

**Actress, teacher, author**

By Maria Frangi, PhD

**Roberta Carreri**, actress and acting teacher, is one of the main partners of the Odin Teatret and was the last trainee to have been taught by Eugenio Barba himself.

Personal research on practice constitutes an important part for the development of the work of every artist. When this is combined with recording this practice in written form- a book, an article or a work diary, then the whole work is bestowed with another way of understanding and in-depth analysis alongside with experience. Roberta Carreri writes nonstop while practicing. She writes a lot and through personal experience. She tells us so herself and we see that every time we meet her in the workshops, the work demonstration and finally in her recent book in Greek [[1]](#footnote-1), where she connects practice with theory. Even here her connection with her notes and diaries -which she mentions or quotes- is evident. For example, Jeronimo’s dance semiography in Chapter 23 of her book. We feel that she decided to write about the art of acting, starting from a fundamental intention traced back to her personal quests, inclinations, tendencies and origins, thus illustrating the conjugation of the personality that developed alongside the artistic flourishing and the professional maturity through the course of her career from 1974 to this day. The scientist or artist who will study and delve in the content of her book discovers a panorama of theatrical life over the last 50 years filled with experiences, information, dates and technique. It is not an autobiographical text but a biography testimony that places the artist in **time and space**. The reasons for this choice are scientific, artistic as well as personal.

Roberta Carreri connects the making of her artistic career and choice of life with the Odin Theatre right from the beginning. In such a decision it is vital to note the era-as it is recorded in the narration- of exchanges through the intense mobility not only of the theatrical groups like Odin but also of other **experimental or research** groups like the one of anthropologist Mette Bovin (Chapter 10). More precisely, Odin’s direct connection with Italy and visits there (Chapter 3) are self- evident due to the fact that it is Eugenio Barba’s place of origin. E. Barba is the most important living instructor and director of actors-creators.

The great activist trends of performance as provocation, challenge, subversion, demonstration etc. appeared during his artistic formation.The 1960’s brought a new view and a totally new aspect in the western show and performance culture.

Sixty years later, social changes in conjunction with financial and technological development have brought a new perception in matters of education, teaching and pedagogical approach, especially in performance studies and art. We could say that to this day, after many versions of teaching, training and producing performances, Odin’s Teatret and Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium spirit remains present and relevant. This is evident through live and online interactions, reminding us every time how this kind of theatre was born and how it endures in time as it is a very well supported and thought out artistic proposal that involves its members in the whole process, from the starting idea, the work process, the performances and even their promotion.

*About the book “On training and performance. Traces of an Odin Teatret actress”*

The book has a clear structure, in three parts and one appendix. The first part constitutes the main body of the content, with the personal and professional life of the actress. The second part includes the detailed description of her workshop. It consists of the content she created and is based on the principles of her personal technique, which she calls “Dance of intentions”[[2]](#footnote-2). The third part contains two texts by important theorists fully relevant to the previous material. Namely, a memo by Francesca Romana Rietti, Professor of Philosophy, Communication and Performance, and the conclusion by Nando Taviani, eminent Professor of Theatre Studies, and close partner of the Odin Theatre, until his death, in November 2020. The presence of these texts contributes to an “enriched reading”, from the personal and scientific perspective of each one it supports in a special way the overall proposal Roberta Carreri attempts by writing.

The last part, as an appendix, includes everything that could be of interest from other sources. We have collected Greek publications concerning Odin Teatret and Eugenio Barba, recorded presentations and interviews, Roberta Carreri’s performances that are available on the internet free, and finally, all the visits of Odin theatre in Greece, with workshops, performances and other artistic activities (1983-2021). The choice to develop this appendix in the current publication took place for research reasons but at the same time for introducing the reader to the perception of Odin’s aesthetics and working style in our country, since the 1980s. Due to social, artistic and basically financial reasons, we would say that the given practice did not flourish in the modern Greek theatre. Let’s not forget that the enthusiasm of the theatre groups that were influenced by one book entitled *Floating Islands* (published in Greece for the first time in 1982 , translated by Kostas Vantzos) and the workshop of young actors practicing the principles of physicality, mainly based on the work of Grotovski and Barba, was bound to expire under conditions of financial dysfunctionality in terms of materializing the research and production. The theatrical practices of that time in Greece were and remain far from those that we can find in Denmark, the country which embraced this genre more than any other in 1966 continuing its to support it to date. The spirit of the actor’s workshop constitutes a necessity ever since it was established with K.Stanislavski, V. Meyerhold, M.Chechov, Y.Grotovski and others.The constant preoccupation with training, peer teaching, self teaching and self training, the way the practical and theoretical work is shaped, the co-operation with the director are characteristics that have not found ground for development apart from a few cases, which are not enough to shape a new perspective in the landscape of the modern Greek stage. We also add the research obstruction factor, in terms of financing in our country. In Greece, even in fields where research in arts could be developed, like in education, there are great difficulties. Furthermore, a long term funding whether by own resources (tuition fees) or other (private funding, sponsors), is not feasible, especially in the current circumstances economic crisis. The hope for substantial research engagement lies in the field of university education, where it is possible to cultivate ***the spirit of workshop*** in the sense that E. Barba clearly established from 1964 to this day.

*Aesthetics and education in the art of acting.*

As E. Barba, has mentioned many times, he was trained in a long workshop, together with young actors from Norway[[3]](#footnote-3). He trained them at the same time and matured artistically, choosing the role of the orchestrator of a material through productive teaching and directing. Roberta Carreri constitutes the most representative example of shaping of an inventive and witty “physical actor”. Barba, giving emphasis on the constant training, personal or in group, places the **Actor** in the centre of his creation. In order to achieve the kind of theatre he intends to, he needs the creative actor, as he is the one who is going to perform on stage the most sensitive transcription, aiming at the ultimate recipient, the spectator. The actor, in this kind of direction-dramaturgy resembles calligraphy ink which writes the performance: if it is too thick, it will lead to bulky writing, if it is too thin it will soon dissolve. The material has a tendency towards treason, while the idea can remain stable[[4]](#footnote-4).

The journey recorded through Roberta Carreri's footsteps, reveals how crucial this material is, which she herself tried to become, creating “herself” within the framework of Odin Theatre. The aesthetic choice of E. Barba is synonymous with the **actor's training in invention and creativity**. From there, he is finding everything: themes, solutions, proposals, and versions. These are communicating vessels that are constantly open and interact with each other. Physical actions do not remain at the primary level of form. The presence of pure intention is clear from the beginning. This is a way that connects essentially the actor-creator with everything he is doing from the first steps so that no energy, movement, breath, text, or object is foreign to them. They are the determined artist.

The path developed in R. Carreri's book could also be called 'the vital decision of the artist.' Only such dedication, without distractions, can create interpretations in which we see her, without the slightest compromise, during all her professional life. The roles created by the performers at Odin Theatre resemble repertoire roles in Opera or Ballet; they belong to each artist's “arsenal” and can be replayed at any moment. The difference is that, in Eugenio Barba's dramaturgical processing technique, roles, as material, can contribute by participating in other activities or even in another performance. Thus, we have heroes who survive and return intact, like *Jeronimo*, or who offer themselves to contribute to another work or presentation, e.g., the Barter. The creation of the score (partiture) as material by the actor is the core of the working method established by Odin. R. Carreri's revealing relationship with the partitura, her unique design in everything she does, is the central axis of her work. R. Carreri invents, creates, and teaches, constantly demonstrating her own personal 'writing.' Her anxiety and the need to record it in written form are evident in her text. For the theater, her book serves as an educational testament about the actor who should never function and perform as an obedient tool of direction.

In her lessons, as well as in this book, Roberta Carreri passes with clarity from the physiology of the body to a body that is simultaneously natural and theatrical-artificial. Just as in sculpture, the statue is not natural but its representation, the body on stage must do effortlessly the transition from 'being' to 'being + something else.'

The thirst for retraining in a “body that thinks” leads her to Asian teachers. Apprenticeship is continuous to overcome the limits, which shift and expand each time. Youthful vigor recedes, and injuries hinder old performances. Motherhood redefines womanhood, and technology brings new stage possibilities, as in the last performance she did for her partner, Torgeir Wethal[[5]](#footnote-5). Experienced Carreri constantly redefines herself, always maintaining an innocent, new approach, as theater creates the live moment in the 'now' and not its memory.

When actors at Odin Teatret study closely with the authentic bearers of great traditions, they aim not for a descriptive, ethnographic approach but for the final, autonomous, and minimalist expressive material. The fragmentation of the material from the form to the sound – to borrow linguistic terms – can lead to the minimal unit of pan-human behavior, from which the alphabet of Theatre Anthropology and stage art emerges. The author describes this entire journey in the 27 chapters of the first part of the book, except for those that contain other, more general, or more personal information. In 'The Dance of Intentions' (Chapter 29), the teaching of movement dynamics and expressive means is more detailed. Like all artisans in the Eastern tradition, each member of Odin is also an educator of the younger generation, without ceasing their own practice and development. Therefore, the theater workshop, in this form, as observed by the university professor Tatiana Chemi, contributes to education through traditional methods, artistic creation, and aesthetic cultivation, while shaping motivations for each individual's acquisition of knowledge and skills that ultimately transform their entire personality and life.[[6]](#footnote-6)

*For a Sustainable and Innovative Pedagogy*

The principles of pedagogy in the art of Roberta Carreri are shaped through an empirical journey that always precedes theory at the Odin Theatre. Experience, both recent and very distant, derived from the great schools of art, is absorbed and transmitted from teacher to student. During the extended period of education and apprenticeship, knowledge becomes reciprocal and collaborative. The common activities of Odin members (travel, exchanges, ISTA meetings, Odin Week, European programs, etc.) lead to the enrichment of their personalities as they develop social skills, emotional maturity, decision-making ability, and group guidance, fostering imaginative and critical thinking.

Regarding artistic production, it is observed that the process supports a spirit of collaboration, intercultural approach, and the aesthetics of a creative multidimensional ensemble. It is the group situated in Holstebro, Denmark, but it is also another, broader group located all over the planet. It is the theatrical family created and continuously renewed by the people of Odin, maintaining the value of human creativity and individuality at a level always higher than what one experiences in the daily routine of life.

From the first edition of her book in 2007 to today, sixteen years have passed, and we are particularly pleased that, through the convergence of collaborations, goals, and most importantly, people, we can not only publish the book in the Greek language (2021), but also welcome and award in person Roberta Carreri within the framework of the 3rd International Conference of Theatre Anthropology in Greece.

Discussing the science and art of acting is quite challenging today in Greece, given the circumstances that recently led to a problematic law framework. Since the first attempt to formulate a "Grammar" of acting by Konstantin Stanislavski, the field is still open, waiting for the answer of the same questions: Can the art of acting be taught? What is the essence of the dramatic art and how is it cultivated? How does the actor function? What obstacles do you encounter when attempting to interpret a role?

Today, we find ourselves in a field of great innovations and achievements in both the theater and research. For some reason, on the stage, a person who does not practice this profession can function as an actor, just as we might see a director on stage, a costume designer, a philosopher, a technician, or a passerby.

In the realm of applied theater, there are no restrictions because in this case, the stage functions as a field of study for other subjects, which are commented upon, examined, or resolved through theater.

We could say that today we are not talking about amateurs on the stage but rather a stage that loves amateurs. On the other hand, the demands of certain types of theater, roles, or scenes are significant enough to revisit the question. How adequate is an actor in a role, such as Prometheus, to climb onto a stage resembling the Caucasus, deliver long monologues about their personal history, interact with other characters on stage, and convey the suffering through their behavior?

*Prometheus*

*Ah!Children of Tethys, who is the father of many and of father Oceanus who circles th e earth with streams that never sleep!*

*Look at me! Here I am nailed upon this high crag which I must guard. Who could envy this work?*

*Chorus I see, I see, Prometheus and as I do, the vision of my eyes blurs by a dull mist filled with tears.*

*I see, Prometheus that on this ghastly rock and inside these steel clamps your body will wither.[[7]](#footnote-7)*

The actor, in order not to exaggerated or become comic will search to discover the "principles that return," in each country, space and time, from Shakespeare to the Beijing Opera, from Euripides to Sarah Kane.

Everyone recognizes that the actor is an essential element of a live performance, the core of the drama on stage. He is the magnet that will bring the audience as close as possible to the essence of the play.

A rather problematic aspect of research into the work of an actor is that we only perceive it at the end, in its completion, in the performance. We miss the research journey, experimentation, documentation and, in general, the genetic creation of a role. A researcher attempting a scientific approach to the actor/performer now has many more reasons to do so, as in the case of the contemporary, laboratory-style production of the performance treated as a composition of actions, initiatives, images, and intentions, leaving the primacy of the text in the background. Additionally, recent scientific approaches such as psychoanalysis, semiotics, social anthropology, neuroscience, and more contribute to this.

What is particularly interesting now is the construction phase of the performance rather than its message or meaning. However, the developments that simultaneously change both the performance and its theory have been particularly rapid since the 1960s, when E. Barba's activity was born, initially alongside Grotowski, and then in international, intercultural exploration. Barba attempts the anatomy of the interpretive process regardless of origin and cultural context.

After a period of deconstruction, fragmentation, and reevaluation, Barba gradually conceived the idea of an international "university" of the performing art, the International School of Theatre Anthropology. The previously laboratory way of working in Odin Teatret, now opens to an international, polymorphic, eclectic and productive gathering.

Theatre anthropology may not have yet acquired a definitive identity because it is entirely consistent with the continuous changes in its nature, namely its anthropocentric dimension. However, it has many living cells, the actors and teachers who cultivate it. Roberta Carreri is one of the representatives of this school and these days, during the 3rd International Conference of Theatre Anthropology, we have the opportunity to listen to her, to understand her way of teaching and transmitting her experience, as well as her reflections on creating a scenic composition. In practice, this will become even clearer with the performance coordinated by Roberta Carreri at the Old Slaughterhouse (photos) and which is based on different proposals of artistic groups that meet and co-create under the general title "Dialogues and Exchanges."

Undoubtedly, the foundations of the actor's complete presence were laid during the Stanislavski era, which spread beyond Moscow very quickly and culminated chronologically with Grotowski's laboratory, as we learned through the lessons, workshops, and demonstrations of his students (R. Chieslak, R. Miretska, T. Richards, M.Biagini and others). Roberta’s work is based on those stable foundations, enriched with the Asian techniques and forms and E. Barba’s performing experience. She is a fully cultivated actress who can be at the same time teacher, theatre director and author of a rich method for the creation on stage, inspiring many upcoming generations.



Roberta Carreri awarded at the University of Patras (17/3/2023)

1. Roberta Carreri, On training and performance. Traces of an Odin Teatret actress, translated by Kostas Vantzos- Evaggelos Vantzos, edited by Maria Frangi, ed. DIAN, 2021

   https://esplo.theatrical.upatras.gr/en/roberta-carreri-on-training-and-performance-traces-of-an-odin-teatret-actress/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The workshop was presented during the 3rd Conference of Theatre Anthropology in Greece https://odinteatret.org/index.php/2023/03/17/odin-teatret-and-theatre-anthropology-patras-17-18-march [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Among them the longest living collaborators have been Torgeir Wethal (1947- 2010) and Else Marie Laukvik. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Frangi, Μ., *Odin Teatret. Theatre Anthropology today*, XOΡΟΣ (*Dance)*, Νο. 44, spring 2002, pp. 33-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Flowers for Torgeir”, Performance by R.Carreri [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Chemi, T., A Theatre Laboratory Approach to Pedagogy and Creativity - Odin Teatret and Group Learning, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Aeschylus’, “PROMETHEUS BOUND”, Translated by George Theodoridis (https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/Prometheus.php) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)