

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE CONCERNING THE SYMPOSIUM “WHY A THEATRE LABORATORY?”

By Eugenio Barba

The aim of the symposium “Why a theatre laboratory?” is to raise a number of questions. The symposium is not a review of the most important historical and contemporary examples, nor does it propose a phenomenology or praise that specific theatre genre. Do theatres which defined themselves or which we consider as ‘laboratories’ share something in common? Or is it just a matter of a recurring name.

Is it possible, by comparing the practice of such different theatres, to sketch the profile of a shared idea, a destiny, a social position, an attitude towards the craft and the art of theatre? Or are we, on the basis of our personal experience, merely projecting a non-existent category on the past and the present?

We have chosen a few examples from Europe. They are very different both from the point of view of the historical period in which they were active as well as of the culture in which they were rooted. We have cast a stone - the same question - in each of these small ponds: “Why can we call that particular theatre a theatre laboratory?” But we are not totally sure that this is the right question to ask. And if not, why not?

There are pertinent questions, inappropriate questions and also paradoxical questions. We have rejected the apparently safe path: the path which might have attempted to give a theoretical definition of the qualification ‘laboratory’, and later verify its possible application to any of the examples provided by European theatre in the 20th century.

By following the path of paradoxical questions, we run the risk of searching for what is uncertain by means of the uncertain. But the straight path which claims to start from the certain, often leads sure-footedly to the vast icy sea of tautology.
