

DRAFT 1 IFTR conference paper

Section 1 Jane

Over the past 12 months, Patrick and I have been working on developing a Third Theatre Network, which will enable research to take place that explores the impact and legacy that Odin Teatret have had on the international theatre community over the last 50 years. The Network facilitates research that questions legacy and intercultural dialogue, promotes knowledge exchange for the Odin diaspora and examines the efficacy of models of intercultural dialogue for the wider arts community.

Network events will facilitate bringing together (both physically and virtually) the beneficiaries of Odin's dramaturgical and training practice, with a focus on questioning the concept of legacy, whilst investigating the processes of transference of theatre practice (physical and dramaturgical) from one socio-political context to another.

Our project has already secured the full support of Odin Teatret and Nordisk Laboratorium, who identify the importance of both the research imperative and the network as contributing a valuable knowledge exchange resource for arts communities and other stakeholders globally.

NTL/Third Theatre/democracy

So, what exactly is "Third Theatre"? Let us turn to Barba's original manifesto delivered as a report to UNESCO in 1976, following a gathering of theatre groups in Belgrade.

Show slide of manifesto:

'What seems to characterise the Third Theatre, what appears as a common denominator among such different groups and experiences, is a tension that is difficult to define. It is as if the personal needs - ideals, fears, multiple impulses which would otherwise remain more or less obscure - wanted to be transformed into work, according to an attitude which from the outside is justified as an

ethical imperative, not limited to the profession only, but extending through the whole of daily life' (extract taken from Eugenio Barba's book *Theatre. Solitude, Craft, Revolt* (1999, pp. 169-170)).

A key question for us concerns the status and currency of the term since its inception in 1976: do theatre groups still identify themselves with the term? If so why and if not, why not?

It is of course coincidental that Eugenio Barba and Homi Bhabha have surnames that sound similar but maybe there is something in the gathering of sounds that suggests a further level of synchronicity. In Homi Bhabha's book *The Location of Culture* he refers to the Third Space as:

'...a time of gathering. Gatherings of exiles and migrants and refugees; gathering on the edge of foreign cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafes of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half- light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another's language; gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present. Also, the gathering of people in the diaspora: indentured, migrant, interned; the gathering of incriminatory statistics, educational performance, legal statutes, immigration status, the genealogy of that lonely figure that John Berger named the seventh man' (pages 199 - 200).

(Berger's concept refers to a book *A Seventh Man*, a book of photographs of migrant workers - a book described by Aimee Shalan as depicting 'the dehumanising experience of migration to reveal a stultifying lack of freedom at the heart of neo-liberal capitalism, which Berger bluntly recoins "economic fascism" (Guardian review 18.12.10).)

I read out this long quotation because it offers us a way to engage/re-engage with Third Theatre - and especially the living legacy of Odin Teatret.

OdinTeatret/NTL has always been centered around the notion of gatherings as demonstrated by the emergence of the Third Theatre manifesto.

A recent visit to Holstebro and Odin Teatret's base reminded both Patrick and I that NTL (Nordisk Theaterlaboratorium) is the founding organisation whose twin logos (a Nordic knight on horseback and the Chinese symbol of yin/yang found in the I Ching (Book of Changes)) have both been evident on their website, their consumerables (videos/dvds, publication of books etc), programmes as well as existing as the overarching brand that encompasses those projects set up by individuals within the company such as Farfa, Transit, Festuge - in fact the 'brand' Odin Teatret/Nordisk Theaterlaboratorium was initiated in 1966 but the recognition of NTL has been supplanted by Odin in terms of global recognition.

At the core of all the Odin Teatret/NTL activities is an ethos that embraces the twin critical frameworks of **conviviality** and **hospitality**. According to Derrida, 'unconditional hospitality' is an encounter with radical difference; an ethical, creative, even transgressive opening up to the Other, the 'foreigner'. Paul Gilroy's concept of 'conviviality' refers to the unruly, chaotic and creative encounters that take place on a pragmatic, daily basis between people of different cultures within postcolonial societies. According to Gilroy, these encounters allow for "emancipatory interruptions" that break up the hegemonic social script, and usher in new multicultural expressive forms and ways of being together (Gilroy, 2004). This ethos reflects and reaffirms the importance of a translocal, diasporic sense of creative community, and is enshrined in the Third Theatre manifesto.

While Odin's work is best recognised as a site for having a particular approach to bodily training for theatre performance and a particular approach to dramaturgical organisation, it is the social structure and organisation of the group that Barba and Julia Varley maintain is the model of practice that is transferable, shared and embraced as a defining feature by theatre groups who consider themselves a part of Third Theatre. And in this we can identify the evident connections between Bhabha's gatherings on the edges of foreign cultures, Derrida's hospitality: transgressive opening up to the 'foreigner' and Gilroy's conviviality: 'emancipatory interruptions'.

In Eugenio Barba's article for the journal *New Theatre Quarterly* published in 1991 he revisits Third Theatre and asserts that it can be understood as 'a legacy from Us to Ourselves' (page 3 – and title of the article) – he argues that we are not inheritors of a 'great tradition', we work with the histories of people/'foreigners' who themselves worked with 'bare hands': another metaphor conceived by Barba that he uses to describe the commitment to work adopted by such 'foreigners' on an aspect of theatre that became their 'legacy from us to ourselves' (a phrase he borrows from Louis Jouvet).

For a long time now, to talk about craft in theatre has been considered old fashioned but Odin and other Third Theatre groups are perhaps made distinct for not being interested in fashions/tendencies but are more concerned with developing the craft, the rigour, of their theatre practice - such theatre often finds it challenging to obtain funding and audiences as such theatre does not conform to the normative expectations of a (cultural/economically driven) mainstream.

The translation of such terms as Third Theatre operate for Barba as metaphors that importantly requires each individual to translate the metaphors in relation to their own 'professional experiences and lives' (1991: 9). In this instance the hybridity of the Third Theatre as a political/social/cultural/geo-political space is also understood metaphorically as a space of translation/negotiation; Third Theatre needs to be engaged in a dialogical discursive exchange – a continual negotiation of terms to retain a sense of vibrancy.

For Odin, who last year celebrated their 50th anniversary, it is crucial for them to resist becoming a 'theatre made of stone' – such theatres

'... represent themselves, not the people who inhabit them...Their inhabitants of the moment celebrate anniversaries...nourished by the illusion that this long time-span represents a precious sense of continuity and the valuable asset of tradition and history' (ibid.).

At the celebration in Holstebro last year the company – with the help of a large mechanical digger – dug a huge hole in the ground and dumped props and

costumes from their previous 50 years of shows into the hole and buried them – constructing a children’s swing on the site. Letting the baggage go, moving forward and seeking out the new challenge has led Odin/NTL to an element of reassessment and reflection.

While Odin/NTL have always sought ways of opening their doors to ‘foreigners’: the Odin Weeks, ISTA, Festuge etc., they have now elected to further open their doors to new and emerging theatre groups, offering them residencies and the opportunity to co-produce theatre at the Odin/NTL base in Holstebro. Barba realised that over the years the company were spending more and more time away from their ‘home’ - leaving it empty and the townsfolk of Holstebro – who have actively supported Odin/NTL’s residency for 50 years - more often than not, with a dark theatre. Opening up their home in this way is a striking shift: it recognises that new people need to be able to inhabit their home – this is arguably another facet of what we argue as the conviviality and hospitality inherent in their group, and a defining feature of Third Theatre.

So the two Barbab/Bhabhas are united in stressing the importance of recognising the foreigner and seeking out a process of intercultural negotiation – a negotiation of cultural/social and aesthetic identity with the foreigner that embraces counter knowledges.

[‘The true [he says] is always marked and informed by the ambivalence [conflict/uncertainty] of the process of emergence itself, the productivity of meanings that construct counter-knowledges in *medias res* [in the midst of things], in the very act of agonism [positive perspective that suggests political conflict is a necessity], within the terms of a negotiation (rather than a negation) of oppositional and antagonistic elements’ (Bhabha, 1997: 33).]

Section 2 Patrick

Thus, as Odin and NTL begin a process of opening up once again, fostering and mentoring the work of young emerging artists, it is timely to return to the wider notion of the Third Theatre. However, even in this early phase of our research, some key questions and problems are beginning to emerge for us. One of which, is the very term “Third Theatre”. Despite our recourse to Homi Bhabha, and

attempt to reframe the “Third” in “Third Theatre” from a critical perspective, the term nevertheless seems problematic today, anachronistic.

Resonant of the 1970s, of similar movements such as “third cinema” and evoking the spectre of the so-called “Third World”, how can such a term persist in today’s globalized, mediated theatrical context, characterised by hybridity, by a fusion of forms and discourses, by the blurring of high and low art, of the mainstream and the so-called avant-garde? Given the proliferation of psycho-physical approaches to acting, the acceptance of physically led and visually potent aesthetics as part of the toolkit available to even the most traditional of theatrical *metteurs-en-scene*, and Barba and Odin’s own canonization within theatre academia, what radical currency can this term have for us today?

Isn’t the very homogenisation of an overarching “tradition” problematic? Do we not risk effacing the uniqueness of each of the multifaceted groups we are researching, and in so-doing tie them indelibly to what was perhaps – in some cases – just a passing encounter with Odin Teatret and its poetics?

Our argument would be that the Third Theatre as a phenomenon obliges us instead to – more radically – deconstruct and contest what we mean by the term legacy itself. Rather than a patrilinear, colonizing force, legacy would seem to be, in the case of the Odin diaspora, a fluctuating, processual, potentially subversive form of craft-based kinetic transference characterized by movement and open to negotiation and radical reinterpretation. One of the key concerns of the Network will, in fact, be to focus precisely on how key groups and companies in differing geopolitical contexts have transformed and adapted Odin’s poetics and methodological approaches to suit their own varying pragmatic needs and cultural material contexts.

As well as possibly alluding to Bhaba’s notion of the third space, we also feel that the notion of a “third” theatre is still useful as it refutes and evades binarisms – the third is always in-between, always supplementary, always instable. It threatens facile categorisation, and evades any recourse to either/or. It points to an awkward space of otherness, of arch-alterity, and opens up room for subversive play, transposition, translation and transformation. Rather than

articulating a definitive aesthetic or ideological telos, the “third” in Third Theatre points towards a zone where pragmatic artistic choices are primarily shaped by the immediate cultural material reality, desires and values of the group in question and their ethical relationship to the surrounding community.

Third Theatre is produced from the nomadic experience of the foreigner – it is transnational, border crossing, problematically hybrid. However, if there is one constant that unites the disparate practitioners and differing strands of the Third Theatre, it is the focus on the body; the body of the actor, the kinaesthetic impact of the actor’s craft on the director and, later, the spectators. It is this tacit, non-discursive negotiation - which Stanislavski termed “communion” and Grotowski called the “total act” - that is revisited and re-articulated by all these practitioners.

Moreover, the centrality of bodily labour in Third Theatre praxis imbues the actor’s work on the self as a space where emerging values can be traced and small traditions founded. Training and performance, in this sense, are not just related to craft, to the development of a virtuoso expressivity – they become an experiential territory where self-limitations can be overcome and new relationships forged. Importantly, the participatory tendencies of recent Third Theatre praxis reveal that these new-found dialogical relationships between self and environment, self and other, are spreading out in innovative ways into the community, as the different groups’ dramaturgical practices transcend the black box space and infiltrate different socio-cultural contexts.

In order to explore the play of negotiation and transformation so inherent of Third Theatre praxis today, I would like to present the work of one small-scale Brazilian theatre company operating on the edge of the Odin diaspora: Grupo NATA. The company’s work fuses African Brazilian praise performance and Third Theatre praxis, blurring the boundaries between theatre and the sacred, aesthetics and identity, arts, education and regeneration.

Section 3: Grupo NATA

Grupo Nata was founded in 1998 in the city of Alagoinhas, in the countryside of Bahia State, in the North East of Brazil. Artistic Director Fernanda Júlia was born into a family steeped in the traditions of Candomblé. Her mother Roselina Barbosa, is an *iyalorixá*, a candomblé priestess, and Fernanda Júlia herself is an *iyaô*, an initiate privy to the mysteries of the religion.

In 2006, Fernanda Júlia moved to Salvador and began to study Direction at the Theatre School of the Federal University of Bahia. It was here that she discovered the work of Eugenio Barba and Jerzy Grotowski. Their research into Theatre Anthropology and Art as Vehicle would, alongside the work of black Brazilian theatre companies such as TEN, the Bando de Teatro Olodum and the Companhia dos Comuns, serve as the fertile matrix out of which NATA's professional theatrical aesthetic and social activism would emerge. This culminated in 2009, at the end of her degree, with the debut of an award-winning performance that would prove to be a turning point in the history of the group; *Sirê Obá*.

***Sirê Obá* and the Activation of Ancestral Movement**

Drawing implicitly on the universe of Candomblé, and based on the *orikis*, praise poems recited during rituals to evoke the Orixás, this sensorial, physically charged and choreographic piece of devised theatre was based in part on the structure of the *xirê* – the public danced ritual of Candomblé. However, rather than directly transpose the dance steps of each Orixá, Fernanda Júlia developed a unique methodological approach predicated on Barba's writings on Theatre Anthropology, encouraging her actors to create sequences of improvised movements that she could then map onto her knowledge of the ritually codified movements of the Orixás, and thus detect the archetypal ancestral energy influencing the work of each actor.

In the final performance, all of this improvised material was woven into a concrete montage in which each of the four actors became responsible for representing the primordial element that their movements most corresponded with, and embodying the Orixás connected to this element. The Orixás each appeared one after the other on stage according to the sacred "grammar" of the *xirê*. However, their movements were based on the actors' own sequences of

actions, rather than an exact replication of the codified steps of the Dance of the Orixás.

(Show clip).

Like much Third Theatre practice, Grupo NATA's work occupies a liminal space between dance, theatre and ritual. However, in the case of NATA, this liminality has been complicated even further in the sense that the group devised, developed and debuted *Sirê Obá* in a *terreiro* (a religious compound of Candomblé) in Alagoinhas, a small, rural city with little to no theatrical tradition. The group continues to tour the show in the region by performing at local Candomblé houses, throwing into disarray the clear-cut distinctions between theatre and African Brazilian religiosity that pervade Brazilian society.

In this case, the performance is an act of affirmation, emphasizing the aesthetic beauty and cultural validity of Candomblé (which is still a socially marginalized religion within Brazil) by imbuing it with the cultural capital of theatre, still seen by many as an elite art form. Thus, whilst in the theatre, the reception of the group's performance is coloured by the affect-laden impact of the trace of the ritual act, inversely, in the *terreiro*, the reception is tinged with pride and a sense of verisimilitude, as Candomblé spectator-initiates see an iconic representation of their religiosity which, whilst blurring the traditional semiotic structures of the *xirê*, still resonates with the intensities of embodied ritual practice and the energetic tendencies of the Orixás.

These performances also regularly attracted a steady stream of spectators from the theatrical circuit in neighbouring Salvador who would not normally visit Alagoinhas or necessarily frequent a *terreiro*. Thus rather than merely watching a scenic adaptation of African Brazilian ritual practices from the locus of a proscenium arch theatre, non-Candomblé initiates were deterritorialized and reterritorialized through their spectatorship of *Sirê Obá* into the spatial-temporal universe of the *terreiro*, characterized by a comparatively less structured flow of affect than in the traditional theatrical venue and thus with the innate potential for a heightened sense of movement and instability between those participating actively in the performance, and those spectating from the sidelines.

This complex, hybrid form of culturally specific, ritualized forms and choreographic theatre predicated on the tenets of Barba's Theatre Anthropology is, at one and the same time, a poetics, an ideological and cultural act of affirmation, and an attempt to verticalise the actor's work on his or her self, connecting him/her with an embodied sense of ancestral intensity, with the indeterminate incorporeal materialism of the African Brazilian body-in-movement. Thus, Grupo NATA's work fuses Barba's notion of theatrical pre-expressivity with a trace of the affect-laden enchantment of African Brazilian praise performance and its ecological epistemic premises which link the subject to the community, the environment, and the numinous through sensation, movement and indeterminacy.

Concluding thoughts

Thus we return to the key concepts of hospitality and conviviality that we started with, as we focus on the praxis of yet another Third Theatre group working with their "bare hands" creating a legacy both "**from** themselves, **for** themselves", but importantly also for the wider community.

Perhaps one of the emerging traits that separates Third Theatre practice today from the laboratory groups of the 1970s is precisely this opening up to the other, the "foreigner" outside of the group. Nevertheless, the core of the praxis is still driven by **individual necessity**, and this takes us back to the title of our project, "A Handful of Dust", we finish here with a quote from Barba:

Antigone's handful of dust, Grotowski's handful of spectators. What ridiculous actions with which to resist the times and row against the currents [...] This is theatre: an empty and ineffectual ritual, which we fill with our "why", our personal necessity.

(Barba, 1994:190).