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## Disciplining the Scream

### Third theatre praxis and song-action in the work of Altamira Studio Theatre

PATRICK CAMPBELL

The term 'Third Theatre' was coined by Eugenio Barba in a brief text circulated at the International Encounter on Theatre Research, directed by Barba during BITEF/Theatre of Nations in Belgrade, 1976. Barba used the term Third Theatre to refer to a multivalent network of theatrical practitioners that emerged in Europe and Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, whose work lay on the margins of both mainstream and avant-garde theatre (Barba 1999). He suggests that, more than a movement, Third Theatre is a locus pinpointing a transnational theatrical community, 'floating islands' connected by a common professional past and culture (1999).<sup>1</sup>

Odin Teatret is perhaps the most internationally renowned and influential of all Third Theatre groups. Founded in Oslo by Eugenio Barba in 1964 as Odin Teatret, and changing its name to Odin Teatret/Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium on arrival in Denmark in 1966, the group has developed an international reputation for its particular approach to performer training, dramaturgy and participation. Over the past decade, Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium (NTL) has taken on a unique identity as an incubator for young Third Theatre artists, enabling emerging artists and groups that are closely connected to Odin Teatret's history and experience to develop their artistic autonomy through residencies, co-productions and local activities.

The members of Altamira Studio Theatre are former NTL artists in residence, and the group's Artistic Director, Pierangelo Pompa, worked for several years as Eugenio Barba's Assistant Director, gaining a deep understanding of Barba's approach to theatrical craft and the particular approach to song and vocal dramaturgy developed within the Odin. By focusing on the ways in which song-work in particular has taken on new forms in Altamira's practice, it is possible to trace a genealogical process of poetic transvaluation that elucidates the tension between deference and

difference characterizing the intergenerational transmission of craft within the Third Theatre community, revealing how a particular theatrical legacy is undergoing transformation and renewal.

#### VOICE, SONG AND DRAMATURGY IN THE WORK OF ODIN TEATRET

From the Odin's inception, vocal action was central to the group's developing praxis and was influenced by Grotowski's theatrical experimentations during the Theatre of Productions phase of his research from 1959 to 1969.<sup>2</sup> A focus on the expressive possibilities of vocal actions was also partially pragmatic; when the Odin moved from Oslo to Denmark in 1966, the group was comprised of an array of Scandinavian actors who often could not communicate directly with the local audience. Over time, the Odin retained a cosmopolitan identity, recruiting actors from across three continents; it therefore became necessary to develop an approach to voice-work that acknowledged the affect-laden, sonorous potential of the spoken and sung voice as well as the semantic logic of the word. This also corresponded to Barba's rejection of the centrality of the play text to theatrical practice, and his focus on a complex, non-linear form of dramaturgy predicated on the scenic montage of devised material.

Barba speaks of the 'orchestration of the vocal dramaturgy' of his actors, which consists of a dialectical tension between semantic and sonorous communication (Barba, 2010: 41). One level of this dramaturgical plane corresponds to the musical, rhythmic potential of vocalization in its many forms, including song. The other level corresponds to linguistic sense making; this often involves the employment on stage of several different languages and simultaneous translation during performance, due to the

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Third Theatre community, see Watson (1993, 2002) and Turner and Campbell (2019). Turner and Campbell have also generated an online platform ([www.thirdtheatrenetwork.com](http://www.thirdtheatrenetwork.com)) that foregrounds the work of contemporary Third Theatre groups from Europe and Latin America.

<sup>2</sup> Barba was Grotowski's assistant from 1962 to 1964.

polyglot nature of the Odin ensemble and their international touring schedule, which means that productions are played to spectators from a variety of different linguistic backgrounds. Barba describes the global sonorous montage of a performance (incorporating the montage of the actors' vocal dramaturgies alongside acoustic effects) as *continuous music* (43), an invisible affective current carrying the spectator through – and at times immersing her within – the sensible universe of the performance.

Since the 1990s, Odin Teatret has built upon this tradition of vocal dramaturgy by incorporating professional musicians into the cast and developing intricate choral arrangements of traditional folk and popular songs that are played live during performance and add to the complexity of Barba's continuous music. Odin stalwart Franz Winther (2000) identifies four different levels of musicality in the contemporary work of the Odin: *the music of the actor* (acoustic scores developed by the actor, reflecting the work on the resonators, voice as an extension of physical action and the sonorous potential of scenic objects); *the music of the musician* (collective compositions developed by the group's professional musicians through improvisation or the adaptation of (traditional) songs); *the music of the composer* (choral compositions written for poetic texts); and *the music of the director* (the final montage of the previous three elements alongside songs from across the world that have provided the director with a string of associations).

Barba (2010: 44) suggests that as well as being a mine of information for the spectator, music and song were important tools for the Odin actor, allowing them to sharpen what Barba calls the *organic dramaturgy*; this is the overall composition of the actor's physical and vocal actions. The level of organic dramaturgy is part of a tripartite dramaturgical model used by Barba to describe his directorial practice. The other two dramaturgical levels that are encompassed within his directorial decision-making processes are the *narrative dramaturgy*, the semantic level of the performance that allows the spectator to make sense of the scenic action, and finally the *evocative dramaturgy*, the intimate personal responses awoken in each spectator by the performance (10).

## MUSICALITY, INTERCULTURALISM AND THE GHOST OF WORLD MUSIC

Barba's focus on the musicality of the voice, his recourse to live song in performance and use of musical tropes in his theoretical musings resonate with David Roesner's discussion of musicality in relation to theatre. Roesner (2014) explores how musicality has served as a guiding trope for a number of renowned theatre practitioners as they regenerated their craft over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Roesner characterizes this turn to music as the 'musicality *dispositif*'. A *dispositif* is understood here, following Foucault, as a 'heterogeneous assemblage fusing discursive behaviour, non-discursive behaviour and manifestations of knowledge through practice' (Foucault qtd in Roesner 2014: 11).

It is precisely this fluid, non-normative notion of musicality as *dispositif*, as organizing principle, that characterizes Barba's recourse to musical terminology in his praxical lexicon. However, what is curious here about Roesner's espousal of the *dispositif* is that the notion of *power*, which is central to Foucault's original use of the concept, is frequently reduced to the interdisciplinary appropriation of musical metaphors within the field of theatre. The Foucaultian *dispositif* is linked to the broader concept of *genealogy*, which traces out historical processes of sense making, interpretation and subjugation that characterize the ways power shapes knowledge. Genealogy is thus both *genetic* (indicating reproduction and similarity) and *differential* (plotting the affirmation of a unique identity, a *will to power*, shaped by serendipity or chance). What gets lost at times in Roesner's historiographical and critical account of different appropriations of musicality by key theatre practitioners is the ways in which a Foucaultian *dispositif* can help map the broader genealogical shifts in structures of power at a social level impinging on and influencing artists' working practice, including their turn to musicality.

Genealogically, the use of song and musicality in Barba's practice with the Odin reflects the group's inception in the 1960s and a contemporaneous desire for a putative (re-) enchantment, manifest perhaps most strikingly in

the international hippie movement, with its turn to Eastern spirituality. Obviously, the 'ritual'-like vocal delivery of Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre actors was a major influence on Barba, his former assistant, but another, perhaps less likely influence is *World Music*.

World Music is, according to Bohlman, 'traditional music repackaged and marketed as popular music' (2002: xiv), reflecting both increasing recognition of cultural diversity and the homogenizing dissemination of exotica by transnational recording companies. A potential space of encounter with the cultural Other, the ubiquity and immediacy of World Music through online platforms and streaming services can also efface the ways in which Western consumption of music from across the world erases difference and reifies Orientalist framings of non-Western cultural repertoires.

The tensions underpinning the appropriation and representability of non-Western cultural repertoires in terms of World Music haunt the theatrical exploration of songs of tradition or the adoption of non-Western vocal techniques in the Odin's practice, given the continuity between the cultural material context in which the group has evolved (globalized late capitalism, with its concomitant commercialization of cultural repertoires) and the particular poetic forms that Barba and his actors have developed. There is thus a tension in the Odin's song-work between the ethical labour of embodied practice and an appropriation of non-canonical or non-Western cultural repertoires.

Writing through the prism of the Intercultural Debates of the 1990s and 2000s, Shevtsova (Qtd in Watson 2002), accuses Barba of coercively using the systemically inequitable mechanisms of intercultural transaction in his practice while erasing these inequities through recourse to universalist claims. As Shevtsova suggests:

What is of central interest here is how intercultural meetings in whatever shape or form they may take, as Third Theatre, ISTA, studio workshops, public demonstrations or productions, are presumed to facilitate the dissolution of all cultural boundaries and yet leave Barba musing on the panorama which 'when seen close up ... resembles an intricate tapestry of minute and diverse cultures'. Even so, to his way of looking, the intercultural work does not throw into relief the individual contours of these diverse

cultures.... As is usual for him, Barba dislocates them, virtually abstracts them from their territories. (120)

It could be argued that traditional songs from across the world are dislocated in the continuous music of an Odin production; in fact, it is often precisely this quality of dislocation that serves Barba's particular form of scenic montage, which is predicated on leaps of association and elisions of logic. While the array of songs harvested for a production reflects both the cosmopolitan make-up of the Odin and their privileged life as a successful touring group working across cultural boundaries and borders and engaging in constant cultural exchange and barter, this peripatetic lifestyle does not erase their cultural specificity as a Scandinavian theatre laboratory or erase the social, political, economic and cultural differences separating them from a number of the cultures (such as those of Latin America) whose repertoires group members frequently embody on stage, often through song. On a more subliminal level, this choice of musical repertoire also reflects the ubiquity of 'World Music' in contemporary Western culture and its frequent employment as an indicative signifier of exotica or quasi-ritualistic otherness.

Nevertheless, scholars and artists working on song primarily within a post-Grotowskian framework have recently countered critiques of the intercultural nature of the work of practitioners such as Barba and Grotowski by emphasizing the ethical significance of embodied craft and labour within their practices. Berkeley-Schultz and Behrens (2017) foreground the enactive, dialogical process necessary for Western artists who have not been born into a culture of singing, yet engage on a deep praxical level with songs of tradition. Speaking of work on songs of tradition within a post-Grotowskian lineage, Ben Spatz (2016) suggests that these source materials can be understood as *epistemic objects*, complex entities that transcend written scores or archival recordings and permit iterative processes of creative exploration through practice. Spatz uses the term 'song-action' to refer to the complex interplay and resonance between voice, musicality and physical action underscoring work on song in a theatre laboratory tradition. This sustained, reflective work on songs of tradition is not predicated upon the passive consumption

or superficial appropriation of commercialized sonorous alterity; it is an ethical, embodied encounter with the Other through sustained craft. Concepts such as ‘song-action’ and song as ‘epistemic object’ are useful ways of framing the work on song in Odin Teatret, Third Theatre as a broad community and in particular the praxis of our case study, Altamira Studio Theatre.

## ALTAMIRA STUDIO THEATRE – AN OVERVIEW

Italian-born director Pierangelo Pompa has a long-standing professional relationship with Odin Teatret and NTL. Pompa recalls his first encounter with Barba, which was during a public lecture that took place in Italy in 2000. Due to an administrative problem with tickets, the lecture started half an hour late. Barba drew attention to the commotion and the time lost due to disorganization. Playfully, he then asked the audience to protest by screaming, which everyone did, boisterously, before falling silent. As Pompa explains:

Eugenio then said – ‘It is not enough to scream. You must be able to discipline your scream’. It was the starting point for a lasting dialogue regarding the complex dialectic between ‘the scream’ and theatrical craft ... (Pompa 2016)

This dialectic between discipline and the scream – between the craft of theatre, sonorous expression and the affective universe of the artist – would become the bedrock for Pompa’s theatrical work, coming to fruition in the developing poetics of Altamira and the group’s exploration of theatrical musicality and song.

In 2008, Pompa founded Laboratorio Altamira in Italy and produced several performances and projects with different actors and collaborators. After Pompa had worked as Barba’s Assistant Director for a number of years, in 2014 Barba offered him the financial means to gather a group of actors in Holstebro, Denmark as a resident company with NTL. This led to the birth of Altamira Studio Theatre, a newfound group comprised of Italian and French actor-musicians based permanently in Denmark. Pompa has directed a number of performances with Altamira, including studio production *The River: Dream of a Poet* (2015), *World in a Song* (2015), *By Heart* –

*Theatre Concert for Another Time* (2016), *Boudu Goes to Denmark* (2016), the work demonstration *Style Exercise* (2016) and *Playroom* (2017). At the time of this writing, Altamira Studio Theatre is comprised of director Pierangelo Pompa, actor-composer Domenico Mannelli and actors Barbara Tholozan and Sara Moscardini.

## ARTICULATION, ASSOCIATION, MUSICALITY

For Pompa, the fundamental level of both the actor’s and the director’s craft is *articulation*. Articulation is the ability to consciously mould one action at a time, be they physical or vocal, before layering them into coherent compositional scores that can be incorporated into scenic montage. For Pompa, articulation is indelibly linked to *association*. While articulation is connected more to embodied craft, association is the imaginative inner free-play of the actor, director and spectator (Pompa 2016). It is this dance between articulation and association, between impulse-laden technical craft intertwining in scenic space with dream-like semiotic condensation and displacement, that allows for the group’s particular style of theatrical *musicality* to emerge. The actors of Altamira all play a musical instrument, several at a semi-professional level, and group member Domenico Mannelli is a professional composer. However, like Roesner’s *dispositif*, Pompa’s expanded notion of musicality is more complex than musical ability alone.

In Altamira, musicality specifically relates both to the horizontal (diachronic) and vertical (synchronic) levels of theatrical composition. In the case of the actor, this transversal musicality is the result of the development of complex sequences of scores, which articulate different units of action in space-time and are fed by the associations generated by the actor’s inner world or the narrative context of the montage. For the director, the musicality is the symphonic outcome of the montage process, the composition of different scores of actions, texts and music into a complex dramaturgical whole. Musicality, articulation and association are thus pragmatic tools that allow Pompa and the actors of Altamira to intertwine Barba’s organic and narrative



dramaturgical levels (the dynamic/semantic levels of the montage), in order to allow the evocative level, the spectator's own inner associations and kinaesthetic reactions, to emerge.

Work on song has become central to Altamira's developing professional culture and is a key aspect of both the actors' training – which draws on song-action as a structural form containing energetic, dynamic and rhythmical possibilities that can be used as a foundational aspect of embodied technique – and the group's dramaturgy. In practical terms, Pompa's apprenticeship with Barba has indelibly shaped his approach to musicality and song-action. According to Pompa:

I have always been very interested in the dramaturgical function of songs. Songs are the quintessence of musicality; the dramaturgical form of the song is directly connected to the organic dramaturgy of the actor in its extended form, which implies both body and voice. Song is a dramaturgical unit; in Altamira I build dramaturgies in symbiosis with the music. Songs are often the generative elements both for the work of the actors, my own work as director and Domenico's work as composer. (Pompa 2018)

While musicality in a broader sense, *pace* Roesner, could never be epitomized by codified song alone, in the case of Pompa's usage of the term, 'musicality' designates a much more focused praxical terrain in which body and voice are articulated together in increasing complexity and coordination. Thus, describing song-action as the 'quintessence of musicality' makes sense in relation to Pompa's working lexicon and directorial practice.

In the case of Altamira's psychophysical training, simple compositional exercises developed by the group predicated on the articulation of physical actions are later explored through improvisation in the space, and then overlaid with song or text and used in order to improvise with others. These scenic encounters train the actor's musicality and can help generate emerging scenic material that is rhythmically alive and interesting to the spectator. Altamira's focus on musicality and Pompa's interest in song naturally extend to voice work, as well. Basic training involves an exploration of the Grotowskian resonators and the vibratory

possibilities of choral song. The relationship between song, articulation and association – song-action – is emphasized at all times.

Altamira's performances are a dream-like fusion of disparate images and allegorical figures. Actors react to one another in the space following a scenic logic that is guided by affective intensity and semiotic condensation and displacement rather than linear narrative, while an overriding sense of musicality is paramount at all times. Performances tend to be either in English (a language easily understood across Scandinavia) or lack text altogether. Thus, Pompa has not adopted the complex, polyglot 'continuous music' espoused by Barba and the Odin actors. Nevertheless, song-action is a fundamental creative element for Pompa, as it fuses affect and structure, association and articulation, in a single, complex unit of musicality, whose iterative possibilities reflect the constant oneiric play of deconstruction and reconstruction that characterizes the group's performance texts.

## THE DRAMATURGICAL FUNCTION OF SONG

Taking the group's 2014 performance *The River: Dream of a Poet* as an illustration, overtly the piece was based on the life and work of Bengali poet and polymath Rabindranath Tagore. The performance was 'a stereoscopic composition of actions, sounds, words and rhythms' (Pompa 2015), featuring a continuous line of singing and live music played by the actor-musicians of Altamira. *The River* was an attempt by Pompa to transpose Tagore's mercurial poetry – which fuses biblical and Vedic motifs – into a theatrical context.

In terms of the musical composition of the piece, Pompa worked closely with Mannelli to create an organic soundscape that grew out of and fed into the emerging dramaturgy. One of the first steps in Mannelli's compositional process was to elaborate on a number of traditional songs brought to the group by Barbara Tholozan, which Pompa wanted to use as musical *leitmotifs* in the performance. Tholozan had learnt several of these songs from Thibaut Garçon, an assistant to Grotowski's former collaborator, Maud Robart.<sup>3</sup> There is an interesting tension within the musical

<sup>3</sup> Haitian-born master singer Maud Robart co-founded artistic movement and research group Saint Soleil in 1973, mining the Vodoun traditions of her native country. From 1977 to 1993, she was a key collaborator of Jerzy Grotowski's, working as an assistant on his research into Theatre of Sources, Objective Drama and Art as Vehicle.

soundscape of *The River* between traditional song and popular culture, deference and revolt. In a dream-like fashion, songs of tradition are deconstructed throughout the performance, as elements of contemporary rock music surreptitiously seep in. For example, the main *leitmotif*, 'By the Waters', is a musical setting of Psalm 137, which seems to emphasize the biblical text's Jewish roots, but it is also the source of the Rastafarian chant 'By the Rivers of Babylon', made internationally famous by disco band Boney M. While the song is sufficiently altered by Mannelli so that this popular lineage is not initially evident, there is a sly, subversive level of humour here, as the stirring chants of the empty ritual of the performance are actually covert references to 1970s pop culture.

In a further reiteration of this song, actress Mbalou Arnold (a former associate member of Altamira) translated the English lyrics of 'By the Waters' into Sousou, a language of Sierra Leone. Mannelli developed a percussive compositional variation featuring a three-part vocal harmony. Thus, a Rastafarian chant rooted in Judaism learnt by a Third Theatre actress from Maud Robert's assistant was transformed into an 'African' chant that was used as the dramaturgical foundation for a violent scene between the Poet – the protagonist of the performance – and his wraith-like maternal *anima*. This playful compositional transvaluation of traditional song emphasizes the dramaturgical role of song-action as a pertinent, slippery, shifting epistemic object, source of scenic material and inspiration within the praxis of Altamira. Song functions affectively and intertextually, tapping into key themes (biblical sources, cultural and archetypal roots) and generating the emotional 'temperature' of a scene.

Antithetically, one could also accuse the group of naïve intercultural pilfering here; songs of tradition that in Grotowski's research into Art as Vehicle were traditionally treated with deference and respect are here transposed and translated into a multitude of pseudo-multicultural guises.<sup>4</sup> One could accuse Pompa of using songs of tradition in a way akin to World Music: as affect-laden, decontextualized exotica that evoke an ersatz sense of Orientalized ritualistic intensity. What gets lost in this intercultural

analysis of the theatrical end *product*, however, is the assiduous craft and artisanal proficiency, the embodied labour underpinning the group's *processual* exploration of song-action. As epistemic objects, these songs are not fixed, reified archives; they are living performative repertoires open to active reinterpretation and renewal. Channelled through daily training and year-long rehearsal processes, they shift and morph into a number of performative guises on stage during performances.

Song has become a currency for Altamira since leaving the privileged space of a residency at NTL. Tholozan and Mannelli regularly generate income by busking on the streets of Holstebro and the group have earned a living by performing concerts for wealthy Danish patrons. The theme of busking went on to become a key dramaturgical and metaphorical dimension for the group's 2016 performance *By Heart*.

In *By Heart*, poetic texts were taken from a variety of authors. Mannelli and Tholozan played blind musicians, performing in the street while being ignored by the general public. These itinerant artists, rooted in the past, became indicative signifiers of the Third Theatre community as a whole, attempting to carve out an autonomous creative territory, singing songs of heritage that have lost their immediate cultural capital.

The continuity between poetry and song meant that song-action and the montage of text and physical action began to blur into and inform one another, contributing in an equal fashion to the musicality of the performance (Pompa, 2018). There were clear echoes here of the Odin's four levels of musicality and Barba's extended notion of vocal dramaturgy, as Mannelli explored his haunting falsetto and Tholozan growled her final texts, plumbing the guttural archetypal territory charted by the Grotowskian tradition of the resonators. However, physically, the piece was much more restrained than Odin Teatret's performances, and more akin to a heightened realism. The performance is as much a concert as a theatre performance, which emphasizes the increasing importance of song-action to the group's practice. More recently, the group has begun to perform *By Heart* as an intimate concert in people's homes. Thus, in order to survive

<sup>4</sup> The use of Songs of Tradition in the current work of the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards has shifted somewhat, and while work on songs of tradition remains paramount, predicated on virtuoso levels of rigour, discipline and craft, from 2007 to 2015 the work of the Open Program, led by Mario Biagini, utilized Allen Ginsberg's poetic texts as a catalyst for the development of original musical material.

economically, Altamira are discovering new ways to package and present their work, maintaining a Third Theatre ethos while surviving financially as young migrant artists living in Denmark.

## CONCLUSION

Song-action in Altamira consists of five interlinked phenomena. It is:

1. a key element of training, fostering both articulation and association;
2. a guiding dramaturgical unit underpinning the broader notion of musicality developed by the group, allowing for reiteration and rhythmic and libidinal shifts in the performance text;
3. a thematic matrix facilitating intertextual allusions to key concerns held by the group;
4. a means for political protest; and, finally,
5. a pragmatic means of earning a living and surviving as a Third Theatre group operating within the harsh material context of globalized late capitalism.

Etymologically, the verb 'to busk' stems from the vulgar Latin *buscare*, which means 'to search'. The work on song-action in relation to musicality allows Altamira to continue their search for an autonomous artistic identity, providing a rigorous foundation for the ongoing development of an emerging poetics that draws on a Third Theatre genealogy while concomitantly renewing and sustaining the praxis.

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