

Director's Commentary 2023

We are governed by opposing forces. At this very moment, forces are at work on us. There is something, which follows the influence from below, and something, which goes against it, which rises upward. Between the play of these two forces, a third force may appear. The nature of this third force depends upon the struggle of the opposing forces. Finding a certain balance can offer a sense of our selves as something more complete, more fully alive. This balance isn't accidental. It requires an active participation; I must be attentive. In Dzieci, we place ourselves willingly into the maelstrom and strive to be present, to consciously embrace, to accept, the opposition of forces.

In 1999, when first developing "Fools Mass", it became clear that many levels of symbolic representation were at work. The nature of being "poor theatre" artists in this society was immediately thrown into question by the death of Jerzy Grotowski, who dared to create a theatre stripped to its essence. This masterful director who devoted his life to an art that was, in itself, a way towards transformation, became the "Father Jerzy", that our piece is dedicated to.

"Fools Mass" also honors the marginalized communities the company works with. Dzieci balances work on performance with work of service for disadvantaged populations in an effort to seek a purer path toward art. By helping others, a profound healing effect is generated not only for the patient, but also for the ensemble. The hymns we sing in our performances are also sung at the bedsides of people who may be in pain or dying. The songs become "coated" by these experiences and our connection to them is forever altered. Through such encounters, we learn how to relate to others in a more human way, a way we wish to extend to our engagement with a public audience.

It is the presence of the audience, which most effectively pits us against our limitations and challenges us to delve into the unknown. We find ourselves at risk before an audience, but a complex bond can be made that, if we truly follow our aim, leads us toward true self-discovery.

Dzieci came into being through a small group of seekers who shared an undeniable attraction to pursuing an organic process toward creativity and personal growth. But there is always an impulse to pull away, to protect. We don't discount this impulse. In fact, we value it. When we feel resistant, uncomfortable, perhaps even terrified, we know we are moving in the right direction. We accept the opposition of forces and invite them to struggle within us. This direction is not for everyone, and Dzieci has had many incarnations over the years, but in its twenty-six years, the group has continued to evolve and has become the sum total of all who have ever participated in this communal effort.

At this particular time of reflection, I am overwhelmed with feelings of gratitude, not only for Dzieci, but also for the communities we have come in contact with. Audiences, patients, congregations, all have served to enable us, to present us with a wider sense of life and purpose. "Fools Mass" has miraculously endured in our repertory. And new works are always in embryo. But all pieces, once created, are re-created perennially. No work becomes frozen in time, the process is open-ended, and there is always further to go.

Thank you so much for joining us on the journey,
Matt Mitler
Thanksgiving 2023
(revised from 2003)