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# Brazilian Musical Theatre: A History of Anthropophagic Rituals

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English translation, Neil CHARLTON

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## Abstract

Brazilian musical theatre has a historical importance in the culture of Brazil. It is responsible for both initiating the professionalisation of Brazilian theatre and for firmly establishing the *música popular brasileira* (Brazilian Popular Music, MPB), for example. However, the main genres of Brazilian musical theatre – the revue or musical political theatre – have their origins abroad, with the *revue de fin d'année* and Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre theory. These elements from European culture were imported and assimilated to later establish an authentic form insofar as it adapted to its audience and its political and social context. In order to identify and explain such a phenomenon, this article will use the concept of anthropophagy introduced in the "Manifesto antropófago" written by Oswald de Andrade in 1928 because of its historical application in the most diverse genres and artistic forms. By analysing the object of research with a theory that seeks to separate from the colonial roots and recover the Amerindian ritual, this study mainly seeks to subvert the prevailing habit of classifying and researching Brazilian artistic productions with models and theories created from and towards European or American models.

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**Keywords:** Brazilian musical theatre, musical theatre, Brazilian theatre, Latin American theatre, theatre, anthropophagy, epic theatre, cultural studies, cultural anthropology, decolonisation

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## Brazilian Musical Theatre: A History of Anthropophagic Rituals

Culture and popular art in Brazil owe a great deal to Brazilian musical theatre. An example would be the humour and satire of the revue, with sketches that feature stock characters who are common in the daily life of the country, still present on very popular Brazilian TV comedy shows. And also the songs of political theatre, which revived genres from the popular musical repertoire of the country and helped establish the most important and expressive genre created in Brazil: the *música popular brasileira* (MPB).

However, until the early 19th century, there was no national drama or playwriting. At most, there were professional foreign companies which, with the exception of those from Portugal, performed plays in a language other than Brazilian portuguese. In this 19th-century context, specifically in the last quarter of the century, the revue became popular in Brazil.

After years overlooked by critics, the revue is now acknowledged as a key genre for understanding the history of theatre in Brazil (Paiva, 1991), not only because it initiated the professionalisation of Brazilian theatre (Veneziano, 2013a) but also because it was an extraordinarily popular genre in its time, influencing the subsequent musical theatre movements in the country, and revealing one of the most important names in Brazilian playwriting, Artur Azevedo (Faria, 2017).

The genre, however, did not emerge there, as its original name indicates: *revue de fin d'année*. The *revue* emerged in France in the 18th century and, from the 1820s, became popular throughout Europe (Paiva, 1991). In Brazil, it achieved great popularity in the late 19th century (Brito, 2013) when the genre was explored by playwrights, composers and impresarios who ingeniously added original elements from Brazilian popular culture to the text and performance, such as songs of the *maxixe*<sup>1</sup> genre or the theme of the *carnaval*,<sup>2</sup> for instance.

1. Musical genre whose roots lie in the urban dance that emerged in Rio de Janeiro around 1870 and developed when the polka, a musical genre of European origin, began to be played by popular musicians on the flute, classical guitar and ophicleide (Albin, 2006).

2. One of the most popular festivals in Brazil, held on the three days before Lent.

The formation of political theatre, a genre that emerged from the 1960s and 1970s, one of the most productive periods in the history of theatre in Brazil, took place in the same way. This Brazilian theatre movement also received a European influence: German epic theatre (Marques, 2014). The ideas perfected by Bertolt Brecht throughout his experience as a director and playwright aimed to construct a theatrical form that better reflected his world view. By conceiving epic theatre, Brecht sought to introduce not only interpersonal relations — the foundation of Aristotelian drama — but also the determining social factors of these relations, as well as to incorporate a didactic feature in the plays, enlightening the audience about the issues of society and getting them to perform a transformative action. The first writings by and about Brecht reached Brazil in the 1960s (Rosenfeld, 2008). The playwrights of the period needed to express the problems of the working class and found in epic theatre, like Brecht, a way of portraying the historical processes underpinning these problems. Moreover, with the 1964 coup, they needed a didactic theatre to raise awareness among the audience and incite them to resistance (Betti, 2013).

Brecht's theatre, once in Brazil, added elements alien to epic theatre but common in the popular culture of the country to attract spectators and adapt to the context of political repression. The recovery of the *compère*<sup>3</sup> character of the revue — present years earlier in Brazilian theatres — and popular Brazilian music — such as the *samba*<sup>4</sup> — are examples of the changes to the text and the *mise en scène* of epic inspiration in Brazil.

This common history between the forms adopted by Brazilian musical theatre since its beginnings in the 19th century enables us to establish a parallel with the concept of anthropophagy, proposed by Oswald de Andrade in his “Manifesto antropófago” published in 1928. Within the movement of Brazilian modernism in the visual arts and literature — which sought to define a national identity — and with the aim of subverting a cultural process marked by Portuguese colonisation, Andrade wrote an ironic manifesto for the movement against the negative stereotype that the foreign world had of Amerindians as cannibals.<sup>5</sup> In the anthropophagic rite of the Tupinambá,<sup>6</sup> the flesh of the prisoner of war is eaten as revenge for the death of their people at the hands of the enemy, thereby assimilating their power, knowledge and qualities (Staden, 2011). In a positive and innovative vision, Andrade compares the anthropophagic ritual of the Amerindians with Brazilians consuming/swallowing foreign culture and ideas. Hence, the qualities of the culture of another country are assimilated, and genuinely national arts are produced in Brazil without copying or imitating others (Andrade, 1928). Therefore, anthropophagy, as proposed by Oswald, is the act of assimilating

3. In short, the *compère* has the function of narrator as well as connecting the sections of the piece.

4. Musical genre which, like the *maxixe*, began with the urban dance in Rio de Janeiro. It is the result of the fusion of European melody and harmony with Afro-Brazilian rhythm (Severiano; Mello, 1997).

5. In fact, name *cannibal* given by the colonisers to the Amerindians is erroneous, as anthropophagy is a ritual rather than a food habit.

6. People native from America who lived on the coast of Brazil until the 17th century (Michaelis, 2014).

foreign cultural production (in Brazil, most frequently European) and giving it a Brazilian character.

Although it is not a theory specific to theatre, anthropophagy can provide many theoretical achievements for this study. We should bear in mind, above all, that the term was used to justify the aesthetic decisions by Brazilian artists such as the theatre director José Celso Martinez Corrêa, the MPB musician and composer Caetano Veloso and the filmmaker and exponent of the Cinema Novo Joaquim Pedro de Andrade (Martinez Corrêa, 1998; Veloso, 2017; Andrade, 1969). Moreover, in his “Manifesto antropófago”, Oswald mixes elements from literature, the arts, history, psychology and anthropology, among others (Azevedo, 2016).

As Oswald de Andrade’s concept of cultural anthropophagy is a recognised tool to understand the formation of Brazilian culture, in this article we will use it to analyse the history of Brazilian musical theatre. Consequently, the approach will be based on how European culture was assimilated in the Brazilian theatre production, represented by the *revue de fin d’année* (from the French context) and the theory and aesthetic of Brecht’s epic theatre (in this case, of German origin). We have chosen these two foreign cultural elements because their respective Brazilian forms — the *revista carnavalesca* and the *sistema coringa* — have great cultural importance, were (and still are) influential throughout the country, and are more widely studied in comparison to other productions of Brazilian musical theatre. The task of compiling a history of musical theatre that includes all the forms in the country becomes complex because of its continental dimensions and the difficulty of preserving its sources and cultural assets. The historiography prepared for this study reveals that the reference books and articles produced in the last decade, which try to outline a history of Brazilian musical theatre, focus their research on the production in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (Brito, 2013; Veneziano, 2013b; Marques, 2014). Finally, the use of cultural anthropophagy as a tool of analysis becomes necessary to break the habit of research on Brazilian culture depending on foreign models and theories — particularly, European and American — to explain and classify artistic production in Brazil.

### ***Revista carnavalesca***

In the second half of the 19th century, the first ideas of the *belle époque* arrived in Brazil and began influencing the tastes of the upper class of Rio de Janeiro. All the cultural goods and assets arriving from France were highly regarded, including the theatre genres in fashion there: the operas, the *café-concert* and the operettas (Paiva, 1991). The pieces were always performed in the original language, usually by foreign companies.

In the same period, an almost century-old genre established itself in Europe. The *revue de fin d’année*, which mixed vaudeville, music hall and the variety show with elements of the *auto pastoril*, emerged in France in 1728 with the show *Revue des Théâtres* (Paiva, 1991). In sections connected by a weak narrative thread, this genre explored the main and most diverse

political, artistic and social events from the previous year (Brito, 2013). Comedy sketches and musical numbers alternated, both replete with political satire and humour, key elements of the *revue*.

Like any French innovation of the period, the *revue de fin d'année* soon established itself in Brazil. *As Surpresas do Sr. José da Piedade* was the first revue in Brazil, in 1859. It is unknown how Justino de Figueiredo Novais, its author, became acquainted with the Parisian *revue* (Paiva, 1991) but the genre, however, did not flourish with his piece.

For almost twenty years after the premiere of the first revue, neither the Brazilian creators nor the audience experienced the authentic *revue de fin d'année*, and the few existing writers of revues based them on probably scarce and poor information to produce their pieces. In contrast to what had happened with the previous genres in Brazil — as in the operettas —, the *revista de ano* did not have a “trial period” in producing parodies and stagings of the original pieces before the creation of new texts by Brazilian authors (Brito, 2013). The playwright of the period, Artur Azevedo, had to see hit revues in Europe (more specifically, in Madrid and Paris) to come up with the right formula to make the genre a success in Brazil.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, in 1884 Azevedo and Moreira Sampaio premiered the *revista de ano*, which for the first time was a success among the Brazilian audience: *O Mandarim*. In the context of the Chinese immigration to Brazil, the piece portrays a mandarin visiting Rio de Janeiro to check whether it is the right place for his compatriots. Throughout the story, the character “experiences” the main events of the year 1883 in Brazil (Azevedo and Sampaio, 1985). In general, it is a piece with varied national themes and with a strong patriotic character — the audience left the theatre thrilled after having laughed at the political caricatures and the nationalistic feeling conveyed by the final apotheosis about the victory in the Paraguayan War (Paiva, 1991).

As it is a genre based on political criticism and on the retrospective of important events of the last year, the Brazilian playwrights of the *revista de ano* soon realised the need to deal with common and daily themes for their audience. Azevedo and Sampaio applied this premise in their pieces, and later other writers followed them. From the outset, revue theatre in Brazil dealt with national affairs and issues from Brazilian daily life.

Despite this change, the genre continued to be a mirror of the French model. Apart from its theme, the other elements of the genre were copied from the formula of the *revue*, even the musical style. Very few records of the songs and scores from the early decades of Brazilian revue theatre survived. What we know, however, enables us to say that the main composers of these pieces were foreigners or their descendants living in Brazil (Paiva, 1991). They often mixed their original compositions with songs written for other theatre genres — operettas and operas, for example — by reputed foreign composers. This way of using the songs on stage continued for over ten years after the consolidation of the revue in Brazil.

7. Researchers on this theme almost unanimously agree that this is the reason the revue had not been successful in previous attempts (Brito, 2013; Faria, 2017; Paiva, 1991; Seidl, 1937), mainly because Azevedo himself before travelling to Europe had staged a revue that had failed.

In 1897, however, playwrights, composers and impresarios discovered the true potential of songs in this musical genre that was beginning to be popular. The song “O Gaúcho”, written by Chiquinha Gonzaga for the operetta<sup>8</sup> *Zizinha Maxixe* from that year, became an immediate success, particularly because it introduced a new type of dance called *corta-jaca*, which spread throughout Rio de Janeiro (Albin, 2006). It was clear that prioritising already existing songs, imported from foreign pieces, undermined the opportunity of Brazilian composers promoting their music in theatre.

For this reason, according to the researcher Veneziano (2013b), the relation of the revue with Brazilian music became inevitable and inseparable. Music and text — the latter being the basis of the genre with political satire, comedy and the retrospective of the previous year — are finally equally important. Theatre, in a time without radio or records, took on the function of a platform to introduce new songs, and their success depended on how they were received by the theatre audience.

This process of promoting Brazilian compositions, which began in 1897, was definitively established with the song “Vem Cá Mulata”. Despite having been composed in 1902 by Arquimedes de Oliveira and with lyrics by Bastos Tigre, it was only successful once it was included in the revue *Maxixe* in 1906 (Veneziano, 2013b).<sup>9</sup> Thereafter, the songs featured in revues usually became very popular. Consequently, a new form and structure was developed in the genre in Brazil, closely linked to Brazilian popular song.

Earlier, however, another piece had already changed the form of doing revue theatre in the country. As previously mentioned, the Brazilian theatres of the time performed in the language of the original text, mostly foreign. Even if it was a parody of European operettas — frequent in the period — or an original piece written by a Brazilian playwright, it was performed in Portuguese but with a Portuguese accent (Paiva, 1991; Betti, 2013).

The reasons were varied. The strong presence of Portuguese people and first-generation descendants in the Rio de Janeiro upper class helped maintain this characteristic (Paiva, 1991). We should also remember that the country declared political independence from its coloniser Portugal in the 19th century, which did not mean independence in other fields, particularly in cultural aspects rooted in Brazilian society.

The main reason was still the aforementioned appreciation of everything from Europe — customs, culture, goods — by the Brazilian elite and intellectuals. Therefore, these two classes (who in this period almost always mixed) imposed as a rule their desire to make culture and Brazilian society a mirror of Europe’s (Sudare, 2018). They argued that Brazilian theatre was dead as it was very distant and did not reflect what was in vogue in the Old Continent.

8. The companies that performed the revues were the same that performed *burletas*, operettas, and so on. Therefore, usually the novelties and adaptations introduced in the revue, for example, influenced the *burletas* and the operettas, and vice versa.

9. Veneziano (2013b) attributes the composition of “Vem Cá Mulata” to Costa Júnior in 1906. The researcher was wrong: the song was, actually, composed in 1902 by Arquimedes de Oliveira and with lyrics by Bastos Tigre (Severiano and Mello, 1997). The fact is that the revue *Maxixe* was written by Bastos Tigre. Therefore, it seems reasonable that Bastos used that old composition of his own that was still unknown for his new piece. Costa Júnior was the orchestrator or arranger of the score.

Revue theatre, without great literary pretensions, was not the best example of representation of the valued European culture. However, the overall perception was not that Brazilian theatre was dead. For instance, in the early 20th century, the revue was an audience and box office success hitherto unseen in the history of the country, and the extensive theatre production was valued by audiences (Reis and Marques, 2013; Sudare, 2018).

Consequently, it is not surprising that *Forrobodó*, a *burleta* from 1912, is one of the most successful theatre pieces of the period. With songs by Chiquinha Gonzaga — which became popular throughout Brazil (Paiva, 1991) — and script by Carlos Bettencourt and Luiz Peixoto, the plot is set in a region of Rio de Janeiro, which, with the modernist reforms, was home to a poor population expelled from the centre (Peixoto and Bettencourt, 1961). Placing ordinary people from the city centre stage — something which had not been done before in any other theatre genre — was crucial to please the audience: *Forrobodó* had 1,500 consecutive performances in a period when companies strove to pass 100 performances (Reis and Marques, 2013; Paiva, 1991).

As if the unprecedented success in the framework of musicals in Brazil was not enough, the *burleta* *Forrobodó* had a bigger impact on Brazilian theatre in general. To depict the most common characters of Rio de Janeiro, the playwrights also decided to include popular language and, mainly, the Brazilian accent (Reis and Marques, 2013). Despite being dismissed by the critics, intellectuals and elite, the audience that attended this type of theatre liked it: for the first time the language of the country was heard as it was spoken in daily life on the Brazilian stage.

Thereafter, theatre shows, particularly in the musical genre, began to include popular language following the creative choice made in *Forrobodó*. The revues, above all, adapted to this new approach and soon all of them were performed in Brazilian Portuguese (Veneziano, 2013b).

However, the format of the *revista de ano* continued to be the same as that of the *revue de fin d'année*. The *revista de ano*, conceived according to the French model when it became established in Brazil, had the following structure: a prologue (or opening scene), songs to introduce the characters, three acts with scenes alternating text and music, and, finally, the apotheosis at the end of each act (Veneziano, 2013b). The genre was considered seasonal: the *revista de ano* was usually premiered at the end or start of a year. A very weak narrative line connects the scenes to a central plot, as the script must introduce several events that are not necessarily interconnected. For this reason, the revue is, in essence, fragmented. To avoid dispersion and the audience's confusion, the character common to all revues — called *compère* — plays the function of presenter and commentator, and he is the link between the scenes (Faria, 2017). To illustrate this, let's take as an example the typical plot of a revue: the piece begins with a pursuit in which the main characters are involved. Driven by this action, they perform scenes that criticise, depict or mention the main events of the previous year (Veneziano, 2013b).

Over almost half a century, however, each element of this structure was modified or removed, new characteristics were added and, in the 1920s, the theme of the carnival dominated in Brazilian theatres: the *revista*

*carnavalesca* was then established. (Veneziano, 2013a). Considered today as the most popular festival in the country and the most representative of Brazilian culture, the carnival emerged in the mid-19th century out of the desire of the middle class to make their own version of the *entrudo*<sup>10</sup> held by the low classes and slaves (Albin, 2006).

The formation of the *revistas carnavalescas* is closely linked to the popularisation of the carnival. Both developed together and were interdependent to prove its success among the Rio de Janeiro population. The revues launched the songs that would soon become the hit of that year's carnival. As previously mentioned, the promotion of the Brazilian musical song had been linked to a new form and structure of the revue genre in Brazil in a period prior to the emergence of radio and records. This new form and structure was the *revista carnavalesca*.

The theme of the carnival and the first manifestation of the *revista carnavalesca* were introduced in theatre with the last piece by Artur Azevedo before he died: *O Cordão*, in 1908, while the custom of songs about carnival began with Chiquinha Gonzaga, who composed the first march for the festival in 1899 (Albin, 2006). As can be seen, the main artists involved in the *teatro de revista* were also responsible for the consolidation of the carnival in Brazil.

After Azevedo's piece, the new structure of the genre would take a couple of decades to be well-established. As general features, there are two acts instead of three; the figure of the *compère* no longer exists but some of his traits persist in the *Rei Momo*; a stronger plot, with the theme of the carnival present throughout the piece; it is also seasonal like the revue, but performed in the pre-carnival period. A typical plot of a *revista carnavalesca* begins with a prologue introducing the problems facing the city of Rio de Janeiro. Thus, the characters seek the *Rei Momo* to solve them and a coup de théâtre<sup>11</sup> begins that puts the characters — as in the revue — in a pursuit or search. There are also interspersed scenes like in the French model. In the end, they find themselves amidst the carnival festivities and then begins the final apotheosis with the songs to be premiered in the festival of that year and the presentation of allegories of each carnival society (Veneziano, 2013a).

The process of transformation of the *revue de fin d'année* in Brazil, since it was first staged in 1859 until the second decade of the 20th century, was characterised by the addition of elements to its structure and new forms of *mise en scène*. All the elements previously analysed — popular language, Brazilian songs and rhythms, national themes — helped establish this new genre as an authentically Brazilian genre of revue theatre. What remained of the *revue* was mainly what was appreciated by the audience: the satire, the *compère*, the comedy and the interspersed sections, among others. In other words, the qualities of the French format were taken just like the qualities of

10. Popular festival of Portuguese tradition developed in the African islands of Cape Verde and Madeira consisting of an entertainment prior to Lent. In the *entrudo* there was no music or dance, only mockery, mischief and drinks. Despite being very popular in the 19th century throughout Brazil, the efforts by the police to repress this popular festival were constant (Albin, 2006).

11. Coup de théâtre that put the characters immediately into action (Veneziano, 2013a).

the “other” are taken in the anthropophagic rite. The parallel established by Andrade between the rite and the Brazilian cultural production in his “Manifesto antropofágo” coincides with the historical process of formation of the *revista carnavalesca* since its first form, the French *revue de fin d’année*.

### Political theatre

In the early 20th century, Germany had to deal with political, social and even economic difficulties. After being defeated in the First World War, the country underwent a hyperinflation that devastated the economy and helped the rise of Nazism, which led to anti-Semitism and scientific racism among the German people. In this context, the German playwright and essayist Bertolt Brecht began his studies and practical experiments with a theatre that would reverse the passive attitude of the audience, since the moment demanded debate and political participation.

Although he had initially called it “epic drama”, Brecht abandoned this name when he realised that he needed to include the *mise en scène* to complete his narrative objectives. In 1926, he introduced the first ideas of the concept of “epic theatre”<sup>12</sup> when he wrote *Mann ist Mann (Man Equals Man)*. Through the distancing between the audience and the situation presented on stage — and this also includes the distance between the spectator and the characters — an educational effect is created. The audience, who previously believed that their situation was natural and unchanging, now observed everything from a new perspective, strange and separate from what is familiar and known, and understood the need for transformation. Hence Brecht’s obstinate opposition to Aristotelian theatre: this included the audience taking a critical position towards the characters that goes beyond empathy and, therefore, there is no catharsis; in addition, he wanted to present not only the interpersonal relationships — the foundation of Aristotelian drama —, but also the determining social factors of these relationships (Rosenfeld, 2008).

In parallel, Brazil also had its own difficulties, this time in the 1960s: the economic problems, with an increasingly predatory capitalism; the social issues, with all the consequences of the Northeastern migration;<sup>13</sup> and the rural exodus to the big Brazilian cities; in addition to the political repression, when the military eventually took power in a coup in April 1964. The artistic and theatre class in the capitals São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, meanwhile, witnessed the decline of revue theatre in the 1950s.

In this context, a new theatre group was founded in 1953: the Teatro de Arena, which at first had a mixed repertoire style with both foreign and national classical pieces. With the addition of new members, including Augusto Boal in 1956, the Teatro de Arena began to solve one of its biggest problems:

12. What is presented in general and concisely in this paragraph is the concept of epic theatre for Brecht. It should be noted that the playwright, during the more than thirty years that he spent developing his theory, did not consider his idea for such a theatre to be concluded, since he constantly modified the concepts according to his experiments with the *mise en scène* (Marques, 2013).

13. Migratory process of the populations native to the Northeastern region of Brazil, which began in the 19th century and reached its peak between the 1950s and 1970s, due to the economic stagnation of the region, the constant droughts and the contrast with the prosperity of other parts of the country.

the need for a new national playwriting. With his experience at the Actor's Studio in New York, Boal began to teach seminars and workshops, and the playwriting sessions eventually created an atmosphere of debate that contributed to the politicisation of the group (Betti, 2013).

At a time of financial hardship, the company decided to stage one of its original dramaturgies for the first time — resulting from the seminars — as a swan song, as described by one of the Teatro de Arena members (Guarnieri, 1981). In 1958, they staged *Eles não usam Black-tie*, by Gianfrancesco Guarnieri. There were no precedents in the history of Brazilian theatre for the workers' strike and its political and moral issues to be the focus of a play (Costa, 2016). The audience and critical success solved the group's financial difficulties and determined that this would be the type of drama that the Teatro de Arena would produce.

However, although the proletariat and its conflicts occupied the core of the plot, the strike itself was shown only indirectly, through comments and discussions between the characters (Guarnieri, 1986; Costa, 2016). There was a conflict between the dramatic and realistic form chosen and the themes addressed in the text, which were social and collective.

In addition to teaching seminars in the company, Boal also decided to write a piece. This time, however, he knew that he needed a new technical element to show on stage the capitalist decadence they were experiencing (Costa, 2016). Boal's new piece marked the transition in the new Brazilian theatre from a realistic model to a non-realistic model: *Revolução na América do Sul*, which premiered in 1960, is structured according to epic style (Marques, 2013). The piece follows the path opened by Guarnieri with *Black-tie*, but the dramatic tone was changed to farcical — *Revolução* no longer obeys the strictures of truth — and the naturalistic processes are abandoned (Prado, 1988).

Through the fragmentation of the unity of place, the reference to reality in the songs (and not its theatrical imitation), the educational meaning of the text and the songs, the counterrevolution as the protagonist of the play and other characteristics, Boal was able to introduce some elements from Brecht's epic theatre into Brazilian theatre for the first time (Boal, 1986; Costa, 2016; Marques, 2013). These new elements were especially important for the new playwrights of the period, such as Guarnieri and Oduvaldo Vianna Filho (or Vianinha), who were also looking for a way to improve how the main problems of the country's social and political reality were presented, beyond mentioning them in dialogues, as happened with *Black-tie*.

The option of having a character like the *compère*, on the other hand, was taken from revue theatre to overcome an impasse for Boal: the character José da Silva, a worker, is exploited by everyone, but he never reacts and always remains impassive. As a *compère*, the character becomes a spectator of everything that happens and a victim of the actions of which he is the object (Costa, 2016).

In the same year that *Revolução* premiered, another well-known playwright — now a former member of Teatro de Arena — continued with Boal's dramaturgical experiences to write his new piece. *A mais-valia vai acabar*,

*seu Edgar!*, by Vianinha, did not dramatisé the poverty of character D4, but rather how he was able to introduce the concept of capital gain and, therefore, explain it<sup>14</sup> to his companion with examples or parables (Vianna Filho, 1981). The use of the distancing effect in the text and anti-dramatic mechanisms, such as slides and posters on stage, were essential to identify it as a play of epic character (Betti, 2013; Costa, 2016). However, they also intended to create a play openly inspired by Brazilian revue. As an example, the character D4 acts like the characters of the genre who, as mentioned above, pursue something or someone and, along the way, find themselves in the sections of the piece.

According to Marques's (2014) definition, *Revolução* and *Mais-valia* are the first incursions into what in the future would be established as Brazilian musical political theatre. These two pieces would directly influence subsequent musical productions, starting with the creation of the Centro Popular de Cultura da União Nacional dos Estudantes (or, simply, CPC) in March 1961. In the collective approach that governed the production of *Mais-valia*, Vianinha, Carlos Estevam and Leon Hirszman formed the group with the aim of working together.

The importance of the group lies in the fact that, for the first time, they were putting on a play about the working class for the working class. Until then, due to the fact that they were performed in theatres or for specific audiences (such as *Mais-valia* itself, staged for students of the Faculty of Architecture), the pieces had been seen by mostly middle-class audiences. The CPC, therefore, began to perform political plays in public spaces, an "emergency service" that took on the task of agitation and periodical propaganda (Marques, 2014). The theatrical form of the *auto* was fundamental for such a challenge since it was not Aristotelian, brimmed with humour, was full of typical characters and made use of non-verbal elements. Therefore, recent news and issues could also be included in this theatre, which resembled agitprop (Betti 2013).

The most impressive piece in the long term from the CPC's whole output was *Auto dos 99%*, by Vianinha. Staged for university students and premiered in March 1962, the piece summarises the history of Brazil in general and, in particular, the history of universities in the country, and all in a farcical style. Just as in *Mais-valia*, Vianinha specifically used the *revista de ano*, so a retrospective text prevails. The retrospective narrative thread was a novelty when compared to the revues' use of it in *Revolução* and *Mais-valia*. Furthermore, instead of alternating text and song — as *Revolução* and *Mais-valia* did —, *Auto dos 99%* created a collage of songs, choruses, short stories and dialogues, superimposing them, which does not happen in interspersing, in which the elements alternate (CPC, n.d.; Peixoto, 1989). The collage of fragments of various kinds and the corresponding jumps in time and space, a consequence of the retrospective, reveal the usual inspiration in this period: epic theatre (Marques, 2014).

14. The use of narration by the character is another characteristic also taken from the *compère*.

These same practices would be taken up two years later in a piece that established musical political theatre in a new political context. On 1 April 1964, the then President of Brazil, João Goulart, suffered a military coup supported by the press, the Brazilian conservative middle class, and the US government. For more than 20 years, any opposition to the government had to endure censorship and survive violent political repression, which led to torture, murders and the disappearance of political prisoners. At some point during the dictatorship, the main artists of musical political theatre – such as Augusto Boal and Chico Buarque – were forced to go into exile to guarantee their own survival.

However, the movement took the left, and the artistic class that supported it, by surprise. With the end of the activities of the CPC<sup>15</sup> and its street theatre with agitprop characteristics, there was a notable withdrawal by Brazilian political theatre, since performing political plays to raise public awareness in the streets, factories and schools was unfeasible (Marques, 2014). The shows used commercial theatres and were aimed at the middle class.

Therefore, 1964 saw the start of the theatre of resistance, a movement in Brazilian theatre that was a form of symbolic resistance to the Brazilian military dictatorship (Betti, 2013). The piece that opened this new movement was *Show Opinião*, written by Vianinha, Armando Costa and Paulo Pontes, former members of the CPC who became part of the Grupo Opinião, directed by Augusto Boal and with a cast made up of the musicians and actors Nara Leão, João do Vale and Zé Ketí (Marques, 2014). The structure of the text of *Show Opinião* is a direct descendant of the lessons of epic theatre that appear in *Revolução* and *Mais-valia* and presents the historical retrospective of the revue and the collage of fragments inherited from *Auto dos 99%*.

Years before, a new movement also began, in another cultural market, that directly affected the achievements of *Opinião*. The popularisation of radio, cinema and records in the first decades of the 20th century in Brazil resulted in more foreign music in the market, especially European and American (Costa, 2016). Given this new reality and following the anti-imperialist line of the Brazilian left, Brazilian musicians began a mobilisation for investigation of “true” popular music, supposedly free of the new influence of foreign rhythms and genres. This new movement was strengthened by the addition of bossa nova musicians, such as Nara Leão and Carlos Lyra<sup>16</sup> (Costa, 2016).

*Show Opinião* in its very conception included testimonies from composers or performers of popular songs, since part of the plot presents the autobiography of the three actors/musicians of the piece. The focus on the national and popular character was a way for the writers to connect with the audience and mobilise them for resistance. A tradition for musical political

15. The CPC was linked to the União Nacional dos Estudantes (UNE), which, as it opposed the coup, went underground, its members were persecuted and its facilities demolished or burned, including the UNE theatre (Betti, 2013; Marques, 2014).

16. Carlos Lyra wrote some of the songs of *Opinião*.

theatre was created by presenting musical genres such as *baião*,<sup>17</sup> samba, *xote*,<sup>18</sup> and *incelência*,<sup>19</sup> among others; and the strategy was successful: the album of the piece broke sales records of the time (Betti, 2013).<sup>20</sup>

Consequently, all productions of the genre that followed used the same resource. After directing *Show Opinião*, Boal returned to work with Teatro de Arena the following year and not only wrote a new piece with Guarnieri, but also directed it. Maintaining the idea of symbolic resistance initiated by Grupo Opinião, *Arena conta Zumbi* included this symbolism and put resistance itself on the stage. Taking as a model the experience of the Quilombo dos Palmares<sup>21</sup> in its struggle and resistance against the colonisers during the 17th century, the playwrights tried to establish an analogy with the context of repression in the military dictatorship they lived in (Marques, 2014).

*Zumbi* continued the path of the political musicals that preceded it by maintaining the resources of epic theatre and the revue used previously (Boal and Guarnieri, 1970). However, there were new processes in the text and the mises en scène in the materials used by the playwrights in the production, which had been taken from those same sources.

The first innovation of the piece, inspired by Brecht's theoretical formulations, was due to the staging of historical documents with the critical objective of presenting the contradictions and falsehoods they contain, attenuated by the temporal distance between the audience and the events portrayed. The other innovation concerns the characters: according to Guarnieri, they did not exist psychologically; they were almost entities (Costa, 2016). Consequently, the actors — in an epic process — took turns playing the characters to prevent the audience from relating a character to a single actor. Finally, the narrative of the text does not revolve around a main character, but rather the story develops from the perspective of all the “sons of Zumbi”<sup>22</sup> (Marques, 2014).

In other ways, *Zumbi* goes beyond epic elements. The songs of the piece, composed by Edu Lobo, preserve the innovation begun by *Opinião*, reviving popular genres such as samba and the rhythms of *capoeira*.<sup>23</sup> And not only did they have an educational function or complement the scenes — as Brecht

17. Musical genre from the interior of the Brazilian Northeast that originated in the 19th century and is generally guided by an accordion (Albin, 2006).

18. Adaptation of the word *schottisch*, of German origin, which means 'Scottish'. It refers to a polka that, presented in Brazil in the 19th century, was adapted to the typical rhythms and instruments of the Brazilian Northeast and began to be played with the accordion, the tambourine and the triangle (Albin, 2006).

19. Music that is sung at funerals and is typical of the state of Ceará in Brazil (Leão *et al.*, 1965).

20. The theatre movement also revolutionised the record market in Brazil. In order to recover the popular repertoire, this new perspective on music-making created effects that changed the history of Brazilian music: the model and concept of *música popular brasileira* was established, the most important and well-known musical genre that originated in Brazil. *Show Opinião* was a major part of this change (Betti, 2013; Costa, 2016). Note that something similar had happened when the *teatro de revista* impacted the carnival festivities with the songs of the pieces and vice versa.

21. One of the largest communities formed by fugitive Afro-descendant slaves in America. Created in the early 17th century in a region that today is part of the Northeast of Brazil, the Quilombo dos Palmares existed for nearly 100 years, during which it faced both the siege of Portuguese and Dutch colonisers (Marques, 2014). Zumbi was the last of the Quilombo leaders.

22. In Angola and African-based religions, Zumbi is equivalent to the supreme god.

23. Mixture of dance and combat in which two individuals make circular movements to the rhythm of the *berimbau*. It was introduced to Brazil by slaves captured in Angola.

proposed in epic theatre — but some songs also acquired a narrative quality, as in “Bondade comercial”, while others did not have great pretensions apart from comedy, something inherited directly from the revue tradition in Brazil (Marques, 2014). Another example of contravening the structures of epic theatre in *Zumbi* would be the direct expression of political messages, which Brecht avoids even in his most mature phase as in *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (*Mother Courage and Her Children*).

*Zumbi* set out to destroy all theatrical conventions that were obstacles to the development of a new theatre aesthetic, as Boal himself declared. However, it also included the destruction of empathy, while the playwright, director and theorist believed that it was necessary to regain the empathy of the audience (Boal, 2019). For this reason, in 1967 he premiered another show in the series *Arena conta...* by the Teatro de Arena. With the same theme of resistance addressed in *Zumbi*, Guarnieri and Boal wrote *Arena conta Tiradentes* about the failure of an attempted rebellion against the Portuguese Government in Brazil in the 18th century (Marques, 2014). The use of this episode known as *Inconfidência Mineira*<sup>24</sup> was, like the group’s previous piece, an allegory of the Brazilian political context in the midst of a military dictatorship (Costa, 2016).

*Tiradentes* began a system created by Boal that brought together all the previous research carried out by the Teatro de Arena. The *sistema coringa* was the epitome of the characteristics and needs of Brazilian society (and, more specifically, the theatre audience) of the time (Boal, 2019). One of its characteristics was the revival of the dramatic principle in the aesthetics of the Teatro de Arena and, with that, the coexistence of the dramatic form, inspired by Stanislavski’s system, and the epic form, the result of experiences in recent years of the lessons of Brecht. The inclusion of the dramatic form restored the experience of pieces like *Black-tie* and was intended to include a key element that would represent the figure of the hero: a protagonist so that the audience would become emotionally involved in and empathise with the story.

In the cast structure systematised by Boal in the *sistema coringa*, a counterpoint to the protagonist is also introduced: the *coringa* character himself, who assumes the function of the *compère* of Brazilian revues — and present in pieces such as *Revolução* and *Mais-valia* — when narrating, explaining and criticising the piece for the audience as if he was its creator. With this, one of Boal’s goals when creating the system was fulfilled: to present the piece and its analysis at the same time.

Another objective of the *sistema coringa* — which is directly related to experiences in musical political theatre — would be experimentation with all existing styles and genres. The collage of fragments of *Auto dos 99%* included this premise, trying to present each scene in a different style: circus, comedy, *auto* and farce, among others. In the pieces that followed *Auto dos 99%*, this experimentation continued. By using the collage of styles and genres in *Tiradentes*, the audience continued to be critically attentive to the plot — which

24. Minas Conspiracy: conspiracy by intellectuals, soldiers, members of the Church and artists of the state of Minas Gerais against the Crown of Portugal that was denounced by one of its members before the revolution began. Tiradentes was the martyr of the movement: the only one of the participants sentenced to death.

had been affected by the feeling of empathy towards the protagonist — since the historical and theatrical truths are remodelled with great fluidity and spectators need to be constantly attentive.

The structure of a production in Boal's system proposes such a collage. Divided into seven parts, the structure includes lessons from epic theatre and previous practices in musical political theatre: the commentary and interview section, procedures of epic theatre, until the final exhortation, recovered from the innovative experiences of direct exhortation in *Zumbi*.

In fact, many innovations in *Zumbi* are once again organised and systematised in *Tiradentes*. Apart from the roles of the *coringa* and the main character, which are played by a specific actor, the rest of the casting structure in the system maintains the *Zumbi* division, in which the actors take turns playing the characters. This new function, which Boal calls a *chorus*, is divided into two groups to avoid the confusion that those changes caused for *Zumbi* audiences. On the one hand, there is the chorus of the deuteragonist and, on the other, that of the antagonist (Marques, 2014). Therefore, in *Tiradentes*, the first group of actors play characters who support the protagonist while the second group challenges him (Boal; Guarnieri, 1967).

Another important structure of the *sistema coringa* is the orchestra, that is, the function of music on stage. For Boal (2019), songs prepare the audience to receive simplified texts, which can only be understood within the simultaneous reason-music experience. To explain the concept, the playwright uses the function of Edu Lobo's music in *Zumbi*: without his songs, no audience would believe that the plot presented on stage takes place during a period of war (Boal, 2019). Both this concept of the *sistema coringa* and the popular repertoire started by *Show Opinião* are present in *Tiradentes'* music. Unlike *Auto dos 99%*, *Show Opinião* and *Arena conta Zumbi*, in which their respective songs were released on disc, there are no records of *Tiradentes*. However, the group of composers allows the songs in the piece to be characterised as belonging to popular genres: Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Sidney Miller and Theo Barros, artists who are part of the MPB movement.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the *sistema coringa* is a theoretical creation of Augusto Boal that comes from all his previous experiences with the concepts for an epic theatre developed by Bertolt Brecht. And this proves that the inclusion of components of Brazilian culture — elements of Brazilian revue and popular songs, for example — in epic theatre throughout the history of musical political theatre follows the process of cultural anthropophagy proposed by Andrade. A new theatrical aesthetic, the *sistema coringa*, was formed as an authentically Brazilian element.

## Conclusion

It is important to point out that musical political theatre does not end with *Tiradentes* and the Brazilian revue does not take on its ultimate form with the *revista carnavalesca*. In the 1920s, after the performances of the French company *Ba-ta-clan* in Rio de Janeiro, revue producers began to prioritise a model of revue in which its luxury and fantasy stand out. It was the last

phase of the genre in Brazil: the *revista feérica*, which, inspired by the new French *revues* staged in the country and by the American musical, changed the text structurally and the *mise en scène* visually.

In its turn, musical political theatre continued its path of resistance and awareness-raising of its audience, although after *Arena conta Tiradentes* more tentatively. After the proclamation of the AI-5 by the dictatorial government in 1968, any possibility of staging a piece with minimally political content was ruled out. All the research work started with *Eles não usam Black-tie* and the progress made until *Arena conta Tiradentes* to achieve a theatre about the Brazilian people and for the Brazilian people, were interrupted. We should note that, after this period, important plays of political theatre appeared, especially in the late 1970s, when the democratic opening in the country began. Some examples of this production are pieces such as *Gota d'água*, with script by Chico Buarque and Paulo Pontes and songs by Buarque; *Ópera do Malandro*, with script and music by Chico Buarque; and *O rei de Ramos*, written by Dias Gomes and with songs composed by Chico Buarque, Francis Hime and Chico Dias. However, the pieces are more the product of an influence of the musicals of the modern age of Broadway than of Brecht's epic theatre.

This research aimed to analyse how the genre of the *revue de fin d'année* and the epic theatre techniques conceived by Bertolt Brecht were used in Brazilian musical theatre through a cultural process of anthropophagy. Therefore, it mainly endeavoured to describe the heyday of the influence of the genre or aesthetic on theatre production and the assimilation by the artists of the time. We saw that, since the first *misses en scène*, the *revue* included national themes and over several decades incorporated Brazilian rhythms and musical genres, and later the Portuguese accent and regional dialects, until presenting in theatres one of the greatest popular festivals of the country, resulting in a new authentically Brazilian *revue* genre, the *revista carnavalesca*. As in political theatre, the playwrights and directors of Brazil appropriated new ideas for a new theatre, conceived by Bertolt Brecht, which more efficiently introduced on stage their desires for a theatre for the Brazilian people with political content. The resources of epic theatre mixed both the legacy of Brazilian *revue* and a repertoire of popular musical genres from Brazil, which enabled Augusto Boal to idealise the technique of the *sistema coringa*. Until now, ironically but fortunately, the resources of the Teatro do Oprimido formulated based on the practice with the *sistema coringa* — this the result of a Brazilian experience with epic theatre — are used throughout the world. What came after the *revista carnavalesca* and the creation of the *sistema coringa* has not been addressed in this article because either it had other influences — such as the case of the *revue* — or was interrupted — as happened with the experiences with epic theatre.

We can argue, with the analysis presented so far, that both foreign genres underwent a process of anthropophagy in Brazil. David George (1985), in his research on the relation between theatre and anthropophagy,<sup>25</sup> establishes

25. George researches the relation through a case study of two pieces: *O rei da vela* (1967) and *Macunaíma* (1978).

three basic points of the aesthetic code of Oswald's anthropophagy: first, the general national author borrows the techniques from the foreign source; then, the foreign aesthetic codes are transformed to address the national interests; and finally, these come together to produce an original national form. This direction formulated by George was tested in the two incursions of artistic creation of foreign origin presented in this article, becoming more a confirmation of the anthropophagic process in Brazilian musical theatre.

We have deliberately not explored the most recent movement of musical theatre in Brazil for several reasons. Importing pieces from Broadway began to dominate the Brazilian theatre scene at the start of this century and over twenty years have elapsed without the Brazilian playwrights, composers and directors finding a way of assimilating this genre and linking it to Brazilian culture. The productions, mainly focused in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, reproduce almost exactly the script and the *mise en scène* of the shows on Broadway, although adapting their content to Portuguese. This is mainly due to the contracts: when purchasing rights to a show, it must faithfully reproduce the Broadway production — from the script and costumes, for instance, to the *mise en scène* — and there are even many American producers who supervise the rehearsals to ensure compliance with the contract.<sup>26</sup>

On the one hand, the biographical or jukebox productions are very successful in Brazil. They use songs that the audience already know — usually from the national repertoire — to compose a brand-new narrative in the case of the jukebox musical, or to illustrate the biography of the composer or singer who popularised them. However, this article deals mainly with original works, both in terms of script and music. It is important to point out the most relevant pieces of this kind in recent years: *7 - O Musical*, written by Claudio Botelho and Charles Möeller and with songs by Ed Motta; *Era no tempo do rei*, based on the book of the same name by Ruy Castro, adapted for the theatre by Heloisa Seixas and Julia Romeu and with songs by Aldir Blanc and Carlos Lyra; and the productions of Núcleo Experimental, particularly *Lembro todo dia de você*, with dramaturgy by Fernanda Maia and songs by Fernanda Maia and Rafa Miranda. However, the Brazilian people, their songs and national themes — which had always been present in the musical theatre pieces of the country — struggle to return to the Brazilian original production amidst so many reproductions of Broadway shows. Between 2000 and 2020, the premiere of shows with original script and music only accounted for 12% of all the musical theatre productions in São Paulo (Silva, 2023a; Silva, 2023b).

Another important issue to be taken into account is the focus of the theatre production in only two cities — São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro — because they are cultural centres and their productions are widely promoted throughout Brazil and the world, and therefore the information and analysis available on the theatre there are more abundant, as previously mentioned. However, political theatre — including musical theatre — from other regions

26. Such information is widely known among the professionals of today's Brazilian musical theatre. This is based on my talks with professionals working in this sector and on my experience when researching current Brazilian musical theatre.

in the country is briefly addressed in Betti (2013). Moreover, the work of musical theatre with original dramaturgy and music has proliferated in cities such as Brasília, with the first musical theatre piece premiered in the capital of Brazil in 2014,<sup>27</sup> and Fortaleza, with the recent production of a classic by Clarice Lispector, *A hora da estrela*,<sup>28</sup> in 2017.

It seems that in recent productions the legacy of the Brazilian revue and the musical political theatre has been abandoned and forgotten. However, this article does not seek to solve this problem, a Herculean task, but actually to remove one of the remaining barriers: to get rid of the common use of Eurocentric theories and concepts, created based on and for European production, to explain Brazilian artistic productions and movements. The use of anthropophagy in this article meets such an end because it was not conceived as a formula or system to be followed by Brazilian artists but as a suggestive metaphorical source for an artistic creation committed to the decolonisation of Brazilian culture.



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