

Eugenio Barba

Anthropological Theatre

Abstract: This text was written by Eugenio Barba on April 12th, 1987, in Bahía Blanca, Argentina, during the Encuentro Internacional de Teatro Antropológico (International Meeting of Anthropological Theatre) organised by Teatro Alianza with theatre groups from Latin America and Europe. Here Barba identifies the differences between theatre anthropology and anthropological theatre. Barba's text first appeared in English within an article by Ian Watson, Third Theatre in Latin America in The Drama Review: TDR, Winter 1987, 31 (4): 18-24.

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Theatre Anthropology is the study of human biological and sociocultural behaviour in performative circumstances.

Anthropological Theatre is a theatre in which the performer confronts her/his own identity.

The notion of identity stems from the Latin *Idem* which means that which does not change, that remains the same. Each human being has an axis, a centre, a kernel of values which orients her/him to life's circumstances, oppositions, and obstacles. In the case of the performer, this identity manifests itself through craft. The concretisation of this craft explores an historic and biographic horizon which determines the artistic results. As with any cultural expression, these results are relative to the performer's experience, heredity, and vision of the world. It is this relativity which gives to each individual uniqueness in front of others. In the same way, a theatre group should manifest its relativity in order to define itself in front of others.

The Anthropological Theatre underlines the uniqueness of the individual, of each actor, of each theatre group, of each historical-cultural horizon. It implies a travel through one's own history and culture, and provides the means of strengthening the individual's axis-identity, giving each of us a separate profile. But at the same time it supplies the tools for meeting in a territory where we are all equal. A territory that consists of the performer's material presence which is the same and unchangeable in any place. This presence is one's professional identity, which permits the performer to go behind her/his artistic temperament and the artistic results or style of a culture to discover the common principles of scenic presence which can be applied to personal exploration. This professional identity belongs to a transcultural theatrical history



built by masters and creators who came before. Therefore an actor from Polynesia can develop a professional identity by orienting her/himself to the values and experiences of masters from other cultures.

Anthropological Theatre only exists if it is based on a polarization. On the one hand, the question: Who am I as an individual in a determined time and space? And on the other, the capacity of professional exchange between individuals who may be far removed from one's own time or geographic location.

It is through exchange, rather than in isolation, that a culture can develop, that is, transform itself organically. The same process applies to individuals and theatre performers. Therefore, in professional exchange one's historical-biographic identity is fundamental when confronted with its opposite pole, the meeting with otherness, with what is different. Not to impose one's own horizon or way of seeing, but rather to provoke a displacement which makes it possible to discover a territory beyond the individual's known universe.

The Anthropological Theatre means protecting one's own axis, overcoming insecurities and self-defense in order to expose oneself to confrontation, disorientation, and crisis, so that the theatre can respect life's law of continual flow and change.