



Theater and Popular Cultures: contributions by researcher Betí Rabetti to discussions on the subject

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ABSTRACT – Theater and Popular Cultures: contributions by researcher Betí Rabetti to discussions on the subject – This article aims to discuss the contribution of Betí Rabetti (Maria de Lourdes Rabetti) to discussions on the relation between theater and popular cultures. A brief overview of the researcher's career and discussions on the subject are presented, based on her research work and publications, and on her work as an advisor, focusing on her discussion on the importance of the modes of theatrical production. Popular culture is discussed from authors such as Bakhtin, Burke, Canclini and José Jorge de Carvalho. Aspects of popular comic theater, *teatro de revista* in Brazil and manifestations of traditional cultures in their relations with the theater of Ariano Suassuna are also discussed.

Keywords: **Popular Cultures. Betí Rabetti. Comic Theatre. Technics. History of Theatrical Performance.**

RÉSUMÉ – Théâtre et Cultures Populaires: les contributions de la chercheuse Betí Rabetti aux débats sur le sujet – L'article vise à discuter la contribution de Betí Rabetti (Maria de Lourdes Rabetti) sur la relation entre le théâtre et les cultures populaires. Un aperçu succinct de la trajectoire de la chercheuse et des discussions engagées sur le sujet est présenté, tant à partir de ses recherches et publications que de ses directions, soulignant sa discussion sur l'importance des modes de production théâtrale. La notion de culture populaire est discutée à partir d'auteurs tels que Bakhtin, Burke, Canclini et José Jorge de Carvalho. Des aspects du théâtre comique populaire, du théâtre de revue au Brésil et des manifestations des cultures traditionnelles dans leur relation avec le théâtre d'Ariano Suassuna sont également abordés.

Mots-clés: **Cultures Populaires. Betí Rabetti. Théâtre Comique. Techniques. Histoire du Spectacle.**

RESUMO – Contribuições da Pesquisadora Betí Rabetti para o Tema Teatro e Culturas Populares: o estudo dos modos de produção teatral – O artigo tem como objetivo discutir a contribuição de Betí Rabetti (Maria de Lourdes Rabetti) sobre as relações entre teatro e culturas populares. É apresentado um panorama sucinto da trajetória da pesquisadora e das discussões empreendidas sobre o tema, tanto a partir de suas pesquisas e publicações como a partir de suas orientações, enfatizando-se sua discussão sobre a importância dos modos de produção teatral. Discute-se a noção de cultura popular segundo autores como Bakhtin, Burke, Canclini e José Jorge de Carvalho. Também são abordados aspectos do teatro cômico popular, do teatro de revista no Brasil e de manifestações de culturas tradicionais em sua relação com o teatro de Ariano Suassuna.

Palavras-chave: **Culturas Populares. Betí Rabetti. Teatro Cômico. Técnicas. História do Espetáculo.**

Dedicated to Beti: professor and friend

Thus, popular theater, precisely in order to be popular, lives at a certain distance from the popular: the popular must be as if torn from itself so that it comes to recognize itself in what it is (Bornheim, 1983, p. 42, our translation).

What was popular yesterday is not today, for the people today are not what they were yesterday (Brecht, 2014, p. 314, our translation).

Introduction

This text aims to reflect on the relations between the performing arts and popular cultures from a very specific perspective: the historiographical contributions of professor and researcher Beti Rabetti (Maria de Lourdes Rabetti) to the current state of discussions.

The critical perspective that guides us is established through the first reflections on the autonomy of art in Kantian thought. Criticizing means resuming the discussion about the foundations of our conceptions and actions, again questioning their articulations, denaturalizing that which is evident. The movement of what is conventionally called the autonomization of art is the movement of the question for the being of art, that is: when what sustains art, as a foundation, is a question and not an answer, criticism becomes indispensable¹. As stated by Bornheim (1998, p. 132, our translation), “[...] criticism became necessary by an imposition interior to the very nature of contemporary art – it is art that requires criticism, that requires hermeneutics”. Or as the author argues later,

[...] the truth of the work of art no longer presents the character of immediate evidence, as occurred with the art of the past. A distance has been established between the work and its understanding. Considered from the negative point of view, the basis of this dissociation is explained by the absence of the Absolute, by the death of God (Bornheim, 1998, p. 138, our translation)².

Thus, the absence of this Absolute also affects the discussion about popular cultures and their relations with theater: it is necessary that a so-called popular theater has in its heart the dynamics of the very question for the being of popular theater, without starting from the stability of a certainty of what this popular is. And if, as Bornheim (1983) and Brecht (2014) point out, popular cultures are somehow related to the idea of people and if the idea of people, their values, expressions and materialities are historically

made, it is necessary to start from popular cultures not as an unwavering certainty pre-existing to our reflection, but as a notion produced in a certain historical situation that necessarily will need to be revisited in other situations.

It is important to note that this article was produced through the reading of articles, book chapters and full texts published by the researcher, available in print and on the internet, and no interviews were conducted with her, which should certainly be carried out at an appropriate time in the future. We also note that our interaction with the researcher was initially as an undergraduate student in History of Theater II and III at Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), in the 1980s. Then, in 1993, after being approved in an entrance exam for a professor position at Universidade Federal de São João del-Rei (UFSJ) (then Fundação de Ensino Superior de São João del-Rei - FUNREI), we joined the Performing Arts Research Group, under coordination of the aforementioned researcher until mid-1994, during which time we conducted activities together. Finally, although we have carried out other significant actions together, we highlight the period in which professor and researcher Beti Rabetti worked for almost two years (2018-2020) as a Visiting Researcher with the Graduate Program in Performing Arts at UFSJ, under our coordination.

Brief notes on the beginning of the journey: cultural circulation

The discussion about the writing of history and its implications is already quite consolidated: the concern with writing itself and with a possible character of fictionalization present in the writing of history, led to the last consequences by Hayden White (1985); the relations between memory and forgetting – in the sense that it is not possible to remember everything and that forgetting is fundamental for the exercise of memory; the relations between collective or social memory and individual memory; and the notion of archon, conceived by Derrida (2008) in his reflections on the idea of archive. All this reflection is present in our brief account about the journey trodden by professor and researcher Beti Rabetti regarding the relations between popular cultures and theater in Brazil.

The first document we want to address is a Theatrical Research Notebook, organized by the researcher and published in March 1991. This

Notebook is the result of a research project entitled *A Study on the Comic. Part 1: medieval theater* (Rabetti, 1991). In the Notebook, we find texts by the organizer and by Undergraduate Research and Improvement scholarship holders (UNIRIO and Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development - CNPq): there are critical reviews of book chapters on medieval theater, questioning the then recurring view of a supposedly dark period with little documentation and information about theater, as well as an emphasis on religious theater rather than profane theater. There is also a report by Floriano Peixoto, one of the actors of the show *Escola de bufões*; Rabetti also worked as a *dramaturg* in the theatrical company. Although the research project's theme is closely linked to popular cultures, there are few occurrences of the term in the texts. There is a reference to characteristics of a "popular theater," there is a quote from Bakhtin's book, and there is an association between comicity and popular taste that is worth quoting here:

[...] the authors studied, when they touch the subject, put the comic always linked to a demand of popular taste. The appearances of the devil, for example, when the religious theater was still inside the churches, would have become more and more constant and 'daring,' due to the need to please the faithful (audience?), causing them to laugh. This 'preference' of the people for the comic – a current discussion that almost always brings with it a certain contempt for the genre – would have even contributed for theater to be expelled from the physical space of churches (Jhin, 1991, p. 12-13, our translation).

The excerpt associates issues that are very important for our discussion of popular cultures: pleasing the public, popular comicity, hierarchy of theatrical forms (inferiority of the comic) and the notion of people.

In 1992, Beti Rabetti began working as a researcher at the then Fundação de Ensino Superior de São João del-Rei (FUNREI), currently UFSJ. In the project for creation of the Performing Arts Research Group of the aforementioned institution, the researcher proposed the creation of three lines of research, all aimed at studying objects that we can affirm belong to popular culture (dramaturgy produced in the city of São João del-Rei and region; activities of the amateur group Clube Teatral Artur Azevedo, which operated between 1905 and 1985), but one of the lines of research made explicit reference to popular cultures: sacred theater/profane

theater: the question of popular culture. It is the researcher herself who establishes the continuity of her research work:

[...] if this theme has been with me for some time (see the project developed with UNIRIO and partially funded by CNPq – “A study on the comic. Part I: medieval theater” – between March 1990 and July 1991), it must be said that here and now there is abundant ‘documentary material’ of very first quality (Rabetti, 1993, p. 6, our translation).

In this same document, in describing and justifying the importance of this line of research, Rabetti succinctly comments on the existence of sacred and profane manifestations, especially in São João del-Rei, in the Lent period, and the spectacular religious presentations made by amateur groups and not necessarily linked to the local Church. And she states:

[...] the so-called folkloric or religious manifestations are exuberant and fruitful for experimentation and reflection on the issue of the emergence of a specifically theatrical framework. The very rich passage from the sacred to the profane context fosters and fertilizes discussions about the circularity between erudite culture and popular culture (Rabetti, 1993, p. 6, our translation).

Although there are no bibliographical references in the proposal to create the Performing Arts Research Group, the use of the expression “circularity between erudite culture and popular culture” leads us inevitably to two authors: Mikhail Bakhtin, already mentioned, and Carlo Ginzburg.

Bakhtin’s text (1993) is certainly indispensable for those who want to study popular comic theater. The considerations presented by the Russian theorist discuss the relation between comicity and seriousness (profane and sacred) in an original manner for the time, showing how the grotesque, images of the material and bodily low are present in a certain vision of reality that, instead of working in an alternative way (or this or that), works in an additive way (this and that): comicity exists side by side with seriousness and one does not cancel the other. The sacred and the profane become mutually contaminated and, although there are hierarchies dictated by the economic and cultural elite and often reproduced by impoverished and exploited social groups, the walls erected between what is called erudite culture and what is called popular culture are much more porous than is often affirmed. Ginzburg (1987, p. 12-13, our translation) revisits this idea in his *The Cheese and the Worms*, a work that we do not hesitate to qualify as hav-

ing a rare flavor. In his preface to the English edition of the book, the Italian author says:

[...] this hypothesis can be linked to what was already proposed, in similar terms, by Mikhail Bakhtin, and which can be summarized in the term ‘circularity’: between the culture of the ruling classes and that of the subordinate classes there existed, in pre-industrial Europe, a circular relationship made of reciprocal influences, which moved from the bottom up, as well as from the top down (exactly the opposite, therefore, of the ‘concept of absolute autonomy and continuity of peasant culture’ attributed to me by a certain critic).

In a way, Bakhtin and Ginzburg point to the importance of studying popular cultures, although they recognize the enormous complexity of the expression, and also to a reading of the popular that is not based on a supposed purity of the popular, but rather on a dynamic perspective of interaction between different cultural ranges, simultaneously recognizing the hegemony of certain groups and the resistance of others. In this sense, Rabetti deconstructs the stereotypes about the Middle Ages (a supposedly dark time) and medieval theater (in which the sacred in everything would be different from the profane), and brings to theatrical studies both the notion of cultural circularity and the notion of long duration, developed in historical studies. In analyzing cultural manifestations of the city of São João del-Rei/MG, Rabetti points to the presence of a medieval theatricality still present in the city of Minas Gerais and to a relation between erudite and popular that is constituted not through rigid borders, but through porous borders³.

In her next project, entitled *A study on the comic: popular theater in Brazil between rites and festivities*, the key terms of the discussion undertaken by Rabetti were made explicit: comicity, popular theater, rituals and festivities and the spatial situation (in Brazil) rather than the idea of a popular linked to a national identity (if the researcher had opted for the expression Brazilian popular theater). The difficulties of the research were presented by Rabetti (1997, p. 16, our translation):

[...] it is a fact that the theme focused on our ‘traditional comicity’ tends to touch, sometimes, on very problematic considerations that run the risk of repeating, for the specifically theatrical case, certain ideological or cultural archaisms that end up always touching the same dichotomy between ‘erudite culture’ and ‘popular culture’ that, today, as we know, resists with diffi-

culties to analyses such as those of Bakhtin (1987), Ginzburg (1987), Burke (1989) or Zumthor (1993), to name only the best known⁴.

The persistence of the term “popular” in the research carried out by Beti Rabetti demonstrates, therefore, her appreciation of the discussion of the relations between popular cultures and theater, circumventing the frequent dichotomies present in these studies and facing the complex relations within the history of the performing arts, if we consider issues of power, memory and the varied modes of production of the performing arts. In this sense, the first master’s dissertations under her advisory already indicated the constitution of a drawing of popular cultures in their relations with the performing art, which will simultaneously become deeper and established through an essay published in 2000, which we will discuss later.

In number 3 of the *theater research Notebooks*, already mentioned, the professor listed four research projects at the master’s level, under her advisory and with defense planned for 1997 and 1998. The first dissertation defended under her advisory was that of Maria Filomena Vilela Chiaradia, later published in a book by Hucitec. The work can perhaps be considered a condensation of the various discussions undertaken by Rabetti: collection organization (Chiaradia literally unpacked the Paschoal Segreto collection, under the custody of the Division of Music and Sound Archive of Fundação Biblioteca Nacional, produced listings, organized materials and identified documents); work with other primary sources such as publications in journals of the early twentieth century; discussion of popular cultures and the modes of production of the Rio theater scene of that time. In the references, Chiaradia (2012) listed, for example, Zumthor (1993), Burke (1989) and Bakhtin (1993) and analyzed the dramaturgical production of the plays written in partnership by Carlos Bittencourt and Cardoso de Meneses for Companhia de Revistas e Burletas do Teatro São José, the apple of Paschoal Segreto’s eyes. One of the chapters of the book was entitled *The Popular Sources and Their Re-elaborations*, and in it the author discussed the comic popular cultures, the idea of re-elaboration and the popular musical theater. In the analysis, Chiaradia also used the concept of *mouvance*, elaborated by Zumthor, to understand part of medieval literature and described with density the mode of dramaturgical production of the mentioned partnership. The material conditions – the operation of the company, the theatrical

space, the world of amusements, the Rio society, the text/scene relationship – became fundamental for understanding the theater, reaffirming the importance of studying the modes of theatrical production, which, we insist, is one of Rabetti's strongest contributions.

Unlike the dissertation defended by Chiaradia, which discusses a theater firmly permeated by commercial relations, the dissertation of Ana Carneiro (1998) (actress of the Rio de Janeiro theater group *Tá na Rua*) discussed the relation between scenic space and comicity with a focus on acting work⁵; and the dissertation of Paulo Merisio (1999)⁶, who had obtained a first degree in Architecture, focused more specifically on the scenic space, but in the theater circus. Finally, the dissertation of Daniel Marques da Silva (1998) addressed the composition of type characters in Luiz Peixoto's burlettas, conducting, in the research process, acting laboratories in experimental meetings (in his bibliographic references, we find the four books cited by Rabetti)⁷.

The neural connections between theater and popular cultures: the publication of a dossier in the journal *O Percevejo*

We address here what we consider the key text for understanding what popular theater would be according to the researcher. We will analyze the dossier dedicated to Ariano Suassuna and, more specifically, the essay published by Rabetti in 2000 in the journal *O Percevejo*. Her text begins with a very significant paragraph that we reproduce here in full.

To discuss the theme 'popular theater' I consider it necessary, from the outset, to indicate some points of reference that I select in the midst of the field of studies focused on 'popular culture'; a vast and complex field, in relation to which one is always subject to ambiguities and is imposed a constant exercise of updates. Even because I believe that also the theater that has been called popular tends to encompass, both in its reflections and in its practices, a varied gamut of artistic expressions. Accordingly, if I extended a line to follow this extremely diverse set, at one end would be a theater of a political nature more explicitly engaged and, at the other end, a theater preponderantly naive and simple, where tones of folklore commonly stand out. In the neural center of this line, of tensions, I would place the popular theater seen as *ligeiro* [light] or commercial (Rabetti, 2000, p. 3, our translation).

Rabetti begins by pointing out again the challenges face by a researcher of the relations between performing art and popular culture; challenges that can be deduced from the quotation marks that surround the expressions popular theater and popular culture. The complexity of the field of studies of the popular and the diversity of the popular require constant updates in its reflections and practices. We want to highlight the image created by Rabetti: a line – at one end, a theater that is close to the so-called folkloric manifestations; at the other end, a politically and socially engaged theater; and, at its center, the *ligeiro* [light] or commercial theater. From the point of view of the social, political and cultural history of Brazil, we can perhaps say that this center has been transforming over time, certainly having already been occupied by this folkloric theater and also by the theater of declared political intention. The important point is that these various aspects of popular theater intersect and alternate throughout history, which allows us to discuss preponderances and alternations, but not pure genres or styles; effectively, this, not only, is not in question, but is questioned throughout the essay. Thus, when Rabetti places, at the center of the popular theater line, the so-called commercial theater, this statement cannot be considered outside history, but as an emphasis on a certain historical moment for understanding the density of discussions about theater and popular culture in Brazil. Fundamental in all this is the characterization of this line: it is a line *of tensions*. Tensions resulting from the plurality of the popular (as we will address later) and from the power relations that permeate reflections and scenes, throughout our history of the performing arts in Brazil.

The axis of the essay appears in its subtitle: the typical and the techniques. Not by chance, typical designates a single element, referring to a recurrent process of homogenization within the popular sphere, often resulting in the creation of stereotypes concerning the nature of popular culture and theater; techniques, however, designates multiple elements, indicating a plurality of resources created and transmitted within popular cultures⁸. In this sense, it is essential to deconstruct the frequent association between popular culture and spontaneity. The valorization of the techniques present in popular theater – be it at any point of the line drawn by Beti Rabetti – is consistent with the combat against this perspective: that true popular culture arises by spontaneity. Thus, when questioning the typifications, which

occurred in many attempts to bring theater and manifestations of popular culture closer⁹, other words and expressions emerge: motions, mannerisms, the characteristic, the exotic, the curious and the picturesque. This all will be opposed by the attempt to excavate the terrain of popular cultures and to understand the techniques present in collections built in the time of the long duration:

[...] technical collections accumulated in deposits of precepts that, supported by the long memory of tradition, continue to be regularly apprehended, operated and transmitted in a particular manner: orally, unsystematically, and validated through the permanent verification of their potency in action, of the quality of their effect on the experience at stake (Rabetti, 2000, p. 7, our translation).

However, and this is also discussed by the researcher, access to these technical collections is, with some regularity, hindered, *camouflaged* or concealed, sometimes by the artists themselves or by scholars of the workers within the scope of popular cultures¹⁰. Considering that, Rabetti will present two excerpts from narratives about artists of the popular comic tradition: the first is a novelized biography about the actor Tiberio Fiorilli-Scaramuccia (Costantini, 1973); the second was extracted from a book written by Brício de Abreu (1963), in which the author reports an account by the clown Benjamim de Oliveira¹¹.

The first narrative is a kind of testament in which Fiorilli, following the trail of dissimulations already pointed out, leaves as a legacy to his servant Brindavena his Scaramuccia costume. According to the report, the actor argues that he has a gift and therefore cannot leave it as an inheritance, reaffirming the idea of an absence of technique. The phrase in the novel, however, is quite thought-provoking: “how can I not bequeath such a precious gift” (apud Rabetti, 2000, p. 10, our translation). If, at first glance, we read the absence of technique, since it is a gift, in a second moment we can assume that the impossibility of leaving his gestures and grimaces as an inheritance is more related to its preciousness, to his value in the profession, than to a hypothetical grace received, “such a precious gift.” In case it were not so precious, could Fiorilli-Scaramuccia leave it as an inheritance? A second observation is necessary in relation to this dissimulation of the technical collection: when describing the asset he will donate to his servant, the actor states that

“[...] with all the cabrioles I did in the theater, for more than twenty years, see, [the clothing] does not have a single tear” (apud Rabetti, 2000, p. 10, our translation). It is, perhaps, a document proving the technique exercised by the actor over two decades. Having excavated the traces indicating the presence of the techniques, it can be observed, for example, the role of the *costume* in the composition of the mask/character; the role of the cabrioles, grimaces and gestures, with the goal of evoking laughter or amazement; the actor/spectator relation in the composition of the mask/character; the “[...] ability to articulate *codes* (persistences) and *variables* (apt for adaptations to new times or new senses), and which can sometimes provide innovative *combinations*” (Rabetti, 2000, p. 12, our translation)¹².

Finally, we emphasize that, when observing the existence of techniques in the work of the comedian *dell'arte*, long elaborated, in the sense of a constant improvement of a certain mask/character, it is inevitable to conclude that this is *a* real possibility of acting work, or, to be more exact, the requirements of contemporary acting training in the sense of a professional who is able to play any and all roles in scenic spectacle, it is *a* possibility among several and the specialization in a certain type character, belonging or not to *commedia dell'arte*, in a certain aesthetic field such as that of popular comic theater, does not detract at all from the technical and artistic quality of a given actress or actor.

The second narrative is divided into two excerpts, both collected by Brício de Abreu. In the first excerpt, Benjamim de Oliveira tells an episode of how he avoided being confused with an escaped slave by doing stunts to prove he was a circus artist. In the second excerpt, he extols the figure of Manoel Marcelino and claims that he would have been his great master and responsible for giving him the final polish (apud Rabetti, 2000, p. 14, our translation). Therefore, it is added here the notion of an excellence or a level of almost virtuosity: in addition to the mastery of technique, there is a special finish that provides brilliance and temporally guarantees the quality of the work. The professor insists and resumes the issue of concealment of the technique and associates this procedure with a non-necessity to problematize “the technical contributions that, however, [Benjamim de Oliveira] effectively *operates*” (Rabetti, 2000, p. 15, our translation). This non-problematization is immediately attributed to an “intimate and vital

correlation between life and art” (Rabetti, 2000, p. 15, our translation), disregarding the idea of a dilution or dissolution of art and technique in the scope of life. Such correlation is fundamental for understanding popular cultures in their relation with art and can be identified in the *commedia dell’arte*, in the type characters found in theater in Brazil and for a long time in Brazilian telenovelas or, more recently – even if the researcher does not address this object –, in the work of drag queens¹³.

Is Pirandello popular?

In order to remain within the dimensions of a scientific article, we will take a small time jump and leave for future occasions the discussion of the second and third parts of the integrated project *Studies on the comic*, entitled, respectively: *The production of ‘ligeiro’ [light] theater in the city of Rio de Janeiro through the scenic writing of Gastão Tojeiro and Armando Gonzaga and Civilization in Brazil began by the feet*¹⁴. We will directly address the last book published by the researcher, which maintains the reference to the popular in its subtitle: *Pirandello presente: traduções, excursões e incursões populares no teatro itinerante pelo Brasil dos anos 1920* [Pirandello present: popular translations, excursions and incursions into itinerant theater in 1920s Brazil] (Rabetti, 2021).

Published in 2021, the book is included in the collection *Dramaturgias*, by publisher 7Letras, and is divided into three parts: the first is composed of three chapters and deals with Brazilian stagings of Pirandello’s play *Pois... é isso!* [Così è (se vi pare)]; the second part presents documents reproduced and transcribed from Brazilian journals from the 1920s; the third part is the unpublished Portuguese translation of Luigi Pirandello’s play *O jogo dos papéis* [Il giuoco delle parti].

Let us focus here on the analysis of a single chapter, suggestively titled *Dangerous approximations: Popular comic contexts for Luigi Pirandello and Jayme Costa in 1926 and 1927 - Pois... é isso!; A Favella vai abaixo!...* It is a long fifty-page chapter, in which the researcher discusses Marinetti’s trip to Brazil in 1926, Pirandello’s trip to Brazil in 1927, the presence of the Italian theater in this decade in the stages of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro and the translation and staging of *Pois... é isso!*; with the neural center – if we want to use an expression of the researcher herself (Rabetti, 2000) – of the

chapter being, in our view, the analysis of the presentation, before the screening of Paramount's film *Epidemia do jazz*, of a "[...] 'modernist prologue' entitled 'À maneira de Pirandello,' interpreted by Iracema Alencar, Aristotle Penna and Mlle. Margarida Roubin" (Rabetti, 2021, p. 80, our translation). The author designates this presentation as a happening event and describes it thusly, associating it with the title of the chapter:

[...] it is absolutely interesting, however, to observe for the theme addressed in this topic a particular *happening-event* that occurred in the same period, that of dangerous approximations between the erudite and the popular, the serious and the comic, cinema and theater, Marinetti and Pirandello and futurism (Rabetti, 2021, p. 80, our translation).

Considering our discussion of popular cultures and theater, it is essential to highlight some points: firstly, the use of the erudite/popular pair (we use the word 'pair' here precisely to avoid the dichotomy pointed out by Rabetti and which we have already discussed above). If we consider that the other pairs mentioned are serious/comic, cinema/theater, Marinetti and Pirandello/futurism, we can understand that this is not a dichotomy or an opposition between each of the elements present in this pair, but an effective methodological strategy, employed by the researcher, of approximation of complex elements that do not necessarily relate solely and exclusively by opposition. We reiterate: the act of approximating diverse elements, even if it starts from a happening-event of the artistic and cultural scope effectively occurred in Rio de Janeiro, is a methodological strategy of the researcher, based on notions and broad discussions present in her research, works of conclusions of research advisory and publications. Approximating in descriptive and reflective text, through a happening-event, the erudite and the popular, the serious and the comic, is, we allow ourselves, analogous to a laboratory strategy: two different elements are placed in the same setting so as to perceive how they react when they are brought together. Thus, the researcher allows dichotomies and oppositions to appear in the descriptive analysis of the approximations, without them being hegemonic or solving her reading. However, already in the title of the chapter, it is announced that such approximations are neither casual nor naive, but, rather, dangerous. Now, immediately, two questions arise: what gives the character of danger to these approximations?; and for whom are these approximations dangerous?

The answer to these two questions can be discussed based on the last two paragraphs of the chapter in question. Rabetti (2021, p. 108, our translation) asks a question that can bring us closer to the core of the problem.

I would like to end this historical incursion, amid indicators and evidence from different newspapers of the selected period, asking why, in the clash between the national and the foreign, which determines the history of our theater and its study, in old and new variants, not give way to the common, probing minutiae that are repeated or that show to be interrelated, and which, in the most general, routine and average details, contribute to lines of continuity that are significant for our theater? And perhaps in them discover some new points, or different ways of facing certain facts or questions?

The danger seems to lie precisely in the possibility of another writing of the history of theater in Brazil and, consequently, in a questioning of affirmations and discourses that are perpetuated in history as it has been written, if attention is not paid to its details, to the common, to the average and to the routine. Danger, or rather threat, to a history that is intended to be perpetuated without discussing the modes of theatrical production. The danger even seems to lie in a questioning of what popular is. Would Pirandello be popular? This question loses its meaning before the researcher's text. It would be more appropriate to ask: to what extent can we approximate Pirandello to a popular theater in Brazil? The characterization of the Italian playwright's theater as cerebral, for example, may prevent the observation of the approximations effectively occurred in the São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro theaters during some years of the 1920s: the prologue *À maneira de Pirandello*; the presentations of *Pois... é isso!*, by the Jayme Costa-Belmira de Almeida Company; the comedy *Um almoço cerebral*, by Jarbas de Carvalho (2021), initially published in the newspaper *O paiz*, in 1927; the presence of Luigi Pirandello in the audience of both the presentation of *Pois... é isso!*, by the Jayme Costa-Belmira de Almeida Company, and in the presentation of the two-act revue *A Favella vai abaixo!*, by Maximo de Albuquerque and Nelson Abreu. Such approximations, which occurred in popular-comic situations, allow "[...] unexpected contaminations, unsuspected by the theater historian extremely affected by the canons of modern Brazilian theater, or used to them" (Rabetti, 2021, p. 108, our translation). It is, therefore, precisely when the research brings to itself the challenge of studying the modes of theatrical production, when it starts from an approx-

imation between erudite and popular, serious and comic, that it is possible to perceive a certain promiscuity between the elements of these pairs. Neither the establishment of an insurmountable separation between the two elements, nor the abandonment of the aforementioned pair, justified by the complexity and difficulty of giving rigorous contours to what popular theater/s is/are, would allow the observation and discussion of such contaminations. Thus, the approximations acquire a character of danger, or, if we will, of risk, through a destabilizing investigative gesture, because it brings to the stage details and routines of their modes of production; character of danger for those who insist on seeking the rigor of academic research within the scope of the history of the performing arts, in establishing the purity of concepts and in establishing facts detached from the webs in which they are produced¹⁵. Thus, professor and researcher Beti Rabetti, through the study of the modes of theatrical production, questions the frequent distinctions between erudite and popular, high culture and traditional culture, contributing to another writing of the history of the performing arts.

Conclusion

Professor and researcher Beti Rabetti's career presents a long and persistent contribution, both in thematic and methodological terms, to the study of the relations between theater in Brazil and popular cultures. In thematic terms, her contributions are evinced through the study, academic production and advisory to researchers at different levels on the oeuvre of Ariano Suassuna in general and its relations in particular with manifestations of traditional cultures in northeastern Brazil, such as singers, cordel writers and artists, and mamulengo puppeteers. It is also noted, under her advisory, contribution to the study of some of these cultural manifestations, but not related to the theater of the Paraíba author, as in the studies on Mamulengo Theater and on Cavalo Marinho, conducted by Adriana Schneider Alcure¹⁶ and Mariana Silva Oliveira¹⁷, respectively. Rabetti also contributed significantly, through research, advisory and publications, when the theme was *teatro ligeiro* [light theater] in Brazil. We note her studies on Gastão Tojeiro and Armando Gonzaga, with survey of published texts, datiloscopies or manuscripts found in archives and collections in general and discussions on the entertainment industry, especially in the city of

Rio de Janeiro in the early twentieth century. In methodological terms, research involving studies on theater and popular cultures requires very specific procedures and principles, present both in publications and in works resulting from research advisory. The indicial method, discussed by Ginzburg (1989), is widely used by the researcher, with research in the most varied primary sources, documentary production and fieldwork, all fundamental for those who dedicate themselves to an in-depth understanding of the relations between performing arts and popular cultures¹⁸.

If we can observe, as per what we described above, a more accentuated dedication to the neural center of the line of tensions to which we previously referred, occupied by the so-called *ligeiro* [light] or commercial theater, we can also observe a certain dedication to a theater in dialogue with manifestations of traditional cultures in Brazil. However, if at one end of the line of tensions drawn by Rabetti there appears the theater “of a more explicitly engaged political nature,” where is this theater in her career?

Such evergreen career can be read as a persistent and educational political gesture. Its political character can be traced precisely through the research of the modes of production: both the mode of production of the theatrical spectacles researched, and the mode of production of the research conducted. To dedicate oneself to the study of popular cultures is to dedicate oneself doubly to the world of work: the world of artistic work and the world of academic research work.

Although professor and researcher Beti Rabetti’s oeuvre seems indispensable for those who are dedicated to studying performing arts in their relations with popular cultures, it is necessary, however, to reiterate that we would be mistaken if we defended a single methodological or conceptual possibility to deal with popular cultures and theaters.

The plural forms we use here should be considered as essential and understood from a popular point of view. In this sense, it is essential to present the essay by José Jorge de Carvalho (2000), published in the volume of *O percevejo*, organized by Rabetti, dedicated to theater and popular culture with the dossier on the theater of Ariano Suassuna. The author concludes his essay by advocating what he calls a “radical symbolic pluralism,” differentiating a classical pluralism from a popular pluralism. Classical pluralism is characterized by an “[...] attitude that, although based on an acceptance

of symbolic diversity, introduces an expectation of ascension, which is made explicit according to the ideals of the intellectual class” (Carvalho, 2000, p. 36, our translation). And Carvalho (2000, p. 37, our translation) adds: “[...] that is why I speak of a popular pluralism: because the popular already includes this diversity of interests, given by the heterogeneity of the segments that compose it.” The popular includes cultures of long traditions; theater with an eminently political purpose, be it *agitprop* or to be presented in economically impoverished communities; nineteenth, twentieth or twenty-first century musicals staged for large audiences often prepared for large profits; the shows of amateur groups, etc. Although Carvalho includes in popular culture the products of the cultural industry or the products of mass culture, the professor and researcher questions the hegemony of these products and their producers. But rather provocatively, Carvalho presents his definition of cultural alienation, as the ideological point of view that sustains his defense of radical symbolic pluralism.

Cultural alienation, for example, would be, in the terms exposed here, no longer the territory of false consciousness or symbolic uprooting only, but mainly the simplification and monotony of expressive resources, the impoverishment of the spirit caused by repetition, by obstinate adherence to a single, or strongly preferential, level of culture (Carvalho, 2000, p. 37, our translation).

It is precisely by valuing differences that Rabetti (2000, p. 16, emphasis added by the author, our translation) ends her aforementioned essay: “[...] theater is theater, that is, it has rule, it has method, it has art and can, if it wants, work towards its utopian specificity, in the exact counterpart of an incessant *dialogue* that it comes to establish with *differences*.” And in the dialogue that theater can establish with different cultural manifestations, whether traditional or mass, whether cinema or music, theater can allow itself to be contaminated without necessarily ceasing to ask what theater is. Thus, Rabetti (2000, p. 16, our translation), after commenting on the work of Antônio Nóbrega with his type character Tonheta and on the work of Luiz Carlos Vasconcelos with his clown Xuxu, states:

[...] I believe it has been possible to collect data to feed the issue with which I have been working, that is, that of determining the extent to which the theatrical work around the popular that reaffirms itself in its theater autonomy is adequate, fertile and of very high artistic expression.

Through the study of dramaturgical, spectacle and acting techniques, that is, through the study of the modes of theatrical production, using a documentary variety consistent with the performing arts, Beti Rabetti revisits the relations between theater and popular cultures, proposing readings that, instead of distinguishing, dangerously approximate the erudite and the popular, high culture and traditional culture, producing another writing of the history of the spectacle.

Notes

- ¹ In this sense, we also understand the statement by Heidegger (1986) that art is the origin of the work of art, which is announced already in the first paragraph of his text *The Origin of the Work of Art* and reaffirmed at the end of it.
- ² It should be noted that Bornheim does not refer to the non-existence of God, but to its death, that is, the denial of the existence of an absolute principle that accounts for and explains all reality.
- ³ It should be noted that the first Brazilian edition of Bakhtin's book on Rabelais and popular culture, translated from French into Portuguese by Yara Frateschi, is from 1987, and the first master's dissertation defended under Rabetti's advisory dates back to 1997.
- ⁴ Note that initially there was the publication of copies of the Notebook only with its first part and then a new publication with both parts. Here we use the publication with two parts. It should also be noted that the researcher mentions the two books already mentioned here and that her warning does not prevent her from using the expression popular theater in the title of her research. Burke's book (1989), mentioned by the professor, deals with a period after that analyzed in the works of Bakhtin and Ginzburg. In the case of Zumthor's book (1993), which also deals with the medieval period, the idea of *mouvance*, the relations between memory and community, and the analysis of performance are emphasized throughout his research and research advisory.
- ⁵ Regarding the research on the *Tá na rua Group*, see Carneiro (2005).
- ⁶ Professor Merisio's doctoral program was also conducted under Rabetti's advisory on the melodramatic mode of acting. Regarding the subsequent developments of this research, it is worth seeing Merisio (2020).
- ⁷ To learn more about the research on comic types, see Silva (2005).

- ⁸ Rabetti's essay refers to a text published by Canclini (1983), in which he devotes some pages to a discussion of the processes of commodification of popular culture products and the relations between the ethnic and the typical, the latter being the result of the processes of indifferentiation promoted both by capitalism and by the formation of nations or state or regional identities, see more specifically Canclini (1983, p. 86-90). Rabetti (2000, p. 15, emphasis added by the author, our translation) also associates the typical to indifferentiation: "[...] if the exercise carried out today, either by the scholar of popular theater or by the theater artist interested in dialoguing with different cultural ranges, only seeks to *reproduce* from these manifestations the same undifferentiated reading, the analysis or art resulting from this approach tend to be inevitably configured as new configurations of the always identical tradition of celebration of the typical."
- ⁹ In some cases, the researcher wonders if it would be more appropriate to think about expropriation of the popular (Rabetti, 2000, p. 7).
- ¹⁰ Rabetti (2000, p. 13, our translation) states in her essay that "there is, in the accounts about the popular spectacle, about the popular actor, *made by its own participating members*, a persistent resistance as to explaining the technical collections present in its artistic manifestations, and its modes of transmission".
- ¹¹ Benjamin de Oliveira was an important black clown, born in 1870 in the Province of Minas Gerais. To learn more about Benjamin de Oliveira, see Daniel Marques da Silva (2010) and Ermínia Silva (2022).
- ¹² It is necessary to refer here to the article published by Rabetti (1998) in the journal *Folhetim*, in which the author, when discussing the writing of the history of theater in its relations with the writing of the history of culture, highlights ruptures and traditions and, at the end of the article, presents the half-mask of type characters of the *commedia dell'arte* as an emblem to think about the articulations between permanences and variations. It is again the mode of theatrical production, between persistences and variables, dissimulation and transmission, that is emphasized by the researcher.
- ¹³ As an example, we mention here four master's dissertations defended under the advisory of Professor Dr. Beti Rabetti (Maria de Lourdes Rabetti), in which the correlations between life and art, to a greater or lesser degree, are fundamental for the studies and researches implemented: Carvalho (2004), Oliveira (2006), Amim (2012) and Pinto (2014). Although they were not prepared under the advisory of Professor Beti Rabetti, but under the advisory of Profes-

sor Maria Helena Werneck, it is essential to mention here the works of Angela de Castro Reis (1999; 2013), with research conducted both at master's and doctoral levels and for which the correlation between life and art is essential.

- ¹⁴ To learn more about the second part of the integrated project, we recommend reading Folhetim (2004) and Rabetti (2007); about the third part, Rabetti and Alcure (2015).
- ¹⁵ We refer here to the book *A teia do fato*, by Carlos Alberto Vesentini (1997).
- ¹⁶ In the case of professor and researcher Adriana S. Alcure, we strongly highlight her last published article on a type of German popular theater, close to what we call mammulengo in Brazil, the *Kaspertheater*, and the Nazi National Socialism: Alcure (2022).
- ¹⁷ To learn more about the research with Cavalo Marinho, see Oliveira (2020).
- ¹⁸ Another article would be needed to discuss the contribution of Professor Beti Rabetti's work with artists and professional theater companies, active in Brazil and for the establishment of experimental laboratories within the scope of research in performing arts in the country.

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