

*I don't know any other group, which combines music, drama, dance,  
and spirituality in the way that they do.*  
~ Rev. Daniel Meeter, Old First Reformed Church, Brooklyn ~

### A Year End Note

I, too, don't know of any other group that does what Dzieci does. If I did, I'd go and join them. Dzieci is hard work, but I can't imagine any other work as challenging, fulfilling, nourishing, healing, and transformative.

In my youth, I found expression through art, fine art. I lived it, breathed it, and though theatre provided some diversion (there were always a few theatre kids in art classes, egging me on), art was everything for me. Almost. My art existed outside of myself. It didn't change me. It didn't help me to understand myself better or communicate with others. What was I missing?

Huxley said, "Life is also an art." I turned to philosophy, to psychology, and in high school, was invited to a modal program for peer counselors that put me through a rigorous training in Humanistic Psychology and Group Encounter. I volunteered and worked at camps for children with physical and psychological challenges, and began finding joy in being of service. I found it just as creative as painting and drawing and sculpture. I wondered if art and therapy could be integrated, not just as a work for others but also as a work for oneself.

And then I hit a wall. Not actually a wall—it was a car, and I was a passenger in the car making the hit. I was 18, fresh out of High School, and was rushed, comatose, to an emergency room. Coming to, briefly, I heard doctors saying there was a ninety percent chance I wouldn't make it. That they couldn't operate because of the hemorrhaging in my head. I couldn't speak, I couldn't see, I couldn't even move. Images of the children in the summer camps drifted through my mind. I'd been fulfilled by that work, and lying there immobile, I was okay with dying.

Obviously, I didn't. Die. But I did go through some major surgery and months and months of rehabilitation and was left, physically, emotionally, and psychologically—shattered. Coming through all this, I saw that while dying may have been okay, it was distinctly not okay to be alive.

Part way through my first year in college (studying existential psychology and fine art, naturally), and haunting campus like a walking shadow, I saw a notice about auditions for a new company that employed "Gestalt Theatre". To top it off, the group was called, The Holy Theatre Company.

Did I know I was going there for healing? Not consciously at least. And when I arrived, the unbridled freedom, the total abandonment I witnessed in the other actors was absolutely horrifying. I was frozen with fear. Somehow, I was invited to stay and I did. And I stuck with it, six hours a night, three nights a week, suffering my inhibitions, my tensions, my broken, walled-up, walled-off, traumatized self. Then one night at rehearsal, caught in my own private pressure cooker, I hit critical mass. A sudden explosion, and I was jettisoned into space. Free. For the moment at least; I wasn't miraculously healed, but a process had begun. That was enough of a miracle.

In truth, the accident didn't initiate my search, it only intensified it. I'd been a sickly, troubled kid and, in so many ways, alone. Art had brought me some comfort, and taught me to see, but the seeing was on the outside. Seeing inward was something else.

I'm often asked how Dzieci started. There are many stories but this one will suffice for now. After the accident, a sincere search began to take shape. It's still taking shape, of course, but now it has a name: Dzieci. It's not just my search anymore, it's an effort shared with others. Shared with people who find that working together forges a stronger practice, who value the creative process as a vehicle for transformation, who sensing an incompleteness, wish to be whole. We follow a path guided by a collective wish to be, and find that those we engage with, if only for the moments of a performance or workshop or hospital visit, share that wish.

Throughout the pandemic, through every single challenge, this community has been a lifeline for me. In Dzieci, we take Huxley's words to heart. We create art that has its own life and our lives reflect that process. The world is not left at our door, we invite it in. We accept adversity. And we change. We keep changing.

Facing a new year is a remarkable opportunity. What does it mean to begin again? From being unable to live, an opening began to appear in me allowing for something greater. Something beyond myself, beyond even Dzieci. Deep inside, above, below, all around. There is a feeling of hope, of grace, of truly not being alone.

Thank you for journeying with us and may your New Year be a blessed beginning,

Matt Mitler 12/27/22

*Life is also an art, and the man who would become a consummate artist in living must follow,  
on all levels of his being, the same procedure as that by which the painter or the sculptor  
or any other craftsman comes to in his own more limited perfection.*

~ Aldous Huxley ~