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## Odin Teatret's *The Tree*: performing in the interstices

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**ABSTRACT – Odin Teatret's *The Tree*: performing in the interstices** – This article aims to critically engage with Odin Teatret's most recent addition to the repertoire, *The Tree* (2016), in order to investigate the ways in which Barba's dramaturgical decision-making processes create a performance field that metaphorically comments on the status of the group today whilst critiquing contemporary geo-politics. Importantly, we argue that notions of interculturalism – which have often been employed by scholars to critique the Odin's work – do not address the full complexity of the embodied concatenation of the group's practice, and we employ the term *interstitial* to more effectively articulate the complex space produced by the group's training and performances.

Keywords: **Odin Teatret. Interstitial. *The Tree*. Dramaturgy. Turbulence.**

**RÉSUMÉ – *The Tree* de l'Odin Teatret: interpréter dans les interstices** – Cet article examine de manière critique l'œuvre la plus récente à intégrer le répertoire de l'Odin Teatret, *The Tree* (2016). Son objectif est d'étudier comment les processus de prise de décisions dramaturgiques de Barba créent un champ de performance qui devient un commentaire métaphorique du statut du groupe aujourd'hui, en faisant une critique de la géopolitique contemporaine. Le texte observe que les notions d'interculturalisme – qui ont souvent été utilisées par les chercheurs pour critiquer le travail de l'Odin – n'intègrent pas toute la complexité de la concaténation incarnée dans la pratique du groupe, et le terme *interstitiel* est utilisé pour exprimer l'espace complexe produit par la formation et les performances du groupe.

Mots-clés: **Odin Teatret. Interstitiel. *The Tree*. Dramaturgie. Turbulence.**

**RESUMO – *The Tree* do Odin Teatret: interpretando nos interstícios** – O artigo examina criticamente a mais recente inclusão ao repertório do Odin Teatret, *The Tree* (2016). Objetiva investigar as maneiras como os processos de decisão dramaturgicas de Barba criam um campo de performance que comenta metaforicamente o status do grupo hoje ao criticar a geopolítica contemporânea. Discute-se que noções de interculturalismo – que têm sido usadas muitas vezes por estudiosos para criticar o trabalho do Odin – não abordam a total complexidade da concatenação incorporada da prática do grupo, e emprega-se o termo *intersticial* para efetivamente articular o complexo espaço produzido pela formação e performances do grupo.

Palavras-chave: **Odin Teatret. Intersticial. *The Tree*. Dramaturgia. Turbulência.**



## Introduction

After 55 years of existence, a substantial body of writing subsists that focuses on the praxis of Odin Teatret, and the group has consolidated an important position for itself in World Theatre. The group's Artistic Director Eugenio Barba is a prolific author (Barba, 1986; 1995; 1999; 2010), and many of the Odin actresses have more recently published books on their practice (Carreri, 2014; Rasmussen, 2017; Varley, 2011). In addition, Anglophone scholars such as Chami (2018), Christoffersen (1993), Ledger (2012), Turner (2018) and Watson (1993) have published important monographs focusing on the range of different activities that the Odin have pioneered and developed as a laboratory theatre. Moreover, the Odin Teatret Archives (OTA), housed in Holstebro and the Royal Danish Library in Copenhagen, which is foregrounded in a recent publication by Italian scholar Mirella Schino (2018), provides comprehensive documentation of the group's extensive activities.

However, whilst much attention has been paid to the craft of the Odin actor, Barba's unique directorial approach and, more recently, participatory activities developed by the group (such as the tri-annual Festuge festival in Holstebro, Denmark), there has been less scholarly analysis of the Odin's performances, particularly more recent *mise en scenes*. Thus, this article aims to critically engage with the Odin's most recent addition to the repertoire, *The Tree* (2016), in order to investigate the ways in which Barba's dramaturgical decision-making processes create a performance field that metaphorically comments on both the status of the group today whilst critiquing contemporary geo-politics. Importantly, we argue that notions of interculturalism – which have often been employed by scholars to critique the Odin's work – do not address the full complexity of the embodied concatenation of the group's practice, and we employ the term *interstitial* to more effectively articulate the complex space produced by the group's training and performances.

Rather than an intercultural form of theatre or a model example of the interweaving of cultures, the Odin's practice should be considered to be a small tradition of cultural performance predicated on interstitial rupture on both the macro level of dramaturgical structure and the micro level of personal, professional technique. Odin Teatret's performances cannot be



understood as a reductive intercultural mush; the focus on psychophysical technique and the craft of the actor is too strong. Moreover, the emphasis on ongoing exploration in the Odin's dramaturgical practices allows for constant renewal and fruitful encounters with difference. This is precisely where the agency of the performer is located; whether the performer comes from a Western theatrical tradition or a codified Asian traditional form of performance, they are still obliged by Barba to step out of their comfort zone and encounter the New, which can often be an uncomfortable, disorientating experience. Even after five decades of existence, the Odin, perhaps one of the most expressive Third Theatre groups<sup>1</sup>, still have the courage to try and to fail, to take risks and reinvent themselves, existing in the interstices as a permanent form of ethical engagement and revolt.

### Intercultural or Interstitial?

During the so-called Intercultural debates of the 1990s and 2000s, a range of scholars attacked what they saw as the neo-colonial appropriation underscoring the work of artists such as Mnouchkine, Grotowski, Brook and Barba. Vehement critiques were published by Bharucha (1993), Marranca and Dasgupta (1991), amongst others, that justifiably indicated the ghosts of colonial inequity and orientalism haunting the performances of White European theatre practitioners. For Pavis (1996), the very term *intercultural theatre* was aligned with the practice of European auteurs, including Barba.

More recently, Erika Fischer-Lichte has turned to a new project titled *Interweaving Performance Cultures*. In this latest project, it is the in-betweenness of performance that she is concerned with, having found the term intercultural theatre problematic due to the aesthetic and political assumptions that she sees as underlying intercultural or hybrid theatre. As she says in the edited collection published in 2014, "Many strands are plied into a thread; many such threads are then woven into a piece of cloth, which thus consists of diverse strands and threads [...] without necessarily remaining recognizable individually" (Fischer-Lichte, Jost and Jain, 2014, p. 11).

The problem with the term *intercultural* as overarching shorthand for complex theatrical practices is its provenance from the field of the social

sciences and the fact that it cannot do justice to the complex play of cultural negotiation that takes place within the microcosm of the actor's body in training and on the stage. Whilst Fischer-Lichte's Interweaving Performance Cultures project is a more nuanced and successful model, which importantly draws from the field of theatre, the theatrical *cloth* that results from this weaving process runs the risk of *resolving* difference and therefore obfuscating what Barba (1999) and Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento (2009) have termed *foreignness*.

Both Barba and Nascimento employ the term foreignness to evoke the two-fold estrangement of the laboratory theatrical practitioner between both her own cultural roots and the conventions of dominant (mainstream) theatre. According to Nascimento, the concept of foreignness encapsulates.

[...] a situation of *simultaneous estrangement* [...] for the systematic cultural border-crosser, the engagement with foreign cultures ends up activating a sense of familiarity [...] (Nascimento, 2009, p. 9).

However, importantly, this sense of resolution, the familiarity with the foreign culture is problematized by Barba. For him, foreignness connotes an in-between space, an estrangement from the self, a permanent process of exile and questioning through art. In *A Premise on Written Silence* (1986), Barba explicitly links foreignness to his concept of the *floating islands*, a vision of a transnational community of like-minded artists that was informed by his mapping out of the Third Theatre community. Pushed to admit that his work is either intercultural or multicultural during a conversation with Ian Watson (2002) published in the latter's book *Negotiating Cultures: Eugenio Barba and the intercultural debate*, Barba responds with the following:

Only a lazy way of thinking would attempt to explain the complexity, continuity, consistency, as well as the often contradictory, results of our group by means of the magic formula 'intercultural' [...] The word 'intercultural' as a cognitive instrument or tool of analysis, does not help throw any light on, interpret or explain the specific professional identity of the Odin people (Barba apud Watson, 2002, p. 238-239).

Troubled by the ways in which the notion of intercultural theatre excluded and dismissed so many aspects of the work developed by Third Theatre groups such as the Odin, we have increasingly employed the notion of *the interstitial* to fully appreciate the complex richness of the varied



modes of training and dramaturgical practices developed by the members of the Odin and the wider international Third Theatre community. Connotatively, 'interstices' refer to both the space in-between two physical objects, a gap or break in an otherwise continuous phenomenon, or a temporal hiatus between events. It is this fusion of spatial, phenomenal and temporal difference and inter-relationship that is particularly interesting, as it refutes the binary logic that often underpinned the linguistic models informing a large swathe of critical theory and the Intercultural Debates of the 1990s and early 2000s. We are not challenging the often invisible binary power structures that are so clearly revealed by postcolonial discourse, or the ways in which intercultural processes of negotiation can generate hybrid forms. However, we also believe that the term *hybridity* can neglect or exclude cultural performance forms that are not *melanges* or *melting-pots*, and are predicated on ongoing investigative process rather than a palatable product.

Thus, whilst there are obvious resonances with Fischer-Lichte's trope of interweaving, the interstices allow for rupture and conflict rather than an efficacious weft made up of different cultural strands. Consistent work on performance forms, old and new, can always allow for something unexpected. The question is to be constantly on the lookout for the gaps, for the new, for the interstitial space that obliges the artist to recreate herself like a phoenix.

As argued by Shaviro (2010), the interstices represent a rupture that has the capacity of revealing something radically new<sup>2</sup>. This futurity, which appears in the gaps pervading causality, escapes our capacity to analyse and fix. This non-causality is vexing for a western sensibility, as our philosophical trajectory from Plato onwards has primarily looked back rather than forward (Shaviro, 2010). Our society tends to congeal and fossilize culture, lauding the customary and the established. Performance is often framed as archival repertory rather than living cultural repertoire that seeks renewal rather than mere repetition. Becoming rather than being, process rather than product, is a challenge to the mainstream, but the mainstay of Third Theatre and theatre laboratory traditions. There is no cultural purity underpinning Third Theatre and the Odin's practice in particular – no fixity, but rather a fluidity sustaining form. Whilst certain processes – training exercises, approaches to montage – may possess a form

that appears from an external perspective to be fixed, in reality these living processes are always fluid and mutable, danced and sung into existence by the practitioners' bodies-in-life.

The body-in-life is equivalent to Barba's notion of the country of speed, which Barba describes as "roots and shadows which wander in my inner city, in that small and boundless territory enclosed within my skin, my nerves and muscles, in a personal and incommunicable microcosm: the country of speed, my body-in-life" (Barba, 2010, p. 14). This is not some solipsistic, inward facing bubble or appeal to transculturalism; the efficacy of this country of speed is that it is the fruit of ongoing, embodied praxis and research that is capable of grounding the actor on stage through her *scenic bios*, her capacity to reach out to the spectator through her presence, fruit of her constantly evolving craft. Part of this evolving craft lies in the interstices of inter-personal relationships; adapting to the other actors on the stage, giving space to other cultural and performance forms without having to lose yourself in them or amalgamate them perfectly.

The interstitial nature of Third Theatre practice and the Odin's poetics allows for the radical New to appear, even after five decades of ensemble practice. It is, however, important to hold onto the distinction between novelty and the New – by the notion of the New we are talking of radical revolt, a break from the past that can only emerge once form, rigour and discipline have been deeply embodied through years of investigative practice. The danger is that, by embracing superficial novelty, exotica, a dilettante's approach to our field, we celebrate change without integrity or depth of research. In the case of the Odin, we have nomadic craftspeople who do not stand still; they invest in technique in order to continue to invent and to move forward.

### **Odin Teatret and *The Tree* (2000)**

Odin Teatret's 2016 performance *The Tree* is the final installment of a trilogy of work entitled *The Trilogy of the Innocents: the innocence of war and of its victims*<sup>3</sup>. In their appraisal of the work, the group pose the question of innocence and culpability. Is the war criminal, a mere cog in the machinic assemblage of war, as innocent as the victims of war crimes? What about the armchair spectators of the performance of war, broadcast on television and

digital media – what is our role in this spectacle? What is the responsibility of the artist, and the theatre practitioner in particular?

Ostensibly, the narrative conceit of *The Tree* seems deceptively simple, slight almost; disparate characters gather around an apparently barren tree, seeking ways to bring the birds back. According to the performance programme, Yazidi monks rub shoulders with a European and an African Warlord, an Igbo woman from Nigeria, a Poet's daughter and her younger alter-ego, two Storytellers and a Deus ex Machina. This is not untypical of Odin's work, which often gathers seemingly unrelated, often allegorical characters together in scenic space. The ensuing dramaturgy is always much more complex than the initial premise might suggest.



Image 1 – Performance: 'The Tree'. Director: Eugenio Barba.  
Source: Odin Teatret Archives. Photo by Francesco Galli.

What is unusual in this performance is the predominance of a massive set piece – the tree, placed centre stage, dominates and disrupts the flow of the montage, and the actors' organic scores. As well as the tree, which is assembled from its branches, layered with teddy-bears and dolls before being chopped down by a chain saw, several large white cloths adorn the space, and at one point are draped over the audience who can pop their heads through slits woven into the fabric, before later being wrapped





around the base of the tree like a swathe of clouds. Much of the actors' work consists of serving these rather unwieldy set pieces, and the paraphernalia in the space often threatens to upstage the virtuoso physicality renowned in the work of the ensemble.

As well as established members of the group, *The Tree* features the debut of young actors Carolina Pizarro and Luis Alonso from Chile, as well as renowned Balinese performer I Wayan Bawa and Parvathy Baul, a singer, painter and storyteller from West Bengal. Thus a range of performers from different traditions gather together under the auspices of Odin Teatret; this continues a familiar trend, of gathering actors from different cultural backgrounds. This is the first time, however, that two performers steeped in two codified Asian performance forms have joined the Odin ensemble<sup>4</sup>.

This could be considered as illustrative of either intercultural theatre or the interweaving of cultures; the traditional songs of the Bauls intertwine with Italian folksongs and classical European music; actors with a deep understanding of the psychophysical technique of Odin Teatret are confronted with a Balinese performer drawing on the tradition of Gambuh. However, this is no homogenizing interweaving that is resolved into a hybrid form; rather, the performance text is characterized by interstices, ruptures and breaks on both a narrative and dynamic level. Actors are often paired on stage in a way that juxtaposes or blurs their different techniques, their bodies-in-life, heightening and concomitantly warping cultural difference. Parvathy Baul's devotional songs blend with Elena Floris' nasal Italian folk singing, and it becomes difficult at times to distinguish between the two. The heightened physicality and scenic presence of Kai Bredholt is very different from the codified scores of Bawa, but they share an energy and a dynamic. With their long flowing hair and shapeless garments, Yazidi monks Julia Varley and Donald Kitt are at times indistinguishable, sharing a soft, *manis*<sup>5</sup> energy throughout. And there is a really interesting mirroring between Iben Nagel Rasmussen and her younger self, played by Carolina Pizarro, the girl who longs to fly but is grounded in the physicality of her older avatar.

Bawa is not able just to reproduce a Gambuh performance in *The Tree*; he has to adapt his codified material according to the requirements of the performance and his scenic relationship to the other actors. Whilst Pizarro has undergone in-depth training in the Indian martial art



Kalaripyattu, this training remains as trace in her body on stage. For Rasmussen, Varley and Kitt, the overt physical virtuosity of the Odin actor is constrained by the drudgery of the menial tasks generated by the manipulation of the scenic objects. The actors become, in effect, *cogs* in the machinic assemblage of the performance text. As Barba suggests, “The profusion and confusion of material and trends is the only way to arrive at the bare and essential action” (Barba, 2000, p. 62). The density of the organic score remains, but in a highly concise form. This is all part of the turbulence – the unsettling of the actor, the search for the New through gaps and elisions in technique and the encounters between different practitioners in the dramaturgy.

These interstices are not just cultural and are not displayed as such in the cramped scenic space. Whilst Barba’s work with *Theatrum Mundi* has been accused of being a spectacle of performative exotica (Turner, 2018), as a laboratory performance *The Tree* obliges all of the actors to find interstitial responses to the challenges of this new scenic context. Whilst Roberta Carreri’s inimitable physicality shines through, her vocal work is a departure; she explores a guttural vocal resonator throughout which gives a very particular quality to her work as the Igbo woman. In the programme notes she comments on her frustration during the process of developing a score for the piece, because she was provoked to leave behind old physical and vocal traces from former performances. The technical journey becomes a rejection of the virtuoso technique that she has developed over decades; she experiences the work as “inaccurate, insecure, inefficient” (Carreri apud Odin Teatret Træet, 2016, p. 30).

Barba’s provocations have taken Carreri to an interstitial space, one that is disconcerting and chaotic, breaking with the causality of deeply learnt embodied technique. This necessary forgetting of technique is experienced as a violation by the whole group; Barba, like Carreri, reveals:

It’s impossible to unlearn. I have spent half my life trying to learn, and the other half struggling to go beyond what I have learnt. Reflections, thoughts, methods and solutions return constantly in my work with a recognizable taste. I feel that it is part of the human condition to belong to the family of the trees which change their leaves and retain their roots. I try to modify my ideas, express them in a different form, rhythm and manners, to use my knowledge in a paradoxical way. But the roots sink firmly into the depths of my being (Barba apud Odin Teatret Træet, 2016, p. 13).



The metaphor of the tree is potent here in Barba's discourse, and within the performance as a whole. Initially, the limbs of the tree are dispersed across the space, taking on the appearance of human limbs scattered across a war-torn landscape. This image is amplified by the recorded voice-over, which alludes to the atrocities of war and the primordial tendency to kill. Over the course of the performance, the tree is assembled by the Yazidi monks, it is inhabited by the poet's daughter, whose body shifts to accommodate the branches, it houses a teddy-bear's picnic before the latter are culled and beheaded, and the tree is finally chopped down as a Christ like figure – one of the Yazidi monks – is crucified. The penultimate image of the performance is the younger version of the Poet's daughter hanging upside down in the shattered tree, like some *Strange Fruit*, or perhaps the God Odin, hanging upside down in the branches of Ygdrasil the world tree, in a search for foresight and knowledge. Whilst she cannot fly, recorded birdsong fills the space. The winged ones have returned. The performance ends in a pedestrian manner, with the actor playing the Deus Ex Machina clearing away the detritus.

The shattered tree is redolent of the actor's dismembered craft; of the challenge of having to rebuild embodied technique for every new performance, searching for the interstitial ruptures that allow for futurity and renewal. The fragmented tree is also akin to Barba's challenge of weaving together often disconnected strands into a weft whilst concurrently pulling at the loose threads, opening wounds in the body of the performance, refusing to tie the narrative strands neatly together. Speaking of the painting of Velazquez, and his capacity to seemingly suspend figures in air, Barba asks "[...] how can we create a similar effect, of a void around the essential" (Odin Teatret Træet, 2016, p. 11). This void is another example of the interstitial; the uncomfortable in-between that alienates the spectator and the actor from the familiar, allowing for an encounter with foreignness.

The child soldiers are embodied on stage by puppets manipulated by the actors playing the Warlords; their wooden bodies are suspended in space, reliant on the actors' dexterity to bring their ghost-like forms into scenic life. Like the teddy-bears and the beatific monks, the juxtaposition between these innocent characters and scenic objects on the one hand, and the horrific war crimes explored dramaturgically on the other, is deeply unsettling. There is an interesting triangulation between these scenic images

and the performance programme, which draws on journalistic and anecdotal accounts of the horrific atrocities of war. The Programme starts off by asking “How should we represent a human sacrifice in theatre? Is it to exorcise our anguish or to show our indignation?” (Odin Teatret Træet, 2016, p. 4). The grotowskian *Total Act*, the *sacrifice* of the actor on stage, has always been at the heart of the Third Theatre tradition; yet it is as if the Odin are questioning the ethical implications of appropriating ‘sacrifice’ as a methodological trope or thematic topic. How can we even begin to contemplate (let alone conjure) the violence of war, the base cruelty of humankind, made so banal by our mediatized culture?



Image 2 – Performance: ‘The Tree’. Director: Eugenio Barba.

Source: Odin Teatret Archives. Photo by Francesco Galli.

*The Tree* is not groundbreaking efficaciously – it is unwieldy at times, defeatist almost, demonstrating how easy it is for all of us to turn our backs on the inequality of the world. Our attention is as fluttering as the birds fluttering through the sky; we all busy ourselves with daily tasks that we rationalize as being important. In a similar fashion, the actors are having to do *busy work* in the space, building trees and faffing about with cloths to ultimately no effect, as the tree is chopped down and remains barren. The political message of the piece lies in the interstices of all of this, in the

fissures between the performance, its programme and the personal associations that they all evoke in us.

A particularly disconcerting scenic element is the choice to have all of the actors (bar the Storytellers) wearing red clown noses. Iben Nagel Rasmussen (apud Odin Teatret Træet, 2016, p. 38) describes her initial reaction to this late addition to the visual conceptualization of the piece:

When, one by one, my colleagues stepped forward into the acting space and repeated their actions, songs and texts [wearing the red noses] something fell into place. It could not have been otherwise. War, ethnic cleansing, crucifixions and decapitations appeared with an unexpectedly disarming remoteness. For, in the midst of these depredations, the depicted figures gave the impression of being almost unbearably guileless.

The use of the clown's nose in this case is not an importation of a comedic trope or set of skills related to clowning; it is not another layer of some hybrid performance technique smoothly interwoven together. It is a rupture, both for the spectator and for the performer. For a group that has dedicated itself to the seriousness of craft and theatre as a way of life, is Barba emphasizing the ultimate futility of art? Or is this an anarchic gesture rather than a nihilistic one – the interstitial ruptures in the performance text disrupt the order and the weight of history. Just as the violence of war and genocide are non-causal, illogic, the absurdly cyclical nature of existence means that renewal and creative responses can equally emerge in the interstices. This is perhaps a key characteristic of successful laboratory theatres – confusion, chaos and error are as important as pleasing aesthetic results. Being must give way to a constant, often painful becoming.

As is typical of the Odin work, song and instrumentalised live music is of particular importance. Diegetic sound takes on a preeminent role in the production due to the limited space for complex physical scores of action. An unusual addition to this performance is a recorded voice-over at the beginning of the piece, translating the Danish text of the European Warlord, spoken by Kai Bredholt. The voice of the Warlord is thus both live and virtual, embodied and mediated, present in the space and yet somehow deadened by the matter-of-fact vocal delivery of the recorded voice, played on a laptop held by performer Fausto Pro, the *Deus ex Machina*. Whilst Bredholt's delivery is rasping and jarring, the voice-over is affect-less.

This juxtaposition between vocal exuberance and monotone, almost chant-like vocal delivery recurs at numerous points in the production. In his role as Joshua Milton Blahyi<sup>6</sup>, the infamous General Butt Naked, a tribal priest-cum-Warlord-cum-Evangelical pastor, Bawa intones a ritual incantation punctuated by the ringing of a bell. This continuous chanting underscores several scenes and, contrasts with the vivacity of the melodic songs performed by Storytellers Parvati Baul and Elena Floris. On one level, the Storytellers' songs function as a potential source of life in contrast to the deadliness of war, however it is the constant juxtaposition of registers that opens up space for skepticism. At the end of the performance, for example, after a particularly stirring song, Floris asks Parvati Baul rather curtly: "Have you finished?", and both actresses drop immediately into a more pedestrian register as they assist in the clearing away of the detritus of the set. It is precisely this type of incongruence in the scenic relationships between actors that is strangely disturbing. Moreover, the lack of simultaneous scenic action (which is a trope that audiences familiar with Odin's work might expect) is oddly disconcerting. The fact that the whole ensemble rarely, if ever, occupies the scenic space together foregrounds relationships between pairs of actors that are ambiguous and mercurial.

Whilst *The Tree* starts from a place of familiarity – the journalistic voice-over, the sound of gunfire indicating the mediated representation of war – everything is unwoven by the contrasting theatrical supersigns created on stage. The sparse scenic space could initially be Syria, Africa, or Iraq, but as the performance progresses, time and place blur. It is as if Barba is playing here with Western philosophy's aforementioned tendency to look backwards rather than forwards; the initial journalistic voice-over and account of war indexically point to the ways in which trauma is congealed and fossilized, tamed even, by our mediated culture, which would seem at first to reaffirm the cyclical, eternal return of violence and its easy consumption by a cosseted West. However, the semantic interstices, the gaps in meaning opened up by Barba's obtuse dramaturgy, mean that we are given no easy answers. The sky falls in on us – literally at one point in the piece, when the white cloths suspended from the roof drop down and are draped over the audience. There is an allusion here to Artaud, when he suggests that:

[...] ‘theater of cruelty’ means a theater difficult and cruel for myself first of all. And, on the level of performance, it is not the cruelty we can exercise upon each other by hacking at each other's bodies, carving up our personal anatomies, or, like Assyrian emperors, sending parcels of human ears, noses, or neatly detached nostrils through the mail, but the much more terrible and necessary cruelty which things can exercise against us. We are not free. And the sky can still fall on our heads. And the theater has been created to teach us that first of all (Artaud, 1958, p. 79).

Thus, if Barba's theatre is no longer about the actor's total act, her self-sacrifice on stage through virtuoso physicality, the performance text is still predicated on cruelty, understood here as a turbulent struggle against the daily banality of alienating epistemic and disciplinary violence. It is this cruelty that ultimately characterizes *The Tree*, Odin Teatret's scenic articulation of the Theatre of War.

## Conclusion

In *The Deep Order Called Turbulence* (2000), Barba speaks of technique as turbulence; “It is the practice of a voluntary and lucid disorientation in the search for new points of orientation” (Barba, 2000, p. 56). This state of constant reorientation is described as a revolt, ‘above all against oneself, against one's own ideas, one's own resolutions and plans, against the comforting assurance of one's own intelligence, knowledge, and sensibility’ (Barba, 2000). It is this constant revolt – akin to futurity – that allows for freedom. It is also this revolt that characterizes the accounts that the artists – director and actors alike – give of working on *The Tree*. Over the years, Barba has had to be turbulent, provoking his actors and almost commanding them to revolt, even when they feel a resistance to this after their years of work and personal training.

Barba speaks of a relationship between order and chaos at the heart of his theatre that could be seen as interstitial. He says, “[o]rder and disorder are not two opposing options, but two poles that coexist and reinforce one another reciprocally. The quality of the tension created between them is an indication of the fertility of the creative process” (Barba, 2000, p.58). Turbulence may appear to be a violation of order, but is in fact, according to Barba “order in motion” (Barba, 2000, p.61). The ongoing turbulence that characterizes the work of the actor and the director in Third Theatre,



this order in motion, is, thus, a form of deep alterity. This is not the binary alterity separating people of differing cultures, the ghost of orientalism haunting the intercultural debates; this deep alterity is the obligation of the artist to consistently integrate otherness through the estrangement of acquiring, developing and breaking with embodied technique. In this way, the actor and the director become foreigners, strangers to themselves.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For a detailed overview of the contemporary currency of Third Theatre and the authors' ongoing research project, see: <[www.thirdtheatrenetwork.com](http://www.thirdtheatrenetwork.com)>.
- <sup>2</sup> Whitehead (1978) and Deleuze (1989).
- <sup>3</sup> The other performances in the trilogy include *The Great Cities Under the Moon* (2003) and *The Chronic Life* (2011).
- <sup>4</sup> *Ur-Hamlet* (2003-2009) was another Odin Teatret production that featured an array of actors from Europe, Asia and Latin America. However, this performance emerged out of ISTA events and fused Barba's research into Eurasian theatre with the group's pedagogical work with younger people. Its genealogy, therefore, is quite specific and different from *The Tree*, which is ostensibly an in-house, chamber piece production.
- <sup>5</sup> *Manis* is a Balinese word to denote a soft, gentle form of energy (energy in Balinese is translated as *bayu*, which means 'inner wind'). *Manis* is a cognate of the term *anima*, which is also used in the work of Barba's International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) to describe 'soft' energy underpinning scenic actions.
- <sup>6</sup> Joshua Milton Blahyi, born September 30, 1971, better known as General Butt Naked, is a former War Lord known for the atrocities he committed during the First Liberian Civil War (1989-1997). A former tribal priest, he went on to become an Evangelical pastor after an alleged spiritual awakening in 1996.

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