

EUGENIO BARBA'S MERITS

In 2000 Eugenio Barba received the Sonning Prize, granted every year by the University of Copenhagen to a personality who has contributed significantly to the growth of European culture. Also known as "the little Nobel Prize", the prestigious Sonning Prize counts among its winners Winston Churchill, Albert Schweitzer, Bertrand Russel, Niels Bohr, Alvar Aalto, Karl Barth, Laurence Olivier, Arthur Koestler, Karl Popper, Hannah Arendt, Simone de Beauvoir, Jürgen Habermas, Ingmar Bergman, Václav Havel, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Günter Grass. The only previous Danish recipient, before Eugenio Barba, was Niels Bohr.

Motivating the prize, the University of Copenhagen stressed Eugenio Barba's merits as artist, researcher and writer, as well as his commitment in spreading the knowledge of the theatres from Asian cultures and in establishing artistic ties between Europe and Latin America.

"Eugenio Barba's cultural merits – says Ferdinando Taviani, Italian theatre scholar and probably the greatest expert of Odin Teatret - can be separated from the aesthetical value of his performances which many consider among the most remarkable of our time. But we have to take into consideration Barba's role as intellectual and cultural catalyst who has contributed in a decisive way to the growth and renewal of theatre practice and theory in the second half of the 1900s. Barba's objective contributions can be synthesized in 6 points:

1) In the beginning of the 1960s, he inaugurated in the West the studies on India's classical theatre Kathakali, making it a main point of reference. In his long essay, published at once in many languages, he didn't limit himself to the dramaturgical and spectacular aspect of that theatre, but investigated its technical skeleton, the pedagogical practice and the transmission of experience as well as the ethical connotations. His essay provided a model of analysis for any form of performance, thus becoming an unavoidable methodological and epistemological tool for years to come.

2) Still in the 1960s, Barba was the main author for the international diffusion of Jerzy Grotowski's theatrical renewal. It was Barba who wrote *In Search of the Lost Theatre*, the first book on the hitherto unknown Grotowski, and who edited and published Grotowski's seminal *Towards a Poor Theatre*, one of the 20th century's fundamental texts.

3) With his theatre-laboratory, Odin Teatret, Barba has built an environment able to conjugate in an innovative way social obligations and artistic search. He shaped his theatre group into a cell of cultural organization (publishing house, pedagogic activity, international gatherings and working exchanges) without neglecting a coherent artistic research whose results were influential performances which were independent of current trends. This model of theatre, different both from the "art theatre" and the "avant-garde", was a source of inspiration for many theatre groups of the 1970s and 1980s, especially in Europe and in Latin America. Both his practice and reflections contributed to

the awareness and growth of a "third theatre", a performative culture characterised by autonomy and strongly rooted within the context of such groups.

4) Since the early 1970s Barba has been a pioneer in introducing Asian theatres in Europe. He organised tours and long seminars analysing in depth the artistic and technical features of the performer's technique in Nô, Kabuki, Nihon Buyo, Butoh and Japanese contemporary theatre, in Gambuh, Topeng, Tjalonarang, Barong and other Balinese and Javanese dance genres, in Peking Opera, in Kathakali, Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Katak, Cchau and Odissi from India and in shamanistic performances from Korea. Barba collaborated with artists and scholars such as Hideo and Hisao Kanze, Mannojo Nomura, Sawamura Sojuro, Shuji Terayama, Kazuo Ohno, Natsu Nakajima, Katsuko Azuma, Kanichi Hanayagi, Akira Matsui, Moriaki Watanabe, Masao Yamaguchi, I Made Bandem, I Made Tempo, I Made Djimat, I Gusti Ayu Srinatih, Park Pyong-Chon, Shanta Rao, Uma Sharma, Sanjukta and Ragunath Panigrahi, Sankaran Namboodiri, Gopal Venu, Kavita Nagpal, Suresh Awasthi, Pei Yanglin, Wu Hsing-Kuo and Mingder Chung.

5) In the beginning of the 1980s, through his books and empirical research, Barba delineated a new field of knowledge that he called "Theatre Anthropology". Devoted to the comparative study of the recurrent principles in the various traditions and stage experiences, and independently of cultural and geographical distinctions, Theatre Anthropology has become a "pragmatic science" with an impressive bibliography by artists, researchers, scholars and university teams from many countries and specializations.

6) With the creation of ISTA, International School of Theatre Anthropology, in 1979, Barba has given life to an intercultural and interdisciplinary environment in which theatre is present in its multiform variations and degrees: masters from Asian classical theatres, from Afro-American traditions, from western theatre, mime and dance, scholars, directors, performers, playwrights, experienced artists and beginners, known personalities and people who operate in the anonymity of the craft. ISTA is a net of collaborative relationships which is neither regulated by statutes nor characterised by the unity of a theory. ISTA meets periodically in sessions of comparative practical work and historical/theoretical reflections based on a common interest in empirical research, pragmatic theatre knowledge and the necessity to transmit this knowledge.

To these points - concludes Taviani – we have to add the stature of Eugenio Barba as a writer. He is the author of a dozen books translated into more than twenty languages. In his texts he tirelessly investigates the ways to transfer the "tacit knowledge" of stage practice into articulated knowledge and writing."