

1/2014

# DRAMATICA

STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI

1/2014

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A black and white close-up portrait of Eugenio Barba, an elderly man with short, wavy white hair. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight, gentle smile. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some foliage.

**EUGENIO  
BARBA**

Celebrating 50 years with Odin Teatret

**STUDIA  
UNIVERSITATIS BABEŞ-BOLYAI  
DRAMATICA**

**1/2014  
March**



# STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEȘ-BOLYAI DRAMATICA

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## Thematic issue

*Eugenio Barba*  
*Celebrating 50 Years with Odin Teatret*

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## Avant-propos

L'année 2014 est une année spéciale pour tous les gens de théâtre qui reconnaissent la valeur des grandes transformations apportées dans le monde de la scène européenne par les recherches des laboratoires artistiques mis en place dans les années 60. Car, cette année, nous célébrons les 50 ans du Nordisklaboratorium / Odin Teatret et un fabuleux travail de création qui a marqué les esprits des artistes et des spectateurs pendant un demi-siècle. Nous nous joignons à cette fête théâtrale en dédiant ce numéro thématique de notre revue à Eugenio Barba et à l'ensemble de la troupe de l'Odin, présents à Cluj-Napoca, en novembre 2012, à l'occasion de l'attribution du titre de *Doctor Honoris Causa* de l'Université Babeş- Bolyai à Eugenio Barba.

Ce numéro thématique spécial propose ainsi un ensemble de textes écrits par des théoriciens, praticiens, pédagogues européens, aussi bien que par les membres de l'Odin ou des proches d'Eugenio Barba, sous la forme d'articles, études, interviews et témoignages. Les sections habituelles de la revue ont été enrichies par la réédition de certains textes publiés dans les années 70, qui ont trouvé leur place parmi les articles inédits, afin de raviver et de célébrer la mémoire d'un travail constant dédié corps et âme à la création théâtrale. Une section spéciale ouvre le présent volume et célèbre la présence de l'Odin à Cluj-Napoca, en proposant un ample panorama des cérémonies, rencontres, conférences qui ont eu lieu et de la réception des démonstrations individuelles de travail et du spectacle *La vie chronique* présentés devant le public roumain. Un dossier sur les Archives de l'Odin et un ensemble de comptes rendus des livres d'Eugenio Barba traduits en roumain viennent compléter la matière que nous proposons à nos lecteurs.

Heureux de pouvoir marquer ce moment exceptionnel de l'histoire du théâtre qui nous lie et unit au-delà des cultures et mœurs propres à chacun, nous rendons hommage à ces gens extraordinaires qui ont su donner vie au légendaire, en faisant de leur existence même un art.

*Les Editeurs*



## **NORDISK TEATERLABORATORIUM / ODIN TEATRET**

Odin Teatret was created in Oslo, Norway, in 1964, and moved to Holstebro (Denmark) in 1966, changing its name to Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium. Today, its members come from a dozen countries and three continents.

Today, in May 2014, the Laboratory's activities include: Odin's own productions presented on site and on tour in Denmark and abroad; "barthers" with various milieus in Holstebro and elsewhere; organisation of encounters for theatre groups; hosting other theatre groups and ensembles; teaching activity in Denmark and abroad; the annual Odin Week Festival; publication of magazines and books; production of didactic films and videos; research into theatre anthropology during the sessions of ISTA (the International School of Theatre Anthropology); periodic performances with the multicultural *Theatrum Mundi Ensemble*; collaboration with the CTLS, Centre for Theatre Laboratory Studies of the University of Århus; the *Festuge* (Festive Week) in Holstebro; the triennial festival *Transit* devoted to women in theatre; *OTA*, the living archives of Odin Teatret's memory; *WIN*, Workout for Intercultural Navigators; artists in residence; children's performances, exhibitions, concerts, round tables, cultural initiatives and community work in Holstebro and the surrounding region.

Odin Teatret's 50 years as a laboratory have resulted in the growth of a professional and scholarly milieu characterised by cross-disciplinary endeavours and international collaboration. One field of research is ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology) which since 1979 has become a performers' village where actors and dancers meet with scholars to compare and scrutinise the technical foundations of their scenic presence. Another field of action is the *Theatrum Mundi Ensemble* which, since the early 1980s, presents performances with a permanent core of artists from many professional traditions.

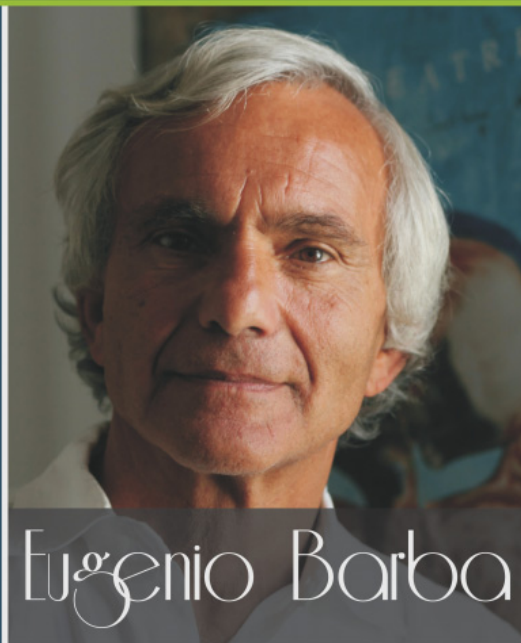
Odin Teatret has so far created 76 performances, performed in 63 countries and different social contexts. In the course of these experiences, a specific Odin culture has grown, founded on cultural diversity and the practice of "barter": Odin actors present themselves through their work to a particular milieu which, in return, replies with songs, music and dances from its own local culture. The barter is an exchange of cultural manifestations and offers not only an insight into the other's forms of expression, but is equally a social interaction which defies prejudices, linguistic difficulties and differences in thinking, judging and behaving.

**EUGENIO BARBA,**  
*DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA*  
**IN CLUJ**





UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ-BOLYAI  
FACULTATEA DE TEATRU ȘI TELEVIZIUNE



**DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA**

Ceremonia va avea loc  
vineri, 2 noiembrie 2012, ora 11,  
în Aula Magna

*Doctor Honoris Causa Ceremony Poster, Cluj-Napoca, 2012*





## *Escape to the North*

**Liviu Malița\***

*Distinguished audience,  
Dear Eugenio Barba,*

Excellence awards in the academic sphere are, obviously, a practice reserved to remarkable minds.

Undoubtedly, one such mind is Eugenio Barba, a representative personality of the theatre world since the 1960s, an artistic character our forms of tribute can only scarcely try to encompass. We could not sum up his complex activity as theatre director, theorist and pedagogue, as founder of institutions and tireless experimenter, as prestigious, widely translated author, and as passionate and resourceful cultural promoter, if we did not apply the "virtue of omission", a technique recommended by Barba himself to the actor, so that the latter does not "disperse oneself around in an excess of expressivity and vitality".

In what follows, let me make a brief outline of the most important moments in the life and activity of this remarkable personality.

Born on October 29, 1936, in Gallipoli, Italy, Eugenio Barba is a total man of the theatre, although he defines himself as "self-taught", descending from the great reformers of the twentieth century Western theatre.

Indeed, he studied, in fact, French and Norwegian literature, as well as the history of religion, at the Oslo University. In 1954, when he was only eighteen, he immigrated to Norway, where he worked as a welder and a sailor, learning on his own, as he will confess later, from simple but real workers, "what it means to believe in an idea and be ready to pay its price".

---

\* *Dean of the Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*



Eugenio Barba, Cluj-Napoca, 2012. Photo: Daria Ioan

Driven by a confident instinct of his own destiny, instead of returning home – he had postponed year after year his first attempt of becoming a lawyer! –, he then chose to study stage directing in Warsaw. That is, in a country about which he knew nothing at that time, but to which he left hastily, in 1961, with a scholarship from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, obtained at the last moment. He had made his decision after he had seen, by chance, Andrzej Wajda's film, *Ashes and Diamonds*. As Barba will state later, Wajda "made this film strictly to determine me to study theatre in Poland".

The twenty-four year old man's mind was "full of dreams" of becoming a director. His choice seemed foolish – a merely amusing substitute for other artistic professions he had wished for (such as becoming a pianist), but which, for private reasons, he could not approach: "By going at the theatre" – Eugenio Barba remembers today with self-irony – "I discovered that there is a profession – stage directing – where, while holding a cigarette in one hand, you could lie idle in a chair, order everyone around and be considered an artist".

There was nothing predictive in this assertion, as far as he was concerned, however, along his path, which would become paradigmatic, Eugenio Barba always got involved beyond his own limits, nurturing

a permanent revolt “against himself, and against his own laziness and compromises”. The orderly universe at the Military Academy he attended in his own country in Naples – which he actually had left only to replace it with the Northern translucent rigor – will be recovered at another level: in his professional accuracy, (self)constraint, and extreme scrupulosity. Perhaps one first sign of the future exceptional development is specifically this effort through which Eugenio Barba managed to transform quasi-miraculously a contextual limitation by converting it into benefit.

The “off-road” chosen by young Barba can be another sign, since it is known that taking the detour is the golden rule of any real initiation.

Therefore, after only one year, he abandons the studies in the capital of Poland, where he had managed to vex his teachers with his extreme-communist options, his views being expressed in the way in which he staged the exam-representation of *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles. Then he joined Jerzy Grotowski, at that time the artistic director of the Opole Theatre of Thirteen Rows, later transferred to Wrocław and transformed in the Laboratory Theatre. Although only three years older, Grotowski becomes immediately his acknowledged master, in whose company he will conceive the Theatre’s New Testament launching, shoulder to shoulder, a Copernican revolution in the theatre. The profound, “unnamed” relation that joined the two scholars, both of them in love with India and its culture, will never be clarified definitively. Revisiting and questioning this relationship by the end of his friend and teacher’s life, provided Barba with no satisfying answers. The one thing certain is that, in these three decisive years they’ve spent together, Eugenio Barba literally undertook the apostleship of a new theatre, which was born in a small forgotten provincial town of a communist country, and which will explode, conquering the entire world. In his own words, he will become “a conquistador in an artistic adventure”.

Less than four years later, in 1964, when Barba returned to Oslo, he was completely changed. He was different from his colleagues by more than his condition of an immigrant; he was different mostly in what concerned his totally new idea of how theatre is made. He had drawn it during the apprenticeship in Poland and had perfected it under the influence of the Kathakali theatre, which he had discovered in amazement (in fact, the adequate term is “in shock”) one year earlier, when he took his first picaresque trip to India. This crucial experience was also the foundation of his first book that bears a Proustian title, *In Search of a Lost Theatre*, written in 1965 and translated quickly “everywhere throughout the world”. This, in fact, is the beginning of a laborious approach of theatre anthropology, a new field of research that he created.



Eugenio Barba, Cluj-Napoca, 2012. Photo: Daria Ioan

A personal turn in his life will help Eugenio Barba to participate intensively, in the years to come, in the fundamental transfiguration of the theatrical language and of the European notion of theatre. His audacious creativity is fuelled by the programmatic rejection of the established norms, by the “detonation” of the “Italian box” theatre and the firm choice for a new theatre. As he states, the transformation resulted in the rediscovery and practice of training, innovations of the stage area, the modifications of the actor-spectator relationship, and the dramaturgic reconfiguration of the text. All these enabled the identification of new significations of the theatre, the inauguration of new relationships with it, the modification of the theatre’s value in the society.

Now, when the initial shockwave has been diminished, the perspective effect renders difficult the attempt to label and describe the mutations produced at that time in the European theatre, but which established a paradigm in which theatre continues its existence until today.

Certainly, specialized references mark the opposition emerging in this context between, on the one hand, the *Theatre of Ideas* or the *Theatre of Text* and, on the other hand, the *Theatre of the Body*, centered on the latter's rigorous and radical control by specifically planned training exercises, able to unleash energies otherwise seemingly inaccessible. The actor will gain privileged access to experiences occurring only in a *no man's land*, in the pre-cultural stage, when the area of the aesthetic is exceeded. But this does not mean that the area of spirituality is reached, in the religious meaning of the term, which the "moderns" contemplate more or less suspiciously. Additional to this "objective" method of training, that should provide the actor with a capacity of metamorphose rooted in his or her imagination and creative associations, a modification occurs also at the level of the spectator who becomes a "spect-actor" – a participating observer.

There was a critical threshold when an entire vision and doctrine of the theatre had changed, along with an entire mental framework. Speaking about the role played by Eugenio Barba in these critical changes, professor Ion Vartic states in his support paper that Barba is the inventor of the "new dramaturgy", which is the "terminus station" of the theatrical art in the twenty-first century. Moreover, he continues, he is "the inventor of *the third theatre*, a form of existence of this art that co-exists with the institutionalized theatre and the avant-garde theatre".

Expressing the same idea of the "third way", George Banu talks about the "writers of the stage" directors (among them Grotowski and Barba), who completed, midway through the 1960s, the classic typology that combines "performer" directors and "author" directors.

Regarding Eugenio Barba's strategy of reassembling tradition in post-modern forms – in order to capture and preserve the former's fundamental energies, a strategy to which he himself gives a Hamletian name, that of "madness with a method" – I cannot find a name different from an oxymoronic formula, such as "a traditional theatre *without tradition*". But what interests E. Barba is not tradition as cultural depository but, on the contrary, the latent energies it continues to hold hidden, the simultaneously demolishing and coagulating archetypes and symbols that transcend it.

Eugenio Barba is, again, paradoxical. In his case, the dismissal of tradition does not fall under the paradigm guided by the tendencies toward relativism of the late-modern thinking (in line with Gilles Deleuze, for instance). It rather falls under an onto-epistemic antagonistic model, interested in praising the

archetypes, understood as anthropological (hence transcultural) invariants, as modalities of giving a meaning and a purpose to daily experiences. Therefore, he keeps on working with the *forte* model, instead of replacing it with a *weakened*, postmodern one.

Nevertheless, his method never turns into dogma. The atypical search for that “laic spirituality” is fruitfully mitigated by the thoroughly learned Brechtian lesson. His representations do not follow the consolidation of the former *illusio*; instead, they propose its organized unraveling.

Going back to the biographic itinerary interrupted in mid-1960s, I will note that what followed were only unmistakable signs of constant success and triumph, at times confirming beyond measure Eugenio Barba’s early declared intent to become “a living legend”.



Auditorium in Aula Magna, Cluj-Napoca, 2012. Photo: Ioan Felecan

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, 1964, he established the now famous Odin Teatret (whose members, present here, I am glad and privileged to welcome), by recruiting several candidates rejected by the Oslo National School of Theatre, in whom he managed to instill the “idea of them becoming the chosen ones”. It is, I believe, Eugenio Barba’s most enduring and most valued construction, one that guided his own life. With the International School of Theatre

Anthropology (1979) and with *Theatrum Mundi*, the Odin laboratories contributed tremendously to the formation and development of artistic performances, of international theatrical thought and research. As noted by Professor Miruna Runcan, the author of the other support paper, “this simultaneously *coagulating and catalytic* dimension of Eugenio Barba’s personality provides the unique and inimitable features of his artistic and pedagogical standing, displaying enviable consistency”.

Therefore, with Odin Teatret, Eugenio Barba’s dream of the creation-as-permanent-revolution began. In the almost fifty years that he conducted the laboratory which is Odin Teatret and the *Theatrum Mundi* Ensemble, Eugenio Barba directed more than 70 emblematic representations for the contemporary theatre, presented at prestigious festivals in the entire world. The list of these contributions is impressive.

I will quickly mention only several of them, with the titles translated in Romanian, for reasons of efficiency:

*Ferei* (1969), *My Father’s House / Casa tatălui meu* (1972), *Brecht’s Ashes / Cenușa lui Brecht* (1980), *The Gospel according to Oxyrhyncus / Evanghelia după Oxyrhyncus* (1985), *Talabot* (1988), *Kaosmos* (1993), *Mythos* (1998), *Andersen’s Dream / Visul lui Andersen* (2004), *Ur-Hamlet* (2006), *Don Giovanni al Inferno / Don Juan în Infern* (2006), *The Marriage of Medea / Nunta Medeei* (2008) and *Chronic Life / Viața cronică*.

Although he says that he has merely built “floating islands”, Eugenio Barba has left deep, unique traces in the history of theatre in which he invested high moral value. He used the theatre as an existential and artistic strategy to acquire improved/upgraded human quality.

However, Eugenio Barba holds more than an impressive directing work; he is at the same time the author of numerous reference books, articles, essays, which have become more than mandatory bibliography for any scholar-artist in the theatre field. They are, as Miruna Runcan observes, “occasions of spiritual journey and delight”. *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, written in collaboration with Nicola Savarese (published at Routledge, in 1991 and translated at the Humanitas publishing house in 2012) remains famous, as well as his already mentioned *Alla ricerca del teatro perduto*, from 1965. To these we should selectively mention other titles such as:

- *The Floating Islands*, 1978;
- *Il Brecht dell’Odin* and *La corsa dei contrari*, 1981;
- *The Dilated Body*, 1985;
- *La canoa di carta*, 1993 (translated also in Romanian, Ed. Unitext, 2003);
- *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt* (Black Mountain Press, 1999), in Romanian: *Teatru: singurătate, meșteșug, revoltă* (Nemira, 2010);



- *La terra di cenere e diamanti*, 1999, 2004 English version (translated also in Romanian by Diana Cozma, Ed. Ideea Europeană, 2010) and, again in 1999, *Il prossimo spettacolo*;
- *Arar el cielo*, Casa de las Americas, Havana, 2002;
- *La conquista de la diferencia*, 2008;
- *On Dramaturgy and Directing. Burning the House*, Routledge, 2009 (*Casa în flăcări. Despre regie și dramaturgie*, Ed. Nemira, 2012, translated again by Diana Cozma).

His internationally renowned research has had a decisive impact on the higher education in the theatre field.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

We cannot establish limits and trace frontiers to the Barba phenomenon and, least of all, we cannot express the emotion and vibration inspired by the personality of an artist who has received so many awards and distinctions, from among which we mention: The Copenhagen University's *Sonning Prize*, the Danish Academy's Kjeld Abell Award, the Diego Fabbri Prize, the International Prize "Luigi Pirandello"; the Order of Dannebrog, Copenhagen, *Golden Gloria Artist*, Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, Wrocław, Poland.

At the same time, he holds the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* of a number of prestigious universities, from among which we mention Aarhus, Bologna, Ayacucho, Poland, Plymouth, Instituto Superior de Artes Havana, Academy of Performing Arts Hong Kong, Instituto Universitario Nacional de Artes Buenos Aires.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The title I gave to this text is *Escape to the North*; to conclude, I would like to talk about what seems to be one of Eugenio Barba's fertile contradictions, between, on the one hand, escape and revolt and, on the other hand, apprenticeship and loyalty.

As we have seen, nomadism, is a biographical constant. It derives, perhaps, from an impulse of the romantic adventurer drawn to exotic spaces, or maybe from a fundamental restlessness, which kept pushing him further to the North. The North, which fills him with "unanticipated desires", represents for him the inversely symmetrical duplicate of the Scandinavian world's nostalgia and longing for the South. North means the Pole star, extremity of the world, the Ultima Thule, a place that integrates the idea of secret and the suggestion of the dawn.

## ESCAPE TO THE NORTH

This is why, to this daring spirit the escape to the North will mean the method of reconstructing the self, a journey toward his own interiority, toward the finding of the axis and the earning of freedom. Symbolizing the inner vertebral formation, the North is to Eugenio Barba an “imaginary Himalaya of the soul”.



Moment of the Ceremony, Cluj-Napoca, 2012. Photo: Ioan Felecan

In his case, the nomad thought is not exercised in a disbanding post-modern manner but, on the contrary, with an attitude of openness and receptive admiration. By adopting the archetypal model of the stranger, Eugenio Barba moves away sufficiently to be able to critically re-interrogate his own condition, contexts and grounds, in order to ensure a high degree of inner autonomy, to sever the different absorbing and restrictive roots (like those in the traditional culture, in the familial and familiar environment, in the language). By using cultural alterity and other foreign elements, he undermines his own background, in order to retain the mobility and the possibility of a floating condition, that permits him to live un-situated, that lets him be forever outside the system, lingering, but nevertheless, within it. Eugenio Barba does things that are so different precisely in order to stay unchanged and he changes constantly in order to be equal to himself: he transforms because he wants to keep himself.

This image of persistent youth is also confirmed at the directly perceptible level. Talking about him on the fortieth anniversary of the Odin Teatret, George Banu draws a disturbing scene: "glancing at the seats in the Odin «dark hall», the eminent theatre scholar confesses, I was not at all surprised by the feeling I was looking at a Goya painting, an assembly of ghosts reunited around Eugenio Barba, a Barba who, on the contrary, appeared to me in the guise of Dorian Gray's double. This insolent energy, this blinding light, this constant challenge, will they ever collapse, revealing their cracks, similar to what happens in the last pages of Wilde's novel?"

Perhaps this will not happen, given this solar and harmonious spirit, worlds apart from the malevolent and irrefutably sterile charisma of Oscar Wilde's character.

As a final point, let me say a few words on the subject of masters.

Eugenio Barba repeatedly describes himself, with unconcealed modesty, as the eternal apprentice guided by an invisible Master (*Land of Ashes and Diamonds*: 119). "I've met a master, he states talking about Grotowski, and completely devoured him. I've kept him inside me".

There is nothing surprising in the fact that the two, Grotowski and Barba, found no unambiguous answer to the question on the relationship amongst them. This would have been equal, perhaps, to a sacrilege. In any case, an uncompromising definition would have blurred the image emerging from Barba's fascinating endeavor to reconstruct the shared past and which is revealed to us as a protective embrace of the complexity and complicity of a decisive meeting.

There is a well-known perpetual vanishing point in the master-apprentice relation.

On the one hand, loyalty is the essential requirement of apprenticeship, understood as modality of knowledge by incorporation. On the other hand, betrayal is, in its turn, an obligation. Barba emphasizes the idea that the new theatre reformers are "Rebels" and Grotowski is one of them. They make a long line in which, by a dialectic negation, each time the master is suppressed in the direction of a Hegelian transgression of the opposites. The apprentice's original loyalty is enriched by the model of the subsequent revolt, settled in a second loyalty, paradoxically more loyal than the first one, because it is not (any longer) so much a literal loyalty as [it is] one "in spirit".

It is only this violent, radical, rebellious act that becomes the supreme act of loyalty. For the thing that seems disloyalty is, in fact, profound loyalty to the innovative spirit of the "demanding predecessors".

Once again, paradoxically, to Eugenio Barba the active meaning of exceeding the master is achieved while staying in the condition of *noviciate*,

generalizing the idea of “beginner”. His entire spiritual biography firmly confirms that the one who stays “apprentice” retains his availability, his receptivity, his self-interrogation.

The apprenticeship paradigm is completed by the aura of constant apostate. Like a real apprentice, Eugenio Barba is ready at any time to set fire to former retreats, to burn down the home of the formerly dominating theatre. Incineration is a drastically necessary move, exercised as extreme form of self-discipline. (In the beginning of his book *Burning the House*, Barba mentions in fact that, year after year, he had envisaged a performance which would end with a fire). This is an act of pushing the limit, which is evocative of Ulysses who asks his companions to tie him to the ship’s mast in order to resist the sirens’ temptation. The temptation of (theatrical) convention is in itself very powerful: at any time one is at risk of falling prey to its own mannerism! In brief, one needs an aggressive strategy in order to keep this spirit of the eternal beginner.

There is a Barba miracle and now we have the possibility to name it: while you want to be a perpetual apprentice, you truly become a master. By laboring at the feet of a long row of titans, such as Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Craig, Copeau, Artaud, Brecht, Grotowski (the order is the one indicated by Barba himself), who have become masters because they remained eternal apprentices, Eugenio Barba has turned, through his impeccable apprenticeship, into a great master. Apprenticeship as such turned him into one of the equals.



Moment of the Ceremony, Aula Magna (Left: Liviu Malița, dean of the Faculty of Theatre and Television; Right: Eugenio Barba), Cluj-Napoca, 2012. Photo: Daria Ioan

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

This is Eugenio Barba. Passionate man of the theatre, an artist of great fame, magisterial theorist, author of theatre books written with a confident voice, accomplished pedagogue, making a decisive contribution to the reformation of the higher education in theatre, prolific publisher in charge with the publication of prestigious theatrical periodicals, untiring experimenter, founder of the unique Odin Teatret, of the University of Eurasian Theatre, UNESCO adviser, member in the Scientific Boards of the most prestigious international theatre institutions; a total and totalizing man.

Here and now, Ladies and Gentlemen, Eugenio Barba in the role of Eugenio Barba!



Eugenio Barba and the Senate of the Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, 2012. Photo: Ioan Felecan

## *Fame and hunger\**

**Eugenio Barba**

*Speech of thanks on the occasion of the Honorary Doctorate bestowed on Eugenio Barba by the Faculty of Theatre and Television of the University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania, on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2012.*

I don't remember where I heard it for the first time – the anecdote of the two worn-out actors, yet not satiated by their craft. They were coming out of the theatre where they had just performed, commenting on the show, the reactions of the audience and the duration of the applause. They grumbled about the drawbacks of their work. "Every evening – one said – I am gripped by the fear that my voice will abandon me. I am there, in front of the public, I open my mouth and nothing comes out, not a sound. A nightmare. It's an awful job, ours". "What is indeed awful – replied the other – is to be a king and nobleman on the stage every evening, and then go home and not have a bite to eat."

The dream of enjoying fame and the need to escape poverty: for



Eugenio Barba, Cluj-Napoca, 2012.  
Photo: Daria Ioan

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\* Translation from the Italian by Judy Barba

centuries the life of the theatre has flowed between these two banks, receiving energy and solidity from both.

Fame? Hunger?

The two banks are not an alternative. Opposite, yet substantially identical, the one is complementary to the other.

Therefore Georg Büchner decided in 1836 to start his comedy *Leonce and Lena* with a rapid preamble in Italian. In his mother tongue, *ruf* and *hunger* were words that could not be confused, each firm in its conceptual difference. The same with the English *fame* and *hunger*; the French *renommée* and *faim*, the Spanish *fama* and *hambre*. Instead, the two words *fama* and *fame*, as well as distinguishing themselves by their meaning, also overlap each other in their form. They point out rather different things but can be confused by their sound, and only the final vowel differentiates them. The Italian language reveals that opposites can in this case encounter, intertwine, separate and reflect each other in an endless game as when, in thrilling comedies, twins meet and recognise each other, not knowing whether it is reality or illusion.

Just before his play starts, when the curtain has not yet revealed the garden and the bench on which prince Leonce is stretched out in existential boredom, Büchner imagined two brief cues in Italian flying over the heads of the spectators, like two disconnected notes opening a symphony:

– *E la fama?*

– *E la fame?*

Two isolated questions as two obvious observations or the opening of a conflict. Büchner had thought that the voices of two famous playwrights should pronounce these cues: Vittorio Alfieri and Carlo Gozzi. The first had given Tragedy to Italy; the second had lavished on Europe the buffo enchantment of his theatre Fables, populated by the masks of Commedia dell'Arte. Büchner's materialistic and revolutionary taste was not for the Italian *teatro buffo*. He was probably attracted by the opposition that the Italian language allowed through two words which could be confused because of their sound. *Hunger* was a central concept for Büchner, not only for the arts, but also for the spirit of revolt. During the months when he was writing *Leonce and Lena* he affirmed in a letter to a friend that hunger was the only revolutionary element in the society of his time. Hunger was a real *goddess of freedom*.

Perhaps, only when translated into Rumanian, the opposition and the complementarity between fame and hunger can achieve an effect similar to that of Italian:



Moment of the Ceremony, Aula Magna (Left: Ioan A. Pop, Rector of the BBU; Right: Eugenio Barba), Cluj-Napoca, 2012. Photo: Ioan Felecan

- *Și faima?*
- *Și foamea?*

According to Büchner's indications, these two words were to be pronounced loudly as the rest of a prologue which didn't concern the play's plot, but its metaphysics where the material and the immaterial blend. Readers and critics find it difficult to imagine how the author intended to stage this diminutive dialogue exempted from its duty to dialogue: just two questions, without any link to a premise or a conclusion.

As a playwright, Georg Büchner could concoct what he wanted: there was no risk of his play reaching the stage. He wrote it for money in 1836, in the hope of winning the prize in a contest to which his manuscript was not even admitted since it was sent in too late. Subsequently, neither he nor anyone else considered staging *Leonce and Lena*. Rebels performed it in Munich sixty years later. It happened in 1895 at the Intimes Theater of Max Halbe, a main exponent of naturalism, associated with Otto Brahm's *Freie Bühne* and inspired by André Antoine's *Théâtre Libre*. The director, Ernst von Wolzogen, was in no doubt and eliminated the microscopic dispute of the preamble. The two questions remained suspended, like two isolated tolls of a submerged bell.



For theatre professionals, the struggle against hunger – the need to sell the fleeting products of their craftsmanship – is the other face of the search for both fame and artistic excellence. Fame and artistic excellence are both remunerative elements in show business. At the same time these qualities are seriously threatened by the market's own laws. Not only by the compromises imposed by the purchase/sale, but above all by the mighty subterranean power of a primordial economic law: the *law* in which the bad coin almost always succeeds in permanently eliminating the good one. Gold and silver keep on imposing themselves on our memory and imagination rather than copper and pinchbeck coins. But in market practices, the latter dominates. In the context of an artistic commerce based on ephemeral products, this law turns nourishment into poison and poison into nourishment. In spite of theatre people's wishful thinking, the search for good quality and that for good commerce are closely linked yet in total contrast, locked in a struggle that allows neither victory nor defeat, like that of Jacob and the angel.

The double supremacy of the "bad" yet rapidly circulating coin, and of the "good" coin tenaciously rooted in the spectators' memory, corresponds to what distinguishes *celebrity* from *greatness* in a person. But we should not consider this antagonism from a moralistic point of view, as if on one side there was the "evil" of fashion and the market, and on the other the "good" of art. It is a complementary opposition as that of the two sisters in the Bible, Martha and Mary, the one attracted by the essential, the other hard-working and carrying out useful yet apparently insignificant activities. Each of the two sisters reproached the other, but without the other they could not exist.

The two sisters' collaboration full of tension and attrition functions as a basic rhythm for the theatre understood as Art and Craft. It is a struggle that resembles a dance in which the opposites detach from and cling to each other. As the French alexandrine verse creates the substratum of plays as different as those of Racine and Molière, so the rhythm *hunger/fame* doesn't permit the definitive choice of one or the other road. These are questioning thorny roads that cause a continuous jumping from one to the other, from an impassioned embrace to a deadly blow. A succession of waves on which we have to know how to sail, riding both their complementarity and their radical opposition. Knowing how to ride them is also an art like that of navigation: an art that invents routes not forms.

Fame? Hunger? These two questions representing two different obsessions seem to indicate an alternative. But this is not true. They imply two different actions: something to *escape from* and something to *aspire to*. The well-off artists and aristocrats of the past centuries aspired to literary and scientific fame as their ancestors aspired to the glory of weapons. In the

same years, actors often told how their work was crucial for them to escape hunger, poverty, exploitation and humiliation. They suggested all this with funny and exotic scenes and anecdotes which entertained the spectators, because the poor and the hungry always appear exotic for the well-off with a full stomach, both the poor who live across the sea or those in the same city. The actors were used to ridiculing the difficulties and the shame from which they escaped or tried to escape through their job. The hunger which for Büchner was a *goddess of freedom* and the people's guide to revolution as in the painting of Delacroix, for them was only a cruel stepmother. In order to free themselves from her claws they mounted the stage to perform a starving Harlequin. As did many poor courageous women who, to avoid a destiny of prostitution, enacted on stage coquettes, procuresses and fatuous or loose women.

Hunger and fame don't point out a dilemma or an alternative. Hunger is the gunpowder. Fame is the point reached by the bullet. In the twentieth century, in the fortunate places where repletion reigned and art was so acknowledged as to become an aim in itself, *hunger* became the name of an inner personal and social need. Artaud even compared this need to the need for bread. In the the sixties, the years of the economic boom and socialist torpor, Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski rediscovered their own hunger for theatre as a rejection of the pretences of human behaviour. Preceding them, the young German sculptor Peter Schumann, who experienced art exhibitions as a Vanity Fair, invented a theatre of huge sculptures in movement, devoted to bread and the great myths of rebellion – the Bread and Puppet Theatre.

Fame? Hunger? The two enigmatic questions of that rebellious German playwright who died of typhus at the age of 23, unfold into a series of harmonics: from personal and social ransom, to spiritual hunger; from inner necessity pushing us to do theatre, to the astuteness indispensable for earning our bread; from the dream of beauty, to rebellion against beauty. In this way, from contrast to contrast, from chord to chord they address each of us, actor or director. These two questions don't resemble the song of a mermaid with a thrilling beginning which ends in folly and death. On the contrary, our awareness of them, when we glimpse them, is a moon on the rim of the horizon.

What attracted me first and then bound me to the theatre? It was not a precocious passion like that which illuminated the adolescence of many actors, directors and spectators whom I have known. The recurrent meanness and decadence of this so-called art don't depress me or arouse my indignation. Towards the powerful theatres capable of success or artistic exploits, I don't nourish the natural jealousies that punctuate true love stories. For the theatre I feel an intellectual curiosity without the complications of love.

What I love with passion and tenderness is a remote islet, sufficiently marginal to allow me freedom. It is a small community with only a few individuals, unconcerned with expansion, governed in its own way and trying to put into practice a few dreams which are considered unrealisable. Besides my own islet, I care for a few others, some fertile, some dusty, with which I feel I share something that I could call the *essential*. Or more simply, a similar past: a path dictated by a mysterious hunger, different for each of us and often difficult to formulate.

As an adult, when I entered theatre to confront the problems of my condition as an emigrant, I chose the road of a scholastic apprenticeship. I wanted a diploma which could give me the alibi of a professional identity and a status. Almost at once, the circumstances diverted me towards a minority corner. Thus I ended among dissidents and I recognised in them a country.

How come I remained there in that corner of dissident theatre? What bound me to the point of considering abandoning it unthinkable? A certain rebellious spirit, not doubt. But the rebellious spirit alone doesn't last if it doesn't experience rebellion as self-respect and a particular sense of freedom. Nor does the passion last, which comes and goes, and is not the soil in which a centenary oak tree can grow.

Theatre was for me like landing, of necessity rather than choice, on an islet where Nature and even History can at times spin backwards. Events which seem impossible become real. Here the houses have rooms with doors devised as those by Marcel Duchamp, which close when you open them, and in order to open them again you have to start by closing them. Thus they capture you in their game. The desire to understand always becomes a new seduction, and each answer which opens up before you, at the same time shuts you out. The path changes constantly, it unfolds with contrasts, double negations, as if driven by the teeth of a cogwheel: a gear whose aim is not to reach a destination, but to prolong and transmit a motion.

Including my apprenticeship, I bear on my shoulders more than fifty years of theatre craft. The hands which hold the rudder are firm. But unsafe as always are the waters that my companions and I have to cross. Despite the accumulated experience, the realised deed and the many performances, after rejoicing over the successes and deciphering their dangers, I cannot deceive myself that I have overcome the eddies of ignorance. I cannot say that I have finally found a route whose clear and repeatable trajectory could be transmitted as the map a good path. It would be ideal if this was possible – at least in the fifth act of my career. But the clear line of a path which takes you far doesn't exist.

In the sea, paths are only imaginary. Therefore navigation never ceases to fascinate for its surprises. Yet it doesn't become less dangerous.



Moment of the Ceremony, Aula Magna (Left: Ioan A. Pop, Rector of the BBU; Right: Eugenio Barba), Cluj-Napoca, 2012. Photo: Ioan Felecan

The secrets of the craft can be useful stories for those who want to listen to them in an attempt to devise their own teaching, each in his or her own way. But they become like the song of the mermaids if they give the illusion that they are a programme which can be learned and a behaviour which can be reproduced. The lengthy calms and the paralysing waves of *not-knowing-what-to-do* cannot be avoided. In the beginning they intimidated us, threatening to wreck our tiny theatre. Although today my companions and I have less fear, the threat is no less. With time we have discovered that the only way to remain a floating island is to keep on rowing.

However, if you think that my words want to depict a distressing and tormented image of work in the theatre, marked only by sacrifice and tiredness, hazard and anxiety, I beg you to change your mind. When I think about theatre, I speak above all of joy, privileges and freedom. I like to boast that I and my companions from Odin Teatret have conquered our particular *difference* which allows us to be only partly at the mercy of History and its present market.

A privilege – unstable like all privileges. For this privilege, also in the dark, it is an honour not to give up rowing. For fame and with appetite, not forgetting Sisyphus.



## **The Chronic Life:** *Debate*

Vu le grand nombre de textes qui ont été consacrés au dernier spectacle de l'Odin Teatret, *The Chronic Life*, depuis sa première, ce n'est pas une ou des comptes rendus de plus que nous lui consacrerons mais plutôt une suite de témoignages de spectateurs avertis, bien que souvent surpris, qui ont assisté, la plupart pour la première fois, à un spectacle « live » mis en scène par Eugenio Barba et sa fameuse troupe, les enregistrements et les livres suppléant pourtant à l'absence d'une véritable rencontre face à face, avant l'arrivée de l'Odin à Cluj-Napoca. Témoignages, pensées et critiques qui donnent corps à un débat digne d'être pris en compte, aujourd'hui, quand le théâtre emprunte des voies si diverses et souvent difficiles à classer, héritières, pourtant, des grandes innovations scéniques des années '60.

## ***THE CHRONIC LIFE***

**Dedicated to Anna Politkovskaya and Natalia Estemirova**

Russian writers and human right activists, murdered by anonymous thugs in 2006 and 2009 for their opposition to the Chechnyan conflict.

**Characters:** a Black Madonna, the widow of a Basque officer, a Chechnyan refugee, a Rumanian housewife, a Danish lawyer, a rock musician from the Faroe Islands, a Colombian boy searching for his father disappeared in Europe, an Italian street violinist, two mercenaries.

*The Chronic Life* takes place simultaneously in different countries of Europe in 2031, after the third civil war. Individuals and groups with different backgrounds come together and challenge each other driven by diverging dreams, deceptions and expectations. A boy arrives from Latin America in search of his father who has inexplicably disappeared. "Stop searching for your father" people tell him while escorting him from door to door.

It is neither knowledge nor innocence that saves the boy. A new ignorance helps him to discover his door. Amid the bewilderment of all of us who no longer believe in the unbelievable: that just one victim is worth more than any value. More than God.

**Actors:** Kai Bredholt, Roberta Carreri, Jan Ferslev, Elena Floris, Donald Kitt, Tage Larsen, Sofia Monsalve, Fausto Pro, Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Julia Varley.

**Dramaturgy and directing:** Eugenio Barba

## *Une nouvelle rencontre avec Eugenio Barba*

ȘTEFANA POP-CURȘEU\*

La rencontre avec Eugenio Barba et les membres de l'Odin Teatret à Cluj-Napoca, dans cette ville universitaire, culturellement très riche et dont la tradition théâtrale est très vive et présente, a été pour moi une double source de joie. Une joie pédagogique d'un côté, car cette rencontre a permis à de nombreux étudiants et chercheurs en études théâtrales d'assister à des démonstrations et à des représentations de l'Odin, de se confronter donc directement à ce que je ne puis m'empêcher de nommer une « légende vivante » du théâtre européen du XXe siècle et, d'un autre côté, une joie plus personnelle, liée à la réactivation d'un nombre de souvenirs théâtraux datant de l'époque de ma vie étudiante parisienne, quand j'ai eu pour la première fois l'occasion de voir un spectacle de l'Odin, dans l'espace, légendaire, du Théâtre du Soleil d'Ariane Mnouchkine.

Avant d'apporter mon humble contribution au débat suscité par *La Vie chronique* parmi les intellectuels et les amoureux du théâtre à Cluj-Napoca, en me lançant dans quelques appréciations et critiques, je pense qu'il est utile de contextualiser un peu cette deuxième confrontation, en ce qui me concerne, avec le travail des membres de l'Odin. En octobre 2012, lors de l'arrivée d'Eugenio Barba à Cluj, invité par l'Université Babeș-Bolyai par l'intermédiaire la Faculté de Théâtre et Télévision et les efforts soutenus de notre collègue Diana Cozma, Anna Stigsgaard, collaboratrice et assistante d'Eugenio pour quelques années, venait de finir un travail de mise en scène au Théâtre National de Cluj-Napoca. J'avais eu le grand bonheur de signer avec elle la dramatisation du roman de Dostoïevski, *L'Idiot*, et de travailler avec les acteurs du National clujois d'après des règles qui contrevenaient en grande partie à la manière habituelle de création d'un spectacle. Lors des répétitions et de mes rencontres avec Anna, elle m'avait non seulement

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raconté son expérience à l'Odin, mais elle m'avait aussi fait comprendre, dans la pratique, les avantages et les difficultés que suppose un travail comme celui des membres de l'Odin, appliqué à un autre type de troupe, à des acteurs ayant d'autres habitudes, bien qu'une grande disponibilité créatrice.



Performance rehearsal *The Chronic Life*, dir. Eugenio Barba.  
Photo Jan Rűsz, Odin Teatret Archives

Pourquoi avoir parlé de cela ?... Les résultats de cette collaboration extraordinaire avec la jeune metteur en scène danoise peuvent éclaircir certains points concernant les effets mitigés de la réception de *La vie chronique* à Cluj. *L'Idiot* a connu dès le début un succès formidable, ayant surpris et conquis son public, bien que ce soit un spectacle dur, grinçant et passionnel. La critique, quant à elle, n'a pas réagi de la manière la plus complaisante. « On voit que c'est une sorte de création collective », m'a-t-on dit, et j'ai perçu une nuance péjorative, là où, pour moi, il n'y avait qu'une raison de contentement et

même la marque de l'aboutissement heureux d'un travail qui avait uni dans la création l'ensemble des acteurs impliqués dans ce projet. Or, il se peut effectivement que cette joie et cet accomplissement dans la création collective ne se fasse pas toujours sentir pour le spectateur autant que pour les acteurs, surtout parce que le spectateur n'a accès qu'au résultat final et non au processus, ne pouvant juger que d'après ce qui lui est donné à voir. Résultat qui doit surtout ébranler ou confirmer un horizon d'attente souvent construit, dans le cas des spectateurs avisés, grâce à une expérience spectatorielle et à des choix esthétiques personnels bien définis. Et il est toujours difficile de surprendre cette dernière catégorie de public quand elle attend peut-être moins une confirmation qu'une révélation...

Ces observations sont valables quant à la réception de la *La vie chronique* aussi. J'entrais dans la salle avec la joie de pouvoir retrouver quelque chose de ces émotions étranges, magiques, ressenties lors de ma participation au spectacle *Andersen*, plus de dix ans auparavant. Je voulais entrer avec un horizon d'attente ouvert, dans une disponibilité réceptrice totale. Et alors, j'ai retrouvé l'espace : la scène, enclavée dans la masse du public, dans la simplicité trompeuse de l'incipit, qui se découvre peu à peu comme un jeu de plans situés à différents niveaux et qui finissent par dominer le spectateur, alors que le premier coup d'œil semblait en donner un tout autre sentiment. Je me suis alors souvenue de la cale ovale du bateau de *Andersen*, qui entourait le spectateur de miroirs et lui faisait faire face à de faux spectateurs, spectres et apparitions étranges, tout comme les acteurs-personnages des différents contes, la marionnette suspendue à un balcon, le rideau qui se levait et tombait pour laisser entrer les personnages dans l'arène de la fiction théâtrale, dans un entre-deux, à mi-chemin entre le rêve et la réalité.

Mais si *Andersen* situait clairement, du moins à un premier niveau, son public dans le monde des contes nordiques, *La vie chronique* allait-elle parler de la vie sous une forme de chronique, d'enregistrement de faits racontés, de compte rendu théâtral de la vie même ? Ou bien allait-elle nous montrer la vie comme maladie chronique, à laquelle l'être humain est condamné et doit, quoi qu'il advienne, en porter le poids et la douleur ? La réponse, affirmative à mes deux questions, s'est esquissée très vite au cours de la représentation. Pourtant, une telle entreprise ne s'annonçait pas simple... car, comment parler de la vie, sans tomber dans certains clichés pratiquement inévitables ?

Les choix scénographiques opérés par Eugenio Barba et sa troupe de l'Odin Teatret m'ont semblé pour la plupart très fins, chaque détail étant pris en considération, avec un travail exceptionnel, qui lui est propre et bien connu d'ailleurs, des images symboliques puissantes (comme l'autel central – table, berceau, porte, puits, tombeau ; le mur devant lequel pendent des crochets pour êtres et objets à multiples emplois – emprisonnement, suspension, torture,

élévation, exposition ; le morceau de glace – marque d'un temps chronique qui fond, goutte à goutte, en diminuant la consistance de la vie, ou brisé en mille morceaux, etc., etc.). De même, le monde sonore créé devant le spectateur joue avec et se joue des sens de ce dernier : de la goutte qui tombe dans la bassine, aux différentes voix cassées, douces, monotones, stridentes, aux objets qui se heurtent, aux pas qui font le tour du plateau, aux violons et autres instruments qui soutiennent certaines séquences et tableaux... Tout contribue à créer des émotions fortes, à surprendre le spectateur, mais aussi à le désorienter parce que, souvent, il ne comprend pas ou pas assez.



Performance *The Chronic Life*, actors: Jan Ferslev, Julia Varley, Sofia Monsalve, Iben nagel Rasmussen, dir. Eugenio Barba.  
Photo Rina Skeel, Odin Teatret & CTLS Archives

Et c'est ici qu'intervient un des problèmes liés à la réception proprement dite de ce spectacle de l'Odin. Faire parler les acteurs chacun dans une ou dans sa langue est un choix à double tranchant, qui a été souvent discuté, que la troupe de l'Odin assume comme tel, mais que je sens devoir reprendre ici, tout simplement parce que, en tant que spectateur, je n'ai pas pu m'empêcher de penser, à quelques reprises, si cette représentation avait ou non besoin de moi et de mon regard, donc de ma compréhension. Et encore, je me considère heureuse de comprendre la plupart des langues utilisées dans ce spectacle, mis à part le danois et les autres langues nordiques. Mais qu'en est-il de ceux qui ne comprennent pas l'espagnol, le français, l'anglais, l'allemand, le roumain, l'italien, etc. ? Supposons – et je pense que tel est le cas – que cet effet soit voulu, que chaque spectateur doit comprendre ce qu'il peut comprendre, le reste se transformant en un galimatias qui peut être apprécié à un niveau purement sonore, musical de la langue en question... mais cela n'est-il pas frustrant pour le spectateur ? Oh, que si... un exercice d'humilité devant sa propre ignorance ? Soit. Un exercice d'écoute et de patience ? Soit. Mais les répliques échangées par les personnages, si elliptiques qu'elles soient, construisent du sens, un sens qui échappe et en dehors duquel on ne reste qu'avec quelques très belles images, quelques moments poétiques, très tendus, avec quelques émotions fortes, mais aussi avec des moments d'irritation, d'étonnement, d'ennui, de frustration. Je puis admettre que dans la vie on ne comprend pas tout, que se confronter à la vie signifie aussi ne pas comprendre et se heurter aux murs invisibles du langage verbal et qu'en ce sens le spectacle de *La vie chronique* nous plonge bien crûment dans ce qu'est la vie, au-delà des grands thèmes de la perte d'autrui, de la maladie et de la mort, des petits bonheurs et de la joie incompréhensible de vivre. Pourtant, je ne peux m'empêcher de remarquer que ce spectacle gagnerait énormément si tout le texte proféré pouvait être compris par ses spectateurs, qui se sentent complètement marginalisés, en présence de paroles incompréhensibles pour eux mais qui font du sens pour les acteurs (et pour les personnages dans le cadre dramaturgique) aussi bien que pour certains autres spectateurs.

C'est un jeu avec le spectateur, qui, bien qu'assumé, peut s'avérer dangereux pour l'unité sémantique du spectacle, perçu en l'occurrence par bribes, et donnant une sensation de fragmentation et juxtaposition là où les nœuds nous échappent. En écoutant sans comprendre les répliques et les chansons chantées en danois, je me suis rappelé que, effectivement, la seule chose qui m'avait laissé un sentiment étrange d'incomplétude lors du spectacle *Andersen*, était, pareillement, le fait de n'avoir pas eu accès à toute la richesse proposée et d'avoir vécu cela comme une sorte d'handicap imposé.

Un autre choix dans la mise en scène et dans la conception dramaturgique qui me semble à double tranchant est l'utilisation de certains clichés culturels, qui, de manière étrange, m'ont fait souvent penser au cours de la représentation aux personnages d'Eugène Ionesco : la ménagère roumaine, la veuve qui est masculine à force de remplacer ses maris (jouée en travesti), le Monsieur en costume bleu, la jeune fille qui joue le jeune garçon, mais se retrouve doublée par la marionnette, puis par la jeune fille au violon. Personnages types, non pas représentatifs mais démonstratifs, carcasses vidées de psychologie, mais chargées de symboles, comme si chaque geste et action devait montrer une vérité rituelle qui ne serait pourtant valable que pour la seule personne qui fait ce geste ou cette action-là. Des lignes dans la paume d'une main arrachée et lue par la sorcière-voyante, qui se croiseraient de temps à autre, sans s'influencer véritablement : une coexistence scénique qui fait du sens en dehors d'une dramaturgie préétablie... comme dans la vie, comme dans les « performances » dont le jeune public semble de plus en plus gourmand de nos jours. Et le spectateur regarde surtout l'acteur qui joue et qui montre des visages composés finalement de nos clichés, de nos projections, ridicules, dramatiques, vulgaires ou tragiques.

Ce spectacle ne nous laisse pas partir, en tant que spectateurs et en tant qu'êtres humains, avec l'illusion de la perfection. Beaucoup d'éléments manquent aux personnages afin qu'ils deviennent complets, beaucoup d'éléments nous manquent à nous, spectateurs, pour que nous puissions atteindre un sentiment de plénitude que nous cherchons, peut-être inconsciemment, au théâtre. Mais ces vides, ces absences qui nous entourent et qui existent de manière chronique dans notre vie, une fois présents dans notre conscience, peuvent nous rendre plus forts, peuvent nous faire réagir véritablement. Et ainsi, *La vie chronique* aura-t-elle pleinement atteint son but.

## The Chronic Life and the “Reading” Paradox\*

FILIP ODANGIU\*\*

Odin Teatret’s *Chronic Life*, performed in 2012 in Cluj, is linked within me to the frustration and to the acute feeling I have missed the point Eugenio Barba and the actors tried to convey. The long-expected production perturbed me. After a performance that had lasted only one hour<sup>1</sup> – which, subjectively speaking, I thought (was) longer – I did not talk to anyone about what I had seen, because I was feeling somewhat guilty. I had not understood anything, unable to “read” the story. I found myself out of my depth, the puzzled target of an actual assault of visual, auditory and tactile images which, to this day, remain unsolved in my mind, a tight knot.

Therefore, the suggestion of writing about Odin Teatret’s performance created the circumstances that could favour an untying of this “knot”, an explanation of my initial feelings. I saw the performance once again, this time in a recorded version; I took thorough notes relating to its inner logic, to the editing technique etc., and then I found myself confused again. Once again, the barely grasped plot “threads” were eluding me: sudden changes of rhythm were taking place on the stage; the actors – whose roles I could no longer recognise – were carrying out multiple, almost simultaneous actions; the lighting and the sound texture strove to convey all kinds of messages. I was reliving the feeling of satiation.

It was clear that a fundamental aspect of my position as a spectator had to be changed. My “specialised” eye was, perhaps, missing an essential piece. What if the director and his actors were, in fact, challenging me to a paradoxical “reading”? What if the paradox resided in the fact that the cultural encryption, the scrambled theatricality – sources of the feeling of superfluity – were not meant to be deciphered, rationalised, but instead

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<sup>1</sup> The *Chronic Life* is 1 hour and 14 minutes long.

relied on the feedback of a “civil” spectator who could take the images “within” and relate existentially to the events on the stage? From this point of view, we, the spectators of the November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012 performance at the Radio Studio, were “guilty”.

I decided to use a *different eye* to approach the performance. Only then did *The Chronic Life* start to reveal its potential subjects. For example, the performance became a vibrant debate on *loss* (the loss of a beloved person, the loss of origins etc.) and particularly on those who have to manage the loss and to live on. Furthermore, the performance approaches a series of other topics: the aged humankind (Europe?), unsettled by interminable warfare, by aberrant ideologies; humanity seeking refuge in senseless entertainment; the new generations in blind/blinded search of an identity meaning; the flaws of the System, on the one hand, and of its opponents, on the other hand etc. Undoubtedly, the aforementioned ideas cover only a small part of the ripple of messages and goals the creators had.

Beyond the reading of meanings, I was then able to note the extent and the variety of Barba’s affinities with (Bertolt Brecht’s) alienation (estrangement) theatre, with the popular theatre or even with the contemporary “performance” practices. I was able to admire the educated orchestration of sounds in the production’s musical universe, made from recorded or live songs. I was surprised to find that, at Barba, in a hierarchy of languages of the performing act, the text occupies a secondary position (with the exception of specific *emblem-replies* usually delivered in the language of the place where the play is performed)<sup>2</sup>. The organisation of the acoustic domain is dominated by a concern with para-language, with the verbal gesture (incantation, scream, whisper, laughter etc.). The actors sing almost unremittingly, fully imbibed by their roles and amplifying the impact the situations have on the spectators. The thorough composition of the lighting completes this whole.

From among the actors’ many activities, those that delineate the “playground” have had a particular bearing on my attention: at a point, the blond Woman cleans an invisible “glass” that surrounds the stage, on the four sides; next, at the end of the performance, the stage is surrounded by white-and-red “do not cross” line tape. The effect of this division is apparently protecting the spectators, because the events on the stage ironically concern us all, as suggested by the actors throughout the representation. We are more than mere spectators; we are witnesses, if not even protagonists.

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<sup>2</sup> One such reply is, for example, “(...) Welcome to the country where people eat without being hungry and drink without being thirsty!”



Performance *The Chronic Life*, actors: Jan Ferslev, Tage Larsen, Sofia Monsalve, Julia Varley, Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Kai Bredholt, Roberta Carreri, dir. Eugenio Barba. Photo Rina Skeel, Odin Teatret & CTLS Archives

In *The Chronic Life*, Eugenio Barba proposes the spectator's switch from the condition of viewer to the one of co-author. The audience, "assailed" by images, by symbols, by messages, by simultaneous actions has, in fact, a pre-established role: to select, to arrange the heterogeneous elements and to configure their own play, according to their culture, to their personal hopes and histories etc. This is why to those who, like me, were "raised" in a theatrical culture dominated by the director as demiurge – usually providing the reading *key(s)* –, *The Chronic Life* was, at first, an enigma. I had to do more than understand the message; I had to find the way to *fulfil* it, as co-author rather than as passive spectator. Therefore, Odin Teatret's production did not target the entertainment-chasing spectator, nor did it target the expert prepared with reading grids; instead, it concerned the type of "[...] theatre that seeks its value by trying to escape its condition of theatre"<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted from Eugenio Barba, *Theatre. Solitude, Craft, Revolt*, translation from Italian by Doina Condrea-Derer, edition by Alina Mazilu, Nemira, Bucharest, 2010, p. 405.



What is the face of the actors' performance in a play "of denial"? First of all, they do not *compose* traditional roles; they *describe* social types or forces (the Orphan, the Politician, the Widow, the Prostitute etc.) The characters are defined by their actions rather than by their relations. Similar to what happens in the epic theatre, their actions borrow a demonstrative feature. The protagonists expose their situation in front of the audience (many times, they do it by singing) and then they stage this situation (see the Widow who tells the story of her husband, Yusuf, and then brings him forward in the door-to-door selling of fabrics). The account of the tragic events is counterpointed by the jocular manner (for example, the Widow tells the persecuted family's story by using playing cards). Therefore, the actors do not "play" characters, but they *represent* them, in a Brechtian approach. The characters do not possess psychology. A significant aspect: the actor is accompanied by the doll, and the two interchange their roles frequently<sup>4</sup>, proving they can both operate equally reliably as vehicles of the demonstration. During the performance, the people, the dolls, the object produce a series of unexpected photograms, of *atmospheres* on which the main topics rely.

Nevertheless, despite the declared theatrical convention, the stage events remain *real*, they are not forged (see, for example, the Man in the blue suit who helps the immigrant Widow enter the desired space, but does not allow her to touch the ground). It seems the actors comply with the requirements of the *real* action on stage ("the reality of doing" mentioned both by Sanford Meisner and by David Mamet). Again by songs, the actor joins wholly the blossoming reality, a trans-historic, trans-individual type of reality.

At a given moment, prior to starting a dance, two of the actors turn toward the audience and, silently, show their palms, in a Christ-like pose. This basic gesture, a gesture that explains the Son of Man's sacrifice, as well as the actor's self-giving, also reminded me of the gesture that defines the perfect comedian, according to Yoshi Oida. The actor points to the moon, becoming invisible in order not to perturb the image. In *The Chronic Life*, Eugenio Barba's actors show they know how to become transparent when they show us the moon, with the difference that each of us has the power to decide its colour.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the characters of the Orphan and of the Soldier.

## *Le Radeau de la Méduse\**

ION VARTIC\*\*

By embodying, as prompted by Eugenio Barba himself, my dramaturgy of the spectator, *The Chronic Life* is reordered, in my imaginary, around three episodes I find fundamental.

The first one. At a given moment – in the misty-yellowish, dominant light of the night evoking one of La Tour's mystical paintings – the *Follia* theme can be heard. Fertile acoustic pun: variations on this theme extend and float above this world swept by "follia".

The second structure erupts with the infuriated "maledetto paese" of one of the women – the Chechen widow – who, like the other castaways of life, hopes in vain she has arrived in a "paese degli miracoli". Suddenly, above the table-coffin and, in fact, above the entire practicable play-space, a huge red flag with a white cross (the Danish or Swiss flag)



Performance *The Chronic Life*, actors: Roberta Carreri, dir. Eugenio Barba. Photo Rina Skeel, Odin Teatret & CTLS Archives

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is unrolled. The hope or the illusion of touching land in a neutral zone, beyond good and evil? Another woman, the Romanian housewife hoists for a moment – as if it were a sail – the end of the flag. Unexpectedly, shining from the direction of the lateral lights, the practicable floats in the dark like another *Radeau de la Méduse*...



Performance rehearsal *The Chronic Life*, dir. Eugenio Barba.  
Photo Jan Rűsz, Odin Teatret Archives

Finally, the third occurrence is a leitmotif in Barba's productions: the door as bearer of multiple meanings. The cover of the table-coffin, handled and moved by the oppressed found on the raft as if it were a door. As if through it, formulaically, they could exit the "chronic life" and enter a new dimension, a dimension of rest and of normality.

## *The Chronic Life*\*

EUGENIA SARVARI\*\*

The stage looks like a ship trapped in ice (a *paper canoe*?). A piece of ice hanged in a hideous slaughterhouse hook and drips regularly, as if giving a measure of time (of remaining life?). The walls of the drifting ship – the synopsis mentions the action takes place in the year 2031, in a post-civil war era, in Denmark or in other European countries, several countries at the same time – are “filled” by the spectators arranged in stairs. Furthermore, the deck on which the characters will act can also be the bed of the river whose waters carry the performance currents, or perhaps the raft or the island occupied by the lives wrecked by the war. The raft is a place of salvation, or, quite the opposite, of destruction. A young man enters this island/deck/raft. His eyes bandaged – they prevent his from seeing the obvious: life is a chronic disease; by entering a life that has become chronic he enters, in fact, eternity. Death as resurrection towards a new life. The Black Madonna, wearing a costume heavily adorned with enigmatic symbols, reminds me of the Black Virgin at the Daurade, her dress now at risk of turning to dust. In a multicultural space, each hero speaks their own language – echo of the director’s permanent feeling of displacement when, in his adolescence, he chose to leave from the southern Gallipoli to the cold Scandinavia – going from Spanish to Danish, to a Chechen-accentuated English and even to Romanian.

This acting evolution is the outcome of an active imagination firmly rooted in the psychological-mental body of the Odin Teatret actor, “life cell, which seems to not belong to a body, to not have an identity. A cell that can be transplanted to an unscheduled context”. The explanation comes from Nando Tavian, the theatre’s literary advisor, in direct reference to the actor’s work in Barba’s laboratory, in general, and for this performance, in particular.

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Performance rehearsal *The Chronic Life*, dir. Eugenio Barba.  
Photo Jan Rűsz, Odin Teatret Archives

This history, this *chronicle of life*, concerns a number of characters: a widow washes her deceased husband's body while rock music can be heard in the background. She is watched by the Black Madonna. A young man sets to search for his dead father, he passes all the tests, he dies and then he is reborn in this community of spectres. Nikita, the Chechen refugee, shares the cards of destiny everywhere. The Romanian housewife keeps wiping the floor, always doing some cleaning and always trying to kill herself.

The thing to be said about these actors of Odin Teatret is that they are more than just characters; they *are* an amplification of life. Their life turns into their work, thus becoming chronic.

## *La théorie à l'épreuve de la pratique\**

IOAN POP-CURŞEU\*\*

Pour un admirateur de l'anthropologue et théoricien du théâtre Eugenio Barba, tel que le signataire de ces lignes, un spectacle du metteur en scène aurait dû être une révélation. Et pourtant, *La Vie chronique* n'en a pas été une. Bien entendu, le spectacle est intéressant grâce aux acteurs qui ont des disponibilités physiques remarquables. Mais la conception de la mise en scène ne brille pas. Les idées du spectacle (montrer les horreurs de la guerre à travers les destins croisés de quelques êtres humains, parler de la vie quotidienne comme maladie *chronique*) sont plus que banales, surtout qu'il n'existe pas d'unité narrative et de véracité psychologique capables de soutenir l'intérêt des spectateurs. Les personnages (la fille sans père, les deux veuves, la ménagère roumaine, la sorcière) vont et viennent, entrent et sortent, récitant leurs « rôles » par petits bouts, chantant quelques airs de musique de temps à autre. Tout cela ne constitue pas une unité esthétique convaincante, surtout que les acteurs parlent une multitude de langues, comme pour marquer les conséquences désastreuses de la guerre et de la globalisation : il y a de l'italien, du danois, de l'espagnol, du roumain, etc. Que peut-on encore comprendre de tous ces patois mélangés, de toute cette agitation sans queue ni tête (le spectacle aurait pu finir au début, au milieu, à la « fin » sans que cela change quelque chose) ? Quelques bons éléments de scénographie, tels que les ailes bleues, le cercueil lumineux, les gouttes d'eau qui tombent dans un casque militaire renversé ne suffisent pas à créer la magie d'un espace scénique, différent de l'espace réel, alors que les costumes – à l'exception de celui de la sorcière – ne montrent aucune touche de créativité. Loin donc d'être une révélation, *La Vie chronique* a été plutôt une déception : ce qui était expérimental dans les années 70 est devenu maintenant du pur conformisme. Tout le monde fait aujourd'hui du théâtre comme ça !

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Performance rehearsal *The Chronic Life*, dir. Eugenio Barba.  
Photo Jan Rűsz, Odin Teatret Archives



Performance rehearsal *The Chronic Life*, dir. Eugenio Barba.  
Photo Rina Skeel, Odin Teatret Archives

## *Yusuf – The Chronic Life\**

**KATA PALOCSAY-KISÓ\*\***

*Les objets ont leurs larmes. Parfois je sens  
Qu'ils pleurent dans ma chambre en silence,  
Aux crépuscules obscurs et mystérieux  
Ils déploient leurs tristes âmes en silence.*

*Peut-être croient-ils qu'ils ne sont pas vus par des yeux ?  
Qui avancent vivants dans l'obscurité ?  
Mais moi, chouette des chambres, je les regarde  
En me réjouissant que j'ai avec qui pleurer.  
(Mihály BABITS, *Sunt Lacrimae rerum*)*

*Van a tárgyaknak könnyük. Érzem olykor,  
Hogy sírnak a szobámban nesztelen,  
Sötétedő, sejtelmes alkonyokkor  
Bús lelkiüket kitárják nesztelen.*

*Tán azt hiszik, nem látja most szem őket?  
Ki járna a sötétben eleven?  
De én, szobáknak baglya, nézem őket,  
örülve, hogy van, aki sír velem."  
(BABITS Mihály, *Sunt Lacrimae rerum*)*

En tant qu'invité, Odin Teatret a présenté des spectacles et des ateliers à Cluj entre le 31 octobre et le 4 novembre 2012. Le spectacle *The Chronic Life* a été présenté dans l'édifice de la Radio Cluj. C'est alors que j'ai connu Yusuf.

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Il n'était présent que pendant quelques secondes sur la scène, mais il va rester pour moi un souvenir inoubliable. Selon la pièce, Yusuf est le mari d'une femme tchéchène et il a été exécuté pendant la guerre. Yusuf ne peut être déjà présenté vivant parmi la Vierge noire, la veuve de l'officier Basque, la femme au foyer de Roumaine, l'avocat Danois, le musicien de rock des îles Féroé et le fils Colombien.



Performance rehearsal *The Chronic Life*, dir. Eugenio Barba.  
Photo Rina Skeel, Odin Teatret Archives

Comme un oiseau rouge-orange désespéré toujours volant, toujours en fuite, la femme tchéchène réfugiée battant de ses ailes d'écharpes a sauvegardé son passé et ses souvenirs. Puis, sa solitude a cessé pour un moment passager : Yusuf, son mari, la visite. L'âme de Yusuf s'est installée dans une carte de jeu. La carte de jeu est devenue un être joyeux, joueur, aimable. La carte de jeu a surpris sa veuve, elle l'a fait rire, elle l'a chatouillée, puis elle s'est envolée comme un papillon en laissant derrière lui un vide et un manque qui est né pour nous aussi. Jusqu' à la scène de Yusuf nous avons seulement observé, compris et respecté le deuil, la souffrance, le sentiment de carence de la femme-oiseau ou bien parfois nous nous sommes amusés sur sa gaucherie,

mais suite au fait que nous avons fait connaissance avec Yusuf, notre relation avec la veuve solitaire est devenue personnelle, car nous avons eu ensemble un vécu commun, une rencontre dont nous avons été les témoins. Yusuf nous a manqué déjà à nous aussi, parce que nous avons eu des souvenirs de lui, des souvenirs qui nous ont arraché des larmes à nous aussi, les larmes du rire et du pleur. Sa visite nous a enrichis et nous a rendus heureux.

Pour visualiser Yusuf, il a fallu techniquement une carte de jeu et un fil de fer en acier, long de quinze centimètres. Et, évidemment, l'excellente actrice Julia Varley qui a joué le rôle de la veuve. C'est sur sa main qu'a été fixé le fil de fer en acier au bout duquel bougeait une carte de jeu. Simple technique, l'une des plus simples. Elle est utilisée par des prestidigitateurs, les artistes des marionnettes et les maîtres de jeu, car l'objet animé peut bouger librement et relayer toutes les petites vibrations et impulsions de son animateur et, en plus, d'une manière très sensible, il va se réanimer comme un être à peu près autonome. Il est important aussi que le lien entre l'animateur et l'objet animé soit à peine visible et que ces deux puissent être sur scène ouverte d'une manière qu'ils soient leurs propres partenaires. Par sa taille et son élasticité, la carte de jeu obéit parfaitement aux impulsions transmises par le mince fil de fer rebondissant. De cette sorte, la carte de jeu peut devenir un être vivant en tous ses membres. L'illusion est parfaite : voici l'un des miracles simples.

Le mouvement, le rythme, l'énergie de la carte de jeu, ainsi que les réactions de la veuve, cette courte scène dialoguée a tout exprimé sur leur relation. Le rire, la parole, la voix, les bribes sonores de la veuve bavarde, monologuisante, parlant en soi-même ont fusionné avec le mutisme de Yusuf en se complétant et en se superposant réciproquement. Le mutisme d'un objet est loquace à condition de comprendre sa langue, son message. La langue de la marionnette est le mouvement avec lequel il communique d'une manière particulière des sentiments et des pensées. Deux langages et deux mondes différents sont ici en parfaite harmonie et union.

La veuve vaticine continuellement des cartes en guettant l'avenir. Yusuf arrive du passé et le présent est le moment des retrouvailles. Yusuf va s'insinuer dans une carte de jeu, dans cet objet à usage personnel. Les objets personnels constituent un groupe particulier d'objets. Nous connaissons l'histoire de ces objets et nous avons de l'attachement pour eux, ils génèrent en nous des souvenirs et les liens sentimentaux qui nous lient à eux sont puissants. Un objet personnel dit beaucoup de son maître aussi. Yusuf choisit bien quand il se concrétise dans l'objet qui est proche de sa veuve. A partir de son apparition, le passé, le présent et l'avenir perdent leur signification : la

rencontre des deux entités se passe indépendamment des plans temporels et projette leur prochaine rencontre aussi, lorsqu'ils vont se retrouver, que ce soit dans d'autres dimensions.



Performance rehearsal *The Chronic Life*, dir. Eugenio Barba.  
Photo Jan Rűsz, Odin Teatret Archives

Le mutisme des objets est loquace. Seulement faut-il comprendre leur langue, leurs messages. Avec leur silence, les objets communiquent du passé. Comme dans le cas d'une personne humaine, le passé d'un objet ne peut être laissé en dehors de l'observation. Les histoires des objets sont en effet les métaphores des destins humains. Plus précisément, les objets sont aussi en quelque sorte des êtres humains. Des êtres humains qui, comme le héros de Virgile, quittent leur terre natale et cherchent une nouvelle patrie pour eux-mêmes. Le vers 462 du Chant I de l'*Énéide* exprime parfaitement ce phénomène. Énée attend Didon dans une forêt où ils bâtissent un temple dédié à Junon. Les murs du temple sont décorés avec les scènes de la guerre de Troie et tout ce qu'Énée a laissé derrière lui devient visible. Énée est profondément bouleversé par ce qu'il a vu et dit à Achate : „*Sunt lacrimae*

*rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt*". Les choses (les objets) nous font pleurer et les choses mortelles touchent l'âme. À travers les choses, l'humain prend conscience de sa nature mortelle : pensons seulement à des objets qui ont desservi plusieurs générations, qui ont été hérités par nous et que nous transmettons à nos descendants.



Performance rehearsal *The Chronic Life*, dir. Eugenio Barba.  
Photo Jan Rűsz, Odin Teatret Archives

Tout objet a la possibilité de devenir une marionnette. La carte de jeu est un objet inanimé, Yusuf est mort lui aussi, mais son âme survit dans les souvenirs de la femme-oiseau. L'objet donne du corps à l'âme qui plane parmi nous, l'âme ressuscite l'objet. Le cercle se ferme. Yusuf et sa femme sont inséparables, ni le temps ni l'espace ne changent point leur relation. C'est cette relation indestructible qui nous est communiquée par l'artiste des marionnettes et la marionnette en ce moment magique.



*Work  
Demonstrations*



## *Les « Work Demonstrations » de l'Odin Teatret*

ANCA MĂNIUȚIU\*

La confrontation avec une page vivante de l'histoire de la pratique théâtrale s'avère être toujours fascinante. Pourtant, les cas de « survie » qui ne soient pas décevants sont tellement rares, qu'ils tiennent plutôt du miracle, comme si la condition éphémère de l'acte théâtral, fréquemment déplorée par bien des praticiens, était vouée en fait à protéger celui-ci de la chute dans l'inactualité, l'anachronisme, le ridicule... Comment expliquer alors la longévité du phénomène suscité par Eugenio Barba à l'Odin Teatret de Holstebro et son rayonnement aujourd'hui encore parmi les gens de théâtre et non seulement ? En rencontrant Eugenio Barba et les acteurs qui l'ont accompagné à Cluj en novembre 2012, en les écoutant parler avec simplicité et modestie de leurs expériences passées et présentes, je crois avoir compris que l'acte théâtral était devenu pour eux expérience existentielle, recherche de l'authentique dans l'ordre de la vie, quête de sens. C'est quelque chose qui ne se périmé pas, qui ne devient jamais inactuel tant que la quête demeure authentique et qu'il y a des êtres qui, à travers une sorte de « kinesthésie »<sup>1</sup>, pour employer le terme à travers lequel Barba caractérisait le « dialogue physique » entre l'acteur et le spectateur, s'y reconnaissent.

En dépit du charisme d'Eugenio Barba, son animateur et maître, l'Odin Teatret et tout ce qu'il représente en tant qu'exploration anthropologique transculturelle de l'art de l'acteur, en tant que poétique et philosophie du théâtre

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<sup>1</sup> C'est le sens qui permettrait aux spectateurs de « sentir » dans leur corps, en dépit de leur apparente passivité, des impulsions physiques qui correspondent aux mouvements sur la scène. Voir Eugenio Barba, Nicola Savarese, *Arta secretă a actorului. Dicționar de antropologie teatrală*, traducere din italiană de Vlad Russo, Sibiu/București, Festivalul Internațional de Teatru/Humanitas, 2012, p. 97. (Sauf mention contraire, la traduction en français des citations m'appartient. A.M.)



n'auraient jamais pu survivre aussi longtemps – 40 ans bientôt – en l'absence du dévouement sans bornes de ses comédiens qui avaient gagné leur liberté créatrice et l'exceptionnelle maîtrise de leurs moyens artistiques au prix d'une dure ascèse et d'un entraînement physique et psychique personnalisé, basé sur un travail infatigable sur le corps, la voix et l'esprit. C'est ce que j'ai compris en assistant, pendant les journées de l'Odin à Cluj, à trois « work demonstrations » révélateurs, soutenus par Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Roberta Carreri et Julia Varley, les actrices légendaires de l'Odin Teatret, qu'elles avaient rejoint en 1966, respectivement en 1974 et 1976. Leur activité liée au théâtre demeure prodigieuse, car en dehors de leur travail en tant qu'interprètes des spectacles de Barba, elles dirigent des workshops, enseignent, mettent en scène et publient des livres qui rendent compte de leur expérience.

La formule originale de ces « work demonstrations », identique chez les trois actrices, repose sur un principe d'hybridation : les « démonstrations », qui comprennent des exercices et des extraits de spectacles, alternent avec des commentaires ponctuels, ainsi qu'avec une incursion autobiographique et des confessions concernant le parcours initiatique de chacune d'entre elles, à partir des premières années d'apprentissage à l'Odin jusqu'à présent. A travers les étapes traversées par les trois actrices – la rencontre d'Eugenio Barba représentant un tournant dans leur vie professionnelle – les réussites et les difficultés rencontrées, on peut reconstituer l'histoire même de l'Odin Teatret et de l'ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology), fondée par Barba en 1980. Quant à l'espace des démonstrations, c'est un espace vide, avec un



Work Demonstration: *The Dead Brother*, with Julia Varley. Photo Rossella Viti, Odin Teatret & CTLS Archives

éclairage tout à fait neutre, qui s'animera miraculeusement grâce à l'évolution des actrices qui n'ont besoin que d'une chaise et de quelques accessoires.

Tels qu'ils ont été conçus, ces « work demonstrations », qui datent depuis plus de vingt ans (*Traces sur la neige* de Roberta Carreri date de 1989, *L'Écho du silence* de Julia Varley de 1992 et *Blanche comme le jasmin* de Iben Nagel Rasmussen de 1993) nous introduisent dans le laboratoire de travail des actrices et nous révèlent ce que Barba appelle la « sous-partition » de l'acteur, qui reste d'habitude invisible pour le spectateur, c'est-à-dire un processus personnel, souvent difficile à conceptualiser.



Work Demonstration: *Traces in the Snow*, with Roberta Carreri.

Photo Fiora Bemporad, Odin Teatret & CTLS Archives

Le va-et-vient entre la présence « quotidienne », terre à terre, des actrices (qui expliquent, commentent leur travail et rappellent leur parcours professionnel avant et après leur arrivée à l'Odin, sur le ton calme et naturel d'une conversation paisible) et celle « extra-quotidienne », quand elles exemplifient avec des exercices où elles reprennent un fragment d'une pièce, est

époustouflant. Une étrange métamorphose, une véritable transfiguration a lieu sous nos yeux et nous assistons à ce que Barba appelle « la naissance d'un corps-esprit scénique, indépendant des exigences de la représentation, mais prêt à les satisfaire »<sup>2</sup>.

Si Julia Varley s'attarde surtout sur le travail vocal qu'elle a mené, en raison des problèmes et des difficultés qu'elle a rencontrés au début de son training, Roberta Carreri et Iben Nagel Rasmussen se concentrent sur le travail physique, sur l'entraînement acrobatique de l'acteur, qui permet la meilleure connexion du corps et de l'esprit en vue d'une tâche précise. Le dialogue entre les différentes parties du corps, le contrôle des différents mouvements par l'exécution des exercices acrobatiques au ralenti, l'utilisation de l'extraversion et de l'introverson des actions physiques, des différents rythmes, vitesses et amplitudes, la libération du corps des automatismes de la vie quotidienne, le travail sur l'équilibre et le déséquilibre, le travail sur la voix, sur les cinq résonateurs identifiés par Grotowski, sur les harmonies et les tonalités sont autant d'éléments de l'entraînement physique pratiqué à l'Odin Teatret.

La technique des démonstrations des trois actrices était parfaite, mais elle serait restée une forme creuse, une forme vide de contenu, qui ne nous aurait touché nullement, si l'énergie qui la soutenait n'avait pas acquis une dimension intérieure. L'énergie physique était soutenue en permanence par l'énergie psychique, ce qui confirme l'affirmation quelque peu paradoxale de Barba qui dit que « tous les exercices physiques sont en fait des exercices spirituels, car ils concernent le développement de la totalité de la personne, la manière dont l'acteur doit déclencher et contrôler les énergies psychiques et mentales, celles que l'on connaît et que l'on peut exprimer à travers des mots et celles que l'on ignore et dont on ne saurait rien dire. »<sup>3</sup>

Les « work demonstrations » des trois actrices d'Eugenio Barba nous ont mis en contact direct avec des concepts-clefs de la théorie du maître, tels que ceux d'énergie, organicité, présence physique, corps-esprit, l'extra-quotidien scénique, etc. et avec un type d'entraînement et de pédagogie théâtrale qui restent uniques.

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<sup>2</sup> *Idem*, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 268.

## *Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret in Cluj\**

EUGENIA SARVARI

**Julia Varley.** In the two demonstration-exercises, *The Echo of Silence* and *The Dead Brother*, she displayed a singular didactic spirit. For example, the manner in which the actress would transform completely by merely dressing/undressing a costume was splendid. She would go from one situation to another, from one gesture to another, from one feeling to a different one by an extremely complex body play. The countenance, the hair, the hands, the feet – everything would be in perfect coordination. The movements, always controlled, would alternate – at times fast, other times slow; they would extend her state of mind. The move through completely conflicting feelings – from extreme concentration during the demonstrative exercise to relaxation during which the actress would explain very thoroughly each physical action – would be the flawless evidence of a perfect coordination at the mental level. An aspect I could detect, in fact, in all the demonstrations.

**Iben Nagel.** In the demonstration work *White as Jasmine*, the actress “landed” on a red rug in the middle of the stage; she was barefoot – all the three actresses performed while barefoot, they would put on their shoes only temporarily, when the exercise required it –, wearing a simple, yet superb white embroidered, starched dress, the low neck adorned with a huge eye-catching brooch. She would be “accompanied” by a drum, by a type of small-size mandolin and by a flute worn around her neck. Very scarce means, we could say a very simple performance which did not require special effects: only two spotlights were used for the crude lighting placed on the performer, while the scenery included the red rug. Nothing elaborate, nothing sophisticated. On the plain board, the actress would speak/sing, while skilfully

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\* Translated by Magda Crețu

EUGENIA SARVARI



Performance *White as Jasmine*, actor: Iben Nagel Rasmussen.  
Photo Tony d'Urso, Odin Teatret & CTLS Archives

playing the instruments and highlighting particular sections. Whenever she wanted to speak of particularly dramatic things, her movingly rough voice would accentuate the moment. Her posture – similar to the one approached in the Japanese *butoh* dance, knees apart, legs bent, straight, extremely difficult and challenging stance – would not leave any hint on the actress's face. On the contrary, absolute serenity would cover it.

**Roberta Carreri.** Actress, acting teacher, writer and festival organiser, is visibly influenced, in her performances, by the techniques taught by masters from Japan, India, Bali, China.

*Traces in the Snow*

Barefoot on the stage board; her outfit is black; trousers that accentuate the perfect line of the muscles with each movement made. The explanations that interrupt her demonstrations are ample and thoroughly termed. Extending Meyerhold's ideas on the acrobat actor, the actress speaks about the meaning of acrobatics to acting. She explains that, through acrobatics, the body and the mind blend, which is exemplified during a genuinely contortionist performance executed unhurriedly, inch by inch, where the body is tense like a spring. To catch the eye of the beholder, she would weigh her flawless technique and then "deliver" it in small bites. She would then dismantle the mechanism, piece by piece, like a skilful clockmaker, show us how each tiny gear worked and then naturally assemble it back together. This technique, the actress stated, would require years and years of dedicated learning; the instrumentalist-actor works out permanently the body-instrument.

When performing an improvisation called *In the King's Garden*, for which she had worked three full years, the actress explained how she obtained the "gliding" (steps that barely touch the ground) from the common walk along the garden alleys. She would move her whole body kept straight, her eyes like a princess's eyes looking down on her subjects. She would then stop, moving in the skin of another character, and would pick a flower, looking around, fearful of whether she might be watched from behind the shrubs perfectly trimmed by the king's gardener. The flowers hide a swarm of bees, tiny prickly aggressive angels. She is rescued by a summer rain shower, which she greets treading on air. This demonstration is followed by an explanation: improvisation means rehearsal; memorising five minutes of improvisation takes place in a week of daily efforts.

When talking about composition, she refers to the work for the Odin production, *Brecht's Ashes* inspired by the German playwright's life and work. Here, Eugenio Barba entrusted her with three characters, two from

Brecht's work and one from his life. Suddenly, by putting on a pair of high-heel red shoes, the actress becomes someone else. She is Polly Peachum, from *The Threepenny Opera*, Yvette Pottier from *Mutter Courage*, Margareta Steffin, Brecht's secretary. In a startling transit from one character to another, she creates a fascinating moment, meant to linger for a long time after the end of the "representation": in a wink, the sweet childish face transforms in a perfectly diabolical, hideous countenance.

Another episode that kept my breath suspended somewhere above the stage was during the singing of a Georgian melody. It was something out of this world. I kept repeating a human voice, a human being could not produce those sounds. Nevertheless, Roberta Carreri was there, all of her a sound, a vibration. She was the living proof of what it means to work your voice, to make it *sculpt the space*.

The end of the exercise-demonstration-performance on *Judith* proved once again that the simplicity of the means used can have a fantastic outcome. When "telling" the story of Judith, the actress needed only a deck-chair, a fan, a hair brush. Roberta Carreri became, in turn, Nebuchadnezzar ordering his general, Holophernes, to march toward the conquest of new territories; she then became Holophernes who invited Judith to drink his wine and eat his food; and then (she became) Judith who was preparing her body for the enemy's conquest: she purifies her body, anoints it with myrrh, embellishes it with sumptuous adornments, dresses it in luxurious clothes that embrace her biblically praised beautiful body. All these preparations are demonstrated by the actress in very slow, calculated movements. The spectator's imagination enters Judith's bath chamber, the chamber where she dresses. The climax, i.e. Holophernes's beheading, is carried out in a simple manner. The actress lets her hair down and, through a quick bow-and-lift movement and then handling of the fan, the hair spreads in all directions, as if blown by strong winds, which makes her face eerily cruel. She did not need sophisticated bellows place through the stage floor or off-stage; the economy of means and the simplicity had a spectacular outcome.

To conclude, Roberta Carreri explains the title of the demonstration. *Traces in the Snow* means the actor's technique – unpleasant, hard, firm stairs covered by white, fluffy, radiant snow. The spectator *must* see only the purity of the snow...

The demonstrations by the three actresses shared one trait: crystal clarity. Nothing was improvised, everything was rigorous, ordered, calculated, without being dry, arid. Art instead of reality, art through acting means purged of any oozes and purified through long-term efforts.

## *The Actor's Dramaturgy. Notes\**

ANCA DANIELA MIHUT<sup>\*\*</sup>

These pages are a *raccourci* to the demonstrations performed, in Cluj, by three actresses of the Odin Teatret – Julia Varley, Roberta Carreri and Iben Nagel Rasmussen<sup>1</sup>. They managed to clarify a series of concepts I had already read about in the books by the director-theorist Eugenio Barba; I was able to get a better grasp of specific aspect relating to the actor's work and to the construction of the performance, as applied at Odin Teatret.

This approach is based on the core concept of dramaturgy – a generator of Eugenio Barba's entire viewpoint on the performance. In his practice, dramaturgy is both the succession and the simultaneity of organic, rhythmic, dynamic, acoustic, narrative, analogical and allusive events.

### **1. *The Echo of Silence. Demonstration with Julia Varley Studio Hall of the "Gheorghe Dima" Academy of Music, Cluj***

#### *1.1 Intense and credible actions*

Julia Varley introduces herself. She tells us a few words about the experiences that steered her path to Odin Teatret and about how she has been working there, since 1976, with Eugenio Barba. She says she's English but she had been living in Italy ever since she was three; she arrived in Denmark after her twenty-second birthday. We can see, thus, that she has undergone successive displacement events, which had a dramatic influence on her artistic development. "When I decided to perform a demonstration about my vocal work – in a way very useful to me, as an actress – I started

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<sup>1</sup> Attended by actors of the "Lucian Blaga" National Theatre and of the Cluj Magyar Theatre, teachers and students of the Faculty of Theatre and Television, of the Academy of Music, specialists in theatre studies and theatre enthusiasts.



from the opposite, the silence". She asked from those at Odin Teatret a poem about silence. The first time she heard, she was impressed by the words in the last verse – "*The road disappears among the cherry trees*" – which reminded her of a song, *Le temps des cerises*, popular in France in the Second World War, amongst the members of the Resistance.

She starts by reciting the text of this song. She then reprises it, accompanying the text with physical actions<sup>2</sup>. In a third form, she reprises only the episodes of the physical actions, without the text. "By this, I wanted to show you what is behind the things the spectator can see – Julia Varley explains – although it is not important that the spectator knows it. The only important thing is that the actions are intense and credible, which means that their volume does not necessarily have to be high. The volume can be lowered."

Then follows a demonstration during which Julia Varley executed a series of actions, which she repeats three times, each time at a progressively lower volume and keeping only the essential. This is her first reference to the relationship between text and action; she will return to it, because, at Odin Teatret, it is one of the main aspects of the actor's work.

### 1.2 Voice training. Resistance work

Julia Varley discusses the aspects relating to resistance, which does not mean endurance; it means a force that opposes the execution of an action; she states it is less obvious in the actor's voice training than in the physical work. This happens because the voice seems to be able to do just about anything: it can fly, it can reach far, it can stay close, and it can cry, talk or laugh. In her demonstration, the actress will show us how she uncovered, in various ways, this resistance in her vocal work. In her experience, each voice has particular traits; there are no two voices alike; therefore, that which is good and helpful for one voice may well be bad for another one.

In a new exemplification, Julia Varley reprises the sequence of actions for the text of the song *Le temps des cerises*. This time, she performs it on a different song, from Kerala, in the south-western part of India. She says she is very fond of this song, because it was the one that led her to her own voice when she started to sing again.

When she arrived at Odin Teatret and had to begin her vocal training, she was asked to sing a song. It was then that she realised she did not know any, perhaps because in her family no one used to sing. She could, however, remember a long-forgotten children's song ("*Baba Blacksheep, have you any*

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<sup>2</sup> An observation here: according to Barba, each action has four essential traits: it is organic, it must be justified from within, it must be real and, in the end, it must be stimulated by divergent impulses.

*wool?*") which, since then, she would repeat in her training; the training was meant to make her voice heard during the performances, but it was also meant to help her find a solution to her "incapacity to sing."

Julia Varley tells us that, four years after her arrival at Odin Teatret, she began experiencing severe difficulties in speech. She could not speak to anyone over the phone or even to anyone sitting next to her, in a car. Her voice was so weak that even those near her could not hear what she was saying. A serious contraction made it very difficult for her to speak. She had visited a number of physicians, each of whom had recommended various treatments and even surgery (tonsillectomy, dental extractions) meant to remove the spasms, the choking and meant to bring back her voice.

In the end, she did not go for any of the recommended treatments; instead, she listened to her intuition and chose isolation, so she could find on her own the most appropriate solution. Thus, she starts her work in the reverse: not on the voice, but on the silence from underneath which the voice could be born again.

In her workspace (a room), she spends her days pronouncing simple sentences such as: "The light is too intense" or "Close the door" or "I forgot to buy bread", just to recognise her voice, to (re)familiarise with it, without necessarily thinking about stage objectives. Apart from the traditional professional practice (vocal exercises), she performs vocal warm ups (whistling, pronunciation of labial or explosive consonants, massaging the cheeks, mumbling, movements of the tongue in the mouth, tongue out, opening the mouth and the eyes at the same time, humming, ascending and descending on the sounds "r" and "a", humming while relaxing the limbs, the entire body, laughter etc.).

After a while, she was able to see she had developed the tendency to work within about the same note and to feel her voice in the same area of the body, which is why she decided to vary the notes and the ways of posting her voice. Thus, she discovered she could work on her voice, by suggesting the observation of an imaginary flight, by reproducing the resonance of different languages or of an invented language, by imitating the sounds made by various animals or combinations thereof. "When I'm doing a workshop, I find it is important – Julia Varley adds – that I join the physical impulse and the vocal impulse." The gestures follow closely the pace of the words; the flow and the intensity of the words take the shape of the physical actions<sup>3</sup>. The actress

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<sup>3</sup> The adjustment of the physical and the vocal impulses is one of the main objectives of the individual improvisations and, later, in the development of the performance. The synchronisation of the two types of impulses is the result of an effort (which is) meant to help the actor get rid of the conditioned reflexes of speech or of the declamation clichés.

exemplifies it – her voice is carried by the energy and by the intensity of her step. Furthermore, in some cases, the physical impulses and the vocal ones are combined, which leads to rhythmic dialogues/counterpoints between the voice and the body.

Vocal work is a way to detect the instances of resistance and use them. To learn to sing is a way to confront your difficulties and self-limits, because, sometimes, thinking is what hinders the things we have to do. This is why we need to let the body think. As an actor, you want to express natural things; to that end, the body must be allowed space and time to react. Necessity needs ways to react.

### 1.3 *Talking brain and singing brain. Working on the text and working on the tune*

Julia Varley delivers a series of clarifications on the activity of the two cerebral hemispheres; the left one processes verbal information (in this hemisphere, processes relating to the sequential and rhythmic aspects of acoustic information take place), while the right brain processes non-verbal, particularly musical, information (perceiving pitch height, melodic lines, harmony and emotional contents of a song). Nevertheless, the actress wants to emphasise that a great part of her work occurs to prove that this is not completely true; she uses various techniques to allow the operation of the thing that brings the two hemispheres closer together rather than apart. The voice enables the coexistence of talking and singing. To exemplify, Julia Varley reads a text in Spanish, by the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro<sup>4</sup>; a text about water. This is why she opts for two songs about water, too.

The actress shows us how she works on the words and on the tune of these songs.

First, she puts the words of Huidobro's poem on the notes of the songs: the first stanza on the first song, the second stanza on the second song. Then she pulls out progressively the melodic line. In the third version, where the tune is a mere halo, she accompanies the words on physical actions. "In the end", she says, "the spectator will no longer recognise the tune, but my spoken voice will give the impression it is singing".

### 1.4 *Working on the text. Pretext, subtext, context*

#### 1.4.1 *Pretext*

To explain how she works on the text, Julia Varley starts from words that include the theme "text": pretext, subtext, context.

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<sup>4</sup> Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948), poet, theorist of "creationism", predecessor of Chilean surrealism.

She says, "the pretext can be the fact that I have to perform a demonstration, it can be the said text on silence or another text on silence, which I don't know. The pretext is like a springboard – it helps me begin a work to obtain results I don't know yet. It's a point of departure toward an effort that will show me what I have to say".

#### 1.4.2 *Subtext. Physical actions as subtext*

"But the most important aspect for the actor is the subtext, because about 90% of communication occurs, as we know, through body language, through gestures and voice tone, while only 10% is given by the meaning of the words. I am using the word *subtext* meaning the thing on which the actor relies, in order to be able to say the text in a particular way. At Odin Teatret, the subtext is often given by the physical actions. I will give you an example from the performance of *Oxyrhincus*<sup>5</sup>, in which I played Joan of Arc."

Julia Varley exemplifies a fragment (text and stage movement): the first time she demonstrates only the series of actions, the second time she inserts the text, the third time she explain every gesture, and the fourth time she joins the text to the actions, in a coherent segment. Explanation: "This is an example in which the physical actions as subtext and the text go hand in hand. But I can take this physical action used as subtext and reuse it in a different stage situation."

##### 1.4.2.1 *Vocal action as subtext*

Regarding *Talabot*<sup>6</sup>, Varley says that, instead of using the physical action as subtext, she used a vocal action. Imitating a singing routine of the Austrian and Swiss mountain men, but also of some African tribes, a routine known to us, Europeans, as *yodelling*, she applies it to the text, using it as subtext. Julia illustrates her words with two examples: a text from *Talabot* and another one from *The Castle of Holstebro*.

She then speaks about the songs of the Sardinian shepherds who have a very peculiar way of singing – sometimes the sounds are guttural, some other

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<sup>5</sup> *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus*, developed in Holstebro, performed in reinvented Coptic, Ancient Greek and Yiddish, in 214 representations, between March 1985 and June 1987.

<sup>6</sup> *Talabot* was created in Chicxulub (Yucatan, Mexico) and Holstebro, based on an autobiographic text specifically written by the Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup; later, Eugenio Barba completed the dramaturgy of the historic and biographic episodes selected by the actors. The volume *Burning the House* shows that *Talabot* was the name of the Norwegian ship on which Barba had been a sailor. A part of the text was delivered by the actors in their own language, another part in the language of the country where the performance took place. The play was performed 279 times, between August 1988 and October 1991.

times they resemble rattling or vibrations; she borrows this singing, to create Mister Peanut's voice, in *The Castle of Holstebro*<sup>7</sup>.

The concordant sounds make another – truly impressive – acoustic effect seen in various performances, in *Talabot* and in *The Castle of Holstebro*, which she exemplifies.

#### 1.4.2.2 *The tune as subtext*

By applying the same procedure as with Huidobro's poem, a song (a tune) can also be used as subtext. This time, the example is a scene from *Talabot*, during which her team sang a Danish song and she used it as a subtext for the text she spoke in the same scene (which she reprises, for us, in English, in Italian and in Spanish): "*My voice is buried there. I mustn't sing this song. My father can't stand hearing it. It's a song they sang on his mother's funeral.*"

"Because we had to change the language according to the different countries where we performed the representation, I found it important to have a song as subtext, because it allowed me to maintain in the performance the original musicality", states the actress.

She draws our attention to a natural quiver in her voice, which resembles the Indian way of singing and which she does not conceal; instead, she uses it sometimes, to create effects, just like she did in a scene of *Talabot*; thus, she demonstrates that a drawback can be converted in an expressive technical solution.

Regarding acoustic inspiration, Julia Varley states that, in some cases, she takes her information from the text, by selecting the verbs, for example. From the English text she speaks, she chooses three verbs: "there is", "to express", "to live", noting that, from the actor's point of view, this phrase is not actually useful, because it includes only three verbs that are not active verbs. Nevertheless, she transforms the verbs in physical actions, to which she then finds vocal equivalents; this is how she can sign a text, using the acoustic information in the text itself.

Another way of emphasising the tones in a text is to accentuate the important words in a sentence; this takes place by speaking them slower and lower. In the exemplification, the actress repeats the same sentence, each time emphasising another word, which allows us to see how the meaning of the sentence can modulate efficiently and expressively according to the intonation used.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Castle of Holstebro* was based on a text by Julia Varley and Eugenio Barba, created in 1990 in Holstebro and performed by Julia Varley.

"I may also decide to make a vocal improvisation based on the text", Julia Varley says, "and when I hear this text – *There is the silence of the old, so loaded with wisdom, that language cannot express it in understandable words*" – I can picture the sunrise". She demonstrates the acoustic improvisation the sentence suggests; then she articulates the sentence, followed by the inflection of the improvisation.

### 1.4.3 Context

Context commands the meaning of the text. Context can be created by the other actors, by the other characters, by the storyline, by the lighting, by the space, by the costumes or by the sonority. To illustrate her words, Julia Varley goes back to "*There is the silence of the old, so loaded with wisdom*" and to its opposite: "*There is the silence of the old who have become infants again*". At first, she says both of the sentences, shaping their intonation naturally; in a second phase, she only inverts the intonation, thus modifying the meaning. The conclusion is that, through a specific piece of information deriving from resonance, the spectator is in possession of a thing that is not obvious, a thing that is not already known by everybody; it is a surprise, something new, more vivid and more vibrant information and meaning.

Julia then evokes a scene from *Brecht's Ashes*<sup>8</sup>, which shows how fascism rose to power; a character (Arturo Ui), coming out of a black box, enters the stage, quoting a text from Nietzsche, while she translates this monologue. She reproduces the text, then she tells us it was used also in another scene of another performance, *The Castle of Holstebro*, where it had other tones and meanings, because there she spoke to her hands, as if the hands were the earth from which the text sprung.

Another example is one in *The Castle of Holstebro*, where a prince of Denmark enters the stage, his hands holding a white object. The text that this prince quotes, however, belongs, in fact, to a vagabond, Vladimir, from Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

This series of examples demonstrated the way in which the actress discovered resistance and worked on it in her vocal training. To conclude, Julia shows that, sometimes, she also works with the freedom her voice allows.

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<sup>8</sup> *Brecht's Ashes* is a performance whose creation began in the same period with the creation of *The Million* (1978) and which includes three story lines relating to: Bertolt Brecht's biography, the historical events during the dramaturge's life and the way in which these events had an impact on his creation. The show had 166 representations, between March 1980 and October 1984.

In the final example, she brings together all the procedures and vocal effects described in this demonstration, in an impressive moment of vocal virtuosity.

“It may seem strange to choose silence for a vocal demonstration, but the purpose was to make the silence sing” – this is how Julia Varley ends her demonstration.

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Someone asks Julia Varley how she prepares for the show.

“The training for the show is a very concrete, very simple, ritual. The same sequences are reprised: preparing and ironing the costume, preparing the required props, dressing the costume etc. The training *per se* takes place during the rehearsals, which can last even entire months, because it takes a long time to prepare a performance at Odin Teatret.”

**2. *White as Jasmine*. Performance with Iben Nagel Rasmussen  
Studio Hall of the “Gheorghe Dima” Academy of Music, Cluj**



Performance *White as Jasmine*, actor: Iben Nagel Rasmussen.  
Photo Tony d’Urso, Odin Teatret & CTLS Archives

This show describes a new approach of voice exploration: the voice as *inner space* (either the intimate, personal one or the theatrical one), the voice as *exterior space* (for example, like in the Italian and Spanish squares, the streets, the grounds for particular games or processions, the fields where you can hear shouting and work songs) and the voice as *space-created-by-words*. Paradoxically, Iben Nagel Rasmussen will close her performance by stating that liberation (emancipation) through words is, in fact, liberation from their meaning.

In line with the demonstration tradition of the Odin Teatret actors, Iben Nagel Rasmussen tells us a few words about her life. She says she has a special relationship with words, because her mother is a poet, her father – a writer, and her first love also a writer.

The props she uses include a rug – which, during the performance, turns into a real magic carpet with which she floats through time and through emotional and geographic spaces –, a whistle and a tambourine, with which she accompanies and illustrates her account and her songs.

Each segment of the representation can be deemed a stop-over in the significant moments of existence and creation of the Odin Teatret company. Thus, the actress's performance becomes a refresher, a living chronicle of the company, since 1966 to present times.

### **3. *Traces in the Snow*. Demonstration with Roberta Carreri Studio Hall of the "Gheorghe Dima" Academy of Music, Cluj**

Roberta Carreri starts by saying a few words about how she arrived, on April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1974, at Odin Teatret, about her work there throughout all these years. When she integrated in the company, Odin Teatret had been established for 9 years and a half; Eugenio Barba was 27 years old back then and he had begun his activity with four people aged between 17 and 20. They grew as actors and as teachers, Roberta Carreri being "adopted" by Iben Nagel Rasmussen and Torgeir Wethal<sup>9</sup>.

Roberta Carreri tells us that she had arrived at Odin Teatret because she wanted to uncover her presence on stage; she also says that her work is inspired, to a large extent, by meetings with masters of the Far East. Her entire activity can be divided, according to her, in three great phases: finding one's own presence on stage, acting against automatisms and creating the actor's dramaturgy. The purpose of her demonstration will be to unveil professional secrets relating to these moments of self-construction.

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<sup>9</sup> At Odin Teatret, there is a tradition that a new actor who wants to join the company should be "adopted" by two trained actors, who, as his/her tutors, undertake material and professional responsibility for the time of his/her apprenticeship.





Work Demonstration: *Traces in the Snow*, with Roberta Carreri.  
Photo Fiora Bemporad, Odin Teatret & CTLS Archives

In her work room, she always has a notebook, to write down all the things she tries. Her notes were then shaped into a book, which she has with her this evening and which she will consult every now and then, just to make sure she does not forget anything from what she wants to share.

The first aspect she mentions regarding the actor's training is the *presence*, i.e. "the quality of being present". "All those in the hall are present", says Roberta Carreri, "but the difference is that you, the spectators, while present physically, can let your mind wander somewhere else, but I, as actress, must be here, body and mind connected at all times".

### 3.1 *Acrobatics or emancipation from automatisms*

One of the ways of making you present and of freeing your body from the daily automatisms is acrobatics. This is why all those at Odin Teatret have had this experience. Acrobatics is very important in an actor's training, because it requires uninterrupted connection of the body with the mind. If the mind leaves the body, the body will fall and, in the fall, will bang against something. For this reason, the actress thinks the floor was her first "Zen master" who woke her up each time she lost her concentration.

Acrobatic movements can be executed fast, dynamically, filling the room with energy; or they can be in slow motion. Slow motion is one of the principles that force the body to move slowly, inch by inch and the actor has to think with his/her entire body, in order to avoid falling and not to accelerate the movements. There is not twitching and there is always a controlled evenness of weight. All these acrobatic exercises have a fixed form: a beginning, an interlude and an end, which allows their learning, their transmission.

### 3.2 *Working on principles*

Roberta Carreri says: "Working on the principles means having a frame, a framework of rules within which we can improvise. For example, the slow motion is one of them; its objective is to make me not forget at all any part of my body." Two other principles are:

#### 3.2.1 *The principle of the work done by hand or by feet*

The objective is to find new ways of moving your body through space, of obtaining *a new way of being*.

#### 3.2.2 *The introvert-extrovert principle*

For the sake of understanding, we could equate the terms "introvert" and "extrovert" with "inward motion" and, respectively, "outward motion". This principle is perhaps similar to what choreography calls "en dehors" and "en dedans" and means the position different parts of the body can have. Several examples: head and shoulders inward, arms, pelvis outward, one leg inward, the other one outward. She then adds that, after approximately two years of work on the two principles (hands – feet, introvert – extrovert), she created a character for a street performance, called *Anàbasis*<sup>10</sup>. The character wears a man's attire (white shirt, black trousers, wide suspenders, high hat, large black shoes) and his name is Geronimo. He goes among men and women, and he talks to them, using a whistle instead of his voice, and his flexibility reminds us of a half-clown half-marionette character.

### 3.3 *Individual training*

Roberta Carreri tells us about the phases of her individual training. We find out that at Odin Teatret, the training is not differentiated on men and on women; at all times, in the first phase, the same training is approached, which last about three years. Then training becomes individual and each actor is free to choose what to work.

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<sup>10</sup> *Anàbasis* is a traveling performance, inspired from parades, based on simple dramaturgy. A group of foreigners (actors) make way through foreigners (spectators). The performance was created at Holstebro, in 1974, and had 180 representations, between April 1977 and September 1984.

The objective of the first phase was the emancipation of the body from the automatism of daily existence and the identification of a natural way on the stage, without stepping on the side of naturalism.

What she tells us lets us guess how an Odin Teatret actor is trained and how he is or is not integrated in the company. The actress tells us that, after three years of training, she entered the actors' group. That meant she was going to train alone, without assistance and help from her tutors, which allowed her a lot of space, but, on the other hand, also brought great responsibility. If until then somebody had always told her *what* and *how* to do, from then on she would decide independently *what* and *how* to work. The inspiration she needed could be found in reading, in watching photos, albums, films, in listening to music etc.

She thus remembers her inspiration for her first principle of her individual training. She was in the south of France and she found a book about the game *pétanque*, a book with very beautiful images. She had been stunned by the fact that the images were, in fact, photos, snapshots that caught the movement and that the men who played, aged 70, 75 or 80, looked as if ready to fly when they threw the ball. She understood she needed concentration and that those who launched the ball were thinking with their entire body, involving the exact amount of energy required so that the ball could set in motion the other balls.

Back to Holstebro, Roberta Carreri tried to create something similar to those photos. She began also by taking snapshots – motions “frozen” in the moment when the hand threw the ball. She understood that “freezing” the motion meant maintain balance.

This is how the **principle of opposite forces** appeared; she continued working on it every day, 20 to 30 minutes, deliberately, throwing in different ways: slowly, fast, softly, with force, ample or small movements, which can change course.

### 3.4 *Fighting fatigue*

Any kind of training can lead to fatigue. The actress says we need to ask: “What is beyond fatigue?” or “My body is tired; do I have to stop?” or “What is beyond the first level of my limits?”

In any training and any type of physical effort, if we manage to exceed the fatigue threshold and even physical pain, our body becomes lighter and we can continue. This is owed to the secretion of endorphins by the brain – the substances produced by our body only when confronted with smaller or bigger challenges, with extraordinary situations. The feeling is tiredness, but not weariness. We are invited to think about different instances of fatigue in our life and to ask ourselves: “What tires first? Our body or our brain?”

Roberta Carreri tells us that, for her, the first one to get tired is her brain; this is why, when she works, she must feed it with work, with something to “chew on”. Therefore, she has to tell her brain to work: on various directions (up, down, front, back, lateral), on different types of energy (low, intense) etc. She concludes that what we call “physical training” is in fact *mental training*.

Nevertheless, there was another risk. Even if she kept giving different orders to the brain, for the purpose of motion and task diversification, automatism could have occurred. After five or six years of these training sessions, she could execute difficult exercises, while thinking about daily issues, i.e. having her thoughts elsewhere. She thus entered a new phase, during which she had to destroy a type of automatism she herself had created.

### 3.5 *The principle of segmentation. Theatrical close-up. Resources of boredom*

Year in, year out, Eugenio Barba would say to her: “Fill the room, fill the space with energy!”; for this purpose, Roberta Carreri would engage in ample motions. At a point in time, she had the idea to do the opposite, i.e. to sit and to irrigate the room with energy, through very small movements. That was how she began working on this principle she calls *segmentation*. *Segment* means *a part of her body*, eyes (direction of sight) included. She gives us several examples during which she moves her eyes, then her head or first her head and then her eyes. The exercise can become more complex and two segments can be moved at the same time. Each movement must be determined; there is nothing automatic in this type of training.

“If we liken the principle to a frame, she says, segmentation is the small, narrowest principle I’ve tried. After I worked on my entire body, I was very difficult to work on only one segment, only one joint. And also very boring. Boredom, however, is essential while you work – it pushes you, at a point in time, to find the best solution. I had to use my entire fantasy to change gears, directions, amplitudes, energy features, to maintain the life of motions. One of the reasons I chose to work on this principle was the dilemma I had relating to the meaning of the theatrical close-up. In a film, if the director wants you to see an actor’s hand, he makes a close-up of five by seven meters. I cannot avoid seeing the hand. But with theatre you can see the actor’s entire body. If I want you to look at my hand, I have only one solution: keep my body still and move my hand slowly. If we forget, however, about one part of the body, it will move, even if we don’t want it to do that.”

### 3.6 *Being one with the action. The difference between action and motion*

"The actor needs to be firm", says Roberta Carreri, which may seem self-explanatory, but which will prove to be a lot subtler than at first sight. She talks to us about the Danish physicist Niels Bohr, renowned for his research of quantic physics and fond of western films. He was concerned with the idea that, when a good character and a bad character would decide to shoot it out, the one who first took the gun out to shoot would die. It seemed illogic, which made Bohr ask himself who this could be. One day, he sent his assistant to buy water guns and then asked him to get in a "duel" with another assistant. While analysing them, Bohr understood that in these films actions took place accurately. The first one to take the gun *decides* to take the gun, which means she does a mental action first and *then* a physical action, while the second one *is* already decided. The second one *is one with the action*. The first one acts based on reason, the second one based on instinct.

The natural conclusion is that there is a difference between *thinking* an action and *doing it* and *being one with it*, i.e. *being decided (firm)*.

The actress emphasises the difference between action and motion: a motion does not change anything in space, whereas an action *wants* to change and always *changes* something.

She gives us an example, by moving the book in front of her. It is obvious that she wants to move the book, that she has a definite intention. She specified that in English we say "intention", which must be read as "intension", i.e. "tension within the body", which we steer and dose in order to achieve something. If she had to lift a case of beer instead of a book, the intention would be different. The body would prepare another way for this other type of action.

### 3.7 *Working on resistance*

Roberta Carreri tells us that, when she arrived at Odin Teatret, her colleagues worked with very large beams, 1.80m in length, 4cm in diameter. They were made of wood and they were very heavy. Although she had just arrived, Eugenio Barba had her, too, work with these beams; he would say, "you must bring this object to life". The actress asks herself: "What is the life of a piece of wood if not the energy you induce in it?" She says she had to perform with these pieces of wood exercises with a beginning, a middle part and an end. Everything had to be very precise and there was one rule: the beam had to be caught at one end or at the middle, so that it stayed straight. Of course, it tended to tilt, but we had to make it stay parallel with the floor. After three years she was allowed to work with a smaller cane. At first sight, working with a smaller cane may seem less difficult, because it is

lighter; however, this is not true, because you do not meet any resistance. Or we need resistance, because it is only through it that we can discover our strength. Roberta Carreri shows us the cane she was allowed to use. "It is so light that I can make it fly and I don't even have to use my body. Therefore, in the beginning, I had to pretend this tick was as heavy as the beam. I started doing all sorts of motions. I could name the movements my body recognised and I would note them down. You need to understand that I do not think first the motion and then do it with my body; by allowing the body to work with the cane, I recognise images I can name. This is called *thinking in movement*, i.e. a different manner of thinking. By working dynamically, you get the meaning. After 12-15 structures, I made a cut."

### 3.8 *Staging the structures and the logic of the improvisation*

Roberta Carreri shows us this cut. She then stops at each structure and explain it to us. There are eight series that make a story: 1. A warrior is in a forest. 2. He hears noise: "Who is there?", he asks, 3. It's only a woman who walks on the river bank. 4. On the river, an old man on his boat. 5. Another one is fishing. 6. When he catches the fish and pulls it in, he sees someone playing golf on the bank. 7. A boy who was watching the boat sees a duck at which he aims an arrow. 8. The injured duck falls deeper and deeper in the river.

We need to note that the logic of the improvisation does not operate linearly; instead, it leaps and makes associations. This is the type of improvisations actors make for theatrical representations. These improvisations always have a subject and they are always individual.

Roberta Carreri talks about the way in which she had improvised, on her arrival at Odin Teatret. She had not improvised before and did not know how to do it. She remembers her first improvisation, *In the King's Garden*, and she performs it. Then she shows us how she would have done this improvisation three or four years later and, again, she stops to explain each sequence and her reason for a particular action instead of another one. She says, "There's a particular logic that makes me react rather than act all the time" and then she adds that, in order to learn/fix a five-minute improvisation, one may need more than a week of work. In the beginning, when an actor improvised, other colleagues assisted him/her and noted down the improvisation, to help him/her memorise it later. In 1972, the video camera appeared and at first they thought it would make the actors' tasks easier; in the end, it turned out that, because of all the details it recorded, memorisation with the help of a camera was more painstaking, more difficult and took more time.

### 3.9 *Adapting the individual improvisation in another story or the “transplant” of the improvisation*

The actress then recounts an episode of her work with Eugenio Barba; it helps us understand how the actors' individual improvisations are used when a play is created for the stage. Eugenio Barba watches her *In the King's Garden* improvisation and asks her, “Can you use this improvisation in a scene on which I am working? It talks about an evil and mad king. He wants to condemn to death a young and noble warrior who had seduced his daughter. Therefore, he summons all the army and church heads in the throne room to pronounce the death condemnation of this warrior. Roberta, you are the noble warrior who enter the room.” Roberta Carreri shows us, step by step, how she transferred her improvisation in the new story. She shows us the difference between what she would have done if Eugenio Barba had said only, “You are the young warrior. Come kneel before your king” and what she obtained when the director asked her to include her improvisation in the new story. The latter version is more real and richer with feeling and meaning. “When we improvise and put our improvisation in a stage scene, the actress explains, we always try to keep the images of the initial improvisation, because this tension of meanings, which emerges between the original images and the new context, is what ascribes a new quality to our presence.”

### 3.10 *Composition*

Roberta Carreri goes back briefly to her book, she flicks through it and then tells us: “There are other ways of creating characters, and one of these ways is the composition, i.e. composing with the body and with the voice.”

She tells us how, in 1979, the Odin Teatret company of actors started to work on *Brecht's Ashes*, where she had to play three characters: Polly Peachum from *The Threepenny Opera*, Yvette Pottier from *Mutter Courage* and Margarete Steffin who had been for a long time Brecht's secretary and co-worker. Eugenio Barba had Roberta Carreri put on high-heel shoes and find her characters' step. For Polly Peachum, the spoiled daughter of Jeremiah Peachum, a wealthy man, therefore a girl who gets whatever she wants, the actress approaches a firm gait, which inspired confidence. For Yvette Pottier, a prostitute who wants to become a lady, which actually happens at the end of the play when she marries a colonel, Roberta Carreri approaches again a firm, relaxed and even provocative gait. However, Eugenio Barba notes that both characters have similar steps and that the spectators may not be able to tell them apart. Therefore, he asks Carreri to walk like Yvette Pottier and, for Polly Peachum,

to do the opposite. Thus, Polly Peachum walks with a limp, crooked, contorted. Roberta Carreri adds a comment, "Many things are not written in the play. What colour are Polly Peachum's eyes? This piece of information is not there. There is not any information on whether Polly Peachum had a hip accident at birth. But we decided that she did indeed have one and this is why she walked with a limp. Furthermore, Polly Peachum and Yvette Pottier had different ways of using their voice." The actress sings the song Polly Peachum sang in the performance, and then the one sung by Yvette Pottier, which paints the very clear picture of two different persons/characters.

Thus, the step (gait) and the voice are two essential elements in the creation of a character.

*3.11 The performance emerged from the director-actor interaction. The solo performance. The text is born with the show*

Roberta Carreri recounts that, in 1987, Odin Teatret would travel 8 months a year. Nineteen eighty-seven was also the year her daughter, Alice, had to go to school and could no longer be brought on tours. Thus, she had to stay in Holstebro, and Eugenio Barba suggests she makes her own performance; he suggests the topic of Judith, the only woman in the Bible who does not give life, but takes a man's life with her bare hands. He asks her to produce a material on which he should be able to work. Therefore, she starts to work on this subject. Until 1972, at Odin Teatret, work had not been done after (based on) a text; the text was created during the creation of the performance, through the interaction between the director and the actors.

She receives from Barba the catalogue of an exhibition of paintings of Mary Magdalene. The paintings have a strong impact on her, due to their dramatic force. She photocopies them, lays them out on the floor of her work room and starts to learn the positions in which Mary Magdalene appears: carrying the oil, washing the feet of Jesus, sitting under the cross etc. She "clips out" a series of movements. She then tries to find a "pulse" to link together the images. She chooses a song on which she can perform these positions. Given that they were dramatic, in order to "avoid putting butter on grease" (a Danish proverb), Roberta Carreri chooses at first an Italian lullaby. Then she understands that it would only mean something to those who know and belong to the Italian culture; she chooses a different, broader spread song – *Silent Night (Angel del ciel or Stille Nacht)*. During another view of the material, Barba notes that this song cannot be used, because it relates to *The New Testament*, while Judith's character concerns *The Old Testament*. They decide



to create a love poem, a poem about Eros and Thanatos<sup>11</sup>. In their version, Judith falls in love with Holofernes before she kills him, and the poem will be recited before the man's head, found on the floor, at her feet. They have also decided that the text should be delivered in Italian, because the heroine is tragic and the language Roberta Carreri speaks best, without mistakes that could compromise the outcome, is Italian.

### 3.12 *Vocal training. Vocal actions*

Roberta Carreri makes a parenthesis on vocal training. She tells us that vocal training at Odin Teatret is the one Barba learnt at Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre and involves the co-operation of the five resonators: the posterior ones (in the occipital region of the cranium), the upper ones (head crown), the mask (the bone cavities of the face and of the front), the chest and the abdomen. To work with these resonators, the actor is recommended to use a text he/she can deliver without thinking – merely focused on the emission of sounds. The focus is not on the punctuation marks of this text; talking takes places based on breathing, on the entire amount of air, after which the actor can breathe in again. The purpose is to perform vocal actions. What is a vocal action? The actor must speak by projecting his/her voice, progressively, from the proximity of his/her body as far as possible, to the exterior, and then return it to the point of departure. Roberta Carreri exemplifies vocal actions for each resonator.

### 3.13 *Vocal colour*

After working on the resonators, another way to achieve vocal actions is to colour the voice. It can be done with the help of the nose (nasalising) or of the throat (guttural voice, glottis effects). Improvisation is possible by imagining how the voice follows a flying object.

The voice can also be coloured by imagining natural elements: fog, ice, streams. The actress provides examples with each of these elements.

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<sup>11</sup> This is one of the situations in which the text is not the premise for the performance; instead, the text emerges from the creation of the performance. Another example is *Brecht's Ashes*, where the setting of the literary material is born from the periphrases of known texts, from the actors' improvisations and options and from the chain of episodes with words that matched the situation. This text, however, is not fully represented in the performance, but – in Barba's words – "it 'represents' the performance, just like we may say that a transcription for pianoforte 'represents' a symphony". See the introductory note to *Brecht's Ashes*, in *Cahier Brecht*, 2, Paris, Éditions de L'Herne, 1982, p. 251.

Vocal action improvisation can also be performed based on a topic. One of Roberta Carreri's favourite subjects is *The Istanbul Bazaar*, because it includes everything we can imagine: merchants, common people, old men, children, women, dogs, cats, mice, birds etc. The demonstration is amazing! By the vocal effects she uses, she materialises characters, the stage is filled and you have the actual feeling of lively to-and-fro and crowding in the Turkish bazaar.

### 3.14 *Working on the text. Colouring the important words*

To offer examples of how she colours the important words in a text, Roberta Carreri goes back to Judith's story, which, in fact, is a monologue. She tells us that, in this case, she worked in various ways on the text. There were times when the physical and the vocal actions matched the actions in the text. The actress exemplifies with fragments from the monologue, stopping on the important words, showing us how the concurrence of actions works. For example, for the imperative of the Italian verb "va!" (go), the voice also "goes", by "drawing" a trajectory in space, and the extended hand, pointing the direction, follows in the same intense line.

Other words such as *perfume*, *bracelet*, *necklace*, *water* are coloured by the acoustic associations they generate.

Not all the words in the text are coloured, but some of them are selected for it, to break the monotony of the text and to provide it with a different dimension. When you hear a text spoken in this way – in "coloured" words – you feel you travel from a two-dimensional image to one the lines of which are three-D.

The actress then mentions that one of the very efficient procedures of emphasising a word is to whisper it rather than saying it loud; it will make the spectator even more alert to what it is said.

### 3.15 *Technique*

After this avalanche of information, Roberta Carreri seems to draw the line and, like an oriental master, tells us: "Until now, I've talked about technique. Technique, technique and technique again... Technique is important, an essential element of art, but it is not the thing the spectator should see. As one of my good friends once said, 'Technique is a cold, black, ugly, iron stair. It is necessary. But it starts to snow. And the snow covers the stair. And the stair becomes white, beautiful, shining in the sun. The snow is the moment of the representation, where the spectator is not supposed to see the technique, although it is there, underlying. The spectator must see the snow rather than the technique'."

“Everything is set, fixed, Roberta Carreri adds, because our representations have a physical score (of the physical actions) and a vocal score. In the following fragment, at some points I will be Holophernes, at other times I will be Nebuchadnezzar and sometimes Judith or even the guards. It is the exact text of the Bible. To me, it is new each time.”

A new demonstration follows, to our delight and amazement. The stage is again occupied by different characters that appear out of the blue. Moreover, Roberta Carreri seems to be able to change her physiognomy. While at the beginning of the performance she was a woman approximately 50 years old, we can now see a Judith who cannot be more than 26... What we see is, indeed, more than technique... It resembles magic!

### 3.16 *Harmonic sounds as a conclusion*

After this demonstration, which makes us wonder what's next, Roberta Carreri tells us she has talked more about her past, in an attempt of “theatrical anthropology” and she continues to talk about vocal training. She speaks about an important phase of her work on voice, which began with the discovery of cassettes with songs sung by Georgian shepherds. She listened to them and she was amazed by their voices, which they call “crystal voices”, but not because they sing in the acute or in *falseto*; they merely manage to produce harmonic sounds. “It's as if you had a crystal glass and you drew circles on its rim. All the sounds are within us. We just have to find them”, she says. Because she did not have a Georgian master, she had to learn this way of singing on her own.

After the subsequent exemplifications which prove once again her vocal virtuosity, Roberta Carreri closes the book and thanks us. Furthermore, with a subtle gesture, she stops our enthusiastic applause, explaining that, according to the tradition at Odin Teatret, the actors are not applauded.

## 4. *The Dead Brother. Demonstration with Julia Varley*

Thursday, 01.11.2012, 15.00 o'clock, Studio Hall of the “Gheorghe Dima” Academy of Music, Cluj

Julia Varley begins her demonstration with two definitions of the actor. “The actor is the person who performs actions. Or perhaps the actor is the person who can help a spectator see what is not there [on the stage]. The former concerns the actor's work with him/herself, the latter derives from his/her relationship with the spectator.”



Work Demonstration: *The Dead Brother*, with Julia Varley.  
Photo Rossella Viti, Odin Teatret & CTLS Archives

In this demonstration, Julia Varley wants to show us how the actor and the director work together at Odin Teatret to create a show, how a text acquires rhythm, meaning and density in the road travelled from the written form to its spatialisation. Nevertheless, prior to all that, she wants to clarify some of the aspects relating to their work.

#### 4.1 *Real actions. Exercises*

Unlike movement (motion), the *action* is the one that produces a change: acting on stage is not the same as acting in everyday life. In theatre, an action is not required to be necessarily realistic, but it must be real. This means that the theatrical action must reinvent on stage an equivalent form of the existing forces of real life. Therefore, it is important that an actor learns to perform real actions. Do what is necessary rather than what is decorative. At Odin Teatret, the actor learns this during training, by performing exercises that include the principles of real actions. The actor learns to think with his/her body.

The principles of the actions and therefore of the exercises are diverse. The exercises include always a beginning and an end, and the space between these two is not linear; it contains a change. An exercise is coherent, it follows a non-random logic and it has at least three phases: a beginning, a middle part and an end. The balance is displaced from the centre of the body and controlled, and weight is transformed in energy.

Each exercise contains an opposition, which can occur in the form of the various directions practiced. For example, the arm ascends along the line on which the knee descends. The opposition can take place by *satz*, which can be defined as the moment when the energy is gathered/concentrated before being released in the action.

Apart from the requirement of reality, an action must also be credible. One of the conditions of the living nature of an action is the accuracy of the extremities: feet, hands, sight. Exercises are brought together in sequences.

#### 4.2 *Score*

At Odin Teatret, a representation involves work on a subject, a text, an image or a technical task. The actors must create sequences (chains) of actions in the space, which they should be able to reprise. The sequences of actions are called *score*, a term obviously borrowed from music.

This score will be processed. It can be modified through rhythm, through slower or faster execution, and the quality of the energy in the score can be intense, soft, mixed. The score can be diminished, taking into account, however, all the original impulses. It can be coloured through the application of the introvert-extrovert principle; it can be transferred from the entire body to only one part of the body; it can find a vocal equivalent of the physical actions it contains.

Julia Varley shows that it is essential that the score is established to the tiniest details; the actor should, thus, be able to repeat them always, accurately.

The score is the material submitted to the director; he will shape it, he will sculpt in it as if in a "marble block", to extract the "statue".

For the sake of illustration, the actress recites a poem by Georg Johannesen<sup>12</sup> about a dream; she tells us she started to improvise, finding a series of oppositions for "to dream": sleeping-awakening, on a chair. Then, she reprised while standing the sequences she had performed sitting on the chair.

She performed an improvisation starting from the verse "*Last night I ran with the moon*". She explains the mind-set that sustains an improvisation, respectively the things that stir actions in it. "There are eleven structures in this improvisation, structures that make a story: 1. The moon is round like a face and holed. 2. Astronauts go on the moon. 3. The moon in children's books is slim and has a nose. 4. In *Talabot* I removed several images from a book and let them fall to the ground. 5. One of these images shows the first astronaut to walk on the moon. 6. This happened on my birthday. 7. And I saw it on TV. 8. There are stars around the moon. 9. I am trying to pick them up. 10. I wonder whether I could put them back where they were. 11. I put them down, on the ground."

First, she shows us the series of structures, without text and without explanations. The second time she considers each sequence and explains it to us. The third time she reprises the entire montage.

Starting from "*Last night I dreamt of saving other lives than my own*", she performs another improvisation that she leaves unexplained. She tells us that she showed Eugenio Barba this entire material: the composition while sitting on the chair and the two improvisations, to which she also added two objects – a rose and a black ribbon to cover her eyes. Eugenio Barba suggested her to use the objects in reverse order, to change the position in space and a series of other adjustments Julia Varley exemplifies in turn. While she works on this montage, Julia Varley receives two other poems that can help her produce material: a poem by Octavio Paz<sup>13</sup> and another one by Nâzim Hikmet Ran<sup>14</sup>.

To improvise on Octavio Paz's poem, Julia Varley takes her inspiration from three paintings by Eugène Delacroix: *Horseman coming out of the Sea*, *Fanatics of Tangier* and *The Death of Lara*. She chooses from here a series of positions she transforms in physical actions and which she can associate to the text.

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<sup>12</sup> Georg Johannesen (1931-2005), contemporary Norwegian poet.

<sup>13</sup> Octavio Paz Lozano (1914-1998), Mexican writer, poet, diplomat. Recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1990.

<sup>14</sup> Nâzim Hikmet Ran (1902-1963), Turkish poet.

To create material for Hikmet's poem, she uses music. She lets music command her actions and then she transplants the text of the poem on the selected tunes. She does it in a manner similar to the previous demonstration, *The Echo of Silence*, on Huidobro's poem: she repeats the text, keeping the inflections of the song, but without making it obvious.

When she brings together the text of the poems and the actions, notable adaptations occur. The actress shows us several of the modifications of the score. Other modifications will occur, however, when the score will be shaped by the director.

#### 4.3 *Elaboration*<sup>15</sup>

"This work on details, this repetition and refinement, they make the most important phase of the creative process. This is why we call it elaboration. It involves the organic union between the text and the action", says Julia Varley.

The texts, the materials the actor suggests, the ideas and images proposed by the director are the starting points. These visions meet and evolve progressively in something that will have a life of its own and which will surprise both the actor and the director. The actress tells us that Bertolt Brecht managed to describe this situation in a letter to actor Charles Laughton with whom he had worked at the performance of *Life of Galileo*.

"During this phase of elaboration, I was asked to show this material publicly", the actress adds. "I was asked to find a title for it. Thinking about the first poem, I suggested two titles: *Running with the Moon* and *Dead Brother*. The latter was selected. Once we chose the title (or rather the title chose us), the director asked himself who the brother was. And this is what he wrote. 'It is obvious. The first dead brother is a brother killed by his brother – just like Romulus killed Remus; brotherly couples like Antigone and Polynices. At times, these couples are incestuous lovers, like Giovanni and Annabella in *This is a pity she is a whore* by John Ford, which Artaud deems the best Elizabethan

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<sup>15</sup> *To elaborate* is one of the frequent terms used by those at Odin Teatret and, like many other terms, it has several meanings – at times even opposed meanings. Thus, it can mean a chain of actions deliberately structured by the actor, the development of the material obtained from an improvisation, "distilling this material by radical changes and cuts; setting variations, refining details, changing the form of the actions while keeping their initial tensions". Elaboration can also mean "shifts in rhythm and in steering, setting the micro-breaks between an action and the next one and a new arrangement of the various parts of the body (arms, legs, facial expressions), which were different from the original material". When Eugenio Barba uses this term, he speaks about one or more of these procedures. See Eugenio Barba, *Burning the House*, pp. 71-72.

tragedy. I am thinking about Pier Paolo Pasolini's poem, a communist poem which speaks about his dead brother and says: «I cry every time I think about my brother Guido, partisan, killed by other communist partisans, in the mountains». Heiner Müller, the German dramaturge, also talks about the dead brother. But he thinks about the relationship between the writer and the actor. The writer is Abel, the actor is Cain. The actor kills the writer. The writer objects: «I am the one who puts on table the meat we eat and which we sacrifice to God». Abel was, indeed, a shepherd. The actor answers: «The land is mine». Müller says: «What do actors do? They eat the author's text and then spew it covered in their own psychology, in their own intentions and emotions». Therefore, the *dead brother*, in theatre, is the text. Is the actor Cain, the one who killed his brother, or is the actor Isis, the Egyptian goddess, who sits in front of her dead brother Osiris? Isis puts together the pieces of his dismembered body, and the pieces start to grow and to flower. The dead brother is brought back to life'."





*Conférence d'Eugenio Barba à  
l'Union des Écrivains de  
Cluj-Napoca*



« *Brûler sa maison* »  
*ou du renouvellement comme principe de vie\**

**Conférence d'Eugenio Barba à l'Union des Écrivains de Cluj-Napoca,  
novembre 2012**

**E. B. :** J'appartiens à une autre époque. La plupart des gens de ma génération ont pris soin de mourir. Parce qu'il faut savoir mourir aussi. Pensez à la manière dont tous les hommes et toutes les femmes de théâtre sont morts. Ils ont bien su mettre en scène leur dernier acte. Stanislavski, par exemple, voyez la manière dont il s'est retiré dans sa maison en faisant semblant d'être malade – probablement il était aussi malade – mais en même temps entouré par un tout petit groupe de collaborateurs qui l'aimaient vraiment, auxquels il a transmis un sens qui va au-delà du théâtre. Pensez à la mort glorieuse de Meyerhold. C'est un véritable martyr du théâtre, c'est notre Jeanne d'Arc. Pensez à Artaud et Brecht qui sont morts à 58 ans. [...] Moi, malheureusement,

Uniunea Scriitorilor din România - Filiala Cluj

**LANSARE DE CARTE**

În cadrul Zilelor **Odin Teatret** la Cluj-Napoca



**Eugenio Barba**  
**Casa în flăcări**  
*Despre regie și dramaturgie*  
Editura Nemira, Colecția Yorick

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Affiche invitant à la conférence d'Eugenio Barba et au lancement de la traduction roumaine du livre *Brûler sa maison*, Union des Écrivains, Cluj-Napoca

\* Conférence enregistrée par Simona Vlasa et transcrite par Daria Ioan

je suis en bonne santé. Ma mère est morte à 96 ans, ayant perdu complètement la mémoire, mais elle chantait toutes les chansons qu'elle chantait quand j'étais petit. C'est ça qui effraye mes acteurs. [...] Que je vivrai jusqu'à 96 ans! C'est très difficile d'accueillir les morts. Vous allez à l'université, vous étudiez, vous lisez des livres sur un certain Odin Teatret, sur un certain Eugenio Barba. On vous donne même à lire un livre de ce Eugenio Barba. [...] Et souvent il entre dans votre université, dans votre cafétéria, il s'assoit, il vous regarde. C'est un choc. Mettons que nous sommes en train de faire ici une petite réunion sur Eugenio Barba et soudain apparaît Stanislavski! [...] J'ai eu toujours un problème: j'ai toujours été très timide, j'avais un problème avec les femmes et je ne suis jamais pris au sérieux. Mais j'ai toujours pris au sérieux le travail. Et c'est ça qui probablement présente une espèce de schizophrénie aux gens qui me connaissent et me regardent ; je leur apparais comme un simple et sympa garçon italien, apparemment doué d'une grande empathie pour les tragédies personnelles de tout le monde. Mais dès qu'ils entrent dans le cercle de travail, je deviens une espèce de Lucifer. Moi-même je ne me reconnais pas. Je suis en train de vous révéler un de mes secrets, parce qu'il n'y a aucun de mes acteurs ici. Quand je termine un livre, je ne le lis plus et en plus je l'oublie. Je suis très étonné quand des gens viennent et citent de mes livres.

Les derniers jours j'ai vécu le processus d'une répétition. Ça tient du sens d'insécurité que j'ai hérité de mon enfance de ne pas être capable de dire que je suis créateur, d'imaginer tout un spectacle. [...] La difficulté de notre métier consiste en la transformation de cette électricité que produisent les pensées dans notre cerveau en mouvement, en silence exécuté par des hommes et des femmes qui nient leur propre identité et se croient autres. Quand je commence un spectacle, je trouve dans un texte quelque chose qui me trouble. Au début il n'y a rien d'artistique, sauf une question que je me pose à moi-même. [...] Quand j'ai fait mes premiers spectacles, je me posais une question. J'appartiens à une génération qui a vécu la Seconde Guerre Mondiale. Je me la rappelle assez bien. Je connais les bombardements, j'ai vu les cadavres parmi les ruines, parfois ces personnes parmi les ruines se lamentaient, étaient blessées et ne pouvaient pas être sauvées. Pour moi c'était comme dans les contes de fées, comme écouter un arbre parler. Ensuite, j'ai été dans une école militaire pour continuer la tradition de famille et après trois ans on m'a mis à la porte. Toute ma préparation mentale avait été patriotique qui me rendait conscient du rôle grandiose de l'Ancienne Romme et des Italiens. Et soudain je suis tombé amoureux d'une fille suédoise, je ne pouvais pas vivre avec elle en Italie parce qu'il fallait nous marier, donc nous sommes allés en Norvège, où j'ai commencé

à travailler comme soudeur en métal. Tout le monde m'appelait « sale Italien », j'en étais étonné. Moi, qui me croyais le petit-fils de Leonardo da Vinci ! [...] Des ouvriers qui n'avaient pas de culture racontaient que les Italiens étaient allés en Abyssinie pas pour apporter la civilisation, mais que c'étaient des gens armés qui y avaient tué les gens, violé les femmes, brûlé les villages ; que les Italiens avaient attaqué la France alors qu'elle avait capitulé devant les Allemands. A l'école militaire, j'avais eu des professeurs extraordinaires ! Mais personne ne m'avait raconté ça... [...] Qu'en Espagne, Mussolini et les Italiens étaient là pour aider Franco ! Moi, je savais que les Italiens étaient là pour aider la civilisation européenne contre la barbarie des bolchéviques. Ça a été vraiment un choc culturel d'être soudeur en Norvège et ça m'a fait comprendre qu'il n'y avait pas des livres ou des personnes auxquels pouvoir faire confiance. Je crois que j'étais à l'époque dans la même situation dans laquelle se trouvent les jeunes d'aujourd'hui, qui ne font plus confiance à personne de manière instinctive et qui doivent inventer tout, reprendre la tradition, l'adjudger, l'analyser et comprendre combien de mensonges et de crimes mais aussi combien d'héroïsme sont cachés dans l'histoire. C'est une longue parenthèse, mais nous sommes tous le résultat de notre enfance. Et je dirais même que l'enfance n'est pas un état provisoire.

Donc je reviens au théâtre maintenant; la question que je me posais c'était une question qui était liée à une espèce de choc que seulement les personnes de mon âge peuvent se rappeler. La première photo que j'ai vue des camps d'extermination nazis. On ne pouvait pas croire à ça ! On se demandait comment on avait fait pour faire cette photo-là. D'accord, on avait lu qu'on brûlait les sorcières, mais on n'en avait pas vu des photos. On peut voir le film de Dreyer sur Jeanne d'Arc, où Falconetti brûle au bûcher. Mais c'est autre chose. Pour moi, la découverte d'Auschwitz et de tous les camps de concentration et des goulags a été une sorte de révélation d'un mal absolu. [...] La question que je me posais quand je faisais mon premier spectacle, c'était : « Qu'est-ce que j'aurais fait si j'avais terminé dans un camp de concentration? Aurais-je collaboré avec les bourreaux? Me serais-je laissé mourir? Me serais-je inscrit parmi ceux qui ont opposé résistance? » Ça a été la base du spectacle, mais je ne savais pas ce qui allait se passer. Même quand j'ai vu le final, j'ai été étonné de ce qui en était sorti. D'abord, j'ai cru que c'était le signe de mon incapacité créatrice. Mais je suis Levantin ; je suis à moitié Turc, à moitié Arabe, à moitié Italien et j'ai une capacité instinctive à profiter de toutes les occasions, même des négatives. Donc j'ai commencé à développer cette incapacité dans une méthode de travail. Mon mérite a été de convaincre les acteurs que c'était une méthode de création.

**Q :** J'ai eu la sensation que votre venue à Cluj avec l'Odin Teatret équivaut avec le proverbe « Si Mohamed ne va pas à la montagne, c'est la montagne qui va venir chez Mohamed ». La vérité c'est que, pour nous, votre présence à Cluj étant une familiarisation avec ce bios dont vous parliez, avec ce que signifie anthropologie théâtrale, avec ce que signifie dramaturgie dynamique, avec l'art de l'acteur amené à un niveau incroyable, avec cette aspiration de dire à travers le théâtre, comme à travers la musique, ce qui est indicible par les paroles. Les démonstrations que vos actrices ont faites dans leurs spectacles ont révélé dans quelle mesure l'étude des capacités de l'acteur peut transformer l'habileté de l'acteur dans une démonstration absolument unique de talent et de raffinement. En même temps, le spectacle que vous nous avez présenté a aussi montré dans quelle mesure ce type de relations que vous opérez et que vous brûlez constamment est à même de découvrir les éléments subtils de la vérité humaine et des rapports interhumains. Le spectacle a été extrêmement choquant pour nous, justement à cause de cet étonnant développement de l'art de l'acteur et de la manière spéciale dont vous animez les objets et dont vous pouvez dresser des symboles au-delà du concept. La démonstration de vos actrices a montré qu'on peut construire l'espace à travers l'introspection, à travers ce que vous appelez dans votre livre partition et sous-partition, ce que signifie créer l'espace intérieur et extérieur, invoquer tout comme un vrai orchestre des espaces exotiques, avec toute leur agglomération et spécificité, et démontrer qu'il est possible de parler dans des langues inconnues pour le public ou même dans des langues inventées ou simulées, induisant des sens qui dans ce spectacle ont résolu et ont montré comment on peut manipuler par le sens. La démonstration de la kinesthésie fondamentalement spécifique à la mise en scène, cette danse des mouvements intérieurs nous a fait identifier les états des autres et vivre le théâtre. De cette façon, la synesthésie et la kinesthésie ont démontré l'amplitude que l'art théâtral peut toucher. [...] Nous vous remercions de tout cœur d'avoir fait cet effort de venir chez nous. L'Université « Babeş-Bolyai » est honorée de vous avoir donné la distinction de *Doctor Honoris Causa* et la Faculté de Théâtre et Télévision mérite toute notre considération et une reconnaissance absolue. Nous n'avons jamais eu part d'un cours de théâtre intensif qui encourage tellement la confiance en un vrai art de l'acteur – malheureusement en voie de disparition et guetté par le maniérisme et le vide – et d'une démonstration de ce qui cache l'histoire du processus de création. [...] Votre livre est extraordinaire, tout comme *Faust* de Goethe, une œuvre qui a été créée dans le temps, une véritable œuvre totale. [...]

Il est en même temps un manuel de mise en scène comme je n'ai pas encore lu, et un livre autobiographique qui illustre la manière dont vous traversez les situations à travers la mémoire qui a déterminé le cours de votre formation. C'est un *bildungsroman* qu'on peut lire passionnellement et une leçon vivante pour les metteurs en scène. J'aime beaucoup le titre originel, *Arde casa!*, à cause de son ambiguïté qui signifie en même temps un avertissement et un impératif de brûler la maison, de brûler la connexion avec son propre pays – comme vous l'avez fait en quittant l'Italie. J'ai compris que brûler la maison signifie brûler les limites, personnelles mais aussi celles du théâtre, et de les faire confronter avec tout ce qui apporte un savoir par la découverte du monde. J'aimerais que vous nous racontiez ce que « brûler la maison » signifie dans tous les sens.

**E. B. :** Quand on pense à la maison, on pense à un lieu de sécurité. On peut fermer les yeux et reconnaître le chemin d'une chambre à l'autre. On sait que si on ferme la porte le vent ne va pas nous faire avoir froid. On est à l'abri des tempêtes de l'extérieur. Je vous racontais, avant, la manière dont les ouvriers norvégiens m'avaient rappelé le rôle historique de l'Italie contemporaine. Avant, j'avais vécu dans une maison milanaise où je me sentais à mon aise et ils ont commencé à la brûler. Dans ce cas, il y a deux possibilités : on appelle les pompiers qui arrivent et sauvent la maison, donc on peut y rester. De cette manière, je pourrais vous raconter la manière dont l'Italie a civilisé l'Abyssinie avec ses soldats qui y sont morts comme des héros. Mais je n'ai pas fait appel aux pompiers. Je ne sais pas pourquoi. J'ai permis aux flammes de brûler une chambre après l'autre. C'est très étrange, car on se retrouve dans un espace tout à fait nouveau, plein de cendres, de livres à moitié brûlés, de photos noires à cause de la fumée – dans lesquels on ne reconnaît plus rien. Aucun être humain ou, mieux encore, aucun animal humain ne peut vivre sans une narration. Cet animal doit se raconter quelque chose à lui-même. Et le fait de manières très différentes ; parfois par la religion, parfois par des idéologies, parfois par des visions. Pour moi aussi, le processus de reconstruction a commencé. Mais quel processus de reconstruction peut exister sans s'appuyer sur quelque chose qui existe déjà? Je parle au niveau des idées. Dès que je finissais le travail à l'atelier j'allais à la bibliothèque et je lisais tous les livres que je trouvais en italien (je n'avais étudié que le latin et le grec en Italie) et peu à peu ceux que je trouvais en français, parce que c'était plus proche de l'italien. Et je suis tombé sur des livres qui m'ont choqué. L'un était un livre de Romain Rolland, d'autres qui présentaient la



biographie de Rama Krishna et des autres grands rebelles de l'hindouisme. J'étais très fasciné par les idées qui sont incarnées par des actions dans une biographie. D'autre part, j'avais été adopté par une famille norvégienne d'un jeune homme qui était communiste. C'est lui qui m'a introduit au marxisme. Donc j'ai développé une double manière de penser : d'un côté, une espèce de mysticisme hindou, et de l'autre la conscience de l'existence de la lutte des classes – que j'avais connue lorsque j'étais marin. J'ai été sur des bateaux où les marins ont fait des grèves, en refusant de faire des transports aux ports espagnols pendant la Guerre Civile, par exemple. Les armateurs voulaient gagner de l'argent, mais les marins n'ont pas transporté des armes pour l'armée de Franco. J'ai rencontré les Héros Anonymes de l'Histoire. Certains d'entre eux avaient été bombardés dans les convois qui venaient de l'Amérique en Europe et m'avaient raconté ce que ça signifiait, de naviguer avec cette angoisse permanente. Mais ils continuaient à se réembarquer. Ils étaient les Héros Anonymes de l'Histoire. Et ils étaient tous alcooliques parce qu'ils ne pouvaient pas supporter les souvenirs.

Ensuite, pour moi, un grand moment est arrivé : j'ai eu la chance d'étudier en Pologne, qui était un pays communiste. J'y suis arrivé songeant à une « belle maison », mais dès que j'y ai mis les pieds, des « incendies » ont commencé. C'est très difficile de brûler sa propre maison. La Pologne de l'époque n'était pas la Roumanie de Ceaușescu ; c'était presque un paradis. Mais la narration d'un monde communiste, beau et différent, a quand même brûlé. La raison pour laquelle je suis resté en Pologne n'était pas que j'étais fasciné par les spectacles de Grotowski que je voyais. Les spectacles qui ont bousculé le théâtre n'ont été créés par Grotowski que tard. Mais ce petit théâtre de cette petite ville, Opole, était persécuté par le secrétaire du parti, qui ne croyait pas que c'était un théâtre pour les ouvriers. Et c'est vrai qu'il n'y avait que deux ou trois spectateurs qui y allaient. Parfois il n'y avait que moi, Grotowski et Ludwig Flaszen ! Je voulais défendre ce théâtre et j'avais un grand avantage : mon passeport. Donc j'ai commencé à voyager à l'étranger et à écrire. L'amour peut faire de grandes choses ; l'amour pour le travail de Grotowski, pour ses acteurs, pour sa personne. J'ai commencé à aller aux rédactions des revues avec de petits articles sur l'activité de ce théâtre. C'était en 1961, à l'époque où il y avait deux blocs distincts. L'Europe orientale était un grand mystère et on était très curieux de savoir ce que signifiait la dissidence. C'est ça qu'était pour moi le théâtre de Grotowski : un espace de liberté que je voulais protéger. J'y ai absorbé énormément de situations de travail et de principes qui m'ont

formé. On m'a chassé de Pologne parce que je m'agitais trop. [...] Ce qui est intéressant c'est que, même si le secrétaire de parti d'Opole a fermé le théâtre de Grotowski, le secrétaire de parti de Wroclaw, qui était en concurrence avec Varsovie, a invité Grotowski pour démontrer qu'il y avait une élite artistique différente à celle de Varsovie. Alors Grotowski est vite devenu une partie de la nomenclature. Moi, on m'avait chassé, mais j'avais bâti une autre « maison ».

Je suis rentré en Norvège, je n'ai pas trouvé de travail, j'ai pris les acteurs qui avaient été refusés au concours de l'Institut de théâtre et j'ai commencé à travailler selon la nouvelle « maison » que j'avais dans la tête, en imitant Grotowski. Mais tout était absolument différent et je pensais que mes acteurs n'étaient pas bien préparés. Donc j'ai dû tout oublier de nouveau, « brûler la maison » et commencer à en bâtir une autre. Là il faut dire qu'il y a une grande différence entre Grotowski et moi, au niveau professionnel. Déjà à Opole, il disait que l'acteur doit montrer le noyau le plus intime de sa personnalité. Moi, j'avais toujours en tête l'image de ce que Ibsen avait raconté dans *Peer Gynt* : que notre identité est comme un oignon ; et ça correspondait à ma propre biographie, parce que j'ai choisi le théâtre pas par sincérité, mais pour mettre un masque, parce que je ne voulais pas être traité comme un « sale Italien », mais, au pire, comme un metteur en scène qui n'est pas bon. Donc, pour moi, le théâtre était un lieu où se réfugier pour se protéger de la société. Et les acteurs qui étaient des refusés de l'école de théâtre se sont réfugiés dans ce théâtre. [...] Mes acteurs n'étaient pas des gens qui voulaient faire du théâtre. Julia Varley voulait faire la révolution à travers le théâtre politique, par exemple. Donc la différence professionnelle entre Grotowski et moi m'a permis de brûler facilement la « maison » que j'avais bâtie en Pologne et me laisser guider par les circonstances et par mes acteurs pour bâtir une nouvelle « maison » professionnelle. [...]

Dans l'Odin Teatret, ce sont les femmes qui ont incarné le vent de l'inquiétude, la protestation, l'angoisse, non pas au niveau verbal, mais inventant d'autres manières de travailler. Et il y a un autre aspect : sur le plan professionnel, le théâtre a toujours existé grâce à deux facteurs. Au début, il a été créé comme association commerciale, donc la rentabilité a toujours été fondamentale. Même maintenant, quand on nous donne des subventions, il faut qu'une rentabilité existe. Dans les pays socialistes, la rentabilité avait à la base l'idéologie. De nos jours, on reçoit des subventions pour une rentabilité artistique. Le deuxième facteur a été le caractère provisoire de ce théâtre et l'éphémère des relations. A travers des contrats, on créait des compagnies

pour un, deux ou trois ans, pour qu'ensuite elles puissent être dissoutes et que les acteurs puissent aller après dans d'autres compagnies. L'idée d'un ensemble d'un théâtre d'art où les gens se réunissent à cause d'une affinité, c'est l'invention de Stanislavski. Mais c'est un idéal. Lui-même n'a pas réussi à le réaliser. Et Brecht avait lui aussi cet idéal, pour son Berliner Ensemble. [...] Dans les institutions il y a des contrats et une hiérarchie. Mais dans un groupe de théâtre créé à base d'affinités il n'y a pas la garantie de recevoir constamment un salaire. L'histoire du XXe siècle montre que ce genre de groupes de théâtre n'ont pas une longue vie. J'en étais conscient. J'ai dû donc inventer une dynamique de groupe très particulière qui permette aux besoins individuels de pouvoir exister à côté du travail commun, inventer des situations qui rendent curieux mes acteurs et moi-même. Il fallait littéralement « brûler la maison ». La première fois que je l'ai fait c'était parce que j'étais en panique. On a fait, avec un petit groupe anodin d'un pays nordique un spectacle qui a eu du succès à Paris. La célébrité soudaine m'a effrayé. J'ai pensé que mes acteurs allaient vite croire qu'ils étaient de grands acteurs. Alors je les ai fait réunir et je leur ai annoncé que j'allais fermer le théâtre, mais que s'ils voulaient continuer de travailler avec moi, les conditions allaient être beaucoup plus dures. C'était huit acteurs, dont seulement trois ont accepté. J'ai recommencé à créer un nouvel ensemble avec trois acteurs. Mais lorsqu'on a obtenu un autre grand succès avec un nouveau spectacle, je n'ai pas pu répéter la figure que j'avais faite la première fois. Donc j'ai décidé de quitter Holstebro et d'aller travailler dans un petit village au sud de l'Italie et de travailler dans des conditions très différentes. On a abandonné pratiquement une « maison » qui nous offrait désormais des conditions optimales de travail et on est allé dans un village où la salle qu'on avait trouvée ne fonctionnait pas. Donc on travaillait dans les champs. Les paysans nous regardaient comme si nous étions des fous. De la même manière, je pourrais vous raconter tous les incendies que tous les quatre ou cinq ans j'ai provoqué dans ma « maison » et dans le groupe pour permettre à la dynamique existant entre nous de se remodeler. Parce que c'est contre la nature même du théâtre de rester ensemble 48 ans !

**Q :** Comment s'applique l'idée de « brûler la maison » dans le processus intime du metteur en scène ?

**E. B. :** C'est du training. Le training pour l'Odin Teatret est une période pendant laquelle les gens qui viennent de l'extérieur doivent « brûler leur propre maison ». Les gens viennent et commencent à répéter les exercices, un

jour, un mois, une année. On ne leur explique pas pourquoi on fait ces exercices et à quoi ça sert, quelle est la relation avec la créativité. La première chose que le training leur montre est de perdre l'instrument dont ils avaient été doués pour se défendre dans la société: l'intelligence exprimée à travers les mots. Chez nous, ils doivent montrer leur intelligence sans utiliser les mots, faire quelque chose avec tout leur être mais sans savoir pourquoi. [...] On ne s'assoit jamais pour écouter une leçon, mais on est restreint au vocabulaire physique. Par exemple, on nous donne 40 mots écrits et on nous demande à écrire 50 poèmes avec ces mots. Et au mieux, on est capable de le faire. Ces exercices imposent d'écrire toute une série de variations. Une autre série d'entraînements impose de travailler surtout quand on est fatigué. [...] Il y a quelque chose qui s'appelle le biorythme qui fait qu'après environ 50 minutes notre attention diminue. A l'école, on donne aux élèves la possibilité de se reposer après 50 minutes. Quand on lit sur l'athlétisme d'excellence, on découvre qu'au moment où le biorythme diminue, il y a un second souffle qui intervient et qui est un autre type d'énergie. Les acteurs de l'Odin travaillent trois-quatre heures sans s'arrêter. A tout cela s'ajoute toute une série de responsabilités, parce que mon but n'a jamais été de créer des acteurs, mais des chefs de bande de bandits ! [...] Pas des gangsters et des criminels, mais des bandits qui luttent contre les lois. Donc je leur donne des tâches. Par exemple, j'ai demandé à un de mes acteurs de faire un ciné-club à Holstebro, où il y avait un cinéma commercial. Il a dû apprendre d'abord à être machiniste, acheter une machine avec de l'argent obtenu par lui-même, ensuite apprendre à utiliser la machine, apprendre à concevoir et imprimer le programme artistique des films choisis par lui-même, après quoi se débrouiller à faire venir les gens au club, voir les films et acheter des abonnements. Tout ça pour pouvoir annoncer dans six mois que l'Odin a un ciné-club. Et il l'a fait! Ensuite la ville a fait un ciné-club. Alors j'ai dit à Torge de faire un ciné-club pour enfants. Mais on a fait aussi un ciné-club pour enfants en ville. A ce moment-là il y avait beaucoup de Turcs qui travaillaient dans les usines de Holstebro. Alors j'ai dit à mon acteur de faire un ciné-club pour les ouvriers turcs. Où trouver des films turcs ? Mais en Allemagne il y a beaucoup de Turcs aussi ! Je lui ai dit donc de se débrouiller. La chose étonnante est que quand je demande une chose à mes acteurs ils la font. C'est de cette manière que les gens ont appris à « brûler leur propre maison », mais il ne s'agit pas de quelque chose d'abstrait, de la terminologie qu'il y a dans les livres, que d'ailleurs on n'utilise jamais dans notre travail. Je ne suis pas religieux, mais je crois que les gens viennent

et me transmettent un message qui vient d'un ordre qui est supérieur ou inférieur à moi. [...] Ici en Roumanie, par exemple, j'ai reçu l'image de la générosité humaine à travers la personne d'un pope. Il y a vue et vision. Il y a une manière inerte de voir, comme il y a une manière inerte d'écouter. Que signifie avoir vu cet homme? J'ai fait appeler Iben, l'une de mes actrices qui avait Sofia comme élève et je lui ai dit que j'avais décidé qu'à partir de ce jour-là Sofia devienne membre de l'Odin. Moi, qui avais toujours été contre ça ! Et elle m'a dit que c'était un miracle. Il y a aussi un autre acteur auquel j'ai dit la même chose et je suis sûr que les deux vont se souvenir de Cluj comme Saint-Paul de Damas.

**Q :** Pourriez-vous définir l'anthropologie théâtrale dont on vous considère le fondateur ? Bien sûr, vous avez aussi des antécédents.

**E. B. :** J'ai voulu imiter Grotowski, mais je n'en ai pas été capable. Pourquoi ne peut-on imiter Stanislavski, même s'il a écrit avec précision ce qu'il faut faire? Bertolt Brecht a même écrit des livres-modèle où il explique de manière exacte comment mettre en scène ses pièces ! Même avec des photos ! Et pourquoi ne suis-je pas capable de répéter le miracle de ses spectacles? Parce que chaque animal humain est différent de l'autre. C'est cette différence qui fait qu'on ne peut pas imiter comme des ordinateurs. On peut imiter au théâtre, mais de manière mécanique, pas de manière créatrice. J'ai vu l'odinisme à la mode dans les années 70. Toutes les actrices de l'Amérique Latine et de l'Europe étaient des copies d'Iben. L'Odin a senti le besoin d'aller en Amérique Latine à l'époque des dictatures. Nous avons épargné de l'argent et nous y sommes allés en payant de notre propre poche. Il y avait des groupes d'Amérique Latine qui étaient extrêmement ouverts envers nous et il y avait des théâtres qui nous considéraient des impérialistes culturels. J'avais une grande admiration pour ces groupes politiques, c'étaient des gens qui risquaient d'aller en prison, de perdre leur vie, de disparaître. J'ai essayé d'expliquer qu'on ne pouvait pas imiter, mais qu'on pouvait être stimulé, comme je l'avais été par Grotowski, par Brecht, par Stanislavski. J'ai essayé de faire des rencontres de théâtres, que j'ai appelées Le Tiers Théâtre – pas dans le sens de théâtre d'avant-garde, mais dans le sens de tiers état, de tiers sexe, de tiers monde.

Une fois, le directeur de la culture de Bonn, m'a proposé de faire une rencontre de théâtre de groupe à Bonn. J'en avais organisé déjà quatre, donc j'étais un peu fatigué. Alors je lui ai dit que j'avais beaucoup d'autres projets plus vastes et que je ne pouvais pas m'occuper de la rencontre. Lui, il m'a dit

de réaliser le projet à Bonn et de lui dire combien ça coûtait. Je lui ai dit un chiffre qui était trois fois plus grand que le coût du projet. J'étais sûr qu'il n'allait pas trouver l'argent. Mais après un mois, il m'a écrit qu'il l'avait trouvé et il me demandait de quoi il s'agissait dans le projet. Et moi, je devais soudain inventer un projet à faire. Ma solution dans ce genre de cas, c'est d'inviter tous mes amis; de cette manière on est ensemble et on est payés. J'ai invité Dario Fo, tous les maîtres asiatiques que j'avais rencontrés et qui m'avaient fasciné. C'était un projet qui devait durer deux mois. Une folie ! Et j'ai pris cinquante metteurs en scène qui puissent être payés et vivre avec ces personnalités, en être stimulés et donner et transmettre cette nouvelle énergie à leur propre groupe. Mais j'avais un problème : comment baptiser ce projet ? Et je me rappelle que j'étais au Japon dans un train, avec un ami italien, critique et professeur de sémiotique. Je lui ai dit que j'avais pensé à nommer ce projet « école », parce qu'à cette époque-là tous les groupes de théâtre s'appelaient « laboratoire ». Allait-il s'agir d'une école internationale ? Il n'y avait pas encore l'interculturalité comme concept. Alors je ne savais pas comment appeler cette école – qu'elle soit de théâtre, d'autre chose... – et je l'ai appelée « école d'anthropologie », « International School of Theatre Anthropology ». Mon ami m'a dit que ça sonnait bien mais qu'il ne comprenait pas ce que ça signifiait. Donc, j'ai écrit tout de suite à mon mécène allemand qu'on allait faire un stage de deux mois de « International School of Theatre Anthropology » à Bonn. Il a été enthousiasmé, mais il m'a demandé ce que l'anthropologie théâtrale signifiait. Alors j'ai commencé à réfléchir à une expérience que j'avais faite en 1963 : j'avais été en Inde et j'avais vu le théâtre Kathakali, les spectacles qui duraient toute la nuit en plein air. À de certains moments j'étais touché par l'acteur, même si je ne comprenais la convention, même si je ne connaissais pas l'histoire et même quand je la connaissais, je ne comprenais rien, parce qu'elle appartenait à leur mythologie. Malgré tout cela, il y avait quelque chose de ce qu'ils faisaient qui retentissait en moi. Je n'ai pas compris ça et c'est resté une question pour moi. J'ai commencé à penser qu'être acteur représente l'unité de trois facteurs différents: la personnalité de l'acteur, son unicité et sa relativité ; ensuite la convention qui lui appartient et qui est relative, elle aussi ; mais il y a aussi un troisième élément qui est identique dans tous les acteurs de partout et de toutes les époques, de tous les genres de théâtre, c'est-à-dire la totalité biologique et anatomique qui essaye de se transformer et de devenir intéressante pour l'autre. Il y a un paradoxe : l'animal humain est le seul qui ne supporte pas le regard des autres. [...] Les acteurs

sont les étranges représentants de l'humanité qui cherchent le regard des autres. Mais pour protéger cette vulnérabilité et cette sensibilité humaine, ils nous disent: « c'est une fiction » et en même temps se cachent derrière une technique aux formes différentes mais à l'information identique. Quand on parle d'anthropologie théâtrale, c'est plus facile à comprendre si on pense à l'anatomie théâtrale. Il y a une anatomie qui crée la vie de l'acteur et qui se manifeste par la température relative de l'acteur et par la convention. Maintenant je l'ai expliqué de cette manière, mais à l'époque je n'aurais pas pu faire ça.

À l'École, j'ai eu de grands problèmes avec les maîtres asiatiques. Ils ne comprenaient pas que je ne leur demandais pas de jouer, mais de me montrer ce qu'ils avaient appris de leurs maîtres les trois premiers jours et d'enseigner la même chose aux 50 metteurs en scène invités. [...] Le résultat c'était le *Verfremdungseffekt*. C'était un grand luxe. Je pouvais regarder pendant des heures des scènes et demander aux acteurs de répéter des choses. Tous étaient là avec leurs orchestres, avec leurs ensembles. Je me sentais comme Louis de Bavière, le roi fou. Je pouvais demander aux gens de faire une scène, avec les costumes, la musique, etc. Ensuite je leur demandais de la refaire sans costumes, mais habillés de leurs vêtements de tous les jours. C'est très intéressant parce que, par exemple, pour les Balinais, pour les Chinois, pour les Japonais surtout, les costumes cachent toute la tension du corps. Mais ils ont accepté ça. Après, j'ai commencé à leur demander de faire leurs danses sans musique, parce que la musique séduit toujours ceux qui regardent. Et là on a commencé à voir toute autre chose, une cohérence étrange dans ce qu'ils faisaient. C'est ce que j'ai appelé, en anthropologie théâtrale, *les principes*. Par exemple, un principe c'est de l'incohérence cohérente. Pourquoi dans le ballet classique les animaux humains marchent sur la surface entière des pieds ou sur les pointes ? Pour apprendre ça, il faut beaucoup de temps, c'est douloureux et on pourrait dire que c'est incohérent par rapport à la réalité. Cependant c'est cohérent parce qu'on maintient jusqu'à la fin une sensation de légèreté que nous tous en tant que spectateurs percevons quand on voit un spectacle de ballet classique. C'est de cette manière que j'ai lentement développé le concept d'anthropologie théâtrale. L'argent aide beaucoup, il est vrai. Au-delà de ça, après la première rencontre, les maîtres asiatiques ont commencé à être fascinés par ce type de travail. Ils étaient fascinés de voir les autres, qu'ils ne connaissaient pas : par exemple, l'Opéra de Pékin, les mimes de Decroux, les acteurs de Dario Fo, etc. Chaque session de l'ISTA coûtait 400-500.000 euros et

à la fin on n'organisait pas un festival avec les spectacles. Il y avait une règle : il fallait habiter tous ensemble dans des monastères, de vieux hôpitaux. On vivait de manière très austère, mais c'était une vraie communauté. On créait un village d'acteurs pour une période de temps...

Et maintenant, je vais – à la polonaise – baiser la main, parce que je dois aller travailler ; il y a mes acteurs qui attendent. Je vous remercie énormément pour votre accueil.





## **STUDIES AND ARTICLES**



## *Grandfathers and Orphans*

EUGENIO BARBA\*

**Abstract.** This paper presents the importance of Stanislavski and Meyerhold for the theatrical formation of the author. Having entered the world of theatre as an orphan, he was “raised” by these two spiritual grandfathers, who taught him fundamental things about acting and the actor, about freedom and political engagement. Stanislavski and Meyerhold permitted the author to be part of what he calls *disconnected traditions* which are handed on through discontinuity and contradiction, evading the straight path. Such a disconnected tradition is the one which saw Seki Sano, a Japanese director, transmit the Stanislavskian and Meyerholdian heritage in Latin America.

**Keywords:** Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Seki Sano, grandfathers, orphans.

### *A family saga*

Vsevolod Meyerhold was my grandfather. It may seem bizarre, but it is an objective fact since it respects historical proportions.

Seen from afar, the profound transformations that occurred in European theatre of the twentieth century resemble a family saga with its own traitors, heroes and giants. A small tribe of a few hundred people, living through revolutions, defeats, dangers and tragedies, defends, squanders or regains the identity of their own *ethos*. It is within this “family” – vast as it is when compared to the circles of an individual life, tiny beside the landscape of the surrounding history – that I feel the right to speak of Vsevolod Meyerhold as my grandfather. We know our biological family from the inside, without even being conscious of the fact. The family of our *ethos*, of our professional identity, has to be conquered through successive discoveries, attentive understanding and sudden flashes of awareness.

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In my family of professional *ethos* there are no parents. There is an older brother, Jurek – Jerzy Grotowski. Many uncles and relatives: Vakhtangov and Copeau, Brecht and Decroux, Sulerzhitski and Artaud. Ahead of them all, the two grandfathers: Stanislavski and Meyerhold. Gradually, with the passing of the years, the affection I feel for my grandfathers becomes intertwined with an awareness of the distance between us and, at the same time, the depth of professional insight that can be drawn from them. It becomes knowledge and tenderness.

Thus we learn that grandfathers are very different from masters. There are two of them and they represent two branches of tradition or two “small” traditions. They are not like the masters who become a single unique point of reference. The plurality of grandfathers makes us understand that the problem of a progenitor is a false one and a source of deception.

In the professional family which constitutes my history there was no equivalent to parents. I am an autodidact. This term necessitates an explanation however. There is a difference between s/he who learns without the aid of normal school, yet masters a precise domain of knowledge such as imparted by schools, and on the other hand s/he who is obliged not only to mark out **FOR HIMSELF** a field of knowledge but also to identify the foundations of a profession to which s/he was denied access. There is a difference between having to orientate oneself in a territory which recognizes you and in which you recognize yourself, and having to trace your own territory, invent your own systems of orientation and discover where you belong. This is the condition of those who are, professionally speaking, orphans.

I come from this region of theatre.

### *The birth of a grandfather*

The discovery of one of my two grandfathers coincided with my first steps in search of theatre around 1960. It was Stanislavski. Everybody mentioned him at the school I studied in Warsaw. Grotowski, who became my older brother, spoke to me about him continually. Stanislavski was one of those grandfathers who give birth to legends.

Meyerhold, on the other hand, was a name always cloaked in mist. The stories I heard about him were fragmentary, laconic and bitter. Legends circulated about him too, ambiguous and sometimes grotesque. He was a huge fleeting shadow, on the horizon. I was to discover through books, bit by bit, the story of this ghost whose shadow was a magnified and fading projection. Above all, three books from the beginning of the sixties guided me on his traces.

Stalin had died in 1953. Three years later the so-called “destalinisation” began and once more it was allowed to write about Meyerhold. After few more years the first important translations appeared. In Italy, at the end of 1962, Editori Riuniti – which was connected to the Communist Party – had published *La rivoluzione teatrale* (*The Theatrical Revolution*), a selection of Meyerhold’s writings. A new cliché was created among theatre people which added a third element to the current schematic antagonism between Stanislavski and Brecht. People said: “Stanislavski is bourgeois theatre; Meyerhold is the revolutionary”. Every time those who had worked with them spoke of them, these clichés crumbled as did those based on the opposition Stanislavski and Brecht. Both from the point of view of the craft and the *ethos*, a theatre “revolution” implies certain practices that are not always reflected in political statements, or else they may be just as radical, risky and intransigent as political intransigence.

In France, at the beginning of 1963, Gallimard published another collection of Meyerhold’s writings *Le théâtre théâtral*, edited by Nina Gourfinkel. It did not differ greatly from the Italian book. But the atmosphere which pervaded it seemed to me to be of quite another kind. The two books appeared contemporaneously, with only a few weeks between them. Whereas the first emphasised the word “revolution”, the second stressed the concept of “theatricalisation”. Taken together, the two titles suggested that revolution and theatricalisation were interdependent ideas. Theatricalisation indicated the conventional aspect of theatre, research into form.

Both books derived from material by Meyerhold newly published in the USSR and most of the writings coincided. Both ended by recalling the immediacy of the personal dialogue, Chekhov’s letters and the meetings with the students as reported by Gladkov in “Meyerhold speaks”. What, then, was responsible for the different atmosphere that appeared to distinguish these two editions of the same texts?

The Italian book was compiled out of a need to document the past correctly, addressing itself to those who studied theatre. The French one had the flavour of a story intended for theatre practitioners. It conserved the sense of adventure, discovery, of the vicissitudes of an artist who is perpetually restless, bellicose, with a mercurial temperament and the destiny of a martyr. This difference, apparent in the tiniest details, was barely noticeable. Perhaps it was I who put it there and it was in no way the intention of the book’s editor.

The Italian edition ended with an essay by Alexandr Fevral’ski, who was presented as being “one of the major experts of Soviet theatre of the twenties”. In his text Fevral’ski introduced himself as one of the young enthusiasts of Meyerhold who had discovered a *raison d’être* in his work and teaching. His

"Memories" portrayed Meyerhold as if seen through the eyes of someone in love. But whoever had edited the book seemed not to notice this loving gaze. It was a surplus. But it was just this surplus, or this excess, that for me gave a sense to Meyerhold's story.

In the first lines Fevral'ski said: "The close friendship that bound Meyerhold to the young derived from the fact that the same 'old man' was eternally young. Young in body and spirit, despite the grey hair, the tuberculosis and the disease of the liver. When directing the exercises of biomechanics, he executed them with greater precision, ease and elegance than the youngest, strongest and most agile of his students. During rehearsals, it happened that Meyerhold could be seen dancing the part of a woman. He danced in such a way that he really appeared to be a young woman instead of the elderly man that he indeed was."

I was bewitched by this elderly master who, under the gaze of his pupils, transformed himself into a girl – a severe father who passed the time playing. I felt I understood the passionate subtext to the formal phrases which concluded Fevral'ski's "Memories": "For all of us Meyerholdians he was a second father, demanding yet ready to impart great artistic lessons that have become the basis of the activity of all those who followed him. We will all be eternally grateful to our master". They resembled the banal phrases one reads about extraordinary men. However, behind the bombastic conventionalities I felt the tremor of that particular feeling that binds the disciple to the master and that transforms true pedagogy into a love story rather than a method.

In Fevral'ski's text I found for the first time the written negation of the schematic opposition between Meyerhold and Stanislavski. Fevral'ski describes how, in 1938, he was present when Meyerhold turned up during one of the rehearsals held at the home of Stanislavski who had a serious heart condition. He told of the tenderness, the respect and esteem that Stanislavski showed towards his younger colleague who was so plagued by the regime. That sense of family, with its tensions and conflicts, yet imbued with a sense of belonging and of common ideals, was more important to me – an orphan in search of a system of orientation – than any discussion about differences in methods and aesthetics.

The mist-shrouded grandfather began to attain a precise profile. Out of a ghost a person was born. He took shape feature by feature in a manner that was neither systematic nor predictable, just as he had described the creation of a character for an actor: sometimes a shoe may appear, or a hat, or a way of tilting one's head while listening. Then, slowly, from the first germ the character emerges.

*The double life of theatre*

Still more books. Now I read my ancestors' texts as though they were written specially for me, for the orphan heir who inhabited the dark province of the theatre and knew nothing. It was an infantile and megalomaniac illusion. I nourished it secretly because I realised that it was a vital illusion.

A few years later, in quite another context, I experienced again the same combination of megalomania and modesty.

In 1965, *Il trucco e l'anima (The make-up and the soul)* by Angelo Maria Ripellino was published. It was an account of the artistic adventures of the principal Russian directors during the first thirty years of the twentieth century. The author told of events that he had not seen as though he had witnessed them in person. With great precision in his use of documents, he did what any historian should be capable of doing: he searched for and found time gone by through the technique of the poet. At the centre of his interest and fascination was Meyerhold.

Ripellino was a prestigious scholar of Slavonic literature but was also well known and esteemed as a poet. On the page he traced the suggestive silhouettes of the protagonists with exact and essential words. He revealed to me that theatre has a double life: in the present of the performance and in the past which returns through books.

This double life was not an abstraction. I experienced it daily in concrete form. As an orphan who was enamoured of the ghosts of my grandfathers, I tried to decipher in the practical work with my inexperienced actors what it was that they were conveying to me in such a difficult way.

In the enigmatic clarity of their words I recognised with hindsight the solutions that I had come upon through guesswork in my rehearsals. I began a close dialogue involving my young actors and the old ever-young shadows which talked to me from the past.

This double life made itself known on all levels. Both in my practical experience and in that which reached me through books, it was a question of distinguishing a formulation from the substance of that formulation. In many cases I could have substituted Stanislavski's or Meyerhold's terminology for the key words that the actors and I used between ourselves during work to indicate technical procedures of which we all had a clear experience. I realised that something similar also happened with the grandfathers' terminology. Those aesthetical theories which appeared to be divergent were, at times, only different metaphors. For example, it seemed clear to me that the three emblem-words that Meyerhold had used at three different stages to indicate



his personal vision of the actor – the grotesque, dance and biomechanics – always concealed the same principle. Rather, coherent and persistent research always leading in the same direction.

Personally, the consequence of all this was not the obvious relativity of the various formulations but the stimulus to decipher the individual working languages which were so personalised and changing. This pragmatic jargon does not concern itself with the misunderstandings that the metaphors employed may cause in those who do not share the same experience. A sophisticated trap is laid for the reader: *particular words* appear to describe repeatable processes that guide to specific results, hereby creating the illusion that the terms used represent definitions, recipes or even a utopia instead of being a simple signpost.

The close dialogue with my work, with the words that reached me from the past and with those who recorded history dragged me out of my condition of orphan. It helped me to find my theatrical family and not belong totally to the panorama of present-day theatre. It was the discovery of a very special “family tradition”, a vertical environment, in part rooted in the present and, at the same time, sunk deep into the preceding generations. The deformations, the norms and the fashions of theatre that surrounded me lost much of their agonising weight. Above all, they were not the sole inevitable reality. *Other ways of being* were possible for the theatre because there existed an elsewhere with which I could identify and measure myself.

Today I am grateful to fate that introduced me to the profession as an orphan blessed with grandfathers. I have been able to grow up in a vertical environment, a theatre which does not stand entirely in the present and which makes dissidence – standing aside – a conditioned reflex that is just as precious as an ancestral home.

### *Perspicacious theatre*

Theatre, in our time, is necessary especially for those who do it. At the beginning of the sixties it was Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski who clearly indicated this mutation in the cultural and social reasons for doing theatre. They stressed the need not to suffer this change as a loss of meaning but to make it a point of departure to identify a *value*. If theatre becomes superfluous to our society, its strength can only come from its *difference*: in other words, its capacity to attract those spectators whose questions are echoed in the needs which drive certain people to do theatre.

At the time of the grandfathers – Stanislavski and Meyerhold – theatre was still considered a necessary common good. Its social *raison d'être* was not yet in question. But Stanislavski and Meyerhold laid the foundation for the value of the theatre from the point of view of those who do it. They created a *parallel life* beside the normal production of performances. They devoted themselves to anomalous activities concentrating on the quality of life of the artistic group, on the existence and defence of a micro-culture, on the theatre as a laboratory for continual research or a nucleus of spiritual and political experience. They also used theatre practice as a means for the work of the individual on himself, as an instrument for exploring the quality of relationships between individuals and nurturing a spirit of opposition.

Stanislavski felt intensely that the potentiality of theatre lay beyond the staging of texts. The actor's work on himself and on the character could become an autonomous value independently of whether the production was presented to an audience. He who was considered an ingenious director-demiurge began to favour the rehearsal phase, as though it were possible for him here to experience the very essence of doing theatre. Stanislavski transformed a paradox into a science. The paradox was the search for "truth" or "authenticity" through scenic fiction. He drew an unexpected consequence from the common place according to which daily life is a play and the whole world is nothing but a theatre. If this is true, doing theatre signifies interrupting our perpetual performance. It is not a *boutade*, a witticism. It was a consistent methodical and scientific line of action.

It was Meyerhold, however, who identified in his work a way to create a sort of fission in theatre practice, unleashing the potential energies for those who do theatre as well as for those who watch it. The first step had the characteristics of a humble craftsmanlike invention. Meyerhold explained how and why the actor's "plastic actions" did not have to harmonize with the words of the character. He pointed out how in daily life there exists a complementarity, or independence, between words and gestures. Words represent explicit intentions, whether sincere, conventional or false, in relationships between individuals. But often gestures, attitudes, proximity, looks and silences which accompany words do not only underline the relationships that they express, but *reveal the real nature of these relationships*, both from an emotional and a social point of view. He showed how the actor could consciously shape two levels of behaviour, outlining his movements according to a logic that interwove new relations with the words, without having to illustrate them.

It was a technical procedure whose effects enabled the spectator not to stop at the surface but to consider contemporaneously the multiple dynamics which are at work within the various realities of the individual and his/her relations with society. The gap between the two performing levels – that of behaviour and that of speech – gave depth to the spectators' vision, making them perspicacious.

The search for *perspicacity* concerns both the spectator and the actor. This does not mean that both of them see and understand in the same way. It does not mean that both the actor and the spectator undergo the same *experience of an experience* when watching or performing a theatrical action. An actor can carry out his/her own exploration and search for a sense *in* and *with* the microcosm of his/her body-mind which remains independent with regard to the meaning perceived and the exploration carried out by the spectator watching the performance. The same performance can become a veritable *anthropological exploration* for both the actor and the spectator, but it is not necessarily the same expedition for both of them.

I do not know whether Meyerhold really intended the last point in this way, but it is certainly what I learnt from him.

Often, both in Europe and in Asia, I have watched performances whose language I did not understand and whose plot was unknown to me, yet they remained engraved deeply in my memory. Meyerhold helped me to understand the reasons for this. For the spectator, the effectiveness of the actors does not depend solely on intellectual understanding but above all on their skill in creating an "organic effect", in embodying the laws of life's movement, in other words biomechanics. This particular understanding through the senses and the kinaesthetic reactions of the spectators sets in motion – as do words – their thoughts and make them *perspicacious*. The spectator then becomes a person who *is able to see as if s/he was seeing for the first time*. The performance acquires a consistency not merely of the interpretation of a text or of a knot of events, it does not simply turn into an emotional involvement, but it becomes the *experience of an experience*.

The fission operated by Meyerhold in the nucleus of theatre practice is the premise for dealing with dramaturgy in its complexity. Dramaturgy, as "performance text" is an organism which is made up of various levels of organisation, each having an autonomous life and interacting with the others like the lines of different instruments in a musical composition.

There is the narrative level of organisation, with its plots and peripeteias – most thoroughly explored by traditional text-centred theatre.

Another level of organisation is that of organic dramaturgy, which composes the dynamics of the actions and the flow of impulses directed at the spectators' senses. This level of "theatre that dances" gives the actions a coherence which does not stem from the meaning but from the capacity to keep alert, stimulate and convince the spectator's senses like music that is not aimed at the hearing but at the actor's and spectator's nervous system.

Lastly, there is the level of that which, for want of better expression, I call the dramaturgy of changes of states. I could define it as the totality of knots or dramaturgical short circuits which radically alter the meaning of the story and plunge the spectator's senses and understanding into an unexpected void that condenses and disorientates their expectations. Meyerhold continually emphasized the importance of this third level of dramaturgical organisation, using and expounding the concept of *grotesque*. His disciple Eisenstein applied the principles of the grotesque to film montage. He spoke of ecstasy, intended in the literal sense, as *ex-stasis*, a leap beyond the ordinary dimension of reality.

The density resulting from the manipulation and intertwining of the three levels of dramaturgical organisation is not only meant to have an impact on the spectator's perception. It is also useful for the actor in his work on himself. In this case, the dramaturgy does not generate a performance but a score called "exercise". Meyerhold's biomechanical exercises are theatrical organisms composed for the doers, not for the observers. They are more than physical training, they are incorporated forms of a way of thinking.

History has saved a fragment of a film with a few biomechanical exercises composed by Meyerhold and performed by his actors. This document conveys to us, in a coded language, Meyerhold's thought-in-action. It is as one could see it, alive, face to face. Meyerhold maintained that the actor had to know how "to live in the precision of a design". The document allows us to verify it with our own eyes. We see clearly how the actors live the exercises instead of simply performing them. Everything happens as though the design was a code that comes to life and blossoms in the organic nature of a specific individual.

The organic quality comes from the actor, but the design is Meyerhold's. It is the trace of a thought that lives through counter-impulses and contrasts, dilating certain details and simultaneously assembling them together with others that "normally" belong to successive stages of the action. It invents peripeteias like a series of swerves in relation to a foreseeable line of conduct. The peripeteia does not only concern the development of a story, but becomes physical behaviour, dynamic design, a dance of balance and contrasting tensions. Each exercise last only a few seconds, yet long enough

to condense the vision and the realisation of the theatre as a discovery and laying bare of the skeleton hidden behind the appearances of what is visible.

The biomechanical exercises are not training patterns, but sensory metaphors showing how thoughts move. They train thought. They are action that distil the way in which what we call "life" reveals itself to different levels of organisation, from that of pre-expressive presence and scenic *bios* to the expressive and dramaturgical, the social and political. They show Meyerhold as a creative visionary in a *historical* theatre. He does not depict the colours of the places and the times, nor does he devote himself to the interpretation of historical events, but he plunges his gaze into the distant roots of what is to be. The "design" of the exercises restores Meyerhold to us better than any photograph or portrait.

For a long time I thought of the exercises and their movement scores as an instrument for training actors. Then I realised that the greatest value resides in their being the channels of an inheritance that cannot be entrusted to words. It is a way of thinking and an *ethos* that the master engraves in the body mind of his actors and that can be disseminated by them.

### *The microscope and history*

Deep in my heart as a theatre orphan there were the two statues of my grandfathers. Stanislavski held a microscope in one hand and a book of poetry in the other; Meyerhold brandished in one hand a propaganda manifesto while in the other he turned the pages of history books in search of points of reference and terms of confrontation.

Both grandfathers were scientists – in addition to being artists and fishers of men. Stanislavski practised the experimental science of the theatre and the actor, he loved to explore in depth starting out from his own experience and reaching the sources of scenic life and its basic shareable principles. He advanced from the complex to the simple, from the organism to the cell.

Meyerhold, on the other hand, regarded the nature of theatre in terms of struggle. In the microcosm of the individual – whether actor or spectator – he looked for the same patterns of action that characterise social change. Conflicts, tensions and polarities were to him synonymous with life. The essential thing was for him not the search for the sources of "truth" or "authenticity", but the discovery of a way in which the dynamics of history can burst into and be miniaturised in the performance as well as in every fragment of the actor's actions and body-mind.

One of the things that made me feel close to Meyerhold was his voracity for the history of theatres.

When we look through the many books that Stanislavski left us, we find ourselves in a panorama of direct testimonies, a crowd of actors who he knew or had seen on many different stages both near and far. He remembers a gesture or an inflexion of the voice of even the most mediocre of them using these as examples to be examined in depth by means of his scientific and poetic scalpel. He spans Russia and the rest of Europe, covering theatre, opera and dance. It is rare, however, that Stanislavski feels the need to search through books for traces of a vanished theatre. He seems only to trust what he has seen with his own eyes and felt with his own senses.

Meyerhold loved to travel through the realm of the dead, through history. He probed the theatre-that-is-no-more in order to invent the theatre-that-is-not-yet. All his writings are crammed with inspiring examples and interpretations from the past. In the light of his own experience he explains ancient documents, liberates them from the dust of the past, transforms them into voices with which to converse.

In the small family of reformers and prophets who changed twentieth century theatre history, Appia, Stanislavski, Decroux and even Brecht were like pure scientists. Their research had the rigour of a process of deduction. They explored the scenic territory with a desire to identify the sources of the life and the new objectives of theatre. Others, such as Craig, Copeau and Meyerhold preferred a broad reconnaissance into history, collected material and workable examples, set new research in motion and contributed to renewing theatre history. They created environments in which theatre artists could carry on a dialogue with historians.

These are not rigid distinctions. It is obvious that none can do without history just as there is no investigation into the past that is not nourished by experimental practice. It is a matter of differing propensities, not opposing methods. On the basis of these propensities, if I had to choose in which of the two groups to place my elder brother, Grotowski, I could imagine him amongst the pure scientists together with Appia and Stanislavski. As for me, I would put myself in the group headed by Craig and Meyerhold.

Those who enter theatre as "orphans" have a special need of the past. Our particular condition forces us "to build our own past" and invent a tradition. *Invention of tradition* has become a common expression since the brilliant collection of historical essays by J.F. Hobsbawm in the mid eighties. It can indicate two very different prospects: an artificial composition, with a

political and nationalistic aim, of a fictive origin, a myth fabricated as an arm (this is Hobsbawm's view). Or else it can signify a path traced in the dark sphere of the past connecting distant points, to be used as a system of reference. In the first case, the invention of tradition is an historical forgery. In the second, it is like a constellation. In the first case it nourishes fanaticism. In the second it is a means of orientation for the conquest of one's *difference*, that is, one's own identity.

Does there then exist an objective or invented *tradition* after Meyerhold? I don't think so. Does this mean that the essential core of his teaching has sunk into oblivion?

There are not only traditions whose continuity is based on the uninterrupted tension between innovation and conservation. There also exist *disconnected traditions* which are handed on through discontinuity and contradiction, evading the straight path. They pass from one element to another becoming unrecognisable just as the water of a dried torrent is unrecognisable in the cloud.

The teaching of the masters – and the grandfathers – is not extinguished or passed on. It evaporates. And it turns into rain where least we expect it. I shall become almost physically aware of this irony of history when, in my old age, I visit my grandfather's house.

### *The grandfather's house*

In May 2001 in Moscow, I met Vsevolod Meyerhold's granddaughter in the house that once belonged to her grandfather. She had succeed in restoring it in the littlest detail, officially maintaining it as a museum and cultural institution. She has established a small harbour where artists and historians of different generations can meet. At the end of the nineteen thirties the wind of history swept over that house leaving a trail of destruction. Even memory was at risk of being obliterated. Now her grandfather's house collects and conserves some of the most important documents in the history of the "golden age" of theatre.

Maria Aleksejevna Valentej is the guardian angel of her grandfather's house. She looks fragile, but all her life has stubbornly fought against the dissipation of memory. She is burdened by the years, yet her eyes are filled with light.

Tears misted my eyes that afternoon of May 19, 2001, in Moscow, in the "yellow" living room where Meyerhold and his wife Zinaida Raikh used to receive their friends around the piano on which Shostakovich and Prokofiev played while Meyerhold imagined invisible scores for his productions.

The grandfather's house – that crossroad of culture defended by his granddaughter Maria – is a riot of colours. Here I discover the vivid scenographic sketches that I had so often seen as black and white photos in books. Dominating them is the large portrait depicting Meyerhold lying on a divan, pipe in mouth and a small dog curled on his lap. The background, a huge floral tapestry, is an explosion of colour. Piotr Konchalovski painted Meyerhold somewhat in the manner of Matisse, comfortable, sophisticated, pensive and relaxed. Shortly to come would be his sudden arrest, torture, an infamous trial and death by firing squad.

We are seated at the large oval table drinking champagne and tea, and eating little cakes while Béatrice Picon-Vallin translates with trembling voice the quiet murmur of Maria Aleksejevna. Around this table they met, discussing and joking: Biely and Pasternak, Erdman and Olesha, Ehrenburg, Eisenstein and Majakovski. Occasionally too there were his old colleagues from the Art Theatre, Kotjalov and Olga Knipper, Chekhov's wife. Maria Aleksejevna's eyes are full with tears as she thanks Béatrice Picon-Vallin for all she has done and continues to do to spread and make known her godfather's name. She also thanks all of us who pay homage to him through our work.

I feel pessimism turning to joy. It is not true that nothing can resist the barbarism of history. Everything had been contrived to make Meyerhold's memory vanish from the face of the earth. So it would have been had not Zinaida Raikh's father and her daughter and son, together with Eisenstein, risked their freedom and perhaps their lives by hiding Meyerhold's documents between the pages of innocuous books in distant archives, safe from police raids. There would be little left of the grandfather but for the relentless struggle of his granddaughter, Maria Aleksejevna. Thanks to these people and their secret and courageous loyalty Meyerhold was not crushed by history.

Alongside the stories of resistance are the subterranean stories that tell of the spreading of Meyerhold's *disconnected tradition*. That long-limbed elderly man, a pipe in his mouth, stretched out amid a blaze of colour, has evaporated. His cloud has travelled far, so far that even Maria Aleksejevna has not heard about it.

Seki Sano descended from an aristocratic Japanese family and had experienced prison because he diffused the idea of socialist revolution in his performances. He affirmed that USSR was a "theatre paradise". He had arrived in 1932. He frequented Stanislavski and became an expert on his method. He became a part of Meyerhold's circle and from 1936 followed his



activity. For Seki Sano theatre was a political art. He was not to be distracted by purely aesthetic disputes. He knew from experience that the discoveries of Stanislavski and Meyerhold were part of the same baggage. With this baggage he landed in Mexico in 1939 after also having to leave the United States because of his ideas. Meanwhile, in the "theatre paradise" Meyerhold had been made to disappear.

Seki Sano, the Japanese who had been privileged to live for some years in "paradise", trained an entire generation of the most pugnacious Mexican and Latin American theatre. He translated Stanislavski's key term *perezhivanie* into the Spanish *vivencia*. Learning with him were Adolfo de Luis from Cuba, Alfredo Valessi from Nicaragua and Jesus Gómez Obregón who was to be of enormous importance to the theatrical life of Venezuela.

One of the masters of Columbian theatre, Santiago Garcia who founded La Candelaria Theatre, spoke to me in length of Seki Sano. In 1954 Rojas Pinilla, who headed the military dictatorship in power in Colombia since 1972, decided to establish a national television. He let loose his men to search out the best man to direct a school for future television artists. Of course he had to speak fluent Spanish. They suggested a Japanese. He was the best, he was famous in Mexico and spoke Spanish. Seki Sano opened a school for actors in Bogota in 1956.

Santiago Garcia was a young architect who dreamed of becoming a painter. He had studied in Europe and the United States. He had a good job but felt himself to be a prisoner. Intrigued by an advertisement in a newspaper, he presented himself to Seki Sano who, after a long interview, accepted him amongst his pupils. Seki Sano introduced him to a theatrical way of being, an individual and collective dimension which surprised the young dissatisfied architect and changed his life. He gave up his job in order to become an actor and director. Today Santiago Garcia is a central figure in the history of the theatre of Latin America.

Only too soon the dictator learnt the appalling news that the Japanese director who had educated so many new talents was a communist. So dangerous was he that when he arrived in Mexico sixteen years previously, a newspaper had found it necessary to inform its readers: *es director teatral, no dinamitero* – he is a theatre director, not an expert in explosives. How many indirect and non violent ways are there to be a *dinamitero*? And how many of them can the theatre allow? After his expulsion from Colombia, Seki Sano returned to Mexico where he continued his activities until his death in 1966.



Eugenio Barba leading the march to the archaeological site of Catamarca (Peru, 1988) to perform an homage to Jerzy Grotowski on the occasion of The Meeting of Group Theatre, organised by Teatro Cuatrotablas. Photo Tony D'Urso

It was the Kanto earthquake in Japan in 1923 that determined Seki Sano's political and artistic vocation. As a student he was destined to belong to his country's elite. The earthquake led him to discover that beneath a well organised life lurked violence and injustice. Many of those in a position of power in modern Japan took advantage of the state of emergency to eliminate their enemies, persecuting the Korean immigrant workers and the communists, oppressing the discriminated cast of the *burakumin* and threatening and beating up some of the progressive political leaders. Government propaganda sowed fanaticism among the population. The earthquake taught Seki Sano that the ground under his feet was only seemingly stable. A natural catastrophe made him see the violent dynamics of history underneath the mask of a civil society.

This, briefly, is a fragment of the *disconnected tradition*, the story of the Japanese who brought Stanislavski and Meyerhold to Mexico and Colombia and who passed on through the rigour of the craft, the meaning of a theatre that lives through revolt and a feeling of not belonging.

I have spoken of orphans. Perhaps I should have spoken of “children of earthquakes”, of those who do theatre knowing that at any time the ground may start to tremble and shake beneath them. We know that our performances – an ephemeral art we nurse as though we wanted to carry it through to eternity – can, at a moment’s notice, be engulfed together with the entire island which contains and supports it, becoming a cloud, the sole remnant of an earth which no longer exists.

A huge cloud, like a gallion’s sail, changeable yet always remaining itself, crosses the “yellow” living room in Meyerhold’s house.

Our grandparents, dear Maria Aleksejevna, do not disappear. They evaporate.



Eugenio Barba in Peru in 1978. Photo Tony D’Urso

**Eugenio Barba:**  
***Les Paraboles de l'utopie et de la résistance***

GEORGES BANU\*

**Abstract.** This paper aims at studying the importance of parables in Eugenio Barba's theoretical thought. It is shown here that Barba's parables are not allegories. They are simple in form, but very rich in their implications, as the parables of religious and spiritual masters. Built at the crossroads of oral and written culture, Barba's parables imply a profound wisdom and have a great pedagogical value.

**Keywords:** Eugenio Barba, parable, theatre, pedagogy, oral and written culture.

***La théorie, posture de la modernité***

L'artiste moderne réfléchit et écrit, le commentaire se constituant en « seconde œuvre », œuvre d'accompagnement dont la portée, dans certains cas, le théâtre par exemple, acquiert une importance décisive. Là où l'effacement règne et le vieillissement décourage les enthousiasmes, le livre prend une importance particulière, se constitue en legs d'une pensée qui a engendré l'acte désormais disparu.

Dans la perspective de la durée, c'est lui qui assure la pérennité d'une esthétique, c'est lui qui confirme l'inédit d'une approche, c'est lui qui perdure. Les photos des mises en scène entassées comme des feuilles mortes dans un album ne préserveront jamais l'essence d'une démarche théâtrale, elle est inscrite *entre* les pages d'un texte. Ou elles bénéficient de la légende constituée à l'heure des triomphes aujourd'hui éteints. La légende, ce sont d'autres qui l'entretiennent et cultivent, le projet initial c'est l'artiste qui le constitue en trace de référence grâce aux textes. Et, parfois, grâce à eux il parvient à interférer dans les destins du théâtre en marche car si les spectacles sont

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défunts, les mots résonnent encore, les rêves persistent, les utopies survivent. Pour preuve, Craig ou Artaud, Stanislavski et Brecht ou encore plus près Grotowski et Brook.

Barba appartient à cette famille mais il va plus loin et, grâce aux livres, finit par élaborer une véritable poétique du théâtre, le sien aussi bien que celui des autres. Pour lui, écrire c'est mettre en page la réserve de rêves et pensées qui le constitue. C'est son *autre scène* qu'il investit et qui vient compléter le portrait de l'artiste qu'il est. Pour le connaître il faut approcher les deux avec le bonheur de le faire encore, avant que le présent des spectacles s'éteigne et la persistance des livres l'emporte.

### *Une pensée concrète*

Jeune encore, en lisant Lévi-Strauss, j'ai eu la révélation de « la pensée sauvage » – le titre même de son ouvrage – et cette découverte répondit aux inquiétudes de l'étudiant qui semblait être interdit d'accès à l'abstraction philosophique. La pensée sauvage est, dit Lévi-Strauss, une pensée concrète qui ne se détache pas de la réalité quotidienne mais qui n'en est pas pour autant dépourvue de capacité de conceptualiser. Ce qui la définit provient justement de cette persistance des matériaux quotidiens sous la forme de légendes ou de récits initiatiques, tous à même de sauvegarder ce dépôt mnémonique chargé d'une pensée qui s'y mêle.

Grâce à d'autres développements, particulièrement pertinents, une conviction s'est imposée et emparé de moi car je m'y retrouvais. La pensée du théâtre est une pensée concrète et c'est ce qui la définit. C'est ce qui la rend pertinente ici où le corps règne et les mots l'accompagnent. De même que dans les rituels ou les opérations magiques, la pensée du théâtre – au moins celle des créateurs – est « sauvage » dans le sens que Lévi-Strauss accorde au terme. Pensée du voyage entre le réel qui persiste et l'imaginaire qui s'en dégage. Pensée à laquelle sont indispensables les mêmes ingrédients qui alimentent la pensée concrète : figures, récits, gestes.

Eugenio Barba dans ses textes conforte la conviction acquise dans ma jeunesse, que je retrouve à leur lecture. Il convoque régulièrement les outils de la pensée concrète qui sera à jamais une pensée des commencements, pensée impure mais également « pensée effective », selon les termes de l'anthropologie. Pensée qui part du réel pour s'en détacher partiellement et faire ensuite retour au réel de l'acte théâtral. Je dirais, dans le sens le plus noble du terme, pensée matérialiste. Et dans ce sens-là pensée effectivement théâtrale.

### *L'énergie des paraboles*

Peter Brook cultive ce que j'ai appelé « les métaphores du vivant » pour définir le théâtre et ses opérations – le sens secret du texte comme le minerais à faire ressortir, la préparation d'un spectacle pareille à la cuisson d'un bon plat, etc. – et ainsi il se dérobe à ce qui lui répugne le plus, la théorie sans assises matérielles, il l'enracine. Par ailleurs, l'exercice brookien a le mérite d'éviter toute intimidation conceptuelle et trouve dans le réel son meilleur allié. Familier à chacun, il assure le préalable de la communication, ce « premier niveau » qui n'exclut personne et permet à chacun d'entrer dans le cercle quitte, ensuite, à suivre un chemin propre, individuel.

Ariane Mnouchkine sans se livrer à l'exercice de l'écrit est réputée, grâce aux récits des répétitions, par la même convocation du concret à même de rendre sa pensée explicite et également accessible aux comédiens. N'assimile-t-elle pas l'acharnement des répétitions aux efforts d'une ascension à haut risque en montagne, les efforts déployés à des combats des samourais inflexibles et n'intervient-elle pas auprès des acteurs en utilisant des remarques quotidienne avec un effet maximal : « Maurice, ne pense pas à ta note de gaz impayée », et tant d'autres. Le concret gros de pensée fabrique du liant au sein de cet acte communautaire qu'est le théâtre.

Chez Barba, qui appartient à la même famille, mais qui voue davantage d'importance à l'écriture, cette disposition devient constante, systématique, preuve indéfectible de son appartenance à « la pensée concrète ». Il en emprunte les procédés et se réclame des mêmes visées. Mais, plus encore chez lui, c'est la parabole qui se constitue en outil privilégié. La parabole non pas comme devinette mais comme condensation de la pensée dans une situation de vie, gestes ou échanges, actes ou silences.

### *De quelques paraboles*

Quelques exemples le confirment et, de surcroît, ils ont le mérite, comme toute parabole efficace, de rester mémorables. Comment oublier la parabole de la princesse nordique et le labyrinthe de ses pierres dressé afin de maîtriser les vents? Cette citadelle sans murs, ouverte et protectrice, renvoie au projet de Barba et son Odin Teatret, projet d'une construction qui ne semble pas en être une et pourtant elle a fini par se constituer en graphe de la troupe, graphe inscrit sur la carte de la scène moderne comme un bastion fermé et ouvert également. La parabole se nourrit d'une histoire, elle ne se résume pas à une comparaison, et grâce à cela nous y trouvons un fragment de vie porteur d'un

sens qui est caché et que l'auteur qui l'utilise délibérément mobilise. Situation « grosse » d'une sagesse comme la femme d'un enfant à venir. Nous devons œuvrer à son accouchement. Barba nous aide et guide ! Comme lors de la parabole du paysan qui sur ses terres semait des lions à la place des haricots, mais, obstinément, il ne parvenait à obtenir que des lapins suscitant l'ironie de ses voisins. Une fois mort, son fils finit par se résigner à semer seulement des haricots et chuta dans la dérision générale. Comment ne pas saisir la portée douloureuse de l'utopie dans le champ de l'art, utopie qui engendre réserve et finit, ensuite, par inviter au respect ? Ou l'histoire du gourou qui inspira un miracle à l'élève dont la performance, avançait-il la réponse, s'expliquait par la force de l'exemple du maître. Il se trouvait à l'origine de l'exploit inouï du disciple. Les paraboles de Barba se définissent par l'aptitude de concentrer une pensée sur le théâtre, ses voies et ses leaders. Et ne cite-t-il pas l'histoire du vieillard qui, à un moment donné, proche de la fin, monta dans sa barque et s'immobilisa au cœur du courant jusqu'à son dernier jour ? Une fois le grand-père mort, le petit-fils emprunta son chemin et s'avança au cœur du fleuve en prenant le relais du vieil homme confronté aux dangers de la rivière agitée. Ou l'histoire, imaginée par Barba lui-même et non pas héritée, du Jésus Noir et de la maison en flammes... Il y a chez lui un attrait récurrent pour les paraboles de l'utopie alliée à la résistance. Comme par exemple dans le récit de Roger Buyant qui se trouve à l'origine de l'ordre des chevaliers-guerriers et qui dressa une forteresse où, malgré sa petitesse, les chrétiens pouvaient se réfugier et trouver abri ! L'Odin a été une pareille citadelle et Barba, comme un Roger Buyant de nos jours, sut la bâtir.

Et comment oublier la conversion en parabole du geste d'Antigone qui, obstinément, sans prendre garde aux menaces ni se soumettre à l'ordre laïque, continue à gratter pour enterrer son frère ? Lorsqu'Eugenio Barba m'a envoyé, pour la revue que je dirigeais alors, *L'Art du théâtre*, ce texte où il évoquait l'entêtement de l'héroïne grecque, son courage démesuré de ne pas bouger, de ne pas se soumettre aux aléas du temps et de camper sur les terres de ses conquêtes, j'ai compris que c'est de lui-même et de l'Odin que ce geste était la parabole. Parabole du rejet de toute adaptation aux impératifs du présent, parabole, une fois encore, de la résistance. En lisant, il y a vingt ans déjà, ces lignes j'ai été saisi d'effroi par pareille audace à l'heure où les changements et les trahisons des anciennes convictions s'érigaient en comportement généralisé. Barba ne plie pas et il se trouve des alliés qui le confortent dans sa posture ! Antigone en est un, de choix ! Il ne formule pas directement l'éloge de la résistance mais il raconte des paraboles et constitue ainsi une vraie galerie

des irréductibles. Ces irréductibles qui, par ailleurs, ont comme partenaires les grands rêveurs, les porteurs de l'utopie. Barba, à travers ses histoires, allie le besoin d'un horizon inatteignable dont l'artiste de génie ressent l'attrait et la volonté indéfectible de ne pas plier. Voici l'écartèlement extrême que les paraboles de Barba entretiennent. Implicitement, elles attestent la bipolarité radicale cultivée par l'artiste qui les raconte, les accomplit et les dresse tels des modèles pour de jeunes gens de théâtre auxquels il s'adresse. L'usage de la parabole implique le sacrifice du monologue au profit d'une relation dialogique... on se souvient des êtres qui ont agi et on s'adresse à des êtres que l'on invite ainsi à agir. La parabole n'a rien de solipsiste. Elle est lien !

Ce qui séduit dans ces paraboles, provient du fait qu'une fois leur appartenance désignée elles s'adressent à quiconque par-delà les frontières et les identités culturelles. La parabole réunit et jamais ne dissocie. Comme le théâtre que Barba, depuis toujours, a souhaité accomplir !

### *Le propre de la parabole*

Chez Barba, nous retrouvons d'une manière flagrante le rejet de l'allégorie qui, de manière statique, désigne une vertu ou une action – la Justice avec les yeux bandés qui tient une balance à la main – allégorie qui se réduit à la désignation par une image inventoriée d'une pratique sociale en général hautement valorisée. Barba se réclame de la parabole avec tout ce qu'elle comporte comme séduction d'un récit, fût-il bref, et aptitude à engendrer un sens. La parabole intéresse dans un tel discours par ce qu'elle préserve de « l'imprécision de la vie et... du vibrato du réel » comme le précise Andrei Pleșu dans son ouvrage récent consacré aux *Paraboles de Jésus* (Bucarest, Ed. Humanitas, 2013).

Si le discours théorique convoque des arguments, la parabole s'organise autour d'un noyau concentré de réel, noyau réduit à l'essentiel mais porteur d'une « pensée concrète ». Le dynamisme la définit et elle mobilise aussi bien le conteur qui fournit le cadre et ses détails que l'auditeur appelé à le décoder. Ils sont à l'œuvre en commun sans que l'interprétation soit univoque : la parabole préserve de l'incertitude ! Et c'est ce qu'Eugenio Barba apprécie, car adepte d'une pensée concrète avec tout ce qu'elle comporte comme constellation flottante de sens. Jean-Pierre Sarrazac écrit que « l'auteur des paraboles donne l'impression de solliciter chez le spectateur... des facultés plus rares... plus ludiques de réflexion et de questionnement personnels »<sup>1</sup>. Cette dimension

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, *La Parabole ou l'enfance du théâtre*, Clamecy, Ed. Circé, 2002, p. 11.



ludique intervient au niveau de la réception mais également à celui de la narration: Barba joue avec ses paraboles comme un conteur oriental espiègle, tout autant en séducteur de l'auditeur et en penseur concret. « Qui veut jouer avec moi? », clame-t-il sans cesse. Et en ce sens-là, il se rattache aux origines, à cet art du détour qu'est l'art de la parabole dont le point de départ se trouve dans le toujours étonnant langage ésopique. La parabole, chez Barba est une ruse supérieure, une ruse qui dissimule la portée de la théorie pour ne pas intimider, sans pour autant la rabaisser. Ruse de la sagesse et non pas autorité de la pensée. Pour reprendre la belle distinction de Sarrazac la parabole invite à ne pas « regarder directement le Soleil, mais seulement *son reflet dans l'eau* »<sup>2</sup>. Le reflet accompagné de vibrations, d'ombres et de clair-obscur permet l'accès à une vérité mais vérité troublée, incertaine, humaine. Vérité essentielle non dissociée de la matière ! D'ailleurs Nietzsche dans *Par-delà le bien et le mal* ne disait-il pas que « plus abstraite est la vérité que tu veux enseigner, plus il te faudra séduire le sens en sa faveur ». C'est ce que la parabole sauve et Barba, justement, plus que nul autre, on doit l'admettre, la manie sur fond de quête du plaisir, le plaisir des sens.

La parabole ne possède pas la précision des termes, outils maîtrisés, car ici la matière les inclut sans qu'elle assure leur maniement sans faille. La parabole c'est un récit de vie qui s'élève à la pensée non pas directement, comme lors du recours à la comparaison, mais par le biais d'un parcours arrondi qui atteste l'effort de la pensée aussi bien que la réussite de sa performance. Ici le détour l'emporte et procure la satisfaction conjointe d'une reconnaissance du réel aussi bien que de l'accouchement d'une pensée. La parabole « n'offre pas de réponse, mais suscite leur recherche » et ainsi se charge d'une « valeur pédagogique » précise Pleşu. A l'homme de théâtre qu'est Barba pareille stratégie semble être indispensable. Pareil à Socrate, en faisant recours à la parabole, il appelle à l'effort du lecteur de penser « par lui-même » ou, au moins, d'éprouver l'illusion de cette performance. La parabole tient aussi de la ruse et cela motive souvent son usage chez Brecht, partisan de l'usage de la ruse pour sauver une pensée subversive.

Le recours à la parabole fait de Barba, on l'a dit, un acteur, mais surtout un conteur. Il raconte, décrit, brosse des portraits, saisit des paysages, affirme une explicite vocation épique, vocation qu'il se refuse de développer dans de longues histoires pour esquisser plutôt des contours, fournir les raccourcis des vies étrangères afin d'extraire un sens de l'entrelacs des événements, des choix et des accidents dont le narrateur dégage le noyau philosophique et, s'il est Barba, le rattache à sa biographie artistique.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.



Else Marie Lauvik in Odin Teatret's performance *Min Fars Hus*, 1972  
(*My Father's House*). Photo: Tony D'Urso

### *Paraboles et biographie*

Les paraboles viennent chez Barba de partout et attestent ainsi, implicitement, son inextinguible attrait pour les expéditions et le syncrétisme des héritages. La réserve des paraboles répertoriées à travers ses livres dessine la carte secrète de cet émigrant inassouvi, partout à l'aise, à même de convoquer tantôt un exemple balinais, tantôt polonais. Plaisir donc lié à ses voyages, à ses lectures atypiques, à ses rencontres... les paraboles dressent une carte de soi, convictions et expériences réunies. Elles ne sont pas dissociées. La parabole les allie. Sur fond, admettons-le, d'un attrait pour de lointaines contrées, pour l'exotisme des maîtres blottis dans des huttes et des peintres aux milles pinceaux, pour le voyage comme source de ces acquis de fortune. La parabole n'est pas anonyme, elle porte la marque d'une communauté ou la signature d'un ami. Et cette « individualisation » explique l'attrait qu'elles exercent sur Barba qui les raconte et moi qui les écoute. Elles arrivent toujours d'ailleurs...

La parabole dans les textes de Barba, comme souvent au Japon et au Proche Orient, conjugue profondeur de sens et... humour. Personne n'a un rire plus intelligent que les maîtres zen ou Nastratin Hodgea. Barba le sait et en racontant leurs paraboles il les érige en alliés subversifs qui se dérobent au prestige de la pensée des mandarins et des experts : le rire apporte l'énergie nécessaire aux récits paraboliques. Ils sont indissociables.

### *Oralité et pensée*

Barba mobilise une réserve énorme de paraboles sans se contenter pour autant de les livrer comme des matériaux premiers. Il les cite comme un préalable, comme un socle impersonnel de la sagesse ancienne pour développer ensuite sa propre réflexion et nous conduire vers le noyau de sa démonstration. L'usage qu'il en fait conforte entièrement les données de la « pensée concrète » dont Lévi-Strauss avait dégagé les particularités. La parabole sert de rampe de lancement pour l'artiste qui ne se résigne pas à sacrifier la matière sans pour autant consentir de s'y engluier.

Heiner Müller a formulé des réserves à l'égard de la parabole brechtienne, au nom de l'écriture fragmentaire. La parabole, dit-il, organise là où le monde disparate, éclaté, exige une approche similaire. Critique plausible et pourtant... la parabole ne nous satisfait-elle pas dans la mesure où elle peut nous apparaître comme une forme qui prend le dessus non pas en reniant la vision fragmentaire mais en l'intégrant dans une structure. La parabole n'est pas forcément unifiante – même chez Brecht – et elle a le mérite de confronter le

spectateur à une question complexe et en même temps organisée. Il n'y a pas d'incompatibilité entre ces deux termes. La question s'impose avec évidence sans cesser pour autant d'être énigmatique. Le trouble n'est pas l'apanage seulement du fragment et du disparate. Et Barba ne l'a jamais renié. Il convoque les paraboles, s'en sert, mais conscient qu'elles préservent une dimension cachée, inépuisable, et cependant en partie révélée, lors des usages successifs. Les paraboles galvaudées lui répugnent, les paraboles généralistes, il les évite. La parabole, chez Barba, est inédite et locale. Gisement peu fréquenté, elle intervient pour éclairer une interrogation sans vouloir se dilater jusqu'aux questions ultimes. De là provient sans doute son dynamisme, son pouvoir d'incitation à la pensée. La parabole nous permet, chaque fois qu'elle est réussie, d'éprouver le bonheur de ce miracle unique de la pensée qui, tout en étant inscrite dans la matière, finit par s'en dégager. La parabole lance la flèche de la pensée et nous en éprouvons la force qui nous emporte.

### *En guise de conclusion*

En utilisant les paraboles Barba entend rester « concret », tout en transcendant le « caractère » individuel de sa pensée. Il le sait et admet que dans les sociétés où la rupture entre l'oral et l'écrit n'est pas entièrement consommée, la parabole rattache son utilisateur à la communauté et à sa vision collective. On reconnaît alors la preuve d'une expression « chorale » dont il est le représentant investi, à même d'accomplir la synthèse. C'est dans cet esprit que travaillait un sculpteur comme Brancusi dont les plus grandes réussites furent des « paraboles visuelles » et qui s'était fixé comme horizon la figure du « Grand anonyme ». Pour y parvenir, insistait-il, il fallait retrouver la force de l'enfance et les secrets du « naïf ». Dans ses écrits, Barba, par l'usage des paraboles, affirme un rattachement à la catégorie du « naïf archaïque » dont ses spectacles restent étrangers. C'est l'autre visage...

La parabole, on l'a dit, entretient un rapport étroit aux origines. Elle se place dans l'entre-deux de l'écrit et de l'oral. La parabole bénéficie de cette « impureté » première et cela explique sa fréquence dans les civilisations africaine ou orientale, qui l'ont préservée plus longtemps que la nôtre. Cela accorde à la culture une efficacité, puisqu'elle se place au cœur du dialogue entre « action et pensée », afin de fournir « une leçon » au nom d'une « action » à venir. À la proposition première – la parabole évoquée – la réponse provient du récipiendaire qui réalise que la parabole ne s'accomplit que s'il admet qu'elle ne se suffit pas à elle-même. Un « paraboliste » comme Barba affirme un « tempérament pédagogique » au nom d'une « vocation d'enseignement »

mais cet enseignement n'a rien d'une doctrine ou d'un système : il est une « sagesse » dans le sens où il suggère des consignes de vie, des hypothèses de comportement, des rapports au monde. C'est un être concret qui s'adresse à un être concret : la parabole pour fonctionner exige, tel un vieux pont, cette assise double. Elle assure la solidité de l'arc qui relie deux instances en facilitant la communication de pensée entre elles. Dans ce sens-là, Barba, avec génie, la convoque et inlassablement l'utilise. Tantôt parabole de l'utopie, tantôt de la résistance, extrêmes entre lesquels son théâtre vacille, écartèlement qui le constitue, posture indéfectible, réfractaire à toute adaptation ou négociation.

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## *Eugenio Barba's Written Work: The Theatrical Vision Implied in Its Structure*

LLUÍS MASGRAU\*

**Abstract.** The starting point of this paper is an investigation conducted from 1992 to the present in the context of the Documentation Center of Odin Teatret to develop and update annually a critical bibliography of Barba's written work. The result is a 150-page document that contains all the texts published by Barba sorted by years of writing. The literature provides in each case details of the origin of the texts, the origin of the materials that comprise it and the many transformations that Barba effected in his materials. One of the most obvious characteristics of Barba's written work is its multifaceted dimension that manifests in a variety of formats, concepts, issues and themes. Barba's written work is like a big melting pot where he mixes and analyzes his theatrical influences, the vicissitudes of his long artistic career, meetings and professional experiences that marked him. The intention of this paper is to show how Barba's written work has gradually evolved towards a distillation of a deep and implied structure. This structure comes out with two intersecting elements: the different levels of organization that Barba distinguishes in his overview of theatre craft, and the professional dialogue he maintained with three great theatre cultures: the European theatre of the twentieth century, Asian classical theatre and the Latin American group theatre. The aim is to show how behind a seemingly heterogeneous, dispersed and multifaceted, Barba's written work organizes this multiplicity in a coherent and deeply structured theatrical vision.

**Keywords:** Eugenio Barba, writings, written works, theatrical traditions, reasons to do theatre.

Barba's written work has an apparently disparate character. On a formal level, his point of departure have been the numerous individual texts that he has published between nineteen sixty-two and today (about two hundred and sixty). From the nineteen nineties on, however, Barba creates a series of

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fundamental books through which he gradually organises his thinking. The majority of these books are anthologies of previously published texts or books that combine the re-casting of previous materials with new materials. In this way Barba has used his most important books to slowly distillate his individual texts and his fundamental ideas. The seven books that contain the core of his theatrical thinking are *Theatre. Solitude, Craft, Revolt* (published in its first edition with the name *The Floating Islands* and then in a second version with the title *Beyond the Floating Islands*); *The Secret Art of the Performer* (written together with Nicola Savarese); *The Paper Canoe*; *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*; *Ploughing the Sky*; *On Directing and Dramaturgy*; *Burning the House*; *The Conquest of Difference*.

These books are the point at which the most important of Barba's themes are structured within larger areas of reflection. By analysing what these areas are and how they are organised we can perceive the deeper structure of Barba's corpus. This is the aim of this article.

#### *Four questions and three theatre cultures*

Barba often notes that any theatre man or woman should respond, either explicitly or implicitly, to four key questions: where to do theatre, why, how and for whom. In my opinion this is the main frame of his written work.

But there is a second frame: the professional dialogue Barba has maintained with three great theatre cultures. The first one is an important part of the mainly European but also North American theatre culture that cross the entire twentieth century embodied by a group of great reformers who reinvented theatre practice in a very personal way. In that context we distinguished names like Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Copeau, Decroux, Artaud, Brecht, Grotowski or the Living Theatre, among others.

The second theatre culture that Barba has most intensely interacted with is classical Asian theatre. He came into contact with this culture very early on, in nineteen sixty-three during his apprenticeship with Grotowski. Barba travelled to India and by coincidence ended up in Kerala, where he "discovered" the Kathakali. Barba's dialogue with classical Asian theatre has been a constant of his entire professional career until nowadays.

The third theatre culture that has powerfully influenced Barba's professional identity has been Latin American group theatre. In nineteen seventy-six the Odin Teatret travelled to Latin America for the first time invited by the Caracas Festival. There, Barba came into contact with a handful of South American theatre artists and groups. From then on Barba's dialogue

with Latin American group theatre has been highly relevant, and has led him to an intense interaction with three generations of groups and theatre artists.

If we intersect the two frames and apply them to Barba's most important books it comes out a context that organises his written work. This context is a deeper structure that gives each of his books an implicit meaning. This structure, however, is not rigid, and has not been designed so from the beginning. It is a consequence of Barba's textual dramaturgy and his efforts to conceptualise the experiences that have strongly influenced him, professionally speaking. The result is a reflection that transforms his own identity into a theatre poetics.

Barba has replied to the four questions implicitly through his theatre practice, but he also done so explicitly in his most important books. In each case he has founded his ideas in a dialogue with one of the three mentioned theatre cultures. In professional practice the "where", "why", "how" and "for whom" to do theatre are melted into an organic reality where it is not possible to clearly separate them. However, in the structure of Barba's written corpus these four levels tend to be extrapolated and thought as if they were a reality in itself. By doing so, the director of Odin Teatret is attempting to underline the questions and specific function of each level in theatre practice.

### *Where to do theatre? The importance of the apprenticeship*

Barba has conceptualised the question of "where" to do theatre by linking it to his own apprenticeship. He explores this question in the book *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, which related his apprenticeship in Poland. Barba explains how he joined the official theatre school in Warsaw, and how after the initial euphoria of the first months, the learning program started to dissatisfy him more and more. Half way through the academic year, he took on board Grotowski's suggestion and, in January nineteen sixty-two, he decided to leave the school to become the Polish master's assistant director. At that time Grotowski was at an early stage in his theatre revolution; he was unknown internationally and in Poland he was considered a rather peripheral figure, an unappreciated rarity in the context of theatre life. Barba stayed with Grotowski from nineteen sixty-two to nineteen sixty-four, just in the period when the Theatre of 13 Rows evolved to become a laboratory theatre.

In the book Barba recounts his fellow students' perplexity at his decision to leave the school for the theatre of 13 Rows. They couldn't understand that he would leave the centrality of Warsaw school to go to the small city



of Opole to work with an eccentric that was far from the important theatre circuits. Working with Grotowski, Barba came into contact with a completely different way of practising and thinking about theatre. In the Polish masters' work Barba finds a powerful ethical dimension that he will also find later on in the great reformer's work and texts.

Where to do theatre? In a theatre laboratory. This is a concept that has obsessed Barba up to the modern day and about which he has often reflected. Barba conceives it as an attempt to root theatre into the edges of market logic, creating a space where it is possible to do theatre as a research inseparably connected to an ethical dimension.

In the overall structure of Barba's written contribution, *Land of Ashes and Diamonds* suggests that apprenticeship is also a part of the craft. He considers that the former should be done with a master. Thus, the apprenticeship becomes a process that goes beyond mere acquisition of a technical base. It should be a process in which the ethical dimension of the work becomes embodied through technique. The implicit meaning of the book is that every theatre person should be able to find their master, should find the way to be accepted by him and should turn him into a kind of professional superego. Letting oneself be totally influenced by a master is the premise to then be able to personalise this influence and transform it into a strong professional identity.

### *Why to do theatre? The search for personal meaning*

The book in which Barba explores the importance of the personal meaning is *Theatre. Solitude, Craft, Revolt*. Through a collection of twenty-eight texts he reflects on the motivation that has galvanised his professional career with Odin Teatret. In this book the dialogue with Grotowski is expanded to the theatre reformers. Barba refers to this theatre culture with the name of "The tradition of the founders of traditions", and reads it as a kind of professional genealogy.

The book dives into an underground current that nourishes the vision of the reformers: the search of personal meaning. In that underground dimension of the craft Barba deciphers a recurrent idea: denying the established meaning of theatre to inject in it values that transcend its artistic dimension. If the reformers denied theatre practice as it was established in their period it was to convert it into something more than theatre: political, social, spiritual, anthropological or pedagogical action in the widest sense of the word.

For Barba the search for personal meaning of the craft is what takes theatre beyond its artistic dimension. This is the key idea of the book. Theatre is a strategy to live in a different way, with other values, in another context. Theatre is the Trojan horse that make possible to carry out a socially recognised activity refusing established values. Theatre practice for Barba is the way of refusal. Is a way to refuse the spirit of the time, but above all, a way to refuse "theatre" itself. The ethical attitude of denying the established meaning of theatre is an indispensable premise for strengthening and finding the personal meaning. Within Barba's written work *Theatre. Solitude, Craft, Revolt* is a kind of professional autobiography that attempts to recreate on paper his own search for meaning. Using multiple metaphors, the book looks constantly towards the essential reality of a theatre made to transcend itself. This is the main thread of the book: the tension between theatre and everything that transcends it. For Barba theatre as cultural goods or art does not justify itself. It is rather a practice that should be revitalised by imbuing it with very personal motivations. Then, the searching for the personal meaning able to fill the shell of theatre in order to transform it into something more than theatre is also an aspect of the craft.

### *How to do theatre? The construction of technique*

In Barba's written work the construction of technique is split into two areas: the actor's technique and the director's technique relative to the overall composition of the performance.

The two books in which Barba conceptualises his reflection on the actor's technique are *The Paper Canoe* and *The Secret Art of the Performer* (the second one written together with Nicola Savarese). At this level of the craft it was very relevant the dialogue with the classical Asian Theatre. The dialogue grew in depth from 1980 (nineteen eighty) onwards with the creation of the ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology) and Theatre Anthropology itself as a study discipline aimed to search the pre-expressive principles of stage presence. Classical Asian theatre were fundamental to formulating this principles, and, later on, Barba broadened the dialogue to include the most European and North American technical traditions.

Asian traditions did not teach Barba and his actors how to do theatre, but they were key in helping him to conceptualise the construction of technique. Through Theatre Anthropology Barba developed an analysis of performative knowledge based on principles and not technical rules. This change in focus allows every one, in Barba's words, to "learn to learn". This is the foundation of actor's technique as developed by Odin Teatret. It is a vision that has allowed each actor to create his/her own training within the group.

The book in which Barba expounded his vision of the director's technique is *On Directing and Dramaturgy. Burning the House*. Developing a complex reflection Barba explain his way to organise the creative process of a performance by intertwining the dramaturgy of the actor, the dramaturgy of the director and the dramaturgy of the spectator. Barba formulates a series of principles and types of logic designed to turn the performance into an empty ritual. With these ideas Barba tries to avoid the construction of a performance with a clear sense that should be understood by all the spectators. The performance is an empty ritual neither because it is senseless, but because it is a montage of actions and histories aimed to create a large *potentiality* of sense. Each actor, the director itself and each spectator may and must "discover" their own sense of the performance.

Within his theatre poetics Barba gives technique the function of a premise. It is not the essential, but it is indispensable in order to turn the personal motivations into a practical reality. Without a good knowledge of technique the personal motivations can very easily become an inoperative rhetoric or solipsism. By thinking about the construction of technique (of both actor and director) in terms of principles, Barba turns it into a solid and efficient tool to make the personal motivations tangible. Doing so, technique may transcend the dimension of an artistic skill to become the praxis of an ethos.

### *For whom to do theatre? The conquest of value*

Without strong personal motivations it is not possible to transcend theatre. But if we are not able to convert our personal motivations in good theatre the ethics that nourish them become unrecognisable to everyone else. The complementary nature of personal meaning and technique is what creates the fourth level of the craft, and perhaps the most enigmatic: value.

When the personal meaning of a theatre practice can be recognised and shared by other persons it becomes a value. Then, for some spectators, this practice acquires a strange magnetism that goes beyond the beauty or expressive power of the performance. The personal meaning of craft lies in its capacity to satisfy the intimate needs of the men and women that do theatre. By contrast, the *value* of the craft lies in its capacity to satisfy the intimate needs of the spectators. The value of a theatre is something intangible bestowed by the spectators who perceive in a theatre practice an ethical pattern that they can recognise themselves in. For Barba, the value of theatre does not lie within originality or aesthetic perfection, but within its ability to nourish the struggle, the aspirations and obsessions of some spectators.

But in professional practice, how can we conquer this value?

The book where Barba has reflected about the value of theatre is *Ploughing the Sky. Latin American Dialogues*. On the level of value, Barba's written work has two fundamental concepts. The first is the concept of "spectator". The director of the Odin Teatret has always refused the abstract category of "audience" to focus on the individuality of the spectator. The audience is an anonymous, faceless group. The spectator is a specific personality. To protect the personal relationship with the spectators, the Odin Teatret has always tried to create a proximity with them, for example, by limiting the size of the audiences. Another way of strengthening the individuality of the spectator is Barba's dramaturgical technique to create the performance as an "Empty Ritual". These strategies respond to the vital necessity to find "their" own spectators. The ones who, in turn, recognise the Odin as "their" own theatre.

Here we find the second key concept that Barba relates to the conquest of value: what he calls the "secret people" of the Odin Teatret. With this concept he is attempting to underline the importance of attracting and articulating a core of spectators that identify themselves with a particular theatre. They identify themselves with it because they perceive a set of values in the theatre practice that they deeply believe in. That theatre, then, becomes necessary for a group of spectators, and in this way conquers a particular value. This is the deepest stratum of Barba's theatre poetics: transforming the theatre into an invisible land where it becomes possible to weave deep human relationships. He refers to the secret people of the Odin with some metaphors: those who not belong to the world they live in, farmers who grow seeds of dissidence, the fabricators of indelible shadows, knights with water swords, warriors of tenacity.

The question of value reappears in Barba's work more and more intensely in his twenty first century texts. That is the key to explain why his texts are often open letters to a specific person or group of people.

To explore the level of the value the theatre culture that has perhaps been most decisive for Barba is the Latin America group theatre. Much has been written about Barba's and the Odin's influence on an important part of Latin American theatre. But the influence the latter has had on the former has come under less focus. This influence has been fundamental to conceptualise the importance and the function of value in the theatre craft. Barba has repeated on many occasions that an important part of the Odin Teatret secret people is in Latin America. The dialogue with some Latin American spectators and colleagues is the context of the book *Ploughing the Sky*.

In Barba's theatre poetics, value is not only a question that belongs to the spectators; it is also a level of the craft whit some specific questions: how to identify his own spectators, how to collaborate with them on all levels, how

to make deeper the emotive links, how to imbue these links with continuity, how to be loyal to that “secret people”. These questions explain certain of Barba’s and Odin Teatret’s professional attitudes. For example, their obsession with dialoguing with the spectators beyond the performance. Or the strategy of putting their own international prestige at the service of anonymous groups and peripheral theatre organisations in order to strengthen their position in the medium they work in. Or contradicting the more basic commercial logic to be present working in particular contexts or places with very specific people. We might think that these professional attitudes are a kind of romantic altruism, an unproductive waste or blind idealism that might endanger the survival of a theatre group. And yet, it is exactly the opposite: it is a calculated professional ability that has a very precise aim: to nourish the theatre company’s resistance.



Barter in South Italy in 1974. Photo Tony D’Urso

When speaking about the Odin Teatret, a recurring question often comes up: What is the secret to its resistance? In November 2014 Odin Teatret will be fifty years old. How can a small theatre company last for fifty years with an unchanged core of people? There is not just one reason to explain the Odin Teatret’s longevity. But an important key is the function of the “secret people”. Constructing and feeding this “secret people” that gives value to

professional practice is fundamental for the durability of an artistic experience. A small independent company needs not only money and material resources. It also needs to have the conviction that the professional action involves other people beyond the group. It needs to know that it has no right to give up its fight to resist. To conquest a value is also a level of the craft. That dimension of the theatre practice is arguably the least obvious one.

### *The conquest of difference*

This, for the moment, is Barba's last book. It is a collection of thirty-nine texts from which emerges a synthesis of his vision. From the point of view of this article the most relevant aspect of the book is that it goes through the four levels of the craft. Not in a linear way, but in a dynamic collage trying to show the global complexity of the theatre craft. In the previous books Barba was focusing his attention in one level. By contrast, the main subject of his last book is the deep interrelation of the four levels.

Barba's professional identity is the conquest of difference. A difference that was cast at the beginnings of the nineteen sixties in Opole and took a great detour through Asia, before ending up in Latin America. A difference that has been developed through a series of concentric loyalties to a master (Grotowski), to a genealogy of professional ancestors (the twentieth century reformers), to his own actors and to the handful of spectators that make up Odin Teatret's "secret people".

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Iben Nagel Rasmussen in the final scene from the performance *Talabot*, 1988.

Photo Jan Rűsz

## *A sense of teaching: who's who in Eugenio Barba's Theatre*

### *Notes on directing and acting*

MARIAN POPESCU\*

**Abstract.** Teaching in universities seems less and less a way to put different people in *live* contact with sharing specific knowledge. Activities usually take a technical shape of transmitting information, practices, a *know how* of a domain, area or expertise. Performance is often excluded. Often, you don't need the *presence* of "actors". But Theatre still keeps the track of a live and ancestral communication tool: the *presence*. Is this yet enough to cope with the technological milieu we're living in? Eugenio Barba's theatre might also be considered from this point of view, of a sense of teaching where director and actor confront themselves with the proliferation of artifacts of the TIC. Who is who in the process of teaching and sharing?

**Keywords:** Eugenio Barba, knowledge, teaching, actor, director, energy, TIC.

### *The Life of Knowledge*

Usually, acting is seen as a sum of practices acquired during a certain period of time. It is also considered a level of *artistic experience* displayed on stage every time when it is needed. For Eugenio Barba and his Odin Teatret, to teach became since a long time not a technique of transmitting but a way to discover the unknown. It is not the search for *knowledge* but that of the *unknown* that eventually leads to the actors' own findings during the process of work. As Barba mentioned many times, these findings are a result of number of exercises that generate energy and not fixed technical procedures. They will, of course, establish a kind of, let's say, *competence* of the actor to put him/

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herself into the right way to express artistic abilities on stage. This competence is acquired through intensive trainings. Barba (BARBA 1986: 56) made explicit that training is not a theatrical know how.

Training does not teach how to act, how to be clever, does not prepare one for creation. Training is a process of self-definition, a process of self-discipline which manifests itself indissolubly through physical reactions. It is not the exercise in itself that counts – for example, bending or somersaults – but the individual's justification for his own work, a justification which although perhaps banal or difficult to explain through words, is physiologically perceptible, evident to the observer.

There's always knowledge of the mind to share but also knowledge of the body to share, in fact to *communicate* to the audience. To make this kind of knowledge common to both actors and audience needs to be the sense of theatrical experience. Barba's theatrical pedagogy has opened the way since early '70s to a non-linear approach to working with the actor: it is not the reality of the exercises but the justification for them that should be the goal of both the work and the reflection of it by the spectators. One way to get to this life of knowledge shared with the spectators is to come up the "knots" during the exercise:

When I composed a scene, I strove for a synthesis of contradictory information in a convincing sensory form. These antithetical elements originated both from the organic/dynamic and the narrative level: physical and vocal actions, ways of using objects, costumes, words, meanings, iconographical motives, sounds, melodies, lights. I stubbornly wanted to unfold and simultaneously structure the innumerable complementary facets of the internal and the material reality. A "knot" was a tangle of conflicting information which, instead of creating confusion, resulted in a paradoxical effectiveness. (BARBA 2010: 99)

The realization of these "knots" led the way to a certain transmission of knowledge: give up the linear narration through words and reach for synchronization of actions taking place in different spaces. While the linear way considers the *time*, the synchronized way relates to the *space*. The latter has the advantage to challenge not only the actors but also the spectators and by doing this the theatre actions become more dynamic and leave the spectators make their own choice among the different possibilities seen on stage. Inspired by Asian ideograms but also by the findings of Vsevolod Meyerhold at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Barba is definitely in favor of a teaching where knowledge is centered around the multiplicity of image-actions superposed in space. In fact, in his theatre, the action is a multi-layered human graphics that asks both actors, director and spectators to come together around the common sense, the shared sense of the physical action.

### *At the Margins?*

As in some of the most interesting new paths in contemporary theatre, Barba's Odin Teatret started from a discontent and a quest. Discontent about the petrified theatre tradition which led to a dead-end. A quest for the *real* actor's experience and *presence* on stage. Barba is well aware by the time when Odin began in 1964 to open the way for a new theatre language that theatre is somehow at the margins of public interest. Nothing new but the same discouraging as always. It's something paradoxical in the theatre activities: the nature of theatre acts on stage are perceived by the spectators as illusion or "not true" and therefore those who perform them are seen not so far from Plato's rejection of the artists. They do not do "real" things but "copies of copies". It is a whole Western tradition in philosophy that makes that theatre be considered at the margins of both everyday life and academic sphere. Jonas Barish detailed the process in his *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (1981).

But being at the margins of social consideration and recognition has at least one positive side if you decide, like Socrates, to follow your "voice" within, your *daimon*: you put something new *at the centre*. What Eugenio Barba did is to make the quest the center of the discontent. His actors and actresses have been selected and stayed with the company after a long period of swimming incessantly into a sea of unknown. Exercises that focused on the actors' unfolding perceptions and views on things, ideas and living through them, a tremendous work with their bodies, with the text, with the body-text to reach a dynamic of *presence* that would carry the promise of sense and shared living knowledge.

What is real in the work of the actors on stage? Barba looks for this "real" as opposed to "realistic" and writes about the art of theatre as one of giving sense to tradition by *communicating it to today* people living in their *present* not in the one of the tradition. It is a work of sending "messages" to apprentices. Apprenticeship is a must and has to be prepared by way of these exercises. The state of apprenticeship is what matters when one decides to learn something about who is who in the world and on stage. An exercise springs out from memory, as Barba defines it very simply (BARBA 2010: 133), a memory of the body: "An exercise becomes memory which activates through the body". We recognize here one of the major principle of acting discovered by the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski almost 50 years ago. Eugenio Barba, apprentice and disciple of Grotowski, do justice to the need for a "totem" each young artist should acknowledge and Grotowski was his "totem". In the same time, he looked forward to place his way of working with actors in the very center of a world to be built. There's no school of actors without

an embodied practice that placed exercises and trainings on a daily basis and the strive for discover the unknown as a dynamic process. When you embody a practice you can create a school. This is how his work and Odin Teatret moved through the decades from a marginal place to a center of excellence in the artistic patrimony of today theatre.

Is teaching an art of deceiving? Illusions often do this. But theater is in Barba's view a "real" thing as his actors and actresses do not pretend to but work in the real dimension of their gestures, moves, physical actions, and way of creating the text on stage. When you pretend you are always at the margins. You are not the real thing to be acknowledged by the viewers. In a world where artifacts and the never ending products of the new technologies of information and communication substitute the "real" with the "virtual reality", the living experience of discoveries about oneself looks like a distant planet. You approximate its characteristics but you can't experience them. As always, what it's impossible now needs more time to make it possible. Eugenio Barba's theatre puts the need to continually exchange our views and experiences of our cultures in the service of redefining who's who in the real world and in the real theatre on stage.

### *A Director's culture of and as transition*

Biography can explain many things. As Barba points out in *The Paper Canoe*<sup>1</sup> he developed through the years a way of being open to other cultures and different experiences. He viewed culture as a transition process. One can but value the *present* of cultural experience not the museum of it. He made of this way the philosophy of action-acting on stage. This culture of transition shapes a continuous change and exchange. If one wants to know this means to share and exchange. It is this way how Barba's work with his company showed how the *energy* can fuel the dynamics of text/context relationship but also that of actor's actions and their perception and understanding by the spectators. Imitation of other cultures is destructive and, thinks Barba, does not make a real actor. In fact, as Jane Turner observes,

Barba wanted to know whether the similarities in behaviour that he had observed between his Odin actors and the Asian performances were common to other performance traditions, and what the principles were that underpinned the performance styles that, as spectators, we see. (TURNER 2005: 47-8)

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<sup>1</sup> Romanian edition *O canoe de hârtie. Tratat de antropologie teatrală*. 2003. București: UNITEXT. As editor of this book I enjoyed the kind support of Eugenio Barba and the friendly competence of his translator, Liliana Alexandrescu. My gratitude to them both.

Sometimes the teacher becomes a pupil during the exchange process. What lies beyond what is seen, the various moods of energy that attract and hold the attention of the spectators, are the first things to "learn" and embody.

*To teach is to Perform? What is there to Teach?*

I have always been interested in how the act of teaching is sustained by physical actions. How does this kind of act could hold the attention of pupils and students? Studies and articles about the *performative* nature of teaching and teaching as *performance* point out to the fact that one should avoid confusions between performing and teaching. Elyse Lamm Pineau in her influential article (PINEAU 2004: 22) displays a wide array of valuable questions and reflections.

The performance paradigm has opened a space to begin thinking and talking constructively about education as a performative experience. The critical question is not whether teaching is or is not a performance. Educational and theatrical stages are not identical, and the aesthetic responsibilities and conventions of the educational performer are not the same as those that govern stage performers. Rather, the inclusionary impulse in performance studies allows us to ask in what ways educational phenomena open themselves up to performance centered research. How might the disciplinary knowledge of performance studies enrich pedagogical uses of performance as both metaphor and methodology? What features of performance can be translated into educational contexts and what kinds of studies are needed to test the applicability and the limitations of the theatrical metaphor?

What Pineau considers as effective performance act in teaching is what Eugenio Barba asks from his actors when being on stage; to reflect on the consequences of their actions that will build the spectators' community (in the sense of Victor Turner) or, in Pineau's words: students were confronted with the performative fact that actors construct audiences, and no performance occurs in a social vacuum. In other words, while performance empowered students to imaginatively construct their teaching personae, it also forced them to reflect critically upon the implications of their enactments.

The golden link between magister and disciple is both kept and surpassed by Barba's work with his followers. You need a living "totem" but also a didactic faraway from it. Barba's way of stimulating the energy of his actors in order to shape the embodied meaning of their actions can be of value for the whole system of education. As Monica Prendergast sees it (PRENDERGAST 2008: 17), teachers must be nurtured and supported to see themselves as interpretive performers of curriculum and as critically interactive spectators in their students' performance of learning. Educational research needs to attend

more closely to root metaphors of cultural performance as templates for curriculum and to encourage the exploration of power, identity and community as vital pedagogical practices.

As we see now, Eugenio Barba's work is always confronted with his sense of making real what's culturally different and then addressing this to spectators' perception. Performance and teaching have in common this energy that shape the common vision teacher-students, director-actors-spectators through which what is *present* is *understandable* and shared. Barba as teacher is student of his own questions; he then share them with his actors to try and confront the unknown. The ethical nature of this long journey into teaching and sharing is obvious and differentiate the actors of the "official theatre" from those of the exploring theatre. In a way, Odin Teatret journey has this pedagogic dimension that theatre and life are both a process and a transitional result: they always will open a way to keep intact a sense of real human in a world of illusionary virtualities.

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## *Odin Teatret Revisited\**

LILIANA ALEXANDRESCU\*\*

**Abstract.** This paper presents three meetings of the author with Eugenio Barba and the actors of the Odin Teatret, in 1976, 1981 and 1985. It is a good opportunity for retracing some very important moments in Barba's theory and practical views on theatre. Great emphasis is put on the significance of the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA), as well as on the techniques of acting developed by Barba and the Odin. Original notes taken by the author at a symposium of theatre anthropology held in Malakoff (France), the 20 and 21th of April 1985, and drawings by Dutch artist, Jasper Stut, who also took part in this international meeting, confer an additional documentary dimension to this paper.

**Keywords:** Odin Teatret, Eugenio Barba, actor, theatre anthropology.

À la fin de son film *Solaris* (1972), Tarkovski ramène son héros sur la terre, après une hallucinante mission interplanétaire. Celui-ci marche de nouveau sur les anciens sentiers, le long des arbres aux branchages familiers, sous les feuillages d'autrefois et se retrouve devant la maison de son enfance. Il revit le passé perdu et franchit le seuil du souvenir, sous le toit paternel. Mais tout à coup la caméra se met à reculer, à s'éloigner de plus en plus de son objectif, et la maison avec le père et le fils, avec les arbres et le jardin environnants, deviennent de plus en plus petits, enfermés dans une île, elle-même de plus en plus minuscule, emportée, préservée au large par l'infatigable océan de la mémoire.

Odin revisité, Odin invoqué possède cette même double qualité de réel et d'imaginaire. Vécu ou rêvé, il se refait incessamment (et pas par hasard) sur quelque île, baignée par les eaux du temps. Je pense aux paroles d'Eugenio :

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\* Cet article, dont une première version a paru en roumain, dans la revue *Teatrul azi*, 10-11/2012, a été revu, modifié, traduit et parfois réécrit en français par l'auteur. (L. A.)

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« J’attends. L’attente est le présent du futur. Dans ce paysage à venir, le théâtre est le chemin qui me rend digne de revenir vers l’enfance et d’avancer dans le temps avec l’illusion de disparaître dans la légende. »<sup>1</sup>

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*Le processus de création, conçu comme un voyage dans son propre microcosme et rencontre avec « l’autre » qui est en soi, était en quelque sorte le voyage de l’émigrant dans une géographie inconnue. (Eugenio Barba, Brûler sa maison, p. 165)*

Ma première rencontre avec l’Odin Teatret, en 1976, au théâtre Mickery, a eu lieu peu de temps après mon arrivée à Amsterdam. J’habitais alors sur la Marnixkade, sur un bateau amarré au quai d’un des innombrables canaux qui découpent la ville dans tous les sens, selon un mystérieux réseau second, liquide, mouvant. Lorsque je m’aventurais parmi les gens, je ne comprenais pas le langage qu’on parlait autour de moi. Les mots et l’attitude des habitants de l’endroit m’intimidaient et me donnaient la sensation d’un monde clos, aux codes inconnus, dont l’accès m’était interdit. Des années plus tard, en 2003, lorsque j’ai traduit en roumain *Le canoë de papier*, j’allais me reconnaître dans la situation décrite par Eugenio Barba, fraîchement débarqué en Norvège : « À l’étranger j’avais perdu ma langue maternelle, je me débattais dans un monde incompréhensible. [...] J’étais attentif à saisir le plus petit geste, froncement de sourcil, sourire (de bienveillance ? de supériorité ? de sympathie ? de tristesse ? de mépris ? de complicité ? d’ironie ? d’affection ? d’hostilité ? de sagesse ? de résignation ? Mais surtout un sourire contre moi ou en ma faveur ?). J’essayais de m’orienter dans ce labyrinthe physique et sonore, reconnaissable et pourtant inconnu, de m’expliquer le comportement des autres à mon égard. »<sup>2</sup> Et pourtant les gens autour de moi avaient une attitude amicale et cherchaient à m’aider, s’efforçant de m’introduire aussi dans des zones plus spécifiques et en même temps plus accessibles, par leur ouverture internationale, à l’étrangère que j’étais. C’est ainsi que je découvris le théâtre Mickery.

Ce théâtre qui, depuis 1965 jusqu’en 1991, a été un véritable foyer de culture d’avant-garde, avait été fondé par Ritsaert ten Cate (1938-2008). En parlant de lui, Ellen Stewart, directrice de la fameuse compagnie LaMaMa de New York, a dit une fois qu’il avait donné une dimension nouvelle à cette

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<sup>1</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Brûler sa maison. Origines d’un metteur en scène*. Traduit de l’italien par Eliane Deschamps-Pria. L’Entretemps, Montpellier, 2011, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Le canoë de papier. Traité d’anthropologie théâtrale*. Traduit par Eliane Deschamps-Pria. Bouffonneries, Lectoure, 1993, pp. 14-15.

culture : « Ritsaert ten Cate taught Holland to walk on the moon ! » Personnalité multiple : metteur en scène, acteur, scénographe, dessinateur, producteur et, en première instance, infatigable animateur du théâtre expérimental, Ten Cate a invité sur la scène de Mickery des noms et des groupes illustres, à une époque d'exceptionnelle floraison du spectacle alternatif, du spectacle de recherche. Je cite au hasard quelques personnalités et quelques groupes qui se sont manifestés dans la modeste enceinte de Mickery : Bred and Puppett, Traverse Theater, LaMaMa, Wooster Group, Robert Wilson, Pip Simmons, Peter Sellars, Shuiji Therayama, Tadeusz Kantor (*Dead class*), Odin Teatret...

En 1965 (l'année où Odin Teatret a quitté Oslo pour la ferme de Holstebro !), le premier espace de Mickery a été une grange à la ferme de Ten Cate, dans la petite localité Loenersloo, située entre Amsterdam et Hilversum. L'élite artistique et intellectuelle de la capitale s'entassait dans des bus de banlieue pour assister, assise dans le foin ou sur des bancs de bois, aux premiers spectacles hollandais d'avant-garde. Cependant, prenant de l'ampleur, en 1972 Mickery a déménagé à Amsterdam, dans l'ancienne salle du cinéma Calypso (Rozengracht 117). Une soirée passée là était toujours une expédition dans un territoire insolite, un plongeon dans l'inconnu. Mickery a duré jusqu'en 1991 lorsque (de façon incroyable) ses portes se sont refermées définitivement, comme si son aliment spirituel s'était épuisé.

Du 25 mai au 6 juin 1976, Odin Teatret a présenté au Mickery deux productions : *Odin in the South&The Book of Dances* et *Come ! and the day will be ours*. Au-dessous des titres, le cahier-programme (digne d'un « théâtre pauvre » : deux feuillets de format A4, tapés à la machine, rattachés par des agrafes) lançait une annonce incendiaire : « Un théâtre physique ayant la force explosive d'une bombe, interprété par le célèbre théâtre-laboratoire danois. » Sur une photo, étalée sur les deux tiers de la page, un mime tout en blanc battait du tambour. À l'intérieur, les notices sur le groupe et sur le spectacle portaient la signature *RtC* (Ritsaert ten Cate). De son voyage sur les lieux et de ses contacts ultérieurs, il nous apporte un premier portrait de l'Odin : « Laboratoire danois de Holstebro, une petite ville plus ou moins isolée. Atmosphère monacale. Deux salles pour le travail et les répétitions, l'une blanche, l'autre noire. Barba est celui qui dirige, et en même temps celui qui nous a révélé la manière de travailler de Grotowski. Évidemment ses propres recherches sont liées aux préoccupations de celui-ci. La longue et méticuleuse recherche avec un groupe resté presque inchangé, véritable travail de moines, a abouti à quatre productions ayant un style spécifique, soigneusement élaboré, dans le but d'exploiter au maximum toutes les possibilités du corps humain. »



Cependant, tout au début, Ten Cate avait eu une objection : la trop grande réclusion, la trop grande protection du groupe, tenu à l'écart « dans une éprouvette ». Deux ans auparavant, en 1974, Odin avait pourtant changé de stratégie, se proposant de nouer le plus de contacts possibles, non seulement avec le public qui assistait aux spectacles, mais aussi en général, avec le monde du dehors. Tout le groupe, composé presque uniquement d'acteurs provenant de la zone scandinave, s'est déplacé du nord vers le sud, parcourant en Italie des villages perdus, où il n'existait pas de théâtre et où tout étranger était un suspect. « Il est fascinant d'apprendre comment on peut construire une relation active, féconde, dans de telles conditions », remarque Ten Cate. Et pourtant cette relation s'est produite, en tant qu'échange de choses vécues et d'expériences collectives spontanées, sans contrainte : en communiquant entre eux, les membres du groupe et les villageois sont restés eux-mêmes, mais ils ont reconnu l'existence de *l'autre*. Les spectacles de l'Odin au Mickery « nous aident à mieux comprendre le travail du laboratoire en action. » Et Ten Cate conclut : « Un théâtre dans une éprouvette, éclaté au dehors et ouvert à la vie tout entière, avec la violence physique d'une bombe et des voix qui peuvent couper le verre. »

Dans un de ses livres récents : *Brûler sa maison. Origines d'un metteur en scène* (auquel il a travaillé pendant 14 ans), Eugenio Barba évoque la manière dont il a abordé, plus de trente ans auparavant, *Come ! and the day will be ours*. Dans le spectacle précédent : *La Maison du père* (1972) d'après Dostoïevski, il s'était laissé guider en premier lieu par le *bios* scénique des acteurs. « ...Je savais désormais que le thème du spectacle suivant devait être une porte ouverte sur un monde de questions. En effet, *Viens ! Et le jour sera à nous* (1976) ne partait pas d'un texte d'auteur. La source originelle fut la soif d'or des *conquistadores* espagnols du Nouveau Monde. J'étais attiré par l'énergie sauvage qui les avait poussés à affronter l'océan... »<sup>3</sup> Au cours des répétitions, qui ont duré plus de deux ans, un autre thème s'y est ajouté : celui des émigrants européens fuyant la misère et les persécutions, passant l'océan à la recherche de nouvelles chances. Ce thème impliquait le plus souvent le choc de destinées opposées dans des collisions plus ou moins violentes, grâce en même temps à la séduction et à l'impulsion de s'exterminer réciproquement, qui se produisent à la rencontre des civilisations. Comme lorsque les pionniers se sont trouvés face à face avec les Indiens d'Amérique, en repoussant la frontière vers l'Ouest. Le titre du spectacle : *Come ! and the day will be ours* reprenait d'ailleurs littéralement l'appel adressé par le général américain George Armstrong Custer

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 164.

à ses soldats, au début de la bataille de Little Big Horn (1876) contre les Peaux Rouges, qui allaient les massacrer jusqu'au dernier. Le cri promettant la victoire devenu échec et mort.

Ainsi, sur le parcours de cette dilatation thématique, est née une densité d'événements et d'émotions de plus en plus complexes, exprimée par les acteurs avec une extrême véhémence gestuelle et vocale, aboutissant à « cette intense libération de signes » dont parlait Artaud (*Le théâtre et son double : Sur le théâtre balinais*). Cette croissance apparemment arbitraire, réalisée par la superposition et l'interpénétration de plusieurs couches de significations, ainsi que par l'exploration insatiable de toutes les possibilités expressives des interprètes, est restée jusqu' à ce jour une constante des créations de Barba. Il nous parle dans un langage scénique hallucinant, souvent énigmatique, d'une grande efficacité performante. Existe-t-il une méthode Barba ? Non, réplique résolument Eugenio. « Ceci est un livre incontestablement subjectif. [...] Chaque cerveau est une jungle particulière. [...] C'est pour cette raison que je ne peux ni ne veux transmettre un style, élaborer ce qui serait mon "école" ou ma méthode, et encore moins définir – pour utiliser un mot que je n'aime pas – une esthétique qui m'appartiendrait et que d'autres pourraient partager. »<sup>4</sup> Plus tard, en reprenant ce sujet, il dira : « Je ne souhaite pas des gens qui pratiquent une soi-disant méthode Barba. Je veux donner vie à un théâtre inimitable, à un lieu où puissent se réaliser certaines de mes aspirations et nostalgies en même temps que celles de quelques autres personnes », à travers une activité commune, « une incrédule prière collective et une pacifique rébellion solitaire »<sup>5</sup>. Se rendant compte, cependant, que son théâtre et celui de ses compagnons (fondé en 1964) a été un « théâtre hors normes » (fonctionnant avec les mêmes personnes, avec le même metteur en scène, sur la durée d'une vie), Barba, 45 ans après, tire une conclusion positive : ce n'est pas normal, mais ce n'est pas non plus un handicap. « Nous avons lutté et nous continuons à lutter pour ne pas devenir notre propre prison. »

Je regarde sur la liste des interprètes qui ont joué, en 1976, au Mickery, au cours de ces inoubliables soirées de printemps. Trois d'entre eux : Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Tage Larsen et Roberta Carreri, figurent aussi, en 2012, dans la distribution de la plus récente production de l'Odin Teatret – *La vie chronique* ! D'autre part, toujours en 2012, en mai, j'ai assisté à Bucarest, dans la salle ArCuB, à une démonstration de travail : *Texte, action, relations* (sur des fragments d'*Othello* et de *Roméo et Juliette* de Shakespeare) présentée par les

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 218.

acteurs Tage Larsen et Julia Varley, que j'avais vus en 1981 à Holstebro dans *Cendres de Brecht*. La spirale du groupe Odin, par ces récurrences, donne une réconfortante sensation de pérennité de ce phénomène par excellence éphémère : le spectacle. Nous pouvons dire avec Horace : « Non omnis moriar... », je ne mourrai pas tout entier. Cette concentration obstinée sur un territoire circonscrit, à partir de certains principes de travail en commun, Eugenio Barba l'explique ainsi : « Nous étions une île, mais jamais nous n'avons été vraiment isolés. Même dans l'apparente solitude des premiers mois, en 1964. Ce qui sépare une île de l'autre : [la mer] est le meilleur moyen de communication. [...] Il faut, par conséquent, tracer un cercle et s'y enfermer avec constance et intransigeance, pour pouvoir dignement entrer en contact avec un monde vaste et terrible... »<sup>6</sup> En abandonnant le soir, sur son bureau, les pages qu'il vient d'achever, Eugenio va se diriger le jour suivant vers la salle de répétitions : « Ainsi, après avoir écrit qu'à l'Odin nous commençons autrefois à travailler à sept heures du matin précises, demain à sept heures j'irai vers la salle bleue de notre théâtre à la rencontre du présent. C'est là que mes camarades et moi-même préparons notre nouveau spectacle qui s'intitule : *La vie chronique*. »<sup>7</sup>

## 2.

*Les expériences théâtrales n'ont pas la même qualité que les expériences religieuses, mais elles sont de la même nature...* (Eugenio Barba, *Brûler sa maison*, p. 159)

Les 23 et 24 avril 1981, l'Association Internationale pour la Sémiologie du Spectacle (AISS) a organisé un colloque sur le thème : *Sens et culture* à Bruxelles. Parmi les organisateurs figurait aussi Eugenio Barba qui, dans le cadre de l'atelier *Société et spectacle/productions spectaculaires*, a projeté son film *On the banks of the river* et a participé à la table ronde finale sur l'acteur. Au même atelier, j'ai présenté moi aussi une communication sur les techniques de jeu du théâtre paysan comme théâtre de rue, rapporté au concept de « Tiers Théâtre ». Le terme avait été lancé et développé (à partir de 1976) par Barba, à la recherche d'une identité pour toutes sortes de manifestations théâtrales existant en dehors des deux grandes catégories professionnelles : le théâtre institutionnalisé et le théâtre d'avant-garde. Les groupes désignés par Barba comme appartenant au Tiers Théâtre ne suivent pas une ligne, une direction ou une tendance théâtrale unique, mais agissent tous dans une situation de

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17.

discrimination personnelle ou culturelle, professionnelle, économique ou politique. Le statut de Tiers Théâtre me paraissait donc (et me paraît aujourd'hui encore) approprié au spectaculaire paysan, non seulement parce qu'il définit correctement sa condition existentielle, mais aussi parce qu'il le fait sortir de son atemporalité folklorique et le réintroduit dans notre histoire commune<sup>8</sup>.

Après la communication, j'ai discuté avec Eugenio Barba, qui m'a invité à visiter Holstebro. Une semaine plus tard, je lui ai écrit d'Amsterdam, lui disant que je pourrais venir pour deux jours, mardi 26 et mercredi 27 mai (1981). Je désirais voir les salles de travail, la bibliothèque, la vidéothèque, et surtout assister à une journée du théâtre-laboratoire Odin : activités communes et individuelles, entraînement, etc., bref, participer à la vie quotidienne du groupe. J'ai encore sous les yeux le télégramme de Barba : « Bienvenue 26 et 27 Stop tu peux habiter théâtre Cordialité E.B. » Ainsi, après avoir atterri à Copenhague, je me suis transférée sur le vol qui allait à l'aéroport de Karup. L'avion qui se dirigeait maintenant vers l'intérieur du pays était plus petit, volait plus bas. Je pouvais distinguer les champs, les labours, les pâturages, les agglomérations urbaines ou rurales autour de leurs clochers : en passant par-dessus un bras de mer, j'avais pénétré dans un autre univers, frais, végétal, dominé par le vert cru du printemps nordique.

Holstebro était à cette époque une petite ville de 18.000 habitants, située au nord-ouest de la Jutlande. La municipalité avait offert au groupe de l'Odin une ferme abandonnée au bout de la ville. Devant l'entrée du grand bâtiment bas, je suis descendue de la voiture avec des sentiments mélangés : ravissement, timidité, une sensation d'irréalité, d'irruption dans un domaine réservé. (L'impression de détachement du monde était accentuée aussi par un autre détail de mon voyage : par une erreur des transports aériens hollandais, ma valise était restée à Amsterdam. Je n'avais donc que les vêtements que je portais sur moi et mon sac sur l'épaule : la besace du pèlerin.) À la porte, j'ai été accueillie par l'une des actrices que j'avais vues quelques années auparavant au Mickery : Else Marie Lautkvik, avec un parfait naturel et une grande chaleur humaine. L'impression de simplicité, de concentration monacale a persisté aussi quand je suis entrée dans la première pièce de la ferme, un réfectoire rustique, avec quelque chose d'amical et de légèrement sévère, de détente mais aussi de dialogues autour de la grande table à manger ou près de la bibliothèque.

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<sup>8</sup> Liliana Alexandrescu, « Techniques de jeu du théâtre paysan », in *Degrés*. Revue de synthèse à orientation sémiologique, Bruxelles, No. 32, automne 1982, pp. h1-h11.

Else Marie (Norvégienne, membre fondateur du théâtre Odin, en 1964, à Oslo) m'a conduite ultérieurement à travers plusieurs corridors (dans mes souvenirs, un parcours labyrinthique...). Elle a ouvert plusieurs portes vers la salle blanche, la salle noire, la salle bleue, ensuite vers d'autres chambres, les unes pleines de costumes, de masques ou d'accessoires, confectionnés ou collectionnés par les acteurs au fil des années (j'ai revu aussi le costume qu'elle portait dans *Come ! and the day will be ours*). Dans le prolongement du bâtiment principal, une annexe récemment terminée, fraîchement peinte, se trouvaient les chambres à coucher pour les hôtes ou pour les « novices », meublées d'un lit, d'une table et d'une chaise, blanches, claires, avec des fenêtres donnant sur le jardin. Ensuite Else Marie a préparé le dîner, m'a fait manger et je suis allée me coucher. Je me suis réveillée le lendemain à l'aube, à 5 heures du matin, dans le gazouillement des oiseaux du jardin. Je me suis mise à explorer sur la pointe des pieds la maison (pensais-je) endormie. Mais dans la salle noire, un des acteurs faisait déjà ses vocalises quotidiennes. Dans une autre salle, par la porte entrouverte, j'ai aperçu plusieurs silhouettes en pleine gymnastique matinale. Vers 6 heures, je suis arrivée dans la cuisine, où régnait une grande animation : les membres de l'Odin étaient en train de préparer leur petit-déjeuner. Tous m'ont invitée immédiatement à prendre ce dont j'avais envie dans le réfrigérateur commun (plein de boîtes, de petits pots et de paquets avec, sur des étiquettes, le nom de chacun, selon leurs préférences alimentaires) et m'ont offert, bien entendu, du café ou du thé bien chaud. À 7 heures précises, est arrivé Eugenio qui, après une poignée de main, m'a emmenée dans la salle blanche. On y répétait *Cendres de Brecht*.

« Probablement le spectacle auquel j'ai été le plus attaché », allait dire Barba des années plus tard<sup>9</sup>. La figure de Brecht, « hérétique, rebelle, réformateur du théâtre », l'a fasciné toute sa vie. Si en 1961, malgré le fameux « effet de distanciation », Eugenio ne peut s'empêcher de pleurer en assistant à la représentation de *Mutter Courage* au Berliner Ensemble, en 1976, au même théâtre, la scène finale, « glaciale et terrible », de la *Vie de Galilée* le bouleverse : surveillé par sa fille, « Galilée aveugle, d'un geste de conspirateur et presque de voleur, tire de sous sa chaise des feuillets et subrepticement se met à écrire, vite, vite, pour aussitôt cacher ce qu'il a écrit. »<sup>10</sup> Ce Galileo touchant à sa fin, tentant désespérément de tromper la censure, veut transmettre un message à la postérité. Un message de la part de l'auteur. Mais « comment

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<sup>9</sup> *Brûler sa maison...*, p. 202.

<sup>10</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Théâtre. Solitude, métier, révolte*. Présenté par Lluís Masgrau. Traduit de l'italien par Éliane Deschamps-Pria. L'Entretiens éditions, Montpellier, 1990, p. 150.

dialoguer avec les morts » ? C'est par cette question que débute *Cendres de Brecht*. « Notre spectacle exprime la nostalgie d'un dialogue impossible. C'est la vie de Brecht qui nous a stimulés. Nous lisions les écrits prévus pour le lecteur, mais nos yeux suivaient les ombres, ce qu'il écrivait pour lui-même. »<sup>11</sup>

Il y a eu deux versions de ce Brecht de l'Odin, l'une présentée en 1980, l'autre en 1982. La répétition à laquelle j'ai assisté à Holstebro a eu lieu pendant un intervalle où le groupe et Barba étaient en train de reconsidérer la structure dramatique. Je retrouve un écho de cette étape dans le récent volume *Brûler sa maison*, dans le chapitre *Ce que disent les acteurs et les réflexions du metteur en scène*, un dialogue de textes alternés, comme une soupe à la réflexion.

ROBERTA CARRERI : Répétitions de *Cendres de Brecht* (mai 1981). Le travail, même avec les acteurs les plus expérimentés, exige du temps. Eugenio soigne attentivement la plus petite intonation de Torgeir.

LE METTEUR EN SCÈNE : *Torgeir avait fondé avec moi l'Odin Teatret. [...] Il était important pour nous tous, vétérans ou débutants, de souligner obstinément, comme dans une cérémonie initiatique, que le moindre détail est essentiel.*<sup>12</sup>

Au cours de la répétition, d'une grande intensité du travail corporel et scénique, je remarque la parfaite concentration et discipline mentale et physique. « Dès le premier jour à Oslo, – note Else Marie Lauvkvik – en entrant dans la salle de travail, nous devons laisser à la porte notre vie privée. Pour protéger notre travail et celui de nos collègues. »<sup>13</sup> Cependant parfois, spontanément, l'humain rentre (presque) sur scène. Pendant la pause, l'une des actrices, qui quelques semaines auparavant avait accouché d'un bébé, le prend contre son sein et l'allait, tout en écoutant sagement les commentaires sur la répétition. J'admire le naturel et la pureté du geste.

Le soir, au dîner, je fais la connaissance de deux autres invités : le mime suédois Ingemar Lindh (élève d'Etienne Decroux) et le Français Patrick Pezin, acteur et metteur en scène, éditeur, auteur, fidèle collaborateur de Barba. Il me fait cadeau du numéro 2 (octobre 1980) de la revue qu'il dirige : *Bouffonneries*.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 144. Le texte intégral (y compris la liste des personnages et des interprètes) : *Ceneri di Brecht*, avec le sous-titre brechtien : *Lehrstück. Dialogo con poesie di Bertolt Brecht, composto da Eugenio Barba*, a paru dans la revue *Biblioteca teatrale*, Nr. 26, 1980, 24 pp., Bulzoni Editore. Le texte *Dialogue avec Brecht* a été publié pour la première dans l'ouvrage de Barba *Il Brecht dell'Odin*. Ubulibri, Milan, 1981, qui a suscité des réactions contrastées à cause de l'interprétation personnelle de la figure et de l'œuvre de Brecht qu'il proposait.

<sup>12</sup> *Brûler sa maison...*, p. 107.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 98.

Après le repas, causerie avec Eugenio. Juste avant minuit, Lindh nous fait tout à coup une superbe démonstration de la marche du mime (je l'ai retrouvée, fixée dans toute sa perfection, dans la série de photos reproduites dans *Anatomia del teatro*, en 1983, reprises plus tard dans d'autres volumes<sup>14</sup>). Après une impressionnante trajectoire professionnelle et didactique, commencée à Stockholm, continuée à Paris, Volterra et Pontremoli, Ingemar Lindh meurt prématurément à Malte en 1997. Mais tout cela, inscrit quelque part dans les étoiles, personne ne le savait, ce soir de printemps à Holstebro.

Pour le lendemain, j'avais marqué dans mon agenda : « Une journée de travail de Iben Nagel Rasmussen » (Danoise, venue à l'Odin en 1966). Je l'avais déjà vue à Amsterdam (c'était elle le clown blanc, battant du tambour, sur l'affiche de Mickery). Dans *Cendres de Brecht* elle jouait admirablement Katrin, la fille muette de la Mère Courage. Avant 7 heures, je la rejoins à la cuisine, où elle m'offre une tasse de son thé spécial. À 9.30 elle est prête, maquillée et habillée pour la répétition, qui dure de 10 à 14 heures. Ensuite, de 15 à 19, elle fait de l'entraînement avec un groupe de mimes de Milan. De 20 à 21 heures du soir, toujours avec eux, elle a une « répétition avec public » : avec moi ! Ensuite, discussions, corrections, demandes. Une journée épuisante, au bout de laquelle Iben, avec la conscience du devoir accompli, tourne vers moi un visage illuminé par un sourire heureux et décontracté.

Entre temps, j'avais réussi à m'asseoir pour deux heures devant un écran, passant en revue certains films documentaires des archives de l'Odin : cours, exercices, voyages de documentation, anciens spectacles du groupe. Après, avec Patrick, nous avons fait des courses et préparé ensemble (sous sa direction culinaire, il va de soi !) un dîner pour nos hôtes.

Enfin, avec des embrassades, des échanges d'adresses et des promesses de se revoir, j'ai quitté Holstebro, à la fois heureuse et triste. À l'aéroport de Copenhague m'attendait mon bagage, récupéré d'Amsterdam.

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<sup>14</sup> *Anatomia del teatro. Un dizionario di antropologia teatrale a cura di Nicola Savarese*, Dall'International School of Theatre Anthropology diretta da Eugenio Barba, La Casa Usher, Firenze, 1983, pp. 58-59.

Eugenio Barba, Nicola Savarese, *Anatomie de l'acteur. Bouffonneries-Contrastes*, Zeami libri, International School of Theatre Anthropology, 1985, pp. 54-55.

Eugenio Barba, Nicola Savarese, *L'Énergie qui danse. Un dictionnaire d'anthropologie théâtrale*, IIe édition revue et augmentée, L'Entretemps éditions, Les voies de l'acteur – collection dirigée par Patrick Pezin, Domaine de la Feuillade, 2008, pp. 174-175.

## 3.

*Seules les relations comptent. Ce sont des fils ténus, illusoire, consolidés par les années ou l'intensité d'une rencontre. Elles finissent par construire un pays qu'aucune carte de géographie ne peut représenter et décrire. Solitaires, nous habitons une géographie faite de liens et de nœuds : affections, livres, souvenirs, passions, collaborations qui durent une vie entière.* (Eugenio Barba, *Brûler sa maison*, p. 170)

En partant de Holstebro, j'avais le sentiment d'avoir découvert un modèle de travail idéal, un centre d'énergie fonctionnant comme un tout. Pourtant, après l'extraordinaire spectacle qu'avait été *Cendres de Brecht*, certains changements étaient survenus dans le groupe : de nouvelles aspirations, de nouveaux besoins personnels, de nouvelles circonstances de vie. Aussi était-il nécessaire de réorganiser les rapports de forces à l'intérieur et d'élargir le champ d'activité au dehors : « Non plus Odin Teatret avec en sous-titre Théâtre Laboratoire Scandinave, mais Théâtre Laboratoire Scandinave qui regroupait nombre d'activités autonomes parmi lesquelles l'Odin Teatret, Farfa de Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Basho de Toni Cots, l'Odin Teatret Film de Torgeir Wethal et la Canada Project de Richard Fowler. »<sup>15</sup> *Odin* devenait ainsi plutôt un cri de ralliement, et Holstebro, ancien lieu de réclusion, un centre d'expansion créatrice.

Eugenio Barba lui-même se lance « dans une aventure solitaire » accompagné par Toni Cots. Ils s'engagent, à partir de 1980, dans un projet de grande ampleur : « Je l'appelai ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology). "École" parce qu'en ce temps-là tout le monde voulait être un "laboratoire", alors que moi je voulais indiquer un lieu où l'on apprenait des connaissances de base ; "internationale" pour souligner une patrie professionnelle sans frontières ; "anthropologie" parce que c'était un terme qui suggérait des notions de recherche et de sérieux universitaire... »<sup>16</sup>

ISTA est donc un organisme de recherche et de pratique de l'art de l'acteur, un lieu de rencontre pour les artistes occidentaux et orientaux. Dans le cadre de sessions qui combinent les cours pratiques avec les conférences et les discussions théoriques, sont présentés des spectacles des maîtres du théâtre asiatique ou de certains ensembles venus d'Amérique latine ou d'Europe. On y attire de nouveau l'attention sur le concept de « Tiers Théâtre » avec ses valeurs spécifiques. Nous retrouvons ici l'immense ouverture de Barba envers toute manifestation spectaculaire, de n'importe où, ainsi que sa nostalgie récurrente d'une sorte de village primordial (de nouveau, en transparence,

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<sup>15</sup> *Brûler sa maison...*, p. 203.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.



le modèle originaire Holstebro !), un village commun, « un babel de langues ... où il n'est pas toujours facile de distinguer les artistes, les techniciens ou les "intellectuels" et où on ne peut plus séparer Orient et Occident. »<sup>17</sup> La nostalgie d'un espace géographique sans limites, de transition, de circulation, périodiquement réduit à un lieu de rassemblement et d'interférences, se manifeste fréquemment dans les métaphores aquatiques du discours de Barba : l'île, l'archipel, les îles flottantes, les rivages, l'eau qui les relie et les sépare, les navires (Odin est le « vaisseau amiral du Tiers théâtre »), et surtout le fragile, l'indestructible canoë qui vient de ce village imaginaire, « pour ceux qui, même sans le connaître, même quand il n'existera plus, en sentent la nostalgie »<sup>18</sup>.

J'ai de nouveau rencontré Eugenio et les gens de l'Odin en France, quelques années plus tard, à Malakoff (près de Paris), au symposium d'anthropologie théâtrale, tenu le 20 et 21 avril 1985, au « Théâtre 71 », dans le cadre des troisièmes rencontres publiques de l'ISTA. Ce symposium était organisé par Barba et par Patrick Pezin, ce dernier en qualité de fondateur (en 1980) et de directeur du Centre d'action théâtrale « Bouffonneries-Contrastes ». Le titre du symposium était : *Le Maître du Regard*. Je cite du cahier-programme : « Le maître du regard est l'acteur. Le symposium développera plus particulièrement le thème de la pré-expressivité de l'acteur. Ce sera aussi une démonstration des principes qui dirigent la recherche de l'ISTA dans le champ anthropologique aussi bien que la pédagogie pour acteurs et metteurs en scène dans un contexte transculturel. »<sup>19</sup> Une telle confrontation interculturelle directe des formes théâtrales permettait de rechercher et de mettre en évidence certaines règles biologiques qui déterminent le comportement de l'acteur, l'équilibre, le déplacement, l'utilisation de l'espace, les modifications de posture en fonction des actions physiques, la relation avec le partenaire de jeu.

Le programme du symposium se déroulait chaque jour de 10 à 13 heures et de 15 à 17 heures, et comprenait le soir un spectacle, couronnement sublime des exercices et des discussions qui avaient eu lieu dans la journée : le 20 avril, *Buyo-Kabuki* et *Kyogen* (Japon) interprétés par deux équipes d'acteurs japonais spécialisés dans les genres respectifs ; le 21 avril, une *Danse Orissi* (Inde) interprétée par la grande Sanjukta Panigrahi, accompagnée par ses musiciens. Les démonstrations pratiques se déroulaient sur la scène du théâtre, c'est là que se montraient les protagonistes : les maîtres de l'Inde, du Japon ou de l'Odin, jouant un fragment ou une scène ou bien expliquant leur démarches. Leurs actions étaient constamment accompagnées par les interventions et les commentaires « sur le vif » d'Eugenio Barba.

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<sup>17</sup> *Le canoë de papier*, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Le Maître du regard*, Théâtre 71 Malakoff, cahier-programme, 1985, p. 2.

Nous, le public, assis dans la salle, avons assez de lumière pour pouvoir noter à la hâte quelques moments des démonstrations, des exercices, des discussions et des interventions de Barba. J'ai retrouvé dans un vieux dossier, parmi les papiers et les dépliants du symposium, mes griffonnages de 1985. (Je pense à un petit chapitre du livre *Brûler sa maison*, qui occupe à lui seul le « Quatrième intermezzo » : *Ce que dit un carnet de travail*. Ces fragiles feuillets, témoins de l'instant, perdus, retrouvés, gardés depuis des années dans un tiroir, Barba ne les a pas brûlés.) Je transcris ici, pêle-mêle, quelques-unes de mes notices, fragmentaires, syncopées, dont la cohérence (textuelle) se situe au-delà du vécu immédiat. J'espère qu'elles pourront suggérer tant bien que mal l'effervescence, la richesse d'impressions, les échanges d'idées et d'expériences, de ces deux jours, ainsi que la subtilité et le raffinement de certaines prestations des « maîtres du regard ». Et j'espère aussi que, dans leur précipitation, elles gardent quelque chose de la qualité de ce désordre positif évoqué par Eugenio Barba comme « l'irruption d'une réalité étrangère et intensifiée », qui bouleverse par moments les points de repère de l'existence quotidienne<sup>20</sup>.

**P.S.** Dans le dossier des documents de la Session ISTA à Malakoff, de 1985, j'ai retrouvé aussi une grande enveloppe remplie de croquis pris au cours des démonstrations pratiques, appartenant au dessinateur et graphiste hollandais Jasper Stut d'Amsterdam. En participant au symposium, comme spectateur, il a tracé ses impressions sur un bloc à dessin, venant ainsi avec ses propres suggestions visuelles, d'artiste peintre.

Voici donc les notes et les images.

20 avril

BARBA

Architecture des tensions.

Dynamo-rythme : changement du rythme et du tonus musculaire. On brise le dynamisme du comportement quotidien et on commence à en rebâtir un autre.

(Manipulation du maître : une pédagogie de la « manipulation physique » et non du « dire comment ».)

Travail d'opposition : une partie du corps est retenue, introvertie, une autre extravertie.

Grande vague déclenchée par le « maître du regard ». Engagement somatique du spectateur.

On apprend à bouger, à danser, à partir de la position « assise ».

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<sup>20</sup> *Brûler sa maison...*, p. 277.

IBEN NAGEL RASMUNSEN (actrice de l'OdinTeatret)

Discipline. Apprendre *comment* apprendre.

L'acteur ne doit pas conduire l'exercice, mais bien l'exercice doit conduire l'acteur (frapper, réagir).

Tension, refus (Grotowski – *The cat*).

À l'Odin on ne travaille pas sur le mouvement, mais sur l'arrêt.

BARBA

Moment pré-expressif : l'acteur se *concentre*, il ne veut pas encore *exprimer*.

KATSUKO AZUMA (actrice japonaise de Kabuki)

(Démonstration :)

La mer, les vagues – avec deux éventails blancs ! À un certain moment elle frappe le sol du pied, elle dit : « je ne sais pas pourquoi je fais cela ».

Deux éventails : la lune, la lumière de la lune reflétée sur le sable, une épée, un casque (tuer, transpercer).

BARBA

L'acteur a une présence très forte, tout en ne sachant pas, à certains moments, pourquoi il fait un geste. Katsuko jette l'éventail. Elle ne doit *pas* tout justifier ! Pour le public, ce geste acquiert une signification énorme, c'est un choc, une brisure.

KATSUKO

(Démonstration :)

L'aube qui se lève d'une nuit de printemps, une mouette, le vent, la vague.

BARBA

Histoire de l'acteur qui décrit et imite : plat ! Chez Katsuko, ces gestes très simples ont une *présence* (suggestion ?). « *Température* » unique de cette actrice.

IBEN (porte le costume qu'elle a eu dans *Cendres de Brecht*)

Les matériaux, les costumes employés pendant le travail d'entraînement, aux répétitions, étaient utilisés aussi dans le spectacle. Elle a commencé son rôle de *Katrin*, la fille muette de la Mère Courage, par des façons de *marcher*, ensuite de *bouger les bras*, ensuite par des manières de *s'asseoir*. Ces choses elle les a découvertes au cours des exercices, des répétitions. Elle a bâti le costume à partir du pantalon du training. En étudiant le rôle, elle s'est rendu compte que *Katrin* est muette mais non pas sourde. Elle *comprend*. Elle peut émettre des *sons*. Donc elle a commencé à *inventer des sons*. Elle est allée aux cours du soir des sourds-muets. Elle a commencé à *parler avec les mains*.

[Démonstration :]

À la fin on la met contre un mur, elle récite avec les mains un poème de Brecht.

21 avril

BARBA

Dynamo-rythme : changement de vitesse.

*Dilatation* : du corps ; de l'être ; des forces d'un individu. L'acteur *fait voir* qu'il est là.

[Démonstration :]

IBEN et SANJUKTA marchent sur la scène (action très simple).

Essayer de relier deux paquets d'énergie, deux phases dynamiques.

SANJUKTA PANIGRAHI (danseuse indienne d'Orissi)

[Démonstration :]

Sur la chaise, elle doit donner l'équivalent de sa danse, en se concentrant sur la « cellule de formation » de la danse, sur l'image mentale et la suite précise des actions.

BARBA

Elle a la mémoire vibrante de sa dynamique.

Comment transmettre l'information au spectateur ?

a) directement : plate, ennuyeuse ;

b) indirectement, d'une manière détournée : le spectateur est surpris, il devient actif. Il se produit donc une *élaboration*, où l'acteur dirige le regard par sa suite d'actions, par ses sauts d'énergie. Le somatique et le *mental* sont engagés tous les deux.

L'acteur doit trouver l'*axe*, le *centre*, et puis s'ouvrir à l'espace.

L'improvisation n'est qu'un point de départ, à la recherche de l'intention *profonde*, qu'il ne doit jamais oublier.

TONI COTS (acteur de l'Odin) et SANJUKTA

[Exercice :]

Une table, deux chaises, un couteau dans le vase de fleurs.

Toni : *Hamlet* (scène du couteau).

Sanjukta : *Ramayana* (message au Roi des Singes)

Les acteurs travaillent librement, mais s'adaptent l'un à l'autre. Cela change tout le temps, on passe de surprise en surprise : sauts d'énergie, détours vers un but précis.

BARBA

Comportement somatique et mental, unité du corporel et du psychique.

C'est le grand organisme du théâtre lui-même qui respire.

SANJUKTA

[Démonstration :]

Elle danse un épisode de l'épopée sanskrite Mahabharata.

Pantomime, chant. Enchaînement et simultanéité : la danseuse joue tous les personnages et toute l'action, elle est crocodile, roi, dieu, danseur pur, conteur, etc. Le chanteur ne raconte rien, il chante la même phrase. L'acteur improvise et construit. Il n'a donc pas besoin de metteur en scène !

BARBA

Thème : *l'intention* de l'acteur.

Au niveau somatique et *moral*.

Dans le théâtre japonais, rite de passage : lorsque le fils joue pour la première fois un rôle joué par le père.

KOSUKE NOMURA (acteur japonais de *Kyogen*)

[Démonstration :]

Joue *Le vieux Renard*. On commence à s'entraîner pour cette pièce un an à l'avance. Au moment où on interprète ce rôle, on est considéré un *maître*.

Pour ce *kyogen*, il faut maîtriser quatre choses importantes : parler, bouger, raconter, observer (le comportement des hommes et des animaux).

Pouvoir bouger / Ne pas bouger / Ne pas devoir bouger.

Délivrer l'énergie et la faire rentrer à l'intérieur.

Dans un répertoire de 300 pièces *kyogen*, *Le Vieux Renard* est le plus grand événement dans la vie de l'acteur. La pièce exige une technique de jeu très avancée, elle est épuisante, psychiquement et physiquement. Un vrai défi pour l'acteur est la scène du renard chez le chasseur : jouer un animal qui se lève de sa position de quadrupède sur deux pattes, terrifié (« plein d'angoisse »). Posture très difficile.

Concentration : une heure avant de jouer, l'acteur, le masque sur sa figure, s'assied dans une loge et regarde la salle.

BARBA

Au théâtre, je voudrais être Caliban et Ariel, épais et transparent.

BARBA (2011)

[En guise de commentaire final : *Ce que dit un carnet de travail*]

Le théâtre permet à l'acteur de devenir un individu « deux fois créé »<sup>21</sup>.

(Amsterdam, août 2013)

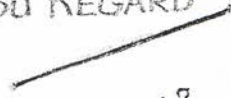
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<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 254.



EUGENIO BARBA

# LES MAÎTRES DU REGARD



Marie  
Antoinette

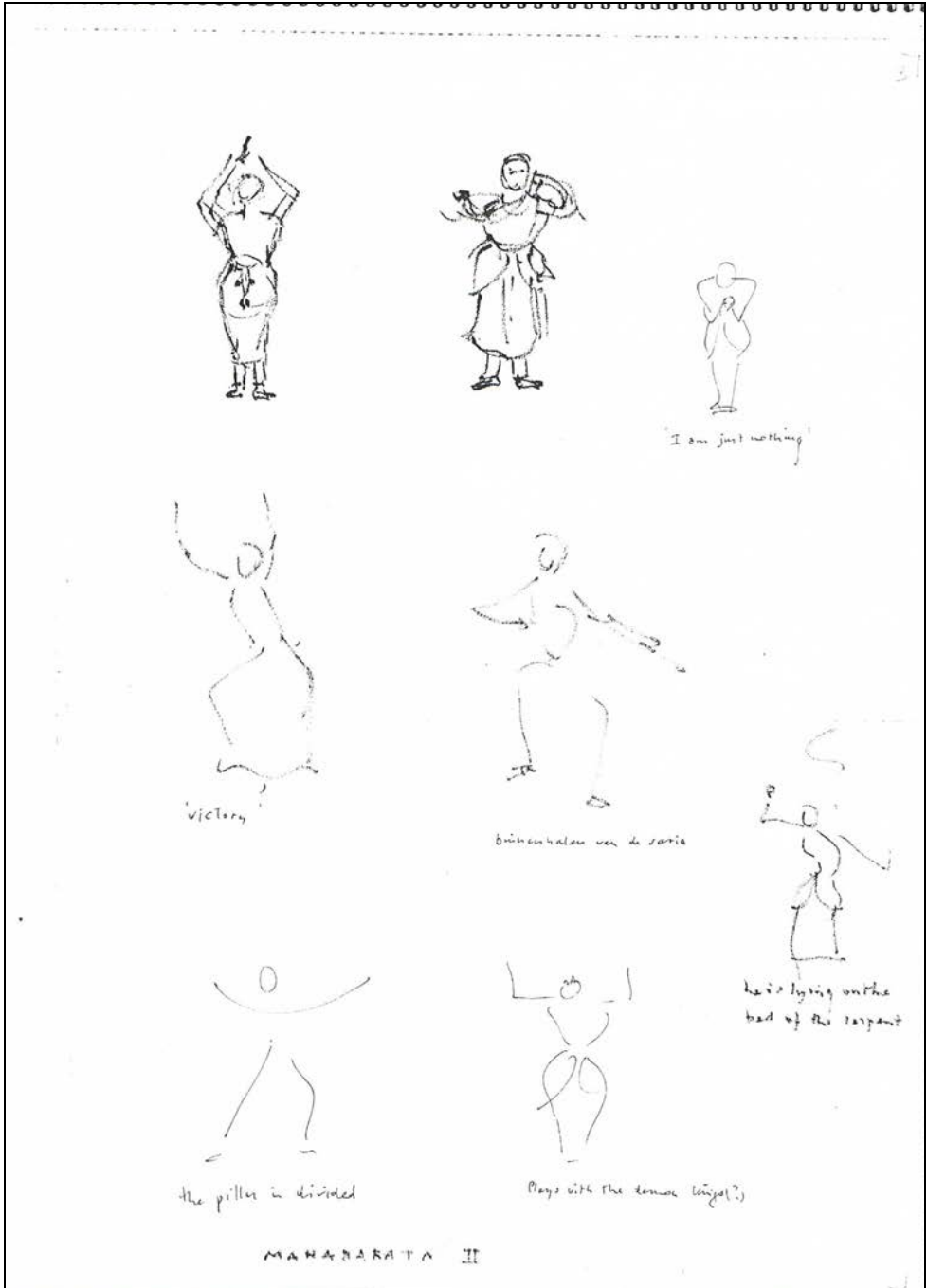


Marie

Antoinette







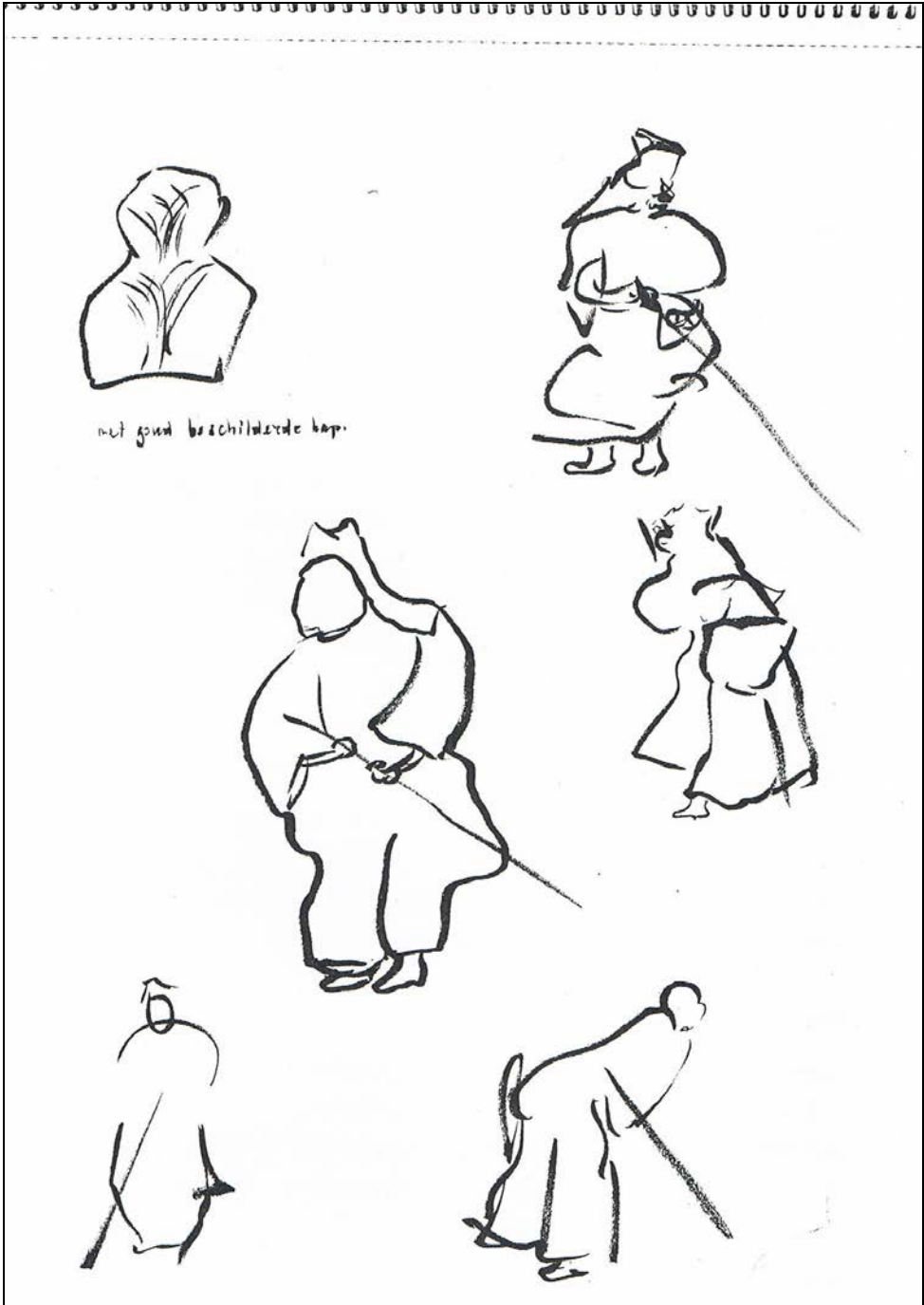


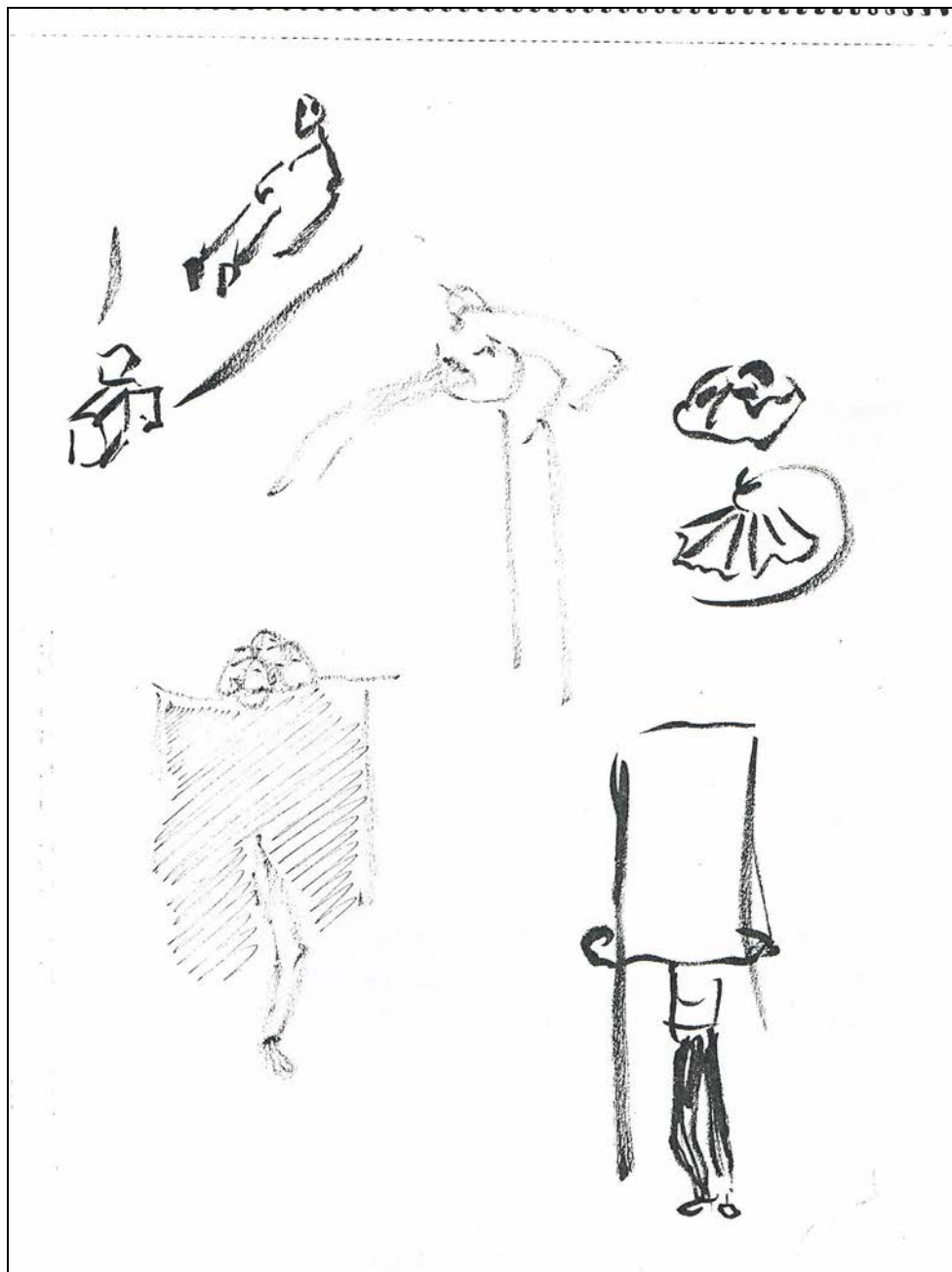
Bană  
Constanța  
Spina

Le vieux Renard.









## BRECHT



every thing must be very existant for the actor

all ways to walk

all ways to sit

'de opbouw van een 'half' personage 'Kattien'  
met bijbehorende kleding - geluiden  
zo spreekt ook met haar handen  
zo is half' doof.





Odin Teatret's literary advisor Nando Taviani and the actress Iben Nagel Rasmussen in a dialogue. VIII ISTA session in Londrina, Brazil, 1994

**LILIANA ALEXANDRESCU** is researcher and stage director. She was for many years (1976-2001) co-editor of the FIRT/SIBMAS Information Bulletin, which appeared in Amsterdam in English and French. Since 1975, the year she settled in the Netherlands, she has directed the university theatre group FRI at the University of Amsterdam. In December 2003, her translation into Romanian (with her introduction) of Eugenio Barba's *La canoa di carta* was published in Bucharest: *O canoe de hârtie*, Unitext Publishing House. In the theoretical field she has worked on modern and post-modern literature and theatre, as well as on contemporary ritual theatre. She has participated in several international symposia with lectures on these terms and has published articles and essays in reviews and books. Volumes published: *Mănușa prințului. Teatrul dincolo de modern* (The Glove of the Prince. Theatre beyond modernism), 2007; *Dramaturgi olandezi de astăzi* (Dutch contemporary play-writers), 2010 (both at the Fundația Culturală "Camil Petrescu" in Bucharest).



Roberta Carreri and Francis Pardeilhan in a scene from *Brecht's Ashes*, 1980.  
Photo Tony D'Urso

## *Transcultural Dialogue: Lecture / Demonstrations at ISTA\**

NICOLA SAVARESE\*\*

**Abstract.** This paper is devoted to the importance of transcultural dialogue in the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA), directed by Eugenio Barba. The transcultural dialogue is promoted through the multiplicity of performance traditions that are at the centre of every session. This kind of dialogue doesn't negotiate a common ground with the observer beforehand, it doesn't end in the intermediate space of a conversation timed at eliminating difference by translating the exchanges for the spectators (the intercultural approach) and/or by combining various of them (cultural syncretism). It provokes instead reactions and reflection by presenting authentic performances or scenes without considering the home cultures of either participants or their fellow artists. These transcultural dialogues are predicated upon Eugenio Barba's notion of *professional identity* in which he privileges training, craftsmanship, and practical experience over national identity, political and religious beliefs, or individuated personality. The main problem investigated by ISTA is that of the contacts between eastern theatrical tradition and western theatrical tradition, which is also at the centre of the author's research interests.

**Keywords:** ISTA, transcultural dialogue, anthropology, eastern theatrical tradition, western theatrical tradition.

As a theatre scholar I have participated in every session of the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) since it was founded in 1980, altogether fourteen. I consider ISTA to be a privileged place which gave me

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\* Translated from Italian by Susana Epstein. This is an updated version of a text first appeared in *Negotiating Cultures. Eugenio Barba and the Intercultural Debate*, ed. by Ian Watson, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 2012.

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the opportunity to expand my experience and knowledge of theatre through encounters with master performers from a variety of Western, Afro-Brazilian and Asian performance traditions.

For me, one of the most interesting aspects of the ISTA sessions has always been the balance between the technical nature of the research and the individualisation of each research project. My first and most enduring memory of ISTA is that of attending an anatomy class during which one sees the simultaneous dissection of the actor and the *mise-en-scène*, the artist and his/her technique, as well as the differences between practitioners and scholars. Leaving aside ISTA's findings, which are numerous, I believe that the scientific approach we have adopted has paid dividends because it has given us access to the smallest details of the theatre world; it has allowed us to stop when needed, as well as to go forwards and backwards over performance fragments with the aid of both Asian and Western theatre masters from diverse cultural backgrounds. This empirical approach is rare in theatre studies, which is far too often diluted by either the scholar's geographical or temporal distance from what he is studying.

Another salient aspect of ISTA, in my opinion, is the transcultural dialogues that it promotes through the multiplicity of performance traditions that are at the centre of every session. These dialogues are predicated upon Eugenio Barba's notion of *professional identity* in which he privileges training, craftsmanship, and practical experience over national identity, political and religious beliefs, or individuated personality. Despite the practical application of the results at ISTA, the discourse it has generated, or the questions it has raised about performance, I consider the dialogue among the practitioners and scholars from different cultures in each session to be ISTA's most relevant political accomplishment, and its most fecund achievement, from a scientific point of view. This dialogue, between students and teachers, directors and actors, and between researchers of practice and theoreticians, has given birth to *a new way of seeing* and has allowed us to understand some of the most hidden aspects of the actor's technique.

Having its origins in Barba's own keen observations on acting and performance, ISTA might even be characterized as a *school of the gaze*. Even though every ISTA is comprised of actors who belong to very diverse cultural traditions, their traditions share common principles of scenic behaviour which, during research sessions, are the objects of that gaze. Performers and scholars alike focus on these principles in an attempt to understand the nature of stage presence and, in the case of the former, to identify and appropriate the principles for their own creative work.

This is how, following more than 25 years of public sessions and publications, the value of Theatre Anthropology is beginning to be recognized. This value centres on Theatre Anthropology's notion of *recurring principles* which have proved to be invaluable tools for understanding the role of technique in conveying presence on stage, and for reassessing theatre and its history in the light of these techniques. For me, as a theatre historian, the latter is one of Theatre Anthropology's major contributions: the rereading of theatre history within the context of a transcultural diffusion of performative techniques and the transmission of these techniques, not only from one generation to the next, but also from one culture to another<sup>1</sup>.

Despite its success, I still encounter sceptics who question ISTA's research. Those who have doubts and raise questions are an invaluable and necessary part of any scientific enterprise. They are the ones who generate dialectics and plumb the depths of the researcher's gaze. What bothers me is that many of the questions raised by these sceptics are the same: looking for common principles among different theatrical traditions is not an universalist temptation or, even worse, an ethnocentric one? Moreover, how is it possible to study these principles within various performative traditions without examining their socio-cultural context?

Since Barba himself has addressed these questions at length elsewhere, it would be repetitive to do so again here<sup>2</sup>. But to be fair to the sceptics, there is some justification for their confusion because, even though most of them are aware of ISTA's findings, few know anything of its activities during the sessions. Yet it is during these situations that most of ISTA's work is done. It is here that one learns to understand a research process that does not offer solutions and answers, but continues to formulate questions and generate doubt. In short, some scholars commit the same kind of mistake about ISTA and Theatre Anthropology that many critics make about theatrical performance: they only look at the product (i.e., the results) without considering the creative processes involved in producing that product. Analysing the creative process identifies methodological mistakes and identifies areas of further research.

For the sake of clarity, we at ISTA have, on certain occasions, omitted from our published findings "all the work, the network of doubts, the failed experiences, the long road to clarity, as well as the comings and goings of

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<sup>1</sup> The results of my historical research on this field are in the book *Eurasian Theatre. Drama and Performance Between East and West from Classical Antiquity to the Present*, Icarus Publishing Enterprise, Holstebro, Malta, Wrocław, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe. A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995, pp 36-49.

the research which precede and underlie the results"<sup>3</sup>. On other occasions, even though many essays and documents about ISTA have been widely disseminated in numerous languages, it is not easy to trace the sources of findings back to the closed research sessions at ISTA. This is especially true of those sources that contain their own contradictions: the mobility of the school; the mixture of recognized teachers and self-taught pupils; the lack of a hierarchic distinction between pedagogues and students; the contributions of multiples cultures through the artists' techniques and individual stories; ignoring distinctions among forms such as dance, mime and pantomime; learning how to see while *learning how to learn*. Yet, ironically, it is these very contradictions which make ISTA one of the most interesting and atypical pedagogical experiences.

Contradictions aside, the major source of misunderstandings about Theatre Anthropology is the lack of knowledge of ISTA's scientific agenda. For this reason, I would like to concentrate on what it is that confirms Theatre Anthropology as an empirical, pragmatic, and operative science.

Let us return to the question of transcultural dialogue that I touched on earlier. How are the dialogues conducted during ISTA's public sessions? This question prompts us to reflect on the dialogues themselves rather than on the results they achieve. It is central to an understanding of how it is possible for masters from different performance traditions to hold a dialogue among themselves without either addressing their individual cultural contexts or rushing to conclusions about the nature of interculturalism.

The dialogues are rooted in a paradox: instead of engaging in a search for answers, they are concerned with participants generating questions. An American industrialist, whose name escapes me, once wrote that one does not need exceptional intelligence to understand that an answer is wrong, but one needs a fairly creative mind to appreciate that a question is incorrect. Although true, this paradox does not explain how dialogue, that is, the process of questions and answers, functions at ISTA.

Dialogue is usually thought of as an alternating discourse between two or more people, be it a quiet debate or an animated discussion, a violent dispute, or an endless series of controversies. But it is difficult to imagine teachers, students, directors, performers, musicians, scholars, critics and professors from different cultures and traditions being able to sit together engaged in a meaningful dialogue about the nuances of a performance.

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<sup>3</sup> Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese, *Anatomia del teatro*, Casa Usher, Milan and Florence, 1983, p.11.

The primary obstacle to such a dialogue is differences in language. ISTA's public sessions are a virtual Babel of languages. Participants come from many different countries with few, if any, sharing a single common language (other than a greater or lesser command of English) and a great percentage of those attending the meetings having to rely on translations that inevitably lack the richness of the original language. But differences in national languages are far from ISTA's only linguistic difficulty. Most of those attending also have a specialized language specific to their profession. Even though theatre knows few national boundaries, those who work in it tend to have jargons that relate solely to their genre of theatre. Similarly, scholars have discipline-specific terminology and research methods.

There are, of course, different types of discussions at ISTA: one speaks, converses, argues, and simply chats with fellow participants. Some of these encounters are positive, because they generate a worthwhile exchange of information, while others, which remain at the level of rhetorical exercises or degenerate into academic confrontations built around prejudices, are less valuable. However, even though the so called "normal" forms of dialogue do exist at ISTA, they are rarely a means of acquiring further knowledge. I recall, for instance, the misunderstandings at the 1986 ISTA which focused on the female role in different cultures. Some participants questioned the programme as well as the nature of the debate. This was because the meeting was described in the official literature as an International Congress but, following traditional ISTA practice, little time was devoted to discussing the theme of the meeting, as would normally be done at a more conventional congress. In hindsight, the term congress was probably ill-advised and the notion of dialogue, as it relates to ISTA, could have been explained more clearly.

The etymology of dialogue encompasses a dual transaction, one in which there is an exchange of words, the other in which the *logos* flows, but without alternating speech acts between protagonists. The latter is pertinent to ISTA. As a scholar, I have had the opportunity to talk to master performers at ISTA on various occasions. During these meetings, I posed many professional and private questions. I often asked them to repeat words or expressions, even demonstrate physical postures, attitudes and movements from their performance forms so that I could gather information and take photographs for my own work. But these private conversations are but a small part of my contact with these masters. Most of the time I, like the majority of the participants at ISTA, attend their lecture/demonstrations rather than engage in "dialogue" with the masters. I *listen* without intervening in the verbal

dialogues they conduct among themselves and with their students. These lectures/demonstrations are *mute dialogues* in which we participants witness the making of theatre at its most delicate moment: its creation.

There are various types of lectures/demonstrations at ISTA. These range from those that focus on physical and/or vocal training to others centred on performance techniques such as the codification of physical actions or particular forms of improvisation. These demonstrations raise many interrelated questions such as: What are the basic postures of a particular form? What does codification consist of? How is energy manifested, and how is it structured gesturally?

The lectures/demonstrations at ISTA are entirely the responsibility of the master performers involved. Rather than shaping them the way a theatre director might, Barba functions both as a catalyst who ensures the artists' freedom to present what they wish and as the first witness who is an intermediary for other participants. Barba does not ask specific questions of the performers at the outset, nor does he request a particular technique. He rather poses the performer a question or suggests something that forces him to reflect *how* he or she works. This strategy prompts the performer to leave the stable ground of familiar technique and, by answering practically, explore uncertain waters in the way only a master can.

The lectures/demonstrations allow the master performers to not only direct the gaze of spectators, but also to reflect upon their own art. Some of the lectures/demonstrations begin with an "inner-dialogue" prior to the masters engaging in a public dialogue with others. This inner-dialogue is a reflective interrogation of sorts between the masters and their tradition or between the masters and their own professional experience. It is only later, following a number of lectures/demonstrations by artists from different performance traditions, that a true dialogue, which compares similarities and differences, can take place.

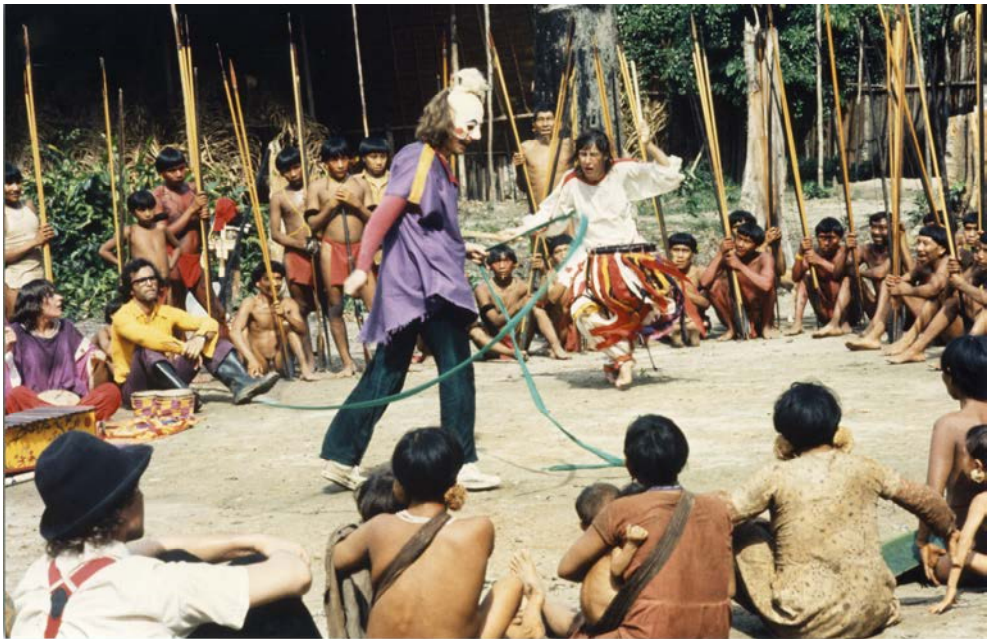
The nature of these dialogues at ISTA only serves to emphasize how unique a setting the latter provides for theatre research with performing artists from different cultures around the world, with scholars, researchers and neophyte theatre workers in a single forum. It also privileges exchange, confrontation and negotiation over results, that is, unlike most research institutes, it is research-centred rather than findings-driven.

This concern with research is nowhere more evident than in Barba's ongoing interest in the first day of a performer's training, which he believes contains the ethical and pedagogical nucleus of every artistic discipline.

Following the 1986 Holstebro ISTA, Barba has repeatedly asked the master performers during ISTA meetings to recreate their first day of training as an artist.

There have been different reactions to this proposal. Most of the Asian artists have had few problems remembering their first day of training. A number of them have shown how they sat in front of their guru to copy his or her physical movements and demonstrated the difficulty they had in maintaining simple positions of the head, eyes, arms, hands and torso during the initial exercises. Other masters, especially those from the West, have not been able to remember the first day exactly. But all have been able to demonstrate a generic sense of the exercises done at the beginning of their training.

The most valuable aspect of these particular lectures/demonstrations has been not so much that the masters have been able to recreate a historically significant event, that is, the transmission of performance knowledge, but that in doing so they have drawn attention to the duality involved in the transmission. This duality, of first observing the teacher then attempting to repeat precisely what he did, requires developing the skill of *knowing how to look* even prior to *knowing how to do*. The seeds of Theatre Anthropology lie here.



Iben Nagel Rasmussen and Torgeir Wethal in *The Book of Dance* a performance/ barter in Amazonia, Venezuela, in 1976. Sitting from left, Francis Pardeilhan, Roberta Carreri, Eugenio Barba

Anthropology is an encounter between forms of knowledge in which the aim is to explain the "other" culture in one's own cultural terms. This explanation is, of course, predicated upon the fact that "the entire tradition of anthropological thought and its research methodology is the product of an enculturation that is much broader in scope than the "science" of anthropology itself"<sup>4</sup>. The lectures/demonstrations at ISTA are an encounter between forms of knowledge in which the tools of a western, enculturated "science" – Theatre Anthropology – are used to explain performance forms from different parts of the world.

At ISTA, however, the degree of cultural "contamination" is minimized. This is because, the master artists show their physical scores, training, fragments of performance, and repeat corporal techniques from their traditions rather than merely providing verbal explanations that, for courtesy's sake, invariably favour the observers' culture. By starting from the deepest embodied knowledge of one's own artistic culture, as only a master can, performers convey deep meanings and knowledge without mediating them through explanations of the historical and/or cultural context from which they spring. In other words, the more the master artists submerge themselves in their own culture through performance at ISTA, the closer they will come to being a transcultural vehicle, a vector of their own personal and particular culture.

This is why the lectures/demonstrations at ISTA are transcultural dialogues. They do not negotiate a common ground with the observer beforehand. They do not end in the intermediate space of a conversation timed at eliminating difference by translating them for spectators (the intercultural approach) and/or by combining various of them (cultural syncretism). They provoke instead reactions and reflection by presenting authentic performances or scenes without considering the home cultures of either participants or their fellow artists (i.e., the transcultural).

I have looked for similar transcultural movements in the past. But it is rare to find situations analogous to the ISTA lectures/demonstrations in theatre history, not because there were none, but because there is little information about them. However, despite the lack of documentation, there are a few well-known events from the past that might be compared to the lectures/demonstrations. Brecht's attendance at the 1935 demonstration by the great Peking Opera performer Mei Lanfang in Moscow, for instance, was the *mute*

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<sup>4</sup> Piergiorgio Giacchè, "Un'equazione tra antropologia e teatro", a paper presented at the Theatre Sociology Congress in Lisbon in 1992, later published in *Teatro e Storia*, Annali 17, 1995.

*dialogue* that lead to Brecht's theory of *verfremdung*<sup>5</sup>. In a similar vein, the encounters in Tokyo between Jean-Louis Barrault and Hisao Kanze, one of Japan's greatest post-War Noh actors, in 1960 and 1978, spring to mind. During these meetings, the unforgettable interpreter of Baptiste and the Noh actor exchanged their work techniques in public with few words spoken between them. As Barrault himself puts it, in silence "...*nous étions tous deux nous passant nos trucs. Nous étions heureux*" [we were passing our tricks to each other. We were happy]<sup>6</sup>.



Odin Teatret in Peru, 1978. Photo: Peter Bysted, Odin Teatret's Archive

The reactions of Asian artists to lectures/demonstrations by European actors are less known. One such encounter, between Ennosuke II – a great Kabuki performer – and Diaghilev's Ballets Russes during the former's 1919

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<sup>5</sup> Brecht's famous essay "Alienation effects in Chinese acting" first appeared in English in the London-based magazine *Life and Letters* in 1936. It was subsequently included in John Willet's *Brecht on Theatre*, New York: Hill & Wang (1964), pp. 91-99.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Louis Barrault, *Journal de bord. Japon, Israël, Grèce, Yougoslavie*, Julliard, Paris, 1961, p. 87.



European tour was documented. Following a London performance of the Ballets, Ennosuke II arranged to meet Karsavina and Massine, the young directors of the company. Ennosuke II writes that during the meeting, which consisted of the reciprocal presentation of several dance pieces followed by the exchange of a few essential words of explanation, he discovered that Japanese dance is essentially *horizontal* while its European classical counterpart is based on *verticality*<sup>7</sup>.

These essentially non-verbal transcultural exchanges are based on two interrelated factors: observation and performance. The observer learns about the other through witnessing fragments of a performance, while the other's primary means of communication is performance – a performance that is firmly rooted in a deep knowledge of his particular theatre form.

This type of exchange raises questions of emic and etic borders because it blurs the line between the observer and the observed. The anthropological convention of the observer watching, annotating and analysing the behaviour of the observed is challenged by the barter-like dynamic of these transcultural dialogues. The dialogues call for an interactive transaction in which the self and other often exchange roles. Equally, the observer in attempting to explain what is being observed, frequently challenges and engages the subject's psycho-emotional reality by trying to understand his or her inner performative process.

This blurring of the emic and etic revisits the question of whether it is possible to study the creative processes of actors from cultures other than one's own without examining the historical and social context of the performance forms involved. However, the scholar/observer should be prepared to participate fully in both the creative and scientific processes by reflecting upon his own personal experience *illic et nunc*, that is, by becoming involved in the process rather than remaining an outsider observing an objectified other. That is why it is normal at ISTA to see scholars attempting the acting exercises proposed by teachers, just as it is common to find other scholars observing these exercises rather than participating in them directly. These are two, often interchangeable, attitudes during which there is *deep* dialogue with the teachers because it happens without words. After all, history tells us that the most significant dialogues have been written by one person.

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<sup>7</sup> Even though this incident is described by the Kabuki actor Gunji Yasunori in G. Azzaroni, *Dentro il mondo del Kabuki*, CLUEB, Bologna, 1988, pp. 15-17, it originally appeared in Ichikawa Ennosuke II's *Ennosuke Zuihitsu*, Nhonshoso, Tokyo: 1937.

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Dialogue at ISTA, International School of Theatre Anthropology, 1990.  
From left: Franco Ruffini, Nicola Savarese, Mirella Schino, Ferdinando Taviani  
and Giovanni Azzaroni. Photo Fiora Bemptrad

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When Barba and his Odin Teatret first began touring outside of Scandinavia in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they were drawn to Barba's homeland, Italy. The fledgling company attracted the attention of a group of young Italian theatre scholars just beginning their careers in the academy. This group, that included Claudio Nicola Savarese even students like Mirella Schino and Franco Perrelli, has remained a touchstone of sorts for Barba throughout his career. It is this group of scholars, university professors and critics who have provided much of the intellectual stimulus and a critical eye to his artistic and research endeavours over the intervening years.

Two of these, Taviani and Savarese, have played particularly significant roles in Barba's career. Taviani, a professor of theatre history at L'Aquila University near Rome, became already in 1974 Odin Teatret's literary adviser and its unofficial historian, having written a book and numerous articles on the group's development over the years. Savarese, on the other hand, a professor of theatre at the University Meldolesi, Franco Ruffini, Fabrizio Cruciani, Ugo Volli, Ferdinando Taviani, of Roma Tre in Rome and for several years actor and director of a theatre group, is one of Europe's leading experts on Asian and Eurasian theatres. In addition to being part of the ISTA's scientific team since its first session in 1980, Savarese documented them and, in collaboration with Barba, compiled **A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer**, published in many languages, among others in English by Routledge (1991) and in Romanian by Humanitas in collaboration with Festivalul Internațional de Teatru de la Sibiu (2012).

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**THEATRUM MUNDI.**  
**About Interculturalism, Politics and Barba's**  
*Ur-Hamlet*

**FERDINANDO TAVIANI\***

**Abstract.** This paper proposes an analysis of Eugenio Barba's *Ur-Hamlet* (2006, 2009), a performance based on Saxo Grammaticus' chronicles. The analysis centres around main issues of the performance, such as interculturalism and politics. Eugenio Barba doesn't make multicultural performances, he doesn't make a spectacle out of the multicultural features. For him, these features are a premise. Barba favours interculturalism, i. e. an open dialogue between actors coming from various traditions. Working with actors trained inside different traditions, Barba respects meticulously the scenic behaviour that characterises the professional identity of each of them. Barba is not interested in the different stage traditions as such; he is interested in actors who have *incorporated* forms. This phenomenon, together with the profound political significations, makes the *Ur-Hamlet* such a great performance.

**Keywords:** Eugenio Barba, interculturalism, politics, *Ur-Hamlet*, Saxo Grammaticus.

*A premise*

In the course of the 1970s, Odin Teatret pioneered seminars in Holstebro involving Javanese and Balinese ensembles and artists, Japanese Noh, Kabuki and contemporary theatre and India's main classical forms of theatre-dance: Kathak, Bharatanatyam, Odissi, Chhau and Kathakali. Besides the performances, the Asian performers presented and commented the technical basis of their way of thinking and establishing a communicative relationship with the spectator.

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This interest evolved into a close collaboration after the founding of ISTA, International School of Theatre Anthropology, which implemented a comparative research and has grown in symbiosis with Odin Teatret. ISTA is a working environment characterised by a technical exchange between regularly returning artists and researchers of different genres and nationalities. In this “performers’ village”, they compare and analyse the technical foundations of their styles in sessions lasting from two weeks to two months. From 1980 to 2005, fourteen ISTA sessions have taken place in Europe and Latin America. All of them ended with a *Theatrum Mundi* performance with musicians and performers from different cultures.

The *Theatrum Mundi* ensemble – about fifty performers and musicians from Balinese, Japanese, Indian, Chinese, Afro-Brazilian traditions together with Odin Teatret actors – presented in 2006 *Ur-Hamlet* based on Saxo Grammaticus’ *Chronicle*. It was performed 21 times in July 2006 at the Ravenna Festival, Italy, in Holstebro and at Kronborg, Hamlet’s Castle, in Elsinore. The performance was again played five times in 2009 in Wroclaw, Poland, at the Festival for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Teaterlaboratorium founded by Ludwik Flaszen and Jerzy Grotowski.

### *Saxo’s Hamlet*

The first account of a hero, later to become the prototype of the wondering and philosophical mind, was told in Latin by Saxo Grammaticus a good three and a half centuries before Shakespeare. Amlethus was his name and he was the protagonist in one of many episodes in the struggle for power in Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum* (*Histories of the Danes*). Little is known of Saxo (1150-1220), the earliest chronicler and writer of Denmark. The 16 Books of his *Gesta Danorum* thread a genealogy of kings in part legendary – among whom also Hamlet, ruler of Jutland. The first translation of Saxo into Danish dates from 1575.

Books Three and Four record Hamlet’s life and death. We recognize most of Shakespeare’s figures. Gertrude is Gerutha; Claudius is Fengi; Polonius is Fengi’s anonymous adviser, living only for his master, being his eyes and dying in his place. He has no family. There are neither Ophelia nor her brother Laertes, nor place, obviously, for Horatio, the young intellectual educated at the university of Wittenberg. There is, however, an anonymous couple of foster brother and sister, humble children of Hamlet’s nanny. They have sucked the same milk and are the dark accomplices of his sexual and bloody intrigues. There are no ghosts on the ramparts of the chieftain’s fortress in Jutland. The

intimate family drama of remorse and incest, of love and abandonment, of innocence and suicide, has vanished. Only the struggle for power is left, bare, essential, physical: a soulless carnage.

The conflict between uncle and nephew, between Fengi and Hamlet, started when Rørik, king of Denmark, entrusted the power over the Danish province of Jutland to Orvendil and gave him his daughter Gerutha in marriage. Hamlet was born. But Orvendil is murdered by his brother Fengi who takes Gerutha as his wife. According to the heathen norms of honour, Hamlet should avenge his father, and therefore Fengi, his uncle, must eliminate him. But Fengi cannot openly resort to violence: he fears King Rørik's and Gerutha's reactions as well as the people's anger. Not even a tyrant can challenge unpunished all the laws, and condemn a madman for treason. And Hamlet is mad, or so he pretends. He feigns stupidity as a defense against the absolute power of his uncle, usurper of the position that belongs to him.

Fengi doubts Hamlet's madness. He arranges for him to meet a girl in a forest to test whether he surrenders to temptation. Mad people don't make love. Hamlet recognizes the girl as his foster sister. The foster sister gives herself to him without betraying him. She tells the courtiers that the foolish young man was not capable of doing anything. While he, the idiot, boasts of his own sexual prowess making everybody laugh at him in disbelief.

Hamlet behaves as an obsessed. Covered with dirt, he mimics a cock, crowing and waving his arms as if they were wings. He kills – as if by mistake – Fengi's adviser who is hidden under straw in the room in which he is left alone with his mother. He draws his sword and strikes, cuts the corpse into pieces, cooks them and gives them to the pigs to eat. After this, he forces his beaten and wounded mother to acknowledge the horror of her behaviour for having married her husband's murderer.

Fengi, expert in intrigues and conspiracies, knows that even a madman can seek revenge. He decides to send Hamlet to England. He gives a secret letter to the two young noblemen accompanying his nephew, in which he asks the English king to eliminate the insane prince. Hamlet tampers with Fengi's letter and replaces his name with that of his companions. As a result, Fengi's two agents are hanged on their arrival. In England, Hamlet acquires the reputation of a wise man, and the English king has such a high regard for him that he gives him his daughter in marriage.

A year passes and Hamlet returns home. He arrives on the day of his own funeral. Everybody thinks he is dead. Hamlet, who looks like a pathetic beggar, is in reality a bloodthirsty beast. A banquet celebrates the funeral

that has no corpse. When the drunken guests fall asleep, Hamlet butchers them and sets the building on fire. He enters the room where Fengi sleeps and exchanges the King's sword with his own which he has nailed to the sheath. Then he wakes his uncle. The terrified Fengi tries to draw his sword, but is unable to do so and Hamlet slays him without sulling his own blade with the traitor's blood.

At this point, the fierce avenger seems to change nature. With the comforting voice of a father, he announces the principles of his future government: "Betrayal cannot be avoided. Betray before being betrayed." Relieved of the avenger's fury, Hamlet is now the young chieftain in a country in a perpetual state of war.

In his *Gesta Danorum* Saxo describes the risks of internal disorder, of factions, of feuds, famine and pestilence. War – real or potential – is the foundation of the state's inner order and a source of respect for hierarchies and laws. Hamlet, a chieftain of Jutland, wants to rule the entire kingdom and takes up arms against his sovereign, the king of Denmark. He perishes while performing the last action of his reason's cunning and craving for power. Machiavelli, the Renaissance scientist of politics, would have been at ease in this kingdom of the North.

Hamlet was just one of the mythical heroes with whom Saxo had embellished Denmark's history. He was destined to an illustrious life and an everlasting chain of incarnations by François de Belleforest, a French writer who retold Saxo's story in his popular *Histoires tragiques* in 1570. Belleforest was fairly faithful to Saxo although he expanded the story to the double and made several changes. He added an aura of chivalry as Hamlet pursued his own honour and glory; he let Fengi incestuously seduce his brother's wife before murdering his brother; and he transformed Saxo's anonymous foster sister into a young woman of the court (the future Ophelia) who has loved Hamlet since childhood, was devoted to him and prepared to do anything for him.

A few years after their publication, Belleforest's *Histoires tragiques* were translated into English, inspiring a host of writers for the theatre in Elizabethan London. In 1596, Thomas Lodge, in his *Wit's Misery*, alludes to a *Hamlet* which was performed at The Theatre. No one knows for sure who was the true author of this *Hamlet*. The most likely candidate is Thomas Kyd. Scholars agree that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* at the midpoint of his career, between mid 1599 and the end of 1601.

### *Barba's Ur-Hamlet*

**Scene 1:** Saxo, the monk, digs into the dark ages and unearths the story of Hamlet, ruler of Jutland.

**Scene 2:** Orvendil, Hamlet's father, is murdered by his brother Fengi. Fengi seizes power and marries Gerutha, Orvendil's widow and mother of Hamlet.

**Scene 3:** Hamlet pretends to be mad in order to conceal his plan for vengeance.

**Scene 4:** The Castle is infiltrated by foreigners from distant lands.

**Scene 5:** Fengi lets Hamlet meet a girl in order to test his madness. He believes madmen are impotent.

**Scene 6:** The Queen of the Rats (the plague) arrives at the Castle.

**Scene 7:** Fengi's counsellor hides in order to listen to the conversation between Hamlet and his mother.

**Scene 8:** Hamlet takes his revenge and proclaims the laws of a new order.



Scene from the performance *Ur-Hamlet*, 2006. Photo Claudio Coloberti and Torgeir Wethal



Thus Barba condenses Saxo's chronicle which takes place in prehistoric times. Hamlet appears as our contemporary. He steps into the aimless fury of History and throws away his mask: he is a stealthy and crafty chieftain, a professional in violence, a tyrannicide who becomes a tyrant.

Saxo, the monk, unearths Hamlet's skeleton from the basements of the castle, evokes his life and interprets it in Latin. He addresses the spectators in this archaic and defunct language, unveiling and commenting the vile intentions of the characters and of their deeds. He wanders through the performance, is at the centre of the action, identifies himself with its development and struggles to avoid its uncontrolled events, seeking a way of escape.

The bare space is lightened by torches that can be both portable and fixed to the ground. These moving flames modulate the intensity of the actions and the perception of the space. The actors move amidst a labyrinth of torches, they carry them and use them to underline – as in a painting by Rembrandt – the fragment of a scene or a detail.

The stage action follows Saxo's storyline, punctuated by Hamlet's outbursts of folly. Moments of indolence are interspersed with frantic crises, while assassins or credulous accomplices run after Hamlet to interpret his behaviour. At times, the whole reality becomes a delirium. The events take place in a castle which is besieged not by the Other World and its ghosts, but – much more concretely – by the outside and its subsoil. From the subsoil rats emerge, carriers of plague. These enemies of the human race surface as miasmas from the dark and underground layers of an orderly society.

Invaders are expected from the outside. Up to now, wretched and hungry people have been arriving, looking for refuge and slowly occupying the whole space. Are they going to be contaminated by the plague or are they its carriers? The castle's dwellers get rid of them methodically yet without anger: a mere territorial cleansing operation. In the cemetery, a few graves are always open in readiness. The gravediggers try to keep order in this kingdom in which lethal forces scurry around.

While corpses burn and the mad night of revenge seems ended, Hamlet, as in a solitary prayer or a hymn of war, proclaims new rules invoking the name of his father. It is not his father's ghost that appears, but a child, ready to fight for his New Order.

*Ur-Hamlet* is not a new interpretation of Hamlet. It doesn't demystify the protagonist, nor does it propose original variations. Nor does it challenge the archetype or pretend to return to its sources. The performance is an attempt to see what happens when Hamlet returns to his origin. In place of Shakespeare, there is the Danish Saxo Grammaticus who limits himself to writing down event after event and thinks like the majority of us. Here the

story is neither exceptional nor memorable, there are no phantoms or riveting monologues, just a chain of shrewd subterfuges which we also find centuries later in Shakespeare's cruelly solemn play. It's a simple chronicle, but chronic: it happened once and will happen again.

We know how Eugenio Barba blends and transfigures fantasies, attempts and perspectives emerging in an untidy and casual way from the actors' work, at times achieving surprising effects that wreck some of the original hypotheses and ideas. Under this apparent disorder there is, however, a logic. Let's begin by focusing on the rehearsals.

Eugenio Barba began working in Holstebro and Copenhagen in 2003 with eight of Odin Teatret's actors, then during the ISTA sessions of Seville (2004) and Wroclaw (2005), for five weeks in the villages of Batuan and Ubud (Bali, 2004 and 2005) with his actors plus thirty-two Balinese Gambuh performers, the Japanese Noh master Akira Matsui and seven other Indian, Brazilian and European singers and musicians. All of these met again for three weeks in Italy in June 2006 with forty-four other actors from different countries who participated in a seminar led by Eugenio Barba and his actors with the aim of being included in *Ur-Hamlet*. In the performance, they represent the *foreigners* – immigrants, refugees, expats – driven by hunger, war and plague, seeking shelter in Hamlet's castle, where the winds of revenge blow.

Barba's dramaturgy starts here, from a web of meetings and an interlacement of different people. It is a *political* dramaturgy since it builds a provisional *polis*, a theatrical country in which professionals, aspiring professionals, masters from different ethnic origins, cultures, languages, competences and stage traditions cohabit. It is not a tribe, because the union is temporary and intermittent. It is a well managed and compact country, not a nomadic but a flying one, like the island of Laputa invented by Swift.

When at work, the theatre's island of Laputa has the features of an energetic and imposing organization. It allows the independence of every professional and group to amalgamate with the independence of the others, exploiting the aggregating fire of Barba's creative and strategic abilities, his authoritativeness, and – a practical detail not to be underestimated – his linguistic skills. But everyone is well aware that such a heterogeneous association is short lived and will vanish, like snow in the sun, immediately after the performance has materialised.

*Ur-Hamlet* is a "special project", very different from the repertoire and the style of Odin Teatret's own performances. But it appears so only if it is observed from the point of view of dimensions and spectacular forms. The work's substance and logic correspond to what distinguishes the whole

history of Odin Teatret, this small group of actors persistently tied to each other and to their director-playwright for five decades.

Over the years, each Odin actor has developed his/her own artistic silhouette and personal working method. They are professionals with very distinct artistic individualities, despite their affiliation to the same theatrical enclave. They are not linked by a stylistic unity like the different members of an Asian classical theatre or a great European tradition like ballet or modern mime. I could say, exaggerating a little, that Odin Teatret has created a situation similar to that of a Commedia dell'Arte company in the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. These companies were clearly distinguishable as a whole, although every actor followed a line of work and even a different professional tradition: that of his/her "mask", with his/her "manner".

The comparison is not an exaggeration since, in recent years, a performer from the Afro-Brazilian tradition of the orishas' dance (candomblé) has been able to integrate himself into the Odin enclave without conforming to a presumed Odin technique, maintaining his own technique and manner. This actor is not introduced into the performance (*Andersen's Dream*, 2004) as a quotation or a striking and exotic body: he is present with the same degree of unity/diversity which characterises the manners of the others:

There is not an Odin technique, not one of the actors I have directed can be considered the single genuine interpreter of my visions and theories. We are a group of unbelievers, towards ourselves even more than towards the surrounding world. Of this I am particularly proud.<sup>1</sup>

As I see it, this pride is both artistic and political. Artistic, because it unifies without standardising; political, because it deepens the diversities, strengthening them reciprocally. It is worth underlining another aspect: this "performers' village" is free because it is not rooted in the division of the work, with hierarchies and subordinate roles, but on multicultural relationships.

The multicultural feature is practically an obligation for the theatre between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. The reasons are many and obvious. The theatre, in any geographical and cultural context, is a small and minority genre of performance. It can escape its isolation and conquer the equivalent of its ancient centrality only if it spins fragile threads from one side of the planet to the other, connecting experiences and professionalisms that in the past didn't feel the need to be connected, or, on the contrary, were motivated by the opposite need: to prevent the proximity of different traditions, in the same context, from becoming a broth in which peculiarities and stylistic contours were obliterated.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugenio Barba, "The Dance of Algebra and Fire", in *Desmontajes: procesos de creación e investigación escénica*, ed. by Ileana Dieguez, Mexico, 2006.



Scene from the performance *Ur-Hamlet*, 2006. Photo Claudio Coloberti and Torgeir Wethal

In general, multiculturalism can be experienced as a value or an invasion, a subversive threat or a fertile revolution. But in the theatre field it imposes itself as a condition of survival, if the dispersion of technical patrimonies and know-how is to be prevented. Without a vision able to unify the different technical patrimonies and know-how, these, taken one by one, would find refuge only in a museum. Or else they would end up isolated and forgotten, minute and almost invisible, crushed by the hegemonic performance media.

It is in this worldwide condition of the various living performances that theatre anthropology – of which Barba is the main promoter since the 1970s – finds its historical basis beyond its theoretical and scientific originality. It is a science, but above all it is an effective tool to prevent our time's minority performance – the living performance – being reduced to a diminutive or handicapped genre.

Theatre anthropology investigates the different recurrent principles in various traditions and performative practices. *Different* and *recurrent* are not contradictory. They point out the possibility of locating a substantially unitary scenic *bios* (life) under the skin of the numerous styles and conventions.

The *recurrent principles* give diverse artistic answers, but these are equivalent to the same basic questions: how to attract and hold the spectator's attention? How to modify daily behaviour in order to make the actor believable despite the artificiality of the representation? How, through the work on visibility, to wipe out the visible and make the invisible come into view?

When expressed in words, these questions seem obscure and abstruse. In reality, they synthesise the artisan's needs and restlessness. The recurrent principles can be studied and recorded. But to study-and-record, for an artisan, is never an end in itself. It follows and precedes the *doing*. It serves to discover the implicit tacit knowledge of what the actor *does* without knowing why *s/he does it in that particular way*. And it serves to open new roads.

The practical consequences of the recurrent principles investigated by theatre anthropology are the projects in which Odin Teatret seems to disappear within a vast *Theatrum Mundi*. Here artists and masters from many cultures and traditions converge. Above all: representatives of heterogeneous professional elites blend with representatives of dissident and autodidactic theatres which open independent enclaves, often ignored or underestimated, in the territories presided over by legitimate and financially protected theatres.



Performance *Ego Faust* with *Theatrum Mundi* Ensemble. Torgeir Wethal and Kanichi Hanayagi, Bologna, 2000. Photo Fiora Bemporad

Odin Teatret's projects are of two types. One consists in the investigation and the transmission of experiences (the periodical sessions of ISTA – International School of Theatre Anthropology, and of the University of Eurasian Theatre). The other projects aim at the creation of performances which are exceptions, such as *The Island of the Labyrinths* (1996), *Ego Faust* (2000), *Ur-Hamlet* (2006, 2009) and *The Marriage of Medea* (2008).

Eugenio Barba, if we look closely, doesn't make multicultural performances. He doesn't make a spectacle out of the multicultural features. For him, these features are a premise.

Barba doesn't underline the stylistic syncretism. He doesn't draw amazing artistic effects by approaching heterogeneous elements, thus generating a suggestive tension or an imagined dialogue between cultures. Nor does he show how, in spite of their differences, the various traditions can embrace, each spilling over into the realm of the other, plunging, for example, a Greek or a Shakespearean text into the waters of Chinese Opera or Japanese Kabuki – or vice versa. On the other hand, he doesn't follow the diametrically opposite road, asking performers from different traditions to strip themselves of their own peculiarities, stylistic uniforms and conventions in order to recover the availability of an actor *in statu nascendi*. He doesn't want them to become a beginner beside other beginners, at the service of enigmatic fables that are the patrimony of human kind, independently from the different cultures in which human kind is divided.

These are all roads that sometimes lead to memorable results, to performances that we call masterpieces. But Barba's road is another. He doesn't look for the rich nourishment of the banquet of cultures, nor for the nourishment of a simple and essential food. Working with actors trained inside different traditions, Barba respects meticulously the scenic behavior that characterises the professional identity of each of them. He composes the performance with these heterogeneous fragments.

He says:

Each artist faithfully preserves the characteristics specific to his/her own style, integrating them into a new context. We practice a dramaturgy that is based on the intertwining of autonomous styles. The way the intertwining comes about, as well as the plot, are both my responsibility as director. What is created by the actors belongs to their cultural identity and is not encroached upon by the *mise-en-scène*.

I have called this way: "the romanesque method".

Barba explains, turning history into example and legend:

In the Middle Ages, the builders of churches in the style that was called romanesque (because it was common in the regions in which the language of Rome was spoken) practiced the art of montage. The craftsman's knowledge necessary to sculpt a capital or shape a column of precious marble had been lost. Nor were there the financial and technological resources to extract and transport the marble. The ecclesiastical architects therefore chose rough or carved stones; fragments of statues; Ionic, Doric or Corinthian capitals; odd columns which they found in various deserted buildings of the ancient Empire. These miscellaneous fragments were reassembled in a new unity, amidst the patches of light and the pools of shadow in the temples where people prayed before bread and wine.

The scenic traditions of the actors who come together in the *Theatrum Mundi* Ensemble are by no means abandoned styles. But my way of proceeding is similar to that of the ecclesiastical architects of the romanesque style.

Then he speaks as an artisan:

I do not intervene over the fragments. I choose them and connect them. A performance composed of fragments remains fragmentary unless it digs a path towards a deeper unity. In order to reach this point, you have to work within the domain of technique, of scenic presence, at a pre-expressive level. Thanks to this work, the actions of the actors can interact and so create a context.

In this new context, the fragments change their nature. Those which started off as corners of separate worlds turn into necessary parts of a story which neither I nor the actors would have been able to foresee.

In this way, stories and characters from far away weave, before our very eyes, a veil of appearances and illusions.<sup>2</sup>

It is possible that the medieval simile is more appropriate than the one which refers to the *Commedia dell'Arte*. Perhaps it is less obvious, but it is as precise. Both are, however, just similes, approximations. They lead to the threshold of the essential work and stop there. Because the essential work doesn't consist of any assemblage, of composition as art – of *associating with power* as Eugène Delacroix used to say. It proceeds, instead, along vertical lines. It operates on the layer beneath the forms incorporated by the single actors. For this, and only for this, this essential work can safeguard the incorporated forms without assuming their meaning.

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<sup>2</sup> Eugenio Barba, *The Romanesque Method*, in the programme of the performance *The Island of Labyrinths*, 10<sup>th</sup> ISTA session, Copenhagen 1996.

When we observe Barba rehearsing, it seems that he is *putting together* one actor's fragment with that of another. He is intervening, in reality, not on the whole fragment, but on its inner ligaments, its impulses and nervous rhythms. Simile for simile, he is not comparable to the medieval architect that sets an ancient capital on a column of a different style. He is similar to a gardener who takes care of the grafts or to the surgeon who restores a tissue.

But similes are not worth much, because theatre is something else. The scenic behaviours are not organisms, they don't belong to the so-called "body", but to the integrity of the body-mind. For this, the fundamental logic of *Ur-Hamlet's* rehearsals doesn't resemble an assemblage of forms drawn from various cultures, but corresponds to the creation of new organic forms.

I don't believe that Barba is interested in the different stage traditions as such. He is interested in actors who have *incorporated* forms. The professional traditions are one of the situations that promote incorporation.

*Incorporation* it is a strange and ambiguous term. It is distinct from *execution*, *reproduction* or *imitation*. It implies the idea of organic roots that reach deeply into the actor's body-mind. These roots can change their external aspect, without losing their submerged identity.

The form and the visibility that these roots assume are always the choice of one of their potentialities. Behind their visible score lives an invisible, yet deep-rooted *music* of psycho-physical impulses, which remains intact in the changes of the visible choices. The more this *music* is incorporated, the less it risks being lost during the external transformations. After all, the difference between the actor-master and the actor-beginner lies in the following: not in the mastery of the execution, but in the density on which the execution is rooted.

This *music* seems to point out something impalpable and metaphoric. In practice it is something empirical and concrete in the eyes of the artisan trained to recognize and manipulate it without offending or suffocating it.

Therefore, when we observe the rehearsals carefully, *Ur-Hamlet* is not composed. It surfaces. It is as if in the submerged island of Atlantis, a living theatre makes and unmakes itself incessantly. And it appears on the surface in temporary islands which never coincide with the expected images.

In this process, to create becomes synonymous with to choose. The artisan's experience coincides with the ability to recognize the choices which impose themselves through their strength and to know how to follow these choices, ceasing to chase one's own preliminary plans.

Also *Ur-Hamlet*, like all Eugenio Barba's productions, is political, that is, brutal. His initial intention was to end with the Danish Prince's proclamation of nine rules of good government:



Men and women submit to fear, money and pleasure. Terrifying violence, plenty of money and the offer of pleasure are the three main tools of government.

A ruler must be loved for his good government. He must therefore entrust the practice of misgovernment to a reliable minister.

A reliable minister must know how to perform secretly his ruler's infamous orders and be ready to suffer openly the rigour of his ruler's justice if his misdeeds come to light.

If you are weak don't stoop to compromise. If you want to weaken the enemy, offer your hand and make a pact.

Never respect a pact. Don't allow your adversary time not to respect it.

Be loyal, but only towards yourself.

If you torture a man, don't kill him. Free him and he will be your dog. If you torture a woman, kill her.

Never be unfair. Be inscrutable. Perversity is inscrutable. Injustice is not.

Betrayal cannot be avoided. Betray, before being betrayed.

Barba cuts these rules out of the script in the name of an iron law of the theatre: when there are too many words to listen to, the spectator doesn't see. But the spirit of those words pervades his whole performance.

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## *Due Visioni dell'Odin Teatret*

PIERGIORGIO GIACCHÈ\*

**Abstract.** This article tries to give a synthetic and sympathetic view on the Odin Teatret. The great innovation introduced by Eugenio Barba and his team in the story of theatrical forms is the building of a living theatre (the Third Theatre), which combines life and art. This kind of theatre is based on the freedom of the actor inside a group, but also on various modes of interaction and of collaboration. In order to describe the group dynamics in the Odin Teatret, the concept of vicinity is introduced here: vicinity of the actors during the exercises and the performances, vicinity with the spectators and links of the theatrical act with the global pulsations of humanity.

**Keywords:** Third Theatre, life, art, group theatre, vicinity.

### *Veduta aerea*

Il teatro appartiene al tempo presente e allo spazio contingente, e di quel tempo-spazio è prigioniero nonostante le memorie degli attori e le testimonianze degli spettatori... Il teatro certo lascia dietro di sé ricordi e repertori, ma fuori dalla sua "improvvisa-azione" non è più "teatro in vita": non è più il luogo di un farsi vedere e veder fare uniti nello stesso attimo, pur se scompartiti fra due diversi attori... E non importa poi se uno si chiama spettatore e solo l'altro si prende il nome e la parte dell'attore. O almeno importa sempre meno da quando la relazione si è fatta più stretta, da quando il prodotto spettacolare non nasconde più il suo processo creativo, da quando il suo avvenimento aspira a diventare una sempre nuova "manifestazione" che intende o pretende di superare l'antica "rappresentazione".

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Forse non tutti i teatranti si riconoscono in questa tendenza, ma anche chi recita "all'antica" sa di doverci fare i conti: dalle più prudenti riforme della scena alle più impudenti forme di happening (di ieri) e performances (di oggi) tutte convengono su una definizione di teatro a metà fra la Relazione e l'Evento, a prescindere da quanto si vuole "povera" la prima o da quanto si vorrebbe "ricco" il secondo. Insomma, a dispetto della resistenza di fin troppi teatri tradizionali, lo sanno tutti che dai testi di Artaud e poi dai tempi del Living non ci si può più accontentare della natura morta di una rappresentazione dal vivo ma si deve entrare nell'affresco di un "teatro vivente", dove si fondono e si confondono l'Arte e la Vita.

E la vita per davvero ha soltanto il presente e il contingente come dimensioni: soprattutto quella vita "finta" che si accende e si spegne secondo la logica e la lingua dell'apparizione e della sparizione, che a loro volta sono il trucco della visione teatrale e l'anima dell'azione scenica...

Fra gli esempi che hanno dato coscienza e poi addirittura fatto scienza di questa vita dell'arte o arte della vita, l'Odin Teatret ha un posto di tutto riguardo, sia per i meriti accumulati che per i metodi diffusi. Per di più, con una durata e un'estensione che è il primo paradosso che lo caratterizza, visto che il *tempo presente* dell'Odin dura ormai da cinquant'anni e lo *spazio contingente* attraversato dal suo teatro misura molti giri del mondo. L'Odin ha dunque avuto tutto il tempo e si è preso tutto lo spazio per sperimentare una Presenza e una Contingenza che è stata "motore" di tanti spettacoli e insieme "modello" di molti altri teatri.

Forse solo nel caso dell'Odin la forma d'arte scenica è sempre corrisposta alla formula organizzativa che la sorregge e la partorisce. "Teatro di gruppo" si chiamava una volta: non una qualunque compagnia d'attori, ma un connubio così stretto tra il teatro da fare e le persone che lo fanno, da diventare insieme metodo d'arte e stile di vita. E però i "gruppi" nascono e crescono diversamente dalle già sperimentate "comuni", dove la fusione rischiava la confusione: la ricetta dell'Odin al contrario consiglia di mettere in comune il mestiere ma non tutta l'esistenza, istituendo permeabili ma ferme frontiere fra il lavoro collettivo e il progetto individuale.

Erano gli anni Settanta e stava finendo (male o bene) la febbre e la moda della rivoluzione politica, e chi si rifugiava in cultura o si impegnava nell'arte stava passando dalla velleità dell'*alternativa* alla verità dell'*alterità*. Per il teatro le cose erano più facili, dato che "essere altro" è nella sua costituzione, mentre le tentazioni dell'agit-prop lo avevano ridotto a strumento di comunicazione. Per il teatro poteva allora essere sufficiente rivendicare la

sua autonomia dalla Società e perfezionarla in isolamento, ma poi era anche necessario che il tema sociale rientrasse dalla finestra e magari un pubblico si affollasse sulla porta. Insomma un isolamento ma in movimento, qualcosa come un'isola galleggiante!

E, come si sa, fu questa la soluzione che Eugenio Barba propose al suo e agli altri gruppi di un "Terzo teatro" che non era ancora un nuovo "teatro di ricerca", ma l'improvvisa emersione di un vasto movimento di attori e registi e tecnici autodidatti "alla ricerca di teatro". Un fenomeno "altro" perfino rispetto all'ordinaria alterità del mondo del teatro: per esempio si collocava fuori dalla storica divisione e discussione fra Tradizione e Avanguardia per aprire invece una "terza via" che le aggirasse o le conquistasse entrambe.

Dall'alto dell'esperienza e sapienza di Barba e dell'Odin Teatret, i gruppi teatrali apparivano davvero come molte e disperse isole, dove si andava concentrando un'imprevista vocazione teatrale, intesa come voglia di imparare un mestiere e fretta di indossarlo come un'identità.

L'Odin in fondo era stata ed era ancora una di queste isole, ma – forse perché primogenita e forse perché vichinga – aveva da subito cominciato a "galleggiare", cioè a navigare avanti e indietro dall'isolamento del processo creativo alla pubblicità del prodotto artistico, dall'intimità della fabbrica del teatro al mercato pubblico dello spettacolo...

La formula dell'Odin ha fatto scuola e forse fatto moda, ma infine era tutta qui: le isole galleggianti devono saper proteggere gelosamente la *vita* dell'arte ma anche riconoscere le leggi e i costi della sua *sopravvivenza*. La si sarebbe detta – in quella fine degli anni Settanta – una blanda proposta riformista dopo tante scelte o mosse rivoluzionarie, ed in effetti quella della ritirata *politica* dall'alternativa per la difesa *culturale* dell'alterità del teatro è stata proprio una "riforma": forse l'ultima riforma utile ed umile che conclude la storia – tutta "riformista" – del teatro contemporaneo.

Ad alcuni sembrerà fuori luogo e fuori tempo sottolineare il successo culturale del "terzo teatro" e le adesioni e imitazioni e conversioni di tanti attori di mezza Europa e di mezza America alla formula di vita e perfino alla forma d'arte dell'Odin Teatret. Ma se – ancora oggi – il mestiere d'attore (e il piacere dello spettatore) ha a che fare (e vedere) con il teatro, è anche per merito o per colpa sua. Forse troppa acqua è passata sotto i ponti perché ci si ricordi della fertile inondazione di cultura teatrale prodotta dalla presenza e attività del "teatro di gruppo". Eppure quel fenomeno di base ha funzionato per anni da amplificatore delle pratiche e delle teorie che venivano dal vertice dei grandi maestri dell'arte scenica del Novecento.

E in mezzo, a fare trasmissione o missione (pensatela come volete), l'Odin Teatret ha tenuto banco ovvero mantenuto il suo posto di guardia. E di guida. Avrebbe potuto ascendere fra i teatri più grandi? Avrebbe dovuto discendere fino a sparire fra i teatri più piccoli? L'Odin ha scelto di posizionare in mezzo al mare di tutti i teatri la sua isola, diventando una nave-scuola dove imbarcare tutti, maestri e allievi. Ha scelto di aprire a tanti il suo arsenale di Holstebro e di barattare tutto con tutti durante il suo navigare. Ha scelto un ruolo utile e umile non per generosità eccessiva verso i troppi candidati al teatro, terzo o ultimo che fosse... Non conta e non contava per l'Odin la quantità politica del movimento dei teatranti, ma valeva e vale ancora la qualità culturale del mutamento del teatro: la scommessa sulla sua "differenza" e la sfida della sua resistenza dentro e contro la società dello spettacolo o peggio lo spettacolo della società. E infine – o meglio al principio – l'Odin ha posto e proposto l'invenzione della diversità "antropologica" dell'attore e la scoperta dell'alterità "etica" della sua arte della vita.

Niente di che. Niente altro che una piccola, antica, gratuita "aggiunta" che contrasta con lo scorrere delle mode e il trascorrere della quotidianità. Ma infine quanto basta per ostinarsi a vivere in un'isola galleggiante, anche dopo che l'arcipelago del terzo teatro era andato alla deriva (diviso fra chi si è felicemente incagliato nella terra ferma dei *consumi* di prima o seconda scelta, e chi è affondato nel quarto stato del teatro addetto ai *servizi*...).

Soltanto l'Odin Teatret – adesso si può dire – ha mantenuto la sua rotta, continuando a esplorare isole di teatro sia nella geografia che nella storia, disegnando cartografie e descrivendo antropologie di un suo vasto e perenne *theatrum mundi*. Soltanto l'Odin fa ancora scalo e spettacolo in porti piccoli o lontani, e se talvolta gli capita di passare in teatri famosi e festival lussuosi, è per via di un prestigio accumulato e valorizzato in proprio, come eccezione alla regola mondana del mutuo riconoscimento o dello scambio del complimento. Non è che non abbia bisogno di compromessi e di compravendite, ma il fatto è che non ha tempo da perdere né spazio cui intenda rinunciare. E' così che – per così dire "fuori dal giro" eppure sempre "alla ricerca" – la massa di corrispondenze e la rete di connessioni che l'Odin Teatret è riuscito a mettere in moto non ha uguali nel panorama spazio-temporale degli ultimi cinque decenni – tanti quanti sono quelli del suo imminente compleanno!

L'abbiamo già detto: il tempo presente dell'Odin Teatret è diventato un tempo così lungo da meritare davvero quell'augurio di "lunga vita!" che si fa appunto ai Re. E il secondo paradosso dell'Odin è forse proprio quello di ritrovarsi in solitaria *monarchia* dopo aver cercato e in parte creato la più larga *democrazia* teatrale che sia mai stata perseguita. Certo, il termine può

dar luogo a equivoci, ma la politica non c'entra e nemmeno l'estetica: si tratta invece di una proposta di centralità e libertà dell'attore, si tratta dell'*ethos* come costume e valore di una professione sempre da riscattare e sempre da rieducare.

La pedagogia è in effetti l'attività dominante e ininterrotta che l'Odin non ha mai smesso di praticare per sé e per gli altri: è il terreno principale e il cielo di riferimento della sua "etica", viene prima e dopo e durante ogni spettacolo, è l'ambito di studio e l'ambiente di lavoro insieme più riservato e più aperto. Moltissimi sono gli attori e registi e critici e studiosi che hanno frequentato l'Odin Teatret condividendo quell'ambito e quell'ambiente. Moltissimi sono stati e sono ancora gli incontri, gli stages, i convegni, le scuole di antropologia teatrale e le università di teatro eurasiatico. Il profitto di tutto questo lo si legge nei libri e lo si è visto nelle scene (e ciascuno può valutarlo da sé), ma il vero patrimonio accumulato è un prezioso ed esteso tessuto di relazioni dirette. O autentiche come si dice in antropologia. O infine relazioni ravvicinate del "terzo" tipo, come si può dire nel caso dell'Odin...

### *Vista ravvicinata*

Cinquant'anni di isolamento e di galleggiamento hanno dimostrato anche ai più scettici che davvero un teatro può costituirsi e resistere come una comunità di attori che si danno norme e valori e comportamenti "etici" cioè professionali, e su quel "terreno di cultura" attivano e consumano tutte le loro intense, dirette, autentiche relazioni.

Questo è il motivo per cui l'Odin va visto e preso da vicino. In tutti i sensi in cui si intende e si usa il modo o il metro della "vicinanza".

L'alleanza e l'amicizia con gli altri teatri è solo il primo segno e senso di questa vicinanza. Ne abbiamo già parlato ma non si è sottolineata abbastanza la novità e l'efficacia di questo atteggiamento, così diverso rispetto alle gelosie e concorrenze e polemiche che da sempre dividono i teatri. Forse solo il Living Theatre ha mostrato un'analogia apertura, ma piuttosto verso il sociale e per un'azione politica, mentre l'Odin Teatret ha inaugurato una modalità di accoglienza, di scambio e infine di "dono" tutto professionale o addirittura si è inventato "baratti" di forme espressive, narrative, spettacolari con la gente che incontrava nelle sue tournée.

Così il teatrale è diventato il modo ma anche il luogo di incontro con il sociale, e mentre l'Odin si arricchiva di antiche tradizioni e di nuove alimentazioni, il pubblico – contemporaneamente ospitale e ospitato – passava addirittura dalla prossimità alla somiglianza, dalla fruizione di uno spettacolo alla condivisione dell'arte scenica.

C'è una scena più grande della scena, un cerchio rituale e virtuale che può ospitare molte situazioni e tutte le relazioni: dovunque va e con chiunque si incontri, l'Odin Teatret cerca di occupare tutto lo spazio contingente e tutto il tempo presente: le sue "parate" non sono cortei ma allestimenti di un circo invadente che traveste tutto e investe tutti in una scena indefinita, illimitata. La vicinanza sta in questo abbraccio che non elimina i ruoli tra attori e spettatori ma li confonde nella stessa "festa". Una festa o un *festuge* che è per l'Odin il contrario ma anche il superamento dell'happening: tutti insieme, ma salvando le differenze tra attori e spettatori, salvando cioè l'autonomia ma anche l'egemonia del teatro.

Ma prima di rivelarsi causa del "rituale" la legge della vicinanza è conseguenza della pratica "teatrale". Lo spettacolo dell'Odin Teatret non nasce in una scena e non viene proposto in un teatro: i luoghi del suo prodursi e poi proporsi sono diversi da quelli canonici e condizionano prima gli attori e poi gli spettatori a una prossimità perfino esasperata.

Nell'arsenale di Hostelbro non ci sono scene ma "sale" – rosse e bianche e nere – che si propongono come spazi interamente a disposizione degli attori e dei loro movimenti e mutamenti. Come nuotando in vasche di terra e d'aria, ogni attore cerca la sua dinamica e tesse una prossemica avvertendo insieme la libertà e il limite della sua danza. "Attore che danza" è stato definito quello dell'Odin, e in qualche modo la situazione o la dotazione di una non-scena sta all'origine di questa sua peculiarità: ciascuno in effetti danza, ovvero prende le misure e sceglie le variazioni che lo spazio gli permette o gli suggerisce. Uno spazio limitato e però senza limiti così come il tempo può essere breve ma infinito se vale la legge della vicinanza e il modo della danza, che è pur sempre il trucco e il ritmo di un movimento libero e continuo anche dentro un solo metro e anche in mezzo a tutti gli altri attori.

E' infine sempre in queste "sale" che si alternano e poi si succedono i momenti costitutivi del "lavoro", che vanno dall'allenamento dell'attore al montaggio dello spettacolo. In mezzo, le ricerche e le improvvisazioni di ciascuno e le dinamiche e combinazioni di tutti con tutti, fanno sì che la *creazione* dello spettacolo viaggi in parallelo alla *crescita* dell'attore. Malgrado le distinzioni di tempi e di ruoli e la formale dittatura del regista, la crescita dell'attore e la creazione dell'opera sembrano la stessa cosa.

Quello che è certo è che lentamente e progressivamente la sala si trasforma in scena man mano che cresce la coreografia dei movimenti e dei mutamenti degli attori, forse prima ancora che il montaggio definitivo intervenga ad assegnare il posto di ciascuno ed a disegnare il percorso di tutti. Quello che

è certo è che infine il disegno di questa scena si proietta sempre sulla totalità di una sala che resta lo spazio dove l'attore è sovrano e il pubblico non sembra nemmeno previsto. E così è o almeno così è sembrato a molti spettatori dei primi grandi spettacoli dell'Odin Teatret.

Chi ha visto lo spettacolo rivelazione dell'Odin o anche soltanto le fotografie di *Min Fars Hus*, si sarà accorto che il pubblico era insieme invitato e intruso: la "sala-scena" non solo aveva annullato ogni possibile frontalità (che, inutile dirlo, non è la rottura di una convenzione ma una rivoluzione copernicana insopportabile per molti spettatori) ma non aveva modo di collocare il pubblico se non nel suo margine e come suo confine. Era come se si fosse stati invitati alle prove generali di uno spettacolo non ancora messo in scena; era come se si fosse deciso di accogliere un folto vicinato da sistemare alle pareti della propria "casa del padre".

Ecco, un vicinato chiamato a raccolta per rendere pubblica ma mantenere intima una propria tragica storia. Un vicinato che deve tirar fuori gli occhi e gli altri sensi, ma ritirare o stringere il resto del corpo, sia per regalare posto ad altri vicini e sia per non rubare spazio all'attore. Si dirà che con gli spettacoli successivi la corona del pubblico si sistema e si struttura, ma sentirà di far parte di una scenografia o di una macchinaria che lo include e insieme lo esclude. Ne *Il Vangelo di Oxyrhincus* gli attori che danzano si spostano anche alle spalle di un pubblico che si specchia come avesse una sua parte in scena. Ma in realtà è ancora una volta la "sala di lavoro e di creazione" dell'Odin che si modifica, si estende oltre lo spettatore e – bontà sua – gli offre ricovero.

L'Odin va visto da "vicino" oppure non si vede: talvolta le facce degli attori si impongono in primo piano e i loro corpi arrivano a sfiorare gli astanti. Qualcuno ha parlato di cinema ma non è esatto; qualcun altro ha giurato di avvertire il fascino o il fastidio di rumori e odori e sudori fin troppo forti, ma non è vero. La sfida dell'attore visto da vicino sta al contrario nel confermarsi distante e nell'esibire semmai la sua maschera, la sua corazza. La vicinanza è il microscopio che amplifica la differenza, e il primo piano visivo è illusione di un contatto che non c'è, mentre il campo lungo totale e corale del "ritratto di gruppo" si impone sempre anche quando ci sembra di non vederlo mai.

Così la vicinanza è una sfida per lo spettatore, che misura la bravura degli attori dell'Odin proprio nella loro capacità di apparire lontani mentre si mostrano vicini. E intanto di essere sempre tutti insieme, malgrado si possa vedere e si debba seguire sempre uno solo, uno per volta.



Visti tutti insieme da lontano – come capita quando l’Odin sceglie la frontalità e sale su un palcoscenico d’ordinanza – lo spettacolo diventa magari più generoso o più festoso ma meno efficace. Il pubblico torna al suo posto e riprende il suo vizio e il suo giudizio; l’attore magari danza davvero, come ne *Il libro delle danze*, ma la densità della sfida e la profondità della relazione si attutisce.

In effetti, l’Odin si mette in mostra su un palco solo quando dà spettacolo di sé e non dell’altro: quando cioè l’attore mostra la sua abilità o la sua ricerca o la sua storia. Magari interpreta anche uno o più personaggi, ma come se fossero le sue maschere. Invece non conviene credergli: nell’Odin Teatret la maschera è l’attore, mentre il personaggio – negli spettacoli in cui davvero fa testo e prende corpo – è indossato per finta mentre si nasconde dentro il grande corpo dello spettacolo.



Performance *Ego Faust* with Theatrum Mundi Ensemble. From left Julia Varley, Torgeir Wethal and Augusto Omolú, Bologna, 2000. Photo Fiora Bemporad

Chi guarda l'attore da vicino non lo sente "in parte", ma lo vede eseguire uno spartito d'opera, affollata di personaggi e affidata all'intera orchestra dell'Odin. Le figure e le storie dei vari personaggi emergeranno allora gradualmente, come per magia ovvero per regia: è il regista il solo li possiede e li evoca in scena, ma attento a non disturbare la linearità e la ritmicità e il rigore di chi li sta danzando. E mascherando...

E' come se il "paradosso dell'attore" l'Odin lo volesse rendere sfacciatamente evidente: *mascherare* invece di *smascherare* per i cultori dell'autenticità e gli amanti della psicologia sembra una bestemmia, ma cambiando l'ordine degli addendi il risultato non cambia. E il teatro spesso ci guadagna. L'Odin Teatret non gioca sulla trasparenza ma sull'opacità: in fondo anche le leggi pre-espressive della "sua" Antropologia Teatrale non servono a rivelare l'anima ma a rafforzarne la presenza, così come la seconda natura dell'attore e il suo mettersi "in forma" e "in vita" riguarda lo scheletro e non le viscere.

Ma allora, dov'è il cuore? Dove il senso e quel che più conta il suo "sentimento"?

Finalmente la vicinanza è – per lo spettatore – una prova di paziente ma infine gratificante attesa: la danza non è l'opposto ma il sinonimo di una densità che infine emerge al di là del mestiere che la copre. Torgeir ne *Le ceneri di Brecht* conta i passi del suo viaggiatore e batte sui tasti della macchina dello scrittore: gioca con i segni esteriori del personaggio ma lo fa "di persona", ovvero con tutta l'intensità di un rapporto che travalica il mestiere. Non sarà mai Brecht ma al contrario lascerà trapelare qualcosa di sé, dei suoi viaggi e pensieri e ferite. E tutto questo senza darlo a vedere e però non potendo evitare di farlo sentire. Intanto, attorno a lui, ogni altro attore dell'Odin fa la stessa cosa: si può dire davvero che "fa la sua parte". E fuori campo e dietro il testo, anche Eugenio Barba ha preventivamente nascosto il suo pensiero, seppellito un suo segreto.

Allora, man mano che l'esecuzione e la narrazione si intrecciano, man mano che la regia si svolge e l'attore vi si avvolge, viene a galla il senso e viene in gola il nodo, certamente diverso per ciascun spettatore. Talvolta non la sera dello spettacolo, ma solo il giorno dopo. Talvolta non la prima volta, ma alla seconda replica o alla terza occasione che si ha di vedere lo stesso spettacolo.

L'ultimo significato o l'ultima norma della vicinanza è infatti la frequenza. Bisogna stare vicino all'Odin più volte, bisognerebbe guardare ogni spettacolo più volte. Infine, se facessimo un'inchiesta, ciascun spettatore direbbe che il migliore spettacolo dell'Odin Teatret è quello che ha visto più volte degli altri.

A me è capitato con il *Brecht*, che ho avuto occasione di accompagnare in una lunga tournée, ma certo non è privilegio di tutti quello di stare così a lungo vicino a un lavoro e addirittura dentro il lavoro. Ma questa eccezione serve a spiegare come in realtà la vicinanza abbia senso solo se acquista la sostanza di una interessata convenienza.

Tradotta per ogni spettatore occasionale, vale come una regola di scambio reciproco, di continuo dare e ricevere un dono. Insomma – anche per chi lo vede una sola volta da vicino – l’Odin va preso come uno scambio oppure non si prende.

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*Something is rotten... not only in the state of Denmark.*  
*Odin Teatret and The Chronic Life*

ANNELIS KUHLMANN\*

**Abstract.** This paper provides an extended analysis of *The Chronic Life*, the latest big theatre performance with the ensemble of Odin Teatret, started in 2011. We take into account evident issues of the play, such as war or peace, time, vulnerability, instability, but also subtler ones, such as the blindness. The blindness is, at the first level, a metaphor of the human condition (the “chronic life”), and, at a second level, it is a way to engage a debate on the theatrical practice. In this performance, the blindness of the performers is used to emphasize the importance of both physical and inner visualising in acting. In the meta-discourse built by Eugenio Barba with *The Chronic Life*, blindness appears as a metaphor for the constant and unpredictable search in art. This paper focuses also on the great number of multicultural allusions in Barba’s performance: allusions to precedent shows by Odin Teatret, political problems, musical mixtures, historical references, etc.

**Keywords:** *The Chronic Life*, Odin Teatret, blindness, re-search, meta-discourse, war, peace.

The reformulation of Shakespeare’s line from *Hamlet* (act I, sc. 4) can here be seen as a persisting protest against the silenced victims in struggles for human rights from one of the longest still existing theatre laboratories in the world, Odin Teatret. The state of Denmark has here been transformed through a theatre performance and echoes the local and the global situation of the vulnerability of life through the sonority of lamentation. Sadness has been turned into an artistic enunciation with a joyful and light spirit of

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hope inside! It is in many ways a remarkable construction, which can be seen in the production *The Chronic Life*, the latest big theatre performance with the ensemble of Odin Teatret. The performance was opened in August 2011.

On the one hand the spectator sees a world theatre, which in close to five decades has been significantly inspired by the medieval theatrical form, *Theatrum Mundi*, with very inclusive stage principles. This world theatre has its base in the town Holstebro in the Western part of Jutland, a region located away from conventional notions of a cultural centre like for instance the capital of Copenhagen. This region has historically been perceived as a relatively poor province, where stronger almost fundamentalist religious directions of the Lutheran Church were rooted in larger parts of the local population. This is how the inherited image of the society around Holstebro looked until the beginning of the 1960s. Little by little this condition became more diverse, partly thanks to the collaboration between the leading local politicians in the municipality of Holstebro and the staff at Odin Teatret. But while being home in this context, the ensemble still tours a great part of the year with the whole world as its performance space.

On the other hand *The Chronic Life* is characterized by being an art work with the theme of globalization as the actual world concept imbedded in the narrative of the production but with many references to Danish national self understanding and to the cultural heritage in Denmark. The question of how a cultural destiny can destabilize traditional movements as well as more radical directions is a theme among the Danes, as well as we see it in the surrounding world. The classical dichotomy of the local and global is lifted up in the performance into a third way of looking, so that the humanistic way of treating mankind is the overall agenda.

The most recent ensemble theatre production by Odin Teatret, *The Chronic Life* (Danish: *Det Kroniske Liv*, 2011), in many ways exemplifies how the theatre understands its own practice and purpose, time, and history. It also developed at a point when the director explicitly wanted to break with a number of the ensemble's regular means of expression. After almost fifty years one might expect that one of the longest working theatre groups in the world would look to the past, but with *The Chronic Life* Odin Teatret has instead decided to use a retrospective way in order to look towards the future.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Director and dramaturgy: Eugenio Barba. Text: Ursula Andkjær Olsen. Dramaturg: Thomas Bredsdorff. Literary consultant: Nando Tavian. Lights: Odin Teatret, Jesper Kongshaug. Stage design: Odin Teatret, Jan de Neergaard, Antonella Diana. Music: Odin Teatret, traditional and modern melodies. Costumes: Odin Teatret and Jan de Neergaard. Technicians: Fausto Pro, Raúl Iáza, Pierangelo Pompa, Ana Woolf.

The title, *The Chronic Life*, suggests an insistent and vulnerable energy, which is characteristic of the way in which the performance tests its strength against time – time being understood here as a time of conflicts and globalisation, as well as time of tenderness, fidelity, reminiscence and searching. The performance also works with the actors' time as an artistic chronicle of living with spectators for almost half a century. It shows time as a form of disappearing act and highlights this loss in a global and local community in which suffering and the fading of love are traced in the family album of the theatre.

In *The Chronic Life* major issues like time, vulnerability, instability and blindness have an impact on three basic questions that I would like to explore over the following pages. First of all, how does the performance transmit these issues as themes and as form? Secondly, how does Odin Teatret transmit its history through the theme and the form of the performance? And, finally, how do the sender and object in the encounter with the spectators articulate an artistic autobiography of the theatre director?

### *A montage story of the archive of eyes*

*The Chronic Life* is based on the principles of montage. It tells the stories of a number of different individual destinies which, according to the programme, unfold around the year 2031, and which work as a form of collective mourning and longing in a dystopian post European third civil war, where people from different areas are searching for lost father figures in their lives. The social conflicts as they appear in the performance provide a chaotic and oppressive backdrop for the black virgin (Iben Nagel Rasmussen), the widow of a Basque officer – in reality a terrorist (Kai Bredholt), the Chechen refugee (Julia Varley), the Romanian housewife (Roberta Carreri), the Faroese rock musician (Jan Ferslev), the Danish attorney (Tage Larsen), and two mercenary soldiers (Donald Kitt and Fausto Pro).

A blind Columbian boy (Sofia Monsalve) meets the mentioned characters in Europe, where he has arrived in order to find his lost father. They all tell him to stop searching, but in vain. While serving a symbolic last supper for her son (a puppet dressed in the same way as the boy), the Basque widow tells him about the five men she loved, and whose corpses she washed. After a short while the blind boy takes the place of the puppet, and through the widow's narration about her dead husband and father of her son, a connection is created between the widow's son and the Latin American boy.

By the end of the performance all the older characters in the ensemble who were originally identified by a particular instrument have been forced to hand over their musical instruments to the mercenary soldiers, while the black virgin seemingly has cut out her tongue and lost language as a means of expression. Together these individuals form a silent tableau, which can be viewed as a glimpse of or homage to theatre history with its allusions to the final image of Vsevolod Meyerhold's production of *The Government Inspector* (1926), and similarly it provides a clear caesura in the rhythm of the performance.

After this turning point yet another alter ego appears: the blind violinist (Elena Floris), who is also dressed exactly like the boy searching for his father. This marks yet another turning point in the narrative since the Colombian boy who was blind can now see and it is the violinist who is portrayed as blind. The violinist plays notes that evoke nostalgia for vital love stories in the chronic life. However, the musical passages from the last choir of Beethoven's *9th Symphony*, Schiller's poem "An die Freude" and Mendelssohn's *Wedding March* all contain elements of festivity and hope for the future. However, the playing of what are usually joyful melodies, here in the minor key makes one question the notion of happiness. "An die Freude" was on several occasions used as a kind of hymn to freedom, but in this performance it mingles with Chopin's Funeral March. The two young boys come together at the end and close the performance with carefree laughter as they exit – as if defying death. They appear together and disappear as final projections of one boy's search in life for his father – a search which may be seen as meta-theatrical discourse within the performance, where lightness overcomes death, when one recalls the results from our ancestors. The performance may be perceived as an embodiment of a key to unlock the world of darkness, which here means to continue to explore relationships in the theatrical space.

Another notable feature of *The Chronic Life* is the multitude of references to the heritage of the actor's and director's craft. This testimony had a very strong impact at the end of the performance, when from my perspective the blind violinist apparently set out to help the searching boy find new modes of existence on the basis of the chronic life. It could be perceived as allusion to Alexander Pushkin's small tragedy *Mozart and Salieri* (1830), where the character of a blind violinist plays the seducing aria of *Don Giovanni* as a comment on the struggle between Mozart and Salieri over the authorship of the *Requiem*. Here, the violinist somehow renders the embedded veiled issues of gender and hegemony in art as a trans-national act of strategy, neglecting boundaries

caused by terror and wars. At one point, the husband of the Chechen refugee says to her: "You are the only country I want to belong to". To me this underlines the force of human relationship. "If music be the food of love, play on... and let it conquer death", – a slightly reformulated Shakespearean theatrical condition could here be seen as an artistic statement in the performance.

### *Disturbing questions of evidence*

Having seen *The Chronic Life* more than once, I continue to be disturbed by different "subterranean" dramaturgical signs (or "elusive order" to quote Eugenio Barba, 2010: 205) that I perceive in the performance. I was continuously struck by the blindness, which I experienced from different angles of the performance on a number of different levels.

For example, what seemed obvious in the main narrative of the boy looking for his dead father, turned out on another level to be something far less obvious although still very insistent. I here refer to the nature of this dimension of the performance as *evidence*. Not evidence as in a regular causality but *evidence as sight and insight*.

The narrative line with the Latin American boy looking for his dead father is the first very visible encounter with the theme of blindness. We can see that the character is not born blind. The boy's eyes are covered with round white patches of cotton suggesting an imposed blindness, as if someone had poked out his eyes, like Oedipus Rex who tore out his own eyes with his mother's brooches. The blindness, which prevents him from having an "outer gaze", is a cultural blindness. He can sense with his inner eye, or with the third eye, and in this way the blindness opens up the possibility of a vision beyond ordinary sight. This is the first indicator of the play's play on blindness, which I perceived as a sign of the director's secret, of Eugenio Barba's vision of the performance as a whole. As I saw the performance, the Nordic god Odin's blind eye was the view point taken by the director through his artistic life's trajectory.<sup>2</sup>

A pattern of fragmented dialogues takes place between blind people and their sighted informants. This offers the possibility to revel in the transcendent power of language, and it provides the relationship between actors and spectators with a specific coexistence. I think that this coexistence, in turn, makes the participants witness with both outer and inner gaze.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Nordic mythology the god Odin had only one eye. He is blind in order to achieve inner knowledge or sight, sometimes mentioned as the oedipism of Odin's eye. In *Edda* it says that Odin sacrificed his eye to gain wisdom of Ages and knowledge of time.



In European tradition the blind man represents the viewer. In ancient Greek tragedies it is always the blind who predicts the destiny of the hero. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (429 b. c. e.), this phenomenon has a poetic sharpness, since the blind man sees the real tragedy for Oedipus, and once Oedipus recognizes this, he pokes out his own eyes. For him the tragic acknowledgement demands that he shall see only the inner truth of this story, and stay blind for the outer representation of the matter. The myth of Oedipus Rex returns in many of Odin Teatret's performances. Barba even made a solo performance with this figure with the Catalan actor Toni Cots, *The Story of Oedipus* (1984-1990). In *Mythos* (1998-2005), another of Odin Teatret's performances, Oedipus appeared with the protagonists of the ancient myths in order to arrange a ceremony, the Great Funeral of the Revolution which was transformed into myth (see Andreasen 2000). In the ancient tragedy the blind viewer is generally characterised as someone who does not directly participate in the core of the myth of the tragedy, but is rather a representative of the one who predicts and witnesses the tragedy's fulfilling. Yet the blind character in *The Chronic Life* is a collective almost archetypal character, inclusively transforming the spectator's role into a character. As a matter of fact, all the characters in the performance at some point are blind, culminating in a collective blindness shortly before the significant caesura turning point and the entrance of the violinist, mentioned above.

If we keep the focus on the "major" character of the young boy, the performance holds a double perspective on blindness. One perspective concerns the boy's continuous search for his dead father. The other perspective refers to the director's comment on quality when considering art. Here the theatricality of the performance is proof of an act of living.

I think that, in this performance, the blindness of the performers is used to emphasize the importance of both physical and inner visualising in acting. Or to put it very simply: you would not search in the same way if you could already see, or you knew it all in advance. In *The Chronic Life*, blindness remains for me a metaphor for the constant and unpredictable search in art.

### *The performance as an eye-opener*

In this performance, the search in art unfolds as a series of sensual scenes: playfulness, loss, destruction, pain, death, longing, tenderness and love, as if they were all bricks in the collapsing house of conceptualised playing cards. The gaze is negotiated as the artistic vulnerability of a visual art, belonging to a particular heritage in theatre.

Since, at the end of the performance, the boy meets his alter ego rather than his dead father; his journey can thus be interpreted as a re-search of memories about professional identity in the craft of the theatre artist. It may not exclusively refer to the theatre director in person; however one could possibly point out moments and scenes which refer to episodes of Eugenio Barba's personal life, which he has sometimes recounted at theatre gatherings and in the numerous books that he has written over the years. The fact that the boy in the performance finds his twin or alter ego is to me a sign of recognition and of finding oneself – in this case the identity of the searching artist. To me this moment of finding oneself refers to the artistic enunciation, where the performance can be seen as memoirs of the blind – here interpreted with reference to the director's artistic autobiography.<sup>3</sup> The performance avoids simply providing a recipe for searching and developing art, instead offering a kind of sharing de-creation (or metaxis) of a portrait of a particular life based on search in art. This search could not be determined as a linearity of direction in life, but more like an image of the serendipity of life in art. In a literal as well as figurative sense it is a performance that opens the eyes of the spectators. Eugenio Barba has expressed it in the way that "dramaturgy was also a method to find something I wasn't looking for" (Barba 2010: 205).

Here, the blindness is playing a major role in the way the montage of the performance manifests itself – and this is in my view the important part of what the director keeps in his professional memory to tell after all these years of life in a particular environment of theatre craft.

I see the memoir part of the director as a basic story of loss in art. But when we look upon this story from the spectators' view, I think we might recognize that the performance is also about heritage to the origins of searching. In this way, the New York based theatre researcher Diana Taylor's description of the archive as layers of repertoire seems an appropriate way to describe the performance (Taylor 2003: 16 ff). We witness an archive containing layers of search through the collective memory of acting in Odin Teatret. These layers express themselves through a repertoire of fragments from different performances through the years. In this sense one can see *The Chronic Life* as a production about witnessing, testimony, legacies and inheritances – both thematically and artistically. It is as if the performance sets out to tell how searching in theatre paradoxically requires a certain blindness.

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<sup>3</sup> I draw upon Jacques Derrida's *Memoirs of a blind* (1993). I use the question of organizability inside an artistic material, which points towards a critical perception.

In general, I have often wondered how a theatre director sees. Or: How do actors and theatrical space *look* to the eyes of a theatre director? But with *The Chronic Life* I have come to the conclusion that I should reformulate my question because of the specificity of the performance. My question has turned into a double hypothesis: a theatre direction of the *blind* is here a direction *of* the blind. Consequently I am investigating the blindness of the theatre director in his intentionally “elusive order” or dramaturgy. This makes me want to pose the paradoxical question: How does the director turn his blindness into evidence as insight for the spectator of the performance? This paradox of how to make the invisible perceptible has been one of the central tasks in Eugenio Barba’s craftsmanship as a theatre director.

### *The Life Nerve*

If we leave the theme of blindness for a moment and look at the framing of the performance, there is the obvious idea of blood pulsating, which forms an artificial band that opens and closes the theatrical space around *The Chronic Life*.

In the beginning, the shimmer from a band of light is intensified, and looks like a stylized artery running below the audience space on the two banks on each broadside of the playing space. Towards the end of the performance, the performing space is transformed into a zone demarcated by a characteristic red and white plastic band like the ones used in police investigations.

Furthermore, during the performance we hear the pulsating sound of a heart as if it were an audible electro-cardiogram of the chronic life. Like a musical sub-bass in the polyphony of voices, the pulse often creates a complementary relation to the visual side of the performance. For example, we see (and hear) the incessant melting of a block of ice hanging from a spring and dripping into a soldier’s helmet. The drips can be correlated to loss of blood in war, and associated with the last pulse of a butchered victim or the natural catastrophe of the Polar thaw. By the end, these drops have become a rain curtain of life-giving force to the earth.

With the artery and the demarcation as framing metaphors, the level of interpretation also contains an artistic exploration of space with special care for the presence of life and nerves of the audience.

When we perceive the blindness in these frames of the performance, it becomes visible that the blind characters draw lines with their extrovert outward looking at the spectators. These lines do not construct a mimetic of what they see. They establish a communication on a representation of the

invisible, the boundaries that we create between the body and its surroundings, between subject and object. This is to say that the spectators get involved in the enunciation of the performance as utterance, as if the question of freedom of expression resonates with the spectators through the act of seeing.

It is written in the programme that the performance is dedicated to the memory of two Russian women, Anna Politkovskaya and Natalia Estemirova, "writers and human rights activists, murdered by anonymous thugs in 2006 and 2009 for their opposition to the Chechen conflict".

In *The Chronic Life*, memorising those who were made silent and disappeared involves revitalising the legacy of making a difference in theatre and in the world. In the art of theatre this is done through moving voices and bodies. So *the disappearing act* is an important theme in the fragments of the performance, and it carries a special message to the spectators – both on the content level and the formal sides of the performance.

When we relate the de-creation with the enunciation of the performance it is striking how the performance itself turns into an act of disappearing, recalling the tremendous loss of peoples in conflict zones.<sup>4</sup> On one level there is the death of the father; this is followed by the blind boy finding something other than that which he was looking for after overcoming numerous obstacles; finally there is the insight into art as an act of lived life. To sum up this argument, the theatrical appearance on the stage reveals a multi-layered disappearing act of blindness.

### *Marking a legacy*

Here the director uses the device of blindness as a tool to draw the spectator's gaze into the multi-layered labyrinth of the performance, his *elusive dramaturgy*. The blindness is here understood as the director's selection principles when developing the different levels of the performance.

My gaze was caught by the performance's invisible track of seeing with blind eyes as if lending us the god Odin's only eye. There is a perception device in this technique, when the spectator senses that the visuality is not like the architecture of a building, placed on earth, but de-created and dug

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<sup>4</sup> The act of disappearing signifies "the act of leaving secretly or without explanation". I here draw inspiration from Diana Taylor's book: *Disappearing Acts* (1997). The book is based on observations under "The dirty war" in Argentina during the years 1976-83, and the author has examined how national identity is shaped, gendered, and contested through spectacle and spectatorship. The disappearing acts also refer to the subversive power of the resistance of many performances under the military dictatorship of the time.

out as if like a cave or an empty grave. As if the performance displays a ground zero of its own. This impression is to my mind not random at all. It takes form from the structural side of the invisibility and blindness of the characters as well as the meta-structure of the embedded enunciation of the performance. The empty space (here understood as the coffin or the grave) has a direct relation to the death theme of the performance. The strategy of legacy of this literally seducing blindness is the point of departure for the major perception that I shall dig into in the following pages.

As it is often the case with Odin Teatret, the spectators surround its performance by sitting on two opposing tribunes as if on the banks of a roaring river, on which the scenic space is reminiscent of a raft. At one end of "the river" the black curtain of night allows single characters to slip through and from the darkness glimpses of memory appear in the form of some of the lost brothers and fathers, here represented by surreal, flat characters that look like images on playing cards flying through the air like cluster bombs. At the other end of "the river" we see a wooden wall from which meat hooks hang on iron chains. The hooks are used for both living and dead organisms throughout the performance.

The performing space between the spectators is neatly divided in two: two thirds of it consists of a wooden elevated platform which looks like a raft; the remaining space is just the floor of the venue where the performance takes place. In the middle of the raft stands a long low table covered by a white tablecloth and much of the action takes place around it. In the course of the action, what looks like a dinner table transforms itself into a bed, then into an entrance barred by a door, and finally reveals itself as a coffin of transparent glass. This space is like a hidden house of glass creating transitions and transparency for the performers. Towards the end, the coffin is an empty spatial entity of the lost father's son as if we are witnessing an inherited ghost. From the same coffin, however, we also see powerful figures who chronically defy several obstacles. One example is the blind boy who has been searching in the realm of death. At a certain point we witness him either resurrecting through a narrow slit in the white cross of the extra large Danish flag that covers the coffin, or as if he is reborn through the intervention of a caesarean section in a mother's womb. Death and national identity are here related in an image of doom; an image that is both mocked and reinforced through the singing of the Danish national football anthem for the European Championship with its repetitive lines "We are red, we are white, we stand side by side...", referring to the flag's white cross on the red cloth and to an

understanding of solidarity.<sup>5</sup> Several times the actors also sing the old romantic song *I skyggen vi vanke* ("In the Shadow we stumble") sometimes with a mechanical optimism in the physical movements of how to "vanke" (as the actors sing), other times emphasizing the shadow part. I have noticed that this technique of embedding national iconic clusters in the current work has been used in several of the previous performances by Odin Teatret. For example in *Andersen's Dream* (2004-11), where some of the still known historical songs were originally connected to the war of 1848-51 between Denmark and Germany concerning the Schleswig-Holstein region (for more info, see Kuhlmann: 2005).

### *Loss and Hope*

In *The Chronic Life* stories of loss paradoxically become stories of hope through meta-narrative action in constantly haltering imbalances and counter-pulsating movements. It is as if we are seeing a corporeal realisation of absence, which especially applies to the women as if they were an expression of Scheherazade's sisters using love stories in order to survive. A form of peeling off layers happens to the characters, which culminates in the meeting with a different reality as it is clearly seen in the boy's relation to the blind violinist.

Classical patterns of rejection by patriarchal cultures here become a variation on theatrical patriarchal dismantling. These are portrayed by the Chechen woman's shawl and countless skirts, the black virgin's sable dance, the Romanian housewife's intent attempts to polish the glass house and to suffocate herself with a plastic bag, and the Latin American boy's efforts to get beyond the door/lid on the table into the coffin.

The black virgin's returning melodic motif is the Danish poet Oehlenschläger's *I skyggen vi vanke* (1803), which becomes, in an example of natural romanticism with a contrasting effect, another layer of fiction in the

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<sup>5</sup> In 1992 this song became extremely popular in Denmark due to the national fever during the European Football Championship, which the Danish National team won. At the same time the Maastricht referendum took place, where the Danes voted "No" to the agenda. These issues were all mixed up, when the Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs at that time, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen (1982-93) would appear at the European Council of Ministers, wearing smart sunglasses, football socks and a hooligan scarf, pronouncing the demonstrative oxymoron, "If you can't join them, beat them". This presumably joking remark of intended fun had also a darker side, since it was the time of the Balkan war, in which Danish soldiers were participating, and new waves of refugees were coming to Denmark. So the so-called spirit of solidarity was now taking another symbolic shape of popular nationalism.

middle of a story of many losses. The Chechen woman speaks of her homeland: "The country where I was born had been at war so many years that I didn't know anyone who could remember days of peace." For generations her family has only known "death and loss and displacement" [...] "*So saieer hokka izabalje hazach a mohka*. I have been through ten, no... twenty countries and I have reached the border of wonderland. Here people eat without being hungry and drink without being thirsty. *Kuzach massua iraz doulush heta*. Here everybody seems to be happy".



Performance rehearsal *The Chronic Life*, dir. Eugenio Barba.  
Photo Tommy Bay, Odin Teatret Archives

This bitter irony is not to be mistaken. The characters continuously comment on the situation when singing Leonard Cohen's classic "Everybody knows..." The Romanian housewife, who tries in vain to kill herself, sings the gospel song "I wanna die easy, when I die..." and a moment later Louis Armstrong's "Oh, what a wonderful world". This song gives the performance

a special meaning, because even the blind will sing phrases like "I see skies of blue and clouds of white... Oh, what a wonderful world". When the Romanian housewife almost hysterically speed-cleans the transparent glass house, frantically breaking a cognac glass in her mouth and swallowing it, she accompanies her actions with the contrasting rhythm and tempo of the song "Amazing Grace". Most of the songs therefore offer a musical counterpoint.

The composition of the performance contains elements from several of Odin Teatret's previous productions: the ritual of the door refers to *Kaosmos* (1993-96), there is a nod to the limping way of walking in part of the female universe in *Brecht's Ashes II* (1982) and a reference to the thrown-away atonement money from *My Father's House* (1972-74). These have all become fundamental cultural expressions within the anthropological landscape created by Odin Teatret for *The Chronic Life*. The complexity of the discourse is here apparent as the resource of the theatrical legacy. The question of what is chronic is passed to the spectators through the pulsation of flowing blood and seen as a state of mind where even chaotic loss has a potential.

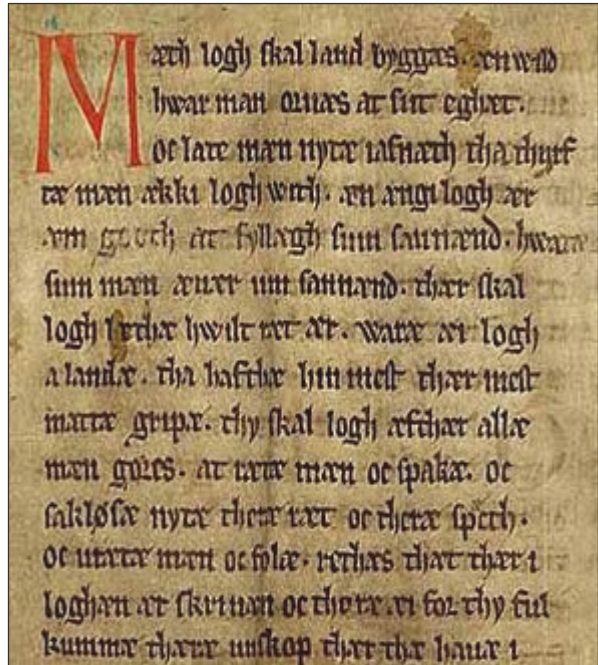
### *The Bubble as Contemporary Theatre*

At one point the Danish attorney sings: "Everybody knows, that the boat is leaking", the famous line from Leonard Cohen's song. This refers to the stage as an unsafe raft in a stormy ocean, but as elsewhere in the production it also works on a popular and metaphorical level. One thing is sure: it is not a safe place to inhabit. The story also establishes a distance of time, which in several ways makes *The Chronic Life* a very contemporary production. The collapse of a world subjected to political risks is here also a story of the life of the theatre, which sooner or later shall come to an end. The lost or disappeared father is a classic theme in theatre history and *The Chronic Life* certainly also offers an opportunity to understand the performance as a collective memory of the irretrievable past we all participate in. Odin Teatret in its third age integrates the stories of loss into the confused Danish image of a so-called "happy nation", and this image runs powerfully through all the characters' stories. The Danish attorney has a number of proverb-like lines, which, in the words of the younger poet Ursula Andkjær Olsen, draw on popular poetic idioms found in the sentence "Med lov skal land bygges" (with law a land is built). This sentence comes from the beginning of Jydske lov (the Code of Jutland – Codex Holmiensis), one of the oldest preserved written statutory laws of medieval Denmark, which to this day is written above the door of the Courthouse in Copenhagen.



To many Danes, this sentence is a given norm of what we almost blindly subscribe to in our society of civil legislation. In *The Chronic Life*, however, which demonstrates the obvious lack of rights of the suppressed peoples, this line has clear, comical and critical undertones. The word “law” has been replaced by a series of national and social conventional idioms and bits from popular Danish songs.

Sometimes it sounds as a satire over greedy selfishness, like one of the contemporary arguments often heard concerning the collapse of the



economical bubble. For instance the Danish attorney says: “Thank God, the time of crisis is over. Now begins the good life.” In the performance this rhymes with fragments of the unofficial law – “the Jantelov”<sup>6</sup> – and complacency is expressed as a chronic element in contemporary Danish society, when the attorney proclaims that, “the good life starts with a good home”. At the same time he asks: “With what must a land be built?” And he gives the answer himself through a silent satire of almost “profane” understatements of the Code of Jutland mentioned above: “With the traffic law. One way direction is the fundamental premise. He who wants to get ahead always has the right of priority, of full speed and of skeletons in the closet. Look ahead! Never look back! Always take the easy option! Keep your eye on the ball!”

In *The Chronic Life*, the Odin ensemble breaks with the stereotyped critique of petit bourgeois nationalism in a way that from a theatrical perspective also strips down several of the otherwise well-known expressions of the group. The performance is like a tornado breaking down the existing creative space, so thus making way for new forms of expression.

<sup>6</sup> Engl. “The law of Jante” goes back to the Danish-Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose’s novel *A Fugitive crosses his tracks* (Norwegian, 1933). This law implies a group behavior towards individuals within Scandinavian communities.

With *The Chronic Life* Odin Teatret puts global focus on the local – and equally a local focus on the global issues. This way of grasping the actual political situation frames the overall theme of the production about a human loss. This story is part of home of Odin Teatret in Denmark, but it is also an acknowledgement of a global tragedy. The rotten situation is here and everywhere. Thus, the performance treats at one side a dystopia. At the other side it also enacts a hope about a future that transforms the crisis in society without losing all values. The production takes these big issues as individual narratives in a montage and in this way the isolated and sometimes also the lonely human in a globalised age of time is produced with a scary sharpness.

In a theatre like Odin Teatret, where difference and otherness has been consistently staged for 50 years, it is quite natural that the fundamental and continuous expression of life also verbalizes itself at a time when the era of this theatre laboratory slowly draws to an end. The insistent and chronic life has become a performance about difference within a vision of the future where new forces must replace the old.

*With chronic life must theatre be build.*

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## *Beyond the network. Towards a rainbow-like theory\**

SELENE D'AGOSTINO\*\*

**Abstract.** This paper focuses on the importance of women in theatre, through the analysis of Transit. Transit is an international woman theatre festival organised by Julia Varley, actress at Odin Teatret since 1976. It takes place every two or three years, in Holstebro, within the premises of Odin Teatret, which supports its realisation. Each Transit festival focuses on a particular theme chosen by Julia Varley. Since 1992 several topics have framed the six festivals' editions: 1. Transit. Directors and the dynamic patterns of theatre groups. What are women proposing?; 2. Theatre – Women and Politics; 3. Theatre – Women – Generations; 4. Roots in Transit; 5. Stories to Be Told; 6. Theatre – Women – On the Periphery. The length of the festival varies from five to ten days of performances, workshops, lectures or symposium. The latest International Women's Theatre Festival Transit VII was held at Odin Teatret from 28<sup>th</sup> May to 9<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

**Keywords:** Julia Varley, Transit, festival, women, theatre.

In the white room at Odin Teatret in Holstebro (Denmark), in the afternoon of January 15<sup>th</sup> 2004, three women come in through three doors: a woman from the Mapuche tribe, a Balinese and a Berber woman. Seeing them together creates emotion. The impossible is made possible. The artistic meeting of three very different cultures and languages sing together on stage. Then a little boat sails with a small candle in it together with the spirit of women belonging to a nomad tribe of fisherman in Chilenian Patagonia. These women carry their homes with them by keeping a fire burning all the time. The fire turns their boats into a home. Voices of artists coming from faraway places,

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\* The quotation "rainbow-like theory" is taken from J. Varley, In Transit, in *The Magdalena Newsletter*, n. 10, March 1993, Cardiff, The Magdalena Project.

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both geographically and culturally, meet on a cold January day in Scandinavia. Outside, freezing gusts of wind and snow; inside the theatre, the warmth of the small flame in the boat. In this way, *Roots in Transit* began to unfold.

### *What are women proposing?*

Transit is an international women theatre festival organised by Julia Varley, actress at Odin Teatret since 1976. It takes place every two or three years, in Holstebro, within the premises of Odin Teatret, which supports its realisation. Transit Festival stems out of the need to become a bridge between generations offering the possibility for young artists to meet older experienced theatre artists. Transit functions internationally to give voice to the concerns of women working in theatre today and is practically and theoretically rooted in the Magdalena Project<sup>1</sup>. Each Transit festival focuses on a particular theme chosen by Julia Varley. Since 1992 several topics have framed the six festivals' editions: 1. Transit. Directors and the dynamic patterns of theatre groups. What are women proposing?; 2. Theatre – Women and Politics; 3. Theatre – Women – Generations; 4. *Roots in Transit*; 5. Stories to Be Told; 6. Theatre – Women – On the Periphery. The length of the festival varies from five to ten days of performances, workshops, lectures or symposium. The latest International Women's Theatre Festival Transit VII was held at Odin Teatret from 28<sup>th</sup> May to 9<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

The combination of my experience including the documentation I have read and reviewed, my firsthand experience of Transit and The Magdalena Project, the practical and theoretical connections I have forged, along with my research at Odin Teatret itself where Transit takes place, has enabled me to identify some of the motivations that underlie Transit's creation. Transit sprang first from Julia Varley's search for professional autonomy from Odin Teatret<sup>2</sup>. Subsequently, Transit emerged as a sign of homage, sharing an acquired knowledge that the work done previously in the Magdalena Project constituted

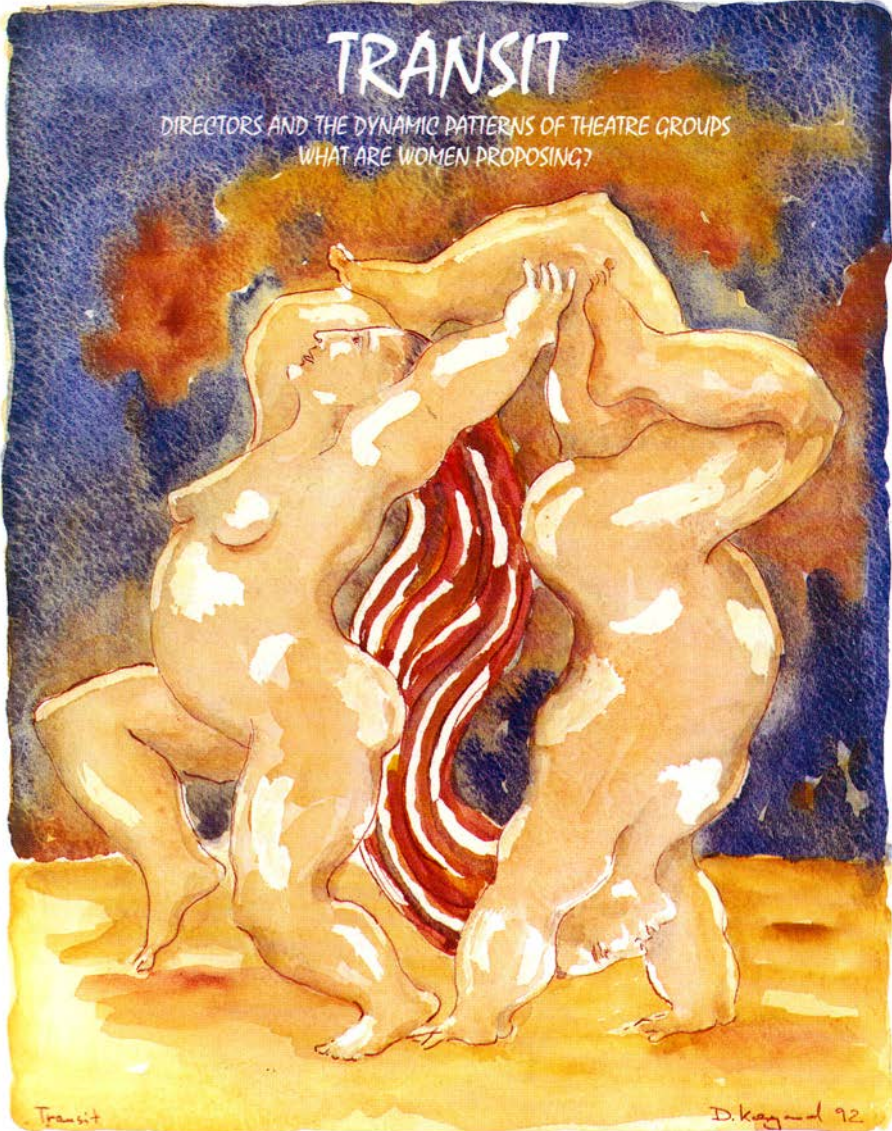
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<sup>1</sup> The Magdalena Project is a network of women in contemporary theatre founded by Jill Greenhalgh, Director and Lecturer in Performance Studies at the University of Aberystwyth (Wales), in 1986 in Cardiff. Since 1986 and currently The Magdalena Project spans more than 50 countries, with autonomous national groups organising festivals, gatherings and events on a regular basis.

<sup>2</sup> In *Marking the Way* (p. 244) she writes: "At the beginning, I participated in the Magdalena Project in search of some personal autonomy from Odin Teatret. Today, with Transit festival, *The Open Page*, and strong connections between The Magdalena network and Odin's tours, I can affirm that the Magdalena constitutes an important part of Odin Teatret's identity and vice versa".

BEYOND THE NETWORK

ODIN TEATRET - NORDISK TEATERLABORATORIUM  
HOLSTEBRO - DENMARK  
1.- 5. NOVEMBER 1992



AN INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL AND MEETING

Transit, Festival Programme, Holstebro, 1992

a collaborative working experience with common identity, an experience beyond comparison in the history of theatre. The Magdalena Project, despite originating from the theatre group culture of the 1970s, shaped “its own vision, tradition and culture”<sup>3</sup> through the multitude of contributions and the work of the individual meetings. Transit is, in a nutshell, the result of an individual vision, that of Julia Varley’s, born within a collective vision, that of the Magdalena Project – a network of artists who have experienced more than 25 years of theatre research, failures, violent discussions and work. Both Transit and the network function internationally to give voice to the concerns of women working in theatre today. Both encourage women to examine their role in the future of theatre, by presenting existing work by women, sharing methodologies, examining form as well as content and making new material. Ultimately, Transit and the Magdalena Project aim to set up opportunities for women to explore new approaches to theatre-making that reflect more profoundly their own experience and political priorities as women.

Julia Varley, after taking part in the first meeting of the Magdalena Project in 1986 in Cardiff (Wales) organised *The Marathon* and *Siren* within Odin Teatret’s facilities in 1987. Later in the article I will outline how these two meetings served as the progenitors of Transit. Since the beginning of Transit, Odin Teatret and The Magdalena Project functioned as the fertile environments in which “the small actions that do not appear to influence the course of the world”<sup>4</sup> could be sowed. However the seven editions of Transit and the intertwining of artists and activities between the two environments exemplify the contrary.

The transmission of knowledge between Transit, Odin Teatret and The Magdalena Project and each entity’s relationship with one another are the harvest of more than 20 years of seeding. Professional and human relationships have left indelible marks, not only in those who have experienced Transit but also in the history of theatre. The lucky professional crosses between artists coming from different cultural backgrounds and faraway countries are proof of that. Diversity and distance are not obstacles; rather these conditions serve as the resourceful first steps towards knowledge. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the title of Dorthe Kærgaard’s painting, *Transit*<sup>5</sup>, has become

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<sup>3</sup> J. Varley 1993, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> J. Varley 2011, p. 250.

<sup>5</sup> The painting showed two of Dorthe Kærgaard’s ample round naked figures locked in a circle of long coloured hair which fused the two bodies into one so that they could walk on their hands in a continuous movement. Its title was *Transit* and in turn this became the name of the Festival.

the title of the Festival. Transit comes from *transeat* (consisting of *trans*, "beyond", and *ire*, "to go"), to go beyond. Transit is therefore a passage. In one respect, Transit is a passage in a physical sense, the crossing of places: Transit takes place in the spaces of Odin Teatret. Julia Varley herself, during our meeting in Codiponte at the end of June 2010, defined her festival like a caravanserail, a place of barter. Just like the inn at the edge of the road, the place where travellers could rest and recover from the fatigue of their trip, so Transit, thanks to Odin Teatret's facilities, is the context in which artists from all over the world cross the oceans and the continents to share their craft. And it is in this aim of sharing that Transit, in another respect, is a passage in the metaphorical sense of knowledge horizontally towards the younger generations. Transit, as Julia reiterates is "just a time to listen and see, to collect information instead of discussions. It is a time to live the experience through others' experience instead of a time of confrontations. Transit is the culture which rises from the time of the barterers"<sup>6</sup>. The seven editions of Transit vary in theme, performances and workshops proposed. Participants and invited artists also change each time. However all the editions share the same *composite dramaturgy*. The dramaturgy of Transit is what distinguishes the festival from others like it. Transit should be thought of as a performance text which exists only in the end of the work process. Paraphrasing Eugenio Barba I can say that Transit is the text of the performance meaning the text is "a weaving together" [the weave] of the performance can be defined as "dramaturgy", that is *drama-ergon*, the "work of the actions" in the performance. The way in which the actions work is the "plot"<sup>7</sup>. Transit is a plot of concatenated and simultaneous actions. As the plot in a performance is comprised of different levels, in Transit too it is possible to say that there are different levels of action intertwined for simultaneity and concatenation. Simultaneous means that everything happens within a single day, which is the basic unit of concatenation. Workshops, performances, lectures, collective training sessions, concerts, as well as social occasions such as meals, tours of the town and shared cleaning responsibilities are simultaneous events. The concatenation is constituted by the succession of each day during the festival with its

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<sup>6</sup> Travel notes of the author.

<sup>7</sup> "The plot can be of two types. The first type is accomplished through the development of actions in time by means of *concatenation* of causes and effects or through an alternation of actions which represent two parallel developments. The second type occurs only by means of *simultaneity*: the simultaneous presence of several actions. *Concatenation* and *simultaneity* are the two dimensions of the plot. They are not two aesthetic alternatives or two different choices of method. They are the two poles whose tension and dialectic determine the performance and its life: actions at work – dramaturgy" (Barba – Savarese 1991, p. 69).



progressive accumulation of emotional tension, and by the gradual change of its internal composition, and also by the rhythm, according to which each single day is mounted. It is “the balance between the concatenation pole and the simultaneity pole”<sup>8</sup>, operating under the simple logic of interweaving different threads together, which creates the dramatic tension. With a skillful cinematic eye, Julia Varley combines the balance between the concatenation and the simultaneity together with a simple logic. Their combination creates jumps of tension which oblige the actions to adopt a new meaning (cf. Barba – Savarese 1991) outlined by the thematic framework. And again with a filming eye the montage for simultaneity and concatenation allows Julia Varley to “direct the spectator's attention, his [her] rhythms, to induce tensions in him [her] without trying to impose an interpretation” (*ibid.*, p. 70) rather inviting the spectator with his and her own body to undertake a path. The spectator finds himself [herself] in a whirlwind of experience. In this way the spectator's attention is at least twofold as “on the one hand the spectator's attention is attracted by the action's complexity, its presence, and on the other hand, the spectator is continuously required to evaluate this presence and this action in the light of his [her] knowledge of what has just occurred and in expectation of (or questioning about) what will happen next” (*ibid.*). In other words, the more difficult it becomes for the spectator to “interpret or to judge immediately the meaning of what is happening in front of his [her] eyes and in his [her] head, the stronger is his [her] sensation of living through an experience. [...] The more the director has woven the different threads, according to his [her] logic, the more the meaning of the performance will appear surprising, motivated and unexpected, even to the director himself [herself]” (*ibid.*).

### *Antecedent to Transit*

During her introduction at the first Transit festival, Julia Varley traced her perception of the strands from the Magdalena Project activity. She alluded to the first Magdalena meeting she had organised in July 1987 at Odin Teatret the *International Research Project*, called a posteriori *The Marathon*<sup>9</sup>. She recalled how she passed the task of directing from one actor to another. She realized that this instance was “our first attempt to find out how we could direct ourselves. That was the first moment that this problematic came out within the meetings of the Magdalena Project”<sup>10</sup>. Together with 22 actresses she

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<sup>8</sup> E. Barba – N. Savarese 1991, p. 69.

<sup>9</sup> J. Varley 1991, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> C. Fry w. d., p. 2.

explored and shared her perspective on the concept and the results of the working process. She used the word *marathon* having mistranslated the Italian word “staffetta” (relay-race) to indicate a process of work she wanted to try out: “that starting from one person’s concrete proposal and its staged result, another should take over to develop or change it, and then another and another...”. If her idea was really quite simple, exploring a collective process led at a time by different artists, the result was unexpected “ending with the same person who had started meant trying to make the process circular, to arrive again at the point of departure enriched by what had happened”<sup>11</sup>. In that way the reference point was not the person directing, but the work itself. Through her proposal she wanted the work to speak by itself.

Moreover, Julia acknowledged that the theme of directing had developed in the following Magdalena meeting<sup>12</sup>. Referring to the earlier projects and specifically to Magdalena ‘86, she strongly emphasized that the most important thing was for women artists to meet in the practice, pointing out that most

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<sup>11</sup> J. Varley 1991, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> *A Room of One’s Own* organised by Geddy Aniksdal and Anne-Sophie Erichsen of Grenland Friteater in Norway in 1989 and *Unter Wasser Fliegen* held in Düsseldorf, Germany, in 1991 by Kordula Lobeck de Fabris.

*A Room of One’s Own* focused on the direction and its process. Geddy Aniksdal and Anne-Sophie Erichsen express briefly the three key points of the work that coincide with those of the Magdalena Project as quoted in Chris Fry, *The Way of Magdalena*, p.160:

1. Can we say that a specific female expression exists?
2. Does a female director see the work of an actor differently from a male colleague?
3. Do we choose different types of material to work with when there are only women working in the group?

Three main phases characterize *A Room of One’s Own*. The first one of the four-days event includes performances, workshops and work demonstrations. The second phase, only for participants, investigated the role of the director and it lasted for three weeks. The two final days session consisted of a public debate and discussion with invited critics. The last two phases were the most controversial ones. In 1992, at the first Transit, Geddy Aniksdal remembered the bitter reactions among the artists who used to discuss and argue about subjects together. The actor and director relationship was the basic question of all verbal confrontations between the artists. Despite the very ambitious goals of the project – as recognized by Geddy Aniksdal and Anne-Sophie Erichsen – and the harsh criticism they received, the two organisers realized that their work was of a high level as well as the one of the artist. Besides the artists considered the project an important point of reference for the direction process within the Magdalena Project.

*Unter Wasser Fliegen*

*Unter Wasser Fliegen* was born from Kordula Lobeck de Fabris’ interest in the European Theatre Group, but especially in the Latin American Theatre Group. Since the early 70’s, her research has focused on the female face directing process. If the actors who belonged to several theatre groups had learned, constructed, shared and exchanged their working methods, the directors were islands apart.

of the women in the first Magdalena's meeting had been actors and that the "first problematic was how to work together, how to reinforce each other through a meeting"<sup>13</sup>. At a later stage the focus became "more a question of who was producing the work and the problem of directing" (*ibid.*).

If *The Marathon* investigated the creative process and the element of performance production, the second meeting, *Siren* (October 1987), needed to concentrate and define the field of work and introduce a theme. *Siren* was dedicated exclusively to the investigation of voice. A simple logic of the dramaturgy, the idea of a circular process and the introduction of a chosen theme are a few of the constant aspects which, moving forward, will occur in all Transit editions.

### *Transit. Directors and the dynamic patterns of theatre groups*

The first edition of Transit was a concrete response to the problems that emerged during the two aforementioned meetings of the Magdalena Project, *A Room of One's Own* in 1989 and *Unter Wasser Fliegen* in 1991. Julia wanted to overcome their differences through the practice, rather than getting lost in the sometimes sterile discussion. Aware of the many different products and results achieved, she wanted to give herself and all those who have been involved in the Magdalena Project the occasion to see the performances which had been created within the network in that period. This helped focus on the aim of the festival: "to find out what changes women are bringing to the role of director" and "to perceive a new way of working that redefines the role of the director"<sup>14</sup> assuming that for Julia Varley the exploration of women's language in theatre is not a gender issue, rather it is a matter of energy which can belong both to a male or a female artist<sup>15</sup>.

In fact the first Transit Festival, concerning women's proposals for directing and the dynamic patterns of theatre groups, was designed – as stated in the programme – "as an opportunity for theatre practitioners to show their performances and explain the processes used to create them, for an investigation of new and evolving ways of directing, focusing on the *conducting* element, be it the group, the actor, the director or the working process itself"<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> C. Fry w. d., p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> L. Sykes 1993, p. 391.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *On tiptoe a Santa Clara*, p. 45. The same issue has been tackled during The International School of Theatre Anthropology organised by Eugenio Barba in 1986. The discussion was about the perception of the feminine role represented on the stage in different cultures.

<sup>16</sup> In "Transit programme: Directors and the dynamic patterns of theatre groups. What are women proposing?"

*Conductor* and *movement* were key words of the Festival. The term *conductor* represents an expanded concept of what and who fulfils the directorial role and the term was used to “give a reference word for this sense of movement, of displacement, of passage, of crossing, of something you cannot catch, something in motion, never still, that you cannot put in definitive unilateral words, something passing through: in transit”<sup>17</sup>. The Festival presented performances directed by women, or performances whose prime motor included women actors, performances with only women, or performances with no director where the group’s collaboration is essential for the result. The heterogeneity of the works presented implied a continuous displacement of the artists’ point-of-view, avoiding an “absolute, standing still knowledge”. Each performance differed from the others according to the artist’s method. The close juxtaposition of such different works let the performances speak by themselves. “This had the cumulative effect of allowing the related aspects of the different performances to emerge, creating the possibility of extracting principles, common modes of practice, and theory”<sup>18</sup> such as an alternative way of speaking about the performances. The new way of speaking arises from “the complementary dynamic between the performances in the evenings and their process explanations the next day [...]”<sup>19</sup>. This mode of practice is “a highly constructive answer to the question, so central to the Magdalena Project, of how practitioners should talk about their work and how to exploit the pedagogic capacity of words within the practical context”<sup>20</sup>. The pedagogical responsibility was strongly recognised as a “need to share and transmit to other women so as to build on what [they] have learned. We need to create our own reference words, a rainbow-like theory, a communicative intuition, a dancing logic, for our experience to move along history. We need to pass on and [...] to invent ways of doing it”.

### *Theatre Women and Politics*

Julia has organised the Transit Festivals “hoping that the massive and simultaneous information resulting from all the performances and process explanations together could provoke unexpected combinations and ideas”<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, this motivation manifested itself during the second Transit Festival held in November 1997. The festival’s debate on Theatre, Women and Politics

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<sup>17</sup> J. Varley 1993, p. 2.

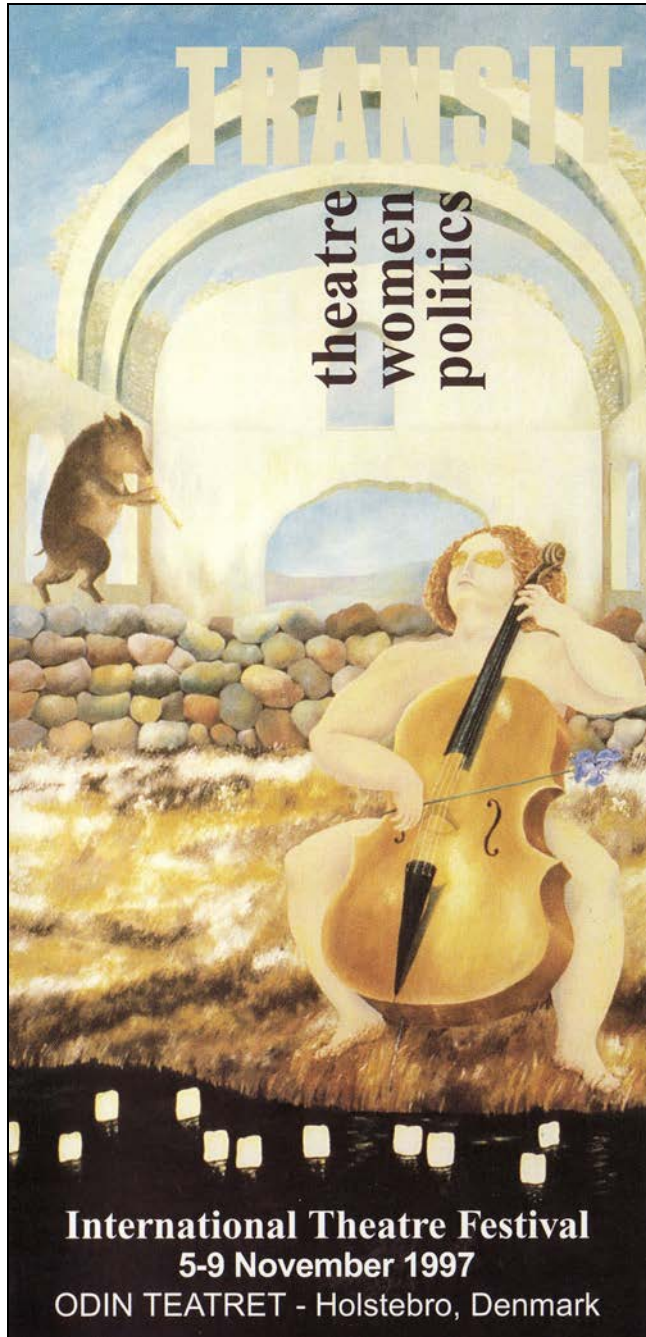
<sup>18</sup> L. Sykes 1993, p. 392.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 391.

<sup>20</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>21</sup> J. Varley 1993, p. 2.

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Transit II: Theatre – Women and Politics, Festival Programme, Holstebro, 1997

provided an occasion to meet theatre women practitioners, artists, intellectuals and scholars who in different ways were politically or socially engaged, therefore aiming to give theatre a participant role in society. The term "politics" has widely diverse meanings across time and geography, meanings which are constantly changing. Politics can immediately be related to power: a way to keep in power, or a way to criticize, overthrow, counterbalance and take power, or a way to live, survive and deal with power, or a way of separating from power and refusing it. Currently, women feel a greater political responsibility in the world and are making a point of voicing their opinions. In theatre women create performances which take position, denounce or inform. As artists we give new importance to the contents of theatrical works, and we actively participate in social movements and activities. Previously, when the form was the content and the stress for change and development centered around how to make theatre, Transit Festival gave another perspective: it seems that many women are pointing towards giving more consideration to what is said with theatre and where they place their work. The presentation of performances, the lectures-demonstrations and discussions gave a vision of the diverse and personal paths followed while trying to understand the motives behind and the consequences of the craft. Some artists have experienced great changes in their countries, with revolutions, counter-revolutions, dictatorships and new instable democracies, as Llieve Delanoy's performance demonstrated. She presented "*...de tanto volver*", a ritual drama that tells the story of Agapito, the president of the peasant community of Andahuaylas, victim of the violence in Peru where she moved from Belgium in 1978. At the same time the performance presents events from the Second World War and post-war Europe as the Belgian actress calls attention to the 500,000 gypsies who died in the German concentration camps. Another performance, *The Legend about the End of the World*, presented by Dah Teatar founded in Belgrade by Jadranka Andjelic and Dijana Milošević in 1991, is played by three women who are determined to create life upon the ruins of what could be a house, a church of any religion, a library or their inner space. They look into their past, tradition, legends and myths from different cultures in search of a way to continue life. The actresses are metaphorically struggling to maintain the importance of culture and theatre, in a country at war which faces the disrupting consequences of the dissolution of the previous political system and the following corruption in Yugoslavia. Other artists have been engaged in political theatre or still are, but in different wars such as Patricia Ariza from Teatro La Candelaria, with *Gotas de Rap* (Colombia). Patricia Ariza, member of one of the oldest theatre groups in Latin America, has worked directing productions with youths who live in the streets, prostitutes, drug addicts and with children and adults

who live in the violent region of Urabá, Colombia. *The Opera Rap* presented a music-theatre project made through the collaboration of professional theatre artists and the members of Gotas de Rap, a young group from one of the oldest areas of Bogotá: the Las Cruces neighbourhood. The performance tells story of the murder of a popular young rapper. His friends decide to exhume his body and hold their own night-long wake. The allegorical character of Death appears and is, paradoxically, the nearest to life.

Some women need to confront contemporary political issues; others prefer to keep a distance between their artistic work and their demonstrations in support of the causes they believe in. Some have already proven their commitment to the past, but have remained largely obscure; while others do not speak of politics, but of funding, censorship, economic pressures, family and village structures such as Teatro delle Albe (Italy), a group that performs both in local dialect and with immigrants from Africa. The immigrants who have discovered acting will return to Senegal to open a theatre-community. To keep doing theatre is in itself a political choice: opting for human relationships rather than mechanical, for intimacy rather than mass media, for memory and resistance rather than neglect and success. The political awareness and responsibility in its different actions carried forward by women are the unforeseen results of the Festival.

### *Transmitting Experience Across Generations*

In January 2001 Transit III investigated the pedagogical aspects of theatre, specifically the horizontal passage of knowledge and practice between generations. The Festival saw the theme of *Generations* as a lifetime of growing. For that reason the Festival concentrated on various ways of transmitting knowledge including: master and pupil relationships, independent auto-didactic realities, the practice of workshops and training, traditional western schooling, the passing on of a craft through family connections or apprenticeship and the absence of references. Transit III invited women practitioners, artists and scholars from Europe, America, New Zealand and Asia to present performances, videos, demonstrations and lectures, to give workshops and participate in discussions. Throughout the structure of the Festival were a number of intermittent and recurring events, all intended to pass knowledge and skills among the generations. *Entrances* took place first thing in the morning; these were active sessions in physical and vocal training conducted by advanced practitioners, a new instructor every session. *Bridges* were events which illustrated the passing of exercises and techniques among generations; demonstrations by masters and pupils together. *Cornerstones* were sessions

in which practitioners of different theatrical ages illustrated the essentials of their work<sup>22</sup>. A selected group of participants attended *Water[wars]*, a production process led by Jill Greenhalgh and culminating with a presentation event in the Festival. In *Crossroads* corner also available were groups formally exchanging ideas in the form of panels, video and web presentations, a concluding lecture, *Passing on Knowledge and Questions of Authority*, by scholar Chiara Zamboni<sup>23</sup>, and – of course – a closing meal and celebration. During a very full and stimulating ten days schedule of programming, some of the performances directly addressed the questions about the learning and teaching processes in theatre, while others presented themes and characters that explore the needs of women of diverse ages and cultural backgrounds. A strong foundation for Transit III was the series of workshops which took place in the first four days and permitted the rest of the Festival. *Wind and Rocks* led by Ana Woolf and Hisako Miura<sup>24</sup> approached actors' physical and vocal training using experiences from different cultures, such as Salsa training and Japanese stamping. The work started from basic technical principles to arrive at a theatre language, through the experience of building the actors' own material focusing on rhythm and energy. The stamping is taken from Tadashi Suzuki's technique called the "grammar of the feet". This form of training focuses on a precise and linear relationship between the performer and the space, to develop the awareness of the body moving as a unit in different spatial levels and directions. Exercises are repeated to reach the centre of energy and then find the way of rebuilding it again. In Ana's and Hisako's work, as young masters' generation, there was a search for enjoyment using the salsa grasping rhythm and the power of a group being together in the work, and changing the quality of energy of the consecutive ways of working according to the pupils' presence. "That made a few miracles possible. One was the first day of Ana's salsa training – how everyone immediately danced it from the very beginning. Another was the misunderstanding of "sole" and "soul" in Hisako's instructions – when she said "touch the floor with your sole" and everybody understood "flow with your soul" – they did exactly what was needed and the energy in the room suddenly became very pure. The last miracle happened when Hisako kept the salsa music for her classical Japanese dance walk, followed by individual singing while still

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<sup>22</sup> Internal sources of information. Report by Beverly Brumm, a participant to the workshop.

<sup>23</sup> Chiara Zamboni is one of the founders of Diotima, a community of female philosophy, at the University of Verona, Italy.

<sup>24</sup> Ana Woolf is a teacher, actress and director. She is co-founder of Magdalena 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation. Hisako Miura is an actress who studied at Odin Teatret for some years. She collaborated with Teatret Om, Denmark.



keeping the walk"<sup>25</sup>. The second workshop *Singing and Speaking Voices*, led by Brigitte Cirila<sup>26</sup> and Julia Varley, worked on the voice which embraces the breath, the body and its roots, the sound and its undulating vibrations. The workshop touched on all of these aspects, transported by the pleasure of singing together to create a shared repertory that uses traditional songs as a starting point. Another part of the workshop concentrated on the unity of the physical and vocal impulses, and of the text and action, to create a bridge between the singing and speaking voices. *Life behind a Mask*, led by Deborah Hunt and Marie Josée Ordener<sup>27</sup>, invited the participants to choose a mask out of Deborah Hunt's collection and then construct a history and environment for their mask, drawing on either their own life stories or inventing new ones. This work integrated the construction of puppets and portable puppet booths as an interior world of the masks. The workshop participants created individual scenes that later became part of a collective choreography so as to construct a final presentation of the work created during the workshop. Deborah Hunt's experience working with human-sized masks in the streets and shop windows of Puerto Rico and New Zealand connected to Marie Josée Ordener's experience teaching the craft of puppeteers to unemployed young people in the south of France, collided to invent new individual situations and techniques for each participant. *Performing Words*, led by Gilly Adams and Geddy Aniksdal<sup>28</sup>, addressed performers who work with text. In their workshop they rigorously explored the thoughts and emotions which inform the words, and they examined the character of the voice. This textual analysis was balanced by imaginative physical work designed to develop and play with the connection between the language of the body and spoken language.

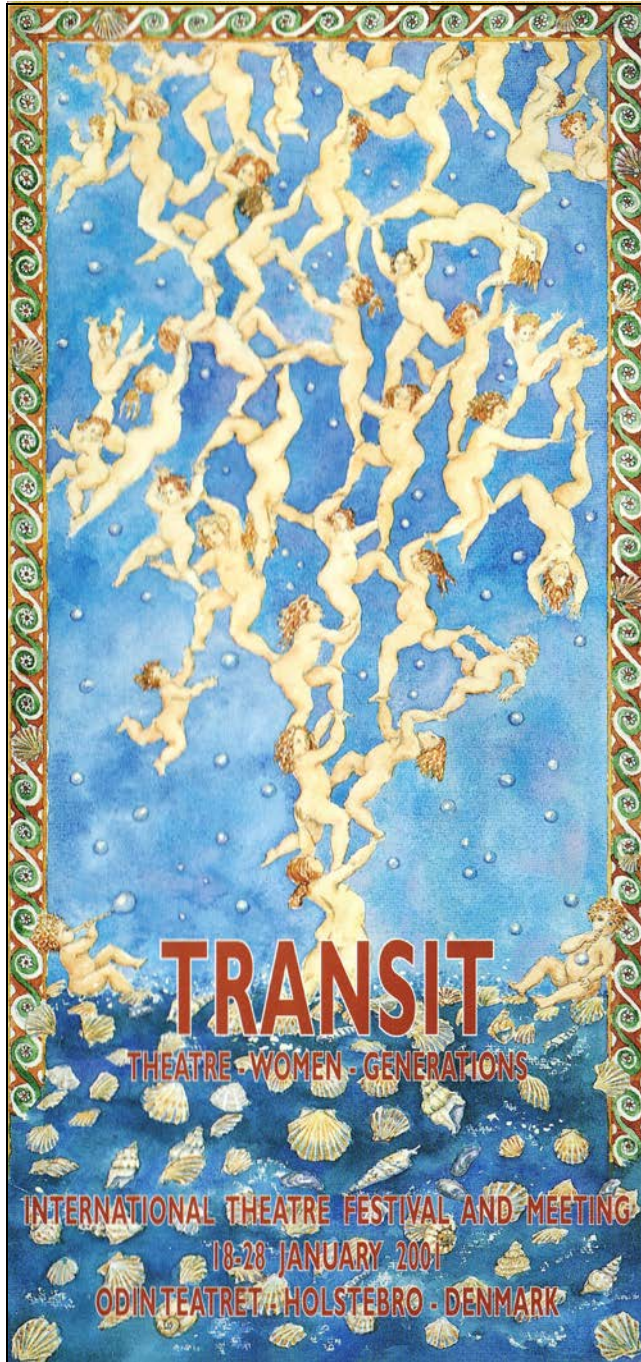
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<sup>25</sup> Description by Kasia Kazimierczuk, a participant to the workshop.

<sup>26</sup> Brigitte Cirila, singer and actress, founded Voix Polyphoniques an association supporting polyphony and singing a capella. Voix Polyphoniques was created in 1991 in Paris, and settled down in Marseille in 1993 and in La Friche in 1996.

<sup>27</sup> Deborah Hunt is a maskmaker, puppeteer and performance artist with 35 years experience in the creation and presentation of original theatre and performance works. She is the Founder and Artistic Director of Maskhunt Inc, theatre of the futile. Marie-Josée Ordener has been working with puppet theatre. Since 1996, she has directed the project *Guignol dans les squares* with Théâtre Massalia. From 1993 to 1996, she collaborated with Théâtre des Cuisines and Compagnie Sanvic.

<sup>28</sup> Gilly Adams and Geddy Aniksdal are both long time associates of the Magdalena Project. Geddy Aniksdal is a performer and director with Grenland Friteater (Norway) and Gilly Adams is a workshop leader and director who specialises in work with text. She is currently Director of BBC Wales' Writers Unit and Drama Producer for Radio Wales.



Transit III: Theatre – Women – Generations, Festival Programme, Holstebro, 2001

The following editions of Transit (Roots in Transit 2004, Stories to Be Told 2007, Theatre – Women – On the Periphery 2009) also had, for their peculiar issues and international resonance, a widespread participation. For that reason they will, in the future, deserve a separate introduction.

### **Risk Crisis and Invention**

*La dedizione è silenziosa, non fa rumore ma è il motore del mondo*  
Rita Levi Montalcini

Julia Varley was inspired to organise Transit VII (28<sup>th</sup> May - 9<sup>th</sup> June 2013) both by a Chinese ideogram “crisis” which is composed of two signs indicating “danger” and “opportunity” and also by the theme of Transit VI *On the Periphery* (2009). *Being on the peryphery* is to be in a place of risk. She found it out through an exercise that Iben Nagel Rasmussen had invented. An exercise in which the body goes out of balance (the risk), falls (the crisis) and has a reaction (the invention) and it gives her pupils the possibility to feel a different way of thinking and reacting with the whole body. Transit VII which was different from the previous editions has followed Iben’s exercise structure in its development. For the first time people were arriving and leaving every day. Usually people come all in the same day, they present each other while everybody is there and then at the end of the whole session they would go. Transit VII had four different sections. The first one which was Odin Teatret presented by its women included performances, work demonstrations and practical master classes (28-30 May); the second one was dedicated to the workshops (31 May-2 June); the third and new one consisted of two days of symposium (3-4 June) and the fourth one was thought as the presentation of the invited performances (5-9 June). During this section participants had a practical warming-up session with the same master for an entire week<sup>29</sup>.

Julia’s necessity to start with Odin presented by its women was due to many reasons. Many people from the outside often say that the Odin Teatret has a “female spirit”. To decide what is female is something that has taken The Magdalena Project various years and still we have not come to a conclusion of what female is. Within The Magdalena Project we prefer

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<sup>29</sup> Keiin Yoshimura (Japan) performer, choreographer and art director of Kamigata-mai dance. She has learned and practiced many kinds of Japanese traditional culture (Tea ceremony, Ikebana), performances (Shamisen music, Gidayu-bushi – story telling on Bunraku, Noh, Kyogen), martial arts (Kendo, Kyudo), and Yoga.

to speak about “women together” and not to use “female” which is an insecure word in its definition. Definitely women in the Odin Teatret have a very strong presence. They are the ones, for instance, who have kept on doing the training through the years while the men of the group stopped. The women continued and “this continuing has to do with wanting to discover a language”<sup>30</sup>. The women of the group are also those who have prepared most of the solo performances; who were the first to create work demonstrations and who have always been very active in guiding the course of the Odin Teatret. For these reasons Julia thought that for Transit VII the women of Odin Teatret should be present. Also many of the participants who come to the Transit Festival take this chance to meet Odin Teatret.

The workshops are one of the most important part in every Transit because they highlight women masters who are a common reference for the participants. Women who have had experience could be a reference for the younger generations. Workshops are also moments of *risk* whenever Julia Varley combines masters from very different theatre and cultural traditions who have never worked together before such as Ana Woolf and Lucia Sander<sup>31</sup>, Jill Greenhalgh and Violeta Luna<sup>32</sup> or Parvathy Baul and Roxana Pineda<sup>33</sup>.

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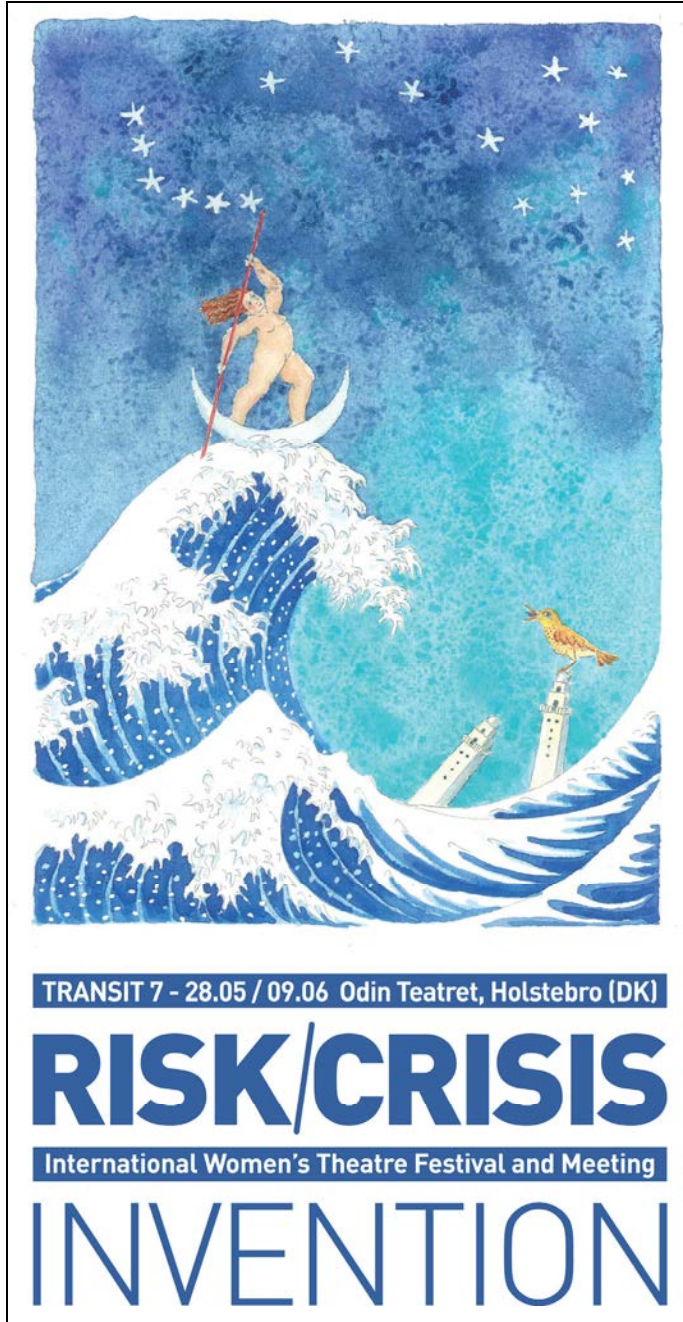
<sup>30</sup> Julia Varley in her introduction to Transit VII, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Lucia Sander (Brazil) is Ph.D. in Literature, Professor and Researcher at the University of Brasilia. She was trained in theatre directing and acting at the British Theatre Association, London (BTA) and creator of the project “Criticism in Performance” focused on discussing polemic issues connected to the theatre on its very grounds.

<sup>32</sup> Jill Greenhalgh’s most recent projects are *The Water(war)s*, an investigation in collaboration with actresses from different countries, *Las Sin Tierra 7 – Attempted Crossings of the Straits of Gibraltar*, with Nomad Theatre from Spain, in collaboration with Mike Brookes, *The Acts – Vigia*, a performance project that works as a reaction to the killing of hundreds of young women around the USA-Mexico borders, in Juárez, and *The Threat of silence*. Violeta Luna (Mexico/USA) is a performance artist and activist. She is currently a Creative Capital Fellow and an associate artist of the San Francisco-based performance collectives La Pocha Nostra and Secos & Mojados.

<sup>33</sup> Parvathy Baul (India) is a singer, painter and storyteller from West Bengal. Her meeting with the living tradition of Baul prompted her to choose the path of self-training in Baul. Since 1995 she has performed in her home state Bengal and all over India and in several international festivals, including Transit V on storytelling. In 2012 Parvathy organised Tantidhatri, a Magdalena festival in India. Roxana Pineda (Cuba) graduated in Theatre Studies and Dramaturgy at the Instituto Superior de Arte de Cuba in 1985. She founded the Estudio Teatral de Santa Clara in 1989 with Joel Sáez, and has performed in all its productions, touring internationally. She is also a theatre scholar and professor, and as such she regularly gives workshops on improvisation and composition. She is the director of *Magdalena Sin Fronteras*, a triennial international festival and meeting which held its first edition in January 2005.

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Transit VII: Risk Crisis and Invention, Festival Poster, Holstebro, 2013

With the risk comes usually a moment of *crisis* and one has to find a way to go forward inventing a new way of collaborating. Jill Greenhalgh and Violeta Luna worked together leading *Body and Presence: Paths towards a Personal Cartography*. When Julia was in *Vértice Brasil 2012 – T(i)erra Firme*<sup>34</sup> Jill and Violeta were giving individual workshops both exploring the actors' presence but in a completely different way. For that reason she invited them to work together. Jill Greenhalgh's work explores the presence and the dynamics of stillness and silence of the body as a powerful tool for female occupation of the scenic space, while Violeta Luna explores the relationship between performance art and community engagement. She uses her body as a *cartography*, a territory to question and comment on social and political phenomena. Both of them make use of the actor's personal memory and identity as the expressive territory from which they chart a vocabulary of stage actions.

*Risk* had to do also with the protection of the intimate working space of an actress while presenting a new work-in-progress. Whenever one presents a work-in-progress, one is taking a risk because the work is not ready yet to be presented to a group of spectators. But it is a step along the way that helps the actress in understanding what directions the work has to take. *Risk* had to do also with the necessity of inviting groups who come from dangerous political and religious situations. Such as Kryly Halopa Teatr from Belarus: they were invited with *Chernobyl*, a performance-documentary resulting of some expeditions of members of the group to a zone of resettlement where they made interviews with the people evacuated after the accident in Chernobyl which happened 30 years ago. Or such as the presentation of *Seeds of Memory* with Ana Woolf, which tells about both the absence of a body to bury and the absence of 30, 000 missing people during the military dictatorship of the '70s, in Argentina. *Risk* was an image which guided Julia in her choice of the last performance for Transit VII. Jana Korb, who creates outdoor aerial theatre, was hanging on a trapeze in the Odin Teatret's backyard.

During the sixth day death suddenly stroke us. Augusto Omulú, who had been collaborating with The International School of Theatre Anthropology from 1994 and in 2002 had joined Odin Teatret as an actor, was brutally murdered in his home in Salvador da Bahia (Brazil). Also, Julia Varley has dedicated her festival to Erica Ferrazzo, a young Italian actress who was

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<sup>34</sup> Third Magdalena festival in Florianópolis, Brazil (July 8th to 15th 2012), organised by Marisa Napolini journalist, actress and director, Barbara Biscaro actress and academic, Gláucia Grigolo actress and film producer, and Monica Siedler – dancer and performance artist.

murdered last year by her ex-husband. *Crisis* came in her most shattering and disruptive way. How could we still speak about our artistic crisis while violence surrounded us? How could we deal with it in our work? How do we transform that reality outside through our work? We shared our tears. We got strengthened from sharing them. *Ophelia*, by Lucia Sander, was there in her vulnerability, soft and gentle with her need of prayers, silence, poetry and love, wise and ironic in her words. We shared laughs watching Deborah Hunt's performance titled *The Package* in which death and macabre are present in all their horror, fascination and great humour. We shared strength and courage during *Crossing the line* the work of Dah Theatre, in Serbia, who continued to play theatre as the bombs fell during the war that took place in Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1999.

We shared solidarity during the presentation of *Catwalk – women's steps and voices against violence* the result of Patricia Ariza's workshop with international actresses and women from Holstebro Krisecenter. Holstebro Krisecenter is one of the places where women in Denmark can go when they run away from violent situations in their homes. One should not know who they are, where they are. It was a completely closed place without any contact with the outside in order to protect women who live in there. The responsible for the Krisecenter wanted both participants and invited artists to visit their house. We went to a very bright and welcoming house organised in autonomous living spaces and shared rooms with a children's playground and a blooming garden. Not all the women had the strength to attend the catwalk. Immediately after the beginning one of them returned to her room crying. We create a collective performative action of rebellion, poetry and humour, celebrating the diversity of our bodies, acting as subjects of our own story. They graced us with their presence staring at us in silence, the very same silence before a wild releasing dance that we had when we presented *Catwalk* to Holstebro community. At that moment we understood that Transit had accomplished an outstanding result. We have taken position through silent small actions. We have occupied the space through our body transforming it in a new one.

Once again the latest Transit edition stresses and gives strength to the connection between Transit and the Magdalena Project. Both the festival and the network met and still meet through the sharing of work, through theatre action, performances and pedagogy. Jill Greenhalgh wrote in "(Now) I Am Waiting" published in *The Magdalena@25 Legacy and Challenge*: since its birth The Magdalena Project has "resisted establishing theoretical or intellectual foundations. Formal discussion or debate was minimal. Instead, instinctively, it



Illustration Transit VII: Risk Crisis and Invention, Holstebro, 2013



created forums where voices could be heard without interruption, argument or opposition. A culture of listening rather than positioning prevailed, a space where silenced stories could be heard and [...] these stories and revelations are the foundations upon which [both The Magdalena Project and Transit Festival] stand"<sup>35</sup>. Based on this assumption, I believe that non-institutionalised theatre exchanges have become the space where women artists create ongoing international events and where the "contagion of feminine artistic isolation [could be] defied"<sup>36</sup>. The horizontal structure which typifies Transit Festival is too a peculiar kind of cooperation deciding not to follow or submit to "vertical hierarchies [which] dominate [...] the economic, political, educational and cultural institutions. These institutions determine the funding, commissioning, staging or housing and dissemination of performance work"<sup>37</sup>. The "horizontal working structure allows [the spread of political actions] – perhaps almost invisibly"<sup>38</sup> exemplifying a true collective democracy.

Paradoxically the marginalization has fortified both Transit Festival and The Magdalena Project. Do non-institutionalised theatre exchanges create enough impulse for a new generation of young theatre practitioners to seek a solution to invisibilisation? Do younger theatre practitioners yearn for greater visibility and establishment recognition or might they embrace the advantages that marginalization can engender and thereby transform obstacle into advantage? So in the end of my article I wonder if it is possible that an apparently invisible root system pervades theatre culture efficiently across five continents through a horizontal structure is indeed a kind of legacy which is much stronger and more widespread than you might think. To reinforce this aspect it is once again Julia Varley's vivid memory when she remembers Luisa Calcumil, the Argentinian artist from the Mapuche Indian tribe, entering in the white room holding in her hands a seed that is at the same time a fruit. She gives it to Ny Nyoman Candri, one of the few Balinese women who practice Arja, Topeng and Wayang Kulit, who answers with a dance and then with a special greeting to Cherifa Kersit, a Berber singer, who replies with a Berber greeting, as an homage to her origins. She embodies her culture through singing. Communication was possible because the language spoken by the artists was not only related to their native country but also to the profession, to the ability of transmitting ideas and emotions on the stage

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<sup>35</sup> J. Greenhalgh 2011, p. 31.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 37.

through body expression and voice intonation. They met each other on the ground of an identity coming from the craft rather than an identity coming from cultural ideology. What happened in the scene corresponds to the phenomenon that Chiara Zamboni calls "Thinking in Presence", an improvisation in which one cannot anticipate the direction and the conclusion since they depend on the particular contribution of each that its presence can give the joint work. However, this is an improvisation governed by the rules of their craft that defines its identity. Women artists could offer alternatives. They could make space for questions and open themselves to unexpected paths without insisting on making conclusions thereby favouring both the uniqueness and the unpredictability of the exchange. This is Transit: a landscape of theatrical gardens that allows women to rediscover the will to shape a real future.

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## *À la recherche du tiers théâtre\**

FILIP ODANGIU\*\*

**Abstract.** Inspired by the tournament of Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret in Cluj (2012), the present paper discusses the principles of existence of the “Third Theatre”, in order to emphasize Barba’s conception on the “paradoxical pedagogy” of the actor. On these grounds, the article focuses on the possible relationships between the formation of the actor in Barba’s *theatre-school* and in the school of theatre belonging to the academic system.

**Keywords:** fracture theatre, poetics, training, personal justification, theatre-school, school of theatre, conceptual pedagogy, master, ethics, renewal.

*« Mon Dieu, donnez-moi la force de choisir toujours la route la plus difficile. »<sup>1</sup>*

### I.

La présence d’Eugenio Barba et des acteurs de l’Odin à Cluj, à l’automne 2012, a suscité des réactions très différentes. Au-delà de l’émotion naturelle déterminée par la présence, en chair et en os, d’une personnalité déjà entrée dans l’histoire du théâtre contemporain, la visite du maître italien et de ses acteurs a contrarié les attentes de certaines personnes. Les spectacles et les démonstrations ont eu lieu dans des espaces qu’on peut appeler « hors circuit » (le Centre Culturel Casino, la Salle Studio de l’Académie de musique « Gheorghe Dima », le Studio de Radio Cluj). La cérémonie du doctorat

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<sup>1</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Teatru. Singurătate, meșteșug, revoltă*, traduit de l’italien par Doina Condrea Derer, édité par Alina Mazilu, Ed. Nemira, Bucarest, 2010, p. 42.

*Honoris Causa* de l'Université Babeş-Bolyai, quant à elle, s'est déroulée selon la formule bien connue jusqu'à ce que, brusquement, elle soit « fracturée » par l'intervention des acteurs de l'Odin Teatret. Ceux-ci ont commencé à chanter un vieux psaume et, à un moment donné, une voix s'est détachée du chœur qui suivait les harmonies de la chanson : une femme a commencé à émettre – dans une langue inconnue – une série de cris, de hurlements gutturaux, désarticulés. Bien évidemment, l'intervention inhabituelle a provoqué un effet de stupeur. Le public s'efforçait de maintenir l'attitude imposée par la convention de la cérémonie, mais il était clair que quelque-chose d'irréparable s'était produit, que personne n'était indemne.

Marqué par cette expérience, j'ai repris la lecture des écrits d'Eugenio Barba, en redécouvrant le concept de « théâtre de la fracture ». Le but de ce type de théâtre est de « soumettre le spectateur à un choc émotif [...] qui le rende conscient du sens et de la mission que le théâtre devrait avoir dans sa vie »<sup>2</sup>. Le « théâtre de la fracture » suppose un groupe qui organise son travail dans l'isolement et qui, à travers ce travail, se propose de mener une guerrilla contre le soi-disant « théâtre académique ». Avec un tel programme, il est évident que l'Odin Teatret ne pouvait venir à Cluj sans provoquer du « désordre » dans nos commodités.

L'effet inquiétant de la présence d'Eugenio Barba agit pendant longtemps, pas seulement de manière immédiate. La rencontre avec quelqu'un qui pratique et vit le théâtre comme une expérience de la Liberté vous oblige à vous poser de nouveau des questions sur le sens et la mission du théâtre ici et maintenant, ensuite sur le pourquoi de la préparation de l'acteur dans l'école de théâtre : au fond, pour quel type de théâtre prépare-t-on nos acteurs ?

## II.

D'habitude, dans l'art, les critiques et les historiens sont ceux qui identifient les « tendances », les « courants ». Ils réfléchissent sur les traits qui, à un certain moment, dessinent une direction particulière, une vision/idée neuve, quelque-chose qui se redéfinit, polémiquement, par réaction à quelque-chose d'antérieur. Ainsi, par exemple, dans le champ des arts visuels, on a la succession classique : réalisme – symbolisme – impressionnisme – néo-impressionnisme – fauvisme – cubisme – futurisme – expressionnisme – surréalisme, etc. Il en va de même, bien entendu, dans l'histoire du théâtre aussi, où la « danse des oppositions » est mise en lumière par l'œil de l'historien : théâtre symboliste versus théâtre naturaliste, théâtre réaliste versus théâtre rituel, etc.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 39, 40.

Les redéfinitions de l'art deviennent beaucoup plus intéressantes quand elles sont formulées par les artistes eux-mêmes, sous la forme des discours *poétiques*. Le 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle a connu une série de reformulations du concept de « théâtre », surgies de la réaction concrète aux pratiques du temps, du désir d'« attaquer » les formes du théâtre « ancien » (vieilli) avec des armes nouvelles. Antonin Artaud propose un « théâtre de la cruauté » qui voudrait être un « spectacle total » et amener la transformation du théâtre en une réalité en laquelle on puisse croire et qui contienne, « pour le cœur et les sens », ce genre de « morsure » concrète qu'implique toute « sensation vraie »<sup>3</sup> ; Jerzy Grotowski rêve d'un « théâtre pauvre » (opposé au « théâtre riche », qui dépend de la « cleptomane artistique » et tire son inspiration d'autres disciplines, pour ne donner que des « spectacles hybrides », des « conglomerats sans caractère », présenté comme des œuvres d'art total<sup>4</sup>, Augusto Boal cherche un « théâtre des opprimés » (« Le peuple opprimé se libère. Il reprend son théâtre... il assume le rôle d'acteur principal dans le théâtre et dans la société. »<sup>5</sup>). Dans un contexte plus proche de nous, David Esrig parle du « théâtre existentiel » (« un théâtre qui, dans une forme *décidément théâtrale*, essaie de saisir les thèmes de notre existence un tout petit peu plus profonds »). Peter Brook établit, dans son ouvrage célèbre, *L'Espace vide*, son appartenance au territoire qu'il nomme « le théâtre immédiat » (de l'espace vide, qui provoque « le muscle de l'imagination » du spectateur). De l'affirmation de Brook, qui se dit incapable de parler d'autre chose que du théâtre tel qu'il le connaît, qu'il l'entend, « de manière autobiographique »<sup>6</sup>, on en vient au mariage – qui va jusqu'à l'indistinction – de l'autobiographie avec le chemin esthétique, dans le cas d'Eugenio Barba et de son Odin Teatret.

Eugenio Barba – dont le nom, déjà légendaire, est lié à la naissance de l'anthropologie théâtrale et à la fondation de l'International School of Theatre Anthropology en 1979, ainsi qu'à un modèle de « laboratoire théâtral » (actif jusqu'à présent) – avance, à son tour, l'idée d'un « tiers théâtre ».

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<sup>3</sup> Voir Antonin Artaud, « Teatrul și cruzimea », traduit en roumain par N. Steinhardt, dans l'anthologie réalisée par B. Elvin, *Dialogul neîntrerupt al teatrului în secolul XX*, vol. I, Ed. Minerva, Bucarest, 1973, p. 426.

<sup>4</sup> Jerzy Grotowski, *Spre un teatru sărac*, traduit par George Banu et Mirella Nedelcu-Patureau, préface de Peter Brook, Postface de George Banu, Ed. Unitext, Bucarest, 1998, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Augusto Boal, *Théâtre de l'opprimé*, traduit de l'espagnol par Dominique Lémann, Édition La Découverte & Syros, Paris, 1996, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Brook, *Spațiul gol*, en roumain par Marian Popescu, préface de George Banu, Ed. Unitext, Bucarest, 1997, p. 92.



## III.

Dès le début, le nom de « tiers théâtre » suggère un ordre, une hiérarchie, une situation géographique par rapport à un « centre » hypothétique. Qui se trouve donc en position de favori ? Barba répond de manière succincte dans *Théâtre. Solitude, métier, révolte*. Le « premier théâtre » fait référence au théâtre institutionnel, « protégé et subventionné », une « variante noble » de l'industrie du divertissement<sup>7</sup>. Le « second théâtre » est représenté par les formes du théâtre d'avant-garde, expérimental, de recherche, iconoclaste, toléré par la société comme un moteur nécessaire au renouvellement de la tradition. Le « tiers théâtre » serait celui qui vit « à la périphérie des centres et des capitales culturelles », fait par un groupe d'autodidactes, qui se disent « acteurs et metteurs en scène » et qui partagent leur temps entre l'entraînement (appelé *training*) et les spectacles. Le « tiers théâtre » est un théâtre « vécu », c'est-à-dire plus qu'une option esthétique, une option existentielle. Dans le manifeste *Le Tiers théâtre*, écrit en 1976<sup>8</sup>, Eugenio Barba essaie de définir cette nouvelle forme de théâtre en y échouant de manière presque intentionnelle. Barba inventorie plusieurs mouvements de l'« extrémité anonyme des théâtres reconnus par le monde culturel », en leur trouvant une série de traits communs.

Tout d'abord, il marque l'*insularité* mais aussi l'ampleur du phénomène, en soulignant que dans toute l'Europe, dans l'Amérique du Sud, dans l'Amérique du Nord, en Australie, au Japon les jeunes se rencontrent et forment des « groupes théâtraux », qui s'efforcent de résister<sup>9</sup>. Ceux-ci se proposent comme des *théâtres de groupe*, afin de souligner une qualité différente de celle indiquée par le terme générique de « groupe théâtral »<sup>10</sup>. Bien qu'ils ne soient pas passés à travers des écoles de théâtre, souligne Barba, les pratiquants du « tiers théâtre » ne sont cependant pas des dilettantes. La soumission à un programme de *training* rigoureux, intense et, surtout, continu les sépare de la condition d'amateurs<sup>11</sup>. Barba trouve diverses expressions afin de

<sup>7</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Teatru. Singurătate, meșteșug, revoltă*, op. cit., p. 236.

<sup>8</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>9</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>10</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Casa în flăcări. Despre regie și dramaturgie*, traduction de l'anglais par Diana Cozma, Ed. Nemira, Bucarest, 2012, p. 388.

<sup>11</sup> Bien que la perspective, la forme et le but du *training* aient évolué continuellement, le programme journalier des membres de l'Odin Teatret, conçu dans les années '70, est resté presque inchangé jusqu'à présent. Dans une interview, Roberta Carreri décrit une journée typique de travail à l'Odin Teatret. Les acteurs commençaient le *training* à sept heures du matin, avec l'acrobatie, on passait après au travail avec des « accessoires », qui pouvaient être des bâtons, des rubans. Suivaient alors les exercices de composition corporelle et les exercices physiques

décrire cette réalité théâtrale. À côté du « théâtre de la fracture » (opposé au « théâtre académique ») ou théâtre qui vit « marginalement », fait par des gens qui ne sont pas reconnus en tant que « professionnels »<sup>12</sup>, Barba parle du *théâtre-enclave* (« une poignée d'hommes et de femmes unis dans le but de cultiver avec une rigueur artisanale ce qui semble une utopie ou un jardin exotique aux yeux des autres »)<sup>13</sup> ou du *théâtre-ghetto* (« où l'on se laisse enfermer afin de s'assurer une certaine forme de survie »<sup>14</sup>). Plus que cela, il découvre aussi l'idée de « socialisation de la différence », en faisant un parallèle intéressant avec la coagulation des premières troupes de *commedia dell'arte*. Le « tiers théâtre » est encore vu comme une « micro-culture »<sup>15</sup> ou comme la fondation d'une « petite tradition nomade »<sup>16</sup>, comme une « forteresse à murs de vent »<sup>17</sup>, ou bien comme une « île de la liberté devant l'esprit du temps »<sup>18</sup>.

Initialement, Eugenio Barba laisse l'impression, à travers le syntagme « le tiers théâtre », de vouloir définir sa propre démarche théâtrale, pour que – plus tard – il opte pour un élargissement de la signification du terme employé. Vers la fin de son livre *Brûler la maison* (2012), Barba suggère que le « tiers théâtre » ne représente pas purement et simplement un choix esthétique ou existentiel, mais quelque-chose d'ineffable, « la continuité d'un exil professionnel intransigeant » et l'entretien d'un état de permanente transition – une « dramaturgie des changements d'état ». De manière encore plus surprenante, Barba choisit d'aligner sous ce signe tous les grands réformateurs du théâtre, de Stanislavski (!) à Grotowski<sup>19</sup>. À l'origine des manifestations du « tiers théâtre », on ne trouve pas seulement la pensée de certains visionnaires, considère Barba, mais aussi une « mutation » produite

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empruntés à Ryszard Cieslak et l'on continuait avec l'élément vocal jusqu'à midi. L'après-midi, on revenait dans la salle pour les répétitions. On faisait des improvisations enregistrées avec une caméra vidéo, qui étaient reprises plusieurs fois pour que Barba lui-même puisse leur donner la meilleure forme. Ce processus durait tout le temps nécessaire, souvent plus tard que 18 heures du soir. Roberta Carreri décrit le *training* comme une épreuve d'endurance, comme une « torture » journalière. Elle parle de la tentation de renoncer, toujours présente, et d'une force souterraine qui l'aidait à aller plus loin, bien que la raison la sommât de s'arrêter.

<sup>12</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Teatru. Singurătate, meșteșug, revoltă*, p. 236.

<sup>13</sup> *Casa în flăcări, op. cit.*, p. 377.

<sup>14</sup> *Teatru. Singurătate, meșteșug, revoltă*, p. 250.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 254.

<sup>16</sup> *Casa în flăcări*, p. 378.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

au niveau du public, qui attend des « rapports nouveaux » entre le théâtre et la réalité, pas des esthétiques ou des contenus nouveaux : il n’y a pas un nouveau théâtre qui apparaît mais d’autres choses commencent à être appelées théâtre<sup>20</sup>.

#### IV.

Eugenio Barba a dévoilé à Cluj, en 2012, que le secret de sa longévité dans le théâtre, c’est l’idée de *théâtre-école*<sup>21</sup>. La préoccupation pour la pédagogie, née du besoin de transmettre leur expérience, a déterminé les fondateurs de l’Odin Teatret à inventer une « *science du théâtre* » en partant de leur condition d’autodidactes<sup>22</sup>. En 1979, ils mettent les bases de l’ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology), qui n’est pas une école à proprement parler, mais un cadre d’organisation destiné aux échanges entre des professionnels originaires de générations, zones stylistiques et géographiques différentes. L’ISTA et l’Odin Teatret – où il n’y a pas des professeurs ou des pédagogues mais où les acteurs « vétérans » élaborent des exercices qu’ils enseignent aux jeunes acteurs – illustrent la conception d’Eugenio Barba sur la seule voie possible pour la formation des acteurs : un « processus psychologique qui se nie soi-même et progresse par des virages dangereux »<sup>23</sup>, autrement dit, *enseigner sans enseigner*.

Par ce paradoxe de la pédagogie, Barba suggère que les protagonistes de ce processus, le professeur et l’apprenti, partagent la même condition : l’entraînement représente pour les deux une voie de perpétuelle auto(re)définition. Et, au-delà des exercices et les techniques transmises, ce qui compte, c’est la *justification personnelle* qui soutient l’effort de chacun<sup>24</sup>. La valeur du *training* dépend de la qualité de cette *motivation intime* – souvent difficilement exprimable par des paroles. En l’absence de la *justification personnelle*, la prestation du professeur peut échouer dans la routine, l’inertie

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<sup>20</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Teatru. Singurătate, meșteșug, revoltă*, p. 57, 58.

<sup>21</sup> Pour une meilleure compréhension de la manière dont Eugenio Barba pose le problème de la pédagogie théâtrale, voir le chapitre « Training » de *Teatru. Singurătate, meșteșug, revoltă*, p. 98-141.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p.14.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 125.

<sup>24</sup> Dans la vision d’Eugenio Barba, la *justification personnelle*, appelée aussi « nécessité intime », est une « force souterraine » qui vous permet de travailler sans arrêt, même dans un état d’épuisement et vous aide à continuer sans céder. Ce serait là une définition de l’*autodiscipline* aussi. Barba va encore plus loin, en affirmant que, dans le travail du théâtre, ce qui intéresse, ce n’est pas le talent mais la volonté de faire et de se donner entièrement à ce travail.

et l'entropie. Mais aussi les efforts de l'apprenti sont menacés de « sclérose ». Celle-ci dérive soit de l'illusion que les exercices seuls le rendent plus créatif, soit de l'effort exercé mécaniquement. Afin d'éviter ce genre de dangers, Barba parle de la nécessité du renouvellement continu de sa propre conscience et de l'attitude personnelle envers la vie<sup>25</sup>. Par conséquent, l'instruction doit être vue comme un *apprentissage continu de la manière d'apprendre*, c'est-à-dire une ouverture envers ce qui est différent, à la fois dans sa propre culture que dans les autres. À un niveau plus profond, comme le souligne Eugenio Barba, il ne s'agit plus de méthodes et de techniques personnelles. En fait, ce qu'on devrait poursuivre, en cours du travail, ce serait l'élimination de la *peur de l'un envers l'autre*. La peur empêche le rapprochement et la découverte de la « richesse de l'expérience » de chacun. Selon Barba, la valeur du théâtre ne réside plus, aujourd'hui, dans sa fonction sociale, mais dans sa fonction psychologique, tandis que le moment du spectacle n'est autre chose que la situation où des gens (les spectateurs) deviennent les témoins de cette « richesse ».

## V.

Les textes de certains créateurs du théâtre ont la qualité de confisquer votre attention et imagination, où qu'on les ouvre. Chaque fois que l'on aborde la listes des écrits d'Eugenio Barba, Peter Brook, Yoshi Oida, Louis Jouvet (et la liste pourrait continuer) on est surpris par la description de tel phénomène, la finesse d'une intuition ou la pertinence de certaines questions. L'anthropologie théâtrale a le mérite extraordinaire d'avoir mis en termes explicites une série de réalités de la pratique scénique, d'avoir fait des connexions révélatrices entre des phénomènes théâtraux similaires, situés parfois, géographiquement, aux antipodes. Par les contributions d'Eugenio Barba, Nicola Savarese et d'autres participants aux rencontres de l'ISTA, des processus intimes du métier de l'acteur ainsi que des techniques complexes, peu éclaircis ou trop facilement métaphorisés (à cause de la difficulté de leur trouver une définition), ont acquis une expression claire, devenant opérationnelles. Démonter des concepts tels que *dramaturgie, énergie, déséquilibre, opposition, organicité, articulation*, etc. a conduit à rendre plus efficace la communication durant l'entraînement / la répétition, par l'imposition d'une terminologie spécifique. Aucune démarche respectable de pédagogie de l'acteur ne peut plus faire abstraction aujourd'hui de la démarche analytique et déconstructiviste appliquée aux *exercices*, à l'*improvisation*, à la *composition*, au *niveau pré-expressif* de la création de l'acteur,

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<sup>25</sup> *Teatru. Singurătate, meșteșug, revoltă*, p. 54.

etc. L'*objectivation* de la technique théâtrale est, sans doute, le mérite majeur de l'anthropologie théâtrale.

Mais, au-delà de cet apport significatif, les principes du « tiers théâtre » – réfléchis dans la pédagogie paradoxale du *théâtre-école* – peuvent-ils être repris par l'« école de théâtre » ? Quel modèle peut-on trouver, pour une institution académique, une voie du « refus », caractérisée par la marginalité, l'autodidactisme et l'auto-négation ? Eugenio Barba semble désavouer tout rapprochement possible entre les deux voies de formation de l'acteur : « Je crois que l'apprentissage théâtral ne peut pas être fait avec des professeurs : je crois qu'il a besoin de maîtres. [...] *Le théâtre-école* [est] l'exact opposé d'une école de théâtre. »<sup>26</sup>

Mais, toujours chez Barba, on trouve une hypothèse qui mérite la discussion, bien que l'auteur la juge improbable. Bien qu'il reconnaisse l'utilité des écoles traditionnelles dans la formation d'acteurs insérables dans le contexte théâtral existant<sup>27</sup>, le maître italien considère que ces institutions sont incapables de cultiver des visions, de pourvoir leur diplômés des instruments techniques nécessaires à l'exploration de « nouvelles relations à travers le théâtre »<sup>28</sup> (c'est-à-dire de nouveaux rapports avec le public, avec les sujets dramaturgiques abordés, enfin, de nouveaux types de relations entre les acteurs, les metteurs en scène, etc.). L'hypothèse de Barba est la suivante : pour donner une impulsion au renouvellement, à la transformation du théâtre, les écoles de théâtre devraient, paradoxalement, former des gens qui ne veulent pas s'adapter à une conjoncture, c'est-à-dire de préparer des « rebelles »<sup>29</sup>. Pour Eugenio Barba, ce rôle appartient au *théâtre de groupe*, au « théâtre de la fracture » situé en dehors du circuit culturel officiel.

Mais est-il complètement inconcevable que, à l'intérieur d'une école de théâtre, les germes du nouveau prennent naissance ? En constatant que les praticiens à vocation de pédagogues ont cru à la possibilité d'une réformation du théâtre non seulement par leurs réalisations mais aussi par leurs élèves, Georges Banu fait, dans un article de 2002, une classification des types de metteurs en scène et de pédagogues théâtraux<sup>30</sup>. Selon lui, on peut distinguer deux catégories : le « maître », associé au modèle du gourou oriental, et le « penseur de l'enseignement », correspondant occidental du maître. Chacun opère différemment, en accord avec les principes qui l'animent.

<sup>26</sup> *Teatru. Singurătate, meșteșug, revoltă*, p. 138, 140.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 126.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> George Banu, « Les penseurs de l'enseignement », in *Alternatives Théâtrales*, n° 70-71 / 2002, p. 2-4.

Parmi d'autres, le « penseur de l'enseignement » considère que l'expérience transforme à la fois l'élève et lui-même. Le professeur, « guide dans l'obscurité » (conformément à la formule de Peter Brook), ne se différencie de ses élèves que le degré d'avancement dans les territoires de l'Inconnu. Comme le même Georges Banu le constate, dans l'article mentionné, les formules contemporaines ont fait glisser la balance vers la philosophie éducationnelle du « penseur de l'enseignement ». Celui-ci fait de sa méthode un acte critique. Plus que le maître, le penseur de l'enseignement incite à la révolte. L'engagement intime de ce genre de professeur ne vise pas seulement l'intégration des acteurs dans le théâtre, mais aussi la *transformation* de celui-ci par l'assimilation d'une nouvelle génération de « rebelles »<sup>31</sup>. Georges Banu mentionne qu'aujourd'hui, quand les formules institutionnelles et les programmes des écoles traditionnelles sont devenus très flexibles, il arrive fréquemment que les « penseurs de l'enseignement » transmettent leur expérience dans les cadres des instituts d'études théâtrales.

Les écoles de théâtre peuvent donc constituer le cadre où des professeurs ayant une attitude créatrice stimulent une attitude « ouverte », capable de générer, ultérieurement, de la nouveauté. Grâce à la stabilité économique, c'est justement ce genre d'institutions qui se montre capable d'assurer une initiation complexe à l'aspirant. Mais, en même temps, les écoles de théâtre sont menacées de toutes les tares de l'enseignement : la routine, le contentement de soi, la « fixation dans le projet ». Les principes pédagogiques du « tiers théâtre » représentent un antidote contre la dégradation des écoles d'acteurs. Concrètement, les normes du « théâtre de la fracture » peuvent être prises en compte en beaucoup de situations. En premier lieu, comme disait Radu Penciulescu, « la première question est celle de la sélection [...] la pédagogie porte l'empreinte de ceux auxquels elle s'adresse. La relation entre l'élève et le pédagogue définit l'un aussi bien que l'autre. » Le processus d'admission dans l'école devrait chercher à identifier, aux candidats potentiels, l'existence de la « justification personnelle » sans laquelle le processus formateur tout entier est compromis. Ensuite, tout au long de son évolution, il est nécessaire que l'étudiant soit guidé par un tuteur / maître. Les formules pédagogiques alternatives (des cours modulaires, l'enseignement dans un système d'ateliers de création, etc.), testés présentement, peuvent éventuellement compléter, mais non pas remplacer, le système des classes de « maître ». Celui-ci, loin d'être le garant d'un processus formateur sans erreur, est pourtant le seul qui puisse assumer une responsabilité. Il n'est pas suffisant que l'étudiant ait des professeurs compétents aux « disciplines » du programme

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

scolaire. L'atomisation de la responsabilité du guidage de l'étudiant peut générer la confusion et l'entropie.

Le secret de l'apprentissage réside, comme le souligne Eugenio Barba, aussi dans la *durée*<sup>32</sup>. Si, en ce qui concerne la première condition, l'effort – l'investissement d'effort –, tout dépend des exigences du professeur, de la motivation / des capacités de l'apprenti, dans le cas de la seconde, la *durée*, on touche à un des points névralgiques de l'enseignement théâtral actuel. Eugenio Barba s'exprime de manière catégorique : « le temps de l'apprentissage ne saurait être limité à trois-quatre ans »<sup>33</sup>. La condensation des études pour devenir acteur à trois ans, dans le système d'enseignement roumain par exemple, n'est pas naturelle, par ce qu'elle ignore les réalités les plus élémentaires quant au rythme nécessaire à la (re)formation de l'*unité corps-esprit* de l'acteur. Roberta Carreri, une des actrices emblématiques de l'Odin Teatret, décrit son parcours, en indiquant deux étapes : la première, celle du *training* collectif, la deuxième, celle des préparatifs individuels, basée non seulement sur les techniques apprises, mais aussi sur les nouvelles choses vers lesquelles l'ont poussée sa curiosité et ses aspirations. C'est seulement après la consommation de la première étape que l'acteur peut commencer à cultiver son « jardin privé ». Si, après trois ans d'apprentissage à l'Odin Teatret, Eugenio Barba considère que Roberta Carreri peut donner forme à son « entraînement personnel », ceci est dû, principalement, à l'intensité du *training* de la première étape, intensité qu'on ne peut atteindre en aucune école de théâtre dans les trois ans de la licence du modèle Bologne. Dans une image surprenante, typique pour Eugenio Barba, le travail est vu comme étant dépourvu de protection, tel un enfant. « Le travail doit être protégé. »<sup>34</sup>

L'insistance sur l'aspect laborieux de l'entraînement a des raisons multiples. À côté de la brisure des limites personnelles, le travail jusqu'à l'épuisement, en groupe, bâtit le sens de la responsabilité envers le partenaire. « Je suis ici pour l'autre », voici le postulat de première importance du code éthique que l'acteur, dans la conception d'Eugenio Barba, est appelé à s'approprier. Chaque acteur contribue à l'élaboration du spectacle, tant par la richesse de ses expériences autobiographiques, que par la richesse des expériences imaginaires. L'imagination est vue comme source principale de la création, aussi valide que le souvenir. Par le signe d'équivalence mis entre la mémoire et l'imagination, Eugenio Barba réconcilie deux tendances théâtrales, deux écoles, longtemps antagonistes.

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<sup>32</sup> *Teatru. Singurătate, meșteșug, revoltă*, p. 138.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> *Casa în flăcări*, p. 382.



Torgeir Wethal and César Brie on the coast of Chicxulub during the rehearsals of the performance *Talabot*, 1988. Photo Odin Teatret Archive

À la fin, il devient clair que, dans n'importe quelle école de théâtre, afin qu'elle puisse faire face à sa mission difficile, dans des conditions de moins en moins favorables, l'entraînement de l'acteur doit rester : 1. une épreuve à travers laquelle l'étudiant réalise jusqu'à quel point il est prêt à s'engager totalement pour ce qu'il croit et affirme ; 2. une possibilité de dépasser le divorce entre l'intention et la réalisation ; 3. un facteur concret de la *transformation* de l'acteur en tant qu'être humain et que membre d'un groupe.

Il est malaisé d'établir combien des idées qui ont assuré la vitalité et la durée du théâtre d'Eugenio Barba peuvent être suivies dans une école qui vise la formation d'acteurs. Mais chaque génération nouvelle d'étudiants représente une possibilité de commencer la réforme de la pédagogie et, implicitement, du théâtre. Les chances de survie du théâtre ne dépendent plus de la réponse à la question démagogique et stérile : que représente aujourd'hui le théâtre pour la société ? Selon Barba, ce que tout un chacun devrait faire, ce serait répondre à la question : « que représente le théâtre



pour moi » et traduire la réponse en « action sans compromis ». C'est cela et seulement cela qui mènera à la « vraie révolution du théâtre »<sup>35</sup>.

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## **INTERVIEWS AND TESTIMONIES**



## *Eros which does not vanish*

### **An Interview with Eugenio Barba by Liviu Malița, July 2013**

**Liviu Malița:** *Eugenio Barba, you have confessed a constant scepticism towards the role of theatre nowadays. At the same time, you have also warned against what you call “the last and most dangerous illusion – which is its insignificance”. Theatre, you claim, has relinquished its traditional goals, it has lost its major meanings and its former importance. It has become something “deprived of rational justification”, of social functionality, an “empty ritual”: these days it is a marginal art, intended for a minority. Why should we continue to do theatre, today, and who will benefit from it?*

**Eugenio Barba:** Since film took over, theatre has become a minority performance genre. This fact which could have represented a death blow at the beginning of the twentieth century, on the contrary provoked a revival of our craft, and we witnessed the Great Reform. Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Appia, Craig, Copeau, Brecht and Artaud and many others discovered new technical devices and infused new visions and objectives for our craft which until that moment had been an entertainment trade. Theatre invented new forms and acquired radical new meanings in society and for the individual, becoming a means for therapeutic, social, ethical, spiritual and political aims.

A feeling of becoming superfluous reappeared after World War 2. Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski wrote in the early 1960s that if all theatre buildings were closed down, nobody would protest apart from the actors. Theatre was necessary only for those who did it. But then came 1968 and we experienced a second Great Reform with a range of outstanding artists who widened the frontiers and scope of our art. Today we can still see the appeal which theatre has for each new generation, nourishing our profession with a continuous stream of young ideas. On the other hand, if theatre does not wish to remain at its zero degree of sheer entertainment, it has to be ignited

by a personal fire which can be lit only by each individual who works on the stage. It is this personal motivation, need and responsibility which I refer to in my writings.

**L. M.:** *You have named three crucial experiences that represented landmarks in your biography: when you saw Brecht's performance The Mother by Gorky, then Grotowski's The Constant Prince and when you discovered Kathakali theatre. Although very diverse, these experiences had all been, according to your confession, shocking events. In what way did they interfere with the shaping of your own artistic program?*

**E. B.:** In my first years of practice, the shock of these three performances seen at different periods provoked an emotional impact. Their powerful effect reached deeply within me. I was astonished by the acting which I had never seen before. They were a source of inspiration and represented an energy which gave me freedom and courage to follow my own path. I would have liked to imitate them, but unfortunately I was not able to do so.

The professional development of any artist is oxygenated by two lungs. One consists of the objective technical know-how which we absorb through practice. We always learn by imitation: children from their parents, art students from their teachers. But with age imitation ends, is transformed and becomes something personal.

The other lung is our biography. This lung prevents us from repeating the artistic results of our models – Stanislavski, Brecht or Meyerhold, although we may strive to do so. The thousand small and fundamental choices taken by these artists during the creation of one of their performances were dictated by their own specific biography and the history in which they were living. Hence, the uniqueness – or relativity – of their exploits. We cannot repeat them. We are doomed to start from scratch.

But we can be enlightened, inspired and even profoundly influenced by a book, a musical composition or a performance. We can clearly sense that it has changed our way of seeing and thinking. But I would compare this fact to a blood transfusion, coming from an extraneous organism but becoming part of our own. The foreign blood does not change us, it just reinvigorates our characteristics.

**L. M.:** *You are aligned among the directors that consider the aesthetic stake of the theatre insufficient. You talk, in the prolongation of Brecht, about "active art" and about "disengaged engagement". In the youth texts you seemed tempted by the idea of insurgence through theatre, later becoming obvious that, in your vision, the change that theatre must determine is (just) the interior one, that you change the*

*world by changing yourself. But you are especially an exemplary successor of Grotowski, for which art was "a vehicle" for achieving a (which?) purpose. Do you privilege, at your own turn, the metaphysical versant? Do you believe that theatre can and must compete, in the contemporary society, with religion?*

**E. B.:** Most of the terms I employ are "estranged" from their customary use and meaning. For example, I speak of *revolt*, but by this I intend an opposition against our own propensity to facility and compromise. The *engagement* I think of is first of all towards ourselves. We should be committed to our own personal values, which are not necessarily similar to those recurrent in our profession, society or in the dominating aesthetical criteria. These values – which I normally call *superstitions* – are decisive in our choices, in the way we build the working relationships with our colleagues and with our spectators, and in which geographical place and social milieu we want to practice our craft. In the end, there are four fundamental questions which each of us must answer: *why* I do theatre, *how* I do it, *where* and for *whom*.

I don't think theatre should compete with religion or that art should be a substitute for religion. For me the theatrical experience – the working process and its result, the performance – is first of all the possibility of a change of awareness. I call it a *mutation of state*. I live it as a subterranean emotional transition into that part of me which lives in exile within me. This is also the response I receive from some of my spectators. Such an encounter with oneself thanks to theatre is rare in the circumstances of our time. When it happens, I know it provokes consequences in a person's inner and sometimes outer life.

One can describe this experience as spiritual. But I don't like to employ this term in order not to banalise the sphere which it alludes to. For me theatre remains a craft, an objective technical potentiality in order to build a fictional world which is more striking than reality. It is a subjective arithmetical operation where one adds happiness to unhappiness and the mysterious result, when correct, is happiness which torments the heart. Maybe this is the "beauty" of which Novalis spoke.

A performance should radiate an aesthetical seduction, but for me it is above all a social ceremony. It is the opportunity to establish a relationship between a permanent *comunitas* of theatre people with a transient *comunitas* of spectators. What sense can I give to this meeting in our lacerated society? We don't agree with many things which happen around us, and many others awake our indignation. How may we refuse these? How may we indicate that



there are other values, ways and solutions? You must build an example, a small society which lives according to a different distribution of merit and material goods. Theatre has been this for me: a floating island, a micro-society which tries to live following other principles and which, through the impartial concreteness of a craft, allows a process of personal liberation. At the same time theatre is an objective artistic fact for the spectators and may change their way of thinking and behaving.

Let me give a concrete example. Odin Teatret moved to Denmark from Norway in 1966. We were a small group of foreigners who in the course of few years became even more internationalized. The small town of Holstebro had 16.000 inhabitants, was Christian of that type of fundamentalist Protestantism which shies from the joys of life, including any form of entertainment. Here theatre was not a traditional activity. We didn't speak Danish, most of us were representatives of that youth culture which in those years was changing the cultural criteria in many fields: long hair, blue jeans and vividly coloured clothes, rock and roll music which sounded like cacophony in many ears. Our performances were radically different from what was seen in theatre and on television. People complained that Odin Teatret's performances were incomprehensible, although they could remain impressed and emotionally impacted. And this caused even more rage because they could not accept being moved by a performance which they did not understand. Once again you must remember that this happened before 1968, at the dawn of the Second Theatre Reform. In Holstebro there was an immediate massive popular protest against our theatre. In public meetings with politicians and in letters to the local press, the population attacked us and the town authorities who had invited us to settle in their town. We were parasites and strangers who deserved to be sent away. But with the years this attitude began to change. People saw that we went to work at 7 or 8 in the morning, just like them. They became aware that visitors were coming to their town to see our performances or study with us. They felt proud that their town became known in the rest of Denmark and even abroad. They themselves began to enjoy our "bizarre" performances and the many strange activities we organized. Recently, a Danish theatre historian, Exe Christoffersen, has written that Holstebro is unique in Europe in its cultural policy over the last forty years. While the rest of the European countries increasingly emphasized and supported a "national" culture and identity, Holstebro politicians chose a group of foreigners as artistic representatives of their town, and this foreign theatre was able to revitalize the population's

feeling of belonging. It appears to be a story with a reassuringly happy end. But when Odin Teatret disappears, I am sure that the old prejudices will return, although at first not as strong as before.

**L. M.:** *Grotowski's allegation concerning the fact that Artaud's inspiring encounter with the Balinese Theatre was based on a fundamental misunderstanding, which finally proved to be fertile and visionary, is quite challenging. What is your opinion about the way in which Grotowski himself related to various traditions and doctrinaire systems of oriental spirituality, considering them to be viable sources of theatre renewal? How can we explain this fertilization of theatre through the appropriation (and voluntary distortion) of non-theatrical and non-artistic techniques?*

**E. B.:** William Butler Yeats with Noh, Brecht with Mei Lanfang and the acting of the Peking Opera, Meyerhold with Kabuki or Artaud with the Balinese: they are all examples of misinterpretations. These misunderstandings were the rule in the first decades of the twentieth century since the meetings were short and happened in Europe. All these great European artists never saw Asian traditional performances in their context, nor did they know the conventions and purposes of their techniques. But in art right and wrong do not exist, only what radiates life or is inert. The misunderstanding of Artaud or the one of Brecht about the *verfremdung* of the Chinese actor were extremely stimulating not only for their vision and practice, but also for generations of western and Asian theatre people. In art there is only one rule: there *are* no rules. You can be inspired by crime, town planning, biology or comic strips, the way a woman sweeps a room (think of Copeau) or how a man rides a bicycle (think of Stanislavski in the novel by Bulgakov). Bob Wilson was inspired to do theatre by an autistic boy. So appropriation and voluntary or involuntary distortion are part of our process of search and individuation.

**L. M.:** *Do you consider that there are aspects of the Grotowskian tradition that require (radical) modification or, at least, gradation?*

**E. B.:** Grotowski was active as theatre director from 1959 to 1969. During these ten years he realized achievements which produced radical changes with far reaching consequences in the way of thinking and doing theatre until today. Let me mention some of them: the breaking of the spatial separation between actors and spectators; the idea that the spectators were also an ensemble who, like that of the actors, should be directed, at times even participating actively; the radical dramaturgical approach since he was the first director to interfere with the text, not in an attempt to modernize it, but imploding it through a painstaking process which he called dialectic of derision and apotheosis; the reappraisal of the role of the

actor as commitment, not just political but as the embodiment of a personal coherence; the re-introduction of exercises accompanying daily the actor's work, underlining the actor's identity which should not depend merely on the work during the rehearsals and the resulting performances. All these are objective aspects, a technical legacy. We may call it the Grotowski tradition and even today it represents an efficient practical inspiration for the mind and the body of any actor and director. Grotowski, like Stanislavski or Brecht, is not a model to follow, an æsthetical dogma, a political or artistic utopia. He is sheer energy which strengthens our own way of transforming theatre into a living relationship, charged with our own diversity.

I am unable to comment upon Grotowski's various stages of activity since he gave up theatre practice. His later activity did not deal with preparing performances and thus with what is the specific kernel of our craft: a relationship between an actor and a spectator. This was an axiom for him in his fundamental interview called "The New Testament of the Theatre". However his later activity which he defined in different ways, was an inspiration for many theatre people although it had nothing to do directly with theatre. I considered him a pole of energy, a displacer of horizons in our profession, if we consider the latter as an ecological system with many niches. I cherished his stubbornness, his struggle against the spirit of the time, his solitary route. I was always at his side. But for me theatre was something else: for instance, how to work daily, year after year, together with the same core of people until our death without withering away as human beings and as artists.

**L. M.:** *At first sight, the concept of "laic spirituality" used by Grotowski is oxymoronic. It seems that its success in the field of theatre practice, rather than clarifying its precise meaning, is rendering it even more obscure. In this respect, do you find that the above mentioned expression is sufficiently informative? What kind of "spirituality" is being targeted, as long as it aspires to exceed the aesthetic, but without positioning itself in the religious? Do you see a possible connection with the "New Age paradigm"?*

**E. B.:** They are two distinct phases in what an actor does: one is the process, which Stanislavski defined strikingly as "the work of the actor on oneself"; and than the result which is aimed at the spectators. If one concentrates only on the process, which Grotowski did when he abolished the spectators from his activity, the process – the work on oneself – becomes a sort of yoga which is laic in the sense of not being attached to a specific religious belief or a doctrine. This has to do with a field close to what one

could call techniques of interiority: how to achieve another state of awareness. This type of “exercise” was always practiced on the edge of the traditional religions. Sometimes these practices were tolerated, at others they were considered heretical. With the slackening of religious belief, this type of need found refuge in different contexts. Grotowski opened a space within the more general field called “Theatre”.

**L. M.:** *To what extent might “theatre anthropology”, founded by you, serve a spiritualist project? Does a tension not appear between the archetypal dimension, non-historical and trans-cultural, on one side, and the inherent relativism of cultural anthropology, focused on the diversity and the socio-historical context, on the other? Is there any risk for this internal conceptual tension to transform itself into a methodological dead end?*

**E. B.:** I don’t think that this danger exists. The best synonym for theatre anthropology is theatre biology. If I show you a pulsating heart ready to be transplanted, you will not be able to find out whether it belongs to a Vietnamese or a Mapuche, to a communist or a racist, if its owner enjoyed Beckett or striptease. You just notice that the heart is pumping and is alive. There exists a scenic anatomy whose principles are shared by all performers – actors and dancers of organized performances – and help to enhance stage presence producing an effect of liveliness which strikes the spectators’ senses. An actor can apply his personal knowledge of these technical principles – change of balance, a dilation of the body’s tensions, a way of thinking and behaving which is paradoxical with respect to that of daily life, etc. – in order to build a scenic presence and retain the attention of the spectators. But for what purpose? This remains the option of the individual artist. In the same way that biology can be used also for indicating that one race is superior to another, also theatre anthropology can be exploited in a spiritualistic performance, a racist, an aesthetical or a therapeutic one. Theatre anthropology does not ensure an artistic result. It indicates a few technical principles which change the muscular tonus of the performer and thus influences the spectator’s perception. It is not a dogma, an aesthetic, a method, just the results of a comparative study of the stage behaviour of performers from various traditions, cultures and genres. It is a pragmatic knowledge which an actor and a director can apply knowingly as long as they consider it useful. On the other hand, many apply these principles simply out of a technical know-how.

**L. M.:** *How do you relate to the tradition of happening and of performance? In the light of the already established theses about the constitutive ambivalence of sainthood and about the primary connection between violence and the sacred (René*

*Girard), do you grant any role to the physical aggression (to which the promoters of these “artistic actions” often turn) in the “sacred” which is manifested theatrically? I refer particularly to trends and art movements such as “The Orgiastic Mystery Theatre” of Hermann Nitsch and “The Panic Movement” by Alejandro Jodorowski, Arrabal & Topor.*

**E. B.:** I shun physical aggression in theatre and I have never used it. I have met Arrabal and read his and Jodorowski’s manifest. They are the proof of the variety and multiplicity of manifestations within the Second Theatre Reform. But they had no impact on my work. However, Marcel Marceau’s small plays, based on Jodorowski’s scenarios, impressed me.

**L. M.:** *Should there be violence in the reference to the masters? How did you succeed to remain wedded to the grotowskian tradition (set up itself as a revolution), avoiding at the same time to give way to dormancy and mannerism, and being inventive and imaginative? You have often spoken about the relationship with the master as a source of artistic and spiritual excellency. However, doesn’t this fact imply also something smothering? What is the burden of the apprentice in relation to the concrete person of the master? Which are his excruciations? Can we interpret the onirical and artistic leitmotiv of your book Burning the House also as a metaphor for the desire to counteract the poisonous aspects of remaining in the master’s orbit?*

**E. B.:** Personally I don’t see any poisonous element in the relationship with a person whom we call our master. Those I have called my masters are individuals who motivated me to climb on their shoulders and see further, discovering the direction for my first autonomous steps. I always called Grotowski my master although he was just a couple of years older than me and didn’t have much theatre experience when I met him. But I witnessed how he literally invented his own theatre with his actors. Above all I learned at his side that theatre is a struggle for inner freedom. One must remember that Jerzy Grotowski and Ludwik Flaszen, the other director of Teatr 13 Rzedów in the small Polish town of Opole, had to cope with a hostile Communist Party Secretary who finally closed their theatre in 1964. What could have been a tragedy became their salvation. The Party Secretary from Wroclaw, a bigger and artistically more effervescent town, invited Grotowski and his theatre to move there. From one day to another, from being a rejected artist he became a part of the nomenklatura. I have several masters and Grotowski is only one of them.



Odin Teatret's 45th Anniversary, Wrocław, 2009.  
Photo Francesco Galli, Odin Teatret Archives

Among these I count my actors. They have taught me all I know about the practice of acting and directing. They followed me with loyalty and fervour in the beginning on a road which seemed worthless and with no issue. Their persistence and abnegation brought about artistic results which have made me and our theatre known. With the years they have come up with new ideas, inventive practices, unsuspected initiatives. Thanks to them, I still feel today as if I am in the centre of a shower of new challenges and impulses.

When it comes to how to lead an ensemble of people in spite of difficulties and tensions, my master was Eigil Winnjie. He was a sheet metal artisan who taught me to weld when, at eighteen, I emigrated from Italy to work in Norway. He was the owner of a small workshop in Oslo employing seven people. He worked together with us, sharing the same tasks: climbing on the roofs in winter time when we had to repair damage caused by the snow, giving advice and taking advice from the other craftsmen, controlling and judging the results of our work while always expecting the best, cleaning the workshop with the rest of us every Saturday afternoon before the day of rest. He imprinted in my memory the image of the leader who is both

humble and skilled, whose authoritativeness does not depend on hierarchic authority, but on competency and ingenuity. Eigil, as a master, was a demanding older brother who knew more than the others and was always able to find a solution and give the example.

**L. M.:** *You are, in your turn, a master – a power and an exemplary pole. Do you consider that at a certain point the “dictatorship of the director” is necessary? The stories that go about say that you impose, at Odin Teatret, a certain “discipline of distance”. If this is true, what role do you grant to this type of relation in the training of the actor as a member of the company and in the maintenance of cohesion within the troupe?*

**E. B.:** The word dictatorship sounds terrible, it evokes images of lack of empathy and oppression. However, preparing a performance is not a democratic game with each person involved having a vote. A performance is a meeting between very different personalities from various specializations: writers, stage-designers, composers and musicians, actors, light designers, technicians. These people are chosen on the basis of their individual merits, and in spite of the diversity of their view on life and art, agree that one person – the director – should lead the process of amalgamating the variety of expressions and make them converge into an organic, suggestive and meaningful unity – a performance – which must have a sense for the spectator. It is difficult to define precisely the type of competences which a director must possess. But today, in our branch, everybody agrees that the director is the appointed and responsible leader of such a process. However the way of implementing this responsibility, imposing the rules, establishing relationships and guiding the growth towards the final result is different. This depends on the director’s personality and on the milieu.

Directing is peculiar in so much as it is a practice that can be defined only *in relationship to a particular theatre milieu*. In some contexts the director is a person who takes care of the critical-aesthetical representation of a text; in others, one who conceives and composes a performance from nothing. In certain cases it is an artist who pursues her own image of theatre materialising it in different performances with changing collaborators; in others he or she is a competent professional capable of harmonising the performance’s heterogeneous elements. There are milieus where the director is a wandering artist, looking for companies to be provisionally ruled; and there are others in which he or she always works with the same group of which he or she is often the leader and also responsible for the actors’ training.

Many consider the director an experienced coordinator. Others identify him or her as the performance's true author, the first spectator who also has the last word in every decision.

When I began I had nothing to offer my inexpert young actors – no venue, no experience or financial compensation. I could only offer them the prospect of a life of sacrifice. We were an amateur group and we wanted to do theatre because we felt a personal need, different for each of us. It was fair that we paid out of our own pocket. No one had asked us to join this craft. I was obliged to train my actors, to prepare them for a long anonymous path. I began with many sorts of exercises which at that time were not part of the usual learning process. But these were not only an approach to the craft but also a way to put my actors to the test, to let them discover their limits and force themselves to go beyond them. I wanted them to climb their own summit. This was always the training's aim. I was demanding, often severe. My task consisted in emptying their minds of the commonplaces and the common sense they had absorbed in school and in their family – how to behave sensibly and avoid excess. After a few years they reached a degree of independence even from me, they became directors and teachers with their own personal visions and different methods to realise them. Odin Teatret today is a milieu of equal masters who, individually, have conquered their own diversity. But I have preserved the director's prerogative and have the last word. Still today my actors recognise in me the protector of the spectators, their ombudsman.

**L. M.:** *You have provided, over the course of time, several answers to the question, already a cliché, about the longevity of Odin Teatret. You have not excluded, among other arguments, the dynamic of the love relationships within the group. Did you refer to eroticism as a contingent act, purely accidental, that you have used as a coagulating agent, or can it be upgraded to a genuine principle of method, similar, let's say, to the transfer in psychoanalysis?*

**E. B.:** The longevity of our theatre with the same core of actors has made me reflect upon its reasons and the nature of the bonds between the people of the Odin. One reason is no doubt economical. The fact is that *always*, from the very moment we moved to Holstebro in Denmark, each member has received a secure salary for twelve months – an exception in the theatre conditions of Denmark and Europe. This form of material safeguard becomes a weighty factor with age.

However I consider crucial my decision to work with the same actors, thus going against the transient nature of the theatre with its ephemeral relationships with regard to the spectators and when it comes to the duration



of working together. Financial security was not enough, if I wanted to keep my collaborators. I had to create a milieu which fought entropy and mechanical habits and continued to be artistically stimulating for the specific needs of each of them. I had to provoke constant changes and encourage the individual needs and urges for freedom, and at the same time integrate these individualistic urges into a collective type of production such as theatre. It has not been an easy task to create a group dynamic which alternates periods of fervent individualism with others of close collaboration. This meant that my choices and decisions as a responsible leader had always to take into consideration the individual wishes of my actors. But my effort and fatigue was compensated by the growth of an emotional universe which your question points to.

Our shared professional adventure has nourished the growth of an *eros which does not vanish*. It is an affective bond that the passage of time and the protracted proximity has transfigured from passionate enthusiasm and juvenile impetus into affection, friendship, attachment, dedication, solidarity, gratitude, loyalty, tenderness, even sentimentality. All these terms – which are for me the different embodiments of *eros* – describe the phases and the consistency of the professional ties holding together the people of the Odin for half a century. This does not mean that tensions, disagreements and conflicts are absent between us. But each of us is aware that we hold in our arms a small child who risks being harmed by the manifestation of our egos. And this is also a form of *eros* which I would call caring.

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## *Dramaturgy according to Daedalus\**

JULIA VARLEY\*\*

**Abstract.** In this confessional paper, the author explains the construction of her role of Daedalus in an Odin Teatret performance, *Mythos*. The relationships with the other characters are explained, as well as the signification of the mythical figure of Daedalus, the rhythm of the performance, the role of the music, of the light and of the costumes, etc. The subsequent question is about the signification of myths in contemporary world, from a multiplicity of points of view: political, psychological, ethical, and, above all, literary and artistic.

**Keywords:** Daedalus, *Mythos*, role, acting, Julia Varley.

The Daedalus who allows me to pursue these considerations on dramaturgy is the character I play in *Mythos*, the production by Odin Teatret presented for the first time on the first of May 1998 in Holstebro, Denmark.

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A long time before the theme of the production was known and also before I was informed of the character I was going to play, Daedalus had begun leading me into the labyrinth.

A music tape had arrived by post from Brazil. It was a gift sent to me by a spectator of another performance, *Kaosmos*. On one side of the tape were a few sonatas by Villa Lobos and on the other a concert that used bird songs and jungle sounds as a starting point to develop a chant interpreted by a woman. I had always liked Villa Lobos and the music inspired by nature also attracted me: the female voice was similar to my own and offered me subject matter for research. I listened to the tape so often that its sounds began to sink into my system.

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\* Translated from Italian by Julia Varley, with thanks to Gilly Adams for reading the translation

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I knew gold would be my colour. I had found a gilt feather in a shop in Holstebro and I had bought it. Showing it to the director, I had said that it was an element for the next production. I don't know why I knew this.

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Dramaturgy according to Daedalus could be described as a seductive path, which seems mysterious from a distance and along which one inevitably gets lost. This path obliges us to defy closed roads, to turn back and start the journey again. It makes us meet difficulties and monsters. Once within the labyrinth, the main preoccupation becomes finding the way out, how to arrive at the end and conclude the process. The red thread provided by a plot, a theme or of the life of a character is continually breaking. As the steering logic seems to disappear, we have to continue to simply move forwards or backwards. When everything seems lost, a new clue appears that prompts us to keep on marching.

The actors and the director do not always have faith that what is being built will have an effect on the spectator, but this result becomes important only when one is near the exit. It can happen that also the spectators immersed in the labyrinth recognise what they have explored only a long time after having passed through the experience.

I have defined for myself the actor's dramaturgy as the instrument that helps to organise a scenic behaviour, the logic with which actions are chained together and the technique to do real actions in a world of fiction. The actor trained to be without divisions between body, mind, imagination, senses, feelings and reason, acts physically and vocally to affect the senses of the spectator. During the process of creating the performance, the order of importance and priority of the different phases of fulfilment of the actor's dramaturgy changes depending on the actor, on the stage of development of the work and on the point of professional evolution. The building of presence, the creation of scenic behaviour through improvisation or composition, repetition, the interpretation of a text or of a character, elaboration, the repeated performances – each of these phases has its own dramaturgy for an actor.

But in this article I would like to consider dramaturgy in more general terms than those of an actor. I would like to enter the complex dramaturgical logic of a performance, *Mythos*, but from the limited point of view of only one of its characters, Daedalus. The first step is to find the entrance to the labyrinth.



Julia Varley as Daedalus in Odin Teatret's performance *Mythos*. Daedalus, a well-known character from Greek mythology, was a renowned craftsman who built the Labyrinth, a huge palace in which one lost one's way. He fashioned the wings with which he and his son Icarus escaped flying from the island of Crete after their imprisonment by King Minos

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While travelling in Bali, I was fascinated by the flowers that adorn the statues and the costumes of dancers, and by the richness of colour of all the decorations in the streets, temples and villages. In the tropical regions of northern Australia a little later, while crossing a bridge over a swampland, the enormous variety of sounds and songs of birds and animals had impressed me. I listened to them and tried to repeat them: impossible. Those sounds reminded me of the Brazilian music tape. While I continued my journey, I started to mix the sounds of imaginary birds into my attempts of producing harmonics with my voice.

I had learnt some rudiments of harmonic chant technique a month earlier during a workshop with Michael Vetter, a German who was Stockhausen's musician collaborator. The workshop had been organised in Turin by Vincenzo Amato of the Cooperativa Il Mutamento and announced on the newspaper of the Italian Invisible Theatres. Michael Vetter was a name I was familiar with: fifteen years earlier I had found a record of his in the library that had kept me company for a long period during the morning training hours.

My interest in harmonic chant had arisen after having listened to a recording of music from Mongolia. It seemed to me that I could hear the sound of a high whistle together with a male voice, even if the presentation on the cover of the record explained that it was the double song of only one person. I could not understand how it was possible to emit such a sound. I searched for other references and so I came to know about Tuva singing, David Hykes and his Harmonic Choir, and Michael Vetter. Later Vetter's music remained as a background accompaniment to my physical training and the harmonic chant disappeared like many other acrobatic exercises that I absolutely did not manage to do, while I followed other roads to grow as an actor.

Chance – and the interest in their movement – made me read the newspaper of the Invisible Theatres. Chance – and the decision to have some time without engagements, in order to regain contact with my dreams without having to chase a pre-arranged schedule – resulted in my being free for the three days of the workshop. Chance – and curiosity – made me sit at the table with Michael Vetter and his assistant Natasha Nikprelevic during the lunch break and ask them if they wanted to come to Denmark and how much it would cost. I wanted to share the experience of that workshop with my colleagues at Odin Teatret. The workshop had enriched me; during the work I had discovered a new vision of sound and text, and I thought that it could be interesting for my colleagues as well. Chance works for us when we help circumstances. By chance we find the point of departure.

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I wanted a character that would be of “nature” and not of “culture”. I worked a whole night preparing a costume composed of a carpet of flowers. I was afraid that the flowers would wither before showing the costume. I only managed to prepare two shields of pink and yellow daisies that I placed on my back and chest. I had painted my mouth black in a thin shape to reproduce the image of a beak. Waiting outside the room where actors and director would meet for the first time, I was embarrassed and excited. A poncho covered my suggestion of a costume so that it would not be revealed before entering the space that had been prepared secretly during the previous two weeks. We had all been informed that in the next production we would work with the poems by Henrik Norbrandt, a contemporary Danish poet, and that the theme would be the burial of a myth. The men of the group knew their characters: Oedipus, Thersites (the cowardly soldier of the *Iliad*), Orpheus, Prometheus and Guilhermino Barbosa (the rebel soldier that marched for 25,000 kilometres in Brazil together with the Prestes brigade).

I also turned to stone when I entered the room and saw the scenic space prepared by the director together with a stage designer and one of the actors: it was a Zen garden. Nothing was alive in there, everything was grey. The space was icy and very powerful.

We sat on the benches around the combed gravel and the stones placed asymmetrically and perfectly, while the director spoke. Amongst other things he gave the women the names of their characters. I should be Clytemnestra, and the others were Medea, Cassandra and Smyrna. One by one all the actors started to improvise moving in the space using what they knew about the characters as reference. My costume of real and colourful flowers was completely out of place.

Whatever movement the actors did in this landscape of stones was excessive. It was as if the presence of the actors was too much. The director usually found a difficult starting point that would force us to find new solutions, but it seemed to me that this time he had gone too far. I felt dispirited: I was a long way from the Balinese and Australian tropics, and I was cold. The next day I came to the rehearsals with a woollen suit and a fur hat, and the following day with a leopard-skin coat. But my courage and my defiance finished there.

Months of technical and building work followed. We moved towers and stones, we tried out light effects and floors that could withstand the trampled gravel. Every experiment demanded hours of preparation in

order to clean the room by making heaps of gravel on the edge of the space using spades and wheelbarrows, before redistributing the pebbles again. Clouds of dust were raised. During the rehearsals we wore masks over our mouths and labourer overalls. We asked ourselves how long our lungs could last. We ordered various kinds of gravel to test its colour and solidity. We washed the gravel and passed it through sieves. The men of the group were active, fascinated by having to solve technical details, while the women – also alarmed by the weight of all the elements used – often observed all the activity from the benches.

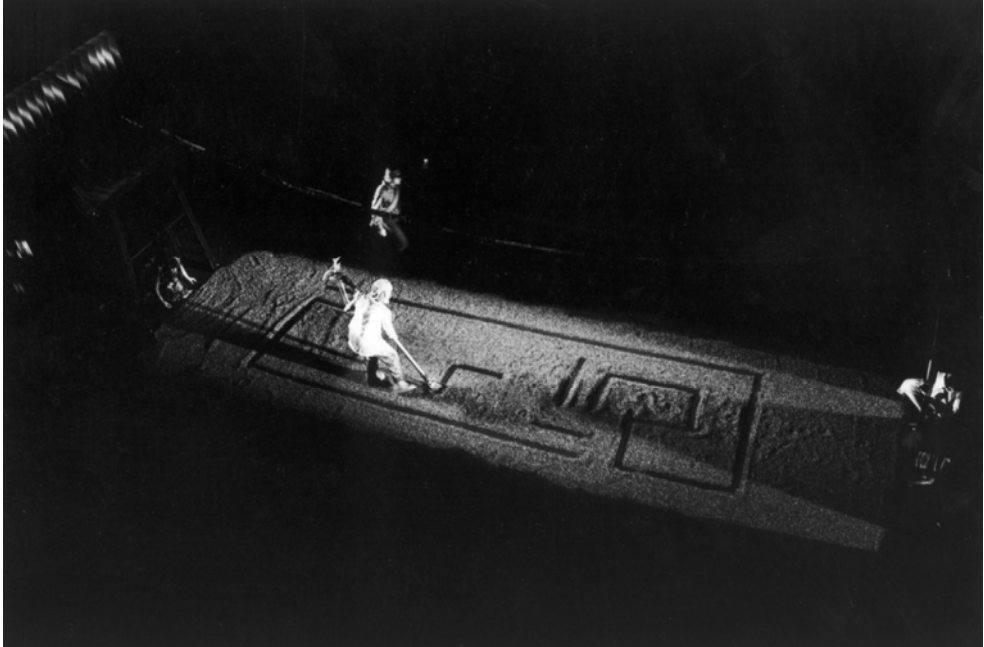
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I must confess that the Greek myths did not captivate me much, and the figure of Clytemnestra did even less. I would have preferred to have a male character so as to take distance from Doña Musica's habits, from the long black dress and high heels this character wore in the previous production. One of the actresses left the group and by so doing changed the balance amongst the characters: now there were fewer females who had committed a crime. Therefore the director proposed that instead of Clytemnestra I should play Daedalus. I immediately recognised the possibility of flying like a bird and of translating the theme of the Greek myths into the natural world I was interested in, and I accepted. Smyrna had disappeared; with time Prometheus became Lucky from *Waiting for Godot* and finally Sisyphus; from a certain point onwards Thersites was called Ulysses without this changing anything for the actor who interpreted that character.

In the meantime, after having worked in Holstebro with Michael Vetter and Natasha Nikprelevic, with the Vietnamese musician Trang Quang Hai, and with four musicians from Mongolia, each morning the actors worked with harmonic chants and adaptations of fragments of Henrik Norbrandt's poems to Mongolian melodies. We wanted to create a "mythical" sound, which came from another world, a non-human timbre, and to sing with a rhythm that would urge us to dance.

I studied all the information I could find on Daedalus and I decided that instead of simply representing the character, I wanted to present the context to which Daedalus belonged. Instead of following the logic of a character, my personal dramaturgy in the performance and consequently the materials I proposed during the rehearsals of *Mythos* referred to all the situations and people with which Daedalus had contact, even indirectly. The labyrinth, the Minotaur, the god in the likeness of a bull that emerges from the sea, Pasiphae, Ariadne, the thread, the betrayed love, Theseus, the

quail, the machine for the coitus between woman and animal, the jealousy between artisans, the mechanical dolls, the string in the snail, the power of Minos, Icarus' flight towards the sun, the journey to Sicily and Sardinia, the melted wings, the island in the Aegean Sea, the spring dance...: these were all elements I referred to and that I wanted to present in synthesis through my Daedalus. I wanted to play a context and not a character.



Daedalus drawing the fundamentals for the Labyrinth

One day a spectator of *Mythos* surprised me by asking why I played a man using a high pitched voice. I never thought of Daedalus as man or woman, but as the builder of the labyrinth, a worker and a parent.

In the centre of this context of the myth of Daedalus I found the Minotaur. The thread would give me orientation. The most typical visible attributes in all images of Daedalus and of his son Icarus were wings.

I built my own Minotaur. To depict a leg I used a long rain stick bought in Colombia that I painted gold; a white rabbit skin was the body; a big hand with lean fingers sculpted by a Balinese artist from the root of a tree represented the head and horns. I hung a golden rope on the horns. Different references came together in this composed object: there was nature in the form



of the sound of rain, the wood evoked the construction of the coitus machine, the white fur of Zeus, the cut hand and crown were the attributes of power. The supernatural and mythical being that was neither man nor animal was also inspired by the sculptures I had seen in Turin's Egyptian Museum.

In Holland in a haberdashery shop in Utrecht, I bought metres of golden string in different sizes and width, and a long roll of rooster feathers. In Korea I found a small bell-cup with a cover that resonated harmonically. I first wrapped twenty metres of string into the cup and then let it unravel freely so that it fell magically onto the floor following a tangled itinerary. I sewed the roll of feathers in a V shape and found a way of attaching what looked like wings to my arms. In this way other references and ideas were transformed into tangible elements: the bond between Ariadne and Theseus, the shape of the labyrinth, the harmonics, the hidden secret, the constructed wings, the bird and once again the colour gold.

With these props I worked to create some scenes.

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I was in Amsterdam with the director visiting the Museum of Van Gogh, one of my favourite artists. At the exit we came across four Asian men who were playing and singing in a nearby square. Their clothes helped us identify them as Mongolians. They had a strange string instrument that could neigh like a horse, and a kind of mandolin. The songs followed the pressing rhythm of a gallop and the "whistle voice", the harmonic chant, that alternated with a low and soft growling voice, could be clearly heard above all the music. One of the men, making use of majestic gestures, at times declaimed texts in which one could distinguish the words "Chingiz, Chingiz Khan". He was the one with whom we tried to communicate as he spoke a little German and Russian. His name was Palamshav Childaa. After many telephone calls and meetings with their local hosts, and having put pressure on the Danish Embassy and Home Office in order to receive an immediate entry visa for them, we managed to get the whole group to Holstebro. They at once charmed us with their generosity, cheerfulness, and musical and vocal ability. In five minutes they learnt the melody and text of a Danish song, while we needed a whole week to manage just to approximate the rhythmical variations and the vocal effects, and to write down on paper some lines of their song about the Altai Mountains.

Palamshav was also a dancer and one day he showed us some folk dances from Mongolia. I saw a bird fly. The movement of the arms and the steps augmenting in pace represented the daily actions of people who ride,

use a whip and lasso, go hunting and hold reigns. But the fast lifting and lowering of the shoulders, and the arrow that hits a bird that refuses to fall, seemed to me to be the essential movements of flying. That would be Daedalus's way of moving.

I recorded some dances on video and then, helped by the image of an always smiling Palamshav, for a month I devoted myself to learning the steps and movements of those dances from Mongolia accompanied by the driving rhythm of their music.

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While working with Michael Vetter and Natasha Nikprelevic, one day we improvised for a long time using only one word. It was really incredible to discover the huge variety of possible ways of saying the same thing. I worked with the word "minotaur". Later the Minotaur also became a central element of the performance, but not in the form of the stick that I had built, nor as simple text, but as the long snake of goat nails which had been hanging over the space since the beginning of rehearsals. With Vetter, I had discovered that a whole world to explore can be found within a word and a syllable, and that it is possible to sing harmonic melodies that would be difficult for me even with a normal voice. The director had given me three texts; one of them was composed of fragments of poems by Norbrandt. I tried to apply the harmonic chant technique to the words. For one text I used an extremely high pitched voice, where my harmonics were limited in number, but stronger. In another text I used the lowest and most relaxed voice I could reach, and in the other I interrupted the words with sounds of birds using the harmonic effects of some positions of the mouth and tongue. I had fun improvising for a long time mixing the sounds of birds, monkeys and frogs. I let the director listen to these improvisations, refusing to fix them into a finished vocal score. I wrote other texts myself starting from what I had read about Daedalus. The other actors of the group, especially the Scandinavians, concentrated more on Norbrandt and then presented some of the poems they liked most.

Many of these texts disappeared completely or were reduced in length, even to the extent of keeping only the vocal articulations that change the harmonics in the voice. Other texts were added; some of these I worked on by grafting them onto a montage of Sephardic songs, the Jewish songs from Arab Spain.

It was difficult to reach a coherent musical dramaturgy in the performance and overcome the fragmentation of the different melodies from Mongolia, Corsica, Sephardim, which were added to the original compositions

of our musicians and the vocal improvisations of the actors. The sound of the gravel, which created the “sea” or the “labyrinth”, helped us find this unity.

The first idea for the costumes came from two glossy jackets that the director had bought in an expensive shop at the airport of Santiago in Chile. These were shown to us together with objects such as a deer cranium and lama foetuses that he had found during a travel across Bolivia and the north of Argentina. In other shops in Utrecht and in Italy we bought evening dresses, coats, hats and wigs. Two sets of skirts and jackets had been sewn for me while I stubbornly continued to follow my own image of a craftsman dressed in overalls and gold to create my costume. Only when I managed to complete my own suggestion by adorning it with many metres of the string I had found in Utrecht, were the trousers and golden jacket finally accepted.

In fact Daedalus’s costume is what is left of an enormous amount of work around the labyrinth. Starting from the idea of the tangled itinerary of the string that fell out of the Korean bell, I had suggested a labyrinth made of rope held at the extremities by some of the actors that would serve to pull Guilhermino Barbosa into the mythical landscape. I imagined that this labyrinth came from Daedalus’s mind, and, to make this idea concrete, I made a hat of plaited rope that slowly freed itself from my head in the shape of the labyrinth. Many metres of rope were necessary to make this labyrinth. I had to add other plaited string wrapped around my neck to the hat and, to help me find the point from which I should start unfolding, I hang the ends of the string on the stick that was my Minotaur. The technical solution and the preparation that the many metres of cord required, kept me busy for two or three hours a day for many weeks. The rope should not only form the labyrinth, it also needed to divide into four parts to capture and pull Guilhermino Barbosa like a wild animal to be tamed. Moreover, if the labyrinth made of rope was used towards the end of the performance, it also needed to be introduced earlier. Therefore, besides the scene with the tangled string that I worked upon with another actor on the base of an Italian *tarantella* song, I also tried to create an extended spider’s web and a rain of strings from the centre of the scenic space.

From one day to the next the director got rid of all these scenes. The string and cords no longer existed in the performance. They were left only in Daedalus’ costume, to make the hat and the decoration around my neck and at my wrists, and to pull off Guilhermino Barbosa’s clothes and boots.

During the rehearsal process I had created the rope labyrinth and the other made of the tangled string that fell to the ground, while another actress had suggested the image of the animal captured by cords and the clothes instantly pulled off. Yet another actor had designed a labyrinth in the gravel by allowing the red carpet to appear from underneath with the help of the snowplough that we normally used to clean the space at the end of rehearsals. The carpet allowed a better view of the string lying on the ground than the gravel did, and consequently I had to dig a labyrinth following the path of the string. When the string finally disappeared from the general montage in the performance, what was left was the labyrinth drawn by the contrast between the carpet and the gravel. My Minotaur stick then both became the sceptre of power and, by adding a small spade and a fork at the opposite end of the sculpted hand, Daedalus's building tool. The hand was placed directly on top of the rain-stick and the white fur, now redundant, was taken away. The drawing of the labyrinth later also transformed into Guilhermino Barbosa's tomb, and the sceptre became the element that guides the ritual that wants to change history into myth.

I arrived at the end of the rehearsal process with the feeling it was not worthwhile to work hard. All the scenic material that I had spent hours, days, months to develop had been cut away, while the scenes I had proposed without engagement and just as a transition or as a solution to changing my position in the space, remained in the montage. I consoled myself by thinking that the wastage could be used to build another performance in which strings could have the main role, and by maintaining some of the work of composition in my way of walking and dancing.

Two years later, during a meeting with the actors, the director explained that all my efforts, which he had considered mistakes from the beginning, had allowed him to discover the dynamic structure of the performance. I could be satisfied: even though my actor's work had disappeared, I had contributed towards the building of the dramaturgy that was useful for the performance as a whole.

I believe also that the wings I had sewn for Daedalus helped to change the dramaturgical direction of the performance. They were beautiful and I absolutely wanted to introduce them into the daily "run-through", even though the director insisted that he wanted to save them for a final scene. I did not trust that this would happen and I knew that the material that was not used in the rehearsals would soon be forgotten. Therefore I persisted to the point of disobedience and during each run-through I would introduce the wings at a certain point. I kept the feathers rolled up in my arms as if

they were a child, then I unwound them to show them and put them on. Also this prop was technically very difficult to master: the transformations always took too long and at times I remained caught up in a tangle.



Daedalus trying to fly out of the Labyrinth

With Daedalus's wings, Icarus, the son, appeared and slowly the mythical figures' criminal action that had been central at the beginning of the process started moving towards the relationship between these characters and their children. Idealism, the hope for a better world, the struggle to change reality and the future were made visible through sons and daughters: children who had been killed, sacrificed, put to death, forgotten, placed one against the other. The cry of the parent who searches for Icarus, the scene I created to present his fall into the sea of which only the song was kept, the bird movements I had learnt – all this contributed to making the sons and daughters visible. And one day Icarus's wings were put on Guilhermino Barbosa. In this way another knot was tied in the performance that brought

together not only the destinies of Medea, Oedipus and Daedalus, but also that of the Brazilian soldier who marches to safeguard honour. It was as if all the characters of the performance met in the labyrinth from which they tried to escape in flight to reach the sun, armed with wings of wax. The parents, those responsible, would survive, but what would they leave as legacy?

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I absolutely had to go to Crete, where Daedalus had built the labyrinth. The performance was nearly finished so the journey would not have given me concrete elements to use in the montage, but I felt that it was my duty towards the character. I had to see the labyrinth, the place where it is said that the Minotaur was shut in, where the wife of Minos had made love with the white bull, the uncontrollable god.

It was strange to arrive to the island at the same time as German tourists and see the bars and restaurants called by the names we knew from the work on our performance: Mythos, Labyrinth, Minotaur...

I searched for the traces of the labyrinth in Minos's palace and in the other Cretan palaces. I did so not so much from observing the position of the walls, but from the Mediterranean landscape, the objects locked up in the museum and the signs that the dance steps and rituals of the past could have left on the stones. I discovered the power of matriarchy in the rooms of the priestess, in the colours left on the walls and in the statue of the woman with naked breasts holding two snakes in her hands. I perceived the laborious passage to patriarchy in the upside-down bull-horns, in the battle between religion and politics, in the extremely well maintained bodies in the paintings. The artistic value and magic were to be found in the daily objects exhibited at the museum, in the dolls and toys, in the jewels, vases and small cups in clay, that had been crafted with care, time and artisan insight. The quality and variety of each of those fascinating objects of the past rendered terribly evident the abundance of mediocrity with which we live today, despite the paraphernalia modernity makes available. I could recognise the value that we try to give to our work when creating a performance at Odin Teatret in the perfect irregularity of the form and decoration of the small cups, in the attention to detail and in the simple imperative of the object. Visiting the museum I had the impression that in that distant past art was an integral part of daily life.

Spring was just starting to show itself, as I toured the island in a rented car with Dorte, a painter friend. The dolphins, the blue and turquoise colour, the consistency of the stone in Crete were both "nature" and "culture".

That which had been created by human beings had the same congruity as the sea, as the trees on which the first flowers were appearing, as the sky, as the rocks and the wind. The big coin with indecipherable signs exhibited under glass in one of the rooms of the museum manifested the fascination of that which cannot be grasped: the attraction of the labyrinth. In Crete I became aware of the secret that Daedalus had taught me: dramaturgy starts with the capacity to explore beyond that which is evident, with the attention and care for detail.

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In *Mythos* the story represented does not evolve in a logical way, with relationships of cause and effect between the characters, but rather it jumps in contiguity from one character to the other.

One scene starts when Ulysses gathers the amputated hands in heaps around the stones, while a blue light blinds the spectators like the glare of the sea. Ulysses says: "Of the sea from last summer only the reflection of the sunset is left. Of the reflection only the faces and of the faces only their waiting." Daedalus cries "Icarus!" and throws himself over the hands, as if in search of his son amongst the waves of the sea. All the characters sing: "The sea... in front of us ...full of secrets..." while Sisyphus accompanies the events with his violin. Orpheus and Oedipus pass through this landscape of stones and amputated hands. As he continues to rake the hands on the gravel illuminated in blue, Ulysses comments: "I am afraid that I am a house inhabited by many people who never tire of going round at night sweeping, and that dust fills my body instead of blood." Cassandra sings: "I see a child on the seashore". Daedalus picks up a feather from underneath one of the stones and sings: "The weight of your skeleton tells me every night the height of the mountains I fly over in my dreams" and then, seeing the winged soul of Guilhermino Barbosa carrying his own lifeless body in his arms, he cries startled: "Icarus?!" While Guilhermino Barbosa continues his march, Cassandra warns: "You taught him the art of flying. You didn't teach him the most important thing: the art of falling." Daedalus embraces the winged Guilhermino's knees and says: "Cursed be the impatience which has filled your pockets with sleepless nights and dreams that scream like a child being born." Guilhermino frees himself from the embrace to continue advancing undaunted. Daedalus picks up the feather: "I saw a child on the seashore. Ulysses, I thought it was mine. He shook his head as if to say: don't use me once again in your dreams." The feather falls to the ground accompanied by the sound of a sad twittering. Daedalus kneels to bury the feather in the

gravel while Oedipus laughs scornfully: "Blind yourself. Tear out your eyes so you will see history only in the light of your memories." Daedalus leaves while uttering a lament of bird sounds. Ulysses uncovers the feather with his feet, picks it up to put it in his hat as a decoration and tells the spectators: "In Italy they are smarter. There they eat the small songbirds so they don't wake you early in the morning, and above all don't shit on the cars!" Daedalus looks upon Medea in terror as she advances with two lama foetuses visible on her shoulders and Orpheus sings: "I call out to love and despair, to madness and insight. I call out to her everywhere where I have not been." Medea strangles the foetuses, buries them in the gravel and abandons them: "Be naked small children, and calm. This is the guest we awaited so impatiently, you and I, the guest who soon will separate us and take us home to ourselves." The scene finishes with Ulysses who enters with the rake to add the foetuses to the heap of amputated hands.



Daedalus (Julia Varley), in the middle, with Cassandra (Roberta Carreri, left) and Medea (Iben Nagel Rasmussen)



The characters remain isolated in their torments and in their world, but they participate together to build the story of the performance that simultaneously concerns and transcends each of them. If I only follow Daedalus's point of view, I could interpret the scene as the search for Icarus after his fall into the Aegean Sea, and I could recognise in the big stone the island where Theseus stopped or where Ariadne was abandoned. But during the performance I do not think of this even though it can be interesting to discover other meanings in what happens around me through my actions. I could see Icarus's soul in the soldier with wings, the anger of the gods at the human longing to fly in Cassandra's predictions, the alternative to exile and running away from Crete in Oedipus' choice of blindness, the interlocutor for the parents who refuse to understand in Ulysses's shrewdness, the corpse of the son vanished in the sea in Medea's foetuses, the victims of the ideals of my youth in the amputated hands, the fallen Wall of Berlin in the stones or the infinite illusions for a better future in the gravel.

The story of the performance passes from one character to the other through a work of montage and simultaneity: Cassandra warns at the same time as Daedalus is searching, Orpheus and Oedipus are passing through the space, Sisyphus is playing and Ulysses is raking. In this simultaneity of actions, the spectators do not necessarily orient themselves, but the director must know how to follow the different threads that merge in this assemblage of apparently diverging directions. The director's logic does not follow a linear course, but it moves in a contiguity of territories. The passage from one closed corridor to the next is opened up by details in the story, which can even be a single word, object or lighting effect: Ulysses mentions the sea in his text, Daedalus searches for his son Icarus in the sea, Icarus flew as a bird, the soul of Guilhermino has wings like an angel, Cassandra speaks of the art of falling, the feather falls, Ulysses amuses himself with the image of birds who let their dirt fall on the cars...

The simultaneity and montage are believable when they are built on an organic relationship between the actors, and not necessarily because of a psychological logic between the characters. The organic, living – and not psychological or logical – relationship follows the principles of action and reaction, instead of the normal dramaturgical construction based on cause and effect. This relationship is not only established through the ways of looking and an exchange of lines, but it is a dialogue of actions and impulses that needs a long time to develop, especially when it happens between solitary characters like those of *Mythos*.

The organic logic is dictated by a continuous reaction of impulses between the actors, by a complex linking of physical, vocal and musical actions, and by a constant dialogue between the actors and the space in which they move. When Torgeir (Ulysses) finishes the text and the blue lights turn on, the accompaniment of Jan (Orpheus) changes tonality to start the collective song about the sea. Julia (Daedalus) cries "Icarus!" and Torgeir starts to rake, Iben (Medea) and Roberta (Cassandra) continue to sing, Frans (Sisyphus) plays the viola with another rhythm, and Jan (Orpheus) and Tage (Oedipus) enter the space. The thud of the stone falling silences everyone; one hears only the fine vibrato of the viola and a whispered text. Roberta sings after another call to Icarus, Kai (Guilhermino Barbosa) advances to the rhythm of the song and the last note provokes Julia's fall and the embrace of Kai's knees. Kai starts walking again and Julia picks up the feather from the stone and in the dark searches for the stream of light to illuminate it, while directing her attention towards Ulysses who stands at the opposite side of the space. After the feather has fallen and it has been covered with the gravel that makes a sound like waves on the seashore, Tage starts his text. Julia turns towards him and follows the rhythm of his words with small impulses of her body and the sound of birds. Meanwhile Torgeir waits for the precise moment in which the text ends to suddenly leave the stone on which he has been standing in a precarious balance to slide towards the feather and take hold of it. The sudden arrival of Torgeir makes Julia stand up and the rhythm of her exit corresponds with Iben's entrance.

Through this precise rhythmic modulation of actions and reactions it is possible to allow meanings and stories to appear. The director discovers the narrative thread to present to the spectators by working on what we call the organic level of dramaturgy, on the microscopic and continual elaboration of tiny details. The actors' material and actions, the relationships and new contexts that are created during the process, indicate the path to follow to find the way out of the labyrinth and these have sensorial and interpretative consequences for the spectators and the performance.

Daedalus looks from a distance upon one of the scenes I like most in this creation of meanings by contiguity. Ulysses has just finished commenting ironically on the revolutionary song of Guilhermino: "And if the hands are yours, what they do is also yours" when Medea, calling for her children, appears with her hands red of blood. Daedalus is in the dark; nobody sees him as he is shaken by the movements of the Mongolian dance.

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It is the spectators who must fly away free of the story, the characters, the montage, the dramaturgy and of the performance itself. Ariadne's thread, that leads the eyes of the spectators through the scenes with the invisible power of actions, must disappear.

Entering a labyrinth, getting lost, meeting the unknown, finding an exit, feeling liberated, flying away: these are experiences I could call archetypal, belonging to the imagery each of us owns. For these kind of experiences myth still has a function: it is a common recognisable reference. Daedalus has helped me understand the dramaturgy of *Mythos* and to accept that the Greek myths can be useful in speaking about a contemporary myth.

Through the performance, each of the spectators should be able to enter a personal labyrinth in which they can identify what they have believed and perhaps still believe in, their own experiences, histories, myths, ideals and dreams. Daedalus has persuaded me that also nowadays we are able to fly, even if our wings will melt in the sun. **But after all is it so bad to fall into the blue Aegean Sea?**

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## *The mutes of the past responses to a questioning spectator\**

IBEN NAGEL RASMUSSEN\*\*

**Abstract.** A testimony on the encounter with and the life experience within the Odin, this text, although it was written in 1979 and already published, reveals again and again, the incantation of one's self discovery, on stage, facing inner fears as well as the prejudices of the others. A few lines about human warmth, about the importance of being guided, the joy of finding the path, the right way to express oneself, discovering one's voice and the power of this hidden voice, answer in a personal and trustful way to some troublesome questions: How to admit another type of profound intelligence which contains not just the head, but the whole body, and which does not communicate only by the use of concepts and words? How to go beyond all the talking around training, workshops, techniques and theatrical knowledge, and see what lies behind all this: to give life?

**Key-words:** Rasmussen, Odin, voice, body language.

I first saw Odin Teatret in 1965. It was a group of young Norwegians on tour in Denmark presenting their first production, *The Birdlovers*. I felt that they were the only people with whom I wanted to work. I was struck by the strength of their work. And within their strength, I discovered something strange. For the first time I saw the habitual roles reversed: the women could be very strong and determined, and the men could be soft and sensitive.

Our generation has been affected not only by the discovery of the diversity of womankind and the oppressions she has lived under, but also by the discovery of the woman within man.

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Even now, those who see Odin Teatret's performances are often astonished by the elimination of the borderlines normally separating "masculine" and "feminine". I remember certain reactions to the Odin's production, *My Father's House*. The spectators, on the one hand, swore that they would never have believed that women were capable of such acting, and on the other refused to accept what the men were doing because "men aren't supposed to behave like that".

As an actress it seems as if I show a woman's strength. I uncover all my energies and let them flow without repressing them, without taming them, without imprisoning them. I do not force them to conform to the laws of "femininity" which the eyes, the wishes and the words of men have forced on women and which often turn the actress into a woman doubly domesticated.

At the same time, I talk of woman using images of earth, fertility, and motherhood. Yet, you say, this is not a rejection of the traditional image of woman and certainly not the only goal of women fighting for their liberation.

I cannot and will not oppose one idea with another. I want to talk of what I myself know, even if it is on a very individual level.

Fifty years ago, Anaïs Nin wrote that what she was doing was something other than being an "artist". It was the woman who was speaking. She said that she was in the middle, between the woman of action, copying men, and the *mutes of the past*, the inarticulate who hid behind wordless intuition. Even Eleonora Duse, according to Nin, belonged to this latter group.

Is the actress also the incarnation of the mute woman?

### *Kattrin, the mute*

I often catch myself using, in private life, gestures from one particular production: those of Kattrin, the mute daughter of Brecht's *Mother Courage*.

This character has been close to me for a long time: a girl always with her drum, wanting to say something, and never succeeding. The clown that I created in the southern Italian village of Carpignano, my character in the open air performances with the mask and the drum, and the town crier in Torgeir Wethal's film *Dressed in White*, were all related to Kattrin.

It was important for me to discover that Kattrin, the mute, is not deaf. She is not isolated. She is always in contact with what is happening around her. She has preserved the child in her in the way she keeps close to others, plays with and touches them. She talks, but with her hands, and with leaps and sounds.



Jan Ferslev, Iben Nagel Rasmussen and Kai Bredholt in the performance  
*ITSI BITSY*, 1991. Photo Poul Oestergaard

I myself don't feel like someone who talks. Each time I try, it seems as if the words are insufficient and are but the tiny summits of icebergs which *say nothing*. It's as though I had seen too much during my experiences in the past years with drugs and in my travels. Even if I start to speak, I know that I cannot explain. Maybe that is one of the reasons why, as an actress, I began to use an invented language. In the final scene of the film *Dressed in White* I return from the sea to a beach and I speak as a survivor of a disaster, in an apparently incomprehensible language, but with a clear emotive content for those who can hear.

Perhaps Kattrin is a phantom from the past: she is not conscious of the violence around her. Or rather, she remains apart from the violence, and yet submits to it. She is like that generation of flower children from the 60's who disarmed themselves and were assassinated, disappearing before they could tell what they represented. Kattrin is not merely mute in words, she is also mute in combat. These are two very different things.

You think that I belong to the species of “theatre animal”, a “force of nature”, strong as an actress, yet mute, passive and semi-conscious in everyday life. Perhaps I know this because once you told me so, or perhaps this judgement can be read on your face.

I was said to have renounced my personality and responsibility in order to place myself entirely in the hands of Eugenio (of “Barba”), as in the hands of a father-psychiatrist. There is a moment in the Odin voice-training film where, after my improvisation, I sit down beside Eugenio and he strokes my hair. Certain people have seen this as an image of a girl who, having finished her improvisation, returns to the role of docile instrument in the hands of her director, kneeling beside him. Some have compared Eugenio’s gesture to that of a trainer after an animal has properly performed its exercises.

But the quality of a work-relationship is not merely defined by original techniques and artistic results, but also by exertion, fatigue, and human warmth. All of this is clear to me. Yet people who talk so much of “different” and “more profound” human relationships, when actually face to face with the difference of such relationships, think merely of zoos and asylums.

I can say aloud that without Eugenio, perhaps I would never have found and followed my own path. In the beginning he pushed and guided me. Still today I can’t imagine not working with him. It is from Eugenio that I receive the stimulation and courage to set out on new paths. He is the only one who, I am sure, scrutinizes what I do carefully and objectively, without the indulgences of a friend or the manipulations of a director. But all of this comes from our being equals. It’s not dependence.

### *Nijinski and Duncan*

When I began to feel myself as a whole person, I seemed to lose the power of speech, remaining silent. In reality I was finding my own language.

Nijinski’s wife recalls the day when he was invited to dinner by one of his most ardent admirers. Nijinski, however, did not know how to maintain a conversation and was silent throughout most of the evening. The host was very disappointed: was it possible that Nijinski, offstage, was so insignificant? Here is one of our prejudices: the dancer is an “animal”, whereas Diaghilev is intelligent, and Nijinski is but a puppet in his hands. But the problem is not whether or not Nijinski was insignificant. It has to do with becoming aware of the prejudice that refuses to admit another type of profound intelligence which contains not just the head, but the whole body, and which does not communicate only by the use of concepts and words.

I remember when I first came to the Odin: I did it because it was important to *me*, not because I wanted to convince others that they had to change. I was there because I was literally dying. I knew that this was the only place where I could find the strength needed for my own battles.

One morning during my first week at the Odin, while doing acrobatic exercises, my partner and I made a mistake and I was hit in the eye by his knee. It hurt very much, as if my head had been torn off. But this blow, received because of our own error, was like the blow which a Zen master gives you on the head, and suddenly you see more clearly. I understood: yes, I could talk, but I had received a knee in my eye and it hurt. Talk was useless – I had to learn with my whole body. This blow knocked my head into my body. That is what I mean when I say that I feel myself as a whole person.

Perhaps it is because of this that I have never given up my personal training. Because training develops beyond training: it has become my own language and my own independence.

Productions seem often to speak the language of the director. Where is the language of the actor? It is extremely important that the actors have something that is uniquely theirs, and which they can transmit to each other without going through a director. Because otherwise theatre remains the theatre of the director, of “Grotowski who discovered this” and “Eugenio who discovered that”. And also there are so few directors in whom one can trust.

Perhaps a lack of words is the price paid for being able to transmit something with the entire body. Or perhaps new words have to be found. One of the most important books for my own development has been the autobiography of Isadora Duncan. In the beginning she says: “I cannot write, I cannot find the proper words, I would take months to choose one word, just as I have used years of work to find a single movement for a dance”.

And yet she wrote. And I wonder if she has broken her mutism, or if on the contrary she has transformed it into something superior, a silence *through* words.

Isadora, I imagine, was no longer Kattrin. But it was important that she had been Kattrin, that she had been mute in the past.

### *Joan Baez*

For me the years before entering the Odin Teatret were years of protest marches, music and drugs, of wandering through North Africa and southern Europe. The boys played and sang, and we girls went around passing the hat.



It was as though they considered it normal that we didn't want to sing, that we didn't enjoy it.

I was timid. I hardly ever sang, except perhaps a little bit in chorus. At the time, a woman's voice was personified by the voice of Joan Baez, which was pretty, high, delicate and fine. I knew that I could sing, but my voice scared me. It was too strong, something strange.

To discover one's own voice means to discover one's own interior universe, one's own soul. It is difficult for a woman to discover and accept her own voice. The voice is not an instrument for the actress to learn to play. It is something more. When I work with women, they always begin by using the highest voice possible. They often accept the stereotype of the little, gentle, fine, feminine voice. But behind this gentle feminine cage is a force, another universe of sounds and colours, vast and deep, yet frozen and plunged in obscurity.

Finding one's own voice means not being afraid of this force and meeting something within oneself which is neither fragility and gentleness, nor rancour and bitterness. It is simply one's own voice, made to give oneself warmth, but also to fight with. It is not important merely to win the fight. It is important to come out of it without becoming hard, bitter and dry.

When my mother was little, she was asked "Where is the soul? In what part of the body?". She answered: "The soul is like a metal tube in the throat. It has two holes, one at the top and one at the bottom, and they are both closed".

It was true. My mother belonged to a generation of women who had shut themselves away. During the Occupation, Danish men and women had fought together against the Nazis in small clandestine groups. "And yet" my mother said, "What did we do afterwards? Once more we started serving tea to the men who were discussing the destiny of the world, darning their trousers, making food, and bringing up the children. We were only free after eight o'clock at night".

At night, finally, my mother could sit down to write. And after we, her children, had left home, I saw my mother become bitter and hard. After so many years of patience and gentleness, all of the suppressed ugliness hidden inside suddenly came out. For too long she had been prevented from carrying out what she herself wanted. When I saw my mother like that I no longer recognized her, and I was afraid. She had done what legions of women and mothers before her had done: accepted in order to have peace and prevent family fights.

When I find this same tendency in myself, I say no. Even if it hurts, even if it hurts others, even if tempests arrive, I would rather live the pain now. I don't want it to accumulate in a corner, waiting for me at the end of my life.

### *The plant*

I refer to the Odin Teatret as *earth*, and I am speaking in a very concrete way.

I used to live in a continual "happening", with voyages and visions. I went in all directions, but it wasn't enough. It was enough for those who already had the tools of their creative activity: the singers, the painters and writers. They could deepen and transform their personal experience. My problem was to orientate myself, to find my own direction. I needed earth to be able to deepen, to transform. Then I met the Odin Teatret, a "floating island".

In the beginning the Odin was very puritanical. We were a bit like monks, and Eugenio would not accept anything that was not austere. But this austerity was not a rule of stone, like the walls of a prison, but a rule of earth, from which something completely different could grow. It was while working on *My Father's House*, that for the first time I didn't exclude the domain of eros from my work. A new path was opened for me, for my voice, as an actress and as a woman.

What is exceptional about Eugenio is that he *allows things to grow*. He knows how to renounce ideas and accept the birth of something living, even if no one apparently desired it or searched for it, even if at the time he does not know what it can be used for, and even if it is quite different from what he had thought to be right and necessary. He knows how to react without hiding behind ideas. He changes.

The earth is like this, something which you cannot programme, which does not function in a repetitive and geometric manner and which has hidden energies that can only be discovered if you engage your senses fully.

It is difficult for a plant to grow, both in a way that is different from that of other plants, and yet with the same strengths. The Odin is strong, not because Eugenio is capable of discussing and talking, but because within the Odin different personalities have developed, each one with its own strength and beauty. We don't think the same things, and we don't carry on endless discussions about the same topics. The group lives, attracts people, gives and receives. But one has to be aware, to be able to see. Sometimes forces are near,

someone will give them to you and you should be able to respond. But you don't see them because you are thinking.

Individuals and groups which think only with their heads are made of stone: they seem solid, they seem to hold together, but suddenly they are shattered.

### *The image of the mother*

Perhaps it is strange that I, who cannot have children, identify the image of woman with the image of the mother.

One has to understand the meaning of being a mother. For a normal woman who can have children the choice seems already made as to which type of mother to be. But it is different for someone who is obliged to find other possibilities.

There is much talk of training, workshops, techniques and theatrical knowledge. And it is as if one doesn't see what lies behind all this: to give life.

For some, perhaps for many, it is merely a question of technique and professionalism: the actor's, the teacher's, and the student's. But whoever has seen Grotowski or Eugenio work with a student has experienced something else. Suddenly, as teachers, they forget everything that is around them, and they resemble midwives around the infant to be born. It is as if they have no more methods and are saving nothing: they talk, explain, command, touch, laugh, play, imitate, improvise with words and images, scold, are astonished, are now icy and now warm, now distant and protective.

These moments constitute some of those rare occasions where words like "total confidence", "opening", and "honesty in work" do not sound empty. And one can see something beginning to live in the body and the voice of the student. You are there in the room, you watch the work, you are a bit bored, and suddenly you see a birth.

One can work with others for a few days or for a week, and then leave. One has planted a seed and then abandoned it to its own devices. But this is the opposite of being a mother to new life, succeeding in transmitting something of oneself to others, being with them as they develop into different autonomous individuals.

What interests me are the people with whom you can work, not for a few days, but for years, so that you can see their own forces grow, because you have given some of your force, not with ideas, but by living and sharing your insight with them. This becomes my world, my earth, something much more than "theatre".

The strategy of the earth is different from the strategy that builds cities and castles.

A few years ago, everyone at the Odin thought that our theatre had enough actors, and that new ones weren't necessary. For me it was important to transmit my experiences, to feel that what we had acquired did not stop with us. I had no choice but to show in practice that Eugenio and those who thought as he did were wrong. I "adopted" students on my own initiative and accepted this responsibility both professionally and economically. Then more young actors, "adopted" by other Odin actors, came into our theatre. It was the beginning of a new period of hopes and fears, when it seemed as if life could not break through and nothing could spring from the earth. A black period, without perspectives, under the sign of death. But it wasn't an end, it was a season. It was not old age, but winter.

When this period started, the Odin was working on a new production, *Come! and the day will be ours*. The images of the hopes and fears concerned with our own lives coloured our work. They were there for the actors, but not for the spectators.

There was a scene where I was left alone, and I heard footsteps behind me. What were these footsteps? Were they death? I sang a funeral lament. But for me it was also a prayer. I raised the palms of my hand towards the sky, and then I turned them towards the earth; it was a prayer for the sun to come down, to make roots, to give light in the night for those trying to live in the earth. The words of this lament were of great importance to me: "Dark is a way and light is a place". A way, but also away.

"Death" walked by me and in front of me, perhaps showing the way, perhaps leaving. I prayed: "Leave, that all this may live". At that moment I heard the pounding of a hammer, the other actors had begun to nail down a book. I suppose that the spectators thought of soldiers who nail the latest official proclamations to wooden walls and doors, or of the crucifixion, or of those who take books, living words, and freeze them, transforming them into laws that destroy forever.

I knelt down with my face on the floor, and I continued praying with my hands: the things of the earth have to grow, receive the force and the heat and the time to blossom. With my hands, I tried to warm that which was still closed up within the earth. When I heard footsteps approaching, when two hands lifted my head and opened my mouth, I felt it as a moment of acceptance of things to come.

The spectators however, said that it was as if my face had turned to stone, and was transformed into a skull. They saw my character in *Come! and the day will be ours* as a shaman, a man who describes a universe created by men.

By observing attentively *you* could discover something else: the shaman is a woman telling the story of her own destiny.

The two images do not cancel each other out, they give each other life. What you experience, as a spectator, does *not* come from the director, nor does it come from the actor.

It is the child speaking.

We must clear our ears of the noise of former prejudices.

We must find silence if we want to understand what the child is saying.

Spring 1979

**IBEN NAGEL RASMUSSEN** is an actor, director, teacher and writer. She was born in 1945 in Copenhagen, Denmark. She was the first actor to join Odin Teatret after its arrival in Holstebro in 1966. In 1983 she founded, parallel with her work at Odin Teatret, the group Farfa with actors from various countries. Since 1989 she has lead The Bridge of Winds (Vindenes Bro), a recurrent yearly project with actors from Latin America and Europe who share their artistic experience and create performances. In 1986 Iben Nagel Rasmussen was given an award as "Best Actress" at BITEF in Belgrade, Jugoslavia, and in 1991 "Håbets Pris" (the "Prize of Hope") in Denmark. Her professional experiences are presented in *The Actor's Way* edited by Erik Exe Christoffersen and in the video documentary *The Transparent Body* edited by Claudio Coloberti. She has published two books: *Brev til en veninde* and *Den blinde hest* (Italian transl. *Il cavallo cieco*, Bulzoni 2006) as well as several articles in journals such as *Teatro e Storia* and *The Open Page*.

## *A handful of characters\**

ROBERTA CARRERI\*\*

**Abstract.** There are innumerable types of characters, and countless ways of giving them consistency and credibility. Starting with the *The Book of Dances* in 1974 and going on through *Come! And the Day Will Be Ours*, *Brecht's Ashes*, *The Million*, *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus*, *Judith*, *Kaosmos*, *Inside the Whale's Skeleton*, *Mythos*, the street performance *Anabasis* and *Ode to Progress*, we accomapgny the actress Roberta Carreri, in the quest of the theatrical substance. A continuous game and fight to embody someone or somethink unknown, unfamiliar, something that could be called sometimes a character, but that would come out slowly, after hours, days and months of work, patience and passion.

**Keywords:** R. Carreri, character, costume, scenic action, E. Barba

I turn to look back and I see a small procession of characters observing me. I am an actress. Creating characters and keeping them alive has been my profession for twenty-five years.

As with all births, the creation of a new character is a small miracle every time. For me, creating a character is somewhat similar to putting my thoughts down on paper, delaying their escape long enough to transform them into words. It requires time. To create a character is indeed to “form” it. The flow of work and of thought must be slowed down and you must make choices, turn down a myriad of possibilities and concentrate on a single detail. It means saying no. But saying “no” hurts. It eliminates and limits, it constrains and obliges. It defines. “No” puts an end to one phase of the adventure and opens another.

When spectators watch my work, they see a character in action.

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The “character” is an effect, an effect designed to give the impression that one is dealing with someone or something resembling a person. This “impression”, however, is embodied in the space existing between actor and spectator: at times more towards the former, at times more towards the latter, on some rare occasions exactly between the two, with many nuances. It would be interesting to be able to determine precisely at what point in this space the “character” effect condenses. Some characters were characters for the spectator but not for me. Others are characters both for me and for the spectator. Still others will always remain characters for me even though the spectator cannot recognise them or be as familiar with them as I am.

It is not possible to reason as though the “character” were an entity in itself, a fully-fledged personality, one you interpret, incarnate and understand, one you are faithful to or betray. Nor is this possible when the character already exists, created by an author in a novel or a play, or passed down through history.

The characters to which I have given form did not exist for me a priori. The costumes I chose and created for them have never been connected to historical reality. The costume has always served as clothing for the spirit more than for the body. Antigone wears the garments of a Brazilian Mae de Santo (a combination of a wedding dress and the habit of a priestess); Judith dons a long night-gown of white silk; Cassandra wears a modern evening dress with sequins. I could say that in choosing the costume I choose how to “illustrate” the character.

Some characters are born from a book, others from a gesture, still others from a pair of shoes, from a hat or from a garment: I put them on, and they transmit to me the desire to move in a particular way.

Some of “my” characters are mythical (Judith, Antigone, Cassandra), others are types or, rather, prototypes (the Free and Untamed Indian Woman, the Civilised Savage, the Mother Who Has Lost Her Child, the Mae de Santo); still others are figures that have already been singled out and characterised by a writer (Bertolt Brecht’s Polly Peachum and Yvette Pottier, or Boris Vian’s Dennis the Wolf).

There are innumerable types of characters, and countless ways of giving them consistency and credibility. For this reason, rather than speak about the character, I would prefer to talk about a “handful of characters”.

My first performance with Odin Teatret was *The Book of Dances* in 1974 in Carpignano Salentino, in Italy.

Everything I did in *The Book of Dances* I discovered under the patient guidance of Eugenio Barba. The performance was based on dances that emerged from our daily training with props. Having just arrived in the

group, I had not yet had the possibility of developing my own training. In Salento's stifling summer heat, Eugenio would spend hours inculcating me with the principles of actions using props, in the aim of creating a dramatic dance. But, to me, the dramatic thing was the situation itself. I was struggling to survive. My body was a stranger to me and yet I had to seem at ease in it while performing.

In *The Book of Dances* I was not consciously working with a character: I was Roberta, dressed in a particular manner, playing music and dancing in a way I had never done before. Like most of my companions, I also worked barefoot; I, who had spent my whole life hiding my feet in shoes. This in itself was out of the ordinary. I also did the physical training barefoot, and this daily work contributed to developing the expressiveness of my feet.

In the programme of the performance no character names appeared near the actors' names. Eugenio Barba could very well have placed one there, however. Perhaps the only one who might have had a character in mind was Torgeir Wethal, who had been working on Pär Lagerkvist's *The Dwarf*. But certainly that was not the character the spectators recognised. On the other hand, since we all wore costumes and had a score of physical actions, a peculiar form of behaviour and particular props to dance with, any one of us could easily have come up with the name of some character. This might perhaps have channelled the spectator's view and perception in a specific direction. But in *The Book of Dances* the director had chosen to leave the spectators alone, free to interpret the figures they saw dancing and interacting.

No story was told in *The Book of Dances*. There was one being told, however, in *Come! And the Day Will Be Ours*, my second performance. It was the story of the colonisation of The Americas: the encounter-clash between the pioneer culture and the culture of a native people. During the creation of the performance, I remember Eugenio Barba in the room, always wrapped up in a blue woollen blanket; looking like a cross between Linus (the character from Charles Schulz's Snoopy cartoon) and an Indian from some reservation.

In April of 1974, at the beginning of the work on *Come! And the Day Will Be Ours* (a process that would take two years), Eugenio Barba told us that each of us would receive two characters: an obvious one and a secret one whose identity we were to reveal to no one. Eugenio likened the two characters to the two horses used in battle by the warriors of a tribe Alexander the Great had once fought against. During the battle, the warrior would use the horses to hide behind, enabling him to spring from one to the other in the aim of disorienting the enemy, and to be sure of having at least one horse on which to return to the encampment. The function of the secret character was to help the actor bounce back and forth between two identities, thereby



avoiding the risk of having the obvious character seem shallow; a strategy, in short, to avoid falling into the trap of cliché. Moreover, should the actor prove unsuccessful in giving form to the obvious character, there was always the secret character to call upon for inspiration. But, in the days of *Come! And the Day Will Be Ours*, I was not yet thinking in terms of a character. Being very young, I used my “free and untamed” energy for the actions of the Indian girl that I represented on stage. And even when, in the course of the performance – during what amounted to a rape scene – my costume was transformed and I finally became “civilised”, the quality of energy that I used did not change very much. The “extra-ordinary” (extra-daily) side of my presence consisted of the actions carried out in relation to my colleagues, the idiom I spoke (Objiwa, the language of a tribe of Native North American Indians), the costume that I wore (a Peruvian dress), and the banjo that I played.

The actions that I performed were taken from a series of improvisations: the first improvisations of my life. Once set, these improvisations were “edited” by Eugenio Barba, who could then alternate fragments of this material with parts of another colleague’s improvisation, thereby creating a dialogue of actions and reactions that defined the (hi)story of the character. The improvisations did not start from a theme directly linked to the performance and, for this reason, were not descriptive. Eugenio would give themes like, “Cognac runs through my veins”, or “Like a jaguar on the snows of Mt. Kilimanjaro”. This kind of theme gave to my actions a surprising yet credible characteristic, in as much as the spectator could associate these actions with “my” Indian, a person belonging to another culture.

Torgeir Wethal, Else Marie Laukvik and Tage Larsen were the colonials and wore boots. Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Tom Fjordfalk and I were the Indians and went barefoot. But it would not have been possible to say that I was working on a character, rather, that I concentrated on giving my utmost. A bit like in the athletic competitions I had participated in years before, where a total presence of my body-mind had been required.

It was in my third performance, *Brecht’s Ashes*, which we worked on from 1978 to 1980, that I ran up against the need to create a fully-fledged character: one that constituted a character both for me and for the spectators. The fact of having to represent three different figures in the same performance compelled me to seek a method for keeping them distinguishable. And so it was that I began thinking of them as different people. Given that the peculiarities of a person reach us through physical signals – recurrent and precise forms of behaviour – I looked for physical characteristics that could define each of the three characters. I invented three ways of speaking, of walking, of being: the limping walk and the aggressive, mocking songs of Polly Peachum; Yvette

Pottier's slovenly gait and sombre, moving chant; the singsong speech of Margarethe Steffin. Thus, the three characters found themselves acting in three different ways and I was able to jump from one to the other without confusing them, feeling at ease in each one of them. Not only had I put on three different costumes, but three different behaviours as well. And, for the first time on stage, I wore shoes: red shoes, with vertiginously high heels. Those shoes were to have a major influence on my way of moving through the performance space. I no longer had the grip on the ground that bare feet had afforded me in the first two performances, the direct contact with the floor that made me feel at one with the earth. Now, twelve cm off the ground, I tottered about, struggling to keep my balance on a slippery surface. These shoes constituted a limitation – and for that very reason they worked. They helped me to avoid repeating the way of moving that had characterised my work up to that point. Going from the need to differentiate between the various characters to questions concerning the identity of their imaginary personalities was a natural step.

An entry in my work diary at that time reads: "The secret lies in looking for and finding oneself in one of our former lives. For this reason it is necessary to know about the history of the period that you're researching and what the social and cultural conditions were that determined our spirit's actions and reactions in that era."

In that period we were also doing another performance: *The Million*. It was our second dance performance. I played the drums, a natural development of my work from the primitive percussion instruments in *The Book of Dances*. In *The Million*, too, I had several characters. But in this case, drawing a clear and visible distinction between them did not constitute a problem, since their behaviour was already set and distinct. My only task was to make it mine. The first character was that of a lion drawn from the tradition of Kabuki theatre; the second was a Brazilian dancer; the third was the caricature of a man chasing a woman.

The dances of the lion and of the Brazilian dancer belonged to the Japanese Kabuki and the Brazilian capoeira and candomblé traditions respectively. I had learned them from Japanese and Brazilian masters, after which Eugenio Barba had re-elaborated them and placed them in our performance which recounted the travel adventures of Marco Polo.

In the Japanese dance I wore a pair of tabis (Japanese socks made of cloth), but otherwise I danced barefoot, which gave me a feeling of great freedom.

During the phase of elaboration, when the dances were set in relationship to the dances of the other colleagues, the first two characters gradually began taking on appearances of *animus* and *anima*, thanks also to the costumes and to

the story the director created using the actions of the dance. As for the third character, the man chasing a woman (the woman being a grotesque vamp impersonated by Iben Nagel Rasmussen), I merely had to put on my hat and coat and I knew exactly what to do. Following the rhythm of a beating drum, I came up with a series of actions to which Iben reacted in accordance with the dynamics of her character. Her reactions provoked other actions in my character. Within a few hours we had set the dance. In that particular case, I can safely say that the character created the dance for me... while I merely took pleasure in going along with it.

The fact of working with the same actors and with the same director for many years obviously has advantages and disadvantages. The most obvious advantage is that through this reciprocal familiarity a profound sense of trust is created. What's more, a work related jargon is established that allows us to communicate very quickly.

The most obvious disadvantage is that Eugenio finds himself working, performance after performance, with the same core of actors which could become very monotonous, both for him and the actors. At the start of work on a new performance this disadvantage leads us to devise new ways of being present on stage, ways that allow us to surprise and stimulate the director and each other. Each time we have begun a new performance, Eugenio has attempted to place himself and the rest of us in a new situation.

Work on *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus*, in 1984, began with choosing the costumes.

The workroom is divided in two by a black curtain. Hidden behind it lies Eugenio's booty, the result of the journey he made through South America with the next performance in mind. Eugenio sits by the curtain with a deck of cards in his hand. Each actor is invited to draw a card. Whoever draws the lowest card is first to go behind the black curtain where an element of costume is chosen. Then the next person goes in. When everyone has been behind the black curtain we return, one by one and in the same order, to fetch a new object. This goes on until the area behind the black curtain is empty and the actors have filled their arms with fabrics, costumes and props.

Behind the curtain were hung all the elements of a ceremonial dress of a Mae de Santo. Each time a colleague emerged from behind the black curtain I was afraid he or she had taken a part of what I had immediately recognised as being "my" costume. But no one had. My character was Antigone, but the "secret" one was Teresa Battista Tired of War, the protagonist of the eponymous novel by Jorge Amado. Antigone's Brazilian costume, with its many layers of white skirts, airy and rustling against my bare legs, influenced

my way of interpreting the physical score of the performance. It awakened in me a new way of moving that evoked the sacredness and sensuality typical of warm climates. On the polished surface of the long platform that constituted the central element of the stage design in *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus*, I was once again working barefoot.

Unlike in past performances, we did not make use of individual improvisations for the creation of *Oxyrhincus*. To tell the truth, I made only one improvisation, the theme of which was the text of *The Three Bears*, the children's story I was reading to my daughter every evening.

As a basis for work on the performance, Eugenio had us create what he called "marble", that is to say physical scores stemming from actions performed by two people sharing the same object (a chair, a poncho, a plastic tube). These sequences of actions were then set by each couple and later repeated by each person on his/her own and without the object. Eugenio then proceeded to "sculpt" this "marble", using the various sequences of actions to create different scenes of the performance.

When I performed one of my sequences wearing the costume and in the context of a scene, I became aware of the fact that in the eyes of the spectator it would be Antigone acting: in relation to her sister Ismene, to her brother Polynices, or to Creon. This awareness of Antigone's relationship with the other characters led me to interpret the different sequences accordingly. That is: I would endow with meaning a physical score that originally lacked significance by adapting it to the different scenes.

In the course of the performance my costume changed, and with each change it gave me the stateliness, sacredness, sensuality and the strength needed to mark the transformations undergone by the character.

At times on stage I was overcome by a very strange sensation. I felt that in reality I was not Antigone. At the same time, I was not "not-Antigone" (as Richard Schechner, the theatre scholar, might put it). Nor was I Roberta, the daughter and mother. On stage, however, was where I felt I existed with the greatest intensity. Who, then, was I?

*Judith* (1987) was my first solo performance. It arose out of the need to avoid going on tour for months at a time, so that I could spend more time in Holstebro, now that my daughter Alice had started school. The physical dynamics of this character (taken directly from the Bible) were determined by my experience in Japan with Natsu Nakajima and Kazuo Ohno, two masters of Butoh dance. Working with Natsu Nakajima I discovered an unexpected quality of presence in myself, a quality that I could call "presence through absence". This might sound like a play on words, but in fact it refers to a technique of work with the eyes in which, instead of focusing on the external world, the actor turns his gaze inward.

While working with Natzu Nakajima and Kazuo Ohno I was also able to experience the extremely slow rhythm of movement that is typical of Butoh dance. This is not merely a question of working in slow motion (which had for years constituted a part of my training), but of succeeding in slowing down the pulsation of the mind and being totally present in the stillness or the fury of the moment.

Upon returning from Japan, I discovered that mice had invaded my house and had nested in the chest of drawers that contained my favourite garments. My gorgeous, antique nightgown of pure white silk had been chewed up in several spots. It was completely ruined, shredded. I was reminded of the tattered costumes I had seen in a performance in Tokyo. That's when I decided to put it on and show Eugenio the work I had done in Japan as well as the material that constituted my present training.

After twelve years of work with Odin Teatret, my training no longer simply included physical exercises and work with various principles and props, but also the creation of dances and the elaboration of sequences of actions. In the context of training, I was developing my own form of actor's dramaturgy. Most of the physical scores of Judith were created in the space/time dedicated to training. Judith had already come across her true nature long before starting work with the director.

So, by the time Eugenio and I entered the room to work on the performance, we already had a story and a name for the character. I had nearly an hour's worth of physical scores, and a choice of texts and music to propose to him. In the month of work together, eight hours a day, day in and day out, Eugenio had me create new improvisations with objects of his choice. We looked for new music and composed new texts. The character was built up around the nucleus of presence that I had found in Japan.

Judith's quality of presence was in reaction to Antigone's vitality in *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus*. But from Antigone, Judith inherited the bare feet and the free-flowing hair. A reaction to Judith's airy presence would later be found in the presence of the Mother in Kaosmos.

Thursday, May 7, 1992 – We go into the black room elegantly dressed, and bringing along a blanket, or something similar. We begin work on Kaosmos with a lengthy verbal improvisation by Eugenio based on the first chapter of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. We've all read it, at least that first chapter. Eugenio's verbal improvisation is the theme of our first improvisation. I've brought a Peruvian poncho with me and improvise while moving only on the poncho. I'm dressed in black, with a light dress, a tightly fitting overcoat and high heels.

A HANDFUL OF CHARACTERS



Roberta Carreri as Polly Peachum in the Odin Teatret performance  
*Brecht's Ashes*, 1980. Photo Tony D'Urso

I set the improvisation using a method Torgeir Wethal calls “one step at a time”: I do the first action and repeat it immediately, followed by the second; I repeat the first two actions, followed by the third; I repeat the first three actions... and so on. In this way, each action of the improvisation has a precise mental image. Repeating them immediately facilitates the process of memorisation.

In just over an hour I am able to set a fifteen-minute improvisation. I don't know if this type of work can really be called improvisation. The images are invented more than improvised, but I imagine that calling them inventions might create confusion.

At the start of work on *Kaosmos* we are not told the names of the characters, neither the obvious nor the secret ones.

August 8, 1992 – Eugenio says, “In his diaries, Christopher Columbus describes his dialogue with the sea, with the seaweed, with the birds... In the creation of a performance, there comes a moment where it is necessary to have a dialogue. What we are doing at present seems familiar to us, but the essence is different. At some point in the work I will tell you the theme of the performance. We don't yet know what this performance is about and, as actors, you ask yourselves, who am I in all of this? What is my identity? This project resembles the preparation of *Min Fars Hus*. We are now far from land. If there is no theme, there are no limits. If there are no limits, there is no freedom. Freedom, in a given situation, is doing that which one deems just. I now know that I must choose the course to take, and this deprives me of other possibilities. Up to now, there has been something both pleasant and unpleasant in this work; I was on an iceberg being swept along by a current.”

For months I work on the performance without knowing who my character is, who is performing my actions, who is singing the songs I sing. At every opportunity Eugenio tells me: “What you're doing is too much like Judith”, referring to the character of my solo performance.

Interpreting the same character for so many years has rooted its physical dynamics in me. They've become second nature now, and threaten to colour everything I do on stage.

I no longer know how to move. I feel I am suffocating. I ask Eugenio to assign a character to me, to tell me who I am in this performance. Eugenio does not yet want to do so, suggesting, however, that I work on *Medea*. *Medea* is to be my “secret” character in *Kaosmos*.

Towards the end of August Eugenio gives me a character: the Mother in *The Story of a Mother*, by Hans Christian Andersen. It is the story of a woman whose son is taken away from her by Death. The Mother sets out to look for Death in the hope of retrieving her son. After enduring many ordeals – which cause, among other things, the loss of her eyes and her hair to

turn white – the Mother finally arrives in Death’s garden where she recognises the presence of her child’s life in the form of a withered crocus. The Mother asks Death to give her back her son. In reply, Death gives her back her eyesight and invites her to look into a nearby well. Therein she will see the course of two lives: a happy life and a miserable one. One of the two lives is her son’s. The Mother peers into the well and then begs Death to tell her which of the two is her son’s life. Death refuses to tell her. In the end, the Mother prefers to leave her son in the hands of Death rather than have the son run the risk of living a miserable and unhappy existence.

In September I am in Greece working. I am in Medea’s native land, and here I must find the costume for the performance. I know from experience that the costume is a determining factor for the character. Its weight, the colour of the fabric, its form, the costume’s age, all influence my way of being on stage. In a dusty old shop where they sell antique folkloric costumes I find various articles that serve my purpose. Medea is starting to take form, to have some weight. It’s a costume in layers, like Antigone’s, but this time each layer is heavy: chamois leather, robust hand-woven cotton, raw wool, heavy satin, woollen felt. The colours alternate as well: red, white, black, red, white... In reaction to the “unbearable lightness” that resulted from not knowing who my character was in the performance, I now long for a heaviness that soon turns out to be claustrophobic. Even my hair will take on weight, wrapped around a huge skein of black wool that girds my head.

“Judith” is light, almost diaphanous. She is barefoot and with loosely flowing hair. Medea will be Mother Earth: weighty, rooted, tough. With black, old fashioned shoes, and bold heels. Medea – the Mother. But the character of Medea was present in my mind only. The spectators found no trace of her in the objectivity of the performance.

Out of the ashes of *Kaosmos*, towards the end of 1996, was born *Inside the Whale’s Skeleton*. In this performance I use the physical score from *Kaosmos* but wear a short, light, cyclamen-coloured dress, with white embroidered pockets and collar, along with a pair of remotely military ankle boots (“clod hoppers”, as my father would have called them). These shoes, easily imagined on the feet of some village idiot, totally transformed my way of being on stage. It was a surprising experience. In spite of the fact that the pattern of my actions was essentially identical, the sequence of actions that I had carried out for years literally exploded into an almost dangerous freedom. The force that was required to move the cumbersome Mother costume could now gush forth without restraint. A different character, originating from a pair of shoes, has taken possession of the actions and songs of the Mother from *Kaosmos* and, in making them her own, has given them a sparkling, new vitality.



Whenever possible, I begin work on the new performance by learning a new technique in order to cleanse myself of the physical dynamics of my character in the preceding performance. After *Kaosmos*, I went to Seville to learn flamenco dance. I thought that this kind of presence might become the starting point for the creation of my next character in the performance to come.

Before beginning work with the actors on *Mythos*, Eugenio had prepared and decided everything in advance: the stage design, the lighting, the characters and the authors. This was something he had not done since *Ornitofilene*, Odin Teatret's first performance.

It was the beginning of 1998. *Mythos* was the first indoor performance in the Odin's history in which all the actors had worked on at least one past performance with Eugenio. At last, there was no new actor to be "educated" by Eugenio during the course of work on the performance. This led me to hope that Eugenio would have more time to concentrate on my acting work. But no. Technical and stage design problems took up most of our time. He too, perhaps, was glad not to have to form any new actors but simply rely on us. Or was he incapable of stimulating me? Practical work with Eugenio on the character of Cassandra was limited to a couple of Saturday mornings and a few brief moments here and there. It was impossible for me to hide a feeling of enormous frustration mixed with an equally strong sense of abandon.

I hardly used any of the flamenco I had learned for the character of Cassandra in *Mythos*, apart from a form of tension in the spine that pulls the nape of the neck upwards and thrusts out the chest and "tail". I use this tension in certain moments of the performance. During the long periods where I sit on or under one of the two towers on stage, I concentrate particularly on the work of the eyes: the eyes of a seer who does not want to see. Cassandra has a very specific physical dynamic, her own way of being, but she has practically no fixed physical score, except for a series of actions that serve a purely dramaturgical function linked to the other characters and to the story that we are all telling.

Already in *Kaosmos* I had begun improvising parts of the performance each evening in which I had no direct relationship to another actor. When the timing of another actor's efforts depends on my actions, I cannot allow myself to change them from one evening to the other to any great degree. This would be like improvising the text, saying different words to a partner who has learned specific lines chosen by the director.

In *Mythos*, Cassandra is a character "apart", an idiot (from the Greek, *idiotes*, a private person, a layman, unfit for public function or communication). In the first part of the performance, Cassandra sits isolated in one of the towers on stage. Her vital space is very limited. From that position I must radiate my

presence throughout the entire room, and therefore I work on the implosion of energy. Eugenio has forbidden me to perform any recognisable action. My mental images are very precise and Cassandra makes them concrete in her own way. Her interaction with the other characters is minimal, and this gives me great freedom. But I was able to take advantage of Cassandra's freedom only after having discovered her nature: her physical dynamics. And this began happening only after the first performance. The context made me discover Cassandra's way of being, one reminiscent of the different states of water: unforeseeable and smiling like a mountain stream; powerful and scalding like a violent jet of steam; soft and vague, like fog; but never hard as ice.

I have not yet spoken about the character I have lived with longest: Geronimo. Geronimo is one of the figures from *Anabasis*, our street performance, and from *Ode to Progress*, our current dance performance. Geronimo was born in July 1976, on the island of Møn, in Denmark. In April of the same year we had held the premier of *Come! And the Day Will Be Ours* at the Caracas Festival. Two weeks later, Odin Teatret had penetrated the Venezuelan jungle on the heels of a film crew and a French anthropologist, with the aim of realising a barter with a tribe of Yanomami Indians. In the heart of the jungle a young Yanomami girl had cut my hair very short, in the typical Indian style. That was also the last time I ever had short hair.

On Møn, I was asked to take part in a street performance with two other actors from the group. Since I had no costume, I found myself borrowing a pair of shoes, some black trousers, red braces, a shirt and a bow tie from an actor who was six-foot-two and weighed two hundred and twenty pounds. Everything was far too big for me but clean and in perfect condition.

I happened to have a top hat with me that went perfectly with the Indian haircut. Dressed like this, I looked at myself in the mirror and found that I bore a certain resemblance to one of those daguerreotype photographs of North American Indians wearing white man's clothes, who wanted to appear all dressed up, but looked comical instead. I baptised myself "Geronimo". It was summer and Geronimo held a piece of straw between his teeth. This allowed him to remain silent while gazing at the surrounding world with wide, dreamy eyes. Geronimo originated from a costume and from my longing for absolute innocence. It is perhaps because of his innocence that he can walk right up to people, look deep in their eyes and take whatever he pleases. The fact that the character is male has not compromised his sweetness or his vitality, nor has it curbed his dancing spirit. On the other hand, his being male and simple-minded frees me from a series of clichés of feminine behaviour and from the risk of being "me" on a private level.

ROBERTA CARRERI



Roberta Carreri as "Geronimo" in Venezuela, 1976. Photo Tony D'Urso

Geronimo is truly a person for me, much more than for a spectator who doesn't know his name or anything about him, and who certainly cannot perceive the reference to reservation Indians, for example. Now that my hair has grown, I hide it inside the top hat. His hat, his shoes and his "voice" (a duck call) are his mask.

It is now clear to me that my process of creating characters has undergone changes through the years.

At the start of my professional history, in *The Book of Dances* or in *Come! And the Day Will Be Ours*, my actions and my way of performing them were independent of my character. The director's work justified them. A key to interpreting my actions lay in the title of the performance or in the name of my character in the programme. One could say that the character was created in the mind of the spectator, thanks to the director.

During the elaboration of *Brecht's Ashes* my attention began focusing on the character's identity and on colouring the energetic quality of my stage presence.

In *Judith*, the character was once again created in the mind of the spectator. A mere change of title – Medea or Lady Macbeth, for example – would have changed the story in the mind of the spectator. I would not even need to alter my actions and it would not have been necessary to change all of the texts. A few substitutions would have sufficed.

With *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus* and *Kaosmos*, originally my actions had nothing to do with the theme of the performance, or with the story of the character. Only later, in a second phase, did I begin "interpreting" them in accordance with Sophocles' story of *Antigone* and Hans Christian Andersen's tale of *The Mother*.

At the beginning of work on *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus*, Eugenio asked us to write a script telling the story of our character within the context of the performance. I justified all of the actions I performed, as well as the situations in which I found myself in the performance, by referring to events in the story of *Antigone*. The character seen by the spectators and the character that I was living on stage were the same.

In *Mythos* my actions stem directly from that which distinguishes Cassandra: her way of seeing. I would even go so far as to say that the actions are secondary in terms of the character's way of being, what I previously referred to as "her physical dynamics"; her behaviour.

In conclusion, I feel that these twenty-five years have been a long journey both "towards" as well as "away from" the character. A constant effort to rid myself of a former character in order to allow a new one to be born. A continuous game of negation: doing the opposite of what I had done before.

The “opposite” can be many things. I had never made theatre before starting to work with Odin Teatret. In the beginning, the fact of delegating to the director the responsibility for creating a character in the mind of the spectator was surely an advantage for me. And, still today, I can feel a touch of nostalgia for that past freedom. But, alas, my innocence is lost: I can no longer avoid seeing my character through the eyes of the spectator as well.

These twenty-five years could also be seen as a long, long education in theatre. And I know that this education is not yet over for me, that there are still years of apprenticeship in this profession – a profession in which I truly believe one never ceases to learn. Working on a character is endless, because the character is a pretext, a way of channelling some form of presence, or a passion. In the words of Jeanette Winterson, “passion is not so much an emotion as a destiny”.

This work is my passion.

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## *The theater of reciprocity*

KAI BREDHOLT\*

**Abstract.** *The theatre of reciprocity* proves to be an experience of a priceless value, from an artistic as well as from a human point of view. It sheds light upon the beauty of artistic and social exchange and shows us today how theatre (and especially the specific form of the “barter” used by the Odin Teatret) can bring together people who live in the same community but don’t really know each other, and how it can reveal to this community new paths to artistic and human collaboration.

Through a set of examples of theatrical experiences (“Headlong Harvest Feast” in *Hvidbjerg, 2003 and Idom, 2005; Holstebro Festive week “The splendour of ages” 2005; Snow cathedrals, Røros, Norway, 2007, Holstebro Festive week – Light and darkness 2008; City Arabesk, 2011; Saeta, 2013*), the present article explores this extremely rich but simple way of doing theatre, a the theatre of reciprocity, which can contribute to make theatre survive in all the corners of society and to continue to be part of our culture, there, where it could once be found before it moved to the big heated rooms with comfortable seats. Because the theatre must and can do something else than other artforms.

**Key-words:** theatre of reciprocity, barter, Harvets feast, Odin Teatret.

### *Prologue*

In the little square in front of Gethsemani church in Copenhagen, flowers bloom through the mosaic floor; an old lady walks in and waters the flowers with a red watering can; she talks to them while she starts to pull small leaves.

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Päivi Raninen and Tania Mortensen in *City Arabesk*, 2011

On the stairs by the church sits a young man with a hood. One of his arms is shorter than the other. He is sitting next to a girl. They throw small rocks to a tower of empty beer cans.

Behind a big, white fabric screen stands a Pakistani girl dressed with a Muslim scarf. She draws slowly on the screen with a marker an arabesque – such as in henna-tattoos for weddings.

A rock orchestra is playing a soft love song; the orchestra stands on a platform placed up between the tree tops.

A young acrobat girl enters doing cartwheels. She stands on her hands in the middle of the flowers and walks in a back arch, and begins to pick the flowers with her bare feet.

A white horse comes in ridden by a girl in a blue dress. The acrobat reaches out a small bunch of flowers to the horse. The horse eats the flowers and leaves the stage again. An old man sweeps the square and picks up the last flowers.

The rock orchestra swifts to a mildly loud rock ballad, the church door opens and a very pregnant bride on 2-meter-high stilts comes out by the stairs.

Music stops. The main singer crawls down of the platform in the trees and goes towards the bride waiting by the stairs.

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A small pensioner's choir – consisting of 4 old Pakistani women – intervene with a quiet Pakistani song. They sit together on a carpet, dressed with beautiful saris. They laugh, and tears fall down from the cheeks of one of them while they sing to the very tall bride and the small rock singer.



Signe Gravlund and Rene Zimakoff in *City Arabesk*, 2011



They are all part of the theatre performance *City Arabesk*. A performance built on Odin Theatre's barter principle:

If I sing a song for you, you must sing a song for me or show me something else you are good at: bake a cake; maybe your grandmother is good at singing and you can bring her along or bring your horse, do a trick with a tractor or a somersault – everybody does what they are best at. The horse plays a horse, not a cow. The street sweeper sweeps and does not perform somersaults, but he is good at sweeping. He uses beautiful movements; he has done it many times.

### *The barters*

In the barters I have made with Theatre's, all participants met just once, at the barter itself. I searched for different groups in the village or neighbourhood that we visited. It could be the Karate club, a wind orchestra, a group of elderly gymnasts, a rapper or a church choir.

Each on its own was maybe not very interesting or theatrical. But I put them together: the karate club carried out its series under a beat from the wind orchestra, while the rappers rapped and merged with them; the elderly gymnasts performed their exercises to the psalms of the church choir. If only the performance numbers were not too long, it worked as theatre and created pictures that were poetic and different, recognisable but still something else.

The barters were both a strong and a unique tool to acquire an audience that otherwise would never come to see Odin Theatre's performances. Either because they were poor workers, or lived far away in a village in the mountains where theatre never came – or maybe they lived next to the theatre but just never went to it. Now they came because they had to sing a song, ride a tractor, or had a son in the karate club.

They had a reason to come and the barter had given them the possibility to find out what they themselves could give.

If we had performed for them for free, they would have felt even poorer when we left again. Now we gave them a possibility to give us something, and we could leave a village or a neighbourhood that knew a little more about itself and was a little bit prouder of what was found there.

It worked, but in the last performance number of the barter I always felt that it was just then that they had understood what a barter could do, just then that they understood the strength it had. I could see in their eyes that now they were ready to work together. But precisely then everything was over.

That is why I got the idea of making something that lasted a little longer and that went a bit deeper.

Instead of everyone meeting for the first time at the barter, we made something called "Headlong Harvest Feast" that lasted 5 days. It consisted of many small meetings and barterers and finished with a big harvest ball.

### *Headlongharvestfeast*

We used the harvest feast as a frame because it was a tradition in every single village in our region. But with the passing of time it had lost many of its original elements: hay, folkdance and hay crowns.

A party that should be celebrating harvest and that was previously held in a beautifully decorated barn full of hay, was now held in a sports hall with neon light, a pop orchestra and beer dispensers.



*Headlong Harvest Feast in Hvidbjerg, 2003*

There is nothing wrong with that: but we thought that we, together with the village, could discover new traditions.

In the end we – all together – made a harvest fest that would include all the elements that the barter had, as well as the best of what the harvest fest once had: folkdance, hay, barns, hay crowns; and added new things: hay dolls, harvest rap, flamenco dance and cha-cha-cha.

I had gathered a group of professional actors, dancers and folk musicians from Spain and Denmark. We took residence in the village for 5 days in a camping van placed in the middle of the schoolyard, so we could be as visible as possible. During the day we met with the smallest kids from school. We placed a big hay pack in the schoolyard and showed 100 children how to make hay crowns and how to put hay together as a long snake which would become a gigantic hay doll.

The most fantastic moment was when we cut the thin string of the big hay pack and within two minutes the whole schoolyard was full of hay. Organised chaos. 2 hours later we had 4 big hay dolls and 100 hay crowns.



Joaquin Galan and Maria Martinez, *Headlong Harvest Feast* in Idom, 2005

The first part of the morning ended with a parade. The 100 children carried the 4 hay dolls and placed them in the South, North, West and East entrances of the village, as a sign that there would be a harvest feast. The

elder children were taught “Sevillanas” dance, flamenco accompaniment with clapping and traditional folk dance. In the afternoon we made small demonstrations and concerts in the village’s shop, municipal hall and retirement home.

In the evening we taught dance to the adults in the village, we practiced folk melodies with the local orchestras, and met with the local electrician and ladies club in order to put lights into and decorate the local barn. Everything was put together in a Headlong Harvest feast in the barn.

We brought the hay dolls in, carried them in procession, and honoured them with Saeta-songs like they do in the Easter processions in Andalucía in Spain. The ball began with a polka and Sevillanas. During coffee time, the local storyteller stood up on the table and read poetry aloud. The ball finished with a cha-cha-cha, and to end the day there was a piece of flamenco dance illuminated by torches in the priest’s garden.

Traditions are not created in one day or with just one Headlong Harvest feast. But the people in that village were moved and maybe look at themselves in a different way. In any case, they now know more about themselves and also about what theatre can do. We know them and they know us better.

### *Festive week and the hay-wall*

We made a Headlong Harvest feast in 8 different villages. The harvest feast was a prologue for the festive week we hold in Holstebro, the city where Odin Theatre resides in the west of Denmark.

It is held every 3 years, where Odin Theatre together with schools, institutions and associations, put together a rich program of performances, concerts and barbers, spread out in the entire county.

I was responsible for the opening of the Festive-week, which was to take place in Holstebro’s town hall square. Here I also wanted to use the hay because it is a beautiful material, and functions well as a visible symbol of the collaboration between agriculture and theatre.

I got in touch with a good friend, Anton Ryslinge – who is an architect, so that together we could have ideas on how we could transform the square, using hay.

I imagined it to look like a barn so that the opening of the festival-week became a huge harvest-feast. Anton proposed that we rebuild the square into a big barn, by closing it in both ends with 2 large walls that would be 16 meters long and 2 ½ meters high. And then make a big door in one end from where all the participants could come in.



Magnus Erboeand Mayor Arne Lægaard dressed as hay puppet opening  
Holstebro Festive Week "The Splendour of Ages", 2005

We needed 32 big hay bales – 16 tons – in order to make it possible. That was more than we could ask to borrow from a single farmer. Therefore I asked for a meeting with the local farmers' organisation. On a little piece of paper, I drew the square and told in a very engaged tone how spectacular it could be. But they looked sceptical and said that it was too much hay... 16 tons in the middle of the city was too much hay. I dropped the subject of the hay for a while, and began instead to talk about how nice it would be if there was a cow at the opening to create the mood of a harvest-feast. They also thought

that this was too complicated. But one of them said that instead they could get 2 calves, 4 pigs, and 6 sheep. Those they had used in a fair a year before. I thanked them for that and thought that it was a good exchange for a single cow. I also told them about all the hay dolls we had built in the villages: that they would be carried into the square, and that the last hay doll would come in walking by itself. It would be the mayor dressed as a hay doll. That, they thought, sounded like fun. By the time we had to end the meeting I asked again about the 32 big hay bales: the leader of the organisation said that Per, a local farmer, could take care of that and asked when they should come with the hay. We agreed that they could come with it Saturday morning at 8.00, and pick it up at 14.00.

I think they accepted because they finally could see by themselves how everything was coming together: the mayor, the hay wall, the music, the pigs and the sheep. Theatre of reciprocity.

It became a very beautiful square like Michelangelo's Campidoglio square in Rome, but here built with hay with figures like statues at the top of the walls.

But the most magic moment was when the 2 tractors arrived that Saturday morning with 2 very long flat-bed tractor trailers full of hay and within one hour built a 32-meter long wall and transformed the town hall square into a very different space. A space which just existed that Saturday morning.

At 3 o'clock everything was gone. Together with 2 farmers and their tractors we had created a moment of magic.

### *Light in the darkness*

A year after, in 2006, we got a request from Norway that asked if we could do something similar in their little town Røros. We only had time in January, and since Røros has the cold record in Norway with an average temperature of -18 degrees, for the whole month it was out of question to use hay, but instead we had a lot of snow.

Together with Anton, the architect, and a small group of actors from Spain and Italy, we travelled up there. We knew how to make a Harvest feast with hay, but we had not a clear idea about how we could use the snow. The first afternoon we made a lamp with the help of handmade snowballs, which took us 2 hours to build. Our hands were totally frozen and the lamp did not look like much, especially if we were to change the whole space of the village like we had dreamt of.



Røros, Norway, 2007

But Anton got the idea of using the already existent mounds of snow that lay all over the city. The communal snowplough cleaned the roads every morning and set the snow aside in big piles. We agreed to meet with the chief technician of the community. Again, we drew our ideas on a little piece of paper:



Arnfin and his tractor, Røros, Norway, 2007

If we could borrow the snowplough with the driver for 3 hours, we could drive around and make a sharp cut in all the snow piles, at the same time make a pair of new snow piles in chosen places. With a kitchen knife we would cut holes for candles, and using new snow as mould, we would make 200 pieces of ice-glass throughout the night, so we could put them in front of each candle to prevent the wind from blowing them out.

They looked at us with incredulity, nevertheless they ended up calling Arnfin, the driver of the snowplough. We presented the idea to him and he shook his head and said that he had removed snow for 30 years in that city, and now came 2 Danish men and wanted him to put the snow back. But he accepted the idea and after ½ hour he was already in good humour. And when by the next morning he was on the front page of the newspaper, he was very, very proud. The entire city was filled with big snow cathedrals. We had found, just like with hay, something that was recognisable and part of the everyday life. It would have taken a very long time if we had built the cathedrals with our hands, but with the help of Arnfin and his snowplough, we had changed the whole space of the city in one day.

Theatre of reciprocity.



Snow cathedral in Røros, Norway, 2007



Together with the local musicians and choir, we could now make a Winter Ball that would end with a warm soup. In Italy, the year before, we had tried an idea that we called “minestrone”, named after the Italian vegetable soup. We went from house to house and collected vegetables for the soup and exchange them for a song or a dance. A song for a potato.

We washed the vegetables in the school the next morning together with a group of ladies from the pensioner’s club and prepared a soup. It had worked really well in a residential neighbourhood with tall houses in Italy where we had brought white tablecloths so we could catch the vegetables when people threw them from the windows from the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. And it worked also in Røros under a snowstorm. We were invited in at every place; we gave a short intimate concert and went back home with a big sleigh full of vegetables. This was a first encounter and we were able to show some of what we could do. Maybe the people would not come to our Winter Ball, but they had contributed with a leek or a carrot, or they would come anyway to see what happened to the carrot. Together we created a feast.

### *The hay square*

I was very excited about the hay, so, when 3 years later we had again to organise the Festive Week in Holstebro, I contacted Anton the architect and the farming organisations. I had been fascinated with how fast a tractor could build and tear down again.

So we decided that every morning for 5 days in a row, we would build a different building made of 64 hay bales in the central square. A building inspired in well-known buildings and squares around the world – the Coliseum, an Aztec pyramid, a Greek temple, etc. Each morning a tractor would come and tear the building down and build up a new one. Throughout the day we used the monuments as set for a performance that played 3 times and which was put together according to the principle of barter. A wide sector of the city’s associations, sport clubs, day-centres, agricultural schools and public schools were put together with a small team of professional musicians and actors that I had gathered.

The figures on the wall were from the Taekwondo club, the girl in the floating hay bale was from the ballet school, and the wild animals of the Coliseum were from the local motorcycle club, which accompanied the folk dancers by playing polka on their handlebars.



*The Hay Square, Holstebro Festive Week "Light and Darkness", 2008*

We built, or rather, farmer Per Sognstrup built with his tractor 5 theatres in 5 days.

It was not dramatic theatre at a high literary level. But we could tell stories and make poetic and strange pictures out of things that people recognised from their everyday life, but put together in a completely different way. And again we had an audience that otherwise would have never gone to the theatre.

I experienced that there were no limits on how abstract our scenes or way of telling stories could be. The audience was caught because they recognized the elements we used to tell a story.

And the more we could work with the scenes, the weirder ideas became, ideas that the participants themselves had proposed.

Together we moved the limits of what was possible. And Holstebro became a place a bit more fun to live in.



Mario Barzagi local folk dancers *The Hay Square*, Holstebro  
Festive Week "Light and Darkness", 2008

### *The light house & Circus at the edge*

We have learnt many things by working in so many different situations and together with so many different people. It was fantastic to see Per or Arnfin with their tractors. They knew their machines to the last detail, and they could, just like physical actors do with their body as an instrument, work and create with speed and precision.

With all these experiences I felt the desire to make a performance that could perform many days, so that I could have the chance to work even more with details and ideas, and each evening have the chance to repeat what we had found.

So when a year later I was asked by a local culture house to make a performance at the base of a lighthouse by the Northern Sea in our region I said yes.

It was a territory with many farmers and the culture house would help me to find the hay, local actors and search for the funds to pay for my salary and that of two professional actors.

I would at the same time make a theatre seminar for actors and musicians with physical and vocal actors' training. Each student would also bring their

own acting material: songs, dance, acrobatics, etc. I would work with their and the local actors' scenes, and put them together in the performance that would play 10 days.



Bovbjerglighthouse

Together with a local farmer, we built a theatre of 96 big hay bales. I used the Coliseum building since it was the one that had worked the best and gave more possibilities. At the same time it could sit 250 spectators whom could all see and listen extremely well, despite the fact that we were outdoors, because the seats were arranged at an steep inclination and therefore very close to the scenario, just like in the real Coliseum.

We had a large audience on the hay bales every single evening.

It became a very beautiful performance not only because it was a beautiful place, but also because the scenes between the actors, the local animals and tractors, worked really well.

A girl had brought her rabbit with her. We used it in a scene together with a Japanese actress who danced Kyogen, a very old humorous Japanese dance. The dance was a traditional dance with a pretty fan. But we substituted the fan in our performance with a carrot. The rabbit improvised every evening, but the dancer managed to perform her dance so that every evening became both a dramatic and very humoristic number.

KAI BREDHOLT



"The ship on the edge", *Circus on the Edge*, 2010



Simone Ghiorzi, Federico and Valentina, *Circus on the Edge*, 2009

## THE THEATER OF RECIPROCITY

A local youth club who specialised in “rappelling” made it possible for us to use the lighthouse as part of the stage. We made a “vertical” wedding scene where the body of the lighthouse was the church floor where the bride walked in, while both the groom and the priest stood waiting in the air 23 meters up.

Another number was one with a tractor and a girl from the ballet school. The ballet dancer was not fantastic, but because she came in riding a “jersey” cow, and standing in a big hay-pack that was lifted in the air by a tractor, the number became something entirely different.

I was especially glad with the contrast between the focused ballet dancer and the young farmer that with a shy smile and millimetric precision lifted the ballet dancer up in the air and put her down again evening after evening.

He was not acting. He was doing what he was best at: to control the tractor and smile with his own natural shy smile.



*Circus on the Edge, 2009*

*Saeta*

The new performance we have made is a performance about horses and flamenco.

My wife is a flamenco dancer from Mexico. She has been very brave to establish in West Jutland where a flamenco milieu is non-existent. Here you have to be inventive, have good ideas and work hard in order to live from dancing.

During the 3 years that we made performances at the lighthouse, we had worked together with a truly beautiful and very big black Friesian horse. He was ridden by the wife of a local farmer and always had a very visible part in the performance.

His ability to be present and just be a horse was fantastic.

So when we moved to the little village of Idom in Holstebro, where there are many horses, and even a small riding hall, we decided to make a performance with 3 horses, a flamenco dancer together with a small group of musicians, local riders and an actor: myself.

I wanted to see if it was possible to work with horses in the same way as in the other performances. Allowing them to do what they were best at and to be themselves.

At the same time we could make them follow the flamenco dancer in her dance, by hiding small pieces of carrots in her hand.



Erika Sanchez Bredholt and Stigandi, *Saeta*, 2013

## THE THEATER OF RECIPROCITY

The audience sat in hay-bales in just one row on each side. All sat in the front row with a hay-bale in front of their legs so the horses could run very close to the audience but without hitting them. We were inside and it was winter and dark outside. This gave me the option to also work with light to achieve a dramatic effect. Besides the temperature in the room we performed in was -12C. That made the performance even more dramatic.

It was fantastic to work with horses, which like the farmers had never made theatre. They clearly enjoyed to be part of the performance and could remember it with every detail every single night.

The relationship between flamenco and horses also worked very well.

The horses' ability to make explosive changes in energy went along with the flamenco dance and the music, which uses the same dramatic effects. The cold and the breath from the horse's noses, the smell of hay and the soil were all real.



Erika Sanchez Bredholt, *Saeta*, 2013

All of these mixed at the end of the performance with the smell of bread and warm food.

In the last number within 5 minutes we all served a piping hot "chilli con carne" that the local culture house had cooked.

We had again a big audience. I would have never been able to fill up a room during 8 nights in a row in a little village in West Jutland just to see a flamenco dance performance alone.



But now there were horses, and you sat on a hay-bale in a cold riding hall and used Danish texts in the Spanish flamenco music. Texts from Danish songs that everybody recognised.

It was important to me that flamenco was not just exotic but had something that the audience would relate to. Again I used something recognisable in order to push the limits.



*Saeta, 2013*

### *Aphorisms*

I do not use heavy dramatic texts in these performances. It is not there that my skill relies. But I think that this way of doing theatre, the theatre of reciprocity, can contribute to make theatre survive and to continue to be part of our culture, so it is present in all the corners of society, where it could once be found before it moved to the big heated rooms with comfortable seats.

They played in the market squares, for the king, in the church, in the streams and for the village feast. It was a living tradition and was an integral part of the society.

Actors were seldom rich and it was a very risky profession where you had to work hard to survive. They had to be good at many different things – reciting texts, playing music, dance, doing acrobatics, juggling and much more. Because one day they had to play for the king who maybe would prefer a poetic text, and the following day they had to play in the market square where the comics and acrobats worked better.

## THE THEATER OF RECIPROCITY

The same rules apply today. To do theatre and above all just to be able to live from it, you have to be good at many things. The body has to be like a sharp and keen tool.

I do not think that all the secrets of performing lie in this kind of theatre.

It is just one of the ways to make theatre. But I think it can help to strengthen the survival of and show new ways to use it.

The theatre must and can do something else than other art forms.

I want to trigger dreams in the audience by using the things that surround them. I think it is interesting if I can make poetry and drama with a donkey, a few hay-packs and a milking cow and show a completely different face of theatre.



*Circus on the Edge, 2009*

### *Epilogue and utopia*

The old lady who waters the flowers at the beginning of this text, she has watered flowers all her life; she was good at watering flowers. The old Pakistani women who sang to the newly married couple; they did not sing that well and always started a little too late, but they made a very lively picture. They lived in that neighbourhood, they have lived there most of their lives and were a part of the picture of the street.

The young man with the short arm worked in a café in the same neighbourhood. He had signed up as an actor in our performance and got a part as a fruit vendor that tried to sell an old lady during the performance.

He told me that he was not so good to use his short arm. I could see that, and that was exactly why he had to sell fruit and collect empty cans in order to survive.

He was not especially good at aiming at the cans but it was a living and fascinating picture, whether he hit the cans or not. They all had the beautiful ability of not acting, and just like the girl on the horse or the acrobat with the flowers, they did just what they were best at: and that is why it all worked together. They were not amateurs, they were professionals within their own field.

Before I knew Odin Theatre I was educated as boat builder and learned to build wooden boats. This has not very much to do with theatre, but it gave me a craft and the skill to organise. All of that has been very important in my work as an actor at the Odin Theatre. And above all in these performances that I have made with horses, hay, snow and many different people and crafts – where such experience has been invaluable.

Each society has circles that maybe never meet.

I use the theatre of reciprocity as an occasion and motivation to meet through habits, culture, language and interests.

It is through this encounter that curiosity, understanding and acceptance of each other arise.

I put people together and focus on what the participants can do, and this makes people in all cultures and of all ages shine with dignity.

I use theatre as a tool to make the encounter possible.

And at the same time it is an opportunity to show another part of our work: the ability to organise, theatricalise and orchestrate.

If it succeeds, we as actors can approach a lot of people that otherwise we would never have met.

It is in the meeting that theatre arises, and without audience, theatre does not exist.

*Idom, Denmark, July 2013*

***KAI BREDHOLT** was born in 1960 in Copenhagen, Denmark. He did an apprenticeship as a boat-builder. He began as a folk-musician playing in the streets and in popular cabarets. His studies include extensive exposure to various genres of European traditional and folk music, especially those of Denmark. He joined Odin Teatret in 1990, first as a musician/composer, later as an actor and organiser/director of barbers and transformations (theatricalisation of a specific social milieu). Kai Bredholt directs street performances for theatre groups all around the world and has created particular circus performances which present actors, pets, farmers with their animals, ballet dancers on tractors and much more. Since 1992 he has been a member of ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology) ensemble.*

## *In search for the mysterious principles of the Odin*

**A dialogue with Anna Stigsgaard\***  
**by Ștefana Pop-Curșeu**

Anna Stigsgaard is a young theatre director, musician, actor and translator. She worked at the Odin Teatret with Eugenio Barba and was his assistant director for the performance *Andersen*. She also took directing classes at the Royal Opera in Denmark, having Kasper Holten (director of the Royal Opera House of London) as a teacher. During the years 2005-2010 she was the assistant director for both Barba and Holten. Anna Stigsgaard directed theatre plays in Portugal, Italy, Brazil, Romania and Denmark.

This interview has been taken during the third edition of International Meetings in Cluj organized in October 2013 by the Lucian Blaga National Theatre, when we recalled the intense moments of the creation of the *Idiot*, after F. M. Dostoevsky, directed by Anna Stigsgaard with the actors of the TNC. The performance was greatly appreciated by Eugebio Barba himself and the actors of the Odin Teatret who had been present in Cluj, on the occasion of the attribution of the doctor honoris causa title to Eugenio Barba, by the Babeș-Bolyai University.



**Key-words:** Odin Teatret, Andersen, training.

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**Ștefana Pop-Curșeu:** *Knowing that you have been working for three years at the Odin Teatret, I am very curious about how you decided to go there and how you lived your experience, first as an actress and then as a directing assistant...*

**Anna Stigsgaard:** The decision to go there was a consequence of how I discovered the Odin. In Denmark the Odin is little known; few people know about the Odin, even in the theatre world... I did not know that it existed, and went all the way to Cuba to go to theatre school – I don't really know how it happened, but I went to knock at the door of the director of the ISA (the Cuban National Theatre School). I had never done any theatre in my life, but I asked if I could be there for three months as an acting student. He said yes, and I was put in the class of the inferior level students, but I had a friend in the class of the higher level students who brought me sometimes to her classes. And she had a very good teacher who was my first experience of the feeling that "Oh wow, I want to do this! This is what I'm looking for", and he, when he heard that I was coming from Denmark, he said: "Oh the Odin! The Odin! Do you know the Odin?" – and he showed me a card with the address of the Odin. And I thought "Holstebro, this small, nothing town in the province, it must be a pitiful theatre!" After this I went to Mexico for many months; the last day in Mexico I was staying at a Quaker House, in the middle of Mexico City, where they had a book-exchange shelf where you could put and take books... I saw a book with a Danish title: *The way of the actor*, and I thought "This is my book, I'll take it". When I opened it, I saw that it was about the Odin Teatret and I remembered the words of my Cuban teacher. I read the book on the plane, going back to Europe. I got a fever when I finished reading it, I was shaking, I was completely shocked by what was written there. In the book there are testimonies and descriptions of performances – you know, as we were talking about yesterday, how such a testimony can evoke in you with a few impressions a kind of wonder at the fact that somebody has made such an amazing performance. And there were pictures of the actors doing the training as young, and interviews, and then in the end there was an essay by Eugenio. And this essay... it was like finding... "if this place is *really* as it is described here, then I must go there".

So I took the train to Holstebro, walked to the periphery of the town, and I knocked on the door – and was received by a sweet lady... she showed me the theatre, she was so kind. I asked her "can I come here and do something" and she said "hmm, no, you have very little experience, maybe not, but in eight months we'll have this workshop where people are introduced in the work of the Odin, you could come". And in the end she

presented herself: “By the way, I’m Else-Marie [Laukvik]” and I was completely shocked: this woman, of whom I had read in the book, who had done these amazing performances, these unbelievable roles, had received me so kindly and with such great humility. It was one of my first impressions, this hospitality of the Odin... then when you enter the Odin it’s one of the first things that you learn, that any stranger who passes by, like with the Bedouins in the desert, you have the obligation to take him inside and offer him something to drink and something to eat.

But eight months later, I went to this workshop...

**Ş. P.-C.:** *Could you tell me exactly which year it was?*

**A. St.:** It must have been in the beginning of 2001. The workshop [the Odin Week] made a great impression on me. At this time I had the wish to start playing the violin again. And during the workshop I asked the violinist [Frans Winther] of the Odin: “Do you know a good teacher in Copenhagen?” And he said: “Yes, I do, I am a good teacher in Copenhagen...” So for months I went to his house every week. After a while he invited me to the Odin to see a performance. Since it ended too late for catching the train back to Copenhagen, I was offered to sleep at the theatre. Already this was taking my breath away... sleep at the Odin Theatre! – but after the performance Frans said, “Now come and have dinner with the actors”, and again I thought “O my God” and they put me between Torgeir [Wethal] and Kai [Bredholt]. It was unbelievable to me... Torgeir pouring the wine for me, I almost couldn’t eat. Kai who is a very jovial person, asked me: “So what do you do?” And I said “I want to do more theatre”, and he said: “Okay, I’m starting a project, would you like to be in it?” That was how I entered the Odin. The project was to last one and a half years, and based on an exchange: He would teach me what he knew, and I would work for free... The project’s title was *Breathtaking Harvest Feasts*, created for a festival called “The Wind” in which the Odin invested a lot of energy, each actor having his own project. Kai wanted to make these *Breathtaking Harvest Feasts*, traveling with a caravan of artists taking over village after village. The harvest feast used to be a very strong ritual in these very small communities in that part of the country, but in later years it has become just going to the Gym hall, drinking beer and listening to some pop music... he wanted to renew this.

**Ş. P.-C.:** *To revitalize these rituals?*

**A. St.:** Yes, so we travelled around from village to village with a Cuban quintet, a Danish Folk Music trio, and our Odin trio: Kai, Magnus Errboe (a young actor whom Kai had met the day before he met me – really a coincidence)

and me. Magnus, like me, could sing and play, so both of us ended up being musicians and actors, administrators and organizers, and directors of the activities in one of the villages. Because of this, even if at the time I didn't understand this, Kai is the "teacher" who has taught me the most... We arrived in "my" village, the village for which I had the responsibility, and Kai asked: "So, what are we going to do?" I just looked at him without understanding. I was waiting to be told what to do, I did not know what it meant to be responsible for an event, to lead, to direct. He got very angry with me, and it was a harsh awakening, but in this way he taught me more than anyone, he just threw me in the water and said: Swim!

For most of this time I stayed in the theatre, and every time I passed the rooms where Eugenio was working on his performances, my eyes were as if trying to penetrate the doors and the walls, and I started to understand that this is what I wanted, this is what I came for, the work of Eugenio, this mastery of the craft... Six months before the Harvest Feasts that we were preparing, the ensemble started the rehearsals for *Andersen's Dream*, and I crept up to Eugenio's office and asked if I could come and watch the rehearsals. I had no pretense to be a director's assistant, and I knew there were already two assistants, but I had made a list with twenty points demonstrating why I could be useful – if he should say no ...and he just said, "I can't see any problem"! Then I started to watch the rehearsals and I tried to become irreplaceable, to be sure that they wouldn't be able to do this without me. I took more and more responsibilities... in the beginning I was just sweeping after the rehearsals, trying to sew some objects for the actresses, and was always failing very miserably. We were working on Andersen's fairy tales, and each actor had to direct one fairy tale of his choice in the two first weeks before Eugenio entered the work. Roberta [Carreri] had chosen the tale of *The Tinderbox* in which at a certain point the queen ties a little bag of small flakes to the princess' dress, so that when she is brought to the soldier in the night, the queen will be able to follow the tracks. I volunteered to make this bag, from which the flakes should fall gradually. It was a disaster: on the first day nothing came out, so I went to the supermarket, I bought every kind of flakes and corn and grains to see what could come out in the right way, and then I found the right material that would trickle nicely, and when we tried the scene ... everything came out at once! It was a nightmare... I continued working on it for days and nights, and then the scene was cut! This was my first job for the Andersen...

Slowly I started to take responsibility for the script, because the two assistants didn't know Danish. And then, for the process of Andersen, I did everything... I was painting the scenography, this huge ship-like oval structure

for the audience, and I painted all of it in one day. And I made a system for this stage curtain, which had to go up and then to be able to fall suddenly with a certain speed and sound; and it's really, really complicated; you can buy a system like this, I discovered, but it costs tens of thousands Euros... so I was sewing, going to the sailor's shop, buying these small wheels and counter-weights, for weeks, failing miserably so many times, but in the end managing. I remember feeling a great joy working on each detail. I did anything and everything for that performance, partly because I loved the work, the atmosphere, and partly because I was convinced that if I didn't make myself irreplaceable they might kick me out at any moment, you know, suddenly turn around and say: "What the hell is *she* doing here?"

**§. P.-C.:** *So you tried to be somehow invisible but extremely present at the same time...*

**A. St.:** Yes, and this allowed me to sit next to Eugenio for months and months, and watch the work and try to absorb the to me mysterious principles he was working from. And this was the most valuable thing of all, I think, to just sit next to Eugenio and watch together and see also how much time he just sat there and watched what the actors were doing, again, and again, and again, and again, again, until something started to appear; and then, try to understand how he saw when something had to change, how, with what kind of eyes did he see the possibilities, how do you discover the crack of the possibility to pass to another level? Where is this opening where something which is really quite banal can suddenly become the entrance to something that blows your mind?

**§. P.-C.:** *How does Eugenio work with the actors?*

**A. St.:** Well, mostly I can talk about *Andersen*, because I followed the whole process, but I think it's quite general... for *Andersen*, a long time before the start of the rehearsals, he decided the theme: Andersen.

Then he decided to mix it with the figure of Scheherazade. And then, what he really wanted to do with Andersen, which was really strange, was to mix it with the theme of the slave-trade, and of the culture of the slaves, both East and West of the passage. And he gave tasks to the actors: the first task for each of the actors was to go to Africa and pick up something for the performance. Roberta went to Zanzibar and learnt zanzibarean dances, Julia [Varley] went to Capo Verde, Kai cheated and went to Sicily (maybe Sicily is a kind of Africa) and worked with the puppets of Mimmo Cuticchio... and then there was music inspired by the blues, jazz, Capo Verdian music... and so on. These were the three themes – Andersen, Scheherazade, and the slaves – which seemed impossible to unite.



Each actor had to prepare one hour of *material*, which could be of the kind that they wanted: the ones who were musicians presented mostly music, the ones who were actors presented actors' work (texts, action, images, dances, costumes...) around the themes. Then in the first two weeks as mentioned each actor had to prepare a fairytale and direct the other actors in this fairytale as if it were a performance; they had each two days of work, which actually means one and a half day, because in the afternoon of the second day they had to show it.

**Ș. P.-C.:** *It is extremely short...*

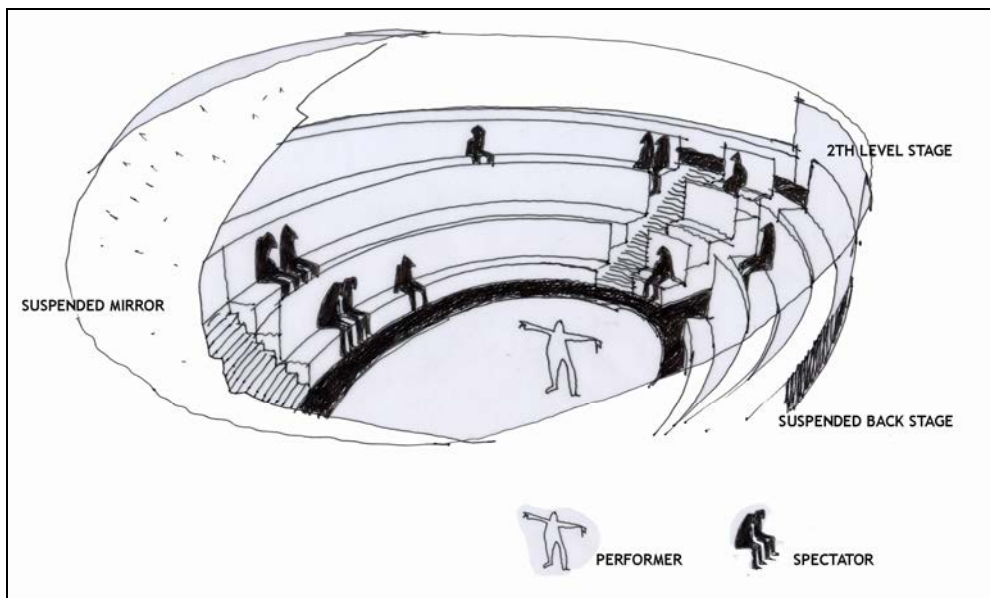
**A. St.:** Yes, very short. The first two weeks were like this: each two days: change of scene, and a new actor was directing the others... maybe you can imagine, it would be kind to say it was on the level of dilettante theatre, but it was a lot of fun. In this way I think it was a good idea, because these actors who have been working together for thirty, some of them for forty years, they were having fun like children! And sometimes we were crying from laughing... But as a first impression I was quite shocked: "How is it possible that these Gods-of-theatre make such s\*\*t?" It was also a good lesson, no? that everything can start from the worst conditions and what you have known is how to make it grow into something else.

After two weeks Eugenio arrived, and we saw all the individual materials and the fairy tale "performances": We had something like ten hours of material put together! Eugenio started to make a montage: he put the fairytales one after the other, and he asked the actors to play the whole thing, all 10 hours. It was like a desert... nothing was worked in detail, nothing had any quality, and it took one whole day to pass through everything. It was a mystery to me how anything good could come from this. And then Eugenio started to intervene on the level of director. What surprised me is how little he actually worked with the actors; sometimes he works on a detail, but this was more towards the end of the process, sometimes he stayed late and worked with one actor but this happened more with the younger actors than with the older ones... he just let them repeat, and repeat, and repeat, and repeat the structure, and then he started to make structural changes: This scene we'll put here, this other scene there, and he directed some scenes that he wanted to do, and then suddenly the scenography arrived.

**Ș. P.-C.:** *He was the one who imagined the scenography?*

**A. St.:** Eugenio imagined it with Luca Ruzza, who is an architect; he thought about a slave ship in which all the audience would be sitting, around, in this oval, on one side there would be the entrance, on the other side there would be a section which when the audience enters would be invisible but then suddenly a curtain goes up and it's full of false spectators.

Even if I watched the whole process, it was a mystery to me how slowly the things started to grow... He was adding mostly director's ideas: the space, some scenes, he was working very little with the actors. The actors were very much left to taking care of themselves. Mostly he says what they have to do, the actors have such an understanding that they know that... they just have to do. You never see an Odin actor stopping and saying "I don't understand why?" or "What is my character", they just do; they know that they just have to do, and do, and do...



Space in *Andersen's Dream*

**Ş. P.-C.:** *In order to find something.*

**A. St.:** And in order for *him* to find something. And the trust is so deep that they went on making these eight hours of very low quality material for many weeks, they just went on doing it without any question mark, for Eugenio to watch; they knew they were filtering, to find the sediments. You just have to have patience. Because if you are not patient, you'll shake the glass and you will not see what is solid and what is liquid, but if you wait, you'll start to see it. This is one thing that deeply marked me, because I really saw that it's true; but it's very difficult to do if you don't have actors who know, by 40 years of common experience, that it is like this. For example,

the actors of the National Theatre in Cluj rebel against this, they are not used to waiting for it to appear: they want to know immediately what is the “sediment”, and then they know how to perform it.

**Ș. P.-C.:** *The actors have to have this patience, this learnt patience.*

**A. St.:** And they have to know that this brings a result which you couldn't think of, which I couldn't think of, but that we make together by being patient, and by working and by using all our capacities of course, but you can find something unknown which is such a concentrate of meaning, something radioactive... and this is one of the most treacherous things about having learnt in this way, that I came away with this knowledge, but I do not have actors who will accept this, because I have not constructed the trust during 30 years.

**Ș. P.-C.:** *It is the result of a lifelong experience, and team work.*

**A. St.:** So when you watch this and when you learn from this, when you come away, you sort of have empty hands. You have to invent for yourself how to arrive at these things, with actors whom you don't know, for example. This is a question which for Eugenio doesn't exist, I never saw him really work with somebody he doesn't know... Except for the oriental masters who have patterns of action and that they can repeat, because the oriental masters have similar principles to the actors working at the Odin – of repeatable fragments of action. If you say “go for half an hour” they will go for half an hour, and if you say “repeat”, he'll repeat exactly in the same way. And if you say “cut out this and put this instead”, he can do it, he can do his own montage. And this is how the Odin actors think; or at least it's very similar. It's very dangerous to assume that any other type of actor could think like that: “Now cut out this and put in this”... “What do you mean? I have my psychological build up!”... “Oh, yes!”

**Ș. P.-C.:** *It's a special way of acting... this is also where a certain fascination comes from, for theatre groups who work in completely different ways.*

**A. St.:** For me, from the very beginning, this attracted me, the fact that the actor has his own inner film (although this is a very *grossier* image) and he's like an editor, he can cut a piece out and stick together, or he can take it out and add another piece – he is disconnected from the dramaturgic logic of the performance. Often, when I see performances constructed by a logical line, I'm bored because it shows me already where it's going, whereas in the theatre of Eugenio, you never know where it's going, it's not taking you by surprise, it's taking away the carpet from under your feet; you always find a moment when you feel like not standing in the ground anymore, and

it's a very precious state of being as a spectator. But I don't want to say that it's not possible to do with a more traditional way of constructing a performance, of course it's about how richly you construct, with how many *peripetie*... if you construct according to a line, I'm sure you can find turns that have the same effect...

**§. P.-C.:** *Yes, because the coherence is not necessarily logical. In theatre coherence is based on different principles, than pure simple rational ones... it has different kind of inner logic.*

**A. St.:** Or let's say that logic is deeply irrational in reality, human logic.

**§. P.-C.:** *It's very beautiful what you said about the actors who cut, mix, construct with their own material, because it is essential for an actor to master the material he's made of, to be conscious that his material has to be available to be modeled in an infinite number of shapes.*

**A. St.:** Also, in this way of working the actor comes prepared, he has a lot of material, he explored himself the theme, he worked on it, he has deep roots already in this material, and so if the director says, you have to go from here to here, the actor of the Odin, (even if they are all very different one from the other and it's difficult to generalize), most of the actors of the Odin would think: "Which part of my material can I use to do this?" So when he is in a rehearsal with a director he can "defend" himself, because he has already a territory and he can bring what he needs...

The really particular thing about Eugenio is how many times he watches the same material; again and again and again and again and again... and the actor does repeat it again and again and again... and even when it's starting to get into shape, they would repeat it and repeat it and repeat it, because only like that is this sedimentation happening. It's an extraordinary achievement to have made possible this, to have conquered time enough, and economic conditions to do this, to insist on the fact that only with this, with the time, will the plot reveal itself. And this is what happened: For a long time the two themes – the slave-ships and Andersen – seemed to be two separate, parallel lines, and it seemed like they were never going to meet. And I was very frustrated with this, I was losing hope, and so I was making searches in Andersen's letters and dreams and notes and books, I was obsessed... and suddenly I found, I couldn't believe my eyes, a dream written down by Andersen: "Last night, I dreamt I was on a slave ship (...)" and I ran to Raúl [Iaiza], the assistant director, and I asked him "Look, do you think this is going to be useful, do you think we should show it to Eugenio?" He looked at it and ran to Eugenio's office...

**Ș. P.-C.:** *So Eugenio didn't know about this? Was it just an intuition?*

**A. St.:** No, Eugenio, didn't know... it was just like this, he said: "We'll make a performance with this two themes and then we'll see..."

And Raúl showed Eugenio this text, and he put it as the first text of the performance. And this is where I was "promoted" to assistant. This taught me that you can have a very irrational feeling that two things have something to do with one another, and that if you wait you'll find the connection... And it's something which is very difficult to share, this knowledge, because you really have to have patience, and time, and partners. Partners who will go along these parallel tracks and know from experience that we'll find at some point a meeting point. And then they meet in a way that nobody could ever had imagined. We could never have started from here, from this dream of Andersen and say "Let's make a performance!" or maybe you could... but for me it has always been the great mystery and greatness of Eugenio and of his actors, that they have the courage to work on the unknown for a very long time and to wait until the right fish comes along and then catch it... but they know how to make the fishing rod and they know how to make the line, and they know which bait to put on the hook; maybe this is what you forget when you're learning from them, that first you have to construct the ways to search.

Eugenio usually says: "We're like police. We don't know who the criminal is but we have techniques to look for him..."

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## *Come dimenticarlo?* *Un incontro durato 42 anni con l'ODIN TEATRET*

ROBERTO BACCI\*



**Abstract.** This contribution describes the long lasting friendship between the author and Eugenio Barba, both from a personal and from an artistic point of view. It begins with the author's trip to Holstebro in 1971, in order to see a performance, *Min Fars Hus* and to write an university research paper. This inaugural event was continued by various collaborations. The Theatre of Pontedera, founded by the author, transferred some of Eugenio Barba's ideas in Italy and permitted Roberto Bacci to create the context of inviting Jerzy Grotowski there (1986 - 1999), where the Polish master taught his last lessons on acting and directing.

**Keywords:** Roberto Bacci, Eugenio Barba, collaboration, Odin Teatret, Pontedera, J. Grotowski.

**1971.** Non esistevano ancora i fax e le lettere, scritte a mano, viaggiavano come gli esseri umani, attraversando i Paesi per giungere a destinazione.

Così la lettera che spedii ad Holstebro, in Danimarca e che cambiò la mia vita, giunse all'Odin di Eugenio Barba.

Oggi 42 anni dopo, sono qui a scrivere qualche pagina intorno ad un rapporto professionale e ad un'amicizia che si è fatta sempre più intima e fraterna in tutti questi anni.

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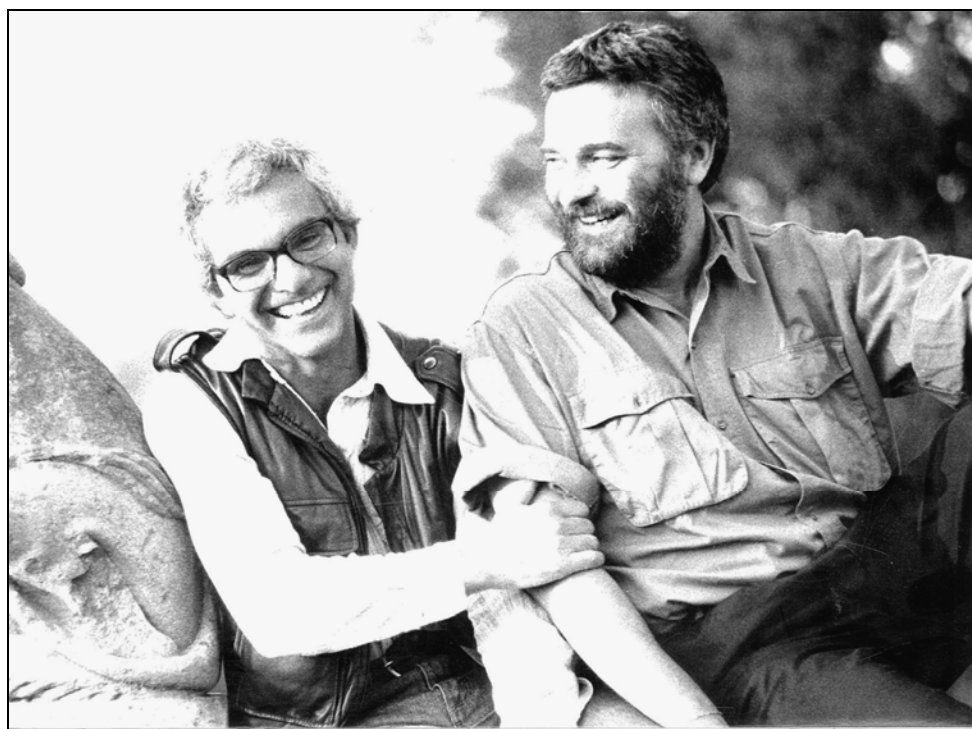
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Scrivere di Eugenio e dell'Odin potrebbe richiedere l'impegno di uno storico (e già molti grandi storici ci si sono applicati), ma nel mio caso voglio parlarne con leggerezza, senza toccare l'aspetto strettamente artistico o quello di "teorico" del teatro in cui Eugenio è diventato un maestro sia con gli spettacoli sia pubblicando libri utili e ricchi di esperienza.

Voglio scrivere di come l'Odin mi è stato necessario e del primo impatto che ebbi arrivando ad Holstebro in una fredda primavera del 1971.

Fui il secondo ospite a cui era stata concessa ospitalità in qualità di studente ed il mio compito consisteva nello studio e nell'analisi di uno spettacolo, allora al termine della lavorazione, che sarebbe diventato l'argomento della mia tesi di laurea universitaria.

Lo spettacolo, dedicato alla vita di F. Dostojevskij, aveva per titolo *Min Fars Hus (La casa del padre)* e la tesi che scaturì da quel lavoro e con la quale mi laureai nel 1972 ebbe per titolo *Teatro e Alchimia*.



Eugenio Barba and Roberto Bacci

## COME DIMENTICARLO?

Naturalmente il lavoro per la tesi divenne presto un pretesto ed il vivere all'Odin e con l'Odin fu senza dubbio la cosa più importante che, inconsapevolmente, portai in Italia come un tesoro che potei riscoprire negli anni seguenti.

L'Odin Teatret: alcuni semplici edifici prefabbricati, sperduti nella periferia pianeggiante di un piccolo paese della Jutland: Holstebro. Una biblioteca teatrale con riviste da tutto il mondo, una piccola cucina autogestita, camerini individuali abitati dagli attori, un piccolo ufficio, due sale di lavoro e per spettacoli (una bianca e una nera) ed un minuscolo foyer.

In questo piccolo mondo si svolgeva una vita disciplinata e monastica con orari inflessibili, pochi rumori e poche parole, allenamento fisico quotidiano e prove, prove, prove.

Così me lo ricordo.



Roberto Bacci, Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba, 1992

Un centro di energia in cui il carisma di Eugenio (allora un po' militaresco e molto diverso da oggi) costituiva il motore intimo di un gruppo di straordinari esseri umani di professione attori, diventati negli anni compagni della mia vita: un "piccolo teatro" la cui guida, come oggi dopo 50 anni, era pronta a contaminare con la propria necessità la storia del teatro moderno.



Paradossalmente, ero arrivato all'Odin tramite la conoscenza libreria di Jerzy Grotowski (*Per un teatro povero*) e di un altro libro sempre su Grotowski *Alla ricerca del teatro perduto*, scritto da Eugenio.

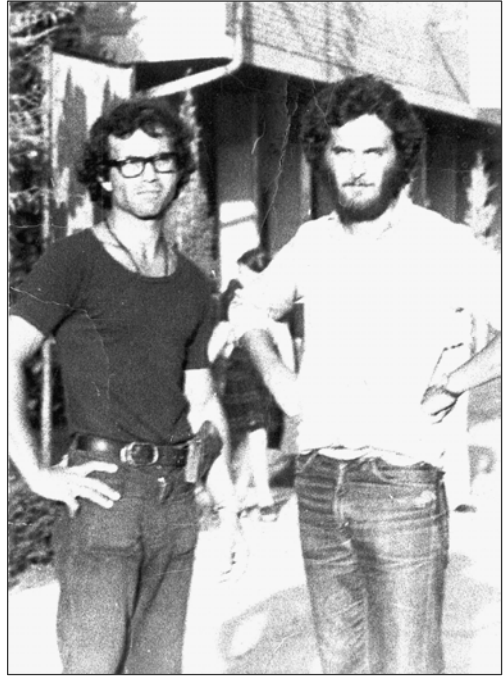
Leggendo quelle pagine che parlavano di disciplina, autenticità, povertà di scene ed orpelli, dono di sé dell'attore in scena e teatro di gruppo, avevo deciso di scrivere all'Odin e di prendere un treno per la Danimarca.

*Min Fars Hus*, di cui fui 23 volte testimone, fu la trappola artistica che mi catturò, ma, ripensandoci oggi, la vera esperienza che per me, alcuni anni dopo, divenne un modello con cui confrontarmi, fu l'esempio di un teatro "egoista", un teatro fatto per gli attori, un teatro che aveva bisogno prima di tutto di nutrire se stesso di esperienze, di incontri, di conoscenza e di domande, per essere poi aperto ed utile agli altri, ai suoi spettatori o testimoni.

Un teatro in cui gli attori erano e facevano "tutto", anche nel senso pratico del termine: custodivano lo spazio, organizzavano eventi, rispondevano al telefono ed alle lettere ecc...

L'Odin per me ribaltava l'esperienza del teatro come spettacolo da consumare, prima ancora che nella forma, nel modo di lavorare e di esistere al proprio interno.

L'Odin Teatret era, ed è ancora oggi, un luogo da abitare e da nutrire, in cui gli attori sono i depositari del proprio destino, individuale e di gruppo, sono un organismo con una reale vita professionale e nello stesso tempo che ha bisogno di contatti con il mondo, cercando i propri simili per conoscerli e riconoscersi, per nutrire delle proprie esperienze l'ambiente circostante, per fare della propria professione uno strumento utile per trasformare la realtà umana e sociale che lo circonda.



Eugenio Barba and Roberto Bacci

Attori che sanno creare tecniche originali e nello stesso tempo sanno imparare da ogni fonte di conoscenza possibile.

L'Odin per me e' stato una testimonianza senza essere un modello, un nucleo di senso e di umanità con cui confrontarmi.

Quante volte ho "visto" Eugenio, anche se lontano, come se fosse lì davanti a me a pormi domande sul senso di ciò che stavo per fare: "che cosa ne penserebbe Eugenio di questa scelta...?". La domanda non riguardava mai la cosa da realizzare, il progetto, bensì quel tipo di energia che si oppone al mondo che ci circonda che avevo sentito in quella mia prima visita all'Odin.

Nel rapporto con Eugenio, che negli anni si è andato via via trasformando in una amicizia fraterna, non ho mai sentito la pesantezza che a volte si può avvertire con un maestro, ma piuttosto la sfida, che Eugenio incarna, di confrontarsi con la realtà per aggredirla, per realizzare, nel quotidiano, l'impossibile.

Ecco, con Eugenio sentivo lo stupore che nasce quando si realizzano le cose "impossibili", l'intimo egoismo che ti porta ad offrire agli altri ciò che non può essere previsto in un contesto "normale".

Questo mi è accaduto quando ho diretto spettacoli, festival internazionali di teatro, quando ho creato un gruppo, quando ho fondato un centro di ricerca, quando abbiamo realizzato a Pontedera, in Italia e nel Mondo progetti di cultura teatrale. Così siamo arrivati a dare ospitalità a ricerche che non trovano casa nel mondo dei prodotti che ci circonda (come per noi è stato la creazione del Workcenter di Jerzy Grotowski a Pontedera dove, dal 1986 al gennaio 1999, Grotowski ha potuto far prendere vita alla sua ricerca ultima, lasciare la propria eredità artistica a Thomas Richards e Mario Biagini e condividere con me e con tutti noi la sua straordinaria presenza).

Questo modo di agire, di lottare contro gli automatismi nostri e che regolano la realtà intorno a noi, questo bisogno di fare ogni cosa come nessuno mai l'ha fatta prima di te, tutto questo porta a vedere ed a vivere il teatro come un'esperienza straordinaria.

Il teatro, allora, non è più un edificio, non è più uno spettacolo, non è più una locandina, un manifesto, una critica su un giornale o un applauso alla fine di un buon lavoro professionale.

Il Teatro diventa un viaggio di cui non si riesce neppure a definire la geografia o il confine.

"Per andare dove non sai devi passare per ciò che non conosci" e questo è il teatro che l'Odin ed Eugenio mi hanno ispirato e che tutt'oggi, dopo 50 anni di vita, l'Odin continua a trasmettere alle giovani generazioni.

C'è un segreto in tutto questo? Sì, molti piccoli e grandi segreti di cui, credo, nessuno può essere fino in fondo consapevole, tuttavia c'è un aspetto che in Eugenio mi ha sempre colpito: l'ascolto e l'ospitalità, non mi riferisco soltanto al significato che tutti diamo alla parola (anche se l'Odin è il teatro più "ospitale" che conosca) mi riferisco all'attitudine di essere "ospite" dell'altro e per l'altro, mi riferisco all'essere completamente in ascolto di chiunque cerchi una vita nuova nell'arte e non solo.

Se, come ho verificato in tanti anni di amicizia, Grotowski è stato il maestro del lavoro con il pensiero, Eugenio è per me il maestro dell'ascolto, di quel dialogo che ti fa sentire un viandante che ha raggiunto una casa, calda, illuminata, protetta e da cui si può ripartire con nuove domande ed energie.

Per raccontare tutto il resto, ovvero 42 anni di lavoro e di amicizia, non esiste un libro adatto a contenerlo o una lingua per parlarne.

I viaggi, gli spettacoli, le tragedie, anche personali, condivise, le passioni, gli artisti conosciuti insieme, i progetti impossibili realizzati, i compleanni che hanno scandito il tempo (50 per l'Odin, 40 per Pontedera), gli amici che ci hanno accompagnato, i giovani gruppi che abbiamo incontrato... di tutto questo non si può scrivere.

Ma come dimenticarlo?

*ROBERTO BACCI is the Artistic and Executive Director and founder of Fondazione Pontedera Teatro, Italy. Together with Carla Pollastrelli he invited Jerzy Grotowski in Pontedera, in order to create an Institute, where to develop a permanent research activity. In 1986, Grotowski moved in Pontedera where he established his Workcenter. Roberto Bacci took part in various theatre projects, along with Peter Brook, Anatoli Vasiliev, Raul Ruiz, Sanjukta Panigrahi, Julian Beck and Judith Malina. Between the years 1978 and 1987 he was the Artistic Director of The International Theatre Festival of Santarcangelo di Romagna, and from the year 1990 until 1998 he conducted The International Festival Volterra Teatro and Passaggio in Pontedera (the last known as Generazioni, starting with the year 2000).*

## *Luxury balance, or the luxury of balance?\**

ANDRÁS HATHÁZI\*\*

**Abstract.** This paper presents a reflection on the acting as a complex phenomenon. The author distinguishes between the emphasis put on the character (realism) and the emphasis put on the role (theatricality). What an actor should find is a “luxury” balance, a formula borrowed from Barba, or the luxury of balance, such as the author of this article interprets it taking as a starting point his experience with David Zinder or Matthias Langhoff.

**Keywords:** actor, character, role, balance, luxury.

The content is unknowable, because we approach it with words. These have different meanings for each and every person, and the essence is lost in the pronouncement of words. Consequently, I cannot say that I will reflect upon “luxury” balance, a phrase borrowed from Barba. I am just clinging to this expression used by Eugenio Barba (and which, most likely, is still used by him) and I will try to harmonize it with something that I discovered for the first time during my work with David Zinder, and which I dared to try in my most recent collaboration with Matthias Langhoff. So referencing Barba is just a pretext for the following exposition.

It has to do with the steady-state condition of “I don’t know what will happen”, the discipline-producing structure of “I won’t interfere!”, and the cheerfulness of “I’m only contemplating all of this”. It’s about the actor, the role, and myself. And their balance. Yet, perhaps, it is simply about *freedom*.

Actors are not free. They give up their freedom without hesitation for the sake of safety. Therefore they pretend to see, to hear, to exist. They know they should see, so they believe they see. They know they should hear, so

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they believe they hear. They know they should exist, so they believe they exist. Indeed, they are convinced of this. And so they remain *merely* actors who would like to become characters. This is why you can analyze them, form an opinion about their presence, develop techniques to improve their work. Because, unfortunately, actors don't consider for a second what might happen if they did not follow the well-known order, if they did not hide behind the sterile, seemingly secure and tested canons, but let the characters take their fleeting, but nevertheless rich fates into their own hands. What would happen if characters turned into real human beings and did not try to remain interesting theatrical figures?

But they don't, because the actors don't even think. The actors know. And this is not good. Romeo goes to the Capulets' ball, because the actor knows that this is how Shakespeare has written it, and if he did not act like that, the performance would stop, or it would be a different play from the well-known and expected *Romeo and Juliet*. The actor should not enter the ball because this was the agreement of the makers of the scene during the rehearsals, but because Romeo (and not the actor!) wants to go in. At a certain point, he really feels that this is what he should do. Romeo feels this; it is *not* about the actor *knowing* that this is how he should feel.

For this to happen, the actor must renounce knowledge, all knowledge about the scene. He has to forget how the play continues, how the play ends. Instead, he needs to pay attention to his own Romeo, and he needs to obey his (that is, Romeo's) rising caprice.

In order to do this, it is not enough to read the text in a different way, it is not enough to squeeze interesting ideas into the scene. We need to think about man himself – but most of all, about ourselves – in a different way.

My starting point is that the personality, or at least how we usually think of it, is not a homogeneous, unchangeable entity, but merely a dynamic, situation-dependent, ever changing guard-rail that we create in self-defense against the world outside us. (And there is a special luck and virtue in our creating it. We have a chance to participate in the future discovery and development of our *essence*! I tend to think that we learn forms of conduct by close observation; we refine the patterns of others, shaping them, tailoring them for ourselves.) Consequently, there's no single I, and we can never say that we are whom we think we are. It's true that we react in a unique way to never-changing human situations, but eventually we come to do so mechanically. But, whenever we lose our balance a little bit, we instantly panic and feel our situation to be extreme. We "lose" our "personality", we "turn

inside out” and, dragging our whole existence into danger, we desperately try to fill the gap through which the outside world may find a way towards us. Anything can threaten us, a sudden fatal event or falling in love, but regardless of how we live the moment, positively or negatively, we suddenly have the option to react *differently*. Suddenly we experience *freedom*.

In my interpretation, this is what theatre events are about. About people who suddenly find themselves in situations where their automatic behavior loses its meaning and they are forced to act in an unusual way by things going on around them and affecting them immediately. At such times categories do not exist *a priori*, but *a posteriori*. The situation can be evaluated only at a later point and participants in the event can be characterized as being this and that only after passing through it. But this belongs to the past, and theatre’s time is exclusively the now, the unpossessable (in the full sense of the word) present.

So then, how could this happen?

When I was a child I played board games a lot – by myself. I played card games for four players – alone. In the same way, I played chess or other strategy games against one of my selves. I played Monopoly on my own, representing six people, and while I knew what the “other” kept up his sleeve, I kept forgetting it in order to preserve the passion of the game. Whenever I picked up the cards of the next player, I focused exclusively on his perspective and strove to win the game with his knowledge. I became the role, and I forgot the actor who knew the dangers of playing a certain card. Since I didn’t cheat, I enjoyed the whole thing. It was extremely entertaining to me to continuously move from forgetting to the always new discoveries that this game offered. I think I encountered the seeds of my present discovery then without knowing the least thing about it.

As I write this piece, it occurs to me that what I call “luxury balance” might contribute to solving another important question about the effect of alienation. I once asked Matthias (Langhoff) how Brecht, the inventor of the phenomenon, thought about this. He could not give an exact answer, because – as he said – Brecht couldn’t tell (neither undoubtedly, nor approximately) what he meant in speaking about the process of alienation either. However, I agreed with Matthias (as far as the translation from German to Hungarian and vice versa permitted) that this phenomenon might be about the actor (and the creators of the performance) reminding the audience they are all in a theatre, and whatever they see and evoke is not a reality. But it could easily be one.

This is where my interpretation of luxury balance fits in. Because everything depends on who I am at that moment. The actor? The role? Or the continuous spectator of myself: me? Where have I swung during the state of balance required by this trio? What have I become?

I think that this is the starting point of realistic or theatrical (or stylized, call it what you will) modes of playing. We form the performance depending on whom we put forward. The character? I will be a realist. The actor? I could display my professional knowledge and be theatrical. Do I employ the effect of alienation? In that moment, I could be the one who signals: this is just theatre. You do not need to take it seriously, but only that of which it speaks.

I know this might seem too simple. But I don't think there is more to it than that. Shall we gloss over the details? That would be mere window-dressing.

I know that I am being silent about what people expect to hear: the disclosure of how these ideas can be achieved. I won't tell, because this concerns only me. I won't tell, because it will incite imitation and because it would immediately become a dogma. I won't tell, because the words are my words, and they acquire a completely different meaning in the recipient.

I say only this: we don't need to know or follow any "actorly aim", we don't need to be somebody.

Luxury balance or the luxury of balance?

Among whom?

Among the actor, the role, or the supposed ego of daily routine?

Yes.

And just as it is easy to find the centre of gravity that assures balance in the case of a triangle, the solution is no different in this case: all we need to know is, who is the AB side, who is the BC side, and who is the AC side?

And what are their dimensions?

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*A real artist acknowledges his success,  
his failure and his limits:  
Eugenio Barba\**

CĂTĂLINA BUZOIANU\*\*

**Abstract.** This paper tries to recover the emotion the author felt at the American seminar in Salzburg, session 205, where four of Eugenio Barba's films were screened: the first one discussed the company's formation and components, the second was a study of the actor's vocal expression, the third one showed the activities of Barba's company in an Amazonian village, while the fourth film showed the Odin Teatret actor's fitness. Without, deliberately, giving titles, names, or historical information, the author focuses on the way these films touched her deeply, personally and artistically. The force of these four films convinced her she was confronting herself with a true and vivid artistic experience.

**Keywords:** Eugenio Barba, film, actor, performance, artist.

Session 205 – contemporary theatre – of the American seminar in Salzburg screened four of Eugenio Barba's films, attended by the creator and accompanied by a description of personal opinions on the contemporary theatrical act, both in relation to the actor's training system and to the direct, aggressive, redeeming or unsettling connection with an audience fixed in an inherited community system.

The films, made by the Italian Television, focused on Eugenio Barba's personality in relation with the society from amidst which the '60s-'70s theatrical bursts would generate interest, panic, indifference, revolt, rejection, contempt, fetishism, profound or superficial political, social, aesthetic mutations.

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The first film discussed the company's formation and components – Barba would introduce himself, in a simple way, unspoiled by celebrity (in fact, the elapsed years seemed to have left untouched this young man who would barely look like a thirty-year old at forty years of age).

Each member of the company would also introduce themselves, in an autobiographical manner: "*my name is... I am... I was born on...*", accompanied by daily images of the team activity (costume creation, organization, scripts, rehearsals, training).

The film was made in an Italian village, a poor, typically Sicilian village, with narrow streets and white houses in the sun, with sunburnt people, their skin like walnut shells, seen in their daily activities, women harassed by children near miserable fireplaces or staying still as if in a millennium-long somnolence, with crude details (a hand like tree bark, staying still in the afternoon sun, a hand on which a stupid, damned, relentless fly would have its fling in vain, because the tree bark-hand would remain inert, like an object in the afternoon sun). The meager and despondently loud parties, in the village square, rendered in an expressionist neorealism of raw singing and dancing, which distorted the sallow deep wrinkled faces, teeth nicked, mouths opened as if screaming, mobile uvulae, injected, mobile or inexpressive eyes, bodies twisted in grotesque motion, bodies deformed by work, by births, heavy or dry, absurdly sized bodies, caught in hopeless merrymaking.

And all of a sudden the explosion, the fringed orange flag fluttering along the alleys, on the roofs, on white walls. Theatre, pure theatre, in its elemental function, dynamic, beautifully living nucleus shattered the ancestral inertia like a revolution.

Young, harmonious and free bodies, simple, functional, white or lively colored costumes, sticking to long threads in the hot wind, painted faces or the customary masks of popular theatre, old instruments of street theatre, characters whose cultural biography is easily readable, traditional carnivals refined by the perfection of performance, Chinese theatre, *commedia dell'arte*, circus, mixed in a living, original, free and vigorous system. A simple, mankind-old code understood by everyone – dark clowns in a large white space, characters wrapped to the child-spectators' indignation, who spontaneously ran to free them. Theatre – an act of courage. An evil demon's beheading in the public square, to the satisfaction of the entire village, the toothless mouths of which laugh heartily. Musical motifs arranged by the spectators and let free in pure sounds, in a communion that stirs relaxed and sweet smiles on the tree-bark, walnut-shelled faces. The true-blue expression is replaced by astonishment and childishness, I am not wrong, by the child's

optimistic expectation, a child who listens to fairy tales. Theatre, a world of mystery and marvels, where the good and the beautiful conquer all, and the evil is punished.

The second film is a study of the actor's vocal expression. Barba describes his system, he explains, demonstrates, controls the impulses, directs the sound by the movement of the hand that guides the fluid. Two superb young men, perfect instruments, mastering every fiber of their bodies, every nerve, every sound. Behind them, from a distance, Barba sings on their spine as if it were a keyboard. Each impulse his hand sends is received and, in its turn, it determines the delivery of sounds.

A simple girl shows the instrumental capabilities of the human voice.

And then there she is. The unique, total, incomparable actress. "*My name is... I am 29 years old...*", she had said in the first film, then she sewed costumes, played with a child, typewrote, carried a big orange flag...

Then she sat quietly, in the middle of that room resembling a gymnasium and just like that, as if she were a mother who caressed her child, she started humming something like a litany. Slowly, the sound embraced her entirely, then embraced the entire space, shocked us. I cannot say how long it took, twenty minutes, thirty minutes, one hour, it was a total, stunning experience for me, something to last throughout my entire life. I had felt such a state of annihilation in 1969, when, in *Bread and Puppet*, while in the circus arena the flood was foreseen, and the multi-headed beast was tied to the man, a woman chanted a dog moon howl.

This (Odin Teatret) girl was carrying on with her litany and was sending so much restrained and unrestrained pain, so much despair and innocence... A song for the beginning and for the end of the world, a mother's cry for her child and an unfulfilled love's scream of indignation, the torn flesh of a woman who mourns for her man and the hopeless resignation of the man facing his condition. At the end, exhausted, emptied, humiliated, she collapsed almost lifeless at the feet of the master whose protecting hand patted her hair. This gesture hurt. I felt within me the pride and the humiliation. The girl was no longer an instrument, she was herself. The abyssal abundance was within her.

Another film showed us Barba's company in an Amazonian village. Color, ethnography, picturesque misery, precipitous movement in a merry-go-round that keeps going for centuries and centuries. The Odin Teatret characters had changed their identity. Oversized, they were articulated with the same perfect virtuosity. A cockfight, a girl with a harmonica, circus exhibitions on a dusty narrow street, amidst the waste of a consumer civilization... The principle seemed rigorous. The tourism advertising was challenged with

means of the theatrical publicity, ancestral misery and civilization misery were annotated with farcical means, the melodrama was performed "sore" like the death of the birds.

While the first film showed us original means of theatre opposing a community stuck in its social determination, Barba's second performance used extravagant, hyperbolic, ultra-arranged means. The gigantic, oversized character of a Lady who kept dragging in the dust her endless marabou, playing with her shimmery wig curls in the dusty wing, her stilts stepping graciously in the pools and bumps of a road on the outskirts of a town, seemingly endless at the horizon, this unsettling and bizarre, apocalyptic, impudently splendid, appeared like an expression of the impossibility of any theatrical aesthetics to modify, to shatter, to truly transfigure social life. The first film had given me a certainty the second one would steal violently. This Amazonian village would go on with his colorful, impenetrable, cunning people until the waste of civilization will drown them in its relentless flooding. The fantastic Lady dragged in the dust and pools her winding marabou and the pensive passage in the history of powerless and pointless dramatic mannequins. The explosive energy of the beginnings had wasted. The end I was feeling was more than the end of a civilization; it was also the (incomparably more painful) end of an unparalleled dramatic aesthetics. In 1977, while watching a film in which Grotowski made impersonal, lucid and ironic comments on his revolution and sclerosis, I had had the same acute feeling of sadness and hopelessness.

The fourth film showed us the Odin Teatret actor's fitness. Barba had lectured on the motion-action. We had worked several days with him, in the morning. We would wake up at 6 o'clock, then would jog half an hour around the lake, than, throughout one hours, we would move to the rhythm of a poem we would recite to ourselves. I found my back head heavily slapped because, at a certain moment, I had played truant, my face lingering in the sun. He had explained to me, smiling maliciously, the importance of the ankle in the movement of the body. I had had a good time peeking at my partners, proper professors, in briefs, believing more or less in the funny hobbledehoy steps they took, feet naked in the wet grass, resisting – of necessity – when the rain would fall on our noses.

Now, in the classroom, accompanied by the humming of the projector, we saw the results of his actual work. We knew that only four fanatics had remained from all of the others. We knew the training was hard and took place with closed doors. Barba was saying the actor was free, that it was only him/herself who improvised the system. However, we had heard that, sometimes, he brings in Chinese, Japanese teachers, we knew he had studied three years at Grotowski whose method he was now discussing relaxed.

In the beginning, there were the two superb Christs, the blonde one and the auburn haired one, otherwise fully identical. The exercise was simple (one of them). Each of them had to reach the other one's chest with their foot. Everything started as a child's play, then would go on like a psychological game and ended in passionate frenzy. She came in, the unique one. Sporty, free, like a boy. She was not spared and she would not spare. She participated with the same ability and commitment.

Then there came the boys' training on the ground. Stunning. Gymnasts, athletes of performance. Everything was added in the same rhythm which would become frenetic up to unbearable. Then the game would come to a halt.

And again Her, the unrivaled one. Free like a serpent, like a bird. Flawless. Committed to simple, rough sexuality. Committed to the ground, to the space, to the pleasure of movement, to the joy of being... At the end, the same gesture of humiliation, this time a triumphant one, at the master's feet.

Again Barba's proud face. I was seeing him. He had won... He received the applause modestly, smiling. He did not hide his pride, nor did he hide his resentment. An impostor, some would say. A player at any rate. But a winner nonetheless.

His experience had ended. He knew it. I had seen Peter Schumann's end at the peak of Kantor's glory, at Nancy, in 1977.

Now Barba was exhibiting his work, weighing, like a merchant, like any real artist, the success, the failure and the limits. I held him in high regard from the bottom of my being.

***CĂTĂLINA BUZOIANU** (b. 13 April 1938) is an outstanding Romanian stage director. She graduated from the Bucharest Theatre and Film Institute in 1969, only to become, six years later, one of its prominent staff members, teaching courses within the Stage Directing Department. After her retirement, she continued to instruct MA students in areas such as Theatre Anthropology and Alternative Theatre. Her name is linked to various state repertory companies, from the Iași National Theatre to the Piatra Neamț Youth Theatre, but most notably to Teatrul Mic (Small Theatre) (where she was active between 1979 and 1985) and the Bulandra Theatre in Bucharest (where she worked between 1985 and 2006). After the fall of Romanian communism, in 1989, Cătălina Buzoianu also approached the newly born independent theatrical movement. Besides directing theatrical works, at home and abroad, she has staged several operas and has written three fine books on theatre, combining autobiographical notes and essays. As a trademark, Cătălina Buzoianu has signed some of the best theatrical adaptations of famous novels in the history of the Romanian theatre (such as *The Lady of the Camellias* by Alexandre Dumas fils, *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov or *Wasted Morning* by the Romanian author Gabriela Adameșteanu).*



## **BOOK REVIEWS**



## To burn houses

### First intermezzo:

Eugenio Barba and the Odin Teatret. On hearing these names, anyone slightly familiar with the universe of performing arts will automatically connect to the history of theatre (both as idea and knowledge). Yet Barba and his actors are still alive, quite active as well and what is even more significant: they are valid (or *contemporary*? is that the term?). To be around them is a special experience. Their *nimbus*, the personal charm of each of them, their technical skills have got a lot to do with it, but the feeling is also due to that *little tradition* they have developed in themselves, for themselves, that scrap that makes one's soul wave its wings and fill up with belief, hope and light at contact with anything related to the concept of Theatre.

This is how I felt in 2011, when I have visited their headquarters in Denmark for a period of ten days and I felt the same a year earlier in Sibiu and in the autumn of



2012 in Cluj (!). And this is also how I feel on reading the latest book by Barba, *Casa în flăcări – despre regie și dramaturgie* published by Nemira in 2012, translated into Romanian by Diana Cozma (original edition: *On Directing and Dramaturgy. Burning the House*, Routledge, 2010).

### Second intermezzo:

What is this book about? Directing and dramaturgy, so the title says, nevertheless those seeking for a systematic methodo-

logy of directing and dramaturgy will have a difficult time finding it on its pages. The book covers the title precisely and it extends further beyond and it remains within a narrower realm as well, it actually simultaneously does all the three without ever bumping into contradictions. It is just like a performance by Odin Teatret: several stories and several characters appear simultaneously on stage with now this story-line and then that story-line up front



and some of the times the audience is free to choose one of the elements to pay attention to, while it is invariably the viewer who finally assembles the actual performance: there is no message, no experience, no ideal – but one's own. According to Barba, solely the theatre can create this type of *contiguity*, and he is right: one cannot write on something and its very opposite using the same word, and I still have to admit: he does succeed to a certain extent. A sentence of his keeps coming back to me: "*How could I tell a story which I didn't know, while telling another one?*"

But still, what is this book about? 45 (and this year 50) years in the *cognitive development* of a director. 45 (this year 50) years of cognitive development in theatre. And 45/50 years with his actors. It is about the development of the profession, about the unquenchable desire of the master (professional) to pursue the mysteries and details of his trade, these pursuing him at their own turn. The snake bites its own tail.

#### *Third intermezzo:*

To strike a somewhat technical tone: a prologue and an epilogue (and additional envoi) provide a frame for an explanatory text and four *Intermezzos*, the actual body of the book (and source of inspiration for the form of this review). The three parts of the explanatory text (Entitled "The Empty Ritual") synthesize the content of the book: the first lists a set of words related to Barba's professional terminology (for instance *revolt, craft, energy, origin, wound, profession*), a set that is further elaborated on to reveal the ideas of Barba on the essence of theatre, the processes taking place

inside the theatre and the players; the second part is a text in italics by which the author makes himself and his readers face his origins (the fact that he is the son of a fascist officer, for instance); finally he presents the dramaturgies he distinguishes in between when organizing a given performance: organic, narrative and evocative. The first three intermezzos are discussing these dramaturgies in turns while the fourth gives the reader a director's notebook elaborated during several years and a conclusion to why had Barba assembled this book using material written between 1994 and 2008: he is still researching his origin and seems to find it in the future, not in the past. And this is where we have reached *the wound*.

#### *Fourth intermezzo:*

The *wound* is something we would frequently discover at the origins of a creative career, the trigger for our vulnerability but for our various needs as well. It is something for us to reject, to question or simply behold and examine: "*This wound necessity* has acted as an impulse to remain close to the boy I was, and from whom time removed me, pushing me in a world of constant change". This book gets incredibly close to Barba's wound: in his other writings he either makes no reference to his own life (*A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology, The Paper Canoe*), or, if he does, he does it in the most objective way possible (*Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt*). This book, on the other hand, abounds in autobiographic texts printed in italics, texts related to previous portions on craft and preparing the way for the next one on the same topic, texts that still remain independent – this is what I meant by say-

ing his words can have one meaning and another in the same time. And beyond all this, the most personal kind of autobiography: the book mentions the lovers of his youth, the death of his father, his relation to his mother and hitch-hiking toward Norway on a freezing-cold day in Germany. The tone is far from being sentimental (which Barba never is), nevertheless – or perhaps all the more – the reader is touched. Just as in directing, in writing, too, he uses many metaphors, but without becoming pseudo-poetical. The metaphors are tools by which his texts become more precise and more visual as well. The book offers a number of delicacies: the author had asked a few of the actors working with him for over thirty years to write down moments characteristic of their joint activity and this is how we find out the way Barba functioned as a young director, what kind of improvisations he enacted with his players – and from time to time the author makes comments related to the memories of his actors. This practice gives birth to an amazing dialogue between past and present, pointing to the future. Barba allots many pages to describe his work with his actors, to whom he is linked by ties that cannot be severed: the two elements work in tandem.

On the other hand, the way Barba and his actors, even at a ripe age, begin each day at seven o'clock by a several hours' physical workout (notwithstanding the creative work!), is something unimaginable in our own quarters – but let this be the topic of another text. Concerning the book: it offers a great amount of professional information to actors, directors, dramaturges or even set designers; while it also presents a biography written in an

overwhelmingly personal voice. We are dealing, beyond the shadow of a doubt, with one of the best books by Eugenio Barba so far: a simultaneously objective and subjective, and above all, sincere piece of writing.

**Csongor KÖLLŐ**

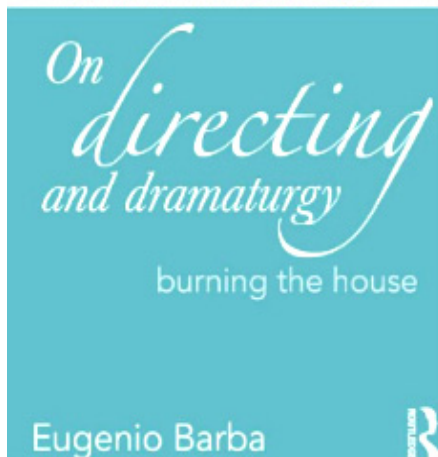
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## ***Eugenio Barba, On Directing and Dramaturgy. Burning the House\****

*On Directing and Dramaturgy. Burning the House* (translation from English by Diana Cozma, Bucharest, Editura Nemira, 2012) is the fourth and most recent book by Eugenio Barba, translated and published in Romanian, after *The Paper Canoe. A Treatise on Theatre Anthropology* (Ed. UNITEXT, 2003), *Land of Ashes and Diamonds* (Ed. Ideea Europeană, 2010) and *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt* (Ed. Nemira, 2010). By using some of his favorite work techniques, such as

the installation or parallel stories (which should be seen fully rather than successively, i.e. precisely the way they would flow in a performance), the author manages to render in writing, by the type of writing itself, the modalities in which he tried to articulate, throughout time, his stage world. The volume is made, mainly,



from autobiographical pieces, which evoke the idea of “underscoring” or “personal reference”, used in order to underscore the actions and reactions of each player in the theatrical performance, fastened by private reflections on theatre and by testimonials of creation from the members of the Odin Theatre, accompanied by comments from the man who had been their decades-long mentor. Additionally, the book encloses recommendations for actors and directors, information

on the personal creative “laboratory” or the notes taken by a former student who had attended the first meeting, in Bonn, of the International School of Theatre Anthropology, founded by Barba one year earlier, in 1979. Thus, at several levels, the book counteracts the “economic” idea behind the author’s statement of intent; he says that he has “stopped at the presentation of his directing principles”, which,

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\* Translated by Magda Crețu

of course, is an understatement. At any rate, if the author reaches his goal, he does it by taking "the long way", the way of the seeming "prodigality", engaging his readers on a labyrinthine route, along which adventures, circumvolutions, detours are scattered, a technique also included in his munitions of favorite procedures.

"Burning the house", here the central metaphor in the book, is a recurrent image in Eugenio Barba's work, with fluctuating yet concurrent meanings and connotations. For example, in *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, Barba invokes it in association with the tragic, "grief-stricken" figure of Ryszard Cieślak, director Jerzy Grotowski's fetish actor and, in general, with his actors' "woe", actors who could no longer make sense of anything in the "conventional" theatre after the break up with the master; he also associates it with the maternal character, equally tragic in her veiled isolation after Eugenio's father's early and violent death. In this context, the "house" seems to mean "overflow": once consumed, "burnt", the experience of the "overflow", of plenitude, of totality, "transfigures" the actor, it squeezes, empties him or, at any rate, puts him on an orbit different from the other people's. He (or she) can no longer go back to the daily routine. It's as if they saw the fairies dancing and then they came undone, as in the Romanian fairy tale about mythological creatures – some sort of nature's virgin, charming and vengeful fairies, ready to put a spell on anyone daring to watch their dance and disturb their merrymaking.

However, "burning the house" can also be the torched citadel of Troy Aeneas leaves behind, a moment evoked by

Barba in one of his texts in the massive volume: *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt*. It is known that Virgil's hero transformed the huge loss in a success, by founding a greater and more flourishing "house". In this context, the image of the "burnt house" renders the myth of the phoenix. Finally, in the volume we approached, "burning the house" becomes a mandatory step of the director's creation – his "pre-condition", in Barba's phrasing –, the most dangerous, potentially fatal, but also the most potentially fertile one. With respect to this, Barba invokes Arthur Koestler and his fundamental work *The Sleepwalkers*, which shattered the foundations of the myth of the linear progress, taking place based on principles of reason, science and arts. There is always a critical moment of disorder, of regression, of negation, of fumble, preceding the great creations or inventions. Eugenio Barba turned this moment in a privileged one, opting for the deliberate "burning of the house" during the work with the actors of the Odin Theatre, in other words rejecting systematically the scenes or situations that would have required weeks if not even months of continuous work; cut, remove, negate, at the same time, what is stated (a categorical requirement of this art, in the work with the actors) etc. As part of a complex and paradoxical strategy, which he calls "serendipity" i.e. the "technique of finding that which is not sought", the burning of the house reiterates at a personal level the great "disruptions" in the director's life (the loss of his father, the self-imposed exile, "the umbilical cord cut with my own hands", the successive transplants, with the company or on his own, from one country to another one

etc.) and seems to refer, at a more profound level, to an original trauma, the trauma of birth. It is not by chance that Barba lays claim for himself of the name of "midwife"; from this position, the director, bereft of the absolute control of the performance to occur, accepts intervention from some obscure forces and meanings he cannot grasp, and even summons them, with a later attempt to tame them. His penchant for maieutics gave, in 1985, during rehearsals for the performance of *The Gospel According to Oxyrhincus*, a new approach of the stage: the narrative context, made from "heterogeneous stimuli" (actors' improvisations, songs, phrases, writings as diverse as possible, images, biographies, historical events etc.) rather than a specific, unique text would become from then on the arrival point of the performance rather than the departure point. The departure topic, described by Barba in a first meeting with the actors, in the form of "oral improvisation", would undergo radical changes, which would make it unrecognizable or would simply make it vanish, in order to leave room to another topic, which would emerge somehow by itself.

By systematizing, the director identifies three work steps in the creation of a performance: in a first phase, his actors are absolutely free to improvise, without a text, carried by their own "underscoring", on topics which, usually, in order to prevent illustrative actions, do not relate in any way with the departure topic of the performance; on the contrary, they are fully opposite; in the second phase, the phase of the critical moment, the moment of "truth", the midwife-director, driven by his personal references, generates disorder,

rejects, chooses, collects, ruins the actors' materials, puts them on stage based on principles known only by him ("dynamic" rather than descriptive principles, he says); and, toward the end, in the third phase, the director polishes, reworks, finishes by considering the various positions of the ideal spectator, i.e. his "fetish" spectators – a child, an old carpenter in Holstebro, the Danish seat of the Odin Theatre, a friend familiarized with the universe of his performances, the blind man Jorge Luis Borges and the deaf Beethoven, a Bororo man from Amazonia and a beloved person, whose admiration must be earned (in a 1988 text, included in the volume *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt*, Barba lists four "basic spectators": "the child who perceives the actions literally; the spectator who thinks s/he doesn't understand but who, in spite of her/himself dances; the director's alter-ego; the fourth spectator who sees *through* the performance as if it did not belong to the world of the ephemeral and of fiction", while, in other writings, the director confirms that, for a long while, his "invisible spectator" was his master, Grotowski). All these extremely exacting spectators must be individually seduced by using different instruments, which should act simultaneously upon a different level of perception and understanding. From this point of view, Barba's performances do not bind; they break.

Therefore, the director works with his own material as well as with the actors' and spectators' materials, equally called "dramaturgies". At the same time, he undertakes the difficult task of orchestrating the other three overlapping "dramaturgies", baptized as followed: "organic" or

"dynamic", sensorial "dramaturgy", which deals with the spectators' senses, drawing upon their "kinesthetic empathy" which can be stimulated by the actors' physical proximity (hence Barba's preference for performances delivered in studio of bridge-stage mode), as well as by a very intricate and precise score of bodily impulses and counterimpulses ("*sats*") and of vocal actions; the "narrative", event-wise "dramaturgy" or the already mentioned "narrative context", which is a series of topics, perspectives, accounts (the preferred languages is that of poetry, owing to its synesthetic and trans-logic nature); the spectator is left to decipher and build his/her own story; and "evocative dramaturgy", which concerns "that part of us which lives in exile within us" (perhaps the Jungian "shadow", a trauma, a repressed memory, memory of the paradise lost), testing the "faculty of the performance to produce an intimate resonance within the spectator" and to "dilate" the glance "to the awareness of personal meaning" – a faculty which, however, cannot be programmed consciously, Barba states. The said six "dramaturgies" (actor's, director's, spectator's, organic, narrative and, respectively, evocative dramaturgy) make, in Eugenio Barba's opinion, the vital units and subunits of the "body" which is the theatre performance; the director must "operate" like a surgeon on its different organs and anatomical pieces. (For example, in his special terminology, "organic dramaturgy" plays the role of the "nervous system", while "narrative dramaturgy" is the performance "cortex"). Unlike the elements of living organisms, however, the functions of which converge, on principle, the elements of a performance, Barba

believes, must operate independently from and at variance with one another in order to keep the spectator alert. The director's role is to run the conflict among the six "dramaturgies" and to counter, at all times, the receiver's expectations, by applying methods such as "negate while executing it", performance against text (Meyerhold's principle) or the use of oxymoronic images and actions. Could it be that the principle of element segregation relates to the great disruptions in the director's life – to the first separation, from mother, the time when the child is exiled in the world?! Or to the "capacity to make mischief", which, in Barba's opinion, is the children's intelligence, which he could not apply completely in its time, thus exhausting his Oedipal revolt, because of the father's early disappearance?!

That the director chooses to work individually with the actors is symptomatic, precisely in order to enable the occurrence of truth in each of them; such truth relates to what he calls the personal "wound"; in essence, theatre is an "art of memory", and the performance a "smoke curtain" meant to conceal and reveal at the same time the participants' "wounds" – the spectators' included, because the purpose is, as stated, to evoke, to stir in them the memory of their own "wounds". It would be wrong, however, to see in this form of theatre just another version of psychotherapy, although there are affinities and Eugenio Barba's choice of words suggests the proximity between the two spheres. When you try to pin it down, the meaning given by Barba to the theatrical exercise "dilates" considerably and paradoxically, the more that the director stresses the lack of meaning of theatre

nowadays – at least the lack of a collective and unified meaning: “Theatre no longer possesses a voice capable of reaching the ears of an entire city. It doesn’t frighten anyone as a possible enemy of power and public morality. And no reasonable person expects that its effectiveness can stir up a general change of mentality”. There are, however, individuals who choose, albeit seemingly absurdly, to invest psychologically in it, in this “empty ritual”, bestowing on it a plurality of meanings, Eugenio Barba notes. This is why the director rejects, in line with Jerzy Grotowski, the use of the generic term of “audience”, choosing instead the one of “spectators”, taken as individualities and carriers of different meanings – while, he notes, his master, while living in socialist Poland, would do it, mainly, in order to protest against the communist, collectivist and leveling regime.

Repeatedly going back in his writings to the burning question of meaning, in *Burning the House*, Barba provides several important additional hints to the weight he gives to theatre, which seems to have two poles: revolt and refuge. Throughout time, Eugenio Barba saw in theatre a form of non-violent, individual or group rebellion (to the extent where the group creates its own, autonomous culture) against the dehumanizing aspects of social order. The embedded violence, beyond this rebellion, was turned toward the inside and transformed in disciplined, ascetic works – in the exemplary discipline specific to the members of Odin Theatre, who allowed their contamination by their master. Dedicated work thus gave expression to the suicide compulsion, which, Barba states, is the “family flaw” (paternal line, as the

book suggests): “There are many ways to refuse life”, the director finds, and the theatre has become his choice modality of rejection throughout adulthood, extending the “autistic” rejection that occurred, in adolescence, throughout the three years spent at the Naples military college. Initially, the revolt, lacking a tight rein on it, concerned the father, higher rank fascist officer in Mussolini’s army, shot by mistake in 1946, when Eugenio was ten years old. Perhaps in spirit of revolt, the son later embraced the communist ideology, with his first ideas on theatre shaped by Brecht’s influence. Nevertheless, the years spent in Poland, as fellow student in theatre, opened his eyes.

Repressed revolt, turned inward and converted by Barba in obstinate work can also be constructed as a form of self-punishment for the “fault” of wanting that the father’s agony, which took hours and hours, should end faster. It is difficult to rebel overtly against a father long gone and toward which you have feelings of guilt.

While a first major meaning of theatre, as seen by Eugenio Barba, seems coalesced around the father figure, the other direction is dominated by the mother. This is the projection of theatre as refuge, i.e. “floating island”, “archipelago”, “ghetto”, “reserve”, “fortress”, “sanctuary”, “homeland” or “home”, albeit burning (at its roots, the obsession with fire would be a reminiscence of a childhood spent amidst ruins, in a country on a continent destroyed by war, turned to ashes and fully metamorphosed?!). Although, after the Allied invasion of Bari, Eugenio’s family relocated to Gallipoli, a small town of fishermen in southern Italy, in order to be



closer to the father's relatives, here, it seems, the foundation of a special complicity between mother and son was set: she was among strangers, father was ill, his health weakened following a prolonged absence because of his military duties during the war; therefore, the mother and Eugenio together with his brother must have been one another's refuge. In the shelter provided by Gallipoli, an islet "connected to the mainland and the suburbs by a long, windy bridge", the future director would imagine rather bellicose expeditions, playing with the buttons in his mother's sewing kit: proper, simultaneously protected and incisive miniature theatre.

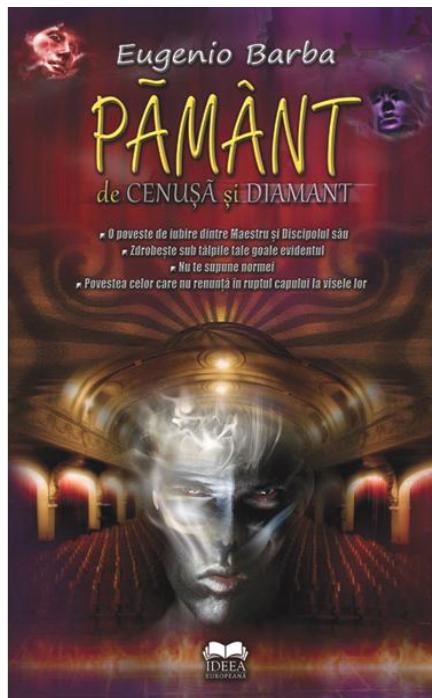
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## *De Grotowski à Barba, un chemin initiatique (ou qui est le Maître et qui le Disciple ?)*

Le livre d'Eugenio Barba, *Pământ de cenușă și diamant* (*La Terra di cenere e diamanti*, Traduction Diana Cozma, Contemporanul/ Ideea europeană, 2010) me semble essentiel pour la compréhension du parcours intellectuel et spirituel de l'auteur. Le lecteur qui veut lire un témoignage direct relatif au chemin qui a conduit Barba au théâtre doit obligatoirement passer à travers ce volume. On peut y découvrir les tribulations d'un jeune Italien hésitant

sur la voie à suivre (choix des études à faire, du métier, d'un enracinement géoculturel). Fasciné par le film d'Andrzej Wajda, *Cendres et diamants*, en 1961 Eugenio Barba décide de partir pour la Pologne – pays d'Ubu – afin d'y étudier la littérature polonaise. Il se retrouve en train de faire du théâtre et renouvelle sa bourse jusqu'en 1964. Les rencontres faites par Barba en Pologne, surtout celle avec



Grotowski, sont décisives pour sa formation à la mise en scène.

Sans avoir montré un intérêt extraordinaire pour le premier spectacle vu au Teatr-Laboratorium, à O-pole, Barba tisse une relation d'amitié avec Grotowski, et finit par devenir son assistant en janvier 1962. Là commence un apprentissage où le maître et le disciple se transmettent l'un à l'autre des compétences et des idées, dans une totale liberté de l'esprit, conquise au mépris de la société com-

muniste oppressive. Barba se fait le messager du nouvel Évangile théâtral (*Le Nouveau Testament du Théâtre*) prêché par Grotowski, en contribuant à la diffusion de la manière grotowskienne à travers des conférences et des publications à l'étranger, en France, en Italie et dans les pays nordiques notamment. Comme les apôtres, le jeune Italien se trouve toujours sur les routes, affrontant le scepticisme

de ceux qui ne croient pas que, au fin fond de la province polonaise, Grotowski nourrit une révolution du théâtre.

À ce propos, ce qui interpelle le plus puissamment dans l'activité du Teatr-Laboratorium de Grotowski ou dans celle de l'Odin Teatret de Barba, c'est la dimension internationale. La passion absolue du théâtre, associée à une croyance que la liberté – intérieure et politique – peut être conquise surtout à travers le (la) geste artistique, a guidé l'enseignement des deux maîtres. Chez Eugenio Barba, peut-être plus que chez Grotowski, on découvre une vraie soif d'explorer de nouveaux horizons humains et théâtraux. Dans *Pământ de cenușă și diamant*, qui est aussi un *Bildungsroman*, on suit Barba dans ses périples en Italie, en Pologne, Israël, en Norvège, en France, etc., on pratique avec lui toutes sortes de métiers, on prend part à ses inquiétudes et à ses interrogations. Il y a des pages édificatrices sur la découverte du *kathakali* en Inde, au Kerala (pp. 92-96, 133-134). Sans en comprendre parfaitement l'enjeu, à cause de la barrière linguistique, Barba est fasciné par la grâce et l'hiératicisme de ce théâtre quasi-sacré, qu'il fait découvrir aux Européens à travers des témoignages et des photographies. Au fond, Barba incarne brillamment une certaine figure de l'artiste contemporain, caractérisée par la multi-territorialité, le plurilinguisme, l'ouverture aux autres et un humanisme de facture renaissante.

Eugenio Barba découvre auprès de Grotowski une mystique du théâtre, même si celle-ci peut se passer de Dieu ou des dieux. Ils lisent *in extenso* Jung, Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl, Mauss, Lévi-Strauss, Caillois, Bachelard, Eliade (p. 86), et interrogent

toutes sortes de traditions religieuses, dont le bouddhisme et la théologie chrétienne, à la recherche de concepts et de voies spirituelles transposables dans la pratique théâtrale. L'alchimie, le chamanisme, les diverses formes de la transe sont des répertoires où l'on peut puiser indéfiniment des gestes, des attitudes, des énergies capables de renouveler en profondeur l'art de l'acteur ou même la conception de la mise en scène. Dans cette perspective, plus qu'une construction esthétique gratuite ou une formule d'intervention politique et sociale, chaque spectacle signifie pour Grotowski une longue initiation, c'est-à-dire ce que les hindous appellent *sâdhâna* (= recherche spirituelle, méthode et pratique).

Dans son récit, Barba a le courage de marquer la distance entre ses idéaux de jeune communiste et la réalité qu'il trouve en Pologne, qui – avec tous les pays de l'Est européen – s'est efforcée d'appliquer l'utopie : une société policière, dogmatique, aussi mécanique que la société capitaliste et, en plus, dépourvue en apparence d'un minimum de liberté de penser et d'agir. La censure agit partout, au niveau des spectacles, des réunions, des publications, sans épargner même une banale carte de visite. Cependant le régime socialiste polonais a aussi un « visage humain » (cela rappelle d'ailleurs un des enjeux de la propagande roumaine de l'époque), manifesté dans la « solidarité » et dans la « corruption » (p. 102). C'est ce double aspect qui permet de contourner la censure, de faire jouer des spectacles qui s'inscrivent en porte-à-faux contre le dogme marxiste ou des publier des livres étonnamment modernes.

Dans ce sens, le titre choisi par Barba a une charge métaphorique forte, au-delà du renvoi au film d'Andrzej Wajda. C'est la Pologne communiste qui est une « terre de cendres », capable cependant de produire des « diamants ». Dans de telles circonstances politiques hostiles, il n'est pas facile de faire un théâtre libre, surtout quand il est défini en tant qu'expédition anthropologique, psychomachie, confrontation entre le travail psychique de l'acteur en train de dévoiler son moi et les spectateurs désireux de protéger leurs certitudes et leur bien-être intérieur (p. 87). Et, pourtant, Grotowski a fait ce théâtre, en proposant un des grands modèles de pédagogie et de travail avec l'acteur du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle !

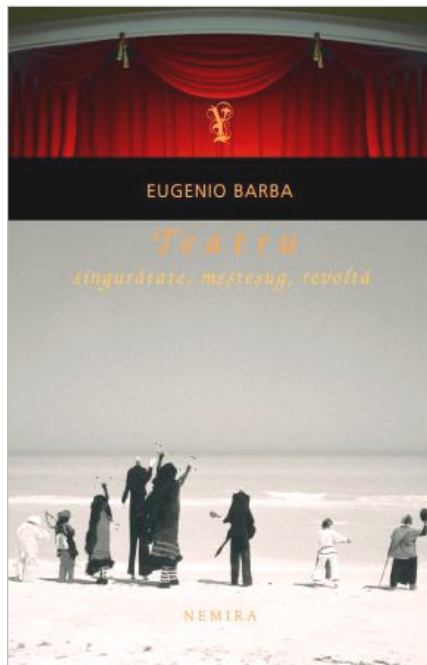
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## *Theatrical autobiographies*

In a brief foreword description to the volume *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt* by Eugenio Barba (translated from Italian to Romanian by Doina Condrea Derer, edition coordinated by Alina Mazilu, Nemira, 2010), Lluís Masgrau points to its complementary nature in relation to the work *The Paper Canoe. A Guide to Theatre Anthropology* (translation from Italian to Romanian and foreword by Liliana Alexandrescu, UNITEXT, 2003). While *The Paper Canoe* approaches issues of theatre technique, the “mechanism” of the actor’s work, and attempts to deal with the “how” of it, Masgrau notes that the volume *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt*, deals with the “why”, i.e. the meaning of theatre. Masgrau believes that its twenty-eight texts, written by Barba in 1964-1995 (starting from the foundation of Odin Teatret), create a “zigzag professional autobiography” that reveals the director’s theatrical thinking parameters, as well as the mutations occurred throughout time. The book has five sections: “The



Origin: The Vocation”, “The Laboratory: Theatre – School”, “Journey: Exchange”, “The Way of Refusal: Third Theatre” and “Identity: Legacy”; Lluís Masgrau notes that the second term in each chapter title indicates how its (supra)theme is articulated in the author’s mind-set. Each text is preceded by very useful bio-bibliographic information and by an abstract and, at the end of the book, similar to an appendix, there is an illustrated catalogue of the performances at

Odin Teatret; the catalogue is put together by Ferdinando Taviani (selection and organisation of the images: Lluís Masgrau).

Most of the texts are actual theatrical and existential manifestoes, joined together around two categories of offensive and defensive metaphors that circumscribe the mission – or the extra-aesthetic meaning – that Eugenio Barba ascribes to theatre: the attack, the “non-violent rebellion”, the revolt against the dehumanising values of contemporaneity, on the one hand, and the resistance, the refuge in front of

the expansion of the said values, on the other hand. Says the author: "I am battling a great part of the society; I am camouflaging this war as art: the battle is constant, because most of the values outside my theatre are just the opposite to those that guide me in my profession. (...) I am seeking a new form of resistance (...); I am seeking a possibility to be here and now, with my own thinking and acting (...). (...) Resistance throughout time is essential. For a theatre laboratory, time is resistance" (*The Theatre of the Polis and the Sanctuary of the Metropolis*, 1990). Frequently, the two means of action via theatre, i.e. the offensive way and the defensive one, are conjugated: "I've been living as an outsider for many years, one who, in order to keep his dignity, to not surrender to abuse and circumstantial restrictions, has invented as defence a modality of attack through theatre" (*The Mutation*, 1976). The first category of metaphors relates, for example, to the approach operated by Barba between the activity of the theatre companies and that of the guerrilla groups. The latter, considerably better represented, includes the images of theatre projected as "island", as "archipelago", as "ghetto", "reservation", "sanctuary", "fortress", "homeland", "two-door house", which, however, do not lack their offensive connotations, such as the metaphor of the theatre-canoe, which the rower pushes against the current.

From the start, we note the director's harsh verdicts, resulting from the acute awareness of theatre's incapacity to comply with its traditional meaning in the current times, awareness present even in the first writings. This view is confirmed by radical sentences: "(...) theatre has lost

its functional depth in a particular community and to a particular social layer", "nowadays, the so-called 'need of theatre' is artificial" (*The Disciple who Walked on the Water*, collection of texts from 1975 and 1978). Social criticism tones are also present; in most of the texts, the theatre crisis points to a generalised crisis of Occidental civilization, in line with modernism: "according to the categories acting in an industrial society, theatre lack sensible justification. It is important that in the United States and in Japan, the most advanced countries technologically speaking, there aren't allowances for theatre" (*The Theatre of the Polis...*, 1990); "Who dares say that a theatrical profession has a meaning as such? (...) Perhaps there had been a meaning, once upon a time, when the industry of the modern performance, mass culture, new rituals and childish myths removed the legitimacy and the efficiency of the theatrical activity. These are historical movements that overcome us" (*Our Legacy for Ourselves*, 1991). The quest for the meaning of theatre starts from here, from this "disappointed", "disenchanted" awareness that, however, does not give in to the temptation of what Barba calls the "demon of high noon", i.e. "the last and most dangerous illusion – of its [theatre's] insignificance" (*idem.*). As long as there are individuals who invest psychologically in theatre, irrespective of their motivation, theatre must be protected: "Theatre can become a sanctuary, a shelter to those thirsting for justice, a freedom refuge, a crypt with coded messages to the spectator who visits it..."

Statistically, there are very few such people. But what is the worth of an individual" (*The Theatre of the Polis...*). Assum-

ing the condition of the minority is, in fact, a defining feature of the theatrical groups brought together by Eugenio Barba under the name of "Third Theatre" (launched in 1976), among which the small ensemble of the Odin Teatret also fits: "(...) we called Third Theatre the one performed by groups who do not delude themselves into thinking they are the expression of something else than their selves, who display deep requirements and contradictions, even if, perhaps, they are identical to only a limited number of people" (*The Disciple who...*). By design, Odin performances take place, usually, in small-scale representations, similar to those owed to Jerzy Grotowski at the Theatre of 13 Rows, performed even with only two-tree spectators. The values embodied by these groups are, however, more important than the spectator numbers, no matter how eloquent. Since these values oppose those currently promoted by society, theatre included, they outline the group as a minority one, while its members are "foreigners", "outsiders", "different" etc. From this apparently intractable position, the communities in the family of Third Theatre nourish, unabashedly and undiscouraged, "the autonomous creation of a meaning that denies the borders that society and surrounding culture ascribed to the stage art" (*Our Legacy...*). Barba believes that, in relation to traditional theatre, these groups are like those aggregations of "solid, independent bodies" that generate the rings of Saturn – "planet and former god", touched by melancholy. They share precisely the absence of a common meaning, the search for identity which, in the director's opinion, is the same with the "personal dis-

covery of the profession". At Odin Teatret, the principle of the "autonomous creation of meaning" has worked not only in relation to other groups and to theatre legacy, but also within the group, within the relationships among its members. After ten years of perfecting Occidental and Oriental theatrical techniques (major influences: Stanislavski, Meyerhold, filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, Brecht, Kathakali Indian theatre, the mime Decroux and, of course, Jerzy Grotowski), the mentor of the company, while becoming aware that the method as such is nothing without the subjects' involvement, initiated a second working phase, namely the decisive stage of the customization of techniques and of synthesis<sup>1</sup>. Throughout time, Barba has given up group practice in favour of individual training, understanding that his actors have different work rhythms, different needs, and different obstacles to defeat.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugenio Barba proposes a very interesting typology that goes beyond the traditional delineations between Oriental and Occidental theatres. Thus, he speaks about techniques of "enculturation" and of "acculturation", in terms borrowed from anthropology. The technique of enculturation involves a "passive, sensory and actuating impregnation of a culture's typical behaviour", while acculturation "makes artificial (or frequently retouches) the actor's behaviour", involving the "use of specific body techniques different from those of ordinary life". Enculturation is Stanislavski's or Brecht's way, while acculturation, which leads to "codification", is the way of classic ballet, of impression, of Kathakali Indian theatre or of Japanese Nō (*The Third Bank of the River*, 1988, see Eugenio Barba, *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt*, ed. cit., p. 280-281). At Odin Teatret, Barba tried to bridge the two techniques and obtain a synthesis.



When he prepares a performance, he chooses to work in a first phase with each individual actor – this way, the performance can first gain a deeply intimate meaning, a meaning the individual is more reluctant to explore from the beginning, while, instead, he/she is tempted to take refuge in clichés and exterior solutions. This shift of emphasis, from the method to the person, from the group to the individual, seems to have occurred at the same time with the director's increasingly firm belief that the rehabilitation of the world and of theatre begins with an interior reform, with the shaping of one's own life rather than the opposite.

The dream – or the Kantian requirement – of the “construction of the self” via theatre (see *Theatre-culture*, 1979) has proven more resilient than the perspective of world transformation, an ambition which fed the totalitarian approaches of the last century and a mirage to which not even Barba could resist during his youth. While abandoning the leftist ideas that had stirred his adolescence, after the contact with the facts in the socialist camp, during the time he spent in Poland (1961-1964), as fellow student in theatre, Eugenio Barba stated the following, in 1990, the year that sealed the fate of communist regimes in Europe: “Theatre is the circle squaring that allows me to stay communist, but in the way of the first monks in the wilderness, as envisaged by some philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the way of Catalan anarchists or of Luis Carlos Prestes.” And, in the same text: “I am seeking a form of communism that will never be victorious, but which does not allow me to surrender” (*The Theatre of the Polis...*). We note the evolution of

the director's perception of Brecht's legacy, from a dogmatic vision to an extremely personal and rather controversial one, since the “parent of committed theatre” became, in his opinion, the model of the autonomous artist, the non-member artist, praised by Barba in the show *Brecht's Ashes* (in two versions, 1980, respectively 1982). Resistant to reactions of rejection, as well as to the siren songs of clubs, parties, surrounding interest groups, Brecht appears to have given in, according to our author, only to the interior impulse of critical distancing: “He has been called the father of committed theatre, but if you look at his life, you can see he had never had close relationships to workers' movements. Marxist intellectuals would attack him as if he were a decadent bourgeois who flirted with Marxism, but who lived in isolation and knew nothing about the working class. And they were right at first sight. During his exile in Denmark, Sweden, Finland and the United States, Brecht did not involve in the political life. Anywhere he went, he did not have any relationship with communist organizations. On the contrary, communist organisations condemned him. (...)”

His distancing, his non-participation, his detachment (as if he'd be standing behind a window) are a way to understand, to keep your eye sharp, apparently non-committed, cynical, but which, in fact, reveals the truth.” (*Dialogue with Brecht*, 1981).

Of course, the “committed non-commitment” assigned by Eugenio Barba to Bertolt Brecht both describes and circumscribes his own ideal of “active art”, of action through theatre, which, although turned inward in a fist stage, has man-

aged to retain its offensive, social intervention direction: "Our profession is the possibility to change ourselves and, by that, to change society" (*Theatre and Revolution*, 1968). This possibility was implemented by Barba and his company, as stated above, mainly in the first 10 years of Odin Teatret, a time interval dedicated to the change of the self, followed by the phase of the outer exchange, of the "barter", with an underlying relation to the former (see *Written Silence*, 1985).

After intense methodological search, in the direction of "formal perfection", carried out under the theatrical "laboratory" from Oslo (Norway), and later in Holstebro (Denmark), in 1974 Eugenio Barba arrived with the Odin Teatret at Carpignano, a village in the south of Italy – a journey in the light, which took five months. The following year the company would return to the same place and later travel the mountain of Sardinia. It was only the beginning of many trips from one continent to another one, from Europe to Asia or to Latin America, from Japan to the Amazon forest and then to the haze of the Scandinavian North. These journeys, which were not tours per se, were dedicated, from the first stay in Carpignano, mostly to the "barter", i.e. the exchange of songs, tales, dances and other types of artistic events, a barter with the members of the corresponding community, without the intent to colonize or to inoculate foreign values and without the attempt of reciprocal adjustment. The parties had to keep their autonomy and individuality. However, there were also attempts to influence the communities toward the awareness of their own needs and the finding of solutions: "We did not

ask only for 'exchange', we would ask the group that had invited us to disclose the village issue they wanted solved." The model – or the ideal – of social intervention theatre was shaped in Barba's mind as a very simple question: "How can you actually influence with theatre something that is outside it?" The answer came in equally simple terms. In a place without a public library, people who wanted to attend the performance were asked, in exchange for their attendance, to donate a book. The director and the company would thus uncover the feast and virtues of "small pursuits". Instead of a social revolution, the answer was, thus, the exchange and small actual actions, because, as stated by the author, "the things we can influence are always considerably smaller than those we can discuss" (*Letter from the South of Italy*, 1975).

As an extension to the experience of the "exchange" and based on similar principles, in 1979 ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology) was born (Barba's undertaking), as meeting place for the "Orient/ Occident, older/ younger generations, traditional theatre/ group theatre", in order to "renew and transform theatre, by training "rebels, i.e. people who do not want to adapt to the current situation" (*The Pedagogical Paradox: Learning to Learn*, fragments of interviews with Barba in 1979-1989). Therefore, from the beginning, ISTA was an actual oasis of inter-culturalism, both horizontally, in the current sense of the term, and vertically, having as interlocutors the departed ones, the grand predecessors, as explained by Barba in a splendid "open" letter to director and theorist Richard Schechner (*People of Ritual*, 1992). Their presence has

inspired and nourished throughout time, within Barba, a paradoxical form of reverence, i.e. the temptation of rebellion, the dream of constant – theatrical – revolution. And this because, in the director's opinion, the great predecessors themselves had been first of all great rebels, on behalf of different causes, but sharing the mark of a "handicap" or "personal injury" – source of both "individual revolt" and nostalgia. "Stanislavski could not manage to be accepted as actor, Artaud could not materialize his visions" etc., notes the author (*Our Legacy...*). They had all known, at a point in time, the condition of marginality Barba had elevated to the rank of requirement for the arts in the society, on which his company fed plentifully – a company of "dilettanti", of self-taught people, whose nucleus was formed by individuals whose admission to official drama academies had been rejected. Therefore, although in time tradition assimilated them, the predecessors imparted to Barba the lesson of creative infidelity toward any "legacy". At a closer look, a well-known Freudian pattern is visible, Barba recognising in *Burning the House*, his most recent volume, here and there autobiographic, the fact that he had projected his father's figure on his other predecessor in theatre, with whom he had always wanted to quarrel, similar to how he would quarrel with his father. This perspective also sheds lights on Barba's special attention to the countries of Latin America, a place where he had always felt "at home": could it be because, as noted by the author, there isn't a burdensome theatrical tradition, like in Europe or in Asia, and the "forefathers" shadow does not suffocate their "sons"? As a matter of fact, when invoking

his predecessors (Stanislavski, "the totem-predecessor", Meyerhold, Vahtangov, Copeau, Eisenstein or Grotowski, "the older brother"), Barba asks, as if stricken: "Who is my foremother? Does my origin include also women?" And the answer overturns suddenly the order of filiation and puts first Edy Craig, Gordon Craig's sister: "I can name Gordon Craig as one of my predecessors. But why is there no book to mention his sister, Edy? In the end, she is our foremother. Because group theatre was not created only in the '60s, nor was it created by the Russian agit-prop theatre or the German theatre of the '20s. Group theatre was created at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in England, by women who fought for their right to vote, the so-called *suffragettes*, who, in order to generate a greater impact of their meetings and to deliver in a condensed form the unfair circumstances, summoned the help of those who, *by profession*, knew how to address the public: the actresses. Thus women drama groups appeared; their function was not artistic, nor was it aesthetic; their function was to assign a different direction to this relationship we call theatre". Or, between the First World War and the year 1925, says the author, in the avant-garde of the theatrical movement launched by the *suffragettes*, rowing against the tide, was none other than Edy Craig, and her group, Pioneer Players. Further following the thread of origins, Eugenio Barba reaches in the end the mythic roots of his theatrical "family", where – unsurprisingly – there is, again, a woman: Antigone. By an odd reversal, the daughter of the one who seeks his origins (Oedipus/Barba, the former as the *alter ego* of the latter) is assigned by the

authors attributed of Great Mother, guardian matriarch. This apparently useless, immaterial gesture of through throwing dust on the killed brother's body, against Creon's interdiction, is, metaphorically speaking, according to Barba, the founding act of theatre as "empty and inefficient ritual we fill with our 'reason', our personal need" (*The Third Bank of the River*, 1987 speech, first time published in the following year). Two years earlier, in 1985, the director had dedicated an entire speech to Antigone, because, he said, "something kept startling me and making me see Antigone". Her face had become a leitmotif, found both in *Roman-cero de Edipo*, and in the performance the *Gospel according to Oxyrhyncus*. In the same discourse, Antigone's gesture disclosed her to Barba as the "intellectual's weapon" and the latter's meaning within the community: "I think the weapon is a handful of dust, a useless and symbolic gesture, against the majority, against pragmatism, against the trend. A useless, inefficient gesture, which, nonetheless, someone must do. Here's the intellectual's part: to know the gesture is useless, symbolic and still do it". Any compromise, any concession (in front of the majority, of pragmatism, of the trend), warned the director, weakens the man's "shadow", i.e. his trace throughout eternity, his "legacy", whereas, paradoxically, precisely by keeping his shadow, that "presence loaded with the energy" of the refusal, in other words faithful to himself, he manages to stand time and pass on the spirit of resistance to his followers (the ideas are in line with those in *Our Legacy for Ourselves*). In the name of... Antigone – i.e. of the mother, rather than

of the father –, Eugenio Barba would then confess the following aspects, which reveal an irrepressible thirst for the unlimited, for the transgression of limits: "I do not accept the present, I want to stay on the outside, to create the shows useful to me and to my colleagues rather than the required show. I want to have my own thoughts, I want to impose them. I will have the strength to do it as long as I manage to pursue this refusal" (*Shadow of Antigone*, 1985 discourse, first published in 1986). The fragment also reveals the director's secret nostalgia for the paradisiac, pre-natal condition of the child in the mother's womb, where there is no separation between the interior and the exterior, between mother and son, and where there aren't any restrictions. The rules, the conditioning and the hindrances appear later, after birth, after the traumatic ejection in the Father's world. Or, almost three decades after this discourse, we may say the director, by turning his back to this world, has obtained everything he set to obtain, staying faithful to the "fancies of youth", to the lost paradise...

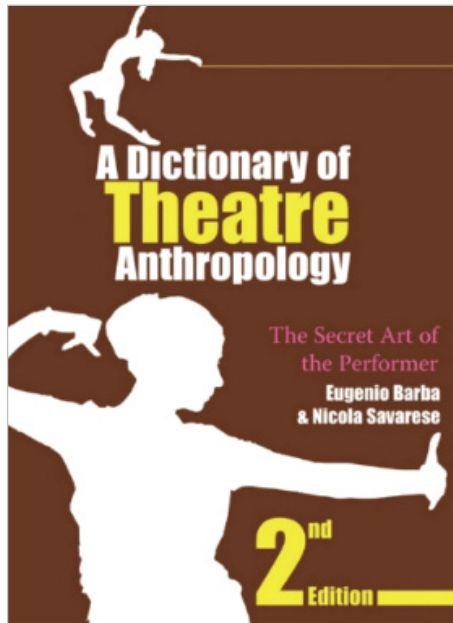
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## *Unfolding of the Human*

Two years ago, in 2012, at the Sibiu International Theatre Festival was presented the volume of co-authors Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese published for this occasion in a limited number of copies (*A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*, translation: Vlad Russo, Humanitas, Bucharest). We must be thankful for the Romanian presentation at the festival from Sibiu of this



gap-filling volume, which since 1991 was published and revised in several languages, not only to the co-writers, the publisher house Humanitas, Vlad Russo translator and Vlad Zografu editor, but to the Romanian theatre profession in general, which pays special attention to the translation of the theatrical specialized literature from abroad. Thus the festival from Sibiu has not only offered the public a technically speaking *useful* volume and the Romanian theatre professionals proved us once again that they are able to react to the most up-to-date theatre theory works,

even by translating them into their own language and turning them to their own profit.

Though this volume defined as dictionary is signed by two authors, it is well-known as a “Barba-book”, even if near the righty world-wide famous Italian director and theory writer we can find Nicola Savarese, who since 1980 is the author of several volumes with the subject of theatre and he is one of the

founding members of ISTA – International School of Theatre Anthropology, lead by Barba.

The volume, published as a result of twenty five years of research at first sight gives the impression of an encyclopaedia with images, because the book with more than three hundred pages contains more than eight hundred photos and illustrations, which are helping us to understand the well edited, separate chapters. Even the first contact with the book suggests that the reader will get to know a serious, comprehensible and useful theoretical

work. But who is the target audience of this work and what are we actually talking about when mentioning theatre anthropology?

By the own admission of Eugenio Barba the theatre anthropology is a relatively new domain in science, which is not to be mistaken for cultural anthropology, and its essence is to focus on the creator who is standing in the centre of the theatrical representation and who is mostly – collectively – called *actor*. Because the person – and in several cases concretely the human body – constitutes the subject analyzed by theatre anthropology, no wonder that some of the chapters of the book are entitled *Eyes and face, Hands, or Legs*.

The twenty seven separate chapters are based on similar key-words, and maybe this is why the volume is defined as dictionary, even if we cannot find in it definitions with short and classic forms which are common for dictionaries. Instead of briefly outlining the semantic variety and the theatrical and cultural situation of the distinct body parts or of the notions used in the art of theatre (like *rhythm* or *antithesis*), in the volume written by Barba-Savarese we can read long, study-like texts regarding different subjects.

Even so the reader cannot feel that he has to do with a technical work, written only for the professional. The comprehensible phrasing and the already mentioned rich image materials are helping to bring closer to the everyday practical theatre making and consuming all those notions which seem to be abstract and unclear. This way the volume is building a bridge between the creators of theatre and the lay, between those who are deal-

ing with the practical part of theatre and those who are concerned with the theory of theatre. An active actor or director may find some support in conceiving his own art or in defining the different stages of his creational process, the lack of which – maybe – he covered by using hazy metaphors. All those who are approaching the scene from the point of view of theatrical science will be able to get some support with notions like scenic presence or suggestive look.

According to Barba's own affirmation he had no intention in registering an entire theatre technique (like it was done by his author colleague, Jerzy Grotowski), but he wanted to show the workshop secrets of a certain technique. This fact is proved also in the chapter entitled *Training*, where he does not present a practice series, but analyzes the opportunities and methods of learning with subtitle *From "learning" to learning to learn*.

Although the volume – as it is suggested by its title – first of all considers anthropology as its main starting-point, near the work of Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese we can find among the pages some writings by authors like Franco Ruffini, preoccupied with semiotics, Richard Schechner, researching the performance or Marcel Mauss, sociologist. Near the two main authors and editors of the volume, the specialists covering a great variety of research domains are the guarantee for *The Secret Art of the Performer. A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* to become a work that can genuinely treat the focus domains.

Beside the presentation of the contemporaneous theatre theories the other great merit of the book is that it offers an overview about the processes of the organiz-

ing elements of a theatre performance. The European theatre play is confronted with Far East theatrical forms: the dictionary points out the similarities and differences of the two great theatre cultures. (Barba himself was deeply preoccupied with oriental culture, when he travelled in 1963 for the first time to India, where he got acquainted with kathakali theatre.) Another characteristic of the volume is that the authors are continuously returning to the details of the different dramaturgies, so in our progress of reading we come upon some notions like the dramaturgy of the actor, the dramaturgy of the director, the dramaturgy of space, and we can go on with the enumeration – Barba disserted on a larger scale about these in his volume entitled *Burning the House. On Directing and Dramaturgy*, also published in 2012 by publisher house Nemira.

It is beyond question that *The Secret Art of the Performer. A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, since its publishing, is considered a volume which offers a great help for those that are interested from any point of view in the art of theatre. By means of this book some of the phenomena become obvious, which without this knowledge we could only call “the miracle of theatre” – even if it does not mean, that through this book the theatre loses its magic, moreover, we can get closer to what most of us are looking for: the essence of theatre.

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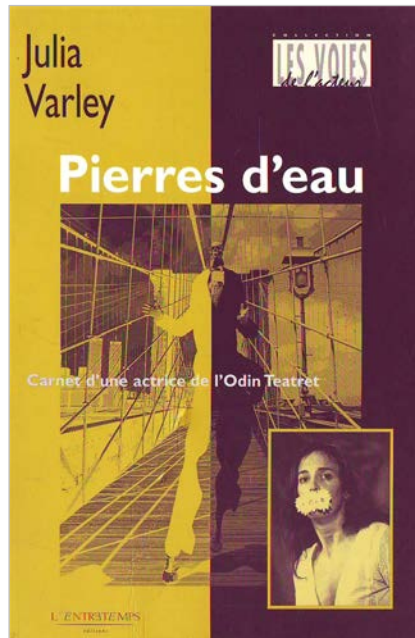




## *Pierres d'eau, ou À la recherche des vérités mouvantes du théâtre*

Julia Varley a rejoint l'Odin Teatret en 1976, après avoir travaillé à Milan avec Teatro del Drago, Centro Sociale Santa Marta et Circolo La Comune. À partir de son entrée à l'Odin, l'actrice enseigne dans des écoles et synthétise son expérience en quatre démonstrations: *The Echo of Silence*, *The Dead Brother*, *Text, Action, Relations* et *The Flying Carpet*. Dès 1990, elle s'implique dans l'organisation de l'ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology, fondée en 1979-80) et de l'Université du Théâtre Eurasien, dirigées par Eugenio Barba, mais continue à être aussi membre actif dans *The Magdalena Project*, créé en 1986, directeur artistique du Transit International Festival Holstebro, éditeur à *The Open Page* – publication dédiée au travail des femmes au théâtre.

Son livre intitulé *Pierres d'eau. Carnet d'une actrice de l'Odin Teatret* (Éditions de l'Entretemps, Montpellier, 2009) transmet l'expérience de la pratique quotidienne dans les salles de théâtre sans pourtant essayer de l'enfermer entre les limites d'un sys-



tème théorique. Dans la préface, Josette Féral remarque l'existence d'un dialogue que l'actrice mène avec ses lectrices, des femmes qui aimeraient embrasser le même métier et découvrir cet « îlot de liberté » qu'est le théâtre. Pour Féral, ce dialogue est fondé autant sur une sensible subjectivité transformée en comportement scénique que sur une incessante interrogation des possibles repères sur la voie de l'être femme dans le milieu artistique.

L'introduction que Julia Varley fait à son livre envisage sa manière de « penser avec le corps » en tant qu'actrice et d'« être perçue dans un présent qui contient en lui aussi bien le passé que le futur ». Elle impose le terme « relation » en tant que centre de l'univers féminin au cœur du théâtre, au-delà de la nécessité d'avoir une autorité théorique, mais sans oublier d'assumer la responsabilité de décrire ou de documenter l'expérience théâtrale des femmes. Face au paradoxe, Varley insiste sur les questions qui n'ont cessé de la préoccuper : comment inclure

la diversité des critères personnels, les propres motivations et les actions pratiques dans un langage conceptuel ou bien même trouver leur juste place dans l'histoire du théâtre, parler de la double réalité du spectacle pour l'actrice-penseur, voire faire fusionner deux systèmes de règles distincts : celui de l'expérience et celui de la représentation, celui de la vie émotionnelle de la femme et celui de la froideur apparente du processus technique qu'accomplit l'actrice.

Dans son premier chapitre, Julia Varley décrit la découverte, au début des années '70, d'un chemin souterrain, parallèle aux pratiques théâtrales d'un paysage italien fortement politisé. La dissension interne du Teatro del Drago et le premier voyage à la Cartoucherie de Paris, pour voir le spectacle *1789* du Théâtre du Soleil sous la direction d'Ariane Mnouchkine ont marqué le début d'un parcours artistique mouvementé pour Julia Varley. Entre anarchisme et militantisme pour l'Avant-Garde ouvrière, elle poursuit la saveur de la rébellion dans tous les aspects de son apprentissage, en jouant dans les rues, dans les universités, dans les balieues, les usines, les marchés et les fêtes populaires. La rencontre avec l'Odin Teatret a lieu suite à l'invitation à la collaboration lancée par le Centre de recherche pour le théâtre de Milan. Après avoir assisté à *Come ! And the Day Will Be Ours* (1976-1980) elle participe, avec les acteurs fondateurs de l'Odin, Torgeir Wethal, Tage Larsen et Tom Fjordfalk, aux recherches pour la présentation d'une partie du spectacle *Le Livre des danses* dans l'église désaffectée de Campofrio. Cette expérience est suivie par la visite de trois mois qu'elle rend à l'Odin à Holstebro, au Danemark, ayant comme but la compréhension de l'action et de la présence scénique. Suite à ce séjour, elle choisit la voie de l'actrice

au détriment d'une voie politique qui se montrait inévitable en Italie à cette époque-là. De retour à Milan, elle se confronte à un théâtre en proie à la rage, mais elle songe à trouver un maître parmi les acteurs anciens de l'Odin Teatret et finit par être acceptée comme élève par Tage Larsen. Elle connaît la rigueur des spectacles, à travers les personnages qu'elle interprète dans *La Nuit des vagabonds*, *Cendres de Brecht*, *Le Million*, *l'Évangile d'Oxyrhincus*, *Le Château d'Holstebro*, *Kaosmos*, *Mythos* et *Le Rêve d'Andersen*. Suite à ces expériences, elle découvre le sens de l'action physique en tant qu'« infime changement qui prend naissance dans le thorax de celui qui agit » et qui se fait remarquer « dans les tensions qui affectent les pieds ».

Dans le chapitre dédié à la dramaturgie d'actrice, Julia Varley parle du détachement du corps et des actions, en vertu de l'existence d'une vie autonome et d'une pensée propre du corps. Elle essaye de définir le « cœur » ou l'essence de l'action, en décrivant diverses expériences de sa pratique à l'Odin Teatret ou ailleurs, mais aussi le principe de l'équivalence en tant qu'instrument « qui sert pour élaborer des matériaux d'actrice et pour passer d'un contexte de référence à un autre ». L'un des problèmes majeurs de la pratique s'avère être celui de la voix, que l'actrice transforme en écho du silence. Le travail avec les sons et le volume mènent à reconnaître sa voix personnelle. De manière paradoxale, Varley pense que celle-ci n'est qu'un don qui ne lui appartient pas, mais qui lui a offert l'une des occasions de découvrir que les obstacles fonctionnent comme des signes sur la voie d'une libération perpétuelle du corps et de l'esprit.

Plus loin encore, la réflexion sur la résistance de la voix en appelle une autre, qui vise l'économie des oppositions dans le jeu d'actrice. Pour définir cette nouvelle

notion, Julia Varley ébauche le schéma d'une série d'actions qui impliquent des tensions contraires. Le terme scandinave *sats* résume sa pensée à l'égard des oppositions : l'impulsion à agir, le moment où l'énergie entière est retenue et préparée à accomplir une action. Dans ce contexte, toute résistance devient le prétexte nécessaire pour faire sortir l'énergie accumulée. Le travail de développement des oppositions dans les actions imprègne la pratique de présence scénique. L'action arrive alors à influencer sur la réalité pour qu'elle ne reste pas la même. Pour illustrer ce changement, l'actrice fait appel à l'image des torsos en tension sculptés par Auguste Rodin. Ce type de présence ne peut être obtenu en dehors du training, qui a toujours gardé une place centrale à l'Odin Teatret. Pour Julia Varley, cet ensemble de pratiques signifie le temps de son autonomie, mais aussi le rituel de son passage pour devenir actrice.

Le training, terme sans équivalent dans une autre langue, suppose des phases distinctes à l'Odin, selon la maturité des acteurs ou le degré d'évolution du théâtre qui les accueille. La première phase comprend des rudiments et des techniques de la pantomime et du ballet, des éléments d'acrobatie, des exercices de Stanislavski et Grotowski. Pendant la seconde phase, les acteurs inventent et pratiquent leurs propres exercices, alors que la troisième phase implique des problématiques personnelles, parfois en relation avec des recherches et des activités pour un nouveau spectacle. Les principes du training que Varley a appris au sein de l'Odin ont été enrichis par les rencontres avec les maîtres du théâtre asiatique et européen pendant les premières sessions de l'ISTA. Entre improvisation et composition, l'actrice cherche les limites de l'intervention, le point d'équilibre entre fidélité et variation.

Dans le même sens, elle essaye de définir la sous-partition, afin de répondre aux questions que Patrice Pavis lui avait posées à l'occasion de la septième session de l'ISTA (1992). De son point de vue, ce concept fait référence non pas seulement à un flux mental conscient fondé sur des images, mais surtout à une technique personnelle qui ouvre la disponibilité pour démarrer des processus corporels et mentaux qui deviennent des repères pour ses propres actions. La rencontre avec le personnage est une quête aussi complexe que celle entreprise à l'égard du corps. Dans le chapitre dédié à ce sujet, l'actrice nous invite à suivre le magnifique et étrange voyage intérieur qu'elle a fait grâce à Mr. Peanut, Doña Musica ou Dédale. La partie finale de *Pierres d'eau* porte sur l'ensemble du spectacle avec tous les changements qui séparent une reprise d'une autre et qui signalent le passage du temps. En même temps, le spectacle est défini en tant que cérémonie, structure fixe qui revient chaque jour, rétablissant le même espace et temps où confluent les énergies, les récits, les sens et les nécessités.

Le livre de Julia Varley se situe à la confluence du récit autobiographique et de l'ouvrage théorique, d'analyse. Il présente l'expérience théâtrale d'une manière nouvelle, enrichissant l'observation constante qui porte sur le travail physique d'une pensée profonde de l'art dramatique. La chance du long apprentissage offert par Eugenio Barba et par l'Odin Teatret montre ses reflets et ses échos incessants dans toute l'activité que la comédienne et la chercheuse Julia Varley continue à développer sous le signe marquant de la féminité dans l'art.

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# DOCUMENTS



## *Building the archives of a theatre-laboratory\**

MIRELLA SCHINO\*\*

**Abstract.** The paper investigates the formula “Living Archive”, chosen by Eugenio Barba to describe the Odin Teatret Archives (OTA). Starting from the archaeological and anthropological uses of it, the author discusses the similarities they share with the challenges of the archival efforts at Odin, that lead to the borrowing of these contrasting terms.

**Keywords:** Odin Teatret Archives, Eugenio Barba, Living Archive, incorporated knowledge, unplanned memory.

1 – Odin Teatret Archives has been defined as a “Living Archive”. It is not our own definition: it was given by Eugenio Barba, the Director of Odin Teatret, and it lends itself to several misunderstandings; that’s why it is useful.

It is a fascinating formula based on contrast and at a glance, “life” and “archives” could appear as contradictory terms. It indicates different paths and in recent years it has often been used. Surfing the net it is easy to come across the title “Living Archive”, generally referring to multimedia museums or institutions widely using their engagement with multimedia as a feature in their publicity.

Archives are often thought to be “living” when supported by intense and sustained promotional activity: seminars, conferences, guided tours, informational brochures etc. More interestingly, the expression “Living Archive” has also been used to indicate traditional performance genres such as classical ballet or eastern dance-theatres. On a number of occasions, Odin Teatret has used a different terminology for these traditions, inscribed not on paper but on the performer’s body, defining them as “incorporated knowledge”<sup>1</sup>.

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\* Translated from the original Italian by Gabriella Sacco

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<sup>1</sup> On the notion of “incorporated knowledge” see especially Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe*, London, Routledge, 1994; see also “Mime Journal”, 17, 1995, special issue entitled *Incorporated Knowledge* (ed. Pomona College Theatre Department, California).



None of these uses of the formula "Living Archive" corresponds to our situation, not even the latter. OTA, Odin Teatret Archives, is an archive made of paper and light: paper, audio, visual and digital documents.

However, archives should always be described as "living" because if well-organized they represent a guarantee for future existence.

2 – At least two usages of the formula "Living Archive" are not metaphorical but scientific. The first one comes from archaeology. Especially for excavations in Mesopotamia, archeologists distinguish documents by their place of recovery: from "living", "dead" or "silent" archives. The first definition refers to the archives that a civilization, town or institution continues to develop until its disappearance.

The second scientific usage of the formula "Living Archive" can be found in cultural anthropology. When commonly speaking, a person having long experience and steadfast memory can be described as a veritable "Living Archive"; in cultural anthropology the formula is used to indicate collective memory, and specifically those people who are acknowledged as custodians of the unwritten rules, customs and living values of the community's collective memory. A "Living Archive" is a person who is recognized by his/her community as a repository of the fundamental rules of his/her culture.

More generally, the expression "Living Archive" is used to indicate the importance and legitimacy of using oral sources besides written ones provided their peculiarity is properly considered.

Neither the first nor the second scientific use of the formula "Living Archive" is directly relevant to the work we have been doing at OTA for the past five years. However, these definitions share with our work similarities which have been helpful in bringing our problems and possibilities into focus.

3 – Problems and perplexities mainly arise from working to organize the future memory of a theatre that has a relatively long past but is still active. This fact has undoubtedly caused numerous difficulties, even material ones.

The main possibility we have focused on has been the opportunity to include the memory and spoken account of a few long-standing members of Odin Teatret, the protagonists of its history.

When building an archive, resorting to the memory of the protagonists is unquestionably useful in order to collect more detailed information; however, it also engenders several problems. Memory is defective and misleading, conditioned and biased. Yet, this is the very reason why it can bring us to understand different nuances from the accounts written in books. Although

sincere and truthful, written accounts always undergo a process of re-narration and adjustment, as they are deprived of the inevitable contradictions of life in order to be intelligible to the reader.

These spoken memories have been central to our documentary film on training, which we have completed in collaboration with Claudio Coloberti and Chiara Crupi, Odin Teatret film-makers. Through this film work, we investigated and revealed a point of view different from the one commonly held when discussing training.

4 – The memory of Odin Teatret’s “living archives” (in the anthropological sense of the “privileged witness”) is primarily Eugenio Barba and Torgeir Wethal. It was especially relevant for our “inventories”, to be completed and published by the end of June 2014. All documents have been arranged and collected in different fonds<sup>2</sup>, each one provided with an inventory.

The archival tradition of inventories varies in different countries. Inventories can be mere indexes of the documents contained in a folder while in some traditions, they are much more: they do not simply list the collected materials but explain the fundamental link connecting the single folders; they provide indications on particularly significant documents or groups thereof. Through the inventory, folders are no longer single objects but nodes in a documentation network.

The “inventory” can extend to outline the historical context, to provide data on the history of the community and the people at issue, as we have chosen to do. It becomes the place where it is possible to include all information deemed useful to let the collected documents speak and reveal nuances.

In our case, the “inventories” of the different folders specifically include the protagonists’ accounts, their way of remembering and narrating fragments of their history. This has allowed us to develop almost two parallel reports: one based on paper documents, the other based on oral culture, and to compare the

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<sup>2</sup> Odin Teatret Archives are divided in different collections or “fonds”. The paper documents are divided in: Barba Fonds, Odin Fonds, Wethal Fonds, Rasmussen Fonds, Wistari Fonds, from the name of the original creator. The Photographic Fonds and the Audiovisual Fonds respectively include all photographic materials and all audiovisual materials. Each fonds is subdivided into “series” (which can in turn be further divided into “sub-series”) consisting of different folders of documents relating to one specific field of activity. The “series” generally reproduce the order fashioned by their creator (for example, the “Grotowski series” in Barba Fonds collects all the documents on Grotowski and his Teatr Laboratorium that Barba himself arranged in one single folder, while some of Grotowski’s letters to Barba are found in the folders where Barba kept the bulk of his correspondence).

inconsistencies between the protagonists' living memory and the statements on papers, often difficult to interpret.

Once completed, the inventories and the documents they describe will shape a history of Odin Teatret complementary to the history outlined in the books written by Odin Teatret itself.

The books by the actors or by Eugenio Barba describe the self-image constructed by the members of Odin, what they wish to pass on to the future, in some cases the legacy they wish to leave.

The archives are something different: they allow for an "unplanned memory", not necessarily in tune with what Odin Teatret sees in its own history and with what it wishes to hand down and preserve.

5 – Probably, the most important information to give is that Odin Teatret Archives hold an organized collection that can be fully consulted. It assembles a wide range of important documents, useful not just to study Odin Teatret. The OTA archives have been established thanks to the intense and committed collaboration of all the people working in it.

Before Odin Teatret Archives was established, different projects with the same aim had been started but none of them could be brought to completion. In 2004, a project for an Odin archives was connected to the foundation of CTLS, Centre for Theatre Laboratory Studies, in collaboration with the University of Aarhus, Denmark. Later, a more ambitious but unfinished project conceived by Nicola Savarese, Professor of Theatre History at Roma Tre University, involved the creation of an online database for an archival network of laboratory theatres.

Odin Teatret had already started rearranging its photographic materials and recording all related necessary information. After relying on oral tradition to identify the actors, people and situations captured in photographs taken across forty years, the theatre started confronting the issue of the future use of this material outside of its walls.

Our work started in March 2008, conceived by myself and Francesca Romana Rietti, soon supported by Valentina Tibaldi. Of invaluable use has been the close collaboration with Giulia Barrera from the Direzione Generale degli Archivi d'Italia (General Directorate of Italian Archives), professionally connected to a wide international network. We wish to express here our thanks to Giulia Barrera, because without her help it would have been difficult to deal with materials which soon proved to be strongly anomalous. I will say more on this anomaly later.

We have worked closely with Chiara Crupi and Claudio Coloberti, Odin Teatret film-makers, to produce the audiovisual materials. Claudio Coloberti has specifically worked on the recovery and restoration of the oldest deteriorated film documents and their conversion to accessible formats.

Over these years a steady and motivated group of collaborators has joined our team. I feel compelled to thank them for their strong motivation: Lluís Masgrau (Spain), Paula Isiegas (Spain), Gabriella Sacco (Italy) Pierangelo Pompa (Italy), Lucia Repašská (Slovakia), Ana Woolf (Argentina), Miguel Jerez López (Spain) and Kasia Chojecka (Poland).

Established just five years ago, the archives presently (May 2013) holds 560 paper document folders, about sixty thousand photographs (18.000 negatives, 2.216 positive slides, 19.899 digital images, 11.569 paper images, in addition to 10.758 photographs by the Italian Tony D'Urso which are 'deposited' at OTA but are not the property of Odin Teatret), as well as a wide range of audiovisual materials. The audio materials are still to be converted to digital formats and inventoried but they are listed in a provisional index which we plan to review and complete during next year.

We have also created a website for Odin Teatret Archives ([www.odinteatretarchives.com](http://www.odinteatretarchives.com)). It is not an online version of the archives because for the time being only a portion of the materials has been digitized. We felt however that the website could be a fair medium to show the nature, origin and development of the archives.

Focused on archiving the documents in relation to fifty years of Odin Teatret's activity since its inception in 1964, the work will end in 2014. As undersigned in an agreement and declaration of intent, the "Living" Odin Teatret Archives will then be relocated to the Royal Library in Copenhagen – the national library of Denmark, the so-called "Black Diamond".

An archive is a desire for immortality. However, most theatre archives disappear, even those documenting important theatres: they go missing or worse, their consultation becomes impossible over time. Only a proper archival institution is the guarantee for a long existence because it can perform maintenance tasks, transferring materials to new platforms with updated support, compiling new inventories, and publishing documents.

These five years of work have been hard. Several of the documents we have acquired during our work had been previously transferred from Odin Teatret to the storage rooms of Holstebro Museum, assembled in bulky unarranged boxes. This accumulation method prevented their dispersal but, without our subsequent rearrangement, the documents would have inevitably been destined to destruction.

Systematic information was missing for the majority of photographs and an accurate archival arrangement was yet to be determined.

Without false modesty, we can proclaim we have accomplished a task and established a resource of fundamental importance to those who care for theatre culture and art.

6 – This archive is an essential and indispensable tool to investigate Odin Teatret's history, contexts and values: it is also much more.

It contains vital documents for the study of some crucial theatre relationships of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, first and foremost the one between Eugenio Barba and Jerzy Grotowski, which has influenced research theatre worldwide for half a century.

Several books deal with this relationship, first of all Eugenio Barba's *The Land of Ashes and Diamonds*. But in addition the paper documents kept at OTA preserve detailed information on the connection between the two directors and their theatres: an association of respect, collaboration, sharing of ideas and practices, as well as minor but concrete actions of help to obtain visas and financial support. Numerous "official" letters kept at OTA were written to enable Grotowski to leave Poland in difficult years. For example, some letters allegedly urge him to meet contractual obligations with Odin Teatret or ISTA, while they were actually intended to offer Grotowski reasons (and evidence) to obtain an exit visa from Polish socialist authorities of that time. For years the complicity between the two theatre-laboratories was also manifested in actions aimed at bypassing the dictatorship of bureaucracy and the bureaucracy of dictatorship.

Does this information change anything in the connection of ideas and theories between these two significant protagonists of twentieth century theatre culture? Perhaps the change is not evident to all but to some these apparently small details outline a precise picture, a detailed image and a human perspective. What changes is the "quality" of memory.

The problem isn't to be remembered or not to be remembered. The problem is struggling "against inaccurate memories", which are nothing but "dead" memories.

7 – I have previously touched on the anomaly of the materials kept at OTA. This anomaly stems from the nature of the theatre that produced the documents, because Odin Teatret is a theatre-laboratory, a definition implying that the theatre does not simply produce performances. The range of activities produced and conceived by Odin Teatret is striking, and equally striking is the number and variety of left traces. Besides describing activities, these traces reveal relationships indicating the existence of an entire theatre environment, not just of one single theatre.

Odin Teatret hasn't simply produced performances and films, it has pioneered the development of training as alternative apprenticeship, as well as the study of the actor's knowledge in oriental theatres; it has organized practice and theory seminars, and symposia on original practices; it has produced books and journals, and created new genres such as "work demonstrations" and "barbers"; it has invented new survival strategies, alliances, training methods and creative practices for actors, alternative networks, ways of thinking about theatre and its history; it has developed new ways to meet its audience; it has searched for audiences not accustomed to theatre going; it has inspired studies and conferences on the techniques of Western and Eastern actors, and even on "Eurasian" techniques. These diverse activities are so distant from what is considered "normal" theatre work, that they may be little understood by readers unacquainted with Odin Teatret: their explanation requires an entire book.

But in this context, activities themselves are not the most important thing; what bears innumerable consequences is the way in which they've been organized, and the connection between these activities and the performances that have reached thousands of spectators.

The result is not a collection of different activities but a complex relational network. Throughout the years this network has developed into a "theatre environment" documented by the archive through different dimensions. For many this has become a way to think of and to look at theatre, a mindset only partially influenced by Odin Teatret's attitude.

These documents are difficult to study but they are important: by narrating the history of one specific theatre, they reveal the experiences of several theatre generations, possibly even beyond theatre. In a hundred years, we can imagine scholars studying these challenging documents, ready to question them in order to reconstruct impulses, desires and requests which go beyond the scope of theatre.

Moreover contemporary anthropological, historical and sociological studies regard theatre as a possible key to investigate areas of human behavior that can otherwise be difficult to approach.

These topics will require extensive consideration in the future.

8 – Theatre museums are impossible, theatre archives are often disappointing. Theatre is an ephemeral art, incarnated in ephemeral bodies. Studying relational networks is probably the only way to retrace an impression of theatre and its effects, of the passions it arouses, of the life ways it influences.

Odin Teatret Archives hold the traces of this infinite range of possibilities with regard to creative relationships, strategies of performances and the various activities of the theatre-laboratory. At Odin Teatret, interpersonal relationships, artistic creation, pedagogy, emotions and the sense and senses of a performance, are inextricably mingled in a homogenous adhesive "magma".

This is not the context to delve into complex and subtle issues of Odin Teatret's culture but we should at least point to the fact that the multifaceted character of this range of activities and associations, the "environment" that has emerged over the years and the consequent "magma", are interesting in themselves from theatrical, anthropological and sociological points of view. This extended image doesn't simply show the deep nature of Odin Teatret, it is a rare document offering an x-ray view of theatre itself.

9 – In this last section I will focus on the collection of letters, the documents that best serve as tools for the study of theatre as a relational network, as well as the most numerous items held by Odin Teatret Archives.

First of all we have protected the letters, by establishing clauses which ratify the impossibility to consult or quote them for a fixed number of years without explicit authorization from the sender and the recipient. Due to their liveliness and richness, letters are vulnerable documents that deserve safeguarding.

Among all possible types of theatre documents, letters are the best to probe and reveal issues that can rarely be explored: regarding emotional relationships for example. By definition non-objective and fleeting, these documents are particularly difficult to interrogate. They do not aim at reconstructing events but hold traces of the event. Letters are certainly unreliable as "objective" documents on the history of stage arts. Technical or stylistic information, even if mentioned, is rarely their core. To be approached, they require respect and caution, even dignity towards the writer.

Precisely for these reasons, letters are essential tools in theatre studies. They do not narrate; they witness what is more subtle and important than shapes: emotional temperatures. They are living materials, to be handled with care and consideration in order not to be killed.

Letters are probably the most precious treasures of this archive, allowing the possibility to define it as an affective archive: documenting emotions and affection induced by theatre in the makers and the observers.

I repeat: for these reasons, these documents deserve the highest protection.

But in thirty or fifty years they will let us understand more, not only about this theatre but generally about doing theatre, because the archive represents the existence of this theatre not for today nor for tomorrow: its scope is in the distant future, once the natural cycle of memory transmission will have faded.

May 2013

*MIRELLA SCHINO, PhD, taught at the Universities of Torino and L'Aquila, first as researcher (1991), then as Associate Professor (2000). Presently, she teaches theatre studies at the University of Roma Tre (since 2010). She is part of the scientific team of ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology). Mirella Schino is responsible for the building and coordination of the Odin Teatret Archives (Holstebro, Denmark). She directs, since 2004 to the present, the international journal of theatre studies Teatro e storia (see the site [www.Teatroestoria.it](http://www.Teatroestoria.it)). Mirella Schino directed some very important research projects: La ricezione del teatro della Grande Riforma europea nel primo Novecento in Italia (PRIN 2005); as well as a project on the Italian theatre in the period of "ritardo" and of the fascism, in which she coordinated teams of PhD students and young researchers. The first results of this research group were the Dossier L'anticipo italiano. Fatti, documenti, interpretazioni e testimonianze sul passaggio e sulla ricezione della grande regia in Italia tra il 1911 e il 1934, a cura di Mirella Schino, Carla Arduini, Rosalba De Amicis, Eleonora Egizi, Fabrizio Pompei, Francesca Ponzetti, Noemi Tiberio (Teatro e Storia, n. 29, Annale 2008, p. 27-255) and the materials published on the internet site "Teatro e storia".*





*Nine images from  
the Odin Teatret Archives*

**Edited by Francesca Romana Rietti and Valentina Tibaldi**

“Dagbladet”, Norwegian daily newspaper, 30 April 1965.

It is one of the first articles on Odin Teatret, founded in Oslo in October 1964. Title: *Oslo receives an experimental theatre*. The article focuses mainly on what appeared to be the strangest characteristics of the group: the fact that they were self-taught, and the hard training (even ten hours per day) that the young actors practised daily under the guidance of Eugenio Barba. The article discloses the preparation of the group's first performance: *Ornitofilene*, taken from a play by the renowned and controversial Norwegian writer Jens Bjørneboe. The article includes fragments from an interview to Barba on his theatre background in Poland (between 1961 and 1964) and his apprenticeship at Jerzy Grotowski's Teatr-Laboratorium.

(Fonds Odin Teatret, Series Odin Teatret-Activities-B, binder 17)

# Oslo får et eksperiment-teater

Tekst: Celine

Eugenio Barba

og 5 elever arbejder ti timer i døgnet - etter den polske regissøren Grotowskis teorier

Første forestilling presenteres antakelig til høsten

FOTOS: ARNE PEDERSEN

Plastikk og akrobatiske, pantomime og stemmelekkelige handlinger i undervisningen på Odin-teatret

De seks elever har først arbeidet teknisk innenfor et eksperiment-teater i Oslo. De har arbeidet med stemmelekkelige handlinger, og har arbeidet med å utvikle en egen språkform som er en blanding av dansk, tysk og fransk. De har arbeidet med å utvikle en egen språkform som er en blanding av dansk, tysk og fransk.

Handen åpner det som virkelig raskt på teaterfronten i Oslo. I Arkitektens Hus i Sandness gate holder en gruppe unge mennesker på å arbeide frem et eksperiment-teater som i utgangspunktet er et teater i Oslo, men i samarbeid med teaterarbeidere og ledere for Odin-teatret i København. Regissøren Eugenio Barba som har studert i Italia, i Norge og Polen og som vil være i Oslo for å undervise i teaterarbeid flere artikler om teater.

Barba, som har bodd i København i mange år, har vært i Oslo i forbindelse med sin studie i København. Han har vært i Oslo i forbindelse med sin studie i København. Han har vært i Oslo i forbindelse med sin studie i København.

Det er tre elever, Anne-Prise Grønne, Toril Ege og Eline Marie Løvstøl, og to elever, Tone Jensen og Toril Westdal, som er i Oslo. De har arbeidet med å utvikle en egen språkform som er en blanding av dansk, tysk og fransk. De har arbeidet med å utvikle en egen språkform som er en blanding av dansk, tysk og fransk.

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Vanligvis trener elevene barbalet

Freidag 30. januar 1965.



Eugenio Barba - teaterarbeider og leder av første første eksperiment-teater.

Denne gruppen har først arbeidet teknisk innenfor et eksperiment-teater i Oslo. De har arbeidet med stemmelekkelige handlinger, og har arbeidet med å utvikle en egen språkform som er en blanding av dansk, tysk og fransk.

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## Leksikonserie - nytt hefte

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De mest interessante opplysninger om de ulike fagene og yrkene. Det er et nytt hefte som inneholder en rekke opplysninger om de ulike fagene og yrkene.

**Perler og edle stener**

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**DAVID ANDERSEN**

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Perler og edle stener - en rekke opplysninger om de ulike fagene og yrkene. Det er et nytt hefte som inneholder en rekke opplysninger om de ulike fagene og yrkene.

“Bergens Tidende”, Norwegian daily newspaper, 17 January 1966.

The article prepares for a three-day tour of the young Odin Teatret in Bergen. It includes a long interview to Eugenio Barba. “Barba, a humanities graduate originally from Southern Italy, has lived in Norway for 10 years. Odin Teatret is an amateur theatre but of a very advanced sort. Barba doesn’t want to hear about avantguard theatre, still Odin Teatret definitely breaks away from conventional theatre.

- So, what do you base yourselves on?

- To put it briefly, on the methods of Stanislavskij, Mejerchol’d and the young Polish director Grotowski.

- And what are these methods about?

Barba looks somewhat bewildered from behind his glasses and deeply sighs at our ignorance. Then, in a very unlikely tranquillity for an Italian, he patiently starts rattling off about the systems of these outstanding theatre personalities. We tried to follow him as best we could and here’s our digest about working methods at Odin Teatret:

- We are 5 young people who love theatre and dedicate all their energies to it. We do not believe in conventional theatre, it has mostly become a source of sustenance. If theatre doesn’t wish to stagnate in its own habits, in the indifference of the audience, in flower bouquets and applauses, it needs to be fully renewed. Amateur theatres are recognised everywhere as having a desire to sacrifice in the eternal struggle against routines, compromises and commercial or complacent situations. This is a form of sacrifice and the reasons for such sacrifice can be manifold. But we all spontaneously and deeply share the same categorical imperative: to love art for itself, instead of loving ourselves through art. This is a theatrical and ethical belief which Stanislavskij himself formulated.

- What can you tell us about the rehearsals?

- Rehearsals? We do not rehearse. We train. We need to go back in time to the ancient Indian theatre to find our inspiration and training methods, for example exercises taken from Hatha Yoga and Khatakali. There is no single effective technique in theatre, one could say that no prearranged techniques exist at all; there are just technical obstacles through which the actors can proceed in their tasks, obstacles that the actor has to overcome with the help of an appropriate, daily, elementary practice”.

(Fonds Odin Teatret, Series Odin Teatret-Perf-B, binder 1)

Bergens Tidende mandag 17. j.

# NYTT TEATER GJESTER BERGEN

Mandag den 24. 25, og 26. i denne måned vil et nytt teater, «Odinteatret» gi tre forestillinger i Folkets Hus her i byen. «Odinteatret» kommer fra Oslo, hvor det ble stiftet i oktober i fjor. Ildsjelen bak foretaket er Eugenio Barba. Han er sør-italiener av fødsel, har bodd i Norge en ti års tid, og studert seg til en cand. mag. eksamen i Oslo. «Odinteatret» driver på noe man kan kalle avansert amatør-basis. Barba vil ikke høre snakk om avant-garde-teater, men «Odinteatret» bryter i hvert fall fullstendig med det konvensjonelle teater. Det har Barba ikke noen tro på.

— Men hva bygger så dere på?

— Kort sagt på Stanislawski, Meyerholds og den unge polske konstruktør Grotowskis metoder.

— Og hva går så det ut på?



Da ser Barba litt oppgitt på oss bak brillene, og trekker et tungt suk over vår uvitenheter. Hvorpå han stille og rolig og aldeles utaliensk snakker ut av seg en hel kronikk over disse fremtredende teatermenns systemer. Vi fulgte med så godt vi kunne, om det ikke var tilstrekkelig, og her er da «Odinteatret» arbeidsmetode i reysmerform:

Vi er fem yngre mennesker som elsker teater og gir det alt det vi kan og makter. Vi tror ikke på det konvensjonelle teater, det er alt for meget av et leverbød. Hvis teateret ikke skal stagnere i avstand — scene, publikum, i likegyldigheter og med nederlagene konsumert i blomsterbuketter og appluser, må det en gjennomgripende fornyelse til.

Det er for lenget erkjent ute, hvor de virkelige, de ekte og de samme teateramatørene når som helst og hvor som helst er villige til å ofre seg i den evige kampen mot rutine og kompromisser, mot kommersielle hensyn og bekvem-

ligheter. Det kan være et offer, og årsakene til offeret kan være så forskjellige — men uansett: Hos dem alle finner man igjen et kategorisk imperativ, spontant og dypt: Å elske kunsten i seg selv og ikke seg selv i kunsten. Et etisk teatercredo formulert av selveste Stanislawski.

**M**en med hensyn til prøver, herr Barba?

— Prøver? Vi prøver ikke. Vi trener. Og vi må helt tilbake til det urgamle indiske teater for å hente inspirasjon og treningsmetoder, øvelser for eksempel hentet fra Kathakali og Hathya Yoga. Det er ikke sant at det finnes en allmen-gyldig teknikk innenfor teateret. Det eksisterer ikke en på forhånd utarbeidet teknikk, det eksisterer bare tekniske hindringer ettersom skuespilleren går videre i sitt fag, hindringer som han må overvinne ved hjelp av adekvate og daglige elementære øvelser.

— Æ hum, og hvordan gjør dere det?

Ikke så lett å si sann i farten. Men treningen foregår individuelt, enhver skuespiller for seg selv, i en periode av minst tre timers uavbrutt arbeid. Det blir ikke lagt vekt på en mekanisk-gymnastisk gjentakelse av fastlagte øvelser, men på en kontinuerlig improvisasjon med sin egen kropp. Skuespilleren leker med den, sjonglerer med den, bruker den som et rekvisitt, som en partner han leker med. Han utforsker den som et slandskap, han skal lære alfabetet i sine fysiologiske prosesser, slik at han kan herske over dem og ikke bli deres slave. Øvelsene er alltid drevet av en presis forestilling eller assosiasjon.

**O**s hensikten?

— At en skuespiller til slutt kan operere med sin kropp

forfatteren har stilt seg selv og enhver av oss...

på en fullkommen måte, at han syeblikkelig kan realisere hvilke som helst oppgaver han får i en kunstnerisk komposisjon.

— Viser det stykke dere skal spille her noe av dette?

— Jeg håper da det. La oss heller si at det er en etyde, en skisse som summerer den første etappen av vårt første års trening. Tilskuerne vil skimte meget vakt i hvilken retning vårt arbeid går, et arbeid som vil kreve flere år før det kan snakkes om noen gyldige resultater.

— Og med hensyn til Jens Bjørneboes stykke «Ornitoflene».

— Vi har forsøkt å omplante en litterær tekst til et scenisk mønster. Til tross for våre radikale inngrep i forfatterens tekst, kan vi si at bare bokstaven er blitt beradd. Vi har forsøkt å bevare hans ånd, den moralsk-sosiale problemstilling som har oppattatt Jens Bjørneboe siden hans første bok.

— Og dere spiller ikke på scenen, men i selve salen?

— Ja. Dermed fjerner man avstanden mellom publikum og skuespillere. Publikum blir så i si kasset midt inn i selve handlingen. rådvillheten overfor de spørsmål som

**B**ak Odinteatrets gjestespill her i byen står Filologforeningen, Studentersamfundets kultur- og teaterutvalg, kulturutvalget ved NHH og Teaterforeningen. -Ør-



Letter from Jerzy Grotowski to Eugenio Barba, Opole, 10 July 1963.

This is the first letter sent by Grotowski to Barba, who had just gone back to Norway after his theatre apprenticeship in Poland. Grotowski calls himself "Lama" and addresses Barba as Kim, the same name of the protagonist of Kipling's novel who accompanies and protects an elderly Tibetan Lama on the roads of India. In 1963 Grotowski was twenty-nine and Barba twenty-six.

"Dear Kim.

Here is your Lama, writing you a letter with trembling hand to bless the Chela on distant roads. May India be benign to you and may that land of secrets choose, among the vagabonds, to reveal them all to you.

The Indias of Nagarjuna and the Tantras are in your soul, dear Chela, in your searching soul – this is what the old Lama wanted to tell you while, bewildered, he stands here in the midst of the abundant harvest gathered during his own journey.

And now, dear Chela, why did I not take leave of you when, with your soul shaken by the wind, you left the hermitage? For two reasons. First, because like a good reaper, I had to take care of the harvest, of the hard daily work, before the setting of the sun. Such is the stoicism of the elders, and their way of looking on work. Second, and more important: because there was a pain in my heart which could see and understand everything, and knew that you were leaving the old Lama for a long time, perhaps for ever. And the Lama, due to age and demeanour, must not have been as close as a son and a Chela to this old man who says adieu.

Lama

P.S. I enclose a letter which arrived for you from England. I opened it in order to include it in my envelope. Let me know, however, whether you receive this letter, 'à Dieu' and 'adieu'".

Odin Teatret Archives' collection includes all letters by Grotowski to Barba, those published by Barba in his *Land of Ashes and Diamonds. My Apprenticeship in Poland. Followed by 26 Letters by Jerzy Grotowski to Eugenio Barba* (Aberystwyth, Black Mountain Press, 1999), and the following ones. The archives also include some drafts of letters by Barba to Grotowski.

(Fonds Eugenio Barba, Series Barba-Grotowski, binder 5)

Pamflet

③

**TEATR-LABORATORIUM**  
13 RZĘDÓW  
Opole, Rynek 4, tel. 3108  
Adres teleg. TELAB, Opole

Kierownictwo artystyczne JERZY GROTOWSKI  
Kierownictwo literackie LUDWIK FLASZEN

Licencja Ministerstwa Kultury i Szkoł Dom  
Związków Twórczych. Subwencjonacja WRN

Opole, dnia 10. VII. 1963

Drogi Kłimie,  
oto i Pauli Lama, samotny,  
stary, dręgię ręką kreśli ten  
list, aby pobłogosławić Czeło  
na daleką drogę. Niech Indię będą Ci lekawe  
i niech się kraj tajemnic, Tobie - wśród wólczyski -  
odstąpi wrystki. Indie Nagardziuny i Tautry są  
w dany twój, jednak Czeło, w dany litery bukari,  
Amen, oto co Ci pragnie powiedzieć Lama, stary  
i zadumany wśród rebranych, \* obfitych rasy  
plonów ziemia i wzdrowania swego.

A teraz drogi Czeło czemu nie pożegnaniem  
się z Tobą, kiedy - z dany niestanę przez wiatr -  
opuścisz <sup>opuścisz</sup> ~~opuścisz~~ pustelnię. Z dany przyrzym: raz, że  
jako dobry inżynier u schyłku stonca muniatem  
razgi się plonami, inudny pracę codzienną. Taki  
starej jest stonczym i rozumienie pracy ludzi  
starych. To dręgi, ale i przed wrystkiem, bo  
mnie bolało serce, które wiedziało i rozumiało  
wrystko i wiedziało, że opuścisz starego laus  
już na długo, chyba na zawsze. Lama też, z razgi  
wieku ~~starego~~ i postawy swojej winien jest nie okarać  
cierpienia. Niech mi to będzie ~~piękny~~ <sup>dobry</sup> wybra-

Opol 2111/62 foto E-4

czony, jeżeli powiem jednak, że był Pan - Kłimie -  
bliski jak syn i jak ciele starcu orłowickowi,  
litery mówi: *requis*

Lama

P.S. Załączam list, litery pynędo z Anglii, stwor-  
ty, aby umożliwić mi w tej kopercii.  
Niech Pan napisze jednak, czy dostał Pan ten  
list: „à Dieu” i „adieu”



Copy of a letter by Barba to Grotowski, dated 16 March 1970.

Barba updates Grotowski on the different translations of his book, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (the first edition was published in English by Odin Teatret's publishing house in 1968), writes about what is happening at Odin Teatret, and specifically about the opportunity to shoot a film from the performance *Ferai*, and about the birth of Studio II, an independent lineup parallel to Odin Teatret but related to it, as were the "studios" of the Moscow Art Theatre. The driving force of Studio II was the mine Ingemar Lindh, who was also the first to introduce Odin Teatret to his master, Étienne Decroux. Studio II was active from 1969 to 1974, with Ingemar Lindh as administrative director, Yves Lebreton as artistic director, Gisele Pelisson as secretary and Maria Lexa. The thoughtful, affectionate tone of the letter (beside work, Barba asks about Cieslak's health, and is concerned about Grotowski's medicines) shows the kind of relationship and exchange occurring between Barba and Grotowski and between Odin Teatret and Teatr-Laboratorium.

(Fonds Eugenio Barba, Series Barba-Grotowski, binder 5)

NINE IMAGES FROM THE ODIN TEATRET ARCHIVES



ODIN TEATRET

NORDISK TEATERLABORATORIUM FOR SKUESPILLERKUNST

Box 118 - DK 7500 Holstebro - Danmark - Tlf. (07) 42 42 12 - Telg.-Adr.: Telabor - Bank: Holstebro Landmandsbank

16/3/1970

M. Jerzy Grotowski  
Rynek Ratusz 27  
Wroclaw - Polen

Cher Monsieur Grotowski,

J'ai reçu votre lettre de réclamation concernant la traduction française et je l'ai tout de suite passé à M. Berg qui s'est préoccupé de l'envoyer à M. Dimitrijević en Suisse. Nous suivons attentivement ce qui se passe avec cette traduction française et dès que nous en aurons un nouvel exemplaire nous ne manquerons pas de vous l'envoyer.

En même temps nous avons encore une fois rappelé à l'éditeur allemand et américain et français à propos des corrections que nous nous avez fait remarquer. D'ailleurs je dois vous communiquer que votre livre vient d'être acheté aussi par un éditeur brésilien.

On vient de me communiquer de Paris que M. Ryszard serait malade. Est-il quelque chose de sérieux. Je vous serais reconnaissant si vous pourriez me donner des renseignements à ce sujet le plus vite possible. Peut-être avez-vous besoin de quelque chose ne manquez pas de me le faire savoir immédiatement. D'ailleurs je veux vous rappeler que pour ce qui concerne ces médecines que vous avez achetées ici au Danemark pour vos reins, elles sont d'un type un peu différent que dans les autres pays d'Europe et que le cycle complet ne doit pas excéder plus de 30 unités.

Avez-vous reçu les exemplaires allemands de votre livre que nous avons envoyé à ZAIKS il y a un mois? En tout c'étaient 7 copies.

Ici le même temps, nous nous préparons au séminaire d'avril qui va en réalité être très parisien. FERAJ continue à vivre, fort probablement la télévision italienne va en faire un film à la fin d'avril. Nous sommes actuellement en tournée au Danemark, nous y resterons jusqu'au 10 mai et ensuite nous serons à Berlin, Rome et Suisse jusqu'à la fin de juin.

Studio se porte bien, maintenant Yves Lebreton est devenu directeur artistique tandis que Ingemar se contente de s'occuper de l'administration.

A vous toutes mes pensées les plus affectueuses, on vous pense souvent ici,

ściskam Pana

Ci-incluse une  
P.S. Copie d'une lettre américaine qui peut être de votre intérêt.

Two pages from the work manuscript for *Ferai* (1969-1970), the performance that gave Odin Teatret its international fame.

The original text from which the work for the performance began was written by the Danish writer Peter Seeberg. His proposal (titled *Moira*) was profoundly transformed following a long dialogue with Barba. Barba and his actors began working on the text starting from this second version (titled *Biddet*). Although generally not considered relevant in connection with Odin Teatret performances, this detailed work on the text is solidly testified in OTA by the materials for the *Ferai* script: proposals from the writer Seeberg; the new script, including contributions by Odin Teatret's playwright Christian Ludvigsen; the performance script before Barba's further changes; the final text of the performance; the drawings of the performance by the actress Iben Nagel Rasmussen; actors' notes and scores; a film script with hand-written notes by Marianne Ahrne, director of the film produced by Rai in 1970; notes taken by Barba during the rehearsals.

(Fonds Odin Teatret, Series Odin Teatret-Perf-A, binder 1)

BARBAS MANUSKRIFT

Ferai

~~MOIRA~~

~~(13. akt)~~

Dramatisk forløb i 28 scener af Peter Seeberg.  
Efter en græsk myte.

Personerne:

ADMETOS, den nye konge

ALKESTIS, den gamle konges datter, sejiens pris

~~KLOTHO (Hæien)~~

~~LACHESIS (Hvæpsen)~~

~~ATROPOS (Hunden)~~

Eventuelt: FØRSTE BORGER

Eventuelt: ANDEN BORGER

Desuden diverse usynlige personer og medvirkende, heriblandt publikum.

SCENERUMMET tænkes opdelt med to tilskuerområder ved langsiderne, således at der opstår to triangulære spillepladser ved kortsiderne, forbundet af en midterplads.

Following page from the work manuscript for *Ferai* (1969-1970), the performance that gave Odin Teatret its international fame.

Am ALKESTIS: Kun en flue. Bryd dig ikke om den eller slå den flad, hvis du tør se blod.

M ADMETOS: Alkestis, kære dronning, lad mig danse dig til lejet.

Om ALKESTIS: Admetos, du er kølen som et kid. Det kildrer mig bag ørerne, det kildrer mig i armhulerne, det løber mig rundt på maven med den snak.

(de danser bort. ADMETOS bærer hende til lejet)

(KLOTHO løber omkring, rejser sig på tærne, vifter med hænderne bag ørerne, lytter, hvisker)

KLOTHO: Nu er det sent på natten, med varme ører sover hele kongeriget. Kun kongeparret forbereder frøstiden og hamner <sup>hænder</sup> ~~les på deres bolader.~~

Jeg nå fortælle det straks i morgen. De første rengøringskoner, som vrider <sup>hænder ved (næsten)</sup> ~~kludene i spandene~~, skal jeg få til at måbe med min beskrivelse af, hvad jeg så og hvad jeg herte, hvordan en prins bliver til.

Her, Alkestis skriger højt af fryd.

Vil ingen vågne ved det? Så meget desto bedre.

(ATROPOS er krevet op af sin hule og kommer luskende)

Hvad gør du her? Du gør mig forakrækket.

ATROPOS: Jeg strækker bare benene.

KLOTHO: Alkestis og Admetos kopulerer. Hører du? Ca

ATROPOS: Det er den vej, det går. ul

KLOTHO: Jeg klarer mig for foruden. Blot at høre og forestille mig og fortælle om det er mer end nok. Jeg lever mer end tusind liv. Ca

ATROPOS: Men døden bliver du ene om, forsikrer jeg dig. U

KLOTHO: Slet ikke. Jeg kommer netop fra fængslet, hvor dem, der skal dømmes til døden i morgen, jamrer sig og stenner. Det gør stærkt indtryk på mig. Jeg er med til det sidste, siger jeg dig. Ca

ATROPOS: Men ikke efter. U

KLOTHO: Selv fra underverdenen har jeg hert en del af sikre vidter. Ca

ATROPOS: Åh vrevl, den mand, som først har mistet livet, han sender ingen rapporter tilbage til de levende. U

KLOTHO: Du er misundelig, fordi de har passeret dig.

ATROPOS: Smur ikke sådan om mig. (han slår ned hænderne efter KLOTHO, der summer bort og stiller sig ved

Interview of the Danish newspaper "Politiken" to Jean-Louis Barrault on tour in Denmark with the performance *Oh! Les beaux jours* of the Compagnie Renaud-Barrault, on the occasion of the seminar The Scenic Language, organized by Odin Teatret in 1970, in which Barrault participated as pedagogue together with Jacques Lecoq.

Throughout the 1960s and '70s Odin Teatret, having found its long-term location in Denmark, made itself known through the organization of tours for big performances – such as Grotowski's Teatr-Laboratorium, or the big Czechoslovakian theatre companies, Luca Ronconi, Dario Fo and Franca Rame – and through an intense pedagogical activity. The activities chosen were new at the time: training, physical and vocal exercises and, more generally, a work that didn't necessarily proceed from the text interpretation. The seminars at Odin Teatret represented a small theatre tradition of high culture and contributed to the growth of an international environment around the theatre, made up of artists and intellectuals who regularly took part in the seminars as pedagogues or participants.

(Fonds OdinTeatret, Series Activities-B, binder 5)





A letter by Dario Fo to Eugenio Barba from April 1970, showing the typical atmosphere of Odin Teatret's seminars (see previous img.).

Fo is answering to a letter of invitation from Odin Teatret proposing to include Fo once again in the seminars. Dario Fo and Franca Rame were first invited to Denmark by Odin Teatret in 1968. They came with the performance *Dump the lady*, which was met with enormous success, and took part in the seminar on the Myth of Commedia dell'Arte. They came back in 1969 to participate in the seminar on the Scenic Language. Answering to this third invitation in 1970, Dario Fo says he is sorry he cannot go because "the Italian police is targeting our performances. Suffice it to say, we've had to cancel 15 shows!!! [...] you can't imagine how sorry I am: beside being an interesting occasion for positive personal encounters, it was always a authentic 'holiday' for me. Yes: no matter how long the working hours, I've always considered the days spent with you all as a moment of true rest". Odin Teatret sent a support message in response.

(Fonds OdinTeatret, Series Odin Teatret Activities, binder 32)



**NUOVA  
SCENA**

Milano, 12 febbraio 1970

Per EUGENIO BARBA  
ODIN TEATRET  
V. Box 118  
DK 7500 HOLSTEBRO

(DANMARK)

Caro Eugenio,

Ti prego di scusare il ritardo nel rispondere alla tua lettera, ma solo oggi ho avuto il tempo di esaminare i miei programmi, per verificare se mi era possibile accettare la tua proposta.

Purtroppo nel periodo dal 16 al 21 aprile sono impegnato in un giro esplorativo in Sardegna. Grazie al lavoro di alcuni giovani avremo la possibilità di girare e recitare anche in questi posti. Quindi, purtroppo, non potrò intervenire al vostro seminario: i 'fronti di lotta' che si stanno aprendo in Italia dopo il sacco che abbiamo lanciato - con la costruzione di Nuova Scena - sono tali e tanti che superano di xgran lunga le nostre speranze. Purtroppo - almeno per me - superano anche le forze a nostra disposizione, ma la volontà di lottare non ci manca.

Ti ringrazio molto per gli auguri, che ricambio di vero cuore. Spero di rivederti molto presto.

Cari saluti

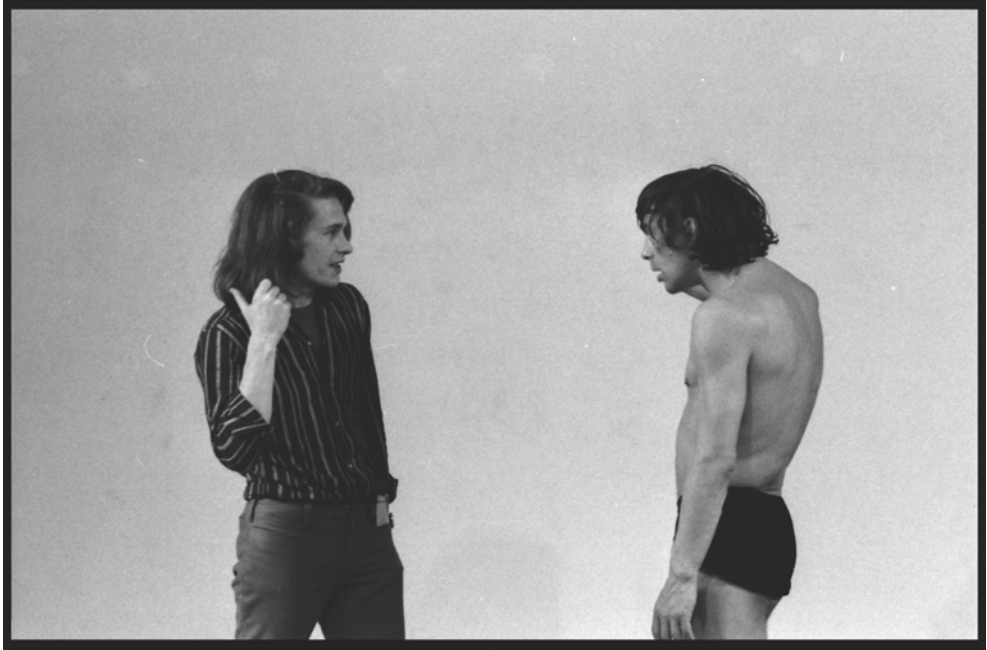
(Dario)  
*Dario Fo*

A series of photographs (by Roald Pay) of the shooting of the film *Training at Grotowski's Teatr-Laboratorium in Wroclaw* in 1972, picturing Torgeir Wethal, Ryszard Cieślak, Tage Larsen and Malou Illmoni.

The film shows the evolution of Jerzy Grotowski's training in a pedagogical situation in which the main actor of Teatr-Laboratorium, Ryszard Cieślak, works with two pupils: Malou Illmoni and Tage Larsen, actors of Odin Teatret. As seen even on Norwegian newspapers in 1965, the "training" has always been a distinctive mark of Odin Teatret. Torgeir Wethal, one of its founding actors, is author of this film, which inaugurates the theatre's close collaboration with Grotowski's Teatr-Laboratorium. Among others, Wethal also directed two films on Physical and Vocal Training at Odin Teatret (1972), and one dedicated to Odin Teatret's long journey to Peru in 1978, *On the Two Banks of the River* (1979). Odin Teatret Archives preserve a wealth of photographic documentation on the shooting of the film, as well as the 16 mm originals.

(Odin Teatret Archives - Photographic Fonds, Series Paper,  
Sub-Series Film Situations, binder 2)

NINE IMAGES FROM THE ODIN TEATRET ARCHIVES



Another example of the work on the text at Odin Teatret, this time by the director and one actress. Pages from Eugenio Barba's version of Iben Nagel Rasmussen's text for *Itsi Bitsi*, the production directed by Eugenio Barba in 1991 with Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Jan Ferslev and Kai Bredholdt, recounting the youth and the love story of Iben Nagel Rasmussen with the Danish poet and singer Eik Skaløe.

The long text is made up of handwritten parts as well as fragments of typewritten texts cut out, glued and corrected yet again. According to Barba, this is the first draft of the final text. This draft was further developed by adding Iben Nagel Rasmussen's biographical episodes which Barba noted down, together with a montage of fragments from the text originally written by the actress recounting her story with Eik Skaløe. The first page shows the typescript given by the actress to the director and the second one the result of his interventions, consisting in hand-written fragments taken from different pages of the typescript, the page number indicated in parentheses.

(Fonds Nagel Rasmussen, Series Odin, binder 1)



Following page from Eugenio Barba's version of Iben Nagel Rasmussen's text for *Itsi Bitsi*, the production directed by Eugenio Barba in 1991 with Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Jan Ferslev and Kai Bredholdt, recounting the youth and the love story of Iben Nagel Rasmussen with the Danish poet and singer Eik Skaløe.

## 3

Jeg husker ikke nogen præcis grund  
 til at det politiske pled i bypræsiden.  
 (9)  
 (10) Det var fuygende diskussioner - Eik  
 ble ankeget for ikke at skrive  
 politiske digte, for at være anarkistisk,  
 usolid - ~~til rampen~~ Han  
 stjal mekt af møyenbudd ved  
 adrene - det var deyang  
 man stadig kunne få nit  
 møyenbudd leveret af  
 procent utenfor hovedadrene -  
 (cont. 11)

Sydtyskland mens Eik efter nogle ugers arbejde på en frugtplantage  
~~xxx~~ også tar sydpå men på en langt mere løssluppen måde end os.  
 Eik blir væk i et par måneder og her <sup>der</sup> stammer brevene fra  
 Fontainebleau og Paris ~~1963~~. & Altså sommeren 1963.

- Han var tydeligt forandret, på detop den måde han  
 beskriver ~~han~~ i brevene: noget forsagt var gået af ham, han var  
 frækkere, mere udfordrende i påklædning og holdning, med guitaren  
 hængende over skulderen og det røde hår længere end det på den  
 tid var tilladeligt. ~~De~~ Han havde nogle små tabletter med, som  
 man kunne få uden recept i Frankrig - <sup>vede</sup> ~~den~~ første amfetamin. Jeg  
 var meget skeptisk over for det der narkotika, men prøvede det



A page from Eugenio Barba's work notebook marked "organicity, Orient", undated and dedicated to the O effect (organicity effect).

It looks like a notebook for the ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology) session which took place in Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal in 1998 titled "O- Effect. This which is organic for the actor / that which is organic for the spectator". Odin Teatret Archives preserve several notebooks and booklets by Barba. related to his work for the performances as well as to his theoretical studies.

(Fonds Barba, Series Miscellaneous, binder 4)

TAKSU = letteralmente, il posto che

RICEVE LA LUCE, posto illuminato, da un

illuminato - corrisponde a quello che

Aprito ha detto in relazione ad **AXE**

che potere è l'essenza degli spiriti

<sup>fonti di luce - sono bene intesi</sup>  
AUGUSTO traduce "ORGANICO" con **AXE**.

Simile simile a ciò che nella terminologia

dopo **SIAMINI** **COESI** si dice **SHIUMYONG**  
**SHIUMYONG** **SHIUMYONG** =

l'entrata degli spiriti in un essere umano.

In altre espressioni d'origine sciamanica è

usato in relazione alle altre, quando lo

spirito è entrato.

**UANI SARAINNENA** **VIDI**, **ALIVE**, **ALIVE** **LIFE** in **IT** (**TUGUIMIN**)  
E come se non si fosse in grado di pronunciare **SHIUMYONG**

dove viene questa parola particolare che ha

l'istore quando copre lo spettatore e allora si

fa ricorso al detto dello sciamano

Appena appena che non si compie quanto necessario

Quanto tempo

Questa trasformazione non dipende dalle lettere.

L'AXE è il fulmine che scende - che non

dispende nella volontà della persona - che

gli viene dato. E' come se si rendesse

DIOMATI: nello spazio bi-temporale

di "organicità", una parola **LEIBENQ** =

legge <sup>del</sup> circuito - compare come in ancora,

in sciando, imputando. Trasformare quello

che è naturale in quello che aggrava

ad un altro contesto.

**JAPANESE**: avere può essere **Taccimamente** **perlo** a

non avere **(KI-KI)**, cioè non

avere la capacità di offrire lo spettatore -

**(KI-KI)**, **Unos** **die** = **emac** **in** **vidio** **(Cilicente)** -

**seem**, **pline**,  
**ORGANICITÀ** - **ORGANICITÀ** **ORGANICITÀ**

Un **non** **proba** - un **neofin** - non è

importante perché sia quello che muove. Un

perché ci permette di non essere le parole vecchie

e con l'ultima posizione del nostro sapere che

non sappiamo di sapere -

**ORGANICITÀ**, **ORGANICITÀ**



## *Information on Odin Teatret*

FERDINANDO TAVIANI\*

**Abstract.** The paper covers the fifty years of history of the Odin Teatret. There are three dimensions from the activity of the famous theatre institution that are detailed chronologically: the development of methods in both the work with the actor and the dramaturgical process, as well as the publishing activity of its founder, Eugenio Barba.

**Keywords:** Odin Teatret, Eugenio Barba, theatre of reciprocity, working demonstrations, barter.

The life of Odin Teatret as a theatre laboratory can be depicted schematically through the complementarity and alternation of introvert and extrovert activities. Among the introvert ones we find Barba's work with the actors, the actors' work on themselves (training, autonomous elaboration of materials for a production, working demonstrations) and rehearsals – which can last up to three years – for a performance.

The extrovert activities include Odin's own productions presented on site and on tour in Denmark and abroad; "bartering" with various milieus in Holstebro and elsewhere; the organisation of encounters for theatre groups; hosting other theatre groups and ensembles; seminars in Denmark and in the countries where the Odin brings its productions; the annual Odin Week Festival; the publication of magazines and books; the production of didactic films and videos; sessions of the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA); collaboration with the CTLS, Centre for Theatre Laboratory Studies of the University of Aarhus; the triennial *Festuge* (*Festive Week*) in Holstebro; the triennial festival *Transit* devoted to women in theatre; the pedagogical

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WIN project – Workout for Intercultural Navigators; children’s performances, exhibitions, concerts, round tables, cultural initiatives etc., in Holstebro and the surrounding region.

There is no rigid separation between the above two spheres of activity. They are planned and realized by the same people and often overlap, transferring energies and stimuli from one field to another. The life of the Odin enclave depends on the precarious equilibrium between these two different dynamic dimensions.

In reality there are three dimensions: the third one consists of the many books and essays written by Eugenio Barba and by his actors Kai Bredholt, Roberta Carreri, Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Julia Varley and Torgeir Wethal translated into many languages.

**1964-1965:** 1<sup>st</sup> October 1964, Eugenio Barba founded Odin Teatret with five young people refused by the national theatre school in Oslo, Norway. While concentrating on its professional apprenticeship as autodidacts, the Odin published *Teatrets Teori og Teknikk*, a quarterly magazine which until 1974 appeared accompanied by 23 monographic issues and books. Odin Teatret’s first production and Eugenio Barba’s first direction were *Ornitofilene* (*The Birdlovers*, November 1965), an unpublished text by Norwegian author Jens Børneboe.

**1966-1968:** In June 1966, Odin Teatret moved from Norway to Denmark and founded its permanent home in Holstebro, Denmark. Its innovative initiative of workshops transformed this small town into a meeting centre through practical confrontation with artists of the new theatre wave in Western as well as Asian theatre and dance. From June 1966 until 1976 the Odin pioneered practical seminars twice a year. Among the teachers were Jerzy Grotowski, Ryszard Cieślak, Dario Fo, Etienne Decroux, Jacques Lecoq, the Colombaioni brothers, Charles Marowitz, Otomar Krejča, Joseph Chaikin, Julian Beck and Judith Malina, Jean-Louis Barrault and Madeleine Renaud, the Javanese choreographer Sardono, the Balinese masters I Made Pasek Tempo, I Made Djimat and I Made Bandem, the Japanese Nô masters Hisao and Hideo Kanze, the masters from Indian classical forms Shanta Rao, Krishna Namboodiri, Uma Sharma, Ragunath Panigrahi and Sanjukta Panigrahi. The latter is among the co-founders of ISTA in 1979. Eugenio Barba edited the book *Towards a Poor Theatre* by Jerzy Grotowski as the no. 7 issue of *Teatrets Teori og Teknikk*, 1968.

**1969-1973:** Barba's third production, *Ferai* (1969), with a text specially written for the Odin by Danish Peter Seeberg, gave the theatre international acknowledgement. The following production, *Min Fars Hus* (*My Father's House*, 1972) initiated a dramaturgical process which has characterized all Odin performances since then. They do not start from a text written by a playwright, but the performance's narrative structure, including dialogues and monologues, is built by Barba and the actors during the course of the rehearsals. Like *Ferai*, *Min Fars Hus* was conceived for only 60 spectators. It confirmed its prestige and at the same time put it in contact with a young theatre milieu in Europe which was extraneous to the official theatre and to the elitarian avant-garde. Social associations, universities and theatre groups which were active in small centers approached the Odin not only to perform, but also to give lectures, working demonstrations and workshops.

**1974-1975:** After playing *Min Fars Hus* 320 times all over Europe's festivals and main towns, Odin Teatret moved to Carpignano, a village in southern Italy, where it worked for five months between the spring and autumn of 1974. The following year, the Odin returned once again to Carpignano for three months, and then to Ollolai, a village in the mountains of Sardinia. The Odin branched out into a new field of activity with open air performances for a large number of spectators, itinerant shows and parades. These performances were put together by assembling material belonging to the repertoire of the individual actors or of the whole group (theatricalised exercises from the training, clown gags etc.).

The "barter" practice began in the autumn of 1974, in Carpignano. Instead of selling its own performances, the Odin exchanged – "bartered" – them with cultural manifestations by the hosting milieu (political and religious associations, villages, neighbourhoods, schools, psychiatric hospitals, prisons etc). The "barter" offers not only an insight into the other's forms of expression, but is equally a social interaction that defies prejudices, linguistic difficulties and differences in thinking, judging and behaving. The practice of "barter" through theatre was to characterize Odin's social action until the present day and has evolved into a variety of manifestations, also called "theatre of reciprocity".

Odin Teatret now introduced itself to the outside with a double face: performances for few spectators in sheltered environments; and crowded, colorful and lyrical-grotesque open air performances. The first required long periods of preparation, with the director and actors starting afresh each time; the others derived from a rapid structuring of already existing material.

**1976-1980:** During April and May 1976, Odin Teatret participated in the Festival of Caracas in Venezuela with *Come! And the Day will be Ours*. Outside the Festival's framework, it was active with encounters with other groups, "barters", parades and open air performances. The Odin "bartered" with a Yanomami tribe after a lengthy journey to their territory in Amazonia. It was the beginning of lasting ties between the Odin Teatret and numerous Latin American theatre groups. Some of these were invited by Barba the following autumn to Belgrade, former Yugoslavia, to the International Encounter of Group Theatre within the BITEF Festival/Theatre of the Nations. On this occasion, Barba published the manifesto on the Third Theatre.

New independent activities emerged within the Odin involving individual actors or Barba with only one of the actors. This also applied to ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology, founded in 1979) in its first years.

ISTA is thought not as a rigid institution, but as a milieu, an interlacement of changing relationships. It assumes a defined form only during its public sessions. Then it becomes a "performers' village" where actors and dancers belonging to many traditions and genres meet with scholars to compare and analyze the technical foundation of their scenic presence. What makes the meeting possible is a discordant way of thinking and a common desire to question the actor-dancer's stage behaviour. It is within this milieu that Barba has confronted the Odin's experiences with other theatre and dance genres, elaborating a new field of study: theatre anthropology – the study of scenic behavior in an organized situation of representation.

An ISTA session is centered on a theme or a question that is placed under investigation (improvisation, organic effect, rhythm and flow, founders of traditions, form and information etc.). It includes 20-30 masters from different traditions and their ensembles, 30-80 international participants (actors, dancers, directors, choreographers, playwrights etc.) and a group of about ten scholars/researchers. It usually lasts for 15-20 days although the longest session, Volterra, Italy (1981) went on for two months. In addition to the international public sessions, always accompanied by a two-day symposium with practical demonstrations and performances with the masters' ensembles, ISTA has developed another recurrent activity: The University of the Eurasian Theatre.

Session after session, since 1990, an ensemble under the name of *Theatrum Mundi* has grown out of the collaboration between the Odin actors and the ISTA masters. The *Theatrum Mundi* productions are events with 45-50 performers and musicians from diverse traditions, under Eugenio Barba's direction. Among these: *Ego Faust* (2000), *Ur-Hamlet* (2006 and 2009), *Don Giovanni all'inferno* (2006) and *The Marriage of Medea* (2008).

**1980-1990:** Since 1980, the dynamics within Odin Teatret assumed two further dimensions. Individual lines of research sprang up in addition to the collective one. Parallel with her presence in Odin Teatret, Iben Nagel Rasmussen founded the group *Farfa*. Then, in 1989, she started *The Bridge of Winds*, an international assembly of actors and directors usually active in their own country, and periodically joining her for a few weeks to concentrate on a personal research.

The actor Toni Cots – Barba’s closest collaborator in planning the encounters of theatre groups and the first ISTA sessions – developed with *Basho* a self-directed activity of pedagogy and performances still in concomitance with his tasks inside the Odin. Julia Varley helped to found the *Magdalena Project* in 1986, a network of women in contemporary theatre, co-editing its annual journal *The Open Page* and, in the same perspective, organizing since 1992 the triennial festival *Transit*. Torgeir Wethal filmed and edited films about training (Grotowski’s, Decroux’s and Odin Teatret’s) as well as Odin performances and “barbers”. Each Odin actor, in a more continuous and formalised way, shaped autonomous fields of action and intervention.

At times, it is difficult to maintain an equilibrium between extrovert and introvert activities, as well as that between activities involving the whole group and those concerning the individual actors. The Odin compactness, that appears unassailable from the outside, is experienced internally as a problem that requires a continuous state of alert. One of the consequences of these inner dynamics has been the flourishing of “small” performances with one or two performers, often with an intensity equal to that of the whole group’s productions.

It is in this context that a new genre has developed: “working demonstrations” by the actors. These are structured like a performance with one or two actors presenting and expounding the fundamental principles of their theatrical craft. Although the original purpose was a pedagogical one, the working demonstrations soon become a way to interrogate the nature of the actor’s technique and to investigate the dialectic between a “cold” and a “warm” process. Quoting Barba, technique manifests itself as a “dance of algebra and flames”, the raw material of a theatre-in-life. Seen as a whole, the working demonstrations indicate clearly that the Odin ensemble is not characterized by a uniform vision, but by a mosaic of methods and individual perspectives which compose a “small tradition” with a manifold face.

Odin Teatret alternates in an ever more evident way periods of concentration with periods of opening up.



Since 1989, Odin Teatret has organized an intensely eventful *Festuge* (*Festive Week*) every three years in Holstebro, hosting foreign theatre groups and individual artists, above all involving and collaborating with over a hundred local associations and institutions. Theatre, music, dance, figurative art, lectures and debates are interwoven with the daily activities of schools, churches, military barracks, the police station, old people's homes, the train station, buses, shops, the hospital, cultural institutions and discriminated spaces. The *Festuge* pervades the whole town, day and night for an entire week, with a grotesque and disturbing spectacularity, from impressive intercultural performances for the crowd to "barthers", from actors' visits to private birthday parties to incursions into administrative offices.

Since the 1980s, another recurrent annual activity is the *Odin Week Festival*. It provides an opportunity for maximum 50 theatres and academics from different countries to be introduced to the multiple-sided structure and life of the Odin laboratory. They train daily with the actors, get acquainted with their personal working methods, with the management and the organization of the theatre, with their community activities and international projects, watch the many performances and working demonstrations and have a daily theoretical/practical meeting with Eugenio Barba.

**1990-2005:** New productions: *Kaosmos* (1992), *Within the Skeleton of the Whale* (1997), *Mythos* (1998), *Ode to Progress* (2003), *Cities under the Moon* (2003) and *Andersen's Dream* (2004). Most of the actors develop their training into a dramaturgical laboratory leading to performances with one, two or three performers. This process which began in the mid-80s with *Marriage with God* (1984), *El Romancero de Edipo* (1984) and *Judith* (1987), intensifies with *Memoria* (1990), *The Castle of Holstebro* (1990), *Itsi Bitsi* (1991), *Doña Musica's Butterflies* (1997) and *Salt* (2002).

In 2004, the house of the Odin was enlarged. For its fortieth anniversary a new space was inaugurated: The CTLS, Centre for Theatre Laboratory Studies. It is a permanent collaboration with the Institute of Dramaturgy of the University of Aarhus consisting in international symposia, research meetings and publishing books.

**2005-2014:** Tours have the tendency to turn into long artistic, pedagogical and cultural residences in foreign countries in close collaboration with local theatre groups, universities and associations, mostly in Europe, Latin America and recently in Asia.

Since 2008, Barba and his actors have been working on a new production, *The Chronic Life* (2011) that they finished three years later. The following year it was *Ave Maria* (2012), a solo performance.

In 2008, the OTA, Odin Teatret Archives, began their activity with a group of young researchers from several countries. Defined as a "living archive", it consists of a library, an archive that collects the documents of the Odin and of other European theatre laboratories, a centre for the digitization and production of audiovisual material on the theatrical craft, and for the editing of materials accumulated during more than fifty years of research and collaborations. An association with the Royal Library in Copenhagen was established in 2012.

The Odin milieu blends actors, directors, dancers and scholars of different generations and nationalities in an ever more enduring way. These may meet annually for collaboration and common research, keeping alive a network of many languages and countries. Several international theatre artists work in residence for longer periods.

At the same time, Odin Teatret strengthens its roots in Holstebro and its surrounding territory. During the first three months of 2009, a dense program of "Interferences" was developed: through previously agreed projects, the world of the theatre intruded into and reshaped the daily life and activities of the community centre and nearby villages. Yet again it was an effort to find a new use and meaning for theatrical practice in civil life.

In 2008, Odin Teatret, the Grotowski Institute in Poland and the Theatre Arts Researching the Foundations (TARF) in Malta gave life to Icarus Publishing Enterprise whose purpose is to present texts in English by artists and specialists on the practice and vision of theatre as a laboratory. In 2013, the English Publishing House Routledge joined this venture.

In 2011, WIN, Workout for Intercultural Navigators, was launched. It is an on-going schooling programme with recurring courses, workshops, performances and interventions in the community under the guidance of its actors and other artists in residence at the theatre. WIN is directed towards theatre practitioners and cultural animators who recognise in their craft the capacity to "interfere" in the different social cultures of a community.

Since 2011, Odin Teatret has been preparing its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary to be celebrated in June 2014 within the framework of the *Holstebro Festuge*. For this occasion Barba and his actors are rehearsing *Clear Enigma*, which will be performed only once for all their friends who will be present.

Does the small theatre group born fifty years ago in Oslo now risk a senile attack of oversize ambition? It might do so, but due to one effective essential factor: the number of actors remained the same and most of them have been together for decades.

At the end of 2013, Odin Teatret's permanent staff consisted of twenty two persons of whom twelve were actors. Its turn-over is about fifteen million Danish kroner (two million Euros). Their own earnings from various activities oscillate between forty and fifty percent of their budget, the rest coming from grants received from the Danish Ministry of Culture and the municipality of Holstebro.

Today, when Eugenio Barba is asked about the future of his theatre, his answer is unequivocal: "Odin Teatret will exist as long as any one of its present actors wishes to continue its activity. After that it must disappear. The Odin *is* its actors. Our name will not be transmitted to an empty shell – to a building or an institution."