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Grzegorz Bral, 'Song of the Goat Theatre: Finding Flow and  
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# Anna Zubrzycki and Grzegorz Bral

*in conversation with Maria Shevtsova*

## Song of the Goat Theatre: Finding Flow and Connection

Anna Zubrzycki and Grzegorz Bral worked for a number of years with Gardzienice before founding Teatr Pieśń Kozła – Song of the Goat Theatre – in Wrocław in 1996. The conversation that follows took place on 22 June 2009, during Song of the Goat's run of *Macbeth*, their most recent production. Created in tandem with the Year of Grotowski theatre festival, the 'World as a Place of Truth' held in Wrocław on 13–30 June 2009, it was one of a series of meetings, presentations, and performances organized by Joanna Klass of Arden 2 for the US Artists Initiative, a project established in partnership with the Grotowski Institute and the Center for International Theatre Development. *Macbeth* will be performed at the Barbican Centre in London as part of Song of the Goat's two-month-long British tour of this production in October and November 2010, accompanied by workshops and demonstrations. Its itinerary is Eastleigh (4–9 October), Birmingham (11–15 October), Cambridge (18–23 October), Manchester Metropolitan University (25–30 October), London (3–20 November), and Brighton (21–26 November). This conversation about some of the principles of the company's work was led by Maria Shevtsova, Professor of Drama and Theatre Arts at Goldsmiths, University of London, and co-editor of *New Theatre Quarterly*.

**Maria Shevtsova** *Thank you, everyone, for coming. It's a great privilege to be invited into the performance space of Song of the Goat to speak with Anna Zubrzycki and Grzegorz Bral, who founded Song of the Goat in 1996. I also want to introduce to you two of the actors of the company: Anu Salonen, who is from Finland, and Ewan Downie, who is from Scotland. The other actors have other obligations, so they were not able to come to this meeting.*

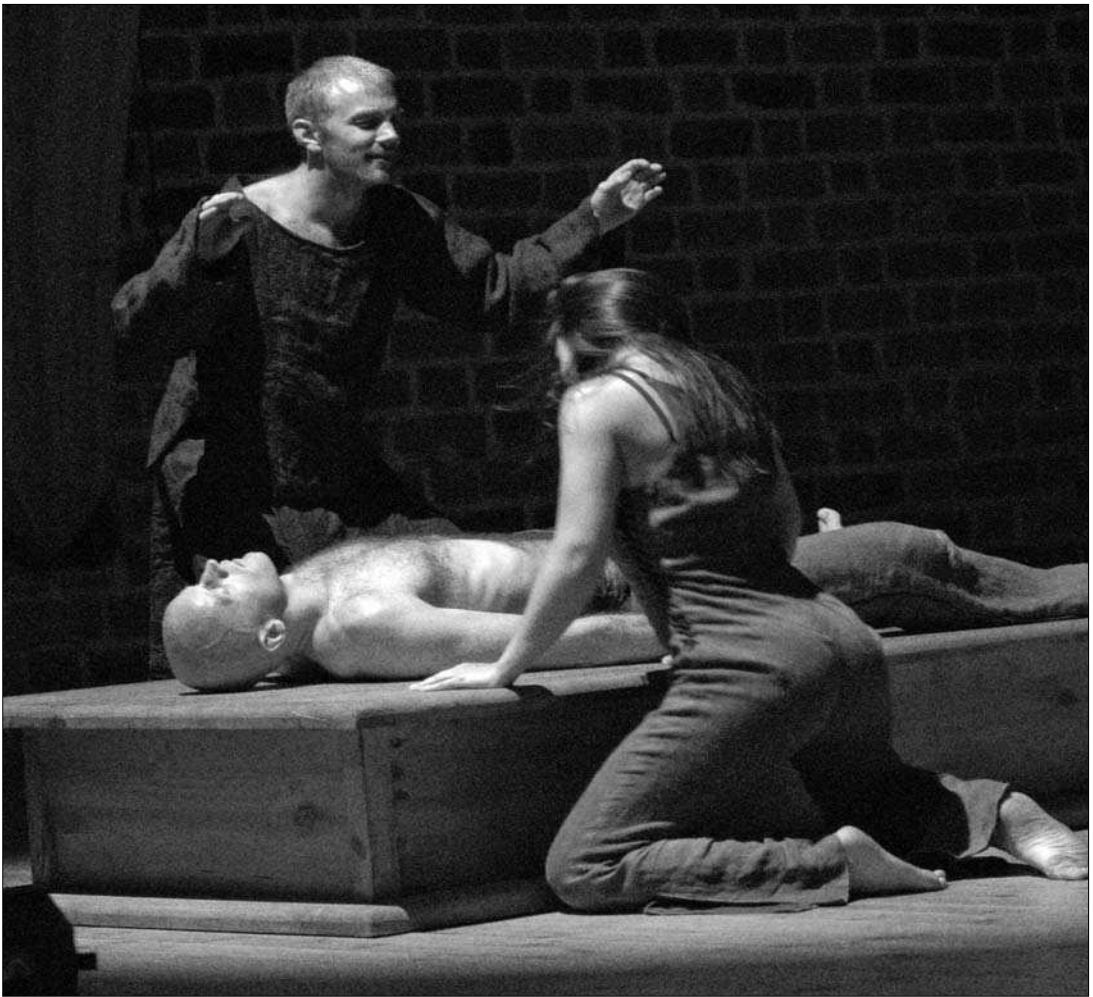
*Anna Zubrzycki and Grzegorz Bral's first work, in 1997, was Song of the Goat, from which the company takes its name. The next big piece was Chronicles – A Lamentation in 2001, which won many prizes, including the main Fringe First Prize at the Edinburgh Festival in 2004. Lacrimosa followed in 2005, and Macbeth was premiered in 2008. So, as you can see, these are works that take many years of gestation before they are actually premiered, and then they keep on growing during their time in repertory. Will you perform those two earlier productions again?*

**Grzegorz Bral** Probably next year. We were asked to premiere work in Wrocław next year

and they requested as many performances as we could do. I have already spoken to former company members, and they said we need to perform *Lamentation* again. We are performing *Lacrimosa* in the Brave Festival in July 2009.

*We will come back to the Brave Festival. What I thought we would do, with your permission, is structure this with fifteen to twenty minutes of me asking some questions, and then we will open it out to the floor. There is, of course, a great deal to ask, and the first question is always so important. Since I have spoken about the slow process of gestation of the work, it might be appropriate to ask you both to tell us about the process – how you go about preparing your work. It might be worth saying quickly that Song of the Goat goes on expeditions: I know you went on many to Greece. How does this also affect the development of the work?*

**Anna Zubrzycki** The process is different for each performance. We don't have set formulas that we try to reproduce every time



Christopher Sivertsen, Marcin Rudy, and Anna Krotoska in *Chronicles – A Lamentation*. Photo: Arek Chruściel.

we do a performance. A particular text has its own needs, and we try to delve into, and research, the environment of the performance that will be created. I know that sounds a bit abstract at the moment, so I'll take our first major performance, *Chronicles – A Lamentation*. That, I think, is a very good example of a process that we tend to feel close to. We were looking at *Gilgamesh* – its roots – to begin with. We had the idea that, since it was a Sumerian myth, we should, perhaps, look at Iran or Iraq and look at that kind of music, which would give us, as performers, a way into the myth. But it didn't work. We tried it, and it wasn't right for us. So we found we had to go closer and closer and closer to home. We had to look in Europe.

We started practising and singing Albanian polyphonic songs. And the polyphony of these Albanian songs created not only the whole background and the whole structure of the performance, but it also created the links and the interdependent actions between the actors. It was the impetus to text, and it also suddenly became the main motif, the main theme, of *Gilgamesh*. We started looking at the whole of the *Gilgamesh* legend and suddenly found ourselves working around just one episode, which was the death of Enkidu; and the whole performance then slowly started to become a lamentation. That is why it is *Chronicles – A Lamentation*. This also coincided with many personal things happening in our lives, which are also

integral parts of the performance. Grzegorz's father passed away that year. . . . Grzegorz, you just interrupt when you feel that you've got something to say.

*I would keep the word while you've got it, so keep going.*

**Anna** So that was the musical approach, the approach into the text and the myth. We were also working, at the same time, on the physicality of the performance. I hesitate to use the word 'training'. We have a training programme, we have an MA programme [in conjunction with Manchester Metropolitan University], we do training with actors, but, when we approach the performance, we try to find the physicality of it, we search for the physicality of it in our own selves. That's why each performance has a different physical approach. Yet, because we are one company that has been working for many years, you can always see the hallmark of the Song of the Goat in our performances.

Many things are very similar: the way we layer each moment of each performance so that there are different things happening simultaneously; their polyphonic structure; their huge emphasis on musicality in the broadest sense of the word. It is always fascinating for me when a member of the audience who has seen our show for the fourth, fifth, or tenth time says to me, 'When did you put that new scene in?' Of course we haven't, but it's the first time that they have noticed something – perhaps because one of the performers was particularly strong that night or because the musical emphasis was different, for example. Also, the way we move is very characteristic: we take the impulse into gesture from our feet and strongly through the legs into the torso, the voice, the text.

The main aspect of our physical work, our vocal work, our training work, is what we call 'coordination': it's the interdependency and interrelatedness of all of the tools that an actor has; also, the fact that one can express a given motif, a given theme, a given moment of a performance using a song, a voice, as well as the gestures of the body, as well as a text, as well as relationships to the space, to the partner – everything.

This kind of coordination and interrelatedness is an integral part of polyphonic singing. We found that the singing was being reflected in our physical approach to the performance of *Chronicles*. We found that the physical approach through the singing and through the connection to the theme of lamentation was dictating the spatial relations and dictating the set, dictating the costumes, dictating who we became in the performance. These things happen on many different levels.

The process took just a little longer than one year. Within it, we had an expedition, a rather crazy one, to Albania: we all got into a car and just went with a translator. Before that, we had been working on Albanian polyphonic songs. When we arrived in Albania, we had the great privilege of meeting a few very wonderful old companies who had been singing these songs, some of them for thirty or forty years. And we sang our versions, and they said, 'Mm, that's interesting. We've got this version,' and they sang theirs. And we also saw how they were singing, how they were grouping, to sing each particular song. And how they changed and shifted. This was somehow reflected in our performance later.

When we go on expeditions, I don't think we go to steal – to take images, to take songs. When we went to Albania it was a real exchange because we sang for them and they sang for us; we spent time with those old men talking, eating, singing, and they had great enjoyment from our being there, just like we did. It was an *experience* for us.

When we came back, we had another few months to set the performance up and we premiered it, but I think it was only really ready as a performance one year later. The actual performing of it is part of the process. Many of you have seen *Macbeth*, where we are not ready yet. Every performance is different, and even from month to month you can see that a lot is being added as we perform it, as it is filled out with our lives. So, in a sense, we never finish training. We never finish creating. The performance goes on and on for many years. If you saw *Chronicles* at the beginning, you would see that it was completely different when we performed it



Gawin Gabriel (blindfolded) as Macbeth, Anna Zubrzycki as Lady Macbeth, and Kacper Kuszewski as Macduff. Rehearsal photo: Krzysztof Bielinski.

in Edinburgh in 2004, and it was completely different two years ago, when we finished performing it. *Macbeth* was different at the beginning, it's different now, and I hope it will be richer in a year. Have I wobbled on enough? Was anything clear there?

*Wonderfully clear, thank you. You talked about the text having its own needs. What were the needs of Macbeth? We know that there is a problem about which version Shakespeare wrote and the question of its folio integrity, but we won't go into the academic issues. You have a text that is called Macbeth written by somebody called William Shakespeare. What were the needs of that text, from your point of view as a group, for this process that you've talked about, which is a slow process of exploration, maturation, and continuity through performance and continual performance, and continual growth – a very organic process. What were the needs of Macbeth as a text?*

**Grzegorz** First of all, you have to understand that the way we work is not the way

people would normally work with a text – not through psychological analysis, not through memory, not through an emotional analysis of the text. It's just not what we do. It's really not. I tried working on the text. I spent several months working just on the text, reducing actors to movement, singing, gestures, expressions, and other levels, and I must honestly say that working on the text and our work are just two different worlds.

We decided to take a text, first of all – a play and not a myth. We felt that the time of myths was over for us, for the moment. We wanted to touch a drama, a tragedy. The first question came: what is the sound of this Shakespeare? Not what it means, not what is said, not the story, not what the tragedy is, but how does it sound? And actually in *Macbeth* there is a huge world of sounds.

English is not my first language, so I don't have the same sense of it that most of you would have. But even the line, 'Which of you have done this?' already provokes the association with 'witch' – not with 'which', but



with 'witch'. And in Shakespeare there are thousands of these words. For instance, the very famous line of Lady Macbeth, 'What's done cannot be undone.' What you hear in this sentence is the name 'Duncan'. Okay? 'What's done cannot be undone' – the 'Duncan' is inside. You can hear it. And when she repeats it several times – 'What's done cannot be undone, what's done cannot be undone, what's done cannot be undone' – you can hear it. [To Anna.] Another example is when Macbeth is asking you, 'What is the night?'

**Anna** 'Almost at odds with morning, which is which?'

**Grzegorz** 'Almost at odds with morning, which is which?' What do you hear? 'Which is which.' And then during the banquet scene: 'Which of you have done this?' You not have only another 'witch', but you also have the whip. So you have the sound of the sword . . . 'Which of you have done this?' And so on, and so on.

So, for us, Shakespeare became an incredible well of vocal associations. Then we started looking for a sort of vocal ground. Initially, we touched the polyphony from Siberia because, in the particular music that we found near Lake Baikal, there were incredibly strong sounds between the chords. Really very powerful – like metal to metal. Very strong. It was very tempting to touch on these sounds.

We also touched on Korean shamanic music because Korean shamanic music, when it is done properly by a shaman, has a lot of incredible, ornamented sounds inside the song. You think you can repeat the song, but they don't really sing a melody. Of course, the melody is there, but they don't sing a melody. The melody is composed of hundreds of small vocal phenomena. But both kinds of music – the Siberian and the Korean – felt too much. It was as if they dominated Shakespeare's language. So, although they were very attractive and very rich, we felt it was just too much to try to work with them.

Then, we met this amazing group from Corsica called A Filetta – which means 'fern', and they say, 'If you lose your culture, you lose your fern.' That's it. In their music, we

found something like proper harmonies for the Shakespeare language to ride on – if that makes sense. We call one of the principal exercises of our work 'horse and rider'. The music is a horse, the text is a rider. The dynamic of the performance is the horse, the performer is a rider. The performers are the horse, and the spectators are the rider. This exercise is very important. Many things happen when we ride on something. The proper energy of the performance is the energy of the horse, on which the actors can ride. This is just one of the associations that are part of our method of working – the 'coordination' that Anna mentioned.

We started working on *Macbeth*, looking for the musical strength of the text. Suddenly, Rafał [Habel] came with his instrument, the *kayagum* [a Korean stringed instrument]. When Rafał came with this instrument, it became apparent that simple sounds could be woven together, like when you weave a carpet: you start by establishing the first lance for the weaver to be able to move slowly through the threads. That frame could be the instrument, and the actor's task was then to enrich the music, not the other way round. The actor's task was to use words in this way. Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't. We're still on our run-up to the proper kick-off.

Rafał created a background and on that the actors speak. They had a range between the fifteen or seventeen strings of the instrument: it's important to know that this is a pentatonic type of harp or zither. Their job was to weave between the notes, and *his* job was to talk to them. That is how it started. That was really the beginning, when we thought we could catch the musicality of the text. Shakespeare is very minimalistic. Everything in *Macbeth* is so condensed, so precise, and at the same time it is like Johann Sebastian Bach. When Bach composes, he starts with the first note that hits your emotions, and he aligns your emotions with his music. And that is what Shakespeare does, and that is exactly what I call the musicality of the text. That means that the musicality of the text itself contains the emotion. So this is what we are looking for, if this answers your question.



Scenes from Song of the Goat's *Macbeth* in rehearsal. Above: Macbeth confronts Banquo (Kacper Kuszewski).

Below: Ian Morgan, Anu Salonen, and Gawin Gabriel: the fight with the Witch/Fate. Photos: Krzysztof Bielinski.



*It does, and your Macbeth is contrapuntal for that very reason. You work on counterpoint right through your performance.*

**Anna** Yes, it is all part of the 'right' timing. And good timing is what gives a performance its magic, its drama – those moments of suspension, of crescendo, of contrapunct. It's amazing because when you perceive the performance as music, and your role as actor as a member of an orchestra – a jazz ensemble, let's say – the whole notion of timing takes on a new energy and decisiveness. When my ears are tuned in a musical way to my fellow performers – and to Rafał, of course, as our musician – rather than in a realistic, psychological fashion, then for sure my instinct is much sharper, far less literal, and ready to react immediately. I have also experienced that this sort of 'listening', this 'tuning', has made me far less self-engaged, and more open to others during performance. It liberates me to be more of a vehicle for metaphors and archetypal images because I stop analyzing and become very instinctual within the score of movement, song, and text.

*It's an extraordinarily contrapuntal piece of work. It's interesting you talked about the horse and the rider, which is a fundamental image of Siberian shamanism.*

**Grzegorz** Yes.

*Did you know it before you went there?*

**Grzegorz** Of course, of course. Also, it's a fundamental symbol of voodoo, and of all possession cults. The performer, the dance – the horse and the spirit.

*Yes. It's also a part of a process of healing. The shaman has to go through the riding to heal the community.*

**Grzegorz** Yes, that's the approach. This is why there is the horse and the rider: if you have something bigger, it is always transmitted by the right vessel.

*Anna, do you have anything to add to this in relation to the question, which was about the text and its needs? Clearly yours is not psychological*

*theatre, clearly you don't work in terms of character analysis and so on, but is there anything that you would like to add?*

**Anna** Well, the lamentation in *Chronicles* that I started to talk about still remains in our work. This is actually our third version of *Macbeth*. The second one came out of our work with Siberian lamentations with a group from Irkutsk. We worked a lot on finding and tuning our voice to these lamentations and on the text. It didn't work in that context because, as Grzegorz said, the music doesn't have space in it. It's just so intense itself that there was no space to go with Shakespeare. Nonetheless, the lamentation remained, and in my work as *Lady Macbeth* I carried it through. I think it was fundamental in my trying to find a way to link singing with text – not only singing, but producing sound in a lamentation-like way. You can sort of understand intellectually, 'Okay, they're trying to be musical. They're trying to sing, they're trying to go with the music,' but you have to find a connection in your very own self. You have to find a psycho-emotional connection, which lamentations by their very nature have.

It's a very old – hundreds and thousands of years old – form of expressing emotionality through singing and then speaking, and singing and speaking, and improvising. Usually lamentations are improvised when they are done by professional lamenters. So, for me personally – to enrich Grzegorz's answer – this is a very important aspect of our work, generally, and was a very important aspect for me because it allowed me to link my emotionality to the words of the text.

*Would you use the word 'impulse' here? Is it the psycho-emotional impulse that also generates the movement?*

**Grzegorz** I would love to answer this question. I think that the field concerning impulse is huge, especially concerning Grotowski.

*Exactly, and I am thinking of Grotowski here, and of Stanislavsky, of course.*

**Grzegorz** Yes, and I want to say one thing regarding practitioners. My fellow practi-





Lamentations in *Lacrimosa*. Photo: Krzysztof Bielinski.

tioners understand this, because it comes with the understanding of the practice: if you name something, if you give a simple definition to something, you stop the process. You close the experience. In the moment of naming something, the process is over. You have to start another one. If you name something an 'impulse', you've actually lost it. If you focus on something that is an impulse, in that very moment you've lost it. So, in order to follow something that you call 'impulse', you must, in a way, not recognize it. There is something like a 'way' that feeds the impulses and, as Anna says, she has to recognize her *own* way. If she recognizes her own way, then the way that Stanislavsky would call the 'internal monologue' is composed of millions and billions of impulses that you must never focus on.

**Anna** But you always have to be responsive, too.

**Grzegorz** But you always have to be responsive, and you always have to be aware of

this. The mind has an amazing quality: it can act and, at the same time, see what acts; it is never separated. Most of us have lost this ability to act something and at the same time to see it without its being disturbed. Usually, when we observe something, we disturb what we observe. How can you train yourself so that the fresh glow of your mind, which is called inspiration or talent, comes, while at the same time you do not disturb it – but you see it? That is very difficult for acting.

Most actors are likely to ask, 'What the hell is he talking about?' But I want to say one thing. A performer shouldn't really name and shouldn't really use too many definitions of what he or she does. A performer is somebody who has to learn to flow – the wave, the energy, the stream – and has to plug into the stream because, if performance is too analytical, you are already too late. Impulse, when you see it, has already happened before. (*Holds hand up.*) When you see this hand, it already happened much earlier than when you saw it. And it is very difficult

for performers to understand this. But once you approach the training of coordination, this is what you start to achieve. This is what you start to understand.

*On the programme, you are named 'Director'. Given how organic and collective this work is, what is your role?*

**Grzegorz** Conductor.

**Anna** Yes, it's devised.

*Yes. It's collectively devised. So you're the conductor, which is really what a director is, anyway.*

**Grzegorz** I see my role as being really important, because I bring the idea, I bring inspiration, I bring the corrections. I bring some kind of judgement on the work but, actually, the whole work – everything that you see in the performance – is produced by actors, not by me.

**Anna** We improvise and Grzegorz's role is to be our sounding board, a mirror, to lead us deeper and deeper into the material.

**Grzegorz** I would never impose on what comes from the actors. Never. And every time I am tempted to force my performer to do something that I want, we both fail. Every time. It is not right if it is not their initiative, if it does not come from their energy. What I can do is say, 'Look, I liked this, I didn't like this, this matched for me best. Could you try to go that way or that way?' I never say to the performer, 'Do it like this.' Occasionally, I may correct something when the performance requires me to say, 'Look, if you three go simultaneously, that will give you something additional.' So, I'm just trying to be supportive, but I'm not really a director. I never was.

*Well, you are a director in the sense in which you describe. I don't think there is just one kind of director. There are directors here, in this space, and I am sure that they would agree with you.*

**Grzegorz** It's more like – it comes from Meyerhold: the performance is a symphony. Every movement, every gesture, every word, every sound, the light, costumes, set – every-

thing is a part of one concert, and everything has to be musical in that sense because it is coordinated. Timing in the sense of music. It has to be musical in its timing, too.

*Macbeth, like your previous pieces, is highly choreographed. Could you please say something about how you achieve this?*

**Grzegorz** None of our performances are choreographed in the sense that dance performances are choreographed. The movement that you see and experience is a physical way of strengthening and heightening gestures in relation to the text, music, and dramaturgy. Choreography is a form, and our movement is not a form, but the crescendo and culmination of previous work and action on the performance. Since we always work in the realm of coordination, we look for physical gestures that replace the dramatic tension coming from the music and the dramaturgy.

*I would now like to open this conversation out to the floor.*

**Audience Member** *I am Albanian and you spoke about Albanian polyphony sounds. What is your experience with these polyphonies of the renaissance that you are working with?*

**Grzegorz** It started many years ago, with inspiration coming from Gawin [Gabriel], who performs Macbeth. He said, 'Why don't you look at Albanian polyphony?' and he played me two pieces on a record that he bought somewhere. It was quite raw music. One of the most raw and, in a way, fresh and, in a way, weirdest kinds of European music that I had ever heard. We started researching, thanks to our friends in Greece. The north-west of Greece is called Epirus, and, as you know, Albania has been artificially cut away from Greece.

**Anna** It is a political border.

**Grzegorz** It is a political border. The culture is pretty much the same. Albanian music and Epirus music is pretty much the same. Thanks to my friends in Ioannina, which is the capital of Epirus, I collected something like one thousand songs. A huge number. So

we started to listen to old tapes, old recordings of the festivals, and then, eventually – just by coincidence – one of the students of Leszek Kolankiewicz, a professor in Warsaw, is an Albanian and heard that we were interested in Albanian polyphony. He was doing a PhD in Poland and became our guide, taking us to a few places in Albania.

We went there, we practised with people, as Anna said, and among all of these thousands of songs that they had, there were a few that completely blew our minds away. Completely. They were so powerful, so strong. We composed the performance almost like a trance from one lamentation into another, into another, and into another. This is how it all started. It was just by coincidence.

**Audience Member** *You both used the expression, 'found that it didn't work'. My question is how was that determination made? Was it made collectively? Were you following an impulse? Was it negotiated?*

**Grzegorz** It's horrible, because it's purely subjective.

**Anna** It's instinctive. I'll say, you know, 'Grzegorz, I can't work, this music doesn't work,' and he'll say, 'I know it's not working because you're not opening anything, you're not going anywhere, it doesn't give anything to the text. Let's try this.' And then somebody will say, 'I can't work with this,' and Grzegorz will say, 'Yes you can. I can feel there's a little window there. Go with it.' It's very spontaneous, in a sense. Grzegorz and a few people in our company have an extraordinary hearing and an acute instinct for hearing something that will work musically and something that won't work musically. But I'm telling you, you hear music on a tape, or you hear music with somebody singing, and you think, 'Oh, this is fantastic! This is going to work in *Macbeth*! So fabulous!' This happens all the time. We go through hundreds of songs. Then we all sit down in the space and sweat it out for a week. We've all learnt these five or six voices, this huge intricate singing, and then we sing, and we sing, and we sing, and nothing. Nothing.

**Grzegorz** What we do is not ritual. Sometimes the song doesn't permit being sung. It is a living entity. It belongs so strongly to its culture and its context that somehow it resists you; or you, on a deep level, resist the song. Song is like a motor, it is a tool. Sometimes it opens something in you. If you do a yoga *asana*, you think, 'I am crap at this.' But, after a while, it opens something and you go further and further, and stretch. It is the same with song, but it opens something internally. It is an internal tool. Some of the tools we use in acting are very external tools, but the song is a very internal tool that is strongly related to your energy and imagination. If your imagination is really touched by the song, it means that the song gives you permission to explore the world of its sounds. Sometimes it doesn't give you permission, or sometimes you are too close to it. Sometimes you have an absolutely banal and simple motif that suddenly opens you, and you are, like, 'Wow, I can really travel with this.'

Sometimes you have the most amazing, complicated notes from, say, Mozart, and it just doesn't work. It just doesn't work. It means that it doesn't touch you and you cannot really access this song. You cannot use it vocally. This is what I see very often in the theatre: people use a song for its beauty, not for its content. The content of a song is like the deep content of words. You can say words, but it actually takes ages to say them correctly and properly, with full motivation, full dedication, and being completely plugged in to why you are saying them, and what their context is, and so on. It is very similar with songs, except that 'song' is not a definition. It doesn't close you. Song opens you.

We at Song of the Goat say, 'When you hear the thought, you think. When you hear the music, your feelings are awakened. But when you hear the songs, you start feeling your thoughts.' That's the power of song. We never sing the most beautiful songs in our repertoire. They are beautiful, but we never sing them. I have to say that there is a huge field that we discovered when we were still working with Gardzienice, a huge field of Georgian songs, but they never worked for us. They are dead for us.

**Anna** For *us*.

**Grzegorz** For *us*, yes. They are not dead for other people. But every time I hear someone singing Georgian songs, I feel they are completely dead. They have beautiful, most incredible, harmonies, but I have no access to them.

**Anna** In the sense that they don't work in our context.

**Audience Member** *I was wondering about layers. I think that some of the Corsican songs were Latin texts, and Church texts. Macbeth is interesting in the way it exists in an in-between place, between Christianity and Paganism. I wondered if there was any kind of productive influence, an interplay with these Church texts.*

**Grzegorz** There definitely was, but on a very non-verbal level. It just felt right. It gave it a proper ground. You know, singing gives you a mood, because you don't have to think. You are open to songs, immediately. If the song is right, your voice, which is part of your body, immediately goes there, and that is the main thing that we are looking for. When you start singing, it has to travel immediately this way, and not that way. That's very important. I really believe that things have more knowledge than I do. Traditional cultures, traditional songs, contain thousands of years of memory. It's like it's genetic; it's as if the song is open, like a gene. You hear the sound, but under the surface of the sound there is the experience of hundreds of generations. Sometimes, you can hear it.

I remember an African girl who came to our workshop about three years ago. On the first day I proposed to students that they sing very simple motifs, and asked some students simply to improvise. She started improvising. She obviously had a good ear and she had a good sense of rhythm. When she started singing, just by instinct, I said, 'Could you sing me your ancestors?' For her, it was a completely natural question, a natural request, and we all felt it, we all saw it.

Only she was singing. She started singing her ancestors, generation after generation after generation. At one point she exploded

with shaking and tears because she touched a place somewhere in her past that completely released her own energy and her own strength and power. Now she works in the National Theatre in London. She is a very good performer, but at that moment something she reached with the song made something explode in her. That is the power of songs. This is what we are looking for.

**Anna** I think that what you are saying, or what you are confirming, is that we stretch between the simplicity – because it has to be very subtle – and the strength of Shakespeare's language. You can't have two steamrollers at once. To see the steamroller, you have to have a big road and you have to give a lot of space. Maybe it's the Paganism of the language and the Christianity of the songs.

**Audience Member** *And a conflict within both of them.*

**Anna** Yes.

**Audience Member** *There is a level of Christianity in the Corsican music or in the words of the songs. But it's the same in Shakespeare.*

**Maria** *There is a subtle movement in Macbeth between the supernatural, Pagan, and Christian, and morality, all the time.*

**Grzegorz** All the time. There is one moment in which we consciously decided to mark it, when the King is asleep and we've got –

**Maria** *Yes, you've got a Christ-like figure.*

**Grzegorz** A Christ-like figure, but the sleeping King is not lying down, but standing. When Lady Macbeth is trying to convince Macbeth to murder Duncan, she stands in front of the figure of Duncan and, in a way, mocks his image with her hand gestures. It takes three seconds, but it was very conscious.

**Audience Member** *I wanted to ask a question about 'coordination' in relation to technique. You mentioned all these tools – gesture, text. If all of these things are floating around, how do you move through them? What are you? It's not a psychological approach if you're not a self, a character, or even a person moving through. What's*



*the form that you move around these things with? How did you come up with the horse and the rider? Do you have many different forms? Is there always a new thing that you come up with for each of your pieces, like taking an inventory, creating these transient practices? You talked about this flow, this 'wave': there's barnacles and fish and things in that ocean, in that water and, again, you need something to move through it. Is there a technique within that process that you don't want to name or to keep quiet? Do you have a sort of big discussion around the horse-and-rider technique?*

**Grzegorz** I'm sorry I used the example of the horse and rider, because it's not important. It's only one of hundreds of our exercises that popped into my mind. Forget about the horse and the rider. It's a kind of metaphor for a particular exercise – we have different names for different exercises. Don't get too attached to them. Coordination is the one thing that we can deal with. There is always a direct flow between how we think, what we say, and what we do. But, in the culture we live in – whatever the culture we live in – we learn to divide ourselves.

Recently, someone told me about a play based on a very simple concept. There is a guy, very unhappy in marriage, who talks to his wife. His soul is standing behind him, saying, 'What the fuck are you talking about? You don't like her.' The guy is like, 'I'm so happy you came back early from work,' and his soul says, 'No, what are you saying?' It's a very simple concept that shows how we behave in most of our life. We are very disconnected from our impulses, from the flow, from the true feelings that we have.

What we try to bring back in our small environment of the theatre is this flow, that it be simply honest, and what it is. We use the piece, which is *Macbeth*, and we use the music, which is Corsican polyphony – or whatever – and we just try to be honest. We say, 'This is what it is. We do what we do. We feel what we feel.' But all actors have several tools. You have the tone of your voice, of your body, of their relation one to the other; you have your imagination, sensitivity, feelings, senses; you have text, you have melody,

you have rhythms. We have a lot of tools as actors – as many as other humans, but actors can use them consciously.

So, what we try to create, simply, is the connection between these elements. We work on nothing more. We are just trying to tell ourselves there is a connection, not only within me, but between all the elements we have – all my imagination, my stress, my problems, my sickness; there is a connection. Sickness is never separate from who I am – never – although most of us treat sickness as an enemy. Sickness is something else. It is someone else. But, it's not: it *is* me. Maybe it's my less-understood me, but sickness is me. It's never something else. The joy or the achievement in life – if I become successful and get a prize – somehow it is part of me, it is part of my mandala, and this is what we try to create in our performances – we connect things.

None of us is perfect in this, but this is the technique. So horse and rider is one of a thousand exercises, but what we try to do is connect. There are two connections happening. One is on your own level and one is on the level between the performers. The performance is one body. If you have five actors, seven actors, twenty actors, a hundred actors – if it is not one body, the performance is crap, always.

I cannot accept a performance where the performers are against each other for – I don't know – social reasons, ego reasons, or whatever. Yesterday, one of my friends told me that she had a debut in a very well-established theatre and she was trying for the main character. The leading actress of this theatre came to her and said, 'I can see what you are trying to do. You want to be first, yeah? You want to expose yourself, you want to do everything for yourself. It won't work. It won't work.'

If I had a situation like this, then I would want both of these people to leave the company. We can't have this. The coordination between actors has to be as strong as the coordination in you, because others are not different from us. We breathe the same air, we eat the same food, we do the same things, and our desire to achieve happiness is exactly

the same. Nobody wants to suffer, nobody wants to be poor. We are the same, we think the same. People say the same things. I say the same things all the time, constantly. I am constantly surprised that people think they are saying something new. They're not.

So, in the theatre environment, we are trying to go beyond these banal life situations. As Grotowski used to say – this was one of his wisest expressions – ‘What we are looking for in performance is something that is not banal.’ I love it, because I think the theatre is about this. It's about trying not to be banal. Most of theatre is, unfortunately, banal – skilful, but banal.

**Anna** It is important to explain how we train our actors because it may make it easier for you. We have training programmes, including the MA I mentioned. We have actors who go through a very long process with us. And what do we say at the end? Forget everything that you have learned. There is not an exercise to be taken or an approach to be taken that is right for us and, therefore, right for them. Everything that we conceive of, everything that happens in all of the training process, is for opening each performer individually.

I can't give people a formula to open their voice. I've got to look at them and think, ‘Ah, well, it's in the buttocks’ or, ‘It's in the legs. Let's work on that’. I think what Grzegorz tries to do as a director is to open up fields and possibilities for us, and we try to do that for our actors when we train them because we want to make the best possible performance.

If you want to make the best possible performance, you can't just go out and say the text. There are thousands of other ways to do it. You can sometimes do it better, as Grzegorz says, by its rhythm: you give a particular content, at a particular moment.

Sometimes you need to have things happen on six different planes, or sometimes you just need to stand straight and find it in your voice. That's why all of the tools are necessary, and the more you can develop your tools as a performer, and the more you can engage them in the content at any moment in time, the better.

**Maria** *Could I ask you a question about a subject to which we referred in passing earlier and that I hoped we would come to. The question concerns your Brave Festival, in its fifth edition, I believe, in July this year, 2009. I know from the posters I have seen in Wroclaw that it is called 'Prayers of the World'. Could you tell us what motivated you to organize this festival, what the first one concentrated on, what this one will be, and what the philosophy behind it is? It's a lot to answer, I know, but let's go for it.*

**Grzegorz** How to make a festival about what is most difficult to express in words? How to create a festival that is deep, intimate, and which, at the same time, confronts the viewer with what is most important? How to create a festival that speaks of persons who truly try to protect something in themselves and in the world?

Brave Festival speaks about people's identity, spirituality, and sensitivity. In a world where we are all striving for material goods, Brave Festival speaks about inner values: about art as an inner value, about discipline as an inner value, about one's identity as an inner value, and about the sense of satisfaction coming from within and not from outer gratification. Brave Festival is the voice of inner values as they are expressed through art, song, dance, prayer. The first festival focused on the voices of the former Republics of the Soviet Union and their still existing minorities. Since then it has developed to show many varieties and aspects of the vanishing human internal world.