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Oh, I Know I've Been Changed

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From the notebook of Richard Schechner concerning the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in Paris, 2–7 July 2019.

2 July

08:25

I'm in the modest dining nook of the Hotel Saint-Antoine, where many of the participants are housed. My room is a postage stamp. The bed is so close to the wall that the desk chair is wedged against it if I want to sit at the desk. The sliding door in front of the bathroom and closet alternates: either the closet is closed, bathroom open, or vice versa. The room faces the very busy rue de Miromesnil with the streetlight directly in front of the window. I need to pull the curtain to get dark and close the window for a semblance of silence. Still, I sleep fine … Each morning I take coffee, part of a baguette, yogurt, fruit. I am inordinately nervous. Afraid I won't be able to find l'Espace Cardin about a half-mile from here on foot, less using the Metro. The programme starts today at 10 a.m. with the Motions led by Mario Biagini. The week is jam-packed with workshops, demonstration of techniques, panels, and performances. The most extensive showing of the Workcenter's methods and products ever in one place at one time.

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12:15

Mario Biagini's workshop on the Motions. About thirty people in a small black box studio in the basement of l'Espace Cardin. Twenty-five participants, five observers, no shoes, sat in an ellipse formation on the floor. Mario begins (in French) by observing that what is needed is careful attention. Then, after less than five minutes, we move outdoors to a grassy knoll at the front of the theatre. We go through the garden covered with pebbles. Some put on their shoes but I do not. It's a rough passage before reaching the grass. Someone brings chairs for the three observers, but I elect to participate.

The exercise starts very much like t'ai chi: centred in the lower abdomen, knees slightly bent, sucking in the lower belly, arms to the side. Relaxed focus, attentive minimal movement. We bend the knees more, go down to mid-level, then rise slowly up on tiptoes. Eyes straight ahead. Mario tells us to observe first each other and then our surroundings. Some people passing on the sidewalk stop to look at this group doing 'whatever'. Grass, trees, birds. 'Feel the wind', Mario tells us. An exercise in

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relaxed awareness, in focus and mini-movement. After about ten minutes of rising and falling, slowly, Mario asks everyone to drop to the ground and roll around. A complete literal collapse. Then back on our feet. Step by step, Mario adds this and that, having people rotate counterclockwise, very slowly, as we lift our feet and pivot, always keeping the same basic stillness in the body core. The pivot is almost like noh walking; the toes lifted, the heels rotating, sliding the foot slightly over the ground, then the toes come down. Stillness for a moment. Then repeat. Then rotate and repeat.

The exercise is restful. The group attentive. I look at them. There is a French actress – 'a very great actor', Mario tells me later when he introduces us; about five members of the Workcenter who are nodes/guides for the Motions; a blonde forty-ish woman. Most participants in their twenties, a few older. Mostly white, two Africans (or Afro-French), two Asians. A typical 'workshop group'. I don't know if they all are performers. The work continues to develop the very simple action of flexing the knees, rising to tiptoes, bringing the weight back down, rotating one-quarter of a circle, and walking. At one point, Mario breaks up the group into four subgroups, each led by a Workcenter person (including Mario). He does not seem to mind my presence or the presence of the other observers. At one point, he calls me '*grand-père*'. I bristle at the slightly ironic, if affectionate, moniker. It reminds me that I am so often now the oldest person in the room.

Mario's 'philosophy', insofar as I can decipher it with my scant knowledge of French, is that whether we are in society or nature, in the city or the countryside, we need to be aware of our surroundings; not to make art by excluding what's going on with our senses, what we see hear smell touch taste, but paying attention even as we practise the Motions (and, by implication, any other exercise). In other words, to make art within the world rather than excluding it; or, paradoxically, to create a 'monastery within' through the practice of exercises like the Motions which focus us on our inward processes but do not exclude what is going on outside.

After 1.75 hours of working outdoors, we return to the basement black box. There the Workcenter people do the Motions (or that part which we have practised). Before they finish, Mario stops them and berates a young man, 'No, that is wrong!' (in English). It seems that this dreadlocked person has moved too swiftly and/or has made some other error. The man is visibly shaken by Mario's public rebuke. It surprises me, too; especially coming at the very end of the two-hour workshop. The man leaves the space's centre and walks to the side. After the briefest respite, Mario thanks everyone for the workshop. Tepid applause – not because people are dissatisfied or unappreciative (I think), but because the workshop was a group effort, a true class, and not a 'performance' of the sort that invites applause.

14:05

In the basement studio. I have permission to type. This is a workshop about singing. Immediately, a woman, Felicita Marcelli, the workshop leader, starts singing: 'Santa Maria Mario!' and the others join in – a call and response. There are about forty-five people in the room. 'Welcome everybody … We are going to sing some songs. Even if you don't know the words, just sing, try to catch what we are going to do.' Feli, as we

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call her, says this in English and then in French. At least half the people know what's going on. A man starts to sing and the others respond. '*Sumbay, les mandey-ha*' or something like that. Some people begin clapping in counterpoint. African. Everyone is moving in the space freely – not 'dance' as usually done, but movement. 'Think of the song as a river, and you are the tributaries.' (Someone else is now translating into French.) The teaching is by listening and imitating. '*Sumbay, sumbay, sumbay. Sumbay la mareh-ah*.' Repeated. A male voice leading.

The workshop continues in the same manner. Different leaders sing a simple song phrase which the others either imitate or respond to. The team knows the rules. For example, Felicita: 'It's a rough and rugged road!' All: 'Before you get together!' After a few different stanzas: 'Oh, I feel like praying all the time.' Indeed, there is a religious undergirding to it all. A kind of combo African American, African, Eastern European kind of singing–chanting. The 'Team', those who know what's going on – have done this a lot, obviously. With always the same structure: leader, answered. Everyone moving, swaying, in a big circle. The sound of the voices fills the room. 'The song hits me, even from behind.' The sense that most people in the room know the rules of the game. Newcomers can join in, but only within the terms of the call-and-response game. 'As I look for the song, the texture of the song, it changes, right? So you do that too. The way you are singing.' The leader instructs, 'Just the Open Program first, OK? Just listen.' There are about fifteen members of the Open Program here. The leader is a woman in a green tank top and white bell bottoms. A strong alto voice. 'Let the song out.' 'My Georgia!' Response: 'Uh-hum!' She divides the room in half for the call-and-response.

The sense of it is very like an evangelical meeting. True, there is no overt religious practice. But the underlying energy is the same as in a 'I found Jesus (or he found me)' meeting. And all the time, the rhythmic movement. 'The name of the Lord!' For me, at least, a bit of a totalitarian sense, an absorption into the crowd – and that crowd is controlled by the leader. Leader: 'Let it be, in the name of the Lord!' Chorus: 'Ah-huh!' A lot of Jesus under it all. 'Good Lord, I have done!' 'Good Lord! I have done what you told me to.' 'I done that too!' Over and over: 'Good Lord, I have done … I have done what you told me to.' The whole effort is toward submission. The circular movement, the swaying, the repetition, the call-and-response. Submitting to whom? The leader, the community, the transcendent.

Now a man leads: 'Moses Moses … get lost, get lost, get lost.' Everyone: 'In that Red Sea!' Over and over. The whole group moving up and down the room, forward and back. Again, being absorbed into the group. 'Moses, Moses don't get lost.' 'Smite your rod and come across.' 'In that Red Sea.' Everyone seems to really enjoy it – the absorption into the group. It makes me uncomfortable. But why? I so enjoy what happens in Ramlila and in *Amazing Grace*, the Aretha Franklin gospel concert documentary. Why does this annoy me? I can't say why beyond that this is 'invented' rather than 'traditional'. It seems as if it's religion for atheists/agnostics. Just dropping into the method of it. Not very different from when I do 'light trance' dancing/chanting in one of my own workshops. Am I envious? I don't think so – but one never knows for sure.

After a ten-minute break, the leader, Felicita, says to the sitting people, 'Stay as you are, seated. But when I ask you to sing, stand.' She begins singing, her eyes closed. 'Alee

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way-o! Alee way-o!' She begins to move into the centre of the circle of seated people. While across at the other edge of the circle, Feli's partner, also from the team, begins to sing with her in a kind of round, overlapping. More and more members of the team join in – a very complex round at one level, very simple at another: just the same musical phrase, the same words, same melody. But starting at different times, they overlap, meet, blend, and diverge complexly: like sets of ripples on an otherwise calm water surface. Literally, the intersection of sound waves.

Now Felicita gets people up – first the team, then others. They move in unison, standing in a circle within the circle. Their eyes are open and closed, the number of singers keeps increasing, as more and more people are invited into the singing circle.

This is unison singing, not call-and-response. Less religious in feeling. Feli shapes the ever-increasing number in the chorus. She directs them physically and vocally, bringing new people in. They form three subgroups in the room: a centre circle and two chorus lines, one each on two sides of the room. Then after some instructions, and strong support from another female singer, Felicita begins again. Others join in. Soon, the whole room is standing and singing, slowly swaying up and down, side to side. '*Alee way-o! Alee way-o!!*' stronger and stronger. The whole room vibrates with the sound. As in the first part of the workshop, there is an oceanic feeling, a sense being absorbed into something … larger than the self. And now, a new song, this time led by a man from the team. This one has a more African and/or Caribbean feel. Then a new song, led again by the man. Not English, French, German … any language I recognize. But it may be Spanish or Portuguese. He moves up and down the room. The chorus adds its tone. Another man softly claps. Felicita stops the singing and explains that there are two parts. She asks that the chorus pay attention to what part they are singing. 'Don't go on automatic pilot,' she cautions. The chorus sounds like: '*A-nissan hosé*' (José?).

Another member of the team – a black woman – starts another song. Same pattern – her lead, a choral response, slow movement in the space. A big circle with the singer in the centre which she shares with some others who join in the chorus; and on the outer fringe people who sing little or not at all. All of these songs the team knows. They lead, they drive what's happening. Everyone else joins in, dances/rocks in tune with the music.

It's all 'round', flowing – not at all the staccato of baroque music or the sharp *tal* of some Indian music. At that we're at the end of the two-hour session; it does feel as if the room has become a congregation. There definitely is a familiarity that was not here at the start. This kind of singing brings people into contact with each other's breathing and moving; very participatory without being confrontational. 'Sit down, sit down now, sit down and rest a little while!' Felicita: 'OK, it's about four. Now we have a talk.' Light applause. *Fin*.

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22:22

Back at the hotel remembering *The Living Room* which took place in the 'studio' (modified black box) of l'Espace Cardin. As we entered the space, the ushers gave us

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each a sheet of paper – in English or French – with texts that we were instructed to read. 'We will pick these up at the end of the performance.' The texts were about journeys, family fights, the *Odyssey* narrative. They set the storyline, such as it would be. A bank of seats at one end of the room for about half the 250 spectators opened to the large performing space set up as a 'living room': plenty of chairs, some of them lounge chairs, tables, carpets around the edges (the centre remaining a standard black performance floor), dishes, lamps and other homey accoutrements. Upstage, one large couch. Two adults and a ten-year-old boy sitting there. I wondered about bringing a child to the performance – I should've figured it out, but didn't. The eight performers – four women, four men – were dressed in 'party clothes', good-looking dresses for the women, slacks and shirts with collars for the men. Richards wore white, loose slacks, a short-sleeved white (or off-white) shirt. One man wore a hat. But the costumes didn't really suggest an epoch or even a social class beyond 'ordinary upper middle class' tinged with some sense of an avant-garde slightly vagabond group, but with money enough to clothe themselves nicely.

On some tables, snacks: grapes, strawberries and cherries; good cheese. An overall sense of a modest party in a modestly well-off home. Soft lighting, but no gels, just the white fresnels and ellipsoidals not at full. Later on, I think the light intensified, bright, but again no colour. The surrounding audience in the 'living room' was not directly lit, but the spilled and reflected light gave everyone a clear view of everyone else. The spectators at the end of the room were in a more ordinary 'theatre darkness'. For the first fifteen minutes, the performers mingled with the incoming spectators – offering us iced tea, water – maybe wine, I don't recall. I opted for *thé glacée*. Thomas Richards moved around the room greeting people. He owns a big smile, and his nearly bald head literally shines in the bright theatre lights. He is friendly, enthusiastic, personal. He didn't go into the conventional house, the seats on risers at one end of the room. An hour before *The Living Room* started, Richards spoke at the opening reception – clearly he did not take a long time to warm up. Maybe no time at all.

Two large screens diagonally across from each other were used to project subtitles in French when the performers spoke English. Sometimes they sang in other languages – ancient Greek? Some Middle Eastern language? An invented tongue? These texts were not subtitled. Some of the texts from the sheet we were given at the outset were subtitled. Other stuff was new. It was not clear to me why some text made it onto the handout and other text did not. But finally it didn't matter. The texts were not the pivot of the piece.

Once the informal greetings were over, *The Living Room* began in earnest. A woman in white with a very strong voice began to sing. Soon enough, the rest of the group joined in. The vocal work was related to what I had heard in both Biagini's and Feli's workshops earlier in the day: very strong, accomplished a cappella singing, close harmonies. But in *The Living Room* there was more variation, more solo and then choral work, not much call-and-response. The movement was vigorous – Thomas broke into a heavy sweat before the piece was over – with lots of running, some jumping, moving back and forth and around the centre space. Mostly inside the circle of furniture, but sometimes outside it also. The theme emerged of separation and reunion, of journey,

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of day dreaming (not fantasies, but dreaming during the day) and night dreaming. Hard to distinguish between the two. It never became clear why a living room. The actions, movements, language and presentation were not in harmony with a living room. The same piece could have happened in an empty space with little difference. Or maybe not. Maybe the point was that inside domestic spaces wild things happen in the realm of the imaginary. Violent things and fun things. The piece alternated between what seemed to be bloody encounters, though there was nothing literally like that, and peaceful, sometimes mildly erotic encounters. The eight performers interacted with each other either without gender references or heterosexually. There were no same-gender pairings. That surprised me. But maybe it was keeping to whatever narratives underlie the work. The Greek myths.

Thomas Richards was definitely the centre of the piece. His demeanour was gentler than most of the others, softer, given to passivity even as his presence dominated *TLR*. He ran a lot, was lifted, dropped, turned: he seemed to die once and then be resurrected; or maybe he was just sleeping. At one point, near the end, the little boy came out and said some words, danced with Thomas and with others. I watched him carefully when he was not at the centre of attention. His mouth twitched a little, or if not 'twitched', was pulled in a direction, something 'nervous'. I knew the boy was Eliot, Thomas and Cécile's son. I don't know if Cécile was one of the women in the piece. I am embarrassed to ask, but will somehow find out. From Kris Salata. After *The Living Room* was over, I went up to Eliot and spoke with him. 'You did a great job.' 'Thank you.' (Perfect English, no accent.) 'Do you like performing?' 'Yes.' Eliot was with someone, not one of his parents. I didn't want to grill him. 'Thanks again,' I said and left.

The performance ended – after about 1.5 hours – with a chocolate birthday cake, candles ablaze, that had been on a table in front of the couch (the candles were lit sometime near the end of the performance, I didn't see exactly when). The cake was brought out to Thomas, who in one puff blew out all the candles. I, and a few others, applauded. It was a nice moment, the presentation of the cake. There was no buffo ending, no 'resolution', because there was no story to resolve. But Thomas knelt at the table, his back to most of the audience, and cut the cake. Performers put pieces in napkins and made many trips into the spectators surrounding the centre space. The woman next to me was offered a piece. She took it and shared it with me and with others. A lot of people shared the cake. I'd say most of the audience in the living room space got to taste it. Other performers came by with water or iced tea. The piece had come full circle. Thomas began to chat with people. There was no curtain call, though at one point people applauded. I went up to Thomas and congratulated him. Several people asked me if I liked it. Of course, I said 'Yes.' And I did like it, though I dozed once or twice – and once Thomas was quite close when I went out, and I wonder if he noticed. When I came back to full consciousness I made an effort to appear 100 per cent alert and look full-face at Thomas. But the piece was repetitious. It intentionally didn't develop a narrative. It felt a bit old-fashioned. I am not sure why. Probably because it didn't engage any current issues in a meaningful way, or even any 'traditional' issues, such as Grotowski's *Akropolis* had. *TLR*'s texts were not, as best I could determine, classic texts. I don't know where the words came

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from. So I may be wrong about what they were. But I am not wrong in saying that *TLR* had no 'politics' as we usually understand that word in theatre: nothing Ibsen, Brecht or Grotowski. Nor did it have that powerful personal narrative, obsessive and deeply visually and choreographically developed, as with Kantor. Nor the formalism of Wilson. It was part of the Workcenter's exploration of song, of communality.

3 July

12:45

Arrive late for Antonin Chambon's workshop, 'Le corps en jeu'. As I entered, a group of fifteen were doing a very energetic version of the *plastiques*, as Cieslak once did them, but without as much variation of movement as with C. There was 'contact' without touching, moving within the energy field of another and being affected by it: dodges, close misses, dips, turns – all kinds of movements on two feet. Then from time to time Chambon interrupts and has everyone go onto their butts and do a rowing, or an up-and-down rapid squat jump. Very physically demanding. Chambon is sweating and breathing hard, but not exhausted. Many of the participants are exhausted and can't keep up the pace. Some can. Around the edge of the studio, about a dozen others who, I suppose, were in the centre at one time. Also three observers other than me.

Chambon is in his twenties, it seems. Confident. Very skinny, a slightly sunken chest, but also muscular. A helmet of brown densely curly hair. He is now explaining, in French, the exercise. I really can't follow him. Close by people are translating into English, but I've arrived too late to ask for help.

Now group two, sixteen persons. They lie flat on the floor. Chambon in centre. Group follows his movements. He rolls over, stretches, a kind of cat exercise like Cieslak's, but not as extreme. Then closer to each other, but not touching. Little confrontations. Then into jumping squats. Freeze. Back to the continuously moving on the feet. Then free movement in the space. Lithe, constantly moving, aware of each other. Then running more or less in place. Each time Chambon wants to change the movement, he makes a 'Wsshh!' sound, a whooshing low-sound whistle, not high-pitched. In the room, I can hear the heavy breathing. Everyone is out of breath, breathing through their mouths. Most are dressed in workout clothes. One woman in sports bra and briefs; another loose linen pants and sports bra. Chambon increases the pace, the 'Wssshh!' He says, in English, 'No slowing down when I change the movement. Stop making noise! Go, go, go! Don't think about it, just do it!' This as they are rowing. Then he stops, freezes, modulates into slow motion. Everyone follows suit. Like they are gliding through water. Slow acceleration; running. 'Look at each other.' Increasing speed. Very fast in the space, lots of near collisions, but no touching. I can smell the sweaty bodies. That sour smell of sweat. Now they slow down. Everyone is barefoot, very little sound of feet on the hard floor (some kind of composition board). Now all on their backs. 'C'est tout. OK.' Everyone sits in a circle. 'You saw Agne, at some point, the third exercise, she thought she would die. She was very tired. You saw how she expressed her tiredness, made her more tired. But at some point, through the contact we had, she started to confront it. What did she do?

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She laughed about it. That's the key – through a contact or through a shock you give to yourself, you can pass through walls. And it's not very complicated. Every fifteen minutes in a race, you hit a wall. When you pass through it, you can go on another fifteen minutes.' He speaks in English and translates himself into French. 'You have an enormous reserve of strength. It's not technical. If you make it technical, you are finished. The key is to not approach things technically. For acting craft, for theatre, you can't find anything by working technically. If you want to build up muscle mass, do push-ups. Our feet are dead most of the time in cities, when we wear shoes. But we need to have our toes awake.' The exercise is done barefoot. Now a long instruction in French. Something about how we discover things. How to 'make things' – '*faire les choses*' – the actions. 'About contact, at the start it was hollow, we don't know each other. But this beginning is a "seed of life" that can unfold to something unknown.' This language is Grotowski's language to some degree, as Cieslak might express it.

Chambon is young, but very confident. He speaks as a master of what he is doing/teaching.

15:55

Singing workshop led by Cécile Richards, Thomas's wife and a chief organizer of these meetings and performances. Extraordinary session into which I sank completely, experientially, ending on the floor in constructive rest, in a hypnagogic state where the singing penetrated and flooded me, knocking me semi-conscious as it awakened very deep parts of my core being. The voices of the leaders were so very very strong – deep, piercing, yet not violent in any forced way, but probing opening peeling away years if not epochs of encrustments.

The singers each started rather quietly and then slowly built up to, sank and plumbed down to, regions depths heights rarely have I been to. Sometimes, in my own workshops, something similar. Also in *Holy Ghost People* the believers speaking in tongues; *Divine Horsemen*, where the people are 'ridden' by the spirits. Balinese *sanghyang dedari* trancers; Mevlevi 'dervishes'. This was at that level. The voices, as I said, start quietly but rise swiftly to high volume and great intensity. But, paradoxically, never sound strained; always profoundly relaxed, as if the singers are being led, taken, absorbed: an active passivity, a giving in to whatever is possessing them. The singers are vessels, they carry and are carried by forces sounding them. The nautical notion of 'sounding', of going as deeply as one can, of seeking the bottom, relating where a safe passage is possible. At the end of most songs – and they were each joined by the whole chorus consisting of both experienced singers from the team and those who are joining only for these days – the singer laughed. Long and hard, continuously, the kind of laughter that is coexistent with sobbing, the same call on the belly reflexes, the muscles in the *chi*, the *nablus*: the centre of the belly-brain, the gut feelings that are directly wired to early parts of the brain. This laughter sounds like sobbing then sometimes became sobs and then back to laughter. No difference, or a convergence. Then silence. And after a bit of silence another singer. All the voices were extraordinary, much stronger and profound, higher and lower, than in the public performances.

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As I stretched out on the floor for the last several songs, I went off and yet remained there; I existed in two worlds at the same time. At least two.

18:02

Mario is finishing up his preparatory workshop for Sunday's Open Choir. In the same space as *The Living Room*. I started by watching, then took off my shoes and got onto the floor and participated for about an hour, and now I am back in the bleachers watching.

The workshop was singing and dancing, led by the team members with Mario explaining. Some people had sheets with the words of the songs printed out. But that really isn't necessary. The lead singers sing, the rest respond with simple words and melodies. But this format does not explain the power and pleasure of this work. It's a different basis for performing. It is essentially participatory and inclusive; it is community-making and sustaining. Maybe only temporarily, maybe in the long run not enough to counter the digitization and automation of experience. But it is a countermove. In its own way like 'dancing in public squares' in China; or any number of community face-to-face activities.

The songs are basically African Brazilian, African American, and other 'from-the-global-South' music. Connected to the Workcenter's origins: Grotowski's turn from Europe to Haiti and via Haiti, Africa; his selection of Thomas Richards as his 'heir'. Richards himself a mix of Euro and Caribbean. And these are of course themselves hybrids. So with Mario we have an Italian interpretation of an American African and Caribbean musical tradition.

For each song, the leader sings the verse, the rest respond. At the same time we move, dance, interact. I had many mini-contacts with women mostly, men sometimes; eye contact; dancing together; sometimes touching. I sized up my partners and thought sexual possibilities, all the while knowing that these thoughts – they were not even fantasies – were preposterous. Leftovers from a Richard long gone in fact. But it was fun to play in the fields of an erotic past (which itself was not as redolent as I want to recall it being). As I danced and sang – with the 'famous French actress' (she's working with Jérôme Bel now), members of the team, and just others participating, I felt relaxed and full of energy at the same time. I let go. People reacted positively to me, coming up as we collectively moved through the space and mixed, and offered themselves as partners. I stuck with one and then moved on to a group, then another individual. I didn't want to seem to be flirting – though in a way social dancing is all about flirting – so I changed partners often and made a point to spend time in groups. The music was strong, the rhythms capturing.

Mario pointed out the importance of directionality, that channels had to remain open in the space – diagonals especially and one central horizontal column. This instruction was sometimes followed and sometimes ignored. Now as we are at 18:15, fifteen minutes after the announced ending, people are drifting out. The original seventy-five plus is down now to about sixty. The whole experience this afternoon, and *TLR* last night, convinces me that the Workshop is basically a music group; music and movement, with some narration laid on top or occurring simultaneously. The basic impulse is music–dance; music–movement. The dancing is 'easy' and

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'pedestrian'. *TLR* is tightly scored and the movement is complex: it is a professional production. But its underlying logic is the same as this Open Choir. Music and rhythm drive everything else. What Mario has done is take Grotowski's move into seeking the 'vertical connection', 'art as vehicle' and democratized it, making it available to ordinary people even while including extraordinarily talented and well-trained leaders.

Very ennobling, actually. Much more effective from the inside than as something to watch. As a normative performance – as in *The Living Room* (and I suppose the other pieces I am still to see) the works are not as rich as Grotowski's 'theatre of productions'. But here, and in Cécile's workshop earlier this afternoon, the true power of this work is clear. It is community work, democratizing work, inclusive work. What an irony! Because Grotowski's work – from the beginnings in Opole and then Wrocław through his paratheatre and Objective Drama, and on to the last years in Pontedera – is a paradigm of hermetic elite 'private' work. Work that sometimes was open to 'witnesses' who were not so much entertained (as in normal theatre) as stunned to admiring silence. But they were excluded from the process. Here Mario – and others in the Workcenter also – are opening the process, sharing it, making it available to everyone who wants it. The final song this afternoon had the choral response of, 'Oh, I know I've been changed'. Indeed.

4 July

00:33

Pretty tired, so this will be very brief. Two drama performances this evening. *Dark Is My Mother*, featuring four women from Mario's Open Program team: Agnieszka Kazimierska, Pauline Laulhe, Felicita Marcelli and Graziele Sena. They sing splendidly, with force, clarity and exquisite harmonies when performing ensemble and clear individual superior abilities when performing solo. They also move with confidence in well-trained bodies, dancers' bodies. The problem is that the piece has no clear dramaturgy. The text is presentational and proclamational, not narrative or drama. It 'explores' what it means to be 'woman', from fierce to nurturing, murderous to gentle. It's all very predictable in meaning. What's worse: there is no development, no thematic or narrative progression. There is a rug, a table and an opening that suggests a birthday party is beginning (offstage noises and laughter, the tune of 'Happy Birthday to You'). But this is not followed through in any compelling way. So the piece features superb performers doing cliché text and nearly non-existent narrative. There is a nod to the birthday party at the end. But no sense of it during the performance; no reason for it to be there at all.

Music and then movement are what Mario's group is best at. The Open Choir shows this ability deployed to great advantage. *Dark Is My Mother* squanders these gifts.

Gravedad is a gem of a solo piece, in Spanish, about the fallout from the Chilean dictatorship – the disappearances, exiles, displacements. A single performer – Alonso Abarzúa – plays a whole family, male side: father, son, uncle, brother. He shows both comically and sadly how the political situation displaced them to Sweden, an almost

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anti-Chile socially and environmentally, and how their memories, fantasies, hopes, desperation work out over the years. In Spanish with French subtitles, I didn't get the nuances. I have the text in English but haven't read it yet. What was excellent was the precise style of acting – storytelling and impersonating alternating; the good use of a simple set – a table, a chair, a small wood box with various things in it, a close triptych which when opened displays elements of the narrative. The costume contains pockets with snow, rose petals and flour. The whole set is overturned and scattered – just like the Chilean family – and is then gathered back together in one spot, carefully organized, but put together in all the wrong ways – like packed house furnishings awaiting the mover. Another reference to the exile underlying this piece. It is well directed by Thomas Richards, clearly focused and athletically yet economically performed by Abarzúa. A big contrast to *Dark Is My Mother*.

Exhausted. Tomorrow is another day.

10:11

'*Le pas et l'attention*' workshop led by Graziele Sena, who instructs people to do the work 'for' a specific person, in the room or not. But don't reveal who that person is. Maybe later in the workshop, 'You will come close to this person, but don't tell the person, still perform for the person.' About thirty people. As before, about 75 per cent females. As in previous workshops, a crowd, a lot of people for a square room about $25' \times 25'$. Many of the people in the workshop are familiar to me from previous days.

Graziele moves and turns and people follow her. When she stops, she wants everyone to stop. Follow-the-leader + Simon Says. A movement game performed in silence. Brief movement sequences, back and forth, sometimes hips swinging, sometimes straight up, sometimes wiggling down. Always the butt pushed out behind.

'We don't have to move in a crowd in the same direction. Use all the directions, all the space.' This makes the movements much more interesting to watch. They are the same in terms of individual moves and rhythms, but different in terms of direction, of placement in space. Very different how people are able to handle their own bodies. Some can move in a circular rotation easily, others not. A big difference between fluid and locked hips. She asks people to coordinate the hands and the hips, back and forth. Then she adds the head. The feet have been involved always. So now whole bodies are in rhythm. Step by step, Graziele has taught people a specific Afro-Caribbean or Afro-Brazilian movement.

Graziele asks people to keep their breaths silent, if possible. But many are exerting themselves, therefore breathing heavily. Lots of sweaty faces and two sweaty male torsos. Graziele keeps changing/adding movements – but all are centred on the pelvis: rotations, thrusts, sways. She marks the rhythms by little mouth clicks and tsks. Reminds me of Indian drummers and dancers keeping *tal* by talking it.

As these workshops continue, it's obvious that there are too many people for there to be any individual work. That's a very big difference from the way Grotowski worked. He gathered very small groups during his theatre-of-productions phase. He worked with Cieslak or some other associate. And he concentrated on one-on-one work. There were some group exercises, but these soon devolved and focused on individuals. The

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underlying support for the theory of the 'secure partner' is that each person/performer is a distinct unique individual in relation to another such.

Even as I write the above, Graziele singled out about ten people. They move with her. The others watch. Then G expands this group person by person until the whole room is moving. After five+ minutes, a stop. Pause. A new kind of movement, more mincing and delicate, upper body folded forward. G holds up side corners of her skirt; men put their hands on their hips. Again, Graziele starts with a few people and then adds others, one by one.

At a side door, Biagini appears, in his bright orange cotton sweater. He observes, patiently and approvingly. His workshop is scheduled to start fifteen minutes from now in this space.

Now Graziele has everyone slow it down, slo-mo, ghostly. A peculiar effect.

Biagini enters the room, sits on a bench and watches. After about two minutes, he gets up and leaves through the same door he entered.

Graziele asks people to bend at the hips, hands on hips, shift weight to the left foot, then take a single step with weight on the left foot, step to the right. Then slowly the whole group advances through the room, step by step, heel down, roll foot to the toes, repeat with other foot. Graziele clicks the rhythm, horse hoofs sound. G shifts attention to the upper body. An Afro-Brazilian dance class, introductory, basic.

As the workshop comes to a close, Graziele leads everyone in slow silent focused steps; a circle forms around her. She accelerates slightly, then slows, almost stops. Then, stop. As Graziele passes close to me, I notice her body shining in sweat.

11:15

Biagini workshop. Songs. In Arabic, '… *il rachmon* …' something 'mercy'. Close to Hebrew. Starts with a few and then everyone. Same as earlier workshops. This ocean of sound into which all sink/swim/drift. Again and again, slow motions too. B kneels at the edge of the circle. Other members of his team are leading. Room is very crowded, sixty plus. The noise fills the space.

Silence.

A new word. 'Allah'. Three beats quietly clapped, right hand on left wrist. 'Allah.' Now more words. Sufi? Their own invention? The words come but always in steady rhythm 'Allah.' Very slow anti-clockwise circulation.

Theatre, song, dance, worship?

B kneeling, points his finger. Lead singer kneels on knee. Then stands, head bent, concentrating on his singing. 'Allah' sounds deeply, male though women are also chanting.

Some people sit. Chanting fades to a very few. B gestures with his right thumb and forefinger.

A new chant, words. I don't know the language. Maybe still Arabic, maybe not. The chanter is the very polite bald man who translated for me.

B stands, gestures for everyone to make room. He then crosses the room and kneels again. Chanter moves among the group. As he sings, he gestures and smiles. Behind him a steady hum. B stands and rotates once. Then a new song that everyone sings,

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that everyone seems to know. Female voices over the top of the group. Maybe Portuguese – I don't know – but a different language than before. Two main singers, bald man and the man from Brazil with a ponytail. They are in the centre, arms raised and slowly dancing with each other. B joins them, gesturing for another to enter the inner arms-raised circle. One at a time, B adds people. Reminds me of Kantor directing his performers. The hands-raised people begin to whirl very slowly counterclockwise. Group chanting keeps up its steady insistent base. A woman in a bright red dress enters at the very centre inside the circle formed by the four hands-raised men. Most people in the room are standing, some sitting. A few, like me, out of it, observing. Of course, it's not possible to be out of it. One is surrounded by the sound even if the visual dancing is within and not surrounding me. I associate the feeling I had in Kurumugl, Papua New Guinea, all those years ago, 1972, the pig-kill dancing and singing. This is a little more familiar. Islamic. But still ritual, ceremonial.

Now total silence. Then, B: 'Bonjour, à tous' (Hello, everyone). He talks quietly about the circle, the passing of sounds and energy. Across the room, Kris Salata, Antonio Attisani, other 'insiders–outsiders'. Followers. Within, listening really closely to B, adepts. And me, as always resisting being whirled into a world that I do not control, or at least can't easily keep my critical distance from. As I listen to B, and hear the murmurs of the translators whispering the English to his French to others not me, and as I see the adepts in the circle, nodding their heads, listening so intently, to whatever he's saying, I know that to them it is 'truth', if only for the moment. A kind of willing suspension of disbelief writ large, as a social rather than aesthetic fact. B dissects the sound of 'A-llah', the premier 'A', the hardly heard 'l' and the final emphasized 'lah'. B instructs, 'Stop the translations please'. Only his words now, though one woman keeps translating. Why? Is she deaf? I wonder if B will ask me to stop typing. Not yet.

B has everyone do the two syllables, but in fact there are the initial 'A' then a long 'll' then 'ah'. After having the room repeat 'A-llah' a few times, he has everyone slap the hard floor; and then touch it softly, *doucement*. He talks of the different kind of sound. Then he has everyone do just 'Ah'. He asks that we do it *doucement*, softly, gently (literally, 'sweetly'). Now everyone doing 'Ah' *doucement*. B asks us to listen to the 'round' 'Ah', not 'flat'. It is a sound that comes from the throat, not mouth. Arabic. Hebrew. B makes fun of making the flat sound or a just loud sound. The room practises. Then we move on to 'llah'.

In this exercise in technical pronunciation, the religious aspect is to some degree nullified. But not ultimately. Because the pronunciation is the gateway to the experience: not understanding but doing; and in the doing, a ritual efficacy.

Now the full singing resumes. A group underlying chorus of some words I can't get, and over that, the chanter's very piercing voice, as he raises his arms over his head. Everyone gets up, moving as they chant. Now the chanting fades. B speaks, quietly. The chanter gives a few more phrases for the chorus to sing. Arabic, I think: '*Fen-wah beelaffwee*'. Then the chanter starts, 'Ayyyee.' B: '*pas fort*', not strong/hard, but '*doucement*'. All join in. Different words from the chanter. B instructs the chorus to lend support. Again, mostly male voices are heard though the room is predominantly

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women. Islam is such a patriarchal system, even in its fundamental sounds. A patriarchy a lot more extensive than the Taliban.

B moves through the room, listening, guiding, conducting. The chanting and undersound fill the room. The timbre is deep. I feel the floor vibrating into my stockinged feet.

Then, concluding, an extensive 'Hallelujah!'

Almost immediately, after B's 'Merci,' dismissing us, the crowd chats, the murmurs of ordinary conversation.

What a peculiar hour, ultimately.

12:24

Now '*La voix du rhythm: Chants afro-hispaniques*', led by Jorge Romero Mora. Beautiful call-and-response singing and easy moving. More of the same of what's come before: the fundamental shared work of the Workcenter (as it is being shared here this week). In a way, a week-long religious music camp. Because the songs are almost all ritual–religious. Only occasional pop music or the kind of fusion that African American musicians did with gospel. There the religious music joined the slave work songs, the blues and even white southern mountain music to form different kinds of pop music from rock and roll to rap and hip hop, and a lot more too. Here the strong emphasis is on the 'roots' sounds, the 'original' ritual–religious music. Well, not 'music', but singing. There are no instruments here: no drums/percussion, cymbals, brass, wind or strings. The voice solely.

This is a continuation/variation of Grot's 'poor theatre'.

Brilliant in its own (limited) way. But also a barrier to going further into the general society. This is a very special world. Earlier, Antonio and Kris and I were talking. Antonio asked me why I thought Grotowski's work – the Workcenter's work – has not developed a wider following, a more extensive legacy. I replied there are three reasons:

1 Grotowski left theatre; he did so publicly and definitively. He said he was moving to paratheatre, and, later, to seeking the 'vertical connection', using 'art as vehicle' to take him, and others, to realms of spiritual experience, both back to what Grotowski thought were the roots/sources of performances and upward to what he felt were more pure experiences. Ultimately, because he rejected theatre, the theatre world rejected – or at least ignored – him.
2 Following on 1, Grotowski left no extensive network of followers. He designated Thomas Richards as his 'artistic heir', shutting out or at least unprivileging others. People have tried to challenge this, but not very successfully. Theatre Zar in Poland, maybe Gardzienice; in the US, Andre Gregory who no longer works in theatre; indirectly, Double Edge Theatre (via Staniewski/Gardzienice). But no followers in the mainstream theatre, the experimental theatre, film: no Group Theatre, Actors Studio, other Stanislavsky-like followers. Grot's influence is there basically in the development of performance art, which is more a convergence than a descendance. That is, performance art is also 'para-theatrical' and often 'ritual',

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but it derives from visual arts, happenings and environmental theatre. Perhaps in RS's work there is a line from Grotowski to Performance Group to Wooster Group and onward. But this is one line only, not the extremely vigorous and diverse line founded by Stanislavsky.

3 Following on 1 and 2, the Workcenter has focused on the music–ritual line, as can be seen so clearly in this retrospective. As accomplished as some of this work is, it does not radiate out into popular culture. It takes from a particular strain of religious performative ritual: the Afro-Caribbean/Afro-Brazilian. It does not draw on other ritual traditions, for example the European (as Grotowski drew on during his theatre-of-productions phase) or the Asian (as Barba draws on). So this work is focused on a single ritual line.

Meanwhile, the performance world has deeply globalized. Asian traditions are very important. The pop African American line is very important. The relation to the visual arts, film and photography is very important. None of this matters much to the Workcenter.

So instead of the Grotowski line radiating outward into multiple lines, it has turned inward and focused on one line. Its adepts are, of course, devoted, but they are limited. This is not 'bad', but it does explain why Grotowski has not become a Stanislavsky. As for the other great influencer in modern Western theatre, Brecht, the development of his influence is another story, linked to Marxist and post-Marxist political theory, dramaturgy and an enduring body of plays – perhaps, globally, the most influential after Shakespeare and the Greek tragedies.

5 July

08:00

Too busy and then exhausted at the end of yesterday to describe much of what happened. With regard to the above paragraphs about why Grotowski is not better known with more influence, I read these to Kris and Antonio. Kris especially disagreed with me. He pointed out that Grotowski was very interested in early Christianity, the Copts, whose texts were often in Hebrew (I need to check this); and that Asian influences are clear in Grotowski (I knew this). He says this multiplicity is still present in the Workcenter, even if it is not so overt any more. When I told him that I thought the man singing in B's workshop yesterday morning was singing in Arabic, Kris pointed out that he thought it was Coptic; that the final 'Hallelujah!' was definitely Christian. I responded that most of the song was based on the word 'Allah', which he said early Christians used for 'God'. Hard to believe, I think, because the Copts were long before the Prophet Mohammed. I don't know when the word 'Allah' came into being.

I took no notes during Cécile Richards' second workshop on 'Le chant et la voix vivant'. As before, the singing was extraordinarily powerful, moving and 'total'. After a while, as on Wednesday, I got down from my chair and lay in constructive rest on the floor just letting the music envelop me. I dozed. When I returned to

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consciousness, the workshop was over. I was not asleep during, but in, a hypnagogic state.

…

10:16

I enter the studio fifteen minutes late. The room is full. I move along the walls till I find a chair next to Antonio, who slightly adjusts a chair for me. Mario arrives out of the blue and greets me with a kiss on my cheek. Then he vanishes. How did he know I had just arrived?

'*Les plastiques*' taught by Agnieszka Kazimierska and Pauline Laulhe. At present one is talking, the other showing. Not sure who is who, I think Agnieszka is talking. About thirty people here. Variations of the association exercises, aka *plastiques*. All very familiar to me from the days with Grot/Cieslak 1967 followed by many years with the Performance Group. Only Cieslak's version was much more intense and, finally, a flow among many movements with nary a pause. It's been years since I've practised these or taught them.

Divides the room in half. She instructs, 'After a few minutes, each of the people sitting begin to follow one person in the middle, but in such a way that no one will know who you are following'. Before this she explained: 'We work with seven elements: head, shoulder, chest, hip, knees, hands, feet. Not so much as isolated movements but by exploring the relationships.' She's speaking French. Of course, for most people this is the first time they've done these. They are 'bad' at them. An almost impossible task teaching the *plastiques* to such a large group. Agni uses the technique of the 'secure partner', to personalize the movements. I am familiar with many of the students in the room. I look for and find the 'famous' French actress – I am impressed that she attends everything, gives over totally to the process.

'In these movements we "send a question" with the movement of the body' – she demonstrates with a hip rotation and thrust. Then she shows more. 'When you send a question, and also you listen for a response. Your knees, your hips – all that we mentioned.' She turns to the onlookers. 'People who are observing, please do it very specifically, follow the element and the person but make out of it your own game.' Not exactly sure what this means. But Agnie is trying to keep everyone in this large crowd involved. Many people in the centre relate well to each other, exchange movements, build relationships. Groups change. Same instructions. Those sitting relate each to one in the centre. In the centre now one middle-aged man with a cane in his left hand. He rotates his shoulders. Then switches the hand holding the cane. He is very intently doing the exercise.

I am trying to pay close active attention. But I know I am tired. I am sweating slightly though the room is not over-warm. My body tells me, 'Stay at home, rest, sleep.' But I need to persevere. Also I am thirsty.

'Make your body talk. Which element of your body wants to talk? What's it saying? To whom? For the people sitting, what is happening? Do not sit passively. Sit gently, but active. Take part in the dialogue.'

Agnie selects seven people, including 'famous actress'.

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'We start from this memory of your "partner". And then start a dialogue with not an imaginary partner but someone in the room.' She adds two more. Agnie does the *plastiques* too, lovely. Her partner too. The eleven in the centre are fully engaged. Some on the side make mini-movements, others still, watching but not (overtly) doing. 'Choose a partner.' Groups change. And so on.

11:20

After an intro on the stairs to the big upstairs studio theatre (where all the formal performances have taken place), Thomas brings a huge crowd upstairs, most are now watching, sixteen people onstage singing. Richards' Pontedera team? Both teams? Richards explained before that each day both teams (his, Mario's) sing together for an hour or two. The music, he said, is African and/or Afro-Caribbean. I am using Garage Band to record it now.

The singers understand the songs very well, and they are on the stage singing splendidly.

But Richards emphasized that this is 'not a performance'. But what is it? Richards' insistence also betrays an anti-performance bias. To call it a 'performance' somehow degrades what is happening. I know what he means, though. It is not made for consumption, for a paying or even non-paying audience. It is, like *Action*, something the performers 'do'.

After each song, the performers laugh, and Thomas among them, making faces, 'fooling around'. A peculiar break from the singing which sounds 'serious', 'ritual', 'traditional'. The laughter is 'impertinent', 'mocking', interruptive'. In Cécile's workshop, too, the powerful singing ended with laughter – laughter that is very much like sobbing.

I had a Perrier and am no longer thirsty. The music is energizing me.

Thomas starts another song. The language is not known to me. But definitely there are words – and the whole group knows them. There is also movement. Now very close to me: Richards' call: '*A-day-ba*.' Group response: '*A-kungo a-go*.' Plus more and different. And then, with no apparent stopping point, the singing stops, and there is this improvised almost silent joking and laughing. Nonsense talk. Cécile is in this group, and now she starts the next song. Her voice is so clear and rich, penetrating but not screeching.

As they sing, call and respond, they move through the space with modified *plastique* movements, but much more gently – and always with one or two hands raised.

Now I see that this is an Alpha Group – the strong performers from throughout the week are on the studio stage singing. The stage is set with a table and two benches on a diagonal upstage right, a bench facing downstage left (left and right from the point of view of facing the audience). This time as the singing stops, more soft sobbing than laughing, though there's some of that too. Now Thomas interacts with (his wife) Cécile and the sobs turn to laughs.

Lots of interactions and close-in movements, but little or no touching. As the singing goes on, Richards participates but also guides, moving people, sometimes speaking to them. 'Now you're moving off your equilibrium, stabilize. No! You're moving off. Keep that! Touch it, touch it. Ah, here we go, here we go.' Richards

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moves an actor, performs with him, talks to him. They form a kind of Balinese Aztec standing group god. 'Go, go. OK.' Richards lies down. Then he says, 'Just go, just go.' One after another he straddles a row of actors. Then they all come to a stasis. Not exactly sure what is going on, but Richards is using the songs, the pauses, the group's energy, the songs, his own confident intuition to form the group – but on the basis of interacting with one or two performers at a time.

Now a tall blond man starts singing. Richards joins in; they sing in close harmony. They walk slowly upstage centre; the rest of the group more or less moves in harmony. Slowly, they all gather upstage. Richards gives instructions (in English, his mother tongue). 'Mighty dales! Mighty da-a-a-les! Ah, *ku-pah*!' Then waves of laughter from the tall blond man. What causes this laughter? I want to ask because I want to understand; but at another level, I don't. Richards hovers over the blond. One hand raised, the other parallel over his body as if guiding energy in and around. Instructs people to pass by the one on the ground, 'Pass, pass, stay. Good.' Richards gestures to all, sits on the bench. Breathes. He seems in trance. Soft laughter. He is both conscious and next to consciousness. A woman starts to sing, next to the head of the blond man still lying on the floor. All this very close to me, upstage right corner. Most people in the room cannot see what's happening.

The solo flows into group singing, then back to solo. The blond man rises, and all join the song. They all know every word. Powerfully free and scored at the same time. A Grotowski paradox. Now the whole group in unison as they move slowly clockwise around the stage – at the moment downstage centre. Silence. 'Good, don't move. Get down.' He touches her fist-to-fist. He is clearly the leader, the master, but he is also the creature of the music, 'in' the music, 'taken' by it. In some ways like holiness churches/glossolalia and being taken by the Holy Spirit. More like that than like the mostly flowing Balinese trance. This stuff is alternately flowing liquid music and sharply defined angular movements. But also flowing movements. Richards smiles often. He is happy. But is it he that is happy? Not clear. He does not seem to be himself in the sense of the self that I talk to when he is 'normal'. In quotes because this trance behaviour is also normal, when in its time–place.

The system: one person sings, after a time a few join; then all, but the lead singer's voice remains audible. Richards moves among the group interacting and guiding sometimes; sometimes he simply participates. After two to five minutes of singing, an end, often abrupt. Laughter. Sometimes Richards works with a particular individual, telling her/him what to do; criticizing; sometimes touching, but only a hand or finger. Most of the guidance is at a distance, a close-in distance, but a distance nonetheless.

I don't know if during a single session each person gets to initiate. I would think that over several days each does. Each is a strong performer from what I have heard/seen these days. A very comprehensive double team: internal Richards; community Biagini.

Richards is helping a man, who laughs–sobs. 'Talk, talk, talk.' Richards guides by moulding the energy around him with his hands, but not touching him. As if the air were a substance. The rest of the group gathers around and empathetically guides too. They chatter, but don't talk. Richards is in deep empathy, forming the energy space close by the man, who is lying out with his head on Richards' kneeling thighs. Now

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Cécile begins singing. The man smiles, and is at peace, happy. He begins to join in the singing. Then everyone sings. Another woman takes the lead. The group is in a circle around the man, who rises to sitting. Richards, still kneeling, turns away from him, but puts a reassuring hand on the man's shoulder. Then the man rises to standing. The singing woman and Richards are kneeling. Then Richards rises. Then the singer rises. The whole group sings and advances downstage left. Then the lead singer kneels, offers a prayer pose, then rises, turns. The group moves in a diagonal to centre stage. Then they face forward toward the large audience in the bleachers. Now all sit or kneel. Silence. Richards almost touches the woman singer. She slowly collapses into Cécile. Cécile laughs. Then others laugh. Richards, on his knees, has his hands over them. Then the woman rises and gestures over the group, then collapses again, laughing, breathing, down on the ground next to Richards, who catches the laughter. Then more people lying down, some on their backs, one on her stomach. A few sit. A few others stand. Silence again. Then a new song, this one initiated by Richards.

'Bali-jo, parlez who. Ho ho ho, Bali-jo, ally … Bali-jo …' Not a good transcript, but an approximation.

Richards sings alone for quite some time before they all join. But they do. It's 12:26 – the group's been at this for about an hour and fifteen minutes. Silence again. Looks like a curtain call moment, but it can't be.

Richards steps backwards, falls back, is assisted to the ground. Rises on one elbow. Then turns three-fourths to the side. Then a woman in a red dress to the right side of Richards begins a song. '*Oh ba-ya-oh me-yeh*!' She sings solo for a while before others join. The whole group moves on a diagonal toward the table upstage left. They gather around it. Then the woman heads back to centre stage. Alternates between her singing and the whole group. But she is more dominant than some of the others. Also she moves confidently, almost marching. Her voice is high-pitched, not beautiful but commanding. Suddenly she stops and drops and then is raised up. Richards takes her foot. She moves around the space in this high-step marching way, then drops, spins on her butt, kneels forward; Richards comes over to her, 'Switch, switch!' Then he's up again, and struts more, short sharp breaths; she moves very far forward. Yoga tree pose. Richards behind her, Cécile behind him, the rest of the group around. The woman is very far downstage centre, almost in the laps of the first row of spectators. She lies down on her back, raises a foot. Then someone else starts singing. Richards tends to the woman lying down. She gets up to sitting. Richards' attention, and everyone else's too, shifts to the new singer.

Wondrous how the focus shifts. No apparent system to it, but person by person each takes the focus. I think Grotowski once told me that in making a performance each performer must have at least one moment of taking the space, having the focus. The actors will work much harder in the ensemble if they know that at least once they will be the centre of attention, their star turn. So here. But it does not seem that there is an order of how the focus shifts. A person just takes over. No one goes twice. Except Richards. He is the focus not only because he sings but because he guides whoever is the lead singer of the moment.

Just now, Richards guided a woman right at my foot, slightly to my right. He spoke to her, led her, steadied her. She was breathing deeply. Both were sweating profusely.

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Richards kept talking to her, reassuring her, steadying her, bringing her through and out. Some of her exhalations and exclamations, the intensity of her posture, her stretching and contracting, her total commitment to the moment – and Richards' commitment to her – I've seen nothing like it since Cieslak in *The Constant Prince*. And now they've all moved across the room to downstage right.

What commitment to the moment, to various moments, by the whole group, by individuals, and especially by Richards. And yet, at the end of it, I believe they are energized, not depleted. As if the ether itself, the 'there' of what is 'here', is an energy source, a repository of energy. And that Richards has learned how to tap it, how to open himself and the performers to it. His gift to them from Grotowski.

And now, at 12:49, he walks to the side. Replaces the downstage right bench, sits on it, puts on his shoes in silence. The rest of the group has gone. Kris says he thinks the benches and tables were brought from Pontedera. As I look up, Richards is gone. A few people remain in the bleachers and in the chairs onstage. I pack up. Lunch.

14:55

Sava Lolov, French professional actor, presents his montage of characters – the outcome of his direct work with Richards. He was already a trained actor. For me, the performing was … well done, but not unique or super-accomplished. Neither Spalding Gray nor Laurence Olivier. So what? Not every actor has that potential. Now Richards tries to explain his method: to fit the resources of the Workcenter to the specific actor.

Next an actress at the beginning of her career, Mélane le Gall. Tall, intentionally awkward-appearing. In an off-orange three-quarter-length dress over black rolled-up soft slacks. Glasses, a headband keeping her hair out of her eyes. She presents herself comically at first. Big open-eyes stare through her round glasses. Then she sings a song. Again, OK; nothing super-special. She is clearly 'acting', and the sympathetic audience laughs at her because she is doing comedy.

So, if the songs in the previous session were not meant for an audience, and if we witnessed Richards actually working with the performers, then here the performance is designed for a public; the actor faces front mostly, the spectators react, and the show is much more ordinary. If the proof is in the pudding, this method of training is neither better nor worse than Stanislavsky-based training, or other kinds for the 'modern theatre'. The question for me: why would the Workcenter participate in this kind of theatre anyway? What's in it for the Workcenter? The 'songs of tradition' etc. is the Workcenter's specific province. Why not stay there? Or if moving into more conventional theatre, why not stage some classics? From Ibsen to Pirandello, Shakespeare to Pinter, etc. Or a monologue performance, either *à la* Gray or some other kind of one-person performance.

As the woman works, Richards pays close attention to her and guides her with his hands. She is not looking at him. He is identifying with her but not really directing her acting as he directed the singing this morning.

The woman sings, crawls across the floor. Much closer to the songs-of-tradition work. Stronger than the comic stuff. But, still, just 'acting'. Not what I saw this morning or at earlier workshop sessions here.

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She finishes, applause, she and Richards embrace. A warm moment.

Next, Richards introduces an already well-known Korean actress, Hyun Ju-baek, who is part of the Workcenter's Focused Research Team in Art as Vehicle. She is continuing to develop a piece which is now an étude of thirty to thirty-five minutes.

A bench is brought out, placed upstage centre. An Asian woman sits on it. She speaks Korean. Subtitles in French on the wall upstage centre. A story of a young woman. She must cross a river. Relation to her family, mother especially. A strong well-controlled voice, assured movement. Only thing, she squeezes her eyes closed too often. And she speaks loudly, rarely changing her volume. She moves a bit too much.

As she sings, Richards rises from his seat, takes a few steps onto the stage and gestures, elongating, driving the rhythm. But it doesn't seem that the performer sees him, her eyes are closed as she sings. She is in her own world. After a little while, Richards goes back to his front-row seat. A little later, he advances again, says a few words because she is not looking at him. He retreats, but not all the way. He sits on the floor where there are a few people. He remains deeply engaged with the performer. Gestures toward her, moves his body in harmony with hers. He is extremely empathic when he is working. It's a big gift.

I'd like to see a scene or two of dialogue, of actors relating to each other. Something 'ordinary'; Chekhov maybe.

As she sings, Richards advances five steps into her space, gesturing to her. If she sees him, she doesn't register it. He sits down a few feet on the stage. She is on the bench. As noted, her eyes are closed a lot of the time. Why? Is this an internal performance, a performance for herself? Then why is she so loud? Her performance is reaching some kind of climax. The text indicates that she and her dear dog are going to the end of the world; fire; some kind of catastrophe. A song. She takes the chopstick out of her hair, the hair falls free. Holding the stick she sings, louder and more 'tragically'. Richards leans in with her. He stands up now and faces her, speaks to her in Korean, and leads her, punches the air in front of her, leading her, even though her eyes are closed. She must know he is there. Her song ends. Last words on the screen, 'the savagery of the storm' (in French).

Applause. Richards embraces her, leads her to the front of the stage. They hold hands. She takes a bow.

6 July

01:36

Back home. Very tired. So this will be brief. There was a panel with Richards, Biagini, Lolov, Valerie Dréville (the famous actress I wrote about earlier) and Jean-François Dusigne (formerly with Théâtre du Soleil, now a professor at Paris 8 University). Thorough discussion of the Workcenter's ethics and methods. Biagini at one point discussing how his 'open' work started. Too tired now to summarize. Maybe later.

Then two performances: Cécile's excellent one-woman show, *L'heure fugitive*, and Mario's *The Hidden Sayings*. Neither of these pieces are new; both are powerfully performed. Cécile is an actress with control, presence and an economical way of

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performing. Again I am too tired to discuss it now. Mario's piece – a kind of Open Choir work – is based on Coptic Christian Jesus texts. It is highly gendered; whites perform black rhythms and songs (and there are at least two African-sourced people in the cast). The work ends with the performers inviting the audience to join them in singing and dancing, and we do. It is a joyous piece, for all its retro gender and possibly racial politics. I am quite sure Mario knows the objections and doesn't care.

It is late night/early morning now. I will sleep.

11:16

In the workshop studio set up with a rectangle of attached-to-each-other chairs, very rigid ranks and files, for a panel on Grotowski publications. I drift in and out of this panel of Carla P, Mario and Thomas.

My mind is back with Mario's *The Hidden Sayings* from last night. It was at one and the same time: fun–entertaining, participatory, moving, philosophical, activist, gender-fixed but without privileging the male, racially diverse but with an emphasis on African American music and rhythms performed by eight persons, only two of whom were visibly 'black'. The performance challenged my own politically correct – and personally subscribed to – beliefs and practices (where I am conscious of these and can control them).

The Hidden Sayings clearly separated the genders by means of costumes and most groupings in the choreography. Mostly there were four men and four women, all in white, with the women in blouses and skirts, the men in shirts and pants. I think all were barefoot. As they danced, they mostly stayed with their own gender. Relatively little female–male dancing; and when they danced as separate groups, mostly four persons/four persons; not overtly 'gay' or 'lesbian'. The gender preference, where it was expressed at all, was normatively hetero. But the piece was not about desire, at least not about sexual desire. It was about hope for liberation (not exactly sure from what, but surely from the current social situation). The mode was a modified version of a black American Christian church. The text, I believe, was drawn from Coptic early Christian texts. Lots about Jesus' love for humankind, his acceptance of crucifixion (wearing the crown of thorns, carrying his own cross), his call for people to effect their own salvation by 'imitating' in the deep sense Jesus. It was an evangelist service of a kind, but without the sermon, the music and dance carrying the message both in movement and in words.

The space was organized into a four-sided diamond with three rows of chairs surrounding the performers in the centre. The spill-over audience sat in the bleachers at one end of the studio theatre. About eighty people in the diamond with the performers, another sixty or so in the bleachers. Clearly, the piece was designed for the diamond.

At the end, after about seventy minutes of singing–dancing–preaching, the performers invited the audience to join in the dancing and in the singing of one particular song: 'I Have Done That Too!', a jubilant acceptance of the Jesus–love doctrine. Throughout, but less so as I participated, I resisted the message. I did not want to declare for Jesus, identify with his epiphany, his joint human–divine presence. Then I thought, I have sung 'Sita Ram' at Ramlila, taken Communion in an

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RC church, done yoga 'religiously' (in both senses), etc. So why am I resisting this? Having that thought freed me to participate, and I did by dancing and singing.

More difficult is to let go of the gender critique. It is built deeply, I think, into Mario's approach. He is not a 'neutral being who happens to be male', but a male performing his traditional role of father, elder brother, alpha male, etc. It is who he is, and his work expresses who he is. This kind of self-expression is key to the Grotowski work, at the time of its origins and onward to its manifestations now. So I should not be surprised. Question is: do I tell Mario about this? Do I suggest any change? Do I ask if he has been challenged in this by the obviously strong women he works with, or by the men who may not want to embody/enact their (traditional in Christianity) privilege?

21:53

The Underground (after Dostoyevsky) directed by Thomas. Why is their musical ability more realized than their dramatic? Why do they speak so loudly? Why is it that when they touch each other they don't seem to take any pleasure from it? Why are the pieces so rich musically and so frigid sensuously?

7 July

10:50

The *Underground* is over-acted, too loud, and without much dramaturgical sense. So-called 'funny scenes' – man upside down in a rolling toilet, another in a trashcan – plus lots of talk about death and the afterlife. I couldn't make much sense of the text, though it was intentionally heavy in counterpoint to the slapstick staging. What's troubling to me is how marvellous and strong the singing and relating is in the workshop sessions; how Richards literally trembles over the performer he's working with, guiding. But once these same people are onstage in a piece, the power is gone, replaced by noise and often too much activity.

Biagini's *Katie's Tales* was a little better, but still not up to the workshops or his *Hidden Sayings*. *Katie's Tales* is a one-woman show of an old woman reminiscing about her lost life: lost lover, parents, friends, all. In a rectangle of flowers with a wrought-iron chair and table – all very New Orleans/Tennessee Williams – the performer (name not given in the programme), enters as an old lady in heavy clogs, stamping, trembling. Then she becomes young, becomes her own servant, visitors, etc. as she relates/enacts her (failed) life. But the piece lacks true tenderness. It is rhetorical, a demonstration of actorly skills, though these skills are not used to great advantage. The piece is not subtle; the text not lyrical or elegant. It is all very predictable, leaving the impression of 'I've seen that before, done better.' Truth is, I have not seen it before – not precisely this way. But it still is cliché: southern belle who has not been fulfilled sexually – in this case, maritally. Her lover never returns; her marriage never takes place. *Menagerie/Streetcar* redux and reduced.

So that is my big problem here, the enormous gap between the intense and accomplished beautiful workshops and the gawky, amateurish, over-acted performance pieces. How much of this do I share with Thomas and Mario? They are in their late

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fifties, they are not going to change. Their work deserves to be seen – but I think the 'public work' won't be well received and the private work, as of now, won't be seen by a public. How could it be? I need to think this over. I emailed Mark Russell, urging him to bring the Workcenter to Under the Radar in New York:

> I am in Paris where the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards are showing their work at a week-long festival of performances, workshops, and panels at the very prestigious Théâtre de la ville. Lots of the work that Thomas Richards and Mario Biagini and their colleagues are doing is powerful, deeply thought through, and often brilliantly done. The core company includes a number of truly accomplished theatre artists. The vocal music which is woven into the work at a fundamental level is extraordinary. I think strongly that the Workcenter should be part of UTR. That is why I am writing you and copying Thomas and Mario. I hope that you will be in contact and discuss the possibilities. Anything I can do to help, let me know.

The audiences here at the Théâtre de la Ville are very supportive and enthusiastic. Preaching to the choir, yes; but also something genuine in response to 'authenticity' and 'intensity'. And to the fact that the Workcenter team (interesting sports analogy) is extremely likable. Genuinely good people, or so they behave.

One other thing: the 'two-popes' scenario of the Grotowski heritage. Thomas Richards, the designated heir, at the Workcenter in Italy (the Avignon pope) and the Polish heritage in Wrocław at the Grotowski Institute. These two entities are working more closely together now – especially on publishing Grot's collected texts. I also think the Workcenter has toured to Poland – but has Jaroslav Fret's Zar been to Pontedera? And what is the personal chemistry between Fret and the others in Poland and Richards, Biagini, and the others in Italy?

Grotowski had a complex relationship with Poland. A different relationship with Polish culture than with the Polish government(s). His years of exile in the US and then Italy made him more cosmopolitan, 'universal', and yet he also had something specifically Polish in him. Of course, from very early in his life, he was attracted to Asian philosophies, but these he melded with Gnosticism and early Christianity. I don't know all of that stuff well enough. Biagini seems to carry this aspect on visibly (texts, performing in churches), while Richards carries it on in the depths (personal work, singing). It's a very dense tangle, but there is a system there.

8 July

09:22

Last evening, 6–8, Open Choir at the sixteenth-century Eglise Saint-Merri, near BHV in the busy Marais/Hôtel de Ville part of Paris, named after St Mederic the patron saint of the Right Bank who died in Paris in 700. About three hundred people in the big church whose chairs had been rearranged around the periphery of the nave. People sat or stood as Mario's team began their singing. Familiar songs by now to all who had attended the Workcenter's week at Théâtre de la Ville. Soon enough, many joined in – including 'strangers' who had not been with us the rest of the week. The crowd was

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overwhelmingly white, but there was one black man, seemed to be from Africa, who joined the singing and dancing early on. I say 'dancing', but I mean moving back and forth in the name, the same processional movement that was done earlier in the week.

Mario started the singing, but soon enough other members of the team initiated songs. A highlight was the singing of an Arabic (I think) member of the team who performed a solo Sufi song featuring 'Allah'. We had practised that song earlier in the week, too. It was peculiar and marvellous to hear this music, this kind of singing, in the church. But, on reflection, given the large Arab population in Paris, and the French ecumenical tradition, probably it's been done before, maybe often. But maybe not in this way: with many dancing, joining in, bringing 'Allah' Sufi-style into the church.

All the familiar faces from the week were there. Across from me was Valerie Dréville and the actor formerly with the Théâtre du Soleil; also the woman who helped organize the week's meetings, Michelle (forgot her last name) who keeps calling me 'Dear'. Sophie Proust's two-year-old daughter Myrtille danced a little and kept climbing up and down a chair to get a better view. The singing was strong and the participation near-total. The Open Choir lasted ninety minutes or so. Then a brief farewell from Mario. After, as the crowd dispersed, more than five people came up to me, one at a time, to thank me for my presentation the day before. A group of theatre students from outside Paris wanted to take their picture with me. I said my goodbyes to a ton of people.

I also thought that this kind of group singing, as healthy as it is, as fun as it was to join in, represented a religion without pain, without commitment to a specific creed, code of behaviour, or exclusion (which all religions require, more or less). We were asked for no declaration of faith, no donation of money, etc. Nothing but our attention and, when the feeling moved you, participation in singing and movement. Not that this is a small thing. But it is also an easy thing.

And, as a tiny itch in the back of my consciousness, I was aware of the horrors committed in the name of faith, religious and political. That the very large crucified Jesus at the end of the church, not used for the Open Choir, haunted and dominated the space nonetheless, signifying a history that began in blood and featured many bloody episodes. And that Christianity was far from alone in performing this kind of history. But, yes, most of that was not in my mind as I sang; and I am sure it was not in the minds of most people in Saint-Merri last evening.

After the Open Choir, Carla, Mario, Thomas and I had supper in a Lebanese place across the street from the church. We discussed bringing Grotowski's collected writings into English directly from the Polish, in four volumes: 1, early writings; 2, theatre of productions; 3, paratheatre and theatre of sources; 4, objective drama and art as vehicle.

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