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Utopian Training

The secrets, 'schools' and continents of Edward Gordon Craig and Eugenio Barba

"My proposal is to discover or rediscover the lost Art of the Theatre by a practical expedition... into the realms where it lies hidden."

Edward Gordon Craig (1910)

"I believed that I was in search of a lost theatre, but instead I was learning to be in transition today. I know that this is not a search for knowledge, but for the unknown..."

Eugenio Barba (2015)

Abstract

This academic article explores the profound impact of theatre visionaries Edward Gordon Craig and Eugenio Barba on the global performing arts landscape. Through a comprehensive examination of their life's work, philosophies, and pedagogical approaches, it uncovers the hidden treasures of their artistic legacies. It explores the 'schools' they established as transformative realms of exploration and creativity; the article highlights their utopian visions that transcended cultural boundaries and continents. By delving into their secrets, 'schools,' and worldwide influence, this article contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolution of theatre and its enduring legacy.

Keywords: theatre, Edward Gordon Craig, Eugenio Barba, training, innovation, influence

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Preamble

The submission of this article was seriously delayed due to illness and conflicting work schedules in relation to the publication of *Performance Research*. However, the delay allowed me to acquaint myself with the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Theatre Anthropology* (JTA – launched in March 2021)¹ and reframe some of the issues I had been reflecting on in relation to the ‘schools’ of Edward Gordon Craig and Eugenio Barba and the dynamic between their practical endeavours and their written texts (the practice and the scriptures).

Craig edited and sustained a journal – *The Mask* – for almost twenty-one years (eighty-seven issues between 1908 and 1929) and made several unsuccessful attempts to establish an innovative theatre school, the most fully realized lasting only one year – *The School of the Art of the Theatre* at *The Arena Goldoni*, Florence, Italy (1913–14). Eugenio Barba launched the ground-breaking *International School of Theatre Anthropology* (ISTA) in 1980 (in Bonn, Germany)² and it has flourished occasionally and peripatetically throughout the past forty years; now, in 2021, he has founded a journal to reflect on the work of the ‘school’. Craig launched *The Mask* at the age of thirty-seven and Barba founded JTA at the age of eighty-four; they were respectively forty-two and forty-three when they established their schools. This article explores how a journal leads to a school, and how a school leads to a journal (with many books along the way), and how both ‘schools’ had very few students and pursued utopian aspirations for pedagogy.

This preamble explains why an article in a journal carrying a cover date of December 2020 manages to embrace another journal published in March 2021: it is not prophetic or visionary, it is simply good fortune – due to delay.

1 The first issue of *Journal of Theatre Anthropology*, ‘The Origins’, features articles and studies translated into English or written in their original languages (Spanish and French), with a foreword by Eugenio Barba and an editorial by Julia Varley. It is available as open access: <https://jta.ista-online.org>

2 The history of ISTA records 1979 as the year of origin and foundation but the first sessions, which comprised four weeks of practical workshops and studio-based explorations (and a symposium) were held in Bonn, Germany, 1 to 31 October 1980.

Introduction – schools

The most desirable thing of all, however, is, under all circumstances to have severe discipline at the right time i.e., at that age when it makes us proud that people should expect great things from us. For this is what distinguishes hard schooling, as good schooling, from every other schooling, namely, that a good deal is demanded, that a good deal is severely exacted, that goodness, nay even excellence itself is required as if it were normal; that praise is scanty, that leniency is non-existent: that blame is sharp, practical, and without reprieve, and has no regard to talent or antecedents. We are in every way in need of such a school.

The quote above, from *The Will to Power* (Nietzsche), is how it appears on page forty-three of the 'prospectus' for the School for the Art of the Theatre.³ This beautiful booklet, published in 1913 (Florence, Italy), with its distinctive yellow wrappers and handmade Italian laid paper, was titled *A Living Theatre*⁴, with three subtitles indicating the complimentary components that formed the 'Living Theatre' and the endeavours the prospectus was intended to promote: The Gordon Craig School, the Arena Goldoni and The Mask. Beneath an illustration derived from Leonardo da Vinci's design of 'Vitruvian Man', which first appeared in the initial volume of *The Mask*, the cover proclaims: 'Setting Forth the Aims and Objects of the Movement and Showing by Many Illustrations the City of Florence, The Arena'. The booklet is as much a celebration of Florence and the Arena Goldoni as it is a promotion of the newly launched 'school' and the ongoing development of *The Mask* (also based at the Arena Goldoni and published in Florence). Following a foreword by Craig it contains a short panegyric on Florence by John Balance⁵, titled *The City of Flowers*, that concludes:

3 The better-known Kaufmann and Hollingdale translation being:

The most desirable thing is still under all circumstances a hard discipline at the proper time, i.e., at that age at which it still makes one proud to see that much is demanded of one. For this is what distinguishes the hard school as a good school from all others: that much is demanded; and sternly demanded; that the good, even the exceptional, is demanded as the norm; that praise is rare, that indulgence is nonexistent; that blame is apportioned sharply, objectively, without regard for talent or antecedents. One needs such a school from every point of view: that applies to the most physical as well as to the most spiritual matters; it would be fatal to desire to draw a distinction here! (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*; Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, trans., p. 912)

4 A digitised version of the full booklet, *A Living Theatre*, can be found on the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/cu31924026123368>

5 John Balance was one of the sixty plus pseudonyms that Craig used in *The Mask* – from ABC to Yu-no-who (via Stanislas Lodochowski).

'Florence is the right centre for The School for the Art of the Theatre and for The Mask. She is the true home of all those who desire to create.' The physical location of Craig's projects in Florence, and their sense of home in a cultural, intellectual and historical context (of artist ateliers and workshops), is significant and will resonate through this article.

The substantial content comprises two essays by D. Neville Lees: 'About The Mask' and 'The Arena Goldoni'. The former describes both the 'constructive' and 'destructive' mission of the journal, and the latter provides a detailed description of the early nineteenth century open air theatre The Arena Goldoni – its history and the fifteenth century convent that previously occupied the site, and its use and function as envisaged in 1913. These essays capture the fervour and unrestrained ambition of the journal and the school; they are written with passion and out of love – Dorothy Neville Lees, the poet and writer, was Craig's ever-faithful lover, the true handmaiden of both the journal and the school (and mother of one of Craig's fourteen children and managing editor of *The Mask*).⁶ 'The School at Florence', written by Ernest Marriott – the British artist/librarian/actor who had been appointed Craig's Senior Assistant at the School – offers the most concrete description of the School, its 'Aims and Objects, Organization' and a detailed prospectus through 'The Work of the School'. This section also contains 'A Student's Impression', written by John Nicholson, which although interesting is probably fictional.⁷ This is followed by a typically loquacious (excoriating and enigmatic) text by Craig – 'What My School Needs' – that expands on the ideal artist combining aspects of sportsmen and craftsmen (all men).

The section 'The Ideal Theatre' is a selection of tributes and testimonials from the great and the good (from around the world) focusing on Craig the man and artist (rather than the school) and a Biographical Note ends: 'In March 1913 Gordon Craig opened his School for the Art of the Theatre in Florence'.

⁶ Dorothy Neville Lees moved from Wolverhampton, UK, to Florence, Italy, in 1903 and was a writer and poet in her own right, in addition to assisting Craig with *The Mask*. She published two books, *Scenes and Shrines in Tuscany* and *Tuscan Feasts and Friends*, in 1907. She rescued Craig's archives and built up a collection that can now be accessed at the British Institute in Florence. Dorothy Lees's papers are held in Harvard University Harvard Theatre Collection of theatrical portrait photographs.

⁷ John Nicholson is not listed as one of Craig's pseudonyms, but I cannot trace any records about him and this account of his experiences at the 'School' are published at the point of formation of the 'School'. William Nicholson (1872–1949), the famous painter and engraver, taught Craig the art of woodcut and wood engraving.

The booklet closes with a strained allegorical text, 'A Coach and Four Horses', signed 'E.C.G.', and an appeal to join the Society of Theatre, which is allied to The School for the Art of the Theatre and The Mask. This, curiously, through a single page titled 'Propaganda', introduces another vehicle to realize The New Theatre that Craig envisions: he implores readers to seek 'One Million Members', the yearly subscription for each of whom was one shilling (equivalent to approximately five pounds (GBP) in 2020). Not in this notice but in the 'Prelude' to Volume 5 of *The Mask* (1913, 193) Craig, under the pseudonym of J. S. (John Semar), clarifies the 'theatrical' mission of his 'dramatic movement' (this immediately precedes the first description of The School for the Art of the Theatre): "The Society for the Theatre... aims at creating a dramatic movement which shall at all times appeal to the theatrical rather than the literary aspects of drama, meaning by 'theatrical' that form of stage reproduction which makes an appeal through the senses to the imagination rather than to the intellect." (Semar 1913).

Finally, and of interest to all arts administrators and entrepreneurs and those who have valiantly inaugurated cultural initiatives, the Members of the International Committee of The School for the Art of the Theatre are listed (it includes W. B. Yeats and Constantin Stanislavski) along with donors and their gifts ('William Gable – USA – A Full-Sized Printing Press') and acknowledgement of the 'Founder of the School', Lord Howard de Walden, 'who has signified his desire to support [the school] for five years'.

Tommy Scott Ellis, 8th Baron Howard de Walden (1880–1946), had actually donated £5,000 (the equivalent of almost £600,000 in 2020) – a considerable investment and an extraordinary proclamation of trust and belief in Craig's long-held ambition to establish a school.⁸ It was the support of Baron Howard de Walden that directly enabled the school at the Arena Goldoni to be realised; Craig's previous attempt, ten years earlier at the Trafalgar Studios, to establish The London School for Theatrical Art (1903) had foundered within a year as an opportunity to design *Venice Preserved* in Berlin took priority. However, this first attempt at a school enshrined the same ideals as the Florence School would ten years later and was aimed more at forming an aristos of highly skilled theatre makers (in all aspects of production) and a company under Craig's direction. A school with no students. An announcement in The

⁸ In addition to offering a further £2,000 for the second and third year of the School's operation.

Pall Mall Gazette clarifies that: "The school will in some points differ from other London schools of dramatic art. For instance, Mr Craig does not propose to train his students so that after two or three terms they will be able to accept London or provincial engagements. His purpose is to prepare them in all that is necessary for their development, and then provide them with opportunities to exhibit their powers under his direction." (The Pall Mall Gazette cited in Rood 1983, 1).

Arnold Rood details that Maud Douie, who had appeared in Craig's immensely successful Purcell Opera Society productions, appeared to be 'the only person known to have attempted to enrol officially' at the school. Rood also noted that Craig's mother, Ellen Terry, was always doubtful with regard to the success of her son's 'school' and the enrolment of 'students'. Rood details two other attempts by Craig to establish his 'school': in Paris in 1910 with Jacques Rouche, founder of the Theatre des Arts, and with Constantin Stanislavski in 1911 as they collaborated on the production of *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre. Craig's demands on Rouche for the 'school' were ever escalating, and although Rouche offered full support, Craig finally rejected the offer. By the time he was collaborating with Stanislavski in Moscow⁹ he was already envisaging the school in Florence and pleading with him 'will you give me my school in Florence', detailing a four-year plan that would empower the actors in the fourth year to improvise spontaneously, 'acting with and without words'. Rood speculates that, although Stanislavski did not embrace this proposal, it might have influenced him and led to the creation of the Moscow Art Theatre Studios; on this logical surmise we might further reflect that Craig's loss therefore could have been Meyerhold's opportunity.

The poet and dramatist Laurence Binyon (1869–1943) wrote an article in the January 1913 issue of *The Mask* titled: 'The Gordon Craig School for the Art of the Theatre: A Recognition of the Need for it', where he emphasised the religious, festive and spiritual dimension of participating in theatre (as spectator and performer), the need for unity and harmony in the form, and the power of theatre to generate 'felt' experience, harnessing the imagination of the audience. Although a dramatist and wordsmith, and not entirely in agreement with Craig's dismissal of the playwright, he did acknowledge: "But probably in all

⁹ Craig collaborated with Stanislavski in Moscow in 1911–12 on what was to be the highly successful and influential production of *Hamlet* for the Moscow Art Theatre.

plays there is a tendency to rely too much on the word. A dramatist's material is not only language; it is even more the action, gesture, movement which the stage alone gives him, not to speak of the emotional equivalents of light and darkness..." (Binyon 1913, 219–220)

He told how, on being concerned that his seven-year-old daughter might not understand much of the language of the Shakespeare plays they were seeing, she retorted: 'Oh, what they say is mostly nonsense, it is what they do that is interesting.' He thought that Craig would approve of this child's perspective and he bemoaned how a dramatic poet was to learn his business and experiment with form and 'totality' for the new theatre. He admired that Craig's ambition for a school 'is one where no fixed routine or rigid pattern are to be taught, but all are to learn and cooperate in learning'. Binyon suggests that had William Morris turned his attention to drama (from the arts and crafts) then he would have done as Craig now proposed. Again, while not supporting Craig's desire to attenuate the written play and substitute the actor with the uber-marionette, he concluded: "But the inspiring, hopeful thing about this projected School is that it would make so much possible, it would open out so many vistas. Above all it would set the life-blood of the art healthily circulating, as in a single organism. Its principles would be, not mechanism but growth. Will not England, then will not Englishmen, make this School a reality?" (Binyon 1913, 219–220)

In March 1913, The School for the Art of the Theatre at the Arena Goldoni in Florence, Italy, began its pioneering work. In *A Living Theatre* (the 'prospectus'), Ernest Marriott writes: "The venture is buoyant and afloat, and, briefly stated, its aims are to make a thorough search into the conditions and practise of matters relating to the Theatre, to do what has never been done by any other Theatre, to explore the devious by-ways, to search for beauty and hold it captive, to collect the broken fragments of the Theatre's beautiful architecture, and reconstruct the fabric, to unite all the Arts and Crafts of the stage and achieve harmony.

To make its pulse beat faster and more rhythmically and more vigorously, to discover and define once and for all the elemental forms and methods which are the bases and keystones of the finest Theatre Art and to inspire a new Theatre into being." (Marriott 1913, 43)

Marriott's phrases – 'to explore the devious by-ways', 'to collect the broken fragments' and to 'reconstruct the fabric' of theatre – could be taken as guiding principles for much experimental theatre of the last one hundred years; they

are inspirational and visionary, succinctly capturing the need to integrate theory and practice and explore the dynamic between innovation and tradition. Marriott, Senior Assistant of the School, clarifies: "It will not be an institution for 'teaching' any art, nor for learning the crafts of acting, of decorating, or of lighting. It will consist simply of a body of earnest and thorough workers who, inspired by Mr Craig, and building with him upon the foundations of his past great work, will strive by means of experiment and research to rediscover and recreate those magic and elemental principles of beauty, simplicity, and grace in a department of the art-world, from which at present they are conspicuously absent."

Faced with the economic realities of today, the neoliberal values adopted by many universities and the commodification of knowledge, it is difficult to imagine any training endeavour (no matter how utopian) explicitly proclaiming its desire for few 'students'. But neither Craig nor Marriott wanted many participants, and the select few were to be regarded more as a family of workers (in the atelier) than 'students': "NA quantity of pupils is not wanted. The choice will be rigorously confined to selecting out of every twenty or thirty talented and educated men who apply, one or two, who satisfy the Director's requirements. There are stricter rules in this school than is usual and yet, at the same time, every pupil feels he is 'one of the family.'" (Marriott 1913, 46)

The rules were indeed strict (aligning to the Nietzschean ideals of discipline) and it is actually easier to become acquainted with the extent of the rules of the School than it is to garner a sense of the programme of studies or learning processes that one would be guided through. Criticism of the School was absolutely forbidden: 'any breach of this rule will not be lightly regarded'. Furthermore: "'Opinions' are not wanted neither inside nor outside the School.

Discretion, silence and attention to work are expected."

Prospective 'students' were advised not to talk about the School or its methods and the response 'I do not know' was to be the stock answer to any questions advanced by friends or family. Chattering was banned. What is clear, however, is that Craig envisioned two divisions functioning throughout the School. The First Division were the professional and salaried 'experimental workers' collaborating with Craig, in effect forming the 'faculty'. And the Second Division were the (few) paying 'students' whose main purpose was to undergo the training and become eligible to be promoted to the First Division. Craig is candid and wholly transparent about this self-serving ecology of the School. While

such subservience might appear alien to us today, in the section 'A Student's Impression' John Nicholson writes with perfervid enthusiasm about being part of the 'family': "It is almost impossible to speak of the work we do here with anything but enthusiasm. All those who have experienced the delight and excitement of working under the Director are convinced that it was inspiration to start such a School in such a place. We are more interested and exhilarated by our work at the Arena than if we were cooped up in an English Theatre in an English City." (Nicholson 1913, 46)

And he concludes with a schoolboy's infatuation: "It is an interesting and absorbing existence. Once having started to learn things in such a vivid and exciting fashion one wonders whether one will ever want to leave School or have anything to do with anything, but the Arena Goldoni and the School for the Art of the Theatre." (Nicholson 1913, 48)

These fervent testimonials were intended to promote The School for the Art of the Theatre at the Arena Goldoni in Florence and enable a rigorous selection (of men) to shape the radical atelier of Craig's imaginings. They were to work diligently under the master's guidance, in all aspects of the craft of theatre, and realise a totality of form – Towards a New Theatre. But on 28 June 1914 Archduke Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated in Sarajevo and Europe was about to implode. Although Italy was aligned through the Triple Alliance (with the German Empire and Austria-Hungary), it was neutral in the initial phases of World War I, but the situation for Craig and his school was dire. At the outbreak of war Marriott returned to England and the few worker-students who were 'enrolled' left swiftly. By August 1914 the School was closed, thus it only functioned for eighteen months but left an eloquent provocation.¹⁰

As a bridge between Craig and Barba, I end this section with Craig's words: 'The school will aim at doing, and revealing the means of doing, what is left undone by the modern Theatre'.

Eugenio Barba and the Kerala Kalamandalam

Eugenio Barba did not attend a theatre school and the origin myths of Odin Teatret contain the wonderful story of him contacting many of the applicants who had been 'rejected' by the Teaterhøgskolen (Academy of Theatre of the

¹⁰ According to Rood, Craig made one final attempt to continue the School in Rome in 1914.

Oslo National Academy of the Arts) and inviting them to join him in his nascent theatre endeavour in the equally fabled 'bunker' in Oslo. Some of those potential 'students' of the Teaterhøgskolen became founding members and life-time professional partners of Barba, learning with him and through him, collaborating as an autodidactic team and as an experimental atelier that Craig would have recognised and admired. But Barba knew deeply the value of apprenticeship and the need to look, listen and learn. Unlike Craig, who had been born into the theatre aristocracy of his day – entitled, privileged and with supreme society connections – Barba was a Southern Italian migrant attuned to the sounds of a 'foreign' language, who learnt welding from a Norwegian 'master' in the manual workshop tradition, and in his early twenties was poised to learn discipline and command through experiences as a merchant sailor.¹¹ These four factors – brought up within a Southern Italian culture with Catholic rituals as theatre, dislocated through migration and in need of adopting another language, labouring as a welder (learning through doing) in a rigorous master-apprentice relationship and encountering strict discipline, responsibility and team ethos as a merchant sailor – seemed to contribute significantly to Barba's formation and to his perspective on theatre training, pedagogy and 'schools'.

Most significant of all, however, must be the two years Barba spent watching the young Jerzy Grotowski work with his actors creating the productions *Akropolis* and *Doctor Faustus* in the Theatre of 13 Rows in Opole, Poland, between 1962 and 1964.¹² Photographs exist of Barba sat in a corner of the small theatre watching the company at work, learning how to see, training an analytical eye, developing perception, day after day, perfecting a way of seeing that is wholly focused, tracking every shift in the actor's motion or expression and the director's instruction or intervention, building a capacity for observation that is almost surgical, precise, unflinching. Percipience, formed through an acute perception coupled with perspicacity, defined as a penetrating discernment (from the Latin *perspicacitas*, meaning through-sightedness), is refined by patience.

11 Barba often writes and speaks about his formative training in Oslo and his apprenticeship as a welder; 'engraved in my nervous system are Eigel Winnje's actions in his welder's workshop', together with his experiences as a merchant seaman on the Norwegian ship *Talabot*.

12 The term 'laboratory' was only in the process of being added to the 'Theatre of the 13 Rows' during this time to become 'The Laboratory of 13 Rows'.

In Opole, while a theatre laboratory formed a new language, Barba forged a look that knew how to see.

But there is another theatre 'school' that Barba did briefly attend that I should like to revisit. In 1963, Barba, recently in love with Judy Jones (they married two years later), set off on an expedition in 'search of theatre' to India: Judy drove the Land Rover from London to Cheruthuruthy in Kerala (among many other destinations and adventures). They had been advised to visit the Kerala Kalamandalam,¹³ the now famous school for Kathakali, itself the product of visionary and utopian formation. The Kerala Kalamandalam was originally founded in 1930 to protect and preserve Kathakali, and since 2007 it has had the status of a university. In 1963, the Kerala Kalamandalam was still relatively 'young' (and less institutionalized) and following training methods founded in the guru-shishya tradition, with embodied knowledge and psychophysical exercises passed on through parampara lineage and the novices beginning their apprenticeship at a very early age and undergoing a body reformation and training of nine- or ten-years duration. Watching these boys train and exercise daily, with the intense and engaged attention he had sharpened in the laboratory theatre of Grotowski, was to make a lasting impression on Barba: "A few harassing questions and an indelible memory remained with me: the humility and dedication of the students, children about ten years old, who, in solitary silence at dawn, tried and retried the basic postures and footsteps." (Barba 2015: 39)

In the early hours of the morning – sometimes as early as three o'clock in the morning – the boys would begin their sadhakam, the gruelling physical training combining stretches, jumps and eye exercises. In the monsoon months (June through August) they would undergo the extremely vigorous body massage chavitti uzichil, conducted by their masters, who used their feet and body weight (by hanging from bars) as a means of massaging deeply the back and legs and altering rotation in spine and hip joints. This unique massage technique originates in Kalarippayatta martial arts training.

I would suggest that in a similar way that the training alters body posture, physique and stamina, so the performance of Kathakali (and other Kerala performance traditions) alters perception, reception and a sense of time. The traditional way to present Kathakali is from dusk until dawn, flickering oil lamps

¹³ Barba describes this trip to India in his books *The Land of Ashes and Diamonds* and in *The Moon Rises from the Ganges*.

half lighting the resplendent figures, with the mesmerising percussive rhythm being sustained and the narrative sung over and through action.

Barba witnessed performances of Kathakali at the Kerala Kalamandalam, in addition to following closely the training process, applying and developing his techniques of observation. I would suggest that his perspicacity was tested and his way of seeing fundamentally challenged. His eyes were opened further, as if he had undergone one of the very Kathakali eye exercises he observed (and later described).¹⁴ To this day he remains candid about the effort needed to sustain attention to Asian forms of theatre that can be so bewildering and beguiling to a Western novice unfamiliar with the codes and conventions that are needed for full comprehension. Barba devised strategies of observation; in this extensive quote he reveals how techniques of looking led to an understanding and a question that would develop into ISTA: "I believed that I was in search of a lost theatre, but instead I was learning to be in transition. Today I know that this is not a search for knowledge, but for the unknown.

After the founding of Odin Teatret in 1964, my work frequently took me to Asia: to Bali, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Japan. I witnessed much theatre and dance. For a spectator from the West, there is nothing more suggestive than a traditional Asian performance seen in its context, often in the open tropical air, with a large and reactive audience, with a constant musical accompaniment which captivates the nervous system, with sumptuous costumes which delight the eye, and with performers who embody the unity of actor-dancer-singer-story-teller.

At the same time, there is nothing more monotonous, lacking action and development, than the seemingly interminable recitations of text, which the performers speak or sing in their (to us) unknown languages, melodiously yet implacably repetitive. In these monotonous moments, my attention developed a tactic to avoid giving up on the performance. I attempted to concentrate tenaciously on and follow just one detail of a performer: the fingers of one hand, a foot, a shoulder, an eye. This tactic against monotony made me aware of a strange coincidence: Asian performers performed with the knees bent, exactly like the Odin Teatret actors." (Barba 1995, 5–6)

¹⁴ Barba described the eye exercises in his writing about Kathakali, and in *Towards a Poor Theatre* photographs capture Grotowski's actors having adopted them from Barba's description (Grotowski did not visit the Kerala Kalamandalam).

For the purpose of this essay, and in considering Craig's ambitions to establish a school, it is worth reflecting further on the Kerala Kalamandalam, especially as it has played a significant role in the imaginings of laboratory theatres in the last fifty years, and also because some of the Kathakali exercises have entered the canon of physical theatre daily routines (without origins or lineage being known). In 1927, poet laureate Vallathol Narayana Menon, known throughout India as Vallathol, formed a society that developed as the Kerala Kalamandalam. On 9 November 1930 (Vallathol's fifty-first birthday), the Kerala Kalamandalam was officially inaugurated in Thrissur and began lessons in a bungalow in Ambalapuram on the outskirts of Thrissur. From the outset the Kerala Kalamandalam was not exclusively teaching Kathakali and after two years was determined to revive Mohniyattam and offer training in Bhartanatyam. In 1933 the rulers of Kochi (Cochin) donated land and a building for the permanent establishment of the Kerala Kalamandalam in the village of Cheruthuruthy on the banks of the Bharatapuzha river. The gift of a disused pig farm on the outskirts of Holstebro (Jutland, Denmark) to the equally homeless/migrant Nordisk Teatrlaboratorium (Barba and the founding Norwegian collaborators of the Odin Teatret), made by the visionary Mayor of Holstebro¹⁵ thirty-two years later in 1965, offers an interesting parallel, as does Craig's settling in the Arena Goldoni (Florence, Italy) twenty years previously in 1913. Utopian theatre schools/institutions take occupation of sites and repurpose buildings through creative necessity.

Just as Craig struggled to sustain the initiative of his school in Florence, so too did the Kerala Kalamandalam lead a fragile and precarious existence throughout the 1930s and 1940s. It was not until the Indian Prime Minister Nehru visited the Cheruthuruthy campus for the occasion of Kerala Kalamandalam's silver jubilee – and was so impressed by the achievements made within the preceding twenty-five years that he offered one lakh of rupees (one hundred thousand) – that their existence and future became more certain.

Although Barba is often regarded as one of the first Western theatre directors to visit the Kerala Kalamandalam, and is appropriately credited with being the first non-Indian to write insightfully about the training process of Kath-

¹⁵ In 1966 the Mayor of Holstebro (then only 18,000 inhabitants) Kai K. Nielsen inaugurated an extraordinarily far-sighted cultural policy for this remote Danish province. The city not only welcomed the Odin Teatret but also a Music and Dance conservatoire.

akali and the function of Kerala Kalamandalam,¹⁶ he was not actually the first Western practitioner to be welcomed in Cheruthuruthy. For a 'school' that first appears to be all male, and a form that is traditionally exclusively so, it is interesting to note that an American female dancer – Esther Sherman (1893–1982) was in Kerala, and known to Vallathol, at the inception of the Kerala Kalamandalam (1930–33), and an Australian female dancer – Louise Lightfoot (1902–1979) – was taking classes there in 1937. Both played an instrumental role in bringing Keralan dance-theatre forms to a larger audience in India and then in Australia, North America and in Europe in the late 1940s and in the 1950s. Ragnini Devi (née Esther Luella Sherman), Sherman's adopted stage name, danced 'authentic Indian entertainments' in New York in the 1920s and was part of the exotic dance movement, although also a scholar, having studied Indian history and culture at university, and she was one of the first practitioners to write a book on Indian dance as early as 1928: *Nritanjali: an introduction to Hindu dancing*. Sherman/Devi did not actually travel to India until 1930 and then rapidly immersed herself in several dance forms and sought training from highly regarded guru teachers; she gained a favourable reputation and an invitation from the Maharaja of Travancore to dance in Kerala. Devi was present throughout the formation of the Kerala Kalamandalam and met the famous Kathakali dancer Gopinath. They formed a partnership and played a significant role in popularising Kathakali and bringing it to the attention of audiences throughout India through their distilled, reduced and edited staged performances. The Australian dancer Louise Lightfoot followed in Ragnini Devi's footsteps, visited the Kerala Kalamandalam, took classes, and met Shivaramam (from Paravoor), who was a student of the first cohort of the school. He later became known as Ananda Shivaram and toured Australia and America with Lightfoot, eventually settling in San Francisco and founding an Indian dance school with Lightfoot.¹⁷ I mention these two female pioneers to throw a spotlight on the intercultural and interweaving transactions that were taking place in the 1930s but also

¹⁶ Barba first wrote on Kathakali after his visit in 1963 and the text was published in French in 1965; an English language version appeared as 'The Kathakali Theatre' (1967) in the *Tulane Drama Review* (TDR) 11(4) (1967, 165–69).

¹⁷ Lightfoot's thirty-three essays, 'reflecting her broader worldview as a dancer, choreographer, and impresario', were gathered into a book: *Louise Lightfoot in Search of India*. Available as print on demand or eBook.

to highlight how individual curiosity spins out from and accelerates developments being explored in specific utopian sites of dance-theatre training.

International School of Theatre Anthropology

Barba achieved what Craig aspired for in his 'schools' within the first few years of founding Odin Teatret and the Nordisk Teatelaboratorium, especially once the fledgling company had relocated to Holstebro, Jutland, on the west coast of Denmark. By 1966 he had a permanent ensemble of actors who were training daily and developing technique and skills – initially based on Barba's understanding of what he had witnessed at Opole and Grotowski's company (not then known as the Grotowski Theatre Laboratory)¹⁸ but rapidly following their own group and individual initiatives and trajectories. Odin Teatret had a permanent home, studios (and ground for expansion), annual financial support with city, state and national subvention; they were hosting pedagogical programmes but without the need of regular students, they were making their own productions and honing a distinctive style and aesthetic and gathering an international following; they even had their own publishing house and a theatre journal advancing theatre practice and theory throughout Scandinavia – TTT (Teaters Teori og Teknikk). In many ways they functioned as a research university without students; the faculty were the permanent ensemble of actors who were increasingly taking on responsibility for film producing, networking, archiving, renovating their 'home' and designing work – everything Craig had wished for. The journal TTT, like *The Mask*, devoted issues to *Commedia dell'arte*, theatre forms of Asia, marionette and folk theatre, and focused on the integration of theory and practice. Unlike *The Mask*, however, TTT paid tribute to past masters (Meyerhold, Brecht, Eisenstein, Artaud), tended not to promote the work of its founder, and consistently championed the work of another contemporary director: Grotowski (issue seven of TTT (1968) was actually *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Grotowski's seminal text, often thought of as Methuen's coup).¹⁹

¹⁸ Only when Grotowski, Flaszen and the company moved from Opole to Wrocław in 1965 did they rename it Teatr Laboratorium (Laboratory Theatre).

¹⁹ The full listing of the TTT issues and content (and, for many issues, access to original texts) can be found via Odin Teatret website: <https://bit.ly/2TLPguJ>

Even though Barba's encounter with Kathakali at the Kerala Kalamandalam was profound and formative, and even though his curiosity with regard to Asian dance-theatres was insatiable, Barba did not think that there was a purpose in European performers going through in-depth training in the exacting and culturally differentiated techniques of the dance-theatres of Asia. This was never to be the purpose of ISTA. However, something unforeseen and serendipitous occurred when his actors returned from a 'sabbatical' in 1978. Craig had never speculated that his actors might have the will, determination and enterprise to conduct self-directed research, but Barba did. Due to a gruelling period of touring productions and organising many international gatherings, Barba needed a break from a schedule that had escalated since 1964, and his group needed a rupture in routine and to gather 'stimuli which might help shatter them from the crystallization of behaviour which tends to form in every individual or group' (Barba 1995: 6). His actors were allowed three months out and encouraged to learn new skills. Three went to Bali and learnt baris and legong dance, two went to Brazil and learnt capoeira and candomblé, two stayed at home and learnt European ballroom dancing and one went to the Kerala Kalamandalam and learnt a female role of Kathakali. It was from this melange of performance fragments that the Odin Teatret were to make the production *The Million*, described as: "A journey among the carnivals of different cultures, from India to Bali, from Japan to Brazil, from Africa to European ballroom dancing. A 'musical' à la Odin: a mocking album of exoticism whose figures of flesh and blood prance about in front of a strange traveller..." (OT website <http://old.odinteatret.dk/productions/past-productions/the-million.aspx>)

The 'strange traveller' is Marco Polo²⁰, who witnesses all these fabulous displays, and this is the loose conceptual framework for what was an immensely successful touring indoor and outdoor show (1978–1982). But the figure of Marco Polo (played by Torgeir Wethal) resonates and manifests in other directions too: in what these 'exotic' fragments of performance mastery revealed to Barba, and how it changed his perception. Also, in how the ghost of Marco Polo

20 *Il Milione* and *The Book of Marvels of the World* are alternate titles to *The Travels of Marco Polo* written by Marco Polo circa 1300, that described his travels in the previous thirty years along the Silk Route into the 'East', and his extraordinary encounters in India, Japan, Persia and China, the Mongol and Yuan Dynasties.

– he who witnessed the strange and the fabulous – haunts the *Theatrum Mundi* of ISTA and ingeminates bewilderment.²¹

As recorded above, through watching many different forms of Asian dance-theatre, Barba realised that there were certain commonalities in a performer's bios on a pre-expressive level – to use the soon-emergent ISTA terminology (in other words, regardless of form, style, culture or aesthetics, there were 'common techniques' the performer was physically engaging) – and the epiphany related to posture and poised knees. In the same text from *The Paper Canoe*, Barba reflects that despite his scepticism regarding the efficacy of his actors 'hurriedly learning' these fragments of Asian dance: "I began to notice that when my actors did a Balinese dance, they put on another skeleton/skin which conditioned a way of standing, moving or becoming 'expressive'. Then they would step out of it and resume the skeleton/skin of the Odin actor. And yet, in the passage from one skeleton/skin to another, in spite of difference in 'expressivity', they applied similar principles. The application of these principles led the actors in very divergent directions. I saw results which had nothing in common except the 'life' which permeated them." (Barba 1995, 6)

These observations triggered Barba's curiosity, and this in turn led to the formation of ISTA and the research questions that have underpinned it for the last forty years. Much has been written about ISTA and I strongly recommend readers to the recently launched *Journal of Theatre Anthropology* (that I will reflect on in conclusion to this article). Within the context of 'Training Utopias' I only wish to focus on several recurrent aspects of ISTA.²²

First: the occasional and peripatetic, ephemeral and almost fleeting event-fullness of ISTA's sessions, fifteen in total, only one outside Europe (Londrina, Brazil, 1994), some lasting only ten days, the longest two months (Volterra, Italy, 1981). It was never the intention or desire to establish a permanent school, and long before 'pop-up restaurants' became fashionable, allowing radical and experimental chefs to 'try out' new methods, gastronomic adventures or hybrid cuisines (without the need for great financial outlay), theatre groups had been forging such enterprises for decades. ISTA is a part of that tradition: creative

21 The *Theatrum Mundi* were, originally, the one off celebratory (often site-specific) performances that concluded a session of ISTA and involved all the ensembles participating in the session.

22 See *Negotiating Cultures: Eugenio Barba and the intercultural debate* edited by Ian Watson, Manchester University Press, 2002 and other essays on ISTA by Watson for accounts of ISTA.

endeavour without commercial entrepreneurship, utopian through being aspirational, creatively disturbing and disruptive, troubling orthodoxy and questioning received wisdom. ISTA's ethos was interruptive, disquieting and unsettling. To attend and participate fully in a session required dislocation and a rupture to daily life and normal behaviour. ISTA functioned out of time and in a different rhythm: only in Uchronia can one hope to find Utopia. There was something strategic and tactical, almost military, in the way ISTA 'hit and ran'. It left no trace, its host perhaps in need of recovery and with little desire to reconvene – and certainly with no embers to rekindle. ISTA came and went and relied on those individuals who (as with Craig's benefactors) raised the funds to realise such momentous ambition. As Julia Varley graciously credits in the *Journal of Theatre Anthropology* editorial: "ISTA became a performers' village thanks to the deep commitment and adventurous will of people like Hans Jürgen Nagel and Roberto Bacci who managed to find the necessary economic and logistic conditions to make it happen."²³ (Varley 2021, 16)

The evocation of a 'performers' village' relates to my second point: ISTA sessions often gave life to a temporary and contingent community. There were village rules (and 'Village Elders') and recurrent rituals that had to be observed: no talking until breakfast was taken and work sessions began; a dawn chorus event (assembled in silence, at a vantage point to witness sunrise, the participants listen to the music of a visiting ensemble); no applauding of demonstrations or performances, no filming or photography (other than the official photographer); an expectation that all external work commitments would be suspended; rotas for cleaning and preparing spaces; communal living and sharing of food. Not all these rules and rituals applied to every ISTA, and some had specific, local rites, but the suspension of normal daily life and external commitments was recurrent in all the ISTAs I attended.²⁴ Depending on the location and the facilities of the host venue, large dormitories and washrooms had to be improvised, requiring a breach in privacy, and for some a very real dislocation in comfort. The communal feasting on the other hand generated commensal-

²³ Hans Jürgen Nagel (Director of Kulturamt Bonn) was the organiser/producer of the inaugural session of ISTA in Bonn, and Roberto Bacci (Director of Centro per la Sperimentazione e la Ricerca Teatrale, Pontedera, Italy) organiser/producer of the second session in Volterra, Italy.

²⁴ I attended the symposium in Bonn (1980), and the full sessions in Bologna (1990), Brecon/Cardiff (1992), Londrina (1994), Copenhagen/Louisiana (1996), and Montemor-o-Novo and Lisbon (1998).

ity and the collective observation of many extraordinary performances a real sense of *communitas* – especially at the culminating *Theatrum Mundi* performance.

The disruption, and in some senses disregard, for established processes of pedagogy and strategies for learning is another abiding feature of ISTA and my third observation. All university professors participating in an ISTA had to think differently and not rely on their established opinions; practitioners had to try to articulate the thought processes that underpinned their practice; performers from different world traditions of dance-theatres had to find a way of improvising together (even the very concept of improvising had to be deconstructed and then reconstructed in culturally different forms); and many strategies of interweaving, cross threading and unpicking were adopted and advanced. An individual and team responsibility towards the work was also promulgated: one had to learn how to see individually and then share what was observed collectively. Witnesses of an accident or a crime pool many different perspectives, and the police experts in interview and interrogation can be highly skilled, and at an ISTA one had to sharpen the interrogative gaze and then build capacity in listening to the team. Also, every participant had to find a way to allow his or her own capacity of observation to be guided by the perception and analysis of one other – Eugenio Barba.

What did we see? We saw a master at work, and we saw extraordinarily skilled exponents of different world dance-theatre forms reveal foundational techniques of their craft. I do not state ‘master at work’ as homage or sycophantic tribute (I was often the refusenik and occasional disbeliever), but I think it is important to recognise that the main vehicle for generating new knowledge within ISTA was a process of witnessing Barba grapple, often wrestle and struggle, with concepts of theatre anthropology as they emerged, through demonstration and encounter with the practitioners and world-renowned performers (not only from Asian dance-theatre forms but also Europe and the Americas). These were ‘live events’ of discovery and unravelling, where misunderstanding, miscommunication and confusion could easily derail the lesson of anatomy that was underway. Masterclasses, lectures, talks, screenings, workshops, debates, symposia and performances were all part of an ISTA, but it was the work demonstrations between Barba and Sanjukta Panigrahi (Odissi Dance), Kanichi Hanayagi (Kabuki), Augusto Omolú (candomblé), I Made Pasek Tempo (Balinese dance) and members of the Odin Teatret (and many other guest

performers/practitioners) where the often-thrilling discoveries were forged, uncovered through an unearthing, illuminating and revelatory – through doing – being in the moment and taking risks.

Many scholars and practitioners have criticised Barba's method of analysis, pursued through these demonstrations (and more generally ISTA), and the analogy with an anatomy lesson is apposite yet problematic (corpses, dismembering, ostentatious dissection, decontextualization, re-animation etc.). An ethos of 'meeting through difference' (quo Barba at the Copenhagen ISTA in 1996) has also been criticised for reducing cultural difference and seeking 'universals of theatre'.²⁵ At the session of ISTA that I convened through the auspices of the Centre for Performance Research in Brecon, Wales, in 1992,²⁶ there was considerable hostility (from a predominately British cohort) towards what was seen as 'scientism' and 'universalism' enshrined in ISTA's methodology and purview. There was also some frustration in participants not having the opportunity to work directly with the Asian master-performers themselves. ISTA has, throughout its forty years, shifted from being purely demonstrative to participatory and a mix of the two; in the former, the main vehicle is the lecture demonstration, the live exposition and witnessed interrogation; in the latter, practical workshops and opportunities to undergo (albeit superficial) training in a variety of forms leads to an embodied understanding of conventions and techniques. In Londrina, Brazil, the ISTA session combined both modes and this was immensely satisfying and edifying. Learning to see and watching the 'master at work' struggling to reveal remains, however, for me, the quintessential aspect of this utopian 'school'.

Finally, my fifth general observation is with regard to the accomplishment and audacity of the performances that were devised to conclude a session of ISTA, known as *Theatrum Mundi*. These were usually one-off, site-located events, open to the public, involving all the guest artists together with the Odin Teatret performers (actors and musicians) who were participating in the specific ISTA, and quite often special guests enrolled from the locality. They were cel-

25 See Maria Shevtsova (2002) for her analysis and critique of ISTA.

26 The Centre for Performance Research organized and hosted in Wales (UK) the 7th session of ISTA, 4–11 April 1992. The closed workshops sessions were held in Brecon and themed: *Working on performance East and West/ Subscore*. The open public symposium was held in Cardiff themed: *Fictive Bodies, Dilated Minds, Hidden Dances*.

eboratory and exuberant, directed by Barba through a process of montage and juxtaposition, some fragments of which might have been discovered through improvisation in the previous days and weeks of closed sessions. The occasions for experiencing collaborative intercultural theatre work are rare. Some luminaries of contemporary Western theatre have had the vision and fortitude to realise specific intercultural productions (Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine, Julie Taymor for example), but only the Singaporean Ong Keng Sen has sustained an intra- and inter-cultural programme of radical productions and collaborations through TheatreWorks and the Flying Circus project (from his early *King Lear* (1997), intertwining several different forms of Asian theatres, to *The Trojan Women* (2018), adapting Korean Pansori Opera) and unsettling the Western dominance of intercultural transaction. ISTA's *Theatrum Mundi* were always intercultural through a European optic (even in Brazil), but for me, the accomplished and uncompromising performances of the Asian performance fragments and improvisation, woven into the fabric of the production, transcended any dominance and resisted appropriation. The *Theatrum Mundi*, as a culminating event, returned all theoretical speculation and elaborate conjecture back to the performers; the actors, dancers and musicians mischievously outperformed scrutiny and analysis, retained their secrets and shone with magical evanescence.²⁷

Ric Knowles has succinctly pointed out that theatre has a long history of intercultural dialogue, but he warns that the ambition of much work emanating in the late twentieth century 'raises issues about cultural imperialism, appropriation, and colonialism, even as it offers the utopian promise of a world where race and cultural difference do not matter' (Knowles 2010, 1–2). ISTA's *Theatrum Mundi* could never avoid those political and cultural issues, but they did project a palpable sense of all the performers engaging fully in the collaboration and being creatively challenged, by both the demand and the opportunity, to dance/perform betwixt and between their traditions.

27 The *Theatrum Mundi* began to have a life of their own, separate from a session of ISTA, becoming almost an ISTA ensemble with a sequence of short-run performances. This started with *The Island of Labyrinths* at the Copenhagen ISTA and led to *Ur Hamlet* (in Helsingør, Denmark in 2006 and Wrocław, Poland in 2009), independent of an ISTA and yet involving almost fifty performers from the ISTA associated artists.

A Quadrille

Whereas Craig gives shape to most of his ideas on theatre (acting, design, harmony and totality of form) in a single text, *On the Art of the Theatre* (his first major book, published in 1911), and then expands and expounds these ideas through *The Mask* (1908–1923) and *Towards A New Theatre* (1913), Barba has sustained a process of reflection and reconsideration (of both practice and theory) through his writing across sixty years. Barba has written twenty-two books (many in both Italian and English, some translated into eleven languages) and many articles; this formidable output of scholarship and analysis indicates a restless need to review and reformulate thinking about theatre. For both Craig and Barba, the written texts, and the actual art object of the books, are important vehicles through which a dynamic relation between practice and theory is forged. For Craig, his concepts for stage design and a radical transformation of scenography for a ‘New Theatre’ are captured in the exquisitely produced books *Hamlet* and *A Production*.²⁸ For Barba, his understanding and insight with regard to the performer’s techniques (knowledge and way of being) pervade all his writing, whether about dramaturgy, directing, the Odin Teatret, ‘third theatre’, or theatre anthropology. Other than the aspirational, indicative and promotional texts written about his visions for theatre ‘schools’ (mentioned above), Craig did not write a reflection on them or analyse their achievements. Barba wrote *La Canoa di carta* in 1993, published in English in 1995 (*The Paper Canoe*) carrying the subtitle *A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*, which aimed to distil and record all the research of ISTA – as discovered in the first thirteen years of emanation.

With regard to the output and written theoretical reflection of ISTA, *The Paper Canoe* was preceded by *Anatomia del teatro*, a collaboration between Nicola Savarese and Barba. *Anatomia del teatro* recorded the key concepts of ISTA in a dictionary format with highly visual content that was not only illustrative but more profoundly evocative; this interweaving of text and visual content

²⁸ Craig’s vision for what can be created for the stage of the page are epitomised in *The Cranach Press Hamlet* (printed in 1929 and limited to 250 copies) and in the Oxford University Press *A Production* (printed in 1930, large folio, containing 32 plates). The British Library describes *The Cranach Press Hamlet* thus: ‘illustrated by Edward Gordon Craig, is often regarded as the most bold and ambitious example of 20th-century book art. Elegantly put together, with obsessive attention to detail, it uses hand-made paper and decorated binding, fine images and beautiful typefaces to enhance the dramatic effect of Shakespeare’s play.’

created a 'performance' for the page that paralleled the revelatory endeavours of the utopian school – ISTA. Here the page as stage functions like a medieval or renaissance illuminated manuscript, intended for educational and liturgical use. *Anatomia del teatro* was published as an expanded and updated English-language edition in 1991, formally as *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*²⁹, although the subtitle *The Secret Art of the Performer* appears larger on the cover and the book was always referred to as such by the authors and editor. *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* was insisted upon by the publisher, Routledge, who were concerned that 'secrets' might not appeal to librarians, whereas 'dictionaries' assured sales. I am familiar with, and implicated in, this detail because I edited the English-language edition and had been committed to publishing an English version since I was given a copy of *Anatomia del teatro* in 1984 and had been enthralled by the visual content and the dramaturgy of the page.³⁰ *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* has subsequently appeared in eleven languages and been revised through various editions over the last thirty years. Reflecting on its composition, Nicola Savarese makes this observation: "Clearly its simple format with text and illustrations having equal importance, each referencing the other, had proven effective. The illustrations played the role of protagonists in a new field of study, theatre anthropology, which Eugenio had invented." (Savarese 2019: 6)

This appears in the introduction to *The Five Continents of Theatre: Facts and Legends about the Material Culture of the Actor* (2019), and this relatively new book functions thirty years later as the companion to *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*: first the dictionary, now the compendium, which is almost encyclopaedic in its engagement with the 'material culture of the actor'.

29 The book was published by Routledge (London and New York) for the Centre for Performance Research (CPR), then based in Cardiff. The CPR determined to publish the book itself after many years of seeking collaboration with a UK publisher. In the final stages of production, a fruitful co-production was established with Routledge, that effectively saw the book 'packaged' by CPR – it was edited, designed and manufactured entirely in Wales – and 'distributed' by Routledge. See note 30.

30 In 1984 I was given a copy of *Anatomia del teatro* by Roberto Bacci (Director of Centro per la Sperimentazione e la Ricerca Teatrale, Pontedera, Italy) and was inspired by how his centre had collaborated with the Florence-based publisher La Casa Usher to realise such an ambitious publication. For four years I sought a similar collaboration within the UK but for no avail, until in 1989 Helena Reckitt, temporarily managing the theatre/performance list at Routledge, encouraged the prospect. A co-production was taken forward by Talia Rodgers (Publisher at Routledge 1990- 2016) and thus the English language version (and subsequent editions) was realised.

There is, however, another book I should like to add to complete this quartet and to enable a quadrille to commence. This is Savarese's *Eurasian Theatre: Drama and Performance Between East and West from Classical Antiquity to the Present*, first published in an English-language edition in 2010 by Icarus³¹ but actually first appearing almost twenty years earlier in Italian as *Teatro e spettacolo fra Oriente e Occidente* (Laterza, 1992). This magnificent work of scholarship embodies a way of seeing informed and guided by ISTA; it is theatre history enriched by theatre anthropology and a way of comprehending the transactions between theatres East and West (past and present) as energetic and effectual exchange. Several close collaborators of Barba and active long-term members of the 'Scientific Committee of ISTA' have written on specific aspects of theatre or theatre history aligned to their previously established expertise but then re-visioned through an ISTA perspective (for example, Ferdinando Taviani on *Commedia dell'arte*). These diverse books give testament to the veracity of the 'school' as a training ground of perception and scholarship.

But it is Savarese's masterwork that functions as a cornerstone to an ISTA-optic insight on world theatre. *Eurasian Theatre* is a massive text of 640 pages and contains not a single image; likewise, Barba's *The Paper Canoe* (192 pages) is devoid of any illustration. The two books – *The Secret Art of the Performer* and *The Five Continents of Theatre* – are replete with images, super-saturated and overflowing. These four books can be seen as oscillating in a square dance, coupling and decoupling, circling and throwing light and casting spells on each other (evocation of magic is never far away). The books dance and geometrically form a super-ellipse, a four-armed star, along which one can slide on the inward concave curves or diametrically traverse; ISTA remains the centre point, the anchor but also the origin.

ISTA began in an age before the internet when chances to see what dances from Bali or Orrisa (India) looked like, or to comprehend different styles of Kabuki, was difficult, unless one had the opportunity to travel. And even then, cross- or trans-cultural comparison of world theatre forms would have been difficult. With the emergence of abundant digital resources and the opportunity to surf and travel the globe and dive deep into the grain and substance of

31 Icarus Publishing Enterprise was initially a collaboration between Odin Teatret (Denmark), the Grotowski Institute (Poland) and Theatre Arts Researching the Foundations (Malta), that became adopted by Routledge, Taylor & Francis in 2012. Ten titles have been published.

every theatre form, the world has changed, and 'changed utterly'. The books of ISTA (as of every 'school') now have to function differently, or rather can be used differently by readers able to access the evidence and reassess the findings. The latest addition to the quartet, *The Five Continents of Theatre*, is in many ways borne of an internet age and is a curated compendium of material selected through an ISTA-optic; it is garnered from diverse recesses of the world wide web, framed and contextualised and commented upon precisely and insightfully. Curation, as the etymology of the word insists, is an act of care; in *The Five Continents of Theatre*, Barba and Savarese have selected carefully and lovingly, revealing a passion for their subject and a deep understanding of it.

Curiously, in 2010 Savarese wondered whether his work *Teatro e spettacolo fra Oriente e Occidente* (Theatre and Performance between East and West) was worth rendering into an English language edition given the almost twenty-year gap since its original research and publication and the spectacular reach of the internet: "I wondered whether now that the twentieth century is over, and internet has now come into existence, it was still worth publishing. At the end of a virtual journey into sites and publications concerning the theatres of the East and the West I concluded that in spite of its age, this volume relates stories of theatre and life that are still little known. I felt that these stories deserve to continue to be told because they trace the ways Eurasian theatre moved across time, as well as across physical and cultural borders, left trails that can still be picked up today." (Savarese 2010, 12)

This reflection emphasises once again that it is the 'way of seeing' that ISTA has nurtured that is its abiding and transcending legacy. To have access to abundant (digital) resources is not enough; it is how those resources are curated (selected with care) that is paramount. It is also about how the trained eye can see beyond the historical facts, details and detritus and can pick up on the 'trails' and the 'traces' that cut across time, performers and cultures, and can, through seeing, illuminate structures and 'secrets' (embodied knowledge).

Whether a dictionary or a ledger of secrets, from the years I spent working on the expanded English language edition of *Anatomia del teatro*, there remain two pages of the book, comprising two images, that I am especially pleased we selected. (I present them here.) The first is the title page, the opening image to the book taken from the culminating *Theatrum Mundi* of the Bologna session of ISTA in 1990 that depicts the Balinese Topeng dancer I Made Tempo

and Odin Teatret actor Roberta Carrieri. It seems to me to capture the essence of ISTA in performance and actual transcultural form. The other is the final image in the book: an historical image (a mosaic) of Salome from the baptistry of St Marks Basilica in Venice and on the facing page the books final text: "There exists a secret art of the performer. There exist recurring principles which determine the life of actors and dancers in various cultures and epochs. These are not recipes, but points of departure, which make it possible for an individual's qualities to become scenic presence and to be manifest as personalised and efficient expression in the context of the individual's own history.

If we were to propose one single image to sum up all the recurring principles which are the basis of the actors and dancer's pre-expressivity, it would be this Salome, a Eurasian figure, between Orient and Occident, in St. Mark's Basilica in Venice.

And somewhere between the persona and the dancer's 'I', the cruelty, which Artaud called 'rigour, perseverance, and decision' seems to lurk." (Barba and Savarese 1991, 268)

Secrets and Continents

When I hawked *Anatomia del teatro* around publishers and literary agents in London throughout 1989, hoping to secure a publishing contract for an expanded English edition of Barba and Savarese's work, in response to the unanimous rejection and the publishers' horror of such a highly illustrated manuscript, I would often (mis)quote Lewis Carroll and somewhat churlishly remark 'what's the point of a book without pictures?' The full musing of Alice that opens *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is: 'And what is the use of a book [thought Alice] without pictures or conversations.' I was delighted to see, on receipt of *The Five Continents of Theatre*, that this project did not only develop the synergy and dynamic between text and images (containing ten-fold the number of pictures of 'The Dictionary') but it also included conversations. Barba and Savarese adopt the pseudonyms of Bouvard and Pécuchet, and through an act of mischievous ventriloquism begin each of the five main chapters with a conversation that playfully grounds the heights of encyclopaedic ambition that the ensuing entries are about to ascend. These entries are replete with pictures, and as Jessica Lim, in an essay on the relation between text and illustration in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, has written, Alice's

musings “suggests that a book is most complete and engaging when it combines different forms of communication in concert and in counterpoint with each other.” (Lim 2016, 386)

Lim explores the ‘synergistic operation of text and image as a mode of engaging the novel’s dual readership’. The Five Continents of Theatre performs this ‘synergistic operation of text and image’ through counterpoint and juxtaposition – one might almost say through ‘coherent incoherence’ and ‘en pointe’ – in the mode of ISTA’s extra-daily ‘luxury balance’.³²

Bouvard et Pécuchet is the unfinished satirical novel of Gustave Flaubert, published one year after his death in 1880. Bouvard and Pécuchet are two Parisian copy-clerks who meet by chance and embark on an adventure in search of knowledge. Aided by a fortune bequeathed to Bouvard, they purchase an estate in Normandy and their quest takes them stumbling through all branches of the sciences and arts. It is courageous of Barba and Savarese to assume the roles of these feckless seekers and typically self-effacing of them as they wish to destabilise and deconstruct the very authority of their authorial command; literary analysis of Bouvard et Pécuchet often remarks on the protagonists’ inability to distinguish reality from signs and symbols. Towards the end of the book Bouvard and Pécuchet construct a two-seated desk from which they can write in symbiosis, but eventually, with all paths of knowledge well-trodden and exhausted, they return ‘to copying as before’. It seems that Flaubert had intended to construct a *sottisier* (a dictionary of jokes and stupid comments) of Bouvard’s and Pécuchet’s copying industry. A Dictionary of Received Ideas was eventually compiled in 1913, itself the result of Flaubert’s relentless gathering of notes and background research, lampooning the aspiration of the French enlightenment’s quest for knowledge. Thankfully the ludicrous aspiration of Flaubert’s Bouvard and Pécuchet is not paralleled in the impossible necessity for Barba and Savarese to gather all evidence of tacit knowledge regarding performance and the performers know-how.

The conversations between Bouvard and Pécuchet in The Five Continents of Theatre are also reminiscent of the ‘Dialogues’ elaborated by Craig in On the

32 ‘Balance’ formed a major section in A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology and the early ISTA observations surrounding ‘extra-daily’ balance as a technique common to most world theatre/dance traditions (extreme ‘off balance’ feet positions and movement) led to notions of ‘luxury balance’ – ‘extra effort which dilates the body’s tension in such a way that the performer seems to be alive even before he begins to express’ (Barba and Savarese 1991, 34).

Art of Theatre, where ‘an expert and a playgoer are conversing’ through two substantial ‘Dialogues’. In ‘The Art of the Theatre: The First Dialogue’ (which actually first appeared as a separate booklet in 1905), the ‘Playgoer’ initially comments to the ‘Stage-Director’: ‘To me it seems that Acting is the Art of the Theatre’, to which Craig (the Stage-Director) sharply retorts: ‘Is a part then equal to the whole?’ The Playgoer is the foil to the all-knowing and far-superior Stage Director, asking the innocent questions and allowing Craig to hold forth and profess. It would be through these dialogues that Craig would advance many of his visionary and controversial ideas for a New Theatre, including: “I believe in the time when we shall be able to create works of art in the Theatre without the use of the written play, without the use of actors.”

While Craig’s dialogues are Socratic and earnest, Barba’s and Savarese’s (Bouvard and Pécuchet) conversations are semantic and playful.

Many years ago, I was fortunate to be bequeathed a full set of the *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo* (the *Encyclopaedia of Performing Arts*) edited by Silvio D’Amico. Sadly, due to my poor language skills, I have not been able to read a single entry (and the work has never been translated from the original Italian), but I have often enjoyed leafing through the profusion of illustrations and colour plates. This massive eleven-volume work,³³ which comprises 18,000 pages and several thousand illustrations (including 320 full colour plates) is probably the most comprehensive print encyclopaedia on theatre ever produced, albeit with a predominately European focus. There is something about the ambition, scope and scale of *The Five Continents of Theatre* that reminds me of the *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, and the encyclopaedia also took an ethnographic approach to its subject (fairly innovative for its time – 1940–50s). The *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo* was also similarly curated by a ‘family’ committed to the realisation of a colossal work of scholarship. Whereas for Barba and Savarese the ‘family’ is mainly the ISTA/Odin family, for Silvio D’Amico it was his actual family, with his father attending to the theatre and drama sections, his brother editing music entries and his brother-in-law, a lawyer, raising funds. From this inner core of editors, the team spanned out to include other Italian professors and specialists in specific theatre fields. The *Enciclopedia dello*

33 To the nine-volume set published by Casa Editrice Le Maschere, Rome, an additional *Aggiornamento* volume (a supplementary update 1955 to 1965) was added in 1966 and then in 1968 an *Indice-repertorio* (an Index-Directory) formed an eleventh, 1,000-page volume.

spettacolo, like *The Five Continents of Theatre*, also developed and was gestated over a long-time span. Beginning in 1945, its original four-volume form was deemed incomplete and unpublishable, and therefore for a further twelve years D'Amico led an ever-expanding team of contributors and editors. The first volumes were published in 1954 and by 1962 the original nine-volume set was complete (one volume per year). As I could only appreciate the visual content of the *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo*, I was curious about how such a vast range of material had been amassed. On enquiring some years ago, colleagues in Italy told me that D'Amico had a network of amateur collectors and enthusiasts who avidly collected material relating to their specialism or hobby from markets, antique shops and antiquarian bookshops (this well before eBay or any internet searching).

The image of a network of amateur hobbyists gathering images from the detritus of flea markets has remained with me, and through *The Five Continents of Theatre* becomes recast and repurposed; now I see Nicola Savarese at home in Carpignano Salentino surfing the internet and over months and years creating a vast storehouse of images: paintings, etchings and photographs. As with Jorge Luis Borges' cartographers creating a map almost as large as the country they chart,³⁴ Savarese acquisitively and assiduously constructs his grand repository, archives and indexes his discovery of exquisite gems and unusual finds. On the title page of the book, under a painting of Quint Buchholz (of a man climbing out of a book on step ladders and peering into the distance), the authors place this statement: 'This book is a tree which has grown out of tombs and from the Internet.' They acknowledge the material is all out there on the world wide web, but it needs a curator's eye driven by a specific and informed curiosity to make the selection, construct the montage and generate the dramaturgy. The thousands of images that cascade throughout *The Five Continents of Theatre* are probably only a small selection of what Savarese and Barba have amassed in the previous thirty years. But it is a wonderful, audacious and illuminating selection. Sadly, D'Amico's *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo* lived a relatively short life (in terms of active use as reference material) – only two decades because by the 1970s it was regarded as too partial, too Eurocentric and lacking any depth in non-Western dance/theatre forms. Its

³⁴ See Jorge Luis Borges' fabulous short story about cartographers and the relationship between maps and territory: *The Accuracy of Science* (1946).

editorial vision, formed before World War II and only slightly updated in the 1950s, remained locked in its twelve-volume form, weighing almost forty kilos and occupying almost a metre length of shelf; it was soon subject to 'review', removed to stocks, and then, since the flourishing of the internet, jettisoned by many of the new breed of librarians who no longer value books.

The *Five Continents of Theatre* is encyclopaedic in ambition and a monumental achievement, focusing ISTA's gaze and perspicacity on the 'facts and legends about the material culture of the actor', the tools of the trade, professional 'know-how' and 'knack', and the inner workings of the theatre machine. In a material culture mode, I recall growing up in 1960s Britain and an era of tinned salmon with the irritating promotional slogan: 'it's the fish that John West rejects that makes John West the best'. I often wondered about those rejected fish. The sixth 'continent' of this work offers a glimpse of the out-takes and 'excluded'. It also gives a sense that, for all its abundance of riches and visual excess, we are only seeing the proverbial tip of an iceberg, and, as with Antarctica, this sixth continent is vast and difficult to encompass. "The authors composed hundreds of pages about creative processes, the technical term, a historical event, or how to face lengthy gestation periods. They filled many such pages in an effort to synthesize History and individual biographies, exploring how History leaves its mark on actors' technique and on their lives. Most pages remained in their notebooks and just a few slipped out here." (Barba and Savarese 2019, 370)

But to return to the beginning, the foreword by Tatiana Chemi is titled 'The grammar of magic and science'. In it, she reframes Grotowski's assertion that theatre is a 'pragmatic science defined by "pragmatic laws"' and advances that magic too is a pragmatic science. She evokes witches and sorcerers and their 'black books' known as grimoires. Thirty years after *The Secret Art of the Performer*, secrets, spells and charms are therefore still circulating. The mythology of fables "is also a tool to organise thought: a web of interlacements allowing actors and directors to fix, capture and formulate what in their practice presents itself as transitory, impossible to shape, recognise or give name to." (Chemi 2019, 1)

The *Five Continents of Theatre* is a treasure trove of fables about the actors' material culture and, through interlacing, interweaving and imbrication, the facts and legends resonate and ricochet, often ringing with poignant clarity, occasionally obfuscated, disturbing and troubling through dissonance. At times

the book is almost unreadable, too dense, compacted, almost matted. One needs to dilute it, as with a highly distilled and potent liquor, and regard it as a reduced distillate needing time and space to expand. The strategy for 'reading' has to be by surreptitious imbibing, dipping and diving, coming up for air.

The five continents rise from the Five W's of established practice in research, journalism and investigation: Who, What, When, Where, and Why. In relation to an interrogation of theatre, the book comprises five chapters: When, Where, How, For Whom, and Why – and then the sixth chapter is the collection of aforementioned 'fallen pages'. Savarese clarifies that the previous works in relation to ISTA (as discussed above) established the body-mind techniques of the actor in relation to the spectator but that relationship was enhanced by 'auxiliary techniques of equal efficacy': "All these elements are managed through a practical knowledge stratified in time and experience, founded on techniques that facilitate the work of the actors and favour the realization of their profession. This is the material culture of the actor, organised within the double spiral of body-mind and auxiliary techniques." (Barba and Savarese 2019, 7)

The work is a product of an extraordinary collaboration, a complex editorial feat involving twenty-five contributors, many of whom have been the core 'scientific team' of ISTA and whose texts have evolved over decades. There are inevitably strange gaps, blind spots, partial and partisan accounts, and abstruse arrangements of facts and legends. But in a compendium of such superabundance, one is overwhelmed by the labour of love that has given form to it and compelled by the curiosity it regenerates.

Journals – The Mask and the Journal of Theatre Anthropology

In conclusion I should like to reflect on the recently launched Journal of Theatre Anthropology (JTA) – the first issue, titled *The Origins*, was published on 10 March 2021. It is planned to be an annual publication and available in digital format as open access and therefore all content can be downloaded (see links below).³⁵ I encourage readers of *Performance Research* to visit JTA and

³⁵ JTA is published in digital format as open access under a Creative Commons Attribution. It will also exist as a print journal, printed by Mimesis Edizioni of Milan-Udine, Italy.

acquaint themselves with the material; I will not offer a detailed description here and I am more interested in examining the relationship of a journal to a 'school' and, as indicated in the preamble, in how a journal leads to a school, and how a school leads to a journal.

The relationship between journals and theatres is complex, turbulent and generative. Through the Russian journal *Mir iskusstva* (World of Art), Sergei Diaghilev not only established an art movement but also paved the way to form the Russian Ballet. *Mir Iskusstva* was launched in 1898 and was active for six years. One hundred years later the Belgian artist, Jan Fabre, enfant terrible of the European performance scene in the 1990s, having established his theatre company Troubleyn/Jan Fabre and garnered notoriety, launched a journal: *Janus*. This journal allowed Fabre to extend the scope of his performance work, help promote a distinctive Belgium/Flanders performance-art aesthetic that was gaining traction in the 1990s and create a vehicle for Fabre's own artwork, designs and musings. Edward Gordon Craig thus returns to the stage of this article. Olga Taxidou turns the spotlight on Craig's performance through the pages of *The Mask*, appositely subtitled her book *A Periodical Performance by Edward Gordon Craig*. Theatre journals are haunted by actors and directors who emerge from the 'Hell' beneath the stage (the 'under-stage') to tread the boards as ghostly apparition. On Craig, Taxidou proposes that *The Mask* was Craig's permanent performance (his many textual appearances authored through pseudonyms functioned as actors within it) and writes: "The very physicality and concreteness of a periodical provided him with a permanency that a theatrical performance – as it turned out – could not. His attempt to formulate his theory of 'a new theatre', 'the theatre of the future', is not only expressed in the contents of *The Mask* but also enacted through its overall visual effect." (Taxidou 1998, 22)

Craig sustained his performance of *The Mask* for twenty-one years and it preserves, like a moth in amber, the intrepid yet inexecutable vision for a new theatre and an audacious new school. As recorded above, *JTA* is not the first of Barba's journal's; *TTT* was, almost sixty years earlier. And whereas *TTT* was on a mission to inform, nurture and empower Scandinavian theatre practitioners with a fervour and passion (and a deep sense of lineage and tradition), *JTA* appears to be far more contemplative, reflexive and mellow. Barba begins by asking: "Am I too old to found a journal of theatre anthropology? I'm 84, 22 books and hundreds of articles behind me. Do I still have something to say?"

Don't I risk repeating what my experience has made me put on paper so many times in so many different ways?"

The self-doubt appears to herald diffidence and a less assertive, strident tone, and reflection through the wisdom of age and experience. With a school realised, theories established, and practices now well adopted, there remains, however, curiosity and restlessness: "Yet some questions keep dancing in my head. They are the same ones I asked myself when I embarked on my theatre journey in the early 60s of the last century. Their simplicity fed my insecurity: what is the essence of theatre? Why do I want to do theatre? How can I appropriate theatrical knowledge? They prodded me to look for people who could help me unravel these questions thanks to their familiarity with the history of the profession or their technical knowledge." (Barba 2019, 9)

The journal (at least in this first issue) enshrines gratitude and a deep respect for the many scholars, practitioners and producers that enabled ISTA to flourish and resonate through physical form throughout the last forty years. No more the exhausting sessions³⁶ or editions of the 'school', a journal, it would appear, is now the vehicle through which the project will evolve – and with a quality of stillness and contemplation: "It is understandable that today I resume one of these questions that my daimon keeps whispering in my mind: what does the tacit knowledge, the technique, the incorporated know-how of the actor consist of? And that I face this question together with a group of people who are willing to climb this crystal mountain with me. Thus, JTA was born, a Journal of Theatre Anthropology." (Barba 2019, 9)

Barba emphasises the collaborative spirit of the enterprise and places great value on team research, the co-production of ISTA and what was achieved through collective endeavour. The contents of the first issue of JTA embody this perspective: many texts from the foundational team of scholars that followed ISTA throughout its journey (and who functioned as both 'Scientific Committee' and 'Village Elders') are included (Ferdinando Taviani, Franco Ruffini, Nicola Savarese, Patrice Pavis, Jean Marie Pradier, Clive Barker and Janne Risum). The editorial team consists of two long-standing members of Odin Teatret, Julia Varley and Rina Skeel, who are joined by two relatively younger scholars, Leonardo

³⁶ As this issue went to print Odin Teatret announced that there will be another session of ISTA themed 'The Actor's Presence and the Spectator's Perception' to be held on the island of Favignana (Italy), 12–22 October 2021.

Mancini (University of Verona) and Simone Dragone (University of Genoa). As was the case with Craig (his journal, publishing house and 'school'), Italy is the spiritual home of JTA, as it was for ISTA (four of the sessions took place in Italy with perhaps the most significant, and formative, edition held in Volterra). The team of advisors and academics that embraced the initiative and supported Barba throughout were predominately Italian. As Dorothy Neville Lees mused in *A Living Theatre* (and Craig endorsed in the guise of John Balance): "The Mask could not have existed... out of Italy. For Italy is the storehouse of these things [referring to the history and regard for theatre] and it is the Italians who write about them with most enthusiasm." (Lees 1913, 17)

Perhaps the Italian sensibility for being collegial, congenial and cordial was always the natural home for ISTA, as it was for Craig. England (Craig declines Britain or the UK), could have never nurtured or given a home to Craig's vision for theatre (as it still couldn't for Peter Brook sixty years later). ISTA's influence within the UK was limited compared to the rest of Europe or the Americas, and even in Wales its methods and findings were challenged, although a profound experience was shared and taken forward through praxis in unforeseen ways. In his old age, Barba dances and becomes more playful: "It is this tradition of shared experience that *Journal of Theatre Anthropology* wants to extend to the field of reflection and studies. A publication that collects facts, technical experiences, historical reflections and above all questions. Whatever the rhythm – tango, rock'n'roll, legong, waltz, mai, can-can, rumba, cha-cha-cha – dancing questions are welcome." (Barba 2019, 13)

But as in all his theatre productions, a transformation is in process and a figure of death casts a sombre shadow; there is also a darker rhythm playing in the background and it comes from the gaps and spaces of those no longer present and no longer companions on the journey. Key collaborators of ISTA/Barba have died in the past few decades: Fabrizio Cruciani (radical theatre historian, guide and mentor to Barba), Sanjukta Panigrahi (world-renowned Odissi dancer, muse and soul of ISTA), Torgeir Wethal (one of the original Norwegian founding members of *Odin Teatret*), and in recent months Ferdinando Taviani (world expert on *Commedia dell'arte*, counsellor and much-cherished friend of Barba). But there is nothing morose or moribund in this venture (JTA), more an acceptance of time passing and a reflection on what else could have (and still could be) discovered.

What might have been and what has been
 Point to one end, which is always present.
 Footfalls echo in the memory
 Down the passage which we did not take
 Towards the door we never opened.

These lines from T. S. Eliot's *Burnt Norton* (the first poem of *Four Quartets*) perhaps aptly capture reflection on both the elasticity and fixity of time, evoking a still point where the restless transformations turn to contemplation and sagacity:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
 Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
 But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
 Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
 Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
 There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

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