

# ***Versus*: a space of Latin America in the alternative press (1975-1979)<sup>1</sup>**

## ***Versus: um espaço da América Latina na imprensa alternativa (1975-1979)***

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### **ABSTRACT**

The magazine *Versus*, published in São Paulo from 1975 to 1979, started as a formally and thematically innovative project, conceived by Marcos Faerman and collaborators, using culture as a form of action and adopting Latin America as its main focus. *Versus* conquered a distinctive space in the Brazilian cultural milieu, occupying an outstanding place among alternative publications. Starting from a brief review of the alternative press in the 1970's, this article aims at analyzing the trajectory of *Versus*, which began with an innovative cultural viewpoint on the place occupied by Brazil in Latin America and the pursuit of a Latin American unity and identity, and later headed for a gradual political instrumentalization that put an end to its existence.

**Keywords:** Latin America, Latin Americanism, military dictatorship, alternative press, *Versus*

<sup>1</sup>This article was conducted with the support of the Dirección General de Asuntos del Personal Académico de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (DGAPA-UNAM).

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### **RESUMO**

A revista *Versus*, editada em São Paulo de 1975 a 1979, partiu de um projeto formal e tematicamente inovador, concebido por Marcos Faerman e colaboradores, baseado na opção pela cultura como forma de ação e na adoção da América Latina como eixo temático. O periódico conquistou um espaço próprio no campo cultural brasileiro, destacando-se entre as publicações alternativas. A partir de um breve panorama sobre a imprensa alternativa na década de 1970, este artigo pretende analisar a trajetória de *Versus* que, de uma postura cultural inicialmente inovadora sobre a inserção do Brasil na América Latina e a busca de uma unidade e identidade latino-americanas, rumou a uma paulatina instrumentalização política que a levou ao seu fim.

**Palavras-chave:** América Latina, latino-americanismo, ditadura militar, imprensa alternativa, *Versus*

# A

IN APRIL 1978, the *Versus* magazine published in the heading of its editorial a Carlos Quijano's letter, delivered to the reporter Hélio Goldsztejn during his visit to the old Uruguayan editor exiled in Mexico. In the brief handwritten letter, Quijano stated to the companions of *Versus* that the time people lived in was not of nostalgia, but rather of combat, and summoned them to keep walking towards "our liberation" (*Versus*, 1978b: 2).

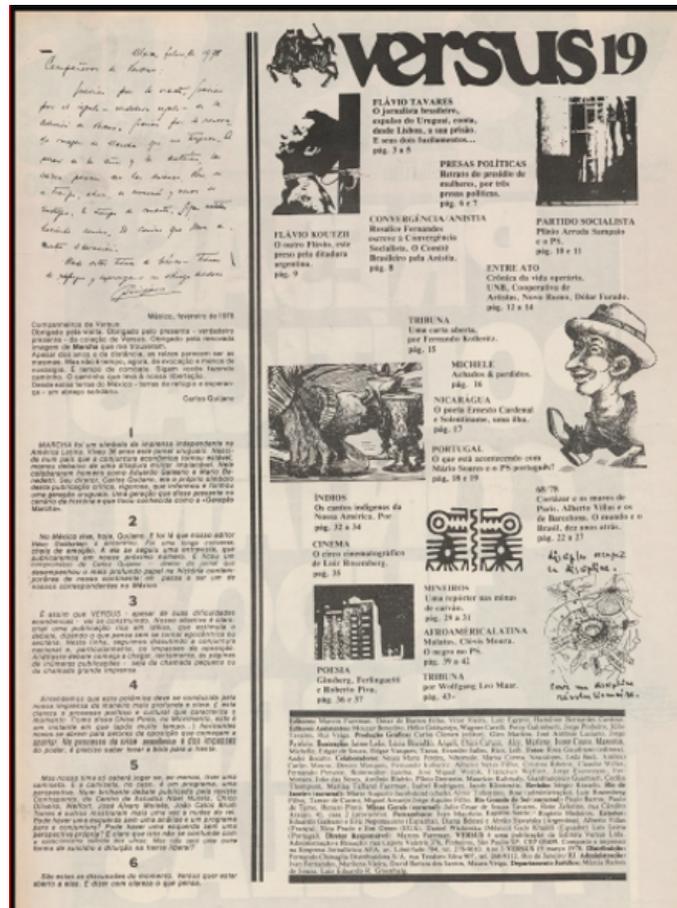


FIGURE 1 – Reproduction of Quijano's handwritten letter to the editors of *Versus*  
Source: *Versus* (1978b).

Carlos Quijano was the founder of the *Marcha*, a Uruguayan weekly newspaper, in 1939, and managed it until November 1974, date of its closure by the civic-military dictatorship that had seized the country from June 1973<sup>2</sup>. *Marcha* was one of the two models that inspired the editorial project of *Versus* – the other would be *Crisis* (1973-1976), an Argentine magazine, of much shorter

<sup>2</sup> In Mexico since 1975, Carlos Quijano (Montevideo, 1900 – Mexico City, 1984) had an important academic and journalistic performance in the country, when keeping alive the Latin Americanist spirit of *Marcha*, with the publication of the second phase of the *Cuadernos de Marcha* (1979-1984), a bimonthly magazine whose first and third phases (1967 to 1974 and 1985 to 2001, respectively) were published in Montevideo. The *Cuadernos de Marcha* were created to circulate texts and essays of greater breadth and depth than the ones allowed in a weekly magazine.

duration than *Marcha*, but with the same fighting spirit and engaged in the study and defense of Latin America. To receive the encouragement of a fighter as important as Quijano represented an enormous prestige for a magazine as *Versus*, which had in Latin America an axis of fundamental support.

The publication of Latin American authors, the analysis of political and cultural themes relevant to the region, the discussion of their artistic and cultural production and the innovative sending of reporters to monitor what was happening in neighboring countries, in political and social terms, were frequent in the 34 issues of *Versus*, which circulated between 1975 and 1979. This editorial project did not cease to attract attention at a moment when the distention of the military regime was slowly starting and the space for political criticism and social demands was recovering in Brazil. The concern in discussing the national reality, in thinking alternative projects for Brazil, in impacting the politics and national cultures was increasing. Hence, why did the editors of *Versus* decide to introduce their public in reading writers as José María Arguedas, Augusto Roa Bastos and Nicolás Guillén, to praise the figure of leaders as San Martín, Simón Bolívar, Tupac Amaru or Emiliano Zapata and to recover the history of colonization, oppression and the spoils of the continent? Why did a magazine that had no academic character was making incursions in the historical and national past of the region?

The theme on continental solidarity, indicated by Quijano, is a key to analyze the content of the magazine and its innovative defense of Brazil's integration with Latin America and Africa. However, we must seek other reasons for the adoption of an editorial line practically nonexistent in the Brazilian press of the time, including in the so-called alternative press, which *Versus* was part of.

The magazine *Versus* raises several questions. Did the reflection on Latin America provided it a distinguished place in the scope of alternative press? At a time when censorship attacked the means of communication, did the establishment of Latin America as main focus mean a smart strategy to circumvent the censorship? Would it represent, in addition, a project to raise awareness of the readership on the need of thinking Brazil as part of Latin America, based on their common origin and similar problems? In this case, could one think that *Versus* was a Latin Americanist vehicle? In case the answer was affirmative, what concept of Latin Americanism would their editors choose to guide the editorial line?

As we can see, we have here a series of questions that lead us to think not only in its own structure, but also in the objectives and operation of the magazine. In addition, they help us to understand its relationship with the political and cultural context in which it circulated, including its bonds, agreements and possible conflicts with other means of communication (both alternative press



as mainstream press), with the intellectuals associated with the academic world and, in a country where the democratic political practices were trying to be recovered, with the politicians and especially with the left-wing movements.

The first 23 issues of *Versus* were published under the coordination of its founder and editor in chief, Marcos Faerman<sup>3</sup>. The remaining 11 issues were published on the orders of the Trotskyist organization Socialist Convergence. During its first phase, the ideological proposal of *Versus* took place with undeniable renewal of the journalistic and editorial language, meticulous creative effort and special graphic care. The loss of these features occurred as the magazine passed from the hands of Faerman and his team of collaborators to the control of the Socialist Convergence, which reduced it to a vehicle for partisan dissemination and propaganda.

The 34 issues of *Versus* deserve, undoubtedly, a concentrated and systematic analysis. However, the option I chose to reflect on the magazine and answer questions previously placed will be supported on the path indicated by some of his editorials and by the punctual review of the articles chosen. In the analysis of these texts, we will be able to observe the ideological and formal differences between the first and the second phases of *Versus*. We will be able to understand a little more about the relations between journalism, politics and culture during the 1970's and, equally, understand how, during the government of general Geisel, from 1974 – when the president himself announced and defended ably a certain distension, slow and gradual –, the options for political action that the left-wing movements glimpsed passed by the reconstruction of the partisan system and the necessary search for communication vehicles that acted as their spokesmen.

## ALTERNATIVE PRESS: A PECULIAR WAY OF RELATING CULTURE AND POLITICS

It is no secret that the mainstream press – constituent of the more conservative and powerful sectors of Brazilian society – was conniving with the military dictatorship. The major newspapers and radio and TV chains were in the service of the protagonists of the coup, but also acting as protagonists. The so-called alternative press, or *imprensa nanica* (tiny press)<sup>4</sup>, appeared precisely as an option, within the limitations of its action space and range, to the hegemony of the mainstream media. According to Bernardo Kucinski (1991: xiii), “between 1964 and 1980 about 150 periodicals were born and died, having as common trait the uncompromising opposition to the military regime.” For the author, the alternative press was identified with the political and ideological combat to the dictatorship. It criticized the economic project of the government, opposed to

<sup>3</sup> Marcos Faerman (Rio Pardo, 1943 – São Paulo, 1999) began in journalism in Porto Alegre, in the *Última Hora*, current *Zero Hora*, in 1961. In 1968, he moved to São Paulo. In 1969, Faerman started working in the *Jornal da Tarde*, leaving it only in 1992, after writing, according to Isabel Vieira (2007: 24), 806 articles, developed from careful research. He worked for several alternative newspapers (*O Pasquim*, *Bondinho*, *Ex*, *Mais Um*) until the foundation of *Versus*. Later, he worked in magazines as *A Hebraica* and *Ícaro*, always innovating, in thematic and formal terms, and always looking for great reports. Winner of several reporting awards, recognized among his pairs as an excellent editor and reporter, in the last years of his life, besides working as a journalist, Faerman was a professor at Cásper Líbero College.

<sup>4</sup> The expression “*imprensa nanica* (tiny press)” is from the writer João Antonio. In an article he wrote for *O Pasquim*, in 1975, the author defined as “tiny” the newspapers *Opinião*, *Movimento* and *Versus* (all in tabloid format), of which he was a frequent collaborator (Bellucco, 2006: 9).

the euphoria caused by the *Brazilian Miracle*, and informed on the torture and human rights violations, an absent theme in major newspapers.

During the 1960's and 1970's, with the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie definitely associated with the ones of the agrarian oligarchy, the media was implemented with "a policy generator of silence, when operating their schemes of social modernization as a mask for the model of concentration" (Ibid.: xxiii). Several newspapers disappeared due to political pressures, financial problems or both factors, and the market began to count with a smaller and smaller number of companies. In the shadow of the Institutional Act number Five (AI-5), an authoritarian legislation was created which, among other actions, did not only establish the wages of journalists, but also imposed the professional diploma as a demand for the exercise of their functions<sup>5</sup>.

Luís Eblak (2002: 127) remembers the period by observing how the strong division of labor, the loss of reporters' autonomy before the editors and the gradual imposition of the lead changed the structure of the journalistic work and the dynamics of the essays. According to the author, the lead was seen by many – as by Faerman himself – as a form of bureaucratizing the text and of limiting the journalists' creativity<sup>6</sup>. In the 1960's and, mainly, 1970's, to fight against the *bureaucratization* of the text, against the *dictatorship of the lead*, was to fight against the dictatorship of the industrialization of the press, against the massification of information and the lack of journalists' autonomy, already surveilled and persecuted by the state censorship and agents (Ibid.: 32). The alternative press emerged as a more ventilated area for those who wanted to break free from the restrictions of the *new* mainstream press, even still needing the latter to survive<sup>7</sup>.

Back to alternative journals. Kucinski (1991) divided them into two broad classes. The first consisted of newspapers and magazines with political themes predominantly, being usually pedagogical and dogmatic, with roots in the ideals based on appreciation of the *national* and the popular of the 1950's, and in vulgarized Marxism from the student milieus of the 1960's. The second contained the magazines and newspapers created by journalists who rejected the ideological discourse. Influenced by American counterculture movements, by the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, by philosophers as Michel Foucault, by psychoanalysis, these productions invested mainly against the authoritarianism in the sphere of customs and against the hypocritical moralism of middle class (Ibid.: xix-xv), formed by the vast majority of its readers. A third branch, little studied by Kucinski, but analyzed by Araújo (2000: 159-182), was the one of the press associated to social movements and to gender and ethnic minorities. The feminist press played a key role in the 1970's, acting as a spearhead in the

<sup>5</sup> According to Kucinski (1991: xxiv), the relatively high wages with which journalists were hired for creative projects, as the *Jornal da Tarde* of the Grupo Estado (Oesp), and the magazines from Editora Abril, as the *Veja*, are paradigmatic of a policy of professionalization associated with the withdrawal of the journalists' autonomy within the alleged silencer modernization.

<sup>6</sup> The lead emerged in the United States in the 19th century and was introduced in Brazil in the 1950's. Its function was to structure the journalistic text and to speed up the communication. First paragraph of a news or report, the lead should answer the classical six questions of a text: *what, who, when, how, where and why*.

<sup>7</sup> Eblak (2002: 127) remembers that almost all journalists from *Versus* had fixed-term employment in communication companies. The meeting agendas began after 10:00 pm, when the team had already worked all day. This search of alternative spaces for a full journalistic exercise marked practically the entire opposition press at the time.

# A

## *Versus*: a space of Latin America in the alternative press

creation and dissemination of several alternative political conceptions that marked the period. The publishing houses of the two main feminist newspapers in the country – *Brasil Mulher* (1975-1980) and *Nós mulheres* (1976-1978) – dedicated their agendas to issues as the necessary junction between the quest for women’s emancipation and the struggle for the end of the dictatorship, and encouraged the discussion of relationship between the public and private spheres associated with public policies. The Brazilian black press was also crucial. Struggling against more financial difficulties than the other alternative publications, newspapers as *Tiçã* (1978-1982) and *Sinba* (1977-1980) were defenders of the cause on emancipation of the blacks and the struggle for the end of racism in Brazil<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> *Versus* has also committed to the black and indigenous cause. The indigenous theme appears since the beginning of the publication, bound to the issue of the construction of a national and continental identity, related to the autochthonous population. The black culture and the space opened to black intellectuals’ voice have appeared later. As editorial policy, with the cover story of issue 12 (August to September 1977), it was published: “*Brasil negro: a imprensa negra renasce* (Black Brazil: the black press is reborn)”, illustrated by a screaming black face in the foreground, and the city behind, in shades of grey, white and brown, under the seal: “*Afro-América Latina* (Afro-Latin America)”.



FIGURE 2 – *Versus*, 12, August to September 1977

Source: *Versus* (1977b).

The alternative newspapers and magazines brought together professional journalists and included intellectuals and writers in search of a broader space of visibility and political and cultural activities than the literary and academic circuits. They formed a collective space, with a network of sociability made of identities and divergences. Place of the consolidation of individual trajectories and of the manifestation of intellectual and artistic movements, some periodicals emerged around one or two central names, others from a larger group. Some were longevous and others could not survive two or three issues; many were published only once. Notwithstanding, alternative magazines and newspapers have always been collective projects, resulting from attempts of public intervention and of political and cultural action from the groups that edited them.

The theme of newspapers and magazines is their present. To note this present implies carrying out a type of *immersion* in the pages to understand their political insertion, social role, cultural function, esthetic project and, primarily, the victory or failure of their ideological proposal at the time they circulated. In a fundamental text about intellectual magazines and intellectual, Beatriz Sarlo (1992: 9) states: “nothing is older than an old magazine”. However, as emphasized by the Argentinian author, in the eyes of historians and literary critics, the moment the old magazines show is enlightening to answer the questions that, based on their own present, seduce and disturb them. The magazines retain the proofs of how a group of people thought the future, based on what was once the present. It is precisely because of this that they can become an important source for the intellectual, literary and cultural history and for those seeking to understand the relations of strength, power and prestige in the cultural, literary and intellectual field in a given period (Ibid.: 15).

Therefore, based on Sarlo, we must seek to understand the political and cultural place of the alternative periodicals during the Brazilian military dictatorship and try to discover something of their projects for the future. Using Kucinski’s (1991) classification, we can state that the Brazilian alternative press – both political as cultural periodicals – was sustained simultaneously by their creators’ impulse and by the revolutionary appeal inherent in the 1960’s and 1970’s. In this context, according to the author, the alternative newspapers worked first as “instruments of resistance or of a revolution supposedly in motion” to be gradually transiting from the clandestine policy to the public space policies, even conquering “part of the grassroots movement” (Ibid.: xvi). For Kucinski (Idem: xvi-xvii), the alternative press became the main scape of political and ideological reorganization of the left-wing movements, which confirms its importance in the Brazilian political and cultural context, under the specific conditions of authoritarianism.



As we know, from the publication of AI-5 by Costa e Silva and under the presidency of Emílio Garrastazu Médici, began in 1969, the *mano dura* from the military men was mobilized against the social movements and repressed, at a huge political and social expense, the clandestine political organizations and the urban and rural guerrilla warfare. Under Ernesto Geisel's command, the country still remained as a stage of strong repressive operations and political assassinations. The death of the journalist Vladimir Herzog in October 1975, in the establishments of the *Destacamento de Operações de Informação – Centro de Operações de Defesa Interna* (DOI-CODI: Detachment of Information Operations – Center for Internal Defense Operations) in São Paulo, aroused the protest of several sectors of the civil society, including the Catholic Church, and was the detonating fact for a broader social and political movement against the dictatorship, which had been gradually growing throughout the country.

It was precisely in this period that the issue of titles of alternative newspapers and magazines increased<sup>9</sup>. Many worked as a type of editorial front, without a real ideological unit (Belluco, 2014). Several had internal ideological conflicts that caused disruptions and the consequent foundation of new and ephemeral newspapers. The search for greater projection led many alternative means to use the national distribution system of Editora Abril. But, with the draconian conditions imposed by the publishing house, rare were those who could sell more than the minimum print run required for national distribution and obtain some profit (Kucinski, 1991: xviii). Different from the mainstream press, more and more tied to the funding from advertising, the alternative ones could not count on the support of big advertisers. They had only a signatures system supported by sympathizers and a network of militants willing to distribute them.

Notwithstanding, the country was beginning to change, as well as the role of alternative press. During the transition of Geisel to João Figueiredo, resulting from both the economic crisis and the growth of so-called new unionism, the striker movement reappeared and returned with intensity to the agenda for discussion on the limitations of the two-party system imposed by the military forces. In 1978, to maintain the political control of the country, Geisel revoked several laws of exception, including the AI-5. In the same year, the first Brazilian Amnesty Committee was founded, congregating several opposition political organizations, relatives of political prisoners and progressive sectors of the Catholic Church. In 1979, Figueiredo promulgated an amnesty law that, despite being structured to protect the military men, provided the release of political prisoners and the return of exiles. If the opposition was not satisfied with these changes, the more radical sectors of the government simply disapproved them and began to articulate against them.

<sup>9</sup> According to Marcelo Ridenti (2000: 404-405), between 1976 and 1977, 48 new titles appeared.

Still, the political opening went progressively reaping the authoritarian regime. In 1979, an important movement in favor of the Brazilian Worker's Party (PT) appeared, expanded and gained visibility in the political and cultural field. The PT, founded in the following year, with the end of bipartisanship, conciliated in its services the Catholics, communists, socialists, trade unionists, journalists, artists, intellectuals and students. According to Kucinski (1991), the emergence of a party with such features broke "the duality between clandestine space and public sphere, between vanguard and mass" (Ibid.: xxix) and weakened the associations and parties of clandestine past and doctrinal character and, consequently, the alternative newspapers that represented them.

These periodicals, although remained analyzing the new parties and social movements and offering space to the feminism and the black movement, even maintaining a constant criticism of the military government and fighting against the dictatorial regimes of Latin America, did not have their prerogative anymore. The censorship of the mainstream and alternative press gradually diminished<sup>10</sup>. With this, the major newspapers returned to make room for themes left aside for a long time.

We could think that the emergence of alternative newspapers was a result of the dictatorship itself, in some ways. With the slow but steady destruction of this system, the alternative press would lose its functions of denunciation and combat. In this new context, when losing the monopoly of criticism, what would be left for them?

During the second half of the 1970's, especially among publications that Kucinski (1991) classified as explicitly political, the theme about representation depended on the struggle between the different left-wing movements producing them. Thus, the *entryism* of the periodicals for a particular faction or movement determined their audience and contributed to delimit and limit their circulation.

However, we cannot deny that the alternative periodicals remained bothering the more radical sectors of the regime. In parallel with this type of internal *cannibalization*, driven by the ideological struggle, responsible for its weakening, the alternative ones also suffered attacks from anti-communist groups and members from the military forces and state and federal police. From the campaign of the more retrograde and radical sectors of the regime started not only terrorist attacks against alternative newspapers and newsstands, as the bombs deposited in the headquarters of the Brazilian Press Association (ABI) – 1976 – and the Brazilian Bar Association (OAB) – 1976 and 1980 –, but also attacks on artistic events, as the fortunately frustrated attempt to the show of Riocentro in April 30, 1981. With specific regard to the persecution to alternative publications, the military forces and far-right groups that still occupied the state apparatus or simply supported the regime adopted two strategies: the first was the dissemination of dossiers against the *subversive* action of publications. The second – far more

<sup>10</sup>In June 1978, the Geisel government withdrew the prior censorship of the periodicals *Movimento* and *O São Paulo* (newspaper of the Cúria Metropolitana de São Paulo) and of the *Tribuna da Imprensa* (Rio de Janeiro). This repeal was not applied to the weekly *Opinião*, which succumbed to the censorship and closed its doors in April, 1977 (Aquino, 1999: 218).



effective – was the accomplishment of accounting investigations and charging of social welfare debts, with the aim of ruining them financially.

Such action against the alternative press indicates that its presence bothered and that, despite tangibly achieving a numerically limited public, the political and cultural echo of its appeal was great. However, an element that we must not forget to understand why alternative newspapers practically disappeared before the end of the dictatorship is related to the aforementioned institutionalization of journalistic activity, which also occurred in the alternative scope, contributing to compromise the protagonism of alternative newspapers, both of political and partisan character and of cultural criticism. The trade unions, the new political parties, the popular movements related to the Catholic Church, the Unified Workers' Central (CUT) and the other entities created their own newspapers. In this context, I believe that rupture of the “duality between clandestine space and public sphere, between vanguard and mass”, which Kucinski (1991: xxix) detected in the emergence of PT, can also be observed in the foundation and growth of newspapers from grassroots parties and movements. When defending agendas affiliated to their associations, legitimate but not necessarily represented by the alternative newspapers, the official diffusion means of popular and union movements and new political parties answered the demands of their specific audience and withdrew the exclusive role of political vanguard from the alternative press.

In addition, the journalists, who had already lost most of their autonomy with the aforementioned processes of wages, standardization and industrialization of press, suffered another loss of autonomy, when having to fit the agenda of institutions that hired them practically as employees. In this new kind of press, either there would hardly be collective agendas or the reporters' independence of action would hardly be preserved, very dear elements to the alternative ones. Pragmatism would surpass freedom, the agenda would be defined by the *owners of the voice*, being either from the trade union direction, the party, or the institution. On the other hand, and interestingly, the mainstream press began adopting many of the alternative procedures, especially in its cultural supplements<sup>11</sup>. The culture was consolidated, definitely, as a product of market.

Thus, we cannot state that the disappearance of the alternative press was simply due to the end of the dictatorship. Furthermore, this authoritarian government officially ended in 1985 and the alternative newspapers began to disappear in 1979. We could think that, on the one hand, the national projects of several alternative periodicals were adrift in a society in ferment, in which the *common enemy* that used to polarize the action of the left-wing movements now stopped conducting the debate and indicating strategies of resistance. On the other hand, the sectarianism and authoritarianism of many alternative

<sup>11</sup>Paradigmatic in this regard was the supplement *Folhetim*, from the *Folha de S.Paulo*, created in January 1977 by Tarso de Castro, one of the former editors of *O Pasquim*.

newspapers contributed to their deterioration, with the support of a smaller and smaller militancy. For Kucinski (1991), the emergence of the alternative press from the 1970's was one of the last major expressions of utopia in Brazil. Under these conditions, we can understand this press as the result of the combination between a certain voluntarism, the defense of social transformation project and, in the words of the author, "the belief in personal fulfillment through collective or community action" (Ibid.: xxvii).

Undeniably, the alternative press from the 1970's managed to establish bridges between the society along with political and cultural organizations and the social movements that were damaged and surveilled. We must notice how these newspapers were consolidated as effectively alternative vehicles to the *truths* imposed by dictatorship and as counterpoint to the mainstream press and the electronic media. The financial difficulties, the censorship, the persecution and the attacks from the regime could never shut them up completely. Even having their programmatic editorial process continuously questioned by articles of their own collaborators, which showed their ideological contradictions and internal political struggles, the alternative newspapers remained as real political and cultural bulwarks, being simultaneously emitting poles and field of intersection of proposals (Crespo, 2011: 107). That is the reason they occupied a crucial place in the Brazilian cultural and intellectual field in the period. They marked a path for permanent criticism, questioning the supposed *neutrality* and *impartiality* that the large means of communication have always recommended, based on liberal principles that structured them – and remain structuring – as the capitalist companies providers of *news*.

These newspapers have always taken their specific *place of enunciation*, with explicit defense of alternative, counter-cultural and/or revolutionary political ideas and projects. They defended and eventually were spokespersons of subalternate groups and ethnic minorities. They opened an important space for the agenda of feminist and homosexual movements. In short, they were the dissonant voice of a period marked by the dictatorship. They were the dissonant voice at a time when the cultural industry, stimulated by the military forces, concluded its consolidation process in the country. From their political and cultural projects (with their specificities and ideological limitations), they contributed to the construction and maintenance of a critical atmosphere, which was important for the slow return of the country to the democratic life.

If, in their transformative and revolutionary eagerness, the alternative press was characterized by boldness and generosity, elements as massification of culture and return of the political exercise via social, trade union and partisan movements (very stimulated by these periodicals) made these productions less and less necessary within the new political scenario created in the country, contributing to their

# A

*Versus*: a space of Latin America in the alternative press

disappearance. *Versus*, as all other alternative publications, could not respond to the transformations in the cultural field and to the new demands of the politics.

## **VERSUS: A NEWSPAPER OF ADVENTURES, IDEAS, REPORTS AND CULTURE**

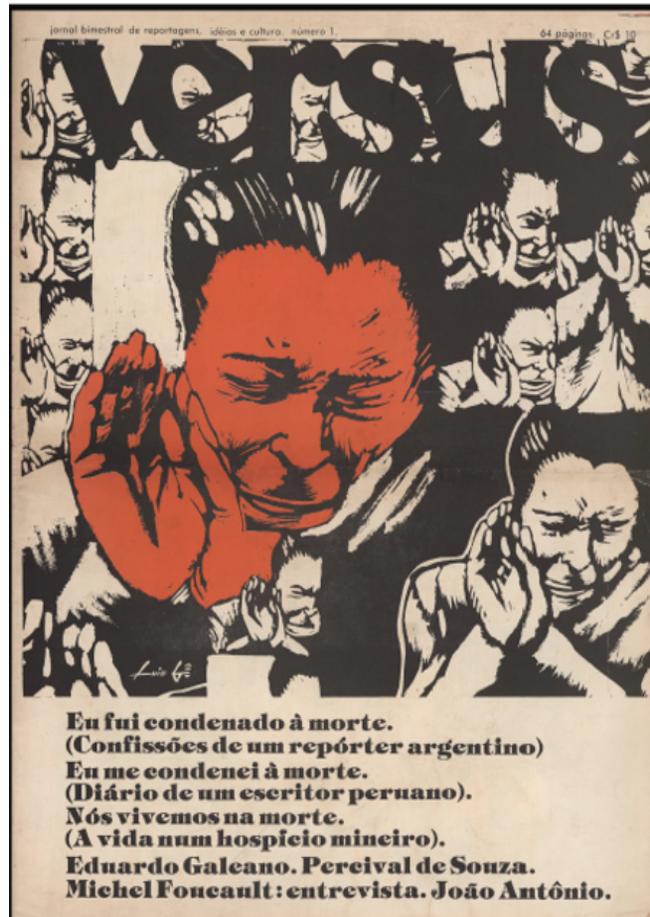


FIGURE 3 – *Versus*, 1, October 1975. The cover is organized based on an alarming image of a male face in a state of suffering, by Luis Gê, with a selection of the content of the magazine: the death as a theme and metaphor of the situation of the country and the continent

Source: *Versus* (1975).

The first issue of *Versus* was published on October 22, 1975, three days before the lifeless body of the journalist Vladimir Herzog was found in the DOI-CODI

of São Paulo. *Versus* did not report the murder of Herzog by the military forces in its issue 2, in December 1975. The journalist's disappearance, his interrogation and murder would happen much later only in the editorial of issue 18 (February 1978). In it, the magazine recalled having happened a "harsh circumstance of censorship and arbitrariness when – symbol and limit situation – Herzog turned into an example of an intolerable and agonizing circumstance" (*Versus*, 1978a: 2). Five months later, Herzog would become again theme of the publication, now in the form of poetry, in the column coordinated by the poet Cláudio Willer, in issue 23, July 1978. Coincidentally or not, the murder of Herzog was theme of the last issue edited by Marcos Faerman, before his expulsion from the magazine he had created, by members of the Socialist Convergence<sup>12</sup>. The poem "Perícia para Vladimir Herzog (Criminal Investigation for Vladimir Herzog)", by the young poet Ricardo G. Ramos, had already been declaimed with fear by its own author at the Municipal Theatre of São Paulo, in November 1976, as told by Willer in the column presentation<sup>13</sup>.

Herzog's death was not reported in *Versus* because the magazine was not a newspaper. Herzog's presence and all his death represented for the country were managed by the publication in another way, with a different type of sensitivity. The editors, who had already announced, in the stamp published in the top of the cover of the first issue, that *Versus* was a "bimonthly newspaper of reports, ideas and culture", would add a new keyword to this stamp. In its issue 3 (March 1976), *Versus* became "a newspaper of adventures, ideas, reports and culture". This characterization would only fall starting from issue 19 (March to April 1978) when, under the growing domination of the Socialist Convergence, *Versus* would only and merely be a "newspaper of politics, culture and ideas". With this change of course, goodbye reports and goodbye adventures; welcome the *serious* politics and the choice of handling really important matters, as the critique to the bourgeois society and the construction of a revolutionary party in the country<sup>14</sup>.

The decision to create a new periodical dedicated to breathtaking reports and articles, intellectually prepared, based on a clear position of dissidence, even within the left-wing movements themselves, marked the founding group of *Versus*. It is important to follow the trajectory of *Versus*, so we can understand the role it had in the Brazilian cultural field during the period it circulated and, also, so we can reflect on the very structure of the magazine to then be able to resume the questions posed in the introduction of this article.

## A NECESSARY PARENTHESIS

Before proceeding, however, we must reflect on an apparently terminological issue. When we talk about the alternative press we usually think about newspapers

<sup>12</sup>Faerman's expulsion would be made official in issue 24 with a text by the author himself, signed not only by him, but also by Cláudio Willer, then subeditor, and other important collaborators of the initial project of the magazine, who resigned in solidarity with Faerman. The text received an ironic and disrespectful title by part of the substitute editorialist body, "Sobre gaviões e passarinhos. E o nosso editor chefe se foi... (About hawks and little birds. And our editor in chief is gone...)", and was added by a long and even more irreverent "Esclarecemos (We clarify)" (*Versus*, 1978f: 2).

<sup>13</sup>"Poesia/Cláudio Willer" (*Versus*, 1978e: 16). Ricardo G. Ramos was included by Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda in her important anthology *26 poetas hoje* (Hollanda, 1998: 186-199).

<sup>14</sup>And, based on the predominance of Trotskyists, goodbye also creativity in formal plan. According to Eblak (2002: 79), the magazine would abandon all the experimentalism used in the design to return to the "enormous text blocks, without harmonization in the use of photos", typical of the traditional press. Starting from issue 25, the covers were no longer esthetically pleasing, and readers came across an evident sloppiness in the editorial care.

# A

## *Versus*: a space of Latin America in the alternative press

and magazines. What would distinguish the first from the second? Several alternative periodicals were weeklies, as others followed the broader circulation periods, and many had no definite temporality, almost invariably due to financial difficulties. Curiously, almost none of them had the format as a magazine. *Versus*, as we have seen, was announced as newspaper, despite having all the features typically associated with magazines: dilated periodicity; maintenance of a fixed number of pages (about 40 pages per issue); careful editorial production; permanent innovation of the graphic part, with very well spatially constructed pages, elaborate illustrations and editorial cartoons and privileged space for comics; agenda built on dense reports, opinionated articles and dynamic and intelligent interviews.

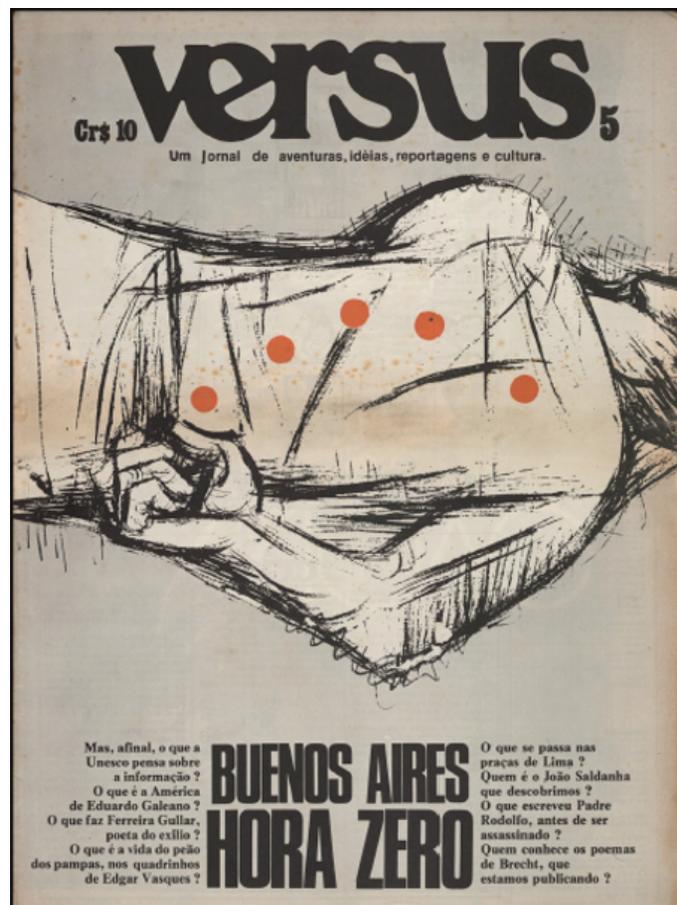


FIGURE 4 – *Versus*, 5. Cover by Carlos Clémen. Under a body riddled with bullets, the title “*Buenos Aires, hora zero* (Buenos Aires, zero hour)”, surrounded with questions, announces part of the content of the magazine.

Source: *Versus* (1976b).



FIGURE 5 – *Versus*, 7 (December 1976). The cover, without authorship, is a montage with Hugo Pratt's drawings (the credits appear on page 2)

Source: *Versus* (1976d).

Let us recall that one of the elements that distinguish magazines from newspapers, despite both making from the conjunctural intervention their *raison d'être*, refers to the issue of time. As newspapers deal with facts in the heat of the hour, the time of magazines is usually less rigid and urgent. Less subjected to the immediatism of news, the editors from magazines provide a larger development time and an eventually broader material space (number of columns or pages) to the themes and facts that they decide to work. This results in the creation of more analytical texts and magnifies the importance of authors who make their own texts and maintain certain autonomy, despite normally accepting or agreeing with the editorial line of the publication. The magazines, as the newspapers, make the literary chronicle from their own circumstance,



but from a little more paused perspective. In addition, they put themselves in a hybrid zone, so to speak, because they simultaneously belong to the journalistic space and to the artistic and intellectual field (Crespo, 2011: 99-100)

In the first editorial, published in issue 6 (October 1976), exactly one year after its release, the editors of *Versus* carried out two tasks<sup>15</sup>. In the text titled “*Aniversário* (Birthday)”, they recalled the birth of the magazine “in a dark scenario” and announced the proposal that incited them to found a publication as *Versus*:

<sup>15</sup>Already in the preceding issue, *Versus* had published a text that we could define as editorial. The text, titled “Crisis”, communicated with grief the closure of the Argentine magazine, its great interlocutor and model after 40 issues (“of invention, audacity and risks”), published for three years and four months (*Versus*, 1976b: 2).

to make a Brazilian newspaper recognizing Latin America. In which the search of our roots was a program. In which the History would be a theme as important as “the news”. A newspaper without shame of recognizing the reflection and the culture, at a time when in the mainstream press the Languages and Literatures, Arts and Thought were relegated to the condition of “varieties”. (*Versus*, 1976c: 2)

This proposal, which guided the 23 issues of the first phase of *Versus* (and, in particular, the twelve first) as editorial program, implicated the adoption of an evidently political posture. A posture marked by the own name chosen for the publication: *Versus*, preposition indicating opposition, originally from Latin, is present, with the same spelling, in romance and Indo-European languages. So there was no doubt, *Versus* announced and structured itself as opposition, as an instrument of reflection *against* the reality in which it circulated, *against* the versions of the facts diffused in the collaborationist media, *against* the economic and political program from the Brazilian dictatorship, *against* the dictatorships of the rest of the continent, *against* the injustices from the capitalist order, and *against* the orthodoxies of left-wing politics.

Perhaps the bellicose postures of an *against* periodical would be more fit to what was traditionally associated and expected from a newspaper, helping to explain the editors’ discomfort: “we did not feel *Versus* as ‘a literary magazine’. (Sometimes, we were called like that – and this bothered us.) Nor as a ‘cultural magazine’ (*Versus*, 1976b: 2).

The disqualification associated to the literary and cultural magazines is present in a context as the second half of the 1970’s. The strong repression, the claws of censorship, the search for an attack position against the political and ideological domination suffered by all opposition forces required more than it was thought that a literary or cultural magazine was able to offer. And, of course, here we are talking about a traditional definition, so to speak, of literature and culture, completely dissociated from the politics – common definition among the reading public as well as many left-wing militants.

The posture of the editors of *Versus* is meaningful: according to the text, to be defined as a literary or cultural magazine did not please them, “perhaps because our concept of culture would lead us to other paths. *Versus* wanted to build its own space. This was the challenge” (Ibid.: 2).

The editorial “*Aniversário* (Birthday)” is particularly important because it introduces readers to the trajectory of the publication over one year and its course of construction and consolidation as *newspaper*, thought in terms of political engagement and editorial consistency with the ideological line chosen:

The viewpoint of *Versus* was educating its editors. In an integrated process, the practice of our work has taught us about what we wanted. The approach with the Hispanic American worlds was opening, at the same time, the trail that led us to life, to the creation and to the dramas of our own people. All was becoming integrated in a single process based on the search of paths. For a newspaper that is deeply Brazilian, Latin-American, popular in the surveys and longings, based on a critical and democratic consciousness. (*Versus*, 1972: 2)

The editorial advances, clarifying the readership about its style, its explicit decision in not participating in the *intellectualist little churches* and their economic and sociological preaching, exposing impetus and passion when mixing “Cortázar and Comics, Football and reflections on the cultural colonialism – memoirs of a worker from the Northeast region from Brazil devoured by São Paulo [...] and an interview with Michel Foucault (which Foucault loved)” (Ibid.: 2).

If the editors of *Versus* announced it as a special newspaper, made of “adventures, reports, ideas and culture”, they must have considered it an alternative vehicle to both the mainstream press with its supplements of “varieties” and the cultural and literary magazines imprisoned in square views of culture and literature. The group of *Versus*, captained by Marcos Faerman, used the culture and literature in its connection with the making, the thinking and the creating, in all its implications. As other publications from the period, *Versus* adopted a critical left perspective, assuming the urgency of seeking alternatives for official views of Orthodox right- and left-wing movements. In its first phase, when defining itself as a newspaper in which culture and adventure were blended, *Versus* also cast doubt on the ingrained concepts of an opposition unused to leaving its *comfort zone* (pardon for the anachronistic term for the time). To understand and affect the society from other perspectives was the proposal of this magazine, simultaneously cultural, literary and political, that, as already mentioned, given the context and its idiosyncrasies, would rather be defined as newspaper.



Let us close the parenthesis and return to the story of *Versus* that, in spite of its editors, I would prefer to call as the magazine that, technically, it was. When circulating at a time when the repression, the censure and the uncertainty were still intense in the country, the magazine reflected on the need of a group of journalists transforming their exercise into a truly alternative practice. Marcos Faerman's figure was crucial for the course of the publication. Between culture and politics, in a trajectory based on a process of growth and collaboration between producers of each issue, the magazine circulated for four years (October 1975 to October 1979). Initially planned to be published bimonthly, the editors never respected this periodicity in a rigid way.

As mentioned, *Versus* had 34 numbers divided basically into two phases. Several authors, with whom I agree, prefer to categorize the phases into three (Buchioni; Ogassawara, 2009; Candido, 2008; Eblak, 2002). Thus, the first of them is divided into two: the first twelve issues, from October 1975 to July 1977, maintain an unquestioned editorial unit and harmony. We can perceive the obedience to a proposal of cultural insertion and the construction of a project of reflection which is developed and grows with each issue, offering the reader a rich, purposeful and coherent publication. In this phase, Latin America's presence is intense and thematically diverse. Starting from issue 13, the prospect of a more immediate and incisive political performance of the publication emerged, with the Trotskyists' seductive argument and traditional *entryism*. Marcos Faerman entered the magazine in this issue. His militant past (first from the Brazilian Communist Party – PCB – and later from the Communist Workers Party – POC) and his enthusiasm for Leonel Brizola's return, to whom he dedicated a long story in the magazine (*Versus*, 1978a) must have weighed on his decision.

Starting from issue 13, the editorial unit of *Versus* was truncated, although not completely. As for the editorials, we observed that they became much more frequent starting from issue 15 (October 1977) and strived to explain and justify which courses *Versus* would take over time. A transitional stage is opened in this phase towards the politicization of the magazine (Buchioni; Ogassawara, 2009), and starting from issue 24, with Faerman's departure, towards the indetermination of its political and editorial project. Latin America would cease to be the organizing axis of pages of the magazine, prioritizing the discussion of the national politics.

Marcos Faerman's presence oriented the publication, even when he stopped directing it, due to the inevitable comparison between what it was under his direction and inspiration and what it became later. As the influence of the members of the Socialist Convergence and its leader, Jorge Pinheiro, incremented, the freshness, the lightness and the creativity of *Versus* were decreasing<sup>16</sup>. Those who discovered *Versus* and started following it due to the innovative approach

<sup>16</sup>According to Kucinski (1991: 197-199), Jorge Pinheiro, from the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR), converted to the Trotskyism by Mário Pedrosa in the early 1970's, in Chile, founded in 1974 the *Liga Operária* (Workers' League) with other exiles in Argentina. In the same year, the group returned to Brazil and its influence kept growing. Some activists of this clandestine organization belonged to *Versus*. On January 28, 1978, the Workers' League launched the Socialist Convergence movement, aiming at attracting the other socialist forces to form a great legal socialist party. *Versus* magazine was present in that act among other political means and associations.

given to themes associated with culture and its relationship with politics, those who bought it to meet Latin American authors and themes, those who were delighted with the possibility of reading “a newspaper of adventures, ideas, reports and culture” were certainly disillusioned with what *Versus* became: a magazine of ideological propaganda and denunciation, somewhat grouchy, acting as spokesman of a political group with little circulation among the learned middle class that, for social and economic issues, has always been – as we have seen – the primary audience of the alternative press.

The emphasis of the Trotskyist group on the limitations of culture as a tool to understand and affect the reality began to take shape under Faerman’s direction, with a change of course indicated in the editorial published in issue 17 (December 1977). The text significantly titled “*Luta contínua. Um partido socialista no Brasil?* (Ongoing struggle. A socialist party in Brazil?)” showed the political position of the magazine before the immediate national and political context, announcing a *corpus* of stories determined to convince readers of the relevance of its own defense of the construction of a socialist party (Versus, 1977f). Now, the sociology and the political science began gaining more space, beating the former ill will of the magazine, in its “option for the culture as a form of action” against the *sociological preaching* and the empty theorizing. The editorial announces an interview with Chico Pinto, from the *authentic* group of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB), a statement of the sociologist José Álvaro Moisés and an interview with Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

According to the editorial, with the publication of these three texts, *Versus* offered its contribution to the national and political debate, inaugurating a new phase. In agreement with the editors, *Versus* had emerged as a new discussion space when thinking the continental issue, assimilated the language and sociological thinking starting from issue 7 (December 1976)<sup>17</sup>, and, from issue number 14 (September 1977), it had opened space to the reflection on explicit politics, with the interview with Almino Afonso, former Minister of Labor from João Goulart, which broke an abstention of 13 years in its pages<sup>18</sup>. Now, continued the editorial: “*Versus* is willing to integrate these three languages: the one from the culture as a form of action, the sociological reflection and discussion of the directly political instance”. When reflecting specifically on the subject of political parties, the challenge would be, according to the editors, in knowing how to build an opposition with a new political, social and cultural program. As we can notice, *Versus* was vigorously starting its militant phase, which would have important consequences for it, for Faerman and for the group of journalists and collaborators who supported him since the beginning and were unhappy with the change of course.

<sup>17</sup>The editorial might have referred to the publication of a text by Fernando Henrique about Jimmy Carter’s policy for Latin America, and to a report by Licínio Cardoso and Maria da Paz Rodrigues, sent by *Versus* to Guinea-Bissau, to hear and record its inhabitants’ testimonies on the war against colonialism.

<sup>18</sup>Almino Afonso provided a long interview to the sociologist Francisco Weffort, in which, among other themes, he analyzed the relationship between the intellectuals and politics (Versus, 1977c: 12-16).



### EXAMINING THE TRAIL OF *VERSUS* IN ITS EDITORIALS

The programmatic editorial process of a publication is not restricted, evidently, to texts specifically associated with this journalistic genre. To study and learn it we must observe all the set of elements – formal and of background – which constitute the publication, from the design of pages to the illustrations of each text, passing by the crucial issue of authorship. The set of issues of a magazine provides the scholar's analysis this editorial process, explicitly and implicitly. Evidently, we can catch it in the issues from *Versus* and confirm, for example, its aforementioned division, for ideological and formal questions, in two distinct phases. However, the specific analysis of editorial texts offers us very interesting paths of reflection. Let us, thus, take this route.

If, on the one hand, the first editorial of *Versus* appeared only a year after its publication, under the little creative title “*Aniversário* (Birthday)”, on the other, the second was released in the following issue, December 1976. The decision of writing this second editorial, according to the authors, happened because *Versus* would be distributed nationally. Therefore, it was necessary to tell the new readers around the country something of its history and proposal.

The editorial, titled “*Aos leitores* (To our readers)”, in line with the previous one, reaffirmed that a group of journalists and intellectuals had concluded “that a publication focused on the present, the past and the future of our continent was necessary” because since colonial times we had denied our “continental being” (*Versus*, 1976d: 2). It recalls that the colonization had produced heroes who were actually here to explore, dominate and enslave. With the military occupation there would come “the destruction of native cultures. Incas, Mayans and Aztecs, their (our) memory destroyed millimeter by millimeter”.

As part of the search for “archetypes of our identity”, *Versus* asks itself: “Where is Our America? In the flutes of our Indigenous peoples? In the ruins of Seven Peoples of the Missions? In the skin of an emigrant from Brazil's Northeast region? In the fear of a shot person from Buenos Aires? In the writings of José Martí? In the testament of Priest Burnier? In Zapata, San Martín, Bolívar?”

According to the editorial, this search for identity led the reporters from *Versus* to travel across several countries in the region. The texts of the magazine “flowed for four and a half centuries” and its collaborators' look addressed not only Brazil and the continent, but the Africa of today and yesterday, in search of a memory that also remained unfairly buried by the destructing colonialism. *Versus* proclaims its proposals and its own role: “Living History. Living Culture. Opening to humanist expressions.” And states, without false modesty, that its greatest contribution was “to have opened a space for reflection”, living exclusively from their readers, and until when it is necessary.

In the second editorial we can basically perceive the confirmation of the program stated in the previous one. And we observed the same euphoria in both of them: the first, due to the circulation of 25 thousand copies; the second, due to the possibility of reaching the entire country, with the employment of a national distributor. For hard times, the possible achievements and, beyond, the maintenance of a project and an increase in the number of its followers.

The following editorial would take five months to be released. In issue 10, May 1977, also under the prosaic title of “*Aos leitores* (To our readers)”, on the same page two of the previous ones, the editors of *Versus* begin the text with the arduous task of explaining the increase in the price of the magazine. The galloping inflation, the scarce, even if loyal, number of advertisers, the magazine costs, which increased by 70%. With a certain intellectualized humor, they would recall their “vocation of poor publication, at least in the miserable ground of the materiality of things”, mentioning the book *Memórias do cárcere* (Memoirs of prison) by Graciliano Ramos (Versus, 1977a: 2).

This editorial, in direct style, accounts for the readers: the magazine is already distributed at newsstands in the country, we only need to insist for news vendors to request and sell them. *Versus* also ensures readers that it continues to maintain “the loyalty to its Latin Americanist and popular proposal”. The magazine announces the publication of Eduardo Galeano’s literary chronicles, “author of *Venas abiertas de América Latina*, former director of *Crisis*, of Buenos Aires from the old days”, and Eric Nepomuceno’s letters, “another Latin American journalist, this Brazilian”, who will send his contributions from Europe, as Galeano, there exiled.

Finally, it makes a few comments on the continuity of the editorial program launched in 1977, the *Coleção Testemunhos* (Collection Testimonies). *Versus* had decided to adopt a project that could be defined as an old tradition among political and cultural magazines: the creation of a publishing house to release works with greater breath made by its own collaborators and authors ideologically identified with its project<sup>19</sup>.

This editorial opens several paths for reflection. It is interesting to note, initially, the editors’ strategic option in stating the precedence of the denomination Latin American over the Brazilian one to refer to Nepomuceno. Attitudes such as the former are characteristic of the first phase of the magazine, which we could define as the quest for a continental unity. We can state that, in its first twelve issues, *Versus* assumes a wide narrative elaborated on circumstances and references common to the entire region.

Its speech is based on themes as rebellions, killings, protests and other significant historical events. The magazine discusses the action of caudillos and dictators of the past and present and reflects on the daily life and everyday

<sup>19</sup>Such tradition is ancient in Latin America. In Brazil, Monteiro Lobato bought the magazine *Revista do Brasil* in 1918, and used its pages as showcase to publicize the books he edited under the editorial imprint *Editora da Revista do Brasil* (Publishing House of the Magazine of Brazil). In Peru, Mariátegui and his collaborators founded the magazine *Amauta*, 1926. The magazine was important to disseminate books from the publishing house *Minerva*, founded by the same group a year before. In Argentina, the owners of the publishing house *Claridad*, founded in 1922, released their prestigious magazine *Claridad* four years later. Also in Argentina, Victoria Ocampo founded the magazine *Sur* in 1931, and the publishing house, with the same name, in 1933. There are several other examples in the continent. As for *Versus*, based on what I could research, besides the *A Arte da Resistência* (The Art of Resistance) by Paulo Pontes (Versus, 1977), only two more volumes were published: *Diário da libertação, a Guiné-Bissau da nova África* (Liberation diary, the Guinea-Bissau of new Africa), by Maria da Paz Rodriguez and Licínio Azevedo (Versus, 1977), and *Vozes & crônicas* (Voices & literary chronicles), “*Che*” e outras histórias (“Che” and other stories), by Eduardo Galeano (Versus/Global, 1978).



resistance in several countries then dominated by military dictatorships such as Brazil. A crucial element in the speech of *Versus* in its first phase is the absence of a clear hierarchy between historical, political or artistic texts. The status of art given to comics published by the magazine is paradigmatic of this absence, as well as the space given to Latin American writers, poets and journalist.

The latter deserves a detailed allusion that is, however, beyond the limits of this article. Faerman was a great reader and always defended the primary place of literature in the training of journalists. His definition of the journalist as “a being in availability” and his defense of a journalistic labor unrelated to formats and an alleged objective language opened space, in *Versus*, for non-standard articles, which were becoming hegemonic in the large newspapers, and for reports, in which the reporter narrated, humanized the subjects interviewed and stood as the protagonist of the event he/she experienced as a reporter. Important examples are the stories and reports by young reporters, trained by Faerman, as Caco Barcelos, about a football fan and the death of a farmer in the *sertão* (Brazilian backland) of Pernambuco; and Isabel Viera, about a fisherman community in Búzios, the miners from Arroio dos Ratos, in Rio Grande do Sul, a taxi drivers’ strike and about the daily life of workers from the ABC (district in São Paulo)<sup>20</sup>. Let us remember that in his classic text “*As palavras aprisionadas* (The words imprisoned)” (Versus, 1976d: 38), Faerman, sympathizer recognized in the movement of the *new journalism*, stated that “journalism is a method: it works as an instrument for discovery of a reality, with its own forms, notes, research” and that the journalist, in the responsibility of the completion of his/her work, should “know how to listen, know how to describe”. The publication of texts by and about Carlos Fuentes, García Márquez and Rodolfo Walsh – writers whose journalistic practice was characterized by the use of literary resources – reinforces and illustrates the editorial line of *Versus* regarding the theme.

After five months the magazine published another editorial. In issue 15 (October 1977), in a short untitled text, on the left side of page 2, the magazine, besides recalling the importance of this issue – for marking the third year of the publication – repeats the previous topics: its decision in preserving the exercise of a critical thinking and the option in keeping “an watchful eye to the neighboring people making the report of these times in which the history, sometimes, is built on the tombstones of cemeteries – in the prospect of a popular Latin Americanism” (Versus, 1977d: 2).

This issue has two important elements worth highlighting. The first refers to the reinforcement of the editors’ concern with both the preservation of the “persistent exercise of a critical thinking against the dogmas of the thought that is established by force” as “with the language, looking for the vital and not for the repetitive and the bureaucratic”. The editors of the magazine reaffirm

<sup>20</sup>By Caco Barcelos, respectively: “*A louca história de Batata, o corintiano suicida*” (Versus, 1976a: 37-39); “*A perseguição (no sertão de Serra Talhada, lá onde nasceu Virgulino Lampião)*” (Versus, 1976d: 14-16). By Isabel Viera, respectively: “*Memória de Búzios*” (Versus, 1977e: 20-21); “*O povo das minas*” (Versus, 1978b: 29); “*Bandeira 2, táxi!*” (Versus, 1978d: 7); “*Trabalhadores, e agora?*” (Versus, 1978e: 20).

to have always sought new forms “because only they can express the content we want to build”. However, this issue displayed new ideas shaped in a new design<sup>21</sup>. Such statement sounds strange, since the magazine had always proved to be innovative, for both language and ideas. What were these new ideas, if the subjects in this issue followed the original project of the magazine, defended in the editorial itself? The second element has to do with working hours and with a certain hierarchy in the employees’ disposition. According to this editorial, *Versus* would be organized around a “Council of Writing”, which would appear on the Masthead as “part of a collective practice which aims at being increasingly collective”.

The Council of Writing disappeared two months later, in issue 17 (December 1977), but the decision to create it, at a time when an increase in the editors’ concern to analyze themes of national politics and conjuncture was perceived, indicates the changes that were occurring in the correlation of forces within the magazine.

*Versus* was always characterized by the absence of a formal inflexibility and excelled for the creative occupation of its pages. The magazine, which encouraged no policy of fixed columns (which usually shows certain hierarchy among the collaborators) and that a few times had a fixed space and a systematic effort to the editorials, dedicated the page two of the four subsequent issues (up to issue 19) to this journalistic genre. Faerman, the great articulator of the magazine, officially left the position of editor in chief to, in issue 15, appear in the seventh place among the 14 components of the Council of Writing and, already in the next number, leave the Council to occupy the first place in the editors’ group – nine in total, four of which were assistants<sup>22</sup>. In issue 18 (February 1978), the name of Jorge Pinheiro, leader of the Socialist Convergence in *Versus*, appeared for the first time among the assistant editors. Already in issue 20 (April 1978), Pinheiro rises to the editors’ group to soon establish, alone, the editorials of issues 21 (May 1978) and 22 (June 1978). The first, entitled “*Olho gordo* (Evil eye)” covered, among other themes, the defense of legalization of parties, to assert that the socialist movement deepened its roots among the working classes (*Versus*, 1978c: 3). The second, entitled “*tumicutuca euticutuco* (youpokeme ipokeyou)”, had a long balance of the national politics during the month, to warn socialists about the need of positioning themselves on the destinies of the nation, instead of behaving like ostriches while others were taking decisions (*Versus*, 1978d: 3-4).

In the editorial of issue 18 (February 1978), the aforementioned change of direction of *Versus*, indicated in the editorial of issue 17, is consolidated. We can perceive in this text, divided into seven numbered topics, with synthetic titles in the punctual and concise Marcos Faerman’s style, that Jorge Pinheiro’s group

<sup>21</sup>The stories were divided into sections, organized by themes: “*30 dias nacional* (30 days national)”, “*30 dias internacional* (30 days international)”, “*Época. Comportamento e tendências* (Epoch. Behavior and trends)”, “*Leituras. Artes, livros e ideias* (Readings. Arts, books and ideas)”, “*Afrolatinoamérica* (Afro-Latin America)” and “*A última palavra é a do leitor* (The last word is from the reader)”. This new layout just kept to the number 18 (February 1978).

<sup>22</sup>According to Kucinski (1991: 198), the decision to form the Council had been from Faerman himself. The Council had no formal power, but indicated “the need to channel the domestic political pressures”. Some of its members were from the Workers’ League, but there was pluralism. The participants were militants as Omar de Barros Filho (who would remain until the end of the magazine) and Hélio Goldzstejn, but also Paulo de Tarsus Venceslau, administrator of the magazine and future founder of PT. At that time, some collaborators of the magazine, perceiving that *Versus* was walking towards the deterioration and closing, left the publication.

# A

## *Versus*: a space of Latin America in the alternative press

proceeds to a true destruction of the original project of the magazine, burying its refined cultural and literary perspective and its defense of a Latin American unity based on knowledge and reflection. “*Um novo Versus?* (A new *Versus?*)” is the title of the first topic. The question that was probably born between readers, from their surprise with the latest issues of the magazine, receives a categorical answer. *Versus* has changed. And *Versus* had indeed changed, when abandoning the Latin American universe and imaginary as guiding principles of its narrative and cultural action to discuss, as any alternative newspaper, the immediate horizon of Brazilian politics and — more than that — to set out for a proselytism with sparse chances of success.

In issue 24, whose cover features, significantly, a photo of Trotsky, announcing the celebration of the “38 years of the cursed Prophet’s death”. The “farewell ceremony” to Faerman, his purposes, his style and his support group were praised.



FIGURE 6 – *Versus*, 24, September 1978

Source: *Versus* (1978f).

**LATIN AMERICANIST VERSUS?**

The initial political and cultural project of *Versus*, based on the “option for the culture as a form of action” and on the Latin America as main guiding theme, provided it a prominent place in the cultural panorama of the second half of the 1970's. Its innovative voice enhanced and enriched the horizon of debates, mainly because the editors of the magazine knew how put in discussion a set of relevant issues within the nebulous and suffocating context of the country, publishing them to the continental scope. The association between culture and politics, with the search for responses to the oppressive present in the oppressor past, expanded the thematic palette of the magazine that, without ignoring issues associated with the present, made use of literary texts and historical essays, building a universe simultaneously delightful and full of erudition, making form the metaphor a tool for critical thinking.

*Versus* suffered the consequences of the intestine war that affected several of the alternative periodicals and contributed to their extinction. The gradual transition of the magazine to a politically militant posture withdrew its distinguished place within the context of the alternative press and also within the Brazilian cultural field at the time. *Versus* became another partisan magazine. Nothing to celebrate and much to lose.

Making Latin America its horizon of action had, undoubtedly, a political effect and worked as a smart strategy that the editors of *Versus* used in order to deceive the censorship that extirpated the visibly political publications, such as the weeklies *Movimento e Opinião*, or the irreverent ones, as the paradigmatic *O Pasquim*. Its articles and interviews about plastic arts and Argentine psychoanalysis, its essays on indigenous civilizations, texts by Martí, articles about Zapata or poems by Roque Dalton called no attention of the coarse and ignorant censors, who were pleased to destroy texts of other periodicals.

However, the care with which the magazine analyzed Latin America during its first phase led it to build more than a strategy of resistance to the repression and censorship. *Versus* carried out an innovative political and cultural project, exactly for introducing its readers in the knowledge, both historical and conjunctural, of strategies and movements of resistance throughout the continent and for encouraging them to feel identified with it.

Perhaps for not having the configuration of an academic magazine and, certainly, for defending, as a good alternative publication, a critical action, engaged and transformative, *Versus* did not lose itself in conceptual discussions. What Latin Americanism did the magazine advocate? What theoretical substrate would it have to support its choices? This seems to me a sterile discussion, given the objectives of *Versus*. Based on our present, when we look at the years of lead



of the Brazilian dictatorship and remember the revival of social movements, the return of the big strikes, the reconstitution of the trade union and partisan movement; when we remember that, in the 1970's, in addition to Brazil, all countries in the Southern Cone were crushed by the military jackboots and their people aimed at resisting, we see with nostalgia and admiration the tireless action of the alternative magazines and newspapers. *Versus* had a crucial role when introducing the necessary discussion on Brazil's place in Latin America. When defending a possible continental unity, when believing in the existence of a Latin American identity, made from the wealth of its similarities and differences. When being swayed by the strict and restricted vision of members of the Socialist Convergence, the magazine left in the past all the wealth of the contribution it performed. Exception in the intellectual and cultural panorama of the 1970's, *Versus* could not leave heirs and, once again, the Latin American themes were lost in the Brazilian cultural and political context. ■

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Article received on December 11, 2017 and approved on February 4, 2018.