Thomas Richards and Mario Biagini
in conversation with Maria Shevtsova

With and After Grotowski

In 1996, Jerzy Grotowski changed the name of his Workcenter at Pontedera in Italy to that of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, and it was here that Richards and his associate Mario Biagini developed the Actions that had originated with their thirteen years of close collaboration with Grotowski before his death in 1999. *Dies Irae* was premiered in 2004. Various research projects led by Richards and/or Biagini include *Tracing Roads Across* (2003–06) and *Open Programme*, which began in 2007. Such works as *I am America*, crafted on the poems of Allen Ginsberg, and *Electric Party*, both directed by Biagini and first performed in 2009, have emerged from Open Programme. A recently 'finalized' work, *The Letter* (2008), directed by Richards, was the result of a long process of development that passed through three major phases and two differently named Actions, starting in 2003. Richards is the author of *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions* (1995) and *Heart of Practice* (2008), while Biagini has edited, with Antonio Attisani, the three-volume *Opere e Sentiere* (2007 and 2008). The conversation below is an edited version, in consultation with Richards and Biagini, of their discussion with Maria Shevtsova in November 2008, as part of her 'Conversations' series at Goldsmiths, University of London. These last pupils of Grotowski give uncommon insight into the processes of their work together, continuing their generous and open reflections in their responses to questions from members of the audience.

Maria Shevtsova *Welcome, everybody. It's wonderful to see you. As you all know, 2009 will be the Year of Grotowski. It will mark the tenth anniversary of Grotowski's death, and also the twenty-fifth anniversary of the end of the Laboratory Theatre. But Mario and I were talking on the telephone a while back, and we decided that we would go ahead and do it early, that we would mark – not the death of Grotowski, actually, but his life. I think of this as being a celebration of the fact that his work is alive and, of course, its living quality can be celebrated at any time. There will be many major events in 2009, notably in Wroclaw, where the Laboratory Theatre moved from Opole in 1965.*

It is such an honour and pleasure to have you with us, Thomas Richards and Mario Biagini. Thomas is the Artistic Director of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in Pontedera in Italy, and Mario is its Associate Director. They have done a tremendous amount together, with their team, in the Workcenter and have travelled a great deal, particularly in the past five years or so, following their various Projects through in different parts of the world. Their most recent Project, Horizons *(2007–09), is supported by the City of Wroclaw and is hosted by the Grotowski Institute in Wroclaw. We were talking this afternoon about the difficulties of constantly being on the road with your work, and perhaps we will have a chance to ask you some questions about your travels.*

We have here two remarkable people, who are the last people to have been very close collaborators of Grotowski. We have, in a sense, another kind of living Grotowski presence embodied in these two people present tonight. Thank you so much for coming. It is thrilling to have you here.

Now, I think I would like to start with a question to you both that most people who write about you seem not to ask – maybe because they feel shy about it, but I don't think we need to feel shy in this context. You worked for thirteen years with Grotowski, from 1986, when he moved to Pontedera, until his death in 1999. This afternoon, as we were talking, Mario, you said something that struck a chord. I thought 'Ah! That plays beautifully into my first question.' You said, 'We spent thirteen years with one of the most intelligent people on earth at that time.' What was it like to

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spend those thirteen years? How did you work? What did you do? What was the daily routine?

Thomas Richards I guess part of the daily routine was that there was no fixed routine. I didn't know when the work would end each day, and even that was a beautiful part of it, that it almost became as if the work never ended. It was a very special time. I needed this place of work, to dive into and be there, completely, almost twenty-four hours a day. It was really like that. In a certain period, working with him, we were living very close together. Not in the same apartment, but very close. During some of those years, Mario and I lived together in the same apartment with another team member and we'd get up and cook, but even cooking was somehow part of the work. One of us would be preparing the meal and there were books that we were interested in – we were working very intensively – so one of us would cook and another would read aloud. Sometimes we'd be eating and take turns to read, and then we'd go to work and then come back. Then often one of us would go to the apartment of Grotowski and talk into the night, until two, three.

There was a kind of protection that came from this way of almost never stopping. It was normally twelve hours of work and then sleeping, and then getting up and working, and then sleeping. It was like another world, in fact. It was like creating another world in which a certain care and attention were flowing. I guess that's one of the main things I felt from Grotowski: incredible care about my life as a human being, about what my possibilities were.

It was like being with a very old and knowledgeable person who was trying to look at your life – not with his own fixed definitions of who you are, but really as if you are a living being who is not something fixed, who can become someone. So, it was like a kind of grace to be next to this man who was asking himself, 'Who might Thomas be?'

What did you talk about with him? You said you talked into the night. What was it about? Wine, women, song? (Laughter from audience.)

Richards Well, of course there was the work, and the talk was a practical analysis of the work, of what had worked well and what not, and why. What did we talk about? So many topics. But what was fascinating beyond the subjects of conversation were the thresholds that I would pass by in my own capacity of being present and faced with a given task. We would talk about one subject – something that happened in the work, anything – and we would speak and speak, and I would start to become tired or want to be somewhere else. He would be in his rocking chair, and I would start to become absent, you know, with my body and my presence and my legs crossed, and I'd suddenly think, 'My God, it's now two in the morning and I've got to get up at nine; I've got the work to lead,' and he'd keep going. He wouldn't give in to this pull that I had outside of that moment. I would see that he kept going, and it was like a mirror for myself – a mirror for my own lack of capacity, but also to show me my own potential. So, after ten minutes of seeing myself in my own inertia, being half-present, and this man who was sick and was giving all of himself to the moment, you know, I would sort of say, 'Come on. Be here.' I guess that's more important than any one topic.

What about you, Mario? You had a different relationship, I think, to that of Thomas.

Mario Biagini: I cooked for him. (*Laughter from audience.*) Every day I would arrive at three o'clock with his food and wake him up. You know, what Thomas said about care and attention – that is really what it was like. I remember one time we were in our kitchen, and we were talking about a book that me and my housemates had read together in the kitchen. We were asking Grotowski some questions and then the conversation continued, and he said 'You know what is happening here now? What is taking place here now is extraordinary.' What was happening every day, every minute, was some kind of request for quality, care – what Thomas was saying: you were in front of this man who was like a mirror to you. What was hap-

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pening was a request for quality and care in every moment, in every aspect – in cooking, in bringing his newspaper, in the human relationships in the work, in the professional relationships in the work.

It was an attempt for quality. Quality – that what you say, what you think, what you feel, what you do, can be of a low quality, or a little better, or very special, even reaching extraordinary moments. And one doesn't know how to get there. One doesn't know how to get to that subtle way where, in a working relationship, one's thoughts, one's feelings, and one's physical presence, what one does – they are of a better quality. For years, with this man who created, somehow, the possibility in which this attempt for quality became the basis for work, everything was for that. All was for the people in the work.

There are rumours that Grotowski treated people like working animals, that everything was for the work. But the work had and has sense because it was and is for somebody, for people. If you were alone with him, you would talk about the subjects that were of common interest. We had common interests in literature, history, and the Eastern traditions. We all say stupid things, many times; we burp them out. With him, what was interesting was that he would never say, 'Well, Mario, that's quite stupid.' No, he would just . . . wait. Wait. No judgement. But you would realize, 'Well, that was just burping.'

Yes, indeed, burping. But this is the period, too, when you developed the 'Actions'. Correct?

Richards We were working on a number of Actions throughout those years, and in fact, at the Workcenter we are still developing new Actions. So, yes.

And you concentrated on vibratory songs. Can you tell us a little about the purpose of working on these songs and what you discovered by working on them?

Richards Well, it's related to what we were just speaking about. It's as if Thomas – well, what is 'Thomas'? What is it to be a 'human being'? I see that we all can have a tendency to slip away from where we are. I can see it in my life. I'm cooking in my kitchen in the evening, for example, but some hours ago I had an argument with my friend and, in fact, my inner life, as I'm chopping, is being dictated by an emotional reaction that I am having related to my friend. My body is doing one thing, but my mind along with my emotional life is still back there, discussing a point from some hours ago, trying to prove myself right. Often, we can notice similar kinds of dispersions going on in our lives.

What our work is aiming towards is a kind of call. It's to call oneself to be here, present. Part of this is to call oneself to see. It's very easy to be with others and not to see them. In our way of perceiving others, we often turn them into objects. We turn people into known objects of our perception. That's Mario, and he's like this, or he's like that. And I have already put him in a box, and it's comfortable for me: he is just what 'I know', and I stop seeing his humanity.

The songs we are working on are tools, let's say, a means to help one to arrive into the moment. And, also, to help one be next to another human being, without any fear, so that inside oneself, inside one's way of accepting the look of another, one discovers that there is nothing to hide. This was my strong impression, when I started to work with Grotowski, that, in fact, I had always been hiding. I had a very deep need that this continual hiding stop, and that something hidden be revealed. Special moments in the work, when something that wasn't normally touched in daily life appeared, those were like a door opening onto a new aspect of myself; a door opening onto a kind of hidden world, which gave a feeling of liberation and joy.

How can the work on these kinds of songs help one arrive into the moment? Well, it has to do with sound, with resonance. The song is precise. It has its precise melody and rhythm. Certain songs, which are very old, can start to touch the person who is singing. So, let's say someone in the work starts to sing and, at first, it's just the melody with its rhythm. But then it's not just that. The song can start to awaken or touch something in-

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Thomas Richards and Jerzy Grotowski, 1994. Photo © Maurizio Buscarino.

side the doer, which is, we could say, related to a kind of inner core. The doer can discover that, in fact, there are different kinds of places hidden inside, which are like pools of different qualities of energy that can be awakened. The resonance of the song touches these places, inviting them to be free, to be open.

There is a place related to our sensual energy, another related to our vitality, another resource related to our emotional life, and another to our mental life. It's as if one can discover all of these places to be like open doors, one facing another. And then, it's as if a delicate waterfall that's going up, like travelling back to a source, can appear. You can arrive at a feeling of transcendence, of going beyond the heaviness of your nature, touching a subtle source that seems to be above your physical frame, and something between you and the moment can start to shine. And from this subtle source something like a very subtle rain can come to you and penetrate you. This experience – a transparency of perception – can be so strong and so alive and life-giving that it brings joy, and it's like, 'Ah, I want to do that again, I want to live that again and again.'

It's something that one can work on consciously. One's perception in life, what you perceive in a given moment, can be more than the result of your circumstances, more than a result of pressures that come from outside. One's fears of what is around, for example, often shape perception. I am speaking to you and I can start to think, 'What is this woman thinking of me?' And I can become completely busy with that, and my perception reduces to that. Our inner life is often in the hands of circumstances, which is what makes us a victim of our surroundings. When one takes oneself and arrives at a kind of plenitude in the moment, one can feel,

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'I exist. I am helping my perception to begin to exist.' And this process can actually flow between people, too. This sort of flame, or transparency, or wave – a kind of energetic wave – that is in one person who is singing can be perceived by the partner, and then he or she can catch it, and the resonance of the song can help in this sort of interchange from person to person. It's complicated to put into words, but, yes, our work is related to this kind of process.

Is that what you call 'inner action'?

Richards Yes, we're talking about that.

Inner action – what you actually articulate as 'inner action' in some of your books. In your last book, The Heart of Practice (*2008*)*, you talk about 'inner action' quite a lot. You also say that this 'inner action', which takes place in* Action*, is structured. Sometimes you call it a 'performative' structure. Mario, you call it other things. But how do you structure it? Also, do you repeat it? Is it a one-off, or do you structure it so that it can be repeated another time, and then you can build on it to repeat it again, and build on it again?*

Biagini You said before that you had prepared a structure for this talk.

I did. And I've forgotten it entirely!

Biagini So you had a structure. Then, you know very well that it's possible just to 'execute' that structure automatically because you are busy with something else, or nervous, or afraid, or angry, or jealous, or very happy. Or, you use that structure as a springboard and you live what you do. What you do is not your structure. The structure is not a description of what you are doing. The structure is a map of reminding factors, points of reference. What you do is a process, and what you live is a process. It's something that you can't really catch and put down on paper. In other words, your doing is not a narrative. The moment you catch it, the moment you stop it, the moment you think that you have the proper technique or the proper tricks to get at it, it's gone.

What Thomas describes as the 'inner action' – you can't really structure it in the sense that you can't really manipulate it. You can remember that a certain flow inside was passing here, it was passing here, it was in relation to, for example, seeing this person – (*He touches Richards.*) and, at the same time going back. The senses are open and, somehow, we both float on the energy of our senses, on their force, on our life force. And we both go as if, at the same time, we are going back to a kind of home. Life is flowing, the senses are flowing, the mind is working, the heart is there. But, what we try to do, as Thomas said, is to go back, or ascend. You see, we can use here words related to space, to directions – 'back', 'ascend' – because we are talking about actions. It can be done if we are somehow together here and there is no block or defence.

What can be structured are the elements of performing – the actions, the songs; yes, the small details. The structure can be extremely detailed, really minutely detailed. But not in the sense that you construct a machine. Not in the sense that you construct, for example, a formal composition of movements. Today I was browsing through that book in your house, the new translation of Stanislavsky [*by Jean Benedetti*]. Stanislavsky said something very interesting: 'Watch out, don't replace complex tasks with the simple tasks. Don't replace complex tasks, for example, with motor tasks,' which is what we do all the time. All the time – not only in acting, unfortunately, but also in our lives.

You arrive home, your wife is already there, you say 'Hello,' but, in fact, you replace the greeting with a motor task – a sound and a movement. We become divided puppets. We are not there. That which is so complex can't be manipulated: manipulation is simplification. It is a displacement from a true happening to a representation. Then, quality drops; it becomes the quality of motor tasks, which can be interesting at times, sometimes astonishing if we are acrobats, but that's not the kind of art we are talking about here.

You've brought me to a really difficult area. How do I go around this? Don't just go straight – I'll

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break my neck! Let's go straight. You know, in the essay called 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle' – was it 1997? – and also in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France and, in fact, I think in some of the other lectures in June of 1997 at the Collège de France, Grotowski comes back to the idea that working on the 'inner action' rather than on the production is nevertheless an art. He says two things. He says it's a craft and that it's an art. Now, in what sense is an action that is not necessarily for witnesses – we'll come back to the notion of witness in a minute – an 'art'? Why is it an 'art'?

Biagini What is art?

Ah, it is a big question. Tolstoy asked it. 'What is art?'

Biagini In order to answer your question, we should make clear for ourselves – just for this moment – what art is. Many times, when we talk, we think that we are talking about the same thing but, in reality, we are on different planets. What I see as 'art' in any field is some help to live. It is a help to live up to what we could be in relation to our present historical moment with its contradictions, with the contradictions of my life, of my epoch, of the workings of my mind and the little pains in my body. And, yet, it is a way of transforming all this into something through which, as Thomas said before, shines the possibility of what it is to call oneself to be present, as a human being. And somebody else can benefit from this. There is a painting: it is the work of somebody in relation to himself and the world. This painting appears, and somebody else can benefit from it and perceive, for some moments, the world and himself, the relationship between his mind and his body, the relationship between this mind, this body, and this cosmos around, through the perception of that painting.

We are in London, then there is England, then there is Europe, then the planet, and then the stars. There are all these phenomena that I don't understand. How this light bulb is shining – I don't understand how it gives light. I don't understand how it is that he (*Thomas*) is breathing and that you are laughing, that you are hearing me, and that I am talking. I don't understand all this. But, for some moments, because I am looking at this painting, something in the sensation of being in my body, among other bodies, with other breaths, something changes. That's art. It is there, it exists and it is somehow possible that other people share this experience.

Grotowski said, 'Well, this is craft.' But, you know, he had a very, very noble understanding of craft. Craft is not tricks. You cannot put it in a book. You cannot write a manual of acting. You cannot write a manual of painting. Or, let's say, you will not become a great painter just by reading it. You will not become a great actor just by reading Stanislavsky or Grotowski. Nor will you become a great yogi by reading some great tantric works from the past, as you will not become a good shoemaker by looking at pictures of shoes.

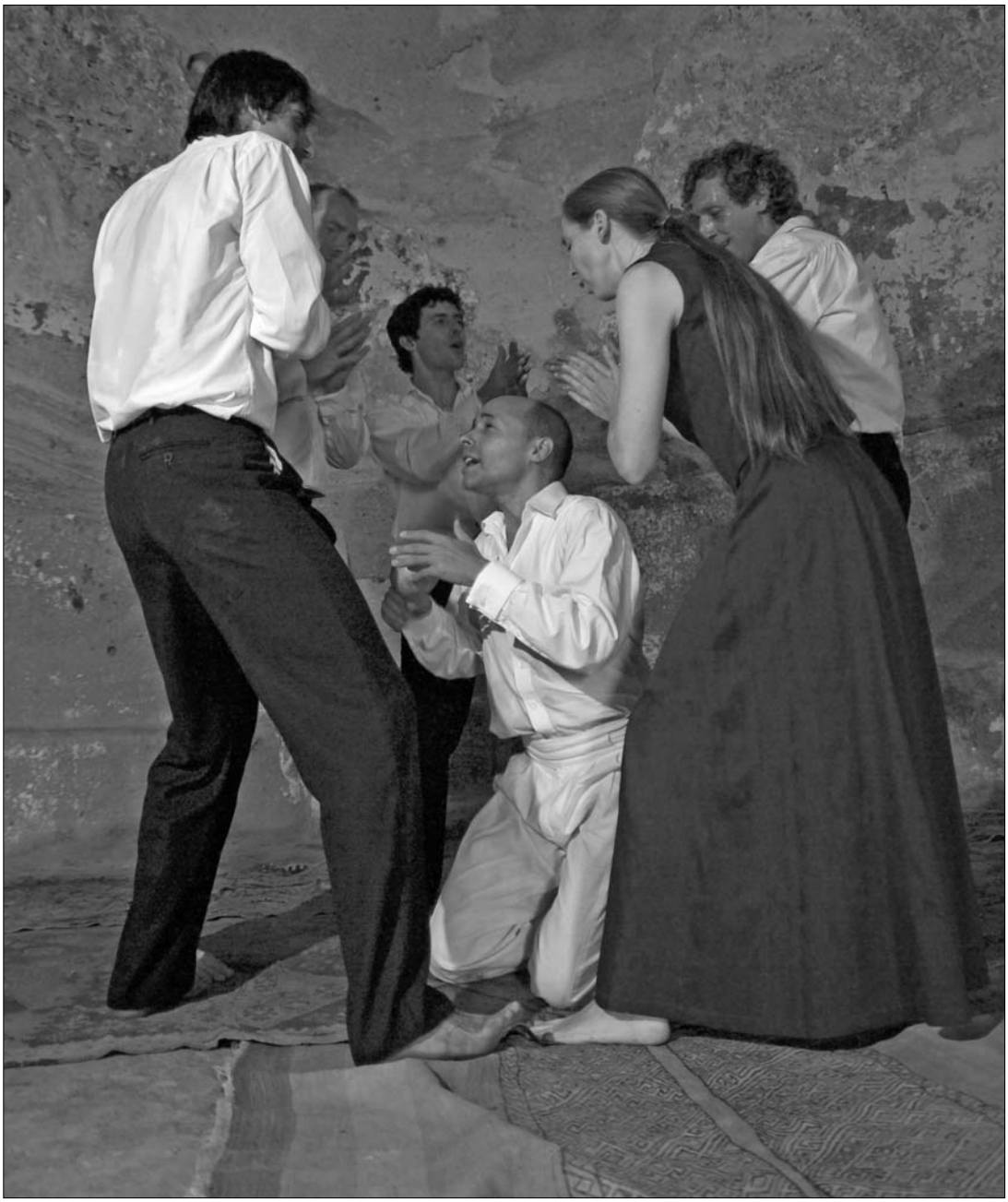
Craft is an embodied conscious and unconscious knowledge of how to deal with the world in a certain form, whether it is acting or shoemaking: now this shoe and this foot and this person are the world. The world, in this form, is in connection with me. I am working materially and operating on this substance, following that foot's life and the lines that are already inscribed in the leather. When Grotowski was alive – yes, many times there were no spectators when we did the work – but Grotowski would come and see the work. And when he wasn't there – and even now – the attempt is always to work on the leather and the foot in such a way that it is a well done piece of work. Well done. Not only in a technical sense – that is only part of craft. Craft is not only technique.

Like art is not technique.

Biagini Yes.

Richards There is a level of craft that is really fascinating. To get into one's body, to get into one's mind, is actually quite complicated. When we work together, if we're singing together there are so many little details that make up the living moment. And one can think about craft and how to have better

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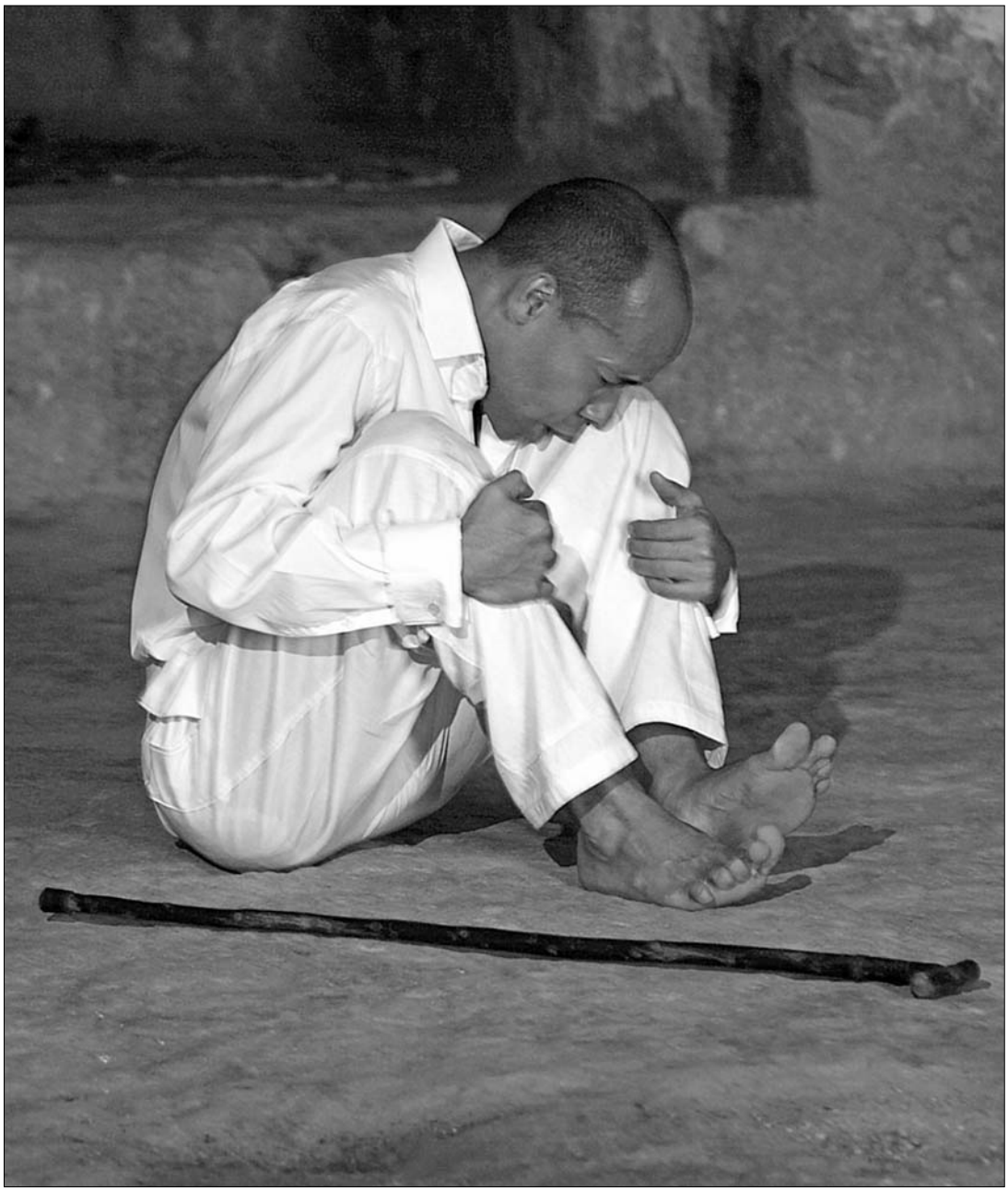
Action (2005), dir. Thomas Richards. Above, left to right: Pere Sais Martínez, Jørn Riegels Wimpel, Francesc Torrent Gironella, Thomas Richards, Marie De Clerck, and Mario Biagini. Opposite: Thomas Richards. Photos: Frits Meyst.

craft, and yet, one key to my craft – to let the moment live, is my partner – to be with him. (*He points to Biagini.*) If he's singing and I'm trying to sing and accompany him in this process – the inner action – the difference between being *here* and being *here* is enormous. (*He changes place in the space, almost imperceptibly.*) This small adjustment can have an enormous effect on the quality of our connection, and one needs always to reawaken in oneself the question, 'Where does he need me? Does he need me here or here?' And with simple and continuous attention on him everything can begin to flow: this sort of

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stream can begin to awaken between us and, in fact, it's as if this stream was already present and I just needed to approach it from the right place. In such moments, when everything is flowing, inside I might need to be like a mother and say to us both, 'Go, go ahead and play! All is fine!' This is also part of craft in our work.

In every living process there's always a crisis moment. There's a moment when the actor – or the doer, in our work – will catch some thread, and then he's about to lose it and if I am his partner, I want to help, right? In order to try to help him I need to see. I've got to see because, even if I think the wrong thing, for example, I might just draw his attention to the problem, and, in drawing his attention to the problem, he might block even more. I need to see what's happening. In fact, I need to try to see and understand



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another human being, and that, I think, is part of the secret of any living process on stage. People can read the texts of Grotowski and the books I've written about our work and read Stanislavsky's book, and ask, 'Well, is there really something similar between the work of Stanislavsky and that of Grotowski?' In fact, there is a similarity, which relates to the question of little actions, of doings, of consciously doing.

You've touched on a point that I thought I was going to ask you about and then I thought that I wouldn't. Well, I will. The question concerns Grotowski's relationship, and your relationship, to Stanislavsky. It seems to me that much of what you've said, Thomas, about the 'inner action' is very much what was happening when Stanislavsky was working on physical action. Stanislavsky makes it very clear that it is not only a matter of physical *action. There is an impulse to the action that is also very much from within.*

Richards It will be hard to answer you. I can speak about what I think about Stanislavsky, but I wasn't there, so I don't know what they really did.

Well, Grotowski wasn't there either, but he does talk about Stanislavsky.

Richards Yes, and so do I. But whether they were involved in something like 'inner action', I can't really say. I don't know.

Biagini He was interested in things like yoga, for example.

Tell me about yoga. How do some of these Eastern practices affect what you do?

Richards Yoga is fun. (*Laughter.*)

Does it help?

Richards Help what?

Biagini Maria is asking you if these Eastern practices – she understands yoga as an Eastern practice – help the work?

Richards I think what helps the work was that Grotowski had a practical knowledge of special subtle processes that a human being can live; a sort of dilation of perception that one can experience. I know that he was interested in, and came into contact with, many traditions – in the East, in Africa, in South America, in Europe. When he used the word 'yoga' in relation to our work, he was not speaking about a cycle of stretches for the body, or even Hatha yoga. He referred to the root of the word, which is 'yoke', the tool you put on the workhorse to channel its force in order to plough the field. When I was speaking before about this part of 'Thomas' running here or running there – it needs to be yoked. Yoke me, please. Yoke me now! Straight away!

When this yoking takes place, something very funny happens, immediately. It's something like when you're a child and you see an object – (*He holds up a pen.*) And yes, it's a pen, but maybe it's also for flying; everything's new, unknown. The child really discovers the object as if for the first time. The child is looking at the object, playing with it, and there's such a strong flow between him and the object, an enormous joy appears. And the joy is so strong that it makes the moment shine, and it's as if for the child that moment is all that exists. It's something like that.

Biagini Maria, I don't know if we can say that this aspect, 'yoga', 'yoke', helps the work. It's rather that everything in the work serves this aspect. Many times, we feel ourselves completely scattered, right? It's a common state. But there are moments when something is quiet and there is contact: you are in touch with yourself, the people around you, the world, and something is clear, evident. There is something inside like a repose. At the same time, you are doing: you are active, you are thinking. And your thinking is suddenly clear. You are feeling, and these feelings have colours, shades.

Richards We are approaching an answer to Maria's question because she asked about the 'inner action' and physical action. They

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are in fact different things. I have my score, and on one level my score is made up of physical actions. They are the basic elements of my score. I know that, for example, I should try to make my partner smile. This little doing we can fix, but just because it is fixed does not mean that it will be alive when I do it. I need to see my partner, find the way to approach him, and yes, now he is smiling and the physical action has been accomplished. You're right when you say that a physical action is not just physical. A physical action is related to all of me, and it relates me to my partner and to my situation.

Let's say that in my score there is a moment when I'm in conflict with my partner and I give him the back, as if to say, 'To hell with you! Get out of here.' We can fix that little physical action. So our scores are articulated on the level of physical actions, which of course are related to contact with our partners. We know, OK, we've got A, B, C, D – a score of physical actions. And, then, the inner action can start to happen – another level of our score. And the ancient songs of tradition help us in the inner action. The song is a sonic wave that rises and falls. It's an organization of the octave. The way that certain ancient songs are organized is a kind of invitation to the doer's inner life. It's as if saying to your inner life, 'Ah, would you like to come here and touch this special place inside yourself, now would you like to come here and discover this subtle source?'

So, the song is happening, the score of physical actions is happening, and the song and its resonance can begin to descend inside the organism, as a kind of active questioning between oneself, and the song takes place: 'Ah, what do you wish to awaken in me now?' And something like a wave, or a wind, like a very subtle substance that passes, as if through you, touching your skin, moving around you and your partner, can appear. We can try to surf with that wave together, or ride it together, live in it.

This process is related to my perception of the moment, to my partner's perception of the moment if we are working in tandem; and it is related to the transformation of our presence.

As the inner action takes place, my partner's deep energetic resources and mine can become open, facing each other and interconnected, as we move together towards a kind of shining experience within the moment. So in our performative opuses, there are many moments in which we have two levels to our scores: one related to physical actions and one to what we can call the inner action.

Biagini Schematically – and maybe in a banal way – if any of you is an actor, you know that physical actions in Stanislavsky's sense are related to intentions and objectives outside. So they organize not your movement, not your motor tasks, but your presence, your doing, because we are present when we are able to do, according to an intention. Normally our intentions go by themselves. We do not 'decide' them, as I don't decide my opinions. We have this illusion that my opinions are my opinions and that I choose them. In reality, my opinions are mine only because they took me – I can't choose them. I can't choose very easily to have another opinion. The same happens in every moment with our manifestations in life and our moods, and our presence or absence. It is in the hands of the wind. We are in the wind, like leaves. So, if the objective of the work is to explore the possibility of what I called 'contact' with myself and with the world, I need to be able, to some extent, to choose responsibly.

If in a certain moment of a working session I am the victim of a big wave of heaviness, of inertia, and suddenly I am tired and almost fall asleep, I must somehow be able to get out of it because, if I am in that heaviness, I cannot do my work in that moment. That inertia is nothing bad by itself. It would be good if it was after teatime and I had half an hour for a nap. But it's not so. It's not the moment for a nap. So I can discover that I can use my presence – my body, my mind – so that my different functions are there with me in that moment so that that work can be done.

In a schematic way, we could say that physical actions have their objectives outside. The actor wants something. Or we could say

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that they have their root in the past. In the later part of his life, Stanislavsky spoke less about the objective and more about what the seed was. But it was still an objective outside. Something happened, or I want something to happen. That's physical action – outside. Inner action is inner, so it is directed towards something inside. But then you discover that this something inside is not mine. *There*, in you, there also is inside. You have an inside. And you. And you. It's not personal. In this quiet place from which the inner action springs, something is not mine.

And how does this something that is not mine exist when you have witnesses? Grotowski said he wanted a spectator who was not a spectator. You talk about 'witnesses'. Why do you have witnesses?

Richards It can exist when there are witnesses in the same way that anything within me can exist when I am alone and also when I am with other people. Any physical process, thought process, or emotion that I can have – for example, feeling sad, happy, angry, content – can exist when I am faced with a partner and also when I am alone in my room. And similarly, the act of 'yoking' oneself can happen anywhere. There is no exclusivity: we cannot say that this special process can only happen under these or those circumstances. This special core that Mario is speaking about, something that I perceive to be like the human core within being and a key point for the unfolding of the inner action, can exist anywhere. It can exist when I am alone, when I am faced with a partner, and also when someone is in the room watching, whether we call that person a spectator or a witness.

But does it relate to the spectator? Is it an engagement with this witness? Or is it within you, and the witness can come into the action, or come out?

Biagini I think that actually witnesses are extremely important in our work.

Why? I'm asking why?

Biagini Because we are working in art, and our art is a kind of theatre. I remember a conversation I had with Grotowski towards the end of his life; we were talking about the future. How can the work continue? He was saying, 'Ah, it will be hard when I am not there.' Because, you know, he was a big guy, he had a big name, and people could accept strange things from him, which maybe they cannot accept from us. So he said: 'There are many possibilities. You could continue in another way, you could even have different jobs and continue doing the essential work, somehow, in an apartment.' 'But then,' he said, 'you would lose something. You would lose the connection with the theatre family and this field, this territory of art, which gives some kind of objectivity.'

Why is the witness important? We could say because it is a test. For all of us human beings – I think I can speak also for you – the stickiest parasite we can have is imagination. We live in imagination most of the time. We read a book and think, 'Ah, beautiful book: it says you can make your life better if you do this and this,' and we just imagine for a few seconds to be doing that, and the fact of reading the book and dreaming about it makes us think that we did it. But it is just completely illusory.

So one problem is that I could be living and working in illusion. A witness is some test – not because of what he or she can tell you. This is quite clear to any decent actor: you do something, you rehearse and what you have created seems very good. Then you ask a few friends, people you respect, to come and see it. You sit them there and you say 'I will show you something,' and then you do what you rehearsed and immediately you know that it's really not working – not necessarily because of any communication or verbal feedback from them. It's because you project something on them and you use them as a mirror, so you know, 'Wow, I was an illusion.'

A witness provides the possibility of circulation. Art is connected with the time in which we live and, as I said before, with the contradictions in which we live. Now, for example, is a time when everybody shuts

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Dies Irae (2005) dir. Mario Biagini and Thomas Richards. Opposite, left to right: Mario Biagini and Gey Pin Ang.

Below, left to right: Pei Hwee Tan, Jørn Riegels Wimpel, Francesc Torrent Gironella, Cécile Berthe, and Gey Pin Ang.

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themselves in a house or an envelope or a school or a style or an 'us' and closes off the outside, or 'them'. So the air does not pass, the circulation does not appear. There is rarely any possibility of fertility, or of discovering what the present is becoming, blossoming into the future, into a catastrophe, into a period of beauty, into a period of understanding or into a period of ignorance and fanaticism.

We do not have this possibility of understanding because there is no circulation of air, of impressions, of food. If there were no witnesses in our work, we would be in this danger. We would be in the danger of having circulation in the work that can be flowing perfectly, but, without this intake of air and exchange of air, it might be barren.

Richards Yes, if someone comes to see, that person can see that something exists. If the inner action is really touched, then the person has the chance to understand, 'That's possible.' And in that case, the content of the work has been perceived. And, as with any work of art, it's a great moment when the artwork's deep content is perceived. What will happen after may be of great importance or not. Both the perception of the content and what happens after is not in our hands.

I'm going to ask one more question and then open our conversation out to the floor. The projects that you did, these big travelling projects – Tracing Roads Across *starting from 2003 and the one you are now doing called* Horizons, *which, if I'm not mistaken, you have been doing for two years running at and supported by the Grotowski Institute in Wroclaw. Is this for circulation and air?*

Biagini Let me put the question this way. How is it that we choose a certain form instead of another for contact with the world? One level of our choice relates to the propositions that we receive from the circumstances. Somebody proposes something to us and we see that this proposition – from a person, a situation, an institution – somehow links to a creative process in the work. Now, for example, we are in a very, very open moment in the work. Another level relates to the many different lines of work appearing at the same time, appearing in a substantial way. Now we need to look and find the forms – 'forms' in the sense of 'modalities' – in which these phenomena appearing in the work, which are unknown to us, can live in relation to other human beings.

'Other human beings' also means other places, other skies, other buildings, different kind of foods. If we just applied a formula, like, 'Now we do a *tournée* [*tour*], now we do another *tournée*,' we would be putting new wine in old barrels. The wine would get spoiled, and the barrels, too. We need to find the forms that serve the work, that serve people inside the work, and also – why not? – outside it.

This has been a very important aspect of the work almost from the beginning: to see what happens in the work and also what happens outside of it, in the world. To find the organic ways of reacting to these two currents, these two flows. Their interaction is vital, and therefore we try to be fluid, and always ask ourselves what the next step should be.

On a personal note – my last question, and then there will be lots more. As you know, I am studying Anatoli Vassiliev's work and, of course, he was close to Grotowski in those last years of Grotowski's life. You worked in his theatre in Moscow. What was the experience like?

Richards Vassiliev is a very special person for me. We met him back in the early 1990s. It was a time when we rarely had visitors come to see the work; we were still doing *Downstairs Action*. Grotowski started to speak to me about a Russian director, Vassiliev – I didn't know anything about him – and told me that he had a very large group. Grotowski had said to Vassiliev that he could only bring twelve of the group of about twenty-four actors, and he decided that he would come with the men of his team. So he brought about twelve men to see our work.

I was struck by how open Grotowski was with Vassiliev. Normally, when a theatre group came to see our work during the early 1990s, we would have dinner with the group

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after they had seen our work and we had seen theirs, and then they would leave. But Vassiliev stayed a few days with his group. They watched us rehearse several times, which was one of the few occasions when visitors during that period saw us rehearse. It was a powerful moment for our team, having them watch our work process.

Biagini They stayed in our houses, too.

Richards Yes, yes! I woke up one morning to find one of the actors tasting our margarine. He was going through the kitchen cabinets tasting the unknown foods, since he thought that an actor should taste as many new foods as possible. We had one work session where – this was a very powerful experience – I really felt a witness among us, next to us, someone from outside the work and yet who was, in some way, connected to the work, even though he was just sitting and watching. Vassiliev was sitting, and the way he sat throughout the long rehearsals, and the quality of attention and care with which his team responded to the way he was present with us, created a very special environment. In fact, it is as if they were not present at all and, at the same time, fully present, and this helped to create a situation in which we could really rehearse and touch essential elements of our work.

I believe that, at that moment, a relationship was born between Mario, Vassiliev and me, which has continued to develop since. Vassiliev has invited the Workcenter on numerous occasions to his theatre to perform. I feel he is like an uncle to our work, a very good friend and a relation, even though our works are, of course, quite different.

Biagini The experience was strong because we went to Moscow several times and we presented several different kinds of work. We had performed and done different kinds of work already in many places, but, in Moscow, we faced spectators who were very well educated. I remember one time we did – I think it was *One Breath Left*. There was a talk afterwards, and a young man asked about montage and editing and he made references to Eisenstein. I remember asking him after the talk, 'Are you a cinema student?' And he said, 'No, I'm a mechanical engineer.'

I think, in the beginning, that I did not understand the differences of temperament and different kinds of conditioning in different countries; but human beings have different kinds of conditioning. This became clear when Anatoli came the first time. We were watching them working and it was clear that certain things that were quite incomprehensible to us – or we could not understand what their use was in theatre – were needed for these actors. I remember Anatoli once explaining to us that the actors, who were middle-aged, had grown up during Soviet times. And he said: 'Look, we have to do these games, these exercises –' I remember them playing with a ball – 'We have to get over so many things.'

The theatres where we went and which were directed by Vassiliev functioned so well – the technicians, the actors, the administrators – so well, that you couldn't believe it. [*Mario Biagini is here referring both to the theatre on Povarskaya Street and the one on Sretenka Street designed by the architect Igor Popov in collaboration with Vassiliev, according to the latter's vision and needs.*] Of course, it is not a question of civilizations; it is a question of individuals. The theatres worked because the teams running them worked very well. The same can happen here. The same can happen if you have a theatre group. There needs to be some kind of agreement between a few people, an agreement that we are going to try to do what we do well. We will find our way, our forms. There is an agreement to be honest with each other, to say, 'Look – you didn't do that well. I am your friend. That's why I say that that was not done well.'

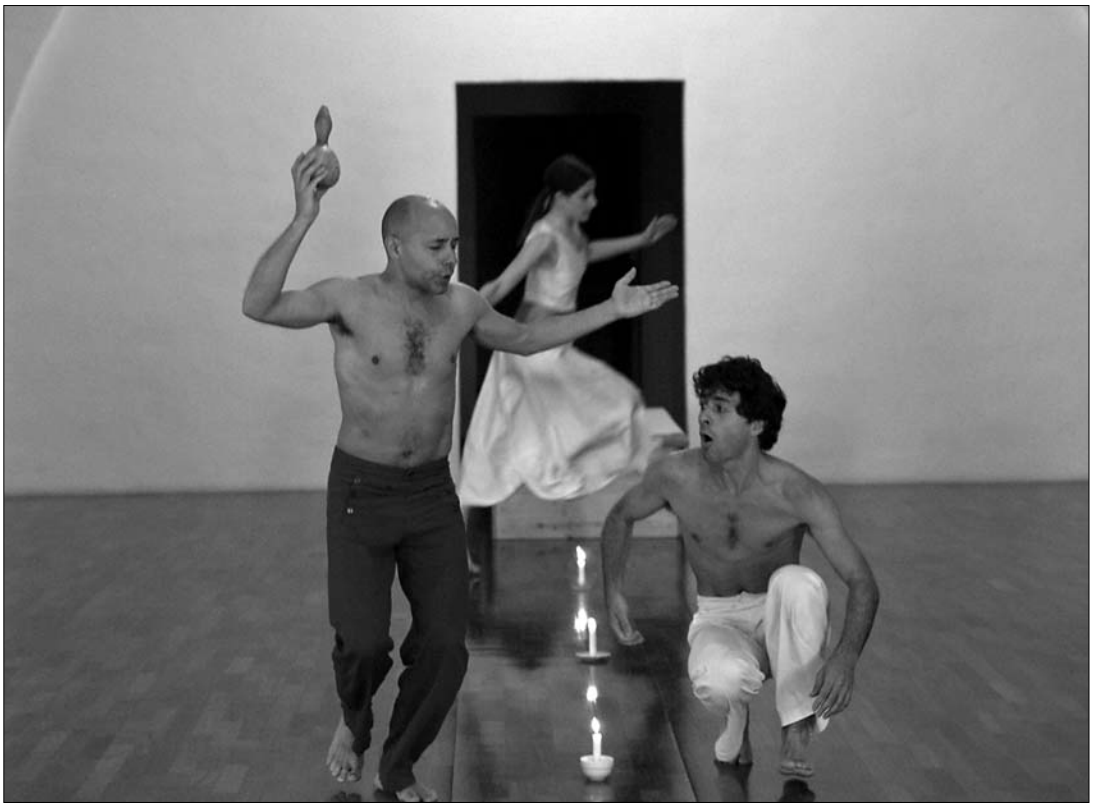
It's what you said earlier about quality.

Biagini Yeah.

Nice note to end on – quality. Are there any questions from the audience?

Audience Member *I've got two. I'm interested to know more about the process by which the actors*

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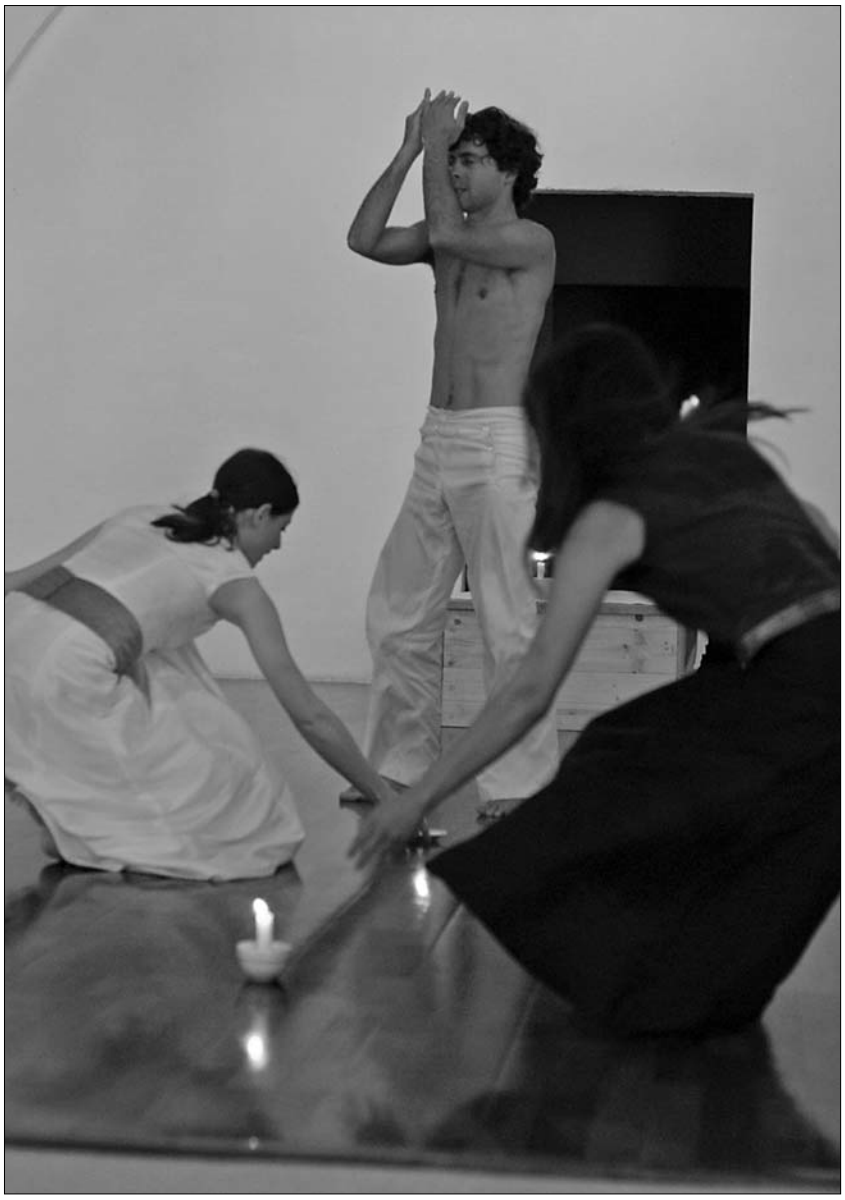
can explain your experience to the newcomers at the Workcenter. I've read a lot about it in your books, but I would like to know more in detail. I would also like to know how many experiences from paratheatre have helped this process of integrating newcomers into Action, *specifically, and into your work in general.*

Richards Inviting someone inside the work is a very complicated process. We need to be aware of a sort of practical knowledge that we have acquired over twenty-two years of work. And we have to be ready to abandon it completely, to throw it out the window, and to try to see that specific person: there's so much to see. When I came into the work and Grotowski tried to help me into it, I remember a lot of work was based upon the fact that I could not really stand. (*He gets up to demonstrate.*) Not that I couldn't stand, but my way of standing was somehow not working for a living approach to these songs. And, it's not just standing, it's also a question of breathing. I mean, I was twenty-two and I realized that, in fact, I was not really breathing. My muscles were so tight that breathing for me was something like this (*inhales shallowly*), which had an effect on singing and on work on sonic resonance. I remember Grotowski working with me: 'Stand like this. No, like this. No, change. More forward with the spine. Arch the spine! Bend the knees. Now a little more.' He was trying to see how the way I was standing was affecting the sound and the resonance, and the subtle connection that could be born between me and the song.

Resonance is not just a question of how the sound is resonating in the body, but also how it resonates in the space so that your body becomes a conductor of sound that is going in two directions. Voice and sound go inside, and also go outside. But, then, you see, it is not just a question of standing and breathing: it's a question of impulse, because breath is an impulse. The breath going in, the breath going out (*demonstrates breath*), is an impulse that involves in a subtle way all of my body.

And then, it's not just a question of standing and of breathing and impulse, but a

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The Letter (2008) dir. Thomas Richards. Opposite page, left to right: Thomas Richards, Cécile Berthe, and Francesc Torrent Gironella.

Alongside, left to right: Cécile Berthe, Francesc Torrent Gironella and Pei Hwee Tan.

Photos: Magda Zlotowska.

question of how my body, in fact, lets itself be, as if *seen* by the space, or by those around me. It's amazing to see the people who come into the work and how difficult it is for them to get out of this (*cups his hand in an artificial way*) – and the hand is like this, almost all the time. You ask the person to stand consciously and sing in relation to a partner, and to let this unnecessary contraction go (*looks at his hand which is now neither contracted nor relaxed*), and for a moment all is well; and then, after some seconds, this again (*contraction of hand*). Or the person has an enormous, unnecessary contraction here (*tightens his shoulders*), and this frozen solidity blocks the resonance from passing down into the body. And it's not enough to say to somebody, 'OK, decontract.' It just comes back.

So, we have many habits, inner habits, coming from the way we relate to others and the world, which lead to the crystallization of physical habits. So you need to look at the person and to see, really, how the person is relating with the world, how the person is, in some way, hiding something special in himself from the world. And also, in some way,

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hiding from his or her own creative potential. And this potential is unknown. We don't know what it is and we need to look for it.

It can be in the person's way of thinking. If the person is continually making unneeded polemics in his/her mind, he or she is continually putting everything into a box of 'I am right and you are wrong. You did that because of this, and that is because of that, and you said this and this is what you meant and you said it because of that.' And the person is convinced of all these assertions. And all of this is a way of controlling things that you can't control, which is the other human being. I don't know what she is thinking and, the fact is, I'm never going to know. And even if she told me, probably I would not know at that point, since I would not know if what she told me is what she was really thinking.

We are continually playing a game with ourselves, turning things that we don't know into things that we do know. This is also part of what limits our creative capacities and our capacities for perception in the moment and, also, our capacities for being alive. You've got to see the person who enters the team and see what that person's habits are. Someone can be very good in the work, and even their way of being good is bad. They're like a good student, and the day that they say, 'To hell with you!' is the first really alive day of their work. Maybe in that moment they stop being a student and really take responsibility for their own work. That's the beauty of work, not knowing exactly what to do. That's great: you can develop capacities, and also forget them. I don't know if I've answered your question, or if it can even be fully answered. There was another part of your question about paratheatre.

Biagini Thomas and I don't know much about paratheatre, because we were not there. Of course, we know what Grotowski told us about it. Paratheatre was quite different from what we do. I was always very fascinated by that period and by the texts by Grotowski on that period because they are very strong. They speak of some possibility that can become real between human beings. About paratheatre, he always said, 'Look, yes, there were moments when miraculous things happened between people. This was when the core team had passed through a very, very rigorous period of work.' When you read Grotowski's texts – I allow myself to give you a piece of advice – read them thoroughly. Don't let your attention be only on the parts you like.

To speak more directly about the difference between our work and the period of paratheatre. When somebody comes into our team, in the different ways of working that we do, he or she needs to start from very basic craft elements. Those are things that one needs to learn. Here is where the first question and the first test of professionalism begins. As Thomas was saying earlier, somebody may be learning something in a 'correct' way but not really learning it because he or she is only catching the shell of it. True professionalism is about finding a way to learn something that includes all of the unconscious aspects, learning as if from the inside of the person who is teaching you. But these elements are *craft* – not technical, but *craft* elements. That's one difference. A lot of time is spent on this, on the songs, or even on acting. You can create some acting fragment and then you have to repeat it, so you need to learn the craft of how to do it again, not how to repeat the form, but how to *do* it again.

Audience Member *I have a question regarding the notion of verticality in your work. I'm trying to create archaeological research on it, but I couldn't understand what you meant, especially when you used the metaphor of the ladder. This notion began in modern times with* [*Edmund*] *Husserl, and I couldn't find any indication as to whether Grotowski knew about it, but you guys as Grotowski's closest collaborators must know. Is there any relation between Grotowski's notion of 'verticality' and that of Husserl?*

Biagini No. (*Laughter from audience.*) I think that Grotowski respected phenomenology very much as a philosophical approach, or as a research approach, but he was a practitioner. He was a man of doing. True, he was also one of the greatest intellectuals of this

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century. I really think so after having worked a lot on translations of his texts. But no, it's not the same. Read the story of Jacob. That's what he's talking about. There is a ladder and there are, as Grotowski says, forces that go up and down. You can almost understand this intuitively, somehow. You can sometimes see in life that the place where you are, in your body, in your way of being and perceiving life as a living phenomenon – not as a myth, but as a living phenomenon – is on the lower end of the ladder. This is nothing bad; it's just different from the upper end of the ladder.

Nature, the world in and around us, can be a passage between different ends. When Grotowski speaks of this change of the quality of energy, he is not talking about it in a way that certain types of theatre speak about different kinds of energy – hard energy, soft energy. (*He demonstrates with voice, different timbres.*) He's talking about a change in perception. He's using a very old terminology.

You are right: it is possible to make some sort of archaeology of it, but it is difficult because the vocabulary changes. So don't look for the word 'verticality', but look for what he is trying to say by it. When Grotowski speaks of verticality, he speaks of something that stands. There is a text of his, 'Performer' (1987), where, at the end, he quotes some passages from Meister Eckhart. The beginning of this quotation is very interesting. It says that the difference between the inner man and the outer man is as big as the difference between the earth and the sky.

What does that mean? There, the text is speaking about verticality. What is the 'inner man'? Of course, in our culture there is an expression from St Paul, from the Epistles, where he speaks about the inner man. It's an old expression. Probably older than St Paul. Grotowski, many times, referred to what, in some traditions – let's say heretical traditions in India – is called 'the man of the heart' or 'the man within'. Grotowski said that 'man' means 'that which stands'. Vertical. Stands between two poles: a pole that is related to our animal nature and passes through our capacity for reasoning and understanding but goes even higher to something that Grotowski called 'awareness'.

Richards I'd like to go back to the question about entering into our work. What I see very often is that someone who comes into the work is sort of caught; his creative forces, as an artist, are blocked – caught, in fact – by some never-ending self-criticism and judgement. A person has a simple task – for example, to create an acting piece or an acting proposition from a text. And what I see when talking to the person about his or her ideas is that this person starts to have an idea and then immediately, before the thought is finished, says, 'No, that's wrong, that won't work.' It's as if the person has no courage.

In our conversation this afternoon, before we came here, Maria was talking about what she sometimes says to her students. She says, 'Finish the thought.' That's incredibly important because we can always find something wrong in what we are thinking. One fight in the creative process is, in fact, to let one's imagination be more free than a chicken that's trying to fly. The work becomes very joyful if the person can actually get out of that mechanism and say, 'I will criticize, but I will criticize afterwards. I will criticize my impulses afterwards.'

If the person has such a discovery, a very creative out-flooding occurs, and surprising, unique propositions can start to appear. To get to that point is difficult, but, when it appears, it is a beautiful moment in someone's work. Just because someone's inside the Workcenter team doesn't mean he or she is actually there. On some days in the work, you see that this person is now really here; this person has become a colleague. It's almost as if that person has discovered himself as an artist.

Audience Member *I did paratheatre in the 1970s and it struck me, watching you and seeing how you express yourself, that you are conveying the work and carrying on the work as people who have embodied it, whereas a lot of the paratheatre actors were led by people who were not embodying the work. They were part of the work's philosophy, but there was no craft. It was entirely about*

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Electric Party (2009) of the Workcenter's Open Program, dir. Mario Biagini. Above, left to right: Felicita Marcelli, Julia Ulehla, Agnieska Kazimierska, Lloyd Bricken, Marina Grégory, Itahisa Borges Méndez, Cinzia Cigna, Alejandro Tomás Rodriguez Aguerópolis and Davide Curzio (photo: Vidon).Opposite, left to right: Itahisa Borges Méndez, Felicita Marcelli, Davide Curzio, and Alejandro Tomás Rodriguez Aguerópolis (photo: Marcin Cecko).

the doing. I'm interested in whether Grotowski talked to you about the difference. I wonder if you've ever had dialogue about this process of the knowledge, the gnosis, that you carry in you in relation to the future of the work, which is so different from how the paratheatre links to the last part of this work.

Biagini Have you ever met Grotowski?

Audience Member: Yes.

Biagini When we met him – Thomas actually began work with him in 1985, I began in 1986 – he really looked as if he embodied something. The most important things were not conveyed by verbalization, but by a look. The paratheatre work – I think we must remember that there were many, many aspects of it and many teams at work. Certain members of some teams surely had developed a knowledge related to the precise practice they were engaged in. That is what Grotowski was referring to when he said – he speaks of it in 'From the Theatre Company to Art as Vehicle' – 'When the inner core team had passed through a fearless . . .'

Richards 'Intrepid.'

Biagini Yes, 'intrepid period of closed work', and when there were little numbers of participants, something at the limit of the miracle would happen. So, there is a hint of what he meant: 'intrepid' and 'work'.

What you say about embodied knowledge – I remember Grotowski speaking about how you can . . . You know, you might say to Grotowski, 'Yeah, this person in the work, he doesn't get it.' Like referring to the difficulties that Thomas was describing before, for example, when someone is blocked by some habit. Grotowski would say, 'You should just show the person another way, don't speak about it. Just *you* do it in another way.'

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Human beings are very perceptive organisms. We can stand facing each other, one can even manage to perceive what is flowing in the other, and some understanding appears: 'Ah! It is that simple.' Of course, it's not simple. It's simple here (*points to his head*), but it's not simple in the way the whole thing functions.

Richards I don't know much about paratheatre at all. I know, from what Grotowski told me, that in paratheatre he did not work on performance elements as the basis for what was happening. That, I think is a fundamental difference between what he did with us and paratheatre. It was clear from the beginning that our work was going to be founded, in part, on the fundamental elements of performative work – acting, actions, structure, the capacity to repeat structure, song, precision of song, rhythm, melody, tuning, and so on. Our work is a specific craft. Any good actor embodies his craft, and it's the same in our work. To advance in it, you need to embody the craft and learn how to live inside it, and let it live inside you.

Audience Member *Thomas, I should probably initially direct this question to you. In one of your books you recall a moment of working with Grotowski as an actor, and this moment is where you had a real discovery, and he stopped you, saying a wild animal had now entered the room and that moments like these were not moments where you should concern yourself with structure. He called moments such as these 'moments of grace'. I was wondering whether you could explain or share a little more detail about what is behind that idea of 'grace'.*

Richards I guess those are the moments when everything makes sense. All of a sudden you know why you are both in the room together. How can I say something about this? It has to do with need.

Audience Member *Maybe I can help a bit. The reason why I'm asking is because it's something more tangible – 'grace', as opposed to the creative stage, or inspiration.*

Richards You mean as a word? But I could use another word. It doesn't matter. We could also call it something else. Grotowski used that word 'grace' to describe very special moments in work.

It has something to do with need. I think each of us has some hidden potential. It's like what we're born for, like our high road in



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life. It's almost as if, in our birth or in the impulse to life, something was given to us that wants to realize itself. In my conscience, throughout my life, I always measure myself face to this. I am unconsciously aware of my distance from this, or of my connection with it. When I started to work with Grotowski, I think I felt desperately far from this place of true need, but I was only twenty-two. I had lived twenty-two years of life and already had a feeling of great anxiety and almost a feeling of desperation. Why am I leading this life? What does it have to offer? Everything was getting pretty bleak, a little dark. You know, Maria, I didn't feel substance between myself and other people any more. It was almost as if I felt a curtain being drawn between myself and other people. This gave me a kind of desperation.

I suppose many people can be drawn to work like ours from different but similar motivations – from some sort of dissatisfaction, or they need something; they need to touch something in their lives. I think these 'special' moments in the work are the moments when that need, which is almost like one's deepest truth, becomes present in the workspace, and starts to flow with the person doing, and be that person – be the person's way of standing, looking and singing, and be their voice. And all craft goes out the window. It's not as if everything becomes a technical mess but, in fact, everything becomes incredibly perfect, in the sense that everything is beautiful, everything is shining. You are watching, and even the resonance inside you coming from what the person in front of you is living as an experience becomes your own rediscovery of life, for a moment. You remember yourself, you remember your own need, you remember your own distance. As if your awareness of life awakens in that moment – poof – and in that moment, everything makes sense.

Audience Member *I had a question about working with songs. I understand that working with songs is a kind of process that is connected with realizing something about yourself on the level of your memory, as well. Do you, at some point of being involved with this process of working with songs, start to be completely clear about yourself, about your past, your personal memory? Or maybe you go beyond those borders of your personal existence?*

Biagini The songs are tools. There can be other tools. Even acting can be a tool. Playing the piano can be a tool. Painting or making pottery or teaching can be a tool in the sense that you have some activity in which you are involved, and you get to know it well. You are doing something and you are doing it well and, at the same time, you look to let something in you go up, rise, touch some subtle source. So it's not about getting to know your past or discovering what all the different shades of your personality are. Rather, it is about seeing what is not accessorial.

Through the work of the songs, there can be some kind of process between the people involved and in relation to a better living, we could say. Then, perhaps we remember. Not that we remember some past moment from our lives, but that we remember that we are here. And if we are here, maybe we are here for some reason, or we can invent a reason, find a reason to be here, and make this 'here' ours, make this time ours, and not just be the victim of our births.

This can be done with songs, or with other things. Somewhere, this may be called praying. It is a direction of attention. You need to know what you are doing well because you should be completely involved in what you are doing, and some part of your attention goes somewhere else. You know what you are doing, with your partners, and part of your attention goes – as in a kind of prayer – to 'not me'. 'You', then, becomes more important than 'me'.

Richards We're talking about processes that are difficult to put into words. Yes, personal memories in some moments can become a part of one's score in a performative opus. But we are not speaking about that. We are also not speaking about memory in terms of 'Ah, I remember something from my youth. This was an experience from my youth that conditioned me in a certain way and it blocked me in this and that way, and I can try

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to resolve this block by dealing with this memory. I understand it; I see how it conditions me; I am fighting with that conditioning.' This is not what we're talking about, even though the kinds of conditionings that happen to us are part of the work, in fact. Knowing them is part of getting to know oneself, and understanding what is happening within: 'Thomas' today is also because of what happened yesterday and, so, it can be important to understand what happened yesterday so that I can better shape what I can do now.

This kind of self-understanding in our work is just a beginning, like clearing the road. It's like setting fire to the weeds in the field to clear it out for something to happen, for a special experience to be lived in the moment. One can start to perceive a kind of expansion; perceive that what is my self, in fact, does not stop at the edge of my skin. It doesn't even stop at the edge of my conceptions of 'I', or of my memories. Some other kind of presence can become so palpable; it's as if it's using me as a ladder, in fact, or like the banks of a river. The doer is doing, but you don't just see the doer doing; something else is doing the doer, and the doer is being used like the banks of a river, and this water is flowing through the person.

You work, and you work in this way, and your sense of 'what is my self' starts to change. You see that, in one moment, this sense of self is constricted and then it grows and grows, and where does it stop? I am speaking about verticality, it's what the work is aiming for. One can't grasp it, one can't catch it, because my perception is now, my perception is now, the chance is now. I can't limit it. I can only hope to hold on to this thread of 'now' and to let the instrument of my being be played like a flute by this wind of now.

Audience Member *I wanted to clarify with you my understanding of 'verticality' and its connection with the vibrations in the songs. My understanding is that this idea of the line through the body, from the spine, from the centre, from the face through to the skull, leads to the chakras, to the different emotional centres, and they then lead to the endocrine system, which also is about vibrations. You're connected to the earth through the face chakra; your emotion, your sense of self, your heart chakra, your connection with your communication and spirituality is in flight of that line. My understanding is that Grotowksi used the song and vibrations in order to stimulate this vertical line through the spine, through the emotions, through the connection with yourself as a person on the earth and yourself as a spiritual being. Where do you stand on what I have just said?*

Biagini Don't confuse the map with the journey. You can have many versions of a map. The map is useful if you go through a journey. Then you don't need the map. The point is not to stimulate or manipulate something in one's organism for some kind of self-perfection. This work is not about making myself better. It is, rather, to *be* and be *with*. Yes, there are traditional descriptions – traditional maps – of these processes. The processes are very complex. Maps are always simplified. They are two-dimensional.

Do you see what I mean? If I start to think about – I don't know – this place (*pointing to his chest*), just by thinking about it I can make it redder. It will become redder. And so what? What will this change of blood circulation do to the life of my partner who is singing with me? To the life of the person next to me?

But, yeah, we can ask ourselves and do some research. What do they mean, in the past, in these strange texts, when they speak about heart? What is it? What is it to enter into the heart? Is it my heart? Will I make myself better, will my body work better, will my mind be better, will my soul be saved? It's rather that all this that works (*indicating body*) works naturally, and it is quite hopeless, we could say. All this (*indicating body*) was born. It will die. The process of years passing brings some kind of general degeneration. But then, what is it to enter into the heart? What is this 'inner man'? The question is important. The *question*, we can say, not the answer, really, but the act of looking for the answer. That will have an effect in which, somehow, this hell that Thomas was describ-

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ing before – this hell will still be there, but, somehow, something larger will appear, which will contain it.

We could say that there would be less identification with it, or less identification with a map, any map. It can be a map that says I am a quadruped, or a biped, or I am an actor. Or there is a map that says I am a flow of energy in the universe – this is also a map. Both are maps. Representations. The work is not about representation. Certain representations can help in the sense that you see that some people from the past were concerned with the same questions as you, and that therefore we are not alone in our search, and we can approach their witnessing, the traces of their efforts, and ask ourselves, honestly, whether and how their research can help us in our lives.

Audience Member *It takes the form, first, of gratefulness for the openness and the struggle and desire that you both obviously have to explain yourselves so clearly and truthfully. And to thank you for the poetry of a great many of your answers; they're absolutely beautiful statements. And a lot of the words that you've used do sound like – and I say emphatically – the presence of a kind of truthfulness and humour; and the knowledge that we can find quality, find a something better, higher, something more truthful in the inner life. Does your thought for the need to circulate this and the journey – does this inform your choice to be in the theatrical family, your choice to be in the position of performer? Is there a possibility that this, which you have so vigorously obtained through craft, could be passed through a witness, an audience, a spectator? Can you circulate the search of the 'inner' that you appear to have encountered?*

Richards If I watch a theatre performance – a good one – a sort of empathy takes place. Part of myself melds into the story. I sympathize with a certain character. Maybe I see myself in him. He reminds me of my desires, my weaknesses and my strengths. If the performance is good, in some way I am on the stage, also, as a spectator. Strangely enough, in this kind of work, if something is very alive there, a similar phenomenon can take place because there are processes beyond narration that can pass from one human being to another.

Processes can pass from one person to another even just through being present face to face; or being face to face with an act that is taking place, simply being in the room when some special act is accomplished; and since the resonance of that act is there, I have the chance to perceive it. So, there is a way for me to watch him (*faces Mario*) as if to find myself in him. If some special, subtle current is passing through him, it should also be possible that the traces of that current can be here as well (*pointing to himself*) – that through some kind of empathy, through some kind of connecting, by laying all my capacities of perception onto this artist, his experience can in a subtle way become my experience.

This is a very powerful phenomenon. It can happen or not. I don't know why or what would make it happen. Maybe I also have some needs, too. I am a human being, too. I also have some need to focus myself on a pearl, to hold on to that pearl for a moment. My life needs that pearl, maybe. I am witnessing him in some special process, and the world of perception is waiting for me, for 'Thomas', to wake up as well. I'm like a child sleeping in my bed. There's an old wise man who said, 'The mother doesn't need to go to wake up the child in the middle of the night for him to go and pee-pee. The child will wake up when the need is there.' Witnessing him, it's as if I am the sleeping child and life is happening there in front of me. Maybe my own need will wake me to perceive the same shining experience he is.

Without need, no action that you do will be alive in your lives. Everything will be conceptual. Your life is related to your needs. Follow them. Follow what's living for you. Let it conduct you. Even if it's money – 'I need a lot of money' – maybe that's what you need to do. I need a career, I need to be a famous professor, I need to be a great director, I need success – maybe if you go through those needs and you let them carry you like a volcano, then that's done. And then something else might take its place, or another kind of need will appear.

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We can get trapped into thinking that, to be a good artist, I should do in this way, this is the right way. Or even to be a good human being: 'Well, I can't want money because that would be low. But, in fact, I want money, I want security, I want a house and, rather than getting it, I never let myself fight for it because I think it would be low.' And I stay in this mediocre territory where all of my actions are conditioned by, 'Oh, it would be wrong if – ' So that's also what we're looking for when someone enters the work: hopefully, they have a need to touch this something that's at the centre of our work. Then, the whole task becomes to try gently to help the person to come close, to see what's between them and it.

Audience Member *You talked about 'art' and how the perception of art can help us understand where we are as people on this earth, in the universe. A couple of things struck me, suddenly, when I was watching the film* La Dolce Vita *a few years ago. I don't know if it was about the contents of the film, but I just suddenly felt that I almost didn't exist. That was absolutely like you were saying about energy in the universe, and I'd never had that feeling before. You think you have these experiences and you think 'I'm the only one that's ever felt that.' Maybe it is that place or that moment where suddenly you know what art is. But what you're saying about perceptions and presence and suddenly understanding our existence means a lot to me.*

Biagini There is also enjoyment in art. I walk in the street and see that a lot of us are very sad. But we are so rich; we have everything. We can drink the water from the tap and we don't get sick or die. We can go to the university until we are thirty-five. Inside this luxury that we have, we get very spoiled. Something in our senses gets anaesthetized and then we are sad, and we don't even know why, and we don't even know that we are sad. So maybe, at times, it is as simple as that. That you see something and it gives you joy. When we say 'joy', we all understand what we are talking about, and sometimes it's just about that: to enjoy.

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