MEMES IN THEATER:
tensions in the transposition of internet comic discourse to the stage

OS MEMES NO TEATRO:
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Abstract: This article explores the process of transposing the internet meme to the theater based on the analysis of three theatrical works: *Roda Viva* (2018), by Teatro Oficina; *Sísifo* (2019), by Gregório Duvivier and Vinícius Calderoni; and the short scene *La fama* (2023), presented by the authors of the article - together with the actors of Cia de Sucesso. The aim is to understand what the appropriation of these digital items and their different mimetic approaches on stage generates in the understanding of theater itself as a way of circulating social mentalities. The humorous character of the meme is highlighted to suggest, based on studies on laughter and comedy - particularly the works of Michael Billig (2005) and Bergson (2004) - that there is a qualitative change in the attributes of the comic that explain the humorous nature of memes (Shifman, 2014, p. 79). It is concluded that the theatrical mimicry of the meme does not imply that the scene becomes a meme, and that, although it contributes to the replication of the reference to which it relates, it proposes unprecedented modifications of posture (stance). The article is one of the results of the research "Archive of the Intercultural Memory of the Performing Arts in Brazil", financed by FAPEMIG.
Keywords: internet memes; theater; humor; multimedia.

Os memes no teatro:
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Resumo: Este artigo explora o processo de transposição do meme para a cena a partir da análise de três obras teatrais: *Roda Viva* (2018), do Teatro Oficina; *Sísifo* (2019), de Gregório Duvivier e Vinícius Calderoni; e a cena curta *La fama* (2023), apresentada pelos autores do artigo - em conjunto com as atuantes da Cia de Sucesso. Busca-se compreender o que a apropriação desses itens digitais e suas diferentes abordagens miméticas na cena geram no entendimento do próprio teatro como modo de circulação de mentalidades sociais. A partir de estudos sobre riso e comicidade - em especial, as obras de Michael Billig (2005) e Bergson (2004) - destaca-se o caráter humorístico do meme para investigar modificações qualitativas em seus atributos cômicos (Shifman, 2014). Conclui-se que a mimetização teatral do meme não implica que a cena se torne um meme, e que, ainda que ela contribua com a replicação da referência com a qual se relaciona, ela propõe modificações de postura (*stance*) inéditas. O artigo é um dos resultados da pesquisa "Arquivo da Memória Intercultural das Artes da Cena no Brasil", financiado pela FAPEMIG.
Palavras-chave: memes da internet; teatro; comicidade; multimidialidade.

1 Shifman's (2014) approach to internet memes

Internet memes are an extremely popular phenomenon in digital culture. Known for their comicality, they emerged as a concept from an ironic appropriation of the homonymous term derived from memetics (Chagas, 2021)—a line of sociobiology studies that investigates the processes of cultural evolution (Shifman, 2014). Since the late 1990s, memes have become popular as a concept of the Digital Age, and the term has come to be used more in reference to a type of digital item with certain characteristics than to sociobiology studies, which fell into a certain ostracism after gaps and inaccuracies in academic research on the concept (Chagas, 2021).

When investigating memes based on academic works, we come across an immense arsenal of theorists who study their structure in search of a way to circumscribe this errant phenomenon (Chagas, 2021, p. 14), marked by a very heterogeneous set of phenomena (Fontanella, 2009, p. 8). In this sense, this paper aligns itself with an important author in the process of conceptually delimiting what is a meme. Limor Shifman (2014), in the book 'Memes in digital culture,' associates the phenomenon with characteristics that do not detract from the semiotic richness of the meme, based on the ambiguity generated by the similarity between memes and other digital objects (Siri, 2024). She defines them as being

> (a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which (b) were created with awareness of each other, and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users (Shifman, 2014, p. 41).

According to Shifman, the common characteristics among memes are defined by their formal and content-related qualities, but also by the stance that the meme establishes in relation to what it refers to:

> I use 'stance' to depict the ways in which addressers position themselves in relation to the text, its linguistic codes, the addressees, and other potential speakers. Like form and content, stance is potentially memetic; when re-creating a text, users can decide to imitate a certain position that they find appealing or use an utterly different discursive orientation (Shifman, 2013, p. 367).

These stance characteristics contained in memes, therefore, can be reinvented and reveal other points of view and positions in relation to the texts, linguistic codes, and addressees of the original meme. The notion of stance will make an important contribution to this work, as it suggests a specific framework for the concept of meme, in which it can be analyzed based on the texts it evokes and the relationships it produces between speakers. Speakers' position reveals a key characteristic for understanding the processes of memetic transformation.

For the author, a central point in analyzing this network of digital items lies in observing their modes of circulation, particularly the practices of copying and imitation. In Shifman's view, it is these practices that form the pillars of what constitutes a "participatory culture" in society in the

Digital Age. According to this perspective, memes would be both a reflection and a form through which certain social mentalities are presented and shared (Shifman, 2014, p. 4).

Considering the cultural and social relevance of memes, we will analyze their presence outside the digital environment and, more specifically, in the field of theater. Based on the analysis of three plays that develop different mimetic approaches to internet memes, we investigate the process of transposing memes to the stage. These transpositions reveal a multiplicity of interactions between memes and the social mindset that contextualizes them. Moreover, it demonstrates that the comic attributes that explain the humorous nature of memes (Shifman, 2014, p. 79) undergo a qualitative change when we analyze how these digital items are presented on the stage.

2 The comic in memes: playfulness, incongruity and superiority

The humorous quality of memes, which vary in theme—sometimes political, sometimes related to pop culture, sometimes to everyday life, among others—and form—sarcastic, ironic, situational humor, etc.—is key to understanding their proliferation processes. Shifman (2014) cites studies by different researchers who, when analyzing the behavior of internet users, concluded that humor plays a central role in virality, since users tend to both want to provoke, through shared content, a positive feeling in receivers and create an association between the positive content and the person who shared it.

In the author's work, one strategy used to account for the heterogeneity of memes is the suggestion of six characteristics common to all of them[1], among which is humor. Shifman suggests that we can understand the humor of memes by defining three comicality attributes: playfulness, incongruity, and superiority (Shifman, 2014, p. 79). Such attributes will be used in this analysis as tools for investigating the process of transposing memes from the digital environment to the stage.

She understands that playfulness intertwines with the comic when users read and remix memes. This aspect associates memes with the dynamics of play, turning memes into a game in which we participate collectively, proposing variations in interpretation, adaptations, and rearrangements of elements based on a single point, be it an image, a video, a phrase, or a sound.

Incongruity denotes the unexpected cognitive encounter between two dissonant or incongruent elements, and is associated with the typical breaks in expectation that characterize comedy. Shifman's main source of analysis are meme videos in which the incongruities between visual and audio information generate a comical strangeness and, at times, a dissonant opening that

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1 The systematic analysis proposed by the author in her 2014 book 'Memes in Digital Culture' identified six characteristics common to heterogeneous memes. Namely: a focus on ordinary people, flawed masculinity, humor, simplicity, repetitiveness, and whimsical content.

provoke readers into solving the enigma generated by the juxtaposition of incongruous elements (Shifman, 2014, p. 80).

Superiority constitutes an attribute of memes that appropriate discourses and people who are unintentionally (or at least not clearly intentionally) funny, that is, who are funny due to the stance they suggest. They are often replicated by users as a way of marking their moral or intellectual superiority over the people in memetic videos.

Defining comic attributes contributes to the quest to understand the relationship between these different memetic forms in stage performances. How do these attributes behave when internet memes are transposed to the stage? Could we say that these attributes remain unchanged? What transformations and modifications are brought about by the process of transposing the internet meme to the stage?

3 Memes in theater

For this analysis, we chose the following plays: 1) the restaging of *Roda Viva* (2018) by the São Paulo-based Teatro Oficina; 2) *Sìsifo* (2019) by Gregório Duvivier and Vinícius Calderoni, from Rio de Janeiro; and 3) the short scene *La fama* (2023), staged by the authors together with the performers from Cia de Sucesso[2] at the 24th Galpão Cine Horto Short Scenes Festival[3] in Belo Horizonte. Our selection sought to encompass different approaches to memes in theater. How does each play transpose memes in its staging? Below we analyze the presence of the comic attributes of internet memes suggested by Shifman (2014) in the plays.

3.1 Memes in the play Roda Viva, by Teatro Oficina

Roda Viva (2018) was a revival by Teatro Oficina 50 years after the first staging of Chico Buarque's play, written in 1967. The play develops a critique of the culture industry and, in its new version, brings to light unprecedented figures like the character Internet, one of the media agents in the play, possessing new forms of communication (such as memes).

The appearance of memes in the play reveals them both as textual information adapted to theatrical language and as cultural elements associated with consolidating the protagonist Ben

2 Cia de Sucesso was a group made up by Professor Raquel Castro and actors graduates and students from the Department of Performing Arts at UFOP to investigate procedures for mimicking discourses about fame, using as reference the Encyclopédie de la parole project, directed by Joris Lacoste. Lacoste's project explores orality in all its forms, and more information about it can be found on the work's official website. See: https://encyclopediedelaparole. org/. Accessed on: June 15, 2025.

3 The Galpão Cine Horto Short Scenes Festival is a competitive theater festival that has been held in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, since 2000.

Silver's fame. In the first act, the 'Guardian Angel' of aspiring celebrity Benedito da Silva tells him, in an attempt to convince him to accept all the proposed changes in behavior and appearance, that his path to fame will be solidified when the protagonist becomes a meme:

> You'll see, I give it two days before women, gays, closets, find your type wonderful. You won't be left alone, all thanks to me. And then comes the marketing, television, likes, flashes, Netflix, magazine covers, Joyce Pascowitch. Direct message on Instagram, and when you become a meme [Black Angel celebrates, general commotion from the chorus in celebration of the protagonist becoming a meme]... That's a whole other level of consecration! (RODA [...], 2024, 43min).

The following meme-related appearances are a translation of specific internet memes directly into theatrical language. Memes are reproduced textually or invoked physically as speech or gestures of the character Internet (played by two different actresses), introduced to represent this new media that marks the historical period of the restaging of *Roda Viva*—which in the 60s could only count on television as a representative of the media in the play.

Internet's first line of dialogue already reveals the mocking tone that characterizes this new media tool. She appears responding to Television's statement that asks: "Have faith, Ben Silver. Believe in television." This quote refers to the role of religious discourses reproduced on Brazilian open-air television networks such as Rede Record—one of the biggest and most influential television content distribution networks in Brazil, which openly supported the Bolsonaro government and reinforced its ideological alignment with the evangelical church. In response to Television, Internet says: "creeeeedo, credo, miga tua louca" ("Whaaaaaaat? Girl, you crazy?"), removing the word from its usual context and highlighting a form of internet operation marked by irony and mockery.

When introducing herself, Internet makes references to various memes: from the dab pose[4], she chases Television referencing "Senhora?"[5] (Ma'am?), cites the meme Neiva[6] by grabbing the protagonist's penis, the meme 'Luisa Marilac by the pool'[7], the meme "brincar de brincar de deitar e

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4 According to Wikipedia, "dab, or dabbing, is a gesture in which a person leans forward into the bent crook of a slanted, upward angled arm, while raising the opposite arm out straight in a parallel direction. It appears to be similar to someone sneezing or coughing into an elbow. Since 2015, dabbing has been used as a gesture of triumph or playfulness, becoming a youthful fad and Internet meme." More information can be found in the article on the website. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dab_(dance). Accessed on: December 10, 2025. On the internet, various videos can be found with examples of dab performances, such as the one on the Behind The Meme page, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRpJk1uERKA. Accessed on: June 23, 2025.

5 According to Wikipedia, "'Senhora?' is an internet meme that originated from an interview Edinair Maria dos Santos Moraes gave to TV Anhanguera in 2015. Edinair, along with other appointed officials from the Legislative Assembly of Goiás, was caught checking in and then leaving immediately for three days." See: https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senhora%3F. Accessed on: December 10, 2025. A video of the interview can be found on Youtube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GdxPGO10fG4. Accessed on: June 15, 2025.

6 The meme originated from an audio recording exchanged between widowed friends that went viral. In the audio, one of them describes an encounter she had with a man. A version of the meme can be found on Tiktok. Available at: https://www.tiktok.com/@renata_fernandesx/video/7105512497981017350. Accessed on: May 30, 2025.

7 The meme "e teve boatos que eu ainda estava na pior..." [and there were rumors that I was at my worst...] is a video posted by Luisa Marilac in 2010, in which she shows a bit of her life in Spain, displaying a drink while swimming in the pool, suggesting that, despite the rumors that her life was difficult, she is thriving. More information about the meme, as well as readaptations, can be found on the #MUSEUdeMEMES. Available at: https://museudememes.com.br/

rolar"[8] (playing at playing at lying down and rolling), until her other facet asks "you done, Jessica?"[9], to which the first facet finally replies, "what the fuck, Giovana."[10] The conversation continues: one Internet facet mentions the meme "teile, Zaga"[11] while performing "the floss"[12] and calls on the protagonist to understand this immense torrent of viral information as a suggestion of its transmission and replication processes. She tells the protagonist: "Ben Silver, a digital mentality is the key to virality. Sorry, Chico, but that's how I rhyme" and puts on the sunglasses from the meme "turn down for what"[13] while its theme song plays in the background.

In the same scene, the character mentions the memes "é verdade esse bilete"[14] (this is no fake) and "juntos e shallow now"[15]. All this content is blended into the character's dialogue; that is, their way of expressing themselves, making themselves understood, and communicating with the audience and their interlocutor—Ben Silver—is present in the flood of references to humorous content known as memes that proliferate exponentially on social media. Interestingly, the audience's response is different with each reference, especially when the number of references, sometimes overlapping, is so great that mentioning memes no longer seems like a joke, but a characteristic of Internet's communication style.

We understand that, at this time, this large number of references is intended to present memes differently from how we see them on the internet. Social media feeds are expected to contain a large number of memes, and this information overload is assimilated by us daily, without much effort. But when the performers at Teatro Oficina embody the memes and present them sequentially,

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collection/luisa-marilac#:~:text=De%20seus%20v%C3%ADdeos%2C%20sa%C3%ADram%20as,eu%20ainda%20estava%20na%20pior%E2%80%A6. Accessed on: June 15, 2025.

8 Meme on YouTube. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjMTdpxR1DU>. Accessed on: June 15, 2025.

9 A meme from November 2015 in which, after a fight between two girls who studied at the same school, one of them gets up and asks, "You done, Jessica?" An article in Folha de São Paulo details what happened. See: https://f5.folha.uol.com.br/voceviu/2021/09/ja-acabou-jessica-jovem-abandonou-estudo-e-caiu-em-depressao-apos-virar-meme.shtml. The video can be accessed on *kwai*. Available at: https://www.kwai.com/search/v%C3%ADdeo-acabou-j%C3%A9ssica/video/5230518079027122881?lang=pt-BR. Accessed on: June 15, 2025.

10 A reference to the "Giovana do Forninho" meme from 2013. More information and access to the video and other versions can be found on the #MUSEUdeMEMES. Available at: https://museudememes.com.br/collection/giovana-do-forninho. Accessed on: June 15, 2025.

11 Meme available on Youtube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeBbYLR8Ejk. Accessed on: June 15, 2025.

12 Dance that went viral on social media from a video posted in 2010. More information can be found on the Know Your Meme website. Available at: https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/the-floss. Accessed on: June 15, 2025.

13 One of the available videos featuring the meme can be found on YouTube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87D4SZ2tyC8. Accessed on: June 15, 2025.

14 The history of this meme can be found on the Museum of Memes website. Available at: https://museudememes.com.br/collection/e-verdade-esse-bilete. Accessed on: June 15, 2025.

15 *Shallow* by Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper, translated into Brazilian Portuguese by Paula Fernandes and Luan Santana, became a meme after they proposed translating a verse from the chorus as "juntos e shallow now" (together and shallow now). Article on the subject can be read on G1. Available at: https://g1.globo.com/pop-arte/musica/noticia/2019/05/17/untos-e-shallow-now-internautas-fazem-memes-apos-paula-fernandes-divulgar-versao-para-musica-de-gaga.ghtml. Accessed on: June 15, 2025.

uninterruptedly, in the form of theatrical text, without mediation of the screen, the memes seem to lose their comedic consistency. While the first memes mentioned might elicit some laughs from the audience, by the end of the references this effect is lost, as it becomes clear that *Internet* does not intend to make people laugh, but rather to present memes as a communicational structure—which makes sense within the play's text, associating 'becoming a meme' with the 'consecration' of an electoral figure, in this case, *Ben Silver*.

In the second act, we have a direct reference to two memes: Betina[16] and Luana Piovani[17] complaining about how difficult it is to be a citizen in Brazil. In this case, both memes are cited by the same character: Vangélica—referencing both the Brazilian TV presenter Angélica and the evangelical church—and serve to characterize her political and social stance. The meme personalities [Luana Piovani and Betina] are marked by alienation from social realities that lack the same conditions and privileges as them, and by an appeal to a meritocratic discourse about success. The social stance of the meme personalities is used to substantiate the character *Vangélica*. Memes condense a network of discourses with a specific political and ideological bias that serve as a trigger for lines of meaning in interpreting the character. With the help of these memes, the play paints a privileged character who lacks critical awareness of her own privileges and contributes to disseminate meritocratic forms of subjectivity that are alienated from the social realities that surround them.

In the play *Roda Viva*, therefore, memes are directly invoked through the performers bodies and voices, whether through dances and gestures or textually, reproducing the quotes of the meme figures. We believe that this intersemiotic gesture reveals a memetic theatrical dimension that goes beyond its formal limits and digital native environment. Memes appear as a resource that provokes laughter from the audience (as in the mention of memes quoted by *Vangélica*), but also as a cultural element that can be analyzed as a specific phenomenon in the field of communication, due to its certain dissemination properties and corresponding, because of these properties, to a series of political and social potentialities. Notably, the large number of references to different memes in the first act shifts the focus from the content of each meme to its configuration as a form of communication.

In the text of *Roda Viva*, memes serve to give consistency to certain discourses, either by presenting themselves as a form of communication that reveals their power to disseminate and legitimize discourses through repetition, or as a reference to a specific type of behavior or worldview

16 The Betina meme emerged after businesswoman Bettina Rudolph posted a video talking about how she had amassed a fortune of over one million reais despite being so young. Following criticism on social media highlighting the businesswoman's privileged status, a video of her responding to the criticism also went viral, in which the phrase "if I am where I am, it's because I deserved it" became famous. The original video is no longer available online, but it's possible to find some versions of the meme. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwk_glNACns. Accessed on: May 30, 2025.

17 The Luana Piovani meme originated from a segment of an interview the actress gave to the UOL portal, in which she talks about the difficulty of being a citizen in Brazil due to the recurring demands for engagement in social causes that prevented her from experiencing the internet simply by posting photos of herself in a bikini and with her children. An excerpt of the interview that became a meme is on YouTube. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGamFi4tZv4. Accessed on: May 30, 2025.

that is synthesized in the meme and embodied by a character (in this way, it is not necessary to develop an original narrative to characterize a character, it is enough to suggest that they share the same stance as the meme they embody).

3.2 Memes in the play *Sísifo*, by Gregório Duvivier and Vinícius Calderoni

Sísifo [Sisyphus] (2019) is a monologue starring Gregório Duvivier that seeks to interpret the ancient myth through the lens of dynamics inherent to digital communication. Starting from the understanding of Sisyphus as a GIF[18] of humanity, the play develops, both scenographically and dramaturgically, bringing the myth closer to the chaotic and hyper-connected contemporary reality.

Sísifo makes no direct reference to specific memes despite constant mentions of memes throughout the play's promotion and journalistic coverage. This is because, in this production, memes were taken as a form that inspires the set design and dramaturgy of the play.

Its creators started from an association that attributes the same type of functioning to Sisyphus' repetitive movement as to a GIF. This association between Sisyphus and a type of virtual text seems to have been the trigger for associations that came to center the meme as an inspiration for the play. In an interview with the website RG, playwright Calderoni stated:

> This premise of GIFs and memes is at the root of the text. We were writing another project, a feature film script, and we came across a scene, an image made up of several animated human GIFs. This image unlocked in me the idea of thinking of Sisyphus as a foundational GIF of humanity. So our love for this wonderful language, which is a kind of modern ideogram, brought an added image to a text that generates an ironic spark. The clash between two messages that forms a third one (Tissi, 2022).

In various interviews, the creators bring to light the notion that a meme is an image over which text is printed, and that this superimposition generates new interpretations and new possibilities for manipulating the meaning of that image. In the staging, one can see how this notion was appropriated for the stage and translated in terms of set design and dramaturgy, especially. On stage, a ramp approximately 3 meters long, with wheels that make it mobile, serves as a platform upon which distinct and numerous texts unfold, composing reinterpretations of the same object and rendering it multifaceted. Gregório Duvivier, in the same interview for the RG website, talks about the set design:

> We then thought of the setting as a backdrop that is also a character: a platform where all the memes happen. The movement of going up and down the ramp happens throughout the entire play, but always with different characters. That are many possible Sisyphus, aren't there? We are all Sisyphus in a way (Tissi, 2022).

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18 A GIF (short for Graphics Interchange Format) is a type of digital image file that allows the display of short, looping animations.

In this case, therefore, the memes mentioned by the actor in the interview are not texts recognized by everyone, as with the memes invoked in *Roda Viva*. Memes are, above all, a form used to weave a text with certain powers of meaning. It seems less important what the meme textually determines than its condition as a structure that assimilates image and text in a continuous process of resignification and generation of possible reinterpretations. Sometimes transforming something tragic into something comical, but also highlighting the everyday nature of certain complex situations, and even proposing reflections on mentioned events, memes are understood in this play as an open form through which texts are associated with an image that is constantly resignified: the ramp as a metaphor for life, as a theater stage, as a race track, as Moses' desert, as an Uber driver's car, sometimes as a simple crossing space. The various texts are imprinted on the image of the ramp, allowing its initial denotation to reveal other connotations, new meanings, and other possible uses of that same image. According to Duvivier, in the context of this staging

> [...] that's what a meme is, it's an image that you impart with whatever meaning you want. And here we use Sisyphus as a meme, as an image that can be captioned and manipulated in a thousand different ways (Tissi, 2022).

3.3 Memes in the short scene *La fama*, by Cia de Sucesso

The short scene *La Fama* [Fame] (2023), presented at the 24th Galpão Cine Horto Short Scenes Festival, emerged from research by the authors on the stage mimicry of discourses about fame. It takes the form of a small concert-conference made from a collection of speech recordings about fame given by or about celebrities from all over the world. The performers experiment with mimicking these discourses and, guided by a teacher from another generation, reflect on success, failure, and self-image as a commodity in the age of likes.

In *La fama*, memes reappear as specific content that makes up this widely recognized digital biome. They are staged through the mimicry of celebrity speeches delivered by the actresses. The process highlights the practice of remixing[19] since, in addition to the mimesis that sought to reproduce the speeches as faithfully as possible to the original, the performers also add sound layers and spatial dynamics to the speeches, revealing a power of modulating their stance in relation to the meme's discourses.

But unlike their use in *Roda Viva*, strictly linked to a character's characterization (the Internet and Vangélica), in *La fama* the memes play a role in the textual structure of the scene. They are collector's items belonging to the protagonist—a Brazilian theater teacher who dreamed of creating a show based on collections of famous quotes, but saw her idea being better executed

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19 Shifman (2014) points out to ways of reworking internet memes: mimicry and remix. Remixing is defined as a newer strategy that involves technology-based manipulation like using Photoshop or adding soundtracks (Shifman, 2014, p. 20). In the short scene, remixing occurs by the addition of live-performed soundtracks and the use of costume and set design elements on stage.

by a foreign group that had more money and time than her. As such, the scene unfolds in direct and metalinguistic conversation with the festival itself, s since it awards the most voted scene with funding for producing a show's season in the hosting venue.

Each quote in the collection, mimicked by the performers on stage, is presented interspersed with the unfolding narrative of this frustrated teacher who never saw the "beautiful, poetic, and sensitive" spectacle she always wanted to produce. Items in the collection of famous quotes range from memes (Luana Piovani struggling to be a citizen, David Luiz after the 7-1[20] defeat, and Susana Vieira bragging about her eight thousand reais mega hair extensions[21]) to speeches by famous people (an excerpt from an interview with Tom Zé on the show *Provocações* and Leonardo DiCaprio's acceptance speech when he won the Oscar for best actor). They are presented sometimes fluidly and linked to the unfolding narrative, and sometimes as simple collector's items that corroborate the play's fictional universe: a conference about fame. There is always a detached perspective on the items, considering them autonomous structures, collected from the world and not produced in the fictional context of the performance—even when the quotes have some thematic affinity with the subjects addressed in the teacher's speech, they are still discourses from the world outside the scene.

Notably, in this play the dramaturgy seeks to create space for memes to be presented according to their relevance to the composition of a conference on fame (the focus presented at the beginning of the scene), and the scene uses two main aspects of memes: their sound and their humor. The aim is to recapture the sound of memes while proposing a kind of sound and bodily mix that reorganizes them for the stage.

Moreover, the humor seems to be produced by the tension and interplay between dramaturgy and meme. The incongruity between the meme and the fictional universe of the play, when combined, create an unexpected situation for the audience since, despite complementary, the elements are heterogeneous and do not belong to the same universe. The meme is never presented in isolation from the dramaturgical context; it always appears as a commentary that concludes or summarizes a subject addressed by the playwright in their quest to analyze aspects of fame: harassment, success, failure, etc.—and its sudden adaptation to the fictional universe of the play is comical due to the incongruity between that universe and the universe from which the meme derives.

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20 At the 2014 FIFA World Cup, held in Brazil, after a historic 7-1 defeat of the Brazilian team by the German national team, Brazilian defender David Luiz gave an interview, in tears, about the game. His image in tears became a meme, and his response to the journalist was mimicked by the actors in the scene La fama as a commentary on the role of failure in the discussion about fame. A video of the player's interview can be found on Globoplay. Available at: https://globoplay.globo.com/v/3484487/. Accessed on: May 30, 2025.

21In an interview to Folha de S. Paulo, the actress Susana Vieira made statements regarding the success in her career and family, going so far as to say that, above her, "only God." The categorical statements about her superiority generated memes that ironize the actress's "humility." The full interview with the excerpt that became a meme. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1Ep1H2I7ZE. Accessed on: May 30, 2025.

4 Analysis of comic attributes present in memes transposed to theater

4.1 Playfulness

Shifman's (2014) proposal, in understanding playfulness as one of the comic attributes of internet memes, suggests that the experience of replicating memes by remixing their elements or imitation functions as a game. In this game, the various layers of the players' social perception are involved in remixing the material—a meme, in this context, will be produced as a way of playing with these perceptions, of suggesting possible unexplored interpretations, of experimenting with rearranging combinations between elements that will be received and shared by other members of this 'participatory culture.' We then wondered whether, in the context of adapting the meme for the stage, this attribute would remain unchanged. In other words, is this what we are proposing by bring the meme into theater? Are we playing the replication game?

To understand this issue, it is pertinent to look at the use of memes in the play *Sísifo* by Gregório Duvivier and Vinicius Calderoni. In it, the meme is interpreted as an element outside the context of the play, and the theatrical work comments on its functioning and structure. Its formal attributes are brought to the scene as if they constituted (in this case) the rules of a game. The way memes behave in the digital world—their duration, the platform through which they are usually disseminated, their intertextuality—is translated by the play without directly resorting to specific pre-existing memes. But the inspiration for the elements that make up the staging, from the mobile ramp, which closely resembles a giant cell phone screen, to the arrangement of the elements combined in the textual composition—short scenes, played with awareness of each other, revealing specific positions, with formal and content-related similarities—clearly lies in the realm of digital experiences and their common characteristics.

Roda Viva and *La fama*, although they do not approach the memetic transposition in similar ways—since they rely on the mimicry of speech, behaviors, stances or sounds of specific web memes—, propose another quality of play experience. The playful use of memes is not defined by delving into the replication processes where the scene mimicking the meme necessarily becomes a meme itself; rather, it is linked to understanding the possibilities of using memes to construct positionings regarding the characteristics they convey, both of form and stance.

Its formal characteristics are analyzed in *Roda Viva*, for example, when the character Internet introduces themselves—the flood of meme references serves to demonstrate how this form of communication is intertwined with the functioning of the web as a communicational field. Memes are not exploited as a source of comedy, but as a form of communication belonging to the digital world highly recognizable by the audience. Stance characteristics appear when ideological stance (as in the Betina and Luana Piovani memes) is used to characterize a character.

Hence, playfulness remains present when transposing memes to the stage based on a qualitative change in the attribute since, even if the scene does mimic the formal aspects of memes, it does not become a meme itself. In this case, the game is not necessarily about participating in the dynamics of meme replication by generating a new meme. Nonetheless, the scene plays with both the formal aspects of memes taken as inspiration for organizing the staging elements (as in *Sísifo*), and the mimicry of the formal aspects of meme characters (their behavior, their speech or sound, costume elements and/or ideological stance).

4.2 Incongruity

When Shifman (2014) points to incongruity as one of the attributes of memetic comedy, capable of explaining its humorous dimension, she refers to a capacity for manipulating content inherent to the digital universe. She points to the following structure as particularly dominant:

> [...] the fundamental yet often subtle incongruity between the audio and visual components of texts. In a few cases, such incongruity is embedded in the video format [...], in others, it is derived from textual components unique to a specific video (Shifman, 2014, p. 80).

Although audiovisual elements can be explored in theater, in the plays analyzed the incongruity between the components of the text (sound and visual) is clearly explored outside the digital environment. In *La fama*, for example, there is an incongruity between Susana Vieira's audio text, in which the actress talks about her life and eight thousand dollar mega hair, and the soundtrack composition overlaying the speech that imparts a religious tone to the meme discourse mimicked by the actresses who embody it.

Thus, the overlap between the religious sound text of the live soundtrack and the actress' mimed speech about success reveals the attribute of incongruity as one of the comic aspects in the scene. A suggestive religious tone for a speech about success was inspired by the meme's concluding line, in which the actress reveals how she sees herself—she ends her extensive list of personal successes with the conclusion "above me, only God." Following this statement, the soundtrack is understood as a commentary on the stance performed by the meme character, actress Susana Vieira.

We can say, therefore, that the context-specific incongruity suggests a critical position that ridicules the famous actress' speech. This approach reveals what Michael Billig (2005), in his book '*Laughter and ridicule*,' elaborates on from readings of laughter by Bergson and Freud, namely, that laughter has a disciplinary social function: in addition to the power of laughter to oppose the dictates of social life, it also embarrass those who engage in ridiculous behavior.

According to Bergson (2004), vanity is the mixture that best fits the principles of the comic. He characterizes it as "the one failing that is essentially laughable" (Bergson, 2004, p. 129), and for which the specific remedy is laughter. In the case of Susana Vieira's speech, the actress presents a vain self-perception detached from a reflection that, according to Bergson (2004), is the only

way to overcome vanity. Her lack of critical awareness about her discourse is laughable because this unreflective foray into vain pronouncements is based on an experience rooted in extremely restricted privileges that accumulate into an ego-driven delusion. Vieira's comparison of her privileged position with an almost divine status ("Above me, only God!") is the culmination of this attitude based on a sense of superiority that we consider reprehensible and ridiculous. In *La fama*, incongruity is explored through the sound arrangement which, by combining the actress's speech with sounds reminiscent of religious environments, reveals an ironic approach to mimicked discourse thus resembling Shifman's (2014) definition of memetic incongruity, suggesting a kind of enigma constructed from the incongruity between image and sound.

We understand that incongruity, as a constitutive comic element in memes, resonates with comic operations in general, not being restricted to the online experience. But the processes of combining heterogeneous elements to generate comicality deals with distinct materialities in the plays analyzed, since they do not use media like the screen to bring together incongruous elements.

4.3 Superiority

Finally, the analysis of how superiority is transformed when transposing memes from the digital realm to the theater stage is based on that dynamic of condemning ridicule mentioned above, as a way of expressing contempt for ridiculous behavior or people. If we take Shifman's (2014) definition of superiority as one of the motives that underlie the memetic comicality, we unveil a relation of showing superiority by "scornfully imitating" (Shifman, 2014, p. 81) certain figures as to attest to their inferiority.

What is particularly relevant in analyzing this attribute is that the memes used in the plays investigated reveal an ambiguity regarding this sense of superiority. While the scenes reveal a relation of superiority demonstrated by mimicking discourses considered ridiculous, the meme gives legitimacy to these discourses, acting a 'consecrator' of public figures regardless of the criticality of their pronouncements.

For example, the appeal to mimicking memes like that of Luana Piovani, both in *Roda Viva* and in *La fama*, forges this relation of superiority. We have a belittling of the actress' discourse, which is seen as uncritical and depoliticized as it disregards the intersectionality of aspects that characterize her privileged social position: a white, famous, and wealthy actress characterizing the fact that she lacks time to post bikini photos in the face of demands for politically engaged posts as a "challenge to her citizenship." This memetic stance appears in the performances as a source of mockery, of ridicule for this uncritical, socially condemnable behavior.

But, beyond that, the stage also explores a relevant aspect regarding the social role of memes in relation to these discourses. This involves understanding the meme as an element of

communication whose main function is to replicate itself in countless variations, popularizing the figures associated with it, whether ridiculous or not. On stage this is shown when the meme fulfills its role of 'consecrating' the fame of these public figures, and this sense of superiority—as a comic element—does not seem to constrain socially reprehensible behaviors.

We question whether one can claim that, through laughter in these cases, we would be determining socially accepted stances—denouncing the ridiculous and censoring what is unacceptable. It does not seem so obvious to us, and the use of memes on *Roda Viva* illustrates this well, that memes can serve as a tool for producing a critical view of the behaviors they present. Because the 'consecration' that memes bring about, for example in the case of Ben Silver in *Roda Viva*, does not constrain the protagonist's behavior. Even though it generates negative reactions from some users, the dynamics of social networks (the native environment of internet memes), where sharing and engagement are measurement units of effectiveness that operate regardless of moral or ethical issues, allows ridicule to be a process that enhances the effectiveness of a meme as content that exists to be shared. Whether it is presented as a joke or as an example of conduct is irrelevant. As long as its sharing is guaranteed, it fulfills its function as a consecrator of public figures.

We therefore understand that memes, when transposed from its digital environment to the stage, reveals other layers and characteristics. Its functioning and structure are revealed in a different manner, since memes in theater do not enter into the playful game of replication as happens on social media. It is 'dissected' and presented as an element with specific properties and functions. Its participation in the analog context of the theater stage suspends its rapid replication process and, as in *Sísifo* (where the meme disintegrates and is taken as formal inspiration) or in *Roda Viva* (where the meme has its political function announced), its formal properties and social functions become evident.

5 Conclusion

From the above, we understand that memes are groups of digital items made with awareness of each other which share common characteristics in terms of content, form, and attitude (Shifman, 2014) and are native to the digital environment. Additionally, they are marked by comic attributes that can be summarized in 1) playfulness, 2) incongruity, and 3) superiority. Analysis of these attributes in the case of exploiting memes outside their native digital environment and, more specifically, in transposing this content to the theatrical field, revealed the possibility of establishing new relationships with internet memes, in which the comedic attributes mentioned above vary qualitatively.

First, we understand that the theater scene that incorporates certain elements of internet memes does not participate in the playful game of meme replication, that is, the scene, even if it incorporates meme elements, does not constitute itself a meme. Additionally, the analog presentation

of memes on stage (i.e., not mediated by screens, but embedded by the actors) evinces social and political factors related to the meme as a communicative dynamic that are hidden in the online experience. On stage, actors constitute a discourse that observes the meme based on its association with specific political purposes. As an example, we have the consecration of public figures in *Roda Viva* who function in defiance of the comic powers to embarrass behaviors considered "ridiculous." Ridicule emerges as a powerful force for engagement and ensures effectiveness in replicating figures and discourses.

Finally, the analysis of the plays shows that the humorous nature of the meme, in terms of the incongruity between its components—whether discrepant images and text, or a sound considered inappropriate for the video—can be transposed onto the stage, even though the materialities in its construction are different in the examples analyzed. All three plays chosen for analysis do not use digital resources to explore the meme on stage—the disparities between the constitutive texts of the memes are explored analogically (the use of live music in *La fama*, for example) and reveal potential in terms of the stance encouraged by the meme remixing in the play. We understand that some stances could only be developed on the theater stage, since it is there that memes appear as incongruous elements in relation to the scene. This produces, as in the introduction of the character *Internet* in *Roda Viva*, another way of interpreting phenomena, broadening our perception of memes as a communication tool, distancing the viewer from the specific meme content and presenting it as a social element, constituted outside the fictional context of the play.

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