

Lineage and Transgression

The Grotowski Legacy with Marina Gregory

Thursday, September 27, 2018

Joyce J. Cammilleri Hall, University of Southern California



KNOW BEFORE THE SHOW

- ◉ Jerzy Grotowski (1933–1999) was a legendary innovator of experimental theatre.
- ◉ Mercedes Gregory (1936–1992) was his close collaborator and sole documentarian for more than a decade.
- ◉ Theatre artist Marina Gregory is Mercedes's daughter. Grotowski also collaborated with her father, theatre director André Gregory, and Marina herself worked for almost a decade with Grotowski's company, Workcenter.

“The rhythm of life in modern civilization is characterized by pace, tension, a feeling of doom, the wish to hide our personal motives and the assumption of a variety of roles and masks in life (different ones with our family, at work, amongst friends or in community life, etc.). We like to be ‘scientific,’ by which we mean discursive and cerebral, since this attitude is dictated by the course of civilization. But we also want to pay tribute to our biological selves, to what we might call physiological pleasures. We do not want to be restricted in this sphere. Therefore we play a double game of intellect and instinct, thought and emotion; we try to divide ourselves artificially into body and soul. When we try to liberate ourselves from it all we start to shout and stamp, we convulse to the rhythm of music. In our search for liberation we reach biological chaos. We suffer most from a lack of totality, throwing ourselves away, squandering ourselves.

Theatre—through the actor's technique, his art in which the living organism strives for higher motives—provides an opportunity for what could be called integration, the discarding of masks, the revealing of the real substance: a totality of physical and mental reactions. This opportunity must be treated in a disciplined manner, with a full awareness of the responsibilities it involves. Here we can see the theatre's therapeutic function for people in our present day civilization. It is true that the actor accomplishes this act, but he can only do so through an encounter with the spectator—intimately, visibly, not hiding behind a cameraman, wardrobe mistress, stage designer or make-up girl—in direct confrontation with him, and somehow “instead

of' him. The actor's act—discarding half measures, revealing, opening up, emerging from himself as opposed to closing up—is an invitation to the spectator. This act could be compared to an act of the most deeply rooted, genuine love between two human beings—this is just a comparison since we can only refer to this 'emergence from oneself' through analogy. This act, paradoxical and borderline, we call a total act. In our opinion it epitomizes the actor's deepest calling."

—Principle 1 of Jerzy Grotowski's "Statement of Principles"

JERZY GROTOWSKI

Polish director and theorist Jerzy Grotowski was a legendary figure in twentieth-century avant-garde theatre. He was active in Poland in the 1950s through the early '80s, the United States from 1982 to 1985, and Italy from 1985 until his death in 1999.

As a child, Grotowski hid from the Nazis, along with his mother and brother, in the small Polish village of Nienadówka. His experiences during that time shaped his thinking and future work.

Grotowski's early years in theatre, in the 1950s, were heavily influenced by the work of Konstantin Stanislavsky; Grotowski often said that his work began where Stanislavsky's left off. Grotowski's first innovations related to theatrical staging, the craft of acting, and the relationship between audience and actor. He later left the "theatre of productions" entirely, producing what he termed "paratheatrical" work.

After researching the ritual traditions of various cultures in the late 1970s and early '80s, Grotowski began working with what he saw as abiding elements of ritual traditions. The last phase of his life and work was dedicated to the idea of "art as vehicle," where art was not an end in itself but rather a practical means and form for spiritual processes and access to other levels of perception.

Perhaps Grotowski's most influential ideas were disseminated through the book *Towards a Poor Theatre*, published in 1968. In it, Grotowski called for dispensing with the trappings of "rich theatre" in favor of a stripped-down "poor theatre," in which only stationary lighting was used, costumes were nondescript, the only masks were the actors' faces, and vocal effects performed by the actors replaced any instrumental music. In Grotowski's ideal, the actors' voices and bodies were the main components of a production, and performers in his company underwent rigorous vocal and physical training. Grotowski created performance spaces that allowed for intimacy and interactivity between performer and audience. *Towards a Poor Theatre* had international influence, including on U.S. experimental theatre movements such as the Living Theatre, the Open Theatre, and the Performance Group.

MERCEDES GREGORY

Mercedes Gregory was a German-American documentarian and an influential figure in experimental theatre. She made three documentaries about Jerzy Grotowski and a documentary about peace movements in the United States and the Soviet Union, among other films. In the 1970s, she was the executive director of the organization A Bunch of Experimental Theaters.

KEY ELEMENTS OF GROTOWSKI'S WORK

- ◉ Stripped-down staging
- ◉ Interactivity between actors and audience
- ◉ Rigorous vocal and physical training of actors
- ◉ Theatrical theory informed by sustained research



Jerzy Grotowski



With Jerzy Grotowski, Nienadowka, 1980

MARINA GREGORY

Marina Gregory is a dancer, actor, writer, and director. In experimental theatre, she has studied and collaborated with her father, André Gregory, as well as Jerzy Grotowski. She grew up around Grotowski and spent a decade as a leading actress with his company, Workcenter. She is a founding member of Workcenter's Open Program, which connects the inner aspects of Workcenter's research with the greater society. She is the recipient of Guild Hall's 2018 Artist Residency for her play *Home*.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- ⦿ Did this event challenge any of your own ideas about theatre?
- ⦿ What do you think of the notion of a "poor" versus a "rich" theatre?
- ⦿ How do you think Grotowski's experience hiding from the Nazis as a child informed the development of his life, thought, and work?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT

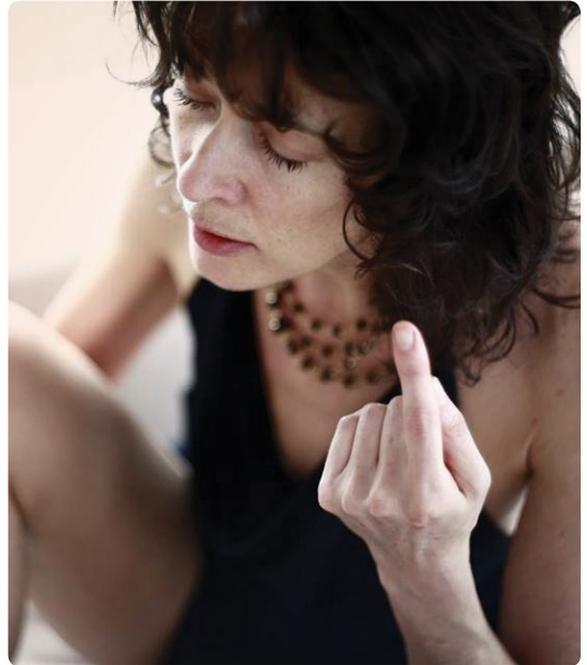
- ⦿ The Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards
theworkcenter.org
- ⦿ The Grotowski Institute
grotowski.net
- ⦿ Theatre in Los Angeles that reflects Grotowski's work
24th Street Theatre | 24thstreet.org
The Actors' Gang | theactorsgang.com
Ammunition Theatre Company | ammunitiontheatre.com
Bootleg Theater | bootlegtheater.org
Critical Mass Performance Group
facebook.com/CriticalMassPerformanceGroup
Ghost Road Company | ghostroad.org
Poor Dog Group | poordoggroup.org
REDCAT | redcat.org
Rogue Machine | roguemachinetheatre.net
Sacred Fools | sacredfools.org
Son of Semele | sonofsemele.org
Theatre Movement Bazaar | theatremovementbazaar.org

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REBECCA MICHELSON of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about tonight's event. You can access online resources, including the databases and journals below, through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu.

BOOKS

- ⦿ Grotowski, Jerzy, and Barba, Eugenio. *Towards a Poor Theatre*. 1st Routledge ed. New York: Routledge, 2002.
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PN2061.G75 2002



Marina Gregory



Still from the rushes of the film *Art As Vehicle* by Mercedes Gregory



Still from the rushes of the film *Art As Vehicle* by Mercedes Gregory

- Richards, Thomas, and Grotowski, Jerzy. *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*. London: Routledge, 1995.
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PN2859.P66 G7713 1995
- Slowiak, James. and Cuesta, Jairo. *Jerzy Grotowski*. London: Routledge, 2007.
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PN2859.P66 G775 2007

DATABASES

- Kanopy Streaming Service**
Kanopy is a streaming video service that provides access to videos on the following topics: Film & Popular; Education (k-12); Global Studies & Languages; Health; Media & Communication; and Social Sciences.
- Digital Theatre Plus**
Digital Theatre Plus is the immersive platform for English Literature and Performing Arts that brings contemporary theater to life. Digital Theatre collaborates with leading theater companies worldwide to develop their engaging collection of filmed and written content, including exclusive backstage insights.

JOURNALS

- New theatre quarterly*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, n.d.
Print version also available in Doheny Memorial Library (JRNLSTACKS PN2001. T43)
- TDR: The Drama Review*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, n.d.
Print version also available in Doheny Memorial Library (JRNLSTACKS PN2000. D68)
- Contemporary Theatre Rview*. Hampshire: Taylor & Francis Informa Uk Ltd., 1992.
Print version also available in Doheny Memorial Library (JRNLSTACKS PN2001. C58)

