

# THEATRICAL ARCHITECTURAL BUILDINGS AND COMMUNITY: TEATRO CONTÊINER MUNGUNZÁ

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Recent set design distances itself from the pictorial two-dimensionality that characterized stage architecture for many years. The three-dimension space in the scene exploration is connected with the modern theatre renovation and it began with Adolphe Appia, who turned the scenic space into a laboratory of possibilities.

Appia refused realism or naturalism and used expressive and symbolic elements of theatre, music and light. He was the first one to use shadows in the stage, creating spaces with more depth and distance, thereby suggesting new theatre lighting concepts (Appia, s/a).

This Swiss theatre director and set designer understood light to be an essential tool in stage's life. For Appia, the dramatic work should be an expression of movement in space; the movable body in space supported by words, sounds and musical rhythmic times that determine the duration of movements. Only in this way could staging be the basis for a work of art. However, the need of arts' emancipation lead artists to leave the conventional places intended for artistic creation and, consequently, to occupy the streets and alternative spaces; becoming closer to the audience and people.

Recently, lots of creators devote themselves to artistic creations taking place in non-conventional spaces. These are different spaces that can be turned into theatrical places, where the artistic shows can be performed.

The architectonic building becomes another dramaturgical element, allowing new possibilities of artistic experimentation in the occupation of scenic space. In João Mendes Ribeiro's words:

*(...) a stage even deprived of any scenographic elements can be an object and inspiration of multiple appropriations. It can make a space of qualified performance, insofar as it allows the audience to project itself, with a huge imaginative freedom, in the absence of scenarios or scenic elements that usually build the sense of what is seen.* (Ribeiro, 2007, pp.84-85)

Thus, we can understand that when the stage action is moved into a non-conventional space the occupation of that space will allow new perspectives regarding the questions presented by the theatrical text, insofar as the architectonic building becomes part of the action.

Thus, the following questions arise: what roles the theatrical architectural buildings have been performing, recently? To what extent the spatial arrangement influences the artistic object creation in contemporaneity, allowing a greater proximity with the audience and how it redefines itself in new functions and by new social actors contributing to the appreciation of the dimension of place. Artistic proposals have exploded in a multiplicity of ways searching for answers to the demands of each time, always in connection with political, economic, social, cultural and technological revolutions (Walter, 1994). For example modern theatre directors have been questioning the function of theatre, so they started researching new possibilities of communication between the stage and the audience, proposing reflections about the spectator's role, what raises a productive attitude concerning the scene.

This issue is ongoing and it is understood as one feature of contemporary theatre



Figure 1. Contêiner Theatre, 2018. Photograph: Victor Lemini

(Desgranges, 2011).

The importance of this new research field is clear and gives relevance to projects whose artistic concerns are allied with ethical and social questions, which allows us to understand that these changes reveal a will to educate and transform in modern artistic creation. It is important to understand these trends in theatre-making as a consequence of the need to communicate and the urgency of finding adequate answers to contemporary issues, through the local and collective construction of spaces of intervention, where the architectonic buildings are regarded as platforms of human-dimension derived from creative processes (Figure 1).

The Mungunzá Contêiner Theatre arises as an exemplary architecture project whose aims are inscribed in the built object for artistic creation in articulation with the community and its territory, such as: the debureaucratization and democratization of access to Art, Culture and Citizenship, through an intensive



Figure 2. Contêiner Theatre, 2018. Photograph: Marco António

programme that mixes artistic, cultural, educational, methodological and academic proposals. It is open to every kind of audience (Figure 2), with popular prices or even for free<sup>1</sup>.

The Mungunzá Contêiner Theatre is a cultural pole and is also used as the head office of Mungunzá company, the creators and developers of project. The building is located in the central region of São Paulo/Santa Ifigênia, in an empty urban depressed space, which gathers marginalized people, such as drug consumers and homeless people. The theatre was built in 2016 through partnerships with Brazilian collectives and foreign architecture students (Figure 3), from institutions as the FAU, Escola da Cidade, Alanus Hochschule für Kunst und Gesellschaft, among others<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Available in: <https://www.ciamungunza.com.br/>

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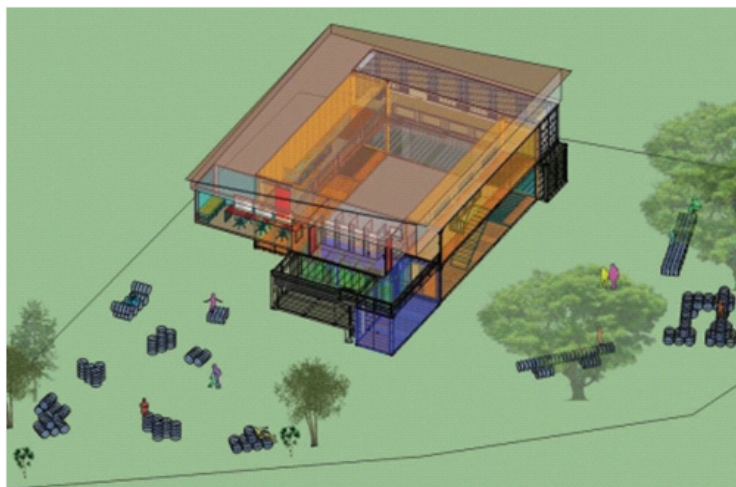


Figure 3. Architectural project of Contêiner Theatre, June 2016. Mungunzá Co. archive

This building is constituted by eleven shipping containers, the stage is flexible and can be used as arena, semi-arena or italian stage. Two containers break the darkness of boxes with glass walls which enable actors and audience to see and to be seen by the people from the street. There is also an office and the dressing rooms with glass walls, which allows the outside audience to watch the construction process of a character before he or she goes on stage (Figure 4).

The spatial division of the Mungunzá Contêiner Theatre provides a more horizontal and human relationship with the spectator. The scenography of many projects staged in this space integrate the pre-existing architectural building, which becomes an integral part of action; it is about one free space, without any set division between the performing space (stage) and the audience, which allows, during the assembly, to determine where the spectators and the actors will be placed.



Figure 4. Contêiner Theatre dressing room, 2018. Photograph: Marco António

The relevance that this project confers on the proposed aims of its creators can be seen in the bar (where vegan and vegetarian meals contribute to decrease the impact on climatic changes, deforestation and pollution). This is an architectural sustainable project that was conceived to reduce the environmental impact, seeing that it's a building which does not produce garbage and reuses objects and natural resources. The building includes translucent glass walls, which allows it to be illuminated by sunlight, contributing to save electricity. Other significant component of the building is its surroundings, a hydroponic vegetable garden (Figure 5), made of reused water, so that the local community is impelled to take care of it and take food home<sup>3</sup>.

According to the history of theatre plays produced by the company, among them the awarded *Luís António Gabriela*, wich received a SHELL award, and *Poema*

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<sup>3</sup> Available in: <https://www.ciamungunza.com.br/>





Figure 5. Hydroponic workshop in Contêiner Theatre, 2019. Mungunzá Theatre Co. archive

*suspensão para cidade em queda*, with a PROAC award, we can understand that the project doesn't just instrumentalize art for other purposes than art. Even that ethical/social concerns are also present in the intervention project of Mungunzá Contêiner Theatre, it becomes more evident for me that the deepest impact in populations that live in isolated or marginalized territories was born from projects whose artistic goals supported the creation of these social actors in interaction with cultural expressions and society. So, the need of exploring different ways in art making arises from this context: think about architectural buildings which promote local social actors aesthetic and symbolic experiences which represent collective experiences that a specific territory is able to appreciate.

*It received 150 thousand people, in only two years, with several activities related to education, art, leisure and social assistance. It was awarded with APCA award, in the "special" category. The project was unanimous among*

*civil society, researchers, the public power and the private sector. The project counts with the support and the partnership of Prefecture of São Paulo – Municipal Culture Secretary<sup>4</sup>.*

### **Final considerations**

This study shows the relevance that a contemporary and ecologically sustainable building has to reaffirm the idea of approximation between culture, community and architecture. The excellence of the mentioned project guarantees a clear view of the humanizing process in the occupation of an architectural building in the reframing of the territory and in the affective creation of interpersonal relationships as a strategy of communication and approximation to community, from an experience which demands an intervention that overtakes the boundaries of artistic creation; therefore, it is urgent to think of architectural buildings which promote, for local social actors, aesthetic, symbolic experiences that represent collective experiences of a certain territory to value.

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<sup>4</sup> Available in: <https://www.ciamungunza.com.br/>



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