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Subject: Theatre

Level: Standard

Candidate name: .....

Candidate session number:

**Instructions to candidates**

Check that your candidate session number is on each sheet of paper used in your independent project portfolio and attach this cover sheet to the front of your work.

What was your independent project? DIRECTING AND DEVICING A PIECE OF THEATRE

Approximate number of words: 1991

**For completion by the candidate**

**Candidate declaration:** I confirm that this work is my own work and is the final version. I have acknowledged each use of the words or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

Candidate's name: .....

Candidate's signature: .....

.....

Date: . . .

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**For completion by the teacher**

Please put your mark and a brief comment to support each specific criterion

A (0-10)	9	Comment: There is consistent evidence of initiative and perseverance. Material produced evidences planning and commitment as well as discovery. There is also an interesting range of ideas.
B (0-10)	8	Comment: The level of skill shown is considerable though somewhat on paper and covering a broad aspect. Clear understanding of demands.
C (0-10)	9	Comment: There is good evidence of learning and development with high-quality reflections and connections to the course.
D (0-10)	9	Comment: Although register is fully appropriate, work has been done relatively well and might be slightly obvious.
Total SL (0-40)	35	Comment:

Teacher's name: ...

Teacher's signature:

Date: .

**For completion by the examiner**

A (0-10)	B (0-10)	C (0-10)	D (0-10)	Total SL (0-40)
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

**For completion by the senior examiner**

A (0-10)	B (0-10)	C (0-10)	D (0-10)	Total SL (0-40)
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Theatre Arts

IPP Assignment

**Workshop and performance based  
on Jerzy Grotowski's 'Theatre  
Laboratory' and 'Poor Theatre'**

Student Name:

Candidate Number:

May 2012

Word Count: 1991 words.

# Theatre Arts - IPP Assignment

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## Introduction

Jerzy Grotowski was a Polish theatre director and innovator. His two most known concepts of experimental theatre were the 'Poor Theatre' and the 'Theatre Laboratory'. For my IP, I'm going to focus on both concepts to produce a performance to give tribute to this amazing trendsetter.

The quote that inspired this idea was "we are trying to avoid eclecticism, trying to resist thinking of theatre as a composite of disciplines."<sup>1</sup> Before researching about Grotowski, the only notion we had of Theatre was of a combination of disciplines, such as the mask, physicality, chorus, and voice projection in Greek Theatre. Grotowski's contrasting way of Theatre was very intriguing, and experimenting with different ways of thinking is always very exciting.

We chose to generate a workshop based on Grotowski's 'Theatre Laboratory'. We would teach his exercises to the class and, from our own experience and research, correct each person and observe the effects of these exercises in the different classmates. As Grotowski, who based his concept of 'Poor Theatre', a practice by which he "eliminated whatever proved superfluous"<sup>2</sup>, on his work in the 'Theatre Laboratory', we chose to use our work with his 'Theatre Laboratory' to device a production based on 'Poor Theatre'.

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<sup>1</sup> Jerzy Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre (Whitstable: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1978) 15.

<sup>2</sup> Grotowski 19.

## My role in our IP

My role was to device the performance which would be based on 'Poor Theatre', and to do so I would have to make decisions concerning from lights to actors to which specific play or scene we would present. I chose this role because it was something new to me, as I had never been 'behind' any performance. I've always thought the process of production of a play to be fascinating, and I had never had such a great responsibility, as I felt most of our performance was on my hands.

### Sources

To fulfill my role I used secondary sources, including research about Grotowski's material from the books Towards a Poor Theatre and The Grotowski Sourcebook and videos that showed Grotowski's 'Theatre Laboratory' and 'Poor Theatre' in action. I also performed his exercises myself to understand his theory and get inspired. These exercises helped me device the play because I was able to feel a sense of release that gave me confidence to follow my impulses when making important decisions.

### Stimulus

I couldn't help but remembering a particular play called "Lazarillo de Tormes".<sup>3</sup> It caused a great impact on me; I had never seen a play that consisted on one barely dressed man and a stationary light. Hector Guido, renowned actor and current director of culture of Montevideo, presented it this way; playing several characters that differentiated clearly from each other by the actor's change in his voice and physicality. With these vivid memories and Grotowski's conceptions, I started imagining my own vision for our performance.

### Choosing the play

Grotowski adapted already existent and performed plays to his ideas rather than creating plays of his own. Examples of his most famous productions are "Orpheus" by Jean Cocteau<sup>4</sup> and "Akropolis" by Stanisław Wyspiański<sup>5</sup>. To follow his tracks I decided to adapt an existent play to 'Poor Theatre'.

During our Theatre course, our class performed 'Trojan Women' using Ancient Greek Tragedy practice. We really enjoyed it and it was a remarkable experience to all of us. Because of this, I had the idea of adapting the same play to Grotowski's 'Poor Theatre', thus showing the class a very contrasting version of it. My group members agreed so I selected a very emotional fragment of it, where Hecuba defends herself from the accusations of Helen.

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<sup>3</sup> Directed and performed by Hector Guido, Teatro El Galpón, Montevideo.

<sup>4</sup> Written in 1925 by Jean Cocteau who also directed its film in 1950.

<sup>5</sup> Written in 1904 by Stanislaw Wyspiański

The play chosen was a success, not only because through it we could contrast different ways of Theatre, but also because the audience remembered the plot and characters very well so they were not distracted in trying to understand but were focused on the actions and dialogues, which intensified the dramatic mood of the scene.

### Actor-audience relationship

The element of Grotowski's work which I found most important was his conception of the interactions between actors and audience. He stated it should be a "relationship of perceptual, direct, live communion"<sup>6</sup> as this experience is the only thing that can compete successfully with the rising technologies and effects in movies. Grotowski indicates several ways of designing spaces for the actors and spectators. He writes, "The essential concern is finding the proper spectator-actor relationship for each type of performance."<sup>7</sup> I decided to make the actors "play among the spectators, directly contacting the audience and giving it a passive role in the drama".<sup>8</sup> This affects directly my decisions of actors, staging, lights, script and directions.

### Choosing the actors

At first I thought of having a monologue from Hecuba, which my group member was going to perform, but then I decided to add a few small roles, Helen and a chorus, to show different ways on which Grotowski's exercises could affect different actors. I also made this decision to emphasize the actor-audience relationship I was trying to create; I thought it would be a good idea to surprise the audience by keeping secret the existence of other actors, so that the day of the performance they would start acting and shock the audience. This shocking effect would emphasize the atmosphere of tension I intended to create.

The use of secondary characters, although short, was vital to state the mood of the scene and served as an introduction for Hecuba's performance.

### Editing the script

After having a main idea of how the scene would be portrayed, I edited the script together with my group members. The scene needed to be short but powerful, so we shortened Hecuba's monologue to twenty strong, emotional lines which we thought were the heart of that scene. I also eliminated other characters except for Helen and the chorus, which were given nine and four lines respectively. This distribution demonstrated the effect of the 'Theatre Laboratory' in different actors without resting importance of the main character.

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<sup>6</sup> Grotowski 19.

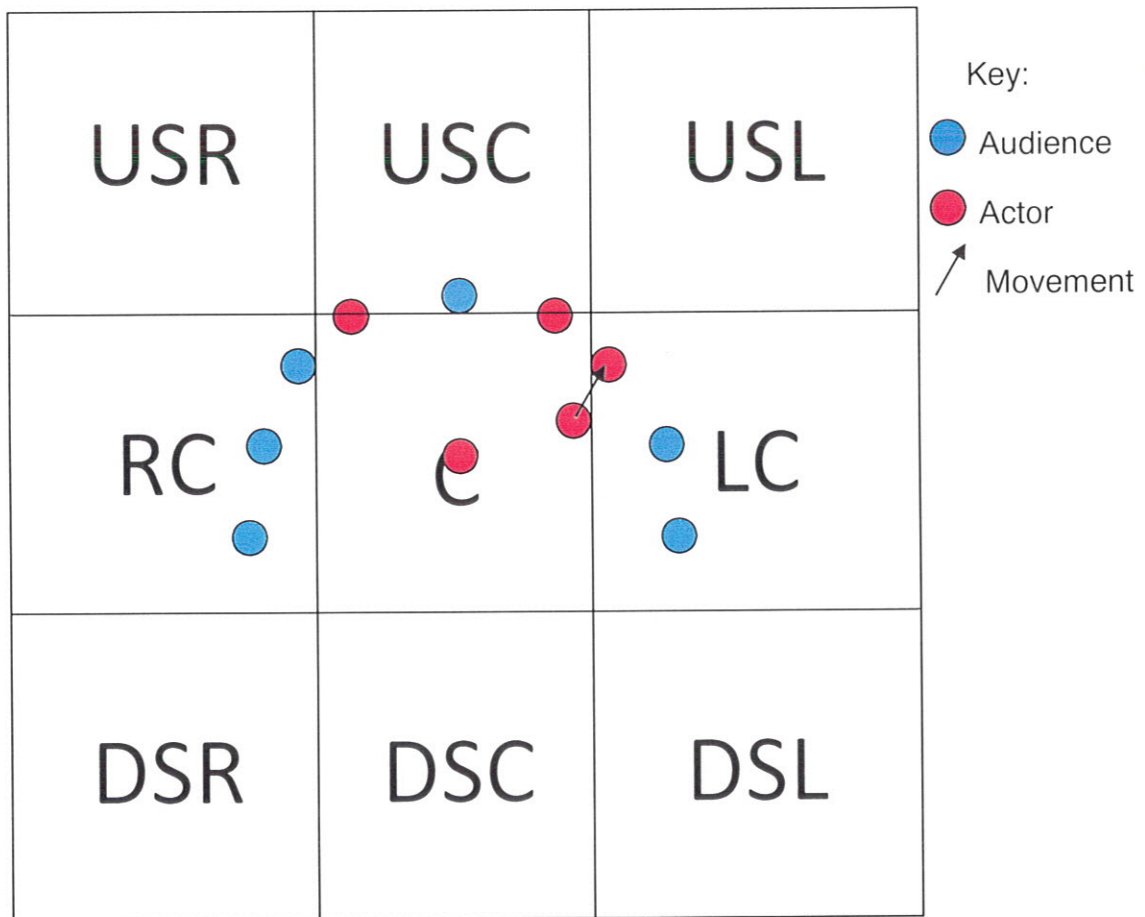
<sup>7</sup> Grotowski 20.

<sup>8</sup> Grotowski 20.

Shortening the dialogues was a great decision because as time passed I realized the actors struggled learning the lines. I'm sure that if the dialogues were longer the scene wouldn't have had the same power and the actors would have been more uncomfortable on stage.

### Stage

I based my decision on staging in the actor-audience relationship and the atmosphere of tension and emotion this scene required. I came up with different sketches for the stage and decided which we should use with the help of my group members.



Final sketch for the stage drawn by myself based on classroom notes.

In order to achieve my conception of the actor-audience relationship, I staged the audience as well as the actors. As this is a powerful scene on which Hecuba shows a lot of strong emotions trying to defend herself and her son, I pictured she should act in the center of the stage and the audience should surround her, in order for her to move among them and interact with them. This surrounding also gives the idea that she can't escape, which symbolizes how she is a captive of the Greeks. Helen is going to start the scene, kneeled on the ground, and after she's finished she is going to sit with the audience, get out of her character and transform into audience. The chorus is going to sit among the



audience, so the shock will be greater. Those actors are going to become audience too when they finish, so that everyone can appreciate Hecuba's monologue. Like Grotowski, I expect the audience to feel more profound sensations than they would feel in other plays, arisen from the close interactions with the actors.

I hadn't imagined the incredible potential the actor-audience relationship and the staging had until we performed our scene. All the work our actors went through was amplified as the audience was so near they experienced the feeling of being part of the scene. This provoked intense reactions; all of them were shocked and some of them even cried from the tension and drama.

### Lights

Grotowski stripped out all of what he thought superfluous of theatre so that only the essence of the actor would remain. To do this, he "forsook lightning effects, and this revealed a wide range of possibilities for the actor's use of stationary light sources by deliberate work with shadows, bright spots, etc."<sup>9</sup> "It is particularly significant that once a spectator is placed in an illuminated zone, he too begins to play a part in the performance."<sup>10</sup> Following these guidelines, I decided to light a low, neutral stationary light when Helen starts her line, illuminating all of the audience as they will all start playing passive roles as soldiers and captives. When Hecuba starts speaking, as she is the most important character, I will light another called zenith, also neutral and stationary but more intense, that will illuminate her and create shadows as she changes her physicality and moves.

Unfortunately, the zenith light wasn't installed the day of the performance, so we couldn't create shadow effects as I had planned. Even though this was a weakness, I think the other elements of our performance were so strong the missing light didn't affect the mood I intended to create.

### Sound

Grotowski also eliminated music not produced by the actor, thus creating more emphasis in the actor's voice and sounds that could originate from the clashing of objects. Because of this I didn't add any music to emphasize the characters' changing voices.

The lack of all technical elements and the voices alone, almost screaming, gave the idea of being lost in the middle of nowhere. We all felt very strong emotions like angst and sorrow principally from the main character, which I attribute to the actor and the whole production of the scene.

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<sup>9</sup> Grotowski 20.

<sup>10</sup> Grotowski 20.

### **Makeup and costumes**

Grotowski only approved costumes that had “no autonomous value, existing only in connection with a particular character and his activities”.<sup>11</sup> I pictured Hecuba’s costume to be a simple, white cotton dress that would only serve to cover her body and reflect her poverty. The other characters will not have costumes so that the audience will not guess they are characters. This also helps emphasizing the importance of Hecuba over the other characters.

Grotowski stated, “The composition of a fixed facial expression by using the actor’s own muscles and inner impulses achieves the effect of a strikingly theatrical transubstantiation, while the mask prepared by a make-up artist is only a trick”.<sup>12</sup> Hence, there will be no makeup in our performance, but we will focus on training the actors into reflecting their inner impulses through their physicality and face specially.

### **Actors’ training**

My group member in charge of the ‘Theatre Laboratory’ workshop will focus on training the actors with Grotowski’s exercises, in order to help them break their barriers and express their inner impulses without using critical thinking. Our group member playing Hecuba would receive more training as we should show the difference between more trained actors and not so trained actors, to make our classmates realize the transformations an actor experiences with the ‘Theatre Laboratory’. I will focus on guiding them in rehearsals and instruct them on what reflects Grotowski’s philosophy the most. Through our rehearsals I experimented with different stage directions so to come up with the final ones:

### **Hecuba**

I shouldn’t give many stage directions to her to let her act through her inner impulses. The more stage directions I give her the more barriers I would be putting her, which interferes with what we are trying to create. I watched her performance several times and indicated whether she needed to show more through her physicality and voice, or interact more with the audience.

### **Helen**

As in Helen’s script she is defending herself in front of Menelaus and blaming Hecuba and Paris for her leaving, she needs to direct her speech to someone in the audience that would play Menelaus in a passive way. I indicated that the person in the middle of the semi circle should be a man and Helen should direct him mostly as if he were Menelaus. I also watched her during rehearsals and directed her on whether she should reflect more in her physicality or voice.

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<sup>11</sup> Grotowski 21.

<sup>12</sup> Grotowski 21.

### **Chorus**

The main worry for the chorus was that they would synchronize their voices and physicality as well as reflecting their impulses through them. As they will generate surprise in the audience, they will need to do this in a powerful way.

### **Conclusion**

This process was an intricate but enthralling experience on which I learned a lot. Being in charge of so many things at one time made me understand the importance of planning and being organized, as without these everything can become a mess. The support of the actors and my group gave me confidence and boost my creativity. Having researched about Grotowski and doing the exercises of the 'Theatre Laboratory' myself was key to understanding the process the actors had to go through.

Word Count: 1991 (without quotes)

## **Bibliography**

Grotowski, Jerzy, "*Towards a Poor Theatre, Preface by Peter Brook*", Whitstable Litho Ltd, Whitstable, Kent; Great Britain, 1976.