



Priscila Duarte as the grand-father in *Pedro e o lobo*, 1996. Photo: Rogério Reis (Diadokai Archive)

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Theatre Anthropology in Brazil

Building an Identity through the Conquest of Difference

Abstract: This article traces the history of theatre anthropology in Brazil from the first meetings with Eugenio Barba to the most recent productions of theatre groups. It discusses questions of identity in the craft and how to deal with colonisation in the search of an autonomous theatrical expression. Examples of choices made by Brazilian artists include Cia. YinsPiração, Cia. Mundu Rodá, Grupo Piollin, Grupo Teatral Moitará, Lume Teatro and Teatro Diadokai.

Keywords: Eurasian theatre, Group theatre, Identity, Colonisation, Professional roots

Traditions preserve and pass on a form, not the sense
that animates it. Everyone must define and reinvent the sense
for themselves. This reinvention expresses a personal, cultural
and professional identity.

Eugenio Barba¹

In 1976, when Odin Teatret first visited Venezuela at the invitation of the Caracas Festival, a close and long-lasting relationship was established between Latin America and Eugenio Barba and the group's actors and actresses. Their first contact with Brazil took place in 1978, when Roberta Carreri and Francis Pardeilhan were in Salvador (Bahia) to study capoeira and the dance of the orixás, as part of the work process for Odin Teatret's performance *The Million*.

However, it was in 1987 that Eugenio Barba's tours profoundly marked young Brazilian theatre artists of the time. He came accompanied by two groups, Farfa and The Canada Project² in the same period as the Italian groups Teatro tascabile di Bergamo and Teatro Potlach visited the cities of São Paulo, Campinas, and Rio de Janeiro. The

1 Barba 1996, 211.

2 The groups Farfa (directed by Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Odin Teatret actress) and The Canada Project (directed by Richard Fowler) at that time were part of Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium-Odin Teatret.



performances, lectures, film screenings, and workshops conducted by these artists in Brazil facilitated a direct contact with theatre anthropology and Third Theatre from multiple perspectives for the first time.³ The impact of these encounters was such that, based on this experience, many groups were formed or laid new foundations for their work.



Luigia Calcaterra, Alberto Gorla, Tiziana Barbiero and Caterina Scotti in the street performance *Albatri*, Teatro tascabile di Bergamo, Rio de Janeiro, 1987. Photo: TTB Archive

These tours were an initiative of Luís Otávio Burnier,⁴ founder and first director of Lume Teatro (Campinas, SP), who convinced the Brazilian Ministry of Culture (through FUNARTE) and the Italian Cultural Institutes of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo to sponsor the events. In 1985, Burnier, a young Brazilian actor and director who had studied in Paris with Etienne Decroux, participated in the 3rd session of ISTA in Blois and Malakoff, France. His meeting with masters of Asian theatre traditions (Sanjukta Panigrahi, Odissi, from India; and Katsuko Azuma, Nihon Buyo, from Japan) reminded him of aspects of the theatricality of Brazilian popular traditions, in which

3 In 1988 and 1989, Tascabile, Potlach, and also the Centro per la Sperimentazione e la Ricerca Teatrale di Pontedera, another Italian group belonging to the culture and production system of group theatre, visited Brazil in several places, not only Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, but other cities, such as Parana (Rio Grande do Sul), Salvador (Bahia), Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais), and Belém (Pará).

4 Luís Otávio Burnier was born in Campinas in 1956 and, in 1975, at eighteen, he left for Paris to study mime. He studied at the school of Etienne Decroux, then 75 years old, and graduated with a bachelor's and master's degree in theatre from the Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris III University. Returning to Brazil in 1984, he became a professor of Performing Arts at the State University of Campinas (Unicamp) and, in 1985, founded Lume Teatro with actor Carlos Simioni and musician Denise Garcia, joined by actor Ricardo Puccetti in 1988. On February 13, 1995, Burnier died at the age of thirty-eight from a generalised infection. (Cafiero, Carla. *Who was Luís Otávio Burnier?* Lume Teatro website. Available at: <https://www.lumeteatro.com.br/o-nucleo/quem-foi-luis-otavio-burnier>. Accessed on: 06/12/2025). Burnier was the translator of the first Brazilian edition of *The Secret Art of the Actor - a Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, published in 1995 by Hucitec. This edition is out of print. In 2012, a new edition was published by É Realizações, translated by Patrícia Furtado de Mendonça, who is the translator of several of Barba's books published in Brazil (*Burning the House, Land of Ashes and Diamonds, Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt*, etc.).



Luís Otávio Burnier, 1978.

Photo: Lume Archive

music, theatre, and dance are not separated. Burnier invited Eugenio Barba to visit his country and learn about these traditions, which could constitute a field of study for theatre anthropology, equivalent to Asian and European traditions. Thus, after Odin Teatret's tour in 1987, Barba and Burnier visited Uberlândia (Minas Gerais), and participated in the Congado festival, passed through Brasília, and continued to Petrolina (Pernambuco), and from there to a pilgrimage to Canudos (Bahia). The trip ended in Salvador (Bahia), where they met the young director and academic Paulo Dourado, who invited Barba to give a lecture at the Theatre School. During their week-long stay in Salvador, they visited different Candomblé *terreiros* (religious houses), along with Paulo Dourado. This trip with Barba strengthened Luís Otávio Burnier's conviction in the richness of Brazilian traditions for research on the principles of the actor-dancer's presence, which are the field of study of theatre anthropology.⁵

The historical moment of these first encounters was marked by the 'political opening' of the military dictatorship that governed Brazil from 1964 to 1985. This "slow, gradual and safe" opening, as determined by the generals, without *Diretas Já* (direct elections for president, governors, mayors, and senators by direct popular vote), as demanded by the population, was preceded by the regime's most cruel period of the 1970s, with the violent repression of the 1968 student movement.⁶ As is customary in dictatorships, artists were censored, silenced, persecuted, expelled from the country, self-exiled, and even murdered; many theatre groups were destroyed. In this devastated land, Brazilian

5 The authors of this article are grateful to Eugenio Barba, Julia Varley, Luiz Carlos Vasconcelos, Venício Fonseca, Luciana Martuchelli, Juliana Pardo and Alício Amaral, for the direct information, which could not be found in written records, and which was fundamental in filling the gaps in our account.

6 In the late 1960s, the darkest period of the military dictatorship that governed Brazil from 1964 to 1985 began, known as the 'years of lead'. On December 13, 1968, General Costa and Silva decreed Institutional Act No. 5, the most draconian of the 17 acts instituted during the military dictatorship in Brazil, which granted full powers to the ruling general to close Congress, revoke mandates, suspend political rights, confiscate property, suspend *habeas corpus*, and prohibit judicial trials of presidential acts. During the governments of General Médici (1969-1974) and General Geisel (1974-1979), many people were kidnapped, tortured, and executed. At the end of the Médici government in Brazil, the military began a controlled transition of power to a civilian president. The objective was to appease popular pressure, reducing repression and restoring some civil liberties, with measures such as the end of Institutional Act No. 5 in 1978 and the 'broad, general and unrestricted' amnesty - that is, for those imprisoned and exiled by the regime, but also for military personnel who committed crimes - in 1979. General Figueiredo decreed, in 1979, the end of the two-party system. Despite the mobilisation of society in large rallies in the capitals for direct elections of the president, with the participation of millions of people and the public demonstrations of artists and politicians on the platforms, the election was held only with the votes of deputies and senators, in a National Congress controlled by the military, which elected, in 1985, Senator Tancredo Neves as president of Brazil.

theatre was rising from the ashes. While the groups that made history in the 1960s no longer existed or were weakened, the new groups that would make history in the following years were taking their first steps. Many of these new groups were deeply marked by the experiences of 1987 mentioned above.

For us,⁷ young theatre students in Rio de Janeiro,⁸ contact with the ideas and practices of Odin Teatret and of those Italian groups provided us, and many young people of our generation, with the first connection with Group Theatre. This particularity marked the history of Brazilian theatre, introducing new theatre practices and conceptions, such as actor training and actor dramaturgy, as well as a new point of view on our own culture's body techniques, from the perspective of theatre anthropology. The relationship between Brazil and Barba and Odin Teatret, as well as theatre anthropology and Third Theatre, has developed immensely since then. This happened both through Brazilian artists travelling to meet teachers in their countries of origin and through the numerous tours that Odin Teatret and other European Third Theatre groups realised in Brazil. Thinking back to that significant experience and how it spread, allows us today to reassess the echoes that still resonate in Brazilian theatre practice and, *mutatis mutandis*, in Latin America.

In the text *The House with Two Doors*,⁹ first published in 1989 in the journal *La Escena Latinoamericana*, Barba reflects upon his relationship with Latin America, and to illuminate its importance, he begins with the following sentence: "I have the impression that the whole of my theatre apprenticeship has been a preparation for Latin America."¹⁰ Indeed, as previously mentioned here in relation to Brazil, from the 1970s to the present, a solid and very well-articulated network of relationships, alliances, friendships, and mutual influences was woven by Barba in Latin America. An example of mutual influence is the central role of Latin American theatre groups in the genesis of Third Theatre:

[...] From the first encounters with Latin American colleagues in Caracas, I realised that the phenomenon I considered typically European – that myriad of groups scattered everywhere, stubborn, ignored by critics, who ended up inventing their own theatre driven by their personal and social needs – was also a diffuse phenomenon in Latin America. There was a surprising and subterranean theatrical density. The equivalent European theatrical reality of group theatre was also invisible to the eyes of two-dimensional theatre. It was then that I realised that there was a third dimension of theatre, a Third Theatre.¹¹

7 Since this article is written by two people who shared many, but not all, experiences, the memories will sometimes include the account of a shared experience and sometimes the experience of one of its authors. For shared experiences, we will use the first person plural; for cases of individual testimony, we will name Ricardo or Priscilla and use the third person singular.

8 Priscilla Duarte and Ricardo Gomes joined the course of Performance Arts of Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro in March 1984, concluding it at the end of 1987.

9 Barba 2009, 183-196.

10 Barba 2009, 183.

11 Barba 2009, 186.

Less obvious is the role of Latin American theatre in the formulation of the concept of theatre anthropology. In September 2021, during his opening speech at the *Encounters on Third Theatre and Theatre Anthropology*,¹² Eugenio Barba stated that the creation of theatre anthropology in the 1970s was linked to his desire to find a common ground for discussion with Latin American theatre artists, beyond the political-ideological frameworks that dominated the theatre landscape at the time.

This centrality of dialogue with Latin America in the formulation of theatre anthropology, however, seems to relate to his motivations, not to his references, since, as is known, those are based on a 'Eurasian vision of theatre'.¹³ According to Barba, Eurasian Theatre "encompasses those theatres that have become research 'classics' for those who have focused on the actors' practice [...]. This 'encyclopaedia' was formed by drawing on the repertoire of European and Asian theatre traditions. Like it or not, right or wrong, this is what happened."¹⁴

For a Latin American artist, however, this *happened* sticks its finger into the open wound of our colonial past, which imposes the need to seek references in our own territories in order to create a theatre that is not a mere repetition of European theatre of other latitudes. Miguel Rubio Zapata, director of the Yuyachkani Cultural Group of Peru, in the article *Retejiendo la raíz rota por las rutas de la antropología teatral* (Reweaving the broken root through the routes of theatre anthropology),¹⁵ published in *JTA*, reflects on this question:

Since the middle of the past century, I have a living memory of a sustained practice born from the need to assert a new, insurgent theatre, which demands invention and rejects colonial heritage. [...] When I approach the theatricalities of distant cultures, in which I can nevertheless recognise similarities, I think that our Latin American theatre groups have not yet reached the splendour they deserve. There is a broken root, which perhaps we must weave again to reconcile ourselves with the origin, to overcome the negating

12 The event *Encounters on Third Theatre and Theatre Anthropology - a Tribute to Eugenio Barba: 85 Years of Life, 60 Years of Theatre, 34 Years of Encounters in Brazil* was organised by the Postgraduate Programme in Performing Arts at the Federal University of Ouro Preto, with general coordination by Ricardo Gomes (Federal University of Ouro Preto and Teatro Diadokai); curated by Ricardo Gomes, Gilberto Icle (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, National University of Brasília and Usina do Trabalho do Ator) and Fernando Mencarelli (Federal University of Minas Gerais); coordination assistance by Priscilla Duarte (Teatro Diadokai). Held virtually from September 27, 2021, to November 26, 2021, it brought together 97 participants, including artists and researchers, from 29 Brazilian theatre groups, 4 foreign theatre groups, 1 local network and 3 international networks of artists, 12 Brazilian universities, 8 foreign universities, 17 cities from 4 regions of Brazil, and 13 cities from Italy, Denmark, Peru, Argentina, Belgium, UK, and Scotland. The activities (available at: <http://www.youtube.com/@TerceiroTeatroBrasil>. Accessed on May 14, 2024) took place in three five-day stages, in the last weeks of September, October, and November 2021, with two to three activities per day, divided into the categories: conferences, roundtables, work demonstrations, and commented films. Each stage developed from a different theme: Third Theatre (September 27th to October 1st), Theatre Anthropology and Identity (October 25th to 29th), and Cultural Action and Artist Networks (November 22nd to 26th).

13 Barba 1993, 73.

14 Barba 1993, 74.

15 Zapata 2022, 247.

leap imposed on us that prevents us seeing where we come from. We should recognise ourselves in an integral way and create with freedom, without prejudice, fully assuming our teachers' mandate to invent our own theatre. From this perspective, it is necessary to revise the colonial legacy that has shaped what we understand as theatre.

Barba's first major encounter with Peruvian groups (and many other Latin American groups) took place in 1978 in Ayacucho, in the Peruvian Andes.¹⁶ In 1988, Cuatrotablas organised the second meeting Reencuentro Ayacucho 88 in Lima and the Chosica district, in the province of Lima, to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the meeting in 1978. It was not possible to hold it in Ayacucho due to conflicts in the area between the government and the Shining Path guerrilla. Dozens of groups from Latin America were present at this meeting, as well as European groups, mainly Italian. There were young groups like ours, Teatro Kairós, with Helena Varvaki's solo performance directed by Manoel Prazeres, *Via Crucis do Corpo*, based on a short story by Clarice Lispector (for which Ricardo Gomes was the lighting designer and technician). There were more experienced groups, like Odin Teatret, Teatro Tascabile, Teatro Potlach, Yuyachkani, Cuatrotablas, etc. We all stayed at the Huampaní Vacation Centre where we performed for each other until the early hours of the morning. Every morning, divided into ensembles with people from various groups, we also rehearsed scenes for a performance dedicated to Jerzy Grotowski that we presented for ourselves in the ruins of the Cajamarquilla Archaeological Complex. In the afternoon, there was



Meeting to organise the final performance dedicated to Jerzy Grotowski with Eugenio Barba, Miguel Rubio Zapata, Beatriz Camargo, Edgar Ceballos, Luís Otávio Burnier, César Brie, Ricardo Gomes, Renzo Vescovi, Mario Delgado, Julia Varley and others, Reencuentro Ayacucho 88, Complejo Arqueológico de Cajamarquilla, Peru, 1988. Photo: Paolo Fattore (Teatro tascabile di Bergamo Archive)

16 The 1978 film *On the Two Banks of the River*, directed by Torgeir Wethal and produced by Odin Teatret Film, tells the story of this encounter. In 1987, this film was screened in Rio de Janeiro, along with other Odin Teatret Film productions directed by Ripa di Meana and Wethal: *In Search of Theatre* (1974, about Odin's experience in the Salento region of Italy), *Physical Training at Odin Teatret* (1972), and *Vocal Training at Odin Teatret* (1972).

El Puente: meetings with Barba, the scholars Nando Tavian (Italy), Patricia Cardona (Mexico) and Ian Watson (USA), with lectures, discussions, and work demonstrations. In one of these meetings, Barba led a work demonstration on corporeal mime with Burnier.

Nitis Jacon (1935-2023), theatre director, creator and coordinator of the Londrina Festival, participated in Reencuentro Ayacucho 88 and in the 6th ISTA session in Bologna, Italy, in 1990. She developed an interest in theatre anthropology that motivated her to organise, in 1991, a week-long participation of Odin Teatret in the Londrina Festival and to realise, in 1994, the 8th ISTA session, in Londrina, Brazil (to this day the only of the seventeen ISTA sessions held outside of Europe). Perhaps it was the desire to contribute to re-weaving the 'broken root' that Zapata refers to, which led Nitis Jacon to emphatically suggest the active participation of a Brazilian artist in the meeting. After accepting the challenge, Barba undertook a series of trips and interviews to find the right person. This is how, thanks to Paulo Dourado's mediation, the collaboration with Augusto Omolú (1963-2013), the Bahian dancer and choreographer, exponent of the Dance of the Orixás¹⁷ and Ogã¹⁸ of the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé religion, began. Omolú participated in the artistic staff of the ISTA sessions in Umeå, Sweden, in 1995; in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1996; in Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal, in 1998; in Bielefeld, Germany, in 2000; in Seville, Spain, in 2004; and in Wrocław- Krzyżowa, Poland, in 2005, as a representative of the Candomblé tradition, along with musicians Ory Sacramento (1994, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2000), Jorge "Funk" Paim (1994, 1995, 1996, 2000), Bira Monteiro (1994, 1996), Antonio Carlos dos Santos Araújo (1995) and Cleber Conceição da Paixão (2000, 2004, 2005).¹⁹

17 The Dance of the Orixás, better known as 'Afro Dance', is a multifaceted branch of Brazilian dance based on the corporality and musicality of Afro-Brazilian religions that developed during the African diaspora caused by the enslavement of men and women from diverse regions and cultural and religious traditions of that continent. Its main reference comes from the dances of the Orixás, the deities of the Yoruba religious tradition, who represent the forces of nature and are associated with human archetypes. In Candomblé, the most widespread Yoruba religion in Brazil, each Orixá possesses a particular *axé* (power or energy) that manifests in the bodies of the faithful in a state of trance through a specific rhythm and dance. Afro Dance uses these ritual references to create Afro-referenced artistic works in dialogue with Western dance, mainly classical ballet and modern dance. (Itaú Cultural Encyclopaedia of Brazilian Art and Culture. Itaú Cultural, 2025. Available at <http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/termos/80242-danca-afro>. Accessed 30 November 2025).

18 Ogã (from Yoruba-Ga: 'respected person', 'chief', 'influential') is the general term for various male roles in Candomblé rituals. They are the direct assistants of the Babalorixá/Iyalorixá responsible for the *terreiro* (the sacred space where the rituals take place), the fathers/mothers of the saints. These men, along with their female counterparts, called Equeles, do not enter into trance, fulfilling essential functions in the *terreiro* (sacred space where the rituals take place), maintaining supervision and leadership during the mediums' trance. Their best-known and most visible manifestation is that of the *atabaques* (drums). Only the Ogã Alagbê (Ketu), Kambondo (Angola and Congo), and Runtó (Jeje) can play the drums. The Alagbê leads the three *atabaques* called Rum (the largest drum), Rumpi (the middle drum), and Lê (the smallest drum on the side). He plays the Rum and directs the other Ogãs on the smaller *atabaques*. It is the Alagbê who starts playing, initiating the choreography of the Orixá, whether it is related to hunting, war, or any other aspect, always following the rhythm of the drums (Åjägünnà 2023).

19 Information from ISTA-NG website. Available at: <https://ista-online.org/category/past-sessions/>. Accessed 8 December 2025.

Omolú's participation as 'the first Latin American member of ISTA's pedagogical staff'²⁰ was celebrated by Zapata in an article originally published in the Mexican magazine *Máscara* in 1995, in which he assumes that

the kind of work Omolú and others have also begun to investigate, that is, performance forms shaped by our Latin American traditions, could be strengthened if we had a greater opportunity of comparing our traditions with those of the pedagogical staff at ISTA. One such comparison could be with the latest research we have begun at Yuyachkani. In the past, we have explored highly codified Eastern movement forms like t'ai chi as starting points for our work. In more recent times, we have invited our own masters of popular culture to incorporate traditional dances into our training. In doing this, we have been looking for the principles embedded in the dances that are equivalent to those that Eugenio has identified in his theatre anthropology research. This type of comparison enables an intercultural dialogue to generate from the technical norms of one's own culture.²¹



Sanjukta Panigrahi and Augusto Omolú.
ISTA 9, Umeå, Sweden, 1995.
Photo: Bernd Uhlig

This desire or need of artists and cultural operators like Burnier, Zapata and Jacon to compare the principles of theatre anthropology with the theatricality of Latin American traditions seems to align with the criticisms and controversies that Barba's proposals and the practices of ISTA aroused in academia. As pointed out by Barba himself²² and Franc Chamberlain,²³ the discussions regarded the supposed exclusion of artistic forms from diverse cultures, such as African and Latin American, its focus of research and the predominance of Asian and European artists in ISTA sessions.²⁴ It is necessary, however, to distinguish the questions of Latin American artists from the perplexities of academics. We do not intend to delve into the merits of these criticisms here, as that is not the scope of this article; we limit ourselves to point out how some artists, moved by personal questions, found fecund ways of using theatre anthropology to create relevant research and artistic work.

The postulate of a Eurasian Theatre introduced us to 'theatricalities of distant cultures' and helped us interpret them, turning theatre anthropology into a powerful instrument for understanding and incorporating the technical information underlying the spectacular forms of our indigenous and African rooted culture into our artistic

20 Zapata 2009, 228.

21 Zapata 2009, 228.

22 Barba 1993, 72-74.

23 Chamberlain 2009, xvi.

24 Regarding the academics, there is an almost exclusive presence of European academics on the scientific staff of all ISTA sessions recorded on the website (<https://ista-online.org/category/past-sessions/>). The only exceptions are María Sten, from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, in the second session; and Moriaki Watanabe, from Tokai Tokyo University, Japan, in the first two sessions.

practices. Barba, however, states that theatre anthropology should not be confused with cultural anthropology,²⁵ as it is not interested in investigating the various spectacular manifestations in their original cultural contexts.²⁶ One of its main assumptions is that “the profession is also a country to which we belong, an elective homeland, without geographical borders.”²⁷

It is necessary to rigorously observe this demarcation of territory, which determines the assumptions of Eurasian Theatre and the objectives of theatre anthropology. If we observe the data relating to the working ensembles of the various ISTA sessions from this perspective, we will realise that, although these people are representatives of specific and precisely geographically located theatre cultures – a fundamental element for the comparative research undertaken at ISTA – what determined the choice of the artists was not their cultural background, but their particular predisposition and affinity for the artistic research proposed. It is important to emphasise that they are a group of researchers. The people in question are active co-authors of the theatre anthropology investigations; they are not the object of research. If we think of ISTA’s artistic staff only as a group of representatives of different theatre cultures, Barba’s choices don’t seem to make sense. To work in a team, it makes sense to continue collaborating with certain people (Sanjukta Panigrahi, eleven sessions; Raghunath Panigrahi, twelve sessions; Katsuko Azuma, seven sessions; I Made Pasek Tempo, three sessions, and I Made Djimat, three sessions; Augusto Omolú, six sessions) and certain countries (India and Japan in all sessions, Bali in fourteen sessions).²⁸

Omolú’s account of his first meeting with Eugenio Barba and Julia Varley is revealing about this particular predisposition:

When he [Eugenio Barba] asked me to dance an orixá sitting on a chair... well, I dance orixá even lying in bed, that’s not a problem [laughter]. It was a test. I didn’t know that it was a test, but I did it. When I started reacting to Julia [Varley] it was also very interesting. It caught my attention because I already had experience in dance. I have had a background in classical ballet, for thirty years. I have also had experience in modern dance, having worked with several choreographers. I was the principal dancer at the Teatro Castro Alves Company (TCA) [Classical Ballet]. I was very committed to the Company. So, seeing Julia making those gestures, movements, actions, caught my attention; it was dance in a different form. And I started using the movements of the orixás, responding to what she proposed with a different energy. And we began to exchange.²⁹

Here we can see the willingness to modify the traditional matrix (dancing the orixás on a chair or lying in bed) and the transition between different languages (classical

25 Barba 1993, 24.

26 Barba 1993, 72-74.

27 Barba 1993, 75.

28 Information from the website ISTA-NG, available on <https://ista-online.org/category/past-sessions/>. Accessed December 8, 2025.

29 Omolú 2015, 239.

ballet, modern dance, orixá dances), which allowed Omolú, among other things, to pass over a bridge between religion and art, because, as Grotowski³⁰ teaches us, ritual and performance use the same instruments for very different purposes:

Eugenio always asked for more and more, and I used to refuse. I would only go up until a certain limit. I held back a little, also because Candomblé was sacred to me, something religious. So, then, I still had the problem of not opening up too much, of not allowing myself to go further. He asked me for things that I couldn't give him, belonging to the 'foundation' of Candomblé. [...] But after you develop a language, passing over to another vision, as art, you begin to perceive other values, you begin to understand that you are not harming religiosity [...] Movement is also a universal language. It belongs to a religion, but it is also an art as movement. And this is also seen in India, in Bali. So why shouldn't the orixá also seek within its movements a quality, or even a style of its own, for what I was thinking at that time? Because [...] I had always worked with classical ballet, modern dance, but I felt a great need to have a technique that was specifically ours, Brazilian. [...] So, this contact with Barba offered a range of possibilities. For every movement of the orixá that I did, he asked me to stop dancing the orixá, and then, for that movement, he gave a thousand explanations. [...] I became more interested in this process, because I knew how to dance the orixás, but [...] I didn't have the knowledge and all this information. [...] Of course, Eugenio was also respectful; he never asked to work with the Candomblé religion. He wanted to learn about it, yes, to have information about it, to then work with the basis and principles of theatre anthropology. This was very powerful as a form of contribution. [...] Developing this partnership with Eugenio, was like he awakened a new life, a new condition for a survival in my art. Besides delving deeper into the research, into what I wanted as an identity. [...] It was stimulating, because I already had an idea of the research and when I met him I realised that this was exactly what I wanted.³¹

The apparent contradiction between cultural, ethnic, national identity, and professional, artistic identity is, in reality, what has made theatre anthropology so useful for Latin American artists in creating strategies that have allowed them to orient themselves between the legacies of European colonial culture and the ethnic roots of indigenous and African cultures silenced and subjugated by the hegemonic culture.

Barba states that:

It is possible to think of theatre in terms of ethnic, national, group, or even individual traditions. But if we are trying to understand our own identity in this way, it is also essential to have a contrary and complementary attitude: to think of theatre itself in a transcultural dimension, in the flow of a 'tradition of traditions'.³²

30 Grotowski 2007, 226-243.

31 Omolú *apud* Souza 2015, 240-41.

32 Barba 2010, 281 (author's emphasis).

In this way, theatre anthropology helped us realise that the roots of our Brazilian or South American theatricality could dialogue objectively with the notions of theatre that we learned in theatre schools and saw on stage, beyond abstract and idealised concepts such as 'character of the people' or 'national identity'. Through the lens of theatre anthropology, the desire to create art that responds to our personalities has taken on precise forms and rhythms, not limited to themes, stories, or characters.

However, there are other layers of meaning to be explored. Theatre anthropology serves not only to identify recurring transcultural principles in various acting techniques but also seeks to study how each artist forges his or her own professional identity within the common context of the theatre craft: the profession as a country. This study also results in a successive unfolding, which in reality seems to be its main objective: for artists it becomes an instrument for creating their own artistic identity, for the search for the meaning of theatre practice.

The search of a meaning for theatre is an Ariadne's thread that has guided research in the performing arts since the end of the 19th century. Theatre seemed to have lost its function in post-Industrial Revolution society and it was the search of its meaning that motivated the great reformers of European theatre in the early 20th century. The reformers were very different from each other but united in the same impulse to invent or reinvent, discover or rediscover, a new theatre, a new way of performing, a new human being. Similarly, also the artists of classical Asian theatres had to reinvent the meaning of their crafts in a new world built over the ruins of their cultures destroyed by European colonisers. In the beginning of the 20th century many dance forms were at risk of extinction. During the first half of the 20th century, in the wake of India's independence from British colonisation, a movement known as the Revival of Indian Classical Dance restored various styles of traditional Indian theatre-dance on new bases, redrawing the boundaries between the sacred and the profane.

For example, there is an evident connection between the creation of schools such as the Kalakshetra of Rukmini Devi Arundale and the Kalamandalam of Vallathol Narayana Menon and Pattikkamthodi Ravunni Menon and the French schools that sought to create new acting methods. The Indian schools sought to re-found their ancient traditional arts but they did so also under the influence of Western ideologies and methodologies. The French schools, such as Jacques Copeau's Vieux Colombier or Charles Dullin's Théâtre de l'Atelier, draw inspiration, among other sources, from elements of Asian acting techniques.

This same line that unites the Great Reform³³ of European theatre and the Revival of Indian dance, leads us to the group theatre movement of the 1960s and 1970s in Europe, the U.S. and Latin America. Groups like Odin Teatret from Denmark, the Living Theater from the United States, Teatro Oficina and Teatro de Arena from Brazil, La Candelaria

33 According to Mirella Schino (2012, VIII-IX, 169), the Great Reform, or *Wielka Reforma* as Polish scholars and theatre practitioners call it, is the term that seeks to 'express the radical changes that took place in theatre in the first three decades of the 20th century'. Some protagonists of the period are Stanislawski, Meyerhold, Craig, Appia, Copeau, Fuchs, and Reinhardt, also known as 'pedagogical directors', more interested in research, studios, schools, and workshops than in attracting audiences, and who 'established practices and poetics that cannot be confined to one or more performances'.

and Teatro Experimental de Cali from Colombia, Cuatrotablas and Yuyachkani from Peru, and so many others, despite having profoundly different histories and cultural backgrounds, identified with each other and established strong bonds of friendship and professional exchange.

These assumptions allow us to understand how – thinking of Ruffini’s talk in 2021 for the *Encounters on the Third Theatre and Theatre Anthropology*³⁴ – Third Theatre is the logical premise of theatre anthropology because, as Barba states, “with the exception of a small but essential part – our unique and unrepeatable identity, the obscure forces that move us – finding *our own meaning* for theatre means finding a personal invention of the craft”.³⁵

Eurasian Theatre in Brazil?

The deepening of one’s own professional identity implies overcoming ethnocentrism until one discovers one’s own centre within the ‘tradition of traditions’. Here the term ‘roots’ becomes paradoxical: it does not indicate a bond that ties us to a single place, but rather an ethos that allows us to change places.³⁶

Tradition can be understood as a concept restricted to a group or an artist, that is constructed in an isolation characteristic of theatre as a local art taking place within a certain community. Artists travel to survive, but also in search of dialogue, confrontation and meetings. Barba’s metaphor of ‘floating islands’³⁷ speaks of this dual reality of artists: isolation and dialogue with other traditions, in the river³⁸ of the ‘tradition of traditions’.

As Barba states,³⁹ theatre anthropology constituted a radical transformation in the way of thinking about theatre and stage acting based on the actors’ physical and mental presence and their kinaesthetic relationship with the spectator – and not on the written theatre text. For Barba, therefore, it is in the body-mind of the actor that this radical transformation takes place. The proposal of theatre anthropology is based on the idea that there would be an underlying ‘skeleton’ to scenic behaviour that would be common to all actors and prior (logically, not temporally) to any possibility of expressing something, therefore called ‘pre-expressivity’ or ‘pre-expressive level’.

Analysing theatre from a transcultural perspective, Barba states that the actor’s work is the result of the fusion of three levels of organisation:

34 Ruffini 2025.

35 Barba 1993, 77 (author’s emphasis).

36 Barba 2010, 283.

37 The metaphor refers to ‘a not very important episode in the history of the New World told by men and women who abandoned the safety of the mainland to lead a precarious life on floating islands’ to think of the theatre as an archipelago of floating islands. “The floating island is the uncertain terrain that can get lost beneath one’s feet, but which can allow for encounters, the overcoming of personal limits”. (Barba 2010, 14)

38 Here, we consider the river, according to Heraclitus’ teaching, as a metaphor that points to the constantly changing nature of traditions.

39 Barba 2024, 124-25.

1. The actor's personality, their sensitivity, their artistic intelligence, their social individuality, which makes each actor unique and unrepeatable.
2. The particularity of the theatre tradition and the historical-cultural context through which the actor's unrepeatable personality manifests itself.
3. The use of the body-mind according to extra-daily techniques based on transcultural returning principles. These returning principles constitute what theatre anthropology defines as the field of pre-expressivity.⁴⁰

These three dimensions amalgamate and permeate each person and can only be distinguished in the context of analysis. They define the actor's identity, in particular and in general: the individual identity, the socio-cultural identity, and the identity of the craft. When Barba refers to these three levels that are amalgamated in stage work, he is making reference to Marcel Mauss's 'body techniques',⁴¹ which are influenced by three levels of interaction: the psychological (corresponding to the unrepeatable personality), the cultural (corresponding to the performance style), and the physiological (corresponding to the body-mind, the pre-expressive level).

How can we think about these three levels in relation to a Brazilian artist? Regarding the first level of unrepeatable personality, it does not seem useful to think of it in collective categories' terms. The 'obscure forces' that move each person are difficult to define, despite ultimately being the ones that lead the artist to seek a particular form of expression. Certainly, these 'dark forces' originate from the confrontation with the second level of cultural context, which determines the marks of identity: a person is born into a certain family, with a certain biological gender and skin colour, within a certain social class, city, region and country, etc. All this marks and 'makes' a person. Each person, based on the particularities of their identity, will shape their own history and process of subjectivation to create their own unique and unrepeatable personality. The same thing happens for actors and actresses, who also enter the theatre tradition in a certain place and within a certain context that will mark them. The context can be that of an extremely conventional art, like Asian theatre, or it can be a more fluid context like contemporary theatre, but each artist will respond differently to the tradition. So, we see how the two levels become confused and mixed. But it is the work on the third level, that of pre-expressivity, that provides the actor with the tools to create their professional identity, starting from the other two.

Each of us Latin American artists can perceive the diverse elements of European and Asian theatre traditions and the roots of our original cultures. We are able to confront them with our own personal history and individual personality, with the 'dark forces' that move us, and forge our own path towards our artistic identity. In this context, for our generation, Eurasian Theatre perspective also represented a broadening of our horizons. It was through theatre anthropology that we were able to familiarise with the various forms of Asian theatre, of which we had little or no information in the 1980s. We realised that drinking from the source of the Asian

40 Barba 1993, 24-25 (author's emphasis).

41 Mauss 2003, 404-05.

traditions did not necessarily mean uprooting ourselves but, on the contrary, could help us weave our own roots.

Are the roots of our theatricality shaped on European colonisers' tradition? Is it possible to accept this heritage as legitimate, forgetting the history of violence it contains? On the other hand, is it possible for us to feel as legitimate heirs to the indigenous traditions which, despite being silenced, violated, almost annihilated, are perhaps the deepest layer of our identity? What to do with the African heritage, which many of us carry marked on the skin, and which reached us through enslaved people stripped of their dignity? The answer to these questions is not to be found in theatre history books nor in formulas such as Brazilian Theatre, European Theatre, Popular Culture when considered in abstract concept terms. "Living memory is suffocated under those formulas and collective subjects."⁴²

When we think of theatre history as 'living memory', we realise that there is not an only answer to these questions, but perhaps a unique answer valid for each person. Based on these assumptions, we, Brazilian artists, can truly understand Eurasian Theatre as "a mental dimension, an active *idea* in modern theatre culture"⁴³ and use theatre anthropology as an instrument to shape our artistic identity.

As in all Latin America, also in Brazil, the history of European-based theatre is recent, and its roots are shallow. By studying our roots from the perspective of theatre anthropology, we notice a collection of traditions that could determine a Brazilian theatricality: in what Mário de Andrade (2002) defines as 'Brazilian performative dances',⁴⁴ in our indigenous traditions, in the African traditions that have become Afro-Brazilian. It is possible to look for inheritances of European popular culture in these traditions, and even traces of the culture of the Portuguese colonies in India and China. But this historical-factual perspective may not be the most fruitful for understanding the relationship of Brazilian theatre culture with Eurasian Theatre.

Despite the feeling of estrangement that the vision of 'exotic' forms of Asian performing arts may cause at first, we will find in them many common points with Brazilian and Latin American theatricality traditions. Characteristic of these manifestations and of the Brazilian Afro-Amerindian performative dances is the inseparable union of music, dance and acting, the use of music as an inducer of psychophysical states in performers and spectators, and the use of dance forms to recognise a character.

Eugenio Barba depicted the map of Eurasian Theatre and on it, using the instruments of theatre anthropology, he marked the cardinal points of Third Theatre, marking the directions of the winds and ocean currents of pre-expressivity. All theatre artists, with their own compass (their unique and unrepeatable identity, the 'obscure forces' that move them), in possession of this map that he offered us, can navigate on their small and precarious floating island.

⁴² Barba 1993, 63.

⁴³ Barba 1993, 74 (author's emphasis).

⁴⁴ Andrade 2002.

The routes of theatre anthropology in Brazil

According to Mauss, technique is “an effective traditional act (and note that as such it does not differ from the magical, religious, symbolic act). It needs to be *traditional* and *effective*. There is no technique and no transmission if there is no tradition.” The art of the actor is a superior physical technique, because the body, “the first and most natural human instrument”⁴⁵ is a human technical means par excellence. Regarding the transmission of acting techniques, Meldolesi states that

[...] the actor’s culture is first and foremost a culture of accumulation. The new actors are formed by imitating the old, and then offer themselves to their successors’ imitation. For each passage, together with the variations of personal art, heritages accumulate in the bodies of the performers. It is the cultural element of the actor’s condition as a species, in perennial contrast with the logic of the actor’s ephemerality.⁴⁶

Based on these assumptions, it is easy to understand how the process of forming one’s own tradition in the performing arts is a personal adventure, linked to the encounters with masters and partners that life has offered to us and to what we have done thanks to those encounters.

[...] However, we must decide upon the sense and direction to take. It is not the traditions that choose us, but we choose them. A Frenchman may convert to Islam and an Indian may become a fabulous orchestra conductor of European classical music. The fact that one is born in a particular land to specific parents does not mean that one’s identity is reduced to that land and to those parents.⁴⁷

From the late 1980s onwards, some young Brazilian artists, like ourselves, spurred by the encounters described at the beginning of this article to explore the paths of theatre anthropology, went in search of European teachers. Some stayed there for short periods, others for many years, and still others settled abroad. Other Brazilian groups and artists explored their paths within our own territory. To understand how Brazilian artists have used theatre anthropology as an instrument to construct their professional identities is a topic that deserves a historical approach, tracing the development of this field of study in this country from the first contacts of Brazilian artists and researchers with the ideas of Eugenio Barba in the late 1980s to the present moment. We – the authors of this article – are not historians. We are Brazilians, performing artists and researchers of acting techniques, who are part of this history. We can give our testimony and reflect on it. We can talk about our history and that of our fellow adventurers: other Brazilian artists like us, old and new friends. It is a partial and personal point of view.

In this article, we recall the trajectories of some Brazilian groups, highlighting the relationships they established between theatre anthropology and Brazilian culture. The

45 Mauss 2003, 407 (author’s emphasis).

46 Meldolesi 1989, 209.

47 Barba 2009, 191.

way in which each of the artists mentioned here elaborated the relationship between their personality and the encounters that determined the construction of their artistic and professional identities can reveal the weaving of web of relationships. This happened at a time when information circulated much more slowly than today and when it was clear that each encounter was a unique and unrepeatable opportunity to acquire knowledge and open doors.

Priscilla Duarte, Ricardo Gomes and Diadokai

Our encounter with Eugenio Barba's ideas began before we even knew of his existence, when Priscilla Duarte participated in an intensive acting workshop with Luís Otávio Burnier at the Casa de Artes de Laranjeiras (CAL) in Rio de Janeiro, in January 1984, shortly before entering the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), where she met Ricardo Gomes, her colleague in the Performing Arts Course. In that workshop, Priscilla learned and practised acting training for the first time and was deeply affected. In January 1985, at UNIRIO, we participated in a workshop led by Helena Varvaki,⁴⁸ who had worked as Burnier's assistant in the CAL workshop the previous year. In 1985, along with about ten young artists, under Helena's guidance, we started a working group where we met – for three years, three times a week – to practise and research actor training.⁴⁹ It wasn't our professors at UNIRIO, but Helena Varvaki, who first spoke to us about Eugenio Barba and introduced us to Barba's *Letter to Actor D* and Iben Nagel Rasmussen's *The Mute of the Past*, translated by Burnier in mimeographed copies.

We personally met Eugenio Barba and the Farfa group (César Brie and Iben Nagel Rasmussen) in 1986, at the 2nd International Theatre Festival of Montevideo, organised by the Uruguayan Association of Theatre Critics, where we attended performances, lectures, and work demonstrations. In 1987, when we had the opportunity to take part in workshops given by Odin Teatret, Tascabile and Potlach's artists in Rio de Janeiro, Priscilla and Aglaia Azevedo participated in an Odissi workshop given by Tascabile. During the whole of 1988, Priscilla and Aglaia continued to practise the few basic

48 Helena Varvaki was born in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1963. She studied Performing Arts at the P. Katsélis School of Dramatic Art in Athens, Greece. After graduating in 1983, she settled in Rio de Janeiro, where in the 1980s and 1990s she trained a generation of actors, working at the Casa de Artes de Laranjeiras and in two study groups on actor training. Together with Manoel Prazeres, she created the Teatro Kairós group (of which Ricardo Gomes, Priscilla Duarte, Aglaia Azevedo, and Arquimedes Bibiano were members for a short period), which performed in Rio de Janeiro in the 1980s and 1990s. Today she works as an actress, teacher, and acting coach. Recently, she participated in the film *Ainda estou aqui* (I am still here) by Walter Salles Junior, as a coach for actress Fernanda Torres, and is currently touring with the play *Um lugar onde a vida acontece* (A place where life happens), directed by Miwa Yanagizawa, which premiered in 2024 in Rio de Janeiro and had a run in São Paulo.

49 Some of the people who worked with Helena on actor training and developed research related to theatre anthropology were Aglaia Azevedo and Almir Ribeiro (who worked in the 1990s with Teatro Mínimo, researching Indian theatre and staging kathakali performances with their master Kattakkal Nandakumar); Julio Adrião (who worked as an actor in Italy in the 1980s and in 2002 created the performance *A descoberta das Américas*, a text by Dario Fo directed by Alessandra Vannucci and staged with a Brazilian accent, which premiered in 2005, had great critical and public success in Brazil and abroad, and will have its farewell season in 2025).

exercises and steps that they had learnt from Tiziana Barbiero and Luigia Calcaterra, actresses of the Teatro Tascabile. Priscilla wrote asking for more information about the dance and received a copy of the book *Traditions of Indian Classical Dance* by Mohan Khokar from Tiziana. Their correspondence helped to strengthen the relations with the Italian group.

In 1988, Ricardo participated in the Reencuentro Ayacucho 88 (Peru), and during this meeting he expressed to the director of Teatro Tascabile, Renzo Vescovi, the desire to go to Bergamo to learn more about the craft of acting with his group. Then, in 1989, we left Rio de Janeiro for Italy for an informal internship at the Teatro tascabile di Bergamo. It was the beginning of a relationship in which the teachers, over time, became friends and partners in the profession, during the years we worked with the Tascabile (1989-1994; 2003-2007). This relationship has continued with our group, Teatro Diadokai, founded in 1996 in Rio de Janeiro and now based in Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, where Ricardo has been a senior lecturer at the Department of Performing Arts at the Federal University of Ouro Preto since 2008.

Since its founding, Diadokai has been producing diverse performances that reflect different phases of research. In *Pedro e o lobo* (Pedro and the wolf, 1996-2008), the performance that gave rise to the group – a solo for children performed by Priscilla and directed by Ricardo, based on Prokofiev's work of the same name – we were interested in researching the techniques of Indian dance-theatre learned at Tascabile and in India. In *Amantes do sereno* (Lovers of the serene, 2002) – a performance about the old carnivals of Rio de Janeiro, presented in the streets of the city centre, with Priscilla and a cast on stilts, live musicians and directed by Ricardo – we revisited the street theatre experience we had practised at Tascabile. In *A casa de lá* (2010) – a collaborative



Priscilla Duarte in *O amor possível*. 2023. Photo: Maria Duarte (Diadokai Archive)

project with actor Cristiano Peixoto and musician Amanda Prates, in which Priscilla also acted, directed by Ricardo – we created a dramaturgy inspired by the works of Guimarães Rosa and in direct contact with the reality of the *sertão*, through a field trip to the Jequitinhonha Valley (Minas Gerais). In *O amor possível* (2023 to the present) – solo performance with Priscilla, co-directed with Ricardo,

based on the novel *A caverna* by the Portuguese writer José Saramago – our main interest is the work on the word and musicality of the Portuguese language, in the transposition of literature to the stage. With our artistic and, since 2003, academic research, we have invented a tradition that today looks at Brazil from a somewhat foreign perspective, as the apprenticeship happened in Italy and India.

Luís Otávio Burnier and Lume

From 1981, Burnier began developing research that he later called *corporeal mimesis*. At that time, he travelled through streets, communities, and children's hospitals in Rio de Janeiro and Quito, in Ecuador, conducting field research for the creation of the solo performance *Macário* (1985), based on the short story by Mexican writer Juan Rulfo. In 1992, he directed actresses Valéria de Setta and Luciene Pascolat in the performance *Wolzen – um giro desordenado em torno de si mesmo* (A disordered spin around oneself), a free adaptation of Nelson Rodrigues' *Valsa n. 6*. In this performance, the actresses performed mimetic work based on physical and vocal actions observed in psychiatric hospitals and in photographs of debutante parties.

In 1993, Burnier directed the graduation performance of a class from the theatre course, entitled *Taucoauaa Panhé Mondo Pé* (Just like we picked it from the tree). Some excerpts from Burnier's diary portray his desire to reconnect with his Brazilian roots and, at the same time, the rigour of his work in acting technique.⁵⁰

January 18, 1993: we started earlier and with an increased workload than academically planned: eight hours a day, without free days. The first major phase of the work lasted until the end of July. During this period, we concentrated on various types of training, seeking to equip the students technically. Energy training, technical training, vocal training, Étienne Decroux's corporeal mime, Peking opera mime, everyday life mime, fixing patterns, and so many other elements aimed at the development and improvement of the physical and mechanical dimension and its necessary connection with the inner dimension. An exhausting period of immersion in the recesses of one's own body and being. [...]

End of July 1993: the students were tired. They needed a 'vacation', some free time and distance. Nothing like 'combining hunger with the desire to eat': not a vacation, but a distancing, yes. Field research. Travelling through Brazil, the Amazon, the *sertão*, seeking stories, legends, anecdotes, and corporality, how our people act, use their bodies, speak, think. [...]

September 1993: everyone returns from their trip. Their features are different. Brazil wasn't quite what they had imagined. The experience left its mark on the actors and the individuals. More than forty hours recorded on cassette tapes, more than three hundred photographs. All paid for by them. Many new friends and acquaintances, simple people, good people. A strange odour of Brazil, mixing everything from the smell of rotten oranges from the Amazon region to the strong smell of urine from wattle-and-daub houses, precarious latrines, and asylums. Now back to work: decoding, memorising, recording the people, their gestures, their actions, their voices and, what is most difficult, their presences. Passionate but arduous work.

November 1993: of the fifty-five scenes staged, seventeen made it into the final performance, still subject to change. This marked the beginning of a more refined

50 Burnier systematised his research in his doctoral thesis, which resulted in a book, published posthumously in 2001, entitled *A Arte de Ator: da técnica à representação* (Burnier 2009).

acting process, as if viewed under a microscope. The cleaning and polishing of each action and micro-action, creating punctuations, oppositions, contradictions, anti-actions, counter-impulses. A work that must be invisible to the spectator, but which will undoubtedly be perceptible.⁵¹

Luís Otávio Burnier died suddenly in 1995 due to a generalised infection. In that same year, in mourning, but also fighting for survival, Lume created the performance *Contadores de Estórias* (Storytellers) using repertoire material from the performances *Taucoauaa Panhé Mondo Pé* and *Wolzen* in its staging.

Corporeal *mimesis* has been developed in various ways by Lume over its forty years of work. Its genesis, in Burnier's work, points to a peculiar way of using principles of theatre anthropology involving fragments of artistic or everyday performances and the recording of these performances, as material for the creation of theatrical scores,⁵² related to Richard Schechner's concept of 'restoration of behaviour'.⁵³ From 1997 to 1999, Ana Cristina Colla, Jessor de Souza, Raquel Scotti Hirson, and Renato Ferracini, who had participated in the Unicamp graduation performance in 1993 and are still actors and actresses at Lume, created the performance *Café com queijo* (Coffee with cheese), a more mature work from their research on the corporeal mimesis of people from the Brazilian interior, based on trips to the Amazon.



Left: Jessor de Souza and Ana Elvira Wuó in *Contadores de Estórias*, Campinas, 1997. Photo: João Maria (Lume Archive)

Right: Raquel Scotti Hirson, Renato Ferracini, Jessor de Souza and Ana Cristina Colla in *Café com Queijo*, 2020. Photo: Artur Amaral (Lume Archive)

Luiz Carlos Vasconcelos and Piollin

Luiz Carlos Vasconcelos was born two years before Burnier, in 1954, in Umbuzeiro, in the interior of Paraíba, in the Brazilian Northeast: much closer to the 'odour of Brazil' that Burnier and his students, inhabitants of Campinas, a prosperous city in

51 The diary entry can be found in the book *Café com Queijo: corpos em criação*, by Renato Ferracini (2006, 215-17).

52 Teatro tascabile di Bergamo worked with similar techniques, imitating the voices of Mahatma Gandhi and of Winston Churchill, and using these fragments as material for the creation of the performance *Esperimenti con la verità* (Experiments with truth), based on Gandhi's homonymous biography.

53 Schechner 2012, p. 244-51.

the wealthy state of São Paulo, sought. When in 1988 and 1989, he participated in two workshops, one month and three months long, with Roberta Carreri at Odin Teatret's venue in Denmark, he was already more than thirty years old and was the director of the Piollin theatre group, founded in 1976 in João Pessoa, the capital of Paraíba. Then, in 1992, he directed the performance *Vau da Sarapalha* with Piollin based on the short story *Sarapalha* by Guimarães Rosa, bringing theatre anthropology into dialogue with Brazilian culture references. We can consider this performance, which remained in repertory for twelve years and was performed more than a thousand times around the world, the first major critical and public success of a Brazilian performance based on theatre anthropology.⁵⁴



Left: Everaldo Pontes (cousin Ribeiro); Servílio Gomes (pointing dog Jiló); Soia Lira (Negra Ceição) and Nanego Lira (cousin Argemiro) in *Val da Sarapalha*. Photo: Adalberto Lima (Piollin Archive)

Right: Nanego Lira and Servílio Gomes in *Val da Sarapalha*. Photo: Adalberto Lima (Piollin Archive).

Érika Rettl, Venício Fonseca and Grupo Moitará

The alliance between Venício Fonseca from Piauí and Érika Rettl from São Paulo began during the meetings in Rio de Janeiro in 1987, and led to the creation of the Grupo Teatral Moitará in 1988. Moitará's trajectory is marked by an interest in the theatre masks, in the techniques for their creation and manufacturing, and for their expressivity on stage. The in-depth research into the language of the theatre mask brought the group closer to the tradition of Commedia dell'Arte. The practical knowledge of the masks' production and use techniques came from apprenticeship at the Centro Maschere e Strutture Gestuali directed by Donato Sartori, son of the renowned Italian mask maker Amleto Sartori, who, in collaboration with Giorgio Strehler and Jacques Lecoq, reinvented the tradition of Commedia dell'Arte in the 20th century. At the Centro, they learned techniques from Lecoq and Sartori's schools, such as the neutral, larva and geometrical masks, from which they elaborated their own actor's training. Today, with almost forty years of experience,

⁵⁴ Now 71 years old, Vasconcelos has had a solid career as a film and television actor. He also became an important name in Brazilian clowning, with the clown Xuxu, which he created in the 1970s to connect with the community in the neighbourhood that still houses the headquarters of the Piollin group.

Moitará has become one of the leading authorities on theatre masks in Brazil.

In performances like *Acorda Zé! A cumadre tá de pé!* (2010) and *Quiprocó* (2007), the group primarily uses half-masks (which allow the use of voice) to create their characters, developed from a hybrid between the archetypes of Commedia dell'Arte and forms from Brazilian popular culture.

Thus, referencing the Zannis, specifically Harlequin and characters from Brazilian literature (Macunaíma, Malazarte, Mateus, João Grilo, among others), compared with the 'types' observed in everyday life, we created the mask Zé de Riba, a 'type' with a mixture of cleverness and naiveté, 'lazy' and hungry, a storyteller who invents stories full of advantages and pranks to achieve his goals and avoid hard work.⁵⁵

Despite quoting Brazilian references that formed the dramaturgy of the performance, Venício Fonseca, who is of Northeastern origin, does not refer to studies on the masks present in performative dances in Brazil, especially in the Northeast. As can be observed in the group's trajectory, Moitará's technique for making and performing masked characters follows the Italian tradition.



Left: Donato Sartori, Venício Fonseca and Enrico Bonavera at an exhibition of Sartori's masks, Rio de Janeiro, 2008. Photo: Moitará Archive



Right: Érika Retll training with a geometric mask, Mariana, 2014. Photo: Maria Dua



Fabiano Manhães and Érika Retll in *Acorda zé! A Cumadre tá de pé!*, 2010. Photo: Celso Pereira (Moitará Archive)

55 Fonseca 2018, 249.

Luciana Martuchelli, Tao Filmes and Cia YinsPiração

Born in Belo Horizonte and living in Brasília since childhood, Luciana Martuchelli is the daughter of artists.⁵⁶ She defines herself as an 'expressive polyglot' who 'wandered for almost thirty years [...] in a constant anthropophagy⁵⁷ of techniques and principles',⁵⁸ working in film and theatre without feeling completely belonging to either. This eclectic identity is partly explained by her belonging to Brasília, a city planned to be the capital of Brazil and built from 1956 to 1960 in an uninhabited region in the centre of the country. Its population constitutes a Babel of people from different places, cultures and accents.

In November 2007, Luciana Martuchelli met Eugenio Barba and Julia Varley at the 1st Meeting of Theatre Directors, promoted by Leo Sykes of the Circo-Teatro Udi Grudi group. This meeting was the catalyst for her apprenticeship, helping her to give a precise direction to her previous experiences and refine her 'mestizo alphabet and collage of recurring principles'.⁵⁹ This distillation gave her research with the Cia YinsPiração Poéticas Contemporâneas in theatre, and with TAO Filmes in film, a focus for the exploration on the actor's presence based on the principles of theatre anthropology. The meeting with Julia Varley was particularly important as a female role model. The relationship gained a special dimension in 2010 after the translation into Portuguese of Varley's book *Pedras d'água - bloco de notas de uma atriz do Odin Teatret* (Stones of water – Notebook of an Odin actress).

With the intention of providing others with a close contact to these masters who had been so important to her, from 2008 Luciana conceived and realised the project The Secret Art of the Actor. This is a week-long artistic residency in a full immersion format led annually by Barba and Varley. Actors (as practitioners), and directors and scholars (as observers), work on actor training and the creation of scenic scores. At its 18th edition in 2025, the project has provided hundreds of artists and researchers from the Americas, Asia, and Europe, but mainly from Latin America, with a rare opportunity to engage with Barba's ideas in the very heart of his practice: in the work room. These encounters have been fundamental in adding new knots to the web of relationships between Third Theatre and theatre anthropology.

In her work as director, actress and acting coach for audiovisual media, Martuchelli found in theatre anthropology an alternative to the hegemony of techniques linked to American interpretations of Stanislavski's proposals, spearheaded by Lee Strasberg, which emphasise some aspects of the system proposed by the Russian master, such as emotional memory, and neglects others, such as the physical actions. The article

56 Luciana Martuchelli is the daughter of actor and director Gê Martú and actress and writer Gisele Lemper, who passed away in 2020. Both worked in theatre and film in Brazil's capital since its founding. Gê Martú is still active.

57 Martuchelli refers to the notion of anthropophagy proposed in 1928 by the Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade, which consists of swallowing and digesting foreign references - mainly European and North American ones - to create a genuinely Brazilian art, without submitting to, but also without rejecting, what comes from abroad.

58 Martuchelli 2022, 283. The author cites as references in her training: Antunes Filho, Aderbal Freire-Filho, Jean-Claude Carrière, Peter Brook, Tizuka Yamasaki and Liu Pai Lin.

59 Martuchelli 2022, 292. In this text excerpt, Martuchelli refers to the aesthetic and pedagogical proposals of Barba and Brook.

*Poetics, Borderlessness, Frameworks: Principles of Theatre Anthropology in Film*⁶⁰ describes Martuchelli's approach in detail and provides examples of how she uses acting techniques learned from Varley and Barba to create psychophysical states and scores of physical actions with the control and precision that training provides to actors.



Julia Varley working with participants of the residence *The Secret Art of the Actor*, 2016. Photo: André Aires



Luciana Martuchelli in *Mare Serenitatis*, directed by Julia Varley, 2019. Photo: Luciano Sartoryi

⁶⁰ Martuchelli 2022.

Juliana Pardo, Alício Amaral and Mundu Rodá

We conclude this narration about some paths of theatre anthropology in Brazil with Cia. Mundu Rodá, a group we met in 2021, during the *Encounters on Third Theatre and Theatre Anthropology*. The initial impulse that brought together Juliana Pardo, a young actress and dancer interested in Brazilian performative dances, and Alício Amaral, a student of classical viola who was researching the intonations of the *rabeca* (a kind of violin),⁶¹ was the desire to merge dance, theatre and music. In 1999, they founded Cia. Mundu Rodá, which develops research on physical and energetic principles, corporalities, and sonorities present in Brazilian performative dances. They seek to identify and utilise their ancestral knowledge in their work as artist-performers with contemporary forms and needs.

The group's founding in 1999 coincides with the residence of the two artists in the rural village of Chã do Esconso, Zona da Mata Norte, Pernambuco, home to the traditional cavalo marinho groups.⁶² They stayed there until 2004. During this period,



Juliana Pardo and Alício Amaral in *A donzela guerreira*. Photo: Roberta Guimarães (Mundu Rodá Archive)

61 The *rabeca* is a string instrument used with a bow, like a violin and used in popular cultural expressions in Brazil.

62 The cavalo marinho from Pernambuco is a cultural event originally performed in Zona da Mata Norte (North Woods Zone), where the monoculture of sugarcane is predominant, and it is 'officially' celebrated during the Santos Reis (Three Wise Men) festivities. In the *terreiro* (yard), dance, music and masked figures build narratives and echo stories and memories from this place. It is a manifestation of resistance and freedom, which denounces patriarchy and slavery in the sugar cane mills, and has different meanings in the processes of historical construction in the Mata Norte until nowadays.

the personality of Cia. Mundu Rodá was consolidated, which was strongly manifested in the group's first performance, *A donzela guerreira* (The warrior maiden), directed by Jesser de Sousa of Lume, in which Juliana Pardo plays the role that gives the work its title and Alício plays the Captain.

Juliana Pardo's interest in cavalo marinho raised a question: the fact that it is a Brazilian dance predominantly performed by men. How then to investigate this *brincadeira*, a form of game dance performance? How to be accepted as a woman by the performers of the Zona da Mata Norte region of Pernambuco and learn in practice, alongside the masters of this art? At the beginning of Mundu Rodá's journey, the path of discovery and development of this performative body was strongly marked by the issue of gender, which becomes evident in the theme of the performance *A donzela guerreira*. The actress narrates the strategies she sought to develop her research as follows:

As a woman, to be able to immerse myself in the universe of the *brincadeira*, I had to seek qualities of energy equivalent to those of the male 'players'. I needed to vibrate in harmony with the game, in which the qualities of energy, the actions and movements are intensely vigorous and precise. Being a woman in a practice dominated by men, where the dance is marked by strong and light footwork, was an arduous but pleasurable task.⁶³

The moment of 'putting on a figure', that is, representing a character and its mask alongside the local players, was even more challenging for Juliana Pardo. Although the initial invitation came from a master, the other performers had difficulty in accepting her status as a woman in the performance:

I did everything I was told: the arrival of the figure (the moment when the character enters the circle, announced by its song), I danced and improvised, but nobody answered me and there was no interaction between the figures. Afterwards, I asked the master why nobody interacted with me during the scene, and he told me that it was out of consideration and respect for my husband [Alício Amaral]. I understood. There was, in fact, a desire on the master's part to see me play a figure, but when the men were faced with a woman on stage, the local custom prevails.⁶⁴

Despite the initial resistance, Juliana gradually earned her place in the *brincadeira* tradition. From the late 1990s to the present day, the reality has changed, with Juliana's contribution to the process. Currently, the presence of women in cavalo marinho is accepted more naturally, although some resistance still exists.

Even without dealing with gender-related issues, Alício Amaral also faced difficulties in 'putting on a figure':

63 Mundu Rodá, n.d.

64 Mundu Rodá, n.d.

It is important to emphasise that this experience [of putting on a figure] occurred naturally and without haste, since I have been following the performances and performers since 1999. For me, as a performer who came from outside the Zona da Mata region, the greatest difficulty in 'putting on a figure' in a traditional cavalo marinho was not the dance, or memorising the songs, or their physicality; the greatest challenge was the interaction with the other performers within the context of cavalo marinho. The words used are very specific to that region, and the reasoning behind the role must be quick during the performance. It's quite an exercise for performers.⁶⁵

Unlike the members of Moitará, who found the base for their work in the teachings of Commedia dell'Arte, the artists of Cia. Mundu Rodá sought in Brazilian culture the fundamental technical elements for the development of their work. They were confronted with the *brincador* body, which at the same time is a worker's body, as Master Inácio Lucindo told them:

The physical characteristics of the worker's body are the same as in the *brincador's* body. Look, the physical characteristics of the *brincador's* body is what I told you: the fellow who's cutting sugarcane, his body goes here, he cuts here, goes down here and then there, suddenly he moves here to this side, he cuts everywhere, his body is soft, it's a gentle body, it's a loose body, a relaxed body. It's the same thing when one fellow is 'playing' with another, we 'play'. It's the physical characteristics of the body. The physical characteristics of the worker's body are the same as in the *brincador's* body. The worker's body has his physical characteristics in everything he does... when holding the hoe to cover the sugarcane, look, his body is ready for the maneuver, covering here and then there. Look, for the guy who 'plays', that's the trick. It's the same thing as dancing cavalo marinho.⁶⁶



Left: Master Inácio Lucindo and Juliana Pardo, cavalo marinho. Photo: Marcelo Eme (Mundu Rodá Archive)
Right: Master Inácio Lucindo and Alício Amaral. Photo Mundu Rodá Archive

⁶⁵ Mundu Rodá, n.d.

⁶⁶ Testimony of Master Inácio Lucindo, of the Cavalo Boi Brasileiro de Chã de Esconso, Aliança, Pernambuco, for Juliana Pardo and Alício Amaral (Mundu Rodá, n.d., 8).



Alicio Amaral, I Wayan Bawa, Parvathy Baul, Keiin Yoshimura, Juliana Pardo and the chorus of participants at the 17th ISTA, during the rehearsals of the performance *Andstasis* (Resurrection), National Theatre of Budapest, Hungary, 2023. Photo: Ricardo Gomes.

The experience lived in the Zona da Mata Norte region of Pernambuco provided a deeper understanding of Cia. Mundu Rodá's research, creating their own stage language. Despite the sense of belonging that is the primary impulse of this research, Juliana and Alício encountered elements that sometimes made them feel almost like foreigners in their own country. The realities of cosmopolitan São Paulo, their city of origin, and the rural village of Chã do Esconso in Pernambuco, where they lived for four years, are quite different. These facts corroborate the idea that the place of origin of each artist has relative importance in their individual theatrical culture.

Since the 16th ISTA session in Favignana, Italy, in 2021, Juliana Pardo and Alício Amaral have been part of the ISTA artistic staff, now composed of a new generation of artists that Barba began to bring together at the 2016 ISTA in Albino, Italy, after an eleven-year period without holding ISTA sessions and the passing of many of his key collaborators. Life has presented Eugenio Barba, who will turn 90 on October 29, 2026, with the contingency, or the opportunity, to reinvent himself once again, to keep his legacy alive.

As we complete the first quarter of the 21st century, it is already possible to look with some distance at the legacy of theatre anthropology in Brazil. We can affirm its

importance in the process of creating a Brazilian theatricality, always evolving and always questioning, as could not be otherwise in a young country, when compared to Africa, Asia or Europe, and founded from a process of colonisation and spoliation. Barba argues that this need to seek and affirm a cultural identity based on a feeling of belonging to a culture understood within certain historical and geographical limits, which we conventionally call a 'nation', is an illusion that can, however, be fruitful and productive in some cases. Perhaps the lesson that theatre anthropology has brought specifically to Latin America, as the Brazilian examples reported here attest, is that, in order to forge one's own path in the labyrinth of arts and culture, differences are as important as identities.

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