Changes

From the Workcenter to the Academy of the Unfulfilled

Mario Biagini

Editor's note: The first time I heard about Jerzy Grotowski was in 1963 when I received an article from James Hatch—a playwright and classmate of mine at the University of Iowa during the academic year 1957/58. Hatch, working in Cairo at the time, sent me Eugenio Barba's account of Grotowski's production of Christopher Marlowe's The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus *(1592). In his cover letter, Hatch noted something to the effect of, "You're the only person I know crazy enough to appreciate this." In our 1964 Marlowe issue,* TDR *published Barba's* "Doctor Faustus *in Poland" (8:4). After that, many articles by and about Grotowski appeared in* TDR. *In 1986, the Polish master moved to Pontedera, Italy, to found and lead the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski. In 1996, recognizing the decisive quality of their relationship, Grotowski named Thomas Richards as coleader of the Workcenter. When Grotowski died in 1999, Richards continued to develop Grotowski's notion of "Art as vehicle." Alongside Richards, Mario Biagini explored the ramifications of Grotowski's paratheatrical work. These two leaders, each in their own way, propelled Grotowski's legacy into the 21st century. In January 2022, Richards announced the closing of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards. Here, we publish his statement as well as two items by Biagini. An important episode in European and global performance has ended. What comes next in the Grotowski world?*

—*Richard Schechner*

An Update—February 2021[1]

Insofar as any "mastering" of the past is possible, it consists in relating what has happened; but such narration, too, which shapes history, solves no problems, and assuages no suffering; it does not master anything once and for all.

—*Hannah Arendt,* Men in Dark Times ([1959] 1970)

1. A first version of this text was published in Polish in July 2021 in the issue 21/2021 of *Performer* (https://grotowski.net/performer/performer-21/uaktualnienie) with the following introduction: *"When Professor Kosiński offered to publish the two texts in this issue of* Performer, *I gladly accepted: it is a beautiful opportunity to inform people in Poland about the activities of the Open Program. The first, 'At the Workcenter – Open Program,' [first published in Italian and English in* NowHere Active Residencies, The Open Program of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards at Macao, *edited by Cristina Fiordimela, Vittoria Pasca Raymondi, and Tommaso Urselli, translated from Italian by Maggie Rose, Milan, 2021:46–58] dates from 2014 and contains information about the beginnings of our group research. The second, 'A Letter,' was written in 2019 prior to the pandemic we are currently living through. Though the world today looks and feels very different than it did at the time of its writing, that text speaks of a search that still motivates us. Not long after, I had a public conversation with Professor Kosiński as part of the Festiwal Retroperspektywy in 2020, during which we spoke about how the Open Program is facing some of the problems that the pandemic has revealed [published in English and Polish as 'A conversation with Mario Biagini,' in the e-book* The Pictures of the Pandemic: An Album of Voices, *edited by Dariusz Kosiński, Kraków: Zywosłowie. Wydawnictwo, 2021:18–30]. While I am happy to share the two texts with you, there is something substantial missing in them [...]. So, I asked Professor Kosiński if I could add an update and he kindly accepted."* Since then, in January 2022, Mario Biagini announced his departure from the Workcenter and the creation of the Academy of the Unfulfilled.—Ed.

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In the course of the last several years, there appeared inside the Open Program the need to reassess our functioning as a group, as well as our internal dynamics, our decision-making process, and the relations of power inside the ensemble and in our contact with others. We followed this need, and this opened for the Open Program new ways of working together and new questions, and provoked in me—as, I believe, in my colleagues—several considerations, some of which I would like to share with you.

What I want to write about is not at all new: most of it concerns topics that have been addressed for decades, for instance by feminist artists, activists, and scholars. What follows are personal reflections that originated mainly from the process of group exploration that I mentioned, and from an individual itinerary of reevaluation. I wasn't able to speak about these issues until relatively recently because I wasn't aware of all they entail. I believe I wasn't able to clearly face them because I fundamentally was, and still am, part of the problem. The infant lucidity enabling me to write on these issues came to me over the course of the last 10 years, mainly thanks to the work we have been doing, that is, thanks to other people: my companions of the Open Program, people we met during our activities, and persons who are very dear to me in my personal life. I am thankful to all of them. The two key points I would like to address here are the social and theatrical culture in which I grew up, and the assumption that art is a field where the aim justifies the means.

I was born on a farm near a small village in Italy. Growing up I was a skinny, physically fragile boy. I remember seeing older children bullying those younger and physically weaker. I saw boys disrespecting girls. Kids torturing mentally ill people. I saw all of this, and developed strategies that would protect me. I discovered that if I proposed new games that interested other kids, I would be safe: the others would play the game I proposed, and this would give me a place among them. It made me feel accepted. I also learned how to use words to defend myself. Sometimes defending myself meant attacking before being attacked. Where I grew up, the capacity to battle in a verbal contest was deemed honorable. In these dialectic games, the players were often men. In men, the capacity to impose oneself verbally on others was considered a sign of strength and intelligence.

Years later, as a teenager, I found a way to escape to the big city—Paris. I wanted to do theatre. Still to this day I don't exactly know why, I suspect it also had to do with childhood experiences. I didn't even know what theatre was. I started to take part in the rehearsals of a theatre group in what I thought was a true process of research, and surely it was a significant period, for me. In that group, I witnessed the people in charge treating some members in a harsh or cold way, or being verbally aggressive towards them. It seemed that everyone accepted what was going on, even the people who were treated like that. They didn't respond outwardly and didn't uphold their own ideas or positions. I was watching. I couldn't really understand what blunders the people who were attacked were guilty of. Those in charge seemed to have no doubts. I was never the victim of these aggressions. I remember thinking that it was because I was quick with words, witty, always ready to respond, apparently never in doubt or in hesitation: all qualities that the world I grew up in trained me to believe were desirable in a boy. And yet, I felt bad when witnessing these episodes. But why didn't I defend the others? Why didn't I react?

Eventually I came back to Italy and found some people around my age with whom to continue to do theatre as I conceived of it then. We were all friends, all leftists and progressive. We did nice things, but I remember contradictory situations, where collaboration together for a common and exciting goal was punctuated with moments where I would impose my views not even being aware of doing so, as if my role was part of a natural order of things, like the fact that rain falls or the sun shines. I also remember the feeling of knowing what we were supposed to do, that my intuitions and imaginations were what we needed as a group, and that I should not show signs of hesitation or doubt. The people around me appeared to accept all this, even if I was young, inexperienced, amateurish. As when I was a child, I started by proposing a game, the others accepted and played with me. This put me in a certain position, which I liked: leadership. What was that leadership based upon? And why did I like it?

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I liked the privileges associated with it. They made me even feel that I was a good human being; they made me feel special. I see that already back then there existed in me a dissociation, between the sense that something was not right with respect to how I was leading the others and the sense of accomplishment that came from being in charge. Not everyone in our society is allowed access to positions of authority, just as not everyone is allowed the use of the tools that enable one to keep them. Since early in my youth, and then in the theatre world, I witnessed mechanisms operating on the basis of perceived and illusory ideas of strength and weakness. For instance, until then, I had mostly seen only men at the top of a hierarchical structure. And, I reproduced these mechanisms in that youth group. Although I was convinced that our work was revolutionary, my acts were often contradicting my own views.

Sometime later, in 1985, I saw another man, Jerzy Grotowski, speak at a conference in Florence. What he said that day was afterwards published as the text "Tu es le fils de quelqu'un" ([1987] 1997).[2] From the way people behaved around him, it was evident that he was an important person. When I heard him talk, I was impressed. I didn't know who he was, but something in him convinced me, and I felt respect for the man. In Italian we have two words for "authority": *autorità* and *autorevolezza*. Autorevolezza doesn't have to do with power, but with experience and understanding. That's what I perceived in him. And then I was lucky because, despite my amateurism, I was accepted in the audition that took place the following year, in 1986, at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski. There started my formative years, professionally; but as a human, I was molded long before, when I was a child. I may be wrong, but I have the feeling that it is mainly in our first years of life that we acquire the possible ranges of experience in which we will be able to evolve during our adulthood.

Grotowski was clearly someone who had all the characteristics necessary to be allowed a position of power, and the skills to keep it. He was a man, he was famous, he was recognized throughout the world as a successful director who revolutionized theatre practice, and he was white. He was considered by many as a theatre master, by others as a genius, by still others as a spiritual guide. Personally, I never witnessed Grotowski abuse his authority. The night we worked together for the first time, just he and I, is still fresh in my memory. He was there, just smiling, as if unarmed and, in a second, that also disarmed me and made me smile too. And I thought, that's who he really is. It was such a surprise because it was so light and funny, and usually he was rather serious. It was not even like work. Nothing was either right or wrong. He was not giving orders, only advice. From then on, he treated me as if I was his peer. Sometimes he was grumpy, but he was old, or at least I saw him as old, and I knew he was sick, so it was ok, for me. Was he always right? Not at all, and I thought he was wrong on several occasions. Sometimes I told him I thought so, sometimes I didn't. When I told him, he listened.

He was a man of his times, and his education was undoubtedly the product of specific historical circumstances. I read and heard people saying that when he was a theatre director he acted like a dictator with actors. I have no reasons not to believe these witnesses, and I am sure that the different phases of his public activity should be read critically. In my time working with him, nevertheless, Grotowski never behaved like that towards me and I never observed him behaving like that towards any of my colleagues, which makes me think that during his life he reformed his ways. When I read his writings I perceive, from the time of his youth and of his political activities onward, a desire for a truer, not alienated relationship with other human beings. In Florence, in 1985, I heard him say: "I work to enlarge the island of freedom that I bear" ([1987] 1997:294). So, he was aware of the limits of that island, as well as a sea of contradictions. My impression is that this desire of his, and his awareness of limits, translated in him into an effort towards a concrete personal transformation. Also, Thomas Richards's written testimonies about

2. The 1987 *TDR* translation was revised by Grotowski and translated by James Sloviak and Grotowski for *The Grotowski Sourcebook* (Grotowski [1987] 1997).—Ed.

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their collaboration indicate this. During the time I spent at Grotowski's side, I saw him continuously question himself, and change. His capacity to reflect on his own practice, and to adjust in response to that reflection—that's the most important example for me, his biggest lesson.

Now to go back to reflecting on my own behavior: did I ever act in an authoritarian way while in a position of leadership at the Workcenter? Yes, I did, especially when Grotowski was already gone. At the beginning of my stay at the Workcenter, it was obvious to everyone that I didn't know how to do anything, and I didn't have a stable position of leadership. I was responsible only for my own work, and even if it was kind of difficult it was also a lot of fun. Then, soon, I started to lead people by myself and, in that position, I exerted an authority that was based also on what I had learned and absorbed. Sometimes my colleagues told me that they didn't agree with my behavior in a given situation, but at the time I was not aware that my actions could be contradicting my own principles, nor that they could be outwardly accepted by others only because of a set of preexisting sociocultural norms. I did not have the capacity to lucidly face the dissociation I spoke about above.

I now know that the way I acted in certain situations was despotic towards my colleagues. I remember occasions when I would keep rehearsing with the group a scene that according to me was "not working," despite Grotowski having advised me not to do this. Do not blindly insist during rehearsals on repeating fragments that, on a given day, are not going well, he said to me. He told me that if something really wasn't getting better, the best was to leave it be for the day and pass on to something else, but I did not always follow his advice. In moments I was impatient, unable to listen, or to see alternatives: I raised my voice, became rigid and not able to feel what the person was living. In those moments, I wasn't unable to relate to an alterity. Outwardly and inwardly, I could not question myself.

Strangely and not so strangely, all this became more evident during the first few years of the Open Program. I say "strangely" because the work atmosphere was friendly, funny, and so many days and weeks were full of joy, lightness, and creativity. My companions were generous, inventive, intelligent, talented, and responsive to my propositions and to the propositions of their colleagues. I say "not so strangely" because then I was often the person with the most experience, in a position where the others were respecting me and my opinions. I was a man leading a group of people; I was their director. To not feel the sense of dissociation inside myself I had excuses—that, for example, the beautiful, joyful, and creative periods were balancing the ugly ones and justifying myself in my own eyes, and perhaps also in the eyes of others. I don't want to throw a negative light on the first years of the Open Program: my colleagues there opened paths that were unknown to me. I was able to follow them, intuit where we could go, and it was a truly beautiful human and artistic adventure that permitted me, among other things, to begin to understand precisely what I am writing about now. A lot of what we did in those years had a light and gentle quality to it, imbued with a delicately wild courage and intelligence. And yet despite this, there were patterns in my behavior from which I couldn't escape. But life is weird, and it provides unexpected opportunities.

About 10 years ago, I went through a painful crisis, following which I was diagnosed with a form of bipolar disorder, and had to begin taking medications daily. It was hard to accept this reality, but I am extremely lucky, and privileged, compared to the enormous majority of people around the world in a similar situation. I have access to a public health system, good doctors, and effective medications. Thanks to the support I received and still receive, I was able to begin not only to function in a less maladaptive way but also to fathom part of what was wrong with me. Again, life: I had met someone, someone with great patience and wisdom, who helped me, day after day and month after month, to understand that, if I wanted to solve part of the contradictions between what I thought I was doing and the reality of my actions, to be able to live and relate in a less dissonant fashion with others, I could not go on in the same way as before. But could I really change my attitude, my personality, my behavior? I understood that feeling entitled to act in a certain way didn't mean I had the right to do it, and that if an action could not be bilateral, that is, if in a situation or a relationship, for example, only one of the two persons was allowed to really speak out, then the way I was approaching it was problematic. What was implied in this understanding

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was that, being in a position of power, the best attitude I could take was to remember what I was *not* entitled to do, and to examine again and again the limits of my actions' legitimacy. That meant to try to make space: space to listen and hear, space to feel the other in the moments when it wasn't "happening by itself."

Directing, as a function, may require someone to say yes or no, to take decisions, to cut a fragment and to keep another, and so on. To make choices. But in these years, I have understood a little more clearly something that I had experienced repeatedly without recognizing it fully: the fact that in a collaboration or in a collective effort there isn't only the possibility of a leader-follower or teacher-learner relationship; on the contrary, it is rare that a one-way relationship can develop healthily and creatively. The moments that are most vivid and that I feel are the most creative are those when I am not defending or affirming myself, nor imposing my view, nor demanding anything. There appears then a vast spectrum of possibilities of interaction that would be obliterated by the attitude "I know what works and how, and you don't." It is impossible to separate the process of creation from the artistic results: the modalities in which we treat each other during rehearsals remain concretely visible in the performance, and reverberate outside the narrow circle of the group. We then inevitably share them with spectators, and in this public relationship they are amplified and perpetuate themselves.

By behaving as if I am always sure of myself, never in doubt, never hesitating, I mutilate the others and myself. That which is "absolute" is dead, certitudes included; they suffocate the potentialities of each individual and condemn the person to self-doubt and self-censure. When I acknowledge my lack of infallibility and the value of distinct subjectivities, I feel a space expand between them and me, and inside me as well. It feels like a kind of liberation. I am far from being free from what I've absorbed, what made me: that is present in me, and always will be, as also the anguishes and fears, the desires and aspirations that accompany me as a person. Year after year, as it became evident that I didn't want to be as my heritage, my story, and my society had shaped me, it was also becoming clearer that to break free from these learned behaviors was an almost impossible task.

In looking for new ways, during these 10 years, it became obvious that I could suppress certain macroscopic manifestations—stop raising my voice, or interrupting people while they were talking. Often, that meant waiting before responding to a situation. Wait. Wait. Wait. Not react. As I tried to avoid these most evident behaviors it appeared, also thanks to feedback from my colleagues, that there were subtler actions, of which I was becoming aware only after the fact. Often, I am not able to catch and stop these less evident manifestations as they appear, and in order to notice them I have to ask for help from others, who are not obliged to provide it. But I can ask. So, I depend on someone else's judgment and subjectivity, and I can accept this as a fact of life and work.

I understood, then, that it was not simply a problem of mine, but something present in theatrical culture. That's why it seemed that the others were accepting it as well. The director, in many circles, can do what he wants. I use on purpose the masculine pronoun. He is tacitly entitled to decide where the limits of his authority are, in order to reach a certain objective. I heard so many times the concept that art is beyond morality. However, I was not at ease with my actions when in a rehearsal I bullied someone, but customs allowed me to be blind and to not lucidly feel the contradictions existing in myself. Custom, professional ethics, moral codes, and language are not set in stone: they can and have to evolve, together with my personal, professional, and political awareness. I can enlarge my capacity to recognize what is mythical (mythical in the sense of a cluster of collective notions that act in and on us) as well as regressive, in my mind and in the cultural world. For example, in theatre, we often assume a fictitious stability: art forms may change, but Art is Art, the artist is the artist, now as before as in the future. One of the functions of theatre is exactly the public unveiling of the myths at work in our culture, through our practice, and this idea of the "artist" may be one of them.

There was still another step. In theatre, we, especially those of us who are coming from the group theatre experiences that started in the '60s and the '70s, tend to think that our actions and functions are an alternative to aspects of society that we deem regressive or reactionary. But our

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professional world, the theatre community and its functioning, are also a reflection of what goes on in wider society. As in society, there are in theatre progressive and regressive tendencies, which I have to recognize if I want to live and work not just as I was taught, but as I could. To be a man, in our society, means to be in a position of privilege from the start. To be white means the same. To be educated, also. To be an educated white man in a position of power, in theatre as in society, means to carry baggage of entitlement, exploitation, arrogance, and violence towards women, people who are not white, LGBTQ+ people, and people with mental illnesses, for example.

To sum up: I discovered that it was a problem of mine, but also of a professional environment, which is in its turn the reflection of a whole culture. The norms on which this culture, my profession, and then my social identity, are based, create a "normality" that is not at all normal. This realization doesn't acquit me from my responsibilities; it just makes me aware of a broader context that seems to socially legitimize my actions. Understanding that what is accepted is not a natural fact, but depends on a social context, I may become able to act on the context itself. But then, if I myself was molded by this context, sooner or later, being in a position of authority, because of my upbringing and the advantages that position entails, knowingly or unknowingly, I may abuse it. So, what to do?

The shift that took place in the Open Program's work towards the utilization of different forms of collective creation in contexts of social injustice may have been the beginning of an answer. With my companions, we moved into a territory where our very structure and way of functioning had to be challenged along with the very issues we were addressing, like mass incarceration in the USA, homelessness, discrimination, as well as economic and social disparities (see Ellis 2021; and Stokfiszewski 2010)—territory where we, and especially I, could be forced to listen and hear—to learn. In recent years, what we have been doing has been raising lots of questions for us. For example, a movement towards a kind of decentralization appeared with the singing meetings we used to call Open Choirs (see Biagini 2021). There, what we looked for was a way of being together with people where what happens in the periphery is as important as what takes place in the center. For this to occur, I needed to not be at the center in a leading role. Ultimately, we all had to find a way where everyone was responsible for what was taking place.

We have been looking for what turns a room, a square, or a parking lot into a public space; by "public," meaning not that which is dispensed as a service by the State, but that which is created and held by a common, shared responsibility. This attempt to examine participation in civic society continued with other steps, for example with public conversations on topics like racism and active citizenship. In order for these efforts to open new roads, we need fundamental changes in the manner our group functions. We are still looking for these ways. For quite some time, for example, we have been devoting time for group discussions, experimenting with various ways to assure that everyone is heard, taking into account the different subjectivities, and sharing together the task of deciding what to do and in which way, including for what concerns organizational aspects. One of the elements we address has to do with leadership, structures of power, and responsibility.

Personally and professionally, I don't want to be "a leader" anymore. I am grateful to all those who trusted me and gave me the opportunity to be responsible for the functioning of a group, also helping me understand that we can now invent new ways together. I am neither going to stop working nor resign from my professional responsibilities, but I don't see how I can fulfill my public function as an actor and a director while keeping a position of leadership: I strongly feel that the times we live in demand from me to question my own automatisms and to take steps forward, which also means to step back. I can perhaps direct a performance, but I have no intention to keep exerting authority. My companions are intelligent, well-informed, and talented people who don't need to be led, but to develop their own capacities of collaboration, to help each other, to discover their own human and professional autonomy and, above all, to decide for themselves how to follow their aspirations, individually and together. I don't have a program to propose; I can only take practical steps in my own work to look to serve my companions' individual needs and collective potentialities. They and the people we meet are my teachers in this respect. Only by being sensitive

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to their propositions can I perhaps find with them what I sense as a possibility, and be able to imagine together with others what I cannot yet think by myself.

During that speech in Florence in 1985, something Grotowski said struck a chord: "The things which were forbidden before me should be permitted after me; the doors which were closed and double-locked should be opened. I must resolve the problems of freedom and tyranny through practical measures, that means that my activity should leave traces, examples of freedom" ([1987] 1997:304). I am full of doubts, but my doubting is not a declaration of defeat. I can keep reforming my actions and my ways of thinking. I can struggle with myself and with circumstances in order to not contribute to perpetuate a structure of violence, even of subtle and casual violence. I want to understand what I can concretely do, because I don't want to keep forging an iron chain to which each generation adds a solid link. I can, together with my companions and all those we meet, imagine and tread other ways, to "enlarge the island of freedom that I bear."

To go back to my village... There was a shy girl in my elementary school in the Tuscan countryside, whose family was from the Italian South. She spoke differently. Her skin was darker. We called her "monkey." My parents were decent and intelligent people, my brothers and sisters progressive and open-minded young activists, and all of them would have been shocked if they came to know what we were calling that little girl. And yet, that's where I grew up. In a sexist, racist, intolerant, and violent schoolyard. That's where I come from, and that's part of what made me: *tu es le fils de quelqu'un*—you are someone's son. As Grotowski says at the end of that text, I come from somewhere, from some country, from some place, from some landscape. To comprehend where I come from is for me one of the conditions of not being "cut off, sterile, barren" ([1987] 1997:304).

To see oneself as one is may be, to some extent, painful. This pain is acceptable. I don't think it equates to the sorrow that little girl endured. The suffering she felt cannot be considered acceptable. Also in a rehearsal, in a performance, or on a stage, pain is not acceptable, nor is it needed: in theatre work it is not acceptable nor needed to provoke suffering or to suffer. There is no director's talent or knowledge, as there is no actor's error or block, that justifies a director's aggression, whatever form it may take. In theatre, the end does not justify the means. The ends do not justify the means because they are often ambiguous and not innocent and, most relevantly, because inevitably the means determine the end and affect the artistic outcome and its public irradiation.

Remorse is present but it doesn't change much if I don't contribute concretely to a more compassionate and equitable world. I am and therefore I work—with my companions and with strangers: this is my field of action. Our craft consists in cultivating the creative transformation of artistic languages and forms and, conjointly, of our manners of cooperation and collaboration. To open the doors that are closed or which I myself have contributed to keeping shut, I should first see them, in myself and in the profession. For instance, for years women have denounced discrimination and violence, as other oppressed segments of the population have done and continue to do, providing all with opportunities to change and progress. And yet, still, the person who speaks out often exposes herself to further aggression, resistance, attacks, and discredit, because the cultural circumstances that make these phenomena not only possible, but normal and tolerated, are ingrained in the very structure of our society and in the privileges of a part of the population, me included. When these issues are brought to light in our profession, one can easily fall into a normalizing attitude and tolerate them as deplorable and yet isolated episodes, and not as symptoms of a much wider situation. Recognizing these discriminating mechanisms in myself, I can look at society as a set of behaviors, relationships, rules, codes, and languages that are susceptible to evolution. I myself in action am the field that needs constant reform.

My relatives, reading this text, will tell me that my family also taught me about other values, like solidarity and sharing; my schoolmates will say that public school taught me about civic responsibility and democracy; my theatre colleagues, that theatre taught me about collaboration and inclusivity; my intellectual friends, that academia helped me to acquire important conceptual tools, such as critical thought and intersectionality. Nevertheless, despite the personal tone, I am

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not writing about my life, and my aim is not to evaluate the merits of our culture. It is rather a reassessment of some of the narratives in which I have lived. Such narration, Arendt reminds us, "solves no problems and assuages no suffering" ([1959] 1970). At best, perhaps, it may prepare the way. But it is also and above all a reminder to myself, for the invention of a new mode of operation: one which I can only approach practically, together with others. That's why this is a public declaration, to others—public in the sense I describe above, that is, demanding an individual accountability in the creation of a shared quality of being with others.

I cannot give a precise report of what we are doing presently, in our artistic and interpersonal search, because we are in a time of transformation. However, there are several corollaries to the conclusions I arrived at, and I would like to briefly mention one of them: as I arrived at the conclusion that I don't want to lead a group anymore, I also understood that I don't want to sing songs from the African Diaspora anymore as I have been doing since 1986. I know hundreds of songs. They wake me up in the morning like birds. But now, after 35 years spent studying these extraordinary creations of human beings who have been deported and exploited and who are still oppressed, I know enough. I know there is a lot I don't know and that I will never know. After 35 years of work in a field I didn't choose from the start, I now understand that I am not obliged to continue and have decided to stop. It is a step in my trajectory that I was able to take also thanks to the work that was done, and to the people with whom it was done, over all these years.

This text is not the place to write about this, and I will do so on another occasion. Here it is sufficient to say that it has to do with the privileges to which I was allowed to feel entitled, to which I don't feel entitled anymore. This decision does not concern my colleagues, or anybody else, at or outside the Workcenter. Perhaps, if someone wants, I can sing with them, softly, supporting them. Perhaps not even that. We will see.

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The New Year

1 January 2022[3]

The time has come for me to start a new journey, to dissolve the Open Program, leave the Workcenter, and head towards an elsewhere that is calling me. With the new year, I'm going my own way, grateful and indebted to so many people, each and every one of those who made this story possible over the years by allowing many, including me, to be part of it. It is not a hasty or impulsive decision; it is rather an ascertainment of facts, which I pondered calmly and at length.

3. This announcement was published by Mario Biagini on social media and by email.—Ed.

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When, in 1986, I auditioned to participate in the activities of the newborn Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski in Pontedera, I was invited to stay for three weeks. At the end of those three weeks, I was invited for another three weeks. After that, I didn't think any more about it. There were people coming and going, and at that time nothing was stable, fixed. I stayed—taking advantage as best I could of the opportunity offered me, learning and creating with others, always discovering new questions. I said to myself that I would stay until someone told me to leave, or until other circumstances and desires called me elsewhere. Now, 35 years have passed, during which I always considered myself as a passerby among other passersby.

Since its beginnings, the Workcenter has been marked by a pedagogical vocation, through an immersion in the processes of artistic creation and, as far as the Open Program is concerned, with a strong anchor in group education. Now, I am 57 years old. I have never stopped learning, but I don't feel like teaching. Rather, I want to devote what time and strength I have left to exploring what people can study together, what fundamental questions carry us, and how we can grow individually and in cooperation. I want to keep learning, especially learning how to think, in ways I can't yet imagine.

The Workcenter welcomed me at a young age, offered me opportunities for action with others and for continued learning and unlearning. There were the years with Jerzy Grotowski, during which, in addition to my relationship with Grotowski, I primarily worked alongside Thomas Richards, and had the possibility to explore the role of the director as well as that of the actor. After Grotowski's death, always together with and thanks to many other people, we managed to give continuity to the existence of the Workcenter, which developed in surprising ways. In the years from 2003 to 2006 we began to travel and to make our research known in Europe and many other countries. That three-year period was fundamental, and it was inevitable that at its end there would be substantial changes. I think that it was then that Thomas Richards felt the need to explore his own responsibilities without having me at his side as his right-hand companion. In 2007 the Open Program was born, at my initiative. I am grateful to Thomas for giving me this opportunity. From that moment on, we took different paths. It is since then that I no longer work, in daily practice, with Thomas, and it is since then that I no longer have any contact with the work he does daily with his colleagues, being a witness only on public occasions.

For a number of years I considered the two wings of the Workcenter—the groups directed by Thomas Richards and the Open Program—to be complementary, even if independent, and perhaps they were so. I later realized that our paths were oriented toward different objectives, and that they met dissimilar needs. In the way I experience collaboration and time spent with others, I am unable to separate the realm of the craft from the ethical and political spheres. I now feel clearly that our respective paths, those followed by Thomas and those that attract me, are divergent. The way he describes his research, the assumptions I infer that underly his public statements, and what I indirectly intuit about his working methods, all of this is foreign to me. Therefore, knowing that I cannot agree, I can no longer operate as associate director of the Workcenter.

Yes, the Open Program has been an extraordinary adventure, but during the last few years I perceived in myself a growing desire for new air, the necessity to transform my ways of relating and collaborating. I told my colleagues that I had enough of being the group director, and I asked them to share responsibilities and decisions, from the daily schedule to the long-term calendar to decisions about which projects to realize. We have done a lot of experiments in this regard. However, I am aware that my companions arrived to the group because they were invited by me, the director and initiator of the Open Program. For what I want to do now, radically different circumstances are needed, in which I am not in a position of authority: an associative form that *from the beginning* is the result of a shared conception and responsibility. That's why, together with others, I decided to create an independent entity, the Academy of the Unfulfilled, which will serve collective and individual purposes, to carry out artistic and social actions that can make sense to human beings of different walks of life. For years now I have thought of the Open Program as a reality that includes people of various ages and different professional backgrounds, who live in circumstances

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and countries sometimes far away from each other. The ties with these people and communities are a source of new thoughts and imagination, for a concrete vision of what can be a common good and what the words *service* and *public action* can mean. The Academy of the Unfulfilled will take into account this reality and these relationships.

The planetary crisis has highlighted dramatic processes of change in individual and collective life. My way of acting in the world must respond to these radical changes in a radical way, not just with minor adjustments allowing me to continue doing the same things under different circumstances. In these times of ours, the strongest voices, the most solid certainties, the movements endowed with the greatest strength, are often those linked to direct self-interest, and to division, polarization, simplification, and aggression. Anything that goes in a different direction is fragile. With the doubts and anxieties of our time: how can I respond to the present, to the reality in front of my eyes—in view of a possible future and thinking of generations to come? I don't know, and I have no certainty, but all I can do is follow what I feel is inevitable.

I began by saying that I am grateful to many. It is not possible to mention all the names and faces that glow in the memory. There are all those whom I had the privilege to meet as colleagues, participants, friends, but also as witnesses and spectators. And there are those who have made all this possible from behind the scenes. People like Roberto Bacci, Carla Pollastrelli, Luca Dini, who supported the Workcenter from its beginnings; like Michelle Kokosowski, who always advised and helped us, with and after Grotowski; like Gül Gürses, who accompanied us in the transitional years that followed Grotowski's death; like the directors and staff of the Fondazione Teatro della Toscana, who welcomed and supported us in recent years. In mentioning these people and institutions, I am not forgetting all the others: they are all part of the life I have been allowed to live so fully until now, and of the future I can only imagine. Thank you to all of them.

If one wants to set out on a new journey, one has to start somewhere. The destination will be a surprise, even for me. See you there.

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