



# Urban Research Theater

song • movement • action

Urban Research Theater Newsletter - October, 2008

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

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### 1) INVITATION TO SHOWINGS

This fall, we invite you to come and see our work as an observer and guest. You will not participate actively in our performance work, but your living presence will become part of the space in which our Song Cycle takes place.

Only a small number of people will be able to attend each evening. There is no charge for attending, but we do gratefully accept tax-deductible gifts to support our ongoing work. There is still room for guests on the following date:

- Sunday 11/23 at 6pm

Please contact [ben@urbanresearchtheater](mailto:ben@urbanresearchtheater) if you want to be there.

The Song Cycle is an active meditation made from theater techniques; an extended vehicle for practical research and self-discovery; and a performed structure that can be witnessed by others. Its basic structure is a sequence of repeated song fragments. Within the framework of these songs, the two partners search for contact on multiple levels: with themselves, with each other, and with the space.

Urban Research Theater is a long-term partnership dedicated to discovering and revealing human presence through techniques of song, movement, and action. After one year of consistent work, we understand ourselves to be at the beginning of the process of developing a fully elaborated and fully enacted Song Cycle.

For those who cannot attend this round, there will be further showings in 2009.

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## 2) MEMBERSHIP COMMUNITY

Urban Research Theater eventually intends to support itself through community-based interactions rather than through ticket sales. In order to do this, we need to build a supportive membership community.

If you support the work of Urban Research Theater; if you have participated in one of our workshops or events; if you believe in our philosophy of art and practice; if you enjoy receiving our monthly newsletter... Please consider becoming a member of our supporting community.

Supporting members donate at least \$5 per month (\$60 per year) to support our continuing work. Five dollars is not very much - the price of a single cheap lunch or an expensive coffee. But we consider it a serious gesture of support.

And with a big enough community, this small amount can add up to a lot:

- If our community had 10 members, we would receive enough income to rent a space for one Body + Song workshop each month.

- If our community had 100 members, we would have enough money to cover all our work expenses for the year and run several week-long or even month-long events.

- If our community had 1000 members, we would be able to dedicate ourselves full-time to Urban Research Theater!

Our goal right now is to build a community of 100 members. All donations to Urban Research Theater are fully tax deductible via the umbrella organization Fractured Atlas. You can also donate to us directly, if you do not require the tax deduction. Please follow one of the links on our website to become a supporting member of the Urban Research Theater community!

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## NOTES FROM THE STUDIO

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### 3) BEN: ON WORK, PLEASURE, AND PERMISSION

When we first come into adulthood, we learn that work is different from pleasure. Pleasure, we find, does not satisfy others; and work does not satisfy ourselves.

Spirituality is the integration of work and pleasure. When work and pleasure are united, or even just when we have the power to move smoothly between work and pleasure without gap or rupture... I call that spirituality. Another word for it might be love.

I mean to say that one cannot offer oneself to the world while repressing one's personal desires. Actually, a human being's most personal desire is exactly the greatest offering that can be made in the world. So it is not a question of good and bad desires. It is only a question of finding the right channels through which one's desire can flow.

To unite work and pleasure is a life-long process. Even when achieved, this unification is unstable and temporary. It takes so little to sunder work from pleasure again. Perhaps this is why it is good to work with partners: At least they can help one remember what it was like in that moment when work and pleasure were one.

Very often the partner is a teacher. A teacher gives a kind of permission to the student -- actually, two different permissions. The first permission that the teacher gives is the permission to do and to do fully. All teachers give this first permission, and all students receive it, in one way or another. It is given via work on techniques. Generally speaking, this is what it means to teach.

There is a second permission as well: the permission to teach. This permission, which is the content of "transmission," cannot really be taught and has nothing to do with techniques. The teacher gives this permission by gradually removing all the masks of authority, until those who were formerly student and teacher now become peers. A line of transmission exists when each generation becomes the full peer of the last.

Of course, both permissions actually take place in the student rather than in the teacher. Sometimes permission is granted officially, and sometimes students take it without the teacher even knowing. ("By initiation, or by theft.") Neither teacher nor student chooses when or how these permissions will be granted. The process takes place by itself, spontaneously, through the active relation of teacher and student.

In any teaching relationship, there is a moment when the first permission has been given to its full extent. The question then arises as to whether the second permission will be given as well. Sometimes the teacher is reluctant to give the second permission, since it means surrendering the identity of master. Sometimes the student is unwilling to accept this entrance into a fuller adulthood, with its accompanying responsibilities and dangers.

It seems that the relationship between Jerzy Grotowski and Ryszard Cieslak ended on the point of this question. Grotowski and Cieslak shared everything that could be shared within the relationship of director and actor. But when Grotowski went towards para-theater, he started to lose Cieslak. He was then confronted by a choice. Why did Grotowski choose para-theater over his relationship with Cieslak?

In the end, these two men did not become full peers. Grotowski was not able to give, or Cieslak was not able to receive, the second permission -- that which is called transmission. Their work on theater had reached the point of transformation. It was about to become a spiritual quest, which meant that pleasure would no longer be subordinated to work. But it did not take that final step.

It seems that Grotowski could do without personal (romantic) love, but Cieslak could not. Cieslak was married and had a child, although his relationship to them remained ambiguous. This implies to me that, although Cieslak gave nearly everything to his work with Grotowski, there remained a part of him that could not be given in that context. There was still some part of Cieslak that Grotowski could not see. Perhaps, in order to see that part, Grotowski would have had to give something up: his authority, his own identification with the father figure. He did not give this up, and so he and Cieslak eventually parted ways.

Grotowski never became Performer and Cieslak never led his own work. These final permissions could not be given in the context of that partnership. That must be why Grotowski

made it clear that his relationship with Cieslak was always fundamentally professional, and that it did not involve the process of transmission that took place later with Thomas Richards.

With Richards everything was different. Their relationship was truly a life-partnership. It was the full giving of the self, and the creation of a completely unique approach to performance work that evolved out of the mutual work and mutual pleasure of these two men. Perhaps it is significant that between Grotowski and Richards was a generation gap, so that the question of becoming true peers never arose in quite the same way that it had with Cieslak.

Richards was a born follower, just like Cieslak. Yet Richards now leads the Workcenter, while Cieslak was not able to lead any lasting project or even continue to produce art after he stopped working with Grotowski. Why is this? It must be because Richards and Grotowski crossed the line that separates life from work, allowing Grotowski to become childlike through his leadership and Richards to become masterful through his followship. This is the relation of transmission.

Somehow, it is possible to give one's partner permissions that one does not oneself possess. Thus, even when I cannot do, I can give my partner permission to do. When I cannot follow, I can allow my partner to follow. When I cannot lead, I can give my partner permission to lead. In such a way, slowly, everything becomes possible.

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As always, comments and feedback are welcome.

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