

# Poetic Creed as a System of Autonomous Reflection in Theatre Creation Processes

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English translation, Neil CHARLTON

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## Abstract

The aim of this article is to introduce the notion of poetic creed. A notion that was created to reflect on the different ways in which a theatre creator can produce theoretical thinking inside and around their practice. The poetic creed of a theatre creator is conceived as a continuously evolving subject. While studying the ways of thinking the practices, we try to discover the ways in which we could reflect inside the artistic field and how they become useful in terms of production of thought about the world that surrounds the creator.

This approach's contribution is to propose different tools for a possible method that can lead to the production of theoretical inputs emerging from the creative practices. We will introduce some working axes that could be useful for researchers (working on the analysis of a specific creator's poetics), researcher creators or creators that are trying to understand their own processes and practices.

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**Keywords:** Poetic Creed, Creative Processes, Performance Reflection

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## Poetic Creed as a System of Autonomous Reflection in Theatre Creation Processes

### Forms of Reflection and Spaces of Legitimation

It is always complex for theatre creators to reflect on their practice. It would be impossible to simplify it as an enumeration of methods, techniques and strategies to practise their craft. By understanding their discipline and reflecting on it, the performative subject<sup>1</sup> goes beyond the sphere of the practice to shape their own creed, integrating and enriching it. By putting theatre creators' theoretical reflection into perspective, we can analyse the configurations produced within the theatre landscape where they develop their artistic production.

To approach the issue of the production of theoretical inputs emanating from artistic practices, I propose the notion of “poetic creed”, which emerges to reflect on how theatre creators objectivise their own experience. This emerges as part of broader research I have conducted since 2012,<sup>2</sup> whose focus is the problematization of the spaces in which theatre creators can establish themselves as autonomous intellectuals based on the systematisation of theatre practices and the reflection on them.

In this framework, the aim is to set out a specific approach to the relations that creators can build with their practice in the reflective act. The reason why the methodology proposed by the poetic creed could be central to reflecting on artistic practices is that (based on the advances to which this research brought me) I recognise that they work as a sphere of construction of unique knowledge, in which one can think about the processes themselves and the contexts based on which art is produced. Moreover, promoting spaces of reflection on the practice works as a channel of analysis of the social phenomena surrounding the creative praxis as such. My intention with this

1. During this study I use performative subject to describe the creators who work in the theatre field and produce reflective thought on their creative production, without prioritising one task over the other.

2. In principle as part of my master's degree research in France and then as a subject of my PhD in France and Argentina. This research emerges from my work in the field of theatre practice in combination with my theoretical training. My current corpus of theatre creators focuses the poetic creed on research-creation within the Argentinean theatre field but with the aim that, in future research, this can be expanded to other contexts.

study is to set out a category that, in my view, could be useful for those theorists, critics and historians who want to study theatre from a perspective in which both theatre practices and the reflections of creators around them are analysed. Secondly, this category could also provide tools for those creators interested in systematising the reflection on their practices.

In *El absoluto literario* (2012), Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy recover what, in their view, is one of the most representative texts of early German romanticism, the journal *Athenaeum*.<sup>3</sup> The particular approach of this publication founded in 1798 consists of not identifying itself as literature “ni tampoco una mera ‘teoría’ de la literatura (antigua y moderna), sino la teoría misma como literatura o, dicho de otro modo, la literatura produciéndose y produciendo su propia teoría” (nor simply a “theory of literature” [ancient and modern]. Rather, it is theory itself as literature or, in other words, literature producing itself as it produces its own theory) (31). This framework includes excerpts from the writings by Friedrich Schlegel, in which he proposes a different angle on the traditional role of the artist understood only as a creator (Lacoue-Labarthe, 2012: 175):

Si la poesía debe convertirse en arte, si el artista debe tener una comprensión y ciencia profundas de sus medios y sus fines, sus obstáculos y sus objetos, entonces el poeta debe filosofar sobre su arte. Si no ha de ser solo inventor y trabajador, sino también concededor de su materia y si ha de poder comprender a sus conciudadanos en el reino del arte, entonces también tiene que convertirse en filólogo.<sup>4</sup>

This quotation sheds light on the particular treatment in this first stage of Romanticism of the figure of the artist as someone with knowledge of a specific discipline, as well as a creator. Based on this approach, Schlegel proposes that whoever occupies this role, beyond their creative practice, must be able to “filosofar sobre su arte” (philosophise about his art), in other words, produce reflections on it. And concerning the publication of *Athenaeum* they stress that “todo arte debe devenir ciencia y toda ciencia arte. La poesía y la filosofía deben estar unidas” (all art should become science, and all science art; poetry and philosophy should be made one) (35).

I developed the notion of poetic creed by thinking about the multiple roles played by theatre creators as a result of reflecting on their practices and their inclusion in a specific field based on them.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, I agree with Michel de Certeau who, in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), defines the

3. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy (2012) will define the main aim of this journal as “la voluntad de ‘retorno crítico a lo existente’” (commitment to the critical “recasting” of what is) (31) from philology.

4. “If poetry must become art, if the artist must have a profound understanding and science of its means and its purposes, its obstacles and its objects, then the poet must philosophise about his art. If he must be not only an inventor and worker but also have a good knowledge of his material and be able to understand his fellow citizens in the kingdom of art, then he must also become a philologist.”

5. Although the logic of religious faith and how the value of symbol, community and mysticism is interwoven may be useful to reflect on given connections that take place in diverse social fields, including the artistic, we must note that here the notion of creed is used in another direction, which does not prioritise mysticism in art or religious faith. It is a creed of the specific arranged around the issue of how creators see themselves and their practice. By doing so, it responds to the bond between creators and their original sphere of practice.

role of belief “not as the object of believing (a dogma, a programme, etcetera) but as the subject’s investment in a proposition, the act of saying it and considering it as true” (178). In the specific case of the material with which I intend to shape the idea of poetic creed, I start from the link of creators with their beliefs to think about the modes in which a certain thick discourse<sup>6</sup> about their own practices is produced. Therefore, by shaping a specific and dynamic discursive materiality based on reflective production by theatre creators with their practice, elements that contain a specific knowledge will emerge. By focusing on the analysis of theatre practice, it could be argued that, beyond the effective and real facts that support the creators in their work, the poetic creed is arranged around the specific link that connects them to the discipline in which they work, in their personal association with the practice itself and also in the work within their specific disciplinary field. Particularly in the sphere of the performing arts, distinct forms of belief are shaped by seeking to describe certain aspects of these practices that cannot be grasped. It is for this reason that this study seeks to focus on artistic practice in terms of production of thought and not only in terms of production.

The study on which this article is based is founded on acknowledging that the complexity of the crossing between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge is far more profound than the mere articulation between theory and theatre practice. I agree, in this respect, with Robin Nelson (2013), who asserts that “rendering porous the firm institutionalized binary between theory and practice, it involves an iterative, dialogic engagement of doing-thinking” (19). By developing the category of poetic creed I was interested in studying the crossing between two spheres of production of thought (practice and reflection on the practice) to see how far the division or meeting between them helps to systematise the processes of creation.

Through this question I seek to identify the forms of reflection within the artistic field and how they are approached in terms of production of thought about the world that makes up the creator’s environment. Moreover, considering that any creative process includes per se an exploration of the materials, history, ideas, resources and other artistic works, the production of knowledge derived from artistic exploration will be activated in all fields in which artists manifest their praxis, mainly all that information derived from choices, possibilities and forms of work with the specific circumstances in which this theatre material is produced. Based on this, the three priority points to reflect on artistic research would be as follows: research inherent in the search (artistic creation in itself), the development of concepts, and the production of thought based on the specific material.

Moreover, the evolution and articulation of these aspects depends on the field of which they form part, without emphasising the binarism of two disciplines but an idea of non-border between theory and artistic practice. At

6. “Thick discourses” is the name I give to a category that emerges out of Clifford Geertz’s (2003) notion of thick description. This author proposes an ethnographic method of analysis for studies produced in the field of social sciences in which a priority value will be given to the discursive production of the subject immersed in his or her practices. Similarly, within the field of the discipline I work in, I recognise that the only way of accessing a thick reflection will take place through the materials produced by a particular performative subject in conditions favourable to generating a specific discursive production.

this point, the in between zone (Susanne Valerie) is a multiplying conceptual element as it does not focus on the limit (the crossing, the edge) but on the grey zone generated by the union between theory and praxis (or, more specifically, between artistic practice and theoretical reflection on artistic practice). Research applied to the performing arts should, then, work in conjunction with them, and not be subordinated only to a theory and epistemology that is characteristic of it. On the other hand, given that research within these practices has specific characteristics, this requires the creation of productive environments that are not always evident. They involve both the organisation of spaces of dissemination and a format that meets the needs of this specific intellectual.<sup>7</sup>

### Translation as Emancipation

The German artist, documentary filmmaker and researcher Hito Steyerl has explored the relevance and legitimacy of research spaces in art based on the following question: in what frameworks can one reflect on artistic practice?<sup>8</sup> One of the particularities that this creator finds is that certain artistic research projects usually make a “claim to uniqueness” (2015), which produces a type of organisation in which a particular logic and a field of individual references are highlighted. This generates, on the one hand, some autonomy and, on the other, a mechanism of “resistance against dominant modes of production of knowledge” (2015). Steyerl will later add that the multilingualism of artistic research includes an act of translation, which involves at least two languages in dialogue. Therefore, it can be noted that, in various ways, the artistic subject as a specific intellectual must constantly perform internal translations. In principle, between those two fields of production of thought that may have points of coincidence, but with different times and norms. The work itself is shaped as the space of resistance for the art subject in two aspects: as a questioning of the practice within the discipline and as a space of reflection producing a specific knowledge.

By focusing on the difference between creators that generate conceptualisations “about” the work of art and those that produce thought “in” the work of art, it should be emphasised that in the first case there is a production of thought about the artistic praxis brought about by means of conceptualisations that are tangential to it but remain outside of it. In the second case, when creators produce thought “in” the work, they develop the set of concepts that the work carries in itself (internal logic, determinations in relation to a poetics, response to a concrete procedural journey, and so on) and that are activated during the situation of production. At this point, the systematisation that each creator performs is unique, since there are some

7. This would be the creator that produces reflection on his or her practice (Tibor Bak-Geler, 2003).

8. Christopher Frayling (1993) has posed the question about the spaces of legitimisation through research on the areas in which historically there has been reflection on the theatre art and those within which there has been theoretical thought. He does so through the following questions: Where does legitimisation lie? In a peer-group? An institution? A foundational structure? An invisible university? A sector of society? Is this a political question with a small p: about degrees, validations and academic status [...] or a more conceptual question concerning the bases of work in the arts [...]?

that can use theoretical reflection as a formula to stimulate the practices and others that use their materiality of work as a reflection (we could also speak of practice as thought).

### Questions on Shaping the Poetic Creed

Certain questions become foundational as they are anchored in theatre practice and how creators are linked to their work. Some of the questions that underpin the notion of poetic creed are as follows: if art is in itself a producer of knowledge, what would be the point of systematically reflecting on practices? Can the knowledge produced within the artistic practice be transmitted? Where is the complexity of theatre creators' reflection on their practice? Is there always self-reference when producing thought within the practices? Who would be the recipient of these reflections or systematisations? How can the reflection on the practice affect the theatre practice itself? Does this give a different dimension to the creators' work? Does it give them a different analytical perspective? Does it require them to organise their productivity? Does it require them to think systematically about the world in which their practice is framed?

On the other hand, what is the use of knowing how the poetic creed of a creator is constituted? To generate reflection systems that are then applicable to other creators? To understand the world of that creator? To be able to talk about the world through art? To be able to speak about oneself poetically and recognise oneself by processing one's own knowledge?

### Poetic Creed as a Collective Construction

The poetic creed of a theatre creator will be shaped as an element in ongoing evolution. When studying the modes of thinking about practices, we seek to see what forms of reflection are generated within the artistic field and how they are taken in terms of production of thought about the world that makes up the creator's environment. In other words, the poetic creed will be worked on in the creators' direct relationship with their original sphere of practice regarding their perception and creative praxis. According to my primary study, the data that helps to build the image of poetic creed is arranged in a non-hierarchical way and each one of the aspects included in it contributes to shaping the notion, in search of an organic and specific whole. The poetic creed will answer the question about how theatre creators see themselves and also how they look, live, transmit and reflect (on) their artistic practice. However, beyond the creators' link with their practice (and what they can develop in terms of a reflection on it), the poetic creed must also be analysed in terms of a collective construction.

What is the use of thinking in terms of a poetic creed? Given that the objective of my work is a reflection on the work of the creator, I base myself on the idea that all creators, to sustain their practice over time, develop a specific type of support that goes beyond artistic production itself. This is why the poetic creed as a category will refer to theatre creators crossed by the world

they pass through and depending on how they perceive it and, secondly, on the reflections arising from this perception.

### **An Autonomous Discursive Subject Based on Reflection on Practices**

Regarding the application of the notion as an approach to the analysis of artistic practices by theatre creators, the elements that contribute to the construction of the creators' poetic creed would be particularly the texts surrounding creation itself rather than the textual production of theatre material. This occurs, to a large extent, because not only theatre creators who deal with writing would be in a position to produce reflective textuality around their artistic production. In order to approach this type of search, a specific type of approach is not essential; in other words, the questions posed to a creator<sup>9</sup> in relation to his/her poetic creed would vary depending on the elements that can contribute to the description of the creative experience of each specific performative subject. This phenomenon occurs because what derives from these categories is a type of discourse by creators on their practice that is intended to have a considerable degree of thickness and is useful to delineate the unique characteristics of the poetic creed of the theatre creator in question.

In order to shape the image of that performative subject facing his/her own materiality, the self-reflective condition that is inherent to it is recognised. Based on this, another element emerges that helps shape the poetic creed. This is the question of self-referentiality, which applies to creators who for reasons of practicality, interest or closeness talk about their own procedures, mainly because they have access to them. Therefore, it is necessary to consider how the performative subject develops his/her reflection and how far he/she contributes with his/her artistic practice, by prioritising the production of thought on the work rather than issues merely linked to specific productivity of the artistic object itself.<sup>10</sup> To this end, it is necessary to consider that the degrees of thick reflection are diverse. It will never be the same type of discursive development that one gets when thinking about artistic practice during a brief interview (which seeks, through certain typical questions, to describe the poetic or artistic search of a performative subject within the framework of promotion of a theatre material) as what is produced in textual terms in an extensive interview about the poetics of a creator.

This type of unique textuality enables a specific discourse that could not be classified as experiential documentation or writing of creative processes and also does not concern the publication of plays but rather particular discursive objects. When reflecting on this type of autonomous discursive object that does not correspond to a specific classification but could be recognised

9. Or the questions a creator can ask himself or herself if they are a reflective creator or a researcher creator (interested in producing theoretical components based on systematisations of their own work).

10. The type of reflection generated as a poetic creed could be directly applicable to his or her artistic work, but not necessarily because I think that this type of reflection has an intrinsic value beyond its applicability to the usual practices of performative subjects.

as a systematisation of reflections around practices,<sup>11</sup> we should also consider the frameworks within which this thought would occur.<sup>12</sup> The consideration of these frameworks leads us to analyse the spaces that foster reflection, as well as the areas of circulation to talk about artistic practice in terms of processes, methodologies or systems. With the aim of generating this type of thick material to approach the poetic creed of the theatre creator, a kind of analytical guide is proposed, which contributes to the development of thought about the procedures themselves and does not seek to be limited to poetics.<sup>13</sup>

The aim of promoting the search for this specific discursive object aims, both for creators and theorists (and especially for research creators), to dismantle the structure that divides the theory of artistic practice into two elements that belong to completely different fields, establishing that reflection and praxis are shaped as two activities that feed each other. In turn, this will involve a reflection on the conditions of production of knowledge (and validation of that knowledge) based on the specificity of the object analysed.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, the poetic creed will respond to the question about the creators' perception of themselves and their practice. To shape it, different approaches can be used: for example, metatexts produced by the theatre creator, paratexts<sup>15</sup> that surround their work (and not the specific production of the creator), elements derived from the role of the participating researcher (during the creative processes of the creator in question) and, as already mentioned, interviews. It should be clarified that, although not all discourse absolutely defines the practice of creators (since in some cases it may not correspond to their practice), it can be said that the creed of the creator in question will be more solid as long as it is organically integrated into his or her practice. On the other hand, for the purposes of this analysis, the oral statements by theatre creators are the gateway to knowing the resources they possess to describe their own procedures and poetics.

This approach would be taken up from different angles: in relation to creators' environment (contact with their work material, contact with their

11. Some of the recent publications in Argentina that systematise and produce discourse on their practices are as follows: *Hacia un lenguaje escenográfico* by Norberto Laino (2013), the biography written in the first person of Norman Briski (2013), *Escritos 1975-2005* by Mauricio Kartun (2006), the essays of multiple creators of reference of Buenos Aires theatre that form part of the publication *Detrás de escena* (2015), as well as the collected works with a foreword by way of a manifesto by Emilio García Wehbi (2012) and other reflective approaches to the creative practices of some of the main exponents of current Argentinean theatre (who have been more or less systematic in their publications), some of whom are Alejandro Finzi, Ana Alvarado, Francisco Javier, Eli Sirlin, Rafael Curci, Griselda Gambaro, Jorge Lavelli, Pompeyo Audivert and Ricardo Monti.

12. Which includes the question about whether they are systematised or, in contrast, random and casual.

13. The type of questions proposed are along the lines of: Have you dealt with this issue? What questions has it brought up for you? What recurrences can you identify? In contrast to a more closed type of interview or focusing on the material produced by the creator in question, for example: What do you mean by that?

14. Some of the questions that channel this concern about the reflection on the practice or shaping of an activity that includes this articulation between the artistic and the investigative by the performative subject could be the following: from where do you analyse your own practice? What theoretical tools exist to read the praxis? How are these activities articulated? Is it necessary to find a specific dialogic framework? Is it necessary to ask specific questions? Is it good to develop a prior systematisation so artists can respond based on their methodology? Is this an autonomous or collective work?

15. Here I borrow the notion of Gérard Genette (1987), by referring to titles, prefaces, interviews given, metaliterary texts, any other explanatory material for a work marked by complexity, and any element that provides the formulation of a critical device about the texts, whatever the format of this material (photos, writing drafts, letters). All this in the search to create an archive that is useful both to critics and researchers and any curious reader that might be interested in this system of information parallel to the work itself.



colleagues), with circumstances (historical context) and with theatrical convention (meeting with the audience). When contemplating these angles, some of the axes that allow the poetic creed of theatre creators to be defined are the methods, words or concepts that distinguish their work, the figure of the others, filiation, their mission and how artists in question define themselves. Next, I describe them briefly:

### *a) Methods*

This focuses on the methods that theatre creators use to carry out their creative processes. It is mainly organised around recurrences during artistic production, the changes in their work dynamics and the possibility of synthesis that they can carry out with respect to the procedures that they recognise in the approach to their own production. For example, César Brie defines his methodology and theatre research based on images built in the questions he asks the actors and actresses working with him. Brie finds that his first methodological feature in the initial question underpins the issue that will organise the associative field into a new theatre project. From here, then, any path possible could be taken, depending on the context and the distinct subjects that will form part of this theatre material that is starting to be outlined. In the repetition of this procedure, Brie says he does not defend the methods or conceive them as dynamic, and recognises that he suggests to his actors that “si viene otro director y les dice lo contrario. mi consejo es créanle” (if another creator comes and tells you the opposite, my advice is to believe in him) (Rosenzvaig, 2015: 81). Similarly, any kind of shaping that the theatre creator recognises as “maxim” or “buoys of passage” during their creative processes is also useful to shape the category of the methods in the description of their own poetics. Rafael Spregelburd says in relation to the procedures of theatre work that “el ‘procedimiento’ existe siempre, y con relativa sencillez. En cualquier creación hay siempre un procedimiento. Lo difícil es nombrarlo” (the “procedure” always exists, and quite easily. In any creation there is always a procedure. What is difficult is naming it) (Ajaka et al., 2015: 57). By searching for the description by creators about how they work, the aim is for them to recognise certain recurrences in their creative processes in order to describe and explain what their methodology consisted of, as well as the relapses and modifications that the procedures undergo from one process to another.

In general, the discourse on work methodologies is usually one of the most accessible in terms of reflection on the practice itself, as this is what creators develop throughout their career when reasserting their procedures. For example, Piel de Lava defines its work methodology as collective, imbuing the creative experience at every moment of its processes and productions. The group approach is based on what they define as “rehearsal mode” and they affirm that they live constantly in this “imposed” rehearsal situation: “Nos juntamos a probar ideas, textos y materiales que nos motorizaron a empezar una nueva obra. Siempre llamamos a esa instancia “ensayar” aunque a veces lo que se ensaya no existe todavía. Es como una forma de estar en el tiempo, juntándonos, compartiendo la cotidianeidad, probando casi siempre durante largas temporadas

cosas que no conducirán a ningún sitio” (Ajaka et al., 2015: 127).<sup>16</sup> The methods that creators describe as a result of the repetition of certain work procedures that gradually shape their poetics in many cases feed off the training elements that also contribute to the construction of their artistic perspective in general. For example, Andrea Garrote will formulate the idea of work techniques as tools “que la razón nos brinda para escaparnos de ella” (that reason gives us to escape it) (Ajaka et al., 2015: 39). She will then note that from her experience in diverse training spaces and as a creator who feeds off diverse disciplinary elements, she takes tools from everything and these, in their turn, are reformulated by experience itself, to the extent of inventing others. By eluding fixed methods, “no me adhiero fervorosamente a ningún método, he alegremente a todos los que conocí (I don’t adhere fervently to any method, I have joyfully exploited all those I knew) (Ajaka et al., 2015: 39). Finally, looking at the case of Federico León, it is curious to see that the director describes himself as “contrario a los métodos” (contrary to the methods) (Rosenzvaig, 2015: 206) by stating that “a cada persona le sirven cosas distintas” (each person finds different things useful) (Rosenzvaig, 2015: 206). On this point I question the idea (that seems to be suggested in León’s claim) that a method is something fixed and immovable within which artists inscribe their poetics and processes of creation to locate it in the mobile place provided by reflecting on the recurrences of theatre materiality itself. Thus, I wonder: are there no modalities that insist on the distinction of a specific format of work? Is there no method in the definition of a sustained search in the construction of individual poetics? Clearly, recognising these elements does not necessarily demand a bureaucratic and mechanical repetition of the same creative procedures.

### *b. Words or concepts*

The conceptual elements developed by creators that become recurrent during their production are part of the communication strategy that they shape with their work teams. Some of them may respond to a specific aesthetic or to a particular training, but in many other cases they simply adopt the jargon of the creation process out of use and custom, without needing to respond to any specific tradition. For example, Rubén Szuchmacher speaks of certain words that are used during the creative process of a show (work slogans, forms of evaluation, anecdotes, gossip, etc.) as a kind of literature that will be constituted as “literary baggage” that is intertwined in the *mise-en-scène*. He notes:

No se trata de hablar artificialmente durante el proceso de ensayos, sino de ser conscientes de que el modo en que cualquiera se expresa sobre los materiales con los que trabaja, despliega, en tanto que proceso artístico, una forma de literatura (Szuchmacher, 2015: 72).<sup>17</sup>

16. “We meet to test ideas, texts and materials that drove us to begin a new play. We always call it “rehearsing” although sometimes what is rehearsed does not yet exist. It is a way of being in time, meeting, sharing the everyday, testing almost always for long periods things that will lead nowhere.”

17. “It is not about artificially speaking during the rehearsal process but of being aware that the way everyone talks about the materials they work with brings about, as an artistic process, a form of literature” (Szuchmacher, 2015: 72).

Moreover, the original ideas of the creators that are defined and rooted in their application will in many cases transcend the communicational link of the work teams to be shaped as discursive forms from which a theatre creator conceives his or her practice. For example, continuing with the above, Rafael Spregelburd speaks of the “solemn” as an organising and conveying conceptualisation for thinking about procedural resources, conceiving it as something from which one should escape to generate a theatre scene and, through the creative process, to “uninhabit oneself”, in other words, leave oneself as a creator to think of oneself as part of a mechanism that seeks to bring about a poetics “para evitar la solemnidad en un proceso creador hay que saber deshacerse. Comprender que debo poder ver lo mismo y otra cosa al mismo tiempo. Descreer de mis convicciones previas a la obra, y burlarme también —de ser posible— de la permanencia de aquellas convicciones que pudieran surgir después de la obra” (Ajaka et al., 2015: 63).<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the “metaphorisation” of the theatre processes, using different disciplines and making analogies, helps shape the conceptual elements that will make up the thought of a theatre creator. In the Argentinean theatre field there are several cases of metaphors and analogies that define a kind of discourse of creators about their poetics; for example, what Alejandro Catalán defines as “producción de sentido actoral” (production of acting meaning) (2001), the notions of “relato” (story) and “teatralidad” (theatricality) that Bernardo Cappa uses to work with his casts and the construction around the image of the “proletarian” that Bartís (2003) uses when describing the theatre work, among many others.

### *c. The figure of the others*

This approach is organised around the ability of theatre creators to recognise where they are located with respect to their peers, and who they align with in artistic terms. The definition of “oneself” in function of other creators of the field will involve a contextual and descriptive shaping of their poetic creed. For example, Peter Brook (2007) talks about a kind of theatre, which he describes as “snob”, as the great motivator of his own work. In this way, the references to the environment, especially those from which creators wish to distance themselves, work as organisers of their practices. In Argentinean theatre, talking about the ways of naming and being named in the 1980s and the search based on the type of theatre being produced at that time, Guillermo Angellelli acknowledges that he constantly defined himself through the negative by saying, for instance, that what he did was not theatre but “clown, [...] modelo vivo” (clown, [...] living model) (Sagasetta et al., 2011: 74). The search for something that specifically identifies the practice shows the intention to differentiate oneself from a way of approaching practices that did not satisfy. In this case, the questioning of the established modes of naming could reveal the appearance of a “cosa singular y diferenciada del paisaje

18. “To avoid solemnity in a creative process it is necessary to un-inhabit oneself. To understand that I am able to see the same thing and another thing at the same time. Un-believe my convictions prior to the play, and also mock — if possible — the permanence of those convictions that may emerge after the play” (Ajaka et al., 2015: 63).

anterior” (something unique differentiated from the previous landscape) (Angellelli, in Sagaseta et al., 2011: 74).

For his part, Matías Feldman forms his own poetics and production based on a conceptualisation that develops in relation to the others (it could be said his peers and his environment in this case) based on two ideas: realism (as prevailing aesthetic of the theatre scene) and capitalism (as an ideology or system that sustains the working of the productive theatre framework in which this aesthetic is framed). Based on this, Feldman conceives realism that, as a discourse, appears as a kind of “base” on which other languages are built. The use of this poetics is for this creator the most immediate option and on which there is less reflection because “los actores, dramaturgos y directores se pueden lanzar a crear una obra ‘realista’ sin necesidad de pensar en el mismo como un lenguaje muy particular y complejo con infinitas variables. Sino que simplemente, se dejan llevar por algo que ya está aprendido”<sup>19</sup> (Ajaka et al., 2015: 49). With regard to capitalism, he will state that the production of symbolic material has been appropriated by the bourgeoisie, and it operates as follows: “la clase media, criada para consumir, es la productora de ese material simbólico, mientras que la clase alta es dueña de los medios para producir dicho material. Los que bailan con la más fea son los pobres, también consumidores de dicha producción proveniente de otra clase”<sup>20</sup> (Ajaka et al., 2015: 48).

Besides the agreement or disagreement with other poetics that can shape a discourse by theatre creators on how they conceive their own practices, another role that contributes to it is that of the participants of the theatre event, those who work with the creator in question and the ways in which that shared work is articulated in practice. For example, Emilio García Wehbi, when reflecting on his role and those who work with him, notes that “todo está en función de la poética de la obra [...] El director es el autor de la obra, los demás son asistentes artísticos” (everything depends on the poetics of the play [...] The director is the author of the play, the others are artistic assistants) (Rosenzvaig, 2012: 72). Obviously, the space that is given to the group of creators that constitute the work is also a reference to the way in which a theatre creator thinks about and conceives his or her work in a group.

#### *d. Filiation*

Within this category come the references that preceded theatre creators in question. In most cases as predecessors within the same line of work they follow, based on their own training, but also as general reference of the artistic field with a theoretical or practical legacy that is held up as a reference for contemporary creators.<sup>21</sup> Based on the recognition of a specific aesthetic or

19. “Actors, playwrights and directors can throw themselves into creating a “realistic” work without needing to think of it as a very particular and complex language with infinite variables. But, simply, they get carried away by something that is already learned.”

20. “The middle class, raised to consume, is the producer of this symbolic material, while the upper class owns the means to produce such material. Those who always draw the short straw, also consumers of that production from another class.”

21. Some of the cases that exemplify this phenomenon are the international visits that appear as determining for Argentinean creators who then would later be renowned and will always be cited as determinant milestones of their

pedagogical approach, as well as artistic belonging and predecessors, this theatre subject has specific elements to shape and describe their particular poetics. Derived from this, there may be several other elements that contribute to the construction of the poetic creed of that creator, such as the recognition of a discourse or “paternal” point of view faced with the aesthetic search itself or the training and professional background that were determining for the praxis itself, although this is not clearly reflected in the final individual poetics of the creator in question. For example, Laura Yusem when reflecting on her practice and that of her contemporaries organises her discourse around the legacy of Stanislavsky and his influence on Argentinean theatre and considers that “no se puede prescindir del maestro ruso, incluso ni aquellos que se oponen al realismo” (we cannot dispense with the Russian master, even those who oppose realism) (Rosenzvaig, 2015: 63). Also in relation to creators of reference that are not necessarily the trainers of theatre creators but influence their work, Mauricio Wainrot mentions Pina Bausch, who he recognises as a fundamental influence whose presence in Argentina created the need to ask oneself “qué estuvimos haciendo hasta ahora” (what we had been doing so far) (Rosenzvaig, 2012: 81). This is a case in which, without directly being his master, the marks and influences in Wainrot’s work become clear. On this he adds: “yo no estudié con Federico Fellini ni con Ingmar Bergman, pero los siento mis maestros, como también el cine de Michelangelo Antonioni y el de Luis Buñuel (I did not study with Federico Fellini or with Ingmar Bergman but I feel them as my masters, as were the cinema of Michelangelo Antonioni and that of Luis Buñuel) (Rosenzvaig, 2012, p. 81).

In this way, the possibility of finding influences of the poetics of the those creators of reference in one’s own poetics and traces of the predecessors in one’s own procedures (those meetings that Borges [2011] describes as “milestones” that leave specific marks on his own journey as a creator) show how far filiation determines the direction that specific poetics take, as well as the ways of conceiving training. An example of this, talking about his own training, is provided by Julio Chávez who conceives his teachers as “oppressors” with whom he could relate through “incarceration” or “liberation”. Based on this he will note with reference to Agustín Alezzo: “Si yo no hubiese tenido su mirada tierna, no hubiese soportado la mirada de Fernandes. Tengo el gusto de haber elegido a mis opresores. Yo decidí cuando encarcelarme y cuando liberarme de mis maestros”<sup>22</sup> (Rosenzvaig, 2015: 15).

### *e. Mission*

Within the approaches that help shape a category within the poetic creed of creators, the idea of “mission” would be activated as the link with the possibility of including art in their own lives, making this a defining trait of their aesthetic and poetics. Similarly, but more generally, it also has to do with

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own artistic career. This is the case of Tadeusz Kantor (on the two visits he made in 1984 and 1987 to Buenos Aires with *Wielopole-Wielopole* and *Let the Artists Die*) for Norberto Laino, Pina Bausch for Mauricio Wainrot and La Fura dels Baus (in the presentation they made in 1984 in the city of Córdoba) for La Organización Negra.

22. “If I hadn’t had his tender gaze, I couldn’t have borne Fernandes’ gaze. I have the pleasure of having chosen my oppressors. I decided when to be imprisoned and when to free myself of my masters.”

the way that creators define the discipline in which they work. For example, Mariana Obersztern reflects on her praxis suggesting that “las cosas que [...] pueda afirmar no buscan postularse como nada. Son meras derivaciones de la práctica y hacia ella vuelven” (the things [...] I can state do not seek to postulate themselves as nothing. They are mere derivations of practice and they return to it) (Ajaka et al., 2015: 67). The playwright recognises that the mission of the creators would be to maintain themselves in a kind of tension that needs the artistic work to be resolved, because this is what would make sense of their work as an artist. Luis Cano, for his part, poses the idea of coherence that determines the mission within the work of the *mise-en-scène*, based on the articulation between ideology and politics:

Yo creo que la ideología resulta de la política. Me interesa más la política. Puedo tener una obra cargada de discurso humanista, pero si yo, como director de esa obra, someto a los espectadores a sonidos estridentes, incluso a un maltrato físico, estoy contradiciendo en la práctica lo que pienso. Aquello que digo con palabras lo borro con la puesta (Rosenzvaig, 2015: 156-157).<sup>23</sup>

Similar to this but with other particularities, Norberto Laino conceives set design as a political and poetic fact; therefore there can be no set design if there is no poetic language and consequently its obligation is “no sólo con-mover en la imagen, en el gesto emocional, sino que también te tiene que sacudir en su expresión poética” (not only to move in the image, in the emotional gesture, but also to provoke in its poetic expression) (Sagaseta et al., 2011: 80); Eugenio Soto defines his practice as “historical” and works from this idea. He affirms that both performance and art in their totality are historical and that “cada uno es hijo de su tiempo, como es hijo de su biología, como es hijo de sus padres, de sus recorridos y de sus trayectos imaginarios” (everyone is the child of his time, as he is the child of his biology, as he is the child of his parents, of his background and his imaginary journeys) (Sagaseta et al., 2011: 62). Following these examples as mere references of the multiple forms of approach from which the praxis itself can be conceived in terms of “mission”, it cannot be overlooked that the artistic practice itself is a way to face the poetics and the contexts in which they are framed. In the search to shape the poetic creed of a creator, notions such as discipline as political and poetic, the performance as historical or the intra and extra theatre ideology are elements that end up forming a viewpoint of the world of which a poetic subjectivity forms part.

#### *f. Self-definition*

To shape the poetic creed of the theatre creator, the fundamental aspect will be the decision of artists to present themselves before the world as creators in one way and not another. Therefore, it will encompass the discursive resources used by artists to describe their position in the disciplinary field

23. “I think that ideology is the result of politics. I am more interested in politics. I can have a play loaded with humanistic discourse but if I, as a director of this play, submit the audience to strident sounds, even to physical abuse, I am contradicting what I think in practice. What I put into words I erase with the *mise-en-scène*.”

of which they form part. With respect to all the previous approaches, this would be the one that focuses more specifically on the resources of theatre creators to define themselves and their own practice. Some of the questions that could help to think about the processes that make up the practices could be: what is the specific approach to the scene? What use is it? What are the stages of work? Are there organising metaphors for the processes of creation? In what context are the procedures transmitted? What disciplines are involved in the work? How does the artistic field of which it forms part work? Then comes the description of the stages of their work and how their procedural poetics and specific final poetics are formed.

For example, one of the elements that contribute to these types of self-definition is to think of oneself specifically as part of a more complex structure (that could be the theatre field as a whole). One case is Maruja Bustamante, who describes her own practice in relation to the claim of legitimacy that is recognised in current Buenos Aires theatre as “politically correct” (Ajaka, et al., 2015: 122), which leads to a lack of artistic risk in the poetics that try to fulfil the minimum indispensable conditions in order to achieve that legitimisation. Beyond agreeing or not that these are the axes that determine the ownership and permanence of a theatre material in the theatre field of Buenos Aires, in this study it is illuminating to see how one is inevitably positioned to produce, and in that positioning to be placed in a specific space within the artistic landscape to which one belongs. It is precisely this type of materiality that feeds the aforementioned “thick discourses” and that is what ultimately affects a view of the practices from a place of autonomy of thought by theatre creators.

### Production of Discourse and Specific Textualities

Having reached this point, the question about the specific approach by creators to the reading and systematisation of their own production could be answered with the analysis of the conditions from which each artistic practice is specifically developed. Ileana Diéguez (2007: 61) says about the crossover between artistic practice and the framework of creation:

El estudio específico de las configuraciones de un texto o de una acción [...] pasa también por la comprensión de las relaciones personalizadas y particulares que en determinado momento desarrollan los creadores y que no siempre pueden construir una sistémica, sino que están vinculadas a la postura existencial [...] la “obra” o la situación artística es edificada en el acto, no habría que encerrarla en un sistema teórico separado de la práctica existencial de sus creadores.<sup>24</sup>

Based on this conception of a single entity that makes up the practice of creators and their “work”, the modalities in which a conceptual material

24. “The specific study of the configurations of a text or an action [...] also involves understanding the personalised and particular relations that at a given moment creators develop and that cannot always build a systemic approach but are linked to the existential stance [...] the ‘work’ or the artistic situation is built in the act, it should not be closed in a theoretical system separate from the existential practice of its creators.”

is produced and how this contributes to artistic praxis are set out. These considerations occur when speaking in real terms about the production of thought around the work and not based on questions related to the concrete productivity of the artistic object itself. By focusing on these dimensions, which in many cases are difficult to describe, the intention is to assess the production of theoretical inputs from artistic practice itself. Therefore, the uniqueness of the categories that arise from this encounter is useful, both for the professional journey of theatre creators and for the field in which their practices are framed. It is for this reason that my study has arisen from the concern caused by reflecting on artistic practice in terms of production of thought.

Consequently, part of the theoretical development that includes the notion of poetic creed envisages that the resources that creators use when trying to describe their specific practices respond to diverse traditions or principles that help to think about them. I have developed various categories of poetic creed according to the foundation on which creators recognise their practice associated with a specific paradigm of artistic production. Some of the derivations that survive to this day (and have nurtured the aforementioned classification) are: the poetic creed of the inspired creator or the “medium” creator, the poetic creed of the genius creator or the sensitive creator; the poetic creed of the uncritical creator; and the poetic creed of the reflective creator and the researcher creator.<sup>25</sup>

Although we suppose that such founding principles of creative practices influence how theatre creators think about their work, there are two points of the classification that concerns creators that we could say tend more to systematising thought on their creative practices: this is the poetic creed of the reflective artist and the poetic creed of the researcher artist. It is from this shaping of the production of knowledge within artistic practice that we can focus on theatre creators who appear, beyond cultural agents and creators, as specific intellectuals, in two directions: from practice towards theoretical reflection and vice versa. From here it is essential to reassert that the complexity of the crossover between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge is far more profound than the mere articulation between theory and theatre practice. It is irrefutable that theatre creators are ready to systematise their experiences, their journeys and their processes thanks to (and not despite) being immersed in them.

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25. Of course this list does not seek to be exhaustive, but works based on the observations made, which helps to develop the point of interest in the poetic creed. The intention in consecutively presenting the approaches to define the poetic creed and the typology of links between theatre creators and their practice is that the former can contribute to the organisation within the categories proposed in the latter. Although I believe that not all discourse absolutely defines the practice of a creator (as in some cases it might not correspond to his or her praxis), it can be argued that the creed of the creator in question will be more solid if it is organically integrated with his or her practice. Moreover, for the purposes of this analysis, the oral statements of the theatre creators are the ways to approach the resources they have to describe their own procedures and poetics. Regarding the question about how these typologies would affect reflection itself, it is evident that the overall conception that theatre creators have of their practice will directly affect the type of thought that may derive from it by recognising that these founding principles of creative practices influence how theatre creators think about their work and make up a specific type of reflective discourse. In a way, I confirm that when thinking about their practices theatre creators subscribe to one of these formats from which they develop their discourse.



Given the foregoing, maintaining the separation between theory and theatre practice goes directly against the production of an integrating thought between artistic and investigative knowledge, as it prevents overall visibility of the creative practices and a creator's thought about them. Although this duality has been considered a real challenge, it is confirmed by detecting a production of theoretical thought that is not systematised within artistic practices, as well as the willingness to use resources that come from the stage within theoretical practices. In turn, the ephemeral and mobile nature of the performing arts poses important challenges to the idea of fixed and measurable knowledge that is usually associated with theoretical research.

## Conclusions

My purpose with this article has been to present the category of poetic creed that derives from the research I carry out on the reflections of artists about their practices. Within it, the poetic creed deals with reflecting on how theatre creators objectify their own experience focusing on the singularity from which thought is generated around the practice in the reflective act. It could be argued, based on the development of this concept, that creators who reflect on their practice always do so from a specific approach or from a series of associations that describe the position from where they think about themselves. To some extent, the categories of poetic creed describe the ways in which theatre creators, when thinking about their practices, subscribe to pre-existing formats to produce thick discourses.

The reason why I consider that this type of methodology can be key to reflecting on artistic practices is the finding that they work as a space for the construction of unique knowledge. Similarly, promoting spaces of reflection around practice works as a way of analysing the social phenomena surrounding the creative praxis itself.

Therefore, I can argue that the spaces provided by an autonomous reflection based on the creative processes themselves shape a type of emancipation mechanism of the art subject within his/her own work. This would occur from two aspects: the questioning of the ways of working within the discipline and the creation of a work that is imposed as a space of knowledge-producing reflection. The detection of the procedures that surround the practices and the dynamics that are repeated in the work of the performative subject are constituents of their own poetics. This leads to the assembly of a textuality about the practice and work methodology, which is fundamental to claim the figure of the creator as a specific intellectual.

The work presented here consisted of proposing an approach I have developed in view of a systematisation of the creative practices in search of a thick reflection by theatre creators, recognising theory and praxis as two activities that feed each other. To implement it, it will be necessary to de-compartmentalise the blocks of information therein, by use and custom, in specific fields. The idea of this contribution is to habilitate spaces for theatre creators with their own voice, intellectual creators who can take the reins of the reflection on their own practices to rethink the ways of doing within

their praxis and depending on their environment. Within this path the definition of poetic creed, the vectors from which this idea can be shaped and the typology of creators associated with it meet in the search for the promotion of creators' original thought, with the aim of giving space to their voices against the domestication of the academic discourse based on a theory.



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