




**PRAXIS AS DEVELOPED BY SOME LATIN AMERICAN
COLLECTIVES:
group theater as an aesthetic-political tactic of resistance**

AS PRÁXIS DESENVOLVIDAS POR ALGUNS COLETIVOS LATINO-AMERICANOS:
o teatro de grupo como tática estético-política de resistência

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 doi.org/10.70446/ephemera.v8i14.7969

**Praxis as developed by some Latin American collectives:
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Abstract: This essay focuses on the characteristic praxis of group theater considering the works, creation processes and forms of organization of some collectives as aesthetic-political tactics for confronting so-called dictatorial cultures. When seeking to identify the roots of this type of organization and theatrical production, diverse ramifications are found, involving territorialities and common elements, such as the need to develop theatrical practices that promote dialogues, debates, reflections and social transformations. Aiming to break with the business and marketing options of art, collectives were formed with proposals for horizontal relationships around experimentation with creative procedures, theatrical forms and how to share productions and gauge public reception. One of the founding elements in this process is the development of epic forms related to the framework of dialectical epic theater. This epistemology encompasses historical subjects, social contradictions, as well as subjectivities, crossed by the geographical, historical, cultural, social and subjective crossroads that define territories. From the conception of the show as an aesthetic-historical-social experiment, in contexts considered dictatorial, the aim is to explain the ways in which some Latin American theater groups face times of oppression. To this end, the so-called collective-collaborative forms of production are reaffirmed as alternatives to the hegemonic capitalist mode of production. The study contemplates some roots of group theater; the concept of dramatics, the forms of collective-collaborative organization of theatrical work and epic theater as a way of confronting dictatorial contexts in the work of the groups *Teatro El Galpón* from Montevideo, Uruguay, and Coletivo Dolores Boca Aberta Mecatrônica de Artes from São Paulo, Brazil.

Keywords: group theater; dramaturgies; collective-collaborative production; epic theater; popular theater.



**As práxis desenvolvidas por alguns coletivos latino-americanos:
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Resumo: Enfocam-se, na presente reflexão, as práxis características do teatro de grupo, considerando algumas obras, processos de criação e formas de organização de alguns coletivos como táticas estético-políticas de enfrentamento às chamadas culturas ditatoriais. Ao buscar identificar as raízes desse tipo de organização e produção teatral, são encontradas ramificações diversas, envolvendo territorialidades e elementos comuns, como a necessidade de desenvolver práticas teatrais que promovam diálogos, debates, reflexões e transformações sociais. Objetivando romper com as opções empresariais e mercadológicas da arte, coletivos se formaram com propostas de relação horizontalizadas, em torno de experimentações de procedimentos de criação, de formas teatrais e de como compartilhar as produções e de aferir a recepção do público. Um dos elementos fundantes nesse processo trata-se do desenvolvimento das formas épicas relacionadas ao arcabouço do teatro épico dialético. Essa epistemologia abarca os sujeitos históricos, as contradições sociais, bem como as subjetividades atravessadas pelas encruzilhadas geográficas, históricas, culturais, sociais e subjetivas que definem os territórios. A partir da concepção do espetáculo como experimento estético-histórico-social, em contextos considerados ditatoriais, pretende-se explicitar modos pelos quais alguns grupos teatrais latino-americanos enfrentam tempos de opressão. Para tanto, reafirmam-se as chamadas formas de produção coletivo-colaborativas como alternativas ao modo de produção capitalista hegemônico. O estudo contempla algumas raízes do teatro de grupo; o conceito de dramaturgias no plural, as formas de organização coletivo-colaborativas do trabalho teatral e do teatro épico como enfrentamento aos contextos ditatoriais no trabalho dos grupos Teatro El Galpón, de Montevideu, Uruguai, e Coletivo Dolores Boca Aberta Mecatrônica de Artes de São Paulo, Brasil.

Palavras-chave: teatro de grupo; dramaturgias; produção coletivo-colaborativa; teatro épico; teatro popular.



1 Introduction

A espera na fila imensa
E o corpo negro se esqueceu
Estava em San Vicente
A cidade e suas luzes
Estava em San Vicente
As mulheres e os homens
Coração americano
Um sabor de vidro e corte
(SAN Vicente, 1972)

Milton Nascimento's song mentions the dictatorial processes that took place in Latin America, evoking the genocide, violence, persecution and exile of men and women in various countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay. Playwright Aderbal Freire-Filho (1941-2023), in his preface to the biographical book of the *Teatro El Galpón* group (Domínguez, 2020), one with the longest trajectory in the history of Latin American theater, addresses real and fictional characters. For Aderbal, the real characters are those imagined, who come to life and populate the lives of the people who come into contact with them based on what is said about them. And the fictional ones are the authors, of whom little is known and therefore lack reality. San Vicente, an imaginary city that is both blood and chocolate, thus represents several real Latin American cities that have lived and are living through processes of effective resistance in their political, artistic and symbolic-cultural aspects. The (often unknown) characters from the history of civil-military dictatorships are present in the authoritarian behaviors that continue to exist in our social environment and haunt us with the constant threat of their totalitarian return.

Aderbal cites the processes of resistance and confrontation that members of El Galpón have gone through, "[...] real people who become characters to regain their power of reality" (Domínguez, 2020, p. 11¹). Histories of the official theaters give a partial account on the history of theater, often suppressing and misrepresenting the histories of so-called political and popular theaters, even appropriating many of their elements. However, these foundations of resistance are being revisited, as they are the milestones of political initiatives that have spread across various countries and cities, forming a web of aesthetic and poetic relations with the territories. They involve theatrical practices with common elements and procedural, thematic, and artistic peculiarities of the different collectives that represent group theaters around the world.

In this way, the construction and sharing of shows (combined with other training and reflection activities) by certain groups, based on different artistic-pedagogical frameworks, presuppose sensitive transformations in social relational forms inspired by alternative ways of organizing group theaters, including those inspired by the organizational forms of collectives that make/carry popular forms of ancestral culture. Unlike possible schematizations of dialectical theater, this refers to a complex system that transposes the dialectical worldview onto the stage and its form of production.

1 "[...] personas reales se vuelven personajes, para recobrar su poder de realidad" (Domínguez, 2020, p. 11).



Such a proposition allows for inventiveness, relations between different contexts and leaps in quality, from which artists and audiences, works and society, group performance and territories, establish a common vocabulary and partnerships. Thus, in contemporary times, the so-called epic methods spread to the alternative forms of production characteristic of group theater, assuming a diversity of manifestations based on the polyphonic and multiplying creativity practiced by different theatrical collectives.

In the 19th century, following the French Revolution (1789), the bourgeoisie consolidated its hold on power and sought aesthetics to convey its ideals. In parallel, the development of industry gave rise to the working class which expanded after the Industrial Revolution. Socialist ideals are strengthened by confronting exploitative processes and organizing workers in opposition to the bourgeois desire to expand the market. In 1871, the Paris Commune was formed, an experiment based on the First Workers' International of 1864, which brought together workers from Europe and the United States.. In this context, theater became a relevant form of expression and dialogue, and several experiments emerged in this wake: André Antoine's *Théâtre Libre* ('Free' Theater), created in 1887, in Paris, which would inspire Otto Brahm's *Freie Bühne* (Free Stage), in 1889, in Berlin; the Independent Theater, in 1891, in London; and the Moscow Art Theater (MAT) in Russia, in 1898, whose experimental laboratories were the breadbasket of modern Russian theater. These were created out of the need to train performers and creative collectives based on the new stage configurations linked to naturalistic plays written in consonance with social reality.

Likewise, laboratories were developed by the theaters of André Antoine, Erwin Piscator (1893-1966), Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) and others to associate research and creation of theater understood as a whole (dramaturgy, scenery, music, acting, cinema) according to the proposed productions. To emphasize social issues it was necessary to produce plays and find new forms for these contents, and consequently the coherent search for new modes of production. Creative collectives then emerged, stimulating research in the performing arts and experimentalism which, in the quest to expand the audience, also opened up new possibilities for reading the works. This process affected the perspective of theater creation, transforming the relation between text and scene and giving birth to theater directors. The so-called 'dramatics' emerge thusly, encompassing elements of music, sets, costumes and props which were elaborated based on the proposed composition.

In this regard, the casts contributed to constructing the works using different procedures. Theatrical language was approached as research theater, and studios, workshops and laboratories were set up in various countries like Germany, by Piscator and Brecht, and Russia/USSR, by Stanislavski (1863-1938) and Meierhold (1874-1940). The filmmaking concept of assemblage introduced onto the stage historical documents, reports, images, videos and other resources, and the term collaboration already appeared in Piscator's (1968) writings, for example. Part of the European theatrical production from the late 19th century and early 20th century instigated a reaction from opponents of the theatrical experiments developed in that period, which set in motion the process of resuming the hegemonic realist movement. As seen in the recent coups imposed in



national political history, the advance of popular movements is attacked by reactionary sectors. In line with the “open” theaters, independent theaters emerged. In Latin America, the *Teatro Nuevo* (New Theater) appeared in the late 1950s under the influence of Brechtian praxis. According to Beatriz Rizk:

Nonetheless, the New Theater occupied an important place in the development of Latin American theater since it forced its makers to look inwards, and faced with the obvious lack of playwriting that could address the surrounding reality, collective creation emerged as a viable alternative that has borne and continues to bear fruit in Latin American performing arts. Additionally, *theatrical work* was taken on as research, as an investigation that extended into many fields, both its own and others, and perhaps most importantly of all actor training was understood as a laboratory for experimentation, including techniques and strategies developed both inside and outside the countries of origin (Rizk, 2016, p. 5, emphasis in the original).

Beatriz Rizk places the emergence of independent theater with the founding of Leonidas Barletta's *Teatro del Pueblo* in Buenos Aires in 1931. In Montevideo, the *Teatro del Pueblo* appears in 1937 (Rizk, 1987). Thematic and structural renewal in theater developed based on the historical context of social movements and independent theaters developed specific characteristics and multiplied in Latin American countries between the 1930s and 1970s. Historical determinants included: the moral and economic malaise of the post-World War II era in the West; the Cuban Revolution in the 1950s, which highlighted the class struggle in Latin America's socio-economic and political context in the second half of the 20th century; the denationalization of growing industry in favor of the foreign market; the foreign debts that postponed the exit of several Latin American countries from underdevelopment; and the class structure.

According to Rizk (Rizk, 1987, p. 41), the new theater came from an eclectic background influenced by epic theater, which in turn drew predominantly on popular tradition, *commedia dell'arte*, Elizabethan theater, the theater of the Spanish Golden Age and *proletkult* theater, influenced by the Russian Revolution and active in the Soviet Union through the 1920s, and its counterpart *agitprop* in Germany. “Both types of theater developed forms of street theater, circus, *vaudeville*, which corresponded to the so-called ‘living newspapers’ in which almost fresh news was dramatized, giving way to improvisation and commentary” (Rizk, 1987, p. 41²). Rizk lists the names “[...] identity theater, revolutionary theater, committed theater, historical theater or theater of violence, theater of social or documentary criticism, avant-garde theater [...]” (Rizk, 1987, p. 19³) and states that out of these, the one that comes closest to reality is popular theater “[...] because *Teatro Novo* is basically popular theater” (Rizk, 1987, p. 19⁴). She also highlights the call for “[...] a

2 “Ambos tipos de teatro desarrollaron formas de teatro callejero, del circo, del vaudeville, que luego correspondieron a los llamados ‘periódicos vivos’ en los que se teatralizaban las noticias casi en fresco dando paso a la improvisación y al comentario” (Rizk, 1987, p. 41).

3 “[...]teatro de identidad, teatro revolucionario, teatro comprometido; teatro histórico o teatro de la violencia; teatro de crítica social o documental; teatro de la vanguardia” (Rizk, 1987, p. 19).

4 “[...]por cuanto el Nuevo Teatro es básicamente un teatro popular” (Rizk, 1987, p. 19).



new relationship with a new audience in new conditions of organizational and economic space. As far as artistic creation is concerned, it followed the epic premises on critical distancing established by Bertolt Brecht” (Rizk, 2016, p. 4).

For Bonilla Picado, the *Teatro de Brinquedo* in 1927 in Brazil, the *Teatro de Ulisses* in 1928 in Mexico and the *Teatro do Povo* in Argentina began a new stage in Latin American theater (Picado, 1988). In observing the organizational methods of different theater groups in Latin America, the author considers three relevant aspects: the creation of a theatrical movement, the development of the theatrical act formed by the unity of five elements (authors, directors, actors, stage and audience) and the choice of repertoire.

2 Developments in contemporary times

Beatriz Rizk cites the influence of Spanish production, especially that of the university group La Barraca led by Federico García Lorca (1898-1936), as a precursor of collective creation group, in addition to the *Teatro Proletário* and the *Companhia de Teatro Revolucionário—Teatro do Povo de Casona* (Rizk, 1987). Experiences of collective creation emerged in this context, including the *Teatro Mambí* (cited by Rizk as a precursor to these processes) and the *Teatro Escambray*, in Cuba; the *Teatro El Galpón*, in Uruguay; the *Él Teatro Libre de Córdoba*, Argentina; the *Grupo Aleph*, in Chile; the *Teatro de Arena*, in Brazil; the *La Candelaria* and *Teatro Experimental de Cali* groups, in Colombia (Rizk, 1987). In 1947, the Uruguayan Federation of Independent Theaters already existed, made up of 17 groups. One of the longest-lasting examples in the world is the Uruguayan group *Teatro El Galpón*, which completed 75 years in 2024. Its performance in groups, which create different shows for different types of audiences, has training as one of its longevity pillars, in addition to a strong relation with the territory, social groups and the audience. According to Rizk (1987), the El Galpón group emerged within the independent theater movement in Latin America, and in Uruguay the groups were united with popular struggles against the dictatorship of the time.

In Brazil, we can highlight some groups that were configured based on this new Latin American theater: the *Teatro do Estudante de Pernambuco* (TEP), the *Movimento de Cultura Popular do Recife* (MCP), the *Centros Populares de Cultura da União Nacional dos Estudantes* (CPCs of UNE), the *Núcleo Teatro Independente*, *Teatro de Arena*, the *Grupo Opinião*, the *Teatro Paulista do Estudante*, the *Teatros Operários Anarquistas*, the *Teatro Popular União e Olho Vivo* (TUOV), among others. Since then, several groups have been created, some of which are still active. Brazilian groups belonging to group theater are continuations in the 21st century of the collectivized processes that began in the 20th century. The collectives related to this movement have examples in several Latin American countries, and they also demand the presence of themes and issues of their territories/populations and macropolitical aspects in their works and work projects. According to Beatriz Rizk:



With the arrival of postmodernity, a “cultural shift” occurred that brought with it a change in sensitivity in the way of perceiving the environment, history and, above all, culture. The representation of reality (then perceived as unfinished and inexhaustible) had to respond to the fall of the past order of things—pushed, furthermore, not only by the devaluation of left-wing utopian thought, but also by the cultural centralization of the “other” (from the point of view of the traditional canon makers), understanding as such the feminine/feminist discourse and that of minorities, whether racial, ethnic, social, gender or sexuality (Rizk, 2016, p. 6).

This context, combined with the term “dictatorial cultures” (Mirza; Remedi, 2009), refers to so-called dictatorial behaviors, which remain present as a cultural heritage arising from dictatorial governments and processes. Even if one does not live, in practice, and considering government administrative issues, in a dictatorship, authoritarian, coercive and antidemocratic behaviors remain in the daily lives of societies, as can be observed in the organization of various institutions that uphold procedures and a certain authoritarian ideological framework. We only need to consider, in Brazil and in other countries around the world, the resurgence of reactionary waves and the processes of confronting disputes that have occurred in society, from the perspective of the entire ideological corollary and the right-left polarization. Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment (2015) and mandate revocation (2016) followed by the result of the polls, leading to the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president, mark countless setbacks and loss of social rights throughout Brazil.

Considering the trajectories of the groups *Coletivo Dolores* (originally starting their activities as *Dolores Boca Aberta Mecatrônica de Artes* in São Paulo, in 2000) and *Teatro El Galpón*, from Montevideo, Uruguay (active since 1949), we have examples of resistance actions due to the struggle to remain in artistic activity and the openly political approach. Although in different ways and with numerous singularities, both companies contemplate alternative production methods, shows built in a collective-collaborative manner, cultural presence in their operating territories and the search for relationships with the public in the set of actions developed.

Due to these articulated elements, the *Coletivo Dolores* and *Teatro El Galpón* constitute the scope of the research. Two works of the first will be commented on: *Bóris não está pronto* (Boris is not ready, 2023) and *Anas, Miquitas, Coras e Outras Mulheres* (Ana, Miquitas, Coras and Other Women, 2023) given their thematic, procedural and formative relevance. From the second, we will discuss *Proyecto Galeano, Latinoamericano* [Galeano Project, Latin American], whose author and director is the Brazilian Aderbal Freire-Filho. When I was in Montevideo, in December 2019, I conducted interviews with members of the El Galpón group and part of the cast.

In the search to identify epic methods in the aforementioned productions, some of them are highlighted based on the concepts of “dramatics” (dramaturgy of the text, scene, staging and actor), collective-collaborative construction and actorship. Moreover, understanding the complexity of the works as belonging to dialectical epic-dialectical theater multiplies the facets of the study, since it concerns an epistemology of theatrical practice that leads to the constitution of work procedures coherent with the need to reinvent forms, experimenting and creating structures and contents in the face of prominent debates in contemporary times.



3 Collective-collaborative creation processes

Popular cultural collectives already used production methods that would be adopted in collaborative processes, and which became characteristic of group theater as an alternative form of theatrical production. The concept of actorship, discussed and practiced today, appears in the late 19th century and early 20th century when actor participation in theatrical creative process began to be discussed to create layers of understanding beyond the textual interpretation. The staging perspective, leaving aside the role of bringing onto stage what is proposed in the text, enhanced the layers of meaning and show construction. By taking the text as a starting point, the creative set was multiplied. In one way or another, the work of surveying and creating scenes was strengthened from Symbolism in France, from the experiences of the Freie Volksbühne in Germany, from agitpropism in Russia's transition to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Drama work started leaving the office to be produced in rehearsal rooms.

In the 20th century, after several names like Eugenio Barba, the concept of stage dramaturgy or show dramaturgy began to be used to name the processes of sharing in the creative act. It involved the concept of dramaturgies, the use of formal methods characteristic of popular forms of culture and the content of theatrical performances considered pertinent to the experiential interests of the audiences for which they are intended—in addition to seeking the representation of these populations in the forms of production and reception. Horizontal creation processes predominate in this organizational form, in which participants assume specific roles in work development and group management. We may argue that the collaborative production method of group theater takes up some of the popular roots of the Brazilian cultural production method. Both the collaborative production mode of group theater and the production mode of practitioners of popular and traditional Brazilian cultural manifestations have been the target of appropriation, disqualification and suppression, as a result of the permanent symbolic dispute existing in the aforementioned processes of domination and resistance.

In investigating the presence of traditional Brazilian popular culture manifestations in the works of the *Teatro Popular União e Olho Vivo* (TUOV), we concluded that the predominant characteristic of this presence was related to the collective-collaborative, horizontal mode of production, with a very marked concern regarding the training of militant actors which necessarily includes a certain commitment to political and social issues. TUOV's way of doing things, that is, the attitude towards the horizontal mode of production—in the sense described by Benjamin (1994), of transforming spectators into collaborators—brings it closer to the way of doing things characteristic of groups that carry on manifestations of traditional popular culture, based on sharing experiences as a pedagogical stance. In São Paulo and throughout the country, TUOV represents a model of popular organization and production, as is the case of the Dolores Boca Aberta collective. Still concerning the collective work at TUOV, in the book “Em busca de um teatro popular” [In search of a popular theater] (2007), César Vieira explains the way in which the texts of *Teatro Popular União e Olho Vivo* were constructed,



which systematized the theatrical by establishing a Dramaturgy Commission, constructing drama files, script and final text, always in friction with the actors' performance in improvisations, in addition to working on the understanding, relevance and embouchure of the text (Vieira, 2007). Regarding the collaborative process, Luís Alberto de Abreu comments on the importance of the processes carried out at the *Escola de Teatro Livre de Santo André* for his experimentation:

[...] The collaborative process comes, in direct lineage, from the so-called collective creation, a proposal for the construction of theatrical performances that gained prominence in the 1970s, in the 20th century, and which was characterized by the broad participation of all members of the group in the creation of the performance. [...] If the conventional creative process had found its balance based on the hierarchy represented by the text and the specialization of functions, the search for an efficient collective process continued its path in search of answers to the problems that its lack of method presented. What we call today the collaborative process was further developed in the early 1990s. São Paulo-based *Teatro da Vertigem*, directed by Antonio Araújo, and the *Escola Livre de Santo André* Free are references in this search for horizontal artistic relationships between its members [...] (Abreu, 2010, p. 166-167).

Currently, there is a true polyphony in collective-collaborative creative processes, producing countless actions and shows with strong roots in the territories, as is the case of São Paulo's theater. Authors, directors, directors, actors and other performing artists open themselves up to the creation of shows in collective-collaborative processes that are also permeable to audience perception and interaction, who complete the work with their world views, especially in the 21st century. Epic forms and methods, notably made up of elements and practices pertinent to popular forms of culture and/or representational manifestations, configure the thematic, formal and procedural inspirations for the creations.

In Alexandre Mate's view (2015), Group Theater can be considered a historical subject, especially since the late 1990s. When addressing theater production in São Paulo, the playwright explains the relevance of collective actions and movements such as *Arte Contra a Barbárie* [Art Against Barbarism], the creation of the *Cooperativa Paulista de Teatro* and the fight for the Municipal Theater Promotion Program.

Below are some examples of São Paulo theater groups in their respective decades of beginning activities, among which is the Dolores group. In the 1950s: *Teatro de Arena* – 1953, *Teatro Paulista do Estudante* – 1955, *Teatro Oficina* – 1958; In the 1960: *Teatro Popular União e Olho Vivo* (TUOV) – 1966; In the 1970s: *Núcleo Teatro Independente* – 1970, *Grupo Ventoforte* – 1974, *Engenho Teatral* – 1979; In the 1980s: *Grupo XPTO* – 1984, *Grupo Sobrevento* – 1986, *Cia. Ocamorana* – 1988, *Cia. Circo Mínimo* – 1988, *Os Satyros* – 1989, *Pombas Urbanas* – 1989; In the 1990s: *Cia. Truks* – 1990, *Folias D'Arte* – 1990, *Parlapatões* – 1991, *Teatro da Vertigem* – 1992, *Fraternal Cia. de Artes e Malasartes* – 1993, *Cia. do Latão* – 1996, *Brava Companhia* – 1998, *Ágora Teatro* – 1999, *Cia. Teatro Balagan* – 1999, *Companhia Livre* – 1999; In the 2000s: *Cia. de Teatro Heliópolis* – 2000, *Coletivo Dolores Boca Aberta Mecatrônica de Artes* – 2000, *Os Fofos Encenam* – 2001, *Companhia Estável* – 2001, *Cia. Antropofágica* – 2002; *Grupo XIX de Teatro* – 2004, *Grupo Clariô de Teatro* – 2005,



Cia. Teatro Documentário – 2006, *Refinaria Teatral* – 2007, *Coletivo Negro* – 2007, *Companhia do Tijolo* – 2008, *Cia. Mungunzá* – 2008; In the 2010s: *Coletivo Estopô Balaio de Criação*, *Memória e Narrativa* – 2011, *A Próxima Companhia* – 2014.

Epic theater has been recognized by many of the collectives mentioned, in addition to *Coletivo Comum*, *Cia. de Teatro Estudo de Cena*, *Trupe Olho da Rua* (from Santos), *Companhia Teatro da Cidade* (from São José dos Campos), *Trupe da Lona Preta*, and many others as a poetics that privileges social relevant topics and that presupposes the critical participation of the audience as a partner in materializing the theatrical phenomenon, thus adopting the perspective of dramatics. These were built based on procedures of collective-collaborative creations, seeking more horizontal forms of organization in the everyday life of groups. Thus, many of these groups adopt the coherent perspective of the epic theater in their social radicalization aiming to transform social relations. Moreover, each person invents procedures and creative processes that are potentially capable of bringing to shows prominent contemporary themes and encompassing representations and reverberations in audiences.

4 Some stage show results

In this article, we will focus on one group from this context, Dolores Boca Aberta Mecatrônica de Artes, and one of our most important ancestors in Latin America, El Galpón, showing some of their epic stage show results that highlight the form of production and the presence of characteristic elements common to both collectives. The shows presented use epic form, historical subjects and the prospect of evoking in the audience contemporary reflections on necessary social transformations. As Roger Mirza quotes “[...] if every culture aspires to be conscious of itself, theater offers the possibility of an elaboration of this consciousness outside the centers of power and the mainstream media” (Mirza, 2017, p. 7⁵). This is a common assumption of the El Galpón and Dolores groups, demonstrated by their actions in the territories, by their horizontal form of organization, and by the shows they produce, reaffirming their ethical and aesthetic coherence.

4.1 *Proyeto Galeano, Latinoamericano*, by *Teatro El Galpón*

Written and directed by the Brazilian Aderbal Freire-Filho, the play was on show in 2019 at the headquarters of the El Galpón group, in the César Campodónico hall. Its cast included Anaclara Alexandrino, Clara Méndez, Dante Alfonso, Elíza Vignoli, Héctor Guido, Myriam Gleijer, Pierino Zorzini, Rodrigo Tomé and Silvia García. Marked by a counter-colonial perspective,

5 “[...] Si toda cultura aspira a ser consciente de sí misma, el teatro ofrece la posibilidad de una elaboración de esa consciencia fuera de los centros de poder y de los grandes medios de comunicación” (Mirza, 2017, p. 7).



the show intersects eminently Latin American issues addressed by Eduardo Galeano (1940-2015) in various books, studies and social stances with the history of Latin America and a look at his life, work and contributions to reflecting on the processes of confronting dictatorships and their authoritarian remains. Aside the dramaturgical approach, the exceptionally well-finished staging by Aderbal Freire-Filho (1941-2023) showed his mastery of collective-collaborative construction and epic theater, highlighting actorality and text appropriation, and the theatrical research by the casting.

Aided by assistant director Marcos Acuña, Aderbal's play is based on texts by Eduardo Galeano, taking the theme presented in "Open Veins in Latin America" as a unit. According to the show's synopsis, it is a work whose dramatic development extends beyond the stage. "It wants to talk about America's past and present in a way that can integrate the past realities, told and sung by Galeano, with the present facts that each spectator, due to their knowledge of our current realities, can associate with what they hear and see in the performance" (Proyeto Galeano, *Latinoamericano*, 2019). In other words, the work (the story) is put on stage, but it transcends it and continues in the audience and outside the theater. Towards the end of the play, an actor says: "This show goes on and you're condemned to watch it if you keep your eyes open; finishing it is up to you: closing your eyes or acting" (Proyeto Galeano, *Latinoamericano*, 2019).

According to Aderbal Freire-Filho, in the show's synopsis, "different scenic treatments were used—narrative, dramatic, epic, realistic, caricatured, assuming anachronism without shame" (Proyeto Galeano, *Latinoamericano*, 2019). Dante Alfonso's set has as its backdrop an illustration drawn in black on white fabric (image 1) which acts as a show summary from the point of view of Latin America in Galeano's perspective. The well-known image of América Invertida (Inverted America) (1943), originally produced by the Spanish-Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres García, challenges the US view of America as a monopoly. Inés Iglesias and Eduardo Guerrero sign the lighting, Fernando Condon designed the sound space, Nelson Mancebo developed the costumes, and executive production was taken up by Patricia Medina and assistant director Arturo Fleitas.



Image 1 - *Proyeto Galeano* show



Source: Alejandro Persichetti, 2019

Another important highlight in Uruguayan theater is the production by the permanent cast of the Comedia Nacional Uruguaya, based at *Teatro Solis*, *El salto de Darwin* (2022) by Sergio Blanco, directed by Roxana Blanco. The cast formed by Camilo Ripoll, Fernando Diansi, Gal Groisman, Jimena Pérez, Joel Fazzi and Tomás Piñeiro staged the story of a family that crosses the country to take the ashes of their son recently murdered in the last battle of the Falklands War, in Port Darwin, on the second weekend of June 1982. All the action takes place on National Route No. 40, in which the family crosses Argentina from North to South in a 1971 Ford Falcon.

Founded in 1947, the Comedia Nacional showed in practice the interweaving of tradition and avant-garde, academic discipline and experimentation, since the scenic mastery and epic structure and interpretation were impressive, with precise and poetically sensitive dramatic, narrative and symbolic nuances, skillfully manipulating emotions, reflections, criticism and interpretative virtuosity. Evidently, the continuous structuring of such an initiative provides this immersion and development; however its form of organization is verticalized, therefore different from group theater.

As Domínguez (2020) writes, in 1950, while construction work on the *Teatro El Galpón* space was progressing, the group launched its first bulletin, in which they announced an “Artists’ Ball” to raise funds. In it, they presented a lighting, sound and technical equipment plan for the theater, encouraged employees to visit the works in progress, and textually explained the purpose of creating a school for training actors, including a study plan (Domínguez, 2020, p. 29). Another article in the same bulletin addressed the crisis of independent theaters, threatened by the lack of official and popular support. For Domínguez, the crisis has accompanied the development of Uruguayan theater practically up until the present day. This led to the search for texts and own productions that could be of interest to different audiences. Moreover, the El Galpón group toured with its plays in several neighborhoods of Montevideo and these movements demonstrate the group’s scope for the collaborative process, the concern with the reception of the works (in contact with different audiences) and the search for an effective communication language.



4.2 *Anas, Miquitas, Coras e Outras Mulheres* and *Bóris não está pronto*, by the *Coletivo Dolores Boca Aberta Mecatrônica de Artes*

Aiming to scenically address the topics of machismo and patriarchy from a perspective that recognizes these structures as determinants of the current capitalist system, the *Coletivo Dolores* divided itself into two groups. One group, formed primarily by men, staged *Bóris não está pronto*; the other, formed primarily by women, staged *Anas, Miquitas, Coras e Outras Mulheres*. According to the group, “As Coras is a research group of the Dolores Boca Aberta Collective that emerged in mid-2015 with the intent of researching the poetics of writers Cora Coralina, Carolina Maria de Jesus, Pagu, narratives and memories related to the female universe. It proposes the investigation of femininity, contrasting the sacred feminine and pointing to feminism as a possible and transformative dialogue for men and women” (*Anas, Miquitas, Coras e Outras Mulheres*, 2023).

Anas, Miquitas, Coras and Other Women ends with the lines “My Body is Feminist. My Voice is Socialist. My Womb is Anti-Racist. My Pleasure is Internationalist” (*Anas, Miquitas, Coras e Outras Mulheres*, 2023). While these lines are being spoken, bread and a glass of wine are shared among the cast. Striking, the scene increasingly gains connections with the whole of the show, which discusses subthemes such as the “world of work, social construction of women, motherhood, domestic work and its invisibility, sexuality and standardization of female bodies” (*Anas, Miquitas, Coras e Outras Mulheres*, 2023). Fernando Oliveira’s music is part of the musical conception of the show, fundamental to bringing the audience closer to an invitation to share, starting with a reference to a place of memories and collective communion. The audience receives medicinal herbs that can be allusions to healing processes, but also to the opening of rituals and paths. Beyond the texts, the poetic aspects gain strength whenever they communicate with the public in a sensitive or direct way, in an atmospheric or playful way, which demonstrates the immense potential of such a work to reflectively and respectfully dialogue with a contingent of women and men in diverse spaces and communities. A dialogue and situations with which they can identify without, however, any type of explicit moral being addressed to them, just a condition of exploitation to be eradicated and transformed in our social relations.

In this respect, several elements of *Bóris não está pronto* account for the reflective elaboration on the social construction of masculinity. Broadly conceived as “machismo,” the concept is explored in depth in the play to encompass the socio-historical-cultural damage caused by the construction of a violent, sectarian, intransigent human profile, to debate the facets of class and gender relations regarding how men’s behavior is formed in a context determined by relations of material and symbolic production, and to expose the sheer violence perpetrated by capitalist exploitation. The layers of the play’s (by Luciano Carvalho and Tiago Mine) dramatic construction, the staging and the acting make up an elaborate complex whole in which the female gender is presented phantasmagorically—at times in the memory of the men on stage, the attire of a loudspeaker, or the voices that echo from it. However, the texts are by male authors:



Charles Bukowski and Boris Vian, who inspired its title. The voices are done by Camila Grande, Erika Viana and Tati Matos.

The show's synopsis also mentions the poetics produced (as a mode of construction and artistic form that comprises the intertwined structure and content): "[...] Focusing on the frailties of man, on the torture of machismo over masculinity and on the consequences of the perpetuation of this social and historical evil, the play relies on the lyrical and epic form to compose a mosaic of man [...]" (*Bóris não está pronto*, 2023). By speaking of a mosaic, it appropriates the image that can symbolize the composition of different materials, colors, textures, amalgamated by assemblage, with "masses and threads" of different types and diverse characteristics. In this way, the work's dramaturgy traces a path that is both bold and playful. With the poetics of the images produced on stage by the cast composed of Cristiano Carvalho, Fernando Couto, João Alves and Tiago Mine, the group addresses the creation of "macho" stereotypes since childhood.

The end of *Bóris não está pronto* brings the worker face to face with the contemporary capitalist system which expropriates from individuals even their last drops of sweat and blood. All of these lines from *Bóris* are presented in paintings that use music, poetry and choreographic drawings with actions related to the founding characteristics of cultural masculinity. Moreover, the epic form provides different moments: comic, acidic and fantastic. Directed by Luciano Carvalho, this is a significant work when considering the form of production of group theater, highlighting the class character in the treatment of the theme. The collective does so in a forceful manner, as it dares to approach the issue of machismo from a class perspective, highlighting the contradictions that exist in social construction. By prioritizing men in various social arrangements, the current social structure produces almost insurmountable impositions of a way of being for men and women. Authoritarian, patriarchal and dictatorial behaviors are naturalized in their material and symbolic determinations, in different environments and social institutions. For this reason, having debates after the presentations enables a somewhat accurate assessment of what touches the audience. In this sense, the scope is precise, consisting of a unique look at this emerging theme today that, even if risking the limit of discomfort, seeks to expose the contradictions of the daily violence to which women and men are exposed. Boris presents himself not as a character, but as a "synthesis of masculinity."

Dolores Boca Aberta Mecatrônica de Arte was born marginal and peripheral, in a socilaist community organization. Since 2000, it unites artistic languages with political actions in a mixture of contestation, expression and the need for survival. It occupies a plot of land in the east zone of São Paulo and organizes community management. Most of its members live in a commune in Guaianases, eastern São Paulo. It produces plays, public sculptures, artistic interventions, songs and poems. The radical nature of its actions is recognized, from the conservative winning of awards to the challenging links with popular movements. Thus, the aforementioned shows reveal the context of their production, as well as the practical investigation of dialectical epic-dialectical procedures



concerning the concept and practice defended by the group, with their permanence in the collective daily life having been constantly evaluated.

5 Final considerations

By relating the selected works of the studied groups, confronting content and structural elements of theatrical works as aesthetic-historical-social experiments, we explained the correlation between the forms of production and sharing procedures as epic methods and the groups' theatrical poetics. Epic theater allows actors to appropriate through their work different points of view for composing characters—from the approach to themes and their possibilities regarding reception. Thus, the performers can permanently review and revisit their stances regarding certain apprehensions about characters and their subjective perception of themselves and the collective as revealing or enhancing a multiple (and usually naturalized) set of contradictions. Similarly, this form of production motivates the collective to check its contradictions, thus refining the social attitude and coherence which results in the making of coherent works. It is, therefore, a methodological proposal that encompasses the hybridism characteristic of postmodern productions.

In investigating the developments and roots of group theaters, we recognize their cultural ancestries (linked to popular forms of culture) in urban performances and in formal methods concerning the structure and content of stage performances by Latin American collectives. Epic theater's perspective, involving dramaturgies (text, staging, scene), actorality and representativities, is revisited under the influence of cultural studies, decolonizing hegemonic views and considering the contributions of different peoples and matrices—Asian, Afrodiasporic and Indigenous—to constitute the histories of world theater, more specifically from Latin American and Brazilian productions. Based on authors such as Rizk and Picado, we can point to the Dolores and El Galpón groups as belonging to the theatrical movements of their territories and, more broadly, continuing independent theater. It is characterized by a conscious choice of repertoire and its form of production and public socialization, often gauging their perceptions through debates and other cultural actions, and by developing a theatrical act that encompasses playwriting in its plurality, intertextuality and collective-collaborative construction.

The dialectical epic-dialectical form, revisited and updated by both groups, confronts the dictatorial context—which sees the majorities represented by racial, ethnic, social, gender or sexuality diversities as lesser—through horizontal organization, rootedness in the territories and Latin American unity. Also according to Roger Mirza (2017), theater offers the possibility of emotionally and intellectually summoning an audience for a collective encounter which unites the symbolic and the emotional in an individual and plural participation, in an art of immediate and ephemeral communication. Hence the importance of reflecting and relating these experiences, their scope and incidence in certain contexts.



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Funding

Not applicable

Ethics Committee Approval

Not applicable

Competing interests

No declared conflict of interest

Research Context

This article is part of a post-doctoral research conducted at the Instituto de Artes at the Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho.

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Not applicable

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**Evaluation Method**

Double-Blind Peer Review

Editors

Ricardo Gomes

Priscilla Duarte

Lídia Olinto

Peer Review History

Submission date: 15 September 2024

Approval date: 28 March 2024