



ZYGMUNT MOLIK'S VOICE AND BODY WORK

THE LEGACY OF JERZY GROTOWSKI

GIULIANO CAMPO WITH ZYGMUNT MOLIK

ROUTLEDGE 

ZYGMUNT MOLIK'S VOICE AND BODY WORK

Zygmunt Molik is one of the last living members of Jerzy Grotowski's original acting company and was a leading trainer at the Teatr Laboratorium. *Zygmunt Molik's Voice and Body Work* explores the unique development of voice and body exercises throughout his career in actor training.

This book, constructed from conversations between Molik and author Giuliano Campo, provides a fascinating insight into the methodology of this practitioner and teacher, and focuses on his 'Body Alphabet' system for actors, allowing them to combine both voice and body in their preparatory process.

The book is accompanied by a DVD containing the films *Zygmunt Molik's Body Alphabet* (2009), *Dyrygent* (2006), which illustrate Molik's working methods, and *Acting Therapy* (1976), exploring his role in the Theatre of Participation, and also includes an extensive photo gallery documenting Zygmunt Molik's life and work.

Zygmunt Molik was a co-founder, leading actor and for 25 years a member of Jerzy Grotowski's Teatr Laboratorium. He played the main role in forming the voice training initiated by Jerzy Grotowski. His Voice and Body training sessions focus on the release of creative energy and the search for the unity and connection between the body and the voice as the basis of an actor's process.

Giuliano Campo is an actor, writer and director. He is the former Research Associate for the British Grotowski Project based at the University of Kent, UK, a member of the European Theatre Research Network (ETRN) and of the Leverhulme International Research Network collaborating with the school of the Moscow Art Theatre (MXAT).



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ZYGMUNT MOLIK'S
VOICE AND
BODY WORK

The Legacy of Jerzy Grotowski

*Giuliano Campo with
Zygmunt Molik*

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CONTENTS

<i>Illustrations</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xvii
<i>DVD Acknowledgements</i>	xviii
1 First Day	1
<i>Acting Therapy – The Voice and the Life – The beginnings</i>	
2 Second Day	11
<i>Techniques – ‘Sing your Life’ – Teachers and masters – Grotowski and the company</i>	
3 Third Day	29
<i>Paratheatre – The Organic Life and the Process – Ryszard Cieślak</i>	
4 Fourth Day	38
<i>Meeting with the unknown – Montage</i>	
5 Fifth Day	45
<i>The ‘Body Alphabet’</i>	
6 Images of the ‘Body Alphabet’	66
7 Sixth Day	93
<i>The text – Organic and cultural differences – Voice as a vehicle</i>	

CONTENTS

8 Seventh Day	109
<i>The attention – Necessity, Organic Process, nostalgia</i>	
9 Eighth Day	121
<i>The productions – Meeting Grotowski – The Teatr Laboratorium</i>	
10 Ninth Day	146
<i>Colleagues and collaborators</i>	
Appendix: Grotowski, Theatre and Beyond	157
<i>From Stanislavski to Grotowski – The Theatre of Productions (1959–69) – Paratheatre (1970–78) – Theatre of Sources (1979–82) and after</i>	
Photographs	167
<i>Notes</i>	188

ILLUSTRATIONS

Images of the ‘Body Alphabet’

- | | | |
|------|---|----|
| 6.1 | Images of Jorge Parente performing the Body Alphabet.
From the film <i>Zygmunt Molik’s Body Alphabet</i> . | |
| | Pulling the body | 66 |
| 6.2 | Lifting up | 67 |
| 6.3 | Pushing forward and aside | 68 |
| 6.4 | Rotation of the shoulders | 69 |
| 6.5 | From the nape backward, the chin straight and backward,
and then relax | 70 |
| 6.6 | Head play | 71 |
| 6.7 | Rotation of the head | 72 |
| 6.8 | Open the arms to the sky, everything is open, go down
with the hands and touch the ground and sharp reaction
(recognising something in the ground – a partner –
which can be anything) | 73 |
| 6.9 | Touching the sky | 74 |
| 6.10 | The arms are heavy and pulling down and then very
energetically up but not completely, but slightly
bound together with the ribs | 75 |
| 6.11 | Pulling the bell | 76 |
| 6.12 | The butterfly seeking a place to sit for a while | 77 |
| 6.13 | Flying in the air | 78 |
| 6.14 | The cobra seeking something to eat | 79 |
| 6.15 | Lifting up the hips and staying on one shoulder and
shooting with an arm | 80 |
| 6.16 | Game with the feet | 81 |
| 6.17 | The grass reacting to the wind | 82 |
| 6.18 | To see behind | 83 |
| 6.19 | Walking on the spot | 84 |

ILLUSTRATIONS

6.20	Walk by the water opening with hips	85
6.21	Running on the spot	86
6.22	Trying to touch the wall with the hips, with the arms straight, and never touching it	87
6.23	Stretching the body during the walk	88
6.24	Playing with the kite	89
6.25	More actions of the Body Alphabet performed by Giuliano Campo. Opening the chest	90
6.26	Walking freely, seeing branches, holding them	91
6.27	On the floor. Kicking back	92

Photographs

1	As <i>recytacje</i> , 'conférencier' for the agency Aktors based in Cracow	167
2	As <i>recytacje</i> , 'conférencier' in the Polish Army ensemble	168
3	Saying goodbye at the drama school	168
4	An early production in Cracow	169
5	<i>Gangsters</i> in Łódź at the Theatre 7.15	170
6	In Łódź in a piece by the Hungarian writer Molnar	170
7	Playing at the Theatre Bagatella in Cracow in 1964	171
8	As Fabian in <i>Twelfth Night</i> by William Shakespeare in Opole	171
9	In Opole as Maurycy in <i>L'été en Nohan</i> , the play about Frédéric Chopin's lover written by J. Iwaszkiewicz and directed by Jerzy Ankczac, before realising his movie	172
10	Playing Brecht's <i>The Fear and the Misery of the Third Reich</i> at the Theatre Bagatella in Cracow in 1966	173
11	Training at the Teatr Laboratorium	173

Following: pictures from all Teatr Laboratorium productions directed by Jerzy Grotowski

12	Orpheus (1959)	174
13	Cain (1960)	175
14	With Grotowski and the cast of <i>Mystery Bouffe</i> (1960)	176
15	<i>Sakuntala</i> (1960)	177
16	<i>Forefathers' Eve</i> (1961)	178
17	With Grotowski in rehearsal for <i>Kordian</i> (1962)	179
18	<i>Kordian</i> (1962)	180
19	In rehearsal for <i>Akropolis</i> (1962)	181
20	With Rena Mirecka in <i>Akropolis</i> (1962)	182
21	<i>The Constant Prince</i> (1968)	183
22	<i>Apocalypsis cum figuris</i> (1979)	183

PREFACE

Beyond Theatre

23	The Teatr Laboratorium in Mexico City in 1970	184
24	Early composition of the Body Alphabet	185
25	In Brzezinka at the time of Paratheatre	186
26	In Montalcino (Italy) for a “Voice and Body” workshop	186
27	A work session in Rome with Ludwik Flaszen	187
28	With Katzu and Ioshita Ono in Paris in 1990	187
29	At work in Wrocław	188
30	With Eugenio Barba during a session of the ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology) in Wrocław in 2005	188
31	Giuliano Campo with Ferdinando Taviani, Eugenio Barba and Mirella Schino in Holstebro in 2008	189
32	A recent session of Voice and Body in Wrocław	189
33	Portrait by Francesco Galli, Wrocław 2008	190

Supplementary Resources Disclaimer

Additional resources were previously made available for this title on DVD. However, as DVD has become a less accessible format, all resources have been moved to a more convenient online download option.

You can find these resources available here: <http://resourcecentre.routledge.com/books/9780415568470>

Please note: Where this title mentions the associated disc, please use the downloadable resources instead.

PREFACE

This publication, instigated by Talia Rodgers of Routledge, is the result of over three years of field research conducted with Zygmunt Molik on his own work. It comes as a result of my role as research associate for the British Grotowski Project based at the University of Kent, funded by the AHRC. Nevertheless, as you will see, it has not turned out to be a typical piece of institutional research.

Polish actor Zygmunt Molik has always been my role model and hero. When I was a drama student in Rome and a young theatre practitioner I spent innumerable hours watching and analysing his astonishing stage performance in the video of the famous 1960s production of *Akropolis* by Wyspiański, directed by Jerzy Grotowski and celebrated as one of the twentieth century's theatre masterpieces.

Molik was the leading actor of Grotowski's company Teatr Laboratorium. When the company was formed, at the end of the 1950s, he was its only professional actor, older and more experienced than Grotowski himself. His early and imaginative approach to voice, as it connects to body, was developed through his role as a teacher within the company. It had a radical and transformative impact on the vocal training of actors and on theatre practices all over the world, just as the *exercices plastiques* created by Rena Mirecka (another founder and teacher of Grotowski's company) had on the physical training of actors.

While Grotowski, the 'spiritual' guide of the company, was developing his technical skills as a theatre director and theorist in collaboration with the literary advisor Ludwik Flaszen, he worked alongside Molik on the development of this innovative approach to voice, which is still highly influential in contemporary theatre.

During this period the practice of laboratory theatre, which was originated by Stanislavski, was revolutionised. From then on laboratory work could no longer be conceived purely in terms of technical achievements and skills directed towards the creation of performances for the audience's

entertainment. Instead, it became a privileged setting for ‘the work on oneself’ that was soon open to participants from outside the company, with a variety of backgrounds and motivations, to experience.

When I first approached Zygmunt Molik with the task of documenting his work, I was ready to contribute to the canon of apologetic biographical literature. Bookshops abound with these kinds of texts, where the names of the editors are hidden behind the name of the artist being celebrated, and are padded as research, or merely as handbooks. But that was not possible: Molik did not want to talk about himself.

While following him closely and studying his art and personality, I soon realised that Zygmunt did not like to give an explanation of his work in public, and that was why his ideas on actor training had never been published in full form. Even during the practical sessions, his favourite way of working was always to use a kind of dense silence. That is, giving a few key words to begin with, followed by long pauses. You can understand it or not. If you do not, never mind. Work and you will. It succeeds marvellously when you are in his presence, and my duty was to try to find a way of making his process function in the written form. In order to do this I had to, and in all honesty I was honoured to, become his student, his pupil and companion in a practical and intellectual adventure. Now I am aware, even more than before, that the theatre and the understanding of it are not, cannot and should not be easy.

Finally the text (with the accompanying DVD on Molik’s method, called ‘Body Alphabet’), based on conversations and practical sessions, has been edited as a series of nine meetings, illustrating a process of transmission of experience that is core to Molik’s approach in the theatre and beyond it. The focus shifted, and the new, inner obligation that I had to attend to was making this process clear; however, I was aware that I had to negotiate this within the strict demands of the scientific community.

Still, the beginning of this story is older than the project and I find it worthwhile to use a few words here talking about the unusual circumstances that brought about this rare collaboration. In fact, the first time I had a chance to meet closely with Zygmunt Molik had been a few years earlier, when I delivered a set of French cheeses to him. I was given this task by one of his students from Switzerland, with whom I was sharing a hostel during the 2005 session of ISTA (the International School of Theatre Anthropology directed by Eugenio Barba).

The ISTA sessions are itinerant and irregular, this one took place in the elegantly old-fashioned watery town of Wrocław, Poland, and was organised in collaboration with the Grotowski Institute, which is based there. The Institute is now devoted to preserving the memory of Jerzy Grotowski and his Teatr Laboratorium, as well as to the task of contin-

uing his views and working principles. Grotowski lived in Italy for many years, where he died in 1999, however most of his work was carried out in Wrocław, and this is where Molik, who worked with his company for its entire existence, still lives.

This particular ISTA session took place at a very special time, because while the theatre sessions were running (involving teachers, artists and participants from all over the world), in Rome the Polish Pope died and suddenly around us the population of Wrocław started to mourn in such a moving way that it is hard to describe without sounding rhetorical. A huge wave of emotion was already in the air, and this confusing whirlwind of feelings came with me when this adventure in theatre began.

So to continue, this student of Molik's had to leave the ISTA session early and she put into my hands the cheeses that she had brought for Molik and had jealously protected from the daily attacks of hungry drama students. And so I met him.

Before then I knew only about the mythology of the man; the protagonist of *Akropolis* (the litany that he sings toward the end of it still resonated inside me during that, my first visit to Poland) or the creator of these strange and mysterious physical and vocal techniques such as the 'resonators' that in theatrical circles are considered almost mystical.

Of course at that time I used to try to practise some of these techniques (now, I would say just some vague ideas of them) with my theatre groups in Rome, just like thousands of other practitioners all over the planet in search of Grotowski's 'holy actor'. This is just one of many inspiring formulations of which his cult book *Towards a Poor Theatre* has plenty.

Yet, I met the man, and the myth stepped to the back of my mind, needless to say, without vanishing completely. As we got to know each other through conceiving this project, Zygmunt and I formed a friendship that was enriched on the many occasions that we enjoyed sharing good food and wine together; I would not dare to visit him and his lovely wife Eva without a bottle of their favourite Pomerol.

Whilst having such a great time with him, I was continually given insight into his essential experience and my knowledge in the theatre and beyond it significantly evolved. Working on this book gave me the opportunity to make this progress effective and to share it coherently in my own practice and teaching.

Again, what was initially intended to be made to give information about Molik's life and vision of the theatre, and about his past and present techniques (students, researchers will find lot of useful and original material in it) developed as the written result of a process of direct inner communication initiated with Molik several years ago. The text does not provide a report of the practical training and theatrical work that occurred during my

time with Molik. This is because from the beginning it was clear that, due to Molik's specific approach, the final form of this document should not be a practical manual. I have taken great care to remove anything that might confuse a reader who would be looking to be told what to do.

Like the book, the accompanying videos are just traces that illustrate his work through shadows and signs that the studious observer must use in a personal way, rather than taking them as guides for the practitioner. Nevertheless, parts of both do give specific insights into the work, and the whole fifth chapter is devoted to the 'Body Alphabet' and accompanied by a full gallery of stills taken from the video. This video was made by me, with the technical support of Heather Green and with very few financial and technical means, in Portuguese actor Jorge Parente's flat of a few square metres in a *banlieue* of Paris. It was shot in a few hours while there was still some daylight left, edited during a night in a cheap hotel room at the Bastille, and shown and completed the day after at Molik's apartment in order to capture Zygmunt's relevant comments. There was deliberately no aesthetic aim in the making of the film, to avoid giving any impression of providing a flashy 'exercise video'. It was made exclusively to record and illustrate the principal actions created by Molik that no one, until now, had ever managed to document correctly.

Not all of the 'letters' of the 'Body Alphabet' are shown in the DVD; there are a few more that we decided not to include, because it must be made clear that this is not a recipe for the student to follow without creative involvement. We could not risk being misunderstood and thought to be supplying a 'method' with a step-by-step guide to acting. The DVD provides video footage of most of the actions from the 'Body Alphabet' for the purpose of clarifying Molik's work.

Right at the beginning of the book you will see indeed that Molik's explanation of the nature of his work is as 'shamanic'. To a modern reader it may be difficult to accept such a perspective; however, the whole text must be read in this light. The film *Dyrygent* (made in 2006) is included because it shows Molik at work with the group in the historic site of Brzezinka in the surroundings of Wrocław; although it doesn't give an explanation of the technical process, it does in fact complement the film of the 'Body Alphabet'. As does the third film, *Acting Therapy* (1976), also never released before. This includes fragments of sessions led by other members of Teatr Laboratorium, such as Antoni Jahółkowski, Stanisław Ścierański and Rena Mirecka at work on her 'plastic exercises'. This is the only film ever made at that time on what is called 'Paratheatre' and it cross-references directly to the text.

I hope that an attentive confrontation between the three films and the book will provide an acceptable, limited though reasoned picture of Molik's Voice and Body work, both with individuals and with groups.

PREFACE

The Voice and Body work, using this specific name, was initiated in the mid-1970s, the time that is known as Grotowski's 'Paratheatre' or 'Theatre of Participation' phase, which followed the period of 'Theatre of Productions' (readers can refer to the appendix for a more detailed description of the phases of Grotowski's work). Voice and Body includes the 'Body Alphabet', which Molik conceived as an evolution of the principles of the work that he used as actor and leader of Grotowski's company during the 'Theatre of Productions'. Changing its focus and aims, he developed it as a tool for the work on the self, alongside its pragmatic use in actor training, so even after the dissolution of the company in 1984 it was used by Molik during his work sessions. The Voice and Body work then allowed Molik to meet and teach thousands of practitioners all over the world for more than thirty years.

During the process of creating this publication I was very often pushed to recall the many precious insights that I had received during the course of my previous training. I was lucky enough to be taught that there are two kinds of books in the theatre: one kind contains and reports facts or experiences; the other kind constitutes an experience in itself, which the author aims to transmit in order to make it endure and continue through the readers' own work. These we call 'theatres in form of books'. Our text, as a result of a close collaboration and a tight link between the two authors, has ultimately been conceived with such 'organic' intention.

Indeed after we started working together, I became progressively aware that Zygmunt had a stronger influence on me as a human being, rather than as an artist and researcher. The choice of a life in theatre can be casual and might become professional, turning to craft, but sooner or later it always comes to reveal itself as a discipline that orientates one's behaviour and way of thinking, a particular way to approach and view reality. I reached the conclusion that my main concern should be to illustrate the dialogue between us and the process of learning and transmitting skills instead of simply providing a solitary monologue. My wish is for the text to be approached as a living body and that the reader be able to experience it from my perspective.

I am aware that the importance of the text lies exclusively in Zygmunt's words; nevertheless, we believed that excluding my interventions could easily result in a flat and contrived style. This contributes to making the book alive and to vividly rendering Molik's real personality to the reader. That is why the language is not and cannot be academic, and at the same time it is not exactly informal.

The reader who is intimately interested in grasping the secret of Molik's work is accompanied by my presence in the text. In this kind of maieutic dialogue the reader has been offered all the necessary tools to

PREFACE

enable him or her to take my place as Molik's counterpart, with all the obstacles that are involved in such an approach.

I feel the need to advise the reader that this text reflects its own development, which, through utilising this type of dialogue, generated a mutual and free exchange, and besides this it shows two non-natives communicating in English in a private environment. The text may not be considered to be balanced and structured as a 'good' scholarly and critical publication should be. Nevertheless, the primary investigative approach of a historian and theorist has been maintained and is present throughout. I am able to observe it from within and its architecture seems to me to be partially old and partially newly built or refurbished in different phases, where signs of the effect of time and changes of the weather have been left on the brickwork.

In case the reader wonders how, after years of research and work, editing and rethinking, the result appears so poor and scarcely organised, I would answer that, according to the same metaphor of the building, neither the builders' effort nor their experiences during its construction, nor its texture say much about its value, which in itself, rather than high or low, may in fact be non-existent. In other words, I hope that the reader's attention will focus on what in this book is not evident; I constantly worked bearing this in mind.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication would not have come into existence without the inspirational teaching that I have received in different times, places, forms and degrees of intensity by Franco Ruffini, Nando Tavian, Eugenio Barba and Rena Mirecka.

We received invaluable support from Eva Molik, Stefania Gardecka, Bruno Chojak and all the staff of the Grotowski Institute of Wrocław, who also provided some of the precious photographs included in the DVD.

I warmly thank Francesco Galli for his commitment and his portraits, and Maurizio Buscarino for permission to publish a piece of his masterly photographic work of Molik in rehearsal for *Apocalypsis cum figuris*.

The DVD *Zygmunt Molik's 'Body Alphabet'* resulted from the voluntary and excellent participation of Heather Green and Jorge Parente.

The text has improved significantly as a result of the gracious interventions of Jonathan Grieve and Emily Ayres. Magda Stam helped with translation of the Polish spellings.

The whole project has been constantly supported at all stages by my former research director and old friend Paul Allain, and by the enthusiasm of my editor, Talia Rodgers. Thank you all.

Giuliano Campo, September 2009

DVD ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DVD features the film 'Dyrygent' © Tomasz Mielnik, used by permission.

'Dyrygent' features excerpts from Karlheinz Stockhausen – Zyklus © Copyright 1960 by Universal Edition (London) Ltd., London/UE 13186.

The composition in its entirety can be ordered on CD 6 of the Stockhausen Complete Edition from stockhausen-verlag@stockhausen.org. Information about Stockhausen and his music may be found at www.stockhausen.org.

DVD produced by Peter Hulton at Arts Archives – www.arts-archives.org.

FIRST DAY

Acting Therapy – The Voice and the Life
– The beginnings

Campo: I'd like to start our conversation about your work and your life by discussing an episode which I find exemplary. It concerns the film *Acting Therapy*. It is a rare film, shot in Wrocław, Poland, in the studio space of the Teatr Laboratorium, the company you co-founded, directed by Jerzy Grotowski. It shows the activity of a workshop you and the actor Rena Mirecka led in the mid-seventies. It clearly demonstrates the quality of your work with the participants, your ability to open the participants' voices through a personal relationship. I wonder what happened on that specific occasion, because it is visible that something extraordinary happened when you were working with that boy.

Molik: It is a strange beginning for a book, and I like it. I agree, it is a key moment, but everything is visible there, so what can I explain? It happened in that way because I didn't know what to do. I did everything that was necessary in order to achieve my goal. My aim was that I wanted to open his voice because I knew that he had it, but he couldn't demonstrate it, simply that. So I did everything that was necessary, and that was all, and I can't say now what I did, what I was doing. I did many strange things, because I tried from one side, from another side, and so on and so on and so on ... until I had it. There you can see how difficult it is. But I knew what I was doing, and in fact I reached the goal.

Campo: At first you worked with your own voice because he didn't have any voice, and at the end he found his voice. So, what is the relationship between voice and the rest of life, why the work with the voice, and what is the voice?

Molik: I don't know, but I got it. Now, when I think of what I did, I can tell my work was like a shaman's work. I worked like

FIRST DAY

a shaman, trying to make the impossible possible. It looked like nothing could be done, because he was full of so much resistance in himself, not to be opened, not to let himself be opened, and so on and so on. So I tried many things, it took such a long time. Usually I never work for so long with one 'patient' (here I can use this term), but this time I was very stubborn and finally we got it, yes.

Campo: *When you work with other students, or actors or practitioners, do you use the same approach to open energetic channels, liberating them and trying to find something, to make something hidden appear, like you did in this case?*

Molik: No, I can never do the same, because everybody is quite different. So I never engage with different challenges in the same way. My method is to find out what is the right way to truly approach someone, and this is the only way to get results. There is no such thing as a method that I can use all the time and achieve the intended result. I must guess, I must seek, I must search a lot, and then I get it. It usually takes much less time, but this case you see in the film was a very difficult one, let me say, and that is why it took such a long time. Normally, if I try to open someone's voice, then I do it in two or three minutes. It's enough. I just try different positions, on the wall or on the floor, and it's very often enough, but that time this wasn't possible. Nothing could work, so I made a kind of quest, into the absolute unknown. It was a case I have never met in my life. Because I knew that he had full voice, but he couldn't open it. Years later I had another similar case, where it didn't look possible to open someone's voice. It was near Bordeaux, Las Téoulères, a studio space in a farm. It wasn't possible to get the voice out of someone, but finally I did it after many attempts, trying this way, that way, and so on. Finally I did it very simply, I made him run, then fall down, and then cry out.

Campo: *Cry out was an instruction that you gave?*

Molik: Yes, I just said to him: 'Cry out now!' And he did, and then later, once opened, it was easy. Once I had opened the voice (later on, because it was gradual) he could keep this voice. I repeated it and told him: 'Cry out, take a breath and cry out, keep on shouting.' And he did it, and then I just regulated it, I put it into a normal channel and he started singing with his full voice.

Campo: *That's something he could never do before. It was the first time for him.*