

American revolutions. The cycle will launch in 2010 with a play by the Chicano ensemble Culture Clash, alongside two Shakespeare comedies that opened OSF's first season seventy-five years ago. Today's festival continues struggling to house so many contradictions: honoring heritage and making change, producing theatre that grapples with our interconnectedness and our isolation, and provoking questions about how we all act together within and outside of the theatre.

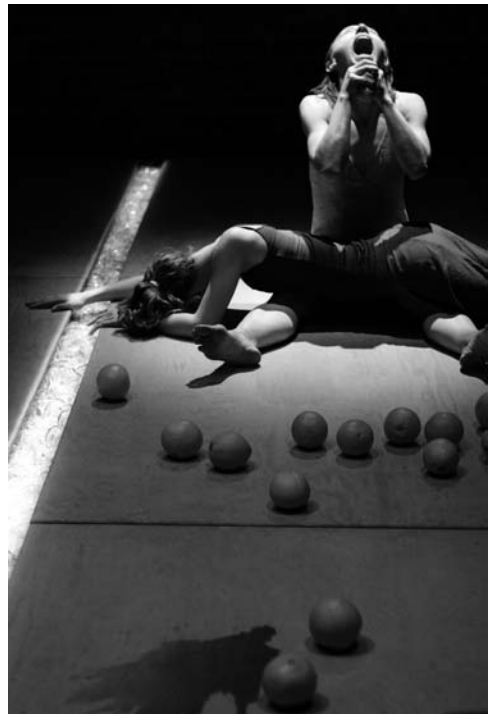
SONJA ARSHAM KUFTINEC

University of Minnesota

THE WORLD AS A PLACE OF TRUTH. The Grotowski Institute, Wrocław, Poland. 15–30 June 2009.

"The world should be a place of truth." So asserted Jerzy Grotowski, the protean spiritual-seeker and tireless researcher into the art of the performer, in a public speech given in Moscow in 1976. This statement of utopian conviction provided the titular rationale for the international theatre festival hosted by Wrocław's Grotowski Institute during the last two weeks of June 2009. The festival served as Poland's marquee event within the 2009 UNESCO "Year of Grotowski," designated in recognition of the tenth anniversary of Grotowski's death and the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the company that would eventually evolve into the renowned Polish Laboratory Theatre. The year saw Grotowski-themed conferences, seminars, and performances in Wrocław, Krakow, Warsaw, New York, Canterbury, Paris, and Rome, among other cities across the globe.

The official festival program audaciously proclaimed that the Wrocław event would bring together for a fortnight the "greatest masters of contemporary theatre": Roberto Bacci, Eugenio Barba, Pina Bausch, Peter Brook, Krystian Lupa, Richard Schechner, Tadashi Suzuki, Theodoros Terzopoulos, Krzysztof Warlikowski, and Anatoly Vasiliev. The notable omissions and debatable inclusions within this theatrical pantheon did not diminish the extraordinary opportunity to see the work of so many theatrical luminaries over such a short timespan—and, moreover, to hear them discuss their approaches to artistic practice in a series of public meetings accompanying the performances. In addition, the festival provided a forum for lesser-known companies from the "Eastern Line" of Grotowski's influence—including groups from Poland, Ukraine, Serbia, Austria, and Kurdistan—to present their work to an international audience.



Kamila Klamut (seated) and Ditte Berkeley (prone) in *Caesarean Section: Essays on Suicide*. (Photo: Lukasz Giza.)

The invocation of Grotowski's name and legacy as the pretext for a meeting of such a diverse set of performance practitioners invited reflection on the relation of the participants' work to Grotowski's own search for truth, first within the theatre, and later on the wider terrain of paratheatrical encounter and ritual practice. Some of the festival participants knew Grotowski intimately (Barba, Brook, Schechner), some had met or worked with him briefly and felt a strong artistic kinship (Suzuki, Bacci), but others clearly were present because of their artistic reputation taken on its own terms (Vasiliev, Bausch, Lupa, Warlikowski). Grotowski, in his writings and public statements, always emphasized that an artist must find his or her own way, but within this should develop true craftsmanship and artisanal technical expertise. Perhaps, then, in assessing whether certain works "belonged" at a festival taking place under Grotowski's long shadow, we ought not to ask how they compare in artistic aim or aesthetic manifestation with those of the Polish master (who, after all, left behind the "Theatre of Productions" in the early 1970s), but rather to measure them against the practical ethics of rigorous discipline, incisive self-awareness, and ceaseless, self-transforming as-



From left: Adam Szczyszczaj, Krzesislawa Dubiolówna, Ewa Skibińska, and Mariusz Kiljan in *The Temptation of Quiet Veronica*. (Photo: Francesco Galli.)

piration laid down by Grotowski as a lasting challenge to all subsequent theatre-makers.

Appropriately, the festival opened with a performance orchestrated by Eugenio Barba, whose practical work as the director of the Denmark-based ensemble Odin Teatret as well as his prolific theoretical writings are indebted to his “apprenticeship” (Barba’s term) with Grotowski from 1962 to 1964. Barba had also participated in the famous Theatre of Nations festival held in Wrocław in 1975, during which Grotowski and his Laboratory performers, along with luminaries of the time like Jean-Louis Barrault, Joseph Chaikin, André Gregory, Peter Brook, and Barba himself, conducted the “University of Research,” a series of public meetings, work sessions, and other events in which over 4,500 attendees took part. Odin Teatret’s offering at the 2009 festival was *Ur-Hamlet* (inspired by the *Vita Amlethi* of Saxo Grammaticus), a boisterously syncretic spectacle staged in the huge open-air courtyard of Wrocław’s historical Arsenal. A show-stealing prologue by the Gambuh Desa Batuan Ensemble of Bali kicked off the performance: wearing the grotesque masks of Topeng dance-drama, the Balinese performers presented a lunatic parody of the Hamlet story featuring various commedia dell’arte-style lazzi of murder and mayhem. The production as

a whole featured a dizzying array of performance styles in raw juxtaposition: an unmasked Balinese performer (I Wayan Bawa) played Hamlet’s murderous uncle Fengi, and an orixá-dancing Hamlet (Augusto Omolú) appeared in a costume of hanging cords suggestive of the Brazilian Candomblé deity of insanity, disease, and death. *Ur-Hamlet*’s ever-present undercurrent of kinetic energy peaked when dozens of performers suddenly stormed the space in a sequence that evoked Bruegel: out of a maelstrom of ephemeral, fragmentary images-in-action coalesced a wedding banquet, whose guests were suddenly struck down by a plague besetting the Danish court (given human form by a masked Noh actor). Twitching corpses lay scattered across the courtyard for the remainder of the performance, rendering corporeal the *Hamlet* story’s inertial momentum toward the grave.

Another major presence on the main program was the Polish director Krystian Lupa. Lupa has perhaps exerted a more direct influence on the present generation of Polish theatre-makers (like his former pupil Warlikowski) than Grotowski, who was largely absent from his native country for the last two decades of his life. (Interestingly, in an interview published after his receipt of the Europe Theatre Prize earlier this year, Lupa leveled a charge of spiritualist fakery

at Grotowski, with sensational repercussions within the Polish theatre community.) Lupa's *The Temptation of Quiet Veronica*, a remount of a 1997 adaptation of Robert Musil's short story of the same name, exerted a mesmeric hold over its audience, who were drawn gradually into an experience of time as subtly but fascinatingly distended (a hallmark of Lupa's work). A love triangle lay at the center of the production's plot, but narrative nodes were only mile-markers along the way during this meandering, unpredictable, and ultimately captivating human journey. The production's stretches of dreamlike surreality and moments of expressionistic ferocity emerged subtly from the oddity of the everyday: one exceptional scene progressed from the clumsy serving of fish fillets by Veronica (Ewa Skibińska) to overt erotic play at a dinner table; a hysterical lament by Veronica's aging aunt (Krzyszława Dubiłowna) was then juxtaposed with a comic grappling bout between the male rivals for Veronica's love (Adam Szczyszczaj and Mariusz Kiljan). This sequence of actions gave the impression of a bizarrely disjointed though highly precise dance, the intensity of which rose gradually and finally peaked.

Most prominent among the offerings on the Eastern line program was the performance diptych presented by Teatr ZAR, the Grotowski Institute's company-in-residence. ZAR's work lies firmly within the genre that Polish theatre scholar Leszek Kolankiewicz has termed "ethno-oratorio": a species of song-driven mystery play, the origins of which Kolankiewicz traces to the founding of Włodzimerz Staniewski's Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practices in the late 1970s. In part 1 of the diptych, titled *Gospels of Childhood*, textual fragments from Dostoevskii, Simone Weil, and the Gnostic gospels of Mary Magdalene, Phillip, and Thomas emerged from highly dynamic physical sequences. Text and action were themselves born along by a current of songs gathered by the company during expeditions to Georgia, Greece, and Bulgaria. *Gospels* took the sisters of Lazarus, Marta and Maria (Ditte Berkeley and Kamila Klamut), as its twin, archetypal protagonists and confronted its spectator with a series of scenarios embodying elemental dynamics of human life: attraction, rejection, domination, protection, agony, comfort, and so on. Rather than fusing into a smooth narrative trajectory, these scenarios appeared sequentially with intermediary breaks, like episodic depictions of the Stations of the Cross in early Renaissance panel painting. As within the liturgical dramas of the Middle Ages, the ZAR performers did not "impersonate" biblical figures, but rather made present scriptural action: as a spectator at *Gospels*, I saw intention, relationship, situation, and passion, but seldom "character" or "plot."



Ewa Skibińska in *The Temptation of Quiet Veronica*.
(Photo: Francesco Galli.)

The second "panel" of the ZAR diptych, *Caesarian Section: Essays on Suicide*, employed a base of polyphonic Corsican songs and was more clearly choreographic than the first, taking the form of an associative collage of danced fragments in which the three main performers—Klamut, Berkeley, and Matej Matejka—conjured intensely physical correlatives for patterns of depressive and self-destructive behavior: Klamut clambered up Matejka's body toward an overhead source of light, embodying the thwarted attempt to escape life's emotional sinkholes; later, she circled the space in a pounding run, tethered to Matejka by one pantyhose leg, knocking over chairs as she captured a sense of centripetally developing psychic chaos. As at the conclusion to part 1, the actors burst from the space, giving the audience no opportunity to applaud. Like the experience of depression, the performance featured no reassuringly comprehensible dramatic arc ending in climax or denouement.

The two most consistently engaging and widely appreciated productions on the main festival program were undoubtedly the Suzuki Company of Toga's *Elektra* (reviewed in the October 2009 issue of *Theatre Journal*) and the Tanztheater Wuppertal production of Pina Bausch's *Nefés*. Although radically different in theme, atmosphere, and approach, both demonstrated the remarkable psycho-physical potentialities of the human organism when developed by rigorous, "artisanal" training. In *Elektra*, the technical exceptionalism of the Suzuki performers was manifested in virtuosic physical synchronization, ferocious execution of choreographic scores, and a shockingly muscular mode of vocalization. The Wuppertal performers, on the other hand, no less adept, displayed a remarkable ease, flow, and gentleness that transcended the physical, informing their modes of relation among themselves and with the audience.

Although the dance theatre performances of the late Pina Bausch typically centered on the human dynamics of the everyday (rather than confronting mythic extremity or investigating altered modes of ritual consciousness, as did Grotowski's), the ethos of Bausch's way of working since the late 1970s possessed considerable affinities with Grotowski's rehearsal methods: rather than dictating choreographic routines to her company, Bausch occupied the role of watcher and provocateur, posing a series of probing, open-ended questions to her performers. The intimate "answers" offered by her dancers in the form of speech or action were then selected, refined, and montaged into the final performance piece. In this way, Bausch's raw material emerged from the bodies, minds, and imaginations of her performers; her main responsibility was thus not to arrange movement-sequences with a composer's eye, but to facilitate and then structure an organic process of collective self-revelation. In refreshing counterpoint to the dark gravity of most of the other offerings on the main festival program, the dominant atmosphere of *Nefés* (a revival of a work created in 2003) was playfully sensual. A sequence of set pieces strung together with a dreamlike associative logic and intermittently punctuated by virtuosic dance solos, the production explored possibilities for tenderness, openness, and generosity in male-female relations. Bausch herself was supposed to have been present at the festival and to have participated in a public conversation, but her sudden hospitalization after a cancer diagnosis just days earlier prevented this. Bausch passed away on 30 June, the final day of the festival, and her company, as a testament to their director's intense dedication and homage to her artistic vision, went ahead with their scheduled performance just hours after receiving the news of her death. On this night, the production's often exultant but sometimes mournful energies fueled a collective celebration of a life lived intensely in art. After the lights went down on *Nefés*, however, the news of Bausch's death cast a pall over the festival's final hours.

While the erstwhile Grotowskian apprentice Barba had been responsible for kicking off the festival, Peter Brook, Grotowski's longtime friend, collaborator, and confidante, was the genius presiding over its finale. The lightness and clarity of Brook's *Fragments* (reviewed in the October 2008 issue of *Theatre Journal*), comprised of a handful of Samuel Beckett shorts, made a refreshing change from the ruminative ponderousness of much of his recent work, but in mining Beckett's material for its histrionic, often comic, possibilities and embracing a direct relation with the audience, Brook and his actors shifted the pieces away from their minimalist essence. However, if *Fragments* provided an often



Members of the Gambuh Desa Batuan Ensemble in *Ur-Hamlet*. (Photo: Francesco Galli.)

entertaining though generally less than enlightening take on Beckett, Brook himself, in his guise as philosopher of the theatre, supplied something heretofore absent from the festival's public conversations: a serious analysis of the relevance of Grotowski's work to contemporary theatre practice. Describing Grotowski as a true master for his concrete knowledge of the visible and invisible potentialities of the human being, Brook encouraged those in the audience invested in the future of the theatre to abandon thinking of how Grotowski's work might usefully be applied today. Instead, urged Brook, we ought to take the example of the Polish theatre guru's life-quest as inspiration for developing new, personally particular sets of "unattainable ideals" worth striving for—an exhortation of which Grotowski, who declared more than once that true discipleship consists in "high betrayal," would almost certainly have approved.

DANIEL LARLHAM
Columbia University

THE GWANGDAE. Seoul, South Korea. 26 July 2009.

HAHOE TALCHUM. Hahoe, South Korea. 8 August 2009.

Hahoe Talchum is one of the most recent forms of Talchum to have been named an Intangible Cultural Property; as recently as 1979, it was thought to be "lost." Dating back 800 years, it now is not only one of thirteen types of Talchum whose preservation is being funded by the Korean government, but iconographically, its masks are the most widely recognized of the Korean traditional arts.

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