ISTA

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THEATRE ANTHROPOLOGY

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6th INTERNATIONAL SESSION

Facts and Tales
ISTA sessions 6 - 7

ISTA 6, Bologna, 1990
Performance Techniques and Historiography

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PERFORMANCE TECHNIQUES AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

An essential part of theatrical culture consists of the study of the performance practices of the past. The history of the theatre is not only a 'reservoir of the past'. It is also a 'reservoir for the new' containing knowledge which from time to time makes it possible for us to transcend the present. This does not mean isolating oneself, but imagining other *possibilities* for the theatre. The history of the theatrical reforms of the 20th century, in the West as well as in the East, shows the strong link of interdependence which connects the theatre of the past with new artistic creation.

On the other hand, historiographical understanding is often impeded by a lack of experience, by the absence of an empirical dimension, by the impossibility of overcoming the limits established for the spectator. Theatre scholars often come face to face with *testimony* without being in a position to *testify*. They run the risk of accumulating the deformations of memory, without possessing the means to correct them and to arrive at a living image of the meaning which theatre had in the past.

The link between *theatre* and *written words* is a fertile means of transmission and cultural growth. But it is often overbalanced in favour of books, and the memory of the living experience risks being dispersed in erudite pages devoid of context. Among

Journal of Theatre Anthropology, 3-4, 2024: 165-166 • Mimesis Edizioni, Milan - Issn: 2784-8167 (print), Issn: 2724-623X (online)
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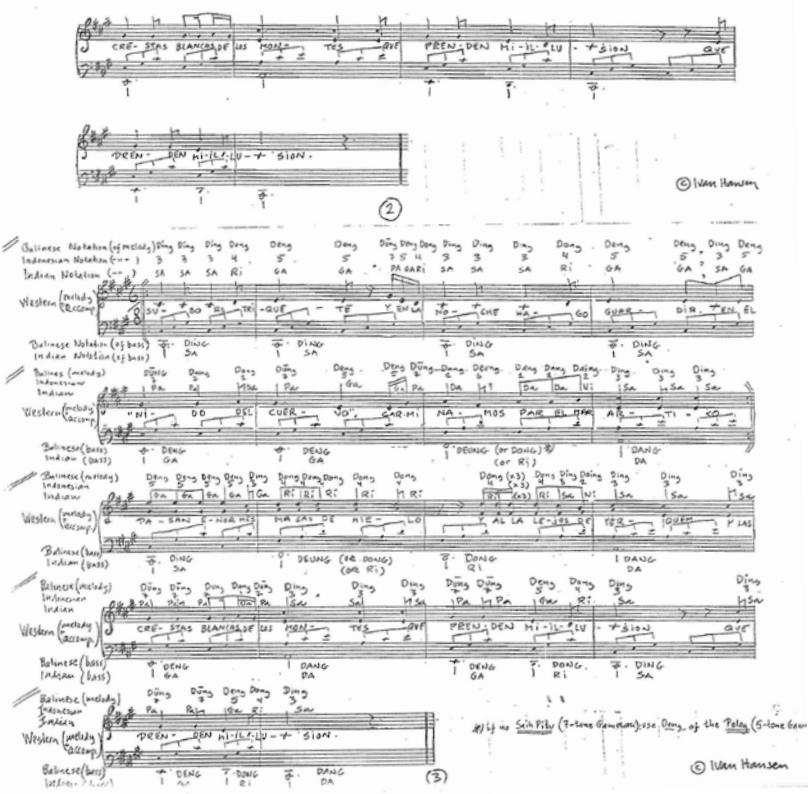
the various forms of ethnocentrism which veil our vision is one which does not depend on geographical and cultural location but rather on the roles created by the theatrical relationship. It is that ethnocentrism which only considers the theatre from the point of view of the spectators and neglects the realm of the performers: the network of their relationships, knowledge and ways of thinking of which the performance is the fruit.

From this arises the vital importance of creating a *time for common experience* in which, preserving the specificity of various competences, the artists who embody particular traditions dialogue with scholars who take on the task of sharpening the instruments necessary for understanding the multiform reality of the theatre and its history. In such a confrontation, hypotheses, doubts and questions can be woven into a common research in which the distinction between practical and theoretical specialisation is temporarily dissolved. The purpose of this *time for common experience* is not the achievement of immediate and unitary results. It offers new points of departure and new stimuli for successive individual research on the part of both those who give life to the performance techniques and those engaged in passing on the memory.



Extract of the musical score *Subo al triquete* by Ivan Hansen composed for *The Crossing*. ISTA 6, Bologna, Italy, 1990. Part for the Balinese musicians.