

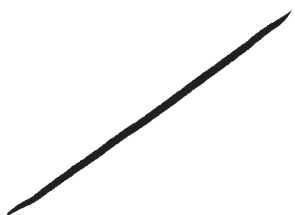
MEMORY, REAL AND SUBJECTIVITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICAN SCENE

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Abstract: In this text we present stage productions/staged performances with which the authors relate as spectators or as researchers and artist-creators. This analysis of works is based on the discussion of devices of theatricality and performance in contemporary theatre, and their relationships with reality and individual and collective memory. This paper aims to follow, through theatre productions, the ways in which the collective memory is activated in the Latin American space, to detect the common points between socio-political events and the possibilities of reproduction on the contemporary stage, and to discuss the relationship that is established between social reality and stage reality. For that, we analyzed the two works *Sin título. Técnica mixta*/Perú and *Memorial de Silêncios e Margaridas*/Brazil. Both are seen as acts of memory in dialogue with reality.

Keywords: contemporary scene, memory, subjectivity, state violence, real.

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Introduction

In this text we present 2 stage productions from the Latin American theatre with which the authors related as spectators or as researchers and artist-creators. The axis of analysis of the works was based on the discussion of the devices of theatricality and performativity in the contemporary scene and their relations with the 'real', as well as individual and collective memory.

The contemporary scene will be discussed here from the point of view of the relations with memory, whether individual or collective, as well as the possibility of creating an ethical act through artistic practice. As an excerpt of analysis, we start from #2 scenic practices, in which these questions were presented to us:

How to represent the violence of the state against its citizens? How has the real invaded the stage? Can the stage become a space for denouncing and reflecting on these acts? How to represent the unrepresentable?

Latin American socio-communist democratic projects, which existed from the 60s to the 80s, almost disappeared, giving way to dictatorial regimes that established practices which restricted civil rights, prevented popular participation, and guaranteed North American hegemony in the region. Some sectors are violently attacked, and their members are persecuted, arrested, and tortured.

Certain words became common in Latin American vocabulary: MISSING, CLANDESTINE, GUERRILLEUR.

The situation of absence is established in the psychosocial structure of South Americans, as a denial of the physical presence of the subject. The person

considered missing lives or revives in the field of memory of his family. The marks of dictatorships and the disappeared begin to occupy a place of memory.

These absences have always been present in the Latin American Theatre. Various groups, playwrights and directors worked with the memories of these times, bringing to the scene submerged voices, absent bodies; remembering them is consummated as a possibility of not forgetting, “as a compensating reparation for the experience of defeat and loss” (Dubatti, 2005, p. 9). In this way, we move from a macropolitical theatre of shock or the metaphorical to a micropolitical theatre of resistance. While the macropolitical perspective works with a totalizing vision and social relations, the micropolitics of resistance “founds alternative territories of subjectivity (identity), lines of flight” (Dubatti, 2005, p. 10).

Thus, memory also comes to be understood as a place for the construction of subjectivities:

[...] the remembrance process is a network, when narrating the memory of certain facts, these triggered the memory of others and others and others... Immersed in this sea of memories, it was impossible not to bring back memories of pleasure, pain, of trauma. (Leal, 2014, p. 26)

These spaces of memory go through both autobiographical paths, constitutive of the testimonial speeches of those who experienced such events, and collective ones, insofar as social spheres feel that they belong to these episodes as part of a common historical identity. Therefore, “memories do not have the property of being preserved in consciousness, they are ‘remembered from the outside’, structured by memory frames that are located both within duration and outside it” (Seixas, 200, p. 101).

The Latin American scene, when working with political memory, promotes other discursive possibilities on the topic, now based on the experience of the subject-actor, in his ability to constitute memory from a process of sensitive accumulation to establish itself on the scene as a body-memory, which resists the continuous movement of forgetfulness.

In Peru, the Yuyachkani: the concept of multiple actor. For Miguel Rubio, it is essential that “the actor seeks a technique [or several] appropriate to this need and at the same time develops a special sense of observation that makes him attentive and sensitive to the different exchanges with the public” (2001, p. 34). The conception of the instrument-actor and its social role will, consequently, underlie the didactic form in the workshops that the group teaches at its headquarters, festivals, and events over the years.

The memory of the first moment I came into contact with Yuyachkani's works and pedagogical practices takes over my body and makes me (re)think about how we do/teach/learn theatre pedagogy(s).

In the Brazilian case, political memory is re-worked in the classroom using viewpoints and composition. Viewpoints are the articulation of a set of aspects existing in various practices and training pedagogies for performing artists, in order to offer the performer or creator a greater degree of political and poetic awareness.

Starting from both the dimension of the multiple actor and the viewpoints, the contemporary Peruvian and Brazilian scene that articulates social and political memory recognizes the artist as a political being, understanding that the acquisition of technical and poetic knowledge presupposes an ethical commitment to the history of his country, of understanding theatre as an art capable of evoking the subjectivities of bodies for scenic creation.

In this sense, Latin American theatre is constituted in its different countries as an ethical-political art, whose plural existence is established in a singular-plural micropolitics of subjectivities based on collective memory.

Here we present two works that try to give visibility to these acts of violence so that, as the actress Ana Correia-Rosa Cuchillo says, "memory flourishes". We can see in this theatre of memory devices of the document theatre made by Peter Weizz in the sixties, but the scene is also invaded by other devices of theatricality and performativity, in creations that make use of "mixed techniques", to use the term of the visual arts and the title of one of the works analyzed here.

The choice of the works was motivated by the importance that the artists involved have for our creative processes. And the artists themselves, such as Miguel Rubio and Colective Núcleo 2, help us reflect on these scenes invaded by reality so that memory can be revived and re-elaborated through art. The scene as acts of memory and violence.

1 – *Sin título. Técnica mixta, do Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani (Peru)*

Upon entering the house of Yuyachkani in February 2016, we found an exhibition of popular ceramic sculptures by the artist Rosalia Tineo Torres from the city of Ayacucho, which represents everyday scenes experienced by her, such as the imprisonment of her father, the violence of the armed struggle in the rural communities of Peru between 1980 and 2000. In one of them, there is a soldier with a rifle in his hand stepping on the body of a woman lying on the ground blindfolded.

We can further see in an annex to the main room several texts, photos and videos related to the war of the Pacific, which took place between Peru and Chile

in the nineteenth century, as well as the civil war between the government and guerrillas in the twentieth century, which left thousands dead and missing.

The two exhibitions, artistic and documentary, are an experiential and historical introduction to what the public will see on stage. When we enter the main room, from where the bleachers have been removed and each spectator can walk through the space as if they were in a museum, we see installations on the walls, while next to them, there are photos, texts, objects, scenarios and costumes related to these two massacres that took place in Peru. These are historical materials [re]constructed by the group. The actors are already present in the room, preparing and/or showing us these materials: The actress Ana Correa dressed in black shows us photos of the brides in black: women who got married in black dresses in protest of the Chilean invasion in the city of Tacna. Actor Augusto Casafranca reads to those who approach him one of the texts he narrates during the show. We can choose what to see, walk around, read the texts written on the walls, look at the objects or observe the actors. It is like a museum where one can see the memory of the last hundred years of a country's acts of violence against its citizens.

When the train's siren sounds, the characters cut off the direct relationship with the audience, climb onto the wheeled platforms that are arranged in the center of the room and the show begins.



Sin título. Técnica mixta, Casa Yuyachkani (Lima – Perú), 2015.

Photo credit: Musuk Nolte; <https://yuyachkani.org/>

The mixed media referred to in the title of the work is linked to the various ways in which the group tells us the story: exhibition of historical records, representation of characters of the time, living paintings, political satire with masks, Catholic and indigenous rituals, the body as a support to denounce violence against women, in a collage of materials and devices of theatricality and performativity, whose objective is to present the acts of violence carried out by both the State as well as by guerrilla warfare.

All the changes in the scenes are made in the view of the spectator-visitor, who is moved by the space along with the movement of the platforms, and who can choose what to watch, including seeing the actors changing costumes and entering and leaving the game of the acting compositions. It is a game between theatrical and performative devices, creating poetic, metaphorical or protest scenes, which immerse the visitor in this movement of choosing what to observe, to experience.

Throughout the show, the group presents us with women in different roles: as victims of this violence, they are raped, enslaved, but they do not stop searching for their missing or murdered loved ones and keep on fighting for justice. The final scene is an example of this choice: on the 2 central platforms, on one side we see Ana Correa, dressed in an Ashenic robe; there we can witness testimonies and photos of the communities enslaved by the Shining Path; on the other stage is her sister Débora Correa, in an Andean costume, in which testimonies of peasant women who suffered from the forced sterilization of the Fujimori government are exhibited. Their bodies are supports for denouncing this violence, which we read with the help of the flashlights handled by the other actors. They show us the reality of a past-present.

For director Miguel Rubio Zapata, it is essential that „the actor seeks a technique [or several] appropriate to this need and, at the same time, develops a special sense of observation that makes him attentive and sensitized to the various exchanges with the public” (2001, p. 34).

The documents and objects of memory presented there to the spectators-visitors constitute an evocation of the social history and, at the same time, of the history of the group, as shared memories of an absent reality. The proposal is that

[...] the audience can view and consult at the time of the presentation. These historical dice placed there also involve the history of the group itself; By circumventing himself, he exposes materials that were used in previous public actions and that the memory of *Untitled* brings back to the scene. (Zapata Rubio, 2008, p. 211)



Sin título. Técnica mixta, Casa Yuyachkani (Lima – Perú), 2015.

Photo credit: Musuk Nolte; <https://yuyachkani.org/>

Photo source: <https://enlima.pe/blog/critica-teatro/sin-titulo-tecnica-mixta-grupo-yuyachkani>

The body becomes a memory and the presence of the actors invokes the absence of real characters and moments in Peruvian history, especially the War of the Pacific. Creation is memory and has the experience of the present as an attitude of understanding that these practices are crossroads between art and life.

As historian Jacy Seixas states about the uses of memory, *Sin Título* makes use of devices that collaborate to understand that memory is apprehended both as “reconstruction-evocation and irruption, at the same time consciousness and emotion; with existence outside and inside (including unconsciously, repressed) of individuals and social groups and constituting itself as an essential factor in the constitution of subjectivities” (2001, p. 105).

Recognizing oneself as an artist (being a politician), understanding that the acquisition of technical knowledge presupposes an ethical commitment to the history of one’s country, understanding theatre as an art capable of evoking the subjectivities of memory for creation, and making artistic practices that activate experience as a possibility of sensitive knowledge, are points that constitute the practices of the Yuyachkani group.

The memory of the first moment we came into contact with Yuyachkani’s works and pedagogical practices makes us (re)think how we do theatre. What involvement or detachment should we have in the face of reality?

Larrosa Bondía mentions that the subject of experience is like a „surface of sensibility on which what passes affects in some way, produces some affects, inscribes some marks, leaves some traces, some effects” (2002, p. 160). This is what we perceive in the work *Sin Título, tecnica mixta*, the configuration of an ethical, poetic and affectionate act.

2 Memorial de Silencios e Margaridas, Núcleo 2 – Coletivo Teatro (Brazil)

The staging of the unipersonal *Memorial de Silencios e Margaridas*, the axis for the scenic-dramaturgical creation of the show, was the recent memory of the violence committed by Latin American dictatorships. The textual materials researched for the creation were testimonies and writings of the political prisoners of the Brazilian dictatorship, such as Frei Betto’s Baptism of Blood, the biography of DOPS delegate Sérgio Paranhos Fleury and texts by Eduardo Galeano, as well as field research and iconographic and sound material.

The work begins as follows: “Scene 1. (On stage – actor receives the audience singing the song “Canção da despedida” by Geraldo Azevedo) [...] The dead general will return, now in a bathing chair and his victims will parade their memories of the tortures, or their refusal to return, hence the use of the term “silences” in the current title. (Leite, 2014, p. 121)

You can access the record of the show at the link:

[<https://vv.youtube.com/watch?v=gibksvj9jhla>]

In this process, the real is also articulated with the field of historical and social memory. Although the actor and director have not personally experienced the violence of the Brazilian dictatorship, we are children of this process, we have grown up and still live with its ghost. The documentary research offered us material to start a creative process based on the “need to know something, which is still knowledge of oneself” (Salles, 1998, p. 30) and with this material we return to the work of composition.

For each selected material/document, we started an improvisational game based on the *viewpoints* and then organized them into small compositions.

We translated and transformed the historical documentary material into acting procedures of body-space relationship, repetition of movements, creation of scores, and playing with objects, among others. In this way, we entered the sources in a corporeal and poetic way, without, at this moment of work, seeking an intellectual understanding of this material, in a sensitive practice of the actor.

According to Tina Landau “composition is the practice of selecting and combining components of theatrical language in a work of scene creation” (1996,

p. 26), a method for revealing our thoughts and feelings about the material we are working on for the creation of the show. The compositions were made using both the *viewpoints* and the materials gathered during our research, which were then reinterpreted from a new creative perspective. We embraced chance and incorporated deviations into our work.

Another basic premise in the process was the perspective of treating the theme from a performative point of view, that is, playing with different levels of performance in front of the spectators. Sometimes starting to activate the character's corporeal-vocal codes, sometimes working in the register of non-performance, in a fragmentation of the scenic game. The staging sought, as Julia Sagasetta says, an expanded scene:

[...] a scenic fact in which the meaning is given in the representation of the actions, [...] it has the use of non-linear structures [...] the narrative character appears fractured and diluted. At the level of acting, there is the development of acting systems that reject the psychological. (2012, p. 39)

The very process of creation, in which the body is implicated in its totality in the production of a virtual power of play, is already in itself based on a premise aimed at the construction of scenes by physical actions and not by a work of acting on psychological bases. In this case, the triggered memory emanates from a collective perspective, from the social trauma of dictatorships.

By thinking about the power of expansion of the scene in contemporaneity, we can broaden the field of sources, even those that come from the factual historical plane. We created a documentary theatre with a poetic basis, beyond the denunciation of the fact itself. In this way, the actorial experience in its sensible knowledge is constituted by what “happens to us, what affects us, what touches us. Not what happens in general, not what occurs, or what touches others” (Larossa Bondía, 2002, p. 21), in a process that takes place between knowledge and life, that is, it is what we acquire to the extent that we respond to what happens to us throughout life.

In the process of creating *Memorial de Silêncios e Margaridas*, the elements used in both free improvisations and compositions expose the actorial exercise to vulnerability and risk, in the construction of its sensitive knowledge, while apprehending the creative act as a trajectory of experiences.

All the elements (objects, music) present in the scene were selected from the texts, reports, interviews and the field research (visit to the spaces of memory of the Brazilian dictatorship) that we carried out during the creation process. This process made it possible for the artists involved to approach the material through

the corporeal-sensible experience in the first instance, and then to organize it for the proposed work. In the image below (see next page) we can identify some of them.

Some of the elements that are being organized from the initial research which are highlighted here are the hood and the cage, which represent metaphors of violence in this show. They carry different keys of reading for the spectators: the historical time of the work, due to the aging of the materials and how they are put into play, but also the present time of the scenic event, when the word Brazil is evidenced as an impossibility of perceiving the socio-political reality of the country. The same happens with the cage, which contains the other scenic objects: comic books, toys, clothespins, but also the metaphor of the actor's imprisonment, with these materials in the reality of the scene and of the prison as a historical issue during the Brazilian dictatorship.



Memorial de Silêncio. Museu Universitário de Arte (MuNA),
Uberlândia – Minas Gerais – Brasil, 2016. Photo credit: Luana Diniz
<https://cteatrom.blogspot.com/2011>

In this scene, developed from the accounts of political prisoners, the metaphor of violence was created from the superimposition of different materials. First, a quote from a performance, in which the actor Narciso Telles puts clothespins on parts of his body – face, mouth and arms. During this action, Gal Costa can be heard singing “Mommy, mommy, don’t cry, that’s just how life is...”, taken from a report of music heard in prison. When the actor fully engages with the preachers, both physically and verbally, he tries to read the poem *O Sentimento do Mundo*, by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, cited as a text that made life in prison bearable. The presence of the actor’s body practicing a violent act

on himself, as the preachers hurt and leave marks, was a scenic device that sought to recover the tension between the concrete act and the poetic sound materials. The spectators are participants in this violent act of the actor on his body, as they develop their sensory journey with the juxtaposition of the soundscape.

For the editing of this scene, it was clear to us that we did not and could not represent torture, but, based on the reports, we wanted to give legibility to this violence, in the sense in which Didi-Huberman exposes us. How to describe this violence and, at the same time, give voice to the different forms of survival? The action with the preachers was thought of as a metaphor, in an attempt to create a “dialectical comparison” in a game of “experimental relativization” (2015, p. 80), juxtaposing it with the documentary material.

Among the documentary materials used, we would like to report one that was literally for the final scene, because it did not require mediation: the actor narrates that during the research process, in 2009, we read in a newspaper of wide circulation in Brazil that Luiza Gurjão Farias, mother of Bergson Gurjão, a 25-year-old student killed in the Araguaia Guerrilla in 1972, had just found her son’s bones and could finally bury him. This mother, who tirelessly searched for her son, performs an act awaited by thousands of mothers and relatives of the disappeared in Latin America today: an act of dignity to these victims, because as Didi-Huberman comments about the burial of victims of a Nazi concentration camp: “It is a question of dignity, that is, an ethical act and an act of memory” (2015, p. 54). Luiza Gurjão narrates in the article that over the last 30 years, while she was constantly trying to find her son, she sang this song on Christmas nights [the song sung by Dalva de Oliveira starts to play, while the actor accompanies it, counting on his fingers as he indicates that there is still one more to go]:

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqxjL2Gnyb8>]

The real on stage

Jacques Rancière states that “there is no real in itself” (2012, p. 74), that is, there is no real outside of art, such as another that artistic productions should or can use. That’s not what it’s about. Art, and in this case theatre, is always remaking its “folds and folds of the sensible fabric” (idem, p. 74) of the real, in the possibility of reconnecting the missing link between the scene and its ghosts, as Ileana Diéguez comments:

Much more than thinking of the theatrical scene as an art of remembrance, of confirmations around the veracity or authenticity of remembrance, I want to think of the scene – and not only the theatre – as the place where the ghosts produced by time and specific experiences are evoked

[...]. It is not a question of what we want to be remembered, but of what comes, what disappears, what is untied. And it is there, in this spectral performativity, that the scene, the ritual and the memory come together. There is no certainty in the imaginaries to be summoned because memory is always performative (Rancière, 2012, p. 6).

We think that the shows analyzed here propose this pact by enhancing the desire for [trans]formation, realizing that theatre “knows that its political effect passes through aesthetic distance” (Rancière, 2012, p. 81). In this sense, these scenes made use of various devices that show the spectator the scenic game, so that he can also be part of the reflection of the reassembly and reconstruction of real people and facts of our recent history. By making acts of state violence present, by exposing these ghosts, there is a desire to think of the past as an act in the present that projects new futures, like the phrase we read on the wall of the Yuyachkani Group House: “remembering as a possibility so that this never happens again”. Perhaps this is the reason for the constant presence of so many absences and of the real in its various facets on the contemporary scene.

The real does not refer to the comprehension of reality, but to its incomprehensibility, that is, the real is experienced as an immediate feeling that can be expressed by anguish. Thus, only subjectivity is capable of describing the encounter with the real (Badiou, 2017). The real refers to the reaction of an individual in relation to the unconscious. In other words, in response to encountering the inapprehensible, the subject experiences anguish as they face the unexpected elements of the scene, which leads to both causation and subjective involvement.

Plato’s cave myth points to the exit as an essential motif of the allegory, as it represents a world closed on a figure of the real, which is nothing more than a false figure, that is, the countenance as a figure that presents itself to everyone, from the cave, as something indisputable about what can exist outside. Any rationalizing or scientific measure on the countenance would make it impossible to get out, fixing the inmates on the alleged reality of the countenance. Thus, the countenance offers the image that translates and represents the invention, or subversion, of the experience that is impossible to be represented, which is the real (Badiou, 2017).

Art breaks with the countenance, for it is capable of inventing an artifice to circumvent the real. The treatment given to the absence of representation, or to emptiness, would be precisely to offer a possible outline. This means that art enables some invention in the face of emptiness, not trying to cover it, since it is placed as a founding element of artistic creation. In this sense, the real is not veiled, but is presented in the work itself as a confirmation of lack (Mello, 2014).

In the relationship between artist and spectator, it is art who looks at the spectator who feels captivated by the work. The gaze, according to Lacan (2008), is placed from the outside, excluding the subject who looks. The dependence on the visual entails the relationship between the seeing eye and the subject looking through this sensory organ. The possible interpretations are of the singular dimension to the extent that the subject feels looked at by the work, everywhere, that is, there is something that precedes the vision and offers the meanings to which the spectator can rely in the face of the contingency of the emptiness that art promotes (Bossa, 2022). Instead of contemplating the work, as in traditional art, in contemporary art the viewer is invited to think about it, constructing the passage from passive spectator to the subject implicated in the work (Mello, 2014).

In contemporaneity, the inversion of the covering of the real with the semblant is the culmination of artistic making. By breaking with the semblant, the artist evokes the real for the scene, whose operation reduces the imaginary through radical symbolization; the semblant is thus presented as intertwined with the symbolic to the point of being out of the sense of language, which characterizes, once again, the real (Mello, 2014). The latter would not be out of the scene, but he presents himself incessantly on the scene, being the engine of artistic production. The real is on the scene, as it stages the enigmatic point of creation. The work offers a subterfuge for the real, at the same time that it is the real that re-presents itself in the scene, and only exists through it.

The scenic assemblies analysed in this study establish two important relationships. In the first, the interaction between artists and spectators, which breaks with the expectation of a certain passivity of the audience, placed with the body to be affected by the scenic composition. The second concerns the artist and his art, purposely interrupted by the third – spectator – who enters the scene. The three elements of the composition, artist-spectator-art, are articulated by a common interest: to make memory with the ballasts of the socio-political crossings of dictatorial regimes.

The titles of the works present culminating points in relation to reality: silence and the inexistence of terms in language that can offer meanings to the experience. Thus, we see *Sin título* (2004) and *Memorial de Silêncios e Margaridas* (2010), in which the former does not name and the latter is silent. Faced with the emptiness of meaning to violence, memory is taken over by the body, with the body, making a scene bypassing the untransmissible experience of dictatorships.

In the field of art, the marks of dictatorships are stamped on walls, objects, scenic spaces, elevating to a singular experience what is lived in collectivity. Memory would not be reduced to the recollection of factual events, but is equivalent to recalling, that is, remembering without memory the experience lived

or not. From Freud (1914/2022), remembering as a psychic effect refers to an experience prior to the lived one, which emerges without the subject's awareness. and its repetition corresponds to an attempt to make sense of it. The real returns in experience without producing remembrance, experienced as repetition. The possible treatment of the scenic experience is, precisely, to put the real on stage; it is not equivalent to denying, but to place it as an effect of production and invention in constant movement, so as not to cease the possible meanings of the experience of the encounter of subjectivity with the real.

Conclusions

The contemporary scene, in its multiplicity of proposals, has made it possible for spectators to have contact with different ways of perceiving the performance. Many of them, creating frictions and tensions in the so-called scenic illusion. The belief in a 'truth' becomes a game pact. Anne Bogart, in this sense, proposes eroticism as a perspective for creators. For her, it is always necessary to think of a scene that promotes an erotic act with the spectator, that awakens their desire to follow the game and become an accomplice in it.

In this sense, the spectators assume new perspectives of relating to the work, and in the works presented here it is also a practice of remembrance, that is, the erotic act begins to be exercised by the evocation of absences and their relations with the historical present. An invitation to the viewer to reflect together dark times that are still present .

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