



## Group Theater Experiences in the Occupation of the Urban Space in Porto Alegre

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**ABSTRACT – Group Theater Experiences in the Occupation of the Urban Space in Porto Alegre** – This article focuses on group theater aspects that take place in the streets, in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil: its motivations, conditions, and relationships established as a consequence of an urban space occupation through theatrical performances. Through the analysis of discourses from representatives of five theater groups from Porto Alegre (which were collected through a seminar and interviews), in a dialogue with performing arts, history, and anthropology scholars, we reflect on the attempt to occupy the city as an aesthetic choice and on the type of relationship established between theater performances and street audiences, aiming to broaden the understanding of the relationships between the theater and the street in the present times.

Keywords: **Street. City. Occupation. Performance. Group.**

**RÉSUMÉ – Les Expériences Théâtrales en Groupe dans l’Occupation de l’Espace Urbain au Porto Alegre** – L'article se concentre sur les aspects du théâtre en groupe dans les rues du Porto Alegre: ses motivations, conditions et relations établies en conséquence de l'occupation de l'espace urbain par voie de représentations théâtrales. À travers des analyses du discours de représentants de cinq groupes de théâtre à Porto Alegre (recueillies dans un séminaire et un entretien), en dialogue avec des chercheurs des arts du spectacle, de l'histoire et de l'anthropologie, on réfléchit sur l'occupation de la ville comme un choix esthétique et la relation établie entre le spectacle et le public dans la rue, en vue d'élargir la compréhension sur les relations entre le théâtre et la ville contemporaine.

Mots-clés: **Théâtre. Ville. Occupation. Spectacle. Groupe.**

**RESUMO – Experiências Teatrais de Grupo na Ocupação do Espaço Urbano em Porto Alegre** – O artigo enfoca aspectos do teatro de grupo que se faz na rua, na cidade de Porto Alegre: suas motivações, condições e relações estabelecidas como consequência da ocupação do espaço urbano por meio de espetáculos. Através de análises de discursos de representantes de cinco grupos de teatro de Porto Alegre (coletados através de um seminário e de entrevistas), em diálogo com estudiosos das artes cênicas, da história e da antropologia, reflete-se sobre a busca pela ocupação da cidade como escolha estética e sobre o tipo de relação estabelecida entre o espetáculo de teatro e o público da rua, com vistas a ampliar a compreensão acerca das relações entre teatro e cidade na contemporaneidade. Palavras-chave: **Teatro. Cidade. Ocupação. Espetáculo. Grupo.**

## Introduction

This article presents some of the reflections of a study<sup>1</sup> on street occupation processes by theater, whose main purpose was to understand the aspects that characterize the current relationship between theater and the city. In order to achieve that, we focused on the work of five groups that perform in the city of Porto Alegre (state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil), in a dialogue with theoreticians in the performing arts field that consider theater as a collective manifestation of urban space occupation, and with authors from the fields of history and anthropology.

Based on this background, which starts by contextualizing the mentioned study, considering its purposes and its methodological design, our attention is focused on two aspects of the relationship between theater and city, in particular the motivations of the investigated theater groups concerning their choice for the street as a space to conduct their scenic proposals - to be focused firstly - and the conditions for occupation of spaces in the city of Porto Alegre under these groups' standpoints - to be explored secondly.

In the initial research project, the assumption that guided it was the existence of a specific preparation procedure for actors performing on the street, which seemed to assume a certain delimitation of the phenomenon known as *street theater*. However, based on readings of new publications, analysis of performances, and emerging theater practices that take place in the urban space, conversation with artists, and deeper reflections on the legitimacy of investigation premises, the initial hypothesis was challenged, and that generated questions regarding the possibility of a characterization that considered the aesthetic and political diversity and complexity of the studied groups, which enabled us to understand that the investigation topic and the feelings of restlessness that motivated it went further than what was being proposed.

Thus, if at a preliminary stage the study seemed to include the definition of the so-called *street theater* and its variables, in the following stages the purpose of characterizing such practice (even in a location-specific way, as was the case of Porto Alegre, in the opinion of the selected groups) was superseded by the need of considering the complexity of the process that involve the occupation of the street by theater, which led to a shift in the investigation path. That way,

the study started considering the procedures for the preparation of performances and their outcomes in the street occupation, through the examination of aspects such as the dynamics of group relationships, the motivations of groups upon occupying the city, the effective conduction of plays on the street, and the meeting between the space and the audiences, considering the diversity of creations, production procedures, and ways through which the plays that are conducted in the city exist.

Aiming to study, in a profound way, an isolated phenomenon – in this case, the plays by Porto Alegre's theater groups that take place on the street – the investigation presented itself as a qualitative multiple case study<sup>2</sup> focused on aspects of the work of five theater groups in the city of Porto Alegre with distinct *street theater* experiences expressed in testimonials of artists representing the groups<sup>3</sup> analyzed. These testimonials were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted by the main researcher.

The groups were chosen primarily because they all performed in the city of Porto Alegre and had experiences with taking theater to the street. They were also chosen because they present diversified artistic performances. The field work was conducted at two times: the first one (in 2011) gathered representatives from the groups in talks, in the form of a seminar involving questions asked by the main researcher, which explored the possibility of the existence of specific training for street actors. The second one (in 2012) was conducted based on the shifting of the research focus and considering the need for further analyzing the questions that had not been examined before, and involved individual semi-structured interviews with the same subjects, focusing on the aspects of the street occupation processes by each group. Audiovisual recording equipment was used at both times, which made it easier to transcribe testimonials, which was performed at a later time.

The analysis of the representatives' testimonials was conducted based on the content analysis method, which allowed eliciting recurring topics in the recorded discourses. Coupled with studies by theater, group theater, and street theater theoreticians, such as Patrice Pavis, Narciso Telles, Ana Carneiro, André Carreira, Jussara Trindade, and Renata Lemes, the analysis allowed formulating categories<sup>4</sup> that then started constituting the discourse thread of the study, and

that allowed characterizing the practices for the occupation of Porto Alegre by theater.

In an attempt of covering the study limits, Pavis' study (1999, p. 141) was used for searching a definition of the French term "spectacle" that applies to the related situation. According to the author "a *spectacle* [performance] is anything that is offered for viewing". That is, the term is generically applied to "[...] the visible part of a play, all its art forms, and other activities that imply audience participation".

Upon explaining the reasons why he adopted the term "spectacle" in the contemporary scene, Pavis (1999) considers that its use is due to the refusal of the idea of producing an illusion of concealing its manufacturing processes, as well as questioning a dynamics that is integrated to the representation itself. Thus, the author affirms one of the tendencies of the contemporary theater that is manifested through forms that show connections between processes and products, inasmuch as they represent simultaneous actions of continuous, never finished, creation. This performance perspective, in the sense of *actual theater on the street*, is the one used by this study to reflect on Porto Alegre's theater, based on the discourses of the studied groups.

Upon eliciting the categories emerging from the transcriptions of the representatives' testimonials, we found a need to discuss the current situation of street occupation in its live reality – which, in the case of the studied groups, is represented by the moment of the performance – and that leads us to think of the motivations that lead these groups to choose the street as a space for performing.

### **On the Reasons**

Based on the fundamental issue in the study, the first question in the interviews, which is an essential point for the reflection on the groups' practices, regarded to their needs and motivations to go to the streets. More than investigating what the groups did, the aim was to investigate the reasons why. This initial question was fundamental for understanding the views of each group regarding their city occupation processes and what they think of the structures involved in such practice.

Upon analyzing the representatives' testimonials, we noticed how different each group's reasons were for planning their projects

for city spaces. In this sense, it should be pointed out that, for collectives such as *Tribo de Atuadores Ói Nós Aqui Traveiz* and *Falos e Stercus*, going to the streets resulted from an ideological issue. That is, their choices were not linked to a *lack of options*, as pointed out by Flores (2012), but rather to a philosophy of the group that, according to Restori (2012), in the case of *Falos e Stercus*, was based on finding ways to *pollute the system*, in a reference to capitalism.

*Depósito de Teatro* and *Usina do Trabalho do Ator* (UTA), in turn, started organizing street performances because they were motivated by other parties. According to Oliveira (2012), the theater experiences outside of theater buildings, which originated in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, drove the group, around 1998, to explore the city space, based on the trend at the time. Conversely, motivated by the experience of conducting a scenic practice using stilts on the street, as invited by an institution, UTA created the *Oficina-Montagem* (Workshop-Montage) project, which aimed to aggregate other members to the group, culminating in the first street performance of the company, called *O Ronco do Bugio* [The Howler Monkey's Howl] (1996).

Such reasons mentioned by the interviewed subjects represent the start of the studied groups' path regarding their interventions in the city. From the initial spark onwards, several other factors encouraged these collectives to keep thinking of street projects. In this sense, many discoveries are reported by the representatives based on the very experience of theater in the urban space.

The choice of exploring the city through theater was made by some of the studied groups because the street space enabled them to have a longer reach regarding the number and diversity of people in performances. According to Flores (2012), the need for taking the performances of *Tribo de Atuadores Ói Nós Aqui Traveiz* to the streets is configured as one of the group's work premises in a more extended space that allows them to reach a higher portion of the population, and this dialogue is of fundamental interest, as it generates a possibility of finding audiences of diversified age ranges, social, and cultural categories.

Under this same view, but motivated by distinct needs, the testimonials by Oliveira (2012) and Icle (2012), regarding the performances *O Pagador de Promessas* [Keeper of Promises] (2000)

and *O Ronco do Bugio* (1996), respectively, reinforce the premise of reaching a bigger portion of the population. In these cases, however, the wish to have a higher number of spectators in the street space rose from the conditions that were generated by the plays that were being performed.

In the experience of *O Pagador de Promessas*, the playwright contents brought in itself a popularity sense that drove its director to have it in front of a church in the city's historical center, which made it easier for spectators to watch it, as tickets were exchanged for one kilogram of food. On the other hand, throughout the organization of *O Ronco do Bugio* (1996), several factors, such as the number of actors in the cast, the personality of the character that was formed by the howler monkey and by the buffoon, coupled with the need for exploring the space in its full potential for the scene were determining factors for choosing the street as a scenic space. Upon focusing on UTA's choices in regards to their occupation of the street, Icle (1999, p. 104-105) considers that:

The street was the best place to carry out the idea of a performance forming a troop of monkeys. Then, a multiple space was chosen, among other things. The initiative took place in four different spaces. The howler monkeys called the audience's attention or took them to the next space. They made the most of the resources in each location. A fountain, trees, or walls; any particularities in the locations were used. Each space was explored for its correspondence.

Coupled with the motivation to gather more spectators, previously mentioned, another factor pointed out by the representatives in the interviewed groups concerns the type of relationship established with street audiences. Regarding this information, even without the intention of romanticizing such participation, many testimonials are verified to express a certain interest, exchange, gratitude, and communication that are intensified by street spectators. However, as highlighted by Restori (2012), this communication may equally take place to shock audiences, rather than to please them.

In this sense, for most of the interviewees, the groups' intention of going beyond closed spaces is observed to rise from the need for establishing other kinds of dialogue with audiences, which are enabled, among other aspects, by the peculiarities in each space and by the approach methods of each performance.

Besides the motivations mentioned, the representatives of *Povo da Rua* and *Falos e Stercus* stated that the street is a choice for the groups' proposals because it allowed them a certain freedom, differently from other spaces. Such freedom, which may be exercised in the field of the performances' aesthetics, as well as in the broader architectural structures of locations, is manifested as a premise that drives the theater creation by these groups. For Restori (2012), aesthetic freedom is also opposed to the conventions established by theater that traditionally is performed on the street, such as the scenic organization in the shape of a circle.

This type of space organization is emblematic in the practice of the theater conducted in the city, especially in the paths of certain groups with nationwide exposure, as is the case of *Tá na Rua*, from Rio de Janeiro. For the researcher Ana Carneiro (2005), circles provide a direct contact with audiences, and are configured in a space that determines *Tá na Rua's* actors' language and training. This direct contact with audiences, through the circle structure, enables the establishment of a certain *communion*. According to the author:

Because of its characteristics and structures, circles make it easier for this communion to be brought up, insofar as it allows freer movement of both audiences and actors. Within them, the representation images are spread across all points (Carneiro apud Telles, 2005, p. 124).

In a study on actors and possibilities of scenes in the urban space, Telles (2005) discusses three performances by Rio de Janeiro's *Revolucena* group, which are conducted on the street and arranged in different ways in the urban space. Among the chosen ones, the performance *Fingindo de Gente* [Pretending to be a Person] (1979) used the circle, as this arrangement provided actors with more freedom to act and audiences with more possibilities of watching scenes taking place at the core.

Regarding the physical structures of the street, Carvalho (2012) points out that such freedom of not having physical constraints, i.e., this feeling of risk that is provided by the urban space dimensions, drives acting. Carreira's (2012) idea<sup>5</sup> that "the city is transparent, vertical, and dynamic", is analogous to Carvalho's (2012) thought, who considers cities as spaces that are prone to interfere in and suffer interference from theater, thus driving the mentioned freedom.

Another aspect pointed out by Icle (2012), which is somehow coupled with the aesthetic freedom issue (which is inherent to the arts but awakened by street spaces in the cases mentioned) is ephemerality. For UTA's director, on the street, the ephemeral nature of theater is potentialized, and that was fundamental for his group, when he decided to research a language and to create a project that had a certain feeling of intensified *freshness*.

Considering the motivations mentioned by the representatives, it is worth pointing out that such freedom can, on the other hand, be a negative aspect of the city space, as it imposes other limits – which are less physical, in the sense of the structures in theater buildings, and more permeable, regarding the multiple interferences from the structures that compose the space (which, in this case, are unpredictable).

### **City Spaces and their Occupation Conditions**

Seeing that the relationships between the arts and the city permeate many historical moments and are faced in different ways by societies, the aim was to reflect on some forms through which they currently take place in the city of Porto Alegre. This search motivated the asking of questions that drove the members of the studied groups to think about the spaces theater occupies in the city, to point out the differences among the places where theater is done, and to identify the factors that determine it.

The purpose of reflecting about the work processes of the studied groups, in a more distant scale, aims to subsidize the understanding of contemporary theater practices in the city. In this sense, the research subjects were asked about the spaces they occupy, and how these spaces were configured as such, and also about their conceptions regarding the relationships between the theater and the city, mainly concerning the conditions of *being on the street*. Many aspects were raised, among which the highlights were the possibilities, constraints, challenges, and risks that permeate and characterize the practice.

The street space is the scenic space as appropriated by theater; i.e., the real space where the performance evolves. According to Pavis (1999), the theater space is characterized by the relationship between audiences and actors during performances, which results from several spaces: dramatic, scenic, playful, textual, and inner

ones. Thus, the scenic space is built from the spectator's unique look on the space actors configure with their bodies; in turn, the theater space arises "[...] from an architecture, from a glance at the world" (Ubersfeld, 1981 apud Pavis, 1999, p. 132). Thus, the scenic space of the theater performed on the street is the re-signified street itself that is appropriated in other ways, and that allows spectators to look differently at the everyday configuration of this environment. For Lemes (2010, p. 21),

The landscape street actors face, which composes their scenic writing, is made up of concrete objects that occupy a certain space: they are seen, they establish paths, heights, obstacles, speeds, actions, behaviors, rules, they evoke memories, and are subject to the social roles they play. At the same time, this landscape does not fail to constitute itself through 'imagery', 'symbols', and 'subjectivity', which are mixed in the everyday life of the city, thus composing a language in the space that is also a result from man's writing and acting upon this space.

Oliveira (2012) draws a difference between the theater that is proposed to take place on the street – i.e., in *any* available space – and the one he calls *localized*. Based on experiences from *Depósito de Teatro*, the director states that the group's localized theater is planned for a specific space, and that is why it differs in its production and in its way to relate to audiences, thus providing a different coexistence with spectators.

However, other experiences seem to subvert such differentiation, as is the case of UTA's performance *A mulher que comeu o mundo* [The woman who ate the world], which treats its proposal in a relative way according to the characteristics and demands of each show or season. The group thought the play in a way that it could take place both in closed and open spaces, to provide versatility that allowed them to consider different spaces to perform. According to Icle (2012), such characteristic provided the creation with two considerably different results, both regarding acting and the development of the performance.

Such examples allow stating that the artist's perspective under the urban landscape modifies it with each glance that is cast and configures a distinct spatiality, insofar as a high load of subjectivity exists in the act of looking. In this sense, Restori (2012) reflects on the act of glancing through an analogy between this thought

that originates from the artistic field and passers-by in the city. For him, plastic artists deal with the consciousness that human glancing is trained for capturing what is different; thus, the challenge of performances is to awake this different kind of vision by passers-by.

Another observation that is added to the discussion regards to the questions raised by Icle (2012) concerning the stance of researcher Jean-Marie Pradier, who considers that individuals only notice what they learned to in the world. Focusing on performing arts, Icle (2012) considers that performances and the time when they occupy each space are peculiar and capable of building new possibilities of perception, new glances at the space, individuals, and at the performance itself.

In this perspective, a performance is understood to reveal, re-signify, reinforce, or even contradict the characteristics and the very space where it is accomplished. The city theater acts in a way to interfere directly, by transforming, even if momentarily, its working dynamics.

An example of this reconfiguration is shown in the play *O Pagador de Promessas*, a montage by *Depósito de Teatro*, which was conducted at the *Igreja Nossa Senhora das Dores* [Our Lady of Sorrows] church,<sup>6</sup> downtown Porto Alegre. In a public critique that was published in the newspaper *Estado de Minas*, Marcello Castilho Avellar (2002) considers that performances have fundamental qualities, the decision of occupying churchyards and church stairways being highlighted among them. According to this journalist,

Rio Grande do Sul's montage of *O Pagador de Promessas*, upon having performers and audiences going through real spaces made alike the play's scenography, resizes its symbolic contents. They are not a hypothetical church or community, but rather a concrete church that is represented by its temples and a real and concrete community that is marked by contradictions, of which the play is just a symbol (Avellar, Aug. 21 2002).

For Oliveira (2012), the unconventional use of the space gave rise to a different view of the public concerning it. Regarding the spectators of the play, the director states, “[...] he had never noticed that that place was so beautiful, or maybe the church had never been as holy as it was on that day we made a *macumba* offering<sup>7</sup> in front of it”.

The same way, the city inspires the artist in different ways, according to its uses, images, and meanings. This relationship between theater and city is established based on the experience of the occupation itself. Such moment establishes the creation of a space where what had been predicted is reconfigured at every moment.

Thus, reflecting on the street occupation processes also requires a reflection on how this space is appropriated by the theater that is proposed in it. The expression *theater conducted on the street* was chosen to name the practices of the studied groups. Such choice was mainly made because groups such as *Falos e Stercus*, *Usina de Trabalho do Ator*, and *Depósito de Teatro* stated they were not street theater groups in their discourses.

The stance of the groups' representatives is understood as imagery that associates such theater modality, and consequently the aesthetic choices related to it, with strictly popular manifestations. Concerning the repetition of this imagery, Carreira (2007, p. 44) points out that, "[...] street theater is usually identified in general by its possible connections with popular culture. Such attitude limits critical opinions to only noticing a characteristic that is not present in the wholeness of street theater. This study should be highlighted to intend on expanding the view of this theater modality: by including the voices of related groups as references, generally speaking, there is a choice of dealing with the theater that proposes to occupy the city, rather than specifically the manifestations characterized as *street theater*.

In this sense, it is important to deal with the notion of street, as, because it is a smaller-scale space within the city, it comprises in its structure peculiar ways of living. Based on the assumption that in Brazil there is a range of definitions for the term *street*, we resort to the ideas of theoreticians and representatives from the groups, in an attempt to raise some aspects that help us understand the structures that make up city spaces.

According to historian Sandra Pesavento (1996, p. 9), as of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the street arises in the urban landscape with its own identity, representing, "[...] no longer an element of separation between houses", but rather defining itself as "a public space, as opposed to private space".

In the Brazilian context, anthropologist Roberto DaMatta (1997) discusses *the house* and *the street* as sociological categories, freeing them from being represented simply as geographical or structural spaces that are measurable, but rather understanding them as moral entities that “[...] are capable of awakening emotions, reactions, laws, prayers, songs, and images that are aesthetically framed and inspired” (DaMatta, 1997, p. 8).

For Nelson Saldanha (1993), social living consists of several dimensions, and one of them takes place in the house. Thus, societies emerge for the cities, which have houses, which are, in turn, placed on streets. Streets, as squares, are public environments, and spaces in which the two levels touch each other. Thus, the street represents a space of contradiction, in which two very different levels coexist. Regarding this encounter, DaMatta (1997, p. 39) considers that “[...] the street is a place for individualization, fight, and street smarts”, and at the same time it “[...] transforms us in exemplarily collective beings: we are either duos or supporters, parties, audiences, crowds” (DaMatta, 1997, p. 28).

Under this view, the street is not understood to represent a stage transported to open spaces, but, rather, as stated by Lemes (2010, p. 77), it is configured as a space that translates the “raw material of poetry”, an element that determines the construction of the theatricalness that is inherent to the city. In the theater planned for the street, according to the way through which the phenomenon analyzed in the study is appropriated, “the city is besides anything else a diversified scenic space, in which there is not protective background, as in the conventional scene. An unpredictable space that can be penetrated and is unpredictable, which will always be the dynamic part of the performance” (Carreira, 2011, p. 02).

As the city is this space prone to exchanges among the agents in the environment, it is relevant to think why the performance and its actors are incited to be in a similar state, which we will call *state of openness*, a posture that does not necessarily imply being pleasant to audiences, but instead being willing to have relationships with the emergencies in the space. Several testimonials pointed out the *state of openness* as a challenge established by the theater that is conducted in the city, as *it does not depend on language* (Mendes, 2012) or on the existence of a *predetermined* performance (Icle, 2012), but instead is

related to availability or susceptibility considering the several possible outcomes inherent thereto.

Icle (2012) defines this element precisely, when he points out that the experience starts from the encounter. And, in this sense, the relationship between a performance and its audience cannot be a unilateral one. Thus, other types of relationship are observed to be established from the moment a performance occupies the street space onwards and assumes a *state of openness* that allows it to play with the possible interferences without “diluting” itself (Carvalho, 2012). Such interferences get close to the idea of “irruption in the everyday life”, which is mentioned by Icle in his testimonial. To a large part of the representatives in the investigated groups, this challenge is predominant in the practice of *street theater* and it goes beyond the competition with (sound, visual, climate, political) interferences. According to Haas (2011, interview), this challenge is related to winning the accidental people over.

What you want is to capture the attention of people who are passing by there, or whatever it is, for you to be able to make that have a meaning to them; if you are not that capable of connecting with people, it is obvious that they will pass by, and it will not make a difference to them.

Castilhos (2011) considers that the street gives the whole power to the public, as it is the space where spectators have increased freedom of choice. Such freedom allows them to decide whether they wish to remain where the show is taking place, from the moment they were touched, provoked or not, in a certain way.

Restori (2012) refers to a kind of *authority* which actors must be vested of before standing against the flow of potential spectators. In this sense, Carreira (2009, p. 7) considers that “[...] the theater has a power to place itself in space as an obstacle to the continuities”. Inspired on the works by Guy Debord (1958)<sup>8</sup>, Carreira adds that such intervention must cause a certain disturbance on the flow, even it is not developed “to the dimension of derived procedures”.

It should be clarified that, in this study, the adoption of the terms *spectator* and *audience* is operated through notions that complement each other in an attempt to characterize the passer-by in urban spaces, or the set comprising his/her individualities. According to Pavis (2005, p. 140), spectators are frequently studied by the reception theory, as well as by other fields such as sociology, sociological

criticism, psychology, and anthropology, as it reaffirms the bond between spectators and the notion of audience “as a collective agent”. The dimensions covered by the related terms verge on several points regarding accidental street spectators, i.e., the ones who do not expect to find an artistic presentation. Such dimensions do not oppose to the related idea. Thus, both terms are used in the text, in an attempt of dealing with the street universe more comprehensively, in its inherently *public* and *heterogeneous* reality.

Regarding the relationships that are established between performances and audiences in the theater performed on the street, communication may take place in several levels of theatrical performance. Some testimonials from interviewed artists mentioned that the performances usually start before they are effectively started, as the first movements for approximation and occupation of the space already attract the audiences’ attention. The same way this may take place at the end of performances, as a street does not have a backstage, or any other structures that enable actors to quickly detach themselves from audiences, especially in the cases in which artists must remain on-site until stage settings can be disassembled.

Considering the multiple relationships that can be established from the moment a street is occupied onwards, a question is asked: how can one define the exact moment when a performance is established? Such question leads to a reflection on subjective topics that can equally relate to the notion of efficiency of a theatrical performance, a term which is difficult to be dealt with and outlined, probably because it is more culturally linked to personal taste than to an aesthetic discussion.

The representatives’ testimonials frequently mention that the act of being on the street demands certain “clarity” (Flores, 2012) and “authority” (Restori, 2012) in one’s attitude, and these are determining factors for the proposed practice. Even without aiming to further analyzing the studies on the work of actors on the street, such notions are observed to somehow be able to get closer to the understanding we have on scenic presence; that is, an actor’s ability to attract/keep audiences’ eyes on the scene.

Another aspect in the relationship with audiences that was mentioned in the testimonials is the issue of *generosity*, a factor that is referred to, through *common sense*, as pleasant in the practice of

street theater; however, such factor was made relative by the research subjects, as it is a generalization that can be hardly applied to peculiar *audiences* and spaces, which leads us to think of spectators as one of the most unpredictable factors in the street theater phenomenon, even outranking urban space itself in its countless interferences. Regarding the actor-spectator relationship, Renata Lemes (2010, p. 89) considers:

On the street, the relationship between me as an actress and other people who pass by or linger on is presented as two sides of the same situation – an urban space practitioner on one side, and the actor in a scene on the other – another urban space practitioner. Both are practicing the city in the same context. Therefore, it is not possible to think of a dual relationship – stage X planet, actor X spectator, scene X audience, but of multiplicities, vectors that cross the theatrical performance and the urban space, reconfiguring each side into many others.

The theater performed in the city gathers supposedly accidental and heterogeneous audiences. Vargas (2011) mentions examples of both kinds of audiences in the city of Porto Alegre: the one from *Brique da Redenção*<sup>9</sup> and the one from *Esquina Democrática*<sup>10</sup>; he points out that, in the first case, audiences were inclined to the type of intervention street theater proposes, as the space is configured as a leisure location, which is traditionally house to artistic performances; in the case of *Esquina Democrática*, which is a space that is permeated by the frantic displaying and offering of products and services, besides its intense traffic of people and vehicles, audiences assume a more defensive stance, as they do not expect theatrical performances.

Another aspect that should also be made relative, which is similar to the generosity issue, is the vision that the theater that is performed on the street is “democratic” (Lauda, 2012). The idea that the theater performed in the city does not select audiences that take part in it may even be the grounds of groups that take on such practice; however, it is necessary to recognize that the very space determines the conditions for public access. Added to that issue is the manner the performances adopt to use the space, and this factor may equally restrict general participation.

A similar stance is presented in the conception that the theater that is performed on the street has a more evident social role than the theater that is performed on private venues. Such “limitation is

deep-rooted in the theater realm” (Icle, 2012) and that often generates some discontentment (Restori, 2012) by the artistic class itself, which feels tied to certain conservative and restraining aesthetic forms.

Considering the city as a dramaturgic element of creation, not only its physical structure is taken into account during performances. Spectators play a different role from *traditional* audiences. The street is configured as a scenic space that does not propose ideal places for comfort and visibility, but it tends to induce the existence of a two-way relationship in which observers are also observed. In this sense, Trindade’s (2010) considerations regarding the practice of an *invasive theater* show that audiences are not the focus of creative processes; therefore, artists are not concerned about keeping them comfortable or their being able to watch the whole scene. The intention is to instigate spectators in a way to enable new possibilities of perceiving the surrounding, to surprise people by the unexpected meeting of scenes that gradually re-signify urban spaces, thus increasing their relationship with the city, the people, and itself.

The posture taken by the theater that proposes to be one of *invasion* is relevant; however the representatives’ testimonials in the studied groups showed a strong conservative tradition regarding the relationship between theater and city. A first stance is translated into the opinion expressed by Carvalho (2012), according to which one of the challenges of being on the street is to increase one’s vocal capacity and to place oneself before the possible interferences, without losing or thinning out the character. The second characteristic, which is pointed out by Restori (2012), regards to the preponderance of words; that is, the theater tradition of using eminently verbal or textual forms over corporeality.

Cláudia Sachs (2011) analyzes the way through which the languages used in the performances by collectives *Oigalê Cooperativa de Artistas*, from Porto Alegre, and *ErroGrupo*, from Florianópolis, interfere in the performances of involved artists, whether they are actors or performers. Her reflection corroborates the previous arguments, as she draws an analogy between actor/character and performer notions, by relativizing, according to the proposals, the ways through which these relate to several aspects, such as the space, acting, their political attitudes, among others.



The highlighted tendencies for occupation of spaces and relationship with audiences are not considered to configure determining aspects of *quality*, if we view the term as a comparative value or as better conditions, regarding scenic manifestations on the street. The experiences reported by the groups allow for an approximation between the multiplicity of forms that constitute the theater practices in the city of Porto Alegre and extend the current understanding of the relationships between the theater and the urban space.

The opportunity for bringing the research closer to the practice of groups who had radically distinct experiences of theater in the city granted the study the required complexity for reflecting on street occupation processes, without restricting its reach or limiting it to a specific group or particular language. That is, the five cases studied allowed expanding the understanding of a larger phenomenon – the occupation of the street by the theater – in a determined context, the current Porto Alegre, in an attempt for a comprehensive and multifaceted reflection.

## Notes

1 The essay that generated this article is titled “*Práticas de ocupação da cidade pelo teatro: um estudo a partir de grupos atuantes em Porto Alegre*” [City occupation practices by the theater: a study based on groups performing in Porto Alegre], presented in 2013 in Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul’s (UFRGS) Undergraduate Program in Performing Arts (PPGAC) under the guidance of Professor Vera Lúcia Bertoni dos Santos.

2 Multiple case studies are the ones in which several studies are conducted simultaneously: several individuals or several organizations, for example. Regarding the research objectives, they can be classified as intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Among the classifications, the collective type extends itself to other instrumental cases “[...] connected with the goal of broadening the understanding or theorization of an even higher number of cases” (Ventura, 2007, p. 384).

3 The studied groups, and their members, were: *Depósito de Teatro* – Elisa Heidrich and Roberto Oliveira; *Falos e Stercus* – Alexandre Vargas and Marcelo Restori; *Tribo de Atuadores Ói Nós Aqui Traveiz* – Marta Haas and Paulo Flores; *Povo da Rua* – Marcos Castilhos, Rogério Lauda, Evelise Mendes, and Alessandra Carvalho; *Usina do Trabalho do Ator* – Gilberto Icle. The participation of these representatives in the research was made formal through their signing of informed consent forms, which certifies that they were aware of the investigation objectives and the use of their testimonials.

4 Such categories were grouped according to the relationships established and materialized in essay chapters, as follows: (1) *A theater in search of itself*; (2) *In the group practice*; (3) *In the experience of risk and surprise*; and (4) *In the contamination*.

5 Notes taken in the course *Atelier of composition and montage, City, and Theatricalness*, taught by Professor André Carreira in the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul’s Graduate Program in Performing Arts in 2012.

6 Nossa Senhora das Dores [Our Lady of Sorrows] is Porto Alegre’s oldest church, and it is one of the city’s architectural milestones. It has a monumental stairway that leads to a façade with an eclectic style and Germanic inspiration. Its cornerstone dates back to 1807, but it was only finished in 1904, and it was included in Brazil’s list of historic places in 1938, when it was declared to be national historic and artistic heritage. Available in: <<http://caminhosdaculturareligiosa.blogspot.com.br/2012/09/igreja-nossa-senhora-das-dores.html>>. Accessed: December 20 2012.

7 Generic designation of African-Brazilian cults that received influences from other African, native American, catholic, spiritist, and occultist religions. Oliveira (2012) uses the expression figuratively to refer to the rituals that were conducted in the play, which went against the typical catholic ones.

8 This theory is the premise of hypotheses regarding a situationist city. The situationist thesis of everyday life revolution is partly based on the idea of a radical experimenting of city places or the design of a new architecture, which does not transform life in ‘happenings and performances’, but which rather has it overcome the ‘dichotomy between

artistic and trivial moments'. Available in: <<http://www.vitruvius.com.br/revistas/read/arquitextos/03.027/758>>. Accessed: December 20 2012.

9 An important tourist and leisure location in Porto Alegre, Brique da Redenção is located in Bonfim neighborhood, next to Farroupilha park, along José Bonifácio avenue; it is open on Sundays, in the morning and in the afternoon, and it gathers arts, crafts, and antique exhibitors, diversified artistic and cultural manifestations, and tourist, sports, and leisure activities. Available in: <[http://www2.portoalegre.rs.gov.br/smic/default.php?p\\_secao=200](http://www2.portoalegre.rs.gov.br/smic/default.php?p_secao=200)>. Accessed: December 20 2012.

10 Located on the corner of Andradas street and Borges de Medeiros avenue, the so-called Esquina Democrática [Democratic Corner] was given this name in 1982, for gathering popular demonstrations and protests since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The space was declared historic and cultural heritage in September 17, 1997, aiming to highlight and preserve the political and democratic past of the area. Available in: <[http://lproweb.procempa.com.br/pmpa/prefpoa/smc/usu\\_doc/historico\\_esquina\\_democratica1.pdf](http://lproweb.procempa.com.br/pmpa/prefpoa/smc/usu_doc/historico_esquina_democratica1.pdf)>. Accessed: December 20 2012.

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