



Kanichi Hanayagi dancing with a participant, ISTA 9, Umeå, Sweden, 1995. Photo: Bernd Uhlig

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Abstract: *Extract of the article "The Pre-Expressive Famil" by Julia Varley published in The Performers' Village (Drama, Copenhagen), pages 122-24, giving some information about the everyday life at the ISTA session in Umeå, Sweden.*

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It was May and it snowed. We were in the north of Sweden, at the time of year when the nights hardly exist. When Raghunath from India and Augusto from Brazil woke up one morning to find the door of their huts blocked by snow, they were horrified. In such a situation they thought it was impossible to work and they were surprised to see everyone else normally walking up to the gym, or Mississippi room, to take part in the hour of *Digging under the surface*, the time dedicated to the *technique of techniques*.

Snow, snowballs and the snow-Ganesha-elephant-god are some of the memories from the 9th session of ISTA, in 1995, organised by Chris Torch and Sven Sahlström. We were staying in a village of small wooden huts, which was built to offer a roof to the nomads who came from the surrounding Lap country to go to church on Sundays. Each little hut had a fireplace and simple wooden furniture. Spring offered the first crocuses in the grass, light which never disappeared from the sky, and then lots and lots of snow. Weather became a great topic of conversation in this ISTA village. This session had the title *Form and information - actor's learning in a multicultural dimension*.

Normally one speaks of the opposition between form and content. At Odin Teatret and within ISTA we usually refer to the complementarity of form and precision. Now the terminology was changing while focusing on the relationship between form and information. When we were deciding on the theme for this ISTA session, wanting to dedicate it to how theatre craft is passed along generations in different cultures, we chose the title which would later have other implications. We were addressing actor's learning as in India with gurus, in Japan with the artistic families, in Bali with the villages' feasts, in Brazil with the Afro-religious ceremonies, in Europe and America with the traditional and alternative theatre schools. Sanjukta Panigrahi, Kanichi Hanayagi, I Made Djimat, Augusto Omolú, Tom Leabhart, Odin Teatret, the university professors together with the help of participants coming from North America and Europe covered a wide range of experience within the different traditions of actors' apprenticeship. We concentrated on exercises, either the first ones which had been learnt or those each artist felt fundamental



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

to achieve an actor/dancer's scenic presence. The title of the session referred to the form – the way – in which actors learn and to the information – the what – actors learn. But while analysing the exercises and wanting to help Eugenio Barba invent the 'perfect exercise', these words and concepts started indicating towards something deeper. The relationship between form and information was taking us towards the mystery in the actor's craft, towards the energy which expresses despite the actor's will, towards the merging of pre-expressive and expressive levels.

When I was a young actor at Odin Teatret and desperate to learn from the examples of my elder companions, precision was one of my main aims. During rehearsals one day I heard Eugenio comment on a scene which Else Marie Laukvik was repeating. He was admiring her incredible precision. I could see that Else Marie was repeating her scene differently each time. I started to understand that precision had nothing to do with doing the same again. During a public seminar in Bologna, Italy, in 1994, all the Odin actors were asked to define what they meant by precision. Jan Ferslev said that in Danish to be precise means to be on time. If we are expected to be in the rehearsal room at eight o' clock in the morning, to be precise could mean arriving ten minutes early, but also to be by the door and extinguish the cigarette as one sees Eugenio walk down the corridor some minutes after eight. Precision is to be in the right place at the right time. But what determines that it is right?

When I am asked to explain what makes that an action is no longer formalistic and empty, but is able to acquire a meaning for a spectator and seems to have a meaning for the actor, I answer that it does not depend on the content of the action, but on the

precision of the action, what could also be called the action's necessity and motivation.

After the ISTA session in Umeå, instead of speaking of 'precision' I prefer to say 'information', a word which I find much more appropriate and less confusing. To avoid new misunderstandings or associations to newspapers and computers I say 'deep information'. The action is scenically alive because of the deep information it contains. This deep information is a kind of energy. Something that technically I can describe through resistance, rhythm, direction, but that actually I am not able to define. The deep information is a mystery. I only know that it is there. I know how it feels, the sensation, but I do not know how to explain or analyse it.

In Umeå a lot of time was spent examining Meyerhold's biomechanic exercises. We looked at a film where the exercises were performed by various generations of Russian pupils and we watched Ralf Raüker time and time again as he presented *the throwing of the stone*, which he had learnt from Gennadi Bogdanov. Ralf would also tell us about the explanations and words used by his master as Eugenio tried to discover the logic behind an exercise which divided a simple action into many phases which were always denying each other. The exercise contains an information which is automatically passed on to the pupil through its form. By learning the form, the body's mind understands and incorporates the principles behind the form. The exercise, or the action, automatically expresses the information it contains, without the actor necessarily being aware of it. What the exercise needs to express is its sense, not stories or meanings. So we have a pre-expressive level of presence which needs to express, a presence that incorporates information. In a performance the meanings and stories to be read can become abstractions in both the actor's or the spectator's mind, but the information which gives life to exercises and actions at the pre-expressive level is tied in an indissoluble way to the modelled form, it is the intelligence which cannot be separated from the body. It is the pre-expressive expression! This deep information is easily perceived, but difficult to explain. It is the mysterious point with no words around which I battle within my *pre-expressive family*, when my point of view as an actor cannot agree with observers, spectators and scholars.