



# Comunicar

Media Education Research Journal

E-ISSN: 1988-3293 | ISSN: 1134-3478

PREPRINT

Received: 2018-02-27  
Reviewed: 2018-03-18  
Accepted: 2018-05-18



RECYT Code: 63502  
Preprint: 2018-07-15  
Published: 2018-10-01

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3916/C57-2018-04>

## Postdrama culture in Ecuador and Spain: Methodological framework and comparative study

### La cultura del posdrama en Ecuador y España: Desarrollo metodológico y estudio comparado

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### Abstract

This paper results from a neo-functional constructivist theory as the one allowing us to understand that dialogue processes and social participation build culture with a dynamic and civic vision, as opposed to organic and much more conservative visions. The main objective is to create a panel of analysis of plays from the point of view of drama (sense) and post-drama (nonsense), introducing cross-cutting concepts such as identity, interculturality and participation. The second objective, and as a way to validate these panels, is to analyze in a comparative way the similarities and differences of two types of post-theater manifestations in Spanish, Europe and Andean theater, particularly in Ecuador. This descriptive and qualitative research applies the analytical-synthetic method to approach the study of seven plays of dramatic and postdramatic nature. As a result, the usefulness of these panels developed to carry out this type of study on the elements of order and chaos, as well as to understand internal and external participation, is validated. As a general conclusion, it is observed that the current Ecuadorian plays respond to a post-drama culture that uses elements of the unitary dramatic stage and differential factors of Andean character.

### Resumen

El presente trabajo parte de la teoría constructivista neo-funcionalista como aquella que permite entender que los procesos de diálogo y participación social son los que construyen cultura, asumiendo una visión dinámica y cívica de la misma, en contraposición a las visiones orgánicas y mucho más conservadoras. El objetivo principal es el de crear un panel de análisis de obras teatrales desde el punto de vista del drama (sentido) y del posdrama (sinsentido), introduciendo de forma transversal conceptos tales como identidad, interculturalidad y participación. El objetivo secundario, y como forma de validación de los paneles, es el de analizar de forma comparada las similitudes y diferencias de dos tipos de manifestaciones del postteatro en lengua española, Europa y el teatro andino, particularmente en Ecuador. La investigación, con un marcado carácter descriptivo y con una visión cualitativa, ha utilizado el método analítico-sintético para abordar un total de siete obras con un modelo de análisis dramático y posdramático. Como resultado, se ve validada la utilidad de dichos paneles desarrollados para realizar este tipo de estudio sobre los elementos del orden y el caos, a la vez que para comprender la participación interna y externa. Como conclusión general, se observa



que las obras ecuatorianas actuales responden a una cultura del posdrama que hace uso de elementos de la etapa dramática unitaria y de factores diferenciales de carácter indígena.

## **Keywords / Palabras clave**

Artivism, participation, drama, postdrama, Andean culture, post-theater, identity, indigenous culture.  
Artivismo, participación, drama, posdrama, cultura andina, postteatro, identidad.

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## **1. Introduction and state of the art**

### **1.1. Cultural industry, popular culture and mass culture**

The development of information and knowledge technologies has modified the basic concept upon which artistic and cultural expressions are developed, allowing for a more powerful presence of citizens in creation processes. This participatory phase is underpinned by a concept of classical culture (Ruano-López, 2006), in which the arts and creative works are essential (Williams, 1994). In the Andean worldview of cultural ancestry, very present in Ecuador, each artistic expression is merely a way by which we can open ourselves to the reality of life or to the illusion of life (Oviedo-Freire, 2013); meaning, a way to “Live Better-/Good Living”, or a life of “Harmonious Coexistence” (“Sumakawsay-Vitalism”).

For the existence of a true popular culture, and in contrast with the structural-functional paradigm (of conservative nature), it is necessary to assume a second and more secure paradigm, the so-called neo-functionalist constructivist (Donati, 1995), which, contrary to the organic vision, assumes a civic and participatory character; that is, a progressive position. It would be through this discussion that the concept of cultural democracy emerges in a Latin American context of an “exuberant modernism with poor modernization” (García-Canclini, 1989: 65), understood as a place where plurality can coexist in a natural way through its various expressions. That is why this cultural democracy in its broadest sense moves away from contemplation to open spaces for participation (Salazar-Peralta, 2006). Faced with the vision that reality is transmitted and discovered, this concept assumes a position of construction, while the processes of dialogue and participation of a society build culture permanently, allowing the introduction of large citizen contingents in creative processes.

An explanation of this confrontation of paradigms is described by the Frankfurt School, which has Adorno and Horkheimer as the main references. These authors show how, speaking of culture depredation in advanced capitalism, the creation of all kinds of artistic work is characterized by three elements; firstly, the degradation of languages, quality and emancipatory potential; secondly, because of the impossibility of the participation of popular classes when building upon an elitist and oligarchic base; and thirdly, because of the world moving towards aesthetic barbarism (Briceño-Liñares, 2010) and, in this way, the cultural industry would be a sector “harmonized in itself and those among it” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1998: 165). The citizen, far from being able to assume a leading role, has only one way to relate to it: as a consumer.

What common elements exist between the Critical Theory presented by the Frankfurt School, its model of cultural industry, and the role of the individual and the cultural vision of postmodernity? Both trends defend a vision of multiform character, the right for people to shape their own stories and to live art broadly, as well as all types of activism, with a very deep critique of modernity. On the other hand, the main difference, besides its temporary vision, has to do with the subject itself: for the postmodern perspective, creation and art have to be centered on the individual; for Marxists, social activism and popular creation are oriented towards the community with an emancipating horizon (Seoane & Javier, 2000). In short, they converge in the critique of the reduction of what is beautiful in art to the appropriate: it works or does not work, according to what the cultural industry dictates. On the other hand, from the point of view of the so-called cultural



capital (Ríos-Burga, 2016) by Pierre Bourdieu (with a constructivist vision, precisely), the very configuration of postmodernity discards any form of class culture accumulation, because it demands an order that is rejected at the start.

## 1.2. Glocal culture and activism

Nowadays, the construction of a cultural identity is no longer performed within the parameters defined by the nation-state. In this way, the concepts of acculturation, interculturality or transculturality are surpassed by the so-called concept of hybridization (García-Cañclini, 2003), which in synthesis is understood as a “fusion of cultural elements in a multicultural contact situation; a synthesizing praxis synthesizer (...) that creates a new meaning and a new subcultural community from transgression” (Steingress, 2002). In this way, culture would combine elements coming from the local and from the global ('glocal'), forming a deterritorialization of contemporary culture (Power, 2003). Nevertheless, this position assumes the globalizing logic as the only possibility, a context in which there is a collision between popular and global cultures, reducing the relationship between identity and culture, adjusted to the so-called modern model. In the field of Latin America, this modernity and its creation was linked to the concept of Nation in its most classic sense, to move in the sixties to the idea of development (Martin-Barbero, 1984) and nowadays to coexist with postmodernity and its representations.

Thus, the concept of “glocal” culture is assumed to be the best expression of a committed culture. The concept of “glocalization” (Siles-González, 2010) starts at the ability to think in terms of the mechanisms and instruments of mass culture through the eyes of popular culture. While from the perspective of the Latin American cultural paradigm of communication for development (Salazar-Martínez, Portal-Moreno, & Fonseca-Valido, 2016) the preconceived relationship between popular and anti-system is destroyed, as well as the barrier between popular and masses culture (Pereira, Bonilla, & Benavides, 1998), allowing processes of hybridization and the introduction of demands such as gender, human rights or indigenism. In short: there are objective conditions for the development of a true cultural democracy that allows for activism through creation.

In this situation of manifestations of popular character, and also in the field of (post) theatrical creation, activism, or the art of activist character, is a mixture or a hybrid of the world of art and also of political claim (Felshin, 1995); a power that applies “criteria of participation and involvement that belie the distance between creator and creation or between public and action” (Proaño-Gómez, 2017: 3). It is not only limited to the staging itself, but it permeates its theoretical and even aesthetic visions with the aim of resignifying the public space (Delgado, 2013) in a “post-political” perspective. An example of this is used by the indigenous movement to demand the visualization of its Andean worldview. At the strategic level, the appropriation of the media, of the technologies themselves and of certain tools are considered essential elements of cultural activism and of solidarity network formation, even at the transnational level in its most diverse manifestations (Salazar, 2002).

This way, through a new model of national literacy, impactful art and communication are configured, a committed social activism that is reproduced in the field of cinema, theater, literature or other types of artistic expressions, standardized or spontaneous, within the public space. This form of art breaks the classic models while destroying the molds of order and promoting a culture of chaos. Thus, beauty would be subordinated to the political claim itself (Colombres, 2005), where art and its techniques become figuratively mere instruments and not a goal in itself. The citizen is the protagonist in the story, and simultaneously participates in its creation, to see him or herself represented in situations of risk and social injustice (Ortega-Centella, 2015).

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Justification, objectives and methodology



The object of study of this qualitative work is the postdramatic organization, the post-theater, and its relevant manifestation in the plays “Gólgota Picnic”, (2011) and “Muerte y reencarnación en un cowboy” (2009), by Rodrigo García; “Eldorado”, by Marius Von Mayenburg (2014); “Barrio Caleidoscopio”, by Carlos Gallegos (2010); “Cucarachas”, by Virgilio Valero and Cristian Cortez Galaecio (2014); “La fanesca”, by the company Malayerba (1984) and “La flor de la Chukirawa” (2007), by Patricio Vallejo Aristizábal.

This selection is justified by the interest that the comparison provokes within the post-theater in the Spanish language, regarding their creations in Ecuador, Andean territory on the one hand, or, on the other hand, those generated in Spain, culturally closer to Europe. A play of German origin is added to this group, “Eldorado”; the relevant social meaning of which is also a topic of the Andean pieces that are proposed in this list. The purpose, therefore, is to see how European and Ecuadorian influences, Spanish and Andean to be precise, approach various crucial and determining issues, and what artistic and architectural attitudes they use.

For this purpose, in addition to the relevant bibliographic review, the analytical-synthetic method will be used: first, there is a decomposition of the plays in several parts; afterwards, the common characteristics are synthesized, as well as the divergences, in order to draw conclusions. This research assumes a descriptive character, since it studies a concrete object through the development of two models of analysis to show the existing characteristics.

According to the criteria justification of a research project, this article is socially relevant because it analyzes a determinant field for cultural industries; it has theoretical value, since it works with several paradigms of the Social Sciences and incorporates them into the conception of drama and post-drama. Finally, it is methodologically useful, because it creates a new instrument to collect data, in this case, for the analysis of post-theater works. The main objective within this methodological use is to create a panel of analysis of plays from the point of view of drama (sense) and post-drama (nonsense), transversally introducing concepts such as identity and participation. The secondary objective is to comparatively analyze the similarities and differences of two types of post-theater manifestations in the Spanish language.

## 2.2. Content analysis and observation sheet

The technique used will be content analysis through the application of two methodological models: dramatic and post-dramatic. The first is Western tradition (the search for meaning), up to 1970; the postdramatic, from 1970 to the present day, starting from the ideas of juxtaposition and parataxis, the “nonsense” of the meaning. The development of the panels was carried out through dialogue with peers in the period 2015-17 within the Theater Group of the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador.

These two models belong to the analytical field of theater and post-theater, to the world of drama (Orosa, 2012) and to the contemporary universe of post-drama (Orosa, 2017, Orosa, 2018). There are five segments in which the dramatic model is divided: plot tools, dramatic organization, tension of the drama, narrative factors inserted into the dramatic construction and, finally, the technical-formal dimension. The dramatic identity more typical of the West as a conceptual inspiration, the so-called “glocal” culture, exists around these tools. It is not a static, closed identity model, but a series of technical tools, an open model whose single presence determines the identity and essence (participatory, the result of a centuries-old popular culture) of the classical model. On the other hand, the postdramatic analysis panel contains those patterns that are observed in the field of intuitions and irrationality of chaos, typical of our time and the result of the inspiration and mentality of the moment.

**Table 1. Dramatic analysis panel**

Indicator	Component	Category
1	Plot: dramatic turns. They are turning points	Plot



	in the story. Sentimental projections: emotions. Argument fact selection: not the hero's entire life or legends, but only the necessary events to cover the topic of the play.	
2	Dramatic organization	External: blocks or acts Media: themes, movements (exhibition, conflict, resolution) Unit of action (a protagonist who seeks an objective)
3	Dramatic tension	Conflict or confrontation (obstacles that separate the protagonist from his goal) Activation: characters, intellectual discourse (background themes in the play), stylistic discourse (prosody), spectacular speech (the show or artifacts on stage), music. Stylistic discourse: rhythm, phonetics, emphasis or isotopies, voice tone, support images or ideas, agon.
4	Narrative organization within the drama: Existing or nonexistent. Type of narrative organization.	Buildings or narrative organizations involved in the field of drama (own arrangements of the "novel" that appear within the drama).

When constructing the plot (panel of dramatic analysis), for example, our own conceptual and emotional dramatic identity turns into constant elements, the turning points or knots of the plot, the sentimental projections or the organization or selection of the facts of the play. The selection of facts refers to those events that the author chooses to tell the story, in order to produce the desired effect. It is well known that dramatic knots are turning points in the plot of the play that allow the story to move forward. Similarly, the dramatic action in terms of unity (a protagonist in search of an objective), the contexts of exposure, conflict and resolution, or external division of acts are more or less definitive variables in the field of dramatic organization. The dramatic tension, then, is based on this stage (and, even today), on the two columns of attention or interest that affects the viewer, the conflict and, on the other hand, the activation, that is: characters, stylistic discourse, intellectual discourse or, also, spectacle and musical discourse.

Fourthly, the narrative constructions and their organizational dispositions are also a part of the architecture of the drama and the post-drama (intensively for the latter). This refers to the dispositions that have come to narratively organize the novel throughout history and, also, the organizations of today. And, finally, the formal or technical architectures, which are the most abstract of this dramatic tradition stage (Orosa, 2012). The use of these tools shapes the existence of that identity, a conceptual sense that flees from the chaos, the Western Common Dramatic Space. It is the order of the West in search of dramatic meaning.

In the last thirty years of the twentieth century and until today, this dramatic conception is only present in contemporary plays to a certain extent. The use of some variables of this model (dramatic) confers order to post-drama plays -wherever it may be- in a universe dominated by the architectural juxtaposition or parataxis (Orosa, 2017), which some call meaningless construction. When the tools of drama in the five dimensions that were previously pointed out were used to



converge towards a process of composition or organic unity, nowadays, in the post-drama hour, these compositional and constructive tools are only used to a certain extent, usually minimally, to give way to non-univocal or explicit manifestations dominated by the personal imaginary of the author or the public (also director/s). These are expressed in terms of expressive dispersion, with disciplines or centrifugal signs for which the word nonsense is only a conglomerate of images, sounds, texts, screens -sometimes contradictory-, to which some elements of Western tradition in search of a lost time, of a certain order, could be occasionally added.

**Table 2. Postdramatic analysis panel**

Indicator	Component	Category
1	Time	Absence of chronological or linear times Temporal fragmentation of characters, architectures Kairos or present time Disregard or controversy over the concept of "reality" Plot change to conditional or to future possibilities
2	Theme and text	Textual autarchy (the predominance of the text is denied) Visuality and multidisciplinary of the show besides the text. Thematic fragmentation or "dramatic" actions on stage Juxtaposition of ideas against organic unity Apparent irrationality, self-referentiality Collage Multiplicity and multiperspectivism Repeating the opposite of what it looked like before
3	Characters	Constitution of characters tends to fragmentation or puppets in the hands of the author
4	Scenes	Incoherence of disciplines and events as well as non-hierarchical horizontality of themes or discourses Sensory communication with the viewer Relations between text and scene not autarchic nor interpretive Reiterations of scenes Microscenes Daily routines and absence of macro-narrative
5	Dialogues and language	Non-logical organizations and provisions The truth and the exclusivity of the word are questioned No to the causal logic
6	Participation and result	Sensitive and emotional communication with the viewer Reflection on the world

The architectural identity of post-drama lies and brings its origin from its chronotope, that place and time from which the action is contemplated and from which the process is narrated, which is a lens with contemplative and metasensitive roots. The postdramatic analysis panel reflects some of the variables or patterns of the open model, the post-drama, namely: the non-causality of the action, absence of hierarchies of any kind, the disappearance of elements or autarchic signs in the work of art -like the text, for example-, the confrontation of disciplines in the scene -absence of harmony-, the self-referentiality, the microscenes to the detriment of the macro-stories, the collage of different scenes and many others that can be observed above. To finish, and from the methodological point of view, the differential factor for Ecuador / Spain lies in whether the Andean note is capital when it comes to differentiating the post-theater of both cultures and which are the essential variables of this Andean spirituality. See in this sense Trentini (2013), Oviedo Freire (2013), Lajo and Ñan (2005) and De-la-Torre and Peralta (2004): first, the concept of "ayllu" (family), which does not include only human beings but also all living natural elements. Another principle is reciprocity,



friends and family sharing work in each productive activity without the use of money ('minga'). And, thirdly, the Andean concept of development and quality of life. In this sense, the accumulation of wealth for the future has very little importance against the possibility of living a good life in the present ('Sumak Kawsai').

### 3. Results

From the aesthetic-architectural and thematic point of view comparisons and analysis are established among the referenced plays to observe the presence of identity elements coming from the dramatic tradition in the Spanish language, from the post-drama world and from participation and the global culture / committed culture in these artistic works.

In the first place, a variable is highlighted: the existence of texts written in these plays within the world of drama tradition. The dimensions of European texts are longer than those of the corresponding Andean texts, but even so it must be noted that all these plays are based on texts, which, in Spain, or in Europe, may seem quite normal (popular culture), given the strength and intensity of the writing, but not so much in Ecuador or in other Andean countries, where the local culture is more a visual civilization than written, at least to an extent. In fact, the length of Ecuadorian texts, in general, is significantly less than that of Europeans. It is considered that this factor would be and is important at the time of introducing order, meaning, a certain hierarchy and composition in post-theater production. This does not mean, necessarily, that textual autarchy is present in both cultures, since in this case one would be talking about drama and not post-drama. However, the mere existence of a text places us in a somewhat conservative attitude within the post-drama and, at the same time, also contributes (the existence of a text) to establish a bit of order or meaning in the field of artistic creation.

Regarding the disposition of the plot and its canonical tools, that is, those used in a habitual way and with constructive character in the West (order, composition), it is observed that all these plays try to convey something; the melody, the existence of a plot theme belongs to the world of sense, order, to the logos of the common dramatic trunk in Spanish language (of which both cultures participate). In the "Golgotha Picnic" play, for example, or Rodrigo García's "Death and reincarnation of a cowboy", the selection of thematic facts puts the post-postmodern mentality and its critique of postmodernism in the hands of a Christ as intelligent and attractive as heterodox as a relevant idea in the text. That has been object of protests and repulses by many Christian groups in various parts of the world. The text of the "Reincarnation..." also approaches the problems of love, sex, the triviality of the world in which we live, betrayal, rebellion; in short, recognizable topics that become part of the crystallizations of dramatic action, in the style of Western drama. The same could be said of Von Mayenburg's "Eldorado" (a social play where this political problem is confronted as a pretext for a post-drama construction that escapes a univocal concept of what reality is, clearly representing the postmodern mentality). It similarly may be said for "Caleidoscope Neighborhood": loneliness, integration, others, difference or fear; "Cockroach": the problem of Ecuadorian immigration treated too realistically for the European post-drama; "The fanesca", on traditional topics such as justice, the coexistence of different ethnic groups and cultures in Ecuador, sadness, death, racism, war; or "The flower of the Chukirawa", which also addresses issues such as those already seen, as well as the mother-child relationship, war, poverty, among others. This traditional position, by the construction and selection of the facts and the tools used (texts, arguments), also speaks to us of activism, the political struggle to which art is lent in order to serve a better and fairer cause in the society of our time. The dramatic elements of poetic tension and style discourse: rhythm, phonetic balance, isotopies, images or ideas of support, agon, are still used in these plays in order to get a sense of meaning in the unbalanced and chaotic world of post-drama, who also shuffles his architectural charts in these works. Therefore, referring to the plot, it is observed in this chapter how the elements used in Ecuador and Spain belong to popular culture of western style, in order to give meaning and order to these post-drama constructions, in its social and political struggle for a better world, the criticism.



In terms of organization and dramatic tension, the use of elements typical of the tradition of drama, namely, conflict and those of activation, is constant, although the meaning with which the use of these elements is stated is different to popular culture of dramatic style. The conflict, above all, lacks the finalist or teleological sense of the tradition to move to another more vitalist or existential tradition, but with conflict at the end, and use the tools of the tradition of drama as a constructive element of compositional character (order).

The use of narrative elements, understood as an organization, both in Spanish and Ecuadorian plays, is inserted profusely in the course of the drama, especially in the texts by Rodrigo García, where his stylistic discourse and the stream of consciousness are spectacular at times. The denunciations that fire these texts against the West and their conservative policies, narratively speaking, are striking because of the intensity of their cries and the calls for reflection that serve or would serve to achieve a better world. Activism, denunciation, politics and the use of elements typical of Western popular culture permeate works in their narrative aspect.

So far, it has been observed how both Ecuadorian and European / Spanish works do not disdain the use of elements of the dramatic tradition to make order in their works, while using the activism and inspiration in popular cultures of Western identity as a constant to cover their constructions.

If careful look is taken at the elements of post-drama, which appear in the second panel of analysis, it may be seen how the variables of chaos (identity also of the culture of our days, both in Ecuador and in Spain) are undoubtedly present in these works: linear times breaking, elections of time “kairós” or present, fragmentation of the construction, the characters, the dialogues without classical logos, approximations to reality showing their extravagance more than their strong realistic character (less in some of the Andean plays), thematic fragmentation, juxtaposition, plot change to conditional, microscenes, daily routines, collage, irrationality... There are many elements that show their postdramatic identity, which would differentiate Ecuador from Spain only because of the indigenous culture and its spiritual variables, a differential factor that these artists take from popular inspiration and project to all of the orb (local culture with global projection). See the example of “The flower of the Chukirawa”, whose heavy, liturgical, mystical atmosphere, Greco-Andean as we would say, is an unbreathable constant throughout the play.

## 4. Discussion and conclusions

The assumption in this work of the neo-functional constructivist paradigm has been shown to be useful for three reasons: first, it allows us to understand culture from a dynamic rather than a static perspective; secondly, it is the most appropriate way to analyze global cultures under the principles of identity and participation from the epistemological point of view; finally, it allows for an analysis of schools as being uneven, as Marxist and postmodern, to draw relevant conclusions. In this sense, the concept of “glocalization” starts at the premise, of the ability to think in terms of the mechanisms and instruments of mass culture through a view of popular culture. This shows how the plays under study make use of indigenous cultures or of so-called metamodern cultures as local cultures, to give identity to the scene and to throw their own productions towards a wider destiny.

The application of both models, dramatic and postdramatic, to the analysis of the plays of Ecuador and Spain diagnose the existence of a common trunk of (post) dramatic (in Spanish language) label, which makes use of the elements of order, in some cases, and of the variables of chaos and “nonsense”, in others, to express popularly the concerns and feelings of the culture of our time. As a general conclusion, it is observed that the Ecuadorian plays studied respond to a post-drama culture that makes use of elements of the unitary dramatic stage and differential factors of indigenous character.

Both Andean and Spanish texts use elements of the drama tradition, as a result both cultures, Ecuador and Spain, try to give a certain order to the cultural chaos in which they develop. That is to say, architecturally speaking, the link between these plays and the tradition of order, of meaning, is more than evident through the use of tools that situate us, albeit slightly, in what we would call





the stage of the drama, the human story, socially and politically, makes use of classic-dramatic elements that would also be part of this cultural stage and of traditional stamp.

The constructive elements of post-drama also appear intensely in the texts, resulting in the contemporary culture, in its Andean or meta-modern manifestations, unfolding itself to its liking in a post-dramatic world.

Within the common trunk of post-drama tendencies lie the metamodern manifestations in Spain and the productions in Ecuador, of Andean stamp. This is the fundamental distinguishing feature of both movements of the post theater in the field of the Spanish language: the indigenous spirituality, as a mystical movement, has a liturgical worldview based on the harmony and integration of the world, solidarity or the so-called "Good Living" which invoke friendship, peace, coexistence in harmony, protection of the community as a family; and, if there is a rupture of the established order, the mystic and the Andean universe will be definitively compromised. Then, this differentiating element is evident in all the selected works present in Ecuador, mainly in "The flower of the Chukirawa" and in the show "The Fanesca".

In recent studies and open to future research (in the field of Latin America), following the current research path, other nations that participate in the Andean culture display the common notes of drama and also of the post-dramatic movement, as well as the cultural peculiarities of indigenous style continue to appear as a constant. We refer to groups such as Yuyachkani or Theater Maguey, in Peru; or companies such as Theater of the Andes or High Theater, in Bolivia.

Finally, the use and utility of the panels developed to extract relevant conclusions is validated, although it is left open to future researchers for full validation. Through them, it is shown how concepts such as participation, identity and metamodernity or the political channeling of arts can be analyzed with an openly social purpose.

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