

## **A brief history of The Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski**

Founded in 1986 in Pontedera, Italy at the invitation of the Centro per la Sperimentazione e la Ricerca Teatrale in Pontedera, Italy (then part of Fondazione Teatro della Toscana). It is here that for the last thirteen years of his life Grotowski developed a line of performance research known as Art as Vehicle, which he continued until his death in 1999. Within this creative investigation, he worked very closely with Thomas Richards whom he called his “essential collaborator,” eventually changing the name of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski to include that of Richards. Grotowski transmitted to Richards the fruit of his lifetime research, what he referred to as “the *inner* aspect of the work.” Grotowski entrusted Richards and Mario Biagini, a key member of the Workcenter team since its beginnings, as the sole legatees of his Estate, which includes his entire body of written work. Grotowski specified that this designation constituted a confirmation of his “family of work.” From 1999 to 2022, acting as the Workcenter’s Artistic Director and Associate Director, respectively, Richards and Biagini continued to develop the Workcenter’s line of performance research. Over the 35 years of the Workcenter’s existence, many artists have joined the teams for varying durations.

Under the reform of FUS - Fondo Unico per lo Spettacolo - in 2014 the Teatro della Pergola of Florence merged with Fondazione Pontedera Teatro. The Workcenter became active within the structure of Teatro Nazionale, Teatro della Toscana.

Jerzy Grotowski, considered one of the most influential theatre practitioners of the 20th century, passed through several phases in his lifetime research. As a young director he immersed himself in Constantin Stanislavski’s pioneering investigations, and often said that his own theatre work began where Stanislavski’s left off. In the first stages of his work, starting in 1959 in Opole and continuing with his Laboratory Theatre in Wroclaw, Grotowski revolutionized and changed conceptions of the audience/actor relationship, theatre staging, and the craft of acting in contemporary Western theatre. Later Grotowski left the “theatre of productions,” pushing the boundaries of theatre, first with his paratheatrical work, and later with his Theatre of Sources research, which took him to India, Mexico, Haiti, and elsewhere, in search of traditional practices of various cultures (1976-82). Following this research, Grotowski began a work of identifying particular abiding elements of ritual traditions (Objective Drama, 1983-86). Finally, at the Workcenter, he carried out the last phase of his life’s research, which has come to be known as Art as Vehicle, in which, as in certain old traditions, the attention for art goes together with the approach of the interiority of the human being.

The Workcenter carried forward Art as Vehicle research while exploring how the essential aspects of this research can unfold within creations that are destined for a variety of settings and contacts with observers, spectators and witnesses. The performing events took place in theatres, industrial buildings, churches, concert halls, pubs, bars, cafes, houses or apartments. Their projects brought them on tour all over the world, in festivals, universities, theatres and other institutions. Aside from performing, the Workcenter carried an important pedagogical branch proposing workshops, seminars, exchanges of work, master classes and intensive programs.

### **The teams from 2007 to 2021**

#### **The Focused Research Team in Art as Vehicle**

Starting in 2008, a research in the domain of Art as Vehicle, a praxis that from the Workcenter’s beginning has been based on work with ancient songs of tradition. The basis of Art as Vehicle is the investigation into the way in which the performing arts can be a tool for the transformation of the artist’s perception and presence, a means of awakening subtle aspects of experience through work on structured streams of action and song. It is a long-term research that requires of each person involved a disciplined and devoted work, with the intention of coming in contact with one’s innermost sources, to move with them toward what Grotowski and Richards have called a “transformation of energy.” Art as Vehicle is therefore a field in which the performing artist works on the rich potential of experiencing what the present moment contains. Here below the pieces created by the team and directed by Thomas Richards, from most recent to oldest:

#### ***Han!***

An ancient dance is performed under a neon light. A virgin ghost stares out of the TV. A baby left alone in an apartment meditates on the nature of solitude. A woman explores memories of her life in relation to the Korean concept of Han. Our heroine moves back and forth between the ancient

myths of “Gojoseon,” the era of her dead grandmother, her mother’s past and her own life. Three generations of Korean women bound together in the “resilient silence” of Han. How will she navigate the sea of expectations that life, family, and nation have thrown her way? Through her struggle to understand the complexity of her own Han, which ignites a fire in her mind, we are carried into a dynamic meditation that explores the no man’s land that exists between myth and modernity, as we weigh the relation between suffering, sacrifice and destiny.  
2019 on, a solo with and by Hyun Ju Baek.

### ***The Underground: A Response to Dostoevsky***

Might a hidden territory exists buried within each of us, an underground graveyard where un-lived needs and actions reside, fermenting? It is as if death has arrived at our doorstep unannounced. How has he seeped into our lives, his formless shadow deviating us from our deepest wishes? And, if we have become a corpse incarnate, can a crack still form in our coffin lid? Here, Dostoevsky’s reflections sound out as a weapon, striking back against that which stifles transformation. Dostoevsky’s analysis of the human psyche meets the performing arts research of the Workcenter. A battle ensues which gives birth to an event that embodies narrative, comedy, grotesque and «Art as Vehicle»; an approach to art in which the work on text and ancient vibratory songs serves an approach to the interiority of the human being. *The Underground: A Response to Dostoevsky* confronts the proscenium, while remaining a frontal performance whose fourth wall is gradually blurred as the director is pulled onto the stage to become part of his own creation. Frontality loosens, the defined characters dissolve and the actors are left to confront, as individuals, the questions the text unveils. Can we be as if dead while living? Is it possible to alter a plan which nature has seemingly etched within us and deviate from the habitual to uncover a providence that exists within, yet which seems so far out of reach.

2016-17: Antonin Chambon, Benoît Chevelle, Jessica Losilla-Hébrail, Bradley High, Guilherme Kirchheim, Sara Montoya, Tara Ostiguy and Thomas Richards.

2017-19: Antonin Chambon, Benoît Chevelle, Jessica Losilla-Hébrail, Guilherme Kirchheim, Sara Montoya, Tara Ostiguy and Thomas Richards.

2020-21, second version, with Alonso Abarzua, Desiré Graham, Javier Cárcel Hidalgo-Saavedra, Jessica Losilla-Hébrail, Guilherme Kirchheim, Katie Mazzini, Maria- Constanza Solarte Burbano, and Thomas Richards.

### ***L'heure fugitive***

One hot afternoon, as her husband naps, she is invaded by a fantasy. Driven by intuition, she abandons herself to the mysteries of metamorphosis, as she embodies the voices of French poetesses anchored in history. Stepping into her own fiction, she tells us the story of Madame “M.” “M.” because she may be every woman, and “M” also for the myth of Mélusine, which means “Wonder” or “Mist of the sea.” Madame “M.” arrives at a fountain, the fountain of thirst. She travels, her soul drunk, through the matter of her dreams, desires and love. Sliding entirely into the fountain, she is now half-woman, half-serpent. Her act becomes event, fantasy and revolution. “She opens herself to the inexplicable, to give reverence to mystery.” In her anonymity, she invokes a world in which man and woman exist as One. She transforms her love into a weapon and asks: “What revolution will throw me into paradise, standing upright in my boots?”.  
2012-20, a solo with and by Cécile Berthe.

### ***The Living Room***

*The Living Room*, takes us home, to a place in which we welcome another. By starting from this fundamental action that can take place in a living room, we enter an investigation into how the potentialities of performance craft can both enrich and be enriched by daily inter-personal relations and realities. How can our room come alive? How can one be with another in such a way that the quotidian slides seamlessly into the non-quotidian? Here the witness has the chance to shed his anonymity, being an individual, a guest. Within our meeting a performance event unfolds, structured and precise, a living stream of actions based on work with ancient songs of tradition, as well as texts exploring what it takes to awaken ourselves faced to ourselves, the other, and the world.

2009: Katarina Arbanas, Cécile Berthe, Benoit Chevelle, Jessica Losilla Hébrail, Teresa Salas, Philip Salata, et Thomas Richards.

2010-11: Benoit Chevelle, Cécile Berthe, Jessica Losilla Hébrail, Teresa Salas, Philip Salata, Thomas Richards.

2012: Cécile Berthe, Benoit Chevelle, Jessica Losilla Hébrail, Jorge Romero Mora, Teresa Salas, Philip Salata, Thomas Richards.

2012-14: Antonin Chambon, Benoit Chevelle, Tzu Lun Chen, Jessica Losilla Hébrail, Bradley High, Tara Ostiguy, Min Jung Park, Cécile Richards, Thomas Richards.

2015: Antonin Chambon, Benoit Chevelle, Delphine Derrez, Jessica Losilla Hébrail, Bradley High, Tara Ostiguy, Cécile Richards, Thomas Richards.

2015-17: Antonin Chambon, Benoit Chevelle, Jessica Losilla Hébrail, Bradley High, Tara Ostiguy, Cécile Richards, Thomas Richards.

2017-19: Antonin Chambon, Benoit Chevelle, Jessica Losilla Hébrail, Tara Ostiguy, Sara Montoya, Cécile Richards, Thomas Richards, with the participation of Eliot Richards.

### **The Workcenter Studio in Residence**

Starting in 2016, a residence that became a permanent work team with two pieces created by the team and directed by Thomas Richards. The Workcenter Studio in Residence provided a place in which an extended investigation could be conducted on the potential that specific songs from Latin America can have as tools aimed towards what Grotowski called «Objectivity of Ritual».

### ***Sin Fronteras***

*Sin Fronteras*, adapted from the text "Beben" by Guillermo Calderón, takes place after the 2010 earthquake in Chile. A group of volunteers comes to help victims of the disaster. With a therapeutic purpose, they tell children affected by the catastrophe, the story, "Earthquake in Chile," written by Heinrich Von Kleist in 1807, in which a woman barely escapes her execution while an earthquake destroys the city of Santiago de Chile in 1647. Nevertheless, she is finally overcome by the tragedy when attacked by a desperate and furious mob. *Sin Fronteras* opens a reflection on the cracks within a society that become apparent after a natural catastrophe, highlighting the precarious equilibrium of our daily lives. The spectator is transported from a realistic universe to a grotesque and comic one, both intimate and profound, in which the volunteers re-evaluate their motivations and actions, as they struggle with inner conflicts that inhabit them when confronted with the suffering that any individual may have to live. With Jaime Alonso Abarzúa Vallejos, Gina Gutiérrez Villamizar, Javier Cárcel Hidalgo-Saavedra, Lynda Mebtouche, Felipe Salazar Montoya, Juan David Salazar Montoya, María Constanza Solarte.

### ***Gravedad***

A family forced into expatriation during the Chilean dictatorship is abruptly confronted with a destabilized sense of identity and an immediate need to construct belonging in a foreign land. Based on stories of Chilean exiled in Sweden, Gravity transports us through memories of uprooting and return, questioning our constant pull towards a perceived homeland. Here, a single actor transforms himself into father, son, mother, brother and a host of friends, as he carries us towards a profound comprehension of a family's desires and temptations as they shuttle back and forth on a fragile bridge between hemispheres and nations. Longing for meaningful affiliation and ceaselessly attempting to take root, a polyphony of voices rings out, ultimately questioning the borders that we all unwittingly construct as we search for imagined or remembered origins. Is there a home with such density that its pull, far more forceful than that of earth's gravity, may rip apart the very borders that we erect in each concept of home? A solo with and by Jaime Alonso Abarzúa Vallejos.

### **Songs of Tradition: Open sessions**

This event included Focused Research Team in Art as Vehicle and the Workcenter Studio in Residence. It was not a performance, rather an event from the domain of "Art as vehicle." Herein, as in certain old traditions, work on song and action goes together with an approach to the interiority of the human being. At the Open Session, the general public was invited to witness a practice on songs of tradition in which the aim is the awakening of subtle aspects of experience, a situation in which performing becomes a tool for the transformation of the artist's perception and presence. 2018-21 : Conducted by Thomas Richards, assisted by - throughout the years - Alonso Abarzúa, Cécile Berthe, Antonin Chambon, Benoit Chevelle, Javier Cárcel Hidalgo-Saavedra, Gina Gutiérrez, Guilherme Kirchheim, Jessica Losilla-Hébrail, Lynda Mebtouche, Sara Montoya, Tara Ostiguy, Thomas Richards, Juan David Salazar, Felipe Salazar, María Solarte.

## **Open Program**

Commenced in 2007 on the initiative of Mario Biagini. The work developed artistic practice in the field of theatre work, maintaining a door that is open towards the community and individuals, who do not necessarily belong to the world of theatre. The practice of the group in the field of performing arts promotes a kind of organic circulation between the internal research of the Workcenter and a broader social context, often at the crossing of social, political and cultural barriers. Open Program works on this aspect of the theatrical interaction in which the contact among the human beings evolves around a search of a different, special quality, of a different kind of attention. One of the fundamental elements of the work of the group is a research on the Afro-American and Afro-Hispanic songs.

From 2007 till 2015 the performances and events proposed by the Open Program are born from the work on poetic texts of Allen Ginsberg, rediscovering the living aspect of the poetic word as a tool for action. The other artistic material is created from the work on traditional songs from the South of the United States, exploring various ways in which the songs can trigger creative processes, thanks to their potential as catalysers of contact and transformation. Open Program follows and supports the search of numerous individuals in Italy and abroad: the Choir of the citizens in Pontedera, free and open-to-all, or the New York City Seed Group in New York. Using theatre arts as tools for creation of contexts of interaction, Open Program creates favorable conditions for the encounter, rediscovering and sharing human and artistic values intrinsic to their own culture. The pieces were created by the team and directed by Mario Biagini, here below from most recent to oldest:

### ***El popolo canta***

This is a taste of a world that no longer exists. The taste of a musical landscape of oral tradition that has disappeared from the living culture of people, and mostly been forgotten. Just as the varied humanity which created that landscape: largely homogenized and flattened by the values of consumption culture. Not only a concert, then, but an attempt to make that human and sonic world appear again, to make it live for some moments. And by evoking that world, we evoke the memory of those "varied ways of being men and women that Italy had produced in a historically very differentiated manner". "It's been a kind of nightmare in which we saw Italy being destroyed and disappear around us. Now, waking up from this nightmare, perhaps, and looking around us, we realize that there's nothing left to do". From 2018 on, a solo with and by Felicita Marcelli.

### ***Katie's Tales***

The story of a Lady. And her Beloved. And a return. A tale of a garden.

*Katie's Tales* is the story of a woman and her lover who, after a terrible event, left her with the promise to come back, one day. It's the story of a garden, with an orchard of cherry trees.

Katie's life unfolds during times of waiting and times of becoming – new and savage times. Katie, together with a couple of foreign servants, lives protected in her garden, under the shade of her cherry trees, silent witnesses of her life and of History. Every day Katie receives visitors: every moment could bring the return of the one who left in order to travel, and Katie struggles to keep herself ready. With her stories, Katie tells us of desire, and of waiting, and with her silences she speaks to us of the unsaid. She who waits is on a journey herself, standing mute on the road of her life sculpted in vivid frames, at the center of her garden under the shade of the cherry trees thick with memories – a woman standing in front of History, face to her own lights and her own shadows, at the crossroad of past and future. The untold desire that Katie embodies invites us to reflect on the place we belong to, and to open ourselves to wordless question about the role of our conscience, in the deafening flux of events and in the confused whirlwind of desires.

2018-22, a solo by and with Agnieszka Kazimierska.

### ***Open Choir***

*Open Choir* is an invitation to take part in a singing feast, out-of-the ordinary, a feast that you can support simply with your presence, and during which you can join in the singing through singing or through listening, and join in the dancing through dancing or through looking.

The Open Choir is perhaps a forgotten art form, which our not so distant ancestors still knew and understood, and which allowed a fluid and active participation of all those present. Gently guided by a group of trained artists, the *Open Choir* is a safe space in which to experiment with taking individual care of a shared action. The participants, each with a different background, become

aware and responsible co-creators of a work of art that goes beyond differences, towards mutual recognition. The songs are born around and among the participants, and the rhythms and melodies, together with the vibratory qualities, encourage the emergence of a different attention. The resonance embraces all those present, who together nourish and give shape to the evening, each person in an active way, finding themselves faced with simple choices: to witness, to enter the space where the action takes place, to follow by remaining aside, to sing and to dance, to find one's own way of being present and support the others. To listen.

It is an event which is part of the trajectory of invitation to singing that the international group of actors extends to anybody – a free event, open to all, without any limitation.

2014-20, with - throughout the years - Mario Biagini, Lloyd Bricken, Sambou Diarra, Thomas Gasser, Agnieszka Kazimierska, Pauline Laulhe, Eduardo Landim, Felicita Marcelli, Daniel Mattar, Luciano Mendes de Jesus, Alejandro Tomás Rodríguez, Jorge Romero Mora, Grazielle Sena Da Silva.

### ***Dark is My Mother***

She's there and she's here. You can find her in every house.

She's mother, daughter, wife, sister. Every woman close to you.

*Dark Is My Mother* is a serious and playful homage to the diverse manifestations of the ancient and powerful tradition of popular myth related to a feminine entity. It explores the tradition of women's gatherings and women's communities, it opens to a world where women's play, imaginations, memories and temptations are woven into song, dance and praising.

The ancestral backgrounds of the women of the Open Program are vast and deep: Mediterranean, Slavic Europe, West African, South American. In all these cultures there exist stories, poems and myths describing a feminine entity – seen as a mother and as a creative energy, but also as a terrible and destructive force that decides upon the destiny of mankind. Through the myths related to this feminine divine figure, to her fall and redemption, is woven the story of oppression and humiliation that has accompanied women on their journey through human history. Women all over the world have tenaciously resisted historical reality, by keeping alive a knowledge of life and nature, of its rhythm and cycles. This knowledge, a treasure within the hearts and bodies of women, is threatened but also still secretly nourished. *Dark Is My Mother* is a contemporary reply to these myths, and bears within itself the seeds of the surging humanity of our days, a humanity that enriches itself by continuing to blend elements of diverse origins. It is a vision, conjugated in the feminine, of how living traditions can reappear and renew themselves, brought together by the migrant humanity of our times.

2013-20, with Agnieszka Kazimierska, Pauline Laulhe, Felicita Marcelli, Grazielle Sena Da Silva.

### ***The Hidden Sayings***

*The Hidden Sayings*, is a performance that was created in 2013 and which is often utilised by the Open Program during its journey like an introduction to its work in the beginning of the contact with a community. It is a mostly sung performance: a small group of people meet together in order to interrogate their own myths, face to the city. They speak words from the scriptures of early Christianity, and interweave them with songs from the African-American tradition. They face texts and songs. They ask themselves what are today for them the meaning, the urgency, the content of these songs and texts that are both, in different ways, at the mythical roots of the world in which they live. They do not arrive to an answer that inevitably closes the question. The question remains, cannot be eluded, and manifests itself through clear and tangible elements: intention, action, contact, living word, song, dance – and throbs as mute and palpable as the silent resonance of a bell. The songs of the African-American tradition carry and amplify it delicately, and the words of the Christianity of the origins (here translated mainly from Coptic and coming from the area comprised of Egypt, the Middle East and Greece), like familiar and forgotten voices, send back to us the echo of this mute question.

2013-20, with - throughout the years - Mario Biagini, Lloyd Bricken, Sambou Diarra, Thomas Gasser, Robin Gentien, Agnieszka Kazimierska, Pauline Laulhe, Eduardo Landim, Felicita Marcelli, Daniel Mattar, Luciano Mendes de Jesus, Alejandro Tomás Rodríguez, Jorge Romero Mora, Grazielle Sena Da Silva.

### ***Electric Party Songs ; Not History's Bones – A Poetry Concert ; Electric Party***

Three different events with a flow of songs and actions based on the poetry of American poet Allen Ginsberg. Composing the songs, approaching the meaning, rhythms and sounds of the spoken poetical texts as the seeds of musical and dramatic creation. Their varied backgrounds

generate a stylistically diverse body of music, drawing inspiration from blues, rock, pop, opera, punk, and traditional sources.

2007-15, with - throughout the years - Mario Biagini, Itahisa Borges-Méndez, Lloyd Bricken, Cinzia Cigna, Davide Curzio, Robin Gentien, Timothy Hopfner, Marina Gregory, Agnieszka Kazimierska, Felicita Marcelli, Luciano Mendes de Jesus, Alejandro Tomás Rodríguez, Chrystèle Saint-Louis Augustin, Grazielle Sena Da Silva, Suellen Serrat, Julia Ulehla.

### ***I Am America***

Based on the works of Allen Ginsberg, *I Am America* is a stream of dramatic structures featuring song, rhythm, dance, poetry and action, exploring this terrain through the personification of America. She speaks of herself, of hope, of contradictions, desires and failures; she is a goddess with many faces. Her offspring are those who give body to her impulses, each one according to his or her own unpredictable paths. America is a mother with many children.

2007-14, with - throughout the years - Mario Biagini, Itahisa Borges-Méndez, Lloyd Bricken, Cinzia Cigna, Davide Curzio, Robin Gentien, Timothy Hopfner, Marina Gregory, Agnieszka Kazimierska, Felicita Marcelli, Luciano Mendes de Jesus, Alejandro Tomás Rodríguez, Chrystèle Saint-Louis Augustin, Grazielle Sena Da Silva, Suellen Serrat, Julia Ulehla.

### **Art as vehicle before 2008**

#### ***The Letter* ; prev. *An Action in creation: work session* ; *The Twin: an Action in creation.***

The opus was being developed in the form of a “Work-in-creation”. For the first time in the Workcenter history an opus was elaborated, in specific periods of the opus’ creation, in the proximity with different groups of witnesses. The text, which along with the work on ancient song was an integral part of the opus, had a narrative nature. The story – a story of a journey, of a task forgotten and then remembered and fulfilled – can be found in several versions throughout the Eastern Mediterranean area. The dramaturgical approach was not one of narration. As in certain old traditions, the direction was rather to re-enact the story than to re-present it. The opus was directed by Thomas Richards and created by the team:

2002-06: *The Twin: an Action in creation* with Cécile Berthe, Mario Biagini, Marie De Clerck, Geneviève Miella Lavigne, Elisa Poggelli, Johanna Porkola, Thomas Richards, Pei Hwee Tan, Francesc Torrent Gironella, Jørn Riegels Wimpel.

2005-08: *An Action in creation: work session* and *The Letter* with Cécile Berthe, Thomas Richards, Pei Hwee Tan, Francesc Torrent Gironella.

### ***Action***

*Action* structures, in a material linked to performing arts, the work on oneself of the doers. The opus is composed of lines of actions elaborated in detail, constructed with and around ancient vibratory songs. Most of these songs are African and Afro-Caribbean in origin, and therefore are in the languages practiced by those cultures. In *Action*, there also appear, often under the form of incantations, fragments of a text in English translated word by word from Coptic. This text comes from a very remote source of the Judeo-Christian tradition; one cannot say anything with certitude about its arising. The nature of *Action* is analogous to poetry rather than narrative prose. For the persons doing, the doers, the opus is a kind of vehicle for the work on oneself, in the sense that, as in certain old traditions, the attention for art goes together with the approach of the interiority of the human being. If we speak in terms of qualities of energy, in *Action* the work on the ancient vibratory songs becomes a sort of itinerary starting from the vital, the biological even, to go towards the subtle: the ascent towards the subtle and the descent of this subtle towards the level of more ordinary reality. The opus was created by the team and directed by Thomas Richards.

1994-96: Mario Biagini, Domenico Castaldo, Nhandan Chirco Rawan, Thomas Richards, Przemyslaw Wasilkowski.

1996: Mario Biagini, Barouch Braner, Domenico Castaldo, Nhandan Chirco Rawan, Thomas Richards, Przemyslaw Wasilkowski, Brian Watt.

1997: Mario Biagini, Barouch Braner, Nhandan Chirco Rawan, Thomas Richards, Przemyslaw Wasilkowski, Brian Watt.

1998: Mario Biagini, Barouch Braner, Marie De Clerck, Claudio Graisman, Mehrdad Mehdikhani, Thomas Richards, Przemyslaw Wasilkowski.

2000: Souphière Amiar, Mario Biagini, Marie De Clerck, Ryan Etzel, Juri Piroddi, Thomas Richards, Jørn Riegels Wimpel.

2001-02: Souphière Amiar, Mario Biagini, Marie De Clerck, Eric Feldman, Thomas Richards, Jørn Riegels Wimpel.

2002-05: Souphière Amiar, Mario Biagini, Marie De Clerck, Francesc Torrent Gironella, Thomas Richards, Jørn Riegels Wimpel.

2005-06: Mario Biagini, Marie De Clerck, Francesc Torrent Gironella, Timothy Hopfner, Pere Sais Martinez, Thomas Richards, Ignacio Monna Rodriguez.

### ***Downstairs Action***

The opus was created under Grotowski's supervision by Thomas Richards and the team he was leading at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski. The opus can be seen as a culmination of many years of Grotowski's experiments and research regarding the ways in which tools of performing arts can serve as a means to support a "work on oneself." Concerning Art as vehicle Grotowski wrote: "The work takes at least eight hours a day (often much more), six days a week, and lasts for years in a systematic way; it includes the songs, the score of reactions, archaic models of movement, the word, so ancient that it's almost always anonymous. And in this way we build something concrete, a structure comparable to that of a performance. The opus' structure is highly elaborated and is not destined for spectators". However, Grotowski stresses that from time to time the presence of witnesses are necessary, so that the quality of the work is tested and the opus does not exist as 'a purely private matter, useless to others.'

1987-92 with Mario Biagini, Piotr Borowski, Nitinchandra Ganatra, Nitaya Singsengsouvanh, Thomas Richards.

### **Project *The Bridge: Developing Theatre Arts* from 1998 to 2006**

The Workcenter developed a new thrust in its research that eventually evolved into a full branch that was maturing next to the research on "art as vehicle" — Project *The Bridge: Developing Theatre Arts*. Therein, a bridge was sculpted in the material of performing arts, a bridge that stretched from the world of theatre to the investigations on "art as vehicle". What appeared in Project *The Bridge* was neither theatre in the strict sense, nor "art as vehicle". Created by the team, directed by Mario Biagini and Thomas Richards, the first piece was *One breath left* It eventually became the transitional piece *One breath left - Dies Irae*, which in turn transformed into *Dies Irae* and then into *Dies Irae: The Preposterous Theatrum Interioris Show*.

#### ***One Breath Left* ; prev. *On more breath left*; prev. *One breath left - Dies Irae***

A woman lies in her death bed: only one more breath left. Who is there, close? And if it was me in my death agony? With only one breath left, with no strength – will I remember? In a flash, from memories and desires, images reappear, visions glitter: childhood dreams and fears, people I met, the search for knowledge, hunger for joy, my nightmares... Will it be just the leftovers of life gone by, emerging again for a second, or an unexplored chance – too late, an instant of recognition, too lately glimpsed? What will I do with that last instant?

1998-99: *On more breath left* by Theatre OX, Resident Theatre Group from Singapore, directed by Gey Pin Ang, with Hey Pin Ang, Leng Long Koh, Yuen Wei Low, Pei Hwee Tan.

1999-01: Gey Pin Ang, Julius Jong Soon Foo, Pei Hwee Tan, Sun Sun Yap

2001 - 2002 : Gey Pin Ang, Julius Jong Soon Foo, Pei Hwee Tan, Sun Sun Yap, Souphière Amiar, Mario Biagini, Marie De Clerck, Ryan Etzel, Juri Piroddi, Jørn Riegels Wimpel.

2002: Gey Pin Ang, Julius Jong Soon Foo, Pei Hwee Tan, Sun Sun Yap, Souphière Amiar, Mario Biagini, Marie De Clerck, Juri Piroddi, Jørn Riegels Wimpel.

2002-03: Gey Pin Ang, Julius Jong Soon Foo, Pei Hwee Tan, Cécile Berthe, Mario Biagini, Marie De Clerck, Geneviève Miella Lavigne, Elisa Poggelli, Johanna Porkola, Francesc Torrent Gironella, Jørn Riegels Wimpel.

#### ***Dies Irae: The Preposterous Theatrum Interioris Show* ; prev. *Dies Irae***

A group of actors gathers for their spectacle. At the beginning, only a man, his head bowed into the darkness. His eyelids open onto the stage of his inner world — and see! Out of the black void seemingly concrete figures come to life, answering his bidding to action: a groping research into the nature of existence, probably. The strolling players of this absurd comedy play hide and seek in the cracks of wake and dream, in the vaudeville of desires and fears. Well, their adventure may also be a cruel inquiry into the dubious essence of theatre art. And surely, these phantasms would make up a theatre company with a very peculiar conception of art.

*"Life's splendor forever lies in wait about each one of us in all its fullness, but veiled from view, deep down, invisible, far off. It is there, though, not hostile, not reluctant, not deaf. If you invite it by the right word, by its right name, it will come. This is the essence of theatre, which does not create, but invites."* The actors of the whimsical drama perform their liturgy, pitilessly. Where does the soul hide, if anywhere? Only a random lottery to find it. Can the one chosen by the raffle — a woman — incarnate his innermost life, made of the evanescent substance of the soul? Can she really transform herself into the vessel of a redeeming presence, while hanging between knowledge and ignorance, yes and no? Will she perish in this grotesque and desperate attempt, or finally fly?

2003-04: *One breath left - Dies Iræ* and *Dies Iræ* with Gey Pin Ang, Souphière Amiar, Cécile Berthe, Mario Biagini, Elisa Poggelli, Johanna Porkola, Pei Hwee Tan, Francesc Torrent Gironella, Jørn Riegels Wimpel.

2005-06: Gey Pin Ang, Souphière Amiar, Cécile Berthe, Mario Biagini, Marina Gregory, Elisa Poggelli, Johanna Porkola, Pei Hwee Tan, Francesc Torrent Gironella, Jørn Riegels Wimpel.

### **Three-year projects**

#### **Tracing Roads Across**

2003-2006

A three-year Workcenter project supported by the "Culture 2000" Programme of the European Union, and by a network of cultural operators from different countries such as Russia, Turkey, Tunisia, France, Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Great Britain, Austria, Poland. In Tracing Roads Across, Fondazione Pontedera Teatro headed the group of co-organizers by hosting the project's "Main Work." Gülsen Gürses was Project Manager of Tracing Roads Across, and Artistic Director of Theater des Augenblicks in Vienna, she was the project's Main Organizer. The other co-organisers were the Centre Dramatique National of Caen, France; Theatre Laboratory, Crete, Greece; University of Cyprus, Nicosia; New Bulgarian University Foundation, Sophia, Bulgaria.

Tracing Roads Across, as well as directly concerning the Workcenter's practical research, periodically focused the artistic team's attention towards selected young theatre groups, performance artists and students, and also gave the Workcenter team the opportunity to address topics related to creative analysis with theatre experts and scholars. The project created the circumstances in which the works and creative processes of young artists and scholars were analyzed by the Workcenter from the point of view of performance craft. A three-year traveling cultural dialogue was fostered between chosen theatre groups, organizations and cultural operators from eleven nations. Tracing Roads Across also created the opportunity for professionals, non-professionals and theatre-lovers of all participating countries to come in contact with the artistic research of the Workcenter through viewing its performance events, as well as through the project's numerous open conferences, projections of documentary films, and public discussions.

#### **Horizons**

2007 - 2009

Supported and hosted by the City of Wrocław, Poland. The Instytut im. Jerzego Grotowskiego acted as a fundamental partner and coordinating agent. During the three-years of the project, the Workcenter continued its main research in Pontedera, Italy, developing its long-term practical performing arts inquiry in its Italian home base. The Workcenter also visited Wrocław three months each year, deepening its internal research, holding its performing events, as well as conferences, practical work encounters and exchanges-in-work. During the final year of *Horizons*, in November 2009 took place *Zero Budget Festival*.

*Zero Budget Festival* was a multidisciplinary arts event hosting well-known and lesser-known, established and debutant theatre groups, individual artists, scholars interested in an active approach to society, culture and the individual. The Zero Budget Festival was a feast of works, an extended gathering between theatre practitioners in which the accent was placed on exchange and common investigation of the ways in which art can emanate from a search for content and meaning, and be a living response to one's times and surroundings. This zero budget and zero income undertaking was open to a broad public for free. Elimination of the necessity of a monetary structure during the Zero Budget Festival engendered a unique atmosphere of exchange. The festival brought together visual artists, social groups, electronic musicians, and



dozens of theatre artists and scholars for a two-week festival of stimulating discussions and new alliances of artists.