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The Board Game as Performance. Reflections on the Process of Creating *El candidato (o candidata)*

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English translation, Neil CHARLTON

Abstract

Drawing on the creative process of the *El candidato (o candidata)*, a piece based on a board game, I focus on the performativity inherent in games and how it can be transferred to the design of a performance device.

Through Eiermann and Fischer-Lichte, I explore the similarities between game and scenic realisation, and propose applying the concept of device to the understanding of theatrical development. Understanding a scenic realisation as a device enables us to analyse it as a set of power relations between participants, without any a priori distinction between actants and spectators. I emphasise the technological dimension of the apparatus as presented by Agamben, where the rules have the function of both restricting and enhancing the freedom of participants. This dynamic is paradigmatically exemplified in the dialectical tension between rules and uncertainty that we find in games.

In tracing the political implications, I explore a number of aspects that are characteristic of participatory artistic formats. I propose a distinction between a representative and a performative point of view, as well as between game and play, and I rely on the binomial formulated by Rancière between politics and police to analyse the power relations at stake in a performance, and detect whether their ludic components are used to create spaces of freedom or to deploy pre-programmed results. In addition to drawing on my practice, I comment on pieces by Rirkrit Tiravanija, Rimini Protokoll, LIGNA, Kate McIntosh, and Mónica Rikić to exemplify different degrees of audience agency.

Keywords: game (board), device, participation, interaction, politics and police, practical research, performativity

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The Board Game as Performance. Reflections on the Process of Creating *El candidato (o candidata)*

Introduction[1]

In *El candidato (o candidata)*, three groups of eight spectators are invited to sit at a table and learn to play a strategy game together based on the rules of a board game supposedly invented in Paris, in the context of the May 1968 protests and the Internationale Situationniste. This game, known in French as *djambi* or Machiavelli chessboard (Anesto, 1975), and marketed in Spain in the 1980s as *El candidato*, stages a political struggle between abstract figures representing candidates, activists, journalists, provocateurs and assassins. The staging that Gerard Valverde and I designed[2] is inspired by the games that, according to the limited documentation available, would have been held in the backroom of L'Impensé Radical, a unique Parisian bookstore that, through the 1970s, specialised in the confluence of games of strategy and political thought, and which was frequented by personalities such as Michel Foucault and Guy Debord.

After introducing them to the history of the game and its rules, and allocating them a random political candidate, the game is in the hands of the spectators, who will have to learn how each piece moves and what it can do, but also how they move and what they are capable of themselves to eliminate rival teams. One of our main interventions on the staging of the game is that, in *El candidato (o candidata)*, each of the four teams (or games) is controlled by two players, which forces the spectators to argue with each other and creates a climate of conspiracy or celebration. The movements of the pieces (industrial screws on a paving stone board) are reinforced by their sound amplification, while certain murders trigger a light effect and the video projection of a significant event in the country's political history on the board. Depending on which card is murdered, there is a transformation in the game,

1. The project that yielded these results was supported by a grant from the Fundació Bancària "la Caixa" (ID 100010434), code LCF/BQ/EU17/11590003.

2. The first version of *El candidato*, for only eight spectators, premiered at the Festival TNT in 2018. The second version opened in 2020, with three simultaneous boards, within the Teatre Lliure's Katharsis season.

El candidato (o candidata). © Sílvia Poch

whether it is a toast with whiskey, the resurrection of a dead piece, or the arbitrary introduction of a new rule. In any of these cases, it is the players themselves who, through an electronic device, select and trigger the corresponding event, and who, ultimately, reach agreements, betray their allies, mock the politicians they are supposed to embody and relentlessly execute their enemies until only one candidate is left alive.

"But why do you say this is theatre?" This question, which I have often encountered in describing my project, clearly shows how the ontological discussion about theatre is not only of interest to theatre studies but also affects the material and practical dimensions of the profession. "This is not a performance, it's just a game." To be able to treat a board game as a performance, you need a performance theory capable of including an event like this, beyond the traditional concept of theatrical performance. In this article, I will endeavour to bring together a series of reflections made during and after the process of creating *El candidato (o candidata)*: on the one hand, I will look for a definition of theatre that considers the similarities and overlaps between performance and game, referring to the theoretical contributions of André Eiermann and Erika Fischer-Lichte; next, I will analyse Michel Foucault's concept of device and propose a possible application to the performing arts, as a tool of analysis and as an instrument of creation. I will focus on how understanding a performance as a device makes it possible to rethink one of the most interesting aspects of the debate on participatory games or formats: the dialectic between rules and freedom. I will explore this point in a third section, where I will ask what we mean by participation (both aesthetically and politically) and where I will comment on a number of examples to try to clarify the differences between game and play, as well as between politics and police.

Game and Performance

In *Postspektakuläres Theater*, André Eiermann (2009: 371-372) argues that contemporary artistic productions are characterised as offering increasing resistance to traditional forms of classification, breaking the audience's expectations and demanding new forms of attention. This makes it increasingly more difficult to differentiate a scenic realisation[3] from an exhibition or an installation of a piece. There are formal aspects of exhibitions that are increasingly found in performances, and vice versa. According to Eiermann (2009: 384), only if we put these formal aspects on a balance can we incline to consider a certain event as exhibitional or spectacular. In this respect, the context in which the event takes place is of the utmost importance: a situation will be perceived as a scenic realisation if it takes place within a theatrical context, although its formal features are more reminiscent of those of an installation.

From Eiermann's point of view, we can say that *El candidato (o candidata)* brings together two independent formats: on the one hand, that of the scenic realisation, which corresponds to its context of presentation, and, on the other, that of the board game, far more significant in the definition of the situation that the piece proposes. This makes the work partially contradict the expectations of its presentation context; that is, with the coordinates of a theatrical performance. It does not mean, however, that the piece is "a simple game". Paradoxically, *El candidato (o candidata)* has been as rejected by theatres that considered it a game rather than a performance as accepted by others who have considered it a scenic realisation and not a game.[4] So the problem has nothing to do with the ludic dimension of the piece but with its performativity.

In *Transformative Aesthetics*, Erika Fischer-Lichte returns to the articulation of the concepts of performance and performativity by John Langshaw Austin and Judith Butler, and describes the scenic realisation as "the essence of the performative" (2004: 59). Fischer-Lichte's starting point is the paradigm shift experienced by the humanities and art from the 1960s onwards, known as the performative turn, and often associated with the names of Erving Goffmann, Richard Sennett, Judith Butler, Marina Abramović, Fluxus, Frank Castorf and Jérôme Bel, among others. As Robert McKenzie (2001: 13) points out, "between 1861 and 1994, only some 127 dissertations

3. As Óscar Cornago points out in his prologue to the Spanish translation of *Estética de lo performativo* (Fischer-Lichte 2004: 16-18), the concept of "performance", which is at the centre of current theatrical studies, poses a difficulty when translating the German expression *Aufführung*, which is used as a performance, but in the sense of' 'realisation'. The nuances and semantic breadth of *Aufführung* have to do with the execution of an action in the present, rather than in the "performed" reproduction of a previous reality. That is why, in translating Eiermann or Fischer-Lichte, I mostly opt for the translation of *Aufführung* as a "scenic realisation", as Cornago proposes to emphasise that theatre can only be understood as something "that is happening" (Ibid.: 18). The downside is that, unlike the everyday use of the term *Aufführung* in German, "scenic realisation" sounds too much like a posteriori theoretical construction, or, worse, false innovation. In order to remedy this, I have in some cases chosen to translate *Aufführung* simply as "performance".

4. For the time being, I've only had to ask once if the piece can be approached as a pure board game, when I was invited to present it in a toy fair. I find it interesting to note that I had to turn it down because I don't hold the copyright to some of the rules.

were written pertaining to the subject of performance. Since then, there have been over100,000."

The interest in observing and understanding everyday actions as performative gestures poses a unique challenge to the concept of scenic realisation that concerns theatre studies. Taking into account the artistic practice of the sixties, Fischer-Lichte (2004: 65) proposes a famous definition that considers "the physical co-presence of actors[5] and spectators [...] [who] meet for a certain period of time and in a certain place and they do something together" as the central aspect of any scenic realisation. The core of this definition, which leaves aside any concept of narration or representation, lies in the understanding of the performance as an event and not as a play. Fischer-Lichte considers the scenic realisation as an encounter, in which the spectators do not adopt a passive position, but "are considered an active part[6] in the creation of the scenic realisation, through their participation in the game" (Ibid.: 65).

This definition of scenic realisation not only allows us to value a piece like *El candidato (o candidata)* as an event, but also brings us closer to Johan Huizinga's classic definition of game (1949: 13):

> Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.

Far from wanting to establish distinctions between the concepts of game, scenic realisation and event, I find it productive to explore the vagueness posed by their intersection. The similarity between the game and the scenic realisation shows that every game has, from the outset, a performative character (Adamowsky, 2005: 23). Even the physical presence of actors and spectators, which for Fischer-Lichte is the scenic realisation, is also a central element of board games, as we can only play with them. Thus, how can we consider an artistic piece that makes use of the daily performativity of a board game, if "neither the concept of staging nor that of aesthetic experience offers us criteria to distinguish between artistic and non-artistic scenic realisations" (Fischer-Lichte, 2004: 398)? Again, we find a contextualisation issue:

> A scenic realisation is considered artistic when it takes place within the framework of the Art institution; in the same way, it is classified as a non-artistic scenic realisation when it takes place within the framework of the institution of Politics, Sport, Law, Religion, etc. What is essential to distinguish artistic and non-artistic scenic realisation is neither the specific character of event

5. *Akteure*, in the original. I would propose translating it as "actants".

6. *Mitspieler*, in the original: co-actants, but also, literally, "players".

> (*Ereignishaftigkeit*) of each of them, nor the scenic strategies on which they are based, nor the aesthetic experience they make possible. It is the institutional framework that allows us to decide whether to classify them as artistic or non-artistic (Ibid.: 400).

What the *El candidato (o candidata)* puts into play is the transfer of an everyday performative practice (playing with someone) to an artistic experience. This transfer is inseparable from a desire to experiment with the fundamental aspects that give both the community game and the scenic realisation their performativity: the meeting, the "relationship of co-subjects" (Ibid: 65) that emerges from it and the emergence of an event through a shared activity or practice that "creates order" (Huizinga, 1949: 10). In this respect, as I will develop later, the political dimension of the piece consists not only of its theme but also the performativity of the event it creates.

In order to carry out this exploration, I considered the creative process of *El candidato (o candidata)* as the creation of a space rather than as the production of a performance. Obviously, I do not refer to space as a container but to the concept of performative space, which "does not exist before or beyond the scenic realisation, nor after, but – as with corporeality or sonority – only takes place in and through the scenic realisation" (Fischer-Lichte, 2004: 220). The idea of space as a performative action, "the production and product [of which] is presented as two inseparable aspects and not as two dissociable representations" (Lefebvre, 1974: 96), allows us to imagine space as play-ground. As Huizinga explains (1949: 10):

> All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course. Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the "consecrated spot" cannot be formally distinguished from the play-ground. The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules are obtained.

The space can be understood, in this respect, as a certain arrangement of rules of the game that, regardless of how they are formulated, allow the emergence of expectations, perceptions and decision-making processes. In short, the play-ground is the stage of a process of subjectivation.

Working on the Device

The first use of the term "device" by Michel Foucault (1999: 56) is clearly dated: 15 January 1975. Although Foucault had not used this concept before and never gave a clear or unambiguous definition, the notion of device "imbues his texts as a latent concept" (Aggermann, 2017: 11) to the point of becoming a central motif of his philosophy. In general terms, the device describes a certain formation of knowledge and power that mobilises discourses and practices to materialise and justify a certain order, and originated at a

specific historical moment to respond to an emergency. According to one of the most quoted excerpts from Foucault (1977: 299), the device is a "decidedly heterogeneous ensemble comprising discourses, institutions, architectural structures, prescriptive decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, or philanthropic propositions; in short, words but also what is not expressed in words." Heterogeneity is one of the characteristic features of the device, to which is added "being, in an irritating way, concrete and abstract at the same time" (Stoellger, 2012: 47). This inconsistency or ambiguity should not be seen, however, as a shortcoming, as it exactly reflects the nature of the device, whose main function is not to establish a particular order in the form of authoritarian imposition but to model a topology of the possible and the impossible without strict regulation. This is how, instead of affecting a pre-existing subject, the device produces its own subject. As Giorgio Agamben (2009: 19) points out, "every apparatus implies a process of subjectification, without which it cannot function as an apparatus of governance, but is rather reduced to a mere exercise of violence." What, therefore, characterises devices is a dialectic constant between structure and freedom (or agency).

The device is also characterised as something that can never be fully grasped. Its scope is such that its effects are so deeply intertwined that the logic of the device can be found on all sorts of scales. Foucault describes devices that are on such different scales as psychiatry, prison or confession. In fact, the reproduction of this logic reaches the very subjects, who through their behaviour updates and perpetuates the devices, embodying them.[7]

When speaking of art and device, we find at least two interpretations of the concept of device: on the one hand, academic research often refers to devices in the sense closest to Foucault's original approaches, as networks formed by institutions, perceptual processes, and power relations.[8] On the other, a work of art can be described or advertised as a device.[9] This use, which "artists often adopt to avoid the overly historically connoted concept of a work of art" (Gonzalez 2015: 15), can be linked to Agamben's reinterpretation in *What is an Apparatus?*, which is an extension of, as well as a deviation from, Foucault:

> Further expanding the already large class of Foucauldian devices, I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the ability to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control or secure gestures, behaviours, opinions and discourses of living beings. [...] To recapitulate, we have then two great classes: living beings (or substances) and apparatuses. And, between these two, as a third class, subjects. I call a subject that which results from the relation and, so to speak, from the relentless fight between living beings and apparatuses (Agamben, 2009: 14).

7. Following Butler (1997: 106-131), we can say that devices are always performative.

8. *Cf.* Kastner, 2012 or Aggermann, 2017.

9. Stoellger (2012: 49) talks of "outlined devices" to differentiate aesthetic experiments based on the articulation of a device from other formations of knowledge and power.

Despite the danger of simplification that this proposal entails, I find it especially interesting for the performing arts, as it allows us to think about the scenic realisation "as a specific, concrete and materialised order of things" (Aggermann, 2017: 16), whose purpose is the production of a subject. While the concept of device can be used to make a reflection beyond the scenic realisation, which sees the performance only as the tip of an iceberg or as the update of a much wider device,[10] the simple rethinking of the scenic realisation as a device seems stimulating enough to question the traditional relations between art and spectators. Rethinking an event as a device allows us, above all, to free ourselves from spectacular conventions. If Fischer-Lichte had already excluded narration and performance from her definition of scenic realisation, the concept of device allows us to definitively abolish the consideration of the separation between actants and spectators (which Fischer-Lichte still defends) as an ontological feature of the scenic realisation. If we look at an event as a device, we can no longer take for granted any difference between actants and spectators: a device is made up exclusively of participants, arranged and organised differently by the same device. From this point of view, the traditional division between actants and spectators is shown as a structural inequality, which reflects a certain arrangement of the device (and, no doubt, a social function). Seen in this way, any stage arrangement, regardless of its degree of historical and cultural consolidation, is only an outline of arrangement that confers a concrete position on its participants, while subjecting them to an equally concrete process of subjectivation. We must not forget that, as Foucault (1977: 302) insisted, "Power does not exist [...] Power actually consists of relationships, it is a set, more or less organised, more or less pyramidal, more or less coordinated, of relations."

If, from this perspective, we return to the initial provocation ("Why do you say this is theatre?"), we see that what lies behind this question is nothing more than a fossilised device, that of the hegemonic theatrical and traditional model. When I considered another problem, I found that it made no sense to try to meet the demands of a device that had nothing to do with mine. So I came to understand my task as a *work on the device,*[11] linked to other questions: how is the board discovered? How does it feel, how do you play it? What expectations does it arouse and what surprises does it create? What is safe, possible and impossible? How do spectators sit, how do they speak, how do they move, what is the volume of their voice? Obviously, the answer to these questions can only be proactive: the device does not predetermine nor can it predetermine what viewers actually do. But the invitation remains. Working on the device means composing and articulating a plurality of invitations.

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10. Eiermann (2009: 282) considers, for example, how "the actions performed in a performance are always foreshadowed or in-formed by actions carried out outside the performance, as well as by a recourse to the performativity always prior to the realisation of the performance." McKenzie (2001: 176) argues, on the other hand, that "performance will be for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what discipline was for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; that is to say, an ontohistorical formation of power and knowledge."

11. Eiermann (2009: 371) summarises it thus: "Staging involves the *formation* of this device; that is, the *in-formation* of an event consists of the *forming* work on a device." Cf. Eiermann, 2009 (280-286) and Eiermann, 2009 (368-372).

El candidato (o candidata). © Charlotte Bösling

If we talk about games, the dialectic between determination and indeterminacy is paradigmatically expressed in the debate over rules. The importance of rules in defining games has often been debated: just as Huizinga (1938: 11) argues that "the rules of a game are absolutely binding and allow no doubt." Caillois, in his description of the game as a "free activity", argues that "the doubt about the development of the game must remain alive until the end." Caillois (1958: 23) adds that games represent an uncertain activity, "the development and outcome of which cannot be known at the outset, and where a certain margin of invention must necessarily be left to the player's initiative." I think we do not stray far from Caillois if we conclude that the most important dialectic of games is not between rules and freedom but between rules and uncertainty. As Greg Costikyan (2015) points out, uncertainty is a central element in the design of any game. The purpose of the rules is not to limit the freedom of players but to create situations of uncertainty that make the game possible.

As I will set out in the next section, the uncertainty created by the rules of the game within the game is transferred, performatively, to the social situation in which it takes place. In the case of *El candidato (or candidata),* the board game acts as a device embedded within the device of a scenic realisation (which, in turn, we can say is embedded within the device of the performing arts institution, and so on). Each level proposes rules and plays with its own uncertainty.

The device should be understood as an interface: it does not work from top to bottom but is developed only through the interrelationships between all its participants (and their actions) and all orders, discourses and institutions (the board game, politics, election campaign, assembly, etc.) invoked by the device. In fact, it could be said that the more freedom of movement the participants have, the more successful the device. The political significance of this is immense.

Politics of Participation

Participation is a keyword for both art and politics. Especially under the influence of poststructuralism, the role of spectators in contemporary art has become an object of discussion, often related to the question of the potential of art for producing a political experience. The promise of empowerment that we find in such an influential text as Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) has filtered, uninterruptedly since its publication, into the language and ways of thinking of many museums and cultural management bodies, not always critically. Claire Bishop, author of the aforementioned concept of the "activated spectator" (Bishop, 2005: 102-127), has often warned that "participatory art is not a privileged political medium, nor a ready-made solution to a society of the spectacle" (Bishop, 2012: 284), as participation and democracy are not synonymous.

This is precisely what the rules of the *djambi* evoke: the problematisation of political participation in a democratic society. The game shows how the mechanisms of democracies also pursue totalitarian ends, so that the possibilities of participation of the population are much more restricted than would be desirable. The question posed by *El candidato (o candidata)* is the same as that posed by Bourriaud's political promise: what are we really talking about when we talk about politics, and what is politics about?

An important distinction when answering this question is whether we consider it from a representative or performative point of view. Take, for example, Claire Bishop's critique of *Untitled (Still)* by Rirkrit Tiravanija's, one of Bourriaud's most acclaimed and praised artists. As usual in Tiravanija's ideas, this 1992 piece consisted of a meeting space, where spectators could sit comfortably, talk, eat and even cook. From a representative point of view, the piece evoked the opening of a space of freedom and participation, where an ephemeral society met and got organised. For Bishop, however, the installation failed, from a performative point of view, to trigger a real democratic dialogue, as this ephemeral society was made up of "a group of art dealers and like-minded art lovers" who considered it "good because it permits networking" (Bishop, 2004: 67). To seek out the political aspect of participation, Bishop focuses on the specific experience that the device produces. While Tiravanija presented the installation as an open event, Bishop (2004: 69) points out that participation was only apparent, as "the structure of his work circumscribes the outcome in advance." In other words, the promise of participation was limited to a representation of freedom, framed by the artificiality and arbitrariness of a museum situation that could not be avoided.

Applying Bishop's critical perspective to *El candidato (o candidata)*, we see how, from a representative point of view, spectators are invited to parody a political campaign, identifying themselves as members of a political party and embodying a randomly selected candidate. The piece can thus be understood as a critique of institutional politics, which is considered as mechanical and empty of ideology as a game. From this point of view, the rules are only relevant insofar as they reflect the mechanisms of politics; that is, insofar as they serve as a metaphor. From a performative point of view, on the

Untitled (Still). © Rirkrit Tiravanija

other hand, it is more interesting to see how the relationship between spectators and the "thickness of the device" (Aggermann, 2017: 10) of the game and its rules lead to a progressive incarnation of power relations between them. Consequently, we can say that the politics of the game lies precisely in how the spectators relate to the possibility of achieving a preponderant position within the game. A spectator describes his experience after a game as follows:

> Marc Villanueva Mir explains that, here, chess strategies do not work because they are too defensive. Instead, we are advised to play as offensively as possible and to cheat on our playmates almost obscenely. [...] The game is going incredibly fast: we make political speeches, we discuss the moves, we laugh when we lose a card that we had not seen or endangered. It is as if, all of a sudden, we were able to express all our distrust of politicians, all our disappointments in social injustice, in an oblique way: embodying the role of politicians in the darkest and most cynical way possible (Köthe, 2019).

Although the game has many rules (and not exactly simple ones), it is interesting to see how this description does not refer to them or their complexity, but to relationships and actions that have nothing to do with it. What stands out is an atmosphere in which the power structures are not represented but, "almost obscenely", are embodied.

This is easily understood if we think about the difference in meaning between play and game. While games can be described through their abstract rules, without reference to the players who play them, play can only be explained through the experience and enjoyment of the player. The player takes over the game to the extent that he interprets, contradicts or adapts the

rules, or simply to the extent that he enjoys them. As Adamowsky (2005: 20) puts it, "from the participants' perspective it is clear that games only allow play to a certain extent and within certain limits, and that too much play can ruin a game." What I want to emphasise is that play is something that the game must allow, since "games constitute an institutionalised structure, within which play can be deployed, or not" (Ibid.). I think it would make no sense to oblige the spectators of *El candidato (o candidata)* to deliver a political speech or to embody a particular candidate. In the moments when this happens, it works exclusively because it is something allowed but not required by the game: because it belongs to the play and not the game. The design of the device anticipates these spaces of uncertainty, and offers an invitation but not an imposition. There is, for example, no rule that says what to do with the candidate and the political affiliation that spectators receive at the beginning. And yet, the presence of these elements often ends up having an effect on the game. Sometimes everyone agrees to block the team that has to play a specific game. Ironic comments are constantly heard about the policies on the table. In one game, one player internalised his random role as a Vox party candidate so much that he was the whole piece making sexist comments and celebrated his victory with a fascist salute. This embodied, unregulated dimension of experience has less to do with the rhetoric of the rules than with the performativity of the game itself.

Another key aspect of this understanding of the game is that play involves the ability to change the course of the game at any time. In some sessions of *El candidato (o candidata)* I have encountered reactions so contrary to the rules that they almost fail to cancel the entire game. But in political life there is also room for a coup, and dealing with the ambition of players who refuse to lose is part of political work.

At this point, I think it is worth invoking Jacques Rancière's differentiation between politics and police, not only because it gives us a deeper understanding of the participatory pieces but also because it shows how ethical questions about artistic participation have a direct correlation with broader political issues.

According to Rancière, both politics and police come from the Greek term *polis*, which is divided into two social logics:

> On the one hand, there is the logic that counts the lots of the parties, that distributes the bodies within the space of their visibility or invisibility and aligns ways of being, ways of doing and ways of saying appropriate to each. And there is another logic, the logic that disrupts this harmony through the simple fact of achieving contingency of the equality, neither arithmetical nor geometric, of any speaking beings whatsoever (Rancière, 1999: 28)

The first logic, which deals with the production of agreement and is often confused with politics, is called "police" by Rancière, while the second, which is devoted to the struggle for equality, corresponds strictly to "politics". If we move these concepts to participatory experiences or games, we will immediately see if they are closer to politics or police.

Evros Walk Water. © Daniel Ammann

An example of police logic would be found in situations or performances in which spectators are asked to participate with the sole purpose of reproducing a pre-designed experience. In pieces such as *Evros Walk Water*, by Rimini Protokoll, or *Rausch und Zorn*, by LIGNA, spectators receive acoustic or written instructions, the performance of which constitutes their participation in the show. In *Evros Walk Water*, which is about re-enacting John Cage's *Water Walk* performance, spectators have to perform certain actions with instruments and objects to produce a kind of remote-controlled concert. In *Rausch und Zorn*, spectators are constantly given movement instructions that end up generating a collective choreography. Neither of the two devices tolerates variations or deviations, which means spectators do not regard disobedience as an attractive option, as in these cases "staying true to unambiguous rules seems to promise a stronger experience" (Schipper, 2017: 205). The form of participation we find in these pieces is to let the movements, actions and even the gaze be directed, in order to achieve a harmonious experience. Spectators become almost workers at the service of the performance, which could not be done without them.[12] The effort is focused, however, only on one performance. Even if these pieces deal with issues of great political importance such as European asylum policies (in *Evros Walk Water*) or authoritarianism (in *Rausch und Zorn*) from a representative point of view, what they accomplish from a performative perspective is a normalisation (and normativisation) of experience. That is why I consider these works examples of police logic, similar to games that do not allow you to play them.

12. For a detailed critique of the exploitation of the spectators in participatory pieces, cf. Kunst, 2015: 59-72.

Conversely, forms of participation that do not require a predesigned result or that do not follow a patterned course are closer to political logic. Most importantly, in these cases, players can take over the game instead of submitting to it. Both rules and agreements between players must be constantly reviewed, and may be contradicted, modified or revoked at any time.

Two examples of this trend could be *Worktable* by Kate McIntosh and *Buildacode* by Mónica Rikić. *Worktable* is presented as an installation, in which each spectator is invited to choose an object from a shelf and destroy it in the way they prefer. In a second room, the spectator has to choose an object destroyed by someone else and try to put it back together. Despite having a strict division of spaces and unequivocal instructions, the installation offers more than just a choreographed pattern of experience. This is mainly due to the fact that each spectator can stay as long as they want in each room, and that nothing stipulates how their interaction with the objects or with other participants should be. This piece is an example of generosity: everything is on the table, nothing is hidden, and everything can be observed, touched or handled. The interest in what happens depends on collective involvement and generosity.

Buildacode is an interactive installation for boys and girls by multimedia artist Mónica Rikić, in which participants can stack or juxtapose soft coloured cubes to create rhythms, melodies and sounds. The cubes, which have QR codes detected by an optical recognition system, correspond to basic programming modules, with which children can play intuitively, combining shapes, colours and directions that are immediately transformed into sound waves. It is no coincidence that this unresolved puzzle is installed in

Worktable. © Kate McIntosh

Buildacode. © FILE - Electronic Language International Festival

museum halls, as this allows people to enter and exit at any time. Participants can therefore enter so that the sound or atmosphere produced by others invites them to do so. *Buildacode* enables an open world experience under construction, where the technological interface acts as a means and result of the decisions and agreements of its participants.

Both *Buildacode* and *Worktable* are quite radical examples of indeterminate participation. We must, however, resist the temptation to classify the pieces as if they could be ascribed simply to the pole of politics or that of the police. As Rancière (1999: 31) says, nothing is in any way in itself political but everything can become so. Finally, it should be noted that the difference between politics and police has nothing to do with the number of rules of a game, as Caillois's famous (and slightly outdated) distinction between *paideia* and *ludus* would suggest (1958: 27-28). What limits the possibilities of participation in a game or a scenic realisation the most are not the instructions or rules but the closed orders and the pre-designed routes.

Conclusions

Games form performative practices. Despite being traditionally separated from the artistic and cultural sphere, considered more serious, games do not differ fundamentally from theatrical performances, as evidenced by the porosity of the boundary between the concepts of play and scenic realisation.

Fischer-Lichte's (2004: 65-66) statement that the rules that produce a scenic realisation "should be understood as rules of the game, which can be negotiated between all those involved – actants and spectators – as well as be followed or broken" should not be understood as a metaphor, but as a sign of the importance of this intersection between games and the performing arts.

Throughout this article I have presented some of the reflections that have accompanied the creative process of the piece *El candidato (o candidata)*, with which I have tried to explore the performative potential of a board game to turn a scenic realisation into a situation that not only performed but also embodied a political event.

In this respect, I considered the development of the piece as the creation of a space for participation capable of fostering an interaction with a free and self-managed game. To achieve this, I had to give up any form of participation that could be invoked by a police logic, as well as look for what a form of political participation could mean. Unlike other pieces that clearly establish a predetermined path, in *El candidato (o candidata)* no behaviour is right or wrong, especially when it comes to rules.

The political component of uncertainty (what is politics if not collectively managing an uncertain life?) is perfectly evident in applying the concept of device to both the understanding of a game and a scenic realisation. Rather than wanting to show something unidirectionally, my work on the device is based on a functions design, the goal of which is to offer a multiplicity of possible and impossible paths. Its incarnation within the piece consists of a plurality of invitations, continuously accepted or rejected by the spectators. As Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2004: 304) point out, "play is movement within a more rigid structure." The intensity of the game depends directly on the involvement of the spectators, who act as real force fields to activate this space.

By constantly oscillating between evoking "original freedom and a desire to stop and give free rein to distraction and fantasy" (Caillois, 1958: 52) and serving as a "representation of the cosmic order" (Adamowsky , 2005: 18), the games make the connection between the aesthetic and the social (or political) that runs through all scenic realisation especially palpable. This aspect is evident when questioning the so-called "participatory"[13] stage formats, since the problems we detect in them are no different from those that affect political participation in society. An important distinction must be made between the representative and the performative point of view. Thus, in *El candidato (o candidata)* I chose not to stage a representation of political clichés but a negotiation embodied with the mechanisms of power. It was not until I came to this conclusion that I stopped thinking about introducing recordings, items of clothing, directions, or any items that would have more expressively reflected political activity, and I focused on the spectators' relationship with the rules of the game. This was especially interesting, given the extreme arbitrariness of the rules: what move will a player make if

13. As we have seen, participation is inseparable from any device; sitting in an auditorium in front of a proscenium stage also means agreeing to participate in a specific way.

he suddenly has the option of assassinating an allied candidate and seizing his party? How do you build relationships of trust in a situation where no one can trust anyone? How does the group manage the different energies of its members, how does each relate to the authoritarian, sarcastic or hesitant characters found at each table? How do we get along with someone we don't know? How do we do all this to have a good time together? The gestures, speeches and political attitudes he wanted to represent end up emerging during the play, spontaneously embodied by the spectators themselves so they embark on this process of negotiating with power.

All these considerations have led me to think that the politics we find in playing together should be looked at in how we play and not in how the game is. And the most important of these reflections is that there is no single way to relate to the question of "how the game is." Just as the free and anarchic game is not opposed to rules but to predetermination and authoritarianism, we can design game experiences aimed at fostering the diversity and richness of ways of playing, while understanding the rules of the game as a design of uncertainties.

However, the most open game and participation formats are not free of criticism. The temporary and artificial nature that characterises the interactive artistic experience constitutes at the same time its maximum value, since through it experimental modes of coexistence can be outlined, as well as its maximum weakness, since often these experiments end up being exclusively a politics simulation, as has often been discussed in exhibition contexts.[14] This critique, which also affects the live arts, should make us aware that both participation and politics should always be approached as a problem. As Claire Bishop (2012: 284) reminds us, there is no form of participation that represents a definitive solution. On the contrary, each form of participation "needs continually to be performed and tested in every specific context."

14. See Kunst (2015: 68): "In this respect, the museum factory as a dispersed social space produces a specific public sphere without the public, a constant training and exchange of linguistic, social and political activity but without the antagonism of an enduring location without antagonistic consequences springing from social effort."

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