



zygmunt molik

How the tradition passes from one to another - about my experiences with Jerzy Grotowski

What is the influence of Stanislawski on Jerzy Grotowski ? What was going on from Grotowski to others, for exemple to Eugenio Barba, to Peter Brook ?

When I am thinking about it; I feel a little surprised now, at the very end of our collaboration with Jerzy Grotowski, how much in him was influences by Stanislawski. I did not realize it before. Of course, there are two aspects of it. In Poland everybody starts his theatre-life from Stanislawski. At least at that time late in the fifties, when we had already finished theatre schools, Grotowski, me and others were educated on Stanislawski. When we started, the first performance was done in ten days. Because when Grotowski came, he had everything in his head. It was Orpheus of Cocteau, in ten days the performance was fully completed. But the next performance took already three weeks, Majakowski's Mysterium buffo. But it was the same. Grotowski knew everything. But the next performance took already three months to prepare it. It was Shakuntala of Kalidhasa. So he already was beginning new ways and approaches. He already started his research and then finally came Acropolis, the first internationnaly known performance. It took already nine months to prepare. Why I am speaking about this ? Because after two years, Grotowski knew already something about himself, about the special way of his research. So he abandoned completely Stanislawski. He started his own research. But Stanislawski remained with Grotowski up to these days now, because there is another aspect of the human nature and of an actor that is connected with the theatre. There is also something that is just connected with a sort of ethic of - you can say - style of life, or the way you live. Grotowski called Jury Zavatzky his father. While in Moscow he taught him not only theatre, but also the approach to the life, to the people. Someone once mentioned that something about the nature which Stanislawski said you can also find in the wisdom of the nature, and so did Grotowski. So we can say, if Zavatzky was a son of Stanislawski, then Grotowski was his grandfather.

One day Grotowski decided not to do any new performance, and half a year later we went for two years into a farm 30 km from the town, which is called Wroclaw. Practically we lived there for two years, coming only for weekends to play our performances in Wroclaw and to see our families. For two years we lived on the farm, which was surrounded by beautiful forests. We tried to learn something from the nature we lived in. For example to listen to trees, how the trees are singing, how the field is singing, what happens when the sus rises, what happens when the sus sets, and what is life at night-time in the forest, what do you hear, what do you see, how slow everything is and what happens when the day

wakes up from the night... And you see, it is a strange story, we were very much changed after these two years. We played the same performances as before, but they were not the same, because we were not the same. All details were the same, here is the difference between Grotowski and Stanislowski : Grotowski is very meticulous, very exact with small details. There is a well-known story, that someone with a hidden camera took the performance Constant Prince but without sound, and then, one year later, the sound was found in the radio from another performance. It was from the same performance, but from another evening, one month or one year later. And this sound fitted almost exactly. The performance had an organic structure as if it was fixed.

In the meantime, just by chance, we found Artaud, first only an article about him, and then his book and the idea of the " theatre of cruelty ". It struck somehow Grotowski and he decided, what we can take from Artaud. (If I say we, I mean of course Grotowski himself, because in that case, it was his problem, not ours, but in that sense also ours.) I don't know exactly, but I think that he took it in that way : sometimes you can, but sometimes you have to be cruel to work yourself. Cruel to the end, that even if you want to hide something very deep, you should not do it. You must however get to it and give it, share it with others and give yourself totally and entirely. This was maybe the lesson of Artaud for Grotowski.

Very early, when he was just a little well-known, he met Peter Brook. Peter Brook got fascinated with his work. But not only with his work, but also with his personality, with his style of life, as I said, so that he changed his own life. He was already a very well-known director when he started to seek some adventures, as we did it. He even made, if you know, a few month long expedition to Africa. He wandered and travelled with his group through the whole continent, for months, just playing to the tribes, to the black people, who had never seen theatre like this. Grotowski and Brook, they became also big friends. However, Brook, as far as I know, after having met Grotowski, he was no more the same. He was already another person.

With Eugenio Barba it is another story. He was in the early sixties two years with us. He did the training without asking what for. But at that time we did a very difficult training with acrobatics and so on, unlike the training we did later . Then Eugenio left and went to Holstebro to start his own way. So he has never been playing Grotowski-theatre, he was always playing his theatre. It must be this way, that everybody must play his own theatre. Grotowski said once about Eugenio Barba : " He betrayed me, but he betrayed me well ". And there was a big applause, when he said it in one conference. That is the way the tradition passes from one to another.

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