

Study Notes for the Mexico Project

Theme and Texts

February 18, 2004

Project web page (Spanish and English entry) = http://pantheatre.free.fr/pages/works_mexico_es.htm

Further notes towards theme and texts, with, as an introduction, some extracts from a series of defining (if sometimes heated) exchanges with Nick Hobbs.

Introduction

Nota: [EP] = Enrique Pardo. Other replies are Nick Hobbs'.

[EP] My idea is to create a strong visual, character and intrigues continuity, and have clear philosophical texts accompanying the action.

[EP] For the Mexico project I want to work a lot on "sentiment" - and, like most of the experimental work I do and that you know well, I want to use the tandem Eros/Psyche - that is, love in all its connotations (from sex to ideals) as the terrain for "dying" (triangles, betrayals, dissapointments, glories, fusions, confusions, etc etc.)

[EP] For me the "Theatre of Death" is one of lucidity as opposed to numbing, of "nothing left to lose so lets risk and expose what is inside, behind life", of stripping away the candid protections of hope, future, ignorance, transcendence, afterlife, etc... of perverting such candidness, of curdling, yagourhting, cheeing, cibations, etc. And ... I turn to one of the territories where these 'mysteries' are the most alive, vivacious, rewarding, lucid, complex, killing - the territories of Eros. (extract from "Variations on Death" see http://pantheatre.free.fr/pages/works_mexico_variations.rtf)

so the concept is about sex and death not love and death?

[EP] Massive grumble at your pragmatic un-mythological dead-Pan Oxbridge classifications, Dr. Hobbs.

i think sex and love need drawing apart - it's sloppy to conflate them - they're intimately related but 2 different things

[EP] You're telling PAN !

when we talk about sex and death we usually talk about orgasms and petits morts and oblivion, about which i'm unconvinced - unconvinced that petit mort (or oblivion) is a useful metaphor for orgasm

[EP] Mini freudian stuff.

i know the biological connection between sex and death (once we've bred and raised our progeny we're redundant, a drain on youth's resources and thus we're better off dead) but that's our curse but not our culture (which is partly do with extending (useful) life as long as possible, partly about justifying the existence of post-breeders to the young); but the biological connection i don't find very interesting, so i want to know more about what you're getting at with the connection between eros and death

[EP] I've written a bit more and put it on the web (will start translating soon.) Grumble grumble grumble.

(exchange on Pina Bausch) : [EP] Include Pina Bausch in this bunch.

she aint butoh! she's postmodern western contemporary dance - entirely different!

[EP] I meant that she belongs to the gang fascinated with the underworld (also German post expressionist etc... not sure about "postmodern")

if bausch aint postmodern not sure who is...

(personally i find baudrillard rather lightweight - though worth seeing of course)
[EP] Knowing well the background of her work I cannot call it postmodern - she comes from German expressionism, the Essen school, etc. with massive spectacular tendencies (I remember when she was called "fascist" for this by the French (envious) lefties - Nuremberg meetings esthetics !) But then "postmodern" is not a term I use.

me neither generally but in the sense of multiple level of (usually superficial) ironies and mixing references to anything and everything and taking nothing seriously and cultural circular references - films which are about films (Tarantino's new one - Kill Bill being an ultimate example - as was Lynch's Mulholland Drive), popsongs about other popsongs etc etc) and in-jokes...

mind you there is of course good postmodernism - i'm not against it (whatever it is) per se - though i sort of try to avoid "postmodernisms" in my own work

[EP] Sean and Caterina are working on a film script full of postmodern references - and say "postmodernism" is all they talk about in L.A. I want to go have some heated talks over there! And see what they are up to too. It seems to me that for L.A. postmodernists the main question is anti-WesternEuro cannon, work that does not comply with its criteria for cultural quality.

isnt that a way of saying kitsch?

[EP] In itself such iconoclasm is very interesting. What the artistic results are is another question I want to see for myself - especially in theatre, though I suspect that in its very nature theatre is considered "modern" and European.

EP : New Notes and J. Dollimore's book

From the start I have insisted on the inclusion as the central triangle of EROS, PSYCHE and DEATH. I have also stated that my understanding of the dynamic of this triangle is akin to what I have called "baroque esthetics" . I would add baroque ethics. The official presentation of the project contains descriptions and explanations of this point of view. The current title "Candid, El Candidato y la Muerte" is a personification of these concepts – and I am not 100% happy with such a title – though it carries both good seductions (à la Garcia Marquez...) and obligations, especially by including "El Candidato" (the love pretendant, and of course the political proposal.) An alternative title would be "Morirse de Amor". We will keep this open.

I have come across an excellent book which I highly recommend to those who want and have the time for some excellent philosophical studies :

Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture, by Jonathan Dollimore, Routledge, New York, 1998 (paperback 2001.)

Not unlike Sonu Shamdasani's book on Jung (<http://pantheatre.free.fr/pages/gossip.htm>) or Steven Connor's "Dumbstruck – A Cultural History of Ventriloquism", Dollimore tackles strands of a cultural history of Death. His writing is excellent and I felt very at ease with, and creatively provoked by, the inevitable attitudes and ideological stands that emerge from having to summarize in a few pages whole cultural periods, or the work of landmark philosophers like Socrates or Nietzsche, for example. I appreciated his psychological depth and intellectual compassion in his sometimes cutting remarks about postmodernism, but most of all in his contribution to the crucial contemporary issues of death and desire that have risen in the homosexual community in the last 30 or so years with the advent of AIDS.

I do not foresee any direct references to the question of AIDS in our piece – though I am not excluding it, and, given how Dollimore reflects on it, it probably will find its way into the piece. His historical perspective links the philosophical and metaphysical thinking that have emerged from the AIDS pandemic, especially the most radical ones, as mutations of recurring themes in Western Eros, and especially of its treatment in what I would call "baroque esthetics" (and ethics.) Dollimore rarely uses the term "baroque", mainly because his cultural point of view is more Northern and Anglo. But of course the overwhelming Northern Anglo monument of baroque is William Shakespeare himself, and Dollimore has great pages on Hamlet, and on Romeo and Juliet, and especially a fascinating section on some of the sonnets – the ones written in loving admiration (attraction?) to a young man (the Golden Boy) – which reminded me of the (homo)erotic complexity of Sapho's poem extracts, especially the ones in which Sapho writes about her contemplating, with a fabulous mixture of envy and in-loveness, a beautiful woman friend of hers who is in love with a beautiful man – some of the best erotic triangles I have come across.

While reading this material a fantasy came up: to freely rewrite and translate some of these sonnets into contemporary Spanish, mix them with baroque material from all sources, especially of course from the large hispanic baroque tradition. Even have them in both languages, (or three: Shakespeare, English and Spanish...) This links with what I wrote for the official presentation:

LOS TEXTOS: en cada escena se interpretará un texto, parte de una selección sobre el tema de La Muerte. Los textos no serán narrativos: serán escogidos por los actores, junto con el director, como sueños filosoficos, como poemas políticos, como ilusiones trágicas – e incluirán clásicos de la literatura hispano-americana.

I'll try scan Dollimore's Introduction, which is in fact a summary of the book, and make it available here.