



Merging Art and Life: The Contemporary Street Theater

Para Fundir Arte e Vida,
o Teatro de Rua Contemporâneo

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ABSTRACT

This article, dialoguing with the studies on creative processes of the Contemporary Theater, has set to itself the challenge of reflecting on the notion of Contemporary Street Theater, based on the experience of Nóis de Teatro (Fortaleza, CE). Reflecting on the experience of this theatrical group in the urban periphery, whether in the staging processes or in the logic of the staging/dramaturgy proposed to the audience, the article addresses the possibilities of this theatrical scene, which is crossed by the times and by the discursive, architectural, symbolic, and political materiality of the city. The article's proposal is to expand the field of action of the Scenic Arts and to stimulate the dialogue with urbanism, reflecting on how the theater reconfigures the city experience itself, regarding the tangible as a fusion of art and life.

Keywords: Contemporary Street Theater. Nóis de Teatro. City. Periphery.

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RESUMO

O presente artigo, inserido nos estudos aplicados aos processos criativos do Teatro Contemporâneo, lança-se ao desafio de refletir sobre a noção de Teatro de Rua Contemporâneo, a partir da experiência do Nós de Teatro (Fortaleza - CE). A partir da experiência do grupo teatral na periferia urbana, seja nos processos de montagem ou na própria lógica de encenação/dramaturgia proposta ao espectador, o artigo se pergunta sobre as possibilidades dessa cena teatral que se faz atravessar pelos tempos e pelas materialidades discursivas, arquitetônicas, simbólicas e políticas da cidade. A proposição do trabalho é, expandindo o campo de ação das Artes Cênicas, estimular o diálogo com urbanismo, refletindo sobre o que o teatro reconfigura, a partir do sensível como fusão da arte e da vida, sobre a própria experiência de cidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Teatro de Rua Contemporâneo. Nós de Teatro. Cidade. Periferia.

To think about space, about the site of a play and, associated with this, think about dramaturgy, the actor, and his relations with the audience, is also to think about the world. The great spectacle of the world does not fit into the space reserved for the spectacle for the social group that judges itself the owner of the world (HADDAD, 2008, p.149).

Filled by a disquieting desire to think about a theater based on a direct contact with the urban space and the poetic materiality of the city, this article draws its considerations on Street Theater from the experience of the *Nóis de Teatro*² theater group in its contact with the peripheral public space and the inhabitants of Fortaleza, in the Brazilian state of Ceará. Thus, like the contemporary studies that aspire to an expanded field of reflection on performing arts, the research that I have carried out in the last years has analyzed the relationships between theater artists and the urban space, focusing on the scene as a thought production space and as a poetic and political intervention in the city. By renewing the field and scope of the theater itself – seen here as an amalgam of interrelationships of times, spaces, contexts, and subjectivities – such studies erase the frontiers between art and urbanism while reflecting on contemporary street theater and establishing direct interfaces between theater and city, whether in the aspects of dramaturgy or staging.

Based on 15 years of theater practice, this article reflects on the experience of *Nóis de Teatro*, a theater group from Fortaleza, CE, of which I am a member since its foundation, allowing me to reflect deeply on the paths and mishaps that weave this theater performed in the streets of the city. These reflections indicate, in view of this field of research, the existence of a wide range of presuppositions and conceptual frameworks that elucidate street theater practices in contemporary times, giving us scope to understand the poetic, political, and social context of the *Nóis de Teatro* art. Even so, it is important to recognize that besides the conceptual and theoretical presuppositions evidenced here it is in the creative processes itself, always unique and ephemeral, that our thinking becomes more complex.

Considering the above, and thinking about the street as a place of poetic vertigo, I am interested in the drive of a variety of expressions that fuse art and the public. The concept of public here goes beyond the mere notion of “audience,” incorporating a synergetic exchange of a community force that takes place in dialogue, in a public and political construction. First, it is

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The group of which I am theatrical director since its founding; over the years, I also directed various plays, experiments, and scenic studies together with eight other artists also living in the outskirts of Fortaleza. Our poetic production, from the beginning, derives from our relationship with the neighborhood where we live. The public space - beyond the traditional street theater activities that it makes possible – thus becomes, to us in *Nóis de Teatro*, a catalyzing environment to a creativity exemplified in a series of actions and performance acts that we perform between the puddles of mud and alleyways of the outskirts of Fortaleza over these years.

interesting to address the reflections of Amir Haddad, director of the *Tá na Rua* theater group (RJ), who tells us that, with the advent of the bourgeoisie and the development of the Protestant capitalist mode of production, the theater lost its characteristics of popular festivity and celebration, and gradually “became a special product, to be consumed by a homogeneous social group that seizes this form of popular manifestation and submits it to the nascent market rules” (HADDAD, 2008, p. 153). In order to understand the poetic and political phenomenon intrinsic to this place, we must not be discouraged by the strategic advances of bourgeois societies to structure a world-system that separates art and life and segregates artist and public. Thus, the complex street-theater movement that has erupted in recent years in Brazil seems to reignite a polytemporal³ movement prior to this bourgeois advent, a period in which public spaces were open to artistic manifestations, a space-time prior to the building of the great theaters⁴ and to spectacles performed in accordance with the economic interests of the ruling class. If it is possible to see, now and then, Squares and Streets occupied with popular demonstrations, theater performances, street dancing, as well as with other artistic expressions, it is exactly because there is a desire to have a place of sharing and sociability, as well as there is a desire to aesthetically and politically experiment with the social uses of a place. Amir Haddad (2008, p. 146) says that:

Today, if the theater wants to recover its communal strength, it must break with the 300 years of isolationism and illusionism in which bourgeois values, ethics, aesthetics, and morality have enveloped it, and seek new ways of relating to its public, under penalty of becoming more hermetic and closed on itself, and increasingly distanced from its audience, that does not recognize itself in it and does not grow through it; what it does as a spectacle becomes more than a visual apparatus for the contemplation of a passive and disinterested audience.

Arguing for a poetic model in which theater takes place in open and communitarian spaces⁵, Haddad mentions the Brechtian theater, the plays of Mayakovsky or García Lorca, or the popular force of the actors of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, as a theatricality made for a heterogeneous public, denying the homogeneity of the audiences and the spaces since then.

In the 19th century, some possibilities of resistance were already pulsating in art, involving artists who already foresaw the need to break down the historically reiterated boundaries that prevent the emergence of other possibilities in the friction

3. The philosopher Bruno Latour presents the term polytemporal to talk about a time that is not seen as a general panorama, but as a provisional result of the connection between beings. The author speaks of times that are arranged in a spiral and not more in one line. In this way, “we certainly have a future and a past, but the future looks like a circle that is expanding in all directions, and the past is not overtaken, but retaken, repeated, involved, protected, recombined, reinterpreted, and redone. (...) Such temporality does not force the use of ‘archaic’ or ‘advanced’ labels, since any grouping of contemporary elements can bring together elements belonging to all times” (LATOUR, 2013, p. 74).

4. Amir Haddad, in the text “*Espaço e ideologia*” (Space and ideology), says that the Greek theater, with its amphitheater and its space for the performance of the choir, confirms the communitarian importance of this form of expression for the Greeks. “The theater then disappears as a building, for a dozen or so centuries, and is kept alive only by the isolated activity of the actors, who, walking alone by the roads of the time, exhibited themselves to an atomized and divided world” (HADDAD, 2008, p. 152).

5. Hélio Oiticica, talking about his ‘parangolés’, defended a true resumption of ‘that primordial mythical structure of art, which always existed, of course, but with more or less definition. From Renaissance art onwards there has been an obscuring of this factor, which has tended, with the appearance of the art of our century, to emerge more and more’ (OITICICA 1986, p.68). I will return, in more detail, to the ideas of Oiticica.

between art and life. It is in this instance, it is necessary to agree with Baudelaire (2010, p.39), who at that time was already interested in the desacralization of art. When presented with the multitudes of the new modernity, the poet drops the halo of his head and throws it into the mud of the macadam, presenting the possibility of an artist who is much closer to man⁶ than to the divine, and amazed discovering “That the aura of purity and artistic holiness is only incidental and not essential to art and that poetry can flourish perfectly, perhaps even better, on the other side of the boulevard, in those low, ‘apoetic’ places like the *mauvais lieu* where this same poem was born” (BERMAN, 1986, p.155, emphasis added). In his claim to an art that breaks with the aesthetic standards of his time, Baudelaire perceives in the “apoetic” places of the city a creative and eminently paradoxical environment that destabilizes a supposedly aseptic world and seeks to obliterate everything that disturbs its harmony.

This is similar to what the visual artist Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980) realizes when he says that “the museum is the world”, bringing with him in this aphorism a revolutionary perspective of understanding everyday life as a poetic device. Oiticica enlarges his view of the world around him, understanding himself as an integral part of it, involved in its construction, helping to reduce the barriers that separate art and life. Hélio Oiticica (HO), as well as other visual and plastic artists of his time, spoke of anti-art in order to demystify the work of art and contribute to a co-participative experience with the spectator, a very clear reaction to the modernist art of his time. Oiticica said that

Anti-art is, therefore, a new stage (this is what Mário Pedrosa wisely formulated as postmodern art); it is optimism, it is the creation of a new vitality in the creative human experience; its purpose is to give the public the chance to stop being a spectator from outside to be a participant in the creative activity”. (OITICICA 1986: 82)

In this context, the world – the city, the square – thus becomes the picture of the painter, the instrument of the musician, and, in our case, the acting space of the actor and the habitat of the director who leaves his intuitive isolation to perceive that in the daily relationships of the city other poetic forms emerge to be seen, lived and experienced by the community that creates it. It is in this context that, like Amir Haddad or Nóis de Teatro, a large contingent of other artists and groups has been interested

6. Baudelaire, introducing the work of Constantin Guys, claims a rupture with the aestheticism reigning in the nineteenth century in favor of configuring an art more linked to everything that happens on the surface of our planet. He argues that it is necessary to understand the work of C.G. as that of a “man of the whole world, a man who understands the world and the mysterious and legitimate reasons of all his customs,” while the artist has been usually seen as a specialist, “a man bound to the palette as a servant to the land, (...) his conversation, necessarily limited to a very narrow circle, soon becomes unbearable to the man of the world, to the spiritual citizen of the universe” (BAUDELAIRE, 2010, p.25-26).

in thinking of the city as a creative power, the Square as a place not only of sociability but that promotes a creating playfulness that never tires of impelling the artist to dialogue with its topographical, architectural, symbolic, economic, geopolitical, and cultural structures.

Haddad says that there is an immanent theater in the city, that “there is an immanent theatrical possibility in the citizen and in the rites of coexistence, not foreseen in the life of the city and consequently not taken into account” (HADDAD, 2008, p. 218). When Haddad refers to the immanence of theater in the city, it is possible to say that he is very close to the ideas of the philosopher Gilles Deleuze when he affirms that “the absolute immanence exists in itself: it does not exist in something, it is not immanence to something, it does not depend on an object and ‘does not belong to a subject’” (DELEUZE, 2002, p. 12, emphasis mine)⁷. It is in this perspective that this immanence seems strongly associated with the Baudelairean project of throwing the halo in the macadam sludge in pursuit of a theater without owner, leaving its buildings, abandoning its art-making force, which leads Haddad to eliminate “the difference between citizen and artist, and to create a space where the citizenship can manifest itself artistically” (HADDAD, 2008, p. 219). “Immanence thus becomes a struggle against the forms of sociability resulting from philosophies and politics which prescribe a way of being and which submits the real to an extrinsic, transcendent, and therefore arbitrary judgment” (MERCER, 2010, p. 98).

Haddad then reveals that he understands the city as a great poetic theater which itself has a framework of meanings to be explored, the citizens as co-protagonists of this construction by manipulating their meanings and the constant traffic of this new urbanity. In this sense, when we speak of this ‘desire for the street’, for involvement with the ‘traffic’, we talk about understanding this immanent theater in the city, capable of eliciting an interlocution not only with urban architectural space but with the flow of its inhabitants, contributing to review the segregation between artist and citizen and to stimulate thinking about what arguably could be described as a citizen-artist or even an artist-citizen.

In that sense, referring to Oiticica, the artist Enrico Rocha from Ceará presents the pertinent notion that “the world is the work”. Work understood not as a product, but as this constant artistic creation of what is real, work as a process, “hands in the dirt.” If the world is the work, then everything becomes art.

7. Deleuzian philosophy helps us to understand the idea of a plane of immanence in postmodern societies. “One of the politico-philosophical implications of the assertion of an absolute immanence is placing the game of life and its rules in the same world, rendering meaningless the search for a foundational moment or a supreme end. (...) Disagreement and dispute operate in this world; they do not refer to causes, objectives, explanations, or determinations that are somewhere else. Immanence means that exteriority is no longer beyond the world” (Mercer, 2010, p.98). In this sense, whenever we speak of immanence in this dissertation, we will not deal with metaphorical relations, but like Deleuze and Haddad, we will refer to an “actual plane”, producing actual effects on the lived materiality, translated into concrete operations of production, and not of representation or transcendence.

The average person strolling through the city center, the surfer catching a wave at *Titanzinho*, the boy from *Poço da Draga* who jumps from the old bridge, the reader accompanying this text, the housewife preparing the family's lunch, the driver who drives the bus full of workers, the cyclist who faces the chaotic transit, we are all, at all times, performing aesthetic experiences (ROCHA, 2014).

Thus, to think the world as a work implies that it is not a given, but is constructed by a series of interventions that we do in him and to him. From this perspective, it may be that creative processes in art not only create works, but also invent their own sense of the world, reinventing also the everyday life. However, in asserting that everything is art, what consequences are we willing to assume with that statement? If everything is art, what is the need for venues for theatrical groups, funding, recognition awards for merit, or other mechanisms for distinguishing art works?

Considering all this, let us look at the scenario presented below, while seeking a different way of acting. Let us recognize that by merging art and life, we may also risk introducing into the picture the capitalistic mastery⁸ over the forms of consumption and the production of subjectivity, which means, as for Marshall Berman, that specialized entertainment, industrial technology, fashion, design, and politics are also claiming their stamp and seal of art. "As the media and the mass culture gained power, they were conquering the space that was formerly occupied exclusively by the university and by erudite culture" (ROLNIK, 2014, p. 89). Indeed, it is also in the interest of this cultural industry to desacralize art, throwing away its halo and enabling its mass production⁹. It was in this path that pop art and other alternatives of serving the interests of the cultural industry appeared in parallel to processes that supposedly were producing sensibilities. The problem was, according to Berman (1986, p. 31), "that pop modernism never developed a critical perspective that could clarify the extent to which this openness should be brought to the modern world and to what extent the modern artist has an obligation to see and denounce the limits of the powers of this world".

The challenge of the artist in the midst of this crossfire would thus be the capacity to go against these interests and, critically, to unveil a deviant poetic in the daily life of the cities, mobilizing the citizens to the daily transformation of their realities as a place of tangible meanings. In the case of the plays of *Nóis de Teatro*, it is the realization of this immanence of the city that has made us leave our headquarters in the outskirts of

8. Guatarri and Rolnik present in the text "Culture: a reactionary concept?" the term "capitalistic", arguing that "the very essence of capitalist profit is not reduced to the field of economic surplus value: It also manifests itself by taking control of the subjectivity" (GUATARRI, ROLNIK, 1986, p.16).

9. For more on this debate, see "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" by Walter Benjamin.

Fortaleza to unveil the urban poetics of the streets. The performances, experienced as a group act in the mysterious frontier of art and life, operate mainly with materials unseen by us in our previous creations. The poetics of *Nóis de Teatro* complexifies this perspective as we increasingly understand our acting as an object of this work-world, seeking to open ourselves to the tangible poetics of urban spaces and architectures, because “the city by itself is theatrical, is dramatic, and the theater is impregnated with these possibilities of expression” (HADDAD, 2008, p. 218). The *Nóis de Teatro* theatrical scene is gestated in the street, from the street, crossed by the street and, why not say, producing street. We cannot deny how much the spaces we passed were crossed and transformed by our action, producing the reflex effect of also, in turn, metamorphosing ourselves. Not in a numerable, quantifiable, and easily apprehended way, but in the territory of the tangible and the poetic.

This restless desire to repair the intersection of art and life has borne a lot of contemporary theories concerned with art as an event that directly interferes with life, and vice versa, producing what various theorists call “performativity”¹⁰. In that sense, in the field of the performing arts, the Canadian theorist Josette Féral says that in the center of the performative work:

The performance takes place in the real and focuses on the same reality in which it takes part deconstructing it, playing with the codes and capacities of the spectator (...). This deconstruction passes through a game with signs that become unstable, fluid, forcing the spectator’s eye to adapt incessantly, to migrate from one reference to another, always making the scene something ludic. (FÉRAL, 2008, p. 203)

In that sense, recognizing the creative frontier in the movement between art and life, *Nóis de Teatro* begins to reinvent its performance space, recognizing the square as the locus of poetic creation and, in counterpoint, our action as the driving force for creating other realities. It is because of this that when we argue in this research, together with Josette Féral, for a performative theater, we are working in the frontiers between fiction and reality, taking into account a performative act against a “theatricality that creates representative systems” and in favor of “the ludic aspect of the discourse in its multiple forms (visual or verbal: those of the performer, text, images, or things)” (FÉRAL, 2008, p. 207). The theater does not pass inert by the street, just as the street does not paralyze the movement made by art, which means that in this plane of immanence,

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Austin’s theory, widely used in the field of performance studies, conducts a relevant study on the emission and reception of discourses by observing the phenomena of speech acts as performative events; acts that do something, rather than only tell something. In sequence, Jacques Derrida, in the text “Signature Event Context”, even while criticizing Austin, incorporates to this theory the notion of success and failure, noting that “the performative is a ‘communication’ that is not essentially limited to delivering a semantic content already constructed and monitored by an object of truth” (DERRIDA, 1991, p. 363, author’s emphasis).

marked by its materiality and its reality effect, there is a powerful game of transformation and construction of other possible worlds. Perhaps we are still talking about an idealized plan, especially in a time of mass consumption. But what we are highlighting here, when I speak of fusing together art and life, is that when the city begins to understand its daily life as a place of tangible experiences, art will not disappear, confusing itself with the dynamics of the citizen's life, but, at least, it may cease to inhabit that bourgeois place to yield to the power of the poetic knowledge immanent in the life of the citizens. They cease to be passive spectators to co-author the artistic experience and the production of the city, or in the words of Rancière, an emancipated spectator:

The emancipatory lesson of the artist, opposed in all things to the stultifying lesson of the teacher, is that each of us is an artist, inasmuch as he adopts two procedures: not be content to be a man of one trade, but to intend to make of every work a means of expression; not be content to feel, but seek to share it (RANCIÈRE, 2002, p. 79).

This emerging restoration of the artist's sharing with the city, of the citizen with the polis, as said before, can be seen as an important key to understand the Contemporary Street Theater and, in the meantime, the work done by *Nóis de Teatro*. In fact, the exchange between the artists of *Nóis de Teatro* and *Tá na Rua* in March 2011¹¹ was of fundamental importance to rethink much of our practices and our relationship with the spectator, revealing to us an image of the scene in which “everything is public and nothing is specialized. The citizen and the artist are the same people and theatrical performances are transformed into public events” (HADDAD, 2008, p. 224). Such perspective – viewed by Amir Haddad as a rebellion, as “an abandonment of the current regime and the search for other possibilities beyond the traditional patterns of the bourgeois society, which is privatizing and specializing” – does away with the idea that “only a few are artists and others are spectators; of a division of the world between the passive and the active,” and critically interferes with the way the idea of culture has been managed by institutionalized and official bodies.

Guatarri and Rolnik (1986, p. 22) can contribute to this debate about theater by presenting the notion of culture as a reactionary concept. The authors argue the specialized value of the culture while understanding its singularities, as well as opposing the hegemony of capitalistic discourses, asking:

11.

In March 2011, *Nóis de Teatro* participated, together with *Grupo Pavilhão da Magnólia*, in an exchange activity with *Grupo Tá na Rua*, at its headquarters in Lapa, Rio de Janeiro. We could then perceive that the acting of *Tá na Rua* pointed to a conception of theater based on carnival street festivities and actor improvisations. Some time before, we had already participated in a workshop led by Licko Turle in Fortaleza, which encouraged us to try to understand this “theater without architecture, this dramaturgy without literature, this actor without role,” advocated by *Tá na Rua*.

How can we make these so-called “culture” categories at the same time highly specialized, singularized (...), without there being a kind of hegemonic possession by the capitalist elites? How music, dance, creation, all forms of sensibility can fully belong to the set of social components? How to proclaim a right to singularity in all these levels of production, called “cultural”, without this singularity being confined [in the sense of a closed classification and exclusive possession]?

When we understand the arts as knowledge, as a possible way of reading, re-reading, and transforming the work-world and of creating forms of knowledge sharing, we can notice that this knowledge, too, often establishes territorial boundaries. Therefore, it is important to point out the theater building itself as a place of tradition and specialty, clothed in values that the Culture, especially the Western, has conferred on it over the last centuries. If we analyze, for example, the origin of the theater spectators who attend the *Centro Dragão do Mar de Arte e Cultura* or even the *SESC Itacema* and the *Caixa Cultural*, all in the same neighborhood in Fortaleza, it is possible to perceive a certain social bias, a majority of intellectuals, artists, and students of middle and upper class. This is because the theater building may still be clothed with a mask of power that drives away the inhabitants of the outskirts of the city, who still see these places as territories of specialized knowledge belonging to intellectual elites far removed from their realities. That is why the French critic and playwright Georges Banu praises the places that are not institutionally regarded as theatrical. This author says that these other spaces, instead of being specialized, provoke us to retrieve and remember them, since they give rise to an acute feeling of truthfulness.

As a carefully researched location or shelter, it welcomes an artist by satisfying his expectations and alleviating his fears in relation to the theatrical, to the false. For this reason, the audience also discover, a priori, a space that makes them confident, favoring the gathering of beings that frequent it (BANU in CARDOSO, 2008, p. 216).

Echoing Amir Haddad, we can affirm that one possible way of doing away with this mystical power of the theatrical building may be a vigorous movement of abandoning its architecture. Tearing down specialization barriers perhaps is a plausible path of unlimited poetic construction, sensitive to the other, weaving the daily flow of life and rebuilding new fields of action and production of knowledge. Glimpsing the city as a poetic space, the street as the

locus of theatrical experience, we can bring the ordinary city practitioners, as Certeau tells us, closer to understanding city life as poetics and a space of creation. It is precisely here that, based on the experience of *Nóis de Teatro*, and understanding the tensions that concern the Theater as a whole, we can begin to think what poetically triggers the Contemporary Street Theater.

After 15 years of experience performing in the street with *Nóis de Teatro*, especially with regard to the experience of performing “The Garden of Plastic Flowers”¹², it is possible to agree with Banu that in the face-to-face with the people of the street we weave a unique poetic event, shared in mutual exchanges with the audience. In general, our spectacles, based on a sense of co-participation with the audience, weave the audience’s knowledge, agglutinating to the scene their opinions, reflections, and conclusions: An interactive path in which most of the scenes of our plays follow the audience inputs and proposals¹³. Knowledge that is woven beyond the dictates of specialization, but which involves the full participation of all in the collaborative construction of its meanings, generating a common culture (different from a culture in common), built collectively and “remade and redefined by the practice of its members, and not that one in which values created by the few are accepted and experienced passively by the many” (EAGLETON, 2011, p. 169)¹⁴.

Thinking in this way, a number of theater artists have worked to build a poetic dialogue with the city, the society and their cultures, contributing to understanding what is a public art. According to the *Itaú Cultural Encyclopedia*, after the 1970s, public art “would aim to alter the ordinary landscape and, in the case of cities, interfere with urban physiognomy, recover degraded spaces and promote civic debate. ‘The public artist is first a citizen’, says the Iranian Siah Armajani.” The application of the concept of public art to the performing arts is strengthened when the audience is seen as coauthor of the ephemeral experience of the theater. This conception broadens the understanding of art products in public spaces (mostly monuments), and lets us rethink the way the audience relates to them, taking them away from their space of contemplation to configure a lived experience. Thus, to think of a “citizen artist” is to broaden the scope of his attitude toward the norms of society, an emancipated experience capable of provoking an act of constant transgression of his views and actions in the city. In this context, the performing arts have greatly contributed to this reflection, whether in urban interventions or even in performances and happenings in the public spaces of cities since the 1970s. To

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Play staged in 2015. Performed only by black actors, it salutes the street in a great scenic procession, investigating and dialoguing with and in the city’s periphery, debating in parallel the genocide of the periphery’s black youth. Thinking about the image of the black garbage bag used by coroners to cover corpses, we began to ask questions about who society judges as social and human garbage, about what it relegates to a plan of concealment and obliteration in a reflex process of its urgent need for sterilization of the city. Asking us what images of the periphery are being reiterated in this process, the play tries to reveal the hidden and the dissension that are beneath this black bag. Marked by the mournful pace of the *Maracatu Cearense* music, the spectacle walked the streets. Summoning the audience to walk for an hour and a half by the neighborhood, we made stops that became as stations to discuss, stimulated by the architecture and topography experienced, the fissures that the play may produce in the discourse of fear and violence that inhabits the city.

13.

Another play from our repertoire, “*Todo Camburão tem um Pouco de Navio Negreiro*” (all paddywagons look a bit like slave ships), tells the saga of a black character that turns from oppressed to oppressor. After assassinating a young man on the periphery, this character goes to trial and the audience, as a jury, are the ones who decide the future of our hero, most of the time arguing and disputing the speeches presented.

14.

It is Raymond Williams who, in connection with utopian and Marxist ideals, argues the difference between “common culture” and “culture in common”, the latter being understood as the process of hierarchical reappropriation of the values created by a small section of the society. The “common culture” “requires an ethic of joint responsibility, a full democratic participation at all levels of social life, including in the material production, and equal access to the process of cultural creation” (EAGLETON, 2011, p. 169). The philosopher Terry Eagleton, defending this conception, observes that “William’s theory (...) cannot be rejected by the postmoderns as an organicist nostalgia, partly because it involves political transformations whose full implications are revolutionary, and partly because it views culture not as an integrated whole, but as ‘a very complex system of specialized developments’” (EAGLETON, 2011, p. 172, author’s emphasis).

think of theater as a public event, as a common culture, means not only to broaden its scope within the contemporary world, but to actively remake and reinvent the theater itself. Antonin Artaud (2006, p.8) already told us that “breaking language to touch life is to make or remake the theater; and the important thing is not to believe that this act should remain sacred, that is, reserved. The important thing is to believe that it is not anyone who can do it, and that it requires preparation.” Of what preparation does Artaud speak? In our field of research, does it act to reiterate the separation between the artist and the public, or does it remind us of the need, as artists, to strengthen our concepts in order to think a theater that launches itself rigorously to face the challenges set forth here?

In that sense, even disagreeing with the specialized knowledge, the *Tá na Rua* Group, working in Rio de Janeiro since 1980, has built a consistent laboratory space for the training of the street actor interested in this art-and-life flow. From the rehearsal room to the squares of Lapa and other neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro, the actors are daily relearning their relationship with the city and its inhabitants, investing in a poetics of chance and improvisation tied to the arsenal of games and experiences that they accumulate in the laboratory. It is in this perspective that the notion of “preparation” defended by Artaud may show its relation to this process of forming the citizen to be a catalyst to the city’s poetic universe, recognizing in the actor a power for reading the world as art.

Amir Haddad goes even further by claiming the notion of public art as a civil right, like the right to healthcare and public education, giving the citizen access to public art, financed with public resources, in the general interest of the nation. We at *Nóis de Teatro*, like Haddad, think that public arts should be financed with public resources, thus guaranteeing the subsistence of artists who view art as a means of producing citizenship in contemporary society. What does that mean? When the city is understood as a poetic source, the citizen then relates to the art/craft – the one performed in a specialized way by the artists who have the theater as a profession - in an emancipated way. At which point he practices, according to Haddad (2008, p. 225), a ludic exercise “and assumes a unique role - that of being a free, creative, fertile, transforming human being,” moving towards an in-depth experience with the universe of codes and symbols of this theater that inhabits the city. Much more than a poetic of the citizenship, we claim here a citizenship that is poetically understood and produced.

Haddad (2008, p. 224), searching for “the construction of another world, within which community life and the city are included”, thus reveals a theater that not only organizes a participatory event, but in doing this also seems to produce other urban experiences. Haddad summons the theater to the purpose of providing the human being “a space for his gregarious and communitarian feeling, thus contributing to the construction of a new city and a new society, where social and cultural differences can be administered and the utopian dream of building the ‘happy city’ can be resumed” (HADDAD, 2008, p. 227, emphasis added). Assuming its performative condition, his theater, more than representing, produces the city. And if not, it presents shocks, breaks, caesuras, and crevices, enabling its multiple inhabitants to use the city, destabilizing the so-called “art market”, besides reviewing the very normalized and hegemonic notion of urbanism.

These mobilizations, it is important to emphasize, not only interfere in the political discourse on art and its possible ethical and social function, but directly simmers in the scenic game aimed to satisfy such longings. In the case of the work done by *Nóis de Teatro*, in Fortaleza, the squares and streets are seen and used as a locus of this tension between art and life. On the streets, especially peripheral ones, poetic experiments have emerged that touch upon the access of a population to the public arts as a political and civil right and to the language that emerges from this opportunity as a tool for the invention of creative possibilities. This understanding has been contributing to take our acting out of that “sacred” place - which has the power to save a community – in order to put our feet on the ground and understand ourselves as artists and citizens interested in discussing the city and establishing a poetic discourse with it. We have begun to realize that there are no measurable solutions for the city. The solutions must all come from the present, from the emergence, they cannot become fixed. Let us see what Amir Haddad tells us about his experience:

So did you not go out to the street to save the poor? To teach the ignorant? To bring culture to the uneducated? To give lessons about health? Hygiene? Sexuality? Politics? No! We went to the streets because my discoveries about space and the relationships between actor and public in the open space, their limits and possibilities, led me to this. There was no messianic, evangelical-evangelizing stance in my attitude. On the contrary! I did not go out on the street to save anyone, but rather to save myself from death, from the lethargy in which I found myself, in a shamed and cowed Brazilian theater, or segregated (HADDAD, 2008, p. 145).

In this space of exchanges and relationships, meeting the poetics of Amir Haddad and *Tá na Rua* was of great importance so that we could understand a theater that does not seek to “separate a part of the city for celebrating the theater or to take a piece of the city and to place it inside a building so that it is symbolized there, but to think of the whole city as a theatrical possibility” (HADDAD, 2008, p. 219), which leads us to the militant and poetic desire for a theater that ceases “to be a cultural product isolated in a space, in order to become the usufruct of the whole city” (HADDAD, 2008, p. 223).

It is precisely this kind of drive, as in the work of Amir Haddad and his actors, that places the theater and the street as parallel events, blurring the boundaries between art and life, and strengthening the pillars of the bridge that interconnects them: The aesthetic character of the world as a museum, as an art work that can be actively transformed by a poetic and public experience.

Preparing to go out to the streets: searching for a new shelter

In this brief journey, we can address one of the aspects of how the *Nóis de Teatro* group perceives the street theater and its possibilities, especially considering the need to discuss the city. In our practices since the founding of the group in 2002, popular traditions have always been a part of our experiences, like the rural games and toys or even the folkloristic representation of these manifestations as an idealized space. However, it was the process of researching rural life during the production of the show “Sertão.doc” (Figure 12) in 2010 that provoked us to discuss our place as inhabitants of the city. It was during this process that we began to experiment with other languages and ways of thinking about the street theater, mainly because we reflected on our cultural action as city artists who were staging a spectacle set in the countryside. The process of self-criticism and the implications of our foreign look on the peasant realities were the triggers that led us to seek urban and cosmopolitan references to deal with the results of our research for the show¹⁵. Hence, as we began to tension our discourse as militant artists who perform in the poor outskirts of the city, our theatrical experience was influenced by our relationship with the neighborhood, impelling us to mobilize other discourses about the contemporary city. We started to think about a theater that wants to discuss the city.

Playing with this idea, the acting of *Nóis de Teatro* begins to incorporate the desire to discuss the political obstacles between

15.

The play sought to reflect on the situation of the rural man, especially because of a broad research on agribusiness as a strategy for controlling rural agricultural production.

center and periphery, bringing to the scene elements seen daily in the streets as material to compose scene and dramaturgy. Thus, understanding the street's own theatricality, in 2011 we produced together with the *Grupo Pavilhão da Magnólia* the play "Assunção 285 – A tragédia anunciada de um forte que virou cidade" (Assunção 285 - The foretold tragedy of a fort that became a city)¹⁶. Leaving with the bus "Assunção 285", the audience was invited to travel through various points of the city and at each stop a scene was acted, such as in "O Jardim das Flores de Plástico" (The Garden of Plastic Flowers). Starting at the sidewalk of the *José de Alencar* Theater in the historic center of Fortaleza, we passed through the *Beira-Mar* Avenue, following the waterfront and to reveal the image of an avenue that on one side has a large hotel that lavishes on luxury - Marina Park - and on the other a poor community - the *Oitão Preto* - until reaching the bridge of the Ceará River, from where we could see the meeting of the river with the sea. We then crossed the river on a raft to perform ritualized scenes about the founding of the city, and on the way back visited viaducts, avenues and squares trying to perceive their echoing voices, given their monumental importance in the city's history.

The play's stage direction was mine and Nelson Albuquerque's, and its poetics derived from the spaces of the city experienced in four hours of travel. The scenes took place inside, outside or on top of the bus, and even on other vehicles that followed it. It was a learning experience of flowing through the city unparalleled in the history of *Nóis de Teatro*. However, what this memory points out is that this joint experience of the city arouses the audience to a poetic experience that dispels a brutalized daily life in which they barely notice the architecture and the material and discursive topographies of a city increasingly clogged with cars. By staging a new itinerant play, *Nóis de Teatro* incorporates the experience of "Assunção 285" as the driving force to face other challenges, taking the viewer off the bus to experience the city by feet, walking through the neighborhood.

This apparatus of stories went to renew our experiences as urban artists, revealing the conflicts that urbanism provoked in the construction of contemporary cities. In this sense, Carreira and Matos (2016, p. 27) tell us that

To work with the notion of city, that is, of a theater in the city, does not imply ignoring the traditional idea of street theater, but rather broadens this concept by making it more complex by seeking to think of the theatricality that dialogues with the city as dramaturgy. Therefore, it seems appropriate to expand the idea of street, considering the flows that delimit and define our cities.

16.

Unfortunately, there was only a single performance of the play because of its high cost; the play was the result of the exchange between theater groups promoted by the Secretary of Culture of Fortaleza/SECULTFOR.

It was thus revealed to our group a theater that is problematized while it also searches to complexify the way the city is viewed, a process that does not, however, lead to a repression of our traditional roots in the street theater. On the contrary, it is possible to perceive in all that is outlined here, as Carreira points out, a process of enlarging this experience. These experiences expanded the concept of street theater for us in *Nóis de Teatro*. Beyond the specialties of acting and staging, there is a plural universe that exists between the notions of art and life, pulsating differences in the construction of the image of the city, producing a theater that performs other realities and creates other worlds, or at least tensions the normalized state of things. Inhabiting this action-conscious space has made us think of a street theater that is interested not only in discussing the city, understanding it as dramaturgy, but also questions the very instabilities that the “stacking of the times” have generated in our understanding of it. For all this, we must agree with Agamben (2009, p. 69) when he tells us that “only those who perceive in the most modern and recent the indices and signatures of the archaic can be contemporary with it.” Agamben goes further and tells us that contemporary is also the one who

dividing and interpolating time, is up to the task of transforming and putting it in relation to other times, to read the history in it in an unprecedented way, to “quote” it according to a need that is not at all arbitrary but that originates in a requirement to which he cannot [avoid to¹⁷] respond (AGAMBEN, 2009, p. 72, emphasis added).

These paradigms configure a vertiginous desire to seek not only to represent new possibilities for the city, but also to live a theater that, in its performative force, put in check and in motion every fixed and totalizing plan for the city, thus generating, from its own scenic force, other ways of dwelling and living in it.

The artists who have abandoned the specialized space to retrieve a desire to engage in the search for another shelter, willing or not, both the refusal of the one and the desire of the other makes a certain sense. Antoine Vitez argues that this movement “wants to grasp reality, because the image and the suspicion of the old theater cease to cast their shadows for the benefit of a climate, an environment” (CARDOSO, 2008, p. 224).

For these artists, the black room of conventional theater no longer appears as such a neutral space, since it brings along in its materiality, as mentioned before, a series of elements distancing

17.

There is a small error in the translation of Agamben published by Editora Argos and used as reference here. Reading the text in Italian, we can see that, unlike the Portuguese version, the author speaks of a requirement that he “cannot not answer”: “Dividendo e interpolando il tempo, è in grado di trasformarlo e di metterlo in relazione con gli altri tempi, di leggerne in modo inedito la storia, di “citarla” secondo una necessità che non proviene in alcun modo dal suo arbitrio, ma da un’esigenza a cui egli non può non rispondere” (AGAMBEN, 2008, p. 24).

it from a part of the city and that, in a certain way, also limit the poetic field of action of an artist interested in the multiform chaos of urban life. The researcher Ricardo Brugger Cardoso adds:

In the modern theatrical experience, the actor became the heart of the discussions. Acting or representing has become a function understood as a highly complex object presented to the public, diverting to itself the general attention in relation to the rest of the structure of a given event. However, some recent analyzes point to the fact that closed scenic spaces have never acted as totally neutral filters or frames, since they always presented codes that directly or indirectly interfere in the understanding of the spectacle itself (CARDOSO, 2008, p. 61).

What is important to say here is that this theater that is staged in public spaces by *Nóis de Teatro*, *Tá na Rua*, *Pavilhão da Magnólia*, and a number of other contemporary artists¹⁸, beyond the false neutrality of the scenic box forged as a mirror of the world, confronts the standardized logic of the city, entering the world seen as a museum and, perceiving it as ‘the work’, presents the fissures existing in its various temporalities, in the forgotten alleys of its own history.

18.

The contemporary street theater scene has invested assertively in creative processes in which walking is an aesthetic practice, whether in the bodies of the cast or in that which it arouses in the audience. In São Paulo, some groups have dedicated themselves to the poetic references of the neighborhoods where they perform, investing in site-specific creations. Plays such as “*Barafonda*”, by *Cia São Jorge de Variedades*, or “*Bom Retiro 938 metros*”, by *Teatro da Vertigem*, offer experiences of immersion in the neighborhoods of the great metropolis, such as *Barra Funda* and *Bom Retiro*. The *Cia Trupé de Teatro*, whose creative spark is the notion of “drift”, proposes the itinerant spectacle “*Um dia o raio caiu, e o baixo ventre da cidade se abriu*” (one day lightning struck and the underbelly of the city opened), with a three-hour duration, in which the living scene is composed of the streets and squares of the *Baixo Centro* neighborhood of the city of Sorocaba. In Fortaleza, the *Grupo Teatro de Caretas* has been engaged in a concise research process on the streets of the city, inviting the audience to walk along with them in their play “*Final de Tarde*” (late afternoon), directed by André Carreira, from the state of Minas Gerais.

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