



presents

# Coffeehouse Chronicles #170: Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards



The Downstairs  
66 East 4th Street, NYC, 10003  
March 4, 2023

# **Coffeehouse Chronicles #170: Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards**

**Moderator:  
Richard Schechner**

**Panel:  
Thomas Richards  
Kris Salata,  
Jessica Losilla-Hébrail  
Dominika Laster**

**Performance by Dzieci Theatre  
Matt Mitler  
Megan Bones  
Ryan Castalia  
Jesse Hathaway  
Yvonne Brechbuhler**

**Curated by  
Michal Gamily  
and  
Tomek Smolarski**

**Photo credit: Maurizio Buscarino**

*Running time 120 minutes with no intermission*

## Coffeehouse Chronicles #170

### Outline/ Running order

2:50pm: *Fools Mass* is performed as people come in.

3:08pm: Michal welcomes the audience. (2 min)

3:10pm: Richard introduces himself and speaks about Grotowski and introduces clip on *Plastiques*. (5 min.)

3.15pm: Video Clip#1 : 1972 *Plastiques*. 5 min

3:20pm: Richard speaks about NYU Workshop, reads a moment from account of Workshop, leads into video clip of *Akropolis*.

3:25pm: Video Clip#2: *Akropolis* film fragment  
(7 minutes.)

3:35pm: Richard invites Dominika and Kris on stage. Kris and Dominika speak. Topics: Grotowski's work on Art as vehicle, Ancestral memory, Verticality, Theatre as carnal prayer.

4:00pm: Live performance #2: Thomas and team sing. Thomas speaks a little in between songs, [about ancient songs/potentiality of work on song/inner process.

4:15pm: Thomas and Richard dialogue. Richard gives context: Grotowski, Thomas' Father. Thomas and Richard dialogue: Thomas' attraction to work with Grotowski, Transmission. At some point Richard asks: "Why do you think Grotowski chose you? He worked with a lot of people, and chose you as his artistic heir, why?" Thomas speaks about the relation between theatre and inner practice (the theatre work that he grew up with/the difference between Art as Vehicle and Theatre; the "seat of the montage"/the different works over the years dealing with Art as Vehicle and Theatre).

4:35pm: Video Clip#3: A video Fragment of The Living Room film.

4:45pm: Thomas introduces Jessica (just in the video.) She speaks about the future, Theatre No Theatre (TNT). She speaks about "inner" work and the present projects of TNT. She leads us into *The Inanna Project*.

4.50 pm : Live performance #3 : Fragments of *The Inanna Project* sung live by Thomas' team, as this happens Thomas speaks about *The Inanna Project*.

5:00pm: The End  
DZIECI accompany the audience from the theatre to the lobby

Considered one of the most important and influential theatre practitioners of the 20th century, **Jerzy Grotowski** revolutionized contemporary theatre. Beginning in 1959 with his early experiments in the Polish town of Opole and later with the Polish Laboratory Theatre in Wroclaw, Grotowski changed the way Western theatre practitioners and performance theorists conceive of the audience/actor relationship, theatre staging, and the craft of acting. This phase of his theatrical work, also called “poor theatre,” was the basis for one of the most influential theatre books of the 20th century: *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968). After abandoning the “theatre of productions,” Grotowski continued to push the boundaries of conventional theatre, first in his paratheatrical work, and later in his performance research, which took him to India, Mexico, Haiti, and elsewhere, in search of the traditional performance practices of various cultures (*Theatre of Sources*, 1976-82). This work led Grotowski to his identification of particular abiding elements of ritual traditions (*Objective Drama*, 1983-86). In the final phase of his work Grotowski explored the far reaches of the performance continuum, which he traced from “Art as presentation” toward what has been called “Art as Vehicle.”

**Thomas Richards (B.A. Yale University, M.A. the University of Bologna, Ph.D. University of Paris VIII)** was Artistic Director of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards from 1999 to 2022. He began his apprenticeship with Jerzy Grotowski in 1985, and their work together developed until Grotowski’s passing in 1999. Richards arrived in Italy in 1986 with Grotowski, from the University of California, Irvine, where he had participated in Grotowski’s “Focused Research Program in Objective Drama.” In Italy, at first Richards worked as Grotowski’s assistant, but soon he became the leader of one of the work teams, and then Grotowski’s “essential collaborator.” Eventually, Richards became Director of the Research Program on Performing Arts at the Workcenter. Thomas Richards was a fundamental driving force in the research developed at the Workcenter that has come to be known as “Art as vehicle,” and in 1996, Grotowski decided to change the name of the Workcenter to include that of Richards, because, as he specified, the direction of the practical work already concentrated itself in the hands of Mr. Richards. Concerning Richards, Grotowski stated, “The nature of my work with Thomas Richards has the character of ‘transmission’; to transmit to him that to which I have arrived in my life: the inner aspect of the work.”

At the Workcenter, Richards was the main creator and doer of *Downstairs Action* (filmed by Mercedes Gregory in 1989), the creator and main doer of *Action*, and the creator and a doer of *The Letter* (formerly *An Action* in

Creation and The Twin: An Action in Creation). He co-directed *One breath left*, *One breath left – Dies Iræ*, *Dies Iræ* and *Dies Iræ: The Preposterous Theatrum Interioris Show*; performative opuses created at the Workcenter inside Project The Bridge: Developing Theatre Arts.

Mr. Richards was Artistic Director of the Workcenter's project *Tracing Roads Across* (April 2003 to April 2006), supported by the "Culture 2000" Programme of the European Union, and also the Artistic Director of *Horizons* (2007-2009 – Wroclaw), a Workcenter project which culminated in the *Zero Budget Festival* (2009). In 2008, Mr. Richards created a new team at the Workcenter, the *Focused Research Team in Art as Vehicle*, with which he directed and conducted work on: *The Living Room* (previewed in 2009, premiered in 2010), *L'heure fugitive* (premiered in 2014), and *The Underground: A Response to Dostoevsky* (premiered in 2016). From 2016, he conducted as well the *Workcenter Studio in Residence*, with which he directed *Sin Fronteras* (premiered in 2017) and *Gravedad* (premiered in 2018). With both of these teams, Mr. Richards also created a new performance event called *Songs of Tradition* (premiered in 2019). As well, at the Workcenter, Richards directed the solo piece in Korean, entitled *Han!*.

Thomas Richards is author of *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, published in Italian, French, English, German, Greek, Spanish, and Polish; *The Edge-Point of Performance*, published in English, Italian, German, Polish, and Greek; and *Heart of Practice: Within the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards*, published in English and French. In January of 2022, Mr. Richards closed the Workcenter, and today he works for *Teatro della Toscana – Teatro Nazionale*, and his new performing arts research is supported by *Theatre No Theatre*.

**Dzieci Theatre's** signature presentation, *Fools Mass*, will be celebrating its twenty-fifth season this December. Set during the Plague years, the piece imagines a group of village idiots who are forced to enact their own Mass due to the untimely death of their beloved pastor (named "Father Jerzy", when Grotowski, a mentor for company director, Matt Mitler, passed away). Celebrating the sacred and profane, the miracle of life and the enigma of death, with enchanted choral singing, riotous comic buffoonery, and extraordinary dramatic invention, *Fools Mass* continues to have relevance, embracing the heart of mercy and the sanctity of the human spirit.

**Richard Schechner**, editor of TDR, is the author of many books including *Environmental Theater*, *Performance Theory*, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, *Performed Imaginaries*, and *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. He has directed performances, led workshops, taught, and lectured in every continent except Antarctica. Among his many theatre productions are *Dionysus in 69* (using Euripides' *The Bacchae*), Sam Shepard's *The Tooth of Crime*, Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and the immersive-devised *Imagining O*. He has been awarded numerous fellowships, awards, and honors, including three honorary doctorates.

**Jessica Losilla-Hébrail** was born in France. She studied performing arts for three years at the University of Nice where she received her Bachelors degree. She then spent the fourth year of her program in Finland, studying performing arts at the Turku Arts Academy. After her studies, she participated in various workshops and collaborated with different companies and artists in Europe. In 2008 she joined the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards and became a member of the Focused Research Team in Art as Vehicle. During her years at the Workcenter, she was a performer in *The Living Room*, *The Underground* and *Songs of Tradition*, all three opus directed by Thomas Richards, and was an assistant director on *Gravedad*, *Sin Fronteras*, and *Han!*. Over fourteen years at the Workcenter, Jessica has been performing, leading workshops and assisting Mr. Richards in workshops in numerous countries throughout the world. In 2014, she became one of Richards' assistants. In February 2022, along with Hyun Ju Baek and Cécile Richards, both former members of the Workcenter, she founded Theatre No Theatre, a new cultural association supporting Thomas Richards' research in performing arts.

**Hyun Ju Baek** was born in South Korea. Her career developed mainly as musical theatre actress for a decade in Korea. She traveled to London studying theatre directing and earned a master's degree in Theatre and Performance at Goldsmiths, University of London, UK. Before joining the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards, Hyun Ju worked as an actress, director, and playwright in both Seoul and London. She wrote, produced and directed many theatre pieces including: *Flatmates V Zombies* (Tristan Bates Theatre UK, Camden People's Theatre UK - a piece that won a fund of the Arts Council of England); *Today And* (commissioned by Kyunggi Cultural Foundation); and *The Sound Factory* (commissioned by the Pusan Cultural Foundation). In 2017, she participated in the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards' Master Course,

supported by the Korean Arts Council. After attending another pedagogic encounter with Thomas Richards in Hong Kong, she organized a theatre group: The association for Theatre Craft and Creative Process GB, and held the Seoul Work Encounter 2018, inviting to Korea the Focused Research Team in Art as Vehicle. The following year, she joined the Workcenter's Focused Research Team in Art as Vehicle. Since 2019, Hyun Ju has performed significantly throughout the world in performances and performance events with the Workcenter and Theatre No Theatre.

**Dominika Laster** is Associate Professor of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of New Mexico. She holds a PhD in Performance Studies from New York University (2010). She is the Books Section Editor of TDR: The Drama Review (TDR) and Co-Editor of European Stages. From 2013-2015, Dr. Laster served as the Director of Undergraduate Studies and Lecturer in the Theater Studies Program at Yale University. She was a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Interdisciplinary Performance Studies at Yale (IPSY) from 2011 to 2013.





A full program with information on this  
production can be found on the  
*Coffeehouse Chronicles #170:*  
*Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards*  
page of the La MaMa website.

In addition you can scan the  
QR code Poster located in the theatre  
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