

Processes of transmission of traditions: fields of tension between rigors and ruptures

Processos de transmissão de tradições: campos de tensão entre rigores e rupturas

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Abstract

This text was presented at the round table: "Dialogues between tradition and innovation in current pedagogy", which composed the program of the 2nd International meeting on training in the arts of puppetry, which took place in Romania on June 2017. In it, more than answers are raised inquiries from a central question: to what extent and how has the artistic heritage transmission forms been operated today with a central focus on puppet theater? Taking as a guide the discussions held at the Seminar "Arts of Transmission and Artistic Heritage", a joint initiative of University of Évora and the Marionette Museum of Lisbon (Museu da Marioneta de Lisboa), and focusing on two forms of puppetry traditions - Bonecos de Santo Aleixo - BSA, from Alentejo, Portugal, and the Mamulengo, from Pernambuco, Brazil, this article seeks to discuss some tensions operated in transmissions processes.

Keywords: Puppet Theater; tradition; ruptures

Resumo

Este texto foi apresentado na mesa-redonda: *Dialogues between tradition and innovation in current pedagogy* que compôs a programação do 2º *International meeting on training in the arts of puppetry*, ocorrido na Romênia em junho de 2017. Nele, mais que respostas, são levantadas algumas indagações oriundas de uma pergunta central: em que medida e como tem se operado as formas de transmissão de patrimônios artísticos na atualidade? Tendo com guia as discussões realizadas no Seminário "Artes da Transmissão e Patrimônios Artísticos", uma iniciativa conjunta do Centro de História de Arte e Investigação Artística (CHAIA) - Universidade de Évora, e do Museu da Marioneta de Lisboa; e tendo como foco central duas formas de teatro de bonecos inseridas no campo da tradição - Os Bonecos de Santo Aleixo - BSA, oriundos do Alentejo, Portugal, e o Mamulengo, de Pernambuco, Brasil -, neste artigo busca-se discutir algumas tensões presentes em processos de transmissão.

Palavras-chave: Teatro de Bonecos; tradição; rupturas

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What we know depends on the practices of communication by which the knowledge comes to us (Francis Bacon).

At the Seminar “Arts of Transmission and Artistic Heritage”, a joint initiative of University of Évora and Museu da Marioneta de Lisboa, in which I was member of the scientific committee, together with the Professors Christine Zurbach and José Alberto Ferreira, both from the University of Évora, the central question set for discussion was: to what extent and how has the artistic heritage transmission forms been operated today with a central focus on puppet theater? From this first question, others derived: How are the “secrets of art” transmitted and to whom? What impact the transmission processes have on the patrimonial characterization of puppet² theatre traditions? And what happens when the processes of transmission become institutionalized and normalized? When do they intersect with creative processes, not just reproduction?³

Since the dialogues between tradition and innovation are only possible because the objects that fall within the field of tradition (those inscribed in a long memory) have come to us from transmission / communication processes, anchored in pedagogical processes being of diverse nature, I begin my speech addressing the issue of transmission⁴.

Transmission has been the object of recent research, considering the processes and practices of transmission in close articulation with cultural practices (Debray, 1997, Canclini, 1998, Ingold, 2011 and Chandler 2014). If we consider that no tradition has formed without the creation of systems that allow the transmission of gestures and materials (Debray, 1997), including the *arts de faire* (Certau, 1980) then, strictly speaking “to think about transmission is to think about cultural processes in their inferences” (Ferreira, 2016, p. 4).

Regarding the aspects involved in the transmission process, José Alberto Ferreira, in the conference given at the referred Seminar, highlights four points: intergenerational dialogue; the place of variation in tradition; the power relations inserted in it, and the elements of representation of collective identities. Following Ferreira’s path, I’ll briefly discuss them.

Related to the inter-generational dialogue, for Ferreira (2016, p.02) the “crisis of traditions often find their greatest problem in this connection”, when the new generations turn their backs on traditions, rejecting them. This conflict seems to be one of the fragile points on the practice of transmitting traditions since, when the cultural practices inserted in this field are related to the previous generation’s ways, they can have a connotation of being obsolete, conservative and outdated practices.

Concerning variation in tradition, although the theme has been widely discussed (Vansina, 1988; Hobsbawn, 1984), the matter of invariability related to the fidelity and veracity of traditions still seems to remain in the present times. As pointed out by Ferreira (2016, p.02) if the transmission is made through “material and mechanical devices” that guarantee the process of the apprehension of tradition; occurring in formal or non-formal pedagogical contexts; in cyclical festivities; in collective practices; among others, it

² Program of the Seminar Transmission Arts & Artistic Heritage.

³ All the Portuguese language texts were translated from the originals by the author.

⁴ Communication held on November 23, 2016, Jorge Araújo Library, University of Évora. The communication was later deposited by the author as text typed in the said library, a document that I use as reference in this article, in addition to my notes during the conference.

is open to variations considering the inevitable updating of lexicons; the reconstruction of objects arising from the access to new materials and, it can be complete, from the absence of others.

In the subject of power relations, they are configured and processed both in the individual and public spheres. Regarding the first, the direct relation between individuals (Master and apprentice, teacher and student) always presupposes a hierarchy that often establishes contours and defines what is hidden and what is explicit. In the public sphere between what can be sold and consumed.

The last point referred by Ferreira (2016, p.03) on the implications of transmission is when in it is possible to verify or claim elements that represent a collective identity, it also raises the question of the legitimacy of transmission, as well as the adequacy of the profile and uses of the knowledge transmitted by its new users.

Concerning pedagogical practices that establish relations between tradition and innovation, I found fundamental to consider these 04 points.

I will now briefly outline some aspects involved in the transmission process of two puppet traditions: the *Bonecos de Santo Aleixo* and the Popular Puppet Theater of the Northeast of Brazil. In order to discuss the first, I extend beyond my observations in the field (postdoctoral research in progress) and the previous studies on the subject (Passos, 1999; Zurbach, Ferreira and Seixas (eds.), 2007; Ferreira, 2015; 2016).

The Bonecos de Santo Aleixo



Part of the collection of original figures of the Bonecos de Santo Aleixo, located in the archive of Cendrev - Évora.
Photo Marcos Pena, October 2016.

The *Bonecos de Santo Aleixo* - BSA - an important legacy of the popular theater of the Alentejo, Portugal, was disappearing when its last holder, António Talhinhas, who died in 2001, began in 1979 the process of transmitting the material and immaterial elements of the Bonecos de Santo Aleixo – the puppets, their movements and voices, the textual repertoire, and so on, to the graduates of the Actor School of the Dramatic Center of Évora⁵. Ferreira (2017, p. 164) classifies this transmission process

⁵ "Resignations of theater traditions of puppets in contemporary times: processes of transmission, staging and documentation", under the supervision of Profa. Dr. Christine Zurbach, from the Theater Department of the University of Évora, from May 2016 to August 2017, with a scholarship from Capes - Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel.

as “philological” once it presents itself as the search for the transmission of a knowledge with a “high fidelity to the original”:

It is an agrapha transmission. Master Talhinhas repeats the repertoire tirelessly to apprentices [...] There are audio and video recordings (many unfortunately lost). There are transcripts the characters’ lines written in a way that seeks to reproduce the speech, so, what has once been heard becomes an emblem of the collective identity. Therefore, there is a temptation to normalize or equalize in written record, something inscribed in its nature, the variety. (Ferreira, 2017, p. 164).



Master Talhinhas performing a demonstration with the puppet / character Father Chanca, being observed by the artists José Russo and Gil Salgueiro Nave, actor and current director of Cendrev and actor and musician of Cia, respectively. Poster present in Cendrev’s archive, Évora. Photo: Izabela Brochado, October 2016.

Since then, the new “family” of puppeteers (CIA Cendrev), has presented the “Bonecos” to new audiences, in national and international contexts, in addition to the usual context of Master Talhinha, the villages of Alentejo.

Although the company presents a perspective “that preserves the qualities of the object using criteria that identify it with a model of ‘reliable origin’ (received from the master’s hands) and stable (not subject to variations in creation)” (FERREIRA, 2016, p. 165) of the 03 autos transmitted by Talhinhas, only the *Auto da Criação do Mundo* (Auto of the Creation of the World) is regularly presented. *Auto do Menino* (Auto of the Baby Jesus) is staged around Christmas time and almost exclusively in Évora; and the *Auto da Paixão* (Auto of Passion) was presented only once.⁶

⁶ Interview with José Russo, director and actor of Cia Cendrev (Évora, 2016).



Above, assembly of the Bonecos de Santo Aleixo' stage, by the Cia Cendrev, during the season of the Auto of the Baby Jesus at the Évora Public Library, held from December 12 to 17, 2016. Photo: Izabela Brochado

In his article, *"O património sem mestre"*, Ferreira (2017) presents a critical revision of this type of transmission process that he calls "genealogical type" and which is, in this context, "almost exclusively aimed at restoring a primordial text, a Ur-text that best represents the will of the author (and in this, providing the paradigmatic meaning of the model)." (Ferreira, 2017, p. 167)

In contrast with the "genealogical" transmission processes, Ferreira cites Tim Ingold (2011), who, as he points out, "submits the model to harsh criticism" by pointing out "its operative immobility (in fact, the impossibility of Ur-text)." (Ferreira, 2017, p.167). According to Ferreira, when opposing the philological model, Ingold "defends a condition of knowledge situated in context, in progress, open." (Ferreira, 2017, p. 166).

Even if the impossibility of "Ur-text" and the limitations of the philological model are evident, one must be aware of the reverse of this medal, when changes can cause irreparable loses.

Brazilian Popular Puppet Theater: Mamulengo, João Redondo, Babau e Casimiro Coco



Meeting of generations in the presentation of the Grupo Teatro História do Mamulengo, by Glória de Goitá, during the TBNP Registration Process (Recife, June 2013). Photo: Izabela Brochado.

The researches related to the Registration Process of the Northeastern Popular Puppet Theater as a Brazilian intangible heritage, held from 2008 to 2013, revealed that the diversity of the 'material and immaterial' elements of this puppet theater has been considerably reduced. Not only considering the puppet theatre presented by the majority of puppeteers of the new generation, but also, by the old puppeteers. In confronting new contexts, they have being "obliged" to suppress scenes and themes of their puppet shows; to replace musicians with recorded music; to dramatically reduce the duration of puppet shows, among other factors, that, might cause abrupt interruptions and a lack of continuity, what possibly will cause losses of both material and non-material components.



Moment of fraternization among puppeteers, during the TBNP Registration Process (Fortaleza, April 2013)
Photo: Adriana S. Alcure, April 2013.

These practices, resulting from the dynamics set in the contemporary, are driven to meet the new demands of the market, which for norm, I do not oppose. But also, abrupt interruptions and lack of continuity might be the result of superficial glances that generate ignorance and incomprehension of the symbolic structures and values present in the puppet theatre tradition.

Such a situation may be the result of changes in the traditional forms of transmission, without the advent of other effective forms that would fulfill the function

of passing on the knowledges. Previously, learning pre-supposed a long contact between master and apprentice, but today it is known that these relationships are increasingly difficult because of various factors. Thus, the forms of transmission must be updated.

Returning to the discussions proposed at the beginning of this article relating to the processes of transmission, Ferreira (2016) says that "with regard to the puppet theatre, only in the twentieth century we identify another kind of learning outside the power system that manufacturing imposed on apprentices and teachers, with the academic-type learning, or, formations of another order". So, thinking about new ways of transmitting traditional expressions, in which questions of otherness; or the use and often abuse of knowledge received from other hands are involved; seems to be crucial, whether they are operated in the context of formal education (universities, federal institutes, secondary schools), or non-formal education (cultural centers, theater groups).

I conclude my speech with one question: what then will be the role of pedagogy in the face of these processes?

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