Returning to the Subject
The Heritage of Reduta in Grotowski’s Laboratory Theatre

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Although the issue the title references has already been discussed by me—and other authors as well—it deserves another look. We have new material on Grotowski’s connections with Reduta at our disposal today and, considering the changing direction of scholarship, we can approach the problem differently and more broadly than before.

[...]

In 1966 the Laboratory Theatre—following Grotowski’s initiative—took Reduta’s emblem as its own, and by so doing publicly announced that [Juliusz] Osterwa and [Mieczysław] Limanowski’s group had been and would be its “ethical heritage.” Grotowski justified this alignment on numerous occasions, but most extensively in an interview for the students’ weekly, ITD:

The loop of Reduta had the letter “R” written in the center—we took it over without a change, writing in an “L” for “Laboratory.” The idea [of taking over the emblem] came first of all from my irritation with the lack of respect theatre people often have when they...
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- Teatr Dionizosa. Romantyzm w polskim teatrze współczesnym (The Theatre of Dionysus: Romanticism in the Polish Contemporary Theatre; 1972);
- Grotowski i jego Laboratorium (1980; released in English in 1986, Grotowski and His Laboratory);
- Grotowski wytycza trasy. Studia i szkice (Grotowski Blazes the Trails: Studies and Sketches; 1993);
- Jerzy Grotowski. Od “divadla predstaveni” k rituálnym hrám (Jerzy Grotowski: From Theatre of Productions to Ritual Arts; 1995);
- Jerzy Grotowski. Źródła, inspiracje, konteksty (Jerzy Grotowski: Sources, Inspirations, Contexts; 1998);
- Pamięć Reduty. Osterwa, Limanowski, Grotowski (The Memory of “Reduta”: Osterwa, Limanowski, Grotowski; 2003);
- “Nazywał nas bratnim teatrem”. Przyjaźń artystyczna Ireny i Tadeusza Byrskich z Jerzym Grotowskim (“He used to call us a sister theatre”: Artistic Friendship of Irena and Tadeusz Byrski with Jerzy Grotowski; 2005).

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In another interview that year, Grotowski stated that Reduta was “the only group in the history of Polish theatre, that had a crystallized vision of theatre, and followed that vision faithfully” (1966b).

[...]

1. Translator’s note: Founded in Warsaw in 1919 by a famous actor and director, Juliusz Osterwa, together with a theatre enthusiast and professor of geology, Mieczysław Limanowski, Reduta [Redoubt] was a laboratory for theatre crafts and pedagogy. In 1925 the group moved to Vilnius, and from there toured rural Poland for the next four years. During its third phase, from 1931 until the beginning of WWII in 1939, Reduta returned to Warsaw to focus on research and pedagogy. In their approach to theatre, Osterwa and Limanowski advocated thorough textual analysis, full embodiment of characters, simple scenery, and intimate contact with audiences. Despite a strong Stanislavsky-inspired vision, Reduta remained open to experimentation with performance styles and fully embraced symbolism and expressionism on its stages. Osterwa and Limanowski had a particular interest in staging Polish romantics and neo-romantics, including Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, and Stanisław Wyspiański.

Reduta’s truly radical side was the approach to ethics in both individual and ensemble work: Reduta members lived and worked together, distributing the administrative and technical duties equally among themselves, and sharing responsibility for all their activities. This living and working style earned Reduta a reputation as a monastic order or a commune.

Studies of the Grotowski-Reduta connection include: Zbigniew Osiński (1972a and 1972b); Zbigniew Barczyk (1975); Józef Szczublewski (1977); Ireneusz Guszpit (1978); Stanisław Marczak-Oborski (1979 and 1986).

For Grotowski, the emblem meant “being on the road, a movement towards infinity.”

[...]

It must be noted that the Laboratory Theatre adopted Reduta’s emblem only during its seventh year of operation, when it was commonly recognized as the world’s leading avantgarde theatre. The move was, to Grotowski and his colleagues, merely an external confirmation of what for them had been a reality since much earlier. During the first months of operation of the Theatre of 13 Rows, Grotowski already had referred to his company as “the only professional theatre focused on laboratory work in the country” (1960a:4)—his indirect acknowledgment of the ideological legacy of Reduta. The first time Reduta was mentioned directly, as far as I know, was in an internal company note signed by Grotowski and probably issued in May 1961:

This is a reminder that during the meeting held on the 27th the Company decided to follow the example of Reduta and observe absolute silence within the Theatre premises one hour before the performance to provide colleagues with a chance to appropriately focus on their creative tasks. Any failure to comply will result in administrative penalties. (Grotowski [1961?])

A year later, on 13 June 1962, Grotowski wrote to Halina Gall thanking her for her letter and for “Iwo Gall’s text”:

Believe me, we consider our work and our fervent search an incarnation of what was alive in theatre in the period between the World Wars, thus an attempt to continue [the work of] Osterwa and Gall above all. (1962)

One can assume with high probability that “Iwo Gall’s text” was Gall’s analysis of [Stanisław] Wyspiański’s *Akropolis*, written during the war. Grotowski himself was in the advanced stages of his work on the production of *Akropolis* in Opole [when he wrote to Gall]. Gall must have known it, for she met with Grotowski in Kraków in spring 1962 during the Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows’ performance of *Dziady* [The Forefathers’ Eve] (after Mickiewicz), *Kordian* (after Słowacki), and *Idiota* [The Idiot] (after Dostoyevsky)—the first two directed by Grotowski, the third by Waldemar Krygier (Osiński 2000:634).

In a telegram dated 29 November 1964, sent to the participants of a meeting celebrating the 40th anniversary of […] Reduta’s inception, Grotowski stated for his group:

We consider the tradition of Reduta’s work as our own. We wish to do all we can to become worthy of it. We wish to express to you our respect and to let you know that we associate the names of Osterwa and Limanowski with a real commitment to the vocation of our profession.

The Laboratory Theatre of 13 Rows, Wrocław.

In the same spirit, Grotowski responded to a survey titled “Whose Portrait?” In 1965, the editors of the biweekly *Teatr* asked “several artists representing different generations working on Polish stages the following questions: 1) If you were to choose a portrait of a person of theatre (an artistic director, a stage director, a scenographer, or an actor), whose portrait would you hang in the foyer or in the office of the artistic director of the National Theatre in Warsaw? 2) Choosing among Polish people of theatre, whose portrait would you hang in your own office?” Grotowski began is his typical way:

2. A photograph of this text can be found in the collection *O Zespole Reduty 1919–1939* (Czytelnik 1970:352–53).
I have difficulties answering these questions. First of all, I have no office of my own; second of all, even if I had it, I most likely wouldn’t hang any portrait there. In regards to the office of the artistic director of the National Theatre, I think we should leave that decision up to him. But if I had to hang some portraits, I would propose, for a warning, to hang the pictures of the martyrs of theatre.

And he listed Meyerhold, Witkiewicz, Artaud, Stanislavsky, and finally, “the pictures of Mr. Osterwa and Mr. Limanowski”:

So that those so-called men of theatre who laugh their faces off at the superstitions of Osterwa, the weird ideas of Limanowski, the monastery-like regime of the work at Reduta (and who by the way are ready to laugh at any decent work and honest approach to the profession—namely at what in the distant past one called a vocation), would realize that the old truths that Reduta promoted did not go so far out of fashion that it would be inappropriate to remind them. (in Szacki 1965:14)

The cited statements come from the years 1960 to 1966. However, the Laboratory Theatre paid tribute to Reduta throughout its 25 years of operation, and Grotowski continually highlighted Reduta’s importance to Polish theatre, and the challenge it proposed to him personally. For example, in his speech at the 20th anniversary of the Laboratory Theatre held in Wrocław’s Museum of Architecture on 15 November 1979, he stated once more: “I wish to remind you that for a very long time the symbol of the Laboratory Theatre has been the loop of infinity, which we inherited from Reduta” (1980a:14).

In a television documentary he further explained:

Our direct theatrical tradition is the tradition of Reduta. Like us, Reduta did not call itself a theatre. On the posters, they stated their name as “The Reduta Group.” […] I have learned that in some way our so-called “paratheatrical” work—this phase of “destroying the theatre walls” as it was commonly understood—was what Osterwa carried in his heart, but had no time to realize. (in Domagalik 1980:11)

Twelve years later, on 10 April 1991, in his acceptance speech at Leopoldin Hall when being granted an honorary doctorate by the University of Wrocław, Grotowski again mentioned Osterwa and Reduta: “In terms of [their] professional ethos and their way of looking at art as an enterprise that involves one’s life dedication, it gives me a feeling that we were a direct continuation of the basic principles of Osterwa and Reduta” (Grotowski 1993:39).

Throughout all periods of his artistic path from the “theatre of productions,” through the “theatre of participation,” the Theatre of Sources, and Art as vehicle, Grotowski referred to Reduta.

Because Grotowski and his Laboratory Theatre achieved worldwide recognition, a rediscovery of a substantial portion of the work of Reduta was possible. Thanks to that, Reduta was really able to function as a living theatrical and cultural tradition.

The last members of Reduta have died. The number of people who personally knew Osterwa and Limanowski is also decreasing. Outside Poland, even in the professional circles of theatre historians, directors, and actors, very few have even heard of Reduta. It is understandable, because other than brief and yet enthusiastically received performances in Latvia in 1925, Reduta never traveled abroad. By the way, this is true for all of Polish theatre of the interwar period, and from today’s perspective this was its biggest weakness.

If it weren’t for Grotowski, who often, and in many countries, referred to Reduta, and if it weren’t for the work of the Laboratory Theatre, the Reduta group would have remained merely a subject of noble passion for Józef Szczublewski and a few other Polish theatre historians, myself included.
Though neither Grotowski, nor Flaszen, nor any member of their company was a Reduta member in the literal, historical sense, they played a great role in awakening contemporary interest in Reduta. However, we must remember what Grotowski wrote in a letter to Tadeusz Byrski: “I have based my understanding of Reduta on what was passed on to me indirectly” (1970a). His main sources were his contacts with Reduta members, written accounts, and photographs.

Grotowski’s deep interest in Reduta and some parallels between their work are evident early on, when he was at the acting conservatory and at the threshold of his practice as a theatre director. One example is his attempt to found a theatre laboratory for Polish contemporary playwrights. This was one of Reduta’s main objectives, particularly in their first Warsaw period, 1919 to 1925. Already in May 1959, before taking over the Theatre of 13 Rows in Opole, Grotowski stated: “I dare to dream about a stage entirely dedicated to the art of Polish actors, directors, and playwrights, where only contemporary Polish plays would be put on, and where the dramatist would be like a member of the company” (1959:11). In this case he did not name Reduta as an influence, but the association is obvious.

The harmony with Reduta’s goals does not stop there, but goes much deeper. As I have mentioned already, the mere idea of a laboratory theatre is tied to Reduta. (It was not without reason that it has been called the first Polish theatre laboratory—the second created by Grotowski and Flaszen.) It doesn’t change the fact that these two theatrical laboratories differed drastically in terms of their organizational structure, and objectives. They were created by different people in different historical circumstances. However, despite all the differences, some radical, one can sense something deeply connected at the base of these two phenomena. At their source. I have mentioned that Grotowski, as a freshman at the Theatre Conservatory in Kraków carried with him a handwritten copy of Limanowski’s article “Sztuka aktora” [The Art of the Actor; in Scena Polska, 1919]. Forty-five years later, in 1994, Był kiedy teatr Dionizosa [There Was Once a Theatre of Dionysus] was published, which included previously uncollected Limanowski texts on theatre and drama, with “Sztuka aktora” among them (Limanowski 1994:138–46). I sent a copy to Grotowski, and when I met him in Pontedera during the summer of 1996, he told me that his reception of the text was as strong as when he had read it as a student.

The other text on this subject important for him during his student years was a 60-page typed transcript of the manuscript titled Autor w Reducie [An Author at Reduta; 1950], by Adam Bunsch. Bunsch describes in it his experience of Reduta’s staging of his play Haneczka i duch [Haneczka and a Ghost; 1936] less than a year before WWII. Autor w Reducie contains many detailed remarks, which without a doubt Grotowski found interesting and worth remembering. In several places Bunsch cites Osterwa and other members of Reduta, and writes his own observations. (Sometimes it is difficult to separate other people’s paraphrased statements from the author’s own commentary.) We learn from the text that Reduta did not use makeup and costumes:

We have clothes here. Clothes are, as Mr. Juliusz [Osterwa] says, a soldier’s uniform, a priest’s habit, a worker’s uniform. A costume is disguise, masquerade, pretending. We do not pretend. Our actors don’t “dress as…,” but dress up. (Bunsch 1950:38)

There were no props or set either: “We treat dramatis res as equal to dramatis personae. And it is the dramatis res that will make our set” (38). There was no curtain, but only two lights: “We have no technical apparatus other than an electrical socket and a light dimmer. Our technical staff is made of actors, members of Reduta” (37). This is followed by Bunsch’s agreement: “It must be this way. The stage has its own geography” (29).

The remarks about the spectator in the theatre could have been also meaningful for the future founder of the Laboratory Theatre. Bunsch either cites or comments on Osterwa’s statements on the matter in several places. For example: “Art doesn’t always need an audience”
“Theatre in which what is not visible to the audience is richer, better made, better maintained than the stage itself” (38); “What interests me more is a direct reaction of the spectator who has no knowledge of theatre, who does not analyze, but only lets himself become effected” (55).

And he adds from himself:

Different theatres and different plays have their own audiences. It is very important at Reduta. Osterwa knows a lot about it and considers it in his acting. He plays with the audience there, in front of the audience, and also on the audience. […]

It is the only theatre in which one almost always experiences that Greek catharsis—a liberation from dull everydayness, an uplifting of the spirit. The actors really enter their roles deeply, inhabit them, almost transform themselves, so no wonder the spectators also become deeply moved, and perhaps momentarily internally transformed. (55–58)

Above all, however, Bunsch describes the Institute of Reduta as a distinctive theatre and a group of people entirely dedicated to art, working in an extraordinary atmosphere.

Another book whose importance as a source of information for Grotowski is difficult to overestimate is Polski teatr współczesny. Próba syntezy [Contemporary Polish Theatre: An Attempt at Synthesis; 1935] by Michał Orlicz. Orlicz was Reduta’s literary director during its last two Vilnius seasons (1927–1928 and 1928–1929). The book contains descriptions of some productions, information about the way the group operated, and the preparation, realization, and reception of its legendary tours.

Grotowski kept current with anything published on Reduta. Szczublewski told me once how after the publication of Żywot Osterwy in 1971, he was subjected to a kind of “private exam” about what he did not write in the book, what he for some reasons removed or skipped. According to Szczublewski, this exam was “super-thorough,” and the “examiner” deserved respect for his “absolute competency” (1971b).

In addition to texts, equally important for Grotowski were his personal contacts with some members of Reduta, above all with Halina Gall, Tadeusz Byrski, and Jacek Woszczerowicz.

Grotowski worked with Gall—who previously worked with Limanowski as his student in Moscow—directing her in his first productions at Kraków’s Teatr Stary, in The Chairs by Ionesco (premiered on 29 June 1957), in which she played the Old Woman, and in Uncle Vanya by Chekhov (premiered 19 March 1959), as the old nurse Marina.

Grotowski told me once that during a work session at the Workcenter, years later, one young woman was indisposed and insisted that she couldn’t work. He gave her the example of Halina Gall. There was a scene in The Chairs, in which Gall and Jerzy Nowak, who played Old Man, jumped through the window. During a rehearsal Nowak, who was much younger than his partner (which forced him to wear makeup), insisted that there be a mattress on the other side of the window to cushion the landing (of his older acting partner). To this, Gall reacted, “I am not an ‘actress,’ but a ‘theatre artist,’ and it is my duty to fulfill all the tasks the director requires of me.” As a result, there was no cushioning in the production. (It is by the way significant that Gall called herself a “theatre artist,” or a “dramatic actress,” and that she capitalized these terms in writing [see Azyk-Milewska 1978:143–45].)

During another rehearsal of the same play nothing seemed to work. As is typical in such situations, nervousness and impatience began to dictate the mood. At one point, Grotowski sat next to Gall and asked her to make a long inarticulate animal-like sound in the scene they were rehearsing. She did it, and afterwards told Grotowski: “I just realized that you will become a great director one day.”

At the Uncle Vanya rehearsals the atmosphere in the group was unusually positive. However, during the opening, everybody played something completely different than during the rehearsals, utterly disregarding the director’s guidance. The only exception was Gall, who played
Marina the very way she had in rehearsals. According to Grotowski, only her role really made sense in the production.

When her husband died—the well-known and well-respected director and scenographer Iwo Gall, and for Halina Gall, almost everything in her life—the artistic director of Teatr Stary, Władysław Krzemiński, canceled that evening’s performance. Gall went to Grotowski and asked him to persuade Krzemiński to let the play be performed as scheduled. The performance went on, and Gall, who played a small part, acted magnificently that evening.

This is what Grotowski told his indisposed young student and her colleagues in Vallicelle near Pontedera. He also spoke about Reduta, about the necessary attitude toward work and the profession, when one treats that profession as one’s vocation. It worked. It helped.

It is not important here that Grotowski had colored his story (the opening of Uncle Vanya took place a month after Iwo Gall’s death), but rather that Grotowski used such an argument. His attitude towards Gall has not changed, by the way, as shown in his letter to the 80-year-old actress, written in Wrocław on 14 March 1970:

Dear Beloved Madam Halina, I don’t have anything special to write about beside the fact that I often think about you, that I always remember you, and you are dear to me. I greet you warmly and kiss your hands. Grotowski. (1970b)\(^3\)

There is also a short letter from Grotowski to Gall, written in Kraków on 30 April 1958 (from the period between the productions of The Chairs and Uncle Vanya), when Iwo Gall was still alive:

Dear Madam Halina, I returned from Warsaw today and (in the theatre) I found a note from you and Mr. Iwo. It is simply hard for me to tell you how glad I am. Before our first production together, above all, I felt respect for you. Now, besides respect, there is something bigger there (much bigger), something that makes me always think about You very warmly, very cordially, the way one thinks about someone truly dear. Jerzy Grotowski. (1958)

The statements and documents presented here suggest that Grotowski’s collaboration with Halina Gall at the beginning of his directorial journey remained for him one of the steadiest points of reference throughout an exemplary collaboration between the director and the actor. The difference in age and experience proved in this case not to be an obstacle, but rather the opposite; they inspired and enriched each other.

In Opole, Grotowski often mentioned another actor of the Reduta group, Jacek Woszczerowicz, whom he considered one of the greatest contemporary actors. He always emphasized that this mastery was a result of enormous work and commitment to systematic daily exercises, which despite the disapproval of many of his colleagues, the actor practiced all his life, usually alone. Grotowski pointed to it as an example for every actor to follow. Upon receiving the news of Woszczerowicz’s death, Grotowski said to Byrski: “There died the last professional actor” (in Kompel 2004:166), and in the late 1970s, he confessed to Grażyna Kompel, who was writing her doctoral dissertation about the great actor: “I loved this man, and will gladly tell you why” (168). Grotowski felt something more than respect for Woszczerowicz, which Ludwik Flaszen wrote about in his letter to me in 1996:

Woszczerowicz was, as you know, a cult within the company. I don’t remember when the personal contacts began. Grot probably saw him from time to time in Warsaw. He came

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3. Translator’s note: In the Polish original, Grotowski used a semi-formal expression, Pani Halino [Madam Halina], which sounds odd in English, but in Polish it is the norm in professional or intergenerational relationships, or in other closer relationship where a level of respectful formality exists.
to us only once, to Wrocław, to see The Constant Prince. We went to a public meeting with him, and then we spent almost the whole night in his hotel room—he talked about his work and demonstrated different fragments to us. (I must write about it some day—it was great, I remember it very well). However, I don’t remember the exact date—it was winter, perhaps 1967, because Moczarism was already spreading in the country—during that meeting Woszcerowicz parodied this nationalistic idiot. (Flaszen 1996)

At the turn of 1976, several Polish periodicals became engaged in a polemic regarding the sense and value of Grotowski’s paratheatrical work (the “theatre of participation”). Byrski wrote an open letter published in Kultura in which he argued against the article published previously by Maciej Karpiński. Byrski wrote:

I know one thing for sure. In our theatre world, Grotowski played a role of a pike let into a pond full of overfed, lazy, soporific, sleepy carps. [...] So then Osterwa was stupid, because during his biggest triumphs as an actor [...] he emptied his bag of the whole assortment of magical acting tricks and began a reform. Certainly, he began from himself! He would search, work out some method; surely he would employ his professional experience, but he would approach it differently, and from a different angle in his new practice. And so what? Had he no right? We all know, and I think Karpiński does too, that Osterwa was accused point-by-point of what Grotowski is now accused of: being a charlatan, a fool (which is a stronger word than Karpiński used), a big zero (this appeared in an otherwise quite intelligent periodical, Wiadomości Literackie). So then this is nothing new. [...] Without a doubt Grotowski and his Laboratory fascinate us and we should write about them with sharpness and criticism. But I have a feeling that the author of “Anty-Grotowski [Anti-Grotowski]” was carried

Figure 2. Jerzy Grotowski and Ludwik Flaszen, Theatre of 13 Rows, Opole, 1960. (Photo by Leonard Olejnik; courtesy of Instytut Literatury Polskiej)

4. Translator’s note: Mieczysław Moczar was a hardliner in the Communist Party and the leader of the anti-Semitic faction that came to power in 1968.
away by his ambition to become the hero who first unmasks an extraordinary phenome-
non. (1976:15)

This is an example of how one can repeatedly find Reduta and its members on Grotowski’s artistic path. It was almost as if on principle these people understood Grotowski the best, and some of them became his friends and supporters.

It is worth noting that the only Reduta production that Grotowski mentioned in his master’s thesis, “Reżyserka ‘praca praktyczna’ na temat Ślubów panięskich” Aleksandra Fredry” [The Director’s Practical Work on Śluby Panięskie by Aleksander Fredro], submitted at the Department of Directing of the State Theatre Conservatory in Kraków in 1960, was Ulica dziwna (Dziwna ulica) [An Odd Street; 1921] by Kazimierz Andrzej Czyżowski, under the direction of Adam Dobrodzicki. Szczublewski, the author of Pierwsza Reduta Osterwy, commented on the production:

The “anarchist and painter” Dobrodzicki began the rehearsals of Ulica dziwna in Reduta around 20 September [1922], after receiving the assurance that the group’s directors would not in any way limit his artistic freedom. Dobrodzicki would single-handedly act as stage director, set and costume designer, music composer, and above all, a “total” theatre reformer. Osterwa purposefully decided to subject his group to “shock therapy” before passing on to a higher, hermetic, and esoteric phase of work. (1971:201)

Half a year later, on 23 February 1923, the play opened. Szczublewski characterizes the play and its meaning for Polish theatre:

The premiered Ulica dziwna is a mad experiment. The most courageous of the experi-
ments Osterwa produced will be played 23 times with heroic insistence, battling the growing uproar in the press and public. Osterwa allowed Dobrodzicki to undertake the bravest theatrical experiment ever to take place on the Polish, and perhaps European stage: in the strangeness of gesture, movement, voice, and diction; in the uncompromised deconstruction of the sentence, word, and inflection; […] Osterwa allowed Dobrodzicki to dispose of every Reduta method besides “fierce work without counting the hours.” “In terms of actor’s expression the performance was simultaneously superb and without a meaning. The vocabulary of the actor’s alphabet of expression of highest quality was scattered and tossed on the stage in no apparent order.” The neoromantic [of the Young Poland literary movement] long-winded text served only as a canvas for cubistic, expressionistic, ultra-futuristic, or even magical etudes. “Discarding the formulas of realism and searching formalistic motivation in the abstraction of gesture and voice, the work offered vast material of denaturalized gestures kept within the frame of a flashy yet intended grotesque.” Only at Reduta could such a production be accomplished; only Osterwa could force the group to undergo the six-month-long toil of rehearsals under the direction of such an absolute amateur as the painter Dobrodzicki. (1971:210)

Almost 40 years later Grotowski would write in his master’s thesis on Śluby Panięskie: “At the end of the performance the principle of deformation should also effect the word (an alienation of sound and meaning, like in Dziwna Ulica by Czyżowski, staged at Reduta)” (1960b:9–10).

The Reduta directors remained loyal to Dobrodzicki and kept their promise. However, it didn’t stop Limanowski from writing in one of his notebooks:

Czyżowski’s play on the page and Czyżowski’s play as staged by Dobrodzicki are two entirely different plays. […] Dobrodzicki does not recognize the romantic pathos, he doesn’t have it in himself and doesn’t understand it at all; he is deaf to it. When analyzing the play, he did not get to the point from which the playwright built his play. Rather, he began to compose by supplying hearts to the figures on the left, while from the figures on the right, he cut the hearts out. Chilling charm emanates from the play. All this havoc,
screams, and anger—all this is Dobrodzicki, a tormented contemporary persona unable to find itself. Far from the peace and wisdom of the found path. (1912–47:44)

Elsewhere, Limanowski wrote briefly: “It was sacrilegious of Dobrodzicki to pin paper hearts to the actors and reduce them merely to senseless automatons. Nevertheless, the entire art of the actor is in the heart” (1922–23:61).

There is no doubt that Limanowski took an entirely different perspective regarding the art of the actor than Dobrodzicki did in his Reduta production of *Ulica Dziwna*. There is also no doubt that in 1960 Grotowski’s perspective was closer to Dobrodzicki’s. He was still interested in “the theatre of signs,” and particularly in “investigating the possibilities of sign-making in European theatre,” which culminated in the Opole production of *Sakuntala* after Kalidasa. Only with time did his perspective change (see Grotowski 1969:64–74).

For Grotowski, Reduta was the only true sacral theatre of its time in Europe and in the West. However, Habima is better known because of its appearances in several European countries and in the US, despite the fact that it staged only a handful of “sacral” productions, among which the most famous one was *The Dybbuk* by S. Ansky, directed by [Yevgeny] Vachtangov (its legendary premiere took place at the Jewish Studio Habima in Moscow on 31 January 1922). In fact, recently available sources suggest that despite the play’s distinctive theme of a Hassidic legend, Vakhtangov staged *The Dybbuk* in the style of “fantastic realism,” the same he used in other productions, including his famous *Turandot* (premiered only a month later on 28 February 1922 at the III Studio). In the 1920s and 1930s a few “sacral” productions took place at other theatres (e.g., the then-well-known mystery play about Saint Uliva—*Mistero di Santa Uliva*, 1933, staged by Jacques Copeau at the Santa Croce monastery in Florence), but one or two productions do not make a sacral theatre.

The notion of *sacrum* used here comes from the field of religious studies and was theorized by Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) and Mircea Eliade (1907–1986). Despite differences in their interpretation, both scholars agree that sacrum does not result from any generalized experience, and that it actually is the entity that gives meaning to all phenomena (belonging to the sphere of *profanum*). In contemporary Poland, where “holiness” both commonly and officially belongs entirely to the institution of the Catholic Church, there is a constant need for reiterating the meaning of the term. By the way, it is not by accident that according to most theology scholars the dichotomist division of all phenomena into *sacrum* and *profanum* “is not useful […] for expressing the way Christianity sees the world and itself” (Rahmer and Vorgrimler 1987:402). This dichotomy is typological and descriptive rather than theological and confessional. Thus when speaking of “sacral theatre,” we remain removed from both confession and theology.

It is in this sense that Osterwa and Limanowski’s Reduta and Grotowski and Flaszen’s Laboratory Theatre were sacral theatres. “Sacral” refers to their attitude towards work, the creative process, and finally the product. (The latter, particularly at the Laboratory Theatre, was identified as more of a process than a product.) However, the theme of the performance, and the characters, may not seem sacral at first glance. As in classical Indian theatre or Japanese noh, the sacral is built in the very essence of theatre, in—to quote Osterwa—“what theatre is, and what goal it has” (n.d.).

Around 1920, the founder of Reduta wrote in his diary: “Theatre is a place of Sacrifice. A ‘performance’ in theatre is a Sacrifice” (n.d.).

5. Translator’s note: The Hebrew theatre company Habima was founded in 1912 in Poland and reestablished in 1918 in Moscow under the patronage of the Moscow Art Theatre. Its members, mainly Polish actors, trained under the direction of Yevgeny Vakhtangov. In 1926 Habima left the Soviet Union on a long tour to finally settle in Tel Aviv, where in 1958 it became the National Theatre.
The use of quotation marks around the word “performance” is significant, and so is the treatment of the actor as “sacrificer.” At the same time, Osterwa is conscious of the fact that in theatre contemporary to him “these matters are unfortunately something merely to think about.” This is why he at one point addresses his colleague-actors in the following way:

If you actors are sacrificers by accident, through a trick or by default and not because of God’s calling, then get off the altar, you counterfeiters of the sacrifice. If you are only made of mimicking, eavesdropping, peeking at the altar, then watch more carefully how things are done [...]. (n.d.)

The famous *Natyasastra* (the Indian treatise on theatre), whose authorship we assign to Bharata at the beginning of the Common Era, reads: “This is the nature of our world, with its happiness and misery, expressed by gesture and the other three ways of acting, and called theatre” (in Byrski 1986). One can be almost sure that the two founders of Reduta as well as Grotowski and Flaszen would agree with such a definition of theatre.

Among Osterwa’s notes there is a revealing poem written in the early 1920s:

Glory of Art
Therefore
A Profit for the Polish Society
therefore
Fulfilling its Destiny
that is
The Purpose of Reduta
Art
is
— God —
the cause of causes
the Creator of our world
and other ones in space
— Force —
that turns the Earth
the Sun and the stars
— Wisdom —
that steers life
and dictates time
— Beauty —
that produced the human being
and rings the rhythm
— Goodness —
that made the heart.

Glory to Art. (n.d.:61–62)

Thanks to this “little poem,” as Osterwa’s biographer condescendingly called it (Szczublewski 1971a:178), we can come closer to understanding the words that sound strange in the context of modern culture:

Theatre was created by God for those for whom the Church is not enough. Theatre is a living history of Beauty—Harmony, i.e., Miraculous Conformity of Goodness and Beauty with Fortune—Destiny. In theatre, an objective subtle Truth about God is shown. (n.d.:91–92)

This is a precise formulation of the essence of the sacral theatre.

[...]

Zbigniew Osinski
However, the sacral theatre of Reduta did not formulate a concrete metaphysical technique, such as the “sacral dances” of G.I. Gurdjieff. According to Grotowski, Gurdjieff’s work counts for the only experience of that kind known to us in 20th-century Western culture (Grotowski 1997). Although Reduta developed (mainly through Osterwa) a creative technique, the level of its “metaphysical technique” in comparison with its “theatrical techniques” was much lower. In the domain of the former, Osterwa and Limanowski’s work could be seen as a somewhat amateur, although gallant, effort.

I will only mention that besides “theatrical” and “metaphysical” techniques there exist playing techniques, e.g., the technique of noh in Japan or the kathakali in India. An evolution of such techniques is entirely impossible in the span of 20 to 25 years, for they call for a multigenerational experience leading to an original play convention. Neither Osterwa and Limanowski nor Grotowski and Flaszen had a shot at it—their role was merely to open a path to such a possibility, and that they have done.

I will now talk about some of the most recognizable similarities and differences between Reduta and the Laboratory Theatre in various aspects of their work.

1. Let us begin with what is most noticeable from the outside and what has a decisive influence on public opinion: reception.

Today we don’t remember that, as a result of their choices, Reduta and the Laboratory Theatre to an even greater degree found themselves at the margin of official theatre life, and that their creative work was often read as heresy. […] If we were to believe the published reviews and opinions, it would be hard not to consider Reduta and the Laboratory Theatre harmful to society and their work suspicious and of poor artistic quality. And yet these voices reveal a particular kinship of fortunes and experiences about these two theatres, despite great differences between them. Grotowski referred to this deep kinship in his speech delivered on 10 May 1972 during a conference dedicated to the commemoration of Osterwa at the Institute of Art PAN [Polish Academy of Sciences] in Warsaw:

All the most essential aspects in Osterwa’s work were also the most ridiculed. And that turned my attention to him. […] The realization of who laughed at Osterwa struck me. […] I am not speaking about the critics. I am speaking about Osterwa’s colleagues. Who laughed long enough for me to hear it, long after Osterwa’s death? Who told us that [Osterwa] set the lights according to the positions of the stars? Who talked about the comical aspects of [Osterwa’s] work with the group? And about his weird ideas? About

Figure 3. Rhythmic exercises conducted by Helena Pruszyńska for the Reduta Institute annual demonstration. Warszawa, 27 June 1925. (Photo by Stanisław Brzozowski; courtesy of Instytut Literatury Polskiej)

6. Translator’s note: Osinski gives a rather detailed account of the bashing Reduta and the Laboratory Theatre received in the press.
his aspiring to something entirely unreal, because it disagreed with the instinct of a true professional who must know his goal, and it disagreed with life, which requires compromise… Yes, this is what we heard, this is what we were told. People of compromise laughed hard. And their laugh wasn’t disinterested. Because one laughs at someone amusing while he is alive. And when he dies, the laugh changes, it becomes more friendly. But this laugh was still aggressive, and that caught my attention.

It wasn’t a laugh at Osterwa as an actor. I haven’t heard aggressive jokes on that subject. I hear aggressive jokes directed at what he considered his calling in life. It isn’t difficult to laugh at Osterwa, although on a higher level—so to speak—than the laughs I have heard. It isn’t difficult as one reads his notes from the end of his life, those about the concept of an association made according to monastery principles, etc. Yes, yes, on some level it is really easy to make fun of. Truly, it is naïve. Truly, it is untidy. And I swear, there is something in it that moves me incredibly, as if it were an image of a real human life through which this man was led by something incomparably stronger than common motivations—money, success, stardom. He was led by some other yearning. I understand him better from his last period than from his earlier period. If it were put forward as some philosophy or faith doctrine, it would feel strange to me. But this was not what he meant. He already felt such a strong repulsion for the filth of theatre, for the compromise of theatre, for the sell-out of theatre—he felt such an enormous disgust that he wanted to leave it and move toward a different perspective, where man could meet another man in the context of something that makes sense, something that has a purpose, something that is pure, something one could not be ashamed of. (1991–1999:116)

Grotowski comments on Osterwa’s “other yearning”: “I take it as the need for sense. Globally” (117). Ending his speech, the founder of the Laboratory Theatre summed up his attitude toward Reduta:

So then, in details, everything seems distant. The way of working. A certain mentality that expresses itself intellectually in this or that way. And deeply in the essence I feel human closeness, something warm, great respect. More than respect. I never experienced his charm, right? And yet I feel something for which the phrase “I like” is not enough. (117)

This is a way in which Grotowski’s reaction toward another person becomes identified with his own tradition, his own choice, and its justification. Tradition always means for Grotowski a situation based on dialogue, continuation through polemics, faithfulness in betrayal and betrayal in faithfulness, this “in details, everything seems distant,” and in essence, true closeness and more than respect.
So much on the subject of reception. I will now briefly speak on other aspects that relate to both theatres.

2. Reduta’s particular attitude towards the Great Theatre Reform,7 and also toward the avantgarde, and avantgardism.

On the subject of the reforms and the reformers, Osterwa states in the early 1920s:

I feel empathy for all reformers in all fields. I can, for example, disagree with Luther, Calvin, Erasmus of Rotterdam, etc., I can even condemn and curse them from the point of view of the Catholic religion, but I can’t deny their good intentions. Things are similar with theatre reforms: I feel empathy, but I consider them nonsense. Contemporary theatre is a relic, the same way the Old Order once was. Christ wasn’t a reformer, but merely founded a New Order without discarding the Old one.

Thus I will consider whoever won’t discard the Old Theatre, but will create New Theatre, the Messiah of Art. (There was once in Poland such a candidate: Wyspiański, but he lived too briefly and under fierce social and political conditions. It ended merely as a prophecy.) All other reformers who merely alter and dye old rags are worthless in their efforts.

Will theatre become different if we change literature?

Will it become different if we change the actors?

Will it become different if we change the technical means?

Will it become different if we change the painter, the musician, or the director? Other than getting older, nothing will change. (n.d.:64, 2)

I will only mention that one of the chapters in Grotowski’s Towards a Poor Theatre is titled “The Theatre’s New Testament.” It may be referring to Osterwa’s comments above.

Perhaps even more meaningful is the fact that Grotowski repeatedly questions the idea of progress in art so intrinsic to Western culture and particularly the avantgarde. A belief that progress, understood one way or another, exists in art, seems to be the underlying principle in all considerations of what is, and is not, avantgarde. To put it differently, the notion of progress in art lies at the core of the traditional/avantgarde division of artists and artwork. Grotowski’s position on this matter is clear: there is no reason to assume that any progress in art has taken

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7. Translator’s note: The term refers to the combined effect of the late-19th- and early-20th-century ideas, movements, and innovations in Europe, from Saxe-Meiningen through the New Stagecraft.
place in relation to, for example, Homer, Dostoyevsky, Mickiewicz, or van Gogh. Therefore neither Reduta nor the Laboratory Theatre reflects any theatre reform or avantgarde movement, even though they were both considered as such. Although they were radically different from all other theatres of their times, unlike the Western avantgarde, they neither “chased the new” nor sought to “be first.”

3. The rehabilitation of work in both groups.

Creative work was not understood as a brilliant effect of inspiration and talent, or as merely craft, but rather as insistent and methodical work on oneself in both the professional and human sense, which in this case are synonymous. Osterwa and Limanowski justified this understanding of work by referring to Norwid,8 and particularly to his Promethidion (1851); Grotowski by referring to Rilke’s book on Rodin (1902). More importantly, such a notion of work found its legitimation in the daily activities of both groups.

[…] 6. Comparing the collaboration between Osterwa and Limanowski with that between Grotowski and Flaszen.

The founder of the Laboratory Theatre best captured this analogy in a letter to me, written in Pontedera sometime between May 1987 and April 1988 […] , which Grotowski did not want to be publicized during his lifetime. I will quote here appropriate fragments because they are the fullest and most competent and credible testimony on the subject of interest:

Thank you very much for sending me the book—the collection of letters between Limanowski and Osterwa is wonderful reading and moved me greatly. Most of what’s said there must be printed for the first time, or in any case, I was unfamiliar with it, and in significant areas it came so close to my view of things that it seemed as if I was reading my own thoughts and reactions, as if we were children from the same source. Certainly the reading provoked some deeper reactions in me. For example, in Poland, my collaboration with Ludwik [Flaszen] is often compared with that of Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch-Danchenko, or Osterwa and Limanowski. All similarities found there are fanciful and superficial.

The relationship between Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch-Danchenko was a “marriage” between two directors and pedagogues—a marriage full of conflicts and silent periods and separations (see Bulgakov’s A Theatrical Novel [1937]), but unbreakable and loyal in the truest sense.9 Each of these directors was differently oriented in his work. Nemirovitch-Danchenko was a director who emerged from being a writer and critic, like, for example, Korzeniowski in Poland. And Stanislavsky was, as they say, an “actor’s director.”

In our collaboration with Ludwik, his striking, life-giving role was to serve as an advocatus diaboli. Limanowski’s eruptive, wild manner, close to madness, particularly in the early years, was my domain, while Ludwik, through his calm, detailed criticism, helped me objectify what was coming from these sources, to construct a defensible and consistent formulation. I am speaking here of the unknown internal aspect of our collaboration, because there are many other obvious, important aspects well known. […]

I am sending you several important newspaper clippings, and among my texts, two theoretical ones: “The Director as a Professional Spectator” [“Il registra come spettatore di
professione”; 1986], and particularly “You Are Someone’s Son” [“Tu es le fils de quelqu’un”; 1987]. I worked on the Italian version of these very carefully, because I consider them fundamental: the first one, from the point of view of my work in the past; the second one from the perspective of three years in California.

However, regarding the most important aspects of the work, which today I formulate openly, but on which I have secretly and intimately worked all my life (not just my artistic life, but my whole life since childhood)—I spoke about it during a two-day meeting in Pontedera last February, trying to explain where I am at this point. Among the participants were: the Temkines, Barba, Banu, the author of the German book [Barbara Schwerin von Krosigk], Kumiega, Taviani (and other Italian professors from this circle), Chwat, Roberto [Bacci], and others. The text titled “Un corpo di teatro,” published in the daily Manifesto, gives a decent account of what I was talking about [Manzella 1987]. It has some omissions and errors, but if you read it with somebody who knows Italian, word by word, you will figure out what was said quite well. Because in general, it is a very thorough report as well as an important message.

A few weeks later, a press conference took place in Florence (from which I am sending you some clippings). It was a conference with [Peter] Brook, with Roberto’s [Bacci] introduction, and was dedicated to the basis and circumstances of my work in Italy.

There are many newspaper clips and many reports, and, as usual after a press conference, there are many misunderstandings and errors in what was printed. But if one reads all the clippings, one can figure out what was said. To put it in the most general terms, Brook tried to touch upon the most important and difficult matter—that in the work I do, the aspect of initiation, in the traditional meaning of the word, is of key importance. And that the performative, dramatic, or ritual-dramatic aspect is a sort of vehicle for a particular kind of “yoga” (Brook [1988] 1992:27–29).

Regarding my contribution, during the first part I talked about this work as some type of yoga within the performative vehicle, but I used very down-to-earth terms, trying to avoid the “hocus-pocus” and mystical atmosphere, etc. In the second part I spoke about the so-to-speak by-products that can result from it simply for the benefit of the creative work in theatre. I said that I consider my directing period fulfilled and closed, and that’s why I can focus entirely on something else. Thus I must evaluate the usefulness of my current work for theatre art at large through others, through collaboration with others, or perhaps others have to evaluate it. And yet, it is actually possible.

If you read Italian well enough to read these reports (with some help), you can reconstruct all we were talking about during this weird press conference. I never spoke this way in my life about what I am really doing at any press conference.

The book with Limanowski and Osterwa’s letters arrived a few weeks later, and I thought that what we were talking about is connected in some way to what’s stated on pages 57–80. Of course the technique, the type of “yoga,” etc., (all so-to-speak) are different, but they have things in common at their basis.

10. Raymonde and Valentin Temkine, Georges Banu, French theatre scholars; Jennifer Kumiega, the author of The Theatre of Grotowski (1987); Ferdinando Taviani, Italian theatre scholar; Jacques Chwat, the translator of most of Grotowski’s texts and speeches in the US; Roberto Bacci, stage director and founder of Centro per la Sperimentazione a la Ricerca Teatrale, Pontedera, Italy, now Fondazione Pontedera Teatro, under which The Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards operates as an autonomous organization.

11. The conference took place on 14 March 1987 at the Medici Riccardi palace.

One more reaction to the book: At the beginning of this letter I spoke of the differences between these theatrical “marriages” or “couples,” like Stanislavsky–Nemirovitch-Danchenko, Liman–Osterwa, and myself with Ludwik (in the Laboratory Theatre, and in the Theatre of 13 Rows). Ludwik had written heavily disapproving reviews of my directing work, and yet, when he received an offer to run a theatre in Opole, he passed it on to me, saying, “Mr. Grotowski, you will be the artistic director, and I will be your main collaborator”—we did not address each other by first names yet. Nemirovitch-Danchenko was very critical towards Stanislavsky; nevertheless, using his influential position, he played a key role in founding the Moscow Art Theatre. During a crucial period, he endorsed Stanislavsky’s “obsession” (his “System”) as the leading aspect of the entire enterprise. Similarly, Limanowski wrote critical reviews of Osterwa’s productions, and, like Nemirovitch-Danchenko (and like Ludwik) provided Osterwa with the institutional basis, that is, Stowarzyszenie Studio imienia Mickiewicza [The “Mickiewicz Studio,” Association], for the future Reduta. Here we see in these three “marriages” something very similar, even if everything else is different. The differences between each of these “couples” communicate and tell more than the similarities. I am mentioning all this, because I hear about these comparisons more and more frequently. There are whole theories based on them.

One more thing to finish the subject: Osterwa and Limanowski were very close to each other as companions and friends as well as in their approaches to work. Nemirovitch-Danchenko and Stanislavsky were very far apart privately, psychologically, artistically. Ludwik and I: it means friendship, constantly engaging in polemics, and playing polemics. Koko and Augustus. Interesting.

7. The principle of playing not for the spectator, but before the spectator.
8. The unconditional silence maintained by the actors before the performance: an hour long at Reduta, and also at the Laboratory (“by Reduta example”), later shortened to a half hour.

This silence was first of all an exercise in concentration and for the purpose of focusing on the task. At the Reduta Institute, it was taught as one of the elements of the art of acting, for the first time in the history of Polish theatre pedagogy.

9. The opening of a new production did not mean the end, but rather the beginning of work. Thus the presence of the director at all performances and his obligatory analytical sessions afterwards. […]

10. The removal of the prompter. […]
11. No curtain call. […]
12. Seeing the creative act as a “disclosure-confession.”

This kind of understanding of the creative act was originated in Polish theatre by Reduta. Orlicz put it this way in 1928:

Remaining under the influence of Stanislavsky despite its autonomy, [Reduta] showed that this perezhivanie14 is nothing more than an analyzed, purified confession of the actor. (1928)

13. Handwritten letter, never sent to me. […] Grotowski showed it to me during my first visit to the Workcenter in Vallicelle near Pontedera on 26 April 1988, while telling me that the letter was very personal, which is why he did not send it by mail. I read it immediately in his presence. Responding to my request, Grotowski gave it to me to read again, and let me hand copy long fragments. I copied about 80 to 90 percent of the letter, returned the original to him, and, what I copied, I gave him to approve. Grotowski looked at the copied text and said, “Fine.” […]

14. Translator’s note: The term perezhivanie is often used in the Stanislavsky-influenced acting world in Russia. It is extremely difficult to translate into English as it is based on the emotional aspects of Slavic cultures. I have seen it translated as the actor’s “intense experience” of an emotional identification with the character, but more often I have heard it used in Russia as “nie perezhivay,” which means something like “don’t indulge.”
From the same semantic pool that confession comes also comes “stage as the confessional,” “monk’s cell,” or “monastery,” all of which were used to describe acting at Reduta.

We can also find many references to the act of confession in the texts of Grotowski, particularly from the period of The Constant Prince and Apocalypsis cum figuris—the text first assembled in Towards a Poor Theatre. […] Grotowski used terms from this semantic pool. For example, in his texts published in the 1990s, “From the Theatre Company to Art as vehicle” and “The Constant Prince of Ryszard Ciesłak” (Grotowski 1995a and 1995b), he referred to the creation of his lead actor as a “carnal prayer.”

13. The desire of Osterwa, and later Grotowski, to cross the “boundaries of theatre” as they were then understood.

It has also been referred to as “leaving theatre.” Osterwa had such a yearning from the beginning of Reduta, and crystallized it in the plan for turning the theatre company into the artistic association Dal i Genezja [Distance and Genesis; formulated between 1940 and 1945] (Szczublewski 1971a:481–534). And Grotowski, from the beginning of his artistic path as a stage director, led other research (by himself or with a small group), and in 1969 he had finished what he later called “Theatre of Productions” (Grotowski 1975).

With time, both Reduta and the Laboratory Theatre abandoned words like “theatre,” “actor,” and “performance.”

During the production period of the Laboratory Theatre, the main objective of the director was to create an optimal environment for the actor’s creative act and to initiate a particular meeting between the actor and the spectator. Formulated this way, theatre became first of all a meeting place, where the spectator was to “open up” before the actor not as a “spectator,” but as a human being, i.e., to confront his life, body, and soul with everything. This is where Grotowski’s postulate “to reduce oneself to a human being” originated, which, when taken literally, had to lead the director of The Constant Prince and Apocalypsis cum figuris out of the “theatre of productions,” or, if you prefer, to crossing the boundary of theatre.

14. Art understood at Reduta and at the Laboratory as initiation.

At Reduta, man was thought of as sanctifying himself “in the soul and through the soul,” and according to the Laboratory’s concept, man would sanctify himself through the body, and the goal was the “rehabilitation of the body” (Osiński 1980:275–82).

15. Reduta and the Laboratory Theatre as a part of Romanticism in Polish theatre and culture.15 […]

17. Appreciating Reduta’s archives that “some day may become the treasure of the museum of Polish theatre,” Orlicz remarked:

There was only one obstacle in creating the archives. Osterwa did not sanction collecting press reviews and prohibited photography. […] When questioned, he would explain: “if someone wants to know what a Reduta production looks like, he should come and see it in person.” […] Photos from that period were taken secretly, or when Osterwa was in a good mood and agreed to the photo shoot. Without the right to collect photos, Reduta’s archives were a bizarre enterprise. I think […] that it was just another whim of Reduta’s founder. (Orlicz 1935:139–40)

The author of the above did not or could not take into consideration that it did not have to be another one of Osterwa’s whims, but rather a manifestation of his consistency. He wished to protect the creative process of the actor from voyeurism and interruptions.

[…] Piotr Baracz, the photographer of the extraordinary pictures of Apocalypsis cum figuris, told me that he had to work under extremely difficult conditions, in almost total darkness, without interrupting the spectators, even without being noticed by the spectators. Baracz

accepted Grotowski’s conditions, and perhaps because of these restrictions, he took some of the best pictures that document the group’s work.

And what about the films about the Laboratory Theatre? For many years the filming of performances, and then of paratheatrical events, was prohibited. Michael Ester’s List z Opola [A Letter from Opole; 1963] was filmed during the rehearsals of Tragiczne dzieje doktora Fausta [after Marlowe’s The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus] (not during the performance). The Constant Prince was filmed secretly in Italy [probably in 1967] by an unknown person shooting with a stationary film camera through a hole in the wall, without sound. The sound was recorded two years earlier in Scandinavia. When in 1970 the picture and the sound were put together, they matched almost perfectly, which shows the incredible precision in the work of the actors and the director. Akropolis was filmed in 1968 in a specially prepared television studio near London.

In my opinion, in his article “Kim był Jerzy Grotowski?” [Who was Jerzy Grotowski?], Zbigniew Majchrowski hits the nail on the head when he describes the attitude of the founder of the Laboratory Theatre:

Grotowski ignored film, television, and multimedia. He made the actor—blood and bone—the sole medium. He opposed the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction (to bring up Walter Benjamin), insisting on art being nonrecordable, incidental, and obscure. He avoided reporters, chose what was to be kept for the records, “frisked” the spectators. His aim at direct, unrepeatable contact was his answer to the secondhand world, perceived indirectly; to the world mediated, illusionary, phantasmatic, virtualized. Perhaps that’s where Grotowski’s attraction to such “magical” words as Meeting, Wake, Holiday, Tree of People, Mountain Project, Theatre of Sources comes from […]. (2000:44–45)

[...] The Laboratory Theatre began its archives in 1966, but Grotowski treated it more as storage. I would say that he acknowledged the need for the archives, but his heart wasn’t there; he did not have a deep appreciation for archival work and documentation and consequently never cared to hire a competent staff to run it. It was as if, at the end, all this did not really matter.

In his article, Majchrowski speaks not only for himself, but on behalf of his generation:

Grotowski had to be upset by the homogenization of culture, but also by all kinds of cultural ostracism based on race, ethnicity, religion, and nationality. In other words: either equalization and loss of identity, or differentiation and aggression. Yet this alternative is false, for Grotowski shows a third possibility: we should find the common factor before the division, [...] find the moment that precedes the difference. It is true, Grotowski restitutes an abistorical and apolitical man. Even though in Poland at the beginning of the 1970s, youth culture was driven by political amateur theatre and New Wave poetry, it was Grotowski who ruled the youth’s souls. To go to Wrocław to see Apocalypsis cum figuris, or better yet, to do a workshop with “Grot” was the most fundamental initiation of that generation. Grotowski found himself at the center of interest and he put a mark on those biographies. (44–45)

All this is true. The problem is that in the Poland of the 1970s—and perhaps always—one could not openly mean “the apolitical man.” Thomas Mann could allow himself such a position in Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen [Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man; 1918], but in our country it was entirely impossible and unacceptable for any side—the communists, the opposition, the Church—and this was what caused those from various sides and various positions to attack the Laboratory Theatre and Grotowski with such a vicious fury.

[...]
I will end with a statement that Reduta and the Laboratory can be linked by what they were searching for in art and through art, but most of all by what they did not want and consequently rejected.

All these reflections give a foundation for a few remarks about the position the Laboratory Theatre took against tradition, including the tradition of Reduta.

First of all, their position was active, dynamic, and evolved over time. Therefore, the picture of Reduta painted by the statements of the Laboratory Theatre founders was always shaped according to their own image at that given period. Thus we could say that it wasn’t so much Reduta that shaped the Laboratory Theatre, but rather Grotowski who kept shaping his own picture of Reduta, which accordingly underwent various changes and modifications. For example, if during the period of the Theatre of Productions the key factor for Grotowski was Reduta’s ethos, ideals, “attempts at long-term research on the craft of the actor,” “craft and vocation through craft”—all of which, by the way, remained important for Grotowski until the end of his life—then in the 1970s, Grotowski called upon the image of Osterwa from the last period of his life, when he worked on detailed ways of “leaving theatre.” We can draw parallels between Grotowski’s own accomplishments and his corresponding image of Reduta in all different periods of his life. We must also notice that that image was never in some striking conflict with historical knowledge learned from the literature and from the surviving members of the Reduta group.

The Laboratory Theatre chose those aspects of tradition that were closest and most interesting to them, then worked on internalizing and including these aspects into their experiences and needs. And this is how a truly creative dialogue with tradition works—a dialogue where “tradition does not rule over us, but rather where we rule over tradition” (Janion 1980:71).

The absorption of Reduta’s tradition by Grotowski and the Laboratory Theatre in particular, and of tradition in general, is a great example of the above maxim. We can see in it an illustration of what [Polish scholar] Maria Janion calls “the movement from the descendant towards the forefather” (1980:71), which, according to Jerzy Szacki, is a testimony to “the ruling of the living over the dead, and not the dead over the living” (Szacki 1971:150).

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