

Statement of Principles

Jerzy Grotowski wrote this text for internal use within his Theatre Laboratory, and in particular for those actors undergoing a period of trial before being accepted into the troupe in order to acquaint them with the basic principles inspiring the work.

Translation: Maja Buszewicz and Judy Barba.

I

The rhythm of life in modern civilisation is characterised by pace, tension, a feeling of doom, the wish to hide our personal motives and the assumption of a variety of roles and masks in life (different ones with our family, at work, amongst friends or in community life, etc.). We like to be "scientific", by which we mean discursive and cerebral, since this attitude is dictated by the course of civilisation. But we also want to pay tribute to our biological selves, to what we might call physiological pleasures. We do not want to be restricted in this sphere. Therefore we play a double game of intellect and instinct, thought and emotion; we try to divide ourselves artificially into body and soul. When we try to liberate ourselves from it all we start to shout and stamp, we convulse to the rhythm of music. In our search for liberation we reach biological chaos. We suffer most from a lack of totality, throwing ourselves away, squandering ourselves.

Theatre – through the actor's technique, his art in which the living organism strives for higher motives – provides an opportunity for what could be called integration, the discarding of masks, the revealing of the real substance: a totality of physical and mental

reactions. This opportunity must be treated in a disciplined manner, with a full awareness of the responsibilities it involves. Here we can see the theatre's therapeutic function for people in our present day civilisation. It is true that the actor accomplishes this act, but he can only do so through an encounter with the spectator – intimately, visibly, not hiding behind a cameraman, wardrobe mistress, stage designer or make-up girl – in direct confrontation with him, and somehow “instead of” him. The actor's act – discarding half measures, revealing, opening up, emerging from himself as opposed to closing up – is an invitation to the spectator. This act could be compared to an act of the most deeply rooted, genuine love between two human beings – this is just a comparison since we can only refer to this “emergence from oneself” through analogy. This act, paradoxical and borderline, we call a total act. In our opinion it epitomizes the actor's deepest calling.

II

Why do we sacrifice so much energy to our art? Not in order to teach others but to learn with them what our existence, our organism, our personal and unrepeatable experience have to give us; to learn to break down the barriers which surround us and to free ourselves from the breaks which hold us back, from the lies about ourselves which we manufacture daily for ourselves and for others; to destroy the limitations caused by our ignorance and lack of courage; in short, to fill the emptiness in us: to fulfil ourselves. Art is neither a state of the soul (in the sense of some extraordinary, unpredictable moment of inspiration) nor a state of man (in the sense of a profession or social function). Art is a ripening, an evolution, an uplifting which enables us to emerge from darkness into a blaze of light.

We fight then to discover, to experience the truth about ourselves; to tear away the masks behind which we hide daily. We see theatre – especially in its palpable, carnal aspect – as a place of provocation, a challenge the actor sets himself and also, indirectly, other people. Theatre only has a meaning if it allows us to

transcend our stereotyped vision, our conventional feelings and customs, our standards of judgement – not just for the sake of doing so, but so that we may experience what is real and, having already given up all daily escapes and pretences, in a state of complete defenselessness unveil, give, discover ourselves. In this way – through shock, through the shudder which causes us to drop our daily masks and mannerisms – we are able, without hiding anything, to entrust ourselves to something we cannot name but in which live Eros and Charitas.

III

Art cannot be bound by the laws of common morality or any chatechism. The actor, at least in part, is creator, model and creation rolled into one. He must not be shameless as that leads to exhibitionism. He must have courage, but not merely the courage to exhibit himself – a passive courage, we might say: the courage of the defenseless, the courage to reveal himself. Neither that which touches the interior sphere, nor the profound stripping bare of the self should be regarded as evil so long as in the process of preparation or in the completed work they produce an act of creation. If they do not come easily and if they are not signs of outburst but of mastership, then they are creative: they reveal and purify us while we transcend ourselves. Indeed, they improve us then.

For these reasons every aspect of an actor's work dealing with intimate matters should be protected from incidental remarks, indiscretions, nonchalance, idle comments and jokes. The personal realm – both spiritual and physical – must not be "swamped" by triviality, the sordidness of life and lack of tact towards oneself and others; at least not in the place of work or anywhere connected with it. This postulate sounds like an abstract moral order. It is not. It involves the very essence of the actor's calling. This calling is realized through carnality. The actor must not illustrate but accomplish an "act of the soul" by means of his own organism. Thus he is faced with two extreme alternatives: he can either sell,

dishonour, his real "incarnate" self, making himself an object of artistic prostitution; or he can give himself, sanctify his real "incarnate" self.

IV

An actor can only be guided and inspired by someone who is whole-hearted in his creative activity. The producer, while guiding and inspiring the actor, must at the same time allow himself to be guided and inspired by him. It is a question of freedom, partnership, and this does not imply a lack of discipline but a respect for the autonomy of others. Respect for the actor's autonomy does not mean lawlessness, lack of demands, never ending discussions and the replacement of action by continuous streams of words. On the contrary, respect for autonomy means enormous demands, the expectation of a maximum creative effort and the most personal revelation. Understood thus, solicitude for the actor's freedom can only be born from the plenitude of the guide and not from his lack of plenitude. Such a lack implies imposition, dictatorship, superficial dressage.

V

An act of creation has nothing to do with either external comfort or conventional human civility; that is to say, working conditions in which everybody is happy. It demands a maximum of silence and a minimum of words. In this kind of creativity we discuss through proposals, actions and living organisms, not through explanations. When we finally find ourselves on the track of something difficult and often almost intangible, we have no right to lose it through frivolity and carelessness. Therefore, even during breaks after which we will be continuing with the creative process, we are obliged to observe certain natural reticences in our behaviour and even in our private affairs. This applies just as much to our own work as to the work of our partners. We must not interrupt and disorganize the work because we are hurrying to our own affairs; we must not peep, comment or make jokes about it privately. In any case, private ideas of fun have no place in the

actor's calling. In our approach to creative tasks, even if the theme is a game, we must be in a state of readiness – one might even say “solemnity”. Our working terminology which serves as a stimulus must not be dissociated from the work and used in a private context. Work terminology should be associated only with that which it serves.

A creative act of this quality is performed in a group, and therefore within certain limits we should restrain our creative egoism. An actor has no right to mould his partner so as to provide greater possibilities for his own performance. Nor has he the right to correct his partner unless authorized by the work leader. Intimate or drastic elements in the work of others are untouchable and should not be commented upon even in their absence. Private conflicts, quarrels, sentiments, animosities are unavoidable in any human group. It is our duty towards creation to keep them in check in so far as they might deform and wreck the work process. We are obliged to open ourselves up even towards an enemy.

VI

It has been mentioned several times already, but we can never stress and explain too often the fact that we must never exploit privately anything connected with the creative act: i. e. location, costume, props, an element from the acting score, a melodic theme or lines from the text. This rule applies to the smallest detail and there can be no exceptions. We did not make this rule simply to pay tribute to a special artistic devotion. We are not interested in grandeur and noble words, but our awareness and experience tell us that lack of strict adherence to such rules causes the actor's score to become deprived of its psychic motives and “radiance”.

VII

Order and harmony in the work of each actor are essential conditions without which a creative act cannot take place. Here we demand consistency. We demand it from the actors who come to

the theatre consciously to try themselves out in something extreme, a sort of challenge seeking a total response from every one of us. They come to test themselves in something very definite that reaches beyond the meaning of "theatre" and is more like an act of living and way of existence. This outline probably sounds rather vague. If we try to explain it theoretically, we might say that the theatre and acting are for us a kind of vehicle allowing us to emerge from ourselves, to fulfil ourselves. We could go into this at great length. However, anyone who stays here longer than just the trial period is perfectly aware that what we are talking about can be grasped less through grandiose words than through details, demands and the rigours of work in all its elements. The individual who disturbs the basic elements, who does not for example respect his own and the others' acting score, destroying its structure by shamming or automatic reproduction, is the very one who shakes this undefinable higher motive of our common activity. Seemingly small details form the background against which fundamental questions are decided, as for example the duty to note down elements discovered in the course of the work. We must not rely on our memory unless we feel the spontaneity of our work is being threatened, and even then we must keep a partial record. This is just as basic a rule as is strict punctuality, the thorough memorizing of the text, etc. Any form of shamming in one's work is completely inadmissible. However it does sometimes happen that an actor has to go through a scene, just outline it, in order to check its organization and the elements of his partners' actions. But even then he must follow the actions carefully, measuring himself against them, in order to comprehend their motives. This is the difference between outlining and shamming.

An actor must always be ready to join the creative act at the exact moment determined by the group. In this respect his health, physical condition and all his private affairs cease to be just his own concern. A creative act of such quality flourishes only if nourished by the living organism. Therefore we are obliged to take daily care of our bodies so we are always ready for our tasks.

We must not go short of sleep for the sake of private enjoyment and then come to work tired or with a hangover. We must not come unable to concentrate. The rule here is not just one's compulsory presence in the place of work, but physical readiness to create.

VIII

Creativity, especially where acting is concerned, is boundless sincerity, yet disciplined: i.e. articulated through signs. The creator should not therefore find his material a barrier in this respect. And as the actor's material is his own body, it should be trained to obey, to be pliable, to respond passively to psychic impulses as if it did not exist during the moment of creation – by which we mean it does not offer any resistance. Spontaneity and discipline are the basic aspects of an actor's work and they require a methodical key.

Before a man decides to do something he must first work out a point of orientation and then act accordingly and in a coherent manner. This point of orientation should be quite evident to him, the result of natural convictions, prior observations and experiences in life. The basic foundations of this method constitute for our troupe this point of orientation. Our institute is geared to examining the consequences of this point of orientation. Therefore nobody who comes and stays here can claim a lack of knowledge of the troupe's methodical programme. Anyone who comes and works here and then wants to keep his distance (as regards creative consciousness) shows the wrong kind of care for his own individuality. The etymological meaning of "individuality" is "indivisibility" which means complete existence in something: individuality is the very opposite of half-heartedness. We maintain, therefore, that those who come and stay here discover in our method something deeply related to them, prepared by their lives and experiences. Since they accept this consciously, we presume that each of the participants feels obliged to train creatively and try to form his own variation inseparable from him-

self, his own reorientation open to risks and search. For what we here call "the method" is the very opposite of any sort of prescription.

IX

The main point then is that an actor should not try to acquire any kind of recipe or build up a "box of tricks". This is no place for collecting all sorts of means of expression. The force of gravity in our work pushes the actor towards an interior ripening which expresses itself through a willingness to break through barriers, to search for a "summit", for totality.

The actor's first duty is to grasp the fact that nobody here wants to give him anything; instead they plan to take a lot from him, to take away that to which he is usually very attached: his resistance, reticence, his inclination to hide behind masks, his half-heartedness, the obstacles his body places in the way of his creative act, his habits and even his usual "good manners".

X

Before an actor is able to achieve a total act he has to fulfil a number of requirements, some of which are so subtle, so intangible, as to be practically undefinable through words. They only become plain through practical application. It is easier, however, to define conditions under which a total act cannot be achieved and which of the actor's actions make it impossible.

This act cannot exist if the actor is more concerned with charm, personal success, applause and salary than with creation as understood in its highest form. It cannot exist if the actor conditions it according to the size of his part, his place in the performance, the day or kind of audience. There can be no total act if the actor, even away from the theatre, dissipates his creative impulse and, as we said before, sullies it, blocks it, particularly through incidental engagements of a doubtful nature or by the premeditated use of the creative act as a means to further his own career.