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ambassadors) and the bad (in 1968 their theatre was taken over by student revolutionaries who trashed it despite Barrault's empathy for the students' cause. On this occasion Madeleine Renaud was heard to say, "Why didn't they go to the Comedie-Francaise?").

On the day Barrault died, actors at that theatre (the Odeon) dedicated their performance to him; all but five minutes of the evening newscast on France-2 television was given over to his passing, and from the stage of the Marigny, a theatre on the Champs Elysees which Barrault had also directed in the 1950s, Francis Huster called him "the Sun Actor who illuminated everything he touched in that great festival which is theatre."

The French love a love story, and French publications reported that, when asked if he watched television in his retirement, Barrault responded, "No, I watch Madeleine." The housekeeper who found Barrault the morning after he had passed away peacefully in his sleep reported that he and Renaud had spent the whole previous day lying beside one another in a darkened bedroom "as if they suspected something."

British publications liked the wit the couple often displayed (Renaud's comment above, "Why didn't they go to the Comedie-Francaise?"), and several mentioned that rioting students in 1968 who occupied Barrault's theatre used expensive costumes for toilet paper.

Barrault leaves behind an impressive legacy: his filmography is important, and *LES ENFANTS DU PARADIS* is now available in a magnificent videodisc format published by Voyager, complete with interviews with Marcel Carne and other historical

data meticulously compiled by Brian Stonehill. Through these films, those who never had the pleasure of seeing Barrault perform on stage can see something of his power and charisma. He wrote several insightful books about theatre craft and his life in the theatre, some of which are available in English translation. In a less concrete—yet not less important—way he changed the course of French theatre practice by institutionalizing some of the reforms Jacques Copeau envisioned before the Second World War. And for the readers of this publication, his contribution to the world of mime is not negligible. With Etienne Decroux he evolved the early phases of Corporeal Mime, and, through the mime sequences in *LES ENFANTS DU PARADIS* and subsequent stage performances that used mime and movement extensively, he helped move the craft of acting away from talking heads and closer to dancing philosophers.

The passing of Jean-Louis Barrault marks the end of an era, as commentators are fond of saying. There are few performers who have the wit and the vision that Barrault displayed when responding to then-President Giscard, who told him he was wasting his time performing for 200,000 people per year in the theatre when he could reach 10 or 20 million people a day through television. "Yes," Barrault replied "but 200,000 sorcerers in the forest are far more powerful than 20 million gas consumers."

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## Getting Physical

### A Workshop with Eugenio Barba

In September 1993 in Montreal, I saw Ariane Mnouchkine's *LES ASTRIDES* performed in French without translation; in November 1992 in Brooklyn, I saw Robert Wilson's *EINSTEIN ON THE BEACH* with Philip Glass as composer; and in January 1993 in New York City, I saw David Gordon's *THE MYSTERIES AND WHAT'S SO FUNNY?* with music by Philip Glass and visual designs by Red Grooms. What distinguished these theatrical events was that the movement looked as if it had been choreographed and felt as if it were being danced even when it was not being danced; the voices sounded like musical instruments and felt as if they were singing, even when they were simply speaking. In other words, these productions, postmodern in style, non-psychological in focus, provided utterly sensorial experiences, which is to say they did what theatre is supposed to do.

When postmodern, or new, theatre reaches its sensory best, as on the stage of Ariane Mnouchkine, it is because the performer has been trained beyond psycho-physical action. The new performer is capable of being actor-musician, actor-dancer, actor-singer, actor-changer, actor-rhythm maker, actor-poet, actor-mystic, actor-extraordinaire. New acting is not reminiscent of film, TV, video, or radio acting. It is not acting that looks like the actor is trapped in a staged reading. It is not verse and a swordfight. New acting is reminiscent of what Meyerhold said of his own system: "Biochemics means that when you wrinkle the nose, the whole body is involved." New acting is wholistic, whatever the costume. It is Meyerhold, which includes Stanislavsky, plus Asia and Artaud.

During the first week in August of 1993, in a workshop presented in Philadelphia by Movement Theatre International as part of their annual festival, I spent 18 hours over four days with Eugenio Barba, director of the Odin Theatre in Denmark, and his colleague/actress Julia Varley. Previously, the greater

part of my own actor-training had been with Stella Adler at her conservatory in New York City, followed by two years of study in Japan. During the hours with Barba, I was able to merge Adler/Stanislavsky techniques with Eastern ones and in a way dissolve them.

Eugenio Barba showed up at 8:30 each morning in a fresh, differently colored cotton or silk shirt under a patch-leather vest. He wore pressed blue jeans, a brown leather belt, brown leather sandals, (which he removed for the work), a gold bracelet, a silver wristwatch, and glasses. I say this because Barba expressed some discomfort at the way in which the 20 workshop participants and the 10 observers, mostly Americans, were dressed. Barba is interested, more than anything, in aliveness, in a quality of energy that responds to a music within oneself. This aliveness necessitates, in his ethics, an attitude toward the self and the work that is serious. He told the story of how Machiavelli, in exile, living in poverty among peasants, went each evening into his small room, dressed himself in his best clothing, and wrote *THE PRINCE*. Barba said that Brecht always wore a worker's shirt, but made of silk.

On the third day of our workshop a fire alarm went off in the room. While obviously false, the piercing nature of the alarm nevertheless sent a few of the participants out of the room. A few others looked to be in pain. Barba proceeded through the noise without comment on it. He conducted himself then and throughout the week with the discipline and focused concentration of meditation. He turned off the air-conditioning each morning and took no breaks in our 4 1/2-hour session.

Barba's attitude of self-respect was in keeping with his expectation for us participants: neither to stop nor to judge any impulse for physical action that comes into the process, even if it seems far away from the process. His overall aim was to see how vulnerable we could be, and his point of departure was collective darkness. There was no pattern to follow. Prior training was of no direct use and, in the case of some mime-trained people, could be an impediment. Barba wanted the maximum from each participant; otherwise, he said, a person is a parasite or an exploiter. To give the maximum, he said, is not to cheat, is to risk the hard thing. If the floor is hard when I fall on it, then the floor becomes my teacher about myself, like the bamboo stick of a Zen master.

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The essence of training, Barba said, is to educate oneself in a way of thinking that is through the body, transforming the conceptual into the somatic. The actor is drawn to this way of thinking because he or she does not want to live according to societal beliefs and rules. Each of us in the theatre is a sort of wound. Some of us have turned our wound into an ego center and others of us have turned it into a spiritual sensibility. If we were not actors, he said, we would have become violent people. But one's personal wound must not, cannot, be forgotten. It must be taken care of: I must find out how my woundedness can become the motor for my discoveries.

Eugenio Barba is an exile in the world and not solely because he is an artist. He calls himself an immigrant; perhaps that is his wound. He is Italian and lives in Denmark. He speaks several languages. For nine months of the year his Odin Theatre company travels. He classifies their work as Third Theatre, not mainstream. Yet within the theatre, he is not an immigrant but is at home. He is at home with Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Serge Eisenstein, Martha Graham, Zeami, Artaud, Brecht, and of course Grotowski, whose teachings he saw published. He noted that neither his Odin activities and productions nor his writing is to build bridges between people, since bridges are static. His produced work is more like a crossing of a river in a canoe, without knowing what, where, who is the other shore. He is certain that Stanislavsky's canoe floated to Barba's table. He told us, by the way, that at the end of his life, Brecht reported that Stanislavsky had been right; that Stanislavsky had been describing theatre from the point of view of the actor whereas he himself had been theorizing from the author's point of view.

Stanislavsky was, of course, right and Barba is using Stanislavsky's principles. But Barba does not speak of psychological action. Rather, he speaks in terms of the tensions in an action. He is also using principles of Asian philosophy and art, and he is using principles of music and dance. He is especially fond of the Indian dance theatre, wherein one actor becomes many characters, but he does not imitate or borrow a style from it. If he takes a technique from the Peking Opera, his purpose is not adoption but distillation to extract a quality of energy. From his observations of the Noh actor he has pulled the quality of absolute non-anticipation of the next moment to be performed. He contends that the major sin an actor can commit is anticipation; that is, to be in one's mind—which is to be in the past or in the future and out of the present—out of the presence of one's body/mind. When the actor anticipates, the audience knows what is coming. The audience deserves the unexpected. The actor's work and greatest joy, in Barba's view, is to surprise him or herself within the action. Theatre is aliveness.

Our workshop, which was admittedly an artificial situation, focused on the energy layer of action. Each registrant had been alerted to memorize at least 10 lines of a poem on the theme of darkness. My selection was from Emily Dickinson:

I felt a funeral in my brain,  
And mourners, to and fro,  
Kept treading, treading, till it seemed  
That sense was breaking through.

And when they all were seated,  
A service like a drum  
Kept beating, beating, till I thought  
My mind was going numb.

And then I heard them lift a box,  
And creak across my soul  
With those same boots of lead, again.  
Then space began to toll

As all the heavens were a bell,  
And Being but an ear,  
And I and silence some strange race,  
Wrecked, solitary, here.

To work through a poem, Barba said, is the best training for an actor: to see how the poet starts from a word and creates a rhythm. We were to manifest a process with our bodies, similar to writing poetry. We were to begin to move, privately improvising physical actions for a word, line, lines, or stanza of the poem. We were to develop a commitment to hit the exact right spot of an action with its necessary (but not stereotypical) rhythm; that is, we were to develop somatic thinking, like a martial artist discovering at once where to attack, aggress, or recede. We were to repeat, explore, clarify, and adjust our physical actions over and over again.

During three days, without voice, but with the language of the poem guiding us internally, we worked our improvisations. We counted the actions within them. Barba defined action as different from gesture, as any change in the muscular tonus of the body. He did not define action as intention or objective. One man thought his improvisation contained 35 actions, but when he showed it to the group, Barba counted 108 actions. To count one's actions, Barba reminded us, is a classic Stanislavsky exercise: working in segments, with segmentation. We felt and marked—physically, visibly, distinctively, and precisely—the beginning and ending of each action. "If you want to fly," Barba said, "landing and taking off are the most dangerous and important moments." We were instructed to consider originating an action from its physical opposite. If my impulse was to go down for an action, I could start the descent by going up. If my impulse was to take an action to the right, I could begin it by adjusting to the left. These oppositions keep the action alive. Opposition is a Barba principle.

Yet we needed to give a flow to our actions, a wave. We were asked to change our improvisations and teach the first 10 of our new actions, without speaking, to a partner. We were to become as deeply rooted in our actions as trees. We needed not only to memorize the form of each action but also to exercise beingness within it. Overall form is the shaping of a piece and can be learned. By having to teach form to a partner, we learned it. Beingness is personal presence and is given by grace. Without beingness, form is reduced to automation. Barba explained that each phase of each action has its own integrity. Forming an action is like executing brush strokes in calligraphy, wherein every stroke styling a pictogram is precise and pertinent; or it is like composing a haiku, wherein each of the 17 syllables is central. We were therefore asked to follow the task of each action with the dedication of a Zen calligrapher and at the same time to improvise on our aliveness within the task. Thus, we learned that an action has its own force and simultaneously is poetic. The poetry, the actor's beingness or aliveness, Barba said, is visible in the eyes.

Barba advised us to emanate out of the torso, finding the source of our actions in the spine. We were to try our actions without using our arms, thereby changing their musculature. "The arms disperse energy," Barba said. "They defeat the power of the body." If I had been using the floor, I was to find an equivalent for lying on the floor that was somehow standing. Equivalence is a Barba principle. "All creation," he noted, "consists in building equivalence." To be able to think paradoxically is to be able to create equivalence. We were encouraged not to depend on any conceptual meaning found in our poem to select and execute our actions. While each of us needed to retain an image of our poem, we could eventually forget about the actual lines or literal sense of the poem. It was the struggle and bliss of forming energy.

Barba invited a woman into the center of the room and handed her his vest rolled up into a bundle to hold in the crook of her left arm. In her right hand, held high, he placed a pair of scissors and requested she consider it a knife while clasp it as if it were a flower. She was to perform her improvisation without changing the position of her arms. Working out of the torso only, never looking at the bundle that had turned into a baby in her arm, with the scissors raised as an implement of murder, she became Medea, protecting the child she was about to sacrifice. "Props," Barba said, "give the relationship."

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We investigated the nature of the transition from one action to another. Transition for the actor is a state of being which Barba calls *elan* (defined by Webster as "spirited self-assurance") or, in Barba's Scandinavian vocabulary, the *sats*. As an example, Barba brought up the image of samurai retainers in feudal Japan. In the presence of the shogun, the majority of samurai would be required to sit on the heels in the (*seiza*) posture of Zen meditation, which is not a *sats* but is a grounded, pyramid-like position of deep-seatedness. Some few retainers, however, the entirely trustworthy ones, would be permitted to assume a more potent posture, with one knee up and a foot on the floor—a *sats*—from which the body could spring if necessary. Barba told us to think of the *sats* as the demiurge, as the creative, creator, or god within, and to search for it as if looking for DNA. The *sats* derives from a dancing to the internal music. It generates the rhythm of the next action.

On the final day of our workshop, beginning at 8 o'clock in the morning, Julia Varley presented an hour-long story of the possibilities of the human voice. In her performance piece, a demonstrative chronicle of how she had found her own voice, Julia related that she was born in Britain and raised in Italy from three years of age. At 22 she went to Barba in Denmark. Immediately upon entering into voice work, she was requested by one of the Odin teachers to sing a song. Realizing she did not know any songs, she sort of sang "Ba-ba, black sheep," which, for want of any other tune, she repeated day after day. Julia has a crack in her natural voice and the crack eventually consumed her sound. After four years of apprenticeship with the company, she nearly lost her voice completely. She said she could emit almost no voice at all even to someone sitting next to her in a car. People advised her to consult various doctors, dentists, therapists. A dentist wanted to remove teeth from her mouth. A doctor wanted to put her on penicillin for a year. A psychologist wanted her to enter therapy. She decided to follow her intuition. She decided to rediscover or recognize her own personal voice, without any thought of finding or developing a voice for the stage. She decided to begin from silence, the opposite of sound. Initially, she simply stayed alone in a room. Then, gradually, she began to practice in the room, beginning gently with everyday phrases. She moved on to vocal sounds—blowing, puffing, gurgling, mmm-chewing, lion-ahing, siren-scales, bending over and humming vvvvvvssssvvvvv, trills, bird-like sounds. At first she stayed with a regular voice placement and tonality. Then she allowed for variation. She would, for example, follow the path of a fly in the room with her voice, varying the sound as much as possible. She would follow the sounds of foreign languages, using unfamiliar accent and dialect rhythms and tones. These foreign rhythms and tones she applied to text, as in her performance piece she applied them to Lady Macbeth's speech, "the raven himself is hoarse / That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan / Under my battlements." She would also follow the sounds of invented languages, using made-up words to discover new rhythms, placements, and tones. And she would follow the sounds of animal voices: a sheep, cat, dog, cock, cow. Each of these she applied to text, as to the raven speech. Finally she would join the animal voices together, as she did for us, making a farmyard of Lady Macbeth.

As Julia was recounting and performing each of these exercises, she was marrying the vocal impulse to the physical action. It was as if her voice were dancing with her body. She explained that insofar as the brain has two halves, and one is related to singing and the other to speaking, she wants to unite them. She wants to annul the brain separation, so that the singing voice speaks and the speaking voice sings.

In the end, having declared that she desires her voice to have the freedom to be able to do everything, Julia gave us a symphony of voice—foreign language, laughing, sirening, screeching, weeping, whimpering, softness, harshness, highness, lowness, darkness, lightness, everythingness. It was gorgeous. And then she sang, a tiny song in a tiny voice, sitting tiny in a chair. She said that since she had begun her study of voice from silence what she most wants is for the very silence to sing. Paradox, opposition, *sats*, internal music, compression, energy—all of

our workshop principles were there in the form and beingness of Julia Varley.

I asked Julia why, in her analysis, she had lost the power of her voice during her apprenticeship. She said she thinks it was because she had been trying for results. She had come into a company of people with strong voices, among women with Italian voices. She said she had had to give up the goal of being like them with a theatre voice like theirs. Julia had learned to surrender expectations. She had entered her own voice, which may have been her own wound.

Back in the workshop, Barba asked me to pair up with Julia in order to model a kind of call-and-response partnering exercise. I was to perform the first action of my improvisation, then I was to hold momentarily in a *sats* in order for Julia spontaneously to invent an action for herself, then I was to go into my own second action, etc., all the way through 10 actions of my improvisation. Barba said that what Julia and I had been able to show together physically was exactly the dramatic situation of a scene from a novel by Goethe. When the other participants paired up randomly to perform the partnering exercise, their improvisations likewise appeared as if they had been made for each other. None of us had aimed for any meaning. None of us had spoken a sound. But meaning emerged, and it belonged to the spectator.

Again we explored our improvisations and compressed them. But we had to keep the same amount and quality of energy, the same tensions, as when we had done our actions large. Since we had previously been on our feet throughout our improvisations, we did them sitting. We reduced the form of each action by 50 percent and then to 10 percent. We tried not to cramp the energy layer of the action but to maintain it at 100 percent. Compression taught us what was essential to each action—what was the core, the heart, the specific physical identity of the action.

As a final lesson, in a spirit of playfulness, momentarily dropping his acute seriousness, Barba called the women participants to sit on two rows of chairs facing front from the center of the room. All together we individually performed the compressed versions of our improvisations, and the onlookers laughed with pleasure. Then Barba stood, a lone man in front of us, to perform his improvisation while we repeated ours. The mood of us women, the scene, and the onlookers changed remarkably—into a kind provocative agitation, as if he were Pentheus and we the bacchantes.

Meaning for Barba is ideo-plastic, as in a film by Eisenstein. It is the underscore of a piece, derived from rhythm and change. As a director, he intends for the actor to create a density—where the movement may be the actor slowly running, the text may speak of cruelty, and the choice may be beautiful—all together in a paradox. Oxymoron physicalized is a Barba principle.

In the first phase of his rehearsal work with the Odin Theatre, Barba protects the actors. They are given total freedom to do anything that emerges in response to the text, anything that is not a trying to express something. His job is to help them think, not through concepts but through action. He then shapes whatever actions they are undertaking to control. At this point, he is also protecting the text, which he sees as fundamental. "Otherwise," he said, "why choose it?" But, together with the actors, he is looking beyond a first interpretation toward a richness. "Otherwise," he said, "we are being lazy."

In the second phase of his rehearsal work, Barba protects the spectator. He intends to initiate a partnership between him/her and the actors. He said that his loyalty to the spectator encourages the actors to declare, "I am doing these actions not for you or against you but in your presence," thus creating a universe for the spectator to witness. In this phase Barba's job is to bring the actions into cohesion with the text so as to build empathy in the spectator; always, however, with the possibility of building different layers but in such a way as not overly to confuse the spectator. If the spectator falls into a black hole, Barba said, he/she must be able to climb out again. "This makes the spectator creative."

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Barba confessed he has always been disinterested in the individual attitudes and values of the Odin actors. In the beginning, they had to relinquish personal beliefs in order to make themselves available to work within the collective mind. Then, after years of training, the actors had to release from all technique and shift into Grotowski's *via negativa*. Finally, they had to become autonomous in relation to Barba. They had to become dramaturg-actors, with the text as a territory to be explored. To Barba as director, the Odin Theatre actors are his colleagues, and his enormous amount of work with them is and has always been "in order to affect the spectator, even a blind one." To Barba as human being, meaning in the world is found through the collective mind, and to Barba as theorist, "organicity is the truth."

All week, improvising without voice, although I had never spoken Emily Dickinson, she had remained within me. Indeed, through movement and imagination, her poem had penetrated to me at the age of four: a child at the wake of her grandfather, made to let go of her mother's hand as her mother went to tend the guests, frightened by the sight of a box at the other end of the

parlor, amazed and drawn by the mountains of flowers, moving forward alone, pushing through circles of grown-ups, and approaching, for the first time, an inert body, that of her grandfather who had taught her to outline the figures in her coloring book with black crayon, who was now laid out on high up some steps with carpet, who was visible only by standing on tiptoe, who was surrounded by colors smelling of something else and sweetness. Emily Dickinson and my childhood remembrance were the veins that forged my improvisation. But no one would have known that from looking. And yet someone looking could have caught the energy in my improvisation, and someone looking could have been moved to sensation.

The last guidance Eugenio Barba gave to us was this: "Try to find your personal, individual self, something deeper than darkness." And then he said, "I hope you meet many resistances, so you will be able to discover your forces."

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Julia Varley in Eugenio Barba's, *THE CASTLE OF HOLSTEBRO*

PHOTO: Fiora Bemporad