

PETER BROOK'S "EMPTY SPACE" / "ESPAÇO VAZIO"
Preface by Gerald Thomas in Portuguese and English

Prefácio por

Gerald Thomas

Fazer teatro, montar peças não é exatamente a coisa mais difícil do mundo. Autorar, sim, é difícil. Mas o “pensar” o teatro, isso é mais difícil ainda. Pensem no seguinte: uma edificação é construída – seja um prédio ousado, uma ponte complicada, um projeto urbano que inclui toda a civilização. Bem, existem aqueles engenheiros civis que a constroem, assim como os pedreiros, os marceneiros, e toda aquela turma com seus ferros contorcidos e concretos protendidos.

Mas existe, primordialmente, aquele que “bolou, concebeu” a coisa toda. Esses são os que chamamos de “gênios”. Falo de Peter Brook, obviamente.

Peter Brook é o pai e a mãe e o Deus do teatro moderno, contemporâneo, pós-moderno, desconstrutivista e *avant-garde*. Sem ele e seu conceito de “espaço vazio”, não teríamos tido Bob Wilson, Pina Bausch, Antunes Filho, Peter Stein, Victor Garcia, Steven Berkoff, Richard Schechner, Mabou Mines ou... ou tantos outros como eu, por exemplo.

Sim, ele estava numa posição muito confortável em sua Royal Shakespeare Company em Londres, plenas décadas de 60 e 70, quando lhe invadiu a cabeça, como um daqueles pesadelos gostosos, com gosto de “Tempestade Calibanesca” (aquela que destrói o que existe, mas aparece com gostos do novo e sabores exóticos).

Foi Grotowski para lá, Grotowski para cá, foi Jan Kott para lá e para cá e foram os princípios de Artaud, mas foi, sobretudo, a ideia de “um espaço vazio”, despojado, expondo o campo nu e cru, com seus andaimes à mostra e sem retoques ou maquilagem, que criou, de fato, o Espaço Vazio. Sim, foi o fim dessa ideia toda de encenação pomposa e farsesca (da qual Brook já era um consagrado mestre), que cairia como uma coluna de gesso falso e sobre a qual os novos valores, simples e diretos, prevaleceriam.

“Menos, menos”, ele gritava ou sussurrava quando um ator ia “além” com histrionismos ou quando a emoção ficava *fake*, assim como um cenário brega de Bollywood. “Menos, menos”. Calmamente “menos”.

Ironicamente, esse “menos”, virou o nosso “mais” (*less is more*) e chegou à nossa essência!

Tive o privilégio de assistir aos ensaios de *Sonhos de Uma Noite de Verão*, no Aldwych Theatre, Londres, em 1971, ainda com a Shakespeare Company. Eu ficava olhando Brook no palco em pleno dilema, em plena crise sobre como contornar uma pergunta vinda de um ator “careta”, daquela nos moldes de “mas de onde tiro essa emoção, Peter?”. Eu o via, andando para lá e para cá no palco, tentando explicar o conceito de um espaço vazio ou de um exercício físico de Grotowski a esse ator. Nem sempre o resultado era feliz.

Mas foi através de Robert Langdon Lloyd (o Puck da produção) que Brook achou sua resposta. Ironicamente, eu estaria (13 anos depois desse evento) dirigindo o próprio Lloyd na minha *première* de *All Strange Away*, de Samuel Beckett, em Nova York. Que pulo!

O *Espaço Vazio* é um “tapete no chão e uma ideia na cabeça”, uma onda no mar, uma estrela em formação. Os ingleses não tiveram muita paciência, mas os franceses, em especial o Ministro da Cultura da época, Jack Lang, convidou Peter Brook a se mudar para Paris, ofereceu-lhe um velho espaço abandonado – em frente à estação de trem principal, a Gare Du Nord, e um orçamento que faria com que os planos metafísicos do teatro de Brook decolassem. Brook se tornou um “ex-britânico” e, daí em diante, viria a ser a principal atração teatral de Paris.

No teatro Bouffes du Nord, nessa “ruína de espaço”, Brook conseguiu “apagar” os cantos e coxias do teatro formal e lá constituiu a sua ideia de teatro internacional: vieram atores do mundo inteiro, da África, da Ásia, da Lua e de alguns meteoros interessantes.

E, com pouco mais que um tapete persa no chão, um pouco de terra e dos ensinamentos do místico armênio George Gurdjieff, Brook mergulhou nos contos mais difíceis (como a encenação “não encenada” de *Mahabharata* – nove horas de duração –, onde alguém, um ator, simplesmente olha a plateia, abre um livro e conta uma história. Foi assim com suas adaptações de Tchekhov, de Bizet, de Shakespeare e de Beckett.

Este livro, *O Espaço Vazio*, foi a nossa bíblia, nosso guia dos anos 70.

Cada página traz uma revelação e uma revolução a respeito do que seria o “palco puro” e o espaço preenchido com ideias metafísicas (em vez de monstruosos cenários que só adornam, enfeitam tudo e em nada contribuem).

O Espaço Vazio de Brook foi como a ideia inicial que, no mundo do rock, passou-se a chamar de *unplugged*. Grupos como Nirvana, Pearl Jam, e mesmo algumas superbandas, entenderam que os efeitos estavam se tornando defeitos e que uma limpa, uma chuva sobre a poesia da arte, era necessária, assim como o quadro de Max Ernst “Europa depois da Chuva”. O livro veio na hora em que o resto da contracultura do mundo estava em pleno vigor, em plena limpa, em plena chuva.

Se você é um encenador, autor ou mero espectador de teatro, este livro visionário de Peter Brook é um must. Por quê? Porque sem ele, você ainda vive naquela época triste e boba que não entende que Peter Pan voa através de um complicado mecanismo de alavancas e fios, mas que, na verdade, a fábula do menino herói pode ser muito melhor contada por alguém que o olha nos olhos – recriando em você a ideia do espaço que esse menino deveria ocupar.

O Espaço Vazio está em nossas cabeças. E o bom teatro está na nossa capacidade de “imaginar o inimaginável”. E este livro de Peter Brook é um daqueles preciosos que você visita de tempos em tempos, assim como eu mesmo o faço, quando eu o procuro em minha prateleira e vejo que ele mudou de lugar por conta própria: assim como a nossa galáxia e o nosso organismo. Este livro é sinônimo do nosso tempo-espaço e é o que eu chamo de uma *masterpiece* do século xx que mudou, para sempre, a história.
Gerald Thomas

ENGLISH

Empty Space – Peter Brook – Foreword.

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Making theater happen or assembling its various parts is not exactly the hardest thing in the world. It's what we all do, all the way back to the Greeks. “**Authoring**”, well, yes. That is tremendously difficult and, dare I say... ‘unique’ !

But to “think” the theater not only as a craft, but as an ever evolving philosophy, well, that is even harder. And to transform it, radically, into ‘before and after’, well...that’s up to the Gods.

And it only happens once every 100 years. I’m being optimistic, of course.

Consider the following: a building is constructed and it’s a daring project. Well, there are those ‘civil engineers’ who build, as well as masons, carpenters, welders and all that crowd

working with contorted iron, massive beams and contorted and pre-stressed, pressed, compressed concrete.

But there is primarily one, that singular one who “devised and conceived” the whole thing. These rare innovators are what we call “**geniuses**“. I speak of Peter Brook, obviously.

Peter Brook is the father, the mother and the God to modern theater, contemporary, postmodern, deconstructive and avant guard stage craft. Without him and his concept of the “**Empty Space**” would not have given birth to the likes of Bob Wilson, Pina Bausch, Antunes Filho, Peter Stein, Victor Garcia, Richard Scechner, the Mabou Mines or or so many others like me, for example .

Yes, he held a very comfortable position in the Royal Shakespeare Company in London, in the late 60’s and 70’s when something broke in his head, cracked his mind open, opened his vision just like in one of those *delightful nightmares*, tasting like “**Caliban-esque Tempest**” (one that destroys what already exists, but opens one’s pallet to new and exotic flavors), Brook introduced the notion of discomfort to the theater.

Peter Brook was obviously picking up on the **Grotowski** ripple effect, in a way. All over the world, Grotowski’s voice is heard and absorbed. Suddenly, as if out of nowhere, in all four corners of the ring, **Grotowski** and **Jan Kott** (“Shakespeare Our Contemporary”) are working in tandem and rattling the scene. But nobody hears them better than Brook.

Nobody understood Grotowski’s “physicality” more than Brook. The Polish master came at the right time, as the right remedy and rescued a Master of the Theater.

The idea of a “**poor theater**” might have born under the horrible occupation of **Poland** during the Second World War. But its germination was resonating morphically, all over the planet.

This “**Poor Theater**” is, above all, and I mean, above it all, Brook’s idea of an “empty space”; a space stripped bare naked, freckled void and just raw.

Scaffoldings all over on stage, meant to be climbed, meant to be looked at, meant to represent “**Under Construction**”!!!

This book marks the definite end of a pompous theater (the Royal Court theater) and a ‘new theater philosophy under construction’ and is only really preceded by the highly politically charged theater of Bertold Brecht and of Artaud’s “cruelty “notations and, of course, the theater without walls by Julian Beck and his Living Theater.

Pomp and Circumstance done away with, what prevailed was the naked lunch or the naked truth of an essence of drama and storytelling.

“**Less, less,**” Brook shouted or whispered when an actor was heading “beyond” the limits of histrionics or when fake emotions were an obvious resource during the rehearsals of *Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Ironically, this “less” turned out to be “more” (**Less is More**) and rippled through just about every aspect of modern life, especially the Minimalists. Brook, Beckett and the Minimalists – a straight arrow in the blue.

I had the privilege to sit in and watch the rehearsals of “**Midsummer Night’s Dream**”, at the Aldwych Theatre, London, in 1971, still with the RSC. I kept looking at Brook on stage in plain view, in the midst of a crisis and one only question was apparent: “how to transform a traditional actor into a modern interpreter”. I guess that this is where the art of ‘representing’ takes over from “acting”. It starts here, with “Empty Space”.

“*But from where do I draw that emotion, Peter?*“. I ‘d see him walking to and fro on stage, trying to explain the concept of an empty space or exercise the Grotowski technique to the desperation of traditionally trained actors. The result was not always a happy one.

But it was through Robert Langdon Lloyd (role of “Puck” in that production) that Brook found his answer. Ironically, I was (13 years after this event) directing Lloyd in my own premiere of “All Strange Away” by Samuel Beckett, in New York. What a leap!

“Empty Space” is a **rug on the floor and an idea in the head**, paraphrasing Glauber Rocha, the mentor of the New Brazilian Cinema of the 1960’s. It’s “a wave in the ocean, a star in the making, a crack in the bottle that carries the message”. Yet, the message was loud and clear: connect with the audiences!

The English did not have much patience for Brook’s rapid transformation. Yet, the French (especially the Minister of Culture at the time, Jacques Lang), invited him to move to Paris, in 1974, with an amazing offer: an old abandoned train depot – opposite Paris’s main station, La Gare du Nord, and a budget so good, it would make the metaphysical plans of Brook’s new theater take off like a rocket around the world. Brook became a “former Brit” and, from now on, became the main theater attraction in Paris. And, literally, this ‘physically powerful’ space which Brook brought into the world could be as subtle as an actor turning 180 degrees and “construct the space’ around him with a simple body gesture. “Here I am...here I am not”. No light cue, no major musical theme, just a simple 180 degree turn.

Here, at the “Bouffes du Nord”, his theater now, that torn apart and “derelict like rubble of a space”, would bubble and this “Empty Space” became a plateau from which Brook was able to build up an international arena: actors came from all over the world; from Africa, Asia, the Moon and some interesting meteors fell into the pit. Spoken language didn’t matter anymore but gestures did.

And with little more than a Persian rug on the floor, some dirt, some real soil and the (so called) the five natural Gurdjieff elements, Brook plunged into the most difficult stories (such as the ‘undoable’ Mahabharata, nine hours long) head first. Someone, an actor,

simply just looked the audience in the eyes, opened a book and told a story. And it was so with his adaptations of Chekhov, Bizet, Shakespeare and Beckett.

This book, *The Empty Space* was our bible, our guide in the 70s. Each page, a revelation and a revolution about what would be the “essence of purity” on a stage and the space filled with *meta-very-physical* ideas and substituted those monster size sets that contributed to absolutely nothing at all to the reflection of drama.

The ‘Empty “**Spaced**’ Brook was the beginning of a new era with repercussions in all the arts, all of them, being stripped to the bone. Even rock groups moved to their ‘unplugged’ phase.

Groups like Nirvana and Pearl Jam understood that the special effects were becoming ‘defects’ and that an acid rain upon poetry and prose were long overdue. Yes, it was all a little like Max Ernst’s painting “Europe After the Rain”. Acid, raw and thoughtfully uncomfortable.

The book came out at a time when the rest of the counterculture movement in the world was in full force, under a full clean view and a dirty bursting cloud of acid rain.

If you are a director, actor, author or a mere theatergoer, this visionary book by Peter Brook is a MUST. Why? Because without it, you’d still live in that sad and silly time-zone which refused to understand that Peter Pan only flies through a complicated mechanism of levers, harnesses and wires. In reality, the fable of the boy-hero can be much better told by someone that you looks you in the eye – recreating inside of YOU the idea of ‘space’ that this fable should occupy.

Ultimately, this “Empty Space” is in our heads. And good theater resides in our ability to “think the unthinkable” and believe the unbelievable without much ado.

It is precious to visit and revisit this book from time to time, as I myself do, when I look at my shelf only to realize that it has moved, changed place, escaped on its own to another level all by itself. It exists so fluidly as our galaxy and its eroding planes.

This book is a synonym to Einstein’s time-space revelation and, just “Relativity” itself, it has changed forever our ever changing History.

Gerald Thomas