

SOMA E SUB-TRAÇÃO: TERRITORIALIDADES E RECEPÇÃO TEATRAL

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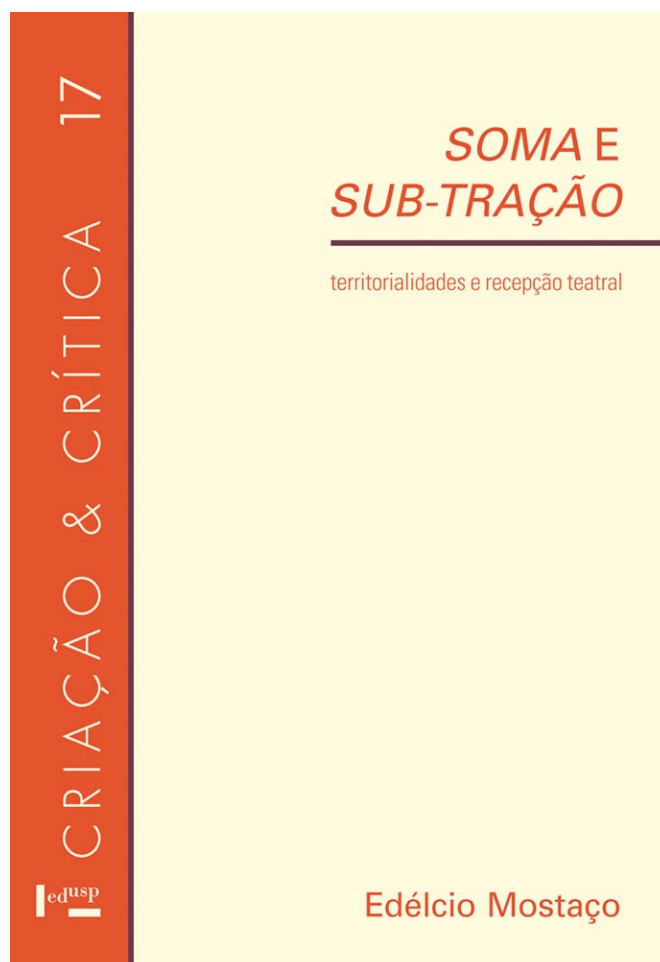
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In his book *Soma e Sub-tração: territorialidades e recepção teatral* (Sum and Sub-tractions: territorialities and theatrical reception), Edélcio Mostaço construes a delightful overview of contemporary Brazilian dramaturgy, from the 1950s to 2006, listing the main stage plays and theater groups that, with potency and boldness, defined the Brazilian theatrical scene.

The text compiles the author's writings, analyses and thoughts around, not only theater history, but above all, the social and cultural construction of theatrical languages and aesthetics, examining its directors, e.g., stage directors, playwrights, critics, theater groups and the public. Mostaço draws attention to the theatrical production of metropolises and its festivals, without forgetting about the countryside and the less visible stage productions, which also have great breath and scenic vigor.

Divided in two parts, the book first deals with the problems raised by the arrival of the reception theory. Developed in Germany and promoted by the works of Hans Robert Jauss (1978) and Wolfgang Iser (1996) in the mid-1960s, the Reception Theory is based on setting aside the author and his universe to favor the text itself, its reader and the social background that composes it. The reception aesthetic privileges the recording of experience and artistic practice, a construction where the relationship with the reader/viewer is valued.

An emphasis justified by the extensive debate about how the work of art, especially the theatrical one, exists between the false and true, the illusory and the concrete. An oscillating decoding, a synthesis that operates much more by a regime of disjunction and production than by proposing universalizing and world-planning syntheses; or, at least, theater is expected to follow that path.

The concept of *folding*, mobilized by Deleuze (2000) when discussing artwork, is retrieved in the text and helps us think about the processes by which the Western notion of person escapes from its unitary and indivisible fantasy and extrapolates itself, out of the skin, relationships of affection, power and implications with the outside world, putting such interaction between the outside and the inside into perspective. "It is a chain formed by human connections, technical artifacts, devices of action and thought" (Deleuze 2000, 64).

The arrival of reception theory in Brazil is late and occurred in the mid-1980s, primarily via Luiz Costa Lima's collection (1979).

In physics, "traction" is the force applied to a body in a perpendicular direction as to enable its rupture. "Sum and sub-traction" – the act of

adding, subtracting and pulling – reveals the contexts in which some theatrical works were created or transformed throughout the Brazilian society after the 1950s, a historical period marked by advances and backwardness that imbued the languages and artistic aesthetics, which contributed to the perpetuation of theater as we know: a force that accompanies, tenses or even accelerates social transformations and what derives from it while feeding it, its culture.

To narrate the arrival of the “Reception Theory”, Mostaço begins his analysis in the 1950s, restoring the historical-social context of a society that, on the one hand, was rapidly changing, advancing artistically, and growing in size, but on the other suffered in 1964 the brutal military coup that would offend Brazil’s the democratic regime.

In the second part of the book, called *Escritos Descolados* (Cool Writings), Mostaço surgically analyzes each work of the main discussed playwrights and their stage plays in a comprehensive and insightful way.

In *Arte, Ciência e Teatro: No Rumor de uma Epistemologia da Pesquisa* (Art, Science and Theater: Towards an Epistemology of Research), the penultimate theme that concludes the first part of the book, the author begins by evoking a Marcel’s quote: “It is not prayer or the gift that is important to understand, what counts is the Melanesian of such or such island. Against the theorist, the observer must always have the last word; and against the observer, the indigenous”, highlighting the emphasis that theatrical theory has given to the field of experience and action.

In the humanities, epistemology, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity are concepts capable of understanding analytical and reflective thinking as a hybrid complex of intersections of distinct knowledge. Art and science are two major areas of seemingly separate knowledge; however, these areas merge mainly in their cognitive aspects, thus recovering a certain connection of thought that has been lost or hidden in Western metaphysics. Ancient civilizations, guided by mythic-religious thought, did not disassociate artistic from scientific, as well as philosophical practice. This tripod was grounded in the practice of observing, reflecting, interpreting, and experiencing the world in an intensified and flexible manner, without thereby establishing boundaries between one universe and another, since art and science belonged with the same experimental element: magic – experiences and practices that cross time and chronological space to a cosmic time/space where knowledge expands the perspective of the practitioner and observer’s look about social life and thus weaves relations that scrambles what we (Western) define as natural and supernatural.

Theater, in its complexity, configures a form of experience that comes close to scientific, sociological and anthropological knowledge (and vice-versa) as it creates and awakens scenic experiments able to analyze, tense or even transgress social values. With a theme that congregates “Art, Science and Theater”, Mostaço focuses on the approximation of this knowledge from the outset, revealing that “by taking the concepts of art and science in its great historical guidelines, we observe no opposition between them, only a marked difference in approach”, further underlining that both art and science derive from the same matrix: the knowledge theory.

For positivism, the central idea of science was related to the idea of “absolute” and “truth,” but with cultural relativism and especially with the advancement of anthropological studies, we may suspect that the notions of nature and culture are epistemological questions elaborated by us, not an universal problem that changes depending on the different perspectives of certain societies; thus, changing the idea of science as “absolute and true” to “relative, conditional, local and susceptible to changes, transformations and interpretations”, recapturing and revealing the importance of mythic and dreamlike thinking, coming from other forms of existence in the world, built and/or inherited by non-western people as knowledge production, where the *modus operandi* of making “scientific thinking” and “artistic thinking” fears their imbricated practices.

The complexity of theatrical practice was not built disassociated from the environment, be it social, cultural or political, or from the plurality and multiplicity of societies. The art of imitation is one of the main energy sources for identity construction and especially for the elaboration of social thought and its archetypes. However, the expressive arts of the body have formed kaleidoscopes to observe reality so it can serve as a social incubator for new experiences of building “people” and human relations. It is a social organism composed of interiority and otherness. In the author’s words, “art is socially instituted, not a natural product or simply made by an isolated individual. It is the public – and, of course, all the instances it represents” (Mostaço 2015, 103).

Mostaço makes a brief social and cultural overview of world theater, but keeps its focus on Brazil, retracing, in the sum of texts/fragments, the construction of the various languages of “drama” and its overcoming by re-reading posthumous authors, as exemplified by the Aristotelian and post-Aristotelian influence in some passages described throughout the work. And this without ignoring the great figure of the theatrical game, that may be the reason for everything: the spectator. Since, as the author himself states, there is no theater without the spectator.

Which leads the author to analyze and understand the construction of theatrical language and its techniques, recognizing the active participation of the public in it. In this interactive process between artist and public, stage and audience, the text is not always the conductor of the dramatic narrative, the body is, its places and its “non-places” as shelters of the paradigm of freedom and the construction of new languages and aesthetics, moving through the poles “myself – in one’s own body in this place – the other – in their body in one’s place” (Mostaço 2015, 110), creating alternative variables and endless paths of theatrical art. Mostaço also recovers tragic pieces of a perhaps today neglected Greece, where ritual is vital energy for life and human relations. Under the theme of “Aeschylus, Hematopoiesis”, which opens the second part of the book, we are directed to the tragic element of theater as the body-devoted temple and its expansions beyond what is physical or psychological – the origin of the ritual – to reconnect bodies and its symbols, engulfing us with the overly-human. The author narrates some works recovering the Greek tragedy by the poetic blood flow, identifying the bloodshed contained in the classical texts of Tragedy as a form of sacrifice in offering to the human, or even to the non-human, and their relations. Demonstrating that, in Tragedy, “whoever wants to understand the meaning of life... will have to dialogue with their blood” (Mostaço 2015, 133).

The book represents the movement that theater plays until it reaches the contemporary scene, highlighting the importance of the 1960’s and the leading actor of the Brazilian theatrical scene: the university professor and one of the most important theatrical critics, author of countless essays on the history of theater, Décio de Almeida Prado. One book section is devoted to making an exclusive and honorable mention: Décio de Almeida Prado e a Cumplicidade “Décio de Almeida Prado and Complicity”.

Décio, unsettled by the novelties of the theatrical productions of the 1960’s, which gave the figure of the director more prominence over the playwrights, who were being less and less respected. According to the book, Décio became one of the most important theater critics at the time but abandoned journalistic criticism in 1968 and devoted himself to higher education.

The Brazilian theater until the 1960’s, as a triumphant and strictly textual Christian heritage, had been surpassed by the theater of life-worship, ritualistic, breaking with Manichean and moralistic standards. The book allows us to reflect on the modernization of theater and its Brechtian heritages, such as “The Little Organ”, which Mostaço (2015, 155) exemplifies in the beautiful previous pages under the theme “Brecht, the organ of fun”, as being the piece that refutes Aristotelianism, “that

is, the scenic illusionism created since the Renaissance, that ideological mass pregnant with outdated conventions and made conformist, based on patterns of thought accumulated since medieval patristic and widely disseminated in Jesuit colleges”. Just as Brazil, by the 1950s, became the pantheon that received the influences of Artaud, Craig, Meyerhold, Stanislavski and Beckett.

In this context, Décio de Almeida Prado had immeasurable importance in recording these transformations that materialized in theater groups such as Teatro Oficina and Teatro de Arena. Several other groups emerged from there, building the modernization of Brazilian theater.

However, theater advances, treading multiple paths with the boldness of its performers and lovers. In the last theme of the book, *Sobre a Recepção de Espetáculos* “On the reception of Spectacle”, Mostaço makes his grand finale, expressing the importance of theatrical critics in his craft and, thus, the relevance of re-enchantment by theatrical criticism, as to not be doomed to a simple opinionated commentary embedded in a newspaper space. But in the effective performance of producing passions to the theater or to a specific play – the same passion that serves as raw material for the Performing Arts.


I often recommend to critic students to watch plays with one eye on the stage and one in the audience. In order to catch, thereby, the effects of the work, an attempt to construct a synthesis between its previous preparation, hardly built with studies, and the living reaction of someone other than himself – Eldécio Mostaço (2015, 160).

TRANSLATION

Bianca
Vasconcelos

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