



# Urban Research Theater

song • movement • action

## Urban Research Theater Newsletter – February 2009

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### ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### 1) SHOWINGS AND WORKSHOPS – WINTER/SPRING 2009

Urban Research Theater is pleased to announce a series of workshops and showings between February and May 2009. The series of three-day intensive weekend workshops will be co-led by Ben Spatz (Urban Research Theater, NYC) and Maximilian Balduzzi (Teatro della Pioggia, Italy). Please be sure to reserve your space well in advance of the dates given below.

#### SHOWINGS:

Sunday, February 22  
Sunday, March 29  
Sunday, April 12  
Sunday, April 26

All showings are at 6pm.  
There is no charge for attendance, but spaces are extremely limited.

#### WORKSHOPS:

Friday-Sunday, April 3-5  
Friday-Sunday, April 17-19  
Friday-Sunday, May 1-3

Participation fee: \$300 for a single workshop / \$250 per workshop for more than one.  
Location in NYC to be determined.

For more details, see attached flyer (last page of the newsletter).

## 2) WEBSITE UPDATES AND RELATED EVENTS

The website [www.urbanresearchtheater.com](http://www.urbanresearchtheater.com) has been updated as follows:

- New mission statement (still in progress)
- New photographs and revised text throughout
- Information on workshops & showings through May 2009
- Updated calendar of events
- Three new photo galleries showing individual work
- Biographical statements from Maximilian Balduzzi and Jonah Dill-D'Ascoli
- Downloadable PDF files of published articles
- New calendar of "Related Events" on the Artistic Family page

The "Related Events" calendar contains information and dates for the following:

- 'Year of Grotowski' events in Wroclaw, Poland
- 'Year of Grotowski' events in New York City
- Workshop in NYC by Anna-Helena McLean and Christopher Sivertsen
- Work Session with Rena Mirecka at Double Edge in Massachusetts
- 'Meetings with Remarkable Women' Work Sessions in Wroclaw
- Grotowski Conference in Kent, England
- Grotowski Symposium in Kent, England (deadline for proposals: February 16)

We hope you will enjoy and take advantage of this information.

## NOTES FROM THE STUDIO

### 3) LUDWIK FLASZEN: FROM "GROTOWSKI AND SILENCE"

Ludwik Flaszen, Grotowski's "Devil's Advocate" in the Theatre of Productions period, will be speaking next weekend at NYU, as part of the Year of Grotowski series of events. The following is from his piece, "Grotowski and Silence," published in "Le Theatre en Pologne / The Theatre in Poland" (3-4, 2008). I do not know whether this piece has been published in English before.

*As far [back] as I can remember Grotowski jokingly called our Teatr Laboratorium an "ashram," meaning a place of solitude. True, we were indeed, paradoxically, a theatre-hermitage sitting in the town's market square. Now [in Brzezinka] Grotowski had something of a real place of solitude, with trees, a pond, a real sky above his head.*

*For more than ten years it was a den of various experiments later transferred to the city, to the road, to our wanderings, but they were born there, in this forested silence. In that place of solitude. There were also more open and very populous undertakings. Regular pilgrimages of people in quest of spiritual adventure came to us from around the globe.*

*There was a need or a trend among the young then to travel with backpack in primitive conditions, however. Today's parading with a très chic backpack is merely a simulation of wandering. Then it was a real rebellion against the maladies of our civilization. Its rejection, without violence. Hunger for sense. They looked to Grotowski, to us, among others, for an answer, for hope. Here there was the quiet, the silence in a way they came out of conspiracy. They were a custom, a way of life, the grain of experience.*

*Grotowski spoke openly of yoga, spiritual techniques, meditation, tantras etc. But ever true to himself, he dissociated himself from a passive contemplation of things. It came through motion, through dance, through producing sounds, through active tasks which were like steps to experiencing that which he called the Unnameable.*

*He was fascinated by Haitian voodoo and the wandering Baul musicians of India, who led a double life as artists and spiritual seekers, receding to their solitudes, then suddenly appearing in the public squares of villages and towns. In those years Grotowski spoke of silence, of quiet in the following terms: "Outer silence, if you keep it, will bring you closer to an inner one at least to some extent, after some time. It is not a question of hieratic motion, but of achieving silence in motion even when running. [...] Silence is therefore at the root of everything: the silence of words, the silence of sounds, the silence of movement. It is silence that gives important words and songs a chance, silence which does not disturb the speech of birds. The body is induced into motion which is seeing, listening, perceiving. It is motion which is rest." Here Grotowski uses the old gnostic formula as a signpost. Mystery!*

[...]

*Starting from a concrete fact, Grotowski approached the traditions that are concerned with awakening in his own way. It is a state objective or other? in which the perception of what is becomes transformed: the world with all its sound and confusion appears as a live and harmonious being in all its contrasts. And all this is in its essence peace and silence. But also consciousness, presence, patency [l'evidence?], as Grotowski liked to repeat. One is in a different dimension, beyond any pangs of guilt or punishment. One accepts what is avec la sérénité.*

*Grotowski realized his metaphysical hunger, his curiosity in search of the absolute, the curiosity of a man of cognition for many years, but still in Poland outside the theatre. But I believe that his uniqueness, his identity lies at the intersection of these two callings. He was perfectly well aware of this. It is not just a question of his social mask: is he a spiritual teacher or a theatre artist? It is a question of the organic nature of his fate, his karmic circle. The two callings were irrevocably connected, in passion, without an exit.*

- Ludwik Flaszen, "Grotowski and Silence"  
*Le Theatre en Pologne / The Theatre in Poland* (3-4, 2008)

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#### 4) ELLIS AMDUR: DUELING WITH O-SENSAI

The following excerpt is from a very different context, but in its own way discusses the same delicate difference / relationship between the spiritual question and technical mastery:

*When studying music, one cannot immediately play Bach or Beethoven at a concert level. One must spend years practicing scales and other fundamentals before one can begin to do justice to the music. If you consider the gokui (secret teachings) of almost any classical martial art, you'll see that there are some very cryptic, apparently simple techniques with a lot of spiritual energy invested in them. One has to practice many years doing the equivalent of scales to approach a level where these techniques can be expressed with integrity and grace in an uncontrolled situation.*

*In aikido, it is as if Ueshiba Morihei [the founder of aikido] were walking in the snow with some branches trailing behind him, erasing his footsteps. All he taught was the gokui. He did not*

*teach the scales which lead to that level. Studying a classical system allows one, in some sense, to work with technical and ethical assumptions similar to those Ueshiba Morihei studied, and turned away from in his younger days. These are the 'lost' scales of aikido. Thus, training in a koryu (classical martial tradition) enables one to retrace, in some fashion, some of the moral dilemma which led him to create aikido for himself.*

*[...] Aikido and hapkido, although bearing clear similarities, are very different arts. For those in the aikido world troubled at what they see as aikido's insufficiencies as a system of hand-to-hand combat, hapkido offers the other side of the mirror. Iriminage (entering throw), for example, is done with a knuckle pressing into nerve centers under the cheekbone, and painful pressure points are attacked all over the body. Kicks can land with bone-crushing force, and techniques are often decided with a finishing blow rather than a simple pin. If one is concerned that one's aikido lacks pure combat effectiveness, at least in a street-fighting situation, there is another art 'in the family' which, while holding roughly the same technical roots, cannot be attacked on the same grounds.*

*I have no intention, however, of confusing these two arts—aikido and hapkido. I am not speaking of better or worse; I am speaking of difference. As I have written elsewhere, almost every martial art has a moral basis, sometimes of profound depth. As a senior hapkido instructor stated in a letter: 'As the practitioner becomes more and more advanced, contact with the attacked becomes less violent, less forceful, less necessary. And thus, at the master level, hapkido and aikido tend to greatly resemble one another.' However, unlike almost all other martial arts in which peace, a surprise and revelation, lies at the end of a long and harsh road, aikido seems to require that a spirit of peace be present as an explicit goal from the first day. The techniques one learns upon entering the dojo are the same as those learned on the last.*

*I am mystified and challenged by Ueshiba Morihei, a man who went to war, who obsessively trained both in combative traditions and austere religious rituals, and emerged, claiming that 'aikido is the realization of love' and 'aiki is not a technique to fight with or defeat an enemy. It is the way to reconcile the world and make human beings one family.' Yet this is where the 'problem' of aikido lies, for Ueshiba Morihei himself trained much as that senior exponent of hapkido describes above, a method very different than that handed down to followers of aikido. The question which still nags at me after all my years of training is simply, 'Is aikido the best way to learn aikido?'"*

- Ellis Amdur, *Dueling with O-sensei*, pp. 28-29, 37-38.

In the martial arts this divergence is most clear, because the martial application is so objective. There is what seems to be a clear and objective test of any two practitioners: Whoever can win in a fight. Of course, it doesn't really work like this, because very high-level practitioners have no reason to fight each other. But the idea of objectivity is there.

The same divergence exists in the performing arts.

There is danger on both sides. If 'efficacy' is emphasized, the work can become soul-less or even violent. But if it is de-emphasized, the danger of self-delusion and fantasy increases. It is easy to see that these are traditionally masculine and feminine perspectives, or — better yet — paternal and maternal teaching styles. On the other hand, master practitioners almost always become masters because their life experience includes both aspects.

The workshops I attended with Rena Mirecka were quite maternal, in this sense. Her work was like the 'aikido' of theatre: Principles of transformation and peace are present from the first day,

rather than being carefully saved for those who pass through an initiation. My experiences working with Włodzimierz Staniewski were just the opposite. But the life-histories of these two practitioners reveal a more complex dialectic: Mirecka worked with Grotowski in the Theatre of Productions phase, where the emphasis was on technical mastery and producing the greatest possible theatrical effect. Staniewski, on the other hand, worked with Grotowski during the paratheatrical phase, and left Grotowski in order to seek out greater theatrical efficacy, even as Mirecka after Grotowski moved progressively towards the spiritual aspects of performative work.

Perhaps it is ultimately a question of temperament. Some teachers are more worried about giving their students illusions, only to have them turn out helpless in the real world. Others are more concerned about escaping the unhealthy constraints of commercialism and the entertainment industry. Or, to say it in positive terms: Some teachers emphasize technique and save spiritual or psychological ideas for rare occasions, while others emphasize orientation and consider technique without perspective to be useless. It is easy to say that a great teacher 'does both,' but in the daily act of teaching, there is a tremendous range of temperament and style.

None of this is static. Every teacher changes his or her orientation over time. Furthermore, many institutions and teaching partnerships bring together individuals with different temperaments and orientations. One can also see this at Workcenter of Grotowski and Richards, both in the pattern over time of greater or less public manifestation and in the current model of two simultaneous projects, one in "Art as vehicle" and the other searching for a bridge back to 'efficacious' theatrical production.

Art as Vehicle and Art as Production. Mirecka and Staniewski. Aikido and hapkido. The goal of peace and transcendence, and the craft of war or entertainment. The awe-inspiring complexity of life, and the technical ladder of mastery. There is no technique of life; but in life, all we have are techniques.

As always, comments and feedback are welcome.

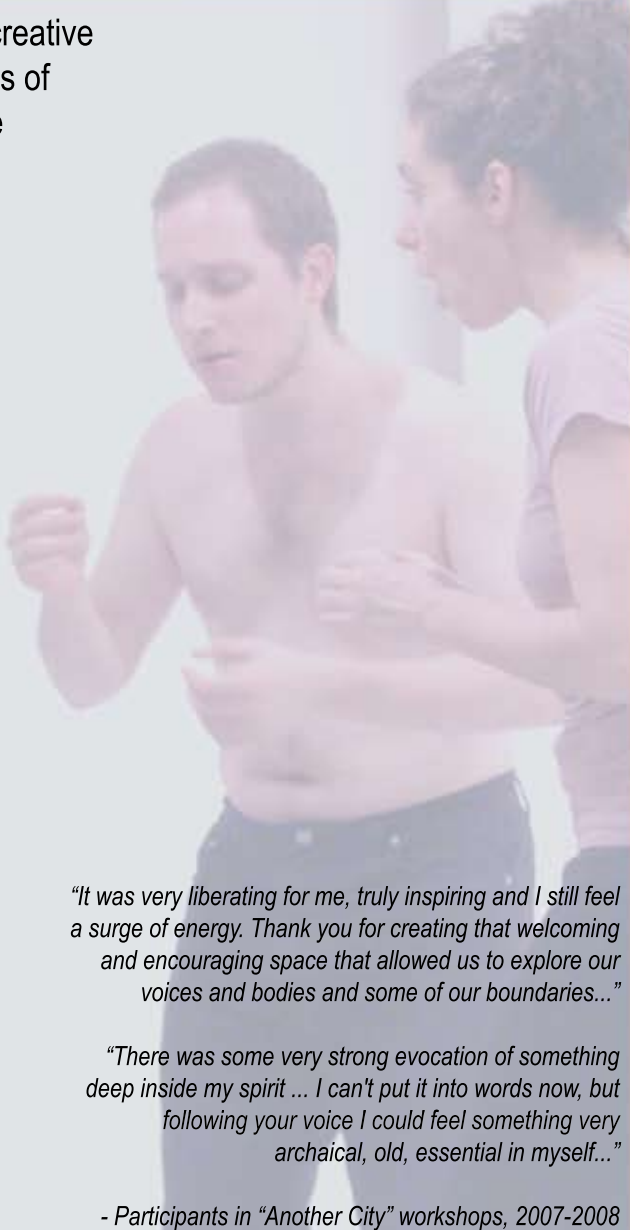
Urban Research Theater  
New York City

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The essence of each workshop is playful, rigorous, and creative exploration in and around precisely repeatable sequences of physical action and song. Every element in the sequence has its own rhythm, quality, and intention. Each of us has spent years developing a particular research at the intersection of song, movement, and action.

Our workshops generate an intense ensemble environment while ensuring that every participant receives individual attention. Each day we will focus on specific elements of physical and vocal work, and on how this work can grow and be tested in a theatrical situation.

Ben Spatz (Urban Research Theater, NYC)  
Maximilian Balduzzi (Teatro della Pioggia, Italy)



**Participation Fee:**

**\$300 for a single workshop**  
**\$250 per workshop for more than one**  
**Location in NYC to be determined**

**Friday-Sunday, April 3-5**  
**Friday-Sunday, April 17-19**  
**Friday-Sunday, May 1-3**

# WORKSHOPS

*"It was very liberating for me, truly inspiring and I still feel a surge of energy. Thank you for creating that welcoming and encouraging space that allowed us to explore our voices and bodies and some of our boundaries..."*

*"There was some very strong evocation of something deep inside my spirit ... I can't put it into words now, but following your voice I could feel something very archaic, old, essential in myself..."*

- Participants in "Another City" workshops, 2007-2008

**URBAN RESEARCH THEATER • NEW YORK CITY • SPRING 2009**

# SHOWINGS

**Sunday, February 22**  
**Sunday, March 29**  
**Sunday, April 12**  
**Sunday, April 26**

**All showings are at 6pm.**  
**There is no charge for attendance,**  
**but spaces are extremely limited.**  
**Contact for address and details.**

**Showings are demonstrations of**  
**current research and practice.**



FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO REGISTER:  
[ben@urbanresearchtheater.com](mailto:ben@urbanresearchtheater.com) | [www.urbanresearchtheater.com](http://www.urbanresearchtheater.com)