

Image Experience and Sound Density: effects of presence in the staging of *Auto da Catingueira*

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ABSTRACT – Image Experience and Sound Density: effects of presence in the staging of *Auto da Catingueira* – This article proposes to problematize notions of presence and body from the sound dimension in a performance of the opera *Auto da Catingueira*, by Elomar Figueira Mello. The study uses a bibliographical, critical and theoretical review, and discusses parts of the recording of the spectacle in close dialogue with music theory and concepts brought from oral poetics. Thus, an analysis of the elements of the performance of actors in the scenic phenomenon is presented in relation to concepts of orality, body and voice, bringing together aspects of performativity and staging based on Brazilian culture and popular actions.

Keywords: Experience. Presence. *Auto da Catingueira*. Theater. Performance.

RÉSUMÉ – **Expérience de la Densité de l'Image et du Son: effets de présence dans la mise en scène d'*Auto da Catingueira*** – Cet article vise à problématiser les notions de présence et de corps à partir de la dimension sonore dans une représentation de l'opéra *Auto da Catingueira*, d'Elomar Figueira Mello. L'étude utilise une revue bibliographique, critique et théorique, et discute des parties de l'enregistrement du spectacle en dialogue étroit avec la théorie musicale et les concepts issus de la poétique orale. Ainsi, une analyse des éléments de performance des acteurs du phénomène scénique est présentée en relation avec les concepts d'oralité, de corps et de voix, réunissant des aspects de performativité et de mise en scène basés sur la culture et les actions populaires brésiliennes.

Mots-clés: Expérience. Présence. *Auto da Catingueira*. Théâtre. Performance.

RESUMO – Experiência da Imagem e a Densidade Sonora: efeitos de presença na encenação de *Auto da Catingueira* – Este artigo propõe-se a problematizar noções de presença e corpo a partir da dimensão sonora em performance da encenação da ópera *Auto da Catingueira*, de Elomar Figueira Mello. O estudo utiliza revisão bibliográfica, crítica e teórica, e discute partes da gravação do espetáculo em diálogo estreito com teoria da música e conceitos trazidos das poéticas orais. Assim, apresenta-se análise dos elementos da performance dos atores no fenômeno cênico em relação com conceitos da oralidade, corpo e voz, aproximando aspectos da performatividade e a encenação fundada na cultura e nos fazeres populares brasileiros.

Palavras-chave: Experiência. Presença. *Auto da Catingueira*. Teatro. Performance.

Among physical objects, sound is the one that most lends itself to the creation of metaphysics. But if music is a model on which metaphysics is created, [...] it is still a metaphor and metonymy of the physical world, as a vibrating universe where, at each new threshold, energy shows itself in a different way.

[music] offers the model of a universe conceived as pure energy, whose density is given by the interpretation of movement (Wisnik, 1989, p. 28-29).

The staging of the opera *Auto da Catingueira*, by Elomar Figueira Mello, took place at the Palácio das Artes de Belo Horizonte in 2011 and renewed in a very sensitive way the scope of the work done by the Bahian composer, not only in terms of the number of people who have access to the composition, but especially in the sense that the journey from the vinyl record recorded in 1983 (CWM Music, 2022) to the stage in 2011 brought with it new voices and bodies of actors, scenery linked to the sertanejo imaginary and the powerful participation of puppets. In addition, the performance of the instrumentalists and singers brought the language of the *sertaneza*¹ to life (Guerreiro, 2007, p. 13) in words and chords, in the way they sang and played the violas, cello and transverse flute. In this way, the move to the theater made it possible to bring together a multiplicity of languages and sounds, which enhance the images of the sertão (Brazilian hinterland) that pulsate in the experience of each spectator.

And with regard to the experience of this spectator-researcher, it is **important to note that I didn't have the opportunity to watch the spectacle live, but only to its record. In this way, I'm exposing something of the path, wanderings and impasses of this research, which is limited and, at the same time, made possible by the recording.** For example, in the 2nd Song (Dos Labutos), because of the way the DVD was recorded and the cuts made, the figure that stands out in most of the scenes is the singer (Xangai), with the puppet appearing in only a few brief moments, most of them in the background, which makes it considerably difficult to observe his gestures, costume and movement, as well as those of the actors who manipulate him. This is a difficulty imposed by the fact that the subject of the research is a performance that took place years ago and is no longer on stage, which the researcher watched on DVD, but did not witness with her own body.

This difference has proved significant, because it's not just my eyes that observe each scene and choose where to look, nor is it just my individual gaze that perceives this or that light or sound effect, this or that almost imperceptible movement at the back of the stage, this or that facial or bodily expression that we sense says more than the central figure in the scene. In reality, this is another language that is no longer simply theater, because between the performance and the spectator there is the camera and, with it, an infinity of variables that are not the focus of this research at the moment, but which need to be considered at all times so that the two dimensions of the screen are not confused with the multiple dimensions of the stage, even if the object of the film is a performance.

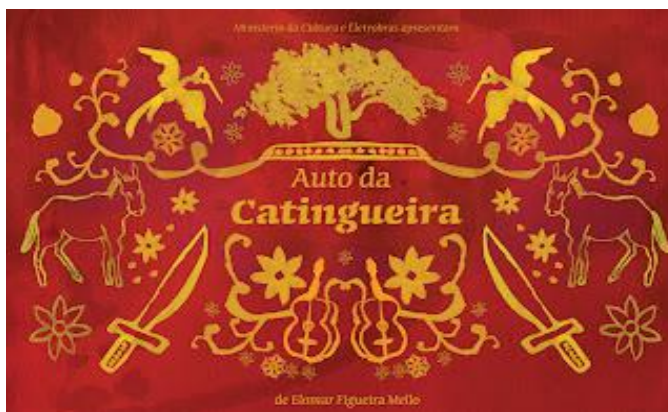


Figure 1 – DVD cover of the performance of *Auto da Catingueira*.

Source: O Homem e a Terra - Auto da Catingueira (cargocollective.com). Accessed on: Jan. 1st, 2023.

In this text, I begin by discussing the sound configuration used on stage and its intimate relationship with the countless elements present on stage, which reach the listener-spectator in the form of experiences explained here as effects of presence and effects of meaning, both intertwined in a moment of poetic intensity. They act as raw materials for each spectator's imagination of a “sertão profundo” (“Brazilian deep hinterland”). This notion of experience points to the subject-object relationship, which highlights certain ways in which human beings, in a given society, see and describe themselves in relation to the world around them.

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2010, p. 46) explains that, during the Western Middle Ages, up until the mid-18th century, man perceived himself as being part of the world, both resulting from a divine creation. This configuration of self-reference changed from the Renaissance onwards and with the start of the modern period in Western culture, when man began to perceive

himself as external to the materiality that surrounded him. This change in the way we perceive ourselves in relation to things is deeply linked to the way we perceive the world: eccentric to it, we can only see it from the outside, and we do so from our cognitive faculties. Thus, the author shows that the “modern” figure of human self-reference is an intellectual and incorporeal entity, fundamentally separate from the material world it observes: this is the dichotomization between the spiritual and the material.

The theorist teaches that, based on this separation, the human being came to be understood through the spirit-matter paradigm – an abstract mind external to the world and a material body belonging to the things of the world. In this direction, the things that surround us, as well as our bodies, began to be seen as material surfaces that would carry a spirit and be “naturally” different from it. *Observing* then became synonymous with interpreting meaning: the subject, an incorporeal entity external to the world, *observes* the object, a thing of the world – it wants to go beyond the material surface of that thing and identify a deeper meaning in it (Gumbrecht, 2010, p. 48).

This way of experiencing is called the Hermeneutic Field by Gumbrecht and is criticized by the author because it dichotomously opposes subject and object, which means that observations only aim to decipher the meanings of the observed objects and disregard everything that is tangible and material about them, thus neglecting the corporeality of the observing subject itself and leading to an “extreme state of alienation from the world” (Gumbrecht, 2010, p. 91).

With the end of the 18th century and the crisis of representation, this metaphysical view began to be relativized. In this sense, moving away from the idea of the transcendental observer, we began to accept that neither the subject nor the object can be stable, and that there is no univocal representation, but rather a multiplicity of representations for all the things we relate to, and began to consider the human senses as an inseparable part of any observation.

On the other hand, as Gumbrecht (2010, p. 67) explains, the 19th century also saw the institutional isolation of the “sciences of the spirit”, disciplines that focused on interpretation and hermeneutics, which led to the foundation of the federation of Humanities disciplines, a crucial point for the materialization of the supposed epistemological incompatibility be-

tween the use of the senses and the use of concepts to study the world, and concentrated Humanities studies on Cartesian world references.

In order to shift these dichotomies, I now believe that the willingness to deviate – as far as I can – from the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy is fundamental to this research. I believe that this study aims to relate to the staging of *Auto da Catingueira* (2011) in order to glimpse some – because I wouldn't be able to find all – of the effects that can happen in the experience, the flows that this poetic form, as a meeting of different languages, tensions in contact with the reader, as it is perceived in the oscillation of effects of presence and effects of meaning, flows that intertwine in the experience.



Figure 2 – Images from the staging of the 5th Song de *Auto da Catingueira* (Das violas da morte: o desafio de violas). On the left, the trio of instrumentalists João Omar on viola, Marcelo Bernardes on transverse flute and Ocelo Mendonça on cello. On the right, Xangai and Dércio Marques duel on the roles of Cantador do Nordeste and Tropeiro, respectively. Source: Image available at: Gosto Musical: DVD *Auto da Catingueira* - ELOMAR (gosto-musical.blogspot.com). Accessed on: Jan. 1st, 2023.

With this in mind, and in order to study the languages of staging, I want to focus our ears, initially, on the way in which the poetic images constructed in *Auto da Catingueira*'s contact with a spectator carry within them vibrations of sound that are not only in the musical forms, but also in the voices, performances and oralities that move around the stage. We can see, for example, in the image of the staging (Figure 2), the Tropeiro Chico das Chagas and the Cantador do Nordeste engaging in a tragic challenge for the love of Dassanta, **which will result in the death of the opera's three main characters.** On the left, the trio of instrumentalists play the viola, flute and cello and, in the center of the stage, the screen shows the challenge of the violas in animated form. In a single scene, we can perceive an intense play of languages in the poetic images

of the sertão, which are realized in experience and are also experience, drawn in the imagination of each subject as they perceive each scene.

José Miguel Wisnik (1989, p. 29), in his book *O som e o sentido*, shows the physical world as a “vibrating universe where, at each new threshold, energy shows itself in a different way”. I understand from the author that the physical world, that is, what is perceptible to people through their senses – including people themselves – can be understood as a vibrating universe and the things of the world are energy that vibrates. In the different vibrations, we find certain thresholds, that is, border and passage zones that mark – without limiting – the point from which the energy vibrates in another way.

Thus, effects of meaning and effects of presence are produced in and by the spectator of *Auto da Catingueira*, vibrating like energy flows that are not dichotomous, but different and which, because they are different, are tensioned on stage and in the body. They always move between thresholds of singing voices and dancing bodies, expressive puppets and a narrative thread brought by the singer and narrator of the story of Dassanta, the beautiful catingueira tree who provokes love and challenges and, when she dies in the dispute between the Cantador do Nordeste and the Tropeiro, transforms into a yellow-winged bird “passo Japiassoca assu”.



Figure 3 – Images of the staging of the 5th Song (Das violas da morte: o desafio de violas). Source: Image available at: Gosto Musical: DVD Auto da Catingueira - ELOMAR (gostomusical.blogspot.com). Accessed on: Jan. 1st, 2023.

On stage (Figure 3), the body and the puppet share the stage in the role of the Cantador do Nordeste and make up a hybrid image in which the viola challenge is constructed and shifted at every moment in this interweaving of languages. On the left, the singer Xangai looks at the puppet, both representing the same character, both with their instrument in their hands to beat their opponent. On the right, we see the puppet representing Tropeiro, also with his instrument in hand, and behind him, the actors manipulating him. In the background of the scene, the big screen shows an image of the night sky with a full moon, bringing to the scene “the presence of the numinous, the sacred, the mysterious” (Guerreiro, 2007, p. 13).

Wisnik (1989, p. 29) explains that music offers “[...] the *model* of a universe conceived as pure energy, whose density is given by the interpretation of movement”. From this perspective, the observed universe is conceived as pure energy, *energy* being treated here as vibration – movement – a hybrid form of spirit and matter, dynamic and not dichotomous. Music – the *model* of this universe – exists as vibration in the world and, therefore, movement. The presence of this energy, its density, in other words, what makes it perceptible to the senses of a being, is the interpretation of movement made by each being.

On the other hand, when explaining the “production of presence”, Gumbrecht (2010, p. 38-39) gives the expression a spatial reference: the “present” is in front of us, perceptible by our bodies; “production” means “to bring forward” or “to push forward” and, therefore, “production of presence” would simultaneously bring the ideas of tangibility that arises with materialities and continuous movement.

Based on these discussions, we can reflect on the notion of “sound density” explained by Wisnik (1989) as the way sound – and music – is perceived by us as psychophysiological, emotional and cultural beings. The concept of sound density, in music theory, refers to the number of sounds that are perceived at the same time in a musical composition or environment, which does not only depend on the number of layers of sound vibrating simultaneously, but can be influenced by numerous factors such as musical texture, volume and intensity, sound space, tempo and rhythm, crescendo and decrescendo dynamics throughout a composition, production and recording, mixing, etc. It should be noted that this characteristic is not

an absolute value of sound productions, but depends on the listener's perception and, at the same time, defines the different listening experiences they have of the music, influencing emotions and the listener's attention in various ways.

Such "sound density", when it encounters a body immersed in culture and language, needs to be contextualized. The body then perceives and interprets a given sound as music "through the perceptible and organizable vibrations of the layers of air" (Wisnik, 1989, p. 29), which engages physiological and cognitive processes, subtle memories recorded in its own body materiality. The body and sound, then, meet in the vibrations of the layers of air, in other words, in movement – music translates this movement that we are into our sensory scale, and in this way, we perceive sound density in our body density, each one being density, movement, vibration.

Thus, the body's interpretation of music is always and from the outset, like the body and like music, immersed in culture and language. Sensory scales are closely related to musical scales, which are designed and practiced in different ways in different cultures. There is a memory there that is not linked only to cognitive and rational processes, but to a set of organizations of sound material that is part of the history, experiences and traditions of people from different places and cultures.

As Wisnik (1989, p. 31) explains, the history of music shows a long conversation between sound and noise, with sound relating to periodic recurrences, the production of constancy, and noise being the relative disturbance of stability. The two are not opposed in a dichotomous way, but are presented as a *continuum*, parts of a scale that cultures will manage according to their traditions:

As an intrinsically wavelike experience of the world, sound projects the threshold of meaning in terms of its relative stability and instability. This meaning is leaked with historicity – there is no absolute measure for the degree of stability and instability of sound, which is always the production and interpretation of cultures (a permanent selection of materials aimed at establishing an economy of sound and noise runs through the history of music: certain intervals, certain rhythms, certain timbres adopted here may be rejected there or, forbidden before, may be fundamental afterwards) (Wisnik, 1989, p. 31).

Therefore, the relationship that different cultures develop with musical scales defines the administration between sound and noise, the more stable or unstable character of sound materials: tempos and counters, tonics and dominants, consonances and dissonances. This factor is relevant when we think of “sound density”: there is no absolute measure for the degree of stability and instability of sound, the perception we have of this density is built on the sensory experience, perception and interpretation we make of the soundscape in performance. So, meaning is put into operation, always “leaked with historicity”, always linked to an experience, an enunciative context, a determined perspective that starts from a body and a culture.

From this perspective, the notion of presence, as explained by both Wisnik and Gumbrecht, cannot become part of a permanent situation, since it is “produced” from the displacements and perceptions made by each being, which is also made up of different cultures and identities. Thus, I believe that a spectator relates to art by experimenting with the movement produced in this very act of experimenting, a transit between thresholds, oscillation of effects of presence and meaning.

And these are the effects of meaning and presence that vibrate in the spectator of *Auto da Catingueira* when they hear the description of the beautiful character Dassanta, whose image is blessed with a beauty that is always echoing the “tragic”, whether in the grave intonation with which she is announced by the narrator, or in the hints of the fate that awaits her: “qui a dô e as aligria na sombra/ dela anda/ e adonde ela tinha a vea da/ foice istava” (“that pain and joy walked in her shadow/ and wherever she was/ the old woman with the scythe was”) (Mello *apud* Rezende, 2011, p. 13). This idea is emphasized in the repetition of the fragment “Chôro e intêrro, chôro e intêrro” (“Weeping and burial, weeping and burial”), which also has voices other than the narrator’s, and seems to sound like a chorus prophesying the character’s fate.

In explanatory note 8 of *Auto da Catingueira*, when describing Dassanta’s beauty, a comparison is made with the pure catingueira tree, “without the clothes and aggravations (resources) of the big city” (Mello as cited in Rezende, 2011, p. 10). The catingueira is considered a sacred tree because of its roots in the caatinga and, in this sense, its beauty is closely related to its roots in the earth. At the same time, it is said that “tia nos ólho a

febre perdedêra/ qui matava mais qui cobra de/ lajêdo” (“she had a wasting fever in her eyes/ that killed more than a snake), longed to “realize the encounter between herself and the world”, to know the world that was not in the place where she was born. In this way, the sacred face of the character, which is related to the image of the pure catingueira, to the mythical rootedness, is profaned when he discovers her desire to know the things of other worlds: her skin is traced with a tense thread of color.



Figure 4 – Images of the staging of the 5th Song (Das violas da morte: o desafio de violas). The puppets in the performance: Dassanta between the Tropeiro and the Cantador do Nordeste.

Source: Image available at: Fotos - Auto da Catingueira (cargocollective.com). Accessed on: Jan. 1st, 2023.

So, before Dassanta crystallizes into a fixed image, she moves outwards as a function of desire, and always returns to some sertão. In this movement of “bringing forward” and “pushing forward”, effects of presence and effects of meaning intertwine with the imagination of a spectator “me” and the heroine becomes tangible in sound and body, at the same time as she finds a search scenario, a place of movement and inquiry.

In Figure 4, the puppet Dassanta appears between the Tropeiro and the Cantador do Nordeste in the final scenes of the viola challenge, in which all three die and the woman is transformed into the yellow-winged bird. Here, the relationship with the catingueira does not mean immobility: the beauty of the tree is not drawn only from a single land, since its rooting in that same land takes it deep into the ground, where it feeds on the fluidity of the water moving through the world. And even when she dies, Dassanta doesn’t remain paralyzed on that ground, but becomes a bird, gains wings and the possibility of flight, as it says in the 1st Song: “Dispois da morte virô passo/ japiassoca assú!” (“Once dead she became a bird/ a japiassoca assú”).

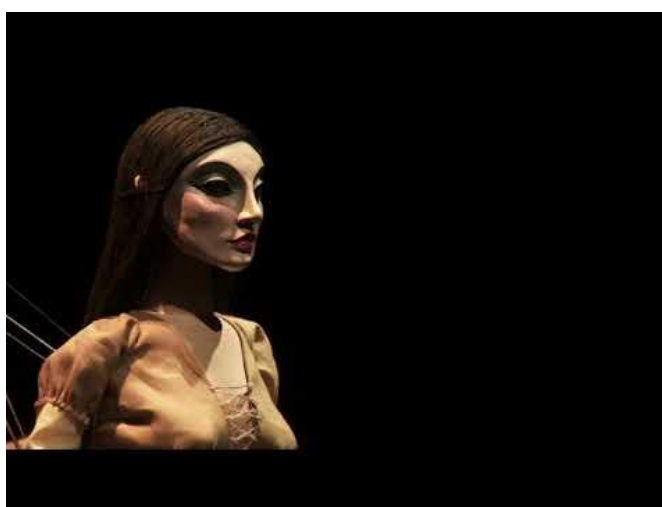
On the other hand, there is such a strong connection between the woman and the land that transforming herself into a yellow-winged bird can also mean transforming herself into that land, becoming part of it as a memory and a myth, an oral history that is passed down from generation to generation by the people of a place, as the imaginary of a tradition and a culture. In this sense, the character moves through a place of passage between human and mythical existence, body and spirit, meaning and presence, which can mean erasure and transformation brought about by the flow towards difference, towards the unknown.

Furthermore, in “ai nessa terra qui é vea e qui é minina” (“*in this land that is both old and young*”), we can understand that the land, like Dassanta, moves incessantly in the space between immobility and search, crystallized form and dynamic existence: it runs in the heart of the caatinga, which is both old and young, depending on the cycle of water and drought: when it rains, the caatinga immediately explodes into green, joyful, refreshed. Drought leaves it wrinkled, aged and prostrate. The cycle of rains and droughts thus establishes a permanent rejuvenating-aging-rejuvenating... (Mello as cited in Rezende, 2011, p. 12).

This terra-sertão (“land-hinterland”) evolves according to the difference that arises from the cycle of water and drought, depending on the rain to explode into green and the drought to grow old and then be reborn again. Dassanta, like the land, moves through tensions and transformations, always towards death and, again, towards life, developing from movements, from its human dynamics, which does not fit into an immutable form, but is always searching. And if Dassanta gets closer to the image of the pure catingueira tree or dies and becomes the “japiassoca assú bird”, she becomes part of this terra-sertão in a different way, in a mythical existence, but one that is just as human and colored with tensions as the cycle of the water and drought, when this cycle is transformed into language and experienced as language by gazes that are also human and colored by tensions.

The 1st Song closes with the prolonged repetition of “passo japiassoca assú” (“japiassoca assú bird), not just by the narrator, but by other voices on stage, perhaps functioning as a choir echoing the phoneme /ss/, so present in the name Dassanta itself, a name that intertwines a certain ambiguity of the profane and the sacred, playing with the meaning of “santa” (“saint”)

and, at the same time, emphasizing its corporeal sound /ss/. She is beautiful in the tension of each chord, in the ambiguity of each voice. Her image is more sonorous than visual. And this resonance of the phoneme /ss/ at the end of the Song sounds almost like an enchantment to participate in the **character's death and her reappearance** in a new space, under a new gaze. The effect draws attention to the concreteness of language, effects of presence and meaning – **and then it's as if Dassanta is transformed, for a moment, into a som-sertão (“hinterland-sound”)**.



Video 1 – Recording of DVD *Auto da Catingueira*– 3rd Song: Das Visage e Das Latumia. The character of Dassanta takes on sharp contours in the voice of the lyrical singer Luciana Monteiro. Source: Arruda (2011). Accessed on: Jan. 1st, 2023.

In this sense, becoming “*passo japiassoca assú*” could perhaps mean existing in the form of language, of another language. Or perhaps the bridge between man and myth are those fluid boundaries that exist in the heroine and in language itself, object and observer, signifier and signified, form and content, eyes and spirits, the search, beauty – paradoxes and presences that meet on stage and pass through each other, conversing with a spectating body that perceives them, tensions them, erases them and transforms them into its own body.

In the recording of the 3rd Song of the DVD *Auto da Catingueira*, *Das Visage e Das Latumia* (Video 1), we see the first appearance of Dassanta's voice – represented by the lyrical singer Luciana Monteiro and the puppet – in the staging, at which point the character sings about her life and her craft of herding goats in the solitude of the sertão. This 3rd Song is also made up of the Recitative, in which the tradition of the oral stories of the sertão is shown in the tense voice of the artist Daisy Andrade and in the form of

dolls and sculptures that represent “[...] magical and demonic entities that populated the natural and mythical universe of Dassanta. The existence of these entities and their recording is quite common in the reality of the sertaneja’s stories and experiences whether written down or just based on orality” (Mello as cited in Rezende, 2011, p. 17). On stage, the Recitative is composed of a dark and tense sound environment, the scenery becomes dark and, in the background, the screen shows the night sky and the full moon, with its many possibilities of meanings linked to the magical and numinous universe.

And in this conversation between languages that move on stage and the spectating body, the subject of this essay – a certain spectator me – is experiencing, as much as she can, an opera made up of five Songs, staged with voice, viola, transverse flute and cello, puppets, actors and singers, words, scenery and lighting. But who, after all, is this spectator who researches, the subject of the action of experiencing *Auto da Catingueira*, and writes about her own perceptions, which are hers and are not, as real and as imaginative as an experience can be when transformed into text?

This issue is relevant in the context of this discussion, because I believe, like Paul Zumthor (2014, p. 26) says in *Performance, recepção e leitura*, that a text only exists as *art* to the extent that there is a reader, to whom a field of interpretative initiative is opened up. And since I don’t intend to present my reflections as unique truths, I’ll make it clear that the subject from which they start is just that common subject, inventor and invented, me. *Me*, subject inscribed in the text, being in the world, body and soul. And language: As Zumthor (2014, p. 63) states: “There is no ‘truth’, it bears repeating, vitally legitimate, other than the particular. Because only with it is contact possible”.

However, the more obvious subjectivity involved in the reflection process should not be confused with an impressionistic and naive approach, based on personal impressions. It is not a question of personalization, but rather, this subject-spectator who experiences and writes also fictionalizes himself in the process of writing, becoming a simulacrum-character of her own research, one more element that performs on the stage-text and slyly deconstructs each scene to recompose it in her own way, always starting

from a certain density of each scene and already so different, so distant from any origin that never existed!

Paul Zumthor (2014, p. 25) states that the theory of literature in general does not consider all the relevance of the reader as a concrete existence and this is due to the very history of literary studies: the *semiotic analysis of the act of communication* and the *theory of reception* were the movements that initiated the critical interest in relation to the reader, considering them, then, as an abstract recipient. This method dichotomizes spirit/matter by presupposing an abstract and transcendental reader – ideal or average – to reach univocal conclusions about a text, and removes from the moment of *experimentation* everything that concerns the being who experiences, in the condition of a singular body and memory, what Zumthor calls “... a stature, a weight, an original constellation of physical and psychic traits”.

Thus, this spectator is not an incorporeal abstraction, nor a watertight duplicity of matter and spirit. I believe that it can come close to what Zumthor (2014, p. 27) describes as a “body”:

It [the body] vibrates in me, a presence that reaches the point of oppression. The body is the weight felt in my experience of texts. My body is the materialization of what is mine, a lived reality that determines my relationship with the world. Endowed with incomparable significance, it exists in the image of my being: it is what I live, possess and am, for better or for worse. It is a set of tissues and organs, the support of psychic life, but it also suffers the pressures of the social, institutional and legal spheres, which undoubtedly pervert its initial impulse.

In this sense, I have a multiple psycho-physiological and social unit that relates to the stage and vibrates like it, oscillating between presence and meaning. This relationship will produce movement: effects of presence and effects of meaning will vibrate in contact with a body. This movement is what the spectator perceives of the artistic object. From there, from this experience of staging, I-researcher act to displace my own perceptions in the act of writing about them, fictionalizing them in memory and text.

When I show this spectator-researcher as a psycho-physiological unit-multiplicity, always in relationship with the things of the world, I emphasize the fact that I don't want to divide this subject according to the binary logic of matter-spirit and, therefore, I can't divide the stage into the Carte-

sian form of meaning-materiality either, **and I can't because, Since / am** the spectator, a being-in-the-world, I can only perceive from the simultaneity and tension of the effects of presence and meaning moved in the relationship I establish with each scene, including in these movements everything that is one and multiple that vibrates in the performance, in the *me* that watches it and in the *me* that writes about the experience of watching it. For Gumbrecht (2010, p. 137), this simultaneity of effects of meaning and effects of presence must be experienced as a tension, an oscillation.

In this direction, Wisnik (1989, p. 29) argues that: “Among physical objects, sound is the one that lends itself most to the creation of metaphysics. But if it is a model on which metaphysics is created, it is still a **metaphor and metonymy of the physical world, as a vibrating universe...**”. In other words, sound is presented as a metaphor and metonymy for the physical world and, at the same time, it is a physical object. Thus, the sound wave vibrates – it moves – and produces presence in contact with the spectator, it is perceived and considered a thing in the world – in the world-stage –, a metaphor and metonymy of the physical world.

In addition, its “**density is given by the interpretation of movement**”, that is, by the oscillation between presence and meaning, because if sound density is related to the complexity and number of layers of sound that are used simultaneously in the soundscape, it moves the body not only in terms of physiological rhythms, but also the rhythms of memory, which inevitably links this soundscape to the traditions in which this listening body is inserted, to the cultures and experiences that are part of its history. Thus, the perception of this density is inevitably linked to a memory and depends on each person who perceives, who will move flows of presence and meaning when interpreting the languages performed on stage.

The author explains that sound is a wave, a vibration transmitted in the atmosphere that occurs in time, within a periodicity, a frequency, in other words, it is produced from a movement of impulses and rests, a movement that passes through the matter of the air, modifying it and fleetingly imprinting its design on it (Wisnik, 1989, p. 17-18).

According to the characteristics of this movement from which the sound wave is produced, it is perceived based on four fundamental parameters: *duration*, *pitch*, *intensity* and *timbre*. Duration refers to the rhythm, pulse and vibra-

tion time of the sound. Pitch goes from low to high according to the speed of the frequency, the vibration of the wave. It is equivalent to the different notes that Western tradition names, in the heptatonic scale, as *C, D, E, F, G, A, B*. Intensity is the degree of sound volume, the energy, the vibratory intensity that is imprinted on each wave. Finally, timbre is the identity of the sound, the so-called “color of sound”. **It is what allows us to identify the origin of the sound**, the differences, for example, between the same song played by different instruments. It should be noted that these parameters of sound are modes of the same thing: vibrations that move through the air, drawing unique, oscillating and transitory traces (Wisnik, 1989, p. 26).

It should be noted that the perception of these parameters is permeated by a body that also vibrates. In this direction, Wisnik (1989, p. 19-20) shows the relationship between the body and sound waves: like sound, bodies vibrate, which is why we can make a relationship between sound scales and body scales with which we measure time. **This is why we use the “body metaphor” and say, for example, that the sound wave propagates following the principle of pulsation.** In the human body, vibrations also occur in different wave bands – somatic and psychic rhythms – which can be transported to the plane of music: the sound wave bands are perceived by the receiver in the form of rhythmic durations and melodic-harmonic heights.

In this way, according to Wisnik, the body/mind complex is a frequency meter and our relationship with sound waves and music dialogues with our somatic and psychic pulse patterns, from which we perceive and interpret time and sound. In other words, the perception of music takes place from the perspective of an individual being, under the bodily and psychic pulses of each receiver (Wisnik, 1989, p. 19-20).

This notion is important because it makes it clear that the human body will have a decisive influence on the movement of the effects of presence and meaning during the enjoyment of a piece of music. Wisnik explains, for example, that if the rhythmic durations are played by an instrument capable of speeding up its frequency a lot, after a certain threshold, the human ear stops perceiving them separately and only picks up a *continuum*: the rhythm then transitions into the sensation of the permanence of the melodic sound, which can be presented in different frequencies (do, re,

mi, fa...). The listening parameter, which before used to perceive duration (rhythm), now hears height (frequency) (Wisnik, 1989, p. 20).

From this example we can understand that it is possible to see sound parameters as listening parameters. A significant detail, as it demonstrates the importance of considering the receiving body when analyzing the object. **The “parameters”, then, are not an intrinsic property of sound, independent of a listener. They are also listening parameters, as they occur according to a receiver’s perception and body. In the example given, from a certain vibratory threshold of the waves, the human body imposes another form of listening: the sensation of rhythm is transformed into a sensation of height. The experience takes place in the fluid and dynamic relationship between vibrations: the being and the sound.**

We can see the profound influence that the listener’s bodily pulses have on the relationship they build with the music that comes to them and the profound influence that the music that reaches them has on their bodily pulses. According to Wisnik (1989, p. 28), “Sound is a subjective object, which is inside and outside, it cannot be touched directly, but it touches us with enormous precision”.

The sensation of time, from which sound is perceived, takes the form of a dialog between the vibration of each body (physical/psychic) and the vibration of sound waves. Receiving music can thus be seen as an intimate relationship of movements: sound waves vibrate and propagate, drawing their temporary contours in the air through which they travel. They meet a body that is also vibrating. In the same way that they modify the matter of the air, these waves fleetingly modify the matter of the body, and are also modified by that body. They are pulsations in transit, passing through each other and weaving the musical experience: **“Sounds are pulsating emissions, which are in turn interpreted according to bodily, somatic and psychic pulses. Music is made in this connection in which different frequencies combine and interpret each other because they interpenetrate”** (Wisnik, 1989, p. 20).

Paul Zumthor, from a different point of view, but still in the same direction, argues that (poetic) reading can be understood as a moment of simultaneous absorption and creation, a process of dynamic exchanges from which the reading performance takes place. In this process of exchange, it is

necessary to consider the set of sensory perceptions of a concrete and contextualized individual. In this way, reading doesn't just mean transmitting information, but consists of undergoing a transformation, which will necessarily pass through the whole of man's sensory perception, manifesting a physiological and psychological vibration.

Under this approach, the performance of poetic reading, which can be of a text, of a music, of a theatrical performance or another language of art, does not concern ordinary relations with an object. Any human contact with the things of the world will move flows of presence and flows of meaning, however, only in some specific situations will the simultaneity of these flows be perceived, since meaning will normally dominate the perception of that contact, and this is due to the paths taken by Western thought: the hermeneutic tradition has turned the West into a culture of meaning in which observer and object relate mostly through Cartesian thinking. For this reason, in everyday life, this culture has forgotten the perception of the world through the body, because it rationalizes experiences before it can even experience them in their vibrations of presence. Zumthor (2014, p. 55) explains that comprehension would be:

To be surprised, in the action of one's own viscera, of one's blood rhythms, by what poetic contact puts in balance in us [...] we perceive the materiality, the weight of the words, their acoustic structure and the reactions they provoke in our nerve centers. This perception is there. You don't add to it, it's there. It is from there, thanks to it, that, enlightened or instilled by any semantic reflection of the text, I appropriate it, interpreting it in my own way; it is from it that I reconstruct this text as my place of a day.

In this sense, if the perception of sound happens in the dialog between the vibration of each body (physical/psychic) and the vibration of sound waves, I bring this image to reflections on the reading of poetic text: the movement of the text imprints its design on the body of the receiver, fleetingly modifying their bodily pulses. As Zumthor (2014, p. 54) has shown, **reading consists of undergoing a transformation in one's own vibrations**. At the same time, it is from the bodily pulses and this relationship with the pulses of the words that the spectator appropriates the text and reconstructs it, always in a dynamic and provisional way.

Thus, the enjoyment of theater can also be an intimate exchange of movements: during the performance, that meeting of languages vibrates and spreads, meeting a body that is also vibrating. It modifies – fleetingly – the vibrations of that body, and is also modified by them. Thus, watching *Auto da Catingueira* necessarily implies experiencing many different pulsations in transit: lyrical and sertanejo voices, puppets, actors' bodies, musical instruments and, also, text and orality producing different semantic reflections. Such experience, when appropriated by the spectator, becomes part of him: “The text vibrates; the reader stabilizes it, integrating it into what is himself. Then it is the reader who vibrates, body and soul” (Zumthor, 2014, p. 54).



Video 2 – Recording of the LP *Auto da Catingueira* – 5th Song: Das violas da morte. The Tropeiro and the Cantador do Nordeste face off in a challenge for Dassanta's love, 1984.

Source: <https://youtu.be/M6OoDcWFISl?si=CTF4oEVW3m4fdMPf>. Accessed on: Jan. 1st, 2023.

In video 2, you can hear the 5th Song of *Auto da Catingueira* on the 1984 Longplay recording (Mello, 1984), available on the *YouTube* platform. In *Das violas da morte*, the Tropeiro and the Cantador do Nordeste fight to the death in a viola challenge. Traditional sertanejo singing is brought to life in *coco*, *mourão*, *parcela* and other genres characteristic of Northeastern singing performed by the two adversaries, through word games and rhythms, rhymes and popular wisdom. They sing about “[...] life's illusions and disappointments, in search of something unattainable – individual happiness without accumulated suffering” (Mello as cited in Rezende, 2011, p. 34). The singers' life experiences are mixed with the image of the violas challenge and are experienced in the form of music by the spectator who puts them into motion in what Zumthor (2014, p. 54) explained as a reading performance.

When talking about poetic experience, it is essential to emphasize once again the participation of the body in the movements of the flows of pres-

ence and meaning: what differentiates an everyday experience from a poetic one, here, is the time and intensity of the perception of the effects of presence: Gumbrecht describes aesthetic experience as a moment of intensity in which we feel “a particularly high level in the functioning of our general, cognitive, emotional and perhaps physical faculties” (Gumbrecht, 2014, p. 127). In other words, it is an intermittent moment and shows that, in this Western historical-cultural context, the movements of presence can only be perceived as fleeting vibrations, but in the experience of the poetic they will have a duration and intensity such as to allow the viewer to at least perceive them and thus experience not only the cognitive faculties, but also the sensitivity of the body itself when relating to that art, always in an oscillating way, in a given enunciative context. Like Gumbrecht (2014, p. 135), I understand that the configuration of the *poetic moment* has as its fundamental raw material the movement of the effects of presence, because they bring to the *moment* the characteristic intensity of the *poetic*. They will, however, be perceived in the form of oscillating flashes that fade as they appear.

Thus, presence cannot become stable, because every perception is immediately associated with a Cartesian rationalization: the subject of experience, from a metaphysical tradition, is not used to perceiving the world from his body, he is not used to being able to hear on his skin the tones of the viola and flute, the gestures of the puppets, the voices and bodies on stage.

In the same direction, Zumthor (2014, p. 38) points out:

If we accept that there are, roughly speaking, two types of discursive practice, one that we'll call 'poetic' for the sake of simplicity, and the other, the difference between them consists in the fact that the poetic has a profound, fundamental need, in order to be perceived in its quality and to generate its effects, for the active presence of a body: of a subject in their particular psycho-physiological fullness, their own way of existing in space and time and who hears, sees, breathes, opens themselves up to the perfumes, to the touch of things.

As we can see, for Zumthor, the physical dimension of the world and its perception through the body – a particular psycho-physiological fullness – or the movement of the effects of presence and meaning, are decisive for the happening of the *poetic*.

The experience of art makes flashes of presence vibrate that are intense enough to deviate, for a moment, from the dimension of meaning. In this

way, it enhances the spectator's perception, always in an oscillating way, of the spatial and physical dimensions of things, preventing them from forgetting their body when they perceive life and giving them back a fleeting feeling of being part of the world. Zumthor (2014, p. 63) describes this sensation born in poetic dialog as pleasure, and explains: "For this reason, because it is a personal confrontation, reading is dialog. The 'comprehension' that it operates is fundamentally dialogical: my body reacts to the materiality of the object, my voice blends virtually with yours. Hence the 'pleasure of the text'".

I stress that these poetic moments we are discussing cannot be theorized to such an extent that we can find some property common to all of them, because each one will encompass a multitude of specific traits, whether they are related to the spectator, the object or the configurations surrounding this relationship. Therefore, I see the theoretical issues discussed as important because they explain the specific perspective brought up here, the theoretical ground on which the discussion develops, or – if it is successful – where the discussion starts from to get somewhere else.

In this way, we can think of an image of the sertão in the dialog between the staging of *Auto da Catingueira* and the experience of a spectator. It is about rescuing the strength of an imaginary that manifests itself intensely through characters, scenarios and plots, in the verses and musical chords woven with the landscapes, smells, sounds and colors of the caatinga in this opera that we can see as a poetics of the sertão, made up of the composer's translation of cultural, linguistic, ethical and aesthetic values from this harsh region that is arid, but also abundant with myths, sounds, gestures and cultures.

In this image, then, we glimpse the challenge of violas and the potential of the imagery made up of experiences acquired in the migrant wanderings of the violeiro who, in the act of performance, draws on this oral knowledge. Thus, the richness of the singing poets – the Tropeiro and the Cantador do Nordeste – lies in the lived experience, from which poetry is born, from the ordinary. Suffering and hardship bring knowledge and thus experience legitimizes the ethics of this poetry: in survival he finds his justification for existing and acting socially.

As part of this imaginary of the sertão, there is also Elomar's *sertaneza* language, which has intense symbolic and philosophical potential. As

Simone Guerreiro (2007, p. 46) explains in *Tramas do Sagrado*, through this language the artist creates concepts linked to the region, articulating knowledge about history, popular culture, religions, language, literature and music. In addition, this language is the soil in which the local landscape, people and values of the sertão are recorded, which often appear in contact with classical and vernacular language and formal style. Even in the same song, these various characteristics can intertwine and become tense, whether in the field of verbal language or in the musical composition itself, which associates certain elements of the caatinga, of an archaic nature, with others from classical music.

This characteristic hybridity of Elomar's compositions embodies the composer's concern to record the landscape of his land and the images of his culture in such a way that they become timeless symbols. The regional reality is thus inscribed in both the form and content of the songs, along with the formal and classical modes, as points of tension and connection that differentiate, but are so intertwined that we can no longer say with certainty, in each scene that appears on stage, where the classical begins and the regional ends, and vice versa.

The use of orality here, bringing in the local element, is powerful in the sense of creating a poetic image of that sertão which is the character's reality and also in harmonizing the text with melody and sound. The composer uses rhythm to bring musicality to the verses and also to create a cadence that is close to the speech of the sertanejo, the character who lives in this poetic sertão. The prosody that appears in these exchanges between formal and regional speech creates a rhythm that is unique to that poetic sertão: as it approaches the speech of the sertanejo, it approaches that reality, the daily rhythm of the region. It is an image that is also rhythm, made up of culture, imagery, different voices and realities transformed into language on stage.

The manipulation of the sonority of language, shifting between different voices, which was once innocent, is carried out with enormous precision and complexity. The language here brings to life and presents an image of the sertão in the imagination of each viewer, but at the same time shifts their expectations and the context in which it is being used. For example, in the song *Do Pidido*: "Já qui tu vai lá pra fêra traga di lá para mim água da fulô que chêra um novelo e um carrin trais um pacote de misse..." ("Bring

me water from the flower that smells, a ball of yarn and a carmine. Bring a package of hairpins”). In this excerpt, we see two variations of the preposition “para” (for/to): ‘pra’ and ‘para’, as well as two forms of the verb ‘trazer’ (to bring): ‘traga’ and ‘trais’. One mode is not placed as more correct or closer to reality than another, but they are only manipulated to best suit the different moments of the poem and the narrative. In this way, as Guerreiro (2007, p. 57) explains, language becomes becoming in its ability to move in a permanent flux.

I then find the lyrical voice singing almost in troves Do Pidido to his love. The 4th Song of *Auto da Catingueira*, written in direct speech, in the first person, and made up of four stanzas, the first, second and fourth with 12 lines each, the third with 14 lines. The heroine’s voice and gaze give life to the fifty verses, almost all of which are heptasyllabic in their intonation, most with a strong third syllable. Now close to her Tropeiro, she asks him, in a very cadenced manner, to bring her some utensils, ornaments and treats from the market.

As Dassanta asks for things in rhyme and rhythm, the image of the fair takes on an almost tangible form in the language of the *sertaneza*. *Água da fulô qui chêra, quermesse, cantadô* and a *reizêra; barraca* and *paca*, are elements that refer to the popular universe of the towns in the northeastern countryside, where fairs represent not just a place of commerce, but a social event, a time of joy when people come together to make exchanges.



Video 3 – Recording of the LP *Auto da Catingueira* – 4th Song: Do Pidido The universe of the sertanejo fairs is presented in the voice of the character Dassanta, 1984.

Source: <https://youtu.be/a2Rz0WO4ZT0?si=EcvtNhMFkIE33ozD>. Accessed on: Jan. 1st, 2023.

In this way, *Do Pidido*, whose first LP recording can be heard on the YouTube platform (Video 3), activates in my imagination the movement of the stalls filled with people, food, fabrics, and language, while the charac-

ter's high-pitched voice colors each of her desires with a rhythmic flow. The words here become so vivid that they sound like memories, and the whole Song seems to bring back images of the character's memories – as she asks, she remembers and sings about things and people. I can even imagine that of all the items in her request to her beloved, one encompasses all the others: “Apois sim vê se num isquece” (“Don't forget about it”) (verses 25 and 39). She asks the Tropeiro not to forget, she doesn't want to forget, she wants to keep the memories of the moments and sensations she experienced at the fairs present within her.

In the same direction, the heroine's voice and gaze give life to verse 24, which stands out from the others because it moves from high to low and has fewer poetic syllables: “Ai sôdade...” (“Oh, how I miss it...”). I note that this is one of the central verses, the last verse of the second stanza in a song with four stanzas, a significant position because it also represents the most intimate center of the poem, standing out from the rest because it is a fundamental key to reading the whole.

Furthermore, as it is shorter, it can be understood as a verse of greater concentration in the text, in which the essential is spoken and, at the same time, it is a moment in which the meaning expands significantly. First of all, the use of the expression “ai” functions almost as an onomatopoeia of a complaining sigh, a sound that can refer to many latent meanings moving from the center of the character to the center of the poem and the reader, or from the center of the reader to the center of the poem and the character.

Then, the choice of the abstract noun “saudade” – a “thing” that doesn't exist on its own, but depends on someone to manifest itself – exponentially opens up the possibilities of connecting and reading the verse, because it refers to a feeling that is different each time it manifests itself, according to each “being” that feels it and each circumstance of feeling.

The ellipsis at the end of the verse sounds like a silent echo of longing that expands the size and intensity of the noun many times over – the maximum point of expansion of meaning. It is as if from now on it would no longer be possible to say with words, but there was still so much more to be said. And then the words fall silent in reticence (without shutting up) to simply listen to the beat of time moving back and forth in memory: “faiz tempo que fui na fêra” (“it's been a long time since I went to the fair”). A

beat that takes the present ever forward and brings back the past from somewhere: “ai sôdade...” (“*Oh, how I miss it...*”). It’s been a while since Dassanta went to the fair and wants to satisfy her longing, not wanting to be forgotten. So she brings her memories in the form of a request, making them come alive with the smell of *fulô water*, the sound of *mote de amô*, the taste of *panelada* and *frigidêra*, alive with details, images and impressions collected in her memory.

Longing (*saudade*)! It seems that this little verse concentrates all the others. And that every detail of the Song speaks of nostalgia and memory, whether in the figure of the blind man – a singer and narrator of the oral stories of a particular tradition –, or in the praying woman and the “feiticêro and curadô” (“*sorcerer and healer*”) - guardians of a culture’s ancestral knowledge –, or in the expression “Apois sim” – which can mean a reminder of something that must not be forgotten.

I can even imagine that the poet has put in Dassanta’s voice a request that these images of memory continue to pulsate. Become perennial. And what an interesting play on words I find when the character asks for “brevidade” (“*brevity*”) because she wants to be everlasting – she wants to make the fair present in the taste of brevity, she wants to “matá sôdade” (“*satisfy her longing*”) because “faiz tempo qui fui na fêra” (“*it’s been a long time since I’ve been to the fair*”).

In this way, the character’s beauty is linked to the power of memory and the presence of elements from the sertão that carry within them the power of an imaginary. The fair, a symbolic figure in this image of the sertão, is associated with Dassanta’s drama and with a historical, social and cultural context. Effects of meaning and effects of presence pulsate in a spectating body. The puppets, voices and songs take the idea of a “beautiful woman” away from stereotypical figures and socio-cultural standards. The image of the heroine, this som-sertão (“*hinterland-sound*”), acquires enough consistency to be imagined from the play of light and shadow proposed in each scene. By letting the rhymes that sing the woman (and that the woman sings) guide my imagination, it is possible to glean something of her beauty in the soundscape that tells the story of her life in colors picked from a certain ground. Perhaps it’s a question of perceiving the metrics, textures and tonali-

ties, using them as paint with which to draw the images (not always visual) proposed by the words – images of Dassanta, images of the sertão.

Note

- ¹ A term used by Elomar to designate a poetics of the “sertão” staged in those compositions in the form of the Elomarian “sertão profundo”. As researcher Simone Guerreiro (2007, p. 13) explains, the composer sets in motion a complex game of languages, signs and sounds by using cultural, linguistic, ethical and aesthetic values characteristic of the sertanejo culture and placing them in dialogue with a diversity of traditions, such as archaic Portuguese, medieval imagery and Renaissance music, interwoven in the manner of opera and poetry.

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