



Research, Experimentation and Creation in 21th century Theatre

Marco De Marinis
University of Bologna

Introduction

The idea that artists have always experienced and done research on their creation process can be defended. With exceptions, otherwise very common especially in the past centuries, of **genre creation**, totally limited by conventions, rules, pre-established and pre-coded principles.

In the late 19th century, with the eruption of the historical avant-gardes, something new happened in relation to the past: the crisis that affected the old conventions, the old rules, the old expressive forms, the encoded genres transformed the artist into experimenters and, in certain cases, in researchers, sometimes in a very close way to the scientific sense of the term. Especially when it was necessary to pass from the destructive phase (*pars destruens*) to the reconstructive phase (*pars construens*).

Although it is always difficult to clearly distinguish both, we have the following hypothesis: in art (as elsewhere) **to research** implies to always **experience**, though the reverse is not always true. We can imagine artists that experience without doing proper research in order to define them as researchers, in the proper sense of the word (but of course you must also precise this "sense of the word").

The following distinction between **experimenters** and **researchers** may be established, at least in relation to the theatrical field: (1) the experimenter artists test in practice new means of expression, or new ways to use old expressive means; (2) the researcher artists, experiencing through a long work both practical and theoretical, try to fetch and to establish new principles, new

rules, with a view to possibly encode new forms of art, new languages and produce, in any case, inedited knowledge in their own artistic domain.

Probably, as I have already anticipated, this distinction is very abstract and very theoretical. In the historical reality of theater, it is noted that these two figures, the experimenter and researcher, are often mixed. However, it can be stated with some certainty, for example, that Jarry and Artaud were more experimenters than researchers; as later were Kantor, Carmelo Bene, Brook, Julian Beck and Judith Malina of the Living Theatre, Mnouchkine, and Robert Wilson.

However, one thing seems certain: the theater of the 20th century, in the specific form of "Direction theater" (*Théâtre de la mise en scène, Teatro di regia, Direction Theatre*) was invented by artist-theorists (as they were called) that were actually true artists-researchers-experimenters: Appia, Fuchs, Craig, Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Copeau, Osterwa, Decroux, to mention only the most important.

A common first data to all these artists-researchers is the disproportion between the research and the artistic results (performances, etc.), that their works exhibit. Almost always, in these cases, the artistic results are reduced in relation to the length, intensity and depth of the research and its cultural, aesthetic and sometimes even scientific results. In the cases of Appia and Craig, for whom it was improperly spoken of **aphasia**, a much more diffuse situation was dilated in a macroscopic way. Both for Appia as for Craig, the work of experimentation and research developed, essentially, away from the stage, in the page writing and image drawn or engraved-level. With the help, in the case of the English director, of the model stage, the miniature theater that represented, during many years, the true place of such a tiny **laboratory**, to anticipate a term that I will introduce next.

Moreover, this disproportion between research and artistic results is typical of moments of rupture and re-founding an art. For Appia and Craig this was the passing of a world of old-fashioned theater production based on the actor and author, to a mode of production based on the director and on new principles, yet to be discovered, of the staging. In the case of Laban and Dalcroze, the rupture was complete with the academic dance: a **tabula rasa** that imposed the need for a re-founding discovered by experimentation, by assaying, by research (after

the pioneering actions in the field of improvisation by Isadora Duncan, Ruth Saint-Denis, and Loie Fuller.)

The theatre laboratories in the 20th century

The privileged place of the theatrical research in the 20th century was the Laboratory, also often called Atelier or Studio, especially in the first half of the century: a place to which the director-pedagogues, starting, of course, by Stanislavski, granted the luxury of a time that, in general, was not allowed to the direction and production of performances. This transformed the school, from a moment of transmission of knowledge and know-how already known and encoded, into a space-time devoted to the experimentation and research of knowledge and a new know-how (principles, rules, techniques, etc.), which can also modify the researchers themselves.

At the same time, by founding the Theatre-Laboratories or the Studios, the directors changed the idea of theater and theatrical work; they do not identify themselves fully with the performance or the work of creation, because in the Studios and Theatres-Laboratories, in relation to creation, experience and research gain the lead.

Of course, there are many differences between the Studios and Ateliers of the first half of the 20th century and the Theatre-Laboratories of the second half. The most important difference lies in the fact that the Studios and Ateliers are born within a preexisting and much wider theatrical reality, from which they distance from, as in a time of rebalancing. If the theater focused fully on the creation and production of performances, the Studio turns its back to the spectacle, to devote itself to a work that neither finalizes nor relates itself to the performance. An exemplary case is the First Studio of Stanislavski, created in 1911, next to the Art Theater, which he ran alongside, but completely separated from Nemirovic-Danchenko. We can also cite Meyerhold and Copeau, while Dullin with his studio is perhaps an exception that anticipates the theatre-laboratories that followed).

On the contrary, the Theatre-Laboratories, starting with the firsts and most famous, such as Grotowski and Barba, founded in the first half of the 1960s, gathered under that same name, and in reality, the separated entities until then. The theater with its demand of creation and production of spectacles to the

laboratory that turns its back to the stage. This is what constitutes its novelty and the strength of their provocation, they made the Theatres-Laboratories an "oxymoron incarnated" or a "living contradiction", as Mirella Schino says in the introduction of her beautiful book *Alchemists of the Stage: Theatre Laboratories in Europe* (2009, p. v).

It is not easy to define unambiguously what a Theatre Laboratory is, to distinguish between theater and laboratory, laboriousness, laboratory size, or to specify the affinities and differences with the scientific laboratory in the strict sense of the term.

The book of Mirella Schino helps us, in any case, to take the first steps in this direction, especially because it proposes to be the finish of a long collective discussion that for years has affected a group of researchers linked to Eugenio Barba and to the ISTA, International School of Theatre Anthropology.

To advance more the thought on the subject, it is preferable to exemplify. That is why the second part of my contribution will be dedicated to the analysis of three different cases of research-experimentation-creation in the 20th century, then three different examples of theatre laboratory: Decroux, Grotowski, and Barba. The examination of these three examples will also allow some considerations on the notions of progress, development, discovery and demonstration in art and theater research in particular.

Etienne Decroux

First it must be said that in the case of Decroux, his long research work and experimentation lead to the invention of a new theatrical art, the corporeal mime, with the new definition of purest strains and unpublished rules: an entire body language, true body grammar and expressive movement. This effectively means that the research of Decroux far outpaced the specific purpose of creating the dramatic corporeal mimic that it expected. It means it is possible to distinguish different levels within his artistic and pedagogical research. At least three interrelated levels:

1) There is, first, as I have said the Decroux inventor of the corporeal mime as a new theatrical genre, based on the rigid exclusion of words. A genre founded on the rigid exclusion of words and principles heavily coded, a very rare case in the West;

2) Then, there is Decroux researcher of a pure theatrical art, essential, founded on the aesthetic use of the human body, but without rigid exclusions and without the strict obligation of formalizing;

3) Finally, there is the third Decroux: the one who pursued for more than fifty years one of the most rigid, deep and systematic investigation the European theater has ever known in relation to the **foundations of the art of the actor**, i.e., on the physical action of the performer, their techniques, their principles, their dramaturgy.

It is primarily this third level that allows us to consider Decroux a true researcher in the field of contemporary theater, and also to consider his long artistic-pedagogical-technical- theoretical work (with no clear distinction between these aspects) a true theatre laboratory.

Obviously, this is not the place to explain in detail what constitutes the technical and artistic acquisitions of the research of Decroux, something about I have already discussed and written extensively. This time it is more interesting to deepen some features that value the character of research in his work.

About the exasperatedly systematic nature of his investigation, one should note that Decroux spent more than half a century trying and naming gestures and gestures of hands, arms and legs, movements and postures; thus fixing the lexicon and grammar of "another" body, incredibly detailed, since the beginning. And, also, he created hundreds and hundreds of exercises, baptized with very concrete while fanciful names, such as "escargots antennas", "eagle wings", "the beautiful curve", etc.

Evidently, we are faced with a fierce technical research, exasperated, almost meaningless to look, overwhelming for most people, which demonstrates – both in the case of the French mime as in the case of other masters – a **double opposite potential**. On one side the access road required to reach the heart of the problems of the performing art; on the other hand, and simultaneously, a privileged way that the theater of the 20th century continued to transcend, – to go beyond itself, beyond the spectacle, and also beyond the art – sometimes through a radical questioning of the value and meaning of art.

A second feature of his performance as rigorous researcher consists in the fact that he has always gone against the current, against the spirit of the time,

against the modes and success: "It is necessary to be always in favor of who are against, and against those who are in favor", he said, "If you do succeed, be suspicious! It is necessary to go back to school" (Marc, 2003, p. 452).

Then, it is necessary to remember the pedagogical priority of his path as an artist-researcher. Moreover, in his case, it might and must speak of a **true educational vocation**: "How we will not have the desire to convert people?", he wondered once, during a conference.

This pedagogical vocation itself imbues the different levels and forms of his artistic creation, reaching the theoretical and experimental elaborations that affect mimic art and its laws or principles. In other words, it is his scientific and creative research on mime that constitutes the intrinsically pedagogical (but, also the opposite may be true).

Another additional feature is that in the performance of Decroux it is very difficult, almost impossible, to distinguish between theater and life, life and teaching, research and artistic life; from the fact that – especially after 1962 – the place of both the public and private existence of Decroux became unique. At the house of Boulogne-Billancourt in Paris, for the last thirty years of his life (and from where he rarely leave), he lived, worked, taught, experimented, and created.

However, beyond the intimate fusion of all the aspects and levels that we have spoken, the need for continuous research and uninterrupted experimentation, always allied, in a priority way, with respect to the need of building finished works and finished products. Among other principles, the priority is of the first terms: "Experimental Theatre? If they want a true experience, they should get rid of the public". This priority was never really discussed, even in the golden age of the years 1945-1962. It has never really resulted in a refusal of artistic creation, but a conception of creation as a mean of experimentation and verification; in short, as a study, test, demonstration.

Jerzy Grotowski

The first thing to note, also in the case of Grotowski, is his researcher attitude that characterizes throughout his journey the theater and beyond it. And, it is necessary, immediately then, to add that his choice for the theatre in his youth

was linked to absolutely no artistic motivations, but to intellectual and existential ones. As he revealed to Marianne Ahrne in 1992:

I have never tried theater; actually, I have always been looking for something else. In youth, I wondered which profession would [allow us] to find the others and ourselves. [...] At the bottom, this was the interest in human beings, in the others and in myself, which led me to the theater, but that could have led me to psychiatry and to the study of yoga (De Marinis, 2011, p. 191).

That said, it is evident that his choice for naming his early theater "theatre laboratory", referring to locations designated by scientific research, was, in no way, accidental. Polish scholars have explained the numerous reasons behind this choice, starting from practical reasons (free himself from the obligation to produce a constant number of performances per year, etc.). Undoubtedly, for the determination of his choice, also contributed his interest in sciences such as physics (his older brother was a nuclear physicist and Bohr Institute, in Copenhagen, fascinated him, and was a true model). The fact that for him "it was much easier to communicate with representatives of science than with representatives of the humanistic disciplines"; and finally, *last but not least*, his personal bias, which Osinski calls "his laboratory background" (Schino, 2009, p. 141).

In any case, in the middle of the 1960s, it was already clear that the Theatre Laboratory of Wrocław had become a true center for research. Confirming this trend, the consecration would come from Peter Brook, with his famous article in 1967, which was published the following year as a preface to the book by Grotowski, *Vers un théâtre pauvre (Towards a poor theater)* (Brook, 1971, p. 9).

But, it is necessary to directly read this book if we want to better understand the ideas that Grotowski had, at that time, about the relationship between theater and science, about the similarities and differences between theatrical and scientific research.

In the chapter "Research on the method", based on an article published in 1967, Grotowski begins by describing the Bohr Institute of Copenhagen, and then he observes:

The Bohr Institute has fascinated me for a long time, as the illustrative model of a certain kind of activity. Of course, the theater is not a scientific discipline, much less is the art of the actor on which I focus my attention (Grotowski, 1971, p. 95).

However, he said, is necessary to individuate "the essential conditions of the art of the actor" and make them an "object of methodical research" (Grotowski, 1971, p. 96).

After this phase, Grotowski speaks less and less of methods and laws of the creative act, but he still engaged, as a researcher, with the actor (or rather, the *performer*) and techniques that were the basis of what, henceforth, he will call *performing arts* instead of theater. In addition, even if his feeling for the men of science remained unchanged until the end (his brother witnessed so after his death), his researcher work approached, preferably, either by method (fieldwork), either by the object cultural anthropology. However, Kolankiewicz has reason when he assumes that, in his development, the research of Grotowski increasingly resembles that of an alchemist, not of a man of modern science (cited by Schino, 2009, p. 153-154).

Now, I would like to turn to Grotowski's research on ritual, and its relationship with the theater, theoretical and practical, artistic and scientific researches, which led him, from the start to the end and discontinuously, beyond the changes that interfered in his theatrical and post-theatrical practice (De Marinis, 2011, p. 139-166).

Working on the ritual, in many ways, throughout his life, Grotowski gave us a key contribution at two levels:

- As an artist-craftsman, he showed that it is possible to take a way of work focused on the self (and in the relation with the other by beginning with yourself, to the extent that the other is part of yourself) definable in terms of "secular ritual", in other words, not based on the "faith", but on the "act";
- As a scientist-anthropologist, he brought considerable contribution by creating a field and a methodology for interdisciplinary research on the performing arts, what he accomplished with *stricto sensu* scientific contributions (especially from biology and neurobiology) approximated to the theatrical perspectives, based on anthropologic and oriented in a pragmatically way. We can give to this field and this interdisciplinary research methodology the name the *Collège de France* has elected for them (the "theatre anthropology") or perhaps another name, this is not important. What counts is to emphasize the *stricto sensu* scientific *ethos*, in other words, to the sense of the "hard" (exacts), naturalist sciences, that has always characterized its development and was also found in various denominations with which appointed, over the years, his projects.

Returning to the relationship between the ritual and the theater, it is necessary to say, at first, that Grotowski has never rejected the idea of the ritual origins of theater, idea openly professed in the 1960s, but over time, his view on this issue has become very more complexly diffused, and also often even contradictory. As demonstrates the important course given in Rome (Grotowski, 1982), in which the relationship between theater and ritual, and analysis of ritual is one of *leitmotive*.

Let us go through the published portion of this course to let emerge the most interesting theoretical elaborations about our theme. As I have already announced, the idea of a passage from ritual to theatre is never totally abandoned. However, it gets less and less evolutionists contours to give rise to a structural opposition, to give time, finally, to another polarity on which Grotowski argues his vision, that he restricts, little by little, to the field of the performing arts and performative practices. Thus, the schema "from the rite to the theater" becomes "rite vs theater" (here with the term theater taken in its most restrictive sense of spectacle, representation).

In the synchronous-structural scheme "ritual vs. theater", the two terms become the ends of a *continuum* of intermediate possibilities, and at the same time, the size of the **entire** constituent opposite phenomenon of performing arts, although in different proportions in either case; an antagonist pair, a polarity, precisely, that overlaps the pair organicity/artificiality without, however, respond to it completely. The use of a synchronous paradigm in place of a diachronic paradigm allows Grotowski to read one (the theater) in terms of the other (the ritual) and vice versa. In other words, it allows finding something of the ritual in the theater and something of the theater in the ritual (as if it was the case, precisely, of constitutive dimensions or levels of organization).

One of the most important contributions to knowledge about the nature and functioning of the rituals that Grotowski provides in the Roman lectures consists, precisely, in resolving their differences in the face of numerous cliché/stereotypes that, even today, and even often in the scientific field, condition the way the West sees ritual, trance and possession.

He repeated, tirelessly, that the living ritual is not a wild breakdown and a loss of control, but rather, it is based on the accuracy of a structure known for many years of training, since childhood. In summary, in the living rituals we find **organicity**, but

there is too, and after all, **organization**, and it is the first one that depends on the second - even though it may seem paradoxical, for us, Westerners.

What, according to Western clichés, is the **rule** (that the possession would be unconscious, uncontrolled, constitutive of a wild breakdown) occurs, however, if well considered, to be just an exception, generally socially disqualified in traditional cultures: it is the case of Haiti, where there is precisely one term, *bossal*, to denote contemptuously the wild possession. Grotowski insists on this point: "For them [the Westerns], possession and conscience are opposed, conscious possession is an oxymoron, there is nothing more superficial" (Vacis, 2002, p. 92-93).¹

In fact, according to the analysis of Polish masters, the wild possession and the hysterical behavior in the ritual do not only indicate a lack of preparation and unprofessional improvisation, as in the case of the Haitian *bossal*, but, often - and this is much more interesting - they are taken as symptoms of a breakdown-degradation of the ritual itself, an index that it becomes something else, that is going (sliding, declining) towards the theater, understood here as a representation-fiction to the other, to the public.

To that reason, Grotowski distinguishes the "sane trance" from the "insane trance" (Grotowski, 1982, p. 9-11; 70-), and the living rituals from the false rituals:

It is easy to be cheated and take a fake ritual for something authentic, because there are many false rituals. In false rituals, there is usually a phenomenon that could be described as hysterical (Vacis, 2002, p. 95).

This hysterical phenomenon, which induces to different types of **incoherent behaviors** (discontinuous movements, interrupted, gestures with the hands and legs bent like claws etc.) (Vacis, 2002, p. 96)² and to a **low** vigilance-awareness-attention-concentration (as, indeed, in the insane trance while in the sane trance turns out, on the contrary, an **increase** of the level of attention-concentration) (Grotowski, 1982, p. 9-11) are associated, according to Grotowski, to the presence of the viewer and the fact to act for them (Vacis, 2002, p. 96; 229-).

The distinctions between the sane and the insane trances, and the authentic or false rituals, allow Grotowski to enrich the polarity ritual/theater of nuances and of intermediate possibilities.

¹ See also Grotowski 1982: 2-8; about Haitian vodu see p. 108.

² "Le vrai rituel produit des ondes de mouvement, le faux produit des points de mouvement"(G. Vacis, *Awareness, o. c.*, p. 96).

At first, from classic ethnographic films now considered classics, he distinguishes three levels:

- "The ritual in its fullness living ", documented in a film by Maya Deren about the voodoo (or better, in certain scenes about trance and possession)³;
- "The ritual in its state of formalism", characterized by the "domination of the symbolic aspect on the aspect of life" (in which is discovered a witness, according to him, in the movie by Jean Rouch, *Yenendi ou les hommes qui font la pluie*, in 1951 (Grotowski, 1982, p. 114-116);
- "The beginning of the theater and the end of the ritual", sustained by well known *Les maîtres fous* (1952), also by Rouch (Grotowski, 1982, p. 125-126).

Following the lessons, the analysis of other audiovisual documents leads him to further enrich his typology, and thus, the intermediate shades between ritual and theater:

- for example, in the Margaret Mead Film, *Trance and Dance in Bali* (1939), he notes "the cohabitation of ritual and theater" (Grotowski, 1982, p. 169; 163-);
- and there is, finally, "the ritual represented, imitated, what "happens often when the ritual is about to fail", and where the "avant-garde or research theater " also, often, deceives.

Eugenio Barba

In the case of Barba, we are also facing a real researcher (since the beginning) with - in particular - a constant inclination to the "science of theater", that one looking for principles and intercultural and cross-cultural regularities for the "fragile art of theater" (Schino, 2009, p. 33). His inclination is also nourished by a constant interest in the hard sciences, such as physics, biology, experimental psychology, etc. His dialogues with the men of science reminds Stanislavski and Meyerhold at the beginning of the 20th century (not, of course, speaking of his master, Grotowski).

For years, Barba has **devoured**, in a way, a mountain of scientific books; and on the other way, he has developed a long field research, as an authentic anthropologist, on several Oriental theaters, particularly Indians, Balinese and

³ The documentary *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti*, easilly found in the internet was filmed between 1947 and 1951.

Japanese. His study of the theatre-dance Kathakali, in 1963, was the first in the West.

At the origin of the ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology), and of the Theatre Anthropology, born together in the late 1970s - thanks to him - two elements were presented: the interest in the sciences and the fieldwork on the Eastern theaters, without excluding, of course, the practical, technical and artistic research worked, together, since 1964 with his group Odin Teatret.

Since 1980, the ISTA becomes, to Barba, the instrument, the time-space, which satisfies his researcher instincts and experience as in degree, at once, theoretical and practical - to investigate the possibilities of a science theater.

In fact, the ISTA might be thought as a great theatrical laboratory or as a large intermittent theater-laboratory. As described by Mirella Schino, "it is a place designed for the research on the actor" (Schino, 2009, p. 12), because it united, encouraging to work together, practitioners and theorists, men of scene and men of books, on one side and other, Western and non-Western, primarily Asian.

From now on, I want to focus the discussion on the Theatre Anthropology as a scientific discipline or even as a science, a science of theater (De Marinis, 2011, p. 35-97).

What should be concluded, at least provisionally, in relation to the issue of the Theatre Anthropology methodology? I believe it cannot be considered as scientifically impeccable a comparison which is out of context, a comparison that puts in contact distinct procedures and terminologies, and distant from the research and its transcultural principles, related to all actors "while such". So from that point of view, cannot be denied the fact that

...to evidence elemental and hidden morphology that many actors share does not mean to confuse them with a single universal idea of theater (Barba 1993, p. 216-217).

However, once one establishes the legitimacy of comparison, decontextualizing and recontextualizing, there is still the need to verify the correctness of the ways Barba performs this comparison. For that matter, I still have doubts, even after reading *Le canoë de papier* (*The paper canoe*) and after attending several sessions in ISTA. In this respect, the risks I perceive can be summarized, in their great majority, in this "homogenization of sources" which Barba refers as, following the terminology of the historians, underestimating, however, its implications.

All those who, for professional reasons, have to do with the texts and the need to cite them, interpret and build, thanks to them, in another text – or, to be more exact, one argued speech, a historical hypotheses, critical or scientific, in the strict sense of the term, – know about the risks of mixing of sources. In addition, they know very well that it is, to some extent, inevitable. Of course, these risks increase significantly, if the texts and the terms we use belong to languages apart of our cultures, such as, for example, Asian languages.

However, a search that, as the Theatre Anthropology, is part of (that is what Barba himself says with all words) a hard and difficult work of lexical comparisons (for example: which word corresponds in India, Bali, China or Japan to our word "energy"?) was and still is very exposed to the risks of misunderstandings, or of handling more or less conscious of the statements and terms.

So that, in the case of a researcher as Barba and of a discipline such as Theatre Anthropology, that has much to do with texts and words, but also, and above all, with human beings in flesh and blood, the risk is double: besides the risk of lexical and textual manipulation (*misreading*), there is also the risk of the manipulation of the actors, a performative manipulation, so to speak.

After a long time analyzing Barba in his work with the actors - besides being always fascinated by his ability to draw extremely interesting, even passionated, demonstrations - with their bodies and their voices, with the mastery and availability of the actors, I wonder, with frequency, whether it is correct to speak, in this case, of an effective laboratory situation in the scientific sense of the term; in other words, in scientifically correct conditions for comparative observation of the phenomena related to the actor (performative phenomena) and with the transcultural principles, according to the Theatre Anthropology, which are the basis of the work taken as scientific.

Every time I come across this question (in other words, almost always, when I awake from fascination), I come not to supplant doubts. Of course, I am not naive enough to ignore the lack of a pure experimental situation in reality, totally neutral, which is not influenced, at least on a small scale, and rightfully by who built it in order to obtain certain results (this is as true for theoretical physics laboratories as for sociological research in fashion nowadays). And yet, I wonder if the demonstrations organized by Barba in the ISTA nothing happens beyond

that and, often, only reached a kind of *wishful thinking*, a theory that holds itself, to say as the philosophers of science.

In fact, the work demonstrations of Barba in the ISTA are fascinating theoretical essays **written** with the bodies and voices of the actors and not with words: these are, literally, **performance texts**. The doubts about the scientific validity of them do not erase the persuasiveness they possess.

The final part of this exposition about Barba, a researcher in the field of science of theater, will be devoted to reflection about the problematic identity, uncertain, of Theatre Anthropology.

What is Theatre Anthropology? What does it mean? Would it be a science, pedagogy of the actor or, perhaps, an aesthetic? And in the case of tending to a theatrical science (of course, taking into account all the inevitable limits within which it would be possible to do science starting from such a complex cultural object as the theater), of which modality of science would it be the case? Again, we should give the word, first of all, to *The paper canoe*. In chapter II, "Definition", Barba explains, at the outset, that the Theatre Anthropology operates in a double level - the analytical-scientific and the technical-practical - and that, according to their pre-expressive principles, aims to produce effects on both levels simultaneously (Barba 1993, p. 23-24).

This duplicity, or ambivalence, is confirmed at the beginning of the next chapter:

The Theatre Anthropology is a study **about** the actor and **to** the actor. It is a pragmatic science that becomes useful as it allows the historian of the theater to touch with the fingers the process of creating and when, in that same process, makes the freedom of the actor increase (Barba 1993, p. 29).

But it is, mainly, in chapter IV that Barba strives to address more often the doubts or uncertainties regarding the identity of this double-sided "science", analytical and/or pragmatic. Those are questions to which he responds, usually, with other questions; without, however, allow that double to be confirmed, androgynous, to speak so, of Theatre Anthropology and therefore its principles.

Does the Theatre Anthropology have scientific character?

[...] Its foundation is in empirical research, which finds its general principles. It lies on the practical dimension and seeks, therefore, the effectiveness of the scenic action. It is confined to a sector of the research and forges its necessary theoretical tools necessary to its own exploration. It signals its pragmatics laws. Therefore, it is a science (Barba 1993, p. 65).

A little later, for those who "estimate that the Theatre Anthropology posits an impossible scientific objectivity" Barba replied:

No: our point of view is firmly and explicitly objective, although partial. We project onto our study field the questions and concerns pertaining to the practice and theatrical craft. We help ourselves of the functional objectivity proper of the craftsmen of the theater (Barba 1993: , p. 75).

But, finally, is it possible to consider scientific a practical-theoretical approach deliberately ambivalent, as occurs in the Theatre Anthropology proposed by Barba?

The answer found, for example, by Taviani is affirmative: when we make science with artistic phenomena, the ambiguity is not a forgivable error, but, somehow, a constitutive limit, unsurpassed (De Marinis, 2011, p. 87).

The logical consequence is inevitable - still following Taviani - that the principles developed in the science of art (hence also the principles of Theatre Anthropology as a science of art) can never be constituted by true "laws", even if they have the appearance of such "laws": "[they] look like laws but are, in fact, miniaturized anthologies of recurring procedures, of historical accounts of which abstracts a drawing" (De Marinis, 2011, p. 87). However, is not totally incorrect or useless to designate them as "laws", because, often, it is convenient to consider them **as** if they were. But to whom is it appropriate? As strange as it may seem, it is not appropriate to the researcher, but to the artist:

About the artistic "laws" the following occurs: those who use them to compose, should treat them as inescapable physical "laws", while those that examine them to build a science of art, should treat them as summaries of operating testimonies, empirical repertoire on which the art of comparisons is applied (De Marinis, 2011, p. 88).

All this may seem a gleaming paradox, but it is, on the contrary, a pure common sense. Indeed, it is evident that the artist can only apply a rule when he assumes it, at least provisionally, as absolute. Instead, for those who seek to discover artistic rules and laws it is convenient and useful to doubt, for as long as possible, of the absolute validity of these rules and artistic laws, subjecting them, continuously, to the test of empirical verification and historical examination.

But for how long? Even for a weak science (or very weak), how could it not be taken as the science of art and, particularly, of theaters; even in a science that is offered, humbly, as an "empirical study of comparisons between **theatrical behavior**" (still Taviani), the extent of their comparisons must be questioned (how many behaviors to compare and how far to extend the domain of the

comparisons?). To put it in other words, the presentation of the problem cannot be prevented concerning the limits of the historic-comparative verifications and of the decisions taken in relation to the validity of the, well spoken, "laws" (in fact, the recurring trends, principles-that-return) put into question by the comparison.

In summary, it admits, again, the confrontation with the question of the empirical basis of the theory, namely: the question of the scope and extent of comparative research, only bastions of the validity of the principles put into evidence. How many must be the theatrical behavior to be studied for the trends to be showed can actually be considered significant, in other words, not random and non-explicable, for example, based on historically documented contacts or only plausible?

And, above all: with which criteria should be conducted the choice of the behaviors to be compared in order to produce the expected and useful results? These are questions that do not find satisfactory answers either in *The paper canoe* or elsewhere into the field of Theatre Anthropology and in the writings of Barba.

Two conclusions, in summary, on the issue of the Theatre Anthropology as a science: one about its problematic identity and other about its theoretical ambitions.

First conclusion: The Theatre Anthropology is, or just wants to be, at the same time a theoretical discipline and a "pragmatic science"; to put it another way, or a science or a pedagogy or an aesthetics.

Second conclusion: as an analytical-theoretical approach, it is based on a deliberately weak conception, or rather, very weak, of the science (Taviani: "An empirical study of comparisons between theatrical behavior").

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