

Editorial



Carolyn Carlson, Julia Varley, ISTA 10, Copenhagen, Denmark, 1996 - Photo: Fiora Bemporad

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Starting a New Adventure

This first issue of *Journal of Theatre Anthropology* takes us back in time, to the origins of theatre anthropology, to the founding of ISTA - International Theatre Anthropology, and to the first ISTA sessions in Bonn, Germany, in 1980, and in Volterra, Italy, in 1981.

Many of the articles have been published before, but we have chosen to include them because re-reading them in a different context and with the awareness of what has been achieved since with theatre anthropology studies, helps give a historical perspective to this field of research.

Some articles are translated, others are in their original language. The languages used are English, French and Spanish. JTA has privileged the translation to English of articles existing only in other languages to expand their distribution and oppose the usual tendency of only translating articles from English.

Language has changed since some of the articles were written. For example, women are now formally included with s/he and her/his and herself/himself forms, and a less euro-centred geographical vision mostly uses Asian instead of oriental when differentiating from the western (European and North American) world. The language of the old articles has been maintained as written at the time and has not been corrected.

The general title of the first issue is "The origins". Reflected in the articles are the themes and discussions of the first years of existence of ISTA: whether theatre anthropology can be recognised as a science or not, the relationship between the Asian and western traditions, the recognition of intercultural principles, and the difference of conception between cultural anthropology and theatre anthropology, and between personal, geographical, genre and professional identities.

Eugenio Barba's and Leonardo Mancini's articles investigate the background that fed into the creation of ISTA and the formulation of theatre anthropology as a study field which should give pragmatic tools to theatre practitioners and scholars. First came the need to learn and exchange and develop an autonomous research process, with the inquisitiveness of making comparisons with the experience of others. Then came the need to point out and understand the principles underlying different acting traditions and conventions, to be used for apprenticeship and for the analysis of documents and



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photographs from the past. Some scholars defined ISTA as a school that taught *how to see*. Theatre anthropology started by concentrating on the first days of the actors/dancers process rather than analysing the results witnessed through performances and texts.

The issue is divided into sections: **Origins, Comments, Reflections and discussions, Recurring principles and News.**

The articles included in **Origins** reveal how one of the starting points for theatre anthropology was identifying and sharing questions concerning the craft. Teachers and students alike were treading unknown territories. Eugenio Barba insisted on asking what seemed like naïve questions looking into the details of the first day of apprenticeship and examining the meaning of the words used during the practical work. The artists questioned and rediscovered their art forms while teaching basic techniques. The scholars inquired more and more wanting to discover what lies behind the results they saw.

Theatre anthropology did not appear as a sudden application of an idea but took form slowly after Eugenio Barba's long observation of Odin Teatret's actors' different use of the body compared with similar ways noted in classical Asian actors/dancers. During a period of travel in 1978, Odin Teatret's actors learned foreign codified forms revealing a similarity of principles of their own training with the forms they had learned.

During the first ISTA sessions everyone was discovering. Later ISTA sessions confronted themes and concentrated on participants' experiencing a situation in which they could *learn to learn*. This was facilitated by an environment that was enriched by the high artistic quality of the invited actors/dancers and by the intellectual fervour of the scholars who profited from the possibility of living together for one month during the first ISTA session in Bonn and two months during the second session in Volterra. ISTA was a school to learn to see for actors/dancers who wanted to go beyond the forms and for scholars who had no direct physical experience.

From the articles in **Origins** we learn how Eugenio Barba first spoke about theatre anthropology in a lecture in April 1980 in Palermo, Italy, then again in the *First Hypothesis* during a lecture in May 1980 in Wroclaw, Poland, and then when the thoughts became concrete actions with the organisation of the first ISTA session in October 1980 in Bonn, Germany. Eugenio Barba often tells the story of deciding on the name of International School of Theatre Anthropology on a train journey with Ugo Volli on their way to visit Tadashi Suzuki in Toga during a tour with Odin Teatret in Japan in August 1980. He chose it to be a school at a time when theatre groups all over the world preferred to call themselves laboratories giving workshops and seminars. ISTA became a *performers' village* thanks to the deep commitment and adventurous will of people like Hans Jürgen Nagel and Roberto Bacci who managed to find the necessary economic and logistic conditions to make it happen.

Franco Ruffini's article differentiates between rigorous science and pragmatic science. The pragmatic laws - the principles underlying the different genres - explain what to do and how to do it, but not why it happens. The sharing of the questions and not understanding permits to observe the pre-expressive level of presence. The pragmatic

laws of the use of balance, opposition and incoherent coherence, and the pre-expressive level are often written about in the articles, anticipating a centrality of themes in later books and research. The misunderstandings over what the pre-expressive level means have flourished for many years while at the same time becoming a common terminology among many theatre practitioners around the world who are not even aware of the concept's origin.

Eugenio Barba gave the task to two or three scholars, among the founders of ISTA or members of the scientific staff, to make a report of each session of ISTA. The reports include detailed explanations of how the session was organised, with timetables and numbers and groups and space allocation. These reports were widely distributed, allowing theatre anthropology to be introduced in different theatre environments around the world. The report of the first ISTA session written by Jean-Marie Pradier, included in the issue, was sent to Jacques Darcant at the ITI (International Theatre Institute) in Paris and to Alexandre Bloch who directed the culture department of UNESCO.

An image of the day-by-day arrangement of the School is given by Nicola Savarese's photographs. Nicola Savarese accompanied his written documentation with the photographs and thus started a tradition of having photographers following the whole session of the different ISTAs (Fiora Bemporad, Tony D'Urso, Francesco Galli, Torben Huss, Emidio Luisi, Bernd Uhlig) to capture body postures and a dialogue of physical tensions that became apparent during the comparative work. It was also the beginning of a new model of books with information given by images beside the written words, like *The Secret Art of the Performer* and *The Five Continents of Theatre*, both written by Nicola Savarese and Eugenio Barba.

The **Comments** are collected from Asian artists invited to the first two ISTA sessions and from scholars who had been invited to the first symposium in Bonn in 1980. Only at the end of the second ISTA the idea of a permanent school emerges. At first, the Asian artists agree about not understanding exactly what Eugenio Barba's intentions were - as he probably did not know himself at the time - but they trusted his work and found the questions stimulating for their own practice. Their reactions after the first ISTA in Bonn and the second ISTA in Volterra, published in the French theatre journal *Bouffonneries* and re-published here, are evidence of how everyone was advancing confidently in darkness.

Eugenio Barba's meeting with Henri Laborit, facilitated by Jean-Marie Pradier, was influential in creating an understanding of a scientific way of thinking and categorising, and in feeding from other sciences, like biology, to develop the research process at ISTA.

Clive Barker suggests considering the everyday body before analysing the different disciplines at a pre-expressive level. He notices that the weight in classical ballet is placed upwards while the Asian lowered pelvis is found in modern dance postures. In the beginning, it was difficult for everyone to abstract from the aesthetics and recognise the principles independently from how they were applied. Getting caught by the rhythm and composition of movements, make many, like Moriaki Watanabe, notice more differences between the Japanese and Indian classical forms, than between the Indian and European classical dance.

Artists, who were used to learn by imitation, had to explain in order to teach the basic elements of their technique in a short time, thus becoming aware of what they only knew by doing and realising the reasons behind choices that centenary traditions had passed down to them. Augusto Omolu, who joined the ISTA artistic staff in 1994, for the ISTA session in Londrina, Brazil, always used to comment on how teaching at ISTA had allowed him to understand the motives behind certain movements of his Orixá dance, while demonstrating how to hold imaginary props, prepare for battle, or imitate the behaviour of nature.

Intellectuals and scholars coming into contact for the first time with theatre anthropology show a mixture of fascination and scepticism, feeling inspired and doubtful. Raymonde Temkine cannot accept that common traits can exist between Asian and European actors. Thomas Bredstorff says that theatre anthropology should be more appropriately called odinology. In a personal conversation, Janne Risum remembers reacting against theatre anthropology thinking that it corresponded to a certain aesthetic; because of this, she did not consider herself as part of the scientific staff even if she participated in many ISTA sessions. It is interesting to notice that although reactions went in many different directions, the dialogue remained important for Eugenio Barba as he organised open symposiums after the closed sessions and encouraged the guests to send their reactions in writing afterwards.

The section of **Reflections and discussions** includes one of these dialogues: Franco Ruffini, Nando Tavian and Janne Risum establish a chain reaction to each other's writing after the first ISTA sessions. Patrice Pavis also provokes a discussion by writing an article after seeing my work demonstration *The Echo of Silence* in Saintes, France, in 1991. The discussion continued practically by sharing the stage during the symposium at ISTA in Cardiff in 1992 where we spoke about text and subtext, score and subscore. The way of thinking of the actor/dancer and if this can be analysed in the same way as the visible results of performances or teaching methods is a field that Pavis and Ruffini investigate. As a response the actors/dancers tend to bring the discussions down to earth, knowing that the body-mind works as a unity and not a duality.

Actors/dancers embody the principles of theatre anthropology, often without theorising. Their actions explain and few words are necessary. What they write may seem too simple and straightforward, especially in the context of an academic journal. This is one reason for a section of the *Journal of Theatre Anthropology* in which actors/dancers can contribute with their experience directly from a territory they dominate, where they are convincing and convinced. **Recurring principles** is a section devoted to actors/dancers who speak with demonstrations concerning processes of work and how the principles of theatre anthropology function practically. This section allows actors/dancers to present their point of view directly without abstract interpretations that maintain that methods decide the practice instead of the other way round.

In the first issue we include Ana Correa's *Desmontaje de Rosa Cuchillo*. *Desmontaje* is the term used in Latin America for work demonstrations that explain the process of creation of a performance. Many of these demonstrations present physical training,

manipulation of props, montage with text and music, and relationship with space. The terminology includes references to soft and vigorous energy, and more concrete examples of how opposition can be explained through different directions of parts of the body, resistance, impulses and counterimpulses.

Reading the text of the demonstration accompanied by some photographs takes us into the intimate situation experienced during many ISTA sessions when the artists demonstrate their techniques step by step and then suddenly jump to the performance situation in which technique disappears so that the spectators experience a different reality.

At the end, **News** includes information from places where theatre anthropology is a subject at many university theatre departments and part of the practice of theatre groups. There are examples of activities in Greece, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, and the UK. **News** also includes letters to the *Journal of Theatre Anthropology*, a basic bibliography for theatre anthropology, and a short biographic information about the authors of the articles.

One of the aims of the *Journal of Theatre Anthropology* is to stimulate the relationship between theory and practice, between historians and performers, for information that is useful for the craft and words that are rooted in the practice, overcoming specialisations, and allowing for dialogues in which terminology can be enriched by different points of view and experiences. There is not a dominating ideology to defend, but reflections that confront shifty notions like energy and presence, thinking with the feet and shamanism, tensions and trance, tradition and innovation, laboratory and improvisation, science and art, culture and individuality, effort and inspiration, theatre and dance, anthropology and biology...

We look forward to gathering articles for the second issue entitled "Learning to see" in which experiences from more recent ISTA sessions will be included.