

Nicola Savarese, Peter Elsass, Jean-Marie Pradier

Report on the 5th Session of ISTA

Salento, Italy 1st-14th September 1987

The 5th public session of the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) was held in Otranto - a region of Salento, Italy - from September 1st to September 14th, 1987. This session was the conclusion of the research which began with the foundation of ISTA in 1979 and constitutes the point of departure for further work.

Faithful to its principles, ISTA organised the 1987 session in a way that allowed for the integration of past experience with new methodology and practice. This integration was realised through a combination of specialised work sessions and encounters with different peoples of the region. In this way, ISTA was able to enter into the living cultural weave of its host, Salento. Preparatory work, as well as scientific and artistic projects, helped ISTA meet the local culture in a manner which was neither abrupt nor artificial.

THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THEATRE ANTHROPOLOGY (ISTA)

ISTA, which was founded in 1979 and is directed by Eugenio Barba, is an international and interdisciplinary research and pedagogical organisation that is based in Holstebro, Denmark. A research laboratory focusing on the fundamentals of the performer's work, ISTA has become a center for the diffusion of Eastern and Western performance knowledge. It holds public sessions at the request of national and international institutions which then take on its administration. ISTA does not use conventional teaching methods: each session leads to the elaboration of a range of themes and an original pedagogy which synthesise past work and create new research perspectives.

In addition to performers from different cultures, ISTA gathers a scientific team of specialists from different disciplines who are drawn from the various universities with which it maintains contact.

THEATRE ANTHROPOLOGY

There is no longer any value in trying to come to terms with the actor's behaviour and performing from the point of view of psychological introspection: we know that this kind of approach has led theatre studies and theatrical practice to a dead end. Drawing upon various useful scientific disciplines (from ethology to ethnology, from history to

linguistics), theatre anthropology explores the actor's creative process and his various ways of learning by examining the empirical knowledge of performance professionals, particularly those whose culture has provided them with a precise repertoire of theatrical know-how.

Theatre anthropology is the study of the cultural and biological foundations of man in an organised performance situation. In this situation, the *actor-dancer* manifests and organises his physical presence according to psycho-physiological principles and processes which differ from those that he uses in daily life. This extra-daily activation of the body corresponds to what is called "technique".

ISTA has released various publications on its work and has organised the following public sessions:

- Bonn, Federal Republic of Germany: October 1-31, 1980
- Volterra, Italy: August 8 - October 8, 1981
- Blois and Malakoff, France: April 12 - 26, 1985
- Holstebro, Denmark: September 17 - 22, 1986

GENERAL THEME OF THE FIFTH SESSION

The 5th session was organised on the central theme of Dialogue of Theatres: The Actor's Tradition and the Spectator's Identity. According to the intentions of the director and founder, Eugenio Barba, this session provided "the empirical circumstances for experimentation with the energy that results from the difference between the cultural identity of the spectators and the traditions of the actors". The fruit of various theatrical traditions Indian, Japanese, Balinese, ODIN TEATRET - was transposed into different contexts and among spectators who, although possessing a different cultural identity, were nevertheless able to make an exchange. Transposition and dialogue led to definitive work and public meeting.

This was the second time that a public session of ISTA was held in Italy. The 5th session, in contrast to the Volterra meeting, which was held in a closed, quasi-monastic environment, took place in a variety of very public spaces: villages and small town squares, churches, historical castles, streets, and municipal theatres.

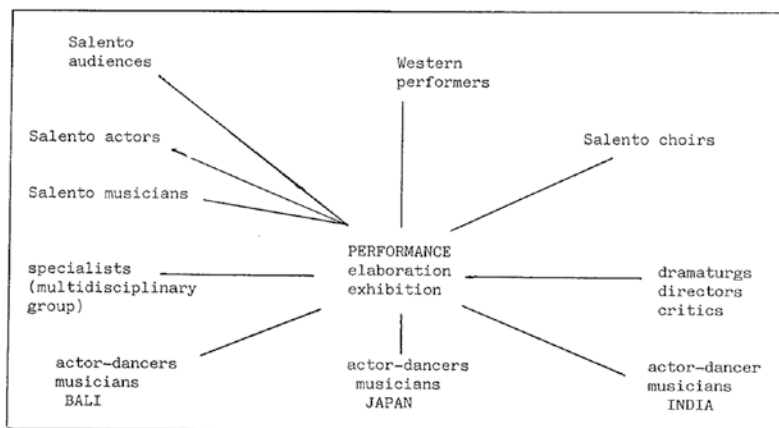
JUSTIFICATION

The 5th public session of ISTA was the occasion to pass from the theoretical level - established by the permanent team throughout the previous years - to the practical level, that is, from the realm of ideas to the stage, from the simplicity of rational hypothesis to the complexity of actual experience. This transition was primarily realised through the contributions of Sanjukta Panigrahi and Katsuko Azuma, two masters capable of working from the richness of their cultural origins and at the same time, of exploring the transcultural dimension of their own knowledge. Also important was the participation of actors, directors, dramaturgs and literary and performance specialists from different disciplines.

Even though ISTA'S public sessions are the results of years of research, they are not demonstrations of definite conclusions. Even though their sessions incorporate various performative elements they are not only performances.

PEDAGOGY

Differentness, difficulty in understanding the unfamiliar, and the surprise of images from distant lands, do not result in a loss of cultural identity. Rather than being obstacles, they become a source of stimulation. The result is not the estrangement of antagonists, but a stronger meeting.



The performances, both during their process of elaboration and when exhibited as aesthetic product, constituted the epistemological and pedagogical space of the meeting. It was in this space that the exchanges between different cultural groups were made. Each performance was an interactive process rather than an end in itself. All of these performances allowed for mutual discovery by providing the opportunity for each of the protagonists to express his own identity and to reinforce or, if necessary, modify it through contact with the other.

The contacts between the different cultural entities were not limited to a linear level. On the contrary, they were interwoven through the performances, on the basis of the performer's original techniques. The absence of "original techniques" would have made dialogue impossible. When the Salento musicians listened to their Balinese counterparts they were aware of difference, but at the same time, the trance-inducing dances from Italy and Bali revealed a strange familiarity between the two cultures.

THE NOTION OF IDENTITY

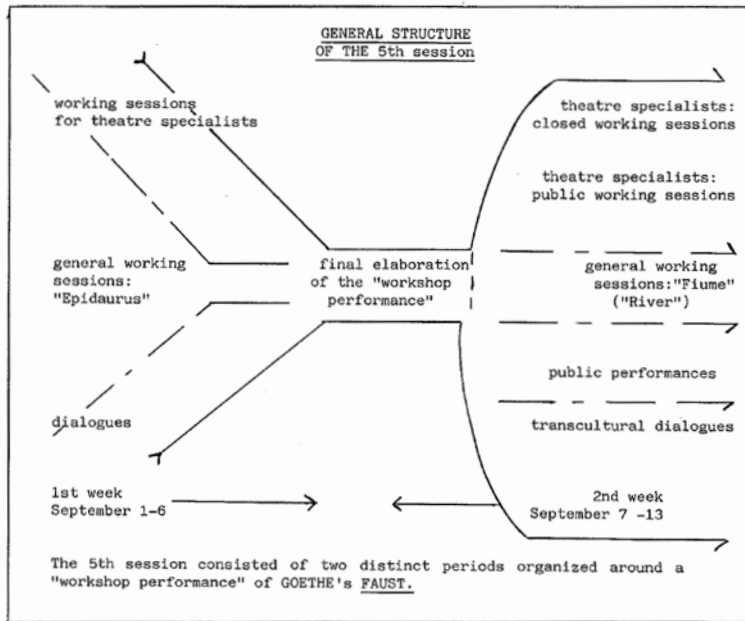
It was evident that this work was not confused with exoticism the wonderfully foreign - nor with syncretism - the amalgam of genres. On the contrary, the question of identity remained central throughout the sessions and followed on from a scientific project started many months before the congress, under the direction of an anthropologist, Piero Giacchè. The principles and the methods of this research were presented at a public seminar on September 12th, in Bari.

The notion of identity adopted at Salento corresponded to the one used by Levi Strauss: identity is the way in which one organises those features that one perceives

as characteristic of oneself. It was a matter, therefore, of assembling the elements of autodefinition via methodological procedures that are different from those used in the cultural market and from those that tend to establish a quantified cultural profile of a given population.

Piero Giacchè's central hypothesis takes into consideration the privileged relationship between the actor and spectator. The performance promotes an autodefinition thanks to cultural contrasts. His investigation does not, however, limit itself to an analysis of audience reactions. On the contrary, when the performance time allows for the organisation of a certain type of response, that becomes part of the complex weave which is the culture of a given region. The study of the regional context - Salento - has benefitted from the contributions of local specialists who, through their writings, revalidate and transmit an oral culture which is several centuries old. The use of questionnaires, informants, and follow-up verification after the performances provided a body of data which will require many months of analysis. The results of this research will be published in the course of 1988.

As to the actors and the specialists, both Eastern and Western, the question of identity was treated pragmatically as is evident in the session's program.



There were two working groups:

- Actors and directors
- Theatre specialists, each observing and analysing activities on the basis of his or her particular discipline.

This distinction allowed for greater collaboration between practitioners and theorists, and gave rise to further dramatic activities outside the general working sessions, based on the contributions of both groups.

PARTICIPANTS

Country of origin and number of regular participants:

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----|---------------|----|
| Federal Republic of Germany | ..1 | France | 1 |
| Argentina | 2 | Great Britain | 1 |
| Canada | 1 | Greece | 14 |
| Chile | 1 | Italy | 46 |
| Cuba | 1 | Mexico | 1 |
| Denmark | 1 | Turkey | 1 |
| Spain | 1 | U.S.A. | 3 |
| | | Jugoslavia | 1 |

Total: 67

In addition to the regular participants, there were also visitors and members of the theatre groups (from Italy, Colombia, Hungary, Malta and Switzerland) who participated in the session in Copertino on September 11th.

First week

GENERAL WORKING SESSION: TEXT AND ACTION

During the first week all participants met each morning at 6 a.m. in an outdoor space called “Epidauros”. Everyone was involved in developing a “workshop performance” or short “frontier production”, based on Goethe’s *FAUST*. Two actresses-dancers, the Japanese Katsuko Azuma (buyo dance) and the Indian Sanjukta Panigrahi (oddisi dance), a Japanese kabuki actor, Kanichi Hanayagi (onnagata), an orchestra composed of Indian musicians led by Raghunath Panigrahi (flute, sitar, percussion, harmonium), a Japanese singer and a shamisen player, and Western musicians (guitar, flute, violin, choir), worked on three scenes under the direction of Eugenio Barba.

The Faust theme was retained due to its importance and because of the quality of the dramatic works it has generated. Each participant was asked to prepare for the session by at least reading Marlowe’s and Goethe’s *FAUST* prior to their arrival in Salento. This previous preparation continued at ISTA through sessions of collective analysis and workshops.

The work on Faust evoked echoes that reverberate throughout our dramatic literature:

- the visible, the invisible, the metamorphosis of the character - Mephisto
- the pact, its stakes and consequences
- the quest for knowledge and power
- the love relationship, and manipulation (Margareta’s character)
- identity

Barba’s approach consisted of developing a performance text which used the

contributions of participants as a point of departure. The participants were divided into groups, each of which was asked to propose a sequence of scenes that they considered essential to the plot, and for which they were to provide possible corresponding physical actions. Barba then worked on the transformation of this “global text” - anecdotal, dramaturgical propositions - into precise theatrical action.

The ensuing vigorous elaboration led to an inversion of the traditional way of developing a dramatic narrative in which the actor illustrates reality through the portrayal of redundant stereotypes that mask the richness of meaning. Barba’s reversal of the approach involved drawing a series of actions from within the text which, when distilled, generated a non-realistic - or “non - anecdotal” - physical narration far removed from redundant illustration.

The entire workshop process consisted of developing this “other text”, and culminated in a final run of some 30 minutes duration which ended with the reading of Goethe’s Dedication from the first volume of his Faust.

ACCULTURATED ACTORS

For an actor, acculturation corresponds to the mastery of specific body techniques which are different from those used in daily life.

Inculturation, which begins at birth, proceeds, on the contrary, by means of a process of passive sensory-motor absorption of the daily behaviour patterns of a given culture.

By acculturated actor, one means the actor who has undergone an apprenticeship which has profoundly modified his “natural” daily behaviour.

The choice of Eastern performers came from a hypothesis that had to be tested.

The acculturated actor’s mastery of the pre-expressive level of performance induces a particular intelligence about dramatic situations so that the creative process, that is, the realisation of the performance, is made possible even if its point of departure - theme, text, intrigue, situation - is absolutely alien to him. The actor’s professional identity, which is concretely incarnated in a codified virtuosity built up during his apprenticeship, permits him to perceive the thematic identity of a piece of work that does not belong to his culture.

The mastery of precise corporal techniques characterises traditional Eastern performers (formed according to their respective traditions) and Western performers who work according to analogous principles, such as those from the ODIN TEATRET. This mastery gives them an evident pre-expressive quality (presence). Similarly, a performer’s physical intelligence is accompanied by an understanding of particular dramatic situations. Confronted with a subject alien to their culture, the Faust, directed by a theatre director who did not speak their language, Barba, the Japanese and Indian artists were capable of creating new combinations of their traditional pre-expressive and expressive “knowledge” and of transforming them into extremely suggestive contemporary forms.

For the Western “inculturated” performer, accustomed to illustrating dramatic situations in a realistic fashion, the lesson is important: it is not the “truth” of the illustration that matters, but the quality of what precedes it, the way of giving life to the body before giving it the word.

RESULTS

The fundamental principles that support the actor's performance were extracted progressively during the course of the work. The process of exploring and developing the staging was analysed from the first work on the text and/or theme up to the final public performance.

It was possible to answer questions that all performers put to themselves:

- How to avoid submission to stereotypes?
- How to reconcile technique and imagination?
- How to guarantee the actor's identity, the spectator's identity?

Obviously, theatre cannot be reduced to technique nor to concepts such as extra-daily behaviour. The principles that were applied constitute neither knowledge, orthodoxy, nor "school". Consequently, the question of identity did not become a matter of revindication or simple affirmation. The performer's and the spectator's identities are founded on an apparent paradox: individual cultures can dialogue insofar as they know how to activate their transcultural components. The quality of the fecund, living, physical presence of the actor is made possible through the most abstract of exchanges, that between cultural systems. The training that allows one to analyse action also allows one to imagine more subtle game combinations. If the actor wants to surpass the elementary stage of undifferentiated emotions, he must rediscover the knowledge of physical presence which is a universal given that belongs to all human beings.

WORK SESSIONS FOR THE THEATRE SPECIALISTS

Additional daily work sessions combined theatre specialists and experts from other disciplines. During these meetings conducted by Barba, the relationship between theory and theatrical creativity was explored.

Second week

TRANSCULTURAL DIALOGUES

ISTA's Eastern artists gave several performances (transcultural dialogues) in conjunction with local musicians and singers:

- September 6th, Cursi: religious music
- September 10th, Nardò: popular music
- September 13th, Calimera: contemporary music
- September 13th, Caprarica: religious music
- September 13th, Maglie: martial arts

BALI

The Balinese troupe Dharma Shanti, from the National Academy of Balinese and Indonesian Dance, directed by Professor I Made Bandem, joined the Indian, Japanese and European groups at the end of the first week.

The company participated in both the public and the closed ISTA meetings.

PUBLIC SEMINARS

In the mornings of the second week Barba conducted practical work sessions with the theatre specialists.

In addition to these meetings, seminars dealing with theoretical questions relevant to the theatre were held, such as the one in Copertino on September 11th on theatre anthropology and the first international meeting between semiology of performance and theatre anthropology in Bari on September 12th, attended by all the guest specialists.

PUBLIC PERFORMANCES

Performances were presented in various towns of the region:

- September 6th
 - Otranto: Buyo Kabuki (Japan)
 - Lecce: Odissi Dance (India)
 - Bari: Dance Theatre of Bali (Indonesia)
- September 7th
 - Martano: Dance Theatre of Bali (Indonesia)
 - Lecce: Buyo Kabuki (Japan)
 - Bari: Odissi Dance (India)
- September 8th
 - Otranto: Odissi Dance (India)
 - Lecce: Dance Theatre of Bali (Indonesia)
 - Bari: Buyo Kabuki Theatre (Japan)
- September 9th
 - Corigliano: Dance Theatre of Bali (Indonesia)
 - Melendugno: Buyo Kabuki Theatre (Japan)
 - Aradeo: Odissi Dance (India)
- September 10th
 - Nardo: Buyo Kabuki Theatre (Japan)
- September 11th
 - Copertino: THEATRUM MUNDI (India, Japan, Indonesia, Europe)
- September 12th
 - Bari: THEATRUM MUNDI (India, Japan, Indonesia, Europe)

“FIUME” (River)

A general session was conducted each morning, following Barba's meetings with the specialists, in which he explored the first week's hypothesis also with Western acculturated performers. In these sessions Roberta Carreri and Iben Nagel Rasmussen (ODIN TEATRET), as well as the Orientals, improvised and worked under Barba's direction following much the same methodology used in the previous week in his work on Faust.

ORGANISATION

The organization of the 5th public session of ISTA was the responsibility of:

- MEDITERRANEA TEATROLABORATORIO, Lecce, directed by Giorgio Di Lecce and Cristina Ria.

- Nicola Savarese, director of the Performance Section of the Department of Social Systems and Communication of the University of Lecce.

BUDGET AND FINANCING

The 5th session was made possible thanks to financial contributions from: the Puglia Region, the Provincial Government of Lecce, the Puglia Public Theatre Consortium, the Lecce Chamber of Commerce, under the auspices of

- The Ministry of Performance and Tourism
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

INVITED ARTISTS

INDIA

Sanjukta Panigrahi (odissi dancer)
Raghunath Panigrahi (musician and singer)
Hemant Kumar Das (musician)
Mohini Mohan Patnik (musician)
Gangadhar Pradhan (musician)

INDONESIA

The company Dharma Shanti from the National Indonesian Academy of Dance (ASTI) from Denpasar, Bali.

Artistic Director: I Made Bandem

Swasti W. Bandem, Desak Made Suarti Laksmi, Ni Ketut Suryatini, Ni Nyoman Candri, I Wayan Rai, I Nyoman Catra, I Ketut Kodi, Tjokorda Raka Tisnu, with the participation of I Made Pasek Tempo from the village of Tampak Siring and Pino Confessa from ASTI, Denpasar.

JAPAN

Katsuko Azuma (Nihon buyo dancer)
Haruchiho Azuma (Nihon buyo dancer)
Kan-Ichi Hanayagi (onnagata kabuki actor)
Shizuko Kineya (musician)
Takae Koyama (singer)

OTHER COUNTRIES

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| Toni Cots | Spain | BASHO |
| Gisela Cremer | Germany | TILBUT THEATER |
| Lena Bjerregaard | Denmark | NORDISK TEATERLABORATORIUM |
| Cesar Brie | Argentina | NORDISK TEATERLABORATORIUM |
| Roberta Carreri | Italy | NORDISK TEATERLABORATORIUM |
| Jan Ferslev | Denmark | NORDISK TEATERLABORATORIUM |
| Richard Fowler | Canada | NORDISK TEATERLABORATORIUM |
| Naira Gonzales | Argentina | NORDISK TEATERLABORATORIUM |
| Iben Nagel Rasmussen | Denmark | NORDISK TEATERLABORATORIUM |

CONCLUSION

The results obtained are indicative of the effectiveness of the method used: an intensive project led by highly qualified actor-dancers in full command of their technique.

This type of session would appear to be extremely useful not only for performance professionals but also for theoreticians and theatre specialists wishing to analyse their practices and knowledge.

PROSPECTIVE

In the coming months, ISTA's permanent research team will publish the results of the work undertaken during the session. In addition, future projects are under consideration in Mexico, Japan and Great Britain. Finally, the new aspects of theatrical practice which appeared during the session will give rise to further new research by the members of the permanent team.