



ODIN TEATRET

**Great Cities under
the Moon**



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Dedicated to Jens Bjørneboe

A performance by Odin Teatret in the spirit of
Bertolt Brecht.

The moon glides over the burning cities below, from the
metropolises of Europe to those of Asia Minor, from
Hiroshima to Halle, from Imperial China to Alabama.
The moon's voice is mocking, amazed, indifferent.
Its compassion knows no melancholy, no solace.

Actors:

Luis Alonso
Kai Bredholt
Roberta Carreri
Jan Ferslev
Elena Floris
Donald Kitt
Tage Larsen
Carolina Pizarro
Iben Nagel Rasmussen
Julia Varley

Directed by:

Eugenio Barba

Texts: Jens Bjørneboe, Bertolt Brecht, Li Po and Ezra Pound.

Music: Hanns Eisler, Kurt Weill, Frans Winther and folk songs.

Lighting: Fausto Pro.

Odin Teatret: Luis Alonso, Søs Banke, Eugenio Barba, Kai Bredholt, Roberta Carreri, Claudio Coloberti, Simone Dragone, Jan Ferslev, Elena Floris, Lene Højmark, Nathalie Jabalé, Per Kap Bech Jensen, Donald Kitt, Søren Kjems, Tage Larsen, Else Marie Laukvik, Barbara Manighetti, Carolina Pizarro, Fausto Pro, Iben Nagel Rasmussen, Francesca Romana Rietti, Anne Savage, Pushparajah Sinnathamby, Rina Skeel, Ulrik Skeel, Peter Stenz Egestad, Nando Tavian, Julia Varley, Frans Winther.

Eugenio Barba

The Imprudence of the Theatre

Great Cities under the Moon emerged by accident in 2000 from a barter between our theatre and a group of patients from a psychiatric hospital in Bielefeld, Germany. It was our intention to play this performance only once, but instead it became part of our repertoire. It describes with serenity scenes of exile, abuse and massacre from the History of our time, accompanied by songs of poets dear to us: Bertolt Brecht, Jens Bjørneboe, Ezra Pound, Li Po.

I never believed theatre could avoid being political. For Odin Teatret this doesn't mean to speak of politics, but *to have a politics*, a vision of the world as it is, and as we would like it to be. Two worlds, and between them a great distance that I imagine like a desert where skulls and bones bloom as vestiges left behind by History.

The greater the distance between these two different worlds, the greater for each of us is the risk of degenerating into a sense of impotence. In time this is expressed in a helpless indignation which ends with the betrayal, not of our companions and ourselves, but of our youth. This happens at the very moment we say to ourselves: "They were all chimeras. We have the right to be tired."

We can ride chimeras all our life without ever winning, yet without being defeated. The stake is not to change the world, but to live in it with dignity. What decides, more than the circumstances, is whether we are able to use the appropriate tools.

The antidote for fighting the tendency to be satisfied has many names. I will use the generic one of "poetry". It is a pathetic and misused term. But I have in mind the sentences of Federico Garcia Lorca when he explained in simple words what Neruda's poetry was, or better what it was *not*. He said that Pablo Neruda lacked the two elements which nourish many false poets: hate and derision. Then he depicted Neruda as one of those artists who on stage or in a corner of a square enchant us with his talents and, wrapping him in a powerful symbol, he concluded: "When Neruda intends to strike and raises the sword, a wounded dove at once appears between his fingers."

It was October 1934 at the University of Madrid. Less than two years later Garcia Lorca himself would be a murdered dove.

Professionally I consider myself a theatre man of Polish origin. I don't recognise myself in a Polish style or school. But I learned my craft in the first years of the Sixties in this country with a communist regime in which anyone who did theatre risked conformism, cowardliness or - if not life - ostracism, exile or jail. Jerzy Grotowski, Ludwik Flaszen and all those people whom I

considered companions and teachers practised a rigorous pessimism of the intellect and a bright optimism of the will. Theatre work was part of this optimism. Wasting of energies, perfectionism, spiritualism, devotion with no apparent purpose, and even metaphysical anxiety generated performances without false illusions, materialistic and sharp. But these performances were generous towards the spectators, with a wealth of forms, excess, eroticism, sumptuousness of bodies and voices: a poor theatre.

In Poland I learned to act according to a political economy which is not based on saving and caution, but on a waste of resources in an activity which breaks down the limits of theatre as an aesthetical genre. I believe deeply in theatre as a coin for exchange and as a means for stressing one's own difference.

All the undertakings and engagements filling the calendar of our theatre seem to shout out to remind me of my advanced age and that of my companions. Perhaps such certainty in the future is imprudent. I can't help calling it "poetry".

When Garcia Lorca finished his brief presentation of Pablo Neruda, he addressed his listeners. Watch out, he said, there is a light hidden within the poets. Try to perceive it in order to feed that grain of folly which each of us carries within ourselves. And without which it is imprudent to live.

He used this very word: imprudent.■



Foto: Rina Skeel

Thomas Bredsdorff

The Open Circle

Observations on *Great Cities under the Moon*

The actors are seated in a semi-circle in front of us spectators. Their attention is directed towards their *active* colleague. To look at actors looking at other actors gives an elementary satisfaction as we see them move back and forth between their roles as spectator and actor. Brecht appreciated this kind of trick which breaks the theatrical illusion.

This has already been tried out with the classics. Ingmar Bergman used it for Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and nowadays we can see the form used at The Royal Theatre in Copenhagen in Shakespeare's *Richard III*.

This performance by Odin Teatret, where the actors are also spectators, is based on three twentieth century authors whom we can consider neo-classical: Bertolt Brecht, Ezra Pound and Jens Bjørneboe. Barba's and Odin's decision to put them together creates a particular dialogue. But a different wordless dialogue develops between the actor who is acting and the one observing. This exchange of energy enhances the relationship between performers and spectators.

Many of the texts are about being alone, being on the margins. The actors - first alone and then in chorus - sing a poem by Bjørneboe about the loneliness of being put up against a wall to be shot. With the help of Brecht, they conjure up the refugee "changing country more often than shoes", as his famous poem "To Posterity" says. This could be the title for the whole performance. I have the feeling that the actors in this performance are passing on a message to us.

The actors continue with a quote from the same poem by Brecht: "We who wanted to prepare the ground for friendliness could not be friendly ourselves". Throughout the performance the actors allude to several of History's acts of war, from the Thirty Years' War to the Hiroshima bomb and the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. War is crude and cruel. It creates loneliness and brutality. "Even anger against injustice makes the voice hoarse", says Brecht who is the main inspiration behind the performance.

But the performance tells us more than how one becomes ugly by fighting ugliness. The world which is shown is certainly brutal. But goodness also exists in this ugly and cruel world. An important character in the performance - taken from Odin Teatret's performance *Brecht's Ashes* - is Kattrin, the daughter of Mother Courage who, being mute, is among the world's loneliest people. But still she saves an entire town without a thought for her own risks. Solidarity exists as well, even if only occasionally and among the weak.



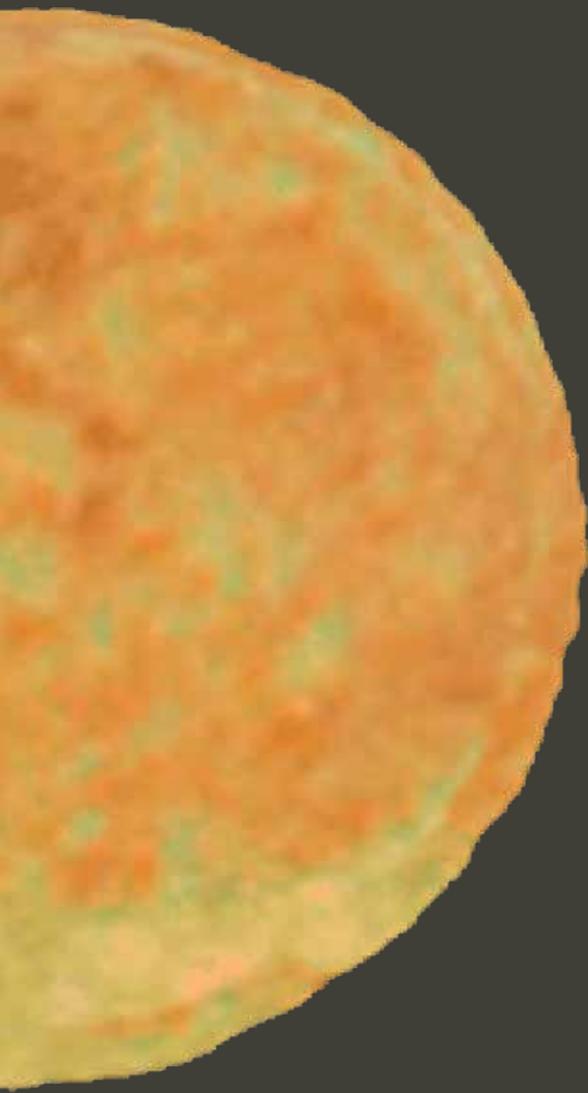
Photo Rina Skeel

Something else exists: the capacity - or at least the will - to watch and listen. When this ability unfolds, loneliness is broken. The ugliness on the face disappears.

One seldom really sees and listens. Many scenes radiate the exact opposite. The exhausted Kattrin lies on the floor on her back. Another actor crudely pushes a goldfish in a bowl between her legs. A third actor carelessly drags behind her several balls of knitting wool, without taking any notice of the ill-treated mute girl. But at times the actors act together; and at others one of the actors watches the actor lying on the floor with attention and empathy.

This is how the actors draw us spectators into the action. We too sit there, separate and alone, sometimes with wandering thoughts, engrossed in our own world, resigned to not understanding. But then it happens that we do as the actors: we follow, immerse ourselves and fully understand that life is the same as in the great cities under the moon: "All countries are an exile, the world is a country", as is said not by Brecht, Pound or Bjerneboe, but by Odin Teatret's voice.

The actors' chairs draw an arch that becomes a circle when we, the spectators, are included. Their part of the circle is open and only becomes whole when we are part of it. Then we understand together something about being the outsider, the exiled, the refugee, and about the condition of the mute in this world. ■



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