



ISTA

International School of Theatre Anthropology
Director: Eugenio Barba

THE FEMALE ROLE

AS REPRESENTED ON THE STAGE IN VARIOUS CULTURES

International Congress Holstebro, Denmark, 17-22 September 1986

The congress will last 4 days and will consist of theoretical explanations, practical demonstrations and performances by male and female impersonators from Indian, Balinese, Japanese, Chinese and Western theatre traditions.

The congress has both a didactic and anthropological perspective focusing on the actor's »presence« and on theatrical extra-daily body technique as opposed to daily body technique.

GUEST ARTISTS:

Bibi Andersson ■ Katsuko Azuma, Buyo Kabuki ■ Swasthi Wijdaja and I Made Bandem, Balinese dance drama ■ Actresses and female impersonators from traditional Chinese theatre ■ Kanichi Hanayagi, Kabuki, female impersonator ■ Sonja Kehler ■ Kelucharan Mahapatra, Orissi dance ■ M. P. Sankaran Namboodiri, Kathakali, female impersonator ■ Sanjukta Panigrahi, Orissi dance ■ Franca Rame ■ Iben Nagel Rasmussen ■ Sathya Narayana Vedantam, Kuchipudi, female impersonator ■

Number of participants: 150 ■ Enrolment fee: Dkr. 2.000 meals included ■ Application deadline (with curriculum vitae): 31 July 1986 ■ Working languages: English and French.

For further information contact:

ISTA International School of Theatre Anthropology
Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium · Box 1283 · DK-7500 Holstebro · Denmark · Tel. (07) 42 47 77

Eugenio Barba

ISTA 4 Animus/Anima: The Actor's Energy

Abstract: Text written by Eugenio Bara on the occasion of ISTA 4 to present the theme of the session.

Keywords: Animus/Anima; Lasya/tandava; Keras/manis; Energy

Interest in actors who play female roles and actresses who play male roles is periodically rekindled. At such times, one might almost suspect that behind these disguises and contrasts between reality and fiction lie hidden one of the theatre's potentialities.

One also often speaks of the actor's female side and the actress's male side attempting to develop these forthwith by means of suitable exercises.

Certain tensions can be discerned with greater clarity in the world of ideas than in the reality of the theatre. What other hidden tensions, then does this clarity cover?

Sex and profession

In each man there is a woman and in each woman a man. This commonplace - or this truth - does not however help the actor to become aware of the quality of his or her energy.

In many civilizations, it was or is normal that an actor's sex and that of the character he is playing were or are not the same. In our civilization, this occurrence is now an anomaly and therefore becomes significant.

The problem of the actor's natural sex in relationship to the sex of the character he or she is playing is interesting from an historical point of view, as an indication of the customs of an epoch, in the context of the principles and preconceptions of different cultures, their respective tastes and aesthetics. But for the actor searching for empirical elements on which to base his/her work, it can be a false problem. To concentrate on psychological questions, Shakespearian labyrinths, the vicissitudes of repression and emancipation, historical and social problems - all this is useful, but not in order to confront an elementary professional problem: the double-edged nature of the actor's energy implying the existence of an Anima-energy and an Animus-energy.

Anima-energy and Animus-energy are terms used in theatre anthropology and have nothing to do with the distinction between masculine and feminine, nor with Jung's archetypes or projections. They refer to a very perceptible polarity, pertinent to the anatomy of theatre, difficult to define with words, and therefore difficult to analyse,



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develop and transmit. And yet, any possibilities which the actor may have to avoid becoming crystallised in a technique stronger than himself depend upon this polarity and the way in which the actor succeeds in dilating its territory.

Like Saint Sebastian, the actors are a target. They therefore try to make themselves invulnerable. They build themselves a cuirass: by means of techniques passed on to them by tradition, or rather by means of the building up of a character, they arrive at an artificial, extra-daily form of behaviour. They dilate their presence and consequently also dilate the spectator's perception. They become a *body-in-life* in the fiction of theatre. Or they aspire to be so.

To this end, actors work for years and years, in some cases since childhood. To this end, they have repeated the same actions over and over, they have trained themselves. To this end, they make use of mental processes, magic "ifs", personal subtexts. To this end, they imagine their body as the centre of a network of physical tensions and resistances, unreal but effective. They use an extra-daily body-mind technique which helps them to become invulnerable.

On the visible level, it seems that the actors are working on their body and voice. In fact, they are working on something invisible: energy.

The concept of "energy" (in Greek, *energeia* = "strength", "efficacy", from *én-érgon* = "at work") is one which is both obvious and difficult to pinpoint when applied to the actor. We associate it with external impetus, with an excess of muscular and nervous activity. But it also refers to something intimate, something which pulses in immobility and silence, a retained power which flows in time without spreading through space.

"Energy" is commonly reduced to imperious and violent behaviour models. But it is actually a personal temperature-intensity which the actor can determine, awaken, mould and which, above all, needs to be explored.

The actors' extra-daily body technique derives from an alteration of their balance and basic posture, from the play of opposing tensions which dilate their body's dynamics. The body is re-shaped, artificially re-built for the theatrical fiction. This "art body" - and thus, "non-natural body" - is neither male nor female. The actor's sex is of little import. Typical male energy and typical female energy do not exist. Or at least, they do not exist in the theatre. There exists only an energy specific to a given individual.

The actor's or actress's task is to discover the individual propensities of his or her own energy and to protect their potentialities and uniqueness.

The actor's origins

The first days of work leave an indelible imprint. The actors in their personal origins, in the first days of apprenticeship, have all their potentialities intact: they then begin to make choices, to eliminate some potentialities in order to develop others. They can enrich their work only by narrowing the territory of their experiences, in order to be able to delve more deeply. This is the period of vulnerability.

In this initial phase of the profession the actors' possibilities to safeguard and reinforce the double profile of their energy are decided. Or else there prevails a unilateral tendency which makes them more secure, stronger, rapidly invulnerable.

In every apprenticeship, every actor who first begins to work, is thus characterised by the acquisition of an *ethos*. *Ethos* as scenic behaviour - that is, physical and mental technique; but also as a work ethic, as a mentality modelled by the *environment*, the human setting in which the apprenticeship develops.

The nature of the relationship between teacher and student, between student and student, between men and women, between old and young, the degree of fixity or elasticity of the hierarchy, of the norms, of the demands and limits which the student is placed under, impregnate an actor's artistic future.

All these factors act upon the scale of balances which equilibrates the weights of two opposing necessities: on one hand, selection and crystallisation; on the other, safeguarding what is essential in the potential richness of the beginnings. In other words: to select without suffocating.

This apprenticeship dialectic is constant, whether in theatre schools or in the face-to-face teaching between master and student, in the actor's practical initiation, from when he first starts to "rise from the ranks", or in autodidactic situations.

Serious impediments, which risk suffocating the actor's future development, sometimes occur for unnoticed reasons. In the period of vulnerability, with unconscious violence or in order to be expedient, the actor or actress often arbitrarily limits the territory in which he or she explores the individual propensities of his or her own energy. The range of the orbit whose poles are Animus and Anima are thus reduced. Some choices, apparently 'natural' become a prison.

When, in the period of apprenticeship, an actor already adapts himself exclusively to male roles, or an actress adapts herself exclusively to female roles, he or she undermines the exploration of his or her own energies on the pre-expressive level.

To learn to act according to one of two clear perspectives which follow the distinction between the sexes is an apparently inoffensive point of departure. There is however a consequence: the introduction, without justification, of rules and habits from daily reality into the extra-daily territory of the theatre.

On the final level, that of results and of the performance (the expressive level), the actor's or actress's presence takes form in a scenic figure, a character, and masculine or feminine characterisation is inevitable and necessary. It is however both unnecessary and damaging when this masculine or feminine characterisation is also dominant on a level in which it does not belong: the pre-expressive level, the level of stage presence.

In the first learning days, in the period of vulnerability, individual differentiation passes through the negation of the differentiation of the sexes. The field of complementarity dilates. This is seen in the West when, in training - work on the pre-expressive level - no account is taken of what is masculine and what is feminine; or in the Orient when an actor explores masculine and feminine roles indiscriminately. The double-edged nature of his or her particular energy becomes tangibly evident. The balance between the two poles, Animus and Anima, is preserved.

In this context, the Balinese speak of a continual interweaving of *manis* and *keras*. The Indians of *lasya* and *tandava*. These terms do not refer to women and men or to masculine or feminine qualities, but to *softness* and *vigour* as flavours of energy. The Indian warrior god Rama, for example, is often represented in the 'soft' manner, *lasya*.

In theatre anthropology Anima (soft) and Animus (vigorous) refer to the two sides

of a pair of scales, a discording concordance, an interaction between opposites which brings to mind the poles of a magnetic field, or the tension between body and shadow. It would be arbitrary to particularise them sexually.

The experience of the flavour

Keras and *manis*, *tandaya* and *lasya*, Animus and Anima do not refer to concepts which are completely equivalent. What is similar, however, in different cultures, is the necessity to define, by means of an opposition, the double nature of the energy which the actors use: that is, the energy which animates, from the inside, their technique.

It is easy to perceive clearly the alternation between Animus-energy and Anima-energy, if one sees Indian, Balinese, or Japanese actors and actresses telling and dancing stories with many characters; or if one sees occidental actors or dancers who have been formed by a training which does not take differences of sex into account. But as happens in these cases, the only words which evoke the experiences we have had seem lyrical or mystical to the layman.

Today, a single word is enough to bring to the reader's mind the taste of ... pineapple. But exactly four hundred years ago, the Florentine merchant Filippo Sacchetti writing from Malabar (now known as Kerala) who wanted to explain to his distant friends the taste of this then unknown fruit, had to describe it as a bizarre blend of strawberry, sugar, and melon.

Just like Filippo Sacchetti, theatre anthropology must make use of abstract hybrids to take into account an experience which is both simple and perceptible.

Venilia and Selacia were two Roman goddesses. One was the goddess of the waves which lap the shore, the other was the goddess of the waves which return to the open sea. Why two goddesses, if the water which comes into the shore and the water which moves seaward again is the same water?

The substance and the force are the same, but the direction and quality of the energy are different, opposite. The same variation in the energy of the wave. the same dance of the two goddesses, can be discovered in the actor's pre-expressive substratum, in the blending of the two profiles of his double-edged energy.

Before being thought of as a purely spiritual entity, before being made platonic and catholic, the soul was a *wind*, a continuous flux which animated the motion and life of animals and humans. In many cultures, not only in Ancient Greece, the body was and is compared to a percussion instrument: its soul is the beat, the vibration, the rhythm.

This wind - vibration and rhythm – can change face, while remaining itself, by means of a subtle mutation of its internal tension. Boccaccio, commenting on Dante and summarizing the attitudes of a millenarian culture, said that when Anima, the living and intimate wind, is drawn towards something external and desires something, it changes into Animus.

One form of essential research, common both to theatre anthropology and the empiricism of our craft, is research into the constant polarities dissimulated beneath the variety and fluctuation of styles, of traditions and different work practices. To give a name to the flavours, to the actor's experiences, to the spectator's perceptions, even the most subtle of them, seems a futile abstraction. But it is a premise which makes it

possible to leap from a situation in which we are immersed and which dominates us to a real *experience* - that is, something which we are able to analyse, consciously to develop and to transmit.

It is the leap from experiencing to having experience.

The wind and the cuirass

In the course of their career, the actors come to realise that their biggest obstacle is not difficulty in learning, but having learned so much that they have become invulnerable.

They have learned a way of thinking and acting which permits them to guide the spectator's attention, even on the pre-expressive level. They know how to surprise, to divert, and to change the rhythm of attention, following principles similar to (even if in a different domain from) those which writers and directors use. They change the directions and the intensity of an action, they cut the action in the middle and jump to the next.

The spectators' perception also changes and jumps. The sense and the meanings glide on the current of this life, which is already fully displayed in its pre-expressive state. The spectators distils a sensory experience into a conceptual experience, not only understanding, but also interpreting and discovering their own personal associations and autonomous reflections.

The actor conducts the game: he is the *maître des regards*, the master of the way of seeing. He senses that his cuirass creates interest, incites respect, dazzles. He becomes, for the observer, a deforming and revealing mirror.

But since he is invulnerable, his shadow has withdrawn into its shell.

The shadow can germinate only from a fracture, when the actors are able to open a vent in the cuirass of technique and seduction which they have built for themselves and expose themselves, undefended, like warriors who fight with bare hands. The actors' strength lies in their vulnerability.

This takes us back to the actor's origins, to the first days of his or her apprenticeship, when the gamut of unrealised and invisible potentialities became marked by the visible work of selection and excavation. Here the invisible - energy, the wind which blows through the cuirass of technique and which animates it from inside - risks becoming tamed by the dominant models of scenic behaviour and acting. The dynamic relationship between the Animus and Anima potentialities, their consonance and dissonance, tends, with time, to become stabilised in a crystallised technique.

But the fracture through which the shadow can leak is caused by the co-existence of Animus and Anima, by the actor's ability to leap from one pole to the other, to show the dominant profile of his energy and also to reveal its double - vigour and tenderness, vehemence and grace, ice and snow, sun and flame.

Thus the spectator discovers the invisible life which animates the theatre and experiences an experience.

The double tension which characterises energy on the theatre's cellular level, the double profile of the wind in the cuirass, is the material source of the spectator's spiritual experience.■