



Reencuentro Ayacucho 1988, international meeting of theatre groups, Huampani, Peru. Eugenio Barba leads the march in the desert for the performance in honour of Jerzy Grotowski at the archeological site of Cajamarca. Photo: Tony D'Urso

Leonardo Mancini

Anthropological Theatre: an Introduction

In a speech given in Bahía Blanca, Argentina, in April 1987, Eugenio Barba put forward the notion of 'anthropological theatre' within the context of professional identity and ethics. Within that framework, Odin Teatret's director thematised the relationship between the actor's craft and his/her cultural background as a dialectic dimension which heterogeneous theatre groups and individuals could share as a common ground of encounter. Therefore, rather than an artistic definition, 'anthropological theatre' had the value of an invitation to exchange and connect, a value that can still be recognised as valid today.

If theatre anthropology is based on the observation and on the active participation of performers and scholars, anthropological theatre thrives in the collective dimension of theatre groups. This connection almost reaches the value of an axiom in Marco De Marinis' essay (*Barba, The Third Theatre and the Discovery of Theatre Anthropology*), in which the movement preceding the *inventio* (discovery) of theatre anthropology is traced in its 'original' context of Third Theatre. If Barba's definition of 'anthropological theatre' dates to 1987, it appears to be the result of a sensibility 'which already existed'. It is not accidental that De Marinis remarks the emergence of an analytical observation of theatre groups' training as the base for the notion of *presence* in theatre anthropology: an experience that De Marinis also recognises as crucial in the development of his own perspective as a theatre scholar.

As Piergiorgio Giacchè observes, at that time, and still today, many theatre groups have adopted the term 'anthropological theatre' to define their way of working. Observing these composite realities, in his essay *Once Upon a Time There Was Theatre and Once Upon a Time There Was Anthropology*, Giacchè overcomes rigid divisions and offers a discipline rapprochement of cultural anthropology and theatre anthropology: in his perspective theatre anthropology was 'an invention for theatre and a discovery for anthropology'. Giacchè highlights convergent aspects and similarities in the two fields, culminating in what he summarises as the researcher's task: 'explore all the theatres of the world but then also the world understood as theatre'.



An exemplification of these processes and relationships among theory and practice was recently offered by Aline Menassé in a speech given during a round-table discussion on Third Theatre and its resonances in Mexico, which was held on 7 February 2024, at the Centro Cultural Universitario of Mexico City. In her article here entitled *Tribu por afinidad*, Menassé - co-founder with Susana Frank of the Teatro Laboratorio La Rueda in 1980 - retraces her relationship with Barba and the value of the dimension of group theatres in her cultural context since her participation in the Ayacucho Festival in 1978 in Peru. Menassé narrates the 'enthusiasm' and the 'euphoria' with which, upon returning from the Ayacucho Festival, a "*trayectoria rebelde*" arose: the desire to organise theatre meetings independently ("*un Encuentro de teatro in Zacatecas, el V Coloquio de Teatro de Grupo Zacatecas* 81"). Finding its terminology in the notions of theatre anthropology and anthropological theatre, these meetings had the intention of bringing to Mexico a new and different way of observing and conceiving the theatrical event, founded on the centrality of the body and on the possibilities of awakening the "ancestral subconscious memory which awakens the physical, vocal, mental and emotional imagination".



Alicio Amaral (Brazil) and Parvathy Baul (India) in *Theatrum Mundi Anastasis*. National Theatre Budapest, May 2023. Photo: Francesco Galli