

Abstract

This theme is a challenge when addressing the specific field of teaching Theatre and Stage Design. On one hand it draws attention to the use and appropriation of space within an artistic perspective and on the other hand, it brings to the fore the interventional aspect of art in a social space that is moreover confined within the boundaries of what is correct, safe and practical.

In Theatre we examine the interdisciplinary principles between the different areas involved, but, we should ask ourselves, do we really put into practice those principles? And, indeed, does it matter? I can find many interlocutors willing to argue about this subject, however, we find the answers in the practice (research/action) far more than in discourse. I focus my attention in areas of interdisciplinary crossroads, exploring different ways of connection: collaboration, interaction, participation and partnership, this has been so far a condition of the utmost importance in the development of practice relating to methodological improvement.

Moving from the specific field of Stage Design to the interdisciplinary practices involved in the process one can draw a connective line between the examination of space and artistic intervention. I want to propose to explore the role of the stage designer as a transformer of space, that should be understood as a physical experience in space and time.

Confronting this subject inevitably leads to the desire for realisation, therein testing the capacity for imagining and transforming of the space, moreover, developing the skills of organisation and production and establishing a bridge between the disciplines of Stage Design and Production. This leads us to the theme of this conference.

The producer, as known in Theatre, has the ability to propose new challenges and to gather around them a team that works as a whole. In a time of mega-scenarios I find it pertinent to question whether the role of the “new” stage designer is that of the great maestro, the Curator.

The world - that beautiful scenario created in few days - six according to Bible – is also perceived as something more than the landscape from which beings and facts are silhouetted weaving stories, it is the space where stage exists and thus it is a inexhaustible source of conflicts. When it suit us – most of the times – we speak of the world’s stage and it is easy for us to see the comedy in our days, with texts and movements right in front of our tired or rested eyes from facing so much representation, and this is how we can obey when we see ourselves always represented without seeing the world. (Neves, Abel, 1998:269)

The subject of this symposium Scenography Expanding 3: On Curating raises some doubts and concerns that hopefully will become dispelled as the meeting evolves.

It is granted that in the global society we live in what matters is to see and to be seen. Who shows up exists and has success and who does not, disappears. Perhaps this is inevitable. Nevertheless, this way of acting starts to shape behaviors.

Today, when one intends to embody a project or an idea, one firstly concerns with its visibility, what is understandable in the sense that one knows the value an image has. This fact, however, results in the secularization of the original idea and of the objective of the project and the visible form of the idea becomes the protagonist. In an extreme situation the image can even replace the original concept through emptying its meaning. This has been one of the roles of advertisement and marketing in our society and the rules that surround this process dominate increasingly all activities.

To my knowledge the roll of curatorship in Portugal is mainly connected to the plastic arts. From this unfolds my vision, perhaps prejudiced and reductionist about this activity. The curator has been the element connecting the art gallery or the museum and the artist, being many times - I recognize his merit - the engine of some cultural activity. However I cannot distinguish the mentor and the conductor activity without looking at the commercial side not in the immediate sense of profit but related to the management of influences and supports, which are inevitably connected to the financial sector. The function of the curatorship answers perfectly to the needs and pretensions of an elite that has its own way of seeing the world.

There are, however, different ways to approach this activity: we have the curator as an artist - *So I use the museum as my palette*¹ - who creates by relating the pieces among themselves and the space that they integrate; we have the curator who reinterpret searching for a meaning to the fragmented contemporary art production; the distanced curator who values the exhibition form itself; and the institutional curator that protects the institution and the public over the author or the artwork interests.

Other models may exist regarding the way artists, institutions and curators relate. Thus, I have decided to accept to be here in this symposium, to learn about and face other perspectives and new realities.

Regardless the system one might be at the curator activity always implies to see 'things' from a point of view. It is important and fundamental that each one of them can have a point of view over 'things' and the world eventually with social and political implications. However, how many of us can own a vision and transmit it? I wonder about who will be able to be a curator, what will be their special characteristics and in what environment could these develop?

The set designer through visual and narrative training has the required tools to face this challenge. However is this what we want?

The question that is posed about the particularity of the scenic language on the quest for affinities with similar activities is relevant. I support the idea that a higher interdisciplinary level among different artistic languages results always in an enrichment of the training and the creativity. We could see the activity of curatorship as a development of these languages, by valuing them and giving them prestige through increasing their visibility. That would open the theatre backstage to a mediatic exposure and, who knows, it would even improve the business capacity in a domain that has been the poor relative of culture.

I know that the perspective I bring here does not represent anything new. It rather points to a critical view about the present time being a little against the current. However as an involved citizen and a teacher of young artists I search to promote a reflexion and a critical view of society in the same way that I consider myself also responsible for the quality of the future we are building.

Therefore I recognise the importance that we have when we decide to accept an intervention either it is more or less physical or of bigger or smaller dimension. It is important to assume a point of view and to risk an action.

This interventionist role that we have became accustomed to recognise in artists seems to be a little bit out of fashion. It has been replaced by the 'politically correctness' that

¹ Cfr.: Karp, Ivan; Wilson, Fred, «Construction the Spectacle of Culture in Museums», in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, p. 253.

contaminates our way of seeing and thinking about the world, in a resigned and condescending attitude.

I believe that art and the art teaching must adopt the opposite attitude, investing in the difference and in the questioning as a added value, opposing to the impoverishment that results from the levelling of knowledge.

I recognise that this role could be represented by the curator himself but this has not been the case.

The subject I bring here ***Intervention in space – space of intervention*** is the result of some researches that have culminate in the conception/building of an optional curricular unit I teach at ESMAE.

By appealing to the art as a form of intervention I intend to sensitize students to the importance of each of their actions in the creative process and to the way they intervene with the space and the time of the spectator.

This challenge has a double premise: the interventional aspects of art and its formulation in terms of space must be weighted. The space I am referring to in this proposal brings together the sense of time and opportunity in relation to a place. The physical space of the object becomes the space that the object itself creates. It is a space of reflection and imagination, accepting the role of the artwork as a medium through which the interior dialogue gets projected between the artist and society.

Space can then be perceived as a medium, as a requirement so that the bridge to creation can be established, being creation the place of all relations.

As a space of relations it is also a place of exchanges. This is because the enjoyment of the creation gives way to several readings, enriching the individual heritage of the observer and of the artwork.

According to Capi Corrales Rodrigañez today the space of the artwork comes closer to its mathematical definition *'in mathematics the modern notion of space as formed by a set of elements and relation between the elements. It is not the container anymore. It is not an object anymore. It is a net of relations between objects'*.²

This is a dialogue almost chemical among all 'things' that are similar to what we call contra scene in theatre. Here, many times, words are not relevant to understand the relation that is established between the two actors on stage since the body and the eyes language discloses the characters.

The **intervention** is presented as an action in a space and before an audience triggering different types of relations.

This intervention will be an experience of interaction, sharing, presenting, exhibit, or an imposition to an audience. This conforms the notion of work of art as an 'field of action' where each one of the intervening elements converges to a collective experience.

The relation to the physical installed space itself, the architectonic component or simply the stage of action raises questions of adaption, transformation and appropriation. The complicity, the medium and the artwork develop complex relations.

² Cfr.: Rodrigañez, C. C. – Contando el espacio, p.18.

When I talk about relation, I talk of definition. The elements never accompany each others, they relate to each other. Nothing is near one other thing without intervening in it, without modifying it, without defining it. (...) Heisenberg said it already, each one has divided the world, not in different groups of objects but in groups of connections; this is relation. (Molina, S., 1995: 51)

Many times theatre and its practice are unfair. When faced to the collective look of a whole they force us to give in. We are taught to accept this as a correct and as an inevitable share to which theatre subject us. However theatre and performative arts history is charged with examples that contradict this inevitability. I will not need to mention John Cage dissociations for us to understand that there are traced paths that today do not represent the norm.

Despite the term itself 'collective creation' is dated and catalogued, as a form of organization, each model and each practice is distinct as well as the methodologies are different.

These sort of meetings want to compensate the gaps that result from the reduced practice on a research level and from the reduced production of reflection materials that generally exist in the theatre. However there is much to do on the research/action level in the way that the theatre is a very complex art not limited to the text and linguistic, nor to the actor technique, nor to the scenery or lights – it is a whole, a combination of all these domains.

The project I propose *Intervention in Space – Space of Intervention* fits into an action area where different forms of space interact – the physical and the three-dimensional space, the time-space and the mental or intellectual space.

This proposal has as main objective to place a special public, the youth, before the imminence of a special construction with an interventionist nature. It appeals to the most irreverent character of their condition leading them to experiment languages more bold than the ones they experienced until now and to venture on the way they present their ideas and projects.

The experiences that were made over the last years showed the students strong determination to materialize their project. The character of creating autonomous production was successfully achieved and it led to a great level of involvement of the community.

The spaces created differed according to each student proposal and these resulted in the presentation of the space as stage, in art installation, in Sound installation, in site-specific for performance and in Happenings.

This theme has had the particularity of encourage students to think and to conceive a project. One of its main chores is that students search and develop concrete solutions so that they can produce an 'Object' and finally to make a presentation of their work.

I consider that the answers to all these questions can be found in our practices and in our organization form. Since production in theatre is one of the most complete subjects – knowledge of the whole – I argue that the search for affinities between scenography and production will be a much better answer than the activity of curator because a mutual knowledge of the languages already exists.

Bibliography

- ALMEIDA, B. P. – *O plano de imagem: espaço da representação e lugar do espectador*, Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim, 1996.
- BENJAMIM, W. – *Magia e Técnica, Arte e Política*, São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1985.
- GREENBERG, REESA/ FERGUSSON, W. BRUCE/ NAIME (ed.) - *Thinking about Exhibitions*, Routledge, London, 1996.
- LIPOVETSKY, G. – *A era do Vazio*, Lisboa: Relógio d'Água, 1989.
- LOMAZZI, G. (et. al.) – *Psicologia do vestir*, Lisboa: Assírio e Alvim, 1989.
- MAFFESOLI, M. – *A conquista do presente*, Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1984.
- MEANA, J. CARLOS – *El espacio entre las cosas*, Pontevedra: Deputación Provincial de Pontevedra, 2000.
- MICHELI, M. – *Las Vanguardias Artísticas del siglo XX*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1981.
- MOLINA, F. V. – *Disfraces del desnudo, El desnudo en el Museo del Prado*, Barcelona: Galaxia Gutemberg, 1998.
- MUNARI, B. – *¿De verdad o de mentira?, Vídeo culturas en el fin de siglo XX*, Madrid: VV. AA. Ediciones Cátedra, 1996.
- NEVES, A. – *Do mundo como cenário ou da preguiça em compreender*, Lisboa: Edições Cosmos, 1998.
- POPPER, F. – *Arte, Acción y participación – El artista y la creatividad de hoy*, Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 1989.
- SÁNCHEZ, A. / ROMERO, J. (et. al.) – *Entorno sobre el espacio y el arte*, Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 1995.
- SONTAG, S. – *Contra la interpretación*, Madrid: Alfaguara, 1996.
- VIDAL, C. – *A representação da vanguarda: contradições dinâmicas na Arte Contemporânea*, Oeiras: Celta Editora, 2002.
- YATES, S. (ed.) – *A Crítica das representações, En tiempo real...el arte mientras tiene lugar*, A coruña: Fundación Luís Seoane, 2001.