska, and by Dobrochna Ratajczakowa and Paul Allain.

Words of thanks to my friends and associates: Mohammad Reza Aliakbari, Francesca Bono, Giulio Ferretto Salinas, Csongor Köllő, Andrea Madrid Mora, Claudio Santana Bórquez, Roberta Secchi and Samaneh Zandinejad, as well as all participants of the Acting Techniques Intensive Seminars ATIS.

STUDY || ROSA's refuge was the Wojciech Bogusławski Theatre Studio in Collegium Maius of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. I would like to thank the directors of the Chair of Drama, Theatre and Performances of AMU, Dobrochna Ratajczakowa and Elżbieta Kalemba-Kasprzak, and the deans of the Faculty of Polish and Classical Philologies of AMU, late Józef Tomasz Pokrzywniak, Bogumiła Kaniewska and Tomasz Mizerkiewicz for allowing us to work in this space.

For supporting the theatre exploration *Feeling the PULSE* I would like to thank Monika Blige and Jarosław Fret from the Grotowski Institute in Wrocław.

I am grateful to Marcin Olivia Soto, Jakub Wittchen and Maciej Zakrzewski for the photographs included in this publication.

I would like to thank Maciej Pachowicz for the book's graphic design and layout, as well as for the designs of the STUDY's logo and posters for its performances.

STUDY || ROSA was a space between people that served long-term work on oneself and research into the relationship between actor training and theatre creation. This work was carried out from the heart, away from formal structures.

From 2012–17, STUDY was directed by Grzegorz Ziółkowski and co-created by Maria Bohdziewicz and Maciej Zakrzewski. It grew out of Teatr Rosa (2009–11), created by Agnieszka Pietkiewicz and Maciej Zakrzewski (actors) and Grzegorz Ziółkowski (director). The theatre's works were a development of the *Song-in-Between* undertaking (2007–09), in the framework of which Grzegorz Ziółkowski collaborated with Agnieszka Pietkiewicz.

Rosa is Polish for *dew*. Until February 2016, STUDY || ROSA was called *studio* in English but its name was changed to get closer to the Polish meaning of *pracownia* which emphasises the idea of *praca* (work). *Studio* suggests small scale while *Study* refers to a retreat, a place of study.

In the theatre work we focused on awareness and the harmonization of breath, body and voice. At its heart was a quality of lightness, sought in the flow of actions and dialogues with oneself, an environment, a partner and a group. We strove to make it present in training and improvisations, which helped us to build a bridge between training and the spheres of the imagination, composition and creation. It is in this domain where performances appeared – created by a common effort.

Why is part of How. How is reflected in What. What is an extension of Who. Who meets Why.





ATIS

STUDY || ROSA carried out the Acting Techniques Intensive Seminar ATIS, addressed to those international artists, researchers and students who wished to deepen their understanding of human creativity and expression.

In the framework of the seminar, the research and education on the performer's elementary and advanced skills were carried out. These techniques included skills related to:

- being open to dialogue and sharing with others
- integration of action, silence, sound, and speech
- reacting precisely with the body and voice to impulses from partners, environment, texts, images, music as well as from the inner sphere of associations, imagination and memories.

Between 2012 and 2017, six seminars were held at Adam Mickiewicz University (AMU) in Poznań, three in Brzezinka (the Grotowski Institute's forest location) and one at the Universidad de Playa Ancha in Valparaíso (Chile), together for more than eighty people from the following countries: Armenia, Chile, Cyprus, England, France, Greece, Hungary, India, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Scotland, Spain, Turkey, and the United States. In addition, we conducted several shorter work sessions in Tehran, at the University of Kent in Canterbury, at the Grotowski Institute's Studio na Grobli in Wrocław, and at AMU.

The ATIS seminars resulted in the creation of, among others, the acting miniatures such as *Abel and Cain* by Mohammad Reza Aliakbari and Samaneh Zandinejad from Tehran and *Veronica's Double* by Andrea Madrid Mora from Barcelona. The seminar also became an incubator for the solo piece *Small House for the Dead*,

created by Csongor Köllő from the Shoshin Theatre Association (Romania) in collaboration with Grzegorz Ziółkowski. This performance – based on texts by Salvatore Quasimodo and Tadeusz Różewicz and performed with live accompaniment by Soma Salat-Zakariás from the Little Light Consort (Switzerland) – was presented in Romania and Poland in English and Hungarian. To this workline belonged the performative lecture *Persona: Lucidity of the Performer's Path*, created by Claudio Santana Bórquez in the framework of the Performer Persona Project (Chile), who consulted his work with Grzegorz Ziółkowski in 2016.









The Duet ON SILENCE

Who's going to mobilise darkness and silence?

Caryl Churchill *Far Away*

The Duet ON SILENCE, composed of STUDY || ROSA's performances *TAZM Silence of Light* and *HEART Silence of Polygon*, was an attempt to confront the paradox of speaking about what cannot be put into words – about appalling suffering.

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TAZM Silence of Light depicted attempts to find an internal vertical axis in a situation of extreme, inhumane, or perhaps – unfortunately – arch-human oppression. It raised questions about what a person's source of strength is that helps them survive in extreme conditions which destroy the body and heart-mind.

The performance was based on Tahar Ben Jelloun's *This Blinding Absence of Light*, a literary adaptation of an account by a former prisoner of a dungeon in Morocco, who survived eighteen years (from the 1970s till the beginning of the 1990s) in the darkness of Tazmamart.

×

HEART Silence of Polygon was a performance devoted to the problem of recognising one's own identity and obligations when humanity is called into question. It was a gesture of compassion towards people harmed by war, fanaticism and ideology, as in the

case of Meriam Ibrahim who was sentenced to public flogging and death by hanging for alleged profanation of the dominant religion.

The performance, based on motifs from Wajdi Mouwad's play *Scorched*, was composed of two parts: *Charred Remains - Suite: Thinking about animals from the bombed out zoo* and *Al-Atlal - Ruins: Remembering Meriam Ibrahim's story...* The first of these, the prelude, was dedicated to every animal who had been a victim of human stupidity and vanity.



TAZM and *HEART* talked to each other and intersected on spatial and thematic planes as well as in terms of poetics. But the quality which connected them above all else was silence. *TAZM* began with a soliloquy on silence, with a request for it; *HEART* ended by bringing silence to an end.

The first performance was vertical, masculine, played in the depths of the space; the second was feminine, horizontal, played across its width. The first was *from* Maciej, the second *from* Maria.

The first performance was based on narrative, on a true story about a life destroyed forever and attempts to maintain and re-stitute humanity. The second had a play as its base; a play that depicted a fictional – although likely, given the turmoil of war – story of harm and hatred, whose destructive power should be brought to an end in the next generation. Since this turns out to be possible, at the end of *the Duet* a note of hope resonated gently in another key, like a lullaby.

We need this hope while we are at a crossroads. After the twilight of grand narratives, only a few small ones have remained available for us in the niches. Everywhere spectacle, a show with the associated element of drama, has been holding sway. Drama is no more than a game, a shoot 'em up game, a game of slaughter. Who with whom? Who against whom? Who to whom? Who under whom?...

We are at a crossroads indeed. It is estimated that our children's generation, the first for centuries, will have shorter lives than us. Their physical capacities are falling dramatically as time spent in front of screens of all types grows and as communing with someone else's words diminishes. Above all, communing with literature, with poetry, is disappearing rapidly. And with song (not with pop songs of course). All the indications are that the creativity of successive generations will decrease as a consequence of the progressive atrophy of the poetic imagination. From a long-term perspective, it is probably the natural order of things. After the light *yang* of the age of reason there comes the dark *yin* of absorption and listening to what this reason actually offers us. In other words, after the extremely rapid advances in the technical field, which creates stunning access to knowledge and communication, there must be time – seen as a counter-movement – to assimilate and discriminate as to how to take advantage of these opportunities. Let it be done with reason.

We need stories that with the natural rhythm of the tides allow scenarios of behaviour to seep into and install patterns of relationships within us. Drama and games do that too, but differently – through conflict, through bursts of ruptures and reconciliations.

Storytelling and tales are like the voices of living grandmothers or grandfathers who whisper homeopathic words directly into the ear of a granddaughter or grandson that have the power to immunize. These voices fade away and we – deafened by the media clamour, often adding to it – hear less and less.

We need stories – as Peter Brook says – but not gossip. The story of a prisoner who survived because he was visited in his cell by an angel or maybe just a sparrow, or the story of a mother who was raped by her own son and gave life – in pain and horror – to twins, and then in her will bequeathed them the fight for adulthood – these stories carry inside themselves the seeds of tragedy. The tragedy of responsibility, the tragedy of being in response. A tragedy to be played in the theatre – this anthropological machine that teaches us to see and hear, to speak and understand.

SILENCE

When you go through an ordeal,
the simplest things seem to be the peak of dreams...

Silence!

Silence... envelops me,
Alighting like a calming hand upon my shoulders...

Silence...

A mirror reflecting the soul.

Silence – it never weighs on me.

I become silence myself.

My breathing, my heartbeat, my inner nakedness...

My secret... Secret.

OF THE HEAD-A BULLET-IN THE BACK!!!

The silence.

The silence of night; a necessity.

The silence of the companions who were slowly leaving.

The silence: a sign of mourning.

The silence of blood circulating sluggishly.

The silence that told you where the scorpions are.

The silence-oppression.

The silence of images which ran and reran through the minds.

The silence of the guards that expressed weariness and routine.

The silence of the shadow of memories burnt to ashes.

The silence of a leaden sky from which no sign could reach us.

The silence of absence, the blinding absence of light.

If I stop hearing your stories, I will waste away.

I know you haven't got much strength left,
that your voice is hoarse from the cold,
that you've lost another tooth this week,
but I'm begging you,
come back to work...

Silence...

Silence!...

Silence... of LIGHT!!

Opening fragment of the TAZM performance text.

ASTRO-LAB-E

SALIM

My garden is humble

A few orange trees

one or two lemon trees

a well of clean water

lush grass

and a room in which to sleep

when it's cold or rainy

The room is empty

just a mat

a pillow,

and a blanket

The walls have been limewashed in blue

When the daylight fades

I light a candle and read

In the evening, I eat vegetables from the garden

An old woman from a nearby village

brings me bread every day

at the same hour

TEBEBT

I'm a murmur

a murmur

fire

I'm a murmur

fire

word

FIRE-WORD

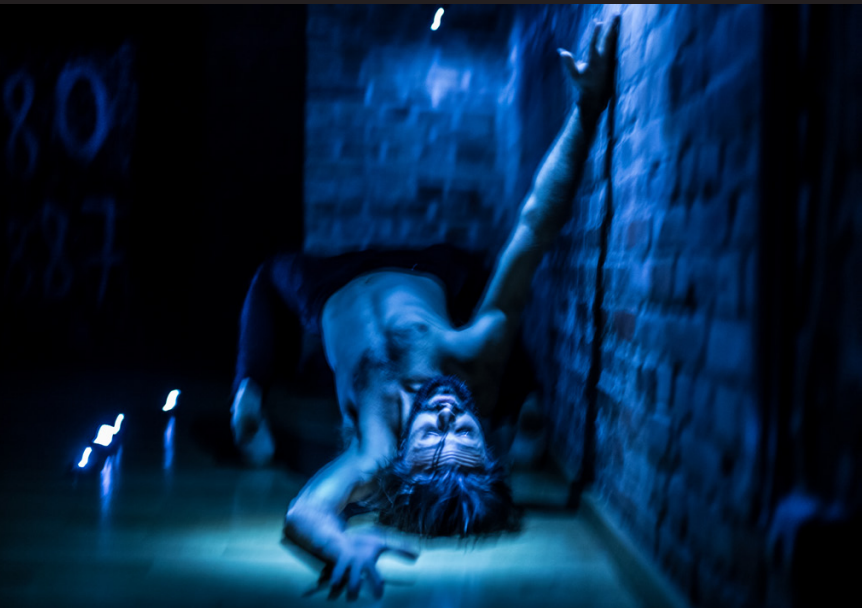
I dwell in thoughts that hurt

I am TRANS-

PARENCY!!

Closing fragment of the TAZM performance text.

Both text fragments were based on Tahar Ben Jelloun's *This Blinding Absence of Light*
in Linda Coverdale's translation.



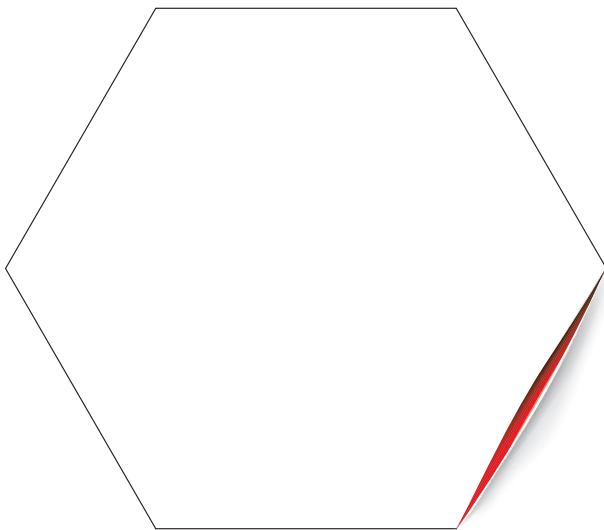


T A Z M Silence of Light



STUDY || ROSA
Research | Openness | Sharing | Action

H E A R T Silence of Polygon



STUDY || ROSA
Research | Openness | Sharing | Action

GETTING TO THE BOTTOM OF IT

From anger to harm,
from sadness to grief,
from rape to HATRED...
and back to... the beginning of time...

Two days ago, the militia hung
three young refugees
who strayed outside the camps.

- Why did the militia hang the three teenagers?
 - Because two refugees from the camp had raped and killed a girl from the village.
- Why did they rape the girl?
 - Because the militia had stoned the family of refugees.
- Why did the militia stone them?
 - Because the refugees had set fire to a house near the hill.
- Why did the refugees set fire to the house?
 - To take revenge on the militia who had destroyed a well they had drilled.
- Why did the militia destroy the well?
 - Because the refugees had burned the crop near the river where the wolves run.
- Why did they burn the crop?...
- There must be a reason...
- There must be a reason...
- There must be a reason...
- That's as far as my memory goes,
But the story can go on forever...

MOTHER-EXECUTION

MERIAM

On fire...

Three days ago everything was on fire,
everything...

everything went up in flames.

One militiaman prepared the execution of three brothers.

He lined them up in front of the wall.

Their legs were shaking.

Others pulled their mother by the hair,

stood her in front of her sons

and the militiaman shouted:

'Choose!

choose, choose which one you want to save.

Choose!

Choose or I'll shoot all three of them!

I'm going to count to three,

and I'm going to kill all three of them!

Choose!'

And she...

unable to speak,

unable to think,

shook her head,

and looked from one son to the next!

With her heavy breasts

and body ravaged by having carried all three of them.

She looked at the militiaman and said,

as a last hope,

'How dare you,

look at me,

I could be your mother!'

And then he hit her.
'Don't insult my mother!
Choose!'
Then she said a name
and collapsed.
And the militiaman shot the two youngest
and left her first born alive.
And the eldest son was trembling!
And he just left him.
And walked away.
And the two bodies fell.
And the mother stood up
and in the middle of the town in flames she began to wail
that she had killed her children.

Two fragments from the first part of the *HEART* performance text, based on
Wajdi Mouwad's *Scorched* in Linda Gaboriau's translation.

Texts FROM THE HEART

Hold on tightly
Let go lightly

Peter Brook *The Shifting Point*

× About compassion

The stench that comes from the swamps of history and the dung-heap of politics is of such a character that it can creep into almost any interior.

Do hermetic locks or escape or withdrawal have any entitlement? To be beyond all this, to stay away, to steer around the shit so as to remain clean, so as not to squander strength in vain – is this all daydreaming, wakeful dreaming?

On the outskirts of the fortified European holiday park – the charred rubble. And at its centre – licentiousness, the lack of any moderation, the lusts of *the ego*. *The ego* reigns.

Indifference. Pretending that we do not know. That it is unknown. That you do not know. Indifference. *Whatever!* – this is our trauma, and at the same time our denial. To react to the rubble of our feelings. To react – with compassion. From compassion.

February 2014, February 2015

× About theatre

Theatre must be ruthless if it wants to survive as art.

Theatre as a tool deployed to help create, maintain, strengthen and purify social bonds (for example, local community theatre, prison theatre, theatre as an expression of the convictions of ethnic, racial, or gender minorities) will keep developing, because there is such a demand. This demand increases due to the domination of technology and the deficit of face-to-face encounters between people, which is a consequence of this domination.

But theatre understood as art? How many people suckle on the illusion of the necessity of its existence only because it is already part of tradition and for this reason should be guaranteed a place in social space? How large is that *handful* for whom theatre as art is something essential for life, just like air or food?

Yes, theatre which aspires to be art must be ruthless in order to justify its existence. It must be ruthless with the full presence of actors who can establish an intimate interaction with each individual spectator and with the whole audience at the same time. It must be ruthless with the rigour of the form and the precision of details (as in Beckett and Kantor), with the harmony of various components, including sound, movement, lighting or words (as in Kantor and Beckett). It must be ruthless with its pursuit of craft and – unattainable – technical excellence. But above all, it must contain the kind of ruthlessness which results from the uncompromising pursuit of discovering the truth about a human being and about people in their mutual relations, mutual grudges and outpourings. It must be ruthless and implacable in the utopian pursuit of inducing trembling in the audience (and in the ac-

tors as well) – a shivering which involves the emotions, mind and body. A trembling, which may (but does not have to) occur in that moment when we stand face to face with ourselves, when we stand exposed in the truth of our existence, the truth of human smallness, of human meanness, in the truth of our human magnitude, of human loftiness. This moment of exceptional intensity, as quick as a flash, is a breach in informality and can liberate us from the constraints of chance – it can provide a sense of reality of another dimension of existence.

The sense and essence of the theatre consists in bringing about such a confrontation. And when theatre takes care of this essence and does not deny it, only then – from a long term perspective – does it have any chance of justifying its existence. And being necessary.

August 2014, January, February, October 2015

× About acting

In the era of so-called *star system* theatre, the stage was one of the few places in public space which was relatively brightly lit. It was primarily the presence of artificial light, which was brighter than that in normal life, which made the actors appear to be shrouded in an aura of uncanniness. Lighting contributed to focusing the audience's attention on them. Cultural, moral and social transformations as well as technological progress, which was connected with and driving all these in a feedback loop, irretrievably deprived the actors of this aura and pushed them out of the privileged position which they had occupied even after World War II. In contemporary culture, especially in its currently dominant form of popular culture, actors must strive for attention and the viewers' recognition, faced with competition from the performer-stars who appear in numerous sports, music and cabaret arenas. Perhaps that is why actors so often and with such ease take part in media-formatted spectacles, which are more often than not nothing more than a perverted form of embarrassing games. This treating of themselves as people for hire, when no performance is too shameful, can be explained by the sense of threat from the loss of standing and fear of losing the base of their material existence, which no doubt accompanies them. It can be explained, but can it be justified?

Hence the question: what special ability do actors now have up their sleeves – some skill that would help them keep up with the competition, when what is at stake is the audience's attention and appreciation? Is it some ability to use the body which is shaped according to sophisticated and scientifically proven rigorous training routines, as in the case of athletes or dancers? Or some ability to perform acrobatics, about which Italian actors of

improvised comedy from the past boasted? (Which contemporary actors could perform a spectacular Pascariello number from the comedy *La Fausse coquette* when harlequin, holding a glass of wine in his hand, is kicked in the stomach, does a backward somersault, and without spilling a single drop, gets up and gorges himself on the alcohol?) Or is it some ability to work with team tactics and implement complex strategies, such as when playing sports team games, which at present are, without a doubt, the most popular and spectacular shows? Is it the ability to use sharpened, sensitive hearing, as in the case of musicians and singers? Will it be some ability to establish and keep contact with the audience, as in the case of any cabaret artist or street entertainer? Or maybe it is some ability to liberate vital energy, that pours out of showmen and DJs during rock, techno, ambient and house concerts?

Indeed, the actor's assets seem meager today... More often than not the theatre, which like almost all culture is sick in its lack of ambition, superficiality and easy ways, which result from haste as well as from chronic cultural amnesia, does not require actors to keep their voices, bodies, sensitivity and imagination in a state of constant combat readiness. Here one usually works in a rhythm of fits and starts, whose power and intensity is defined by consecutive opening nights. One illness which often reappears is addiction to applause, *publicotrophism* as Juliusz Osterwa put it, but there are also other kinds of rubbish. In other words, theatre has lost huge swathes of its craft and ethical base.

Actors are very rarely unusual, *remarkable* people today (unless this uniqueness is artificially pumped up by their media presence); people who can share their humanity with others, enriching and deepening it all the time, and giving themselves, referring

to most or all of the aforementioned skills simultaneously. And yet this is what makes acting seem the toughest and one of the most extraordinary professions in the world... And it is precisely this human quality which makes us believe actors and follow them into the world of illusion.

August 2014, March, October 2015

× About merging craft with art

Craft without art, which is its *raison d'être*,
is a mechanism operating in a vacuum.
Art without craft, which gives it strength and durability,
is an elusive apparition.

Jacques Copeau *Craft in the Theatre*

Is it possible to untie this knot? Why does it even cross our minds that craft and art can exist independently of one another? It is like trying to separate ethics from technique. They also form a dynamic pair of interconnected, interpenetrating qualities. Let's start from them.

Without ethics can one even dare to speak? And without technique, can one even imagine uttering a word? Without ethics, sooner or later everything will be distorted, twisted, out of kilter – just as without technique.

Questions such as: 'Can I help?,' and if so: 'How?,' are fundamental in ethics and create an ethical foundation. They lead towards the dimension of duty in artistic work, which is connected with the cause of expression, the reason for taking a stand. What do you serve? What do you stand for, what would you give your life for? The answers to these questions are fundamental in determining the issues of technique, its level, its cultivation, an aspiration to climb higher.

Technique interlocks with ethics also on the level of quality, which – as we know – is reflected in details and the joins. It is a question of care, diligence, precision, and a *less is more* approach. It is a question of deepening, of experience and of the deepening

of that experience. Here one cannot make do without patience, regularity, firmness and discipline, without a strategy of *little by little does the trick*. One has to train – nothing can be done about it. Quality can also be recognized thanks to durability (for example of the relationship, of an object or a piece of clothing). And again – in order to obtain it, technique has to go hand in hand with ethics, which guarantees confidence. And without confidence it is impossible to imagine long-term teamwork in the theatre.

Accepting at face value the maxim ‘Technique can be acquired from the master. But true mastery can be acquired only from the flowers, the trees, the wind and the moon’ entails the rejection of self-centeredness or the transcendence of egocentrism which – by the way – is particularly difficult in the case of actors (and other artists)... (However, we should show some understanding because they work with – so to speak – their own *selves* and are constantly subjected to evaluation carried out from different viewpoints: appearance, speech, credibility, etc.) But recognising the importance of the idea in the above quotation implies also the need to reject or transcend anthropocentrism. In other words, if you want to develop your technique, you must be able not only to look further than the tip of your nose, but also acknowledge – with all its consequences – that your nose is more than a hundred times less sensitive than a beagle’s nose.

Now the question of attitude, which is as much ethical as technical, and which falls within the scope of body techniques. Understanding the problem of treating others as partners only as an ethical issue seems illusory. Changing your attitude from treating others as objects to treating them as subjects, where trust and collaboration are crucial, also influences in a fundamental way the approach, the choice of technical means and their development.

It is often repeated that when you have reached a certain technical level and you wish to continue to develop you have to forget about technique and transcend it. Is it not the same with ethical conduct? Acting by instilled, learned moral rules or standards is one thing. Quite another is the ethical intuition which emanates from the heart-mind (in Chinese *hsin*), in other words the conscience which, as Frankl put it, discloses to man 'unum necesse – the one thing that is required.' In the latter case, *ethical* does not necessarily mean something that complies with rules but with the nature of things, which various configurations of principles try to pin down and codify.

Besides, technique – in the same way as an ethical life – begins to blossom when it serves the game for..., not the game with...

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Theatre is not sacred, it is the work that is holy.
It is craft that should be saved,
theatre can perish.

Jerzy Grotowski, cit. after Lech Raczak *Absent Presence*

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Now about craft-art.

It is assumed that technical skills are the essence of craft, while art starts where one transcends them and freely expresses oneself, taking control over the chaos and inertia of matter. Art would then be the creation of works saturated with the artist's 'I,' his/her ingenuity, sensitivity, imagination, and at the same time

– which is a bit old-fashioned, pre-modern and also paradoxical
– creation that results from inspiration, from something impersonal or beyond the personal, something that transcends human singularity; and at the same time permeates his/her individuality, seizing his/her deep intuitions and reaching unconscious layers. Craft in this approach would serve to pave the way for the breath of inspiration, for something which speaks through us, which speaks ‘us.’ But in such a case, how can you deal with objective art which is governed by rules such as – for example – the golden ratio? What to do with art fought for by ‘the two Gs’ – Gurdjieff and Grotowski? Here, any attempt to draw a clear dividing line between craft and art seems to be merely a waste of time. But this issue can be tackled also in less lofty terms. A good artisan through his/her work also expresses – probably less explicitly than in the case of an artist – him/herself, that is his/her beliefs and values to which he/she adheres. And it is very likely that if an artisan is not a mere workhorse, he/she will aspire to transcend a purely utilitarian dimension and mass production, as it is the work that constitutes his/her identity. This issue becomes even more complex when an artisan is one of a number of people creating the work – as in the case of forging samurai swords which are real works of art. (See the film *Secrets of the Samurai Sword*.) This is perhaps the best example of the knot in question. What is objective (i.e. based on tradition and technique, on calculations and regulations) merges here with the intuitive, the stand-alone, and even then the individual-yet-objective includes only one phase of creation and is only one link in a longer chain...

We used also to believe that craft is the basis of art, as if they were two overlapping layers. However in practice, as has just been said, they often merge with each other and we cannot unequivocally tell where one ends and another begins. (This ambiva-

lence is well recognized in the term *artistic handicraft*.) Of course there is a good reason to talk about craft as a base, but it is worth noting that this may be confusing and 'double-edged.' On the one hand, yes, without foundations we are left clinging to nothing; on the other – since craft is a basis, then perhaps it is something noble (as with Stanislavski who held craft in high esteem and felt contempt for hackwork and hams who use clichés and formulae), but also secondary, because in the end we should aspire *higher*, to art. And it is best if art is written with a capital letter, inspired Art. Therefore it is probably better to speak about craft as a scaffolding for art, which is present at different levels and stages of creative efforts.

Finally, it is worth remembering that, although in relation to craft English language uses two words: *craft* and *trade* (in French *métier*), a craftsman could also be called an artisan, fulfilling his/her skills, his/her art. And the word *craft* refers as much to handicraft as to artistry (which in German is captured by the word *Kunst* – that is *art, skill, expertise*).

January, February, October 2015

× About training

Do actors need to train? And if they indeed do, why and what kind of training proves useful? The most important 20th Century directors, such as Brook and Suzuki (a performance directed by the former was presented at the end of the Theatre Olympics in 2016 whilst a piece directed by the latter opened it), provided their own answers to these questions, albeit in a similar spirit. I am referring to both artists because nothing can substitute for reading their words and studying their practices.

Let me put it simply here. Training is preparation for a meeting with the Other, that is with the unknown, with mystery, with the unpredictable, with uniqueness. There are so many variables to this encounter that it is impossible to take all of them into account and predict everything. This means that training will always be provisional and imperfect. These variables include: the time of year and time of day, the weather, current social events and moods, the number of observers, the nature of the space and its acoustics, the condition of the actors and their past experiences. Performers must operate within such a network of determinants, which in fact is even more enmeshed, because there are many more factors to consider. That is why actors have to make themselves ready. And it is by no means enough to rehearse and re-run the performance material, because the performance is like a living creature that easily gets the jitters or – to use a different idiom – is like a sport match which goes through ups and downs. These undulations may appear within a single performance and/or in its subsequent renderings. Training helps to counteract this. It is especially useful when the piece does not work, when – despite preparation and rehearsals – the ‘machinery’ of the performance jams for vari-

ous reasons and seizes up like a badly oiled engine. Exercises are the lubricant used to prevent or tackle this.

Theatre anthropology teaches us that exercises of the body, voice, imagination, reflex, tempo-rhythm, etc. inscribe specific reaction patterns into the performer's body-mind-spirit and condition it, and the spectators absorb and perceive these reactions subconsciously and often do not even pay any attention to these matters, because perception takes place – as cognitive scientists have proved – at a neuronal level. The trained body-mind-spirit is a foundation on which the small house of performance can be built. And when this foundation cracks and hesitation creeps in, emotions are often 'pumped' and forced, which usually becomes manifest through excessive gestures, a raised voice and a kind of frenetic expression. Conviction about the importance of what I want to share and my self-confidence in this process result in economical expression which doesn't need excesses. This certainty eliminates deficiencies tactfully and without strain. It is rooted in long-term training and the kind of aptitude that goes along with this.

How to prepare? How to practise? One definitely has to take into account the fact that the exercises must be individual and evolve, because we are constantly changing (we get older every hour, minute, second – fortunately or unfortunately). Here, a useful tip is that it's good to balance what is fixed and repeated over long-term periods with new exercises, introduced for a shorter time to restore some freshness. The former strategy resembles digging a well and deepening what we already know, the latter is like opening a Pandora's box and is related to absorbing what is new. But that is not essential. The crucial thing is not to separate *how* from *why*. The motivation to start the work affects the training.

And if this correlation is missing, we risk the exercises degenerating into repeated ad nauseam patterns, and becoming routine.

One can also look for an equilibrium between the repeatable and the eventful, which can be achieved despite the fact that training is – by definition – a repeated practice. Looking for uniqueness – or, better, being open to uniqueness – is associated with a readiness to change plan, the chosen direction, to introduce modifications. But not just. It is also a search for going beyond the daily (daily – because it is cultivated on an everyday basis). It is seeking out the extraordinary in the ordinary – through *being* fully, through *being-in-response*. Being here and now. Like during the performance. Like in life.

Training provides a specific background for the work. It is something one can resort to in this uncertain domain of creation which is subjected to so many pressures. Thanks to it, one can try to overcome stage fright and avoid any danger of aggression and/or self-aggression which results from fear – the fear that this time we won't find anything, that one comes away empty-handed, that one fails, that I'll not cope, that you'll not cope, that we'll not cope.

How to prepare for the unknown? During the actor training process, we must take into account a wide range of tensions, and bear in mind that actors are subjected to various pressures. And ultimately, training is about preparing actors to confront these pressures. Unfortunately. Unfortunately – because it means that training is not necessarily a 'nice' activity related to the consumption of secreted endorphins. In other words, it is not a 'happiness pill' but often a hard and stressful chore. But if we approach it like that, it will be a chore which is twice as dull.

When? Where? In what dose? With whom? We may ask multiple questions about training. But they are easier to answer (always individually!) than the questions 'What to do?', 'Why?' and 'How?' One has to – as Brook used to say – talk less and do more. Because practice, understood and cultivated as a process, very often brings answers to questions that have not even appeared yet...

14, 30 November 2016

9 March and 3 April 2017

× About method and a methodical approach

A method in theatre work can be harmful. Unlike a methodical approach which often turns out to be useful.

The former can be dangerous because it provides an illusory hope that one owns a key to all locks, a proven recipe that makes a wonderful bake every time, a magical formula that always turns the coarse into a golden thought. Meanwhile, reality is more complex and multidimensional; like a tree it cannot be squeezed into a box or fitted into a frame. A method is like a recipe for success, a start-up procedure or an instruction manual. Of course, it does not exclude variations, it may take into account deviations from the norm and include Plan B or even C. Yet in theatre – a field as confusing as life – methods often do not work (or they do, but only to a limited extent). As with winning over a beloved or with getting a new person to fall in love with you – there is no method. After all, the interpersonal bonds (and the theatrical relationship has such a character) sparkle, shimmer, constantly change, and are – unfortunately? – chimeric. Does this mean that there are no regular occurrences in these relationships, no constants, no sequences of repetitions that are certain or at least predictable, no behavioural patterns? Apparently there are, and methods (e.g. psychological) rely on them (and sometimes feed on them too). But eventually most often it turns out that what does recur are our projections and desires, repetitions are iterations, and patterns are inaccurate templates. Method usually adjusts something to the form which trims and cuts whatever protrudes, especially the mysterious and the inexplicable, and then ‘spits out’ smooth and round results. And thus method gives an illusion of effectiveness. However, it has to be admitted that methods can be efficient at times, and are therefore all the more deceptive.

The methodical approach is something else – it resembles a safety valve. When we are like a cauldron bubbling over with ideas, premonitions, emotions and uncertainty, referring to order (i.e. ‘it’s good to do it in such and such an order’) and listening patiently to good advice (sometimes given to oneself) may turn out to be helpful. We don’t know how to start. Our head, heart, and body overflow and threaten us with an eruption. What then? The ability to start each time *as if* from scratch (of course, it is impossible, because successive experiences are deposited in us like layers, or maybe – more precisely – they stick to us like a web), as if one was a debutant, the ability to return to the sources, to the basics – these skills are part of a methodical approach, as in craftsmanship. Organise your workshop, clean your toolbox, clean the floor, erase what was before, so that what exists today may appear here and now. When you hit a block or you arrive at a dead end, don’t bang your head against the wall over and over again, but look for a crack that may help you overcome the block. And in order to spot the crack, change perspective, climb a tree (literally!), hang upside down – look at things in a different way, different from what you do every day. Methodically, i.e. with consistency and stubbornness (worthy of a better cause), though perhaps a bit chaotically and not too skillfully, run away from the routine, get off the beaten track (beaten also by yourself), consciously let yourself be thrown off balance. Throw yourself off it. And don’t think that this approach will always work, because theatre practice is like a passage through a minefield and good craftsmanship with all its repetitions doesn’t at all guarantee survival. Approaching a task or a problem with self-confidence (though not self-righteousness) is crucial, although it does not provide a key-method, a pick for a lock. Do not become discouraged by failures and crises – they can teach you good lessons. Although it is always better to learn from the mistakes of... others.

But can approaching oneself (because what I want to share – in my impudence – is brought up from my depths) and others as timid animals who might sneak off into the bushes at any moment ever be at all methodical? It could be if it simultaneously contains unexpected and past experiences, but without absolutizing them. It will be so when it is permeated with delicacy and firmness – at the same time. And finally: it will be so if we know the rules (i.e. that we should work evenly, not in spurts) but we are aware when, how and why they should be rejected.

14–15 November 2016

× About non-directing

You cannot make things happen;
you can only create the circumstances
in which something might occur.

Anne Bogart *And Then, You Act*

The process aspect of theatre work is often no less important than the result, a performance. Now and then a performance is just a side effect of attempts to penetrate into some issue using theatre tools. The research process – or rather the intertwining beams of processes – takes place in a specific microcosm of human energy, continuously shaped anew. Therefore directing can be associated (especially in a laboratory theatre context) with monitoring processes, or – to use a different vocabulary – with taking care of them; with regulating the flows.

Of course, the initiation of processes, the creation of frameworks for them and decision-making (with regards to making cuts – the director is the one who holds the scissors and knows how to use them!) equals power, and this in turn means responsibility. Meyerhold used to say that the director in rehearsal must be like a commander on a battlefield. Kantor's specific example shows that sometimes there is no chance of avoiding the language of instructions and the poetics of orders. But it is – for the sake of balance – worth recalling Brook's idea of a 'stereoscopic vision,' that is a vision which is not created in the mind of a single person to be later projected onto others, but is made concrete as a result of the effort and intensity of the imagination of many individuals, of their tuning into each other, of their

mutual listening. Such directing recalls a moderating process, smoothly transforming into conducting.

Therefore – as Brook said – directing is a vast notion, which can mean both steering (giving directions or instructions) and setting the main direction, an azimuth for others and for oneself on the journey together.

But what about the unattainable idea of directing through non-directing, which looms on the distant horizon? What about directing without prompts, hints, directives or guidance, without mentoring, coaching, the boss's charisma, without 'coordination missions,' 'truce missions' or 'reconciliation missions,' without manipulation, even in trace amounts? Is it a mirage to the same degree as the *art of fighting without fighting*...?

I repeat exercises in non-directing with a persistence worthy of a better cause. Incidentally, often with meagre results. I try to create an environment by preparing a workspace, taking care of the soundscape (music, songs, words), lighting and props. I remind the actors to treat all these elements as equal partners, who deserve the same respect and consideration. And then they are asked to warm up their bodies and voices, which helps them to bring about a 'creative feeling' (Stanislavski), the right mood. They are to tune themselves like instruments – to tune the instruments which in fact they are. And when everything is prepared, I give an impulse – now their task is to bring life to this world and to share their own dynamics, drives, sensitivity and imagination in these circumstances. And the point is also to give all these *partners* an answer, to start a live dialogue with them. (You can also determine the key in which this 'game' can be played.) And then it so happens (though rarely!) that arrangements con-

cerning scenes or sequences which are still to be worked out are unnecessary because everything seems to flow its own way or maybe it indeed flows its own way. Scenes, etudes, relationships between those playing emerge as if by themselves and interpretation knots and tangled staging webs seem to untie and solve themselves. You must not interfere then. The time to give shape to this reality, to compose is yet to come. And after this comes time to catch your breath, time for living, now within more defined, clearer boundaries.

Non-directing equals removing obstacles, it is like collecting pieces of broken glass from under the feet of playing children who have been let off the leash. It is joyful and approving, and as quiet as active attention. It is thoughtful. And without directing it is probably impossible...

January, May 2015

× About theatre to which I give life together
with those close to me

From this theatre I desire three things. Firstly, on a basic, pragmatic level, I expect that it will provide me with fulfillment which is connected with contentment, with the satisfaction of a job well done, necessary and purposeful work, done with one's own hand and flowing from the heart. *Hand-made* and *heart-made* work. Work done with care for its quality and performed voluntarily, of one's own free will, for – as Kurt Vonnegut would say – 'a fat girl!' Work – one hundred percent, without feigning and without indulgence. Work *full size* and... *full stop*.

Secondly, that it permeates me, trickles into me through all channels. That – above all – it hits me with sound, cuts me to the quick with an important word, that it sharpens my hearing, immerses me in a phonosphere in which harmony and dissonance are only an apparent contradiction. That it will be a theatre of embodied metaphors which become concrete synchronously or asynchronously on aural, visual and somatic planes. That it will be a theatre of subtle energy – as subtle as the breath of a warrior perhaps.

Thirdly, and most importantly, that this theatre will be a place of concentration and intimacy, and at the same time a place where there is nowhere to hide. A place where important questions about humankind and about humans are asked – questions that are not drowned out in the media scramble. A place where one has to stand face to face with the truth about oneself and one's human species and individual conditionings. That it will constitute a personal challenge, and that it will guide one through a series of stages and levels from a silence pregnant with waiting

towards *anagnorisis* – an insight, which is accomplished in ‘the silence animated by consciousness’ (Brook). Without any claim to *catharsis*, without hoping for it.

August 2014, January, February, October 2015

× About obligations

The avoidance of becoming (emotionally) indebted, the avoidance of taking responsibility for others (often for oneself), drifting – without an anchor, brakes and... an ounce of humility. Does this attitude describe the generation of so-called *liquid* modernity? And can it be sustained in the long run (through successive generations, through rationing, portions of genes)? Because in the end, on the down side, more and more items always pile up. Even if this is only by virtue of being born (from someone), that is – in other words – due to receiving a dowry in the form of our genetic code, character, temperament (or whatever else this might be called), not to mention that it forms a memory in us. We can pay off the debt, at least partially – for example – by setting signposts, marking the way for those who come after us.

I am writing like this because it is possible that such *accounting* terminology will reach those who subordinate themselves to the rule of calculation. Such a kind is now at any rate in the majority. And this – somewhat surprisingly – applies equally to young, usually idealistically-oriented people.

May, August 2014

× About *Scorched*

And maybe we should imagine Sisyphus happy because Mouawad – like Camus – does not appeal to withdrawal, but – on the contrary – to the grueling quest to attempt redemption.

Georges Banu

Scorched by Wajdi Mouawad is a play about honoring commitments. It is a tragedy of obligations, seemingly devoid of transcendental references.

Its main character is a mother whom her own mother forced to get rid of a baby – the fruit of forbidden love. It happened when the heroine was fourteen, which in her case was a tragic, blameless error, and which turned out to be fateful. Then Nawal Marwan could not, was not in any position to take on the obligation of bringing up her subsequent children – the twins – with love. Above all because they were the fruits of rape, which – as she later discovered – was incestuous.

The tragic situation in which the heroine finds herself along with her children is a consequence of a fratricidal war which wrecks her life. The war in turn is derived from 'the terror of the situation,' as we might call – after one of the *hommes remarquables* – those culturally-sanctioned patterns of human actions and behaviour based on religion – a religion which is used as a tool for domination and oppression. Mme. Marwan tries to transform her own death into a message to all three of her children. She does this in order to help them achieve adulthood, which is connected to recognition of their own identities and the need to be respon-

sible for their choices, for their independence and individuality, as well as knowing how to recognize their own responsibilities. Does perhaps the heroine *endow* them with her own death because previously she could not, was not able to give her love to them, envelop them in it, wrap them up in feeling?

Her greatness – a tragic greatness – is revealed precisely in this gesture – the gesture of using her own death. For Nawal Marwan, an active attitude towards what is definitive and inevitable means a confrontation with what strikes at the pivotal points of her life, in intimate places – in love, in motherhood; it means a confrontation with hatred, anger, violence and revenge. This is why I believe that the contents and tone of her message, statements contained in her will, and then in letters to all three children, have a chance of inducing a trembling in us, a feeling of fear and compassion. Nawal Marwan's dignity when she confronts her life and death can help us recover, cleanse perception and perceive another dimension of humanity, a dimension which is often hidden inside the buffer zone of the everyday.

I wrote at the outset that this play seems to be devoid of transcendental references – there is no mention in it of gods, fate, destiny, while people immersed in hatred seem to hurt each other as if of their own free will. In a moving film of the same title, which was based on the play, it is altogether different. There is no doubt here that it is religious ideology that is at the root of the catastrophe. And this is probably why at the end of the film we can hear an overwhelming song performed by Ciara Hendrick (a mezzo-soprano), composed by Grégoire Hetzel set to these words (among others) of Nietzsche addressed 'to all or nothing': 'We all bleed on secret sacrificial altars, we all burn and broil in honour of ancient idols' (*Thus Spake Zarathustra, Old and new ta-*

bles, 6). But in both cases – in the film and the play – the metaphysics of *Scorched* is not one of divine interventions in response to human guilt; and if it was to involve a transcendent reality, it would rather be the metaphysics of human emanations. The human world is shaped by ideologies, marked by violence, corroded, riddled with hatred, shaken out of a rut, out of kilter. Women hurt women under a diktat and under the dictation of men. The men in turn had got rid of their independent judgment (or never acquired such) and are nourished by religious slogans. In this regard, the whole spectrum of religious attitudes appears to be a homogeneous force crushing human individuality and independence of judgment and action. This is why Nawal Marwan's mother forces her to get rid of the baby, which she had conceived with a person from another religion (this is in the film, in the play we can only guess at it). Moreover, in spite of herself, in spite of her maternal feelings, she forces her, contrary to what her mother's heart prompts her to do. Does it need to be added that this is done above all under the pressure of religious ideology?

The world of nature provides a counterweight to the dislocated world of humans. It is not idyllic however and stretches across the elements of fire and water, across what is burnt and dried and damp and wet. It is important that the characters in *Scorched* are affected by the sun's rays and drops of rain. This reality flows and is transformed in a constant rhythm of changes (the annual cycle is strongly highlighted in the play) in accordance with the nature of things, regardless of the aborted outpourings of blackened brains. Does it embarrass or comfort us? Or maybe both?

When a human gives him/herself to the service of an ideology and/or submits to its pressure, and at the same time does not want to remember that he/she is part of nature, that nature

– so to speak – is in his/her nature, then the tragedy of the disintegration of family ties is inevitable. And after this disintegration there is no way to draw the graph of the visibility of the polygon anymore.

As in ancient tragedy... because *Scorched* follows an ancient pattern – the twins, like Oedipus, must solve a riddle, discover the reason for their mother's silence. This obvious trope, however, should not obscure an even more basic convergence with the ancient matrix. The actions of the heroine are a variant of 'deep play,' which stands at the root of the tragedy. This 'deep play' – as Dobrochna Ratajczakowa argues – 'is played out with very high stakes, because the community's existence and success depends on an individual's actions.' I do not think 'community' here refers only to family, lineage or clan.

This issue posits a question about the foundation on which acting-human credibility is built when faced with the text of such a play as *Scorched*? On psychological identification with the characters? This would be more than risky because more often than not our life experiences are nothing like that of tragic characters such as Madame Marwan, who crystallizes the essence of the human condition. Intuition tells me that the only foundation for gaining such credibility can be honesty when faced with fundamental questions. Questions of the same order – rightly keeping an appropriate sense of proportion – which Nawal Marwan, immersing herself in silence for five years, had to ask. Of course, if one consistently follows this line of thought in no way is one lead to psychological theatre. At stake is a theatre which pursues a tragic dimension, a disturbing theatre, which can become a tool for self-knowledge and a scalpel dissecting the tissue of human existence. And thanks to this, theatre may

have a chance to regain its dignity as one of the basic forms of artistic expression.

May, June, August, September 2014, February, October 2015

× On *Son of Saul*

Your patience, sand and delicate,
robbed us of fear,
a lesson of days linked to the death
we had betrayed, to the scorn of the thieves
seized among the debris, and executed in the dark
by the firing squads of the landing parties, a tally
of low numbers

Salvatore Quasimodo *To My Father*

We stand facing a wall of a deciduous forest. This confrontation ends *Son of Saul*, a film about Auschwitz. Green leaves mean life. Life is wind in the foliage. And water drawn up by the roots. Gray is the ash we see earlier, its piles, methodically poured into the river by the prisoners. Gray is the thick smoke of burnt corpses that resembles a fog. The forest is close at hand, we are standing in front of it. It may mean an impossible and unattainable freedom, but it seems to me that the scene is not a metaphor. The forest is a judge. Or rather, an unbiased observer of human frenzy. The trees look at us and see. They see. In their own way. They see us in their own way. They do not judge, but allow a non-human judgment, if one looks from their perspective, with their eyes, for a moment. In this sense, they are and are *not* judges.

A few moments earlier, Saul – together with a group of desperate men from the Sonderkommando who escaped from the camp – strayed into a ruined or burnt out house in the forest. The others frantically discuss what to do. He sees a boy. Perhaps it is the same boy whose body he unsuccessfully tried to

bury, or perhaps a different boy from the village. Maybe it is the boy-messenger from Godot, whose task is to inform those waiting that his master will not come today... Has God sent – as a reward or as a punishment perhaps – a vision or an illusion of resurrection to Saul? As a reward? For an act that reached the deepest layers of humanity, an act by which the man tried to save the dignity of another human being, a defenceless child whom Saul, in the depths of despair, had previously adopted or who had indeed been his son. As a punishment? Because by taking on such a mission, he endangered the lives of those who still clung to life and continued to hope. Has God really been so kind as to interfere in human affairs?

The boy is caught by one of the guards from the pursuit unit who pushes him off so that he does not stand in the way of what is about to happen in the nearby ruin. The boy runs towards the forest and disappears among the trees. A short machine gun salvo can be heard. It's all over now. The moment of freedom and hope lasted only a second longer than Saul's epiphany, and was perhaps just as short.

When Saul sees the boy, when the boy reveals himself to him, a gentle smile appears on the man's face. The frozen face of a Muslim, a comatose man, a walking corpse, resembling a mask like in the Laboratory Theatre's *Acropolis* – this face comes to life. This is another 'resurrection' after that of the boy. Or maybe it is just an illusion that goodness has broken through the deadliness and the indifference? Was the good called up by the desperate act of the man sinking into the abyss? Has it appeared and manifested itself as a deathly bliss? Even despite the fact that the obligation was not fulfilled, because the boy's corpse had earlier been taken away by the river's current? But

Saul's smile does not lie, it does not mask anything. It is involuntary, like a shiver running down the body. It's like the reverberation of *apocatastasis* that seems to come from the transition between this and the other world. I defend myself against the reality of this smile with question marks and a multiplication of 'maybes.' I do not know what to do with the fact that it counters the degradation of men by men. I am distrustful and helpless. Helpless because distrustful?

Art is an inn that has question marks on its menu. Is it redundant? Is it an excess? Is it justified only as a hymn of praise or cleansing? Or when it provides comfort and relief? Or when it is shocking and disturbing? Still, artistry provides a space for questions to be asked of oneself, to the other, of oneself and the other. It is a paradoxical place that creates an opportunity for the transgression of the mundane. It is a place of confrontation with oneself, here and now, now and immediately. Real art does not wait, does not knock. Without further ado it enters into us, as if into soft butter. Do we still wish to and are we still able to take advantage of the opportunities it provides?

Yes, art *after* genocide is possible. After the genocide of the Armenians, after the Holocaust, after Cambodia, Rwanda and after the brutality of Tazmamart. And after that genocide which Pasolini wrote about – the quiet or screaming genocide of Western consumerism. Moreover, art *on* genocide is possible. Werfel and Ben Jelloun, now Nemes, provide proof of this. Art is the natural emanation of human creativity, of imagination which is the most precious of our human faculties. This need is the same as hunger and defecation. It expresses the human craving for freedom and the desire for transgression. So it will continue, it will renew itself from the charred remains and ruins, and will re-generate. And it

will confirm its necessity, if only as a way to remember. In the era of the selfie with Auschwitz in the background, *Son of Saul* provides an example of this.

But the value of this film goes beyond remembrance. Like the most outstanding theatre performances, it places us in the *here and now*. As a rule, cinema is safer than theatre, because it is predictable in a material sense. What can happen during the projection onto a flat screen? Does the tape burn in the projector? Does the picture freeze? Does the sound distort? In theatre, one basically never knows what's going to happen. It can be dangerous and indeed sometimes it is menacing – both to the actor and to the spectator. But this cinema is a cinema as cruel as Artaud's theatre of cruelty, from which, according to Susan Sontag, spectators should not come out morally or emotionally unscathed. And this is not only because the film is subjected to the rigour of form – a consistently implemented, specific method of filming from the perspective of the main character, which draws the viewers into the almost tangible reality of the death factory and makes them fall into the gear wheels of the machinery of destruction. It is the consequence of a lack of compromise – unlike in Agnieszka Holland's film *In Darkness*, here we share the prisoners' fate all the time. There is no respite, no possibility to leave the ghostly reality even for a moment. As in an ancient tragedy, an action once set in motion unfolds inexorably, time thickens, becomes 'dense time,' there is no turning back, a catastrophe is inevitable. Here, unlike in the theatre, metaphors are avoided, yet the same happens as takes place in Beckett's and Kantor's theatre works. The reality of the past reveals itself and makes itself concrete, it almost materialises. I am transported there and then, here and now I am exposed, stripped bare. I was called to face the truth about humans. And thus I am bound to face my

own truth. And I answer the call. How has this come about? I do not know. Maybe by the blasphemous suggestion, by provoking transcendence, about which I wrote? All I know is that it hasn't come about through identification. Identification, as in tragedy – contrary to appearances – is not at all possible. Besides, it would be somewhat ridiculous in this case.

One does not enter this cinema with impunity. It hurts, it really does. I promise myself that I will not watch this film a second time, and that confronting it should remain a single experience. I know I won't keep my promise. I'll show it to my son one day. And then we will go to the forest, maybe in Brzezinka. And we will talk – or remain silent.

Wrocław, 29–31 January, 2 February 2016

Poznań, 9 March 2016

× About the human dimension of silence

It is thought that only in nature, in the loneliness of nature
can one experience this deepest silence... in the desert.
... But such silence also takes place in the theatre,
... the actor makes a gesture or utters a sentence,
a look, a pause, and suddenly this great silence descends
– deep as an underground cavern, a shocking silence.

Tankred Dorst in collaboration with Ursula Ehler I, *Feuerbach*

Silence does not equal a lack of speech. Silence is a lack of sound, not words.

The area of human relationships extends from the tense silence of misunderstanding and the lack of desire to understand (the so-called *quiet days*) to the mature and complete silence of acceptance, unity and compassion, when words and other sounds turn out to be unnecessary.

The first dimension of silence is associated with repression, with silencing, censorship or self-censorship. This silence results from the deprivation of the right to speak or a lack of will or interest in listening. This silence weighs down, falls, is heavy, dead. Stony. 'Deep as an underground cavern.' Like Cordelia's silence.

The second quality of silence manifests itself through harmony, balance – it *resonates* when there is no excess and no lack. This silence is nameless, it does not need a name. And at the same time it is the silence of those without names – of those who are nourished by pure presence, by intimate meetings when names

and titles are useless. This silence vibrates, envelops, it is light, sonorous. 'Deep as an underground cavern.' Like Cordelia's silence.

Can we turn to and head towards the second dimension of silence? The way leads (probably)* only via conversation, via dialogue, through breaths, sounds and words assisted by alive presence, and through alive presence assisted by breath, sound and word.

And it is dialogue, the art of listening and responding adequately, that is the value whose deficit we experience most acutely today. And it is here where theatre (theatre where silence is rarely a pause or suspension and much more often, unfortunately, a long-drawn-out bit) may prove its usefulness as a place for listening, for practising dialogue, as a place for experiencing different qualities of silence.

* I write 'probably' in parenthesis because it seems possible that the rule of separation and silence, as it is practised in some religious orders (see the film *Into Great Silence*), works here as well. I do not know this though, as I have not practised it.

August, September 2014, January, February 2015

× About duet

For Esterka and Kajetan

A bird sat on my shoulder.
It was born together with me.

Nemes Nagy Ágnes *Bird*

'A bird sat on my shoulder.' No... two birds. They came into the world with me. But they are not two ravens that pass on news to the warrior-god Odin, but like them – one is a thought, as bright and flying around like a seagull, and the other is a leaden memory, like a sparrow. I am always worried that my mind may not return home in the evening, but I am more concerned whether or not the memory of my heart will find its way back to the nest.

To remember and to think. To think and to remember. Tangled like the umbilical cord of a fetus in the mother's womb. Entangled like photons.

We are dual (but not quite). Human, animal. Organic, geometric. Symmetrical (but not quite), perpendicular. Rarely straightforward.

We have two lungs and two hands. Two auricles and two ventricles. Two brain hemispheres and two nostrils. A pair of eyes to look forward and back. And two ears to listen to that which was and, often with awe, to the coming of that which is inevitable. At our origins – there is a mother and a father. At our end – there is only You and me.

When we are old we carry our child on our shoulders – a wax student effigy. We peck and see pecking at the same time, setting the carousel of our inner theatre in motion. Like an antiphon – we are in response.

We are in-between – present in others, we carry others in ourselves.

Between heaven and earth, our animal-human parity transforms, flows, vibrates. Like a landscape in which we long for a blot, like a steady rhythm in which we long for syncopation, like an iron fist in which we long for a velvet glove. And in this dance of complementary opposites, one plus one transforms into one, sometimes equals φ (pronounced: 'Phi' like phi-lo-sophia), or 1.6180339887..., at other times two plus one is something more than three, and two and two make five. A square loses its corners. A craftsman becomes, for a moment, an idealist, rides two horses at the same time and draws tight two bows at once.

Be dual, but not duplicitous. Dual, but not divisive. And let this duet as well as the theatre diptych give you a taste of silence.

February 2015

× For nothing

You are nothing
It's nothing
You are everything
That's all

We enter a cool stream that meanders through a dense forest. We walk in single file. A few of us. We have wellington boots on. The water comes halfway up my calf, sometimes – when a sandbank appears – it is shallower, in other places a little bit deeper. We go downstream, slowly and carefully, so as not to splash the water or make any noise. We are silent. We don't look at each other, sometimes we just glance at the other person. Everyone is alone, although we are here together. I lead, looking for places where you can safely put your foot so that it does not get stuck in the silt or slip. If it gets too deep, too boggy, or a fallen tree blocks the passage, I climb ashore and look for paths trodden by forest animals who come to the watering places here. Then we follow these narrow, barely visible paths. We try to tread carefully, so as not to snap the sticks under our feet and the twigs around us. Sometimes you have to bend down or duck, at other times we go on all fours. We stay close to the stream all the time. We enter it again. We get out, walk across the trunk of a fallen tree. And then back to the stream. We walk for a long time, slowly, sometimes very slowly. The rays of the summer sun shine through the dense foliage, illuminating the twilight and flashing when they reflect off the water. Sometimes I stop in the middle of the current and we freeze for a moment. Through our noses we inhale the smell of water, decaying leaves and branches. We keep walking, wading in the water. It takes two, maybe three hours to walk a few hundred

meters, a kilometer or two. After some time, our movements become softer, and the resistance of the stiff air here seems almost tangible. There is no jerkiness in our movements, only occasionally – when you need to help someone climb ashore – is there a slight jerk when you pull their hand. I have the impression that my eyesight and hearing have become one sense. Associations and thoughts slowly flow by and away. Everything sharpens and deepens. Colours, sounds, shapes, smells, the murmur of water, its splashes, flashes of light, touches. I'm not doing anything to make this happen. It happens by itself, by the force of nature. The *earlier* disappears, as does the *later*. *Somewhere else* disappears too. The *here and now* become palpable and dense. The energy flows gently, effortlessly, like sap in a tree or water in a stream.

Upon our return, in front of the building, I ask the others to answer *niente* when asked what we were doing. Because that's how it was.

I didn't think about it at the time, but now, after some years, when I remember these few journeys in the water with different people, I imagine my ashes flowing downstream.

7, 11 June 2021

THE LEADEN BALL

It is leaden because it weighs down.

It is a ball because it rolls.

It appears in the left ventricle,

in the finger that taps heartily on the forehead,

in the right hemisphere.

Get out – it doesn't want...

Lead cannot be forged, you can only cast it – into the heart.

The ball not a sphere, because it is stuck in the barrel

pressed to the temple, not strapped to the foot.

It gets things done efficiently, once and for all.

Lead is pain – the ball sighs heavily.

The ball is not a little ball, because we are not that close,

although it is pulsating in my veins,

in the alloy of

desperation and peace

It is limping heavily inside me.

Sphere, ball, the little ball

– make a toast of the leaden fog for me.

2008





TRUTH IS SILENT

Truth is silent
silent as night
it trembles, sparkles, snorts and foams
like a leaf, a snowflake, a cat, a stream

Love is silent
silent as day
when you listen and hear
when you get out of the way
like him, like us, like her, like You

17 May 2017

INFORMATION ABOUT THE PERFORMANCES _____

TAZM *Silence of Light*

Direction, musical dramaturgy, lighting: Grzegorz Ziótkowski

Text: Grzegorz Ziótkowski based on Tahar Ben Jelloun's *This Blinding Absence of Light* with fragments of *The Stranger* by Albert Camus. The performance text was to a large extent elaborated during rehearsals.

Actors: Maria Bohdziewicz (Tebebt) and Maciej Zakrzewski (Salim)

Music fragments: *The Remote Viewer* by Coil and *Quasi una fantasia* by Henryk Górecki, performed by the Kronos Quartet

Setting: Maciej Zakrzewski, Grzegorz Ziótkowski

The performance, dedicated to Dobrochna Ratajczakowa, was presented for the first time in Theatre Studio of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań in December 2012. Since then it was performed there more than sixty times for free. In 2014, TAZM was presented in Tehran and at the University of Kent in Canterbury, following an invitation from Prof. Paul Allain. In 2015 and 2016 the performance was shown at the Grotowski Institute in Wrocław. It was also presented at the theatre festival KaravanAct in Romania in 2016.

HEART *Silence of Polygon*

Direction, musical dramaturgy, lighting: Grzegorz Ziółkowski

Text: Grzegorz Ziółkowski, based on motifs from Wajdi Mouwad's drama *Scorched*, with a fragment of the poem *Al-Atlal (Ruins)* and a quotation from *Under the Volcano* by Malcolm Lowry as well as with fragments of lyrics of *The Logical Song* by Supertramp (authors: Richard Davies, Roger Hodgson) and *Silence is Sexy* by Einstürzende Neubauten. The performance text was to a large extent elaborated during rehearsals.

Actors:

- Maria Bohdziewicz – Meriam, Midwife, Guide, Attendant, Woman
- Maria Kapała (acting collaboration) – Twin Sister, Mother, Grandmother
- Maciej Zakrzewski – Twin Brother, Beloved-Father, Nihad
- Grzegorz Ziółkowski – Notary

Technical assistance: Marta Pautrzak

Music fragments:

- *Charred Remains – Suite: Guard Down, The Crumbling, Between Monuments, World Without Ground, Guardian at the Door, Big Reveal* from Valgeir Sigurðsson's album *Architecture of Loss*
- *Al-Atlal – Ruins: Elevation, Unveiled* from Hildur Guðnadóttir's album *Without Sinking*; *The Logical Song (remix)* by Supertramp; *A Cradle Song* by Hanna Kulenty; *Silence Is Sexy* by Einstürzende Neubauten
- A Greek lullaby *You're a flower among flowers* was sung during the performance. We owed its presence to Aphrodite Evangelatou.

Setting: Grzegorz Ziółkowski, Paweł Nowak (metal pillars), Andrzej Walada (rostrum with a lid)

We would like to thank the participants of ATIS 2014 SITE OF THE FIRE: Julia Lewandowska, Meysam Ghaseminejad, Paulina Wilczyńska and Yildiz Gülmez who helped us to approach *Scorched* on a practical basis.

The outline of *HEART Silence of Polygon* was presented for the first time in Theatre Studio of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań on 20 February 2015 and later – on 24 May, on the occasion of Mother's Day. The performance was elaborated during STUDY || ROSA's theatre exploration *Feeling the PULSE* (2015–16), supported by the Grotowski Institute in Wrocław, and was presented several times there. In 2016, the performance was also shown at the theatre festival KaravanAct in Romania.

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The second, revised and expanded edition

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Cover design, layout and typesetting Maciej Pachowicz

The first edition of this publication was part of the STUDY || ROSA's theatre exploration *Feeling the PULSE*, carried out at the Grotowski Institute in Brzezinka and Wrocław from 1 August – 1 October 2015 and from 26 January – 26 February 2016. The exploration was directed by Grzegorz Ziółkowski, consulted with Paul Allain and supported by the Grotowski Institute. The book came out in parallel with the larger volume *Dwugłos O CISZY* (The Duet ON SILENCE), which included *Texts FROM THE HEART*. *The Duet ON SILENCE* is available in Polish, in full version, free of charge, online: [grzeg.home.amu.edu.pl/?page_id=22](http://www.grzeg.home.amu.edu.pl/?page_id=22). It includes, among others, the texts of both ROSA's performances.



Grzegorz Ziółkowski (2012).
Photo. Maciej Zakrzewski

GRZEGORZ ZIÓŁKOWSKI

is an explorer, director, editor, translator and author of books on Peter Brook (2000) and Jerzy Grotowski (2007). From 2012–17, he directed *STUDY || ROSA* and Acting Techniques Intensive Seminar ATIS. As a Professor at AMU, he carries out interdisciplinary investigations rooted in the anthropology of performances. He has recently published *A Cruel Theatre of Self-Immolations: Contemporary Suicide Protests by Fire and Their Resonances in Culture* (Routledge 2020).