



Faces of the Future - Phantoms and Fictions, Holstebro Festuge 2014. Photo: Tommy Bay

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The Place of the Possible

Abstract: *The essay was published in Italian in Tecniche della rappresentazione e storiografia (1992), which collected material from the 6th session of ISTA held in Bologna in 1990. This text by Cruciani in the year of his death (1992) can be considered a summa of his continuous questioning on the not ephemeral nature of theatre and on the system of symmetries that he established existed between theatre practices and historiographic research. The author reflects how theatre is a field of investigation and argues why, from his point of view, theatre studies should be in a dialectical relationship with social, pedagogical, artistic, anthropological and historical studies. He identifies one of the values of theatre in its being a long-lasting category owing "its continuity and persistence in history because it does not produce works, but rather ways of operating".*

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For its claim to study the trans-cultural and pre-expressive level of theatrical creation, theatre anthropology has been accused of being ahistorical, of not taking into account cultural diversities across space and time. The topic of this essay, on the contrary, highlights how theatre anthropology substantiates a deeper and more dynamic dialectic in the knowledge of theatre.

For the theatre maker, the relationship with history is the foundation of one's identity and the search for what is possible. For the scholar of theatre culture, the direct experience of performance techniques illuminates and frees from prejudice (the use of concepts that are more often accepted rather than known) and conquers a 'point-of-view'. In both cases, at the foundation of these relationships lies the notion that Eugenio Barba, with his theatre anthropology, has posited as the basis of creative movement, both in performance practices and in historiography: learning to learn - that is, a knowing marked by amazement and difference, not just a recognising, void of perplexity and creativity.

Theatre practice needs the freedom that Meyerhold spoke of (to know many and diverse performance techniques, searching across time and space); it needs the astuteness sought by Brecht (those who are not familiar with tradition will end up falling back into it); it needs the *true* tradition pursued by Copeau: not the progressively degenerating repetition of habits, solutions and answers, but the "*tradition de la naissance*" (to recover that creative movement which presided creation - in this sense Copeau speaks with reference to Moliere's dramatic works, but the same concept is fundamental for both the art and the historiography of the theatre).

Theatre culture needs to become acquainted with the fundamental questions related to the human being in the situation of performance. It needs to operate at the different



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levels of organisation within the complexity of the theatre, and it needs to achieve points of view which allow it to know - that is to confront itself with - the globality of phenomena of which the theatre is an element, starting with its own identity.

The definition of the theatre (the 'what it is') is identified - in its concrete existence - by the precision and absoluteness of doing. In theatre studies and reflection, instead, such a definition remains subject to multiplicity and uncertainty. In historiography, the theatre never seems to be understood in and of itself: 'what is theatre?' is neither the question nor the answer of theatre studies; it is, if anything - to different degrees of awareness - an *a priori*, technically, an operative prejudice. In historiography, it appears to me that theatre always actualises and reveals itself as 'theatre and something else': and it is within such a dialectic relationship (theatre and...: representational requirements, expressive needs, society, commerce, utopia, behaviours, forms, visions, literature, music, the plastic and figurative arts, aesthetics, pedagogy, etc.) that I have always found the intellectual wealth and fascination of theatre studies. For this reason, the theatre, and theatre studies, are the dialectical place of convergence for situations and problems that are diverse in nature and in origin: the 'place of the possible'. This is also because, as has been pointed out, the theatre owes its continuity and persistence in history because it does not produce works, but rather ways of operating. Theatre works are the sum of the relationships that come into being in the aimed event, and of the forms in which such relationships are realised: what 'remains' are merely partial or sectoral traces, such as the play text (when there is one), the architectural structures used, scenic designs, reviews, the spectators' memories, and the projects, aims, records or memories of the makers (and, nowadays, the very partial documentation afforded by audiovisual recordings). The ways of operating persist in the 'duration' of theatre makers and spectators, in the culture that they produce and partake in, in the tradition that is an active system (when it is a positive value) of creating relationships with what happened. In this sense, the theatre is not ephemeral, just as any human work is not: the theatre is a long-lasting category beyond the present event of the performance.

From the scholars' perspective, the theatre is a field of investigation because it adopts expressive situations and languages that are not necessarily born in the theatre, but become theatre: with respect to cultures, the theatre is the place of possibilities materialised and located in that relational and representational culture that a civilisation is able to express. Hence, theatre knowledge is built not starting from theatre studies alone, but through the interplay of "theatre and..." (Theatre and representational requirements, and liturgy, and society, and literature, and figurative language, and entertainment, and whatever else may come useful to the research that validates the relationship). Considering the complexity of the theatre, a complex system of relationships and levels of organisation such as the theatre is, what is required is both a complexity of learning and the capacity to investigate each diverse level.

The theatre maker derives great wealth from recovering the tensions, the implicit techniques, the divergent uses and approaches, which could have become, and which in part have become, theatre life; thus, we avoid reifying, consciously or unconsciously, an exclusive and predetermined notion of what pertains to the theatre; and we become able to discover other assets, which may not have been thought of before. On the other hand, every creative theatre has, in a more or less explicit way, constructed and established a theatre history of its own, realising and actualising an active tradition, which thrives

upon seeking itself, upon its rediscovering the movement that has presided creation (the "*tradition de la naissance*").

For theatre culture to be alive and creative, it needs to make its way across the frameworks, definitions, habits, encrustations, and responses that have been erected as tradition; it needs to recover the modalities, the place of choices and of possibilities, the foundation routes, the questions that demand the assumption of responsibility and of values. Tradition is not the passive conservation of forms and values accepted in the small successive deteriorations of continuity (the identity of water in a pond); it is rather the active and dynamic achievement that investigates and draws upon the experience that has produced forms and values (the identity of water in a river).

In theatre making and in the historical knowledge of theatre, theatre is dialectically the 'place of the possible'.

Every theatre, being a creative theatre, is an act of foundation that, at the same time, makes a tradition alive. Creative theatre acts, almost always, in the name of a possible future, of an immanence of the present; and often it does so via the imagination and the revivification of a past through the "*tradition de la naissance*" in history. It does so by means of memory, which is organised selection (not an archive or a data bank) and conquest of identity.

In a dialectical reciprocity, for the study of theatre to be active, not to close itself in the updated repetition of forms or limit its knowledge to the spectator's point of view, it necessitates experience, to educate the gaze and the mind to see the problems and processes of composition. In order to construct *true* memory, historiography needs to learn to recognise tensions, techniques, skills, presences - even those which are not theatre in themselves, but become theatre.

Thus, (creative) theatre making builds - also - historiography, a possible knowledge of the past; and in this way historiography builds - also - a warehouse of the possibilities of theatre making. If theatre is, essentially, a set of relationships, so is the thinking about, the reflecting on, the studying of theatre. In the dialectical relationship between them, what we can call theatre culture is built, a reality which is not ephemeral, like performances, but which is long lasting, which does not concern the opuses, but rather the working in the theatre. Just as the theatre is not only born of theatre, so is theatre historiography not born solely of theatre studies: theatre culture is, therefore, a 'place of the possible', a living body which can/must become a body-in-life, and is realised in making theatre as well as in studying the past.

Theatre makes sense inasmuch as it is organically alive: that is inasmuch as it is not the art and technique of creating performances on the one hand, and the history of theatre performances and poetics on the other hand, but inasmuch as it succeeds in being theatre *culture*. Theatre anthropology investigates principles which are fundamental to human behaviour in performance situations, and it develops knowledge and experience of the pre-expressive level of the theatre; and with the practice of ISTA sessions it builds a laboratory where you can experience learning to learn and apprehending through amazement and difference, in order to define your own identity. It is a method which results in a real bridge for an organic and creative theatre culture.

Translated by Victor Emanuel Jacono