

# **AGENDA FOR THIS AFTERNOON**

**JERZY GROTOWSKI (POLAND)**

**- & PETER BROOK (UK) -**

**2:05 – 3:30 pm LECTURE WITH SCREENED EXTRACTS**

**3:30 – 4:00 pm BREAK**

**4:00 – 5:00 pm SCREENING**

# LECTURE AIM

- introduce useful concepts: metaphysics, collective unconscious, archetype, and social mask
- outline Jerzy Grotowski's biography and practice
- the ways in which he experimented with forms, actor training and scenography
- dispel common misconceptions about Grotowski
- introduce Peter Brook
- view some of Grotowski's performances



# METAPHYSICS

τά μετά τά φυσικά

*tá metá tá physiká*

“the [writings] after the *Physics*”

- thematically go beyond Aristotle’s *Physics* (nature, biology, etc...), chronological arrangement

The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy: “*questions that arise out of, but go beyond, factual or scientific questions about the world.*” (Audi, 1995:498)

Questions of being, non-physical entities, construction and structure of reality.

- Questions of reality and its essence
- The ‘mysterious’ and ‘transcendental’
- ‘*poetic greatness*’, ‘*mental profundity*’, ‘*solemnity*’, ‘*harmful effectiveness*’.  
Antonin Artaud, Theatre and Its Double, 1938
- ‘*the unknown*’ (Grotowski), and ‘*the invisible*’ (Brook)

# CARL JUNG (1875-1961)



## 1. COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

- ‘Psychic inheritance’ - handed on (human genome)
- Not personally determined as in Freud but ‘hard-wired’ in
- Influences all our emotional decisions and feelings and links back to what might be called ‘animal instinct’, irrational fears, or desires - love, violence

## 2. ARCHETYPES - mother, trickster, hero

- Primordial images stored in the collective unconscious and **are** its contents
- Latent, i.e. we do not directly access them, but they shape our consciousness and are found in many MYTHS, RITUALS, and in SYMBOLS (forest, church, etc)

## 3. PERSONA or SOCIAL MASKS

*“The persona is a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual.”*

‘The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious’ (1928). in Collected Works 7: Two Essays on Analytical Psychology. p.305

# JERZY GROTOWSKI – WHO ?

- Born Poland 1933 (just pre WW 2)
- Catholic upbringing though not a believer
- Influenced early by India and Hinduism
- 1951-55 studied acting at Krakow Theatre School
- 1955-56 trained as director in GITIS, Moscow
- Primary influences were: Stanislavski and Meyerhold
- 1959 ran Theatre of Thirteen Rows in provincial Opole (working under Socialist Regime)
- **Theatre of Productions** (1959-69) with Laboratory Theatre in Opole and then in Wroclaw
- Moved beyond theatre as traditionally understood
- Lab closed officially in 1984



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# JERZY GROTOWSKI - Beyond theatre

- **Paratheatre** 1969-78

working processes outside formal theatre structures  
involving participants not spectators

- **Theatre of Sources** 1976-82

exploring roots beyond the culturally specific  
work with a transcultural group and expeditions abroad

*Left Poland in 1982 during Martial Law (1981)*

- **Objective Drama** 1983-86

work on small details of performance craft  
develop structures and tools that are objective

- **Art as a Vehicle** 1985 – today (carried on by Thomas Richards)

art as a process not presentation  
work on oneself – verticality

- Grotowski died Pontedera, Italy, January 1999

# THEATRE OF PRODUCTIONS LABORATORY THEATRE (1959-1984)

## POOR THEATRE

*‘Consequently I propose poverty in the theatre. We have resigned from the stage and auditorium plant: for each production a new space is designed for the actors and the spectators. We forsook lighting effects and this revealed a wide range of possibilities for the actors’ use of stationary light sources [...] actors can illuminate through personal technique [...] a source of spiritual light [...] We can thus define the theatre as what takes place between the spectator and the actor.’*

**Jerzy Grotowski in Towards a Poor Theatre, edited by Eugenio Barba, Odin Teatrets Forlag, 1968, pp. 19-20**

# GROTOWSKI'S THEATRE PRACTICE

How to achieve this metaphysical aim of 'spiritual light'?

1. Through manipulation of the actor-audience relationship.

Each performance had different design and staging.

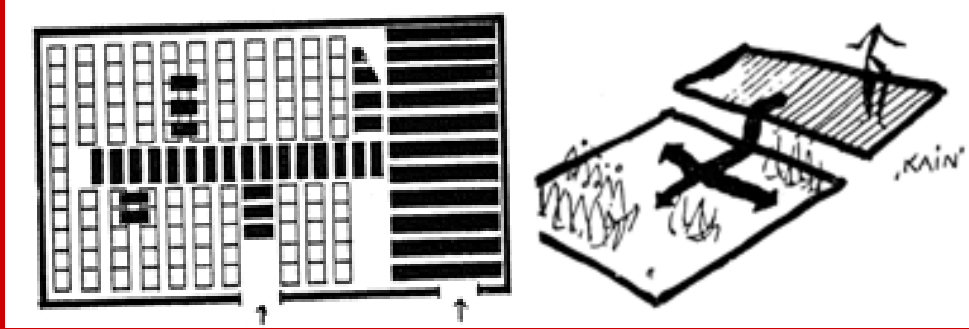
2. Through actor training. Vocal and physical exercises:

*corporels, plastiques*, dynamic yoga, acrobatics.

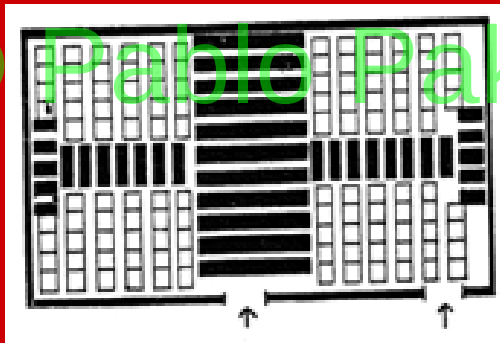
3. By incorporating and emphasising the actors' 'inner life' as a key part of their physical performance (psychophysical approach).



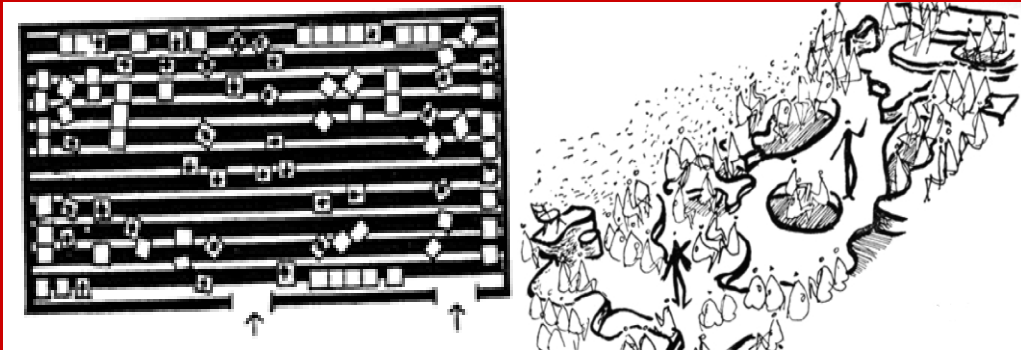
# ACTOR-SPECTATOR CONFIGURATIONS



*Cain* (1960)



*Shakuntala* (1960)

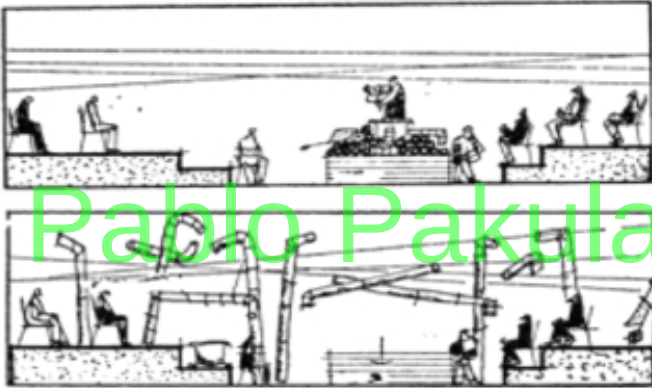


*Forefathers' Eve* (1961)

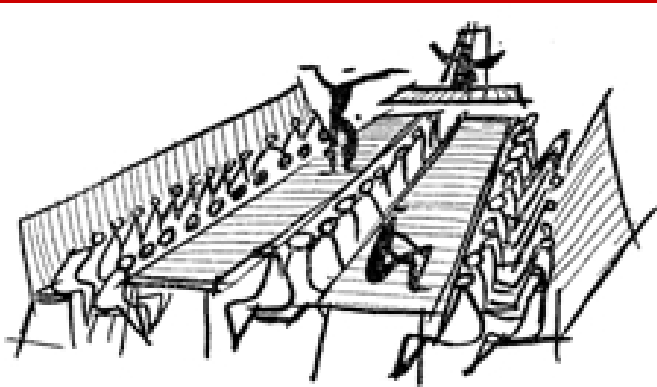
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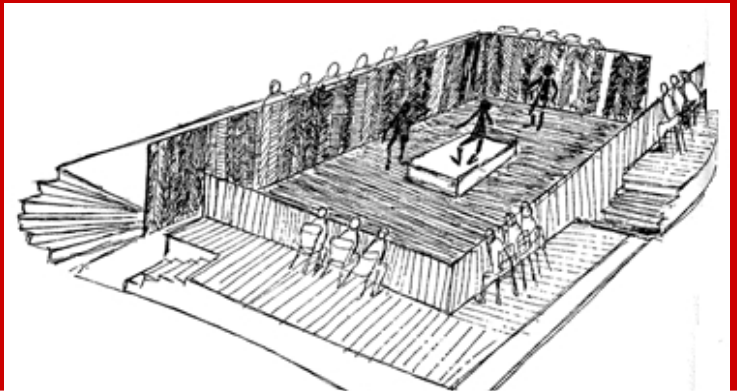
*Kordian (1962)*



*Akropolis (1962)*



*Faustus (1963)*

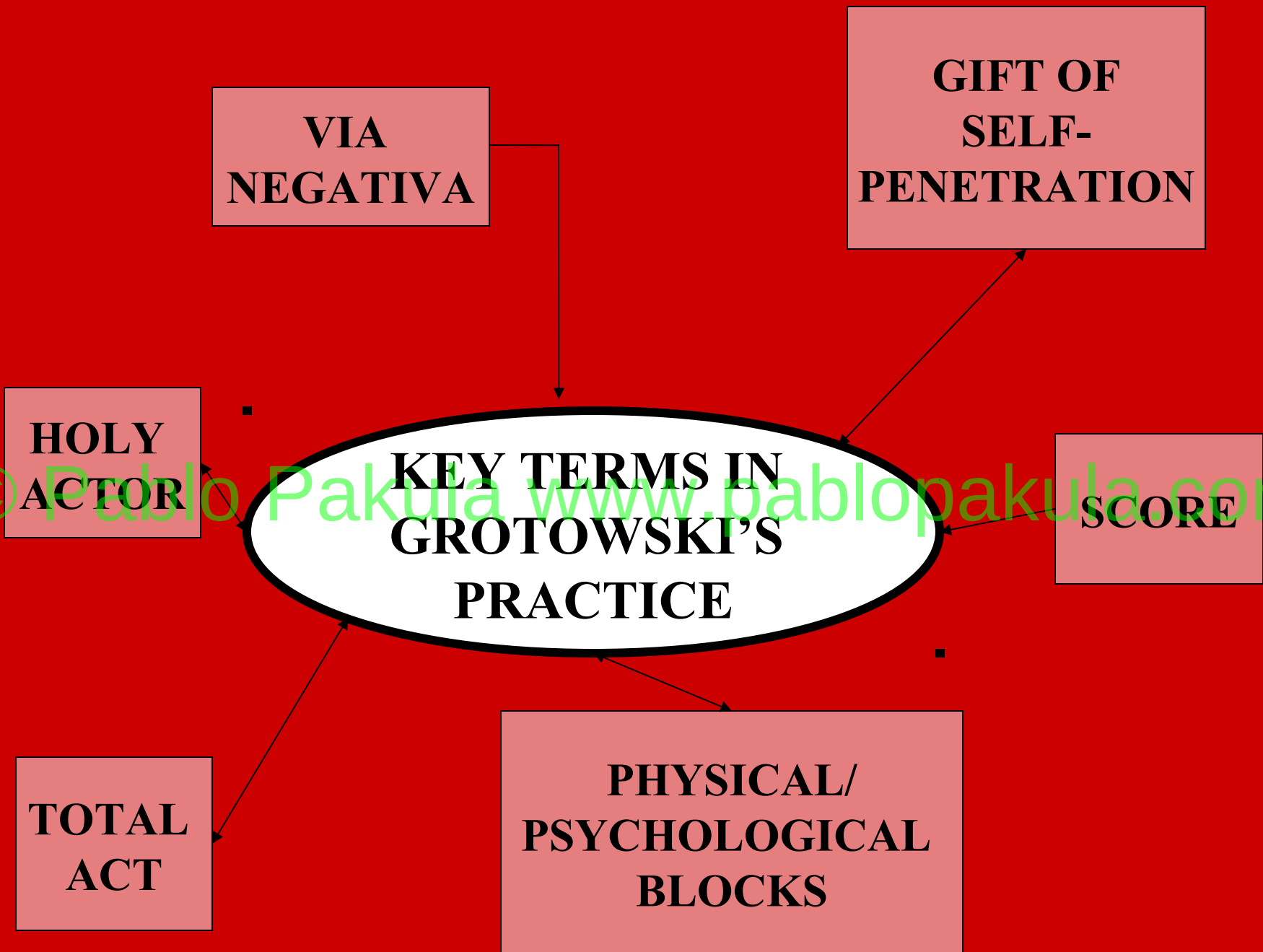


*Constant Prince (1968)*

*Apocalypsis cum figuris* (1969)



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<http://www.grotowski.net>

<http://www.grotowski.net/en/encyclopedia>

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**VIA  
NEGATIVA**



A deductive rather than accumulative process – not acquiring skills but removal Of

**PHYSICAL/  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
BLOCKS**

The actor must make themselves vulnerable, to reveal their innermost being what Grotowski called a -

**TOTAL  
ACT**

**GIFT OF  
SELF-  
PENETRATION**

This gift to the audience might lead the audience to change and through this the performer becomes a

**HOLY  
ACTOR**

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## **VIDEO EXTRACTS**

*Sacrilegious Rite, Abounding in Sorcery:  
on Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory*

**(1980) by Krzysztof Domagalik**

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# Grotowski, metaphysics and Jung - connections

*'look for a dimension of life that would be rooted in what is normal, organic, even sensual, but that would go beyond all this, that would have a sort of axis, another higher dimension that would surpass us.'*

(Grotowski in Croyden, 1999)

- desire to go beneath the surface
- emphasis on human encounter
- reawaken & rediscover innate physicality
- re-connect body/mind

- 
- central characters as archetypes
  - work on ancient rituals and songs – going back to that which is pre-modern

(Kumiega, 1987:133)

*'based on the theory that by liberating the creative impulse from the physiological and psychological blockages and healing the mind/body split to permit spontaneous response, the actor is freeing the psychological riches of the unconscious (or even Jung's 'collective unconscious')'*



# COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT GROTOWSKI

- he was a dictatorial / authoritarian director (*collaborative process*)
- he created a system for actor training (*methodology*)
- his practice is opposed to that of Stanislavski (*physical actions*)
- he focused only on the physical (*associations and 'inner work'*)
- he disregarded text (*collage and montage*)
- his actors improvised in performance (*score and impulse*)
- his work is divided into separate periods (*comon threads*)

see **At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions**  
by Thomas Richards for more on the connection between  
Stanislavski and Grotowski

# COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT GROTOWSKI

*'The other internationally renowned director usually associated with Artaud's ideas is the Pole, Jerzy Grotowski. His 'Poor Theatre' was a theatre of ceremony in which the actor's physicality as well as their spirit and behaviour, was intended to impact directly on the spectator's psyche. Setting the action all around the deliberately small, privileged audience, Grotowski aimed to reduce the importance of words to bridge the usual 'body/think' divide. Thus, in his famous production of The Constant Prince (1966), he stripped the text down as Artaud had proposed to do with Elizabethan tragedies, and his leading actor, Ryszard Cieslak, was genuinely humiliated, put in danger, made to feel the pain of the staged flagellation.'*

(Leach, 2004:190)

# GROTOWSKI's links to ARTAUD ?

- connection is less direct than we might assume, Grotowski discovered Artaud AFTER he had established his techniques
- See 'He wasn't entirely himself' in Towards A Poor Theatre
- Not following Artaud for: '*Artaud left no concrete technique behind him.*' (Grotowski, 1968:86)
- some connections - total theatre/total act - but equally Grotowski's emphasis on minimalism and 'poverty' does not concur with Artaud's extravagant use of mise-en-scene
- Similar conception of the actors: '*like martyrs burnt alive, still signalling to us from their stakes*' (Artaud in Grotowski, 1968:93)

# PETER BROOK- who ?

Theatre/opera/film director, writer



- born England 1925
- Studied English at Oxford University
- built his directing experience from repertory theatre and regional productions of classics
- 1946 began directing at RSC at Stratford and increasingly overseas including opera and films
- 1964 Theatre of Cruelty season London's Aldwych theatre
- 1964 *Marat/Sade*
- 1966 – invited Grotowski and Cieslak to RSC for brief training period during work on *US/U.S.* – a devised piece on the Vietnam War
- Brook's 1966 article for *Encore* – preface *Towards a Poor Theatre*
- connection remained from this early contact

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**RECOMMENDED  
VIEWING!**



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*Marat/Sade* (1967)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJc4I6pivqg>

# BROOK and GROTOWSKI

- **essentialist approach** (prune away the inessential)

*'I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.'* (Brook, 1969:11)

- **research methodology**

1970 - present moved to Paris and founded Centre International de Recherche Theatrale (CIRT) at their base in les Bouffes du Nord

- **theatre as more than entertainment** (efficacy and universality)

1971 *Orghast* with poet Ted Hughes – ancient vibratory languages

1972-3 project in sub-Saharan Africa. [See J. Heilpern's Conference of the Birds in for a less positive view]

*'England destroys artists...*

*[their] edge is rapidly knocked off. No one presses the artist to do anything ...[there is] no conflict, only reassurance', [resulting in a deadly] auto-conformity.'*

Brook in 'Oh for Empty Seats', *Encore*, 1959!

(Brook in Williams, 1988:163)

## **SOME POSSIBLE QUESTIONS**

**What does performance share with rituals ?**

**Can the performer AND the spectator transcend themselves ?**

**Does the spectator also need to be trained ?**

**How does one reconstruct 'social masks' once stripped away?**

**By what process does one attain the metaphysical, tap into the collective unconscious and archetypes ?**

**Can performance cross cultural borders without 'syncreticism' or creating 'cultural salads'?**

**What aspects of Grotowski's work have become widespread today?**

# THE SCREENING

**Jerzy Grotowski's *AKROPOLIS*  
(1962) by Stanislaw Wyspianski with  
an introduction by Peter Brook**

**Jerzy Grotowski's *THE CONSTANT  
PRINCE* (1968) by Juliusz Slowaki on  
Calderón de la Barca**



<http://www.grotowski.net/en/media/videos>

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