

*“The Artist’s Work is Related to Creating
a More Human Place for us Here”*

**Ștefana Pop-Curșeu in dialogue
with Lloyd Bricken¹**

Ștefana Pop-Curșeu: I see for the first time the work of the Workcenter groups... and everything is wonderful, very special. And I believe you are the only American native speaker in Mario’s group.

Lloyd Bricken: When we started it was a little bit different, but now... yes. There were two other Americans, and a Canadian in the beginning.

Ș. P.-C.: When was this beginning?

L. B.: The beginning of our group, the selections of the *Open Program* was in 2007, starting in the spring of 2007. It’s been a while...

Ș. P.-C.: And so you’re the only one who started then, or do you have some more colleagues here who came then with you?

L. B.: Alejandro Roriguez, from Argentina, Agnieszka Kazimierska from Poland, Felicita Marcelli from Rome and of course Mario. So, we’re the veterans.

Ș. P.-C.: And when did you start to work for these performances? These multiple performances? Because Mario told us a little bit about the way they are staged, about the fact that you have a material and that it changes its form.

L. B.: Yes. What started to happen was that in 2008 Mario started giving us poems, we didn’t even know who the poet was, and you know, he was suggesting me, for example, like: “Lloyd, this is a poem. Why don’t you make a song?” and I was like: “Ok...” And people started to create different

¹ Lloyd Bricken is one of the first generation actors in the *Open Program*, part of Mario Biagini’s group at the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards.

things and it just exploded. Like in the sense that we started creating lots of songs, actions, all those different things because we were working in another line of research with these old songs from the deep south in the United States.

Ş. P.-C.: *So was it a separate, a different thing?*

L. B.: In the beginning they were distinct. But we were also working in the traditional African songs that the Workcenter has worked on for many years. I don't know if you've seen performances by Thomas Richards.

Ş. P.-C.: *Unfortunately not yet.*

L. B.: Ok. So they were like three, let's say they we're distinct lines of research and then things started to...



Sequence of the performance *The Hidden Sayings*, with Felicita Marcelli and Lloyd Bricken, Open Program directed by Mario Biagini, Teatro Era di Pontedera, 14.12.2014 (photo Ştefana Pop-Curşeu)

§. P.-C.: *Merge.*

L. B.: Yes, and in about 8 or 9 months we created a huge amount of material. I mean, at one point Mario was like: "Ok, let's see everything" and it took us three days, eight hours a day just to do everything. And he was really in a crisis, he was like: "Wow! Stop making things!"

§. P.-C.: *It must have been hard to choose.*

L. B.: Yes, and he was like: "I don't know what to do because it's so good, all of this, I don't wanna throw anything away, but how are we gonna turn this into a performance? What are we gonna do?" So what started to happen is that we started to perform, to make "parties". Have people invite us and make a party. And then, for each party we would choose different materials and create a list of things that could happen spontaneously at the party. Something like stops, you know, we'd go back to talking with people and things got happening again...

§. P.-C.: *A kind of "happenings"?*

L. B.: Yes, kind of like this. But it was very structured. And so we started to explore in this way, and we started doing things in bars also, in cafe's... And then, with a long night of material, we're calling it an "electric party", where we could even go on for twelve hours. And just go on all night long with a big party.

§. P.-C.: *Is this why it's called this way? Because I've wondered why you called your first performance we've seen here in Pontedera Electric Party Songs?*

L. B.: Yes, because this was the original work aesthetics, it's called "electric party". It comes actually from a quote from Walt Whitman, the american poet who has this famous lyric: "I sing the body electric". But we didn't wanna say "electric body party" because it's just becoming too much of this, particularly in America, this kind of a fetishization around body work, we wanted to let that go, so we called it the "electric party". And then eventually the longer work of 12 hours, we called it "the *veillée*", the "watchnight". And then the things started convincing in another way around the poem *America* by Ginsberg... and this gave shape to *I am America*, which became a song performance. And then, in this last period, in the last years we've been creating this new work, I don't know if you'll be here on Sunday to see *Les parole nascoste*.

§. P.-C.: *Yes, I will. Because I'm leaving on Sunday evening. So I'm going to see it.*

L. B.: *Ok. So this one is about a year old.*

§. P.-C.: *So it has nothing to do anymore with what you've done before?*

L. B.: *It has nothing to do with the Ginsberg materials, but it is still working with these traditional and older songs from the deep south of the States.*

§. P.-C.: *And how did you come across these songs?*

L. B.: *It kind of started with me. Because, since before I came to the Workcenter, I was researching old music. And I'm from Alabama, down in the deep south, and I was researching old music and also meeting with churches and groups of people that we're still singing some of these things and started to see some unusual things, and learning some stuff. But I really wanted to work in a deep way with these materials and really know how their craft could work. This is what we started to do.*

§. P.-C.: *So you are a musician by formation?*

L. B.: *A musician also. I'm an actor.*

§. P.-C.: *So you have big parts to play in these performances. I was wondering how you worked because the songs are very beautifully put together.*

L. B.: *Mario has an amazing ear for helping us, to help the song to arrive. So many of the songs, the Ginsberg songs, we've worked on now for a long time, but yes, we still keep changing them, like: "oh, let's do this different harmonic development", so they keep growing.*

§. P.-C.: *And do you in all this work, do you still have some connections to Grotowski's way of seeing the actor or not? I was wondering.*

L. B.: *It's an interesting question, because I never met Grotowski, you know, I never met him. Mario and Thomas of course have worked with him for a very long time but you see, there was and there is no Grotowski method. Grotowski was looking to and working in a very special way to help, to give good conditions for something very alive to happen with different people that he was working with. And I feel that this lives on in the work.*

But the work is alive because of both the sincerity that we bring and of the way of penetrating into what you work on. So that the research is something that stays alive, and this, to me, is something, let’s say, very “grotowskian”.

§. P.-C.: And the presence, the fact that you’re really present in what you’re doing. And this is for the spectator extremely important, to feel that you’re so alive there, at that precise moment.

L. B.: Absolutely, and the moment is always changing, things are always in change, every night is different, not just because you change materials but every night is gonna be a little different, always. But a great musician or a great painter also it’s in the little details. You walk up close to the Van Gogh, you see immediately a scene with some incredible image, but then you walk up closer and see all the little brush strokes, all the little details that make it up. So this is something, that work is making something finer and finer. Here and with this group it never stops.

§. P.-C.: I think that your voyages, your trips to other countries help this growing of the work.

L. B.: Sure, everytime I’m going to other countries I’m always shocked by different ways of being, different ways of doing. When we went to Romania, for example, it was excellent. But I still really want to get out into the country very much. Because in the big cities it is more difficult to see the life of the people in several ways. That’s true anywhere. But the interactions when we were travelling are incredibly enriching for our work. Every new place we go to I pick up new details that end up going into *I am America* or any of these different things. It may not be so obvious, you know, to the untrained eye but I’m absorbing.

§. P.-C.: I saw that in I am America for example, you talk and Ginsberg talks about real problems, some things that are really problematic nowadays too. Especially the final statement “we do care”. What is the effect you’d like these performance to have?

L. B.: That’s an interesting question also because I don’t think that’s a simple answer in the sense that I know that for me and I would think also Mario as well it’s not that we tried to have a message. In the sense that the impact of the work, I would hope, can create a kind of induction, let’s say maybe, of this type of caring or this type of longing for another type of condition. Personally I believe that the artist’s work is related to creating a

more human place for us here, in life, to me this is obvious. This is part of the work that is possible for the artist. And the artist has a chance to make an impact. When I look around in the public and I see people's eyes and faces lighting up, and something very young starting to appear in this context, starting to really happen, and sensations starting to return to everyone in the room... I don't know how to describe this, but the affect is something very inexplicable. You can feel it...

Ş. P.-C.: The real answer is thus given by the public. Grotowski says that actually art, theatre has to transform reality, to have an impact on reality. Otherwise it's useless.

L. B.: Yes, it's right.

Ş. P.-C.: In conclusion , could you give me a word to describe your life at the work center? Something that characterises in a few words. How is it?

L. B.: For me it's interesting, because it has been years of being able to transform inside into something more subtle... It's related also to growing up, to becoming more responsible for other people. The work is about craftsmanship, in the sense of doing something with great quality. Finding great quality in our life and the details of our life as well as in the details of our art. Both of these things can hopefully mash in some way. I mean, for me, this is the goal. And obviously this is something that isn't, it's not something you ever achieve. You're always moving towards it. Like a ship that uses the star to guide its journey. I think our work is about that kind of contact, and as long as that kind of contact is renewed, things keep happening and are very interesting. So I think this is a gift of Grotowski, I think this is something that he brought very strong, so it does live, and lives.

Ş. P.-C.: Thank you, thank you very much.

L. B.: You're welcome.

Interview transcribed by Flavia Coroian