

The Expanded Fields of Theater¹

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The migration of the theater beyond its traditional paradigms is a constant in the contemporary scene, in proliferating hybrid and decentered experiments whose dominant feature is to evade conventional models of creating and understanding theater. Whether it expands beyond the limits of what is considered a theatrical manifestation, or whether it invades and appropriates life itself by real mechanisms of annexation, it is clear that the playing field of today's theater is wide open and of no definitive shape.

The phenomenon is not new. Since the historical avant-gardes of the beginning of the twentieth century the site of theatrical occurrences and the concepts that gave it visibility have undergone profound changes. But undoubtedly the most radical shift has been since the 1960s, when artists mainly from the visual arts and music, such as Alan Kaprow, Joseph Beuys or John Cage, created hybrid theatrical genres like happenings and performance. During this period, the Cage and Merce Cunningham events, the Fluxus movement, the radical experiments of Beuys and immersive environments emerge as art forms that use the theatrical materiality of space and the corporeality of live performance to construct an expanded field of bodies, objects, visual and sculptural stagings, sculptural and sound that is often difficult to define. These unprecedented experiments can not be treated simply as theater, cinema, music, visual and dance arts, because what is presented is the "kingdom of everything together," as Roger Shattuck would say about the Parisian avant-garde during the belle époque" (Shattuck , 1968).

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One of the first essayists to analyze this hybrid art was Rosalind Krauss in her already canonical article "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." Commenting on the largely different modes of sculpture in the late 1970s, Krauss emphasizes the break with the artistic specificity of modernism and the development of a new field of activity where creativity is characterized by the absence of boundaries and the multiple relationships between art, science and new technologies (2008, p.87-93).

In an essay in this dossier, Gabriela Lily notes that in a later period, these creations with no fixed territory, whose common assumption is to have no specified field in which to manifest, proliferated to the point of earning differentiating terms such as expanded sculpture, expanded cinema and expanded literature. Visiting the ideas of Krauss, Couchot and Garramuño, Lily identifies the expanded field as an expression set in opposition to the specificity of the arts, as a network of tension and new relationships between the expressive elements. It claims a hybrid place, a living space of different art forms and technological interaction, which interrogates the viewer's perception in unusual ways. In view of this scene that expands or extends its original territory, Lily ends her reflection raising important questions about the need to rethink the formative processes of the performing arts, what is essential to them, and at the same time, the difficulties of implementing interdisciplinary laboratories of experimentation within educational institutions.

In regards to theatrical theory, attempts to cover this ample field of experimentalism have focused on the concepts of theatricality, performativity and the post-dramatic, approaches that seemed able to realize expanded experiences well beyond the staging of a dramatic text represented by actors. When Josette Feral supports the idea of theatricality as a conscious act of the performer and the spectator, whose gaze opens a gap, or fissure, necessary for the theater event, she leaves no doubt about the scale of experiments she intends to encompass, to the point of including in this spectrum scenes of invisible theater in subways, daily activities snipped in cafes and even outdoor events where it is difficult to distinguish a theatrical landscape (Feral, n.d., p.3-12).

Erika Fischer-Lichte follows the same path to emphasize the performative shift theater underwent around the sixties, when the construction of the scene from plastic and corporeal genealogies is a constant, with a progressive distancing from the dramatic roots and fictional representation that until then had constituted the

core of theater (2008, p.36). As for Hans-Thies Lehmann, the ample cartography that he maps of the post-dramatic theater is sufficiently known in his polemical eponymous book that outlines the difficult quest to organize vectors for reading the multifaceted processes of the contemporary scene, as it invades the intermingled territories of fine arts, music, dance, film, video, performance and new media, besides refusing to grant drama any ascendancy as to constitution and its meaning (Lehmann, 2000).

In this dossier, Ricardo Fabbrini takes up Lehmann's concept of the "theater of visual dramaturgy" to associate it with the expanded field of theater, which in his view incorporates various media in order to produce different image systems. In close dialogue with Gilles Deleuze, Fabbrini uses the notion of "image-individualization" to show that this theater is the place par excellence of the "perception of drama," a space where form affects sensation and forces the viewer to think. The confluence of languages, lights and bodies, which for Deleuze is a "community of arts," for Fabbrini is a composite form capable of producing images critical of the "wiles of representation" and the simulacrum of mass media, returning "to the eye the chance to see."

The possibility of seeing that which looks at us, as Romeo Castellucci notes when creating the performance *The Concept of the Face of the Son of God*, is presented in this dossier in an interview conceded by the artist to Leonel Carneiro and Eli Borges. When referring to the genesis of the piece, he remembers the strangeness he experienced upon seeing the Christ portrayed by Antonello de Messina and perceived that the Christ was looking at him from the painting with a look that stripped him naked. "Immediately, I thought to reproduce the portrait on fabric, on a gigantic scale," recalls Castellucci, recounting the moment he conceived of the face image that, during the performance, jumps from the central vanishing point of the stage to launch on the viewer a look he can not avoid.

Broadening the look on the expanded theater fields, analysts gathered in this dossier depart from different point of views, using various devices to read this theater. Although the approaches are plural, as is desirable, this may perhaps indicate how constant we find, in the articles, the concept of contemporary theater as an art intersected by all sorts of interference and materials, as noted by Christophe Bident in his article. Using three artistic examples, the site-specific creations of Teatro da

Vertigem, the Berlin group video performances and the multimedia productions of director Guy Cassiers, the researcher characterizes what he calls the “traversed theater” by two movements: the centrifugal, resulting from the realization of performance in different urban spaces of the theater experience in which the world is declared theater due to the conjuncture of bodies and language before an audience; and the centripetal, resulting from the appropriation of new technological devices within the space of theatre rooms in ways that render the distinction between reality and fiction nebulous. These movements, Bident alerts us, are only apparently opposed, since performances in open public places can make use of technology, and installations with site-specific materials can be created inside theaters. Moreover, he points out that these two movements converge regarding their rupture with representation; in traversing social and political issues; the questioning of history; by intersecting present-past; in the requalification of the real as an object of perception; and in the relative character of what can be considered fact or fiction. Proceeding in this way, this “traversed theater” liberates, according to Bident, “the infinite circulation of perspectives,” mentioned by Viveiros de Castro, and operates in line with the politics of Jacques Rancière’s “ignorant master.”

Intercepting some subjects covered by Bident, Marvin Carlson notes that the current theater expands toward reality. In his text, he assumes that the tension between real and illusion has always been the core foundation of the theatrical experience, as real life and the living body of the actor are the preferred material to construct fiction. But he notes that it is only in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first that the real in theater becomes emphasized in an unprecedented way as many artists decide to focus their experiments in life itself, in space and in real performers at the expense of fiction. What Lehmann diagnosed as the “irruption of real theater,” Carlson sees as a major shift that the practical and phenomenological field of theater has undergone in recent decades to turn its back on mimesis and discuss the negotiation between the real and the mimetic. The historian looks back at the origin of these practices from the historical realism of Nicolai Evreinoff, through the documentary theater of Erwin Piscator, the American Living Newspaper and the experiences of Rolf Hochhuth and Peter Weiss in Germany, to arrive at the documentary dramas of Moisés Kaufman and Emily Mann and to the testimonial theater of Barney Simon and Anna Deavere Smith. However, he also

points out another aspect of the tendency, to refer to the experiences of body art, the happenings of Allan Kaprow and radical performances of Bruce Naumann and Chris Burden, exclusively composed of “real life actions.”

For Carlson, violent physical actions such as Burden practices, real and not simulated, are part of the experimental theater project to break the barriers between stage and life, public and private. The theme serves as an introduction to the analysis of the German collective Rimini Protokoll, which develops its work with “specialist of the everyday,” who must bring their own professional experience to the scene. The author associates this invasion of “real people” on stage to experimental uses of direct contact with social reality that blur the boundaries between theater and reality, as is the case of site-specific creations or of the Disabled Theatre of French choreographer Jerome Bel, who created several works with the disabled. The conclusion Carlson comes to is that the most significant theatrical experiments of the twenty-first century constitute a continuous negotiation between theater and reality, that not only reflect, but also incorporate, reality.

The article by Renato Ferracini and Bruna Martins Reis explores a field of work similar to Jérôme Bel’s. In this reflection on the border between dance and clinical practices, the authors consider provocative experiences conducive to reinventing the self and new modes of existence. The proposal of the article is to discuss dance’s role in the context of two mental health services for psychosocial rehabilitation of people with severe mental disorders. The practices experienced in the corporal encounters and in the research on states of presence activated processes of subjectivization able to create something similar to “the life devices” - referred to by Nicolas Bourriaud - that enable the self to “recreate itself.”

The work of Catalan artist Roger Bernat, interviewed by Julia Guimarães for this dossier, also reflects on the border between art and life. One of the most important artists of the Spanish contemporary scene, Bernat is known for involving non-actors in his creations and by the invention of unusual devices for audience participation. As noted by the interviewer, although his creations are considered performances or happenings, Bernat wishes to emphasize that what he does is theater, since it creates spaces for gathering people to rethink their collective relations.

Other dossier articles focus on different experiences that traverse the expanded territory of contemporary theater. The encounter of procedures geared to the

creation of dance performed in open spaces, outdoor, motivates the empirical research and reflection of Paula Kramer, who shares in detail the process of creating the performance *Body, trees & things* (2012). Inspired by the thought of political scientist Jane Bennett, the researcher takes the position of the non opposition between human and non-human, subject and object, attributing to things, to objects and materials live aspects, or elements. Thus, she relies on the ballerina's potential of physical exposure to the outside world and to relationships with the different categories of objects that compose it. The researcher's process of creation ultimately rests on the assumption that "nonhuman materials affect and resound in the dancer, in the human being, and through intermaterial confederations, the dance appears."

The exploitation of non-human materials reappears in the text of Felisberto Sabino da Costa and Ipojucan Pereira, commenting the production *Stifters Dinge*, by the German director Heiner Goebbels, a performance without actors in which mechanical devices, natural elements, lights and disembodied voices are the protagonists. The authors point out that landscape art is one of the proposal's inspirations, whose poetic is based on the perceptual relationship of the viewer to the scene, based on what Goebbels calls the aesthetics of absence.

The analysis of Goebbels' radical aesthetic is deepened in the review of Stephan Baumgärtel's book *Aesthetics of Absence: Texts on Theatre* (Goebbels, 2015), a collection of the renowned composer and director's writings. In his refined reading of Goebbel's work, Baumgärtel highlights the aesthetic principles taken by the artist, such as the desire to break with the formal conventions of both the modern theater as well as contemporary performative events; the peculiarities of Goebbels' creative process, where the construction of gaps that destabilize meaning has a determining role in the composition of the work and also in the ethical and political character acquired by the creations due to the absence of a semantic organizing center of all scenic elements, since their absence prevents a normative reception procedure. Baumgärtel not only presents, with propriety, important aspects of Goebbels' poetics, thus arousing interest in the work analyzed, but also carries out an interesting comparative reflection between the German and Brazilian cultural and artistic reality, discussing the possibilities and interests in Brazil regarding the development of a poetics of absence.

The use of digital technology appears frequently as an operative way to promote the expansion of theater's territory. In this sense, the Polish researcher Izabella Pluta analyzes the intersection of theater with robotics. She traces the trajectory of collaboration between the director and the Japanese playwright Oriza Hirata and robotics engineer Hiroshi Ishiguro, a partnership within the Android-Human-Theatre project. The proposal consists of getting robots of extraordinary human appearance to interact, on stage, with actors, a development that results, along with other technological devices, in an artificial skin perfectly similar to human skin and sensors that ensure that the android has the possibility of facial micro movements. In her study of the use of the Geminoide F robot model in the pieces *Sayonara*, *The Three Sisters Android Version* and *Metamorphoses Android Version*, Pluta identifies the specificities of the dialogue between artists and scientists in the process of creation in a territory that brings together art and science. She also puts emphasis on what questions these creations pose to theater, notably with regard to the paradigmatic presence of the actor.

Considering the realization of performance within the expanded field of theater, Annette Arlander prefers to problematize performance itself, inquiring how it might enter into an expanded field. She proposes to think how performance arts - for which the present, the here and now, is a determining aspect - can contribute to the future. That is, how it can go beyond the present. The researcher then finds, in the thought of Australian philosopher Elisabeth Grosz for whom there is art existing in the natural world, the foundations for the development of a working method she calls "performing landscape:" video performances produced in contact with the earth's forces that activate transformations in nature.

The dossier also includes two essays dedicated to performances that were presented at the Third International Exhibition of Theater in São Paulo (MIT/2016), pulsating works of a stage contaminated by different languages, expressions of mestizo territories. After recalling relevant aspects of the artistic career of the renowned actor and director Josse de Pauw, Marta Isaacsson presents us with one of his latest creations, *An Old Monk*, a work conceived and carried out in partnership with composer and jazz musician Kris Defoort. Inspired by the American musician Thelonious Monk, the piece presents itself as a sensory experience of renovation of musical theater through the improvised dialogue between music, the word as

half-intoned and half-sung, half spoken and dance.

Matteo Bonfitto also comments a work presented at MIT, *Still Life*, by choreographer Dimitris Papaioannou. Starting from stimuli such as a “cloud/cosmos” hovering over the stage, a stone/wall penetrated by the performers, subtle physical scores, moments of silence and sounds of objects, the essayist explores the powerful sensory effects that act on the viewer. Bonfitto likens this to the experience of a meditative exercise guided by a musical pattern that builds gradually, “a quality of specific attention.” The author also refers to the exploitation of the wide range of materialities on the stage, in the transit between the bodies of the performers, the stone/wall, the cloud-bubble and estranging sounds that escape “known representation” to go back to the condition of “matter before meaning.”

Comparing *Still Life* to a meditative exercise is enough to show the experiential breadth that the contemporary scene is able to offer the viewer. Among these experiences and experiments, we can include the creative process, the discursive elements accompanying the presentations and even the iconographic documents and sound produced from the event. This is what Catalão defends in his article on virtual theater, in which he refers to genetic criticism and reception theories to support his conclusion. Supported by Mathias Langoff’s thought, Catalão affirms that the viewer’s experience is, in fact, the “second appearance” of theater.

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