

ISTA 5

The Actor's Tradition and the Spectator's Identity

ISTA SALENTO '87

1 - 14 SETTEMBRE

TRADIZIONE
DELL'ATTORE

E IDENTITÀ
DELO SPETTATORE

DIALOGHI TEATRALI



INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THEATRE ANTHROPOLOGY
DIRETTORE: EUGENIO BARBA

ISTA SALENTO '87

SEMINARI E INCONTRI

1 - 6 SETTEMBRE

LAGHI ALIMINI (OTRANTO)

Seminario Teorico Internazionale sul Testo e l'Azioe in Teatro

11 SETTEMBRE

CASTELLO DI COPERTINO

Seminario Internazionale di Antropologia Teatrale

12 SETTEMBRE

BARI - CASTELLO SVEVO

Primo Incontro Internazionale fra Semioogia e Antropologia teatrale

Parteciperanno gli studiosi:

Soren Rasmussen (Gran Bretagna) - Monique Borin (Francia)
Patricia Carolina (Messico) - Fernando De Toro - (Canada)
Peter Eliaz (Danimarca) - Ronald Jenkins (Stati Uniti d'America)
Hector Nogueira (Cile) - Patricia Pavis (Francia) - Patrick Pavis (Francia)
Jean Marie Prodir (Francia) - Tetsuo Toshimitsu (Giappone)
Jan Watson (Stati Uniti d'America)

Anna Bandettini, Eugenio Cassi' Ripa, Fabrizio Crociani,
Marco De Marinis, Della Falsetti, Bruno Filippi, Piero Giocchi,
Raimondo Guarino, Gerardo Guzzi, Laura Mariani, Claudio Mobbili,
Renata Molinari, Franco Perrelli, Franco Quadri, Franco Ruffini,
Nicola Savarese, Mirella Schino, Ferdinando Taviani, Gabriele Uberti,
Cristina Valent, Ugo Valli.

Vincenzo Blasi

The Spectator's Shadow

ISTA Salento 1987: the practice of theatre dialogues

Abstract: The author summarises the different stages of his continuous research on the 5th session of ISTA in Salento (1987) that he began in 1997. The text throws light on the ISTA participants' group dynamic during the 'closed' part of the session, the variety of 'dialogue-performances' (barter) with the local population during the 'open' part, and quotes several observations by cultural anthropologist Piero Giacchè during his field work which lasted several months.

Keywords: Salento; Spectator; Tradition; Identity; Barter; Intercultural dialogue; Faust; Piero Giacchè

ISTA Salento will take place in the streets and the squares. One of its aims is to study what happens in situations of intercultural dialogue. It will show us how the sense of a performance is transformed in the passage from the tradition of the actor to the personal 'translation' of the viewer who is distant from this tradition.

Eugenio Barba¹

The 5th session of the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA), which took place in Salento (Apulia, Italy) from 1st to 14th September 1987, was an encounter between two stable yet changing realities: on the one hand the Eugenio Barba's "floating island" with the performers of Asian and international theatre as well as Odin Teatret's actors; on the other hand the Salento "quasi-island" and the complex personality of its inhabitants.

After the session in Volterra in 1981, ISTA came to Italy for the second time. But if in the Tuscan town the work was carried out in an almost monastic way, although with regular openings to the outside world, the session in Salento was distinguished by the abundant offer of performances in various locations like a festival of Asian theatres and in constant relationship with the people of the territory.

On the streets and in the squares, in the courtyards of castles and in public gardens, "theatre dialogues" took place between Asian actors and local musicians and dancers:

1. "Terra d'Otranto" Numero Speciale, Rivista Trimestrale della Camera di Commercio Industria Artigianato e Agricoltura di Lecce, 1987, p. 17.



Indian percussion instruments competed with Salento drums; local voices, songs and dances discovered strange correspondences with Balinese dance-theatre; fairs, religious celebrations and social rituals became places of “barter”, of cultural exchange.

The selected ISTA theme, *Tradition of the Actor and Identity of the Spectator*, constantly confronted the two subjects of the theatre dialogue: the actor, guardian of a specific (professional) *tradition*, and the spectator, guardian of a deep cultural and social *identity*. The ISTA became both the *content* of the activities - practical lessons, work demonstrations, comparative analyses, performances and exchanges/barters between actors and spectators - and the *container* of the event. In the months preceding the session, research on the spectator from Salento had been launched on behalf of ISTA. Conducted by the anthropologist Piergiorgio Giacchè, of the University of Perugia, it lasted well beyond the duration of the session. The investigation allowed the researcher to deal with a territory, balancing between memory and innovation, and with a population in constant relationship with “theatricality” and entertainment.

The session was attended, in the double role of artists and teachers, by the actors-dancers of three prestigious Asian companies: the Indian odissi dance company, led by the actress-dancer Sanjukta Panigrahi and Raghunath Panigrahi, composer and director of the classical orchestra with musicians Hemant Kumar Das, Mohini Mohan Patnaik and Gangadhar Pradhan; the Japanese buyo kabuki dance troupe, which included Katsuko Azuma and Haruchiho Azuma, two Nihon buyo dancers, and the onagata kabuki dancer Kanichi Hanayagi, accompanied by musicians Shizuko Kinoya and Takae Koyama; the Dharma Shanti dance troupe, from the Indonesian National Academy of Dance (Asti) in Denpasar, Bali, directed by the dancer I Made Bandem. In addition, for the first time in an ISTA session, a few of Odin Teatret’s actors participated. As always, the scientific staff was numerous, consisting of internationally renowned historians, semiologists and anthropologists - some of whom are founding members of ISTA - together with experts and scholars from all over the world.

The organisation was entrusted to Mediterranea Teatrolaboratorio, directed by Giorgio Di Lecce and Cristina Ria, and to Nicola Savarese, professor of History of Theatre and director of the Department of Social Systems and Communication of the University of Lecce. The event was financed by the Apulian Region, the Provincial Administration of Lecce, the Consortium for the Apulian Public Theatre, the Chamber of Commerce of Lecce, with the patronage of the Ministry of Tourism and Performance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The operational venue of the event was a summer camp for children, close to the sea and the Laghi Alimini of Otranto, along the provincial road “litoranea” 366.²

2. For the organisation of the itinerant sessions, ISTA seeks out environments in which the relationships between participants are privileged. Participants are often forced to adapt to structures and spaces that are not intended for the theatre, where teachers and students eat and live in common areas. Moreover, the informal nature of the meetings and community life imply the acceptance and observance of certain rules of behaviour, from the strict rule of silence as soon as you wake up in the morning to the shifts for cleaning the rooms. As Nicola Savarese - a permanent member of ISTA and scientifically in charge of the Salento session - told me in the interview he gave me for my degree thesis, “as soon as they arrived, all the guests - teachers and students, directors and actors, university lecturers and students - were welcomed into the facility and housed in two large dormitories. It was not easy for them to sleep on beds that a couple of months earlier had accommodated school-age children: squeaky cots that were too

Hypothesis for a Faust

Inside the seaside summer camp for children, among the green of the pines and the blue of the sea, a circle of sand had been traced, evocatively named “Epidaurus”. Here, for the first five mornings - the so-called “closed week” - around Eugenio Barba and the artists of Asian theatre, sat the fifty participants of the *International Theoretical Seminar on Text and Action in Theatre*, previously selected from actors, playwrights, directors and specialists in various disciplines. They were collaborating with Eugenio Barba on staging *Faust* inspired by the texts of Goethe and Marlowe, or rather on the passage from text to action.³

There is immediately some evidence and a few tacit agreements: Eugenio Barba interacts with the Asian actors-dancers well knowing that their cultural distance from the theme-myth of *Faust* could suggest unprecedented possibilities to approach the text. During the rehearsals only the “insiders” (actors, director, orchestra and chorus) speak. All the others are not allowed to intervene in the work.

The artists actively involved are the Japanese actress-dancer Katsuko Azuma (Nihon buyo) in the role of the protagonist Faust; the Indian actress-dancer Sanjukta Panigrahi from the odissi tradition, playing the character of Mephistopheles; and the Japanese Kanichi Hanayagi, specialised in kabuki female roles (onnagata), playing Margarete. The music and choruses are entrusted to the small Indian orchestra, conducted by Raghunath Panigrahi, together with Balinese, Japanese and Odin Teatret’s actors-musicians.

The result is a sort of work in progress of about 30 minutes or, as Patrice Pavis writes, « *une esquisse rapide qui permet le mieux d’observer la gestation et la fixation progressive du sens dans la mise en place gestuelle, vocale, textuelle, musicale et scénique des danseurs et des musiciens* ».⁴

Preliminarily, starting from episodes or fragments of Marlowe’s and Goethe’s dramas, the participants-observers were asked to propose key scenes or scenarios capable of generating a *physical narration*, not necessarily realistic or anecdotal. From here Eugenio Barba delimited a narrative framework within which the performers could freely improvise to define their own characters, each according to their own style, creating scores of original and coherent actions. The director then transposed them into three main scenes whose gestural and narrative macrostructure was symbolic but recognisable.

short, on which they had to crouch, bend their knees, before resigning themselves to sleeping with their feet protruding from the bed. [...] In a context of community life, the group’s tasks were entrusted to the participants who, in turn, had to clean the work rooms, the large rooms where they slept and the bathrooms. Fernando De Toro, a Chilean University professor who taught in Canada, after reading in the cleaning programme the name of Prof. Marco De Marinis - known in Italy and abroad for his studies on the semiotics of theatre - said that he would offer a dinner to all if he saw him clean the bathrooms. He didn’t want to believe his eyes when, a few days later, he found the Italian colleague standing in front of him holding a bucket and a broom.” (Blasi 1999, 255).

3. The materials on the staging of *Faust* are not many if we exclude notes, diaries and scenarios written by the participants, in which the technical aspects are mixed with personal considerations and suggestions of the results. An excellent synthesis between chronicle and short essay is the text of the semiotologist of theatre Patrice Pavis entitled *Dancing with Faust. A Semiotician’s reflections on Barba’s Intercultural Mise-en-scène* (Pavis 1989b), published also in French (see Pavis, 1989a), presented at the *First International Meeting between Semiology and Theatrical Anthropology* (12th September in Bari).

4. Pavis 1989a, 226. Of extreme importance are the videos on the performance and rehearsals of *Faust* (Odin Teatret Archives 1987b and 1987c), the latter a backstage of the mise-en-scène work.

Scene of the meeting. In the background, hidden among the trees, Sanjukta-Mephistopheles cautiously approaches Katsuko-Faust who is at the centre of the space in a long, immaculate white gown. Mephistopheles has a black shawl over a red sari, his (her) raven hair falls heavily down his cheeks and shoulders. He attracts Faust's attention with bewitching, calculated movements of the arms and the whole body. The work on this scene makes it clear that "the assimilation of materials derived from Faust thus occurs through the dancing body and not through a psychological approach to character or a textual approach to the play".⁵ Two fingers indicate the twirling eyes of Mephistopheles. The spectators' gaze fixes on the whites of the haunted eyes, then the arms rise slowly, fingers trembling, and spread above the head before being suddenly directed towards Faust. The latter's body sways in a carefree, unconscious dance before falling into the arms of Mephistopheles. Faust's white garb falls off, revealing a red shirt and a pair of jeans.

Juxtaposition of styles and polarisation of the characters: on the one hand, the extreme mobility of Sanjukta-Mephistopheles, the decisive expressiveness of his/her body and face, the luxuriant black hair and bright colours. The Indian dancer represents the 'masculine' but incorporeal side, the seducer's character. On the other hand, Faust-Katsuko, more measured in his/her torso movements and poses, his/her feet firmly planted on the ground: the Japanese dancer symbolises the 'feminine' but terrestrial element, the fragility of those who fall for seduction.

Exhumation scene. In the foreground Faust-Katsuko and Mephistopheles-Sanjukta, both kneeling on the sand, are looking for something. They exhume the corpse of Faust's and Margarete's child. They have conflicting thoughts and emotions. The impressive Mephistopheles takes a handful of sand in his fist and shows it to Faust, the grains of sand fly away as if from a broken hourglass - thus do joys and sorrows pass. Faust pokes at the sand with a knife. Mephistopheles' hands resume digging. They find the swaddling clothes of a new-born baby, a dress, right where Margarete had buried them.

At the same time, behind them, Kanichi-Margarete draws gestures in the air corresponding to the opposite states of mind of the characters in the foreground. The director breaks down the Asian actors' scores and codified actions into small segments to be *reassembled*, on the horizontal plane of *concatenation* and along the vertical axis of *simultaneity*. Thus "three gestural keys, corresponding to three clearly distinct emotional tonalities, are presented to the spectator's comparative perception".⁶

To the western spectator the scene succeeds in arousing pity and horror, old categories of Greek tragedy. The music is intense, the singing obsessive. Faust and Mephistopheles, in the foreground, wrap the child's bones in bandages. On Mephistopheles' lips there is no longer the indulgent smile of a lover or mother, but that of the gods when they contemplate life manifesting itself in death and destruction. Displaying the newly exhumed dirty dress, Mephistopheles' superhuman smile says, "So it is! That's it!" It is one of the most pathos-filled moments. Behind them, not far away, Margarete is dreaming, leans towards a pine tree and falls to the ground. She looks like a spring-dressed girl from

5. Pavis 1989b, 40.

6. Pavis 1989b, 43. Cf. Barba - Savarese 2006, 178-184 (entry *Montage*).



the early 20th century: a straw hat with a satin ribbon, a sleeveless, frilly, embroidered white dress and white high-heeled sandals. She dances her delirium, relives love and abandonment, and has no memory of infanticide. She goes through all the emotional reactions of the characters and of the spectator. Iben Nagel Rasmussen, in the chorus, sings the “lullaby” that Goethe composed for Margarete, the “song of the juniper”, taken from a popular fairy tale that Faust had heard beyond the prison walls. The music is sweet, almost monotonous:

*Bitch of a mother, it was she who killed me.
Wretch of a father, it was he who ate me.
My little sister collected my bones in a fresh grave.
Then I became a little bird of the wood.
Fly, fly away!*

Scene of drunkenness. At other times the spectators are drawn to the burlesque aspects. These happen before the pact between the two characters. Sanjukta is holding a bottle. To represent Mephistopheles’ drunkenness, she redefines the character by improvising “drunken” poses and *mudras*. Similarly, Katsuko acts after grasping the bottle. The entire scene is transformed into a “caricature” of a dance. One actress almost parodies the movements of the other. It is the joyful dance of two drunkards who manage to synchronise their state of intoxication, a scene seen repeatedly in popular comedies or silent films.⁷

At the end, the short performance crystallises around a *Dedication for Faust*, signed and distributed by Eugenio Barba to all the participants. A sentence is added at the bottom that sums up the meaning of the work and, at the same time, the utopia of ISTA: “Faust ovvero il mondo può essere rovesciato” (Faust or the world can be overthrown).

Goethe’s work is an attempt to overthrow the world and its laws: Mephistopheles will provide Faust with the filter of youth and all sorts of worldly pleasures, but only in exchange for his soul; ready to do anything to satisfy his desires, the protagonist will seduce Margarete who, carried away by her passions, will infringe God’s laws.

But this Faust is not content with subverting only the moral order. The games of the imagination and the contradictions of the drama are carried out in the actors’ ability to accumulate and redistribute energy, “with clarity and reason, as one masters a technique and directs a work”.⁸ It is on this ground that distant realities can come closer and opposing principles embrace each other: truth and fiction, Asian theatre and western theatre, “acculturated” actors and “inculturated” spectators.

“*Zwei seelen wohnen, ach! In meiner Brust,*” (two souls habit my breast), Faust complains, but “if he had known that his breast would one day be a theatre of

7. The work of scenic composition takes place step by step and thus, as Pavis points out, “The dancer incorporates into her performance and traditional codification those ‘foreign bodies,’ gestures, and rhythms that she had automatically rejected. This appropriation is achieved by way of a sort of ‘gestural graft,’ which she must tolerate without rejection. [...] The two dancers’ appropriation/incorporation of the Faust story is the first stage in the process of acculturation, the movement from Eastern encoding to Western decoding, [...]”. (Pavis 1989b, 41).

8. Cruciani 2006, 100.

interculturalism, God knows whether he would have agreed to sign a contract with the Devil!"⁹

Dialogues as performances

In the second week, ISTA opened to an audience. On September 6th, in the Church of the Augustinians in the village of Cursi, the first "dialogue-performance" inspired by sacred music was staged. The Indian company, the parish choir of Catholic Action from Andrano, the religious choir from Cutrofiano and Odin Teatret's Scandinavian actors-musicians took turns at the altar.

On September 10th, in the main square of Nardò, a "dialogue-performance" of popular music took place with the Balinese and Indian actors/musicians, and singers and musicians from Salento with their repertoire of *tarantate* and folk music. Finally, on September 13th, the last three dialogue-performances were staged with the title *The Silk Road*. The first focused on religious music, in the churchyard of Calimera, with the participation of the Indian, Balinese, the Vocal Chorus of Spongano, the cultural circle of Corigliano and the choral group of Maglie; the second one was a contemporary dialogue-concert in the village of Caprarica, with the Indian and Japanese ensembles engaged in a jam session with the Trio Folk del Salento, the jazz duo of Roberto Gagliardi and the group Banda di Aiuto of Toni Robertini and Mino Toriano. Finally a dialogue-performance in Maglie, focused on martial arts: here the Japanese actors had a 'dialogue' with the performers of the fencing-dance of Ruffano, to the whirling rhythm of the Salento tambourines.

From 6th to 10th September, every evening, the three Asian ensembles performed in the squares and theatres of Salento and Apulia: in Bari, Lecce, Otranto, Martano, Corigliano, Melendugno, Aradeo and Nardò.¹⁰

The Indian company went on stage with an odissi performance, a form of dance developed in the region of Orissa (north-eastern India) between the 7th and 14th century, with the cult of Shiva and the construction of many temples.

One of the greatest performers of this style is Sanjukta Panigrahi. In her performance, accompanied by the Indian classical orchestra - harmonium, sitar, binka, shabai - conducted by Raghunath Panigrahi, she presented episodes from the Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and the ancient poetic hymns of the *Rigveda*. After an invocation to the gods, the performance developed into an alternating series of narrative pieces and 'pure' rhythmic dance.

Those who attended the performance saw a combination of the aesthetic principles of

9. Pavis 1989b, 54.

10. "The planning and staging of the events were very tight - recalls Nicola Savarese - it was the first time in Apulia that such an organic project of theatrical involvement had been carried out, in a comparison with artistic experiences of international prestige. [...] I do not believe that the organisational aspect can be separated from the artistic one: it is the other side of the coin, since it allows the latter to 'take off'. [...] Experience has taught me the materiality of theatre: being able to count on group solidarity, exploiting temporariness and the medium term, finding expedients and solutions to guarantee optimal conditions for an event... at least until the curtain falls." (Blasi 1999, 255-256)

Indian dance - use of the body and voice modulations, dynamic and symbolic use of the hands and fingers (*basta*) in expressive compositions (*mudras*) - with the psychological element of “narration”, the richness of the costumes and the “symbolism” of the make-up.

In the Japanese ensemble, together with the two buyo dancers Katzuko Azuma and Haruchiho Azuma, Kanichi Hanayagi, a kabuki impersonator of female roles (*onnagata*) was performing accompanied by the music of Shizuko Kineya (*shamisen*) and the singer Takae Koyama.

In the first piece, *onnagata* actor Kanichi Hanayagi performed a dance number from the kabuki repertoire called *Okané*, the name of the beautiful girl who lived in the Kyoto region, near the Lake Biwa bridge. With her physical strength she had tamed wild horses and repelled the onslaught of enemies, yet she was too shy to declare herself to the man she loved.

Yashima, the second piece, was a classical Japanese dance, derived from *nô* theatre, with a delicate style (*jiuta-mai*). The famous battle of Yashima was staged, where two factions, the Heike, and the Genji, to whom the hero Yoshitsune belonged, face each other. His ghost appeared at night to narrate the tragic scenes of the battle. The dancer Katsuko Azuma played all the characters: the Buddhist monk, Yoshitsune’s spirit and the heroes who faced each other in the battle.¹¹

From a dance of the kabuki theatre came the piece entitled *Sagimusume* (The young heron girl), performed by Haruchiho Azuma. The ghost of a young woman, killed for having committed adultery, now took on the appearance of a white heron and then that of a white bride. By dancing, the young woman-ghost evoked the rare moments of happiness for a love which bloomed among the cherry blossoms in spring and the pain of the winter landscape.

The fourth piece on the programme, *Ashi Benkei*, narrated the first meeting between two popular Japanese heroes of the 12th century: Yoshitsune (played by Katzuko Azuma) of the Genji faction always fighting against the Heike, and Benkei (played by Kanichi Hanayagi), a cunning and strong warrior monk who became devoted to Yoshitsune.

From the kabuki repertoire came the last piece, *Onatsu*, based on the tragic story of two young lovers, Onatsu and Sejuro, told in the 17th century by the writer Saikaku Ihara. Onatsu (played by Katzuko Azuma), the daughter of an Osaka merchant, fell in love with Sejuro, one of her father’s employees. The two ran away and hid in a small village. One day, the young man decided to return to Osaka. Dressed as a peasant, hiding under a straw hat, he arrived in the city but was taken prisoner by the guards and executed. The piece described Onatsu’s madness at the news of her lover’s death.

11. Sometime later, Eugenio Barba wrote to Katzuko Azuma, recalling her extraordinary performance in Salento: “Dear Katsuko, for many years I have carried in my memory the image of my first experience of Oriental theatre, which occurred in India: I saw a kathakali actor, playing a hero, crossing a forest and becoming the trees, the river, a bird, an elephant. The actor as creator and the created world. Your *Yashima* had the same strong impact on me. You were not only the actor becoming the monk and then becoming the ghost of the warrior. But in this continuously suggestive metamorphosis you also made me forget what it is impossible to forget in Europe: that you were a woman playing a male monk and becoming the ghost of the male warrior. It is an experience in which the perception of the real world is transmuted into an experience of an immaterial spiritual nature. Our art cannot reach higher. With gratitude for having given me this experience, I am respectfully, yours Eugenio Barba.”

The Dharma Shanti company was made up of old and young performers from the Indonesian National Dance Academy (Asti) in Denpasar, Bali. Directed by the dancer and scholar I Made Bandem, it included N.L.N Swasti W. Bandem, Desak Made Suarti Laksmi, Ni Ketut Suryatini, Ni Nyoman Candri, I Wayan Rai, I Nyoman Catra, I Ketut Kodi and Tjokorda Raka Tisnu. For the occasion the well-known master I Made Pasek Tempo, from the village Tampak Siring, and the Italian actor and researcher Pino Confessa, who had been living and working in Bali at the Academy for five years, were added.

The actors presented kebyar duduk (sitting dance), oleg tumulilingan (bumblebee dance), terunajaya (vigorous dance) and legong kraton (ancient dance) - and two pieces, *The End of King Dukut* and *The Marriage of Babula*. The first, of the topeng Panca genre, taken from a 16th century Balinese story, narrated the conquest by Jelantik, prime minister of King Sagening of Gel-gel, of the island of Nusa Penda ruled by King Dukut. The second piece belonged to the dance-theatre calonarang, telling semi-historical facts from the 11th century in the Kahuripan kingdom of East Java.

The actors, in order to stage the love struggle for the beautiful Ratna Menggali, daughter of the witch Calonarang, impersonated the spirits of black magic in the form of Rangda, the demonic widow (I Made Pasek Tempo), and of white magic, represented by the barong, the dragon-lion protector of humans.

On the island of Bali, calonarang performances take place in a cemetery, near the temple of death, from sunset until dawn. The spectators take an active part in the performance and at particularly tense moments fall into a trance. In Apulia, the play was performed in the Swabian castle in Bari, in Piazza Duomo in Lecce, in the central square of Corigliano and in the amphitheatre of the public park in Martano.

At the end of two theoretical meetings, the International Seminar of Theatre Anthropology (11th September in Copertino) and the First International Meeting between Semiology and Theatre Anthropology (12th September in Bari), the collective performance called *Theatrum Mundi* was presented to the public. In the courtyard of the Aragonese castle of Copertino and at the Teatro Petruzzelli in Bari the three Asian companies, the actors of Odin Teatret and Cristina Ria of Mediterranea Teatrolaboratorio performed simultaneously.¹² A heterogeneous anthology of pieces and dances - from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to the improvisations of the Odin Teatret actors, from the scores of Indian dances sacred to the god Shiva, to the stylised hieroglyphics of buyo kabuki, from the evolutions of the rutilant Balinese barong, to the poses of the mythical Japanese lion-dog Shishi - was composed by Eugenio Barba in an organic and unitary structure interweaving colours and sounds, rhythms and energy. Drawn into a sort of popular *happening*, actors and musicians appeared in different places, conquered the spaces, moving across the stalls, up the stairs and through the loggias

12. Nicola Savarese told me that "on the occasion of the *Theatrum Mundi* of Copertino the organisational effort was really enormous: We worked all day long under a burning sun to set up the evening performance in the courtyard of the castle. As if that wasn't enough, the next day, as soon as we arrived at the Petruzzelli in Bari for the repeat performance, Eugenio [Barba], Giorgio [Di Lecce], I and others had to clean the floor of the stage, which was dirty and full of chewing gum. On such a floor the actors certainly couldn't dance barefoot!" (Blasi 1999, 254-255.)

of the medieval fortress in Copertino and the balconies of a traditional theatre in Bari.¹³

The spectator from Salento

Starting from the theme chosen for the 5th session, *Tradition of the Actor and Identity of the Spectator*, the anthropologist Piergiorgio Giacchè, of the University of Perugia, conducted research on the spectators from Salento on behalf of ISTA.¹⁴ The investigation was of considerable relevance, considering that the last important anthropological study on Salento coincided with the ethnographic expedition of Ernesto De Martino in 1959. It was a fundamental date for the meeting between theatrical culture and social sciences. That year saw the debut of Carmelo Bene's *Caligola*, the founding in Opole of Jerzy Grotowski's *Theatre of the 13 Rows*, the renewal of the Living Theater with *The Connection* and the publication of *Everyday Life as a Representation* by Erwin Goffman.

Giacchè's study tries to bring back to more reliable criteria the "dialogue" between the two main subjects of the theatrical relationship. Therefore, it would be the actors who move within a *tradition*, understood as the set of ways of acting and communicating through recognised rites and spectacular forms. It is up to them "the action of *tradere* through the 'Theatrical' - writes Piergiorgio Giacchè - in Latin *tradere* means both *to transmit* and *to betray*." The spectators, on the other hand, would retain "the highest degree of representation and management of *identity* [...], the widest freedom and responsibility of imagination and knowledge, with which to modify, or rather 'invent' their person". They are the holder of cultural and psychological processes, insofar as they are the 'Social'.¹⁵

But what are the *experiences* of theatre for an inhabitant from Salento? To what extent has theatre (or the theatrical) contributed to the formation of his or her personality?

13. "I'm not thinking" wrote Eugenio Barba "of Asian stories interpreted with a western sensibility, nor I'm thinking of techniques to be reproduced, nor of invention of new codes. [...] I'm thinking of those few spectators capable of following or accompanying the actor in the dance of thought in action." (Barba 1999, 254)

14. Giorgio Di Lecce and Cristina Ria - founders of the Mediterranea Teatrolaboratorio and organisers of the public session - and local scholars and intellectuals Rina Durante, Bruna Filippi, Luigi De Luca and Claudio Pedone contributed to the inquiry. It is possible to consult some contributions by Piergiorgio Giacchè which appeared in some journals: *Mémoire sociologique. Extraits de carnets d'une recherche anthropologique sur « L'identité du spectateur »*. (Giacchè 1989, 177-197); "Introduzione all'identità dello spettatore. Una ricerca di antropologia del teatro." [Introduction to spectator identity. A survey of the anthropology of theatre] (Giacchè 1992, 12-19); "Scene e visioni del Salento. Pagine tratte dal diario di una ricerca di antropologia del teatro" [Scenes and visions of Salento. Pages from the diary of an inquiry on anthropology of theatre] (Giacchè 1994, 38-43). These are brief accounts, mostly in the form of a diary, of the experiences and encounters made by the anthropologist from Perugia during the months of his stay and while moving from one place to another in Salento. See also the book: *Lo spettatore partecipante. Contributi per una antropologia del teatro* [The participating spectator. Contributions to an anthropology of theatre], in particular the chapter "Tra attore e spettatore" [Between actor and spectator] (Giacchè 1991, 85-107).

15. Giacchè 1987, 29.

Is there an interdependence between the *activity* of a spectator and the cultural *identity* in Salento? Can the fruition models of the spectator from Salento be generalised by virtue of a redefinition of the contemporary *western* spectator?

Giacchè stayed for several months in Salento. Travelling around the peninsula - Lecce, Otranto, Carpignano, Cursi, Galatina, Cavallino, Melendugno, Torrepaduli - he met and interviewed a sample group of local people from different social backgrounds - peasants, bourgeois, intellectuals - returning several times to them, being accompanied by them to festivals and fairs, then inviting them to attend the performances of the Asian actors-dancers.

At first, information of a socio-cultural nature was collected, useful for proposing an initial definition of the territory in relation to the scope and specific object of the research. After that, fifty subjects were selected to be interviewed, and a questionnaire was administered on their cultural and entertainment consumption, their exposure to the media and their degree of absorption of modern communication languages. This made it possible to make up a representative typology of the Salento 'spectator' from which to extrapolate twenty-four "privileged witnesses" with whom to deepen the research.

The Salento's witnesses included "elderly folk singers" and "disk jockeys", "preachers" and "organisers of a *fiesta* of a patron saint", "directors and actors in amateur theatre" and "film and music critics", "writers and scriptwriters", "cultural operators" and "subscribers to the local drama and opera season". Others came from more heterogeneous sectors of the entertainment industry such as "opera concerts" or "fireworks", "experimental theatre" or "fashion shows".

The sample of witnesses was assigned two themes. The first collected "the main material of the investigation, i.e., the information and considerations related to the *suitability*



Barter. ISTA 5, Salento, Italy, 1987. Photo: Tony D'Urso

of the spectator. It started from the recording of a sort of “life story” organised on the data and moments of an ideal spectator’s story,¹⁶ from the first personal experiences of theatre to the more general relationship with the performance. The second theme was to record first-hand reactions and comments at the end of the performance of Balinese dance-theatre, certainly unprecedented for them.

Piergiorgio Giacchè’s first findings were collected in a ‘log-book’ from which a sort of active and sentimental predisposition of the Salentine spectator towards everything *theatrical* emerges. Travelling through the Salento countryside, from town to town, “costs a precise toll - Giacchè wrote on 28th March 1987 - a fair, a festival or just a stroll stops you and explains to you that the ancient suburbia is not made up of secluded places where you can hide away to live, but of an infinite series of public squares or, if you like, of a single great ‘theatre of relations’, where the living also appears.”¹⁷

One of the most popular genres in the region and a much-awaited event, a *fiesta* of a patron saint is a “privileged, if not unique, container of the various types of performances that take part in the tradition: devotional practices and firework displays, folk songs and dances and opera concerts.”¹⁸ It is a good opportunity to *train* the eyes and to *be seen*.

Every town has its own patron saint who is celebrated, venerated, and exalted in a *fiesta* with the engaged participation of the citizens. In Lecce, from 24th to 26th August, Saints Oronzo, Giusto and Fortunato are celebrated, with the characteristic fair of livestock and agricultural products. In Martano on August 15th there are celebrations for the Madonna dell’Assunta with tasting of typical products. In Otranto, the festival dedicated to the Holy Martyrs recalls the massacre carried out by the Turks in 1480. In some cases, the religious mixes with the magical and the irrational: in Galatina, from June 28th to 30th, the festival in honour of Saints Peter and Paul is linked to the rite of healing of the *tarantate*, the women bitten by the tarantula, while in Montesano Salentino (August 6th and 7th), to cure the so called “evil of San Donato”, the intervention of the patron saint of the town is invoked.

These celebrations, while inextricably linking the town or village to its own religious *fiesta*, have some common features: the statue of the saint is carried in procession through the streets, with prayers and songs, with thunderous bangs and huge bass drums. The celebrations of the patron saint require the presence of one or more opera bands and end late at night with fireworks.

In Carpignano Salentino, on July 2nd and 3rd, the *fiesta* in honour of the Madonna della Grotta takes place. The event is part of a cycle of festivities that includes several devotional moments: there are frequent celebrations, inhabitants and people from outside fill the streets of the village during the procession, enter the church to pray in front of the statue of the Virgin or offer ex-votos.

On the first day, at nightfall, the most representative and symbolic moment is the rite of the “exchange of the keys”. The event is sealed by the meeting of two processions: one with the statue of the Madonna della Grotta coming from the sanctuary outside the

16. Giacchè 1992, 15-16.

17. Giacchè 1994, 39.

18. Giacchè 1992, 17.

village and the other starting from the main church, follows the statue of Sant'Antonio da Padova, the other patron saint of the town. The fireworks, the acclamations of the devotees and the loud music of the bands underline the moment when the two statues come face to face in the crowded square illuminated by an excess of lights. The music falls silent. In this silence full of emotional tension, the mayor, in his official capacity, loosens from the wrist of Sant'Antonio the red ribbon with the "key of the village" and ties it to the hand of the Virgin. The band plays "*Il silenzio*". Bangs sound and the crowd can finally get rid of their anxiety in a thunderous applause.

Every year tradition and devotion are respected, and so is the spontaneous imagination of the spectators and the dramaturgy of the celebration. During the ritual the mayor is at the centre of the scene. Around him the community - as participating spectators - observes his gestures, identifying themselves with their 'actor'. Even the religious authorities, in front of the first citizen's office, remain spectators.

Still in Carpignano Salentino, as for the last fifty years, on the first Sunday of September the *Festa te lu mieru* (wine feast) has been carried out. In this anticipation of autumn, in the square and in the streets of the village, thousands of people taste wine and typical food products, dancing until late into the night to the rhythm of the *pizzica-pizzica* or other popular songs, all in a noisy and orgiastic atmosphere.

Odin Teatret contributed to the rebirth of this event in August 1974, during its five-month transplant from Denmark to Carpignano Salentino. For the occasion, the "Danes" proposed to the population a particular form of barter: their performances in exchange for local songs and dances. The community of Carpignano responded with enthusiasm, organising a village festival with traditional music and dances, typical homemade products, and a lot of local wine. The feast, called *Lu Patrunu*, from the name of a very popular amusement among wine drinkers, was repeated the following year, becoming in time the most important secular *fiesta* of Salento.¹⁹

In Torrepaduli, a hamlet in the municipality of Ruffano, San Rocco, the miraculous protector of plague victims, is celebrated on August 16th. Already on the eve of the *fiesta*, numerous street vendors meet for the fair in his honour, with a variety of merchandise: local handicrafts in terracotta and wrought iron, devotional objects, tambourines from nearby towns and typical dishes.

After the procession, on the square in front of the church, dancers and musicians form a circle (*rota*) in the middle of which pairs of dancers perform for hours. To the obsessive rhythm of the traditional folk music, they perform the so-called *fencing-dance*. The index and middle fingers are used as weapons, extended to simulate a knife with which to 'touch' the opponent, ousting him from the circle. The confrontation involves only men. The challengers bring into play their skills as dancers and fencers. What once was probably a real knife fight between 'men of honour', ex-convicts or street people, today has become a symbolic and codified combat. Even if it is not a real exhibition - nor a sequence of actions and prefixed choreographic steps - we should not forget we are "on stage", and "giving a show".²⁰

19. On the stay in Carpignano and Odin Teatret's 'heritage' in Salento, see Santoro 2017.

20. See Ria 1987. A documentary study on the origins and context of the fencing-dance is by Luigi Tarantino (2001) with, as an afterword, an interview with Nicola Savarese entitled *Il teatro allo stato nascente*.

What was the first performance you saw? What about your first experience as an actor or spectator? What was your initial *enchantment*? A big bonfire in the middle of the square for the *fiesta* of Sant'Antonio Abate, patron saint of Novoli or the *vision* of the grandmother who, early in the morning, in front of a white wall in the courtyard and without a mirror, dedicated herself to the daily ritual of combing her hair.

Thus a spectator evokes the first *performance* for his childish eyes: « *Ses cheveux tombaient jusqu'aux genoux, elle avait alors à peu près soixante-dix ans, et il existait tout un rituel, une gestuelle incroyable, une utilisation des mains comme si elle était dans l'obscurité, pour ordonner une chevelure d'un mètre vingt, pour l'enrouler en un tout petit chignon, par une multitude de petites touches, avec une maestria infinie...* »²¹

And for those who lived in Otranto? Their first *experience* must have been the Tree of Life represented on the huge mosaic floor of their Cathedral and which they climbed with their gaze. They were like intruding spectators “who are denied detached and complete contemplation but are allowed the active search for all the figures and the close view of each detail.”²²

Some of Salento's inhabitants continue to use urban spaces - churches, buildings, balconies, windows - to see and be seen. Others try to escape the crossfire of glances, and in the summer move to their house in the country, a place of youth and nostalgia, of invention and improvisation on stage: « *Le soir il y avait de la lumière* - says another of those interviewed - *et nous, les jeunes, nous allions toujours vagabonder et jouer de la musique. S'il avait un accordéon, tant mieux, et sinon on prenait nos tambourins et on allait chanter un peu partout. Quand on passait devant les maisons de ceux que l'on appelait les 'tarantati', alors ceux-ci sortaient à notre rencontre, et cela durait une éternité.* »²³

The first results of the anthropological research seem to disprove the idea of a 'life' of spectators in Salento *only* in relation to the performance and the theatre. In their *activity*, the distinction - already in use - between *performance*, defined as “something to see”, and *theatre*, understood as a “place where one sees”, persists. Although the origin and the energy that nourish their *identity* are found in the experience of the former, one can only find a theatre of the spectator, not a performance that is their own. Their *theatrical* endowment, 'performed' in their everyday life, lies in imagining a situation in which one is both actor and spectator. Hence the Salento inhabitants alternate the taste for mean and coded communication with oral extremism and the hyperbole of gestures. Some of them live an existence in the shadows and in the meantime enact life like a carnival script, unable to survive without the lights of the stage, susceptible to applause, whistles, and the opinion of the people. Some look within themselves with one eye and outside with the other.■

Translated from Italian by Franco Zadra

21. Giacchè 1989, 187.

22. Giacchè 1994, 39.

23. Giacchè 1989, 187.

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