Anarcho-Radical Roots—Opole to Oslo to Holstebro 1959-69: Eugenio Barba's Early Experimental Theatre as Intervention

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> When I try to understand what has happened to the theatrical research of the sixties, it appears clear to me how it has slowly taken a direction that, in the beginning, none of us foresaw. A deep bond with a specific history, whose ancestors could be Stanislavski, Meyerhold or Brecht, translated our needs into artistic terms, into a reform of "theatrical language" and expressive means. With time and experience, this bond went beyond the profession, it became an ethical attitude, with a distinct way of perceiving and reacting. Although this attitude represents for many a widening of the confines of theatre, it seems to us like a refusal of everything in our culture that is called theatre.
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> --Eugenio Barba

Eugenio Barba's Odin Teatret (1964) and his original notion of theatre culture or "third theatre" (formulated 1964-69) together provide a unique context for the consideration of the meaning and impact of any theatre event. These phenomena fostered a praxis in which a theatre event is drained of its geopolitical particularity and exists outside what is generally perceived as the profession's infrastructural symbiosis with the aesthetic and economic concerns of dominant culture—the praxis is expressed via the ethos of theatre culture. When theatre workers break the restraints of mainstream theatre production, the profession's own geopolitics flood in, renewing the meaning of the theatre event. Barba's renunciation of affiliations with the cultural and economic machinery of the theatre and his founding of a creative collective have the earmarks of an anarcho-syndicalist or anarcho-collectivist stance, though it was

never conceived as such.[1] Barba has never articulated his own politics within any specific Marxist taxonomy. Odin Teatret was not conceived in the crucible of direct political action but rather took form while responding to a set of highly personal and practical needs arising along their labyrinthine artistic journey.

The story of Barba and the Odin is a chronicle of theatre artists whose dramaturgy emerged from necessary choices based on their survival as individuals and as a group, necessities met only by stepping outside the mainstream of culture. Barba and his companions' activities throughout 1964-69 have the imprimatur of artistic life and death because, from the very beginning, using Grotowski's confrontation with the Polish authorities and subversion of state professional theatre as his model, Barba believed the theatre group should function as an autonomous creative community, free from any obligation to larger cultural political obligations. This amounts to renunciation of the theatre's connection with dominant culture and dissatisfaction with its traditional understanding of so-called political art. The result was that, in 1964-65, Norway's authorities, institutions, and Oslo's avant-garde were disinclined to show any interest in a theatre that would ignore them. Yet from Barba's perspective, by virtue of the Odin's very existence, the group had already fulfilled its social purpose.

The chronology of Barba's first ten years in the field of art and theatre and the Odin's first five years as a group reveals that most major decisions were matters of exigency, not aesthetics, though from exigency aesthetics emerged. These necessary acts were means of resisting the hegemonies of literary drama, the restrictions of theatre architecture, and insensitivities of mainstream theatre administration. Barba took a unique radical stance, a kind of professional rather than political radicalism. Yet this professional radicalism was done within a web of political and cultural circumstances that make the phenomenon of Odin Teatret worthy of scrupulous historical and critical study.

In 1954, at eighteen, after being singled out as record holder in accumulated disciplinary demerits, Barba completed military school and embarked on a hitchhiking sojourn that ended in Oslo in 1955. There he worked on the rooftops, specializing in gutter repair. In his early days in Norway, 1954-59, Barba was apprentice to Eigel Winnje, owner of a sheet metal workshop. Winnje was part of Norwegian resistance during the War. Fridtjov Lehne, a journalist writing for the communist daily, *Friheten*, and his wife, Sonja, "adopted" Barba, putting him up in their home (Barba 1999a, 86). The painter, Willi Middelfart, employed Barba as a model. It was here that Barba discovered his admiration for artisans, political commitment, and creative artists. It was Middelfart who enabled Barba to travel to India by getting him a job on a Norwegian merchant ship after Barba had become fascinated by Rolland Romaine's *Ramakrishna*. Ramakrishna's experimentation with the pursuit of non-Hindu worship so fascinated Barba that he traveled as a merchant marine just to visit Ramakrishna's temple at Dakshineswar and descended to the riverbank where Ramakrishna

performed his morning ablutions. Gradually, within Barba, two seemingly opposing commitments took root—the first, a kind of rudimentary commitment to change via Marxist ideology, and, second, an equally strong commitment to spiritual depth and self-discovery. These would come together over the years after being refined in Poland where, through Grotowski, Barba was exposed to a kind of secular spirituality that had become a virtual *raison d'être* in Russian theatre after the Revolution.

In 1957, Barba was on the verge of returning to Italy to study law when his Norwegian friends convinced him to stay in Norway to study philosophy, religion, and linguistics at the University in Oslo and to continue his Norwegian experience (Barba 1999a, 75). Barba was close with a group of Norwegian Marxists, AKP-ML (Workers Communist Party-Marxist Leninist), a sub-group, indeed the sons and daughters, of *Mot Dag* (Move Towards Daylight) founded 1920. *Mot Dag* believed they could change Norway by gradually moving into government positions of social responsibility without letting the electorate know their radical intent. AKP-ml, the children of these entrenched Norwegian social democrat "careerists," endeavored to rebel against the status quo, infiltrating the working class and exposing them to contemporary ideas, without enflaming their own politically committed *Mot Dag* parents by appearing to be reactionary against their elders' investments in post-War social democracy (Barba 1999a, 88). From 1949 to 1965, the Labor Party, many of whose members were secretly committed to *Mot Dag*, dominated Norway's government. Yet culturally Norway was little changed by *Mot Dag*'s surreptitious presence in their administration and remained a constitutional monarchy; Norway's king Haakon VII died in 1957 succeeded by his son, Olaf V. It is unlikely that Barba was a member of any AKP-ml or *Mot Dag* inner circles, but, within their milieu, his own identity as an outsider with a committment to cultural transformation thrived. Barba organized art exhibitions, borrowing paintings from Middelfart to demonstrate a connection between politics and the arts, believing that art is a tool in the "evolution of the working class" (Barba 1999a, 88).

In 1959 Barba saw Andrzej Wajda's film, *Ashes and Diamonds*, and was compelled to journey to Poland and be among the passionate and tragic people depicted in the movie. Barba applied for a foreign study grant in Polish literature, which he received in 1961. For six months out of 1960 Barba wandered the deserts in Israel. From Israel he traveled to Poland where he enrolled at the University in Warsaw and the theatre school simultaneously. He arrived in Warsaw during what appeared at first as a post-Polish-October renaissance. Barba was twenty-four and a rudderless activist moving from one culturally entrenched nation to another.

His project at theatre school was an "optimistic tragedy" in lieu of his "political commitment" (Barba 1999a, 16). Barba's politics were not very sophisticated at the time, as the theme of his project demonstrates. His *Oedipus*, in Bhodan Korzeniewski's directing class, *optimistically* proposes the triumph of individualism. During

these first days in Warsaw, while Barba was also a student of Jan Kott, he attended the theatre and student clubs regularly. Barba hung around with playwright Slawomir Mrozek, with whom he saw the great Ida Kaminska in the Yiddish Theatre and the secret performances of censored material in the home of the poet, Miron Bialoszewski. Warsaw's avant-garde playwrights and scenographers made such an impression on Barba that he felt it his duty to disseminate information about the high quality of Poland's theatres (professional and avant-garde), and its government whose cultural policy nourished over 100 state-subsidized theatres. He approached the journals *Siparo* and *Theatr Dialog* to propose coverage of the Polish avant-garde (Barba 1999a, 18). His urge to write about theatre can be said to have begun before he found his true subject, the theatre of Grotowski. In the early 1960s the Polish avant-garde was an institutional avant-garde. But, as Barba would discover, the emergence of Grotowski—who excluded himself from the Polish avant-garde by choosing only Classical and Romantic texts—heralded the emergence of an extra-institutional avant-garde.

Barba's altruism compelled him to travel around the country to the smaller cities and provincial towns to conduct research on the less grandiose theatres. Friends invited him to Opole (an industrial town in Silesia) where Grotowski and the already well-known Ludwig Flaszen ran Teatr 13 Rzedow. That night Barba saw Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (*The Forefathers)*. He was annoyed by the production's rough edges, ineffectual make up, and costumes, overacting, and the direct contact between actors and audience (Barba 1999a, 20). Barba felt the work could not compare with the riches he had witnessed in the more established theatres in Warsaw and Cracow, or the smaller, state run theatres, like the one in Nowa Huta. Critic Tadeusz Kudlinski claimed of *Dziady* that Grotowski had imposed a dialectic of "apotheosis and derision" on the original text. Grotowski adopted Kudlinski's formula as a dramaturgical *modus operandi* for productions to come (Barba 1999a, 20). Barba however came away from his first Grotowski experience nonplussed.

After his first academic year, Barba worked all summer in factories and peasant collectives. Back at school he became unhappy with socialist Warsaw. Unable to maintain his political ideals in the gloom of post-War urban renewal—including the unearthing of scattered human remains, construction of socialist realist edifices on the sites of atrocities, abuses of power by an unjust bureaucracy, and general poverty—Barba's commitment to political theatre dissolved. He rejected his former belief that communism revived the "fertility" of the human race, and came to view socialism as a "caricature" or "nightmare" (Barba 1999a, 22). His new friends convinced him this was a crisis through which every committed Marxist must pass; Barba extended his scholarship another year and thus continued his sojourn in Poland.

While traveling between Warsaw and Cracow, Barba impulsively stepped off the train in Opole and paid another visit to Teatr 13

Rzedow, and, though there was no performance at the time, Barba found Grotowski affable and eager to talk. The Grotowski of 1962 was quite different from the enigmatic reformer he was to become; rather, he was more a part of a specific strain of the Stanislavski tradition, and *briefly* part of the Polish avant-garde.

Grotowski completed his academic matriculation in theatre in 1955 at The State Institute of Theatre Art (GITIS) in Moscow under the mentorship of Yuri Zavadsky, who had acted in Stanislavski and Vakhtangov's productions, and was of Polish aristocratic descent. Grotowski was well liked by Zavadsky, but troubled by the latter's ambivalence as to his actual beliefs. Zavadsky was always taking a wary, politically correct stance, which suggested a weakness of character of tragic dimension in an honest artist:

> Zavadsky believed that there were generations which created and generations which were witnesses. During the official ceremony of rehabilitation for Tairov, Grotowski had asked when it would be Meyerhold's turn. Zavadsky had replied harshly: Meyerhold was a formalist and a cosmopolitan whose defeats, though merited, were more significant than all our greatest victories (Barba 1999a, 24).

In his luxury apartment Zavadsky had a statuette of Felix Dzerzhinsky, a Pole who fought in the October Revolution, and founder of CEKA (the secret police, antecedent to NKVD and KGB). Zavadsky possessed two limousines and the cherished passport; he could leave the USSR whenever he wished. Grotowski has remembered him saying, "The Soviet people put them at my disposal day and night. I have lived through dreadful times and they have broken me Jerzy . . . it is not worth it. This is the harvest of compromise" (Grotowski in Barba 1999a, 24). Grotowski was to confide that this was one of his most formative experiences. Formative because, after his return to Poland, though he was briefly active during The Polish October thaw of Stalinist repression, Grotowski grew frustrated with national politics and turned his attention to matters spiritual within an agnostic context, informed equally by Hindu belief and socialist realism.

> I was so fascinated by Gandhi that I wanted to be him. I came to the conclusion that not only was this improbable for objective reasons, but incompatible with my nature—although equal to fair play I am incapable of a total and generalized assumption of everyone's good intentions. . . . Freedom is associated neither with freedom of choice, nor with sheer volunteerism—but with a wave, with giving oneself up to this huge wave, in accordance with one's desire (Grotowski in *Kumiega*, 6).

During the period of de-Stalinization Grotowski was not content to tailor art to the national mood, and certainly not to any religious dogma; instead, he searched by creating theatre that resembled religious ritual for an "existential naturalism"—spirituality achieved through corporal work (Grotowski 206-07).

Given Barba's ambivalence about communism and his faith in human creativity, Grotowski's Teatr 13 Rzedow was the perfect place. Both men feared being reaped in the "harvest of compromise." They were aware of the conflict between participating in the "spirit of the times" and "finding an enduring value for [their] actions" (Barba 1999a, 24). Barba returned to Cracow that night, feeling dejected, seeing Poland as a prison, believing Poles could gain freedom only through literary fiction, and observing that privileges that befell artists were never extended to workers. Secret police and censors attended all the theatres and student clubs, monitoring and informing on the avant-garde. Traveling over the Christmas holidays, Barba ran into Grotowski at a railway station bar and discussed his disenchantment with Poland and lack of progress at theatre school. Grotowski proposed that Barba come work with him immediately. With nothing to lose except his director's diploma and his faith in communism, Barba accepted.

This loss of faith in communism can be seen as a cornerstone for Barba's later, more complex theories of resistance through work on performance and actor training—a shift of focus away from the external world towards the infrastructure of an artists' collective. From 1962-64 Barba was Grotowski's privileged companion (Barba 1999a, 26), and, even though Barba's fascinating work with Grotowski on performance is too extensive to explore here, the entire group made superhuman efforts in the studio, as the opus, *Akropolis*, demonstrated. But what is salient here is Barba's stance as Grotowski's international promoter and independent intellectual. In this guise Barba practiced a strategy of intervention on behalf of a new theatre that functioned as an extreme alternative to an overly institutionalized and aesthetically complacent profession. What is germane is the extent to which Barba endeavored to counteract the geographical and ideological isolation imposed upon Grotowski by censors, bureaucrats, and secret police.

Barba began his tenure with Grotowski at the end of the latter's period of directing avant-garde drama and the beginning of his work on classical and romantic texts and the search for archetypes (primordial human desire and action). Both men were avowed agnostics who paradoxically believed that theatre connected people to a tangible spiritual life, regardless of God's actual existence or nonexistence. This was the nascence of some of Grotowski's most essential ideas, such as live and immediate contact between audience and performers; unique spatial arrangements to facilitate each performance's audience/actor relationship; performance as a collective introspection as though it were a ritual stripping away of a veil from daily to life to confront spectators with a visceral reality, simultaneously beautiful and hideous; and actor as shaman who

concentrated to the point of trance thereby overcoming "psychic humps" (Barba, 1999a, 28). Along with Flaszen and scenographer Jerzy Gurawski, and Ryszard Cieslak they pursued, indeed invented, a genre of autonomous theatre, independent from dramatic literature, i.e. plays, playwrights' intentions, and accepted interpretations of canonical works—a theater independent of an epistemologically secure metaphysics, institutional status, and cultural locale. Throughout 1962-64 Barba edited booklets, essays, program notes and eventually a book about Grotowski.

Polish authorities' discomfort with Grotowski is part of the larger history of socialist-realist restrictions on ideology that resound with contempt for spirituality and any manifestation of the immaterial, from mysticism to analytical psychology. This prejudice, a hallmark of Stalinism, manifested itself in Grotowski's case as an ever-present threat of theatre closure through the deprival of the "clearance permission" on texts, and subsequent inspection of performances. In Poland's case, socialist-realist objections to formalism and mysticism were imbricated with national loyalties that made virulent anti-Catholic sentiment equally reprehensible at a time when the government wanted good relations with the Church. Grotowski was perceived as too mystical to be a Marxist and too blasphemous to be a Pole. Censors' motives generally remained secret and changed from one extreme to another, but the censors themselves became familiar to Barba and Grotowski. Barba was able to turn to one of them to get a booklet on Grotowski published in April of 1962.

Barba's most important asset as a promoter was his passport—access to the world the Poles were denied. Throughout his Opole period, Barba, using his scholarship money to survive, traveled across Europe from Vienna to Rome to Paris, making inquiries and contacts. In Vienna in 1963 Barba was introduced to Austrian playwright Adolf Opel, who gave him a few contacts; one was James Hatch, an American scholar, then a professor at Cairo University. Barba mailed Hatch a package of his photos, booklets on Grotowski, and Gurawski's drawings. Hatch replied, suggesting that Barba also send the same materials to Richard Schechner in New Orleans. Schechner's reply in spring 1964 was the beginning of a fruitful relationship for Grotowski and Barba. *TDR* (then the *Tulane Drama Review*, subsequently *The Drama Review*, now simply *TDR*), published translations of Barba's French booklets: *Expériences du théâtre-laboratiore 13 Rzedow* and *Le théâtre comme auto-pénétration collective* and then much more over the years.

Barba believed Grotowski's ideas would transform the profession if he could only expose others to them, to somehow get an invitation to perform abroad. Barba's most significant act of professional insurrection was his ITI intervention. In June 1963 the annual congress of the International Theatre Institute (a cultural appendage of UNESCO) was held in Warsaw. Barba's former teacher, Korzeniewski, organized the congress. There were over 200 delegates from around the world, but Teatr 13 Rzedow was not repre-

sented; for that matter, it was not even mentioned in the program. Barba and Grotowski decided to remedy the oversight. Without legitimate support in the capitol, they decided upon a nearby city from which to launch their cultural assault. They arranged for a performance of *Dr. Faustus* in Lódz. Barba "was to act as a fifth column, going to Warsaw and mingling with the delegates at the congress" (Barba 1999a, 69).

At the congress at the Palace of Culture, Barba made himself useful to the Swedes and Norwegians—translating, explaining Poland to them, and helping them with their sightseeing excursions. He thereby attached himself to the Scandinavian delegation. At this time he met Judy Jones, then secretary to ITI, later Judy Barba. Through socializing with Jones and her friends, Barba put together a small group of young people who helped him befriend the influential Jean Julien, organizer of the prestigious Paris *Théâtre des Nations*. Barba interposed himself in a conversation in which Julien and some others were griping about having no access to Poland's more adventurous avant-garde authors, such as Miron Bialoszewski. Barba explained the paradoxical situation in Poland whereby "audacious creativity" was held in check by Polish "social Puritanism" (Barba 1999a, 70). Barba took Julien and his companions out for a night on the town, attending the student clubs and bars, on condition that they accompany Barba to a performance the next night in nearby Lódz.

The next day Julien had amassed a large group of equally influential delegates (Emile Biassini, Eduardo Manet, Hubert Gignoux, Henry Popkin, Alan Seymour, Michele St. Denis, Ellen Stewart, and thirteen others). Barba loaded them into an illegally borrowed minivan and drove the entourage to Lódz—a two-hour trip. All of this occurred right under the noses of the Polish authorities, often with their unwitting assistance; the same censor who had helped Barba publish a booklet made the government minivan available. At Lódz, they saw the performance and met Grotowski. Then, over the course of two years, with the expenditure of significant energy by Julien and Gignoux, Teatr 13 Rzedow (in its later incarnation as The Polish Teatr Laboratorium) was invited to Jean Louis Barrault's 1966 *Théâtre des Nations*.

Barba's activities, especially the ITI/Lódz escapade are performative interventions such as Dwight Conquergood describes in "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research" (2002). Barba's activities constitute a "participatory epistemology" that fulfills what Conquergood has described as the mission of performance studies; Barba however was doing it thirty years before it was named (Conquergood 149). Conquergood writes of performance studies' creative works:

> The creative works are developed for multiple professional reasons: they deepen experiential and participatory engagement with materials both for the researcher and her audience; they provide a dynamic and rhetorically compelling alternative

> to conference papers; they offer a more accessible and engaging format for sharing research and reaching communities outside academia; they are a strategy for staging interventions (Conquergood 152).

Barba's intervention is performative not only in the sense that Conquergood would like other theatre academics and professionals to interact outside academia, but, given the potential for legal consequences and physical danger for all involved, the intervention moved beyond academia into a global context, specifically using theatre as a device for compelling people to think seriously about issues and taking action. Ironically Barba consistently renounced all aspirations towards political theatre. This is perhaps because conventional political theatre was and is powerless to effectually change anything when it is restricted to the performance of dramatic literature. Both Conquergood and Barba reject "textocentrism" (Conquergood 151), while Barba's *modus operandi* of infiltration and persuasion resembles *Mot Dag's* methodology and Conquergood's description of performative intervention.

Participatory epistemology renounces the universal "view from above" in which the authority of written texts legitimizes knowledge that is written and erases knowledge that is corporal and/or oral. He affirms that corporality and orality are ways of knowing cultures de-legitimized by the absence of cultural textual canons, i.e. developing nations' folkways (Conquergood 146). But, when applied to theatre as a profession, it captures Grotowski and Barba's dramaturgical approach, especially since both created performances without any reliance on dramatic texts. Participatory epistemology makes two things possible: first, intercultural penetration of different theatre traditions through the exercise of physical training and oral transmission of knowledge gained in the workshop/rehearsal/performance setting; and second, autonomous theatre culture becomes a reality through the recognition of the small group or community's intervention in the machinery of mainstream theatre. Like anarcho-syndicalism, Conquergood's participatory epistemology captures what Barba has done by creating an autonomous group—a theatre group—focused on its own internal goals with primary emphasis on corporality.

The performative instincts that led Barba in 1956 to walk in Ramakrishna's footsteps led him to India again in 1963 to discover something that can only be best experienced as a sojourner, traveling in a strange land. In Cherutheruthy he found the Kalamandalam *kathakali* school, where the importance of professional ethos, those ethoi about which Conquergood speaks, had been in practice for generations There Barba experienced what would later become central to the Odin's work. What Barba adopted from *kathakali*, beyond exercises, was the idea of theatre as a vocation, not merely a profession.

> The long nights of kathakali in 1963 helped me

> catch a glimpse of the limits which the performer can reach. But it was the dawn which revealed to me these performers' secrets, at the Kalamandalam school in Cheruthuruthy, in Kerala. There, young boys, barely adolescents, diligently repeating exercises, steps, songs, prayers, gymnastics, eye movements and votive offerings, crystallize their own ethos as artistic behaviour and ethical attitude (Barba 1995, 42).

Upon Barba's return to Poland the *kathakali* exercises became part of his and Grotowski's work on *Akropolis*. *Akropolis* depicted inmates of Auschwitz portraying Biblical characters speaking only Polish Romantic poetry. But it was the daily ethos of the young boys training in Cheruthuruthy from which Barba formulated his own sense of professional ethos. *Akropolis* was also the seminal moment in the field of intercultural theatre, necessarily politicized and by now a recognized performance genre.

Breaking the political and professional boundaries that constituted Grotowski's prison had become Barba's labor of love. By 1964, The Polish Ministry of Culture wanted to be rid of Grotowski once and for all. Though it remains unclear if this was a desire to eliminate him or merely his theatre group, *Akropolis* was surely not what they had in mind when underwriting Grotowski. He was compelled to defend himself and his theatre to a Ministry of Culture commission. Meanwhile Barba went back and forth between Opole and Paris, trying to get a publisher for *In Search of Theatre* (a collection of his, Grotowski's, and Flaszen's writings, precursor to *Towards a Poor Theatre*). Barba and Grotowski believed its publication would function as a means of pressuring the Ministry of Culture to allow the group to travel (Barba 1999a, 83-84). But to succeed, Barba had to do much more than publish; he had to secure invitations to perform outside Poland.

Grotowski was rapidly losing friends. Polish critics who held positions in the Ministry of Culture turned against Grotowski. Communist intellectuals who wrote for the magazines Barba approached had become impatient with Polish cultural intransigence. It became difficult to get articles about Grotowski published. Barba traveled to Copenhagen where he succeeded in getting Christian and Silvia Ludvigsen, Danish theatre scholars, to look at his *The Psycho Dynamic Theatre*, the working title for *In Search of Theatre*. With this good news Barba was ready to return to Opole.

Usually re-entry into Poland *was* a mere formality given Barba's student status (his visa and scholarship gave him this privilege), but, having neglected his studies, his scholarship was on the verge of being revoked. The Polish Consulate in Oslo refused to reissue the visa because Barba was designated "*Persona Non Grata*" (Barba 1999a, 85). No explanation was given for this assignation, but it seems a by-product of circumstances more strenuously imposed upon Grotowski by Poland's Ministry of Culture.

With little more than a bag of clothes, the twenty-eight year old Barba was stranded in Oslo. Yet as he loved Poland, so did he Norway. In 1964 Oslo was a place where he could establish himself, an imperfect but peaceful place where he and his future colleagues could work unmolested by censors and secret police. In Norway he pursued what he was pursuing everywhere else: a community grounded in honesty, hard work, and artistic transformation. His new goals differed from the art-for-workers projects in the mid-1950s. Barba now proposed to create theatre within a collective committed to itself at the exclusion of all other commitments; a theatre that stimulated spectators on a visceral level because it is devoted to research on the human in a performance situation; a theatre that takes an ethical stance that promotes honesty in art, a community of members of equal status and duty; a theatre of the iconography of the human form rather than the authority of the canon.

Though Norway's professional theatre was in the same stasis it was in the 1950s, Barba now had sufficient training to embark on a serious career as a director. Seeking employment in the state theatres, he made the rounds in Oslo, but without a completed degree no one would take him seriously. Norway's theatre was a closed shop. Having no success with a cold bureaucratic profession uninterested in his experiences in Poland and India, Barba approached Oslo's few amateur, avant-garde theatres. But those actors were unhappy with the highly disciplined, overtly physical approach Barba proposed. His description of his approach to theatre as "psychodynamic" frightened the amateur actors, and they worried (reasonably) that Barba would not be sanctioned by the state and thereby ineligible for funding.

Frustrated that no "real" actors would or could work with him, Barba went in search of others who shared his frustration (Barba 1999a, 90). He discovered that there were hundreds who had been refused admission to the state theatre schools. He got their addresses and contacted each one, inviting them to a meeting and, he says, "kindled in them the idea of becoming the chosen ones who would bring about our artistic revolution" (Barba 1999a, 90). Again infiltration, persuasion, and intervention were deployed to create a new situation. In October 1964 Odin Teatret was formed out of a handful of those who attended the meeting. Their numbers dwindled from twelve at first, to the four who performed in *Ornitofilene* (1965), to the two who moved to Holstebro (1966); there the number grew as Danes and others from around the world joined the Odin, but the group was not a revolving door. Eventually they settled on a permanent company, and only very rarely is there a new member. Genuine membership is deemed permanent because Barba imagines something that lives past its founding and becomes strong like a tradition:

> There are people who live in a nation, in a culture.
> There are people who live in their own bodies.
> They are the travelers who cross the Country of

> Speed, a space and a time which have nothing to do with the landscape and the season of the place they happen to be traveling through. . . . Speed is a personal dimension which cannot be measured with scientific criteria, although science and progress themselves have roots in this unmeasurable dimension. . . . The travelers of speed can also meet in the theatre. The significance of their lives, the meaning of their revolt has been forgotten. Other times they have merely become famous. . . . The inhabitant of the great traditions and the traveler of speed live together on the map of theatres and their histories, and it is difficult to tell them apart. The former lives inside a heredity which he passes on to generations . . . The latter, having arrived at a certain point on his path, looks at his hands, and discovers that with them he has built something very different from what he had in mind (Barba 1986, 11).

Though these poetics come well after the hard road from Opole to Oslo to Holstebro, they demonstrate the magnificence of Barba's project and significance of his earliest activities.

In October 1965, still at work trying to get *In Search of Theatre* published, Barba founded the journal *Teatrets Teori og Technik* and devoted its first two issues to Grotowski. Grotowski and Flaszen were invited to speak at a conference in Italy in 1965. Given this thaw in Poland's Grotowski policy, Barba and his Odin Teatret (operating under conditions of virtual obscurity) endeavored to bring Grotowski's newly reorganized Teatr Laboratorium from its new home in Wroclaw to Oslo. Because of Norwegian predilection for things foreign in theatre and connections with *Mot Dag*, Barba was successful in getting a small grant from the government. His friends also put up their money to back this venture. Additional funding came from *Fylkrugen*, a Swedish cultural organization and from the Copenhagen University student theatre, where the Ludvigsens held court. The greater problem was finding the appropriate space for the performance of *The Constant Prince*. The performance required a wooden floor and the possibility of total darkness. Oslo's theatre milieu could not comprehend such demands. The generally accepted theatre arrangement wherein a large audience looks down on a well-lit stage framed by a proscenium was the presumed métier; Grotowski was in the habit of creating new spatial arrangements for each work, usually in small restricted spaces with audiences limited to less than 100 spectators. This innovation created an intimacy between performers and public at which the Scandinavians rankled. Ultimately Barba rented a spacious industrialists' meeting hall with a parquet floor. Teatr Laboratorium actors were to be housed by his friends.

In February1966, Grotowski and his company left Poland for Norway, their first international tour. Of the public's reaction,

Barba remembers:

> The disconcerted Norwegian press formulated the objections that were to accompany and sustain the Grotowski 'legend' from then on. Could his technique be applied to a contemporary text? Why so few spectators? Why so much mysticism? It was like a sweetened paraphrase of the Polish reviews (Barba 1999, 92).

Though *The Constant Prince* had little impact in Norway, the event triggered an enormous critical and professional response. The Teatr Laboratorium's next booking was Jean Louis Barrault's *Théâtre des Nations*, Paris, June 1966, which made them famous. At the same time, the Odin was invited to Holstebro, Denmark.

It was during this brief beginning in Oslo where an ethos and methodology centered on the primacy of actor training were formed. Here, Grotowski's work took on a new significance for Barba—who had moved outside a Soviet republic into a NATO social democracy. In this more peaceful place the nature of the struggle changed. Now, without Grotowski's credentials and—albeit reluctant—state support, the struggle was against the mundane exigencies of daily life and a closed-shop profession. The Oslo period was a time for practicing the ethos learned in Cheruthuruthy, of learning the extreme self-discipline and physical stamina associated with long hours of daily training and rehearsal. Barba moved beyond Grotowski's tutelage. His own ideas concerning ethics and physical training combined with the goals of the secular-spiritual collective instilled in him by Grotowski, resulting in a programmatic approach to achieving altruistic goals through gymnastics, clowning, ballet, modern dance, and vocal improvisation. The group's poverty was also part of the context for the formulation of Barba's own methodology. Though Poland has a long tradition of supporting its theatres through a system of matriculation, which Grotowski fulfilled to the letter, no such ironies presented themselves to Barba. He had no funding, no professional status, and no sense of national identity from which an aesthetic might emerge.

Barba was curious how an expansion of Grotowski's project in Norway would be received. The attempte to break the traditions of naturalism and psychological realism in the national theatre, in a nation without its own avant-garde movement but rather focused solely on its six permanent theatres and three touring companies, resulted in what at the time Barba called a "rift theatre" (Barba 1999b, 29). Barba modeled his activities after Ernesto Che Guevara's maxim from his *Guerilla Manual*: "One should not always wait for favorable conditions to start a revolution. The actual breaking out of the insurrection can create them" (Barba 1999b. 29). Although uninterested in armed insurrection, Barba was devoted to honesty in art and took steps to activate his program without waiting for marching orders from Norway's avant-garde.

Flemish playwright, *Tone Brulin* submitted Barba's "The Rift Theatre" for publication in a Dutch magazine in 1964; they were turned down. Now, having resurfaced almost forty years later in the archives of Fernando Taviani, co-founder of the International School of Anthropology, they capture that which is essential about the Odin as an effective radical force. In "The Rift Theatre" Barba renounced the traditional concept of academic theatre. He was opposed to its organization, its "artistic and social function," its day-to-day operation, and the deadly "finality" of its work in both performance and scholarship (Barba 1999b, 29-30). Barba proposed that people's spiritual and intellectual needs could be fully addressed by a rift or sectarian theatre. The rift theatre was to overcome "intellectual lethargy" (Barba 1999b, 30). Barba believed the formation of his alternative theatre required working in isolation, away from artistic circles, taking long months of hard work to prepare one production. He believed that the assault on the academic theatre should be waged not only by proposing ambitious new theories, but also by maintaining the highest standards of technical excellence and "artistic sincerity" possible (Barba 1999b, 30). Each ensuing production should so differ from the previous one such that it destroys labels, explanations, and "–isms" supported by the previous work. The rift theatre was based on members' sacrifices and dedication to working to their limits. The long-term goal was to build an artistic community (rather than a production company) in which members collaborated with their colleagues, creating performances and sharing equally in administrative duties (Barba 1999b, 30). In these preceding respects the Rift Theatre fits both an anarcho-syndicalist model and Conquergood's participatory epistemology of intervention.

According to the early manifesto, the actors in a Rift theatre must be amateurs having no experience of the demoralization imposed by mainstream theatre production, who have not learned the inertia and laziness of the profession. By giving amateurs status as members who train daily, the theatre functions simultaneously as a school. By virtue of ever changing dramaturgy and permanent membership, training is ongoing and the theatre remains a school throughout its life, ultimately evolving into a research institute, and developing its own methodology. Membership is not based on talent, but willingness to work. The actors must finance the work themselves. The group's "'commandments' of professional ethics," which, although rigid and authoritarian, and never mentioned again after 1964, were always tacitly embraced and remained central to the group's existence despite their ultimate escape from poverty (Barba 1999b, 31). A key passage from "A Rift Theatre" reads:

> On a quiet street in Oslo there exists a theatre unknown to all: Odin Teatret. . . . The members have been selected from amongst the applicants who were refused admission to Oslo's Drama School. They work from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and

> from 5 p.m. until 8 p.m. . . . The economy of the theatre is assured by weekly contributions which every member of the group pays into a common kitty. None of the actors can take up temporary work in another theatre, nor in films nor on television without the consent of the other members. They must agree to three conditions:
>
> The work must be useful from a technical point of view.
> The Actor works extra time making up for the hours of lost training.
> Half the earnings go to the actor's own theatre.
>
> Another method of incrementing the economy of the theatre is to enforce a week's work outside the theatre, turning the salary over to the common kitty. An attempt is made to avoid such a method, however, in order not to interrupt the rhythm of the training. (Barba 1999b, 20)

Odin's most radical act is their praxis of a decidedly austere ethics when, around the world, young people openly broke the law in the struggle for freedom, integrity, and social justice in environments characterized by hatred, horror, and hypocrisy—such as abuse of power in Poland, extremism in China, unjust war in Vietnam, violent white racism in the United States, and cold war all over. But the Odin's ethics were unconnected from politics or social issues; they were and remain strictly related to the profession. The Odin never directly embraced socio-political issues in their performances, but they addressed them in how they structured their economy and daily activities, thereby creating a context to live according to their principles, creating an autonomous culture, which itself was made necessary by the circumstances under which the group was created and survived. Their autonomy allowed them to remove themselves from the social mainstream and live and work as they chose. This fits the anarcho-syndicalist or anarcho-collectivist models because they regulate themselves internally without mirroring external social and economic policy and they apportion all work and reward according to an equitable arrangement that increases skills and cultivates innate ability. But as they matured they moved well beyond anarcho-collectivist models to function globally without losing their sectarian identity. It is more characteristic of the Odin of the late 1970s and early 1980s to describe their work as intercultural or transnational, but it was in the crucible of their beginnings that the Odin would do Barters (performance exchanges with small communities in towns and remote rural areas) and from whence Barba's International School of Theatre Anthropology emerged in 1979. These later developments problematize the socio-political structure of Barba's early years. But the later work clearly is a by-product of the early

sectarian stance.

The group was invited to move to Holstebro at a propitious moment of renaissance at the municipal level in Jutland's northwestern farmlands. Leaving behind Oslo's ateliers, air raid shelters, and industrial halls, the Odin moved into farm buildings donated to them by the municipality of Holstebro in the autumn of 1966. The Odin renovated the structure to house three performance/rehearsal spaces, a scene shop, a costume shop, storage space, a library, office space, dressing rooms, and guest quarters; the actors were able to find their own quarters off site. The conditions of their tenancy and residency in Holstebro were contingent upon their functioning as a social institute that fit the municipality's model of cultural regeneration, but they were essentially a school already. That said, the town's cultural policy was not rigorous. The idea was to attract cultural work and institutes from beyond Denmark such that the intermingling of arts and pedagogy from around the world would make Holstebro the urban hub of a large farming region. As a school and research institute, the Odin functioned in two ways: one, as a legitimate social institute whose activities qualify for city and state support; and two, like the Kalamandalam School in Cheruthuruthy supporting a curriculum of physical training and professional ethos. By virtue of the arrangement, a significant portion of the group's economy was provided by the municipality and the Danish Ministry of Culture, the remainder to be made up from box office receipts, workshops, and publishing.

By any standard of comparison, the Odin's welcome in Holstebro was warm, friendly, and generous, thereby establishing an environment that nourished their experiment. The authorities never insinuated that the project was a threat or foolhardy, but rather deemed it an integral part of the long-term survival of a small city which was nearly left behind as Denmark's agricultural economy gradually shifted towards a more omodern, industrial, and technologically driven economy.

Holstebro's social experiment had its origins in the mid-1950s. In the first part of the twentieth century, Holstebro was the railway center for a vast and fertile agricultural region, but the post-War economy caused an exodus from the farmlands and a push to industrialize. Holstebro's one significant industry, Faerch's Tobacco, also deserted the area, emptying the suburbs of Faerch employees as well as those whose livelihoods were tied to the service of tobacco workers and their families (Holm 11). Holstebro did not attract a major industry to replace Faerch. The half-empty town was surrounded by empty farmland. Holstebro was potentially doomed to be little more than a backwater railway depot. But the town's administrators had the foresight to purchase the unwanted outlying farmlands during the exodus so that, during reconstruction, the municipality had control over zoning, therefore discretion over land usage. They were able to gradually recover by building housing developments near entrepreneurial industrial concerns and, later, social institutes. The stipulation was that no company or

institute could employ more than fifty people. Thus no single business failure would devastate the town's economy, nor could any one concern control it. Gradually farming re-stabilized and industries thrived in Holstebro; the municipality accumulated a sizeable budget surplus through resale of the land. Under these conditions, social institutes—such as museums and schools—were attracted and invited to the town, which could well afford to underwrite their activities. This reached its pinnacle under the mayoralty of Kai Nielsen, who might appear a maverick by contemporary standards. Economic administration selected the artworks and pedagogical institutes based on their subjective perceptions of the town's needs; there were no steering committees. Though Nielsen's actions were radical by comparison to other small cities' urban policies, Holstebro's were dictated by the logic of their financial situation, rather than any political ideals.

In 1965 Nielsen declared Holstebro a *kultur by* (culture town). The city became home to a museum exhibiting collections of Picasso, Matisse, and Chagall. Sculptures by Alberto Giacometti and others were situated in public places. Most significant is Giacometti's "Woman on a Cart." The town's decision to purchase it was the first among numerous decisions taken towards the cultivation of art and ideas from outside the Scandinavian milieu (like Barba). Modern sculpture, architecture, museums, and schools of various arts and crafts have done much to transform Holstebro from the center of a depressed rural area, not only into a small cosmopolitan center, but also a fertile territory for cultural development. Under Nielsen's administration the town invited Odin Teatret to move from Oslo and open its school, Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium.

The administrative process (combining earned and unearned income) eventually made the Odin financially viable, but what was more important were the leaps forward in training the moment they found a safe European home. The extent to which the Odin could nourish and cultivate the training of their actors, protecting them personally, professionally, and psychically, demonstrated the unique success of a radical approach after the circumstances that necessitated rebellion had fallen away. The Odin's administration has always evinced genuine commitment to the members. The actors receive yearly salaries, unconnected to box office receipts or any other earned income, and tangible support from a municipality that addresses all citizens' housing needs. The Odin's asocial self-sufficiency coupled with the willingness to integrate within municipal and state cultural policy is a unique imbrication of anarcho-collectivist ideals and Mot Dag methodology of infiltration.

The Holstebro move resulted in shifts in membership; two Norwegian members left the group. In Denmark, new members joined Wethal and Laukvik, the two Norwegians. One new member, Iben Rasmussen, was to radicalize the group from within. The social and political circumstances that make the Odin's early Danish experience socio-politically significant can be seen in Rasmussen's autobiographical performance *Itsi Bitsi* (1992-present). It is the most topical of the Odin's shorter works, dealing real-

istically, but in non-realistic terms, with the legacies of drug addiction and the radicalism of the mid-1960s. *Itsi Bitsi*, the story of Rasmussen's relationship with Eik Skaløe, Denmark's first beat poet, is more confrontation with, rather than celebration of, the relationship, their journeys, and their ultimate deterioration through addiction. It also addresses the interrelationship between Rasmussen as actor and the characters she has played during her career. Throughout *Itsi Bitsi,* Rasmussen resuscitates characters from earlier Odin productions, including the Shaman from *Come! And the day will be ours* (1976-80), and Katrin, Mother Courage's mute daughter, from *Brecht's Ashes* (1980-84), both of whom spoke invented languages. Rasmussen's performance is testimony to how her work with the Odin in the late-1960s awoke her from self-imposed silence in the aftermath of addiction and denial of her identity hidden behind the mask of the thin-voiced girlfriend of the beat poet and anti-war activist, captured by Skaløe's nickname for her, Itsi Bitsi. The work is not smugly anti-drug; rather, it questions how the drugs overwhelmed the politics, and how—though thought of by some as doors to spirituality—the drugs became doors that closed people off from any spirituality. She equates her silence and inability to interact with others with women's silence on a larger scale. Her discovery of a new powerful voice, literally and metaphorically, frees haunting images that become her characters.

Holstebro's welcoming atmosphere did not slacken Barba's sectarian stance against the machinery of mainstream cultural production. The founding of the Odin under both hostile and hospitable conditions led this emerging group (who throughout the seventies launched one after another assault on mainstream theatre in the form of Barters, while maintaining a European home) to develop a unique methodology as a response to these conditions. Barters, which were carried on in southern Italy and South America, were kinds of performances that went beyond the purely economic terms of barter—*quid pro quo*. By exchanging an Odin performance or dance for local song and dance with people in regions with no institutionalized theatre, the Odin members were able to confront the potential loss of cultural identity in places where young people did not know their own traditions. It was the old people who played powerful roles in the Barters. What is of particularly political interest was when Barba used barter as a means to make material differences such as using performance to receive books in exchange, which he then donated to Monteiasi, a town without a library.

Odin Teatret is a thirty-plus-year experiment in theatre culture that has challenged the profession to practice its own ethics—not merely professional ethics, but those that enable actors to be honest and intimate with their own desires no matter how asocial and/or amoral. Having positioned themselves as an autonomous theatre, it is in the next phase of the development (the Barters from 1974-79 and the founding of ISTA in 1979) that the Odin makes a more significant and lasting radical impact on the profession

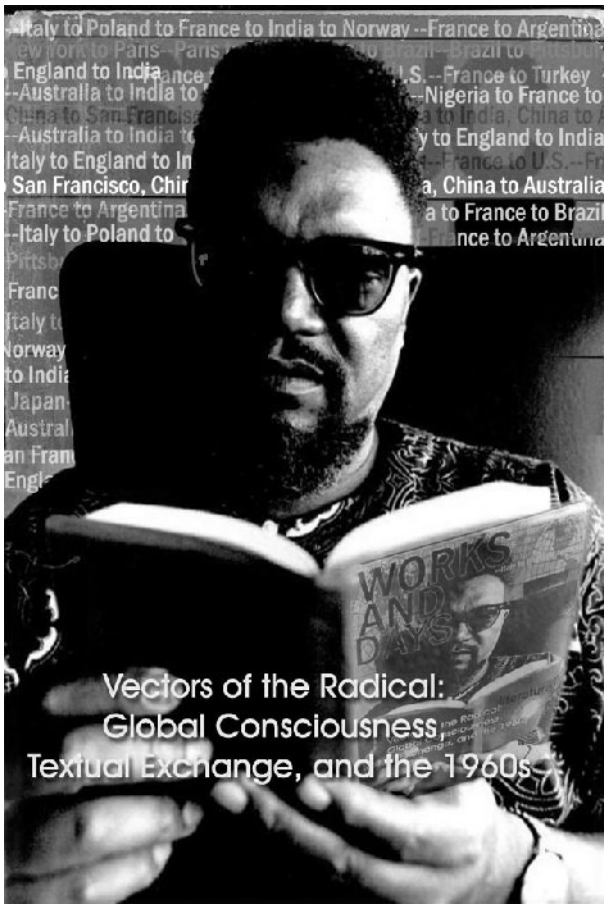
because of its applicability beyond itself. Through the training they uncovered and created a culture that pre-existed them without any consciousness of itself, and opened the doors of that culture to those who search through creative collectivity for identity and/or otherness. Not to be confused with a subculture, a genuine cultural nascence happened within the training right after the move to Holstebro.

Barba is very precise when talking about culture or more precisely theatre culture, carefully avoiding confusing theatre culture and group culture with subcultures within society.

> It is not enough to be different, to use norms and values that are more just, standing by oneself and one's aspirations, however naïve and utopian. It is necessary to go through and overcome that which usually brands a marginal group: being a subculture. A theatre which is representative of the "new culture" of the young, a "young theatre", is not a value in itself. It is just the theatre of one of the subcultures of our society.
>
> It is necessary to change oneself from a subculture into a culture (Barba 1999b, 120).

Barba points out that the subculture is complicit with the society it resists by virtue of its youthful rebellion against having a vested interest in it, or the society having an investment in its youth. As it matures, the subculture adapts to the mainstream as the mainstream adapts to it; thus, since its youthful rebellion is swallowed up by the its complicity in the culture it rejected, the subculture can never become an autonomous culture. Alternatively, Barba proposes that the subculture mature into a "group culture" through internal reorganization, regulating its own conditions such that it may "adapt itself to the outside world without depending on it" thereby establishing a kind of "cultural completeness" enabling it "to react in appropriate ways to changes of situation, without the group being reduced to dead matter, either so rigid that it breaks or so malleable that it can be moulded like wax" (Barba 1999b, 120).

In his "From Culture to Hegemony," Dick Hebdige confirms many of Barba's misgivings about the classification, *subculture*—the two most important are subculture's lack of maturity and its ultimate alignment with the hegemonious mainstream ideology it initially resisted. Borrowing from Gramsci and Lefebvre, Hebdige sees the subculture's struggle as a discourse among signs in which the subculture's systems of signification are merely the new signs of the consumer society's mythology. They do not represent what is of value to Barba, which in Hebdige's terms would amount to an entirely new system of signification with autonomous meanings and ethos.


Vectors of the Radical:
Global Consciousness,
Textual Exchange, and the 1960s

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ABSTRACT:

Julian Beck's and Judith Malina's Living Theatre reacted to the exhaustion of radical cultural work in late 1960s Europe and America by traveling to Brazil, where they developed methods of cross-cultural collaboration that would enable a systematic critique of their theory and practice of political theater. These discoveries would be used to significant effect when they returned to the U.S. in 1971, allowing them to produce a political praxis that transcended class and cultural boundaries.