

# The Conflict Element in Modern and Contemporary Dramaturgy: tool of analysis and creation

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**ABSTRACT – The Conflict Element in Modern and Contemporary Dramaturgy: tool of analysis and creation** – This article focuses on conflict as a dramaturgical element, with the objective of firstly performing a bibliographic review on this specific theme, besides showing its presence and relevance not only in more traditional dramatic works but also in dramaturgies of greater rupture from the dramatic canon in which epicization and/or lyricism stand out. It also proposes to consider conflict as a tool for analysis and creation based on the system of division into drives (intersubjective, extrasubjective and intrasubjective) and axes (intrafictional and extrafictional) that interchange.

Keywords: **Theatre. Drama. Modern Dramaturgy. Contemporary Dramaturgy. Conflict.**

**RÉSUMÉ – L'Élément *Conflit* dans la Dramaturgie Moderne et Contemporaine: un outil d'analyse et de création** – Cet article se concentre sur le conflit en tant qu'élément dramaturgique, dans le but de réaliser d'abord une revue bibliographique sur ce thème spécifique, en plus de montrer sa présence et sa pertinence non seulement dans des œuvres dramatiques plus traditionnelles mais aussi dans les dramaturgies de plus grande rupture avec le dramatique canon où ressortent épiciation et/ou lyrisme. Il est également proposé de penser le conflit comme un outil d'analyse et de création basé sur le système de découpage en pulsions (intersubjectif, intrasubjectif et extrasubjectif) et en axes (intrafictionnel et extrafictionnel), qui sont interchangeables.

Mots-clés: **Théâtre. Drame. Dramaturgie Moderne. Dramaturgie Contemporaine. Conflit.**

**RESUMO – O Elemento Conflito na Dramaturgia Moderna e Contemporânea: ferramenta de análise e criação** – Este artigo se debruça sobre o conflito como elemento dramático, com o objetivo de realizar primeiramente uma revisão bibliográfica sobre esse tema específico, além de mostrar sua presença e relevância não somente em obras dramáticas mais tradicionais como também em dramaturgias de maior ruptura com o cânone dramático nas quais se destacam a epicização e/ou o lirismo. Propõe-se também pensar o conflito como ferramenta de análise e de criação a partir do sistema de divisão em pulsões (intersubjetivo, intrasubjetivo e extrassubjetivo) e em eixos (intraficcional e extraficcional) que se intercambiam.

Palavras-chave: **Teatro. Drama. Dramaturgia Moderna. Dramaturgia Contemporânea. Conflito.**

## Introduction

The purpose of this article<sup>1</sup> is first to perform a literature review on the element of ‘conflict’ in modern-contemporary dramaturgical practices in order to map and contrast different theoretical views. It is a set of discussions around dramaturgy that for decades have been demonstrating how this instance has become more flexible/transformed and, nevertheless, remains central, depending on what is seen as ‘conflict’ in the sense of the works’ propulsive dimension. For this review, it was also necessary to address the main authors who have analyzed the transformations in drama since the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this regard, it is worth mentioning: the classics *Theory of the Modern Drama* (2001) and *Theory of Bourgeois Tragedy* (2004) by Peter Szondi; *L’avenir du drame* (2002), by Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, *Lexicon of Modern and Contemporary Drama* (2012), by Sarrazac and coauthors<sup>2</sup>; *Introdução à dramaturgia* (Introduction to Dramaturgy) (1988), by Renata Pallottini; *Dicionário of the Theatre* (2008), by Patrice Pavis; *An Anatomy of Drama* (1977), by Martin Esslin; *Introduction Aux Grandes Theories Du Theatre* (1990) and *Theatre et mise en scene*, by Jean-Jacques Roubine (1998); *A ação do lírico na dramaturgia contemporânea* (The action of the lyric in contemporary dramaturgy) (2015) and *O drama lírico* (The Lyric Drama) (1981), by Cleise Mendes; *Conflitos estruturais no texto pós-dramático: reflexões sobre o deslocamento do conflito dramático na teatralidade performativa e sua aplicação na dramaturgia brasileira* (Structural conflicts in the post-dramatic text: reflections on the displacement of the dramatic conflict in performative theatricality and its application in Brazilian dramaturgy) (2010), by Stephan Baumgärtel; the doctoral thesis by João Sanches, titled *Dramaturgias de desvio: recorrências em textos encenados no Brasil entre 1995 e 2015* (Dramaturgies of deviation: recurrences in texts staged in Brazil between 1995 and 2015) (2016); and the recent article by Paulo Ricardo Berton, Aline de Fátima Pereira and Waleska Georgiana de Oliveira, titled *O conflito como o fundamento do drama* (Conflict as the foundation of drama) (2019).

Among these fundamental authors of drama theory, who directly embrace the element of conflict, there are those who have a more teleological view, from which this conflict in modern-contemporary dramaturgy tends

to lose importance or even disappear. It is worth noting other theorists who maintain that conflict continues to be a crucial aspect of dramaturgy, although it has changed in *type*. On agreeing with this second group and considering intersubjectivity – the relation between individuals – as only one possibility of a type of conflict, we realize that, besides conflict remaining an essential element, it can be divided into three distinct drives: the *intersubjective* (the classic opposition between subjects-characters), the *intrasubjective* (tensions of the individual in relation to him/herself), and *extrasubjective* (tensions of the individual regarding the environment in which he/she lives, social, cultural, environmental issues, etc.). We also identified two operational axes in which such impulses interchange or reinforce each other: the *intrafictional* and the *extrafictional*. As such, without intending to create a new theorization on the subject, we explore how the element of conflict can operate as a useful tool both for the analysis of works as well as for stage-dramaturgical creation.

### Transformations in dramaturgy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

From the Renaissance onwards, especially at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, there was a strong interest on the part of the era's intellectuals in the translation and interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, a phenomenon called "Aristotelianism" (Roubine, 1990, p. 10), gradually contributed to the fixation/canonization of a certain normative model for the dramaturgical and, consequently, theatrical practice in Europe and its colonies, resulting, in the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the paradigm/canon of the "pure dramatic style" (Szondi, 2001, p. 96). This canonical model is characterized by the following elements: units of action, time and space, communication almost exclusively through dialogue between the characters and the intersubjective conflict as the center of the dramatic action, that is, the opposition of goals/desires between subjects/characters as the triggering *problem* of all events sequenced in the plays.

And with the so called "crisis of drama" (Szondi, 2001, p. 79), at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, another process of rupture with this canon of the drama genre began, which was also long, non-linear and non-absolute, through the exploration of epic and lyric deviations<sup>3</sup>, sometimes subtle and sometimes more radical. Therefore, one of the main transformations in

modern-contemporary dramatic writing concerns precisely the presence and centrality of the intersubjective conflict, which tends to lose focus or even almost disappear with the epicization and lyricism of many of the dramaturgical works that gained prominence throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When Patrice Pavis, in the *Dictionary of Theater*, states that conflict “has become the hallmark of theater” (Pavis, 2008, p. 67), one realizes how essential this element was and still is in what we perceive as dramaturgy and theater. Similar reasoning can be noted in author Renata Pallottini, when paraphrasing Henry A. Jones in her book *Introdução à Dramaturgia* (Introduction to Dramaturgy), argues that: “a drama is built on the basis of a conflict” (Pallottini, 1988, p. 25). However, for Pavis, such prominence that conflict assumes “[...] is only justified for a dramaturgy of action (closed form\*). Other forms (the epic\*, for example) or other (Asian) theaters are not characterized by the presence of conflict or action\*” (Pavis, 2008, p. 67). In this perspective, it is possible to say that there are dramaturgies and theatrical manifestations without conflict or, at least, dramatic literary works and plays in which this element is not a striking/determining characteristic. It is also pertinent to note that Pavis (2008, p. 173) refers to the “closed form” as the one that “draws most of its characteristics from classical European theater,” which is thus linked to what Szondi (2001, p. 96), in *Theory of the Modern Drama*, points to as “pure dramatic style.” In this model, conflict is a fundamental element, assimilated in its interpersonal dimension, that is, as opposition between subjects/characters. In Szondi’s (2001, p. 70) words, “the drama of classicism had taken as its theme the conflicts of the intersubjective relationship”.

### **The model of the pure drama and the teleological view of the conflict**

Based on the notion that *teleology* is a science that studies the ends, this article aims at a non-teleological perspective of conflict in dramaturgy, precisely to propose an understanding of *non-end*, or a study about the *non-end* of conflict. Consequently, to defend a non-teleological perspective on conflict in dramaturgy, that is, one that presupposes its non-disappearance, implies that there are also conceptions about this element that are to some extent teleological. In fact, there are authors<sup>4</sup> who refer to a supposed disappearance of conflict in the course of the transformations in drama through-

out the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, to affirm that there are perspectives that consider the end of something (a certain dramaturgical model characterized by conflict, in this case) means that at a certain moment this *something* emerged, was born or was established in some way. Thus, contextualizing such views in the search for a non-teleological perspective of conflict will bring us more insights into dramaturgy and conflict as one of its elements.

A possible beginning for this contextualization occurs in what Peter Szondi explains as “modern drama”, that is, when there is a transition “from the pure dramatic style to the contradictory one” (Szondi, 2001, p. 96), in a gradual process of ruptures with a certain dramatic and, therefore, theatrical model, which was gradually established in Europe (erudite context) over the course of the Modern Age<sup>5</sup>. This initial process of ruptures was observed by Szondi between the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a period he called the crisis of drama.

Among the defining characteristics of *pure drama*, according to Szondi, are: the fact that the drama is absolute, meaning that its reality is closed, with no awareness of what is external to the work’s context; the impression of the dramatist’s absence, leaving only the voices of the characters communicating through dialogue; the primary quality of the drama, consisting in the fact that it represents only itself, instead of a historical fact, for example; the drama always takes place in the present, rendering it free of time lapses. However, perhaps the point most emphasized by Szondi about drama concerns intersubjectivity and, consequently, the dialogues. According to the author, the totality of the drama develops “[...]by overcoming, always effectuated and always again destroyed, the intersubjective dialectic, which in dialogue becomes language” (Szondi, 2001, p. 34), with dialogue as the support for the drama.

Also on intersubjectivity in drama, Szondi remarks that in drama “the intersubjective relation is always a unity of oppositions that aim at its overcoming” (Szondi, 2001, p. 109). Hence, if the intersubjective relations in drama imply in the opposition between the parties involved (unity of oppositions), one can infer that, when one speaks of intersubjectivity in drama, one is referring to interpersonal conflicts, not only in any interpersonal relations, but in those that involve opposition and desire to overcome or, in

other words, conflict, in the most traditional sense of the term. Interpersonal conflict should be considered, therefore, as one of the central or basic characteristics of *classical* drama. In this way, if the crisis of drama and the emergence, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of modern and contemporary drama with its epic and lyric deviations<sup>6</sup> bring about changes in the elements that compose drama, we aim to understand what happens to the behavior of conflict as a dramaturgical element in this context.

The dramatic paradigm that dominated theatrical art in the erudite European context and focuses on intersubjectivity, as well as on closed reality (as the *closed form* also described by Pavis and presented earlier), is linked to a certain logic of *faithful imitation* of life, in order to achieve the maximum level of verisimilitude in dramatic and theatrical representation. Both realism and naturalism are characterized, as the terms themselves suggest, by this mimetic search, the main differences between the two movements, according to Esslin, being the radicalism in this effort and the fact that “[...]Realism is a descriptive term coined by critics, naturalism was the programmatic slogan of a school” (Esslin, 1977, p. 60).

It is important to take into account, as a preamble, that this pursuit/question of verisimilitude was not exactly a novelty brought by the realist-naturalist movement. From the Renaissance on, however, there was a *retrieval* of the Greco-Roman theatrical model, taking as reference for the theatrical praxis not only ancient dramaturgical works that survived the centuries, but also the interpretation of the theoretical writings of Aristotle and Horace *retrieved* by the intellectuals of the Modern Age. Hence, especially from Aristotle’s Poetics and the written plays that arrived partially or fully intact in the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, a process of canonizing Aristotle began – something Roubine (1990, p. 10) calls “Aristotelianism” –, which, little by little, established a normative model for European dramaturgical and theatrical practice, culminating in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, leading to the so-called *absolute* or *pure* drama (Szondi), in which the elimination of epic and lyric aspects and the Aristotelian concept of mimesis (interpreted as *imitation* of reality) are central and interconnected.

It is worth pointing out that this normative model does not correspond to the characteristics of Greek theatrical-dramaturgical practice from which it emerged (5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) as a reference, since it featured epic

and lyric aspects, eliminated from the *pure/absolute drama* based on a slow and gradual process, considering that the Renaissance and Baroque theater also displayed epic and lyric aspects, which were later suppressed. Moreover, popular genres and non-European theaters coexisting in the same historical period did not correspond to this dramatic model, which predominated in the erudite European cultural context.

It is only between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, with French classicism, and especially the bourgeois drama (romanticism and realism-naturalism), that a greater crystallization, the apex of the dramatic standardization is witnessed. Accordingly, based on the interpretation (or super-interpretation<sup>7</sup>) of Aristotle, in the field of dramaturgy, one can identify as a central paradigm the search for a certain type of imitative art-life relationship, that is, theatrical representation intended as an imitation of life. In his words: “French Aristotelianism is undoubtedly an attempt to establish realism in theater in a coherent and systematic way” (Roubine, 1990, p. 24). However, in the *classical doctrine* of the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries there were other aesthetic principles that prevented the full realization of this *mimetic goal*, such as: beauty (necessity of metrics/versification/declamation) and decorum (morality that prevented certain events/actions from being represented on stage).

From this perspective, the romantic movement took a significant step towards a more integral realism, not only questioning the clause of the States<sup>8</sup> by positioning the bourgeois as the central focus on stage, advocating dialogues in prose and not in verse, and also by inserting aspects considered grotesque and/or immoral, that is, defending the theatrical-dramaturgical representation of aspects of reality viewed as improper. In this context, Lessing<sup>9</sup>, Diderot<sup>10</sup> and Victor Hugo<sup>11</sup> – mentioned by Peter Szondi (2004) in *Theory of Bourgeois Drama* – whose theoretical writings and dramaturgy contributed to a certain *progress* of stage realism in terms of *copying* reality. Realism advanced even further in the search for perfect imitation by breaking with the strong idealization still present in Romanticism, with its still very Manichean characters (either very good or very bad) and endings full of *theatrical coups*, that is, characters and plot still somewhat unrealistic.

Among the prominent dramatic authors of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century who are references in the realist-naturalist aesthetics are: Ibsen, Chekhov and Strindberg. Not by chance, the iconic work of these playwrights is one of the apexes of the realism-naturalism ideal, setting one of the best examples of representing reality via dramatic structure and, at the same time, the *swan song* (beginning of the end) of the *pure* dramatic model, since one can observe, in these works, lyric and epic overflows, some of which Szondi comments on when classifying them as a crisis of drama.

The Norwegian Ibsen is considered the father of Realism for producing work that is effectively iconic in its effect of reality, although he also wrote plays classified as symbolist. In his production, however, one can notice certain lyric-epic aspects, since the present is always an excuse to evoke the past. In this sense, Szondi (2001, p. 44) points to “an invisible epic base”. Ibsen’s main plays are *Peer Gynt*, *The Enemy of the People*; *Hedda Gabler*; and the famous *Doll’s House*. The work of Chekhov, a Russian playwright, is characterized by characters who live in the past and by the refusal of action, that is, what happens on stage is nothing (apparently) or, when it happens, there are no major consequences (the unfolding of the action from a conflict). His best known plays are: *The Three Sisters*, *The Seagull*, *The Cherry Orchard* and *Uncle Vanya*. And, last but not least, we have Strindberg, whose first phase of works is classified as realist, and the second as a precursor of Expressionism. Szondi calls this first one “dramaturgy of the self” (Szondi, 2001, p. 123), since the intersubjective dramatic conflict gives way to the characters’ internal conflicts, that is, intersubjectivity yields space to intrasubjectivity. Of his realist works, the most famous are *Miss Julia* and *The Father*.

The naturalistic works by Strindberg, Ibsen and Chekhov, however, are not the only ones in which Szondi highlights subtle changes in order to show how they diverge from *pure drama*. An example of this is when Szondi comments on Gerhart Hauptmann’s naturalistic work *The Weavers*:

In this way, the epic description of the weavers’ living conditions seems – as the motivation for the upheaval – to be capable of dramatization. But the action itself is not dramatic. Until a certain scene in the last act, the weavers’ revolt lacks intersubjective conflict; it does not develop in the medium of dialogue (as in Schiller’s *Wallenstein*), but is situated, desperate impetus

that it is, beyond the dialogue and, for this reason, can only be its subject. Thus, the work relapses back into the epic (Szondi, 2001, p. 81).

Note, in the quote above, that Szondi differentiates the epic and dramatic forms starting from the behavior of the conflict, which, in the case of Hauptmann's play, does not appear in an intersubjective character for most of the work. Thus, the conflict element is seen as an interesting tool to analyze possible deviations from the *pure* dramatic form in a given literary work. As already commented, Szondi resorts to three main points to define pure drama: "fact (1) present (2) intersubjectivity (3)" (Szondi, 2001, p. 91), and uses these points as comparative axes to determine the crisis of drama, constantly mentioning conflict through the comparative axis of intersubjectivity. The other comparative axes used by Szondi can be better observed in the following excerpt, in which the author compares Ibsen, Chekhov and Strindberg:

In Ibsen, the past dominates in place of the present. It is not a past event that is thematic, but the past itself, insofar as it is remembered and continues to resonate within. Hence, the intersubjective element is replaced by the intrasubjective. In Chekhov's dramas, active life in the present gives way to dreamlike life in remembrance and utopia. Fact becomes accessory, and dialogue, the form of intersubjective expression, becomes a receptacle of monological reflections. In Strindberg's works, the intersubjective is either suppressed or seen through the subjective lens of a central self (Szondi, 2001, p. 91).

In the above excerpt, even if Szondi does not refer exclusively to conflict, the idea that intrasubjectivity is present, in a different way, in Strindberg's works as well as in those of Chekhov and Ibsen, iconic authors of realism-naturalism who were focused on the attempt to faithfully represent the *real*, is explicit. As we know, *reality* has aspects and layers that are not restricted only to intersubjective conflicts represented in dialogues. Therefore, it is not surprising that precisely in these authors, who stood out for their ability to mirror reality, the crisis is evidenced through eruptions of intra- and extrasubjectivity articulated to the intersubjective universe, that is, embracing internal, psychological aspects of the characters, as well as issues related to the socioeconomic macrostructure. It is also no coincidence that these authors have part of their work classified as pioneers of the following modernist avant-garde currents: Symbolism and Expressionism. As Sarrazac (2013, p. 63) defines it, it was a "naturalist-symbolist crossroads," with

Symbolism being “the other face of naturalism.” Both movements, besides having the same decadent spirit of the century’s end, operated fissures in the canonical dramatic model, presenting epic and lyric aspects that would constitute the first chapter (*crisis of drama*) in an explosive movement of dramatic structures (model) operated in a non-linear way throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Modern and contemporary dramaturgy: new conflicts

Concerning the transformations in drama throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Szondi identifies deviations from *pure drama* not only in the authors he mentions (and already mentioned here) of the so-called crisis of drama, but also in works considered *salvage attempts*<sup>12</sup> traditional drama and those considered *attempts at a solution*<sup>13</sup>; the latter constitute the *turn* to new forms, in which the epic resources, especially, and also the lyric ones, stand out more clearly. The *salvage attempts*, on the other hand, are those in which the *classical* dramatic form is maintained, but which, even so, have some subtle epic and lyric aspects. Thus, for the author, the *new* drama, typical of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, derives from the mixture, within the dramatic genre, of epic and lyric elements. For example, regarding Gerhart Hauptmann’s work, within the category of *salvage attempts*, Szondi states that this naturalistic drama “chose its heroes from the lower strata of society” (Szondi, 2001, p. 101). According to his view, this choice could already be considered as an epic aspect, since the “epic-self” is closely related to the problem of the “medium” (Szondi, 2001, p. 103).

Thus, the dramaturgy of naturalism, in which the dramatic form tries to survive the historically conditioned crisis, is from the beginning in danger of becoming epic because of the same distance from the bourgeoisie that made it possible to save drama in the first place (Szondi, 2001, p. 105).

Another interesting example to be mentioned among the *attempts to salvage* drama are the conversation plays, which “[...] revolve around issues such as voting rights for women, free love, divorce rights, *mesalliance*<sup>14</sup>, industrialization and socialism” (Szondi, 2001, p. 106). Such a definition by Szondi confirms that conversation plays, even within the canonical pattern, are not limited to the territory of intersubjectivity, since their dialogues re-

volve around extrasubjective issues – and for this reason they could be considered epic.

By underlining the *solution attempts*, Szondi demonstrates the strong epic tendencies in several playwrights from the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, indicating epicization as a solution to the dramatic form that had been in crisis since the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, in the *solution attempts*, the epic becomes the basis of the new modern dramaturgy, not only in Brecht's epic theater, but also in the strategy of the "epic self as scene director" (Szondi, 2001, p. 156), as in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938), or in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), about which Szondi states: "[...] it is not a dramatic work, but an epic one. As for every epic-drama, what normally constitutes the form of the drama is for it something thematic" (Szondi, 2001, p. 151). Jean Pierre Sarrazac, in *The Future of Drama*, equally points to the appearance of "epic resources" in modern drama, referring to the intersubjective conflict as "not being enough to serve as a counterweight to the epicization of the world" (Sarrazac, 2002, p. 15).

It is important to point out that Szondi and Sarrazac wrote about the transformations of drama throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but neither of them has satisfactorily delved into the lyric aspects present in the works of this period. Szondi holds a predominantly teleological view, which places epic drama as a kind of solution for a dramatic form in crisis, and Sarrazac, despite criticizing Szondi's teleological view, points to the hybridity of the modern dramatic works he analyzed with a focus still very much directed towards the epic deviations of these works. As such, both leave the lyric aspects in the background, turning their attention primarily to the epic elements. Sarrazac and Szondi are the main authors criticized by Cleise Mendes in her article *A ação do lírico na dramaturgia contemporânea* (The action of the lyric in contemporary dramaturgy), which deals precisely with recognizing this *forgetfulness* of lyricism by emphasizing "[...] the role of the lyric as a tendency structuring the various instances of dramaturgical composition, in the design of situations, in the singular mode of action of the characters immersed in a process of subjectivation" (Mendes, 2015, p. 9).

As such, in agreement with Mendes (2015) and Sanches (2016a; 2016b), we understand here that the *deviations* in the context of transformations in drama in the last century do not imply only epic overflows, but

also lyric ones. Our hypothesis is that drama, when it reaches its *apex* in realism/naturalism, in its *x-ray* of human issues, ends up entering in *crisis*, as it overflows both in intrasubjectivity and extrasubjectivity, with extrasubjectivity being relatable to the epic aspects, and intrasubjectivity, in turn, associable to lyric properties. This overflow of epic and lyric dimensions is further accentuated in modern and contemporary dramaturgy, in its need to address not only interpersonal conflicts, but also intra- and extrasubjective conflicts, leading to a dramaturgy both full of epicization and lyricism.

Based on the logic of the “rhapsodic becoming” and its “incessant overflows” (Sarrazac, 2002, p. 103)<sup>15</sup> and the concept of deviation explored in *Lexicon of Modern and Contemporary Drama* (Sarrazac, 2013), João Sanches, in his doctoral thesis, synthesizes the following epic resources most recurrent in contemporary dramaturgy:

I. Rhapsody: “‘hybrid’ dramatic forms (those that use strategies associated with different canonical genres and subgenres) and open forms (those that make explicit strategies of self-reflexivity, relativization, and more direct appeal to receptive collaboration)” (Sanches, 2016a, p. 112);

II. Montage/collage: more radical autonomy between parts; use of diverse materials (texts, poetry, scenes, improvisations, songs, choreography, objects, documents etc.);

III. Metadrama: rupture of the microcosm; self-reflexivity.

As for the lyrical deviations most recurrently observed in contemporary dramaturgy, these are the ones described by Sanches:

I. Monodrama: when the action presented in the work is a projection of the mind, the unconscious, the subjectivity of a character, or of the author;

II. Dramatic poem: “the formal aspects of these works are determined by their lyrical content (feelings, thoughts, dreams and memories), not by an actantial scheme [...] a dramatic poem is not some kind of drama – it is *a lyrical form with dramatic emersions*” (Sanches, 2016a, p. 199);

III. Cyclical action: “dramatic text whose central dramatic situation/action progresses circularly, through repetitions, accumulations and/or in a dynamic of spiral movement – which does not demand a definitive outcome” (Sanches, 2016a, p. 201).

It should be noted that, when mentioning “deviation dramaturgy” (Sanches, 2016b, p. 65), the *pure* dramatic style to which Szondi refers is used as a reference, but at the same time it is important to consider that this ideal model is not entirely contemplated by any dramaturgical work. This is because one must take into consideration the acanonical nature of the artistic works, as João Sanches argues: “The statement that drama is by nature acanonical seeks to highlight the formal freedom that artists have always experienced, despite the majority values, predominant in the recognized productions of certain cultures, or historical periods” (Sanches, 2016a, p. 22).

In the face of epic and lyric deviations, different authors point to a disappearance or a dismemberment of conflict in dramaturgy. In this sense, the playwright and theorist Cleise Mendes, when commenting on the possibility of lyric-dramatic miscegenation in recent dramaturgical production, states:

Common elements in much of this production are the predominance of the poetic function over the referential; the fragmentation of the daily dialogue into emissions that seem to appear randomly, gradually enabling the emergence of meanings and eventually achieving a curious effect from sparse responses, silences or parallel voices; the permanence of situations as if suspended in time and space, without dramatic progression; the subjectivation process that isolates the characters, dissolves the classic conflict and transforms their enunciations into bundles of monologues or flows of reminiscences, making the language acquire an unmistakable lyrical force (Mendes, 2015, p. 10).

The author mentions a dissolution of the *classic conflict* associated with the isolation of the characters and the disappearance of dialogues giving way to (bundles of) monologues, presenting a view similar to that of Sarrazac (2002, p. 14), who speaks of the “fading of the conflict” in modern-contemporary dramaturgical production. It is interesting to realize that by using the expression *classical conflict*, Mendes does not totally eliminate the possibility for conflicts of other types. It is understood that this intersubjectivity, common to drama, is not predominant in the lyric form and ends up giving way to intrasubjectivity. However, the non-predominance of intersubjectivity in a given work only indicates that intersubjectivity is not the dominant drive there, which does not mean that conflicts of an in-

trapersonal type cannot exist in it, even if they appear in a more subtle or secondary manner.

Regarding definitions of conflict, *The Lexicon of Modern and Contemporary Drama* contains the following description:

From its etymological meaning – that of ‘shock’ – the term ‘conflict’ has broadened. It no longer designates only the precise moment of collision, but more generally any situation that brings into play two antagonistic entities – two individuals, but also two countries at war or two desires within the same consciousness – whether the collision is real or subterranean. This richness is primordial. Dramaturgically, to speak of conflict is to refer to the notion of dramatic ‘collision’, coming from Hegel’s *Courses in aesthetics*. The very idea of collision refers to a theater of action\* in which the unfolding of the fable follows the different stages of a struggle. In this sense, the history of the dramaturgical notion of conflict is that of a slow disappearance, accompanying the erosion of dramatic action. However, if we take the term conflict in its broadest sense, it seems indeed that modern and contemporary writings continue to feed on tensions, oppositions and struggles (Gaudé; Kuntz; Lescot, 2013, p. 41).

The above definition does not completely disregard a more *traditional* notion of the term, but recognizes that it does not account for everything it encompasses, to the extent that the very ways of thinking and making theater expand. In other words, it is recognized that there is a first notion of conflict linked to the etymology of the word and also to the logic of the *closed form*, or the *theater of action*, as the authors expound, but, at the same time, it makes room for understanding that conflict can exist in an expanded sense, recognizing tensions, oppositions, and struggles as possible territories of conflict that feed modern and contemporary writings. It is possible to even consider that these tensions, oppositions and struggles are not limited to dramaturgical writing, since even theatrical processes, which do not necessarily have the text as the first layer of the dramaturgy, can still, in their discourse/theme/poetry, feed on these broader meanings of conflict.

In a more recent article, Paulo Ricardo Berton, Aline de Fátima Pereira, and Waleska Georgiana de Oliveira (2019, p. 278) discuss “the persistence of dramatic structure today and the sustaining of these structures through conflict,” applying the idea of conflict as the “foundation of drama” to the analysis of the dramaturgy of animated films, thrillers, and soap

operas. The authors argue that “[...] the importance of conflict lies in the fact that it is from it, or as a result of it, that the progression of the dramatic structure, the narrative, and the consequent involvement of the audience occurs” (Berton; Pereira; Oliveira, 2019, p. 278), showing conflict as a tool for capturing the viewer’s attention. From what is set forth by the authors, it is possible to grasp how conflict remains present in contemporaneity through dramatic structures in films and soap operas, for example. But what can be said in this sense about less traditionally dramatic structures? Does conflict disappear, shatter, or displace itself? Are there other *types* of conflict other than the *classical* one, associated with the territory of inter-subjectivity?

Along these lines, there are at least two possible paths when investigating the presence of conflict in other works less close to the *traditional canon*. One of them is to understand that interpersonal conflict can disappear from the general context that moves the dramaturgy, but often remain present in a secondary way, through micro-conflicts. This seems to be the case in the play *Hotel Iphigenie*, mentioned by Sarrazac in *The Future of Drama*, in which there is an extrasubjective general context driving the action, while at the same time the play is filled with interpersonal micro-conflicts, which are not directly interconnected in a cohesive plot. Therefore, even *classical* conflict can still be present in works that invest in the epic-lyric elements. The fact that a work may contain multiple interpersonal conflicts does not necessarily mean that its overall action is predominantly moved by the inter-subjective drive.

Starting from the assumption that there is always one or more conflicts driving a dramatic work in a wider sense of conflict, another way to investigate the non-disappearance of the conflict would be to analyze, in works whose base is not in intersubjectivity, what the dominant drive is and, therefore, what kind of conflict is presented as central. In this view, the existence of other conflicts is accepted (that is, beyond interpersonal relations), from which differentiated forms of tensions, oppositions and struggles can be expressed. Here, it is understood that a social struggle or an internal crisis can configure distinct kinds of conflict that are not limited to interpersonal relations. A very practical example of central conflict in a work whose dominant drive is not the intersubjective one can be found in

the following description of what are some characteristics of *lyric drama*, in the model formulated by Cleise Mendes. In her words:

Lyric drama is built on the model of circularity. The dramatic action of a play like 'Waiting for Godot' develops in a movement similar to that caused by a touch on the surface of a lake: through concentric circles that form from a point. The conflict thickens through an accumulation of images, through an expansion of meaning that detonates at the very first impression; it does not progress towards a future, as in dramatic drama, but rather imitates the suggestion of a poem. Through repetition, through the jumble of questions and answers that close in on themselves, a recurring rhythmic structure is created (Mendes, 1981, p. 65).

From this perspective, it is believed that the construction of this conflict, which can be called intra-subjective, tends to the emergence of lyrical deviations within the dramatic form (drama). In this way, the development of the action in works of the type described by Mendes occurs through a progression of events based not on interpersonal conflicts, but on the accumulation of images and other resources such as repetition. Thus, there are ways of constructing non-interpersonal conflict that allow the work to move and work on the spectator's expectations and emotions.

*Waiting for Godot* is a play that works very much on expectation (Beckett, n. d.). The characters Vladimir and Estragon spend the entire play waiting to meet the one they call *Godot*, without it being made explicit in the play whether *Godot* is a person or a metaphor. Even if Vladimir and Estragon reach the end of the play without finding *Godot*, the initial problem, which consists of their desire to find *Godot* versus the fact that *Godot* has not yet arrived or appeared, already sets up a conflict that leads the characters to act through speech, which would not be necessary if there were no conflict motivating them. Along this line, the almost inertia (but not total, since a speech already constitutes a kind of action) of the characters still leads them from point A to point B in the play, even though these do not configure a plot in the sense of concatenated actions. However, at point B, which is the final point of the plot, the main characters have already been traversed by the different issues raised throughout the play, and are visited by other characters – who, in turn, also undergo transformations. This movement from point A to point B, although apparently static, is engen-

dered by an issue, which can be considered as conflict, although it is of another order distinct from interpersonal.

Therefore, considering intersubjectivity as only one possible territory of conflict, we propose here to think of conflict in three different drives, which are: intersubjective, intrasubjective and extrasubjective. According to this perspective, intersubjective is what concerns the subjectivity of the individual in relation to the subjectivity of another or others; intrasubjective is what concerns the subjectivity of the individual in relation to him or herself, in their contradictions and dilemmas; extrasubjective is everything that is external to the individual (social, cultural, economic issues, etc.), but that inevitably goes through him or her. Hence, it is understood that if the intersubjective drive tends to materialize in interpersonal conflicts, it is possible to think of *intra* and *extra* drives as indicators of conflicts of an intrapersonal and extrapersonal character.

Nevertheless, there are authors who approach their discussions on dramaturgy without necessarily starting from the concept of conflict (at least not naming it that way), including the dramatic theater. Martin Esslin (1977), for example, introduces the notion of suspense, which, in turn, occurs in the relationship between the conflict of the presented drama and the reactions/emotions of the spectator/reader. For Esslin, suspense is the element that holds the spectator's/reader's attention, stimulating his/her expectation, and it can happen through conflicts in intersubjective drives, or even beyond:

Interest and suspense need not necessarily be aroused merely by devices of plot: at the opening of a plotless ballet the beauty of the principal dancers may suffice to arouse interest, and the audience's expectation of seeing the full gamut of steps provides sufficient suspense to sustain concentration for a long while (Esslin, 1977, p. 43-44).

As for the use of the use of the term 'intrigue', Patrice Pavis defines it as follows: "[...]detailed sequencing of the *fable's* qualitative leaps\*, the interweaving and series of *conflicts\** and *obstacles\** and the resources used by the characters to overcome them" (Pavis, 2008, p. 214). Thus, intrigue is taken to be a weaving of actions and conflicts. The "intrigue resources" to which Esslin refers, therefore, have to do with the organization of actions and conflicts in a dramaturgy – in this sense, *dramaturgy* being more linked

to a notion of dramatic text –, so Esslin points out that suspense does not always depend on the intrigue resources linked to this more traditional logic. This statement of the author already opens up some space that indicates the possibility of expanding the perspective to other elements about what in fact moves the dramatic structure, not being solely based on the clash of interests between characters/personas.

For Martin Esslin (1977, p. 51), “[...]The suspense of the main action depends on the existence of at least two solutions to the main problem of the play”. In this way, viewing conflict in its broad sense, it would be fair to say that every main *problem* to be solved is a type of conflict, since a problem in itself already characterizes a tension. This is independent of whether the problem will be solved or not, just as it is not conditioned to the drive of the problem. In any case, the element of *suspense*, as described by Esslin, seems to have a hybrid characteristic, constituting something that starts from the microcosm (the internal/intrafictional universe of the drama), but is always mentioned in dialogue with the macrocosm (the external/extrafictional axis; the audience), so that it is directly linked to these two axes and demonstrates their interdependence in the theatrical experience.

Let us observe how Martin Esslin exemplifies what, in his view, are species of suspense:

And there are many kinds of suspense: suspense may lie in a question like, ‘What is going to happen next’, but equally well in a question like, ‘I know what is going to happen, but *how* is it going to happen’, or, indeed, ‘I know *what* is going to happen and I know *how* it is going to happen, but how is X going to react to it?’; or it may be of a quite different type, such as, ‘What is it that I see happening’ or ‘These events seem to have a pattern; what kind of pattern will it turn out to be?’ (Esslin, 1977, p. 44-45).

The way Esslin explains suspense depends both on what occurs in the microcosmic axis (actions internal to the work’s context) and on the audience’s reactions to this microcosm. The relationship with the audience, the theatrical space understood as such, and the entire layer of the *real* beyond the real that can be conveyed within the microcosm of a work, consist of the macrocosmic layer. These micro and macrocosmic axes will be referred to here as intrafictional and extrafictional axes, in order to facilitate later di-

alogues with more authors, although it is recognized that the microcosm of a dramaturgical work is not necessarily composed of fictional elements. The separation between intra and extrafictional axes, or in micro and macrocosmic layers, serves to distinguish, in theoretical terms, what is particular to the universe proposed by a play, for example, from what integrates the relation stage-spectator or stage-society (stage as the place where the actors present themselves, or stage as the place where they perform).

### **Conflict as element of analysis and creation: drives and axes**

Several types of conflict that intersect in a work can be divided into two major axes: intrafictional or microcosmic (belonging to the work's fictional/internal universe); and extrafictional or macrocosmic (between work and audience and/or the political-economic-social context of which this work is a result and refers to at some level). Within these two axes, it is possible to find drives of inter, intra, and extrasubjective character, that is, interpersonal, between individuals; intrapersonal, internal to each individual; and extrapersonal, between the individual and the surrounding political-economic-social superstructure. It also takes into account that these drives, as well as the intra and extra-fictional axes, intersect in a complex and sometimes even paradoxical way. Intersubjectivity, as already seen in Szondi, for example, is the dominant drive of the dramatic genre, but an interpersonal conflict depends on the intrasubjectivity of the individuals/characters who clash, that is, issues of internal order from the psychological field which move the desires/needs that clash, giving origin and justifying the intersubjective conflict.

In the same way, whenever there is intrafictional conflict, be it mostly intra, inter or extrasubjective drive, there will be an extrafictional conflict axis that consists of the audience's expectations and reactions to the actions presented and the various correlations one can make with the *world outside*. The correlation between intrafictional and extrafictional conflicts is most evident through the idea of suspense as described by Martin Esslin. The examples of suspense mentioned by Esslin in *An Anatomy of Drama* are nothing more than the spectator's perspective on what conflict exists in the microcosm, although a constant and coexisting macrocosmic axis of conflict is evidenced as the spectator questions and expects certain events in the work.

Expectation, in counterpoint to *not knowing what is going to happen*, characterizes a macrocosmic, or extrafictional, axis of conflict, one which depends on the intrafictional context to exist. Intrafictional conflicts are part of the work before it is presented to the viewer, but from the moment there is an audience, there is an intertwining of intrafictional and extrafictional layers of conflict, because the intrafictional factors that are constant to the work, already containing conflict, enter into relation with the audience's reaction, generating new conflicts on an extrafictional axis.

Following this logic, one can consider conflict as a web through which intra- and extra-fictional dimensions and inter-, intra-, and extrasubjective drives coexist in codependency with the dominant axis and drive, varying from work to work, as already seen in relation to dramatic, epic, and lyric tendencies. This *web* is valid both for the correlation between the intrafictional and extrafictional layer, and for the interdependence of inter, intra, and extrasubjective drives within the intrafictional layer, understanding that extrasubjectivity may be traversed by intra and intersubjective issues/pulses, as well as extrasubjectivity by extra and inter drives, as well as intersubjectivity through extra and, mainly, intra drives. Consequently, assuming that the intrafictional axis of conflict encompasses intra, inter and extrasubjective drives, there is also the possibility of drive variations also on the extrafictional axis, with intra and extrafictional dimensions being *umbrella* axes that at the same time correlate, as shown in the diagram below:

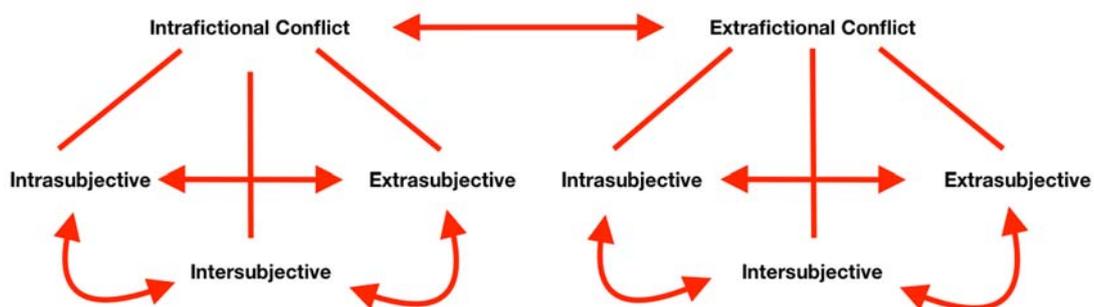


Figure 1 – Layers of conflict in correlation. Source: Authors' creation.

Still regarding the presented possibilities of conflict and their correlations, it is interesting to think about the existence of layers of conflict within the extrafictional universe, not only because Esslin's notion of suspense provokes this conjugation between micro and macrocosmic layers, but

mainly if we take into account what Stephan Baumgärtel states in the following excerpt:

In the mid-1990s, new theatrical practices that did not fit into the dramatic form were analyzed as ‘postmodern’ (Pavis), ‘postdramatic’ (Lehmann), or ‘performative’ (Féral) practices. In dramatic dramaturgy, the confrontation between the fictional proposal and the empirical reality of the spectators takes place within a representational context, that is, under the hegemony of intrafictional communication between the characters. For the said new dramaturgies, the dominant axis of the confrontation has been the vector between stage and *theatron* (Baumgärtel, 2010, p. 34).

According to this line of reasoning, there is also the possibility for works whose conflict dominance not only varies in drive (inter, intra and extrasubjective), but also migrates axis entirely, shifting from the fictional universe and occurring predominantly in the extrafictional axis, as Baumgärtel suggests to be the case of the so-called performative theater. The author argues that “[...] the displacement of conflict from the dramatic center (the relationship between characters) to the different semiotic layers and modes of theatrical presentation helps to increase the possibilities of interaction between actors and spectators” (Baumgärtel, 2010, p. 45).

Still on the subject of how conflicts constitute an extra-fictional axis, one can hypothesize conflicts not only in performance theater, but also in performance art. In the performance *The Artist is Present*, by Marina Abramovic, held in 2010, the performer sits on a chair and remains motionless for several hours, while visitors have the prerogative to sit, one by one, on a chair positioned in front of her for as long as they decide. The theme of the performance in question is not necessarily based on conflict, but it is possible to consider that the performance, in its static action (the immobile eye contact), is self-moving through the conflict between work and spectator, meaning that the conflict dominance is on the extra-fictional axis. This conflict can happen in different ways: in the expectation of action – that something happens from that static action (intersubjective drive; direct questioning from spectator to work); in the questioning of what a work of art should be, which can even result in a negative response from the spectator, by not considering it a work of art (extrasubjective drive; questioning beyond the work, such as *what is art?*); in the expectation of understanding

what the work is communicating (intrasubjective drive; the spectator's questioning of himself or herself).

Finally, these brief mentions/indications of conflict in performative theater or in performance art contribute in the sense of indicating possible ways of analysis hereafter. We have seen, from the bibliographical review and the contextualization presented throughout this article, that conflict does not disappear, but becomes more flexible, displaces itself and can be observed in different drives (intersubjective, intrasubjective and extrasubjective) and axes (intrafictional and extrafictional). It is nothing new to identify that the relevance of the conflict element does not cancel itself out when we talk about epic and lyric dramaturgies, or to point out the existence of different types of conflict. Therefore, what we did here was a reflection based on the authors who have addressed this specific issue, aiming to open paths for the analysis and creation of dramaturgical works, with the category of *conflict* as the main thread. In the same way, we believe that this analysis contributes to new discussions about conflict as a dramaturgical element, offering notions that engage in dialogue with the extensive variety of theatrical practices in the contemporary world.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The article is an excerpt from the monograph *A dramaturgia sob a lente do conflito: uma perspectiva não-teleológica* (Dramaturgy through the lens of conflict: a non-theological perspective) (Barros, 2020).
- <sup>2</sup> The work *Lexicon of Modern and Contemporary Drama* was organized by Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, co-organized by Catherine Naugrette, Hélène Kuntz, Mireille Losco and David Lescott and includes the following authors: Florence Baillet; Laurence Barbolosi; Jean-Louis Besson; Clemence Bouzitat; Joseph Danan; Laurent Gaudé; Kerstin Hausbei; Céline Hersant; François Heulot; Geneviève Jolly; Hélène Kuntz; Patrick Leroux; David Lescot; Mireille Losco; Martin Mégevand; Tania Moguilevskaia; Alexandra Moreira da Silva; Catherine Naugrette; Muriel Plana; Jean-Loup Riviere; Arnaud Rykner; Jean-Pierre Ryngaert; Jean-Pierre Sarrazac; Catherine Treillhou-Balaudé.
- <sup>3</sup> The notion of 'deviation', in the sense adopted here, comes from Jean-Pierre Sarrazac (2002) and is further developed by João Sanches. According to Sanches, "[...] the notion of deviation is an unfolding of Brecht's notion of distan-

cing”, whereby the “[...] difference between distancing and deviation would be in the fact that the notion of deviation, proposed here, deals specifically with dramaturgical constructions in which self-reflexivity is presented not only by means of epic emersions” (Sanches, 2016a, p. 10).

- <sup>4</sup> Peter Szondi (2001) and Jean Pierre Sarrazac (2002), for example.
- <sup>5</sup> Period spanning the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- <sup>6</sup> Notion from the dramatist and theorist Jean-Pierre Sarrazac (2012), to be further explored below.
- <sup>7</sup> For a critique of classical thought and its interpretation of Aristotelian mimesis, see Ramos (2015).
- <sup>8</sup> Postulate invented by the scholars of classical doctrine that established that only characters from the nobility (kings, princes, dukes, counts, etc.) should be the protagonists of tragedies.
- <sup>9</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781). French philosopher, poet, art critic, and dramatist. One of his most important theoretical writings is the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, and his major plays are *Minna von Barnhelm*, *Emilia Galotti*, and *Nathan the Wise*.
- <sup>10</sup> Denis Diderot (1713-1784). French philosopher, writer and playwright. Among his well-known theoretical texts are: *Paradox of the Actor* and *Discussion on the Illegitimate Son*. Main plays: *The Illegitimate Son* and *The Father of the Family*.
- <sup>11</sup> Victor-Marie Hugo (1802-1885). French poet, novelist, and playwright. Among his major works are the novels *Les Misérables* and *Notre-Dame de Paris* (popularly known as *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*), the plays *Cromwell*, *Hernani*, *Ruy Blas*, and *Torquemada*, and his theoretical manifesto *Preface to Cromwell*.
- <sup>12</sup> Szondi describes the following as *salvage attempts*: naturalism (Hauptmann; Strindberg); the conversation play (Beckett; Hofmannsthal); the one-act play (Strindberg; Maeterlinck; Hofmannsthal; O'Neill); confinement and existentialism (Lorca; Strindberg; Sartre).
- <sup>13</sup> The *solution attempts* mentioned by Szondi (2001) are: the dramaturgy of the self (expressionism: Hasenclever; Sorge; Toller; Kaiser; Brecht); the political revue (Piscator); epic theater (Brecht); montage (Bruckner); the impossibility

play of drama (Pirandello); the interior monologue (O'Neill); the epic-self as stage director (Wilder); the play of time (Wilder) and reminiscence (Miller).

<sup>14</sup> Marraige to a person from a 'lower' social position.

<sup>15</sup> In *The Future of Drama*, Jean-Pierre Sarrazac (2002, p. 103) states that: "[...] the rhapsodic becoming proceeds by incessant overflows. From the dramatic through the epic or the lyric, of course. But, equally, in the other sense, from the epic or the lyric through the dramatic. However, to overflow does not mean to annihilate".

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