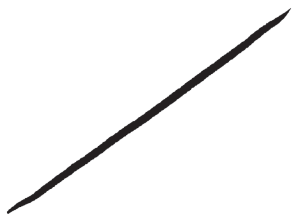


REVERSING THE ORDER AND
COMMANDS OF HISTORY. **THE WORK OF
THE INDEPENDENT MEXICAN THEATRE
COMPANY *PUNTOS SUSPENSIVOS*
*TEATRO***. RESEARCH AND CREATION ON
THE STUDENT MOVEMENT OF 1968 AND
THE ESTIGMATIZATION
AS STATE STRATEGY

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Abstract: Through rigorous, sustained research, Puntos Suspensivos Teatro—an independent Mexican theatre company of which I am a playwright—has challenged the dominant historical narrative about one of the leaders of the 1968 Student Movement: Sócrates Campos Lemus, my father. The stigmatisation of people involved in social struggles has often been a Mexican state strategy to silence key figures, especially before and during the “dirty war”. In response to narratives that silence and stigmatise victims, theatre—and art—can rescue these diverse stories from the rubble and make them heard. This text is a first-person account of how theatre, supported by anthropology, history, and philosophy, and through the interdisciplinary approach I call comprehensive research—a kind of phenomenological archaeology rooted in the sensuous and the loving—can confront calculated discrediting as the most effective form of censorship: that which does not seem to be censorship but legitimises itself beyond question. Theatre has enabled me to create devices—aesthetic, ethical, and poetic strategies—to repair (in) the world. This quest defines my current artistic and research practice and serves as the basis for the work by Puntos Suspensivos Teatro.

Keywords: Hegemonic history, stigmatization, theatre, artilugio, historiography, memory, territory.

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Introduction

I have grown up with my father’s story, not because it belongs to me but because stigma has a “tendency to spread from the stigmatized individual to his closest relationships” (Goffman, 2006, p. 44). Stigma tends to persist and mark the following generations, whose members are directly or indirectly attributed the same characteristics that served to discredit in the first place, or some other conditions attributable to those who form part of the close bonds of the one who is stigmatized. In other words: being a relative of, or being friends with, a person who bears social discredit makes you discreditable; you are so by virtue of your bonds with the one who is discredited, and it does not matter, moreover, whether what discredits is true information or not.

Although from my earliest years I learned that my father’s name set off extreme reactions—some of admiration and others of open rejection—it was while I was studying for my Bachelor’s Degree in Ethnology at the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia that I learned that some people saw me as a kind of moral extension of my father, for better and for worse... “She can’t be trusted; treachery is something you take in with your mother’s milk”: one of my

classmates said it, and he was referring to me; the comment was made in front of friends of mine who told me about it, although only one of them responded in my defense forcefully and without hiding his indignation.

My father was the representative of the Escuela Superior de Economía of the Instituto Politécnico Nacional before the Consejo Nacional de Huelga (National Strike Council) of the 1968 student movement in México. On October 2 of that year, like most of the representatives, he was detained in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Tlatelolco; like everyone, he was beaten, tortured, and imprisoned, exiled and amnestied, but in addition he was stigmatized: Sócrates Campos Lemus, according to the best-known version of the events, had betrayed his comrades and his convictions. My father's version, of course, was not that one.

For more than fifty-two years my father wrote several books, gave interviews to every medium and person who asked him for one, and testified when summoned by the Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado (FEMOSPP, Special Prosecutor's Office for Social and Political Movements of the Past) created in 2001; and I am sure he would likewise have provided without any problem the information requested of him by the Mecanismo para la Verdad y el Esclarecimiento Histórico (Mechanism for Truth and Historical Clarification) constituted in 2021, but he died without this happening. From 1968 until his death, my father always maintained the version of events that I heard at home from the time I was a girl, from which it was concluded that accusing him of treason was a State strategy that, moreover, has been repeated every time social movements emerge, in order to break them.

Revictimization is a concept that in México we began to become familiar with only recently; it is no surprise, then, that the State has been able—and is still able—to discredit, by means of rumors and unproven sayings, without any investigative rigor, those whom it considers, for various reasons, to be people of special importance or dangerousness within social struggles: “slander, and something always sticks”; the lie that “if it does not stain, it smudges”—sayings that sustain this part of an idiosyncrasy that allows history to be constructed to suit itself, “*haiga sido como haiga sido*” (however it may have been).

Method

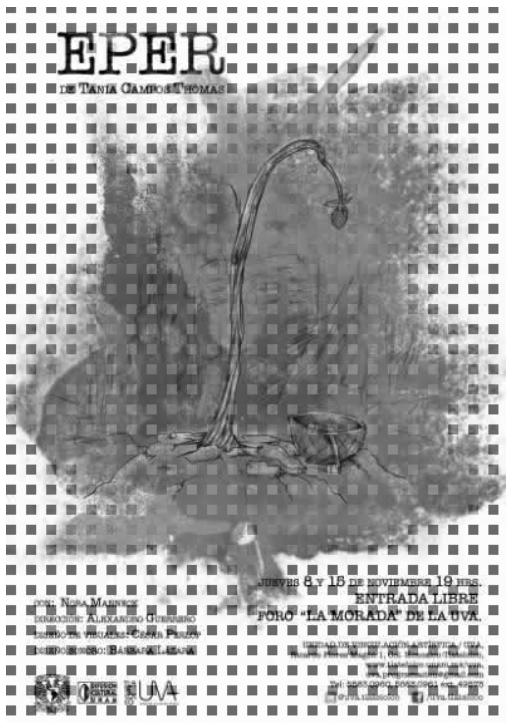
It is not that I did not trust what my family said, but confronting a story—a single one, repeated over and over—requires solid foundations. In 2011 Puntos Suspensivos Teatro, the company of which I am a part of as a researcher and playwright, set out to carry out an exhaustive investigation into the 1968 student movement in México and its narratives, specifically with respect to the versions

and people silenced within them. To date, our research work has resulted in six staged proposals on the subject: *Trilogía del 68* (*Eper*, *No corran, es una provocación*, *Elena: la censura de los buitres*), *Documento Elena*, *Vivir de Paz, morir en Revueltas* and *Como Elena, en París*; in addition, a monologue whose character is José Revueltas is in process.

In May 2012 we presented, at a festival in Cananea, Sonora, a preview performance of *Eper*, a play about my mother's story, but one that already raises the need to confront the story that was fabricated about my father. *Eper* is the first work of what later became *Trilogía del 68*. The decision of the director of the company and of the play, Alexandro Guerrero, was that *Eper* would premiere at the Foro La Morada, belonging to the Unidad de Vinculación Artística (UVA) of the Centro Cultural Universitario Tlatelolco of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, located in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, site of the massacre of October 2 and where my father was detained, a place to which, incidentally, he had not returned until the day of the premiere.

It should be said that the UVA was at that time under the direction of that university classmate who claimed that I was not trustworthy because I

had inherited the condition of betraying. It was a coincidence; we did not know it when it was decided that this would be the site of the premiere, and when we found out, we directed the request, as is proper, to the person it concerned—that is, to him—; we received no response and, for that reason, we went directly to the director of the CCU Tlatelolco, who scheduled us with openness. We invited the classmate: I would have liked him to hear in that play the phrase he uttered and that tormented me for a long time, since not only did I not forget it but it inevitably ended up in the first theatrical text I have written, and also in the first in which I spoke of this story; he did not attend. *Eper* is a monologue that the maestra Nora Manneck performed from 2012 to



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2016. Later, the performer was Paola Medina. There has been interest in other spaces, such as the Foro La Gata, in Puerto Vallarta, where it is presented on October 2 as a staged reading, no longer with the involvement of our company, though with our consent.

Appealing to the Situationist proposal of psychogeography has been a characteristic hallmark of the artistic explorations of Puntos Suspensivos Teatro; we try to ensure that at least the premiere takes place in a location related, if possible directly, to the events we speak about; a way of revisiting not only the history but the territory on which it is sustained. We conceive of territory as a *signified place* on the basis of the bonds that are produced and reproduced within it, therefore inseparable from the identities that are built on the basis of it and that are traversed by history (Llanos-Hernández, 2010). In other words, territory is a social construction, the product of a determinate historical society, but above all it is the result of the collective identity that signifies (and resignifies) it. Territory is then, as Marc Augé (1992) would say, a place of identity, therefore relational and historical.

What determines territory are the bonds established over time by the subjects who relate there to one another and to the space in which they find themselves, that is, to the territory itself. In this sense, historiography has been a necessary tool for the intervention of meaning that we have proposed by means of theatre, since it is not a matter of the geographic place but of the one that is inhabited (López Limón, 2017) and, therefore, susceptible of being signified as many times as necessary. We thus appeal to one of the theses of Walter Benjamin (2005) to support ourselves in the idea that if we want to recover the stories from among the rubble, we will have to go and dig them out there where the monuments of the hegemony that has buried them have stood. In the face of the tragedies of history, not forgetting must be accompanied by a review of that which is to be remembered, a nodal axis of the research and artistic work of Puntos Suspensivos Teatro.

After its premiere, *Eper* was presented in very diverse places, among them the Sala Julián Carrillo of Radio UNAM, the foro Un Teatro Alternativa Escénica, the then Teatro Carlos Lazo of the Facultad de Arquitectura of UNAM, and the Teatro Terry of Cienfuegos, Cuba, within the framework of the Tercer Festival del Monólogo Latinoamericano; in 2019 the restaging was in the charge of the actress Paola Medina, within the season of *Trilogía del 68* at the Teatro El Granero Xavier Rojas of the Centro Cultural del Bosque of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura (INBAL). From the first time it was presented, *Eper* brought for me an astonishing discovery: theatre had managed to make part of a version—told many times without its really being paid attention to—be heard. What my father said was used to legitimize, each October, what seemed to be the unofficial history but which has in fact been the most official

of all. The performances of *Eper* gave rise to comments and reviews in which, for the first time, doubt was entertained: perhaps the history of the 1968 student movement in México had not been as we were told, perhaps there were other voices to be heard. I then understood what Julio Amador Bech (2019) points out when analyzing the position of Gadamer, for whom the primordial meaning of the work of art is to reveal truths that cannot be expressed in any other way.

This was the beginning of a greater investigative effort: we could not allow ourselves to narrate this story as if it were the only one and disparaging the rest; it was not a matter of reproducing the strivings of imposition, but of gathering loving comprehension; to understand, says Gadamer (1999), is always to understand (oneself), starting from letting oneself be affected and renouncing objectivity as a synonym of truth. The next station on this journey was a second theatrical piece: *No corran, es una provocación*, this time entirely devoted to recounting what happened to my father and, more than anything else, to doing so without shying away from the questions; all the questions were answered: was he a policeman? Did he work for the sinister Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS)? Why did one of his comrades say that he informed on him? why did others claim

he was a provocateur? Why did he not defend himself against the accusations? This work was also known to my father: he attended two of the performances, the first at the Foro Carretera 45, in the Colonia Obrera, and another at the Teatro El Granero of the Centro Cultural del Bosque; in both seasons the direction was by Alexandro Guerrero, the lighting and scenic space by Lydia Margules, and on stage were Antonio Zúñiga, Francesca Guillén, and César René Pérez. The premiere of this work was not held in the place we would have decided on, were it not that we knew my father would flatly refuse to return to Lecumberri; it was his story, and the idea of staging it where it was not possible for him to be did not fit.

The research for *No corran, es una provocación* was not limited to the information provided by my father and my mother, nor to the review of their



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books and the interviews they gave on the subject: we also read the books written by other student representatives and listened attentively to their statements in the media. In addition, we incorporated the analysis of other writings that proved to be of great importance for understanding the context of the student movement and the specific conditions of the imprisonment: *La violencia de Estado en México antes y después de 1968*, by Carlos Montemayor (2010), and *México 68: Juventud y revolución*, by José Revueltas (1978), were fundamental texts that, moreover, allowed us to trust that our search was on the right track, since in both, the versions of what happened with the 1968 student movement and what occurred afterwards coincide with what my father maintained for decades each time he was questioned. Also of importance was *El asesinato de Elena Garro*, by Patricia Rosas Lopátegui, in the edition by the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León.

Throughout the entire process, which continues, we have been updating our sources as new books, films, and plays on the subject appear. We have also taken a clear and firm position when one of the artistic proposals dealing with the subject crosses ethical limits and falls into the revictimization of my family precisely for lack of historiographic and documentary, academic, or artistic research. There is no neutral position because we do not believe in it; we even consider that art has a political dimension that Puntos Suspensivos Teatro assumes as part of artistic creation, relating it directly to the revisiting and critical review of the History that is crowned with a capital letter, disparaging all those narrations that contradict it; of course, the recovery and analysis of the testimonies, of the memory, that have been systematically silenced and delegitimized are of the greatest interest to our company.

Elena, la censura de los buitres is the third work of *Trilogía del 68*, the result of having discovered (as part of the research for the second work) that Elena Garro (2003) had written her testimony about what happened to her in 1968 in a dramaturgical document called *Sócrates y los gatos*. This text was censored to the point of being considered the author's "ravings" and, under that lamentable argument, was not staged until 2016, when Puntos Suspensivos



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Teatro did a staged reading at the Castillo de Chapultepec, directed by Alexandro Guerrero and in which Margarita Sáenz, Evangelina Martínez, Mercedes Olea, Paula Watson, Héctor Holten, Paola Medina, Jyasú Torruco, Sebastián Bonilla, and the musician Ares Israel Hernández participated. Elena Garro's version was unavoidable in our search because she is implicated in that story as a result of the declaration that my father was forced to make before the media at a press conference convened for that purpose at Military Camp number 1; she is accused of being the link between a politician of the time named Carlos Madrazo and the students (among them my father) to finance the movement, something that has been proven untrue. After that, my father was locked up in Lecumberri; shortly afterward Elena went into exile in France, and two years later the plane in which Madrazo was traveling crashed.

Elena, la censura de los buitres was not premiered, since we decided that the text would be part of a scenic device called *Documento Elena*, after, in 2020, a large quantity of documents—until then in the custody of the Secretaría de Gobernación—were released by presidential decree concerning the so-called dirty war, which includes 1968. At the Archivo General de la Nación we were able to recover the report of the DFS policeman assigned to surveil my father, within which there is a description of the declaration before the media of which, until that year, no record was known other than the resulting press notes; there is not even video or audio of this declaration, despite the fact that it was televised and that photographs do exist. We also found my father's formal statement, obtained under torture, in which no accusation whatsoever against Elena Garro appears. My father died in 2021 without knowing *Documento Elena*, although he was able to read the text of *Elena, la censura de los buitres*.

We took up part of the text of the work and accompanied it with a lecture given by me, as an academic and as Sócrates's daughter, which is integrated into the scene. *Documento Elena* was premiered in 2023 at the Foro de la Biblioteca de México, with the maestra Sandra Félix as the actress. With his passing, all that remains from my father's story is what I consider to be my own, which is why we decided that we would present *Documento Elena* at Lecumberri as well, on that occasion with the performance of Francesca Guillén and César René Pérez, and again with the direction of Alexandro Guerrero. In what was once the central courtyard of the "Palacio Negro" we told the story in a different way, we narrated the research carried out, we showed the documents found in the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), right there where theatre opened the door for us to say what otherwise could not be said¹.

1 The AGN currently occupies the aforementioned Palacio de Lecumberri, which at the time functioned as a prison.



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If with the first work my father's story was heard, with *Documento Elena* we got rid of the commands and disrupted it, we disordered it to the point of achieving the recognition of the truth that until then had been denied to my father and to my family; theatre as a contrivance (artilugio) that reverses the order and the commands of history is the thesis on which, at Puntos Suspensivos, we continue to investigate and produce. The research has been rigorous and long-term, and so we gathered information that goes beyond my father's story, and we have taken on the task of writing other works that are a kind of

counterpart to *Trilogía del 68: Vivir de Paz, morir en Revueltas* (on the relationship between Octavio Paz and José Revueltas), which premiered at the Théâtre de l'Opprimé on November 20, 2024, and was presented in 2025 at the Teatro de las Artes of the Centro Nacional de las Artes (CENART), with the performance and direction of Alexandro Guerrero and the participation of Alain Ramírez (it also had a brief run at the Teatro de La Rendija in Mérida, Yucatán), and *Como Elena, en París*, which premiered in February 2026 at the Théâtre de l'Opprimé in Paris, with the direction of Alexandro Guerrero and the participation of Brontis Jodorowsky, Marisa Rubio, and Alain Ramírez. As mentioned, at this moment we are in the process of a third related work, a monologue about José Revueltas.

Results

Unlike the device (dispositivo) conceived as a “war machine” (Islas, 2014), the artilugio is an ethical event that appeals to love, not as an emotion but as a constitutive part of the human (see Berlanga, 2022). The artilugio is also, perhaps above all, an event that seeks to achieve a change in the framework through which we perceive the world and relate to it (Zizek, 2014). In this sense, the artilugio

fosters encounter and complicity in the task of *repairing (in) the world* or, as Tim Ingold (2021) would say, “corresponding” with it, one of the causes that currently move my work as a researcher, teacher, and artist. In the theatrical sphere, and in the scenic realm in general, the work of Puntos Suspensivos Teatro follows the route of creating artilugios that profane the device (dispositivo) that is official, hegemonic history.

I understand artilugio as an antihegemonic poetic device. The poetic in the sense of making (action, even praxis) that fulfills the function of art as Alain Badiou (2003) conceives it: to give visibility to that which, for the Empire (the world capitalist order in the contemporary State), has no existence. Undoubtedly, hegemonic history increasingly attests to processes of fascistization that require urgent editing, on the basis of the conviction in the possibility of a new world, a declaration that art must make according to Badiou (2009). An artilugio thus conceived is constructed with the same objective as the avant-garde utopia—taken up by different artists at various moments—of expanding art into life in order to transform it. The condition of the poetic, says José A. Sánchez (2017), is transformation, but also the making that cannot be delegated and that is always shared.

Artilugios, in their condition as poetic and antihegemonic, are created by dislodging the existing devices; they disorder, they modify the conditions of enunciation in order to make visible what was not, they selectively sabotage, they parasitize contexts, they review what is claimed to require no further review, they search and they find. If these tactics manage to move from entertainment to the transformative immersive experience (Ingold, 2015), to affection (Gadamer, 1999), the profanation of the hegemonic device will have been achieved (José A. Sánchez, 2016). *Documento Elena*, the artilugio resulting from the research-creation process that has occupied Puntos Suspensivos Teatro for more than a decade, has managed to reverse the order and the commands—in this case of history—allowing memory to peer out from among its rubble. With and through the scenic art, in the places of memory (Cortés, 2001), territorializing them, we intervene in the reiterated, suspiciously stubborn narration about a series of stigmatizing events that have not infrequently also been reproduced by means of theatre—a theatre that revictimizes, that sustains the hegemonic narrative, that lacks research, ethics, even aesthetics.

From all of this, today we have a result even more astonishing than the listening—previously systematically denied—to the unspeakable that staging *Eper* and persisting with *No corran, es una provocación* gave us: through *Documento Elena*, after the performance at the Archivo General de la Nación, in what was formerly the courtyard of the terrible “Palacio Negro” where my father was imprisoned

for almost three years, I was invited to be a witness to the Declaration as a Site of Memory of the Torreón Norte of Lecumberri. This invitation and the signing of the document that endorses it recognize me as an indirect victim (and my father as a direct victim) of the State, owing to the revictimization and stigmatization of my family, of my father specifically. It was there, in that place, where the political prisoners who passed through the prison and the infamy were held, since it was also there that a State strategy was forged that silenced voices important for understanding what happened in 1968 and throughout the period of the dirty war. History is not one, nor is it static, which is why it is important to revisit it from time to time in order to recover what was said by those who were not heard. For that task, Puntos Suspensivos Teatro is profoundly interested in the research and creation of artilugios in defiance, capable of dismantling devices of control from the arts and other disciplines. We consider that these interventions, lovingly in correspondence with the world, are more urgent than ever in the face of the evident fascistization; as a company we assume the ethical and aesthetic responsibility of responding to it from our places of enunciation, thought, and action.



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