



# Origins

Augusto Omolu, ISTA 10, Copenhagen, Denmark, 1996 - Photo: Fiora Bemporad

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## Reading for the "Flying House"

### Barba's early research towards theatre anthropology

*Abstract: The article examines some of Eugenio Barba's study material now preserved in the Fonds Barba at Odin Teatret Archives (ISTA Series, b. 1). Barba's readings preceding the first edition of the ISTA in Bonn in 1980 trace the development of interests cultivated by the director, from humanities to science (biology, neuropsychology, studies of perception, posturology). Even before developing the theory of theatre anthropology as an autonomous discipline, Barba evolved many fertile perspectives of study on energy, within which he expanded the understanding of presence as a fundamental component of theatre. Barba's reading notes reveal an intellectual approach similar to his artistic work: the accumulation of an overabundance of material, which in the theoretical sphere, too, invert the principle of maximum results with minimum effort.*

*Keywords: Eugenio Barba, ISTA, Third Theatre, Theatre Anthropology, Odin Teatret Archives*

## 1. Introduction

Forty years after its first edition in Bonn in October 1980, the itinerant International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA), founded and directed by Eugenio Barba, boasts a history no less unique than that of its closest relative, Odin Teatret.<sup>1</sup> Compared with the chronological trajectory of the latter, founded in 1964 in Oslo and transferred

1. The stories of Odin Teatret and ISTA follow parallel paths that have often been reflected in studies, too, as is evident in the vast bibliography available today. Consider, among others, the special dossier dedicated to ISTA by the journal *Teatro e Storia* (35, 2014) on the occasion of Odin Teatret's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, entitled *L'altra metà dell'Odin*. It contains the following contributions: Franco Ruffini, *Scuola per attori* (1981) (347-52), Marco De Marinis, *Il processo creativo nel teatro contemporaneo: trionfi e trasmutazioni* (353-79; essay dedicated to Torgeir Wethal), Nicola Savarese, *Aventure di un dizionario. Note dedicate a Nando Tavian con l'aiuto di Angelo Greco* (393-408), Kirsten Hastrup, *The Making of Theatre and History* (1996) (409-419), Jean-Marie Pradier, *Ethnoscénologie. Les incarnations de l'imaginaire* (421-36), Lluís Masgrau, *La vision teatral cifrada en la obra escrita de Barba* (381-92), Peter Elsass, *La presenza assoluta. Uno spazio terapeutico per il teatro e per la psicologia* (437-52). In its first issue of 1986, *Teatro e Storia*, founded by Fabrizio Cruciani, Claudio Meldolesi, Ferdinando Taviani, Franco Ruffini, Nicola Savarese, Eugenia Casini Ropa and Daniele Seragnoli, opened with Ruffini's essay on theatre anthropology, which is now published in English in this issue. For an account by Mirella Schino on the importance of ISTA in the context of her training as a scholar, see the recent essay *Spettatore, spettatori, pubblico* (Schino 2018).



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to Holstebro in 1966, the story of the ISTA “flying house”<sup>2</sup> began fifteen years later and is now in perfect balance between the two centuries. In its fifteen previous editions, held in cities across Europe and South America,<sup>3</sup> ISTA has redefined the pedagogical possibilities of the actor’s art in an unprecedented practical and theoretical context, opening a new window of multidisciplinary study on contemporary theatre, in dialogue with, on the one hand, the ‘ancient’ (a notion that, as specifically understood by Odin Teatret, evokes above all the relationship with the ‘ancestors’ of the art<sup>4</sup>) and with extra-European cultures, on the other.

Due to global circumstances associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, the 16<sup>th</sup> edition of ISTA, which should have taken place in Italy in the summer of 2020, could not be held.<sup>5</sup> In that year, nevertheless, Barba participated in numerous online initiatives, continued in presence, when possible, the creation of new performances with his actors, and prepared to hand over the direction of his theatre, announced on 29 March 2019, fifty-five years from its foundation.<sup>6</sup> The animated climate always gravitating around Odin Teatret also favoured the conception of numerous projects: the annual *Journal of Theatre Anthropology*, published both on paper and in open-access format, is one of these new initiatives.<sup>7</sup>

2. The International School of Theatre Anthropology is defined by Barba as a “flying house” in the paragraph on *Transmission of the Inheritance* in the book *Theatre. Solitude, craft, revolt* (“all the Odin actors periodically join the ‘flying house’ amongst masters from other traditions and, together with them, give life to the *Theatrum Mundi* performance”: Barba 1996, 92-8).

3. Among the most important historic accounts of ISTA, see *The Tradition of ISTA* (Skeel 1994; which also appeared in Brazilian-Portuguese in the same year: *A Tradição da ISTA*), *The Performers’ Village. Times, Techniques and Theories at ISTA* (Hastrup 1996), and the more recent *Thinking with the Feet. Actors’ Techniques and Theatre Anthropology* (Cremona, Galli and Varley 2017). Also Franco Ruffini’s *La scuola degli attori. Rapporti della prima sessione dell’ISTA* (Ruffini 1980), followed chronologically by issues of the journal “Bouffonneries”: 4, *Improvisation. Anthropologie théâtrale*, 1982; 15-6, *L’énergie de l’acteur. Anthropologie théâtrale* (2), 1986. Also note publications of the Eurasian Theatre, including, in particular, *Drammaturgia dell’attore* (De Marinis 1996) and the 1995 issue of *Mime Journal*, edited by Thomas Leabhart, *Incorporated knowledge*. For a detailed discussion on theatre anthropology, elaborated by Marco De Marinis after the first five sessions of ISTA between 1980 and ’87, see as well the chapter *Antropologia* in De Marinis 1988, 99-127.

4. Barba names the ‘ancestors’ of the theatre craft, among other occasions, in a passage from his article *Theatre-Culture*, appeared for the first time in *Arte Nuevo* (1979), now in *Beyond the Floating Islands* (Barba 1986, 195-212): “If, looking around me, I try to understand what theatre research became in the Sixties, it becomes clear to me that it has slowly turned in a direction that, at the beginning, none of us expected. A deep connection with a precise history, whose ancestors might be Stanislavski, Meyerhold or Brecht, translated our needs in terms of theatre, of ‘reform of theatrical language’, of its expressive means. Over time and with experience, this connection has gone beyond the profession; it has become an ethical attitude, with its own distinct way of perceiving and acting” (Barba 1986, 206).

5. The theatre company Linee libere directed by Irene Di Lelio had started preparations for the 16<sup>th</sup> edition of ISTA in the town of Greccio, in the province of Rieti, where it was supposed to take place between 5 and 15 August 2020. Due to its cancellation, the latest edition to date is therefore that of 2016 in Albino, in the province of Bergamo, which reopened the activities of ISTA after the 2005 edition in Wrocław.

6. The letter dated 29 March 2019 in which Barba announced the handover of artistic direction of his theatre, entitled *Eugenio Barba leaves the direction of the Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium*, is available online on the Odin Teatret website (Odin Teatret 2019).

7. The Barba Varley Foundation was established in Rome on 11 December 2020 by Eugenio Barba and Julia Varley with the aim of supporting “fields of action animated by people who are disadvantaged by gender, ethnicity, geography, age, way of thinking and acting inside and outside theatre.” (Odin Teatret 2020). The *Journal of Theatre*

In the antinomy that, still today, opposes exercise of the profession on the one hand and the effort of critical definition on the other, there is evidently a theoretical and practical lacuna that both sides say they can fill. Seen from a historical perspective, this process of separation appears not devoid of links with the phenomena of alienation typical of consumer societies, with the progressive erosion of activities not immediately of financial use, their consequent isolation or hyper-specialisation.<sup>8</sup> Rethinking what is too easily taken to be an ‘obligatory’ dichotomy between the moment of theoretical reflection and the places of putting it into practice could, on the contrary, encourage the rediscovery of interests in that essential human component which, in the early years of the third millennium, has not always appeared to focus the attention of the vast terrain of theatre.<sup>9</sup> Lowest in the order of social prestige granted to the arts, ‘theatre research’ deserves, once and for all, due recognition: a recognition based in part on the existential, selfless dedication of its adherents, above and beyond commercial trends.<sup>10</sup>

The need for a holistic perspective in the art of theatre, in itself understood as culture in a unified concept,<sup>11</sup> had from the beginning driven Eugenio Barba’s endeavours to define the field of research of theatre anthropology. Barba’s work, advocating the coexistence of theory and practice, and based on creative studies, did not fail to provoke scepticism and criticism as well, however, as much research in scientific and historiographical fields. This, in turn, resulted in a considerable growth of interest in how to look at, think and do theatre, whose heritage is alive and current still today. The wealth of knowledge and discoveries acquired by this new branch of learning often attracted subsequent critical debate (both in agreement and disagreement). Now, a fresh look at its premises enables us to better re-evaluate its founding elements, the measure of its cultural substrate and the context in which it matured. In this article, therefore, I propose to analyse some stages in the evolution of Barba’s interests preceding the

*Anthropology* is the second journal founded by Barba in the course of his career: the first was the famous *Teatrets Teori og Teknikk* (“TTT”), published between 1965 and 1974. For a study of “TTT”, in dialogue with Barba himself, see Rietti 2004. It has to be recalled as well *The Open Page*, founded by Gilly Adams, Geddy Aniksdal, Maggie B. Gale and Julia Varley, active as a journal between 1996 and 2008 as a joint editorial project between Odin Teatret and The Magdalena Project, now freely available at: <https://www.themagdalena-project.org/en/content/open-page> (last access: 23 October 2020). Out of the journal’s working group came the “Open Page Publications”, latest of which to date is *Risking Hope* (Adams, Aniksdal, Gale and Varley, 2019).

8. In the theatre, once the separation between work and specialisation had taken place, Turner says, “special professions” and “vocations” sprang up that severed the ritual from its relationship with society: see Turner 1982, 114.

9. Among the merits of the working methods in ISTA, Taviani highlighted the overcoming of the opposition between the moment of the creative act and that of critical reflection, a separation that “when it is reactivated and emphasized, becomes one of the pillars of theatre as a school of approximation and mediocrity”: see Taviani 2009 (1994). In the ISTA sessions, overcoming the barriers between the knowledge specialisations was abandoned in favour of a hybrid and intercommunicating context; according to the scholar, the daily process of observation, learning and comparison, in fact, required individuals to abandon positions defending their personal notional baggage. See the 2007 interview with Taviani, *Voices from ISTA* by Claudio Coloberti in Århus (also available at Odin Teatret Archives).

10. On the “self-denial” required in a life in theatre, see the paragraph on *The Invisible Spectator* in Barba 1996, 86: “Abnegation is indispensable to a profession which is necessary above all to the one who chooses it”.

11. Barba argues his cultural concept of theatre in “Pueblos”, “cimarrones” in the essay *Theatre-Culture*, already quoted (now in Barba 1986, 195-212; Barba 1999, 175-93).

definition of theatre anthropology, retracing its ‘pre-scientific’ matrices, divided thematically and prior to the theories subsequently formulated.

In order to place the reflections that follow in context, it would be useful to first consider the origins of Barba’s interests. From 1954, when he started work as a welder in Norway, Barba devoted his free time to studying cultural anthropology and history of religions. He strove to understand his condition of emigrant. He was interested in descriptions and analyses of the different ways in which an individual thinks and acts in a certain social and cultural context, and in different states of consciousness, or “energies that determine changes of consciousness”.<sup>12</sup> Hence his readings on Hinduism, which prompted him to work his way as a sailor, to visit India in 1956. In 1964, when he returned to Norway after his theatre apprenticeship in Poland, Barba completed his studies at Oslo University, obtaining a degree in French and Norwegian literature and in history of religions, with a thesis on Sufism and on mysticism in Islamic culture.

The valuable archival material conserved at Odin Teatret, available to researchers thanks to the work of collection and organisation carried out in recent decades,<sup>13</sup> make it possible to take a close look at the vast extent of Barba’s reading. This clearly reveals the roots of his previous interests in individual and collective behaviour and energy changes on his future research in theatre anthropology. Which fundamental questions drove the director’s research, at first on an individual level, from the second half of the 1970s? In the next paragraph I consider some preparatory material from 1978-1980, examining recurring areas of research that gave rise to this extremely fruitful initiative.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. From third theatre to theatre anthropology

Barba had behind him eighteen years of intense activity forming his theatrical experience (including the periods between January and December 1961 at the Theatre School in Warsaw, and January 1962-May 1964 with Jerzy Grotowski’s “13 Rows” in Opole<sup>15</sup>)

12. From a conversation with Barba, 20 December 2020.

13. Mirella Schino, in collaboration with Francesca Romana Rietti and Valentina Tibaldi, coordinated the work of organising the Odin Teatret Archives. For consultation it is now possible to use her precious *Odin Teatret Archives* (Schino 2018). The archive material cited in this article belong to the ISTA Series of the Barba Fonds (Barba-ISTA series, b. 1).

14. For an estimate of the number of people involved in the history of ISTA, I counted a total of 1,333 names enrolled in the list of “participants” in the various editions, from 1980 to 2016, in appearances; if the other categories (artistic staff, scientific staff, special guests, etc.) are added, the number rises to the considerable figure of almost 2,000 (some of whom took part in several editions, as did the participants). The figure is approximate and does not consider the large audience that attended each single symposium, estimated according to Julia Varley at an average of about two hundred people. To all this must be added the participants in the activities of the Eurasian Theatre University.

15. For an account of this period see Barba 1965, 153-65, where the director retraces the essential traits of Grotowski’s archetypal research in those years and declares the need for radical reform of the theatre, lamenting the immobility of the art (“there is nothing creative done on stage - only sterile repetition of worn-out formulas and hybrid styles that try to look ‘modern’ by exploiting the discoveries of other art forms”). In October-November 1978 Barba again renewed his criticism of contemporary theatre: “The ‘science’ of theatre has not yet even had its Copernican revolution. It seems that men revolve around the immovable lands of theatrical aesthetics and ideologies, and not around the men whose concrete history generated them” (Barba 2019, 57).

before he founded ISTA. In the five years before ISTA was formed, Odin Teatret had had its international baptism, following participation in some important events, including the Venice Theatre Biennials of '69, '72 and above all '75. But in an article of 1977, entitled *La mutazione* and published in Turin in the journal *Quarta Parete*,<sup>16</sup> Barba focussed attention on other events involving Odin, especially on time spent in Salento in 1974 and on the journey to South America in 1976.<sup>17</sup> Chronologically, the theoretical formulation of theatre anthropology dates from three years after one of Barba's most famous short essays, on *Third Theatre*,<sup>18</sup> written during Odin Teatret's stay in Belgrade in 1976 for the International Meeting of Theatre Research, organised that year by BITEF (Belgrade International Festival) in collaboration with the Theatre of Nations. The essay<sup>19</sup> was swiftly adopted as a manifesto by a broad base of theatre groups and its success bears witness to the strong sense of belonging to a concept of theatre laboratory across various linguistic and cultural areas. It defined a new way of conceiving the professional ideal, and of creating an innovative system of production, not based exclusively on performance.<sup>20</sup> After outlining the coordinates of the "archipelago" of groups of the Third Theatre, Barba addressed the fundamental question of the actor's presence.<sup>21</sup> In his view, the importance of this element went beyond the time on stage and determined a more concentrated vision of existence: "theatre" - he wrote - "is a means to find their own way of being present [...] seeking more human relationships".<sup>22</sup> Within this context, the impact of *training*, which was elevated to a "spiritual exercise", worked progressively upon the individual's life, transforming it from within.

The actors first looked to by Barba were, naturally, his fellow travellers at Odin Teatret; their paths, individual and as a group, wove the network of experiences within which the director's thinking grew and was tested on a daily basis. Barba has often acknowledged his debt to the actors close to him. In the case of theatre anthropology, he has made it abundantly clear, indicating the essential starting point for elaborating all subsequent

16. The article *La mutazione* is now contained in Barba 2014, 156-60.

17. For a study of Odin's experience in South America, see Masgrau 2001. In 1987, between 6 and 12 April, the important Encuentro Internacional de Teatro Antropológico was held in the city of Bahía Blanca: a 'barter' involving, in addition to Odin Teatret, Teatro Potlach, Grupo Farfa of Iben Nagel Rasmussen and César Brie, the Teatro Tascabile of Bergamo and Richard Fowler's Canada Project. See de Toro 1988, 91-7.

18. Barba 1999, 169-70. In the afore mentioned *Corsa dei contrari*, after criticising the production system of art (Barba 2019, 47), Barba contextualises his essay on *Third Theatre* as an attempt to interpret the reality of marginalisation of theatre groups and a point of arrival of individual questions gathered up to that moment (Barba 2019, 49).

19. See also Watson 1993 and, by the same author, the chapter *The Third Theatre: a legacy of independence* in Watson 2002, 197-220.

20. In a document presented to the Holstebro Cultural Service in February 2020, entitled *Søgen efter mening og brød* ("The search for meaning and bread"), Barba reaffirmed his concept of Laboratory Theatre as an alternative production system to official theatres, in close relationship with its community and not solely intended for the creation of performances (OTA 2, Odin Collection - Activities-D Series - 2020).

21. For a discussion on the construction of the performer's presence in theatre anthropology, see the chapter on *Organicity* in the *Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* (Barba and Savarese 2005, 206-14) with essays by Barba (*Organicity, presence, scenic bios*), Mirella Schino ("Organic and natural") and Marco De Marinis (*At work with physical actions: the double articulation*). *The performer's bios* was the focus of the 10<sup>th</sup> session of ISTA in Copenhagen: for an account of this see Falletti 1996, 396-401.

22. See the essay on *Third Theatre* in Barba 1999, 169-70.



theories.<sup>23</sup> If the intercultural perspective had interested Barba from the very start, in 1978-79, before the first session of ISTA, it underwent considerable expansion, thanks to time spent by the actors in various parts of the world (Haiti, India, Bali, Brazil<sup>24</sup>). Some of those artistic acquisitions went into performances - the musical *à la Odin* of *The Million* (1979-84),<sup>25</sup> staged along with *Brecht's Ashes*<sup>26</sup> (1980-84).

The synthesis of research and direction, already touched upon in seminars in the 1960s, was given full expression by Barba in the latter part of the 1970s. The vast quantity of material conserved at the Odin Teatret Archives bears witness to intellectual methods of enquiry not unlike those used in working with the actors. Of particular note is the accumulation of a superabundance of preparatory material, beyond all logic of 'production efficiency' or saving, which obliges theorising by excess and overturns the principle of the maximum result with the minimum effort.<sup>27</sup> Along the way, an encyclopaedic type of culture was forming, in directions unheard of at the time, in its way of looking at the actor physiology, anatomy, research into the muscular and neurological systems... these were just some of the fields in which Barba read the latest scientific literature, acquiring articles in journals and international convention proceedings in several languages. The numerous underlining and marginal notes on the study material enable us to review the texts in the light of what can be seen as the reader's 'sub-score', so that today we can observe the progressive refinement of themes that were to feature strongly in the writings on theatre anthropology.

The material in the Barba Fonds on ISTA opens with reading notes on *Yoga. Méthode de réintégration* (1951),<sup>28</sup> the first book of French historian Alain Daniélou (1907-1994).<sup>29</sup> The notes, in English, contain typewritten observations about the art of yoga, which

23. "I would not have understood Asian theatre, its principles, its profound experiences, its 'secrets', without working with the actors of Odin Teatret on a daily basis. It was this constant practice that gave me eyes to see theatrical realities that usually seem too different from our own to be able to dialogue with them" (Barba 2019, 183).

24. See Kuhlmann and Ledger 2019, 169. In that same period, some actors stopped in Struer, fifteen kilometres from Holstebro (see Barba 2019, 18).

25. Conceived between Denmark (Holstebro) and Peru (Lima, Ayacucho), *The Million* was performed 223 times between September 1978 and October 1984, with the participation of a large group of actors who took part: Torben Bjelke, Roberta Carreri, Toni Cots, Tom Fjordefalk, Tage Larsen, Else Marie Laukvik, Francis Paradeilhan, Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Silvia Ricciardelli, Gustavo Riondet, Ulrik Skeel, Julia Varley, Torgeir Wethal.

26. For a study of the piece see, among others, Schino 1999, 186-96. A year after the debut of the performance Barba's book, *Il Brecht dell'Odin* was published (Barba 1981). As Schino noted in 1984, the last year of the Brecht run, two more performances were created at Odin: *El romancero de Edipo*, monologue with Toni Cots, and *Marriage with God*, with Iben Nagel Rasmussen and César Brie (Schino 1999, 193).

27. On "waste of energy" in the actor's work, see Barba 1995, 15. Considering the abundance of reading matter, Barba was rather more frugal in the use of quotations in writing, adhering to a rigorous principle of essentiality and at the same time of creativity. In this regard, Lluís Masgrau has called Barba's writing a "language of stained glass", capable of creating new forms, with every turn of the kaleidoscope: see letter from Masgrau of 8 December 1992 to Taviani preserved at OTAs (Odin-Environment, b. 4; Schino 2015, 203). In the essay *La visión teatral cifrada en la obra escrita de Barba* Masgrau laments the absence of studies dedicated to Barba's "written work" (Masgrau 2014, 381-92); with the exception, adds Masgrau, of Taviani's article, *Premessa cubana. Il 'romanzo che non c'è' e le 'opere scelte' di Eugenio Barba*, in which the Italian scholar identifies the origin of some principles of theatre anthropology in Barba's writing in the 1960s (Taviani 2004, 117-55).

28. See Daniélou 1951 (for the English edition, see *Yoga. The method of re-integration*, Johnson, London 1949).

29. The photocopy of an article in Danish by Ralf Normann, entitled *Strukturalismen*, without annotations or underlining, is conserved as an extract from no. 4 of the 1979 journal *Horisont* (not covered in this article).

had interested Barba since his early studies on Hinduism in Oslo (later shared with Grotowski<sup>30</sup>), and his solo trip to Kerala in 1963.<sup>31</sup> Barba specifically noted references to the six Daršana, the “points of view, or principal methods as essential approaches to the problem of reality”: *sankhya* (cosmological point of view, governed by the method of intellectual knowledge), *vaisheshika* (naturalistic view, method of sensory experience), *nyaya* (logical, dialectic method), *yoga* (re-integrative, method of mental control of the senses and inner faculties), *mimansa* (ritualistic, based on the deistic study of sacred texts), *vedanta* (metaphysical, method of metaphysical speculation, non-dualistic). In the reading notes, passages are highlighted dealing with the figure of the researcher (*sabdaka*), the apprentice on the pathway to knowledge. Further passages highlight the etymology of the word *hatha* (*ha*: sun and *tha*: moon); the significance of the rhythmic repetition of *mantras* (*japa*) and the identification of the base of the spine (*kundalini*) as the seat of energy; *laya-yoga*, that is the process of awakening energy and its journey through the six centres of the “subtle” body, up to the crown of the head, where the encounter with the Supreme Being takes place; finally, the definition of the teacher (*guru*), which may be rendered as he or she who “dispels the darkness”, but also, in Daniélou’s study, as a sort of parental figure and sole point of reference for the student, who should listen only to the words spoken by his teacher<sup>32</sup> (later, following the lessons of the Balinese dancer I Made Pasek Tempo, Barba was to declare “the guru knows nothing”<sup>33</sup>).

A further work of psychological nature, significant for its interest in the figure of the researcher, was a Danish article of 1972 by Ellen Bach, devoted to “creativity in theory and in practice” (*Kreativitet i teori og praksis*<sup>34</sup>). Here, Barba gave his attention

30. In his first book of 1965, *Alla ricerca del teatro perduto. Una proposta dell'avanguardia polacca* (Barba 1965, 120), Barba had focused on Hatha yoga and in particular on the “study of the changes taking place in the organism, specifically the study of the relationship between position and movement, breathing, heart rhythm and the search for the balance barrier”. In 1963 Barba was particularly active in disseminating Grotowski’s ideas across Europe: see Perrelli 2005, 11.

31. Barba’s interest in Asian cultures and religions dates from the early years of his emigration to Norway. In 1956 he had embarked as a sailor for India: he wanted to visit Ramakrishna’s house in Calcutta, which had become his point of reflection in Oslo after reading the biography by Romain Rolland (*La Vie de Ramakrishna*: Rolland 1929). It was this interest in Hinduism that was the first connection between Grotowski and Barba, who had remained ‘indifferent’ to the first performance he had witnessed by the Polish director. See Barba 2004, 22-3. In 1963, he had gone in search of ‘Indian theatre’, which at the time was not very popular in the West, and had ‘discovered’ the training and performances of kathakali in Kerala. For a reconstruction of Barba’s relationship with Asian theatre traditions, see the introductory essay by Lluís Masgrau, *Eugenio Barba and traditional Asian theatres*, in Barba 2015, 9-36. On the evolution of Barba’s interests in kathakali, even during the 1980s, see Watson 1988, 49-60 (in particular, 54 et seq.). See also Barba’s answer to Kermit G. Dunkelberg on the influence of kathakali on Grotowski, originally published in *Land of Ashes and Diamonds. My Apprenticeship in Poland* (Barba 1999).

32. A discussion of the significance of the master (*guru*), and his relationship with the pupil (*sisya*), occupies the first part of the *Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, with an essay by Rosemary Jeanes Antze (see *Guru as parent, honoured preceptor; Guru-kula, study in the guru’s home; Guru-dakshina, gifts and fees; Ekalavya, disciple extraordinaire* in Barba and Savarese 2005, 28-31).

33. Barba’s reformulation of the notion of guru is contained in a passage from *The Paper Canoe* (“the guru knows nothing”), where Barba describes a work session with the Balinese dancer I Made Pasek Tempo, present from the first edition of ISTA in Bonn): see Barba 1995, 92.

34. Bach 1972.



to a chapter on the “responsibility” of the researcher (*Forskeren og hans ansvar*<sup>35</sup>), containing an examination of four different intellectual typologies. Beyond this classification, the “researcher of creativity” (*Kreativitetsforskeren*) was identified in a completely different, perilous and uncertain path, placed between the theoretical and the practical researcher. Driven by the desire to “see new things and get to know new places”, the researcher of creativity would pursue a type of knowledge whose points of origin and destination were found in his own self. Having decided to explore the possibilities of human beings, in fact, he would find himself involved in the research with his own body and soul, making of himself an investigative laboratory. As for the practical and the theoretical researcher, the author added, both would certainly fail as, in addition to their ever incomplete approach, they would infallibly have an idiosyncratic relationship with thought. While the researcher of creativity risked falling by the wayside, at the opposite extreme there were the ‘safer’ paths of a predetermined research, aimed at satisfying the expectations and opinions of others. Yet such approaches, at best, would lead the researcher along already trodden, short-lived paths; and though he did his utmost to publicise his results, he would see research as a pretext and, ultimately, a pretence or an illusion.

It is often reiterated that theatre anthropology is not a lesser branch of cultural anthropology and should not be confused with it, having its own specific qualities and its own critical autonomy.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, because of its underlying, vast transversal heritage, it runs across areas of knowledge and establishes interdisciplinary dialogues in many directions. On the subject of ethnology, Odin Teatret’s time spent in the “land of remorse” is well known and documented, from their time in Carpignano (Salento) in 1974 when, after an illuminating experience in Sardinia, the idea of “barter” was developed as a method of exchange between the group and the local community, their hosts.<sup>37</sup> In those same years, Ernesto De Martino’s essays were read, from which the Italian director drew inspiration for the cultural rediscovery of his origins.<sup>38</sup> It is no surprise therefore, to find among the ISTA material in the Barba Fond, extensive, detailed reading notes on *Il mondo magico* (1948), a work that may certainly be included in the Barba’s list of *libri peculiari*. Here, too, the typewritten notes trace a useful conceptual map within the volume and its prolegomena, underlining its influence on Barba’s interests.

Distancing historicist ethnology from the “futility of purely naturalistic knowledge”<sup>39</sup>

35. Bach 1972, 9-15.

36. In the opening remarks of *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, Barba specifies the principal field of investigation of the discipline as “a new field of study applied to the human being in an organised performance situation”: see Barba and Savarese 2011, 5. See also Barba 1993, 24: “Let us avoid equivocation. Theatre Anthropology is not concerned with applying the paradigms of cultural anthropology to theatre and dance”. For a reflection on the relationship with cultural anthropology see Giacchè 1995, 37-64.

37. Barba outlined the modalities of barter in an interview for Danish television in 1974, the transcript of which was published in no.10-11 of *Biblioteca Teatrale* that same year (now available in *Due Tribù. Intervista con Eugenio Barba a cura di Stig Krabbe Barfoed* in Barba 2014, 101-103). On Odin’s experiences in Salento, see D’Urso and Taviani 1977. For a recent study of Odin’s experiences in Sardinia and Salento, see Santoro 2017.

38. See on this Perrelli 2005, 5. A new edition of De Martino’s book *Sud e magia* (“South and magic”) (first ed. Feltrinelli, Milan 1959) edited by Fabio Dei and Antonio Fanelli, was reprinted by Donzelli (2015).

39. De Martino 1958, 11.

and participating in the reform of a “wider humanism”<sup>40</sup> was one of the objectives of anthropological research, affirmed by De Martino and underlined by Barba, who was not unfavourable to a historicist perspective for intangible traditions of knowledge, too. In his reading notes Barba first made a long list of bibliographic references around specific topics of interest, such as, for example, those relating to firewalking in the Fiji Islands in late 19<sup>th</sup> century sources.<sup>41</sup> Then, regarding methodology, he highlighted the line of conduct postulated by De Martino for the man of science, compared with the empiricist and the epistemologist: “The naturalist must always remain faithful to the great precept that nature can only be controlled by obeying it”.<sup>42</sup> Lastly, he transcribed a passage from *Il Mondo magico* on the implications of breaking taboos in the religious system of the Inuit and on the consequent restorative action of the shaman, extracting from De Martino’s text the bibliographical source - here, Danish-Greenlandic anthropologist Knud Rasmussen.<sup>43</sup>

The majority of notes were taken from the second chapter - *Dramma storico del mondo magico* (“The Historical Drama of the Magic World”) - the director focusing firstly on the description of the state of *latab*, as the Malays defined it:<sup>44</sup> the phenomenon of loss of autonomy of the self by the indigenous for periods “of varying lengths and different degrees”. This was also called *olon* by the Tungus. On the typewritten page, Barba added by hand “holonism: Shirokogoroff” (the Russian scholar who had first proposed that term). Within this state of consciousness, caused by an emotion or a great surprise, the *latab* individual would react to phenomena around him by passively imitating them, with gestures and movements, in a state of “echokinesis” which, in some cases, was even witnessed as a collective phenomenon.<sup>45</sup> Correlated with and distinct from *olon* was the state of *amok*, “found among almost all Malaysians”,<sup>46</sup> consisting of a convulsive “storm of impulses”, often at high risk to the safety of others, deriving from the loss of presence. Faced with such psychic states involving the dissipation of presence and the affirmation of a form of *koinonia*, the individual could react with “visible resistance”, produced by a “characteristic anxiety”, which would express “the will to be there as a presence against the risk of not being there”.<sup>47</sup> In other words, it would have allowed the emergence of a “redeemed and consolidated presence”, configured by the “creation of defined cultural forms”.<sup>48</sup> In the struggle between abandonment and reconfiguration of the presence, the

40. Grotowski had seen the need for a “renewed humanism” in a generational frame, for those born in the 1930s, through the vision of *Rebel without a Cause*: see Perrelli 2014, 139.

41. On fire ceremonies in the Fiji Islands, Barba annotates from De Martino bibliographic references to Thomson 1894 and Hocken 1898, 667-72.

42. De Martino 1958, 66-7.

43. Rasmussen 1932.

44. At the beginning of his reading notes on *Il mondo magico*, Barba had noted the bibliographic reference to the work of Russian anthropologist Sergei Mikhailovich Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*, (Shirokogoroff 1935), adding the following introductory note: “*Poteri paranormali di conoscenza degli sciamani*” (“Para-normal power of knowledge of the shamans”) (OTA, Barba-ISTA, b. 1, 290).

45. See De Martino 1958, 91.

46. De Martino 1958, 94.

47. De Martino 1958, 94-5.

48. De Martino 1958, 95.

magical world was at work, “in the variety of its cultural forms”, within which “its day in human history” arose.<sup>49</sup>

Barba linked the above quotation to the discussion on *atai* among the indigenous people of Mota, revisited by De Martino from the observations of Codrington,<sup>50</sup> where the word referred to the “reflection” of the individual: a “second self”, intended both as an experience and as a representation, undergoing emotions of amazement and wonder. The individual and his *atai*, “linked by an intimate solidarity of destiny”, “thrive, suffer and die together”.<sup>51</sup> The redemption of presence was therefore the result of the struggle of being there in the face of risking disappearance and arose “when the presence is called to an unusually high effort”.<sup>52</sup> The risks inherent in the path of the man of magic, in his “solitary wanderings”,<sup>53</sup> were only mitigated by a necessary “cultural creation and using an accredited tradition”: a “fight against the process of disintegration”, summarised Barba.<sup>54</sup> He then noted the list of six points of the redemption process referred to by De Martino, according to Yamana forms of spontaneous call (from disintegration of the person to the vision shaped by mythical themes, to the choice of a “spirit guide”, with whom to establish socially useful relationships<sup>55</sup>).

The techniques for deliberately provoking the trance state of consciousness were also much underlined. Noting the specific passages in Gusinde and in Shirokogoroff, Barba dwelt particularly on the role of singing as a way of access to the “second personality” associated with a “self-suggestive state, a sort of self-hypnosis, in which the sorcerer achieves the accomplishments of his profession”.<sup>56</sup> Barba did not record, in this case, the reference to the complementary reaction in the listener,<sup>57</sup> but moved on to the actual achievement of the sorcerer’s faculties, which was entirely completed when, “after a certain time, it is no longer he [the sorcerer] who sings, but his second personality, which takes over the chanting and continues it, so that the sorcerer lends only his voice for the chanting”.<sup>58</sup>

49. De Martino 1958, 95.

50. Robert Henry Codrington, in whose work, however, De Martino found elements of ethnocentrism and the inability to distinguish the object of research from preconceptions originating in his own culture: see De Martino 1958, 99. The 1990 performance *Talabot* by Odin Teatret, enacting the life of the Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup, did not fail to show the limits and contradictions of anthropology as an exclusive field of study. Note the essay by Hastrup, anthropologist at the University of Copenhagen, on *Talabot* entitled *Out of Anthropology: The Anthropologist as an Object of Dramatic Representation* (Hastrup 1992, 327-45). Her experience, staged by Barba in *Talabot*, was also the subject of a long analysis on the role of the anthropologist in McLean 2017, 3-95.

51. De Martino 1958, 101.

52. De Martino 1958, 104.

53. De Martino 1958, 105.

54. Barba-ISTA, b1, 293.

55. De Martino 1958, 108.

56. Barba notes the bibliographic reference to the essay by Martin Gusinde, *Die Feuerland-Indiäner*, (Gusinde 1935, 753), also mentioned in De Martino 1958, 109. In the context of ISTA, as Janne Risum recalls in her essay *L'acteur dans la savane*, Taviani spoke of the “second nature” achieved by the actor through training: see Risum, 2021, 188

57. “Even a simple listener felt a nervous excitement during which it seemed that he was losing control of his mind”: De Martino 1958, 109.

58. De Martino 1958, 110 (see also Barba-ISTA, b1, 294).

To enable this, no special facilitations were needed, but a process of inner concentration in which darkness and obscurity also played a useful role (“the presence of darkness has precisely the significance of helping the world to disappear, removing it from sight”; “the shaman’s activities usually take place in the dark”<sup>59</sup>). Following on from this discourse, Barba then highlighted a passage on the importance of tradition, as a guarantee of the stratification over time of techniques acquired, to prevent dissipation of the “experience of various generations”.<sup>60</sup>

Having dominated “evil” (the trigger of agonising instability) by means of the trance (not, however, uncontrolled possession) the magic drama thus allowed *healing*.<sup>61</sup> Within this soteriological perspective, perhaps through a period of solitude (essential condition in the context of theatre-laboratory<sup>62</sup>), it became a possible way of preparing precisely that instability, from which the process of construction of presence would then take off. Here appears the figure of the intermediary, found across many cultures, also considered and contemplated: he who has a problematic relationship with being, and “who has the power to give himself his own presence”, can reveal to the people the way to salvation. Barba lingered on this passage, observing how De Martino configured the sorcerer in terms of the “magical Christ”.<sup>63</sup> As we have seen, theatrical representation of presence, constructed objectively, was also reflected in theoretical sources where it was examined in its absence, as a premise for the birth of culture. Particular attention was given to the notion of “redemption”, consubstantiated in experience and representation, in the face of the fleetingness of presence alone. Barba also recorded De Martino’s critique of the “narrowness of the historiographical horizon”,<sup>64</sup> noting the content for future consideration. For the anthropologist “the historiographic categories used to understand the historical formations of our civilisation (or of others more or less similar to it) turned out to be inadequate for within the magical world”,<sup>65</sup> but Barba saw a similar situation as valid for the world of theatre. He said this in 1978, in the paragraph on *Immagini antistoriche* in his essay *Teatro-cultura*, where he first redimensioned the position of critics.<sup>66</sup> Subsequently, in 1993, in the chapter on *Notes for the perplexed (and for myself)*

59. Shirokogoroff 1935, 363. Darkness is a definite tool in Barba’s practical work. Inspired by the research of Russian neuropsychologist Alexander Luria, the barn on the Holstebro farm was transformed in 1966 into an empty black space, where spectators lost their orientation. For many years, it was the custom at Odin Teatret to work at night when rehearsing a new performance (from a conversation with Barba, December 11, 2020).

60. De Martino 1958, 113.

61. De Martino 1958, 128. On the shaman’s “cure” of the “anguish” of the individual through his own “cultural forms”, see also Berardini 2009, 8. Barba was not interested in the therapeutic aspect, but in the fact that there are latent energies in the individual, and therefore in the actor, which can be activated under certain conditions (from a conversation with Barba, 11 December 2020).

62. Barba has repeatedly seen in the initial solitude of the theatre-laboratory the necessary prerequisite for development of the profession and acquisition of awareness of oneself and one’s role. See for example the essay on *Corsa dei contrari*, where he states: “my colleagues and I, after years of isolation, of ‘laboratory’, discovered almost suddenly that we meant something that was important to many”: Barba 2019, 83.

63. De Martino 1958, 122.

64. De Martino 1958, 192.

65. De Martino 1958, 192.

66. “Written testimony is often not a testimony to the thing being looked at, an understanding of it. It only bears witness to a way of looking and its conventions. It lasts, however, and for this very fact it prolongs itself

in *The Paper Canoe* he took fresh issue with the generalisations made by the history of theatre, within whose formulas “the sense of irreducible presence” was lost.<sup>67</sup>

The reading notes ended with a textual transcription from the last sentence of *Il mondo magico*, where De Martino had summarised the themes of the battle against alienation, the underlying basis of the struggle against this process and the ultimate goal of presence: “the modern battle against every form of alienation of the products of human labour presupposes as a historical condition the human struggle to save the elementary basis of this struggle, *the presence guaranteed in the world*”.<sup>68</sup>

### 3. The actor's *bios*

As in his theatrical work, in Barba's readings, too, the physical and the interior levels coexist and intertwine epistemologically. Thus, in addition to essays on the individual's inner life, numerous articles on physiology were scrutinised by the director, the amount of underlining and notes showing the kind of attention that must have been dedicated to them. On the whole, what transpires is an approach nourished by lively curiosity, which does not necessarily aim at elaborating new normative theories of art, but rather seeks ideas and reflections useful for the director's work, in approaching the new scientific discoveries almost with natural wonder, but always in line with his concept of theatre as a way of “being present” and of researching “more humane relationships between man and man”.

Barba therefore proves to be not only to be a protagonist but also an attentive observer of his times, capable of grasping the elements of innovation and of deriving practical syntheses that are useful for his own field. To question its validity, some of his critics, still not completely convinced, had to address the points of interest he had found at the mere level of science, when in any case their function was already complete, and behindhand compared to the progress made by the director. But with the field of action (the theatre) unavailable, every theoretical speculation is forced *in primis* to shift the analysis towards areas extraneous to the terrain on which that discourse was promulgated, losing sight of the inner needs with which the participants had looked at things, from the oscillating and intercommunicating space of their “floating island”.

Within this broad thematic area, Barba was extremely interested in some specific elements. These included the analysis of the complex phenomenon of fatigue, crucial for the director and his actors in the context of the theatre-laboratory,<sup>69</sup> which could

by imposing its vision. Actors, of course, do not write ‘reviews’ of their audiences, nor do they - as a rule - leave written testimonies about the relationships within the group, about the social dimension of their group”: Barba 2019, 54-5.

67. See Barba 2019, 63. Referring to the categorisations typical of history Barba writes: “Under those formulas, under those collective subjects, the living memory is suffocated. We lose the sense of the presence and full of contrasts of men and women who, by socialising their needs and personal visions, their biographical wounds, their loves and repulsions and even their selfishness and loneliness, invented the sense of theatre, built piece by piece the mental geography and history in which our theatrical ships navigate.”

68. De Martino 1958, 258.

69. Tatiana Chemi has recently related how, in the meetings of the Eurasian Theatre University in Scilla in 2003, Barba had derived the notion of theatre-laboratory from the Latin *labor*, thus indicating a “theatre

be viewed from a wide range of perspectives. In the ISTA sessions, this matter was examined embracing the diverse perspectives of the Asian masters and the participating actors, where the former believed that fatigue should never be shown on stage, while the latter were actually accustomed to showing it, in demonstration of a good job done.<sup>70</sup>

Barba read the latest works, freshly printed in those years, concerning the impact of the automation of work in contemporary society and its effects on the human organism, finding much of interest in a Danish 1978 study in which some significant critical issues were examined in terms of the “interactions between physical and mental tension”,<sup>71</sup> such as the stratification of erroneous postures and the negative influence exerted by monotony.<sup>72</sup> The technological advances of automation, with ever less involvement of the body (despite overload of some peripheral parts), led to new imbalances, difficult to analyse, given their fragmentary cause,<sup>73</sup> with unprecedented repercussions on the nervous system, on the perception of fatigue and on pain. Awareness of this kind of problem, legacy of the social and production systems, gained considerable importance and endorsed the pursuit of a *via negativa* in training actors, whose organicity seemed increasingly undermined by the rhythms and habits of contemporary society.

For an *ad hoc* discussion on fatigue Barba turned his attention to another essay of those years, by C. Cameron and still widely circulating in the literature, entitled *A theory of fatigue*. Published in the journal *Ergonomics* in 1973, it contained numerous reflections on fatigue, understood as a protective function of the organism, and examined, among other aspects, for the role exercised on it by anxiety.<sup>74</sup> Not only did this state of mind induce an increase in fatigue, but - Barba underlined in the text - it also triggered a vicious circle in the individual that led to increasingly stubborn attempts to repeat the exercise, with a consequent deterioration in the quality of the activity itself.<sup>75</sup> An interesting hypothesis, reported by Cameron, was that the peak of fatigue might occur after the moment of greatest expenditure of effort, and not during the effort itself. In other words, it was possible *to be too busy to feel tired*,<sup>76</sup> a conclusion of considerable importance if one thinks of the often exhausting habits typical of theatrical life, but also

of fatigue”: see Chemi 2017, 197-202. In his *Corsa dei contrari*, Barba says of the actors: “I marvel at their continuous research, their stubbornness, their courage to work every day, from morning to night, without, at times, appearing to be a fruit of their labours” (cf. Barba 2019, 84).

70. In his writings on theatre anthropology, Barba offered a further viewpoint on fatigue in the emblematic case of giving thanks in Noh theatre, with the expression *otsukarasama* (translatable as “you tired yourself greatly for me”): see Barba 2019, 31.

71. Saaby 1978, 14.

72. An understanding of the effects of monotony and boredom was also advanced in an older study of 1957 by Woodburn Heron (Heron 1957, 52-6), read by Barba and conserved among archival material relating to the “ISTA Series”.

73. Saaby 1978, 9.

74. Cameron 1973, 67-82. In his “theory of fatigue” Cameron had highlighted the benefit of short periods of interruption between phases of more intense work. Also of crucial importance was the observation that fatigue experienced by an individual should be contextualised in the totality of habits of the person throughout his life, on which it has influence (“the fatigue problem is embedded in the whole life pattern of those who suffer from it”: Cameron 1973, 71).

75. Cameron 1973, 73.

76. Cameron 1973, 73.



of the repercussions in terms of training and exercises. Possible strategies for reducing the impact of fatigue lay in the introduction of new stimuli, in maintaining interest in the subject, and in the challenge posed by new tasks. Thanks to such incentives, the individual would be able to bear the burden of fatigue longer, counteracting its effect.<sup>77</sup>

Some readings on neurology revealed an opportunity for exploration, which at the end of the 1970s, thanks also to a type of discursive writing, appeared less focused on the prevailing use of more recent technicisms. So Barba was able to read the transcript of a lecture at the University of Minnesota in February 1978 by the neuroscientist Marcel Kinsbourne, *Mapping a behavioral cerebral space*, subsequently published as an article in the *International Journal of Neuroscience*. He underlined in pen references to the passage of impulses from one hemisphere in the brain to another, examined as a highly interconnected system.<sup>78</sup> Then, he noted with interest the mirroring of this complementarity process in the body, too,<sup>79</sup> and the role played on it by speaking, an act capable of significantly altering balance.<sup>80</sup> Nor did he fail to notice Kinsbourne's observation that, for example, driving a vehicle - a condition of optimal body use (and here Barba's underlining began) - required carrying out one action with one arm and a different one with the opposite leg.<sup>81</sup>

With equal curiosity he also read a study of 1971 on the relationships between *Eye movements and visual perception* by David Noton and Lawrence Stark,<sup>82</sup> an article full of potentially useful indications for more effectively organising action and space on stage. Not surprisingly, Barba's attention focused on the premise of the study ("[...] the ears accept rather passively whatever signals come their way, but the eyes are continually moving as they scan and inspect the details of the visual world": see Noton and Stark 1971, 263). He then highlighted passages relating to internal representation and the creation of images by the brain ("the memory system of the brain must contain an internal representation of every object that is to be recognised"<sup>83</sup>). More underlining followed three pages later, on the internal representation of an object as an "assemblage of features"<sup>84</sup> or, better, a collage "of memory traces of features".<sup>85</sup>

Again, on the subject of physiology, he focused on a discussion on resistance training by the famous New Zealand athlete and coach Arthur Lydiard, contained in his 1978 book *Run, the Lydiard Way* (read by Barba in a Danish translation of 1980<sup>86</sup>), from which he highlighted a passage on breaking through the "steady state" and on the impact on

77. Cameron 1973, 78.

78. See Kinsbourne 1980, 45-50. On the functioning of the brain Barba also read an essay by Michael S. Gazzaniga, *The split brain in man* in "Scientific American" (Gazzaniga 1967, 24-9).

79. See Kinsbourne 1980, 8 (Barba-Ista, b1, 328).

80. In the passage underlined by Barba, referring to an experiment, Kinsbourne wrote: "Speaking and balancing being uncorrelated activities, closeness in functional space is disadvantageous" (Kinsbourne 1980, 8).

81. Kinsbourne 1980, 8

82. Noton and Stark 1971, 263-71 (this article is conserved as excerpted by Barba, who wrote the title of the journal by hand on the first page).

83. Noton and Stark 1971, 263.

84. Noton and Stark 1971, 266.

85. Noton and Stark 1971, 271.

86. Lydiard 1980.

the organism, through the production of energy.<sup>87</sup> With keener attention he examined a 1971 article by Jane Winearls, professor of dance at the University of Birmingham: *Posture: its function in efficient use of the human organism as a total concept*, presented on the occasion of the first *Symposium international de posturographie* which took place that year in Madrid. In this work, Barba was firstly interested in the author's professional status ("the point of view of a professor of dance is presented"); then, he lingered on some introductory remarks on the gaps in specialist learning of specific forms of training, from gymnastics to athletics. Winearls confirmed - and this is what seems to particularly interest Barba - that it was her practical experience that led her to the conclusion that the mere learning of physical techniques irremediably lacked the objective of personal growth and maturity in a broader sense (conclusion that led Winearls to abandon gymnastics in favour of dance).<sup>88</sup>

The director also examined the other lectures published in the proceedings of the Madrid posturography symposium of 1971. Thus, in a study by three researchers of the Institute of Hygiene and Labour Protection in Sofia<sup>89</sup> he found some important considerations on the effect exerted by the movement of the eyes on balance, as a consequence of the redistribution of muscle tone. The study showed, among other aspects, how looking upwards led to an increase in body sway, while closing the eyes led to a forward imbalance; and the tendency of human beings to fix their gaze on an axis inclined at about 30° degrees with respect to the horizontal plane<sup>90</sup> was confirmed. These observations, and their scientific evidence, could not but be of extreme interest, if one thinks of Barba's recognition of the crucial importance of balance, alterations of which, since Meyerhold, have been identified as one of the basic principles of constructing presence in the work of an actor.<sup>91</sup>

Along this line, and perhaps even more stimulating for the type of conclusions presented, was a study by J.-B. Baron titled *Tonic Postural Activity and Motor Imagination*,<sup>92</sup> presented at the same Madrid Symposium. The author offered new verification and practical application for the model of action-preparation of British scientist Charles Scott Sherrington, who had already demonstrated that muscular activity could also be activated through use of imagination alone. Based on this known fact, Baron had conducted a similar experiment shifting the object of analysis to the spectator, and had found that in the observer, too, it was possible to record postural variations, activated by both active and passive imagination.<sup>93</sup> The more practised and predisposed were the observers' bodies, the more frequently was this type of reflex

87. See Lydiard 1980, 43.

88. Winearls 1972, 99-101.

89. Gantchev, Draganova and Dunev 1972, 55-60.

90. Gantchev, Draganova and Dunev 1972, 59.

91. A detailed chapter is dedicated to balance in *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* (Barba and Savarese 2005, 32-51), where it is discussed through examples from different eras and cultures, from the *Commedia dell'Arte* to mime, up to Asian dances.

92. Baron 1972, 95-9.

93. Baron 1972, 97.

activation recorded.<sup>94</sup> Finally, a comparative study by a scholar from the University of Libreville, Monique Berthelot, examined the differences between the tonic-postural activities of European and African individuals, raising the question of the impact of culture and sociology on the postural typologies prevalent in different geographical areas. In the article by the Gabonese researcher Barba underlined “*L’activité tonique posturale est-elle fonction de la culture?*” (“Is the postural tonic activity dependent on the culture?”).<sup>95</sup>

## 4. Conclusion

The rationale for Barba’s readings should not be sought in a rigid scientific path for art. Rather, what emerges in this ‘preparatory’ phase of defining theatre anthropology is the participatory way in which the voices of different perspectives met, and were listened to. As Barba recalls in his new article, *Dancing Questions*, theatre anthropology was first formulated in Trappeto, Sicily, 11 May 1980,<sup>96</sup> and was reprised, a week later, in a lecture given at the University of Warsaw. The paper of that conference, entitled *First Hypotheses*, appeared in 1981 in various international publications, including the UNESCO ITI journal *Théâtre International*.<sup>97</sup> In it Barba discusses the three fundamental laws of “presence”: alteration of balance, the dynamics of opposites and “inconsistent consistency”. Jointly applied, and exemplified in a range of references from Asian theatre (kathakali theatre, Balinese dance, the Peking opera, kabuki and noh theatre), these laws laid the basis for overcoming the ordinary functioning of the human body, towards an extra-daily dimension and, consequently, towards “a whole new level of energy use”.

The ability to accommodate different disciplinary approaches, a hitherto rare combination, significantly broadened the range of horizons within which to consider the actor. A similar situation materialised in the sessions of ISTA, where experts and scholars from various disciplines gathered in conference, in a hybridising environment capable of breaking down the barriers between fields of knowledge. Thus, in the first session in Bonn, the participants received didactic material and bibliographies on various topics: “verbal and pre-verbal communication”, “comparative history of theatre pedagogy”, “sociology of the actor”, “comparative history of eastern and western theatre”, “group psychology”.<sup>98</sup> The positive effects of this mixing were often verified on both sides. For example, on the one hand, Barba recognised the debt towards theoretical methods used in science (and continued to read scientific essays in the years that followed<sup>99</sup>) while

94. Baron 1972, 98.

95. Berthelot 1976, 95-101 (the article also appeared in the “*Annales de l’Université nationale du Gabon*”, 1, 1977).

96. Barba 1983, 24-34.

97. Barba 1981, 11-8.

98. See the summary material on the first ISTA in Bonn, available on the Odin Teatret website: <https://odinteatret.dk/media/6050/1ista.pdf> (last consulted 26 December 2020).

99. Scientific readings occupied Barba throughout the 1980s. In addition to those cited here, see the 1983 essay by Jean-Pierre Changeux on *Homme Neuronal*, examined by Barba in particular for the chapter on the “theory of epigenesis”, within which he found scientific proof of the fact that “apprendre, c’est éliminer” (“to learn is to eliminate” : Changeux 1983, 327).



Dario Fo, Eugenio Barba, Katsuko Azuma and Sanjukta Panigrahi, ISTA 2, Volterra, Italy, 1981  
Photo: Nicola Savarese

Henri Laborit, in a speech given in Bonn on 25 October 1980, recounted his amazement aroused by observation of the work sessions.<sup>100</sup>

Contacts between Barba and Laborit, emblematic of the encounter between the arts of life and the life sciences, had already begun with the *Colloque sur les aspects scientifiques du théâtre* (Colloquium on the scientific aspects of theatre) organised by Jean-Marie Pradier in September 1979 in Karpacz, just before the creation of ISTA, in which Grotowski also took part.<sup>101</sup> From the three levels of the bio-systemic theory postulated

100. See the typescript, on headed paper of the “Odin Teatret. Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium for Skuespillerkunst”, entitled *Transcription de discours de Henri Laborit, ISTA Symposium, 25 octobre 1980*, 5, preserved at the Odin Teatret Archives (Odin Teatret Collection, Series Activities, b. 44), where Laborit says: “si j’étais resté chez moi, tout un aspect du théâtre oriental m’aurait été caché.” (“if I had stayed at home, a whole aspect of oriental theatre would have been hidden from me.”)

101. For a profile of Laborit, and in particular for the 1979 Karpacz Convention, see Pradier 1995, 13-7. In addition to Barba and Grotowski, also at the Karpacz conference were Włodzimierz Staniewski, Barrie Coghlan, David Goldsworthy, Noah Pikes, Roberto Bacci, Alain A. Barsacq and Janusz Degler. The conference was organised by Pradier in collaboration with Alina Obidniak, director of the Cyprian Kamil Norwid Theatre in Jelenia Góra.

by Laborit in the 1950s,<sup>102</sup> Barba drew inspiration for the “levels of organisation”,<sup>103</sup> which would strongly influence his conception of the material identity of the theatre, the body-mind of the actor, the technique, dramaturgy and communicative value of energy on stage.<sup>104</sup> The “revelation”<sup>105</sup> of the organisational levels resulting from the decisive encounter with Laborit then found in Pradier, organiser of the Polish conference, a fundamental indirect supporter and important interlocutor in the following years.<sup>106</sup> Still today Barba acknowledges Pradier as an essential “catalyst” figure of theatre anthropology, able to organise productive meetings and dialogues between theatre artists and scholars of various scientific disciplines, including biology, neuropsychology and acoustics. From this multidisciplinary mix, Barba conceived a new vision of theatre that, superseding earlier questions of psychology, sociology and economics, was open to examining the complexity of the development of *life* in the different levels of behaviour proposed by biology.

In addition to all this, a historiographic dimension was added to ISTA, thanks to which, to quote an expression used by Raimondo Guarino, “the historian and the actor stand in front of the wall of time, to interpret it and cross over it”.<sup>107</sup> Inheriting the experience and methods of theatre-laboratory (a theatre that “does not listen to the applause of its time”<sup>108</sup>), ISTA extended its unique characteristics by projecting its methodologies, work ethic and objectives within a new research framework. Thus, the daily apprenticeship with the various visiting masters, their technical explanations on improvisation, rhythm or the “sub-score” and the work demonstrations were combined with the characteristics typical of group theatre, such as the drive towards encounter with the other, the need for practical feedback in support of intellectual vivacity, the sharing of moments of life and the creation of a sense of community. Not for nothing Barba defines ISTA as “the military academy of Third Theatre”.<sup>109</sup>

The origins of theatre anthropology lie therefore in Barba’s attempt to understand his condition of emigrant through books of cultural anthropology, his interest in the changes

102. Pradier 1995, 15.

103. The “levels of organisation” articulate Barba’s well-known, above-mentioned book, *The Paper Canoe*, whose index is structured around various thematic areas (“organic dramaturgy as a level of organisation”, “narrative dramaturgy as a level of organisation”, “evocative dramaturgy as a level of organisation”).

104. In a speech recently delivered at the Honoris Causa ceremony in Greece, celebrated at the Old Parliament of Nafplion on 3 July 2019, Barba placed energy at the centre of theatre, capable of generating a message that, although pre-verbal, kinaesthetic-gestural and subliminal, is itself text and message: “Today I can affirm: theatre is energy. [...] It is a message of energy which cannot be verbalised, and yet we feel it is aimed specifically at us. This message is a text that we decipher with our entire organism and its different memories. This kinaesthetic-gestural and subliminal process corresponds to the different rhythms and natures of energy”.

105. From a conversation with Barba, 11 December 2020.

106. Pradier subsequently created “LIPS” (Laboratoire Interdisciplinaire des Pratiques Spectaculaires) and between the late 1980s and early 1990s organised several encounters in Saintes entitled “Emotions and complexity”. It was during one of these meetings that Julia Varley presented the work demonstration *Écho du silence*, from which Patrice Pavis’ article on the “sub-text” emerged, now republished in the first issue of the *Journal of Theatre Anthropology*.

107. Guarino 2014, 107.

108. Barba 2014, 87

109. From a conversation with Barba, 11 December 2020.

of consciousness and states of energy, the long autodidactic apprenticeship training his own actors and, at least in part, in the attitude of radical scepticism and rejection of the pre-established theatre and social order that has never departed Barba's thinking. Within this context, the director looked at the 'categories', the formulas within which the great 'ancestors' had been "dissolved", and, in return, he reflected on how to bring theatre work back to those enduring points, opening new areas of investigation for an objective construction of presence. Shared solitude and active 'asociality' appeared to him as necessary conditions for focusing on his theatre and its position in the world. These conditions also characterised the phases preceding the 'birth' of theatre anthropology, those stages whose study, rediscovered in the archives, can today shed new light on the genesis of this fundamental chapter of contemporary theatre. ■

Translation: Julia Campbell Hamilton

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