

Conatus - Journal of Philosophy

Vol 8, No 1 (2023)

Conatus - Journal of Philosophy



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doi: [10.12681/cjp.32387](https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.32387)

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To cite this article:

Kavouras, P. (2023). Between and Betwixt the Other Theatre and the Theatre of the Other:: Performativity as (Re)presenting, Show and Self-Awareness in the Myth of Barba. *Conatus - Journal of Philosophy*, 8(1), 201–232. <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.32387>

Between and Betwixt the Other Theatre and the Theatre of the Other: Performativity as (Re) presenting, Show and Self- Awareness in the Myth of Barba*

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Abstract

This article deals with the legendary figure of Eugenio Barba as a paradigmatic case to demonstrate the difference between the other theatre and the theatre of the other. Its main objective is to discuss the juxtaposition of performativity as (re)presenting, showing, and self-awareness by narrating the myth of Barba. The argument is presented through six interconnected caveats: the legend and its myth; The Moon rises from the Ganges: the story inside the myth; the critique of western civilization: an insider's story of self-reflexivity; the other theatre is not the theatre of the other; the life-world of the myth of Barba; and finally, performing otherness, othering performance. The article is addressed mainly but not exclusively to readers with a background in cultural anthropology, performance studies, theater studies, hermeneutics, phenomenology, history of civilization, literary theory, colonialism, and representation of the other.

Keywords: *performance; performativity; self-awareness; otherness; othering; consciousness; theatre; reflexivity; critical anthropology; colonialism; representation*

I. The legend and its myth

Eugenio Barba is a living legend for contemporary world theatre. A legend that emerged and was established in the second half of the twentieth century, he still fascinates its global audience. A legend inextricably linked to a peculiar ‘myth,’ in the ancient Greek

*Throughout this paper I use the prefix ‘re-’ to indicate repetition as well as withdrawal. The prefix re- in parenthesis, with or without a hyphen, signifies reflexivity and the possibility of awareness as a result of (reflexive) repetition or withdrawal.

meaning of the term, a 'shared discourse of truth.' Like almost all ancient myths, the myth of Barba contains a 'sacred,' that is a 'realistic,' narrative. This is the narrative of performing arts, and theatre and dance in particular. Thus, the peculiarity of this myth owes its symbolic uniqueness to its form and content, to its narrativity. The legend tells of Barba wandering in the ceremonial and cultural traditions of the unknown world 'out there,' away from his birthplace and his familiar culture. The wanderings lead to 'mythical,' i.e., archetypal, encounters of the western with the non-western component, initially with 'Asian' and later, with 'Brazilian' and 'African' traditional artistic formations. Despite the heterogeneity of these encounters, the narrative movement of the myth, as a discourse of truth, revolves steadily around a key thematic axis. It is the axis of self-knowledge. The reflexive principle of the ancient Greek aphorism 'know thyself' constantly inspires and strengthens the soul of the mythical hero. As another explorer of the postmodern age, he travels to the unknown to 'discover' the 'true' in life and art in his own life and in the lives of others, in his own art and in the art of others. And it is from this constant reflection that the central idea of the myth derives: the search for a new theatre, for a theatre focusing on the Other.

In the myth of Barba, the central hero co-stars with an equally basic character: his significant Other. The Other of Barba is not fixed but emerges each time with a different face, name, or form, as a real, symbolic or imaginary (re)presentation of the strange, of the unknown. Iconoclastic and at the same time creative, the mythical discourse features the idea of re-considering the 'familiar' from a different, i.e., non-familiar, point of view, which can play an important role in establishing an alternative approach to life and art as well as to contemporary theatre and dance. Closely connected with the myth is the diverse troupe of characters that frame it. The ardent supporters and dedicated collaborators of Barba, with the close social relationships they have developed among themselves, form an extremely tied and stable community to which the global dynamics of the myth is much indebted, in particular the setting up and wider dissemination of its discourse of truth. The community of performers-collaborators, with its exemplary behaviour and pioneering work, has made a decisive contribution to the establishment of Barba in the consciousness of its members and the broader audience of contemporary theatre as a legendary revolutionary who was both an innovative researcher and a distinguished reformer mainly of the stage component of the theatrical Being and becoming.

The mythopoetics of Barba's legend is based on a blending of heterogeneous cultural, artistic, and ideological elements. His myth is the myth of a modern superhero of the arts achieving a feat. He brings to life something great, something exceptional, which goes beyond the scale of human ordinariness. In search of the unknown Other, he transverses various arts and cultures, and in this endeavour, he encounters heterogeneous historical perceptions and social practices that enrich his reality and broaden his imagination. Thus, he ends up bringing together, by his own will and logic, numerous persons and elements from diverse traditions. The legend of Barba was systematically made by himself and his collaborators in the context of a contemporary theatrical mythology which is dominated by the idea of 'pre-expressive' training of theatre and dance performers in order for actors and dancers to discover and develop their innate physical and mental potential. The principle of 'pre-expressivity'¹ became an archetypal feature of the myth, as it was associated with the ability of performers to transform with the help of their heightened physical and mental state of being through acting the perception of everyday life. Thus, with their thorough performative training, they created a non-ordinary or unusual – existing in its own right – and, eventually, unique, stage reality. Barba's pre-expressive methodology for his own Other Theatre was decisively influenced by ideas and practices of foreign student-performers he encountered as he wandered in the exotic 'East' by his very first contact with the Indian dance-theatre.

The methodology of 'pre-expressivity' draws ideas and practices from traditional artistic formations but does not depend on them, as it aims to transcend the habitual perceptions and institutionalized practices of any establishment. Barba contends that the repetitive methodology of pre-expressivity emerges as a ritualistic mythical modality that actively contributes to the performance of the extraordinary, as an aesthetic achievement. With the strict, constant and uninterrupted repetition of certain physical and mental movements, a common, actually experienced and at the same time collective, practical philosophy of an expressive method is attained. In this context, the subject (the performer) is initiated into the idea and performance of 'Being,' learning to contrast and consciously juxtapose it with the corresponding ideas and performances of 'Having.' Using pre-expressivity as a symbolic vehicle, Barba illuminates the minds of

¹ Eugenio Barba, *The Moon Rises from the Ganges: My Journey through Asian Acting Techniques* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Lluís Masgrau, "Introduction: Eugenio Barba and Traditional Asian Theatres," in Eugenio Barba, *The Moon Rises from the Ganges: My Journey through Asian Acting Techniques*, ed. Lluís Masgrau, 7-36 (New York: Routledge, 2015).

his performers-students and other collaborators by introducing them into the idea of ‘surrendering’ prior to the performing show of ‘delivering’ a play as an act of (re)presenting on stage. The archetype of pre-expressivity is a sacred symbol – a means of expression and at the same time a state of consciousness – for the mythical hero and his community. The specialized usage of this symbol on stage enables performers to activate through their own intensified mental and physical mobility the co-movement or emotion of the audience: that is, to create a unique (outside the usual and everyday reality) stage performative identification, which may lead the audience of (re)presentational performance to ecstasy. Concerning the conception and realization of this plan, Barba directs and interprets, on and off stage, explores and discusses, alone and in collaboration with others, the field of new theatricality as a living, energy-centred condition of being-in-the-world, a condition of self-realization. He recognizes his totemic ancestors in great figures of contemporary western theatre such as E. G. Craig, A. Tairov, V. Meyerhold, J. Copeau, Ch. Dullin, A. Artaud, B. Brecht, and J. Grotowski.² However, Barba differentiates himself from all these reformers in terms of practice and ideology through the constitution of an alternative genealogical myth for the Other Theatre, which is his own version of new theatricality. In the myth of Barba, great personalities, and prestigious institutes of traditional Asian performing arts, mainly theatre and dance, co-star with him, as the main narrative characters.

The myth of Barba belongs to a special category of cultural myths that narrate the feats of the central hero against the established order of things. Barba vigorously fights the theatrical foundation of his time, its self-referentiality and ethnocentrism. At the same time, he proposes a new conception and practice of contemporary theatre, which does not have a western national character but a global and cross-national one. To this end, he uses a complex methodology based on systematic exploration and combinatorial teaching, interdisciplinary research, and intercultural collaboration with other performers, and, eventually, on the actual co-production of plays with other, considered as ‘equal’ to Western theatre, high-art or not, yet renowned ‘non-Western’ dance-theatre traditions, initially Asian and later Brazilian and African.

II. The Moon Rises from the Ganges: The story inside the myth

The book *The Moon Rises from the Ganges: My Journey into Asian Techniques* is a selection of texts written by Barba from various periods, in which he presents his relationship with traditional Asian theatre,

² Masgrau, 11.

mediated through his trips to India, a country he travelled. Some of these texts were published as independent papers and are republished with a new logic in the book next to new texts. Old and new texts together constitute a narrative that unfolds like the personal journey of the author to the eternal unknown Other. In *The Moon Rises from the Ganges*, the Other emerges from this journey as a unique consciousness of both life and art: a journey-symbol through which the new theoretical ideas and practices of the traveller are crystallized in a self-narrative about himself jointly with his co-travellers, his significant 'Others.' An imaginary journey, like the journeys of great discoveries, it is full of contradictions and utopian conceptions, impasses and promising moments that are noted *a posteriori* as ultimate transcendences of Being and Having. Beyond anything else, this particular narrative-journey plays up Barba's insatiable desire to encounter and utilize the unknown Other: what he understands as the truly 'real' Other, beyond the habitual conventions and bargaining or self-serving impasses of the established, 'familiar' Other. The 'journey' (re)presents the social and psychological urge that prompts the central hero of the narrative to seek, locate and analyse other people's traditions, always reflecting on his own world's familiar conceptualizations. This attitude often results in an instrumental relationship with the emergent Other: a relationship that is based on the aesthetic utilization of the non-familiar Other in the perspective of the post-modern familiar. This instrumental utilization of the Other leads the narrator to selective appropriations, often in an arbitrary way, of fragments that are constitutive parts of historical entities and cultural wholes of great non-western traditions. These traditional fragments are appropriated and reformulated with Barba's own hybrid recipe into new diversified formations of knowledge and combinatorial synergies. *The Moon Rises from the Ganges* is a timeless journey into Barba's idiosyncratic and iconoclastic fiction, an actually lived journey into the Other of the East that records the archetypal encounter of alternative western theatre – the Other theatre – with Asian traditional dance-theatre.

The myth of Barba is a complex hybrid created by long and steady incubation through a cross-breeding of a multi-collection of varieties; in this formation the role played by the various individual hybrids that emerged from time to time from the central hero's personal encounters with the diverse cultural and artistic formations of the significant Others was decisive. The common thread that narratively and interpretively connects the components of these transitory mixtures and final compositions is the idea of pre-expressivity, the methodology for the

new stage performativity. This element serves as a non-negotiable milestone for the myth around which and for which the multi-collection narrative unfolds. This component archetypically refers to the personal experience of the hero regarding the Kathakali dance-theatre tradition in the state of Kerala, in Southwest India. And this is how Barba's eclecticism and poetic license help to shape the mythopoetics of the narrative. The river Ganges, sacred to Hindus (from where the 'moon' of his book incidentally rises) is in northern India and not in southern India, where the state of Kerala administratively belongs. The two vast geographical regions of India, North and South, are divided into distinct cultural sectors by a historical differentiation of the Indian continent in terms of philosophy and language and, among other criteria, letters, and the arts. The artistic tradition of the North is known as *Hindustani* while the Southern is known as *Karnatak* (e.g., Indian music is generally distinguished into *Hindustani* and *Karnatak* music). The double reduction by means of synecdoche from Kerala to India and from India to Ganges is not a naive superficial connection but signifies a deeper reality: the connection of art with the sacred and of the poetics of art with the poetics of the sacred. In using this hybrid synecdoche, Barba follows perhaps unconsciously a reflexive tradition of European civilization that flourished mainly with Romanticism: Orientalism. Orientalism, as Edward Said pointed out in his book of the same name, constitutes to this day – for the western world and all those who were influenced by this ideological matrix of mysticism – an imaginary political framework that defines a western type (re)presentation of the non-western Other.³ Reflexive Orientalism, imbued with the exotic for the West 'East,' permeates from end to end the whole myth of Barba. The rebel hero is opposed to names and forms, to established traditions of art and culture of his own world, without, however, fundamentally contesting the very mechanism of ideological conceptualization and legitimization of the power of (re)presentation.⁴ Barba did not content himself with a hybrid blending of a multi-collection of varieties, i.e., a synthesis of diverse formations from non-Western (Asian) traditions of dance and theatre. He also proceeded with a non-ethnocentric initiative on the exotic sacred Other, developing a long and sincere relationship of

³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

⁴ Pavlos Kavouras, "Folklore and Tradition. Perspectives and Transformations of a Modernist Ideological Formation," in *Folklore and Tradition: Issues of Re-Presenting and Performance in Music and Dance*, ed. Pavlos Kavouras, 9-25 (Athens: Nissos, 2010); Pavlos Kavouras, "Ritual Act and Dramaturgy. The Idea of Folklore in the Age of Ethnic," in *Folklore and Tradition: Issues of Re-Presenting and Performance in Music and Dance*, ed. Pavlos Kavouras, 227-250 (Athens: Nissos, 2010).

co-existence and active cooperation with renowned institutions and performers from these traditions.

III. The critique of Western civilization: An insiders' story of self-reflexivity

In conceptualizing the Other or the 'different' in relation to the Same, Barba does not move away from the deep structures of Western civilization he inherited from the familiar environment of his own cultural habitus.⁵ The ideological reaction to the familiar, even the questioning against the subliminal realizations of the sacredness of the familiar does not automatically imply an awareness of the embodied alterity of the Other, that is the view of any imagined Other's own perspective of him/herself. The question remains open. Who observes and who composes? Who knows and who manages the knowledge of the Other? Who creates new structures and practices with hybrid content and format? For whom and why? What does 'alterity' serve in such a perspective of self-rearrangement of reality for the hero of the myth of the dispute of the establishment? Where are they, the 'Others,' the collaborators of the hero in the discourse of truth in which he himself is the main protagonist? Do these Others have an independent voice, or are they *de facto* bound to bearing voices mediated by the perception of the hero-narrator? And if so, are they constantly forced to negotiate the boundaries and margins of the expressivity of their voices, their own spontaneous reactions and reflections stemming from the awareness of their life-worlds, with those of the western collaborating Other? Despite his democratic aspirations, this Western Other continues to be the undisputed leader and manager, the *primus ante pares* among his Others. This motley subject with his hetero-referential ego-consciousness emerges as a legend that achieves the feat of transcending the western deep structures regarding otherness with the help of an imaginary catalyst: the 'equal' non-western Other.

This discussion is not new. One can look for its foundations in many thinkers and cultural traditions of the western world. Apart from Edward Said (1935-2003), whose *Orientalism* has already been mentioned, there are two older writers and thinkers of Modernity, the pioneer Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), whose political philosophy influenced the progress of the Enlightenment throughout Europe. These two seminal thinkers

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

signify the existence of a great (as a numerical size and theoretical magnitude) genealogy of distinguished people of reflexivity and artistry. They systematically criticized European civilization as an imperialistic formation based on the production and reproduction of knowledge with reference to the non-Western Other, by analysing in detail the ideological (re)presentation of the Other as an imaginary object of the western subject. As Said demonstrated in his study on Orientalism, the West systematically constructed its 'eastern' Other through its own symbolic and imaginary representations of the East out-there: the societies of and the people living in Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East. But like any systematic knowledge about the 'Other,' Orientalism had diverse political connotations with which it served the hegemonic power of the Western imperialists and colonialists in many ways. The critical narrative about Orientalism is not limited to the political poetics and responsibilities of the West, both its rulers and the common people. It expands and includes the role of local rulers, courtiers, and the bourgeoisie of the eastern world itself, who introduced the spirit of Western Orientalism into the culture of their wider society. Any critical approach to Orientalism as a total phenomenon potentially carries a marginal awareness of the relationship between politics and culture, actually lived experience and (re)presentation, the Self and the Other. This awareness has as a direct consequence the decolonization of the thought and action of the embodied Others – of the specific Others who were subject to the real, i.e. economic, political, and military power of Western colonialism and dependent objects of the symbolic (re)presentations of the western imaginary. It is 'marginal,' because it is radical and at the same time enlightening. A reflexive as well as political rebellion, it reliably and clearly documents the hegemonic conception of Western culture regarding the ideological manipulation of the relationship between knowledge and power. It foreshadows a prospective of liberation from the established habitus of such a subservient and at the same time subliminal constitution of the Eastern Self as a Western Other.

Said's orientalist view was largely incorporated by post-colonial cultural anthropology in its attempt to foreground the social and cultural formations of different peoples with their own historical and actually lived experiences and not through the (re)presentational ideas and practices of western modernity and post-modern globalizing colonialism. Social and cultural anthropology was established as a discipline in the field of the humanities and social sciences in the second half of the 19th century; therefore, it cannot be considered historically and ideologically a

discipline that is unaffected by colonialism and the principles of Western Orientalism.⁶ However, the critical view of Western culture through in-depth references to Western colonialism and ‘objective’ (re)presentations of the non-Western Other had already begun to appear in the European literature and the arts since the 16th century by bold thinkers such as Montaigne and Shakespeare; it reached the full form of an open critique of the social and cultural establishment of the ‘developed’ Western world with Rousseau’s socialist ideology.

These critical views provided a fertile historical and literary ground for a radical exploration through science and art of the non-Western Other as an autonomous Other, and not exclusively as the ideological construct of a Western (re)presentational logic. One of the last humanists of the Renaissance, Montaigne distinguished himself in letters as a sceptic, whose critical discourse creatively intertwined the ‘Same’ with the ‘Other.’ Through his *Essays* – a pioneering publication for literature of his time – he established critical reflexivity as a peculiar and radical discourse of truth.⁷ In the essay *On Cannibals*, he uses subtle irony to criticize the ethnocentric stereotypes and hypocrisy of European civilization by reflecting on a ‘ceremonial’ (for the French) meeting of the exotic ‘cannibals’ (for the French) Tupinambá from the New World (Brazil) with the young French king and his courtiers in Rouen. It is worth noting that the impact of the essay was such that it even touched William Shakespeare who incorporated Montaigne’s idea of the ‘Cannibal Other’ as Caliban (an anagram for Cannibal) in his play *The Tempest*.⁸ The literary idea of the ‘noble savage,’ which was later wrongly attributed to Rousseau, i.e. the man who has not been alienated by the European civilization, inspired many thinkers who strongly criticized the Western hegemonic establishment. Anthropological reviewers were important exponents of this movement, among many others; their empirical ethnographic works underscored the cultural diversity of ‘primitive’ peoples encountered and recorded by Western colonialism as well as beyond the colonial matrix.

A philosopher, writer, composer and music theorist, Rousseau was a pioneer of socialist theory and an important forerunner of the

⁶ See, James Clifford, and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography: A School of American Research Advanced Seminar* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986); George E. Marcus, and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

⁷ Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958).

⁸ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. David Lindley (Cambridge, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

European Enlightenment. In his essay *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (1750),⁹ he criticized vehemently the countervailing relationship between the morality of citizens and the development of letters and the arts, systematically reprimanding the established morals – the dominant structures of expression and living practices of his day. His revisionary critique of the progress and superiority of Western hegemonic civilization was transformed into a programmatic discourse on social change: a ‘pedagogical’ project guided by the joyful becoming of modern man into a virtuous and fulfilled individual.

Rousseau’s theoretical contribution to the field of established music science was equally significant. With his *Dictionary of Music* (1767),¹⁰ he broadened considerably the field of comparative musicology by making reference to other musical traditions, in addition to ‘high or art’ (classical) European music, which until then monopolized the interest of musicologists. Rousseau distinguished western art music from all ‘other’ musics by proposing a taxonomic typology of the latter based on three categories of music as follows: a) ‘high-art’ or ‘art’ music from the great Eastern civilizations; b) ‘folk’ music of the peoples of Europe; and c) ‘primitive’ music, in which he lumped together all other forms of musical expression of humanity, regardless of style, geographical origin and time period. Rousseau’s *Dictionary* undoubtedly marks a unique initiative of its time, an iconoclastic innovation. The broadened perspective of the musical Other, featuring the dimension of (musical) alterity definitely challenges and undermines the conservative view of the universality of the value of classical European music and European civilization for humanity. However, this innovative *Dictionary* did not cease to be an endogenously self-referential and, eventually, a Euro-centric creation, because it was written on the basis of a multi-collection logic of classification (hence bearing a self-referential mechanism of recognition and identification) of the ‘unknown’ musical Other with reference to the western Self. The taxonomic logic of alterity in the *Dictionary* is exhausted in an accumulation of information without critical remarks about the actually lived and historical-cultural specificity of the various, global and diachronic, musical formations that constitute the expanded subject matter of the new, according to Rousseau, comparative musicology.

⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts and Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, trans. Ian Johnston (Arlington, VA: Richer Resources Publications, 2014).

¹⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Dictionary of Music*, trans. William Waring (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale ECCO, 2010).

IV. The Other Theatre is not the Theatre of the Other

Montaigne, Rousseau and Said launched at different times their criticisms of European civilization as self-reflexive views of their life worlds. But how are these rebellious thinkers of the West connected to Barba? In his foreword to *The Moon Rises from the Ganges*, Barba refers to the theatrical sun of the great reform of European theatre from the early twentieth century as the sun that always rose from the West, namely from the *Moskva* River. And he argues that this sun of change illuminated the two moons, each signalling in a different way his own (Barba's) re-vision of western theatre. The first was *Commedia dell' arte*, the popular Italian improvisational comedy that had been popular in Europe since the sixteenth century; it was mainly based on the personal technique and stage means of actors, rather than the playwright and the director of the play. The second moon illuminated by the reform sun from the Moskva was, as Barba notes, 'exotic and distant': the traditional Asian theatres. In other words, he had two sources of inspiration for his critical reflection on life and art: the moon of the *Commedia dell' arte* and the moon of traditional Asian theatres. In the first case, the moon refers practically and symbolically through *Commedia* to the pre-classical European folk theatre in its entirety. In the second, the moon marks a peculiar transcendence, as the traditional Asian dance-theatre stands next to the established western theatre as a homologous art form, as both are 'high art' traditions; yet it is still an 'exotic,' foreign and unknown artistic creation – a fundamental Other – as it comes from a completely different cultural environment to that of Western civilization.

Barba's thought converges in many respects with that of Montaigne, Rousseau, and Said. Convergence is mainly due to the common critical view of Western civilization. On the one hand, there is a discussion on the theatrical, musical, or cultural establishment, and on the other hand, on the ideological expansion of the current hegemonic map of European domination attempting to include the 'unknown' or 'exotic' Other. The identification and remedy of the problem point at foregrounding the idea of the 'different' in relation to the familiar western, which is articulated together with a radical questioning of the structures and practices of the ruling class, as well as with a new ethical orientation governed by at least a theoretical respect for any form of unexplored (for the western familiar) alterity. Barba anoints as significant partners in his myth of new theatricality, *Commedia dell' arte* and the traditional Asian dance-theatres. This choice foregrounds

de facto the symbolic significance of alterity in the Other Theatre's rebellious move: firstly, it is based on a non-'high-art' European Other as 'popular and improvisational' (through reference to Commedia), and secondly on a 'high-art' non-European (Asian) Other.¹¹ Barba's radical innovation lies in the fact that both references to 'different' theatre are treated as equals with the dominant western, 'high' or 'art' theatrical Being and as a source of inspiration for a new theatrical prospective.

One might ask, in analogy with Montaigne and Rousseau, how does Barba treat the 'primitive' or 'primordial' components of actually lived humanity in relation to the cultural and political hegemonic establishment of his own world? This issue does not leave him indifferent. However, he does not deal systematically with this dimension of alterity as he has neither the time nor the educational constitution to study it thoroughly. It is widely known, mainly from numerous studies of cultural anthropologists from the early twentieth century,¹² how ritual acts and myths are for 'primitive' societies a symbolic field of expression and re-negotiation of everyday life, of initiation into and sacred interaction with the extra-ordinary, non-everyday Other where performativity can be either a show-centred reality or not.¹³ Ritual acts as show – or non-show – centred instances of performativity are not unknown in modern western theatre, as for example in Grotowski's *Poor Theatre* (1968).¹⁴ The component of primitive or primordial innocence in contradistinction to the alienation of European civilization – the

¹¹ Although Kathakali is a highly structured and performatively quite demanding artistic genre, should not actually be classified as a high-art form in analogy to the classical western forms of dance and theatre as this distinction between 'high' and 'low' does not really apply to any of the great popular traditions of performing arts in India.

¹² There is an extensive ethnographic literature on primitive rituals, their symbolism and social usage dating back mainly but not exclusively to the time of the American school of Franz Boas, the British school of Bronislaw Malinowski and the French school of Marcel Mauss until today, including post-World War II critical reflections of Western civilization through the looking glass of primitive cultures and their ritual performances. See, for instance, Georges Balandier, *Political Anthropology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972); Diamond Stanley, *In Search for the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1974); Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982).

¹³ Paul Radin, Karl Kerényi, and C. G. Jung, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (New York: Bell Publishing, 1956); Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969); Clifford, and Marcus, *Writing Culture*; Steven M. Friedson, *Dancing Prophets: Musical Experience in Tumbuka Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London, and New York: Routledge, 2006); Michael Rudolph, *Ritual Performances as Authenticating Practices: Cultural Representations of Taiwan's Aborigines in Times of Political Change* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2008). See also, Pavlos Kavouras, "An Allegorical Anthropology of Trickster, Cain, and Music," *Mediterranean and European Linguistic Anthropology* 3, no. 2 (2021): 60-101.

¹⁴ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968).

‘primitive’ Other of Montaigne, Shakespeare, and Rousseau – was the catalyst for Grotowski; it functioned as a ritualistic path to self-realization, due to his own long and dedicated commitment to Indian esoteric philosophy. On the contrary, for Barba, an instrumental management of the foreign, different to the dominant western, ‘ritualistic’ self-discipline of the student-performers was enough. Yet this management was completely dissociated from the esoteric aspect of the reflexive exercise, which had as its purpose the control of mind-movement through the methodology of Yoga. Barba’s attitude towards the theatrical and dance traditions of India, with which he came in contact on his first voyages, was also based on the reduction of the spiritual whole to the aesthetic part, especially the kinaesthetic aspect of it. In 1963, following ‘unconsciously,’ as he says, the light of the Ganges moon, when he visited India for the second time, he knew nothing about Indian theatre and dance. His stay in Kerala for three consecutive weeks allowed him to observe closely and sufficiently learn the exercise system of the students of the famous school of dance-drama tradition of Kathakali, Kerala Kalamantalam.¹⁵ During his contact with Kathakali in Kerala, Barba, after admiring the dedication and discipline of the local students, dissociated the external aspect of training from its inner component, discarding the reflexive part of the learning system of the specific school. He discerned, specifically, the significance of the subconscious constitution of a physical and mental self-knowledge on the part of the performers in serving as a pre-expressive basis for the joint development of a new dance-theatrical technique of great expectations regarding stage performing.

Barba’s synthetic ingenuity and rebellious nature enabled him to formulate successfully a number of hybrid proposals aimed at introducing a new perception and management of theatrical art. Living and creating for personal and historical reasons in such an anti-hegemonic environment, Barba gradually developed, with enviable consistency, a peculiar form of eclecticism regarding contemporary theatre, having as his main project-making partner in this endeavour the ‘great,’ that is ‘high-art,’ Asian traditions of dance and theatre. By isolating the techniques of kinaesthetic discipline and repetitive subliminal training from the broader social and cultural reality of the students, as well as from the special requirements of the foreign traditional performing arts schools, Barba permanently detached the actually experienced daily discipline of the students from the

¹⁵ Kathakali is one of the most famous forms of physical theatre that tells stories using dance as its main vehicle of expression.

historically grounded reflexivity of a transcendental prospective of training. He balanced skilfully this arbitrary artistic reduction with the development of a collective instrument of cooperation with highly acclaimed in their own societies exponents of the eastern traditions of dance and theatre. This instrument functioned as a peculiar social, artistic, and cultural framework of constant reference to the new theatricality: a world of experts coming from both traditions (western and eastern), with a great ‘high art’ experience in life and creativity founded on a peculiar variation of a familiar reality. This collective instrument was set up on a purely Western basis. Created by Barba himself, both the *Odin Teatret* (founded in 1964) and the *International School of Theatre Anthropology* (ISTA, founded in 1979), despite their ‘openness’ to other structures and collaborating agencies, were created from the beginning and functioned steadily in accordance with the perceptions and practices of Western civilization.¹⁶ This is because in itself the alternative orientation of the theatrical approach proposed by Barba remained, in its deepest structure and fundamental logic, a Western construct. Barba changed the theatrical signifiers by proposing a new hybrid synthesis, without, however, changing the bundles of signifieds that these signifiers conveyed on both a symbolic and imaginary level for the western audience at least. The heterogeneous dynamics of the new signifiers was performatively based on their own arbitrary, idiosyncratic hermeneutics without historical-cultural depth. Fascinated by the energy the actors and dancers emitted on stage, Barba’s hybrid semiotics derives mainly from his life experience in Kerala although he knew nothing about these traditions, techniques, stories, and the religious content of the plays. He transformed this exotic for Western theatre, reconstituted due to its otherness, ‘vitality’ of the Asian Others, whom he adored, into a pivotal methodology and practice that became a symbol of the new theatricality. A symbol for the Other Theatre that was perfectly compatible with the main features of the *Commedia dell’arte* – emphasis on improvisation, professional physical technique, as well as media and stage interventions by the performers themselves. Choices and reforms essentially targeted the artistic and social establishment, expressed by the logocentric theatre of literary scripts and rulers-directors.

Barba’s relations of friendship with several of the Asian dance and theatre teachers as well as with other collaborators (of different nationalities), contributed significantly to the formation of a close

¹⁶ Ian Watson, *Towards a Third Theatre: Eugenio Barba and the Odin Teatret* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

social network that had all the attributes of a utopian transnational community. This community, living and creating far from the western theatrical establishment, played a key role in supporting, maintaining, and enhancing the popularity of the Barba legend. *Odin Teatret* and especially the establishment and functioning of the *International School of Theatre Anthropology* (ISTA) mark a decisive turn in the life of the legendary hero. The ‘moon of the Ganges’ ceases to inspire with its magical attraction the nomadic heart of the wandering traveller, who no longer seeks the truth and meaning of life in his mental and tangible journeys from the West to the East and vice versa. He is now a sedentary traveller instituting a new ‘unknown country’ guided by a supra-western (in the rhetorical sense of transcendence) sun. This is the sun of ecumenical togetherness. The prefix ‘supra-’ has a double meaning usually signifying transcendence and excess. In this context, ‘supra-western’ means primarily an ecumenical logic transcending all kinds of western nationalism and ethnocentrism. It also means an extremely western, deeply westernized, and westernizing conceptualization of the ecumenical. And of course, the two meanings define as a postmodern hybrid of interpretation the multifaceted notion of ‘globalization,’ the various connotations of which ideologically and practically underscore the appropriation of the ecumenical as an actually lived component, its objectification and finally its manipulation as an independent commodity.

V. The life-world of the myth of Barba

Barba set up a complete life-world – a ‘country’ or ‘homeland,’ as he calls it – grounding it on a common modality of living and acting and endowing it with a shared symbolic language. This language refers to a set of principles, rules and practices whose embodied exponents – the performers, who literally and metaphorically live in this country – repeat intentionally and fervently until they acquire a subconscious pre-expressive skill. This is the initiation rite and symbolic mark of belonging in Barba’s life-world. The social organization and cultural functioning of the community are tailored after the individualistic structures and agencies of archetypal utopian collectivities. The new theatre was first established as the *Eurasian Theatre* and later as the *Theatrum Mundi* (*Theatre of the World*). This is a development that goes even further away from the actually lived connection of theatre and the performing arts with their embodied social and subliminal cultural contexts. The emphasis on an individualistic technique as a common collective methodology of the new performativity

is not essentially a new invention but a multifaceted ‘bricolage’¹⁷ of movements and training practices combining creative ‘appearing’ with combinatorial ‘Being.’ This is a postmodern hermeneutical usage of the modernist notion of the ‘establishment.’¹⁸

When there is a structural division of labour between the artists who perform the work on stage and the audience that watches it in an orderly, socially acceptable way, silently and without interrupting the performative realization, (re)presenting is a kind of monologue.¹⁹ The institutionalization of (re)presenting as a monological (one voice, one logic) modality of expression and communication was the prelude to the objectification of the performing arts and their ensuing commodification.²⁰ In monological (re)presenting the sensorial and symbolic domains of a stage performance – the sound and visual components of the show on stage – are mainly set up and managed by the performers. Monological performance is a historical development of dialogical performance, the modality of which is central in ritual acts, whereby performers and the public realize and formulate together the production of the performative event. Monological (re)presenting through its centralized and centralizing hegemonic orientation is intertwined with the economic power and the political ideology of the social establishment of humanity across time and culture.

The monological authority of (re)presenting provoked a multitude of ideological and artistic reactions, which had as a common appeal

¹⁷ The French word ‘bricolage’ refers to the idea of creating something from diverse things that happen to be available and, by extension, the idea of constructing a reality using mixed methodologies.

¹⁸ For a reflexive discussion on the relationship between the historical condition of Western modernity and the option of interpreting reality through either a modernist or postmodern hermeneutics, see Pavlos Kavouras, “The Past of the Present: From the Ethnography and the Performance of Music to the Performance of Musical Ethnography,” in *The Present of the Past: History, Folklore, Social Anthropology*, 307-359 (Athens: Society for the Study of Modern Greek Culture and General Education, 2003); Pavlos Kavouras, “Allegories of Nostalgia: Music, Tradition and Modernity in the Mediterranean Region,” in *Boundaries, Peripheries, Diasporas*, ed. Gr. Paschalidis, El. Hodolidou, and Iph. Vamvakidou, 263-288 (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2011).

¹⁹ *Monologue* (from Greek *monos* ‘alone’ and *legein* ‘to speak’) and its derivatives are used here metaphorically, extending its literal meaning as ‘speech monopolizing conversation’ to refer to a historical condition of social reality whereby a particular hegemonic modality determines the shaping and management of discourses about experience, expression and communication. See Pavlos Kavouras, “Ethnographies of Dialogical Singing, Dialogical Ethnography,” *Music and Anthropology* 10 (2006): 1-41; Pavlos Kavouras, “Voices, Meanings and Identities: Cultural Reflexivity in the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the XXVIII Olympiad in Athens,” in *Making Music, Making Meaning*, 375-394 (International Association for the Study of Popular Music, 2006).

²⁰ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

the liberation of artistic creativity from the economic and political establishment. Grotowski's conscious return to the dialogical modality of the ritual act in European theatre may be considered as one such great reaction to the monological condition of staging as (re)presenting. Similarly, with his *Theatrum Mundi*, Barba enabled performers from different cultures and artistic traditions to perform together, without relying on their particular stylistic knowledge and learned heritage, but also without denying them. The paradoxical modality of such a combinatorial option leads to (and is led by) a postmodern logic of a 'hybrid mutation of heterogeneous constituents.' This hybrid logic of composing mutation is rhetorically substantiated by the hermeneutical glorification of alterity, ideally expressed through the collective invocation 'All together, equally, everyone as he/she can and as he/she knows.' Transforming the invocation into a bonding preamble for his performers and collaborators, mainly regarding their technical constitution and stage discipline, Barba has founded his Other or New theatre on the solid ground of a shared, improvisational and experimental 'professionalism,' outside the star system and the hegemonic establishment of conventional art culture.

The long-term collaboration of the actors that follow *Theatre Anthropology*, the *Eurasian Theatre* and lastly, the *Theatrum Mundi* is based on a rebellious and idiosyncratic conception of art as a life-world. This conception is closely linked to the creation and consolidation of a self-referential collectivity that functions socially and artistically as a utopian community. The performers-members of the community express with their embodied and symbolic Being a specific iconoclastic idea about a radical (re)definition of the conservative principles of life and the ensuing habitual attitudes towards theatrical art. To this end, all members of the community are actively engaged to setting up and using a unified symbolic language connected to physicality and stage presence. They cultivate a common philosophy for the theatrical technique, of a new, revolutionary, as they believe, physicality, which bases its stage-centred peculiarity on the semiotic domination of the signifier over the signified: to the free, in fact liberated, signifier, which derives no meaning or interpretation, no signifying context, from the historical, social, artistic or cultural signifieds of other signifiers from the countries and places of origin of the performers, bearing diverse embodied experiences and critical reflexivities. This is actually the rebellious qua anarchist spirit informing Barba's community of performers; an iconoclastic ethos which challenges the status quo of life and art at all levels of its inception: sensorial, symbolic and imaginary.

But why is the collectivity of the rebellious performers of Barba's life-world conservative? The 'Performers' Village,' as Barba himself

calls the community of his collaborators, is the title of the fourth and final part of the book *The Moon Rises from the Ganges*. The title bears special symbolic significance for the myth of Barba. With it is announced not only the writing completion of the book, but also the completion of the wandering journey of the legendary traveller. The incessant nomadic movement of the hero is terminated as a result of his sedentary option to stay permanently in Denmark and institute his own stable hearth of social and artistic cohabitation with the initiated faithful Other: his co-travelling village performers.

Describing the 'Performers' Village,' after a long and systematic ethnographic field-research, the Danish social anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup maintains that this 'village' is not a 'global' one. She describes it as an islet of culture that has no globalizing but transcultural orientation. The Performers' Village is an autonomous entity with a special topography, social organization and cultural ontology – an islet that cultivates the idea of 'tradition of traditions,' a truly transcultural reality. In her *Introduction* to the book on the Performers' Village, Hastrup highlights the life and work of the 'villagers' by connecting them directly with the *International School of Theatre Anthropology*.²¹ But perhaps Hastrup's most astonishing contribution toward a deeper understanding of Barba's myth is her perceptive description of the Performers' Village with the help of a metaphor that connects it directly to an archetypal European model of a medieval chivalric community. According to this view, the Performers' Village has a hierarchical power structure, in which the Leader excels over all, followed by the Elders, then come the Nobles and finally the Jesters. As Hastrup maintains, the Leader and the Elders form an inner conclave that diligently guards the 'secret of art,' which is the hidden core of the symbolic constitution of the community. The conclave convenes regularly to articulate and assess the emerging signs of the manifestation of the secret of art and discuss the prospective of a wider dissemination of the principles and aesthetic values of Barba's *Theatre Anthropology*. The third hierarchical group – the Nobles – is in charge of the action, that is, the practical implementation of the interior perceptions of the Village. However, it is the fourth group – the Jesters – which spreads, as Hastrup holds, the 'sacred' message of the 'Village,' as the Other theatre, to the external world. This happens because the Jesters, by virtue of their (social) 'nature,' are constantly moving and encounter people from diverse communities and performative situations. In this last hierarchical category of the Village social organization, Hastrup includes herself as a social anthropologist.

²¹ Kirsten Hastrup, ed., *The Performers' Village* (Gråsten: Drama, 1996).

The contemporary medieval Village of Performers is a utopian formation developed around the sacred idea of the secret art of performing and completed socially and artistically, like any reticent organization, through a ritualistic action that aims to move the Others out-there-in-the-world – the uninitiated – and attract them to its Tradition. This vision has been realized in recent years by means of the initiatives of *Theatrum Mundi*. Of particular interest is the historical background of the term, as it refers semantically to a specific and timeless conceptual framework of Western literature and, more broadly, civilization. *Theatrum Mundi* is a metaphysical interpretation of and approach to the world whereby the signifier ‘world’ as a whole is not limited to its signified parts expressed by the acting subjects, i.e., the performers, and their diverse audiences. This is an ambitious yet conservative choice that implicitly orients itself toward Baroque metaphysics to reiterate a timeless view of life as ‘theatre.’ Aligned with the interpretations of humanity’s life-world as products of great high-art traditions, *Theatrum Mundi* has been associated with a variety of metaphorical references from classical Greek and Hellenistic literature, medieval Arabic and Persian literature to Western European modern dramaturgy. According to these views, the sensible world is a ‘theatre’ – a ‘theatre of shadows,’ in the sense of it being a false perception of reality, as in Plato’s myth of the cave. The experience of the world as a transient awareness in the form of ‘theatrical vanity’ is encountered in one of the maxims of pseudo-Democritus (2nd century BC): “The world is a scene, life a passage. You come, you see, you go.” An anonymous Alexandrian poet (5th century AD) offers a similar view of the world to that of pseudo-Democritus: “All life is a stage and a game.”²² For the medieval Sufi mystics, e.g. the Persian poet Omar Khayyam (11th-12th century AD), the world is like a “chess game;”²³ for the Arab-Andalusian mystical philosopher Ibn al-Arabi (12th-13th century AD), it is the “shadow of the Absolute,” an “illusion of the human imagination.”²⁴ Perhaps the most famous phrase that captures the timeless conception of the ‘world’ as a theatre of life in Western modernity is due to Shakespeare and comes from his drama *As you Like it*: “All the world’s a stage.”²⁵

²² Palladas, the Alexandrian, *The Greek Anthology and Other Ancient Greek Epigrams: A Selection in Modern Verse Translations*, ed. Peter Jay (London: Allen Lane, 1973), Book X, epigram 72.

²³ Omar Khayyâm, *The Quatrains*, trans. E.H. Whinfield (London: Trübner & Co, 1883).

²⁴ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism. A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

²⁵ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge, and New York:

Theatrum Mundi marks the institutionalization, that is, the stabilization, of the nomadic experimentation and constant wandering of Barba's performers-collaborators into a permanent hearth which gathers and codifies, together with the other sedentary realizations of the Village, the history of its development from the actually lived experiences and practices, trials and feats of the former wandering explorers of the Unknown. Such a stabilization in movement is almost always followed by a standardization of new ideas and practices. The history of the Village is a hybrid discourse of mythopoetics, as well as a systematic account of many persons and events, situations, and perspectives. It bridges in a peculiar yet dynamic and consistent way the incessant moving of the heroes of the Barba myth inside and across the pre-bourgeois European traditions of art and culture on the one hand, and on the other, the timeless high-art and other popular traditions of the performing arts of various cultures, first from Asia and later from Brazil and Africa. The selective reference to the 'familiar popular Other' (Commedia) and the 'foreign high-art popular Other' (Asian dance-theatre) first and later to the 'foreign folk or primitive Other' (Brazilian and African dance-theatre) underlines in an exemplary manner the eclectic affinity that exists between Barba and Rousseau.

I believe that cultural anthropology in general and performative anthropology²⁶ in particular can make significant contributions to the understanding of the Barba myth by calling our attention to unseen aspects of his 'Performers' Territory' as a coherent whole: the *Village*, *Odin Teatret*, the *International School of Theatre Anthropology*, the *Eurasian Theatre* and *Theatrum Mundi*. There is no doubt that Eugenio Barba is a unique personality, an embodied hero who carried out the 'feat,' in the mythical sense of the word, to connect diverse elements of art and culture into a single whole which conceptually and practically exceeds the sum of the historical signifieds culturally conveyed by its performative signifiers. Barba has repeatedly stressed that his *Theatre Anthropology* is neither a form of cultural anthropology nor anthropology of performance, and that one should seek the theoretical and methodological aspects of his term in a biological rather than a

Cambridge University Press, 2009).

²⁶ The term 'performative' indicates a performed as well as performing dynamics of anthropological inquiry. Such an epistemological performativity helps to establish a self-reflexive orientation toward the anthropological discourse as an emergent realization of its formation and presence – an anthropological critique of anthropology based on heightened awareness with respect to the juxtaposition and reshuffling of subjectivities and objectivities. See, Kavouras, "Ethnographies of Dialogical Singing;" Kavouras, "Folklore and Tradition."

historical, social and cultural basis.²⁷ Here, in my opinion, lies the secret of the ‘mystery’ – the sacred idea – of Barba’s utopian myth. This myth is built on the dissociation of physical behaviour and mental functioning from the actually experienced cultural traditions through which the moving human ‘body’ is signified by the life-world and is, in turn, signifying it, manifesting with its movement subliminal or dispositional realizations of an historically wrought expressivity. Equally fundamental to the dynamics of the functioning and perpetuation of the myth is the creation of an ideological collectivity of skilled craftsmen who possess, promote, and establish through their off-stage teaching as well as on-stage performances a philosophy of a common methodology, that of pre-expressivity. Evaluating Barba’s venture from a social and cultural anthropological point of view, the ethnographic analyst may find it weak and rather volatile, as he knows from his systematic training as an anthropologist that consciousness, whatever its form – tangible, symbolic or imaginary – does not exist outside historically specific and actually living socio-cultural conditions of reality. However, considered as a live entity – idiosyncratic, utopian, iconoclastic, or as one might call it – Barba’s enterprise is a microcosm made up of several people who are whole-heartedly dedicated to a common cause about life and art, a world that is special and quite real even to the uninitiated Others, to the wider audience of this myth. As utopian communities are a topic extensively studied in social and cultural anthropology, the anthropological methodology of performative ethnography could be particularly useful to a thorough exploration of the relations between performers and performative practices and to shedding more light on significant aspects of the Barba myth that remain unknown or obscure to this day.

Thus far Barba’s new theatre on the one hand and cultural anthropology on the other have been compatible only as discourses that present the historical and ontological uniqueness of each as the Other without raising questions about (re)presenting and authority. Such transfers of the anthropological life world to the theatrical and vice versa that safely highlight the uniqueness of each genre without touching on such sensitive issues as methodological orientations, power realities, (re)presenting imaging and transcendental consciousness are not satisfactory from a critical perspective of transmigrating between and betwixt theatre and anthropology.²⁸

²⁷ That is, strictly speaking, social or cultural anthropological.

²⁸ By transmigrating I mean being aware of moving into the Other’s territory of Being, moving from theatre into anthropology and vice versa; and also showing actively respect for the

VI. Performing otherness, othering performance

Barba's Other theatre is founded on the kinaesthetic idiom of pre-expressivity, which is the technical platform of new performativity. Performativity is a reflexive as well as practical condition of acting aiming at initiating change, referring to the awareness and potentiality of the social poetics of performed and performing deeds.²⁹ Put otherwise, performativity is a state of mind signifying the process of subject formation, which creates that which it purports to describe. Thus, performativity is a reflexive modality of social acting involving a critical perspective of trans-subjective realities. Barba's new performativity is inextricably linked to pre-expressivity that is, the philosophy of long and uninterrupted, repetitive training by the performers in order to become aware of their physical and mental capabilities and to develop them further. Focusing solely on physical and mental training with the intention to attain a non-verbal pre-stage acting consciousness is an arbitrary deed, because in this way performativity is stripped of the multiple signifieds of its symbolic and imaginary references, of its conscious and unconscious, historical and cultural contexts. The methodological reduction of traditional performativity in its diversity into the new philosophy of a performative qua kinaesthetic technique inevitably leads to a radical formalism that treats the performativity in question as a perfect (from a technical point of view) condition of preparing prior to stage acting. Barba's understanding of performativity as pre-expressivity differs greatly from the perception and usage of the same term in contemporary anthropology, in which performativity is grounded on ethnographic research based on actually lived experiences and trans-disciplinary dialogue.³⁰ Anthropological performativity is about the reflexive understanding and management of subjectivity as performance, its expression and perception, interpretation and communication, whether conscious or not. Moreover, the anthropological term 'performance' refers to an action that is carried

Other's knowledge of its life world.

²⁹ Pavlos Kavouras, "Empowering Theatre Training through Performative Awareness: The Dialogics of Reflexivity and Transcendental Consciousness," in *Challenges of the Mind: New Directions on Theatre Training*, ed. Christine Schmalor (Berlin: World Theatre Training Institute, 2020).

³⁰ Kavouras, "Empowering Theatre Training;" Kavouras, "Ethnographies of Dialogical Singing;" Kavouras, "Voices, Meanings and Identities;" Pavlos Kavouras, *Ghlendi and Xenitia. The Poetics of Exile in Rural Greece (Olymbos, Karpathos)* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1990).

out according to some commonly accepted rules informed by two distinct yet interrelated components. One component is poetical and determines the way, the process and the outcome of the realizing aspect of the action.³¹ The second dimension is rhetorical and is related to the art of ‘persuasion,’ which aims to manipulate the opinion of the audience so that it agrees with the opinion of the orator-performer. The dynamics governing the relationship between the realizing and assessing components of performance has been studied thoroughly by cultural anthropology in a multi-cultural and diachronic perspective. In contemporary anthropological theory, there has been a shift of focus from the empiricism of ‘performance’ studies to a dialogical perspective of the performative condition as a new methodological paradigm of ethnographic inquiry that transcends the study of performance itself. Thus, using performative and dialogical ethnography as an analytical tool can help us better understand Barba’s new performativity from a broader, trans-disciplinary and trans-cultural, reflexive point of view.

A performance may or may not have the constitution of a show, as the stage action of the performers in front of an audience is one of the performing conditions of (re)presenting, but not the only one. Many cases have been recorded around the world and over time where performances are not identified as shows, as they refer to inner practices of self-purification for the purpose of attaining illumination.³² In other situations as in ritual acts, one can distinguish between an initiated group of participants and an uninitiated audience, but again the performance as a whole cannot be reduced to any one of its differentiating manifestations, to any specific act of (re)presenting as witnessed by those present at the performative event. Moreover, the notion of ‘presenting’ or ‘(re)presenting’ signifies a conscious reality in which the human mind in general and the mind of the performers in particular produce and manage, by being in a state of awareness, concrete ‘images’ about the ensuing reality of the emergent performance at all levels of mentality – sensorial, symbolic and imaginary.

(Re)presenting signifies the act or practice of mental imaging of an idea or thing by someone for another.³³ Human consciousness is inextricably linked to the object and subject of knowledge, expression

³¹ In the sense of poetics i.e., the art of making or creating.

³² Illumination is the state of consciousness in which there is annihilation of Ego mentality, resulting to self-knowledge.

³³ See Th. Vostantzoglou, *Anti-lexicon of Modern Greek Language* (Athens: Domi, 1962); Kavouras, “Empowering Theatre Training.”

and communication.³⁴ It may be argued then that a performance is a particular act of presenting a ritual act or a play on theatrical stage. However, the notion of '(re)presenting,' as indicated above, also refers to the mind's inner act of imaging in its encountering with the sensorial reality, as well as the abstract contemplative functioning of consciousness.³⁵ These 'images' do not have a visual or other sensorial identification but constitute mental (re)presentations of consciousness in its manifestation as knowledge, expression and communication. Although the idea and comprehension of (re)presenting is amply signified by the phrase 'performative (re)presenting on/off stage,' I choose to use the term '(re)presenting' to refer only to the inner (mental) reality of (re)presenting and 'stage performing' or 'ritual performing' to account for performative (re)presenting in the cases of a theatrical play on stage or a rite taking place in a ceremonial space, respectively. With this distinction it is possible now to describe more precisely the dialectical relationship between the two forms of (re)presenting, the inner and the outer i.e., mental, and theatrical or ritual. Such a description is analytically significant as it endows (re)presenting reflexivity with the potential to unfold in a two-way movement from the inner to the outer and vice versa.³⁶ This way mental (re)presenting or 'imaging' may be juxtaposed to ritual, ceremonial or theatrical performing yielding a dynamic intertwining and constant trans-configuration, as in the interplay between philosophy and art.

Performativity also means the state of being performative in the double sense of being performed and performing oneself. The awareness of subjectivity as performance does not necessarily imply that its reflexive quality must be of a (re)presenting kind, either mental or theatrical, ceremonial or ritual. Stage performativity (and the same is true of 'imaging' or mental (re)presenting) depends on an intentional and self-centred action of the performer or thinker in which the action itself develops as a relation between its subject and object. In other words, performativity is connected to mental and stage (re)presenting through imaging. The performer casts images and at the same time manages a consciously fluid and often indeterminate awareness of

³⁴ See Kavouras, "Empowering Theatre Training;" Kavouras, "Folklore and Tradition;" Kavouras, "Ritual Act and Dramaturgy;" Kavouras, "Ethnographies of Dialogical Singing;" Kavouras, "Voices, Meanings and Identities."

³⁵ Kavouras, "Empowering Theatre Training."

³⁶ This distinction is important in Greek because it allows the discernment between mental imaging and artistic performing, which are traditionally rendered by the same term (*ana parastasi* or (re)presenting).

his ego-consciousness as a symbolic and imaginary feat performed autonomously, outside of himself-the-actor, in front of an audience, on stage. Performativity as self-reflexive subjectivity manifested through performative awareness may be just an act of improvising or better an emergent presence, devoid of any imaging. Such performances are the self-reflexive or 'spiritual' exercises of the mystical traditions of the various peoples of the world, which aim at taming, harnessing and eliminating the performative Ego by annihilating imaging and, eventually, (re)presenting. In this esoteric dynamic, we must seek the obsession of Barba and his collaborators to discover the 'secret of performance,' which for them is pre-expressive physical and mental consciousness, the embodied awareness of acting prior to theatrical (re)presenting.

There are two ways to transcend (re)presenting or imaging in performativity. The first is cultural and is closely related to the states of mind of the performers and their audiences, through the prevailing 'structures of sentiment,'³⁷ as well as their shared embodied habitus. Cultural transcendence is embedded in the actually lived historicity of each artistic tradition and is manifested as an inherent and subconscious knowledge. Under certain performative conditions, which are historically and culturally determined, it can lead to a rupture of habitual consciousness through Ego's surrendering engrossment in the emerging That of its (re)presenting subjectivity. The momentary rapture caused by the mutual annihilation of the rhetorical confirmation of Ego through the transitory removal of its poetical faculty of (re)presenting or othering marks the emergence of a new performativity that signifies nothing other but itself.³⁸ Although such a performative transcendence is devoid of any (re)presenting, it does not last very long. Habitual consciousness and the cultural constitution of social reality compel the reflecting Ego to re-establish itself in a new mental and performative condition of imaging and (re)presenting.

The second way is mystical and is encountered in all the esoteric doctrines of the world. The mystical way of transcending Ego relies on the deliberate cessation of the constant activity of the human mind, by means of which a complete annihilation of imaging and (re)presenting as manifestations of Ego-consciousness is attained. The mystical way of taming and harnessing Ego-performativity is not unknown to Barba. The irony is that he came to know this methodology in the exotic guise of his imaginary otherness through 'India,' on his very first trip to the East, when he encountered Kathakali dance

³⁷ Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters* (New York: Schocken, 1979).

³⁸ Longinus, and William Smith, *Dionysius Longinus: On the Sublime* (Dublin: S. Powell, 1740).

and yogic practice. The performative techniques of the local students who impressed him so much, used cultural and esoteric techniques of taming and harnessing ego-performativity. Barba was aware of the value of the spiritual methodology of Yoga, as evidenced by his multiple references to the ancient Yoga system of the Indian mystic Patanjali.³⁹ Barba's choice to adopt only the outer, preparatory components of a holistic methodology of artistic and at the same time spiritual training is clearly an individual appropriation of an actually lived and embodied otherness. This is a case of manifestation of orientalism – instrumental, to be more precise, orientalism. The instrumental usage of the transcendental methodology of Katakhalī performativity and its transformation into a technical framework of pre-expressivity are deeply reductive acts, disconnecting and discarding the cultural historical bridging of (re)presenting with performativity and the reflexive juxtaposing of Ego-imaging with the enacted potentiality of Ego-transcending. Put otherwise, it is an act of appropriation violating the actually lived and embodied unity of an otherly (Indian, Katakhalī) manifestation of otherness alongside with its othering orientations.⁴⁰ The terms 'awareness' and 'renunciation' refer to two distinct yet interconnected processes of spiritual training that lead the practitioner, through meditation, actually to experience a non-dualistic state of consciousness.⁴¹ Barba, like his mentor Grotowski, was well aware of the esoteric dynamics of Yoga. But unlike his great companion in theatre, Barba secularized and instrumentalised the spiritual methodology, as he did with the artistic and cultural traditions of the world with which he came in contact. Thus, as the horizon of training was radically changed, revealing a totally new prospective of physical training strictly for the sake of performative staging, transcendence of the (re)presenting and imaging of the moving Ego through spiritual enlightenment was lost for ever in Barba's condition of theatricality. Pre-expressivity emerged at the expense of transcendental consciousness and kinaesthetic awareness of pre-stage mobility prevailed against the self-reflexive potentiality of attaining through theatre training and theatre making the 'samadhi' state of 'undisturbed non mobility'.⁴²

³⁹ See, for instance, the entire chapter titled "Awareness and renunciation," in Barba, 2015; Patanjali, *Yoga Sutras. Kriya yoga and kaivalya yoga*, ed. S. V. Ganapati (Madras: Hindi Prachar Press, 1962).

⁴⁰ Otherness refers to the mental (and social) state of being an Other, whereas othering is the mental (and social) process of reflecting otherness and is also otherness itself. See, Kavouras, "An Allegorical Anthropology;" Kavouras, "Empowering Theatre Training;" Kavouras, "Ethnographies of Dialogical Singing;" Kavouras, "Voices, Meanings and Identities."

⁴¹ This state is called 'samadhi' or illumination in Yoga.

⁴² In a personal communication I had with Barba in September 2020, he said to me bluntly: "I do theatre, not yoga." I fully respect this view, but I still believe that the 'artistic' appropriation of a reflexive methodology that blends harmoniously the cultural historical component of an

The debate over transcending the established logic of stage performance through self-awareness finds strong foundations in the idea and practice of studios and laboratories in twentieth-century European theatre.⁴³ Theatrical labs placed special emphasis on ‘training’ as opposed to ‘performance.’ With training they emphasized the experience of life itself and not just stage reality. As such theatrical labs created the preconditions for a dynamic approach beyond (re)presenting, favouring a more aware and self-reflexive condition of theatrical being in the world. The concept of theatrical lab is closely linked to Barba’s theatre. However, the dimension of training as we have already seen does not go beyond a kinaesthetic cultivation and promotion of the individual physical element. In other words, the Ego of performance dominates the Ego of training, thus blocking the removal of its presence as such. Barba’s utilization of theatre laboratory reduces training to self (re)presenting through the self-affirmation of the stage Ego. Conversely, theatre laboratory in the hands of Grotowski and Brook elevated training to self-reflexivity and, eventually, self-annihilation.

One last remark: The iconoclastic legend of Barba shows a remarkable dedication to the arts of theatre and dance, without showing an analogous interest in literature and music. It uses oral or written speech, sounds and silences, rhythm, melody and harmony in a peculiar way that aims at utilizing the poetical and rhetorical methodology of literature and music in the stage context of a dance-theatrical performance. I believe that this choice is primarily due to Barba’s negative reaction to the hegemonic logocentrism of Western theatre, expressed through the predominance of the text or script in a stage performance and the authoritarianism of directing.⁴⁴ Barba’s attitude towards the authority of music as an autonomous art of sounds is similar to his approach to written discourse or directing habitus in theatre contexts. In Barba’s performances, music appears on stage as a spontaneous and improvisational partner, which is devoid of any cultural and reflexive connotations, as an ingenious supporter of the dance-theatrical becoming. This is because pre-expressive consciousness, which aims at perfecting physicality as

actually lived humanity with the spiritual-transcendental one, and the subsequent management of the expropriated reality in such an instrumental way so as to satisfy the interests of the appropriator reflects vividly the hegemonic relation of the Western subject to his object – the objectified Other. See, Kavouras “An Allegorical Anthropology.”

⁴³ Mirella Schino, *Alchemists of the Stage: Theatre Laboratories in Europe* (Holstelbro, Malta, and Wrocław: Icarus Publishing Enterprise, 2009).

⁴⁴ This is a view that is fully in line with the improvisational and artist-centred professionalism of the *Commedia dell’arte*.

stage self-knowledge rules out in principle any artistry connected to musical enculturation and achieved humanity. No matter how much improvisation potentially or essentially frees us from the shackles of the establishment, it cannot undo the traditional art of a historical, artistic enculturation and autonomous creative practice. A formalist reshuffle is nothing but a severe reductionism, stripping artistic formations of their traditional significations with reference to social habitus and emergent self-reflexivity. Liberation from the hegemonic establishment of any art culture cannot be accomplished solely through an anti-hegemonic aesthetic with the help of a politics of form. Such a prospective must rely on actually lived experiences of artistry along with a policy of redefining the reflexive priorities and spiritual needs of humanity. By ‘humanity’ I do not mean the ethnocentric appropriation of the concept by Western civilization. I mean, first, the political coexistence of different peoples and cultures through art, and second, the self-reflexive prospective of a constant search for the cultural and spiritual significations of Selfhood and Otherness – what it means to be ‘human.’

Sounds and silences, collective and individual songs, vocal and rhythmical effects, pre-existing tunes and melodies, sonic improvisations: they all contribute to establishing the volatile soundscape of the new stage performativity, according to the coordinating dictates of the aesthetics of physicality and pre-expressivity. In contrast to the formalistic use of music by Barba, Grotowski and Brook (the other two of the historical trio of contemporary Western theatre reformers) incorporated music as a vocal or instrumental creation, as a song, as a soundscape and silence, as rhythm, but never reduced it to a stage component devoid of its cultural, reflexive and spiritual connotations.⁴⁵ However, understanding the importance of music or sound in general as an empowering constituent of stage performing enhancing receptivity on the part of the audience, Barba created the notion of the ‘complete actor,’ i.e. the performer who narrates, converses, sings and plays music, dances and emits in every possible way a ‘mysterious energy,’ as he called it, on and off stage. This mysterious energy is, according to him, theatre itself.

Eugenio Barba: A legend, a myth, a symbolic world of agencies and structures, a space-time continuum with a peculiar multi-modality,

⁴⁵ The focus on self-reflexivity through ritual activity and the perspective of music as a concrete pathway leading the subject of music to the awakening of his or her spiritual consciousness was greatly influenced by the life and works of the esoteric philosopher G.I. Gurdjieff, whom Grotowski and Brook highly esteemed. See, for instance, Peter Brook, *Playing by Ear: Reflections on Sound and Music* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2019).

a rebellious cry against the western bourgeois and postmodern establishment in art and culture, the apotheosis of stage performativity at the expense of traditional (re)presenting, a utopian community with dedicated members who adopted the myth and worshipped its legend, contributing greatly with their life and work to creating and institutionalizing a unique landmark in the history of world theatre and the performing arts. So many lessons yet to be learned from the myth of Barba.

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