

# Jerzy Grotowski



## Objectives

- To be able to develop an understanding of Grotowski's view of theatre
- To be able to identify conventions within 'Poor Theatre'
- To be able to demonstrate an idea of the actor as a gift.

## A brief history ...

- Born in Poland in 1933
- Developed a spiritual side during WWII
- Influenced by Russian theatre pioneers such as Stanislavski
- Directorial debut – Gods in Rain (1958)
- Began to abandon the conventions of traditional theatre.
- Last production as a director - Apocalypse Cum Figuris (1969)

## Changes in Direction

- Moving away from conventional theatre styles
  - Audience as Spectator
- Discarding physical mask of life
  - Theatre not a composite of disciplines
- The set up of the theatre space
  - The role of the actor

# What is 'Total Theatre'?

## Rich Theatre

- Drawing on other disciplines
- Trying to fight back against the development of Film and TV
- Incorporating technology
- Changing perspective and time within a performance
- Conventional and Modern theatre dressing

## Poor Theatre

- A new space for each production
- Stripping away all artificial scenes
- Natural lighting, no sounds effects
- Audience part of the action; no definite stage
- Costumes, Props, Make-Up are seen as unnecessary

## Theatre Laboratory – Statements of Principles

1. The actor and their masks
2. Sacrifice for art
3. Actor – Creator, Model and Creation
4. Inspiration and Partnership with others
5. Environment to suit all
6. No external references to creative process
7. Consistency and keeping record of activities
8. Creativity is boundless, yet disciplined
9. No recipe or "box of tricks" for the actor
10. Leave your ego at the door to achieve a "total act"

# Actor = Gift

## Holy Theatre

- Actor/Audience = Priest/Worshipper
- Performance and Ritual offered to the audience
- Audience Participation
- Holy purpose – Place in community

## Actor as Gift

- Role must 'penetrate' the actor
- Break down boundaries
- Acquire the technical mastery over physical and psychic means
- Inner impulses and outer reactions
- Must not illustrate but accomplish

## Dialectics – Composition of Role

Activity – Parts of the body are put in contradiction with each other

Task – Using your hands and feet react to the surfaces that are called out.

Remember – You must think realistically about your **whole body** reaction

# Conclusion

- Holy Theatre
- Actor as a gift
- Poor Theatre
- Total Theatre = Rich Theatre
- Theatre Laboratory
- Composition of Role
- Developing conventions
- Inner Impulses and Outer Reactions

## Presentation on theme: "Jerzy Grotowski."— Presentation transcript:

Jerzy Grotowski

Objectives  
To be able to develop an understanding of Grotowski's view of theatre  
To be able to identify conventions within 'Poor Theatre'  
To be able to demonstrate an idea of the actor as a gift.

### **A brief history ... Born in Poland in 1933**

Developed a spiritual side during WWII  
Influenced by Russian theatre pioneers such as Stanislavski  
Directorial debut – Gods in Rain (1958)  
Began to abandon the conventions of traditional theatre.  
Last production as a director - Apocalypse Cum Figuris (1969)

### **Changes in Direction Moving away from conventional theatre styles**

Audience as Spectator  
Discarding physical mask of life  
Theatre not a composite of disciplines  
The set up of the theatre space  
The role of the actor

### **What is 'Total Theatre'?**

Rich Theatre  
Drawing on other disciplines  
Trying to fight back against the development of Film and TV  
Incorporating technology  
Changing perspective and time within a performance  
Conventional and Modern theatre dressing  
Poor Theatre  
A new space for each production  
Stripping away all artificial scenes  
Natural lighting, no sounds effects  
Audience part of the action; no definite stage  
Costumes, Props, Make-Up are seen as unnecessary

### **Theatre Laboratory – Statements of Principles**

The actor and their masks  
Sacrifice for art  
Actor – Creator, Model and Creation  
Inspiration and Partnership with others  
Environment to suit all  
No external references to creative process  
Consistency and keeping record of activities  
Creativity is boundless, yet disciplined  
No recipe or "box of tricks" for the actor  
Leave your ego at the door to achieve a "total act"

### **Actor = Gift Holy Theatre Actor/Audience = Priest/Worshipper**

Performance and Ritual offered to the audience  
Audience Participation  
Holy purpose – Place in community  
Actor as Gift  
Role must 'penetrate' the actor  
Break down boundaries  
Acquire the technical mastery over physical and psychic means  
Inner impulses and outer reactions  
Must not illustrate but accomplish

### **Dialectics – Composition of Role**

Activity – Parts of the body are put in contradiction with each other  
Task – Using your hands and feet react to the surfaces that are called out.  
Remember – You must think realistically about your whole body reaction

### **Conclusion Holy Theatre Actor as a gift Poor Theatre**

Total Theatre = Rich Theatre  
Theatre Laboratory  
Composition of Role  
Developing conventions  
Inner Impulses and Outer Reactions

Jerzy Grotowski/Poor Theatre

### □ **Environmental Theatre**

Grotowski's theories and the works he staged with the Polish Laboratory Theatre from its founding in 1959 until presented the guiding principles of environmental theatre. *Kordian* (1962): The space resembled a mental institution, with audience members scattered among beds and patients (the actors). *Doctor Faustus* (1963): The theatre space was filled with two large dining tables at which audience members sat as if attending a banquet given by Faustus.

### □ **Audience and Actor Relationship**

For each production, the theatre space and the actor-audience relationship were arranged to conform to the play. Jerzy Grotowski (an atheist) believed in the concept of the 'priesthood' or sacredness of the actor. When the actor entered the sanctity of the performance space, then a special event occurred, much like the Mass in the Catholic Church. It was in this space, in the holy relationship between the actor and the audience, that an audience was challenged to think and be transformed by theatre.

### □ **Audience and Actor Relationship**

What makes theatre theatre is the relationship between the performer and the spectator. The audience should not be separate and distant from the actors during the performance. As a result, artists have had the audience sit in an around the actions, with the plays staged in hospitals, factories, airplane hangars and other real environments.

### □ **A Religious Experience**

The recurring themes within the Polish Laboratory Theatre's work of persecution, martyrdom and suffering for causes of debatable worth, such as Christianity, is meant to make each member of the audience think more deeply about what is life's purpose and meaning. What Grotowski wants from his audience is not merely that they be engrossed in the drama but that they judge for themselves who in the play is right or wrong in his actions. The audience will be so affected by the spectacle of another human's suffering that they will be forced to worry, think, or feel unease.

□ Poor Theatre He was the author of *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968), where he declared that theatre should not, because it could not, compete against the overwhelming spectacle of film and should instead focus on the very root of the act of theatre: actors in front of spectators. A theatre in which the fundamental concern was the work of the actor with the audience, not the sets, costumes, lighting or special effects. In his view these were just trappings and, while they may enhance the experience of theatre, were unnecessary to the central core the meaning that theatre should generate.

□ 'By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous, we found that theatre can exist without make-up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc.' Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*. Simon & Schuster, 1968, p.19

□ Poor Theatre 'Poor' meant the stripping away of all that was unnecessary and leaving a 'stripped' and vulnerable actor. Applying this principle in his 'laboratory' in Poland, Jerzy Grotowski dropped all costume and staging and preferred to work with all black sets and actors in plain black rehearsal costumes, at least in the rehearsal process.

□ Poor Theatre He overturned the traditions of exotic costumes and stunning staging that had driven much European theatre from the 19th century. This is not to say that in public theatrical performances he completely disregarded lights and sets, but these were secondary and tended to complement the already existing excellence of the actors.

Acting Style Externally Based, with the emphasis on control of body and voice. Acting involves the actor presenting the complete psychological and emotional essence of his being before the spectator. He made the actors go through rigorous exercises so that they had full control over their bodies. What was important to Jerzy Grotowski was what the actor could do with his or her body and voice without aids and with only the visceral experience with the audience.

Acting Style Grotowski appreciated Stanislavski's work but he (Grotowski) was not attempting to supply his actor with a "bag of tricks" as he called it. It is not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks. The techniques and exercises used in Grotowski's laboratory required serious concentration and commitment. The actor needed to find the strength of his natural voice and body.

The actor, depending only on the natural gifts of voice and body, could bring the sacred rituals of theatre and the themes of social transformation to the audience. The audience became pivotal to theatrical performance, and theatre became more than entertainment: it became a pathway to understanding.

**Create a 'Poor Theatre' style performance including:**

A shared actor-audience space  
Actors performing in and around other class members (the audience)  
No sets, props, lighting or music  
Different levels of staging, if possible (eg. rostra)  
Protagonist as a victim  
Sound effects are produced by actors' body and voice  
Relationship between spectator and performer as paramount