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Monsters, machines and popcorn: theatre of the oppressed and street protest

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Abstract

This article rises from the experience of the Theatre of the Oppressed Group from Braga in the context of the movements carried out in Portugal against austerity between 2012 and 2013. It presents some of the political and artistic interventions of the group, as well as a reflection on their impact and limitations. We intend to analyze the possibilities of the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) to intervene, influence or enhance street protest and, at the same time, examine the extent to which this experience can articulate and question the two critical dimensions of capitalism, social and aesthetics, enunciated by Boltanski and Chiapello in their work *O novo espírito do capitalismo* [The new spirit of capitalism]. This article is part of an interventionist and participatory research perspective, that seeks to conceive and frame the TO as a collective action and critical education tool, within the context of contemporary social mobilizations.

Keywords

Austerity; crisis; criticism; social mobilizations; theatre of the oppressed

Resumo

Este artigo parte da experiência do Núcleo de Teatro do Oprimido de Braga no contexto das movimentações levadas a cabo, em Portugal, contra a austeridade, entre 2012 e 2013. Apresenta algumas das intervenções políticas e artísticas do grupo, bem como uma reflexão sobre o seu impacto e limitações. Pretende-se analisar as possibilidades de o Teatro do Oprimido (TO) intervir, influenciar ou potenciar o protesto de rua e, ao mesmo tempo, examinar em que medida pode esta experiência articular e interpelar as duas dimensões de crítica do capitalismo, social e estética, enunciadas por Boltanski e Chiapello na obra *O novo espírito do capitalismo*. A investigação insere-se numa perspetiva de investigação interventiva e participativa, procurando conceber e situar o TO enquanto ferramenta de ação coletiva e educação crítica, no âmbito das mobilizações sociais contemporâneas.

Palavras-chave

Austeridade; crise; crítica; mobilizações sociais; teatro do oprimido

Introduction

> Word, image and sound, which today are channels of oppression, should be used by the oppressed as forms of liberation. It is not enough to consume culture, it is necessary to produce it. Do not just enjoy art: it is necessary to be an artist! It is not enough to produce ideas: it is necessary to transform them into social acts, concrete and continuous. (Boal, 2009, p. 19)

Augusto Boal (1931-2009), playwright and creator of the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), uttered these words at the World Social Forum in Belem, Brazil, a few months before he passed away. This Boal's appeal is especially mobilizing in the context of crisis and austerity in which Portugal finds itself. Since the start of the crisis and the consequent intervention of the Troika in 2011[1], successive austerity measures have been implemented and, although announced as conjunctural, have been perpetuated with an ideological character, legitimizing the restructuring of labor law and relations, the intensification of social fragmentation, the weakening of collective solidarities, the dismantling of the Social State (Abreu et al., 2013; Ferreira, 2012). Thus, more than a mere set of economic and social policy options, austerity has thrived by "consensus fabrication" (Chomsky, 2000), through manipulation of public opinion by the media (Monteiro, 2011); by the creation of "common-sense myths" around austerity (Soeiro, Cardina & Serra, 2013); By the job insecurity (Ferreira, 2012; Soeiro, 2015); by the emptying of public space and, in general, by the "culture of fear" (Furedi, 2006) that feeds resignation and inhibits social and political mobilization.

However, these transformations have not occurred without resistance. In response to the global challenge and in particular the mobilizations and "crisis movements" – "pro-democracy and anti-austerity" (Della Porta, 2014) – which took place in several countries, particularly in southern Europe, Portugal played a leading role, between 2011 and 2013, in a cycle of intense and continuous protests (Estanque, Costa & Soeiro, 2013). Although historically and traditionally fragile in its organization and civil mobilization, the country was hit by strikes, demonstrations, direct actions, carried out by collectives that followed one another – March 12 Movement, October 15 Platform, "Que se lixe a Troika" [The Hell with Troika], etc. – and also by unions, left wing parties, associations and social movements. These collectives combine "classic forms of political intervention" with "more creative and transgressive forms of action" and cooperation with union and partisan actors is "tense", "crossed by differences in language, political hegemony, class cultures that persist (Soeiro, 2012, p. 9).

This article based on the activist experimentation of the Theatre of the Oppressed Group from Braga, Portugal, adopts the method created by Boal as a social and political tool of mobilization and protest. More than a set of techniques – theatre-invisible, theatre-image, theatre-forum, rainbow of desire, theatre-legislative, aesthetics of the oppressed -– TO has a particular history and development. Influenced by Bertolt Brecht in the theatrical field and by Paulo Freire in the educational field, TO was idealized and conceived in the early 1970s in the context of the Brazilian di ctatorship. From Marxist inspiration, the method puts the systems of oppression and power imbalances at the center of analysis, with a view to overcoming them and to social transformation. In 1970, in response to repression and censorship and still influenced by the theatre of agit-prop – agitation and propaganda (VC, 2007, p. 12) – the first experiments with *theatre-newspaper* take place,

[1] Troika is the entity that brings together the European Central Bank, European Commission and International Monetary Fund. Troika's presence in Portugal occurred between 17/05/2011 and 17/05/2014, however, austerity measures and external surveillance will continue over the next few years.

considered the "seed of the theatre of the oppressed". In 1971, Boal is arrested, tortured and goes into exile. It is in these thirteen years outside Brazil that the seed germinates giving rise to the greater part of his arsenal.

Although some of the techniques are assigned to a normative and even therapeutic nature, the perspective of the method we explore here is that of "political theatre" in its emancipatory dimension, inscribed in the history of "critical thinking" (Neveux, 2014; Rancière, 2010). "An essay on the revolution" was what Boal called TO, because it tests resistances and seeks alternatives (Boal, 1980). It is in this perspective that this article incorporates data that intend to emphasize the critical experiential learning of the group, in individual and collective terms, associated with the political-artistic action of the street protest.

Methodology

Through the impulse of a group of friends, meanwhile formed in association Krizo – Education, Art and Citizenship[2], the TO group Braga was created in 2011. The militancy is fluid and intermittent. A core of five members that has been maintained since the beginning drives and motivates others to collaborate. The intermittency is due, in a large extent, to the precarious conditions of the young members of the group. There are those who have emigrated; who is unemployed; who is back to studies, with the hope of increasing their chances in labor insertion; or who accumulates two or three jobs to be able to pay the bills. Since the creation of TO / Krizo, the group has organized various initiatives – debates, workshops, exhibitions, concerts, art installations, theatre-forum sessions, political meetings, video activists, etc. – engaging in local, national and international projects. The members consider themselves "*subversive*, because they do not agree with the dominant logic, and *insistent*, because they do not give up easily". They move through the "collective search for alternatives": "research, reflect, raise awareness, debate in depth and with many people"[3].

Several concerns are expressed in this paper: what role can TO have in the street rescue and in protest? What brings that is important or new? How can intervene, influence or empower the public space? What is the relation of the so-called "artists" with other political subjects? Inspired by perspectives of participatory research (Fals Borda, 1991; Freire, 1981) and a public and militant sociology (Braga, 2011; Burawoy, 2006), the research involved participant observation, with logbook recording; a focus group with group members held in 2014 and the analysis of documentary sources: newspaper news, photographs, posters, videos, convocations of the movements/unions, the script of a play of theatre-newspaper and texts published in social networks. The analysis intends to come near the narrative character of self-ethnography (Denzin, 2014) and militant ethnography (Juris, 2007).

[2] Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/ajkrizo

[3] Retrieved from http://www.comumonline.com/cultura/item/844-teatro-do-oprimido-de-braga-agita-a-cidade-dos-arcebispos; http://www.comumonline.com/?p=1240

At the same time, and using Boltanski and Chiapello's *O novo espírito do capitalismo* [The New Spirit of Capitalism] (1999), reflects on the way in which this activist experience stands in the face of the two dimensions of the critique of capitalism that these authors enunciate: aesthetics criticism and social criticism. The intention is to contribute to the understanding of the articulations and interpellations that the two critical registers express today, crossing the analysis of the internal dynamics of the activist group (TO) with the reflection around societal factors, specifically in the context of social movements against austerity and the Troika in Portugal.

The crisis, the Troika and the rescue of the street

In the 2012-2013 period, corresponding to the mobilizations peak against austerity, the group played a leading role in a series of street initiatives, in the various protests that were taking place across the country and, more discreetly, in Braga. We decided to include here the report of four specific moments – October 13, 2012 (Cultural Demonstration); November 14, 2012 (CGTP General Strike); March 2, 2013 (Demonstration "Que se lixe a Troika" [The hell with Troika]); and May 1, 2013 (Labor Day) – where the TO intervention presented different characteristics in relation to the type of protest, preparation time, strategies, participants or objectives. Theatre-newspaper and theatre-image techniques are used, but above all, the interventions fit the Theatre of the Oppressed Aesthetics principles and the appropriation and democratization of the street, art and politics.

Salazar, Troika and the monster of the crisis

Cultural Demonstration "Que se lixe a Troika" [The hell with Troika], October 13, 2012

> Were present at this meeting around twelve people (...) some were around 50 years old – the April militants – and others were around 25-30 years old. There seemed to be small differences, not in the sense of conflict but of different visions. The older ones proposed popular and intervention music, the younger ones spoke of rock and punk. (Logbook, 01/10/2012)

Disagreements were not limited to musical tastes. In spite of the low participation, the meetings had a big diversity in many levels: age, schooling, social origin and ways of "doing politics". The left-wing party militants, unions or individuals and members of associations or movements had clear different points of view. The discussions were long, the strategies did not reach consensus, the leadership was not obvious and often, fatigue and some irritation stood out in the end of the meetings.

The text of the convocation[4], with the slogan "culture is resistance" signed by a "broad set of professionals from the world of culture", motivated popular participation, calling "all forms of art that materialize the insubmission spirit that its felt throughout

[4] Convocation "Que se lixe a Troika" [The hell with Troika]- Cultural Demonstration. Retrieved from http://www.precarios.net/?p=167

the country" taking "from the street to the art and from the art to the street all the energy that goes through them". The TO decides to take part in the demonstration, not only with a piece of a play of theatre-newspaper "Exchange Salazar by the Troika"[5] that had been presented at the April 25 celebrations, but also in the definition of programming and alignment, press convocation, leaflet distribution and in anything else that was needed[6].

"Without culture man becomes a dog", the start of the manifestation, which had about 1000 people, was given by Adolfo Luxúria Canibal, lead singer of the band Mão Morta and one of Braga "mythical figures: "when you get to where you are, where even the stomach already feels the crisis is because we have already passed many sides. It is at this point that man becomes a dog"[7]. During the play presentation, dozens of people formed a circle around the group, participating with comments, laughs, whistles, jeers. The piece proposed to establish a parallel between Salazar's[8] speech and the austerity speech, focusing on the loss of social and political rights won in the 1974 revolution and established in the constitution[9]. Using humor, satire, language and metaphorical characters, the play featured a succession of interconnected scenes[10]: a cook prepared the "austerity recipe" explaining the necessary "cuts"; The premiere of a horror film in which Princess Lusitania was attacked by the Monster of the Crisis and saved by the Alchemist Coelho[11] (Figure 1); television commercials for bank loans, gold sale and *Salazar*[12] (*pan scrapper*) now converted and upgraded to a modern equipment, the Troika; a room full of "good students"[13] obedient and abiding by the austerity program; a sparing and honourable Gasparzinho[14] or a strikes strike. The program also included concerts, poetry, political interventions, and performances (Figure 2).

[5] The play's title "Exchange Salazar by the Troika" refers to the austerity speech at different times: in the Salazarism era of the dictatorship and in the present time

[6] Retrieved from http://www.correiodominho.pt/noticias.php%20...%3C/p%3E%3C/noticias.php?id=64775

[7] Retrieved from http://www.dn.pt/inicio/portugal/interior.aspx?content_id=2826776&page=-1

[8] Salazar is the name linked to the dictatorship, which lasted for 48 years in Portugal: the longest authoritarian regime in Western Europe of the twentieth century.

[9] An in-depth analysis on the theme and on the use of the technique nowadays you can read in our article "Does Fascism Still Live in Here? The theatre-newspaper and the austerity speech" , *Magazine Education, Society and Cultures* (in press).

[10] Some scenes you can see here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7T9Td_D9DZM

[11] Alchemist Coelho is a play with words between Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho and Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho, author of the book "The Alchemist".

[12] Salazar is the name popularly given to the instrument used to scrape the cakes and fight waste, precisely because it refers to the sacrifice and restraint of Salazarism times.

[13] The expression "good students" it is used to describe the Portuguese government's behavior towards the Troika. For example http://economico.sapo.pt/noticias/de-gastadores-a-bons-alunos-a-imagem-de-portugal-melhorou-mas-a-que-preco_218456.html

[14] Gasparzinho refers to Victor Gaspar, then Finance Minister. This is the news that inspired this scene: retrieved from http://www.asbeiras.pt/2012/03/vitor-gaspar-foi-a-manteigas-lembrar-ensinamentos-da-avo/



Figure 1: Exchange Salazar by the Troika
Source: Rómulo Duque



Figure 2: Cultural Demonstration Poster "The hell with Troika
Source: Que se lixe a Troika, Braga

At the end of the performance, the group gathered in the grass talking to other friends and decided to carry out another idea: a plastic installation of the "Monster of the Crisis", with the aim of denouncing the media manipulation around the crisis speech, whose abundant presence in the newspapers raised fear in people. We had taken card boxes, paint, scenery paper, newspaper news and monopoly notes. We built a monster with dollar signs in the eyes and an open mouth from which hung a long tongue with the help of a *graphite artist* friend and more than a dozen young peopl (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Plastic installation "Monster of the Crisis"
Source: Filipe Fernandes

Circling through the demonstration venue, TO members questioned who was passing: witch dreams the monster of the crisis is robbing you? People responded with wishes and longings – I want to have a job; I want to leave my parent's house; I want to be entitled to retirement; I do not want to emigrate-that were registered and glued into the Monster's tongue, as if he was swallowing them. At the end of the demonstration, there was a sense of joy in all of us: "above all it was a beautiful event" (Logbook, 14/10/2012)

"Tied hands" and "statue of the crisis"

CGTP General Strike /Concentration, November 14, 2012

> The street has an inescapable energy. The approximately three hundred people present gathered with flags and banners in front of the microphones, to listen to the trade union leaders speeches. Although we were not interested in the slightest to what they wanted to proclaim (possibly many people who were there had the same feelings), we sneak off to a relatively distant place, forming a line of ten people for the "representatives of the crisis" performance. (Logbook, 14/11/2012)

The TO had not been invited to participate and our intervention was kind of a public space invasion. CGTP, the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers, summoned the protest, "against exploitation", "impoverishment" and "the aggression program"[15] Were assembled several groups, in Braga, represented by the movement "Que se lixe a Troika" [The hell with Troika][16]. We had prepared two ideas in the previous days: "a collective statue of the crisis" that would become an "alternative machine" and "a row of crisis

[15] Pre-notice of General Strike, CGTP. Retrieved from http://www.cgtp.pt/materiais-greve-geral-14-11-2012

[16] Retrieved from http://rr.sapo.pt/informacao_detalhe.aspx?fid=25&did=84964

representatives (precarious, unemployed, retired...)" who, with the megaphone, would share their situation: "each person will say a sentence, then the megaphone (voice) it is taken away from them and their hands are tied with a cloth (hands tied, impotence)", "we want people to remember that behind the numbers are people, with real stories that have to be seen and heard"(Logbook, 08/11/2012). Without rehearsals, only with the joint elaboration of ideas, the distribution of tasks and collection of the necessary material, the preparation had not gone beyond this.

There was not many people present; the released figures oscillate between 300 people in the concentration and 1500 in the march that followed. Despite this, the strike adhesion reached 100% in some sectors[17]. The impression that we are invading is more pronounced, when we arrive at the location of the concentration. We hesitated, at times, afraid that we were being "impolite" presenting our performance during the speeches. However, we decided to do it. Since we needed "reinforcements", we spoke with some friends, asked them to participate and explained the performance. The group line up, with a sign in their neck that summed up their situation (Figure 4).

Each one uttered the phrase that had decided: "Helena, green receipts, debt to the social security of 423 euros"; "Tatiana, 30 years, I live year by year"; "João, 35 years old, I am a teacher of A.E.C.(extracurricular activities) and receive less than the minimum wage "; "Paulo, 30 years old, graduate, there is no other option, I have to emigrate"; "Marcelo, 33 years old, unemployed, I do not have a present, never mind a future". A man insistently asked the megaphone to express his sorrows too. The appearance of some imbalance (psychological or being intoxicated) made us concern of what he would say or what it would cause so we ended up not allowing it. After this intervention, we took advantage of the circle that formed around us and opened a circular blanket on the ground, delimiting the space. One by one, we read at the megaphone, newspaper headlines presenting little more than numbers: emigration, school dropout, poverty, unemployment, bankruptcies (Figure 5).



Figure 4: "Hands tied" performance
Source: Filipe Fernandes

[17] Retrieved from http://www.tvi24.iol.pt/sociedade/mabifestacoes/greve-geral-retrato-de-um-pais-em-manifestacao



Figure 5: Statue of the Crisis (Headlines reading)
Source: Filipe Fernandes

Through the theatre-image, we wanted these numbers to convert into human statues: how does the body respond to the crisis? We wanted to make visible the invisible: the numbers translated into people and concrete lives. The people around us were looking attentively; some of them got emotional and commented amongst themselves. The challenge was launch: to modify these images, carving others in which transformations could occur (Figure 6), some of them moved and commented. The challenge was launch: to modify these images, carving others in which transformations could occur.



Figure 6: Statue of the Crisis
Source: Filipe Fernandes

> When we asked them to suggest ways out, to give us alternatives, the silence answered us. Minutes later, one of the present man grabbed one of the statues and removed it from the circle. It was a staggering moment, people clapped and we noticed relief. Others followed and everyone did the

> same. One woman, who withdrew H., could not hold back and burst into tears. It was hair-raising. (Logbook, 14/11/2012)

By the end of the interventions, there was an adrenaline rush. Meanwhile other friends had joined us. We decided to take the first performance – "hands tied" – to another place, moved by the desire of confrontation and provocation. At first, we thought of a Bank, but it is closed, so we decided to do it by the Citizen's Shop. In less than five minutes, a security guard approached and forced us to end the performance. While leaving, in between laughs, "we wanted to repeat this experience", with the awareness that we needed to "be informed about legal issues, what is allowed or not, so that we could defend ourselves" (Logbook, 14/11/2012). In Lisbon, the news was of violence[18].

The "entrepreneurship machine"

"Que se lixe a Troika" [The hell with Troika]: the people rule the most, March 2, 2013

> As soon as we got in, a man said, "Look! Thankfully the TO comrades have arrived, to help decide what the best time to take action". It seems that we have already begun to be a publicly recognized entity. (...) Another funny detail was that one of the technicians referred to the TO saying, "we have to be careful with the times and spaces where the TO will do the presentation, you already know how sensitive artists are." I, who was by their side, was offended. I mumbled something like, "We're not artists, we're activists," but that was not the time or place for philosophical discussions. (Logbook, 01/03/2013)

The TO had already participated in almost a dozen street initiatives and in Braga, at the time of the March 2 demonstration, we were beginning to have some notoriety. Probably, for this reason, they ask us to open the demonstration with an intervention. This recognition was dubious, as we do not want to be seen as a theatre group but rather as political activists. Making that difference was important to us. We chose to present a performance that we had created during Oprima – Meeting of Theatre of the Oppressed and Activism[19], held in Braga, a few days before.

"Machine of entrepreneurship"[20] performance was prepared from a Julian Boal exercise: *allegorical sequence of analysis*. We analyzed the entrepreneurship speech in times of crisis, answering six questions[21] and using metaphorical language, sound and rhythm. The sequence wanted to represent the various mechanisms involved in the

[18] Retrieved from http://www.publico.pt/economia/noticia/greve-ao-minuto-1572391

[19] Óprima is an annual meeting held since 2012. It is currently organized by TO Braga/Krizo, Talking Turtle, KSK Arrentela and the Women World March -Lisbon. It was held in Braga in 2013. Retrieved from https://oprima.wordpress.com

[20] Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRS3HP8nTZQ or: http://krizontobraga.foliohd.com/#semana-da-juventude

[21] Where are the power relations? What strategies uses to perpetuate this power? Who benefits or takes advantage? What does this concept hide? What is the root of the problem? Where are its contradictions?

entrepreneurship speech – its strategies and its objectives – taking into account the panorama of crisis and austerity.

The text of the convocation[22] for the platform "Que se lixe a Troika" [The hell with Troika] reflected the climate experienced at the time, with the increased desperation – "we cannot stand any longer the robbery and the aggression". Repeated words in plural – we are indignant, we revolt, we resist. "All this is Troika," read it; "The Troika condemns dreams to death, the future to fear, life to survival". To finish off: "to this wave that destroys everything, we will oppose the giant wave of our indignation and on March 2 we will fill the streets again."



Figure 7: Entrepreneurship Machine
Source: Ana Barros



Figure 8: Entrepreneurship Machine, GNRation, Braga

[22] Convocation "Que se lixe a Troika" [The hell with Troika]: the people are in charge retrieved from http://queselixeatroika-15setembro.blogspot.pt/p/que-se-lixe-troika-queremos-as-nossas.html

Source: Gonçalo Delgado

There was around 7000 people in Braga and, besides our performance, some musicians joined with guitars and other instruments. The "machine of entrepreneurship" allegory, which lasted about eight minutes, accompanied the route of an *unemployed*. (Figure 7). It began with a boss dismissing employees, increasing his profits and work overloading those who stay; a Job Center employee whose only action is to stammer and stamp papers, the agonizing wait of the *unemployed*, leafing newspapers, listening to the ticking of unpaid bills (Figure 8).

In this impasse, starts the song "Welcome to the enchanted world of employment where there are kings, princesses, thieves, develop your potential and you will be a great entrepreneur"[23]. Eluded, the *unemployed* enters this world, surrounded by others who shape him to be more confident, active, and dynamic. Little by little, the circle becomes an always on the go game and the *unemployed* is pushed back and forth until he gives up and breaks the barrier around him. They yell at him – *loser* – and the chain restarts: the boss dismisses employees once again, the employees work in triplicate and profits keep increasing.

Although the creation and collective reflection process of this *machine* was long and on other occasions even led to intense debate[24], its transposition to the demonstration space did not have the expected effect: "there was clapping and immediately the parade through the center of Braga started, what left a bitter taste in the mouth". At the end of the march through the city, the concentration started and

> we were invited to take the stage as part of the organization. It was beautiful, of course. In front of us we had thousands of people, downtown was full of heads, some more serious, others smiling, everything vibrated while we sang the Grândola[25]. (Logbook, 02/04/2013)

Popcorn, popcorn!

Labor Day, 1st of May 2013

> Friend, if you with 20 years old cannot get € 100 a month to pay for your education, you're going to have a lot of problems in your life, because even selling popcorn gets a hundred euros a month. (Miguel Gonçalves, *Público,* 02/04/13)[26]

> It is a great myth to say that there is no work (...) many of those who are

[23] The song's melody and the lyrics adjustment correspond to Leopoldina's music from Continente (supermarket chain in Portugal): "Welcome to the enchanted world of toys, where there are kings, princesses, dragons ..."

[24] The "entrepreneurship machine" presented during the Youth Week in August 2013 in Braga, followed by a debate.

[25] Grândola is the title of Zeca Afonso's song that was the password for the revolution of the carnations, in April of 1974.

[26] Excerpt from a piece of the *Público* newspaper, April 2, 2013, entitled "Relvas presents the 'ambassador' he met on YouTube," reporting that the "Deputy Minister and Parliamentary Affairs, Miguel Relvas, presented this Tuesday "The Ambassador of the Young Impulse, Miguel Gonçalves, a young entrepreneur".

> unemployed are unemployed because, point number one, they do not want to work and, point number two, they are bad at it. (Miguel Gonçalves, Jornal *i*, 22/04/2013)[27]

These Miguel Gonçalves declarations, a popular Braga entrepreneur – at the time ambassador of "Young Impulse", the Government's program of incentive to create your own business – were the fuse to the 1st of May intervention. The idea came from one of the TO members: as a form of criticism to this speech, we will distribute popcorn on Labor Day. The planning followed the usual logic: to gather the group, to attract people who could collaborate, to acquire the necessary material and to go the streets. As there was no trade union concentration scheduled for Braga – or any other event marking the date – the TO decides to call a concentration through the social networks, contacting the platform "Que se lixe a Troika" [The hell with Troika] that quickly became available to collaborate in the dissemination and performance.

In the convocation, we did not mention the action we were preparing, because we wanted to take advantage of the surprise factor. In the text of the event on *facebook*[28], the TO began by recalling April 25 and 1 May 1974, when the streets were "filled with joy and dreams".

> For tomorrow, Labor Day, there is nothing organized for Braga. No celebration, no protest. Does not matter. The street is OURS! Therefore, we invite all citizens to occupy the streets. We are meeting on Central Avenue, near the pyramids, at 3pm, for a community picnic. Bring food, music, word and strength. The sun will shine. (...) It is in the claim of the public space that the claim of citizenship, of democracy and of the future is made.

On the appointed day, several members of the group, wearing ties, distributed a bag of popcorn along with a publicly read manifesto (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Stall for popcorn distribution

[27] Excerpt from an interview by Miguel Gonçalves to Jornal *i*, dated April 22, 2013.

[28] Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/events/3257780108828 90/

Source: Aixa Gonzalez

In the manifesto, in addition to the above statements, it was written: "in the name of the 17,5% unemployed, 40% of them young people; on behalf of the approximately 100.000 Portuguese who emigrated in the last year; of the thousands of students who dropped out due to lack of resources; on behalf of all the precarious workers and the numbers that aren't in the statistics and, above all, on behalf of all the people behind these numbers". It ended with a critique to the "fallacy of entrepreneurship", the speech of "superheroes with initiative and attitude" that "blame the individual" and support the government that disclaims responsibility (Figure 10).



Figure 10: Manifesto Reading
Source: Vasco Santos

Teatro do Oprimido lembra desempregados no 1.º de Maio



Grupo ofereceu pipocas para denunciar «gurus do empreendedorismo»

JORGE OLIVEIRA

O Núcleo de Teatro do Oprimido de Braga assinalou ontem o Dia do Trabalhador lembrando os 17,5% de desempregados (40% deles jovens), os cerca de 100 mil portugueses que emigraram no último ano, os milhares de alunos que abandonaram os estudos por falta de recursos e os trabalhadores precários em Portugal.

Durante a ação, organizada na Avenida Central, o grupo resolveu oferecer pipocas aos transeuntes como forma de denunciar «todos os gurus do empreendedorismo» que procuram com os seus discursos passar a ideia de que não há falta de trabalho no país.

«É insultuoso pessoas como o nosso conterrâneo Miguel Gonçalves dizer que as pessoas precisam é de iniciativa, de ser empreendedores e que não querem trabalhar», considerou Inês Barbosa, porta-voz daquele movimento, depois de ler um manifesto em que o Teatro do Oprimido afirma que «é preciso terminar com esta falácia do empreendedorismo que culpabiliza o indivíduo, desresponsabilizando as políticas sociais e económicas que têm vindo a ser impostas pelo Estado».

Recorde-se que Miguel Gonçalves disse, quando foi apresentando pelo Governo como embaixador do programa Impulso Jovem, que se um jovem com 20 anos não consegue arranjar 100 euros por mês para pagar os estudos, «vai ter muitos problemas na vida, porque até a vender pipocas se arranja 100 euros por mês».

Segundo Inês Barbosa, este tipo de discurso, que «esquece as milhares de pessoas desempregadas e as que abandonam o país por falta de recursos», não é só propalado na praça pública, é algo que está também a «invadir» as universidades e isso «é muito grave».

«É o espírito do capitalismo a falar. Não podemos cair no erro de responsabilizar o indivíduo, dizer que são as pessoas culpadas por tudo o que acontece, que são culpadas do seu estado de desemprego, e desresponsabilizar o Estado disso», referiu.

A este grupo de ativistas juntou o núcleo de Braga do movimento "Que se lixe a troika", que aproveitou para distribuir a convidar para numa reunião, no dia 7 de maio, às 21h30, na Velha-a-Branca, para preparar a manifestação agendada para o dia 1 de junho, em Lisboa, sob o lema "Povos unidos contra a troika".

Figure 11: News published in *Correio do Minho* (regional newspaper, 05/02/2013)

The mobilization appeal had a diminutive effect, with no more than two dozen people meeting, because it was done the day before, but the satire we had prepared had managed to attract some media attention[29] (Figure 11) and the fact that we circulated around the square with the popcorn and the manifesto, talking to people, generated some local impact.

Why street art protest? an (almost) dispassionate analysis

In the year 2011 – "in which we dream dangerously" – Zizek was speaking on a camping field in New York to an immense crowd of Occupy Wall Street protesters: "do not fall in love with yourselves or with the pleasant moment we are having here. Carnivals cost very little, the true test of your value is what remains the next day, or the way our normal everyday life is modified"[30].

It has been more than four years since the first initiatives of the TO Braga. Everything seems already very far away. Written in a celebratory tone, the logbook reflects the "passionate" tone in which was written, without major criticism or dialectical sense, reflects the "passionate" tone with which it was written. With the distance that only time allows, there is now room here for a reflection on the weaknesses, limitations and potentialities of the artistic interventions described above and of the learning, "conscientization" and "intellectual emancipation" (Freire, 1975, 1979) that they provided in individual and in collective terms. To do this, we gathered some excerpts from a focus group held in 2014, with the participation of four members.

The "inescapable energy of the street"

> I think the street interventions are important, it is great to get a sense of the people that are there by a chance, that hear us and some of them even follow us. (A)
>
> The street has this power, the distance is visceral, there's everything is there by your side. (Q)
>
> In Braga really has to be on the street... (J)[31]

In recent years, new possibilities for virtual protest or for political mobilization (hashtags, denunciations in blogs, Facebook, Twitter) have emerged (Luque, Cerdá and Sánchez, 2013). However, despite its limitations – visual, spatial and sound – and its

[29] Some of the published news retrieved from http://www.rtp.pt/noticias/cultura/teatro-do-oprimido-de-braga-oferece-pipocas-para-comemorar-dia-do-trabalhador_a647941

[30] Retrieved from http://blogdaboitempo.com.br/2011/10/11/a-tinta-vermelha-discurso-de-slavoj-zizek-aos-manifestantes-do-movimento-occupy-wall-street/; "The year we dream dangerously", 2011, Editorial Boitempo

[31] Statements registered in focus group interviews, held in 2014.

degree of unpredictability, the street continues configured as a vital space for collective awareness and intervention. Proceeding to a double movement of occupation and opening of the public space (Bogad, 2005, p. 52), street performances allow protagonists to "gain a voice in the public sphere through artistic metaphor" (Mourão, 2013, p. 55) and, at the same time, capture the attention of people who are there by a chance, that can identify and be mobilized. Not being completely reliable, the audience's movements and reactions – laughter, applause, and comments – are a good barometer for measuring the impact of interventions. In a city like Braga, where mobilizations rarely reach a large number of people, it is of major importance the use of performative tools in times of protest, breaking this way some silences and giving meaning to social and political participation.

The urgency and context fluctuations

> One of the things that was positive in this work (Exchange Salazar for Troika) was to have more time to work, to prepare, to research (...) to consolidate what is being done (...) and the spontaneous actions work because they need to exist, they are urgent (...) but it made me think that they needed more strength, because in one or another, I felt that it happened and right after was blown by the wind. (Q)
>
> At that point they made perfect sense. It was a time when there were several manifestations, that was the moment for those interventions. (J)
>
> Both forms are important. There are moments that has to be *now*. (T)[32]

This *now* reflected the urgency that was lived at the time, the succession demonstrations and the atmosphere was of an uproar. Interventions were often prepared from one day to the next. The emphasis was more on the action itself than on what we wanted to say with it or how we related to the topic. As a rule, this type of intervention does not involve rehearsals, "presenting nearly always with unique performances" and a way of not losing strength (Mourão, 2013, p. 63). However, this urgency occasionally caused feelings of incompleteness: "that moved people, but lacked dialogue and feedback. Sometimes I find myself tempted to enter into a wave of "agit-prop", to provoke something immediate in the streets and in people, but in reality, it is not enough."(Logbook, 02/03/2013). Another obvious aspect is the influence of fluctuations of the national and European social and political context: when people were motivated, the energy rose, when the mobilization faded, our intervention was diminished or interrupted.

Symbolic language, humor and irony

> The image does not give too much information "transmits something that

[32] Statements registered in focus group interviews, held in 2014.

> forces us to decode, to read it ... (A)
>
> The word is a rational process, while the image is much more emotional, more subjective. We have to do it ourselves. And each one sees things differently. (J)
> The word is much more limited (Q)
>
> When we use the word we are bound to certain concepts and meanings, the image and the sound are absorbed more quickly. (T)[33]

The work of constructing-deconstructing the image it is here highlighted as a fundamental element for the audience to appropriate and construct their own meanings. As Boal (2009, pp. 88-89) wrote, "words are so powerful that when we hear them, we obliterate our senses through which, without them, we would perceive the signs of the world more clearly. Their understanding is slow because they need to be decoded; sensations are of immediate perception". The role of humor "to speak of serious things", "not in a moralistic way", "that kind of thing that does not scare anyone" (GF) is also highlighted by the group, as well as the irony or sarcasm that "may surprise people and stimulate reflection", impelling them to do an "interpretative work" (Bogad, 2005, p. 53). One of the most repeated goals in the description of performances – showing people behind numbers – is also made possible by theatrical language, by materializing what is abstract, by uncovering what remains invisible, what "overuse" stopped creating any emotion (Boal 1977 p. 71). This process occurs not only externally, but also within the group. The exercise of thinking about how the crisis affects our body, what would be the image of the Troika, the sound of debt or the rhythm of austerity[34] allows us to question our experiences with what we are told, giving it our own meaning, (re) constructing the meanings on subjects that concern us: unemployment, emigration, precariousness. Doing it collectively allows us to find dominant thoughts and emotions that can devastate us or, on the other hand, it can help us to find common points and spaces of resistance. Referring to the theatre-image, Bogad reinforces how he can "bring people together in a common space, to express and develop creatively, nonverbally and dialogically their perceptions of the world, power structures and oppressions." (2005, p. 49). Therefore, these strategies "not only awaken the conscience but also the bodies for political action" (Delgado, 2013, p. 69).

Emotions and collective consciousness

> There is an awareness of ourselves, but the fact that you belong to one group also creates a collective consciousness ... and of the other. (Q)

[33] Statements registered in focus group interviews, held in 2014.

[34] These theatre-image exercises were done during the workshops "Images and sounds of the crisis" or "Youth, work and future"" held in various parts of the country and inspiring part of the group's initiatives.

> I feel that the TO helped me indirectly, to feel more integrated in the city (...) in the community. (J)

> I also see the group like a group of friends (...) I know I can count on each one of them. And this cherishes. (Q)[35]

The emotions that emerge from participating in a protest and by getting involved in a group, play a relevant role, but for a long time they were absent from the studies on the dynamics of social movements. Enthusiasm, hope, trust or indignation, impotence and resignation are present in the various phases and in all aspects of the protest and it can be means, ends or the combination of the two, can keep people in a certain movement or it can make them walk away. Identity or collective consciousness is not only the sharing of common values or goals, but also an emotion, affection, and loyalty towards group members (Jasper, 2011). Although the TO militancy is intermittent and many people collaborated only in an isolated, specific way, at the end of the actions, a sense of community, identity, "affective solidarity" and "feelings of collective agency" always stood out. (Bogad, 2005, p. 52; Juris, 2014, p. 242). The "political emotion" provoked by the activist performances thus serves as "social awareness and mobilization" both of those who participate in it and of those who attend it (Mourão, 2013, p. 54).

The protest-party and the risks of political un-framing

> People (including us) are fed up with speeches and trade union slogans, doesn't say anything to them and doesn't add anything. This type of direct intervention has a completely different impact; people get involved, review themselves and feel that we are talking about something that is close to them. (Logbook, 14/11/2012)

This excerpt expresses the difficult relationship with other political actors and with the language produced by them. Referring to the "intrinsic performativity" of the organized demonstrations by the parties and unions, Soares (2013, p. 9) stresses "hierarchical decisions", "chromatic and iconic unity of posters", "repetition of a small repertoire of slogans", "monotony of rhythm", "rigorous organization of the parade" and "rigid delimitation of space and time", which aims at "ideological unification", "promoting uniformity" and "leaving little room for individual action". In the same line, Mourão (2013, pp. 40-43) points to "predictability" and "loss of vitality" and "impact" of these demonstrations, as opposed to "freedom of action", "plurality of voices", "disruptive performativities of the usual order" and "less domesticated force of actors that go to the street" in the protests convened by the new/extremely new social movements.

If it is true that the repertoire of action of parties and trade unions present features that go in this direction, we cannot fail to reflect on the tendency of arrogance and

[35] Statements registered in focus group interviews, held in 2014.

prejudice towards these political actors. This arrogance, which, in addition to not having gained us much more than a "carnival", did not allow us to establish solid bridges with them, losing an opportunity to learn from their modes of organization, their strategies, their capacity mobilization, organization, leadership and loyalty of militants. In a post-political era, with a tendency towards aestheticization of social struggles, of widespread disbelief towards the institutions of representative democracy (Delgado, 2013), this was perhaps one of the greatest learning experiences of the group. The dilemma expressed in one of the descriptions of the protests – "we are not artists, we are activists" – reveals, in part, the concern and willingness to overlap ends with means: art is the tool and the goal is political intervention.

Aesthetic criticism and social criticism: the theatre of the oppressed and the expansion of the public space

In the US, during the Occupy, store windows were decorated in a way to simulate broken glass, depicting the riots of the proteters; Ché Guevara's t-shirts are sold in a prolix way, and to advertise their products many brands invoke the revolution. For Krause (2011) art has been at the service to the liberal market, the language of resistance it has been co-opted by corporations and advertising agencies and only an "artistically radical" project, closely linked to a "politically radical" project, can prevent this from happening. Defending that art should come under the control of people and communities, the author argues that art must be decentralized, politicized and democratized, accompanying and nourishing a process of social transformation.

If, on the one hand, in the course of the anti-austerity protests, we have witnessed the "unusual dynamization of public space" (Ferreira, 2012), where the city is the stage of political struggle and claimed as a collective right (Harvey, 2008), in which the street is a "symbolic place of display of power and contestation", making possible the "reappropriation of public space confiscated and privatized" and configuring "a new relationship between citizens and city" (Antentas & Vivas, 2012, pp. 77-80); on the other, we have witnessed the impoverishment and reduction of the public space, "devoid of antagonisms", through the consolidation of a "single thought" about the crisis and the austerity policies (Cardina, 2012; Monteiro, 2011).

In the examples of TO initiatives, the public space – as a place of encounter and contestation, as a social experience and the creation of a collective identity (Mateus, 2011) – was the place chosen for the production and dissemination of its criticisms. The actions carried several criticisms of capitalism, deployed in a critique of austerity policies as an ideological program; criticism of using the economic crisis as a form of blackmail and as a pretext for the destruction of the Social State; critical to the entrepreneurship speech as a banner of individualism and panacea for all evils; critical to the restructuring of work presented as inevitable; critical to the social division of politics, which gives to some the opportunity to intervene and to others the "opportunity" to follow. In this respect, we hypothesize that the TO experience articulates and interpellates the two critical

registers that Boltanski and Chiapello define as aesthetic criticism and social criticism, both of which are fruitful to understand and act in these two tendencies – of dynamization and reduction – of space public.

In *O novo espírito do capitalismo* [The New Spirit of Capitalism], these authors sustain that the sources of indignation that historically have fueled criticism have remained more or less the same over the last two centuries. They are of four orders: capitalism as a source of disenchantment and inauthenticity; as a source of oppression; as a source of misery and inequalities and as a source of opportunism and selfishness. Aesthetic criticism rests above all on the first two sources of indignation, drawing attention to standardization and generalized commodification, and social criticism relies more on the other two. In general, criticism tends to privilege one of those sources, developing the argumentation around it.

In the 1960/70s, aesthetic criticism and social criticism were associated, characterized by two sets of claims: on the side of social criticism, the reduction of exploitation and social inequalities, the consolidation of state security arrangements and the stronger representation of wage earners in the state; on the side of aesthetic criticism, denunciation of the conservatism of institutions and the abolition of domestic forms of patriarchal domination; and, in a particular way, criticism of the state, considered a servant of capitalism and an apparatus of exploitation and oppression. In this juncture of May 68, youth movements demanded freedom and autonomy, spontaneity, authenticity and creativity, coexisting with a demand for freedom and autonomy (aesthetic criticism) and a requirement of security (social criticism), expressed with intensity of labor movements in the early 1970s, claiming economic and social rights. The new capitalism that has begun to form since then has relied in a large extent on aesthetic criticism, incorporating anti-hierarchical denunciations and aspirations for autonomy expressed previously, especially in youth manifestations. Thus, from the 1980s, capitalism eagerly benefited from the weakening of criticism.

The TO Braga activist experience denounces capitalism from social criticism, that is, as a source of oppression and inequalities, focusing mainly on materialist issues (work and employment), but articulates, as a strategy and also content, with aesthetics criticism: in the form of organization of the group, in the spontaneous way of concretizing actions, in the use of artistic language and by focusing on aspects relegated to second place in social criticism: the "dreams" swallowed up by the monster of the crisis; the personal cases of those with "hands tied"; the replacement of the numbers of the crisis by human bodies; or the utopian evocation of better worlds and societies. This denunciation and critique of capitalism and its consequences – particularly in the world of work – it is not done without contradictions. The simultaneous demand for "guarantees and autonomy" required by the youth of May 1968 is very visible today. If, on the one hand, one of the main "sources of indignation" of the group (and of youth in general) is directed at the precariousness, castrating of projects of life in the short and long term; on the other hand, the "established jobs" occupied by the previous generation are often refuted by a youth who balances between the claim of freedom and security. This aspect

cannot fail to be taken into account in the processes of collective action and its systematic study in several disciplinary areas.

The collective action reported in this work, as an artistic and political experience, has proved to be a possible form of expansion and dynamization of the public space, for several reasons: for centering the analysis of reality on its contradictions; because it allows politicizing the life in common; for serving as an instrument of popular auscultation; for making the invisible visible; for helping to deconstruct dominant myths and thoughts; for using satire, metaphor and humor to denounce forms of manipulation. However, its strength lies in the articulation with other strategies, never as an end in itself (Juris, 2014). At least within the TO Braga group, the activist experience produced a sense of affective solidarity, resistance and rebellion, which helped to erase fear and reject fatalism strategically fueled by austerity measures.

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