Dramatic space :
Jerzy Grotowski and the recovery of the ritual function of theatre

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Abstract

This thesis explores temporal forms of architectural meaning through the investigation of the dramatic space of "ritual theatre." In particular, it analyzes the thought and several theatrical productions of the twentieth century Polish theatre director, Jerzy Grotowski. Grotowski is of particular interest because he designed a "total dramatic space" that incorporated both the actors and the spectators (although without necessarily integrating them) for each of his dramatic works. In each case, the spatial relationships created by the theatrical architecture were indissolubly connected to the meaning of the drama itself. In this way, space was used as a kind of third protagonist that, along with the actors and spectators, participates in the theatrical ritual.

Résumé

Cette thèse explore les formes temporelles de signification architecturales par l'observation et l'analyse le l'espace dramatique du «théâtre rituel.» Celle-ci analyse en particulier, la pensé et plusieurs productions théâtrales du metteur en scène polonais Jerzy Grotowski. L'œuvre de Grotowski est d'un intérêt particulier car il crée un «espace dramatique total» en incorporant autant les acteurs que les spectateurs (toutefois, pas nécessairement intégré) pour chacune de ses pièces. Dans chaque cas, les relations spatiales créé par l'architecture théâtrale sont indissociablement lié au sens dramatique même. De cette façon, l'espace est utilisé comme une sorte de troisième protagoniste qui, avec les acteurs et spectateurs, participe dans le rituel théâtral.

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Contents

Prologue

My interest in theatrical space as potentially fertile ground in which to investigate forms of architectural meaning was sparked by the writings of Antonin Artaud, the visionary actor, director, and theoretician of the theatre.[1] Artaud dreamt of a type of theatrical production that would attack us through our bodies' senses and transform our very souls. He called it the "theatre of cruelty." His impassioned and unswervingly didactic writings have, in Susan Sontag's words, "had an impact so profound that the course of all recent serious theatre in Western Europe and the Americas can be said to divide into two periods – before Artaud and after Artaud."[2]

Antonin Artaud's ultimate demand of the theatre was that it exploit its own "concrete language," that of the *mise-en-scène*, rather than subjugating itself to the written text. This language consisted of "everything that can be manifested and expressed materially on the stage and that is addressed first of all to the senses instead of being addressed primarily to the mind as in the language of words,"[3] including "music, dance, plastic art, pantomime, mimicry, gesticulation, intonation, architecture, lighting, and scenery."[4] However, these were not to be considered an accompaniment to the text, nor even a representation of the text, but rather the *primary* vehicle by which the ideas are shot directly

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[1] Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

[2] Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) xxxviii.

[3] Artaud 38.

[4] Artaud 39. Whereas architects since Vitruvius' time viewed architecture as the mother of the arts who gathers them all into her bosom and her service, Artaud believed it was the theatre that was the *grande dame* of the arts.

into the organism.[5] This emphasis on the experience of the body as the primary locus of meaning is particularly relevant to architecture, which cannot rely on discursive forms of signifying. Even architectural symbolism is increasingly impotent, given the disintegration of any common horizon of belief or culture in contemporary North America.[6] We are left with very few options for any real "grounding" of architectural meaning. Artaud's view of theatre as a "concrete" language that signifies to the *entire organism* raises interesting possibilities.

Using this "concrete" language, Artaud felt that the theatre would recover its sacred symbols and archetypes in order to materialize and reveal to the spectator what he considered the primordial drama of the human condition, the "fall of man." In his theatre, the actor becomes a kind of priest performing a ritual in which he rejoins the Sacred realm so that the spectator may understand himself and his own conflicts by his connection to the primordial ones.

In subject matter, Artaud felt the theatre must deal with these "metaphysical ideas," rather than social or psychological ones. It must sear us with the primordial and archetypal questions and conflicts of the human condition. He recognized, however, that the mythical images of the Western tradition that gave form to these eternal conflicts, this eternal lack, have lost their power for us. He proposes that it is the theatre's true function

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[5] Artaud. See "Preface: The Theatre and Culture," "Metaphysics and Mise En Scene," and "The Theatre of Cruelty (1st Manifesto)".

[6] Of course even in our extraordinarily heterogeneous culture, one can find wide-ranging commonalities of experience, e.g. consumerism, alienation etc. but these are hardly what one would consider desirable grounds for architectural meaning.

to formulate *new* myths, to give these archetypes *new* forms in order that they may again be relevant to our daily lives. The new theatre, "the theatre of cruelty," will "try to concentrate around famous personages, atrocious crimes, superhuman devotions, a drama which, without resorting to the defunct images of the old Myths, shows that it can extract forces which struggle within them."[7] This new type of theatre would require a new type of theatrical director, a kind of super-director who would not simply give form to a playwright's words, but would truly create an entirely new work of art.

Artaud's insights into the nature of meaning in the theatre are helpful in thinking about architecture but they do have their limitations. His ideas were ground-breaking, but he was never able to give them concrete form. Indeed, perhaps no one can. Susan Sontag, in her introduction to *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings* writes, "Not only is Artaud's position not tenable; it is not a 'position' at all.... One can be inspired by Artaud. One can be scorched, changed by Artaud. But there is no way of applying Artaud."[8]

And yet, without trying to "apply Artaud," there is one theatrical director whose work has consistently inspired comparisons with Artaud's dreams. French critic Raymonde Temkine has called him "Artaud's natural son."[9] Acclaimed British director Peter Brook was also struck by the perception of kinship. He wrote that this director's "theatre is as close as anyone has got to Artaud's ideal."[10] And again, critic Michael Kustow: "...the most

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[7] Artaud 39.
[8] Sontag lvii.
[9] Raymonde Temkine, "Fils Naturel d'Artaud" *Lettres Nouvelles* 1966 mai-juin.
[10] Peter Brook quoted in Robert Baker-White, *Artaud's Legacy in the Collectivist Avante-Garde* (London: Associated University Presses, 1994) 206.

complete and overwhelming realization of the dreams of Artaud that I have seen was not in Mali or Mexico, but in a small city in Poland where a young troupe, who were literally possessed, presented an adaptation of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* in front of an audience of sixty people."[11] This troupe was the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows. It's cofounder and artistic director was Jerzy Grotowski.

Like Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski has also had an enormous influence on the theatre of the second half of the twentieth century. Unlike Artaud, whose actual theatrical practice has left scarcely a trace, Grotowski's influence is based on his actual innovations with respect to the craft of acting and the use of dramatic space. Whereas Artaud's notions of what theatre should be were generated from the analyses that he attempted of his own tormented mind and of what he considered an ailing culture (his notions about theatre may be seen as coming from his desire to cure both), Grotowski's theory was firmly rooted in, and sprang from, the *practice* of his craft.[12] In his "manifesto," *Towards a Poor Theatre*, he quotes Sartre: "Each technique leads to metaphysics."

In the present work, I will place Grotowski's work in a particular theatrical tradition that privileges the physicality of the actor and "theatrical architecture" over the written text as the primary sources of meaning. I will discuss both an immediate precursor as well as the ritual theatre of ancient Greece in order to show how he fits within this tradition and

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[11] Michael Kustow, *Esprit*. May 1965. My translation. "...la réalisation la plus complète et la plus bouleversante des rêves d'Artaud, ce n'est ni à Bali ni au Mexique que je l'ai vu, mais dans une petite ville de Pologne, où une jeune troupe, littéralement possédée, jouait une adaptation du *Faust* de Marlowe devant une salle de soixante personnes."

[12] Grotowski learned of Artaud's existence in 1960 and read his work only in 1964, five years after he became director of the Theatre of 13 Rows, and after most of the productions analyzed here were produced.

how he has innovated upon it and adapted it to suit his context. Although Grotowski himself focused much of his attention on the craft of acting, I will focus my attention on his innovations in the realm of the spatial relationships involved in theatrical production. I will do this by examining three of his productions mounted during the third and fourth seasons of his "Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows" covering the period of 1962-1965. Finally, I will attempt to draw conclusions from his research and practice that may be of use in informing contemporary architectural practice.

2: Origins and Roots

During his years of secondary education, the young Grotowski had already manifested an intense interest in literature, giving frequent poetry recitals and entering (and winning) poetry contests. Upon graduation he enrolled in the acting program of the State Theatre School in Kracow, gaining entrance on the strength of an essay on the question "How can theatre contribute to the development of Socialism in Poland?"[13] He graduated in 1955 and by this time, had already published several articles demonstrating an earnest commitment to the revitalization of the theatre in Poland. In response to one of these articles, critic and playwright Jan Paweł Gawlik wrote: "I don't know Grotowski personally but I know that his head is on fire. In his article, there is plenty of nonconformism, bragging, and clichés, and a pinch of complacency, typical of youth. But there's also something that commands attention."[14]

Soon after graduation, Grotowski received a scholarship to study directing at the State Institute of Theatre Arts in Moscow. He was already known at this time as a "fanatic disciple of Stanislavsky," the great Russian actor, director, and theoretician, but he wanted to deepen his knowledge of Stanislavsky's theories by studying them at their source. [15]

Stanislavsky had been the pre-eminent proponent of Naturalism in the theatre at the turn of the century, both in terms of acting and *mise-en-scène*. Naturalism meant basically

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[13] Poland at this time was under the heel of Joseph Stalin's rather heavy boot.
[14] Quoted in Zbigniew Osinski, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, trans. and abr. Lillian Vallee and Robert Findlay (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986) 15.
[15] Stanislavsky had died in 1938 but his theories and the acting method that he had developed continued to dominate the theatre and theatrical education in the Soviet Union.

that everything portrayed should aspire to "Truth," – truth as correspondence to reality as well as truth as internal coherence. He is most widely known for his investigations into the craft of acting, which he had researched more deeply and more methodically than perhaps anyone else in the history of theatre before him. During his four decades of directing, he developed what is commonly called the Stanislavsky Method, or the "method of physical actions" which is based on the idea that there is an unbreakable link between the physical and psychological in human beings, between outer form and inner content – a link which goes both ways. The idea was that instead of forcing an emotion or psychological state, the actor concentrates on performing the minutiae of the physical actions associated with that state as truthfully as possible, and this triggers the emotion or psychological state in the actor. In addition, if the action itself is done truthfully, the spectators will as a result, truly understand the inner psychological truth behind the action. "The 'small truth' of physical actions stirs the 'great truth' of thoughts, emotions, experience...."[16] Stanislavsky's predilection for natural form was not the result of an aesthetic preference for realism, but rather a conviction that what he called "the life of the human spirit" could only be communicated in this way. He considered this "spiritual communication" to be the ultimate goal of all art.

Stanislavsky extended this understanding of the importance of realism to his *mise-en-scène*, which was notoriously realistic, down to every conceivable detail. As was the case with Artaud, the fundamental truths of the production were not to be found in the

[16] Sonia Moore, *The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of an Actor* (New York: The Viking Press, 1965) 23.

text or words spoken, but in the physical actions of the actors and the material reality of the *mise-en-scène.*

It should be noted that Stanislavsky never considered his "method" to be a closed, fixed system. He continued his "research" in the theatre throughout his career. His rehearsals had the atmosphere of a laboratory – his relationship with his actors was pedagogical rather than dictatorial. We will see this understanding of *practice as research* profoundly reflected in Grotowski's approach to theatrical production, particularly with respect to the use of dramatic space.

Upon completion of his studies in Moscow, Grotowski spent two months travelling in Central Asia, and then returned to Poland and was accepted as a fifth-year student in the directing program at the Theatre School in Kracow. During this period from 1956 to the beginning of his professional directing career in 1959, he was assistant professor at the Theatre School, pursued his directing studies, and directed several productions in repertory theatres and for Polish Radio Theatre.[17] He also published numerous polemics on the theatre and theatrical education in Poland.

One can already see the manifestation of certain interests and tendencies in Grotowski's thought and character that would help to shape his years as director of the Laboratory

[17] These included Ionesco's *The Chairs* (1957), Prosper Merimée's *The Woman is a Devil* (1958), two adaptations of *The Ill-Fated Family* by Jerzy Kzyszton called *Gods of Rain*(1958) and *The Ill-Fated* (1958) respectively, Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* (1959) for the stage and *The White Elephant*, an adaptation of Mark Twain's short story; *Sakuntala,* based on a dramatic poem by Kalidasa, and a play entitled *Marriage* for the radio.

Theatre of 13 Rows in Opole, Poland. One of these is an interest in varying techniques and theories of theatre practice. He would go on to investigate a wide variety of theatrical traditions throughout Europe and Asia and incorporated elements from these into his own "method" of actor training. He also, at this young age, demonstrated a fervent desire to engage the establishment theatrical community in polemics. This was to characterize his relationship with his peers in Poland even after his theatre and his methods were acclaimed worldwide.

In spring of 1959, Ludwik Flaszen, a young but highly respected literary and theatre critic, was asked to take over the directorship of the small Theatre of 13 Rows in Opole, Poland. Feeling this to be beyond his capabilities, he contacted a young director whom he did not know personally, but with whose work he was familiar. They met and found much on which they agreed, including a sense of boredom with the state of the theatrical art and the feeling that it trailed behind the development of the other arts. By June of 1959, the new Theatre of 13 Rows (they would soon add the word "Laboratory") was established with Ludwik Flazen as its literary director and Jerzy Grotowski, aged 25, as its creative director.

3: Grotowski's Theatre

Introduction

In the first paragraph of his important essay "Towards a Poor Theatre,"[18] Grotowski poses the question that guided his theatrical research and production for over 25 years. What is the true language of the theatre?[19] It is the same question that had been posed by Artaud, but the answer at which he arrives is radically different. Whereas Artaud pursued an additive Frankenstein physiology of the theatre, concluding that its proper language was nearly anything and everything visual and auditory (but non-discursive) that could be presented on stage, Grotowski pursued a more subtractive process. In order to discover what is essentially theatrical, he poses the question, "what can be removed?" He concludes that make-up, "autonomic (sic) costume and scenography," a separate stage, lighting and sound effects, music (except for the sounds coming from the actors themselves), and even written texts are all superfluous. All that is essential is "the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, 'live' communion."[20] He rejects the "synthetic theatre," made up of all the various disciplines of the arts – literature, sculpture, painting, architecture, music. "The Rich Theatre," as he calls it, "depends on artistic kleptomania, drawing from other disciplines, constructing hybrid spectacles, conglomerates without backbone or integrity, yet presented as an organic artwork."[21]

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[18] Jerzy Grotowski, "Towards A Poor Theatre" in *Towards A Poor Theatre*, (Holstebro, Denmark: Odin Teatrets Forlag, 1968) 15. Originally published in Polish in the journal *Odra* in September, 1965.
[19] Grotowski 15.
[20] Grotowski 19.
[21] Grotowski 19.

Grotowski proposes as an alternative, "the poor theatre," which is essentially "what *takes place* between the spectator and actor."[22] This phrase implies a kind of theatrical holy trinity: the actor, the spectator, and the "place" that is taken. Athough I will not be focusing here on the actor's craft and training, nor on the spectator per se, it will be helpful to provide an overview of Grotowski's views of both of these essential elements in order to demonstrate how they have informed his thinking of the workings of theatrical space.

Actors

Jerzy Grotowski is most widely known for the "methods" he developed for the training of actors. In the late 1960's and 1970's students from all over the world flocked to his Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows (known after 1965 as Institute for Research in Acting Method) and to the seminars and workshops he taught throughout Europe and North and South America. His approach to actor training had two orders of intention – the first directed towards the actor and the second, through the actor, towards the spectator.

The methods of training that slowly developed at the Laboratory Theatre focused as much on the development of the person as it did the development of the artist. This training attempted to help the actor to remove all the psychological and physical "blockages" that prevented him from making a "total gift" of himself during the performance. The goal was "the integration of all the actor's psychic and bodily powers which emerge from the most intimate layers of his being and his instinct, springing forth in a sort of 'translumination.'"[23] Like Stanislavsky, Grotowski believed in a natural link between the inner-

[22] Grotowski 32. My italics.
[23] Grotowski 16.

most human impulses and the external signs by which they manifest themselves. However, in stark contrast to the Russian, he believed that "natural" signs were in fact an obstruction and a perversion of these basic impulses; a kind of barrier raised up by each individual to hide his inner spiritual and psychological truth from others and obscure it from himself. He called this barrier "the life-mask." The actor's training was designed to reconnect the artist's "artifice" with his most naked, human impulses. It tried to guide him towards the physical and mental state that was required in order to achieve this. Like Artaud, Grotowski believed that these true signs were to some degree "objective" and could be discovered. Ironically, he tries to get these unmediated impulses through the investigation of artificially constructed signs. He writes, "The form is like a baited trap, to which the spiritual process responds spontaneously and against which it struggles."[24] The signs that emerge come out of the investigation rather than being determined a priori from some aesthetic theory. The actor in this process uses the role to dissect himself, to study and reveal what is behind his daily "mask." Thus he becomes what Grotowski calls the "holy actor," he who "undertakes an act of self-penetration, who reveals himself and sacrifices the innermost part of himself – the most painful, that which is not intended for the eyes of the world."[25]

When analyzing Grotowski's use of dramatic space, one can clearly see the influence of his pre-occupation with the actor and his craft. His tendency towards "stripping down," or removing what is harmful or useless, for example, that we have seen with respect to

[24] Grotowski 17.
[25] Grotowski 35. Compare to Artaud's notion that an actor should be "like victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames." in Artaud 13.

actor training (understood as the removal of "blockages") extends equally to Grotowski's vision of theatrical space. What is deemed unessential is removed in order to let theatrical "place" speak with more force. The notion that an actor must "unlearn" natural "form" in order to signify naturally is mirrored in the apparent belief that theatrical space must "unlearn" its traditional organization around the proscenium arch in order to discover its ways of signifying "naturally." Like the actor who tries to fuse her artifice to her most naked impulses, the architecture of dramatic space could be said to "signify naturally" when its architectural form and its dramatic content are fused together, acting in consonance to produce meaning. A new theatre must be built for each new play.

With Grotowski, theatrical space drops much more than just its traditional division between the audience on one side and the actors on stage on the other. His productions shed all plastic elements that "have a life of their own," that is, props, costume and scenery that have autonomous meaning outside of their role in the particular production.[26] He eschews lighting effects in exchange for stationary lighting sources with which he explores the varying effects of shadows and bright spots on both the actors and the spectators. Music and sound effects that are not created "on stage" are also eliminated.

This movement toward divesting the theatre of its excess is complemented by an investing in the actor of an ever-increasing responsibility and importance. Many of the functions fulfilled traditionally by props, scenery, and sound effects, are now fulfilled by the actor himself, by his "own body and craft." He becomes the *mise-en-scène*. "By his

[26] Discussed in Grotowski 19-21, 31-32.

controlled use of gesture, the actor transforms the floor into a sea, a table into a confessional, a piece of iron into an animate partner, etc."[27] Music is produced by the rhythms of the actors' voices or by the clanging together of objects or, occasionally by a musical instrument, but one played within the action of the drama, by one of the actors. If masks are needed, they are composed by the actors using only their facial muscles – no makeup. When objects are used, there is only one rule: that nothing should be entered into the action of the drama that was not there in the beginning.

Spectators

Despite the incredible emphasis that Grotowski placed on the actor, he did not believe that the theatrical act reached its completion within him. Like Artaud and Stanislavski, he believed profoundly in the theatre's role as a moral and spiritual force capable of changing the spectator at a fundamental level. If the actor's task was to "struggle with one's own truth" on stage, it was in order to challenge the audience to do the same. Grotowski does not intend this type of theatre for the spectator who is looking for something to satisfy her cultural needs, nor for one who is looking for some entertainment to distract herself from her day-to-day existence, but rather for someone who, through a confrontation with the play, wants to confront, question and analyze herself. He writes,

> We are concerned with the spectator who has genuine spiritual needs...who does not stop at an elementary stage of psychic integration, content with his own petty, geometrical, spiritual stability, knowing exactly what is good and what is evil, and never in doubt... whose unrest is not general but directed towards a search for the truth about himself...[28]

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[27] Grotowski 21.

[28] Grotowski 40. The scarcity of this special kind spectator ultimately led him toward his "paratheatrical" experiments in the 1970's and 80's in which the participants where selected after an interview process.

Like Artaud, Grotowski believed that the theatre was primarily a space of provocation. However, he felt that in order for the spectator to be stimulated to self-analysis, there must be a common ground in the performance between him and the actor. The performances are aimed, therefore, at "the collective complexes of society, ...the myths which are not an invention of the mind but are...inherited through one's blood, religion, culture and climate."[29] Grotowski's productions interrogate religious, biological, and national myths; critiquing and reforming these myths through a contemporary lens and, at the same time, analysing our own epoch from the point of view of these traditions.

Grotowski's understanding of theatre as a place of provocation has clearly helped to shape his understanding of the nature and workings of dramatic space. Each of his productions investigates different ways of effecting this confrontation by establishing particular spatial relationships between spectators, actors and the dramatic action. The particular mode(s) of confrontation are directly related to the central themes of the drama and act on varying levels simultaneously.

On one level, the spectator is confronted with the *action* of the drama, as it is "situated" by theatrical architecture. Grotowski recognized that the spectator's physical position *vis-à-vis* the exploits of the actors will be one of the principle factors in determining the nature of the confrontation. For example, the spectator may find himself within the space of the action with actors on all sides. In this case, he becomes a virtual character in the drama itself, albeit a passive one, and is confronted corporally by the events occurring around him. Or he may be radically separated from the drama, being allowed access ex-

[29] Grotowski 42.

clusively through a particularly skewed viewpoint. To take things a step further, the spectator may also be confronted in various ways by the actors themselves. This can range from being directly addressed, commanded or even threatened by the actors on the one hand, to being conspicuously ignored despite very close proximity on the other.

A second order of confrontation that occurs in Grotowski's dramas is that which occurs between the spectators themselves. Again, this is largely determined by the architecture of the dramatic space. If the space(s) occupied by the spectators is illuminated, they are not only confronted by the action and the actors, but by the reactions of other spectators to the events unfolding before or around them. Spectators can be placed all facing the same direction or facing one another; they can be arranged in one mass or two opposing groups or broken up into a myriad of individual cells. All this can have a powerful effect on the individual members of the audience. French critic Ramonde Temkine describes some reactions to the first international presentation of Grotowski's *The Constant Prince* at the Theatre of Nations Festival in Paris in 1966 in the following terms, "shamefaced participants... communing in uneasiness...looking at one another mutually looking at something they shouldn't be seeing."[30] A necessary part of any ritual is the sense of commonality or community amongst those taking part. Grotowski, through his experimentations in the forms of dramatic space, is not only concerned with meaning for the individual spectator, but also engages the group as a kind of community engaged in collective action.

[30] Raymonde Temkine, *Grotowski*, (New York: Avon Books, 1972) 30.

Conclusion

When Grotowski maintains that theatre is essentially "what *takes place* between the spectator and actor,"[31] the important phrase "takes place" moves the connotation of *mise-en-scène* from the *decoration* of a stage to the *reorganization* of theatrical space itself. Critic Javier Navarro de Zuvillaga writes of Grotowski as being "one of those who did most to rediscover theatre by replanning the theatrical space...a space which lives during the performance and which should be a protagonist as much as the actors and audience."[32]

With each successive production, Grotowski investigated the spatial component of the actor-spectator relationship and its possibility for conveying meaning. In collaboration with architect Jerzy Gurawski, he designed a space for both the actors *and* the spectators in each of the dramas that he staged. In each case, the environment designed and the resulting spatial relationships created between the actors and the spectators were directly related to the meaning of the particular drama. Laboratory Theatre literary director Ludwik Flaszen writes, "Directing a performance, unlike in the traditional theatre, concerns two companies. The director constructs his performance not only of actors, but also of spectators. Theatrical ceremonial is created at the intersection of these two ensembles."[33] Grotowski's investigations helped to liberate theatrical space from its traditional dual role: decorated space serving to give plausibility or context for the

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[31] Grotowski 32. My italics.
[32] Javier Navarro de Zuvillaga, "The Disintegration of Theatrical Space," *Architectural Association Quarterly,* (Vol.8. no. 4. 1976) 25.
[33] Quoted in Osinski 14.

actions of the actors on one hand and a functional container of spectators on the other. It becomes instead a living space that signifies in its own right through the actions and reactions of human bodies. After seeing a performance of *Akropolis* at the Washington Square Methodist Church in New York, James Schevill wrote,

> I have a new vision now of what space can mean in a theatre.... If every play has its own unique space, it is not enough to begin with the idea of a flexible theatre. What is more important is the vision of a company, uniting director, playwright, designers, and actors, creating their vision of space in each work....Even if a company plays only in its own theatre, it must find ways to abolish the idea of aesthetic, theatrical space and explore the transformations of dramatic space. This may mean not only the abolition of fixed seating and barriers of any kind between audience and actors, but also an architectural and psychological ability to transform the basic theatre into an ideal space for a particular production.[34]

As we will see in greater detail when I discuss particular productions, this is precisely the kind of rethinking of dramatic space in which Grotowski was engaged.

[34] James Scheville, *Break Out! In Search of New Theatrical Environments* (Chicago: The Swallows Press, 1973) 300.

Theatre as Ritual

Introduction

By creating both a dramatic work *and* a corresponding architectural form, Grotowski explored dramatic space's capacity to shape both the actors' and spectators' participation in the theatrical event in an attempt to revive the ritual function of theatre. To fully understand this endeavor, we must first discuss the function of ritual generally, and its ancient relation to theatre in the Western tradition.

In archaic or *unhistorical* cultures, actions only became "real" and attained meaning if and to the extent that they recreated mythical actions; that is, those enacted by gods, heroes, or ancestors at the "beginning of time."[35] These mythical actions and the characters that perpetrated them constituted the realm of the sacred, the "Golden Age" before the "fall of man" from unity with the gods and cosmos. Everyday existence, on the other hand, was understood as a kind of "dream," an illusion characterized by incessant transformation and radical unpredictability. Only the realm of the sacred was enduring and immutable, and therefore "real" and meaningful. This is the essence of Plato's allegory of the cave.[36] Rituals then, were "meaningful acts" imitating archetypal models that projected the participants back to the "Great Time," the realm of the sacred, often in order to "remind" them how to live a proper life.

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[35] Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954) 3-4. In the same way, people were meaningful only in relation to their repetition of these archetypal actions; objects had meaning only in their relation to archetypal objects.

[36] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G. M. A Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1974). The one significant difference is that Plato thought one could access the sacred, or the realm of "Forms," using contemplation alone rather than through cyclical repetition of primordial acts.

Ritual Function of Ancient Greek Tragedy

Friedrich Nietzsche, in his important essay *The Birth of Tragedy*, argues that this was precisely the function of theatre for the ancient Greeks. He describes Attic tragedy before Euripedes as an uneasy truce between the two great creative forces – the Apolline and Dionysiac.[37] The Apolline was connected to dreaming and semblance. It represented the artistic drive of image-making, images whose peculiar quality it was that they always existed to reveal and conceal a deeper, hidden truth. The Dionysiac was connected to intoxication, excess, and transgression. It was the creative force associated with music, dancing, and singing and represented direct access to truth. The Apolline demanded moderation and the knowledge of the limits of the individual. The pleasure that we take in images of reality must not be taken so far that we confuse them for reality. The Dionysiac demands complete abandonment and surrender, the tearing asunder of all boundaries, the horror and bliss of losing oneself completely. The Apolline represented what Nietzsche called "the principle of individuation," the belief that each individual creature and object is separate and distinct from every other creature and object; the Dionysiac represented the total dissolution of the individual self into what he called "the primordial unity." Nietzsche believed that all art emerges from one or the other or a combination of these two creative forces.

These two "artistic powers which erupt from nature itself,"[38] he claimed, reached a state of mutual perfection in Attic tragedy. This dramatic form had three groups of participants, the tragic protagonists on stage, the chorus, and the spectators. The suffering of

[37] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy,* trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).
[38] Nietzsche 19.

the tragic hero of the drama, was, at its core, a re-enactment of the sufferings of the god Dionysos, who was torn to pieces and then reborn. Thus the stage represented a "sacred" or ideal space, inaccessible to mortals. The chorus represented a kind of middle world between the profane realm of the spectator and the sacred one of the stage. It was comprised of half-human and half-goat creatures known as satyrs. These satyrs represented man in a primordial state, "a proclaimer of wisdom from the deepest heart of nature" before the artifice of culture and knowledge.[39] It is *they*, the chorus, who in their state of intoxicated ecstasy, see the tragic vision of the suffering Dionysos. The spectator in turn, identifies himself with the chorus. Nietzsche writes, "The chorus of satyrs is first and foremost a vision of the Dionysiac mass, just as the world of the stage is in turn a vision of this chorus of satyrs."[40] The spectator's experience of the sacred is mediated by these beings that have direct access to this ideal realm.[41]

For Nietzsche, the tragic artist is one who sinks into intoxicated oneness with the primordial unity through music and then emerges with dream images of this underlying reality. In Attic tragedy, the music that provides direct access to the sacred comes from the chorus, while the dream image, the *semblance* of the underlying reality, provides the spectators with mediated access to the truth. The result according to Nietzsche, is that in the Dionysian state, "the usual barriers and limits of existence are destroyed,"[42] and spectators are provided with the "metaphysical solace" that despite all suffering, creation and

[39] Nietzsche 41.
[40] Nietzsche 42.
[41] In fact Nietzsche writes that originally, tragedy consisted of only a chorus, who in their ecstatic state caused by the music, described the events unfolding in the unseen sacred realm.
[42] Nietzsche 40.

destruction, and the incessant changing of appearance, conditions, and fortunes, the "primordial unity" continues and "life is indestructibly mighty and pleasurable."[43]

The ritual function of Attic tragedy was reflected in its architectural form. Aristotle tells us that poetry should represent universals rather than particulars and it is because of this that it is a more "philosophical" and "serious" discourse than history. Poetry shows not what has happened, "but things that may happen, i.e. that are possible in accordance with probability or necessity."[44] In other words, it reflects the horizon of potentialities inherent within the cosmic order. In the essay "Chora: The Space of Architectural Representation," Alberto Pérez-Gómez describes how the architecture of the amphitheatre in turn reflects the *form* of this order, with its plan "constructed in accordance with the image of the sky, starting from a circle and inscribing four equilateral triangles..."[45] The focal point of the amphitheatre is not the stage, but rather a circular dance platform known as the *chora*.[46] It is from this "middle world," between the Sacred and Profane, Being and Becoming, that the ecstatic chorus relates to the spectators the "unseen" events occurring on the stage. The space of the *chora* mediates between the two realms by taking part in both. "It is both a space for contemplation and a space of participation – a space of recognition."[47]

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[43] Nietzsche 39.
[44] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Richard Janko, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987) 12.
[45] Alberto Pérez-Gómez, "Chora: The Space of Architectural Representation," *Chora 1: Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture*, eds. Stephen Parcell and Alberto Pérez-Gómez, (Montréal: McGill-Queens Univerity Press, 1994) 14.
[46] Pérez-Gómez 12.
[47] Pérez-Gómez 15.

"Drama," writes Pérez-Gómez, "is experienced as a tight weaving of temporality and spatiality."[48] The architectural form of the Greek theatre and the dramatic content of its dramas were, for a moment in time during a performance, inseparable. Together, they revealed to the spectators the order of the cosmos, and the place of humans within it.

Grotowski's Recovery of the Theatre Ritual

Jerzy Grotowski was committed to the revival of this ritual function of the theatre, in which "the spectator thus had a renewed awareness of his personal truth in the truth of myth..."[49] However he recognized that this ritual function, if it could still function at all, had to be reworked from a contemporary perspective. He called for "a rational review of the problem of myth,"[50] given our loss of the "common sky" of belief that makes collective identification with the truth of myth possible. He writes,

> The theatre, when it was still part of religion, was already theatre: it liberated the spiritual energy of the congregation or tribe by incorporating myth and profaning or rather transcending it.... But today's situation is much different. As social groupings are less and less defined by religion, traditional mythic forms are in flux, disappearing and being reincarnated. The spectators are more individuated in their relation to the myth as corporate truth or group model.... Group identification with myth – the equation of personal, individual truth with universal truth – is virtually impossible today.[51]

What is needed, Grotowski concludes, is a "secular sacrum" to replace the "religious sacrum" of previous days. So how can the ritual function of theatre be restored? Gro-

[48] Pérez-Gómez 14.
[49] Grotowski 22.
[50] Grotowski 22.
[51] Grotowski 22-23.

towski answers that there are two possibilities: confrontation with myth (rather than identification with it) and "the violation of the living organism."[52]

The notion of confrontation with myth recognizes that there is still something in the content of myths that speaks directly to us about our human condition and yet is no longer connected enough to our contemporary condition to command belief or allegiance. Using classic texts from "grand traditions," he tries to find the primordial mythic content, while at the same time exposing it to derision. This approach has been called by critic Tadeusz Kudlinski, "the dialectics of derision and apotheosis." Grotowski explains,

> ...while retaining our private experiences, we can attempt to incarnate myth, putting on its ill-fitting skin to perceive the relativity of our problems, their connection to the "roots," and the relativity of the "roots" in the light of today's experience.[53]

One uses the mythic content of "great works" in the tradition as a perspective through which we may judge and understand our own contemporary epoch, while at the same time, subjecting the myth to a contemporary critical perspective in order to jettison what is no longer relevant.

In addition, religious myths of ancient ritual theatre are replaced by secular ones, which are found in the enduring works of literature. Grotowski wants to restore the mythical dimension of theatre, but tries to arrive at it through the historical, or through what Nietzsche has called "monumental history," historical events that through time have been arranged along mythical lines, choosing works in which the characters or events de-

[52] Grotowski 23.
[53] Grotowski 23.

scribed still reverberate in the collective (western) imagination. In his productions, he tends to remove all elements from the dramas that would link them to particular times and places. The characters and events are instead symbolic of the archetypal conflicts that have defined humankind's existence seemingly from the beginning of time. He writes,

> The strength of great works really consists in their cataclysmic effect: they open doors for us, set in motion the machinery of our self-awareness...the author's text is a sort of scalpel enabling us to open ourselves, to transcend ourselves, to find what is hidden within us and to make the act of encountering the others; in other words, to transcend our solitude.[54]

Monique Borie, in her book, *Mythe et Théatre Aujourd'hui: Une Quête Impossible?* describes the process as using "a 'classic' text as a trampoline allowing one to restore mythical time from within the historical dimension."[55]

Ritual and Dramatic Space

Naturally, this attempt to put mythical truth back into theatre goes beyond simply choosing the appropriate works of literature. Borie points out the necessity that ritual drama make a definite break with the profane world of our daily existence.[56] This break is both necessary for, and brought about by, the dramatic representation itself. As we have seen, in Attic tragedy, this break was mediated by the middle world of the chorus, by whose agency the spectators were able to access the sacred space of the stage. In Grotowski's

[54] Grotowski 57.
[55] Monique Borie, *Mythe et Théatre Aujourd'hui: Une Quête Impossible?* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1981) 122. My translation. "...il s'agit d'un texte «classique», défini comme un tremplin permettant d'opérer, à l'intérieur de la dimension historique, une restauration du temps mythique."
[56] Borie 121.

dramas, the actors fill this role of chorus.[57] They are the ones with access to the truths of the work and they sacrifice their bodies so that through them, the spectator can also see the "secular sacrum." As we have seen, Grotowski's actors cultivate forms of physical representation that try to capture human impulses unmediated by consciousness of the "norms" of human behavior. Often, people who had seen a performance by Grotowski's troupe described the actors as seeming to have been in a trance.[58] This "strange behavior" helps in establishing the break with the profane of which Borie speaks. The attempt to eliminate props, scenery, and costumes that have autonomous value outside of the drama also supports the establishment of this division. This does not necessarily imply the use of bizarre, outlandish, or surreal objects and scenery. It can also mean (and with Grotowski, it usually does) the use of incredibly mundane objects like stove pipes, tin tubs, and dining tables, that acquire a powerful new meaning because of *where* and *how* they are employed. This innovative use of the physical objects in the drama helps to establish the "otherness" of the dramatic space.

And then there is the organization of the space itself. As we have seen, Grotowski and his architect, Gurawski, designed a new theatrical space for every new production. This, in and of itself, was a factor in bringing about the break between the profane and the sacred. The spectator who attends a production at the Laboratory Theatre of Thirteen Rows

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[57] Of course, the parallels between the ancient Greek chorus and Grotowski's actors is not absolute. Nietzsche tells us that direct access to the sacred is possible only through music and thus the songs of the chorus are what make the events on stage "appear." In this case, access to the sacred truths comes through the sacrificing of the actor's body.

[58] Indeed, Grotowski himself uses the word to describe the psychic state of the actor. He describes it variously as "the ability to concentrate in a particular theatrical way..." (Grotowski 37.) "a state of passive readiness to realize an active role, a state in which one does not 'want to do that' but rather 'resigns from not doing it.'" (Grotowski 17.) and "a state of idle readiness, a passive availability, which makes possible an active acting score." (Grotowski 37.)

enters into an environment in which he has probably never before found himself, neither in "real life," nor in the "fictional" world of theatre, nor even in a previous Grotowski drama that he may have experienced. He is perhaps not even aware of where he should go, or which of the spaces set out before him are in fact admissible to him. In addition, Grotowski and Gurawski investigated this division of the realms by experimenting with spatial relationships that create particular physical and/or psychological separations and connections between the actors and the spectators and between the spectators and each other. These separations and connections had the effect of either identifying the barrier between the sacred and the profane, or in some cases, the temporal abolition of the profane realm altogether. These varied from complete integration of all persons involved to a radical separation between actors and spectators to a psychological separation, but with intimate physical closeness.

Ritual and the Actor

The second of Grotowski's strategies for the recovery of myth in theatre is pursued by and through the actor himself. He makes the distinction between what he calls the "courtesan actor" and the "holy actor." The "courtesan actor" is he who exploits his body on stage for money or the adoration of the audience. However, if he,

> through excess, profanation and outrageous sacrilege reveals himself by casting off his everyday mask, he makes it possible for the spectator to undertake a similar process of self-penetration. If he does not exhibit his body, but annihilates it, burns it, frees it from every resistance to any psychic impulse, then he does not sell his body but sacrifices it. He repeats the atonement; he is close to holiness.[59]

[59] Grotowski 34.

The actor must come to know his body so completely that it "ceases to exist," that it manifests pure psychic impulses "so quickly that thought – which would remove all spontaneity - has no time to intervene."[60] His training therefore does not consist of the accumulation of a "bag of tricks" that can be used for various roles, but rather the removal of everything, both physical and mental, that keeps him from making a "total gift" of himself. According to Grotowski, this "violation of the living organism, the exposure carried to outrageous excess, returns us to a concrete mythical situation, an experience of common human truth,"[61] – the truth of human suffering and mortality.

[60] Grotowski 35.
[61] Grotowski 23.

5: Explorations in dramatic space

Introduction

In this section, I will discuss in detail three of the productions of the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows: *Akropolis* (1962), *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (1963) and *The Constant Prince* (1965). I chose these particular plays for several reasons. First, *Akropolis* was the first of Grotowski's productions to tour internationally. At this time, his work was virtually ignored in his native Poland but had begun to garner accolades abroad. Writing about theatrical productions without having experienced them personally poses significant challenges since the performance, unlike the text itself,[62] is temporal, existing for a moment in time and them disappearing completely, except in the memories of those present. The immediacy of the dramatic action and the bodily experience of the spectator are integral to the meaning of the drama and cannot be reproduced on video or in photographs of the sets. This is particularly true with Grotowski, whose primordial concern was "direct, 'live' communion" between the actors and the spectators. While a performance of *Akropolis* was videotaped in 1965, it has only been marginally helpful in understanding Grotowski's usage of dramatic space. I have relied much more heavily on "testimonies" of critics and spectators from Europe and North America who have actually experienced the performances, as well as the theoretical writings of Jerzy Grotowski and Ludwik Flaszen themselves.

Another reason for choosing these particular plays is that they represent a kind of crystallization of both Grotowski's theory and practice. By crystallization, I do not mean an

[62] Although one's reading of the text is temporal, the text itself as a physical artifact does remain the same.

ossification in which he was simply repeating himself. Rather, there was a honing of the research and an integration of previously learned "lessons" into the new investigations. These three particular productions are also instructive because they represent three quite different approaches to the use of space in the theatre as a conveyer of meaning.

I will begin with a brief discussion of some earlier works in order to sketch out the development of certain lines of inquiry that were explored more fully in the later work. When discussing the three plays mentioned above, I will begin with a brief description of the original text on which Grotowski has based his own work.

For its inaugural season of 1959-60, the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows staged 3 productions: Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus*, George Gordon Byron's *Cain*, and Mayakovsky's *Mystery-Bouffe*. In each production, Grotowski used the author's text as a kind of springboard for a new work. He would begin from what he felt was the central theme of the play and then added elements of other works, including other plays, poetry, journalistic articles, works of philosophy, etc. The result was a series of complicated montages that were generally polemical towards playwrights' original texts. However, although his treatment of the dramatic texts constituted a radical departure from that of conventional practice, the theatrical space was still conventionally divided between the actors and the action of the drama on one side and the spectators on the other.

Grotowski's abolition of the conventional stage occurred in June 1961 with the premiere of *Dziady (Forefather's Eve),* based on the play by the Polish Romantic poet Adam

Mickiewicz. In this production, the audience's chairs were grouped in "islets" throughout the entire auditorium and facing varying directions. The action occurred amongst these audience groupings, with the spectators treated as participants in a ceremony.

Kordian, which premiered in February 1962, was based on a work by another Polish Romantic, Juliusz Słowacki. In this production, Grotowski followed a line of investigation similar to that of *Dziady*. In one scene in Słowacki's play, the protagonist, Kordian, is imprisoned in a mental institution after attempting to assassinate the Tzar of Russia. Grotowski expanded this scene to include all the action of the drama. The audience was given the nominal role of mental patients. The action of the play was approached as the collective hallucination of Kordian and the other patients (the spectators). At one point in the play, the chief doctor orders all the "patients" to join in song and threatens those found not singing with a cane.

The architecture of Kordian was more structured than that of Dziady but maintained the total integration of actors and spectators. The action of the drama took place on a collection of single, double or triple tiered metal-framed hospital beds that were spread throughout the auditorium. The spectators were seated either amongst the beds on raised platforms or on the beds themselves with actors in very close proximity.

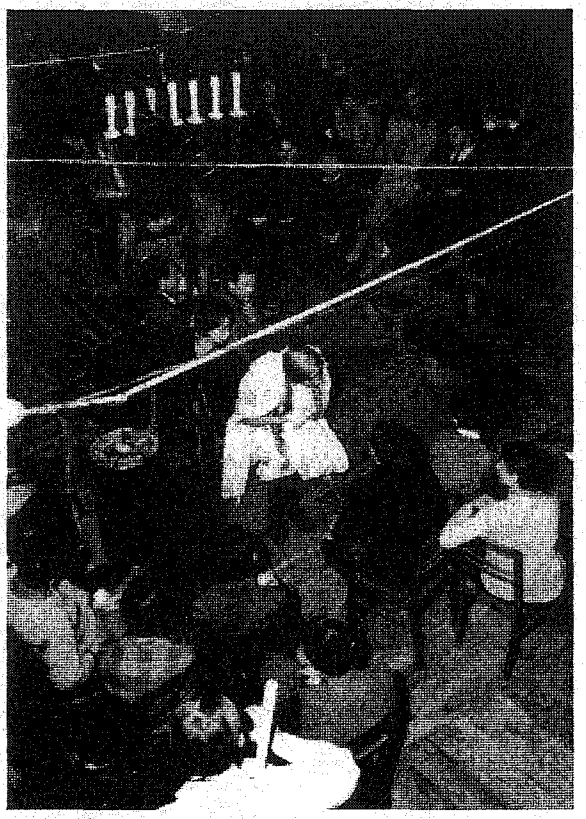

fig. 1: scene from *Dziady*

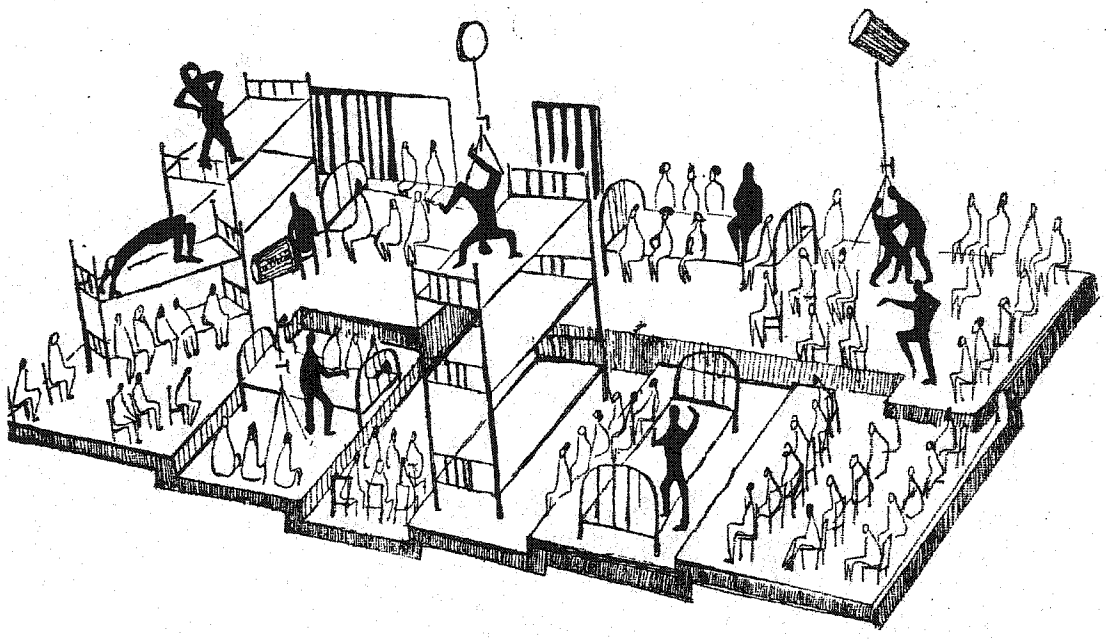

fig. 2: sketch of scenic arrangement for *Kordian*

fig. 3: scene from *Kordian*

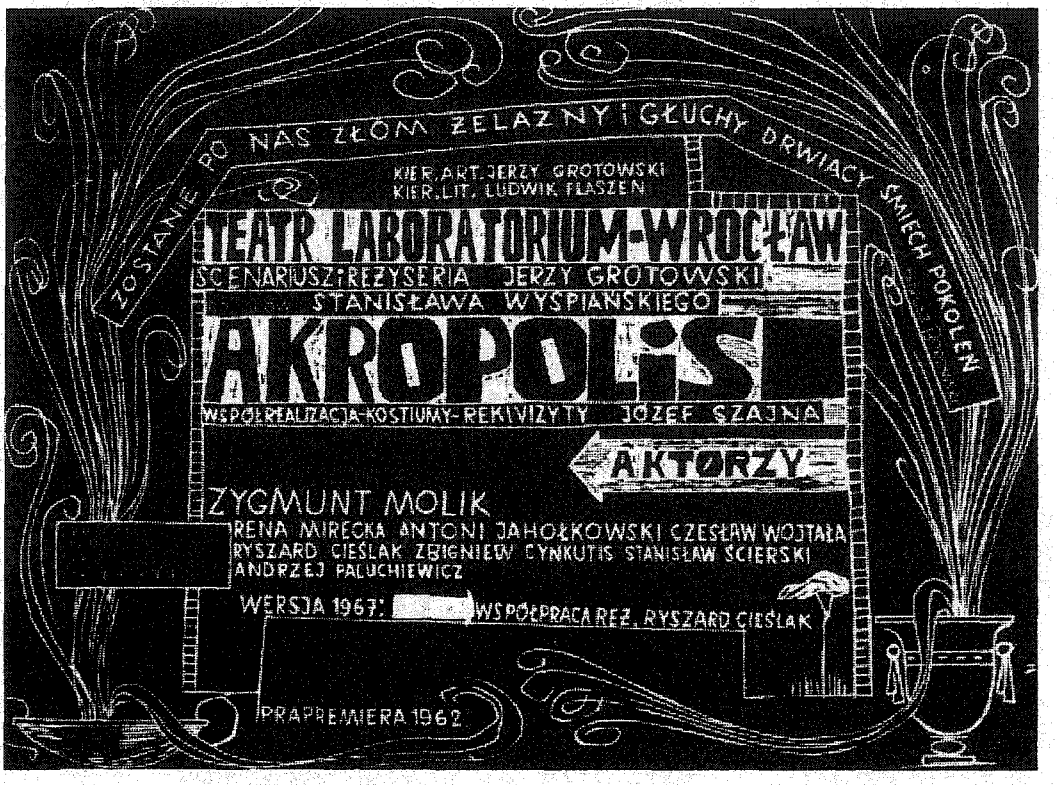

fig. 4: poster for *Akropolis*

Akropolis

Akropolis was written by the Polish Symbolist poet, painter, and playwright Stanisław Wyspiański in 1904. This complicated 4-act drama is based on a Polish tradition that holds that on the night of the Resurrection, the characters depicted in the works of art in the Wawel Cathedral (in Kracow) come to life, reliving their adventures. In the first act of his play, four silver angels who hold the coffin of St. Stanislas, the patron saint of Poland, come to life and proceed to "wake up" the other sculptures that line the walls of the Cathedral, who begin to act as normal people with their joys, sorrows, conflicts, etc. Scenes from the siege of Troy that are depicted on six Renaissance wall hangings are enacted outside the Cathedral, in and around Wawel Castle. In the 3rd act, characters from eight Flemish Baroque tapestries become flesh and relive the Old Testament story of Jacob. Finally, a statue of David comes to life, tells his own story, and expresses a fervent desire for the Resurrection. The statue of Jesus becomes animated and responds "I am here!" whereupon Apollo comes driving into the Cathedral in a golden chariot with 4 white horses. The Apollo and Jesus figures fuse into one symbolic entity, and "the walls and vaults of the Cathedral catch fire and begin to crumble while, simultaneously, spring dawns and a new light rises over the stage."[63]

Wyspiański's intention, as he once indicated in a letter, was to represent the roots of the European tradition and confront it with contemporary experience. He saw this tradition as a convergence of Hellenism, Latinism and Christianity and represented it by the artefacts of civilization: art, architecture, etc. The contemporary experience against which he

[63] Tymon Terlecki, *Stanislaw Wyspianski* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983) 111.

wanted to test this tradition's values was that of partitioned Poland, which had ceased to exist as an independent nation some 110 years before. He, like other Polish Romantic poets before him, saw Poland as the "Christ of nations," martyred at the hands of powerful Russian and eastern European empires.[64] Wawel hill, site of the venerable old cathedral and royal castle, was seen as "our [Polish] Acropolis," where the 3 roots of the European tradition converged to die, becoming "the cemetery of the tribes." But he also believed, as did Mickiewicz, that Poland would be resurrected, and would lead a renewal of European civilization.

Like Wyspiański, Grotowski also wanted to use *Akropolis* to confront the sum total of Mediterranean civilization's contributions to humanity with contemporary experience. But much had happened in Poland in the sixty years since the old poet had written his play. Grotowski transfers the action to the Auschwitz death camp, "where our century has to measure its values."[65] Flaszen writes, "The characters re-enact the great moments of our cultural history; but they bring to life not the figures immortalized in the monuments of the past, but the fumes and emanations from Auschwitz."[66] The cemetery of the European tradition becomes a literal cemetery, where the question is asked: "what happens to human nature when it faces total violence?"[67]

Grotowski's production cuts Wyspiański's text extensively, interspersing scenes of camp

[64] This belief, known as Polish Messianism, can be traced to a pamphlet called *Books of the Polish Nation and Pilgrimage* published by Mickiewicz in 1832 while he was in exile in Paris.
[65] Jennifer Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski,* (London: Methuen London Ltd, 1985) 59.
[66] Grotowski 62.
[67] Grotowski 62.

life among the scenes from the Bible and antiquity. The episodes of prison life, based on the stories of Polish writer and Auschwitz inmate Tadeusz Borowski, show the prisoners doing hard labor and meaningless repetitive tasks as dictated by the camp regulations. They also show the even more horrible rules dictated by the desire to survive, in which "victims become executioners." The scenes from the Iliad and the Bible represent their daydreams and flights of fancy in which in through their imaginations they can escape reality and temporarily restore dignity to life. The characters in the drama are the Auschwitz dead, brought back to life from the smoke of the crematorium. The spectators are the living. The relationship between the two is treated precisely as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn imagines the dead must regard the living in his famous work, *The Gulag Archipelago*. During one compelling passage, Solzhenitsyn describes his first experience of being temporarily among "normal" people on a train after several years of prison, torture and labor camps in Stalinist Soviet Union,

> If the souls of those who have died sometimes hover among us, see us, easily read in us our trivial concerns, and we fail to see them and guess at their incorporeal presence, then that is what a special convoy trip is like.
>
> ...You sit on the ancient passenger benches, and you hear strange and insignificant conversations: about some husband who beats up his wife or has left her; and some mother-in-law who, for some reason does not get along with her daughter-in-law; how neighbors in communal apartments make personal use of the electrical outlets in the corridor and don't wipe their feet; and how someone is in someone else's way in the office; and how someone has been offered a good job but can't make up his mind to move – how can he move bag and baggage, is that so easy? You listen to all this and goose pimples of rejection run up and down your spine: to you the true measure of the things in the Universe is so clear! The measure of all weakness and all passions! And these sinners aren't

> fated to perceive it. The only one there who is alive, truly alive, is incorporeal you, and all these others are simply mistaken in thinking themselves alive.
>
> And an unbridgeable chasm divides you![68]

In Grotowki's *Akropolis*, the actors are those who have been "initiated in the ultimate experience," that is, the dead. Their costumes consist of rough potato sacks with holes patched with a material meant to evoke the image of torn flesh. These are complimented with heavy, wooden-soled work boots and berets. The prisoners are represented as ageless, sexless, classless bodies, nearly devoid of all individuality.[69] What distinguishes them from one another is simply the mask that each actor wears throughout the performance, an individual "expression of despair, suffering, and indifference," created solely through the use of facial muscles. Grotowski's drama does not depict the exploits or difficulties of an individual hero, but rather presents "the image of human community in an extreme situation."[70]

The actors move amongst the spectators, yet they see through them like glass. There is absolutely no contact. They act, singularly and in groups, all over the dramatic space, as if the collective nightmare of the spectators, ever-present yet horrifyingly inaccessible. Critic Raymonde Temkine describes the experience,

> The spectator would be relieved if real contact could be established, a communion through pity; but he is rather horrified at these victims that become executioners – one need only refer to Borowski's work to know what was necessary for survival in the camps – and who repulse or frighten more than they evoke pity.

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[68] Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr. *The Gulag Archipelago.* (New York: Harper Collins, 1973) 590-91.
[69] Raymonde Temkine states that, despite her physical proximity to the actors, the first time she saw the production she had great difficulty recognizing actors that she knew.
[70] Tadeusz Burzynski and Zbigniew Osinski, *Grotowski's Laboratory* (Warsaw: Interpress Publishers, 1979) 32.

> They escape, they repulse....Because the spectators are the living, they find themselves rejected by the dying, who know more than they do about life and feel strongly their absolutely uncommunicable experience....They cross *through* you and you do not exist.[71]

The spectators sit there, dreaming of a world that envelops them, but from which they are radically separated.

At the beginning of the performance, there lies in the center of the space, an enormous black box with a pile of rusty metal on top of it. This "scrap" consists of an old tin tub, two rusty wheelbarrows, and a pile of stovepipes of various lengths and widths. In Grotowski's *Akropolis*, these objects play a varied but essential set of roles. At their root, they are symbolic. The bathtub is evocative of "all the bathtubs in which human bodies were processed for the making of soap and leather."[72] The wheelbarrows represent daily physical toil. And the stovepipes are symbolic of the crematorium itself. But these objects quickly supersede their symbolic meanings with concrete ones, conjured up from the ways in which they are manipulated during the action. The bathtub becomes an altar where a prayer is chanted by one prisoner and again the wedding bed of Jacob and Rachel. The wheelbarrows are used for varying kinds of toil including picking up dead bodies. They are also Priam's and Hecuba's thrones and a strange force that binds Jacob and the Angel together but allows neither to win in his fight with the other. The stovepipes are used as objects of toil but may also be transformed by Jacob's imagination into his bride.

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[71] Raymonde Temkine, *Grotowski*, (New York: Avon Books, 1972) 126.
[72] Grotowski 76.

The objects and costumes are also used extensively for their purely sonic value.[73] Watching the performance, one is struck in by the incredible emphasis that the troupe places on the rhythm of sound.[74] Scheville describes how "the shoes have taken the place of music, the shoes of slave labor pursuing their mad, clumping tasks," and that "This rhythm can never be forgotten."[75] The clanging of the heavy work boots is complimented by a myriad of other rhythmic sounds as the characters carry out their absurd, aimless tasks.

Perhaps the most provocative way in which physical objects are used in the production is as the means of building the architecture of the dramatic action. The prisoners are building a crematorium. During the course of the action, they nail the stovepipes to the floor and suspend them from cables until they eventually take up the entire space of the auditorium. Just as the scenes from Wyspianski's play show the "building" of Mediterranean civilization, Grotowski shows us the building of its culmination in the 20th century, "the civilization of crematoria."

The spectators are seated on platforms on all four sides of the central space. The auditorium is small and there are relatively few seats. Thus the spectators' relationship to the drama is constructed by the tension between two contradictory elements: alienation from dramatic action and the actors themselves on the one hand, and the uncanny intrusion of

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[73] Words are also used for their purely sonic qualities, as Artaud demanded that they should be. Kumiega describes how the language is used ritualistically (quoting Eugenio Barba) as "more than a means of intellectual communication. Its pure sound is used to bring spontaneous associations to the spectator's mind (incantation)." (Kumiega 29.) Not understanding the language probably intensifies this experience for non-Polish audiences. However, Temkine notes that even many Polish speakers understand relatively little of the words spoken during a performance because of the way in which they are spoken – spoken very quickly, chanted, whispered etc.

[74] The performance I saw was recorded on videotape in England in 1968.

[75] Scheville 298.

the architecture of the drama on the other. Playwright and critic James Schevill described his experience of seeing *Akropolis* in New York in 1969:

> Mechanically, slowly, with a terrifying condemned rhythm expressing the loss of will, the absence of originality, the prisoners begin to erect the pipes through the audience....Suddenly I am looking at members of the audience and the actors through and around an intricate tangle of pipes....I can only feel they are building a nightmare.[76]

The spectator finds himself feeling pushed and pulled from different directions, unable to locate himself. At the beginning of the performance, the intimacy of the seating and the spectator's physical proximity to the actors and the physical objects of the dramatic space encourage his connection to the actors and their activities. But the actors quickly deny any possibility of establishing this connection. The dislocation that results is then gradually increased by the invasion of the spectators' visual and even physical space by the jumbled network of stove pipes.

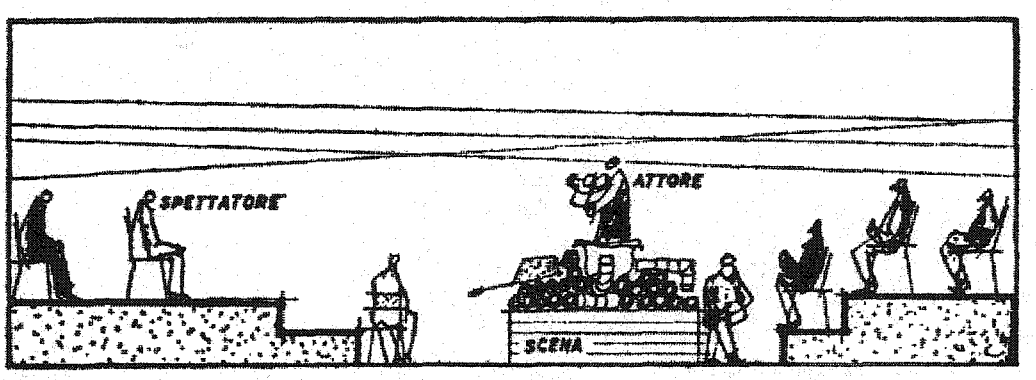
The beleaguered spectator may try to find some relief in communion with her fellow spectators, but even this is denied. Scheville comments, "Seated very close to each other, we seem incredibly distant. Who would have thought that such powerful alienation could be achieved by intimacy."[77] The spectators, whose normal relationship to one another has already been disrupted somewhat by the presence of these uncanny "spirits" among them, are further dislocated by the gradual transformation of "their" own space, along with the central dramatic space. As the metallic network gradually invades the entire

[76] Scheville 297.
[77] Scheville 293.

room, these two realms slowly collide and the spectator is thrown from her own profane realm, but is denied direct participation with the "inititated." She occupies a "middle world," like Nietzsche's sartyr, who can see the suffering of the god Dionysos in the sacred realm, and can sing of it to the mortals assembled, but cannot himself take active part in the events. It is as though the tangle of stove pipes is barring the spectator's way, reminding her that she is flesh and so cannot yet pass into the "ultimate experience."

Among all the works that Grotowski staged, *Akropolis* remains the one in which he was least faithful to the original text. Temkine points out that it is not that Grotowski rejects the spirit of Wyspiański's play, but that he rejects its optimism. In his version, all the bright points, all elements of hope, are extinguished. "The tragic-comedy of rotten values," Flaszen writes, "has been substituted for the luminous apotheosis which concluded the philosophic-historic drama of the old poet."[78] In the final scene of Wyspiański's drama, the triumphant, radiant Christ-Apollo figure leads a procession of hope for the future – death is necessary for rebirth. In Grotowski's version, the prisoners, in their desperation for hope and deliverance, mistake a grotesque headless corpse for their Savior and follow it in a mad, ecstatic procession into the big black box in the center of the space - into the crematorium. When the last of them has entered, a disembodied voice says simply, "They are gone, and the smoke rises in spirals."[79]

[78] Grotowski 63.
[79] Grotowski 75.



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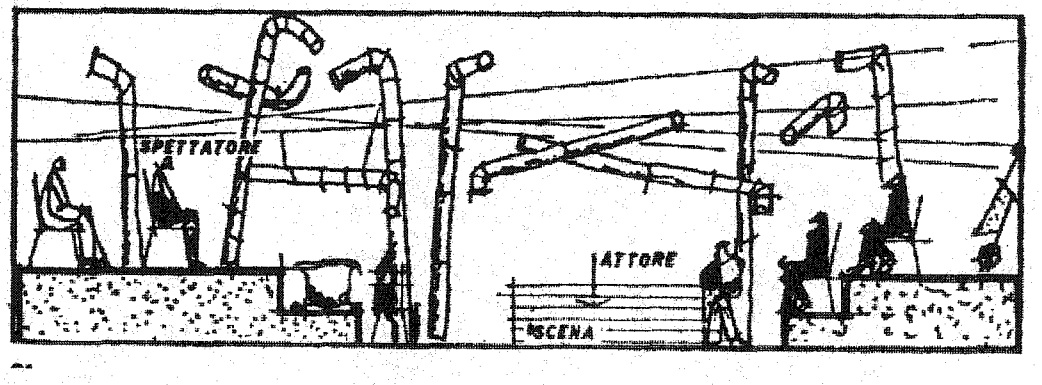

fig. 5: sketch of scenic arrangement for *Akropolis*

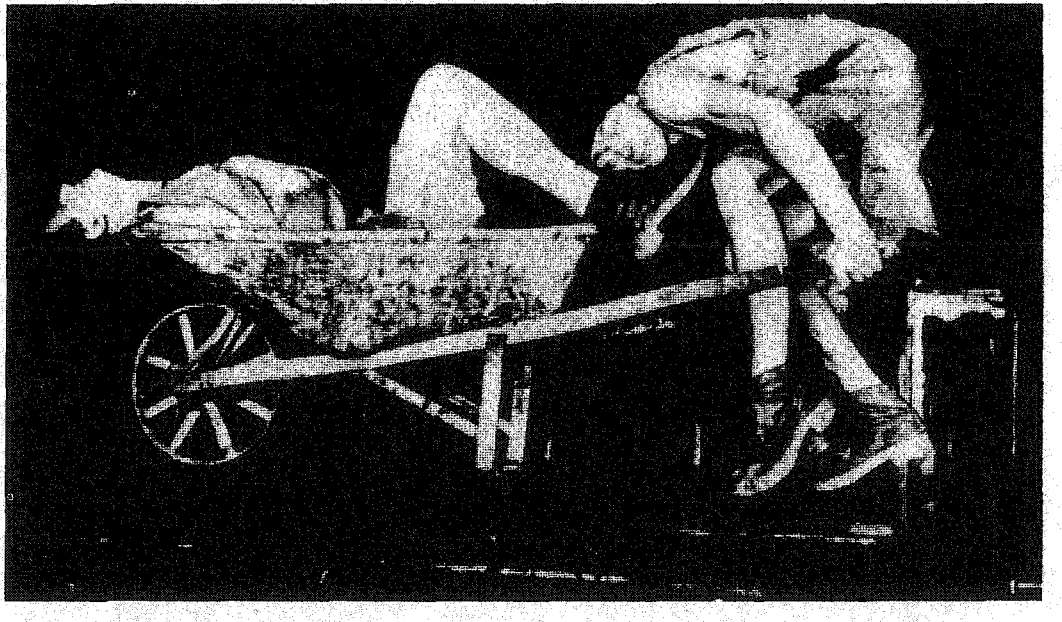

fig. 6: scene from *Akropolis*

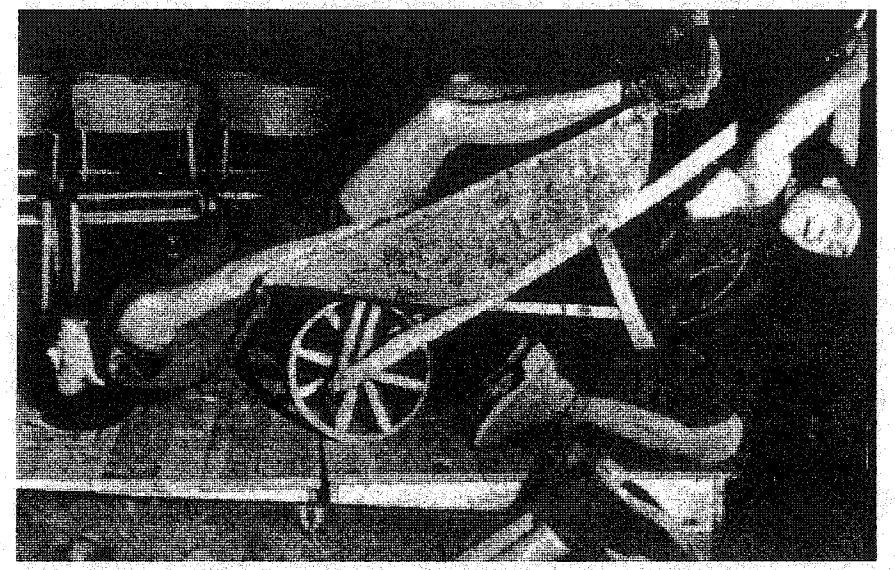

fig. 7: scene from *Akropolis*

fig. 8: scene from *Akropolis*

fig. 9: scene from *Akropolis*

fig. 10: scene from *Akropolis*

fig. 11: poster for *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*

The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus

Christopher Marlowe's play tells the story of the legendary Doctor Faustus, who sold his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge and power. The legend is itself an amalgamation of stories surrounding several historical figures including, among others, the first century philosopher-magician Simon Magus of Samaria, the 16th century Swiss born doctor and alchemist Paracelsus, the 12th century Manichean bishop named Faustus, and Henri Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, a renowned doctor, theologian, philosopher and alchemist, author of *De occulta philosophia* and *De vanitate*.[80] But more importantly, it is representative of one of the most enduring myths in the Mediteranean tradition, that of the mortal, who overreaches the bounds set for him by the gods, and suffers the consequences for his ambition and pride. Precursors to the Faustus legend abound, including the Biblical myths of the fallen angel Lucifer and of Adam and Eve, as well as the Greek myths of Prometheus and also Icarus.

Marlowe's drama represents a point of transition from the medieval morality play towards tragedy. It uses techniques from both dramatic forms, resulting in a somewhat ambiguous attitude towards the protagonist. Faustus is both the laughable fool of the morality play who chooses evil and gets his just deserts, and also the heroic figure of tragedy who deserves our sympathy. This ambiguity has led to two very distinct readings of *Dr. Faustus*, one who sees it as proponent and defender of orthodox Christianity demonstrating that "the wages of sin is death," and the other which sees it as a stalwart of Renaissance humanism. This second viewpoint turns on the question of whether or not Faustus'

[80] David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen, Introduction to *Doctor Faustus A- and B-text* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) 8-9.

destruction is depicted in the play as being *just*. The play undoubtedly depicts the Christian cosmic order in which those who turn away from God face their own destruction but, as Irving Ribner writes, this does not mean "that the order of things which decrees such human deterioration as the price of aspiration beyond arbitrary limits is affirmed by Marlowe as a good and just one."[81] Ribner believes, in fact, that the play is "essentially anti-Christian" and pessimistically depicts "the futility of human aspiration" within the orthodox Christian cosmology.[82]

Grotowski's production of *Dr. Faustus* lands firmly in the humanist camp in its interpretation and its attitude towards its protagonist.[83] He conceives of the Faustus as a lay saint, who rejects God for his duplicity in dealing with humans. For Grotowski's protagonist, God is the creator of Nature whose laws are "traps contradicting morality and truth."[84] God demands that men live virtuous lives but then betrays them with all sorts of temptations. In Grotowski's version, Mephistopheles is himself in God's service. He is not only a tempter but also praises God's work and punishes on His behalf. Faustus rejects this "God who ambushes man," and "spies on the dishonor in our souls the better to damn us."[85] He cares too much for his soul and refuses to give in to the "divine blackmail." So he makes a pact with the devil, choosing eternal damnation over compromise with God. For Grotowski, Faustus' sainthood lies in his uncompromising search for pure truth. He is a martyr, whose persecutor is God, and who is much more "holy" than

[81] Irving Ribner quoted in Bevington 22.
[82] Bevington 22.
[83] Grotowski actually interpreted Marlowe's play as being a Christian testament and conceived his own production as a humanist polemic to what he believed to be Marlowe's intention.
[84] Grotowski 79.
[85] Grotowski 80.

Christian martyrs because he cannot even look forward to eternal bliss in heaven as compensation for his sacrifice. He makes the "ultimate" sacrifice for the sake of truth, damnation and eternal torment for his soul.

In Grotowski's production, scenes from the original piece are rearranged or removed and new ones are added. But the text itself is unchanged. It begins where Marlowe's drama ends, with Faustus holding a banquet for his friends and students an hour or so before his impending death and damnation. At this feast, he is challenged by two of the guests present to justify his life and decisions and he presents episodes of his personal odyssey to his guests.

The production has a sharply religious atmosphere, with all the characters, save two, dressed in monk's robes. Faustus is in the white of the Dominican order, the double Mephistopheles (played by a man and a woman) don Jesuit black and the rest wear the brown robes of the Franciscans. The "set" is arranged like a monastery's refectory with a U-shaped table arrangement. The guests at this "Last Supper" are the spectators. They sit on wooden benches along two long parallel sets of tables and Faustus, like the prior of the community, sits at a shorter table, perpendicular to the other two. The action of the play occurs on these tables, and also between and underneath them. The entire set is boxed-in by a gnarly wooden wall approximately five feet tall.

Unlike *Akropolis*, Grotowski's *Doctor Faustus* is marked by a complete absence of props. Everything that must be represented is signified by the actors themselves. In one

scene in which the Pope is dining, the twin Mephistos are his table and chair as well as the food he eats. At other times, they are the seven deadly sins, diverse temptations and also play the angel of good and the angel of evil. Temkine observes, "Whether they run, fly or freeze in extraordinary positions, the actors without adding anything derive great resources from costumes consecrated with religious tradition."[86] Sound too, is strictly provided by the actors' own physiology, working in conjunction with the physical elements of the dramatic space. Critic Alan Seymour saw the production in Poland in 1963 describes how,

> At one climatic moment voices in harmony rose softly right behind us, obviously from actors behind the partition, the closeness wrapping us in the atmosphere in a way 'background music' in a proscenium rarely does.[87]

The actors also "speak nearly all their lines in a sort of liturgical singsong," adding to the ritualistic feeling of the performance. We can see in this production significant steps towards what Grotowski would later call "poor theatre," stripped down to actors, spectators and space.

The tables serve several important functions both symbolically and physically, forming a kind of center of gravity for the play. They are first and foremost, as I have mentioned, the principle location of the dramatic action. It is as though Faustus, using his magical powers, has conjured up visions of events from his past so that those assembled may see them for themselves. Within the first order dramatic reality of banquet tables, we are confronted with a second order representation in which they become a confessional, the banks of a river (the space between the two rivers constituting the river itself) or even the

[86] Temkine, *Grotowski,* 130.
[87] Alan Seymour quoted in Kumiega 68.

entire world. The tables are also used to organize time in the play. Action occurring during the time of the banquet is represented on the short table where Faustus is seated. Events that took place in the past are given shape on the two longer tables. However, they are not simply a "setting" for the dramatic events. They are engaged dynamically and come to signify different things by how they are used. Michael Kustow describes the scene in which the knight Benvoglio tries to kill Faustus:

> There is one terrifying sequence in which the Emporer's servant goes berserk and rushes around dismantling the rostrum-tops (inches away from us) leaving on the skeletons of the tables. The world for a moment seems to be coming apart.[88]

Alan Seymour recalls how in another scene, "An actor disappeared. A moment later, the surface of one of the tables rose like a trap, and before the spectators, the actor seemed to emerge from a cave."[89]

In *Doctor Faustus*, the actors and spectators are completely integrated in the dramatic space. There are even two actors in plain clothes that sit on the benches with the spectators and "speak the low-comic lines" of the text. The spectators have their own roles to play, first as Faustus' guests, but then, after he is challenged to justify himself, as his confessors.[90] During the course of the action, a spectator might be addressed directly by one of the actors. The actor's subsequent actions depend to a certain extent on how the spectator himself reacts to the situation. The spectators are also engaged on a very physical, corporeal level. As I have mentioned, most the action occurs on the tables right in front of them, within inches of where they are sitting. Michael Kustow describes how,

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[88] Michael Kustow, "Ludens Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinoscum" *Encore*, (October 1963) 10.
[89] Alan Seymour, "Revelations in Poland" *Plays and Players*, (October 1963) 33-34.
[90] Grotowski 79.

"actors are never more than fifteen feet from us. They come behind, beneath, and among us."[91] The performers completely violate the spectator's sense of his own inviolable personal space, as well as his sense of the audience group space, with the feelings of comfort and security (as well as detachment) that it provides. He is surrounded, overwhelmed by dynamic movement, unexpected actions, and strange sounds. As one Czech reviewer recalls, "you do not know whether your neighbor at the left or right will get up and join in the play." He goes on to describe a scene in which, "Mephisto is in a strange position, incredible, inclined to one side like a diagonal in an invisible square....The frightened spectators expect him to fall on their heads."[92]

This visceral sense of vulnerability is further heightened by the wooden enclosure that surrounds the scene. On one level, this rough wooden wall works with the other physical elements of the production to evoke the image and feeling of a venerable old monastery. But this wall also functions to "pen up" the spectators, cutting them off from external references they could use to orient themselves. The spectator might expect a typical trip to the zoo, hoping to see "strange" animal behavior. But he suddenly finds himself *inside* the cage, with actors whose actions are as inscrutable and unpredictable as those of any wild animal.

As much as the walls surrounding the space act to shatter the spatial distinction between actor and spectator, they act to establish another distinction, that of known from unknown, cosmos from chaos. Marlowe's play is an account of one man's desire to inter-

[91] Kustow, *Encore*, 13.
[92] Ivan Klima quoted in Temkine 129.

sect two worlds, that of mortal man, and that of angels, gods and devils. In the account quoted above in which the actors voices rise slowly from behind the spectators, the wall functions to demarcate the frontier between the two. These alien voices can be heard and even located in space, but they emanate from outside the "known world" and so remain strangely *other*.

Grotowski uses the varied elements described above, as well elements within the text it self, to try and make manifest the participatory theatrical ritual. The separation of profane from sacred space begins as soon as the spectator arrives. Each "guest" is greeted personally by Faustus as they arrive and requested to take their seat at the banquet table. The text of the play is recited in unnatural, often liturgical ways. Michael Kustow speaks of words "spoken, chanted, whispered;... strange vocalizations; Christian hymns... linked with pagan practices," and prayers that "sound like threats."[93] There is also the sharp physical separation between the world of the play, which includes the spectators, and the world of everyday objects and activities outside the scenic architecture. But the break between the sacred and the profane does not itself constitute ritual; it is simply a prerequisite. The ritual itself requires the re-enactment, or rather the manifestation of an archetypal event, one that speaks to us about the core of the collective human condition. In this case, we relive the myth of the "Fall of Man," which simultaneously warns against contradicting the cosmic order and suggests why human the human condition is characterized by suffering.

[93] Kustow, *Encore*, 11.

Grotowski was searching for ways to incite *full* participation of the spectators in the drama. But this sort of heavy-handed manipulation of the audience with which he had experimented in *Dziady* and *Kordian*, and then again in *Doctor Faustus,* produced mixed results. English critic Alan Seymour, who saw the performance in Poland in 1963, describes how, in his case, Grotowski's efforts produced the opposite of the desired result:

> At moments our English reserve made us embarrassed....How not to be when an actor incorporates you into the drama by kneeling before you, putting his face close to yours and whispering a passage that is doubtless most engaging in Polish, especially when all the lights are lit and the other spectators feel your confusion. The extravagance of the Polish emotion was too strong for some of us and the movement was sometimes too dynamic, for these actors were not walking, but were jumping sliding and plunging into the air to land on their elbows some meters off.[94]

Doctor Faustus was the last of Grotowski's productions in which attempts were made to "force" the spectators to commune with the actors. True spectator participation in the theatrical ritual remained the ultimate goal but, in keeping with his view of work as research, he went on to experiment with other methods of engagement and other conceptions of dramatic space that might encourage and shape that engagement.

[94] Alan Seymour quoted in Temkine 128.

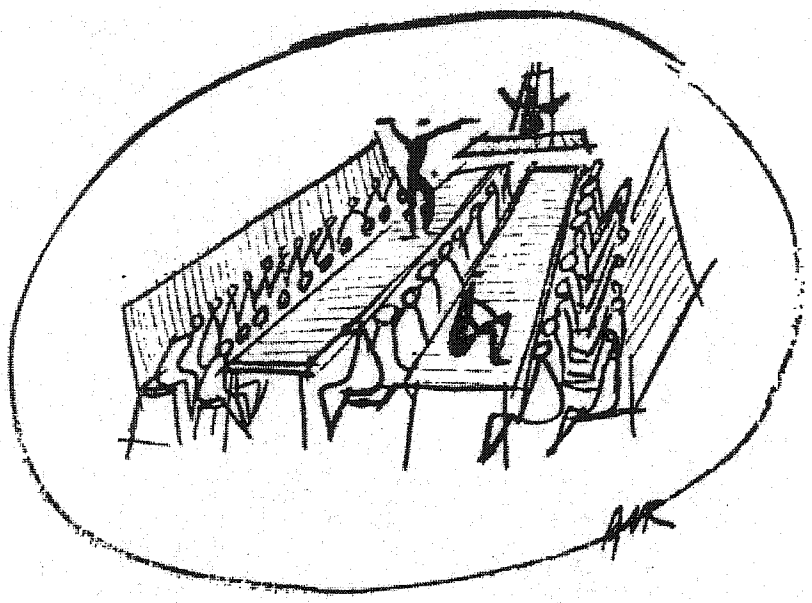

fig. 12: sketch of scenic arrangement for *Doctor Faustus*

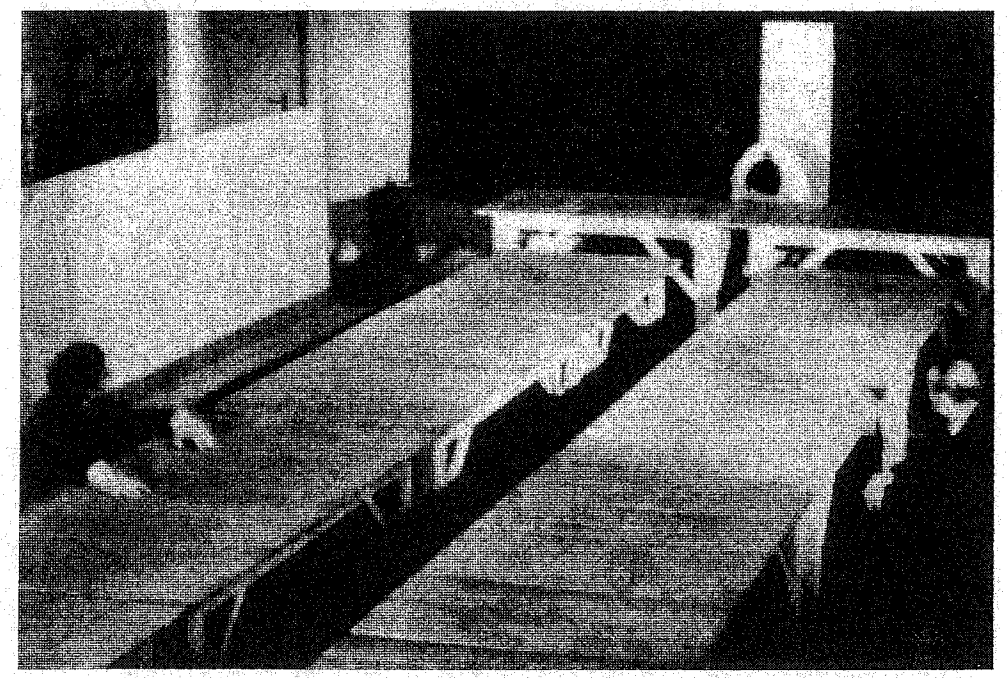

fig. 13: scenic arrangement for *Doctor Faustus*

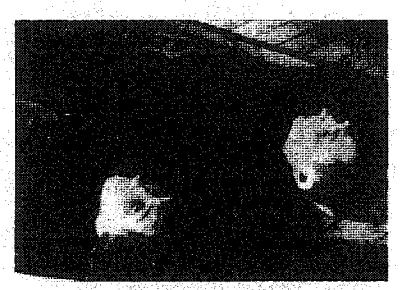

fig. 14: scene from *Doctor Faustus*

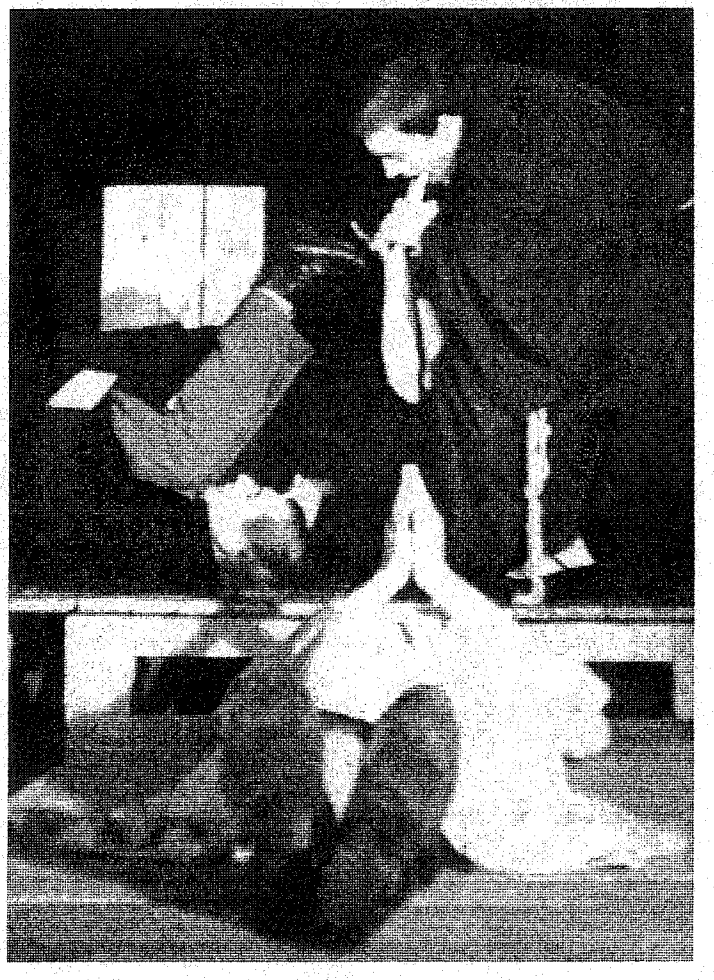

fig. 15: scene from *Doctor Faustus*

fig. 16: poster for *The Constant Prince*

The Constant Prince

Grotowski's *The Constant Prince* is twice removed from its model, *El príncipe constante*, by the Spanish Baroque playwright, Calderon de la Barca. The play was adapted and translated into Polish by the eminent playwright and poet Juliusz Slowacki in 1874. It was this work that Grotowski used as an outline to create his production.

In Calderon's 3-act drama, two Portuguese princes invade Tangiers but are taken prisoner by the Moorish king of Fez. One of the brothers, Henri is dispatched to Lisbon to persuade the Portuguese king to surrender the fortress of Ceuta in exchange for the other prince. Meanwhile Henri's brother, Fernand, is treated with honor and accepts his conditions as a "subject" of the king of Fez with good grace. But when his brother returns with the news that the king had agreed to the exchange and then died of grief, Fernand himself refuses the conditions, unable to bear the thought of Christian Cueta becoming Muslim. The enraged Moorish king abruptly changes his treatment of the prince, abusing him even more cruelly than the rest of the Portuguese he has taken as slaves, refusing even to feed him. Ultimately, in full acceptance of the misery and humiliation he suffers, he dies a martyr for his faith.

Grotowsk's drama takes from Calderon only the basic outline of the story. He removes nearly all the historical references to the conflict between the Moors and the Portuguese as well as the broader conflict between the devotees of Christianity and those of Islam. The action is moved from an historical to a more universal plane. Henri and Fernand become 1st Prisoner and 2nd Prisoner respectively, and the Moorish court becomes The Per-

secutors. Relations between the characters are treated as power relationships rather than specific ones.

When the "curtain rises," the 1st Prisoner is brought in and symbolically castrated, after which he merges with the rest of the group of persecutors. The 2nd Prisoner is brought in but refuses all compromise and counters his captors' manipulations with kindness and passivity. To them, he is an alien and incomprehensible creature with altogether different values. His inner strength arouses hostility, but also fascination, curiosity, and even admiration in the persecutors, driving them to ever increasing acts of cruelty and humiliation, culminating in his agonizing death. Once he is dead, the persecutors regret their actions and apotheosize him.

Throughout his ordeal, the 2nd Prisoner accepts his lot with total passivity. His persecutors do what they will with his body and his life but they never really reach him. Ludwik Flaszen writes in the program, "Thus the Prince's enemies who would appear to hold him in their power, in fact have no influence over him. While submitting to their evil doings, he preserves his independence and purity to the point of ecstasy."[95] Grotowski's drama contrasts the phenomenon of steadfastness, and orientation towards higher values, with extreme social conformism. We will see that this contrast was not only expressed by the characters' actions but was sewn throughout the production – in costumes, props, and the architecture of the space itself.

[95] Grotowski 97.

Whereas Calderon's play has nine scene changes, the entirety of Grotowski's production takes place in one very simple, almost barren, yet subtly polyvalent rectangular space. This "bear pit," as Raymonde Temkine called it, is surrounded on four sides by high wooden walls, with one opening on either of the two ends. In the center lies a raised wooden platform that serves a variety of functions during the hour-long performance. The spectators sit on benches behind the walls, raised up on platforms, just high enough so that they can see over the wall and perhaps rest their chins on it. From this skewed vantage point, they observe the goings on in the "pit" below. There is but one row of seating. It makes its way around the central space, stopping on either side of each of the two openings in the wall. As in Grotowski's other productions, seating is very limited, in this case to 40 spectators. Even with the radical separation between the action and spectators, it was still essential for Grotowski that there be as close proximity as possible between the two. In fact, he came to believe, in contrast to and probably as a result of, his earlier experiments, that it was precisely this separation that would cause persons to connect with the actors. In a presentation at a conference in 1968 in Paris, he states,

> When for example you wish to give the spectators the opportunity for an emotive participation, direct but emotive – that is the possibility of identifying with someone who bears the responsibility with the tragedy taking place – then you must remove the spectators from the actors, despite what may be the assumption. The spectator, distanced in space, placed in the position of an observer who is not even accepted, who remains exclusively in the position of observer, is really in a position to co-operate emotively, in that he may eventually discover within himself the primitive vocation of spectator.[96]

[96] Qoted in Kumiega 79.

The clothing of the characters is symbolic of the characters themselves. The persecutors all dressed similarly – black judges' robes, knee high-topped boots, and riding breeches – signs that they "take pleasure in making use of their power, that they are confident of their judgement, particularly when concerning people of a different kind."[97] The prince, in contrast, wore a white shirt as naïve symbol of purity, a red cloak which becomes a shroud, and a loincloth as a symbol of nakedness.

Not only does the prince's purity contrast with his persecutors' cruelty and "worldliness," but his constancy contrasts with the inconsistency and contradiction that swirls about him and lashes him without mercy. The tension created by this play between constancy and transformation can be observed at every level of the drama. It is most obviously carried, of course, by the characters' actions and words. However, it is arguably carried with the most force, by the architectural arrangement and the *mise-en-scène* itself.

Despite their radical homogeneity, the individual persecutors are characterized by an incessant shifting, as though they are trying to locate themselves, having long since dissolved into the group. As I mentioned, their reactions to the Prince's fortitude varies – one instant it is marked by curiosity and fascination, the next by outrage, and the next, by adoration. They torture and humiliate him, they confess to him, and they beg the king to have mercy on him. Even their costumes, symbols of their group identity, undergo transformations. Raymonde Temkine describes in her book on Grotowski how, during the castration scene, their black garments transform "from military "uniforms" to bird cos-

[97] Grotowski 98.

tumes."[98] In another part, the members of the court dance a minuet with music supplied by the tortured cries of the prince. In this macabre scene, their garments become costumes for a masquerade ball, including elephants, a nun, and the image of reverence.

The role of the red cloth is more complex. When the prince first enters the "arena," it covers him as a coat or cloak. However, it is quickly taken from him and then continues to play numerous roles until, at the end, it covers him again, but this time as a shroud. In one scene, the king has arranged a bullfight as "entertainment" for the Prince. Three "bulls" are in turn "put down" by the king, each one reacting differently to his subjugation at the hands of the monarch. Here, the cloth is used as a symbol of the absolute power of the king over the members of his court. Later, it is used as a leash holding a wild animal and also as a whip with which the king's daughter flagellates the Prince. Here again it is emblematic of power relationships. During a procession of penitents in which the Prince becomes a Christ figure, the king carries the cloth on his back as if a heavy burden. And again, it becomes a confessional for the king's daughter when she confesses to the Prince.

Flaszen writes in the program notes, "At the end of the play, he [the Prince] is naked, with nothing to defend himself but his own human identity."[99] His is the only item in the drama that never transforms into something else - his loincloth, the symbol of his nakedness. It stands as a poignant reminder of both human vulnerability and strength.

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[98] Temkin 135.
[99] Grotowski 98.

The raised wooden platform in the center of this strange microcosm that Grotowski created is perhaps the most crucial part of the production because, it serves as a kind of linchpin around which the architecture of the production and the events that unfold within it, its form and its content, revolve in a tightly conceived but fluid swirl. The platform is approximately 6 or 7 feet long, 4 feet wide and perhaps 16" high. It is made from dark planks like the walls that surround it. It is laquered smooth. It is typical of the elements of Grotowski's *mise-en-scène* in that it has no autonomous value. It, in and of itself, is not evocative of any particular time, place, group, event or even function. Its meaning is generated within, by, and for the particular representation.

During the play, the platform functions as a prison bed, a surgical table, a sacrificial altar, and an executioner's platform. As it transforms from one thing to another it changes in its wake the entire dramatic space and how the spectators, from their awkward position, relate to the events and characters of the story. The architecture of the production, in turn, amplifies this "wave" emitted from the platform and reflects it back to its center, intensifying each of the platform's successive meanings.

The spectators are seated close enough to the actors to be able to discern even the subtlest of gestures and shifting facial expressions. As in previous productions, they can see straining muscle and sinew, and hear every whisper and even heavy breathing. They see and hear the Prince slobber and lick the floor. They see him flogged and the red welts that appear on his back. They see and hear all this with an excruciating immediacy. After seeing the Constant Prince performed in New York, critic Stefan Brecht observed that,

"Grotowski trains his audience on the action like a telescope."[100] Yet the spectators are separated from the action by a literal wall as well as by their higher position. They look down on the events as one might look down onto a science experiment, as if observing a group of rats in a maze. They can see everything occurring in the "pit" but can scarcely be seen by those below. But this singular, fixed, unnatural viewpoint is itself subject to transformation by the actions of those being observed.

During the scene of the symbolic castration of the first Prisoner, as well as the failed attempt with the Prince, the spectators observe as if in a surgical theatre, with perhaps the same curious mixture of clinical detachment and uncontrollable empathy that one might expect of a first year medical student. During the episodes of the torture and humiliation to which the Prince is subjected the spectators become "collectors of impressions, tourists demanding sensations, or eavesdroppers on some secret ritual which they watch from a safe corner and to which no intruder is allowed access."[101] The fact that they are "hidden" lends to the action and to their own presence as voyeurs, an intensified sense of moral transgression. During the *corrida*, they are a mob deriving personal pleasure from a bloody spectacle like Romans watching gladiators kill and die at the Coliseum. While these particular associations may spring from particular events within the action, each continues to linger, to color the spectators' subsequent experiences. They are overlayed one on top of the next. But they all have as their epicenter the ordinary wooden platform in the center of the "arena." It is as though meaning is bounced back and forth between

[100] Brecht, Stefan. "On Grotowski : A Series of Critiques" *The Drama Review* (Vol. 14, no. 2, winter 1970)
[101] Jerzy Grotowski quoted in Osinski 85.

the center and the periphery, each bounce carrying the cumulative effect of the previous ones.

In *The Constant Prince*, as in the other Grotowski dramas, the way in which the architecture organizes the spectators themselves also impacts how they experience the spectacle. In this case, they are connected by their status of being "outsiders," both literally and figuratively. They are all outside looking in. They are hidden from the actors but somewhat less so from one another. They sit uncomfortably on wooden benches and, leaning forward, perhaps craning their necks, they rest their chins on top of the wall and watch silently like a brotherhood of Peeping Toms crouching in the shadows. This temporal communion of spectator/voyeurs offers perhaps the only respite from the emotional (and physical) onslaught coming from below.

As we have seen, in order to have ritual theatre, there must first be a break the profane. The architecture of *The Constant Prince* attempts to establish the break with the profane necessary for ritual in a number of ways. First, there is the physical separation between the seating area and the space of the dramatic action. The spectator must climb a number of stairs in order to get to the platform on which rest the benches. They may be organized in a peculiar fashion (only one row deep) but they clearly mark the area designated for the audience. It is the space of the spectator as spectator, detached from the events of the dramatic action. The central space, however, offers no explanation. It references no particular epoch or country. It is not "realistic" nor even surreal. Rather than any of the

nine particular locations indicated in Calderon's text, we are faced with a barren, enclosed realm, out of time and space.

In many shamanic cultures, it is believed that in order for the shaman to travel to the other worlds that make up the cosmos, he must first journey to the center of the earth, often via a sacred mountain. The platform in the center, on which so much in the drama depends, is the symbolic center of the earth, through which the Prince must pass (through his martyrdom). Monique Borie points out that during the performance, the Prince occupies the platform during moments of exaltation and during his "translumination" but is on the floor, often on his knees or else rolling on the ground during episodes of humiliation and degradation. In the end, when he does meet his death, his martyrdom is also achieved on this "sacred" ground at the center of the earth.

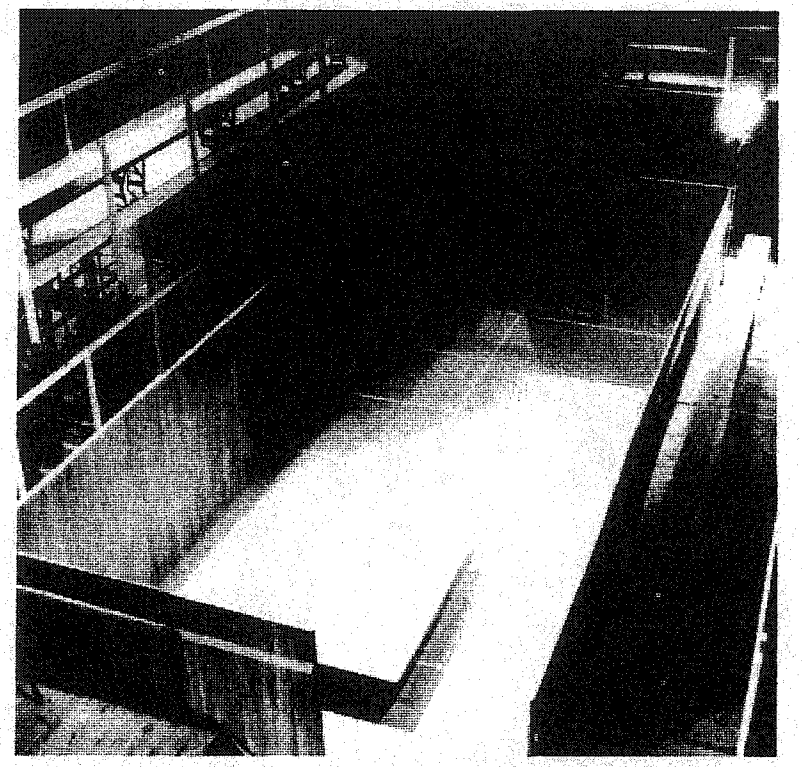

fig. 17: scenic arrangement for *The Constant Prince*

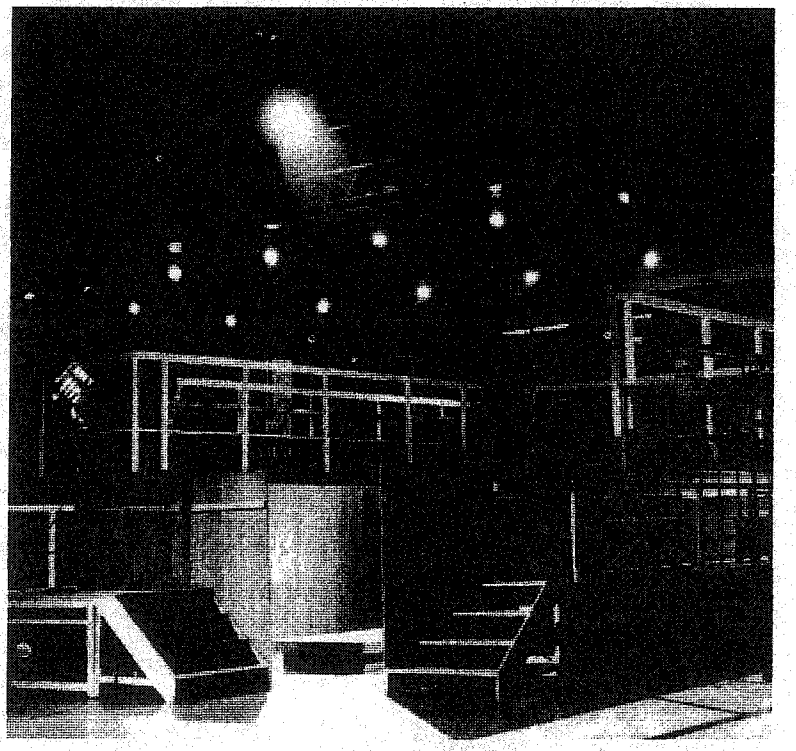

fig. 18: scenic arrangement for *The Constant Prince*

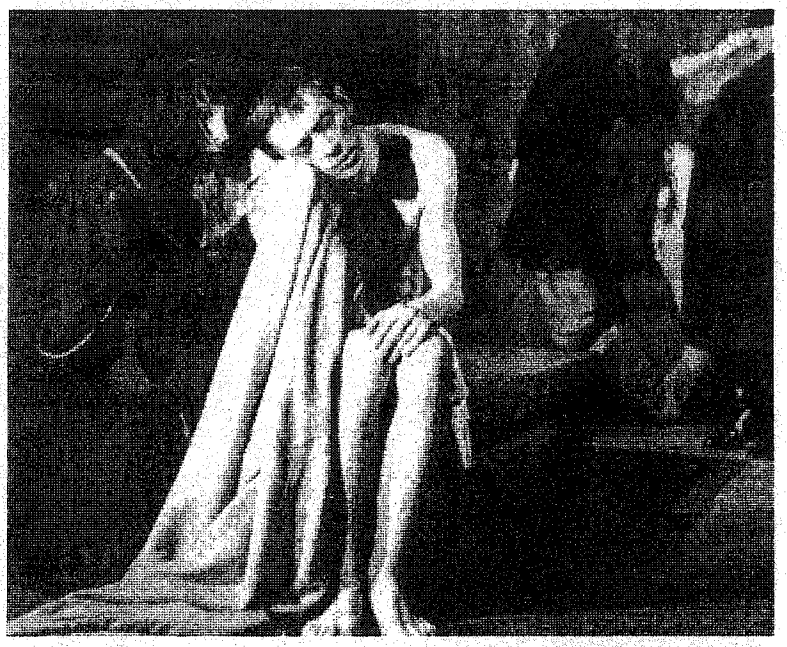

fig. 19: scene from *The Constant Prince*

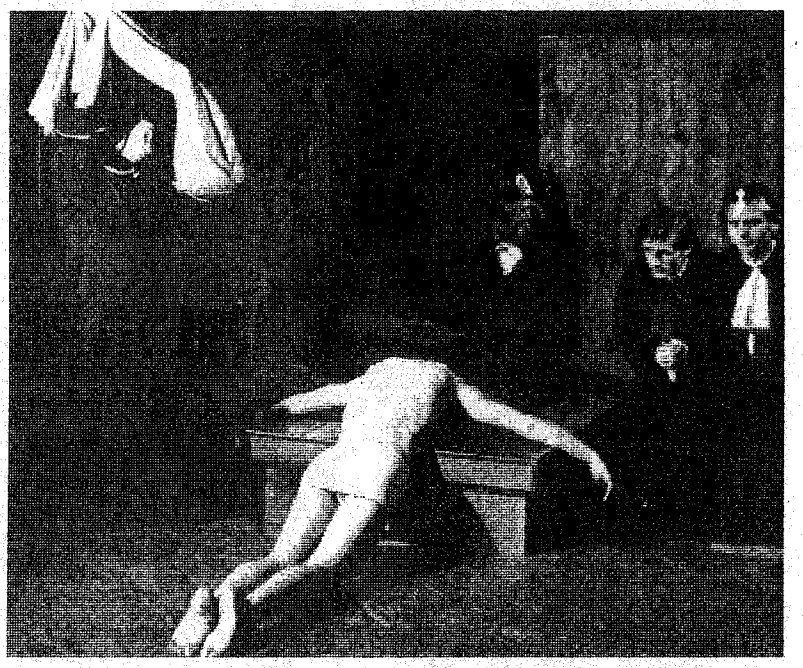

fig. 20: scene from *The Constant Prince*

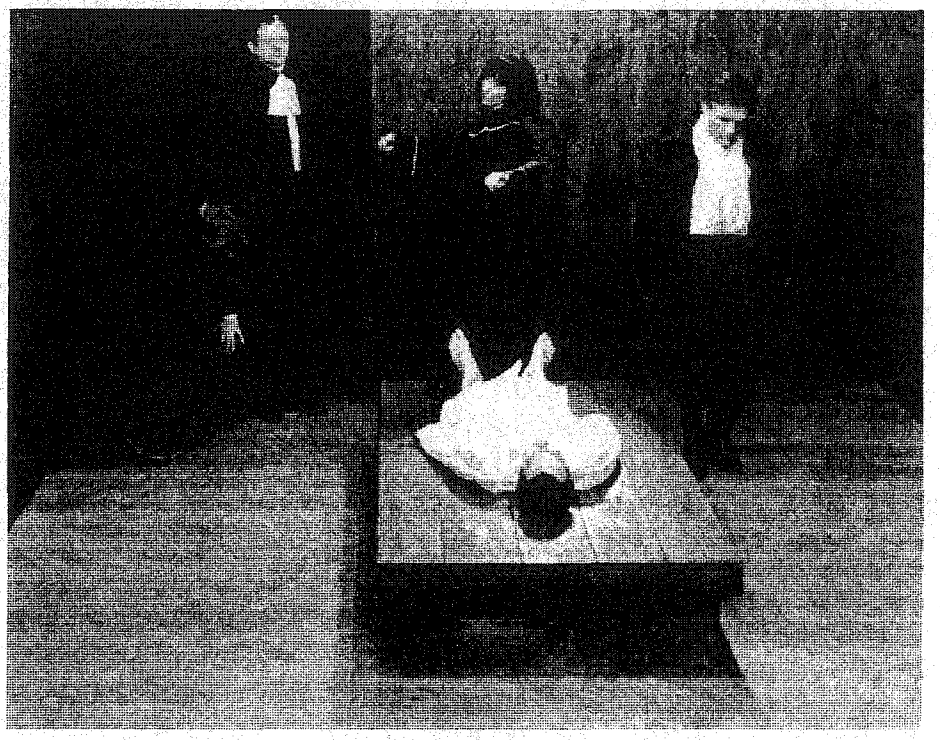

fig. 21: scene from *The Constant Prince*

Conclusion

Each of the *Laboratory Theatre's* productions constituted an investigation into how space could aid in making manifest the ancient ritual function of theatre. In all three of the examples discussed here, spatial relationships were explored that, in conjunction with the dramatic action, were meaningful in a particular way *vis-à-vis* a particular play. Jean Jacquot, in *les voies de la création théâtrale,* points out that Grotowski's adaptation of *The Constant Prince* would make absolutely no sense as a purely written text and similarly, that it would be inconceivable that the production have any other *mise-en-scène* than that which was designed for it.[102] This could be said, to a varying degree, about all three plays that I have discussed. Each one explores a specific mode of spectator participation and establishes a set of spatial relationships that engender that particular mode, allowing meaning to emerge from the combination of all the elements.

Akropolis is concerned with what happens to human nature when faced with the "total violence."[103] The vast majority of us can no more empathize with this condition than we can with being a holy ascetic. So we are denied emotional identification with the play's protagonists. They present a startling combination of the strange, the horrid, the beautiful, and the pitiful, simultaneously. Their reality is so removed from ours that, although we surround them, we are invisible to them. But the questions concerning "human nature" and civilization emerge, after the astounding atrocities of World War II, with an almost frantic urgency. Like nightmares, the seemingly ubiquitous prisoners are every-

[102] See Jean Jacquot, ed. *Les voies de la creation théâtrale,* (Paris, Éditions du Centre National de La Recherche Scientific, 1970) 32.
[103] Grotowski 62.

where at once, invading our space with their mad constructions and their ludicrous day-dreams, dreams of a normalcy that no longer exists. We are excluded emotionally, but at the same time, included, indeed overwhelmed, physically. Our bodies are oppressed, stifled by the ever-expanding web of rusty metal. By the end of the production, even the spectator's relation to the other spectators is deformed by the hopelessness of the prisoner's striving, and their legacy, "the civilization of crematoria."

As I mentioned, Grotowski's adaptation of *The Tragicall History of Doctor Faustus* presents a theme that has deep roots in both the Judeo-Christian and the Hellenic tradition. Doubtless it is also found in most of the world's mythical traditions. It is the story of the "overreacher," he who is not satisfied to remain within the limits set upon him by the cosmic order, and the subsequent doom that must befall him.

The spectators in this production are invited to participate both emotionally and physically, and the dramatic space is designed to encourage both. First, the spectator is seated at the very "banquet table" around which the action unfolds. His body's location and position forces him to participate, albeit passively, as Faustus' "guests," then his "confessors," and finally as horrified witnesses to his damnation. This inclusion of the spectator into the theatrical ritual is deepened by his proximity to the actors themselves.

The architecture of the production allows the actors to perform above, below, before, and behind him, and sometimes engage him directly with dialogue or action. The dramatic action is aimed as much at his body as it is his critical or emotional capacities. The spectator's involvement in the drama is then cemented by the wooden wall, which surrounds

both he and actors. It physically closes the ritual space off from the profane world outside, and at the same time, demarcates the limits of the "known world," to which the spectator himself belongs and with which he identifies.

The architecture of Grotowski's adaptation of *The Constant Prince* works in a way that is quite different from the other two plays I have discussed. This play analyzes the dynamics of the individual and the group, exploring the notion of individual self-sacrifice for the sake of the collective, as well as persecution of the one by the many, who misunderstand and fear him. Like the other themes Grotowski has tackled, this one also has deep roots in the Mediterranean tradition, including the Greek myth of Prometheus and the Judeo-Christian stories of Abraham and Isaac and of Jesus Christ.

The architecture of *The Constant Prince* acts to manifest this dialectic through a radical separation between the space of the spectators and that of the dramatic action. They are made to feel almost as though they are trespassing together onto forbidden territory. The fact that they are located physically higher than the action and that the actors can scarcely see them encourages the spectators to identify with one another as some sort of collective, engaged in a communal act of ritual transgression. In conjunction with the specific actions taking place below, they come to play "roles" as various kinds of observers. In this way, the architecture acts to forbid direct identification with the tortured protagonist. Instead, the spectator feels himself to be part of the collective, for the sake of whom the Prince suffers, and at the same time, at the hands of whom he suffers. His relation to the protagonist is mediated by his relation to his fellow voyeurs. The result is that, the feel-

ing of sympathy that a spectator typically has for the tragic hero is replaced by another: that of personal responsibility.

In Grotowski's productions, the three constituent parts of the theatre – actor, spectator, space – act *with* one another and *on* one another to produce meaning, which is directed at the spectator's totality. His dramatic space, like the Greek *chora,* is simultaneously a space of contemplation and of participation.

Epilogue

The endeavor of studying the theatre as a way of investigating forms of architectural meaning, has of course, its limitations. These limits stem from the differences between the ways we experience architecture from day to day and how we experience theatre at privileged moments. The theatre enjoys a captive audience, the members of whom are likely to be far more attentive to their surroundings and indeed more attentive to their own experience of those surroundings. The spectator is, after all, there for one purpose: to pay attention. Second, there is the "story." Even though the dramatic space can be exploited to signify in and of itself, it does still rely on a particular temporal context, that is, the dramatic action. Outside of this privileged moment, theatrical space loses its fire and becomes an altogether different sort of space.

Still, I would argue that it is a useful inquiry, particularly with respect to Jerzy Grotowski's work. On one level, his approach itself is instructive. From the very beginning of his career to his death in 1999, Grotowski viewed the practice of his art as *research* rather than as the production of products or even of "effects" or experiences. Everything was driven by concerns and questions that he felt very deeply. Again, I realize there are fundamental differences between the practice of theatre and that of architecture. If a particular experiment did not work for Grotowski, it was still an extraordinarily useful experience because it indicated the need for a shift in direction of the research. If an experiment does not "work" in architectural practice, it means at best, a dissatisfied client and at worst, a complete disaster. And yet I would argue that this very understanding of practice as research is what the practice of architecture is desperately in need of if it

hopes ever to rise from the miasma of instrumentality, consumerism, and market analysis that characterizes our contemporary existence.

Grotowski's work is also significant for architects in its framing of meaning as something that engages the total individual, encompassing the corporeal, visceral, and the contemplative. It emphasizes the human body (the actor's body as a signifier and the spectator's body as both a signifier and receptor of signification) as the primary locus of this meaning, but also incorporates symbolism and other more contemplative forms of signification. Another interesting aspect of the work is the use of physical objects that have very little autonomous value or signification in and of themselves but then become poignantly meaningful through human activity. Here again, the human body becomes the ground of meaning. How might this translate architecturally? It would indicate architectural form that is not simply intended to act on the body "unilaterally," directing and containing its activity and experience. Architectural signification, rather than being "found in" or "read from" the physical artefacts, could be understood as that which *emerges* when a space is inhabited by, or as Merleau-Ponty has written, "haunted" by the body. This haunting is a kind of mutual deformation in which *both* the body and the architectural space are transformed. This understanding would also acknowledge that the space of architectural signification is, like the body's own experience, temporal, since it is located in that body's experience.

Grotowski and his architect Gurawski designed spaces that not only addressed themselves to the individual body, but to the collective *as a collective*. He was very much

aware that our experience of a particular place or event can be changed radically if we feel this to be a personal experience or a communal one and he exploited this understanding in different ways in his various productions. For architects, this understanding acknowledges that for an individual body, other bodies are not simply objects in space like furniture or machinery, but contribute profoundly to the total architectural experience. Here gain, the inhabitants are not seen as simply the users or beneficiaries of architecture but as integral to the emergence of meaning.

The problem of myth, which is very much connected to architecture, is also addressed by Grotowski's work in a provocative and valuable fashion. Rather than naively embracing myth as meaningful today or negating it as completely meaningless, Grotowski proposes to *confront* it in order to "shake out" what is still relevant for us. This perspective maintains that there is still something within myth that speaks to us about our common human condition, but acknowledges that myth as a narrative form of knowledge cannot operate in our world in the ways it did previously.

Finally, Grotowski's work involved a continual exploration of the relationship between "form" and "content." In his work, architectural form and dramatic content were inseparable during the privileged moment of the performance of the drama. This does not, however, translate into the old Modernist adage, "form follows function." It brings us instead to "form in dialogue with function." Here, it is not the *idea* of the function that is the most significant, but rather the *activity of bodies* that constitutes that idea. The two

elements dance together and deform one another until they can no longer be distinguished.

Grotowski's work has much to offer the study of architecture but it does not translate directly as a model that can be emulated. To paraphrase Susan Sontag, we cannot "apply" Grotowski's explorations of the meaning of dramatic space to the practice of architecture, but we can be "inspired" by him and "scorched, changed" by what he has accomplished.

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