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Attraversare confini: rotte, geografie e migrazioni tra  
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A cura di Ester Fuoco

## **Performative migrations: Odin Teatret's theatrical barter in the Seventies**

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## Abstract

The essay explores Odin Teatret's journeys through Southern Italy and Latin America in the 1970s as paradigmatic instances of *performative migration*. By retracing the group's experiences in Lecce, Sardinia, and Carpignano Salentino, it analyses how Eugenio Barba and his actors transformed the boundaries between art and life through the practice of *theatrical barter*—a symbolic exchange of performances, songs, and gestures with local communities. This practice, far from being mere cultural animation, became a means of redefining theatrical identity through encounters with difference. The article further examines how these ephemeral exchanges generated an enduring “living archive” of gestures, memories, and audiovisual traces, now preserved in the LAFILS archive in Lecce. Finally, it situates barter within a broader genealogy of intercultural performance, reading it as a device of negotiation that redefined the geography, ethics, and epistemology of twentieth-century theatre.

## Riassunto

Questo saggio esplora i viaggi dell'Odin Teatret attraverso il sud Italia e l'America Latina negli anni Settanta come casi paradigmatici di *migrazione performativa*. Ricostruendo infatti le esperienze del gruppo in Salento e in Sardegna, analizza come Eugenio Barba e i suoi attori abbiano trasformato i confini tra arte e vita attraverso la pratica del *baratto teatrale*, uno scambio simbolico di performance, canzoni e azioni con la comunità locale. Questa pratica, lontana da essere solamente una mera animazione culturale, diventò infatti un mezzo per ridefinire l'identità teatrale attraverso l'incontro fra differenze. Lo studio esamina quindi come gli scambi effimeri abbiano generato tuttavia un durevole “archivio vivente” di gesti, memorie e tracce audiovisive, ora preservate presso l'archivio LAFILS di Lecce. Infine, questa analisi situa il baratto entro la genealogia più ampia della performance interculturale, leggendola come una strategia di negoziazione che ridefinisce la geografia, l'etica e l'epistemologia teatrale del Ventesimo secolo.

## 1. Borders and performative migrations

The theme of the border, as proposed by this thematic issue, prompts not just geographical and political reflections, but also aesthetic and anthropological insights. The fact is that the border can never be identified as a static line, but rather as a threshold that allows passage, crossing: a liminal space in which identities hybridise, languages affect each other and practices are reinvented. In the twentieth century, the theatrical scene was a privileged laboratory for observing this process: from European

research theatre to Latin American community theatre, the performing arts have continuously explored the boundaries between art and life, between actor and spectator, between local and global.

The experience of Odin Teatret in the Seventies, which appears paradigmatic, was a part of this trend. Founded in 1964 by Eugenio Barba, a former pupil and collaborator of Jerzy Grotowski, the theatre collective was born as a group of amateurs excluded from the official Norwegian academies, and moved two years later to Denmark as Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium. Hence that condition of 'marginality', which at first might have been perceived as a limit, soon became the driving force of radical research into the work of the actor and the role of the collective in the creative process.

In the Seventies, however, the group went through a decisive transformation: from the closed laboratory of Holstebro it moved towards extra-theatrical contexts, choosing to work in urban peripheries and countries without permanent theatres. This transition was made possible by developing the concept of theatrical barter, a practice involving the exchange of performative actions between actors and local communities (TAVIANI 1975; WATSON 2002). Instead of simply presenting a spectacle, Odin Teatret offered dances, and fragments of its repertoire, receiving in return songs, folk dances, stories and poems. Barter was therefore not configured as a simple strategy of cultural animation, but as a true act of performative migration; the theatre group not only traversed geographical borders, moving from Northern Europe to Southern Italy or Latin America, but migrated in identity, transforming its dramaturgy and training through its contacts with different cultures. In this respect, the border was manifested as both a critical and generative place: what questioned the actors' certainties was also what allowed them to reinvent themselves.

Analysing the experiences of the Danish group in Italy between 1973 and 1975, in particular in Salento and Sardinia (ACCA 2013; SANTORO 2017; FRATTALI 2024), therefore enables us to focus on the connections between borders, migration and performance, not limiting ourselves to the reconstruction of an episode in the history of contemporary theatre, but reflecting on the role of the performing arts as practices of traversal and as languages capable of creating new cultural geographies.

## 2. From the laboratory to the journey

To understand the significance of Odin's experiences in Italy, we need briefly to retrace the path that led the company to emerge from the «closed room» of the theatre laboratory (CHRISTOFFERSEN 1993, pp. 19-27). The collective was founded in Oslo by a group of actors not admitted to the National Theatre School, and this condition of exclusion prompted Barba – who had migrated from Salento to Poland for an apprenticeship with Jerzy Grotowski – to think of the theatre as a place of permanent training, rather than as a production machine.

In the early years, the group developed a practice of training based on physical and vocal exercises, disciplines of concentration and the search for an extra-quotidian presence. The transfer to Holstebro in 1966, thanks to support from the local institutions, finally placed stably within the institutional framework of the Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium. Spectacles such as *Kaspariana* (1967), *Ferai* (1969), *My Father's House / Min Fars Hus* (1972) were developed here, each notable for a growing attention to the work of the actors as the creative core of the stage action.

The success of *Ferai*, inspired by Euripides' *Alcestis* and written by Peter Seeberg, took the Odin on international tours, making it one of the most acclaimed research groups in Europe. However, as Franco Perrelli points out, this success also represented a threat: the repetition of the productions risked crystallizing a form of expression created to be experimental. Barba himself spoke of a crisis of success that risked transforming the «secret art of the actor» (BARBA, SAVARESE 2011) acquired in the laboratory into a mere artistic and commercial product.

The construction of *Min Fars Hus* in the early seventies was the beginning of a process of renewal for the company. The spectacle – stemming from a dramaturgy inspired by the life and works of Dostoevsky – in fact permanently introduced the use of musical instruments and stage props in the Danish group's repertoire. The montage of the dramatic actions did not follow a narrative logic, but an associative one, based on the rhythm and energy expressed by the actors. This method also arose from encounters with other cultures of performance. In 1971 and 1972 Balinese and Javanese groups were hosted in Holstebro, and their songs and dances deeply affected the theatrical imagination of Odin's actors. Iben Nagel Rasmussen – long an actress with the

company – recalls how photographs of kabuki actors and the Beijing Opera were used daily to study the control of energy and precision of gestures as a part of the training. The premiere of *Min Fars Hus* at the Venice Biennale Teatro in 1972 consecrated Odin as one of the most innovative companies on the European scene, but despite the success (followed by the conferral of Danish citizenship) some doubts continued to plague Barba. In an era overshadowed by 1968 and the protest movements, there was a risk that the theatre of research would remain confined to the intellectual elites, remote from communities. This led to the idea of a journey to the South, to what the director would call «lands without theatre» (BARBA 1975, now 2023), where stage practice was not institutionalised and where contact with everyday life could call into question the very identity of the actor. So leaving Denmark became a necessity, to meet new people, see unknown places and purify old ideas. Starting from the journey to Italy, the closed room of the theatre group therefore began to open up to outdoor spaces, to engagement and participation with the spectators.

### 3. The Italian tour: Lecce 1973 and Sardinia 1974

The arrival of Odin Teatret in Lecce in September 1973 marked the group's first real contact with Southern Italy and was a decisive experience not only for the company, but also for the local theatrical and university context. The invitation came from the University, in particular from professors Alessandro D'Amico and Ferdinando Taviani, who in those years were the moving spirits in a lively theatrical debate, and in conducting theatrical research with the students. Alongside them was the Oistros group, made up of university students engaged in experimental theatre, which reflected the influence of the new Italian research theatre.

Odin Teatret arrived in Lecce on 21 September, bringing with it *Min Fars Hus*. The performance of 24 September took place amid an atmosphere of great expectation, giving rise to an intense engagement with the audience. However, the stay in Lecce did not end with a repetition of the spectacle. Odin later conducted work demonstrations and training sessions, creating active exchanges with students and young local actors. In this way, Lecce was the first laboratory of encounter with a community that was not that of an audience understood in the traditional sense. Given the environmental and

social conditions that had been created, Barba sensed the need to move the company out of the theatres and into the piazzas, villages, and communities, so traversing, physically and thematically, the boundaries between art and everyday life.

After the experience in Salento, Odin Teatret continued its Italian journey with a tour of Sardinia in January 1974. Here the company established ties with Pierfranco Zappareddu's Alkestis group and with cultural bodies in rural and community settings. The villages visited, in particular San Sperate and Orgosolo, were notable for their complex social fabric: massive emigration, conflicts caused by modernisation, and a strong communitarian tradition.

The performances of *Min Fars Hus* were received with interest, but what was most striking was the dialogue established after the performances. Barba and his actors engaged with audiences, not so much to explain the spectacle as to gather impressions and stories and reply to questions. The inhabitants of Orgosolo, a town with a long history of resistance and a strong sense of identity, unexpectedly recognised in the staging certain features that evoked their experience as a community. Yet the initial dramatic core was inspired by the life of the great Russian writer who, as many of them said, was unknown to them before.

Sardinia therefore represented an intermediate step. While in Lecce the engagement had been mainly with the university milieu, here the encounter extended to the community as a whole. For the first time, Odin Teatret began to experiment with forms of exchange not based on spectacle alone, but on forms of shared life. Folk tales, traditional songs and village festivals thus became an integral part of their experience, anticipating what at Carpignano Salentino would be termed "theatrical barter". Their experience on the island had therefore revealed itself as a threshold: no longer the simple closed laboratory of Holstebro, not yet the fully defined barter of Carpignano, but a transitional ground where Odin learned to see the theatre as a border experience and as a migration between languages and cultures.

#### 4. Carpignano Salentino: towards barter

From May to October 1974 Odin Teatret settled in Carpignano Salentino, a small town of the lower Salento with just over three thousand inhabitants, with strong levels of

emigration that had halved the resident population. The experience, which can be read as one of the founding moments of the notion of theatrical barter, was radical precisely because it tested the very idea of performance in a setting devoid of any spectacular infrastructure and far from the official cultural circuits.

Odin Teatret's actors did not arrive in Carpignano as visitors passing through. They resided there, rented rooms with local families, transformed the Palazzo Ducale into a place of daily work and used the fields around the town for physical and vocal training sessions. Hence their intention was not to "bring" the theatre to a marginal place, but to temporarily root themselves in it, accepting the challenge of building ties with a community that had not asked them to perform.

The first shared activities were not performances, but community initiatives: the creation of a "piazza for everyone", a play space open to children and young people. They organised outdoor screenings of films, which transformed summer evenings into moments of collective socialising; and the publication of a local newspaper that brought together news, stories and reflections by the inhabitants. Through these gestures, the group gained the trust of the population, showing they did not want to impose a top-down aesthetic model, but desired an authentic exchange of a horizontal nature.

It was only some months later that the public presentation of performative materials took place, conceived not as complete spectacles but collective events. On 14 September 1974, the group presented *The book of Dances*, a montage of physical actions, vocal fragments and musical improvisations that constituted an example of "open dramaturgy": not a closed narrative, but an interweaving of gestures that left room for active reception and participation by the audience. The spectacle did not claim to "represent" something, but offered an opportunity for actors and local society to meet.

Soon after this *Johann Sebastian Bach* was created, a performance with a clownish tone mingling elements of Commedia dell'Arte, circus techniques learned from the Colombaioni brothers and musical parades. With this creation, Odin engaged with a popular and comic repertoire, upending the image of an austere and intellectual company that still accompanied it. Play, laughter and surprise thus became tools of immediate communication with the community.

The principle that guided these experiences was that of symbolic exchange. The actors offered fragments of their work – performances, songs, dances – and received in exchange popular songs, stories of emigration, tales related to tarantism, and village festivals. In this process, the boundary between artist and spectator, between locals and outsiders, was continually traversed and renegotiated. In fact, it was not a question of culturally colonizing a community, but of allowing the community to transform the theatrical work and influencing it with their own communicative and expressive codes.

The experience in Carpignano thus developed a form of theatre that was no longer spectacle or animation, but a rite of reciprocity. The theatre did not end in performance, but expanded into daily life: in the square, in children’s games, in film nights, in stories gathered from house to house. It was a crossing of borders in the full sense: geographical (from Northern Europe to Southern Italy), social (from elite theatre to the peasant village), cultural (from the avant-garde to the popular festival), and inward (from individual training to collective relationships). In this way, Carpignano became not only a place of work, but a symbolic stage in which Odin developed a method destined to influence its own practice and many other experiences of Third Theatre that grew up later.

## 5. Barter as performative migration

The term “theatrical barter” was adopted by Eugenio Barba to define a practice that was developed in Italy and immediately applied in different settings, becoming a staple of Odin Teatret’s work. At Carpignano and in Sardinia, barter was shaped as a symbolic exchange with local communities. The actors offered sequences of their training or fragments of spectacles and received in exchange popular songs, traditional dances, life stories. Already in those early experiences it was clear that barter did not coincide with performance. It was not a matter of displaying an artistic product, but of establishing a relationship.

This practice soon became the core of a broader reflection on the actor’s role and the social function of the theatre itself. For Barba, the value of barter did not lie in the aesthetic quality of the items traded, but in its potential for creating a tie, a reciprocal

bond. In this respect, the notion can be read in the light of Marcel Mauss's (1922-24) theory of the "gift". As in the gift, exchange is not free, because it obliges a return; but it is not economic either, because it is not measured with parameters of equivalence. It is a device of reciprocity that builds community, creates alliances and generates trust.

Barter, however, did not remain confined to the Italian experiences. Starting in the mid-Seventies, Odin Teatret took this practice to Latin America, visiting countries such as Venezuela, Peru, Brazil and Nicaragua, where the company came into contact with indigenous communities, peasants, students and militant theatre groups. Here barter took on an even more radical value: exchanging actions meant engaging with cultures with a colonial history and racked by strong political tensions.

In Venezuela, for instance, Odin Teatret organised barter in rural villages, where musical traditions and rituals coexisted with extreme poverty. In Peru, the company met with Quechua and Aymara communities, exchanging theatrical songs for indigenous music and collective dances. In Brazil and Nicaragua, the actors found themselves in politically fraught settings. Barter was not only an intercultural gesture, but an act that inevitably acquired political overtones, since it implied the decision to share spaces and times with marginalised communities, some of them engaged in political struggles.

These experiences outside Italy showed strongly that barter was above all a performative migration. It was not just a matter of geographical travel, but of identitarian journeys. The actors, in encountering other cultures, modified their training, incorporated new rhythms and revised their vocal techniques. Odin Teatret moved like a migrant body, pervaded by traces and influences transforming it from within.

Barter thus became a practice capable of crossing multiple borders: geographical, because it brought actors from Northern Europe to the countries of the global South; cultural, because it created a dialogue between Avant-Garde theatre with non-Western popular traditions and rituals; political, because it inscribed theatre in contexts of conflict, marginality and resistance; and inward because it forced each of the actors to continually renegotiate their artistic identity.

The migratory aspect was therefore not only an external movement, but an inner transformation that redefined the very concept of theatre. In this respect, the practice of barter shows how, through performative practice, the theatre can become a space of passage and fracture, a place of transit and hybridisation, an action that brings about far-reaching changes in the performers and the communities encountered.

## 6. Foreign tours and the transformation of performative maps

When barter passed beyond the borders of Italy, travelling along routes that traversed South America, Africa and Asia, it revealed in an exemplary way its nature as a migrating device: no longer a simple local practice adapted to different contexts, but a paradigm of cultural negotiation (WATSON 2002) that produced new maps – real and imaginary – of contemporary theatre. The tours of Venezuela, Peru, Brazil and Nicaragua, carried out in the mid and late Seventies, were therefore not only opportunities for international visibility. They were encounters in which the performative dimension was reshaped and renegotiated in partnership between actors and spectators, in which the company itself incorporated traces of those worlds into its bodily actions and vocal scores.

In Lima, in 1978, *The Book of Dances* and others of Odin's works by were presented in both institutional and non-institutional venues, from the Agricultural Cooperative to the Museum of Italian Art, and city and village squares. Here, as in the experiences of the Ayacucho Project, the barter took place in a public and plural form. The Danish group did not limit itself to performing before audiences with typically Western spectator habits, but found itself acting in the presence of groups that had their own ritual, musical and educational tradition. The rehearsals of dialogue with the Conjunto Nacional de Folklore, participation in group festivals and the possibility of performing before large audiences showed the double level of this encounter. While on the one hand the European scene led to an enrichment of the group's techniques, with stringent training and a codified aesthetic, on the other the Latin American communities brought it ritual and collective materials that questioned the assumption of the independence of the artistic act itself. In those conditions, barter ceased to be

mere ethnographic curiosity and became a practice of openness, transforming the scoring of Odin Teatret's performances, welcoming percussive rhythms, ritual gestures, and choral modes that could not simply be used and juxtaposed, but required sensitive translation, responsibility and empathic comprehension.

In Amazonian Venezuela and the rural areas visited in those years, contacts with indigenous music and gestures also raised ethical and political issues, since barter took place in regions riven by profound inequalities and power relations inherited from colonialism. Exchanging performative actions with ceremonial songs was not a neutral practice, but meant occupying a symbolic space that brought with it precise memories and social functions. For this reason, as shown by the reports and audiovisual documentation of the time, Odin Teatret developed a different sensibility. The delegation made use of local mediators, sought forms of exchange that did not trivialise the material forms of ritual and inserted their presentations in circuits of cultural reciprocity. The ministerial subsidy received from the Danish government for their tours also helped break down the physical and ideological barriers of access to theatres, enabling the spectacles to be presented in community contexts, shifting the engagement from the artistic and intellectual sphere to a broader collaboration with national and local cultural forces.

The most significant lesson of the tours was perhaps the transformation of the actor's body. In Andean villages, among the Quechua and Aymara, and in Afro-Brazilian communities, actors encountered ways of singing and movement rooted in practices of care, celebration and collective memory. Accepting those materials required a renunciation. The actors had to give up their exclusive dominance over the stage action and open out their performances to enable them to circulate. This renunciation was not passive, but a technical and moral receptiveness that profoundly reshaped Odin's training as it had been performed until then. Their vocal techniques, use of objects, breathing and group management took on new colours and modulations. Likewise the practices of warming up and listening were enriched with methods learned with their local partners. What was taken on tour then often returned to Europe in the form of trade-offs, notes, rhythms captured and accumulated, guidelines that helped change the Danish group's whole performative grammar.

Alongside the technical changes, the tours produced a series of interpretative and critical issues that the group and observers could not ignore. Cultural asymmetries – linguistic, economic and symbolic – made barter an often fragile act of negotiation. Here the insights of scholars such as Ian Watson acquire a ‘practical value’: barter is not in fact an illusion of equality, but an act of negotiation in which asymmetry has to be recognised and transformed into an opportunity for mutual learning. Seen in these terms, barter is a system that does not smooth over differences but relates them to each other, so that they produce new horizons of meaning. This implies precise methodological practice: preparation in the field, working with cultural mediators, care for restitution and the way the collected materials are placed into circulation again. The tours thus took the form of true laboratories of applied ethnography, in which the actor’s work mingled with anthropological research and the practices of public responsibility, while always remaining within the framework of artistic creation. The circulation of the barter in both big cities – Montevideo, Paris, Bologna – and small towns – Monteiasi, Orgosolo, Arquà, Calci, Pontedera – then became a part of different circuits where the context was sometimes more institutional, but the practice retained its disruptive charge. Presentation at festivals or museums created a productive paradox: the actions that had been created to mix with popular practices were now observed as an object of international comparison. It was in these venues that the traces accumulated on tour could be clearly seen: sequences of movement that carried the echo of Andean songs, processions that recalled the objects found in Brazilian villages, vocal scores evoking Latin American rhythms. Odin Teatret’s imaginative geography thus encompassed a plurality of territories. The group itself had become a living archive of contacts, memories and hybridisations.

Finally, the tours had a function as political experimentation, in the non-ideological sense of the term. The act of sharing training or offering a symbolic exchange with communities engaged in struggles, or in the phase of self-definition and self-determination, also took on the value of concrete solidarity. But the political dimension was not reduced to an external gesture. It transformed the way the theatre thought about community, cultural citizenship and the artist’s responsibility. In this respect, the routes travelled by the theatre group not only traced the movements of bodies and performances, but also drew new maps of ethical concern and the political

practicability of doing theatre. The imaginary geographies that ensued were not conceptual idealisations, but stratified maps, marked by friction, renunciation, exchanges and responsibilities, and so capable of nurturing a scenic practice that still remains relevant for those who conceive theatre as an experience of traversal and relationship.

## 7. Archives of barter and living memory

One of the outstanding aspects of these experiences of barter is their ephemeral character. Arising as acts of relationship, they were designed to exist at the moment of encounter and not be fixed in a definitive form. Yet, it is precisely this unrepeatability that immediately generated the need to document them, preserve their traces and transform them into objects of critical reflection. Odin Teatret, like other groups of Third Theatre<sup>1</sup>, has always cultivated a twofold vocation: on the one hand the living, community practice, on the other the need to accumulate materials that could preserve the memory of what had been achieved.

Film footage occupies a special place in the documentation of barter. In the early Seventies, Barba realised that the ephemeral nature of Odin's work required a gaze capable of fixing a trace of it, at least in part. In 1971, Odin Teatret Film was founded with artistic director Torgeir Wethal to support the aim of producing educational films documenting the actors' work during both their travels and the intensive Danish seminars. The decision to use the camera was not celebratory or promotional, but met the need to create a memory of gestures, rhythms and intonations that writing or photography were unable to record in their complexity. It is no coincidence that in Carpignano Salentino, *The Book of Dances* (1974) and, soon after, *Johann Sebastian Bach* were documented in films, as well as some moments of collective training in the camps and community festivals that accompanied the theatrical work. In the same way, the barter made in Sardinia and on the Latin American tours were the subject of video recordings that are an irreplaceable source today. In these images we observe the combinations of different languages and the tension of intercultural exchanges that characterised those experiences.

In many cases scholars and collaborators did the filming, as happened with Ferdinando Taviani and Gigi Santoro, who recorded some footage in Salento and helped circulate the material in university and critical spheres. But most of them were actual films shot by external directors, including the documentary *In cerca del teatro* produced by RAI in 1974 and directed by Ludovica Ripa di Meana. Today these documents are mainly preserved in the audiovisual fonds of the Odin Teatret Archives. Previously kept at the Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium in Holstebro and now transferred to the LAFILS in Lecce, they are a precious record not only for the history of the theatre, but also for the social history of the regions involved. These film materials, far from being a simple substitute for the stagings, today constitute a resource for educational transmission. They enable us to observe details of the actors' score, to analyse the quality of the group's relationship with communities and to better understand the creative process in its making. In these ways film becomes an extension of the living archive, capable of renewing over time the memory of an experience that otherwise would have remained elusive due to its ephemeral nature.

The traces of barter can also be found in the actors' diaries and notes, in which the daily work was entwined with observations on encounters, impressions of exchanges, reflections on the risks and potential of practice. These personal materials, in some cases long unpublished, are a precious resource not only for reconstructing events, but also for grasping the way the actors themselves perceived their own process of human and professional development. Together with diaries, photographs and filmed footage – often the work of scholars or local collaborators – they recorded fragments of performances, aspects of the collective training and glimpses of community life.

A fundamental role in the preservation of the memory of barter has been played by theatre criticism and scholars. The accounts published in the *Quaderni del CUT* of Bari, as well as the writings of Ferdinando Taviani, Gigi Santoro and Nicola Savarese, immediately conveyed the significance of an experience that went beyond the boundaries of representation, being inscribed in a broader framework of reflection on the political and anthropological role of the theatre. Subsequently, works by scholars such as Marco De Marinis, Franco Perrelli and later Ian Watson and Eric Christoffersen helped systematise the notion of barter as a critical category, placing it within an international debate.

But barter does not live in written or visual documents alone. It has been handed down as a veritable living archive through the bodies and memories of the actors who practised it. The actions, songs and gestures incorporated during the experiences in Salento, Sardinia or Latin America have remained as traces inscribed in their daily training, reappearing in subsequent performances, being transmitted to the new generations of Odin's actors and shared in the sessions of ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology), founded in 1979. In these ways barter is presented as an archive that is not static but dynamic, being transmitted bodily and continuously reworked.

This tension between ephemerality and permanence, between event and archive, therefore raises the crucial question of how to preserve an act born as exchange and relationship, which takes place in the here and now. While on the one hand there is a risk of reducing barter to a static and hierarchical exhibition of museum documents, on the other hand its loss would erase a fundamental part of the twentieth century's theatrical memory. The solution has been to accept its twofold nature, as an unrepeatable event and a shareable record, a unique moment and a trace, which, as such, can be revived. In this way, barter proves to be not just an experience of the past, but a living heritage that questions the present. It is an archive in motion that preserves not so much objects as relationships, asking to be reactivated by those who, today, still conceive of the theatre as a practice of traversal and exchanges.

## 8. The legacy of barter

Odin Teatret's Italian and international experiences in the Seventies showed that barter was not just a practical expedient for engaging in relationships with communities without theatrical infrastructures, but a true epistemological device capable of redefining the coordinates of theatrical research. Its legacy is measured in the persistence of a model that, although never fixed in codified rules, has continued to influence theatre groups, scholars and intercultural practices to this day.

Ian Watson, in particular, has emphasised that it cannot be understood only in terms of a reciprocal gift, in keeping with Mauss's suggestion; rather it should be interpreted as a form of cultural negotiation. Barter is in fact never an equal exchange, because it

brings together asymmetrical symbolic universes. Odin's actors, with their technical training and aesthetic awareness, were faced with peasants, students and indigenous communities who did not share the same codes. The strength of this practice of exchange then lay in the ability to traverse this asymmetry, transforming it into an opportunity for encounter, not effacing it but recognising it. In this respect, it was configured as a liminal space in which identities were redefined starting from a degree of friction, a conflict between codes that was not resolved, but rather made productive in expressive and communicative terms precisely by this lack of resolution.

It is not surprising, then, that theatrical barter resonated in ways that went beyond the boundaries of the group. In the following years, other theatrical experiences also measured themselves against intercultural encounters. Among them Peter Brook occupies an emblematic place. After the experience of *Orghast at Persepolis* (1971), with the first journey of Centre International de Recherche Théâtrale – the result of a meeting with Iranian culture – Brook developed a practice based on encounters between actors and people in different context of their everyday lives, in which they exchange theatre improvisation with folk rituals, songs and dances from different cultures (BROOK 1999), culminating in his famous African tour of 1972-73, and subsequently developed in projects such as *Mahabharata* (1985). After his first exploratory travels in Nigeria in 1971, the British director experimented with forms of barter on his journey through the desert in West Africa, with a group of thirty actors and collaborators (RUFFINI 2020). Although differing in its first principles, Brook's work presented many points of contact with the Odin experience. In it, too, theatre involved a crossing of borders, a negotiation between languages, gestures and distant traditions, and the search for common ground without erasing differences, but rather enhancing their value.

The legacy of barter, therefore, is not exhausted in the memory of Carpignano or the Latin American tours, but was inscribed in a broader genealogy of intercultural practices that marked the theatre in the later twentieth century. While Brook favoured encounters between actors from different cultures, Barba chose the path of exchanges with communities. In both cases the border was no longer perceived as a limit, but a generative place, a space where fracture acquired a transformative potential.

Today, in a world marked by new migrations and borders often experienced as barriers, this practice seems to retain a surprising relevance, at least on the level of a symbolic space for the renegotiation of cultural contents. Not so much on a methodological level with a rigid modelling function, but on a paradigmatic level, thinking of theatre as an art that is ready to live in the tension between self and other, between identity and otherness. Odin Teatret, with its performative migrations, has shown that the art of performance can concretely become a political and social act, not conveying messages with an ideological imprint, but creating relationships and requiring actors and spectators to continuously redefine their communicative and perceptual boundaries. Perhaps its most lasting legacy consists precisely in conceiving theatre as a process of traversal and reinvention, stemming from the encounter with others and therefore capable of engaging with the great cultural challenges of the present.

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<sup>1</sup> During the International Theater Research meeting held in Belgrade in 1976, Barba had already coined the term to refer to a “third” type of theater, distinct from both avant-garde and traditional theater, which worked continuously in a group over many years of research. It was within the context of Bitez/Theatre of Nations that Barba drafted the document Third Theatre, now published in E. Barba, *Teatro. Solitudine, mestiere e rivolta*, Ubulibri, Milano, 1985. See also R. Ferraresi, *Terzo Teatro: ieri, oggi, domani*, La casa Usher, Florence, 2018; E. Barba, F. Ruffini, N. Savarese and J. Varley, *Terzo Teatro. Un grido di battaglia*, edited by Claudio La Camera, La Bussola, 2021.