

Editorial



Photo montage with Richard Cieslak. Photo: Teatr-Laboratorium



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Learning to See

JTA - Journal of Theatre Anthropology no. 2 has grown into a big issue. Wanting to include historical references, interviews, discussions, actors' experiences, articles by people from other professions than theatre, recent events, news and letters has resulted in an issue well beyond the first expectations, also delaying the editorial process. The list of authors for *JTA - Journal of Theatre Anthropology* no. 3 entitled "Theatre Anthropologies" is already decided, making it difficult to move articles for later publication.

As in the first issue, also for the second, some articles have been published before, but we have chosen to include them because re-reading them in a different context and with the awareness of what has been achieved since with theatre anthropology studies, helps give a historical perspective to this field of research. Some articles are translated, others are in their original language. The languages used are English, French and Spanish. *JTA* privileges the translation to English of articles existing only in other languages to expand their distribution and oppose the usual tendency of only translating articles from English.

Language has changed since some of the articles were written. For example, women are now formally included with s/he and her/his and herself/himself forms, and a less euro-centred geographical vision mostly uses Asian instead of oriental when differentiating from the western (European and North American) world. We have changed "masters" when used to designate teachers and artists, a habit coming from Spanish and Italian, but otherwise the language of the old articles has been maintained as written at the time.

"Learning to see" is the general title for the second issue of *JTA - Journal of Theatre Anthropology*. Theatre anthropology has taught scholars to see what is hidden in the documents, directors to see the potentialities of their actors, and actors and dancers to see what can inspire them in other forms. Learning to see has indicated ways to distinguish between the daily and the extra daily behaviour that enhances the energy necessary to be watched by spectators. Learning to see has pinpointed a pre-expressive level within the actors' work corresponding to the needs of the process before the result. In her



article, Cecilia Hopkins reminds how learning to see passes through the perception and thinking of the body. Nicola Savarese and Jacques Arpin insist on the importance of images to read reality and remember. During the ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology) sessions learning to see has given the capacity to look beyond the forms and aesthetics to find recurrent principles that could be useful despite the genre and tradition one belongs to.

In Claudio Coloberti's interview, Franco Ruffini says: "Looking is not just an activity of the eyes. Gradually one discovers how this activity, which starts from the eyes, ends up in the mind, in the attention, in the ability to be focused on what you are looking at, even if you often do not understand what you are looking at. One mustn't get distracted by questions and the desire to always have a ready answer. To look passively, but at the same time actively. To look, letting what you look at trigger journeys of the mind, without these becoming digressions that remove you completely from the subject of your gaze: so, the ability to return to the gaze."

This second issue is divided in sections: **Learning to see, ISTA facts and tales, Reflections and experiences, Recurring principles**, and **News**.

In **Learning to see** we get an historical overview going back fifty years as the experience of the first ISTA sessions is still mentioned by various authors. It is recent history, but so much has changed since. The interviews to scholars who were at the first and second ISTA sessions reveal their sense of adventure as they entered unknown territory during the first attempts in the process of learning to see. For the scholars this meant letting go of the confidence provided by previous studies to rebecome beginners and accept their exhaustion. For the artists it meant mostly not understanding what was asked of them even if gratified by the seriousness with which their apprenticeship explanations were received. The interviews clarify how the details of the arrangement of sleeping quarters, meals, timetables, and the mixture of languages had an enormous impact on the research. Many authors underline the importance of their relationship with Eugenio Barba, and the international and intergenerational environment of ISTA. Discipline, self-discipline, acceptance or non-acceptance of authority, discussing concepts only in relation to the craft, created a separate island of research which did not follow the normal rules of social behaviour and dialogue.

In the first issue of *JTA - Journal of Theatre Anthropology* we concentrated on the origins, looking at Eugenio Barba's first definitions and the sessions held in Bonn in 1980 and Volterra in 1981. With the second issue, in the section **ISTA facts and tales**, we are moving to the experience emerging from ISTA sessions in Blois and Malakoff (France) in 1985, Holstebro (Denmark) in 1986 and Salento (Italy) in 1987.

The reproduced documents and the articles remind us of some essential turning points for the research in theatre anthropology. Following the luxurious month-long sessions in Bonn and Volterra, the third session in Blois was short and with fewer invited artists. It established ISTA as a continuative school that gathers periodically. The different organisers for the ISTA sessions belong to the theatre group environment, and this

influences the structure of the teaching and research. From the third session onwards, discoveries become firm experience and new terminology is confirmed and repeated during more organised and coherent work demonstrations. From 1986, with "The female role", the chosen themes are no longer just general investigations of the principles of scenic presence but confront specific questions of the craft.

In 1986, the same year of the ISTA session in Holstebro, The Magdalena Project, a network of women in contemporary theatre, started with an international festival in Cardiff directed by Jill Greenhalgh. The theme of the female role in theatre is talked about in both situations but with a different focus: at ISTA the demonstrations concentrate on the pre-expressive level, comparing soft and strong energies in both male and female performers, while at the Magdalena festival the question was women's autonomous theatre language. In the years to come the environments of ISTA and Magdalena develop in contiguity. Today many of the artists invited to ISTA/NG in 2021 of which Francesca Romana Rietti writes about in this issue when focussing on the younger generation of teachers, were first involved in Magdalena Project activities and only later were included in the ISTA artistic staff. As the heated discussions at ISTA 1986 concentrated on whether the female roles in the different traditions represented were submissive and anti-feminist, Sanjukta Panigrahi, Pei Yanling, Katsuko Azuma and Kahno Azuma - all women - presented soft and strong male roles, and soft and strong female roles. Previous convictions and prejudices made it difficult to see what was being presented.

In 1987, with "The actor's tradition and the spectator's identity", the relationship with the spectators and the practice of barter invades the technical aspects with the complexity of cultural customs anticipating what Eugenio Barba will sustain during the ISTA session in 1996 in Copenhagen: that theatre is the art of the spectator, and that the spectator is the essential aim of theatre. In 1987, Eugenio Barba starts rehearsing and presenting intercultural performances creating the first *Theatrum Mundi* Ensemble event and working on *Faust* in front of the ISTA participants. Narrating the experience of ISTA Salento and the process of *Faust* in his article, in relation to learning to see, Vincenzo Blasi discusses theatre as a place where one sees and performing events as something to see, while Franco Ruffini remembers that the theme of the ISTA in Brecon 1989 on the mental pre-expressive level was first talked about in Salento.

The section **Reflections and experiences** gathers articles that expand the understanding of theatre anthropology geographically and conceptually, ranging from rituals to internet, from science to intuition, from psychiatric sessions to feasts.

It is paradoxical that *absence* emerges as a theme when theatre anthropology usually deals with the *presence* on stage of actors/dancers/performers. Theatre builds *presence* so that the spectators see what is not there, stimulating their imagination and associations to give life to something that exists in their minds and memories. This *absence* assumes another level of meaning when Miguel Rubio writes of the character of a disappeared peasant searching for his absent body in Yuyachkani's performance *Adios Ayacucho* and when Bianca Mastrominico and Luciana Martuchelli reflect on theatre online and film. The covid pandemic has enriched our vocabulary with the word *presential* in opposition to *virtual* as many theatre practitioners resorted to meetings and performances online.

Film has become a technical tool for the stage while at the same time the principles of presence can be used in virtual reality and for film actors. Bianca Mastrominico writes: "Working through digital platforms, the remoteness of the performer-spectator interaction establishes *presence* through what is experienced and perceived as *absence*. This apparent paradox is embedded in the digital encounter and requires experimenting with principles and working techniques that enable performers to embody 'essence through absence' in the digital realm".

While Leonardo Mancini explores Eugenio Barba's interest for science and his meetings with scientists of different fields during the 1980s which are at the root of his conception of theatre anthropology, Miguel Rubio and Mette Bovin search for the principles of theatre anthropology in ancient rituals, religious practices, village feasts and dances in the Andes of Peru and the African Sahel.

Often theatre anthropology is confused with cultural anthropology, especially when Odin Teatret's travels to places without theatre are placed side by side with ISTA's field of research. In 1986 at the ISTA session in Holstebro, Eugenio Barba insists on the fact that theatre anthropology has nothing to do either with the application of paradigms from cultural anthropology to theatre, nor with the study of performative phenomena from those cultures which are normally the object of study by cultural anthropologists and ethnologists. Theatre anthropology is the study of the human being in a situation of organised representation.

Miguel Rubio's and Mette Bovin's articles refer to dance and shamanistic rituals as organised representation which can enrich the contemporary theatre experience with the practice of modulation of energy, in the capacity to evoke the dead and the close relationship with nature often found in traditional forms of dance and music. This reminds me of how Augusto Omolu (ISTA teacher of the Afro-Brazilian Orixá tradition) would explain that the value of his dances was embedded in the energy employed and independent from the spirituality that concerned onlookers wanted to impose on what they saw. Learning to see also gives the capacity to distinguish the level of organisation we are dealing with when we look at performances, rituals or dances. Here the scientific approach described by Leonardo Mancini meets Miguel Rubio's and Mette Bovin's points of view.

Recurring principles is a section devoted to actors/dancers. In *JTA* no. 2 Claudia Contin Arlecchino presents her journey with Commedia dell'Arte, and the traditional nô actor Akira Matsui in an interview by Jonah Salz tells of his introduction to theatre anthropology. Akira Matsui gives an insight in Eugenio Barba's work as a director who collaborating with artists of different nationalities, traditions and genres would nevertheless insist on respecting the original forms and on avoiding experimentation to adapt to the contemporary themes. Francesca Romana Rietti presents Kapila Venu, a Koodiyattam and Mohiniyattam performer who came to ISTA for the first time in Favignana, Italy, in 2021 and had to learn to teach again. Photographs, which help illustrate the actors' words, enrich this section. The photographs which accompany Claudia Contin Arlecchino's article make technical examples of extra-daily body positions for exercises and characters, while Francesco Galli's images of the 16th ISTA/NG session show situations

that range from practical classes to demonstrations, from exchanges between participants to portraits. For the actors/dancers the work on presence is not only a technical question but it acquires a political meaning, learning not only to see but also to speak an autonomous language and exist.

At the end, the **News** section includes articles from places where theatre anthropology is part of the practice of theatre groups. There are examples of activities in Greece, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Malaysia and Italy. Many of the articles explain the historical process leading up to more recent events. For example, we read how theatre anthropology was first introduced in Brazil when Odin Teatret, Teatro tascabile di Bergamo, and Teatro Potlach where on tour there in the early 1980s. It was in those years that theatre anthropology became an essential tool for local theatre groups, later becoming a regular course at many universities. Jaime Soriano at first met theatre anthropology through his lengthy collaboration with Jerzy Grotowski, to then organise various activities with Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret in Mexico. **News** also includes letters to the *Journal of Theatre Anthropology*, and a short biographic information about the authors of the articles.

We look forward to hearing comments and suggestions from the readers and contributors while working on the third issue with the title "Theatre Anthropologies". ■