

## A Note on Process: Theatre Group Dzieci

In 1997, following a lineage as beholden to Jerzy Grotowski as to G.I. Gurdjieff, a small group of spirited individuals drew together, embarking on a search for the “sacred” through the medium of theatre. Out of this communal effort was born Theatre Group Dzieci.

In Dzieci we say that the creative act must primarily have a transformative effect on the artist himself. We make no pretensions of altruism. If others are involved in our efforts - as students, audiences, patients - it is because a relationship with them is a natural extension in the context of our own development. What we have found helpful, (in fact a necessity) is to follow a process of inner inquiry. The teachers who have had the most profound influence for us have also been perpetual seekers. They explored timeless mysteries: “Who am I? Why am I here? What do I serve?” Their work was to work on themselves. A work of personal transformation.

Theatre serves as a vehicle for such a transformation, but theatre is not our aim. Our aim is simply to work on ourselves. Such a process is fraught with pitfalls for any individual. With Dzieci, it has only been possible through the cumulative efforts of each member of the ensemble. This collective endeavor does not preclude conflict and struggle – the effort is unrelenting – but we have found a few guidelines to help keep us in balance.

We begin and end performances, workshops, hospital visits, and rehearsals in silence. We return often to silence. We do not seek applause. We share meals. We join in work and prayer with sacred communities. We lead non-verbally through action and gesture. We delve into the unknown. We wear funny teeth. If there is a way to do something more humanely, more organically, or more adventurously, we make every effort to do so.

For Dzieci, performance ultimately becomes an act of purification. We establish seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and we traverse them. We work on strengthening our attention. We expose our fears. The hymns and chants we sing in performance are integral to our service work. As we sing at the bedsides of people who may be in pain or dying, the songs become “coated” by the experience, and our relationship with them is forever altered.

Through creative therapeutic encounters, we learn how to relate to others with simplicity. We see a deeper contact is only possible when we are in tune with our essential nature, so we strive to strip away obscuring layers of personality and habit. Individually, this leaves us vulnerable, so we begin to value, ever more, the strength we find as a group. This strength demands to be tested, so we open our work to the public. We are at risk before an audience, but a complex bond can be made, if we follow our aim; that leads us even further towards self-discovery.

Dzieci came into being fifteen years ago, fueled by seekers with an undeniable attraction to join together to pursue 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 resistance, uncomfortable, terrified, we know we are proceeding 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 the company has continued to evolve. And as with the company, our repertory also continues to grow. New works are always in embryo, and pieces, once created, are then re-created as living rituals. No work becomes frozen in time, the process is open-ended, and there is always further to go.

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For more information on Dzieci please visit: <http://dziecitheatre.org/>