

Gerald Thomas's Postmodernist Theatre: A Wagnerian *Antropofagia*?

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“Gerald Thomas’s Postmodernist Theatre: A Wagnerian *Antropofagia*?” examina o encenador controvertido como o principal “distribuidor” teatral no Brasil do pós-modernismo internacional; seus espetáculos estão cheios de colagens a-históricas e fragmentos estéticos nos quais se representam todas as artes. Como ele mesmo sempre fala, porém, isso não leva à síntese wagneriana de todas as artes (*Gesamtkunstwerk* ou obra de arte total) mas ao que ele chama *Gesamtglücksfallwerk* (obra do acaso total). Tal conceito se refere nitidamente à antropofagia de Oswald de Andrade, à arte de desconstrução, e o que se estuda no presente ensaio é a maneira como Gerald Thomas desconstrói a ópera wagneriana, incorporando-a ao seu teatro à moda antropofágica.

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Brazil is now more than ten years into its latest experiment with democracy. The previous experiment lasted two decades: 1945-1964. During that period Brazilian theatre underwent revolutionary changes, a process of modernization in the scenic arts which transformed stagecraft immeasurably and placed national playwrights squarely on the stage. During the latest democratic period, however, little would seem to have happened if one were to judge by the silence in the pages of U.S. scholarly journals. It is the theatre created during the dictatorship, in particular the engagé work of the 1960s, which continues to occupy the scholarly mind.¹ This is curious, because the latest period of democracy has been as fertile in theatrical terms as the previous democratic interval. The rift between theatrical din and scholarly silence raises this question: how and in what forms does theatre emerge from the ashes of police-state repression? It is a complex question, which I will attempt to answer in part during the course of this article. I begin by affirming my view that the absence of censorship, on the one hand, and the removal of the exigencies of protest and ideological purity, on the other, have given rise to a variety of theatrical modes and activity which Brazil has never experienced in the past. It is true that democratization has silenced some members of the engagé generation, who no longer have a powerful political cause to motivate their art. Nevertheless, the absence of the dual pressures of right-wing persecution and its doppelganger, the left-wing ideological patrol, has allowed myriad forms of theatre to flourish, experimentation to run unchecked, and all voices the opportunity to be heard in the marketplace of artistic ideas. Brazil’s greatest playwright, the late Nelson Rodrigues, who was censored by successive governments and scorned by the left, has now found a home on the stages of his own land. Themes the ideological patrol formerly considered the province of “alienated” theatre are now privileged: feminism, sexual identity, psychological issues, the individual in society, and religion are examples. Home-grown comedy, obscured for decades in spite of its deep roots in Brazilian theatrical soil, has made an impressive comeback. Foreign classics, especially the plays of Shakespeare, no longer suffer the “imperialist” stigma and are now widely staged. Important theatre companies, the best example being Grupo Macunaíma, directed by Antunes Filho, have endured.

Antunes Filho is the forerunner of a new generation of directors who double as designers and/or authors, known as *encenadores*. Their closest U.S. equivalents, some would say models, are Robert Wilson and Richard Foreman, whose work bears all the trademarks

of postmodernism: mixing of high art and pop art, blurring of genres, recycling and deconstruction of centuries of western art, placing the artistic creator in the center of the work (artist-as-subject). The Brazilian *encenadores* include Bia Lessa, whose best known works are her literary adaptations: Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, H.G. Wells's *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, and *Cartas Portuguesas*, her adaptation of a 17th-century classic from Portuguese literature — also known as *Lettres portugaises* — based on the letters of a nun, Sister Mariana Alcoforado. She has also staged her own visually conceived works, such as *Exercício nº 1*.

O primeiro impacto do espectador de Bia Lessa costuma ser visual... O aproveitamento do espaço aéreo do palco enquanto zona de imprevisíveis interferências (via papel picado, como no *Exercício nº 1*, via folhas, areia, água, pedras, como em *Orlando*) ou enquanto lugar para desenhos diversos com linhas e cordas no vazio, como as que atravessam e rabiscam o palco em *Exercício nº 1* (...) Daí o palco propositadamente sempre “sujo” de Bia Lessa. (Süssekind 44)

Other significant figures in the new generation include Gabriel Villela (Calderón's *La Vida Es Sueño* and Nelson Rodrigues's *A Falecida*); Márcio Vianna, whose highly personal pieces include *Coleção de Bonecas* and *O Circo da Solidão*; Moacyr Góes, Antunes Filho's former assistant, best known for his productions of *Nosferatu*, Buchner's *Woyzeck*, and *Macbeth*. If there is a single figure who embodies the tendencies — and the contradictions — of the last decade, it is Gerald Thomas.

The most notorious member of this new generation of *encenadores*, Gerald Thomas launched his theatrical career at New York's La Mama theatre. In 1985 he returned to Rio, where he was born and raised, and began making his mark by staging Beckett's works. He has also directed Heiner Müller, Shakespeare, Kafka, Merimée, Wagner, as well his own original productions, such as *Mattogrosso*, *Flash and Crash Days*, *M.O.R.T.E.*, *O Império das Meias Verdades*, and *Unglauber*. In Brazil he works with his own group, the Companhia da Ópera Seca. He also spends a great deal of time in New York and Europe, where he directs mainly opera.

Gerald Thomas has attracted a great deal of critical attention and generated heated debate in Brazil during the last decade. Delineating and codifying his work is not an easy task. He has clearly been influenced by international theatrical postmodernism, an issue I have written about in other venues. But he is also a product of Brazil, on the one hand the heir of Antunes Filho, whose dazzling visual style and fusion of international modes and national motifs during the 1980s laid the groundwork for the directors who have come to the forefront in the 1990s, and on the other hand the heir of José (Zé) Celso, who with his Teatro Oficina during the late 1960s and early 1970s was as contentious and controversial as Thomas has been in his own time. “Que encenador atualmente representaria no teatro nacional o papel designado em outro tempos a Zé Celso?” asks Ricardo Voltolini. “Guardadas as devidas diferenças estéticas, há quem identifique em Gerald Thomas... a figura do ‘transformador’ polêmico e líder do movimento sem parâmetros na cena do País exatamente como o Oficina do passado” (Voltolini).

José Celso deconstructed foreign and occasionally Brazilian texts in the service of a leftist nationalist agenda. Mr. Thomas shares Celso's vision of a bold and innovative stagecraft. Direct evidence of the link between Thomas and Celso is contained in an article the former wrote, entitled “O maior espetáculo da terra.”² The article effusively praises José Celso's recent production entitled *Ham-let*, speaks movingly of Celso's return to full form, and criticizes those who had given up on him. Celso, Thomas writes, “só perdeu a atualidade

porque era umbilicalmente ligado a um momento social, a um movimento ideológico que se perdeu com a hegemonia do cinismo e da comercialização do underground e evaporou-se.”

To understand Celso's legacy one must first make reference to Oswald de Andrade, arguably *modernismo's* principal theorist, whose 1928 *Manifesto Antropófago* was reborn in 1967 when José Celso staged Oswald's play *O Rei da Vela*. Celso informed the production with the principles of *antropofagia*, in a process I have previously termed the Tupy potpourri: “unfettered utilization of a myriad of sources, whatever their origin, without respect for the integrity of those sources” (George 1992 77). Those sources included the early European avant-garde (e.g., *Ubu Roi* and futurist decor), Brecht, classic western literature (e.g., *Macbeth* and the story of Heloise and Abelard), Italo-Brazilian opera, American pop culture (e.g., comic books, Groucho Marx, Shirley Temple), exotic Tropicalist kitsch created by foreigners but consumed by Brazilians (e.g., a Busby Berkeley number featuring Carmen Miranda), Brazilian circus and carnival and *revista* motifs, *comédia de costumes*, the work of film director Glauber Rocha, musical recordings ranging from the western classical repertoire to American jazz to Brazilian pieces in many styles. The list could go on. The sheer quantity of cultural references and puns rivals those in Gerald Thomas's postmodernist productions two decades later. But the purpose of Celso's multi-referentiality, although a harbinger of postmodernist style, was quite different from anything Thomas has in mind. The 1967 production of *O Rei da Vela* presented its potpourri of recycled — to use a postmodernist term — images to a specific ideological end: the decolonization of Brazilian culture and concomitant emancipation from “imperialist” subjugation. José Celso and his collaborators also used their art as a means to rail against the military dictatorship. Their subjects, in other words, were external and political. It is no small irony that Celso's recycling of foreign artistic modes was interpreted by some not as resistance but as submission to cultural imperialism. Although Gerald Thomas does not embrace the political agenda of the José Celso of 1967 — nor does the José Celso of today — as Thomas's article reveals he respects that agenda in the context of its own time. The social vision of the *encenador* — environmentalism, sexual identity — corresponds to the concerns of many members of his generation. What Thomas shares with Celso is a revolutionary aesthetic program, especially multi-referentiality and deconstruction, which are today considered basic tenets of postmodernism. And like José Celso — as well as the *Tropicália* movement the latter helped spawn — Thomas has been denounced by some critics for his alleged cultural imperialism.

Gerald Thomas, one might say, has recreated *antropofagia* for the 1990s. The term he uses to describe his aesthetic is *Gesamtglücksfallwerk* (*obra do acaso total*), a postmodern homage to the Wagnerian synthesis of all the arts or *Gesamtkunstwerk*. That is, while Oswald de Andrade — himself influenced by the European avant-garde of his day — was the source of Celso's *antropofagia*, his deconstructive Tupy potpourri, Richard Wagner provides the source of much of Thomas's *obra do acaso total*, in which Wagnerian synthesis becomes fragmentation, collage, and deconstruction. “A expressão surgiu de um cruzamento do projeto wagneriano de ‘obra de arte total’, síntese de todas as artes, e a frase do filósofo alemão Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘todo caso é um acaso’. A ‘obra de acaso total’ de Thomas pode ser definida como uma disciplina estética não verbal” (Veloso 1995 n.p.). *Gesamtglücksfallwerk*, a postmodern potpourri of signs, is an anti-synthesis; there is no closure, denouement, resolution, epiphany, catharsis. It doesn't belong to any artistic school, such as Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, expressionism, surrealism, which are intertextual fragments to be deconstructed. That is, those artistic schools are present in Thomas's *Gesamtglücksfallwerk* as signs to be “devoured,” to use terminology apropos of *antropofagia*. Yet the Wagnerian sign remains central; it is much more than a fragment, and Gerald Thomas's identification with Richard Wagner is a work of total design.

I offer an anecdote here: in his wide-ranging interview in a TV Cultura documentary,³ Gerald Thomas describes Wagner as a source of strength; when he is stuck in one of Rio's nightmarish traffic jams, he plays a Wagner tape and is rescued from the ordeal. His remark might lead one to imagine Brunhilde, surrounded by fire, being rescued by Siegfried. The fundamental question is this: why is a high priest of postmodernism so drawn to the high priest of late romanticism/early modernism? In a nutshell, both were artistic revolutionaries, both transformed and blurred their respective artistic genres, both generated heated controversy. Their iconoclastic, avant-garde, and deconstructive aesthetic practices unite them.⁴ What Wagner deconstructed was the grand opera of high romanticism — which had become formulaic — by exploding its rigid framework with such measures as eliminating the overture — for the most part — as well as the distinction between singing and speaking. Indeed, Wagner claimed to dislike opera; his interest was in what he called “musical drama,” and his ideal was Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with its synthesis of music and poetry. The deconstruction practiced by Thomas and other postmodernists has meant blurring genres; the *encenador* particularly dismisses the notion that he is a “theatre director.” In his own words: “O que eu faço no teatro é cinema no palco. Eu faço questão de dizer isso quando me chamam de diretor (...) Não me confundam, não sou diretor, acho isso uma profissão fácil, decorativa. Eu sou um autor, da mesma forma que um cineasta é um autor. Eu coloco essas autorias no palco e tenho que encená-las senão não haveria quem as encenasse” (TV Cultura Documentary).

Both artists have experienced notable successes and failures. When Wagner originally staged *Tristan and Isolde*, with its overheated yet cerebral romanticism, he believed it would be a crowd pleaser, but it bombed (it has of course become a staple of the now staid and protected Wagnerian precinct). When he tried to write a comic opera, the bloated five-hour *Meistersingers of Neurenburg*, it suffered a similar fate. Thomas, too, has suffered his falls from grace. I wrote this about his 1993 *O império das meias-verdades*: “a confused hodge-podge of theatre of the absurd, biblical myths (Adam and Eve), and pretentious narration blasting from powerful loudspeakers” (George 1994 140-41). Thomas himself admits to failure with a 1995 production entitled *Don Juan*, a text by Otávio Frias Filho, based on the myriad versions of the Don Juan myth. The piece was praised by at least one critic. Filmmaker Arnaldo Jabor writes that “o sonho de Gerald ganhou uma luz sinistra e profunda [que] cria um trem de metáforas tão duras de suportar quanto a idéia de morte sem céu. Aí é que o espetáculo vira uma metáfora do nosso desamparo diante da utopia sexual” (Jabor n.p.). Audiences, including supporters, were shocked or at least discomfited by the “perverse” production, which featured Don Juan as an impotent gynecologist.

Thomas's labors in the theatre are infused with Wagner's works and motifs. He has staged Wagnerian operas in Brazil and in Europe. His 1987 staging of *The Flying Dutchman* set off a firestorm of critical protest, particularly for its allegedly gratuitous and anecdotal allusions to other works of art: “[Na] montagem da ópera *O Navio Fantasma*, de Wagner (...) o diretor se deu ao luxo de se referir (...) a obras de artes plásticas do século XX” (Brandão 32). Mário Henrique Simonsen, former minister of finance during the military dictatorship, wrote a diatribe in the news magazine *Veja*, scolding the production as an anthem of confusion. Simonsen was particularly upset by Thomas's postmodernist proliferation of cultural references, the placing onstage of “incongruous” elements such as models of Duchamp's bicycle wheel and Rodin's “The Thinker,” as well as a set design that included the Berlin Wall, all of which, according to Simonsen, obscured and muddled the plot. None of this was original, Simonsen alleged; it was “psychedelic” and constituted a lack of inspiration, not art but *besteiro* (Simonsen 113-14). Subsequently, Simonsen threatened to sue Thomas because the latter called him a “thief.” Thomas later amended his statement to “thief of ideas,” but then added that Simonsen had colluded with the “fascist generals” in

sinking the nation's economy and that the threatened lawsuit showed that the former minister was well versed in repression ("Simonsen..." n.p.). While Simonsen's views were seconded by one group of critics, other commentators viewed the production much more positively. For example, Marília Martins saw the controversy itself as a positive opening of the closed, elite world of opera in Brazil. Invoking Oswald de Andrade's *antropofagia* to defend Thomas's *Navio*, she wrote that "a encenação antropofágica desta ópera se apresentou como uma espécie de antimuseu que recusa o velho" (Martins 41).

Wagner is a frequent visitor to Thomas's stages. The latter's 1989 production entitled *Mattogrosso* — a deliberate use of the archaic misspelling — includes in its set design the landlocked Titanic, with its hoard of treasure, which refers in part to the tempest-tossed ship in *The Flying Dutchman* (a reference not only to Wagner but to Thomas's staging of the opera). *Mattogrosso* is related to the first and last parts of Wagner's tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen: Das Rheingold* and *Götterdämmerung*. The last part, *Götterdämmerung*, the twilight or "extinction" of the gods, has special significance for Thomas's production, which deals with the twilight of western expansionism, with the extinction of modernist myths. The hero Siegfried — from medieval Germanic legend — slays the gold-hoarding dragon and awakens the Amazon *Walküre* Brunhilde from her enchanted sleep. It is important to remember that Wagner not only borrowed Norse myths but recreated them, just as Gerald Thomas has in turn transformed Wagner's mythological themes. The hero is now the protagonist Friedrich Ernst Matto, a down-and-out Siegfried, a "defeatist" who awakens a bevy of keening *Walküren*. But these Valkyries do not conduct fallen heroes to Valhalla; rather they descend into a fiery underworld (the orchestra pit). Siegfried's followers are dwarves known as Nibelungs, which Gerald Thomas transmutes into mythologues — postmodern inscriptions and deconstructions of sedimented layers of western art — who dance the samba at the close of the production.

Finally, one should keep in mind that Wagner spearheaded the undoing of a long-lived movement that maintained a near hegemony over the arts: romanticism. At the same time, his work marks the beginning of another protracted period in the history of western art: modernism. Thomas's work corresponds to another moment in this cyclical process of death and rebirth: the postmodernist crusade to deconstruct hegemonic modernism.⁵

Further examples of international "devouring" — a term beloved of those in the *antropofagia* camp — in *Mattogrosso* include the cinema (e.g., Fellini), European drama (e.g., García Lorca), painting (e.g., Francis Bacon). Postmodernist multi-referentiality also characterizes Thomas's play *Flash & Crash Days-Tempestade e Fúria* (1991). Robert Myers puts a further spin on the Wagnerian element when he writes that the character Mother is "dressed like Brunhilde (...) with an expression straight out of Fritz Lang's cinematic treatment of Wagner's Ring Cycle" (Myers n.p.). Emily Mitchell states, "Mom is a towering figure straight out of Greek tragedy" (Mitchell n.p.), probably in reference to Medea, who slays her own children. A scene in which a severed head is tossed about calls to mind myriad beheadings throughout the history of dramatic literature (e.g., *MacBeth*, *Salome*). Critics have suggested other sources of inspiration: "Stylistically, Mr. Thomas's play suggests a Samuel Beckett clown show washed with Latin American surrealism" (Holden n.p.). Although the attribution of "Latin American surrealism" may be facile, a reflexive American response to any artistic phenomenon arriving from south of the border, the Beckett association is on the mark. Beckett is one of Thomas's enduring sources of inspiration, and *Flash & Crash* owes much to *Waiting for Godot*, with its endless, circular, unresolved interplay between the two protagonists.

Thomas's internationalism has drawn fire from many critics, as did José Celso's in the late 1960s. Furthermore, Thomas has aggravated the situation by needling his critics and the theatre class. Brazilian theatre, he claims, is hopelessly backward, provincial, moribund.

He owes a considerable debt to his Brazilian predecessors in making such claims. In the 1930s, *modernista* Oswald de Andrade called Brazilian theatre “that gangrenous corpse.” In the 1960s José Celso, picking up where Oswald left off, outraged theatrical and political conservatives — and some on the left — with his production of *O Rei da Vela* and its potpourri of borrowings from international theatrical sources. Gerald Thomas's indisputable internationalism has led many to view his work in terms of a resentful *tupiniquim* xenophobia, as does, for example, critic José Carlos Camargo, when he rants that “o Brasil, para 'Mr. Thomas', merece a mediocridade de seu público e a estagnação de sua cultura, enquanto as artes avançam a cavalgadas no mundo civilizado. A solução, então, é levar 'Mattogrosso' para esse mundo” (Camargo n.p.).

On the other hand, it is hyperbolic to claim that Thomas produces the only international theatre in Brazil, since many artists participate in the process of cross-fertilization. Among the “hyperbolists” is Marcos Veloso: “Ele produz o único teatro internacional feito no Brasil (...) A maior crítica que o teatro nacional pode receber vem do teatro de Gerald Thomas. Implodindo um continente com complexo de inferioridade e mostrando a mediocridade dos dramas domésticos” (Veloso 1995). It is easy to see that Brazilian theatre needs an infusion from international sources, but it also needs theatre that maintains national traditions, from Antunes Filho, who projects those traditions on the world stage and therefore makes the national international, as the magic realists have done in fiction, to “domestic” comedies such as Marcos Caruso's *Porca Miséria*, which keeps alive the *comédia de costumes* tradition and speaks directly to audiences in São Paulo's Bixiga neighborhood about their own immediate concerns. Any of these phenomena in isolation presents a picture of incompleteness; together they make up the richness of the Brazilian stage in the post-dictatorship period.

All the controversy Gerald Thomas has stirred up demonstrates that the avant-garde, from modernism to postmodernism, continues to *épater les bourgeois*, at least those members still thin-skinned when it comes to fine art tainted by pop art. James Brooke, in writing about Thomas's *Mattogrosso*, asserts: “Reviews in Brazilian newspapers today confirmed that Mr. Thomas and Mr. Glass may have achieved the venerable goal of the avant-garde: frightening the bourgeoisie” (Brooke n.p.). The *Times* writer, however, does not stop there. The reaction of the foreign press sheds considerable light on cross-cultural misunderstanding.

The controversy generated by Thomas's productions has given the New York press a pretext to indulge in a bit of condescension towards Brazil. The *New York Times*, in Brooke's and other articles, has exaggerated the negative reaction to Gerald Thomas's productions. Other comments by Brooke include the following: “after the opening night applause died away on Monday, many in the audience seemed unaware that the opera's theme was environmental destruction.” Brooke fails to amend his statement by informing the reader that many other audience members were aware of *Mattogrosso's* environmental theme. He also claims that Thomas's production had a “lone defender” among the critics, Marcos Veloso. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that critics were divided, that there were many defenders. Nelson Motta, for example writes that Thomas is the creator of “incontáveis momentos de beleza audiovisual, onde várias e refinadas artes se misturam e se integram, são séculos de pintura, de luz e sombra, de surrealismo, de escola flamenca, de dança e movimento, de música” (Motta n.p.). In an even more blatantly ethnocentric article than Brooke's, entitled “In Brazil, It's Lonely in the Avant-Garde,” Alan Riding writes of Thomas that “the fury of some of his critics has helped draw the world of drama into the public spotlight for the first time in almost two decades” (Riding n.p.). Riding stretches the truth. Neither Thomas's controversial status nor his significant contributions can be denied, but “the world of drama” never disappeared from the spotlight in Brazil, in spite of military

repression, which Riding correctly singles out as a culprit. Teatro Oficina, especially, held theatre in the spotlight until 1971; several other companies kept the candle burning in the dark years of the 1970s, particularly Teatro Ipanema, Asdrúbal Trouxe o Trombone, and O Pessoal do Vítor; from the late 1970s to the present, Grupo Macunaíma, under the direction of Antunes Filho, has received as much attention nationally and internationally; it has drawn theatre into the spotlight in a similar fashion to Gerald Thomas's productions. Riding goes further: Thomas's "attacks on recent Brazilian theatre had earned him an army of enemies waiting to block the incursion of an experimental director into the cultural mainstream." Brazil has had many experimental directors attacking the theatrical status quo; Thomas has not been blocked at all but has received financial support from the cultural and financial mainstream. Indeed, it is this support which has, as much as anything, incurred the wrath — and jealousy — of others. Without qualifying the nature of the controversy surrounding Gerald Thomas, without placing it in context and by selecting a narrow range of critical reactions in the Brazilian press, the *Times* articles suggest an attempt — apparently unconscious — to reinforce the stereotype of a backward and unenlightened Brazil, that country of carnival, Pelé, lambada, murderers of street children and abusers of women. Such a recondite sphere as the Brazilian "world of drama" breaks into the mainstream U.S. press only when a westernized savior appears to stir up the natives, to bring light into the darkness. Gerald Thomas is no savior; what he does represent is one significant dimension of a broad effort to keep theatre alive in Brazil. Thomas's specific contribution has been to add postmodernist style to that nation's theatrical diversity, to advance Brazilian stagecraft as Oswald de Andrade and José Celso have done before him. Thomas, along with Antunes Filho, has aided Brazilian theatre immeasurably by opening its doors to international influences, and the converse, by bringing Brazilian theatre into the international arena.

This, in the end, is the antidote for the narrow cultural nationalism into which Brazilian artists have so often lapsed. Gerald Thomas, for all his recycling of signs and deconstruction of western artistic icons — in particular Wagner — attempts to rescue those icons rather than to denigrate them. He seeks to blend them with Brazilian art, and in doing so is practicing genuine multiculturalism in which "the work of one civilization [is] invariably enriched after borrowing from another" (Brustein 20). By this means Gerald Thomas, with his revitalized *antropofagia*, energizes the Brazilian stage, enhancing its resources, creating a foundation on which future theatre artists can build.

NOTES

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¹ An exception to this rule are the writings of Severino J. Albuquerque: "From Abertura to Nova República: Politics and Theater of the Late Seventies and Eighties." *Hispanófila* 32 (May 1989), 87-95; "O Teatro Brasileiro na Década de Oitenta," *Latin American Theatre Review* (Spring 1992), 23-36.

² I received the article in a fax that Gerald Thomas sent me on 3 December 1993. Although it was subsequently published in São Paulo, I do not have the specific citation. Thomas has also generously supplied videotapes of his productions, his press book, and through faxes and telephone conversations has kept me abreast of his activities.

³ "Gerald Thomas, eis a questão," Documentary, TV Cultura, São Paulo, 1994.

⁴ Many of the same comparisons could be made between Oswald de Andrade and José Celso. All are deconstructionists: Oswald deconstructed Brazil's archaic linguistic-literary code and its outmoded dramatic formulas through the establishment of a nationalist

aesthetic that would “devour” rather than imitate imported literary forms, while embracing distinctive Brazilian popular and folk culture. Celso deconstructed what he saw as Brazil's slavish imitation of foreign models by cannibalizing those models freely; deconstruction for him meant “decolonization.”

⁵ I owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor Richard Fisher of Lake Forest College for his invaluable insights into Wagner and his relationship to postmodernism.

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