

# Talk between Davide Carnevali and Carles Batlle

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DAVIDE CARNEVALI'S BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Playwright, theoretician and translator with a PhD in Performing Arts from the Autonomous University of Barcelona. He lectures on Playwriting and Theory at the Paolo Grassi academy in Milan and leads workshops in different theatres and institutions in Europe and Latin America. His plays have received many awards and have been translated into 13 languages.

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**Carles Batlle:** I have the pleasure of introducing Davide Carnevali, probably one of the most international Italian playwrights today. His impeccable career as a playwright is complemented by a remarkable theoretical interest. Some years ago Carnevali did his doctoral thesis in Barcelona (on the former IT and UAB Performing Arts Doctoral Programme). We talk to him on the occasion of the publication of the research work *Forma dramàtica y representació del mundo en el teatro europeo contemporáneo* by the Institut del Teatre and the Mexican publishing house Paso de Gato.

I'll make a brief introduction before dealing with the subject... Davide Carnevali trained in theatre in Italy. Later, he moved to Barcelona, where he completed his studies in the framework of the Performing Arts Doctoral Programme under professors such as José Sanchis Sinisterra and Hans-Thies Lehmann. Also, at the start of the international courses at the Obrador de la Sala Beckett, he attended seminars conducted by playwrights such as Martin Crimp, Biljana Srbljanović, John von Dörfel or, more recently, Simon Stephens. The play that brought him international fame was *Variacions sobre el model de Kraepelin*. It received an award at the Theatertreffen in Berlin in 2009, won the Riccione Prize in 2009 – the national award for new playwriting in Italy – and has been staged in countries such as Argentina, France, Estonia and Romania, and was premiered at the Sala Beckett in Barcelona. Carnevali's plays have been translated into more than ten languages and include: *Sweet Home Europa*, premiered at the Schauspielhaus Bochum in 2012; *Retrat de dona àrab que mira el mar*, which in 2013 received the Riccione Award again; and *Actes obscens en espai públic*, based on Pasolini's *Theorem* and premiered last year (2017) at the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya directed by Albert Arribas. A few years ago, he edited a book on Catalan contemporary playwriting with plays by Lluïsa Cunillé, Victoria Szpunberg, Jordi Galceran and also one of mine for the Italian publisher Gran Via. Carnevali has also translated plays by Josep Maria Benet i Jornet into Italian.

Finally, he forms part of the Writing Board of the Sala Beckett's journal (*Pausa.*) and of the Institut del Teatre journal *Estudis Escènics*.

Hi Davide and welcome. Some years ago Anna Pérez Pagès interviewed you for (*Pausa.*). Among others, she asked you two questions that I believe are worth repeating, perhaps because with time I suspect the answer may have changed: "Where do you place yourself in the European panorama as a playwright?" and "How do you assess the relationship between theoretical training and practice in playwriting?"

**Davide Carnevali:** First of all, thank you for inviting me. It's an honour to be here. I've trained here, and Carles was my first professor. For me, meeting local people and having access to plays and theoretical texts has been very important because at that time in Italy the publication of these texts was quite limited and contemporary drama was not so widely disseminated. In fact, I discovered interesting European contemporary playwriting thanks to Carles, who lent me plays such as Martin Crimp's *Attempts on her Life* or Caryl Churchill's *Far Away*. A world I wasn't familiar with opened up to me, which is why I decided to spend a few years here in Barcelona. Later Hans-Thies Lehmann taught a course in the doctoral programme that Carles had also begun. Moreover, at that time many German productions arrived in the city, when Àlex Rigola was director of the Teatre Lliure. Thanks to Barcelona I understood that German drama was worth discovering. I went to Berlin to complete my training but the essential part was here, at the Institut del Teatre, the journal (*Pausa.*) and the Obrador de la Sala Beckett. In fact, what interested me was the relationship, which existed here but was not so common in Italy, between theory and practice. At that moment in all the artistic activities of the Sala Beckett, in the playwriting cycles — Schimmelpfennig, Crimp —, you could see all the productions and listen to the plays if there was a dramatised reading, but the playwrights also attended and you could talk or do a course with them. Theoretical documentation was produced based on the plays, and I have always found this very interesting. I have always followed this model: to be both a creator and a theoretician of what I created. I think that these two things have nourished each other and have been essential for me. The plays that helped me develop a career as a playwright — *Variacions sobre el model de Kraepelin* and *Sweet Home Europa* — were the result of the need to research a theoretical problem in practice: the de-structuring of contemporary drama. Meanwhile, I was studying and trying to apply the theory I was learning to dramatic or non-dramatic creation. This helped me a lot. One thing that perhaps has less to do with our artistic world but more with ourselves as people in general is the need to immerse yourself in those new things you discover. And I thought there were interesting things underway here; and in Berlin and Buenos Aires, which are the cities I've lived in at some moments of my life. In short, everything I do is closely linked to an approach to reality that obliges you to leave your comfort zone. This is important.

**CB:** Yes, I don't think that we can understand your work without the theoretical reflection that drives it; and, similarly, playwriting experimentation creates conflicts and difficulties that require reflection. And sometimes you complete all this with an educational activity.

**DC:** Hence the need to test myself as a teacher. After having learnt and studied so much, trying to explain these things and teach courses also helps you to nourish the reflection. When you have the need to convey information, you become aware of creating a discourse. But we must not forget that there is something artificial about discourse. It is the "artificialisation" of an experience; a formalisation of the experience that, while helping you to convey it also locks it in a defined form. And this means that we miss some things and we need to question again...

**CB:** Let's talk about the book and focus on the title. Why "dramatic form" and why "representation of the world"? There is an important relationship not only between dramatic form and representation of the world but also between fable — the concept of story —, dramatic form and representation of the world. I'll read a bit to orient us:

Una buena forma de definir fábula podría ser la siguiente: el conjunto de los acontecimientos que integran una historia en su relación y sucesión, dispuestos de acuerdo con ciertas reglas estructurales para formar un todo unificado y coherente en cuanto al cumplimiento de la acción y su sentido. La fábula aristotélica es concebida de acuerdo con aquellos mismos parámetros derivados de la lógica clásica a través de los cuales podemos leer e interpretar la realidad.<sup>1</sup>

The same parameters with which we build the fable help interpret reality:

Esta coincidencia de reglas entre la construcción e interpretación de la fábula y la construcción e interpretación de lo real es la que justifica la homología estructural entre la forma dramática y nuestra imagen del mundo y, por tanto, la que fundamenta el paralelismo drama-vida.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, the fable — the foundation and the classical structure of the story — helps us to understand the world. But what happens when the way we understand the world can't be based on the idea of progress, or of causality, or of end (which are ideas related to story)? If the dramatic form helps express the world or we understand or build the world thanks to the dramatic form, what happens when this link enters into crisis? I think that here we have one of the first questions that the title suggests, but we can go even further.

1. A good way of defining fable may be as follows: the set of events that make up a story, arranged according to some structural rules to form a unified and coherent whole in terms of accomplishment of the action and its meaning. The Aristotelian fable is conceived in keeping with those same parameters derived from the classical logic through which we can read and interpret reality.

2. This coincidence of rules between the construction and interpretation of the fable and the construction and interpretation of the real justifies the structural homology between dramatic form and our image of the world and, therefore, underpins the drama-life parallelism.

Peter Szondi used to say that until the late 19th century the timeless form of drama adapted to the contents of each moment, of each period. In other words, that there is an ahistorical form, a fixed form, that somehow reproduces the outline of the story or drama. At the turn of the century there was a crisis of drama. The new contents — let's think of the avant-gardes, symbolism, naturalism, expressionism, etc. — need new forms. There must be a new dialectic between form and content. Beyond this idea, the thesis provided by your book is that these contents, despite the rupture they may involve, are always expressed rationally. Thus, although, on the one hand, we must break the classical form of drama to adapt to the new contents, on the other, it seems clear that we are unable to move on from a historical conception of reality. In conclusion, it is necessary to take yet another step; to grasp the dialectic between form and content as an organic whole that must be connected with the vision of reality expressed by the form. We can't write without facing the world. There must be a dialectical relationship between writing and the vision of the world. But, how can we fight — if we must fight — against our tendency to understand, interpret life, reality, as a story: as a thing that begins and ends and that has a project, a progress, an evolution, some objectives, an end, a causality? It's frustrating. We know that we have an incomprehensible reality — or very complicated to understand —, but we find it hard to resist the impulse to interpret it dramatically. How can we overcome this?

**DC:** We must accept this frustration. It's cruel, as Artaud said. Should we fight? Should we not fight? It depends on what we want, on whether we are interested in analysing reality or more interested in living reality without the need to formalise it in a defined form. The book is born out of this question. For me, it was fundamental to re-develop Szondi's entire theory and see how I could go further based on dramaturgic experiences that Szondi, of course, did not know about because they emerged in the last twenty-five years and are highly related to the de-structuring of the logical form of reality. All Szondi's and Hegel's problematics — because what Szondi really does is to resume Hegel's aesthetics in the concept of drama that emerged in the Renaissance as an expression of human relations between subjects — were limited to the field of logic, as is normal in the Hegelian concept of philosophy, which is the apotheosis of Western logic. So, what comes later? I am influenced by my readings of postmodern philosophy — Lyotard, Baudrillard, Foucault —, which helped me immensely to start thinking about a different idea of reality and a vision of the world. How can all this be translated into playwriting practice? Well, by starting to “fight” against the concept of story. When I speak of story today I mean a logical formalisation of experience. It is clear that in some moments of our political and social history the concept of “story” has helped us a lot. It doesn't mean it is useless and that we must forget it. But the very idea of understanding reality diverts from what life experience is. Life experience is not related to intellectual formalisation, it is

something else. Any intellectual operation we apply to reality is an abuse of reality itself and ourselves. In this respect, I am interested in the theatre experiences of theorists such as Artaud and John Cage or all 20th century experiences that are defined as alternatives to dramatic or text-based theatre. But I was interested in doing it from the text because I am mainly a playwright. I was interested in de-structuring the very concept of drama, based on drama, not based on an alternative that overlooks drama. The concept of fable is the main concept for undertaking this operation. The fable is, in fact, the logical construct underpinning drama, and therefore in order to address this idea of drama as a logical formalisation of the world it was necessary to address the fable, and above all, the Aristotelian concept of the arrangement of events – the logical, chronological and causal arrangement of events. Plays such as *Variacions sobre el model de Kraepelin* or *Sweet Home Europa* are based on this, on this need to challenge story, the very concept of story, and also the concept of memory, and see how any memory is an artificial construct of our past. It has helped me a lot to be interested in mathematical, physics and quantum physics questions (assuming that I don't know anything about mathematics, my approach is not at all theoretical-mathematical but philosophical or intellectual). If you study quantum physics you finally see that there is no past or future. There are events that occur and that we arrange at our convenience to make statistical analyses of reality.

**CB:** There is a whole chapter in the book in which, against this idea of time as a project, as evolution “towards”, as linear time with an idea of end, you speak extensively of the philosophy of history and temporality in Walter Benjamin. Benjamin theorises that there is the possibility of re-reading the past, to approach events from the past and address them as events that, as they are updated, exist again: if we relate it to the aforementioned scientific theories, perhaps we can understand that time is not a thing that happens linearly but is always simultaneous. The theorists of the aesthetic of reception are inspired by Benjamin when they speak of this constant re-updating or eternal return or, if you like, updating of the past. This breaks the historical arrangement, the linearity and the causality, but mainly leads us to consider that the past is dynamic. Sometimes it seems that the past must be the most stable and that the present, and above all the future, is changing and unexpected. But it is not so, the past is dynamic. And all this is being discussed at a time when we talk of recovery of memory, both individual and collective. In *Variacions sobre el model de Kraepelin* I think that this reflection is based on an explicit but also metaphorical image: Alzheimer's. A case that, although concrete (individual), has a collective scope: if memory is so fragile, how can we reconstruct the historical legacy of a given community? What is your approach in *Variacions sobre el model de Kraepelin* to the recovery of history based on Alzheimer's?

**DC:** All this has a lot to do with the Hegelian concept of history as a rational development of reality and events. I discovered Walter Benjamin thanks

to Mayorga, when I was here during my Erasmus, on a course on “History of Spanish drama” with Manuel Aznar at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, and through this I discovered that there was a playwright called Juan Mayorga who had dealt with Walter Benjamin’s philosophy. And I began to be interested in him (also through Victoria Szpunberg, who has extensive knowledge of Benjamin’s philosophy). By studying Benjamin’s philosophy in contrast to the Hegelian concept of history I found out that there was material to work on. What Benjamin mainly says is that the past is not closed, that the past can be reopened at every moment. This reopening of the past, which depends on the historian’s viewpoint, gives the historian an enormous political responsibility. Benjamin is Jewish by origin and training, a left-wing Hegelian Marxist, and makes this reflection before the Holocaust. Mayorga also picks it up in his work. The text of *Variacions...* emerged out of personal experience. My grandfather suffered a disease that, at first, doctors said was Alzheimer’s but later turned out to be senile dementia. I found what was going on very interesting and also suffered a lot (out of the experience of suffering arises the need to formally express something). His idea of time had nothing to do with mine. His idea of what his personal story was had nothing to do with mine. For example, I remember that there were moments when my grandfather recognised me as his grandson and, at the same time, my mother was next to him and he believed that she had not married yet. This was very interesting because it led you to being simultaneously in two different places and in two different times. This is not related to the degeneration of a person’s mental capacity. It is an extreme example, but we, in our life experience, always experience moments in which we leave our history, our identity, because this is closely related to the training of identity: when we are in love, when we are very frightened, when we experience paranoia, or during the artistic process, or mystical, religious processes. On all these occasions we abandon a rational idea of reality and discover that life is something else. The play was a way of developing all this. At a given moment I thought that it would be very interesting to link this personal experience and see how it was translated in collective experience, what can happen to a people, or to a country, or to Europe. How the identity of Europe is constructed was a very interesting issue for me. Then I had moved to Berlin from Barcelona and was reflecting a lot on how this country that is Europe and that allows us to travel so much, to meet people from other nationalities, to fall in love with people from other nationalities and live together has been formed. And, of course, it was a personal problem again. It was no longer my grandfather’s problem, it was mine, but also the two things fused together, as identities fuse. When you don’t have the possibility of formalising history, not only at a chronological level, you always miss the opportunity to formalise yourself as a person. I wondered: what idea must my grandfather have of himself as a person?

**CB:** The issue of Alzheimer's creates a great metaphor — there are contemporary plays that have explored amnesia, too —: it suggests a new conception of temporality in the contemporary individual, more or less consciously. As if this individual was a sick person who lacks the capacity to retain his/her identity or idiosyncrasy, to know who he/she is exactly. It is deconstructed in memory, not only individually but also collectively, as a country or community. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur spoke of the need for a “narrative identity”. Given that we can't retain who we are and memory is fragile, discontinuous, synthetic — we select fragments, we remember what we remembered last time rather than what we really experienced —, finally the only resource we have for recognising ourselves is to recreate ourselves in a story, and in this story we build an identity that gives meaning to our life, to our acts. A causality, even a morality. And we can also reconstruct the life and reality of our community. Often, when we speak of experiences of reconciliation in communities that have experienced traumatic situations, what is done, therapeutically, is to rearrange (perhaps theatrically) and to give coherence and a meaning to the experience of the past in order to be able to assimilate it, to understand it. Thus, on the one hand contemporary playwriting requires a form that expresses the de-structuring of reality — also of this perception of memory, of identity and temporality — and, on the other, to comfort us, to heal us, we must constantly turn to history. When Ricoeur speaks of “narrative identity” he is referring to history (we need to say: “This began the day... and ended the day... and it was done for this reason and with this objective.” When we experienced it things had not begun or ended this way or did not necessarily correspond to that causality. We invent all this later... How can we take into account contemporary drama's need to establish a powerful formal dialectics with this atavistic need that takes us back towards history?

**DC:** I think that we'll never move on from the need to create stories and fictions. When we speak of historical memory we can't forget that we are also speaking of a story. Then there are two stories that contradict each other. How do we manage? Benjamin says that what is fundamental is the historian's ethical commitment, or also our ethical commitment when we read the past again or when, as creators, we create fiction or “art”. What is the relationship between our “product” and society? This is the problem. Moreover, I think that it is useful to start working against the concept of organic coherence of history, because although a logical formalisation is very useful to move around the world, sometimes it is also very useful to know how to leave it — to let oneself go, to stop thinking, to feel more, to perceive.

**CB:** You've mentioned the ethics that a historian must have, according to Benjamin. Lately, in forums and debates we also discuss the playwright's responsibility and commitment. In the book you say that we must distinguish between an interesting drama and a comforting drama. I like this distinction. It makes me think of other similar categories, such as

Howard Barker when he speaks of “theatre of catastrophe”. Barker distinguishes between this theatre — which provokes, destabilises, questions, does not give a message, lets the audience return home mentally unbalanced — and “humanistic theatre” — which affirms, comforts, gives messages and slogans, and which is perhaps more dramatic or conventional. It also makes me think of Giorgio Agamben, who defines the idea of contemporary as untimely. For you, the interesting theatre is untimely theatre. You clearly explain all this in your book, fully aware that 90% of theatre you can see in Spain or Europe is a theatre that continues to be dramatic. Responsibility is related to this idea of playwriting that does not assert itself, that does not necessarily mirror things that are already admitted by society, that constantly challenges everything, that allows us to be provocative, or provoke viewpoints without giving slogans (who are we to give slogans?). Nevertheless, being responsible does not mean being bored. How can we ensure that theatre is untimely and at the same time not boring? Or even, can there be a time when there is a theatre that is both untimely and comforting?

**DC:** The theatre you call untimely is a theatre that challenges an idea of the world that has imposed itself as hegemonic. Right now it is clear, for our social and economic system, that our idea of the world is very logical. Capitalism is based on the Hegelian idea of historical progress; in other words, working for a future capital gain. Marxism is not based on this. They are very logical readings of reality. We sacrifice the present for the future. Hence Benjamin’s criticism, both of Hegelism and Marxist orthodoxy. For me, working against the logical or progressive concept of history is closely related to fighting against a vision of the world in which you have to justify yourself all the time within our social and economic system. Then, returning to the question, is it possible to be both untimely and comforting? It may happen when untimeliness becomes the hegemonic form of seeing reality. But for the time being this doesn’t happen. Returning to Agamben’s idea, what is interesting for our work as creators is that the most contemporary is what comes out of contemporaneity and we can see it from a distance, start to go against it and anticipate a future contemporaneity, moving on from a hegemonic vision of reality. This is essential for me. And making people understand that there is the possibility of seeing things differently. This is the hope that we can give to the audience, or at least this is what I like to think I am doing with my play: to suggest different ways of seeing reality. How do we do this? It is not enough for this to be expressed in the content of the play, in the theme, but that above all it has to be expressed through the form. In other words, in how I am talking about these things. Theatre is political not so much because it talks about politics but because it reflects on the forms of talking about society, the manipulation of language — which is a very serious problem —, about creation — what creating a story means, what manipulating the consciousness of your audience means through

the manipulation of events, of the consciousness of fictions creating tools. This is an ethical commitment for me.

**CB:** A great virtue of the book is that it is both profound and entertaining. To explain the de-structuring of the dramatic form in contemporary drama there is a moment in which you use the image of three popular stories that give a very precise idea of what we are talking about: the story of Theseus and the Minotaur, Hop-o'-My-Thumb and Alice – both the *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice through the Looking Glass*. Can you explain this a little?

**DC:** I have taken three stories to explain three visions of reality, three different ways of constructing a fiction. In the story of Theseus and the Minotaur, the unwinding of Ariadne's thread, which marks the path of Theseus in the labyrinth, gives us a very clear visual idea of how a coherent story that is gradually developed works and in which the events are linked to each other without considering any problematics for the person who is unwinding the thread – a logical vision of reality. Hop-o'-My-Thumb does something similar, but with an important difference: he does not have a thread and must use his wits. He leaves small breadcrumbs along the way. Then, to reconstruct his path he must use his intellect because before he had to have left the breadcrumbs at a suitable distance from each other (he must always see the next breadcrumb from the last one). This allows him to reconstruct the path very coherently because there is only one path home. In contrast, the path of *Alice in Wonderland* seems to me closer to my vision of the de-structuring of drama in terms of the fable, because Alice's problem is that she cannot reconstruct any path back home. The name of *wonderland* does not work with logical coherence. Moreover, linguistically, Lewis Carroll also works with fusions of meanings of words, word plays and blurs the meaning of language – as blurred as this world where Alice moves, which is a world that cannot be mapped or have concrete or stable points of reference. Our need to construct stories is closely related to the concept of stability, and with the fear we have of not having stability in any field of our existence. To construct a story of yourself, of your identity, of your history, of your memory, has a lot to do with our atavistic fear of this abandonment. In contrast, Alice is abandoned, is pure wandering. And this in fact is the meaning of the experience, what makes her non-story in *wonderland* beautiful.

**CB:** In the first story there is a leading thread. In the second there is an idea of restitution of the story by the subject, who at a given moment must fill empty spaces to go from one breadcrumb to the next (he probably has to zigzag). This makes us think of a playwriting we are used to that, although speaking of dialectics between form and content (de-structuring the form), although playing with a chronologically messed up fragmentation, although featuring profound ellipses, always comes from the need for the receiver to restore the story. Thus, it is not so different from the first story (Theseus and the Minotaur). Often when we speak of

contemporary drama we lump together — because formally they have a similar appearance — the products that respond to Hop-o'-My-Thumb's approach and the products that respond to Alice's. What happens is that in the case of Alice there is no story to restore. It is not about who is more or less contemporary but about making a distinction that until now had not been made. For example, Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, when he speaks of rhapsody, lumps the second and the third together.

**DC:** Because we always tend to try to reconstruct.

**CB:** In the end Alice is looking for the story. She seeks a logical path within her “wonderland”. In other words, we mirror ourselves in the Alice who is looking for a story but doesn't find it. Is it really not there?

**DC:** Umberto Eco also does not make this distinction. In *Opera aperta*, when he distinguishes between different types of fables, closed and open, lumps the second and the third case together. He does not question the logical core of the fable. But when you start seeing plays in which there is no fable behind but rather an idea of de-structuring of the fable, you must consider this problem. In the second case, what you have is a plot that is not coherent, that does not deceive you, which takes you to another place, but you have a coherent fable and then, fighting against this plot that is not coherent, you go back to the coherence of the fable. What happens when there is no coherent concept of fable behind? Then we do have to make a distinction between Alice's and Hop-o'-My-Thumb's problem.

**CB:** There is a final chapter in which you speak of the post-dramatic — defined years ago by Hans-Thies Lehmann — and Erika Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics of the performative. Depending on how it is read, it may seem that you posit an evolution of the dramatic text. In this order: Theseus, Hop-o'-My-Thumb, Alice, and finally, the need of the performative to deny performance, of saying “this is happening here directly and the text is no longer the central pillar on which the performance is built” (the idea of performance enters into crisis). In short, that the performative is like the final link of a chain through which contemporary drama passes. I understand that this is not so and that what you are advocating is the existence of a parallel line in which, on the one hand, there are performative proposals that are coherent with this philosophy but, on the other, there is a perfectly alive contemporary drama that is not made up of material texts but defines scores that must be translated on stage (although we don't speak of performance). How can this chapter be read in the context of the book?

**DC:** Yes, we must not confuse the two things. There may be a theatre that is not based on text, that is based on improvisation or the creator's experience on stage and that at the same time suggests to the audience a coherent vision or invites them to coherently reconstruct what they have seen on stage. This does not make us abandon this logical and hegemonic vision of reality.

**CB:** For instance, some playwrights you deal with, such as Martin Crimp, Sarah Kane, Caryl Churchill, Roland Schimmelpfennig and Juan Mayorga, are sometimes called “postdramatic” in many texts, programmes, newspapers... Do you think this label is appropriate?

**DC:** It is very comfortable but does not really explain what the problem is. There are playwrights that do base themselves on a text but go against this logic. The problem is not so much text-based theatre or non text-based theatre, but how theatre, the performance or the creation put themselves at the disposal of or against the hegemonic vision of reality. There are many productions by Jan Lauwers that are not based on a text but include text to create a leading thread, a path within the de-homogeneity of signs that we have on stage — which is very nice and makes us dream —, a narrative line that works against what we are seeing but somehow harmonises. This is why I love Jan Lauwers’s and Needcompany’s early productions: *The Deer House*, *The Lobster Shop*, *Isabella’s Room*.

**CB:** There is a relatively new trend in theoretical reflection, in criticism, mainly in Germany, that questions the concept of postdramatic. They talk about postspectacular, also of impossible theatre, of return to fiction, of new realism... Would this idea of postulating a return to fiction challenge your approach to history in your book?

**DC:** No, they put the problem to one side. In the type of theatre I propose, fiction also plays a very important role. It is the benchmark against which I work. The concept exists, I cannot free myself from considering it. In much contemporary theatre that falls within Lehmann’s concept of postdramatic, the concept of fiction continues to be fundamental. And it is that we cannot live without fictions. Later it depends on how you want to live with fiction and the use you make of it. All these theories are very comfortable. Theory helps us to logically explain to ourselves some concepts that probably do not intrinsically have these attributes that we give them. But this is theorising: forcing some meanings, giving them a form and seeing how they connect with other meanings, how they make up a network, how they create a form. But don’t forget that every time we theorise we also overlook some things about which we are theorising. Being aware of this loss is very interesting.

**CB:** You speak of the autonomy of theatre literature, of the validity of the concept of literature. The text is also to be read. In several places I have found debates on this idea: “why do you write these stage directions that are so difficult to do?” It is about finding a balance with a writing that leaves empty spaces that allow joint creation and the construction of the receiver’s imaginary and, at the same time, being understandable for someone who will later stage this text. Can you explain a little about this validity of the value of dramatic literature — in the sense that we are no longer speaking of drama in the classical sense?

**DC:** When I am writing I work on both things: theatre literature and theatre. So that the play has a form it must end at some point, to put the word “End”, and must be able to circulate in this form. Later what comes on stage is different, it is a mediation, a translation of this literary document into another code, along with other codes. For me, in my history as an Italian playwright, aware that if I had only worked in Italy I would not have been able to earn my living as a playwright, and that I have gone to live in other countries — Germany plays a great role —, the interesting thing was the circulation of texts. But I had to create a text that was also interesting, once read, to attract potential directors, actors or producers. The text had to be an autonomous element that could exist alone, without me. Moreover, until recently I had not thought of staging my own texts. Now I have also started working on the creation process, but with a type of plays that are very different from those I used to write before. What happens is that when the text circulates on its own, you must provide clues to readers — and to the first reader, who is the director. The whole question of stage directions, whether they are complicated or not, is not so much related to a “literary” translation of what I had written for the stage but rather to a translation of the atmosphere that the text is creating within your reading as a director. I want the director to be able to transport to the stage his or her concern about what he or she is reading. The things I write, and the stage directions form part of it, help shape an atmosphere and this is what I am interested in seeing on stage. Not so much the words but what they have provoked in the first reader — the director — or the actors, of course. In this respect, the literary scope of the text dialogues with its ephemeral scope of being nothing, of disappearing on stage. I find the degree to which the text disappears a very interesting concept to study. Seeing how the text disappears but its spirit remains. Often, to maintain the spirit of the text you must maintain the things that the text says, but it is not always one hundred per cent like this.

**CB:** It’s now time for questions. You can ask about any issue: about the book, about the fact of writing now and here, in Europe, about any personal issue...

**DC:** ...About Barça...

**CB:** ...About Barça.

*[Nobody asks.]*

**DC:** I’ll talk about Barça. I saw the day when Messi debuted. It was Rijkaard’s Barça, very physical, very rough to see, but at a given moment Messi comes and you think “this guy is good, he’ll do something.” Messi’s skill was that he really saw the reality on the pitch differently from the others. It has to do with a concept of space and time that is different. His vision of reality, which on the football pitch is limited to a rectangle, went beyond the hegemonic vision of other players. This was very clear when he played in Guardiola’s Barça: it was a very tactical, squared and geometric

Barça, but there was an element that escaped this geometry and made it an extraordinary experience, in the etymological sense of the term. This is closely related to some aspects of theatre. Mainly when you are a playwright and you build a geometry, a structure based on the text and then you have to take it to a specific stage — playing field or theatre stage —. Then you need that element that escapes, because, otherwise, it doesn't work. I am realising this now working with some actors, both here and in Milan.

**CB:** In an interview you talked about a goal by Messi that you saw in Menorca, and you said “writing not about the goal, but like the goal.”

**DC:** That's right. In 2015 I was in Menorca writing *Actes obscens* and there was the Cup Final against Bilbao. Messi scored a spectacular goal, he tackled six players, making the result 1-0. I thought, “here you are seeing some extraordinary things. How do you talk about this goal?” In the club where I was watching the match they told me: “You are a writer, you can write about this.” I also lived for a while in Buenos Aires when Guardiola's team won three titles in the same season, the last one with a goal by Messi at the Bernabéu and, of course, I heard the South American commentators, who are very different from those here, and they said “*Weeeell, how can you explain thiissssss?*” [*He imitates the Argentinean accent.*] No, you can't, and this is exactly what is interesting: all these phenomena defy language. The thing is not writing about Messi's goal but like the goal. It is not a problem of content but of form. How can I express some things?

**Audience question:** You are European, Italian, and you live in Berlin, and you two — Carles and Davide — speak of examples of European theatre as if you were relying too much on a vision that questions but from a hegemonic position. It is like a questioning from the problem itself. Above all because of the systemic crisis Europe is experiencing. So my question is: what is your link with South America? You have a deep knowledge of theatre in Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay. These societies that live in a precarious state, in an almost institutional ontological improvisation, in an eternal present of political crisis... What relationship do you find between the theatre you see and experience here, in Europe, mainly in Germany, and the theatre that you see in South America? Do you find any kind of hope in the non-institutionalised and peripheral forms of Latin American theatre?

**DC:** Yes, probably. The thesis deals with European theatre because I had to create a framework and couldn't talk about everything I'd like to. Sprengelburd's theatre is very interesting, or Daulte's or Fabio Ruano's. I have a European PhD, I also carried out research in Berlin. I had to find a way to say “no more”. But the experience of Buenos Aires, living there, working with local people and seeing theatre from there was fundamental. I think it's a model. There are two issues. One is the centre-periphery issue, of how at a given moment the cultural benchmark of Latin America

is Europe, many forms are taken and assumed as the standardised form of featuring reality. There is a very nice text by Spregelburd related to this called *Apátrida*. It talks about how 18th and 19th century Argentinean painters used to go to Europe to copy European painters and return because the problem of the new Argentinean state was the formation of an *arte patria*. This “*arte propio*” was a copy of European art. In contrast, Spregelburd claims the importance of the periphery of this hegemony. What is happening now? The model of Argentinean theatre – which for me is very interesting – of construction of the show, of forms of production that escape the production forms here, linked to economic problems, helps us a lot now in this period of crisis and can be a model of which we are the periphery – because the centre is them. What we can learn is very interesting. I think that it has become clear in Barcelona how these Argentinean models have influenced the creation of the new generations. From the time when Veronese, Spregelburd or Daulte came until now, when it is very complicated to find productions, when we have to invent different productive forms, different spaces. There the proliferation of theatre venues, which does not mean the proliferation of theatres, is fantastic. You go to Buenos Aires and you have 350 active theatre venues. Sports clubs, shops, any venue is good for doing theatre. It has a lot to do with the Italian background of the locals. They are *tanos*, they are Neapolitan. I’ve seen many parallelisms between the Teatro Eduardo in Naples – Eduardo de Filippo, the Neapolitan theatricality – and Buenos Aires theatricality.

**AQ:** My question is also related to the forms of production. When you question the forms, you are speaking of forms of writing. For instance, you’ve mentioned Needcompany and we could talk about the production that surrounds the shows by this company and that has to do with pretty bodies, lots of money... Why do you focus on the text-based form?

**DC:** This is a book on drama theory rather than on performative theory. You must delimit. If not, I would still be writing the thesis, which took me many years. But the question of what the production models are also interests me, mainly now that I have begun experimenting not only with text-based but also performative creation. And also how the production models are related to society. A very interesting thing about Latin American or Mexican drama is the issue of *teatro social*. What does doing theatre mean in places where you risk your life every time you do theatre? Because they really kill you. Companies are formed and keep changing members because they kill people from the company. They kill them because they work with street children and drug lords don’t want children to work and leave that system. Or you go to neighbourhoods where people don’t leave their homes after six in the evening because they know that they can’t. What does it mean to do theatre, what is the importance of aesthetics in this type of theatre? Of course, we cannot judge this theatre with the parameters with which we judge Needcompany or Catalan or Spanish theatre. Last year I went to the *Muestra Nacional de Teatro*

*de México* which included the fifteen most interesting productions from different states. There were people from Chihuahua or Ciudad Juárez who told you about these things. You saw the show and thought: “Ok, it’s a little more than amateur, but this doesn’t work, or the dramaturgy is weak,” but people go for a reason for which I would not do theatre. Every time these people leave home they can lose their lives. And they go there to help other people so they don’t go through the same thing. I talked to a 25-year old girl with a two-year-old daughter and she told me that they had killed some of her friends, or had kidnapped them. And I asked her why she did it, with a 2-year-old daughter, and she told me it was because she didn’t want her daughter to live in a city like that. This kills any aesthetic discourse on theatre.

**AQ:** Rather than questions, I have some comments or ideas. One is related to the current *modus vivendi*, mainly of the youngest generations and how they learn. It is perhaps linked to the idea of liquid society that we all have in mind. There are no longer jobs for life; there is no lifelong project or planning. Thus, we already assume uncertainty as certainty. Just breathing is enough, you don’t need a set path. This is somehow related to these dramaturgies you talked about with the examples of the three stories. It’s also related to how we access information or structure thought. I was surprised by an article I read a couple of years ago on a comparative study conducted among primary and secondary school students with access to Internet who had trained and those who hadn’t, from the same generation. The “classical” students continued with the regime of a textbook or of thought. The others were incapable of maintaining the theoretical regime provided for in the textbook and chose information according to their interests. Thus, in the latter there was no longer the commitment to say “this requires an effort because I know it will be productive” — this viewpoint towards the future —, but they learnt by taking from many sources and achieved almost the same information but based on something more sensorial, more related to immediate pleasure. And this makes you also think about a way of structuring drama. In other words, we don’t have a story with future prospects but some randomness when living and grasping reality and learning that can be linked to Alice’s random journey. Moreover, you made me think of the rhetorical and structural forms of classical music. When you talked about variations I thought about Bach’s variations and fugues, the Goldberg variations, the “variation on a song by...”, etc. I would like to look for some similarity between structuring, repetitions, variations and alliterations of the classical composition with contemporary playwrights. I think that behind this non-linear narration there is something to discover such as quantum physics or some types of mathematics.

**DC:** Yes. I’m not a musicologist but the concept of harmony and the musical trends that work against the concept of harmony or harmonisation are closely linked to the concept of de-structuring. Harmony is closely related to classical physics and the logical vision of the Pythagoreans — our

concept of musical harmony is based on Pythagoras' division of musical frequencies. The combination of these frequencies provokes a sound or a noise. Music, during most of its history, has been based on this harmonic concept. Dodecaphony is the limit of this concept. This has a lot to do with the life we are living. For example as someone who leads a very de-structured life — I don't have a home, I live in different places at the same time —, I increasingly have the need to return to coherence. I am always fighting against this return to logic. It is a combination of both things. The issue of job flexibility is closely related to the possibility of building a stable economic future for oneself. Not so much job but economic stability. They tell you "now you are more flexible, but because you can earn from here and from there." The concept is still "earn money." This barrier always exists.

**AQ:** It is true that, when we go to see a more deconstructed performance, construction always goes through our minds; and the truth is that, if they don't tell me stories, I need to build them. But I remember that as a child this didn't happen to me. In other words, I don't think that it is something that goes with nature, but with culture. Our childhood went by watching a Tarzan film every weekend. In principle we were supposed to know them by heart but we didn't remember the plot, the fable. I remember, for example, the sequence of the moving sands, the sequence of the crocodiles, but the construction of the story didn't interest me. And I am not the only one. When we are children, what we have is the idea of sequence, but not of something global.

**DC:** All this forms part of our education as individuals in this society, which teaches us from the outset that we must build, arrange, order. Now we are preparing a reading at the Sala Beckett and it's a text that deals with how fictions enter in children's education and influence their vision of the world. It is a text I'm working on with the actors in Italy. It will be premiered there in April but we'll do a dramatised reading here on 30 January. I also remember that, as a child, coherence didn't interest me, that something happened before or after or that this (*he picks up a paper glass*) is a glass or a helmet. It is very interesting how flexible children's minds are and how they don't care about ordering and structuring. It's nice to remember our fight against this concept in our childhood and that then we still won.

**CB:** I would say that perhaps it is not only cultural. When primitive communities begin to relate to their environment and have to give an explanation of what they see — the storms, the cycles of nature — they finally build myths and these myths are always structured as stories. In any primitive community, even before Aristotle, understanding reality is always done through a story that is built as a fable.

**DC:** Yes, but this is also cultural. It is a very primitive "culturalism" related to the human being, because it is much easier to convey information through the fable. Our evolution as animals is also defined by how easily

we convey information to our peers and to be the most intelligent of the apes. Arranging enables us to live more comfortably in this world.

**AQ:** I would like you to tell us about quantum physics and mathematics. How they have influenced your plays, if they have. I form part of a publishing project in which we publish “quantum” authors and I am interested in knowing if it has influenced you a lot.

**DC:** Yes, the study – without a mathematical approach, because I don’t understand the formulae, the equations – of how quantum physics’ approach to reality destroys Newtonian physics has influenced me a lot. For example, Feynman’s concept of sum-over-paths. Feynman is a physicist who in the 1960s began to say that in reality there is no stable past. There are a series of possibilities in this universe and we, from our point of view of the present, consider that some possibilities are more feasible than others and then we believe our past based on the present. This completely overturns Newtonian theory. Our present does not come from a past but rather the past comes from our present. Moreover, quantum physics also tells you that there is no difference between past, present and future. In other words, what we call past is simply the evidence of some physical states that have materialised in this way, because through the thermodynamic law that rules the universe we can only be aware of the materialisation of some events that range from disorder to order, rather than the opposite. We call this thermal upset past, and it is the reason why we have memories of the past and not of the future. It is simply a problem of thermodynamic physics and not because there is really a past, a present and a future. Our life is not a story, it is our life and no more. Later we arrange it as a story, but the terms past, present and future are more related to fiction than to life.

Now I’ve been commissioned with a text on an Italian physicist called Majorana, who disappeared in the 1930s and whose end is unknown, who contributed to the development of quantum physics in the early days.

**AQ:** Carles asked you if there could be a kind of theatre that was both comfortable and untimely. You said, yes, when untimely theatre becomes hegemonic. I wonder how far that is the case.

**DC:** When it becomes hegemonic, all untimeliness is finally comfortable. Any break with tradition, when it has become normal, loses its meaning of innovation.

**AQ:** It is the *conditio sine qua non* of Walter Benjamin himself: maintaining oneself on the periphery and, above all, not even being recognised by your fellow citizens with the value for which he is recognised today. Perhaps in theatre something similar happens. You spoke of South America, but in Barcelona there is also a lot of periphery and a lot of theatre done on the fringes. There are venues that are not advertised in the newspapers because there is a law that impedes it, but theatre is done in houses...

Perhaps it is a way of approaching it from this ethics you mentioned and that, as I said before, is related to the production systems.

**DC:** And that requires another type of theorising. Jorge Dubatti is doing a lot on this issue. He says that “as a critic they call me to go and see productions, but there are four hundred every evening. How can I speak as a critic about the theatre that is currently done in Buenos Aires? There is more that I don’t see than I do.” He has started developing a theory about the importance of what remains on the fringes, on the periphery.

**AQ:** What elements taken from Europe are being replicated in Latin American theatre?

**DC:** The Goethe Institut is everywhere. They have translated many German playwrights and have brought many German productions. In some cases, you find this aesthetics in Latin America, more or less well done, or as a simple reproduction of some systems without having really integrated what these aesthetic systems mean in society. In Mexico I saw productions that could be “copies” of German productions. Mariano Pensotti in Buenos Aires has also produced a very European aesthetics. Or Federico León. Or *La Resentida*, in Chile. They are all very fine creators and I find their discourse interesting; I am talking about aesthetics and how it has influenced some. Spregelburd is a playwright who knows the German theatre very well and in fact he slightly mocks all of this when he works with his actors in Buenos Aires.

**AQ:** Now that you are not just writing your plays but directing some of them, how have you incorporated teamwork, especially in the scenic or visual field, or in the dramaturgy that set design gives you?

**DC:** With reference to the text I am working on in Italy and here (there will be a reading at the Sala Beckett), my experience as a person putting my own text on stage is closely linked to the processes of creation I experimented with in Buenos Aires: very few economic resources, some objects but no set design and very basic lighting. It is a theatre based on the actor-text relation and actor-audience relation.

**AQ:** But earlier you spoke of atmospheres.

**DC:** In this case it’s very poor.

**AQ:** But the atmosphere always exists.

**DC:** Yes. In the play I’m working on here what creates the atmosphere is the relation between actors and audience. In the other case it’s completely different: I am working in Germany, at the Staatsoper in Berlin, with a huge amount of resources, a fantastic set designer, a wonderful lighting designer and all the technical means I wish. It is a project on biofiction, also self-fiction. The actor speaks in the first person about a story that has happened to him. They called him because a relative of his from Córdoba (Argentina) lived in a flat that belonged to a person who had been evicted during the Argentinean dictatorship and he, as the closest relative of

that person, returns to see the flat, because the family of origin had reclaimed it. He finds out that the person missing was a musician who was working on the scores of a Jewish musician that had disappeared during Nazism and then a parallelism is created between different places and temporalities. Consequently, I need quite an extensive set design.

**AQ:** Earlier you talked about the representation of the world. I think it must be collaborative because we cannot construct it autonomously based on any of the signs. This dissolution of the playwright is reshaping the way we work.

**DC:** Yes, in Latin America perhaps these experiences of collective creation or authorship are more common. By tradition. Or in Europe in countries that have suffered dictatorships. The experiences of Kantor or Grotowski would not be conceivable outside the communist dictatorship in Poland during that period. Any process of authorship — authority —, also in relation with South American dictatorships, takes on another meaning. The democratisation of the creation process is also related to this. A need for there to be no authoritarian voice.

**AQ:** Is the European influence vital in Latin American countries? For instance, last year you were in Mexico. Did you prefer seeing productions with European influences or with the essence of Mexico? What is essential?

**DC:** I am interested in seeing what a type of theatre can do in the context in which it emerges. It seemed interesting to see experiences such as the Teatro Bárbaro in Chihuahua or the Teatro para el fin del mundo, which recover places that have been abandoned because for a time drug lords worked there, people could not go and they have ended up as abandoned buildings; then they go there to do theatre so that people return to these places, to repopulate them culturally. I find the meaning of doing theatre at that time and in that place interesting. I also saw a beautiful performance, *La belleza* by David Olguín, a totally different approach; it was theatre more as we understand it in the institutional sense. It was not that one is better than the other; it is about understanding why you are doing theatre.

**AQ:** Back to peripheral theatre, we are so used to it that if our *modus vivendi* is anti-capitalist perhaps the peripheral theatre is our status quo. We already understand that it is peripheral with regards to peripheral thought but if it doesn't annoy anyone as we ourselves consume it, where is the problem? How can we make this untimely theatre untimely again?

**DC:** And it is interesting for the community. If only people who agree with the idea it expresses see this type of theatre, what does it do? Nothing. The problem is how to awaken community awareness. What sense is there in doing theatre when 90% of the audience are theatre people who go to see their colleagues? We have to find a way to connect with the social fabric again. In Italy, theatre has lost the link with the social fabric,

it does not form part of the social debate. What can we do for theatre to form part of the social debate again? I don't know, by suggesting interesting issues, interesting forms. Perhaps we must sometimes use marketing tools to go against marketing — I don't know if this is right or not. Probably it is worthless to do it for ourselves because it means spending energy, time and money to do what? To self-assert. It is not only a problem of the creators. I am convinced that theatre should leave the arts pages of newspapers and appear in the gossip columns, economy sections, on TV news. To use these means.

*[After this answer, the session is closed and Carles Batlle says farewell to the guest.]*

