



## **Experience and History in Arts Research**

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### **1. Foreign Views**

Compared to human age, research in arts, in Brazil, is in its childhood. This comparison takes into account the relative maturity achieved in other areas of research, especially notorious from the experimentalism, which propelled modern sciences. In the field of human sciences, such advancement is significant, and, at its inner, artistic investigations begin its first steps.

In other ages, to arts was also given investigation. They were interpreted under the perspective of philosophy or theology, seeking to understand the artistic phenomenon as an integral part of complex systems and the consolidation of thought. Art itself was not being questioned, but rather its framing into a greater set of ideas, forming a kind of totality to view the place for each human activity, the practical, theoretical and poetic in the general entirety of philosophical and/or theological systems. It had to do, therefore, with the philosophies of art and not artistic investigation per se. In fact, Aesthetics, while a philosophical discipline, entered late into the panorama of philosophical knowledge, and, even so, under the presupposition of investigating artistic beauty, basing itself on the judgment of taste.

In other words, the constitution of the arts as an object and specific problem of scientific investigation is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the range of human sciences, she is the youngest sibling. The immediate implication of this infancy is the absence of consolidated theories and methods to support such an action. Other fields of knowledge in the human sciences already have theoretical approaches and sustainable methodologies.

Art researchers resort to "foreign" theories, adapting and mutilating them, but also amplifying and modifying their range and field of action. From another

angle, theories conceived to approach other objects are forced into exile, in order to rescue the infancy in the studies of the arts.

The social sciences, for example, investigated, experimented and put to the test several scientific theories. The classical authors of these sciences (Durkheim, Marx and Weber) consolidated specific theories and methods that direct the construction of knowledge(s). The same perspective is verified in literary studies, linguistic studies, in History and in various sciences, which have found a certain epistemological solidity.

Unless mistaken, studies in arts have not produced specific investigation theories. Researchers seek support for theories forged for addressing other objects, other than the artistic. Thus, it is common for literary theories, for example, to support some studies done in art, be they founded on linguistics, semiology, genetic criticism or in the history of literature. Most likely, these are the most evident recurrences in art research. They are, although, certainly not the only ones. Other attempts require different theoretical points of view, like the aforementioned social sciences (including Politics, Anthropology, Ethnography and Ethnology), theories of history, philosophy, psychology, pedagogy and the economies.

Evidently, a science historian would point out, immediately, an infinity of examples where a specific field of investigation, in order to take its first steps, sought paradigms in other sciences. This was, and still is, a common process perfectly recognizable in the sciences. This history did not occur through intermediate jumps and radical disruptions. Philosophy, when it arose, incorporated structures of mystical thought; Chemistry owes a debt to Alchemy. The examples are many. Yet, the same historian would point out different moments in which theoretical models and specific methodologies would consolidate a new scientific discipline. This phenomenon was in turmoil beginning with empiricism, which, over time, boosted the shutdown of several scientific disciplines, sheltered before under the immense cloak of Philosophy. Scientific specificities consolidated and, along with Philosophy, particularly Aesthetics, subsidize the young and promising research in the arts.

This loan will certainly contribute to the multiplicity of perspectives regarding the artistic phenomenon. But, there still remains the ever-present feeling of incompleteness, of the absence of that intrinsic and foundational element that would end up sealing the relations of contradiction (necessary and implicit)

between at least, the making of art, the finished work and its comprehension within the production of knowledge.

It would be fitting, however, to ask whether this lack of specific theories amalgamated to the studies in arts would not be only a sensation without greater consequences, an egocentric manifestation that recognizes its impotence in creating theories and methods that contribute for approaching the artistic phenomenon in its complexity and, with that, establish reasonably solid levels for universal knowledge. After all, theories aim for and place themselves as legitimators of the universality of knowledge.

## **2. The Surrounding**

Research means to surround something and investigate it. That is what the dictionaries say. In the Italian language, the term and its meaning become evident: *ricerca*. The "something" referred to here can be a complete and ready work, a creative process, an instigating research problem, a phenomenon and its critical fortune, finally, everything that could be taken as an object of research.

The subject that surrounds something can place itself in or out of that surrounded. This does not prevent migration, temporarily or definitively, from one place to another. Being inside impels to an act of experience intrinsic to the investigated object, which, in the arts, can be a creative process. In this case, the researcher and the artist merge into a single agent and the migration process between the inner and the outer is an act that repeats itself often. Being inside, however, does not mean to investigate exclusively the paths of artistic creation of the subject that surrounded an object. Experience extrapolates the limits of that which is personal and non-transferable. When the subject places itself on the outside, it assumes, consciously, a distanced role, which approaches the "classic" researcher attitude equivalent, for example, to the investigative work of the historian. The reference here refers to the historian who investigates past historical processes, where he/she did not act.

The act of investigation immediately demands the delimitation of an object, a problem or a set of phenomena. To delimit something is to establish its outlines so that it can be distinguished from that which is around it; it is, at the same time, an act of standing out amongst multiplicity and, with that, achieve an identity, a particularity that makes it recognizable.

To surround something in light of investigating it is similar to the act of surrounding a portion of land to establish possession and property. The one who carries out the investigation becomes the author of this discovery, that is, the owner, especially when it results in technologies that rebound to practical life. The similarities between the investigator and the owner do not stop there: both cause their "possessions" to differentiate themselves from others and thereby raise other parameters on the scale of social recognition.

The image/metaphor of surrounding brings with it the main questions of research: delimitation of the object or of a problem; the employment of a method and of theoretical principles that guide the surrounding and enable advancement into the unknown and inhospitable territory. One does not surround something with the objective to know it from nothing. Experiences, prior knowledge and theories induce the choice of the object being investigated. After all, theory has the sense of "looking through" and binds itself to the idea of the point of view of someone about something. Using the same etymological matrix, theater the "place from where one sees", a space that organizes the look.

Once elected, the object of the surrounding shall be viewed from the paradigms of time and space. Both induce the recognition of the object or the problem to be investigated in a story and in a social and cultural experience. History focuses both on the object itself as well as the history of knowledge which regarding it, is produced.

### **3. The Object in History**

To locate the object in time and history should not be read with the purpose of knowing its *arché*. If this purpose prevailed, we would inevitably have, in all investigations in the performing arts, a return to the Greek Theater, if the research would be limited to the context of Western Culture. It is not, therefore, about seeking origins, although for some cases, this search is necessary.

The temporal dimension is a relevant criterion when it furthers our understanding of the synchronic and diachronic object, when it is presented as a result of historical situations housed in the complex and contradictory set of social and cultural practices. In other words, it is not enough to know only the **how** and **where** such an object was forged: the **why** and **what for?** are necessary questions. For the arts, historical time is relevant because it associates itself to symbolic spaces.

Historical understanding discusses and relativizes the idea of the new, the work and its innovative particularity, the creator as genius and visionary. These forged and fed mental aspects in romantic times still linger and act as ghosts to mask the real force field, the insertion and action of art making. The ideology of the creative genius equally causes the distance between producers and connoisseurs, with significant breaks between both spheres: It focuses on a subject and its genius reinforces the inferiority of others.

The play of powers that interfere in the creative processes, and of which the works are the result and expression, is hidden in view of the great creator. In the scenic arts, the concreteness of creating is the result of contradictory processes where projects, people and concrete possibilities of realization confront each other. Projects are manifestations of the most intrinsic subjectivity which reveal readings of the historical moment, life situations and the mindset of a given society or social stratum, of projections of the future, in the end, combine the reading of the **what is** associated with the utopia of the **how it could be**. Those involved in the projects place their expectations on them, but equate them to the real conditions of existence and the concrete possibilities of realization, which involves financial resources and materials conditioned to investments, deadlines, producers, promoters and many other professionals. In short, the immateriality of meanings proposed by the work and its creation dialogues in the field of perpetual conflict with the material conditions of its realization, and is, therefore, not an exclusive act of will emanating from the creative genius. The genius wants to distance himself from the concreteness of history and from social and cultural practices, when the incidence of the idea of beauty, devoid of materiality, ends up prevailing.

#### **4. Subject and Knowledge**

Knowledge in the arts is not regulated by the discovery of truths, which is cumulative and, concomitantly, renews itself, when the last investigation overrides the previous ones. The latest investigation regarding mimesis, for example, is not the ultimate truth regarding it nor does it supplant the reflections developed in the most remote antiquity. Art as imitation is a subject that spans the centuries and Plato and Aristotle are neither superior nor inferior to the current onsets of aesthetics of theater in this theme. Research into knowledge that produces art may be both in opposition to others, or expands the range of

interpretations, as it can be complementary or even repetitive and, in this case, ends up being an exemplification, a reinforcement of something known. Historical time and the social and cultural space are hallmarks of knowledge, which are not mutually exclusive

In this respect, research in arts and production and/or artistic creation approaches each other. It is not said that an artistic work is a bearer of truths. Contemporaneous artistic creations are not above nor below those produced in ancient times. It would be an idiosyncratic exercise, for the arts, the use of the criteria valid to the experimental sciences. The history of the work is the foundation for its consecration, as well as the spaces that make it significant.

The point of convergence between artistic creation and investigative work is the subject. In these terms, the beginning of the research - the surrounding of an object - is nothing more than surrounding a particular human action that interferes in history, and from it becomes part, in concrete spaces and situations of production, accomplishment and manifestation. Subject and object, in the production of the arts and research in the arts, will eventually unify themselves and constitute a single paradigm: human action for the creation and production of knowledge and the senses.

Subjectivity emerges, then, as an upholder of the uniqueness of research in the arts. Concurrently, it approaches the research of production and creation, for both have the subjects and their actions as mediators of the artistic act and its research. To complete the picture, artistic action, emanating from one or more subjects, directs to other subjects. At the encounter and its inter-subjective relation, art and its practice are actualized as experience. This experience is dependent on material relations and, from them, the immaterial senses are established that project themselves into the field of cultural practice, through consolidation and/or overcoming of ideas, of ethical propositions, moral and political, that project themselves into the social game.

In research in the arts, experience becomes a differentiating factor compared to research in other fields of knowledge. This experience does not occur through the prism of the distancing and of the epistemic rupture between the knower and the knowable object. Rather, it is an integral part; it is the subject itself, especially when it admits creative work and research knowledge in the arts as intrinsic components of subjectivity for both actions are identified in their processes of

subjectification. In the arts, the production of works and knowledge do not alienate themselves from the subjects to which they are dedicated.

## 5. Material and Immaterial

Research in the arts (as well as in other areas) is oriented under three major fields: descriptive, analytical and interpretive. For the first of them, a detached and objective stance of the researcher in research should prevail. The presentation of the object - the description of its nature, its qualities and quantities, its contextualization in time and its place in space - should be an act of the utmost focused objectivity. Matter manifests itself in the work and its embodiment in the text written in the score, drawings, sketches, recordings, videos, reports, interviews and field diaries, in press texts and literary criticism. For all other fields, the subject of knowledge causes the prevalence of its theoretical and methodological instrument. The interpretive field deepens the investigation in its immaterial and symbolic aspects. As its name itself indicates, it approaches the act of the speculative and demands articulation of thought. The analytical acts as an intermediary, when matter and immateriality have guaranteed presence and research excels through the act of comparison, from the parameters of time and space.

For the arts, materiality achieves greater presence, since it occurs phenomenally in its visibility through, for example, colors, lines, shapes and performance actions. With this, the time parameter can be operated chronologically. This operation is possible when the work does not fall apart in time and in the experience of the present. When dealing with visual situations in performance, where the perceptive insertion of the public is sought and that occurs in the present, such experience and its research face the same epistemological dilemmas of the dramatic arts, such as music, dance and theater if taken at their present dimension.

For the arts that involve the spectacular, sound, corporeal and visual materials manifest themselves **presently** in the **here and now**. They are acts of demarcated temporality, involving the direct relationship between artists, artworks and the audiences, of a transitory and ephemeral nature, whose full repetition is practically impossible. The immediate implication of this observation is that, radically speaking, it is not possible to study theater, dance, music and the performing arts that occurred in the past.

The restrictions of the here and now imposed on research in the arts, the certification of material limits that takes into account the phenomenon of art cannot prescind the appreciating and receiving audience, individually or collectively. Technological advancement provides the most sophisticated mechanisms for recording sound. They extend the empirical possibilities and research materials. However, they have not yet reached the totality of the phenomenon in the present act, in conjunction with the performance of the presence of the audience.

Music, for example, may set aside the present act and focus solely on exposure, analysis and interpretation of the musical material, as it is given in written records and sound. Musical notation and writing are a closer approximation to the sound event. Both were able to develop an instrument that records codified language, tonality, modality, intensity, tempo, pitch, articulation, phrasing, types of beat, rhythm, movement, and text, in the case of sung works. But, even though approximating the sound, writing and language created that it aims to reproduce, as faithfully as possible, it cannot register the noise and errors that occur involuntarily in the act of musical performance, attended by the public. Moreover, musical writing is, at its best, written code that aims to be faithful and that needs to be transformed into sounds in musical performance itself, and this necessarily predicts the action of the public in the performative act. Sound registration through recording and playback technology extends the range of action of the researcher. Even so, the approach of music in the past resents the absence of the unforeseen and mishaps in an art that is performed presently, in the concert, in the show, in the recital, etc.

The same problem extends to the arts. The forms of recording the scene transfer, in the first place, the scenic act to the scope of writing, be it a description, a screenplay, a play, and finally, a dramaturgical work. The drawings and sketches of scenery and costumes, as well as the light maps are static visual records. Film extends the record for the work of the actors and the staging. Either way, those materials of the performing arts available to the researcher are texts, drawings, sketches, maps and video. All prescind the here and now. The exposition of the phenomenon, its analysis and interpretation end up devoid of the ritualistic and collective relations that occur in the present.



The spectacular arts present epistemological deadlocks for the approach to the phenomena of the past. The approach on occurred works and artistic acts is based on codes and languages that are focused on a partial registration for they do not cover the totality of the phenomenon. Resorting to the score, the disc, the video and dramaturgical text implies recognizing the limits of such records and, therefore, recognizing the partiality of the study of the arts that take place in the present.

The present act of music, the performing arts and of the visuals also extend themselves to appreciation, to reception, to contemplation, to public participation, that is, the aesthetic experience that brings the creator, creation and re-creation arising from the reading and/or readings emanate from the public, the critics and the commentators. At the current stage of research in the arts, in Brazil, unless there is a great misconception, the investigations of languages establish a shy dialogue with the broader aesthetic experience. Research in the field of reception, in turn, does not delve into the tangle of creative processes and the specificities of artistic languages.

Themes related to broader aesthetic projection point out that the art object has features that go beyond the exclusive field of matter, although it is dependent on it. It has to do with the range of immaterial work and its processes, which operates under the senses caused by the author and the work, absorbed and distributed throughout the aesthetic experience. Studies in the arts, in this respect, extend beyond the specificities of languages and reach the area of collective projection and repercussion, reconciling time and space.

To design research in the arts for the cultural and social meanings that the investigated objects desire and provoke, allows the approximation of singularities and pertinences of the **text** (the specific languages and their materiality) with the **context** in which such matter is effective. The social and cultural spaces in which artworks and artistic experiences occur are laden with meaning.

Processes, audiences, experiences and social dimensions distinguish themselves in immateriality. Works are made in partnerships aimed at collective practices; others are put into temples of the arts, in order to preserve the distance between the artist and connoisseur in the act of contemplation; others emphasize the procedural aspects of the educational and training act; others (the majority) are manufactured in series, in highly industrialized processes with the purpose of consumption; others are directed towards leisure and recreation. Each of these

possibilities correspond to distinct material processes of social practices, which can be handmade, commercial or industrial. Concerning the fate and cultural practices, they can be individual, collective, religious, ritualistic, contemplative and for entertainment. These instances, very often intermingle.

## **6. Experience and Uniqueness**

The reflection of Walter Benjamin (1987) is known regarding the poorness of experience in the contemporaneous age. The monstrous development of technique is the reason of such poverty. The present misery is manifested in the dissociation of the subjects with ideas and the entirety of cultural heritage, which would only have significant value if amalgamated to us through experience. Benjamin's perception directs itself to humanity as a whole. The trend is dominant and hegemonic, but not unique. Opposition, rebellion and utopian practice niches remain alive.

Technological advancements have brought many changes and transformations from and of everyday life alongside the abundance of material goods targeted at the consumer. It has also sophisticated the forms and means of production and work, computerized individual and collective spaces, interfering in inter-subjective relations. The greater the feeling of happiness provided by available goods, the greater the surrender to the society of consumerism, which supplants the notion of citizens to enforce that of the consumer. The individual and individuality is lost amid products to the point of overshadowing the marks and characteristics of individuals through the bewildering profusion of merchandise.

In an era dominated by the market, both of things and also consciences and subjectivity, art, its creation and its research, when not turned to the reification proposed by the market, stand out as unique elements of intertwining of subjects. Inter-subjectivity is the guarantor of experience and the arts are land still fertile for their proliferation. The quality of that experience is consolidated to the extent that the creation evokes freedom as a supreme ideal. With this, they can operate the emancipation of sensibility, imagination and critical reason.

Experience in creation can be transferred to research in arts, making it *sui generis* and, unless there be greater misconceptions, this seems to be a particular element to pulse in favor of the specificity of arts studies. The practical and sensitive knowledge of the artist, when transferred and triggered by the

researcher, facilitates the approach of the poetic linkages and challenges of creation. The experience self helps understanding that of the other.

When the researcher and artist merge, sensitivity, imagination and reason go hand in hand. Yet, it is necessary to ponder: Can this amalgam be transformed into pure appearance and reveal its misconceptions when it chooses to investigate itself and its creative processes. In this case, the subject becomes the object of exposure and critical reason tends to be put aside. This egocentric stance is accentuated further when the exposure and the alleged self-study come devoid of a historical insertion. Thus, the parameters of time and space are abandoned. Historical insertion and the space of realization for the symbolic are deprecated and the new intrusive tenant of the research ends up revealing a warped image of an "I" supposedly sovereign and self-sufficient. The experience is lost because it is not proposed to be held in the collective and the inter-subjective. Isolated, the conscience of the artist and researcher who becomes the object of exposure, manifests its fragility and, at the same time, joins the consumable and quick goods of the market. This self-made and inflated conscience, and abandons the higher sense and the collective of experience: it becomes a thing amid so many other things.

Despite the risk of emptiness and decay, creation and research in the arts can overcome the stage of lethargy of the extreme and arbitrary exposure of the self. One of the ways is the recapturing of dialogism and adopting the concomitant attitude of learner and teacher with other realities of creation and research. This transfer and contact of knowledge, governed by a healthy contamination of collective experiences, make research of the arts something differential and unique.

### **7. In the end, a fiction**

A fictional story can refresh the ideas expounded on here and direct, intuitively and perceptually, some considerations.

Averroes in Cordoba had before him the *Poetics* of Aristotle, and, according to Jorge Luis Borges, not knowing the language of the text, could not find adequate words to translate two terms: tragedy and comedy.

Fourteen centuries separated Averroes from its source. More than centuries, cultures, religions, and different languages plagued the Arab physician. He

lacked, therefore, cultural experience, linguistic knowledge and religious experience different from those preached by the *Koran*.

In the story in question (*La Busca de Averroes*, by Borges) Averroes, in his work, is detached from things and earthly daily chores and things: he is always in a higher topographical surface, something that common sense would designate as an "ivory tower". While translating Aristotle, struggling with the difficulties and limitations, he speculated about what might have been the Athenian experience of the tragedy and comedy. There were two levels of difficulty for the Arab thinker: first, it was concerning the fragments of the Aristotelian text and language difficulties; second, the lack of social and cultural experience of the theater in Athens. Therefore, he lacked empirical, experiential, linguistic and historical elements.

How was Averroes' dilemma solved? That same day he would dine at the home of the Koranist Farach. Among those present at the table was the traveler, Abulcásin Al Ashari, who had returned from Morocco. The conversation flowed among the guests up to the moment Abulcásin narrates an episode involving a spectacular representation. Muslim merchants of Sin Kalan led Abulcásin to a "painted wooden house," in which "many people lived." The house seemed to have a "single room" surrounded by "cabinets or balconies" one upon the other. People ate and drank in all these "cavities", as well as on the floor and on a terrace where some "played drum and lute." Another fifteen or twenty people, who wore red masks, prayed, sang and dialogued; they acted as if incarcerated where no bars were to be seen; they would ride invisible and imaginary horses; fought, died and the next moment were standing. Moreover, they were not crazy, Abulcásin assured: they were - in the words of one of the merchants - "figuring a story." Abulcásin addressed Farach's guests stated: they "showed" a story rather than "tell it".

Abulcásin's precarious description provided clues to solving Averroes' dilemma: the experience filled in, even though partially, the historical, social and cultural gaps of speculative research of the Arab philosopher. The Abulcásin's experience was not enough to ensure the universality of knowledge, but sharpened the perception that was lacking for the Averroes' speculative process.

Regarding the arts, in research and its creation, Averroes and Abulcásin appear to be, at first glance, divergences and opposites of a united phenomenon. Often

seen, they complement each other. Practical knowledge of the creative subjects and of the researchers, combined with the universality of history, to the experience and practice of the arts in an act of presence comprise the general symbolic picture in which the arts and knowledge subscribe to.

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