



BETWEEN HYPERREALITY AND MAGIC:

DEPOIS DO SILÊNCIO BY CHRISTIANE JATAHY

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ABSTRACT. This article investigates the considerable anthropological and social value of Christiane Jatahy's theater performance *Depois do silêncio*¹. Jatahy, Brazilian playwright, director and actress, conducts in-depth analysis and a philological work on various documentary materials while also adapting literary and cinematic sources for the theatrical stage in a performance depicting the journey of the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement, descendants of slaves still persecuted today, and unveiling dark aspects of the history of Auriverde. This essay examines the play *Depois do silêncio* (After the Silence), the third and final chapter of the Trilogy of Horror, a performance in Portuguese in which we can observe this Wagnerian transmedia summa. The play gives the impression of leaning heavily towards documentary theater but, gradually, the static aspect of the beginning of the work fades away and the discussion unfolds among the three main characters, cinema intermingles on the stage and the live music by Aduni Guedes brings forth the sound of the earth, the celebration, the tribal rite and the magic spirits.

PAROLE CHIAVE: theatrical anthropology, documentary theater, intermediality, magical realism, epic theater

¹ <https://christianejatahy.com/creation/depouis-do-silencio/>.

1. THE TRILOGY OF HORROR - BEYOND THE THEATRICAL ADAPTATION



The layering of various themes and the closely related cross-media approach in Christiane Jatahy's work make it challenging to adopt a single interpretative model, as well as to provide a comprehensive presentation of his theatrical aesthetics in a short article. That said, to fully understand her direction² it is necessary to make some general remarks about Brazilian theater, which has always been closely tied to the unique course of local history and reflects the situation of "marginality" to which Brazilian culture has been relegated until recently (Cacciaglia 1980: 10-12). The director aligns herself with a group of artists who, alongside those influenced by American and French culture, offer an extremely vivid vision of the currently difficult local situation. Brazil is a land rich in contradictions; it is experiencing rapid industrial growth, making it one of the leading countries in South America, yet it still bears the marks of the complex and troubled history of its diverse ethnic and social milieus (Ibidem: 12). Theater is the medium that reflects this dimension and serves as a mass information tool on par with television, which has a more popular and commercial character.

The theater of the Brazilian artist is rich in explorations of binary dramaturgical and performative elements: the actor as the absolute materiality of the theatrical event³ and the fictional character as a theatrical reference; the narrative of fiction

and the accounts of reality as constitutive elements of dramaturgy; the common territory of the actor and the spectator in the theatrical space; the very place of authorship, considering the option for collaborative processes in writing and the recreation of classics from literature and theater. These aspects translate into the means of creation and open avenues for the spectator to collaborate with what they see. In the procedures adopted by Jatahy in the creation of theatrical works, one can indeed observe strategies of emphasis and explicitation of this creative condition in the spectator's approach to the works (Avila Small 2015: 246-247).

If theater direction is an independent art and its concrete place is the individual and historical cultural setting in which the staging takes shape, in Christiane Jatahy's directorial aesthetics it becomes increasingly difficult to easily recognize the author of the original text or film that is being used and "manipulated". Instead, the identity of the director, the one who, starting from concrete artistic elements, has created something entirely different, is evident and clear. Her language is constantly driven by a bold spirit of inquiry, seamlessly navigating between the realms of the present and the past. If theater is a mediation between ideas and their materialization, the addition of a technological device external to the artisanal nature of the theater, chosen by Jatahy, emphasizes the process of constructing scenes, the artificiality of signs, timing and the composition of actors/characters. The presence of cinematic language in the analyzed performance highlights, paradoxically, the very nature of theater, revealing it as a process⁴ (Lírio Gurgel Monteiro 2015).

2 Born in Rio de Janeiro in 1968, Christiane Jatahy is an author, theater director, and filmmaker. Christiane Jatahy is an associate artist of the CENTQUATRE-PARIS, à l'Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe, Schauspielhaus Zürich, Arts Emerson Boston and Piccolo Teatro di Milano – Teatro d'Europa. Cia Vertice is supported by Direction régionale des affaires culturelles d'Île-de-France – Ministère de la Culture France. In 2022 she was awarded the Golden Lion for Theatre at the Venice Biennale for her theatrical career.

3 Christiane Jatahy makes her theater debut as an actress, and the development of her aesthetic taste involves engaging in artistic research. It is as a performer that she initially delved into the works of the Spanish playwright José Sanchis Sinisterra, who has since become a fundamental point of reference in her artistic and intellectual development (Da Costa, Jatahy 2016:25).

4 The emphasis on mediation is a critical, destabilizing device that became canonical in 20th-century theater with Bertolt Brecht's epic theater.

Indeed, when discussing Jatahy's theater, the focus is always immediately drawn to the technique of "adaptation" she adopts, her theater being the result of a process of translation or a code transfer from a previous work. Among the specific meanings taken by this term "adaptation" the scholar Rajevsky identifies the so-called "medial transposition," which refers to "the way in which a media product comes into being, i.e. with the transformation of a given media product (a text, a film, etc.) or its substratum into another medium" (Rajevsky 2005:51).

It is also worth emphasizing that, just as in references to film adaptation and novelization processes, the final product is generally seen as an inventive work. This assumption is suitable to describe the director's work, which is characterized by a strong aesthetic tension between artistic creation and critical discourse, between fiction and reality.

It is therefore entirely natural to associate this trilogy with the theatrical philosophy adopted by the pedagogue and theater director José Sanchis Sinisterra to the concept of the frontier applied here metaphorically to the boundary between narrative and theater and between cinema and live performance.

Jatahy's exchange with Spanish dramaturgy, which led to the excellent staging of Sergi Belbel's "Caresses" in 2001, consolidated mainly through the dialogue with the playwright and scholar of dramaturgy José Sanchis Sinisterra. Sinisterra focused on the research of dramaturgical systems. Together with him, Jatahy staged the play "Memorial do convento" in 2003, an adaptation by Sinisterra with Jatahy as the director, based on Saramago's novel. In addition to this production, their collaboration also resulted in Jatahy directing Sinisterra's text "Leitor por horas" in 2006. (Avila Small 2015:253)

Like any theater director worthy of the name, Christiane Jatahy creates, through a series of codes, a language for which there are no pre-existing systems of signs before the staging is created, and it ceases to exist

when the context of the performance ends. Precisely due to this unique and personal aesthetic mark, some have defined her as the author of a "fusion theater"⁵, a theater that is based on a dense interweaving and leads the critical spectator to observe the relationships established between a literary work and its transmedia extensions, such as a dramaturgical outcome, a film, or even between a documentary and its theatrical adaptation. Once again, we could associate Jatahy's aesthetic approach with the reflections of Sinisterra, who indicates that there has been a paradigm shift in contemporary theater towards dramaturgies of fragmentation. The change involves moving away from the idea of creation based on the psychological aspects of bourgeois drama (from the perspective of narratives and character creation, both in the context of the written text and in the actor's work) to a non-psychologized approach. In this approach, the actor is on stage in relation to others, the context, objects and activities they engage in—opposing the notion of the subjective inner trajectory of a character (Sinisterra 2013).

The Trilogy of Horror, of which the performance focused on in this article forms part, was born as a reaction to the terrible radical right-wing party that took control of the highest positions of power in Brazil over the last four years. For Christiane Jatahy, the director and a Brazilian national, it was essential to reflect on the forms of post-colonialism to try to understand what might have caused this political and social catastrophe. Her three shows aim to dissect the endemic structures that allowed the rise of the Bolsonaro government, each realized in three different languages and contexts.

The first part of the trilogy is *Entre chien et loup* (2021), inspired by Lars Von Trier's film *Dogville*⁶. In this performance, "Grace", the main character, escapes a totalitarian regime and finds ref-

5 Definition used by Marco Palazzini, film critic and curator of film presentations at the Agenda Brasil Festival during the meeting on May 10, 2023, *Pagina letteraria e racconto cinematografico: il teatro fusionale di Christiane Jatahy*, held with Prof. Vincenzo Russo, Nina Vinchi Cloister of the Piccolo Teatro in Milan.

6 <https://www.theatre-contemporain.net/spectacles/Dogville/critiques>.

uge in a theater where a group of actors is immersed in adapting the film to explore the idea of welcoming outsiders. It is a situation where the director re-experiments with her hybrid language between theater and cinema. The second is *Before the Sky Falls* (2021)⁷, which connects to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* through the film *The Sky Falls* by Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert. This performance revolves around the theme of toxic masculinity, violence, the political power of patriarchy, and its intrinsic aggression against femininity in all its forms - women, children, and ultimately nature and the earth itself.

To close the trilogy, *Depois do silêncio*⁸ is adapted from the best-selling novel *Torto Arado* by Itamar Vieira Junior (2019) and the iconic film *Cabra marcado para morrer* (1984) by Eduardo Coutinho. This theatrical reflection took shape through documentary and literary research, combined with intense and constructive dialogue with actresses and collaborators. "In the construction of the show, these people brought their past and present experiences, along with the weight of the violence stemming from the persistence of the colonial system in which we all still live. Being able to listen to their stories is the most concrete opportunity we have to transform the future" (Merola, Strazzi, Vitalone 2023) says Jatahy, adding:

In 1964, Eduardo Coutinho began shooting 'Cabra Marcado para morrer', an investigation into the life of Joao Pedro Teixeira, a leader of the peasant struggles who was assassinated by the landlords in Paraiba, in the northeast region of Brazil. Set in the rural interior and featuring Joao's widow and his fellow comrades, the film's production was interrupted by the military coup of 1964. It remained unfinished until 1984, when Coutinho was finally able to complete it (Ottone, Dabusti 2010:153).

Coutinho's film thus covers twenty years of military rule and intertwines the history and genealogy of the film itself with the accounts provided by the people involved in its production. It can be considered an anti-Platonic work that focuses on individuals rather than general ideas (Ibidem), highlighting the interplay between ethics and aesthetics.

The same characteristics can be found in the other source chosen by the Brazilian director, the best-selling novel *Torto Arado* set in the Diamantina Mountains in the state of Bahia. The novel tells the story of two sisters: "Belonísia" who enjoys working on agricultural activities and supporting her father, Zeca Cappello Grande, who is involved in the ritual practices of the community in Bahia. On the other hand, Bibiana grows up realizing the condition of subordination her family has been forced into for decades and decides to fight for land rights and against the exploitation of workers. It is a story with almost epic tones, tied to the liberation struggle of a people, observed from the perspective of the large community of Agua Negra, faithfully brought to the stage with a mix of folklore, the magic of "encantados" and the earth itself. The show extracts the narrative core of the relationship between the two grown-up sisters, Bibiana and Belonísia, who choose opposite paths in life, and intertwines it with the plot of the documentary. We witness a widowed Belonísia, reminiscent of the character Severo, who coincides with the charismatic labor union leader assassinated, the protagonist of Coutinho's documentary film.

An empty stage, except for tables arranged on each side. This neutral space, almost devoid of clues, except for a few stacked files, is the paradoxical starting

⁷ <https://christianejatahy.com/en/creation/before-the-sky-falls/>.

⁸ *Depois do silêncio* (After the silence), 2022. Direction and Text Christiane Jatahy, with Gal Pereira, Juliana França, Caju Bezerra, Aduni Guedes and, for the film, Lian Gaia and the participation of the residents of the communities of Remanso and Iúna - Chapada Dimantina/Bahia/Brazil. Containing references to, and images of "Cabra marcado para morrer" by Eduardo Coutinho, Mapa Filmes production. Production - Cia Vertice - Axis productions. Coproduction - Schauspielhaus Zürich, Le CENTQUATRE-Paris, Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe - Paris, Wiener Festwochen, Piccolo Teatro di Milano - Teatro d'Europa, Arts Emerson - Boston, Riksteatern-Sweden, Théâtre Dijon-Bourgogne CDN, Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles, Théâtre Populaire Romand - Centre neuchâtelois de arts vivants La Chaux-de-fonds, DeSingel - Antwerp, Künstlerhaus Mousonturm - Frankfurt a.M., Temporada Alta Festival de tardor de Catalunya and Centro Dramatico National - Madrid.

point of an extraordinary incursion into the heart of a little-known dimension of Brazilian life. It all begins in the form of a testimony, that of two sisters seated at one of the tables. But their words, already powerful in themselves, soon amplify to become a concert of voices intertwining with one another, while past and present resonate as if summoning spirits (Ottone, Dabusti 2010).

A DOCUMENTARY AND REVOLUTIONARY THEATER

Emerging from the tradition of agit-prop theater that spread in Europe following the Russian Revolution, this theatrical form was introduced in Germany in the 1920s by Erwin Piscator, who aimed to create shows “in which the document itself constituted the fundamental basis of the text and representation” (Diaz 2012: 301).

For Piscator, in order for theater to be political, it needed to grasp reality in its “totality.” It was no longer about showing “this or that episode of our time, but time itself”; not to present “extracts from a worldview” but “the complete tree, from the roots to the farthest tips of the branches.” This decidedly realistic perspective required, as Piscator noted, “completely exploding form and space.” He advocated the development of a “sociological and political dramaturgy” modeled after the newspaper, which, unlike theater, could capture the most engaging aspects of reality. Jatahy’s work aligns with this vision of documentary theater, as she delves into reality, weaving together personal stories, historical contexts and social issues to create powerful and politically charged performances. By using real-life elements as the foundation of her work, she brings a sense of urgency and authenticity to the stage, inviting audiences to engage deeply with the complex realities of the world we inhabit.

However, what also unites Jatahy with Piscator’s revolutionary theater is the integration of film as an essential part of the dramaturgical writing. In this context, the film serves an educational function, informing the audience about the subject of

the performance. This dramatic approach becomes part of the development of the action, sometimes replacing live enacted scenes and acting as a commenting chorus (Piscator (1929) 1978: 183).

It makes sense to think about the relationship between audiovisual and theater only if there is a total integration with dramaturgy (Da Costa 2015). The exchanges between theater and cinema are numerous and diversified, giving rise to numerous artistic and academic research projects. In Brazil, some directors work on what I have called “expanded scene” - a scene that absorbs exchanges between the arts previously analyzed in their specificities but that today, due to the incorporation of technologies, supports, and creation devices, multiply and also create several focal points for the audience. In this way, the boundaries become thin, and we can no longer analyze correspondences, approximations and singularities unless we consider the show as it plays out (Magris, Picon-Vallin 2019). Directors like Christiane Jatahy conduct research on the interrelation between theater and audiovisual, positioning themselves on the border between documentary theater, such as that of Milo Rau, to cite a recent well-known example, and multimedia dramaturgy that sees the fusion of theatrical and cinematic language in a creative way, like Thomas Ostermeier (Boenisch, Ostermeier 2016).

In fact, through the integration of film and the use of documentary techniques, Jatahy creates a complex and layered narrative space that combines theatrical fiction with recorded reality. The director indeed states that “it makes sense to consider the relationship between audiovisual and theater only if there is total integration with dramaturgy” (Da Costa, Jatahy 2016: 21). This fusion of theater and cinema, blending the experiences of the actors with filmed testimony, amplifies the impact of the stories told and provides the audience with a more comprehensive and engaging perspective on the themes explored in her works. Jatahy harnesses the evocative power of cinema to enrich her theatrical storytelling and create a compelling, educational, and deeply political performance.

This is precisely what we find in *Depois do silêncio*: an alternating blend of archival scenes, specifically constructed film footage pre-recorded in Brazil, and live theatrical performances.

The footage we shot in Chapada Diamantina was done with the same people who inspired Itamar Vieira Junior to write his book. All of this work has given me the opportunity to rediscover my ‘artistic home’ in the broadest sense of the term. The home that I am for myself, which constitutes me, and never abandons me⁹.

The utilization of technological elements in Jatahy’s documentary direction, capturing the reality through direct filming, and the practice of using actor-witnesses, some of whom are actually from the places they depict, represents another significant aspect akin to theater as a political instrument (Magris, Picon Vallin 2019). It echoes the intentions pursued by one of the founding fathers of documentary theater, Peter Weiss. Weiss embraces the structural idea of epic theater inherent in Piscator’s approach but takes it further, almost pushing the formal and rational logic to its extreme.

In what is considered the true manifesto of documentary theater, Weiss’s second text *Die Ermittlung* (The Investigation) from 1965, we witness the literal reconstruction of trial proceedings in which Weiss participated in Frankfurt. It is a theatrical proposal for the reworking of journalistic documentation and notes taken in real-time, with the directorial ambition to renew the audience’s understanding of historical and political themes. This goes beyond a mere objective description of reality but rather takes a stance and positions itself politically. As the artist herself affirms:

The scenic concepts of reality and fiction that shape my dramaturgy are constantly intertwined with each other. This leads to the creation of two distinct but constantly dialoguing languages. From these considerations, an image comes to mind, that of a slingshot: reality represents the stone flung into the heart of fiction. The story is thus catapulted into the “present” and is forced to deeply reflect on itself, revealing to us the circular ripples of the stone in the water¹⁰.

This “black and white” theater, as in Jatahy’s, is about defending a thesis, a certain interpretation of the world or the event that emerges from the singular montage of different documents. The stage thus transforms into a “courtroom” where a genuine trial against the culprits takes place. This kind of work, like that of the Brazilian director, completely rethinks the role of the actor: they become less an interpreter of a character and more a spokesperson for a person, seeking to convey their thoughts, expressing their point of view, and taking a stance in their investigation.

In *Depois do silêncio*, the narrative delves into that mythical Eldorado of Brazil, so coveted by the early colonizers, which organized the largest slave trade on the entire American continent and was the last country to abolish slavery in 1888. On the backdrop of the stage, three large screens display film footage of that emerald-green land to which the three female protagonists on stage belong. Their account accompanies a video set in the region of Chapada Diamantina, where diamond mines have long been closed, and on whose lands black farmers, descendants of slaves, were tolerated by their former masters¹¹. They had the right to build

9 <https://www.theatrenational.be/en/activities/2661-depois-do-silencio-apres-le-silence-christiane-jatahy>.

10 Interview with Claudiléia Lemes Dias, *Bolsonaro è finito, il machismo no*, in «Left. Un pensiero nuovo a sinistra», 3 marzo 2023, <https://left.it/2023/03/03/bolsonaro-e-finito-il-machismo-no/>.

11 Juliana França was born and lives in Japeri, in the Baixada Fluminense in Rio De Janeiro. She is an actress, teacher, Master in Philosophy, researcher of performing arts and ethno-racial relations, and has been a member of the socio-cultural group Código for 16 years. Caju Bezerra is an actress, theoretical researcher, and artist-educator. She researches the narratives, oralities and corporealities of the African diaspora in live arts. Gal Pereira is an actress from the quilombo of Remanso in the Chapada Diamantina, in Bahia. She has acted in two short films and one feature film, and produced and directed a musical event. Aduni Guedes is a percussionist, music producer and researcher of the African diaspora, crossing ancestral tradition with contemporary music forms. Lian Gaia is an indigenous woman born in the Atlantic Forest in a peripheral urban context. Graduated in psychology, she works in scene art. She is co-founder of Anauá Filmes, an activist producer for indigenous causes.

houses without electricity, as long as they were not made of bricks, making it easier to demolish and evict them.

The director's approach is not to seek a pitying empathy but, rather, in an attempt to encompass reality she executes a composite montage that spans from film to theatrical performance, with total adherence of the actor-witness to the person (not a character) whose thoughts they faithfully convey. This montage allows for a "leaping" and "curved" process, shattering any concept of merely quantitative temporality, and emphasizing the irrepressible qualitative nature of epic narrative time.

If history is repeating itself (and it is chilling), it's because we haven't studied it enough, haven't revisited it, and haven't used it as a tool to bring the gravity of Brazil's situation in every historical period to the surface, be it during the military regime of 1964 or the colonial period¹².

Indeed, even though the actor-witnesses speak in the first person, they are clearly guided by the figure of an omnipresent director. In the theatrical process, the director plays a demiurge role, orchestrating and shaping the performance, and having a significant influence on how the actor-witnesses present their testimonies. The director's vision and guidance are integral to the creation of the production, ensuring coherence and conveying the intended message to the audience.

During the construction of the work, a heated discussion arose about using the real names of the actors and their life stories. As a result, the idea of blending everything together - reality and fiction, actors and characters - took shape. This process was crucial. In the end, the story told by one actor to the audience, presented as their own personal story, was not true, as it belonged to another actor; however, the actor narrating it used their real name and, at times, shared parts of their life story. The audience sensed the intensity of this work due to the friction between reality and fiction, creating a powerful impact on the overall performance¹³.

The intermingling of narrative theater – in Portuguese with supertitles – and

multimedia theater leads the audience to discover the history of the Landless Workers' Movement and their constant struggle for the right to own the inhabited land parcels. The history of this movement is marked by bodies, with farmers being executed, sometimes merely as an example, to sow fear. With Bolsonaro's rise to power, the repression of this movement intensified, with its members labeled as terrorists, expelled, or killed. Before the audience stands the young wife of one of the main activists of the movement.

What is claimed is the right to knowledge that the director says she was denied during her adolescence and childhood, which took place during a period of dictatorship that affected the right to information. As an adult, the artist became aware of what was omitted and decided, through her performances and even more through *Depois do silêncio* to bring the invisible to light. Not only in relation to the Bolsonaro government but also to expose the illusion of perfect racial integration that is not yet deeply rooted in Brazilian culture. White Brazilians enjoy certain privileges and unite in the struggle with all those people who, due to the color of their skin, still face prejudice, violence, and injustice – this is well explained in the speeches drawn from one of the chosen sources for the performance, the novel *Torto Arado*.

3. THE MAGIC OF/WITHIN THEATRICAL RITUAL

As we have discussed, the main theme tackled by Jatahy is undoubtedly the status of reality and the sense of truth. This dramaturgical process has been investigated for many years and is given ample space in *Depois do silêncio*.

In this performance, Jatahy delves into the blurred lines between reality and fiction, weaving together different elements like documentary footage, personal testimonies, and live theatrical performances. Through this intricate amalgamation, she creates a theatrical ritual that goes beyond

¹² Interview with Claudiléia Lemes Dias, Bolsonaro è finito, il machismo no, in «Left. Un pensiero nuovo a sinistra», 3 marzo 2023, <https://left.it/2023/03/03/bolsonaro-e-finito-il-machismo-no/>.

¹³ <https://www.redcat.org/events/depouis-do-silencio>.

traditional storytelling, inviting the audience to question the nature of truth and the impact of historical events. The theatrical ritual becomes a powerful tool for conveying the complex layers of reality, transcending the boundaries of ordinary storytelling. The magic lies in the immersive experience created for the spectators, who become active participants in the exploration of the themes presented. Jatahy's approach challenges traditional notions of truth, creating a thought-provoking and emotionally engaging performance that resonates long after the curtains close.

The performance weaves together elements of myth and mysticism, creating a universe where the peasants' struggle revolves around the appropriation of words. It delves into the lives of black bodies that were once slaves and are still stigmatized in Brazilian society. In this land where the Landless Workers survive, ancestral rituals are celebrated – the only legacy handed down over centuries from the ancestors who arrived on slave ships from the Horn of Africa (Sirach 2022).

These rituals involve dance and music, emitting enchanting waves that evoke a mute ecstasy until the body falls into a state of motionless trance. Through these rituals, the performance taps into the deeper essence of human experience and history, connecting the present with the past, and reclaiming the power of storytelling and cultural heritage. The magic of the theatrical ritual lies in its ability to create a sensory and emotional experience for the audience, transcending mere storytelling and engaging them on a profound and transformative level.

The director deliberately seeks a phenomenon “in which aesthetics are directly connected to the political and social” as a result of the feedback loop, which is the process of constructing meaning tied to the staging and the bodily co-presence that Jatahy never relinquishes. The starting point of the actor's direction work appears to be the reworking of a spontaneity that does not select but uses as a basis the wide range of natural behaviors and cultural actions. Enculturated reactions are transformed into stage behavior, that is, into organic and effective actions for the

audience's senses (Geertz 1973) The performance, while having a dramaturgical project with a well-defined use of space and timing for each individual performance, is never identical to the previous or following night. This is due to the different arrangement of the actors each time and the state of the audience.

In this dialogue between actors and images, accompanied by the live music of Aduni Guedes, which conveys the sound of the land, the celebration, the fear and the spirits (Wynants 2022), the traditional organic conception of drama inherited from Aristotle's poetics is dismantled in favor of a “montage” of different sequences inspired by historical events. This montage allows for a free organization of action and time. Unlike epic and political theater, with which Jatahy's work has been associated thus far, the music is not used as a mere accompaniment to the content and images.

In the second half of the performance, we witness the manifestation of two types of ‘spectacles’, which is nothing but a search for representation of sociality, aesthetics, exhilaration and, above all, communication. We see, in fact, how vertical communication, directed towards a supernatural sphere and therefore coinciding with what is a ceremony or religious ritual, occurs simultaneously with horizontal spectacle addressed to observers, the audience. This synthesis is usually found in a celebration where spiritual rites and secular entertainments alternate (Barba, Savarese 2018:16).

The witnesses are led and drawn by the music into an atmosphere animated by supernatural presences. These are the spirits of those who, despite the terror, managed to rebel and escape, the voices of the slaves who sought refuge in the forest. Protected by this natural barrier, beyond which the colonizers dared not venture, they created quilombos, communal settlements where they could practice their culture, speak their language, and hold religious ceremonies (Le Tanneur 2022). The music becomes a driving force, leading the actors into this realm of the supernatural and connecting them to the voices and spirits of the past, creating a powerful and immersive theatrical experience that transcends traditional narrative forms (Fischer-Lichte 2008:90).

Indigenous performance relied on culling elements from the surrounding world—bird calls, animal movements, the sounds of a certain wind, the pursuit of a hunted animal, and the feelings evoked by a spirit, for example. The sights, sounds, and rhythms of a particular part of the earth were momentarily held and celebrated. Indigenous performance danced, sang and drummed their part of the earth into being. This type of performance came about through a complex, spontaneous intuition, a trial-and-error interaction and process. When humans performed, it was as much for themselves as it was for the spirits, ancestors, the elements, and animals (Ricchio 2010: 151).

With reference to the period spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when individualism was extreme to the point of considering the individual as the object of a sort of religion (Durkheim 1962:278-279), whilst at the same time, due to industrialization and urbanization, anonymous masses were being created, the theatrical context appeared to many as a place where these processes could not only be observed but also exemplified – a place where a community could be reconstructed. Community in the political sense embraced in the thought of Piscator, as well as a collectivity based on class struggle (Piscator [1929] 1978: 183).

Certainly, this performance can be placed within the great tradition of magical realism (Sirach 2022). One might think of Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed, founded in the favelas of São Paulo in the 1960s, as “a theater by the people and for the people” (Parkinson Zamora-Faris 1995).

In magical realism, indeed, extraordinary or supernatural events are seamlessly integrated into the ordinary, mundane world. This blending of the real and the surreal creates a sense of wonder and enchantment, making the fantastical elements feel natural and almost believable within the context of the narrative. The genre often explores themes of identity, culture, social issues, and the human condition, using magical or surreal elements

as metaphors or symbols to reflect deeper truths about the world and human experience. In this case, it is relevant to mention a moment in the performance that evokes a fundamental aspect of the cultural identity of Bahia – the moment of possession experienced by one of the protagonists and her supposed state of trance. A very particular trance in which the body empties not to welcome a spirit or a demon from outside, but rather, in a sort of reversed ‘possession,’ it empties to bring forth the spirit, the demon that is within, to reveal the soul.

Although it may seem like a gesture connected to hyperrealism, it can also be interpreted as a meta-theatrical reference, an allusion to the actor's simulation of being possessed or a sorcerer. In the illusion of the audience, it appears as if they are witnessing participants in a tribal ritual. The stage, which throughout the entire first part of the performance has been a place of metamorphosis, indicating a metaphor of death and foreshadowing the future, now aligns itself with the video images displayed and what is happening on stage. The presentification of the devices and the pact established from the beginning with the spectator create a realistic effect by involving the audience in the state of ecstasy experienced by the actress. In this way, the body on stage attempts to free itself from itself, shaking and disarticulating. It is a body drawn to the allure of trance, understood in various ways from Grotowski to Antonin Artaud, up to the Dionysian mystery, the source of ancient Tragedy, or that of Eleusis. In theater, it has always been the painful pleasure that leads to the ultimate liberating catharsis. The question of whether that moment is authentic becomes secondary, and the viewer is invited to bring their thoughts beyond the physical and corporeal presence of the actor before their eyes.

For a western audience, who rarely encounters such situations, it may be a considerable effort to suspend their disbelief. The spectator is not faced with a well-known and familiar role belonging to a shared collective imagination, so they may interpret this moment in the perfor-

mance as a peak of unruly emotion. The incorporation of elements like possession and trance into the performance challenges the conventional theatrical boundaries, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. The audience's experience goes beyond mere observation, as they are called to immerse themselves in the immersive and hyperrealistic ambience, questioning their own perceptions and interpretations of the narrative.

Finding the right balance between allowing space for emotion, identification, and laughter, and dedicating room for deep reflection is essential. As artists, we cannot think of ourselves as the sole possessors of knowledge. In my own work, I bring forth specific elements on the stage that I believe are worthy of discussion. At times, this may be seen as a form of denunciation. However, I aim to convey that it is an artistic experimentation, an ongoing journey filled with twists and turns. Each performance is a constant adjustment, a process of exploration that evolves over time¹⁴.

That said the audience finds itself in an undeniably "magical" dimension. If we understand magic as a cultural and social phenomenon that gains value and meaning only when everyone believes in what they are witnessing, it relates to the spectacle of a shared performative moment in a place like the theater, where anything can happen (Mauss 1972). The theater embodies a space where reality can be suspended, and a small imaginary division, such as the fourth wall (our *limen*), creates a dimension that is extraordinary compared to everyday life. It is an exceptional context, especially in the case of Christiane Jatahy's documentary theater, which is not customary.

The theatrical performance becomes a shared experience that transcends the boundaries of everyday reality. The audience becomes an integral part of the magic, immersed in a unique and extraordinary time, contributing to the creation of a powerful and thought-provoking moment. In this immersive and transformative space, the theatrical work resonates

on a deeper level, inviting the audience to engage and reflect on the complex issues presented in the performance.

CONCLUSION

The search for an authentic "here and now" is a fundamental aspect of Jatahy's theater, which is always firmly grounded in the present and confronts the challenge of repetition that threatens to turn it into a mere reenactment of the past.

Theater is about the here and now, cinema is about the past. I try to create a third space in which in the present we can reflect on the past and fantasies about the future. These three times always come together. [...]The footage that has been made appears like a phantom. Suddenly you understand that the performance is no longer taking place live. I describe it as a discursive present in which history strongly manifests itself (Taveirne 2022: 64).

The process of construction and exploration revolves around the performance of the actors, who are required to navigate a delicate balance where the audience is aware they are witnessing a performance, yet prompted to question how much is genuinely rehearsed versus how much unfolds as a spontaneous and authentic event of the present moment.

Grotowski defines the theater as "a collective introspection". Art, whatever its form, has one single purpose: to generate a number of very definite psychic reactions. If the purpose of the theater is to stimulate or revive the inner life of the spectator, it will have to break all resistance, all the mental clichés which prevent access to the unconscious mind of the audience. This type of theater could be compared to an anthropological expedition. It goes beyond the civilized territories into virgin forest. It ignores clearly defined rational values and challenges the darkness of the collective unconscious (Barba, Flaszen, Sanzenbach 1965:174).

Jatahy's theater is not only deliberately political but also utopically transformative, as she states: "the theater as a machine that sows seeds of transformation regarding the subject matter; in doing so, I always use the metaphor of a stone thrown into a lake and the concentric cir-

¹⁴ Interview with Claudiléia Lemes Dias, Bolsonaro è finito, il machismo no, in «Left. Un pensiero nuovo a sinistra», 3 marzo 2023, <https://left.it/2023/03/03/bolsonaro-e-finito-il-machismo-no/>.

cles it generates”¹⁵. To awaken and reactivate the audience’s consciousness, she employs not only hypertext references but also incorporates fully-fledged expressive structures into a theatrical form of total artwork, echoing the concept of Richard Wagner, where tradition and innovation converge in a harmonious relationship. The use of technology is not secondary, nor does it override the strong anthropological dimension of Jatahy’s theater; instead, it exists in a dynamic convergence as a “constant force of unification in a dynamic tension of change” (Jenkins 2006:70). The theatrical performance I have analysed exemplifies optimal transmediality, deriving from the joint articulation of the same content through various media languages in a sort of transmedial narrative (Dena 2009).

This combination of a deeply anthropological and documentary-rooted theatrical foundation with a language more connected to fiction, speed and the flow of images represents a distinctive strategic practice chosen by the Brazilian director, fitting well with the idea of theater as a metaphor for the world. Art, and specifically theatrical art, have always been fundamentally important as tools for defining the human experience. Theater is undoubtedly one of the oldest expressions of human creativity and the result of cultural evolution.

Indeed, the modern and contemporary theatrical device is a way of approaching the external world that is entirely different from the past. Recent scientific studies, particularly in neuroscience, have shown that the spectator’s brain synchronizes with the mimetic and imitative aspects of the performance, engaging with the primal human tendency to imitate and mimic.

In this sense the artistic object (the actor’s body on stage, for example, but also a painting, a sculpture, etc.) acts as a mediator of an interpersonal relationship and stands in between someone who may not necessarily be present (the artist, painter, playwright, director, sculptor, etc.) and the person facing the work of art.

However, the object is no longer just a simple object, as it becomes the mediator of an interpersonal relationship (Wojciehowski-Gallese 2022: 64).

If the actor’s body can evoke emotional reactions by eliciting sensory-motor and affective resonances in the spectator through the theatrical artistic expression sought by Jatahy in her direction of the actor, it is entirely aimed at making the actor’s body a public manifestation of the universal human capacity to feel and think. The political and multimedia performance *Depois do silêncio*, through an ancestral narrative and the reconstruction of a communal ritual on stage, not only seeks the spectator’s empathy but aims at generating a shared multiplicity (shared manifold). It is a way of “mapping” the other that likely generates intentional consonance, forming the basis of the typical phenomenological quality that we ourselves experience, feeling with the other a relationship of identity and reciprocity. What ensues is our intentional attunement with the other on a level of embodied consciousness and recognition through the theatrical medium of “another similar to me”. Jatahy’s intentional integration of aesthetics with politics and social themes creates a dynamic and ever-evolving theatrical experience. To succinctly describe the performance outlined, we could refer to the theatrical form typical of the Far East (Japan), that of the “monistic ensemble”. It is a perspective and approach embraced by Jatahy in which the unity and interconnectedness of all elements involved in theatrical creation are emphasized. A concept in which actors, set design, direction, music, and other elements collaboratively contribute to create a singular theatrical experience without distinct separations or dualisms (Ejzenstejn 1949).

The loop of feedback between the performers and the audience, along with the continuous bodily presence, ensures that each show is unique and responds to the energy and interactions of the specific

15 Interview with Claudiléia Lemes Dias, Bolsonaro è finito, il machismo no, in «Left. Un pensiero nuovo a sinistra», 3 marzo 2023, <https://left.it/2023/03/03/bolsonaro-e-finito-il-machismo-no/>.

moment, making it a living, breathing entity. This approach blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction, engaging the audience in a more profound and interactive experience, where the lines between performer and spectator become fluid, and the collective energy shapes the performance's unfolding.

Depois do silêncio explores the complexities of societal dynamics and seeks to reflect the struggles and aspirations of individuals and communities in the face of societal changes. It highlights the interplay between individualism and collective identity and the need to find a sense of community and shared purpose amidst the challenges of modernization and industrialization. In this sense, the theater becomes a space where the collective experiences and stories of the people are brought to the forefront, allowing for a deeper exploration of the human condition and the complexities of social interaction. By integrating elements of magical realism, the performance can transcend the boundaries of traditional realism, providing a rich and evocative portrayal of the human experience.

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