

Book Reviews

La Fountain-Stokes, Lawrence. *Escenas transcaribeñas: ensayos sobre teatro, performance y cultura*. San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Isla Negra, 2018. 292 pp.

Escenas transcaribeñas: ensayos sobre teatro, performance y cultura es un libro heterogéneo que navega por estilos y textualidades disímiles con el propósito de incursionar en las “masculinidades contemporáneas [de] Puerto Rico y [...] su diáspora”, así como en “la cultura lesbiana, gay, bisexual y transgénero (LGBT) o queer isleña” (15). Sin embargo, esta colección de cincuenta y tres textos, en su mayoría ensayos y crónicas, en la que el autor recoge parte de su labor intelectual desarrollada entre 1996 y 2017, es también una reflexión lúcida sobre los modos de enunciación de la crítica cultural. Aunque La Fountain-Stokes confiesa que se trata de un libro “incompleto”, este se organiza como una serie de revisiones de temas y problemáticas recurrentes entre las cuales la pregunta por el “ser” o la identidad puertorriqueña se entrelaza con el estudio de las diversas manifestaciones artísticas de contestación o reafirmación de la masculinidad heterosexual hegemónica. Por ejemplo, el encuentro fortuito del documental sobre la performer Jennifer Miller, *Juggling Gender* (1994), durante una visita al Museo de Arte Moderno de Nueva York, desencadena una aguda crítica al programa televisivo *Minga y Petraca*, cuya condición paródica, denunciada por los bigotes que lucen los personajes femeninos actuados por hombres, no hace más que proponer la tranquilizadora farsa de una masculinidad estable.

El mayor acierto de la colección es, sin duda, su negativa a categorizar los textos en torno a una cronología o a modos de enunciación vinculados a los diversos públicos para los que fueron escritos. *Escenas transcaribeñas* sigue “otra” lógica, proponiendo una estructura en la cual la memoria no es mo-

numentalizada, sino que el homenaje recae sobre las diversas subjetividades exploradas. Si bien se divide en cuatro secciones —a saber: “Reelaborando (y abandonando) las masculinidades”, “Teatro y performance”, “Escenas literarias y visuales” y “La herida abierta”—, el libro reclama una lectura lúdica (cual *Rayuela* cortazariana) más acorde a una “actitud de inconformidad”, resistente a moldes fijos preestablecidos, dando cuenta así de su sintonía con las textualidades y corporalidades exploradas en los ensayos.

La variedad estilística de los ensayos, cuya brevedad y escritura ágil no desatiende el rigor crítico, reafirma el gesto político de no entronizar una única forma de practicar la crítica cultural. Por el contrario, la colección incorpora de manera gozosa una multiplicidad de perspectivas, experiencias, temporalidades, léxicos y voces que hábilmente reunidas contribuyen a dar una mayor visibilidad a prácticas culturales que, desde la literatura, las artes plásticas, performativas y visuales, denuncian las multifacéticas manifestaciones que han adoptado el rechazo, la persecución y la violencia homofóbica. *Escenas transcaribeñas*, lectura que recomiendo no solo a los interesados en la literatura caribeña, sino también a quienes deseen conocer actores marginalizados (u olvidados) por los estudios culturales, se lee al borde de la piscina, en una hamaca, en el avión o en el subte. Es que *Escenas transcaribeñas* es una invitación a cuestionar las normas desde las cuales leemos el fenómeno cultural para revindicar el placer, la libertad y el amor que sostienen a toda expresión artística.

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Lima Torres Neto, Walter. *Ensaio de Cultura Teatral*. Jundiaí: Paco Editorial, 2016. 302 pp.

Ensaio de Cultura Teatral informs about the key factors and actors that, on and off the stage, have defined theatrical activity in Brazil since the nineteenth century. These include the attrition and fusion of foreign influences as well as the quest to accommodate both classical plays and genuinely autochthonous works. Beyond the struggles between tradition and innovation, foreign and own, theater in Brazil has been influenced by politics from its inception. It has been largely dependent on, and conditioned by, public policies in the form of direct intervention and financial support, or fiscal incentives for partnerships with the private sector. Walter Lima Torres Neto does not

view this as a problem per se and maintains that open debate may refine such policies to benefit theater throughout the country. As with other aspects of Brazilian society, marked discrepancies come to the front. In the profitable venues of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, for example, famous actors from TV boost ticket sales and enjoy a structure capable of hosting Broadway shows. Elsewhere, one finds the idealism of travelling actors accepting food items as tickets. Despite such circumstances, and however intermittently, theater is a creative facet of Brazilian arts that carries clear social value for the author, who repeatedly refers to Pierre Bourdieu as a theoretical source.

An actor and cultured playgoer turned professor of Theater Studies, Lima Torres Neto stresses the challenge, and the need, to map the evolution of theater in Brazil. He concedes that it does not have the same popular appeal as music, soap operas, and soccer. There is scant research devoted to theater in the country. The author's motivation to take on such challenge is best expressed in the last chapter of the book: "The Love of Theater." Despite its beginning as an activity only accessible to the elite, Lima Torres Neto claims that theater may epitomize inclusion in a society where the inequalities of the past have long survived. To foster a love of theater, it is necessary to assign it importance as a cultural heritage, be it regarding universal works or plots telling the stories of small communities in Brazil. Granting access to such heritage is more than safeguarding a constitutional right to culture. It is providing individuals with a social experience magnified in theater: getting a new grasp on reality, attaining self-knowledge, understanding human diversity, and overcoming prejudice.

Ensaio de Cultura Teatral does not afford a comprehensive history of theater in Brazil, and, as a collection of essays, it wanders through different aspects of performance art in a rather superficial and disconnected fashion. Still, the author offers a detailed map that can prove handy to his target audience: students of the arts, practitioners, scholars, critics, cultural producers. Sensibly, each essay poses a number of questions in the effort to both recognize the limitations of the book and the issues that must be thoroughly addressed to write, by many hands, a more complete narrative of Brazilian theater that consolidates its practice and social function in the current century.

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Tellas, Vivi. *Biodrama. Proyecto Archivos. Seis documentales escénicos*. Compilación y coordinación: Pamela Brownell y Paola Hernández. Córdoba: Papeles Teatrales. Serie *Dramaturgia*, 2017. 287 pp.

When in 2003 the Argentine theatre director Vivi Tellas invited me to write about a seemingly minor documentary piece she had crafted in her studio in Buenos Aires, I could not have imagined that the intimate and precarious piece featuring the director's own mother and aunt would become such a crucial landmark on the local performing arts scene. More than sixteen years later, *Mi mamá y mi tía* stands as the inaugural piece of *Proyecto Archivos*, a performative series that specialists Pamela Brownell and Paola Hernández define as one of the most influential since the turn of the century (11).

In *Biodrama. Proyecto Archivos. Seis documentales escénicos*, Brownell and Hernández gather together the first six performances composing the project: *Mi mamá y mi tía* (2003), *Tres filósofos con bigotes* (2004), *Cozarinsky y su médico* (2005), *Escuela de conducción* (2006), *Mujeres guía* (2008), and *Disc Jockey* (2008). The initiative was not, however, as simple as it might sound. As Tellas was never particularly interested in the written dimension of her work, in most cases these minimalist productions were not full-fledged dramatic pieces, but rough texts to be used as a guide in the performance space. Brownell and Hernández hence worked together with Tellas to reach the final version of the collection. As the authors themselves note in their Introduction, this editorial endeavour became an archival work in its own right (33).

The result is quite fascinating: an organic and playful archival volume with multiple entries in which the aftermath of the six documentaries-en-scène also resonates in selected essays, written by renowned scholars including Brenda Werth, Beatriz Trastoy, Jean Graham-Jones, Julie Ann Ward, María Fernanda Pinta, Federico Baeza, Graciela Montaldo, and Javier Guerrero. The collection also features an interview, conducted in 2007 by the writer Alan Pauls, which is published for the first time in its entirety in Spanish. There, Tellas reveals her endless will to find theatricality outside theatre, her conviction that each person constitutes their own archive (273), and also her account on the "Umbral mínimo de la ficción," what she calls that threshold zone in which "la realidad misma parece ponerse a hacer teatro" (274).

What makes this carefully edited volume particularly timely is its revival of Tellas' passion for archives, when she had in fact dropped the term, embracing instead the notion of *Biodrama* to define her broad, long-term project.

Thus, the volume succeeds in recovering Tellas as a curatorial pioneer in the local field. The volume, however, does not recognize the emergence of Biodrama in its specific context as a response to the critical aftermath of the 2001 crisis, in which Tellas anticipated the “uses [of] theatre to explore the possibilities of rebuilding a sense of community” (See article by Philippa Page in *LATR*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2017). In any case, the inspiration of this volume will appeal not only to theatre experts, but also to those who share a transnational passion for personal (and political) lives on and beyond the stage, when vulnerability and failure become the main protagonists.

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Trastoy, Beatriz. *La escena posdramática. Ensayos sobre la autorreferencialidad*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Libretto, 2018. 310 pp.

La escena posdramática continues Trastoy's examination of contemporary Argentine theater and its autobiographical impulse. While her previous book on the subject, *Teatro autobiográfico* (2002), describes the turn to autobiography in the '80s and '90s, *La escena posdramática* lands on the other side of the millennium to explore the newest self-reflexive dramaturgies of Buenos Aires, using Hans-Thies Lehmann's postdramatic theory as its roadmap. Like the postmodernity to which it belongs, postdramatic theater re-centers spectatorial interest on the human body, acknowledging rather than denying its physical presence. For Trastoy, this real, onstage *I* manifests the period's autobiographical spirit, making postdramatic autoreferentiality Argentine theater's “principio constructivo, su principal artificio, la matiz semántica que modula un aspecto fundamental de su programa interpretativo” (15).

The book's six essays discuss the predominant patterns and critical responses to the autoreferential, postdramatic moment. Trastoy chooses the essay form precisely for its historical ties to autobiography and critical (self) reflection, thus modeling a potential answer to the book's central question: how can theater criticism better respond to an art form obsessed with the subjective body?

The first chapter argues that postdramatic theater and the autobiographical impulse share a focus on reflexivity and the body, and consequently blur the limit between fiction and reality. The second chapter catalogues plays that talk about food or involve its ingestion, revealing the role of *taste* in

sociopolitical and aesthetic formations. The third chapter looks at plays that present and trigger strong affects like disgust in order to rethink their social significance. Chapter four develops the paradoxical relationship between a theater that self-theorizes (via program notes, curatorial statements, meta-theatricality, etc.) but also exhibits an anticritical prejudice that insists on a clear practice-theory divide. The last two chapters offer examples of plays that present death on stage (as in the case of chapter five) and appear in series or cycles, often tied to the curatorial strategies brought to theater from museums or art galleries (chapter six).

A detailed record of dramaturgical output, *La escena posdramática* thoughtfully analyzes overall patterns in the last twenty years of experimental Argentine theater, unfurling the umbrella term *postdramatic* to gather the plays it studies under one canopy. While an accurate descriptor of the work Trastoy observes, the term itself requires further evaluation, since autoreferential patterns also appear in contemporary dramatic theater, which troubles the primary link the book observes between reflexivity and postdrama. Nevertheless, Trastoy's foremost concern with criticism's ability to propose a more bodily-minded reading of bodily-focused work remains a pressing academic line of inquiry in sync with current debates about affect.

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Alvarado, Leticia. *Abject Performances: Aesthetic Strategies in Latino Cultural Production*. Durham: Duke UP, 2018. 232 pp.

In the introduction to this succinct study, Leticia Alvarado illustrates her argument for an aesthetics of abjection by counterpoising two figures: the aspiring student Dreamer and the abject immigrant mother. Whereas depictions of the Dreamers (undocumented young people who arrived in the United States as children) often play into an assimilationist politics of respectability, Alvarado notes that immigrant mothers are more apt to be vilified as the irresponsible progenitors of “anchor babies” and hence an invasive threat to the nation's integrity. Taking this pathologized character as her cue, she makes a case for the political power of artists who “cohere their aesthetic gestures around negative affects—uncertainty, disgust, unbelonging—capturing what lies far outside mainstream, inspirational Latino-centered social justice struggles” (4).

The author begins her loosely chronological trajectory by revisiting the legacy of the Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta. Rather than privileging Mendieta's celebrated *Silueta* series, the first chapter shifts the focus to a number of more unsettling works that she created in the early 1970s as an MFA student at the University of Iowa and views them in light of the artist's experience as a young Cuban exile in a rural Midwestern community where she was racialized and redefined as non-white. Alvarado reads the live installation *Rape Scene* as an intersectional critique of sexual violence; she also draws out the specter of blackness haunting the photographic self-portrait series *Untitled* (Glass on Body Imprints) and *Untitled* (Facial Cosmetic Variations), arguing that such pieces "provide a site to reflect on embodied alternatives to weak multiculturalism's reification of identity" (27). The following chapter, which deals with the Los Angeles-based collective Asco, approaches the "uncivic engagement" (86) of its public art actions as an alternative to the heteronormativity of Chicano nationalism. Although one might quibble with her tendency to label all experimentalism as queer, Alvarado's attention to the competing tendencies and tensions among Asco's members lends nuance to her discussion and makes this a significant contribution to the growing body of scholarship on the group. Slightly less compelling is the third chapter, which offers a thorough but unsurprising critique of the *Ugly Betty* TV series and contrasts its mainstream appropriation of abject aesthetics with the performance pieces of Nao Bustamante, whose grotesque bodily contortions and deformations align the Chicana artist with the animal, the alien, and the homeless. In the final chapter, Alvarado performs a self-reflexive turn by setting her sights on the Mormon religion in which she was raised and examining performative testimonies and pageants in which Latino identity (via the discourse of *mestizaje*) is linked to the Lamanites, a racialized civilization in the Book of Mormon. It is a fascinating topic, though its treatment here feels far too cursory and the role of performance is insufficiently theorized to do it justice.

Indeed, *Abject Performances* is admirable in its interdisciplinary ambitions, but like many studies that foreground the role of affect, it could benefit from a more sustained attention to the differences in how abjection operates across diverse media such as performance art, television, and texts. The absence of any markedly indigenous or Afro-descendant artists, and the focus on well-known figures and phenomena (with the exception of the chapter on Mormonism), are also indicative of a contradiction at the heart of the book: although she offers up abjection as a means of theorizing the "incoherence

and instability of interpellative identitarian categories” (4), Alvarado invokes a familiar set of theoretical and critical references that carefully position her own work within the field of Latino studies while doing little to unsettle its boundaries. To be clear, however, this is a solid and in many ways insightful book, and my objections have roots in my own sneaking skepticism about the subversive power of abjection within the context of academic critique.

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De la Parra, Marco Antonio. *La tragedia del lenguaje*. Ed. Nieves Martínez de Olcoz y Sonia Sánchez Fariña. Madrid: Libros de la Resistencia, Colección Poésis, 2019. 179 pp.

Doble mérito posee este libro: reúne tres textos teatrales notables del dramaturgo chileno Marco Antonio de la Parra y cuenta con la cuidada edición de Nieves Martínez de Olcoz y Sonia Sánchez Fariña, quienes incluyen en el volumen dos textos crítico-filosóficos de alto nivel académico y destacable escritura, tanto por su aporte a la comprensión de la poética de De la Parra, como por su hondura teórica innovadora en la línea de la Filosofía del Teatro. Es celebrable, además, que la editorial española Libros de la Resistencia comience a publicar dramaturgia latinoamericana.

Los tres textos dramáticos, desafiantes en su compleja estructura y fundamentales en el corpus de De la Parra, son (en el orden en que aparecen en el libro) *El sueño de Cordelia*, *Elisabeth Nietzsche en el Paraguay o Dios ha muerto o la Voluntad de poder* y *Wittgenstein o el último filósofo*. Explica Martínez de Olcoz (ver pp. 128-129, nota 4) que, para fechar los procesos creativos de las tres piezas, las editoras recurren a la información provista por la tesis en curso del profesor Domingo Ortega Criado, *El teatro de Marco Antonio de la Parra: Nuevo Arte de hacer comedias* (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid). *El sueño de Cordelia* fue concluida en junio de 2011 y no ha sido estrenada hasta la fecha de publicación del libro (2019). *Elisabeth Nietzsche en el Paraguay* tuvo una primera versión en 1999 (estrenada en el Teatro Galpón por Luis Ureta) y luego fue reescrita en 2005 (esta última versión es la que se publica en el libro). *Wittgenstein o el último filósofo* tuvo una primera versión, con otro título, en 2002 y se publica según su reescritura fechada en 2005 (no se consigna estreno). De acuerdo con estos datos, el arco histórico de escritura corresponde centralmente a la primera década del siglo XXI.

Las investigadoras proponen como rasgo integrador de las tres piezas el concepto de “tragedia del lenguaje”, noción filosófica fundamental. En síntesis, la tragedia del lenguaje consiste en que este no puede dar cuenta plenamente de la existencia del ser, porque no es autosuficiente ni se fundamenta en sí (depende ontológicamente del acontecimiento de existencia), y el ser tiene una dimensión inefable, inaccesible al lenguaje, donde este se “despalabra”, o en un sentido más amplio se “deslengua”. Según términos de Pierre Hadot (*Wittgenstein o los límites del lenguaje*), citado por Martínez de Olcoz, “El lenguaje no puede decirse a sí mismo [...] Lo que cuenta entonces no es lo que nos dice, sino *lo que nos permite vislumbrar*” (147, el subrayado es mío). Por esto el acontecimiento de la palabra-en-el-teatro sería la forma más plena posible del lenguaje verbal, en tanto la palabra-cuerpo y la palabra-convivio asumen en su unidad lo decible y lo no-decible de la experiencia existencial. Cuerpo y convivio se cuecen en los fuegos de la in-fancia, es decir, de lo que se resiste al lenguaje. En sus respectivos estudios, Martínez de Olcoz y Sánchez Fariña ponen en evidencia la importancia de una Filosofía del Teatro, construcción científica teatrológica que considera que es necesario volver a hacerle al acontecimiento teatral las grandes preguntas filosóficas: la ontológica (pregunta por la existencia), la gnoseológica (pregunta por el conocimiento y sus condiciones de producción, sus bases epistemológicas), la ética (pregunta por la razón práctica), la axiológica (pregunta por los valores), la política (pregunta por el poder), etc. “La palabra sueña su cuerpo en el actor [...]. Cuando la palabra cesa, entra la estética del silencio como inmanencia en escena” (130), escribe Martínez de Olcoz. “La palabra teatral es para De la Parra, en última instancia, el pensar del silencio” (132), agrega. Y Sánchez Fariña apunta: “El dramaturgo chileno, por su concepción del teatro como territorio ultrarreal lindante con los mitos, las religiones y el juego, declara a la palabra dramática como la única posible vía de superación de la deficiencia del lenguaje, dado que las esferas de lo inefable solo pueden ser expresadas por el teatro, suceso que trasciende los límites del lenguaje” (162). Una Filosofía del Teatro es también una Filosofía de la Praxis Teatral, una Filosofía de la singularidad del acontecimiento teatral, y en esto las investigadoras sobresalen por su profundo conocimiento de De la Parra como artista-investigador, como artista-filósofo, no solo en tanto autor de dramaturgia sino también como productor de textos teóricos sobre su hacer (especialmente las *Cartas a un joven dramaturgo* y otros diversos ensayos).

En su artículo “Tentativa poética para la tragedia del lenguaje” (127-153), Martínez de Olcoz afirma que en *El sueño de Cordelia*, reelaboración de *Rey*

Lear de William Shakespeare, “la escritura teatral adquiere un carácter escénico absoluto como transcripción surreal del teatro de la mente” (134). En tanto, *Elisabeth Nietzsche en el Paraguay* está dedicada a “la exploración del sujeto llevado a los límites de su ausencia. De la Parra devuelve al individuo —jamás a la masa, ni al poder omnívoro de la revolución o el totalitarismo diverso— la capacidad política de su representación” (137). Por su parte, en el estudio “Tres escenarios de la tragedia del lenguaje”, Sánchez Fariña analiza cada una de las piezas incluidas en el volumen. Sobre *Wittgenstein o el último filósofo*, observa que De la Parra señala que “la búsqueda de sentido del mundo es la tragedia por la que camina Wittgenstein [...] en su imposibilidad de decir el mundo” (161). En esta pieza, De la Parra le hace expresar a “W.” que lo más importante de su *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* “es lo que no dice” (163). En suma, tres piezas fundamentales para la comprensión de los nuevos rumbos que adquiere la poética de De la Parra en los primeros años del siglo XXI, sin duda en estrecha proximidad con el pensar filosófico. Los trabajos críticos de Martínez de Olcoz y Sánchez Fariña contribuyen a su intelección, así como abren fecundos caminos a las indagaciones de la Filosofía del Teatro.

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