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Risk in Theatrical Performances in the City: Creating Impact and Identities

André Carreira

This chapter focuses on participatory theatrical performances in the city. It aims to discuss the relationship between theatrical performances in urban space and risk taking by performers and the audience which, in turn, can create new experiences for both parties. My goal is to examine the city as dramaturgy and risk as an element of performers' work. The chapter's central objective is to explore the use of risk as an instrument of experimentation in urban theatrical performances. To do this, I examine my own artistic productions in public spaces as a theatre director, creating relationships through a new concept of street theatre. I have worked with the idea of street theatre as the occupation of urban spaces, which is related to civic participation and different forms of public engagement. This is why I discuss participation *as* risk.

The reflections that I present in this chapter are based on my experience making dramatic productions for non-theatrical spaces, which I call here *theatre in the city*. These experiences are the result of my work with different artistic groups over the past twenty years and took place in tandem with the courses I taught in both undergraduate and graduate

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233

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programmes. These studies were related both to the creation of theatre that appropriates urban spaces—particularly spaces where there is an intense circulation of citizens—and to the exploration of the limits of the work of actors.

These experiments with drama aim to disrupt the attention of passers-by and create a rupture in the daily life of common users of the streets. At the same time I, and the groups with whom I have worked, have sought to investigate extreme opportunities for creation by actors. These studies also discussed possibilities for taking radical artistic actions that could include different forms of participation by city residents. Therefore, I also discuss risk in the context of actors' work in contemporary street theatre. Risk is both physical and mental. This theatrical approach seeks to expand performers' abilities to take risks and to explore urban boundaries.

It is necessary to consider the city as dramaturgy in order to investigate the possibilities for theatre that invades the city's public spaces. By positioning the performers to take risks, we can amplify the opportunities to break citizens' routines and discuss the city as a theatrical space. Through these procedures we can increase the physical and symbolic interactions between people in the city and performers as part of social experience. Using fiction as a starting point, we can incorporate a proposition that considers the creation of theatre in the city as a real, lived experience.

Working with risk leads actors to take their own risks, assuming a radical position that enables them to seek opportunities for new ways to inhabit the city, transforming it into a space for theatrical interplay that invites political discussion. We were able to experiment more as we became more comfortable in pushing our own and others' boundaries. This is a complex reality because the audience reads both the physical body of the person and the character they portray. By taking real risks, the actors make the action more compelling, which can open an audience up to a kind of intimacy with the performers. The actors feel more vulnerable as they perform, which is important, because this vulnerability can be used as the focus of all street performances.

This chapter starts with the concept of city as dramaturgy, an idea that I have developed in my artistic practices. I then present different points of view from urban studies about public space as a territory of conflict. After that, to discuss participation, I refer to the work of Rosalyn Deutsche, Claire Bishop, and Erika Fischer-Lichte. Finally, I propose the

idea of risk as material for a "theatre of invasion", a kind of performance that is made by occupying public spaces with the objective of breaking up daily routine, through the use of ludic materials.

THE THEATRE OF INVASION AND THE CITY AS DRAMATURGY

The objective of my artistic practice in the city is to construct performances that take the most mobilising elements possible from the spatial realm to create dramatic sequences that engage the public as they develop.

Working with this premise, I propose that the performers experiment with conditions for creativity. They begin with exercises that imply being in the city in a situation of fictional interplay to create a dialogue with the context of the street. Using this idea as a starting point, I experiment with actors trying out different forms of breaking the daily flow in different public spaces to create situations in which the theatrical scene and real life are related and in which the participation of passers-by is fundamental. These exercises seek to both give voice to the passers-by and allow the performers to try to understand the life of the city from within the performance, that is, to connect with the passers-by in the everyday scene to create new scenes (Fig. 1).

The idea of the city as dramaturgy implies the participation of people who use the city as an element of the composition, given that these users and their habits shape the structure of the city's environment. Thus, to study urban dramaturgy it is important to construct scenic-based exercises through which the performers engage passers-by.

Participation is thus understood as an action that establishes closer ties between artistic language and political fact, that is, between the poetic field and the social field. To participate is thus to intervene in the construction of a work in which individuals go beyond their condition as spectators who interpret the work. It is necessary to remember that Italian historian Marco De Marinis observed that to be part of an artistic work one can be in the place of the artist-creator as well as in that of the spectator and of the critic. Nevertheless, this perspective is directly related to the type of participation that is based on the production of meaning in the context of the work.

Meanwhile, theatre that invades urban space works with a logic opposite to that of Relational Art as suggested by Bourriaud (2002). Relational Art appears to produce experiences that are said to be



Fig. 1 *Das Saborosas Aventuras de Dom Quixote de La Mancha*—Grupo Teatro que Roda. Photo Lev Rebostein

subordinate to social and cultural contexts without, in fact, questioning their ties to these contexts and certainly without considering the aesthetic and linguistic dimensions. There is thus an acceptance of the relational structures, whereas the participation sought by the Theatre of Invasion attempts to break with the established rules of conviviality in order to open up new horizons of relationships in urban spaces that are clearly supported by the production of the poetic objects that envelop the city. In this case, passers-by produce their own participation, aware that they are facing an artistic object, and they can thus experience aesthetic pleasure as a material of their active transformation of the event.

In my experience, this is done through the realisation of small scenes in which the performers invade public spaces using their bodies in a manner that is out of the ordinary. Thus, we experiment with performers lying on the ground in a bus station while speaking with people who pass by; performers seated in chairs that are on billboards or in trees who engage in dialogue with passers-by; and groups of performers moving through public transportation, such as buses or subway cars, while enacting a precisely choreographed scene, such as a group of people reading a newspaper synchronically.

All of these modes of occupation were used to produce materials for the creation of invasive theatrical performances. Discovering ways of dialoguing with the users of the city, using artistic experiments, enables these users to fulfil more than the role of simple informants who provide us with the material for our creation. The fact that the performers are in the city and are doing research within a performance process radically changes their perception of the city. It involves their conducting a reading of the city through the lens of a performance condition that shifts them, as artists, out of a zone of security because the exchange with the passers-by is mediated by fiction.

Artistic interventions have a powerful capacity to provoke shifts of perception about how we can behave in situations that deviate from the daily or normal routine. This is due to the fact that they visit playful territories that facilitate the inversion of order, as French anthropologist Jean Duvignaud affirms in his book *Le jeu du jeu* (1980).

From the time of the Dadaists to the Situationist's Theory of the *Dérive* (Debord 1999) and the productions of the Living Theater (Tytell 1995) through to today, we can consider different approaches that take the relational spaces of the city as a realm for artistic experiences that converse with the effective participation of citizens. The city is a living space constructed by a multiplicity of forces, among which are the users who directly or indirectly intervene in all events that take place in the public space.

When considering artistic actions that invade the urban space to create an experience of participation, another element that is worth considering is affect. Brazilian cities can be hostile environments in which passers-by often feel threatened in some way. Therefore, producing moments in which strangers can overcome these situations of anxiety and submit themselves to a form of interplay with the performers is a strong way of generating a discussion about the rules of urban space and public participation.

In addition to these elements, we also experimented with scenes that included actors running through streets, through subway corridors, and on bus platforms, as well as crawling along building façades and walking on roofs and marquees. In these different situations the risk for the performers was real. It was within these risky experiments that we sought to create forms of connection with the "accidental" public in the streets. The fear the performers faced and the sensation the spectators felt

mediated the relationship between them. This constituted a fundamental element for the interplay between the actors and the passers-by.

In the process of this theatrical approach and appropriation of the urban silhouette, the transformation of the use of urban space is inevitable, and this allows new connections to form between the spectacle and the public. These ties are built through a re-assignment of the use of urban space, a transformation of the condition of passers-by, and a communion in the act of sharing a situation of risk, and consequently, the state of readiness that both the performers and the passers-by should experience.

THE CITY AS DISPUTED TERRITORY

Streets, squares, and pavements are areas of permanent dispute as different forces struggle to establish uses and identities that define the fragments of the city. On the one hand, institutional actions construct a regulated image of the city—the functional and touristic city—while on the other hand, social forces occupy and contemplate the city, based on each of their own daily uses and, particularly, their immediate needs. Thus, the territorial dispute in the city takes place between the order of security and the chaotic and irreverent occupations of citizens. It impedes the strict control of space, even if control is a goal that is well defined by governmental norms. There is also a private occupation of public spaces in the city, and consequently there are movements of resistance that insist on the preservation of the city as a space for everyone. In this context, theatrical performances in the city can produce moments in which the identities in dispute are questioned by means of participation. As the Mexican scholar Mario Cesaroli argues, “the contemporary city is losing the ‘relationship element’ and space is not necessarily public any more; it is turning into an essential accessory solely for individual mobility” (2014, 239). This is why street theatre performers need to discuss the sense of public spaces from their own practical experiences of them. The performance must be created through practices that oppose mass culture and consumerism if it looks for a social interaction to establish new patterns of artistry on the streets.

All of this can be summarised in the contemporary confrontation between the uses of the city of consumption and the city of politics, and all the intermediary actions that take place in this zone of conflict.

The daily lives of cities turbulently express the tensions that traverse our societies.

The Brazilian geographer Milton Santos has written that in our time we can see a symbiosis between the city and techniques that reverberate in the power that ebbs and flows in social and economic contexts (2004; 17). This happens because the process can be understood as an economy of thought adapted to an instrumental logic, which has the function of reorganising our behaviour in the city as part of a complex system of production and consumerism. It means that we are losing public spaces where communities could confront social conflicts. For this reason, the ethics of citizen occupation of the city requires the construction of practices that create spaces of sociability that go beyond the flows of consumption and that stimulate the possibilities of participation to politicise the space of sociability. It is on this terrain that different artistic projects that seek to recover an urban utopia as a site of conviviality are built. To say this is not to affirm that these projects can erase the conflict through artistic practices, but rather it is to recognise that the city's spaces are realms for processing these conflicts. We must understand participation—even participation that is part of an artistic event—as a voluntary intervention in the development of conflict.

The space that invites citizens' participation must be recognised as an arena in which the citizenry can contemplate various points of view and, based on their collective interests, consider various alternative policies. We consider the occupying public squares as the creation of forums where a wide variety of political and ideological forces, directly or indirectly, debate the future of their respective countries or collectives. A recent example of this was seen at Tahrir Square in Cairo, which for weeks was the centre of political life in the city. All of the living forces that could coexist were represented there, expressing their differences and engaging in political argument, and this is what produced a violent and authoritarian response from the reigning powers, an expression of fear.

This is a fundamental perspective for considering the hypothesis that artistic actions invade the city, even when considering the different levels of impact that exist between an artistic initiative and the decision making effected by broader layers of society. Only by considering this space as disputed territory can artistic action be projected beyond a form of immediate entertainment, constructing an interplay that diverts and simultaneously constructs spaces of discussion about the meaning of

the city. The spaces of participation, or the lack thereof, are placed in evidence.

If we consider artistic creation as a fundamental practice of social interplay, it is necessary to politicise this type of artistic action, less by the thematic aspects of the projects and more through experimentation with the way space is occupied and the manner in which (physical) bodies are used by the actors. It is the bodily practice of using space that can produce in individuals an opening up toward shared experience. Through the experience of occupation, the passers-by animate and transform the theme of the project.

Exploring this territory of conflict is a key task for the production of performances that seek dialogue with the city. This already implies a shift from a place of pure (theatrical) presentation to one in which performers cannot abandon their role as citizens. Instead, they approach other citizens so that together they can undertake transformative actions. In this case, we need to recognise the potential that artistic performance has for transformative action when it is able to effectively incorporate the participation of passers-by.

To shift the passers-by from the position of mere spectators to that of active participants is an important element of the process of constructing the performance. To produce this change is to expand the possibilities from which new perspectives emerge about the uses of the city, and about the place of people in public space. For this reason, it is essential that passers-by be able to discover new forms of being in the public space.

It is impossible to consider artistic creation in urban space without supposing the possibility of a central role for city residents, who represent the most unstable element we can consider in relation to government planning, business actions, and the legal order that disrupts daily urban life. This requires us to think of risk as an element in the process of creation: performers and spectators conduct actions that place them in situations of instability that stem from their occupation of the space. The passers-by are part of the creative process, which includes the incorporation of the ingredient of unpredictability. The street brings to the artist the risk of error, of unexpected variation, of a rupture that disorganises what was planned and causes the city to penetrate the artistic action. At the same time, it puts passers-by in an unexpected territory that is caused by the alteration of order, making them participate and not be simply users of the city streets.

Despite considering participation as something inherent to the context of the city, it is important to note that the very idea of participation has acquired growing importance in contemporary artistic projects through the valorisation of new forms of democratic administration. Participation, as a sign of the valorisation of any institutional or governmental action, permeates the discourse of a wide variety of social organisations, as well as that of artists, even when the very notion of participation is not fully explored.

To reflect on public spaces as places for artistic experiences that incorporate participation, it is first necessary to understand that it is most common to identify as public spaces those that remain after a process of accelerated occupation due to real estate expansion and government actions of urban modernisation. These remnants of public space constitute what is currently administered as public space. Therefore, art in public spaces is an art of resistance to privatisation, which swallows the public.

Even if authors such as Victor Neves affirm that "public space is a space of action, a locus for the living experiences of the individual with his immediate surroundings and with other (people), making identity a factor of agglutination, of mobilization for collective action" (2014, 252), it can increasingly be perceived that city spaces are less public, or they are appropriated for commerce or are administered to benefit corporate marketing. For this reason, the occupation of public spaces with artistic actions is a necessary gesture of resistance in large cities.

The image of the city as a major support for advertising has intensified. Large corporations are no longer satisfied with billboards; they seek to place their names on public streets. We can see this in the case of a cellular telephone company that acquired the rights to place its name on the most important square in Madrid and on its metro station so that for over a year these places were no longer known only as the Puerta del Sol. Artists can play an important role in the discussion of the appropriation of public spaces by creating experiences that discuss this logic and that propose to passers-by the development of new forms of being in the streets. They can perceive that the possibilities for public participation are related to a project of reconquering the city.

This echoes with the view that, as Pau Pedragosa affirms, currently a "city is defined only by the perception of an image that refuses to consider the relationship between identity and space, and for this reason can only provide a 'fluctuating' identity without its own space" (2014, 226).



Fig. 2 *Antígona Cidade*. Photo Leo Macário

The culture of images and of hyperconsumption also corrodes the notion of public space as convivial space. Certainly, this does not mean that citizens have completely lost their capacity for occupying and using public space as a forum for political life. The different movements that have occupied squares and the permanence of the tactic of holding street demonstrations indicate that not all perceptions of public space have succumbed to the sphere of virtual social networks. Nevertheless, the substitution of the occupation of public space by virtual encounters is evident.

Are we losing a sense of space? Pedragosa also posits the question: “are we not failing to understand space as a carrier of meaning linked to our practices and uses of space?” (ibid., 226). Considering this question, it is necessary to remember that living in a city is a corporeal experience: We are destined to move through it, and for this reason we inscribe it on our bodies. Thus, we continue every day to resist, despite the depletion of meanings in interactions triggered by the practices of the image (Fig. 2).

The experience of invading zones of the city through performance actions requires that we confront questions related to the two elements

that are the focus of this text: experimentation with situations of risk and participation as prime material for the impact of theatrical performance; and experimentation's link to ethics when committed to disputing the processes for constructing the identities of urban spaces. It is also necessary to affirm that the very notion of participation is controversial and the related need to reflect on the possibility that participation is not an instrumental experience, but rather a sign of collective and individual autonomy for those who decide to break with the logic of repetition.

These processes take place in dialogue with the materiality of the urban space, that is, amid the flows and variations in its repertoire of uses and in relation to the appropriation of physical structures. These materials shape the dramatic plane of any creative process that takes place within the city, and they are the elements that determine what makes the spectacle, or watching the spectacle, into a redefinition of the city, even if in an ephemeral way.

It is precisely for this reason that it is important to discuss how the conditions of public spaces and the social experience of identities perforate the theatrical scene, making it porous and transparent. Urban performances can construct spaces of fleeting conviviality that stimulate exchange and participation. This can be seen in a more complex way through the experiences of neighbourhood theatres, the occupation of neighbourhoods, and professional artistic practices that question the place of the citizen in public spaces.

Because of its adverse and conflictive environment, the city offers creators an enormous quantity of material for the construction of performances that encourage participatory experiences. The theatrical performances create new unstable zones in a naturally unstable territory. I see performance in the city as an exercise for intensifying the experience of inhabiting urban spaces. This type of artistic proposal requires that both performers and spectators experience different ways of adapting to events, and this, in turn, requires reflection on the conditions of effective participation.

It is these conditions that open up possibilities for the creation of intense, although provisional, ties, because they take place in situations characterised by their ephemerality. Both performers and passers-by interact with elements of the unexpected with great intensity, given that the city is a living organism that does not shirk from being invaded by a performance; to the contrary, it incorporates it and intensifies it with its own dynamics.

The streets have repertoires of uses that are articulated by their inhabitants and these are related to the processes of constructing identities that define the imagery of cities. For this reason, the invasion of the theatrical performance creates dialogue with the identities of the citizens who consider the city to be theirs. The construction of images that are a key element for the production of urban identities is related to what the anthropologist Néstor García Canclini considers to be the multiple cities fabricated by the uses of their inhabitants, and by the overlapping of territories identified by the citizens (2005). Kevin Lynch observed in the 1950s that flows and landmarks are elements that organise our image of the city (1960). The relationship between this image and the practice of inhabiting spaces produces the process for identifying the material for constructing artistic projects that seek participation. In these circumstances, the identity of the space (in the city) is the starting point that stimulates passers-by to become spectators of an artistic moment.

THEATRICAL PERFORMANCES AND PARTICIPATION

In reflecting upon participation and artistic initiatives, I considered the research of Claire Bishop, whose book *Artificial Hells* points to relevant elements when discussing artistic projects that seek participation. Bishop concludes that:

Activation of the audience in participatory art is positioned against its mystic counterpart, passive spectatorial consumption. Participation thus forms part of a larger narrative that traverses modernity. Art must be directed against contemplations, against spectatorship, against the passivity of the masses paralyzed by the spectacle of modern life. This desire to activate the audience in participatory art is at the same time a drive to emancipate it from a state of alienation induced by the dominant ideological order—be it consumer capitalism, totalitarian socialism, or military dictatorship. Beginning from this premise, participatory art aims to restore and realise a communal, collective space of shared social engagement. (2012, 275)

Bishop also affirms that study of these questions requires observing the tensions between quality and equality, singular and collective authorship, and the “ongoing struggle to find artistic equivalents for political positions” (ibid., 3). Bishop also delimits the experiences of participatory art, considering three key moments: the historic avant-garde in Europe

in the twentieth century; the 1960s and 1970s; and the revival of the 1990s, just after the fall of communism. She affirms that:

Each phase has been accompanied by utopian rethinking of art's relationship to the social and of its political potential—manifested in a reconsideration of the ways in which art is produced, consumed and debated. (Ibid., 3)

In her book *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (1996), Rosalyn Deutsche compares works that ask spectators to decipher relationships and contents already inscribed in images, without invoking them to examine their own role and participation in the production of the images. On the other hand, there is an entire generation of artists who think of images as a social relationship, and who consider the spectator as a subject constructed by the object, from which it thus would apparently be separate. In addition, Deutsche affirms that:

The artworks of Louise Lawler and Hans Haacke present politicized ways of engaging urban contexts. Unlike the new public art, these works do not collaborate in the design of the redeveloped city. Unlike neoexpressionist city painting, they do not seek to transcend urban social conditions. On the contrary, they draw attention to those conditions. But they do not reduce art's social meaning to a simple reflection of "external" social reality, a model that leaves art per se politically neutral. Instead, they employ spatial tactics developed in postmodern art-site-specificity, institutional critique, critiques of representation to reveal the social relations that constitute both aesthetic and urban spaces. (Ibid., xvii)

From this point of view, a perception emerges that takes the direct effectiveness of participation in an event that transcends art as it is happening as they key element of the repercussions it has in the social sphere. In this case, in particular, that element would be the capacity to activate participation based on artistic projects that intend to go beyond criticism of the condition of urban spaces.

Considering that the city is a space of conflict, it can also be perceived that different tensions shape the space of the streets each day. This is precisely what makes this space particularly sensitive to artistic experience. It also stimulates thinking about the potential of artistic forms that invoke participation by experimenting with risk. Because it is an environment of conflict, it has all the elements that shape the basis of social

relationships, which are present in the streets. There are echoes and discourses that are directly tied to the projects of society and to practices of resistance. This determines the existence of conflict, even if various repressive means are used to keep the streets calm and functioning most of the time. Nevertheless, in the street there is always a fuse ready to be lit. Explosions are always imminent, even if much time passes without hearing their blasts.

Passers-by do not rehearse with the artists. They do not know the objectives proposed by those who initiate the creative process, and, finally, they do not have a reason to completely respect what was previously planned. The passers-by have the liberty to incorporate their own desires and ideas into the artistic object, which is basically a provocation for opening a new creative process. This is a key element when we consider the idea of participation, given that if participation does not include the ability to decide the outcome of the event, it is nothing more than a mere representation of the act of participation.

A decisive question is therefore: Can participatory artistic practices be proposed that do more than produce provocative moments over which the artistic team does not have any influence at the time of contact with the passers-by? To escape from the mere role of agents provocateurs, it is necessary to think of the intensity of the practices proposed and to create mechanisms for interplay that allow the performers to take advantage of all of the interferences of the passers-by as material for deepening the experience. For the participation to be more than a reflection of an instant of liberty—even if this is also important from the perspective of an artistic intervention—it is necessary to think of instruments of connection that project themselves beyond the moment of the performance. At the same time, it should be considered that the intensity of the experience must suppose the production of residues among the spectators that stimulate later comments and narratives as a consequence of having participated in the artistic event. I call “residues” those images or memories from the performance that hours afterward make the spectators still feel the need to comment on their experience with others. It creates the possibility for the ephemeral to last longer than the performance itself.

It is important to work with a structure of interplay that is based on risk for both parties because this allows for the establishment of commitment to passing spectators. This structure should be supported by creating the greatest possible proximity between performers and spectators, so that both must run some risk during the presentation process.

Nevertheless, despite all the strategies that can be adopted to open spaces for participation and to construct ties that stimulate a participation that is not immediately depleted, it is necessary to reflect on the importance of participation for the political aspect of the artistic statement as well as for its own development as a language in the city.

Understood abstractly, "participation" can mean very little, especially in times when institutional norms demand collaboration and participation in official projects. It is necessary to think of the idea of participation in the context of projects and initiatives that break with the logic of domination, and even more so in cases where participation can camouflage the biased instrumentalisation of power. To think of participation as an initiative that chooses to intervene in the collective in order to transform shared and social living conditions demarcates a territory that allows us to think of its very role across a wide variety of artistic actions.

Based on this perspective, I propose we consider participation based on need. I do this by considering my own questions as an artist and researcher in relation to the possibilities for achieving effective participation in creative processes and presentations.

I thus begin by recognising that this image and the practice of inhabiting spaces produce the processes for identifying material for constructing artistic projects that seek participation. The identity associated with the space of the city is the starting point for stimulating the passers-by to become spectators. The term "participation", which is so important to the artistic movements of today, runs the risk of having its meaning diminished by an insistence on its use through tireless repetition and the association of participation with an enormous diversity of artistic practices. Some of these practices, for example, are too closely associated with the international market of dramatic arts festivals.

Given the difficulties of finding meaning and strength in the idea of participation, an inevitable sense of anguish arises among artists who see in their projects the opportunity for transformation. What can be said of the sincere militants who place their faith in the transformation of society as a result of collective conscious action? The action of performance itself can open spaces of participation. As the Spanish author José Antonio Sánchez says:

When theatre leaves the theatre building and performers feel free of an artistic tension, it is possible to discover the efficacy of transformation and the masking. This efficacy comes from the possibility to do effective the

strength of theatrical convention out of its own space. The transformation could be effective when the actor appears in front of its collectivity as an incarnation of what it represents, as a real or fictional character. (2014, 29)

The poverty of encounters and distrust of the possibility for people's effective participation seems to turn political and artistic initiatives into events that are not truly participatory, but only representations of participation; that is, they become mere reality shows in our society of spectacles. Persistent distrust corrodes the possibility for effective participation that has a potentially transformative role.

In this context, it should be considered whether effective participation is only possible when a need or a threat that mobilises individuals and collectives is perceived. It is unlikely that participation will be born as part of a rational project that results from goodwill, that is, from a mobilisation driven by the very need to participate in constructing a better world. It is interesting, for example, to think about Erika Fischer-Lichte's analyses of Marina Abramović's experiences with her audience:

Abramovic created a situation wherein the audience was suspended between the norms and rules of art and everyday life, between aesthetic and ethical imperatives. She plunged the audience into a crisis that cannot be overcome by referring to conventional behavior patterns. The transformation of spectator into actor happened almost automatically as specified by the *mise en scène*. It was hardly the result of a conscious decision on the part of the concerned spectator. (2008, 15)

This is why we can think of hunger as a motor for behaviours that mobilise collective participation. The hypothesis would be that the genesis of participation is based on the coincidence of individual needs that lead to collective dynamics. Fischer-Lichte writes:

Is it really legitimate to equate actors and spectators? Is not the contribution of the artists who prepare the production larger, given that they determine the course of the performance, while the audience at best reacts to it? How can the proclaimed dismissal of the artist as autonomous subject be reconciled with the common complaints about the despotism of theatre directors since the late 1960s who seem to consider themselves almighty? (Ibid., 163)

These needs can serve as organic impulses to transform the audience and actors of a political action into a performance.

The interminable crisis of revolutionary proposals and, above all, the crisis of paradigms of revolution and the political organisations that characterise contemporary times have opened up a space of insecurity and a lack of hope in the possibility for transformation. Yet they have also inaugurated creative possibilities in light of the void of normative models. Upon recognising this void, we are driven to find or invent alternative paths.

Many artists and theoreticians attribute to art the role that once belonged to political movements. The field of education has also considered itself as a territory of transformation. Thus, a combination has been fomented in academic spaces: To be an artist and to be a transformative individual, educating through art becomes a way to change the world by artistically intervening to question forms of power.

Even though modern art has always been related to a mandate for transformation, its relationship to political processes was one of criticism and transversal intervention. The dialogue with the political field took place through the recognition of their respective particularities, and this dialectic constituted its power as an autonomous instrument that could intervene with the anarchic liberty that the process of artistic creation supposes in modern life. Artistic individuals occupied places from which they became dissonant voices.

The arrogance that has characterised the world of art since the rupture caused by the Renaissance has driven artists to consider themselves as vectors of transformation. This explains their actions as interventions in the political field. However, the existence of militant organisations supported by mass movements could constitute the territory in which these relations are made concrete. This same arrogance, which always envisioned a dynamic role for artistic action, created a growing tension between the political and the artistic when the paradigms of political militancy entered crisis in postmodernity. Thus, when there were no parties or organisations capable of leading the struggle, artists were able to maintain the flame of resistance and confrontation against the order of capital and oppression.

It is important to note that there is an enormous difference between the role of the artist as an element of resistance—an element that is confronted with the organisation of power and uses its language to fight as an alternative voice—and that of artists who consider their actions to be a substitute for political actions that are made instrumental by people in the streets. When we see stencils and graffiti (or street art) that criticise

the absurdity of occupation painted on a wall that is built by the Israeli state in the Occupied Territories, it is quite different from seeing young Palestinians throwing stones at Israeli tanks. It is difficult to encounter hierarchies of values in these two distinct elements because each fulfils a role within the political and cultural context. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that as creative and provocative an artistic action might be, it also might resonate among people as a discourse about something in the field of political action. This action could be an element that stimulates and mobilises—and could even be part of—a movement, but it will need people in action in order for it to have structural repercussions.

Even if artistic action cannot substitute, in an absolute manner, for the action of people, it is part of this process, and it makes the process more complex because it incorporates divergent readings into it. Art engages with individuals from their own space by constructing other possibilities for thinking through and understanding events.

In the same way that education can only transform the world in a radical manner when the world is in an acute process of transformation, art will fulfil a revolutionary role when it is joined with broader political processes that originate among the most thoughtful individuals who compose a given collectivity. This is related to the perspective that denies history the lulls that are inherent in cumulative and progressive processes because it understands that transformation is always a consequence that explodes from within an accumulated need.

The profound difference between the proposals of Meyerhold and Brecht reside precisely in the fact that while those of Meyerhold were generated in the cauldron of a revolution in progress (1905–1923), those of Brecht were the result of a period of conservative reaction (1928–1958). Meyerhold's work was the result of coexistence with a world in transformation, an invention of the future that experimented with various forms and discourses and that understood the chaotic and festive elements of the revolutionary process. Brecht reacted to the Nazi regime and dialogued with the Stalinist regime, adapting his work as a rationalisation of the normative historic processes. In Brecht's case we see that political action was thought of as participation from the premise of an understanding of processes. The call to participation became an ideological imperative and not the result of an organic need stemming from daily life and stimulated by a necessary future.

In theatrical performances it is common to discuss participation by considering the possibilities in spectators' shift from a "passive" situation

to active participation. To break the dichotomous barrier between stage and audience was always the goal. For this reason directors experimented with different procedures. It is curious to observe that there are very few experiences in which we can see actions that are generated by spectator initiative. Who are the individuals who have a need to participate? How many people who walk on the street are able to participate in a performance without prejudice if the performance is by an artistic group that is not identified with popular culture?

Popular forms of theatre show us many modes of participation, but few of these modes, if any, are recognised by artists who work as part of militant theatre. In reality, the history of the dramatic arts is full of examples of participation that deserve greater attention from contemporary artists.

Although it is important to avoid falling into the simplification of using forgotten models to sharply criticise the spokespeople for participatory art, it is interesting to consider the idea of participation from a broader perspective. This is particularly necessary for understanding that participation cannot emerge only from the delineations created by the artists themselves. Participation must be faced as a concrete phenomenon that occurs when barriers are broken and a determined collective can perceive that the actions of each individual and of the collective have an effective result. Effectiveness is the element that allows one to identify with participation. This does not mean we should suppose there is an immediate effectiveness that transforms the world, but rather that there is an efficacy that can be identified collectively, even if not as a shared event.

Immersed in the world of artistic and critical discourse, we are moved in an inert manner, submitting ourselves to ideas and practices that absorb us. Are we aware that we can only repeat slogans without incorporating them in our practices until they take us to our own limits? What is our commitment to the permanent transformation that we make as creators?

Considering the perspective of Fredric Jameson, according to which in postmodernity we observe a complex fusion between the fields of culture and economic life, it is pertinent to question whether it is possible to continue to produce critical art without placing ourselves completely in crisis in relation to the meaning of our work. In fact, we are always facing the risk that our work can quickly become transformed into a type of merchandise and that any participation takes the form of simulation.

To recognise that only the perception of need mobilises us to act, and therefore to participate in a political action, is a form of breaking with this inertia and with the reiteration of the idealistic discourse that constructs artificial images of our spectators and ourselves. By proposing participation based on need, perhaps it would be possible to advance beyond participation as representation, opening new forms of participatory interaction with the citizens who pass through the streets. This is related to the need to construct alternatives for the creation of theatrical performances in cities that allow for integrating passers-by with parts of the dramatic text. By perceiving citizens as a dramatic element, it is possible to speak more directly with the needs that are identified through the social exchanges that are manifested in the political arena of the streets.

RISK AS A PROPULSIVE ELEMENT OF PARTICIPATION IN URBAN SPACE

Risk is a natural condition for performers because they are individuals who live in a universe of desired risks. In our daily reality we see the immanent risk in deciding to work in acting because, although we live in an era of simulation par excellence, the acting profession, as a rule, does not reap a level of financial reward that allows for a life of economic abundance. The only actors who receive high remuneration are those who are submerged in the economic structure of the "star system". Thus the social risk inherent in acting necessarily acquires greater dimensions when actors understand their art as a social practice based on a transformative function. In this case, the possibility for marginalisation and loneliness of those in theatre is evident.

The actor is an artist who is prepared to permanently confront dangerous conditions. By definition, the art of acting is a practice in which performers expose themselves and place themselves in unknown territory. They cross boundaries by exposing their bodies and minds to adverse conditions and, paradoxically, this is how they find pleasure. This is an age-old element of theatrical art: to expose oneself, thereby exposing the collective drive. If we think of this exposure as something that goes far beyond psychological exposure and a confrontation with the potential of risk that are part of their universe.

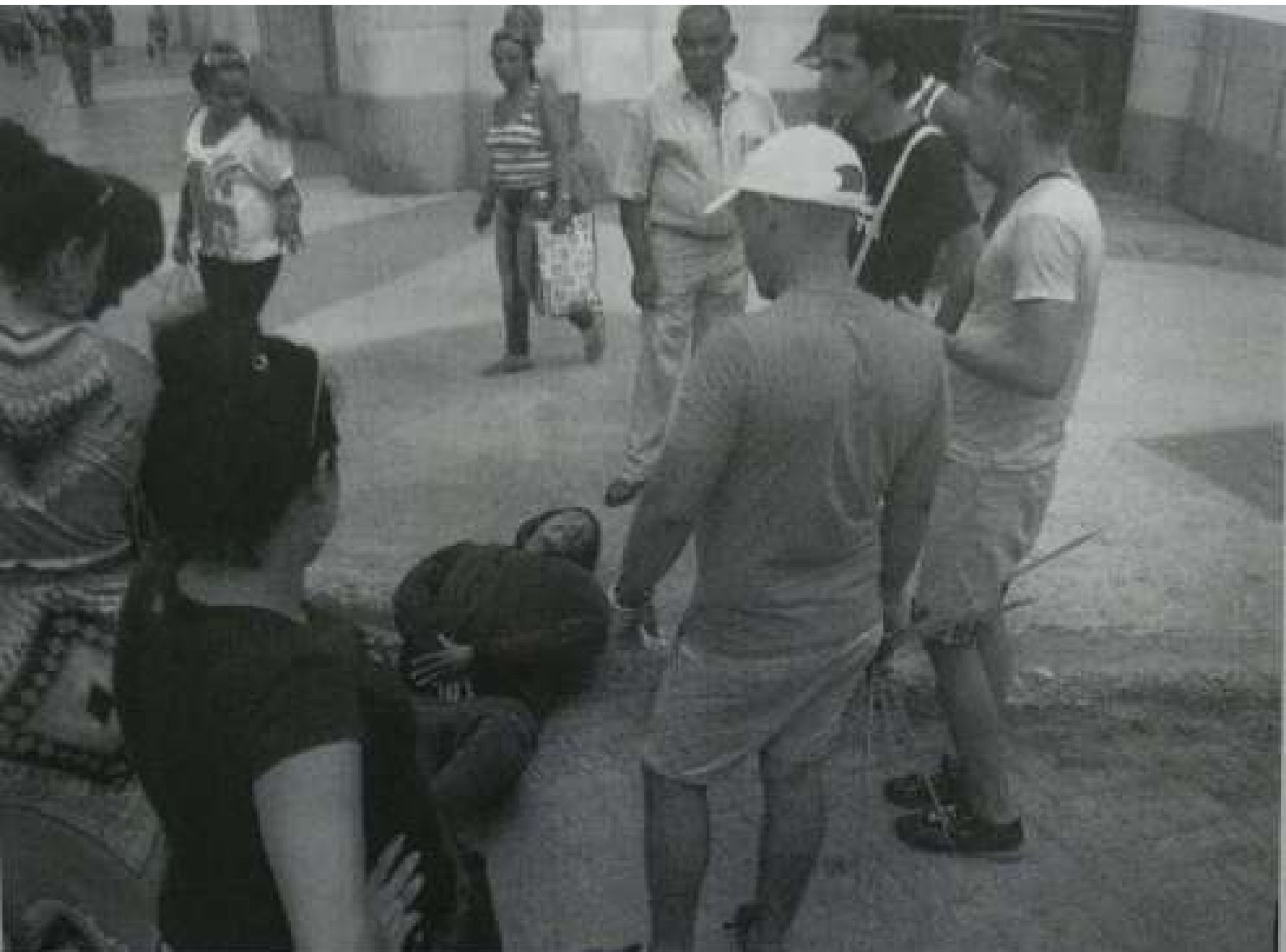
Even if we are confident in our political capacity and our critical perspective, can we effectively take part in a participatory experience without

letting the representation of our place dominate the social interplay which joins us in artistic action that seeks participation? How can we mobilise energies of participation that generate processes of transformation based on art without assuming a position of control and direction that knows the final result? What type of transformation can be considered when we unleash artistic processes? Will there be consensus about the transformations and the need for them? These questions deal with the idea of risk in performances because the theatrical approach to the urban silhouette supposes a series of difficulties for a spectacle's development. Most of these difficulties are related to our notion of theatrical events that go into crisis mode when they accept the street's unspoken rules.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, the philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1962) wrote that we are temporal beings endowed with a notion of time, affected by the very history we create. We are also spatial beings, cognisant of space in its different dimensions, living in a world composed of places. As spatial and temporal beings, our bodies are also sentient beings that are aware of themselves. In the streets we are dealing with space-changing references all the time, but our concrete relationships are determined by events between bodies in space, a space that is defined by the intense process of change. Our own perception of ourselves changes when we face a performance that works with risk because our perspective as spectators is broken, and we can experience the performance through our bodies.

During street performances, the audience soon realises that, in addition to the first level of receptivity, that is, the interaction between actors and spectators in their respective routines, there is a second level of interaction between the viewers and others who are there who see what happens as an unusual moment. That is why all street performances are part of an experience where we can observe how spectators perceive the reactions of the audience. As the actors move through their fictional spaces we are able to see, at the same time, the reality of spectators who are watching the performance. This can elicit surprise and exhilaration through a feeling of shared experience. Unlike in traditional theatre, in street theatre spectators are exposed to the gaze of other spectators. Their reactions to this exposure can change the conditions of receptivity, thereby creating a situation of risk where nobody knows or controls the complete process (Fig. 3).

Adversity in urban spaces means that a performance must coexist with permanent interference from a wide variety of noises and especially with



create a feeling of risk. But at the same time, the audience can enjoy this situation as if it were a participatory game.

It is important to question whether this changes the artistic experience. Firstly, it is worth reiterating that the use of public space was born of the desire to conduct spectacles that play with the distance between the performer and the passer-by. Under these circumstances, making theatre requires the artist to seek a point of connection with the public, to operate by creating the possibility and convincing the audience to dedicate time and attention to the theatrical event. If the public is not convinced that they should offer their bodies and minds to the theatrical event, the attempt to create a performative ceremony will fail.

Performers who submit themselves to the exercise of risk will be required to take paths that are different from the traditional ones that are used to construct fiction and characterisation. Experimenting with techniques of risk supposes a series of situational experiences that range from an individual experience to that of the group. These require actors to focus on the perception of the function of the body-mind binomial in action. The radical and mandatory alteration of the quotidian physical state causes the body's functionality to be reconstructed by finding a new modulation for props, voices, and gestures. The balance between the dramatic performance and the experimentation of risk will shape the performer's essential place of work.

Techniques of risk use physical experiences to make performers directly face the universe of their fears. To overcome these fears supposes a work of self-knowledge and a re-elaboration of their attitudes in the face of theatrical productions and life itself. The process of confronting risk and the resulting attempts to develop techniques to decrease physical risk are essential components of the training process. Performers immersed in this class of experience are required to undergo a series of lessons that include the discovery of a point of equilibrium between the various components present in the process. It is the performer who must establish a harmonious relationship within the interplay between risk and the expressive potential that emerges from the learning process. It is also necessary to deepen the collective experience that is particular to manipulating the exercise of risk. The practices of these interdependent relationships that are based on reciprocal trust allow actors to assess up to what point they are, or are not, prepared to face a theatrical practice that advances them toward the development of a solid group creative process.

It is from this place that performers will see themselves committed to the task of exposing themselves to conditions that require multiple foci of attention and, minimally, a duplication of action. That is why performers must construct their fictional work at the same time as they are also obliged to undertake the procedures of risk proposed by the scenic actions. This duplicity, which is specific to the work of the performer, takes on particular characteristics, because it not only involves the dual existence of the real and the fictional, but also a radicalisation of the reality in a way that generates a particular fictional quality.

Street performances deal with a “surface of events” (Velloso 2011), which is represented by ideas formed via different conceptual and artistic flows that include the word, the body, and the image. The presence of risk introduces a special condition in this rhizomatic manner to create participation that becomes an aesthetic experience on the street.

On this “surface of events” the receptors and interpreters are agents that are always transmuting their states. This condition generates corporeal and mental forms that articulate ideas. This happens while producing the dramaturgy of the city, which is a text developed simultaneously with the participation of both artists and viewers in a drama that is not composed solely of words. Risk means, in this case, a kind of real-time composition. It could be an experience in which the performers and the audience collectively create an artistic practice.

What is sought through risk is a way of stretching reality, transforming it into a supra-reality because the “doers” are shifted out of their field of reality. Thus, we come to have three overlapping planes: the daily life of the actor; the daily life of both performers and passers-by, which is submitted to risk; and the generation of a fiction.

Working with real presence and risk as an element of the *mise en scène* means that we reveal the existing tensions between the performers and the audience. Therefore, to offer the audience as intense an experience as possible, we sought to maintain a close proximity between viewers and performers, and to escalate the sense of intimacy we decided to use on the streets as a way to offer a new perspective on street theatre. The feeling of being in the space of the Other—and, moreover, of having this Other so close—we hoped, would imbue the audience with a sense of being in contact with something real—or would, at least, create a need to question the reality of the material presented in the scene. The sense of reality stemmed mainly from the proximity of intimate spaces. This is a procedure that tries to put the spectator at risk, but at the same time,

the performers are facing a risk that is extremely self-exposing. This could be seen in my performance titled "Agatha's Confession" when the actress, Lara Matos, asked a man in the audience to touch her breast while she told a story about love between her character (Agatha) and her character's brother. It creates tension for the actress, for the spectator, and for the rest of the audience, who experience a scene with an extreme element of sexual contact in the middle of a street.

Since the dramaturgical qualities of a theatrical text launched in the urban space are not sufficient for creating a space of profound relationship between "doers" and "observers", it is necessary to attempt to create a sphere of sensations. It was in this sense that we investigated the proposals of physical risk in a scene. By using this orientation for our work, we created an opportunity to develop a bond that was strong enough to create a theatrical ceremony.¹ The theatrical ceremony, in turn, catalysed the attention of the spectators and opened up space for the exchange of experience between the scene and the audience.

The imminence of disaster and physical misfortune throws the body into a dangerous adventure. This adventure allows the transmission of sensations based on the perception of the possible effects of the gestures and the movements of the performers when they project themselves in aerial space, revealing the possibility of falling. A performer who runs on stilts through tight spaces on a metro platform or who performs risky acrobatics inside a bus is proposing to the public a special physical state at the moment they present the experience. In the same way, performers experience particular physical sensations during their risky performances. The spectators cannot prevent themselves from reacting, stimulated by the perception of the performer's situation of risk. This type of event creates a thread of contact between the observer and the performer that is strengthened by their connection and by the unspoken convention that a disaster will not occur as everyone imagines. It is important to say that perhaps, in some hidden place, there is a timid desire that an actual disaster does take place. Wouldn't this secret be the same source of the sensations that promote a spectator's connection with the scene?

Unlike circus acts, where the imminence of the accident operates as the reference that allows for evaluating (and applauding) the quality of the performers' dexterity, in the theatrical phenomenon the physical risk is articulated by constructing a fictional structure. The risk is not a separate, particular, or exclusive element, but a component that constructs the possibilities of the fiction.

CONCLUSION

The training of actors based on risky conditions is related to the objective of placing performers at their limits so that they can have a profound experience at the moment in which they choose theatre as their field of artistic creation. The steering of the personal work of research and introspection that leads the performer to plunge into their own interior proves to be increasingly incapable of revealing the performer's possibilities. It is by exercising the function of representation that performers discover their possible paths. In this sense, work with physical risk seeks to incorporate in this experience difficulties that lead to a global reflection of the work of the theatrical performer. In conditions of risk, performers cannot fail to experience an encounter with their fears. When I refer to fear, I am thinking of all the dimensions of fear. In the act of representation it is necessary to expose to oneself and others (to oneself and to the public) to the practices that prepare the performance to test the depths of this relationship.

Combining fiction with the possibility of a real element is part of a game that seeks to seduce the spectator's gaze, to change or to break the dual position spectator-performer, as a strategy to create participation. The "theatre of invasion" tries to build a ludic space in which viewers experience intense sensations related not only to the development of the narrative, but also to the way performers interact in the street environment, taking into consideration themselves and the audience as part of this environment. In this regard, in this kind of theatre, viewers find themselves in an environment that bears no resemblance to the traditional arrangement of street theatre. Proximity is a key element in the construction of a scene that tries to produce risky situations, because risk is affectation and it generates a compromised body. Throughout my work I have insisted on intimacy, especially in the exposure of the actors' and actresses' bodies, in order to facilitate a tension with the audience.

The proposal of working with physical risk presents us with the problem of examining the repercussions of this work in the individual trajectories of the actors. One cannot forget that the questioning stimulated by the act of confronting risk supposes there is the possibility for an undefined series of consequences of a psychological order for the participants of the experience. One cannot believe that facing the risk functions only as a technical resource for achieving specific results. These practices are an integral part of a creative process that seeks to establish strongly organised nuclei for the work of theatrical investigation. This

investigation signifies seeking to learn through both the realisation of a spectacle and through the process of constructing an articulated structure of solidarity.

If we think of creative work as existing at the limits of risk, it is possible to consider that theatrical performance in the city can be an instrument of participation. The theatrical approach to and appropriation of the urban silhouette, with the consequent transformation of the uses of space, can produce disturbances that we can exploit as possibility. This possibility can then generate genuine participation that results from a mutual understanding between performers and passers-by.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to face an urban space without confronting its ambivalence: a controlled space and a space for free expression is also a space for anonymity and a place to meet people. The street is a space characterised by porosity.

Even though we are able to say that contemporary cities are de-territorialised spaces and that we live in an era that emphasises the ability to produce virtual communications over interpersonal connections, it is still possible to propose that street performances provide a way to break down distances between people.

To be on the street can be a practice, a shared construction mediated by theatrical performance. Though this may reaffirm our sense of reality within the artistic experience, we can now be content to think of our world as something we construct and not as something given to us and external to our perceptions. As we cannot help questioning the veracity of things and information, given the suspicious times in which we live, it is natural that we question the ability of the real world to offer us a life filled with the relationships we crave. But a performance that creates and takes risks can create moments in which we can feel something very real and participate, even when it happens purely by chance.

NOTE

1. See the concept of "deferred social ceremony" by Jean Duvignaud in *Spectacle et Société*, Paris: Denoël, 1970.

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