

Brossa on Stage. History of the Reception of *Regular* or *Stable* Theatre (1960-1971)

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Abstract

From the 1960s, some pieces included in Joan Brossa's *Poesia Escènica* began to be staged in theatres, particularly in Barcelona, making him less dependent on the artistic sphere of previous readings and performances. The new decade brought a series of global and radical changes in the field of culture and art, led by young or emerging intellectuals and creators, who argued the need for a culture politically and ideologically committed to the urge to transform contemporary society. In Catalonia, under the yoke of the Franco dictatorship, the need for a cultural and artistic change also reached theatre, intellectuals and creators, and the renewal of theatre criticism. However, this theatre criticism did not quite understand or assimilate Brossa's theatre, whose name was respected although his pieces were not generally well received in a system of often one-off theatre performances. The regular, more literary theatre of *Poesia Escènica* was not universally understood by critics, nor was Brossa's original recreation of the Catalan dramatic tradition, represented by Ignasi Iglésias. When in 1968 he premiered *Concert irregular* and *Quart minvant o els nassos històrics*, both his *irregular* and *regular* theatre failed to win the approval of either critics or audience.

Keywords: Joan Brossa, *Poesia Escènica*, *regular* or *stable* theatre, reception, theatre criticism, theatre directing, non-professional theatre groups

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Introduction

In the 1960s, some pieces of Joan Brossa's *regular* or *stable* theatre¹ began to achieve greater stage presence,² so that readings or performances in private homes, studios and some theatres expanded (Planas, 1992; 2002: 385-386).³ Between 1960 and 1971, four non-professional groups put on nine plays mainly in Barcelona venues — the Agrupació Dramàtica de Barcelona (ADB), the Escola d'Art Dramàtic Adrià Gual (EADAG), the Teatre Experimental Català (TEC), and Jocs a la sorra. Teatre d'Investigació — and four other pieces more linked to stage directing (Josep Centelles, Antoni Bachs, Lluís Solà, Carlos Lucena) were performed.⁴ This article aims to analyse the reaction of the newspapers and specialised press of the time to all of these Brossian productions.

Indeed, performing Brossa's *Poesia Escènica*, of an alternative nature and restricted access (via non-professional groups) in relation to the private theatre of the time, arose gradual interest among a renewed theatre criticism in Barcelona, which disagreed with the criteria of aesthetic, ideological and moral assessment of the prevailing critics. However, the artistic and ideological credo of a revived theatre criticism did not understand or assimilate

1. The division of *Poesia Escènica* into two groups, "one, of irregular or research theatre — quick-fire scenes, striptease, circus, etc. — and the other of *regular* or *stable* theatre — dramatic, comic, epic, burlesque, etc.—", is due to the Italian critic Valerio Riva "who, when introducing it into the repertoire, suggested a name: *irregular* theatre, or research, as opposed to the *regular* theatre applied to known theatrical genres" (Brossa, 1983a: 7).

2. Brossa also disseminates his poetic work in the private sphere, in the "Borbolles poètiques", organised by the doctor, writer and politician Joan Colomines i Puig in his home. In the XXIV session (13 May 1961), he read the poems "Nocturnal", from *Catalunya i selva* (1953-1954); and "Oda a la poesia" and "Catalunya" from *El pedestal són les sabates* (1955). Or his poetic or "aesthetic theory" (Camps and Veny Mesquida, 2016).

3. On 20 November 1959, a group of students from the University of Barcelona held the reading of the second act of *Els beneficis de la nació* (Cirici Pellicer, 2015: 400). The censor did not authorise the performance, which much later was published as an addendum (Brossa, 1983b: 327-356).

4. *La jugada* (EADAG, 1960, 1961), *El bell lloc* (EADAG, 1961), *Or i sal* (ADB, 1961), *Gran Guinyol* (EADAG, 1962), *Aquí al bosc* (Josep Centelles, TEC, 1962; Lluís Solà, Vic, 1965), *El rellotger i Collar de cranis* (Lucena, Teatre Romea, 1967); *Quart minvant o els nassos històrics* (Jocs a la sorra, Casino L'Aliança del Poble Nou, 1969), and *El temps escènic* (Jocs a la sorra, Sitges, 1971).

Brossa's theatre approach, which coincided and contrasted with other post-war dramaturgical trends filled with reflection, political condemnation and the will to transform contemporary society, such as American and Spanish realist theatre, the angry young men, or the Brechtian legacy. All these trends were represented in Spain, especially when the Franco regime provided an opening for cultural liberalisation under the mandate of Manuel Fraga Iribarne, Minister of Information and Tourism [MIT] (1962-1969), and the permanent control of censorship

***La jugada and El bell lloc* (Cabrils, 1960; Barcelona, 1961)**

Brossa's first performances in the 1960s were not well received by critics. Jordi Carbonell acknowledges that, "unfortunately, it has not been possible to perform Brossa in public until last year [1961]," when the playwright was forty-three years old and eighteen years had passed since *El cop del desert*, his first piece, and he comments:

Brossa has tried to get to the core of human issues following a minority path, which has distanced him from his mission towards and in relation to Catalan society in its wider dimension. He has, certainly, demolished the ostentatiousness of neo-romanticism and sentimental falsehood, and has striven for a reality stripped of anecdote. For this reason, his theatre is refreshing and gives this feeling of exposing things unreservedly. [...]

Although Joan Brossa's experience as a playwright is interesting, he is on a path from which it is difficult to find the way out; difficult but of great significance for our society. Brossa's theatre I am familiar with — *La jugada, El bell lloc, Or i sal* — is, for me, a theatre of transition towards a new attitude further removed from illusionism and closer to epic theatre. And I say this not imaginatively but because Brossa's latest poetic production that I know through private readings makes me think it. And because I think this is his path (Carbonell, 1962: 44-45).

The first piece performed was *La jugada* (1953), premiered by the EADAG in Cabrils (19-XI-1960, Teatre de la Concòrdia), directed by Moisès Villèlia.⁵ Alexandre Cirici Pellicer, who introduced it, recalls it in his diary: "I introduce Brossa. *La jugada* is a trap for everyone and everything. An abstract game. Nice Villèlia gestures (pulling on the ear, etc.). At the end Jehovah appears and is outraged to see the men. If all that man has done best is man, he cannot be satisfied with man" (Cirici Pellicer, 2015: 429).

Later, the EADAG staged it along with *El bell lloc* (1958)⁶ (2/4-VI-1961, Cúpula del Coliseum). The first to talk about it in a periodical publication was the writer Giovanni Cantieri in *Primer Acto* (Cantieri, 1960). As Marrugat recalls, he expresses his distance from the "Brossian artistic credo" of a

5. Directed by Villèlia: (Capmany, 1974: 63); (Cirici Pellicer, 1960: 1-3; 1962: 49-51). According to Brossa, "I found that Villèlia's work as director of *La jugada*, which premiered in 1953, was excellent. In 1958 he directed another of my plays, *El bell lloc*, which was boycotted by Salvat. Foix confessed to me: 'This is a very nice piece; I would have liked to have done it myself'" (Permanyer, 1999: 160-161).

6. It had been premiered in Sallent on 23-IV-1961, at the Biblioteca Popular (Planas, 2002: 343).

“cerebral and abstract” character, which does not provide an “atmosphere of understanding and communication between audience and actors” (Marrugat, 2013: 13). All in all, he lays the ground for quite a comprehensive reading of *La jugada*.⁷ In his turn, the critic Martí Farreras speaks of an “exceptional evening and its organisers deserve our recognition”, but *El bell lloc* has seemed to him to be “of little consequence, to be honest”, and on *La jugada* he adds:

An unending and vulgar melodramatic situation, which demanded or called for nothing, and which leads to the appearance of a *tremendista* demiurge who says some things that are daring, others puerile, and others, quite a few, that cannot have been intended to be understood, since they were formulated using esoteric and picturesque language. Precision or a real need for a dramatic exposition? We were unable to find it anywhere. [...] Brossa manipulates — this much is true — a language of undeniable poetic grace, but dramatically atonic and ineffective, despite the shouts and swear words — another recipe — that give it an appearance of rotundity. And nothing else. Perhaps one is irremissibly corrupted by so much vulgar theatre that I could not see in *La jugada* any of the graces or merits that the faithful panegyrist of the playwright claim. The staging — you have to call it something — is entirely puerile, although perhaps, on second thoughts, that puerility was an apt vehicle for so much gratuitous phrasing and so much dramatic levity (Martí Farreras, 1960).

The critic’s opinion provoked an immediate response from Brossa who, always attentive to what was said and done regarding his work, wrote an open unpublished letter to the editor of the journal. He asks Martí Farreras “to remain fair in the face of any trend otherwise you will fall into a negative way of exercising judgement,” and he notes: “*La jugada* is written on one plane, in your opinion, motionless on another, and in the end you shift and disregard it. Your concept of the dramatic makes me wary: it sounds like that illusory *living the turn of events*. You forget above all theatrical truth in the sense of art. Freedom against necessity.”

While making it clear that “my artistic intentions are different, and the fact that if I didn’t get the right perspective is your fault, not mine,” Brossa concludes: “My theatre is directed at Man, and not at an audience resigned to mediocrity, and even less at a group of stalwarts.” Martí Farreras’ opinion contrasts with Cirici Pellicer’s, who places Brossa “at the end of the cultural perspective that goes through Modernisme, Noucentisme, surrealism and

7. The Arxiu Joan Brossa at MACBA also holds a letter by José Agustín Goytisolo (7-II-1961) with a cutting of a review published in *Índice*, in January that year, with the initials of his name (J. A. G.). He introduces Brossa as the “grey brain of the avant-garde group *Dau al Set*” and points out, among other issues: “In the stagnated environment of Catalan theatre, the premiere of the piece [...] makes enthusiasts think that a dignified, intelligent Catalan theatre stripped of the usual clichés and vulgarity is still possible.” On the text, he notes: “caricatured and schematic tableau, the development of the deception and exploitation to which man is subjected by his peers in the society of our time, a development that culminates with the final allegorical appearance of the ‘thundering god’ in a surprising and incisive way, full of suggestions with which the cycle of this tragic game is closed. Brossa appears to us as a skilled connoisseur of the satirical resources that they have managed to use sparingly in this play, whose performance was a real success” In Brossa (2015: 235). At the Arxiu Joan Brossa of MACBA it is possible to consult the correspondence between Joan Brossa and Madelon Belle regarding Moisès Villèlia’s directing (Brossa_Corres_per_JB_Brossa_0044_020;0044_89). On the relations between Brossa and Madelon Belle (Massot, 2021: 1-3).

rationalism” (Cirici Pellicer, 1961), and presents *La jugada* “as a combination of avant-garde research and collective social value” (Marrugat, 2013: 14).

The most radical review of *La jugada* is by Jordi Germà, penname of Francesc Nel·lo, published in *Nous Horitzons*, the clandestine journal of the PSUC, as he provides a political reading of the text:

It is a circumstantial piece. Written taking into account the atmosphere and the date, and above all the audience at whom it is addressed. It is a combative play.

Brossa, with a lack of curious laziness, approaches creation by feigning the point of view, the capitalist angle: divinity is contemplated based on the members of bourgeois society. Seeing them act, through a kind of logical figure he draws the conclusion that creation is absurd, and therefore its creator is a madman. Brossa does not deny the materialist in this play. He only shows us the caricature of the capitalist God.

And he concludes: “An insubstantial play, but, due to excessive localism, the very characterisation of the Creator in the staging was a witness that made it a kind of atheistic response to catholic association theatre” (Germà, 1961: 56).

***Or i sal*. From the Palau de la Música Catalana to the IV Cicle de Teatre Llatí**

The production of *Or i sal* was surely the touchstone for the reception of Brossa’s theatre in this period, because it was performed by the ADB, an association that had already become a reference recognised by theatre critics. Brossa left the more private shelter in which he had been known until then. He abandoned the protection of the artistic world and faced the more specifically theatrical one in a system, however, still limited by the almost single performance as a norm. *Or i sal* was, moreover, performed on two occasions: first, by the ADB, in collaboration with the Club 49, at the Palau de la Música (18-V-1961); and later, at the Teatre Romea (3-X-1961), in the framework of the IV Cicle de Teatre Llatí, replacing the production of *Beckett o l’honor de Déu*, by Jean Anouilh that the ADB had premiered on 14 March that year, also at the Palau. Although outside the contest, *Or i sal* was performed in front of the “official” critics, who did not attend the Palau performance. As I have noted elsewhere, *Or i sal*, a *regular* piece of theatre

[...] precedes in time the emergence of Ionesco or Beckett, beyond certain technical, formal coincidences or literary procedures. *Cruma* or *Homes i No*, by Pedroló, cannot be understood without the discovery of Beckett, like the beginnings of Harold Pinter. This is not the case for Brossa, as he stated more than once throughout his career. His literary origins are different, linked to the world of art, to Dau al Set, surrealism and the artistic avant-garde (Gallén, 2021: 222).

From *Gran Guinyol* to *Aquí al bosc*

Vázquez Montalbán Interviews Brossa

With the performances of *Or i sal* at the Palau de la Música Catalana and the Teatre Romea the real scope of the critical reception and social perception of Brossa's theatre became visible for the first time and in no uncertain terms. From now on, his presence in the press, always within certain limitations, was more or less regular than it had been until then. I may be wrong, but Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's interview must be the first (or one of the first) of this new period. Vázquez Montalbán (Vázquez Montalbán, 1962) starts with a physical description: "Joan Brossa seems like an intellectual in a play written by Sartre. He wears a sweater and a pair of trousers and no tie. He is a mature man who appeared in the Catalan literary field through his books of poetry and who moved this literary field with his *Poemes civils*."

Brossa, who had already written forty pieces, admits that he had not worried about premiering until then, but "now I plan to premiere what I can" and he explains the reasons: "Because I didn't have a theatrical technique of my own. I didn't yet have a style. I wasn't sure of myself. Moreover, the theatrical environment disgusted me. Have you read some of the reviews that are usually published? For some critics theatre ended with Martínez Sierra."

He is very critical of the Catalan theatre performed, full of "rambunctious plays without any human interest, and those who sought to do so used elements that were not too fair." For him, Catalan theatre has no audience, and if it does "it is responsible for their mediocrity. Catalan theatre has the look of a 'rough-and-ready theatre' without the slightest projection." When asked for his opinion on Sagarra, who died in September 1961, Brossa makes it clear who his references are in the Catalan dramatic tradition: "In the theatrical aspect, a legend [Sagarra]. In my opinion, his work has been negative. It has not contributed anything new. In his 'theatre of ideas' like *La ferida lluminosa*, he gives the impression of not having played fair. I believe much more in Guimerá and Ignasi Iglésias. These were playwrights rooted in their time and willing to take responsibility for it."

Given that Catalan theatre "doesn't have much of an audience," Brossa believes that it can be revitalised with "some translations", and that "it is urgent to find topics for the man of today and written in Catalan. We have to build a 'new audience' for Catalan theatre that demands this." There is, however, a serious issue in Catalan theatre, and in "Spanish" theatre: "The problem of theatre and the society that attends it". Brossa, who gave the audio and performance rights of *El cap violent* (1959) to the radio and television of the Federal Republic of Germany and published in Cologne (1962), points out that the fundamental problem of his theatre is "man's destiny. I want to apply a current criterion to it."

Gran Guinyol

Gran Guinyol (1957) should have been performed at the Teatre Talia (2-IV-1962) as a chamber piece by Núria Espert's company, which was in residence there, in collaboration with the EADAG (*Anonymosa*, 1962: 35). In the end,

the company withdrew (Salvat, 2015: 31-32), and the EADAG premiered the piece at the Cúpula del Coliseum (29/30/31-V-1962) without the director Ricard Salvat, who was outside Catalonia (Salvat, 2015: 50). The show was in two parts: the first, *Poesía y realidad*, an epic production based on a selection from *Veinte años de poesía española* by Josep M. Castellet⁸ and, the second, *Gran Guinyol*,⁹ with stage design by Albert Ràfols Casamada and costumes by Maria Girona. According to the anonymous review in *La Vanguardia Española*, *Gran Guinyol* is: “A piece with a very modern technique and spirit, in which the playwright follows the most daring currents of contemporary theatre. The show satisfied the crowd that filled the Cúpula del Coliseum” (Anonymouse, 1962).

The director of *La carreta* María del Carmen Carrión¹⁰ applied a criterion to Brossa’s theatre that was beginning to spread among a sector of theatre critics. *Gran Guinyol* is a “theatre experiment, illusionist theatre participating in dadaism and surrealism, with fifteen years behind it” (Carrión, 1962: 19). Then the newer and/or younger critics expressed their difficulties with understanding and interpreting Brossa’s theatre work, framed within *regular* or *stable* theatre: “His plays, poems arranged to be put on stage arbitrarily, are based on and developed through an intimate absurdity, with the profusion of ‘snobbery’ on a large scale, which as it does not possess even an ounce of sincere concern collapse into absolute nothingness.”

From an artistic point of view, the anonymous critic of *Cataluña Exprés* takes a more positive approach to *Gran Guinyol*, not without drawing attention to the need for the Brossian piece to connect with the audience:

Brossa builds and destroys at the same time. His plays are like timeless ballads and the craft of the stage director becomes (and I say this from happy experience) a fascinating adventure. If Brossa’s style is a desire for subversion, through imagination everything is possible for the director although, as I see it, he cannot renounce his functional mission of ensuring that the play reaches the audience. One way to achieve this is by insisting on the “humanity” of characters and situations: otherwise, everything is a symbol or a puppet. (This must be a prejudice of those who believe that in order to jump far you have to run from behind.)

As for Salvat’s stage directing, he brands it as “very contained, according to his personal style, on the two dimensions of text and the visual aspect” (Anónimb, 1962). However, for Carbonell (Carbonell, 1962: 44), *Gran Guinyol* is not Joan Brossa’s “most successful” play: “The transfer to the stage of the

8. In *Poesía y realidad*, the actors Claudi García, Carme Fortuny, Josep Ruiz, José M. Segarra, Antoni Canal and Maria Tubau read poems by León Felipe, José Hierro, Miguel Hernández, José Agustín Goytisolo, Gabriel Celaya and Blas de Otero, among other poets.

9. *Gran Guinyol* was performed by Antoni Canal, Rosa M. Espinet, Josep Montanyès [Montáñez, according to the press], Fabià Puigserver, Adrià Gual, Rosa Muniesa and Marià Jaime. In 1958 the text had been read in the house of doctor Joan Obiols (Gomis, 1958). Letter from Joan Brossa to Madelon Belle (Brossa_Corres_Per_JB_Brossa_00044127).

10. Previously, in a conversation with J. M., the journalist regards Brossa as a “formal informalist” and as being “considered more abroad than in our country, the Spanish Ionesco” and concludes: “His theatre has been defined in many ways. One of them, as ‘avant-garde poetic theatre’. He already knows and is content: his theatre is for tomorrow” (J. M., 1962).

techniques of surrealist poetry — we must not forget that Brossa was influenced by Foix — has two sides: on the one hand, it requires a considerable effort to achieve a clear theatrical perceptivity; on the other, it places this theatre, today, in our country, in a markedly minority terrain.”

Here is the problem: Brossa’s theatrical world was not widely seen in Barcelona until 1961, eighteen years after he wrote his first piece. Brossa’s situation, however, was the same that the “best Catalan playwrights and our stage have experienced during the last quarter of a century,” that of a deep divorce that has “modified their technical and literary evolution.” This also explains “in one sense, the irregularity in the theatrical qualities of Brossa’s plays, evident in *Gran Guinyol*, and, in another, his continuity on a strictly intellectual path.” Brossa’s idea of minority dissemination has distanced him “from his mission in the face of and in function of Catalan society in its wider dimension.” It was a theatre that “connects with the meaning of the art of *Dau al Set*” of which he was a member. This is how the accolades of the artistic world can be understood; “excessive praise [that] has deprived our playwright of an advantage to which he was entitled: criticism.” However, Carbonell finds a way out, which can allow Brossa’s theatre to become known within Catalan society:

The plays that I know — *La jugada*, *El bell lloc*, *Or i sal* — are for me examples of a theatre of transition towards a new attitude, further removed from illusionism and closer to epic theatre. And I do not say this negatively but because the last poetic production I know, through private readings, makes me think so. And because this is the way forward (Carbonell, 1962: 45).

Aquí al bosc: Three Productions

Brossa was aware of the productions of his plays, which did not always coincide with his own idea. There were three productions of *Aquí al bosc* (1956), two in 1962 (Centelles; Bachs) and one in 1965, as an interlude in the production of *Poemes civils*, directed by Lluís Solà, at the Teatre Canigó in Vic. The first performance, organised by the Cercle Artístic de Sant Lluc, took place in the studio of the painter Joan Abelló Prat in Mollet del Vallès, directed by Josep Centelles.¹¹ For *Revista Gran Via*, the piece is “characteristic of the theatrical rhythm recreated by Joan Brossa” that:

[...] presents the problem of loneliness without a solution of continuity, and love above the everyday life of the two main characters, a love that oozes effort, fatigue and hard work before reaching an absolute mythical height and already out of time, since it has become a time for living, a time as realisation of being in life (Anonymouse, 1962).

11. Doctor Joan Obiols introduced the play, and when the performance ended there was a discussion with the critics Alexandre Cirici Pellicer, Joan Cortès Vidal and Rafael Santos Torroella. The cast included Aurora Gassó, Núria Feliu, Encarnació Sugranyes and Ernest Martínez. On Abelló and his museum: Arnal, 1958.

On the second production, premiered by the TEC at the Teatre Guimerà in Barcelona (10-XII-1962) under the direction of Antoni Bachs,¹² Alfred Badia says:

The playwright seems to want to suggest against logic the existential lack of communication between the “old” and “young” generations, but the caricaturist and intentional realism of the “old” and the sharp impressionism of the “young” belie [sic] the appropriateness of the resource. The result is a play in which, alongside a genuine power of farce and mystery, one notices a professional insecurity that he should not conceal behind any aspiration to achieve a personal style (Badia, 1963: 44).

In terms of the three productions, in his conversation with Jordi Coca, Brossa says that he has not attended the first, in Centelles, because it coincided with his trip to France and Holland; nor the second directed by Bachs, but he expresses his recognition of Solà's production¹³ in Vic:

The others I think used a more fanciful language for the play, which I didn't even want to see. [...] Then it was put on in Vic, one of the best ever done of my play. This young man, Solà, conceived a production of *Poemes civils* when nobody here was talking about epic theatre and, in my opinion, it was unbeatable. He knew how to deal with it very well, he gave it the exact tone required by the poems of “difficult ease”. The actors had very clear diction without the annoying singsong of Catalan theatre professionals. Very good, perfect! The production of the poems consisted of two parts and in between, to separate them, *Aquí al bosc* was performed. Then he wanted to take it to Barcelona, but he ran into the narrowness of the Club 49; those damn sponsors said they only had money for one performance. I opposed it because, given the effort the actors had made, at the very least one performance was necessary in all the Catalan capitals. This was not possible because of the meanness of the redeeming benefactors of the culture of rationing (Coca, 1971: 124).

In fact, the link between the verses of *Poemes civils* and *Aquí al bosc* points to an important aspect of the whole of Brossa's literary production, which, in relation to *Poesia Escènica*, reached its maximum artistic expression between 1962 and 1964: the poeticization and transformation of the everyday into a creative, dynamic, personal and collective event. To put it in John London's terms: “Brossa, following the aesthetics of Meierhold (who he greatly admired) redramatizes theatre, by using, among others devices, aspects of popular culture. The aim is not to lose himself in the fiction of metatheatre, since popular culture is a direct route to self-liberation and a precise link with a very specific and lived reality, that of the people” (London, 2010: 87).

12. It was performed along with *Desè aniversari*, by Josep Rabasseda, with Adelaida Espinalt, Àngel Company, Núria Casulleras and Encarnació Sugranyes.

13. The Arxiu Joan Brossa at MACBA [corresp 0046-050] holds the draft of a letter from Brossa to Carlos Lucena, in which he acknowledges that of all the productions up to 1965, “the performance in Vic, in July, was the greatest of all. That Solà is very good. It will be repeated in Barcelona in October or September and I would like you to see it.” This did not happen.

As for literary poetry – “and often very theatrical,” as London points out – *Poemes civils* (1961) became the second poetic collection published since *Em va fer Joan Brossa* (1951), establishing the link and following an approach to realism in poetry, which does not quite fit in with the so-called “historical realism” or “social realism” of Spanish poetry (Balaguer, 2000: 47-60). Not fitting in means, in terms of Brossa’s poetry, staying on the margins of the established Catalan literary system. The lack of appreciation of his poetic work (two published collections) was confirmed by his absence in the anthology *Poesia catalana del segle XX* (1963) by Josep M. Castellet and Joaquim Molas.¹⁴

In late 1962, Frederic Roda interviews him in *Serra d’Or* (Roda, 1962). In his view, the premieres of *Primera història d’Esther*, by Espriu, *Homes i No*, by Pedrolo, and *Or i sal*, by Brossa, all three by the ADB, and Brossa’s, directed by Roda, were “the most important moments of our theatre since 1936.” From the conversation, it is worth noting, on the one hand, the “optimistic” consideration of his theatre premieres: “I am convinced that, in the future, having the promotional resources that are indispensable to all cultures will mean a revival of Catalan theatre through its necessary continuity. My work points towards this goal. It is, of course, necessary to overcome some obstacles and resolve some misunderstandings.”

On the other hand, when asked if his theatre “is against anything”, he replies: “Bringing light to a place presupposes some necessary shadows. The conscious man must reduce his small problems to one big one: his destiny. And this is where I direct my light.”

1964

Calç i rajoles

Between 1962 and 1963 Brossa wrote *Cavall al fons* (1962), *El saltamartí* (1962), *El sarau* (1963) and *Calç i rajoles* (1963) (Bordons, 1999: 5-42), pieces that express the evolution of *Poesia Escènica*,¹⁵ focused on the reality of his time, with a significant role of the theme and the break with the plots of conventional dramatic theatre:

It is a process. I found myself with the possibility of getting closer to the plot, to shaping a story, adding to it the experiences I had had before, yes, because all that gave me resources that, properly applied, could bring a new way of making theatre within tradition. As a playwright, I had a palette with a wide variety of colours. In any case, “imitating an object”, considering a subject

14. The publication a year earlier of the volume of *Poesies* by Joan Salvat-Papasseit, highly appreciated by Brossa, with illustrations by Josep Guinovart, is framed in this context. An anonymous note published in *Serra d’Or*, mentions it: “Today, finally, the publishing house ARIEL, having overcome those difficulties [of not being able to published it unabridged], can offer readers the first complete edition of the poems of ‘the only great authentically proletarian poet’ of Catalonia, who is at the same time one of ‘the greatest erotic poets of modern Europe’; anarchist, Christian, nationalist, contradictory and unique, different from all those of his time and strangely close to ours, which fully vindicates him, nearly forty years after his death” (Anonymous, 1962: 48).

15. A series of previous pieces show Brossa’s position on certain aspects of post-war Catalonia: *La sal i el drac* (1956); *Tríptic* (1957), *La mina desapareguda* (1958), *Els beneficis de la nació* (1959), or *El dia del profeta* (1961) (Marrugat, 2009: 152-189).

with the traditional *trompe-l'oeil* did not fit into the course of my evolution. I immediately tried to force it and I did so in such a way that each act had independence and represented within the whole a different point of a trajectory. It was equivalent to placing the spectator at different angles in front of the same spectator (Coca, 1971: 75-76).

On *El saltamartí*, Marrugat notes that *Em va fer Joan Brossa* is the “true origin” (Marrugat, 2009: 142) both of the drama in six scenes (1962) (Marrugat, 2009: 231-243) and of the third book of poetry published (1969). At the same time, two texts reaffirm the most committed and social aspect of his production, that of the *regular* or stable theatre: *Cavall al fons* and, especially, *Calç i rajoles* (1963), vindicating the role of Ignasi Iglésias in the Catalan drama tradition: “There is, therefore, a relationship with Iglésias: the social problem; but no, it was not written with any of his plays in mind, as I did with *Calç i rajoles*” (Coca, 1971: 127).

Because *Calç i rajoles* is one of the great literary texts of *Poesia Escènica*, rooted in the tradition that subverts and artistically recreates *Les garses* (1906), by Iglésias, to whom he pays homage, from a contemporary perspective:

Moreover, in *Calç i rajoles* Brossa takes the popular genre of the one-act comedy and updates it to use it for his own purposes, among which is that of making it clear that what humans need to live is to keep their feet on the ground, a lesson also inherited from popular common sense. And so all types of religion and metaphysics are criticised in this play, as is any attempt to explain the material world based on arguments that are foreign to it, and any attempt to dominate the being by elements that are external to it, like money. It goes without saying that the piece thus connects with a critique of Catholicism and capitalism very much in line with the ideology of the left parties of the time of Iglésias and, even more so, of the groups close to the playwright, such as Foc Nou or Teatre Independent (Marrugat, 2009: 75).

The TEC, responsible for the second production of *Aquí al bosc*, presented *Calç i rajoles* at the Palau de la Música Catalana (5-II-1964).¹⁶ Two months before its premiere, Francesc Balagué expressed the TEC’s desire to give the playwrights “of today the opportunity to be performed in the near future in so-called commercial theatre” and mentioned the names of Espriu, Brossa, Pedrolo, Rabasseda, and Porcel. Josep Montanyès, the interviewer, asks him:

—Does the programming of these playwrights suggest following an approach that excludes other types of theatre?

—No, because in accordance with the word “experimental”, we want our task, more than anything else, to be research into current theatre, which although at the moment it seems to take place in the theatre of the so-called “absurd”, there

16. The piece was performed by Natàlia Solernou, Francesc Balagué, Mercè Guiamet, Jordi Campillo, Nadala Batiste, Àlex Aixelà, Josep M. Minoves, Ricard Font, Núria Feliu, Antoni Millà, Vicenç and Lluís Olivares. On the TEC: Gallén, 1990. <<http://www.revistapausa.cat/teatre-experimental-catala-historia-dun-projecte-singular/>>.

is another type, let's call it "social" — like, for example, *Roots* [Wesker] — and which interests us as much or more than the first. In short, "the absurd" as a theatre of disruption and "the social" as the main goal (Montanyès, 1963: 68).

Balagué does not properly frame Brossa's piece in either of the two approaches, but Gonzalo Pérez de Olaguer, a representative of the young critics of the sixties, makes it clear in *Revista* and *Primer Acto* where he places playwright and play. In the Barcelona publication, he calls Brossa a "playwright clearly among the 'avant-garde' group" in these terms:

In the theatre there was little atmosphere, which, along with the enormity of the room, gave a soulless performance, in accordance, in general, with the play and with the acting. The three acts denote a lack of knowledge of the most elementary rules of the art of theatre. Within the dispersion of the play, it is fair to point out the markedly poetic nature of the dialogue, although it is remote and without the slightest unity. It is in the third act when that quality is seen (Pérez de Olaguer, 1964a).

In *Primer Acto*, he reiterates that Brossa is a "young Catalan playwright clearly framed in the group of 'avant-garde', a word that is already somewhat outdated, but which serves as the first and elementary classification." As an "avant-garde" piece, *Calç i rajoles* is not however an "accomplished" play, and adds:

It is unquestionable that there is a new Catalan theatre with renewed techniques and themes. It is no less true that it has an audience and followers. As clear examples we can cite Espriu and Pedroló, theatrically far superior, in my opinion, to Joan Brossa.

A demonstration of what I say is *Calç i rajoles*, whose three acts show a departure from the knowledge of the theatrical phenomenon in its most elementary conceptions. [...] The language — remote, lacking unity — has a marked poetic nature. It is, without doubt, the best of the play, especially in its third act — each act is a whole or a contribution to incommunicability — which combines dramatic tension, poetry and defined intention.

As a whole, this play by Brossa is by no means a step forward in the aforementioned theatrical line followed by this group of renovating Catalan playwrights. That is how — let's be realistic — the audience sees it and does not in the end respond to a single performance of this playwright (Pérez de Olaguer, 1964b).

The magazine *Destino* also published a short review, with a photograph of the production. Starting from the text in Cirici Pellicer's programme, it highlights Brossa's approach to the one-act farce and the work of Iglésias in particular, with the desire to offer "a one-act farce in accordance with current technique and taste" with this result: "Under the direction of Vicente Olivares, the members of the TEC put all their effort into the endeavour, offering the audience a discreet work of acting. The comedy, due to its form as well as its intention, was prone to cause argument and controversy. It wasn't like that."

However, the critic of *Destino* differs from Pérez de Olaguer over the behaviour of the audience: “It can be said that *Calç i rajoles* has been another success to add to those already achieved by Brossa as a playwright” (Anonymous, 1964). Olivares explains that they contacted Brossa after the ADB’s “controversial production” of *Or i sal* to “reaffirm his role in Catalan avant-garde theatre” (Bennasar, 2016: 43-46). Brossa accepted the TEC’s proposal while telling them “that he wanted us to put on his play, *Calç i rajoles*.” Before the production, there was a preview in Banyoles (2-II-1964, Teatre del Círcol).¹⁷ However, Olivares does not assess either the production or its reception, he only transcribes Cirici Pellicer’s text for the programme, and finally adds: “The play is defined as a comedy, but a poetic comedy, complicated and full of symbolisms like all Brossa’s theatre of this period of great creativity (from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s” (Bennasar, 2016: 46).

When summarising and assessing the theatre performed in Barcelona in 1964, Maria Aurèlia Capmany notes:

Leaving aside the Teatre Romea’s Festival del Centenari and the Cicle de Teatre Llatí, which are supported by municipal subsidies, all the decent theatre performed in Barcelona has been the work of independent, non-professional groups. We must clarify that, in the response of the audience, the chamber performances [*Calç i rajoles*, TEC] must be understood as diminished by the fact that they occur on limited occasions (Capmany, 1965).

Certainly, 1964 was an important year in Joan Brossa’s career; he completed the production of *Calç i rajoles*¹⁸ with another three examples of *irregular* theatre,¹⁹ and wrote six more of *regular* theatre: *Quart minvant o els nassos històrics*, *Viatges Barcarola*, *Diumenge*, *La son del gall*, *Únicament* and *L’emplaçament del rellotge*, and published the first collection of *regular* theatre comprising five pieces already performed: *Gran Guinyol*, *Aquí al bosc*, *El bell lloc*, *La jugada* and *La xarxa*.

Publication of *Teatre*

In 1962 the publishing house R. M. submitted to censorship the publication of five plays: *La jugada*, *La sezra*, *Gran Guinyol*, *El bell lloc* and *Or i sal*. In the typewritten copy kept in the Arxiu Brossa at MACBA, the word “censored”

17. The play premiered in the *Semana de la Juventud* de Banyoles with a lecture by Alexandre Cirici Pellicer (Anonymous, 1964: 12).

18. When it was published in 1971 (Ed. 62, El Galliner, 11), a young Lluís Pasqual noted: “Joan Brossa first started from a certain theatre of the absurd (*Or i sal*, *Concert irregular*, *Nocturns encontres*) with a theatrical structure that had certain contrasts from which a situation resulted. In *Calç i rajoles* he creates a new theatrical language that has nothing to do with the technique of the absurd used previously, but rather the text mixes two worlds: the world of the symbol and the poetry of the suggestive situation with characters and a language with popular roots and tradition in our theatre (in this case the play is dedicated to Ignasi Iglésias and many fragments are a recreation of *Les garses*). All this serves the ideology of the playwright who plays with language, with a valuable technique of recreating popular words and expressions, bringing about situations that are not important in themselves but for what they can suggest to those on the stage” (Pasqual, 1972).

19. *Tres cançons de bressol*, with Anna Ricci and Carles Santos, at the Salle Molière in Lyon; *Concert en tres temps*, with A. Milhaud, in the house of R. Gomis in El Prat de Llobregat, and *Excursió col·lectiva*, with J. Mestres Quadreny. In 1964 the collection also published some theatre pieces, *Troupe*, “with antecedents in the book *NORMES DE MAS-CARADA*, where the ballet is subjected to a series of transformations the result of which points in this direction” (Brossa, 1983a: 7).

in pencil and capital letters appears on the cover with the erased MIT seal. Of the four texts, however, only in *La jugada* does a red cross appear on the thirty-three sheets. In *El bell loc*, the sentence highlighted in bold is deleted:

VENEDORA: Bé que jo sàpiga. Cada país té la seva i aquestes altres banderes tenen una significació històrica. Tothom sap, per exemple, que la nostra bandera és feta amb bandes vermelles sobre grogues. La bandera de França és feta amb els colors de la ciutat de París, als quals van ajuntar el blanc, que era el color dels Reis. La bandera anglesa simbolitza la unió d'Anglaterra, Escòcia i Irlanda, els tres reialmes que... etc.

This publication was stopped in its tracks. Two years later, a new one was submitted again, but not with the same plays or in the same order: *Gran Guinyol*, *Aquí al bosc*, *El bell lloc*, *La jugada* and *La xarxa*. As in the 1962 initiative, all the pieces have been performed; *Or i sal* is not included and is published separately²⁰ and replaced by *Aquí al bosc*. An edition, perhaps under the mandate of Fraga Iribarne, that includes information about premieres with no suppression, as also in the case of *El bell lloc*.²¹ Significantly, some members of the Lletre d'Or jury included the edition among the “more or less passable” books, as Josep M. Castellet and Maria Aurèlia Capmany explained to Joan Fuster on 24 February 1965 (Fuster, 2022: 190-191). Finally, the Lletre d'Or award 1965 was given to *La cultura catalana, del Renaixement a la Decadència*, by Dr. Jordi Rubió i Balaguer.

**Between *El rellotger* and *Collar de cranis* (1967),
Quart minvant o els nassos històrics (1969) and *El temps escènic* (1971)**

El rellotger and *Collar de cranis* (1967) in the X Cicle de Teatre Llatí

Six years after participating in the X Cicle de Teatre Llatí with *Or i sal*, Brossa returned with *El rellotger* (1957) and *Collar de cranis* (1962), which, directed by Carlos Lucena, could be seen at the Teatre Romea (2-X-1967) in a

20. It was published by *Quaderns de Teatre* of the ADB (issue 13, Joaquim Horta editor, 1963) with a cover by Tàpies and a prologue by Arnau Puig, “Els fonaments i l'obra actual de Joan Brossa”. Among other issues, Puig points out that “Brossa has his own genesis and is different from that of Ionesco and the circumstances and the society in which they have developed differ in many fundamental aspects.” An essential aspect is the language, “rather simple and without fancy words”, of an “obscurity” that “comes from the link between the sentences. It comes from the apparent incoherence of the dialogue.” A “dialogue of the deaf” in which each character “develops his thought and the intertwining determines its structure. The structure, because the real meaning must be sought, I say, once again, outside the play.” The other difference with Ionesco's theatre is that it reflects “the absurdity of a decadent bourgeois society in which individualism has reached paroxysm.” Ionesco's success is due to the “masochism that characterises an entire decadent society.” On the other hand, Brossa's theatre “has developed within a society that has not yet reached its limits of exhaustion. Instead, it is already aware of new possibilities for coexistence. The issues that concern him therefore go beyond the limits within which it is tolerable to reconsider them. Automatically, this gives a literary style, if, despite everything, you persist in exploring them. Then the work of art becomes mystifying and the expression is confusing and equivocal. Only the initiated are able to decipher it; only for them is it comprehensible and understandable. For the rest of the spectators the purposes seem absurd and meaningless. [...] In summary, we could say that it is a literature of personal testimony, which approaches a literature of collective testimony. We could only ask that an entire society follow him, even if it were through these very complex streets. The discovery of the new man can be made in so many ways!” (Puig, 1963).

21. In the 1965 edition, the reference to the Catalan flag is not suppressed (p. 57).

double evening and night performance.²² The context was new, the ADB and the early TEC had disappeared, and the EADAG was in a phase of transition towards a certain professionalization. Until 1967, Brossa premiered twelve plays, always in a single performance (or almost). In the context of the scope and significance of independent theatre, Robert Saladrigas interviews him in *El Correo Catalán* (Saladrigas, 1967). Brossa presents himself as a poet dedicated to theatre out of the “need to find a fourth dimension in the poem,” a theatre that he began to write in 1944, before Ionesco, influenced by the artistic world “in terms of theatrical viability not only from my theatre, but theatre in general.” He also considers that his theatre is linked to the Catalan dramatic tradition: “It is not detached from what is traditional, even though I apply a very current technique, which enables me to adjust it to the reality in which we live.”

He repeats once again his debt to the “one-act farce sources of Ignasi Iglésias, but as I have just said, transferred entirely to the theatre formulas and language we use today.” Faced with Iglésias’ contempt for the intellectuals of the moment, who insisted on Brecht’s theatre “as the only viable way to solve the multiple problems of Catalan theatre,” Brossa affirms: “However, I do not believe that, drawing on epic productions of foreign plays or texts that were not made for the theatre, absolutely anything can be solved.”

And he defends the Catalan one-act farce, because “it is the genre that best adapts to our theatre, perhaps because it faithfully reflects the Catalan character [and] we could obtain much more satisfactory results than those achieved until now.” On the other hand, Brossa is also aware of the lack of popularity of his theatre: “This is an arduous problem. I am obliged not to completely dispense with the audience, but do so a little. I have done compact and consequential work, and I am not to blame for the fact that even today, twenty years after the first premiere, it is still dissonant.”

Between 1944 and 1967 he was still an avant-garde writer: “I consider that I chime with the hour ringing in the world and that sets the pattern of my time. The people in the country are behind and of that, I repeat, I am not guilty.”

Consequently, he does not feel that it is a poor investment “to always work for a small minority” and does not feel responsible for the divergences with the audience:

This is a structural conflict that I deeply regret, but is nothing to do with me. Faced with a case like this, the writer has only two positions: either he adapts his plays to the demands of the majority audience, or if he is honest he continues working on what he believes is fair and does not contradict himself, stupidly. I have chosen the second position. And here I am.

22. See Roda’s note on Brossa, with a photo by Pomés: “Catalan theatre allows itself the civilised luxury of also having its *auteur maudit*.” The first thing that is required to earn such a distinction is to be a writer, that is, a real writer. And Brossa is. The problem of being *maudit* is entirely objective, since in reality it is a long-term speculation. Brossa writes, continues to write and evolve: his interest and concern for new formulas will ensure a new source of vitality for the future. Now, when we still remember the impressive tumult of *Or i sal* in a previous Latin season, we can see two plays — *Collar de cranis* and *El rellotger* — in the current season” (Roda, 1967: 57).

This time Brossa (Brossa, 1972: 99-100) has two very different plays: *El rellotger* (1957) and *Collar de cranis* (1961). The former is “a synthesising tragedy of our days and tomorrow’s health”; the latter, in contrast, “is not part of the indeterminacy of *El rellotger*.” In the introductory text, Brossa identifies the two plays with Valerio Riva’s *regular* or *stable* theatre model. Despite not being very inclined to explain his theatre before a premiere, he clearly differentiates them, highlighting both their spectacular nature and their social stance. First, *El rellotger* is constructed with two independent acts:

The first act is constructed with an Aeschylus tone in terms of the simplicity of its course and the material limits. In the second act, I have deprived myself of everything but the essentials. The perspective of the first concludes with a coup de théâtre that takes the play to where the audience wants. This device, however, I believe brings the drama closer to the essential and unalterable reality of each person without the need for any further testimony.

Collar de cranis is also arranged in two independent acts:

In the first act, the protagonist is not a craftsman, but a married couple who are customers of a shop, and the desired result is also different. Here a whole farcical process of social unmasking prevails without giving up any of the imaginative resources highlighted by theatrical convention. The field is restricted to the framework of a society, although the road is taken there without any kind of prudence.

As for the second act, “it even points to a way out that would be true if it were not for the fact that the play — like so many others with a hopeful ending — begins exactly where the playwright leaves off” (Brossa, 1972: 99-100).

The director of the production, Carlos Lucena (P.A., 1967), endorses Brossa’s project, while making its avant-garde authenticity clear: “It is a totally intelligible poetic theatre. While the other avant-garde playwrights start from the concrete world to reach nothingness, Brossa makes an inverse change: he starts from nothingness to take us to the concrete world. So his theatre cannot be more realistic.”

In keeping with the interpretation that, at the time, he made of *Or i sal*, Lucena emphasises the “intelligible”, “social” and “historical” character of Brossian texts, while acknowledging their connection with the Catalan dramatic tradition: “Always, he purifies especially the one-act farce of its faults and provincialism to present it to us universalised and current. It is a fully social and historical theatre, free from anxieties of any kind.”

The interpretation of Brossa’s theatre leads him, however, to acknowledge that “the only thing that happens and that is possibly what alienates the uninformed spectator is that the playwright dispenses with a series of theatrical elements that he considers superfluous such as the plot, etc.”

While with *Or i sal* almost all theatre critics showed an absolute discrepancy with the play and playwright, this time they were not so unanimous in an overall assessment. At the very least, Joan Brossa’s career and personality

had a place and were respected and recognised; the plays performed were another thing, ascribed or not to the theatre of the absurd (Rosselló, 1997; 1999), and of which some critics' misunderstanding was clear again (Aran, 2022). Certainly the critics had changed. At *El Correo Catalán*, Junyent had been replaced by Joan de Sagarra, and Julio Manegat worked for *El Noticiero Universal*, María Luz Morales remained at *Diario de Barcelona*, and Martínez Tomás continued at *La Vanguardia Española*. Martí Farreras was the critic of a new evening newspaper, *Tele/Expres*, and Frederic Roda worked for *Destino*. Another young critic, Xavier Fàbregas, became the critic for *Serra d'Or*, and Vidiel for *Hoja del Lunes*. Neither *Solidaridad Nacional* nor *La Prensa* published any review of the production. The new currents that emerged – some independent theatre groups were in favour of an ideologically and politically committed theatre – can help the reader understand one of the debates provoked by Brossa's pieces, partly derived from his statements to Saladrigas.

Of the theatre critics who already reviewed *Or i sal*, it was above all Martínez Tomás (Martínez Tomás, 1967) who modified, at least in tone and overall appreciation, his interpretation of Brossa, “in accordance with our limited artistic horizons,” with a nuanced recognition:

This playwright was already treading the paths of difficult theatre, of obscure appearance, but of with a deep transcendent meaning, when other playwrights did not dare to do so. Therefore, it is important to recognise this important virtue that places him before the most advanced elements that cultivate the new theatre in Catalan.

Joan Brossa has created his aesthetic and emotional world to which he remains devoted and faithful, regardless of the vicissitudes [...] his literary and theatrical career focuses on an industrious search for new formulas. [...] His tenacity and his fidelity, truly impressive, deserve our consideration to a high degree. The aesthetic moment that corresponds to Brossa's work may not have come, but no one can be sure that one day not too not far away it will as a classical norm.

Morales, in *Diario de Barcelona*, adopts a similar stance to that of Martínez Tomás in assessing Joan Brossa's play, framed within the so-called “theatre of the absurd”, and critical capacity:

If we validate the theatre of the absurd, we must place Joan Brossa in a preferential place... In this aspect, you can always expect from him... the unexpected. And even his undeniable fantasy, the magic wand with which his good or bad mood strikes our mind, has the virtue of taking our judgment (alas, fatally, implacably logical!) through the most unexpected directions and the most labyrinthine paths... I think it must be a healthy mental space for any critic to go in search of possible hidden symbols, messages and other mystifying literary-philosophical-theatrical trifles with which he puts himself to the test – no longer the playwright's imagination, but ours, and that of the possible spectator... if there is one (Morales, 1967).

Manegat (Manegat, 1967), who had attended other productions and also some readings of Brossa's theatre, shows his respect taking into account "that maybe tomorrow he will be recognised and accepted," pointing out that Ionesco, Beckett and Audiberti had also been questioned, or that Miguel Mihura waited years and years to see *Tres sombreros de copa* performed. For Manegat, "one cannot deny what is not immediately understood, which immediately hurts our thinking, our artistic consciousness." Brossa also founded magazines, published poetry books, staged poems, and premiered them in Paris. In short, Brossa "fights and follows his path. This is worthy of respect."

Martí Farreras (Martí Farreras, 1967), moved by Agustí Pons' interview with Carlos Lucena, points out Brossa's genuineness in relation to the theatre of the absurd and, like other colleagues, shows his limitations in understanding Brossa's play.

The theatre of the absurd, which is already a current genre — perhaps even somewhat outdated — gives us countless examples of perfectly structured, thought-out and constructed plays. With Brossa's theatre, in contrast, we always expect the feeling of dealing with a game of speculations, projects, cryptic formulation and consequently very relative pleasantness. I very sincerely regret my inability to appreciate and discover the importance that some very intelligent people detect in Brossa's play.

Vidiel is more forceful, concise and sincere (Vidiel, 1967): "I don't understand anything. But that's what it's all about, that the audience is left in the dark," and, after the performance of *Collar de cranis*, he notes: "There is no booing. Some whistling and lots of applause. I also applaud. I'm very happy. I haven't seen the promised *Collar de cranis*."

The stance of three new critics differs from the presuppositions of the others I have referred to so far with, to say the least, peculiar approaches: Joan de Sagarra (*El Correo Catalán*), Frederic Roda (*Destino*) and Xavier Fàbregas (*Serra d'Or*). While Roda and Fàbregas strive to situate and explain Brossa's original contribution to theatre, Sagarra responds indignantly to Brossa's statements to Saladrigas. Roda, who directed *Or i sal*, emphasises, on the one hand, his *maudit* character:

Catalan theatre allows itself the civilised luxury of also having its *auteur maudit*. The first thing that is required to earn such a distinction is to be a writer, that is, a real writer. And Brossa is. The problem of being *maudit* is totally objective, since in reality it is a long-term speculation. Brossa writes, continues to write and evolve: his interest and concern for new formulas will ensure a new source of vitality for the future (Roda, 1967a).

And, on the other, he notes the genuine character of his work: "If Brossa died now, his work would already be crystallised in the form of a thing, a considerable object of Catalan literature. This playwright does not fall into a clear line that can explain it by his antecedents and he has not formed around him a certain school or constellation of followers in his own way" (Roda, 1967b).

Fàbregas (Fàbregas, 1967), who had been a critic for *Serra d'Or* for a short time, also points out the uniqueness of Brossa's theatre: "Joan Brossa is a separate phenomenon in our theatre: condemned without remission by some, declared an intangible genius by others, the fact is that his work will have to be carefully considered when the time comes, without the frivolity that conclusive postures entail and as he deserves."

Sagarra (Sagarra, 1967), in his initial exposition, shows the opposition to certain statements expressed by Brossa about Brecht and the theatricality in the interview with Saladrigas. According to him, what the Barcelona poet must do is to worry more about his work:

I ask myself: why isn't Brossa's theatre — nearly one hundred plays — performed more often? Very simple, because Brossa has no audience and Brecht does. Can Brossa have or does he already have the same audience that Brecht's theatre enjoys? Well, come on, what are they waiting for to prepare them and perform it regularly?! Where is the patronage, the authentic patronage — the one that translates into pesetas — of the Club 49? It seems to me that Joan Brossa, rather than taking on Brecht, should take on other people. If there are people who are behind in this country, it is not because of Brossa or because of Brecht. [...] If Brossa hasn't had his chance, I don't think it is the fault of those of us who believe in Brecht and accept his poetics without Brechtisms. I am more, much more, interested in Brecht than in Brossa, whom I respect as a poet and a man consistent with his world. However, if Brossa is not performed, it is not Brecht's fault, in the same way that those of us who accept Brecht do not despise Iglésias or the one-act farce. To say that we despise the one-act farce is to say that one, in this case Joan Brossa, has no idea who Brecht really is.

In relation to the issue of theatricality, on texts that have not been conceived for theatre, Sagarra asks: "What is theatricality, Mr. Brossa? Isn't Dostoevsky more theatrical than Echegaray? Isn't it possible to talk about texts that were not made for the theatre but that are used with an eminently theatrical show in mind? Where is the theatricality, in the text or in the show? Joan Brossa, I repeat, does not play fair."

As for the texts performed, Sagarra calls *El rellotger* "poetic theatre of a certain quality and great theatrical effectiveness." A kind of Prometheus bound with the consent of a rich and elegant Marquis whom he forces to give him the clocks. Finally, "Neither Hercules, nor Zeus, nor Brossa, free Prometheus from the claws of the Marquis. According to Brossa, his theatre serves to 'attack some of the structures established by man'. Like Brecht's, hélas!" He thinks *Collar de cranis* is a mistake: "If the play intends to be, as I believe, dialectical, it would have been preferable to extend, and not explain, this first part a little, and shorten the second." A long and immoral second part, according to Sagarra. He reiterates his disagreement with Brossa: "In any case, Brossa is a poet and lives in his world, an apparently coherent world. If there are other people who accept him, who recognise themselves in him, it is only fair that Brossa is performed and, I repeat, I am surprised that he is not performed more."

He congratulates Lucena for having faith in Brossa's theatre, but he considers that his directing has been "slow and insecure." With the exception of Dora Santacreu, no performer convinces Sagarra who, nevertheless, praises Moisès Villèlia's set design.

If we leave aside the generic ascriptions of a sector of critics to the theatre of the absurd already noted, the production of *El rellotger* and *Collar de cranis* generates a reflection on a two-fold legacy in Brossa's work: surrealism and the Catalan one-act farce tradition. The stances of Roda and Fàbregas are framed in this line. Roda more succinctly speaks of it as "two ingredients of very diverse origin but that are in Brossa," and Fàbregas (Fàbregas, 1967) does so in terms of evolution. From the initial neo-surrealism, from the 1960s with pieces like *La jugada* (1960) and *Gran Guinyol* (1962), he begins to reconsider reality:

This evolution places Brossa's work — and in a very special way *Collar de cranis* — halfway between the two extreme currents that tempt the artist immersed in the contradictions of capitalist society, as Lukács defines in *Goethe and His Age*: "The increasingly abstract and empty stylization as well as the increasingly servile and photographic naturalism which clings to immediate surfaces."

However, the acting labelled as "incoherent" damages both plays with the help of the prompt box:

For the only time in the entire season, we saw the prompt box dominating the stage, something of course unjustifiable, today, in a performance of a certain level; it was said that at the last minute some of the actors had to be replaced. The actors, some of them professionals with a well-earned reputation, in order to make up for a directing that was not apparent on stage, trusted in their dramatic skills to resolve some simple scenarios with which they did not at first identify. As in previous years, the so-called "Companyia del Festival" was nothing more than a pure entelechy, an arbitrary and hasty gathering of actors without any kind of cohesion. In the auditorium the audience applauded discreetly, and the whistling and tapping of feet prevailed.

From *Quart minvant o els nassos històrics* (1968) to *El temps escènic* (1971)

Two and a half months before presenting *Quart minvant o els nassos històrics* (21-XII-1968) in the XI Cicle de Teatre Llatí of the Teatre Romea, he premiered *Concert irregular* (7-X-1968),²³ an *irregular* musical action, with music by Carles Santos, who also performed with the singer Anna Ricci and Marc Costa, under the direction of Pere Portabella. With this performance, the XI Cicle de Teatre Llatí and VI Festival Internacional de Música also honoured the seventy-five years of Joan Miró.²⁴

23. On 22 July that year a chamber version, with the same team, was presented as a prelude to the Miró Exhibition at the Fondation Maeght, in Saint Paul-de-Vence, to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of Joan Miró.

24. The show comprises "Homenatge a Leopoldo Frégoli", "Inquisitorial", "Esquelet musical", "Transformacions", "Peixos de pluja", "L'eco", "Homenatge a Fatima Miris", "Lacalor dels esquimals", "Pastoral dalt d'un escenari", "Les figures de cera", "Les caràtules", "Bombetes al paraigua", "Nocturnlàndia", "Dilluns", "La mòmia" and "Homenatge

The group *Jocs a la sorra. Teatre d'Investigació* was included on 28 September 1968 in the provincial register of associations²⁵ to give legal cover to the theatre group *Gogo Teatro Experimental Independiente*, promoted by Santiago Sans and Mario Gas, who had performed until then in the Institute of North American Studies, in Via Augusta in Barcelona. This group premiered, at the Casino L'Aliança del Poble Nou, *Quart minvant o els nassos històrics* (21-XII-1968),²⁶ once permission was received from the censor “for chamber theatres”, with the suppression of a series of lines, among others, that refer to the military, a “parlo de fer trontollar els puntals i de prosseguir una lluita”, to the “nas històric de Mossèn Nassari”, “que beneeix el pa de luxe que menja” or “els governants són una lladregada de cafres. Per això jo no vull ser alcalde.”²⁷ Written four months after *Calç i rajoles*, the action takes place in a working class atmosphere in crisis in 1964, and Brossa is critical of the Francoist administration and the Church, who act with impunity, without consideration or scruples, against subordinate classes, powerless to fight them, but with the recognised dignity of the vanquished and a restless and expectant youth” (Gallén, 2019: 11-17).


The response of the critics to a production with poor audience attendance was practically unanimous regarding the play. First of all, before starting the show, according to Roda, the director explained that “the playwright washed his hands of the show. It seems that Sans had added too much theatrical spice to something that Brossa wanted to be only word, a spoken dialogued poem” (Roda 1968: 74). The critic of *Destino* came out in defence of the director — “he understood the play in his own way (and how else can we understand things other than in our own way?) and he was consistent and coherent” — and the actors, if we consider that the text “has nothing particularly outstanding and is a long (excessively long) sample of a theatrical formula that has much better examples. Because Brossa can also sometimes copy himself.”

al Vietcong” (Fàbregas, 1976: 95). The act about the Vietcong caused the American ambassador to leave “in a flash” (Brossa 2015: 651). Before the premiere, Roda notes: “Brossa could have written the most beautiful ‘graffiti’ of the May uprisings. His imagination as a poet, that is as a creator of meanings, has now been combined with the musical breakthrough of Carles Santos and the performance of Anna Ricci. The “tempo” of this highly irregular concert in the experimental line taken by the Season remains to be seen. Its premiere is announced for the 7th, in the evening” (Roda, 1968: 62). *Concert irregular* was submitted, according to Sebastià Gasch who defends the production, to “a frenetic and incessant boogie,” and he says that he “believed to see in *Concert irregular* a certain influence of surrealism, in the sense that Brossa assigns things a role different from that which has always been assigned to them, diverts things from the path that they have always followed” (Gasch, 1968: 67). For his part, Pérez de Olaguer speaks of “huge scandal” and considers that “the biggest mistake of this strange performance was to include it in a theatre season,” and points out that “this possible path that many people see — I do not — in Brossa’s theatre evidently does not exist here at all. Since we agreed from the beginning that this *Concert irregular* is not theatre in any of its traditional forms, let’s call it a *game* in which the spectator also participates” (Pérez de Olaguer, 1968: 65). See “*Concert irregular*, segons l’autor” and “Nit sorollosa” in Brossa, 1972: 103-106.

25. Founding members include, along with Santiago Sans, Josep M. Servitje (lawyer), Maria Lluïsa Borràs (writer and art critic), Mercè Camprubí (social worker), Francesc Alborch (technical engineer), Anna Bosch (librarian), Pilar Simon (entrepreneur), Mario Gas (actor and theatre director), Ignacio Álvarez de Sotomayor (designer) and Camilo García and Paco Valls (actors). All are involved in the Gogo productions. <<https://udeducteatre.cat/el-grup/el-principi-del-principi/>> [accessed: 24 April 2023].

26. Directed by Sans and with set design by Evarist Barranco and Ignasi A. de Sotomayor, the production was performed at the Casino L'Aliança del Poble Nou with Francesc Alborch, Anna Bosch, Mercè Camprubí, Ferran Caralt, Pere Prats Sobrepere and Pilar Simon.

27. See Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya. Fons *Delegación Provincial del Ministerio de Información y Turismo*. Fons 318. Caixa 1. Carpeta 3. Número 116. Document 114.


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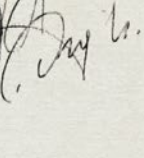
Sección Teatro
Núm. 26.00-68

En el día de la fecha, esta Dirección General ha resuelto autorizar a la Compañía GOGO TEATRO EXPERIMENTAL la puesta en escena de la obra "QUATRE MINVANT O ELS NASSOS HISTORICS" original de Joan Brossa, en el Teatro Alianza de Pueblo Nuevo de esta capital, según guía de censura núm. 0, expediente núm. 168-68, bajo las normas particulares que al dorso de la presente notificación se detallan.

Lo que comunico a V. S. para su conocimiento y efectos consiguientes.

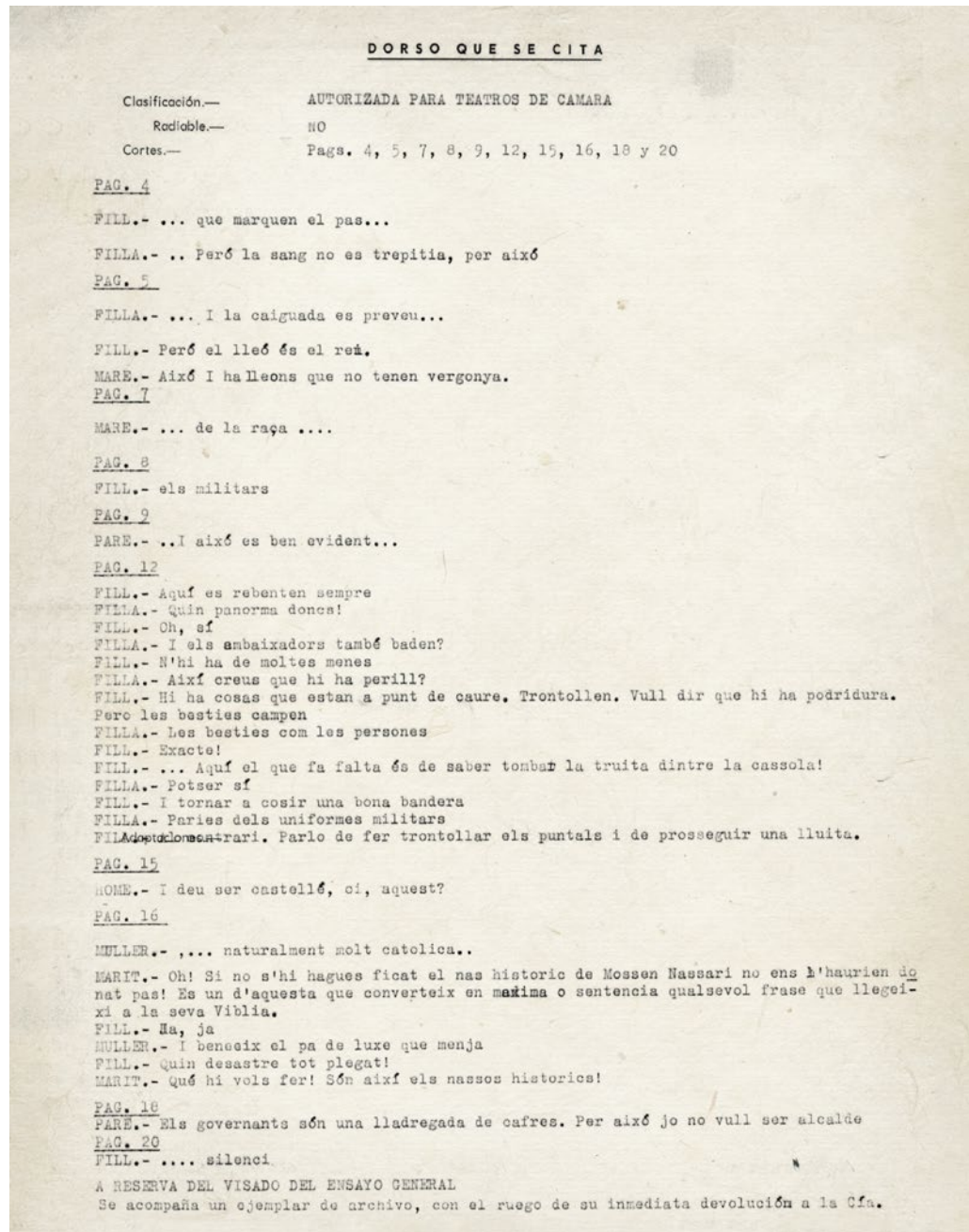
Dios guarde a V. S. muchos años.

Madrid, 22 de Julio de 1968

EL DIRECTOR GENERAL,



SR. DELEGADO PROVINCIAL DEL MINISTERIO DE INFORMACION Y TURISMO.—~~MADRID~~ BARCELONA

For Fàbregas, the play has been conceived according to the proven orthodoxy of surrealist canons, and he points out that “if we dispense with this wrapping, however, we find ourselves with a comedy of manners very similar to those written by Conrad Roure a hundred years ago or Eduard Vidal i Valenciano.” Unlike what Ionesco constructs in *Jacques ou la soumission* based on *La main leste*, by Labiche, in Brossa’s play, “the renewal of language does not manage to create the necessary trauma nor does it guide us to new places of some imagined reality that Joan Brossa could have suggested to us.” Consequently, he focuses too much on customs and manners, avoiding the caricature, the puppet show or the absurd, and “the drama appears to



us aged at the very moment of its birth, and it cannot hide its wrinkles under some pretended verbal audacity that today seems tentative” (Fàbregas, 1969: 67). Like Roda, however, Fàbregas assesses positively the work of the director and the actors, highlighting Francesc Alborch, and complains about the show’s lack of publicity, “because there is one obvious thing: if the audience is aware of a performance they can go or not go; but if they don’t know about it, they won’t go.” In turn, Pérez de Olaguer starts from the idea that the director “interprets in his own way as much as can be interpreted in Brossa’s words.” In this respect, Sans creates “a clarifying production that manages to give coherence and a visible meaning to something that I find very difficult to see in a simple reading or in a production that will limit itself — as apparently Brossa himself wanted — to giving us the lines of the text.” With few resources, a set design “that goes on depicting the same scene” and

a plot that was not new for Brossa, the critic of *Yorick* finds that “the group work is important because it achieves an authentic investigation around a text which in and of itself is not excessively important” (Pérez de Olaguer, 1969: 77).

In the V Setmana de Teatre Nou de Sitges, on 3 October 1971, Jocs a la sorra premiered *El temps escènic*, a brief piece from 1963, prior to *Calç i rajoles*, which left the audience disconcerted (Martínez Tomás, 1971: 47). For Martí Farreras, Brossa’s artistic link with Joan Miró serves to grasp the audience’s opinion: “If the presumed spectator is an enthusiast of Miró’s work, it may well be that Brossa’s theatre awakens tremendous sympathies. If, on the other hand, Miró does not excite him very much, it is unlikely that *El temps escènic* will be intelligible. Although thinking about it deeply and without forgetting that we are immersed in a surreal climate, the intelligibility of theatre is surely a negligible circumstance.” However, the critic of *Tele/eXpres* acknowledges the director’s work: “The spectator, who initially gives up understanding what he is seeing and hearing, is considerably gripped in *Temps escènic* by a very agitated stage mechanism, replete with anecdotes, that is, in the strictly formal, entertaining aspect”, because “Santiago Sans does the directing. Well? Badly? Those who ‘know’ how a Brossa text should be directed should throw the first stone, it’s not my case. The audience didn’t seem too shocked or bored. And although there was no shortage of signs of disconformity, the play was applauded” (Martí Farreras, 1971: 36).

By Way of Conclusion

When the staging of all of Joan Brossa’s theatrical productions collected in *Poesia Escènica* is revised today, the perception remains that of the one hundred and twelve dramatic works, or three hundred and twenty-three, if we add *Accions musicals*, *Post-teatre*, *Normes de mascarada*, *Troupe* and *Strip-tease*, the audience has seen, during the dictatorship and in democracy, a rather low number. In the “Introducció” to the first volume of *Teatre Complet*, Xavier Fàbregas notes that only eighteen pieces have been premiered (Fàbregas, 1973: 6). Regardless of whether they are *regular* or *irregular* theatre pieces, Brossa, who ended up achieving in his lifetime at least public recognition for his artistic and theatrical work, is not a playwright who has achieved stage continuity, not even with the publication of *Teatre Complet* edited by Fàbregas, and not later, including the *Espai Escènic Joan Brossa*. In this respect, in essence, his situation is not that different from that experienced by Catalan playwrighting, which is further removed from the Brossian theatrical procedure. At the very least, from 1976 onwards, his presence in both public and private theatres falls within the framework of a regular season and with an established number of performances in Barcelona. Quite different from what was experienced during the Franco dictatorship: studios, private houses, theatres in Barcelona or elsewhere, which only offered a very limited number of performances, with a single one as the norm, to a large extent because Brossa’s production is tagged with the label of chamber.

The nine *regular* or *stable* theatre texts performed between 1960 and 1971 faced a gradual change in historical, political, social and cultural perspective around the world. Within the framework of a dictatorship (let's not forget), Catalan society also saw the change from the 1960s onwards, and participated to a certain extent in the transformations developing in the cultural and artistic sphere. The youngest and most combative sectors of culture wanted it to be closer to contemporary historical reality and called for an art, a literature, a theatre and, in short, a culture that becomes a weapon to transform reality. As far as theatre is concerned, in the early 1960s, this new sensibility was assumed as an essential need that was already apparent. The changes in the profile of theatre critics in Barcelona were also significant. The world was beginning to move on to what we can call a post-war routine. In this context, a series of non-professional theatre groups, and some directors, decided to stage texts by Joan Brossa, in the same way as they do with young local playwrights, and especially foreign ones, who until then had not been part of the Barcelona scene.

Brossa's theatre crashed into the consideration given to it by theatre critics, the veteran and the youngest or new ones, who, for perhaps sometimes different reasons, did not embrace it. When they attended a performance, they did not quite grasp his way of understanding theatre, at most some compared it with the model of the theatre of the absurd. Even the youngest questioned whether Brossa's output, apart from the artistic evaluation, had a progressive nature from an ideological or political point of view without noticing Brossa's by no means casual recognition of Ignasi Iglésias. They did not understand that, with an extraordinary desire for artistic recreation and transformation, in a major text such as *Calç i rajoles*, Brossa feels that he is the heir and champion of the dramatic tradition of the playwright from Sant Andreu de Palomar with "a very current technique that allows me to adapt it to the reality in which we live." A different orientation from that of Josep M. de Sagarra, who, aside from political contingencies, was also not accepted as a model by the young playwrights of the 1960s and 70s.

In 1968 the poor reception of Brossa's production on stage was due to the misunderstanding of an example of *irregular* theatre — the *Concert irregular* — and *regular* theatre with *Quart minvant o els nassos històrics*. If the former, with Josep Mestres Quadreny, Carles Santos and Anna Ricci, scandalised the audience, the latter neither had the minimum promotion to attract an audience or the attention of the critics as a whole. As a counterpoint, the name and the literary and artistic work of Brossa were gradually accepted and recognised by a wide sector of critics and, in a democracy, also by political and cultural institutions. It would not have been possible, however, without the prior support of Josep Centelles, Antoni Bosch, Lluís Solà, Ricard Salvat, Carlos Lucena, Jordi Mesalles, Guillem-Jordi Graells, Fabià Puigerver, or Santiago Sans, among other directors; or Jordi Coca, as promoter of Brossa, and Xavier Fàbregas as editor of *Teatre Complet* (1973-1983) in six volumes. Hermann Bonnín deserves special mention, who, as director of the Centre Dramàtic de la Generalitat de Catalunya, and later with the artist Hausson, endeavoured, in the Espai Escènic Joan Brossa, to perform

and praise Brossa's theatre until *Diumenge* (2017), the last production directed by Bonnín. Let us hope that his artistic work and, especially, *regular* or *irregular* theatre, do not remain outside the programming of today's theatre.



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