LIBRO RESEÑADO
Manuel Sosa-Ramírez (2001),
El nuevo teatro español y latinoamericano.
Un estudio transatlántico: 1960-1980

AUTOR DE LA RESEÑA
Francisco Javier Sánchez
Brandeis University

FECHA
7 marzo 2006
Manuel Sosa-Ramírez’s work, *El nuevo teatro español y latinoamericano. Un estudio transatlántico: 1960-1980*, provides a comprehensive view of the artistic theatrical movement called Nuevo Teatro from its origins to its decay in both Spain and Latin America. One of the Nuevo Teatro’s central goals lies in defying texts which present an authoritarian and totalizing exposition of History, Culture and State while introducing new, avant-garde methods or strategies of representation. The dramatists José Sanchis Sinisterra and Enrique Buenaventura –representing Spain and Latin America, respectively– articulate a type of theater that questions the prevalent and dominant ideology of official history and of Spanish colonization by offering theatrical productions where ambiguity, linguistic heteroglossia and plurality of significations reign. Both “teatristas” make a conscious effort to force the readers’/spectators’ active participation –a dialogic relationship between the production and its recipients– whether by use of Sanchis’ minimalist approach of “teatralidad menor” under the strong influence of Bertolt Brecht or Buenaventura’s concept of “creación colectiva.”

Grounding his study in a variety of theoretical notions, Sosa-Ramírez presents mainly Roland Barthes’ views in *From Work to Text* (1972) in order to distinguish between “the written text,” which is associated with the script, the screenplay or books and “the text,” which is defined as a much broader, abstract entity always in the process of redefinition. This distinction favors those who search for pliable material to investigate, to create multi-perspectives and to engage in a dialogue with the public.

As a result, Sanchis’ approach to theater, different from that of the social realist writers, veers from a representation of reality where the duality between “los buenos y los malos” exists. Rather, he experiments with intertextuality, minimalism, defamiliarization and distancing techniques to stage a complex pluridimensional reality. Moreover, the voice of the marginalized person –drug addicts, homosexuals, prostitutes, gang members– resonates with the intention of challenging the paradigms of the culturally dominant discourse.
Similarly, Buenaventura’s productions intimately connect with Latin American social and political issues regarding the process of decolonization and the dictatorships that followed. His “creación colectiva” method incorporates the spectator as one more agent in the creation of “the text.” Forgotten myths and oral tradition find a space in his theater also and, of course, the voice of “the other” is included as well. The goal is to expose the mechanisms of discourse formation to shape a counter-discourse or an unofficial history. Nevertheless, Buenaventura—as Sosa-Ramírez shows—redefines his notions on theater and, progressively, moves towards a theater which favors ambiguity and multiple significations for the verbal script and the images presented on stage.

Finally, Sosa-Ramírez explains the important role of theater festivals during their nascent condition—generating the opportunity for international and transatlantic communication between Spain and Latin America. Sosa-Ramírez not only highlights the festival’s combatant phase standing their ground irregularly against a system of censorship (Spain, Argentina, Chile) but also he points to the deterioration and demise of such enterprises due to social, political and, especially, economic factors in recent years on both sides of the Atlantic.

Overall, Sosa-Ramírez’s transatlantic and comparative study offers a valuable definition of the Spanish and Latin American Nuevo Teatro regarding its ideological perspective and its experimental nature. The analysis of José Sanchis Sinisterra and Enrique Buenaventura’s productions and theoretical postulates exemplifies a concept of theater which revises the official history and its hegemonical practices while activating “la teatralidad del teatro” —the usage of more avant-garde techniques— in order to invite spectators to reflect about their past and to reevaluate their memories and the established authoritarian historical discourse. Indeed, in the Nuevo Teatro, as Sosa-Ramírez demonstrates, experimentation in theater and the exposition of social and political concerns go hand in hand on both sides of the ocean. Moreover, for those interested in theater, this investigation—with a theoretical background,
analyses of plays (sometimes brief and general), an extensive discussion on festivals and their relationship with the state in power at the time, their fluctuating reception and their productions—provides a solid base for future studies about this subject at the same time that it opens a door to investigate the more contemporary (dis)continuity of the bond between the theater in both Spain and Latin America.