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IN THE FLOW OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS: THE DISASSEMBLY RITUAL IN THE THEATRE

ABSTRACT

This article describes and discusses a theatre ritual known as disassembly. We follow the presentations of Tania Farias, member of the group Ói Nós Here Traveiz, from Porto Alegre, performed in 2014. In this ritual we see the links established by the artist between her personal history, the group's history and the theatrical challenges that enabled her to enact her performance. In order to be able to act, she develops her own expressive vocabulary. Her disassembly shows these connections, allowing the audience to see the creative process behind the scenes. Based on this material, we discuss the issue of consciousness and the tacit in ritual.

keywords

theater; anthropology
of art; performance;
creativity; ritual.

Roy Wagner opens his book *The Invention of Culture* with the following phrase: “The idea that man invents his own realities is not a new one” (Wagner 1981, 5). Cultures, however, contain everyday creative dynamics that in general invent only very small parts of their reality. No culture is invented as such. Cultures are forged from innumerable continual changes that affect them unequally. This effervescence is not necessarily invisible, unconscious or casual. Situations exist in which this process becomes exposed and the dynamics governing the connections between the signifier and the signified are revealed. This article analyses a theatre ritual called *desmontagem*, or disassembly, in which the audience is invited to become involved in the connection made by the actor between her personal life and the role being performed in the production, between the expressive resources being used and the way in which they were conceived in order to make sense to the audience.

Anthropology’s attention normally focuses on recognizing the interpretative capacity of a particular symbolic content, its diffusion and the social consequences of mastering the sets of meanings involved (such as knowledge of a particular language or a variant of it). The questions elicited by the work of art, however, do not refer to the social relation alone, but also to its rehearsal – that is, to its earlier moments. This precedence is not a synonym of absence. It can also occupy specific spaces, be attributed to particular social characters, and involve more or less defined explicit or implicit resources.

One of the first and richest anthropological contributions to this field continues to be Victor Turner’s notion of *communitas*. The invocation of a state of exception, the requirement of isonomy when treating a question, overthrows hierarchies and thus the established order, and opens the way for the construction of other social configurations. This potential means that as well as reinforcing social organization, ritual also assumes the function of subverting it. The notion of culture as a holistic system shared equally by everyone was gradually questioned and definitively abandoned in the 1970s. However, the practice of invention, which generates dissensions, divergences, or what we call originality, still remains little studied.

Today we know, for example, that no image reproduces the way in which the human eye sees. In order to be seen a painting, or even a photograph, depends on an illusion in the sense attributed by Gombrich to the term: that is, it involves causing a visual effect that allows whatever the producer wishes to be seen to be identified through particular cultural codes. Perhaps this point is more

evident in dance. Just because a ballerina moves as though floating in space does not mean that her body became weightless. The same applies to music or any artistic activity. This ability leads to artists becoming surrounded by a certain air of mystery and magic. Normally we spend little time reflecting on how this illusion is established. However, it is essential to life in society and depends on tests of efficacy. Every spontaneous behaviour was at some point in time a rehearsal of a social relation. Observing creative processes allows us to accompany this experimentation.

George Marcus points out some of the difficulties to emerge during this kind of research: in order to capture and explain new conceptions of culture, we need to break away from the classic form of field research, which proves inadequate to the new topics of investigation in contemporary society. It is, he argues, impossible to maintain “a tradition committed to a documentary function and naturalist representation, driven by distanced and disciplined participation and observation in and of the lived worlds of others taken formally as the research ‘object’” (Marcus 2003, 134). In this text, Marcus draws attention to the collaborative form of field research employed by artists, and emphasizes that anthropology can and should learn from them.

The process through which we embody the emotional charge and meaning of each gesture, posture or word may be somewhat akin to what Patrice Pavis calls the *living archive* of the actor:

The actor archives within herself her past roles, maintains them, plays them, consults them, compares them, relates them to her past and present experience. (...) When demonstrating their work, it is not rare for such actors to revive some moments of their major roles, providing glimpse into the living archive of the plays in which they took part, and from which they serve up fragments that appear uprooted from the depths of theatrical memory. Indeed, it is this living memory of the theatre that is the most precious asset, the treasure that escapes mediation and directly interacts with the spectator’s vital memory. (Pavis 2001, 39)

The specific characteristic of disassembly is that it makes explicit this archive and how it was constructed. We can compare this situation with the one described by Lévi-Strauss in ‘The Sorcerer and His Magic’ where the shaman secretly hides a tuft of down in his mouth, bites his tongue to soak the feathers in blood and then spits it out, revealing it as the pathological foreign body

sucked from the patient's body. Lévi-Strauss argues that there is no duplicity involved, neither does it make sense to question the practice since the cure proves effective. The procedure involves a principle similar to psychoanalysis in which the session enables patients to regain symbolic control over their actions or over whatever is happening in their lives.

In the case of disassembly, it is as though this bloody tuft of down were brought into public discussion. Those sharing the belief can capture the minute details of the illusory mechanism involved, understand its effectiveness and make use of it in the future with renewed conviction. For this article, we observed eight presentations of the same disassembly protagonized by Tânia Farias. The first was performed for the other actors from her theatre group, *Ói Nós Aqui Traveiz*, and for students from the Actor Training Workshop run by the group at the *Terreira*, the group's base. Afterwards, the other performances were observed at the SESC Theatre in the centre of Porto Alegre, as part of the program for the *Palco Giratório* Drama Festival; in the exchange between the *Contadores de Mentiras* group and *Ói Nós Aqui Traveiz*, also held at the *Terreira*; during the program for the *Teatro e Memória - 50 anos do Golpe Militar* event held at the Casa das Artes Vila Mimosa in Canoas, organized by the group; at the *Conexões para uma Arte Pública* show, also organized by *Ói Nós* in collaboration with other groups in Rio de Janeiro, held at the home of the *Tá Na Rua* group, and in Belo Horizonte, at the home of the *Galpão* group; in the space of the *Contadores de Mentiras* group in Suzano (SP); and finally in Vacaria, via the *Teatro e Memória* Project. In addition, a semistructured interview was conducted at Tânia Farias's home. Notes were taken during all the presentations of the *desmontagem*, as well as the discussion that took place at the end of each.¹ We also listened to the audio recordings with the statements and impressions given by the audience after watching the disassembly during the *Conexões para uma Arte Pública* project.²

The *Tribo de Atuadores Ói Nós Aqui Traveiz* [lit: the 'Hey, Us Here Again Tribe of Actors'] is the oldest theatre group in the city of Porto Alegre. Founded in 1978, it was created by Paulo Flores and Rafael Baião, drama students from the Department of Dramatic Arts at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, with the idea of

1. Most of the field data was collected by Leticia Virtuoso, who also conducted the interview by herself. Caleb Alves watched the plays cited in the disassembly, as well as the performance itself.

2. Access to these recordings was kindly provided by Pedro Lucas, responsible for the audio-visual recordings for various of the group's projects.

researching a new interactive language between actors and spectators. The group's members called themselves *atuadores*, 'actuators,' a combination of actor and political activist.³

The disassembly concept was incorporated after reading the book *DES/TEJIENDO ESCENAS - Desmontajes: procesos de investigación y creación*, a collection of texts edited by Ileana Diéguez and written by actors, performers, director and theatre researchers who undertook *disassemblies* in 2003 in Mexico City at the Centro Nacional de Investigación Teatral Rodolfo Usigli, as part of the project *Desmontajes, Procesos de Investigación y Creación*. Ileana writes that at the end of the 1970s some actors and theatre groups began to perform demonstrations of their creative processes, showing the audience what lay behind the characters performed in their plays (Diéguez 2009, 15). For her, *disassembly* involves the actor's reflection on, organization and eventual sharing of factors influencing their creative processes at an intimate level and helped shape the development of each of their characters. The work presents immersions, discoveries, small errors and corrections, which, combined, represent an actor's creative experiences (Diéguez 2009).

In the case of *Evocando os Mortos*, performed in 2014, the actuator Tânia Farias highlighted short fragments from the theatre plays involving the characters Sofia, Sasportas, Cassandra and Ophelia. At the same time as the actor shifts between the characters, transforming into one and then the other, returns to herself and tells us what resides behind the performed fragment: she expounds on the political context of the city, the group, the moment of stage research and the actor's work, and exposes the gender issues that merge with all the contexts and stages of creation. A *disassembly* is more than a technical exhibition: it is an affective demonstration of the actor's work, linked far more to the non-rational, the elements behind the scene and what the artist was living through when the performed role was being conceived.

Disassembly is a magnifying glass that allows artists to reflect on their own work, combining results and processes simultaneously and revealing the research. For Tânia, it allows the woman, actor and citizen to become visible. Her story takes us back to her first interest in the theatre while still at high school. At that time, in

3. The Tribo works intensively to keep its memory alive via the Ói Nóis na Memória label, which has published various books and DVDs on the group's history and recordings of shows. In addition, the Tribo writes, edits and publishes an influential theatre magazine, *Cavalo Louco*, distributed gratis twice a year.

order to support her activities, she had to spend the whole day in the street with little money and always without eating lunch. She waited and caught the bus home very late at night. On one of these occasions she was subject to sexual violence. Asked about the relation between being a woman and being a member of Ói Nóis, she replies that joining the group allowed her to reflect on her condition as a woman and artist.

So if (...) Heiner Müller says that change will come from the margins. Change itself will not come from Marxist intellectuals, it will come from the margins, from the periphery, from the islands of disorder. And within these processes I could understand a little of what had happened to me, I could understand my place, our place as women, I could understand why we can no longer stay quiet, because we can no longer just let things continue to be as they always were. (...) And through what I do, I want to discuss and ensure that women can like being women. Because we're essential, we're essential to everything. (...) Our place as women cannot be the place of the raped, the place of the beaten, the place of the subjugated. (...) Paulina Salas had been raped and tortured. The first great woman who I lived at Ói Nóis, from the show I created, you know.⁴ (Farias 2014)


The description below is a summary of the observed performances.

We entered the theatre space and made ourselves comfortable. In one corner we noticed Tânia Farias watching us. Placed behind her was a pale wooden chair with a dark brown upholstery on the seat. The chair was open back, tall and detailed. Tânia explained, at another moment, that the idea was to perform a *disassembly* for just a relatively small audience, some 30 to 50 people, so that a closer, more intimate relation could be established.

SOFIA

The actuator is dressed in Sofia's costume, designed and made for the play *Widows*, performed in 2011 by Tribo de Atuadores Ói Nóis Aqui Traveiz on Pedras Brancas Island, based on the text by Ariel Dorfman. The character walks to the middle of the stage and put

4. *A Morte e a Donzela* [Death and the Maiden] was a play performed by Tribo de Atuadores Ói Nóis Aqui Traveiz in 1997 and 1998, based on the text by Ariel Dorfman.



her chair there, slowly lowering herself to the ground. She picks up a kernel of sweet corn from the floor. She looks alternately from the corn to the person sat in front of her. Sofia is squatting on the floor. She begins to recite a text taken from the play in which her character featured, invoking her presence. “When I was young, with my sisters, we lived faraway, there in the mountains, and we would always go to the village wearing the most beautiful clothing our grandma could make.” She drops one... two kernels on the ground, saying: “And my sisters – may they rest in peace – were devoured by the crowd...,” as though each kernel were one of her dead sisters joining the earth. Another sweet corn kernel is kept in her blouse, near to her breast, while she talks of Miguel, her husband who vanished during the military dictatorship. Her eyes fill with tears and her voice chokes. According to Levi-Strauss, in ‘The Effectiveness of Symbols’: “...each spirit, when it appears, is carefully described, and the magical equipment which he receives from the shaman is enumerated at great length” (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 194). This is what unfolds in this drama ritual too.

Suddenly the performance ends and the actuator starts a dialogue with the audience. Tânia talks about the process of creating the character: she tells that, for Ói Nóis, women’s protagonism is very important in their shows, since in Latin America women are constantly found at the forefront of social struggles (she cites the *madres* and *abuelas* of the Plaza De Mayo). She explains that she was chosen by the group to play the part of Sofia after she performed her ‘character ritual’: an Artaudian exercise in which each actuator chooses a scene or a character to play (the actors themselves may perform the part or invite colleagues to execute their ideas). Depending on the choice of actuator and what the scene is meant to say, he or she may work alone or involve everyone concerned.

When it came to staging this play, the group decided to look for a location other than its centre. They wanted to interact with a real space. They chose Pedras Brancas [White Pebble] Island, better known as Prison Island. This experience, for her, was the most intense she has gone through in almost 20 years with Ói Nóis, since even though the play deals with absences, what she felt every night on the island was an inundation of presences: “and I was just like her [Sofia], heavier and heavier.” She tells of a scene in which Sofia entered real cells, the ones used to jail political prisoners. In each of them there was a woman with a pestle and mortar grinding corn. Next Sofia instigated a discussion with

another character, Alejandra,⁵ her daughter-in-law: she asked why the women were not waiting for their vanished men: “Where is your husband, Alejandra? Where is Alonso, Yajina?” Tânia tells how each night of the rehearsal and presentation she would include the first name of a Brazilian political missing person. As she called them, she felt that “they were right up next to me, as though saying – here! – in my ear.” She also relates that while they were putting together the show, they read the book *Substantivo Feminino*, which recounted the experience of women tortured during the military dictatorship and survived: “It was impossible to read the book in one go... It made very painful reading.”

Continuing, she then talks about the contact between Terreira and Yuyachkani, a Peruvian drama group that visited Porto Alegre at the invitation of Ói Nóis to take part in the *Festival de Teatro Popular Jogos de Aprendizagem*. From them she learnt various songs in Quechua that were later used in some of scenes. She did not want to use ‘non-everyday actions’⁶ in constructing Sofia’s persona. Likewise she did not want to use Stanislavsky’s methods and set out from a psychological study of the character. She wanted to make visible the actor who, even in her early thirties, was able to transform into a woman of over 60.

Tânia puts on a Yukuko *mascarita* and begins to play a small drum.⁷ She approaches someone in the front row of chairs and licks the spectator’s forehead. She plays *Grande Poder*, by Comadre Fulozinha. As soon as she finishes, she removes some of her Sofia costume and announces: “Sofia is a character from 2011.”

The theatre shows have something magical about them, imbued with the unconscious category of ritual understanding or *mana* intrinsic to this social event, the *mana* element in the relations between actuator and public.

5. The character Alejandra was played by the actuator Marta Haas. In this scene the women began asking Sofia to stop saying the names of the missing men: “Not the names, Sofia, please, not the names!” and they repeated each one in a low voice inside their cells. This continues with Sofia and the other women each speaking increasingly loudly until the scene culminates with Sofia’s cry, calling out for Miguel, her husband, and a rain of sweet corn falls on her character, hurling her to the ground. A 60-kilo sack was used each night.

6. A term used by the actuators, taken from the work of Artaud. These are actions that do not represent people’s conventional everyday movements, nor are they directly connected to illustrating the words spoken by the characters.

7. The instrument used is a drum called Cultrun of Mapuche origin.

...the efficacy of magic implies a belief in magic. The latter has three complementary aspects: first, the sorcerer's belief in the effectiveness of his techniques; second, the patient's or victim's belief in the sorcerer's power; and, finally, the faith and expectations of the group, which constantly act as a sort of gravitational field within which the relationship between sorcerer and bewitched is located and defined. (Levi-Strauss 1963, 168)

SASPORTAS

Tânia announces the next character to be shared with us: Sasportas, from the play *The Mission: Memory of a Revolution*, written by Heiner Müller in 1979, and staged in 2006 and 2007 in the Terreira da Tribo, at the centre on Rua João Inácio, in the Navegantes district. She keeps coloured trousers from Sofia's costume and a white blouse worn under her other clothes. Tânia tells us that "Müller uses the French Revolution to recount the story of a group of French revolutionaries who travel to Jamaica to foment a slave revolt. A member of the bourgeoisie, a peasant and a black man." At the time, the group thought that it would be important to research the Haitian revolution, "the most successful black revolution in known history." They entered into contact with a researcher from Porto Alegre specialized in Haitian culture through whom they learnt about debates on the armed occupation, music and photographs of Vodou.

The actuators decided that all the black slaves in Müller's work would be played by female actors, merging the gender and race issues. The group had returned to a song by John Lennon which said "Woman is the nigger of the world. Yes she is, think about it. Woman is the nigger of the world. Think about it, do something about it. We make her paint her face and dance. If she won't be a slave, we say that she don't love us. If she's real, we say she's trying to be a man." She recalls that the dyed sisal costume made it very clear that they were female actuators since they the breasts and crotch area of the actors were left exposed:

...the different movements of the bodies that shook to that pulsating sound. And during the improvisations, the actuators began to use those songs as a back drop. They tried to let those images leak through their skin. Bodies stretched out in many directions. And the music started to be used to energize all the rehearsals as an important element of this ritual. (Farias 2014)

Tânia says that the music played during the warmup to stimulate the bodies of the actors also led to the idea that the group should learn to play Afro-Brazilian ritual drums. So a Bahian percussionist taught the three female actors playing the part of the slaves. Tânia used her body to show us the suggested posture (which permeated all the images of the slaves): legs wide apart, knees bent pointing outwards. They needed to play sat down since the drums were enormous. She says that the drums 'chose' the women who would play them and that each one was like them.

She reveals that she improvised a variety of moves linked to the continual vibrations: she begins a quick movement with her hips jutting forward and backward to the rhythm of the music. "Obviously this was not included in the final scene." She switches on the sound system so that the audience can hear the music that animated the rehearsals. While researching the character, she also came into contact with the entity *Eleguá*, corresponding to *Exu* in Afro-Brazilian culture.

Tânia starts by moving her entire body vigorously and looks at us from behind the hair falling across her face: she is now Sasportas. The lighting casts shadows onto her face. In an article on her *disassembly*, she explains:

I wanted to give muscle to the words: "My accomplices will be the slaves of all the races, whose number increases... at each instant when you feed at the trough of the slave-owners or slip between the thighs of your white whore" (Müller 1987, p.55), while I bent my spine back, jutting my hip, head and shoulders forwards and backwards, creating an imaginary bridge between the basic chakras and the heart. These words were accompanied by a sarcastic laugh, inspired by a Vodou entity, *Eleguá*, who corresponds in Afro-Brazilian candomblé to Exu... (Farias 2014, 10)

Sasportas leaves: "This is a character from 2006."

The moments of evocation or incorporation in this meta-ritual are multifaceted, dense and complex. It is very difficult to describe the energetic bridge and warmth established between audience and actuator, or between the spectators themselves sharing this ritual, this *mana*. Julia Varley explains that:

In theatre anthropology, the word 'subtext' has been replaced by 'subscore,' a term more suited to the forms of the theatre... the actor constructs her stage presence through a form of vocal and physical behaviour called a score. The term 'subscore' should include all the mental and psychic processes on which an actor bases her work. Merged into this context are technique, starting points for creating materials, what the actor thinks about before and during the show, the character's motivations, the inner world, emotions, energy, recollections, images, sensations and everything that cannot be set out in concepts. (Varley 2010, 121)

KASSANDRA

This was my longest and deepest process. At that time we were researching physical actions. Each warmup I had a new score. We spent hours in the laboratory. Researching the body, dissonance... I wanted to create a character through actions. I wanted to create a character who was as complex as the human being, full of contradictions, but I wanted to create her through physical actions. (Farias 2014)

She asks the audience if they know 'Kassandra's little tale': she recounts that she had the gift of persuasion but lost it. At that time the group was facing its worst crisis: they were on the brink of losing their centre, a space that, since the final years of the military dictatorship, had been a place of freedom and discussions about theatre and the arts.

The actuator says that she became a resolute defender of the Terreira and Ói Nóis:

At that time, the Tribe was going through a tumultuous period in the city, a political fight for the preservation of our Centre of Experimentation and Drama Research, an open space that, as well as being the base of Ói Nóis, the generative womb of the group's research processes, is also where Ói Nóis develop its School of Popular Theatre, offering free open workshops [...] I took part in the public meetings to safeguard the centre, the Terreira da Tribo. Not infrequently, being female and young, I came face-to-face with a highly chauvinist, hostile and dissimulated context. (...) (Farias 2014)

Albeit at a different scale, she did the same as Kassandra, coming into conflict with the State. "This was my great subtext." Her real life.

The next question relates to the show *Kassandra in Process*: “There was a scene which the actuators called the ‘cave scene,’ where a ritual takes place, as though it were an underground religion, and Kassandra was set to be initiated into that religion. All the women from the group took part in this ritual.” None of them, however, had any children and they believed that they needed a ‘substrate’ for the scene. They began to take belly dancing classes, aiming to achieve more contact with the feminine, with the womb and with the meaning of the energy coming from this region of the hips. They created a scene full of movements of this dance, but when “they showed it to the lads, they hated it.” They reduced the dance movements and created another scene – “they still hated it.” The third attempt omitted any dance movement. This was the one that the men liked and that became included in the show. What interested them was not codifying bodily expression, but the female energy that come from the womb, and the women took a while to realize this. The women touched and kissed each other, “it was a beautiful scene, full of affect.”

She recalls that in Kassandra’s first scene the character began punching her own belly: “And I think that must have meant something.” She begins another *incorporation*. Kassandra reappears before us. Her face and energy are those of a young woman, she is more fragile and gentle. Her voice is soft. She shows us the character, her body movement, her vocal score and text, composing everything right in front of us. Kassandra punches her belly, she tells a story with mythological figures, jumps in the air and comes down with one of her knees bent.

Tânia speaks to us again: she is going “to show the next scene... Kassandra is a patchwork of texts.” It is a dialogue between Hitler and Stalin: “Each of these men was responsible for a series of murders; it makes no difference whether one is located on the left and the other on the right. They both committed mass murder” (Farias 2014).

The scene begins with the character lying on the ground. Kassandra talks with her whole body tense, but her limbs raised up in the air. She sings a song in a foreign language. She blindfolds her eyes with a strip of fine, red cloth which she ties neatly with the tips of her fingers. Still singing, she stands up and steps on top of a small box with both feet. She stamps on it with one foot to the beat of the music.

Kassandra and the audience are situated in a space called the ‘battlefield.’ Kassandra removes various small blue figures from

beneath her skirt and scatters them across the field. As the audience move about, they take care not to crush the little figures into the ground covered in crushed marble. She shows us the little figures and spreads a few of them on the ground. Around this time, Tânia says, she discovered a community on a social network where people shared what they took home after watching the show. She concluded this part saying: “This is a work from 2002.”

OPHELIA

The warehouse in which the *Terreira da Tribo* was located in Cidade Baixa had to be vacated. Their attempts to keep the centre were in vain. The text chosen to be the last one performed in the space was *Hamletmachine* by Heiner Müller because it referred to the German totalitarian left and, through it, they could draw a parallel, a critique of the left-wing government in the city of Porto Alegre. The city council, she said, wanted to close down the collective and co-opted various members, offering them jobs. The aim was to dismantle the group so that there would be no need to keep the *Terreira da Tribo* space running: “I’m talking about an investment of time, energy and money to destabilize and finish off the group.”

She thinks that people, the city population, thought that it was a moment of change and transformation, but in her view, at that point time, the government’s sole project was to maintain power. She began to speak about her character, Ophelia.

There’s a text of Ophelia that says: “I break the instruments of my captivity and tear up the photographs of the men who I loved and who availed themselves of me.” (...) I therefore had a personal subtext, intimate, secret, that I was unable to relinquish when I came to create Ophelia. Because the way in which Heiner Müller treats Ophelia in his text, this voice of revolt that is at once fragile and strong, meant that this subtext kept calling my attention the whole time. I had been sexually assaulted, I had been collectively raped. (Farias 2014)

Ophelia was the first character to be constructed by her using an action score:

That’s why when it came to *Kassandra* I thought: I want to do a real character. I thought that she had to be real [she emphasizes]. Because I didn’t see Ophelia as a character.

For me, she was a force. She remains so today. What I managed to do at that moment was create a force. (Farias 2014)

She tells us that she will demonstrate the physical actions from which Ophelia originated. She makes a vigorous movement with her arms, moving her finger and neck with great precision and muscle control. She speaks again. She says that the group consulted photographs by Jan Saudek⁸ during the creative process and that this was very important because of the singular way in which she portrays the female figure:

There is a moment where she becomes a representative of suicidal women. As Artaud suggests, suicided by society. So she says that it's a woman hanged, a woman with her head in the gas oven... And she gradually acquires a space. I don't know if it was how Heiner Müller depicts the figure of Ophelia and her function in the play, as a possibility, but she ends up being enabler of change in the play... Either it was how I proposed the scenes, the ideas, for the composition of Ophelia and these chorus scenes based around my personal subtext. Or it was Saudek's photos that set the tone for the scenes of the women that I'll call 'anti-pornography.' (Farias 2014)

The text of the suicided women spoke of "breaking from the captivity in which her own home had transformed..." She felt something was missing from the actions she had prepared. She recalls that she weighed just 38 kilos, "I was really skinny, really really skinny," and being so thin was good for playing the character since she believed that Ophelia's strength must derive precisely from her fragility, and she the actor was very fragile. She begins to talk about Cieslak,⁹ an actor who worked with Grotowsky, who said that the action score is like a cup with a flame inside: the function of the cup is to protect the flame so that it can flutter but never become extinguished.

8. Considered one of the most eccentric photographers of the present. Also a draughtsman and painter, the aesthetics of his photography is similar to that of his other work. Though little known in Brazil, Jan Saudek is the most famous photographer of the Czech Republic. His style includes painting his photographs by hand, leaving them with sepia tones and a nineteenth-century appearance. His models pose theatrically in front of the lens, adopting suave and intense positions, as though dialoguing with one another or with the scene through body language (Farias 2014, 5).

9. Ryszard Cieslak, actor, who worked extensively with Grotowski (Farias 2014, 3).

So, one day... getting ready for a rehearsal, I discovered a point of vibration in my leg and thought it was something interesting. (...) Only this silly thing about the point of vibration in my leg, which is nothing really, acquired a spectacular dimension for me. I began to create connections and have subtexts that I hadn't had before. I thought a lot about Ophelia's madness, this violence to which she was subjected. (...) And so I began to create a bridge with my own personal experience and started to think 'wow, I'm here, talking, and my leg is there [trembling], I don't need to do much, it can stay there a long while' and I thought how it might be a part of my body rebelling against me. I was thinking 'what did I do with the violence I suffered?' I hadn't accused anyone, I had done absolutely nothing. [...] So many things. And in a way this work, my leg, reconciled me with myself. (Farias 2014)

Tânia added the following text to the action script:

I am Ophelia. She who the river could not hold. The woman on the gallows. The woman with the slashed arteries. The woman with the overdose [*Vocal action. She elongates the sound of the syllables and her voice trembles*] on the lips snow. The woman with the head in the gas oven. Yesterday I stopped killing myself. I am alone with my breasts, my thighs, my lap. I rip apart the instruments of my imprisonment, the stool, the table, the bed. I destroy the battlefield that was my home. I tear the doors off their hinges to let the wind and the cry of the world inside. I smash the window. With my bleeding hands I tear the photographs of the men who I loved and who used me on the bed, on the table [*She makes various small vocal noises and performs the body score shown to us earlier*], on the chair, on the floor. I set fire to my prison. I throw my clothes into the fire. I dig the clock which was my heart out of my breast. I go onto the street, clothed in my blood. (Heiner Müller, *Hamletmachine*, text interpreted by the actuator). (Farias 2014)

The character leaves. A lot of women cry. For her, the theatre's purpose is not to exorcize pain, but to share it so that we identify with it and, who knows, adopt a response. "I'm almost finished." She announces that she will read an excerpt from a letter written by Rosa Luxemburg, which showed her the path to Medeia, the character she is currently playing in the most recent play staged by *Ói Nós Aqui Traveiz*:

Into the courtyard where I take my walks there often come military supply wagons, filled with sacks or old army coats and shirts, often with bloodstains on them... [...] ...the soldier stuck both hands in his trouser pockets, paced around the courtyard with long strides, and kept smiling and softly whistling some popular tune to himself. And the entire marvelous panorama of the war passed before my eyes.

Your R.

Sonyichka, dearest, in spite of everything be calm and cheerful. Life is like that, one must take it as it is, [and remain] brave, undaunted, and smiling—in spite of everything. Merry Christmas!

(Rosa Luxemburg apud Adler 2011, 457)

Tânia concludes: “Letter from Rosa to Sonya during her exile, Breslau, 24 December 1917. Thank you.”

LEAVING THE STAGE

Disassembly is a vision, the artist reflecting on her work, a meta-discourse, a meta-ritual. For this very reason, it reveals the stitches sewn by the actuator to connect elements of collective history (such as the political transformations experienced by the city), the female condition, the actuator’s personal history and the trajectory of the theatre group to which she belongs. These elements are the sources from which she draws to weave her scores. The audience believes that Tânia’s explanations concerning her subtexts or subscores are what make the characters so true to life or so strong, enabling them to turn into characters. “Consequently, the fundamental problem revolves around the relationship between the individual and the group, or, more accurately, the relationship between a specific category of individuals and specific expectations of the group” (Levi-Strauss 1975, 180). The evocations and incorporation of the characters are an important part of the ritual’s effectiveness, the execution of these actions relating the shaman to the spectators.

According to Peirano:

Focusing on rituals means dealing with social action. If this action occurs in the context of shared worldviews, then the communication between individuals provides an insight into

the implicit classifications between human beings, humans and nature, humans and gods (or demons), for example. Whether communication involves words or actions, it may differ in terms of the medium, but minimizes neither the action's objective nor its efficacy. Language is part of culture, it is also possible to act and make through the use of words. Put otherwise, speech is an act of society just as much as ritual. There is a fundamental consequence to this observation: anthropology always explicitly or implicitly incorporates a theory of language. (Peirano 2002, 09)

An essential part of any theory of language is the emotional charge that the words or phrases activate. However, this connection is not fixed. Social changes depend on the construction of meanings or the attribution of new meanings to old terms. There are moments when this process becomes evident, when attention focuses on the relation between the term or the gesture and the type of disposition that it awakens. This does not involve a dispute over ideas, meanings, positionings or forms of understanding. It is a moment when the elements used to construct meanings, their agents and their dynamics are placed at the very centre of debate.

The character Ophelia, for example, as understood through Tânia's reflection on her dramatic creation, enables a cure. Our shaman narrates in mythic fashion the history of her conception of this dramatic figure and emphasizes how this process was fundamental to her self-reconciliation. Lévi-Strauss writes:

The cure would consist, therefore, in making explicit a situation originally existing on the emotional level and in rendering acceptable to the mind pains which the body refuses to tolerate. That the mythology of the shaman does not correspond to an objective reality does not matter. The sick woman believes in the myth and belongs to a society which believes in it. [...] The sick woman accepts these mythical beings or, more accurately, she has never questioned their existence. What she does not accept are the incoherent and arbitrary pains, which are an alien element in her system but which the shaman, calling upon myth, will re-integrate within a whole where everything is meaningful [...] Once the sick woman understands, however, she does more than resign herself; she gets well. (Lévi-Strauss 1975, 197)

This cure is not limited to recuperating the patient's health. It also involves proposing to the audience a connection between sets of movements and emotional devices. It is the organization of the

individual lexicon, displayed in the form of an invitation to the audience, that becomes a reference point for them to deal with these same meanings. In composing their roles, the actors treat everyday events and happenings as performances. It is how they construct their subtexts. Disassembly makes evident this trajectory. The main contribution that can be derived from this type of study is to show that the difference between belief and make-believe, present in Schechener's texts, perhaps needs to be revised. For the latter, theatre produces a 'pretence' or 'make-believe,' not necessarily a belief. Ritual, on the other hand, is linked to belief. The distinction resides, among other elements, in the temporary nature of make-believe, which allows the actor, or the spectator, to eventually emerge from the trance of a fantasy.

By transforming the performance elaborated by the artist into a ritual, disassembly invites us to entertain a different kind of belief, not directed towards the outcome of the performance as such, but to the path taken and the desired objectives of the play. In this sense, it is the return to the quotidian that becomes the representation's main element. Tânia's own proposal for her disassembly is to show how she, through her theatre, she sought to instigate dispositions for change vis-à-vis sexual roles.

For Schechner, the difference between theatre and ritual resides in the subtext (Schechner 2009, p. 784/785): in theatre, the subtext controls the play, while in ritual the text governs. As an example of a subtext, he cites asking for someone to pass the butter as though making a declaration of love. The subtext is the true feeling behind the action. In the process of disassembly, the subtext cannot be random: it depends on a communion of meanings, on us questioning along with the actuator the violence that she suffered and understanding why she associated these feelings with that particular play. This connection shortens the distance between subtext and text. The possibility of this approximation suggests that the distinction between theatre and ritual may reside less in the event itself and more in what it activates in diverse ways among the participants.

The actor counts on the audience's capacity to distinguish an effect of fantasy (a momentary diversion or a sensibilization to elements previously disregarded) from an effect of direct reflection on experienced events and postures. By demonstrating the similarities between the character she played and her own experience, Tânia, while reinforcing this distinction, simultaneously invites us to abandon it. We managed to see the actuator immersed in her dramatic role through an understanding of the personal symbolic charge evoked when she acts.

translation
David Rodgers
text received
06.03.2015

Ritual is never an end in itself. The force and effectiveness of the process depend on the participant managing, both in the theatre and in the disassembly, to convince us that the emotional charge activated is not individual and can be embodied in the specific form presented to us. Saying that a ritual is always renewed means saying that the relation between belief, believing and the lived is negotiated during its realization and afterwards (the multiplicity of meanings cited by Turner). The study of creative processes in the art provides a clearer understanding of the dynamics between these elements, between consciousness and belief, between social agreements and their tacit employment. It also provides the possibility of examining the process of generating new postures and ideas at the moment when they occur.



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