Contemporary Theatricalities between the Private Space and the Public Space. The Experience of What Is *Unheimlich*

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Abstract

The relationship between the private and public dimensions is one of the main pillars of the discourse on the performing arts. The architectonic space of theatre dialogues with the urban space in which it is located and with the community to which it refers; the shaping of the performative space determines the relationship between a group of individuals and a stage conceived as the place where individuality is exteriorised; the performative space goes beyond precedents, with which it coexists and confronts itself, determining the reception and turning the private experience of the spectator/participant into a public theme. Based on these ideas, we will see how this issue has influenced the emergence of different dramatic and performance events in recent years.

Keywords: theatre, architecture, audience, participatory theatre

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In recent years, the interest in theoretical studies has gradually moved from text-based creation to performance creation and later from performance creation to active reception. In my view, in a climate of secularisation and demolition of the big myths, the myth of the text has naturally collapsed, followed by the myth of the spectacle: or, in other words, the conviction that "doing theatre" means staging a previously written text and, later, the conviction that "doing theatre" means "staging", *tout court*. However, this is not what I want to talk about now. In our context I find it more interesting to start this presentation and close this symposium on the relationship between city and theatre by reflecting on the issue of *collapse*, of *demolition* and on what remains of this demolition, the *emptiness* it leaves and the possibilities opened by this *emptiness*.

Those among you living in a town minimally gentrified or in a tourist area know that the plots listed as building land do not remain empty for a long time. When a piece of land or a whole urban area is reclassified, or when a reform requires the demolition of old buildings to make new ones, the machinery is set in motion immediately. Slowly, or very rapidly, depending on the cases, the place we knew disappears and a new landscape replaces the old. It is a process that we see as natural and that responds to a logic that has determined the evolution of our cities and, to some extent, the shaping of our society, especially our economy and, therefore, our life: the productive logic, a logic that requires us to fill and make the most of the available spaces, resources and efforts. And, above all, realise our potential, which should not remain "potential" but should enable us to achieve, as soon as possible, positive results, profits and capital gains. *More* is better than *less*; *full* is better than *empty*; *being present* is better than *being absent*; *what is there* is better than *what is not there*. Why do we tend to produce, fill, do, instead of *not doing*? Why do we relate inactivity, *emptiness,* the fact of not being there, with negative concepts? Is it so difficult to conceive the value of the potential in itself, of the absence, of what is not there?

The economist and philosopher Nassim Nicholas Taleb has written an essay, *The Black Swan,* subtitled *The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, in which he explains how instinctively, when we develop a life project, we tend to let ourselves be influenced by events rather than by non-events. Based on the facts that fall under our sensorial perception, we make predictions and build theories to protect ourselves from chance; but we are barely able to take into account everything that may happen and in contrast *does not happen*, even if this "non-fulfilment of the events" has a great impact on our lives. That said, Western culture has always given preference to what is visible over what is invisible. When we name, define and measure one thing, we can control it and this enables us to live a more comfortable existence and be less frightened. We constantly need to produce and have "concrete things" in front of us. We assess success in the form of tangible results rather than accumulated experience. When a three-year relationship ends and what we had programmed is not fulfilled, we have the feeling of having wasted an important part of our life instead of thinking that this experience has greatly enriched us. We feel lost, the future seems dark to us and we feel this cosmic emptiness within, while forgetting that emptiness in itself can be a unique experience and it is precisely this cosmic emptiness that in a not so distant future will lead us to a new wonderful state of infatuation.

The periods of transition between one love and another can be very harsh but are extremely interesting, although we often only realise this *a posteriori*; in other words, when such difficult periods end and we feel safe again. At the time of experiencing them, in contrast, we find everything extremely insecure, unstable, and we feel at the mercy of something bigger than us, something that has no definition or defined form. Out of a primitive instinct that takes us to search for security, we tend to shorten these transitional phases as much as we can and to rebuild an existence as soon as possible. This strategy is not only applied to love: any turbulence in our life causes in us this feeling of dislocation to which we can only later give a name, a shape, an explanation, through an operation similar to an exorcism and that we usually call a "story". We are like the legendary Homeric King Menelaus, who can explain his stormy return from Troy to Telemachus only in the safety and tranquillity of his house in Sparta. If you recall, Homer tells that Menelaus, while the rhapsodist was telling of his misfortunes, offered drugs to his hosts to relieve their pain. There is very strict homology between the drug — the *pharmakon* — and the rhapsodist's story, as they have the same effect: making a past pain bearable. Neither is it by chance that this takes place in the safety of the domestic home. Let's recall that the *Odyssey* is not a poem of journeys, but of *nostoi*, "returns": returning home, to order, to the familiar and safe shape.

Early societies invented stories to search for causes and explanations, which is equivalent to protecting themselves from chance and what is shapeless or, rather, the *emptiness* of meaning. Stories were of paramount importance in societies that were not completely sedentary, which did not protect themselves behind the walls of a house or within a town. In German, there is a term that perfectly identifies this feeling of vulnerability, of non-comfort, of discomfort and, even, of fear against what causes insecurity: *unheimlich*,

which can be translated more or less with the terms "uncanny", "sinister" or "disturbing". The adjective comes from the noun *Heim*, a term of Phrygian origin quite common in Anglo-Saxon languages, a term from which, for instance, the English home comes. It identifies the place where one lives, understood as a protected place; and remember also that the verb *protect* comes from the Latin *pro-tegere*, "put a lid", "cover," "repair", like the architectonic element of the *tectum*, the ceiling, or the *tegula*. Therefore, what is not *heimlich* is, etymologically, one thing that leaves us unprotected, at the mercy of what is bigger than our logical understanding: something that is not safe unlike, in contrast, everything that is delimited by the walls and ceiling of our domestic space. The term *Heim* does not indicate a material, tangible, construction but rather a condition; nevertheless, given its closeness with the architectonic field, it reminds us that we have supported an ancestral instinct by constructing buildings to feel protected from the incomprehensible laws of nature, and by building myths to feel protected from the incomprehensible laws of existence. Just as old buildings are demolished to accommodate the new ones, more comfortable and suitable, a time comes in the history of a society when the old myths lose their validity and new, more comfortable and suitable ones must be forged. However, in the transition between old and new, in this empty space resulting from a demolition and enabling the new construction, we are exposed to what is *unheimlich*.

Berliner Notebook

I live part of the year in Berlin, a city where, for some strange reason, the discourse of theatre and the discourse of urban planning have often been interlinked. Actually, I have experienced at close hand only the last ten years, perhaps the most frantic, of the reconstruction that began after the fall of the Wall. But, despite everything, I have had the opportunity to somehow experience the remains of that idea of freedom that in that period turned the German capital into a pole of attraction for architects and theatre people. I would like to start with an image: the large-scale writing on the façade of the building located at Brunnenstrasse 10: "Dieses Haus stand früher in einem anderen Land" (This house used to be in another country).

The writing is the work of the Belgian artist Jan-Remy von Matt and appeared in November 2009, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Wall. What does the idea that this country was different before mean? In fact, this part of Mitte and the adjacent Prenzlauer Berg were the neighbourhoods most vulnerable to change: from the mid-1990s, many German youths moved there, taking advantage of the big empty and disused spaces, the low rental prices, the public aids given to prevent a new flight towards the East and the depopulation of the area. Once the political myth and the geographical limit that separated two worlds fell, the bordering territory was invaded by the members of a non-wealthy social class, who did not need many infrastructure; on the contrary, they felt attracted by their absence, which offered the possibility of constructing a space according to their own needs and tastes: students, artists, craftspeople, architects... The
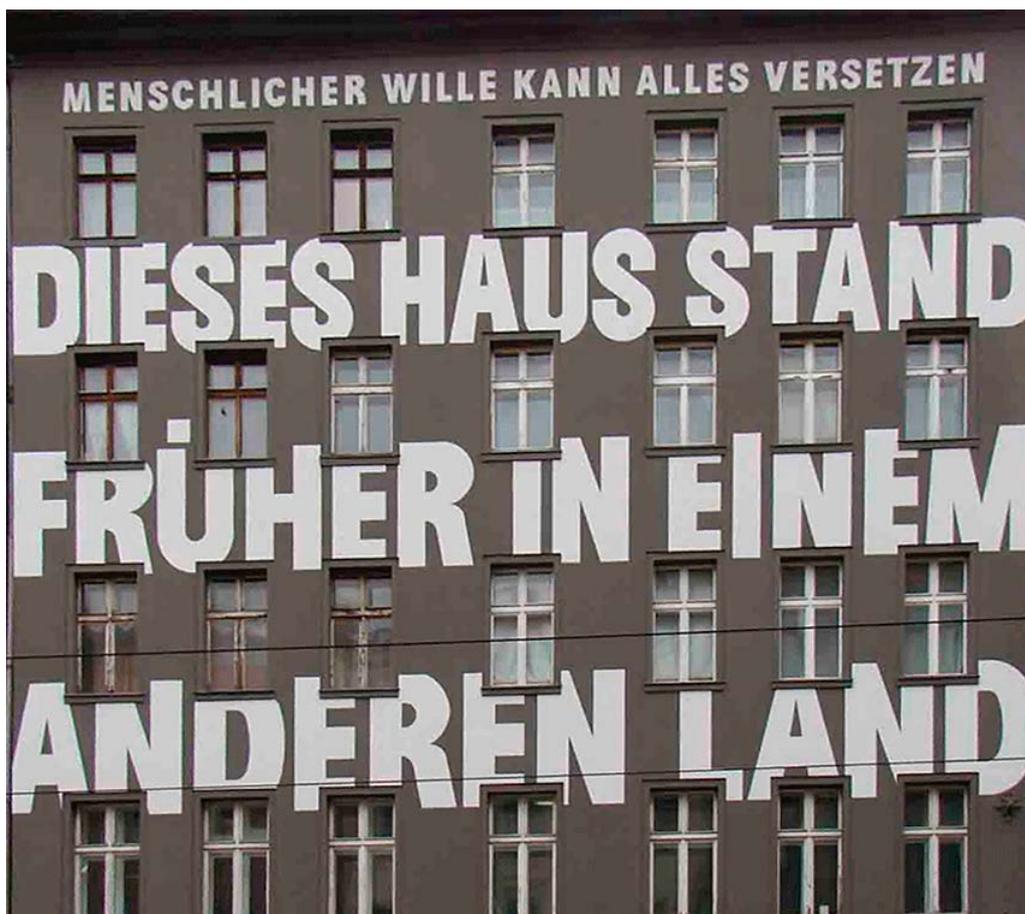
Photo 1. Building in Brunnenstrasse, which also houses the entrance to the Rosenthaler Platz metro station. Source: Wikipedia.

neighbourhood thus revived and began to define its own identity and offer a fervent cultural activity, which increased its power of appeal and, with it, its economic value. Although many of the newcomers, along with the few who were already there, have endeavoured to preserve its spirit as much as they could, the neighbourhood has definitively changed its appearance. Currently, Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg are considered the radical-chic areas par excellence, among the nicest, but they are also the most expensive: the first areas of Berlin affected by the phenomenon of gentrification. A few hundred metres from Alexanderplatz, the former centre of the pro-Soviet republic most loyal to the dictates of Moscow, one of the most attractive centres of the building neoliberalism has developed.

The example of Berlin seems to me a good paradigm of how our instinct to fill and produce tangible forms lends support to the economic system that governs our lives: the emptiness, the experience of the emptiness, is not only *unheimlich* but also not very economic. But it is also paradigmatic when we want to explore what happens in this moment of transition, in this "no long form / still no form", which I find an interesting state not only for urban planning but also for theatricality, because it puts at stake a different concept of temporality. In this time of emptiness, which in fact is a "potential state", something strange happens, something that not necessarily has to do with what was there before, or with what will be there later. Bags

of freedom, *ephemeral* experiences that bear an expiry data, can be created here; but precisely by virtue of this expiry — of this "not lasting" — they are often fruitful.

When I arrived in 2008, the city still had a large number of empty spaces to occupy. I am referring not only to occupation as squatting but to an overall possibility by citizens of also taking possession legally, at low cost, of spaces to carry out their activities. Some situations were really advantageous, outside the market logic prevailing in other big European cities. This enabled the development of risky artistic initiatives and projects, and everything was imbued with a sense of the provisional. Experimentation in itself involves expiration, and the possibility of exercising it always lets people glimpse the inevitable horizon of its end. Without this end, which is the return to the ordinary time of common life, this experimentation could not be seen as *extra-ordinary* and could not take on the status of "surprising" (20th century historical avant-gardes, whose innovative burden was activated and exhausted within a few years, know something about it). Artistic experimentation is related to this concept of different temporality. Those who experiment seeking inspiration know that they will never find it merely by seeking it. Inspiration does not allow itself to be found but comes by itself; what's more: we could even argue that inspiration comes to the extent that we do not seek it. We can help its arrival, but we cannot be sure if it will come, or when. At any time, at any moment, experimentation can end. Also, inspiration could never come during that time we have devoted to searching for it and this would not mean that our activity has been a failure. What happens when the exercise of experimentation ends and we have not achieved the result expected? What happens is that its end closes a portion of time without concluding it definitively; it is an end that does not accomplish anything, an ateleological end. But this in-conclusion of the end does not undermine the time that has preceded it, does not make that experience less valuable. Because it is not the end but rather *the transition towards that end* that matters. Experimentation is an eternal "now", which at a given moment will cease to be present.

Perhaps some of you will remember Tacheles, the big five-floor occupied building between Oranienburgerstrasse and Friedrichstrasse, which included theatre and cinema auditoria, workshops and other artistic venues. A famous graffiti painted in the *Brandwand* of the building (the *Brandwand* is that bare wall that remains visible when the building next door disappears) featured an enormous face in black and white with the words "How long is now", as if wanting to say that everything that was happening there could only be understood in the space of the *moment,* of the *now,* of current time.

An unstable, transitory time, alien to any projection towards a teleological horizon. Moreover, the fact that those words were painted on the *Brandwand* involved an added meaning, because the inscription could only be read because the space next to Tacheles was empty and the building that existed before, once demolished, was not reconstructed. Tacheles lasted twenty-two years as an occupied arts centre, from 1990 to 2012, when it was sacrificed in the name of the urban reform of Mitte.

Photo 2. Graffiti on the west wall of Kunsthaus Tacheles (Oranienburger Strasse, Berlin). Source: Wikipedia.

Something similar happened last year a kilometre and a half from there, on the other side of Linienstrasse, a quiet and somewhat hidden street that starts just opposite Tacheles and ends just behind Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz. The Volksbühne is a good example of the urban-theatre parable of Berlin. With the permission of the Berliner Ensemble and the Schaubühne, under the direction of Frank Castorf, the Volksbühne was the most emblematic theatre in reunified Berlin, the one that has most related the city to its image, its irreverence and, of course, its ups and downs and (unfortunately) its destiny. For years, the theatre was an important point of reference in the urban space of Berlin, a relation that found its *point de capiton* in the famous sculpture of the wheel with two legs in the centre of Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz. Last year, the sculpture was symbolically dismantled and the city was without it for some months; it has now returned to its place. From 1992 to 2017, during the "Republik Castorf", the Volksbühne was a not very institutional public theatre, remote, outside the norm; its imposing size and façade, both anachronistic. Its interior was also ruled by "another" time: the foyer, where you felt as if in a light comedy by Schnitzler; in the bar, in a Fassbinder film, and the offices seemed like those of the first episodes of *Derrick*. Even the corporate image, the posters of the shows, the banners hanging on the rooftop, were part of a peculiar communications strategy, boldly unconventional, that helped convey that unique feeling of freedom that was later lavished on the productions by Castorf, Pollesch, Marthaler, Herbert Fritsch, Gob Squad... One factor brings together all these aesthetic initiatives: the use of freedom disconcerts the audience, tends not to comfort them, helps disorient them, alters perceived time and leaves the audience in an *unheimlich* zone, insecure, unfamiliar and barely recognisable. It is not by chance that these creators, who more than the others linked their name to that of the

theatre, conceived their work in symbiosis with the spaces of the theatre. You could not imagine that legendary productions such as Pollesch's *Tod eines Praktikanten* and *Cappuccetto Rosso* could be set outside the Prater (the second auditorium of the Volksbühne, located in Kastanienallee). And when you saw one of those shows with a retro look by Marthaler, the stage seemed to expand to the most extreme corners of the theatre. The same happened with Castorf: seeing his *Faust* at the Haus der Berliner Festspiele last May, instead of the Volksbühne, was a little like seeing Messi playing in the Sporting de Gijón shirt.

I remember that, until recently, it was possible to smoke (anything) in the rooms of the theatre; in the Prater you could go into the auditorium with a beer or a glass of vodka; the tickets were very cheap and the most natural thing you could ask when you stepped into the Volksbühne was: how long will all of this last? The Volksbühne was, rather than a theatre, a public space open to creativity, like many others in the city; a space that for a quarter of a century maintained an air of expiry, of permanent temporary character. An example: when the reform of the main auditorium was being envisaged, in 2009, in order not to interrupt the programme another wooden theatre with semicircular layout was built just opposite the entrance's steps. For some weeks the performances took place there, in the open air, during the spring-summer season, which in Berlin is not particularly dry or sunny. That provisional theatre built in the square, where the voices of the actors mixed with the noise of the city, was called — not by chance — "Space Agora". Another example: the following year, Pollesch took to Berlin the trilogy he had produced at the Ruhrtriennale; for the occasion, some circus tents were set up on a vacant piece of land between Grantizstrasse and the track of the S-Bahn railway, in the district of Pankow. The simple fact of going to that place was already an experience for many of us, who did not usually visit that part of the city, where basically *there is nothing to see*; but a show by Pollesch in the sunset in a deserted area was a worthwhile experience. Some days ago I searched for information about this piece of land and found out that the whole area was affected by a reclassification project in 2014; the new dwellings should be ready in 2016, but the work has been delayed.

What I will say next is contaminated by a personal suggestion, even though I do not think it is totally wrong and undoubtedly many of you share it: when it changed artistic direction, with the appointment of Chris Dercon in 2017, the charm of Volksbühne suddenly vanished and the image of the theatre changed overnight. Not so much due to the change in programming, which, in fact, was not so traumatic, or because poor Dercon was conservative, because he really is not, and his idea was not so bad either. But perhaps this was precisely the problem: from a certain point of view, the new artistic direction sought to institutionalise the image of outsider theatre that the previous direction had created. It maintained the tendency to experiment, but rejecting its provisional character. It established this temporary, unrepeatable state, making its *expiry permanent*. An old reformed building can be aesthetically more attractive and more accessible but it will not have the same aura it had before the works, when it was falling apart but was

fascinating. Perhaps with these reforms the city gains in functionality but loses in charm, a lesser considered quality because it is difficult to measure. Each place, when it is given as a diaphanous, known, space, when it is no longer *unheimlich,* loses its charm, which we can consider the measure of experience, as entropy is to disorder.

In the end, going to the theatre should not be a diaphanous and accommodating experience; but often it can be very difficult to achieve the experience of what is *unheimlich* in a familiar place with a recognisable programme. Our theatre system has gradually been shaped based on other premises and with other objectives: many people go to the theatre to feel safe and choose the play they will see, the auditorium, the names of the actors or the director (almost never the playwright), based on this need. They don't want to experience what is *unheimlich* but, rather the contrary, they want to feel protected in a comfortable place, looking at people on the stage who show them what they already know, listening to words they have already heard before going into the auditorium and that they know they can agree with. From a certain point of view, these spectators consider theatre as an annex to their home, an extension of their living room, of their private space. And it is interesting to think that, if we do not see it like this, a space is shaped as "public" based on a multiplication of superimposed individual private spaces rather than as a common space for co-participation (a discourse very similar could be applied to our cities: what does "common" mean? "Also mine" or "of everyone"?). Directors and programmers often build the programme based on the need to satisfy this kind of audience, which is the most numerous; and we creators, who have to be liked by programmers, do the same, because otherwise they would not programme us. What must we do as creators? Try to unsettle the spectator through alternative strategies, which reduce our visibility and, therefore, the effect we pursue, or accept the commitment and try to change the things from within, very slowly (perhaps too slowly), almost invisibly? It is clear that this doubt not only refers to theatre creation but to each artistic product that forms part of a production system; and, in general, it can be extended to politics and human sciences: how to change society? With a revolution that suddenly bursts? With a slow work from within? Who is right: Bordiga or Gramsci? Lenin or Trotsky? Luis Enrique or Valverde? Nobody has so far found a definitive solution to the question, not even Slavoj Žižek, and neither can we expect to find it here now. Nevertheless, just as we speak of cities made to the measure of man, we can speak of theatres made to the measure of the audience. The architectonic structure of a theatre auditorium, whether it is Italian or frontal, has always been designed to facilitate the audience's view; in other words, for a model of reception that helps "the gaze from the distance". Probably, in this context, it will be superfluous to recall that the term "theatre" is linked to the gaze: *theaomai* in Greek means "to look", "to project the gaze through the space". This gesture of "having a look" — which etymologically has nothing of the superficial — involves a distance between the observer and the object observed: there is a space between the eye and the object, a safe distance through which the observer feels protected. The Aristotelian logic has turned this "gaze from the distance"·into

a gnoseological method. In the concept of *mimesis,* imitation, reproduction or even better "representation", the life experience was mistaken by the experience of the gaze, and tradition has made the theatre building the place devoted to this visual, although not tactile, act. The representation, which is always *re-*presentation of something absent, allows us to see a *mediata* experience of this *absent*, but distances us from the direct experience, which must be, in fact, the experience of an absence, of a lack. Instead, the theatre building has traditionally been a safe place, a *Heim*, to learn with the mind but without taking with the hands. Those who have worked against this feeling of safety have done so aware of this insufficiency, pushing the audience to touch, rather than to see, and calling on the materiality both of the stage and life. Futurists even sought the physical fight on stage; Artaud in contrast used an interesting metaphor, that of the *plague*. A sickness or an epidemic, given that it has no shape and cannot fall within the domain of the gaze, is always very *unheimlich*. Thus, Artaud asks himself: how can the theatre of the gaze really pollute — this term that comes from *cum tangere*, that is, "touch" — the spectator? Against a theatre of representation Artaud places a theatre of cruelty, which recovers the *unheimlich* part of the ritual, of the magic; in other words, of those experiences that are not only visible but also escape the language articulated in the form of speech. Artaud refuses the Aristotelian logic because the ultimate end of that positivist philosophical tradition is for all experiences to be *heimlich*; and we should not forget that Aristotle, in the *Politics*, precisely identifies the *polis* as the space of institutionalisation of the significant language, the *logos*. The city itself, with its walls, its laws, its social and political organisation, found its reflection in the classical tragedy; this formula of mise-en-scène that had already lost — Nietzsche recalls — its original, irrational and Dionysian significance.

Many of the most successful theatre productions in recent years have been related to the desire to change their relation with the *theatron* and the *polis*. Instead of reproducing the *polis* (the community, its organisation) on the stage and showing it from the distance, they have suggested that citizens leave the theatre and delve into the city, going along its streets or into private houses, turning these places into the object of the performance and, above all, a territory to have an experience. This has led to the emergence of a given type of theatre that plays with giving a new value to what is everyday and through which many situations that to our eyes are banal now have charm again. In *Cargo Sofia* (2006), by Rimini Protokoll, for instance, the audience is seated inside a truck with polarised glass through which they can see the outside. This vehicle goes through the city offering the audience, for two hours, a different point of view onto the urban centre where they usually move. I find this example interesting because, to some extent, it is like lifting the stalls and taking them outside the theatre, into the city. Here this idea of filter and vision from the distance is maintained in some aspects, but in projects such as *CallCutta* and *Remote,* the group developed a deeper relationship with the urban space; we could talk about it for hours, mentioning again and again the works of Helgard Haug and Roger Bernat. Bearing them in mind, if we wonder now why the theatre should get rid of

a model of mise-en-scène focused on the vision, we are ready to formulate a first answer: because at a given moment it might be more interesting to give up looking from the distance to get closer and touch it with our hands, giving ourselves to the concrete experience of life.

Alice in the Cities

In 2010 I participated in a tour that started in the central hall of the library of Humboldt Universität and ended on the roof of the HAU2. The project was called *Parallele Städte / Ciudades paralelas*. Lola Arias and Stefan Kaegi invited participants to move through the city to attend a series of performative events, curated and set up by other creators. In *Bahnhof* (Train Station), by Mariano Pensotti, four authors were sitting at a metro station writing on a computer the imagined stories suggested to them by the vision of passers-by. What they were writing could be seen on screens visible to all, placed in the four corners of the station. The passers-by were the real protagonists of the performance, because their actions and reactions inspired or modified the activity of the authors. Some of the participants endeavoured to enter the stories of the writers in a more or less hidden way, seeking to attract their attention; others reacted to what they were reading, playing to satisfy or frustrate the expectations that their "characters" created among the audience. All this happened while the underground was running, with the trains moving, carrying workers and tourists who were not aware of the fact that at that moment a performance was taking place. They became involuntary spectators and also themes of the authors' stories and automatically became the object of vision by the real theatre spectators, who had bought a ticket for *Parallele Städte / Ciudades paralelas*, and who also ended up being involuntary performers. This merger between theatre audience and citizens devoted to their daily activities was a key characteristic of the whole project.

In *Bibliothek*, by Ann Hampton and Tim Etchells, participants had a table reserved at the library of Humboldt Universität and set about reading some books, following the instructions of a voice recorded on an iPod, amidst hundreds of occasional students and readers who passed through these rooms every day. In *Shopping*, by the group Ligna, participants mixed with the customers of a shopping centre; they were distinguishable again when, always guided by a voice in the earphones, they performed a flash mob, which could be seen from outside as a choreography. The spaces chosen for the performances were not the defined and recognisable space of a theatre, but the whole city, with its often anonymous places of transit, introductory zones in which the depersonalisation processes are amplified: hotels, libraries, stations, shopping centres, factories... The recovery of the urban space has, of course, a political significance, accepting the word "political" in its etymological sense: what belongs to the *polis*, the community. The spectators move around, play, make decisions, become political animals, parts of a system that invites them to be active, to get in touch with other people who belong to the community, interacting with them, *polluting them*.

There are many examples of this kind. In September 2014, the Japanese artist Akira Takayama coordinated a series of performative events in the Rin-Main region under the title of *Evakuierung* (Evacuation). The idea was to create routes of artistic escape for citizens forced to leave the city in case of catastrophe. After responding to questionnaires that enabled different types of profiles to be established, participants were invited to visit open air facilities in especially designated places, following the "escape" urban route on special maps. I find the concept of *evacuation* interesting because it is related to that empty space created when one leaves a safe place that is no longer safe to look for another space of safety. The experience is recorded in a book published by Alexander Verlag, called *Evacuating Theatre*, a concept very useful for our symposium. In an interview with Akira Takayama we read: "My interest lies less in introducing elements of the city into theatre than in creating, through theatre, a framework for reencountering actual society" [Takayama, in: *Die Evakuierung des Theaters*: 249]. In fact, if we think about it, the *unheimlich* situations of shared danger also enable a society to be drawn together; we saw it with the 11 September, we see with the terrorist attacks, with natural catastrophes... After all these events a kind of area of consensus is created within which, for some hours or some days, we feel part of a more compact community.

One of the most profitable, non-conformist and *unheimlich* examples of dialogue between theatre and city I remember is the operation set up in 2000 by Christoph Schlingensief in the Herbert-von-Karajan-Platz in Vienna, *Bitte lieb Österreich!* (Please, love Austria!). In the rise of Görg Haider's populism, for a week, in the Wiener Festwochen, a series of containers were set up next to the opera house, within which a kind of *Big Brother* was held:
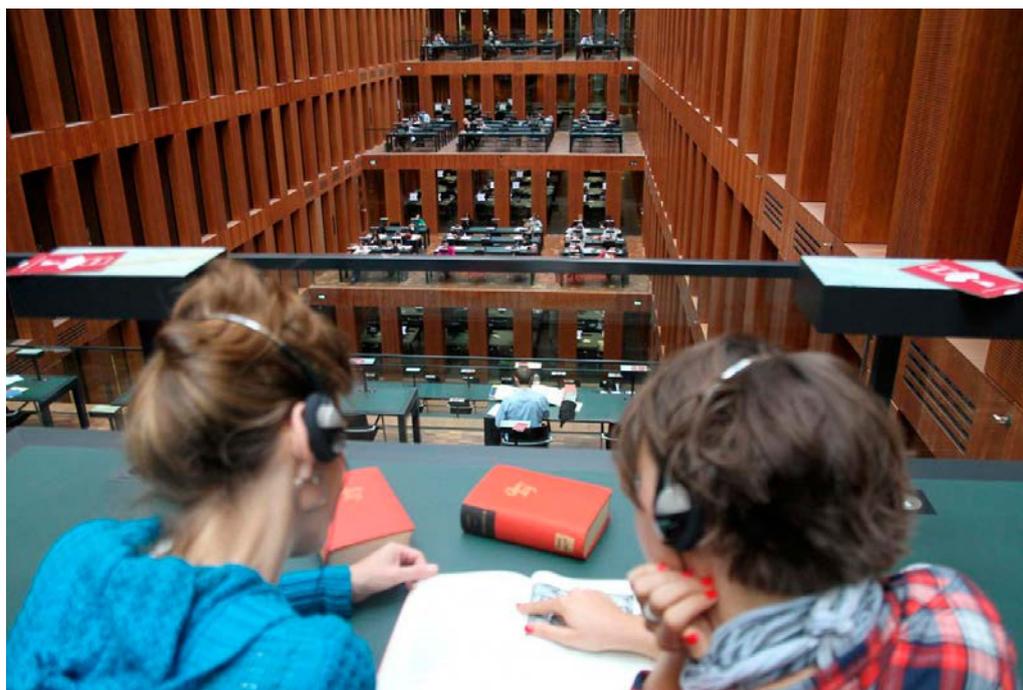
Photo 3. Reading room of the Humboldt Universität library, in the Centre Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm.
Source: http://www.ciudadesparalelas.org/bibliotecaale.html.

the participants were asylum petitioners that would be expelled from the house and, therefore, from the country, through a phantasmagorical electoral vote of the audience. Everything looked like an improvised anti-immigration citizen action and, from a box bespangled with flags of the FPÖ, Schlingensief encouraged passers-by to express themselves on the issue. Opposite the installation, open day and night, groups of people met for and against this fake xenophobic initiative, whose theatre nature was concealed. Of course, if its origin as fiction had been revealed, it would not have had the same effect; in contrast, given that the spectators did not know exactly what was happening there, how it had originated and what its real purpose was, the operation caused some concern among citizens (the videos of the debates held in the square prove it). The theatre left the auditorium and camouflaged itself in the urban fabric; disguised as a para-political initiative, it made the city ask itself what kind of society it was building. And it did so by leaving not only its building but also its form of canonical presentation, of fiction limited to the moment of the performance, to actually become again an "event", which happens unexpectedly and modifies people's daily existence. Hans-Thies Lehmann recalls that, when theatre is hidden and camouflaged in the city, "it has to find forms and locations where people are not expecting to find it and perhaps will not immediately recognize it. It will take place where the boundaries of what we imagine theatre to be are reached and transcended. Art can no longer be art if it is only art" [Lehmann, 2015: 243]. However, we know that making theatre leave the theatre is not new; and not so much because it had been seen in the 1960s but above all because the tradition of a theatre in a public place, in the open air, in the street, has never ceased in the history of Europe. Still today, in many cities — like this one where we are now — it is possible to attend events that have their origin in the sacred mysteries, in the medieval secular events or in baroque theatre and that, although they are not often labelled as "theatre", they belong to that wider category of theatricality. Paradoxically, although we often do not realise it, in the European history of the last two thousand years the theatre that has most interested the audience — or, rather, the public affairs, in the widest sense of the term — at the level of the shared imaginary has not been the theatre within the theatres (which is a form of entertainment that has been enjoyed, let us say, by the last three generations; four, if you come from wealthy families) but theatre in the street (which is a thing of the other previous seventy generations). The reason it is difficult to acknowledge it is that, because it is rare in the field of literature, it has always been considered a minor theatre, and only sporadically has it found a small space in the "highest" intellectual theatre (I am thinking of Goldoni with his operation on the *commedia dell'arte*, or of Hugo von Hofmannsthal with the rewriting of *Jedermann*, or of how José Sanchis Sinisterra has recovered a "minor" theatricality which, certainly, has nothing of the minor). With the reduction of the role of the text and the dramatic representation, the problem of literature no longer concerns so much these performative forms that are developed outside the auditoria. At a given moment, producers and theatres realised that they could offer their audience the possibility of not going to the theatre but to other spaces in the

city; or even that the theatre went to them: to the square or even their homes. This began to intrigue the spectators. Once it was decided that going to the theatre did not mean having to cross the doors of an auditorium, the entire city became the ideal place for these kinds of shows. This is also the starting point, for instance, of a series of operations related to decentralisation towards peripheral areas, implemented in different cities after the Second World War. I am thinking of Paris, of course, with projects such as the Cartoucherie; or of the city where I was born, Milan, in the work undertaken by the Piccolo Teatro, first with its expansion towards the working-class neighbourhoods and later, for instance, establishing itself in the venues of Spazio Bovisa with *Infinities* by Luca Ronconi, in 2002. In the last twenty-five years, with the deindustrialisation of the urban centres, theatre has discovered the beauty of the big former industrial buildings.

In Berlin it has been dance, the performing art of the non-representation, that has most used these venues: Radial System, Dock 11, Sophiensaele, Tanzfabrik, Uferstudio, and so on. I think that, also in this case, the determining factor is the empty space, which offers artists and spectators great freedom of imagination and movement. Some months ago, within the Tanz im August Festival, the former brewery Kindlbrauerei hosted *Inside Out*, by Isabelle Schad, who presented six different dance pieces on the three floors of the building. The factory, which is five minutes from my home, has been reformed and now functions as an arts centre; but I remember its enormous rooms open to improvised parties, such as New Year's Eve 2009 when the Kindlbrauerei in disuse was partially occupied by a citizen group. Another example: that same year Sasha Waltz was invited to reopen the Neues Museum, where the reform had been completed. Before they put the works on display in their corresponding places, the German choreographer used the big empty rooms of the museum for the intervention *Dialog 09*, a piece conceived precisely as a dialogue between the performers and the space of a public venue that was not yet open to the public. In all these cases I find it interesting to highlight the extreme freedom that the empty space offers to choreographers to direct the movements of the performers, and to do them, in wide spaces, not recognisable as theatre venues, which from a certain point of view surprise spectators. And the audience also enjoy freedom of movement, encouraged to wander as much as they like through the different rooms and choosing the route and the times, while being accountable for the use of those spaces. We can also approach it this way: an event of this kind offers the audience a kind of mirror of the relation between citizens and the city; a city invites citizens to live in it actively (to discover it, to go through it, to experience it) as does the performance with its spectators. In both cases, the level of satisfaction of the citizen/spectator is determined by the range of possibilities, by the variety of events, by the ease of movement, by the fact that it awakens the feeling of being in front of something wonderful. I think that the city is precisely the place where wonder, which in theatre can only be shown and looked at, can be touched and experienced. An old film from 1974 reminds us of this: *Alice in der Städten*, by Wim Wenders, the director who has most analysed the insufficiency of the gaze through the big utopia of the camera-eye. *Alice in the Cities*:

Foto 4. © Davide Carnevali.

the protagonist is a girl with the same name as Lewis Carroll's character, but her journey among wonders is set in the German cities. We believe that children do not limit themselves to looking, they want to be close to what they see, their experience is not complete in the gaze: it is really complete only if they can touch it with their hands.

Talking of wonder and children, I find it appropriate to mention a project that has been going for ten years in the city of Nantes. The former Dubigeon shipyards on the river Loire have been, since 2007, the house of *Les machines de l'île*, an area of exhibition, creation and entertainment for big theatre machines, a small world that seems to spring from Jules Verne's imagination. The main attraction is a big mechanical elephant (photo 4) that leaves its hangar every day and walks for half an hour through the streets of the island, carrying around fifty passengers including adults and children.

At present they are designing *L'Arbre aux Hérons*, a steel tree 50 metres in diameter and 35 metres in height (more or less a ten-storey building), although from its highest branches mechanical birds can take flight up to forty-five metres. The tree will be covered with plants and organic materials and visitors will walk through its branches using stairs and mechanical animals, such as caterpillars that work as lifts. The cost of the project is around 40 million euros and is fully supported by the Council, which considers the *Machines* a source of visibility and tourist attraction for the city.

The reason my interest as a spectator, who has seen a lot of theatre in many auditoria, has moved towards these kinds of shows, is because of the amazement, the dislocation it causes and the feeling of being in front of something wonderful awakening. When I ask a friend to come with me to the theatre, I think he or she accepts more willingly if I suggest an experience outside the theatre. I know that it is not a statistic validated by a scientific study, but that's the way it is, believe me: my friends' happiness has no scientific basis. Perhaps these kinds of events are what better meet our compelling need for change: we are living in a period where change obsesses

us, we want to be anti-conventional at any cost. Our life is so monotonous that it must appear multiform on Facebook, we must constantly post photos on Instagram that prove the multiple faces of our personality, which show how varied our activities are... Social media has permeated our lives with this dual function: on the one hand, to make us see as a uniform mass of users; on the other, to offer each individual the opportunity to build a personal story outside the common. A good reason for the attraction we feel towards theatre in non-theatrical spaces may be the following: the need to change and the interest in an event that invites us to adopt a different perspective on something we already knew. Not only, as we have said before, on the city and the public space but also a different point of view on the theatre art itself, on its potential, on its role within society.

Theatre for the End of the World

A couple of years ago I was invited to the Muestra Nacional de Teatro in Mexico as an external observer and I had the opportunity to expand my knowledge of Mexican theatre, while attending around forty shows in two weeks. If I think about it two years later, the clearest memories I have concern those events that were presented in non-theatrical spaces. The *Ricardo III* by the Compañía de Teatro Penitenciario de Santa Martha Acatitla is a production of Shakespeare's classic play performed by inmates, but the real experience, everybody said, was going to Santa Martha, in the south east of Mexico City, into the prison, walking through the corridors and taking in to the sound and smells of that place. This, of course, is not so easy: it is necessary to file a specific request, send the documents, fill in the forms and, to find a place, you have to book weeks in advance because it is always sold out. Perhaps the desire of the people to visit such as terrible place depends on the fact that what is *unheimlich*, even if it is not appropriate and we do not like it, attracts us a little; like everything we are not familiar with. The value of this attraction must not be underestimated: as human beings, it leads us to explore new paths, to take risks. Something inherent to our genetic code, which goes back to our origin as nomadic hunter-gatherers, urges us to do it.

In *Shift y suprimir*, by Monos Teatro, the audience was invited to the house of the actors, who performed fragments of daily life, explained their lives and metaphorically undressed, while opening their thoughts and feelings to the audience while also opening that intimate physical space that is their home, their bedroom, their bathroom. The show ended on the rooftop where people arrived through an uncomfortable window and walking up a small staircase: once again, the charm of unusual places, difficult to reach and theoretically forbidden as they are private. Of course, this is not new: theatre has been performed at home for years; in Buenos Aires it gave way to a very powerful movement; here it has become a trend for economic reasons, with microtheatre. Theatre in inhabited houses and theatre in uninhabited houses: in *El puro lugar*, by Jorge Vargas for Teatro Línea de Sombra, the spectators went into an abandoned building, in ruins. Within the different rooms it was possible to consult documents and speak with the performers,

who had been witnesses to the stories of different places located in the city of Veracruz, which for one reason or another had been a setting for violence and had been abandoned by the residents in the area. The show was originally performed in *el puro lugar* (the exact place) where the events described had occurred. By exporting it to other locations, the group sought an especially significant space that had suffered the same fate, which in Mexico unfortunately is quite easy to find due to its reality. The transfer from one place to another also created an interesting reformulation, which influenced the performative act and became part of it: interacting with the participating audience, the performers re-programmed their discourses bearing in mind that an additional explanation on the origin of the project itself was necessary. It was not enough to speak of the story of the place: it was also necessary to speak of the places where the story had occurred. This "speaking of" was, to some extent, a cathartic act and came along with the fact that the participating spectators, with their physical presence, gave new life to those buildings. All this redeemed that place, taking it back to a *lugar puro* (pure place). It was on this occasion that someone mentioned to me "Teatro para el fin del mundo" (Theatre for the End of the World).

It is a far-reaching project in the form of a platform driven by diverse groups, whose objective is to study, analyse and actively intervene in architectonic and urban contexts, undermined by acts of violence, with the aim of returning them to their use and life. As pointed out in the presentation note, "the programme is made up of diverse systems of operation as an emerging alternative for the recovery of the urban space and its memory, inhabiting the remains of history in the cities." The project began in 2012 in Tamaulipas, and later was extended to Argentina and Uruguay, while taking Latin America as it main reference. Currently, for instance, there is a programme of interventions underway in the neighbourhoods of El Cerro and La Teja in Montevideo. The goals of the TFM in Uruguay for 2018 are:

- support and expand the programme of on-going intervention of artistic work in the territory;
- strengthen the work of professional research for the development of the intervention of abandoned spaces and promote the new knowledge generated;
- foster the creation of new audiences;
- promote the on-going work with socio-cultural institutions that are a benchmark in the area, particularly with those that plan actions in the territory.

The platform has dealt with the recovery of the urban space in an overreaching way, working in spaces devastated by human and cultural phenomena but also natural such as earthquakes and tsunamis; recently it has also addressed the migratory phenomena that affect the European Union. In an interview conducted a couple of years ago, Ángel Hernández, speaking of communities and individuals in migration, emphasised that "by challenging these so deeply established models, they have found alternatives to reshape

identity through non-localisation, non-geography, non-identification; in other words, non-identity. This is what particularly concerns this project, as it asks itself about how, depending on this non-belonging, a belonging can be transfigured that, in an emerging way, is established as a strategy of survival and resistance for these communities in displacement." I would like to highlight the concepts of "non-localisation" and "non-identification": migrating, changing a familiar place for a strange one, experiencing insecurity... One of the focuses on which TFM is working is the forced domestic emigration in Mexico as a result of violence, with special attention on urban spaces confiscated by the drugs trafficker. Complete neighbourhoods stolen from the city to be used a business and exchange base, which the legitimate inhabitants have abandoned over time, are recovered through performative interventions and other activities in which the audience is invited to occupy those public spaces again. The danger factor, in these cases, exists.

Sometimes I have spoken to companies working at high risk bordering places, such as Ciudad Juárez, which literally puts their lives at risk every day to maintain, through theatre, a space of cultural resistance and make uninhabitable areas liveable again. Here, the exposure to risk becomes a determining factor, which conditions the aesthetic proposal through an ethical need: the presence of the body, of the performer in the first person. Actors and spectators share a space and time marked by a specific risk, theatre forgets the protection that an auditorium of a specific institutional context may offer, and the event takes place under the sign of uncertainty, its temporary character, the insecurity that identifies unknown, untamed, hostile *unheimlich* places. "How in hell can someone risk their live for theatre?", I think with my European theatre man mind, and I realise that, when I think in this way, I see theatre as an end rather than as a means. I speak about it with a girl of just over twenty, who has just had a baby, a member of Teatro Bárbaro, a company based in one of the most confrontational neighbourhoods in Chihuahua. I ask her: "Aren't you afraid? You've just had a baby, why don't you stop?" She answers: "Because I would like my daughter to grow up in a city where she could live freely and didn't have to hide." In *Ética y representación*, José Antonio Sánchez speaks of the ethical commitment of someone risking their body, offering as an example groups such as Teatro Abierto and Yuyachkani, which played a very active role during the 1970s dictatorships in Latin America, representing a silenced collective voice and taking on the burden of the prohibited public events. A dynamic typical of the great events in the open air was created in the closed venue of a small theatre auditorium: it was theatre as a condensed space of the city. The case of military dictatorships is significant; in all these realities, the individual lives in a constant state of danger; not only in their public exposure but also in their private dimension, in usually safe places such as a flat or a private home.

I would like to conclude this presentation by mentioning a last personal experience, in which I am personally involved as a creator. In June, we debuted with a production by the Münchner Biennale and the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, a show called *Ein Porträt des Künstlers als Toter*, a personal story about two dictatorial regimes: the Argentinean (1976-1983) and,

as a reflection, the national socialist (1933-1945). In this docufiction show, the actor Daniele Pintaudi explains in the first person a private event that took place in 2014: the warning, by the Argentinean Ministry of Justice, of the opening of a judicial process concerning a flat located in the city of Córdoba, Argentina. The property, acquired by a relative of Pintaudi in 1978, was expropriated from a musician, a supposed political dissident, during the military dictatorship, and for this reason the family of the legitimate owner today is asking for its return. When he disappeared, the musician was working on the incomplete scores of a Jewish musician, who in his turn had disappeared during Nazism. The construction of the show oscillates between biographical research and historical investigation; based on a portrait of the disappeared artist, it expands to reflect on a form a barbarism: that of state violence, which is repeated in diverse historical and geographical contexts, and which could also be dangerously repeated today. On the stage we reconstructed a section of the flat; in the theatre this space is somehow extracted from the *continuum* of the story, building a bridge between 1941, 1978 and the present; between Argentina, Berlin and the place where the show is performed. But the flat is also the private space that becomes public space: after the judge has ordered the return to the family of the disappeared, at the request of the family, the family becomes a house-museum and a site of memory. Meanwhile, the private space finds its place within a public space, the theatrical space, which in the case of the Staatsoper is even more significant, because of the role that the square just opposite it, Bebelplatz (where Nazis used to burn books), has taken on in German history. In the final part of the show, the audience is invited to stand up and step on the stage, as if entering a house-museum; and they are invited to use this space and touch the objects to check that everything the actor has said has really happened (photo 5). Citing a sentence from the judge's ruling, the actor tells the audience: "What you see here is the reconstruction of the flat object of this judicial process. I would like you to look at it closer. Touch it with your hands. We are so used to listening to words on dictatorship, on state violence, looking at photos, videos… that we have become insensitive to words and images… But if we enter a real place, touch it, touch the objects, see that actual events have taken place there, it is something different. This is why an occasion such as this should prove useful," he said referring both to the historical trial and the theatre event, as if they were (and can be) the same thing.

I think that the meaning of the initiatives we have analysed here may be this one: to challenge the relationship between time of life and time of art through experimentation and the production of an *extra-ordinary* time. And challenge the relationship between private space and public space, by which the city, the public and political space par excellence, often becomes the setting of these operations. But making the spectator live in another time and another space also means reactivating their sleeping consciousness and put entertainment at the service of this experience. It means accustoming spectators to experience, to put the body (their own body) to experience the expiry of the body and existence, and experience its fragility. It means letting someone have a physical experience that leads them to change their point of

Foto 5. © Charlotte Pistorius.

view about reality, accepting even what is *unheimlich,* its most uncomfortable but fascinating and particularly stimulating part. The experience of the emptiness, of uncertainty and risk takes spectators far from their comfort zone and pushes them towards a practical activity in the first person which, along with that of other spectators, becomes a collective and therefore public activity in an exercise of empathy that can only be intellectual. This awakening of a feeling of community is indispensable to reconstruct the social fabric and a sense of community that are, at present, quite exhausted; an exhaustion that dramatic theatre, in contrast, finds it hard to counter because it is linked to its own system of production and to the protected and protective space of the theatre auditorium.

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