

*“Every Moment We Are In
Has the Transparent Seed of Grace”*

**Ștefana Pop-Curșeu in dialogue
with Thomas Richards**



Ștefana Pop-Curșeu: *For me, it's the first time I see the performances of the Workcenter and I'm impressed. I think it would require quite a long conversation.*

Thomas Richards: Yes!

Ș. P.-C.: *I want to ask you mainly about the part you give to the voice because I believe this is one of the main directions of your work. I wondered also how you work with your actors.*

T. R.: The voice is a potential instrument of revelation, but the key for that is somehow we don't work the voice. It's basically through action that the voices are mysteriously finding some kind of a living opening. The work on voices is very much related to contact, it's related to the partner, related to

association and to memory, in the way the most specific memories can somehow have a way of resonating inside the person. So, strangely, a lot of the work on voice is very stanislavskian, in our own particular way. What you can see is that there are certain songs that have a specific quality, they are almost like sonic waterfalls. They have a way of entering the person. Do they enter just the body? No, not just the body, but they enter. So somehow the voyage of the sound inside the person, meaning the air, the way the body resonates, becomes fundamental in terms of what somebody can discover. And one can discover that hidden in each of us they are places, sort of coagulated places of enormously strong and subtle energy, that are made of reactions we don't live in life. When you pass your day, how many times do you not say what you are thinking, do you not express what is really inside you? Every time that it happens to us in our own life, something inside us contracts and these contractions makeup our being, physical but not just physical. So what happens is that gradually, as we become older, we shut down. Often, there is even a war between our inner core and what is outside. However, the voice and the work on the body, the work on action can be a way that the sounds and songs start to touch these places. It's like you would discover a hidden volcano inside, and this material of your life goes with the song and with the voice, and this is the way the song starts to awake your core. Then the work becomes very interesting, because it's about how we hide every day from this core and how we cannot hide from it again and again. So the performance becomes some kind of a battlefield. It's not just something for the public, the public can witness this battle, but what's happening on this battlefield which takes place inside the person between one layer of oneself and another layer of oneself is looking to some sort of be-born into action. And it's this whole complicated process that makes: what is that voice? what is that sound? what's a personal experience?

Ş. P.-C.: It's because the voice and the energy delivered by it is much more important than what is said, than the content of the words.

T. R.: Yes, but it depends on the dramatic structure. Did you see de piece of *Sophie*?

Ş. P.-C.: Yes, a very difficult work.

T. R.: Very difficult indeed. Well, that's a performance...

Ş. P.-C.: And the text is absolutely beautiful. She put the different parts together in a wonderful poetic puzzle.

T. R.: We've been creating this through a long period of time. Of course, she, as an actress, needed to find the forms that were closed to her and to speak about different aspects of a woman's need, like the hidden things a woman wishes to experience, faced to someone or almost alone. So first she found this text and then proposed the initial structure and then gradually we wrote together the dramaturgic ark of the event. But you see, in this performance, the word and the dramaturgy, like in theatre, have a sense which is directed to the public. I mean, you can understand something about a woman's solitude, about the story of Mélusine which is a French story about a woman who has moon as a lover. In *The Living Room*, there's a different thing. This is more like an allegorical structure, almost dream-like structure, where what you can see is the odyssey of a man who doesn't leave his house. But this happens inside of a dream, so like in a dream there are jumps from one event to another. So it's a different type of structure and also the structure is made from song to song, in order to create, like in a ritual, an energetic ladder, an energetic *parcours* for the doing persons.

Ş. P.-C.: *Yes, the effect is strong for the spectator who gets into this ritual, accepts this fear of action. And people discuss a lot these days about Grotowski saying that theatre must have an effect upon reality. How do you see this? Upon the reality of the actors or upon the reality of the world, of people who are not inside your work?*

T. R.: I believe there are different levels on which we can change things in life. One level relates to a kind of reality that exists between human beings, which is a kind of negotiation. It's a kind of material negotiation. Between people, there are power structures that exists, class structures that exists and if we are honest with ourselves, we recognize we are all the time caught up in a kind of game, of competition and domination of each other. How many times you go, for example, you go with a girlfriend, a best friend, and she says to you about her new boyfriend: "How great it was, how wonderful it was!" And after she says four or five positive things, you start to feel weak or you start to feel a little bad. This is part of a negotiation, even if the person is doing it unconsciously: she keeps going. These things happen all the time and they articulate the society. Finally, some people hold all the wealth and other people get very poor, some people have all the power and other people have no saying in anything and live on the streets. Then things get to a point where it's out of balance and they change: someone makes a revolution. But what has really changed is the material wealth, the distribution of things,

which may be important in some moments in order to change the way things are on that level. There is another level, where a completely different revolution is needed, another kind of work, independent for one's fate. My fate made me be born in New York city in 1962, with my intelligence, my stupidities, my mechanisms, whatever. It's almost like a broken record somehow, my life. So there's a way to change those things, which is not only to change one's fate, but to turn one's fate into destiny. Destiny is somehow related to the way in which the quality in each one deals with this fate. When we fight back, how do we try to back up? Just not necessarily to change the material aspect, but to change our relationship to the moment, to what I'm living now. Because I can live now, I can want things to change: I want to be rich, to be more powerful, and maybe I need to be this way, but I can be so obsessed with those things that I would close my mind to anything else. So, I'm identified with my fate, I want to change it, to make something different. But if we untie identification, we can see that every moment we are in has the transparent seed of grace. It has the seed of some incredible taste of life; we can really live and breathe and life can pass through us in another way.

§. P.-C.: *It is what I call happiness.*

T. R.: Yes, an extreme happiness, a kind of opening happens. So what your question is about is a very important change: in what way theatre, a performance can change the reality. Let's say that our tendency in the Workcenter is more this second way, meaning there's a kind of sense, at least that I have personally. The real transformatory change happens in that second way, when one becomes more and more independent from these things we can become attached to, and then wins capacities of affecting, of making changes on another level.

§. P.-C.: *Do people in the Workcenter come in touch with this new reality?*

T. R.: Yes, and this is important for you as a public, because the worst thing would be that I come to you and tell you: "we have something special to give you". We should do our work, we should have an artistic quality, we should be excellent artistically, but inside there should be this other transforming reality. And then, like you said very well, as a public you should let yourself go on a journey. And somehow for me that's very healthy.

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Ș. P.-C.: *And is there some others links with Grotowski's vision in what you are doing, except this change of reality? From the point of view of the form, what you are doing seems to me very different.*

T. R.: Yes and no. He worked with me, I was his apprentice, he worked with Mario as well. I was in his team for the last thirteen years of his life. Everything I was talking about was born in these thirteen years working with him very closely. So both on the level of very deep inner content and on the level of craft we are developing and changing what's been given to us by him.

Ș. P.-C.: *Thank you very much! I'm very glad I can be here. I hope you might come to Cluj someday.*

T. R.: Wonderful! When will you invite us?

Transcribed by Ioan Pop-Curșeu

A DIALOGUE WITH THOMAS RICHARDS



Thomas Richards talking to the spectators before the performance
Chez Eve, at the Workcenter, Vallicelle, 13.12.2014.