

PRESENTATION OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE
GROUP THEATRE YESTERDAY AND TODAY:
Acts and powers of transformation of art and society

APRESENTAÇÃO DO DOSSIÊ
O TEATRO DE GRUPO ONTEM E HOJE:
atos e potências de transformação da arte e da sociedade


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**Special issue presentation - Group Theater then and now:
Acts and potentials for artistic and social transformation**

**Apresentação do dossiê - O Teatro de Grupo ontem e hoje:
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Performing arts are inherently collective, across all latitudes and historical periods. The stage itself can be defined as the encounter between two collectivities: that of the artists—cohesive and organized around the scenic action—and that of the spectators—temporary and casual, but representative of a broader community. Due to this inherent group-based nature, the performing arts can be—and have historically been—laboratories of human relations, with ethical, aesthetic, political, psychological, and existential ramifications.

However, in the late 20th century, a particular form of scenic grouping emerged: Group Theater. Its roots go back to the laboratory theaters of the early 20th century, but its modes of organization, political engagement, and aesthetic orientation (despite the multiplicity and singularity of each groups' poetics) are deeply linked to counter-cultural movements and the 1960s- and 1970s-values revolution. Within Group Theater lies a desire to reinvent the entire spectrum of human relations on new foundations: from power structures to affective bonds; from artistic creation to the relationship with the market; from engagement with the scenic space to the interaction with the city, and so on. Group Theater, therefore, is very different from a company, a political or cultural association, or even a family. Yet, it shares many traits with these social forms, thus living immersed in contradictions inherent to revolutionaries, who struggle to overcome the past but cannot fully break free from it.

Over 50 years after the student uprisings of 1968, the force of counterculture seems to have subsided. While it is undeniable that much has changed since then, and that these social transformations are indebted to the forces awakened during that era, it is also clear that the wave driven by the desire for radical change expressed by that generation collided with the rocks of reality and receded into the very contradictions it carried. The present is marked by disillusionment, physical and mental exhaustion, and a sense of powerlessness in the face of a world-machine that crushes dreams, transforming them into commodities. But the present can also be a time to say NO to the many forms of oppression we have internalized for so long, if we are able to organize and fight so that our voices are not reduced to artificially compartmentalized and disempowered discourses. Most Group Theaters that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s—and many of their members—no longer exist. Some have endured, perhaps less marginal or independent than they once were, perhaps still guided by the same ideals, but certainly adapted to new realities. Other groups have and continue to emerge, each with their own names and modes of organization.



When we presented the proposal for this special issue to the academia, we asked ourselves: What does Group Theater have to say to us? Can it still effectively resist against the world-machine in contemporary times? Judging by the number of people who answered our call, and the quality of their research, it seems to us that the power of this movement, which took shape during the 1960s, has neither subsided nor grown obsolete, despite its more than 50 years of history. However, it has certainly changed. The diversity of themes and approaches found in the selected articles shows us there is no single understanding of what we call Group Theater. Despite this plurality of perspectives, it is possible to identify a shared reference horizon, which points to the struggle against individualism and consumerism in contemporary society, to nonconformity in the face of injustices we tend to naturalize, and to a counter-hegemonic view of Art. As we unfold the texts in this special issue, we observe several expressions of what we might call the “spirit of Group Theater,” based on theoretical, historical, technical, and philosophical approaches by means of case studies, historical research, or artists’ testimonies.

Some texts take a historical approach, focusing on artists, groups, or movements. “The Paratheater of Grotowski and company as a radicalization of group theater practices” explores a particular moment in the trajectory of one of the central figures of Group Theater tradition, offering a reflection on the ethics and aesthetics of this movement. “Pagu and the Group Theater: forgotten narratives in the historiography of mid-twentieth-century Brazilian theater” reflects on the importance of a major Brazilian artist and intellectual, who may be regarded as a precursor or promoter of Group Theater, due to her role in its emergence. “The Experimental Theater of SESC: Art, Politics, and Resistance in the Heart of the Amazon” sheds light on theater in a region of Brazil whose history remains largely unknown and undocumented.

Other texts highlight particular aspects of contemporary collectives currently active, addressing technical, historical, and social dimensions. “Ethics of creation in social precariousness contexts: a study with three Brazilian artistic collectives” analyzes the survival and creative strategies of theater groups, showing how precarious conditions, characteristic of the Group Theater reality in Brazil, shapes its poetics. “Towards a pedagogy of expressive forms: a conversation on the 40th anniversary of the XPTO Theater Group” and “Incendiary Puppets: reflections on the artistic trajectory of Pigmalhão Escultura que Mexe” analyze the trajectories of two prominent Brazilian theater groups that draw on the poetics of puppet theater. “Reframings of Group Theater in the playwriting experience of the Elas Tramam Collective” uses core concepts of Group Theater practices to analyze a collective of women playwrights, confronting the historical erasure of women’s contributions to the arts and to many other areas of public life.

We also include texts that reflect on the concept of Group Theater and its social and aesthetic implications. “Praxis as developed by some Latin American collectives: group theater as an aesthetic-political tactic of resistance” and “Group Theater as a collective experience in the face of neoliberal challenges in the urban context – a brief reflection” analyze Group Theater as



a tool for political struggle. “Chorality and the Field of Vision” addresses an acting technique rooted in collectivity, which can be considered intrinsic to this kind of theater.

Finally, we present two texts by artists from a generation that experienced a particular moment in our history—when, in the 1980s, Group Theater was, in a sense, reborn after being violently suppressed by the military dictatorship. “A mountain with no summit: Memories of a climb in seven steps” and “To Those Who Will Come After Us” offer partial and limited perspectives of this movement—as expected from personal testimonies—but provide critical analyses with a depth of lived experience.

Thus, the special issue “Group Theater yesterday and today: acts and powers of transformation of art and society” offers a glimpse into diverse inflections that, while far from exhausting an inexhaustible theme, contribute meaningfully to the study of a movement that is a source of inspiration and a possibility of action in 21st century theater.



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