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Singing from Stones: Physiovocality and Gardzienice's Theater of Musicality

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It is midday in the village of Gardzienice, Poland, in September 2009. This is my penultimate day of fieldwork with Włodzimierz Staniewski's theater company. After an intensive session of morning acrobatics in the meadows, physical exercises in mutuality, and ensemble singing of Georgian and Ancient Greek songs, we rest in preparation for rehearsals, performances and night running in the forest. The relevant entry from my training journal reads:

A student from the Academy is playing the violin near a window of *Oficyna*. From inside *Carmina*, I can hear Joanna, Anna, Agnieszka and Maniuszka practicing the dance of the maenads, singing “*Euoï Backhai*,” screaming, shouting celebratory calls. Some fellow-trainees are still trying to get the rhythm of “Hai-Hai-Hai-Ha-Ee-Ha” in their bodies, moving their vase-inspired, two-dimensional choreography in the meadows. Up the hill, contractors are yelling at each other. A few birds are chirping, the breeze echoes in the forest, the stream creates a constant

buzz. And Kirca, the energetic dog with the ancient name, barks at the window out of which the sound of a violin emerges. It may be just me, but it sounds as if everybody acknowledges the sounding of the others. In a weird way, it seems that all these sounds are not antagonizing each other and, at the same time, they are not intruding on the calmness of the early afternoon.¹

Certainly, the excerpt does not claim scholarly accuracy. However, it hints at important themes and recurring preoccupations of the group, such as the sharpened sense of aural perception, the trained attitude of openness towards other(s), and the connections between voicing and the landscape. Building on my recent fieldwork, this chapter examines elements of both Gardzienice's performances and pedagogy as case studies of what I call *physiovocality*. Meanwhile, the overarching aim of my investigation is to formulate a definition of Staniewski's theater(s) of musicality.

In 1976, Staniewski (1950-) decided to pursue his vision of theatrical de-urbanization and resist the leveling of minority culture resulting from the Communist administration in Poland. He subsequently founded the Centre for Theatre Practices Gardzienice, which is still based in the homonymous village of the Southeastern region. Constantly pushing the boundaries of the avant-garde, the company has cultivated a unique approach to devising, one that is inspired by expeditions to the multicultural Polish borderland as well as abroad. The performances of Gardzienice, which incorporate acrobatics and gestural choreography alongside such complex vocal phenomena as antiphony or dissonance, have been a territory for the exploration of the tensions between the

physical and the vocal. Not surprisingly, his pieces have been thus analyzed as either “ethno-oratoria”² or “village operas.”³

In this creative strand, literary sources or playtexts are only a point of departure. The musical and vocal material defines the devising process and the final aesthetics to such an extent that Staniewski has declared directing to be a praxis pertaining to the field of musical composition.⁴ In *The Life of the Archpriest Avvakum* (1983), the autobiography of the Russian archpriest and liturgical songs are juxtaposed with Lemko folksongs, whereas in *Carmina Burana* (1990), the well known codex and the story of Tristan and Isolde are combined with Georgian songs. Similarly, the last period of the company’s work, while building on the gestural and vocal depository accumulated through years of traveling, is largely dedicated to the reconstruction of Ancient Greek music. Combining academic research with their deep understanding of folklore, Gardzienice has revisited Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses* (1998) and Euripides’ *Elektra* (2003), *Iphigenia at Aulis* (2007) and *Iphigenia in Tauris* (2011).

Singing in these productions is either homophonic, heterophonic or in canons; hence the importance of the dynamic interactions taking place between the voices. Although the vocal arrangement often accords with the division of Catholic choirs in high and low, male or female voices, the sound texture is dense and inclusive; registers are frequently blended and strict lines intermix with perceptible breaths, vocal glidings, exclamations, shrieking laughter and cries. Still, the sounding of Gardzienice performers exhibits a distinct connection to its body source. The release of breath into voicing follows the impulses of the choreographed sequences, gesticulation or the physical encounters between the actors. The quasi-spoken or semi-chanted text is performed in a mixture of

(mostly) Polish, English, and Ancient Greek, with a strong use of facial musculature and an accentuation of consonants. Singing employs spasmodic inhalation, a raised larynx and gaping mouth—in a combination of technical qualities of folk singing with festive/marketplace imagery. This meticulous examination of vocal and corporal interconnections has consistently been the cornerstone of Staniewski's endeavors, informing his group's balanced investment in both theater-making and the development of a new strand of performer training.

Defining physiovocality

The interweaving of song and dance in Gardzienice's performances is not merely an aesthetic choice. Staniewski frequently admits Bakhtin's (1895-1975) influence on his theater.⁵ Staniewski's dialogue with the Russian philosopher's writings is evident in his interest in folk culture, his awareness of historical processes, and the undividedness he perceives between the individual, the community and the cosmos. Also, Gardzienice's director places distinct emphasis on bodily movements that mingle the high and the low, such as the whirling of the dervishes in *Sorcery* (1980), "which expresses the release of an excess of joy,"⁶ or the dance of the maenads in the last scene of *Metamorphoses*. Most importantly, Staniewski's training, in a decisive amalgamation of Bakhtin's polyphony/heteroglossia and the grotesque bodily canon, promotes states of abundance, physical exuberance and vocal interrelativity, which reject the concept of "the private, egotistic, 'economic man.'"⁷

From the foundation of the company until the radical political change of 1989, the embodiment of Bakhtin's principles and the exploration of grotesque

physiovocality were effected via the methodology of expeditions and gatherings. Expeditions were “pilgrimages”/fieldwork in specific communities, especially those of the Eastern borderland, during which the group, after an initial “reconnaissance” visit by one or two of its members, journeyed towards the village, trained in the new environment, engaged in conversation or everyday tasks with the locals, and organised gatherings. The latter were events during which Gardzienice performed songs, rehearsed performance extracts and physical sequences, in an attempt to involve the locals as much as possible in a mutual sharing of dances, music and songs: “Singing,” according to Staniewski, “was the most open channel of communication.”⁸

In blending everyday labor with the extra-daily exigencies of gatherings, in an atmosphere of reciprocal conditioning, Staniewski discovered the connective tissue of his directing: song, music and episodic storytelling. The elements of pilgrimage and the intentionally Bakhtinian blending of high and low culture (as exemplified in the impromptu encounter of canonical texts with folk art) were major components of the experience of gatherings. These, in combination with direct inspiration from culture-specific gestures and voice vibrations and the urgency to hone performance skills in an informally competitive situation, contributed to the dynamics of Gardzienice’s productions in such a definite way that Staniewski considered his training as taking place at “the ‘university’ of the countryside.”⁹ Preserving and transforming the musicality of the encountered ethnic groups, Staniewski’s expeditions in the rural culminated in his “ethno-oratorio”-type performances.

Gardzienice’s use of the body and the voice stems from a particular lineage of performance, the Polish student theater of de-Stalinization and the practices of

Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999). Staniewski grew up in Poland in the oppressive atmosphere following Stalin's death in 1953. Upon graduating from the University of Krakow, he joined Teatr STU, an influential group of the early 1970s, which resorted to music and techniques of collage as means to avoid censorship and to support the undercurrent of resistance to the Communist regime. Staniewski performed with the company in the piece *Spadanie (Falling)* (1970) and the aesthetics of this work (emphasis on music and exploration of voice and sound, devising techniques, a variety of written sources) was crucial to the shaping of his own creative perspective.

In 1970, he was invited by Grotowski to join his paratheatrical activities, characterised by an attempt to erase the boundaries between audience and performers, a deliberate refusal to create in conventional theatrical settings and the formation of intimate "meetings," where vocal participation and movements that unleashed sound were paramount. Grotowski promoted a physical understanding of the actor's work cultivated through exercises called *plastiques* and detailed work on gesture, understood as "[a] *sign*, not a common gesture, [which] is the elementary integer of expression for us."¹⁰ It is here that one can trace the origins of Staniewski's interest in gesture, epitomized in his inspiration from village gesticulations and iconography in *Avvakum* and *Carmina* and Greco-Roman vase painting in the Greek plays.

Furthermore, in terms of voicing, the conceptual skeleton underpinning the pedagogy of Gardzienice has been formed to a large extent in relation to Grotowski's paradigm; the avoidance of pre-recorded or technologically modified sounds in performance,¹¹ the disparagement of vocal improvisation in performance,¹² the cultivation of freedom and spontaneity in the training and

rehearsals,¹³ as well as the “body first, then voice” principle.¹⁴ All of these can be better comprehended if related to similar concepts in Grotowski’s teachings. Thus the following statement by Grotowski could be endorsed by Staniewski as well:

Being products of different systems of transcription (both in the sense of musical notation and in relation to recording) and not of the oral tradition, Westerners mistake singing with melody. They are pretty much able to sing anything that can be notated in notes. But they are completely unable to notice such things as the vibratory quality of the voice, the resonance of the space, the resonators of the body or the way in which the vibrations are carried through the out-breath.¹⁵

Differences are noticeable nevertheless. Grotowski, when working on the voice, suggested exercises that address individual needs, whilst Staniewski’s training, as will be analysed in the following section, highlights the role of the group. Moreover, while Grotowski worked from a detailed anatomical perspective when touching upon resonators,¹⁶ Staniewski, aiming at a similar result of holistic vocal exploration and honing of the vocal imagination, relates the areas of the body to cultures and ethnic groups.¹⁷ Rather than insisting on a physiological concretization of vocal qualities, Gardzienice achieve the vibrations peculiar to each song through imitation and imaginative playfulness. In an informal conversation, Gardzienice expert Alison Hodge recalled that in the mid-1990s the company was experimenting with “very specific sounds from specific regions.” In her Gardzienice workshops, Anna-Helena McLean, who worked

with the company from 2001 to 2007 and performed the title role in *Elektra*, teaches a step-by-step warm up of the resonators, moving from the pelvic area to the cranial structures, and attributes the filtering of the harmonics in each resonator to a region or people. For example, the sound around the nasal cavity and the sphenoids is called the “Bulgarian sound” or the open sound at the top of the head “the Ukrainian sound.” Staniewski worked in a similar way in the Summer Intensive 2008, asking invited trainees to share songs and encouraging mimesis of the “geographically proper” vibrations.

Gardzienice’s inspiration by the primordial role given to voice by Grotowski and Bakhtin’s examination of folk festivities is further illuminated if related to contemporaneous findings of Polish ethnomusicology. Anna Czekanowska, studying the period of the 1970s and 1980s, concludes that in Poland, folk music in its entirety, comprising both vocal and instrumental genres, has derived from the vocal repertory. This is manifest in the use of such terms as *spiewany* (vocal) when referring to traditional forms, while *techniczny* (technical) stands for more recent and elaborated versions. In a sense, “vocal” is used as a synonym for originality. Furthermore, events that have traditionally been central to the life of the community called for songs; however, and this is quite important to my discussion of physiovocality, out of these collectively valued sung repertories, the most well preserved are those that accompany entertainments such as dances, whilst ritual song has fallen into decline.¹⁸

The productions of the post-Communist years revolve around the artistic director’s collaboration with composer Maciej Rychly and actors/musicians Tomasz Rodowicz, Mariana Sadowska and Marcin Mrowca,¹⁹ a group that attempted to access the musicality hidden in the remaining fragments of Ancient

Greek music, “not in a manner of reconstruction, but of reminiscence.”²⁰ The training principles and core devising techniques of the first period persisted. Still, Staniewski’s interest in preserving the physio-vocal expressivity of near-extinct minorities developed into an equally ambitious project: the research into the “revival” of the less documented elements of Greek drama, its physical and vocal resources. In McLean’s description:

We tried from every root to get close to the original. But the more you studied, you realized it is nonsense to try and reconstruct exactly what it was. [...] Initially with Maciej [Rychly], we absorbed the melodies that were left, and looked at the words. Then you created a new melody based on your invention, based on the scales that you have studied, the sounds you think are there, the instrumentations that are signaled in the scores that are left from Ancient Greece. So how do you put new life into it? You go and study today’s indigenous cultures, looking for sounds and colours and rhythms and affectations, and, being a musician yourself, you evoke your way of reconstructing this or that song, making lots of different versions. You are not saying any one of these is the right way, but “how about this way?”²¹

In view of the devised performances, this process of embodiment was further informed by Staniewski’s research into other remains of the culture (sculptures, ceramics, mosaics, texts), in particular through the work, and personal input, of philologist Oliver Taplin. This led to the creation of musico-

theatrical études, the iconograms, which tested the invented vocality through sequences of postures found in vase-paintings,²² the reconstruction of Greek instruments (see figs.), and the development of an “alphabet of gestures,” known as *cheironomia*, which joined the expressive gesticulation of Ancient Greece to specific musico-textual fragments.²³

Figure 28

Figure 28: a reconstruction of a *seistron*-type instrument. Photo by author.

Figure 29

Figure 29: a reconstruction of a *kithara*-type instrument. Photo by author.

Staniewski’s vested interest in physicality and voice is what provides his work with a sense of continuity. The creation of the “dramaturgy of gestures”²⁴ is a development of his earlier work on iconography, in tandem with his commitment to discovering the “archetypal” gestures of the minorities of the countryside. Similarly, music remains the focal point of all activities and dramaturgical choices. Once more, Staniewski’s decisions seem to have been dictated by the musical data at his disposal more than anything else. None of the tragedies he staged is analyzed in Taplin’s *Tragedy in Action*, Staniewski’s main theoretical influence in his work on tragedy. No surviving ceramic pot is directly connected to any of the two Euripidean plays he directed (even though Euripides is, generally speaking, by far the greatest source of inspiration for the vase painters). However, Euripides is the only one of the tragic poets whose music has survived, although in just a couple of short and not easily decipherable

fragments.²⁵ Furthermore, the oral character of musical transmission in ancient Greece, which inevitably drew attention to the acts of listening and memorization, is yet another element with which Staniewski's research can identify.

Consequently, any classification of the group's work as pertaining to either the fading Communist past or the internationalized present is reductive, and does not acknowledge the ability of the company to evade such categorical polarities as Ratajczakowa's "artistic reinterpretation of national symbols versus universal archetypes," Cioffi's "literary versus visual" strands of the Polish alternative theaters, and Taplin's "iconocentric versus philodramatist" approaches.²⁶ Staniewski overcomes such polarities by drawing on the Greek concept of *choreia*, the principle according to which the actors merged elocution, singing, dance, expressive gesture and character-making into a seamless whole. This aspiration to an all-encompassing acting style informed the reconstruction of the songs. As Rychly, comparing Gardzienice's work with scenes depicted on Attic vases, relates: "That's how musicians really behaved. They did not use to sit [sic] hunched over their scores. We see them flying in dance movements. Their entire bodies are alive with music."²⁷

Staniewski's work is therefore a significant case study in physiovocality, the uncompromised parallel development of the performer's bodily and vocal technique. A Gardzienice actor is not a triple threat, an actor-singer-dancer who cultivates each discipline separately in order to combine them at later stages of professional development. This, as affirmed by Allain, would be "anathema to their [Gardzienice's] approach."²⁸ Physiovocal integration in this case is key to every phase of preparation and performing, as song is learnt through movement

and choreography is understood as part of a musical composition. Furthermore, the inseparability of voicing and movement is not only a matter of aesthetics. It is historically necessitated (the avoidance of Communist censorship and the need to explore multiple national identities), pertains to a well-defined genealogy (Polish folk music and Grotowskian techniques), relates to performance parallels (student happenings and the Greek *choreatic* expression) and is philosophically articulated (the relation to Bakhtin's marketplace). In other words, Staniewski's suggested paradigm of how voice and body cooperate does not only problematize definitions of the actor; it promulgates a particular cosmology of being. This is why in the following sections I will probe the principles that form the backbone of the company's pedagogy and examine how these, rather than a specific style or aesthetic, have become the wellspring of other theatrical work.

Musicality, mutuality, chorality, and voice as a bodily impulse

The training of Gardzienice epitomises a movement towards both ends of the continuum from artificiality to authenticity, from the open performativity of the twice-behaved to the everyday-ness of the behaved, as encountered in expeditions. Artificiality is cultivated through the attempt to "expand the actor's *instrumentarium*."²⁹ The actors should be capable of executing challenging acrobatics, energetic dances, or choreographies based on iconography, while voicing poetic texts and a wide range of songs. However, Staniewski, inspired by distinctly local rituals, the directedness of transmission in oral cultures, the Polish concept of *pieknoduch* (\approx esthete), and the Ancient Greek notion of *paideia* (\approx education), searches for the originality of encounter between trainees or performers that will constitute the nucleus of truthful expression in all his

attempts.³⁰ Staniewski has summarised this attitude as being in search of an actor who is “truthfully artificial.”³¹ Towards this end, the main principles underpinning the training of Gardzienice are those of musicality and mutuality, the emphasis given to the ensemble, as well as the cultivation of an approach towards voice that begins with the actor’s physicality.

The origins of these principles can be traced back to Bakhtin’s analytical discourse; the unifying force behind the first two is his discussion of dialogue. Bakhtin, being a proponent of dialogism in literary theory and linguistics, extends this concept to his philosophical investigation of the Act and the individual’s participation in Being:

Two worlds confront each other, two worlds that have absolutely no communication with each other and are mutually impervious: the world of culture and the world of life, the only world in which we create, cognize, contemplate, live our lives and die or—the world in which the acts of our activity are objectified and the world in which these acts actually proceed and are actually accomplished once and only once. An act of our activity, of our actual experiencing, is like a two-faced Janus [...]: it looks at the objective unity of a domain of culture and the never-repeatable uniqueness of actually lived and experienced life.³²

In other words, Bakhtin suggests that each action partakes simultaneously in the timeless concept of dialogue and the implications emerging in the present, contingent dialogue within the given circumstances; each action is situated within a complex nexus of response-abilities towards the eternal, logical or

moral (in its philosophical meaning) *and* the necessity and liveliness of the moment. Through this prism, each act is axiomatically dialogic and presupposes and cultivates an intricate network of reciprocal connections. This is a useful tool in order to comprehend Staniewski's distinction between a method and a codified training process; the first is closer to "the objective unity of a domain of culture," while the second highlights the importance of a set of principles re-invented in each "never-repeatable" encounter—Staniewski is interested in principles, not systems, and sees each moment of the training as unique and located at the center of mutually influenced lived presences.

Therefore, Staniewski's training should be understood as situated within the tensions between each *specific* dialogue and the *general condition* of dialogue: on the one hand, the concept of the grotesque body, and, on the other, the specific, exuberant, human body; the notion of carnivalesque and the particular festivity; the eternal image of the banquet and the historically specified banquet of a certain people; the ideology of Bakhtinian laughter and the physiologically concrete laughter.

Following this line of thought, it is easier to touch upon the way music is distinguished from musicality within the practices of the group. Music, according to Staniewski, is an abstraction, the codification of sounds into concrete compositions and systems of notation or intellectualized perception. Musicality is the realm of sounds beyond music, the entire array of sounding vibrations that cannot be easily explained, notated or reduced to our listening and voicing habits. Recent developments in evolutionary musicology have confirmed that "[m]usic may be considered as a product of social forces, whereas musicality is principally a biological phenomenon."³³ Contrary to the cultural specificity of music,

musicality includes the biological ability to make and perceive any sound. Therefore, in terms of human voicing, music can be understood as the superficial level of melodic and rhythmic schemes. Musicality, on the contrary, provides access to each performer's physiology, each performer's unique bodily imprint as encapsulated in the voice: "Musicality exists only if it is in permanent connection with its source. Musicality speaks about identity, it identifies, it says who I am and what I am doing here."³⁴

Staniewski draws on a variety of sources to explain and solidify his concept of musicality: "the psychagogic power the Greeks attributed to music,"³⁵ the Sami practice of *yoiking*, or the rediscovery of Hellenistic musical philosophy during the Renaissance, among others.³⁶ *Yoiking* is a voicing practice of the Nordic Sami; Staniewski is fascinated by the subtle nuances of the term "to *yoik*," which could be considered synonymous with "to sing." "I *yoik* you" is not "I sing about you" but rather "I sing you."³⁷ *Yoiking* in this sense is a way of connecting to the other, to all manifestations of existence, and materializing them in the act of song. In the light of performativity, it is a vocal act (to broaden and paraphrase Austin's speech acts) that effects "truthful"/daily meetings through the extra-daily means of song. According to Thomas Hilder, an ethnomusicologist who is currently conducting ethnographical research on the Sami people, "[i]f I say 'I *yoik* you,' it means 'I make you present through my *yoiking*.' In the same sense, if I want to express that you bring happiness to me, I *yoik* you happiness, and the happiness is present."³⁸

In terms of the Western concept of music as extending beyond the level of aesthetics and being a notion crucial to the understanding of the cosmos, this can be traced back to the Neoplatonists and the Neopythagoreans. They distinguished

between *musica mundana*, *musica humana*, and *musica instrumentorum*: the first is the music created by the movements of the stars and the heavens, the second allows the coexistence of the bodily and the spiritual elements in the human being, and the third is the instrumental as well as the vocal music.³⁹ Similarly, Staniewski talks about musicality as *musica vita* (music of life, or life music) and links it to the concept of *harmonia mundi* (harmony of the world), in a Bakhtinian gesture of perceiving at the same time the entirety of the musicality of the world and the interconnections between the musicalities of the individual in their relation to the environment and history. Therefore, in the practices of Gardzienice musicality becomes a sociological and ecological term as well, revealing an ethical stance towards all aspects of the world and human activity: “I am utterly convinced that the earth is musical, that it has musicality and that every part of nature can be musical [...]. When the strings of the earth’s musicality break, the earth dies.”⁴⁰ In this sense, vocal expression is invested with a performative character of cosmological dimensions.

The training of Gardzienice exhibits a tripartite relationship to musicality. The first step is to widen the trainee’s perception and sensibility beyond music and towards musicality, as exemplified in the expeditions to “the university of the countryside.” Then, the perceived musicality needs to be absorbed in their training practices—the “revival” of the stone fragments illustrating this stage. Finally, for every new performance, new ways of allowing musicality to inform all its aspects should be explored.⁴¹ Staniewski implies that every component of the performance rises from musicality. First, the musical material is learnt and repeated, as in an act of allowing a mantra to exert, through its musical structure, a specific spiritual function. Then, out of this deeply embodied musical structure,

out of the wholeness of the musical “score” and its choral/group lifeline, the characters emerge: “In this moment, the actor no longer produces the voice—the voice is already a given, functioning somehow like the actor’s alter ego; and in this moment, for the spectator, it is as if the space is sounding.”⁴² Even in performance, the idea of openness and dialogue is applied to the voicing of the actors, whose voice is defined more in relation to their connection to the group and the space rather than their individual physicality.

Mutuality,⁴³ the principle of meeting the other, working with them or simply *being* with them in a deeply collaborative partnership, is also inspired by a variety of literary and lived sources: Socratic dialogue, Plato’s idea of shame, “the underlying idea of dialogue and correspondence” of the Polish folk repertoire,⁴⁴ the spontaneous interactions encountered in gatherings, Zeami’s concept of the “flower,” and, once more, the Sami *yoiking*.⁴⁵ Of course, Bakhtin’s discussion of the grotesque, ever-interactive and non-delimited body is of paramount importance. Influenced by all the above-mentioned ideas and principles, the training practices at the village of Gardzienice are founded on the concept that the body should not be merely understood as the individualized by-product of the advent of industrialization, or of the processes which led to what Bakhtin names “the bourgeois ego.”⁴⁶ The individual physiology is trained towards a state of alertness and responsiveness, which, in a sense, erases its own importance and places the emphasis on what takes place among mutually interacting physiologies. To put it in a deliberately oxymoronic way, the Gardzienice performer’s body exists only in co-existence.

The point of convergence between the principles of musicality and mutuality in the practices of the company is the use of the breath. Breathing is

not only the mechanical basis of phonation; it becomes the source of the common vibrations of the polyphonic voicing, the foundation of a shared rhythm in morning exercises or night running, as well as the principal form of communication in physical sequences. This understanding of musicality and mutuality as communicating vessels is of paramount importance in my discussion of physiovocality. Furthermore, for the same reason, it is essential to note that mutuality, in its purest form, the form of being in relation to a partner, or even to a transcendental Other, denotes a connection to a whole which is “gay and gracious,”⁴⁷ with connotations of happiness: “In Old Church Slavonic the word ‘*bog*’ (god) had three meanings: ‘fate-lot-happiness.’ Experience [sic] shared mutuality gives happiness. Cognition and positive sensation changes into sadness, if we do not share with Another.”⁴⁸

This idea of openness and constant interconnection with the members of the group is cultivated through what I term the choral character of all training, performance-related and everyday activities. The philosophical groundings of the principle lay, once more, in Bakhtin’s propositions, encapsulated in his understanding of the festival-type activities of the Middle Ages, hosted by and targeted to the “chorus of the laughing people.”⁴⁹ I understand the entirety of the group’s endeavors as choral encounters, not only because of their all-out, musicokinesthetic tone, but also because of the primordial emphasis placed on the dynamics of the group at all stages of artistic and non-creative processes. In the performances, the role of the group is stressed to such an extent that Hutera describes Gardzienice as “a collective human flame,”⁵⁰ and Niziolek states that in *Elektra* “the theatrical reality becomes polycentric.”⁵¹ The omnipresent group, out of which individual characters emerge only to be absorbed by it again, takes

in *Avvakum* the role of the mob, in *Carmina* that of the choir, in *Metamorphoses* that of Plato's "family," and in *Elektra* and *Iphigenia* that of the tragic chorus. Solos are used as exceptional dramaturgical devices; even in these instances, the actors react to sounds, provocations, or the spatial configurations created by the group. The idiosyncratic nature of solos in Gardzienice performances urges Staniewski to claim that "parting is a sacrificial ceremony."⁵²

The principle of chorality finds, once more, parallels in such sources as the gatherings of the indigenous communities visited during the expeditions, the Bakhtinian notion of carnivalesque, the dithyramb, the tragic chorus, and the antiphonal practices of Mount Athos. Staniewski, inspired by the notion of *zgromadziciel* (gatherer), sees himself as a conductor of the group's choral encounters.⁵³ Moreover, he often creates an alter-ego of a "master of ceremonies" who paces and orchestrates the group's performances from the inside; this is the case with the accompanying violinist in *Avvakum*, the magician Merlin in *Carmina* or the figure of Euripides in *Elektra*.

In the everyday activities of the group, teaching, administrative and "housekeeping" tasks are evenly allocated, while students of the Academy and workshop performers are encouraged to participate. Thus, in each synchronic cut, the Centre for Theatre Practices is animated by a different "constellation," to use Staniewski's term. Regarding the company's voice pedagogy, the emphasis is mostly placed on group voicing. This is not only the appropriate context to put into practice Staniewski's vision of a new natural, de-urbanised environment for theatre, but also becomes a means through which spontaneity and expressivity are encouraged within the group and ego-related inhibitions are surpassed.

As for the fourth principle, the *through-the-body approach* to voice, and performing in general, it is important to reiterate that in Staniewski's cosmological understanding of theater, the body is a dynamic aggregation of historically, philosophically and individually specified forces. The physicality of the actor is moulded by memories and archetypes evident in social gestures of indigenous traditions and iconographic paradigms of such ancient cultures as the Greek-Roman antiquity. Through the reassembling of hidden traces of musicality residing in the actor, the body becomes a microcosmic representation of the cosmos and of unity. In its movement towards extreme physical expressivity, the soma reaffirms Bakhtin's topography of the grotesque body; cartwheels and the movements of the clown (the buttocks taking the place of the head and vice versa), considered parallels of the rotation of earth and sky, symbolize the mingling of high and low culture.⁵⁴

Singing and movement, the creation of bodily images and aural landscapes, are inextricable in Staniewski's directing and of equal merit in the creation of the tone for each piece. The transmission of these melodies within the company follows a similar pattern. Rhythm is embodied through touch and stomping, while melody is taught with gestures. Considering the melismatic complexity of the company's songs (both those of the repertory and the material explored in training), gesticulation is an embodied, visually engaging and easily followed pedagogical tool. In the language of these invisible neumes drawn by the performers' hands in the air, movements upwards or downwards translate into changes of pitch, while movements on the horizontal axis can either signpost duration or volume, depending on the context and the particular moment within the song. On a deeper level, teaching through gesticulated neumes, if compared

to reading a score, brings the emphasis to the group. The need for imitation and the subconscious following of the pulsating choral movements of the hands and the arms, especially when done with the speed and high energy of Gardzienice performers, entrain a common rhythm, leave no time for intellectual processing and immediately establish an embodied relation to voicing.

In terms of the company's research into Ancient Greek practices, Wildstein rightly emphasizes the difference between the constructive and expressive kinds of artistic creation, and situates Staniewski's work within the choreatic (expressive) strand, which encompassed dance, music and poetry in an inextricable whole.⁵⁵ Staniewski, in his *Humanities* lecture (2005), relates that the first performers of tragedy sang, spoke and danced, but due to lack of breath they were unable to sing properly; thus, the separation and discipline-based organization of performing arts, still prevalent in the West, was established. However, Staniewski reverses this tendency and, in his training, acrobatics, running, *cheironomia* and iconograms become “physical ways of tapping into the voice”—or, to resort to his own terminology, “a song of the body.”⁵⁶

These main principles of Gardzienice's training, in tandem with the characteristics it inherited from its Polish folk roots (centrality of the voice, heterogeneity, and tension between strict structure and spontaneity), make it necessary to clarify that such elements as rhythmic patterns, modes and melodic features are not rigidly conventionalized. These are constructs directly related to music, and, as explained above, musicality is far more important in Staniewski's vision of theater. Therefore, any analysis of these elements in the company's training should be regarded as an attempt to grasp recurrent musical traits rather than to outline unyielding rules. Put differently, the aesthetic codification

presented through the performances is often less pressing an issue than the organic embodiment of the principles of mutuality and musicality.

Toward a theater of musicality

This working ethics has found applications extending beyond the rural homebase of the company. Through years of long- and short-term collaborations, nationwide and international touring, teaching, demonstrating and lecturing, a Gardzienice “landscape” has already begun to be formulated.⁵⁷ The availability of electronic sources has also facilitated its recent expansion and the establishment and maintenance of a wide network of audiences, scholars, collaborators, artists and aficionados.⁵⁸ Central to this activity is the company’s archives department, based at the offices in Lublin. However, tape-recording of voice sessions has not yet invaded the pedagogy and the use of electronic media in the training room is strictly prohibited. This is not only an outcome of the oral memorization techniques employed in the training. Gardzienice voice training, with its all-body character and the relational physiology as its “grain,” to employ Barthes’s term, cannot be realised outside the given constellation/ensemble.

My fieldwork with both Gardzienice and several “parts” of its landscape has illustrated that their common denominator is not an aesthetically fixed use of the voice. Each company and artist has developed distinct performance styles and has been inspired by Staniewski in a way that is in dialogue with their own artistic pursuits. The major axis around which their activity develops is formed by the notions of polyphony, expedition, mutuality and musicality, the training process through which physiovocality is understood on the level of inter-subjectivity, and the subsequent attempts to create performance contexts which

promote a new understanding of sounding and gathering-type participation.

Given that musicality is, to Staniewski's eyes, the most effective path to interconnectedness, "the most open channel to communication," one can see this lineage of productions and practices as attempts to create "[a] theatre from the spirit of sounds."⁵⁹

Conclusion

I cannot deny that there is a certain allure of mysticism in Staniewski's terminology and theoretical formulations. In concluding, however, I wish to return to the main questions of this chapter and, more broadly, of this volume. What is the performativity of singing and gesturing in Gardzienice's case? In other words, what is effected through what is articulated here as physiovocality? In searching for an answer, the densely heteroglossic fabric of Gardzienice's performances or their episodic, abstract and explicitly choral character point away from the semantics or syntactics of performance as the main agents of performativity. Conveying characters or the meaning of songs and movements does not seem to be Staniewski's main interest. It is in the contexts of voicing, in the vocal pragmatics, to borrow from semiotics, that his core concerns are revealed. His main focus is on processes rather than aesthetics. The anthropological expeditions and long-term training of his company cultivate an ethics of openness, vulnerability, and sensitive listening and voicing. The complex dialogues between the soma and the voice in Gardzienice's pedagogy systematize an embodied understanding of physiovocality as expressive of individual and collective identity. In other words, what the materiality of gesture and singing are designed to effect is the implementation of a specific type of

desire, the performer's desire for interpersonal, "I-thou" physiovocal communication.

In the case of the performances, however, I see this desire as less tangible, as the analysis needs to shift from the kinesthetically palpable to a glimpse of something verging on the affective. The spectauditors are not only to partake in the sharing of the company's inter-corporeal principles and ethics; as outlined in the first section, Staniewski wishes to invite them to his broader understanding of the world as musical. If we, capitalizing on Staniewski's accounts as well as related concerns of evolutionary musicology, identify music as a socio-cultural praxis and musicality as its biological grounding,⁶⁰ then Gardzienice's work is significant in advocating another taxonomy of musico-theatrical performance. Staniewski's pieces and the considerable corpus of his students' and collaborators' work seem more accurately theorized not as music or musical theaters but rather as *theaters of musicality*. This new taxonomy comprises theaters that (aspire to) go beyond employing music as their main expressive means. They inculcate, instead, a systematic belief that all aspects of the theatrical event can be devised, perceived and comprehended as musical behavior. In this sense, and if Jill Dolan is right in suggesting that theater can make "palpable an affective vision of how the world might be better,"⁶¹ it does not seem unfair to speculate that, for Staniewski, there is only one utopian performative: to give his audiences a glimpse of the world as an undeniably musical one.

¹ Extract from the author's training logbook, 11 September 2009. Oficyna is the central building in the company's base in the village. Carmina is one of the performance spaces, named after one of the long-standing performances in

Gardzienice's repertoire, *Carmina Burana*. "Euoi Backhai" is a newly composed song, inspired by Ancient Greek exclamations in celebration of god Dionysus.

"Hai-Hai-Hai-Ha-Ee-Ha" is a vocal drill devised by the group.

² The term was first suggested by Polish critic Leszek Kolankiewicz and is quoted in Alison Hodge, "Włodzimierz Staniewski: Gardzienice and the Naturalised Actor," in *Actor Training*, ed. Alison Hodge, (London: Routledge, 2010), 268-87.

³ Former Gardzienice actor Grzegorz Bral is responsible for coining the term, see Paul Allain, "Gardzienice: A Village, a Theatre, and a Cultural Crossroads," *New Theatre Quarterly* 2 (1993): 48-58.

⁴ Włodzimierz Staniewski and Alison Hodge, *Hidden Territories: The Theatre of Gardzienice* (London: Routledge, 2004), 109.

⁵ See, among others, Włodzimierz Staniewski, "Iphigenia at A...: Oxford Lecture" (Magdalen College, Oxford, 26 October 2009).

⁶ Yana Zarifi, "Staniewski's Secret Alphabet of Gestures: Dance, Body and Metaphysics," in *The Ancient Dancer in the Modern World*, ed. Fiona Macintosh, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 399.

⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 19.

⁸ Włodzimierz Staniewski, "Baltimore Interview with Richard Schechner" (*The Drama Review* 113:1, 1987): 137-63.

⁹ This is quoted in Paul Allain, *Gardzienice: Polish Theatre in Transition* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 39.

¹⁰ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. Eugenio Barba, (London: Methuen, 1969), 69.

¹¹ Richard Brestoff, *The Great Acting Teachers* (USA: Smith and Kraus, 1995), 155.

¹² Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions* (London: Routledge, 1995), 21.

¹³ Grotowski, *Poor*, 188-89.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 151 and 174.

¹⁵ I have translated the passage from its transcription in Greek, in Konstantinos Themelis, *Enestos Diarkeias: Synantisi me ton Jerzy Grotowski [Present Continuous: A Meeting with Jerzy Grotowski]* (Athens: Indiktos, 2001), 125.

¹⁶ Grotowski, *Poor*, 165-66.

¹⁷ This dialogue between Grotowski and Staniewski should not be seen as one-way. Shortly after Staniewski left, with the clear intention of exploring the musicality of marginalised ethnic minorities, Grotowski entered his “Theatre of the Sources” period (1976-1982). Expeditions to Haiti, Mexico, India, Eastern Poland and Nigeria and the idea of roots became central to his new vision of artistic discoveries, as outlined in Lisa Wolford, “Grotowski’s Vision for the Actor,” in Hodge, *Actor Training*, 191-208. Also, in 1991, Rodowicz, Staniewski’s collaborator, visited Pontedera, Grotowski’s base in Italy, and worked with Grotowski on folksongs, as documented in Allain, *Transition*, 55.

¹⁸ Anna Czekanowska even contrasts ritual songs with entertainment songs and concludes that “the music of entertainment is definitely Polish,” in *Polish Folk Music: Slavonic Heritage-Polish Tradition-Contemporary Trends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 103.

¹⁹ In 2003 Rychly and Rodowicz co-founded Theatre Association Chorea, so as to explore further their discoveries related to the music of Ancient Greece, their

“dream of capturing” the “living brilliance” of ancient music, as affirmed in Maciej Rychly, “Untitled Note,” in sleevenotes to *Metamorfozy, Music of Ancient Greece*, Universal 5423692 (2000) [Compact Disc], 9.

²⁰ Staniewski and Hodge, *Territories*, 128.

²¹ This is an edited section from an extensive interview between Anna-Helena McLean and the author in London, in December 2009.

²² Staniewski and Hodge, *Territories*, 82-92.

²³ See Zarifi, “Alphabet,” for a broad contextualization of Staniewski’s system of gestures.

²⁴ In Phoebe Hoban, “Euripides in Bacchanal (it’s Also One of His Plays)” (*The New York Times*, 13 April 2005: E7), n.pag.

²⁵ For a detailed transcription and analysis of the musico-textual properties of the surviving fragments, refer to Egert Pöhlmann and Martin L. West, *Documents of Ancient Greek Music: The Extant Melodies and Fragments Edited and Transcribed with Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²⁶ The methodological continuum from nationalism to universalism is discussed in Dobrochna Ratajczakowa, “In Transition: 1989-2004,” trans. and ed. Paul Allain and Grzegorz Ziolkowski, *Contemporary Theatre Review* 15:1 (2005): 17-27. The symbiotic or antagonistic coexistence of the literary and visual strands in Polish theatre is the thematic axis in Kathleen Cioffi, “New (and Not-So-New) Alternatives,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 15:1 (2005): 69-83. Oliver Taplin investigates the icocentric and philodramatist approaches in *Pots & Plays: Interactions Between Tragedy and Greek Vase-painting of the Fourth Century B.C.* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2007), 22-26.

²⁷ See Rychly, “Note,” 12.

²⁸ In Allain, *Transition*, 60.

²⁹ Staniewski and Hodge, *Territories*, 65.

³⁰ Staniewski is quoted as saying: “In Poland we speak of *pieknoduch*, one who is cultivating his own beauty. I wanted to go into the eye of the cyclone or, if you like, the heart of darkness,” in Donald Hutera, “Religion and Ritual,” *The Glasgow Herald* (1 May 1989), n.pag. One such figure for Staniewski is the legendary violin player Magur. For the Ancient Greek notion of *paideia*, see Giovanni Comotti, *Music in Greek and Roman Culture*, trans. Rosaria V. Munson, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); David Binning Monro, *The Modes of Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford: Elibron Classics, 2005); and Włodzimierz Staniewski, “*Gardzienice*” *Practising the Humanities*, CD-ROM (Gardzienice: Dialog and Institut Teatralny, 2005).

³¹ See Staniewski, “Oxford.”

³² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, trans. Vadim Liapunov, ed. Vadim Liapunov and Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 2.

³³ Barry Ross, “Challenges Facing Theories of Music and Language Co-evolution,” *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* 6 (2009): 61-76.

³⁴ Staniewski and Hodge, *Territories*, 64.

³⁵ Comotti, *Music*, 6.

³⁶ Staniewski also quotes Milton in his research for fragments of musicality: “Milton is positive in saying, ‘Look for the pieces,’” in Staniewski and Hodge, *Territories*, 23.

³⁷ See Włodzimierz Staniewski, *Gardzienice, Poland*, DVD-ROM, eds. Peter Hulton and Dorinda Hulton, (Exeter: Arts Archives, 1993).

³⁸ From email exchange with the author in February 2010.

³⁹ See also Comotti, *Music*, 47.

⁴⁰ Staniewski and Hodge, *Territories*, 63.

⁴¹ Staniewski understands devising as “musical dramaturgy,” and elaborates in this principle in “Carmina Burana: Director’s Note,” in *Hidden Territories*, Arts Archives CD-ROM, eds. Włodzimierz Staniewski, Alison Hodge and Peter Hulton, (London: Routledge, 2004). Albert Hunt sees even the visual elements of the performances in close-knit connection to musicality: “the musicality of Gardzienice’s theatre language is made up of a highly organized structure of complex images,” in “Gardzienice: An Introduction,” in *Gardzienice, Poland*, DVD-ROM, eds. Peter Hulton and Dorinda Hulton, (Exeter: Arts Archives, 1993), 3-12.

⁴² See Staniewski, *Gardzienice* 18.

⁴³ For the most extensive discussion of this principle in the literature, see Staniewski and Hodge, *Territories*, 72-101.

⁴⁴ Czekanowska, *Folk*, 131.

⁴⁵ Socrates is well known as a proponent of a dialogic concept of philosophical inquiry. His student, Plato discusses several aspects of the idea of shame (example given, as an ethics underlying friendship or, in the public sphere, as a motivator of justice), in several of his works, such as *The Apology of Socrates*, *Crito*, *The Symposium*, or *Gorgias*. The concept of Zeami’s “flower” has been much discussed and debated; the purpose of the actor is to allow their “flower” to blossom. Staniewski proposes this as the obligation of the partner: to make their colleague’s “flower” flourish, in Staniewski and Hodge, *Territories*, 82.

⁴⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 19.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 474.

⁴⁸ Staniewski, *Humanities*, n.pag.

⁴⁹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 474.

⁵⁰ Hutera, “Religion,” n.pag.

⁵¹ Niziolek Grzegorz. “Gardzienice: ‘Elektra,’” *Le Théâtre en Pologne-Theatre in Poland* 1-2 (2004): 41-44.

⁵² Staniewski, *Humanities*, n. pag.

⁵³ Staniewski and Hodge, *Territories*, 97.

⁵⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 353.

⁵⁵ Michael Billington, in his review of *Elektra*, admits that the company reminded him of the fact that Greek tragedy was intended as a “total theatre experience rather than a restrained poetic event,” in “Metamorphoses/Elektra,” *The Guardian* (2 February 2006), [Online] Available:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2006/feb/02/theatre?INTCMP=SRCH>. [10

March 2011]. A cross-reading of the notion of choreatic expression and

Gardzienice’s work can be found in Bronislaw Wildstein, “Theatrical Mediations and Dionysian Intoxication: On ‘Metamorphoses’ by Gardzienice,” trans.

Agnieszka Ginko-Humphries and Carl Humphries, in Staniewski, Hodge and Hulton, *Hidden Territories*, n.pag.

⁵⁶ The first formulation of the principle is derived from an interview with Yale voice coach Pamela Prather, who visited Gardzienice in 2008 and worked with performers and trainees. For a discussion of the latter formulation, look at Staniewski and Hodge, *Territories*, 87.

⁵⁷ For the most detailed discussion of Gardzienice’s influence in the literature, consult Alison Hodge, “Gardzienice’s Influence in the West,” *Contemporary*

Theatre Review 15:1 (2005): 59-68. See also, Dariusz Kosinski, *Polish Theatre Perspectives: Theatre "Out of the Spirit of Music"* 2:2 (2011). In Poland, companies inspired by Gardzienice or founded by ex-members are Pogranicze (led by Krzysztof Czyzewski and Malgorzata Sporek-Czyzewska), Muzyka Kresow (by Jan Bernard), Teatr Wiejski Wegajty (by Wolfgang Niklaus and Malgorzata Dzygadło-Niklaus), Studium Teatralne (by Piotr Borowski), Teatr Piesn Kozla (by Grzegorz Bral and Anna Zubrzycka), Teatr Zar (by Jaroslaw Fret and apprentices of the Grotowski Institute) and Theatre Association Chorea (by Tomasz Rodowicz and Maciej Rychly). Companies working in other countries are Double Edge Theatre in the USA (by Stacy Klein), Theatre Gargantua in Canada (by Jacquie P. Thomas), Tanto Theatre in Austria (by Jan Tabaka and Susanna Tabaka-Pillhofer), Stella Polaris in Norway (by Per Borg), Earthfall in Wales (by Jim Ennis), Oyfn Veg in Germany (by Christian Bredholt and Uta Motz), The Quick and the Dead (by Alison Hodge), Moon Fool (by Anna-Helena McLean, Christopher Sivertsen and Ian Morgan) and Waving Not Drowning (by Andrei Biziorek) in the UK. Also, artists that have been influenced by Staniewski's vision include British director and National Theatre associate Katie Mitchell, Viliam Docolomansky, artistic director of Farm in the Cave, and Yale voice coach Pamela Prather, among others.

⁵⁸ CD Roms, videos and DVDs of performances, documentaries on expeditions and training, CDs published by the Ancient Orchestra project, and a frequently updated website all contribute to the dissemination of the work. See Wlodzimierz Staniewski, "*Gardzienice*" *Practising the Humanities*, CD-ROM (Gardzienice: Dialog and Institut Teatralny, 2005); Peter Hulton and Dorinda Hulton, eds.,

Gardzienice, Poland, DVD-ROM (Exeter: Arts Archives, 1993); and Staniewski, Hodge and Hulton, *Hidden Territories*.

⁵⁹ Staniewski and Hodge, *Territories*, 47.

⁶⁰ See Ian Cross and Iain Morley, “The Evolution of Music: Theories, Definitions and the Nature of the Evidence,” in *Communicative Musicality*, eds. Stephen Malloch and Colwyn Trevarthen, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 61-82.

⁶¹ In Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 6.