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In the belly of the monster: Workers' dramaturgy in the ABCD region (Brazil) and in the Southwest of the United States of America

Revised version
(via corrigida)

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RESUMO

Este estudo analisa peças teatrais produzidas por grupos chicanos dos Estados Unidos entre as décadas de 1960 e 1980 e por grupos de teatro de trabalhadores do ABCD paulista nos anos 1970 e 1980. A perspectiva analítica aqui considerada enfatiza os fundamentos sociopolíticos e históricos de tais criações artísticas, em um esforço para relacionar formas e conteúdos aos contextos concretos de produção. Os grupos e obras selecionados mantiveram relações íntimas com sindicatos ou com movimentos da classe trabalhadora e lidaram com uma dialética de integração e não integração ao sistema econômico hegemônico. As novas tendências da militância política da esquerda a partir da década de 1960, que englobavam abordagens inovadoras para movimentos sindicais, partidos e religiosidade, foram elementos fortemente impactantes nas peças teatrais examinadas neste estudo. As formas teatrais desenvolvidas tanto pelos grupos chicanos El Teatro Campesino, La Compañía de Teatro de Alburquerque e Teatro Libertad e pelas trupes brasileiras da região do ABCD Teatro Ferramenta, Teatro Forja e Teatro Debate do ABC refletiram sua busca por recursos documentais capazes de denúncia social e por expressões artísticas que pudessem reconectá-las a formas culturais populares tradicionais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Teatro Chicano; teatro dos trabalhadores; teatro épico; teatro de agitprop; teatro sindical

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes theater plays produced by Chicano troupes in the United States between the 1960s and 1980s and by working-class theater groups in the ABC region of Brazil in the 1970s and 1980s. The analytical perspective considered emphasizes the sociopolitical and historical foundations of such artistic creations, in an effort to relate forms and content to the concrete contexts of production. The groups and works selected had intimate relations with labor unions or a working-class milieu and dealt with broad dialectics of integration and non-integration to the hegemonic economic system. The new tendencies of political militancy of the Left starting in the 1960s, which encompassed innovative approaches to labor union movements, parties, and religiosity, were heavily impacting elements of the theater plays examined within this study. The theatrical forms developed by both the Chicano groups *El Teatro Campesino*, *La Compañía de Teatro de Alburquerque*, and *Teatro Libertad* and the Brazilian troupes from the ABC region *Teatro Ferramenta*, *Teatro Forja*, and *Teatro Debate do ABC* reflected their search for documentary resources capable of social denouncement and artistic expressions that could reconnect them to ancient, popular, cultural traditions.

KEYWORDS

Chicano theater, working-class theater, Epic theater, Agitprop theater, Labor Union theater

SUMÁRIO

INTRODUCTION

A few theatrical consequences of the fast transformation in Latin America

After the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the United States launched a so-called "decade of maximum effort" towards Latin America. A new age in the relations between North and South begun that resulted in a massive investment of economic, political, and military power in the countries south of the Rio Grande River. As Eric Hobsbawm explains, the United States' policy for the Latin American social problems—a strategy to prevent possible new revolutions—has failed to produce the projected results but secured for the U.S. corporations a stronghold on southern economies[1].

The gigantic amount of capital invested in Latin American countries in the 1960s, an estimated $ 3.3 billion USD between 1961 and 1968, the opening of U.S. corporations branches along with subsidiaries from European countries, and the direct political and cultural influence exerted by the United States were a high point in the process started after World War II[2]. Between 1940 and 1960, the economic pressures on Latin American rural economies had been pungent enough to reshape the human geography of several countries, which turned predominantly urbanized within just a few years. In the 1960s, this process was accelerated and deepened by the incorporation of new technologies, chemicals, machines, and methods by the agriculture in the former colonial countries. It was a new wave of international valorization of capital in agricultural production, the so-called Green Revolution[3]. The United States was certainly the main promoter of this "revolution" and combined its movements in Latin America with the introduction of it. Thus, the "maximum effort" was in fact a consortium of military presence, political maneuvering, and the "penetration and expansion of the 'logic of capital'"[4] on a new level, both in the countryside—with the "Green Revolution"—and in the cities with the international corporations.

Hobsbawm describes how the peasant masses that left the countryside flooded Latin American cities and their political organizations, which were not prepared for

[1] HOBSBAWM, Eric. Viva la revolución. A era das utopias da América Latina. São Paulo: Cia. das Letras, 2017.
[2] Id., ibid.
[3] JAMESON, Fredric. Periodizing the 60s. Social Text. No. 9/10, The 60's without Apology (Spring - Summer, 1984), pp. 178-209. Published by: Duke University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/466541
[4] Id., ibid.

those influxes. Many labor unions previously controlled by communists, socialists, or anarchists were not able to answer the needs of the new moment and became peripheral. The same happened to most leftist parties[5]. The shock waves of those encounters were multiple, and the present study is an effort to deal with a few of them in the popular and worker theater spheres, both in Brazil and among the Latin American communities of the United States, particularly Mexican Americans.

Among the theories formulated in the decades after World War II to argue against the conception of feudal enclaves in Brazil, the ideas of Jacob Gorender seem to be the most appropriate to understand not only the infrastructural causes of the broad shattering of rural life in Brazil during that period, but also its social, political, and cultural consequences for the new landscape that was emerging. Gorender considers that the migrants that inundated the big cities in the Southeast, particularly São Paulo, came from a non-capitalistic mode of production. It was not feudalism, though:

> It is not possible for the moment to get into details on such peasant forms, some of them in process of extinction, such as the quarteação, in the case of the cowboys, and others still very resistant, as the parceria in most of the Northeast. All of them, however, were peasant forms in which the plantation and the cattle raising latifúndio found support, shortly after the Abolition [of Slavery] and throughout decades, maybe characterizing […] a plantationist mode of production based on peasant forms of exploration.[6]

Even though the relations of production in most rural areas in Brazil usually included wages paid in cash, Gorender argues that this was not the central aspect of the arrangement between workers and landowners and represents only an accessory component. The existence of mercantile relations in conjunction with the predominant plantationist mode of production in those regions neither confirms the theories that identify a capitalistic nature in the whole country since Imperial times. Natural economy and market were always frequent companions in Brazil.

The same process is noticeable throughout Latin America, even if the particularities of the historical developments in each country generated distinct combinations of mercantile components with dependent peasant forms of exploitation by huge landowners. The hyper concentration of land in the continent, from the colonies until the 20th century, carried with it and generated, at the same time, specific forms of

[5] HOBSBAWM, 2017.

[6] GORENDER, Jacob. Gênese e desenvolvimento do capitalismo no campo brasileiro. In: João Pedro Stédile (org.), A questão agrária hoje. Porto Alegre: Editora da Universidade/UFRGS, 1994.

peasant exploitation. After World War II, the incoming waves of capital rapidly transformed the relations of production in those areas. A growing level of industrialization in the central outposts of advanced Latin American capitalism, at the same time, contributed to dismantling rural communities and dragged millions of people from their centenary, non-capitalist communities.

The newly urbanized peasants—living not only in São Paulo, Mexico City, and Bogota, but also in urban areas of Texas, California, and Arizona—had to adapt to the ultra-capitalist forms of work in the cities. They also had to deal with such pressing issues as housing under capitalism, access to food under capitalism, and health under capitalism. They certainly could do almost nothing, at least in the beginning, to transform the most atrocious components of the system in which they were suddenly inserted. However, they obviously carried their own forms of resisting oppression and injustice, which matured throughout centuries of plantationist violence. Their basic institutions of solidarity between neighbors partially survived, at least in their memories, and could possibly boost unity and camaraderie in the new environment while combining with modern forms of political militancy. The same is true for the cultural processes.

The fast transformation of Latin America renewed interests in the region and the explosive hopes of social change liberated by the Cuban Revolution drew the attention of most Latinos in the United States. The young generation of Chicano activists in the 1960s and 1970s had an unprecedented interest in the events in the South and established political and cultural ties with activists from all over Latin America. The continuous waves of Latin American migrants to the United States also functioned to strengthen such relations.

The recently proletarianized Latin American masses brought with them centuries-old artistic forms. Through the contacts allowed by political and cultural activism, in labor unions, political parties, social and cultural movements, and the churches, late Modernist artists in the cities sometimes got in touch with those traditional expressions in collective experiments of artistic creation. The urban creators also developed a new interest in their own local historical traditions. The surprising combinations that emerged from these encounters not only brought a fresh air to political Modernist practices but also produced entirely new artistic forms.

Those historical encounters mediated by left-wing activism were usually conformed by the political influxes of different tendencies that were emerging in those

years, especially Marxism, both the historical formulations and the new ones, Liberation Theology, a collective effort of the Latin American Progressive clergy to base Evangelical reflection and pastoral practices on the preferential option for the poor, and new labor union movements that sought for more horizontal and participative practices.

The following chapters analyze how those new, left-wing reflections combined in the theater plays produced by troupes organized in the labor union milieu in the United States and in Brazil. Often times addressing subjects of specific sectors or crafts, those plays materialized, nevertheless, the great dichotomies that were part of the horizons of the great masses of new proletarians. One of the recurrent tensions seen in that period was the dialects of integration and non-integration to capitalism: on the one hand, those poor workers of rural origin had the urgent need to improve their living conditions, their salaries, their power of consumption, and their position in the new order, and on the other hand, their disadvantaged status was so clearly connected to their group history that no real integration seemed to be possible, or desirable, in leading them to visions of systemic transformation. When the particularities defined by common origins, segments of work, crafts, and political tendencies could be relativized and articulated to bigger categories, the artistic creations and their political consequences generally attained higher spheres. The theater groups that emerged from that historical transformation in the Southwest United States constituted a radically new artistic movement, the Teatro Chicano. In Brazil, the theater troupes that accompanied the rise of the mass labor union movement of the ABCD region at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s proposed an unprecedented cultural debate in the Brazilian left-wing and elaborated works of historical aesthetic significance.

Both movements assumed the task of discussing in their plays the causes of their rural poverty and of their need to migrate, denouncing the exploitation and violence they suffered in the country and in the city, cherishing their culture, their habits and their way of being, and orienting their political and historical horizons. There was a collective effort connecting Latin America and the United States on this mission of understanding the reason why all those broad social changes were happening, what the political sense of that transformation was, and how to canalize the social disturbances with revolutionary (or radical reformist) ends. All theater created by these new actors—or at least with their inspiration—shared those concerns and goals.

The plays analyzed in the following pages were created as part of a militant effort and had as preferential audiences the subjects of such activism. Therefore, they

include an inescapable agitation and propaganda (agitprop) nature. They artistically stimulate, inspire, and encourage the spectators to political action through critical thinking and sociopolitical reflection. However, these works also have other layers of understanding and in variable degrees could sensitize any reasonable member of society to their subject matters.

The first chapter debates one of the initial plays of the Chicano theater, *Quinta Temporada*, a short agitprop work created at the end of the 1960s by El Teatro Campesino. In many senses, it presents the basic advances and limitations that would characterize most of Chicano theater in the following years. The second chapter deals with a unique Chicano play produced by the equally unique Chicano troupe La Compañía de Teatro de Alburquerque. The New Mexican group's *La Pasión de Jesús Chávez* is an interesting example of the presence of Liberation Theology ideas in the Southwest United States and their very productive articulations with left-wing radicalism. The last chapter about the Chicano experience reflects on two creations of the Teatro Libertad from Tucson, Arizona—two great works of art that connect Marxist ideas with the Teatro Chicano's forms and subject matters.

The other three chapters of this thesis relate to the working-class theater produced in the highly-industrialized ABCD region, in the Southeast region of Brazil, in the 1970s and 1980s. Two essays reflect on a few creations of theater ensembles organized in the Metalworkers Union of São Bernardo do Campo and Diadema, then led by Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, Brazil's president between 2003 and 2010. Groups Ferramenta (Tool) and Forja (Forge) combined to allow factory workers to study and create plays about their own realities, making use of several left-wing instruments of critique. The last chapter analyzes two plays produced by Grupo Debate do ABC, a contemporary of Teatro Forja, which addressed very complex sociopolitical themes in highly effective ways.

CHAPTER I

El Teatro Campesino: Raza, Churches, Union

Before founding El Teatro Campesino in 1965, Luis Valdez had played Brighella in *Candelaio*,[7] an adaptation of Giordano Bruno's piece that was staged by the San Francisco Mime Troupe (SFMT) under the direction of R.G. Davis. He was a native of Delano, California, and a graduate of San Jose State University—where he studied English with an emphasis in playwriting. After a troupe's presentation there —the play was *Tartuffe*—he decided to temporarily join them.[8]

Since 1962, three years after R.G. Davis founded it, the SFMT had been working with *Commedia dell'arte*. The first experiment was *The Dowry*, a play largely based on Molière and Goldoni, which benefited from a workshop given by Carlo Mazzone-Clementi, a mime who had worked with Giogio Strehler at the *Piccolo Teatro di Milano*. Mazzone-Clementi taught the troupe about Commedia's masks and showed the artists the eight masks in his possession, all of which were manufactured by Amleto Sartori, a sculptor who used the traditional medieval process of modeling leather masks on wooden molds. Invited by Eric Bentley, he first arrived in the United States in 1958 to give lectures on *Commedia dell'arte*.[9]

For the SFMT, *Commedia dell'arte* was a way of dealing with social issues that involved direct participation from the audience and gestural impact, something that proved useful in parks and open spaces, which was the elected habitat of the troupe. In an unstable reality ("post-beat and pre-hip,"[10] as Davis puts it), the arts were a privileged environment for experimentation, and Commedia was perceived by the SFMT as a form of theater that could generate productive tension. "Why Commedia? The intrinsic nature of *Commedia dell'arte* is its working-class viewpoint,"[11] Davis would affirm a few years later. The company, according to him, eventually learned "how to make stereotypes carry the burden of social satire"[12] after working with it for an extended period of time. Davis would argue the point that Commedia's stereotypical

[7] BRUNO, Giordano. Candelaio. Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1994.
[8] MASON, Susan Vareta. The San Francisco Mime Troupe Reader. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005, p. 12.
[9] RUDLIN, John. Commedia dell'arte: An Actor's Handbook. London, New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 212.
[10] DAVIS, R. G. (1975). The San Francisco Mime Troupe: Ten First Years. Palo Alto, CA: Ramparts Press, 1975, p. 155
[11] Id., ibid., p. 18.
[12] Id., ibid., p. 19.

characters "operated both as an escape valve for irritation and as an integrating force,"[13] but were "more accurate in describing social conditions than bland generalities."[14]

Davis and the SFMT had intuited Commedia was an artistic form capable of dealing with a complex sociopolitical landscape composed of a sometimes-cacophonic multiplicity of new agents. At its birth, *Commedia dell'arte* portrayed in theater the remarkable Renaissance linguistic transformation, when "the vernacular invaded all the spheres of ideology and expelled Latin."[15] A changing world, distancing itself from the Middle Age patterns of sociability, rapidly brought together different social actors under the emerging dominance of the bourgeoisie. "The new social forces were most adequately expressed in the vernacular."[16] In fact, a variety of vernaculars were spoken by Commedia's characters unintelligibly for the audience's sake. Each one corresponded to a specific language (mostly from the Italian peninsula, but also from other European countries), type of mask, and pattern of body movements and gestures. *Commedia dell'arte* was, therefore, "an intentional dialectological hybrid,"[17] in which the "dialects become complete images and types of speech and thought; they are linguistic masks."[18] Moreover, there was a very concrete division between masters and servants.

The first half of the 1960s was agitated by the increasing force of the Black Civil Rights movement, which obtained significant legal victories in 1964 and 1965 and progressively grew in radicalization.[19] The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were an emerging political force, jumping from 2,500 members in 1964 to 25,000 in 1966, after changing its main focus from the fight against poverty to protesting the war in Vietnam.[20] A new wave of Feminism was mounting and would soon become an influential sociopolitical movement, particularly among intellectuals, and with durable force. Other minorities were also taking center stage, especially the Chicanos in the Southwest and the Puerto Ricans in New York and Chicago. All of these groups were,

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[14] Id., ibid., p. 19.
[15] BAKHTIN, Mikhail. Rabelais and his world. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 465.
[16] Id., ibid., p. 467.
[17] BAKHTIN, Mikhail. The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays. Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 82.
[18] BAKHTIN, Mikhail. Rabelais and his world. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, p. 465.
[18] Id., ibid., p. 469
[19] BARBER, David. A Hard Rain Fell: SDS and Why It Failed. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008, p. 16.
[20] NESS, Immanuel. Encyclopedia of American Social Movements. London, New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 1186.

to a certain extent, connected to the rise of revolutionary movements in the Third World. Suddenly, the themes, languages, ideologies, images, and arts from countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America were present and had a say in the Left debate in the United States. The SFMT anticipated this conjuncture and attempted to figure out the new movement.

Brecht's epic theater was not unknown to Davis and the SFMT. The radical theater movement of the 1930s—when Living Newspapers and radical vaudeville were experimented by Leftist modernists in New York and throughout the country—also encompassed the first wave of Brechtian attempts in the United States. In the 1960s, radical theaters once again studied and tried to apprehend his ideas. It would be natural for Marxist theater artists to claim something like a "pure" Brechtianism, but Davis was equally interested in Che Guevara's guerrilla theories and reasoned that operating in the United States required more than just importing European models. "Theatre and the sense of dialogue are different in this country. Our aesthetic is tempered by what can be done now, and what the actual climate is. […] To perform historical Epic theatre in a U.S.A. glutted with doublespeak, cinemascope, and newspapers, is to rely upon Brecht for help."[21] The tactical language Davis used was obviously an attempt at applying Guevarist ideas to theatrical thought. This so-called Guerrilla Theater that was attached to it could not completely coincide with Brecht's totalizing system of elucidating the sociopolitical mechanisms of capitalism and pointing at their economic causality. In 1964, when the SFMT staged Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule*, Davis felt the need to resort to Kabuki and Noh techniques. "In the past, I had warned against using Brecht as a simple solution for American political theatre."[22] It seems that, for Davis, epic theater could not be unproblematically applied to the United States political conjuncture of the 1960s and that something more—or something else—was needed.

One of the basic impossibilities for the United States radical troupes in creating a strict Brechtian epic theater was the displacement of the conception of social class as the central category "that had hitherto seemed to subsume all the varieties of social resistance."[23] Considering the whole radical milieu in which a group like the SFMT

[21] DAVIS, 1970, p. 109.
[22] Id., ibid., p. 80.
[23] JAMESON, Fredric. Periodizing the 60s. Social Text, No. 9/10, The 60's without Apology (Spring - Summer, 1984), pp. 178-209. Published by: Duke University Press. Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/466541, p. 181.
Accessed on 02-06-2019

operated, one could not directly connect the political horizon of a Brechtian play to any specific social force actually in existence. Brecht's theater unequivocally presupposes political reflection and activity in a Communist direction, so it is dependent, among other things, on the conception of class. The United States Leftists in the 1960s were precisely testing different syntheses of it with other categories—or outrightly abandoning it for new ones. That political landscape only to a lesser extent included Communist forces, although Marxist ideas were unprecedentedly discussed. Therefore, it was a political context in which Brechtian theater—if taken to its full extent—probably lacked social materiality. This, however, does not mean that Brechtian epic theater can only be performed if there is a strong mass-based Communist party in full operation. As Roberto Schwarz describes it, the audience Brecht had in mind was *stricto sensu* something like "an assembly of world transformers: proletarian in character, critical in spirit and equipped not only with a well-formulated dissatisfaction but with subversively practical proposals."[24] Most of the SFMT audience, in general, would not straightforwardly identify with a traditional notion of proletariat. Thus, its political dissatisfaction was not expressed in Communist terms and many times blended anti-systemic views with "the more psychological and cultural rhetoric of new collective 'identities,'"[25] and its actions were not organized in subversive Communist proposals, lacking a clear strategy to take over the State power. The divergences were too big for an artistic project that desired to build a concrete relationship with its audience. Moreover, there were certainly internal limitations and political disputes. In this sense, *Commedia dell'arte* might have contributed to producing a basic artistic unification. It also contained additional layers of immediate political critique and denunciation, which formed an organic anti-capitalist composite of a demystifying nature without the necessity of showing a definite direction. Anti-systemic reflection would, therefore, find a formal counterbalance in laughter and theatrical ingenuity—and certainly in moments of agitprop identification. Otherwise, preaching for revolution and pointing to an explicit way of achieving it could be, at best, a kind of innocuous meta-representation of revolution, and that was not what R.G. Davis had in mind.

Davis' political *Commedia dell'arte* was one meridian for radical theater in the mid-sixties and became an inspiration for many young artists interested in militant art, such as Luis Valdez. In 1965, he left the SFMT and went back to Delano to join the

[24] SCHWARZ, R. Brecht's relevance: highs and lows. New Left Review, 57, May/June, 2009, p. 236.
[25] JAMESON, 1984, p. 181.

efforts around the massive table-grape strike organized by the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, a union directed by Philippino labor leader Larry Itliong, and the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), founded by Chicano organizers Dolores Huerta and César Chávez. Valdez had heard about the strike when he was still working with the SFMT and soon had the idea of doing theater with the farm workers. After two decades, a program that opened the border with Mexico each season for thousands of *braceros* to work in the North for terribly low pay and indigent conditions was terminated by the government of the United States in 1964, but the plight of the rural workers of Mexican origin remained virtually unaltered. In the United States of America, farm workers were the only labor category not covered by the 1935 National Labor Relations Act, which means that they were largely unprotected, had below minimum wage jobs, were forbidden to organize labor unions and could not engage in collective bargaining with the growers.[26]

Jorge Huerta described in his historiographic work the birth of Chicano theater, at the NFWA's pink house in Delano, when Valdez gathered a few Chicano workers and improvised with them a skit on strikebreakers:

> Speaking to the *campesinos* in a mixture of Spanish and English, Valdez urges members of his audience to step up in front of the other and show what happened in the strike that day. He has brought signs to hang around these "actors'" necks, identifying the characters, and asks for two volunteers to portray *huelguistas*, or strikers, and a third volunteer to play an *esquirol*, or scab. Everyone is reluctant to play the part of the despised strikebreaker, but finally a brave young farmworker says he'll do it.
> "Now show us what happened today on the picket line," Valdez tells these three farmworkers, and immediately the two "strikers" begin yelling at the "*esquirol*," who good-naturedly shouts back at them. […] Valdez now triumphantly pulls out another theatrical device, a pig-like mask which is immediately identified by the jeering crowd as *El Patroncito*, the "boss" or grower. There, for all to see, is face that could belong to no one else, and the people respond with glee at the prospect of seeing a portrayal of a despised figure – the wealthy grower who refuses to negotiate with the union. […] Valdez chooses an energetic striker to don the mask, and as soon as he puts it on, the audience cheers in delight and disgust. The actor turns his head to face the audience, and the mask seems to come alive, sneering this way and that, drawing roars of laughter with every move. "Y'all stop that laughing!" he shouts at the crowd in a Texas drawl, and they love it.[27]

[26] The Bracero History Archive gathers a comprehensive list of resources and information on the Bracero Program: http://braceroarchive.org. Accessed on November 1, 2019.
[27] HUERTA, Jorge. Chicano Theater: Themes and Forms. Ypsilanti: Bilingual Press/Editora Bilingue, 1982, p. 11-12.

This short description includes a number of important artistic elements that would be largely employed by El Teatro Campesino (ETC) in the following years, while the ensemble operated as the union's theatrical branch. The first works of the group were called *actos*, short plays or skits with a specific political theme always related to the needs of the farm workers and their developing labor union. The *actos* were created collectively through improvisation and were based on the interactions between clearly delimitated characters, whose actions always followed a pattern of conduct, interests, language, and political perspective. They were, therefore, stereotypes. The main characters of the *actos* were directly inspired by the social reality of the rural worker in the context of the strike and behaved within the limits of their sociopolitical configuration. First created as cartoons by graphic artist Andy Zermeño, at the request of Chavéz, the most recurring characters of many *actos* appeared in the strips of the Chicano newspaper *El Malcreado*, which was the Union's house organ. According to Zermeño, the triplet he came up with gave the basic structure for the stories being told:

> Don Sotaco was a bumbling ignorant guy who just worked and worked and worked […] and was always being abused. The other one was a contratista, a Coyote, who was bringing the workers for the grower. And there was the Patron, the owner of the land. So between all of those, we were able to tell a story using these characters. There was no hero, they were all villains, except for… Well, the hero was Don Sotaco, actually. He was the guy who got punished. And you felt empathy for him. It also gave us a reason to explain your rights. If you see somebody abused, you explain what that guy can do about it. He's got rights.[28]

In ETC's *actos*, Don Sotaco could appear as a hard-working, Spanish speaking farm worker with no name, continuously exploited and humiliated, or as an *Esquirol* (a scab), easily deceived both by the labor contractor and the grower in his eagerness to break the strike and work. Don Coyote, the labor contractor, was frequently a Spanglish speaker, who functioned as the bridge connecting the Anglo grower to the Mexican worker and employed wit and charm to make his intents prevail. *El Patroncito*, the English-speaking, Anglo grower, was a Texas-accented, greedy racist who only worried about his profits. He often wears a pig mask but appears in a few *actos* without it.

It is not difficult to realize that *Commedia dell'arte* had a strong influence on the early work of ETC. The very dynamics of the *actos*, not only the most visible elements

[28] THOMPSON, Julie and WELLS, Carol A. Interview with Andy Zermeño. In: Decade of Dissent: Democracy in Action 1965-1975. Accessed at www.dailymotion.com/video/x2pjo4y, on November 2, 2019

and props, such as masks and stereotypical characters, are grounded in Commedia. They consisted of a motif and the free movement of characters—with their class perspectives, ambitions, and limitations—around it. One could almost think that no script was needed and that the artists were creating the scene during the presentation, in a free flow of theatrical substance. In fact, this was the way the ensemble created the *actos*, which were then crystallized in a script. Valdez, himself, indicated a few times the close relationship he had with *Commedia dell'arte* in those years by declaring in an interview that he had seen "a direct link between these Commedia types and the types [he] had to work with in order to put together a Farm Workers' theater." He then defined ETC's work as "an outdoor, robust theatre of types."[29]

Over the years, the ETC worked inside the National Farm Workers Association—then amalgamated with Itliong's association and officially became a labor union under the name United Farm Workers (UFW) where their *actos* were presented to rural workers in the fields, with the troupe using a flat-bed truck as a stage, and striking workers during assemblies and rallies. It was mostly a theater in open spaces, with no stage settings. The permanent call to join the union was the overall message transmitted in all presentations[30] and reinforced by songs and slogans created for the *huelga* marches.

It is pointless to search for direct correspondence between the masks of *Commedia dell'arte* and the stereotypical characters of the *actos*. Valdez and the ensemble he directed made use of a multiplicity of available resources and arrived at a complex synthesis that was equally shaped by Brechtian proposals, among other elements. However, one can see much of the astute and scheming First Zanni in ETC's Don Coyote; the average farm worker obviously being the naïve Second Zanni. *El Patroncito* would be a very particular kind of Pantalone—who not only carried his purse but had to assure his workers he would make it bigger.[31] The abyss between the ages of advanced capitalism and the Renaissance, when the market had a growing presence in the economy but still could not hegemonize the very production process or

[29] SAVRAN, David. In their own words: Contemporary American Playwrights. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1988, p. 261.
[30] HUERTA, 1982, p. 16.
[31] According to Rudlin, "a scenario must have two zanni (at least): the first is foxy and astute, the second more *stultus*—an ox, beast type, (*il furbo* and *il stupido*), but this distinction should not be absolute." He describes Pantalone as "money: he controls all the finance available within the world of *Commedia dell'arte* and therefore his orders have, ultimately, to be obeyed. He is the employer, giving orders to his servants, and the father, dictating to his children, controlling the social structure which obtains before the events of the scenario take place." RUDLIN, 1994, p. 71 and 92.

the political relations, is deep enough to reasonably block any mechanical sociopolitical and esthetic correlations. Therefore, it would be more productive to focus on the whole dynamic of the *actos* and identify the multifaceted ways they employ to transform the structure of *Commedia dell'arte* in a fertile and innovative form of political theater.

The *acto Quinta Temporada*[32] (The Fifth Season) is a good example of how these complex amalgamations were processed by the ETC. Its formal structure was inspired by *Commedia dell'arte*, but the demystification of the boss' and the contractor's economic interests partially responds to the Brechtian program, and the application of *Commedia dell'arte* to the Chicano context was materialized in the routines of the Mexican popular comic tradition. The way the ETC organized all these elements in a short, political presentation was undoubtedly related to the Iberian tradition of morality plays. The overall result is a historically new form of agitprop theater. A systematic analysis of *Quinta Temporada* will demonstrate that this combination is too strong to be neglected in favor of any attempt to frame the *actos* in a one-dimensional theatrical perspective.

The play was first performed in 1966 at the Filipino Hall in Delano, during a grape strike meeting. It was probably the sixth *acto* to be staged by the Teatro Campesino, which means the ensemble had some time to mature the conventions of the theatrical form it created. *Quinta Temporada* develops around the triplet Patrón, Don Coyote and Farm Worker, in addition to the personification of abstractions: the four seasons that regulate the rural work throughout the year and the three social institutions or categories that organize the Chicano struggle—the Churches, the Union, and La Raza. The message of the play is, as per usual, an undeviating one: join the Union in order to survive the winter.

José, a Chicano farm worker recently arrived from Texas and desperate to find a job, introduces himself by speaking directly to the audience. Don Coyote enters and promises José a "fat summer," covered with "five-dollar bills, ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred-dollar bills." He initially approaches the farm worker in Spanish and then switches to English; his lines are accompanied by grandiloquent gestures to emphasize his seductive manner. Of course, it does not take too much effort to persuade the farm worker—a poor worker stereotype with a lineage of Mexican Second Zannis to which belong, with a variety of particularities, Don Sotaco and Cantinflas. The Patrón

[32] All citations are from VALDEZ, Luis. Luis Valdez – Early Works: Actos, Bernabé and Pensamiento Serpentino. Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1994.

arrogantly enters the scene, calling Don Coyote a "boy" while asking if he likes him—in the way racist Southerners typically addressed Black people, especially subordinate workers. After certifying that everything is ready for the harvest season, he orders the Summer to arrive and the work begins:

> COYOTE: ¡Entrale, mano! (The FARMWORKER attacks the SUMMER and begins to pick as many dollar bills as his hands can grab. These he stuffs into his back pockets. DON COYOTE immediately takes his place behind the FARMWORKER and extracts the money from his back pockets and hands it over to the PATRON, who has taken his place behind the contractor. This exchange continues until SUMMER exits. The PATRON then moves to S.R., counting his money. DON COYOTE takes the FARMWORKER to S.L. Enthusiastically.) ¡Te aventastes! Didn't I tell you we're going to get rich? Didn't I tell you? (DON COYOTE breaks off abruptly and goes over to his PATRON's side.) How'd we do, boss?
> PATRON: Terrible! We're going to have to ask for a federal subsidy. (The FARMWORKER searches his pockets for money and panics when he can't find a single dollar bill. He spots the PATRON with handfuls of money and his panic turns to anger.)
> WORKER: (To DON COYOTE.) Hey! Where's my money?
> COYOTE: What money?
> WORKER: Pos, what? The money I work for all summer.

This simple and very effective action revives an ancient kind of *lazzi*, the comic stock routines that are interspersed with the main scenario in a Commedia dell'arte presentation. It seems to recreate the *Lazzo of the country of Cuccagna* catalogued by Flaminio Scala in Venice in 1611, and described in Mel Gordon's compilation of *lazzi*:

> Lazzo of the country of Cuccagna (Venice, 1611)
> Two thieves enter to tell Zanni [or Burattino] about a magic land, Cuccagna. As one spins tails about the good life in that land, the other wolfs down Zanni's meal. The second then begins to lament about the difficulties of life as the other eats from Zanni's basket.[33]

Lazzi involving the creation of a distraction to steal food, money or jewels were rather common in Commedia. They also could include some kind of technique, trick or special device to effectuate the robbery. Gordon's compilation mentions the *Lazzo of the straw*, in which the Capitano pours wine into a glass that always remains empty because Arlecchino is on the other side stealing the wine with a straw. In the *Lazzo of the Multiple Thief*, "Pandolfo hands Zanni a gold collar for safe keeping," and Pulcinella disguises himself as a devil to scare Zanni out of the collar. "Cola, watching from another side of the stage, dresses as a ghost and frightens Pulcinella out of the prize." In the end, "Pandolfo and Ubaldo enter, dressed as policemen, and take the gold

[33] GORDON, Mel. Lazzi: The comic routines of the Commedia dell'Arte. New York: Performing Arts Publication Journal, 1983, p. 51.

collar from Cola."[34] There is also the *Lazzo of the Zig-Zag*, in which "Arlecchino (or Scaramouche) uses an expanding hinged apparatus to deliver a letter across the stage, or to pick the Doctor's pocket."[35]

In *Quinta Temporada*, the scene's distraction is the farm work itself since José is robbed while he picks up the fruits of the season, presented as dollar bills. The physical trick is to artfully take the bills while he is not looking, much like the Arlecchino does in the *Lazzo of the straw*. However, the real scheme that makes the money earned by the farm worker to be transferred to the grower appears only in the prologue when Valdez mentions the "liquor and meager lunches sold at exorbitant prices to the workers" in the fields. The *Paese della Cuccagna*, the mythical Middle Age country where there was plenty of food and comfort for everyone, needs no description by Don Coyote or the Patrón—every Mexican migrant carried some kind of hope that the United States would be an earthly paradise (making California a kind of *Cuccagna* for out-of-state workers of Mexican origin). Ultimately, the contractor is forced to appeal to this ideal when the farm worker refuses to return in the Fall for work after being robbed the previous season:

> Look, mano, this autumn is coming FAT! Fatter than last summer. You go to work for me and you'll be rich. You'll have enough money to buy yourself a new car, a Cadillac! Two Cadillacs! You'll be able to go to Acapulco! Guadalajara! You'll be able to send your kids to college! You'll be able to afford a budget! You'll be middle-class! You'll be Anglo! You'll be rich!

This is probably a good description of a Mexican American *Cuccagna*. José reacts to each one of the arguments with feigned joy, but ends up saying no. He is finally convinced to go back to the fields, however, when Don Coyote reminds him Winter is coming. As Valdez explains in the prologue, since there is no unemployment compensation for the immigrant farm workers, "'El Invierno' is […] almost a living, breathing creature to the campesino—a monster, in fact, bringing with him humiliation, starvation and disease." The same routine is portrayed but now the worker tries to react when the Coyote grabs his money—only to be spanked while the Patrón observes and gives his approval. For his commitment to disciplining the workers, Don Coyote throws a bone and is paid a bonus. This sequence is completed with the arrival of Winter, who requests "money for gas, lights, telephone, rent." Don Coyote gives him his bone; el Patrón hands him a "small wad of bills;" both of them announce it is time to leave—el

[34] GORDON, 1983, p. 52.
[35] Id., ibid., p. 31.

Patrón is going to Acapulco and Don Coyote is going to Las Vegas. With no money to give Winter, the Worker has to "suffer:" he is beaten and covered in snow.

If the structure of these episodes shares central elements with *Commedia dell'arte*, then the overall perspective has connections to Brechtian formulations. Brecht's epic theater was no stranger to the typification that was a common attribute of many theatrical traditions before the hegemony of the dramatic form. In this sense, he "insisted on the antiquity of anti-illusionist drama"[36] and liked to indicate as other examples of epic theater the Elizabethan, Japanese, and Medieval mystery plays. The association of *Commedia dell'arte* dynamics with a demystification program, therefore, is not incongruous. It is quite the opposite as a Brechtian perspective was probably facilitated by it. The ETC effectuated this articulation with very simple mechanisms, approximating *Quinta Temporada* not so much to Brecht's didactic plays (the *Lehrstück*e) but to his defense of *plumpes denken*—or crude thinking, as in the sense of being able to produce ideas that are inseparable from concrete action and, therefore, "represent nothing other than the application of theory to practice."[37]

The massive efforts made by the UFW to congregate farm workers and make them aware of their needs and their rights; the great grape strike, which would take a few more years and have an impact both nationally and internationally; the marches, boycotts, rallies and formative activities; the collective building of a network of solidarity with the farm workers involving other entities, such as the Catholic Church and the academic world were all measures, in those initial years, that created the foundation of the ETC's plays. There was not much space left for a particular kind of mystification: thoughts and theatricalization without consequences.[38] The fruits of the work are money bills; the *contratista* is a kind of devil; el *patrón* is a pig; the Winter is a devil and a pig; the Chicanos work and work in the fields and the boss gets everything, including the money that he had paid them before. No subtleties were needed, and the representation was as plain as in the agitprop tradition of the 1920s and 1930s. The practical consequence of this *plumpes denken* theatrical layer was also easy to apprehend; denounced and ridiculed on the stage, the grower and the Coyote's schemes would no longer prevent the farm workers from reflecting on their own plight and from working together to build a better life.

[36] SCHWARZ, 2009, p. 236.
[37] BENJAMIN, Walter. Understanding Brecht. London, New York: Verso, 1998, p. 81.
[38] JAMESON, Fredric. Brecht and Method. London, New York: Verson, 1998, p. 159.

The brief robbery sequence has yet another important layer. The Mexican *teatro de carpa*, the travelling tents that developed throughout the decades since the end of the 19th century, also gave birth to Mario Moreno's famous character Cantinflas. Yolanda Broyles-González affirms that such genre—which she includes in a broader definition, the so called "Mexican popular performance tradition"—plays a central role as an antecedent of *El Teatro Campesino* and the subsequent groups that were formed in the United States at the end of the 1960s. Building a rather idealized notion of an "immemorial" Mexican performance lineage based on the key ideas of oral history, human memory, and community experience, Broyles-González seeks to distance the ETC from so-called European traditions:

> Although some affinity maybe sought and found between El Teatro Campesino and European models, be they German (the Brechtian), Italian (commedia dell'arte), Russian (agitprop), or Spanish (Golden age drama), it seems spatially and temporally more compelling to investigate the question of origins in our own backyard first, especially when the Mexican lineage is more than evident.[39]

In her conceptualization of a "Mexican lineage" of performance, Broyles-González establishes a direct link between the *teatro de carpa* and the theatrical forms that were observed among the pre-Cortesian peoples and described by the Catholic chroniclers Diego Durán and Antonio de Herrera. Those reports suggest there were relevant comic—and even farcical—elements in the forms of amusement that interspersed the usually sacred dances among Nahua peoples. Friar Durán, for example, narrates a number of *entremeses* (a Spanish word he used to describe a short action involving simple staging) presented after a dance. The mimics represented two blind people, a lame person, a fly and a scarab, causing great laughter in the audience. This is taken by Broyles-González as a sign of antiquity within the comic tradition in Mexico, which significantly flourished with the *carpas*—and then with the Chicano theater. Interesting as they might be, the descriptions of Durán and Herrera deal with forms that were no longer in existence at the time of their accounts. To connect those "rudimentary farses or commedies [of] the pre-Cortesian peoples" with the unequivocally Modern *teatro de carpa* is to romanticize the possibilities of cultural resistance through "human memory" and "community experience." Although powerful, there is no evidence, in this case, that they were successful.

[39] BROYLES-GONZÁLES, Yolanda. El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994, p. 6.

Moreover, a broader perspective, one that takes into account the Latin American history, will show that the cultural process from which the *teatro de carpa* emerged was not only Mexican but was also active throughout the continent—sometimes with very similar developments, despite relevant regional and cultural disparities and specificities. In Brazil, for instance, there was a strong presence of the *circo-teatro* (Circus theater) in the rural and, also, urban areas of the country since the end of the 19th century. Nothing similar to a *momoztli*—the huge stone platforms where sacred and artistic liturgies were performed by pre-Hispanic peoples in Mexico—were ever found in Brazil, and no account of European chroniclers decisively indicates there was ever any kind of theatrical or performance art among the indigenous peoples in the region before the Portuguese arrived. Yet, starting in the 18th century, there was a *circo-teatro* movement teeming with popular laughter and ridiculing of the powerful elite. If in Mexico and the Southwest United States a few comics of the *carpas* ended up transferring to the movie industry, with at least one case of astonishing success (with Moreno), then the *circo-teatro* in Brazil led to the very same process: it gave birth to the first generation of Brazilian movie stars, including the biggest of them all from the mid-1950s on, Amácio Mazzaropi. The correlations between Cantinflas and Mazzaropi's *Jeca Tatu* are not negligible, both in style and in their ambiguous social function.

These similar developments also suggest similar origin. The *carpas*—like the *circo-teatro* in Brazil—were a product of the European circus itself, brought to the New World at the end of the 18th century and synthesized with local cultural elements. They were also a reaction to an elitist cultural market, which privileged the access of landowners and big businessmen to a European type of art and left large portions of the population out of the artistic circuits. These travelling pavilions had affordable tickets and attracted large working-class audiences, with presentations that emulated the hegemonic theatrical models, but also encompassed their own expressions. At a time when Paris was the cultural capital of all Latin America (a role currently shared by Miami and Los Angeles), the French hegemonic theatrical genres were also the cultural dominants in Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Buenos Aires. The last decades of the 19th century—when *carpas* and *circo-teatro* became a massive cultural element—were the age of the musical revue, vaudeville, cabaret, and melodrama, all of which originated in *Commedia dell'arte*. Synthesized with the circus tradition, these forms reactivated much of the Commedia typification and dynamics. A rapid analysis of

the comic routines present in *teatro de carpa* would indicate the deep similarities with the *lazzi* of *Commedia dell'arte.*

Carpas—particularly the ones from the Southwest—played a fundamental role as a cultural element in the sociability of rural workers of Mexican origin. Felipe Cantú, a comic virtuoso that was once part of the ETC during its initial years, confirms that the *carpa* style had a great participation in his formative years and on his performance style.[40] During the short sequence in *Quinta Temporada* where José's money is taken from him by Don Coyote and passed along to the Patron, there is a quick *carpa* style physical battle just after the farm worker discovers that he has been robbed:

> COYOTE: No! Not my patrón! It's Autumn! Autumn has your money.
> WORKER: Autumn?
> COYOTE: El otoño.
> WORKER: Puras papas. I don't believe you.
> COYOTE: You don't believe me? (Faking his sincerity.) But I swear by my madrecita! (Pause.) Still don't believe me, eh? Okay. Do you want to see the truth in action? Well, here's the truth in action! (DON COYOTE makes a flourish with his arms, and spits on the floor, then stomps vigorously on the spit with his foot. All in a grandiose manner.)
> WORKER: That's it?
> COYOTE: La verdad en acción.
> WORKER: Well, here goes mine! (FARMWORKER spits at DON COYOTE's foot, but COYOTE pulls it back just in time. He retaliates by spitting toward FARMWOKER's foot. FARMWORKER pulls his foot back just in time, as DON COYOTE stomps toward it. The FARMWORKER now catches DON COYOTE off guard by spitting on his face.)

This spit-and-stomp duel is a brief demonstration of the big disputes that were part of the entertainment in *carpa* presentations. Their nature was customarily verbal, with the *albur* as a classic means of battle: one of the contenders provokes the other, usually with a sexual allusion, and the other has to respond quickly by using any element of the other contender's line as part of his answer.[41] These exchanges, a kind of battle of sagacity, were rather common during the *carpa* shows and sometimes involved a member of the audience and one of the artists. Verbal—and at times physical—duels were even more common in the movies of Cantinflas, which were frequently combined with nonsensical speeches.[42] The disloyal actions of the farm worker (who agrees to

[40]BROYLES-GONZÁLES, 1994, p. 14-15
[41]LAVERTUE, Julie. El Albuer en México: Descripción y Percepción. Mémoire presenté à la Faculté des Études Supérieures de l'Université Laval pour l'obtention du grade de maître en arts. April, 1998, p. 37.
[42] PILCHER, Jeffrey M. Cantinflas and the Chaos of Mexican Modernity. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001, p. 44.

take part in the duel but chooses to spit on Don Coyote instead of the floor) is also a traditional element of this popular comic tradition. The underdog (or *peladito*, the typical lumpen proletarian of Mexican society in the period between wars) was obliged to appeal to every resource at his disposal to assure minimum social honor and his own survival.[43]

However, the United States in the 1960s was not Mexico in the 1930s, and the Mexican farm worker in the United States was not the Mexican *peladito* of the President Lázaro Cárdenas era. José's plight can only be changed if he joins the union—that is the message the *Teatro Campesino* insists on, after all. His individual picardy is not relevant in any fashion. Even more unsuitable is Don Coyote's attempt to play with Cantinflas-type gibberish. When José finally agrees to work with him again, he hurries to seal the agreement by shaking hands and says: "Lío es lío, yo soy tu tío, grillo." This Cantinflesque attempt ends up being more a cultural marker than the real practice of a tradition. The overall comic approach to the problems the play deals with is much more concrete. The exploitation of the Mexican American rural migrant by labor contractors and Anglo growers could certainly give substance to a tragedy, but the *actos* are vibrantly funny. This is where Cantinflas meets the agitprop tradition of the United States and the labor miseries of the country while simultaneously making people think and laugh.

In fact, many elements connect *Quinta Temporada* to the forms of agitprop theater that emerged in the United States in the 1930s, as described by Jay Williams in his account of that decade's theatrical movement.[44] Agility is the basic concept that gathers all these aspects. The characters wear signs with their names to facilitate the apprehension of their roles and functions, ideas or concepts are personified and portrayed in their immediate significance to the story being told (Summer is fat and full of money while Fall is thinner), and the epic-theater style of economic revelation is carried out through the direct representation of the interests at play, without much theorization about it. One of the effects these resources have is the easy association of economic and political interests in a very simple fashion. A clear example is the answer the Patron gives to Don Coyote as to his financial success during summer: "Terrible! We're going to have to ask for a federal subsidy." This crudeness aims to provoke a bit

[43] Id., ibid.
[44] WILLIAMS, Jay. Stage Left – An engrossing account of the radical theatre movement in America. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974.

of a shock, one that could fill some gaps in the consciousness of the spectator. The whole dynamic of the seasons' sequence is reminiscent of the forms and motifs of the Living Newspapers produced between 1935 and 1939 by the Federal Theatre Project. One of them, *Triple-A Plowed Under* (staged in 1936), was a play that sought to elucidate the relations between the rural economic crisis and the rise of food prices in the city in an effort to connect the hardships of the small growers with the struggles of the urban working class. After many depictions of the terrible consequences the crisis inflicted on poor people, scene 15 shows a couple having dinner in a fancy restaurant, wearing evening clothes, and ordering caviar and expensive wine. The husband is a wheat middleman and explains to his wife that his business was affected by the new processing taxes—nevertheless, he is happy about it because he had wheat on stock and could now sell it for the new price:

> WOMAN (after a short pause): Tell me, are you affected by these newprocessing taxes?
> MAN: Uh-huh.
> WOMAN: You seem pretty cheerful about it.
> MAN: Why shouldn't I, it's the consumer who pays.
> [After a quick explanation, they go on:]
> WOMAN (also after a slight pause): I'm afraid it's just a bit complicated. ...for me.
> MAN: Oh well, wheat's up and I've been saving a lot of it to unload... so what will it be: a new car or a sable coat?
> WOMAN: Mmmmmmm!
> MAN: Ok. Both.[45]

This could be seen as a cheap attempt of villainization, but the resulting effect is not the presentation of the middlemen as the evil enemies of the people. The idea is to identify the malfunctions of the political and economic system in order to understand why the growers were losing their farms and the workers were starving, while the wheat merchants were making so much money. Portraying the symptoms of the social crisis was a way of creating tension—maybe a productive type of discomfort. The same thing happens in *Quinta Temporada*. The villain is mainly Don Coyote, but also the Patron. However, there is no place for any kind of process of individualization or psychologization. The goal of the *acto* is to criticize the open-shop contract policy, which is the real evil to be battled. This makes *Quinta Temporada* an integrant of the

[45] ARENT, Artur (Ed.) Triple-A Plowed Under. New York: Federal Theatre Project, 1936, p. 64.

United States agitprop tradition, particularly the kind of agitprop developed in the 1930s with radical collectives such as the Workers' Laboratory Theater.[46]

Yet, there is something devilish about Don Coyote, which is still stressed by the ETC in current performances. The actor Adrian Torres can be seen in a recent rehearsal playing a finely diabolical *contratista*, whose gestures, prosody, and movement evoke the apparition of an ambiguous genie.[47] Don Coyote is continuously trying to convince José of accepting an agreement with him and to work for the Patrón. Considering the Latin American tradition of *autos sacramentales* and medieval morality plays, the persuasive efforts of the labor contractor can also be seen as a kind of temptation. It is surely tempting to accept work when one is in desperate need, as is the case of the Texan migrant worker, but there is a massive strike going on. Although it is never mentioned in the play, this is the historical context of *Quinta Temporada*. So, José is all the time being convinced to become a scab. The allegorization of abstractions adds up to this religious layer of the *acto*. One of them, Spring, is the one who talks to the farm worker and opens his eyes—the way an angel would do it:

> SPRING: (Crosses to FARMWORKER and helps him to get up.) There, there, you poor, poor farmworker, here, now, get up. You mustn't let this happen to you again. You've got to fight for your rights!
> WORKER: You mean I've got rights?
> SPRING: Sure!
> WORKER: Ahora, si. I'm going to fight for my rights like Pancho Villa, like Francisco I. Madero, like Emiliano Zapata . . . (SPRING startles him by touching his shoulder.) Ta-ta-ta! (From backstage is heard the cry: Campesino!)
> SPRING: Oh, my time has come . . . (Crosses in front of FARMWORKER.) I must go now. But, remember, fight for your rights! La, la, la, la. (Exits S.R., singing and skipping.)
> WORKER: She's right! From now on I'm going to fight for my rights, my lefts, and my liberals. (DON COYOTE enters S.L.)

Spring is a functionalist materialization, but also a spiritual entity who takes care of José and gives him useful advice. The religious perspective is much balanced by her hippie looks and manners and by her comic exchange with Winter at the moment of her arrival on stage (he calls her "mamasota," a word with sexual connotation, and refuses to leave; she ends up losing her patience and yells at him to get the hell out). The

[46] "The workers' theatre group spanned the country, from the Solidarity Player of Boston, to the Chicago Blue Blouses, to the Rebel Players of Los Angeles, some twenty-five or thirty of them in all." Williams, 1974, p. 46.
[47] Video accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3EVyaAIgmM on November 2, 2019.

sudden excitement of the farm worker with his labor struggle, compared to the lack of political instruction that is noticeable in his speech, also creates humor. However, the religious horizon is still there. Jorge Huerta mentions these elements, besides the overall structure of the play, as consisting of "representative character types and a particular conflict that has an obvious solution," to conclude that it is a "modern morality play,"[48] a descendant of the Spanish religious drama.

Quinta Temporada is certainly a morality play of a Mexican type (given the particular development it had in the country since colonial times.) However, the morality in which it is based is obviously not from the Middle Ages since it is rooted in class struggle. The central moral element hanging in the balance is the social role played by the *contratista,* discussed by Valdez from the prologue on. The farm labor contractor is "one of the most hated figures in the entire structure of agribusiness," he affirms, as he exploits the work of the poor migrants and "sits in his air-conditioned pickup while the workers suffer the blistering heat or freezing cold of inclement weather." Valdez adds that the *acto* included the names of real *contratistas* in the first performances—direct denouncement is a world-wide agitprop theater procedure. The focal point of the critique, however, is not only what the labor contractor does, but also who he is. When José opens his eyes and decides to fight for "his rights, lefts and liberals," he accuses Don Coyote of having robbed him, and the dialogue which follows is noteworthy:

> COYOTE: No! No, I'm your friend.
> WORKER: Ni madre! You're a thief!
> COYOTE: No, soy tu amigo. ¡Somos de la misma raza!
> WORKER: ¡Simón, eres rata! (He swings at DON COYOTE.)
> COYOTE: ¡Calma, hombre! ¡Ahí viene mi patrón!

Don Coyote is a traitor, a Chicano Judas, and the criticism of his actions toward his own people is where much of the strength comes from for the *acto*. The farm workers' struggle in *Quinta Temporada* results, among other things, in Don Coyote's defeat and disappearance. Thus, the play is moral in the sense that it demonstrates that a Chicano cannot ally with the Anglo elite and still expect to be seen as "raza."

Raza is one of the characters that appear at the end of the play to help José in his struggle. The allegorized seasons now become new allegories: Fall re-enters the stage dressed as a Mexican revolutionary, assuming this new character, Raza; Spring appears

[48]HUERTA, 1982, p. 27.

with a nun habit and becomes the Churches; Summer carries a contract and a giant pencil to represent the Unions. These three entities will assure that José can continue on strike and triumph in the end when the Patrón signs the UFW hiring hall contract and the *contratista* is finally kicked out of the labor relation by the Social Justice—which is the fifth season, assumed by Winter. The *Quinta Temporada*, therefore, is the distributive solution to the farm worker's misery, mediated by the union and enforced by the progressive churches and by the Chicano movement.

This is the political horizon of the play: the orchestrated fight of the UFW, gathering support from religious people and Chicano workers from other labor categories, can all put an end to the unfair conditions of life for migrant workers, which was intentionally kept the same for decades. Although it employed revolutionary theatrical forms, the ETC's play was not talking about political revolution, as would do a play solely inspired by Brechtian proposals, but of a limited (yet significant) reform. This should be clear for everybody, but the Churches and farm worker on strike are called Communists by the Patrón and Don Coyote—the same way César Chávez and Dolores Huerta were in reality. Another relevant moral aspect of this *acto* is that the union labor activists were organizing the strike because, from their point of view (which is, of course, the point of view of the working class), that was the right thing to do.

This new politically radical sense of righteousness owed much to the rapidly changing spirituality of those years, when large sectors of both the clergy and the lay people's movements were discovering and building a new progressivism in the heart of Christianity. In the 1960s, the Catholic Church and a number of Protestant denominations were going through gigantic transformations in Latin America and in the United States. Latino communities were particularly touched by these changes, given that they had a higher degree of cultural exchange with Latin America and followed the Catholic Church movements, and they were, at the same time, close to the Black Civil Rights struggle, whose most vocal leader, Reverend Martin Luther King, inspired many young Catholic Chicanos. Therefore, great segments in the Chicano communities began to combine those new religious views with the political radicalism they were experiencing on the sociopolitical front. One of the meta-synthesis of that era concerning faith and politics—as this new approximation became known in some academic and militant circles—was the "preferential option for the poor," a motto that developed from the Second Vatican Council (held in Rome between 1962 and 1965) and was deepened by the Second Episcopal Conference of Latin America, which

occurred in Medellin, Colombia in 1968. When this perspective rose in the Church of Latin America, the Catholic Chicanos had already been following the same direction. Since the 1950s, several initiatives had been stimulating a progressive approach in the Church, as was the case of the Cursillo, a "three-day retreat for lay people" held in English and Spanish that "gave Mexican American Catholics a new sense of purpose and involvement in the church," having "motivated many Mexican Americans to become actively involved in the pursuit of social justice."[49] César Chávez had been one of the attendants of a Cursillo; years later, he would be one of the main inspirations for the creation of the *Padres Asociados para Derechos Religiosos, Educativos y Sociales* (Priests Associated for Religious, Educational, and Social Rights, or only Padres), the Chicano priests' movement established in 1969. It is not difficult to see why the UFW marches and rallies were, from the beginning, accompanied with banners showing the Virgin of Guadalupe, at once a religious symbol and a cultural identity sign. The masses on strike were mostly religious and so was the new generation of community leaders. This was an emerging element in the dynamics of the political struggle for the United States left-wing.

Despite the drastically comic nature of the whole *acto*, it manifests an emotional grave note concerning the suffering of the farm worker. In theater, the attempt at creating empathy with the sentiments expressed on stage can have a variety of manifestations and intents. It is not uncommon to notice this element in radical melodramas and in social or documentary dramas when it comes to plays produced by the Left. However, in the case of the *actos* staged by the Teatro Campesino, the source of this identification drive is the progressive spirituality of the 1960s. When José discovers he had been robbed, he complains about it and is spanked by Don Coyote:

> WORKER: Hey! That's my money! You're stealing my money! Pos, mira, qué hijo de . . . (FARMWORKER strikes at contractor. DON COYOTE knocks him down and kicks him three times. The PATRON stands watching all of this, then finally calls out.)
> PATRON: You, boy!
> COYOTE: (In a sweat, fearful of reprimand) ¿Sí, patroncito? I didn't mean it, boss. (Pointing to his foot) Mira, rubber soles, patrón. (DON COYOTE obsequiously slides over to the boss. The PATRON is expansive, beaming, pleased)
> PATRON: I like the way you do that, boy.

[49]MARTÍNEZ, Richard Edward. PADRES - The National Chicano Priest Movement. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005, p. 30.

> COYOTE: You do? Oh, I can do it again, patron. (He runs over to the FARMWORKER and gives him one final kick in the ribs. The FARMWORKER groans.)
> PATRON: (With corporate pride.) Beautiful! If there's anything we need in our company, boy, it's discipline and control of our workers!

The scene keeps the ridiculous tone, of course, but the farm worker's groans surely could not be ignored by an audience that was at constant risk of being submitted to the same kind of violence. The farm worker's pain is there to be shared with the spectator—and help raise his revolt against the state of things. The aimed emotion was compassion; compassion for a fellow poor laborer, *un hijo de Dios*.

The encompassing political category of working class, allegorized as the Unions, was thus presented side-by-side with Christian universalism, represented by the Churches. What about the third character, the Raza? In the play, as in the political reality of the 1960s, it was surely thought of as having the same kind of political activation potential as the other two abstractions. As a matter of fact, in the environment of the ETC/UFW, it operated as a synonym of *campesino*—an already confusing category given that the union was protecting the rights of farm workers, not of peasants or small growers. Maybe the reference was to their original socioeconomic condition of peasants or small growers from Mexico or the Southwest United States. If that was the case, *El Teatro Campesino* accounted for an effort, since its very start, in providing social and cultural orientation to those dispossessed people inserted in a new land and (sometimes) in a new mode of production. *Raza*, this way, would be a category that encompasses that specific contingent of immigrant or migrant former peasants, which shared a common language, a cultural community and the same ethnic heritage. The goal of the ETC and of the UFW was precisely to improve the conditions of life for that community, as it was subject to a labor legislation that failed to provide a minimally acceptable standard of living. They desperately needed help. That is why the univocal political message of the *actos* necessarily had a limited political horizon. To join the UFW could not represent anything more than raising the standard of living inside the United States' political and economic system. In fact, if the UFW managed to reach the goals it proposed, the results would include important changes to the agribusiness in the country—and a relevant part of them were obtained. However, no revolution was planned.

In 1967, the ETC decided to leave the UFW and pursue its own autonomous way in theater. Nevertheless, they kept "*campesino*" in their name. This measure could be

seen as the growth of the character *Raza* and the shrinkage of the Churches and the Union. However, as long as the original ensemble existed (Broyles-González considers 1980 as the year of disbandment), all these layers, forms and content already constitutive of *Quinta Temporada* remained active, with variations according to the phase or work. Many years later, Luis Valdez would say, when questioned about the similarities and differences between his work and the works of his Latin American counterparts of the same period, that the Chicano theater artists were in the belly of the monster. "In the belly of the monster there is more food, but we are also food inside it." This seems to be an appropriate image for the struggles of the UFW: the union had to do something to take the rural workers out of misery, so it deployed very powerful political and symbolic resources to battle the system, but the system could not really be challenged and all revolutionary discourses against it only corresponded to a few possible reforms. ETC's *actos* were part of this process; they helped people to gather and reflect on their own realities and, at the same time, gave form to the impasses they were living. When the troupe left the UFW, the impasses continued to exist, but could no longer be theatrically figured. For most Teatros Chicanos, many times unable to identify the source of the malaise, theater became, after that rupture between the ETC and the UFW, a phantasmagoric game of allegories in which Raza tried to address issues that could only be dealt with by another character, the Workers.

CHAPTER II

La Compañía de Teatro de Alburquerque's *La Pasion de Jesús Chavez*: Christian universalism and Latin American revolution

Father Gustavo Gutierrez dedicates his book *A Theology of Liberation* to the Peruvian author José María Arguedas and opens with a fragment of the writer's masterpiece *Todas las Sangres*. A priest tries to persuade a *mestizo* organist to help him celebrate an important mass during the village's festivities. The man does not want to do it and references Gertrudis, an indigenous hunchback who can "sing like an angel:"

> — La Gertrudis no piensa en Dios; canta triste, sí, porque *es deforme*.
> — Padrecito, tú no entiendes el alma de indios. La Gertrudis, aunque no conociendo a Dios, de Dios es. ¿Quién, si no, le dio esa voz que limpia el pecado? Consuela al triste, hace pensar al alegre; quita de la sangre cualquier suciedad.[50]

It is not inconsequential that one of the main works of Liberation Theology starts with a piece of literary art—a small portion that condenses criticism on the social role of the Church in Latin America and on the traditional elitist vision of art, while at the same time implying a whole program for the progressive clergy and artists living in the continent. Gutierrez's book reflected on ongoing radical experiences throughout Latin America and systematized a new theological perspective in the light of those unprecedented social novelties that were taking place. It was not only a programmatic coincidence that priests and theologians were taking the same path as so many Latin American artists in seeking a radical voluntary proletarianization. The very basis of Liberation Theology includes an aesthetic principle, as discussed by Mancini:

> El método de la teología de la liberación (TL) considera la praxis como primordial: contemplación y solidaridad son el acto primero que inspira el acto segundo, la reflexión teológica. […] Convivencia y contemplación tienen, indudablemente, una dimensión estética. […] Muchas veces, la cuestión estética se ha visto reducida a la belleza, a la *via pulchritudinis*. Pero en este caso tiene que ver con la fealdad, con el mal sufrido, mal deformante y asesino, que despierta la indignación y la compasión que busca superarla. […] En esa experiencia de entrar en contacto con el mundo de los pobres, de enfrentar la fealdad mediante el compromiso liberador, de contemplar la acción salvadora de Dios en ello, resuena nuestro mundo emotivo, imaginativo, sentimental y pasional.[51]

[50] GUTIERREZ, Gustavo. A Theology of Liberation – History, Politics, and Salvation. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988, p.

[51] MANCINI, Santiago Rodríguez. También en lo más pequeño. Dimensión estética del acto primero de la teología de la liberación. Paper presented to the Universidad Católica de Córdoba, July of 2013.

Voluntary poverty represents, in this new sense, a "commitment of solidarity with the poor, with those who suffer misery and injustice," which "must manifest itself in a specific action, a style of life, or a break with one's social class." In Gutierrez words, this "is the concrete, contemporary meaning of the witness of poverty. It is a poverty lived not for its own sake, but rather as an authentic imitation of Christ."[52] The imitation of a "Christ of the Poor" took an artistic perspective in many levels in the 1960s, 1970s, and the beginning of the 1980s, even including the formation of a distinct aesthetic taste that consisted mostly of indigenous and peasant elements combined with a radical anti-capitalist critique and arranged in Modernist fashion. Liberation Theology aesthetics surpassed the religious sphere and became an important feature in popular culture in most Latin American countries. In art, products carried out in connection to religious entities or in parishes and Catholic communities contained elements that were obviously much exacerbated. Such manifestations were most common in the countries south of the United States—following the *latinidad* of Liberation Theology itself—but were also present there, particularly in the Southwest and in regions with a high concentration of Latinos.

It is well known that Iberian Middle Age religious and artistic traditions were cultivated for centuries in Latin America, and the reenactment of the last moments of Jesus Christ became an essential part of the Easter celebrations from South to North. However, particularly in the 1970s, this ancient tradition sometimes assumed a political nature, with the "Christ of the Poor" giving proof of his commitment to the peasants and the working class, in its revolutionary tone and agitprop form. *La Pasión de Jesús Chávez*, staged by *La Compañía de Teatro de Alburquerque* in 1980, is part of this context and is a sign of the great effort the Chicano Theatre has made to recover the Mexican forms of expression that have been silenced since 1848 by the Anglo Americans.

José Rodríguez, the founder of *La Compañía*, was a Puerto Rican graduate from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London and worked for a few years as an actor of Repertório Español, a small Spanish-language theater founded in the 1960s in New York by Cuban directors René Buch and Gilberto Zaldívar. His strong academic formation and his experience with the Spanish classical dramaturgy greatly influenced

[52] GUTIERREZ, 1988, p. 172.

his ideas on theater. Two elements of the Repertório Español's work were equally important for Rodríguez's theatrical model: the high level of excellence of the actors and director and the straight contact with the community, as the Repertório programmatically visited schools to make special performances of its plays. He was also deeply inspired by the Catholic Church and would eventually become a priest.

In 1977, Rodríguez was touring with Repertório Español in New Mexico and was invited to give a workshop at the University of Albuquerque. Surprised by the New Mexican culture and history and noticing the need for a Spanish-language community theater, he decided to stay and establish *La Compañía de Teatro de Alburquerque*—with the extra "R" as to commemorate the city's original name. His workshops, offered as part of the Multicultural Education Program coordinated by Professor Miguel Encinias, attracted dozens of participants with some remaining with the group, before becoming an autonomous non-profit organization two years later. La Compañía's first stagings were Spanish language theater classics, written by authors such as Lorca and Lope de Vega. However, it rapidly began to produce renditions of local liturgical theater plays, often presented according to the Catholic calendar.

New Mexico is one of the states where the Iberian Catholic *autos* remained most preserved. Throughout the year, several liturgical plays retelling the events of the Bible while adding apocryphal ones to them are performed by the New Mexican communities. Since the 16th century, they have absorbed indigenous elements and developed enriched scenic and musical qualities. The decline of Roman Catholicism in New Mexico, together with the diminished usage of Spanish in daily life and the dismantling of traditional communities, contributed to the progressive rarefaction of such practices. However, numerous communities continue to enact *Las Posadas* (in which Joseph and Mary look for shelter), *Los Pastores* (in which the shepherds struggle to get to Bethlehem), *Los Reyes Magos* (about the three magi), *Los desposorios de San José y María Santisima* (about the wedding of Saint Joseph and Saint Mary) and even two vetero-testamentary autos, *Adan y Eva* and *Caín y Abel*.[53] The Spanish Christmas season, which begins at the end of December and ends January 6, is a time to enact *Las Pastorelas*—the autos about the Nativity in which there are always the characters of the shepherds. During Easter, obviously, the tradition is to stage the local version of *La Pasión*.

[53] ESPINOZA, Aurélio M. The folklore of Spain in the American Southwest. Traditional Spanish folk literature in Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado. p. 201-213.

La Compañía's first staging of an auto was *El Sueño de Navidad del Santero* (The Wood Carver's Christmas Dream), an adaptation of the versions of *Los Pastores* collected in the New Mexican cities of Socorro, Griegos, Gallegos, Santa Fé, and Tomé.[54] Rodríguez inserted the character of the Wood Carver (or *santero*), the traditional sculptor of wooden saints and a figure that was almost banished from the state when Archbishop Lamy assumed the Church in New Mexico, after the Mexican-American War. *Los Pastores* appeared as a dream the *Santero* had, in a way that his layer of the play that served as an epic frame for the auto.

El Sueño probably solidified Rodríguez's perception about the central role that faith played with the New Mexican people.[55] One of La Compañía's next works, *Nacimiento*, written by New Mexican playwright Denise Chávez, was not an auto, but based its whole structure on the form of a Nativity play.[56] This tendency would reach a culminating point in 1980 when *La Compañía* took a big step in the experimentation of liturgical theater forms and decided to stage a passion play.

La Pasión de Jesús Chávez[57] also makes use of an epic frame. The passion is told in remembrance of three Mexican immigrants—Pedro, Juan, and Santiago—who were arrested for illegally entering the United States and injuring a border agent. They had been part of a peasant revolt in the Mexican state of Chihuahua led by Jesús Chávez. After the movement was dismantled and Jesús was killed, they fled persecution and came to the United States. The actual Passion of Christ, therefore, is not directly portrayed; in its place, an allegory is told in which Pedro, Juan, and Santiago are obviously Jesus' disciples and the political movement that ends up being crushed by the Mexican authorities, with the help of gringos, equals Jesus' spiritual revolution in Judaea.

As the story is told by the detainees, there is an additional layer to the play that deals with the U.S. prison system, immigration, state violence, and contemporary politics. The allegorized Gospel, which constitutes the most important layer, is the story of a campesino revolt in the city of Madera. Along with the biblical message, the fable

[54]MCCOSKER, SUSAN. La Compañia de Teatro de Alburquerque. The Drama Review: TDR, Vol. 27, No. 2, Grassroots Theatre (Summer, 1983). The MIT Press. Stable URL: www.jstor.org/stable/1145494, p. 51.
[55] MARTINEZ Marcos. La Compañía de Teatro de Alburquerque – Community development through an actor-centered theater. In: GONZÁLES, Felipe. Expressing New Mexico: Nuevomexicano Creativity, Ritual, and Memory. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2007, p. 101.
[56] MCCOSKER, 1983, p. 52.
[57] RODRÍGUEZ, José. La Pasión de Jesus Chávez, 1980. Play script. La Compañia de Teatro de Alburquerque Records, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico.

is about land concentration, the structure of poverty in Latin America, imperialism, and the role of the United States in the repression of popular movements in the South. The other layer of the play consists of a journalistic television show presented by a reporter that condenses, analyses and criticizes the contents that were recently shown or that are upcoming. The combination of all these layers results in a passion play of unique political and social natures in which the story of Jesus is directly related to the social reality of the New Mexican audience—something that probably restored much of the strength of a worn-out narrative while simultaneously energizing the sacred component. This arrangement was carried out the same way it would be if located in the direct sphere of influence by Liberation Theology, even though New Mexico was mostly outside of it. This was a personal effort for Rodríguez, which was only brought to fruition because of the context surrounding the Chicano Movement.

The creation of the play's script was mainly Rodríguez's responsibility. It also had different layers, which are not disconnected from the three partitions of the subject matter. The basic idea was to transplant Jesus' story to the working environment of Latin America, through the lowest stratum of the laboring classes, the peasantry, and the lumpen proletariat. Although very particular, this social place was certainly occupied by a great part of the Latin American population, especially in rural countries rapidly industrializing such as Mexico and Brazil. This poor Latin American figure had full correspondence with the *oppressed*, a historical subject that played a central role in Liberation Theology and in other correlate radical theories of the Left, such as Paulo Freire's pedagogic ideas. Rodríguez's great inspiration, in that sense, might have been the novel of the Mexican author Vicente Leñero, *El Evangelio de Lucas Gavilan*, which was published only one year before the production of the play. Leñero retells the Gospel of Luke as a Mexican story, with Jesucristo Gómez, a mason, assisting poor workers and peasants with humorous concretion (Jesucristo, for instance, heals Simón Pedro's mother-in-law by protesting she should undergo surgery at a clinic despite not having health insurance).[58]*El Evangelio* is cited all over *La Pasión*, a fact that is mentioned in the program of the play, but there are more important parallels between the two works: they both center the narrative on a "Jesus of the Poor," who lives among all segments of the Mexican oppressed people, His miracles are related to the simple practice of citizenship and the organization of the dispossessed, and the model of virtue in both

[58] LEÑERO, Vicente. The Gospel of Lucas Gavilán. University Press of America, 1991.

works involves an anti-establishment stance. Rodríguez's citations of Leñero's work, of course, end up approximating the two characters even more—particularly because some of them are fundamental formative passages.

Another layer of the creation process is the contemporary social commentary, which includes the Gospel allegorization. Jesús Chávez is a peasant from Madera and heads a revolt against Mexican landowners, the State and their imperialist international supporters. According to Marcos Martínez—the actor who played Iscariote and, a few years later, became the artistic director of *La Compañía*—Rodríguez adamantly affirmed that the play was based in actual facts.[59] They were inspired by the attempted takeover of the Military barracks in Madera by a group of revolutionary teachers, peasants and students on September 23, 1965. This event is loosely mentioned in a few stories and critiques published by local newspapers when the play premiered, but, in fact, it represented the beginning of the armed struggles by leftist groups in Mexico during the 1960s, which was a major occurrence in the political history of Mexico in the second half of the 20th century. The attack became known in Spanish as the *Asaulto al cuartel de Madera*, a direct reference to the *Asaulto al cuartel de Moncada* (the Attack on Moncada Barracks) —the frustrated takeover of a Military garrison commanded by Fidel Castro on July 26, 1953. The Madera attack was the starting point of the Mexican guerrilla movement in the 1960s and inspired several militant groups, including the *Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre*, which adopted the date of the attack in its name. Rodríguez mentions the event that inspired the play as a peasant's movement that was taken apart by the Mexican Army, but certainly publicly minimized its political content: it was actually a guerrilla operation directed by leftist revolutionaries with the clear vision of taking power and was inspired by Marxist ideas. This was the story by means of which he chose to reenact the Gospel.

The idea of the epic frame was equally rich in political significance. In an article published in *El Hispano*, a Spanish-language newspaper, readers are told that the ensemble collectively made suggestions and demonstrated the desire to approach the issue of immigration and the plight of undocumented Mexicans in the United States. The brother of a member in the group had just been released from prison and gave precious information to José Rodríguez regarding the ambience and jargon used by inmates. However, Rodríguez wanted to delve deeper into the world of the prisoners

[59] Personal information.

and asked to spend a whole day in the county's jail. Already famous in the community, Rodríguez was protected from possible troublemakers by part of the arrestees, according to Bennett Hammer, one of his closest friends at the time and a member of the company's board of directors.[60] Moreover, one of the invited directors of *La Pasión*, Miguel Sandoval, worked at the New Mexico State Penitentiary staging a version of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* with convicts.[61] The whole effort based the prison scenes and provided them with a strong element of realism.

The quotations Rodríguez inserted in the script somehow reaffirm his trajectory in making the play. Besides *El Evangelio de Lucas Gavilan*, the text includes fragments from the poetry book *Salmos* published by Nicaraguan poet and priest Ernesto Cardenal. The previous year Cardenal, a leading figure in the Liberation Theology movement, had been named the Minister of Culture of the Sandinista administration—something that would provoke the anger of conservative Pope Saint John Paul II, who publicly reprimanded him during a visit to Nicaragua in 1983. The play also encompasses poetry from *A Passion Play: A Drama for Several Voices* authored by Catherine De Vinck, a Belgian Catholic writer residing in the United States. (De Vinck and Cardenal coincidently had a friend in common: another poet-priest, Thomas Merton). The literary fragments placed in the play, written by profoundly religious poets, operate as lyrically pious content and function as radically aestheticized prayers—in a Modernist mode with a distinguished political expressivity. Rodríguez's Liberation Theology aesthetic program is thus concluded, articulating popular traditions, socially motivated denouncements, leftist historical references, and literary fragments by progressive Catholic poets.

La Pasión starts with three Mexican refugees trying to cross the border near El Paso, when they suddenly realize they are surrounded by border patrol. Impulsively, Juan injures a guard and they all get arrested. The subsequent scene shows an audience with a judge, who says they will not only face charges related to illegally entering the United States but are also wanted by the State Department. The reporter from the TV show *What's Wrong with the World Newsbreak* then explains they had been part of the *campesino* movement of Jesús Chávez, who had been killed a week before while attempting to escape prison in México. She also says that the State Department may be considering a possible exchange: the three Mexican revolutionaries for Joseph Bosco, a

[60]Personal information.
[61]MARTINEZ, 2007, p. 101.

United States financer who fled the country to avoid being arrested and now lives in Acapulco. The show ends playing a "Mexican corrido, a peasant ballad about Jesús Chávez, recorded live in the mountains of Mexico exclusively for your listening pleasure." The corrido, composed and sang by La Compañía's musician, Chuy Martinez, introduces the Gospel theme:

El Corrido de Jesús Chávez

En el pueblo de Madera
del Estado de Chihuahua
Pasó un caso interesante
que agarró toda la fama.
Un hombre que sin sotana
su amor a Dios entregó.
Jesús Chávez se llamaba
el campesino valiente
El que su vida a la gente
A ayudarla dedicó.
Tantos lugares se acuerdan
de problemas resolvidos.
Huellas que Jesús dejaba
por toditos los caminos.
Lo recordaba la gente,
lo recordaban los niños.
Jesús Chávez regresó
decía toda la gente.
El campesino valiente
que a los ricos humilló.
La historia se repetía
del otro Jesús Divino
aquel que a este mundo vino
a pasar puros tormentos.
Y el que dejó mandamientos
Que Jesús Chávez cumplió.

Since the beginning, Jesús Chávez is presented as someone who "dedicated his life to the people" and left a trail of "solved problems." He was a man who "devoted his life to God," but "without wearing a cassock." There is an unequivocal political morality in the corrido: Jesús' leadership among the *campesinos* was the result of his commitment to the transformation of their lives and this should be the consequence of true faith. This is also seen as bravery and as the act of complying with God's commandments. "Humiliating the rich," particularly the rich in Latin America—a consortium of landowners and foreign imperialists—is a natural outcome of consciousness and virtue, according to the play's perspective.

The *corrido* continues to be heard at the beginning of the next scene, as a prison inmate listens to it on the radio and sings along. The action moves on to the prison's

dynamic: in a cell, one of the inmates, Carson, dominates a Mexican immigrant, who cannot even talk anymore after being repeatedly raped by him. The three disciples are put in this cell. The linguistic difference between the newly arrived and the others is continuously stressed. Lucero, one of the veteran inmates, explains to them that most prisoners are Chicano and, therefore, "get prejudice with" Mexicans. "Ustedes vienen pa cá y nos quitan jale. [. . .] You take jobs and work for nothing." This sequence, which ends with the beginning of the Gospel allegory, demarcates another qualitative difference between the Chicano inmates and the Mexican disciples. Lucero prevents Carson from taking the Mexican youngster to be raped again and counts on the refugees during the confrontation. He brags that all *mojados* could unite against Carson. "They were with Jesús Chávez, man, the Savior of the peons in Mexico." When Lucero pulls out a weapon, the disciples inform him that they want to help the boy, but with no violence. "Sin violencia? What do you think this is, kindergarten?" He later emphasizes:

> Lucero: Ah, sí, Jesús Chávez, otro pendejo... A lo todo Martin Luther King... They're all the same... They get all these poor dumb bastards all worked up… get your rights… Let's get together and demonstrate peacefully. And the world will be yours… shit! Lo que no le dicen es que the majority wind up in jail… their heads busted by the cops… Qué acaban muertos como pollos!..
> Santiago: Es major morir como hombres… que como esclavos.
> Pedro: No gastes saliva, Santiago, éste no entiende.
> Lucero: Y tú, sí? You understand all these Christian stuff, huh? Y por qué estás aquí, mi cuate?,,, Sabes por qué… Cause life makes no sense... 'cause it's big fish eat little fish… and the only way we can take life is becoming like everybody else. If you can't beat them, join them… We are all drogos…we are putas… thieves… liars… el que más y el que menos we all have our way of escaping, of doing it to each other… And no pinchi savior is gonna change that. Ningún Jesús Chávez vá a cambiar ná.

In opposition to the disciples' faith and superior moral behavior, the speech of the Chicano inmate demonstrates that he can no longer take part in a collective effort for social transformation. The dialogue shows that the loss of his faith corresponds to a lower morality and scarce sense of social commitment. Assimilating to the hegemonic values of United States capitalism, Lucero no longer believes in God or in the human being—he just wants to become "like everybody else." This stance is clearly associated in the play, moreover, to the minor usage of the Spanish language in daily life. The impression is that, for *La Compañía*, revolution is something that is directly connected to Latin American values and ideas. Given that the political foundation of the play is Liberation Theology, it is not a strange set of ideas—in 1980, just one year after the

Sandinista takeover in Nicaragua, political revolution was only real or possible in the countries south of the United States. However, Rodríguez is not advocating for bloodshed. His idea of revolution, at least as it is expressed in *La Pasión*, is like Cardenal's "revolution full of divine spirit—in a Catholic/mystic conception—, like presence and life in the spirit, like intimacy with the beloved, like a fountain of fresh water; a revolution-feast, that breathes art, dialogue, encounter, poverty, rite and other aspects."[62]

The allegory of the Gospel advances and deepens the same scheme of the introductory frame. Jesús Chávez is awakened to his mission when the local priest invites him to play the role of the Messiah in the Easter enactment of the Passion. The invitation is extended shortly after the priest delivered a radical sermon, taken from Leñero's book, and confronted the local politician, Mrs. Pilatos. Chávez tells the priest that he was the one who should play Jesus's role, since he had been brave like a "Christ with balls." The priest answers that he is a privileged man, from the elite, and is not able to really be like Christ. For that, he says, it is needed "another class of man." The play goes on presenting men and women in clear relation to their class. Mrs. Pilatos, of course, is a member of the landowner elite; Pedro, Juan and Santiago are Chávez's workmates, subjected to an exploitative boss in what seems to be a sawmill; Frederick Stevensburg, a gringo industrialist, is not only a bourgeois but an Imperialist agent who continuously determines the course of political events; Iscariote is a *vendido*, a sellout.

The portrayal of class functions is assisted by indefectible information of economic nature, always provided when needed and particularly relevant at turning points. While working, Juan and Santiago decide to ask the Patrón a favor: their mother is ill and they need to buy an expensive medicine, but they do not have money. The boss reads the medical prescription and tells them to ask his brother for the medicine, as he owns a pharmacy, and he will take it out of their payment. "One day he will take out from our salaries even the air we breathe," concludes Pedro. The nature of the exploitation becomes apparent: in activities related to the most backward segments of the economy in Latin America, such as the peasant agriculture or extractivism, the relations of production tended to have pre-capitalist characteristics—to a bigger or lesser extent—and many times involved higher degrees of appropriation of labor by the ruling class. In Madera, the lumber industry was one of the most relevant segments. The

[62]ARROYAVE, Carlos Fernando. Cantar la esperanza: Ernesto Cardenal y Roque Dalton. Dissertation. Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-Americana. Foz do Iguaçu: 2016.

habitude of directly selling overpriced products and goods to the workers is very common throughout the whole continent and represents an ancient form of exploitation. This information is important not only to the apprehension of the characters, but also to the play's narrative nature given that it demonstrates the terrible conditions of life Chávez and his colleagues had to face and what kind of personal relationship they had with the Patrón. When Jesús Chávez decides to begin his journey and does not show up at work, the same Patrón tells his colleagues that he will be fired for missing that workday. In a following scene, Iscariote is at a cantina, drinking beer and surrounded by women—including foreigners. Chávez's colleagues are looking for him everywhere and Iscariote invites them for a beer, paid by the Anglo-Americans that are inside. Again, we understand that Iscariote is already close to the *modus operandi* of the imperialist system. He already accepts, at least in part, playing the role of the opportunistic, Latin American handyman, who is always near when some dirty job needs to be done, in exchange for a few luxuries to which his friends do not have access. Another example is that Chávez's pilgrimage throughout villages and towns in Northern Mexico ends up constituting a movement because he helped the people any way he could, including their "efforts of harvesting or fishing." So, we learn that the poor people Chávez preached for were, likewise, peasants and fishermen, demographic sectors that were mainly composed by indigenous peoples and endured pre-capitalist relations of production. No relevant class definition is complete, in the play, without a corresponding economic description.

Rodríguez's intention of bringing to the forefront the economic debate becomes apparent in the scenes depicting Chávez's return to Madera. As soon as he arrives, he and Stevensburg have an argument and the gringo assumes the character of the Young Rich Man, whose encounter with Jesus is described in Matthew 19. In the Gospel, the young man asks Jesus what good actions he should do in order to attain eternal life. Christ concludes by telling him to give all his wealth away and follow him. In *La Pasión*, Chávez tells Stevensburg to leave his "company in the hands of the workers, maybe converting it into a cooperative." A song about the biblical passage is then performed, stressing that it is very "difficult to a rich person to obtain salvation." Immediately after, an altercation occurs between Santiago and Iscariote:

> Santiago: Iscariote… compra me una cervecita…
> Iscariote: Esto es para la causa, no para comprar cerveza...
> Santiago: Como que para la causa...Y yo que soy?
> Iscariote: Eso lo sabrás tú… Yo soy el tesorero del grupo…

> Santiago: Dame acá.
> Iscariote: Suelta. (They fight. Pedro and Juan interefere)
> Jesús: ¿Qué les pasa?
> Iscariote: Este que siempre está con sus borracheras.
> Santiago: Desde que lo hiciste tesorero se cree mejor que nadie. Sólo le pedi que me comprara una cervecita.
> Jesús: Bueno, ya basta. Olvidenlo.
> Santiago: No, que no lo olvido. ¿Cuántas veces le voy aguantar sus pocas verguenzas? Este no piensa como tú... Está con nosotros nomas por lo que puede sacar...
> Iscariote: Yo guardo el dinero para los pobres...no para borrachones como tú.

The reference here is to a famous passage in the Gospel of John (chapter 12) where Jesus is having supper in the city of Bethany and a woman named Mary brings a whole pound of a very pure balm to anoint His feet. Judas then asks Mary why she did not sell the ointment for three hundred denarii and give the money to the poor. The Evangelist then explains that he said that not out of concern for the poor, but because he was a thief and, "in charge of the common fund, he used to help himself to the contents." Jesus tells him: "Leave her alone; let her keep it for the day of my burial. You have the poor with you always, you will not always have me."

This small story is frequently used—at least in the Progressive Church milieu – to illustrate Judas' bourgeois mindset. Rodríguez's version of it stresses the anti-collective aspect of Judas' argument—if the cause is made of people, why should not the cause's supporters be regarded as important as the ideas they support? Judas was mainly an egotistical man, unable to really build Jesus' project together with his comrades. The centuries-old accusation that Saint John registered in the Bible against Judas appears as straightforward as a street fight, in which the act of treason is a result of the financial ambitions connected with international imperialism—an act of treason, therefore, against the whole of Latin America.

Iscariote's transgression is effectuated by the invitation of Frederick Stevensburg, who seduces him with a position in the administration of his factory. Their negotiation contrasts with Chávez's recitation of the Sermon on the Mount and of fragments of Ernesto Cardenal's *Salms*, particularly *Cantaré Señor tus maravillas, Salmo 9* and *Sus acciones son como el heno de los campos, Salmo 36*. It is from this last one that the final verses of the scene are drawn:

> Están agrandando los campos de concentración
> están inventando nuevas torturas
> nuevos sistemas de "investigación"

En la noche no duermen haciendo planes
planeando cómo aplastarnos más
cómo explotarnos más
pero el Señor se ríe de ellos
porque ve que pronto caerán del poder
Las armas que ellos fabrican se volverán contra ellos
Sus sistemas políticos serán borrados de la tierra
y ya no existirán sus partidos políticos
De nada valdrán los planos de sus técnicos
[the script suppresses four verses]
Nos espían todo el día
Tienen ya preparadas las sentencias
Pero el Señor no nos entregaría a su policía
No permitirá que seamos condenados en el Juicio

Here Rodríguez makes an important indication of what will come in the future. In 1963-64, when Cardenal published his *Salmos*, there was an ongoing process of development and application of the so-called techniques of counterinsurgency by the United States, in Latin America, in an effort to contain nationalism and progressivism in the hemisphere during the Cold War. Starting in Guatemala in 1954—when reformist President Jácobo Arbenz was overthrown by the Eisenhower administration—the United States military were present everywhere to train local armed forces in their methods, primarily based on torture. The list of Latin American countries where the "U.S. actions […] contributed to the torture and murder of hundreds of thousands of individuals"[63] is not a small one and includes Nicaragua in the 1980s. Cardenal's psalm establishes the right connections between a revolt in Northern Mexico and the tragic fate of the characters from the Gospel. The United States' methodology for dismantling popular radical movements applied in Guatemala specially after 1965 included gathering and coordinating intelligence, analyzing information, and conducting rapid raids on the homes and meeting places of suspected subversives.[64] It certainly encompassed bribery and the cooperation of sellouts, too.

Given that the gringos were obviously the source of the persecution, why would a campesino leader plan to escape to the United States, as Chávez announces to the disciples during the Last Supper? The measure was being planned by Iscariote, according to Jesús, and that could be a sign of intended confusion. The true nature of the idea, however, could be that political repression in Latin America historically resulted in millions of deaths. In Guatemala alone, the phase started by the coup against

[63] GRANDIN, Greg. The Last Colonial Massacre – Latin America in the Cold War. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, p. XII.
[64] Id., ibid., p. 11.

Arbenz caused the death of 200 thousand people, many of them indigenous *campesinos* like the ones in *La Pasión*. Maybe the idea is that Chicano people in the United States, alongside with other Latinos, Blacks, and further minorities, surely suffer the worst of political oppression, having to endure persecution, intimidation, mass incarceration, and even death—but not on the same level as countries in the South, where State repression (largely implanted with United States techniques) led mass killings to an unprecedented level since the 1960s.

Another possible interpretation is that Latin American popular rebellions might have something to say to the United States. A movement like the one Chávez led was at the same time a strong denouncement of the conditions of life in the South, to a great extent conformed by the United States' interests, and a path to the political awakening of the United States people, suddenly confronted by radically collectivist values that could only arise from the distinctive Latin American experience of imperialist subjugation, mass starvation, overspread social indignity, and the continuous impossibility of pursuing its own way of organizing the production and reproduction of life.

It is, after all, a play about conversion staged mainly for Spanish-speaking audiences, but not exclusively. Although it has an unmistakable Latin American message—for Latin American spectators, one about the vital necessity of resisting imperialism through political organization—*La Pasión* was primarily conceived to be performed in New Mexico for a mixed audience composed of Anglo and Chicano viewers. The main idea, at this level of the political message, is that spiritual conversion leads to social revolution—but not a violent one. During the Last Supper, when Chávez announces to the disciples that he had been betrayed and would be imprisoned, some of them react:

> Santiago: Si se trata de pelear, yo puedo conseguir escopetas.
> Juan: Levantamos a la gente.
> Pedro: Si, tenemos mucha gente de nuestra parte.
> Santiago: También para los trancazos no pintamos solos.
> Jesús: Basta. Callense ya. Esperen aqui. No se duerman. Voy a rezar.
> [...]

Chávez's response points not so much to the pacifist nature of his preaching, but to the mistrust inspired by most perspectives of armed uprising and guerrilla ideologies that had been so influential among Latinos in the United States, and the Left in general, since the 1960s. In 1980, *foco theory* had already been long exhausted and not even the

Nicaraguan revolution could really inspire a renewed interest for it. As Jameson explains, since the failure of the guerrilla in Peru and Venezuela in 1966, the First World Left started to lose its fascination with it and turned to its domestic issues.[65] The idea of an armed revolt was no longer considered a viable alternative and could be promptly discarded by Chávez in the dialogue with his disciples. Clearly something more than weapons was needed, but even the idea of political conspiracy seemed unsuitable for the kind of social change he stands for, as Jesús complains about his arrest and says: "No tenian porque agarrarme como a un bandido. Siempre andaba entre la gente, a la luz del día."

The complexity of *La Pasión*'s political perspective, noticeable in this apparent blind alley of Jesús' mysterious strategy, derives from the difficult articulation of revolutionary theories and Christian universal humanism that the hegemonic currents of Liberation Theology proposed in the 1970s. Referring to Christ's own way of dealing with political contingencies and coordinating them with his universal vision in the Gospel, Gutierrez affirms that "the life and preaching of Jesus postulate the unceasing search for a new kind of humanity in a qualitatively different society."[66] This is the difficult synthesis observable in the story of Jesús Chávez: personal conversion—through a deep individual and social awakening—and the struggle to transform society. He wants his disciples to realize that it is not enough to fight injustice with the masses and use guns, if a new "kind of humanity" is to be achieved.

This political stance seems to differ substantially from the Marxian idea of consciousness determined by the social being. However, it is, in fact, a partial development conjoined with a specific Christian point of view. In an excerpt from Gutierrez about conversion, this attempt synthesis appears in depth:

> A spirituality of liberation will center on a *conversion* to the neighbor, the oppressed person, the exploited social class, the despised ethnic group, the dominated country. Our conversion to the Lord implies this conversion to the neighbor. Evangelical conversion is indeed the touchstone of all spirituality. Conversion means a radical transformation of ourselves; it means thinking, feeling, and living as Christ—present in exploited and alienated persons. To be converted is to commit oneself to the process of the liberation of the poor and oppressed, to commit oneself lucidly, realistically, and concretely. It means to commit oneself not only generously, but also with an analysis of the situation and a strategy of action. To be converted is to know and experience the fact that, contrary to the laws of physics, we

[65] JAMESON, 1984, p. 203.
[66] GUTIERREZ, 1988, p. 25.

> can stand straight, according to the Gospel, only when our center of gravity is outside ourselves.
> Conversion is a permanent process in which very often the obstacles we meet make us lose all we had gained and start anew. […] But it is not a question of a withdrawn and pious attitude. Our conversion process is affected by the socio-economic, political, cultural, and human environment in which it occurs. Without a change in these structures, there is no authentic conversion. We have to break with our mental categories, with the way we relate to others, with our way of identifying with the Lord, with our cultural milieu, with our social class, in other words, with all that can stand in the way of a real, profound solidarity with those who suffer, in the first place, from misery and injustice. Only thus, and not through purely interior and spiritual attitudes, will the "new person" arise from the ashes of the "old."[67]

For New Mexicans—Anglos or Chicanos—a "conversion to the neighbor" could mean the recovery of a sense of community and solidarity with Mexicans, a process through which they could restore the full extent of their own sense of originally belonging to Latin America. Moreover, a "radical transformation" and a "break with [their] mental categories" would allow the emergence of long forgotten Latin American or Indo-Hispanic values once cherished by the New Mexican society. The "new person" who should arise from this process would not be a supporter of imperialist drives throughout the world and would work to welcome and integrate Mexican immigrants. All this could be the beginning of a radical anti-capitalist transformation.

The two scenes prior to Chávez's death confirm that Rodríguez's aim was not to criticize the whole U.S. society, values, and way of life, but the State politics that historically brought repression and violence to Latin America. Jesús' *Via Dolorosa* takes place in a dungeon where torturers interrogate him. They submit him to electrical shocks and to waterboarding, which is a technique of torture that simulates drowning and was largely used by the U.S. military throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. He prays, reciting Cardenal's *¿Por qué me has abandonado? Salmo 21*, in which the speaker laments his sorrows in mental institutions, police departments, torture chambers, and orphanages, desperately asking for help but nobody comes.

In the next scene, Madera's priest, Mr. Stevensburg, and Ms. Pilatos negotiate Jesús Chávez's future, mostly using excerpts from De Vinck's *A Passion Play.*[68] Stevensburg plays de Pharisee accuser, advocating for the death of Chávez, while the priest tries to defend him. Stevensburg affirms that their "function is to protect, to

[67]GUTIERREZ, 1988, p. 118.
[68]DE VINCK, Catherine. A passion play – Drama for several voices. Allendale and Ontario: Alleluia Press, 1975.

preserve the taxable population." He accuses Chávez of inciting the people not to pay taxes and to have a fiery speech, which can generate a threatening mob. Ms. Pilatos ends up accepting his argument that Chávez's death is not a matter to be taken to the capital and that she should let him solve the situation locally. He is executed by a firing squad, along with Iscariote—and tells him before dying that his soul would be saved.

The action goes back to the narrative frame of the play and the three disciples conclude the story about Jesús, reflecting on all the teachings he left to them. Lucero is their privileged listener, so his reaction may function as a model to the audience. A prison guard enters and announces that the three Mexicans are being expatriated back to their country and they leave the stage. In the final action, Carson passes by Lucero, who puts a hand on his shoulder, and the two keep staring at each other for a moment. Lucero then simply tells Carson to take it easy—he heard Jesús Chávez's story and something changed in his heart. He might want to start his relationship with the other inmate again, in a non-violent way, and create a healthier environment in the prison. He is probably on the path for conversion, as should the audience be, too.

In the final scene, the TV show appears again. The reporter informs us that Mexico and the United States agreed to exchange the financer Joseph Bosco for the three Mexican disciples. She also shows the official version of Jesús Chávez's killing; he was shot by officers as he attempted to escape the prison. Nevertheless, his work still produces fruits. "Mexican authorities hope the trial will put a stop to the growing popularity of Chávez's legend by discrediting and exposing his lieutenants." Her bulletin ends with a side note:

> Meanwhile in Hollywood, Dream World Productions, a subsidiary of Oil Western, announced approval of a multimillion-dollar budget for a motion picture dealing with the life of the slain leader. Shooting of the film will begin shortly in Mexico with an international cast. The movie will be title "The Passion of Jesús Chávez."

This is how capitalism works, particularly in the United States: a story of popular struggle, political repression on an international scale, and murder becomes, for another segment of the economy, the subject matter of a blockbuster movie. The effect of this announcement should not be to discredit the whole Passion as historically irrelevant, but to clarify for the viewer that the system always finds its way of turning a revolutionary character into the opposite—or, at least, of neutralizing it. This was made, first of all, with Jesus Christ himself, who was stripped of much of his humanity—

including his political views—in order to become an icon, as explains Comblin, cited by Gutierrez:

> This is a Jesus of hieratic, stereotyped gestures, all representing theological themes. To explain an action of Jesus is to find in it several theological meanings. In this way, the life of Jesus is no longer a human life, submerged in history, but a theological life—an icon. As happens with icons, his actions lose their human context and are stylized, becoming transformed into signs of the transcendent and invisible world.[69]

The metamorphosis of Jesus is, in essence, the basic process of sterilization of a political character carried out in Western civilization. It established the model for an infinite number of other cases involving the neutralization of dissonant and anti-systemic messages. In art, the same logic was applied both to authors and their works—which are included in some kind of canon and become classics.

The debate on the neutralization process was frequent among Modernist artists, who had many times experimented with tradition and its refunctionalization. Brecht was particularly interested in this subject and discussed it, for instance, in his article *Classical Status as an Inhibiting Factor* published in 1954. In this text, he affirms, with his traditional ferocious humor, that "the old masterpieces become as it were dustier and dustier with neglect, and the copyists more or less conscientiously include the dust in their replica."[70]

La Pasión de Jesús Chávez took both risks, as it dealt with the figure of Jesus Christ and with the most well-known story in the Western World. At the same time, it faced the possibility of being despised as a work of art, given that the Passion of Christ—year after year performed not only in New Mexico, but in a great part of the Christian world—long ago received the label of "popular art." *La Compañía de Teatro de Alburquerque* chose to make conscious use of the historicity of these elements and let them collide in scene. The result was the portrayal of a fictional Jesus, who shared all virtues of the original one, but had to face the reality and challenges of Mexico in the 1970s. His spiritual authority could have something divine, but it did not exclude the fact that he was a human being, with political stances and a concrete historical conjuncture with which to deal. His persecutors, like the Romans, were part of an

[69] COMBLIN apud GUTIERREZ, 1988, p. 130.
[70] BRECHT, Bertolt. Classical Status as an Inhibiting Factor. In: WILLET, John. Brecht on Theatre – The Development of an Aesthetic. London: Eyre Methuen, 1974, p. 272.

Imperial power and mobilized local allies to do the dirty work for them. Jesús Chávez equally had the intention of converting the imperialists to his cause.

Formally, the play kept the Medieval Iberian structure, with a narrative sequence that followed the literary disposition of the Gospel itself and stressed the fragmentation of the account of Jesus' life in determinate modules—which operated as stations, to use a theatrical term, although not necessarily as physical stations. However, *La Compañía* added to this traditional staging approach a narrative frame, one that brought the original fable to the present and amplified its political resonance. The allegory of the Gospel was also interspersed with another epic device, a journalistic TV show. The reporter enabled an additional level of critique: translating Latin American popular politics and the Bible to the *journalistically minded Westerner*, as Adorno referred to a probable member of late Brecht's audiences[71]. Given that the epic structure of *La Pasión* attributed a higher intelligence to it, its viewer was much ahead of a journalistically minded Westerner and was able to sense the occasional stupidity of the mass media approach to rebellion, Latin America, and mass media itself. At the same time, this epic mechanism filtered the Latin American chaos to the United States' higher degree of institutionalization, creating a double reflection on the cruelty of the dynamics of the repression in Latin America and on the role played by United States agents in the South, where they are free to act like no one is watching.

Concerning the form of *La Pasión*, it is important to mention again that it purposely included long-established artistic forms from Latin America and New Mexico, as the *corridos* and the *alabados*, unaccompanied chants that were sung during processions, the Holy week, and in vigils or funerals.[72] The use of these elements not only created an atmosphere of familiarity between the ensemble and the audience, as a direct demonstration of cultural identification, but more significantly, these artistic expressions were epic forms themselves developed throughout centuries to be performed during key moments of community life and to contribute to the building of a collective sense. In the play, they operate as New Mexican interpreters, devices that can approximate Judaea and the U.S. Department of State to the reality of a forgotten New Mexico.

The *alabados*, particularly, play a special role in this construction, with being genuinely New Mexican. They were created and developed as a music form over the

[71] ADORNO, Theodor. Commitment. In: Aesthetics and Politics. London: Verso, 1977, p. 188.
[72] Personal information provided by Chuy Martinez.

centuries by the Penitentes, or the *Hermandad Piadosa de Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno*, a two-century-old popular congregation from New Mexico which was subjected to fierce prejudice since the United States took control of the region. The *alabados* are traditionally the basic song form of the reenactments of *La Pasión* in the communities of the whole state. Their mournful nature is related to the meditation on the sufferings of Jesus Christ and Mary—they are stylistically close to Gregorian chants, often sung without any instruments, but sometimes interspersed with drums, *matracas* (cog rattles) and *pitos* (whistle flutes) that are probably a Native American addition. Their origin is certainly based in the Old World, but there is no consensus as to the exact cultural manifestation that generated them. Research showed that a funeral lament sung in Lebanon by Shi'ite Muslims is so similar to a New Mexican *alabado* "that it could be considered a variant of the same song."[73] In the Northeastern region of Brazil, a comparable manifestation called *ladainha*—also distinctively Medieval and Iberian—was often revived in theatrical plays dealing with a Northeastern theme with an analogous function.

For many New Mexicans in the audience, the *alabado* in *La Pasión* established a direct connection to the community enactments during Holy Week, when the Penitentes usually organized the whole festivity. "On Good Friday morning, stations one through nine are observed; followed by stations ten to fourteen in the afternoon."[74] The great moment of the passion was the Encuentro, when Mary talks to Jesus on his way to Crucifixion. Significantly, in *La Pasión de Jesús Chávez*, the prison guards forbid John, Magdalena, and Mary to see Jesús for the last time and she can only hear when her son is shot by the squad.

According to Ancestry.com, Chávez is one of the most common family names in New Mexico, along with Martínez and García. Of course, Chávez would be a perfect complement to Jesús, so to form the initials "J.C."[75] In every detail, José Rodríguez and the ensemble took care of recreating Jesus' story according the reality of New Mexico.

The play was a big hit in Albuquerque. It debuted only a few weeks after the Santa Fe State Penitentiary riot, still considered to be the worst prison riot in the history of the United States, with a total number of 33 deaths—24 of them of Chicano inmates—and more than two hundred injured. The prisoners' epic frame ended up being

[73] MONTAÑO, Mary Caroline. Tradiciones Nuevomexicanas: Hispano Arts and Culture of New Mexico. Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 2001, p. 174.
[74] Id., ibid., p. 175.
[75] Personal information provided by Samuel Sisneros.

almost a prophetical choice, dealing with the most pressing issue in the State. After the first season, the play toured several cities in New Mexico with the support of the Catholic Church. The actors remembered to perform in parish halls and churches, always to thrilled crowds.

La Compañía's next step was to create a documentary play about the whole history of New Mexico, from the first Spanish expedition to the North until the contemporary age. *Nuevo Mexico, Sí!* was a natural development of all the research that was carried out to produce *La Pasión*. Again, the particularities of the social formation of New Mexico were intensely analyzed and presented with a universalist approach. Soon after that, José Rodríguez left the group and went on to pursue his dream of becoming a Catholic priest—and he became a very popular one, always in New Mexico, until his death in 1993.

CHAPTER III

El Teatro Libertad – Integration and non-integration, *rasquachismo*, and class-based universalism

In his essay on Manuel Antônio de Almeida's novel *Memoirs of a Militia Sergeant,*[76] literary critic Antonio Candido draws the baseline for understanding Brazilian society in the 19th century through a dialectic between order and disorder. According to Candido, Almeida's work figures in its own literary core the hardly kept order in Brazil, "surrounded on every side by a lively disorder, which opposed twenty situations of concubinage to every marriage and a thousand chance unions to every situation of concubinage."[77] Candido talks about a society in which there is a "dance of the characters between licit and illicit," a society in which "transgression is only a nuance in the spectrum that runs from norm to crime." For better comprehension, Candido employs the United States society as a counterexample:

> In the historical development of the United States there was, from very early on, a constricting presence of law, civil and religious, that shaped groups and individuals, limiting their behavior through the punitive force of exterior penalties and the internalized feeling of sin. From this arose a moral society, which finds expression in such novels as Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, and which created the setting for such dramas as the witchcraft trials of Salem. This hardening of the group and individual confers a great strength of identity and resistance on both; but it dehumanizes relations with others, above all with individuals of other groups, who do not belong to the same law and therefore can be manipulated at will. Alienation becomes at the same time a mark of rejection and a punishment for the rejected; the stern biblical model of an elect people, justifying its brutality toward the nonelect, the others, reappears in these communities of daily readers of the Bible. Order and liberty—that is, internal and external policing, arbitrary rights, and violent action against the stranger—are formulations of this state of affairs.
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> In Brazil, neither groups nor individuals ever effectively encountered such forms; they never had an obsession with order, except as an abstract principle, nor with liberty except as caprice. The spontaneous forms of sociability operated with great ease and thus mitigated the collisions between norm and conduct, making conflicts of conscience less dramatic. The two diverse situations are linked to the mechanisms of the respective societies; one that, under the assertion of a deceptive fraternity, sought to create and maintain a group that would be, ideally, monoracial and monoreligious; the other that in fact incorporated racial and, later, religious pluralism into its most intimate nature, despite certain ideological fictions that might have been postulated to

[76] ALMEIDA, Manuel Antonio. SOUSA, Ronald W. (Tr.) Memoirs of a Militia Sergeant (Library of Latin America) (English Edition). Oxford University Press, 1999, 1st Edition.

[77] CANDIDO, Antonio. Dialectic of Malandroism. On Literature and Society. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 99.

> the contrary. With no desire to constitute a homogenous group and, in consequence, no need to defend it strongly, Brazilian society opened itself broadly to the penetration of dominated and foreign groups. And gained in flexibility what it lost in integrity and coherence.[78]

The dialectic between order and disorder in Brazil was fully internalized as the basic component of its social dynamics. In the United States, this dialectic was externalized in such a way that order is the hegemonic value of its social reality and disorder is the result of the exterior and its effects. If such a scheme is valid and the kind of dynamics it describes can be extrapolated to other situations, then the highly problematic position of Chicanos in United States society could be analyzed through the clash of sociabilities it produces. This is not to say that the Brazilian dialectic between order and disorder entirely corresponds to the reality of Mexican society or of the Chicano communities in the United States, but the way Chicanos deal with order and disorder certainly is not, originally, the same as how the Puritans approached it. At least in part, the social dynamics in Brazil might have important consonance with the whole Latin American sociability, particularly in regard to norm.

One of the synthesis produced by the clash of sociabilities, in the case of Chicanos, is *rasquachismo*, a distinct set of ideas, images, styles, and attitudes based "on the world view of the have-not."[79]*Rasquachismo*—in art, one of its manifestations is the aesthetics of the *pelado*—directly connects the Chicanos to the Mexican comic tradition, mainly the *teatro de carpa* and the popular cinema of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. However, in the United States, it particularly materializes a sociopolitical response to the precariousness of Chicano life.

In the social context where *rasquachismo* is developed, another pair of opposing forces is appended to the dialectic between order and disorder: the dialect between integration and non-integration (and many times disintegration). The essence of such a life perspective is summarized by Ybarra-Frausto in a very efficient formula: "To be rasquache is to be down but not out (*fregado pero no jodido*)."[80] From the very need to be part of a social order that rejects them, the *rasquaches* end up producing an "attitude of survival and inventiveness." That is, they employ all means possible to be part of a social structure that is not meant for them and finally manage to attain some level of colorful integration—but the arrangement is weak and may constantly disintegrate. The

[78] Id., ibid.
[79]YBARRA-FRAUSTO, Tomás. Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility. School by the River Press, 1989, p. 5.
[80] Id., ibid.

world of the *rasquache* is "an environment always on the edge of coming apart (the car, the job, the toilet)," so "things are held together with spit, grit and *movidas*" —these are the "coping strategies you use to gain time, to make options to retain hope."[81]*Rasquachismo* can then be seen as a response to the unwarranted space of the Chicano in the Anglo-American society. The *rasquaches* struggle continually not only to survive, but also to be visible on their own terms, with a distinctively sophisticated style that reminds the Anglos and themselves of the Latin American masses that are contained south of the border.

Order and disorder, integration and non-integration are the basic forces all over the story of *Los Pelados*, the "expanded *acto*" collectively created by Teatro Libertad, a group from Tucson, Arizona. *Rasquachismo* was one of the central aesthetic traits of the ensemble since the beginning, in 1975, but a very particular form of *rasquachismo* based on revolutionary, class politics. The group was composed of former members of Teatro del Pueblo, a theater collective that presented some ETC *actos* and their own skits to Chicano and worker audiences as part of UFW's campaigning drives in Arizona. Although it always defined itself as a teatro Chicano, some of its key members were Anglo-Americans, such as Pima College' theater professor Barclay Goldsmith, who acted primarily as the company's artistic director, and artist Scott Egan, in addition to actors from other nationalities, as two women from Bolivia. The multiethnic composition of the group reflected Tucson's sociopolitical atmosphere: markedly a pro-labor, progressive environment in which the Chicano community was demographically and culturally significant (as opposed to the very conservative Phoenix area).

At first sight, *Los Pelados* seems to be an offshoot of ETC's *La gran carpa de los rasquachis*, the final version of a play that Valdez's ensemble started to create in 1972 and concluded in 1975.[82] The name of the central character is almost the same: Jesús Pelado, with the difference being that in ETC's play there is the additional surname Rasquachi. The subject matter is also similar: both plays deal with the socioeconomic misfortunes of a family of Chicano workers. However, the whole dynamic of the two plays are very different. ETC's creation is entirely based on *corridos*, with a very fast sequencing of facts, which are continually presented, explained, and commented on through song. In the case of Teatro Libertad, the play is

[81] Id., ibid.
[82] HEMISPHERIC INSTITUTE at https://hemisphericinstitute.org/es/enc05-interviews/item/589-campesino-familia-rasquache. Accessed on November 12, 2019.

an effort of deepening the consequences and developments of several situations that occur with the Pelado family—apparently, a Brechtian effort.

In his essay *Brecht and Chicano Theatre*,[83] written at the end of the 1970s, Barclay Goldsmith argues that both Brechtian and the early Chicano aesthetics are kinds of presentational theater, a type of theater that "drops all pretense at achieving 'slice of life' naturalism and attempts to eliminate what is called the 'fourth wall' dividing actor and audience."[84] He stresses that presentational theater typically employs "masks, asides, large mimetic gestures, and a device known as 'breakouts,' in which the actor drops the character and "addresses the audience as a performer." Presentational theater, according to Goldsmith, is the "basis for such high art forms as late Renaissance Commedia dell'arte (Molière), German expressionism, and the Brechtian epic." When it appears in its *popular* version, presentational theater refers to a "working-class, peasant, or campesino audience who can identify with the subject matter presented through song, topicality of humor, and immediately identifiable archetypal characters."[85] Nevertheless, Goldsmith emphasizes the significant dissimilarities between Chicano and Brechtian theaters. One of the main aspects is that Chicano theater "lacks the dialectical analysis found in Brechtian epic" —something that is probably connected to the fact that Brecht wrote "with a broad Marxist perspective, . . . very few teatros, if any, are Marxist in concept, at least in the way Brecht intended, with his merciless expose of contradictions within a bourgeois value system."[86] In the conclusion of his article, Goldsmith asks what happens to Chicano culture when so many Chicanos move to the cities. "Can popular theatre be urban or only rural? These have become urgent questions now that the last stronghold, the barrios, seem increasingly to be doomed." *Los Pelados* seems to summarize and respond to all concerns discussed by Goldsmith, at one time rectifying and outgrowing *La gran carpa de los rasquachis* and keeping the aesthetics of the *pelado* alive and productive.

The booklet of the play, published in 1978, confirms the Brechtian effort made by Teatro Libertad. In the "production notes" of *Los Pelados*, some aspects of the intended staging are clarified. One of the comments deals with the interpretation style, defined as "realistic" —although a little magnified, in order to fit the needs of street

[83] GOLDSMITH, Barclay. Brecht and Chicano Theatre. In: BIAL, Henry et al. Brecht Sourcebook. London, New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 163-72.
[84] Id., ibid.
[85] Id., ibid., p.163.
[86] Id., ibid., p. 169.

audiences—with "little exaggeration or comment." This part includes a very interesting observation on gestures:

> The meaning of one gesture is more important to us than realistic depiction of many gestures. For example, in scene five, the way the mother-in-law hands Margarita money places the latter in a position of beggar. The gesture patterns of physical work are fully explored. The motions, for example, of garbage-collecting and sweeping, in scene four, are almost choreographed so as to show the parallel work during the day of Chuy's outdoor physical labor and Margarita's housework. […]
> The acting then, while based in the traditional realistic/naturalistic mode, employs many devices of presentational theatre such as choreographed movements, mimetic use of real props, direct audience address and selective gestures to make a comment on a social relationship existing at the moment.[87]

The detailed selection, definition, and composition of key gestures for the characters, along with its connections to particular social-political behaviors, are undoubtedly a Brechtian concern; that is not, as Goldsmith himself notes, a typical feature of Chicano theater.

The play starts with the Pelado family talking to neighbors in their barrio in Tucson. We are informed that Chuy has been looking for a job for some time, and the next day he will have a test with the City Sanitation Department in order to apply for the work of *tirabichi*—a Yaqui word for garbage collector. His mother-in-law, Doña Chona, announces she won the bingo, but all she is willing to pay for Chuy and Margarita is a snow cone to celebrate. She asks for music and they all gather to sing "*El Piojo y La Pulga*" (the Louse and the Flea), a traditional Mexican children's song. In this small section, Teatro Libertad's presentational theater introduces itself to the audience: a social economic problem is demonstrated, with a partial discussion of its causes; the collectivity of the barrio appears as the general ambience of the play; there is no condescendence with the Chicano workers and other types who are portrayed with a general irreverence in the dialogues and a crude exposition of their eventual vicious attitudes; cultural elements of the Mexican tradition are recovered and related to contents of the United States reality; the point of view of the lower strata of the Chicano community is the privileged one and is emphasized through several different mechanisms, including the metaphorical relationship between repugnant bugs and the "undesirable" poor Chicano worker.

[87]TEATRO LIBERTAD, Los Pelados, 1978, p. XXXI

The following scene figures the test for garbage collector, in a curious attempt to synthesize Chicano theater routines and Brechtian epic theater. Chuy arrives to the place of the test and sees another worker, who helps him to do the right movements as he practices lifting garbage cans. They sit in the middle of the audience, as if the spectators were part of the mass number of job applicants. Then the Efficiency Expert enters the scene and gives them the instructions for the test:

> EFFICIENCY EXPERT – […] As you all know, we're here to take the test for the City Sanitation Department. This is a fare and square test. No one will be discriminated for race, color, sex, creed, religion – whatever. The department is very proud of our fair test and only the BEST will be selected. This test was devised after five years of intensive trial; we have consulted experts from New York, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles – and if anyone knows their garbage, they do (ha ha). When your number is called, step forward and at a given signal run required distance until reaching disposal cylinder, execute horizontal pivot, and dispose into clearly receptacle container. Is that clear? Any questions, see me after the test. Will numbers 13, 39, 401, and 519 step forward? (Chuy and three other workers run excitedly on stage.) Ready? Get on your mark, get set – (lined up as if for a race.)
> WORKER – Nos ponen como caballos (horse race trumpet heard.)
> EFFICIENCY EXPERT – Go!!
> (Workers jump off stage at left race through audience. Efficiency expert follows race with binoculars. Voice in background describes horse race. All is in darkness except for strobe light (optional) and when workers enter stage right from audience they run and pick up cans in slow motion. Worker # 1 reaches can and empties it. Chuy does likewise. Workers # 3 and # 4 fight and wrestle to reach one remaining can. All reach finish line after cans are emptied into receptacle. Workers huddle, breathing hard.)
> EFFICIENCY EXPERT – And the winner is number 13.
> (Chuy, surprised but glad, runs to efficiency expert who holds up his hand like a boxer in ring.)
> WORKER # 1 (disgusted) – Back to the unemployment line. (Chuy tries to console him but worker brushes him off and exits.)
> WORKER # 2 – Yo ni 'pa unemployment hago qualify. (Chuy pats him as if in football game and again worker ignores him and exits.)
> WORKER # 3 – I'm gonna have to leave town so my old lady can get on welfare. (starts to exit, changes mind, and returns to give Chuy last advice.) Mira, cuando vayas por el physical, no les diga nada que tienes back troubles o hernia, ¿'stá suave? (exits)
> (Chuy starts changing into city uniform.)
> […]

The animalization of the workers, compared as they were to racing horses, and the overall indignity of the whole test is counterbalanced by the stupid figure of the Efficiency Expert himself. The way the applicants react to the absurdly technocratic recommendations demonstrates a total lack of tragic sense on their part. They do not care about being humiliated by the Anglo, managerial, know-it-all—they just want to

have a job. Profoundly *rasquachi*, they even accept to be treated as horses and seem to assume the role they were to play. The only problem for them is when they fail to get the job; this is the point where frustration finally explodes. Although even then, there is space for solidarity and one of the dismissed applicants comes back to give Chuy some advice.

At the same time, the episode is a trustworthy portrayal of the neoliberal advance in the public sector during the 1970s, with an "efficiency drive" throughout state companies in the United States, United Kingdom, and other countries. The Expert's management baloney, curiously up-to-date even in the second decade of the 21st century, is not only theatrically ridiculous, but gives evidence of a whole new mode of capital accumulation that was launched in the 1970s based on cutting "useless" spending, improving efficiency, and then privatizing public companies at the cost of the working class, which faced a massive loss of jobs due to the structural changes in world capitalism. At the end of the 1970s, as David Harvey points out, many state-run corporations started to be "prepared for privatization, and this meant paring down their debt and improving their efficiency and cost structures, often through shedding labour."[88] This seems to be exactly what the Efficiency Expert is doing in the City Sanitation Department in the scene. After the test is over, his colleague reminds him through a beeper that he has to visit the Wastewater Treatment Plant and Systems Maintenance for additional selections of applicants. At the same time, his vocabulary and the technocratic culture he stands for signals a broader ideological offense in which a new set of social and professional values are being endorsed on a larger scale. One of the darkest sides of the new mode of accumulation was the naturalization of intra-class competition—not only among work colleagues but also among the unemployed—capable of doing anything to get a job. In the scene, two of the applicants have to fight for one remaining garbage can, which means that the test was not measuring their ability to work, but their sense of opportunity. Chuy is lucky enough to pass the test without resorting to any stratagem to overwhelm his fellow applicants. That is why he seeks to console them after they fail, but their frustration does not allow them to correspond. The scene clearly demonstrates that the new mode of accumulation under capitalism was becoming hegemonic in the 1970s and brought even more trouble to the

[88] HARVEY, David. A brief history of neoliberalism. Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 60.

Chicano community, as it raised the internal pressures and introduced a whole new set of divisions in the barrio.

The humorous approach of the scene, in association with a direct political and economic message, could link it to the agitprop tradition of the European and United States theaters. It certainly has similarities with the radical theater from the 1930s and a close relation to the work of the San Francisco Mime Troupe in the 1960s. However, *Los Pelados* has a notable dialectical development in which economy is interrelated continuously to the characters' intersubjectivity, determining their choices, their individual attitudes, and their direction in the fable. The Pelado family, the landlord Don Faustino and Chuy's mother-in-law, Doña Chona, are complex representations of the barrio's human types, and not stereotypes. They are more closely related to dramatic characters than to agitprop figures, exactly as in the so-called Brecht's great plays.

Thus, the actions of the Pelado family are presented as the results of a multifaceted set of circumstances, which can be analyzed and understood by the audience. Such circumstances are engendered by historical and economic forces materialized in the play by the new wave of neoliberalism in the United States. The dialectics between order and disorder, integration and non-integration that are combined in the lives of the Chicanos appear as determinants of the impact the barrio will suffer under the new system. Neoliberalism for the Chicanos—as for other minorities in the United States—had a radical disaggregating impact over the traditional forms of solidarity in the communities, tearing apart historical neighborhoods. This is precisely where the fable of *Los Pelados* leads the audience.

Three central elements encompass the consequences of neoliberalism in the life of the Pelado family. The most visible is the professional decline of Chuy. After he gets the job of *tirabichi*, we are informed—during a conversation between Mague and Doña Chona—that he was laid-off from his previous job after the company decided that all its workers had to have a high school diploma. Doña Chona accuses him of being *parrandero* (a party lover) —in her opinion, that is the reason why he lost his job—and reminds Mague that she had advised her to get married to a miner, who would provide more financial security. She also criticizes garbage collecting as being unworthy work ("¿Y qué trabajo es ese? Trabajando todo el día con moscas, basura y—cagada"). As we can see, the structural changes in United States capitalism are devastating for laborers, particularly Chicanos, and Chuy suffers the consequences of having poor access to

education as a child. However, a member of his own social group, his mother-in-law, prefers to blame him for his fails.

As the play goes on, we see Chuy's extensive routine at work, particularly in a scene in which his movements as a *tirabichi* are choreographed and interspersed with Mague's body actions as she takes care of their home. In scene 8, the precariousness of Chuy's job is more broadly exposed. Although the work climate is relaxed, full of camaraderie among the workers—and even includes opportunities to express sexism, as they wave to a girl on the street—the conditions are manifestly adverse. Along with the physical toughness of the activity itself, the garbage collectors have to deal with people complaining about the time the truck passes by (either too early or too late, depending on each individual perspective) and their notifications to the supervisor, the very low wages, the heat they have to endure, and finally with the poor condition of the equipment. Regarding this last aspect, the malfunctioning of the truck's brakes is the cause of Chuy's ultimate professional failure. As his colleagues go to the grocery store, Chuy is questioned by the Foreman, who asks him to take the truck out of the street:

> CHUY – Y mi raise, ¿cómo va? You know, we're saving for a house...
> FOREMAN – Bien, bien. Oye, Chuy, ¿por qué no mueves el troque?
> CHUY – No es mio. Está signed out pa'l Antonio.
> FOREMAN – Pues está en el camino. Muévelo, Chuy. (Chuy hesitates, then decides to move truck. Hits a gas meter.) ¡Me chingo! You hit a gas meter! ¿Qué no sabes manejar?
> CHUY – Pero no tenía maneas. El Antonio no me dijo...
> FOREMAN – Te chingaste! Te va a costar cinco días de suspension.
> CHUY – ¿Y mi raise?
> FOREMAN – Me chingo "mi raise". (Antonio raises.) Y tú también. Cinco días de suspension. (exits.)
> ANTONIO - ¿Qué hiciste, babas? ¿Qué no te dije que no lo movieras?
> CHUY – Él me hizo que lo moviera.
> ANTONIO – Pero no tenía frenos.
> CHUY – ¿Y por qué no me dijiste que no tenía frenos?
> ANTONIO – Este troque era mío. Si no fueras tan lambión — ¡cinco días! (exits)
> CHUY – Me corrieron por cinco días. Por pendejo. (exits)

The insecurity of the worker under neoliberalism is complete. Chuy takes the exact measure he was told to take but is blamed anyway for the consequences of such act—having to pay for the damages himself. He convinces himself that he is guilty. By the end of the play, we discover that Chuy is ashamed of himself for being a garbage

collector and even asks Mague if she thinks he is disgusting. His work and social conditions generate in his mind the very opposite attitude of *rasquachismo*.

The other consequence of neoliberalism is Mague's second shift. Despite Chuy's resistance, she begins to work as an office typist. However, her duties at home continue to be the same as always, resulting in her always arriving late at work and making several mistakes due to her indefectible fatigue. Her routine at the office is rather unstable, as she is always admonished by her boss and one of her colleagues:

> MR. WILLIAMS – You know you've been coming in late (holds paycheck in air.) You're making too many mistakes — (hands her paycheck. She reaches for it. He withdraws it.)
> MARGARITA – I'm sorry, I've been having some problems at home...
> MR. WILLIAMS – Well, we can't bring our problems to work, now, can we? (Again, hands her paycheck. She reaches for it. He withdraws it.)
> MARGARITA – I'll try to work something out...
> MR. WILLIAMS – And you know the company motto: "Strive for the HIGHEST." (The two say motto and though supervisor holds check over head, Margarita goes on tippy toes and manages to finally grab it. He exits. Margarita looks at her check.)

What follows is a kind of station drama: in each one of the windows of the scenery appears a different character, representing an entity of the market: a bank teller, a Sears clerk, and Doña Chata, the babysitter. Each of them tries to obtain the biggest possible share of Mague's paycheck. "See you in the next paycheck," all of them say. The obvious conclusion is that Mague ends up with no money, ironically reasoning: "Qué bueno que tengo trabajo."

As the time passes, Margarita's double burden becomes more and more unsustainable and things begin to fall apart. After an argument about it with Chuy, she imagines a dialogue with his Supervisor, in which he tells her that they appreciate her efforts to take care of his clothes and his meals. He concludes by telling her to "fix him nourishing lunches" and she agrees, but soon she realizes: "Hey, wait a minute. You're Chuy's boss. You're not my boss." Chuy reappears and, thinking she was talking to him, reaffirms: "I am your boss. Yo soy el hombre de la casa." They talk about their kids and have another argument. Chuy exits and Mague now sees Mr. Williams, who stresses the hardships of the work at the office. Shortly after, he asks her about her late assignments and criticizes her errors. The scene ends with Chuy calling her again; this time he is not interested in arguing with her, but in having sex. She tells him she is exhausted and

worried about their problems and he gets frustrated, finally confessing to her that he was suspended from work due to an accident.

What we see as we follow the development of Mague's journey in the play is the socioeconomic impact of neoliberalism on the lives of women—particularly the Chicanas, already pressured by the forces exerted by the system in the barrio. She is responsible for the family budget and having to borrow money when there are no sufficient funds to pay the monthly bills. At the same time, she has to fight with her husband in order to persuade him that the family needs her to work. Finally, she sees all the money she made going straight to the family's creditors, while she is forced to deal with all the work at home. Under this set of circumstances, there is no *rasquachi* alternative; Mague faces the hardships of a working-class woman with the regular resources available to workers: body energy and a keen sense of her own reality.

The last Neoliberal element *Los Pelados* discusses is the rise of the urban land prices and the displacement of poor workers. This theme is introduced from the very beginning. The happiness of the Pelados when Chuy gets his new job is ephemeral as Don Faustino tells them, when he goes to collect the rent, that he will sell their house:

> MARGARITA – Pero Don Faustino, usted sabe que nosotros estamos guardando para el down payment. Tenemos muchos años aquí. El Chuy ha puesto mucho trabajo…
> DON FAUSTINO – No, no. Déjate de cosas, Mague. Cómprense una casita fuera de este barrio. Con un corral para los buquis…
> MARGARITA (protesting) – Pero, Don Faustino, no nos queremos ir. (Don Faustino ignores her and exits.) Yo no me quiero ir de aquí.

A few tableaux ahead, Don Faustino shows up with a real estate agent to shoot pictures of the house without having been invited. The realtor, suggestively called Mr. Stiller, encounters Chuy half-naked, as he was in the shower, and he kicks them out. Although, Mr. Stiller had enough time to criticize the poor conditions of their house and to visualize a "quaint" Mexican restaurant in that "authentic" place. "I want these people out as soon as possible, ok?" Mague and Chuy's rent was seventy dollars; moving to a new house meant they would have to pay at least two hundred dollars and would not have enough money to save for a down payment. This is one of the reasons why Mague decides to start working.

However, her job is clearly not enough to solve the problem, as all her money is used to pay bills. With Chuy's suspension from work, the situation presumably

deteriorates. At that point, all neoliberal pressures conjointly make their position unbearable and a few hard decisions have to be made.

The solutions come from the barrio itself and are presented in the last few tableaux. Chuy goes to a bar with his work colleagues and is made to question his machismo—he discovers that his friends share with their wives the homemaking tasks. After a frustrated move with a girl at the cantina, he starts a bar fight with a friend and has to leave. In the middle of garbage cans, he learns from his friends that there is no reason to be ashamed of his work. The tableau is called "Abre los ojos, baboso," and that is what happens; Chuy decides to go home and tells Mague he will help with household chores.

In parallel, Mague understands that she has to join a collective struggle in order to improve their lives. Although her work environment is terrible, with all the pressures of her boss and her sellout colleague, it is through the office that she happens to find out about a community movement to fight for the right to decent housing. Her colleague, Isabel, insists on her going to a meeting that Saturday to discuss this issue, but she decides not to go, given that she will work on her belated assignments and take care of her home:

> ISABEL – You know there's all that talk about the buying and selling of our houses.
> MARGARITA – Pues sí. That's why I'm working. Don Faustino wants to sell our house.
> VENDIDA – Well, it's his house. He has a right to sell it if he wants to.
> ISABEL – We have a right to buy the houses ourselves. At a fair price. The meeting's to see if we can get a federal grant or loan...

The idea, nevertheless, sticks in her mind. In the final dialogue, after Doña Chona tells her that Don Faustino finally sold their house, she remembers the meeting and tells Chuy about it:

> MARGARITA – Chuy, tenemos que hacer algo inmediatamente. Me dijo la Isabel, la que trabaja conmigo, que vá ver un meeting.
> CHUY – ¿Qué meeting?
> MARGARITA – Los que viven en el barrio se van a juntar para ver como pueden salvar las casas.
> CHUY – Pues con dinero.
> MARGARITA- Maybe que podemos agarrar unos grants y federal loans. Y arreglamos las casas o tambien podemos comprar los lotes y haver las casas nosotros.
> CHUY – ¿Cómo que nosotros?

> MARGARITA – Pues sí! Hay muchas en el barrio que saben de construccion, painters, carpenters — y tu sabes poner techos.
> CHUY – Es cierto. El Ramon sabe poner sheet-rock, el Fred sabe de carpentry — Sabes qué, Mague, si nos organizáramos, podíamos hacer buenas casas.
> MARGARITA – Si, Chuy.
> CHUY – Ya es tiempo de que no nos dejemos que nos saquen de las casas como ratones.
> MARGARITA – Entonces, ¿vamos al meeting?
> CHUY – Si, vamos (starts to exit.) ¿Sabes el lotecito en la esquina? Siempre me ha gustado — (exits talking.)

The play booklet informs us that Teatro Libertad would conclude the presentation for Tucsonan audiences with a kind of apotheosis: all cast would enter the stage carrying signs in support of the Barrio Association and chant "No nos moverán;" signs and leaflets were passed to the spectators in order to stimulate support for their own community organizations. This was precisely the kind of ending agitprop plays used to have in the 1930s in Germany, the USSR, and New York.

The final enlightenment of the Pelados, mediated as it was by the social economic pressures that made their lives unbearable, has a dialectical nature. They understand it is impossible for them to thrive inside the order, despite all their efforts to attain their petit-bourgeois goal of buying a house. Their hardships are shared by the barrio as a whole, with the exception of a few Chicano landlords, such as Don Faustino. So, they finally understand that they must assume their position as members of the Chicano community and fight. There is no real integration possible, but they have to struggle against total disintegration. The way of achieving this is by going full "underdog," assuming the garbage and the cockroach stance. As Betty Diamond once argued, writing about Luís Valdez's *The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa*—in which one of the characters eats cockroaches—cockroaches are a symbol of a "psychological aspect of barrio life—the will to endure and the desire to rebel."[89] In *Los Pelados*, the elected symbol is garbage—par excellence, the milieu of the underdog. Assuming *rasquachismo*, the Pelado family assumes the fight against neoliberalism.

Only six years after *Los Pelados*, the conjuncture seemed to be totally new—and so did Teatro Libertad. Some of the key ensemble figures, such as Silviana Wood and Barclay Goldsmith, had left. The group had always worked in a very

[89] DIAMOND, Betty Ann. Brown Eyed Children of the Sun – The Cultural Politics of the Teatro Campesino. (Ann Arbor, University Microfilms, 1977), p. 130.

collectivist way, being internally divided into committees in charge of several work fronts; every play was created inside this structure. Nevertheless, it gradually radicalized the collectivist speech over the years, a move that led to the dissatisfaction of at least one of the members that quit the teatro. In 1984, the ensemble decided to stage a play about the ongoing copper miners' strike in Arizona.[90] In order to tell the story properly, they worked with a two-folded script: the first part dealt with the big Arizona miners' strike of 1915, which ended with a the mass deportation of strikers in 1917, and the second part referred to the contemporary movement. *La Vida del Cobre* seemed to be the product of a completely different company; instead of *rasquache* elements, Teatro Libertad followed the path of agitprop theater, the way a 1930s radical collective would choose to tell the same story. One could argue that the ensemble was no longer worried with the Chicano debates, or with its own identity as a Chicano collective. Maybe it is possible to affirm that Teatro Libertad assumed a more radical workerist perspective, probably as a response to Reagan and the advance of neoliberalism.

The fully collectivist stance of the group did not prevent one of its members from having a bigger influence on the play script. In fact, most of Libertad's veterans remember that Scott Egan was the key coordinator—with the acceptance of the others. A New Yorker and a veteran of the Communist Party, Egan ended up organizing the creation of what could be seen as a genuine Living Newspaper about the copper strikes in Arizona. The similarities between the play's structure and the Living Newspapers staged by the Federal Theatre Project between 1935 and 1939—under the supervision of the playwrights Arthur Arent and Hallie Flanagan, the general director of the FTP—abound. They can be noted not only in its concern with bibliographic research, with the factual accuracy of the scenes, and the documentary foundation of the play, but also in the forms of transposing facts to an imaginative and entertaining theatrical creation.

[90] In 1983, the workers of the mining giant Phelps Dodge Corporation started a strike against salary cuts. The movement lasted almost three years and resulted in a general break with the pattern of relations between labor and capital in the United States that had been active since the 1930s. The company resorted to the replacement of striking workers, who voted and approved the decertification of the unions that represented its employees till then. The National Labor Relations Board approved the move and the strike was finished by 1986.

The allegorization of historical situations and contemporary politics in the play follows a very proficuous tradition in the history of agitprop theater, particularly the FTP's living newspapers *Injunction Granted*, about the history of judiciary persecution of labor in the United States, and *Triple-A Plowed Under*, about the consequences of the financialization of agriculture during the crash of 1929. Both plays were fundamentally based on facts—inspired by history books or newspapers—but had a relevant creative layer of allegorization and fictionalization, in which a number of forms originating in the circus, cabaret, vaudeville, and musical revues were largely employed. In *Injunction Granted*, a famous scene showed a boxing fight between William Randolph Hearst, the magnate of the press, and a militant of the journalist's union. The labor activist repeatedly defeats Hearst, but the referee, nevertheless, declares the tycoon's victory. The very funny tableau was based on the true case of a reporter from one of Hearst's magazines that was fired due to his union activism and subsequently lost all filed suits, despite having the law on his side.[91]

In order to narrate the historical events related to the Bisbee strike of 1915 and the contemporary facts of the 1984 Phelps Dodge strike, *La Vida del Cobre*[92] makes use of forms such as a political debate, a union meeting, a bourgeois dance, and a TV game show. The central political ideas at stake in each moment are adequately demonstrated and debated, but they are always processed and shown through the sophisticated lenses of allegories. Part of this process incorporates something of the Chicano theatrical perspective, but, in general, the living newspaper form is dominant.

The play starts in 1915, with an Announcer directly addressing the audience:

> ANNOUNCER – Good evening, compañeros y compañeras! Welcome to Teatro Libertad's new acto, La Vida del Cobre (The Life of Copper). Tonight, we are going to perform the first act for you, called "The Deportation", which is based on actual historical events. But before we begin, are there any announcements that anyone would like to make? (Announcer lets any community announcements to be made. When last one is said, IWW goes:)
> IWW – Brothers and sisters! I just want to point out to everyone the incredible hardships that copper miners are experiencing today. And I believe that we must all realize that this situation is caused by the cold-bloodedness and utter disregard that the copper bosses and their stockholders in New York have for the lives of the miners and their families. Si no estuvo claro antes, debe ser

[91]LIMA, Eduardo Campos. Coisas de Jornal no Teatro. São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2014.
[92] Teatro Libertad Papers, forthcoming, Special Collections, The University of Arizona Libraries, Tucson, Arizona.

> claro ahora que los trabajadores y los patrones no tienen nada en común. There can never be peace in this country or anywhere as long as the few who make up the employing class have all the good things in life. We must all acknowledge that many of our trade unions have mislead the workers into the belief that workers have a common interest with their employers. También, it's time to admit that the trade unions have been guilty of pitting un grupo de trabajadores against another set of workers in the same industry. El único modo que estas condiciones pueden cambiar es si los trabajadores, all the workers, si organicen de tal manera que una indústria apoya a otra, that all cease work when there is a strike or lockout in any department — because an injury to one, an injury to all.
>
> AFL – I would like to respond to the brother's comments if I may. I am a long-time union member, and I understand the brother's frustrations, but we must not go to the extreme of throwing the baby out with the bath water. We have some of the highest wages in the world, which we have fought for and won — not by an attitude or uncompromise, but through negotiation and arbitration. We should not let the heat of the moment blinds us to the fact that if the companies go down the drain, then we as workers will also. It is the companies that have the money to develop the plants and factories that give us our wages, and they stay healthy, we stay healthy.

From the start, the union issue is presented in a straightforward way; the basic stances of the American Federation of Labor, founded in 1886, and of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), founded in 1905, are briefly contrasted in the words of their spokesmen. The AFL organized its unions according to the craft categories of the workers and not the industrial sector. The IWW, on the contrary, had the ultimate goal of constituting "one big union;" the Wobblies prioritized, therefore, the industrial field and not the professional activity of the workers. The Wobblies also criticized the AFL for their refusal "to organize black workers, women workers, immigrant workers and unskilled workers."[93] From the Chicano perspective, this last aspect had central importance given that the copper miners of Arizona were mostly Mexicans or of Mexican origin (about 80% of all laborers, according to Rosenblum).[94] Thus, the Wobblies' perspective is the privileged one—something that can be perceived, among other things, by the fact that the IWW spokesman is Chicano and AFL's is white. If we consider the fact that *La Vida del Cobre* was being presented during the copper strike of 1984, the immovability and compromise the AFL stands for also appear as negative values to be contrasted by the critical and active Wobbly position.

If the first scene exposes the divisions among the working class, the next scene shows the unified field of the bourgeoisie. As in a kind of musical revue, the

[93] NEWSINGER, John. Founded on the class struggle. Socialist Review. Ed. 417, October 2016.
[94] ROSENBLUM. Jonathan D. Copper Crucible: How the Arizona Miners' Strike of 1983 Recast Labor-management Relations in America. Cornell University: ILR Press, 1998, p. 19.

three main characters of the copper business during the strike of 1915 are introduced while dancing: Sheriff Harry Wheeler, Governor Tom Campbell, and Phelps Dodge president, Walter Douglas. Their interrelations are exposed in each of the initial monologues they deliver as they enter the stage. Basically, the copper barons' ambitions—particularly Douglas'—dictate Wheeler's and Campbell's actions. After a brief exposition of the problem, Douglas tells them his plan of deporting all union supporters from Arizona to a non-specified location in the desert of New Mexico, both from the IWW and the AFL.

The two labor organizers from the first scene appear in jail, where they keep debating the different approaches of their respective confederations. The AFL militant's wife visits him and ends up agreeing with the Wobbly: the company is targeting all union activists, regardless of their affiliation. But Al—we learn his name through his wife—is not convinced; he thinks his AFL miners' union is a "legitimate union" and that Walter Douglas "knows the difference" between the AFL and the IWW.

The next tableau shows a union assembly of the miners affiliated with the IWW. Worried about the increasing risks to the lives of copper miners—forced to go to the mines alone and to keep working during blasts—they discuss the possibility of a strike. One of the Wobblies argue that they have not gathered all the forces they need to organize a mass strike and should wait, but the others defend an immediate strike. A vote is taken during the presentation—at least in the one which was videotaped—and the pro-strike vote wins. The scene leads into that and so does the conjuncture of 1984—after all, a strike against the same Phelps Dodge was taking place and most of the audiences of *La Vida del Cobre* were somehow connected to it. The staging of a union meeting, again, is reminiscent of a few great plays of the 1930s, such as Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* and the big pro-union apotheosis that concluded some living newspapers, such as *Injunction Granted* and *One-third of a Nation.*

The apotheotic effect, however, is counterbalanced by the final tableau, in which Al's wife appears reading a letter he sent to her while slides showing the deportation are projected. Al tells her about the long and exhausting trip by train to Columbus, New Mexico and then to the location of Hermanas, surrounded by the Loyalty League, a group of vigilantes operating under Sheriff Wheeler's orders. According to Rosenblum, the deportees traveled in wagons still containing manure

and did not receive sufficient water and food when they were left in the desert. President Woodrow Wilson had a good friend at Philips Dodge, director Cleveland Dodge—a former colleague at Princeton University—and only slightly reprimanded Governor Campbell in a letter. Some days later, President Wilson sent troops to Hermanas, but they had the sole mission of providing food and water to the miners. Al tells his wife that "they were mostly Black soldiers and were the first ones that treated us decently." He goes on saying that one-third of the deportees were from the IWW, another third from the AFL and the rest "are not even members of any union." He concludes that "the only way that we can use this incident to our advantage is to make sure that it is never forgotten." This was the precise function of the first part of the play.

In part two, the audience is transported back to the present—and the strike of the Phelps Dodge workers is examined. The focus here is to unveil the economic interests that informed the political actions of the company and of their allied politicians. The Brechtian intention is noteworthy, but the kind of theatricalization really achieved is more of a political satire with an agitprop tone. The first tableau is a parody of the TV show Family Feud, here transformed as "Corporate Feud." The competitors are the two mining giants Anaconda and Phelps Dodge, in the satire called Anacono and Belch Dogs. Anacono starts introducing itself: it says its "proudest accomplishment was in Chile, a country rich in minerals and peon labor down in South America." Here alone, the company says, it has "been able to bleed them of $4 billion in half a century," and it "only had to invest a few hundred million!" It goes on bragging that they raised production, cut the workforce, and dug the largest open pit in the world. Then it is time of Belch Dogs. It celebrates the fact that the company was "one of the main forces behind making Arizona a 'Right-to-work-for-less State'" and that they have continually violated "health, safety and environmental regulations." Belch Dogs concludes by pointing out that it has two "top police-makers" on the board "of Valleys National Bank," an office they share with "Governor Bruce Scabbit's brother."[95] The Narrator comments that it was a "fascinating coincidence" and announces the game will start. "Ok. Before we begin, let's have Bonzo show you what your grand prize [will] be if you win." Bonzo enters, with a Ronald Reagan mask and acting like a monkey, carrying a covered

[95]The Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt, a Democrat politician, is called alternately as Bruce Scabbit and Booze Rabbit.

platter that he opens to reveal a “large pile of cheap, cheap copper” that the winner will take home.

The scene keeps developing in the same spirit: the TV game dynamics allow for all necessary opportunities to point out the national and international criminal actions of the copper corporations, including the ongoing transformations in the labor structure and the automatization of their operations. The denouncement of the companies’ actions is interspersed with plenty of political satire and ridiculing of politicians and company directors, leading to a humorous panorama of the corporate and political side of the class struggle.

Scene four replicates the political satire dynamics of the first scene. Belch-Dogs calls the Arizona governor and tells him—using very informal and bossy language—to get him a few hundred State policemen and National Guardsmen. The faltering Governor Rabbit is convinced to act on behalf of Belch Dogs to stop the strike after he mentions the possible consequences of the political radicalization of the copper workers for his own family business. They conclude the scene by intercalating the most cherished values for them in the class struggle, “Our country! Our religion! Our property!”

The second part of the play has two additional layers: one of a documentary and fictional nature and the other composed of agitative chants. Scenes 2 and 3 are interrelated and present the issue of the replacement of strikers by workers brought from other States and by scabs. The artifice chosen by the playwrights to explain the reasons of the union movement and to show the most relevant conflicts with the company is the inclusion of a TV reporter in the picket line. She is producing a TV story about the strike and interviews picket line members, giving them the chance to talk about the salary and benefit cuts. The Reporter also sees the scabs arriving in the mine—and the strong reaction of the strikers against them. The following scene starts with the story being aired on TV. Members of the Soto family recognize Miguel as one of the scabs and confront his attitude—his father is an active member of the labor union. Miguel gives them all the common excuses for strike breaking—he needs to work, he wants to take care of his family, he fears the consequences of joining the picketers. By the end of the dialogue, his father reminds him of the events in 1917. Miguel then reads a letter distributed by Belch-Dogs, with all kinds of pressure to force the employees to come back to work. He decides to rejoin the strikers. As the scene freezes, Belch Dogs appears and demonstrates surprise with

the scab's reaction. "This isn't part of our plan," he says, and then promises to use an additional trick. The next scene is the one where he asks the governor to send the troops to put an end to the strike.

Act 2 ends with a musical crescendo. Songs such as *Canción del minero*, composed by the Chilean singer Victor Jara, and Jimmy Cliff's *The Harder They Come* are played and accompanied by the presentation of slides with pictures from the strike. An apotheotic ending comes with a strikers' rally set to the sound of *Trabajadores al Poder,* the anthem of the Chilean Marxist party *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR). A strong political speech is given in the epilogue reaffirming the Arizona copper strike is not only a labor movement, but a political struggle for the workers' right to unionization.

In its two acts, *La Vida del Cobre* demonstrates that the class struggle in Arizona has always involved copper mining. In 1917, the corporations used all the weight of racism in United States society as a tool to defeat the striking workers, deporting thousands of labor leaders. In 1983, more sophisticated strategies are used to battle the labor movement, but the remembrance of the corporate actions in 1917 can possibly help the Chicano workers to take the right side. Moreover, the denouncement of the mining companies' actions abroad, such as their contribution to Augusto Pinochet's coup in Chile in 1973, accompanied by cultural productions of the Chilean Leftist resistance, was able to establish a pan-Latino sense of working-class solidarity.

From *Los Pelados* to *La Vida del Cobre*, El Teatro Libertad went from *rasquachismo*, at the beginning of neoliberalism, to a class-based universalism a few years later. The precarious integration to United States society was no longer questioned. Now, it was the time for Chicano copper workers to feel the need to establish alliances with other laborers—postal workers and coal miners are directly mentioned in the final speech—and even with their colleagues in foreign countries, particularly the Latin American ones.

This change was more than just a result of the transformations in the ensemble. The fast advance of neoliberalism under Reagan and the huge defeat of the traditional labor union activism in the United States during the Arizona copper strike were certainly important elements in the transition. From the debate on Chicano specificities that marked the works of so many *teatros* since the end of the

1960s, the Chicano Theater now arrived at the discussion of *stricto sensu* class politics—and even international class solidarity.

CHAPTER IV

Teatro Ferramenta and the play *Eles crescem e eu não vejo*: the birth of a new working-class culture in the ABCD region

After a little more than three years, a new circuit of cultural production and circulation, in which dozens and dozens of autonomous collectives took part, emerged and grew in several regions of Brazil. The *Centros Populares de Cultura* (Popular Centers of Culture)—or CPCs—were initially founded by actors and directors, but also included artists from other areas. In theater, they radicalized the search for a working-class audience, which the *Teatro de Arena* (Theater of Arena), the most radically modernist stage in Brazil at the end of the 1950s, was incapable of achieving. The CPC committee of street theater, led by João das Neves, brought to the streets a kind of satirical and very efficient theatrical form that always referred to a specific political issue, known as an *auto*. The *autos* were performed everywhere, sometimes to working-class audiences in union halls, sometimes in squares and sometimes in favelas. A few months before the 1964 military coup in Brazil, Oduvaldo Vianna, CPC's main leader, and his colleagues were planning to recruit steady groups in favelas and working-class neighborhoods in order to deepen the work within the communities and stimulate the formation of artists and cultural groups. The beginning of the military dictatorship thwarted all such plans and imposed new demands. "The abortion of the historic and artistic process of the CPC as a whole and particularly of its theater sector deprived the country of having contact with reflections and creations that would be discussed again only much later, in very different social and cultural conditions."[96] For the first time, a very radical process of democratization for education and the arts was brewing in Brazil because of a circuit of workers and political militancy unhindered by institutional or governmental limitations.

The coup cut ties between radical militants, artists, students, and workers and made that democratization platform impracticable, particularly after 1968 when the regime put an end to all civil liberties that still had formal existence. The main organizers of the CPC—many of them members of the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB, in Portuguese)—had to look for alternatives to survive in the new system. In the wake of the fragmentation of the PCB—which until then had been the major Marxist

[96] BETTI, Maria Silvia. A politização do teatro: do Arena ao CPC. In: História do teatro brasileiro [S.l: s.n.], 2013, p. 36.

organization—a portion of the CPC's organizers engaged in the new Communist tendencies and parties that arose after 1964. The artists connected to the new wave of Marxist militancy sought to distance themselves from the PCB model, as it was considered to be bureaucratic, hierarchical, and politically moderate. Some of these new political movements deployed their militants to poor neighborhoods in the outskirts of big cities, such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, in order to get in touch with the working class. For the artists and educators among these activists, this experience somehow revived the CPC's project that had been so abruptly interrupted in 1964 (although they generally refused any continuity with the political practices of the previous phase.)

The watchword for a considerable part of those cultural militants was participation. Either using play scripts from other authors—at many times, the selected plays were from the CPC and *Teatro de Arena*'s sphere—or producing their own works, the theater artists that operated in working-class communities and favelas privileged their continuous relationship with the audience. The general idea was to propel local cultural initiatives and to facilitate the access of the lower stratum of labor to theater.

Many political ideas at that time coincided with the search for horizontal practices and forms of organization in the Leftist milieu. However, in Brazil, there was a peculiar combination of criticism toward PCB's practices with ideas from the Catholic Church. Trying to reestablish the severed ties with workers and peasants, several Marxist movements and activists sought alliances with Catholics in order to gain access to their large network of popular entities, organizations, and community movements, which had an enormous presence among the poor. Influenced by Liberation Theology, Catholic activism generally emphasized the relevance of the knowledge, experiences, and expressions of poor workers, which was in opposition to the Leninist idea of a political and intellectual vanguard as the adequate directive force of the labor struggles.[97] This particular juncture reaffirmed among large sectors of the Brazilian Left the idea that revolutionary artists should have the goal of transferring to the people the artistic means of production—to use a formulation of Walter Benjamin. The sole creation of artistic works with a revolutionary nature is no longer considered enough. New as this perspective could be, it had, at the same time, a historical connection to the

[97]FREDERICO, Celso (org.) A esquerda e o movimento operário, 1964-1984 – A crise do "milagre brasileiro". Volume 2. Belo Horizonte: Oficina dos Livros, 1990, p. 152.

CPCs; part of those artists were resuming the cultural debate from 10 years earlier and starting to operate precisely at the point in which the CPCs had stopped.

On a few special occasions, all this coincided with a labor union milieu. This was the case with *Teatro Ferramenta* (Theater Tool), a theater group created by the Metalworkers' Union of São Bernardo do Campo and Diadema. The founder of the group was José Roberto Michelazzo, known as Mic, a Physics teacher who had been a young activist of the CPC in Ribeirão Preto before 1964. At the end of the 1960s, Mic briefly joined the Ala Vermelha (Red Wing), a Maoist political organization that was involved in the guerrilla against the regime. Since the beginning of the 1970s, Ala Vermelha had started to rely on activism in poor neighborhoods and among factory workers after a profound process of self-criticism led it to abandon the idea of an armed rebellion. In the heavily industrial region known as the ABCD—the cities of Santo André, São Bernardo do Campo, São Caetano do Sul, and Diadema, all of them in the metropolitan area of São Paulo—Ala Vermelha was building a strong relationship with the Metalworkers' Union of São Bernardo and Diadema, then led by Paulo Vidal (Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was already a member of the directive board). In 1973, Mic had already left the Ala Vermelha, but remained close to many of his former comrades and somewhat influenced by the party line. He began teaching at an adult education school close to union headquarters, and most of his students were metalworkers—Lula himself studied there for some time. "Lula concluded that the workers spent too much money studying and, as Paulo Vidal's secretary, he suggested the creation of an adult education school inside the structure of the union."[98] The only requirement to become a student was to join the union. Starting in 1974, the *Centro Educacional Tiradentes* (Tiradentes Educational Center) became a huge success. One of its greatest qualities was its complete adaptation to the reality of the metalworkers: the school offered classes all day so night shift laborers could take classes in the morning and day laborers could study at night.

A group of Tiradentes teachers, led by Mic, later had the idea to create a theater. At that point, Mic was the coordinator of the school and suggested the idea of a theater group to Lula, who agreed. He hired as his assistant his then-wife, Izolda Cremonine, who had studied theater direction and had been a member of the *Teatro de Equipe* of the

[98]Personal information.

Serviço Social do Comércio (Commerce's Social Service). That group had staged three of Argentinean author Osvaldo Dragún's *Stories to be told*.

At the beginning of 1975, the union newspaper *Tribuna Metalúrgica* published an article, titled *O teatro está perto de você* (Theater is close to you), calling union members to take part in the group.[99] The resulting group had a rather heterogeneous nature, consisting of metal laborers and female office clerks. Their interests varied; political theater was not the first option for some of them. Izolda Cremonine remembers that the debates to choose a name for the company somehow demonstrated this: one of the first suggestions was Peace and Love.[100] However, names linked to the universe of the metal industry prevailed, such as *Pica-Ponto* [101] (something like "Time-Card Puncher"), and Ferramenta ended up being chosen. The work began shortly after with physical expression workshops given by artist Sonia Grossi.

Initially, Mic and Izolda planned to stage Dragún's *Los de la mesa 10* and *The story of how our friend Panchito González felt guilty about the bubonic plague epidemic in South Africa* and had the young members of the ensemble study both scripts. However, they decided to work with two plays by a 19th century Brazilian playwright, Martins Pena, *Quem casa quer casa (*Whoever marries wants a house) and *O caixeiro da taverna* (The tavern clerk). Both plays were written in 1847 and were comedies of manners, that is, humorous portrayals of social life in Brazil during the Empire, which were quite commonly staged by theater students. According to Mic, the great success of those first stagings led Lula to realize the great potential of theater and required more political engagement from *Teatro Ferramenta*. Mic then suggested the creation of a Cultural Department in the union, which ended up being directed by Izolda.

The group rapidly started to occupy an important place in the lives of its members. The meetings were held on a weekly basis, always on Sunday afternoons, but they also gathered for parties and collective excursions to theaters in São Paulo. Soon it became a closely-knit ensemble; all its members felt confident enough to explore their artistic interests and experiment with their means of expression. This is why one of the participants, Expedito Soares, felt the desire to write his own play. He left the group for a few months in order to focus on the task and then, with the play script concluded, shared his work with his colleagues. The play was called *Eles crescem e eu não vejo*

[99]PARANHOS, Kátia Rodrigues. História(S) do Grupo Forja no ABC: Militância, Memória e Engajamento no Brasil no pós-1964. Ponta de Lança, Vol. 1, ano 1, outubro de 2007.
[100]Personal information.
[101]Personal information of José Contreras.

(They grow up and I don't see it) and dealt with the overwhelming routine of the factory workers in the metallurgical industry.

The play was rehearsed by *Teatro Ferramenta* for some time but was never presented. Nevertheless, the Cultural Department had a cinema division in 1977, which is when Soares, the playwright, and Renato Tapajós, the Department's director, decided to produce a short film about *Eles crescem*. This film, called *Teatro Operário* (Workers' Theater), is the only record left of Soares' play, along with a few excerpts included in Celso Frederico's critique of it.[102]

The play is entirely guided by one character, Careca, who at times also plays the role of narrator. In fact, it should be a portrayal of one day in Careca's life, from dawn to the moment he comes back home at night. Most of its scenes concentrate on specific aspects of his routine in the factory, the ones that are related to the causes of his tiresome life. Although the play does not exhaustively expose the deeper motivations of the state of affairs, it denounces each of the manifestations within the workers' routine. After all, this was the level at which the metalworkers could have a say and try to change things. In 1977, the unions in the ABCD region, especially the Metalworkers Union, were almost ready to start a large transformation in the balance of power in the industry and in the country as a whole. *Eles crescem e eu não vejo* somehow materialized the conjuncture that needed to be transformed.

In the presentation of the play, Soares explains it has a veridical nature and is based on his experiences as a worker at four car factories in the ABCD region. The script, he goes on, was constructed from the notes he had taken at work and most of the lines were really said by his workmates and bosses. In a short interview with Soares that Tapajós included in his film, he explains: "I wrote the play because I read several works by several authors and none of them responded to the needs of the workers." He was probably referring to the playwrights Ferramenta read collectively until that point, a list that included at least Osvaldo Dragún, Mário Brasini, Ariano Suassuna, Martins Pena, Augusto Boal, and even a little bit of CPC's dramaturgy. Among the plays the group watched, it was *Um grito parado no ar* (A scream stopped in the air,)[103] written by Gianfrancesco Guarnieri, a former member of Teatro de Arena and CPC. It is also rather possible that Soares studied other authors. Many of the ones mentioned addressed themes of the working class and of the life of the poor. So, why did Soares feel their

[102]FREDERICO, Celso. A Vanguarda Operária. São Paulo: Editora Símbolo, 1979.
[103]Personal information of Izolda Cremonine.

works could not be useful and entertaining for his factory colleagues? The problem could be that he felt the need for plays written specifically about the ABCD reality, an already relevant conjuncture that should inspire particular works of political art. Moreover, Soares probably shared with many people at that time the intention of boosting a workers' culture. As Frederico affirms, the Catholic influence on the organizations of the working class in the 1970s resulted, among other things, in an "encouragement to self-expression," something that led to "a genuine passion for the written word among some segments of the working class:"

> Instigated to self-expression, some workers started to write about the history of their lives and the factory routine. In this context, neighborhood newspapers and attempts of researching the worker's condition flourished. (...) In the oppressive conditions of that time, the impossibility of political expression led some sectors to resort to artistic events to discuss the situation of the workers and consequently to denounce the Military regime.[104]

The Workers' Culture Fair (Fecop, in Portuguese), organized by the Strike Fund of Santo André in 1983, was one among many examples of the Progressive Catholic's influence on the workers' cultural dynamics. The event gathered amateur theater groups, musicians, folklore dancers, and craftsmen with the idea of stimulating the free cultural expression of the working class. One of the main organizers of Fecop, Father Bernard Hervy—a long time coordinator of the Progressive Workers' Catholic Action in Brazil—declared in the video of the event:

> Usually the workers' idea of culture corresponds to what they receive from the TV, radio, and magazines. But they feel and experience things that they don't have the means to express. For me, culture is when a group of workers—in a neighborhood, factory or union labor—has the condition to express those things the way they want—by protesting, or poetically, or playing, or through art.

There was, therefore, a clear alliance between the Catholic left-wing, labor unions, and Marxists that favored the working-class cultural expression in those years. Expedito Soares' desire to write a play about his own reality was materialized by this particular context.

Soares' play begins with Careca waking up to the ring of the alarm clock:

[104]FREDERICO, 1990, p. 153.

> CARECA – Wow! I'm late! I think I'll be late for work! (Goes to the kitchen, takes a coffee pot and a cup and drinks pure coffee. Goes back to the room and gets a briefcase with a few notebooks. Walks very fast, almost running. As he gets to the door, he looks back at the bed. A little downcast.) Yes, you're growing up and I don't see it. Many things happen in this world and we don't see them. And even if we wanted to see them, we wouldn't. Not everything, in fact almost nothing. Not even what should be a priority. Look, it's not lack of courage! I wake up every day at 5 am, work hard as hell and only come back at 11 pm. I've been doing it for several years. And almost nothing has changed. (...) Please, I'm not a machine, let me get back home earlier! They may not recognize me in the future. I know they're growing by my side, but we almost don't know each other. (...) I confess: I'm anxious to see them smiling at me! Until then, should I keep waiting for it? Today I'm not rushing: I'm already too late. But pay attention and see if I have any time left – even to dream.

This initial monologue introduces the subject matter in a very effective way. The character/narrator is caught right at the beginning of his routine, already running against the clock at 5 a.m. His speech demonstrates a confusion of emotions and desires: he is concerned about the hour, but at the same time he does not want to leave his home and his children; he is anxious about a transformation in his life and maybe in society, but he is depressed with his work routine; he hopes his dreams can come true, but he does not have time to dream.

When he arrives at work, Careca greets his colleagues and starts his shift as a quality inspector. As they talk about their problems while the boss is away, the images and messages of the cultural industry somehow invade the factory: one of the guys lights a cigarette and the ambience becomes the one of a TV ad. Another actor, wearing a sophisticated suit, then parodies an actual cigarette ad of the 1970s; the brand Chanceller becomes Franceller and two slogans are presented: "Franceller, the cigarette of all classes," and "Franceller, smooth as life." The ad ends and the workers resume their work at the factory. This unexpected insertion is repeated throughout other parts of the play; at times it is a TV ad or a telenovela scene. In Tapajós film, the young Soares mentions this idea. "Offering only a portrayal of the factory [would not be enough because] our comrades already know it. Therefore, I interrupt it with TV ads, so our comrades can form a critical vision of these TV ads that only serve to alienate them." This layer of the play, therefore, cannot be considered a collateral element; it constitutes, along with the more naturalistic layer, the core of its content. As a matter of fact, there is an intimate relationship between both elements: the phantasmagorical insertions of the cultural industry work to relativize the objectivity of the factory narrative. The effect generates a more contradictory totality in which the workers' daily plight is not only

explained in economic and political terms, but also from a cultural perspective—and the hegemonic culture is unveiled as a tool of consumerism.

In the 1970s, many poor workers already had the means to own a TV set. In Rainho's survey on the life of the metal workers, they mention that watching TV was their main leisure and cultural activity. "The major entertainment here is TV (…) I like to watch TV. To telenovelas and [to the entertainer] Silvio Santos's show."[105] Television was part of the new needs massively generated in urban life. At the same time, it operated as a powerful form of massification for those new standards of consumption, in line with international patterns. For millions of peasants that migrated to the big cities and had to adequate their pre-capitalist values and modes of living to an advanced industrial capitalism, the TV culture stood for something as a behavioral guide; urban life and the conformation to a consumerist society appeared to be the same thing. This is why Soares and other worker-artists were eager to criticize TV forms and contents. Contesting the role played by the cultural industry's forefront, they expected to discuss the limitations imposed by its ideological content to the advancement of the workers' consciousness.

The incorporation of habits related to the consumer society consequently appears in the play as the uncritical adherence to an anti-labor platform. In a quick dialogue during a break, one of Careca's workmates, an ambitious "yes-man," expresses such an adherence:

> ODAIR – A color TV has plenty of benefits! You can see [the soccer club] Coringão on color! It's awesome! See, the other day I wanted to buy soap, but I forgot the brand of it. So, when I got there, I told the lady the color of its pack and she brought to me exactly the one I wanted! You can see everything perfectly, it's like the movies inside your house. Yes, Old Man, but a guy your age won't be able to see a color TV!
> OLD MAN – No surprise! You're killing yourself at work. You arrive at 7 am and only leave the factory at 11 pm.
> ODAIR – That's it! You're not fit for this rhythm. You've reached your limit. You gotta be fit for the job.
> CARECA – No, you don't gotta be fit for that! You gotta be a crazy man and a bagpiper like you.

The anti-labor attitude stimulated by the cultural industry is directly associated with one of the great problems in the lives of metalworkers: the long extensions of their work journeys by the companies. Working overtime was seen by the most conscious workers as a despicable, individual solution for the lack of adequate salaries, and the

[105]RAINHO, Luis Flavio. Os peões do Grande ABC. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1980, p. 150.

union frequently campaigned against it among workers. The Brazilian labor legislation allowed only two additional hours per workday, except in cases of imperative need. The big corporations operating in the ABCD region got used to exploring this breach in the law, requiring several hours of overtime daily. The employees had a formal right to refuse to stay for additional hours at the factory, but they were compelled to accept them by their bosses and for economic reasons—thus giving up "one of the great conquests of the workers, celebrated in most of the world on May 1st."[106] Besides the impact on their mental and physical health, on their social and family lives, and on their consciousness, working overtime favored the corporations and harmed the working class as a whole given that overexploitation allowed the companies to hire less employees, which was cheaper for them. Purchasing a TV on installments is mentioned by Rainho as one of the reasons why the workers were obliged to accept working overtime. Careca deals with this theme when he reprimands Odair:

> CARECA – Do you think it's right to humiliate the Old Man everyday and to stimulate the guys to work overtime? I'm sincerely sad when I look at you, my friend! It's not by working overtime like you that they'll buy a color TV. What they need – what we need – is to get much better salaries! Much better! They need – you need – to realize the terrible conditions here! Take a look (points at the ceiling)! We don't even have proper ventilation. That's is a fucking place. In only one day, seventeen women passed out here. Where have you seen such a thing? Here, man, we're quality inspectors. But we also perform the work of production assistants: we carry boxes all over the place! Damn, my friend, you should be ashamed of yourself for talking about overtime work with these people!
> ODAIR – But I'm satisfied with it...
> CARECA – You're not! You lack professional competence, so you spend all day ass-kissing Morila out of fear of being fired. (Odair leaves angrily.)

During lunch time, talk about working overtime is back. Linguiça (his nickname means sausage) explains to Careca that he always has to accept overtime work when Morila asks him due to his financial issues: his family is from the State of Minas Gerais and he does not have enough money to visit his mother. He is conscious of his situation, but nevertheless feels pressured to work on the corporation's terms. After telling his colleague about a few of his misfortunes—he needs to walk for five kilometers to go to work sometimes, when he has no money—Linguiça concludes by saying that Careca is too much of a "thinker." "You're thinking too much. I also used to be a thinker, and Senhor Arnaldo used to worry about all this as well. However, there he is, with plenty of grey hair and most of his problems still unsolved."

[106] RAINHO, 1980, p. 242.

Through these quick dialogues, Soares effectively delineates a few character types: the individualistic and alienated bagpiper, Odair; the disenchanted—although conscious—laborer, Linguiça; Morila, the boss, represents exclusively the discipline in the factory and all he does is give orders and complain about the employees; Careca is obviously a conscious worker's voice, but he is not yet a labor organizer given that there is no mention of the union; Arnaldo—the old man—and the rest of the workers are naive types, paralyzed and uncritical human beings waiting for incoming orders (in the film version, there are a few more characters in this group, such as Paulo, who had suffered a work accident and lost his left hand, and a pregnant laborer). They feel the impulse to rebel against the restrictions so omni-presently imposed on them, but they cannot really fight back in a coherent way. The orders they receive are mostly related to the rhythm of their work or to the need of working overtime. Work steals their entire lifetime.

Rainho lists the main "resources of spontaneous protest" the metalworkers used to employ in order to minimally resist the military discipline of the factory, at a time when the unions were not significantly relevant in their daily lives and the political activity they could pursue was almost nonexistent due to the dictatorship. He mentions, for instance, the act of killing time in the production line, something that requires a lot of expertise given that the supervisors are always checking-in on them; the act of magnifying the consequences of an unimportant work accident, gaining time to go to the doctor and avoiding work; the act of causing damage to machines, tools, equipment, vehicles, or even to the facilities of the factory; the act of intentionally disrespecting orders or instructions, which many times can result in poorly done work.[107] Most of these acts of "spontaneous protest" appear in *Eles crescem e eu não vejo*. Despite the fact that he is aware of the need for a collective and organized reaction, Careca is the one to incentivize his workmates in a few of these situations. Right at the beginning of his shift, for instance, he takes advantage of the absence of his boss and gathers his colleagues in a musical game—which the supervisor abruptly interrupts. In another part, his colleague Canoinha (small canoe, probably a humorous nickname in reference to some physical trait) asks him about one of the metal pieces they have to inspect:

> CANOINHA – Careca, what do you think of it? (Shows him a piece.)

[107] RAINHO, 1980, p. 291.

> CARECA – (Takes the piece without looking at it.) It's all a matter of responsibility. The ones who should assume the responsibility for our salaries don't do it. (Smiles.) Funny thing... Why should we care about their pieces? (Throws it at the box.) It should be good.
> CANOINHA – Yes... You're right.
> CARECA – (To Canoinha.) You also should realize these things by now and start to think differently. You only think about samba! It's not right! I'm not against music, on the contrary. I'm against all this nonsense such as soccer, telenovelas, working overtime. I'm tired of listening to you talking about all that. It's a shame that you're always screwing things up: you even quit studying to work overtime. If you don't study now, you'll regret it later.

It is curious that Careca indulges in an act of sabotage, something that is not exactly common for leftist activists in the Brazilian tradition. This kind of action raises the suspicion that he does not truly represent the model of a member of the workers' vanguard in formation during those years.

Careca, as far as we know, is fed up with his tiresome daily life and with the seemingly unchangeable reality he shares with his colleagues. There are a number of times where he or another character mentions the fact that he studies at a night school after work. It appears to be a sign of his desire to improve his life conditions and as an obstacle to additional hours of work:

> OLD MAN – Careca, that movie on Channel 13… hmm… the Cyborg. Is it true that he has a mechanical arm?
> CARECA – Oh, please, Senhor Arnaldo, I don't have time to watch TV. I leave work and go straight to school everyday. Besides, television only shows rich people coming and going to Europe. Why doesn't it show our situation?
> OLD MAN – You're right, son. Going to school is the right thing to do, because nowadays the man who can't read is nothing.

When Morila checks if everybody will be able to work overtime, he does not ask Careca the same question he asks the others— "Are you staying today?"—but mentions the school instead:

> MORILA – Are you going to school today?
> CARECA – Yes.
> MORILA – So, you can't stay today?
> CARECA – Yes, unfortunately I won't be able to stay again.
> MORILA – Why even os Saturdays you can never work overtime?
> CARECA – Because Saturdays were made for rest. I already work more than eight hours everyday in order to compensate Saturdays. Moreover, working overtime is not the solution for anything. The right thing to do is to be paid enough money in exchange for the regular eight hours of work.

The school where Careca studies is obviously Tiradentes, something that is clear not only to his boss and his colleagues, but also to the audience. Careca's studies, therefore, are not only a matter of professional formation and ambition but are related to consciousness and critical thinking. It is not a coincidence that almost all allusions to the school come together with themes connected to class struggle. The only exception is the talk with Arnaldo—as an elderly uneducated worker, he is not familiar with the advances of the Progressive education in Brazil since the end of the 1950s and does not think the school can help people to know and fight for their rights in society.

What we know about Careca, therefore, is that he is getting in touch with a different type of blue-collar milieu, probably for the first time. At the labor union school, he certainly met leftist militants and labor leaders and is starting to develop new ideas about his situation and work conditions. He is in transition: from a countryside migrant who had fought to fit-in in the big city—and capitalist—dynamics to becoming a citizen aware of his needs and of the things the system has taken away from him. This is why he is rebellious, inquisitive, and even rude at times. The play shows him at the point where he is probably going to assume political activism for the first time in his life, against all odds. His next step is to join the union and a social movement. Although now he is still divided between the rage against the hardships of his factory labor, against his immobile workmates, against the products of his senseless work and the hope for change.

In his critique, Celso Frederico argues, from a Lukacsian perspective, that Careca represents Expedito Soares himself and carries the conscience of a labor union group that was on its way to completely seizing the power in the Metalworkers Union—and in the Brazilian left-wing. Alluding to Lukács' conception of realism—"the emphasis on the totalizing reproduction of social life" —Frederico points out that Careca is surrounded by stereotypical characters who cannot really represent the state of affairs for the Brazilian working class of the 1970s:

> […] the artist needs to work, as Engels said, with "typical characters in typical situations". This is the way to reach the apprehension of reality in a synthetical fashion, one which discards what it has of accidental and accessory and gets the singular traits of each character dialectically articulated with the universal aspects of the human being. […]
> Givan that it does not work with typical characters in typical situations, the theatrical play of Expedito Soares Batista presents us only with a stereotypical vision of the workers' daily lives. The "objectivity" which was

> built, as honest as the author's intentions can be, leads to a partial and fragmentary portrait of the reality which his art wanted to imitate.[108]

Always lecturing on how people should think and behave, Careca does not get involved with any real action or problem of the factory; no character was properly structured and, according to Frederico, all of them represent automatized living dead, only present in the play to serve as the objects of Careca's bureaucratic conscience. Several elements, nevertheless, starting with the act of sabotage, seem to contradict such analysis.

Indeed, the structure of the play is almost a list of different types of factory abuse interspersed with disorderly resistance acts, with Careca's commentaries about them and with mass media phantasmagoria. Careca is a conductor and a commentator, but he is not a professional revolutionary, some kind of Leninist model organizer who can open his colleagues' eyes and articulate class demands; he is also one of the victims of the automobile industry. One should not expect all-enlightened alternatives coming from him—and certainly not from his friends. In fact, the play is about his effort to reflect on the causes and effects of his condition. His way out of the vicious circle of industrial exploitation is the night school and his individual reaction to his boss' demands, but this does not mean he cannot see a collective solution for his class problems. Those are part of the collective solutions at hand for a conscious blue-collar worker such as Careca in the mid-1970s.

Careca is in the middle of two conflicting forces: on the one hand, the liberational Third-World process started in the 1960s[109] and abruptly interrupted in Brazil by the 1964 coup which somehow survived out of institutionalism and grew up in the popular movements and in a number of blue-collar circles, particularly in the ABCD area, and, on the other hand, central aspects of contemporary capitalism that were being assimilated and naturalized by Brazilian society and reaching greater portions of it, such as mass consumption, cultural industry, and a general sense of political inactivity. All these aspects gradually combined with historical elements of Brazilian sociabilities in the new, gigantic urban areas, generating several sociopolitical syntheses. In culture, those years saw the rise of popular theater groups, blue-collar artists and creators of all kinds, and the labor union theater with Ferramenta. They rapidly originated a massive

[108] FREDERICO, 1979, p. 49.

[109] JAMESON, Fredric. Periodizing the 60s. Social Text. No. 9/10, The 60's without Apology (Spring - Summer, 1984), pp. 178-209. Published by: Duke University Press. DOI: 10.2307/466541 https://www.jstor.org/stable/466541

culture circuit in poor working-class communities but had competitors that were already immense and would certainly continue to grow more and more, especially with the wide-spread use of TV. Careca materializes in his political anguish the shock of all these new political and cultural possibilities with the monstrous wall of big, international capital.

Frederico considers Careca's reflections to have a professorial nature caused by his actual separation from his workmates at the factory:

> Careca speaks from the outside, always in a professorial tone. The 'realism' intended becomes complete idealism, given that the character's conscience is not determined by its social being. On the contrary, it is the narrator's conscience that gives life to the social being of the abstract character: an empty skeleton put to motion by the arbitrary breath of a moralistic and gratuitous external speech, which does not correspond to any necessity of the situation that is intendedly being portrayed.[110]

The real interests and ambitions of the narrator, according to Frederico, are found at the Tiradentes school, as his relations with the factory environment lack concreteness and his discourse is vague. Moralism is supposedly the consequence of such an emptiness.

Following a certain Lukacsian tradition, Frederico looks for a specific type of organic totality in the play, in which internal necessity governs the actions and the decisions of the characters and, at the same time, reflects the true nature of the social reality that is represented. In this sense, *Eles Crescem*… is in his opinion a fragmentary, patchwork narrative, in which TV ads and soap opera scenes appear without "any internal need for the development of the action." These ideas are somehow an outdated version of some of Lukács' arguments in the notorious debate he had with Ernst Bloch about Expressionism in 1938. Bloch suggested in his article *Discussing Expressionism* that discontinuity—an element the Lukacsian system apparently cannot encompass – is also part of reality:

> Since Lukacs operates with a closed, objectivistic conception of reality, when he comes to examine Expressionism, he resolutely rejects any attempt on the part of artists to shatter any image of the world, even that of capitalism. Any art which strives to exploit the real fissures in surface inter-relations and to discover the new in their crevices, appears in his eyes merely as a willful act of destruction. He thereby equates experiment in demolition with a condition of decadence.[111]

[110] FREDERICO, 1980, p. 52.
[111] BLOCH, Ernst. Discussing Expressionism. In: Aesthetics and Politics. London: Verso, 1977, p. 23.

In his response, an article titled *Realism in the Balance*, Lukács reaffirms that totality is a central element in Marxian economic thought and should guide the artist in the adequate perception and treatment of what is only superficial and what are the true elements of the essential reality. Something like "discontinuity" should be apprehended as an almost accidental element, one that belongs to the surface of daily life. For him, Expressionism and Surrealism are tendencies that cannot privilege the essential traits of existence.[112] The entire critique of Frederico seems to echo this argument but applies it to the Brazilian reality many decades later. The inadequacy of such procedure is evident.

The basic mistake of Frederico's analysis is the assumption that Careca is some kind of direct representation of Expedito Soares Batista himself. He even extends this idea to the whole group of Luiz Inácio da Silva, and Careca suddenly becomes the spokesman of the hegemonic labor union faction in the ABCD, whose supposed intention was to "manipulate an uncharacterized set of average and mediocre workers." Only in this sense, Careca's reflections could be deemed a moralistic preaching without any political value.

However, this is not true. Despite the possible similitude with the author's biography, Careca is a fictional creation of Soares' mind. At the same time, Careca is the narrator of the play often acting as a kind of *raisonneur* of the 19th-century Brazilian comedy of manners, a kind of commentator that extracts moral lessons from the decisions and actions of the characters. This type of *raisonneur* lived through a variety of phases in the Brazilian theater, from musical revue to a few of the CPC's plays. The moral aspect of the *raisonneur*'s discourse, when inserted in a militant or agitprop play, certainly had a much different function than the original. Let us take, for example, the final scene of the CPC's *Auto dos 99%*, a play that Mic—the founder of Ferramenta—staged when he was a young member of the CPC. The play deals with the historical process of exclusion by the majority of the population in Brazil from higher education at the beginning of the 1960s. During a meeting of older professors that managed the university, a young student enters the room and talks to them:

> Student – It's not the time to think about discipline. There're things that are much more important than discipline. There's life. It's about the university. Everything must be changed. I came to help. Listen to me!
> Old Man 4 (Wakes up) – Can you please cut this noise? I want to sleep. Now this!
> […]

[112] LUKÁCS, Georg. Realism in the balance. In: Aesthetics and Politics. London: Verso, 1977, p. 28-59.

> Student – Everything needs to be changed, professor. The things that are taught here we don't use, or aren't true, or are lies, or are forgotten, or are stolen! We get here young and we become old people in two weeks, in a monotonous stupidity that nobody can handle.

The student's emotional and explosive political speech is continually interrupted by the old professors in a comic way. It is possible to notice an immense disconnection between the decrepitude and uselessness of the university, portrayed in the play in a very satirical tone, and the militant impulse of the young student. The abyss between the two worlds results in the student's moral indignation and his political preaching—delivered in the way a militant *raisonneur* would do—to the old professors. The student is taken out of the room by a university officer and the old professors continue with their surreal meeting. Nothing really happens, as Frederico affirms in regard to *Eles Crescem e Eu Não Vejo*, but obviously the intended shock of ideas and realities was planned to have an impact on the audience. In the case of the CPC's play, it was watched mainly by young students who hoped to engage in the struggles against the centuries-old injustices in Brazil; Soares's play was written, as we know, to be presented at the Metalworkers Union hall, allowing its audience to reflect on the validity, usefulness, and realism of the situations and themes portrayed. Careca's visceral anxiety with the international industrial system and the immobility of his colleagues was shared by the audience. In the ABCD working class' collective process of awareness, Careca's journey could help spectators ask the right questions about their own situation.

Soares' play, therefore, has a distinct educational nature, to which is attached a specific morality. The moral element in Careca's discourse is not evidence of his "distance" from his companions, as Frederico affirms, but a political and artistic tool. *Eles crescem…* is not an outwardly didactic play given that it has an important layer of denouncement and an Expressionist component, observed especially in the phantasmagoria projected by Careca's mind. However, the didactic aspect is also visible, particularly if we consider the repeated efforts by the narrator to explain the political sense of each daily situation for his workmates.

In the sociopolitical reality of the ABCD region in the 1970s and 1980s, morality was a key component of the working-class subjectivity and played a central role, for instance, during the great 1980 Metalworkers strike, according to Barbosa de

Macedo.[113] In order to convince wavering workers to join their movement, strikers appealed to their *community values* and pressed on their *social networks*. The bonds that united the workers inside the companies in which they worked were strengthened on the outside—in their neighborhoods, churches (and church movements), and pubs. In the words of Leôncio Martins Rodrigues, a true "working-class community" emerged in São Bernardo and could be noticed in 1980:

> Several factors converged to form this feeling that there is a community—and this is decisive, because probably there is a great identification of the city with the workers. (…) But I would like to stress this idea of a workers' community, which brings together the Church, the local population and a strong working-class concentration, with such a moral density.[114]

This is the kind of morality expressed by Careca when he admonishes his workmates to be more active, more critical with their boss and with the factory environment, to resist the military discipline the company imposes on them, and to start worrying about their own reality, instead of fantasizing with consumerism and mass culture. Where Frederico sees a separation between the self-proclaimed working class intellectual and his workmates and a distanced and empty preaching, there is in fact a moral speech organically produced by a member of a working-class community, who is worried with the attitude of his neighbors, fellow churchgoers, pub friends and (obviously) workmates. This was exactly how a new kind of working-class mobilization developed in the ABCD in those years.

The new class dynamics produced by the region's explosively fast industrialization and the resulting mass migration of millions of peasants and workers to the ABCD region was a radically new process, one that had a distinct cultural layer from the beginning. For many intellectuals and artists that emerged in that context, the need to reflect on that gigantic social process came together with a systematic observation of their own milieu. It was not enough to live in the same environment as their workmates; the real knowledge about them required a sort of scientific, distanced observation, weekly records, and interpretation.

Expedito Soares explains at the beginning of his play that several lines were really said by his colleagues throughout the years he worked in the automobile industry.

[113]BARBOSA DE MACEDO, Francisco. A greve de 1980: redes sociais e mobilização coletiva dos metalúrgicos de São Bernardo do Campo. Dissertação de Mestrado. Programa de História Social, Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas da Universidade de São Paulo, 2010.
[114]RODRIGUES, Leôncio Martins. Folha de S. Paulo, 11/05/1980. Apud BARBOSA DE MACEDO, 2010.

Taking notes was not only a consequence of those artists' documentary impulse but was also a moral element. As the monstrosities of the multinational industries revealed themselves in small daily occurrences and the lack of instruments for resistance condemned most workers to inaction, organic intellectuals and artists wanted to report all the situations they saw and think on the best way of dealing with them. This reflection process usually did not have direct political consequences but constituted an individual basis for the development of a critical working-class conscience, which was later shared with smaller or bigger groups of workers in the form of works of art or of themes for discussion.

The basis of such a reflection was obviously an idea of right and wrong and a variety of concepts arising from it. A great part of the ABC region workers had a Catholic or Protestant upbringing; relevant portions of them were frequent churchgoers or militants of Catholic social movements. Even for non-religious people, their prevalent values remained connected to a centuries-old, popular Christianity in Brazil, in which the faithful observance of promises made to God or to saints had more value than Sacraments. Loyalty to God and to the community was almost the same thing in social groups under plantation modes of production, in which class solidarity determined subsistence. Such logic was brought to the ABC region and synthesized with urban elements.

There was, therefore, a deep relation of Christianity—in its popular, Progressive and even hierarchical perspectives—with the metalworkers. Under the guidance of the Bishop of São Bernardo, Reverend Cláudio Hummes, the Church gave full support to the 1980 strike:

> […] the Church's public support encouraged the workers as to the fairness of their demands. Members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and Catholic militants went up the tribune and directed their symbolic force and their organizational resources to sustain the strike. In a city like São Bernardo, where 87,52% of the population professed Catholicism, it is possible to have an idea of [the effects of] such endorsement […] when, for instance, during the assembly that decided to launch a strike, Rev. Cláudio Hummes, Bishop of the ABC region, declared that "your decision only deserves applause and should be kept until the end" and that "the Diocese is at your service", then guiding a "Holy Father, prayed with plenty of faith by all workers."[115]

[115]BARBOSA DE MACEDO, 2010, p. 80.

Eles Crescem e Eu Não Vejo does not directly depict those connections but is entirely a product of them. An interesting indication of the Progressive Christian presence in Soares' creation is seen in one of Careca's dialogues with Linguiça:

> LINGUIÇA – […] I think this explanation was graphic enough for you to understand that if I don't find a way, I'm (makes a gesture with his hands.)
> CARECA – (Sadly) Yes… you're right… each one of us have a piece of cross to carry. (Excited.) But if we gather all pieces (tries to demonstrate) and assembly this cross, and carry it together, all united, isn't it going to be easier?

The moral aspect of the play does not correspond entirely to Catholic values, of course, but it is the result of the formation of a working-class consciousness amid Progressive Catholicism, a new unionist impulse, and Marxist ideas. It is important to note that theatrical plays produced by and presented to the working class historically manifested and endorsed politically based moral views. Part of the Soviet theater, for instance, was dedicated to portraying and debating the adequate attitudes of the people at work or in the political sphere. Korobova's play *For a factory of shock, for the quality of work* criticizes the drunkards and shirkers in the work environment, advocating the total "extirpation of the rest of the Ancien Regime attitude towards the factory." Among its characters, other factory types appear, such as the "Ass-Kisser."[116]

What seems to be politically and artistically irrelevant for Frederico is, therefore, historically and socially grounded. *Eles Crescem…* is a play that was created to stimulate discussion with particular people, in a particular situation, and its forms and content are the fruit of a concrete historical conjuncture. At the same time, it is a universal play about the reflections and the Expressionist projections of an anguished factory worker in the 1970s as he tries to deal with his sick work environment. At the beginning of his chapter about Soares' play, Frederico affirms that "although it is not a 'work of art,' (…) it has at least a documentary importance." Considering the long history of the working-class theater in the 20th century, there should be no doubt that *Eles Crescem e Eu Não Vejo* is a legitimate theater play, one that deals with immensely relevant subjects by employing very effective forms.

[116] BABLET, Dénis. Le Théâtre d'Agit-prop – de 1917 a 1932. Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1977.

CHAPTER V

Teatro Forja – Complex portrayals of the working class and a multifaceted left-wing universalism

In the 1970s and 1980s, Progressive Catholic activists in Brazil were frequently seen carrying a notebook in which they occasionally registered ideas. Usual subjects included a conflict with the boss at work, the mistreatment of a poor vulnerable person on the street, or an authority's arbitrary act against a worker. The nucleus of the reflection was the set of behaviors from each agent involved and how the narrator reacted to them. These notes would later be shared and discussed with fellow Catholic militants.

This habit was the result of a long process of assimilation and the shaping of Liberation Theology's methodology, one that could be used both for theological reflection and pastoral activities. The basis of most systems employed by the practices of Latin American Liberation Theology was the See/Judge/Act (SJA) process—and its cognate form, the Revision of Life. Such systems were created by Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, who established the specialized Catholic Actions and created the Young Christian Workers movement during the first half of the 20th century. Cardijn's proposals were fundamental to several changes suffered by the Catholic Church in the middle of the 20th century, with relevant contribution by Pope John 23's encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (which endorsed the SJA method) and to the configuration of the Second Vatican Council.

In Gustavo Gutiérrez's A Theology of Liberation, the *Revision de Vie* method is described as somewhat inadequate for the Latin American reality—insufficient for the fierce class struggle in the continent and outdated for something as a pre-revolutionary conjuncture (as he considered to be the case in Latin American during those years). However, in Brazil, the Cardijnist method had been strongly disseminated among popular Catholic movements and soon became a relevant practice of Brazilian Liberation Theology as a whole. Over the years, the SJA method was the Liberation Theology method, according to Manzatto[117]. It was a natural consequence of the

[117]MANZATTO, Antonio. O Papa Francisco e a Teologia da Libertação. Revista de Cultura Teológica, 86, 2015, p. 186.

necessity of "understanding the reality, the context where one lives, the world where the Church exists and where Christians live their faithful lives"[118].

This impulse of observation and analysis of the social reality and political behavior of people in their daily lives produced a kind of activist political reflection that was deeply concerned with the documentation of facts in the work environment. Such notes were the basis for the "See" part of the cycle, in which each Catholic militant must present relevant facts or situations of sociopolitical significance that somehow resonated in his or her conscience. In the "Judge" phase, the occurrences are analyzed and interpreted through the light of the faith. The "Act" stage is when a set of concrete measures are applied to the elements of reality that were previously presented and analyzed—always in the direction of social transformation.

The SJA method was one of the forms of documentary impulse among activists, artists, and intellectuals in the 1970s and 1980s. Assumed by the base ecclesial communities (CEBs, in Portuguese), which were the fundamental unities of popular organization for Liberation Theology activism (in 1975, there were 50 thousand CEBs in Brazil[119]), the SJA method gained the masses. In the popular militancy milieu, it encountered other methods of social analysis, artistic creation, and political critique that were based on the documentation of facts about the sociopolitical reality. In theater, for instance, the documentary impulse was the basis of Newspaper Theatre, a system for the theatricalization of news created by the last generation of actors at the Teatro de Arena, in São Paulo. The method, which was systematized by Arenas's director Augusto Boal, gathered ten techniques for the theatrical unveiling of the sociopolitical content of the news published by the press. After the end of Teatro de Arena in 1972, members of the Newspaper Theatre group continued to work with variations of the method in popular neighborhoods in the São Paulo metropolitan area.

Newspaper Theatre was the culminating documentary form in Brazilian theater, directly connected to the history of the CPCs, which also had the urge to obtain knowledge from the working class and figure it artistically. From the CPCs and Teatro de Arena, other documentary theater languages emerged over the 1970s. In the Teatro Forja (Forge Theater), created in the Metalworkers Union of São Bernardo after the end

[118] Id., ibid.
[119] AÇÃO CATÓLICA OPERÁRIA. História da Classe Operária no Brasil – Resistindo à Ditadura, 1964-1978. Rio de Janeiro: Ação Católica Operária, 1990, p. 92.

of Teatro Ferramenta, some of those forms were suddenly combined, resulting in a surprisingly new, popular theater.

Teatro Forja was created shortly after the Ferramenta group disbanded in 1978. A few members, such as Izilda Françoso and José Massayuki, wanted to keep doing theater and invited young director and leftist militant Tin Urbinatti to coordinate a new troupe. Urbinatti had directed the Social Sciences Theatre Group for a few years at the University of São Paulo, staging plays by the CPC and its main author, Oduvaldo Vianna Filho. After leaving the university, he was invited by members of the Metalworkers Opposition—the leftist labor union movement which was part of the new model implanted in unions in the ABC region and struggled to gain control of the Metalworkers Union in the city of São Paulo—to create a play for their electoral campaign. Urbinatti wrote and directed a short agitprop play called *O Engana-Trouxa Tá Caindo* (roughly translated to "The Trickster is Going Down"), as a reference to the union leader Joaquim dos Santos Andrade, known as Joaquinzão, the union's first president and a long-time traitor of the working class. The play was a success and toured to different neighborhoods in the city. At one of them, veterans from Ferramenta approached Urbinatti and asked him to join the group in the ABC region.

Tin Urbinatti, with a Marxist formation and an artistic experience with Progressive Brazilian theater, obviously had a strong voice in the new collective. With the intention of depicting the most important sociopolitical contents involving the metalworkers' reality, he encouraged the members of the group to pay attention to their workmates and take notes of important facts during the week in order to create scenes based off them at their weekend meetings. One of the new members of Forja, the Catholic metalworker Eduardo Moreira, also achieved an important position among his colleagues because of his deep commitment to the union and his sincere desire for social change. Always connected to the Workers' Pastoral and to CEBs, Moreira was a genuine Liberation Theology militant—and, of course, the SJA method was an important part of his intellectual approach. In his archives, old notebooks from the early 1970s still contain his daily observations at the factory. One note from 1972, for instance, is about a colleague that was suspended by his supervisor after producing two metal pieces with wrong dimensions. The other workers mocked the man, saying he was probably drunk. Moreira then told his colleagues that the worker lived in a very distant neighborhood and was facing a terrible family crisis, thus putting an end to the mocking.

This consistent working-class solidarity and the ancient habit of scientifically observing the workers' milieu are clearly noticeable in Forja's plays.

Over the years, Teatro Forja developed an aesthetic conformation that somehow gathered different documentary approaches from left-wing movements that were active in the ABCD area. However, the troupe made a continuous effort to process the elements of social reality in a fictional manner. This is why the first collective play produced by the group, *Pensão Liberdade* (Liberty Boarding House), achieved a rare richness of content addressing very unusual themes in the history of the workers' theater, as Urbinatti points out in the prologue to the 1981 edition. Sexism and homosexuality were by no means habitual subjects in the ABC labor union discussions. In deciding to deal side-by-side with unionization and homophobia, accidents at work and prostitution, Teatro Forja built a complex representation of the working class within the confines of the play.

The dramaturgical structure of the play cannot adequately deal with so many subjects, so a few of the most demanding—such as prostitution and family crisis in the workers' milieu, for example—are only presented and superficially analyzed on stage by the most enlightened characters. However, *Pensão Liberdade* does not demonstrate an impulse of exhausting such matters; in fact, they appear as unavoidable components of the working-class reality.

In this sense, the play can be seen as a collection of tableaux that build up a panorama. Everything happens inside the boarding house owned by Luis and Santa, parents of the young militant student Maira. There, we find different types from the working-class world: Rui, an elder worker who became blind and has great political experience and wisdom; Pedro, a metalworker deeply involved in the union struggle; Tomé, a strikebreaker who does not care about the union and works overtime to get a better payment; Paulo, an unemployed worker who ends up turning to crime in an effort to survive; José and Manuel, fearful workers, who do not join the strike movement, but sometimes show signs of support; Antônio, a factory clerk and night student who is attacked by the other roommates because of his homosexuality; and Carolina, a store clerk who prostitutes at night for extra income.

Another key character in the play is the huge television that stands at the back of the stage, which occasionally interrupts the interaction between characters with soap opera dialogues, news shows, and advertisements. The TV characters sometimes interact directly with those at the pension—a theatrical resource that highlights the epic

character of the play. One of the TV characters is the President of the Republic, which during the last years of the Military Regime was General João Batista Figueiredo.

The play starts after a brief dialogue between the boarding house lodgers (about their ideas concerning the new president) is interrupted with the arrival of Pedro and Paulo. Pedro is hurt and reports that, after forming a successful picket line at a factory early in the morning, the union decided to do the same thing at night—but this time the police showed up and violently repressed the strikers. A heated debate begins in the living room:

> JOSÉ – You see, guys? Didn't I tell you a dozen times this strike thing is a mess, it only causes problems?
> RUI – Did they arrest anyone?
> PAULO – I don't know how many, but they've taken several people away.
> TOMÉ – Didn't I tell you that guy is a really tough one? He said he would arrest and beat the hell out of them[120]. There it is, isn't it? (Points to Pedro's head.)
> PAULO – Shut up, you ass-kisser! You haven't seen what happened, you had just sat in and stayed here comfortably, didn't you? You're full of opinions because you have a job, always work overtime and doesn't let the boss' ass go too far away! If you were in my shoes, unemployed like I am… You ass-kisser, son of gun!
> TOMÉ (Goes to Paulo to hit him) – It's you…
> MANUEL (separating them) – Calm down, guys. There's no reason to fight. We already have an injured man here.
> PEDRO – Indeed! Our struggle is not a comrade against the other. We must fight the bosses! If we're on strike – you see, Tomé? – it's because our conditions led us to do so. It's like they say: "Necessity makes the frog jump." We don't have any alternative. These guys only think about their profits, plenty of profits, and all those profits come from our backs!
> PAULO – While we were having our heads beaten up by the police, you didn't do anything and will get your raise anyway.

After the argument, the boarding house owner advises the lodgers that the increasing cost of living forced her to raise the rent. Everyone is silent and leaves the room.

This quick scene has the function of demarcating the different positions of the working class in relation to the strike and the picket line—from an active and courageous participation to the most obtuse alienation, also including faltering attitudes along the way. To some extent, these characters are typifications, but some of them present additional layers. One of the steps in the creative process coordinated by Tin Urbinatti, amid the general definition of the tableaux and the compilation of the final text, included an in-depth character creation by each actor who would play a given role. In one of Eduardo Moreira's notes, it is possible to observe the details of this

[120] This is a reference to General Figueiredo, who once famously said he would "arrest and beat the hell out of" the people who were eventually dissatisfied with the end of the regime.

intellectual composition of a character: age, place of birth, reasons for migrating to the ABCD area, profession, and political stance. According to Urbinatti, this was a Stanislaviskian effort to create and ascertain the nature of each character so that the artist's performance would be strongly founded in the appropriate elements and intentions.

Beyond the solidly developed characters, the very interaction between them in this scene is genuinely grounded on the workers' sociability in the ABCD region during those years. It is possible to clearly distinguish several elements, such as the frank—and sometimes rude—exchange of ideas, the camaraderie born from a common work and life experience, and the collective cherishing of rural values. When tension grows and a heated debate arises between workers with different positions, a character usually interrupts the contenders and says something like: "Wait a minute, guys. [. . .] There is something I want to say," or "Well, what I'm wondering is [if] we have a more important question to consider." This kind of manifestation introduced through the act of formally requesting a moment to talk, is not accidental. It indicates the perception that there is a permanent, on-going working-class council and reflects a sense of political participation in all instances of life. Such components, curiously, remain alive in the speech of several veterans of *Teatro Forja*, pointing out a commitment to the real exchange of ideas in a dialogue—something that neoliberalism has progressively taken away from us.

Pensão Liberdade does not have a proper plot. As an exposition of different issues in the metalworkers' lives, it is more of an overview. It would be a difficult task, for example, to write a synopsis of the play. The element that unites all the different situations in the thematic sphere is the relationship between the workers' strike and the military regime's new administration. Most of the "television world's" interferences in the boarding house sphere are related to political news.

The second appearance of the TV characters in the play occurs shortly after a discussion between Pedro and Manuel—who excitedly took part in the assembly that decided for the strike—and José and Tomé, who continued to work. Santa gets annoyed with the argument and asks them to stop. To break the ice, Antônio turns on the TV because it is "telenovela time." One of the new state ministers appears on screen preaching to people the importance of saving as much money as possible—especially with spending related to "superfluous goods" —because of the country's serious financial crisis. Tomé and Antônio protest: they want to watch the telenovela and the

TV is on the wrong channel. Pedro, the labor activist, asks for silence and pays attention to the minister's announcement. In the end, Antônio changes the channel and the advertisement for the whiskey “Black Scott” appears.

> ADVERTISER – Get out of your world! Join the world of joy! Drink "Black Scott" whiskey. Black Scott Whiskey is the only whiskey aged in oak barrels. Malty and refined like no other. (Break out of the video.) Have a drink you too! (Goes towards Pedro and offers him a dose.)
> PEDRO - But ... I ... I don't drink ...
> ADVERTISER – No problem! This is the only whiskey that is good even for the children’s health. After the first sip, you will never drink something else. Black Scott is the only whiskey that truly satisfies. Take it, drink it. Try Black Scott Whiskey. Be sure to try it now! Drink Black Scott today. (Some lodgers show they want to drink it.) Just a moment, guys. Black Scott Whiskey is on sale throughout the country! (Takes the glasses back.) Enjoy it! And... break out of your world too! (A blim-blim sound is heard and the advertiser quickly goes back to the TV.)

This tableau presents several correspondences between national politics and the struggles of the ABCD metalworkers by suggesting analogies, consequences, and contradictions. Almost schematically, it is implied that the most alienated workers are not interested in the news and only wish to go back to the parallel reality of the telenovela. At the same time, the official propaganda—which postulates that it is necessary to ration the country's resources, but omits mentioning that only the working class will bear the brunt of the rationing—seems to affect the metalworkers less than a whiskey ad. The “Black Scott” whiskey advertised on TV jumps out into reality, thus suggesting how strong its economic and social authority is among society. The same government that opened the Brazilian economy to big international capital, offering it central economic sectors, now calls for containment, that is, by proposing the workers passively accept the wage cuts to be imposed. On the other hand, the massive importation of capital promoted during the dictatorship was accompanied by the importation of cultural elements from the United States and Europe, something that further deepened assimilation to the new needs and habits of consumption by the Brazilian people. It was during the early years of Military Regime that Brazil’s culture industry had a consolidated structure similar to the United States’ model—with strong North American support. Suddenly, rural migrants find themselves addicted to television and encouraged to drink whiskey, which is presented as a better alternative than *cachaça* (a traditional Brazilian sugarcane liquor). Even the most alert members of the working class are stunned by this media assault. The political education acquired in

the labor union, nevertheless, provides critical elements for the comprehension of this complex new reality—and Pedro's indifference to the soap opera is a sign of this.

In the following tableau, Antônio is mocked by Tomé and Manuel as he approaches the boarding house front door: "Dolly is having a date, hmm?" He tries to defend himself by lying ("I'm planning to go out to meet my girlfriend from the office,") but the attack continues. So, Rui interferes, saying that each one has a "way of living" and that "Antônio's is this one," which "may not be right, but it's this one." After this somewhat contradictory defense (which, for the narrative consciousness of the play, seems to be sufficient), the old metalworker makes critical comments of a political nature about Antônio, which are also extended to Tomé:

> RUI - Now, what I think is wrong about his way of living is that he's there working at the office while the peons are on strike at the factory. That's not right, for sure. We have the habit of criticizing the others and forgetting about ourselves. You, Tomé, are singing like a cock, but you're singing out of time! While everyone is on strike there in your company, you, yourself Tomé, even work overtime. That's why I say, Tomé, that's where your ignorance is.

It is interesting to observe that the most politically conscious character in the play intervenes in favor of Antônio and against Tomé and Manuel, making clear his stance against any hostility based on elements of a colleague's private life—even though Rui himself is apparently homophobic. For him, moral criticism is only acceptable if there is a political foundation to it; that is, individual actions and behaviors can only be criticized if they have a negative collective impact.

In many cases throughout the play, this perspective is reaffirmed—a negative moral judgement is relativized by social, political, and economic arguments. In one of the following scenes, for instance, Paulo, the unemployed metalworker, is seen stealing a customer's wallet at the store where Carolina works. Shortly after, already at the boarding house, he vents to Antônio about the inglorious search for a job. "I've been to more than fifty companies and nothing. It must be my age. (Pause.) That's it. They must think a man of a certain age is no longer useful. We're just like bagasse." He explains that he already went through a similar phase years before when his wife was pregnant. The child was born, but his wife died during labor. Paulo, still unemployed, was forced to leave the baby with a rich lady, Dona Olivia, who promised him that she would bring the child to visit him from time-to-time. He never saw his son again but retains a photo

of the woman. The dialogue is interrupted by the arrival of a policeman, who subsequently arrests him.

All lodgers comment on Paulo's imprisonment. Tomé and José show no surprise and reinforce the opinion that their colleague seems to be guilty. Rui tries to defend Paulo by saying that he is an honorable man. Manuel adds: "If he did it or not, what is sad is that he is under arrest. We're all mates here." Manuel's stance is supported by Pedro, and most of the lodgers agree that they should seek legal assistance from union lawyers in an effort to bail Paulo out of jail. Paulo's emotional outpour to Antônio had the effect of creating in audience members a degree of identification with the character, therefore humanizing his criminal act. Such identification between the spectators (who were generally workers and were, therefore, aware of the pains of unemployment) and the character confirms a relation that is typical for the form of drama. However, in Forja's play, the provoked identification is not the same as the one generated in bourgeois drama as a mechanism to conceal social reality. Its foundations are a *working-class compassion*—considering Forja's configuration, the combination of these terms is not too contradictory.

Regarding Antônio and Carolina, the process of identification is connected to denouncement. In a posterior scene, both arrive at the boarding house injured for similar reasons. Antônio reports to Carolina how he was removed from a car in which he was with a man (maybe his boyfriend) and beaten up by homophobic policemen. Carolina, in an outburst with Luis (who wanted to expel her from the boarding house because of her night work as a prostitute), tells how she was arrested by police officers and barbarously tortured and raped at the police station. The figuration of police violence and torture is a direct allusion to the worst years of military repression. The dictatorship was beginning its final period of distension, but its mechanisms of terror and barbarism remained alive and active. With these scenes, *Teatro Forja* linked the repressive structure established in Brazil since the 1964 coup to the violence exerted by the police on the most unprotected working-class segments.

Other issues are addressed in interconnected tableaux: the student activism during the Military Regime through Maira's story, where she is seriously injured during a protest for the democratization of education; the structural problems of the Northeastern part of Brazil, as a news report shows serious flooding in the region; the physical risks for metalworkers in factories, demonstrated with the accident and amputation of a few of Tomé's fingers while working overtime; and the housing

problems of laborers. Except for the latter, these themes are only mentioned and not deeply analyzed.

Given that the action is located at a boarding house, the debate surrounding the housing issue has a broader perspective. It appears in several key elements but has a stronger impact when the workers end up mobilizing at home. The lodgers decide to come together and tell Luis and Santa they cannot afford any rent increases. However, they are informed that the boarding house will be expropriated for the installation of a public park. Also impacted by the government's plan, they suddenly take sides with their landlords and discuss the possibility of resisting the forced removal together.

In the following scene, the boarding house and television layers finally come together: the President announces that he will visit the suburbs of the major industrial centers throughout Brazil in order to more closely see the difficulties of the poor. His tour will begin with Liberty Boarding House. Shortly after the announcement, a federal agent appears at the house with the excuse of needing to gather some information about the residents in preparation for the President's visit. Santa provides the names and professions of everybody, but the agent seems interested only in Pedro—and she mentions that he is a union member.

The play ends with the President's visit. Just before he appears, we learn that Pedro has been arrested by the repressive forces and Maira has left the hospital but returned in a wheelchair. They timidly start a dialogue with the President, but after Rui's initial manifestation everyone poses questions concerning the panorama that was just presented:

> RUI – What about the workers, who have their lives ground by the factory gear, sir?
> ANTÔNIO – (Showing the picture.) Where is Paulo's son?
> MANUEL – Where is Pedro?
> TOMÉ – What about our labor union?
> CAROLINA – What about these bruises? (Shows the signs of torture on her breast.)
> JOSÉ – What about the slums?
> SANTA – What about our compensation?
> LUÍS – When it will be paid?
> MAIRA – We want Paulo back. (All characters from the last scene should say their lines two times more, at the same time, in a crescendo, and cut. Sound of a Military march. Lights off.)

It was not surprising that *Pensão Liberdade* would arrive at the end without indicating any possible solutions for many of the contradictions presented. It would not be

appropriate to require that the play thoroughly examined the causes and configurations of the diverse antinomies of working-class life. The main narrative line focuses on the political activation and the strength of the mobilization of the working class. Its composition is delimited, on the one hand, by the common experiences of the lodgers, both at the factory and at home, and, on the other, by the consortium formed by the military dictatorship and the media. All other themes, however dissimilar or complex they may seem, are subordinate to this centrally organizing narrative line. The only possible solution for the fundamental conflict is extra-artistic, but it nonetheless comes from the stage: it is the workers' organization, like the *Teatro Forja* itself.

There is, however, an unconformity in the relationship between the panorama of tableaux—which denounces the living conditions of the workers—and the master narrative. The problem lies in the fact that the play has a causal progression. As Tin Urbinatti mentions in the introduction of the play script, *Pensão Liberdade* was created in a specific way that allows one scene to generate the other. The problem is that the wide variety of subjects it wants to deal with presupposes a panoramic and expositional form, as if a spotlight is focused on each episode to tell a particular story. At the same time, the contrast between the government's official speech—exposed and endorsed by the media and based on the interests of the bourgeoisie—and the workers' organization cannot be expressed in a logical sequence. The delimitation of all the play's components within the boarding house, with the use of the television to bring to the scene the broader social reality, is a mechanism that seeks to solve this impasse. This arrangement ends up emphasizing that the basis of the workers' struggle for their own liberation is the organization. *Pensão Liberdade* is, therefore, a play of agitation and propaganda, despite its complex shape and unusual extension.

Pensão Liberdade was a huge success and caused quite a shock. Not only were artists and intellectuals astounded with the fact that factory workers could elaborate such a complex theatrical creation, but so, too, was the audience of metalworkers. Despite the distrust directed at the young workers who wanted to make art, the audience recognized the play's value and identified with it. For a lot of people, this was the first opportunity to watch a theatrical work, especially one that dealt with their own lives.

The next genuinely collective play produced by *Teatro Forja* was *Pesadelo* (Nightmare). Again, the group grounded the process of artistic creation in the research gathered about the metalworkers' daily life. The decade of 1980 began with a major international recession, which was felt in Brazil with the decline of industrial activity

and rising inflation. The ABCD region's major automakers began a phase of mass layoffs—in only one year, 1981, 50,000 workers lost their jobs. At the same time, the government was forced to implement wage adjustments every six months in order to compensate the workers' monetary losses. Notwithstanding, the purchasing power remained unstable since the readjustment of market prices was constant. After the great union-led uprising in the late 1970s, the dictatorship again strengthened the siege on workers' associations, putting several—among them the Metalworkers Union of São Bernardo and Diadema—under intervention. The persecution of labor led to the creation of factory commissions, which were basic worker organizations within a company. First at Fiat, in Rio de Janeiro, and then at Ford, in São Bernardo, the factory commissions were the renewal of an old project for Leftist labor unions in Brazil. They were an attempt to resolve the contradictions generated by the labor union legislation, which historically subordinated them to the authority of the state. Given that there were no legal provisions in the legislation concerning the factory commissions, they were able to play an independent role as organs of democratic organization for the workers in the companies.[121] The commissions gained strength in the 1970s when a twofold structure of labor control existed in the industrial sector in Brazil. According to Eder Sader, there was an internal one inside the factories, which was composed of a set of coercive measures for work organization, and an external one, based on the state repression of the working class.[122] The factory commissions emerged at the same time the companies tried to implement the so-called Quality Control Circles (QCCs), which had the mission of giving the workers a sense of involvement with the company's goals and an (illusory) idea of participation in its decisions. *Pesadelo* deals with the consequences of the dispute between the two new models of engagement for workers in the industries: the factory commissions organized by labor and the capital's tactics of co-optation, like the QCCs, associated with an increasing fear of unemployment.

According to Tin Urbinatti, at that point, *Teatro Forja* had gone through a deep aesthetic discussion reflecting on their previous creations—particularly *Pensão Liberdade*—and the artistic challenges they would face while elaborating a play concerning complex working-class issues:

[121] RODRIGUES, Iram Jácome. Comissão de Fábrica e trabalhadores na indústria. São Paulo, Cortez, 1990, 172 páginas.

[122] SADER, Eder. (1988). "Quando novos personagens entraram em cena". Experiências, falas e lutas dos trabalhadores da Grande São Paulo (1970 — 80). Rio de Janeiro, Paz e Terra.

> We did several readings and debates about other plays: *Papa Highirte*, by Oduvaldo Viana Filho; *Dr. Getúlio, sua vida, sua glória*, (Dr. Getúlio, his life, his glory), by Dias Gomes; *O Crucificado*, (The Crucified), by Consuelo de Castro; and *Braço Forte* (Strong Arm), co-written by me. We were mostly trying to learn those authors' playwriting techniques, as literary qualities, plot, character development, approach to reality, proposals for scenario, spaces, and flashback.[123]

Once again, the troupe established that one scene should engender the other in a causal relation. However, there were four different stories, which were intersected and distributed to three different stage levels. All narratives were related to each other, but the unity of action was, therefore, coherently disrupted. The characters and situations had been suggested by one of the group members who had drawn up a kind of extended roadmap of the probable destinies of the lodgers from Liberty Boarding House. The group became interested in José's trajectory, which in the previous play was portrayed as a wavering, sometimes even reactionary, metalworker. That is how *Pesadelo* began to develop.

Now, two years later, José holds a position of leadership at the factory and makes use of his relative power against the most conscious workers. He is married to Alice, a housewife who gets involved in the neighborhood's Clube de Mães (Mother's Club, one of the new types of popular organizations that emerged in the 1970s and gathered working-class women), despite not actually having kids. The couple also hosts Lusia, Alice's sister, and her husband, Julio Cesar for a few days. Involved in a peasant movement, Júlio had been charged of participating in the murder of a big, local landowner. Arrested and tortured, he has gone mad. Now, his wife is seeking hospital treatment for him in the capital.

Another level portrays a factory, where the team headed by José works, discussing and organizing a resistance in response to a series of layoffs in the company. This subject emerges with their first appearance:

> ZÉ PINGUINHA[124] – Damn, man! Your [soccer] club is really a shame, huh?!
> ARREPIADO[125] – Oh, such a crooked referee! He not even awarded that penalty and besides ruled out a great goal! If it wasn't for him, we'd have beaten them.
> LUISÃO – Beaten is what everyone here is going to be today. You haven't heard the rumors out there? The axe is coming to get us.
> ANTÔNIO – That's what the people of the union are warning out there.

[123]Urbinatti, 2011, p. 102.

[124]*Pinga* is a traditional sugarcane spirit, also known as *cachaça. Pinguinha* is the diminutive form.
[125]Something like Ruffled Hair.

> VALADÃO – Bullshit, old man, those union guys just want to shake us up. Take a look at our timecards! They're all in the puncher.
> GÉSIO – I don't understand a thing. The cards are all in the puncher. But what about this crowd of security guys running up and down like a headless chicken? The big shots are all excited!
> LUISÃO – In Stamping and Machining it's full of people, like this, look! (Making a gesture with his hand.) There's even a firefighter there!
> ZÉ PINGUINHA – Many guys will get the pink slip today. Haven't you seen it? The gringos have been at the boss' room since 7 am. Prepare to get canned, folks.
> MARIA – Things look really ugly. This time I think a lot of people will be sent home.
> LUISÃO – Hey, guys, nobody is signing any paper, ok? If anyone is fired, we're all turning the machines off.[126]

José quietly arrives at the factory and his section subordinates already expects he will announce a few firings. The workers move to another plane on the stage as it is now lunchtime. When they return to the section on the main stage, José is waiting for a few of them with envelopes in his hands. A Voice reads the letters, which say that the economic crisis impacted the company's sales and consequently the production level had to be reduced—something that led to cuts in their staff. Some metalworkers react with despair, thinking of the bills they have to pay and their broken dreams. Others get angry with the layoffs and the coercive apparatus the company's management mobilized within the factory ("Even in the bathrooms there are security guys!"). A few of them have, what seems to be, a Luddite reaction. Luisão, the labor union activist, calls his colleagues back to session, arguing that only an organized response may have an effect on the company's directors.

The play then exposes the opposing movements experienced by José and his group of workers. On their side, the metalworkers create a structure of solidarity and mobilization towards the consolidation of a factory commission; the supervisor, on the other hand, is tormented with his decision to fulfill the company's interests at the detriment of his own colleagues, becoming more and more isolated and weakened.

On the other stage level, Júlio carries the emotional consequences of the land violence in Brazil. His situation functions as a reminder of the deep historical relations between the urban and rural dimensions of the Brazilian class struggle—whose developments seem very much alive for the ABC region workers. These different narratives are masterfully alternated in the play through focuses of light and the three different layers of the stage.

[126] TEATRO FORJA, Pensão Liberdade, p. 29.

Urbinatti mentions the study of Oduvaldo Vianna's *Papa Highirte* as part of the troupe's preparation in the creative process. However, the scenic scheme of flashbacks and narrative cuts is reminiscent of Vianna's masterpiece, *Rasga Coração* (roughly translated to Heart Rending). The play puts into perspective decades of leftist militancy in Brazil from the Old Republic to the Military Regime, including Getúlio Vargas' dictatorship, through the trajectories of the health agent 666, his Communist son Manguari Pistolão, and his grandson Luca, a young man interested in Hippie culture. The political struggles and individual frustrations that substantiate the characters' trajectories are reintroduced in the present and placed side-by-side through a number of epic features, such as flashbacks, focus light interchanges, and songs. At key moments, there is even a kind of timeless interaction between characters from different eras. Such mechanisms, although not entirely new to Brazilian theater, are employed in a pioneering way by Vianinha.

In *Pesadelo*, the mismatch between José's regressive attitude and the strength of the labor mobilization is figured through this clash of different dimensions. Soon after a moment of workers' revolt, in which they stop the machines and start shouting "break, break!" José, who is in the living room of his house, gets up angrily and crosses to the factory plan. On his way, he comes across Júlio, who starts screaming in despair. Lusia reacts by saying that their stay in São Paulo is temporary and that they will leave his house as soon as she finds a hospital for Júlio.

Light transitions also expose the phantasmagoria and hallucinations that disturb José. At the factory department, José stands a few steps ahead of the other workers and a few changes in lighting and sound ambience create a different reality. All metalworkers who had not been fired leave—Luisão, Valadão, Antônio and Zé Pinguinha—and only Ana, Gésio, and the Preparer remain in scene. They all accuse José of class betrayal, vent their problems and promise he will not have peace. Trying to get to Ana's position, José stumbles upon the Demon, who says, "You are the right guy!" Trying to escape, he is followed by a Wraith, or a snake, that latches onto one of his legs. Gésio warns: "Snake means betrayal!" Alone on the stage, José begins a defensive monologue in which he seeks to justify his decision to fire his workmates. The light is abruptly cut, and another focus transports the scene back to his house, where Júlio is seen speaking alone to a small box. He tells it about TV news: an outbreak of typhus and police killings—events that he relates to his own rural misfortunes.

The main clash of different stage levels is seen in a following sequence. On one layer appears the manager with the company's director and president, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Smith—the gringos that the workers had seen throughout the day. Smith begins a discourse in English, which is translated bit-by-bit by the manager. On another stage level, Luisão, Lumbriga,[127] Dito, Zé Pinguinha, and Antônio appear during the first meeting of the factory commission. Luisão asks each one to talk about the situation in their respective departments. Lumbriga reports that although the assembly line and the boiler room are full of security agents, workers are freely exchanging ideas, even in the bathroom; Zé Pinguinha says that the maintenance crew is well organized and a whistle is enough to make them all stop working; Antônio and Luisão explain that in the machining sector, despite a very reactionary boss—who is José—people are very united and can understand each other with just a glance:

> SMITH – We know that your biggest concern is unemployment. You'll ask me – "Who caused this situation?" It wasn't us. The increasing unemployment that exists nowadays is caused by economic recession, that is, the drastic reduction of the development rates of our national economy. That affects us directly, for the last months we had to reduce the production of our goods. And, since we are producing less, we need less employees.
> MANAGER – (Repeats everything in Portuguese. At the end, light dims.)
> LUISÃO – You know, comrades, when the factory was producing a lot, we were forced to work overtime so that the factory could deliver its orders within the time limit. Now that we're in crisis, once again we are forced to pay for it. What about our government, what's it doing for us? Does it really belong to us? Or does it belong to the multinational corporations?
> LUMBRIGA – When we were on strike, the government sent the police to get us. Why doesn't it send the police for the bosses now that they're screwing us like that, firing that bunch of workers?
> DITO – Forgive me for saying this, comrade, but the bosses and the government are birds of a feather. (Light dims.)
> SMITH – Everything has become more expensive. The prices of machinery and raw material purchased abroad are high. The loans we get from international banks carry high interest rates. Besides, there is the daily devaluation of our currency. Even the labor, hired internally, now have their wages raised twice a year, which, besides bringing delight and rejoicement to us, also causes anxiety, for these raises mean more expenses for our company in this department.
> MANAGER – (Repeats everything in Portuguese. At the end, light dims.)
> ANTÔNIO – What's the use of having a raise every six months? Every time we have a raise, the bosses also raise the prices of the products that we ourselves produce!

The opposition of the two narrative layers, that of the workers and that of the company directors, reaffirms the consolidation of interests for each of the classes in dispute. The workers' side is two steps behind the bosses' side: while the former still

[127] Roundworm.

discusses the need to materialize a factory commission, the latter not only defined and applied the austerity actions but also came up with the arguments in its defense to be used in the announcement to the workers.

Antônio, who has worked in the ABCD region industry since 1958, says to his colleagues that "since his youth" there was a debate about the creation of factory commissions ("the people started to feel the need to make the labor union find support on the base and not only on the top, as usual"). This line reflects the criticism of the new labor union activism that emerged in the ABCD region in regard to the operations of the hegemonic labor union tendencies of the previous decades. The main political force active in the labor movement was the *Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro* (Brazilian Workerist Party) and its frequent allies of the Brazilian Communist Party. Since the 1964 coup, their practices began to be criticized as not horizontal enough and many of the new, left-wing tendencies of the 1960s and 1970s sought to establish closer relations with the political base of social movements and labor unions. Factory commissions are obviously part of this strategy.

Antônio explains to his colleagues that the factory commission must have a strong organizational structure, with a secretary, who makes the connection with the union and supports its activities at the factory, and a finance supervisor, who collects and manages the contributions that will fund the commission's activities and possibly use them to "help a comrade who is facing money problems, preventing the actions of loan sharks."

As the workers' debate progresses, the stage level with the company managers also radicalized its discourse. The manager appears dressed as a devil and rants against "these agitators who drag innocent workers into the anarchy that is a strike." Smith interrupts and asks him to say something, but he doesn't let the gringo finish his speech and he himself takes the word:

> SMITH - Please, tell them ...
> MANAGER – (Interrupts.) Yes! Yes! (Resumes the discourse.) We therefore call out all workers to unite and cooperate, accepting this harsh phase we're going through. (Light dims.)
> LUISÃO – We have to be united and organized to face this tough phase that we're going through. (Light dims.)
> MANAGER – Only with everyone's work and sacrifice we can have progress. (Light dims.)
> LUISÃO – Only with the conscious work of each one we can win this fight.
> MANAGER – Go to work!
> LUISÃO – Let's fight!
> JOSÉ – (On the stage plan of the house.) Let's work!

The final clash between workers and leaders of the corporation is prepared—and also the one between José and his own conscience. Confronted by his wife—who is spreading propaganda for the election of the factory commission in their community—and fatally betrayed by company management, who fires him, José discovers he is a disposable good:

> JOSÉ – (Carrying a bag on his back, heading for the first machine.) ... Didn't I tell you we were going to meet someday? A day like today, when I'm like bagasse. And you're like that, a useless piece of junk. (Laughs.) Catarina, Catá ... (Mocking.) Today you don't even have a name. It's just junk. Where are the pieces you made, huh? What was good for staying awake so many nights? Look there, look! The rust even ate that pretty color you had. Abandoned, thrown out, with nobody left to watch over you. (Time.) Are you crying, Catá?! There's no need to cry. I'll take care of you (Turns to the other machines.) Of you all. I won't be fired, I guarantee. I even talked to the president. I'm safe. Courage, okay? (...)

Workers enter the stage declaring they are on strike, as there were 300 layoffs—Luisão being one of the dismissed. The eruption of the movement at the factory is intercalated with the scene of Alice discovering José has poisoned himself and is taking his last breath on the living room floor. The play ends with a broadcaster making a sensationalist report about his suicide. "Why would you, José, an honest worker, a department chief, a good husband, why would you kill yourself, José Alves Filho? Cowardice? Your wife Alice? ... No, no. Not, Alice! Unemployment? ... If there are so many unemployed! Your terrible nightmares? Answer yourself, dear spectator: why?" The sounds played at the beginning of the play are repeated at the end—soccer commentator, *caipira* music, child crying, alarm clock ringing—as all of them are related to the daily life of factory workers.

It is curious to note how such a specific theme—the need to create factory commissions in the ABC region—provides so complex dramaturgical content.[128] The dreamlike nature of one layer of the play, in which José's mental projections come to life (and also Júlio's given that he re-examines his torture on two different occasions), deepens *Teatro Forja*'s experimentation with unrealistic forms related to German Expressionism and popular fantastic narratives. José's nightmares are not only a clash of modernity's phantasmagoria with his psyche but are also wraiths and apparitions of

[128] *Pesadelo* was edited as a book in 1982 by Hucitec. Teatro Forja gave copies of it to the factory commissions of Ford and Filtros Nasa.

an ancient rural-based Brazilian culture, which are seen by those who have made a pact with the devil.

At one point in the play, when José begins to despair about the consequences of betraying his companions and the first hauntings begin to manifest, he decides to make an appointment with a *mãe de santo*, a priestess of the African Brazilian religion Umbanda. His visit to the *terreiro*, the place of worship and rite in the Umbanda tradition, brings an additional scenic element to the Brazilian Expressionism under construction in the play. The fact that the Umbanda religiosity appears as a kind of superstitious escape for José, given that he does not want to face his own ghosts and prefers to look for an external and magical solution, is multifaceted and complex. Although the labor union ethos was partially composed of Liberation Theology's progressive Ecumenism, there is a certain anti-religious background in this specific narrative.

However, the main focus of criticism here is the commodification of faith. The workers of José's crew are the ones who mention Umbanda for the first time when Maria's son is sick. Ana says that her brother-in-law and her sister visited the "Caboclo Mamadô and Vovó Maria Spiritist Center" and they solved all their problems. The Spiritist Center's pamphlet promised solutions for any kind of misfortune. The allusion to Caboclo Mamadô (in Umbanda, *Caboclos* are a lineage of spirits of deceased indigenous leaders who have a certain degree of spiritual evolution and can help the people who look for them at a *terreiro*; *mamadô* means breast feeder) gives an indication of the kind of debate suggested. This expression refers to a police case in the 1950s, in which an alleged *pai de santo* asked the young ladies who went to the *terreiro* to show him their breasts so that the spiritual entity, supposedly a child, could suck on them. "Cabloco Mamador" eventually became a synonym for "profiteer" and became a cartoon character created by Henfil in 1972. Henfil's Cabôco Mamadô in the newspaper *Pasquim* managed a cemetery for the "walking dead;" the names on the graves varied in every edition, but always included social figures who were known for their connivance with the Brazilian Military Regime. Therefore, the Spiritist Center's name refers not only to religious exploitation but also to political alienation.

The Umbandist rite is represented in the scene in a lyrical key and has liturgical validity, which means that a few of *Teatro Forja*'s members were close to Umbanda—or at least had conducted research on *terreiro* chants and basic Umbanda theology. José calls for Vovó (Grandma) Maria Conga, an entity from another constellation, the

lineage of the so-called old blacks—the wise spirits of ancient African slaves in Brazil. With her keen eye, Grandma Maria Conga warns the tormented department supervisor that his disgrace is related to the box that Júlio always carries with him. José does not take long to open the box in order to verify its contents but misunderstands their meaning.

Talking about it with Alice, José explains that Júlio kept inside his small box a newspaper clip with a story about the peasant uprising in which he had taken part:

> JOSÉ - (...) This box's contents are going to the trash can. Why didn't you say nothing about it, huh?? (Pause.) You've hidden your brother-in-law's shamefulness only because he's sick, because he's crazy!?
> ALICE – José, don't talk like that ...
> JOSE – Yes, he's crazy! This man is really my disgrace!
> ALICE – They're our relatives. We have an obligation to welcome them at such a time of necessity. We couldn't just leave them wander about, lost and disoriented, in this city. Júlio has always been an honest man, a good father for his family and responsible with his duties. He just desired good things for his people. He desired justice. And he became like this after they mistreated him, after they abused him so much. He always fought for justice.
> JOSÉ – Justice? They killed that big landowner, Alice! It's written here, take a look! (He shows her the newspaper.) They made an ambush. They hid and killed him, is that justice? What's documented is legal. And the landowner's lands were documented. What about them? They didn't have documents proving the land was theirs, did they?
> ALICE – And was a document necessary? The land, by right of labor, was theirs. Can't you see? Since our grandfather's time, our families took their livelihood from that land with their own hands. The landowner is the real thief. He arrived after everything was ready. (...)
> JOSEPH – You sound like the people at the factory. Even if there's no reason to fight, you keep looking for one. Nitpicking. (...) You, Alice, have gone crazy like Júlio, like those people at the factory. Order, Alice, order! Everyone has to know their place.

One may conclude that one of the curses pointed out by Grandma Maria Conga is the Brazilian land concentration. The migration of José and Alice from a rural area to the ABCD region—a movement that Júlio and Lusia exceptionally have not done, but millions have in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s—was the result of this fundamental contradiction. It is also a disgrace that José repudiates the popular organization against exploitation, both in the countryside and in the city. An even worse ignominy is the fact that José believes in documents: he believes in the landowner's fraudulent land deed, in the idealistic abstraction that a modern labor contract represents, in the statements of the factory management, and in newspapers which only reaffirm the immutability of the social roles of employers and workers. Like a kind of sybil, the *mãe de santo* traces José's fate: such contradictions in fact will lead him to disgrace. However, he was able

to avoid such an ending, so his position is not the same as the tragic hero's. Even his suicide cannot redeem his betrayal to the working class.

In *Pesadelo*, José, the faltering worker and occasional striker that was portrayed in *Pensão Liberdade*, is co-opted by the company to represent its interests in a small factory unity. José's tale is not only the traditional working-class story of a man betrayed by his individual ambitions, but also has a concrete connection to a contemporary, corporative strategy of dismantling the strong labor movements in the ABC region. His co-optation is an allusion to the new "participative" initiatives of the companies, developed to make part of the workers believe they had a voice in their decisions and some kind of institutional power. The QCCs were one of the corporate bets of this type. José's destiny pedagogically demonstrated to the audience that the workers should only believe in a class-based organization.

These two markedly collective works by *Teatro Forja* were probably the best examples of the group's political and aesthetic achievements over its years of activity. Until 1986, when the labor union fired Tin Urbinatti in a measure to assume control of the theater, the group also created small agitprop sketches, to be presented during assemblies and meetings, and staged scripts written by important Brazilian authors. Since its first production, *Teatro Forja* demonstrated that its concerns were not limited to the metalworkers' particular interests but had a true working-class based nature.

Politically, this perspective was expressed by the combination of elements most relevant to the left-wing tendencies of the time, mainly Liberation Theology, Marxism, and a horizontal labor union movement. From an aesthetic point of view, the documentary composition was omnipresent; through different channels, aspects of the social reality were collected, analyzed, and processed in an artistic fashion. The documentary impulse shared the creators' artistic sensibility with the search for traditional, cultural expressions from rural Brazil—something that emotionally connected many metalworkers to their roots and also reminded the audience of the intimate relationship between the working-class repression and the centuries-old inequalities in Brazil's agrarian structure. The result was a Realist portrayal of the working-class struggles with an Expressionist layer, usually composed of popular forms and means of cultural manifestation. The universalist base of Forja's work is evident.

CHAPTER VI

Teatro Debate do ABC – Agitprop theater, party militancy and a class-based perspective

Since the first decades of the 20th century, the agitprop theater assumed different configurations in the class struggle. At times, agitprop troupes were connected to social movements, such as the German language *Prolet Buhne* in New York, which operated as the theatrical branch of the radical working-class German movement between 1928 and 1934. Sometimes, agitprop groups were directly affiliated to left-wing parties, such as the KPD's numerous troupes that were active before Hitler's ascension.

In Brazil, although the *Centros Populares de Cultura* (CPCs) had several members that were militants of the Brazilian Communist Party, it would not be accurate to affirm that they were a cultural branch of the party. In fact, a relevant part of the CPCs' activists were militants of other political organizations, mainly the *Ação Popular* (Popular Action, or AP, in Portuguese); many others were not affiliated to any party or movement.[129] The agitprop plays produced by the CPCs, therefore, were not a cultural expression of the PCB's political guidance. Rather, they expressed a radical political perspective to which contributed different political agents and views.

Most of the working-class theater groups that emerged in the industrial neighborhoods of São Paulo in the 1970s and 1980s were part of the same political effort expressed in a new kind of labor unionism and in the creation of a new workers party, the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT, in Portuguese). Many actors of the ensembles Ferramenta and Forja, for instance, were also founding members of the PT. Although their theatrical works can certainly be included in the history of PT's political field, these groups were never considered to be a theatrical branch of the party. The *Teatro Debate do ABC* (Debate Theater of the ABC) was also founded within the same context in 1979. It cannot be considered part of PT's theatrical group, but it was probably the closest any troupe came to being one.

The Debate was created when Argentinean theater artists Julián Romeo and José Luís Andreone—who were living in Brazil after having spent a few years in France and Colombia—met at an amateur group in the city of Santo André. The young actors had

[129]LIMA, Eduardo Luís Campos. O Auto dos 99% - O Centro Popular de Cultura da União Nacional dos Estudantes (CPC da UNE) e a mobilização estudantil. Rev. Crioula [Internet]. 1nov.2011 [citado 13nov.2019]; (10). Available from: http://www.revistas.usp.br/crioula/article/view/55487

been doing several presentations of Gianfrancesco Guarnieri's *Eles Não Usam Black-Tie* (They Don't Wear Black Tie), a play produced at the end of the 1950s by *Teatro de Arena* and one of the most important theatrical works in the Brazilian tradition of the working class, with a long history of stagings by labor union troupes. The performance the Argentineans watched was the group's final work examination at the *Fundação das Artes de São Caetano do Sul* (Arts Foundation of São Caetano do Sul) and was directed by the actors Antonio Petrin and Sônia Guedes. Guedes had been part of the *Centro Popular de Cultura* of Santo André, before the 1964 military coup, and worked on the CPC's staging of *Eles Não Usam Black-Tie* at the Metalworkers Labor Union of Santo André in 1962.[130] At that point, the group was heavily involved with labor union activism and some of its members started to fear possible retaliation by the regime's repressive agents. They decided to disband after the performance Andreone and Romeo watched, but two of its members listened to the Argentineans' proposal of staging another play and, thus, formed a new troupe.

Andreone and Romeo's plan was to stage a play with the recently met actors – one that they produced years before and was called *La Jaula*, which dealt with the plight of the employees at a pharmaceutical factory, working in an unhealthy basement with the most degrading conditions. In Colombia, they were militants of the *Movimiento Obrero Independiente y Revolucionario* (Independent and Revolutionary Worker's Movement, or Moir, in Spanish), a Maoist political group, and had been in charge of the theatrical education at the *Instituto Popular de Cultura* (Popular Institute of Culture.)[131] In the ABCD region, they found the opportunity to establish a political theater like the one they developed in Argentina and Colombia. Indeed, besides Inês Costa and her sister, many people that followed the presentations of *Eles Não Usam Black-Tie* joined the group, and a new creative process began.

According to Costa, each actor was responsible for the creation of his or her character, suggesting items such as life history, individuality, physical and gestural aspects, and idiosyncrasies of speech. The Argentinean directors based their theatrical approach on a Naturalist perspective and encouraged the artists to define and identify each little component of the character's nature. "When you get to the point of dreaming

[130]TAKARA, Jacqueline da Silva. O Centro Popular de Cultura de Santo André e sua proposta de um teatro proletário. Revista Aspas, 2018.
[131]REY, Sandro Romero. Género y destino – La tragédia griega en Colombia.Bogotá: Universidad Distrital Francisco Jose de Caldas, 2015, p. 724.

with your character, you will be ready to play its role," Andreone once told Costa.[132] The character's development was based on social observation in the working class milieu of the ABCD region; for two members of the new collective that were actual factory workers, this was an opportunity to pay attention to their workmates and to the daily situations at work. The group, as a whole, also held meetings with members of the chemicals labor union of the ABCD region, something that had a profound impact on the intended realism of the dramaturgical creation.

Rehearsals were based on the collective presentation of each character and on improvising situations, conflicts, and lines. The Argentineans, however, already had a basic structure for the play, in which they inserted the collective contributions. The final compilation was their responsibility, so it is not surprising that they appeared as the script's authors. Nevertheless, part of the troupe felt this was not fair and left only a few weeks before the premiere. New actors joined Debate and assumed the roles.

The play premiered at the beginning of 1980 at a neighborhood association in Vila Palmares, Santo André. Although it had a somewhat conventional stage configuration, it could also be presented in open spaces. Drawing large audiences from the very beginning, *A Gaiola* was taken to several union halls, neighborhood associations, and even to the streets. After each performance, there was always a debate between the artists and the spectators, and so the group decided to be named *Teatro Debate*. The play then had a season at the *Teatro de Arena Eugênio Kusnet*, the theater that used to be the house of the homonymous group and was assumed by the government after its disbandment. This was the phase when important theater critics wrote about it in major newspapers. It was also presented at the *Circo dos Bancários* (Bank Employees Union Circus), a militant labor space in São Paulo, and at *Teatro Igreja*.

A Gaiola starts with the actress that played the role of Rosa casually talking to the audience as it arrives to the theater. She makes jokes and mentions international news, waiting to introduce the subject of Imperialist domination and resistance in Brazil:

> She talks about the existence of two cultures, one that favors the interests of the North-American imperialism, still dominant in our country but in clear decline, and the other pertaining to the exploited; a nascent, rich and promising culture – but currently persecuted and silenced by the imperialists' footmen. She must

[132]Personal information.

> avoid transforming it in a boring political speech by developing such ideas with concreteness, using anecdotes, funny examples etc.[133]

The sense of a growing working-class culture that was on the verge of becoming hegemonic was undoubtedly connected to the context surrounding the creation of the PT and an unprecedented national mass movement in Brazil. It was also a Maoist bet on the emergence of a new political culture in Latin America. In a certain sense, *Teatro Debate* was a product of such hopes and pointed to the cultural possibilities opened by the rise of the factory workers in the ABCD region. The actress' speech reflected, therefore, the recent experience of the ABCD working class and signaled to the audience that they were part of an ongoing transformation.

The actress presents the group and the play; she will also function as a narrator in several scenes:

> ROSA – Dear comrades, we're the Teatro Debate do ABC. We're a group of workers of the arts that came together to create plays that deal with our reality without any fear, exactly how it is, so we can be at the people's service. We were born in the glorious and exploited ABC region, the biggest factory workers' concentration in Latin America. Today we're presenting to you our first work. The play is called "The cage – life, dreams and struggles of our working class". (Points to the scenery.) This is the cage. (Lights on and then slowly weakening.) It's a section in one of those companies with foreign names, where I, Rosa (assumes Rosa's role) work with other colleagues. We call our section the "cage", because it's really a cage. (…)

In the next scene, titled "Routine," we learn about all five characters and the cage. Each one of them has an animal nickname: Zefa, a 60-year-old supervisor, is the Jararaca; Tereza, a 48-year-old Northeastern, is the Ox Foot (slang in Brazil for a hard-working person); Cleusa, of indigenous origin, is the Duck; the young newbie, Marli, is the Little Bird; and Rosa, who is a 43-year-old Black woman from Bahia, is King Kong—a racial epithet that she repudiates and was apparently given by Cleusa. The cage is described as the "crippled's section", the "shame of the factory," the destiny of the most frazzled workers in the factory. Tereza is lame, Cleusa has a large scar from a chemical burn on her face, Rosa is a hunchback, and Zefa has lung problems. The cage itself is under street level, only receiving light and fresh air from a small skylight. Two contiguous spaces are continually mentioned, although they do not appear: the catacomb, a dark small room where the drain is always clogged, which results in waste

[133] GRUPO DEBATE DO ABC. A gaiola. Play script.

overflow, and the freezer, where one of the workers has to spend long hours every day taking the vaccine ampoules that the others put inside carton boxes. Their work is exhausting and completely manual since a treadmill uninterruptedly brings the items to be packed, often times with great speed. They barely have time to talk about their personal lives, which are generally impacted by the long years of inhumane routines, long work hours, and insufficient pay. Their miserable routine has recently been changed by the departure of one of their colleagues, Chocolate, who went mad after working too much. At the end of the scene, they meet Marli, Chocolate's substitute, still very young, beautiful, and naive. What follows is the story of Marli's gradual crushing by the cage.

As soon as she arrives, Marli is seen by her colleagues as a kind of mirror to the past, resulting in a mixture of jealousy and nostalgia. Their first measure is to "baptize" her: they show her the physical consequences of the work on her own body, they take her to the catacomb, they strip her of her beautiful clothes and make her wear old ones, and they force her to work at a violent speed. The scene's title is "Violence." Marli faces all attacks with dignity and a certain naivety, but has a few important perceptions:

> TEREZA – Hurry up! We're gonna need two like that one here to take care of everything! (Rosa comes out of the catacomb, bringing buckets of water and mud.)
> MARLI – (Protesting) I'm getting the hang of it!
> TEREZA – You don't have to get the hang of anything, you gotta work! And take this beautiful shoe out, there're old slippers over there.
> MARLI – I don't like to wear other people's things…
> TEREZA – But now you will, okay? And hurry up 'cause we're late.
> MARLI – Oh, god, so much hurry! One can't even blink.
> TEREZA – Carry those boxes and shut your mouth! So much fiddle-faddle!
> MARLI – Everybody is like the Military here!
> TEREZA – We live in a Military country, what did you expect?

The military discipline imposed by international corporations at the factories in Brazil, aimed at improving productivity and preventing the workers' organization, were particularly tough on the lower ranks of the workforce, which were composed of non-educated, manual laborers, often times women with monthly salaries considerably inferior than those of the men. This sub proletariat endured particular dynamics caused by their own economic hardships. While the Metalworkers Union of São Bernardo and Diadema consistently campaigned against overtime work, laborers like the ones in the cage depended on, to a great extent, the extra income that came from daily overtime

hours. In the case of women, the situation was especially cruel, since they already had to handle their homemaking tasks.[134]

Although she is a newbie, Marli quickly correlated the physical condition of her colleagues to their work environment and to the daily overwork. When the siren rings, Little Bird exclaims with relief that the day is finally over. Tereza then asks if she is working overtime. Marli stares at everyone and says, firmly: "I swear, I swear I'll never work overtime, I swear! I'll not become a slave!" However, she quickly adapted to the conditions in the cage and started working overtime. Her freshness of spirit and the open opportunities her youth afforded her, still not clearly limited by her lower proletarian condition, functioned as "a light, a hope for everyone" in the cage. As the fable develops, however, her position in the production system becomes dominant over her potential; similar to a character in classical tragedy, Marli moves towards an inescapable destiny. With all complex contradictions that are inherent to reality—and that were successfully figured in the play—her workmates try to help her avoid the future they themselves met, but they cannot succeed.

Marli gets pregnant by her boyfriend Pedro, an underpaid metalworker who must provide for numerous siblings and his mother. The women in the cage assume the role of her confidants and advisors, orienting her on several pragmatic issues and even organizing her bridal shower when she and Pedro decide to get married. However, it is not enough; the factory discipline and the general poverty of their lives determine the following sequence of events. From the beginning, for instance, Little Bird is not allowed to go see the doctor during her work hours—even promising she will come back to work after the appointment. Zefa repeatedly threatens to fire her, and her colleagues, especially Tereza, press her to keep the pace during production. She rents a house in a very distant neighborhood with Pedro, but they barely have the means to pay for it. She is completely under pressure from her female and lower proletarian conditions.

Marli's boy is born with a lung problem and is kept in the hospital. She cannot take a full leave from the factory because she would lose her overtime work. Thus, she is obliged to alternate the hospital hours with Pedro and works hard during the day to pay all the bills. Desperate and exhausted, she dreams of a better future for her son, but reality is implacable:

[134]ANTUNES, Ricardo. Os sentidos do trabalho: ensaio sobre a afirmação e a negação do trabalho. 6. ed. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2002, p. 202

> MARLI – I made a promise to Our Lady of Aparecida. I'll go there [to Aparecida sanctuary] on foot – did you hear me? –, on foot if he gets better!
> ROSA – He will get better, he will! Stay calm… (Trying to cheer her up) After all this, we'll take him to play with my kids, okay? All children will be friends, okay? He'll grow a handsome boy, the most handsome boy of the neighborhood! (Marli smiles and drops a tear.)
> MARLI – He's so gorgeous! The curly hair like Pedro's, the big black eyes! I'll give him all the good stuff! (Kisses a little blouse she's holding.) I'll not let him suffer like us, I really won't! He'll be victorious, even if I have to sacrifice my life till the end! I'm gonna make him study! He's gonna get to the top, he's gonna be a doctor, an engineer, something very important like that… He won't starve like us.
> ROSA – My kids made it in their exams! This kind of thing gives us so much joy!
> ZEFA – What's it good for? They're all gonna end up as peons in construction. (Laughs.)

Zefa's pessimism, which counterbalances the hopes of the workers throughout this scene, is particularly bitter for them because they all know she is right.

The growing tension inside the cage explodes in an Expressionist nightmare. Alone at work, Little Bird falls asleep after several hours of overtime and hears her colleagues coming back to the cage. However, they all look different, with a phantasmagorical note, and only repeat a nonsensical phrase that concentrates on the ideas they expressed in the previous scenes but in a diluted way. Rosa gives Marli honey and milk for the baby and Zefa hands her an invisible cross, which Marli starts to carry on her shoulder, while the supervisor takes care of the preparations for her upcoming funeral—"the retirement day." Marli suddenly ages and assumes the disablements of her workmates—she becomes a hunchback, with a hardened leg and full of wrinkles. As she tries to approach each colleague, they only make animal sounds. The scene ends with Marli working frantically and obsessively repeating that her baby has to get better. Rosa, the narrator, appears and informs the audience Marli's son is dead.

In the following scene, a commission with the new industry manager and a member of the Ministry visits the factory. The crippled workers of the cage are locked in to prevent the "suits" from seeing the underground misery of the company. Zefa announces that the boss forced her to retire and that Marli will be fired. A political reaction to this state of affairs begins, grounded in another layer of the play—the one that shows the advances of the workers' consciousness. The two primary opposites in this process are Zefa and Tereza, on the one side, and Cleusa, on the other. Zefa and Tereza represent the alienated worker disciplined over the years to work without

complaining and incapable of formulating any productive criticism to express indignation. Their relative commanding positions—Zefa is the cage's supervisor and Tereza, the oldest worker, coordinates the activities of the others—give them an additional inaptitude in understanding the injustice of their working conditions. Cleusa, on the contrary, is a developing labor militant. She deals with the cage's daily violence in a different manner, sometimes exerting violence on her colleagues, sometimes defending the victim in each situation, and sometimes by trying to give her workmates a sense of collectivity and solidarity. Throughout the play, she lets us know that she is familiar with the work legislation and that she knows her rights; she also says that she has been attending labor union meetings and even tries to take Marli to one.

In the final scene, normality again tries to impose itself on the cage. The tableau starts with Rosa performing the same routine from the first scene, as she arrives early on Monday morning to work. Instead of talking about Chocolate with Tereza, she tells her that she had visited Little Bird. "She finally got a job. It's a shit, but it's better than nothing. She's pregnant again! They're so, so happy!" Just like at the beginning of the play, she chases a rat that enters the catacomb and so on. However, now, Tereza seems to be melancholic, enumerating all sorts of frustrations that they have to face each new day. "Another day with the desire to set everything on fire… but having to swallow this anger!" Rosa agrees with her colleague's dissatisfaction and asks her: "And we're gonna keep living like this, huh? Forever? We're gonna keep our mouths shut, thinking everything is ok, that the poor were born to be screwed up, huh?" At that moment, Cleusa, the Duck, excitedly enters the cage telling her workmates there is an agglomeration at the entrance of the factory. "People are leaving all sections and gathering at that little square." She goes on:

> CLEUSA – The guys of the freeze-dried department also want to go. (Tereza is static. The siren rings. Silence. Expectation. Cleusa shouts to Tereza while the siren rings.) What do we have to lose, huh? What we got to lose besides this hunger and this misery? What we got to lose besides this unjust life that we have? (Siren stops)
> TEREZA (Takes the apron off) – Get your stuff, Rosa. We're coming too. (Birds are loudly heard. The actors freeze in their position. Green and red lights. Lights off.)
> ROSA (after the applause) – They say necessity makes a frog jump. We all left that day and assemblied at the entrance square, and there, everybody together, united, decided that… Well, this we'll tell you in another play. (Chuckles and takes the handkerchief off.) We hope our work has been useful to you, and that you liked it. We're always around, in unions, factory entrances, squares. We're always with our working people, struggling for unification. That's why we're called "Debate"; and also because we always talk to the audience after our

> performances to hear your opinions and critiques, which will guide our work. So, if you'd like to join us, we're at your service (Debate begins.)

The play does not show the organization of a strike but demonstrates the process of political awakening for the lowest rank of the ABC region's proletariat, a working-class segment that is so exploited by capital that it could hardly take part in the process of political radicalization that was happening at that moment. While Ferramenta's *Eles Crescem e Eu Não Vejo* tells the story of a laborer who arrives home late at night because he is in night school, *A Gaiola* presents us women that are almost sleepless because they are overworked on a daily basis. In addition to the tiresome factory journey, they have to take care of their children, their husband, and their houses, taking at least two buses every day to come and go to work, as Marli. Some of them are the sole providers for their families, such as Rosa, whose husband is a drunkard. They are responsible for the two grueling functions of producing and reproducing life under capital.

Not surprisingly, the lower proletariat shares with the rest of the working class the objective conditions for political awakening. As a properly political theatre group, *Teatro Debate* had a different approach when compared to Ferramenta and Forja. It was not part of any labor union and had more encompassing concerns in relation to class struggle. This is visible in many aspects of its productions. While Ferramenta and Forja had overtime work as a constant target—given its consequences for the specific interests of the metalworkers as a labor category—*Teatro Debate* demonstrates why it was an obligatory element for a whole section of the working class. As we saw, *A Gaiola* does not condemn the acceptance of overtime work by the characters; on the contrary, it shows the economic inevitability of it. As manual laborers, the characters in the cage are not contributing to unemployment when they admit to performing the workload of two or three people; they are solely struggling to keep their lives at a basic minimum condition. Many times, the women mention that without overtime work it would be pointless to work there. So, it is not really a matter of choice. This broad economic perspective, that surpasses the point of view of a specific category or section of the proletariat in order to address a relevant social problem, is only possible because of the group's party perspective.

The discussion of the conditions of life for other segments than the metalworkers in the heart of the ABC area in 1980—when middle and high-ranking metallurgists were the indisputable vanguard of the Brazilian working class—is not carried out

uncritically, of course. The women in the cage are exposed as animalized proletarians, crushed and crippled by capital and incapable of reflecting on their individual situations. The description of the characters in the play almost recalls Marx's depiction of the lumpen-proletariat, but with the fundamental difference that lumpen-proletarians are unable to acquire class consciousness while the lower proletariat of the cage did. The director's notes for *A Gaiola* indicate the "action should be exaggerated, grotesque, with broad, strong, well-delimited gestures, without any fear that the characters really look like animals." It is almost like the creators wished to Naturalistically stress the inhumanity of these workers, after being submitted to the horrors of the lower proletarian condition, in order to demonstrate the practicability of their critical awakening and political activation. In the end, their decision to join the workers' mobilization appears as the ultimate sign of their actual human condition. *Teatro Debate*'s effort, therefore, had a distinctive, class-based universalist approach based on a broad uptake of the Brazilian proletariat's contradictions and challenges. This is why they became a referential theater group in the ABC region, always being invited for performances by different organizations. They had something to say for broad audiences.

After the season at *Teatro de Arena*, *Teatro Debate* experienced rapid growth. Many people saw them there for the first time and asked to join the collective. Thus, the company was able to divide into three different casts, doing simultaneous performances of *A Gaiola* in different places. At that point, Debate started to think about new perspectives of operation. On the one hand, the group wanted to create other deep, complex works; on the other, there was a sense of urgency and militancy that drew the young artists to the streets. Andreone then asked one of the newbies, Paulo Marchesan, to direct a division specialized in street theater. This is how the *Show de Emergência* (Emergency Show) was developed.

The *Show de Emergência* was the most radically agitprop work of *Teatro Debate*. It was mainly presented on the streets, at factory entrances, and before public meetings and rallies. In general, its structure was fragmentary, composed of quick sketches addressing specific subjects. However, it sometimes encompassed longer plays. This was the case of the *Show de Emergência* number VI, called *Agora é com o ABC* (Now it's up to the ABC), produced in March 1981. The first small play of the show was called *Raimundinho*; it was presented several times and turned out to be a great success among the ABC region's militants.

The play was written by Marchesan with the creative help of the actors—especially Eduardo Lima, who played the role of Raimundinho. Three actors stood in front of the audience, semi-immobilized, playing the role of a complex of machines for a lemon juice manufacture. With body movements and sounds, they should represent the machine's squeezing, fermentation, and canning of lemon juice. The factory owner is the Gringo, a guy wearing a coat and a tie but no pants. He is followed by a General, a short man with a huge army uniform, who the entire time butters up the Gringo and treats the others with authoritarianism, and a Cameraman. Speaking with a North American accent, the Gringo says this is a great day for the United States and Brazil because another major North American investment in Brazil was being materialized, the new factory of the United Lemons of Brazil:

> GRINGO – Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, Military and civil authorities here present. Good morning, Globo Television Network spectators (To the Cameramen) Good morning, dear people of the ABC region. This is a big day for all of us. A day of great happiness for the government of this country (Looks to the General, who smiles to the audience). A day of great happiness for the people of this country (Looks at the camera). A day of great happiness for the people of the ABC region, you. And a day of great happiness for the people of my country, the United States of America. (Enters a waiter serving invisible glasses and snacks. He will come and go during the entire scene.) Today is the inauguration of another great investment that my country has made here in Brazil. Today begins the operation of the United Lemons of Brazil SA (Points to the machine. General applauses.) Today, in the benefit of everybody, the United States and Brazil are more united. We, the North American people, and you, the Brazilian people, are together for progress, security and development (applause). Because we (the General applauses again, euphorically, and Gringo looks at him with reproving eyes.) Because we, the Americans, bring the capital in order to do the buildings, set up the machines, we bring technology. And you Brazilians contribute with the work, the manpower. You lay the bricks, put the machines to work and operate them. Together, the North American capital and the Brazilian labor will transform this nation in a developed country, a rich country. (Applause) Together, there will be plenty of lemon juice in this country. I'll show you (he presses the belly button of one of the actors of the machine and it starts to move and make noises.) (…) You'll never squeeze lemons at home again!

From the beginning, the play denounces the collusion of the military regime, the United States, and big, international capital as the major force behind the industrialization of the ABCD region. At the same time, the culture industry, led by Rede Globo, the first national television network in Brazil, is defined as an important accessory for the whole scheme of justification and naturalization of the process. The communications infrastructure, which made it possible for TV Globo to become a national network, was implemented by the Military Regime—and this made Globo the

channel of preference for the government. The state and capitalist apparatus that launched that process was also employed to culturally justify the resulting novelties. Thus, the very usual habit of preparing lemon juice at home is suddenly presented as an old-fashioned one. Now, there is a lemon juice factory in the country and its products cannot be considered useless given the apparent modernity of the whole enterprise. It is also interesting to note that, despite the fact that the social forces presented in the scene established an alliance, the Brazilian state is actually subordinate to United States capitalism—as the commanding position of Gringo in relation to the General demonstrates.

Gringo announces that many workers will be needed in the new factory and selects Raimundo Inácio da Silva—Raimundinho, a young migrant from Bahia—to be a machine operator. Other positions are filled and the production starts. Gringo preaches about the need to raise productivity:

> GRINGO (…) – We'll produce as much as we can! And whoever among you has the bigger production, whoever sacrifices more in the name of common good, whoever arrives earlier at the factory and leaves later, whoever shows more efforts and dedication… To this person, to this exemplary citizen, to this Brazilian of honor, I, we (Points to the General), the United Lemons will give the prize of "standard worker". And this individual will be the model of the worker conscious of his patriotic, Christian and Western duties. A tireless warrior, who cannot be corrupted by the pessimist agitators who just talk about strikes. Who is not a sellout of the Communists. Who is not deluded by the Workers' Party. Yes, this will be the national hero, ready to do any sacrifice for the development of the country (General applauses.) (…)

The allusion to *Lulu the Tool* is evident. However, instead of only selecting a standard worker in order to set the minimum times for the other workers in each different operation, the goal of Gringo seems to involve a propaganda effort, too. The model worker is not only profitable, but he is also an ideological symbol. The General and Gringo seem to be in an offensive against the rising workers' movement and want to publicize and defend backward social values on national TV. In fact, the newspaper Globo organized since 1955 a campaign called *Operário Padrão* (Standard Worker), in order to "praise the trajectory of those who are winners at work for their discipline, dedication and competence.[135]"

Gringo tells the Secretary to hit a bass drum to define the production rhythm. She gradually speeds up the pace, while Gringo counts his money and gives some to the

[135] A short description of the campaign can be seen on http://memoria.oglobo.globo.com/institucional/promocoes/operaacuterio-padratildeo-9260928

General. When the rhythm becomes unbearable, Gringo turns the machine off and everybody finally relaxes. He then announces the winner is Raimundinho. Very excited, he goes to the center of the scene and receives his prize: a clown collar that he proudly wears. He receives general applause while the Cameramen records everything and starts to give an interview to TV Globo, but Gringo interrupts him and sends everybody back to production.

The routine is repeated: everybody works at an increasing pace defined by the Secretary. It develops until an unbearable rhythm. Although this time, instead of Gringo's interruption, what is heard is Raimundinho's desperate cry. The machine smashed one of his arms. The rubrics indicate the scene has to be "strongly dramatized;" as the worker shouts, everybody—including the machines—must stop and look at him. To intensify the "dramatic effect," the rubric says the scene can be photographically frozen at the point of Raimundinho's cries and when all other actors desperately look at him; or it can be repeated three times. Of course, the idea is not to raise the dramatic impact of the scene but rather the opposite. By freezing the immediate moment after the accident, the resulting effect is epic, as it stresses one exact point the narrator wants to highlight. In this case, the social shock caused by the work accident is accentuated. Since the beginning, it could be noted that a work accident was possible as the process of productivity was raised. However, nobody in the scene—and maybe in the audience—thought about it. Everything seemed to be working fine: the workers are working hard, the bourgeoisie is making money, the graft is being paid to the government, the best worker is recognized, and everybody is happy. The accident shows this process was problematic from the start.

Raimundinho disappears and all his colleagues are terribly sad. Gringo says:

> GRINGO – Oh, that's so unpleasant! Oh, that's horrible! Very bad, very, very bad! (Looks at watch.) Well, what can we do? Life goes on. Brazil goes on, progress goes on. We have to keep producing in order to feed the people. People need lemonade. (Addresses the audience.) Who wants to become a worker at the United Lemons in Brazil? Who?

From the audience comes the "Other," who is immediately trained and starts production. The routine is repeated one more time: the Secretary gradually increases the rhythm and the workers and machines go crazy. When everybody reaches the highest speed possible, Raimundinho enters the scene. He is missing part of an arm—a drumstick is tied to his stump and he has a whistle in his mouth. In the other arm, he

carries a tambourine and a rattle is positioned on his elbow. He became a street artist. As he appears, the scene is frozen. Raimundinho sings and plays a lousy samba and passes the hat (or the tambourine, to be precise). The rest of the actors become active again, but now they only pay attention to Raimundinho. In a solemn way, he starts to recite a poem about his life.

Raimundinho's poem has a popular tone, partially composed in the structure of a *cordel*, a kind of popular poetry from the Northeastern region of Brazil that is written to be declaimed. Most of the poem was created in stanzas of seven verses, which is one of the most commonly used forms in *cordel*. The simple rhymes and the metrification of Raimundinho's verses have the power to immediately connect the audience to one of the most popular literary forms in their homeland—considering that most of the spectators were migrants from the Northeast.

The idea of this final scene was to build an encompassing reflection on the problems presented in the previous episodes, creating at the same time a strong cultural and political identification with the audience. The poem also gives several indications of the political actions the audience should pursue in order to transform the situation in which Raimundinho ended up being victimized. It is certainly a kind of apotheosis, an effort to raise the morale of the spectators and prepare them for the political struggle.

Raimundinho begins by saying that he "came from Bahia five years ago, it's been five years since I left my house, my family, my little ranch. I came here thinking I would become rich and would go back there." He left his culture—"moqueca", a traditional dish made of fish, and "forró," a dance and musical rhythm from the Northeast—and came to pursue an "illusion" made of "money," "glory," "cars," "buildings in construction," and plenty of jobs and careers. "I was pure dream back then," he comments.

Once he arrived, he worked "from dawn to dusk." He worked so much he felt sorry for the machine. "That's how my fresh years became dust," he says. His will became the will of his boss and he was "pressed and exploited" as a fool:

> I don't know if I were born like this
> Or if I became over the years abstruse
> My understanding could only dehisce
> When my arm turned into lemon juice
>
> That's when I understood
> It's not a problem in the suits' head
> If São Paulo brings you no good

If your family doesn't have any bread
If in your land, there's no land for livelihood
If your kids are starving to death
If the president and the TV are pure falsehood

Yes, then I understood
TV, Figueiredo,[136] and the boss
Form a true brotherhood

Raimundinho's initial description presumably raised sympathy among spectators who had very similar experiences. In Luís Flávio Rainho's work about the consciousness of the ABC region workers in the 1970s, the process of migration from the countryside to the big city is described as being heavily influenced by illusions concerning the opportunities in the urban context, followed by deep economic and social hindrances and a gradual process of disillusionment and dissatisfaction.[137] The experience the character is sharing with the audience is exactly this turning point, in which an enthusiastic worker, ready to make any sacrifice for a better life, discovers the system in which he lives does not allow any real advance in his life. In the case of Raimundinho, this process is concentrated on one abrupt and shocking experience; the work accident that leads to his mutilation is the detonator of his disillusionment. Scenically, this shock is portrayed through his cry—that is frozen and repeated over and over again—and in his unexpected apparition as a handicapped popular artist, one that resorts to an artistic form that is based in his original, cultural traditions. This is an indication that the end of any illusion concerning life under industrial capitalism in São Paulo necessarily includes, among other things, the recovery of the traditional, popular culture that was erased and forgotten in the process of migration.

At the same time, Raimundinho takes this disillusionment to the next level by connecting his problems with the interests of the "suits," the ones that do not care about the problems of his people both in their region of origin and in the ABC area. Commenting on the previous scenes in order to reinforce their meaning, he mentions that the suits, together with the president and the TV, had somehow allied to keep the reality of his situation, of the exploitation and misery in which he lives, private.

[136] General João Batista Figueiredo was the last Military president in Brazil, from 1979 to 1985.

[137] "Their consciousness' trajectory goes from the initial illusion to the disillusionment and dissatisfaction in the present (…) a few landmarks are part of this trajectory: the memory of the hardships of the rural life; the imposing force of emigration in its first stage; the illusion that their problems will be solved in the big city; the obstacles from the first moments until the present, when they are disillusioned as they realize that their fundamental difficulties were not and will not be solved." RAINHO, 1978, p. 231.

He goes on with his recitation, deepening the conclusions to be taken from such a reflection. Raimundinho says he realized that the "suits" are not worried about his accident because other "Raimundinhos will come," pointing to the audience, with their minds "full of illusions and dreams." The "two-handed Raimundinhos" that already came and the ones that will come in the future, he says, are the people who produce everything: "cars, juice and buildings, machines, suits and remedies." The "two-handed Raimundinhos" from the "coast and the countryside," from the Southern State of Paraná or from the Northeastern State of Maranhão, are the "builders of this nation."

The stanzas gradually become shorter and the rhythm of the poem speeds up. The actor's voice is louder and his physical posture changes in form. He asks the audience why they "still wait for any favor from the bosses." He then shouts that the two-handed Raimundinhos are the only solution "in this fight against the TV, the generals and the bosses:"

> We can only seek unification
> Of the workers in all occupations
> So, the Raimundinhos' agglomeration
> Will straighten up this nation

All the actors slowly advance toward the audience and repeat the last stanza. For the last time, they change the last verse to "Will revolutionize this nation." The ending has an obvious agitprop nature, inviting the spectators to take real political action. Often times, the play was presented before big assemblies and rallies and functioned as a kind of warm-up for the political speech that would follow.

The sketch about Raimundinho is an interesting example of the Marxist perspective of *Teatro Debate*. Dealing with a few of the most discussed issues by labor unions in those years—particularly overtime work and work accidents—the play very effectively resumes the political conjuncture in a revolutionary way. The productivity obsession of the corporations in the ABC region is directly related to the military regime's policy of complacency with big capital and the lack of governmental control over the work conditions in the factories. TV Globo appears as the cultural branch of this alliance, disseminating the values and ideas needed to naturalize and reinforce the exploitation of the working class by international companies. The solutions to this problem are not only economically and politically based, but also have to consider cultural elements. In opposition to the United States' values and behaviors publicized by TV Globo, the working class should look back and reclaim its own traditions and art

forms. This is why *Teatro Debate* proposes a Brazilian revolution against capital, the army, and the cultural industry in verses of *cordel*.

It is curious to observe that in 1991, eleven years after PT's founding and a decade after the creation of *Raimundinho*, some of the party's militants wrote an article arguing the organization had never "evaluated the significance of culture for its action."[138] The authors—among them artists and intellectuals—affirm that PT had a vision of culture that could be summarized in three angles: "culture understood as 'shows,'" as the product of a "few experts and talented people for the passive contemplation of the others;" culture as the product of the "innate genius," that should be funded by the state when the cultural product is ready to be shown; and culture as agitation and propaganda, which is much more interested in the "political or social message" and is not concerned with "the knowledge, specific requirements and development" of the arts.[139] These misconceptions were the reason why the party failed to conceive culture as a central element in its political formulations.[140] According to Viscovini, since the 1980s, the party had a critical vision of the cultural industry, but it was never deeply analyzed. "The resolutions from the meetings and congresses of the party also do not advance in this sense; failing to discuss cultural policies, they do not point to any debate concerning the means of mass communications."[141]

Teatro Debate, nevertheless, already dealt with all those conceptions in 1981, as we could see in *Raimundinho*. The play was possibly seen by many PT militants as part of that third concept of culture mentioned in the 1991 article, "culture as agitation" and propaganda. Indeed, *Raimundinho* is unquestionably an agitprop play; even *A Gaiola* can be so defined, considering the militant aspect, the situations and spaces where it was performed, and the function its presentations had. However, both plays had much more to offer than only their agitational aspect, as they reflect on fundamental class-based issues, many of them still not broadly debated in the party.

Of course, *Teatro Debate* was not formally part of the PT. Although, almost all its members were and the group was "in the service" of the party and of the labor and social movements that somehow were connected to it, in the words of Inês Costa. The

[138]FRATESCHI et all. Esperança racional: Ainda não fomos radicais. Teoria e Debate. Ed. 16, 01/10/1991. Accessed at https://teoriaedebate.org.br/1991/10/01/esperanca-racional-ainda-nao-fomos-radicais/2/
[139]Id., ibid.
[140]VISCOVINI. Lenir de Fátima. A política cultural do Partido dos Trabalhadores em Santo André: da inovação à tradição (1988-1992, 1997-2000, 2001-2004). Master's dissertation. Universidade Estadual de Campinas, dec/2005.
[141]VISCOVINI, 2005, p. 17.

group remained active over the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, with several transformations and different names. In 1988, one of its versions was even called "*Grupo de Teatro do PT*" (PT's Theater Group) —according to a few ex-participants, however, the party never really subsidized the troupe and it was never directly structured as the party theatrical branch.

The final call for a proletarian revolution in *Raimundinho* is a signal that, although the party stood up for "democratic socialism," it still encompassed, in 1981, groups and individuals that believed it could be an instrument for a socialist revolution. *Teatro Debate* disbanded in the 1990s when there was a general "ideological retreat of socialism and PT gradually left the "streets and the [sphere of] political militancy."[142]

While it operated, *Teatro Debate* functioned as an unprecedented agitprop theater troupe connected to a political party in Brazil. Far from limiting its experience to a given set of historical forms developed by the international working-class theaters decades before, *Teatro Debate* sought its own ways, following the Latin American social realist propositions—through the eyes of its Argentinean founders—and the Brazilian experiences developed right before the 1964 coup, especially *Teatro de Arena*'s political modernism. One of the great inspirations for Debate's street theater, moreover, was the popular street art tradition in Brazil, according to Paulo Marchesan. "We watched to many and many popular artists and their street routines. And over the years, we also started to learn from the street which elements worked and which didn't," he explained.[143]

The overall configuration of Debate's street plays combined Brechtian elements, such as the revelation of the economic reasons of a given political situation, with very humorous, popular theater routines and clownery. The troupe usually experimented with cultural industry elements, including in its sketches a TV reporter or showman, for instance, and also satirized political figures, such as Paulo Maluf, the former governor of São Paulo (in a sketch that sometimes followed *Raimundinho*, Maluf was portrayed visiting a street market.)

The starting point of Debate's plays were usually related to the great labor union reflections and campaigns in the ABC region. However, they were only starting points; through the artistic process developed by the group and a collective political reflection, topics such as factory work accidents gave birth to broad theatrical productions about

[142]SECCO, Lincoln. História do PT. São Paulo: Ateliê Editorial, 2011.
[143] Personal information.

the Brazilian sociopolitical reality. A specific element, therefore—something that reflected the life and work experience of a given segment of Brazilians—gained class-based universality. The environment in which the artwork was presented—the street—greatly contributed to the success of this effect. The street theater routines perfected by the troupe over the years gradually invaded the productive process of its plays and were mixed with new experiments, such as the use of radio during the presentations (this happened especially in the 1990s when the group already had assumed the name *Rádio Marmelada*). *A Gaiola* and *Raimundinho* were the main landmarks of this path.

CONCLUSION

A brief reflection on originality and tradition

Besides its direct Mexican origins, there is an observable historical connection between Teatro Chicano and the United States agitprop theater of the 1930s, both the most immediate and short street forms and the full-length and elaborate stage plays, such as the Living Newspapers of the Federal Theatre Project and the many stagings of the Workers Laboratory Theatre. Such a relation was probably mediated by the contacts and exchanges between Chicano artists and other avant-garde groups of the 1960s and 1970s, such as the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the Living Theater and the Bread and Puppet, which in variable degrees also recovered and reprocessed the forms and dynamics of the international agitprop tradition of the working class. The university and formal theatrical training possibly played a role in this historical transmission as well.

This does not mean that Teatro Chicano was not entirely innovative. The sociopolitical situation in which it emerged required particular forms and content, and the Chicano groups followed several ways in order to address the necessary subjects. However, the starting point for most of them could only be historically concrete. This is why the process of typification of social characters, which structures the *actos*, was primarily based on the centuries-old *Commedia dell'arte*—not only through the experiences of R.G. Davis and the popular comic tradition in Mexico, but also with roots in 1930s agitprop. The marked presence of the "Living Newspaper" form in Chicano plays such as Teatro Libertad's *La Vida del Cobre* and Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit* is an additional indication of this historical path for Chicano groups.

At the same time, the particularities of the 1960s and 1970s and the influx of new intellectual and artistic ideas generated new aesthetic possibilities, new forms of theatrical production and organization, and a new kind of relationship with the audience. From the incentive to unionization to the invitation to join a Chicano aesthetic-political procession, the doors of the *teatros* seemed to always be open to the active participation of the community.

In the case of the Brazilian working-class plays of the ABC region labor-union milieu, one must not ignore the fact that the main theatrical experiences started with some kind of connection to the left-wing popular theater made in the 1960s by Teatro de Arena and the Centers of Popular Culture (CPCs). Although the 1964 military coup resulted in the abrupt interruption of the CPCs and the strengthening of repression put

an end to Arena a few years later, their processes of aesthetic and political reflection and creation had been so intense that they still inspired new initiatives years later.

It was not the first time that working-class groups associated with labor unions created theater in São Paulo. At the beginning of the 20th century, hundreds and hundreds of anarchist workers organized a whole circuit for the circulation of the arts in the city, which resulted in the creation of dozens of theatrical plays—a history first told by Maria Theresa Vargas.

However, the experience of the three ABC region groups mentioned in this study—and many others that were not mentioned—was the last real opportunity to constitute a working-class based cultural program for an emerging left-wing mass movement in Brazil. Ferramenta, Forja, and Debate demonstrated that workers are able to think of their own reality and produce high-quality works of art for worker audiences.

Unfortunately, both Teatro Chicano and the ABC workers' theater in Brazil were not able to produce a long-lasting revolutionary theater movement. Their direct and indirect successors struggle with very similar problems as the ones they had to face decades ago, but at a moment when the power of attraction for the cultural industry seems to allow no real competition. Nevertheless, their history remains alive and their creations keep a surprising validity in the present.

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