

A hit: Grotowski

„Grotowski – the attempt to retreat” directed by Tomasz Rodowicz from the CHOREA Theatre Association in Łódź. Joanna Derkaczew writes in Gazeta Wyborcza – Wysokie Obcasy.

“Grotowski – the attempt to retreat” directed by Tomasz Rodowicz, the Chorea Theatre Association in Łódź. It doesn't matter that it's Grotowski. It doesn't matter that it's THIS Grotowski, about whom academic papers are written, to whom institutes and dozens of discussions during the jubilee Year of Grotowski 2009 are devoted. It's important that he made the same mistakes, had moments of weakness and used to overcome crisis in order to fall into another one. Six young actors from Chorea theatre met someone they could talk to. Just because he never was a mysterious legend. He tormented himself and other people. Used to discover something and quickly give it up, open something and shut it down with disappointment or nonchalance. “Grotowski – the attempt to retreat” is a personal play for Chorea which celebrates its fifth anniversary. It contains many confessions verging on exhibitionism. A lot of physical extremism, fighting with the body, the desperate search for communication through movement. The young artists struggle with one another, use quotes from Grotowski's works to talk about their own maladjustment. The most intimate interlude is constituted by the recollections of Tomasz Rodowicz, a several decades older director, who talks about a night once spent with Grotowski in a hospital in Chicago. It was a crucial moment, a moment of questioning the certainties, throwing off the balance. A moment which, if it happens, never ceases to exist. Grotowski lived in such a moment of a constant questioning. Rodowicz tried to reject this destabilizing experience for years. What will 20-year-old actors do with their turning points?

A room with disturbances after Grotowski

„Grotowski – the attempt to retreat” directed by Tomasz Rodowicz from the Chorea Theatre Association on the First Festival RETRO/PER/SPEKTYWY. Chorea in Łódź.

Grotowski's answers are of no use today. But the moment of asking questions with which he dealt may influence one's life. It plunges into loneliness. The young artists from the Chorea Theatre found in Grotowski a partner in the fight with alienation.

Not because he was a master. Who knew it anyway, who can recall it now... Not because he left a theory, method, technique of acting. The course books with his “theories” are usually fake.

Six young artists from the Chorea Theatre used Grotowski's texts because they harmonized with their feeling of alienation and the sense of being lost. The author was extremely demanding towards himself and others, but at the same time he was aware of the fact that he failed and was disappointed many times. The young artists found him to be a good partner for conversations on awkward topics.

The attempt to retreat from Grotowski was for the Chorea Theatre an attempt to sum up five years of activity. They concentrated more on human matters than on artistic ones. Instead of putting together pieces of old plays, they examine whom they have become during these years. Did they understand what acting is about? Did they experience something authentic? What were the intentions and problems they started the project with?

In the opening scene the actors stand by a bar made of pallets and are ready to tell the most painful and shameful stories of their lives. Bad touch. Being abandoned by parents. Discovering homosexual orientation. But the confessions sound surprisingly poor and banal. It's nothing new. Words don't work.

The artists try some more. Physically. They combine elements of yoga and martial arts, contact improvisation and their own moves based on workshops in Chorea, including movement, dance and classical singing. The actors wearing white gowns change into a team of lab technicians who examine themselves. Not Grotowski. Not the veterans' stories about a suspicious “guru and shaman who ruined so many lives”. But they use expressions and quotes from his texts. “Memory of the body” is a practical life category, when one has to assess “whether this man actually touched me, or it's someone's business to convince me I have a non-existent trauma”. The words “a performer”, “a vehicle”, “a technique”, “obscenity” turn up. But it isn't the way it should be. Except for one thing. The word “loneliness” sounds powerfully and dramatically.

The director Tomasz Rodowicz wanders around them. He lurks. Squats in the corners. Goes around. He watches with attention and disbelief. Is he a superannuated peeping Tom of young people or a caregiver?

Sometimes a beautiful, sweaty actress sits on his knees and shouts out in an accusing manner her fears and grudges against the whole generation of disgraced authorities. Sometimes an actor leans against the director during a complicated gymnastic figure. Finally, he himself with the rest of the artists is thrown from the bar to rubbish bags. He calmly waits for his turn and tumbles down.

Rodowicz, who founded Chorea with a group of former co-workers from Gardzienice, was the only one who knew Grotowski. They coincidentally met in the 80s, when the young musician, philosopher and community worker concentrated on the Beatles and work with drug addicts, didn't even think about taking up theatre. They occasionally worked together, bumper into each other and quarreled through over a dozen of years.

They talked and talked. They met once by chance in a hospital in Chicago where Grotowski heard a depressing diagnosis – at most a couple of years of normal life, that's all. They talked all night. After many hours Rodowicz went back home to write down Grotowski's monologue. He didn't come back to this memory for years. However, in the play he admits he has never left that room where he wrote down Grotowski's words, led by an impulse from beyond the intellect. The easiest, most infantile questions, as well as the tension ordering to question the certainties again – that's all what's left. Walls covered with foil, a wheelchair in the corner and an IV over the stage, measuring time.

There's no retreat. Not from Grotowski, but from these intense moments when everything collapses and clears up at the same time. When one has to question everything in himself, be ashamed and not agree with himself. Grotowski was able to create these states because he sought for and experienced them himself. He couldn't cure anyone from loneliness which is caused by basic questions that keep reappearing. The Chorea play hasn't a therapeutic effect. It is an invitation to an empty room where one hears exactly these voices which he would like to deafen.

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