

Resource Pack  
Paratheatrical Explorations with Theatre Group Dzieci

A Summary

Dzieci Paratheatrical workshops are essentially non-verbal and improvisational experiences, with guidance gently provided by the ensemble through sound and gesture. Employing elements of ensemble theatre, meditation, psychotherapy, and ritual, the event flows in accordance with the nature of the participants and leads towards a heightening of consciousness and deepening of community.

Each workshop begins with a theme based on a current inquiry for Dzieci. Past themes have included: *In the Country of the Blind*, where blind and seeing participants worked together in absolute darkness; *The Hero's Journey*, employing tribal rites and archetypal narrative; *Circle of Fire*, exploring Native American ritual; and *Maraton*, a 24-hour total immersion in ritual creation which Dzieci offers annually each winter.

After decades of investigation and practice, company director, Matt Mitler, has developed a methodology that allows for both primal and spiritual interaction, forsaking the masks of habit and personality. With a background in experimental theatre and psychology, and an intensive spiritual training, Mr. Mitler communicates to the core of being through direct transmission.

Along with his company, Mitler brings this work into hospitals and institutions that serve marginalized and disadvantaged communities who have deep therapeutic needs. He also works with professionals and students in the fields of religion, psychology, art therapy, and theatre, serving all who seek a creative communal environment that is challenging and inspiring.

Dzieci has been hired to create specially designed workshops for such diverse clientele as: arts therapists, theology students, psychiatric staff, youth in crisis, clergy, and actors.

For participants, the workshop is a chance to work intimately with the company, while exploring the essence of Holy Theatre, a line of transmission, which includes the evolutionary investigations of Jerzy Grotowski and The Polish Theatre Laboratory. The workshop also serves as an entry for potential members who may wish to join the work.

Dzieci was the only theatre group chosen to present at the 2003 Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona, and is profiled in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. Mr. Mitler and Dzieci are also featured in the anthology, *Working on the Inside: The Spiritual Life Through the Eyes of Actors*.

The following is an excerpt from a lyrical essay by a past workshop participant -

It wasn't the words, words were meaningless. It was all in the eyes, round, clear, deep pools. It was a coaxing out of my humanity, a breaking apart of the robot of me.

The small and plain room, empty except for cushions on the floor. It was dark. She led me to a cushion, with her hand, she suggested I sit, in silence, opposite me, she began to breathe. Matching my breath to hers in meditation, she raised a V with her fingers, directing my gaze to hers. I stared straight into them and we continued to breathe, breath was the only thing. I fell in and out of narrow focus on her eyes; noticing the impossibility of staring into both at once. I got lost in the shifting focus from one eye to the next. She looked so sad to me, I felt as if her gaze was filled with pity for me. I felt bad, I felt sorry for her having to stare into my pain. I began to feel a panic. I took a deep breath refocused my attention to her physical eye. I tried to stop thinking, just be a breath wave, I could hold it for only a glimpse then I would lose attention and fall back into thoughts, most of them a body fear, a silent sadness forming a stone between my shoulder blades. So it was breath; clear, focus, sadness, self awareness, self consciousness, fear, panic, deep breath, breathe, clear, focus, again and again, the same circular stumbling dance of mind. The limitations of contact between two people, between two minds, insurmountable; through this lens my heart was breaking. My shyness came to mind, my inability to open, just be human creature, without pretense. The urge to talk wasn't there, in fact, words were against the rules. The rules, who told me the rules? I read up on the workshop before I went, I knew the name of Jerzy Grotowski, I knew something, I thought I knew something.

There were others in the room, they were engaged in the same meditation. I felt their presence; as well, I felt the presence of the clock, and my creeping relentless panic. The knowledge of the clock, and by extension, the time, it was hanging on my shoulders. I was dizzy when the first one stood up.

Through some signal, a breath sound started, she was making a noise at the end of each breath. Then a forceful pushing of breath, three for each exhale, pushing out the lung in three hard bursts, reaching farther into the room for air on each inhale. The humming inhalation that began to my left, maybe, by others, the humming a trigger for the uncurling of legs, the taking of feet, we did it each in our time, seemingly guided, but without any signal that there was a charge directing us, directing, it was me alone standing and feeling the prickling light of blood rushing down. And then there was a circle. We were a circle, looking and breathing into the blank shape between us. We stepped to the right, then the left, taking steps forward and back, the side and the center, we moved together in our spot, each in his own spot, breathing.

I kept moving, fighting for the right steps, and wondering whether this had been a mistake. And there was a man suddenly in the center, adding notes to the breathing adding a song to the steps, a song like a prayer to the wind or a god with most unusual ears. He stalked the circle with wild eyes, open and howling. He was reaching out around the circle, reaching and grabbing with his eyes, searching for someone to join him. His song was fierce and strong, it bellowed and boasted, it asserted itself; it was a thing in the air, a form in the room. He took the hands of a woman, her eyes seemed very far away,

she shook her head forcefully holding her eyes on him, passing the cup, but he refused to let her flee, she entered the circle and met his howl with a soft high note that played out like line from a kite, tight and urgently moving upward, out. She was there alone, and we all kept moving and breathing into her circle as the note climbed on its current.

There was a thunder over her note, a joining in, she turned toward it, she embraced it, that high reaching became harmony, became lightening in another sky, she came near to him, her lips almost against his, only the vibration of song between them. Hand to hand, fingers entwined, they moved out of the circle and into the center. His voice was a deep baritone but fleet and agile it waved and spun long notes. Each sound caressed his face; his stare was a thousand polished river pebbles.

A perfect work, a confluence, the love of pure light, simple gain and simple surrender; it doesn't take into account audience just raw completion; a solitary madness. It sings about itself. He washed over me; his gold coral tree and I pulled into it, waved and fluttered around it I broke over his baritone with a quavering banshee moan. I was an old woman, my voice palsied and crying, I was my grandmother with nothing left to do but wait for god, but I wasn't waiting. It was not my lungs, a trembling washed over my hands, my legs, a twisted, twisted, twisted willow shimmering within, and my voice was fire and wet smoke, all the waters of the earth. I opened my eyes, I was in the center and I was scared, I reached out for help, I reached around the circle at the eye repeated, curly hair and young face, drawn and pale woman with cheep yarn hair, bull with face stubble vainglorious and sympathetic. I looked away and cried again, vomiting sound.

A porcelain and blond voice next to the flames, was reaching into the circle into old worried woman me. I smiled into her, taken by the throat of her hands and turning sweetly, spinning gently, greeting grace with my own humble offering. She was lifted, each foot on steady grounded point, dipping her whirl of gosling feather intoning, drifting on a bubble beach. She was dancing. Palms spread upward drawing in the air of gold and copper breasts which beat together their thumping exhalations using us as spandrels she built a tower to heaven.

I was breathing, pulling lustfully at the rope of air, stomach against spine with each exhalation, the stone in my shoulders becoming a current, I was a melted gun, dumb and blind and my legs carried me around, carried the circle as it rattled and shook, expanding to entropy and we were not getting old, we were dancing on each other, reaching out with our eyes lighting candles of touch. My wrist passed over forearm, breast and back, the back of my hand over cheeks, salt hair tangled in my fingertips. I spun and slid among and around, meeting eyes, staring into the hollow of collarbones, soaking in sweet and rhythm. But there was no music, just breathing. Hell is chattering, the shedding of words like blood. The murder of meaning. The drum beat wore a beard, she touched her shoulder to my chest, the drumbeat stroked my open throat, she grabbed me underarm and tossed into the air, I hung and spun, she smiled, the drum beat spoke, she swore, she sang, the drumbeat charged around the room, she offered both hands to me, we spun around the fulcrum of the heart.

James Chris Fields 2009

## Resources and Follow Up Material

### Reading List

(in no particular order)

How Can I Help? - Ram Dass & Paul Gorman  
Practical Intuition - Laura Day  
The Mystic in the Theatre: Eleonora Dusa - Eva Le Gallienne  
Stanislavsky in Rehearsal: The Final Years - Vasily Torporkov  
Towards a Poor Theatre (last chapter - 'Statement of Principles') - Jerzy Grotowski  
The Theatre of Grotowski - Jennifer Kumiega  
Between Two Silences: Talking With Peter Brook - Dale Moffitt & Peter Brook  
Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual - Tom F. Driver  
The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property - Lewis Hyde  
The Art of War - Sun Tzu  
The Gospel of Thomas (from The Nag Hammadi Library)

### Films

My Dinner with Andre - Louis Malle  
Resurrection - Daniel Petrie  
Meetings with Remarkable Men (the last 15 minutes) - Peter Brook

### Links

On Makbet:

I'm Seeing Green: The Unnamable Play at the Old Stone House

[http://seeinggreen.typepad.com/my\\_weblog/2009/03/the-unnamable-play-at-the-old-stone-house.html](http://seeinggreen.typepad.com/my_weblog/2009/03/the-unnamable-play-at-the-old-stone-house.html)

Linewriter's Gazette, Park Slope Food Coop: A Wicked Work in Progress (pdf)

<http://dziecihteatre.org/dzfiles/foodcooparticle-april2008.pdf>

The Wave: Rockaway Artists Alliance Hosts Dzieci's Makbet

[http://www.rockawave.com/news/2008/0801/entertainment\\_lifestyles/071.html](http://www.rockawave.com/news/2008/0801/entertainment_lifestyles/071.html)

On Fools Mass:

The Encyclopedia of Religion: Drama: Modern Western Theater (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, Vol 4, p2476)

<http://www.dziecihteatre.org/dzfiles/encyclopedia2.html>

On Dzieci:

The Grotowski Archives: A Human Sacrifice (pdf)

[http://owendaly.com/jeff/Sacrifice\\_Dzieci.pdf](http://owendaly.com/jeff/Sacrifice_Dzieci.pdf)

KadmusArts: An Interview with Matt Mitler (mp3 audio)

<http://kadmusarts.com/blog/?p=378>

Soundcheck, WNYC (RealAudio, final 20 minutes)

<http://wnyc.org/shows/soundcheck/episodes/2003/01/07>

On Grotowski:

The Grotowski Archive: Statement of Principles

<http://owendaly.com/jeff/grotows2.htm>

The Journal of Religion and Theatre: Theoretical Foundations of Grotowski's Total Act

[http://www.rjournal.org/vol\\_4/no\\_2/lavy2.html](http://www.rjournal.org/vol_4/no_2/lavy2.html)