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GROUP THEATER AS A COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE IN THE FACE OF NEOLIBERAL CHALLENGES IN THE URBAN CONTEXT—A BRIEF REFLECTION

O TEATRO DE GRUPO COMO EXPERIÊNCIA COLETIVA FRENTE AOS DESAFIOS DO NEOLIBERALISMO NO CONTEXTO URBANO – UMA BREVE REFLEXÃO

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Group theater as a collective experience in the face of neoliberal challenges in the urban context—a brief reflection

Abstract: This reflection begins with the praxis of group theater, its collectivized mode of organization, and its counter-hegemonic experiences. The text seeks to articulate a range of concepts such as commons, heterotopias, the right to the city, and theoretical approaches to what manifests and is present in the world today. In this sense, this reflection encompasses what can be observed through group theater not only as a form of resistance to the challenges imposed by neoliberalism, but as exercises for a world yet to be born. Through the characteristics that comprise the historical subject of group theater, it seems possible to identify in collective action the practice of equality, justice, guarantee and expansion of social rights from a collaborative, collective, and community-based perspective. The theoretical framework draws on concepts from fields such as urban geography, social psychology, and the performing arts, referencing authors such as David Harvey, Julia Caminha, Michel Foucault, Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, João Tonucci, and André Carrera.
Keywords: group theater; commons; collaborative process; neoliberalism; community.

O Teatro de Grupo como experiência coletiva frente aos desafios do neoliberalismo no contexto urbano—uma breve reflexão

Resumo: A presente reflexão tem por ponto de partida a práxis do teatro de grupo, seu modo de organização coletivizado e suas experiências contra hegemônicas. O texto busca articular uma gama de conceitos como os comuns, as heterotopias, o direito à cidade, teorias e leituras daquilo que se manifesta e se presentifica no mundo na atualidade—e nesse sentido, do que a partir do teatro de grupo pode ser observado como não apenas resistência aos desafios impostos pelo neoliberalismo, mas como exercícios para um novo mundo a nascer. Por meio das características que compõe o sujeito histórico teatro de grupo parece ser possível identificar na atuação coletiva o exercício da igualdade, justiça, garantia e ampliação dos direitos sociais em uma perspectiva colaborativa, coletiva e comunitária. Para o referencial teórico são trazidos conceitos de áreas como a geografia urbana, a psicologia social e as artes cênicas com autores e autoras como: David Harvey, Julia Caminha, Michel Foucault, Pierre Dardot e Christian Laval, João Tonucci e André Carrera.
Palavras-chave: teatro de grupo; comum; processo colaborativo; neoliberalismo; comunidade.

1 Introduction

To begin, we may engage with a practical dimension of the multiple aspects that shape this reflection on group theater, collectivities, and bandos. At this point, it is worth highlighting the historical continuity of artistic nuclei, since within them new groups are constantly being generated. Memberships change, and new strategies are invented to sustain their activities. In moments of uncertainty, even when the broader capitalist system seems unfavorable, these groups continue to make theater—echoing the words of one of the major enthusiasts of popular theater in São Paulo, Lino Rojas[1]: 'when you don't know what to do, do theater.'

The organization of artistic collectives is driven by the shared practice of group theater. This process unfolds through collectivity, at the level of each individual member, shaped by the group's internal conviviality—a dynamic marked by ongoing tensions, contradictions, challenges, and potentials—and extending outward into communication with the public through the reception of performances, pedagogical exchanges, and the many ways in which relationships are built.

Even though these elements are shared, the practical action of each group theater collective results in highly diverse stage work, whether in terms of their research into theatrical languages and use of alternative performance spaces, or the broad range of themes in their productions. These aspects become evident when comparing one theater group to another, as do their modes and structures of production, which reveal major differences. As researcher André Carreira explains:

> The diversity of forms and models that characterizes group theater does not allow us to think of it as a homogeneous whole or something easily identifiable. However, the diversity of theaters gathered under the umbrella of this expression does not prevent us from referring to a movement that sees itself as a specific theatrical field, from which develops its creative processes and political actions, when mentioning this term. (Carreira, 2011, p. 43).

2 Group theater as an exercise in community

Building on André Carreira's statement, we can broadly reflect that group theater collectives come together as forms of community. Their existence reflects both the particular characteristics of each group, and the familial affective bonds, emerging within the urban fabric and creating possibilities for ways of being that run counter to capital. Yet, even as they continue to strive toward collective practice, they are not immune to the pressures that capital imposes on any individual or group living in the same time-space.

1 Born in 1942 in Peru, Lino Rojas Perez was a theater director, playwright and actor who worked mainly in São Paulo, Brazil, where he died in 2005. He conceived and coordinated important projects involving theater, youth and the community. One of his artistic training projects with young people gave birth to the *Pombas Urbanas* group in 1989, in São Paulo.

The constitution of the group is collective, which brings to mind a proverb from Indigenous and African peoples: "It takes a whole village to raise a child," in which the child is the group itself. It is all members, acting in concert, who make its existence, form, and expression in the world possible.

To inhabit the world—and not only when it involves cultural work—should imply a positioning in relation to what is observed around people, to what permeates and crosses their existence. The persistence of the art-life of theater collectives aligned with the historical subject [2] that is group theater in the city of São Paulo, or in other cities across Brazil and Latin America, forms a polyphony bordering on the delirious. This seems incompatible with the society we live in. By the very nature of their praxis propositions, these collectives often challenge the dominance of hegemonic reason.

> To speak of our capacity to transform the world through work—and, in doing so, to transform ourselves—is to presuppose a certain understanding of ourselves as a species. It also involves considering how we might put our imagination into practice, even under constraints that limit the realization of such a project. (Harvey, 2014, p. 271)

3 the hegemonic and initiatives moving against it

Currently defined by neoliberalism, the hegemonic reason presents itself as a very particular idea of democracy, as Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2018) explain n many respects, it stems from an anti-democratic stance: private law should be exempt from any form of deliberation or control, even that which takes the form of universal suffrage. (2018, p. 08). The authors further argue that this rationale produces and provokes suffering

> by this neoliberal subjectivation, the mutilation it imposes on common life, on labor and beyond, is such that we cannot rule out the possibility of a large-scale anti-neoliberal revolt in many countries. However, we must not ignore the subjective transformations brought about by neoliberalism that operate in the direction of social selfishness, the denial of solidarity and redistribution, and that may lead to reactionary or even neo-fascist movements. The conditions for a large-scale confrontation between opposing logics and adversarial forces on a global scale are mounting. (Dardot; Laval, 2018, p. 9)

2 We use the term historical subject of group theater here in reference to the concept employed by Professor Alexandre Mate in his work on the topic. By historical subject, we refer to all agents of social action individuals, groups, or social classes—who take part in the historical process and whose actions affect it. The condition of being a historical subject, both individually and collectively, entails an awareness of the possibilities for historical change and continuity. Thus, given the territorial and historical scope of this research, we adopt the designation historical subject of group theater because we identify, in what we consider to be group theater in the city of São Paulo, a collective consciousness. It is grounded in a relevant analysis of reality and an ethics manifested through the actions of the groups that constitute this historical subject.

How can initiatives like these exist in a financialized city? How can relationships be mediated by something other than money? Each account or performance by a collective, their singular ways of thinking that point to the creation of a sonic unity—a chorus—formed by São Paulo's group theater collectives, is revealed in fragments. We are invited to consider what group theaters can be in the urban landscape in the face of the prevailing system with nuances, particularities, and shared objectives that emerge from praxis.

Following this line of thought, we might rework a phrase[3] by Roberto Unger (1987 *apud* Harvey, 2014, p. 245) saying that, as visionaries, artists of their time glimpse possible futures and do not seem confined to the limits of tradition within which their interlocutors are immersed. The groups aligned with group theater appear to embrace what David Harvey (2014) calls a spatial-temporal (dialectical) utopianism, rooted in present-day possibilities while also pointing toward new trajectories and multiple potential futures.

Group theater's greatest wager lies in communitarianism, as it seeks therein an escape from the normative frameworks and structures that constrain human imagination and reinforce neoliberal individualism. These collective perspectives draw on survival strategies observed in other forms of animal interaction, as illustrated by sociobiological approaches that Harvey (2014) also engages—organisms that gather in groups to increase their chances of survival in adverse environments, such as ants, monkeys, fish, or bees.

There is, however, a clear risk regarding leadership and hierarchy in this context. As Harvey (2014, p. 73) notes, "[...] sects form around charismatic leaders who aim to create their own 'spatial fix' to social problems by founding isolated communities or colonies abroad." In the field of theater, this can be seen in the historical model of actor-manager companies or in the dominance of renowned directors. Similarly, commercial productions are often structured around hierarchical systems and unequal labor relations, typically centered on the figure of the white, cisgender male director as a gravitational force.

Furthermore, it is essential to take a critical and careful view so that our analyses do not fall into the trap of a "puritan horizontalism," which makes it impossible to recognize the contradictions present in group theater practices. The very division of tasks and the various forms of collectivized or alternative organization are exercises, attempts and not complete or ideal models. What emerges from a shared belief in their goals is the idea of collaboration as a means to enable slightly more favorable conditions for existence. In various public statements, director Luiz Carlos Moreira[4] of

3 Originally, the phrase by Umberto Unger reads, "The visionary is the person who claims not to be restricted by the limits of the tradition in which his interlocutors are immersed. It should be noted that visionary thinking is not inherently millenarian, perfectionist or utopian (in the vulgar sense of the term). It does not need to present—and generally, it does not—the image of a society made perfect. But it does require us to be aware of redrawing the map of possible and desirable forms of human association, inventing new models of human association and designing new practical arrangements to give them form" (Unger, 1987, p. 359-360).

4 Luiz Carlos Moreira is the founder of the Engenho Teatral group, which premiered its first show in 1979 and continues to play an important role on the theater scene and in political struggles. The group has its headquarters in various regions of the city of São Paulo and is currently located in the East Zone, next to the Carrão subway station. (ENGENHO, 2023).

Engenho Teatral said that "[...] group theater is not a choice; it is a lack of choice". This is in the sense that there is no art market capable of absorbing the labor force emerging from professional theater schools or university programs. This highlights a significant difference from many other professions in the world of work.

4 Precarization and the alternatives that emerge

We may agree with the statement regarding the labor market, but there is also a search for alternatives, for "spaces of hope" in which to invent other ways of creating, reflecting, and intervening in the world through theater. There is certainly a historically identified precarization in the work of those whose existence is tied to the mode of production characteristic of collective theater. On the other hand, when operating within this framework, a broader horizon opens up—albeit eroded by precarity and uncertainty—for exercising intentionality in the world we live and observe through "dialectical lenses."

Culture can be understood as a sector operating largely within the informal economy when compared to the vast majority of other fields. This is not a new phenomenon and becomes particularly evident when we observe how theater has long established itself precisely through its creative process—its circulation, more intermittent projects—accumulating periods of suspension alongside periods of intense activity. What stands out, however, are the low wages, which fail to correspond to the profession and to the minimum salaries that were arduously secured through the legal recognition of occupations tied to artistic labor.

If we consider the precarization of labor as a feature of neoliberalism, we can trace a direct line that points to theater or even to the cultural field more broadly. It functions as a testing ground for this model, which imposes intense competitiveness among individuals in the field and, according to Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2018), leads to the dismantling and fragmentation of the notion of collectivity

> In addition to sociological and political factors, the very subjective motivations for mobilization are weakened by the neoliberal system: collective action has become more difficult as individuals are subjected to a regime of competition at every level. Corporate management practices, unemployment and precariousness, debt and performance evaluations are powerful levers of inter-individual competition and define new modes of subjectivation. The polarization between those who give up and those who succeed undermines solidarity and citizenship. Electoral abstention, union withdrawal, racism, all seem to lead to the destruction of the conditions for collectivity and, consequently, to the weakening of the capacity to act against neoliberalism (Dardot; Laval, 2018, p. 9, free translation).

5 Practices of the common as alternative and experimentation in collective theater

However, one of the points of sustained intentionality within collectivities lies in the insurgent action of theater groups. They create greater distance from market practices at each deepening of their work and commitment to what is held in common, thereby gaining a certain degree of poetic freedom and potency. Consequently, they face increasing economic difficulties. The balance becomes a complex equation when attempting to weigh values of such distinct natures (economic sustainability versus political approaches). In the search for alternatives to this equation, there are the so-called "practices of the common," which provide a compelling point of support for reflecting on the challenges faced by collective theater opposing the impositions of capital. To approach the concept of the "common," we may rely on the explanation offered by geographer and professor João Tonucci (2017), who explores the concept in depth in his PhD dissertation, explaining that

> the first impulse when trying to define the common is to consult dictionaries, in search of established meanings and etymological roots. In Portuguese, according to the *Houaiss Dictionary* (Houaiss; Villar, 2009, p. 508), the word *comum* dates back (first known or estimated usage) to the 14th century. Its main definitions are: "1 related or belonging to two or more beings or things [...], 2 which is usual, habitual, 3 [...] characterized by simplicity." It is the first meaning that interests us most here. Its origin goes back to the Latin *communis*, an adjective derived from the noun *communitas*, which, according to Roberto Esposito (2010), refers to which is not proper (*proprium*), and begins where proper ends. It is that which belongs to more than one, to many, or to all. It is the "public" in opposition to "private", and the "general" and "collective" in contrast to the "individual." In this sense, the community (and the corresponding common) is never a substance or essence belonging jointly to all who participate in it, since what defines it is precisely its antagonism to what is proper, and therefore to "property" (Tonucci, 2017, p. 36, free translation).

Conceptions of the common stem from discursive abstractions, which may seem like intellectual constructs that fail to take root in everyday praxis. This perceived disconnection from the real world—the difficulty of its practical applicability—becomes evident here, given that the common (Hardt & Negri, 2005) to which we refer is often easily associated with the realm of ideas rather than with daily practice. The common subject operates from a set of ethical and political commitments. They are committed to social emancipation, autonomy, direct democracy, horizontality, rejection of state tutelage, organization in networks, and the occupation of public space—the very city—as a common resource (collective and shared goods and resources). Taken together, the features that define the common seem to belong to, and almost constitute, an antithesis of the real world, appearing closer to something utopian, distant, and incompatible with the possible and lived world.

When we seek to identify how the common manifests in practical life experiments, we encounter what is referred to as commons, which consist of collaborations and self-management

practices, in relationships and forms of collective production, social sharing, and reciprocity. According to Tonucci,

> The word *comum* in Portuguese corresponds to common in English—a term that carries a broader and historically richer etymological density, as well as a wide range of meanings. One important variation is *commons*, a noun that may be used either in the singular (a commons) or in the plural (the commons), to refer to communal lands or shared resources (common lands and common-pool resources). While communal lands in Portugal, (which is homologous to the commons or common lands in England) are called *baldios*, in Brazil this term refers solely to unowned or abandoned spaces. The limited vocabulary related to the common (and its derivatives) in Portuguese is both symptomatic of the distance between such practices and our cultural universe, and a call for the political and theoretical introduction, adaptation, and dissemination of the *common* in our context. "[...] the common emerges whenever a community decides to jointly manage a resource to the well-being of all (Tonucci, 2017, p. 36–37, free translation).

It can be observed in cities when it manifests in the dimension of collective urban experiences, for example, when residents organize communal efforts to plant, paint objects, or maintain equipment in a neighborhood square used by that population. This reveals the city's potential to foster encounters and interweave relations of cooperation and commonality. Such relations are built over time, yet there are also singular events that reframe and render certain moments in the life of the territory memorable. In our case, they highlight the presence of group theater in collective construction. The common resides in collectivized practices carried out through the association of different individuals, materializing through collective action and, on another scale, even in association with the multitude, for instance.

As we have noted, it also emerges in the use of public space, in self-managed cultural spaces, or in creative acts of resistance and transgression. Drawing on the thinking of João Tonucci (2017), the common refers to goods, spaces, and resources (material and/or immaterial) that are produced, shared, used, and collectively managed by a given community through practices and relations of sharing and reciprocity. This takes place through practices generated by the community itself, beyond the scope of the state and the market. It is collectively appropriated by society as a transitional perspective toward a more just city and society, in contrast to the hegemonic capitalist model. "This definition will gain depth throughout the discussion of other theoretical approaches, but it primarily takes shape through the struggles and resistances for the common" (Tonucci, 2017, p. 36). Based on the contributions of various authors, Tonucci presents:

> this way, the common is not a thing or a resource, says Bollier (2014, p. 175–176), but a shared resource associated with a given community and with the protocols, norms, and values created for its collective management, with particular attention to issues of equal access, use, and sustainability. Similarly, for David Harvey (2012), the common should not be construed as a particular kind of thing, asset, or even social process, but rather as a malleable socio-spatial relationship between a specific group and those aspects of its social and/or physical environment that are crucial to its reproduction. These three dimensions of the common—the resource, the community, and the act of communing—are

> interrelated and together constitute an interdependent whole (Tonucci, 2017, p. 37, free translation).

Lefebvre (1999) stated that "[...] urban life presupposes encounters, confrontations among differences, mutual knowledge and recognition (including ideological and political confrontation) of ways of life, of the 'patterns' that coexist in the city" (Lefebvre, 1999, p. 22). Thus, the "shrinking" of spaces for encounter and coexistence in the city are identified as key factors contributing to the loss of urbanity's characteristics as a collective space of relations. At the same time, the group theatre emerges as an agora in which these characteristics are manifested.

Several scholars work on the notion of the common point to it as a constitutive practice of humanity. According to researcher Julia Caminha (2018), there is a constant presence of the common across various societies and spatiotemporal contexts.

> It is important to emphasize that the common is not something new; it was the predominant form before capitalism became the dominant mode of production. In fact, its very end—or the attempt to end it—laid the groundwork for the capitalist advent through the enclosure of English common lands. The commons did not disappear entirely; rather, over the centuries, they were rendered "invisible" by proprietary ideologies, both private and public. New forms of urban enclosure operates through the privatization of public and common areas as part of neoliberal restructuring (Caminha, 2018, p. 9, free translation).

By acknowledging the current challenges, contradictions, and negotiations of urban life, which involve, in addition to the dynamics of capital, the practices of common-making we reconfigure the notion of the public, pointing to possibilities for reconnecting through encounters that take place in public space. As a result, we can further develop thought around the layers that relate to one another and the potential actions of group theater within its territories of creation, its headquarters spaces, and in its performances and activities that unfold across the urban fabric.

The idea of the common should not be understood as a third option beyond the domains of the state and the market, but rather as antagonistic to the management of capital and its modes of production (including both public and private forms) (Hardt & Negri, 2005). In this sense, according to Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval (2017), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri produced the first theorization of the common. Thus, the term "[...] became the designation of a regime of practices, struggles, institutions, and research that open the door to a non-capitalist future" (Dardot; Laval, 2017, p. 18).

Another risk identified is the common becoming associated with the domain or exclusivity of a specific group, as it may increasingly take the form of a closed community over time, what could be described as a kind of sect, as previously discussed with reference to Harvey (2014). This mode of organization runs counter to the fluidity, fluctuation, and porosity characteristic of communal practice. While it may presuppose a certain social unity and collective identity in its functioning, its aim is to reinforce community, not to exclude others or to control who may or may not be present/belong/make use of the space. In fact, such would result in forms of segregation.

When such appropriation and the resulting closure occur, what unfolds is the so-called "tragedy of the commons"[5] (Hardin, 1968 *apud* Tonucci, 2017, p. 41-43), in which the commons no longer represent something shared by all, but are subjected to control under the justification of preservation. In theory, the tangible and intangible practices of the common should not be appropriated in the sense of being acquired, exchanged, or sold. Yet they are subject to tensions along a continuum between free and restricted access. A profound contradiction emerges when the strengthening of a community and its shared goods and resources coincides with the exclusion—and thus the restricted access—of those not belonging to it.

Such issues are frequently encountered when seeking to understand the nature of group theater collectives' headquarters, which do not fit neatly into the category of private space, yet are also not considered public. Even when they receive funding from public budgets or private capital, they maintain a hybrid character, resisting classification under both state or market domains and instead proposing other possibilities beyond the framework defined by capitalism.

These groups operate, albeit on a limited scale, with elements of capital in the "commercialization" of some of their activities (those more accepted by the market), in artistic actions, and even in the use of their spaces by other subsidized projects. Multiple arrangements are possible, and these are in constant flux. The collectives are not bound to fixed forms but are driven by the intention to sustain the group and its activities. In the wake of their experimentation, group theatre collectives work tirelessly to ensure their continuity, though the field remains in motion, with new groups emerging. It is also clear that many others are unable to persist and end up suspending their activities for various reasons.

In returning to the exercise of identifying the commons manifested in collective practices, we find grounding in historical experiences, such as that of Teatro Popular União e Olho Vivo (T.U.O.V.), which since its founding in the late 1960s. Continuing until today, it has employed what is referred to as the "Robin Hood" tactic, i.e., channeling revenue from ticket sales or paid performances for middle-class audiences into free presentations in peripheral neighborhoods. These experiences, accumulated over time, provide a historical foundation for other attempts carried out by newer collectives.

Peripheral and working-class territories are the spaces where the common has long been created, manifested, and lived, as David Harvey (2014) argues. The forces of communality, sharing, and cooperation are constitutive of everyday life in urban areas of the Global South, particularly in

5 According to professors João Tonucci and Mariana de Moura Cruz, "the idea of the 'tragedy of the commons' was developed by American ecologist Garret Hardin in his article 'The Tragedy of the Commons' ([1968] 2009). Hardin argued that the commons were the cause of environmental degradation, based on the argument that resources without owners are unprotected and therefore subject to overexploitation. This neo-Malthusian thesis, which has long since been debunked by historical, anthropological and economic studies showing that communities can sustainably manage their common resources, still supports neoliberal policies of enclosure and privatization of natural and community resources. For a wide-ranging discussion, see: MENDES, Alexandre Fabiano. *Para além da tragédia do comum: conflito e produção de subjetividade no capitalismo contemporâneo.* (PhD dissertation) - Faculdade de Direito, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2012" (Tonucci; Cruz, 2019, p. 4).

working-class territories that contend with structural adversity. In this context, we identify factors that support the institutionalization of the commons, such as informality, survival tactics, collective inventiveness, and social reproduction. There is a reciprocal dynamic: practices nourish the commons, and the commons foster the emergence of new practices. Here, we find a fundamental connection between group theatre and the practices and territorialities of the common.

6 The relationship with the state and the practices of group theater

As we have seen, one of the challenges identified in the notion of commons is overcoming dependence on the state (Kip, 2015 apud Tonucci, 2017, p. 128). However, there remains a continuous and growing effort to secure every possible form of public support. This tension makes it possible to act outside, or somewhat displaced from the realm of commodities.

Within this understanding, we recognize that the survival and ongoing maintenance of group theater collectives often depend on resources external to the commons. As these resources are produced and traded in the sphere of the non-common, they are, by extension, linked to the relationship with both the state and private capital. It is clear that, in contemporary urban settings, it is impossible to be entirely outside the capitalist system. Theater groups that genuinely adhere to the mode of production characteristic of group theater—anti-capitalist by nature—cannot fully escape the rules of capital, which are not confined to the market alone but also permeate public administration.

According to Julia Caminha (2018), Michel de Certeau (2004) points to micro-resistances, micro-freedoms, or the simple capacity for (re)invention through the modification of codes, objects, and the (re)appropriation of space Such practices emerge precisely from people's actions in space, from their arts of doing, their cunning, and their tactics of resistance within consumer society. For Certeau, the ordinary man invents the everyday in diverse ways, seeking to escape the conformism imposed by consumer society. Drawing on various authors, Caminha (2018) identifies points of convergence when she notes that the 'ordinary man' approaches Milton Santos's (2017) concept of the 'slow man'—the common person, rooted in place, who resists external and globalizing forces (Caminha, 2018, p. 7). The researcher also recalls that Lefebvre (1999), in turn, introduces the notion of 'residues': places that remain irreducible to hegemonic systems" (Caminha, 2018, p. 7).

In any case, what these authors collectively suggest is that, although a hegemonic model may prevail, it is never absolute—there is always resistance. As Caminha (2018) notes, this resistance may be 'however small or imperceptible'; there will always be social groups excluded from the capitalist mode of production who seek new or alternative pathways. For Caminha, the residues to which Henri Lefebvre (1999) refers operate from within and disrupt the very systems that seek to absorb them. Thus, gathering these residues is, in itself, a revolutionary act.

It is worth considering that the dominant model generates the very substrata needed for its own overcoming, and that ordinary, slow, or common people are not only survivors but also subjects who seek to live through resistance. The appropriation of space becomes a key trigger for effective resistance. In this sense, group theater, like other small-scale organizations, cannot be relegated to something fleeting, intermittent, or ephemeral as a social phenomenon, since through dialogue and alliance it may foster and amplify broader experiences (and resistances). According to Ana Clara Torres Ribeiro:

> On the reverse side of these mechanisms of power, there emerge social movements expressive of resistance to the oppression stemming from systemic reproduction, linked to the contemporary phase of capitalism. As a consequence, social action resisting the mechanisms of control over collective life tends to take place, or be stimulated in social spaces that until recently were disregarded by the political apparatuses of modernity (public administration, political parties, and trade unions). This action shifts into everyday life, emerging in unexpected public and private spaces at the heart of the social fabric. [...] This profound shift, observed in recent decades, also constitutes one of the interpretive threads for the contemporary valorization of space. In fact, it suggests that social practices [...] have become repositories of utopian energies and, at the same time, new forms of power in action (Ribeiro, 2013, p. 138 as cited in Caminha, 2018, p. 8, free translation).

From the perspective of the collective actions of theater groups aligned with the historical subject of group theater—and with their sense of belonging to public space and the city—the struggle for the right to the city takes shape. This struggle seeks to reorient urban space, with insurgent actions carrying with them alternative (or even new) urbanities and uses, such as the commons. According to Carreira,

> [...] there are countless collective or individual initiatives that aim to create spaces for coexistence or that reclaim the city as a relational space. Theater, as a rule, aligns with this second trend, which already reveals a point of conflict, given that our practices in the urban space also contribute to making visible the tensions that underlie the many different uses of this space. Moreover, we might emphasize the uselessness of theater as a dissident force (Carreira, 2020, p. 16, free translation).

Harvey (2014) proposed political action by citizens as necessary to transform public goods and spaces into commons (Harvey, 2014). "In this way, the commons are not only resources or facilities but also relationships, requiring collective effort to bring them into being, and representing, in turn, the act of resistance through the struggle for collective appropriation" (Caminha, 2018, p. 10, free translation).

7 The collective path in singularity and otherness

The production of subjectivities, otherness, affect, and social interaction forms a kind of logic that should be on the agenda, with a view to fostering insurgent actions and spaces of hope,

in both their concrete and practical construction. Group theater collectives in the cities they reside and through which they circulate with their artistic-political-pedagogical practices would exercise such a logic.

This involves beginning from the possibility of imagining and sharing futures that articulate difference, "the other," "otherness," and the collective on various scales. Each member of a theater collective forms part of the whole and contributes their existence to the continuous process of negotiating the self, the other, and the group as a whole—negotiations that are expressed in apparent fragments composing the image that shapes the resulting mosaic of these interactions: the group itself. Just as the city is collectively produced—and in the process of constructing it, we also produce ourselves—this also occurs, both powerfully and subtly, within and beyond the internal dynamics of the groups, in a fleeting yet continuous sharing of uninterrupted self-formation. According to Jacques Rancière,

> I call the sharing of the sensible the system of sensible evidence that reveals, at the same time, the existence of a 'common' and of the sections that define places and respective parts within it. Therefore, a sharing of the sensible fixes at the same time a shared common and exclusive parts. This division of parts and places is based on a sharing of spaces, times and types of activities that determines the way in which what is common is made available to each other, and how they participate in this sharing (Rancière, 2009, p. 15, free translation).

Since imagination is also a fundamental part of human existence, the boundaries between reality and illusion are blurred in the "subtle action" that the groups carry out in society through the urban space. In their small territories of creation and in their surroundings, practices of the common rooted in the present exercise a vision of future space, creating utopias that are tangible to the eye and in relation to society.

At this point, we must turn our attention to the idea of utopias—visions that inhabit our imagination and often inspire life itself. They function as ideals that drive our commitment to causes and collective mobilizations, sustained by the hope of one day reaching a shared goal. Whenever I reflect on utopia, I am reminded of Eduardo Galeano, who nurtured the desire to move forward through faith in what lies ahead According to Fernando Birri, "Utopia is on the horizon. I take two steps forward, and it moves two steps further. I walk ten steps, and the horizon moves ten steps away. No matter how much I walk, I will never reach it"[6].

However, we must be careful and avoid reproducing concepts uncritically, as there are other meanings, as Harvey (2014) highlighted. Utopias tend to produce hegemonic images of idealized, marvelous, smooth, and orderly spaces that totalize and homogenize any location in which they operate—much like what philosopher Byung-Chul Han describes in his work Saving Beauty (2019). When co-opted by the logic of capital, their closest materializations are often planned neighborhoods, "urban revitalizations," empty streets, and a purist Caucasian presence

6 Fernando Birri, cited by Eduardo Galeano in "Las palabras andantes?", published by Siglo XXI, 1994.

as the model. Furthermore, utopias can also be conceived as fictional narratives not grounded in space. They work with the idea of social organization and the creation of perfect societies, based on a precise determination in which people must be fixed in places/functions to ensure social efficiency, leaving no room for breathing or for the acceptance of difference, in yet another totalizing and universalizing assertion.

Based on this, in this reflection we approach the idea of the common not through utopias, but through heterotopias[7], as explored in the studies of Michel Foucault (2013). There seems to be a similarity in their subversive force, in the drive to seek alternatives and to resist the homogenization of urban experience. By emphasizing contrasts, differences, and the load of heterogeneity that characterizes cities—and especially popular territories—heterotopias frame them as organic and living spaces in which group theater acts as an agent.

The heterotopias with which we are in dialogue offer a perspective that counters monolithic spaces and their immobilizing configurations; they sharpen curiosity about the potential of other orders and disorders, creating fissures in established structures and pointing toward multifaceted paths to spaces that are more dignified and, above all, more solidaristic. What stands out in heterotopias is that the "standard form" and a "universal type" are not part of what is expected. They are diametrically opposed to uniqueness, to the totalizing characteristics that homogenize space, what Foucault calls "sacred space". Their exercise is present across diverse cultures—identified, but not standardized—acting precisely against the grain of that which is classifiable and already seen or repeated. Their discourse is fable: one that creates realities embedded in microphysics and that may bear multiple intentionalities, uses, and contradictions, given their wide scope.

According to Foucault, (2013, p. 52) 'space is the privileged site for understanding how power operates'. There are clear affinities between the concept of the common and that of heterotopias, particularly in their insurgent and contestatory dimensions. At the same time, we must acknowledge that these singular, symbolic, and formal spaces—which give visibility to that which or those who appear to have no place in society—can also function as mechanisms for containing what is not accepted by the Ideological State Apparatuses. Examples include hospitals, prisons, and even institutions such as schools, museums, and libraries.

The action of group theater seems to materialize what Foucault envisioned as an alternative to the dominant discourse imposed by public power structures and established civil society. If, as we have seen, there exists a public space that fails to fulfill its social function, that has been abandoned, and is then occupied artistically—through the actions of theatrical collectives—we then see a practical opposition and a collective and intentional reclamation of that space's potential,

7 According to Michel Foucault, heterotopias are defined as localized utopias, counter-spaces, in opposition to utopias, "[...] with no real place ... essentially and fundamentally unreal" (Foucault, 2001, p. 1574). In his essay Heterotopias, these would be "[...] different spaces, other places, mythical and real contestations of the space in which we live", such as psychiatric clinics, retirement homes or prisons, which can be places of ideal contestation and purification or places of deviation, in which there is an allocation of what society has at its margins (Foucault, 2013, p. 20).

desacralizing its ownership and reclaiming the common power of inventing new possibilities. As Foucault stated

> Certainly, there has been a theoretical desacralization of space—initiated, for instance, by Galileo's work—but we may not yet have achieved a practical desacralization. A range of untouchable oppositions that institutions and practices have not yet dared to challenge—oppositions we tend to accept as entirely given, may still govern our lives. These include the divides between private and public space, family and social space, cultural and functional space, leisure and work space, all of which remain animated by a hidden sacralization. (Foucault, 2009, p. 413).

The exercises of group theater collectives are practices that are almost ephemeral, like theater itself, which erupt into urban space and populate the imagination through the impulses of collectives in dialogue with their surroundings. They foster new perspectives on old landscapes through a process of continuous research that resists market-driven and seasonal logics.

The praxis of group theater lies in its constant experimentation and in the historical journey that discovers procedures, clues, and errors in its approaching its goals. There is still much work to do and their actions cannot be idealized. We must observe the mobilizing eruptions of varying intensities and qualities operating in cities, yet constrained by dominant logics. Group theater is shaped by action driven by collective sensitivity and connection, not by a hollow discourse detached from practice. It enacts its intervention in the world through presence and practice, when people are together in community.

The insurgency materialized in the existence of diverse group theater collectives in the city of São Paulo, in Brazil, and across Latin America over time and today allows us to perceive a thread that connects past to future. This thread relies on the potential for resistance, confronting enormous adversities in an increasingly conservative and fascist world. The collectives seek counter-hegemonic forms of artistic creation, maintaining their research and actions that awaken others to the struggle, those who come into contact with their way of life, to critically act in the world, reflecting on their contexts and participating in emerging experiences outside, or rather within the cracks of systemic logic. Returning to the thought of Dardot and Laval (2018), we find a valuable path, as the authors point out that:

> If we want to move beyond neoliberalism by opening a positive alternative, we must develop a collective capacity that puts political imagination to work based on the experiments and struggles of the present. The principle of the common, which today emanates from movements, struggles, and experiences, refers to a system of practices directly opposed to neoliberal rationality and capable of revolutionizing all social relations. This new reason, emerging from such practices, privileges common use over exclusive private property, democratic self-government over hierarchical command and, above all, makes co-activity inseparable from co-decision. There is no political obligation without participation in a shared activity. As we wrote in the final lines of this book, we must work toward another reason for the world (Dardot; Laval, 2018, p. 9–10).

Reflecting on the foundations of group theater—on its singular and collective experience—offers a valuable lens through which to examine the articulation of concepts such as the commons, heterotopias, the right to the city, and various theoretical approaches to what becomes manifest in the world. This reflection serves as an exercise in imagining a world yet to come, one grounded in principles of equality, justice, and the expansion of social rights. In this process lie both acts and potentials t art and society alike.

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