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This article derives from the author's PhD thesis, "The city as a stage: the urban center as locus of the contemporary theatrical experience", defended in 2005. (Cardoso, 2005, p. 263 - 274)

*With this majestic action, Getúlio Vargas is saying that politics includes tragedy as an indispensable reference? Would he want to play that whoever wants to sacrifice for his people has to be capable of a tragic act in order to not to be a false prophet? This palace is real, the actors and the spectators are flesh and blood, this fable happened, but all this now is the theatre. In 1954, on the true night of August 24, the characters lived minute by minute this tragedy; so it was also theatre. The theatre only reveals the tragic dimension of politics. Outside the palace, Brazil is still the same piece. Aderbal Freire Filho, winter of 1991" (Freire-Filho, 1991, our translation).*

In his second term as mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Marcello Alencar (1989, p. 92) invited the writer Carlos Eduardo Novaes to be his Secretary of Culture. The position was initially accumulated by the Deputy Mayor and journalist Roberto D'Avila and then exercised by the writer and former president of RIOARTE, Gerardo de Mello Mourão. Faced with a dramatic picture of bankruptcy of the prefecture, as an inheritance of the previous administration, the mayor gathered in the same secretariat three distinct areas. At the beginning of 1990, therefore, Novaes assumed a supersecretariat - the Secretary of Culture, Tourism and Sports of the Municipality.

But, on the other hand, it should be noted that the transformation of the Secretariat of Education and Culture into the Secretariat of Culture, Tourism and Sports, already pointed to signs of changes in government guidelines, accompanied by a new political vision about culture. As a typical Rio de Janeiro-born, Novaes wanted to impress on the secretariat a more popular character in his only passage in public administration. There was a concern, at the time, with the actions of government that were being implemented not only in the cultural area, but also in other fields of action of the municipality. With only two years to go, Marcello Alencar sought to intensify a policy of preservation of the natural and built environment, in order to build a new image for the city and, at the same time, to strengthen the cultural identity of the carioca.

In this year of municipal elections, what was at stake, in fact, was the strategic role of the secretary of culture. Coveted as a public agency that housed activities of symbolic value, the secretariat had already been used at a growing pace to give greater visibility to the achievements of municipal public management. And one of the main objectives of the organ was to try to develop activities that could cover diverse layers of the local population, besides the Brazilian visitor and, above all, the foreigner. It was from this angle that Novaes saw no reason to refuse an innovative proposal from the Museum of the Republic, inviting the city to participate in the commemorations of the remembrance day of the death of Getúlio Vargas, in the premises of the old Catete Palace.

The initial idea came from the director of the Museum of the Republic, Helena Severo, who wished to value and develop more cultural activities in the old Palace of Catete<sup>1</sup>, in the sense of providing more vitality to the place, to make it more dynamic in its relationship with the city. Or, as Choay says, "it is necessary to remove it from its own inertia to make it more consumable, since it is considered insufficient for personal appropriation." For that, it would be necessary to create an urban and theatrical fact that would allow a refreshing of that environment, still very marked by the suicide of Getúlio Vargas.<sup>2</sup> Helena first contacted Culture Secretary Carlos Eduardo Novaes to see if the city would be interested in participating in the project. Aderbal Freire-Filho was then invited to direct the event, still in preparation at this time.

That was in 1991. Getúlio committed suicide in 1954; it was not even a very special date (...) But Helena Severo was very impressed that the Catete Palace was still very much connected to Getúlio. (...) Helena wanted to exorcise that ghost. The initial idea was to do something in Getúlio's room and perhaps still another place in the palace. She and Novaes had thought about

adapting some scene from Rubem Fonseca's novel, 'Agosto'. That is where my contribution began, in this phase of definition of what to do (Lopes, 1999, p. 170, our translation).

In this specific case, the museum tends to be a play-place, insofar as it represents itself through theatrical action. But there was interest in playing it at a more favourable angle, suppressing the weight of a historical fact which happened within it, through a playful play with time, in an attempt to reveal another dimension of the monument as 'place of remembrance', defended by Banu (Banu, 1987, p. 236). A dimension that would allow a more poetic interpretation of its architecture, its decorative elements, its ambience. As the scenographer Nicky Rieti (Rieti, 1979) states, "the place is incapable of lying, because loaded with the weight of things and the marks of history, it escapes from the domain of the illusory and satisfies this irrepressible requirement." On the other hand, this proposal of the museum as a theatrical place also suggests the concept of *mise-en-scène*, posited by Choay (2001, p. 215), who in this specific case appears even more the idea of a staging inserted in another staging.

In this sense, it is revealed how strong the power of theatrical language is, demonstrated by Roubine (1998), that is, how theatrical staging can exert its aesthetic and political fascination whenever requested. However, the question that seems to emerge most strongly from this theatrical fact and, at the same time, political fact is that behind an unusual and innovative spectacle, as it was foreseen at the time, there was also the interest not only to popularize and publicize the museum, but also to mark the administration of a federal public body. In this case, it is necessary to question the extent to which a symbolic event, such as this one, may have contributed equally to the political ascent of Helena Severo, in its trajectory by the different instances of the public power.<sup>3</sup>

*At the time, I had just finished writing 'Lampião, rei diabo do Brasil'. I was very happy with the text, which I thought was very good, well done. From the dramaturgical point of view, it contained everything I think necessary for contemporary theatre, leaving the limited spaces of the usual Brazilian dramaturgy. And I wanted to continue this work. I remember that in the second or third meeting, I had already said that I wanted to write, and they had agreed (...). Carlos Eduardo Novaes was going to be the co-author of the text, and I was enthusiastic about the idea. That's how it all started ( Lopes, 1999, p. 173, our translation).*

Resuming the conception and preparation of the event, Novaes and Freire-Filho drew a first script, that was developed by the two until transformed into the text that served as base for the spectacle. The CDCE actors<sup>5</sup> were invited to do the play, along with guest actors. These invited actors were artists already known to the general public, especially for their work on television. According to Bernardes (2004), the actors at the centre were very young and not old enough to make the main characters in the story.

By opting for a work of exchanging between the theatre with the television, which for Dort (1988, p. 59) would represent a much greater risk to the theater, Freire-Filho seems to be aware of what he really wanted with this approach. The cast of the play was further complemented by the presence of a soprano and three musicians. The event was originally scheduled to be presented in nine performances, and in just one week. With the success already expected, the spectacle turned into a public phenomenon with an initial season of three months, which stretched then to six, then a year, until completing about two years of presenting.

I remember going to the museum and the play was born from architecture and history. I would go there and watch and write a scene thinking about that space in that place, the details of that environment (Dort, 1988, p. 59, our translation).

"The shot that changed history" is the kind of scenario that leaves in memory the feeling of being inside a movie set, watching a movie that is being shot at that moment. Curiously, this theatrical experience was not separate from the everyday scene that happened on the street, in the environment surrounding the museum. It seemed as to be in front of an event that could be interrupted at any moment and that risk, intentional or not, was part of the event. In addition, audiences could take advantage of not only watching the scenes, but also feeling involved in them, of being in a kind of 'theatre-movie', represented in a 'memory museum' that was a real scenario and at the same time fictitious.



**Fig. 1.** The actors Paulo José (Oswaldo Aranha) and Cláudio Marzo (Getúlio Vargas) stand in the foreground in the ministerial hall, with audience watching from inside the : Museum of the Republic, 1991. Source: Personal archive A. C. Bernardes (Media: video tape).



**Fig. 2.** The actor Emiliano Queiroz receives the audience at the Entrance Hall , before starting the meeting scene in the Ministerial Hall. Source: Personal archive A. C. Bernard (video tape).

*"There I did interesting things and had a lot of fun doing them. For example, in the last scene, Novaes had suggested that we keep the audience outside and hear a gunshot, then the door would open and the public found Getúlio dead. So, I said, 'No Novaes, the suicide scene is the most important and we cannot avoid writing this scene.' He would say, 'But you do not have any documents, no information on that.' And I would say, 'which is better, because that's where I really can invent'. In the others I invented little because I had a lot of historical registers, but this one had no, so I could do whatever I wanted, and so, I wrote that scene" (Freire-Filho, 2005).*

Freire-Filho, explores the emotional and sensitive order of the spectator in relation to the specificity of space, its historical meaning, its memory. The director does not dispense the frontal layout of the Italian scene, such as those of the grand staircase, for example. However, it may be noted that the director uses during most of the spectacle a Elizabethan configuration, releasing the illusion of purely visual order, including the audience in the space of action and inviting them to participate in the scene as spectator. In this case, stage and room share the same architectural space. The Museum's architecture<sup>6</sup> and decoration<sup>7</sup> inspire feelings and perceptions that allow the spectator to feel in the same world of the spectacle and the historical plot, above all. Instead of hiding the elements that give weight and carry the museum's internal ambiance, or even punctuate only a few elements with lighting, Freire-Filho openly explored that baroque universe to engage the spectator even more in the scenic game.



**Fig. 3.** At the entrance of the MR the audience is received by the "hostess" Ana Barroso, who invites them to penetrate the historical moment of the staging. Source: Personal C. Bernardes (Media: video tape).



**Fig. 4.** The scene portrays the meeting held in the ministerial hall with all ministers present at dawn on August 24, 1954, prior to Vargas' suicide. Source: Personal Archive Bernardes (Media: video tape).

The climbing up of the public through the various floors of the museum establishes a complicity between space and time within the plot, where this union of time with a course traced in space, by walking inside the museum and, at the same time, through the pages of history. From a story tempered by illusion, memory and reality. As well Lopes analyzes (1999, p. 170 - 181, our translation):

*Once inside the museum, the viewer is watching a succession of scenes and understanding the play as the unfolding of a plot. Even giving signs to the public that all that is past, that what has already occurred, is history, the event establishes the theatrical play for the viewer to participate in the story. (...) The public, when climbing, is approaching the crime scene: Getúlio's room. The succession of scenes and sites seems to be guiding them to the well-known and expected outcome.*

It is worth remembering that the play was assembled in less than three weeks and, as it was about thirty actors, the texts were rather short to facilitate very little rehearsal time. Entering a little behind the scenes of the play, in order to understand a little about the conditions of this production, the cast was rehearsed at different hours during the week and, in the meantime, the costumes and props were produced along with other elements of the preparation of the play.



**Fig. 5.** Initial scene represented in the gardens of the MR, with the actresses Ana Luisa Cardoso, Ana Gueiger and Paula Feitosa (the deities). In an allusion to the witches Shakespeare. Source: Personal Archives A. C. Bernardes (Media: video tape).



**Fig. 6.** Meeting of Getúlio with Death, in the Hall of Mirrors with the actor Cláudio Marzo (Getúlio), the actress Gisele Fróes (the death) and actresses of the CDCE (the Muses) Personal Archive A. C. Bernardes (Media: video tape).

It was the semiology of architecture meeting the semiology of theater. From this point of view, the museum perfectly assumes its stage role.

Carrying the analyzes of the bourgeois theater for this experience inside the museum, Boyer (1998, p. 123, our translation), points to the influence of the environment in the staging and states:

*The focus' center is directed to the whole ensemble and not just to the scenic stage, so the auditorium, the balconies, the entrance halls, and the elegant staircases represented specific roles in the bourgeois spectacle of commerce and enterprise.*

It was the museum's own space, its possibility as a scenic space that inspired much of the scenes. The architecture of the museum, its ambiance, its marks were fundamental for the elaboration of the dramatic play. Some scenes were born from a modelled frame in some wall of this museum-theatre, the staircases that go back to the Italian stage, the table of meals or meetings, the lamps that refer to the urban lighting of the streets of the city. The scenery was practically ready and with all the details. Therefore, the scenes were born of the exploration of that baroque ambiance, marked by a political tragedy.



**Fig. 7.** Scene with the actor Paulo José (Oswaldo Aranha) representing lying on the staircase of the MR, demonstrates the total exploration of space by the director. Source: Archive A. C. Bernardes (Media: video tape).



**Fig. 8.** Final scene with the actor Cláudio Marzo (Getúlio), the actress Kiki Lavigne (the girl) and the soprano Ivonet Rigot-Müller accompanied by the musicians, composes the climate for the scene of the suicide. Source: Personal Archive A. C. Bernardes (Media: video tape).

In the Catete Palace, Freire-Filho sought to explore the inner spatiality of the rooms and outside the gardens. A walk that began in the gardens and passed through several rooms and halls of the Palace, until reaching the room of the suicide of Getúlio. In a scene where the public watched from above and overseeing Oswald Aranha extended on the steps of the stairs, it is possible to observe the alternatives of using the space of the museum as an open stage.

In the play about Getúlio, there were more assets. There is a game that, for me, has always been the subject of my conversations about Catete's Palace: about what can be real and what is fantasy, what is real and what is fiction. There is little difference between the real and the false and the real and the false of the theater. What is strong is: what is real is false, in Catete Palace. For example, Getúlio's bed is real, the room where he killed himself is real and his death is false. So, in the Getúlio, this I explored much more. The meeting table was the meeting table. It was already pure theatricality (Kosovski, 2001, p. 315, our translation).

In *The Shot that Changed History*, the play invites the public to walk inside the Museum of the Republic, presenting the history of the president's last moments, through scenes that run through the halls, the staircase and the corridors of the old Catete Palace. What seems to be more important to highlight about this play is the proposal to lead the public on a journey through time, narrating a story that mixes moments of fiction and reality in a space marked by a dreamlike atmosphere that is related to its imposing architectural work and interior charged with history.



**Fig. 9.** The shooting scene with actor Cláudio Marzo staging Getúlio Vargas' suicide in a poetic freedom of Freire-Filho as the end of the play. Source: Personal Archive A. C. B (Media: video tape).



**Fig. 10.** The public at the end of the play with the descent of the whole cast of the play, demonstrates one of the configurations of this rich space explored by the director. Source: Personal Archive A. C. Bernardes (Media: video tape).

The interior decoration of the Catete Palace presented itself as a fitting setting for the tragedy of a national myth, where unreal time also refers to an atmosphere of celebration, hedonism, pure pleasure, lived in festivities, banquets, social meetings, in the frivolous life that the high society developed, in a time of representation of the individual wealth. This Palace is a typical example of the reversal of values. In the nineteenth century, private buildings, or palaces, would be converted into symbols of the state. And this was only possible because, since its construction, the palace was not part of the culture of the Empire. Such a construction represented a culture that foreshadowed the defeat of the decadent aristocracy, supplanted by the wealthy bourgeoisie that ascended to power with the birth of the Republic.



**Fig. 11.** The decorated ceiling of the Ministerial Hall, in the dependencies of the Museum of the Republic, benefits the theatricality desired by the director. Source: Personal Archive A. C. Bernardes (Media: video tape).



**Fig. 12.** The ceiling and chandelier of the Hall of Mirrors set the play and engage the public in the real and fictional climate of history. Source: Personal Archive A. C. Bernardes (Media: video tape).

The Catete Palace, and all that it represented, was appropriated by the Republic as the true symbol of its power, that is, of the power of a new elite. This palatial space was constituted in the past, above all by the art of music, painting and sculpture, which settled in architecture, thus determining the ambience of the place. In this CDCE theatrical production, director Freire-Filho explored all the details contained in the different spaceships of the former Palace-Museum, transforming it temporarily into a scenic space, into a Theater-Museum, combining the place of the theatrical scene with the place of collective memory.

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<sup>1</sup> Formerly known by the name Nova Friburgo Palace, the ancient Catete Palace was the home of Antonio Clemente Pinto, the first Baron of Nova Friburgo, built between 1858-67, a project by the German architect Gustav Waehneltd. In 1897, after a reform coordinated by the engineer Aarão Reis, the seat of the Federal Government is installed in the Palace. With the transfer of the capital to Brasília in 1960, the Palace was transformed into a Museum of the Republic (IPHAN, available at: [http://portal.iphan.gov.br/ans.net/tema\\_consulta.asp?Linha=tc\\_hist.gif&Cod=1767](http://portal.iphan.gov.br/ans.net/tema_consulta.asp?Linha=tc_hist.gif&Cod=1767)). During this period, sixteen presidents directed the country, and some came to reside in the Palace with their families, like Getúlio Vargas for about nineteen years in all.

<sup>2</sup> In 1954 the Vargas government, increasingly supported by the labor movement and with a clear nationalist bent, faced strong opposition from conservative political forces and military sectors who identified with American anti-communism. The main focus of resistance to Vargas politics was found in Carlos Lacerda's "Tribuna da Imprensa" newspaper, which systematically campaigned against the government with the nickname "muddy sea" of corruption. On August 5, 1954, Lacerda suffered an attack in which he was wounded and in which the major of the Air Force Rubens Vaz, who accompanied him, died. The campaign against the government intensified, making the military articulations become more and more open, according to the manifesto of August 23 signed by 27 generals, demanding the resignation of the President. The next day, without being able to obtain military support to remain in office, Vargas committed suicide, leaving a 'Letter of his last will', in which he denounced the forces that had planned his deposition. With the death of Getulio Vargas and the popular commotion that followed him, the political situation underwent a turnaround, frustrating the military coup that was in progress. Vice-President Café Filho was then able to assume power. (Silva, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> After taking the position of director of the museum, Helena Severo was secretary of culture in the first municipal administration of César Maia (1993-1996); then she was secretary of culture in the state government of Antony Garotinho; and later president of the Municipal Theater Foundation of Rio de Janeiro, during the Rosinha Garotinho government.

<sup>4</sup> With the support of BNDES, the play 'Lampião, rei diabo do Brasil' [Lampião, the Devil King of Brazil, translator note] premiered on June 19, 1991, at the Space BNDES by invitation, with only three presentations. On July 23, 1991, the play debuted for the public at the Teatro Gláucio Gill, remaining only four months in play. (Source: CEDOC-FUNARTE).

<sup>5</sup> The Centre for Building and Demolishing of the Spectacle (CDCE) was a theatrical group created by Aderbal in 1989.

<sup>6</sup> In the Catete Palace, the four facades are different, based on the expression of internal functions and the relationship with the urban context. This change appears based on the compositional freedom that comes from the emergence of the so-called Eclecticism, which assimilated and altered the stylistic and compositional elements of the different historical periods. In this case, it has the evident influence of the freedoms of Baroque and Mannerism. (Available at: [www.fau.ufrj.br/prourb/catete/index](http://www.fau.ufrj.br/prourb/catete/index). Accessed: 12 Feb. 2005).

<sup>7</sup> The structure of the decorative system has as a goal maximizing the value of the internal space with the appeal of French references and baroque elements, such as mirrors, paintings, sculptures and ornaments.