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To cite this article: Vicki Ann Cremona (2017) Drawing back the curtains on the actor's 'private place': a personal journey into ISTA 2016, *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 8:1, 33-45, DOI: [10.1080/19443927.2016.1230144](https://doi.org/10.1080/19443927.2016.1230144)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19443927.2016.1230144>



Published online: 07 Apr 2017.



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Drawing back the curtains on the actor's 'private place': a personal journey into ISTA 2016

Vicki Ann Cremona

This article describes a personal journey into the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) during its fifteenth session in Albino in April 2016. It reflects upon the common elements underlying the different approaches to training in the different traditions that were represented by actors who are considered as 'masters' in their specific art forms. It highlights different techniques from both the West and Asia that were demonstrated and discussed. It takes a look at daily life during ISTA, as well as the training that the participants were asked to undergo.

Keywords: theatre anthropology, body-mind, presence, discipline, Barba

Withdrawing to a private place

No one has as yet been concerned with establishing a private place where, in an atmosphere of simplicity, honesty, comradeship, and firm discipline, the young Servants of the Theatre will acquire the complete technique and spirit of their profession; where they will learn to consider their art, not as an easy game, a brilliant and profitable craft, but as an idea that demands hard, relentless, complex, often unrewarding work, to be achieved only through great self-sacrifice – work which is done not only with the mouth, not even with mouth and mind, but also with the body, with the whole person, all the faculties and with the whole being. (Copeau 1990, p. 25)

On Thursday 7 April 2016, inhabitants in the little northern town of Albino, situated 10 kilometres from Bergamo, Italy, were surprised to see a motley collection of foreign-looking people of different ages, generally armed

with trolley suitcases or backpacks, heading towards the Sanctuary of the 'Madonna della Gamba'. The travellers' pilgrimage led to another destination close by: a monastery recently converted into a youth hostel where they would be experiencing 10 intense days of community life. As they walked, the travellers caught glimpses of the breathtaking views of wooded hills, whose valleys were, up to relatively recent times, famous for their range of textile industries, and which are trying to stave off the assault of non-European competition that has ravaged industrial activity in nearby areas.

The quasi-monastical life to which the pilgrims were willingly dedicating themselves was based on the contemplation of the 'Actor's Know-How – Personal Paths, Techniques and Visions'. They were participating in the fifteenth session of the International School of Theatre Anthropology, better known as ISTA, a term coined by Eugenio Barba in 1980. Barba defines theatre anthropology as 'the field of study of human beings in an organised theatre situation'.¹ ISTA sessions are periods of intense research into the acting techniques coming from different theatre traditions, in order to derive principles of acting and training that transcend geographical areas and can determine a common terrain of knowledge and exchange on the body-mind skills that constitute the actor's working tools. 'Body-mind' implies the necessity, for the actor, to eliminate the sensation of a mind commanding a body that executes when accomplishing a 'necessary' action – that is, one that engages the whole body in a leap of energy, even when immobile (Barba 1995, p. 115).

¹ ISTA conference 7 April 2016.

ISTA sessions: the focus

The fifteenth ISTA featured masters from Bali, Japan and India with whom Barba is currently collaborating, and – as in the case of the Balinese actor – has already worked with in the preparation and production of intercultural performances with the actors of Odin Teatret. The actors were chosen for the disciplines they specialise in. The Balinese I Wayan Bawa is the artistic director of the Gambuh Desa Batuan Ensemble and also practises Topeng and Tjalonarang. He has participated in ISTA since 1995. Keiin Yoshimura is a performer, choreographer and art director of the Kamigata-mai dance. She has practised Kabuki, Noh, as well as the martial arts Kendo and Kyudo. She was accompanied by the shamisen musician So Sugiura. The Indian Parvathy is self-trained in Baul and, like Keiin, is connected to the Magdalena Project, an international network of women in contemporary theatre, of which Odin actress Julia Varley is a founding member. ISTA 2016 also included members of the Odin Teatret and of Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo – the latter are Western actors who have trained and performed in Asian – particularly Indian – forms of theatre.

ISTA sessions are built around highly trained actors from Asian and Western cultures, who are recognized as masters of the specific art form that they have integrated within their bodies. During the sessions, each 'master' is asked to demonstrate and elaborate on the incorporated knowledge that s/he has acquired through learning processes, mastery and practice. Barba privileges Asian art forms at ISTA because he maintains that the rules governing these different performing styles provide a solid, well-tested basis for the actors' practice, even though he admits that purity of style is

often achieved at the cost of isolation from other traditions and experiences. Barba has often argued that contemporary Western performers 'lack rules of action, which while not limiting artistic freedom, aid them in their different tasks' (Barba 2006, p. 6). He sees ISTA as an opportunity to observe and open up to different forms of theatre in order to derive common principles in the way the body is used, which can provide a clearer understanding of the actor's technique, regardless of the specific form practised. This knowledge can contribute to developing the quality of actors' scenic presence, making them appear more alive, and consequently retaining the spectators' interest.

Each session focuses on the observation and discussion of the work processes of these masters, by concentrating not so much on the meanings the actions are intended to transmit, but rather on the ways each action is accomplished, the different stages of preparation and execution. Barba (1995, p. 107) calls this scenic presence the actor's *bios* – the bodily positions assumed and the energy emitted by the actor, as well as the training underlying this craft.

The sessions, which are based on lectures, demonstrations and training workshops, teach participants how to 'see' differently through their personal physical experience of certain actions, as well as through watching the actions being performed and understanding the process behind their development and acquisition. The sessions are intended to 'provoke reactions and reflection by presenting unmediated authentic performance fragments without considering the home cultures of either participants or their fellow artists (i.e. the transcultural)' (Savarese 2002, p. 43). As highlighted previously, the focus in ISTA is on technique: how actors acquire their skills, how they work upon and perfect them, how they prepare themselves for performance, and what elements across these different approaches are fundamentally constitutive of the actor's craft. Although actors use their bodies in ways that are often dictated by their cultures, all actors share the same anatomical features. This consideration is probably what led Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese to call their first version of *The Secret Art of the Performer* (1991) by the title 'L'Anatomie de l'Acteur' (1986).

The question that should underpin every participant's experience in ISTA is to ask him/herself how the principles underlying the techniques that are demonstrated and worked upon in the different sessions can be converted, adapted or infused into the participant's own specific process and reshaped according to his/her needs. The idea is not to reproduce what is taught. In the discovery of general principles across cultures that underpin the art of the stage, the aim is to undergo a process that may lead to an evaluation of one's own approach to theatre and working methods, whether in one's practice of theatre or, as I was to find out, in one's reflection upon the art of the actor.

My experience was to show me that training, observation, and discussion – well-tried methods at ISTA – are key to grasping the complexity of the different techniques that had been selected. I was to discover that the interest of ISTA is not, a priori, in creating new forms of research, but rather in obliging each participant to embark on his/her individual search and reflection, by exposing them – in a concentrated time and space – to diverse pathways that are each working on the body to produce different aesthetic

2 Term used by Barba, ISTA conference 7 April 2016.

results, but using similar points of departure, or, to use Barba's terms: 'patterns of behaviour'.² The idea behind this direct participation is that in order to understand an actor's know-how, a person has to experience directly the psycho-physical paths and techniques demonstrated by the masters.

A comparative analysis of the different techniques studied reveals certain common principles, many of which have been written about, but need to be experienced in one's own body to provide the individual with tools for further physical or intellectual research. In ISTA, Barba's concern is not to underline what is different in the various traditions that are presented, but rather to observe the similarities. In comparing Barba's methodology to Foucault's idea of 'archaeology', theatre scholar Maria Shevtsova (2009, p. 148) clearly highlights this fundamental principle when stating that, like Foucault, 'Barba's investigation into recurrences lead him ... to a map of elements that have no choice but to be seen to be being repeated again and again, give or take some minor variations on the pattern drawn'.

With hindsight, I believe that the wealth of ISTA lies in the experience itself. I describe ISTA as an experiential immersion based on cross-cultural comparison, making the participants go back to certain cardinal principles that are used differently in the moment of performance according to the different performance traditions, but which come together in the moments of training and preparation.

Due to this continuity in the ISTA methodology, I shall be referring to writings about other ISTAs to bring out more clearly the line running through the different experiences and individual discoveries which can be traced up to the one I attended.

A taste of experience

The fifteenth ISTA was different to all those that preceded it. Whereas other ISTA sessions were composed of three groups: masters, participants and observers (generally academics), the 2016 session did not allow for observers during the practical sessions. Every single participant, whether practitioner or academic, had to actively participate in the practical sessions with the various masters. Also there were no sessions that were open to a wider public, consequently, the time that was shared between the participants, as well as between the participants and the masters, generated closeness and intimacy.

As a theatre scholar and a non-practitioner, I approached the aspect of direct participation in the sessions with great trepidation because I am physically unfit and untrained. I had already in the past watched training sessions and rehearsals with Barba which were building up towards a performance (Cremona 2011), but I had never attended ISTA nor had I ever undergone the training. I found, however, that the fact of actually performing the exercises myself, however badly, allowed me to acquire a more personal insight into certain aspects and imperatives of the physical work and energy that are required of a trained actor. Although the masters were encouraging and understanding, the exercises were not easy. They obliged me to shift from thinking through concepts to thinking in action. I was made to feel, within my own body, the physical implications of what I have been reading about

throughout my career: the centre of energy in my trunk, the importance of my knees as vehicles of force and vitality, the face and arms as embellishments, but not as centres of expression, and the wielding of various physical tools that are part of the secret art of the performer. This was certainly not going to make of me an actor, but it created a physical awareness of my body that I had never acquired before, and that no workout in a gym would ever give me. It showed me how to play with balance, how to work with rhythm, create resistance through opposition – fundamental techniques found in every theatre culture that allow for the creation of a body that is interesting to watch, and that may capture and hold the attention of the spectator.

It was interesting to learn of the difficulties these highly trained actors themselves encountered, and still face, in order to master, day after day, the drills and exercises that sustain their work. Part of the ISTA magic was also to discover a master, in a secluded corner or during a quiet moment, away from prying eyes, engaged in the relentless practice of particular aspects of his/her art.

Daily life at ISTA

ISTA's monastic life is highly regulated, with different moments for different activities. In a monastery, the transition from one activity to another is often marked by a particular sound, such as the tolling of a bell. In ISTA, the sound that accompanied us was that of a huge Balinese kebyar gong that first sounded at six o'clock in the morning, accompanied by the sound of a Chilean 'happy hang' passing through the corridors, in order to ensure that we would wake up in time for the 6.30 call to the sunrise. The day started with this intense moment of 'communitas' (Turner 1992, p. 45), when all the participants would gather in silence under the dark arches of the main cloister that would progressively light up as the sky passed from dove grey to eggshell blue. At the appointed time, one or more actors would sing either to a traditional ritual, or to a tune that was part of their traditional music. The gong would sound at different times of the day, four minutes before an activity was to take place; it would be followed by the sound of feet scurrying to the designated destination.

Self-discipline and negotiation were necessarily the order of the day. Participants, many of whom had long forgotten hostel living conditions, had to negotiate sharing of dormitories and queuing for showers and toilets. Silence in the sleeping quarters was a golden rule, which became especially important to adapt to conditions which, although comfortable and adequate, were experienced as 'extra-daily' (Barba 1986, p. 115). The day was regulated by sessions followed by short breaks, and longer ones for breakfast, lunch and supper. The intense, rigorous regime of ISTA left little time for much beyond the sessions and performances. This made the afternoon moments very precious, where people engaged in private or collective discussion with the masters, or created mini-seminars, demonstrations and discussions among themselves, or simply worked or relaxed. The mini-seminars covered all sorts of subjects – those I attended ranged from a lecture about Meyerhold's biomechanics, to practical demonstrations of certain Chinese forms of theatre training, to discussions about theatre in South America – any

person who wanted to propose something would just put up a notice on the notice board, and anyone interested would attend.

The fact that the majority, composed of younger actors and budding directors, shared their working and living spaces with older scholars and people involved in the theatre in different ways, was in itself an experience. The life stories of some of the younger generation, their tenacity in pursuing their goals and ideals in a material world which has little place for art, or the recognition of the sheer hard work necessary to produce a high level of artistic quality, added another layer to this experience. Moreover, Barba's utter determination to hold an ISTA in spite of the total lack of financial support, incomprehension and indifference of public authorities drove home the fact that however big or small, artists are constantly obliged to nurture, maintain and renew the necessary skills to claim respect and recognition in a political world that remains largely impenetrable to art, but expects it to be produced effortlessly and inexpensively at its behest.

ISTA discipline was also reflected in the tasks assigned to each participant. Our menial tasks, which covered many aspects that living in a community demanded – washing dishes, cleaning floors, bedrooms or bathrooms etc. – demanded fast work and collaboration, and obliged us to structure our time effectively. It was essential to nurture and maintain a team spirit and a feeling of camaraderie, which was spurred on by chatting, singing and other distractions. My workmates came from different countries and backgrounds – from European countries such as Italy, the UK, Hungary or France, or further afield, such as Turkey, Chile, Australia or China. The work generated a spirit of reciprocal respect, and intense discussion about what theatre meant to each of us.

There were also moments where people could sit out and chat, or meet up with one of the masters. These early afternoon sessions, which I have referred to previously, were called 'Balaganchik Time: Barter and Interactions'. The title, which also happens to be the Russian version of Blok's *The Fairground Booth*, implied the possibility of a hub of activities, and that is what it turned out to be. I particularly remember a warm afternoon with the Indian Baul singer, Parvathy, sitting out on the terrace with a group of enthusiastic participants, talking about training, consciousness, spirituality, and going away with the feeling of having caught a glimpse of a special inner serenity. I also remember a fruitful afternoon with the Japanese actress Keiin Yoshimura, discussing ways in which some of the exercises she had taught us could be applied to non-actors in daily life.

Discussions with members from Teatro Tascabile often centred on the ways they used the training acquired during their long years in India. The question 'Why India?'³ was often asked of them. Their Indian adventure started out with the feeling of their past director, Renzo Vescovi (1941–2005), for the need of an expressive body technique that demanded total precision, and which did not admit any shortcuts. Vescovi (2007, p. 96) felt that Indian dance theatre offered 'a semantic nucleus' that had found expression in 'pure rhythmic sound' through what he called 'the musicalized word', as well as highly stylised dance forms whose semantic value lay in the ways 'rhythmed sound' is blended into 'pantomimic expression'. He was fascinated by what he termed a 'counterpoint technique' underlying Indian dance-theatre,

3 The question is actually the subject of a chapter in a book dedicated to the writings of Renzo Vescovi (2007, pp. 81–89), the director of Teatro Tascabile who passed away suddenly on 3 April 2005. All quotes taken from Vescovi's writings have been translated by myself.

where the dancer plays with the sung text by producing complementary or contrasting physical messages, 'using all the possible devices of choreographic rhetoric' (Vescovi 2007, p. 96). He called this type of trained body a 'body-orchestra' (Vescovi 2007, p. 167). The Tascabile actors have, in fact, mastered different body techniques – as one of the actors, Tiziana Barbero, stated, they have spent most of their lives in training. Discussions often centred on the ways the Italian actors create performances where the bodily knowledge and skills acquired in India are never reproduced directly. The actors' presence on stage does not evoke Indian dance-movement in any way, but it underpins the dexterity and expertise which emanates from their action. The actors create their own 'counterpoint technique' in the elaboration of the particular physical idiom that is at the root of their performances.

The opportunity to witness this type of technique in practice was offered through their performance: 'Rosso Angelico. Danza per un viaggiatore leggero' (Rosso Angelico. Dance for a foolish [but also, shallow, nimble, weightless] traveller), which takes as its basis the medieval 'Danse Macabre', many visual traces of which can be found in the Bergamask region. The performance may be defined as a choreography where the actors' physical work pulls the spectators into a tourbillon of action, imagery, sound and words, intended to make them feel as though they are caught in a dance from which it is difficult to emerge. The actors rely on their baggage of physical knowledge to ply techniques that derive from oriental theatre forms, circus arts, dance etc. in order to engage the spectator physically and emotionally in a dance with Death. At no moment can one relate the specific actions to Kathakali, Flamenco, Orissi or any of the multiple techniques that they have embodied. The actors' knowledge of the underlying basic principles of all these techniques allows them to develop a physical line of action that establishes a relationship between this polyphony of styles in order to create their own peculiar movement and dynamism. Using live and recorded music, texts from the German-language poet Rainer Maria Rilke and the Italian comic actor Totò, the actors mix tradition with innovation in a whirl of spectacle and movement that, to my mind, plays with, and not simply to, the spectators.

Learning to learn: control and truth

Morning life was regulated by breakfast and two workshops entitled 'Learn to Learn'. For these, the participants were divided into four groups which rotated for two days with each master.⁴ The masters' teaching techniques differed, but all had one characteristic in common – transmission through example. The master would break down the action into sequences, starting from ways of breathing. I discovered that in some theatre forms, there is an important distinction between breathing from the nose or mouth. According to Keiin Yoshimura, at birth we have an original life energy, known as 'ki' in the Japanese tradition and as 'prana' in Sanskrit, that diminishes as time passes. The actor has to restore and intensify this through deep breathing. In the Japanese dance-theatre form, Kamigata-mai, inhaling and exhaling deeply from the nose allows for energy to be pushed down and accumulate in the area known as 'tanden', starting four fingers down from the navel, up to the

⁴ The groups were:
Ceylon Group,
Madagascar Group,
Crete Group and Cuba
Group.

acupuncture point called 'ein', situated close to the anus, and it is kept in by tightening the latter. Breathing in from the sides of the mouth, and exhaling through the nose while bending the knees gives more grounding and stability to the actor.

Parvathy, a Baul, or mystic minstrel, breathes through her nose in her exercises because, she maintains, breathing through the nose links man to celestial forces, while breathing through the mouth connects to terrestrial energies. Tiziana Barbero from Teatro Tascabile, who specialises in Orissi, echoed the Indian dancer Sanjukta Panigrahi, when she stated that Orissi dancers keep their mouths closed while breathing, in order not to lose power (Panigrahi, Ruffini in Hastrup 1996, p. 100). Julia Varley from Odin Teatret also worked with breathing techniques in her voice work with us, making us relax while inhaling and tense up while exhaling. In all cases, it was possible to note how the different modes of breathing led to the development of a different quality and intensity of energy, essential to movement and control of the body.⁵

5 Some of the effects of Varley's exercises are described in her book (Varley 2010, p. 33) Roberta Carreri, who also spoke about energy in showing us how to create sequences and develop them into physical scores, has also described these processes (Carreri 2014).

Both the morning and afternoon sessions showed clearly that the specific terminology, which the actor has acquired or elaborated in order to translate action into words, is always very important. I was also fascinated by the little details that the actors used to explain their art. Keiin Yoshimura spoke about the position of the little finger that is directly connected to the centre of energy situated, as previously stated, four fingers under the navel. Awareness of its position made us focus on developing our actions through the lower torso rather than through the arms and legs, which gave added intensity to our movements.

The practical sessions proved to be tiny bite-size experiences of the prodigious art that lies behind the seeming effortless of a 'master'. Participating in these sessions allowed me to catch a brief, albeit incomplete, glimpse into the intense discipline of a trained body. They made me realise to what extent total control of one's physical movements are equated with the idea of truth on the stage. A decided body is one that can assume, in a seemingly natural way, an unnatural position, thereby holding the spectator's unswerving attention – what Stanislavski termed simply as 'I believe'. Dominating one's body implies, as Stanislavski once pointed out, a creative state of mind that demands the actor's full concentration, thereby arousing the spectator's curiosity to find out what is retaining the actor's interest (Stanislavsky 1967, p. 21).

Simply to get into the initial standing position of the various theatrical forms that we were led to experience demanded intense concentration and effort. The Japanese 'kamae' (standing with bended knees); the Orissi 'trib-angi' position, with one's head, shoulder, hip and knees pulled in different directions; the firm legs balanced on bent knees in flamenco; the tension created by standing with open bent knees and raised toes in the Balinese gambuh, or balancing on the outer edges of the foot with toes curled in and the large toe raised, as in Kathakali – all these unnatural positions provided a straight back and a curved body, situating the energy in the lower part of the trunk. It is during these moments that the words of Tadashi Suzuki kept coming to mind: 'An actor [...] will appear clumsy if he cannot project a sense of profound truth to his audience. The actor's nationality is irrelevant' (cited Barba and Savarese 1991, p. 128).

6 Term used by Barba,
ISTA conference 7 April
2016.

The two gruelling practical sessions were followed by various practical analytical conference sessions throughout the day. In these sessions, the participants acquired a deeper understanding of what they had begun to experience with their own body through the practical sessions: the true meaning of Barba's expression 'to kill one's spontaneity'⁶ in order to acquire the skills that attract and retain an audience. These sessions were followed by full performances by the masters that were also open to the general public, where participants could consolidate their understanding of what they had physically experienced and witnessed during the day.

In his first meeting with the participants, Barba spoke about his own process. He described his three sources of knowledge: his master, Grotowski, the books he had read, and the Asian actors he had watched during his travels, but whose techniques were little known when he started his Odin adventure in 1964. He spoke about the first invitations he sent out to Asian dancers in the early 1970s, in Holstebro where Odin Teatret is based, or later, within the context of ISTA. Barba quickly came to the realisation that what was necessary for other actors was not simply to watch the end result – the performance – but rather, to understand the process of an actor's work, which he termed succinctly as: 'what the actor did on the first day of work'.

The conference sessions I particularly enjoyed fell under the general heading: 'Memory and Discontinuity: Professional Biographies'. During each session, Eugenio Barba would question one of the masters about his/her personal life, training and techniques. The master would answer and demonstrate. The basic idea is that an actor or dancer does not only recreate a particular style (flamenco, Kathakali, etc.) but the style is also conditioned by a specific biography which has shaped the actor's cultural characteristics and life-experiences. The detailed answers that each master provided were characterised by openness and sincerity, to the extent of revealing the tough continual negotiation between their professional and private lives.

Various masters commented about the difference between past and present. Formerly, in Asia, students trained under a master. In India, they became part of the master's household. They were constantly with the master, who imparted a technique, but also a philosophy of life. Our masters in Albino all concurred that institutionalisation has also meant loss of value. When schools were instituted, the methods of transmission of knowledge changed radically. The formation of classes of relatively large groups of students meant that knowledge became more widespread. However, the technical precision that was imparted through the daily shared life of master and student was lost, together with the transmission of a particular way of living and thinking, which was part and parcel of the learning process.

Another factor that has been lost is time, which, in an institutional framework of learning and apprenticeship, has been considerably shortened. The learning process itself is built around continual repetition, up to the point when actions that have been repeated for years are fully incorporated into the actor's body, to the extent of almost becoming natural in the exercise of their art. Moreover, in Asian dance-theatre, every detail within the technical structure of the particular theatrical form is noted and given a name. Beyond this formal score that every trained actor embodies, there is also an invis-

ble sub-score that is created by the individual performer, which is based on the performer's particular abilities, interests as well as life-choices, circumstances and directions. Developing this sub-score in a way that will enhance the technical score is also part of the performer's secret art.

A characteristic shared by many masters is that they did not limit themselves to one artistic form. I Wayan Bawa was made to learn the traditional songs before being allowed to train as an actor. The songs taught him rhythm and tempo. Later, he was made to study traditional painting with a master, and then to play musical instruments. It was only when he had acquired these various skills that his master, Djimat, who performed a particular type of Gambuh – an old traditional form dating back to the fifteenth century – began to teach him how to move. He first started him out by making him imitate a horse, and when he had mastered that art, he could move to the most basic mask in Topeng – the Prime Minister, which he had to master in turn before going on to more complicated and intricate work.

Keiin Yoshimura played the piano until the age of 22, before moving to the three-stringed music instrument, the shamisen, and is also skilled in the martial art Kendo, as well as in Hatha Yoga. As previously discussed, the actors from Teatro Tascabile have all developed knowledge and specialist skills in particular Indian dance theatre forms, to the extent that they play to audiences in India. They also possess acrobatic abilities, as well as intense training and performance on very high stilts. Both Tascabile and Odin Teatret actors – who at the ISTA represented the group theatre traditions – can play different musical instruments. This polyphony of abilities contributes to what Barba (2015, p. 123) calls the pre-expressive – that is, the knowledge that is integral to the actor's work and that makes for well-rounded actors who are able to command attention by mastering presence on stage in different ways and through a variety of means that they have acquired through the years.

During both practical and conference sessions, the masters shared information about the various components of the process: balance – the dynamic force which helps to transform body weight into action and energy; tension – the tonicity that is produced through creating opposing dynamics within the same action, such as looking upwards while pushing the body down; estrangement – rendering strange or unusual what is familiar by creating obstacles to accomplishing actions, in order to retain consciousness and control of every impulse and movement; flow – the personal way the actor puts together the different components in order to give shape, depth, purpose and continuity to artistic presence which will arrest the spectator's attention during performance.

Acquiring technique contributes to constructing a performative presence that can arouse a cenesthetic response in the spectator's body, thereby retaining attention and provoking pleasure. Effective presence is constructed through an artificial process. This common use of artificiality is formalised in different ways according to the provenance and training of the actor, but all are linked by elementary principles that are at the basis of the actor's art, whichever way it is declined.

Alessandro Rigoletti from Teatro Tascabile, who has trained rigorously in Kathakali for over 20 years, explained that this theatre form is based on quality of presence, rather than representation. Tiziana Barbiero spoke of

her initial efforts in Odissi dance, which consisted of learning mechanically, in order to work upon the shape of the body and place the different parts of the body correctly. It was only once she had mastered the technique that she could focus on developing the transmission of emotion. I Wayan Bawa focused on the mastery of balance through the unnatural placing of different parts of the body – shoulders – which in Balinese dance-drama are raised, in order to open the chest – hips, bent knees, and even heels that are turned forward while moving. Caterina Scotti from Tascabile, who is highly trained in Bharata Natyam, is also a professional flamenco dancer and spoke of the incorporation of rhythm within the body in order to sustain and develop movement. Parvathy spoke about connecting to one's deep inner consciousness and inner practice, which gives rise to 'another intelligence' that may be linked to the actor's work. Roberta Carreri, from Odin Teatret, spoke of the way she integrated her training into the construction of her performances.

Discipline and music

A recurrent word in all the different biographies was 'discipline'. Copeau (1990, p. 169) defines the sense of discipline, that should be inherent to every actor, in this way:

their sense of discipline consists of avoiding nothing, of never pretending, of never expressing or even thinking of anything that they cannot personally and authentically think and express.

Discipline, therefore, is at the root of an 'authentic' presence, one which makes the spectators engage with what they are watching. Parvathy defined this as the inner world that one has to build according to the path that one is shown. Within the theatrical context, it also means precision that can only be achieved through restraint, self-control and constant practice – the endless repetition which creates the psycho-physical awareness that is essential to the actor's craft. The discipline of rigorous training allows the body to achieve what the mind wants to do. In exercising discipline, the actor develops different ways of being that allow for the creation of a complex dramaturgy. In the various demonstrations and discussions with Barba, it became clear that the actor's discipline means continually pushing the body beyond its limits, and working incessantly on the constant honing of technique.

I would have wished to see more actors juxtaposing their specific techniques to create performance, as in the case of Julia Varley and I Wayan Bawa. Under Barba's direction, the two actors worked together before the participants to develop a shared dialogue through the construction of a common 'score' that they elaborated on the basis of their particular ways of doing theatre. I found particularly interesting the way they negotiated presence, non-verbal and verbal communication, and how and when the director intervened to develop a montage of the sequences they produced. This transcultural exchange placed both actors and director in positions of observation, action and reaction, as each engaged differently his/her creative process, relying more heavily on imagination in one case, or on tradition in the other, while finding ways to develop interaction and construct 'dialogue' through

their physical work. My observation of this interaction led me to think about the ways energy is expressed through the body in different traditions – the different bodily postures, facial expressions, types of movement and rhythms that suddenly confront each other but through which the observer who has learned to see can begin to discern underlying common principles.

Another important factor is music. My observations have led me to the conclusion that Asian actors are musicians of the body. Like any other musician, they subject their instrument to rigorous technique, to produce a quality of spectacle where sound and movement cannot be dissociated. Watching Parvathy play her one-string *ektara* and small drum *duggi* made me observe how the music of the body and that produced by the singing and the instruments, came to form a perfect whole that is echoed in the spectator's experience of the theatrical event. Parvathy's instruments, as well as the shamisen used by So Sugiura to accompany Keiin Yoshimura's movements, were at the basis of performance which intertwined movement with sound, rendering the two indissociable, and leading the spectator to experience them as one.

Even when recorded, music was essential to all the other masters practising art forms from Asia. I could not help thinking of the fact that Ancient Western theatre was also based on the musicality stemming from this inseparable quality of movement and music, and I mused about the general effect that may have been produced through the intertwining of instruments such as the ancient Greek aulos, the chanting, dance and the ways of recitation. It drove home even further the awareness that the few texts from ancient times that have come down to us have led us to focus on a very partial fragment of performance, but have failed to capture for posterity the wholeness of the theatrical experience.

The evening performances, where the masters fully expressed the skills and techniques they had shown and discussed, provided another dimension to all I had observed. I was sensitive to the aesthetic qualities of the masters' work, but also to the different physical layers that made up their performance. In other words, my 'experience of the experience' (Hastrup 1996, p. 175) provided an aesthetic synthesis to all I had watched, learned and understood at ISTA.

ISTA 2016 provided me with new keys to penetrate the actor's 'private place of doing'. It provided deeper insight into the relentless and often unrecognised work that actors striving for excellence have to accomplish, in order to nurture the pre-expressive capabilities that determine the mastery and constant freshness of their art. This condensed period of time furnished a unique opportunity to observe at close range shared qualities in psycho-physical characteristics and concerns that run through strikingly diverse cultural expressions produced by highly trained actors working within different traditions. It allowed me to establish connections between over-arching techniques that are deployed by skilled performers in their effort to bewitch audiences and hold fast their attention.

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