

## Freedom in the margins: experiences from Brazil<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

This paper presents a conversation between Lucia Gayoto and Marcio Meirelles curated by Pedro de Senna. In it, Gayoto and Meirelles discuss their experiences, respectively, at the Escola Livre de Teatro de Santo André and the Universidade Livre do Teatro Vila Velha, both theatre schools operating at the margins of the official Brazilian educational establishment and making use of overtly Freirean pedagogical models.

Starting with a brief historical overview of the two institutions, the conversation addresses questions of access, pedagogy and curriculum design, demonstrating how these three aspects and inextricably connected within each institution's ethos and praxes. It is no coincidence the word *Livre* (Free) appears in both institutions' names: their existence outside the aegis of the Ministry for Education, affords the Escola and the Universidade the freedom to diverge from the often Eurocentric practices in the Brazilian education system. The marginal, peripheral status of these schools is therefore deliberate and strategic, but not without its perils. Economic precarity is always a risk, and the work both institutions undertake is inherently political – by virtue of their very existence; in a climate of right-wing recrudescence, these 'free' schools offer a bastion of resistance.

Gayoto and Meirelles discuss the implications of all this for their respective institutions, the challenges that each of them faces and the solutions encountered. The role that both schools play within their local social, economic and educational contexts is also discussed, and while points of convergence are highlighted, characteristics that make each school unique are brought into focus. Through this conversation, common challenges are addressed, models of good practice are shared; and the gauntlet is thrown to British Theatre departments to adapt and apply them within the constraints of their own institutional academic frameworks.

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## Origins

This paper presents a conversation between Lucia Gayotto and Marcio Meirelles curated by Pedro de Senna. In it, Gayotto and Meirelles discuss their experiences, respectively, at the Escola Livre de Teatro de Santo André (henceforth ELT or Escola Livre) and the Universidade Livre do Teatro Vila Velha (henceforth UVV or Universidade Livre), both theatre schools operating at the margins of the official Brazilian educational establishment, and making use of overtly Freirean<sup>2</sup> pedagogical models.

The conversation took place in Portuguese, via Zoom, on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020 : Gayotto in São Paulo (SP), Meirelles some 2,000 Km away in Salvador (BA)<sup>3</sup>, and de Senna in High Wycombe, UK. It addressed questions of access, pedagogy and curriculum design, and it is clear that these three aspects are inextricably connected within each organisation's history, ethos and praxes. It is no coincidence the word 'Livre' (Free) appears in both the organisations' names: their existence outside the aegis of the Ministry for Education (MEC), affords the Escola and the Universidade the freedom to diverge from the often Eurocentric practices in the Brazilian education system. Theatre education in particular tends to be centred around academic frameworks in universities and structured training regimes in conservatoires. (Leite, 2008) And while Brazilian theatre schools have often sought to represent Brazilian voices in their syllabi, they are also very much in thrall of the European 'masters' – from Stanislavski to Barba; this conversation, however, does not focus so much on content as it does on pedagogical models.

There is of course, and perhaps inevitably, another implicit dialogue taking place in and around this paper: that between the contexts and practices of these two organisations on the one hand, and the contexts and practices of teaching and learning theatre in the United Kingdom (where de Senna works and where this journal is published) on the other. What follows, therefore, is not a direct transcript of that conversation, but a curated version, in which de Senna translates, edits, and reshuffles – while trying to preserve the orality of Gayotto's and Meirelles' voices – and attempts a general systematisation of ideas, an undertaking engaged with somewhat reluctantly, as one of the key characteristics defining both organisations in their 'freedom' is the resistance to being subsumed into systems. Occasionally, some of that implicit dialogue is made explicit, but it is important that any attempt at doing so does not become an exercise in recentring in the UK what is essentially a Brazilian conversation: and while translation and editing may be processes of refraction and dis-location, we wish to avoid any linearity which might point towards a specific target

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<sup>2</sup> The term refers to Paulo Freire (1921-1997), widely influential Brazilian educator and philosopher, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972).

<sup>3</sup> The abbreviations SP and BA respectively stand for the states of São Paulo, where the cities of São Paulo and Santo André are (Santo André is part of the metropolitan area of São Paulo); and Bahia, in whose capital, Salvador, the Universidade Livre do Teatro Vila Velha is located.

reader. And so, the authorship of this paper is not so much shared as it is dispersed, dialogic, decentred. Still, prior to the conversation, de Senna – who had met both Meirelles and Gayotto during a research trip to Brazil in 2019 – sent his collaborators a series of questions that might help frame the discussion and which, to some extent, also frame this article.<sup>4</sup> Below, is Meirelles’s opening statement at the meeting:

Marcio Meirelles: *The questions you sent are good because, as you saw [when de Senna visited in 2019], the Universidade Livre lacks systematisation, theorizing... So I thought of taking those questions to organise my thoughts. But the thing is: every year, everything changes – every year there is a new project, a new process, new working methods – and so systematizing this is tricky.*

Elliot Eisner (1985, 1996) talks not only about teaching art, but about the art of teaching, highlighting its often-improvisatory nature. It would seem that not only teachers, but entire programs need to be able to adapt, according to the changing circumstances and realities of the classroom, as well as the historical and social moment. A pedagogy for performance precisely ought to create the conditions for the unexpected to emerge, as good theatre directing does in a rehearsal room. In the 1960s Eisner had already stated that in certain situations “educational outcomes are appraised after they emerge; specific learnings are seldom formulated in terms of instructional objectives”. (1967, 353).<sup>5</sup>

In a sense, preparing this article has also been a learning process, where meaning is emergent. A good place to start organising ideas might be a brief historical overview of the origins of UVV and ELT..

MM: *The history we need to tell predates the Universidade Livre. It goes back to 1957, when the Theatre School of the University of Bahia (which later became the Federal University of Bahia) was created. When the first cohort of aspiring actors were to graduate in 1959, there was a rupture between them and the school’s director, and led by João Augusto, who was one of their teachers, they created the Companhia de Teatro dos Novos. João Augusto believed that the theatre director has the role of a pedagogue, not only to the public, but also towards the cast. Or not only towards the cast, but also the public. So they worked in a way that was almost a follow-up to the school’s work –they would do exercises: voice, body, expression, all that stuff from the 1960s, and got in touch with a lot of popular culture: they travelled to small towns in the interior, looking for local arts and crafts, researching the*

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<sup>4</sup> The questions emailed were: 1. Tell me a little bit about the history of the Escola/Universidade Livre. 2. What is the meaning/importance of the word ‘livre’ in your practice? 3. From a pedagogical point-of-view, what are the consequences of being in the margins? 4. What are the greatest challenges that you face today? 5. What is the relation between the Escola/Universidade and their local contexts (economic, social, educational)? 6. Is there any anecdote that synthesises your experience?

<sup>5</sup> Eisner is here talking specifically about doctoral seminars, but one could argue that the idea applies also to art, when “a theme will be identified around which both teacher and students can interact”.

language of popular theatre and Cordel Theatre<sup>6</sup>. The Teatro Vila Velha was a consequence of these students leaving – ungraduated, without their diploma from the university. They left like two months before graduating. And they spent four years struggling to find a space. They used the streets, small towns in the country, squares, because there were no theatres in Salvador. The Castro Alves Theatre had caught fire, and you had the theatre of the Theatre School, and some Cine-Theatres. That's until the Vila Velha was built in 1962-64. In 1968 the company dispersed around the country. When I joined the Vila Velha in 1994 [as artistic director], we went in with the objective of restoring the theatre. I had the Bando de Teatro Olodum. This was my group. Then in 1998, when we re-inaugurated the theatre with Don Quixote, we also reconstituted the Companhia de Teatro dos Novos. In 2012, after I had a stint as culture secretary<sup>7</sup>, when I returned to the Vila Velha and to Olodum, I arrived at the conclusion that I had to leave Olodum, that they needed to go their own way – as friends, close by, together, but not with me as a director/coordinator. And in 2013 I created the Universidade Livre out of this necessity to have a new 'body' inside the theatre.

Lucia Gayotto: It is interesting to hear Marcio speak, because we realise it is impossible to speak of our school without speaking about our own history. Our history is the school. We are the school. So, my 'masters' was at the Teatro Oficina, with Zé Celso. And for a long time, I thought how much the Oficina had summoned me. But then after I left, after 13 years coming and going, and working with other theatre groups, I noticed I already had the Oficina inside me. I recognise myself for a long time with this DNA. It is incredible, hearing you speak, Marcio, about Salvador, [I imagine] the landscape embracing you, and in São Paulo it is very different. And I notice that for me the two fundamental places in theatre are the Oficina and the Escola Livre. When I walk in there, it is like I am walking onto a beach, and being embraced by this valuable thing that São Paulo has. Because we feel very lonely in São Paulo, but then when we enter these collectives we say, 'ah, I understand why I live here'.

Pedro de Senna: So how does this translate into the school's history –your own? I mean the school precedes your joining it, right? How does your personal history parallel that of the school?

LG: The Escola Livre was founded as a pilot project by Maria Thais [Lima Santos], a theatre director, and the then municipal culture secretary of Santo André, actor Celso Frateschi, under mayor Celso Daniel, who was later murdered. And during Daniel's tenure, with PT [Workers' Party], this pilot project emerged, because in 1990, the basic reference for actor training in SP was only EAD [Escola de Arte Dramática], at the Universidade de São Paulo... We had Teatro Escola Macunaima, Teatro Escola Célia Helena, some private courses. But there was nothing that was free. We had this history of over 60 years with EAD, which is a

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<sup>6</sup> A popular performance form in the northeast of Brazil, written in verse.

<sup>7</sup> Meirelles was culture secretary for the state of Bahia between 2007 and 2011, under governor Jaques Wagner (Workers' Party).

*history of actor training, not an experimental laboratory for the art form, circus, dramaturgy, dance, voice, music, chorus – EAD doesn't have this. Only now it is starting to re-evaluate and it is changing a little, which is cool, into choral work and other kinds of things. But it was always very much this actor thing, the individual and their repertoire. So, we got people like Paulo Autran, great actors, but we did not feel like groups were formed there. From the Escola Livre, we have a number of groups coming out.*

*MM: I, on the other hand, come from a line of work that is university theatre during the dictatorship, a collective thing, a debate, the construction of a poetic discourse against the dictatorship, theatre for awakening people's consciousness, and so on. So, I created a group, Avelãz y Avestruz – which was my 'university', where I learned to make theatre (I had studied Architecture but left it). I formed this group, and this is how I became a director. And at the same time, I prepared actors and actresses in the group. It was a mutual collaboration / formation. And then the Bando de Teatro Olodum, which was, as it were, my 'masters'. And the Teatro Vila Velha which is my 'doctorate', but perhaps with a focus on administration, management, organisation, which comes from this group thing. So all my process of formation comes from this learning by doing. I was learning to make theatre, constructing my way of making theatre, by doing it. Getting things right, getting things wrong, searching.*

A word in Portuguese to which both Meirelles and Gayotto often return is 'formação' – formation. It is more than training, more than education, it constitutes the whole formative process of a performer, key to the holistic visions of their organisations, as we shall see below. And while both organisations have very different histories, they both have their origins in the 1990s, a period of relative optimism following the end of the Brazilian military dictatorship in 1985. What becomes clear is that they both place paramount importance in the idea of the group, the collective – with the understanding that collectives are made of individuals. The question of scale is also noteworthy, and the possibilities that different scales afford. The opportunities UVV can offer and those that ELT offers are different, not only because of their different histories and structures, but also their different sizes, which is something we have not discussed much. If at any given time UVV has only up to 30 people and if ELT has 100-plus students across four years, the institutions – one perhaps should not call them institutions, but organisations, or dis-organisations – will have different needs. All this notwithstanding, the notion of the collective is crucial to both organisations' pedagogies, with an emphasis on the exchange of practices and experiences.

### **Pedagogies of Freedom**

In his preface to the 17<sup>th</sup> edition of Paulo Freire's seminal book, *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, Ernani Maria Fiori addresses this idea of exchange, when he states that "O diálogo fenomeniza e historiciza a essencial intersubjetividade humana; ele é relacional; e, nele,

ninguém tem iniciativa absoluta”<sup>8</sup> (Freire, 1987, 8) This way of thinking permeates the work undertaken at UVV and ELT.

MM: *The concept of ‘free’ is precisely this – we are not tied to a curriculum grid or anything, we have the freedom to say: now we will research this, now I will get involved in that, and it is something that goes like that: let’s go! Then everybody embarks on this research. In truth our idea is this: to show the many ways in which the tools that theatre has can be used. And the participant chooses the way that is most appropriate for them, their style, their desire to say things and how to say them. So, they go through Tadashi Endo, Butoh, whatever, and at the same time work with people from Afro dance, and then something else, because in the end everybody uses the same tools. So they start organising themselves internally about how they prepare, how they warm up, what exercises they do – sometimes they invent their own... And when they are on stage, they will really say what they have to say, why they are there, what for. We have the rehearsal rooms, we work on both of them, working the ‘narrative’ part. We divided the whole process into ‘territories’. So there is the territory of narrative, which includes all this: body work, dramaturgy, mise-en-scène etc. Then there is the ‘management’ territory, which includes administration, front of house, research, production, project writing, box office, door; and then the ‘technical’ territory, of scenic architecture, which is everything that involves the scene physically – kit, working with the equipment: they operate and design lights, sound etc.*

*In these 6-7 years of the university, we’ve had more than 150 collaborators, who came to us. Be it people who like you [de Senna] came in, sat down and had a chat with them, bringing information about how things happen in another part of the world, to people who come and do a week-long intensive workshop on a topic, people engaging in experimentation, people directing a play, or preparing them to be directed by someone else in a show.*

LG: *So last year we decided to write a document, as we had for the pilot project which had been made in 1990; and then when the school completed 20 years we made a book, and this year we want to mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. So last year we wrote a PPP, Politico-Pedagogical Project. Yesterday night in preparation for this talk, I decided to read the whole PPP and I marked out various bits of the PPP and I would like to cite them, starting with something Foucault said, which we paraphrase and I find very interesting, speaking about freedom. This is what it says:*

*a liberdade nunca será uma libertação completa ou uma emancipação absoluta, simplesmente porque novos poderes, e novas relações de mando se criam. A liberdade está no exercício ininterrupto da resistência, da revolta e da recusa. A liberdade não é um estado, mas uma ética.*<sup>9</sup> (Prefeitura de Santo André, 2019, pp. 41-2)

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<sup>8</sup> “Dialogue phenomenises and historicises the essential human intersubjectivity; it is relational; and, in it, nobody has absolute initiative”. [de Senna’s translation, and always henceforth]

<sup>9</sup> “Freedom never will be a full liberation or an absolute emancipation, simply because new powers and new relations of control are created. Freedom lies in the uninterrupted exercise of resistance, revolt and refusal. Freedom is not a state, but an ethics.”

*So how do we construct this ethics of freedom? Paulo Freire speaks a lot of this – Pedagogy of Autonomy is a very valuable little book. So I wanted to just tell you that I believe our proposition is free because it is not in accordance with the modes of production of the cultural industries. It is free because it understands there is a horizontality, that learning is mutual and therefore I am starting my work from the exchange I am having with the learners. It is free because we create yearly pedagogical projects; we ask what do we desire for the first year, for the second, for the third and fourth? So the person who is with us for four years, will have two years of the basic knowledge of what we call formation, and then they have two years of staging, collaborative processes, dramaturgy, playwriting, all of that. So we have more or less some vectors, some parameters let's say of what is given in the first year and so on.*

*MM: When we founded UVV, we were coming from a number of questions. The first one is: why are theatre audiences dwindling, at least in Salvador, very visibly? The second question is: what theatre are we offering to these audiences who are not interested in showing up? And then: "how are the people who make this theatre formed?"<sup>10</sup> And then, what do we do? Let's debate, discuss, look for these audiences to try to understand these questions. And then we started to work from this experience – mine and beyond me, the institutional experience, the collective experience of the Teatro Vila Velha, the many groups who had been there, and we built the Universidade Livre. So at the start all we had was this idea: let's research this, look for our audiences, let's see what kind of theatre interests them, and how might we not lose or give up a theatre that is ours, that is part of our tradition, too, which belongs to humanity, a big theatre, with lots of people on stage, tribes and tribes on stage, let us escape the monologue and the dialogue as the only ways to make theatre, and let us exaggerate – let us make shows with 30 people!*

*PdS: It seems you are saying that the origin of UVV comes from a necessity. A perception that theatre is dying and we need to find a solution in this historical-social context.*

*MM: And believing there is a generation with a strength and need to say things, but which is very unfocused and who lost this feeling for a tribe, a theatre with many people, a choral theatre. It is basically from this that the idea of the Universidade Livre comes. This choral theatre with many people. The current Companhia ds Novos is made of people who emerged from the Universidade Livre and now are here consolidating this idea of a group, which we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are still not sure what it is. We knew in the last century, but here we don't know yet.*

*PdS: This was something that impressed me a lot in Santo André, when I was there: the impression of collectivity, for example in the work you do, Lucia, in your class, work that is choral – literally – voices and bodies together.*

*LG: So I'll have to speak a little bit of my experience here. I taught at PUC-SP, speech and language, which is my trade. Then at PUC-SP they started a Somatic Arts [Artes do Corpo] course; and at the same time TUCA (the theatre at PUC) started to offer a technical course in theatre. At this time, I left PUC and I started teaching at the School of Communication and*

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<sup>10</sup> In Portuguese, 'formados' – as in 'formação, above.

*Arts at USP, which houses the Performing Arts course, CAC [Curso de Artes Cênicas]. I was there for two and a half years. Everybody there told me: “you have to go to Escola Livre, this is where you belong, it is the best etc.” And in fact the moment I stepped into ELT, I said to myself, I will never teach in a university again. I want a ‘free school’! The concept, some premises of what being free means, for example the collaborative project in which everybody creates, where creation happens horizontally, where questions are not given, knowledge is not put forward a priori, it is shared – totally Paulo Freire and Pedagogy of Autonomy... So you really experience knowledge in the encounter, the friction with the students and so on; I discovered this truly, starting from zero, in ELT. It was as though in the universities I had inhabited and which had inhabited me I was below zero, in a negative state; I had to get to a zero point in which you can say “now I’m in a good place, I can understand what a group is, I can make a circle, I can see”, you know, the basics of the encounter. And it took so long to arrive at that in a university. In the Escola Livre, it was like the minute you walked in, and it seemed like the foundations of theatre making were much more established, already there, you know – and it is a public full of creative emancipation. I would say, a public to whom you today offer a reference – whatever, say Virginie Despentes’s King Kong Theory – you tell them this today, and tomorrow they will return with five videos and talks that they will have researched and found online. It is an avid public.*

Again, we are talking about a model of education which is emancipatory, and not what Freire (1987) has called the oppressive, ‘banking’ model of education, “o ato de depositar, de transferir, de transmitir valores e conhecimentos”.<sup>11</sup> (p. 34) It might be worth observing, as de Senna has, that “curriculum design, even at its most mechanical or operational [...] can, and indeed does, bear relation to the level of engagement students have with their education”. (2014, 5) This is something that becomes clear in the pedagogies of both organisations, whose curricula are, in effect, co-designed.

### **People, Places, Precarity**

These emancipatory praxes are reflected in the composition of the ELT’s and UVV’s cohorts, and the efforts made to keep them engaged with their studies. The realities described below are far removed from what one might encounter even in the least resourced of UK universities, and yet these organisations have a vitality that is enviable, and the quality of the work produced is excellent. This is not to romanticise poverty, rather to suggest that the generally linear, streamlined, UK model for education in theatre and performance might not be the most efficient, even in its own capitalist ‘value for money’ terms. Neither organisation follows a linear path in their learning and teaching. Instead, UVV works with ‘territories’, as explained above, and ELT operates ‘nuclei’. Both word choices allude to structures and praxes emphasising contiguity and nodality, where an artist’s formation is relational, intersubjective. And the paradox of intersubjectivity is that it requires autonomous subjects: Freire reminds us that “O respeito à autonomia e à dignidade de cada um é um imperativo ético e não um favor que podemos ou não conceder uns aos outros”.<sup>12</sup> (1996, 25)

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<sup>11</sup> “The act of depositing, transferring, transmitting values and knowledge”

<sup>12</sup> “Respect for the autonomy and dignity of each person is an ethical imperative, and not a favour which we may or may not grant one another”.



LG: And it is a lot of people, our target audience are really hard up, from the periphery, from the countryside, people coming from [the state of] Acre, from Argentina, Chile – many people from different parts of the country and South America coming to join ELT. Our students keep asking us if we can offer them transportation, because they don't have 1 Real for the bus fare, for instance. So there are people who leave for lack of money; then we pool together some money for that person to stay... And recently, last year, something that really changed the ELT were the affirmative actions, from the point of view of PPI (pretos, pardos e indígenas)<sup>13</sup>, people from Santo André and trans-people. So we have 50% of affirmative action: we have to have people from Santo André – we can't only have people from São Paulo and other places, Santo André must be represented in there; PPI too, as well as the trans population, and this was really cool because then it 'rained' trans-people on ELT – we have examples of two wonderful transwomen, who are Linn da Quebrada and Liniker, who are both very famous political singers, transwomen who graduated with us and now we have a series of people, transitioning while at school.

PdS: Marcio, you said earlier that beyond the search for a new public, there was a search for new people to make theatre. So my question to both of you is: who are these students? I remember you telling me, Marcio, memorably, that the way to get into the Universidade Livre is 'through the door'. What are the criteria, is there some kind of contract, who are these students, where do they come from?

MM: For us this is problem, because we really can't maintain the Universidade Livre if the participants don't invest in us, financially. So we really don't have this public who are completely hard-up, which would be very important for us, for the theatre itself, to consolidate anything truly democratic. We have no money, no sponsorship, no government subsidy. So we created this social currency, with which we try to balance the finances. They have a monthly cost of 350 reais<sup>14</sup>, which is what pays the collaborators/teachers: so if someone comes to teach some voice or yoga or whatever, that person earns some money, because the theatre can't afford it.. In the beginning, the participants organised it, charged and reminded one another, there was a joint account that they administered, and it was very chaotic; so now the theatre administration takes care of that, does that financial management. But all 32 plays that we staged in this time were done from this pittance: 350 Reais from 20 people, we can then buy a costume, and then we started using again the same dresses, skirts, recycling them –we all know this story, this is not new... Re-appropriation.

But then we created this social currency called Tempos. Each task has a value in Tempos – each task the participants perform and which is also a learning task, they earn in Tempos for it. When they are experienced in a particular area, then they start earning partly in Reais, partly in Tempos. And they accumulate Tempos, and the idea is that this economy is more efficient not only in terms of solving the problem of their staying in with us (retention), but also that they can buy clothes, their lunch – that this economy also spreads to other partners, not only the theatre administration and the participants of the UVV. So we did a calculation, all together, as part of the 'management' territory. We did an open spreadsheet.

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<sup>13</sup> 'black, brown and indigenous people' is the official categorisation for racial quotas in Brazil, the equivalent of BAME in the UK.

<sup>14</sup> To put this in context, the monthly minimum wage in 2019 was 998 reais.

*How much the theatre spent so that the UVV happened in there? What was the cost of the UVV? Then we divided that cost per person. Then we arrived at this number, which in today's terms would be around 1,000 Reais a month. And this would cause absolute attrition, nobody would be able to afford this... So we agreed on these 350 in Reais, because this is the cost that the theatre would not have had were it not for the presence of the UVV; and the rest – light, water etc, stuff that the theatre would be spending anyway, perhaps fractionally less, but the cost would be there, is paid in Tempos. And so we try to balance our economy in these two ways. With this alternative, social, collaborative economy and the economy of the Reais, for the things we cannot pay in Tempos.*

*LG: Well, we have a budget from the municipality, which is minimal. For you to have an idea, every year there is a reverse auction, that we have to go to and bid with our project. So there have been – because each contract we get is for four years – there have been occasions when we had to lower our lessons' costs (which are already the lowest in the market) so that we could win the contract. Otherwise the winner would be someone like a husband and wife – they decide they want to go teach at the Escola Livre, they'll just call some kids and do it. So they hand in a project and go to the auction and say "we can teach for 20 Reais an hour". And of course the quality of the project is considered, but the cheapest one is always most attractive to the authorities. So we have had times when even though we have a 30-year history of occupying that space, there have been times when in order for us not to lose the auction, we had to reduce the amount of hours taught, which is already small. So there is this type of thing. But this money, at the same time, is money that, from the point of view of productions, maintenance and school admin, is very limited, to the point of us having to take our own coffee; there's sometimes water, toilet paper sometimes we have to take our own... sometimes there is one person – Dona Beth – this person who is there in charge of the whole school administration, who has been there for years.*

*So I was going to ask Marcio what is the relationship between the facilities / space of the school and the space of the theatre. This interests me because the school is in Santo André, there is the Teatro Conchita de Moraes, this theatre which the school kind of 'hugs': the theatre was there but the school had an architectonic project which 'hugged the theatre'. The school's facilities were built therefore around the theatre, and this is interesting and at the same time precarious because the theatre is now, for instance, interdicted by the Public Prosecutor's office. It is a building that can at any time have its rig collapse, there are drips, the floor was breaking; the most we were able to do – and I've been there for 13 years – we managed to get a new wooden stage, but the situation is very, very precarious. When it rains, we have to close a staircase – we need to go around to enter through the theatre or the street.*

*MM: All the Vila Velha theatre space is the Universidade Livre's space, there is no separation. The stage, the two rehearsal rooms, dressing rooms, a café-theatre (Cabaré dos Novos) and the administrative, communication and production areas. UVV spreads all over the theatre. Because we divided the whole process in territories, as I explained. So they have an apprenticeship of the theatre as a whole, not only the stage. And for this they have the whole theatre at their disposal. So the relation between UVV and the theatre is very organised in this sense. They occupy everything. And the theatre sometimes welcomes this and sometimes we have issues with the administration, because for them to incorporate this*

*thing is a process that, even though we've had seven years of UVV, we still haven't been able to make it an organic thing for the staff, they are still seen as students, not as part of the body of the theatre – but we are better now than when we started.*

*LG: Look, I think, listening to Marcio, my heart sinks a bit because we have a theatre we can't open to the public. Every year, we have been promised a refurbishment, for some time now, many years. So every year the agenda item that is always renewed is when will we get, say 50,000 Reais just to get the wiring of the school done so we don't risk a short-circuit, some really basic stuff, you know? We have no budget to... and then there is the other question, which I imagine is also different for you Marcio, that we cannot touch the building without consulting with the municipality. So even if we managed, for instance, to raise money through some kind of 'friends of ELT' association or something like that, we couldn't do this, because we need municipal approval. I would love the Conchita de Moraes to be a working theatre, with plays on the bill from local groups and from São Paulo and the ABC,<sup>15</sup> and where the students could work, like Marcio said in the box office, production, and that the school were alive and open every day, including weekends.*

*MM: The model I describe is really pedagogical, it is amazing how much they grow as actors and actresses when they start to really take ownership of the production, front of house. They themselves understand that when they are there tearing tickets and ushering, they are making theatre, they are in dialogue with the public, they talk to audiences – and in the technical side, too; so it is really a learning experience that feeds from all other learning experiences. And this was our basic question really, that of the relationship with the public, not only the public that attends, buys tickets and comes in, but also how do we bring this public to the theatre. And then, there is this other public that frequents the theatre, who are the other groups, other productions who depend on the technicians etc, they also dialogue with this learning. They are there, they observe, it is very rich. I understand Lucia's problems, this is the difficulty of being publicly owned. We're not. The building –we have ownership.*

*LG: I'm just going to make a small observation, which is this: what happens is that we cannot make some kind of exchange or residency with people there, because the theatre is closed. But what happens is that every mid-year and end of year we have our shows, works in progress, and what we do is first of all we don't charge, it is free, so we cannot even use box office takings for the theatre itself, which would be great; and we cannot open the theatre itself, so we pretend we are not in the theatre – like we do a scene in the theatre and leave, then we go to a classroom, to the foyer, then outside the school... So we do a scene in the theatre and run. Because keeping 150-200 people in the theatre is not allowed, because of the theatre's interdiction. For you to have an idea, in the theatre – we stage a lot of pieces that talk about our precarity of course – and one of them, for example, used the drips and the water that ran down the stairs to make a scene, in the middle of the water... Really, what we have lived through there is crazy, because it is 'free' even in the use of its precarity, how we use it and dialogue with it. It is a dialogue.*

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<sup>15</sup> Industrial region of metropolitan São Paulo, comprising the municipalities of Santo André, São Bernardo do Campo and São Caetano do Sul.

The gauntlet is thrown to British theatre departments to learn and adapt their pedagogies, operating within, but also challenging the constraints of their own institutional academic frameworks, while resisting the dismantling of material and human resources in universities.

### **The Perils of Freedom / Freedom in Peril**

This freedom of course does not come without its perils. Organisations run the risk of sailing too close to the wind, and economic precarity is very real. Questions of class and access cannot be ignored. However, if one is to combat the systemic 'epistemicide' (Santos, 2014) UK institutions have collectively been committing, and work towards teaching, learning and performance practices that are indeed reparatory and truly inclusive, the risks are necessary. Safety is a privilege which must be foregone.

*PdS: This question of the people who are coming in, these diverse cohorts and horizontal pedagogy which you both talk about in your schools, and relating this to the question of freedom not as a state but as a process seem to be fundamental and foundational parts of the philosophy of both schools. The question is: this 'marginal state' is a state of being that has its problems, but also seems deliberate to some extent. Both UVV and ELT – do these organisations resist being incorporated into something more official? In other words: if the Santo André municipality suddenly decided to buy-in to the idea and invest in you, would the school resist that because it might feel its freedom was under threat? And by the same token, Marcio, would the Universidade Livre's freedom be under threat if the Vila Velha was less in the margins?*

*MM: I think Lucia's is more problematic than ours, because we are a theatre group who manages the whole thing. We are a theatre administered by a group of artists, so we don't have this risk that the municipality or the state government would come in and say "now we will come in and take charge of this mess". This would not happen. The great danger would be if they said "we can't maintain you any more, sorry, you'll have to close your doors". Or I don't know, a large multinational, say Telefonica, wants to sponsor Vila Velha and all its content, but with the power to interfere in decisions, and we accept it – which is unlikely, but not impossible. So these are the biggest risks: that we can't take the hit, or that we take the hit and give in.*

*PdS: The two threats to freedom, it would seem (not wanting to put words in your mouth) are the State and Capital. And it seems you have to work in the margins of both.*

*MM: Or in spite of both.*

*LG: So I wanted to speak about this thing of being in the margins. What we feel as a team at ELT is that if we don't have legislation to protect us, we [will be and] have always been very vulnerable and depending on political administrations who, even though they are left-wing, have their own instabilities and vulnerabilities. We had a Workers Party mayor who looked like a character in a Western – it was really hard to talk to him, he had no culture and no interest, and ELT was something he had never heard of, an organisation which is part of the history of the city. He'd ask, "why do we have this school?". For him it was something of very*

*little value, so what we feel is like with the Oficina, when Zé Celso wanted its oeuvre to be declared intangible heritage,<sup>16</sup> we feel that ELT should also have itself somehow protected by law, for us and those who will come after us. This is so that we are protected and won't depend on a particular mayor, or secretary, someone crazy or thinking differently at any point, wanting to take the Conchita Theatre for themselves, or these kinds of situations we live through.*

*Something else – we think that the very fact that we work with this diverse body of students (whom we call learners – we call them learners and masters) means that we also inside the school suffer from the instabilities and vulnerabilities of being free. So, for example, we have a forum, a general forum of the school which discusses its questions, from management to classes. We have a Black forum in which we discuss topics relating to Black people, who run it. We have a trans forum which deals with questions relating to trans-people in the school. So we have questions that are super-rich and at the same time with unimaginable unfoldings, to do with the functioning of the school or ethics and relationships; for instance in a given moment the forum decided there would be no more male and female toilets, this was decided some 7 years ago. So this entailed labour, from destroying the urinals to all sorts. These are specific examples, but they show how the ELT community is involved with many topics, from the municipality to the day-to-day running of the school and their target audiences, and the community, all of which is free and risky – risky because free.*

The marginal, peripheric status of these schools is therefore deliberate and strategic, but not without its perils. There seems to be a tension between the risks and benefits of operating outside normalising systems, a pull towards the stability of institutions, balanced by an awareness of their ossifying power. Economic precarity is always a risk, and the work both organisations undertake is inherently political – by virtue of their very existence; in a climate of right-wing recrudescence, these 'free' schools offer a bastion of resistance.

### **Performing names**

We would like to conclude this contribution by sharing a couple of experiences, in the performative, pedagogical exchange spirit we have been exploring. Indeed, performing the role of teacher in such encounters renders moot Jos Boys's question: "Are teachers still lecturers or are they facilitators, coaches, mentors, or curators?". (2015, p5) They are all of these, and more – they are directors, performers, designers, co-creators, participants. Theatre practitioners and educators are at their best when they are open to what the 'other' in the room – actor, student – has to offer, and ideas and practices are rehearsed together.

*LG: So I will talk about Linn da Quebrada, this wonderful person who has turned into a political body, as she self-defines. She has videos that are very provocative where she sucks a*

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<sup>16</sup> The building of Teatro Oficina is protected as a cultural heritage site by the state of São Paulo. The theatre company, and its work, are protected by the municipality. There is a whole chapter to be written (alas not this one) about the various defence mechanisms theatres and theatre companies in Brazil resort to, in order to protect themselves from political volatility and real-estate market forces.

*cock-shaped candle in a church, to videos – her latest video – in which there are transwomen taking communion (Liniker is in it too), asking for peace, let transwomen live, because their life expectancy was 37. I worked with Linn for four years at ELT, we made a lot of work together.*

*At that time – and thinking back one realises how beautiful and crazy it is how things change – fortunately – it's been 7-8 years since she graduated. At that time, she spoke of a trans theatre in Brazil and in São Paulo. And I told her “you'll need to play all characters, you'll need to do everything!” And as I work with voice, many times for example I'm working at a particular range of the keyboard on the lower register, which women normally don't reach, or a higher frequency of the speaking voice that normally men won't reach, only signing. And Linn would say: ‘I'm not staying in this group, or that one’. She always challenged me, and because we shared a lot of affection and love for the work, she always challenged me to review not only the way I would have to study with her the trans voice – she had not yet transitioned, she transitioned fully after leaving the school, but she started transitioning at the school. And she was to me a very rich experience, because she has showed me, as have all the transwomen I've worked with since – every year I've had transwomen in my groups – they have been teaching me to see myself afresh, re-view myself as a woman. Most trans people I've been working with are transwomen; as a woman, as a cis-woman, as heteronormative; they have made me review my pedagogy.*

*As I have learned from my Black students, how they have led me to understand structural racism and how I put myself before this space of being a white woman; and how they have made me read, I am full of books here now about Black theatre, books about African stories, how they have revolutionised the syllabus in the school, how we have now been reading trans-dramaturgies (Ave Terrena is brilliant and we have been reading her, Amara Moira and other wonderful writers). So I think ELT is an experience of what is yet to come, an experience of the place you would not otherwise be in, and you have to leave where you are to get there.*

*MM: My story is quite similar, not an anecdote, but an experience. A specific case. We once had a project with some cultural workers who made a project on accessibility. So they selected some plays in the city to have audio description for blind people and LIBRAS<sup>17</sup> for Deaf audiences. So this woman called Iracema came to do some audio description – she was blind and she told me “I want to make theatre, I want to join UVV”. I said ‘ok, but I don't know how I'm going to deal with you, how I'm going to work with you’ – but we will discover it. So she joined us. And here is a clear example of why we don't call ourselves students and teachers, or even a course; [we call ourselves] participants and collaborators. The collaborators are those who have maybe an archive, a repertoire of some kind of practice in narrative, management or technical and are willing to distribute, to share this repertoire. And the participant is someone who also has their repertoire, but who is there to participate in this sharing of the collaborators' repertoire. So she arrived as a participant to be an actress, to experiment with that; and then in the end – we started to – I asked her to start an audio-description workshop. So we would do our improvisations and someone would narrate / do an audio-description for her. And she would in that practice correct and explain the*

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<sup>17</sup> Língua Brasileira de Sinais (Brazilian Sign Language)

*rules of audio description: that you don't explain, you don't for example say "this resembled some other thing"; no, you have to say "this is it". So you don't say "she moves like a cat"; you say "she moves this way and that way". And so the person who listens, sees a cat. We were doing precisely Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There. And the first improvisation we did was exactly Alice passing through the glass. And so this audio description taught me a lot in terms of staging. Because what we were doing was not a mirror: we bought it as a mirror because we could see it, but in the audio description it was never a mirror. And if it wasn't a mirror in the audio description it is because in fact it was not a mirror. So this was very beautiful, and she was incredible in this respect, because for example we had capoeira classes, or yoga classes. And then people were being careful with her and she'd be really pissed off. She'd say I can do it, I will do it, and she'd learn everything through a process of contact. She'd touch people's legs, bodies to check how they were moving so that she could move too. So this was a learning experience for everyone – I learned how to direct a blind actress, she learned a bunch of things, I learnt a lot about narrative, about mise-en-scène –*

*PdS: And about pedagogy itself, I imagine...*

*MM: Yes.*

*LG and MM: Teacher and Student are names that belong to other pedagogies.*

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