

**DILATED BODY:  
A CRITICAL READING OF EUGENIO  
BARBA'S THEORIES AND THEATRE  
PRACTICE**

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## ABSTRACT

“Dilated body” is an exploration of Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret theories and practice through a feminist perspective. By analyzing their trainings, body theories and performances, I try to identify a feminist line of thinking that was not explored so far. This reading is viable in the conditions of a special type of theatrical practice that produced a theoretical standpoint, and a new style of performances is generated from theory. This process is a long term activity that has taken over 40 years and is vastly documented by theatre theoreticians and historians. What is missing from those studies is an interpretation of Odin activities as a possibility for social change in theatre environment, through a break with a traditional way of conceptualizing the body and with a representation of gender roles on stage and in the process of training. My research tries to fill parts of that gap.

**to Jasmina and all Fellinian clown-lovers**

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## part one: sentence first - searching for horses

“So Alice began telling them her adventures from the time when she first saw the White Rabbit. She was a little nervous about it just at first, the two creatures got so close to her, one on each side, and opened their eyes and mouths so *very* wide, but she gained courage as she went on.”<sup>1</sup>

What is this thesis all about? Is it a travel down the rabbit-hole to an unknown theatrical world? Before getting into the adventures, and following the impatient advice of the Gryphon from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (“No, no! The adventures first, explanations take such a dreadful time”<sup>2</sup>), a short explanation is needed in a form of introduction to the topic, as the Queen of Hearts shouts “Sentence first – verdicts afterwards”<sup>3</sup> because you can always simply follow the instructions of the King of Hearts in reading such a paper: “Begin at the beginning... and go on till you come to the end: then stop.”<sup>4</sup>

In the thesis I analyze theatre practice and theories of Eugenio Barba<sup>5</sup> and Odin Teatret, from the perspective of a possible feminist project. In my view, this reading is viable in the conditions of a special type of theatrical practice, which produces a theoretical standpoint that generates a new style of performance. This process is a long term activity that has taken over 40 years and is vastly documented by theatre

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis Carroll, “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There. The Centenary Edition*, London: Penguin Books, 1998, p.91

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 107

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 105

<sup>5</sup> Eugenio Barba is the founder and director of Odin Teatret.

theoreticians and historians.<sup>6</sup> What is missing from their perspective is an interpretation of Odin activities as a possibility for social change in theatre environment, through a break with a traditional way of conceptualizing the body and with a representation of gender roles on stage and in the process of training.

In the period 12<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup> of April 2007, I had the opportunity to attend Odin Week in Holstebro, Denmark, an international seminar where Odin Teatret presented its activities, performances and methods of working.<sup>7</sup> Here I could make interviews, talk directly to actors and Eugenio Barba about their work, observe how trainings take place and how they construct their performances in several *work demonstrations*<sup>8</sup> and also be a spectator for over twelve Odin performances. All those elements are included in my thesis every now and then. Besides close reading of Eugenio Barba's texts, they represent my methodology: participatory observation and semi-structured interviews. What I was firstly amazed at was the practicality of those meetings, the focus on technical elements that are at the basis of their work.

Why am I interested in theatre and why did I choose this topic for a MA thesis on gender? Acting theories are deeply embedded into Western culture, where gender roles are present in the very understanding of culture itself as male subjects in opposition to womanized bodies that are to be tamed and controlled in a directorial gesture of inscribing culture into performance. From this perspective, cultural authority and creativity is in the patriarchal position of excluding women, where theatrical culture is

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<sup>6</sup> Ian Watson, *Towards a Third Theatre. Eugenio Barba and the Odin Teatret*, London: Routledge, 1993; John Andreasen and Annelis Kuhlmann (eds), *Odin Teatret 2000*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2001; Jane Turner, *Eugenio Barba*, London: Routledge, 2004

<sup>7</sup> My participation was financially supported partially by Odin Teatret and partially by the MA Conference Fund of Central European University. I want to thank them both for this opportunity.

<sup>8</sup> Odin actors name as *work demonstrations* various examples of how they construct their characters for performance and how trainings take place.

property of educated men, inherited from their intellectual forefathers, previous directors that formed a tradition of approaching performance and preparing performers and their bodies. By asking questions about the bodies on stage, about the position of directors and actors within the theatrical milieu, about the gender relations in the world of theatre, about sexuality on stage, the marginality and secondary status of women, long-standing and unsolved problems are addressed.<sup>9</sup> The purpose of this revision of our own methods, traditions and ways of constructing performances as directors, performers, critics or theoreticians is rich: to come with new ways of understanding our own lives within theatre and on stage and changes in those lives. Eugenio Barba offers a method of working within theatre that I can recognize as relevant also for myself: “Theatre allows me to belong to no place, to be anchored not to one perspective only, to remain in transition.”<sup>10</sup>

Thinking the body represents an enterprise of disrupting a dichotomic conceptualization of mind-maleness/body-femaleness. In the construction of philosophy as a mode of knowledge, the status of body/Woman (upper case and singular) remains the status of enigma, a mysterious object, a highly restrained and contained product. From the fringes of theatre, a practice challenges this approach and inspires new groups to look for social change through their art, always acknowledging their position: “we are like pandas: extinguished but not dying”.<sup>11</sup>

Revolt is an important concept for Odin. It expresses a special way of thinking and acting that is not like the rest of the theatrical landscape, there is a break from traditional

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<sup>9</sup> For a better understanding of the crucial moral and political points that a feminist critic confronts, see Sandra Gilbert: “What Do Feminist Critics Want? A Postcard from the Volcano”, 1985, pp. 29-45

<sup>10</sup> Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe - A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*, London: Routledge, 1995, p.8

<sup>11</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Odin Week*, Holstebro, 2007

values in a search for a way out, in a revolt against what you are or what you represent. By following already fixed lines, established working methods, and going with the flow are all forms of collaborationism that has a strong negative connotation in Barba's vision.<sup>12</sup>

In the thesis, I explore several themes central to Odin company's practice such as actors as floating islands, the concept of third theatre as a voice of marginal theatre professionals that goes against the mainstream, the group culture for Odin members, the process of training, constructing performances, the role of the director in this process, how Odin members see their representations. An important part of this study is dedicated to the concept of dilated body, a central theme in Barba's theories that is actually challenging formal theatre practice and a specific form of essentializing the body in Western culture. I see dilation as a subverting discourse that can inspire other practitioners and theoreticians to develop this concept that can be interpreted as a feminist attempt to criticize several theories of embodiment. To exemplify the usage of this concept on stage I briefly analyze three Odin performances: *Itsi Bitsi*, *Judith* and *Dona Musica's Butterflies*. In the next part I will look at the possibility of reading Odin theatre practice as a feminist project by emphasizing several parallelisms that I have found between their activities and theories and some key feminist approaches related to body, subjectivity, performance and sexuality.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Odin Week*, Holstebro, 2007

<sup>13</sup> Hélène Cixous "The Laugh of the Medusa" in Marks, Elaine and de Courtivron, Isabelle (eds) *New French Feminisms*, New York: Schocken, 1981; Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994; Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance*, London: Routledge, 1993; Sue-Ellen Case (ed.) *Performing Feminisms. Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990

In dilation there is an inner consciousness of the body that offers the coordination of movements. In action, energy is not in the presence but in intention of movement, in an answer to an inner search of the bodymind. A dialogue is created in the body of the Odin actor, which has precision and is based on a continuous change of the body. Its purpose for actors, as they put it<sup>14</sup>, is to keep the body alive, not to let it die on stage.

The living horse on stage is one of the most common illustrations of dilation used by Barba: seeing *Cyrano de Bergerac* as a teenager, a realist play and mise-en-scene, the presence of a real horse on stage that was pulling a carriage offered a feeling of ambiguity and a strong disturbance in what was expected from a realist performance. This example emphasizes the disorientation that explodes all the dimensions that control the stage, thus producing an affect of dilation of senses for the spectator. “Because of this sudden interference from another world, the uniform veil of the stage seemed torn before my eyes.”<sup>15</sup> In my opinion, Odin Teatret can offer exactly this type of breaks and the possibility of creating breaks in understanding and doing theatre practice.

Following a white rabbit like Alice or a horse, in our case, can bring a whole new vision of ourselves and our own practice together with understanding of various unclear concepts about “a world of monsters” that at the end of the road are left behind, so that we can continue with our own discoveries and adventures.

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<sup>14</sup> Jan Ferlov, *Odin Week*, Holstebro, 2007

<sup>15</sup> Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds.), *A dictionary of theatre anthropology...* p. 61

## part two: odin – developing a third theatre

*“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”*  
*That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,* said the Cat.  
*I don’t much care where\_\_\_\_\_* said Alice.  
*Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,* said the Cat.  
*\_\_\_\_\_ so long as I get somewhere.* Alice added as an explanation.  
*Oh you’re sure to do that,* said the Cat, *if only you walk long enough.”*<sup>16</sup>

In this part I investigate the main characteristics of Odin Teatret, the company founded by Eugenio Barba, following the possibility to see it as a subversive tool present in a conservative Western theatrical environment. Besides analyzing the extensive written and video material, I consider that observing and understanding the practice of Odin theatre is stringently demanded in order to get a fuller comprehension of this phenomenon.

Paying attention to its long activity on the theatrical stages, Odin Teatret represents a special form of theatre of resistance. Lo and Gilbert define theatre of resistance as being “...driven by a political imperative to interrogate the cultural hegemony that underlies imperial systems of governance, education, social and economic organization, and representation”.<sup>17</sup> Some elements of resistance theatre that interrogate hegemonic values and make possible resistance to oppression, while producing opportunities for empowerment are: open critiques of mainstream discourses, disruption of deeply fixed

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<sup>16</sup>Lewis Carroll, “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”, p. 56

<sup>17</sup> Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert, “Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis” in *The Drama Review*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 2002, p.35

notions, and questioning the foundation and construction of norms and power,<sup>18</sup> reconfiguration of mainstream notions of the speaking subject and giving voices to silenced stories,<sup>19</sup> presentation of specific social circumstances with a critical and analytical perspective, construction and investigation of identities through performance<sup>20</sup> and physically reenacting lived experiences within the context of the performers.

Odin Teatret is promoting itself especially as a place of research and study of performance techniques, where a specific approach to actor training, acting and performance is developed. Since its formation in 1964, the group has been considered by the theatrical critics and theoreticians as an innovator in research, pedagogy and performance and it was promoted and studied as such.<sup>21</sup> During my own stage directing studies, at least two courses emphasized the importance of Odin Teatret and Eugenio Barba in the history of theatre.<sup>22</sup> Their performances are considered to be results of long researches and most of them are directed by Eugenio Barba in his meticulous style. A strong feature is an overwhelming presence of live action, figures, recurrent characters, masks and music. Barba recognizes that Odin has plenty of advice to offer but the

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Rabinow (ed.) *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon, 1984; Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985; Philip Taylor, *Applied Theater: Creating Transformative Encounters in The Community*. Portsmouth: Heinemann 2003

<sup>19</sup> see Julia Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language" in Toril Moi (Ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986

<sup>20</sup> Richard Owen Geer, "Of the People, By the People and For the People: The Field of Community Performance" in Linda Frye Burnham and Steven Durland (Eds) *The Citizen Artist: 20 Years of Art in The Public Arena—An Anthology from High Performance Magazine 1978-1998*, New York: Critical Press, 1998; Philip Taylor, *Applied Theater...*, 2003

<sup>21</sup> Julia Varley, *Wind in the West*, Holstebro: Odin Teatrets Forlag, 1997; John Andreasen and Annelis Kuhlmann (eds) *Odin Teatret 2000*, 2001; Ian Watson, *Negotiating Cultures: Eugenio Barba and the Intercultural Debate*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002; Kirsten Hastrup (ed.), *The Performers' Village*, Graasten: Drama, 1996; Jane Turner, *Eugenio Barba*, 2004; Ian Watson, *Towards a Third Theatre*, 1993

<sup>22</sup> Those courses are still provided by Theatre and Television Department of Babes Bolyai University Cluj Napoca, Romania: *History of Universal Theatre*, held by Laura Pavel-Teutisan and *Directing Poetics*, held by Anca Maniutiu.

company does not hold itself as a model to follow. Their main purpose, why they are still active after forty years of existence, is to develop and permanent explore a new theatrical language and new forms of contact with the spectator.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Floating Islands***

Barba uses the image or the metaphor of the floating island to describe the actor. His first books about Odin activities were named *The Floating Islands* and *Beyond the Floating Islands*.<sup>24</sup> This metaphor implies a call for Odin actors: “the desire to remain foreign... the awareness that our action through theatre springs from an attitude towards existence that has its roots in one transnational and transcultural country”.<sup>25</sup> This country is seen as an archipelago of islands that are not connected and not rooted in one time and place.

When the small company moved to Holstebro, Denmark, in 1966, they didn't have a common culture or language and no one from Odin Teatret spoke Danish.<sup>26</sup> For these practical reasons, they had to build another type of dramaturgy not based on text, one that would connect events, music, characters in a “theatre that dances”.<sup>27</sup> For this purpose, developing skills, permanent training and understanding theatre were major concerns.

Numerous seminars and conferences were organized during the years by Odin Teatret. Writing, filming and publishing material about theatre and the craft of the actor in journals, magazines, volumes or on video represents a rigorous documentation of their work and the whole company was directly involved in those highly demanding activities.

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<sup>23</sup> Eugenio Barba, *The Floating Islands*, Holstebro: Drama, 1979, p.29

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*; Eugenio Barba, *Beyond the Floating Islands*, New York: PAJ, 1986

<sup>25</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Beyond the Floating Islands*, p.10

<sup>26</sup> Jane Turner, *Eugenio Barba*, 2004, pp.11-13

<sup>27</sup> Eugenio Barba, “Four Spectators” in *Tulane Drama Review* 34/1, 1990, p.97

The research of Odin actors focuses on finding terms of communicating experiences and observations to other practitioners and observers in order to facilitate discussions and debates on the craft of making theatre. The themes that are addressed can be identified as: becoming an effective actor, desire for making theatre and not something else, reflection on possible setting where theatre can take place and relation to spectators.<sup>28</sup> Such an understanding of the craft of acting is being developed continuously, no activity on stage is taken for granted, all actions are observed, analyzed and reflected upon. What we can discern in Odin's various activities is a desire to demythologize the mystique of acting as an obscure craft. The art of acting is to be constantly improved and discussed in concrete terms.

### ***The Third Theatre***

The first thing to note about third theatre is that it is almost impossible to define because as soon as one tries to categorize it, it is no longer third theatre. Barba coined the title to describe certain groupings of people who create their own theatre. These are groups who work outside of the institutional theatre and outside of the boundaries assigned by the surrounding culture. The third theatre is understood by Barba not necessarily as a theatrical style, nor a movement or an international association, nor a school, an aesthetic, or a set of techniques. If we accept established theatre as the first, and the avant-garde as the second, then what Barba and his colleagues in theatre produce is the third.<sup>29</sup> From this point of view, Barba and Odin are practicing the peculiarity of the avant-garde by mediating different Western non-mainstream traditions: from symbolism

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<sup>28</sup> Jane Turner, *Eugenio Barba*, 2004, p. 24-25

<sup>29</sup> Eugenio Barba, "The Third Theatre: a Legacy from Us to Ourselves" in *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 8, no.29, 1992, pp. 3-9

and expressionism to Brechtian theatre, guerrilla art, agitprop, street theatre, from Alfred Jarry to Dada and Surrealism, Theatre of the Absurd, happenings, performance art, postmodern dance, independent and alternative theatres etc. Richard Schechner in his introduction to *Towards a Third Theatre* sees Odin as the perfect example for third theatre: “Barba's Odin incorporates aspects from all these avant-garde and experimental tendencies. The result is what Barba terms the *third theatre*.”<sup>30</sup>

In third theatre, there is a priority given to the search for meaning of theatre and to how theatre is made. The focus is on the relationships within the theatre group and the relationship between actors and the audience. For members of these groups there is no difference between a personal and a professional life.

Even if the concept of third theatre is adopted now by many theatre groups that see it as recognition of their existence on the theatre map and also for defining their style, there are plenty of critics of this concept. Its definition as a negation of mainstream theatre and also experimental theatre highlights the negative definition of a theatre that has a hand-to-mouth existence, lacking a clear-cut identity, an impossible categorization of its aesthetic, an all-purpose ambiguity, with “actors that have to fill their bellies”<sup>31</sup> in the shadow of the first and second theatres that it clandestinely wishes to be branch of.<sup>32</sup> Another strong critique that is discussed extensively by Ian Watson is based on the connotation of the Third World, that Barba connects to the discrimination found in both, and not to a sense of inferiority or a desire to become part of the First World as it was interpreted. Barba identified in the 70s a strong characteristic that defines third theatre: “The groups that I call Third Theatre do not belong to a lineage, to a theatrical tendency.

<sup>30</sup> Ian Watson, *Towards a Third Theatre*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. xvii

<sup>31</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Odin Week*, 2007

<sup>32</sup> for a review of critiques on third theatre see Ian Watson, *Towards a Third Theatre*, 1993

But they do all live in a situation of discrimination: personal or cultural, professional, economical or political.”<sup>33</sup> In this specific approach towards different styles of theatre, Barba rejects any connection between third theatre and ritual, another non-mainstream theatre practice that came up in the 60s; he even considers ritual theatre an imperialistic way of seeing the world.<sup>34</sup>

What unites all these groups that are representing third theatre is a search for a performance language that connects actors and spectators: “each [theatre company] defines its meaning and legacy by embodying them in a precise activity and through a distinct professional activity”.<sup>35</sup> This laborious activity is done outside centers of culture, mainly on the fringe; they are migrant companies, aware of the rejection that they can come across and courage to fight it back. This theatre is created by actors, directors, theatre workers that distance themselves from traditional forms of theatre but remain professionals. Third theatre is far from amateur theatre.

### ***Theatre as a family***

The importance of the director or teacher is a crucial one in a small company like Odin: he is considered an older brother or a father who is taking care of his weaker close relatives.<sup>36</sup> Eugenio Barba is trying to fit this type of roles through his various activities. We can look at Odin as being built as a traditional family with one *paterfamilias*:

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<sup>33</sup> Eugenio Barba, *The Floating Islands*, 1979, pp.160-161. Even if Ian Watson considers that a distance from this characteristic of third theatre in favor of an autonomous construction of meaning separated from surrounding culture, or exploration of a personal language of performance takes place (*Towards the Third Theatre*, 1993, pp.18-22), during Odin Week 2007, Eugenio Barba had insisted on this major characteristic that unites third theatre groups.

<sup>34</sup> Eugenio Barba, public discussion, Odin Week 2007

<sup>35</sup> Eugenio Barba, “The Third Theatre. A Legacy from Us to Ourselves” in *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 29, 1992, p.7

<sup>36</sup> see Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, London: Theatre Arts Book, 2002

Eugenio Barba. In this type of environment, to express your own personality as an actor is like a continuous walking a tight rope, and even if the proposed themes for work and performances sound liberating, the fact that one are restricted through authorial power of the director to an imposed narrow line of exploration is not very good news.

Odin actors do not see themselves as something out of the ordinary in the theatrical world; they don't want to be original, interesting or clever.<sup>37</sup> They consider each day important, like their last and try to do their job like it is the last thing that they do. Subsequently to this intention, they are guided by simple rules related to their small community and their way of working together. In being a participant in a project like Odin Week, several rules should be followed: not to be late, not to take drinks into the working room, to keep the theatre clean etc. By not following those simple rules, a strange effect takes place: "Eugenio gets mad at me, not you. Save me from Eugenio's wrath!" as Roberta Carreri puts it.<sup>38</sup>

Despite his obvious role of *paterfamilias*, Eugenio Barba surprisingly speaks about breaking up with what is familiar, with what we know already from our parents, to find our way out. Family, mother, father are all seen as wounds or dark sides that we carry and that we try to escape.<sup>39</sup> A new type of family emerges in this new style of living, by creating your own theatrical culture and history.

Odin Teatret has a history of over 40 years together, they always worked as a collective but we can especially identify a cultivation of individuality, and not a group culture. Some actors even talk of a "groupophobia".<sup>40</sup> There a few rules to be respected at

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<sup>37</sup> Julia Varley, during Odin Week, Holstebro, 2007

<sup>38</sup> Roberta Carreri during Odin Week, Holstebro, 2007

<sup>39</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Personal Interview*, Holstebro, 2007

<sup>40</sup> Iben Nagel Rassmussen, Odin Week, 2007

this company: to clean the theatre, to be punctual, everyone earns the same amount of money and they should keep as much of individualistic perspective as possible.<sup>41</sup> This emphasized individuality is considered to be the main reason for their continued, prolonged existence as a company: the idea of an oasis for misfits in a theatrical desert was emphasized by Barba on several occasions at Odin Week.

Observers can identify strong dissimilarities between Odin members, where Barba maintains his position of the unquestioned leader. “We argue, we don’t agree and that makes us a group.”<sup>42</sup> Even if they put an accent on their activity as an ensemble, there are strong individuals that impose their style in the work beyond the company and within performances. What actors appreciate in Barba’s attitude is the possibility for them to develop their “own principles, ideas, dreams, desires, and then put them together to express his own dream”.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Training***

Odin Teatret performers followed a process of training that was characterized by severity, individuality and continuity. Exercises and experiments with theatrical forms that were not fully understood by performers, connected with training for the sake of training were all new aspects unheard in the theatrical European environment at the beginning of 1960s, when Odin Teatret started its activity. When Barba started Odin Teatret, he had a group of young amateur actors with little or no training at all; most of them were rejected by acting schools. His experience as theatre director was also limited.

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<sup>41</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Odin Week*, 2007

<sup>42</sup> Julia Varley, *Odin Week*, 2007

<sup>43</sup> Roberta Carreri, work demonstration, *Odin Week*, 2007

He had worked only with Grotowski<sup>44</sup> for three and a half years, mainly observing and without understanding the language that Grotowski and actors were using, and he had spent some time in India studying kathakali.<sup>45</sup> Neither Barba nor the actors could afford to pay outside tutors for training and Barba decided that they had to rely on sharing their own experiences. Barba established what was eventually to become the company's practice by inviting the actors to share their own particular skills with each other.

One of the actors who had studied jazz ballet and gymnastics and another who had studied pantomime became the first teachers. Barba introduced acrobatic exercises based on the work of Grotowski, as seen in Poland. At this phase, Barba was also significantly influenced by the work of Stanislavsky<sup>46</sup> and Meyerhold<sup>47</sup> regarding training and encouraged his actors to read their work. Meyerhold's theories of biomechanics were to form an integral part of the training in the early days of Odin. Barba rejected the idea that the director has complete control over the actor<sup>48</sup>, in the line of Edward Gordon Craig's notion of the actor as *Uber Marionette*<sup>49</sup>, but has to transform abstract thinking into concrete answers, to give technical advice when necessary, not to tell actors what to think or feel but to be next to them as an observer and helper.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Grotowski, Jerzy (1933-1999) is a Polish director who founded The Theatre of Thirteen Rows that later became Theatre Laboratory. He was specifically interested in the development of the actor's creative energy. His work continued at Pontedera centre in Italy. For his influence on Barba see Jane Turner, *Eugenio Barba*, 2004

<sup>45</sup> Kathakali is a traditional form of dance drama from Kerala, in South-West India. See Eugenio Barba. *The Paper Canoe*, 1995

<sup>46</sup> Stanislavsky, Konstantin (1863-1938) is a Russian actor, director and teacher, who founded the Moscow Art Theatre with Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko in 1898. He developed a system for training actors that is still a major influence on the training of actors in Europe.

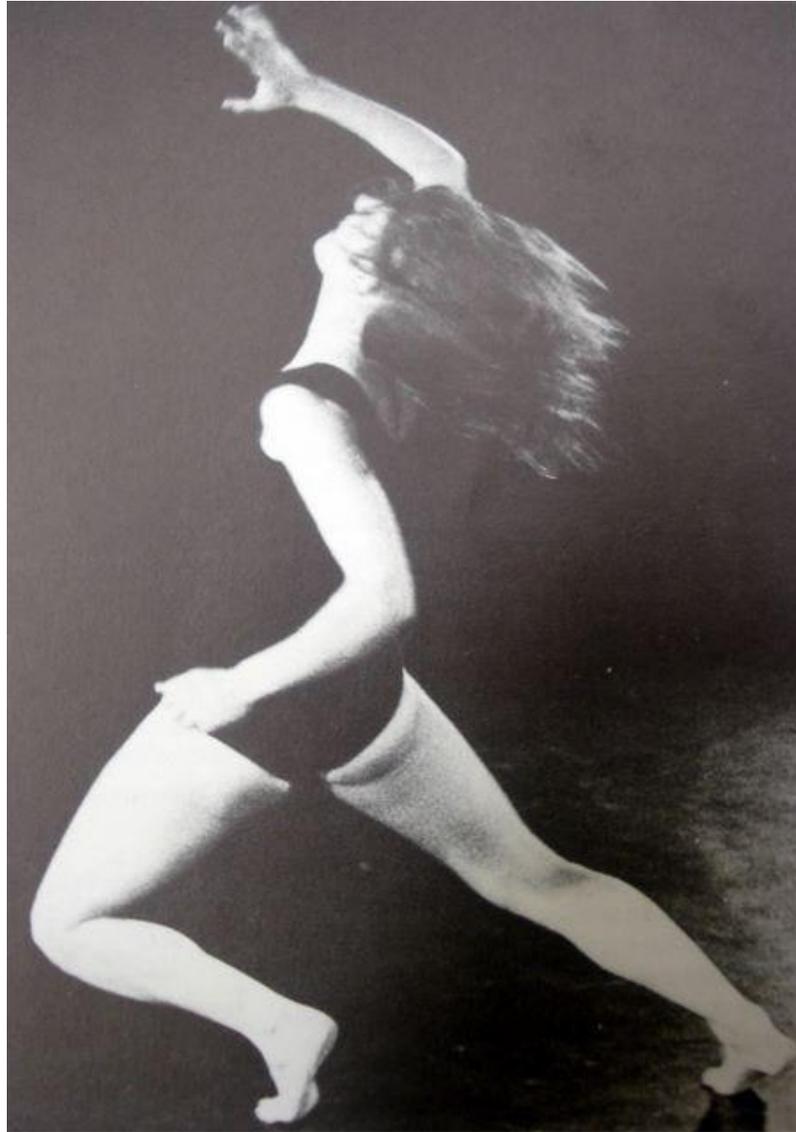
<sup>47</sup> Meyerhold, Vsevolod (1874-1940) is a Russian actor and director who worked alongside Stanislavsky and ran the Moscow Arts Studio. Worked against naturalism in acting and founded a system of training called bio-mechanics.

<sup>48</sup> Edward Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre*, London: Methuen, 1991

<sup>49</sup> Edward Gordon Craig, *A Vision of Theatre*, London: Routledge, 1998

<sup>50</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Odin Week*, 2007

Through a harsh work based on Meyerhold's theories, the small company developed a series of 'études'. These 'études' were short, non-verbal movement pieces which the actors developed through improvisation. After two years of intense practice, these 'études' were abandoned. This period of work was critical in the development of the group in that it established their training philosophy.



*Odin actor Iben Nagel Rasmussen during training*<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> extracted from Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds.), *A dictionary of theatre anthropology...*, p. 45

Training at the Odin is not only about acquiring skills. The skills are important in that they provide the basis for exploration. The training is mainly a form of research: the personal research of the actor, the research of the link between the performer's physical action and the inner process. These experiments led to investigations into other stimuli that might cause an action. Sound, interpersonal interaction, and the inner process are all combined, and the result is the discovery that each performer has an individual rhythm. For the actors of the Odin, this leads to the beginnings of individual work. Performers choose how they would use the exercises for themselves and developed their own physical montages. Exercises are used and transformed in order to fit very particular individual needs of distinct actors and their elements can be recognized as coming from clowning, mime, commedia dell' arte, political theatre, kabuki, Beijing opera, vocal music from all over the world, dance-theatre etc. Barba considers exercises as similar to bricks that can be used to build whatever we want; they serve the theatrical context in which they are used.<sup>52</sup> The method, exercise or style of performing has no value in itself but it can become relevant in the theatrical elaborated process through its exploration, its embodiment or through actor's mastery.

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<sup>52</sup> see Jane Turner, *Eugenio Barba*, p.5



*Odin actor Torgeir Wethal during training*<sup>53</sup>

The actors work on balancing opposing tensions in the body, they worked on using different centers of gravity and using different alignments of the spine. The most significant aspect to arise from this is the repetition of actions. This repetition of actions is quite an unfamiliar concept to Occidental performers who are only used to repeating words and for whom the emphasis is on the character and not on the actor who performs the character.<sup>54</sup> Certain bodily tensions are searched through training, special ways of moving, vocalizing, making contact and gestures are used in searching for a non-ordinary body that is able to perform on stage. An unusual way of using the body can be learned. The danger in training by repetition is appearance of mannerisms in the actor's work.

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<sup>53</sup> extracted from Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds.), *A dictionary of theatre anthropology...* p. 253

<sup>54</sup> for more details on training see Barba and Savarese, *A dictionary...* 1995

Jane Turner analyses in her study<sup>55</sup> how during training the emphasis is on the quality of the action and not its simple repetition: this quality makes the action real, even if its basis is in fiction. A real action makes the actor react with her whole body to the real action of her partner. If the action is not precise, clear and faultless indicated then the other actor cannot react and then the performance cannot be real.



*Iben Nagel Rasmussen during training*<sup>56</sup>

Performers are fixing their moves and choreograph them. This technique can dull an actor's presence and lead to a dull performance. If the technique is used like body armor, something necessary in order to hide her vulnerability, the story that is told through movement and the actions are monotonous and uninteresting. The purpose of

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<sup>55</sup> see Jane Turner, *Eugenio Barba*, pp.25-31

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*p.51, photography by Tony D'Urso

controlling technique is to melt this body armor and to penetrate it, to find real responses to impulses. This sense of alertness demanded by actors as ‘decided bodies’.<sup>57</sup> Alertness between actors is transmitted also during performance to spectators that enter in a dialogue of reactions with the actors on stage.

Training at the Odin is an ongoing process of discovery for the performers and for Barba. Through observing the training, and through his personal research, Barba has developed his theories of pre-expressivity, the dilated body, extra daily technique and the balance of oppositions. I will explore more deeply the concept of dilated body in my next chapter.

### ***Rehearsals***

At Odin there is a clear distinction between training and rehearsals, in the line of Meyerhold and Grotowski, even if actors participate in both activities and even if there is a conceptualization of both activities, Eugenio Barba and his company didn’t resolve the issue of how some actors that are not very good performers are very good in training and how some very good actors during performances are not doing so well in training.<sup>58</sup> Even if it appears that there is no direct connection between training and performing, there is an emphasis on training in relation to potential scenic presence that is used extensively during rehearsals and performance with spectators. Scenic presence is induced through exercises that employ the entire body of the actor.

For the actors of the Odin, the beginning of a rehearsal is when Barba presents a theme and the actors begin to improvise and use the theme as an unambiguous

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<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p.27

<sup>58</sup> Barba discussed this issue in one session of Odin Week, 2007, without coming with a clear answer on the issue, but even complicating it even more by speaking how actors that are very good in training but bad in performing become very good in performing and bad in training and vice versa during the years.

framework. The initial improvisations are physical, and in the early productions these improvisations were collective, while in later productions they became individual. Improvisation is a vital tool for construction of performances at Odin and is used to generate new material in preparing all Odin performances. Improvisations do not have a theme that is directly connected to the future performance but focus on emblematic images that can be used further. Barba is searching for improvisations that give actors the necessary impulses for live actions and direct him indirectly to the theme of the performance. It is important to note that the physical and vocal improvisations are always separated and are only combined at a much later stage in the rehearsal process.

In Odin practice, the director has to be interested in the process and depends on what actors propose. Barba collects materials that are related to the central theme that he wants to explore in the new production. This method is opposed to the work of several mainstream directors such as Robert Wilson,<sup>59</sup> who is well known for his plain formalist vision of the performance before any rehearsals begun. At Odin the way to performance is marked by the performance materials provided by the actors. During rehearsals, there is a permanent negotiation between director and actors, where the director protects the performance text but not by the means that it was constructed by actors' materials. The new structure based on several events that apparently have no connection needs to have coherence for the spectator: the performance text, made up of several parts provided by the performers, is put in a comprehensible context that is provided by the director.

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<sup>59</sup> Robert Wilson (1941-) is an acclaimed American avant-garde stage director and playwright who has also worked as a choreographer, performer, painter, sculptor, video artist, and sound and lighting designer. Wilson is known for pushing the boundaries of theatre and his works are noted for their austere style, very slow movement, and often extreme scale in space or in time.

In *Towards a Third Theatre*, Ian Watson commented on Odin rehearsals based on text: 'In this deconstruction/reconstruction approach to dramaturgy, the script is a mere catalyst for the performance text rather than a detailed map it must follow... The performance text is thus neither a staged version of the original dramatic text nor a piece created entirely from improvisation without regard to the writer's original script. It is a product of the meeting between the dramatic text, the director, and the actors.'<sup>60</sup>

This perspective on the performance is empowering for the actors, in the first place, and also for the relationship between spectators and performers. Actors have a bigger freedom to express their own perceptions and experiences and the production is highly connected to their own standpoints, in contrast to repertory theatre practices.

In Odin there are no rules attached to the process of developing a performance text. There are, however, procedures that have evolved from the training work. Before Barba begins rehearsals on a production, he collects together material based on a theme that he wishes to investigate. This material can be in the form of stories, poems, songs, short movie sequences, photographs, illustrations, items from magazines or newspapers, or anything that will act as a catalyst for improvisation. Basically, Barba researches his theme carefully and extensively before beginning rehearsals.

The first phase in the rehearsal process is physical. The actors work individually on physical improvisations based on a theme given by Barba. His reasoning behind the individual work at this stage is that in collective improvisations actors become concerned more with interaction than the theme itself. The actors, observed by Barba, that takes the role of the spectator, create short physical pieces based on the imposed theme and Barba

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<sup>60</sup> Ian Watson, *Towards a Third Theatre*, p.76

suggests changes and refines from the outside. The actors continually refine these individual improvisations until they can repeat exactly without any variation.

Barba calls this refining of the improvisations *registering*. After a period of time, each actor has a repertoire of improvisations which is called personal *physical score*.<sup>61</sup> During this period, which can last for months, of developing the composition improvisations other areas of the performance text begin to be developed. Character, music and vocal material are also researched and improvised. Odin actors develop characters from the physical and vocal improvisation work and these types of characters do not have a psychological background. Odin characters are usually larger than life and do not have a basis in realism.

The development of the vocal text is disconnected from the development of the physical text. The actors decide to use parts of text from the material proposed by Barba for improvisations and sometimes bring in their own parts of text significant to the theme. The actors' effort used on the text is not based on discovering its logic; it is however, a process of noticing its melodious and rhythmic qualities. Besides the work on the vocal text, the actors work with their musical instruments and with songs, this component has an important part in the productions.

The process of constructing a performance involves a large number of stimuli that create a score. In fixing the score for performance, actors repeat it accurately each time with full energy and for this purpose they need a means where all associations, images, music and actions can be grouped and memorized: this is what they call the *subscore*.<sup>62</sup> The exact correlation between the subscore and the performance itself as it is presented to

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<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 76-107

<sup>62</sup> for more information on this element see Jane Turner, *Eugenio Barba*, 2004, pp. 31-41

spectators can be even inexistent. The subscore is usually not known even by other actors on stage or by the director; it is highly personal to the actor and it doesn't have a rational logic, it is similar to dreams, coherent only for the actor in the moment of acting. The process of fixing the score is similar to the process through which a dancer choreographs her movements, it demands a dilation of outer and intern physical and mental energy and is coined as the process of *embodying the score*. This term is used extensively by Barba and Odin actors to address a certain bodymind epistemology. Jane Turner defines embodiment as ability "to give expression to, or give tangible or visible form to, something abstract and this is precisely what the actor is doing to their subscore".<sup>63</sup>

By fixing the subscore through rehearsals, the performance score is set for stage representation. In this process the performer works to escape merely representing himself or herself: "a man is condemned to resemble a man, the body imitating itself"<sup>64</sup> and this social denunciation is to be escaped during performance. This poor imitation is not sufficient to be considered art or as Roberta Carreri told me in an interview: "No one wants to see Roberta, they will not pay for that. They want *Judith!*"<sup>65</sup> Scenic presence is a craft to dilate the everyday behavior into something that surpasses blind imitation into theatrical act that subverts and resists the starting point.

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<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37

<sup>64</sup> Eugenio Barba. *The Paper Canoe*, 1995, p.30

<sup>65</sup> Roberta Carreri, Personal Interview, Denmark: Odin Teatret, 2007

## ***Montage***

The next phase in the rehearsal is the combining of the individual physical, vocal and musical improvisations. This phase is identified as *the montage*. Through improvisation, images are composed spontaneously and can be later developed into a montage. Rather than talking about the improvisation, working and playing spontaneously is encouraged during this phase. The actor's imaginative internal stories help her to recall the score or external actions with precision and are a safe and sound way to fix images coming from improvisation. Even if the director changes the external context of montage, the actor keeps the actions accurate, because the internal story remains unchanged. When the actor presents a sequence of movements that has an internal story, the director can ask for the same actions to be performed but in a different setting such as sunny day in the desert, during a storm, as you try to communicate to someone far away from you, as you are trying to find a wall behind you, as you try not to be caught moving etc. Even if the action is modified and maybe it won't resemble the original score, the internal story that is inaccessible to the director or the spectator will remain untouched. If this internal story is fixed with its score of actions, it can be colored in various and unusual ways.

The montage phase begins with combining together physical improvisations. After connecting the physical elements, Barba then matches the vocal parts to different scenes. The vocal parts are not linked to the scenes because of their textuality, but because of their musical association with the theme. Barba's reasoning behind the separation of the physical and vocal in training and rehearsal has its result at this stage. In creating the montage neither the physical nor the vocal has dominance over the other. Barba uses the

metaphor of perfume<sup>66</sup> to show how actors' scores are put together and how the final performance takes shape: a perfume is made up over eighty ingredients, some smell bad, some do not smell, some are too strong, but together they create a perfume. The process of mixing demands detailed and precise work in order to synchronize all ingredients. After a long time, the physical, vocal and musical scores have been formed together into what has become the performance text. At this stage it is still considered to be work in progress and is shown as such to an audience. Comments from spectators are taken into consideration. Together with Barba's comments and other observations coming from persons close to Odin, they bring more changes in the performance. This part of preparing performances is innovating and expresses a form of a freer artistically creative process.

Barba's rejection of realism, linear narrative and dominance of a pre-written text has directed Odin to this style of production. A director is supposed to have the ability to translate abstract thinking in concrete answers.<sup>67</sup> It is his rejection of what he terms the 'artificiality and denial of organic life' that dominates Western theatre that has led him to create performance texts based on action rather than psychological motivation. The motivation for this method is connected to the fact that he wanted to create performance texts that mirror the 'dynamics of the creative process'.<sup>68</sup> The montage of the director puts together actions that are coming from performance scores prepared by actors.

The performance has the role to question the experience of the spectator. One way is to disrupt the viewing position of the spectator, especially in performances where many things happen simultaneously, and forcing the spectator to create her own montage

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<sup>66</sup> in Jane Turner, *Eugenio Barba*, 1995, p.38

<sup>67</sup> Eugenio Barba, discussion at Odin Week, April 2007

<sup>68</sup> Ian Watson, *Towards the Third Theatre*, 1993, p.81

by choosing what they focus their attention on. Simultaneity on stage is a special technique used methodically by Odin and occurs when actors represent several things at the same time and they take up different fictional spaces and different parts of the story within the same performance.<sup>69</sup> Another technique of disrupting the traditional viewing position during the performance is by creating a map of the stage, where every part represents a part of the character, where objects have a very important and their usage, related to the space has the effect of disorientating and making spectators question what they see on stage. This technique is illustrated in the solo performance *Judith* that I analyze later.

### ***Odin Representations***

According to Peggy Phelan, representation follows two laws: it always communicates more than it intends and it is never totalizing.<sup>70</sup> The excess of meaning provided also by Odin performances creates a supplement that makes possible multiple and resisting readings and also numerous gaps and ruptures that are to be figured out by the spectator. As Barba pointed out in one session<sup>71</sup>, Odin is like a Swedish buffet where you can eat as much as you can and there are still dishes that you didn't try.

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<sup>69</sup> Jane Turner, *Eugenio Barba*, 2004, p.34

<sup>70</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the politics of performance*, 1993, p.2

<sup>71</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Odin Week*, 2007



*Odin Teatret's street performance*<sup>72</sup>

In Odin representations, actors are omnipotent, they are strongly working on the illusion that they can be everywhere and anywhere, invisible to the audience but always present. In this play of presence, they work together as a functional mechanism in the machine of performance. This scenic approach highly influenced the aesthetical and stage design decisions, lighting and sound. For example, a performer's body can be illuminated like a Rembrandt painting and special light design allows actors to move in darkness as invisible characters. Stage designers are rarely involved in productions: Odin's scenography is always efficient, made on the ideas coming from actors during improvisation or Eugenio Barba's montage, it is functionalist, easy to transport, set up

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<sup>72</sup> extracted from Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds.), *A dictionary of theatre anthropology...*, p. 72

and dismantle. Their limit for setting up a show is eight hours and they rarely broke this rule.<sup>73</sup>



*Odin actors Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Tom Fjordefalk and Else Marie Laukvik<sup>74</sup>*

Performances do not exist in themselves, they are interactions: Odin performances are in a permanent state of flux, they are mobile and Barba usually makes changes in order to develop them. Different versions of the same performance or reappearance of characters from dead performances are common practices in Odin Teatret. Theatre practice influences what spectators finally see on stage. How an approach like dilated body is related to Odin performance will be explored in the next chapter.

<sup>73</sup> for more details on how shows are organized see Jane Turner, *Eugenio Barba*, 2004

<sup>74</sup> extracted from Eugenio Barba, *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt*, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 1999, p.280

### part three: dilated body – constructing resistance

“So she sat on, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland, though she knew she had but to open them again, and all would change to dull reality.”<sup>75</sup>

In Barba’s understanding, a *body-in-life* dilates the presence of the actor and also the perception of the spectator.<sup>76</sup> A body-in-life doesn’t name something that **is**, but something that is *there* in front of us as spectators, a presence and tensions that come to the surface in the performer, a process through which the unexpected becomes visible. “The dilated body is a hot body”,<sup>77</sup> a body that glows. During the performance, feeling and emotion are only consequences for both performer and spectator. How are actors’ dilated bodies forms of liberation through control and how can inscribing docility on bodies be seen as a process of resistance in special cases such as theatre practice?

Barba explains that “terminology is taken from practice”<sup>78</sup>, and even if Odin Teatret focuses mainly on transmitting knowledge through workshops and practical work demonstrations, they depend on written word in order to keep their theatre practice coherent. Bodies and communication without words are vehicles of transmitting embodied knowledge; words have appeared from practice that was “observed and recorded in fragments of notes written on paper”<sup>79</sup>. All these fragments built a canoe for Barba’s writing. This thesis that is mainly a reinterpretation of Barba’s text is also

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<sup>75</sup> Lewis Carroll, “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”, p. 110

<sup>76</sup> Barba’s term used to differentiate it from an alive body, in Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds.), *A dictionary of theatre anthropology*, 1995

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, p.54

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, p.139

<sup>79</sup> Jane Turner, *Eugenio Barba*, 2004, p. 72

drifting us further from practice itself. In my conclusions, when this work is done, I try to construct an argument for a return to practice.

### ***Dilating the body at Odin Teatret***

The concept of dilated body is based on a continuous work of the actor on the reduction and amplification of the actions typical of daily behavior. Barba encourages practitioners not to take the analysis of dilated body as a good-for-all- purposes theory but as a reason to find their own way, to try new exercises and trainings, to reflect on what they can find, to test Odin terms and see how they can work if they work and constantly adapt them to specific contexts.<sup>80</sup> When he writes on dilation as a possible theory, Barba considers daily behavior to be based on functionality and “economy of power”<sup>81</sup> and relationship between used energy and obtained result, while the performer’s extra-daily behavior that appears in each action, no matter how small, is based on waste, on excess.

A well-known technique that is constantly used by Odin performers is the beginning of an action in the opposite direction that the action is finally guided. This practice of oppositions is central to the dilated body and it actually recreates a condition that appears in daily life activities that demand a certain amount of energy to be accomplished: “before striking a blow, one draws one’s arm back; before jumping, one bends one’s knees; before springing forward, one leans backwards: *reculer pour mieux sauter*”.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Jane Turner, *Eugenio Barba*, 2004, pp. 71-74

<sup>81</sup> Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds.), *A dictionary of theatre anthropology...* p.55

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p.57



*Julia Varley expresses the practice of oppositions in a work demonstration*<sup>83</sup>

In extra-daily life activity, this type of behavior is applied even to the smallest action as main means to be used by the performer in order to dilate her presence on stage. Barba calls this action *the negation principle*: before starting an action, the actor negates it by executing its complementary opposite. This process of disintegration and deconstruction prepares the leap towards the result; it represents a pre-condition in construction. This moment of negation seems to go against what is familiar in Western thought in search for a result: it doesn't determine a new orientation but it represents a voluntarily disorientation which demand all the energy of the researcher, performer, director, artist, to be put into motion. Her senses become sharper in this process that Barba compares to a walk in the dark.<sup>84</sup> The question of "what does what I do *mean*?" is not rewarding at this stage of negation of action or creative pre-condition. What is

<sup>83</sup> extracted from Jane Turner, *Eugenio Barba*, 2004, p.53

<sup>84</sup> Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds.), *A dictionary of theatre anthropology...* p.58

significant at this point is not the meaning of the action but the precision of it, which prepares the terrain for an unexpected meaning that can explode in the next phase. Barba observes a fetishistic obsession for meaning for many theatre artists, based especially on the common project that a performance and beginning of a result are to be achieved. In many discussions, meaning in performance and training appears as something that should not concern the actor or director, but as an opened possibility, while they focus on the process of constructing the performance or live action.

An action is associated with the character that is interpreted by the actor; it is embedded by a very precise value: it is connected to specific images and understandings of that character. If the meaning of the action is considered unsuitable or inexplicable because of the context in which the action is placed or the construction of the character, the actor or the director drops or forgets the action fragment. The connection between action and its contextualized meaning is seen as indissoluble in mainstream theatre.

Even if the initial context is transformed, Barba explains how the reaction of an actor that is encouraged to keep her action unchanged is a backlash: the actor feels that she is treated as inert body, that she is exploited by the director. The meaning of the action and not its energy is considered central. This pre-conceived idea appears also in directors' understanding of theatre practice and it tends to characterize the mainstream theatre: an image or a sequence of images obeys only one simple dramatic logic, and can only transmit a specific sense.

To this type of approach, Barba proposes a resistance position: the negation of action that points to the opposite direction, freeing the actor, the spectator and the director from a pre-established order, from the belief in the rational result that one wants to

obtain. Through this process, the whole point of departure is transformed by its opposite. By leaping from one context to another, new expressive potentialities are developed.

Training can lead the performer to a new behavior, a new way of moving, of acting and reacting, to new skills.

Barba rejects dialectics as a construction out of willingness to control forces, as a learned way of acting and thinking. He is searching for asymmetry, through paradoxical means, where the work of art is understood as an artificial effort that has a coherent incoherence. The search for oppositions and differences contradicts the universal search for unity or wholeness. The possibility for dilating the body stands in intensity of differences between the performer's way of seeing and the spectator's way of seeing, between the actor and the director and also in the method of search for the relationship between the various forces that are into question.<sup>85</sup> The living horse on stage is one of the most common examples of dilation used by Barba: as a child, seeing a real horse on stage that was pulling a carriage offered a strong disturbance in what was expected from a realist performance and a feeling of ambiguity. This example accentuates the disorientation and a dilation of senses for the spectator. "Because of this sudden interference from another world, the uniform veil of the stage seemed torn before my eyes."<sup>86</sup>

Dilation to the actor's presence and spectator's perception corresponds also to a dilation of the plot, the story or the situation that is represented. Extra-daily behavior can be connected also to the way that the story is approached. Through unexpected changes in direction, breakages in the linear development of the text, composing the action

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<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p. 60

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, p. 61

through montage and interweaving two or more simultaneous actions, dilation comes into play in the relation between the text and the construction of the performance, when they can become oppositions that are used together.

Dilation is applied to the level of dramaturgy in performance practice at Odin Teatret, where actors can choose their characters from different stories or they can adapt events and vicissitudes. Those new stories are added to director's narration and become the basis for the performance.<sup>87</sup> Those apparent unrelated elements, associations and images can attain unity and create coherence in Barba's view through a process of working as a whole group that follows a different logic: a logic in motion, a logic related to the improvisation as the point of departure.

### ***Thinking with the body***

A way of moving in space denotes a way of thinking: what Barba calls "the motion of thought stripped naked".<sup>88</sup> Although the body of the actor is the only means of expression in live performance, the body and self consciously constructed system of training towards performance is variable since both are culturally, socio-economically and historically specific. How do diverse theories of acting as form of embodiment relate to different paradigms of body, body-mind relationship and body awareness developed?

Acting marks the emergence of the subject or bodily identity. The coherence of bodily identity masks the power relations that invest it and create it and the tension between subjectivity and embodied experience is blurred in "thinking with the body".<sup>89</sup>

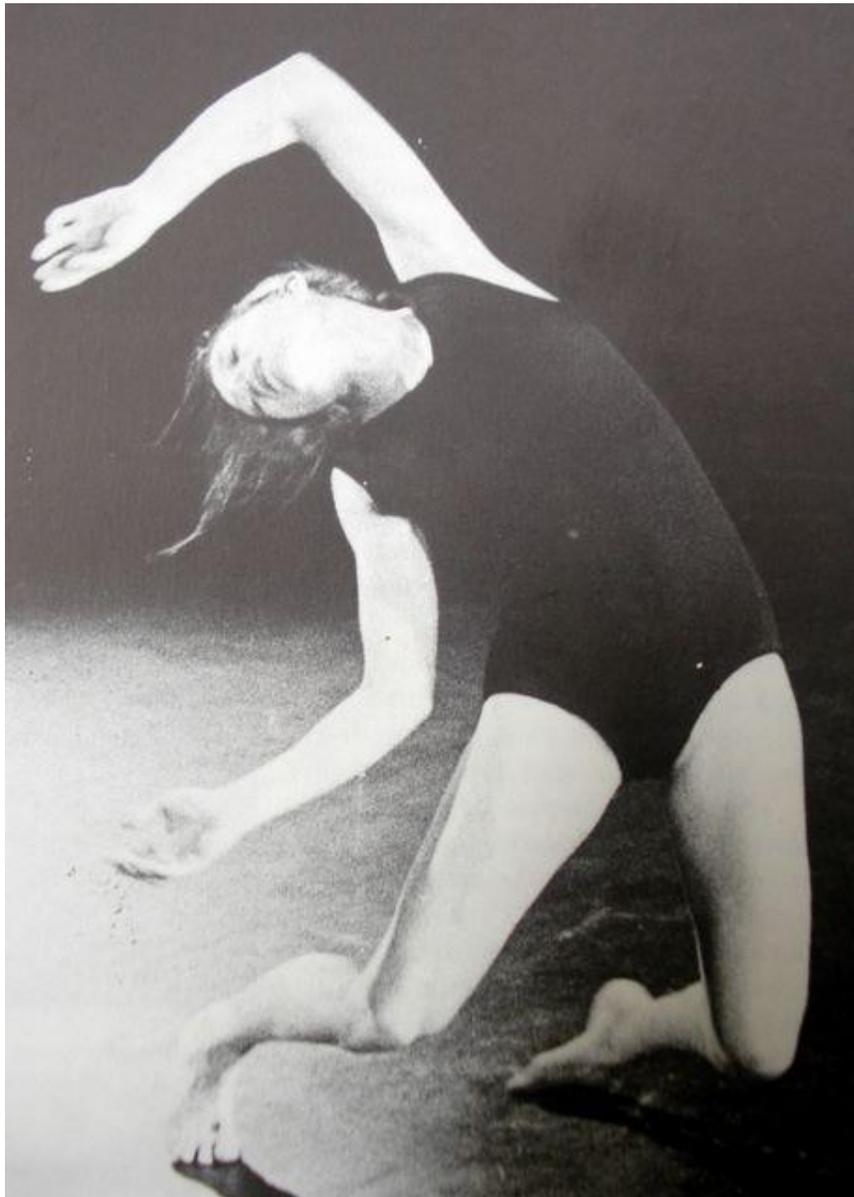
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<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 62-63

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, p. 55

<sup>89</sup> Phillip B. Zarrilli (ed.), *Acting (re)considered: a theoretical and practical guide*, London, New York : Routledge, 2002

An actor trained mainly through the body is able to overcome the connection between imagination and image. The image becomes palpable through the body of the actor (in Barba's theory this is possible through dilation<sup>90</sup>): the physical aspect to thought, creating thoughts with the body.



*Iben Nagel Rasmussen during training<sup>91</sup>*

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<sup>90</sup> This theory is explained extensively in Barba and Savarese (eds), *A dictionary...* 1995

<sup>91</sup> extracted from Barba and Savarese (eds), *A dictionary...* 1995 p.45

Dilated body can be understood also as a disappearance of the body, a body burning, where the spectator can see only impulses and not materiality: an elimination of the resistance of the body to a process where the inner impulse of the actor becomes an outer reaction on stage. During training, one of Odin actors was saying: “Don’t let your body die! Show it is alive! Don’t wait on one position!”; he was encouraging trainees to create relations and stories, to use impulses to keep their bodies alive, to put more life in their eyes and don’t think too much and “just do it”.<sup>92</sup> This process is named by Grotowski as *via negativa* and is based on the elimination of blocks and not on a collection of skills; the actor is stripped by her *bag of tricks* in the process.<sup>93</sup> Impulses are dilated through artificial construction of systems of signs and elimination of natural behavior which obscures them. Another technique followed by Odin actors to reveal hidden energies is contradiction between gesture and voice, voice and word, word and thought, will and action etc., where *via negativa* is also present.

### ***Docile body***

All modes of disciplining and cultivating the body exemplify how power touches people’s lives through social and cultural practices more than through centralized state organizations or systems of belief in Foucaultian thought. Power is diffused at the ‘capillary’ level in the micropolitics of everyday life<sup>94</sup>. Many types of bodies on stage are fashioned by different environments and expectations that societies have of their member’s bodies. Particular modes of training and particular genres of performance demand explicit bodies fashioned in a specific environment for a particular set of

<sup>92</sup> Jan Ferlov, during training, Odin Week 2007

<sup>93</sup> See Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, London: Methuen, 1969

<sup>94</sup> Michel Foucault, “Docile Bodies”, in *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan, trans., London: Penguin, 1975

performative expectations. Acting, like any other technique of disciplining the body such as aerobics, weight training, contact improvisation etc., might be considered technologies of the body in Foucault's sense, as a practice through which actors develop knowledge about themselves. In this process, subjectivities are produced and are subjects of inquiry and not the premises or starting points. The techniques which constitute a particular technology of the body cannot be divorced from the discourses and assumptions which inform how that set of techniques is understood and/or represented<sup>95</sup>.

The body of an actor is constructed as "object and target of power", that body "is manipulated, shaped, trained, obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its forces"<sup>96</sup>. The training of the body of the actor has as target the possibility of subjection, usage, transformation and improvement of the technique and also the body itself. The director or the trainer has the possibility to impose restrictions, limitations or obligations on the body of the actor. Craig's *Uber marionette* can be a prototype: it needs long exercises and a better training<sup>97</sup>. The work on the body is always individual, the director exercises a subtle coercion, she obtains "holds at the level of mechanism itself - movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body"<sup>98</sup>. This control implies constant coercion, permanent supervision over the activity of the body of the actor, and also implies a codification related to space, time and movement. These methods, which are extensively explored by Barba, make possible a meticulous control over bodies and are wide-ranging formulas of domination. The purpose of control

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<sup>95</sup> Zarrili, *Acting (re)considered* 2002: p.87, Foucault, *Docile Bodies...* 1975

<sup>96</sup> Foucault, *Docile Bodies...* 1975: p.136

<sup>97</sup> Edward Gordon Craig, *A Vision of Theatre*, 1998

<sup>98</sup> Foucault, *Docile Bodies...* 1975: p.137

is not only an increase in skills and an extension of its possibilities, but to make the body well-trained and more useful in the machine of performance<sup>99</sup>.

Mechanics of power defines how the director has a hold over others' bodies, not only that those bodies can do what she wishes but they can operate as she wishes with the demanded speed, techniques and efficiency that one determines. This discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, docile bodies. Power is dissociated from the body, it is transformed into aptitude or capacity that can be increased, through this process, the course of energy or power that can result is reversed and becomes a relation of authoritarian subjection. Discipline makes the connection between increased aptitude and increased domination and is not only an art of distributing bodies but also to compose forces in order to obtain an efficient machine<sup>100</sup>. The individual body becomes an element that can be placed, moved or articulated on others.

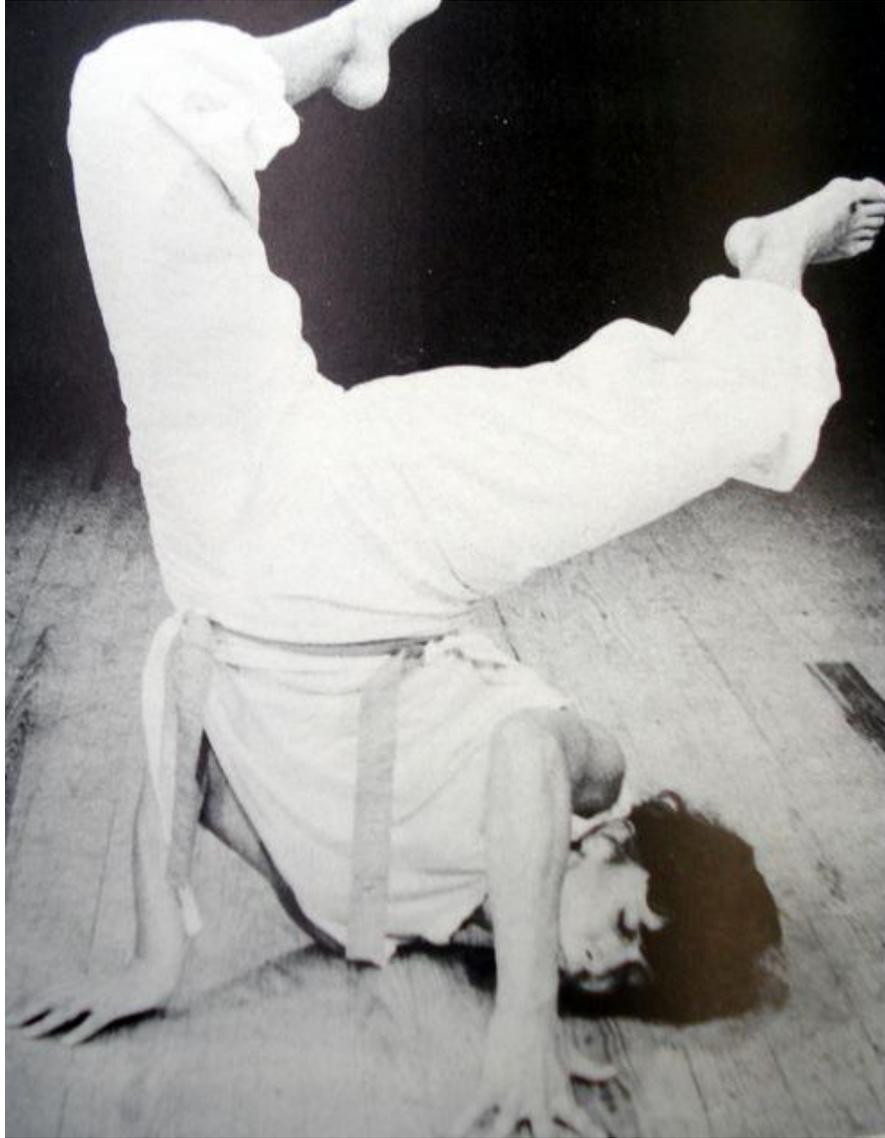
The docile body is mechanical by being composed of solid and assigned movements; the purpose is a disciplinary perfection. This body is predisposed to specified operations, with a clear order, stages, internal conditions, and constituted parts. Authority manipulates this type of body through exercises, useful trainings and not through any rational mechanics. "Exercises are connected to other individuals or to specific type of itinerary in order to make possible a perpetual characterization of the individual. Exercises assure in the form of continuity and constraint, a growth, an observation or a qualification."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Barba and Savarese, *A dictionary...* 1995

<sup>100</sup> Foucault, *Docile Bodies...*1975: p.164

<sup>101</sup> Foucault, *Docile Bodies...*1975:161



*Iben Nagel Rasmussen during training*<sup>102</sup>

What I estimate in the concept of *dilated body* is the possibility for liberation and change that can be accomplished through body control and discipline in the sense of apparently useless and illogical excess and waste of energy in action, following Susan

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<sup>102</sup> extracted from Eugenio Barba, *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt*, 1999, p.102

Bordo's anticipations when she analyses Foucault's theories on the docile body<sup>103</sup>. The manipulation has to be calculated and all its elements, gestures and behaviors are to be explored, broken down and rearranged in convenient positions for "artistic" reasons.

### ***Resisting docility***

In Foucault's analysis, the body is the object, target and instrument of power; it is the ground where power games are played. The focus is on the struggle for control of power over a materiality that is dangerous to it, precisely because is unpredictable and able to be used in various and inestimable ways, according to infinitely changeable cultural milieus. Power does not control the subject through systems of ideas or through coercive force, rather it examines, reviews, supervises, observes, measures body's behavior and interaction in order to produce knowledge. It punishes those resistant to its regulations and norms, it extracts information from its punitive methods and uses this information to create new modes of control, new forms of observation, new regimes of power-knowledge and new sites of resistance.<sup>104</sup> In materialist feminist terms, it is highly problematic to see the body as a blank page, as a neutral locus or as a signifier for the inscription of a text: one and the same message, inscribed on two different bodies in same contexts does not mean the same thing or result in the same text. This is one of Barba's main questions that he tries to answer through the concept of *dilated body*: how can two similar actors that are doing the exact same movements on the same stage and with same costumes can be so different?

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<sup>103</sup> Susan Bordo. "Feminism, Foucault, and the Politics of the Body" in Caroline Ramazanoglu. *Up Against Foucault*. Routledge, 1993

<sup>104</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile bodies : toward a corporeal feminism*, Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 145-159

Through disciplinary normalization, power utilizes and produces the subject's desires and pleasures in order to create knowledge and truths which may provide more refined, improved and efficient techniques for surveillance and control of bodies in what Grosz calls "a spiral of power-knowledge-pleasure". Body is that materiality that is represented in Foucaultian terms as a medium through which knowledge operates and functions. Barba proposes a type of bodily control that escapes normalization and creates alternative knowledge that focuses on materiality itself. In Nietzsche's understanding, the very formation of knowledge is the unrecognized product of bodies: "our lust for knowledge of nature is a means through which the body desires to perfect itself".<sup>105</sup>

Bodies are the agents of knowledge, but physiological aspects are mistaken for their conceptual, moral or intellectual effects. In my view, Barba proposes exactly this return to a Nietzschean vision of body as the agent and active cause of knowledge, in contrast to Foucault's concept of body as a field of power play, where knowledge and resistance are exercised. Foucault recognizes the body as potentially resistant but without any challenge to a fundamentally passive inertia whose internal features and forces are irrelevant to the *almighty-like* functioning of power. What kind of resistance can we possibly address from this perspective? In Foucault's thought, the body itself functions almost as a *black box*, it is acted upon, it is inscribed, examined, information is extracted from it, and disciplinary regimes are forced on it. What we can acknowledge here, in a manner of the feminist critique on Foucault, is a lack of interest in composition, constitution, or internal functioning of the body.<sup>106</sup> But still, materiality makes resistance possible and potential opposition to power's order. This resistance is only another form of passivity, one that

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<sup>105</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, New York: Vintage Books, 1968, p.358

<sup>106</sup> for more critique on Foucault's superficial reading of the body see Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile bodies...* 1994

can be mobilized merely in harmony with interests of power or in different forms of subversion, depending on strategic positions.

Nietzsche understands the body as a site for departure for the will of power, a strongly energetic setting for all cultural construction and this concept can be closer to my own understanding of *dilated body*. The body's forces are the site for resistance precisely because of their force and energy, not simple because of location and insubordination. While Foucault strips corporeality of its multiplicity of forces, Nietzsche's bodies are acknowledged to create a memory and this is possible exactly because of the body's forces. This is closely the role of Antigone's shadow that is impossible to be erased with the knife by the Grand Inquisitor, the keeper of the law in Barba's performance *The Gospel According to Oxyrhyncus*. As Barba writes: "It is easy to kill bodies, very easy, but some bodies leave shadows, as if their lives were so loaded with energy that they remain imprinted on history. Even if physically they have vanished, their shadows are there to darken the beautiful landscape".<sup>107</sup>

The social inscription of corporeal surfaces is not a concept to be abandoned, but the metaphors related to it must be reconfigured and rethought, their history and subtleties made clear in order to get something of insight or strategic value in those texts. It appears to me that this is a postmodern feminist project of rereading Foucault guided by an interest in questioning, exposing, or even dismantling those cultural and social constructions and assumptions that governed also traditional gender roles, stagings of the body, and gender performance.

If in the patriarchal system of signs and of representations, "women do not have the cultural mechanisms of meaning to construct themselves as the subject rather than as the

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<sup>107</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Theatre: solitude, craft, revolt*, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 1999, p.240

object of performance”, Odin’s one-woman-shows challenge this system by the establishment of an actual woman as a speaking subject, a phenomenon that the theatrical system denies. The traditional audience for theatre is assumed to be the male subject and the woman on stage “a kind of cultural courtesan”,<sup>108</sup> an objectified site of fulfillment of desire.

Physical performance can offer the possibility for women to escape what Julia Kristeva has called the “symbolic logical and discursive language of the father”, a male construction, dominated by the operation of logic and abstraction and reflecting the interests of patriarchy.<sup>109</sup> The utilization of dilated bodies in performance can provide an alternative to the symbolic order of language itself by encouraging performers and spectators to think critically about the whole apparatus of representation, including the subject/object relation.

### ***Making a show***

When I asked Eugenio Barba what is the relation between technique and aesthetics in his performances he answered me very fast, without even a glimpse: “There is no aesthetics or at least I do not know what it is”. From this point of view he was following his mentor, Jerzy Grotowsky: productions do not come out of aesthetic postulates but from practical discoveries and use of theatrical principles for acting, where each technique leads to certain aesthetic representations. Barba and the Odin have developed their own language to deal with aesthetics, forms and process. One example is what Barba calls the *pre-expressive*. This term refers to the level of performance which makes

<sup>108</sup> Sue Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, London: Routledge, 1988, p.120

<sup>109</sup> Jeanelle Laillou Savona, “French Feminism and Theatre: an Introduction” in *Modern Drama* no.27, 1984

the performer seem alive on-stage, the over-studied presence of actor on stage. The pre-expressivity exists prior to the creation of plot, character, situation or setting. Recognizable expressivity is laid on top of the pre-expressive, especially in codified performance forms; i.e. Kabuki or Noh. Pre-expressive techniques require a greater effort to be achieved: they are what Barba calls extra-daily techniques.

Constant referrals to *sats* appear during rehearsals, a Norwegian word describing the moment just prior to an action when the performer's energy and concentration are focused on the action that is about to occur. This concept is related to Grotowski's system of training, where it is called *impulse to action*.<sup>110</sup> In explaining how different versions of physical training are taking place, Odin actors refer during training to a moment of concentration and visualization that appears before physical action begins. In order to begin a physical action, even before they get into their first position in their score or set series of physical actions, they start to relax their bodies into a comfortable standing position. Then, with a single decisive step, physical score begins. They use the energy of that very first step to bring their body up into a more upright position. Then, the slumped body position is the *sats*, where they prepare to perform the score. Although the body of the actor appears relaxed, it is still full of presence or pre-expressivity because it is in a state of *sats*, there is a strong focus on the action that is about to start. At every point between actions within the physical score, actors are in a state of *sats*. Barba explained during a work presentation how a state of *sats* can be created by only lifting the body a few millimeters above the floor on the toes. In the same time, Barba insists on the fact that each actor has a personal rhythm which affects how she performs actions, her

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<sup>110</sup> Jennifer Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, London: Methuen, 1985, p.125

individuality as an actor. In order to work with this rhythm in actors, the Odin training process focuses on the actors' individual rhythms.



*Roberta Carreri explains how to use impulses*<sup>111</sup>

As Roberta Carreri has said during a work presentation, "training is a constant process of becoming".<sup>112</sup> This statement reflects the fact that the training is in a constant state of change: during Odin Week, Torgeir Werthel, an Odin actor that was a member of the company from its start, said that years ago, he would have taught an exercise differently, and may not have showed it to someone else at all.

During Odin Week, the actors carefully explained how they currently use training to create productions, by using physical scores developed in training to create "material",

<sup>111</sup> photography by Fiora Bemporad, extracted from Jane Turner, *Eugenio Barba*, 2004, p.119

<sup>112</sup> during a work demonstration, Odin Week, 2007

which they bring to an initial rehearsal. Material can also include vocal work, text, costume pieces, character ideas and requisite use. This is presented to the other actors and Barba. The other actors may comment on the material, but the final decision is Barba's. He puts the material together with that of the other actors and his own ideas for this production. He carefully edits material, suggesting that the actors perform it in different ways and with different images. This emphasizes the importance of being precise and exact in one's material, if the actor knows her score precisely, she can easily modify it without stopping to think about what comes next. Eventually this process leads to production and that was the way that the Odin performances are constructed, starting with an individual training that approaches the body of the performer differently and gives birth to new characters and Odin performances that are surprisingly emphasizing new aesthetic and story-telling directions.

In his work for stage and theoretical explorations, Eugenio Barba is concerned mainly with how the actors solve a crucial professional problem: the embodiment and control of energy in performance. The focus is on alternatives to main psychological/personality-based theories about performance. Barba defines energy, the most basic tool of the performer, as: "the consequence of the tension between opposing forces".<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, Barba goes on to state that: "The performer's body reveals its life to the spectator by means of a tension between opposing forces: this is the principle of opposition".<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds.), *A dictionary of theatre anthropology...* p. 12

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*

Barba identifies as the next principle for performance what he calls "consistent inconsistency and the virtue of omission".<sup>115</sup> The virtue of omission refers to the tendency in Asian theatre forms, especially in Japanese Noh, for the performer to retain some of her energy in her actions. The Noh actor uses the concept *tameru* ("to retain") and from this comes *tame*: "the ability to keep energy in, to absorb into an action limited in space the energy necessary to carry out a much larger action".<sup>116</sup> Consistent inconsistency Barba defines as: "the way of thinking implicit in the practice of extra-daily techniques".<sup>117</sup> The performer drops everyday body techniques when she approaches the stage even for acts which she normally performs in life. This seeming inconsistency is replaced by the consistency of her scenic life, her acculturated body techniques and a certain culture of the theatre company. The new consistency, while artificial, reveals a certain life on the stage. In my opinion, this method offers the possibility to challenge "unquestionable" gender roles, even in a technical and not fully aware way, to contest given forms of behavior and offer new perspectives on our social life coming from an artificial way of living, life on stage.

When introducing his next recurring principle, Barba quotes Etienne Decroux: "For art to be... the idea of one thing must be given by another thing".<sup>118</sup> This explains the principle of equivalence, where one action represents another. Barba states: "on stage, the action must be real, but it is not important that it be realistic".<sup>119</sup> The reality of the action is not mimetic, equivalence is not imitation but represents an equivalent action: "The

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<sup>115</sup> Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe*, p. 25

<sup>116</sup> Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds.), *A dictionary of theatre anthropology...* p. 14

<sup>117</sup> Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe*, p.26

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, p.30

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, p.32

tension of the [daily] gesture remains, but it is *displaced* into another part of the body".<sup>120</sup> Therefore, when the actor in the Noh play, Matsukaze, suggests the action of dipping a pail into the sea to collect brine through a movement of his fan, he displaces the tension of pulling up the large heavy object into another part of his body, by assuming an uncomfortable crouching position and holding it almost completely still. The audience is still able to see the equivalence of the action, which is portrayed through the script, as the actors repeatedly mention dipping brine, as well as through the actors' use of dilating body techniques. This convention is expected to be understood by the intended audience as consistent inconsistency.

In identifying working principles for performance, Barba considers the dilated body a decided body during performance. Explaining this concept, Barba writes: "One says, in fact, *essere deciso, être décidé, to be decided*. And this does not mean that someone or something decides for us or that we submit to a decision. Neither does it mean that we are deciding, nor that we are carrying out the action of deciding".<sup>121</sup>

The performer must know what she wants to do exactly. She must have the bodymind working precisely to achieve the decided body. This is clear in the Odin training technique in which the physical score is developed. When a physical score is performed as in work demonstrations, actors know exactly what they are doing and going to do at each moment.

*Itsi Bitsi* is a three-actor cooperation, *Judith* and *Dona Musica's Butterflies* are solo performances. All three performances exemplify a different direction the Odin's work has taken in 1990s: para-theatrical events in which improvisations and physical scores, drawn

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<sup>120</sup> Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds.), *A dictionary of theatre anthropology...*, p.96

<sup>121</sup> Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe...*, p.33

from Odin actors' physical and vocal training, were presented in small performances, usually one-woman shows based on actresses' own dramaturgy. Barba's earlier work formed a large part of his public image as a revolutionary theoretician in the theatre, but his recent work moderates against this public image, revealing Barba the director, more a person of the theatre than social theorist. All these 'small' performances reflect a trend in Odin Teatret. The material is mainly produced by the actors themselves as a result of training and previous performances and exemplifies on stage how the dilated body works.

I will analyze these performances that I saw in April 2007 in order to see how Barba's theories are applied on stage in his own performances.

### *Itsi Bitsi*

A three-person performance with Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Jan Ferlov and Kai Bredholt, begins with Jan Ferlov welcoming people at the entrance. The audience comes in. After everyone is inside, courteously, with no rush, Jan Ferlov shuts the door. As spectator, the impact is strong: you realize that you exist for actors and that they are waiting for you on stage. As he walks across the polished wood floor, he stoops to pick up a small cut-up of white tissue paper. The idea of cleaning the floor before everything starts comes into your mind. And then, he carries the piece over and Iben Nagel Rasmussen whirls her inside-out parasol, and thousands of tiny flecks fly out and become snow, and you realize that the very first bit of paper was set there on purpose. It was part of the play, planned from the beginning. Starting with this small example, I realized that this performance is so tuned, so precise, so decided, that one piece of tissue paper laying

just there was put to lead the spectator into the world of this play, a world of snow and drugs.



*Iben Nagel Rasmussen in Itsi Bitsi*<sup>122</sup>

Iben Nagel Rasmussen tells of the years preceding her arrival at Odin Teatret, years of hitchhiking round the world, of music and poetry, of political radicalism and drugs. It is her story and that of Eik Skaløe (the first Danish beat poet, who committed suicide in India in 1968).

The basis of *Itsi-Bitsi* is Iben Nagel Rasmussen's previous working demonstration to which is added a dramaturgical context. The professional biography in terms of former

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<sup>122</sup> photography by Tony D'Urso, extracted from Eugenio Barba and Iben Nagel Rasmussen, *Itsi Bitsi*, theatre program

characters from different performances is revived and begins to speak and act in relation to the story of her life with Eik Skaløe. The theatrical characters become a language: words, movements, sounds, gestures; a personal language which permits a dialogue with the past. Her past is dancing. This proves that the theatrical characters have been created from actions which are part of the actors' languages, which are not limited by a certain context and by a certain performance. And this language, which is part of the actor's reality, often acquires a new and unexpected meaning in a new dramaturgical context, and this meaning disconnects it from a biographical origin.



*Jan Ferlov, Iben Nagel Rasmussen, and Kai Bredholt in Itsi Bitsi*<sup>123</sup>

Some fragments of the actress's previous performances are interwoven, not as quotations and examples, but as revealing metaphors: the mute Kattrin from *Brecht's*

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<sup>123</sup> photography by Paul Ostergaard, extracted from Eugenio Barba and Iben Nagel Rasmussen, *Itsi Bitsi*, theatre program

*Ashes*, the wandering shaman from *Come! And the Day will be Ours* or the Trickster from *Talabot*. They are all women telling stories of their own destinies.



*Iben Nagel Rasmussen as Katirin in Itsi Bitsi*<sup>124</sup>

Iben Nagel Rasmussen writes an article named *Mutes of the Past. Responses to a Questioning Spectator* in the program of the performance. In this article she explains her meeting with Odin Teatret in 1965 and the attraction of that theatre group for her, based on a reversal of traditional gender roles in the performance *The Birdlovers*. Iben Nagel

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<sup>124</sup> extracted from Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds.), *A dictionary of theatre anthropology...*, p. 20

Rasmussen considers herself being part of a generation that discovered diversity of womankind and their oppressions and also forms of feminine masculinity that disrupts a hegemonic type of masculinity.<sup>125</sup>



*Iben Nagel Rasmussen in Itsi Bitsi*<sup>126</sup>

Odin Teatret performances are seen as astonishing in the way that borderlines between masculine and feminine are eliminated. Iben Nagel Rasmussen remembers how spectators reacted to one Odin production, *My Father's House*: they were shocked by how women can act on stage and masculine characters were refused because “men are not supposed to act like that”. In the process of acting, Iben Nagel Rasmussen has a purpose: to show “a woman’s strenght” by uncovering all her energies and let them flow without repressing or taming them. The laws of femininity that “the eyes, the wishes and

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<sup>125</sup> Eugenio Barba and Iben Nagel Rasmussen, *Itsi Bitsi*, theatre program

<sup>126</sup> photography by Tony D’Urso, extracted from Eugenio Barba and Iben Nagel Rasmussen, *Itsi Bitsi*, theatre program

the words of men have forced on women”<sup>127</sup> are consciously broken in *Itsi Bitsi*. Iben Nagel Rasmussen is not following a liberation program here but tries to let herself talk through her body, through what she knows, to let out in the open a very individual level of her.



*Kai Bredholt, Iben Nagel Rasmussen, and Jan Ferlov in Itsi Bitsi*<sup>128</sup>



*Iben Nagel Rasmussen, and Jan Ferlov in Itsi Bitsi*<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Eugenio Barba and Iben Nagel Rasmussen, *Itsi Bitsi*, theatre program

<sup>128</sup> photography by Jan Ruzs, extracted from Eugenio Barba and Iben Nagel Rasmussen, *Itsi Bitsi*, theatre program

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*

The actor is seen as an incarnation of a mute woman, a lack of words makes the entire body able to transmit through acting something that is uniquely hers.

### ***Judith***

Performed by Roberta Carreri on a text by her and Eugenio Barba, who directs the performance, *Judith* was presented during Odin Week 2007. According to Roberta Carreri, the play began in 1986 when her daughter started school and she realized that touring with the rest of the company would no longer be possible for her. She thought: "Maybe I should make a solo performance?".<sup>130</sup> In the construction of the performance, Roberta Carreri focused mostly on her physical movement and the discoveries she made during training. She explained during a work demonstration named *Traces in the Snow*<sup>131</sup> how she ended up working in a lawn chair, and how that affected her work, how she was training specifically with her eyes. Different exercise can be changed through intensity, duration or direction. By focusing on different parts of the body like eyes, feet or hands through a technique called *close-up*, the spectator is aware how different bodily parts can be articulated separately. For *Judith*, Roberta Carreri worked in this particular way to direct spectator's attention to specific locations on the body.

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<sup>130</sup> Erik Exe Christoffersen, *The Actor's Way*, London: Routledge, 1993, p.152

<sup>131</sup> during Odin Week 2007



*Roberta Carreri in Judith*<sup>132</sup>

Roberta Carreri demonstrated how she started with a thematic idea and how it developed into material through training, “Eugenio said that we could make it into a performance. We had to find a story. Eugenio began to think that I needed a relationship with another character in order to create a dramatic situation. There needed [to] be someone for whom I acted, someone in relation to whom I did things.... He thought of Salome, and later of Judith”.<sup>133</sup> These decisions were reached through observing the physical development of the piece in rehearsals.

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<sup>132</sup> photography by Tony D’Urso, extracted from Eugenio Barba and Roberta Carreri, *Judith*, theatre program

<sup>133</sup> Erik Exe Christoffersen, *The Actor’s Way*, pp.155-156



*Roberta Carreri in Judith*<sup>134</sup>

The decision was made for Roberta Carreri to interact with a head because Barba thought it should be something close to the floor. Judith is an extremely erotic character, interacting sensuously with the head throughout the play. From the grotesque mask of horror when she first uncovers the head, to queer playfulness with an impossible object of desire, Judith is constructed in my opinion as a queer character, an Oscar Wilde heir, where the impossible love that cannot happen and cannot be discussed is freely expressed on stage.

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<sup>134</sup> photography extracted from Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds.), *A dictionary of theatre anthropology...* p. 111



*Roberta Carreri in Judith*<sup>135</sup>

It is a virtuosic tour-de-force in which Roberta Carreri demonstrates her considerable acting skill. The actress's physical presence is at a high point of tension throughout the long piece. There is never a moment when Roberta Carreri allows the energy to drop, there is "a continuous dialogue between different parts of the body", how she calls it during training. Improvisations with newly born or older exercises from training were used during the preparation of this performance.

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<sup>135</sup> photography by Tony D'Urso, extracted from Eugenio Barba and Roberta Carreri, *Judith*, theatre program

In *Judith*, an important focus is put on the eyes and Roberta trained that part of her body as much as any other in the creation of this piece and her work with the eyes is meant to cause an electrifying effect on the spectator. At one point in the play, Carreri places her hand on her forehead, pulling back her eyelids and rolls her eyes back into her head so that only the whites are showing. This powerful image is used on different materials and exemplifies Judith as in holding the head of her lover, as a queer anti-hero opposed to other readings of this biblical character.



*Roberta Carreri in Judith*<sup>136</sup>

Her behavior is especially erotic in her interaction with the severed head of Holophernes. She places the head between her legs, plays with its hair with her toes, and

<sup>136</sup> extracted from Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds.), *A dictionary of theatre anthropology...* p. 111

later brings it up across her body, showing an ambiguous form of sexuality, where a mask or a representation of a severed head becomes an unshameful object in producing pleasure. There is a definite narrative structure to the text and action, although the action does not illustrate the text literally. Thus the piece remains unrealistic and Roberta Carreri's physical action employs many conventions from Asian theatre such as the *kabuki*, a moment when the actor playing the lead male character stops the action at the height of tension in a scene and holds himself in a tableau with his eyes crossed to emphasize the climax in energy that occurs at that moment.



*Roberta Carreri in Judith*<sup>137</sup>

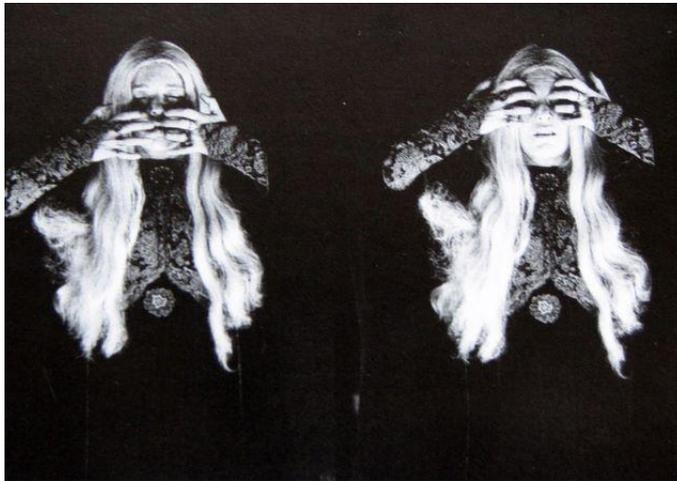
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<sup>137</sup> extracted from Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds.), *A dictionary of theatre anthropology...* p. 111

In *Judith*, the tradition viewing position of the spectator is challenged through the unusual stage setting, where different areas that represent different parts of Judith and the balance of objects in the space are deliberately and calculatedly asymmetrical. The effect obtained is a puzzled and disoriented spectator, where what is seen in space and easily observed is questioned by the performance. The dramaturgical process is illustrated not as narrative but as dynamic.

### ***Dona Musica's Butterflies***

This one-woman show is the story of a character that has escaped from another performance by Odin Teatret, *Kaosmos*, and tells of her origins and adventures in terms of entomology, through theories of modern physics, poems and tales.



*Julia Varley in Dona Musica's Butterflies*<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> photography by Jan Ruzs, extracted from Eugenio Barba and Julia Varley, *Dona Musica's Butterflies*, theatre program

Performed by Julia Varley on a text and scenography by Julia Varley and directed by Eugenio Barba, *Dona Musica's Butterflies* represents a return to the fringe, to the world of the marginalized independent groups where Odin started its journey in a continuously fighting for survival, protecting their identity as an alternative to either the commercial or the subsidized mainstream theatre, exactly what Barba would call a "third theatre". *Dona Musica's Butterflies* is constructed in the spirit of artists as small, floating islands or little paper canoes, floating from shore to shore across dangerous waters.

Technical procedures and aesthetic questions are permanently related to personal needs and wounds, ethical choices, questions of identity and cultural subversion, to the dilated body as force. The rigorous discipline, individuality, personal artistic interests and continuous training become means of achieving a particular form of theatre.

It is a performance which uses theatre as setting, material and starting point, and the dialectical relationship between theatrical character, actress, author and director as a vehicle to explore the meaning of identity, reality and theatre, in the end revealing their fragility and vulnerability, through the disappearance of the character. Fragments of real stories merge with others from poems, fictional tales and are interrelated with scientific accounts of the life-cycle of the butterfly and the theories of modern physics about the nature of matter, reality and atomic events.

Early in the play, *Dona Musica* mentions what the real actress, Julia Varley, had tried to achieve in her representation of her on stage: "Infinity, to be and not be, flowing and changing, the shadow, what cannot be known and understood, the dance and the dancer who are one and the same... alteration, motion without rest, rising and sinking

without a fixed law; it is only change that is at work here; it is like water in its movement."<sup>139</sup>



*Julia Varley in Dona Musica's Butterflies*<sup>140</sup>

In *Dona Musica's Butterflies* one of the threads of the story is “the dialogue between the character, the actress and Julia... I cannot be only one person.”<sup>141</sup> Julia Varley has outlined the central relationship in the play as being among character, actor and the actor’s non-performing self. *Dona Musica's Butterflies* is a description of process

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<sup>139</sup> Eugenio Barba, Julia Varley, *Dona Musica's Butterflies*, theatre program

<sup>140</sup> photography by Jan Ruzs, extracted from Eugenio Barba and Julia Varley, *Dona Musica's Butterflies*, theatre program

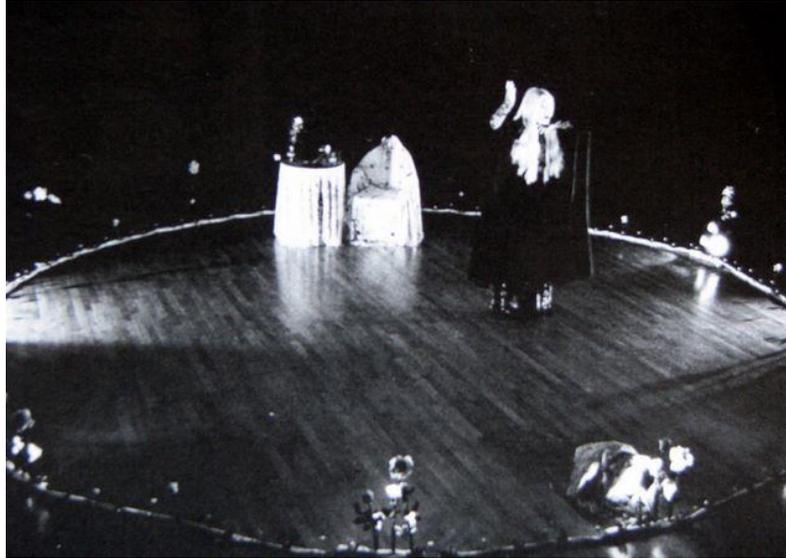
<sup>141</sup> Eugenio Barba, Julia Varley, *Dona Musica's Butterflies*, theatre program

framed in a performance structure. Indeed, Julia Varley asks: “But can a theatre performance narrate the birth and the development of a character that already is theatre? I still ask myself this question. But if *Dona Musica’s Butterflies* is not a performance, what else is it, how else could it be called?” This is an important question, both for Julia Varley and the spectator.

Dona Musica’s garden is a closed-in space, delineated by a circle, with occasional white silk roses. Lights glow inside the roses, illuminating the space, Dona Musica’s first words in the play create the space for the spectator: "This is my garden, I live here, amongst flowers and butterflies". Throughout the play, Varley questions the relationships between actor, character and play. The question of the spectator's importance is brought into by Dona Musica: “Why was I born? Did the actress give me life? Or did I, a character, reveal the actress? Did the actress mould her energy so as to transform it into Dona Musica? Or did I, Dona Musica, modulate the actress’s energy?”<sup>142</sup> Varley uses a Brechtian-style alienation effect in this play, which prevents the spectator from suspending disbelief and getting into the fiction of the play.

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<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*



*Julia Varley in Dona Musica's Butterflies*<sup>143</sup>

The final image is of death sitting on Dona Musica's chair, beside her small round table, and wearing her long white wig while the actress, Julia, having removed her makeup and wig, quietly withdraws.

### ***Theatre of resistance***

According to Foucault and post-modern feminist interpretations of his work, power is not something relegated to the dominant class that preserves and wields its influence on others in order to secure authority, but a complex system of social interactions which are constructed, enacted and transmitted through institutions, social structures, and various discourses, that shape the physical and psychological conditions of each person's life. The norms and standards that we each are judged by, and which we internalize, become means of social control that keep us docile and hesitant to question authority that seems

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<sup>143</sup> photography by Jan Ruzs, extracted from Eugenio Barba and Julia Varley, *Dona Musica's Butterflies*, theatre program

so far removed from everyday life. Our physical and psychological lives are shaped by institutional values, but a critical awareness of the ways in which one is affected by institutions of power and the norms that they produce is the first step in resisting them on a personal, organizational or community scale.

In my opinion, developing a critical awareness and producing alternative readings are indispensable when approaching theatre as a means of resistance or empowerment. The elements that make space for resistance and empowerment in theatre projects either rely on or promote critical awareness. *Dilated body* is one example of how this type of resistance can work, at least at the level of critique of mainstream theatrical hegemonic discourses in Western traditions. Even if the framework fixed by Eugenio Barba is still problematic from my perspective, especially in the internal processes of production and its closed specificity, Odin performances bring fresh air in the European theatre environment for over forty years and also possibility and encouragement for other performers to move further in contesting mainstream domination. The *dilated body* can be a fruitful concept to approach and question theatre practice and also theories of embodiment.

## part four: frame up - feminist landscapes of theatre

“First, she dreamed of little Alice herself:, and once again the tiny hands were clasped upon her knee, and the bright eager eyes were looking up into hers - she could hear the very tones of her voice, and see that queer little toss of her head to keep back the wandering hair that *would* always get into her eyes - and still as she listened, or seemed to listen, the whole place around her became alive the strange creatures of her little sister’s dream”<sup>144</sup>.

The theoretical approach, especially regarding theatre, cannot be divided or abstracted from the practical; once put on stage, every theoretical text has direct political implications in analyzing or creating gestures that are based on complex suppositions about gender relations. Rereading basic texts on how one performs on stage, on how one construct a performance as a director or how one acts as actor, how one designs the lights or the stage elements, how one writes as critic about a performance that was just seen, one also discovers that “pressures and oppressions of gender can be as invisible as air [and] also as inescapable as air”.<sup>145</sup>

### ***Need for feminist criticism***

Elaine Showalter said that “feminist criticism has allowed us to see meaning in what previously has been empty space”.<sup>146</sup> This remark can be seen as a starting point for this analysis: feminist critics can use the practice of contemporary theatre that can be

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<sup>144</sup> Lewis Carroll, “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”, p. 109

<sup>145</sup> Sandra Gilbert, “What Do Feminist Critics Want? A Postcard from the Volcano” in Elaine Showalter (ed.) *The New Feminist Criticism*, New York: Pantheon Book, 1985, p.33

<sup>146</sup> Elaine Showalter, “Review Essay” in *Signs* vol. I, no. 2, 1975, p.435

related to feminist epistemologies. On the one hand, starting from feminist analyses, performers can develop new practices and new aesthetics. Those analyses can help in answering very practical difficulties that they encounter on stage, and also contribute to awareness of the agency they have as performers.

On my side, what I discovered as a spectator at Odin performances was a certain joy of going to theatre, as a community of spectators in a public space, as a highly subversive, politicized environment. Enjoying my time during performances, I thought of Hélène Cixous and her going to theatre as “going to [her] own funeral”, where traditional theatre that was rejecting her as a playwright was the place of “the horror of the murder scene repeated and intensified with more violence even than fiction” and where “a woman must die before the play can begin”.<sup>147</sup> I thought that Odin would be the theatre that she could get pleasure from, a place where she can follow her own line of thinking put into practice.

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<sup>147</sup> Hélène Cixous, “Aller a la mer” in *Modern Drama* vol. 27, no. 4, 1984, p. 546



*Julia Varley as Mr.Peanuts*<sup>148</sup>

From creating and discovering positive images of women in various theatrical contexts to analyzing and disrupting the ideological patriarchal codes<sup>149</sup> embedded in inherited theatrical structure of representation, third theatre stands also for vigorous feminist perspectives. Language, space and the body are loci for dramatically challenge of images of women in dominant discourses and must be re-visited and re-visioned for a

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<sup>148</sup> Barba, theatre, p.323

<sup>149</sup> Lynda Hart, "Introduction: Performing Feminism" in *Making a spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989, pp.1-25

feminist enterprise for stage. For feminist critics, there is a need to discuss, analyze, and demonstrate various efforts towards resistance. As feminist theatre practitioners, we should continue to choose the stage as an arena for our visions. This combined effort can prepare public spaces for the materialization of social change. In what manner such perspectives can be recognized in Odin's performances and activities and in Barba's theories?

### *Discovering the feminist performance*

What are the characteristics of a feminist performance and how can we recognize one? In a minimalist reading, a feminist performance rejects violence as a solution to any crisis and problematises power and control; women are not objectified, images of women are not exploited for desecration or possession.<sup>150</sup> In mainstream performances, actors and musicians address an amorphous, anonymous mass and the lighting, setting, costumes, text, music and action are directed so that performance's meaning are intelligible to a particular spectator, constructed in a unique manner.<sup>151</sup> In Western context, this ideal spectator created by a dominant culture is represented together with his ideology as white middle-class heterosexual male. Feminist criticism worked on exposing gender-specific nature of theatrical representations and to drastically modify its terms. In denaturalizing the position of the ideal spectator as a representative of a dominant culture, every aspect of preparing the performance, the training process and the performance itself are analyzed and criticized.

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<sup>150</sup> see Helene Keyssar (ed.), *Feminist Theatre and Theory*, New York: St.Martin's Press, 1996, pp. 1-19

<sup>151</sup> See Catherine Belsey, "Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text," in Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfeld (eds) *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class, and Race in Literature and Culture*, New York: Methuen, 1985, for an analysis of the ideal spectator as it is constructed in realism

Eugenio Barba and his company are exposing the secrecy of performer's craft by coldly writing and showing how performances are build for stage. In this attempt, they are opening the space for the feminist analysis of Odin and other theatre companies. One can identify in this process of deconstruction of their own work a desire to subversiveness, to prove themselves as resistant practitioners. By reading and constructing a performance against the grain of stereotypes and resisting the manipulation of the cultural environment, they are continuously trying to escape this environment by occupying its fringes.

If we look at Odin from the perspective of a possible feminist project, we can identify in it a radical will that is the originating force of any feminist project, as Judith Butler would consider.<sup>152</sup> "Theatre people are social elements that are shocking the rules"<sup>153</sup>; their break with traditional social set of laws is a form of escaping monotony and a way of getting rewarded.<sup>154</sup> Gender rules are the first to be broken in such a game. As Iben Nagel Rasmussen writes in the theatre program for the performance *Itsi Bitsi*: "Even now, those who see Odin Teatret's performances are often astonished by the elimination of the borderlines normally separating *masculine* and *feminine*."<sup>155</sup>

Odin practices related to training, constructing performances, bodies on stage and dilation that I explored in this thesis could be read as formulas that can be put to work in other theatrical contexts. However this would be a false track and it is not my purpose to label it as such. Ideas, theories on performing and embodiment, together with a specific

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<sup>152</sup> Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" in Sue-Ellen Case (ed.) *Performing Feminisms. Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990, pp. 270-282

<sup>153</sup> Eugenio Barba, public lecture, Odin Week, 2007

<sup>154</sup> Eugenio Barba emphasized those elements during several meetings at Odin Week, 2007

<sup>155</sup> Eugenio Barba and Iben Nagel Rasmussen, *Itsi Bitsi*, theatre program

practice and aesthetic should be considered Odin's particular way of approaching theatre in a process of continuous change that cannot be reproduced. We don't have an Odin method that we can apply in our own theatrical environments. What we are left with is a reading that can raise awareness on our own practice. Taken as a blueprint that can be studied and then meticulously applied in other theatrical circumstances, it just won't work. Barba emphasized several times<sup>156</sup> that they cannot offer a fixed theory of theatre or even a theory of body on stage or craft of the actor, they have nothing to give us to take home with us as participants to Odin Week and even if we ate and digested all the knowledge that they can provide at a specific moment, all that we can do is to eliminate everything out of our organisms and stay alive. This aliveness is their legacy: it is a form of calling for empowerment, an explicit form of awareness rising. In the same time, their continuity as a company is influenced by the artists that are inspired by them. A search for new methods and styles, personalized ways of performing, new possibilities for social change, is what Odin performers are encouraging other performers to do.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Odin Week*, 2007

<sup>157</sup> Eugenio Barba and Odin performers at *Odin Week 2007* during the last meeting with participants

## ***Magdalena Project***<sup>158</sup>

Julia Varley, a prominent member of Odin Teatret, has been part of *The Magdalena Project*, a women's performance collective since 1986, and she brought to Odin two other subdivisions of Magdalena Project that were adopted by Odin: *The Transit Festival* that supports women artists to perform and *The Open Pages*, a journal published by Odin Teatret.

The Magdalena Project is a cross-cultural network of women's theatres, organized as a nexus for diverse performance groups and individuals whose common interest lies in a commitment to ensuring the visibility of women's artistic endeavor.

The network was founded in 1986 and currently spans more than 50 countries, with autonomous national groups organising festivals, gatherings and events on a regular basis. The aims of the Magdalena Project are to increase the awareness of women's contribution to contemporary theatre, to enable women to explore new approaches to theatre making that reflect their own experience rather than that of men, create forums that can give voice to the concerns of women working in theatre, to encourage women to examine their role in theatre and to question existing structures.

In their activities, they try to create opportunities for women to work together, to share, develop and pass on their work through performance platforms, festivals, pedagogical activities, workshops, collaborations, publications and conferences. If there is an overall objective it is to create the artistic and economic structures and support networks to enable women to work.

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<sup>158</sup> During Odin Week 2007, I attended an optional Magdalena meeting where the project was presented and women participants were presenting their own projects and struggles as women theatre practitioners in their various contexts. This subchapter is based on that attendance.

The Magdalena Project is dedicated to raise awareness of women's contribution to the theatre and performance, and to support exploration and research by offering concrete opportunities to “as many women as possible”, both in profession and in study. They consider that women's art has been left unrecorded, leaving few precedents with which to compare work. Feminist theories of creativity that are rapidly emerging in the last twenty years are a major influence in this type of a project. The struggle of women in theatre is very much oriented towards winning a place within existing structures rather than towards questioning the function of those structures. The Project has encouraged women to examine their role in the future of theatre through looking at existing work by women, by sharing methodologies, by examining form as well as content or by making new material. The Project has been trying, practically, to reveal recurrent themes, vocabularies and images that can be identified in various performances and practices around the globe. The main work of the Project is to create a theatre that has universal resonance for women. In this wide-ranging approach, it aims to provoke the organization of opportunities for women to explore new approaches to theatre making that reflect their own experiences and political priorities.

At the practical level, The Magdalena Project has hosted international performances and women artists at festivals and workshops since 1986; has produced a newsletter that ran to 28 issues; has published and disseminated *The Open Page*, an ongoing annual journal that is produced by Odin Teatret; has collaborated in organizing women's theatre events and festivals worldwide; has produced an accessible Research Archive of material relating to women and performance and generated numerous academic theses that have focused on the Project.

Two of the main parts of the project, *The Open Page* and *Transit Festival*, together with various Magdalena meetings that they attend, are part of Odin Teatret activities and are also part of their group identity. Barba acknowledges this fact and even if he is not directly involved in it, recognizes its major impact in keeping Odin alive and also in constructing their distinctiveness as a multivocal ensemble. From this point of view, Barba is not the only official representative voice of Odin, but one of the many voices. His perspective is as well influenced by this type of activities and his writing and practice as director supports several changes in disrupting “a male language”<sup>159</sup>.

*The Open Page* is an annual journal with issue dedicated to a theme that focuses on women's thoughts, questions and visions for theatre. Its aim is to give space to women's words, theories and analysis. If the Magdalena Project aims to support the work of women in theatre, *The Open Page* aims to support the reflections of women working in theatre and to encourage them to write so as to start building their own memory and critical perspective within theatre history. *The Open Page* aims to give space to many different voices which can be used by other theatre practitioners, keeping a balance in contributions from experienced authors and scholars, practitioners wanting to put thoughts on paper and first-time-writers usually only accustomed to expressing themselves on stage.

What challenges this type of informative and recuperative project that tries to unite voices of women artists is the futility of a political program which seeks to transform the social situation of women within theatre. Without determining if the category of women is socially constructed in such a way that to be a woman in theatre is, by definition, to be in an oppressed situation, Magdalena Project inescapably essentializes this category.

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<sup>159</sup> Eugenio Barba, *Personal Interview*, Holstebro, 2007

Their main wish for celebration and self-discovery expresses a lack of analysis and criticism.

In an understandable desire to form links of solidarity between women in theatre, an “universal presupposition of cultural experience which, in its universal status, provides a false ontological promise of eventual political solidarity”.<sup>160</sup> Magdalena Project is successful in bringing female specificity into visibility and to rewrite history of theatre in a way that acknowledges the presence, the influence and the oppression of women. In this effort of fighting invisibility of women theatre practitioners as a category there is a risk of making observable a category that can or cannot be representative of the concrete lives of women in theatre. The status of the category itself is not challenged in this approach and “conditions of oppression coming from an unexamined reproduction of gender identities which sustain discrete and binary categories of man and woman”<sup>161</sup> are not questioned in this particular case of The Magdalena Project.

### ***Writing feminism with bodies on stage***

Acting theories are deeply embedded into Western culture, where gender roles are fundamentally assumed to be present in the very understanding of culture itself as male in opposition to womanized bodies that are to be tamed and controlled in a directorial gesture of inscribing culture into performance. Cultural authority and creativity is nevertheless in the patriarchal position of excluding women, where theatrical culture is propriety of educated men, inherited from their intellectual forefathers, previous directors

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<sup>160</sup> Judith Butler, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, 1990, p.274

<sup>161</sup> *ibid.*

that formed a tradition of approaching performance and preparing performers and their bodies. By asking questions about the bodies on stage, about the position of directors and actors within the theatrical milieu, about the gender relations in the world of theatre, about sexuality on stage, the marginality and secondary status of women, long-standing and unsolved problems are addressed.<sup>162</sup> The purpose of this revision of our own methods, traditions and ways of constructing performances is generous: to come with new ways of understanding our own lives within theatre and on stage and changes in those lives. Eugenio Barba offers a method of working within theatre that I can recognize as working also for myself: “Theatre allows me to belong to no place, to be anchored not to one perspective only, to remain in transition.”<sup>163</sup>

Quotations, paraphrases, allusions, parodies and acts of cultural ventriloquism can be found side by side with what can be considered authorial comments in Odin performances. There is a specificity of a kaleidoscope that is specific in *écriture féminine* and it can be identified here. One actress told me between two trainings in a short interview: “We know Hélène Cixous!”<sup>164</sup>

The rules of dramatic genre are experimented and broken down, especially in the scenes when actors are in close relation to spectators that are delighted and also challenged in this game.<sup>165</sup> We can identify a detailed uneasiness concerning the idea of limits, ignorance towards theatrical conventions, boundaries and rules, playfulness, poetic, Brechtian cabaret, carnivalesque, and performance text ‘writers that are

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<sup>162</sup> For a better understanding of the crucial moral and political points that a feminist critic is confronting, see Sandra Gilbert: “What Do Feminist Critics Want? A Postcard from the Volcano”, 1985, pp. 29-45

<sup>163</sup> Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe - A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*, London: Routledge, 1995, p.8

<sup>164</sup> Julia Varley, *Personal Interview*, Holstebro, Odin Teatret, 2007

<sup>165</sup> Ian Blyth and Susan Sellers, *Hélène Cixous: Live Theory*, New York: Continuum, 2004, pp.1-35

adventurous in language’ with an undeclared purpose to “be faithful by being unfaithful”.<sup>166</sup>

While patriarchy is reducing all things to a singular, phallic meaning, *écriture féminine* explores multiple, even paradoxical or oppositional, significances and forms of expressions. Odin characters have many complex faces and contradictory depths that are explored in a visual and alert way that can keep spectators watchful till the frequently impressive end of the performance. We can identify in this type of performances, in the process of exploring social relations, gender roles and sexualities on stage through live action and dilation of bodies, what Cixous claims about woman’s sexuality as being “infinitely plural, various and changing: it is endless body...without principal ‘parts’”<sup>167</sup>

The act of performing can be seen as a freely given gift, an action that is opened to the others, and an ambiguous and contradictory event that does not settle on a single phallogocentric meaning or text. For Cixous, theatre is “the immediate site of the desire for others”.<sup>168</sup> The emphasis on connection to others from *écriture féminine* emerges in Odin practice as well, where the actors and director are in the closest contact with the others, in all possible forms: everything is there to be seen, difficulties and things that keep you back are emphasized and used in this relation,<sup>169</sup> space is usually organized to have the spectators as close as possible to the action on stage, the presence of actors is very visible in the community, they take part to different public representations, they talk about how they perform and why, they present themselves through various materials offered to

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<sup>166</sup> Hélène Cixous and Ian Blyth, “An Interview with Hélène Cixous” in *Paragraph* 23:3, 2000, pp. 338-339

<sup>167</sup> Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p.87

<sup>168</sup> Hélène Cixous, “From the Scene of the Unconscious to the Scene of History” in Ralph Cohen (ed.), *The Future of Literary Theory*, London: Routledge, 1989, p.12

<sup>169</sup> Julia Varley, work demonstration, Odin Week, Hostebro, 2007

spectators and several forms of cultural meetings where different artistic groups are encouraged by Odin actors to work together.

The closeness of theatre creates what Cixous calls a “violent condensation”.<sup>170</sup> Odin members act even for one spectator, because they consider the gesture of coming to their performance a rare gift. A performer has to be aware of the proximity of theatre and the existence of many others in the dark: how their work is taking account of the presence of spectators, other actors and characters on stage, together with the persons involved in the production (the technicians, the stage designer, the director etc.). This is achieved through exactly a sense of “letting go”, that Cixous talks about in *Sorties* or *Angst*.<sup>171</sup> The position of an actor during performing needs a sense of “self that has almost evaporated”.<sup>172</sup> The actor on stage is not acting only her own body, she is acting the body of all those who inhabit her, through the body of characters, director, playwright and, why not, spectators. Theatre has much to offer in continuing *écriture féminine*: to write incarnated characters on stage.

### ***Dealing with subjectivities***

There is a certain interest in questioning, revealing and disassembling cultural and social constructions and assumptions that ruled staging of the body and traditional gender roles on stage during performances and also in the backstage. A materialist concern for exposing systems of power and oppression stimulates performances and theatre theories that show an emergent interest in cultural dynamics. Performances that put a woman on stage as a speaking subject challenge a traditional system where the male has the only

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<sup>170</sup> Hélène Cixous, “From the Scene...”, 1989, p.16

<sup>171</sup> see Susan Sellers (ed.), *Hélène Cixous Reader*, London: Routledge, 1994

<sup>172</sup> Hélène Cixous, “From the Scene...”, 1989, p.9

subject position as character or spectator. In these traditional performances women occupy the object of the male's desiring gaze. The limited vision of giving the female subjects a possibility to return the gaze is not fully satisfactory by not challenging the hierarchy of representation.

The simple acceptance of a discourse based on body as a proper and effective way to give voice to women is problematic in my opinion. As Rachel Bowlby warns us: "it remains to be shown that the female body is itself productive of a distinctive mode of subjectivity"<sup>173</sup> and in the end, if this type of subjectivity is a desirable goal for feminists, since it can be read as an attempt to essentially reinforce traditional structures of relations between dominant and subordinate positions, sustaining power relationship that they critique. The possibility of subversion from within theatre has become accepted but the strategy involved is debatable and a central concern of resistance for theatre practitioners, theoreticians and critics is based on a dangerous game that is played as double-agents: complicity and subversion are inextricably connected. Derrida's warning is applicable also in this field: "by using against the edifice the stones available in the house... one risks ceaselessly confirming, consolidating... that which one allegedly deconstructs".<sup>174</sup>

In postmodern terms, if the subject is decentred, there is not a new subject position for women to be achieved. Postmodern spectators and performers are encouraged to think critically about the representation itself, including the subject/object relationship.<sup>175</sup> As Jill Dolan puts it: "the postmodern performance style breaks with realist narrative

<sup>173</sup> Rachel Bowlby, "The Feminine Female" in *Social Text*, no. 42, 1983, p. 62

<sup>174</sup> Jaques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982, p.135

<sup>175</sup> see Marvin Carlson, "Resistant Performance" in Lizbeth Goodman and Jane De Gay (eds) *The Routledge reader in politics and performance*, London; New York: Routledge, 2000: pp. 60-65

strategies, heralds the death of unified characters, decentre the subject, and foregrounds conventions of perception”, with the purpose of encouraging critical thinking about “representation as a site for the production of cultural meanings that perpetuate conservative gender roles”.<sup>176</sup>

Butler considers the subject as being “performatively constituted” by acts, including acts that indicate gender roles.<sup>177</sup> Even if her theories focus on the performative dimension of everyday life and not on performance art, ironically, it became more difficult to create a theatre theory or practice that can challenge or question constructions of social relationship or, more specific, gender roles, that are founded on performativity. The times of straight conflict in the style of guerrilla theatre have disappeared, but various styles of socially and politically challenging performances have emerged, mirroring the concerns, apprehensions and suppositions of a postmodern way of thinking. Odin Teatret represents a group of theatre practitioners that try to resist, challenge or even subvert the theatre practice from within, since there is no outside from where they can operate. The key element in this theatre of resistance is performance itself, as an operative tool that simultaneously reinscribes and defies pre-existing prototypes. In this type of theatre that, in my opinion, has a strong political attitude: gender roles are challenged and simultaneously marked as such during performance, where Derridean warning comes into play as a permanent consolidation through deconstruction of traditional gender roles on stage.

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<sup>176</sup> Jill Dolan, “In Defense of the Discourse: Materialist Feminisms, Postmodernism, Poststructuralist... and Theory ” in *The Drama Review*, no.33, 1989, pp. 59-60

<sup>177</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, New York: Routledge, 1990, p.25

## **Queering Odin**

A close reading of Eugenio Barba's texts and performances can focus on the representation of sexualities, masquerade techniques and elements of the carnival and reveal several elements for a political queer interpretation that questions heteronormativity and its centrality in theatrical discourse. But this reading is not the subject of this thesis: a future research will focus on such an analysis. Still I consider that it is relevant to indicate a possible reading in this direction. A deconstructive reading of Barba and Odin's works has the possibility to reveal the undiscovered inherent transgressiveness: a possibility for the theatrical discourse to be changed from within, by finding where its resistance points are and how those points can be achieved by approaching a new form of mise-en-scene based on carnivalesque and parodic language pointing towards the heteronormative patriarchal discourse. There are several themes developed by Odin that focus on sensitive and silenced topics of "anomalous, exceptional, non-serious performative which associate theatrical with the abnormal"<sup>178</sup> I can identify here "a clandestine key to break into a culture by queering historico-aesthetical categories"<sup>179</sup>.

Theatre as performance, as irony, as carnivalesque, in the practice of theatre whose specific focus is the dynamic relationship between theatre and society, and especially that theatre practice which sees itself as an agent for social criticism and change is tailor-made for revolt against the social shackles, not just of gender, but of also class, race, and sexuality.

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<sup>178</sup> Lizbeth Goodman and Jane De Gay (eds) *The Routledge reader...*, 2000: p.148

<sup>179</sup> Fabio Cleto, *Camp: queer aesthetics and the performing subject: a reader*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999: p.8

## ***Afterward***

Theatrical language is used in order to promote certain social practices and preset aesthetical mechanisms but it remains also a frame for transformation and experiment, by offering strategies for social change and strong critiques on unquestioned social practices. Theatre practices such as those developed by Odin have created theatre-making processes that can serve as model processes for social change. Julia Varley encourages performers during her training to find references and logic of their own work that are to be reduced when a dialogue with other performers, spectators or spaces is established. This reduction has the purpose of determining small changes in both parts, to create estrangements to what is already known and under control, to intrigue and to disturb. As she puts it: “we all know that theatre is artificial but do you believe it?”<sup>180</sup> In this searching, both parts, performers and spectators, are gaining possibilities and openings for a form of freedom that is channeled, goes in different directions.

What Barba leaves us with is a “legacy to others that which we ourselves have not wholly consume”,<sup>181</sup> a possibility to move further from Odin practice to a world of new experiments and discoveries in theatre practice.

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<sup>180</sup> Julia Varley, work demonstration, Odin Week, 2007

<sup>181</sup> Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe*, 1995, p.36

## part five: final thoughts

“...and she told her sister, as well as she could remember them, all these strange Adventures of hers that you have just been reading about.”<sup>182</sup>

Now that we have come to the end, maybe, we should follow the advice of King of Hearts and just stop.<sup>183</sup> In trying to sum up, to conclude, to bring out new frames that we can further use, we are just killing the beauty of the adventure a little bit. But at the end of the day, what we can conclude can be found also in Alice in Wonderland: “...her sister sat still just as she left her, leaning her head on her hand, watching the setting sun, and thinking of little Alice and all her wonderful Adventures, till she too began dreaming after a fashion, and this was her dream”.<sup>184</sup> This aftermath, the possibility for someone else to continue adventures with a sequel, can be seen as a relevant point for departure. Eugenio Barba and Odin actors are always talking about bits of advices that can help you move further in your own direction and create your own theatrical adventure. And that was the purpose of Odin Week and, maybe, of this thesis: to help us move further in our own direction, in creating our own performances as performers, write our own texts as critics and theoreticians. This perspective brings back the memory of H el ene Cixous with her strong advice that is at the core to her understanding of * criture f eminine*: the necessity to take out the pen and write with a conscious hand that is aware of the fact that is doing the gesture of writing.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Lewis Carroll, “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”, p. 107

<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*, p. 105

<sup>184</sup> *ibid.*, p. 107

<sup>185</sup> Read H el ene Cixous. “The Laugh of the Medusa” in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds) *New French Feminisms*, New York: Schocken, 1981

The dilated body was my starting point for this thesis and it can be considered a concept that transforms the understanding of the actor's body on stage along the lines of what I would call a postmodern feminist reading. This interpretation can move further and it can be continued in other contexts. The connection to the Odin practice that is central to this body theory can get lost in a simplistic reading and the theory won't have a long life by itself. What I find more constructive here are various strategies to work on stage and create new practices and aesthetics that are in accordance with a feminist line of thinking. In his writings and practice, Eugenio Barba is not looking for a predetermined set of rules available for any performance, but he tries to identify what different strategies performers use to create believable actions and energy. In everyday life, for daily behavior we use the least of energy while on stage, the amount of energy is expanded or the body of the actor is dilated. This expresses the aliveness of the actor in expressing something, in communicating with the spectator. The actions are not bigger, faster or necessarily exaggerated but they engage the whole body, all the energy is focused on the action itself, one that is "alive and believable; not the volume is important."<sup>186</sup>

The body of the actor is committed in making the action real and not for illustration, imitation or pantomime. In practice, energy cannot be avoided and is usually translated falsely: by making bigger and exaggerated actions. Bombarding the spectator with energy in the form of loud voice, furious paces, exaggerated gestures have the effect of alienating and not charming the spectator. The performer has to carefully model and focus energy during performance, to "use subtlety, feints and counter-feints. Only in rare,

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<sup>186</sup> Julia Varley during her work demonstration, Odin Week, 2007

carefully planned cases is a powerful action effective”.<sup>187</sup> The ability to effectively use this energy on stage in order to inform the spectator is the scenic presence of the actor, what the actor has to do to create a center of attention for the spectator during performance. By dilating the body, a transformation in the body appears and this is the first step in making active the energy on stage.

A dilated body is an “art body”, a “non-natural body”, it “has the sex it has chosen to represent”.<sup>188</sup> Through dilation, a deconstruction of gender roles appears, together with the rest of ideological inscriptions on the body. We can identify in this theory of theatrical practice a deconstruction of gender roles that is transmitted on stage through performances. Barba and Odin Teatret can offer a new reading and a new conceptualization of embodiment that challenges a traditional environment such as Western theatre. The position that they use to make such comments is the one of the marginal, one of the excluded. In this attempt to make themselves heard, they claim centrality without leaving their marginal positions of being excluded from the table of the rich, and this attitude can be seen as functional for feminist performers and theatre theoreticians.

Without even knowing it, Odin Teatret confirms that feminist practice and theory can be successful formulas and feminist knowledge production can come from unexpected locations and this is very good news indeed for conscious feminist performers and scholars.

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<sup>187</sup> Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe*, 1995, p. 59

<sup>188</sup> *ibid.*, p. 62

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