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Campbell, Patrick  and Turner, Jane (2022) The clinch and the crack: rupture and resolution in Third Theatre's laboratory practices. *Arts*, 11 (6). 118 ISSN 2076-0752

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11060118>

Publisher: MDPI AG

Version: Published Version

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Article

The Clinch and the Crack: Rupture and Resolution in Third Theatre's Laboratory Practices

Patrick Campbell  and Jane Turner *

Manchester School of Theatre, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester M15 6BH, UK

* Correspondence: j.c.turner@mmu.ac.uk

Abstract: This article maps out our critical engagement with the Third Theatre community pre- and post-COVID-19, with a focus on both performer training and the concrete material ways in which group theatres connected to this small tradition have responded to the challenges of the global pandemic. To illustrate our arguments, we draw on the Japanese craft of *kintsugi*—the transformative repair of ceramics—as a *dispositif*, employed to investigate the ways in which theatrical practice can comprise ‘an art of precious scars’, to paraphrase Stephano Carnazzi. This model allows for breaking with form and, importantly, re-modelling energy, which conversely becomes the most important aspect of the theatre laboratory, encompassing the relationships between body and form, individual and group, and artist and the wider society, importantly allowing for the creation of something that is more unique and authentic. Theatrical practice can thus be a clinch (bound like in a mother’s embrace) or jolted through disruption (like the cracks of *kintsugi*). Importantly, this disruption and its resolution takes place on both a level of form (as in the theatrical exercise) and on a broader, socio-political and economic plain. The article importantly focuses on both phenomena, and in so doing reflects on both the legacy and futurity of the transnational Third Theatre community.

Keywords: laboratory theatre; Third Theatre; kintsugi; performer training; psychophysical; dispositif; praxical



Citation: Campbell, Patrick, and Jane Turner. 2022. The Clinch and the Crack: Rupture and Resolution in Third Theatre's Laboratory Practices. *Arts* 11: 118. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11060118>

Academic Editor: John Zarobell

Received: 18 October 2022

Accepted: 14 November 2022

Published: 16 November 2022

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1. *Kintsugi*: Laboratories in Flux

It is January 2020. We, the authors, are en route from Manchester, UK to Holstebro, Denmark and have been invited to give a paper on our current research at the 2nd International NTL Festival.¹ Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium (NTL) is the umbrella organisation that has historically encompassed renowned theatre group Odin Teatret, founded by the then-Artistic Director Eugenio Barba in 1964.² We have been engaged in a research project looking at the genealogy and current valency of Third Theatre³, a transnational community of like-minded group theatre practitioners first identified by Barba in the mid-1970s, who share a laboratory ethos and see theatrical practice as a vocation, a way of life.⁴

Third Theatre draws on a tradition of laboratory research in the performing arts with a particular focus on the body, presence and the psychophysical craft of the actor. The genealogy of the practice harks back to the Russian tradition of studios, first initiated by Konstantin Stanislavski in conjunction with Vsevolod Meyerhold in the early 1900s, and latterly Jerzy Grotowski's Teatr Laboratorium in Opole, Poland (1962). This tradition of theatre has always crucially emphasised the proximal relation between actors and spectators, orchestrating a heightened sense of being together in the secular ritual of the performance moment.

On the way to Denmark, we are perturbed to see fellow travellers at Schipol airport wearing face masks. Talk is in the air of an emerging pandemic. The atmosphere is tense and there is a sense of foreboding in the departure lounge. The world that we have grown used to is about to be irrevocably changed, shattered even.

The NTL Festival is a gathering organised by Odin Teatret actress Julia Varley, bringing together emerging artists linked to the international community of Third Theatre.⁵ Many of these young practitioners have been mentored by the actors of the Odin over a number of years, having taken part in residencies at the group's theatre in Holstebro. The event showcases these artists' emerging practices, encouraging knowledge exchange. The schedule comprises practical workshops followed by performances, and there is a dedicated space for praxical and scholarly reflection and dialogue. We convene a plenary session on the last day, reflecting back on the week's events. From observing the workshops and the artists' performances, we are struck by the impact of this rigorous approach to theatrical craft and the lasting effects that this can have on the body of the actor. We are also interested in the ways in which novel approaches to technique 'crack open' this small tradition of practice, allowing for innovation and futurity.

In our search for a means to critically engage with the artistic innovation we are witnessing, we turn to the notion of *kintsugi* to articulate the artist's work on the self in training. The Japanese craft of *kintsugi* is a transformative process of repairing ceramics, which Stefano Carnazzi describes as 'an art of precious scars' (Carnazzi 2016, online).⁶ In *kintsugi*, broken ceramics are restored using *urushi*, a plant-based resin, decorated with gold or silver. *Kintsugi*'s use of precious metals draws attention to the object's flaws and transforms its appearance, rather than attempting to hide a history of damage. We are aware of the play of appropriation in our decontextualised use of the Japanese art form *kintsugi*, which we have no cultural connection to. However, it is our scholarly encounter with this arch alterity that opens us up to the unknown; to a different way of thinking through a theatrical tradition that we are ensconced in. Hence rather than mere appropriation, it is a dialogical engagement with both Japanese culture and the visual arts that offers us new insights into the laboratory processes we are witnessing, which, given the international constitution of NTL, are always and already border crossing.

Scholar Guy Keulemans (2016) makes a number of profitable links between the phenomenon of *kintsugi* and the philosophy of affect theory, as developed by French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who identify the twin notions of *the crack* (the rupture or the break) and *the clinch* (the bonding, the embrace, the holding together) (Keulemans 2016). According to Keulemans, touching or observing the repaired cracks in *kintsugi* has a concrete effect on the body of the individual, eliciting a jolting sensation that can be repelling and alarming. In contrast, the *urushi* resin also has the potential to bring into materiality the clinch, a sense of binding (ibid.). Thus, *kintsugi* marks both rupture and resolution, concussive force and functional restoration, importantly at a deeply embodied level.

We employ *kintsugi* in our plenary presentation as a metaphor for understanding the ways in which the spirit of the laboratory allows for processes of breaking and, importantly, re-making, which we argue become an important aspect of Third Theatre, encompassing the relationships between body and form, individual and group and artist and wider society. *Kintsugi* allows us to celebrate the scars and the flaws uncovered by exercise, training, performance, group dynamics and social engagement, and thus counters theatrical virtuosity, allowing for an unruly laboratory process of trial and error to truly take place.

In pragmatic terms, Third Theatre artists are autodidacts who develop and engage in regular, life-long training, often creating novel exercises for themselves. The focus on the self in the training room can, on the one hand, lead to virtuosity in technical terms, but on the other can lead to mechanistic complacency and personal cliché. Thus, our argument is that the phenomenon of *kintsugi* can serve as a *dispositif* to describe the concomitant cracks and clinches that we observe taking place in the body of the actor during systematic work on theatrical exercises, through processes of risk and experimentation.⁷

Our observations of the young performers at the festival demonstrated a range of unique approaches to gathering fragments of training, encountered and integrated through the development of unique, idiosyncratic practices united by a shared ethos, a dedication to continual work on craft. At this point in time, *kintsugi* is merely employed to elucidate the key aspects of the actor's relationship to their practice, to an ongoing sense of studiousness

inculcated through daily practice within a theatre laboratory setting. This will, however, be radically challenged over the coming months and years, as COVID-19 takes hold, theatres shut down and the art form as we know it grinds to a halt. On reflection, our use of *kintsugi* as a *dispositif* has become even more vital, in terms of articulating the play of cracking and clinching that has been a result of the pandemic, as the theatre industry has been ripped asunder and subsequently obliged to question its function as an art form in the 21st century.

2. *Kintsugi* and Third Theatre: Rupture, Revolt and Resolution as Psychophysical Praxis

Before exploring in greater depth the impact that COVID-19 and the ensuing period of lockdowns has had on the Third Theatre community (given these artists' focus on the presence of the actor's body and its proximal impact on the spectator's kinaesthetic empathy), it is perhaps useful to reflect in greater depth on the particular ways in which *kintsugi* as a *dispositif* can help us to unpack the praxis of this theatrical community as an iterative process of rupture, revolt and resolution.

The embodied bedrock of the artists and groups that comprise Third Theatre is a unique, artisanal approach to theatrical praxis based on lifelong training, which later segues into dramaturgical work on scored material and expanded practices of cultural action that transcend the black box space and filter into community settings.⁸ Lifelong training not only provides the Third Theatre actor with a solid craft, it also becomes the embodied locus of a particular ethos, a way of being in the world characterised by tenacity, discipline and innovation. As we have argued previously, in relation to the praxical bedrock of this transnational community:

Training in Third Theatre becomes a privileged space for an ongoing embodied work on the self, guided by the principles underpinning key exercises. Importantly over time, exercises change, are adapted or abandoned once they are no longer useful, and new exercises are encountered, developed and adopted. Whilst exercises can be learnt and mastered as a fixed structure, training is an ongoing, mutating, interstitial process which needs to offer the actor room for play, discovery and risk-taking. Training is thus indelibly linked to a notion of 'revolt', to a rejection of artistic sterility and complacency. (Turner and Campbell 2021)

Training is a fundamental part of the Third Theatre actor's craft and, historically, it has taken several different forms. Key groups have taken exercises from extant codified performance traditions from Europe, Asia and the Americas, whilst others have developed their own unique exercises based on their own personal needs or the tenets of Theatre Anthropology, the field of transcultural research initiated by Eugenio Barba in 1979.⁹ Significantly, exercises have been shared between groups at the plethora of knowledge exchange events held by the community over the years, especially the Third Theatre Encounters that have taken place across Europe and Latin America since 1974.¹⁰

However, the danger of any training exercise is that, over time, the actor can become restricted and limited by form; thus, a part of the craft becomes learning how to remain vigilant regarding this tendency and embrace the concomitant cracks and clinches that can take place in their body when they are prepared to take risks, to break with the past and to encounter ruptures that lead to revolt and, later, to embodied processes of integration and resolution. Keulemans makes a useful link between *kintsugi* and affect. Importantly, as he explains, affect manifests as sensation; sensation has the capacity to 'potentialize new perceptions, contemplations and the opening of possibilities for action within social and cultural domains' (Keulemans 2016). This has an obvious resonance with the experience of the actor during training; on the one hand, the exercise (initially) deconstructs the daily behaviour of the actor, providing an aesthetic framework, which obliges her to think, move and be in a different way. However, this can lead to drudgery through repetition. In this case, the actor is then obliged to reconstruct the exercise in an idiosyncratic fashion according to her needs by breaking it apart and refusing to conform. In fact, every conscious repetition of a given exercise inevitably leads to cracks and clinches as the actor explores

the boundaries of that particular unit of action. It is when the actor tries to paper over the cracks, often searching for a virtuoso physicality, that this more radical process of deconstruction and re-construction is not allowed to take place. Thus, *kintsugi* serves as an insightful metaphor for unpacking what takes place on a micro level in the body of the Third Theatre actor.

Two concrete examples can perhaps help to unpack this deconstructive, reflexive approach to training as an ongoing laboratory process of trial, error and breakthrough. In order to illustrate the foundational ways in which the clinch and the crack are apparent in the very foundations of Third Theatre training, we turn briefly to the practice of two young groups affiliated with the authors' Third Theatre Network: Teatro a Canone (Italy) and Zahr Teatër (Albania/Italy).¹¹

Teatro a Canone is a Third Theatre group based in a small town near Turin, in Italy. The group was founded in 2008, but in 2011 they split, leaving actor Luca Vonella on his own in the studio. According to Vonella, he was like 'a "little guardian" of Teatro a Canone' (Vonella 2018). He continued to develop the group's training on his own, taking each exercise to 'extreme consequences' (Vonella 2018). The exercises he shared all derived from two principles of Theatre Anthropology, namely *opposition* and *coherent incoherency*.¹² Vonella's exercises are deceptively simple, and comprise four different units, namely:

1. Walking
2. Jumping
3. Throwing
4. Falling

These exercises are all predicated on codified actions, which can later be gathered together in sequences, which Vonella terms 'movements', which originally followed the affective flow of the recorded music that Vonella played during training. Significantly, the training is entitled 'Dot-to-Dot'; connections are traced between each of the exercises and there is a search for precision. The exercise originally served the rhythmic constraints of the music, as Vonella says 'you cannot be early and you cannot be late' (Vonella 2018). In many ways, Vonella was held in a clinch by the choreographed score, which gave him something to hold onto during his autonomous work.

However, a minor revolution took place in the wake of the 2016 edition of ISTA (the International School of Theatre Anthropology), where he was introduced to the radically different rhythms of Balinese Gambuh, an ancient form of dance-drama.¹³ Vonella reveals that the particular rhythmicity of Gambuh shattered the fixed way in which he had been approaching his exercises, and on return to the studio, he began to apply certain tenets underpinning Gambuh to his own work. He states:

Slow, fast with change of direction, stop with keeping and coda. This principle breaks the shape of our memorised actions and lets the liquid of scenic life emerge. It's a difficult rupture of thinking, because when the actor starts moving, he doesn't know which action he will perform. It has become an improvisation technique. (ibid.)

This break with the fixity of movement within his training allowed for a creative fissure to take place. What is fundamental, however, is that the underlying form of the exercises remained the same, although they were reoriented by the rhythms of Gambuh, which, like *urushi* lacquer, reformed the exercises on a dynamic level, allowing as Vonella said 'for a different scenic life to emerge' (ibid.). The Gambuh rhythms effectively re-enchanted the training for Vonella, which over time and through repetition had become mechanical and somewhat of a drudge. His encounter with radical otherness at ISTA enabled him to break with the *doxa* of his own practice, re-enlivening his approach to the exercises.

Exercises provoke an energetic flow, and this can become addictive, especially for the younger actor; actors can be swept up in affective currents as exercises generate an inner intensity that builds to an overriding dynamic that may obfuscate other, subtler rhythms and energies. In fact, exercises can become mindless and operate at the level of graft. Actors

can forget what the function of the exercise is and lose track of the heightened sense of awareness that the work can generate by zoning out or pushing for results. In this sense, an emerging awareness of energetic dynamics is important. For example, as illustrated by Vonella, when actors work alone, it can become difficult to recognise the mechanical repetition of the exercise. It was only after moving away from the studio and encountering a different cultural practice that he was able to recognise the potential for other dynamics within his fixed score of exercise: the pre-determinedness of his ‘dot-to-dots’.

Moreover, reading Vonella’s account of his work, it would appear that when the other actors of the group left Teatro a Canone, he overcompensated for their absence, taking his exercises to ‘extreme consequences’, which in turn led to one effect—an overly-strained affect, a constantly-sustained, heightened energetic presence that, at times, lacked nuance. A key question that we posed to the actors attending the NTL International Festival was, should actors be better able to control an exercise rather than allowing it to control them? An exercise involves sustained labour over time; there are no quick fixes, but this differs from mindless graft. The embodied learning that can be inculcated by the exercise needs time to be resolved within the *micro-laboratory* of the body (to borrow a term from Julia Varley (2011)). An actor needs to cultivate a reflexive capacity to be able to be both inside the exercise whilst also critically aware of its shortcomings and not afraid of rupture and change.

Conversely, whilst the rigidity of an exercise can lead to a stringent level of intensity that lacks subtlety and nuance, working to exhaustion can lead to epiphany. The secret is to be aware of neurotic tendencies towards masochistic, self-punishing behaviour, and rather use the exercise as a true *via negativa* to unblock (to paraphrase Grotowski (1968)).¹⁴ Ironically, this can sometimes involve doing less rather than more. It is important for actors working in a laboratory tradition, after a time, to refuse and resist the exercise: stop, reflect on what they are doing, reclaim themselves. Smash the exercise into smithereens, open it up, deconstruct the thing; view the fragments and reconstruct it anew.

Zahr Teatër was founded by Albanian actor, director and musician Mateo Çili. Like Teatro a Canone, the group is based in Italy and espouses a laboratory ethos, which includes daily training. A key exercise that Çili shared with us on the Third Theatre Network is called ‘Throwing the Shoe’. The exercise seems beguilingly simple, but in fact works on several different levels in terms of its complexity. According to Çili:

There is a very simple exercise in our training routine, which we use to train every possible aspect of the actor’s physical preparation, stimulating cooperation and competition at the same time. It’s done in couples and it could last for up to thirty minutes. We need just a shoe and some space: the aim is to throw the shoe to each other but in a way that it won’t be too easy or too hard to catch it in the air. We have to pass it in a way that the other person has to make at least one step to catch it without the shoe touching the ground. If this happens, both the actors have to lay on the ground and get up as soon as possible without using their hands, then the exercise continues. (Çili 2018)

In many ways, this is, following Grotowski, a ‘Poor Exercise’.¹⁵ Zahr Teatër do not try to plaster over their frugality here; they make a virtue out of necessity, transforming a banal, daily object into a vehicle for honing their craft. The exercise allows for a flow of affect and a playful sense of risk as different couples undertake the exercise across the space. These different interjections create a disruption or a chaos in the space, moving the actors out of the clinch into a fissured zone where discoveries can be made. Importantly, there is room for failure; the shoe can, and does, drop on the floor, only to be taken up again. Once more, the *dispositif* of *kintsugi* is evident in the fragmented, disrupted nature of the working rhythm installed by the exercise. As Keulemans comments in relation to *kintsugi* ceramics and affect:

A repaired crack can trigger and link to many things, not least perceptions of threat, urgency, catastrophe, risk, but also care, amelioration or hope. (Keulemans 2016)

The act of allowing the thing (the exercise) to break apart can enable the actor to read the body anew, identifying and challenging what has become cliché. Rather than searching for a spurious perfection, a virtuosic physicality, with time the exercise can reveal that what laboratory theatre actors are able to do has a uniqueness that is more important. This rejection of the order of physical virtuosity and espousal of improvisational chaos is apparent in Zahr Teatër's 'throwing the shoe' exercise; its playful, unpretentious nature allows the group to create a strong ensemble whilst also enabling the individual actor to trace out new pathways for movement carved through action and reaction in the space. The ludic nature of the exercise allows for a sense of childlike re-enchantment to emerge in the work space, which can counter the dour tendencies of the theatrical laboratory. Moreover, the exercise cultivates reflexivity through its focus on partner work. By embracing failure, foregrounding flaws, and promoting unruliness, 'throwing the show', like all good training exercises, allows for both clinches and cracks in the body of the actor and the body of the group to appear, through time and repetition. This play of deconstruction and reconstruction is at the heart of the art of *kintsugi*.

Both Teatro a Canone and Zahr Teatër have emerged relatively unscathed from the pandemic. As small-scale theatre groups already working in a frugal manner on the margins of the theatrical mainstream, they have been able to continue their activities and currently, as of 2022, are engaged in a number of pedagogical ventures, including Vonella's Autumn Workshops in Sallugia and Chivasso, in Italy, and Zahr's Experimental School in Milan. However, more established Third Theatre groups, with greater infrastructure and overheads, have been more adversely impacted by the national lockdowns that robbed them of the heart of their practice: physical proximity. Nevertheless, the grounding of this community is a shared ability to shatter tried and tested forms and embrace the unknown. We shall now reflect on how a deep, embodied knowledge of unruliness, revolt and resolution has enabled Third Theatre groups to face the systemic rupture ushered in by the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Shatterings and Smithereens

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the implementation of lockdowns, social distancing and institutional closures, including theatres, long-standing laboratory theatre groups such as those of the Third Theatre community, have struggled to survive. Whilst the theatre community as a whole suffered from the ensuing forced isolation imposed internationally by government measures aimed at reducing the spread of infection, laboratory and Third Theatre groups, who have historically remained on the margins of society and the arts, were particularly affected by the lack of proximity, presence and liveness during this two-year period. Financially dependent on touring, knowledge exchange events and the workshop culture, they were particularly vulnerable to the financial upheavals ushered in by the pandemic, and their existence became even more precarious.

Revisiting our use of the Kintsugi metaphor in 2022 has subsequently revealed further facets of its resonance for the Third Theatre community in a very different and unexpected manner. The global COVID-19 pandemic prevented theatre practitioners from not only being able to perform in theatres in front of audiences, but also train together with their colleagues to develop and refine their craft. In online gatherings, many of the artists have reported novel and improvised ways that they sought to duplicate the laboratory and training studio in their living rooms, kitchens and outside spaces. However, the process of continuing their work in isolation was especially difficult to contend with, and while other artists looked to develop online means of making theatre and sharing training, for Third Theatre artists, this strategy was ultimately resisted; for some it appeared to be a betrayal of a fundamental principle that theatre and training are inherently live interactions.

Juliana Capilé and Tatiana Horevicht of Brazilian Third Theatre group Cia Pessoal de Teatro spoke eloquently during a recent interview at Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium in Holstebro, Denmark of the difficulties they had faced in this regard during the pandemic. As they explained:

We had recently debuted a performance directed by Julia Varley that we could no longer promote or tour. We started to work with online theatre classes: it was something that we did not really believe in, but we found ways of doing it because it was what sustained us financially at the time. During this period I completed my PhD, Tatiana continued hers, we were able to live off our grants, but this was a very small financial amount in Brazilian terms. (Capilé 2022)

Faced with these struggles, they took the radical step of leaving Brazil and moving to Europe. They see this as an extension of their practice: 'when things are difficult, we complicate them further, and generally it works!' (ibid.). What sustained them during this tumultuous period was their embodied knowledge of resistance and refusal, honed through their psychophysical training and dramaturgical processes. As they explain:

As we do not have a training space, our practice is now a mental one. What connects us to the work is our commitment to our performance, *Entrenãolugares*. KLM lost our set on the way to Europe and we no longer have a space to rehearse, but we can sing the songs from the piece, recall our lines or reconstruct what is missing. We sit down and we sew our costumes again. We recreate set pieces. An internal motivation is created through these material difficulties. It is as if these challenges created a greater internal sense of dedication: we have to get through this! We do not have to invent moments of resistance, as in a theatrical exercise, because the moments of resistance are already there. They are concrete, real. (ibid.)

The deep-seated experience of rigour and tenacity in their practice enabled Capilé and Horevicht to deal with the financial and logistical difficulties they faced as artists relocating to Europe in the wake of a global pandemic. A belief in their practice and a totemic relationship to the remnants of their performance helped them to reorientate themselves on foreign soil, remaining connected to a sense of craft and purpose. In many ways, the embodied traces of their performance text have acted like an *urushi*, binding them together through their connection to Third Theatre as a praxis and ethos. They have since gone on to collaborate further with Varley, Barba and the actors of Odin Teatret in Denmark, whilst concomitantly establishing themselves as artists residing in Portugal.

During the same recent visit to Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium we also spoke with Gregorio Amicuzi, Artistic Director of Madrid-based Third Theatre group Laboratorio Internacional Residui Teatro. Amicuzi reported how, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Residui Teatro's work had already undergone a period of breaking and re-making: a transition and relocation from Rome to Madrid. The clinch of their renewal identifies them as key international Third Theatre makers; thus, rather than having an alignment with their geographically local theatre community, it is the knowledge exchange possibilities beyond national borders that prove to be the ones that most excite them, especially those encounters with Third Theatre groups in Latin America (Amicuzi 2022). However, as the pandemic burgeoned, the group recognised a need to review the potential scope and function of their activities to establish their identity and visibility. Initially, they promoted performer training courses and projects which could be delivered on-line; however, they quickly realised that trying to simulate their work using a different medium was ineffective. Thus, the group re-conceptualised their performance skills and their roles as artists and proposed and were granted civic permission to perform Street Theatre and a series of Cultural Actions within and for their local community¹⁶.

For Amicuzi, and many other artists, the pandemic has not only led to a 'crack' but a shattering of forms and core practices; however, it has also created an important pause, a space and time to reflect on questions such as 'what is our role now?', 'how

can our work serve the changing landscape?’ (Amicuzi 2022). Amicuzi reached out to members of the Third Theatre community with his questions and asked for a video letter reply. The letters form a series of fragments that have been *urushi*-ed together to form a documentary titled *Letters from the Islands* (Amicuzi 2020)¹⁷. The letters document that the destruction and resulting smithereens caused by the pandemic have, for these artists, merely reinforced and activated an increased vigour and belief in the importance of making and performing theatre.

The enforced isolation has not destroyed the important recognition that fraternity, belonging and knowing that one is travelling with allies is essential. For this international theatre community, many of whom work alone or in very small groups, the sense of belonging and having kin who understand what they do is essential, and, although they do not share a linguistic language, they share a praxical laboratory language that binds them to a living corporality. Patricio Vallejo Aristizábal¹⁸ speaks in his ‘Letter’ about how creating theatre is a means of ‘weaving hanging bridges’: precarious but essential (ibid.). Other ‘Letters’ record how enforced isolation and silence can be considered positively; for example, Parvathy Baul¹⁹ observes that the pandemic created a space and time where theatre makers could reflect and discover unexplored areas within themselves, and Luis Ibar²⁰ reported that the gift of the pause allowed him to escape elsewhere and find new stories that need to be told.

There is an evident sense of resolve in the *Letters*, a call to be stubborn, to not capitulate to the expectations of the prevailing political order but continue to resist. The Third Theatre community has frequently ‘done theatre’ differently. Third Theatre habitually exists on the margins of accepted culture and here—despite the strictures of arts institutions and funding bodies, whose mission it is to tame the arts and insist they conform—it has cultivated spaces where its work has thrived. Julia Varley’s ‘Letter’ describes the ‘days of isolation’ as ‘days of preparation’ (ibid.) and, again, the point finds an echo in the *dispositif* of *kintsugi*; this is a time for a gathering of shards but this time maybe not the familiar, well-used shards, but the shards that have become hidden within us, recollections from moments shared with others that have not had the time to be incorporated. This point is reinforced by Gill Greenhalgh²¹ who, like others, emphasises that the restoration of theatre as a live event should not—must not—be a return to the old normality; the space of the pandemic should be a space to break with the ‘clinch’ of the past: this, she says, is a ‘portal’ through which the world can be re-envisioned (ibid.).

The ‘Letters’ collated in the documentary may offer an expected optimism, a rejection of the invasive spread and pervasiveness of technology in theatre, that has enabled these commentators to recognise and articulate the vitality of theatre as an art form that is innately *lifeful*. The documentary concludes with a written letter from Eugenio Barba, scrolling the screen. He describes how those theatre practitioners who align their craft and their values with the Third Theatre are ‘looking for ancestors, for the disinherited, planting roots in the sky’ (ibid.). He likens the impact of the current pandemic to the upheaval caused by technological innovations, such as photography and film, on artists and actors at the beginning of the 20th century. Out of that crisis, there emerged a new sensibility regarding the function and purpose of art. He notes that the pandemic may be a ‘harbinger of a return to humility, to the essence and the inner potential of our [theatrical] profession’ (ibid.). He is certain that the future is not technological but essentially concerns the ‘embrace of an artistic energy and a receptive energy’ (ibid.). Here again there is a re-sounding of the shattering, a recognition that this rupture can productively lead to a new conception of the clinch.

Whilst we are still unclear what the full ramifications of the pandemic’s destructive impact on the wider laboratory theatre ecosystem will be, there have been coterminous major casualties. In January 2022, Thomas Richards officially closed the Workcentre of Thomas Richards and Jerzy Grotowski, due in part to ‘... the present historical moment of multi-dimensional international crisis’ (Richards 2022, online). The Workcentre had carried on the pioneering research of Jerzy Grotowski, a key historical proponent of laboratory

theatre, and the folding of this unique institution dealt a blow to the continuity of a particular strand of deep, rigorous work on theatrical craft. Furthermore, a key actress who continued the work tradition of Grotowski, Rena Mirecka, sadly passed away at the end of August this year. The deaths of Mike Pearson²² earlier this year and, more recently, of Peter Brook²³, in July, mark two further endings to the work of key auteurs whose contributions to laboratory theatre have been significant. Furthermore, in January 2021 Eugenio Barba officially stepped down as Artistic Director of Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium, which represents a caesura and a potential change of direction for NTL as an organisation. Other prominent laboratory groups have been obliged to radically rethink their practices considering emancipatory movements such as #metoo, and older hierarchical models of the (western) male director as auteur have been challenged in light of recent social movements pertaining to equality, diversity and inclusion.²⁴

Grotowski, Brook and Barba appeared as pioneering theatre figures whose work developed and came to prominence in what Arthur Marwick (1998) describes as the 'long sixties', a time of radical reform and cultural revolution that indelibly changed the arts landscape. Marwick disputes that the changes occurring at this time can be described as a paradigm shift; however, the community of practitioners emerging in the 1960s cultivated a landscape of group theatre with a focus on psychophysical training and offered an aesthetic/creative way of being that has been sustained through Laboratory Theatre. The ethos of the work drew particular groups and practitioners who recognised their work as belonging to and orientated around what in 1976 became a Third Theatre. While it may not be correct to refer to this model of practice as a singular paradigm, as groups employ methods and key values in diverse and anomalous ways, there is, however, a constitutive core that is shared.

Barba acknowledges that the landscape of destruction left across Europe after World War II provided space for new ways of creating and performing theatre; out of the ashes emerged new group theatres with a laboratory ethos: a discrepant element in the paradigm of post-war theatre. The impact of his stepping down from his role as director of NTL after nearly 50 years building what has become an internationally significant institution, will inevitably lead to perhaps a fundamental change; a reconstruction that will, following Kuhn (1970), 'change some of the field's most elementary theoretical [and practical] generalisations as well as many of its paradigm methods and applications' (Kuhn 1970). Kuhn goes on to describe how, during a transition period, 'problems' will come to the fore that can be solved by the old and by the new paradigms. However, he says, there will also be a decisive difference in the modes of solution; Kuhn cites Herbert Butterfield likening the process to 'picking up the other end of the stick . . .' (ibid.). At this time of disruption, a query concerns who might pick up the stick; is it our collective responsibility to sustain the vitality of theatre by revolt and constant renewal, and, if this is the case, how can this be achieved? The artists whose voices are captured in Amicuzi's documentary *Letters from the Islands* draw on both established and emerging voices. Moreover, our recent visit to Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium revealed a tenacious and resolute determination by small-scale groups, such as Residui Teatro and Cia Pessoal de Teatro. It seemed that the broken shards of their performance work *Entrenãolugares* stimulated them to make it anew, make it stronger and more beautiful.

In addition to the pause engendered by the pandemic, the passing of key figures from the landscape has also provided space for new voices to come to the fore. As Kuhn notes, artists are used to living with crisis in a world perilously out of joint. Ironically there is an expectation by mainstream culture that a laboratory theatre approach should generate credible research; such research, as evidenced in Theatre Anthropology, works with an 'essential tension' and precarity in the bodily training, and this precarity is often echoed in the organisation of the group. However, Cia Pessoal de Teatro, Residui Teatro and the many artists working as a part of Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium are embracing the cracks and fissures that have been exposed and the new opportunities afforded by a restorative clinch.

4. Conclusions

It is 2022. We the authors are sitting together in Manchester, considering once more the shards of our peripatetic research over the past four years. In many ways, this writing is an extension of *kintsugi* as a dispositif: an attempt to fuse together fragmented moments of ethnographic field research carried out both proximally and online.

Over recent months, the international activities of the Third Theatre have begun to pick up pace once again. Residui Teatro have just realised their International Festival Artistas TTT2022, featuring talks and masterclasses by Odin Teatret, Italian groups Teatro Tascabile di Bergamo, Teatro Nucleo and Compagnia della Fortezza, the Spanish group Atalaya Teatro and the Mexican Cartaphilus Teatro.²⁵ Invited guests included a mixture of younger and well-established groups, such as Contadores de Mentira (Brazil), Teatro del Norte (Spain), Teatr Brama (Poland), Zid Theater (Netherlands), Teatro a Canone, Antagon TheaterAKTion (Germany), Abraxa Teatro (Italy), Fabrica Athens (Greece), Teatro Ridotto (Italy), Grenland Friteater (Greenland), La Luna nel Letto (Italy) and Compagnie della Fortezza (Italy), amongst others. The event offered a cartography of contemporary Third Theatre, demonstrating the transnational breadth and reach of this tradition of theatrical 'floating islands'. Such a gathering of like-minded artists reflects the older knowledge exchange events that traditionally served as an *urushi*-like glue, solidifying a shared sense of a professional ethos and identity amongst the scattered shards of the Third Theatre community.

In a collection of correspondence between Grotowski and Barba during the 'long sixties', Grotowski constantly reminded Barba that a theatre group, like all organisms, grows old and new shoots of growth are essential to keep it healthy; the old parts must be relinquished to make way for the new (Barba 1999a). Residui Teatro appears to be one of the younger Third Theatre groups figuratively 'picking up the stick', combining fragments of the old whilst incorporating new perspectives and welcoming a younger generation of practitioners. Their tenacious commitment to Third Theatre emphasises the continuing valency of the field. The importance here is the revisioning that Greenhaugh spoke of, as mentioned above. There is a precarious balance that must be struck between the continuity of this particular 'small tradition' and a need to learn from the challenges of the pandemic in order to develop new means of surviving and thriving. Knowledge exchange events such as TTT2022²⁶ perhaps offer the laboratory conditions for different generations to rub shoulders and collide, comparing the shared 'precious scars' of a lifetime making theatre work on the margins, finding new answers to old questions surrounding rigour, craft, revolt and continuity.

In September 2022, Barba and the Odin debuted their most recent—and, reportedly, final—performance, *Thebes at the Time of Yellow Fever* (2022). We were fortunate to watch one of the final rehearsals of the piece during our stay in Holstebro. Sadly, one of the members of the cast was absent on the day, having been struck down by COVID. The shadow of the pandemic continued to loom. Nevertheless, the remaining actors of the Odin carried on work on the piece, tenaciously enacting their lines of physical actions, imbued with a presence and aliveness garnered over decades of training and performing. In many ways, Odin Teatret's montages have always been a *kintsugi*, as Barba amalgamates and joins the different performative shards developed independently by the actors and brought to the working space. This latest process was particularly touching given the age of the ensemble and the status of the piece as a potential ending to a lifetime's work. However, *Thebes* marks both an ending and a renewal for the group, as some members leave their headquarters in Holstebro and start a new venture, the Floating Islands Living Archive, in Lecce, Italy. Even at this late point in their professional lives, the actors of the ensemble, and Barba, still appear willing to break with tried and tested formulae, moulding new forms out of the old, tracing out novel lines of flight by reconfiguring the shards of their artistic and organisational practices.

Shattering and repairing, clinches and cracks, *kintsugi* and *urushi*. Loss and renewal at the heart of the Third Theatre; a living legacy from us to ourselves, as Barba once said

(Barba 1999b). To paraphrase Eliot, ‘At the still point of the turning world . . . there is only the dance’ (Eliot [1941] 2001).

Author Contributions: This is a co-authored article based on co-research. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: This is not applicable.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to thank members of the international Third Theatre community who shared information and positively contributed to our writing of this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

- 1 There were two iterations of the NTL Festival, held in 2019 and 2020 at Odin Teatret’s theatrical base in Holstebro, Denmark, directed by Julia Varley. In 2014, NTL officially set up an incubation project for artists, based in Odin Teatret’s theatre. The project provided groups and individuals with studio space and opportunities to share their work and receive feedback from members of Odin in artistic safety. The support, space and time offered through this initiative enabled artists and groups to refine a project or performance. In addition to proposing a project and explaining why they wanted to work at and with Odin, applications also required groups and artists to outline why and how they could deploy aspects of their project in/with/for the local region.
- 2 Odin Teatret was founded in 1964 in Norway by Artistic Director Eugenio Barba and moved permanently to Holstebro, Denmark in 1966. There is extensive literature available on the praxis and history of Odin Teatret. The group’s Artistic Director Eugenio Barba is a prolific author (see, for example, Barba 1986, 1995, 1999b, 2010). A range of Barba’s earlier papers have been gathered together and published in English in the book *Theatre: Solitude Craft, Revolt* (Barba 1999b). Moreover, many of the Odin actresses have published books on their practice (see Carreri 2014; Rasmussen 2017; Varley 2011). Furthermore, a number of scholars have written monographs that focus on the group (see Andreasen and Kuhlmann 2000; Chemi 2017; Christoffersen 1993; Ledger 2012; Turner 2018; Watson 1993). Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium emerged officially in 1984 and is the historical umbrella organisation that encompasses Odin Teatret and the wider activities of Barba and the Odin actors.
- 3 The term Third Theatre was coined by Eugenio Barba in a report to UNESCO in 1976.
- 4 The result of this research was the authors’ monograph *A Poetics of Third Theatre: Performer Training, Dramaturgy, Cultural Action*, published by Routledge in 2021. The book offers an overview of the history and current valency of the Third Theatre as a transnational community of theatre artists united by a shared set of values and praxes, inspired by the laboratory theatre tradition.
- 5 Odin Teatret actor, director, pedagogue; founder of The Magdalena Project, artistic director of Transit International Festival and editor of *Open Page*.
- 6 See <https://www.lifegate.com/kintsugi> (accessed on 26 August 2022).
- 7 A *dispositif* is understood here, following Deleuze (1992), as a heterogeneous assemblage fusing discursive behaviour, non-discursive behaviour and manifestations of knowledge through practice. In this sense, we are using *kintsugi* as a guiding, generative principle rather than as a mere semantic trope. Thus, it influences both the structure of our writing and serves to illuminate the practices of the Third Theatre artists we are mapping.
- 8 For further information on the concept of cultural action in relation to Third Theatre (including a critical evaluation of the term’s roots in both the post-World War II French cultural scene and Paulo Freire’s theories around instruments of liberation and the pedagogy of the oppressed), please refer to Turner and Campbell (2021).
- 9 Theatre Anthropology, the field developed by Eugenio Barba, is based on the premise of a pre-expressive level, which is concerned with the principles that performers use to transform from their daily selves: to fragment their external ‘everyday’ pot and transform themselves into an expressive being. These pre-expressive principles include opposition, balance, equivalence and consistent inconsistency. Theatre Anthropology deliberately identifies and isolates these recurring principles, which Barba argues are foundational to performance forms across the world.
- 10 For further information on the Third Theatre Encounters and other knowledge exchange events and networks within this theatrical community, please refer to Turner and Campbell (2021).
- 11 In 2014, as a part of their wider research, the authors set up the Third Theatre Network (www.thirdtheatrenetwork.com (accessed on 26 August 2022)). The website documents the activities of the Network, and platforms the work of young Third Theatre groups, such as Teatro a Canone and Zahr Teatër.
- 12 For further information on the pre-expressive principles see Barba (1995).
- 13 The International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) was founded in 1979 by Eugenio Barba. ISTA is a multicultural network of performers and scholars who gather to further investigations related to Theatre Anthropology. ISTA holds open sessions periodically at the request of national and international cultural institutions which provide the necessary funding. Each session

has a different theme defining a particular subject which is investigated through practical classes, work demonstrations and comparative analysis. Key writings on the findings of ISTA include Barba and Savarese (1991); Barba (1995, 2016) and Hastrup (1996).

- ¹⁴ Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski (1933–1999) was one of the most important figures of 20th century western theatre. He founded a small laboratory theatre in 1959 in the town of Opole in Poland, the Teatr Laboratorium, and developed unique approaches to actor training, dramaturgy, montage and environmental theatre. His notion of the *via negativa*, an approach to actor training based on the dissolving of psychophysical blocks rather than the accrual of technique, has had a lasting impact on laboratory theatre practice. His early theories and writings were compiled in the book *Towards a Poor Theatre* (Grotowski 1968).
- ¹⁵ For Grotowski, Poor Theatre represented an attempt to distil the theatrical event to its simplest form: an encounter between the actor and the spectator. All other elements and effects were deemed to be subservient to this relationship, and the Teatr Laboratorium's praxis consisted in exploring how a proximal energetic encounter could be crafted using a modicum of resources.
- ¹⁶ As Eugenio Barba (1995) notes in his book titled *The Paper Canoe*: 'When performers throw themselves into the daily life of a street or a market, they are not blending with the local people; they don't establish a communion with them. They are merely solidifying their own identities, and therefore their own differences. This leads to the possibility of creating a relationship' (Barba 1995).
- ¹⁷ Cartas desde las islas // Letters from the Islands.
- ¹⁸ Artistic Director of Contraelviento Teatro, Ecuador.
- ¹⁹ Singer, musician and storyteller of the Baul tradition, India, and a performer with Odin Teatret in their production titled *The Tree* (2016).
- ²⁰ Director of Cartaphilus Teatro, Mexico.
- ²¹ Founder and Artistic Director, The Magdalena Project, freelance director and lecturer in Performance Studies at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.
- ²² Mike Pearson was an influential theatre director who co-founded Cardiff Laboratory Theatre in 1973 and created the Brith Gof theatre company in 1981.
- ²³ Peter Brook was one of the most original and influential theatre directors of the 20th century: https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2022/jul/03/peter-brook-obituary?CMP=share_btn_link (accessed on 23 September 2022).
- ²⁴ See Adameicka-Sitek, Agata and Zelwerowicz, Aleksander. "'Our World Is Ruled by Insensitivity": The #MeToo Movement and Transformation'. (M. Rusek, Thum.). *Didaskalia. Gazeta Teatralna*, (English Issue 2021), pp. 4–41.
- ²⁵ See <http://www.residuитеatro.com/ultimas-noticias/artists-ttt2022> (accessed on 23 September 2022).
- ²⁶ For information on TTT2022 see <http://www.residuитеatro.com/ultimas-noticias/tt-2022-english-version> (accessed on 23 September 2022).

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