

Oh, I Know I've Been Changed
Richards Schechner

Extract from the notebook of Richard Schechner concerning the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in Paris, 2-7 July 2019.

15:55

Singing workshop led by Cécile Berthe - Richards, Thomas's wife and a chief organizer of these meetings and performances. Extraordinary session into which I sank completely, experientially, ending on the floor in constructive rest, in a hypnagogic state where the singing penetrated and flooded me, knocking me semi-conscious as it awakened very deep parts of my core being. The voices of the leaders were so very very strong – deep, piercing, yet not violent in any forced way, but probing opening peeling away years if not epochs of encrustments.

The singers each started rather quietly and then slowly built up to, sank and plumbed down to, regions depths heights rarely have I been to. Sometimes, in my own workshops, something similar. Also in Holy Ghost People the believers speaking in tongues; Divine Horsemen, where the people are 'ridden' by the spirits. Balinese sanghyang dedari trancers; Mevlevi 'dervishes'. This was at that level. The voices, as I said, start quietly but rise swiftly to high volume and great intensity. But, paradoxically, never sound strained; always profoundly relaxed, as if the singers are being led, taken, absorbed: an active passivity, a giving in to whatever is possessing them. The singers are vessels, they carry and are carried by forces sounding them. The nautical notion of 'sounding', of going as deeply as one can, of seeking the bottom, relating where a safe passage is possible. At the end of most songs – and they were each joined by the whole chorus consisting of both experienced singers from the team and those who are joining only for these days – the singer laughed. Long and hard, continuously, the kind of laughter that is coexistent with sobbing, the same call on the belly reflexes, the muscles in the chi, the nablus: the centre of the belly-brain, the gut feelings that are directly wired to early parts of the brain. This laughter sounds like sobbing then sometimes became sobs and then back to laughter. No difference, or a convergence. Then silence. And after a bit of silence another singer. All the voices were extraordinary, much stronger and profound, higher and lower, than in the public performances. As I stretched out on the floor for the last several songs, I went off and yet remained there; I existed in two worlds at the same time. At least two.