The Site-Specific Projects of Teatro Potlach: The City as Set Design and Dramaturgy

Vincenzo SANSONE

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2933-1631
Independent researcher
vincenzosansone87@gmail.com

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Vincenzo Sansone, master's degree in Digital Performance at Sapienza University of Rome, holds a PhD in European Cultural Studies from the University of Palermo. He was a Visiting Scholar at Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona and the Polytechnic University of Valencia, researching video projection mapping and its relationship with the performing arts. The focus of his research concerns these areas: theatre, dance, set design, new media, animation, AR technologies, and software culture. Since 2015, he has been working with Teatro Potlach (Rome) as an actor and digital set designer.

Abstract

Teatro Potlach is an Italian theatre company founded in 1976 by Pino Di Buduo and Daniela Regnoli in a little village, Fara In Sabina, after a period of training by the two young people at Odin Teatret, under the supervision of Eugenio Barba. The principles of the company are those of the theatre anthropology followed by Odin, the work exclusively based on the body and the transformation of the space through the body. In 1991, to create a relationship with the citizens of the place where the company lives, the director begins to perform the first site-specific performance, *Invisible Cities*, inspired by Italo Calvino's book, which explores the memory of a place and gives it back to its inhabitants, letting a never seen before city appear. Subsequently he creates other similar projects like *Contemporary Landscapes*, inspired by the intangible culture of the places; *Angels over the City*, about the theme of the artist and *I Landscape – The Secrets of the Building*, which creates its dramaturgy based on a historical value building. The projects are developed with an interdisciplinary and multimedia approach that involves, in addition to the performing arts, anthropology, history and above all architecture and the work on a space. Indeed, on the place chosen for the performance, the company builds a path of about 1 kilometer that is transformed by means of different elements. Unlike theatre shows where the space is generally not binding, for these projects the space is the primary founding core. All the stage elements and the performances are linked to the real city, which is not a neutral element but an active subject. The final set design is partly built and partly real, but the built one depends on the real one that determines it. The city is not only set design but also dramaturgy because it is staged and tells

itself. For this reason we can speak about "dramaturgy of space", referring to dramaturgy, not only to the written text but also all the elements that create the whole performance. The final goal is to put citizens in contact with the culture and memory of the place where they live, which are the dramaturgical roots of these projects so that they are not forgotten and they are transmitted to the new generations.

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Introduction

Doing theatre in urban spaces is not only a modern custom. In fact, the idea that theatres were the only place for stage performance was questioned in the 20th century with the observation that "non c'è *il* teatro ma ci sono molti teatri"[1] (Cruciani, 2017: 99; original 1992). The new conception of theatre has made this phenomenon grow and normalised it. However, this practice has always been linked to the live performance and its need to interact with a non-elite audience; that is, with those who do not go to the theatre because they cannot (such as in the Italian Renaissance court performances that were reserved for the nobility) or because they do not want to (they do not feel the need or see theatre as something above their cultural training). On the other hand, as Cruciani notes, "ogni spazio può essere spazio del teatro purché si creino relazioni"[2] (Cruciani, 2017: 98; original 1992).

The fact that theatre occupies urban spaces has other motives in addition to the foregoing. For example, the desire to reinforce a doctrine, as happened in medieval theatre with sacred performances, where the Resurrection of Christ was usually staged through the discovery of the empty tomb. At first, the dramas were performed within the place of worship but, needing larger spaces, they first moved to the church cemetery and then to the town square, where mansions were set up, on which the various episodes of the drama were staged.

Bringing theatre to urban spaces is also a way of showing and affirming a power (whether ecclesiastical, political or economic), as happened with the urban baroque festivals that took place in much of 17th-century Rome. In these festivals, all the performers who worked for the papal court dedicated their art to the creation of an ephemeral event, which temporarily transformed the real, and tangible, city into a virtual and evanescent place.

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1. "*The* theatre does not exist, but many theatres."
2. "Every space can be a theatre, as long as links are created."

The city was covered by wooden or papier-mâché arches, floral and vegetal decorations, lighting systems, and all kinds of devices that created illusory optical effects in the city. These spaces also hosted tournaments, attractions, Chinese shadow shows and even circuses.

Theatre has occupied places that were not appropriate, thus leaving the theatre building. However, more than theatre itself, what has become widespread in urban spaces is the idea of theatricality, an idea that involves places in two different ways. On the one hand, the place becomes a theatrical site, as it reflects the scenario of a hypothetical story told by a drama. On the other, the place becomes dramaturgy because the performance depends on it, since it determines the events that will be narrated. Therefore, the place not only acts as a set in which the action takes place but also the subject that triggers the action itself. The place is the origin of dramaturgy.

As an example that illustrates the use of urban space for performance turned into dramaturgy, we will talk about the site-specific theatre projects that Teatro Potlach from Fara Sabina (Italy) has performed for more than twenty years worldwide. In 1991 the project *Invisible Cities* began, inspired by the book by Italo Calvino and based on the theme of cities, and in recent years has continued with other projects such as *Contemporary Landscapes*, *Angels over the City* and *I, Landscape – The Secrets of the Building*. These later projects, although they always use the city to develop the dramaturgical node, see it with other eyes, from other points of view and interests.

The objective of this article is to illustrate the conceptual and practical process that underlies these projects to see how they transform the city into a theatrical element (from a drama and set design point of view) and how they manage to fuse the theatricality of the city and theatre into a single inseparable element, which is the principle of the site-specific art concept. The methodology used to analyse these projects has been a combination of field research, practical experience and theoretical abstraction of concepts, principles and work methodologies derived from the experience itself and supported by bibliographic sources on the urban and theatrical space. The following, therefore, is not a simple illustration of the projects; it is rather a piece of original research that, through observation and participation in the first person, has extracted some principles (perhaps hidden even to those who perform them, because they are almost *automatic*) to illustrate the particular working of these urban theatre performances.

But what is Teatro Potlach and how did this practice become the cornerstone of its professional experience?

Teatro Potlach and Site-Specific Theatre

Teatro Potlach was founded in 1976 by Pino Di Buduo and Daniela Regnoli, after a period of training by the two young people at Odin Teatret, under the supervision of Eugenio Barba. The principles of the company are those of theatre anthropology followed by the Odin, the work exclusively based on the body and the transformation of the space through the body. The company immediately established itself in Fara Sabina, a small village near Rome,

as they preferred a decentralised position rather than the central Roman theatre scene for research and experimentation, only possible in the altered space-time of a small village if compared with the frenetic pace of a capital like Rome.

However, the residents of the small village did not understand the young people's group activity, who were locked up all day to work and experiment. They observed these practices with suspicion, perhaps due to fear of the unknown; they felt that they had somehow invaded their vital core and altered their balance. This is one of the reasons that led director Pino Di Buduo to practice site-specific theatre in 1991.

They left their comfort zone to take that theatre to the streets, but not in the way it had been constructed inside the rehearsal room but starting from those principles that the company had followed for years: theatre originated in the streets of the village to create direct contact with people and to establish a relationship of exchange involving the residents themselves, who became actors, and their houses and gardens, which became performing spaces.

This direct participation was also possible for a reason that depended on the relationship established between theatre and residents. Although the residents initially did not understand this way of doing theatre, they felt a great respect for it, since over the years the behaviour of these young actors has been beyond reproach. In this respect, the site-specific project transforms mutual respect between the initiative and the residents into an emotional relationship, in an indissoluble link between that theatre and the territory. In addition, the undertaking of the project is also linked to the nature of the initiative. In fact, *Potlach* is a word that comes from the Indian tribes of northern Canada and means *gift*, but also *exchange*. This word indicates

Figure 1. *Invisible Cities*, first performances (1991). Photograph from the Teatro Potlach archive.

Figure 2. *Invisible Cities*, first performances (1991). Photograph from Teatro Potlach archive.

that a gift received must be reciprocated with an equal gift. To the hospitality of the residents of Fara Sabina, theatre can only respond with what concerns them most, theatre, but in a close relationship with them. Hence the first project, *Invisible Cities*, which has travelled to more than sixty towns in the world since its premiere.

Over the years, other initiatives have been added to the main project: *Contemporary Landscapes, Angels over the City* and *I, Landscape – The Secrets of the Building,* all previously mentioned. These projects follow the same basic principles of performing operation and adaptation to the characteristics of the urban space where *Invisible Cities* is produced, even if they change the dramaturgy concept, which in any case is always linked to the space, and the point of view with which the research is carried out on that urban space and its culture.

But what does site-specific mean in these projects and, above all, in what way does the urban space, the city and its streets, become dramaturgy and not just a container of actions?

To try to understand these aspects, we must first briefly describe the phases of the practical operation of the different site-specific theatre projects of Teatro Potlach:

1. Once the city, the site of the event, has been identified, a path is chosen within it whose dimensions are variable (in some cases it can cover one km) and is transformed with stage elements in keeping with the existing space, its culture and memory, which determine the set design interventions and the dramaturgical actions themselves.

Figure 3. *Angels over the City* in Budapest (2016). The path of the performance seen from above. Photograph from the Teatro Potlach archive.

2. Along this path, different performers act simultaneously and, during the entire duration of the show, repeat their scene within the spaces transformed by set design elements and installations.

3. The audience can move freely along the path but following the direction created by the director, which must be clear and precise to maintain the dramaturgical harmony of the path itself. This freedom of movement is the reason why continuous repetition of the same scene is required, since different audience members will witness that action at different times.

4. The performance path is bounded by a framework, a beginning and an end, which lends it unity. In these two moments, all the performers line up in front of the audience, who are gathered in a large and

Figure 4. *Invisible Cities* in Fara Sabina (2016). The beginning. © Photograph by Stefano Cirilli.

emblematic place in the city, such as the main square. The master of ceremonies opens the presentation with a speech and invites the people to experience theatre such as they had never seen, to become travellers and explorers of their own city. When a bell rings, all the performers go to their space of action and the audience move along the path. At the end, all the performers return to the audience and the master of ceremonies, having illustrated the completed path, thanks them and says goodbye. When the bell rings again, the performers and the path disappear. The illusion is over and reality returns, but now it is different and will continue to be so in the memories of those who participated.

To see how the concepts of site-specific and space dramaturgy are the essence of the urban theatre projects created by Teatro Potlach, it is enough to take into account the first point: choose a place that is not a theatre and transform it with theatrical elements. That will determine the indissoluble link that is created between the event and the place that hosts it, so the performance is born and dies in that place and cannot be reproduced elsewhere, although it can travel between different spaces as a concept, but transforming every time it is put on in a new place.

These actions, therefore, underlie a dual thought: one of a general nature, of the vision of the project and its applicability to any existing space; and the other, of a particular nature, which determines where these actions will take place within a specific city/village. Indeed, what is a site-specific performance?

> Site-specific performances are conceived for, mounted within and conditioned by the particulars of found spaces, existing social situations or locations, both used and disused […] They rely, for their conception and their interpretation, upon the complex coexistence, superimposition and interpenetration of a number of narratives and architectures, historical and contemporary, of two basic orders: that which is of the site, its fixtures and fittings, and that which is brought to the site, the performance and its scenography: of that which pre-exists the work and that which is of the work: of the past and of the present. They are inseparable from their sites, the only contexts within which they are intelligible. Performance recontextualises such sites: it is the latest occupation of a location at which other occupations — their material traces and histories — are still apparent: site is not just an interesting, and disinterested, backdrop (Pearson; Shanks, 2001: 23).

What is particularly interesting about this definition, in addition to the site-specific parameters, is that these performances are inseparable from the places for which they are conceived. It should be stressed that a site-specific performance is the final occupation of a place that has had previous occupations that have left a mark. This aspect implies that the place chosen cannot simply be considered a container or a backdrop for the performance. This accumulation of occupations until the one reached by the performance is what constitutes the dramaturgy of space. In fact, as stated by De Marinis:

> Fare dello spazio un elemento o una dimensione della drammaturgia significa rifiutare l'idea che lo spazio sia un dato a priori immodificabile ed esterno alla messa in scena, o più precisamente alla composizione dell'opera teatrale, insomma un contenitore neutro indipendente dai suoi possibili contenuti. Significa ritenere che, al contrario, la dimensione spaziale, scenico-architettonica di un dato spettacolo, sia un qualcosa che fa parte (deve par parte) costitutivamente del processo creativo di quello spettacolo, e che quindi, al limite, va progettato / reinventato / organizzato ogni volta ex novo e ad hoc, riducendo al minimo, e se possibile eliminando del tutto, le costrizioni preventive.[3] (De Marinis, 2000: 32)

The disregard of space as a neutral container is even stronger and more predominant in a site-specific project in which space is related to the dramaturgical node. To understand this last aspect, it is enough to observe the dramaturgical nodes of the respective site-specific projects of Teatro Potlach, where it is understood that these are rather generic lines that develop each time they interact with an urban space.

The Dramaturgies in the Projects

Invisible Cities, as mentioned, was inspired by the book by Italo Calvino, but it is not its mise-en-scène. The book revolves around a fundamental theme: the memory and theme of the city, the memory of Marco Polo who sees the same city, Venice, in different ways, bringing out that invisible side that everyday life drags into oblivion. The Teatro Potlach project points precisely to this: it excavates from the memory of the residents and the city a hidden memory that must return to the light and be delivered to the same residents who can no longer see it, which will highlight a city hitherto unseen and that can never again be forgotten once rediscovered.

Contemporary Landscapes is linked to the site of the performance but, rather than deepening the historical-architectural memory of the place, it focuses on the intangible culture related to the artisanal activities, food and popular traditions of the place with the aim of bringing it to light and putting it into practice. The purpose is to arouse interest and, at the same time, preserve an almost intangible culture that runs the risk of disappearing forever.

Angels over the City is closely linked to the performers of the event. In all the projects there are local performers, but in this specific case they themselves are actors and dramaturgical subjects. They tend to highlight the artistic skill they perform. They are performer-angels who descend to the city to offer their art to the residents.

I, Landscape – The Secrets of the Building takes place in a smaller location than the others. It is usually carried out inside a building of great interest or in an abandoned site that seeks to attract attention and create its own drama.

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3.   "Making the space an element or a dimension of dramaturgy means rejecting the idea that space is, *a priori*, non-modifiable and external to the mise-en-scène, or more precisely to the composition of the play, in short, a neutral container independent of its possible contents. It means thinking that, on the contrary, the spatial, architectural and performing dimension of a given show is something that is part (must be part) of the creative process of that show, and therefore must be designed / reinvented / arranged every time *ex novo* and *ad hoc*, minimising or, if possible, completely eliminating preventive restrictions."

Memory, intangible culture, artistic heritage and details of a city are elements that cannot be developed without strictly depending on a site, a site that, however, as these themes show, is not only physical but also metaphorical, a multiple space that is really a combination of spaces, in which real elements and ideas work together to bring the event to life.

The Structure and Construction of the Projects: The Four Spaces of Action

The work that gives life to the site-specific projects of Teatro Potlach is aimed at the construction of four spaces that, as mentioned, are not only physical but also metaphorical. In their construction, the company's work in these four spaces follows a vertical trend, whose structure in phases forms the dramaturgy of the project and the resulting performance. The four spaces of these projects are:

1. Physical space.
2. Memory space:
   a) Memory of the places
   b) Memory of the residents
3. Staging space
4. Space of the performers

Each of these spaces requires specific work and can only be built if the preceding phases have been carried out:

Physical space

It is the real physical space, the city made of buildings and streets, the building with its stairs and rooms. The real space of the city requires several inspections to determine the route and thus organise the staging of the performance on a physical level. How long should the route be? What part of the city can be used? What private spaces can be used? Physically, what parts are worth highlighting and rediscovering? This is very delicate work that includes not only compliance with all regulations related to events in public places (which entails a series of meetings with public bodies and bureaucratic practices) but also building relationships with those who live in those places to speed up some procedures and be able to put into practice some options, such as the use of private places. The entire project from the beginning is based on building relationships, without which this type of project cannot be implemented.

Memory space

It is a space that is linked to the first, but as a deep layer and not always visible and accessible. It is the space of the historical, cultural and social memory of the place, but at the same time it is the space of the memory of those who live in that place, a cross-generational memory from which different levels of interest emerge. This space is explored through field research (where we talk to experts, historians and ordinary people) and theoretical research carried

out in libraries through consultation and study of texts and sources of different types. This whole part, together with the physical space as architecture, becomes the basis on which the dramaturgy of the project is shaped, which uses the city as a dramaturgical source. The objective of the projects is to highlight the different levels of memory buried under a layer of oblivion to offer them to the residents of the place so that they are readjusted and become the vehicle of transmission of their memory and collective memory for future generations.

We can find an example of how historical memory intervenes in the projects in the performance of *Invisible Cities* at Trinity University in San Antonio (Texas). During its path, the show passes by the university theatre, which originally had three stages on which actions were carried out simultaneously. In its restructuring, the three-stage system was modified and the theatre became traditional, with only one stage. The director Di Buduo decided to interpret this memory of the place not by telling it but by evoking it. First, he reversed the stage and stalls: the audience moved over the stage while the stalls became a place of performance. Then three different performances were inserted in the same space, evoking the theatre with the three stages, especially for those who had seen and experienced it a few years before [4]

Staging space

It is the scenic part of the performance, based on the two previous spaces, as now it is not performed within a neutral space such as the theatre but on a specific site. The staging must adapt to and depend on the space; that is, maintain harmony with it. So the staging is always different, but we use materials that the company controls perfectly. In short, although the staging adapts to the specific place, the materials are the same. We highlight three:

1. *Canvases*. Canvases (very large pieces of cloth usually white or coloured according to the arrangement desired) generally follow the principle that the director has chosen: "covering to reveal." Often, some parts of the city are completely covered. This coverage, instead of eliminating what is underneath, shows the two sides of a space: how it is during the show and how it really is. This process leads to reflection, especially after the show, which is what reminds us of what has been seen.

    Another use is to modify the city spatially. The roads that are always accessible are completely closed, those that are often never used become the cornerstone of the route, which forces the audience to walk in an unusual way through their living space.

    Another use is to cover a part of a space to clearly stress the part that was left uncovered and that becomes a central element because it highlights the part removed.

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4.   For a deeper analysis of the use of historical, cultural and social memory in these projects cf. Sansone, Vincenzo. "*Città Invisibili* of Teatro Potlach: A Journey to Rediscover Our Cultural Heritage". In: Ippolito, Alfonso; Cigola, Michela (eds.). *Handbook of Research on Emerging Technologies for Digital Preservation and Information Modeling*. Hershey: IGI Global, 2016, pp. 536-562.

Figure 5. Use of the canvases to build a tunnel in the city: the empty street and the same street in the staging phase. *Invisible Cities* in Fara Sabina (2016). Photos from the Teatro Potlach archive.
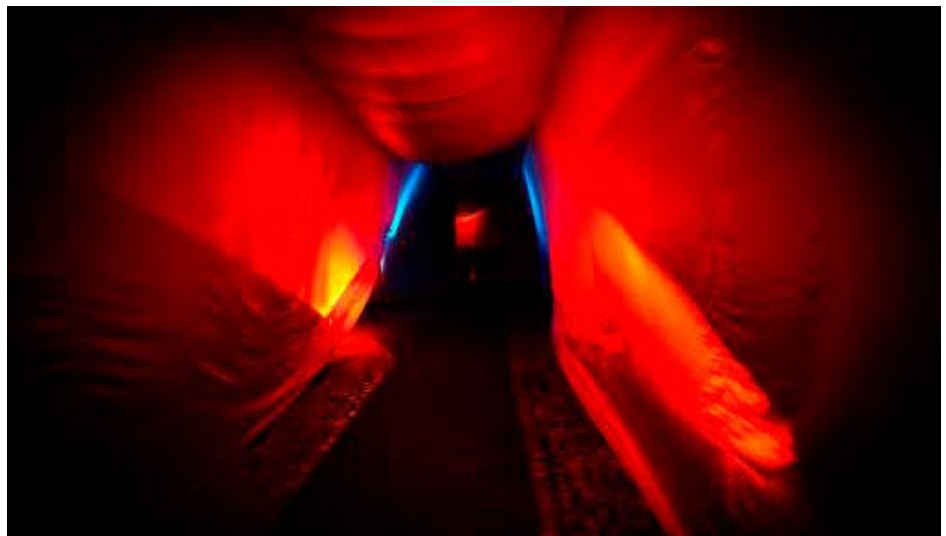

Figure 6. Installation of the tunnel in *Invisible Cities*. Fara Sabina (2016).
© Photograph by Stefano Cirilli.

Figure 7. *Invisible Cities* in Karlsruhe (2008). Spatial transformation of the city with the canvases. Photograph from the Teatro Potlach archive.

Figure 8. *Contemporary Landscapes* in Catania (2015). Use of the yellow canvas according to the principle of covering to reveal. © Photograph by Alessio Marchetti.

2. *Digital projections.* Digital projections usually follow the same theoretical principle of the canvases: to cover, but naturally they act differently. They are large-scale projections that cover entire buildings but are not designed to reveal but to transform the daily static nature of the architectures, which now become liquid, appear light, almost volatile, thereby losing their consistency. As a general rule, for this particular objective abstract images are used, so that the perception may respond to the principle of liquidity and alteration of the perception of the spectators who usually live in that place. A strictly visual dramaturgy is constructed which, at the same time, highlights the building (or part of it) or, in contrast, the non-screened part emerges alongside the screened part.

Figure 9. *Contemporary Landscapes* in Catania (2015). The use of digital projections to transform the static nature of architectures. Installation made by the author of this article with his team. © Photograph by Alessio Marchetti.

Figure 10. *Contemporary Landscapes* in Catania (2015). Figurative projections of elements of the Sicilian tradition. Photograph from the Teatro Potlach archive.

There are also figurative projections that create a narrative through images of the history of the city and its traditions or the building that houses the projection. These images often emerge by only screening some of their details.

On other occasions, the screening is video projection mapping. In this case, there is a complete fusion between the architectonic element and the screened element, by which a kind of new real-digital object is created in the city without losing the dramaturgical objective of telling the history of the city.

3. *Lights.* The public lighting is switched off and replaced by different types of lights. In the diverse projects, the lights follow different principles: they are not only sources of lighting but have an active function

Figure 11. *Invisible Cities* in Rovereto (2015). Video projection mapping of columns. Projections of the columns by the author of this article. Personal photo.

Figure 12. *Contemporary Landscapes* in Palermo (2015). Video projection mapping of columns. Installation by the author of this article. Personal photo.

of construction of part of the visual dramaturgy by means of the chromatic alteration of the places. They also recreate the space through their balance with the darkness, thereby erasing the parts of the city that remain outside the path and constructing the new city to make it visible. Like digital projections and canvases, they follow the principle of revealing, highlighting.

These three elements and, therefore, the three teams that manage them are not independent but must necessarily work together. Balancing the use of projections and lights is one of the most delicate tasks, because lights burn out the projections. However, if they are used correctly they can be incorporated into and help the creation of the scene, be a continuation of the projections and, on some occasions,

Figure 13. *Invisible Cities* in San Antonio, Texas (2015). Projections, lights and performer. Installation of projections by the author of this article. © Photo by Siggi Ragnar.

Figure 14. *Invisible Cities* in San Antonio, Texas (2015). Canvases, lights and performers.
© Photo by Siggi Ragnar.

attenuate their excessive neatness. Moreover, in a screening there is almost always a performer who needs a light. Usually LED lights are combined with the projections.

Lights also create spaces in combination with the canvases. If they are not lit, particularly at night, the canvases are mere cloth. There is a particular task that the lighting team and the canvas team perform together: those who set up the canvases must provide spaces to place the lights, and the lighting technicians must control the amount and angle of individual lights so that the canvas is uniformly lit and can, in combination with the lights, become the environment.

Moreover, the projections and canvases are often used together because the white canvas acts as the screening surface. The canvas, in contrast, as it is mouldable, creates a volume in the space. When the projections are incorporated into these structures, they take on volume. Therefore, it is a joint task in which the three teams work independently and, at the same time, must communicate with each other to balance the three elements. A piece progresses and changes until the final phase, in the first place because of the particularity of the event, which is subject to changes derived from the site itself, which is unpredictable if we compare it to a theatre building, and also in relation to the performers that go there and occupy the different spaces, which must be related with their own performances.

Beyond these three elements, props also include other materials, such as plastics, paintings and diverse objects used for different theatre actions.

Figure 15. *Invisible Cities* in San Antonio, Texas (2015). 360° projection, canvases, lights and performers. Installation by the author of this article. © Photograph by Siggi Ragnar.

Space of the performers

The space of the performers not only involves the physical space where they perform, because this is within the space of the staging. The space of the performers is something less concrete, it is the feeling of the performers themselves, what they bring to the space. Those who participate in these projects, professionals or amateurs, are of different types and different backgrounds, local or not. How can they link the artistic expression itself, experience,

Figure 16. *Invisible Cities* in Fara Sabina (2016). Two foreign performers in the village. © Photograph by Stefano Cirilli

history, memory and culture to this particular physical space? How can they develop a dialogue with the memory of the place to build a unique dramaturgy with the end of returning to the audience the memory of the place and its own interiority? All this is the space of the performers: the construction of a performing action that derives from the fusion of the invisible aspect of the space and of the performer.

These are the phases that Teatro Potlach mainly follows to develop its projects by applying the aforementioned dramaturgical nodes. After these phases, how does the company apply the same dramaturgy to a specific site, which changes with each new show?

To understand this work methodology, we can use as an example the three different versions of *Contemporary Landscapes* and, in particular, one of the components of the dramaturgy developed in the three shows. In 2015, *Contemporary Landscapes* was put on three times in Sicily: first in Palermo, the second time in a small village, Sambuca di Sicilia, and finally in Catania. This project theatrically develops the tangible memory of a place. In the case of Sicily, the story told was about the old fishing practice: catching tuna. This same story was used in the three versions because it forms part of Sicilian culture, but in different ways. The main element that determines the differences in the same story is the place, differences that are conveyed mainly in the visual aspect. The written text and the actress who performs it, Daniela Regnoli, were the same. In contrast, the site of the performance changed radically.

In Palermo, the actress was in a rectangular, aseptic and completely white space. The director put her in a corner of the room and, behind, on the two walls he used some black and white photos that showed the fishermen fishing in their boats. Therefore, the space enabled this story to be told through photographs and the actress had to relate her words to these figurative pictures behind her.

In Sambuca di Sicilia the space of action of the performance was completely different. The story about catching tuna was transferred to the small enclosed cemetery of an old church. First, we had to check whether what was created for the first version still worked. Then, we tried to screen the black and white photos of the fishermen in the site. However, in this site the pictures became blurred, thereby losing their meaning. The site determined that the performance had to be changed so that it continued working. The small church cemetery, which the audience could not enter but had to watch the scene from outside, transmitted a feeling of entrapment: it seemed like part of the net that irremediably catches a tuna and causes its death. Therefore, it was necessary to conceal the church's façade and evoke the context of the story with abstract images. These are elements that recall the shape of a star that, when joining together, generate a kind of net and endlessly move and shine in the dark of the night as if they were the lights of the fishing boats that will illuminate the prey caught. In this respect, the actress also had to change her performance, not only because the site was different but also and mainly because the images had changed. We no longer had

descriptive photos and therefore the story moved to the hands of the actress as she lacked the previous visual support.

In Catania, the site changed even more: it was the immense courtyard of the 15th century Palazzo Platamone. The arches that characterise the courtyard were covered with immense white canvases, annulling the typical mixture of spaces of the building and making this site unique. The three sides of the courtyard became the perfect surfaces for large-scale projections that maintained its abstract character but the number of images changed, which always evoked the idea of nets and turned red. What was created thanks to the spaciousness of the site was the immensity of the sea, where tunas initially move believing that they are free but are actually surrounded and, by clashing against the nets, they begin to get hurt. The actress had again to change her performance and moved through different areas of the site to be able to reach the different levels from where the audience could see the performance: from below, at the same level, but also from the upper balcony that allowed a new perspective on the same space.

This example perfectly explains the work methodology of Teatro Potlach to modify and adapt the same show to different places. In these projects, the site determines how the dramaturgy and the performance must be developed and not the other way round, as usually happens in theatre created in an auditorium.

Conclusions

The work in these sites is done in the design phase vertically, as already mentioned, because every site depends on the previous ones. This verticality, however, must become horizontal during the performance, because the sites do not act separately. After working in each of them, we endeavour to incorporate them in the definitive show that must always be conceived according to an anomalous spectator, who does not look at the scene from a frontal position but freely moves within the performing space. This spectator becomes to some extent a performer because his or her movements create a rhythm that is combined with the rhythms of the different scenes and therefore acts as a link between the different performing points distributed along the path.

The practice of working in a way that strictly depends on the space of action and the particular nature of the spectator are the main elements that differentiate these projects from street theatre. The real space is the core from which the performance originates, which builds the different listed spaces, and the spectator, like in the editing of a film, must reconstruct the path, putting in sequence the different spaces visited, interspersed with their own memories related to each site.

The spectator of such projects, therefore, is not only a committed spectator, but an active subject, a traveller (as Pino Di Buduo likes to call it), an archaeologist that has to research during the show to build his or her own story, dramaturgy, identity and culture, collecting fragments that for years have been buried under a layer of oblivion and that a company of performers-archaeologists has discovered to bring them to light.
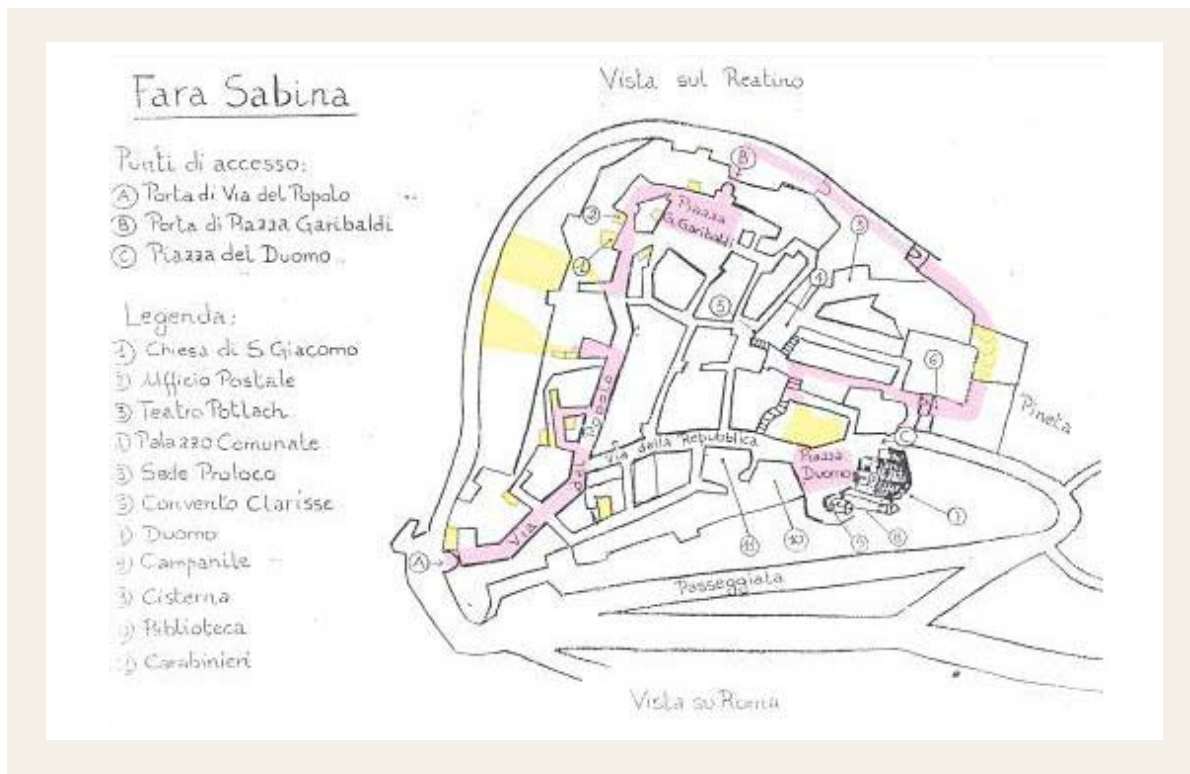
Figure 17. An example of planning of the path of *Invisible Cities*. Photograph from the Teatro Potlach archive.
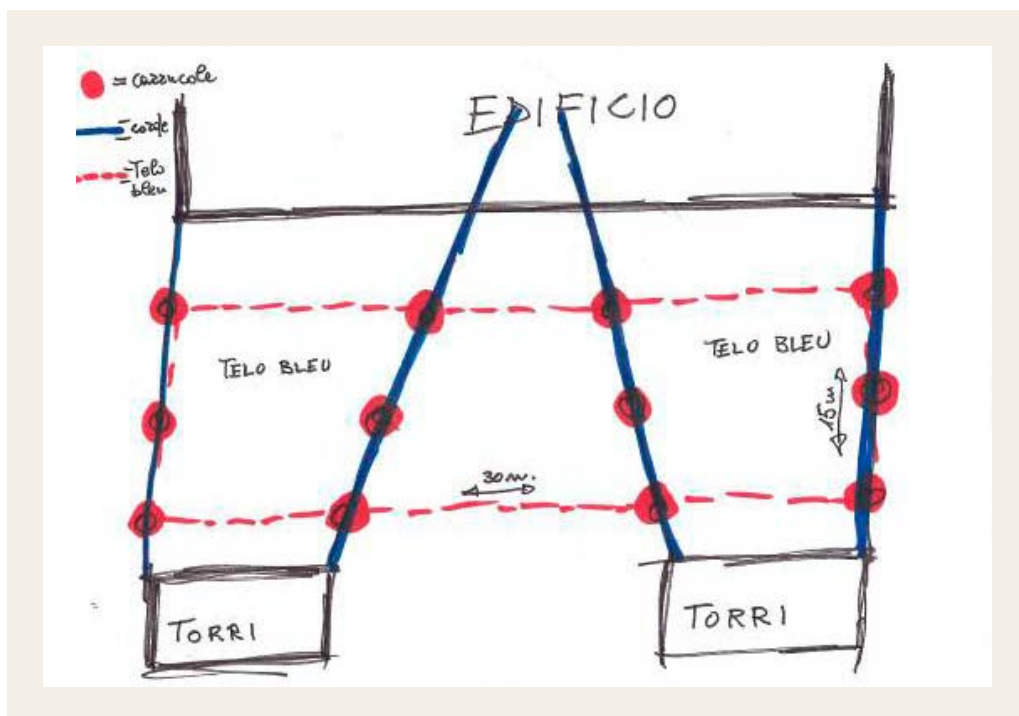

Figure 18. Planning diagram to make an installation. Photograph from the Teatro Potlach archive.

What is particularly interesting about these projects is that they open up different research perspectives. It is not only about theatre and, therefore, research on the performing arts and set design, which, however, as we have seen in this article, must leave the strictly theatrical margins because it has to relate with the urban contexts.

Figure 19. Distribution of the electric current along the path of the performance. Photograph from the Teatro Potlach archive.
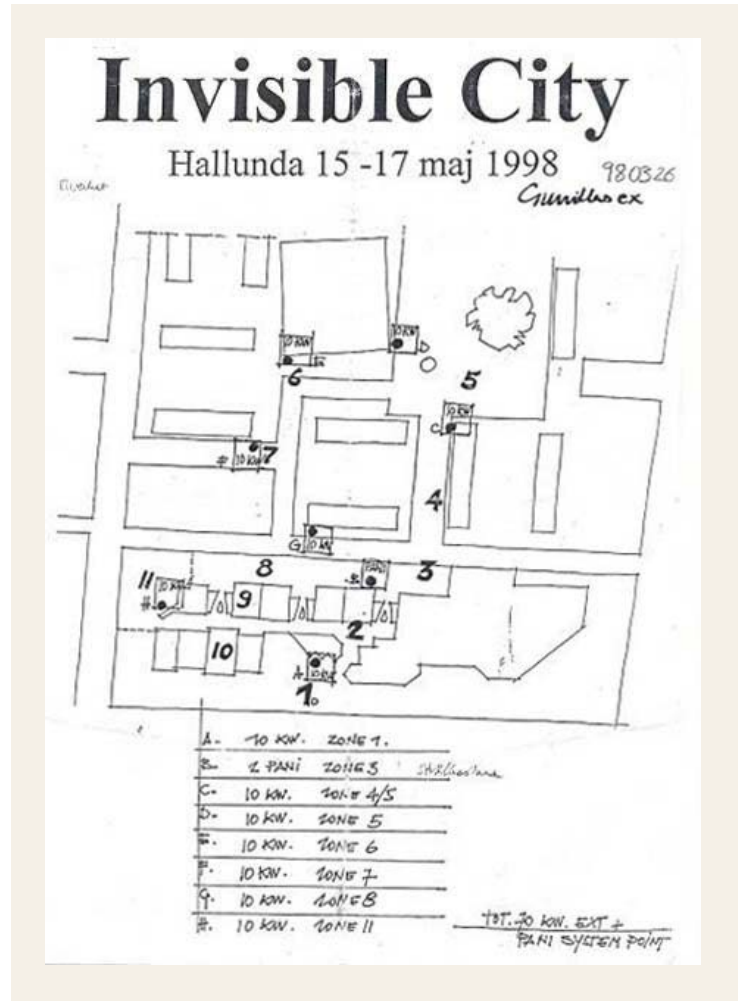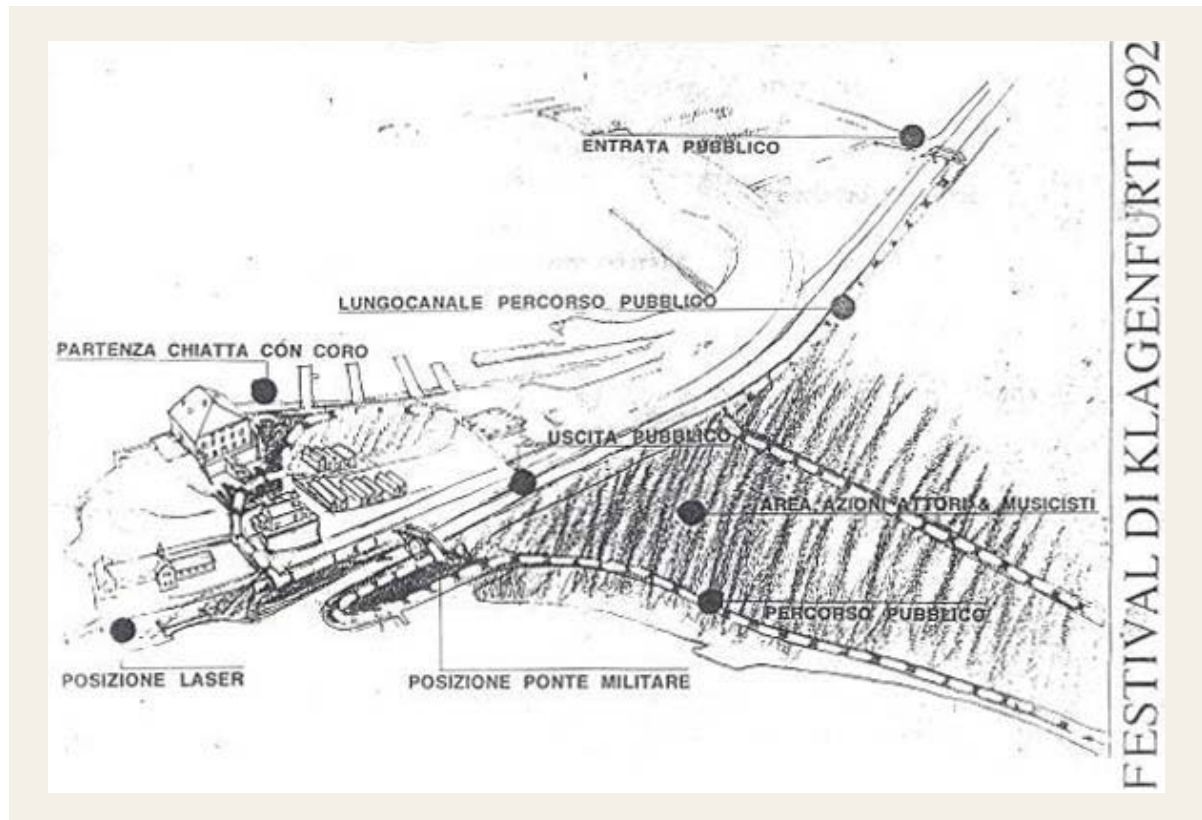

Figure 20. Distribution of the installations along the path of the performance and the different positions reserved for the audience. Photograph from the Teatro Potlach archive.

For instance, the research into architecture and urban planning can find the study of this modality of theatre production in the cities particularly interesting, as it fits perfectly with the problems currently under debate: the regeneration of urban fabrics, the use of the new technologies in the cities, such as urban screens and video surveillance technologies. The interesting question to begin with would be: how can a temporary and ephemeral project contribute to the redevelopment of urban spaces?

Another interesting line of research on these projects is anthropological, and the question in this case would be: how do local traditions and culture emerge from an urban fabric in relation to a production undertaken by a "foreign" company without becoming folklore?

These different research possibilities explain why in these projects Teatro Potlach temporarily gives up its exclusively theatrical direction and opens up to a multidisciplinary approach. In fact, the projects involve not only actors and directors but also architects, experts in visual culture, digital set designers, experts in local traditions and cultures, university professors and researchers from different fields. In fact, the director does not consider the projects complete and closed shows but as laboratories of ongoing experimentation in which the different areas meet and, sometimes, clash to try to find a balance between the different elements involved while contributing a line of research to projects that have been developed for over twenty-five years but that want and must be different from each other.

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