

INTER VIEW

Wolfgang Pannek interview Maura Baiocchi

*E*coperformance

A Politics of the Body

*E*coperformance

Uma política do corpo

ABSTRACT

Interview with Maura Baiocchi, the founding director of Taanteatro Companhia and the International Ecopeformance Film Festival. In the interview, Baiocchi talks about the artistic journey that led her to the creation of the concept of ecopeformance and the production of a festival dedicated to this theme. In this context, she addresses the overcoming of anthropocentrism in the performing arts, referring to the transition of AntropoScene and SimbioScene, two other concepts coined by this Brazilian choreographer.

Keywords: Ecopeformance; Ecorporeality; AntropoScene; SimbioScene; Taanteatro.

RESUMO

Entrevista com Maura Baiocchi, diretora fundadora da Taanteatro Companhia e do Festival Internacional de Cinema Ecopeformance. Na entrevista, Baiocchi fala sobre o percurso artístico que a levou à criação do conceito de ecopeformance e à produção de um festival dedicado a esta temática. Nesse contexto, ela aborda a superação do antropocentrismo nas artes cênicas, referindo-se à transição de AntropoCena e SimbioCena, outros dois conceitos cunhados por esta coreógrafa brasileira.

Palavras-chave: Ecorporeidade; SimbioCena; Taanteatro. Ecopeformance; AntropoCena;

WOLFGANG PANNEK: Since 2021, you have directed the *International Ecoperformance Film Festival*, an annual project with growing resonance among artistic and academic circles, the press, and the general public. Upon reaching its third edition in 2023, the festival presented a total of more than 200 films created by artists from five continents and more than forty countries. What motivated you to create this project, what is the mission of the festival, and how do you evaluate its evolution up to the present moment?

MAURA BAIOCCHI: Since its founding in 1991, Taanteatro Companhia has dealt with themes that bring together the body and the environment in an ecopoetic and ecoethical way. In fact, this inclination predates the company. It emerged in the late 1980s, when I started performing while immersed in nature. Back then, I called this kind of work *environment-performance*. In 2008, when I began to conceive the solo performance *DAN Ancestral Becoming*, I started to call it *ecoperformance*. Since then, and in parallel with other projects focused on works by playwrights, philosophers, and visual artists, as well as on sociopolitical, gender, and decolonial issues, we have developed the practice and theory of ecoperformance within Taanteatro Companhia.

The International Ecoperformance Film Festival originated from the company's ecoperformative practice and the organization of the Ecoperformance Forum. Between 2010 and 2019, in Brazil and Argentina, we held four editions of this forum, bringing together

artists, producers, journalists, and the public of the performing arts. These events, with programs consisting of lectures, debates, video projections, and live performances, had suggestive titles such as *The Environment is Us* or *The Environment as Performance*.

So, it was very natural for us to arrive at the festival in 2021. The first edition of the festival took place in one of the most serious periods of the Covid-19 pandemic and through a government averse to the arts, the environment and the original peoples of Brazil. We felt it was urgent to address these issues, not only as an art form and poetic language of the body, but, at the same time, as an ethical and political positioning.

We created the festival based on, I wouldn't say, a mission, but a vocation, encouraged by my personal experience. I was born on a farm and have lived, since childhood, in intense contact with nature, and I could not fail to address the relationship between body and environment in everything I do. Not only in the sense of praising nature but also asking questions, proposing reflections, or making complaints, and inviting the public to follow an instigating path where they do not forget this issue. The festival exercises this multifaceted communicative function in an expanded way by being annual and international.

Adding up the first three editions of the festival, we received more than five hundred entries from five continents and presented around 140 works online and in person. The curatorial selection process is quite demanding, as there are interesting and beautiful

works coming from all over the world. In any case, it is a very happy project, with positive resonance and surprising developments in the form of interviews, lectures, debates, publications, seminars, courses, and the projection of selected works for students at schools and universities in Brazil and other countries such as Argentina, Canada, the United States, France, Norway, Thailand, and Turkey. The institutional collaboration with different age groups is yet another dream being realized by showing the educational power of the arts through concrete actions.

WP: The festival is a diffusion platform for *eco[po]ethical* works that operate at the intersection of performance, cinema, and ecology. What are the distinctive aspects of *ecoperformance*, and how does this concept relate to another notion of your performative thinking, the *ecorporality*?

MB: *Ecoperformance* has an affinity with other performative and artistic modalities (including site-specific, urban intervention or *landart*) carried out, say, outdoors or in non-conventional environments. In fact, it can occur in any environment, in nature, in urban, virtual environments (and even in theaters) as long as it is based on a conceptual tripod that involves the environment, the body and ancestry. This tripod, developed little by little over the last fifteen years, particularizes *ecoperformance*, above all, by including ancestry. Ancestry has to do with memory. Not only the personal

memory of the performer, but a geological, biological and cultural memory, that is, a complex environmental memory.

The performer's body is not an aborted body, it was not born from a magical act, out of nowhere, but comes from the very ancient forces of Nature and from very ancient genes, that is, from a planetary ancestry, just as planet Earth has a unlimited cosmic ancestry in space-time terms. In other words, we are not just talking about a fading ancestry, linked to the past and human ancestors, but an ancestry linked to all forms of life and projected for tomorrow, for a time to come.

So, given the diversity of dimensions, elements and tensions that constitute and inhabit the body and considering the opening of ancestry to the future, what are the questions that we as performers should ask now? One of them is: what ancestor do I want to be for my descendants? And along with that question comes another one, which is: what worlds do I want to build with my art, with my work, with my life? These are questions that underlie ecoperformance and emphasize its ecopoetic character. They also imply that our descendants have the opportunity to collaborate with the creation of their respective present and future.

These questions are necessary. Otherwise, we run the risk of conceiving and performing works overly centered on the notion of *anthrôpos*; all too anthropocentric works. We envision and crave a more expanded body. And here we arrive at the concept of *ecorporeality*, which proposes a body that is not isolated from other

bodies, beings, and lives. A body composed of and operating in energetic networks. We need to observe this notion of the body not only in our artistic production but also in the production of our daily lives. The performer needs to incorporate this notion of a body embraced and traversed by the environment, the planet, the world, and its circumstances, a body in constant tension with all the things it relates to, and vice versa. All bodies, not just the human body, are producers of relationships or, in Taanteatro terms, producers of tensions.

We aim for positive and propositional tensions—tensions that may reflect and improve the world. In our proposal, ecoporeality and ecoperformance combine in a policy of the body and the performer, the amplified body-performer, and of interrelated body-nature-world-circumstances-events. Not for that little thing over there: my body, my little world, my art. This I, which thinks of itself as the center of the world, must rethink itself. It must try to evolve symbiotically with all of life, and all the animate and inanimate beings that live with and are part of our bodies and make our lives possible. Without plants, without animals, without water, without the air we breathe, without the planet breathing well, without a happy planet, we will also be sad.

WP: In other words, does ecoperformance overcome the anthropocentric perspective of the performing arts?

MB: Perhaps it is impossible to completely transcend the limits of the existential and cognitive perspectives determined by our human condition. However, it is possible to say that the ecoperformer dives into this attempt to expand and diversify his/her perspective and to overcome the anthropocentric dramaturgical principle of performance. The least performers have to do is try. Obviously, we are not identical to other beings or to the landscapes we inhabit. We are not sea water, we are not that tree, and vice versa. If we were identical, there would be no need to perform. But we are ephemeral forms of life, related and intertwined in the vital continuum. And, poetically, starting from these tensions of differences and affinities, we can produce diverse and infinite realities, including the transmutation between forms of being and species. This symbiosis needs to at least be tried. Performers who incorporated this idea already are ecoperformers.

WP: In Taanteatro's conceptual work, the attempt to overcome the anthropocentrism of performing arts through ecoperformance is associated with the proposal of a broader paradigmatic change: the farewell of an *Anthropo-Scene* towards a *Symbio-Scene*. Could you comment on this proposal and its relationship to the thinking of the Australian environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht?

MB: Currently, we are experiencing this productive tension of reflection on the departure from the Anthropocene towards a future period, the Symbiocene. The concept of the anthropocene proposed by Crutzen designates the current geological era that began with the industrial revolution and was, for the first time, determined by the impact of human action on Earth. Albrecht proposes a *green* line of flight to overcome the anthropocene and its correlative destructive environmental behaviors towards new forms of coexistence, not free of conflict but of mutual benefit: the symbiocene.

Analogous to this paradigm shift in geosciences, Taanteatro proposes in the field of the performing arts a departure from the *antropo-scene* towards the *simibio-scene*. That is, a departure from a conception of the performing arts defined by the centrality of the anthropos towards a decentralized performativity that places all the agents of the scene, human or not, on the same plane. We do not claim to already know what the symbio-scene is, but we are in search of it. We don't intend to say: 'This scene we did here is a symbio-scene'. But we intend to say: 'We are creating poetics that show our process towards a symbio-scene and, consequently, a symbiocene". Similar to what I said earlier, this search, this attempt is already the work or the art that needs to be developed.

WP: The newly elected Brazilian government has repositioned the country in ecopolitical terms. Both in relation to

industrial development, which, according to President Lula, must be green, as well as the preservation of the most important Brazilian biomes - the Amazon, Cerrado, and Sertão - and the protection of the rights of native peoples. How do you see the role of your artwork in this broader ecopolitical context?

MB: The previous government had no positive interest in the environment, no respect, love or care whatsoever. It was exclusively invested in environmental exploitation and destruction, without regard for sustainability. Considering the statements given and measures announced, I hope that the new government will finally be interested in what we are proposing. We depend on a certain institutional interest and investment to guarantee the economic sustainability and, therefore, the future of the festival.

The work carried out by the International Ecoperformance Film Festival has a great power of communicative penetration because it has the film as support. The transmission of the program over the internet expands and diversifies our audience and, consequently, enhances its political reach. We hope to be able to extend that reach even further.

The artistic work, as it communicates via poetic language, has a great power to convey messages, including socio-political messages. This power of art operates through the senses and the interlocution of feelings. It becomes effective by affecting the heart. Obviously, reason also acts, but rather as a form of emotion. Art appeals primarily to the emotions and, thus, to an aesthetic that

transcends even the concepts of beauty and ugliness. I believe that the power of art to reach an audience through the languages of film, dance, photography, music and literature is deeper than a news report dealing with the same subject. The performer has this power in his hands. A synesthetic power to reach the public's sensibility and memory and to incorporate it through images, sounds, movements, and messages. This power must be taken seriously.

WP: The human-nature relationship is often conflictual. Is the objective of ecoperformance primarily harmonizing or does it also include dissonant dimensions?

MB: Earlier, I mentioned the relationship of tension between all living and non-living things. The world is flowing all the time, but in a flow of tension, in tension networks. Conflict is inherent to every being, every event. Harmonious relationships are not exempt from conflicts, and conflicting relationships have harmonious dimensions. So, the presence of conflicts and harmonies (conflict-harmonies) in ecoperformances is natural. For us, conflict is not synonymous with negativity. Yes, the violence of war is negative. Even in the legitimate form of self-defense, it is very bad. We are paradoxical beings. We commit violence in the name of a greater good. War in search of peace, but peace for one side only.

WP: What are your wishes and expectations regarding the future of the International Ecoperformance Film Festival?

MB: Ecoperformance basically has two formats: the face-to-face performance format, done live, and the film format. The festival is held online and in cinemas. It does not aim at presenting documentaries of works conceived for face-to-face events, but at sharing ecoperformance as film. For this reason, we are currently emphasizing the importance of cinematographic language. This trend will become increasingly prominent and also be a selection criterion. So much so that the third edition is now called the International Ecoperformance Film Festival. This emphasis, however, does not prevent, in the future, the realization of an amplified festival with adequate logistics for an ecoperformance program in its original format, in person and live.