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## **A Driving Force, Odin Teatret: *Ur-Hamlet* at Kronborg Castle**

**A. Gabriela Ramis<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Olympic College – Bremerton/Washington, United States of America

**ABSTRACT – A Driving Force, Odin Teatret: *Ur-Hamlet* at Kronborg Castle** – *Ur-Hamlet* is Eugenio Barba's production performed at the Elsinore castle in Denmark in 2006. Odin Teatret worked in collaboration with many actors, dancers and musicians from diverse cultures and theatrical traditions. This paper traces the relationships that Odin Teatret has established with other theatre groups in the world, their exchanges and the concept of the third theater. It analyzes the artistic practices that Odin Teatret usually applies and how the integration of actors with different Western and Eastern backgrounds was marked by their professional trajectory. There was a clear distinction between actors with diverse theatre training and also experience, and younger Western actors who took part in Odin Teatret's workshops.

Keywords: **Esthetic Principles. Ethics. Marginality. Multiculturalism. Third Theater.**

**RÉSUMÉ – Odin Teatret, une force motrice: *Ur-Hamlet* au château de Kronborg** – *Ur-Hamlet* est une mise en scène par Eugenio Barba réalisée au château de Elsinore au Danemark en 2006. Odin Teatret a travaillé en collaboration avec de nombreux acteurs, danseurs et musiciens issus de cultures et de traditions théâtrales diverses. Cet article retrace les relations qu'Odin Teatret a établies avec d'autres groupes de théâtre dans le monde, leurs échanges, et le concept du troisième théâtre. Il analyse les pratiques artistiques qu'Odin Teatret applique habituellement et comment l'intégration des acteurs avec différentes expériences professionnelles occidentale et orientale a été marquée par leur trajectoire professionnelle. Il y avait une nette distinction entre les acteurs avec la formation théâtrale diverse et longue expérience, et les jeunes acteurs occidentaux qui ont participé aux ateliers d'Odin Teatret.

Mots-clés: **Principes Esthétiques. Ethique. Marginalité. Multiculturalisme. Troisième Théâtre.**

**RESUMO – Odin Teatret, uma Força Propulsora: *Ur-Hamlet* no Castelo de Kronborg** – *Ur-Hamlet* é uma produção de Eugenio Barba apresentada em 2006 no castelo de Elsinore, Dinamarca. O Odin Teatret trabalhou em colaboração com muitos atores, bailarinos e músicos de diferentes culturas e tradições teatrais. O artigo descreve as relações que o Odin Teatret tem estabelecido com outros grupos teatrais do mundo inteiro, suas trocas e o conceito de Terceiro Teatro. Analisa as práticas artísticas usualmente aplicadas pelo Odin Teatret e como a integração de atores com diferentes origens ocidentais e orientais foi marcada por suas trajetórias profissionais. Havia uma clara distinção entre os atores com diferentes formações e tempo de experiência teatral e aqueles mais jovens, ocidentais, que participaram de oficinas do Odin Teatret.

Palavras-chave: **Princípios Estéticos. Ética. Marginalidade. Multiculturalismo. Terceiro Teatro.**



In Elsinore, Denmark, there is an annual theatrical event that takes place in August at Kronborg Castle, a medieval construction completely rebuilt between 1574 and 1585. *Hamlet Sommer* began with a performance of *Hamlet* in 1816 and after one hundred years the productions have continued to be offered with some interruptions<sup>1</sup>. In 2006, Odin Teatret, based in Holstebro, Denmark, and directed by Eugenio Barba, performed *Ur-Hamlet* at *Hamlet Sommer*. This production was not a staging of Shakespeare's text, and much less an attempt to rescue the lost text attributed to Thomas Kyd and Shakespeare.

Eugenio Barba is an Italian director who founded Odin Teatret with Norwegian actors in Oslo in 1964. The group received an offer from the town of Holstebro, Denmark, to become a resident company with municipal support, and since 1966 it has been based there. Barba studied theater in Poland, and between January 1962 and April 1964 he collaborated with and learned from Jerzy Grotowski. About his experience with Grotowski, Barba states:

My role as 'assistant director' in *Akropolis* and *Doctor Faustus* consisted in sitting and watching the progress of rehearsals and training sessions and then, sitting alone with Grotowski, making comments, expressing doubts, asking for explanations, making suggestions, opening up for all my associations, impressions and questions. This I did for thirty months. Only rarely did I have the opportunity to direct the actors myself. [...] (Barba, 1999a, p. 34).

This individual work with Grotowski shaped the work of Barba with Odin Teatret's actors. Although teamwork is extremely important in this group, the actor's individual work on his or her own, later shared with the director before the interaction with the rest of the group is not unusual.

During the first years, Odin Teatret's actors and director had to earn their living doing work unrelated to theater<sup>2</sup>. Once in Denmark, they did not limit their activities to creating a theater laboratory, in which autodidacticism was fundamental and training was practiced daily, but also covered other areas that extended their influence in the theater world: pedagogy, research and publication. Barba organized performances by foreign companies, as well as workshops and lectures by visiting actors and directors, beginning with Jerzy Grotowski, in Holstebro. Barba also established a publishing house in order to disseminate the theory and history of theater that, although crucial, was not well known. He began to



publish the journal *Teatrets Teori og Teknikk* in 1965. Barba himself wrote and writes with great erudition on theory of theater in a poetic style.

Odin Teatret had a critical problem in Holstebro: the linguistic barrier that separated the Norwegian actors from the Danish audience. This was decisive for the aesthetic choices that the group made. The limitation constrained them to develop a performance style that could rely more on other languages of the stage. They did not eliminate verbal language from their productions, but they had to make sure that the visual elements, kinesic and paralinguistic signs would be more important<sup>3</sup>. Soon after Odin Teatret settled in Holstebro, actors from diverse nationalities joined the group. In their productions, actors speak different languages, sometimes each of them his or her own language, but also other languages that they have learned<sup>4</sup>.

Most of Barba's writings have strong autobiographical references. He usually makes reference to the death of his father, a military man who fought in the Fascist army before and during World War II. As a Southern Italian boy who enjoyed the privileges of a bourgeois family, Barba had the very personal need to go beyond his own identity. This wish drew him to travel to Norway at eighteen<sup>5</sup> (after going to a military school for three years), to study at the Warsaw theatre school and also with Jerzy Grotowski in Poland, and to go to India and see the Kathakali performances and schools that he photographed and reported to Grotowski. Over the years, Barba's study of the Eastern theatrical traditions has been continuous, and he has maintained also an exchange with masters of these traditions. Moreover, Odin Teatret has reached Western practitioners and researchers, and established common projects and collaboration with them.

Responding to Ian Watson, who has spoken of multiculturalism as the main characteristic in Barba's work, the director wrote *La conquista della differenza* (The conquest of difference) in 2004, in which he acknowledges that multiculturalism is present in all his projects. However, he states that it is not a goal, but a consequence of the need to go beyond one's own identity, "refusal and escape": "the contact with diverse worlds becomes a path to take a step back from oneself, from one's own origin, from the world to which one belongs. To give rise to something else" (Barba, 2004, p. 272). Meeting with people who belong to other cultures and traditions



also helps to question the principles that Odin Teatret has established as a theater group. It is a form of avoiding a standstill.

Barba emphasizes the importance of marginality for a group to be inclined to challenge theater traditions: “We began ‘different’ because we were theatrically poor people, born outside the great Western traditions. Later, we became ‘different’ by choice and vocation” (Barba, 2004, p. 281)<sup>6</sup>. The actors were students who had failed to pass the required examination to receive training in a traditional school. Despite his university degree and his learning period with Grotowski, Barba could not find a job as a director in Oslo. All the founders of Odin Teatret had been rejected by the Oslo theater community, and the aspirants to actors had not received training at all. Thus, they had to find their way in autodidacticism.

Multiculturalism is present in the composition of the group, in which there are performers from Scandinavia, Italy, France, England, Spain, the United States, and Brazil. It is also present in its audiences: spectators who travel to Holstebro, and spectators whom Odin encounters when it travels to perform in other countries. Multiculturalism is also present in the collaboration of masters and theater researchers, in the composition of groups of students at the International School of Theatre Anthropology; in the collaboration with international performers in *Theatrum Mundi*, in the cultural “barter”<sup>7</sup> that they have with communities in the countries that they visit, and in the collaboration of theater researchers who write about Odin Teatret and are members of the editorial board of their publishing house. Odin Teatret’s multiculturalism has been very criticized as a form of colonialism by some practitioners and theoreticians. The practice of taking cultural expressions out of context and using them in Odin’s productions has been considered like a form of appropriation. However, Odin Teatret approaches cultural expressions from Western cultures in the same fashion. For example, Catholic symbols are used in some productions, but they are as removed from their context as any other symbol taken from an Eastern culture or a Latin American indigenous culture. Adam Ledger discusses the concept of “cultural imperialism” of which Barba has been accused for his use of multiculturalism, and concludes that the director “deals with *Theatrum Mundi* actors in the same way as the Odin actors” (Ledger, 2012, p. 190)<sup>8</sup>.



Thus, Odin Teatret's influence in the theater world is not limited to the productions that the group presents. The group is a driving force that convenes and unites theater groups which, as marginal institutions, have similar conditions, and which do not have commercial goals. Barba names this category the Third Theater in order to differentiate it from traditional and avant-garde theaters. He defines these theater groups as those that "[...] are discriminated against, personally or culturally, professionally, economically or politically. The masters of writing are the ones who decide the validity of what these groups are doing" (Barba, 1999b, p. 184)<sup>9</sup>.

Barba characterizes the Third Theater as theater groups who prefer to establish their own discipline, on the margins of the official theater, and accepting the consequences that the rejection of the system may have. This stand implies an ethos that differentiates these theater groups from the rest. Although the Third Theater represents a few artists who are above the ethical average in theater groups, he states that these artists do not necessarily have the same aesthetic principles. In fact, they do share some aesthetic principles such as the importance of the actor above any other element of the stage, but Barba sees more value in the ethical principles: "Production does not only produce wares, but also relationships between people. This is also true of theater: it does not only produce performances, cultural products" (Barba, 1979, p. 149)<sup>10</sup>.

For Barba, the three concepts of autonomy, commonality, and cosmopolitanism are equally crucial both for the group member and the group as a whole<sup>11</sup>. Commonality does not just extend to the relationships among the group members or the group and its audience, but also to other theater groups that share the same ethical principles<sup>12</sup>. And even more, commonality also refers to those predecessors who practiced a Third Theater when they reaffirmed their autonomy from society:

[T]here are those two kinds of history. The history of official theater – and there is nothing negative in that word – that history that we read in all the books, and the ideas in wheeled books, that is another kind of history. And this history is very peculiar; these are books that we read and that, suddenly and truly, go through our guts. Those books seem to turn into a virus, just as if a phrase, a page, an image metamorphosed, mutated into a virus, and they enter our organisms as parasites that never leave us. In the end, we have forgotten them; we live our lives, but everything that we do is the result of an anonymous symbiosis. Although we reject the influence of those who

came before us, it is the result of the dead who preceded us (Barba, 2006a, p. 47)<sup>13</sup>.

Barba points out that these practitioners did not seem to excel during their times, or at least at the beginning of their careers. As examples, he refers to Sulerzhitski, Vachtangov, Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Craig, and Artaud, who are remembered today, unlike their successful colleagues such as the actors of the *Comédie Française* or the Russian Imperial Theaters (Barba, 1999b).

Some of the groups that are part of the Third Theater meet with Odin Teatret either when Barba's group travels or when they visit Holstebro. These groups have worked in a very similar and independent way. Moreover, there are innumerable groups that have been founded by practitioners who have had some training with Odin Teatret: David Korish, American codirector of *Teatro Abya Yala* in Costa Rica; Stephen Legawiec, founder of *Ziggurat Theater* in Los Angeles; Pippo Delbono, director of *Compagnia Pippo Delbono* in Italy; Etelvino Vázquez, director of *Teatro del Norte* in Spain; Richard Fowler, founder of *Canada Project*; César Brie, Argentinian director, founder of *Teatro de los Andes* in Bolivia, among many others.

Ana Woolf, one of the director assistants in *Ur-Hamlet*<sup>14</sup>, is an Argentinian actress who points out that Odin Teatret has fulfilled a pedagogical role with its performances and demonstrations in diverse theater communities in the world:

Odin Teatret is not a school, it never had one and never aspired to have one either. And nevertheless, many practitioners and independent theater groups in the world (I would stress in Latin America) have been trained and upgraded our training in 'Odin's school'. What does this mean? Through a literary education (through all the 'Odin' literature written by Barba, his actors, and the theoreticians of ISTA among others). Through an 'itinerant' training fragmentarily composed by meeting moments. Through pieces of shared life taken from daily work at a certain time and place: Encuentro Ayacucho festival, ISTA, Odin weeks, Odin's birthdays, conferences and performances done in our countries or neighboring countries ... Each moment of our meeting was and is a pedagogical moment. Because the theorization is presented after practice. Theory turns into reflection in a living process, and not into theoretical tips of a model to be built (Woolf, 2004, n.p.).



Some of these practitioners have been trained at the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA). This is not an institution running all the year round, but rather a meeting celebrated approximately every two years. Western and Eastern performance masters, Third Theater practitioners, and theoreticians get together to participate in lectures, demonstrations, practice, and discussions that are an opportunity to study diverse training techniques and traditions. Ian Watson describes the spirit of these meetings in these terms: “The ‘community’ concept, of people brought together in a relatively isolated setting where they work, sleep, and eat together, began with the third theatre gatherings and has been carried over into ISTA” (Watson, 1993, p. 150).

Barba has interest in researching the discipline that he has defined as theatre anthropology: “Different performers at different places and times and in spite of the stylistic forms specific to their traditions, have shared common principles. The first task of theatre anthropology is to trace these recurrent principles” (Barba, 2006b, p. 29). These principles do not depend on techniques or cultures; they are common to all performers. However, the techniques of Eastern traditional performances are very precise, hence the interest that Barba and Odin Teatret have in Eastern theater and dance. Barba formulates a series of principles that any tradition applies in order for the actor to achieve an extra-daily presence that demands the spectator’s attention<sup>15</sup>.

*Ur-Hamlet* is a project that was prepared during a long period of time, and in different countries: it began in 2003 in Denmark, and continued at ISTA sessions in Seville in 2004 and in Wroclaw in 2005, as well as in Batuan, Bali, in 2004 and 2006. In 2006, it was performed in Ravenna, Italy, and in Elsinore, Denmark<sup>16</sup>.

This production makes use of two artistic devices that are typical of Odin Teatret: defamiliarization and impeded form, as they will be defined below, integrating actors with a diversity of techniques and traditions. *Ur-Hamlet* expresses a change in Odin’s status as Third Theater and in its relationship to its audience that will be discussed below.

In the *Ur-Hamlet* program, Barba states that the production is based on Saxo Grammaticus’s (1979) *Gesta Danorum*, which is a narrative text, not a dramatic text. It is a chronicle of Jutland, written in Latin in the





twelfth century. The actions presented in *Ur-Hamlet* are some of those that Saxo narrates in books III and IV, but the production takes only some elements from the medieval text. Although Barba points out that Odin Teatret's version maintains the theme of the fight for power, there is a fundamental difference. In Saxo's text, Hamlet's wit and cleverness to overcome difficulties set a light mood that counterbalances the theme of struggle for power. Odin's *Ur-Hamlet* is completely focused on the struggle for power, and has no space for comic relief.

In Barba's *Ur-Hamlet*, there is a narrator, Saxo Grammaticus, played by Julia Varley. The predominant image is death, either in the action of many characters dying, or more specifically, being killed, or in the bones and skull manipulated by the character of Saxo. Augusto Omolú, a Brazilian actor, who has training in classical ballet, modern dance, and candomblé<sup>17</sup>, plays Hamlet. Roberta Carreri plays Geruth, Hamlet's mother; Mia Theil Have plays Hamlet's foster sister<sup>18</sup>; and Torgeir Wethal plays Pulcinella, the master of ceremonies. These members of the Odin Teatret collaborate with other international performers. Noh theater actor, Akira Matsui, plays the Queen of the Rats and Hamlet's foster-brother. Cristina Wistari Formaggia, an Italian actress trained in Gambuh tradition from Bali, plays Orvendil, Hamlet's father, and also a Counsellor. I Wayan Bawa, Gambuh performer, plays Fengi, Hamlet's uncle. The Gambuh Pura Desa Ensemble from Batuan, Bali, composed by thirty actors/ dancers and musicians, three musicians of Odin Teatret, and the Foreigners' chorus of forty-three actors from Europe, Latin America and North America complete the team<sup>19</sup>.

Already in the casting, in which actresses play masculine roles and an actor plays a feminine role, one can see the device of *defamiliarization*, which Shklovsky formulated in 1917 as a fundamental technique of art. It consists in making the perception of the artistic object an extraordinary process, different from daily life, which must last as long as possible (Shklovsky, 1973). The need for short perception and the goal of efficiency is essential for everyday life, but art requires a different timing and its purpose is not to achieve a goal with the minimum possible investment. However, in *Ur-Hamlet*, the superabundance of signs on stage calls attention to other aspects first. This is the effect of the *impeded form* device, which makes the perception of the artistic object difficult (Shklovsky, 2005)



The spectator has to overcome the difficulty that the polyphony of the languages of the stage imposes, as a driver who is, momentarily, blinded by the sun. The spectator's senses and attention need some time to begin to see the performance.

The stage space is determined by six rectangular sections of seats for the audience arranged in a polygonal form in the courtyard of the castle. One of the sides of the polygon is free of seats and works as the back of the stage. There are innumerable big fishbowls on red pedestals paired with torches; some of them form a circle around a well curbstone, which is in the middle of the space. The torches are burning, but there is still daylight. By the well curbstone, there is a bright, light blue silk cloth on the floor. Outside the circle and against the back of the stage space, there are four platforms: two are black and have chairs, microphones and a drum kit; two platforms are light brown and much lower than the black ones; each platform has one gong and many musical instruments. Against the back, there are very long golden standards, waving in front of the main tower in the castle. Behind each platform, there are several spotlights, which are not lit. After the spectators take their seats, there is enough time for them to perceive the stage space in detail before the performance begins.

After a fanfare, the musicians enter and take a seat on the platforms. Some are members of Odin Teatret: Kai Erik Bredholt, Magnus Errboe, and Jan Ferslev. Others are musicians who have collaborated with ISTA and *Theatrum Mundi* for years: Indian flutist Annada Prasanna Pattanaik and Brazilian percussionist Cleber da Paixão, as well as the musicians of the Gambuh Pura Desa Ensemble. Also, the singers enter with the musicians: Ny Nyoman Candri (Balinese classical opera singer), Brigitte Cirila (French mezzo-soprano), and a Western soprano whose name is not stated in the program. Musicians and singers are dressed in red or black. After the musicians are in their places, most of the actors, except for the two choruses, enter and assume an orderly arrangement behind the black platform stage right. Some actors light the torches that were not on yet. The music, specially composed by Frans Winther for the production, begins to play. The instruments are Balinese, Western, and Afro-Brazilian. The Balinese men dancers enter. Then the Balinese women dancers enter and divide into two branches. Torgeir Wethal, as the Pulcinella master of ceremonies, and another Pulcinella wearing masks display a sign that says:



*The monk Saxo digs into the dark ages and unearths the story of Hamlet, Earl of Jutland*, while one of the Balinese dancers perfumes the stage space with incense. Saxo, with his bald head emerging from a long, red, violet and orange costume, walks, leaning backwards and at a slow pace, towards the well curbstone. He lifts the blue cloth and places it on the well curbstone, revealing a skull and human bones on a carpet. Saxo recites a Latin text as he picks up the skull and elevates it. The Balinese men and women enter again, now dancing. Multiple elements amaze the audience: the light walk of the women, whose arms describe gracious waves as they advance slowly placing their feet bone by bone on the ground; the attractive and detailed headdresses that the women and men wear; and the majestic and hectic walk of the men, with costumes that exaggerate the strength of their shoulders and make their heads look buried between their shoulders. Saxo announces, *Hamlet's father*, after the Balinese women dancers have entered as a court around Orvendil, played by Cristina Wistari Formaggia. Next, there is a fight with swords between Orvendil, Hamlet's father, and Fengi, Hamlet's uncle, which results in Orvendil's death, choreographed as a dance in slow motion. Fengi wears the king's crown, and is carried on the court's shoulders. The audience then sees Geruth's mourning as a stroll in a circle, in which the actress bends her elbows and closes her fists as she moves her arms in a V shape downwards, as if pulling ropes from a ceiling. Her wordless dirge ends by Orvendil's corpse, which Saxo has placed on the carpet where bones are lying. After Fengi helps Geruth raise, they stroll like a smiling royal couple, as she whispers words in his ear that the audience does not hear. The next scene is Hamlet's Candomblé dance with Orvendil's skull in his hands, followed by his rooster's crow as he plans his revenge and pretends madness. Saxo announces Hamlet's plan and an invasion. As Geruth calls Hamlet, the Foreigners begin to invade the castle. The first foreigner is a woman who takes off a black tunic and a turban, and she stands wearing a black bra and net stockings. The invasion of the castle – action that is not part of Hamlet's story in *Gesta Danorum* – takes place simultaneously with the following actions. There is a wedding banquet of two of the Foreigners, and the first deaths caused by the plague take place – another action added by Barba to Saxo Grammaticus' story. Saxo announces 'Fengi, Hamlet's uncle, decides to test Hamlet's madness. He thinks a madman cannot make love'. Hamlet's foster sister is introduced to



him to test him; it is a love scene, echoed by other characters in the Foreigners' chorus. The Queen of the Rats, who brings the plague, enters. A Noh actor performs this character. The participants in the banquet first, and then other Foreigners, die. Hamlet punishes himself and Geruth with a white rope, as he shouts "Bitch" in Portuguese. Then he kills the spy counsellor hidden under the straw. Hamlet is taken away. The Pulcinelle carry the bodies of the foreigners away. A tractor carries away more bodies. Saxo announces the return of Hamlet with a warrior. They throw a net – represented by many streamers – on the court as a surprise-element tactic, and the warrior assassinates Fengi and the opponents. During the fight, the action of the bride and groom continues. The next actions are Geruth's mourning, the drowning of Hamlet's foster sister in a basin by members of the court, and Hamlet's proclamation of a new order. Three foreigners enter again with an old baby's stroller and plastic bags. They sit down to talk and laugh.

These actions take place simultaneously with many others, such as the Pulcinelle carrying away the corpses of the Foreigners in a wheelbarrow or covering them with a sheet, a fork-lift carrying away other corpses, or Saxo reciting the Latin text as he manipulates the bones – usually contrasting to the main action's rhythm or volume. When the performance begins, the spectators are bombarded by the amount of visual and auditory stimuli. Undoubtedly, besides the defamiliarization device, the device of impeded form is also used. Theater is a system in which the polyphony of languages is present, and in *Ur-Hamlet* the polyphony becomes very evident for the spectator. The many languages of the stage are used with the device of defamiliarization, thus the spectator's reception is not easy. The audience sees and hears a multiplicity of signs that are not emitted in a usual, familiar way. Sometimes, there are three simultaneous actions: the main one with Hamlet's story, Saxo's narration conveyed through visual, kinetic and paralinguistic signs as well as a few verbal signs, and the Foreigners' action. Barba knows that each spectator will see a different production because he or she will favor certain signs over others. This use of the languages of the stage leads the audience to enjoy the process of the performance and not be interested in getting to the end of the story. *How* the story is performed is more important than *what* is performed. Barba mentions some of his

practices as a director that resemble traditional Eastern forms as a result of an autodidact research:

[N]ot to take the differences between what is called ‘dance’ and what is called ‘theatre’ too much into consideration; not to accept the character as a unit of measure of the performance; not to make the actor’s gender coincide automatically with that of the character; to exploit the sonorous richness of languages [...] beyond their semantic value (Barba, 2015, p. 243).

Verbal language is employed only as a significant resource: its use is limited, but when it is used, it expresses something that no other language of the stage could have expressed in this production. Saxo, the narrator, announces characters and some key actions in English. He also delivers long speeches in Latin, of which only the paralinguistic signs can be perceived and not their semantic sense, at least by the great majority of the audience. The same impediment to the understanding of the semantic meaning takes place when the Balinese actors or the Noh actor speak. As in a secret ritual, the texts that the actors deliver, which are very few, have a semantic meaning, but Barba has structured the production in such a way that the audience can understand the production even if they can only comprehend the very few lines in English with which Saxo announces characters and actions.

The simultaneity and abundance of visual and auditory signs contribute to a difficult perception. A specific form in which the device of impeded form takes place emerges from the multiculturalism created by diverse theater traditions or techniques, and also by the diversity of the actors. Erik Christoffersen (2008, p. 122) indicates that *Ur-Hamlet* “creates a reflexivity in ‘the formation of otherness’ since anyone can be ‘foreign’ in the social context [...] an act of reflexion is initiated over what is foreign, perhaps giving access to what is foreign in ourselves”. For example, the character of Saxo, who is a medieval monk, could be seen as a Western figure, which will be more familiar to the audience. However, although he is the narrator and delivers the few lines that the audience can understand, Saxo speaks Latin during most of the performance, a language that is the origin of most Western languages in Europe. Ironically, Saxo’s language is an element of impeded perception. Thus, the character who essentially could be seen as the link between audience and performance text is perceived as foreign.

What characterizes *Ur-Hamlet* is the participation of performers who contribute their particular technique to the production. The diversity of techniques can be considered in two aspects: one is related to the origin of the training, and the other implies the level of internalization of the technique.

In two cases, those techniques are the result of traditional training that has been transmitted through generations in Japan and Bali: Noh and Gambuh. Odin Teatret's actors have developed a technique since the foundation of the group in 1964. To state that their technique is a tradition is just a metaphor. Although there have been more recent generations of actors who have been trained by the older actors, and the life of the group is long, Odin Teatret's technique cannot be considered a tradition because it is the technique of one group. It is a particular group because it has the ability to gather other performers, and also because it fulfills a pedagogical function. However, Odin Teatret's teachings have reached contemporaries for now, whereas Eastern performance traditions have been transmitted from generation to generation for centuries. Despite the historical differences between Noh theater, Gambuh and Odin's technique, all of the professional performers collaborate allowing the audience to perceive a commonality achieved through the diversity of styles.

Barba says that he works with this heterogeneity of styles respecting the identity of each technique and creating something new out of this diversity when he works with *Theatrum Mundi*:

We employ a dramaturgy that is based on the intertwining of autonomous styles. The intertwining, as well as the development of the plot, are both my responsibility as director. What is created by the actors belongs to their cultural identity and is not encroached upon by the *mise en scène* (Barba, 1996)<sup>20</sup>.

And, although he stresses the importance of his role as a director, he also points out that the collaboration of artists who have very different techniques and cultures leads to paths that cannot be foreseen; thus, he cannot ever begin to work with preconceived ideas. Adam Ledger points out that, in *Ur-Hamlet*, the focus has shifted from the identification of technical similarities and transculturation to the incorporation of diverse genres that together obtain a unique result in which multiculturalism takes place (Ledger, 2012).

On the other hand, the actors in the chorus, who participated in a workshop with Odin Teatret for forty days, also have a different experience with technique. Fundamentally, the difference lies in the amount of time in which they have learned certain technique; in other words, the chorus actors do not have the experience in training that the rest of the actors have. They are young actors from many countries, and they may have a heterogeneous background, but in all cases, they have not had a long and consistent training as Odin Teatret's members or the other well-trained performers, whom Barba calls "master performers". Tatiana Chemi classifies the training that these young actors have received as a form of pedagogy that Barba began to apply in the *Theatrum Mundi* some twenty years before *Ur-Hamlet*: it is offered by actors of Odin Teatret (Julia Varley and Augusto Omolú for *Ur-Hamlet*), not by the institution itself, as "external education", not intended to prepare the young actors to work in Odin Teatret (Chemi, 2018, p. 22-25).

Barba has marked the performers in the chorus of *Foreigners* with an erasure of individuality through their acting style, their costumes and props, and their interaction with the audience at the end of the performance, as well as through the place that they are assigned in the program of the production. In the *mise en scène*, the difference is accentuated by the role assigned to the chorus. The chorus performers work under aesthetic principles that differ from those of the experienced actors. The younger actors have some scenes in which they perform as one body, or divided into two bodies. In one of these scenes, they advance threateningly and simultaneously as the Queen of the Rats, or the plague, enters. A member of the chorus, Sofía Monsalve, from Colombia, describes the origin of this sequence in this way:

It was during two warming up exercises that Eugenio found the form that he wanted. The first one was one of the Orixás dances<sup>21</sup>, the hunter. In the legs one can find the horse galloping tirelessly, and in the torso, the rider whirling a rope above his head. Eugenio wanted it to look like an army breaking into a battlefield, like a powerful mass, one only threatening cry punching the spectator (Monsalve, 2008).

When Odin Teatret's actors play a scene in which they form a compact unity in other productions, it is always possible to identify the particular qualities of each character. Unlike Odin Teatret's actors, the



members of the chorus in *Ur-Hamlet* form an anonymous, unified mass in this kind of scene. Moreover, these actors perform in a realistic style. Their costumes are twenty-first century Western clothes. They have props such as trash bags, travel bags, and cellular phones, which represent exactly what they are, and do not stand for something else as is the case with most props that the older actors use. In work demonstrations, actors of Odin such as Roberta Carreri and Julia Varley address the special care with which they select the objects that they will use in a production. The selection of the objects is almost a transcendental action, and the objects are invested with a quasi-religious aura. Barba explains the degree of personalization that the actor has with “scenic materials”, which include the elements that the actor creates: “physical and vocal actions, texts, songs, costumes or objects” as non-transferable to another actor in case the actor leaves a production (Barba, 2010, p. 53).

What the director’s choices indicate is the decision to highlight the hierarchical organization of performers in this production, which would have been unthinkable in Odin Teatret’s history. Evidently, there is a huge difference in quality in the training among the performers; however, the members of the chorus could have performed under the same aesthetic principles as Odin’s actors. As indicated above, when Odin Teatret’s actors perform a chorus action, the individuality of each actor is always identifiable.

Erik Christoffersen argues that the stylistic differences found in the chorus have the purpose of presenting the foreigners as a disturbing element that contrasts with the plot of Hamlet, and that Barba takes also a political stance towards migration and refugees introducing the chorus (Christoffersen, 2008). However, there is a conflict in this contrast between the professional performers and the younger ones that stems from what artistic tools the performers in the chorus have been provided. Adolphe Appia, who wanted to eliminate perspective painting in scenery, pointed out that an actor’s body and a painted flat on stage cancel the effect of the light projected on them because the actor’s body has volume, and light creates shadows when cast on it, whereas shadows are not possible when the light casts on a flat (Appia, 1993, p. 47). Actor and flat scenery on stage form an inconsistency. In *Ur-Hamlet*, the professional actors have volume, but the chorus is equivalent to the flat.





Among Odin Teatret's ethical principles, there are some that rule the group's interaction with its audience. The group's opposition to the treatment of the spectator as a customer entails the rejection of certain theater practices that may be viewed as the result of a commercial relationship such as the applauses and bows at the end of a performance. Usually, at the end of Odin Teatret's performances, the audience applauds, and the actors do not come up to take bows. The audience increases the volume and rhythm of the applause, in the hope of a response, but the performers do not come back to the stage after their performance is over. They never show up in the hall of the theater after the performance either. They establish a clear differentiation in their relationship to the audience during the performance, which is very close – not just in physical distance – , and after the performance, which is very distant. In the performance, the precision and rigor of the actors' performance is total, thus the spectator perceives the actors' devotion to the audience as absolute. Trained in the habitual theater practice that allows the audience to express its appreciation for the actors' work, the spectator applauds, and feels disappointed at the lack of response. As a rule, in the theater during the applause, the spectator has the possibility of observing the actors' reactions and their satisfaction at the acknowledgment of their work, and he or she can even compare the actors' particular gestures and gait to those of their characters. Odin Teatret refuses to grant this pleasure to the audience. In a sense, the group reaffirms its autonomy from the audience by not taking delight in the spectators' expression of approval or admiration. But, even more important, this refusal is part of the construction of performance as a non-mundane phenomenon, as an event that creates an exciting, extraordinary and spiritual experience, which confers its participants a transcendental quality. This complete disappearance of the actors marks the performance almost as a magic act. Else Marie Laukvik, an Odin actress, states in an interview with Erik Christoffersen:

The process is the most important thing, not the result. You must work without thinking that people will have to like what you are doing, you must work because you have a need that has grown from within. It's not because the actor has a big ego that must be satisfied. You don't get on stage to get applause. We've never experienced it because, apart from the [sic] *The Million*, we've never stayed to receive applause (Christoffersen, 1993, p. 172).



Thus, the actors' disappearance from the stage is also a statement against the need for the audience's recognition. Odin Teatret's actors become approachable again when they offer workshops and work demonstrations in the days following their first performance. The attendees to these events are spectators who have seen the production and are knowledgeable about theater: actors, directors, theater students, professors, critics, etc. Odin Teatret's actors and Eugenio Barba share their knowledge, demonstrate how they build a character, expound the principles that they apply, and introduce the basic concepts of theater anthropology. Eugenio Barba speaks extensively about the importance of the relationships among theater groups, theater history, and his personal experiences in the theater. The actors' demonstrations are not performances, but lectures illustrated with examples of actions. And, although during their demonstrations they reveal how they build their scores<sup>22</sup>, they do not obliterate the almost magical nature of the performance because they pervade their demonstrations with a transcendental nature, although they acknowledge the audience's presence and answer questions at the end.

Nevertheless, this tenet of clear separation between performers and audience is not strictly applied in *Ur-Hamlet*. When the performance ends and the audience applaud, the actors proceed in an unusual way for Odin Teatret. First of all, the fact that *Ur-Hamlet* takes place in the open air, in the castle's yard, and during the summer, when the sunlight is still shining and the performance begins at 9:00 p.m., makes the stage space less controllable. The usual effect of the blackout, during which the actors vanish, is not possible. Surprisingly, the actors take bows when the spectators applaud. The technical factor cannot be the only reason for this choice, since there are other concessions to this more conventional relationship between performers and audience.

Second, the fact that the chorus of young actors does not proceed in a uniform way as the experienced actors do shows that taking bows is intentional. At the end of the performance, the Foreigners' chorus is lying in the castle yard and although the rest of the performers take bows, the chorus does not get up. The applause is over, and the chorus is still on the floor. The spectators remain in their seats, expecting these actors to move, but when they realize that the chorus will not get up, they leave. This ambiguous action, which intends to project the fiction beyond the



performance, and seems to state that these actors and their characters are one, contradicts Odin Teatret's general practice of clear separation between actors and audience after the performance. The space dedicated to performance is not suddenly divested of its magical nature with the disappearance of the actors: the limits are not clear, and the spectators seating in the first row even have to walk by the actors lying on the yard as they leave.

In the production's program, each performer and participant in the production is introduced by a photograph and his or her curriculum vitae, with the exception of the members of the chorus. This, which may be natural for most theater companies, is not what Odin Teatret has done for other productions. The programs of other productions only state the names of the actors, sometimes specifying what role they play, and other times not even this. On the other hand, all the programs present long explanations on the literary texts or life experiences that have given rise to the production, performance theory, and ethics of Odin Teatret's work. These aspects are also developed in *Ur-Hamlet's* program. The content of most programs indicates a determination to focus the spectator's attention on the group's work as the result of a joint effort, in which all the individuals' contribution is significant. The lack of information on the performers or the director in other productions is a statement of lack of interest in proving value, reaffirming prestige, and as a consequence, obtaining the audience's acknowledgement. In *Ur-Hamlet*, by contrast, the group seems to claim that acknowledgement.

When Odin Teatret's members expose themselves to the audience in lectures or demonstrations, and when they write about their own work, they usually avoid anything that might picture them as mundane. They have always avoided attitudes and withdrawn from activities that might express a wish for prestige, fame and acknowledgment. Identities flow, and these changes in Odin Teatret's practice show that a theater group can behave as one of the few with great commitment and sincerity, but maintaining this commitment is hard work that requires alertness to oneself.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Hamlet Sommer* presents theater companies from many countries. Among the companies that have performed at Kronborg Castle are: The Old Vic and the Royal National Company from London, The American National Theatre and Academy from New York, The Dublin Gate Theatre, The Oxford Playhouse Company, Nationalteatret from Oslo, and many Scandinavian companies.
- <sup>2</sup> Jens Bjørneboe – a Norwegian author who regrets his country's rejection of Barba when he tried to find a position as a director in the Norwegian theaters after having lived in Poland – recalls that when all Barba was offered was a stagehand position, he decided to work as a garbage collector (Bjørneboe, 1970).
- <sup>3</sup> In *Beyond the Floating Islands*, Barba explains what resources Odin Teatret had to use in these circumstances: “[...] We searched for a sonorous, emotive-sensory logic in the emission of sounds and phrases; a logic which would help us augment the power of the dramatic situation, since on the semantic level, that of the meaning of words, we had a considerable handicap: our actors came from different countries and spoke different languages. During approximately eight years, we circumscribed and explored this field in both our vocal training and our productions” (Barba, 1986, p. 76).
- <sup>4</sup> Eugenio Barba is a polyglot, which is very useful for his international networking.
- <sup>5</sup> He earned a master's degree in French and Norwegian Literature and History of Religions.
- <sup>6</sup> This is Viktor Shklovsky's concept of the need of the artist to “always foment the revolt of things” (Shklovsky, 2005, p. 73). Barba identifies Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Craig, Copeau, Artaud and Brecht as revolutionaries who have caused “a new awareness of their art as a political, ethical or spiritual agent” (Barba, 2004, p. 275).
- <sup>7</sup> “Barter” is for Odin Teatret a cultural exchange that the group practices when it visits a community in any country and offers its inhabitants a performance in exchange for a performance of that community (songs, dances, etc.). When the inhabitants of a small town in Peru or the South of Italy perform, they are not offering a professional performance. Speaking about barter, Barba stresses the importance of not treating the spectators as customers: Odin acquired in



Salento the awareness and expertise of establishing contacts and relationships with the spectators beyond the traditional selling of tickets. Monetary economy is not necessarily the only way to tie bonds between actors and spectators (Barba, 2011).

- <sup>8</sup> Ledger refers a new approach that Odin Teatret has to interculturalism that focuses on the “social function of theatre”: the projects that the group is developing to work within the city of Holstebro bringing together members of the community, and also relating the city to cultures abroad (Ledger, 2012, p. 195-196).
- <sup>9</sup> In the eighties, there were three other theater groups that had their origin in Odin Teatret, and worked under the aegis of Barba. These groups and Odin Teatret were the Norddisk Teaterlaboratorium. Iben Nagel Rasmussen founded Farfa, Toni Cots founded Basho, and Richard Fowler, Canada Project. Ian Watson states that Barba directed a production of Farfa, one of Basho, and one of Canada Project (Watson, 1993, p. 170), but in fact the program of *Esperando el alba* [Wait for Dawn] does not indicate Barba as the director. In Canada Project’s program of *Esperando el alba*, the direction is indicated as Richard Fowler’s, although he thanks “Jesper Gottlieb, Luca Ruzza, Else Marie Laukvik and Eugenio Barba” (*Esperando...*, 1987).
- <sup>10</sup> However, analyzing Odin Teatret’s work, Barba acknowledges the unity of ethical and aesthetic principles as a relationship of cause and consequence: “All the fundamental traits of the Odin – from the actor’s technique to internal organization, from its ethics to the way of resolving economic problems, finally to its performances for few spectators and not based on the understanding of a text made up of words – all these are the answer to a situation that seemed to condemn us to impotence” (Barba, 1979, p. 159).
- <sup>11</sup> See Dan Rebellato’s explanation of Kant’s concept of cosmopolitanism in terms of autonomy and commonality (Rebellato, 2009).
- <sup>12</sup> In a letter addressed to Richard Schechner, Barba affirms his identity as an outsider in society, who has searched through emigration for a new identity, and who feels stronger links to theater practitioners: “[A]mong men and women of our profession, I feel at home regardless of where we are in the world. You also made this point in your essay ‘Magnitudes of Performance’: performers from distant cultures meet and experience more affinity with each other than with their compatriots” (Barba, 1999b, p. 152).



- <sup>13</sup> The similarities of this passage to Jurij Oleša's image of the beetle and the larva are striking. Victor Shklovsky wrote a report of Jurij Oleša's image of the beetle and the larva in the introduction for Jurij Tynjanov's *Avant-guard and Tradition* (Shklovsky, 1968).
- <sup>14</sup> The other two director assistants are Julia Varley and Cristina Wistari Formaggia.
- <sup>15</sup> In *The Paper Canoe*, Barba defines all these principles in chapter 3 (Barba, 1993).
- <sup>16</sup> Three years later, it was performed again in Wrocław.
- <sup>17</sup> Candomblé is a philosophy-religion that the Afro-Brazilians created in the sixteenth century in Salvador da Bahia in Brazil, which was the capital of the Portuguese colony, and it is the city from where Augusto Omolú is. This philosophy-religion is a form of syncretism, that is, it results from the encounter of African religions, Catholicism and some *Caboclo* (Native American) religion. Its main characteristics are the strong sense of community and the "outward show of conformity seething *resistance*" (Merrell, 2005, p. 104). In this philosophy-religion, dance is a very important part of the rite. Augusto Omolú is a religious assistant of Candomblé, but he also has formal training as a professional dancer.
- <sup>18</sup> Mia Theil Have was not part of the cast when *Ur-Hamlet* was performed later, in 2009. Yalan Lin played Hamlet's Foster Sister in Poland.
- <sup>19</sup> Vicki Ann Cremona describes the musical instruments played in the production: "The Balinese musicians provided the traditional strains of their music through the use of the long bamboo *gambuh* flutes (the basis of the *gambuh*), the rebab, a string instrument played with a bow, and the gamelan. The Odin players, using trumpet, euphonium, accordion, electric bass, and guitar, played music that was specifically composed for them. They were accompanied by an Indian flautist and a Brazilian *candomblé* percussionist" (Cremona, 2011, p. 352). Christoffersen renders the following description: "[...] The music and choral songs, composed by Frans Winther, consist of Balinese *gambuh* and *gamelan* orchestras, a solo Indian flute, *candomblé* drums and percussion, and some Western instruments (guitar, trumpet, accordion). [...]" (Christoffersen, 2008, p. 109)
- <sup>20</sup> The director compares his work to that of the medieval architects of the romanesque style, who – having lost the professional knowledge which would have allowed them to build a column or capital – utilized architectural



elements taken from buildings that remained from diverse periods and styles of Antiquity, creating, by means of montage, a new style (Barba, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> Orishas are the African deities that are revered in Candomblé.

<sup>22</sup> The actor's score (one of the terms created by Barba to refer to the actor's dramaturgy) is the chain of activities created during an improvisation, and memorized, which can be repeated. However, it is important to point out that, unlike a musical score, the score of an Odin Teatret's actor is not a text that can be performed by any other artist.

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A. Gabriela Ramis is Professor of Spanish, Lead Faculty Member.

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2906-4553>

E-mail: [agramis@gmail.com](mailto:agramis@gmail.com)

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