

Jerzy Grotowski's essential search for the original wholeness:  
a genuine journey of Ramana Maharshi's path to the Heart through  
non-dual performing arts

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Grotowski explained in some occasions that he had two lines of research, one public and the other one personal and private. The public line was his professional trajectory, that is the periods known as theatrical and paratheatrical, Theatre of Productions until 1969 and Paratheatre until 1978. The other line of research, his personal and essential research, started when he was ten years old with the discovery of a very special man and accompanied him for his entire life. He kept his personal search private during many years. He kept it secret surely because it was so sacred.

But for someone who is really in love with truth and wants to live this truth in all aspects of his life, he cannot keep what is most precious only in the privacy of his heart, and at the beginning of the seventies he started to share carefully his intimate and private essential research with a very small nucleus of collaborators. Around 1977 not being able to keep hiding his real work, the personal line became his official and public research, with an international project under the name of Theatre of Sources that later would be called Art as Vehicle. As Ariadne's golden thread, Grotowski's essential line of research was the return journey to our true and essential nature, our Source, our original condition, the original joyous wholeness. This essential research was his real search, his path, to which he devoted his love and his life.

Grotowski's essential research has been completely overlooked because its field is not theatre but spirituality, or verticality as he sometimes called it to avoid misunderstandings around the term «spirituality». But for some people very close to Grotowski he was considered a spiritual teacher devoted and always faithful to the hindu sage Ramana Maharshi.

Grotowski arrived to Nienadówka in 1940 at the age of seven, with his mother and brother, scaping from the nazi occupation and lived in a farm for 4 years. That was a moment of

destruction but at the same time it was a second birth for him, he felt a new life was beginning. The roots of his essential research started there. They were spontaneous direct experiences of the origin, of his original and true nature, as he would explain years later. It was a deep connection with nature, where he felt transported by the light of the natural world to the original wholeness. A profound, total, global, non rational understanding, a luminous explosion that established him spontaneously in the original silent and peaceful fullness where there is no room for suffering. To return to the experience of original joyous wholeness became his primordial desire and the profound motivation of his essential research.

During war time, around the age of ten he read Paul Brunton's book *A Search in Secret India*, and was fascinated with the great sage from Arunachala, Sri Ramana Maharshi. With this book he discovered that the return journey to our original condition, connected to the direct experiences of the origin that he had briefly tasted, was possible through the spiritual path indicated by Ramana and his non-dual teachings in the Advaita Vedanta tradition. A practical return journey to the Source of what we are, the original wholeness, our essential and true nature of pure consciousness, that Grotowski started to practise at that moment following the indications of Ramana, who became and would always be his inner-spiritual teacher. This was his initiation to spiritual life, the beginning of his true inner journey that he would follow and deepen during all his life and that Grotowski himself would consider his legacy. That was the beginning of his essential search.

After reading Brunton's book he copied all the answers given by Ramana and made a set of notes with the title «Notes on Initiation». They were notes about his initiation with Ramana, on how to practise the inner path of Self-enquiry to abide in his true Self and on how to enter into direct perception, without the filter of the conceptual conditioned mind, a perception also called spiritual, original or non-dual, that is the perception of the infinite essence in everything, to live the reality of experience. His brother photographed a picture of Ramana and of the ashram and Mount Arunachala from the book, and Grotowski never parted with these pictures. Some time later he also read all the teachings of Ramana. He had translations of Brunton's book in different languages and made everyone working with him to read the chapters about Ramana.

Brunton's book accompanied Grotowski for his entire life. In it, Paul Brunton accounts how he met his own guru, Shri Ramana Maharshi, after seeking the true and authentic spirituality all around India and founded the purest and highest spirituality in Ramana. In his teachings Ramana indicates to dive deep within yourself without attachment, to let the mind sink in the Heart of awareness and to find out the truth behind your mind, your true Self. He advises to cast aside the idea that you are the body-mind and to establish yourself in and as your true nature of pure awareness, infinite, divine, eternal. Abiding in your real Self, your innate peace will flow into you, then the belief of being a person will dissolve and you will merge totally surrendered in your Original Source of infinite awareness. Ramana's path became Grotowski's essential research, his inner journey that influenced his theatrical work and evolved privately with the discovery of the possibility of a real unveiling of himself and of the actor in a true meeting, a sacred communion, feeling a temporary dissolution of his self-imposed limitations and the revelation of his true self. In this unveiling Grotowski starts to briefly feel the peace, freedom and love inherent in our Source, that joyous fullness so longed for.

At the end of 1968 due to an intense lack of sense in his life Grotowski feels the strong need to go to India to the land of his teacher Ramana, in Tiruvannamalai and Mount Arunachala, where he makes a pilgrimage to the ashram of the great sage. He lives a strong experience feeling the presence of Ramana in himself. This provokes the beginning of a deep transformation in him, either inner and profound as well as a radical change of his external aspect. He feels clearly that he has to leave his professional trajectory in theatre and devote himself fully to his deepest and most precious primordial desire, his essential search for the original wholeness following the path of his spiritual teacher Ramana.

From 1970, after his third pilgrimage in India, Grotowski starts to share very carefully his personal and private research in the field of ancient inner techniques for the return journey to the Source indicated by Ramana with a very small nucleus of collaborators in the silence and isolation of Brzezinka's forest. It was a closed work for three years, called the «path of knowing», focused on individual work and the possibility of rediscovering direct perception and on the experience of true communion between humans, experience that Grotowski would call *Holiday*. That would be the essence of the paratheatrical experiences but

Grotowski continued to develop this line of research almost privately with his collaborators and totally independent from the open and public paratheatrical activities conducted by his colleagues from the Theatre Laboratory, which were focused on group experience and which would be shared gradually with larger groups of people and known as Paratheatre. Grotowski's personal and private line of research on the Advaita inner journey to the Original Source following the teachings of Ramana was known publicly around 1977 as Theatre of Sources. So, Theatre of Sources is not the continuation of the line of work of Theatre of Productions and Paratheatre as it is normally presented, but the continuation and opening of Grotowski's personal path, shared privately with a few collaborators from 1970 to 1976, becoming his official line of research with the international project Theatre of Sources around 1977, and finally would culminate under the name of Art as Vehicle. That was his one and only essential research, to find a practical way to access our Original Source of non-dual awareness, where we establish our selves in and as open transparent impersonal awareness. That's the path to the experience of non-duality which is the heart of all great spiritual traditions.

Grotowski gives us clear hints of the Advaita return journey to the source indicated by Ramana and followed by himself since he was a child, in the text Performer, the key text on the final stage of his essential research, and also in his last lectures from 1997-98, where the last session was devoted to «Ramana Maharshi and the return path to the Original state, the Beginning». To see Performer in the light of non-dual understanding and the teachings of Ramana Maharshi, who was Grotowski's real inner teacher, and also taking into account Grotowski's last detailed reflections on his essential research and personal path, gives us a whole new and profound understanding of Grotowski's real work and transmission.

Ramana's words and message are shining behind all the text. The whole text is an indication of the return journey to our Original Source, our essential nature of pure objectless consciousness. According to Grotowski the last part, called The inner man, is a description of this return journey to our true Self, indicated by Ramana, but using a European analogy of this process with the words of Master Eckhart. First it says «Between the inner man and the outer man there is the same infinite difference as between the heaven and the earth.» That is the infinite difference between truth and illusion. The inner man is what we are and the

outer man is what we erroneously think we are. According to the text when we are established in what we are, in our real self, our essence, the inner man, infinite and eternal, there is peace, freedom, love, joy, complete fullness. That's our home, our origin, the beginning. There, there are no objects because it is the infinite source of all potentialities. It is prior to anything finite, prior to the mind, prior to duality. It is the mind which divides the seamless intimacy of our experience into a multiplicity and diversity of objects. When we go out from our home and enter into objective human experience, we apparently separate ourselves from our source and we identify ourselves with the body-mind, finite and temporary. That's the birth of the outer man, the separate self, ego or person. And so, feeling to be a finite fragment of the infinite totality that we really are, we feel incomplete, a sense of lack, and believing to be temporary we feel fear, insecure, thus we feel in us the need to return to the freedom and peace of our original condition, our essential being. Here begins the spiritual return journey to our essence.

In *Performer*, Grotowski gives us some practical details about this essential path using the sacred words of the Rig Veda Samhita and the Mundaka Upanishad, spiritual ancient hindu texts about the supreme knowledge. They speak about the knowledge of our true nature and the primordial unity with our true self of infinite eternal awareness, with the parable of the two birds. There is one bird who picks and the other one who looks on, says Grotowski. The bird who looks on is the inner man, that in us which is aware of our essential and true nature of awareness, in peace, and the bird who picks is the outer man, the illusory entity appearing from our identification with the body-mind. Identified with the limits and destiny of the body-mind we are destined to suffer.

The inner process Grotowski teaches, which he learned from Ramana, is the inner itinerary through the vertical axiality of Being, from the outer man manifested in time to the still presence outside time, which is immortal. Time appears with thought so outside time again means prior to the appearance of the mind. Prior to the mind we find its source, its essence, that is just pure awareness, non-dual awareness. In this process we go from ignorance, ignoring our true nature, to knowledge, first hand experiential knowledge of our true and essential being. That's real knowledge, it is the knowing coming from direct experience and

not theories or believes, coming from doing and not from thinking. Knowledge is a matter of doing, says Grotowski.

In the text Grotowski uses the expression from Ramana, the I-I, to indicate the journey from the illusory I to the true I. From the thought made I to the I that is the real I, from the I-Thought, that is the mind, to the I-I, that is the presence of awareness. We disattache ourselves from the believe to be the body-mind where we were totally lost in experience, we make a step back, we establish ourselves as the bird who looks on, as that which is aware, and realize that we are not the body-mind, the bird who picks. The body-mind, a flow of thoughts, sensations and perceptions, is perceived by us. If I'm not the body-mind, Who am I then? That's Ramana's Self-enquiry's question, the sacred invitation that iniciates the inner process to our true I. We are that which perceives the body-mind-world, we are that which is present and aware, we are awareness. Desidentified from name and form, we can establish ourselves and abide in and as our real nature, the still presence of awareness. In the inner process of abidance in our true and only Self of unlimited and ever present, inherently peacefull and unconditionally fulfilled awareness takes place a transformation of energy, from believing and feeling to be the body-mind to the spacious abidance as awareness; a transformation from the density of matter to the subtlety, transparency and luminosity of consciousness. As Grotowski says, from heavy organic energies to subtil energies.

This inner process is the first step in Ramana's and Grotowski's path. But that's half stage of the process. That's the Vedanta or inward facing aspect of the Advaita or non-duality path. That's the position of the witness, where there is still duality. The two birds.

During many years Grotowski developped and refined sourcing active techniques to access and abide in our original source. This sourcing primal actions are a bridge between experience and the Source of what we are. The term Performer refers to this sourcing actions and not to a person, as the obstacle in the inner path is the believe and feeling to be a person, a separate self, the outer man. That's why Ramana says «One cannot see God and yet retain individuality». But a rational recognition of that it's not enough. Our patterns of thinking and feeling have taken their shape, over the years, from the belief and feeling to be a separate self, and only reasoning cannot touch all of our conditioned tendencies deeply rooted in the

body. And the body has only two possibilities or to express the fears, needs and anxieties of the separate self or to manifest the peace and love inherent in awareness.

Grotowski discovered that one way to escape the habits of the mind and body is through sourcing non-dual actions that allow us to feel the dissolution of the sense of separation and of the habit of being located in the body, implying the dissolution of the feeling to be a limited entity or person. The body-mind liberated from the tyranny of the ego or person is given the opportunity to integrate into its original condition of openness, receptivity, sensitivity, availability, transparency, lovingness, aliveness. Totally surrendered without any resistance, the body is in total osmosis with the source-essence—that's Grotowski's «body of essence»— and the flow of life flows freely through this openness, this open channel, and flourishes in all its potentialities. The sourcing action-relation flowing freely from the Source, without the obstacle-contraction of the person, springs up organically from the background of silent and vigilant awareness, and is a direct manifestation of the qualities of peace, freedom, love, fullness, aliveness, inherent in our Source-Being.

The body, being a transparent openness, allows the original truth to impregnate every aspect of our experience with its vibrant aliveness, unconditional joy, imperturbable peace and primordial fullness. This process means also a transformation of the way we perceive, from dual perception—the habitual way divided into subject-object—to original non-dual direct perception. Without feeling located, the contracted knower expands into knowing and realize that all we ever enter in contact with is the knowing of our experience. The knower and the known merge into knowing. The conceptual division of our experience dissolves into awareness and we experience the original non-duality; the reality of our experience. The world, seen in the light of impersonal awareness, reveals itself as a permanent miracle, a divine display that celebrates its invisible source. That's the second aspect of the journey, the outward facing path.

That was the key question for Grotowski, the conjunction or yoga of the two aspects of our reality, abidance in our true self but at the same time to be fully surrendered without resistance to the great joyous current of life. That's the Advaita or non-dual conjunction of light or divine source—the Vedanta aspect of Self-abidance or the inward facing path—and

all-embracing love —the Tantra aspect of Self-surrender or the outward facing path. Truth and love. Repose and movement. Awareness and experience. Grotowski's path implies the complete Advaita journey where the two aspects, the formless Absolute or Consciousness and the manifested world or experience merge in a genuine, complete-whole, unique spiritual journey. Grotowski, a closet Advaita teacher, has the uniqueness of reintegrating the wholeness, the completeness of the genuine Advaita path in the experience of primordial original non-duality. As Grotowski says in the text, in experience the couple, the two birds, doesn't appear as separate, but as full, unique. Not two. A-dvaita. It means not two. That's the experience of non-duality. That's Grotowski's Advaita or non-dual essential path to our Original Source.

The images he used in 1998 to show the fulfillment of this spiritual process were videos and pictures of Ramana, he didn't mention Gurdjieff at all.

Grotowski's path gives us a taste of infinity in our human experience, where we discover that awareness lives in eternity but dances in time.

Four days after Grotowski's death the words of Ludwik Flaszen were:

«As a young boy in the village of Nienadówka near Rzeszów he read a book about sages of India. His ashes are to be scattered on Mount Arunachala, near the abode of Ramana Maharshi, an indian sage to whom he was faithful for his entire life.»

**(foto Ramana-Grotowski)**

So, from 1999 Mount Arunachala, considered the spiritual centre of the world, keeps the heart of the saint Sri Ramana Maharshi and also the one of his faithful disciple Jerzy Grotowski.

**(foto Arunachala)**