



**THE THEATRICALITY OF THE SECURITY SYSTEM AND  
THE POTENTIALITY OF THE LIVING**  
**Inquiries about Chácara Paraíso (2007) by Lola Arias and Stefan Kaegi**

LA TEATRALIDAD DEL SISTEMA DE SEGURIDAD Y LA POTENCIALIDAD  
DE LO VIVO

Indagaciones acerca de Chácara Paraíso (2007) de Lola Arias y Stefan Kaegi

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**Abstract:** In the light of the notions of territory, testimony and life this work sets out to investigate contemporary documentary stage production, observing ruptures and continuities with a tradition of historical documentary theatre. Since the aesthetic-political renewal presented that emerged in the 2000's, the deepening of the crisis of representation in art has led to a growing interest in the concept of *the real* that has allowed the reinvention of forms that put in tension the technologies of biopower through the imperceptible germs of life that emerge from its interstices.

**Keywords:** documentary theater; performance; territory; life; testimony.

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**Resumen:** A la luz de las nociones de territorio, testimonio y vida este trabajo se propone indagar la producción escénica documental contemporánea observando rupturas y continuidades con una tradición del teatro documental histórico. Desde la renovación estético-política presentada a partir del nuevo milenio, la profundización de la crisis de la representación en el arte contrajo un creciente interés por *lo real* que permitió la reinención de formas que ponen en tensión las tecnologías del biopoder a través de imperceptibles gérmenes de vida que emergen de sus intersticios.

**Palabras clave:** teatro documental; performance; territorio; vida; testimonio.



## 1 Introduction

At the dawn of the new millennium, documentary theater echoes the socio-political transformations linked to the resurgence of neoliberal policies and the rise of the right-wing in the world. Likewise, the deepening of the crisis of representation in art and the growing interest in the real allow for the reinvention of forms that are rooted in the first research efforts initiated in Germany in the last century<sup>1</sup>. Both in Europe and Latin America, the new documentary theater emerges renewed<sup>2</sup>.

An example of this renewal, which also allows us to account for the contagions and bridges that started being built between the European and Latin American scenes, can be found in works such as *Chácara Paraíso* (2007) by Lola Arias and Stefan Kaegi. The work, product of the artistic collaboration of two central exponents of the contemporary scene, shows a theater that from a scientific and political perspective we recognize as indebted to Brechtian theory and consequently aligned to a questioning aspect of disciplinary power and its public and private apparatuses of domination. This search is developed from a materialistic dialectic (Brecht, 1972) that treats “social situations as processes, studying them in their contradictions” (p. 82, our translation). Thus, we consider that Arias/Kaegi’s proposal allows the emergence of new forms of politicization that, from a performative, deconstructive and detotalizing logic, uncover the tension between the norms that biopower produces and the infinite variation of the living, mobilizing flows, intensities and becoming capable of creating new questioning powers.

To understand the procedures that these works set in motion and that give rise to this stage-documentary reinvention, we propose to study these materials in the light of the notions of *territory* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1997; Echeverri, 2004), *testimony* (Agamben, 2002) and *life* (Foucault; Deleuze; Agamben, 2007). Considering the potential ruptures and continuities with a tradition of historical documentary theater (Hamidi-Kim, 2019, p. 221) that held relevance in the Interwar period, and the strong renewal in the 1960s, we will focus our analysis on the politicization that these plays convey by observing not only what happens at the level of their content, but also in their form.

This materialist perspective, which finds its major development in Brechtian theater and reaches worldwide productivity, is affected by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the advance of capitalism. In synchrony with the deepening of the crisis of representation in art and the new research efforts around the *subjective turn* and the *performative turn*, discourses that are not as totalizing and more

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1 We refer to the aesthetic proposals linked to the political theater of Erwin Piscator (1976), the epic theater of Bertolt Brecht (2004), and the documentary theater of Peter Weiss (1976).

2 Some unavoidable references of the documentary stage renovation in Latin America in the early 2000s are Rimini Protokoll, She she pop, Groupov, Milo Rau, Rabih Mroué, among others, in Europe; Lagartijas tiradas al sol, Mapa teatro, Vivi Tellas, Lola Arias, among others.



focused on intimate or personal aspects of individuals who, as part of a composition, lend their testimony to build a mosaic of multiple gazes, an “*agora* [or] space of crossing between the real and the scenic creation, where the intimate and the collective is imbued” (Verzero, 2010, p. 8, our translation).

As described by the anthropologist Echeverri, to speak of territory today is to accept the paradox that, as places become blurred and undefined, the idea of cultural place, ethnically defined, seems to become more important<sup>3</sup>. To think about territoriality is also to think about the borders between us and the other, and the naturalization of differences. The work by Abu-Lughod (2012) discusses, from a gender perspective, the political consequences of these distinctions and the prominence of the idea of culture, while proposing three strategies to try to subvert the process of otherness. The first suggests reviewing social life without assuming the degree of cohesion that the concept of culture has come to have, that is, “refusing to generalize” (p. 151, our translation). The second suggests reorienting the topics towards the “historical and contemporary links and interconnections between a community and the anthropologist who works there [...] as well as the world to which they belong, and which allows them to be in that particular place researching that group” (p. 144, our translation). And the third invites us to encourage an ethnographic writing of the particular, that is, forms of writing in which “others are considered less others” (p. 146, our translation), based on “actions of individuals who live their lives in a particular way and are inscribed in their bodies and in their words” (p. 148, our translation).

By transposing the notion of territory in relation to the idea of otherness to the field of theater studies, we intend to understand how the encounter between Arias-Kaegi as directors/authors and the possible interpreters of their works takes place in creative processes based on the biographical account of people who are part of a specific group or community. These people give testimonies through interviews. Their accounts allow generating a first textual material, from which the authors compose the text of the work that will later return to them as interpretative material.

Agamben (2002) states that “in Latin there are two words to refer to the witness. The first, *testis*, from which our term ‘witness’ derives, etymologically means one who stands as a third party (*terstis*) in a process or a dispute between two disputants. The second *superstes*, refers to one who has lived a certain reality, has gone through an event to the end and is therefore able to offer a testimony about it” (p. 15, our translation). Consequently, it analyzes the notion of testimony as a narrative production of the *superstes*, based on the expression of an experience through language.

Truth has a non-legal consistency, by virtue of which the *questio facti* cannot be confused with the *questio iuris*. This is precisely what concerns the survivor:

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<sup>3</sup> We also consider the notions of territorialization and deterritorialization understood in the light of the philosophical thought of Deleuze and Guattari (1997) as the possibility of “making rhizome, extending our territory by deterritorialization, extending the line of flight until it encompasses the whole plan of consistency in an abstract machine” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1997, p. 17).



everything that leads to a human action beyond the law, everything that radically subtracts it from the process (Agamben, 2002, p. 16, our translation).

As a good reader of Primo Levi, Agamben argues that bearing witness is a political act since it implies active participation in the construction of discourse and its moral responsibility. He does not think of testimony only as the establishment of facts with a view to a judicial process, but also as the possibility of narrating a lived experience, constructing a story about past events, constructing the actuality of the past in the present (Oberti, 2009). Testimonies refer to the public arena between memories and forgetfulness, narratives and acts, gestures and silences; to the oscillation between presence and absence that exposes the gaps and fractures that illuminate what normativity or the canon keep hidden.

Those who are involved as performers in Arias-Kaegi's works offer their life journeys as scenic material based on elements of their biography. Deleuze's ([1995] 1994) notion of life—pure power that resists and threatens the devices of subjection and control imposed by *biopower*—puts into tension such subtle and omnipresent means that shape our lives and the normative and hierarchical distributions installed.

For the purposes of our study, we will understand the concept of *biopower* linked to processes of territorialization and the notion of *major language*<sup>4</sup> that mark a clear field of forces against which Arias/Kaegi's works seem to be arguing through procedures that question and seek to redefine the links between life, art and politics.

## 2 The Arias/Kaegi collaboration

Between 2006 and 2007, Arias' works were scheduled at international festivals in Vienna and Berlin for the first time. The trips allowed not only to make his artistic practice known to a wider audience, but also to get in touch with the stage production of different countries.

During those festivals in Europe, Arias met Stefan Kaegi, an artist of Swiss origin, member of the German collective Rimini Protokoll (RP)<sup>5</sup>. They had met in Buenos Aires with the premiere of *¡Sentate! Un zoostituto* (2003), a work that was part of the Biodrama cycle

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of major language refers to Deleuze and Guattari's (1978) text that explains that "a minor literature is not the literature of a minor language, but the literature that a minority makes within a major language. In any case, its first characteristic is that, in this case, the language is affected by a strong coefficient of deterritorialization. Kafka defines in this way the impasse that prevents Jews from access to writing and makes their literature impossible: impossibility of not writing, impossibility of writing in German, impossibility of writing in any other way" (p. 28, our translation).

<sup>5</sup> Since 2001, the group has produced as an artist collective Rimini Protokoll resident at the Hebbel am Ufer theater in Berlin, and in 2008 was distinguished with the European award "New Realities in Theatre". They produce their plays mainly in Germany and have been scheduled at the world's most important international festivals since their inception. In addition, they have created an international sub-label in South America, which has been run by Stefan Kaegi for several years, in parallel with other group projects.



(2001-2009) curated by Vivi Tellas, to which both were invited and from which a fruitful collaboration emerged<sup>6</sup>.

In 2006, Arias and Kaegi took part in a workshop programmed by the Mobile Academy in Warsaw, Poland, where Kaegi delivered the seminar *City as stage*. His colleagues say that it was from this experience that Arias and Kaegi decided to jointly create the show *Chácara Paraíso (CbP)*, to be premiered in Brazil in 2007<sup>7</sup>.

As a background to this experience, it is important to mention that in 2002, Kaegi, who had spent a year as an exchange student in Blumenau, in southern Brazil, created *Matraca Catraca* (2002), a bus tour through Salvador da Bahia with stories -documentary and fictional- presented in a format similar to that of the guided tour, through audios. The Brazilian drivers act as hosts and, on the street, some hired performers are part of the work.

In 2005, he presents in Brazil *Torero Portero*, a work with which he arrives for the first time in Argentina in 2001, specifically in the province of Córdoba, within the framework of the second edition of the Mercosur International Festival, under the co-production of the Goethe Institute. In this proposal he worked with a group of unemployed building doormen who narrated their life stories, the stories of other doormen linking the reality of past events, narrated in first person, with fragments of fiction, especially conceived for the show. In both contexts, the scenic device triggered diverse reactions and comments from the audience, showing their surprise at seeing the street become a stage and the most everyday stories and gestures become a theatrical event.

The creative process of *CbP* is divided into two moments: the research stage and the production stage.

[...] while they [Kaegi and Arias] were in Europe, I stayed here and started interviewing people who could be possible cast members. And then, when they came, we went back to talk to these people and that's when the participants were chosen (Zuan Esteves, personal communication, October 17, 2022).

During the research stage, Cristiane Zuan Esteves and Manuela Afonso begin a process of searching for witnesses. The work consists of interviewing people who had, or had at that time, a relationship with the military police (PM) and the civil police (PC) of the city of São Paulo. After a few months, Arias and Kaegi joined the team and began the final phase of the investigation.

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6 For further information on this work access <http://www.alternativateatral.com/obra1850-sentate-un-zoostituto-de-stefan-kaegi>

7 Information provided by Cristiane Zuan Esteves through personal communication on October 17, 2022. Cristiane is a Brazilian director, actress and playwright, founder of the group Opovoempé (*The People Standing*) created in 2004 as an artistic collective oriented to research and intervention in public space, to the crossing between the borders of art and life, theater and performance (Cosmo, 2017). In 2007 she was artistic collaborator of *CbP* (2007) together with Manuela Afonso, Brazilian actress member of the group Opovoempé, who participated in Arias/Kaegi's project as assistant director.



It was very difficult to do this investigation, to enter the places. We discovered that there was a PM training center in a metropolitan area of São Paulo called Chácara Paraíso. So, I drafted a fake email saying that we were visual arts students and that we wanted to visit the facilities that they made as simulations of the slum (favela), to see how they did that (Zuan Esteves, personal communication, October 17, 2022).

During fieldwork, the directors set up interviews at *ChP*, while walking around the site. They take photos, record and file information. The oral account of the testimony has an impact on the research space. The exchange between directors and staff of the training center broadens the view and deepens the field work. Their close relationship allows them to learn about discourses that reflect the logic of the place. In parallel, they conduct interviews with people who have been pre-selected by the collaborators/assistants to carry out the final stage of the selection of *experts of everyday life*, in this case, former civilian and military police officers of the city of São Paulo who wish to be part of an artistic creation based on their life stories.

Jean Pierre Sarrazac (2011) affirms that *bearing witness* is a gesture that fully engages who performs it. Gestures, tone of voice, emotion, appear as contingent behaviors resulting from the situation of exposure. The witness, understood as *superstes*, involves their person in the gesture of giving testimony of what he/she has experienced, making them pure materiality. It is the immediate presence of a humanity that comes to share its experience. Unlike the witness—as it appeared in the model of the historical documentary theater—of Piscator and Weiss, with whom the contact is made in an instance prior to the creation of the dramatic text as a source of inspiration.

In Arias/Kaegi's proposal, the intervention of the witnesses in the creation is greater, since the selection includes both the testimony they can provide on a subject, and the particularity they bring from their physicality or their way of narrating. Directors select witnesses to build with them the content of their works. In other words, they are given the role of co-authors of the texts, in addition to an active participation in acting and staging decisions.

Artists start from the testimonies, and then perform a dramaturgical work that turns these oral stories into the material text of the show. The act of narrating is exhibited and configures a device (Foucault, 1973; Agamben, 2011) of which these experts are the protagonists<sup>8</sup>. By the time of the public presentation of the work, spectators are invited to enter the device, making known certain rules for the experience: moving in groups, respecting the times stipulated in each room. The tour is like a tourism or educational guided tour, with the difference that there is an intentional interaction. The installation is composed of rooms in which different people present an autobiographical story and, depending on each space, spectators are free to choose to play a more active or more passive role<sup>9</sup>.

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8 The Rimini *experts* should not be confused with the amateur actor proposed by Piscator ([1929]1957), since they practice in their free time what at the time was called *bourgeois theater*.

9 The term "spectator" could present problems if understood only in its etymological sense, since it derives from the Latin *specto*, "I look", "I observe", so it would seem to be linked only to the sense of sight. However, and given that the



Image 1 - *Chácara Paraíso* (2008). Cover of the book/program that accompanies the play



Source: personal archives, 2024

*ChP* premiered in January 2007 in São Paulo thanks to a co-production between the Goethe Institut São Paulo, the SPIELART-Factory München and the SESC of Brazil<sup>10</sup>. The work is conceived with seventeen policemen and ex-policemen for the top floor of the SESC in São Paulo, a building located on Paulista Avenue<sup>11</sup>. This project also unfolds in a parallel production that functions as a mirror: *Soko São Paulo*, premiered in November of the same year in the city of Munich. This idea of two mirror works is based on a comparative concept that seeks to relate the security systems of both countries.

São Paulo is one of the most dangerous places in the world. Munich is the safest city in Germany. There are more than 150,000 policemen in the state of São Paulo, 6,000 in Munich. Fifty police officers were killed in on-duty shootings in São Paulo last year. The Munich police hardly had to use a firearm in the same period (*Soko São Paulo*, 2007).

Like the first one, this work is configured as a scenic installation that seeks to account for this comparative study, so that the six Brazilian performers are presented together with five German performers to reconstruct together their experiences within the security system of their respective countries.

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spectators of *Chácara Paraíso* (and, as we will see, of other works by Arias and Kaegi as well) actively participate in the proposal, getting involved not only by looking but also by doing, we will keep the term spectator, taking as support the theory of artistic reception developed by Dubatti (2020), which states that the spectator “[...] although he/she does much more, he/she does not stop expecting. Participating does not imply ceasing to expect. One can be doing many things (building poetry, living in conviviality, participating as an actor abducted by the scene, for example in the circus, etc.) and be expecting at the same time. The action of expectation coexists and interweaves with other actions. That is why it is necessary to refute the statement that ‘there are no more spectators’. There may be more participation, but that does not cancel the action of expecting” (p.11).

<sup>10</sup> SESC is the Brazilian Social Service of Commerce. It is maintained by a tax paid by state commerce, so, in each state, merchants contribute a tax. “In São Paulo, the SESC is the strongest in the country. It has wonderful venues, ranging from dental services to a whole extremely broad cultural program [...] From sports practice, cultural activities: theater, dance, exhibitions, library. And it does what a Culture Secretariat should do”. (Zuan Esteves, 2022)

<sup>11</sup> In 2007, Paulista Avenue was considered one of the most important economic and cultural centers of the city; it houses the main cultural spaces, companies, embassies, consulates. From a geographical perspective, it is a high point from where you can have access to a panoramic view. It is an area with a great deal of traffic, since it is the site of a concentration of diverse institutions, with people from all regions and cities of the country, street vendors, bank workers, consulates, hotels, hospitals. It is also one of the most important places in Brazil in terms of visibility. The main political demonstrations of both the left and the right, the gay pride march, the marches for Jesus, among many other expressions, take place there.





### 3 A journey through *Chácara Paraíso* (2007)

Conceived as a walk-through installation, the work presents a map composed of different rooms<sup>12</sup>. The public enters in groups of five to seven people at a time and the path indicated follows a single direction that guides the passage from one space to another. Drawing on Situationist theories (Debord, 2010), we can understand this installation as a drift, that is, “a technique of uninterrupted passage through different environments” (p. 197, our translation).

Next, we will make a brief description of the performers who participated in this work and of the situations posed in each of the rooms that made up this installation<sup>13</sup>.

Image 2 - *Chácara Paraíso* (2008). Plan of the space presented in the book/hand program (our intervention to indicate the direction of the tour and the order of the rooms)



Source: personal archives, 2024

The tour begins with Paulo Roberto, a fireman who worked at the PM between 1993 and 1997, who welcomes the public at the entrance of the building and takes them up a service elevator to the top floor. As they make their way up, Paulo Roberto welcomes them and announces that he no longer belongs to the forces and that he works as a photojournalist for *Bombeiros em Revista*. He tells the public about the objectives of a firefighter and the keys to keep in mind in case of fire.

Then they enter a glassed-in room with a view of Paulista Avenue. There, participants seat in front of a large window. Each seat is equipped with headphones and binoculars. When using them, the audience can listen to the voice of Pedro, a civil police investigator, son of a PM, who at the time of the play works at DECAP<sup>14</sup>. Pedro describes people walking at that moment along the Avenue, arguing that any person can be suspicious in the middle of the city.

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12 We understand the concept of installation in the light of the studies carried out by Josu Larrañaga (2001) and Mónica Sánchez Argiles (2006) for whom the installation “makes possible a new use of the space in which it acts [...] the one who sets it in motion, who gives it a certain use, is the one who uses it, the ‘user’. The term user points to the closeness between seeing and doing that this form implies, to interactivity. “The installation is the way of seeing art. It seeks to affect the reciprocal relationships between the art object and its environment.”

13 We rely on a paratextual material, a small book/program that accompanies the work and contains several elements: a log of the work process, the plan of the space divided by sectors and marked with color references, a photo of each performer per room accompanied by a biographical file and a text by curator Ricardo Muniz Fernandes (2007) entitled *Puede ser un ready-made teatral*. (Among other possibilities), in which he presents certain conceptual guidelines about the work.

14 Department of the Judicial Police of the Capital - São Paulo Civil Police Headquarters.



Women, like that woman you see there, commit crimes too. Because bandits do not have a specific face. Like the man you see over there by the traffic light. Do you see him? He has a black briefcase in his hand. He looks like a drug dealer who wants to sell drugs in one of those fancy buildings (CHÁCARA , 2007).

The audience can only hear his voice, but despite his physical absence his presence can be felt as he describes live what the audience sees on Paulista Avenue. This present-tense sound intervention reinforces the idea of the territorial extension of the police corporation and its omnipresence.

The second station is a small and closed room with a counter that separates it from another space. Above the counter, and up to the ceiling, a one-sided viewing glass covers the gaze of the participants to the outside. On the table there are several telephones and, in front of them, a chair. As soon as the audience enters, the telephones ring and invite the spectators to pick up the tube and answer. Each person picks up a tube and sits down to listen. A voice states that her name is “soldier Flavia, police officer”, and that she worked for ten years as a telephone operator for the 190 emergency service. Flavia tells anecdotes from that job, intertwined with other personal stories, such as her activity in a samba school.

The crossing between the happy anecdotes, those of the samba school, and the atrocious ones, heard in her work, generate a captivating counterpoint. The audience listens to this former police officer, hidden behind the glass<sup>15</sup>, thus generating a kind of Gesell camera between her and the audience. Flavia poses questions to the audience, provoking interaction and inviting them to narrate an experience they have had with the 190 telephone service.

Then they go to the room where Marcel Lima is. As the son of policemen, Marcel explains that he lacked options for his training and that he is a policeman by legacy of his parents. However, he clarifies that, as his sincere desire was to be a musician, he decided to join the police orchestra. Marcel adds that “the orchestra is the toilet paper of the police [...] because the band plays to calm people’s nerves, to get the dirt out” (Zuan Esteves, 2022). In *ChP* he performs with his double bass: he plays, sings and tells short personal stories.

In the next room, the audience meets Amorim, a retired police dog handler, who introduces himself with Ágatha, a *Belgian shepherd* dog<sup>16</sup>. Amorim explains that his dream had been to join

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15 Through communication with Cristiane Zuan Esteves, artistic collaborator and assistant director of the play, we learned that the selection process of the experts was very long and involved many hours of listening to potential participants, to try to discover which people and stories had theatrical potential to be part of the play. Some, like Flavia, made their participation conditional, such as not showing their face during the show or using a false name. This is proven by the fact that currently in the technical file of Lola Arias she appears under the name of Isabel Cristina Amaro. Other people, on the contrary, showed interest during the casting, but finally decided not to participate for fear of exposure.

16 It is important to highlight that Agatha had a particular card in the book that accompanies the play with a brief description of her activity linked to the PM and the number of dead people she may have seen in her life up to the time of the play; in the same way that the rest of the cards are structured. At the side of the photo, on the right side, they have the quotation of some text fragment of the work. In Agatha’s case, the quote reads “... Auau ... Auau”. This relationship between animals and caregivers refers to the play *¡Sentate! Un zoostituto* (2003) by Stefan Kaegi, mentioned at the beginning of the paper, where although the pets are presented by their caretakers, they take a vital role in the show.



the military dog training school, but since he was able to enter, he was sent to SIPOL<sup>17</sup>, where he worked for ten years as a secret agent. Amorim assures that you must have imagination to find a way to infiltrate, to pretend to be a criminal. He then introduces his dog Agatha, and demonstrates how she responds to the “obedience commands that are: *together, sit, lie down, stay, here, no and walk*” (CHÁCARA, 2007). He simulates a patrol scene with the dog and recreates a robbery scene with the help of another member of the production team who poses as a criminal. This person carries a toy gun in his right hand and a shield covering his left arm. In the scene, Amorim orders Agatha to attack the supposed criminal. The dog begins to bark loudly and, when the leash is released, she goes to the young man who puts his left arm with the protection in front of him. The dog bites hard on his arm, the delinquent simulates a struggle to free himself and, meanwhile, Amorim shouts repeatedly “drop the gun”<sup>18</sup>.

Towards the end of the tour, the spectators go to another room where they are welcomed by former policeman Gerson, who tells how he was in service for a truly brief time. He had joined at a time when the PM wanted to increase the number of agents and, because of that urgency, he had extremely brief training. “You could see that he had a very precarious training” (Zuan Esteves, 2022). Gerson explains that, at present, he is engaged in masonry and shows up with his wife and two children between eight and ten years old. “Gerson had several conditions [...] It was difficult to participate with his family” (*Ibid.*).

At some functions, the father is not present and his account is synthesized in writing, on a blackboard. It is evident from the handwriting and the use of the third person that it was Jessica and Jefferson, his sons, who wrote the poster. They are seated on either side of a small table, playing “Real Estate Bank” with a board and cards. Jessica rolls the dice, and the result corresponds to a numbered card that is handed by Jefferson to a random member of the audience. Finally, the girl announces the rules for moving on to the next stage of the run: “At the end of the corridor are rooms 1 through 6. When the number you have in your hand lights up, you must enter the corresponding room.” (*Chácara Paraíso – 2007*).

The audience is thus directed to a common space, a waiting room with televisions hanging high, in front of a row of seats where the audience waits to be called. In that same hallway, there are doors marked by the number of the rooms to which each spectator must enter to continue the drift. When a number lights up on the television, the person called enters the assigned room, individually or in pairs, and randomly encounters a performer seated behind a desk. The spectator is invited to sit on the other side of the desk to have a conversation and to have a closer look at documentary objects placed on the desk. In room 1, Sebastião Teixeira dos Santos, a retired policeman, introduces himself and his wife, as he did in all the interviews prior to the work. She helps him complete sentences or

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17 PM Intelligence Service.

18 Cristiane Zuan Esteves describes Amorim as “a half-thug biker. He was a dog trainer and, at the same time, he had a thing that looked like he was half a killer. You couldn’t know the story in detail, it was very strange” (Zuan Esteves, 2022).



replenish memories. On the desk there are photos, notebooks, diaries. His time with the police was during the dictatorship, between 1964 and 1968, when he participated in a systematic regime of persecution inside the University of São Paulo, which consisted of infiltrating the police and even had university employees as accomplices who denounced colleagues and students<sup>19</sup>. The undercover agents of the State spied within an internal network that was, in turn, part of a larger structure in charge of organizing repression and censorship, intervening public agencies, institutions and civil organizations throughout the country.

Cristiane Zuan Esteves explains that, although they did not respect the times and the script, some of them did not. Sebastião was one of the policemen who least respected these rules. In addition, Zuan Esteves states that from the first meetings it was difficult for him to detail his work as an undercover agent.

Sebastião was very interesting to us, especially his account of the police invasion of the University of São Paulo campus. But he didn't always tell this because it had to do with his relationship with the dictatorship. That was something that Lola (Zuan Esteves, 2022) was extremely interested in developing.

In room two is Beatriz, an investigator in the civil police, who through a photo introduces her husband, also a policeman, and tells about a riot in 2002, in the branch where she worked, where eleven prisoners were burned to death; and of a homicide office where she later worked.

In room number three is Celver, a former tactical force policeman who, from a very young age, knew that joining the police was his dream until one day he was forced to intervene in a conflict at the door of a bar, and killed a person. As a result, a legal case was opened against him, and he says that in a month he will know if he will be acquitted or not.

A former traffic policewoman is waiting in courtroom number four. She is Ellana Gombes Viana Pires, who had started her career in 1985, “a time when the regime was very rigid for women” (CHÁCARA, 2007). Eliana shows photos of policewomen of the time, of trainings, and says that after an argument with a man she had fined, as the man insulted and belittled her, she felt like taking out her gun and shooting him. From that day on, Ellana quit her job with the police.

In room five, Luis Carlos, a former guard at the Government Palace, intervenes. He made his military career in *ChP* and was part of the fifth platoon of the first company. He exhibits photos, shields and narrates anecdotes of kidnappings and murders of members of upper-class families who had been under his surveillance, or that of one of his colleagues.

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19 Cardoso Da Silva's (2014) work explains that the repressive apparatus was “assembled by the Brazilian military dictatorship from 1964 until 1985, at USP in three cycles: the first, after the military coup in April 1964; the second, after the implementation of the Institutional Act Number 5 (AI-5), in December 1969; and, the third after the implementation of the Special Security and Information Advisory (AESI) within USP, in October 1972” (p.50, our translation).



And finally, in Room 6, Marcelo, a civilian police officer at the time of the play, tells the story of an escape attempt organized by the prisoners of a prison, which he managed to prevent.

When leaving these rooms, the audience gathers again and, as a group, they go to a large room, where the scenographic simulation of a slum (*favela*) is set up. This was taken from the visit to *ChP*, where officers had shown Kaegi and Arias how future military police officers were trained there to carry out raids in popular neighborhoods. In the play, the audience tours that simulation and then meets Oliveira, a former PM who explains to his police trainee, Thiago, how to do the training: “We are going to do a simulation of a supermarket robbery of a man and a woman. They start running and enter the *favela*. Then we must locate them” (CHÁCARA, 2007). The trainee takes position with a paintball gun at the entrance of the simulated *favela*. The trainer says: “Look up and down. Always alert.” And immediately, changing the tone of voice, he shouts to him from behind what he should say: “Hey, you, stop! Police!” And changing his voice, he continues: “I’m a journalist, officer.” Back to the loud tone: “Put the camera on the ground and put your hands up.” And, again, in a fearful tone: “Please, Mr. Officer, don’t shoot. I’m a little nervous that you are pointing your gun at me” (CHÁCARA, 2007).

They enter. The audience follows them. With one kick, they kick down the door of a simulated house, and start shooting at a cardboard figure in the shape of a human inside the space. The trainer makes the audience enter this sector and, following the shots, says: “The man is armed and starts shooting when we enter. You must find him. Let’s go!” (CHÁCARA, 2007).

Thus, they and the public continue behind, going through the *favela* until the coach takes the gun, opens a door, points inside and, looking at the public, explains: “When I get into position, he was already ready, waiting for me. He fired but his gun missed. He fired again and his gun missed again. I shoot against the element and that is why I can be here, today, telling you this story” (CHÁCARA, 2007).

The training taken by aspiring police officers in *ChP* must do not only with physical and technical skills, but also with a mental preparation that becomes a specific discourse, as the work reveals when cutting those discourses from their original place. Words as an element—to name a person—take on a new value, stand out and become strange.

You don’t call the person the same when you are a policeman. Even less, if the person is a criminal. They have a whole vocabulary that you learn inside the police academy. And you could hear everyone using that vocabulary in the play. They are terms that objectify the other, that blame the other. For me, that was an important part, it is the part that touches me as a Brazilian, as a person who handles the language. It was very violent [...] Really, that military training deforms, renames everything. (Zuan Estevez, 2022)

The inclusion of weapons in the show—wether fictitious or those that could be imagined there, in any bag or purse of the policemen still on duty—and the sound of the gunshots, in combination with the presentations and the life stories, produce a disturbing effect that generates



that the experience can be lived as a process of embodiment, a performative experience. The installation is then not toured in the manner of a classical museum where a distance between the visitor and the work of art prevails, but rather the spectators are inside the work, they are the work of art.

The tour ends with a video projected on a giant screen made by the PM herself with images of *ChP* and fragments of the selected trainings. The cover of the video reads the following caption: *Some people are committed to their work for a lifetime, others make their work their life* (CHÁCARA, 2007). Thus, in a cursive lettering that inspires romanticism, the incentive video begins, linked to the training provided by *ChP*, material that presents police officers as the “heroes of the homeland”. Images are projected over a musical background, created with the Queen song, *We are the Champions*, played at full volume.

And it was interesting that moment also because the people who were against the police thought it was an apology for the police and didn't think it was a video of the police themselves about how they perceived themselves. So, the work had that tension. [...] When the policemen went to see the work they found it barbaric, the best. But for us it was a strong criticism. [...] It had that ambiguity (Zuan Estevez, 2022).

Irony and double meaning are resources that insist in Arias' theater and interest Kaegi. Taking on a task close to that of television journalism, the work with live or lived matter (Giorgi and Rodríguez, 2007) can be shaped from the selection of fragments of testimonies, their rewriting in terms of their passage to the stage and the subsequent editing and staging.

However, what happens to the physicality of that body when it expresses its testimony in public? Following Rolnik (2009), we understand that “the formal rigor of the work in its physicality becomes [...] inseparable from its rigor as an actualization of that which tensions” (p. 11, our translation) so it is possible to recognize that the problems of the present affect the acting bodies and as a consequence the relationship of their actions with the present. In the light of these reflections, we believe that Arias/Kaegi's work allows us to raise not only the awareness of what causes tension (the oppression of the security forces), but also the experience of “agreeing” its invisible and unconscious face linked to the processes of subjectivation in which the body becomes captive and depotentialized. By making room for this discomfort, the work questions the prevailing political cartography.

#### 4 Foreignizing reality

*ChP* shows the possibilities and contributions of a foreign gaze. A director who was born and lived most of her life in Argentina, and a Swiss director who, although he lived for a while in Brazil—during an internship in the last year of his studies and had returned later to produce



another play—he has no historical ties with the place, carry out an investigation of a few months on the police forces of São Paulo. Although they had the collaboration of Cristiane Zuan Esteves, Arias/Kaegi's view of the relationship between the police and the community is an outsider's view that highlights aspects normalized for Brazilians that coexist with the discourses and protocols of the security forces.

The work captures elements of reality that are naturalized and looks at them from afar, from a distance. This is linked to the Brechtian concept of *Verfremdungseffekt*. Translated as *estrangement, estrangement effect* or foreignness, this procedure makes it possible disassociating naturalized references, and presenting themes and issues as if one were seeing them for the first time. Arias/Kaegi update Brecht by investigating a reality that is alien to them and of which they only knew its officialized aspect, discovering it from archives and testimonies and then presenting fragments of it from that investigation. Each cut creates a scene that denaturalizes crystallized knowledge, unalterable truths.

*Experts* play a vital role because they recover the Brechtian notion of *social gestus*. They are neither professional performers nor amateurs of theater as a hobby. They are people interested in a project that deals with a subject that is close to their hearts. They are particularly knowledgeable about the issues presented and the places and situations worked on in the play. That is why they can be thought of as witnesses. Their stories give testimony of life experiences that occurred in the context to be dealt with. And they, in the mere act of narrating their memories, display a social gestus, a particular attitude. This is reminiscent of Brecht's example of the fish seller who, according to him, has the attitude of selling and with it makes visible social relations, which are normally hidden. Likewise, by making it explicit that these are non-professional performers, the play plays with the ambiguity of the reception contract established with the audience, since it presents as theater something that does not fall within the structure of what is traditionally understood as a "theater play."

In this way, Arias/Kaegi's proposal to work with non-professional performers recovers aspects of Brecht's epic theater such as respect for the heterogeneous and the plural. Brecht's 1939 description of "the street scene", as a typical model of an epic theater scene, reveals a central procedure of this theatrical form developed on public streets. The exercise consists of the report of the "eyewitness of an accident" (Brecht, 2000, p. 857) who explains to a group of people, by means of his testimony -accompanied by his own gestures-, how the events happened. This street scene described by Brecht, as a fundamental example of epic theater, shows the intention of exploring a theater performed by non-professional performers.

Evidently, this process is not what we call an artistic process. It is not necessary for the demonstrator to be an artist. What he must know to achieve his goal, practically anyone can do (Brecht, 2000, p. 857, our translation).



Proposals such as *ChP*, which retakes and deepens the Brechtian search that Kaegi had started with his work *Torero Portero* (2001), focus the creation on the figure of the *witness* of facts that revolve around a subject to be dealt with. However, what is important to emphasize is that what allows its close link with the Brechtian tradition is the “demonstration of a practical social significance”.

That our demonstrator can show that such and such a behavior of a passer-by or a driver makes the accident inevitable, that such and such another would have made it avoidable, or that he makes his demonstration to establish responsibility, this has practical effects, it has a social significance (Brecht, 2000, p. 858, our translation).

Thus, the increasingly key role that the police seem to have during the first decade of the 2000s in the Brazilian society, as expressed by the witnesses in *ChP*, highlights naturalized problems, informs about a particular state of affairs in relation to an issue, and raises some responsibilities<sup>20</sup>.

## 5 Ready-made of the living: between theatricality and performativity

Arias and Kaegi’s work attaches a singular value to the interview or casting within a creative process. Although each had explored the artistic possibilities of the biographical in previous works to *ChP* using traces, marks or scars of the bodies and elements taken from selected testimonies, the searches of both artists complement each other<sup>21</sup>.

Since its beginnings, Kaegi’s work has been linked to the *ready-made*<sup>22</sup> and the production of portable theatrical concepts, using simple technology, with the city as scenery and local people as performers. In the case of Arias, his research was mainly focused on the writing of the text that conveys intertextual discourses, and the performance as the engine that gives life to those texts. The collaboration in *ChP* assembles procedures and a combination of perspectives on the scene.

If Kaegi seeks to generate concept from the encounter with places and people, Arias’ experience in dramaturgy and acting provides the synthesis and a rigorous handling of rhythm. Based on this combination of knowledge and skills, the Arias/Kaegi collaboration reformulates the concept of *ready-made* to produce experiences from living matter. We comprehend the concept

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20 Zenker’s work (2013) explains that the term *Protokoll*, in German, expresses the epic relationship established towards the real facts since it translates as *report*, “a notion that runs through the documentary theater of the 20th century as evidenced by Peter Weiss’s *Notes on Documentary Theater*” (p. 194, our translation).

21 The preceding works we mention are: *Torero Portero* (2001) and *¡Sentate! Un zoostituto* (2003) by Kaegi and *Estudios de la memoria amorosa* (2003), *Poses para dormir* (2004) and *El amor es un francotirador* (2007) by Arias. We respect here the premiere date assigned by Arias as a trilogy at *Espacio Callejón*. In our periodization, *Chácara Paraíso* is located between the premiere of *El amor es un francotirador* at the CCRR and the premiere of the trilogy at *Espacio Callejón*.

22 The term *ready-made* or *found object* defines art made by using objects that belong to everyday life and are not normally considered artistic. Marcel Duchamp was one of the main referents and pioneer of its establishment at the beginning of the 20th century.





of life through the conceptualizations developed by Foucault, Deleuze, and Agamben in the works compiled by Giorgi and Rodriguez (2007). In Foucault's final article published before his death, he reflects on the notion of life and argues that at its most fundamental level, 'the games of coding and decoding leave room for chance.' According to Foucault, life is that which is capable of error. Anomaly permeates biology and demonstrates that knowledge is rooted in the errors of life. Coincidentally, before his death, Deleuze publishes a text in which he exposes his perspective on this notion, expanding it on the plane of immanence as it transcends both subject and object to present itself as pure potency. Subsequently, Agamben (2007) relates the reflections of both authors and points out that if life is potency, power, in Foucault's terms, is exercised over life, a biopower that enables its control. In other words, following these reflections, we can infer that life, as the biopower of the 'other,' invariably seeks to break free from the hierarchical ties that define and fix it through the instruments of biopower.

Using the living as the primary material for composition aims not only to question the expressive or representative aspects of a work but also to engage the sensibilities of the audience by emphasizing elements that suggest profound connections with the social and political landscape of the investigated territory. In an interview conducted for the play *¡Sentate! Un zoostituto* (2003), Kaegi states about his working method:

[...] I say that what we are going to do is that, a documentary, but in a theater. That immediately lowers the level of artifice. Nobody wants to be artificial in a documentary. Many people leave thinking that we are really shooting a movie. And in truth we are not very far from it: we talk, we record a lot with the camera... It's an investigation. People are not very aware that everything they say is already part of the work, but when I arrive with the written texts, and they realize that there is what they said three days ago, in a rehearsal, they start understanding. They see what they said transformed into literature, and they get a little scared, but they feel honored because they realize that what they are doing is valuable (Kaegi, March 16, 2003).

Although the entire statement is unprovable, we are interested in highlighting that throughout the creative process, working with people who are not professionally engaged in interpreting generates certain tensions. The technique proposed by Kaegi in a first instance of *casting*, relieves those features of both the testimonies and the phenomenal body of the applicants, allowing them to enter a zone activated by theatricality, where the everyday is denaturalized, and can be viewed with critical distance. It is there where the materiality of the *ready-made* is configured as an ironic and provocative object, a sign within a larger syntactic system. Likewise, the spectators actively participate, that is, they become the work. Ricardo Muniz Fernandes (2007), producer of *ChP* for SESC São Paulo, affirms that Arias/Kaegi's work is a theatrical *ready-made* since it dismantles the established common knowledge about the police structure and the theatrical structure to create an action that relates this knowledge to denaturalize it. It thus collapses closed systems based on rules and disciplines.



*ChP* proposes a *ready-made* space using for its installation the top floor of SESC, a building under renovation located on Paulista Avenue. This allows us to establish a parallel with most of the buildings in the area, whose top floor houses the management offices, reserved for executive staff. Unlike these, *ChP* presents this space as an exercise demonstration room where decisions are not only made by the police officers invited as performers but also by the spectators invited to participate in the experience. It is then in this crossing between theatricality and performativity that we find the fine limit through which the proposal moves. Here, the failure of artificiality opens a zone of pure presence, of pure being in the world, the contact with the real and the detachment from traditional theatrical forms that allow mimesis. The text made up from the testimonies of the experts and the actions set in rehearsals reveals the remains of a work with illusion that clashes with the inevitable reality of these non-professional bodies of the performing arts in a situation of exposure. It is in this clash where the error, the failure, the coarse emerge and become a machine for producing distance and denaturalization of reality and, at the same time, configure the reality of the common aesthetic experience that crosses the bodies and allows life to be presented, in a Deleuzian sense, as an indeterminate power that is capable of “putting in suspense the hierarchical distributions and normative distinctions that *biopower* produces on the infinite variation of the living” (Giorgio and Rodriguez, 2007, p. 12, our translation).

The work thus unfolds as an ambiguous experience that diminishes theatricality and amplifies performativity. The boundaries of art become indistinct, giving rise to a ready-made of the living that demonstrates how, in the face of mechanisms of possession, control, and normalization of bodies, imperceptible seeds of life sprout from their interstices. The established forms of biopower and their representations, exemplified here through standardized bodies and linguistic codifications, reveal escapes that allow “life to emerge as a power of differentiation” (Rolnik, 2001, p. 9), signifying unforeseen manifestations as forms of resistance amidst a continual process of creation and transformation of experience.

## 6 Final reflections

As we have tried to demonstrate throughout this work, the artistic collaboration Arias/Kaegi recovers the tradition of modern political theater (Piscator-Brecht), highlighting contradictions and ambiguities, while distancing itself from the militant model of the 1960s (Weiss) at the same time. Thus giving way to a documentary scene in which politicization appears displaced. The responsibility of taking sides is delegated to the spectators, who are confronted with a scene with multiple reading possibilities.

*ChP* places at center stage the security forces of Brazil, a country that in the years following the premiere of this work was governed by representatives of the Social Liberal Party, a conservative, right-wing party, democratically elected by a large majority, which assigned public positions to former PM officials.



The critical gaze that emerges from this documentary theater finds its counterpoint in the artistic-cultural production system itself. *ChP* is not produced within the framework of an autonomous or independent theater circuit, but relies on Latin American state funds, the economic support of the Goethe Institute, European theaters and international festivals. It also puts non-professional actors on stage, while, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), one of the main axes in the fight against economic inequality in the world lies in prioritizing education. Equal access to education and the attainment of professional diplomas, accompanied by policies of professional insertion and social integration, according to this organization, are a basic measure in the fight in favor of equitable opportunities for the development of people. The experts in these works are then witnesses or victims of a system that promotes social differences, sustained by militarization and surveillance, radical income inequity reflected in the access to education, culture, job opportunities and subjugation that leads to the growing increase of poverty rates in the world, and the accumulation of wealth in fewer hands.

Considering the context of production, in the light of Abu-Lughod's theory to subvert the process of otherness and find other forms of relationship between "us" and "others," we consider that the duo Arias/Kaegi approximates their artistic work to a process of social research. Thus, *ChP* presents a sharp critique of biopower expressed not only through the testimonies of that community, representative of the Brazilian security forces and the treatment of procedures that accentuate distancing and foreignness—but also through the form adopted by the installation/intervention in a reformed cultural center located on the top floor of a skyscraper on Paulista Avenue. The paradoxes that emerge from this proposal provide a complex gaze that affects the bodies and, from which, a subtext is perceived that subtilizes the position on the problematic of power, where life is filtered with greater spontaneity, thanks to the possibilities of improvisation and audience participation in interactive devices that invite to a less forced exchange than in other cases.

In brief, the testimony on stage and the physical experience experienced by the spectators in *ChP* allows not only the expansion of knowledge, since it generates new hypotheses for which the testimonial actor or actress becomes relevant evidence, but also the possibility of keeping the body awake and seeking, through desire, a vital, performative detour that allows a passage towards the yet unnamable.



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### **Funding**

CONICET-IIGG-UBA/UNA

### **Ethics Committee Approval**

Not applicable

### **Competing interests**

No declared conflict of interest

### **Research Context**

No declared research context

### **Copyright**

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### **Evaluation Method**

Double-Blind Peer Review

### **Editors**

Dr. Ernesto Gomes Valença

Dra. Pamela Brownell

### **Peer Review History**

Submission date: 23 October 2023

Approval date: 10 January 2024