

Drawing - Federica Terracina

A New Strategy to Write the Territory

Salvatore Margiotta / Researcher at Orientale University in Naples

"A curious idea has been swirling around in our heads for some time: what if Altofest was displaced somewhere else, in another city. What if somebody else would support and share Altofest out of Naples." For a moment Anna Gesualdi and Giovanni Trono leave aside the balance of the Altofest edition finished few months ago, to abandon themselves to a sudden thought. It is October 2015 and, to them, La Valletta only represents the Capital of the Republic of Malta, a bit more than 800 km away from Naples.

Three years after that thought expressed en passant, apparently within a more articulate reasoning, this unique work-format-festival conceived by TeatrInGestAzione, finds itself "displaced" to "give rise" to a human/urban regeneration.

An "elsewhere" – being Malta the European Capital of Culture 2018 – which, beside redefining necessarily and inevitably the dramaturgy of the "fest", redesigns its geography.

"Gheo", "Earth", "Graphia", "writing".

The European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe 2000) at chapter I, article 1, paragraph A, defines "landscape" as "an area whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors". Therefore, the relation between natural and urban elements – we'd like to add – is connected to the experiential component, which practice is a crucial aspect to redesign the scenery where the separation between the agent role – the one who acts on and in the landscape – and its function as a spectator, is no longer perceived.

The dynamics of these reflections immediately lead us to the language of the scene and its practices. However, underlining the existence of such common denominator does not imply to recall open-air, environmental, street theatre forms, nor is the occasion to quote or refer to the critical and theoretical legacy of Richard Schechner. Or at least, not only.

"Theatres have always been a significant presence in cities, both on the symbolic and on the physical level" (Marco Serino, Spazio urbano e spazio teatrale nell'organizzazione dello spettacolo dal vivo, 2011). From an

From the 13th April until the 13th May, 20 residents and communities of Rabat, Manikata, Qormi, Hamrun, S'ta Venera, Żejtun, Bormla, Birgu, Sliema, Gzira and Valletta will host international artists in their houses or workplaces, offering them hospitality. Therefore, the intimacy of domestic interiors and the unique landscape of Maltese territories becomes the scene of artistic residencies: during a two-week process each artist re-qualifies one of his/her works engaging a specific dialogue with the offered space. The same spaces will be then opened to the audience, to show (share?) the re-born (regenerated?) works. This proximity exposes both, the resident and artist, to a mutual dispossession: the first renounces to his exclusive rights on the places and objects of his daily life to welcome the artist and his practices, while the artist allows his artwork to be compromised by this encounter.

Abandoning the institutional space it was conceived for, the artwork is indeed displaced: it loses his ordinary frame and all technical supports, while the relationship with the inhabited space, his memories and geometries, forces the artist to let it evolve in his essential meanings and forms.

The "space donors" are the crucial elements of the project. Accepting the challenge of integrating their everyday life with the revelation of the artistic creation, they become the first "actors", "initiators" of Altofest's process.

Thus the festival aims to call into question the boundaries between public and private, creating a no-ownership area and to activate an experimental social dynamic between residents and artists, with the intent to change the art's understanding of both parts and to affect the geographical urban and social texture of the city.

historical point of view, when their presence becomes relevant on a political level, the reason shall be researched in the process of transformation of pre-established values, where such value, assumed by institutional Convention, drifts to the one of a strong cultural action result, a passage that can be traced back to a renewed way to intend the social practices, implemented, promoted and appointed by the community. Theatre is considered then as a space "where", but even more, as a place "how". In this perspective, theatre is assumed in terms of territory of identity, not only as a stage, showcase, where to exhibit mere attractions.

Inside the dispositive set up by Altofest, in conformity with its highly detailed dramaturgical design, the "scrittura scenica" (= stage writing) – and in general the performative tension – embed by the artistic intervention – not only covering a generator and multiplier function of lyric and aesthetic values – becomes the instrument to operate a "territorial rewriting" with a mainly poetic accent, and moreover political. Such process triggers a regeneration of the urban and extra-urban texture. Moreover, from this rewriting process, transversal and multi-layered, the territory description – meant to be the scientific mandate where the geographical discipline and its several branches are grounded – is performed in a different representation of the landscape, a spectacular narration of the place.

The place becomes space, the territory, theatre.

In Malta, the Altofest process of localization will invest Rabat, Hamrun, Qormi, Santa Venera, Żejtun, Birgu, Bormla, Sliema, Gzira. Those sites will strategically create interconnections between urban spaces and

experience- existential areas. In the special Maltese edition, it will be interesting to live and experience the transformational process of an "elsewhere" starting point – meaning Malta and Valletta as "elsewhere", in comparison with Naples – where new ethical and aesthetic dynamics will redefine it as an alter-ego, transfigured into a crossing-relational dispositive where the community could build a collective space, horizontally organised.

Altofest and Valletta 2018

Graziella Vella / Research Coordinator, Valletta 2018 Foundation

As a Valletta resident, born and raised in Valletta, and working with Valletta 2018 since the very beginning of this exceptional adventure, I have experienced the city of Valletta embarking on a radical change. The city has become a more accessible space, with open and accessible spaces, and abandoned buildings being given a new lease of life. This, combined with the Valletta 2018 Foundation's extensive Cultural Programme, has ensured the city is once again a cultural hub. Albeit some issues still needing to be tackled after 2018, the city has overcome a strong period of decline and is now at a peak.

The city is now a space for interaction, where the community interacts with its respective members and meets other communities. The concept of human geography is developed further within the city space. The residents themselves experience a

sense of intimacy with the city, an extension of their home. All these changes, have created a sense of displacement, which create new synergies, and sometimes tensions between different groups.

The work of the Valletta 2018 Foundation has focussed on making culture more accessible, providing a varied programme of events for active participation by different groups. The Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme extends beyond the walls of Valletta to all the Maltese Islands, and this is also reflected in the programme of Altofest. The Foundation has also embarked on extensive evaluation process which looks at understanding the impact generated by Valletta 2018.

As part of this process, we ask questions such as, how is Valletta 2018 changing or re-shaping our identity? How can we evaluate the success of artistic interventions? How can we say artistic

projects have met their objectives? How do we actually measure successful participation rates?

On a more personal level, I ask questions like, how has my city really changed? What was the real impact on my city, on my surroundings and for myself, of this Capital of Culture? Will I still be able to live in Valletta after 2018? Is it possible to obtain a balance for residents, businesses and the artistic community? Can we all 'reside' in 'our' city? Can it be our home and playground at the same time?

Taking the case of Altofest, one of the objectives is to create the so-called unforeseen. In this case, can we really define success? Should we do so? And if not, how can we evaluate similar projects? Shouldn't we look more at understanding the discoveries, the experiences generated in such contexts, by the artists, donors, communities and participants, rather than understanding whether

similar projects have been 'successful'? Especially for projects where the main objective is to actually 'lose control' over what we have planned on....

In conclusion, the Foundation has focussed the work on its Cultural Programme to ensure that Valletta 2018 is not just about 2018. Once 2018 is over, the real success will be measured by quantitative and qualitative data. But, the real success of Valletta 2018 will be measured by how many people have experienced new cultural events and the new skills gained. Possibly more importantly, the real success of Valletta 2018 will be 'measured' by the experiences and interactions generated. That will be the real success of the European Capital of Culture, and it is with this in mind that Altofest is proudly part of the Valletta 2018 Cultural Programme.

The Chants of the Earth
Claudia Fabris / Performing artist

"The land where I was born, in the North of Italy, does not have any town leaning on the landscape, filling the emptiness against the stones. Towns do not insist with soothing the absence, melting into the mountains. They do not creep along the splits like plaster on a crack. In the North, cities overtop the hills. They emerge along the flatland, rising from nothing or, even, they control and dominate the surroundings from a hill, suspiciously. Here instead, they look like totally organic to the geography, almost a way to fulfill, to accomplish it, perpetuating it". I wrote those words in astonishment to my friend, a poet, while driving through Irpinia, Cilento, and then Calabria, three Southern regions of Italy, while I was travelling towards Malta.

Geo-graphy. The writings of earth, its alphabet, its words of light, mountains, lakes, torrents, streams, seas and mosses, trees and volcanoes. Its tales whispered in the feet, while we walk. Its words whispered into our bodies, when we sleep, that later become sound and find in ourselves a voice digging it in the languages we speak.

Its ancient writings everywhere. And us, who cannot read it anymore.

Moving a few kilometers over, the language changes, dialects change, sounds, accents, a different background chant.

I frequently asked myself which was the reason why this happened, answering that all is changing under our feet, at every footstep indeed.

Thus, every language we speak is the music of a land, it keeps a secret to tell. This image of human beings, buzzing around like musical instruments, touched me; we are not aware of such music, earth plays its sound through our feet, blowing until it whispers out of our mouth. An enemy may colonize your land, imposing its language, but in your earth its language will change sound, will have another rhythm, a different melody.

Geography.
A Trace about Disorientation
Azul Teatro / Theare company

Cartographies belonging to the instant. As launching a ship, landscapes sail away, leaving us transformed. Our architecture is migratory, each time we settle new cardinal points. The map contradicts and overwrites itself again and again. Never faithful to the territory, furthermore, to what it was supposed to truly represent.

The territory demands a meticulous immersion, eyes wide open, new visions, in order to be reflected. The re-discovery of ancient dimensions, through a new knowledge. Seeking a nomadic atlas where to trace, then erase, re-trace again hypotheses and researches.

The writing here becomes a sketch, a draft, a note, a memory, a manifold representation, a reference and a betrayal.

Through the persistent details of the wandering, we orient ourselves, at the same time we lose our way, widening our inner landscapes, shaping a new description, inlaying new paths. Descending deep, underneath the layers, into the geography of the greater significance, into the geology of the word, into the cartography of lying in a timelapse. Deep inside the writings of the earth, everything gets transformed, ideas, boundaries, words, disasters, meanings. One is waiting, one is curious, one ignores, one surrenders. Some will never get there, the

We cannot see the geography where we are immersed, we would rather think about history, about the past and the future, to the present economy, but we never reflect we are guests of a greater writing, that gives us a shape, since the very first day we are born. Our thoughts and feeling arise from what we see every day, from the light, the landscape; it could be wide open rather than narrow, generous or desolate, sharp or dark, flat, rather than brimful of mountains, welcoming or inhospitable; all these elements mould our character, our vision of the world. During the years I persuaded myself that geography shapes a human being much more than what is believed or imagined; even history is a consequence of geography. Every city fructifies in a different way; in every single plant growing in that particular ground, with its peculiar dominant note, in every single urban tree, the land gives different fruits, sounds, architecture, shapes, and nevertheless, different visions of the world to those who live in it.

I remember that year when I stayed for one month in Naples, living by a staircase from where you could see the whole city and, at the end, the sea; once I came back home, in the flatland of Val Padana, I still continued to straighten my neck for days, as I was missing the space and my view, running towards the horizon. I was feeling the constriction of having so little world to see. Still now, If I concentrate, I could sense the eyes feeling stifled and my neck, trying to stretch, in the attempt of helping them.

Who knows which tales the land of Malta will tell me, which sacred writings are impressed into the bodies of the ones belonging to the island.

I will attempt to divine it listening to the sound of the language.

(always being the language that we speak, the one and only sound will keep its secret to us)

greater absent. And the nothingness, allowing us to go beyond the line our gaze dares to reach.

We are in the evanescent border between losing ourselves and reaching the threshold of new discoveries. We move forward as tightrope walkers among inner and outer landscapes.

Their reciprocity is ineluctable, perpetual, feral, astonished, whirling, shattering, gigantic. Their dissonant and assonant harmony creating a musical score made of footmarks, restraint, deceptions/disguise, illusions, traps. Towards a nomadic feature of knowledge.

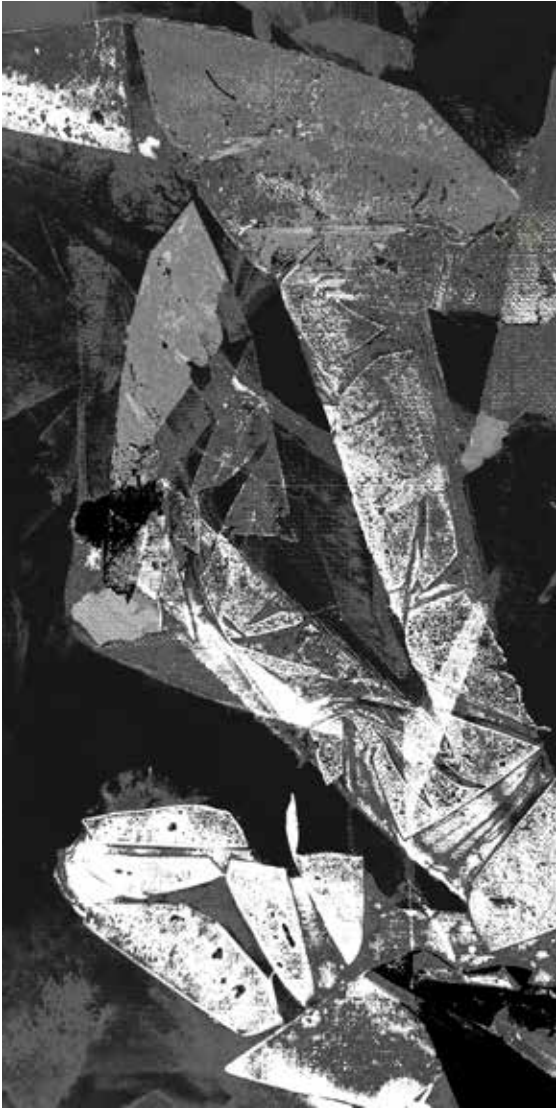
Step by step, we compose the writing. Step by step the path reveals its magnitude, its enigma, its encounter with the unexpected, the mythical adventure of losing oneself, finding oneself different, reinventing a new and diverse being.

Geography is an endless writing. A grounded path and a cosmic science.

Land, let me be aware of your skin
the harvest, the clods, the gulfs, the peaks,
the buds. Let me walk all the way
round your road, up
to the hill, down to the valley,
through the territory of existence
where sprout and grow green the plants.



Drawing - Federica Terracina



Drawing - Federica Terracina

Using Performance
in Human Geography:
Conditions and Possibilities
(«Kaleidoskope», 5.1, January, 2013)

Elizabeth Richardson

Here [Human Geography] performance operates as an intervention of a social and/or artistic nature. In some cases this intervention is one primarily aimed at disturbance, disrupting existing spatio-temporal orders through their occurrence in public space. This rendering of the political potential of performance derives in part from the situationist desire to intervene in the 'spectacle' so as to gain immediate experience of the world and therefore transform the everyday. The politics here lie in the questions posed through exposure, particularly in why these happenings are often deemed out of place despite being within 'public' space. Such art tends to be acutely tuned to the dynamics of its particular site, picking up and reworking ordinary elements in a way that estranges them, thereby drawing attention to the processes of viewing. In other cases, these forms of intervention are explored with a more creative (rather than disruptive) emphasis that sees performance as providing an arena for imagining alternative presents and futures. Within human geography, these ideas have often been elaborated through an engagement with forms of community theatre. Whilst the politics of such performance is in part based around notions of reclaiming theatre for the 'people', geographers have tended to approach such notions critically, questioning both the ideas of community evoked and the manner in which enacted changes may extend beyond the performance space.

One potentially fruitful direction for this interest in specific political interventions of performance may be what [Gerry] Pratt and [Elia] Kirby call the 'interspatiality' of performance. Although the forms of community theatre outlined above retain a strong element of stability through their performance in a specific location (e.g. community centres, pubs etc.), Pratt and Kirby argue that the multiple spaces that inform performance are integral to its potential as an object of study. Rather than placing all the emphasis on experience of/in the event, this is considered the practices and processes that enable and are enabled by performance.

The “Collective Theatre”
Elements for a Discussion
(«Teatro», n. 2, 1967-68)

G. Bartolucci, E. Capriolo, E. Fadini, F. Quadri

Theatre is nowadays a way of intervening directly into the living body of society, it represents a meeting point for the community of which it adopts its most complex forms of expression, the peculiar features of its own transformations and its structural elements.

Despite what happened during the immediate post-war period, the relation with the reality has to be seen in problematic terms more than with a moral attitude. Consequently, there will be popular themes and not popular characters.

These popular themes need an elaboration that requires a group work and, even when an individual dramaturgy exists, the group work will maintain its prominence over the planning, elaboration and staging phases.

The popular topics elaboration entails a collective work, since it requires a participation of the audience, that has a revolutionary meaning. The group work itself is a prefiguration of this new relationship between audience and theatre.

This audience involvement follows three directions:

- 1. as a political tendency
- 2. as a protest against the social and political system
- 3. as awareness of crucial moments in the contemporary world

Theatre is thus today the ultimate collective theatre. And such it is in its main and vital elements: the scene and the audience.

Therefore, it will reject:

- 1. the escape of aestheticism with political alibis
- 2. every kind of reformistic moralism
- 3. issues and dramaturgies of a false “tradition of the new”

This collective theatre is essentially a no-boundaries theatre, where any diaphragms between the stage and the audience must be removed.

This theatre postulates indeed a special kind of scenic writing ("scrittura scenica"), which can be staged also outside the traditional theatre venues.

The Radicant

"Radicant" is meant to be – in the words of Nicolas Bourriaud – the artist in the era of globalization. The artist is no longer intended to be "radical", as in the XXth century, when he was spurred on by the urgency of re-grounding its own practise, seeking the source, the origin, the primary necessity. The contemporary "radicant" artist produces forms-spaces-trajectories, transferring these elements from a place to another. Bourriaud says that the contemporary art forms are supposed to be a mirror of the "radicant" flowing of the artist biographies. In the displacement from one region to another, they evolve, creating cross- points among the spaces they pass through, inventing new forms of trans-lation (referring to the latin ethymology "transferre"- "carry accross"), putting them in dialogue.

"In our imaginary universe of dwelling, sedentariness is one option among others. As heralds of this transformation, contemporary artists have recognized that it is just

as possible to reside in a circuit as in a stable space, just as possible to construct an identity in motion as through fertilization, and that geography is always also psychogeography. Thus it is possible to dwell in a movement of round trips between various spaces. Airports, cars, and railroad stations become the new metaphors for the house, just as walking and airplane travel become new modes of drawing. The radicant is the quintessential inhabitant of this imaginary universe of spatial precariousness, a practitioner of the unsticking of affiliations. [...] Life and artwork communicate, and they do so through channels chosen by the artist. For its part, contemporary altermodernity is born amid the cultural chaos of globalization and the commercialization of the world. Hence it must conquer its autonomy vis-à-vis the various modes of identitarian assignment and resist the standardization of the imagination by producing circuits and modes of exchange among signs, forms, and lifestyles" (Nicolas Bourriaud, The Radicant, 2009)

Border as Method: Contemporary creation
processes as fabrica mundi

"The border is for us a method. By this, we mean not that the border provides an abstract methodology that can be detached from its material contexts and applied generally across any number of empirical situations. We understand method to emerge precisely from the material circumstances at hand, which, in the case of borders, are those of tension and conflict, partition and connection, traversing and barricading, life and death."

(Sandro Mezzadra, Brett Neilson, Border as Method, "Transversal", 03.2008)

A number of contemporary artistic creation processes could claim, or assume this programmatic declaration by Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson. Such processes settled on the border, investigate it as a fault, as that tormented verge where the genesis of new spaces and territories happens. Therefore, the artistic practice as a "science of boundaries" refers to those border regions, and instead of merely represent them as objects, learns their dynamics bringing new visions of

landscape. Contemporary art re-thinks herself as a fabrica mundi though, creating new artifices to inhabit the conflicts hurting the border territories, facilitating the transition from one place to another, underlining the unexpected connections, understanding and challenging the persistent impulses of self-defence and self-conservation.

"Crucial is the ontological sense in which borders are involved in making or creating worlds— their role in the scene of fabrica mundi, to pick up an expression circulating among Renaissance philosophers such as Pico della Mirandola and Giordano Bruno. The concept of fabrica mundi resonates with the celebrated image of the homo faber fortunae suae ("man as master and creator of his own destiny"), employed by these thinkers to designate the liberation of "man" from the sub- jugation to natural and transcendent forces."

(Sandro Mezzadra, Brett Neilson, Fabrica Mundi: producing the wold by drowing borders , in A. Blackwell & C. Lee, Scapegoat: Architecture, Landscape, Political Economy: 04 Currency, 2013)