



# Inhabiting as an Aesthetics of the Public: notes on the practice of theatrical habitation

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**ABSTRACT – Inhabiting as an Aesthetics of the Public: notes on the practice of theatrical habitation** – This article presents an excerpt from a master's research in which the proposal was to conceptualize the practice of theatrical habitation, performed by the *Teatro Público* group (Belo Horizonte/MG), as both process and scenic proposition. For this purpose, the authors start from the aesthetics related to walking in order to map the theoretical field of this project, and then use other spatial practices analogous to theatrical habitation to expose their similarities and differences that justify the choice of a new nomenclature. Finally, some of the characteristics of this practice are outlined, such as the coexistence in extended temporality, as a way to think about inhabiting as an *aesthetics of the public*.

Keywords: **Performative Theater. Public Art. Spatial Practices. Permanency. Theatrical Habitation.**

**RÉSUMÉ – L’Habiter comme une Esthétique du Publique: notes sur la a pratique de l’habitation théâtrale** – Cet article présente un extrait de la recherche d’un master dans laquelle il a été proposé une conceptualisation de la pratique de l’habitation théâtrale du groupe *Teatro Público* (Belo Horizonte/MG) en tant que processus et poétique de la scène. Pour cela, les auteurs partent ici des esthétiques liées à la marche pour cartographier le territoire de la recherche, et utilisent d’autres pratiques spatiales proches de l’habitation théâtrale pour tracer les similitudes et les différences afin de justifier le choix d’une nouvelle nomenclature. Enfin, quelques caractéristiques de l’habitation théâtrale sont décrites, comme la convivialité dans une temporalité étendue, afin de penser l’habiter comme une *esthétique du public*.

Mots-clés: **Théâtre Performatif. Art Publique. Pratiques Spatiales. Permanence. Habitation Théâtral.**

**RESUMO – O Habitar como Estética do Público: apontamentos sobre a prática de habitação teatral** – O artigo traz um recorte de uma pesquisa de mestrado na qual se propôs uma conceituação da prática de habitação teatral do grupo *Teatro Público* (Belo Horizonte/MG) como processo e poética da cena. Para tanto, as autoras partem aqui das estéticas ligadas ao caminhar para mapear o território da pesquisa e, em seguida, recorrem a outras práticas espaciais próximas à habitação teatral, a fim de traçar as semelhanças e diferenças que justifiquem a escolha de uma nova nomenclatura. Por fim, são delineadas algumas características da habitação teatral, como o convívio em temporalidade estendida, no intuito de pensar o habitar como *estética do público*.

Palavras-chave: **Teatro Performativo. Arte Pública. Práticas Espaciais. Permanência. Habitação Teatral.**

The leaflet contained the following instruction: 'Move along the marked path every Friday, when the clock tolls 5 pm. You will have three hours to find them. Good ride and good luck.' My experience started when getting off at the Lagoinha subway station and entering a neighborhood never visited before. There was no single path or destination, but several possible paths, so you had to let yourself go. [...] After a long walk [...], I found Comadre and Juju walking alone and they soon greeted me as old acquaintances. [...] I think that feeling happened [...] by the familiarity of these elderly figures, who reminded me of my grandparents, and also by the daily air with which they present themselves, in close and direct relationship with us and, above all, with the residents. Where was the theater? There was no scene, nor anything to be seen. At that moment, the event was our meeting, the scenic space was the neighborhood and we were part of it. Walking, getting lost and meeting were all part of the aesthetic experience<sup>1</sup>.



Figure 1 – Naquele Bairro Encantado – Episode I: Estranhos Vizinhos (2011). Source: Naum Produtora.

In this article, we start from the account of the experience of drift lived by one of its authors, during the theatrical habitation *Naquele bairro Encantado* [In That Enchanted Neighborhood] (Figure 1), created in 2011 by the Teatro Público group in the Lagoinha neighborhood, in the city of Belo Horizonte, state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. Such experience became a trigger for an investigation into the scenic practice so named, since it brought up spatial displacements, perceptions and relations capable of

revealing the pillars of this practice: the *space* (neighborhoods), as a living environment of relationships, with its architecture, history and memory; the *spectator* (resident and visitor), who is inserted in the scene and even perceives themselves in a state of drift; and, finally, the *extended time*, visible in the degree of affinity between the masked individuals and the residents.

This investigation generated a Master's dissertation, *Sobre o habitar e um teatro que habita: a habitação teatral como processo e poética da cena* [On inhabiting and a theater that inhabits: theatrical habitation as a process and poetics of the scene]<sup>2</sup>, presented in 2019 in the Graduate Program in Performing Arts at the Federal University of Ouro Preto (PPGAC-UFOP), in which a concept for the practice of theatrical habitation was proposed, based on the monitoring of the group's artistic experience in the Minas Gerais capital's neighborhoods, where it develops its creations. This article, in turn, presents a focus that highlights the theoretical path of the theatrical habitation concept as a process and poetics of the scene, in order to contextualize this practice in the field of art, through a panorama that covers from the avant-garde procedures of the 20th century to contemporary art, of which it is part.

The theatrical habitations Naquele *Bairro Encantado* (2011) and *Saudade* (2014) were carried out by means of the characters' walk through public spaces and commercial establishments in the Lagoinha and Saudade neighborhoods, respectively, in a procedural way and in direct action with the spatiality and residents. In the first, a group of actors and actresses, masked as old people, rent a house on 183 Ibiá Street, and begin to inhabit the region. There they stay for 9 months, conducting daily actions such as *walking, sitting in the square* and *buying bread*. After a few months, the masked individuals start serenading residents of the neighborhood and, at the end of the process, open the doors of the house at Ibiá street to receive visitors<sup>3</sup>. In the second habitation, inspired by the novella *The Two Deaths of Quincas Wateryell*, by Brazilian writer Jorge Amado, *missing person* posters are spread throughout the Saudade neighborhood, reporting the disappearance of a dead man in the vicinity of the local cemetery. Days later, a group of masked actors and actresses wearing veils walk silently around the Saudade Cemetery looking for the body of a deceased relative. Subsequently, actors and actresses, masked as drunks, carry a *body* and

musical instruments through the streets of the neighborhood, stopping at every pub to drink and play sambas in one last farewell<sup>4</sup>.

In both experiments, there was no prior rehearsal, only some devices that worked as starting points, such as: *going to the market, looking for the house, taking a walk in the cemetery or finding a pub*. In the serenades held during the night, in *Naquele Bairro Encantado*, even when accompanied by the public external to the neighborhood, there was no predetermined route: the director's indication to go "wherever the wind takes you" retained the experimental essence of the drift, whose purpose was "its own existence at stake" (IS, 1959, n. 3 apud Jacques, 2003, p. 105). In *Saudade* (Figure 2), the masked drunks went out with the deceased in search of pubs, without determining which establishment to stay in, so that the spatial, temporal and relational circumstances themselves led the choices. As Guy Debord (2015) explains, those who dedicate themselves to drifting "[...] are rejecting, for a short or long period, the reasons for moving or acting that they usually have with friends, at work or at leisure, to surrender to the requests of the land and of the people who they may find in it" (1958, IS n. 2 apud Jacques, 2003, p. 87).

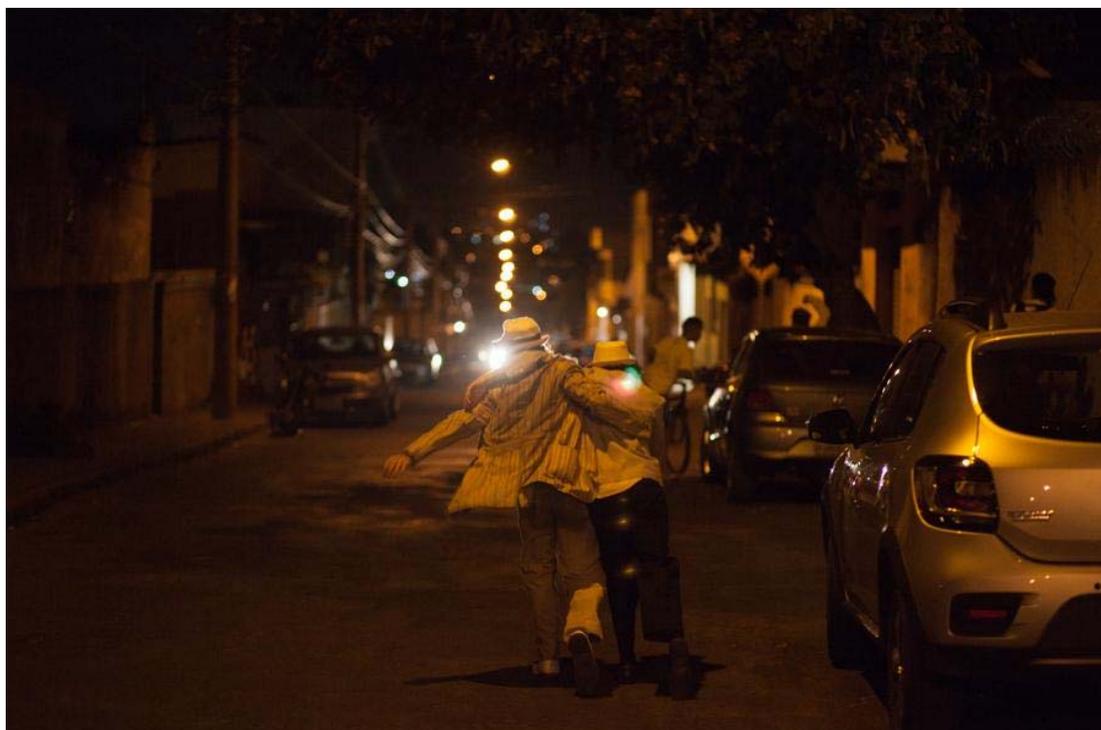


Figure 2 – Second season of *Saudade* (2016). Source: Naum Produtora.

Walking, as one of the procedures of *theatrical habitation*, has been present since the first contact of the actors and actresses with the neighborhoods, guided by drift practices in which they collect first impressions and map the spaces; also extending to the time when the masked figures begin to inhabit their daily lives and relate to the residents, and even in the experience of the visitor-spectator, who is also put on drift or route when they arrive in the neighborhood. Beyond a simple instrument for research and artistic creation, walking is shown, in this process, as a practical experience capable of altering the actor's perception of daily life. In a way, the first walking activities already brought principles that would later govern the way of inhabiting the neighborhood, such as the presence, availability and interaction with the context.

Thus, the theatrical habitation practice proposes unusual relations with the urban space and the spectator, experimenting with the theater language interwoven in daily life through a work that involves the use of masks, occupation of spaces, urban intervention, drift and some principles of performance as drivers of creation. The absence of training in rehearsal room, of defined body scripts, scenes or memorized texts shows a practice that does not precisely distinguish the creation process from the presentation, since the experience is designed *live*. Therefore, we seek to think the theatrical habitations performed by the Teatro Público group from the perspective of the experience-action. This is because the experimental and experiential character of the word *experience*, when added to the idea of an event, helps us to situate the art in a space where process and poetics coexist. Here, we approach the reflection brought by performer and researcher Eleonora Fabião (2008, p. 237), when she states that “[...] far from an exercise, a preparatory practice for a future action, the experience is the action in itself”.

It is in this aspect, displaced from the convention of closed show, of the separation between stage and audience, rehearsal and presentation, process and product, and connected to the idea of event, of the living and the *lived*, that theater can be understood as experience-action, approaching situationist, performative and contextual strategies, so the Teatro Público's practice addressed here, as well as that of other contemporary artists and collectives, permeates an experimental and porous territory. Behind that,

what is presented is a journey of ruptures with the traditional paradigms of the work of art, throughout the 20th century, which led to the emergence of increasingly hybrid works and new modes of artistic production and perception. In this perspective, we can situate the *theatrical habitation* practice in an *expanded* field, resulting from a process of debordering of the arts (Fernandes, 2018). But what would be the borders addressed by Silvia Fernandes? How does this debordering process reverberate in the contemporary scene? Based on these questions, we present below how *walking* has played a fundamental role in the expansion of artistic frontiers.

### Walk to Expand Frontiers

“Citizens of all countries, drift! Dissolve borders and destroy walls of all kinds” (Andrade apud Jacques, 2003, p. 11). These are the watchwords that begin the preface to the book *Apologia da Deriva: escritos situacionistas sobre a cidade*, organized by Paola Berenstein Jacques. In this excerpt, the direct reference to the famous rallying cry of The *Communist Manifesto* (1848) – “Proletarians of all countries, unite!” (Marx; Engels, 2006, p. 92) – makes inevitable a connection with the desire for rupture through a collective experience.

The project for the transformation of society, driven by Marx, reverberated, approximately a century after the first edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, in the ideas and practices brought by the *Situationist International* (SI), a group composed of artists and thinkers whose objective was the “active participation of individuals in all the fields of social life, especially in that of culture”, in order to overcome “the alienation and passivity of society” (Jacques, 2003, p. 13). Certain that an effective change would only be possible through concrete action and considering the “urban environment as a field of action” (Jacques, 2003, p. 13), the situationists already proposed, since the late 1950s, other forms of experiencing the city, becoming known, above all, for the theory and practice of the *dérive* [drifting or wandering]<sup>5</sup>.

According to Paola Jacques, the situationists argued that, through the “construction of situations”<sup>6</sup>, citizens would become subjects that participate in society or, in the words of the author, would go from “[...] simple spectators to constructors, transformers and ‘experiencers’ of their

own space, which would indeed prevent any kind of urban spectacularization<sup>7</sup>” (Jacques, 2003, p. 20). Although the *Situationist International* presented an attitude of “denial” or “overcoming of art” problematized by Bourriaud (2009, p. 26), it is essential to consider their participation in the paradigm shift that affected 20th century art, with practices and procedures that enabled changes in the current artistic parameters. In this sense, what the situationist perspective seemed to suggest was that, only when the various artistic proposals turned to the urban space and began to dissolve the boundaries between art and the public, the idea of *spectacle* – traditionally configured by the separation between actor and spectator – would cease to exist. To some extent, the situationist project was resumed and updated by the *relational art* (Bourriaud, 2009) of the 1990s, *reconciling* Debord’s ideas with “the world of art” (Caballero, 2016, p. 46).

It is worth noting that the situationists were not the first to turn to public space and wandering. Francesco Careri, in *Walkscapes: walking as an aesthetic practice* (2016), traces the history of walking since the nomads, when it was allied with the need for survival, until the 20th century, when it gains the status of aesthetic practice.

According to Careri, in the Dadaist tours and surrealist drifts carried out in 1921, transit through public spaces was experienced as a way of confronting the idea of representation and the current art system. Later, in the 1950s, the experiments developed by the situationists criticized and intensified this thinking towards the attempt to modify the behavior of society. If, according to the author, “[...] the passage from show rooms to open-air’ was the first step in a long series of excursions, wanderings and drifts that crossed the whole century as a form of anti-art” (Careri, 2016, p. 71), we emphasize that this kick-off will trigger not only works related to walking, but also a multitude of artistic proposals that come to see in the everyday spaces their horizon of experimentation. In general, what the drifts in the early twentieth century boosted, by opposing the controlled spaces of institutions, was an attitude of openness and listening to the world, which will lead to the so-called *contextual* practices (Ardenne, 2006).

From the avant-garde to the neo-avant-garde, between 1920 and 1970, there are different boundaries that break and diverse artistic

possibilities that arise from the exploration of spaces other than those considered suitable for holding art (museums, galleries, theatrical buildings): *happenings*, installations, *land-art*, urban interventions, site-specific art, among others. Paul Ardenne denominated this set of practices that are born from the rupture with the established spaces, in search of a direct relation with *reality*, as *contextual art*.

The concept brings together “[...] all creations that are anchored in circumstances and are willing to ‘weave with’ reality”<sup>8</sup> (Ardenne, 2006, p. 15, our translation). Due to its circumstantial character, contextual art depends on spatial, temporal and relational conditions, as the author explains. Thus, it is in urban interventions, when artists leave the spaces that make artistic mediation to insert themselves in the world; in *site-specific* art, where the work/situation takes the context as a horizon for experimentation; in performances, which seek to distance themselves from the ideas of simulacrum and representation in search of an aesthetics of presence, in the *here and now* of art as an event; in drifting and wandering practices, where the artist forgoes control to put oneself in a state of exploration and adventure; and in relational and participative arts, which seek to strengthen the relations between artist and public, repositioning the spectator’s place as creator, to name a few examples.

Despite the scope of the concept presented by Ardenne, which encompasses very distinct poetics, it is the displacement of controlled spaces toward spaces of the *real* that unites the contextual works and marks a paradigm shift in art: the end of the autonomous work of art. According to him, when art loses its *status* as an object and assumes the character of an event, the spectator leaves the position of observer to be *in a situation*. As a result, the relation between art and the public becomes less and less contemplative and more participatory, undoing the idea of an autonomous work of art and repositioning art in the public sphere.

Alongside the visual arts, secular structures established by theatrical tradition – such as the Italian stage, the stage-audience division, and the representational conventions – are destabilized, allowing the theater to venture into other spaces and explore new forms of production and reception. Such movement is observable in different parts of the world: with the *poor theatre* by Jerzy Grotowski, the *theatre of death* by Tadeusz

Kantor, and the *theatres of the real* by Maryvonne Saison, in Europe; with the *theater of the oppressed* by Augusto Boal and the *Workshop Theater* by Zé Celso, in Brazil, and with the *environmental theater* by Richard Schechner, in the United States. Thus, contemporary theater has increasingly occupied everyday spaces, such as churches, hospitals and towns, such as Teatro da Vertigem and Grupo XIX, from São Paulo, to name two well-known Brazilian groups that are benchmarks as to theatrical experimentation in the space urban, in addition to the Teatro Público group, our research subject, which is dedicated to the practice of theatrical habitation in neighborhoods of Belo Horizonte.

At this point, it is already possible to realize that addressing the different uses and occupations of public spaces is an extensive task and the possibilities are somewhat inexhaustible. From visual arts to performing arts, including hybrid poetics, the idea of a work that breaks with the boundaries of the theater building or gallery, in search of new relations between art and the public, is not recent, but inherited from the artistic movements of the 20th century. Considering this, we realized that the process of debordering the arts, from which we started this reflection, is as concrete as it is subjective, as it refers both to the destruction of the physical boundaries of the institutional space toward the public space, initiated by walking, as well as to the boundaries that separate work of art and public, artist and spectator, process and result, representation and presence, art and life. If, on the one hand, it is possible to trace, in the second half of the twentieth century, a contextual turn in the arts, an effect of the displacement to the public space, on the other hand, there is a “performative turn” (Fischer-Lichte, 2011), driven by *happenings*, which, as its name suggests, granted to art the *status* of an event.

Thinking about theater from the perspective of an event is in line with that which Josette Féral (2015) calls *performative theater*, in an attempt to seek other parameters to reflect on contemporary scenic practices that emerged under the influence of the performing arts. According to her, the performative theater “aspires to produce an event, a happening”, because “it has distanced itself from representation” (Féral, 2015, p. 131). In a context where the dramatic model – marked by the primacy of the text and the idea of representation – is insufficient, it is the procedural and eventual

character, open to the risk of the unpredictable, that characterizes the notion of performative theater, among other elements. As stated by Féral (2015, p. 124): “[...] scenic writing is no longer hierarchical and orderly; it is deconstructed and chaotic, it introduces the event, recognizes the risk. More than the dramatic theater, and like the art of performance, it is the process, even more than the product, that the performative theater puts on the scene”.

According to researcher Ileana Diéguez Caballero (2016, p. 19), during the 20th century “theatricality began to vary its architecture and language”, diluting the boundaries between diverse artistic languages, as well as between the spheres of art and life, which explains the emergence of hybrid poetics that are difficult to categorize – a problem that continues to date in the contemporary context. As an effect of the movement of expanding the limits in the field of theater, it is possible to think, according to Caballero (2016, p. 177), of a “transcended” theater, which exceeds the theater field itself and encompasses the social field and “citizen actions”. Considering this aspect, we take as our own the interest presented by the researcher regarding the *liminal condition* of the contemporary practices, a condition that goes beyond purely formal issues, that is, understanding “[...] liminality as a strangeness from the usual state of traditional theater and as a ‘staying close’ to the everyday sphere” (Caballero, 2016, p. 57-58).

Based on the discussion presented and on the investigation of the procedures adopted by the Teatro Público group, we realized that the theatrical habitation practice discussed here, although belonging to the field of study of the performing arts, eludes the traditional definitions of theater and seeks to explore strategies of other artistic modes, especially visual arts. In addition, some trends, such as the tension between art and life and between aesthetics and ethics, the expansion of the relationship with the spectator and the character of risk, which distance the theater from dramatic tradition and bring it closer to performance, are present in this practice. Thus, we start from the definition of “scenic practices”, brought by Caballero (2016, p. 16), that “tries to break the traditional systematization and seeks to express the set of scenic modes – including those not systematized by theatrical taxonomy – such as performances ,

interventions, citizen actions, and rituals”, and move toward a more specific focus, linked to spatiality.

We will call *spatial practices*, based on the study presented by performance researcher Luiz Carlos Garrocho (2015), the various scenic modes that have place and coexistence as a fundamental element, including in this notion the *theatrical habitation*, which is the focus of this article. According to Garrocho (2015, p. 17), spatial practices tend both to “an apprehension of the place in more physical and/or more contextual terms” and to “a view on the relational sphere, more typical of coexistence”, which seems to summarize the aspects raised so far. Having situated the theoretical field of the work, it is now necessary to look into the issues surrounding the theatrical habitation practice conducted by the Teatro Público group.

### **A Public Theater and Inhabiting as Aesthetics of the Public**

Since we set out to think about the concept of *theatrical habitation*, we felt the need to trace similarities and differences between the spatial practice conducted by the Teatro Público group and other experiences with urban spatiality close to it, such as urban interventions, *site-specific art*, scenic occupations and even the notion of artistic residency, in order to understand and justify the choice of the term. If there is one thing that unites all the above artistic practices, it would be the displacement to spaces outside the traditional arts circuit, in search of a more direct relationship with the context and the spectator. Therefore, as a *spatial* practice (Garrocho, 2015), *theatrical habitation* is neither the first nor the last proposition that occurs in direct dialogue with *reality*. Considering that there are so many nomenclatures, why bring another term? Why insist on the notion of *inhabiting*?

The Teatro Público group has a history characterized by experimentation with the relations and limits between theater, public space, and spectator, by investigating the potential of fiction in the daily life of the city and the participation of the public in the theatrical event. Two relevant features of the work, initiated in 2011 with *Naquele Bairro Encantado*, are the choice of neighborhoods for the development of their creations and the long-term occupation living together with the community. In addition, the research on the mask is also part of the group’s signature. By combining

two distinct references – originating from a training that encompasses the theatrical tradition of the mask in the actor training and the masks of Brazilian popular culture – the Teatro Público gives a particular character to its use, since, introduced in the daily life, it presents a more relational and performative character, therefore less spectacular<sup>9</sup>.

In the two works developed by the group, the choice of neighborhoods of historical importance, which, however, were gradually pushed by the contemporary urbanization process to the margins and oblivion, was intended to reactivate their memories and the local identity. The act of occupying spaces outside the cultural circuits has both a political and social impulse (to focus on specific places and seek new audiences) and an aesthetic one (to try new artistic forms) and, from this combination of interests, a specific practice emerged: *theatrical habitation*.

In addition to the intense dialogue with the places and their residents, the practice also proved to be a way of inviting the public external to the neighborhoods to visit them, to know their stories and their daily lives, living an experience of physical involvement with them – as reported by the drift experience mentioned at the beginning of this article. This involvement of the bodies, of both the actors and the public, in a concrete action (walking, singing, talking, drinking), arises from the choice for a creation in direct relation to *reality* (the daily life of the neighborhood), but it has a background of performative and contextual interest that, as we have seen, is inherited from the artistic movements of the last century. According to Ardenne (2006, p. 53), it was from the beginning of the 20th century, when artists began to criticize the controlled and “too normative” access to art and started to reject the instituted spaces, in order to seek new relations with the places and with the spectators, that “public art” was born.

It is not by chance that the group investigated here received the name *Teatro Público* [Public Theater]. In addition to being a direct reference to the public space – the neighborhoods where their creations take place – and to their target public – the inhabitants, passers-by, and visitors – it is also part of their proposal of thinking and implementing a theater that has a *public* dimension. At this point in the discussion, it is worth asking: what makes art public? Artist Jorge Menna Barreto, in a seminar on the theme *Site-specific public art practices*<sup>10</sup>, held by Itaú Cultural in São Paulo (2009),

stated that what defines the public character of art is the way it is made, the procedures used by the artist, and not just a public theme or the *accessibility* factor provided by the open space. According to him, “differently from the methodology of the artist who first thinks about their work and then exhibits it”, public art requires the artist to put assume a listening position. By creating based on the context of the neighborhoods, the theatrical habitation seems to put this aspect in evidence, focusing both on the physical and architectural characteristics of the place and on the memories and occupations previous and simultaneous to the artistic proposal.

At the beginning of the first theatrical habitation, when *Naquele Bairro Encantado* was still a post-doctoral research by professor and director Rogério Lopes Paulino<sup>11</sup>, the proposal was presented with the name *Residência teatral no bairro Lagoinha: Um estudo sobre dramaturgia da improvisação a partir dos princípios cênicos das máscaras brasileiras* [Theatrical residency in the Lagoinha neighborhood: A study on dramaturgy of improvisation based on the scenic principles of Brazilian masks]. At first, the idea of *residence* was linked to the act of renting a house in the Lagoinha neighborhood, which would be the starting point for the work. Thus, in addition to the physical space of the house, the artists’ movement to the neighborhood, the coexistence with the residents, and the experimental character were factors that could be associated with the notion of artistic residence. In a brief research on the term, it was possible to trace a very comprehensive field, which encompasses a plurality of works with different frameworks and methodologies. Marcos Moraes, doctor of architecture and urbanism from the University of São Paulo (USP), thinks of artistic residency as “a space destined to creation” (Moraes, 2014, p. 10) and highlights the character of the artist’s displacement to another context and of exchange between artists and/or the community, which make the residence “a contemporary form of production” (Moraes, 2014, p. 41).

Most residences result from initiatives by public or private institutions that open public selection processes and programs, providing funding and an adequate environment for the creative process. According to Moraes (2014, p. 42), “[...] the experience of artistic residence provides the artist with a specific, privileged space-time condition, intended for creation and production”. Although there are exceptions, where groups and artists

develop artistic residences on their own, the characteristics mentioned place this practice in a more institutional relationship of training and promotion of experiences and exchanges. Thus, the residence seems to present itself more as an *ambiance* where varied creations are developed than as a particular artistic or aesthetic practice. Therefore, if at first we find many similarities between the practice developed by the Teatro Público group and the notion of residence, in the end it is not very operative to think about the specificities of the work.

Another important point, in which the difference is also manifested, is in the dimension of temporality. While the artistic residence can vary from a few days to months, the theatrical habitation is based on an extended temporality, the necessary duration for building relationships with the place and for establishing coexistence with the people who live and/or transit in it. Although it is not possible to specify the minimum period necessary for habitation to happen, it is definitely not a job that can be done in a few days, as it happens in some artistic residencies. The time of theatrical habitation varies according to the place and the relationships established, and what determines its duration is the process experienced and not a previous delimitation, as in most residence proposals. Therefore, although *residing* and *inhabiting* appear as synonyms in any Portuguese dictionary, there is in the meaning of *inhabiting*<sup>12</sup> a sense of permanence that is not necessarily found in the word *residence*<sup>13</sup>.

Finally, inhabiting encompasses not only the intimate space of the residence, as we also inhabit a neighborhood, a city, a territory, a country. The Teatro Público group's proposal, of inhabiting not only a house, but also the streets, commercial establishments, daily life and even the imagination of the residents, seemed to no longer fit in the word residence and, with that, the notion of urban intervention brought other possibilities. In an article with the first directions of the research, the work came to be presented as "an artistic process of urban intervention" (Paulino; Muniz, 2011, p. 3) and, with this second denomination, the process was also mentioned by others researchers. This variation in terminology already signaled attempts to understand a practice that was not included in an easily delimited field. By naming it as urban intervention, Paulino and Muniz referred to the masked actors' action of interacting with the daily lives of

people and public spaces, since the proposal was not restricted to occupying only the rented house, as already mentioned. In this sense, this characteristic dialogues with the concept of urban intervention, which, according to researcher Clóvis Domingos dos Santos (2010, p. 92-93):

It consists in an interaction with the public space or with some monument or artistic object. Its challenge would be to question the perception of some political or social fact or event and also the citizens' relationship with the city. As different forms of urban intervention, we can highlight: the use of posters, graffiti, open-air theater scenes, musical shows and the combination of plastic, scenic and sound elements in an attempt to change the common sense and routine of persons and spaces.

It is evident that the masked actors caused a change in the normal flow of the neighborhood, interfering with its dynamics with a fictional proposal, but the major issue was that, little by little, they started to be part of that daily life. If, also according to Caballero (2016, p. 109), interventions “produce a certain, minimally fleeting alteration of space and context”, in habitation it is again the time of permanence (in addition to the fleetingness of actions) that determines the form that the work will take, making those presences that, at first, were seen as strange, become more and more familiar. Thus, the initial effect of “disruption” (Araújo, 2011) in the daily life routine, characteristic of urban interventions, decreases over time, and a particular poetics, established by living together, is introduced in the *life* of the place. This poetics begins to be part of everyday life, albeit temporarily, and creates something that remains, even after the masked actors leave the neighborhood, whether they are made up stories, affections or memories produced during the time of habitation.

Thus, the two concepts – of *residence* and *urban intervention* – that appear before the term *theatrical habitation* is reached, although they present elements common to the process of inhabiting, do not seem to be able to configure the practice in its entirety. The notion of habitation, properly, arises at the end of the experiment *Naquele Bairro Encantado*, referring to the set of actions conducted in Lagoinha, already in the format of the three episodes released to an external audience. However, we are interested in thinking of it as an aesthetic practice or form that comprises all the experience developed in the relationship with the neighborhood, from the first contact of the group with the places and its inhabitants until the

period after the arrival of the external public. With no intention of fitting the *theater habitation* in the conventional separation of process of creation and end product of the presentations, we try to understand it at the same time as a process and poetics, in a constant and always incomplete *making* that approaches principles of performance and of the *work in process*.

In an attempt to understand and conceptualize the practice of *theatrical habitation*, now assuming it as the denomination chosen by the group, we surveyed other artistic practices that had the notion of *habitation* in its nomenclature and found the term *theatrical cohabitation*, addressed by Daniel Pereira Mendes (2016). According to him, differently from the *scenic occupation*, which concerns shows performed in a space “in disuse, abandoned, empty or in ruins... something that is [...] uninhabited” (Mendes, 2016, p. 32-33), the “theatrical cohabitation” is conducted in functioning spaces, which have a flow of people who are not there to watch a show, but for activities related to their daily lives, which would justify the use of the prefix in the word *cohabitare*, indicating an *inhabiting* with other subjects present. However, such definitions seem to say more about the spatiality in question than about the procedures that characterize each one of them.

Contrary to Mendes’ argument, which is based on the words *occupy* and *vacate* as evidence of a practice that seeks to fill a place that was hitherto *empty*, it is worth remembering that the recent wave of occupations linked to the political situation in Brazil, in 2016, conducted in schools, public universities, cultural spaces, among others, may raise some questions about the term. In these cases, the idea of occupying is not restricted to abandoned or disused places. Furthermore, the activist choice for the term *occupation* instead of *invasion* – as this type of action is often called, pejoratively – refers to a need to demonstrate belonging to these places, as a political act of claiming what is public and not as taking possession of something that doesn’t belong to us. Although it is not our intention to deepen the discussion on the types of occupations carried out by civil society, such reflections are important for thinking about artistic occupation practices today.

Before proceeding with the discussion on *theatrical habitation*, it is pertinent to note that, from the moment the scene leaves the safe space of

the theatrical building, spatiality becomes the main aspect in question. For this reason, we turn again to Garrocho (2015), who treats it as a part of the performance of spatial practices. Shows in abandoned buildings, hospitals, cemeteries, disabled nightclubs, subway stations, villages, among other infinite possibilities, seek, according to him, something of the *real* that these places manage to emanate and that the stage does not seem to be able to handle anymore. *Unconventional* or *alternative* spaces are the first names to emerge, in an attempt to address other spatialities. However, according to Garrocho (2015), such nomenclatures do not encompass the complexity of the spatial analysis and understanding, because, in addition to focusing only on the fact that they are not places dedicated to art, they treat them as if they only come to life with artistic action.

Due to judging these terms as superficial, the researcher looked for a more operative concept and reached the notion of *found space*<sup>14</sup>, by Richard Schechner, which deals with places “that are not previously intended for artistic production, presentation and circulation... and that, as such, have an existence that is prior and/or simultaneous to attempts of appropriation, intervention and/or fictionalization” (Garrocho, 2015, p. 134). In other words, precisely the spaces that, not originally intended for art, carry a life of their own, regardless of urban interventions, performances and artistic occupations that may happen. According to Schechner (1994, p. 30), “every space has its own given character. This particularity must be respected”. Still on “found space”, Schechner (1994, p. 33-34) states:

The principles here are very simple: (1) the given elements of a space-its architecture, textural qualities, acoustics, and so on-are to be explored and used, not disguised; (2) the random ordering of space or spaces is valid; (3) the function of scenery, if it is used at all, is to understand, not disguise or transform, the space; (4) the spectators may suddenly and unexpectedly create new spatial possibilities.

Within the notion of found space, Garrocho calls *hollow spaces* those that are in their normal operation and where a multiplicity of people circulate: passers-by, visitors or inhabitants and not only artists and spectators. According to him, public and urban spaces, which carry the elements of unpredictability more strongly, already assume risk as a condition of existence, which makes them belong to the category of hollow

spaces. As stated by Garrocho (2015, p. 141), “[...] what characterizes every space is, thus, highlighted in the context of public spaces: multiplicity and chance”. In hollow spaces, since the subjects are not protected, but exposed to the elements of everyday life, they are in a *situation* more than in a state of *contemplation*. As he points out, such denomination, “[...] on the one hand, speaks of the degree to which people’s access can be controlled; on the other hand, of the possible transactions between the outside and the inside. Also of the gradient of indeterminacy that they contain” (Garrocho, 2015, p. 139). The hollow spaces are, therefore, those over which we have even less control, such as streets, squares, markets, bus stops and subway stations, among others.

Based on the spatial notions brought by Garrocho, if we return to the conceptualization of Mendes (2016) about *scenic occupations* and *theatrical cohabitations*, we confirm our hypothesis that the author points to the type of space where the practices occur, so occupation would happen in found space and, cohabitation, in hollow space. However, just by inserting itself in the hollow spaces does not guarantee that the work is configured as a way of *inhabiting*, so the distinction between occupation and habitation practices remains undefined.

Beyond thinking about spatial displacement in scenic practices, that is, the black box for the found or hollow spaces, it is important to understand the relations established with spatiality, as well as the procedures and elements that characterize them. While presenting a show in a space not intended for theatrical activity often presents itself as a simple relocation from one space to another (perceptible attitude in works that use found spaces in the same way as the black box), thinking in terms of found and hollow spaces requires reviewing the occupation possibilities, implies not wanting to impose transformations on the place, but dealing with its physical and contextual specificities, not seeking to discard its characteristics and presences, but understand them as possibilities of game.

The understanding of spatiality as experimentation is also largely due to *site-specific* art. Breaking with traditional languages, shifting the attention from the object/work to the context, proposing new modes of perception based on the notions of experience, and fighting capitalist models of art circulation are the principles that govern *site-specific* art, according to

Miwon Kwon (1997). If this artistic practice, by leaving the “manufactured” and “controlled” place of the gallery, found its first paradigm in the “‘site’ as a real location” (Kwon, 1997, p. 167), which, in principle, established a relation of dependency and fixation of the “work” with the place of origin, it gradually gained another dimension with the current *site-oriented* approach. In this approach, differently from the recurring way *site-specific* works are thought about, the issue of *site* specificity is not so categorical, in the sense of a work that was conceived from a place and can only exist in it, but concerns the crossings between the artistic proposal and spatiality. Between the *site-specific* and *site-oriented* works, what matters is whether their specificities are being heard.

It was not without reason that Garrocho was based on *site-specific* strategies to define his notion of *spatial practices*. By recognizing that “[...] the *site-specific* character does not find the resolution within the scope of the object [artwork], but rather in the shift of attention from the observer to the environment, of which the object and the observer are part” (Garrocho, 2015, p. 57), the author explains a decisive change in the status of the artwork. As already said about contextual art, when new subjects – the space and the observer – gain importance in the discussion, the autonomy of the work of art is called into question. This means that the idea of a work as an autonomous and self-sufficient object – which does not depend on the observer’s gaze and which places the artist in a place of sole authority over the work and its meaning – is no longer sufficient. With that, new subjectivation processes are introduced, so the subject’s sensory perception, in addition to the ability to decode signs into meanings, starts to have a determining role. Based on this observation, Garrocho traced the place and the coexistence as the *site-specific* tensors that operate in spatial practices.

The *site-specific* character was assumed as a pillar of research and performance of Teatro da Vertigem and, less directly, its strategies also appear in isolated works of the Belo Horizonte scene that propose to occupy the city, such as the show *Casa das Misericórdias*, by Maldita Companhia (2003), which occupied an old disabled bar in the Horto neighborhood, and the show *MedeiaZonaMorta* (2006), by Teatro Invertido, which took place in an abandoned laboratory in the lower downtown area. Or, also, the more recent *Nossa Senhora do Horto* (2016),

by *Toda Deseo* in the streets of the Horto neighborhood; *Intermitentes ou vai e vem*, *Trincamatraca* and *Seis personagens à procura de um lugar*, that make up the *trilogia andarilha*, by the Teatro & Cidade group (2015, 2016, 2017); *Rua das Camélias* (2016), which occupied a disabled nightclub on Guaicurus street; *PassAarão* (2017), by the Espanca! group, which proposes a guided tour around the group's headquarters, dialoguing, above all, with the history of Aarão Reis street; *A Santa do Capital* (2017), by Cócix Cia Teatral, which sought to occupy different spaces in the city and, finally, *Escombros da Babilônia* (2014 and 2017), created in an old mansion on Manaus street, in the traditional Santa Efigênia neighborhood, which was occupied by artists in 2013, after 20 years of abandonment by the public authorities, receiving the name Espaço Comum Luiz Estrela.

If the *site-specific* scene, according to Garrocho (2015, p. 34), is where “[...] the statutes of the scene, the place and the character of encounter between proposers and spectators are in evidence, in experimentation and problematization”, the occupations, interventions, performances and scenic habitations always have a relation with the notion of “specificity of the place”. As Miwon Kwon (1997, p. 173) explains, “conceiving the *site* as something more than a place – as a repressed ethnic history, a political cause, a group of socially excluded people – is a crucial conceptual leap in redefining the ‘public’ role of art and artists”. However, in addition to the two tensors indicated by Garrocho – place and coexistence –, temporality will be added as the third element of *theatrical habitation*. This is because *habitation*, differently from the other practices analyzed here, is related to a *habitation*, that is, to the creation of a habit, to getting used to something. Thus, by staying in the place and living with its inhabitants, the scenic proposal becomes part of the habits of a community.

In the three shows of the biblical trilogy of Teatro da Vertigem – *O Paraíso Perdido* (1992), *Livro de Jó* (1995) and *Apocalipse 1,11* (2000) –, the occupation of the chosen spaces took place in the last phase of the process, being always in found spaces, already abandoned or inoperative. In *BR3* (2005), *A última palavra é a penúltima* (2008) and *Bom retiro 958 metros* (2012), the presentations were held in hollow spaces in the São Paulo capital: the first on the banks of the Tietê river, the second on an

underground walkway, near Viaduto do Chá, and the third in the Bom Retiro neighborhood.

Although they happen in different spaces, whether they are found or hollowed spaces, we can understand Vertigem shows as scenic occupation practices, since they are usually created from workshops and residences, with subsequent occupation of spaces and with defined actions, scenes and texts, albeit conceived through a procedural dramaturgy. Even in *BR3*, which is perhaps the most radical in terms of spatial displacement, the artists underwent an initial period of residence in three regions of Brazil – Brasilândia (SP), Brasília (DF) and Brasiléia (AC) – and, after that first period of time, they created the show on the banks of the Tietê River. There is, therefore, a division between the research/residence process *in the field*, the occupation/rehearsals at the chosen location and the presentations publicized to the external public, although all stages are always permeated by the unpredictable and the lack of control characteristic of this type of space. Thus, the most significant difference with regard to the practice of *theatrical habitation* would be that in it, from the first moment that the group moves to the neighborhood, it already begins to inhabit it. Although there is also a publicity and *season* phase, required by the funding selection processes, for Teatro Público theatrical habitation already exists prior and independently from the presence of a public external to the neighborhood.

Here we resume the first questions presented about the search for a public theater. Contrary to common sense, “promoting a public theater is not simply crowding audiences”, as it is about “[...] training spectators with strong community characteristics, expanding the circle of connoisseurs and defending not only a public space for the theater, but also a citizen-public” (Fernandes, 2002, p. 53). Perhaps this reflection implies the ambition and utopia of the Teatro Público group of executing a work that is not only inserted in the city, but that is undertaken with the public space and the spectators, an open and porous creation, with multiple authorship.

This public dimension appears at the times when the neighborhood takes center stage and becomes the focus of the scenic practice, either due to the symbolic load of the places, or when the residents transform themselves into “everyday actors”, as denominated by researcher Julia Guimarães Mendes (2017, p. 60). Here we reach a crucial issue in the discussion,

which concerns the various forms of public art, including theatrical habitation: can inhabiting, based on the practice conducted by the Teatro Público group, be thought of as an “aesthetic of the public” (Cornago, 2019)?

Óscar Cornago (2019, p. 46) perceives, in some artistic works, the everyday proximity and the experience shared with the spectators as “some of the traits of the aesthetics of inhabiting as public form”. In the opposite sense to private property, inhabiting presupposes an “open relation with the environment” that makes this practice a “public capital of sensitive intelligence” (Cornago, 2019, p. 34). In this perspective, when the author addresses the habitation as aesthetics linked to the public dimension, deviating from the private field, we can trace a relation with the concept of *theatrical habitation* discussed here, that is, a habitation that goes beyond the notion of home or residence and takes place in relation to the surroundings.

In the theatrical habitations addressed in this article, the relations with the surroundings and with the residents of the neighborhoods were established through the proximity to everyday life and, above all, through *conversation*, recognized as a potentially convivial situation. This aspect is also shared by Cornago, since he traces in the word “one of the basic elements around which the situation is organized as a basic way of being in a space” and also as “[...] a key element in the construction of a collective sense – telling, listening, recognizing, remembering, asking” (Cornago, 2019, p. 40).

At this point in the discussion, we address another important aspect of inhabiting presented by Cornago: the “collective dimension”. According to the author, this dimension implies “doing with the other and others”, so that “knowledge is produced through a situation” of which everyone is part (Cornago, 2019, p. 36). Cornago’s approach also makes explicit the condition of “situation” of the habitation, that is, “a living space in which the fundamental is yet to be done” and in which a kind of “public knowledge” is produced (Cornago, 2019, p. 40), characterized by a continuous process of exchange with the environment. In the Lagoinha and Saudade neighborhoods, the actors inhabited the *hollow* spaces (streets, squares, pubs, markets, cemeteries) and *found* spaces (the house) by

walking, dwelling, attending and staying. They stayed for months, until familiarity and fellowship were established between artists and residents. They coexisted with the residents to the point of creating affective bonds and cultivating a space for collective creation.

Would not this be the political potential of theatrical habitation? Differently from thinking a political scene based on thematization and direct discourses, it is possible to think, in the wake of Lehmann (2007, p. 424), that “its political engagement is not found in the themes, but in the forms of perception”. Also partially assuming this perspective, Garrocho (2015, p. 156) “[...] thinks the action on the place as a spatial policy problem, in terms of the agencies produced as modes of enunciation, positioning and subjectivity of the participants”. It can be said, then, that the spatiality, the temporality and the conviviality in question, that is, its architectural and contextual characteristics, the forms of access, who transit in the space, all this is part of the work-event and points to a “political situation”, as stated by Lippard (apud Fabião, 2008, p. 245). With this, if the theatrical habitation not only allows the voices of spaces and inhabitants, passers-by and/or spectators to be heard, but is constituted from them and by them, we have a policy of the scene or, to put it another way, the artistic practice is shown as “an aesthetic form of the ethical act” (Caballero, 2014, p. 4).

Under these conditions, theatrical habitation, as an artistic and political *situation*, loses the *status* of finished work and proposes a more extended temporality, which defies the logic of acceleration and productivity of contemporary society, at the same time that it deviates from the standards imposed by the market. The proposal of coexistence and cultivation of relationships, through the stay and everyday use of spaces, is also a way to resist the increasingly virtualized relationships, in search of tactile experiences.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Excerpt from the account of Luciana Araújo Castro, actress of the Teatro Público group since 2014, about her experience of drifting as a spectator during the theatrical habitation *Naquele Bairro Encantado*.

- <sup>2</sup> The research was presented by Luciana Araújo Castro (2019), under the mentorship of Nina Caetano.
- <sup>3</sup> The walks, serenades and visits to the house were released to the external public in the form of three episodes. Episode I video available at the link: <<https://vimeo.com/137833155>>; Episode II available at the link: <<https://vimeo.com/137995914>>; and Episode III available at the link: <<https://vimeo.com/133164493>>.
- <sup>4</sup> The experience was released to the public in a three-hour format. Registration video available at the link: <<https://vimeo.com/139649135>>. Intermezzo video available at the link: <<https://vimeo.com/133160534>>.
- <sup>5</sup> Drifting was defined by the *Situationist International* as a “technique of fast passage through varied ambiances” (IS, n. 1, 1958 apud Jacques, 2003, p. 65).
- <sup>6</sup> “A moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambience and a game of events” (IS, n. 1, 1958 apud Jacques, 2003, p. 65).
- <sup>7</sup> The notion of spectacularization of society, which appears in situationist discussions, would deepen, about 15 years after the emergence of *Situationist International*, with the concept of *the Society of the Spectacle*, developed by Guy Debord (1997) (one of the members of SI) .
- <sup>8</sup> Original text: “todas las creaciones que se anclan en las circunstâncias y se muestran deseosas de ‘tecer con’ la realidad.”
- <sup>9</sup> Although it is not the objective of this article to focus on the use of the mask, it is worth noting that in both experiments conducted by the Teatro Público group the actors never reveal their faces. They wear masks from the beginning of the process, in all ordinary experimentation and without a precisely defined fictional context. The masked actors experience the daily life of the neighborhoods and relate directly to the residents, so that the characteristics of each character, as well as the narratives constructed, develop procedurally and in constant negotiation between the fields of the *real* and of the *fictional*. For further understanding of this issue, see the full dissertation at: <<https://www.repositorio.ufop.br/handle/123456789/11845>>. Accessed on: Jun 2, 2019.
- <sup>10</sup> Available at: <<http://iptv.usp.br/portal/video.action?idItem=2867>>. Accessed on: Jun 2, 2019.

- <sup>11</sup> Rogério Lopes da Silva Paulino, actor and director of *Naquele Bairro Encantado*, holds a PhD in Performing Arts from the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), a post-doctoral degree from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), and works as a professor at the UFMG University Theater.
- <sup>12</sup> “Dwell; stay; populate”. Source available at: <<https://www.dicio.com.br/habitar/>>. Accessed on: Jun 2, 2019.
- <sup>13</sup> “Dwell; take place in; consist; exist”. Source available at: <<https://www.dicio.com.br/residir/>>. Accessed on: Jun 2, 2019.
- <sup>14</sup> The original term “found place” is mentioned in *Environmental Theater* (Schechner, 1994, p. 33).

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