

TRIANGLE THEATRE – *THE DIG* (1992)

I am 13 years old. I am sitting next to my mother in the raked seating at the small theatre space at Earnsford Grange Secondary School, waiting for Triangle Theatre's *The Dig* to begin. This must be the third time that I have seen a theatre performance. This one is in my community. The other members of the audience are middle-aged couples and school children from the surrounding neighbourhood. I am very excited because Carran Waterfield – the actress and deviser of *The Dig* and artistic director of Triangle – is also the director of my Youth Theatre, Bare Essentials, and I have just began to immerse myself in her way of making theatre. Gentle a capella music plays from a CD over the sound system. I feel a sense of anticipation.

The lights dim to a blackout. There is a spotlight centre stage and Carran stands there wearing a check dress and gardening gloves, brandishing a menacing pair of secateurs, which she holds aloft in her hand above her head. She gallops towards the four cardinal points of the room. Her energy is strong and heavy. She looks fiercely determined. The lights dim. They rise again, slowly. There is the sound of birds. Carran is now sat on a step ladder in the garden, pruning demurely. She is Mary. She is an archeologist. She begins to tell us of her childhood. Of the games she used to play. Of her mother and her father.

As the play goes on, Mary excavates her life, uncovering the repressed memories of her childhood sexual abuse at her father's hands. She sings beautiful songs in what sounds like a foreign language. The music fascinates me, striking a deep chord within. Carran's voice is looped and the songs are projected throughout the space, as if angels or spirits peopled the air. She tells bawdy stories as a schoolgirl and makes the audience howl with laughter. She is forced to eat the apple of the tree of knowledge and sobs. The very props and objects become extensions of her tortured body as she recounts her rape and the enforced abortion of her baby. She bounds the set in rope and tries to reign in her memories. She covers herself in earth, takes up her rod, confronts her invisible, absent father and liberates herself from the specter of her past. She is redeemed. *Awe, awe soma gwaza.*

I am extremely moved. I feel that I have watched something very important. There is a questions-and-answers session with the audience afterwards. Carran talks about the show, about how it was devised. She is very warm and open. She explains that the performance is not autobiographical, that she was not abused, that Mary emerged in the rehearsal space. I feel that the performance has touched me on a very deep level, that I was completely drawn into the character's inner world. On the way home in the car with my mother, I am very quiet. I think about the performance for days afterwards.

Small-scale touring theatre company Triangle Theatre was founded in the city of Coventry in 1988 by artistic director Carran Waterfield. Over the past 25 years, the company has gone onto make innovative, award winning productions on the cutting edge of contemporary British theatre. Carran studied extensively with members of Odin Teatret and Pan Theatre in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and, alongside director Ian Cameron, developed her own unique style of potent physical theatre, drawing on local history, biography and autobiography to create original productions from a decidedly feminine and feminist perspective. In 1996, she initiated a long-lasting collaboration with practitioner Richard Talbot, and together they began to create work that fused immersive performance and live art with heritage and museum theatre. Carran's most recent work has come full circle, mixing her earlier devised studio aesthetic with elements of the improvisation and audience interaction developed alongside Talbot.

The Dig was created by Carran in 1992 in collaboration with Ian Cameron after an intensive period spent training in Europe with Roberta Carreri of Odin Teatret and Enrique Pardo of Pan Theatre. *The Dig* was a commercial and critical success, winning the Edinburgh Fringe First Award in 1992. I would like to explore the production in greater depth now, looking at the ways in which the performance text was articulated by an exploration of what Julia Kristeva (1982) and Judith Butler (1993) have termed the *object feminine*.

WHAT IS THE OBJECT?

According to Kristeva (1982, p.4), the abject is "(...) what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous the composite". In developmental terms, it represents the pre-objectal relationship foreclosed by primal repression, which, according to Kristeva, is triggered by maternal anguish, when the pre-verbal infant's (r)ejection of the mother as all-encompassing being inseparable from its self involves the initial, violent, clumsy separation and rejection of the composite mother-child relationship (IBID, p.3). This initial foreclosure, this *abjection* of a part of the child's psyche during this initial phase of object formation, is subsequently reinforced by imaginary alienation (the Lacanian mirror phase of child development) and symbolic castration (language acquisition and acculturation), in effect creating a zone of psychic exclusion where the maternally-connoted pre-objectal, the animal, and the non-sensical, drive-laden orders of consciousness are relegated to and repudiated.

This abjected zone of exclusion remains a synchronic element of the subject's psychic make-up, and forms the 'enigmatic foundation' of obsessive compulsive, paranoid and psychotic disorders, triggered subsequently by either the repression or foreclosure of castration (IBID,p.11). Thus the abject either overwhelms the subject, emerging as symptom – the ambiguous territory in which phallogocentric meaning breaks down in psychic disorders – or is kept in check through sublimation – which channels the pre-nominal and pre-objectal into the sacred and art (IBID, p.11). Thus the *deject*, the subject steeped in abjection, who locates herself in this ambiguous territory, is the madwoman, the mystic, the artist. In fact, according to Kristeva, great contemporary art forms such as Modern literature unfold over this condemned territory of the inassimilable and unintelligible (KRISTEVA, 1982, p.18).

Beyond the microcosm of psychic functioning, Judith Butler (1993) suggests that the process of abjection occurs in the macrocosm of society and culture through the regulated, heteronormative, phallogocentric sexing of the human subject, which "(...) not only produces the domain of intelligible bodies, but produces as well a domain of abject, unlivable bodies (...) the latter is the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own

impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside". The phallogocentric economy produces the feminine (and the queer) as its constitutive outside through the regulatory ideal of "sex" which is enforced through the performative iteration of heteronormative social norms. Thus, "(...) the feminine is the unspeakable condition of figuration, as that which can never be figured within the terms of philosophy proper, but whose exclusion from that propriety is its enabling condition" (IBID, p.37).

'Girlness' and 'womanhood' are, in fact, constituted socially (and not pre-determined biologically) by the performativity of gender norms, and the real of femininity is abjected out of the bounds of phallogocentric discourse. However, it can return to haunt the very language from which it is excluded, and this is the task of the radical feminist; to imbue her discourse with the abject, to speak from this unintelligible domain.

I posit that this disruptive, improper femininity, situated on the margins of law and language, exploring and drawing upon the unutterable abject, is precisely the domain charted by the work of Triangle Theatre. Over the past 25 years, artistic director Carran Waterfield, alongside long-term partner Richard Talbot, has explored the figure of the fallen woman, probing into the foreclosed terrain of her own local, personal and family history.

Like much of Triangle's work, *The Dig* was fundamentally shaped on a level of both form and content by an in depth exploration of abjection. In the case of this specific performance, this aesthetic strategy served to immerse the audience in the inner universe of a survivor of child abuse. The kinaesthetic impact of the corporeality of Carran's performance, and the potent play of metaphor and metonym that transformed props and the very set itself into a scenic manifestation of Mary's foreclosed embodied trauma, enveloped the audience in a ritualistic tale of abjection and redemption that left indelible marks on my young psyche. As the performance field unfolded, I felt increasingly submersed in the encroaching psychosis overwhelming Mary, and cathartically shared in her redemption as she found a way to sublimate her own abjection, transforming taboo into totem.

I shall now give some concrete scenic examples of this aesthetic approach as it played out in the performance field of *The Dig*, emphasizing my phenomenological perception/reception as audience member. The performance began, for example, with a fade in from a black-out. The gentle a capella music played as the audience entered faded out and the sound of galloping could be heard. As the lights rose, a dissonant track was played as Carran appeared centre stage, dressed in a yellow dress, wellington boots and a hat, trotting energetically on the spot, her right hand held aloft as if holding the reigns of a horse, her left hand held above her head, brandishing an open pair of secateurs that formed a large, menacing cross. She turned around clockwise, galloping to the four cardinal points. The rigorous action of her stomping legs contrasted with her relaxed gaze and the soft, fluid, slow motion of her arms, which gently bobbed up and down with the reigns, creating a tension between the soft and sensual fluidity of her torso and the violent, aggressive energy of her feet.

As theatrical supersign, Carran embodied a number of aporias here that would unfold over the ensuing performance text. The secateurs held aloft could be interpreted at one and the same time as the Christian cross (the character Mary would heretically be compared to and fused with Christ throughout the performance), the symbolic castration always already inflicted on the feminine body (reiterated by the violence of Mary's abuse), and the image of the crossroads, invoking the pagan goddess Hecate, the mythic embodiment of the abject feminine and a recurring, emblematic trope in Triangle's work. The dialectic between the upper and lower parts of Mary's body during the galloping perhaps articulated on a corporeal level the forecluded, abjected memories of abuse that would spill over, breaking through her calm exterior and invading the space as the performance progressed.

As audience member, this opening scene served to dislocate me from any linear narrative, giving immediate primacy to kinesthetic awareness and the corporeal impact of the moving body. The actresses' body was charged with the mythic quality of the pagan idol, of the equine goddesses of the ancient Celts, our forebears. There was something of the sacred about Carran's performative corporeality, which I might now interpret as a theatrical sublimation of the

abject feminine. Thus this tale of trauma and sexual abuse began with an embodiment of feminine strength and determination as the actress demarcated the performance space as mandala through her circular movement, consecrating her (abject) territory whilst placing a very different vision of femininity firmly centre stage. As spectator, I was rooted to my seat, immediately engaged, seduced by the potent physicality of this opening image that contrasted to such a great extent from the calm background music that had immediately preceded it.

The lights dimmed on the galloping actress and her action slows to a halt, and rose once again on a step-ladder stage left. Bird song filled the space as the actress sat herself atop the ladder and began to sharpen her secateurs with a rock. A grating sound filled the space. She began to 'prune', cutting into the space with her secateurs, as she quietly hummed a child's nursery rhyme, laughing to herself. She looks over her shoulders and begins to speak the following directly to the audience, breaking the fourth wall.

My name's Mary. I'm not married. I used to be an archaeologist. I suppose my interest began when I tried to dig down to hell. Then I wanted to find the bones of a unicorn. Eventually, I became a bit more realistic. I searched for old coins and buried treasure. You see, I liked to play in mud. I used to take my tools from the kitchen, one knife, one bowl and a saucepan of water. I would put on my mother's apron and go out into the garden. First I collected dandelion leaves and shredded them with a knife. They would be the cabbage – I hated cabbage. Next, I collected stones. I washed, scrubbed and scraped them. They were my potatoes – they wouldn't mash properly. Then I scooped dirt into the bowl, rubbing it between my fingers until it became fine breadcrumbs. Then, with the knife, I made a well, and poured the water in, stirring it until it became sticky. I made big fat dumplings of mud and placed them on dock leaves. I loved getting in a mess. I was always in trouble. And when I said my prayers at night it was always...
(Cameron and Waterfield, 1992).

At this point, Carran slammed the secateurs on the top of the step-ladder, holding them closed and upright like an erect phallus or two hands joined in prayer. She would slowly make her way down the step-ladder and say the

following text in a sing-song, chant like, childish voice, in a more strident pitch that contrasted with her previous, measured vocal delivery.

“Forgive me God for I have sinned; I have covered my face in mud, I have covered my arms in mud, I have covered my dress in mud, I’m a dirty girl. Please forgive me. Hail Mary full of Grace, blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus (Ibid).

Thus, after the initial, stylized opening image, the audience was introduced through a monologue to Mary, the main protagonist played by Carran. The performance began in earnest then in the realm of text-based theatre, establishing a sense of familiarity and calm linearity through the initial scene’s stilted realism. However, the linearity of the monologue was offset somewhat by the abjection lurking just beneath the surface of Mary’s description of her childhood. Mary is an archaeologist, and the performance will be a psychic excavation as she digs down to ‘hell’ and confronts us with the horrors of life in/as abjection.

The play began with Mary tending her garden – a liminal space, outside the confines of the house, with its connotations of family life and domestic order. It was revealed that Mary – like Magdalene and the Virgin (biblical allusions reinforced by the Catholic imagery that recurred throughout the piece) – isn’t married, immediately hinting at the unthinkable realm of Butler’s abject femininity, which is ejected from the symbolic through the regulated, performative iterability of socially entrenched heteronormativity.

Mary’s references to playing in the mud concurrently evoke childhood games and hint at the implicit abjection of her femininity – she enacts normative gender roles, but in an abject, admonished space that causes her to be chastised and punished by the Father and by God. Her obsessive invocation of Mary at the end is unsettling; the adult woman is infantilized and, as audience, we now witness an attempted ritual purification of sin through prayer, an effort to wash away the filth of abjection, which contrasts sharply with the sublimation of the abject feminine in the opening image of the quasi-divinized, phallic horse-woman.

As spectator, I remember being utterly seduced by Mary's initial coyness, and by the carefully measured delivery of her opening monologue. I was able to locate myself in the imaginary space-time of the garden – a familiar realm from my own childhood, a hidden place of games and daydreams. Like Mary, I would often enact my own abject games at the bottom of the garden, inspired by myths and legends. Her wailing prayers also resonated with my own Catholic upbringing, and the ever-looming shadow of sin.

Thus, despite its fragmentary nature, I was able at thirteen to navigate through the unfolding phenomenological performance field articulated by Carran. The fictive world she was invoking resonated with traces of my own embodied experience as a young child growing up in suburban England, although I remember at this point my stomach beginning to knot, as Mary's distressed wail filled the space, transforming an idyllic moment of reflection into the nightmare of the traumatized child.

I now move forward to the middle of the performance. A comic scene of a stropky, teenage Mary singing a rebellious rock song in her bedroom has come to an abrupt halt, as she is told off by her absent, all-seeing Father. She is sent to prepare his tea for him. She now wears a pair of rollers around her head – stereotypical domestic implements of female beautification that have been strung together like Christ's crown of thorns. She is a sacrificial victim.

Jarring music plays. She crouches down by a tray of kitchen implements, set atop a basin centre stage. She places a pair of rubber gloves on her hands, methodically and clinically, as if preparing for surgery. She grabs a can opener, holds it above her head and plunges it violently into a can. The music cuts out. Mary doggedly opens the can of tomatoes. She cracks an egg and slowly separates the yolk as the albumen drips into a glass bowl. She crunches one half of the shell in her hand. She strains the tomatoes, the bloody juice oozing into the egg yolk. She prods the tinned tomatoes with a knife, squeezing the pulp with her fingers. She chops up the remaining egg shell with a pair of scissors. She sprinkles it all with flour, and rings her maid's bell. Dinner is served.

This scene serves to abjectify regulatory ideals of the 'obedient daughter' and the 'good housewife', gender norms that have been wrongfully fused together and imposed on Mary through the abuse inflicted on her by her father. The violent penetration of the can and obliteration of the egg invoke Mary's brutal molestation at her father's hands, whilst the oozing mess of egg yolk and tinned tomatoes metaphorically invokes the abject interior of Mary's traumatized body. The ritualistic nature of the scene invokes both the world of childhood games and the obsessive compulsive behavior of the neurotic. The surgical precision with which Mary prepares 'tea', and the carefully placed rubber gloves anticipate the disclosure of Mary's enforced abortion, which will be revealed towards the end of the piece.

Thus, through the power of theatrical condensation and displacement, the very props themselves become metaphoric and metonymic extensions of Mary's abuse and, on a wider level, of the violation of the feminine body by the Laws and regulations of an absent, yet all-pervading phallogocentric Father. The space/time of the performance field is articulated by the eternal mortification of the traumatic event, which subsumes the audience in Mary's impinging psychosis. The abject begins to rupture the symbolic; subject and object fuse on stage as a pre-nominal and pre-objectal (il)logic begins to hold sway and fictive 'reality' gives way to a scenically articulated 'hallucination'. The audience is immersed in this carefully crafted breakdown of linear logic, as the inanimate props on stage are infused with the horror of rape and molestation.

This scene had an enormous, visceral impact on me. The switch in tone from the previous comic scene to this ritualized reenactment and invocation of abuse caught me off guard, and I remember feeling extremely uncomfortable, but also mesmerized. Carran's props took on a life of their own as the messy ritual proceeded; they seemed to grow in size, to fill the space, to mutely testify to the unutterable. I felt engulfed in the performance at this point, and almost suffocated by the implied violation of the teenage girl. I was following Mary into the deep abyss of the foreclosed.

I now move forward to the final scene of the performance. After a text-driven scene in which a teenage Mary recalls the day her father made her go for a backstreet abortion, the actress ties her hair backwards and, as an adult archaeologist, switches to a cool description of the remains of child victims of ritual sacrifice recovered from peat bogs.

The body lies deposited in a sitting position, with its legs bent up and crossed. A rope around the neck has been used for strangulation. When they killed their babies they broke their necks. Then they burnt them (Cameron and Waterfield, 1992).

She slowly picks up a long wooden rod leaning against the wall backstage right, and begins to walk forwards slowly, as if in a trance-like state, as a projected multi-track recording of a ritual South African song linked to male circumcision and rites of passage (Awe Soma Gwasa) plays in the background. The soundtrack gets louder. Mary raises the stick and slams it on the floor. She draws out a circular mandala around two bowls, one of which is filled with earth, the other with water. She crouches over the bowl of earth, and begins to pull out small bones, which she washes in the water and lays out on the floor, like runes. She begins to sing along with the chant-like song, quietly at first and then building in volume and intensity.

She rises upwards, standing with her legs bent and spread apart, in a standing birthing position. She raises both arms upwards. She is holding a knife in her left hand. Her face is ecstatic. She sings, joyously and powerfully, and draws the knife down along her arms and across her neck. Her voice is loud now, and deep. She screams the words and brings the knife down into the pan of earth. The music cuts out. She continues to scrape in the earth, singing softly like a child. She pours the water into the earth, and mixes it together, making a mud pie.

Incidental music that sounds faintly like water going down a pipe plays. Mary picks up two clumps of mud and wipes it over face, her dress and her bare arms. She takes another clump of mud, and forms it into a round lump, which she holds out in her left hand. She slowly walks in a semi-circle backstage, round the step-ladder, out to the front. She looks straight ahead, outwards, and says in a deep, forceful voice,

Father, I remember now. I remember everything. I remember the darkness, I remember the kitchen table where it happened. I remember the smell of burning. "Herod the king/ in his raging/ all children young to slay". Father, you burnt my baby (Cameron and Waterfield, 1992).

Thus, the foreclosed abject content is reintegrated into the psyche and the deject sublimated. By taking up her staff and singing *Awe Soma Gwasa* (a song in deep Zulu which means "When a boy is old enough to take up his staff, he may leave the mother's house), Mary subverts a traditional male rites of passage from another culture, and becomes a scenic representative of the abject phallic feminine, the woman who accepts her dejection, embraces her abject past and confronts the spectre of patriarchal abuse and oppression head on.

There is a moment, when the knife is drawn across the body, when a certain uncertainty reigns, and we are not sure whether this is a scenic representation of ritual scarification or suicide. But by covering herself in mud, as she did in the garden when she was a little girl, Mary takes back the abjected aspects of herself excluded by abuse. She excavates the site of her trauma – the lost child; both Mary as victim of abuse and her aborted baby – and rearticulates herself from the fragmentation of foreclosure. She literally molds herself anew, bathing in abjection, transfiguring trauma, resignifying herself beyond the confines of the phallogocentric symbolic. She confronts her Father, adopts the deep resonant tones of an adult woman, and buries her subservience in the past.

This scene has remained with me all my days. It moved me on so many levels; the ancestral, disembodied voices, imbuing Mary with the strength to rebuild herself, the potency of the water and the earth, transformed from inert material into living symbols of femininity and rebirth. If in the previous scene, the props were infused with the symptomatic abjection of foreclosed abuse, the natural elements here are charged with the sublimation of abject femininity, and drenched in its restorative and curative potential.

The scene is a fictive depiction of the reintegration of the psyche; however, by immersing us in the sensorial, by rearticulating scenic space/time through the non-linearity of textual fragmentation, the drive-laden corporeality of Carran's

body and the potent, non-sensical semiotic of both her singing and the soundtrack, Triangle Theatre managed in *The Dig* to immerse the spectator in the abject, to allow him/her to experience this unintelligible, animal, pre-objectal realm of sensuous tacit trans-linguistic perception. Thus we experienced a different being-in-the-world in the context of that performance field; a different way of articulating femininity and subjectivity was offered up, and I still bare the traces of that experience today. When Mary passed that knife over her body, it dug into my soul, and I have longed to recapture that *jouissance* ever since. I was reborn after watching that performance. It was the beginning of my initiation into the theatre, a process that would continue in 1994, when I first watched Odin Teatret's production of *Kaosmos*.

ODIN TEATRET - KAOSMOS (1994)

I am 15. I am watching Odin Teatret's performance *Kaosmos* at the Belgrade Theatre, the municipal theatre of Coventry. Odin have come over as a part of the Arts Alive Festival, an international theatre festival organized by the Belgrade in collaboration with Triangle Theatre, the Coventry Theatre Network and the Arts Council. I have worked with members of the company for about a week now, taking part in a workshop administered by company member Isabel Úbeda. I have read extensively about the company in books before this moment. They are my idols, and I am sitting alongside my friends, who are also budding young actors and are also enamored of the charismatic Danish company.

The performance unfolds slowly. Julia Varley enters as Doña Musica, weaving through the space, making butterflies appear out of thin air. Torgeir Wethal enters speaking in Danish alongside young actress Tina Nielson. Then the music begins, a slow accordion piece plays as the actors leisurely enter the space and present themselves one by one. "The ritual of the door has begun".

The performance picks up pace. The music washes over me, drenching me in sonorous landscapes sang in several languages I cannot understand. My teacher, Isabel Úbeda is on stage, beautiful, distant. The actors seem possessed of an incandescent energy; their bodies dilate and fill up the space. The developing narrative makes non-sense – there is an (il)logic to the fragmented vignettes of

expressive movement, evocative textual delivery and constant musical accompaniment that touches me on a deep, visceral level. I am entranced.

Whilst I am overflowing with emotion, bowled over by the beauty of the production, moved to tears by the choral singing and the integrity of the actors' performances as a whole, I look across the stage and notice that Torgeir is luminescent. He is doing very little on stage. He is outside the main flow of action, deep in his own internal process, following the minute impulses of his own inner score. The stage is replete in song and incantation and expressive physical movements. He is pianissimo, and shining somehow.

The performance reaches a final crescendo – the actors change out of their folkloric costumes and put on contemporary garb. They crush a field of corn beneath their feet, stamping over The Door of the Law, the only set piece that has been transformed into a plethora of different images throughout the piece. The performance ends in silence, as Roberta Carreri looks back knowingly at the audience, and, head bowed, walks away. I look across the rectangular strip of performance space at the other row of audience members facing me, like a mirror image. A beautiful young Japanese girl is in tears.

My friends turn to me in excitement and begin talking incessantly. I am silent. I cannot speak. I find a quiet spot in the theatre, and for half an hour try and process what I have just seen. I cannot quite comprehend this experience, or the overwhelming emotions whirring throughout my body. I feel vertiginous.

Odin Teatret was founded in Oslo, Norway in 1964 and moved to Holstebro, Denmark, in 1966, changing its name to Nordic Theatre Laboratory/Odin Teatret. Its members come from a dozen countries and three continents. Under the direction of Eugenio Barba, the company has made a major impact on world theatre, creating acclaimed theatre performances, developing a systematic process of 'barbers' with people from an array of different socio-cultural contexts and backgrounds, exploring the pre-expressive level of performance under the auspices of ISTA (the International School of Theatre Anthropology), creating periodic performances with the multicultural Theatrum Mundi Ensemble; collaborating with the CTLS, Centre for Theatre Laboratory Studies of the

University of Århus; the Festuge (Festive Week) in Holstebro; and helping to organize the triennial festival Transit devoted to women in theatre, amongst other activities.

Kaosmos was devised and created by Odin Teatret in 1993, and toured extensively throughout Europe, North America and Latin America until 1996. It was based in part on a paper written by Hungarian scholar Ferenc Gombai, entitled “The Theatre of the Mountains and the Ritual of the Door”. The paper focused on the folkloric theatre of Transylvania, and a traditional performance reenacted every Easter, entitled “The Ritual of the Door” by academics, but known as only “The Action”, or “The Act” by locals.

The folkloric performance focused on the trials and tribulations of a man (or woman) who wants to enter the Realm of Plenty, or Salvation, and who is told to simply wait at The Door. The man waits a lifetime to be admitted, representing the richness and the waste of existence. Sometimes, The Act was fused with other stories and other characters, such as the mother-who-lost-her-child-stolen-by-death and the man-who-does-not-want-to-die. The ritual apparently influenced Kafka’s literature, especially *The Trial*. Gombai mentions the increasing decadence of the performance, which died out in the first half of the twentieth century (GOMBAL in BARBA, 1993, p.16).

For all its apparent obtuseness, *Kaosmos* was actually an extremely faithful recreation of the Ritual of the Door, as described by Gombai. Barba ostensibly reimagined “The Act” as an allegory of the Yugoslavian war and the collapse of popular culture in Europe, and fleshed out Gombai’s descriptive account by drawing on the poem ‘The Seventh’ by Hungarian poet Attila József, Kafka’s short story *Before the Law*, and texts by Hans Christian Anderson. The actors all performed in their own language, and sang an evocative choral score composed by resident musician Franz Winther based on traditional folkloric melodies.

I would like to focus on the image of “The Door” as trope now, as liminal threshold, as the interstice both separating and indelibly fusing inside/out, in order to rethink Barba’s tripartite notion of dramaturgy from a

phenomenological perspective, exploring its link to Merleau-Ponty's notion of the chiasmic interrelation between the visible and the invisible.

THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE

According to Merleau-Ponty (1964), the visible and the invisible are indelibly intertwined in a chiasmic relationship forged by the perceptual interrelation between subject and object, perceiver and perceived, the sensitive and the sensible. He goes so far as to suggest that perception is an "ontogenesis", in which the body unites the subject and the thing, wielding one to the other, unfolding phenomenological reality (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1968, p.136).

He suggests that the differentiation and modulation between the seer and the seen is a latent '*flesh* of things', the '*flesh* of the visible' the dynamic, ever evolving interstice between the phenomenological perception of the subject, and the sensitive mass of the given world.

When we speak of the flesh of the visible, we do not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask. Rather, we mean that carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible (...) What we call a visible is, we said, a quality pregnant with a texture (...) a grain or corpuscule borne by a wave of Being. Since the total visible is always behind, or after, or between the aspects we see of it, there is access to it only through an experience which, like it, is wholly outside of itself (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1968, p.136).

Thus, behind, or after or between the '*flesh*' of the total visible, is an ambiguous aspect of things that cannot be so clearly perceived – the invisible. The invisible is that which transcends the limits of phenomenological perception – the always already '*more than*' of the real. Merleau-Ponty speaks of the invisible "idea" and its relation to the ephemeral *jouissance* of art and music,

With the first vision, the first contact, the first pleasure, there is initiation, that is, not the positing of a content, but the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed, the establishment of a level in terms of which every other experience will henceforth be situated. The idea is this level, this dimension. It is therefore not a de facto invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, which would have nothing to do with the visible. Rather, it is the invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being. At the moment one says "light", at the moment the musicians reach the "little phrase", there is no lacuna in me; what I live is as "substantial", as "explicit", as a positive thought could be (...) We do not possess the musical or sensible ideas, precisely because they are negativity or absence circumscribed; they possess us. (MERLEAU-PONTY, 1968, p.151)

Thus the 'invisible of this world', that which is not perceived in the outside world but inhabits it and is a sensible phenomenon perceptible on the subject's interior horizon of experiences, is as tangible as things and other people. Reveries, passions, rhythm and musicality possess us and leave substantial traces.

I would suggest that, like The Door in *Kaosmos*, the performance field articulated by Barba's unique triadic approach to dramaturgy creates a liminal space, a threshold characterized by a relentless tension, a constant coming and going, between the visible and the invisible.

The marked difference between

- a) the implied semiosis of the actor's scores within the context of the narrative dramaturgy;
- b) the actual psycho-physical motivation driving their organic dramaturgy, and;
- c) the spectator's evocative dramaturgy, their reception of this embodied dialect

sets up layers of invisibility, aporias, which underscore the ambiguous flesh of the visible performance field, immersing the audience in a very different

phenomenological space/time that offers a radically alternative experience of being-in-the-world.

The tenets of phallogocentrism are overturned by this play of alienation, by this sense of a tangible, *organic* invisible order of embodied meaning always already undercutting and subverting the overt semiosis of the scenic action. As the audience becomes more aware of this other scene taking place concurrently in space/time, this hidden, invisible inner world of impulses and intentions, intersubjective corporeity destabilizes the preeminence of the linguistic and the sensible takes precedent over linear logic and meaning.

The actors of Odin Teatret physically embody the difference always already underpinning signification, and, as linear narrative logic breaks down irrevocably over the course of the performance, the spectator is obliged to turn to primary perception, to trust his/her kinesthetic responses, to revert to the (non)-sensical, to the sensorial, to the embodied level of experience underpinning the linguistic. Audience members are invited to integrate these other aspects of their being once again, even if only on a temporary basis for the ephemeral duration of the performance. Thus theatre becomes an empty ritual, a potential rites of passage to a different, embodied state of awareness.

Let us now turn to the performance field of Kaosmos for concrete examples of this play of visibility and invisibility, which I shall then relate back to the embodied trace of my own phenomenological experience of the production as spectator.

This scene takes place roughly fifteen minutes into the performance, and explores the moment that the Mother's child is stolen away by death. The Man from the Country (Iben Nagel Rasmusen), dressed in a striped white dress and a sun hat, sits on a small stool in the centre of the space and reads from a bound book that looks like the bible. To her left, Doña Musica (Julia Varley) lies on The Door, which has been placed flat on the ground in a previous scene.

The Man from the Country reads a text in Danish – the story of the mother-who-lost-her-child-stolen-by-death.

A MOTHER SAT BY THE BEDSIDE OF HER LITTLE CHILD, IN GREAT GRIEF BECAUSE SHE WAS AFRAID IT WAS GOING TO DIE. THERE WAS A KNOCK AT THE DOOR AND IN CAME A POOR OLD MAN.

She comes to a natural pause in the text. The Mother (Roberta Carreri) enters the performance space blowing softly between her hands. The Doorkeeper (Jan Ferslev) begins to play a gentle melody on a small ukulele, which is covered in a small white nightdress and a mask, and looks like a small child. He becomes the poor old man from the text. He positions himself just in front of The Man from the Country, and sits on one of the benches placed at both ends of the rectangular performance space, straddled on both sides by rows of spectators.

The Man from the Country continues to 'read' his text,

IT WAS THE MIDDLE OF WINTER AND THERE WAS A BITING WIND. AS THE OLD MAN WAS TREMBLING WITH COLD AND THE CHILD HAD GONE OFF TO SLEEP, THE MOTHER WENT AND PUT A SMALL MUG OF BEER ON THE STOVE TO WARM IT UP FOR HIM. THE OLD MAN SAT GENTLY ROCKING THE CHILD, AND THE MOTHER LOOKED AT HER SICK CHILD.

The Mother carries out a complex physical score, cutting across and filling the space with her dynamic actions, and Doña Musica (Julia Varley) makes a high-pitched rhythmic whine. The Mother begins to speak in Italian in the first person singular,

"YOU DON'T THINK I'LL LOSE HIM DO YOU?"

The Mother holds her dress up to her eyes and then flicks it down with a sudden vigorous gesture, a look of fear on her face. There is silence. The Doorkeeper is now knelt near The Door. He taps rhythmically on his banjo and confirms that she will, laughing. The pause ends and all the actors return to the previous sonorous montage (The Man from the Country's Danish text, Doña Musica's whine and the gentle banjo music). The Man from the Country says:

AND THE OLD MAN, WHO WAS DEATH HIMSELF, NODDED STRANGELY. THE MOTHER LOOKED DOWN INTO HER LAP AND TEARS RAN DOWN HER CHEEKS. HER HEAD BECAME SO HEAVY THAT SHE FELL ASLEEP.

The sonorous montage pauses abruptly once more. The Doorkeeper taps on his banjo rhythmically as The Mother walks forwards slowly, tapping her right heel like a flamenco dancer and scraping her left foot along the floor, one arm raised, as if in trepidation. The Doorkeeper falls onto the floor and places his head in the lap of his Twin Sister (Isabel Úbeda), who is sitting on the floor, and who takes his hat and places it on his undertaker's shovel, which she holds in her right hand.

The Man from the Country says 'his' text once more, as The Mother walks slowly backwards.

SHE SHOOK WITH COLD. THE OLD MAN WAS GONE

The Mother looks around.

AND HER LITTLE CHILD WAS GONE, HE HAD TAKEN IT WITH HIM.
THE POOR MOTHER RUSHED OUT OF THE HOUSE CALLING FOR HER
CHILD.

She then breaks out into a vigorous sequence of actions that we first saw at the beginning of the performance, running across the space and leaping up and down several times, slamming her feet into the floor whilst shouting out frantically in Italian. The Man from the Country shushes her, pointing towards Doña Musica, who begins to rise from her prone position on The Door, whining once more. The Man reads again,

THERE, OUT IN THE SNOW, SAT A WOMAN IN LONG, BLACK
CLOTHES, WHO SAID "DEATH HAS BEEN IN YOUR ROOM, I SAW HIM
HURRY AWAY WITH YOUR LITTLE CHILD.

Doña Musica echoes the above text in English. All three actresses (Iben, Roberta and Julia) say/sing the following text quickly, creating a sudden dissonant break in the vocal delivery of the narrative:

"JUST TELL ME WHICH WAY HE WENT"

The Mother runs forwards towards the door, standing next to The Man. The Man speaks:

SAID THE MOTHER. "BEFORE I TELL YOU, YOU MUST SING ME ALL THE SONGS YOU HAVE SUNG TO YOUR CHILD. I AM NIGHT AND I SAW YOUR TEARS AS YOU SUNG THEM

Doña Musica repeats the above text in English. The Mother drops down and lays her head in Doña Musica's lap, singing snippets of songs from the performance. She sits back up. Doña Musica says in English,

"GO TO THE RIGHT, INTO THE DARK FOREST, THERE I SAW DEATH RUN WITH YOUR LITTLE CHILD".

The man from the country repeats the text in Danish,

THE WOMAN IN THE LONG BLACK CLOTHES SAID: "GO TO THE RIGHT, INTO THE DARK FOREST, THERE I SAW DEATH RUN WITH YOUR LITTLE CHILD".

Thus a polyphonic, at times dissonant sonorous and rhythmic scene is created through the layered montage of physical and vocal actions, spoken text and song, the word, the body and the voice interwoven and bound together. Disparate organic dramaturgies intertwine in a complex narration of the Mother's story, which is tied here to the story of the Man from the Country, who reads to while away the tedium of waiting for Paradise.

The flesh of the performance field is dense with the pre-expressive training informing the actors' corporeity. Theatrical space/time here unfolds following the logic of negation, opposition, disequilibrium, changing states of energy, direction and rhythm. The spectator is immersed in this decidedly different habitat, and becomes an extension of this Other organism, losing him/herself in the sensorial labyrinth of the performance.

The actor's physical actions and vocal intonation do not quite map onto the fragmented linear narrative being retold. There is a strange, alien quality to this fairytale scene, a brooding, pulsating libidinal charge that bubbles under the surface, threatening to cancel out the semantic level of the text, which is already severely hampered by the multilingual textual delivery. Danish in particular, a marginalized language from the very edge of Northern Europe, must have been particularly impenetrable to many spectators.

Thus, the deep complexities underpinning the simple narrative of the fairytale are emphasized and exposed by the internal contradictions articulating the performance field. There is an inherent ambiguity to this scene and to *Kaosmos* as a whole; the only thread that the audience has to follow is their own immediate kinesthetic response to the invisible organic dramaturgy of the actors. Whilst visible images from two of the main stories come and go, it is the invisible, drive-laden richness of the multi-layered scenic text that is privileged at all times.

Thus, primary perception takes over from semiosis; every body in the space is invited to connect to a tacit, embodied (il)logic, as actors and spectators alike are sensuously enveloped by the unfolding flesh of the performance field. Corporeity reigns, as a secret dance of intentions weaves the semantic chaos that is *Kaosmos*.

I never “understood” this performance – I still don’t. It remains and will always remain a mystery, an aporia, a beautiful, seductive black hole pulling me in, chewing me up and spitting me out. I do not want to “understand” it, to pretend to know it, to tame the unknowable, the unutterable that it awakened within me. But the *jouissance* it offered me, the overwhelming sense of communion, rocks me still, all these years later. That is what I carry with me – that is the invisible yet tangible experience that speaks me today.