





THE OTHER IS AN I – PART 2

O OUTRO É UM EU – PARTE 2

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The other is an I – part 2

Abstract: This is an attempt to situate artistic, particularly theatrical creation, within the specific ideological environment of recent years in Brazil, in which the so-called “progressive front,” under threat, seems increasingly impervious to critical and self-critical thinking. The article seeks to merge analyses of several significant theatrical events from recent years to propose a perspective on dissident thinking in a period of reflux such as the one we are experiencing.

Keywords: extreme right; progressive front; agropeça; Serra Pelada.

O outro é um eu – parte 2

Resumo: Tentativa de situar a criação artística e particularmente teatral dentro do ambiente específico ideológico dos últimos anos no Brasil, em que o chamado “campo progressista”, acuado, parece tornar-se mais e mais impermeável ao pensamento crítico e autocrítico. O texto procura mesclar análises de alguns acontecimentos teatrais importantes dos últimos anos para propor um olhar sobre o pensamento dissidente em um período de refluxo como o que vivemos.

Palavras-chave: extrema direita; campo progressista; agropeça; Serra Pelada.



1 The other is a self (part 1)

I published an article in volume 2, issue 51, of *Urdimento* titled *O outro é um eu*¹, in which I attempted to address a phenomenon that seemed to be occurring in the arts market: a certain artistic status quo—still centered in Europe—began, at a certain point, to show interest in other perspectives. These perspectives, however, as I sought to analyze, play a very specific and ideological role within that universe. In that piece, I offered a broad analysis of some of the works shown at the 35th São Paulo Biennial, along with aspects of the play *Sem Palavras* by Cia Brasileira de Teatro, among other artistic events.

There is, however, another side to this issue—let us say, the problem of *alterity*—that also seems to challenge us in the current moment. I refer not to the *other* desired by the current ideology of the art market, but to the other it *repels*. This *other* goes by many names but, unlike the “other voices” that every theater festival wants to amplify, it is never treated as an *other* but rather as the *same*. Everything takes place as though novelty, innovation, were entirely reserved for the discourse deemed authentic, liberating, and transformative within these *other* voices we wish to hear. And everything we already know—what is old, repetitive, redundant—is reserved for this *same*, with which, however, we never identify. We do not call it the *other*, then. We call it *them*, a vague and dismissive third person, which does not imply the unfamiliarity and curiosity carried by the idea of an *other*. Toward the *other* voices, we feel curiosity, interest, hope. Toward *them*, we hold certainty, disdain, and indifference. Yet this is another kind of other: someone who is not us (hence, the third person, never the first), but whom we presume to know fully.

Some theorists, heirs to what is known as the Brazilian critical tradition, attempt—at least to some degree—to challenge this notion of absolute falsehood that we attribute to them. They also seek to question our supposed total knowledge of these segments of society and the fact that we attribute them to the past, to what is old, to what should have already ceased to exist. There is, therefore, some thought—clearly dissident—being produced about this *other*, about *them*, attempting to conceive of *them* beyond what we allegedly *already know*.

One of the faces of this *other* that we believe we already know all too well is their spirituality. We assume they are evangelicals because they have been deceived, manipulated by the church, as a result of an oppressive society and an absent state, thus the church occupies the space the state failed to fill, or the subjectivities that “the left abandoned”—we might recall the famous and endlessly repeated speech by Mano Brown: “the left needs to return to the hood” (free translation). This kind of commonsense narrative has been obsessively repeated—almost as if we, too, were devotees of some religious cult that believes if we just repeat our prayers enough times, they will come true—namely, that *they* will disappear.

1 DAL FARRA, Alexandre. O outro é um eu. *Urdimento - Revista de Estudos em Artes Cênicas*, Florianópolis, v. 2, n. 51, jul. 2024. Available from: <https://revistas.udesc.br/index.php/urdimento/article/view/25531/17250>. Accessed on: Jun 11, 2025.



Those regarded as heirs to the Brazilian critical tradition, reclaiming something of the role it once played, seek to rethink this commonsense notion, this consensus, that this particular *other other* is already fully known, old, backward: the image of everything we supposedly already know and wish to leave behind.

Alongside various collaborators, I have been focused on this *other* for more than ten years. In 2012, with the Tablado SP group, I premiered the play *Mateus, 10*, which portrayed an evangelical pastor who commits a crime—we began from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Intuitively, at the time, I felt that the setting in which an *idea* like Raskolnikov's—his violent, absurd, yet *novel* nihilism—could be situated was within the evangelical church. Back then, little was said about the proximity between these *others* and politics. But we already viewed them as fully recognizable scoundrels. A theater critic, at the time, told me personally that she was disappointed in the work: it was a political mistake. That guy was a scoundrel and should simply be imprisoned. My mistake, she said, was giving voice to someone we did not want to hear—someone we were supposed to silence. As if by silencing him symbolically, we might somehow bring about his silencing in real life.

Time has passed, and this *other other* has only gained more space and a louder voice, yet our position has not changed: we merely want to stop listening to them. We just want them to disappear, they and their supposed total falsehood, them and their backwardness, etc. But what if we consider, even as a mere hypothesis, the possibility that *they are the novelty, and we are the ones repeating ourselves*? What if we ask whether this other *might not speak only lies*? And whether we, on the other hand, might not speak only truths? In short, what if this other could also be a *self*? What if we allowed ourselves to see the other as a self?

From 2012 to now, evidently a lot has changed. And yet, it seems that our relationship with *them* has changed very little. Perhaps we have become only more cornered, but we continue to believe we know them inside and out, while still not knowing how to deal with them. At this moment, those putting up barriers to this other are, once again, not “us.” Let us recall that Alexandre de Moraes was appointed to the Supreme Federal Court by Michel Temer, the same figure we then called a *golpista* (coup-plotter). Might we soon see Michel himself become one of “ours,” a person defending democracy against “them”? In sum, times have changed; we have witnessed how “they” have gained more and more ground, and how we have remained paralyzed in the face of this—and yet, it seems, this has almost always been interpreted as some kind of victory of evil over good, explained by the most varied justifications. Still, few people—almost no one—have turned to seriously trying to understand what made “them” become so significant and such a positively advantageous option for such a large portion of the country. That is, again, few have genuinely tried to grasp their logic. We have mostly tried to understand how they manage to deceive others—always with a confirmation bias toward what we supposedly already know about evil, about backwardness, about *them*.

In a text on the documentary *Fé e Fúria*, the theorist João Marcos Duarte writes:

It is as if we lived, until recently, in a blessed homeland where everything had already been achieved and peace reigned, but which, for some time now, has



started changing its face (or its character). As much as one tries to deny it, there is a belief—ideological, no doubt—that Brazil is naturally good and that there are enemies, a dangerous minority, who always manage, whenever our country—a land flowing with milk and honey—is on the verge of becoming a minimally livable place, to show up and ruin the collective dream and the people’s joy (Duarte, 2022; free translation).

In fact, this collective awakening from a dream is precisely what we are speaking of. And perhaps we are still in that dream, as if refusing to get out of bed.

2 The Other Truth

In 2022, the Tablado SP group and I premiered a play called *Verdade*, about the Brazilian military. I wrote an article about it in *Revista Rosa*², in which I tried to address what I perceived as a certain *difficulty* in the reception of the work. The play opened more or less at the same time as *Agropeça* by the Teatro da Vertigem group, and the differences between them could not have been greater—at least in terms of the relationship each work established with the current ideological battleground.

I intend to briefly outline these differences, not so much by analyzing the works themselves, but rather by pointing to their general premises to identify what I believe may be a blind spot in the *Verdade* project. I will conclude by presenting a new project in which I will continue this difficult effort to *constitute this other as a self*: not by delegating to the other the task of delivering us truths (as the current ideology of the art market tends to do with the so-called “new voices” of the “Global South”), but so that our own point of view might, without vanishing, actually come into contact with *them*. Because, although they keep defeating us, I believe that we continue desperately trying (and succeeding) not to see them, but only to see our own projections in them. Our fears, our certainties, those things we imagine we can purge³.

3 Sítio do Pica-Pau Amarelo

I do not intend here to provide a detailed or exhaustive analysis of the play *AGROPEÇA*, which is obviously complex and multifaceted, such as any theatrical work. I aim only to address the *devices* the piece employs and the pact it proposes in its interaction with the audience. As is known, the entire dramaturgical structure of the play is based on an inversion of *Sítio do Pica-Pau Amarelo*

2 DAL FARRA, Alexandre. Encarar a luz que cega, resistir à penumbra que conforta. *Revista Rosa*, São Paulo, 2023. Available from: <https://revistarosa.com/7/encarar-a-luz>. Accessed on: Jun 11, 2025.

3 In my doctoral research, I analyzed aspects of the tendentially paranoid structure of society that gives rise to this kind of dynamic of constantly projecting onto the other.



by Monteiro Lobato, a sort of retaliation by the oppressed characters in the novel—whether taken literally for what they represent in the original work, or metaphorically as oppressed populations. For example, the figure of Tia Anastácia returns in a performance by Mawusi Tulani to take control of one section of the play and voice what the original novel silenced in this Black female character. Meanwhile, the doll Emília is reimagined in the dramaturgy as a trans woman, in a provocative and powerful performance by Tenca Silva. Pedrinho (Vinicius Meloni) is portrayed as a symbol of normative patriarchal masculinity, Narizinho (Lucienne Guedes) embodies a perspective of female empowerment, and so on.

Amilton de Azevedo wrote that the play, though it clearly sets out a questioning and mobilizing trajectory—since it takes on a deeply rooted national imaginary—“by not allowing itself to be traversed by contradictions, ends up running the risk of becoming merely a highlighted image; a composition that is somewhat flat, even if longing to summon futures” (Azevedo, 2023; free translation). What stands out in the critic’s formulation is the final part: “even if longing to summon futures.” I ask myself what futures are being summoned there. Indeed, the very idea of “summoning futures,” along with phrases such as “disruptive forms,” is part of a jargon widely known and used among us—a sort of playbook imposed in a brutally unilateral fashion, dictating how one is supposed to be anti-colonial in the Global South; and the playbook obviously does not come from the Global South, but from the centers of power. This was evident, for example, in the 2024 São Paulo International Theater Festival, which claimed to focus on the “Global South.” What we saw on the city’s stages, however, was a series of works by artists originally from the Global South—but all of whom (without exception) had already been widely supported and “discovered” by the usual power centers. That is, all had already been sanctioned by the center before returning to the Global South, now presented as the true theater of the Global South. This playbook that defines who has the right to be called “Global South,” “other,” “future,” or “new forms,” as dictated by the Global North, is effectively the latest form of colonialism in the performing arts—resurfacing in a version more cynical than ever: now, the metropole teaches the colonies how to properly position themselves against the colonial system, *so that this critique ends up reaffirming and sustaining the very system it claims to oppose*.

Returning to *Agropeça*, the play does not address these dynamics explicitly, but it is clear how hegemonic forces permeate the work. The setting of a rodeo transforms into an arena for a reckoning, in which each of the oppressed voices returns with the right to say what was silenced by patriarchal tradition. The retaliation—and I believe the work is aware of this—is for our benefit. It is *we*, the audience, who delight in the vengeance the piece offers, which is why the actors’ provocative stance is entirely justified—not as a real risk, but as reaffirmation: the audience *wants* to be provoked in the very ways the play provokes, as it already agrees in advance with the assumptions underlying the provocation. In this way, provocation functions primarily as a rhetorical device for reaffirmation, and as such, it works and stirs emotion *precisely because it does not truly provoke at all*.



As Bakhtin said, the discourse of provocation is a form of dialogism, as the provocateur always presupposes *another* discourse that is not explicitly stated but silently underlies what is said, and that continually reasserts at the same time it provokes, criticizes, questions. In other words, it is a double-voiced discourse, one that speaks two things at once and puts them in tension. However, for such *dialogism* to be realized, the *other* discourse must in fact underlie the provocative one and remain active within it. That is not what happens in *Agropeça*. There, the *other* discourse is not provoked but eliminated from the outset. The discourse that underpins the creation of the work is not placed under tension, but rather replaced and corrected. It is a kind of direct transposition of affirmative politics into the artistic field.

It is important to stress that what is being defended here is not, by any means, the need for a purist dialogue with Monteiro Lobato—nor do I believe such a dialogue is even possible or desirable. Rather, I seek only to point out that the structure of the work is grounded in an action that, although it mimics the dynamics of provocation, in truth does not provoke but reaffirms positions—positions with which we already fully agree. This text is not about questioning those positions—on the contrary, I too agree with all of them. Rather, it is about understanding how this work approaches the *other*—the one it *appears to provoke* but in reality merely replaces and removes from the scene.

It seems that the only problem with this device is that, while all of us may dream of simply removing this *other* from the world, the fact is that this *other* insists on remaining. No matter how brilliant, intelligent, or provocative we may be—no matter how powerful Tenca Silva's performance in the play may be (and it is)—the *other remains*, right there outside the theater. In reality, unlike in actual affirmative programs, which have direct concrete impacts in the world, transposing such a system into a theatrical work seems to have, perhaps, the opposite effect: the more we affirm ourselves and congratulate ourselves on our certainties about the *other*, the more fragile and disoriented we become when faced with the unbearable facts that await us once we leave the theater, the cinema, or a debate, or after watching a moving speech by the president. We are confronted by unbearable *facts* and even incomprehensible realities, such as the fact that Bolsonaro has basically not lost popular support since the end of his term; or the ongoing difficulty of Lula's administration to secure broad social backing. And this sense of dismay, which grows in proportion to the time we spend convincing ourselves of what we already think we know, leads us to desperate emergency exits, to reasoning and concepts so blatantly fragile—such as *Pobre de Direita* (Right-Wing Poor), among others. If we already know we are right, and already fully understand the *other*, and if there is no explanation for its success, then the problem must not lie in us or in our conceptual framework, but in them, who must suffer from some kind of cognitive or moral deficit. In other words, rather than question our certainties, we choose to question the facts.

In this sense, *Agropeça* seems to be the theatrical and performative expression of a hegemonic ideology not only in Brazil but internationally—an ideology the play powerfully materializes and thereby amplifies. It reinvests the audience with emotion and renewed energy for the certainties it



already holds, and thus truly aids reaffirm the very same hegemonic structure that permeates the so-called global “progressive camp,” from Joe Biden to Lula—an ideology which, it is becoming increasingly clear, does not lead us to *envision futures*, but at best merely aids us avoid the worst—though even that has rarely been possible (with few exceptions).

In the opposite direction, I believe *Verdade* may be an example of a clumsy and unsuccessful attempt to question this same hegemony onstage—to actually generate some kind of *provocation*.

4 *Verdade*

Verdade, as already mentioned, premiered around the same time as *Agropeça*. As noted earlier, I wrote an article in *Revista Rosa* about the piece. What I would like to do here, however, is simply to place the work in perspective, offering a comparative reading in light of what I previously discussed regarding *Agropeça*. Indeed, if *Agropeça* is among the recent works that strive to *reaffirm* the consensus of the progressive camp, reinforcing its widely known, recognized, and recognizable hegemonic discourse—and if it does so successfully, as a work capable of moving and emotionally engaging the public around ideas and convictions they already hold—then *Verdade*, by contrast, is an attempt—difficult, perhaps necessarily so—to create fissures within that same discourse, to go against it. It is worth noting: saying what everyone already knows and believes, in a way that still stirs emotion and interest, is not easy art. Consider *Ainda Estou Aqui* as another successful example of this genre: the screenplay, direction, and performances are (and must necessarily be) exquisite; the emotional scaffolding, the script structure, and so on; all must be finely crafted to place on screen something capable of truly moving an audience around convictions it already holds. It is, in fact, an artistically demanding task that requires the best-trained professionals in the country and beyond. Likewise, *Agropeça* relies on the full mastery of a director such as Antônio Araújo to structure a work that can emotionally impact its audience by reaffirming the very thoughts and convictions they already possess and know they possess.

Verdade, by contrast, is a gesture that, in itself, *might be too easy*. Denying hegemony, becoming the annoying one, the contrarian, the pessimist, is an easy gesture because it does not inspire communion and therefore carries no risk of failing to deliver what it promises. In other words: if the work sets out only to disappoint, it is quite easy to fulfill that promise. But that is not why I previously described *Verdade* as difficult. Nor is it out of self-pity. On the contrary, I believe the piece was difficult because it suffered from a kind of foundational mismatch: it began from the assumption that it *was actually possible to provoke*. The play, or rather the project behind the play, was, in this sense, afflicted by a certain degree of anachronism. Until around mid-2015, I believe the Brazilian “progressive camp” was still interested in dissent, in controversy. Somehow, the (delusional) self-confidence it had built for itself allowed for the illusion of permanence, such that even dissent could be tolerated (something uncommon on the Brazilian left) and even *desired*.



However, starting in 2016, the left (increasingly less left) permanently retreated into a kind of self-defensive mode, in which criticism became simply impossible. And in that sense, returning again to Bakhtin, when there is no viable ground for polemic, that is, when the discursive field with which one seeks to engage in polemic is not willing to echo it, then no polemic truly occurs—that is, the impact of the work is as or even less polemical than the one outlined earlier in *Agropeça*.

For anything—absolutely anything—that does not serve to reaffirm the certainties the “progressive camp” already holds about itself (and about others) is simply discarded. In this terrain, which I had already explored in my doctoral research, anything involving internal critique has no chance of flourishing. And therefore generates no noise. And therefore generates no polemic. In this sense, the analysis must once again be reversed: if in *Agropeça* the polemic has, let us say, low intensity in terms of how much it actually puts into question, on the other hand, it does indeed reverberate—that is, even if, in the end, it is not truly polemic but rather a rhetorical use of polemic aimed at reaffirming the same, there is still reverberation. In *Verdade*, by contrast, if there is real internal polemic within the piece, it fails to manifest—because it does not resonate within the discursive field it seeks to engage. The *progressive camp* has expelled real dissent, discussion, and controversy from its terrain. It has become merely an echo chamber of the same—leaving those who somehow refuse this repetition confined to a narrow space of discussion, with no reverberation beyond their own limited circle. Yet this kind of stubborn refusal to stand on the “right side” is the hallmark of that work—which, for that reason, runs the risk of turning into an empty lament: a place at once uncomfortable, yet also easy to occupy, in which nothing is expected and from which nothing will come.

5 Futures

The future no longer exists and yet it is up to us to truly invent it. And inventing it means not repeating the same and expecting new results. As I write this text, I am performing in São Paulo, at the Teatro de Arena. I am drawn to *Serra Pelada* because it deliberately distances itself, with all its strength, from the role of lament, from that embittered Cassandra voice crying out, “I warned you,” to anyone who will listen. On the contrary, *Serra Pelada*, though it addresses things rooted in the past, which trouble and disgust us, and though it draws on Nelson Rodrigues and, in my view, tries to pick up threads of a Brazilian theatrical tradition that is always dying but always being reawakened (a tradition that runs through the Arena itself, and through groups such as Cia do Latão, among others), nonetheless, this play genuinely attempts—strange as it may seem—to point toward futures, in terms of language, of our ability to speak, and to generate meaning—even from a kind of scorched earth, where all that remains are the remnants scattered in a crater. I cared deeply about this. In contrast to a reality that is becoming increasingly closed off, I sought to create a linguistic environment that truly interests me—and that is, in itself, *constructive*. This desire—let



us call it a constructivist one, albeit a tense and difficult form of constructivism—has always been what interested me in this text, especially in terms of language. This is the direction that interested me after the experience of *Verdade*: to recreate a kind of praise for *constructive creativity, neither disruptive nor destructive*. I removed from the work the impulse toward dissolution that had always characterized my perspective—and doing so required real aesthetic effort. That shift, to me, is what most clearly expresses an attempt to reorient the work toward the world.

If the progressive camp is *closed* to critique, polemic, and imagination, and is now dedicated only to reaffirming the same in different forms, then trying to destroy it is useless, there is little else to be done, as this camp has expelled anything that questions it. In this environment, I am interested, at this moment, in creating a work that *is not provocative*: as there is no longer the possibility of provocation. On the contrary, this is a sincere, real attempt to *build something*. To build something possible from the remains of what we have thought, what we have lived, and what we have picked up along the way. As someone once said: throw away the gold and keep the scraps. Make something from them that genuinely interests me. In a world that is already over, faced with a progressive camp or a left (which tend to have become synonymous) that only tries to salvage the legacy of something that has long ceased to be viable, the task is to create a work that is still possible, without falling into supreme naivety or predictable complaint: *to create a possible imagination in an impossible world*.

6 Vereda

The next project mentioned above is, in this sense, a continuation. If we previously engaged with *Garimpo* and *Boca de Ouro* to create a possible work from the debris of a tradition, we will now turn to *Vereda da Salvação* by Jorge Andrade to create a *gospel* piece, with evangelical actors, musicians, and artists. In seeking to connect Brazilian traditions with their current outcomes and to trace continuities where we have become accustomed to seeing only ruptures, this work will be a direct continuation of the *Serra Pelada* project. It will attempt to establish links with the tradition from which Jorge Andrade's classic stems, with its iconic staging by Antunes Filho, and the brutally distinct/*other* reality of the modern evangelical church that frightens us, that we stereotype, that we do not know how to imagine. With theoretical support from André Castro and João Marcos Duarte—who, in their own ways, also seek to reestablish connections between a supposedly dead Brazilian critical theory and a present that demands new theoretical links—this new project will also aim to credit a *creative* space that, nonetheless, emerges in the most inhospitable possible environment: the evangelical, neo-Pentecostal, gospel symbolic universe. In order to avoid falling into a repetition of the same—whether via affirmation or negation—it is necessary, truly, to *create*. Even when that no longer seems possible.



In both cases—*Serra Pelada* and *Vereda da Salvação*—the aim is to resist the invention of a total *other*, one that comes bearing a solution: neither *them* as pure enemies, nor the true *other* who arrives to save us. It is about creating from the remnants, creating links where none appear to exist.



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