

All the world's a mega construction site: *Rimini Protokoll's* *Gesellschaftsmodell Großbaustelle*

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Abstract

Theatre and work not only show many similarities but have since a long time influenced one another. The following paper aims to investigate how contemporary German theatre – specifically the work of the theatre collective *Rimini Protokoll* – deals with the representation of work in performative and interactive plays. Focusing first on the general approach of the group on this subject and then on the performance *Gesellschaftsmodell Großbaustelle* it will be shown how, by exploiting affinities between work and theatre and also ironically recurring to different theatre traditions, *Rimini Protokoll's* theatre aims to counteract the alienation and de-personalisation brought about by the mechanisms that regulates post-capitalist labour in order both to rehabilitate work – also theatrical work – as a truly productive dimension of mankind and to urge a reflection on condition of the (post)modern *homo laborans*.

Keywords

work; theatre; performance; production; mega construction site; society

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Introduction: Work and/on the stage

Apparently distant from each other, work and theatre, understood as fields and modes of human activity, are, however, much more akin than it may appear at a first glance. Theatrical praxis, in the specific sense of staging a performance, requires the bodily presence not only of people who by acting – with the exception of the *sui generis* case of amateur theatre – are in fact carrying out a paid job, but also of many other figures, from the director to those involved in the ideal and physical conception of the stage, who likewise exercise a specific profession; it is no coincidence that, speaking of these people, we usually call them ‘theatre workers’. One might even go so far as to recognise affinities between going to the theatre as a spectator and going to work: even a theatre performance, although often falling within those recreational activities that take place in so-called ‘free’ time (as in free from work), requires compliance with schedules (in particular the starting time), a precise spatial organisation (the seating is established in advance, most of the times without any possibility of choice) and known rules of behaviour. Further similarities also emerge when one looks at the structure of the individual performances, which often involves a pause, but also at a theatre billboard as a whole, which at times foresees actual shifts, e.g. with the repetition of the same performance in the morning or in the afternoon and then in the evening, as well as a precise scheduling of activities and resting days. Although often overshadowed by the gratifying and playful¹

¹ The intrinsic link between theatre and ‘play’, understood as an experience that is not only ludic but also “educational” as in Schiller’s definition – to which we will return later –, is very well evident in those languages that, in order to

principle of mimesis, which since Aristotle's *Poetics* directly or *ex negativo* – i.e. by work of subtraction and deconstruction – has represented one of the pillars of dramatic art², many are the aspects that the world of theatre and that of work have in common, even on a purely practical level³.

But there is more: even from a diachronic perspective one can identify, in the evolution of these two fields, parallel and coinciding moments of radical change, often even characterised by a profound, reciprocal interaction. In order to prove the accuracy of the assumption by which «periods of major aesthetic representation of work coincide not by chance with upheavals in the history of production»⁴ (Brogi *et al.* 2013: 11), one may take into consideration – though limiting ourselves to German-language dramaturgy for reasons of space – the birth of the 'bürgerliches Trauerspiel' (bourgeois tragedy), which in the second half of the 18th century indeed accompanied the emergence of a very early bourgeois and therefore entrepreneurial ethos and was at the same time complemented by Lessing's project of a National Theatre in Hamburg, the first German theatre institution with a modern and truly professional organisation; one may then recall the predominance of theatre during the period of Naturalism – a time when Germany reached, albeit decades later, comparing to other European nations, complete industrialisation, therefore bringing the ever more imposing "problem" of the proletariat to the surface (and, at the same time, to the stage) – but also later on, during the 1920s, Brecht's attempt to unmask the hidden mechanisms of capitalism through his epic theatre⁵; finally, it is no coincidence that the first convincing heteronomous representation of a 'Gastarbeiter' came to life on a theatre stage, in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's play *Katzelmacher* (1968).

indicate the theatre performance as well as the activity of acting, use the word 'play'/'to play': e.g. in German 'das Spiel'/'spielen'.

² «In general, two causes seem likely to have given rise to the art of poetry, both of them natural. Imitation comes naturally to human beings from childhood (and in this they differ from other animals, i.e. in having a strong propensity to imitation and in learning their earliest lessons through imitation); so does the universal pleasure in imitations. What happens in practice is evidence of this: we take delight in viewing the most accurate possible images of objects which in themselves cause distress when we see them (e.g. the shapes of the lowest species of animal, and corpses)» (Aristotle 1996: 6-7).

³ On the substantial aporia that innervates theatre understood both as 'play' and work see Haunschild 2009.

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, the translation is always mine.

⁵ Fischer-Lichte 1999.

Such interrelationship between the world of theatre and that of work becomes even more glaring the closer one gets to the present. On the one hand, vocabulary itself indicates the advent, starting in the last decades of the 20th century, of major and yet again similar changes in both fields: we have indeed reached a 'post' phase, whereas the prefix 'post' is used to signal an overcoming as well as an overturning of the fundamental assumptions that for centuries have been underlying these two realities. Therefore, we now speak of *postdramatic theatre*⁶ and of *post-Fordism* and *post-capitalism*. On the other hand, it is possible to observe an undeniable tendency towards mutual osmosis, which encompasses both an «integration of artistic (i.e. playful, creative) elements in fields of the economy traditionally distant from art», such as, for example, the increasingly frequent team building activities among co-workers, and an ever-increasing interference «of economic and commercial practices within cultural production» (Haunschild 2009: 153), which is in turn echoed by an intense “theatricalization” of the working world, to be understood as its representation on the stage.

Within this framework, the German-language theatre of the last thirty years or so has not failed to bring to the stage, often also exploiting the affinities highlighted above, protagonists, places, and devices of the contemporary working world, primarily underlining its insecurity and precariousness⁷. The vast panorama of plays that handle the subject ranges from 'classics' such as *Top Dogs* (1996) by Urs Widmer and various pièces by Roland Schimmelpfennig (*Push up 1-3*, 2001; *Das Reich der Tiere*, 2007; *Der goldene Drache*, 2009), through Moritz Rinke's *Republik Vineta* (2000), Dea Loher's *Der dritte Sektor* (2001), Kathrin Röggla's *junk space* (2004) and *wir schlafen nicht* (2004)⁸, to works such as Marius von Mayenburg's *Stück Plastik* (2015). This list, which could include numerous other examples, becomes much longer when alongside the aforementioned plays, which are more or less still pertinent to a traditional theatrical practice, which sees the staging in the theatre as its ultimate goal, one also takes into account those performances, actions, interactive and multimedia/digital installations that are nowadays exceptionally widespread in contemporary German (and

⁶ Lehmann 2006.

⁷ Pewny 2011.

⁸ This text, albeit published under the label “novel”, can also be considered a play due to its structure – it is, in fact, a fictional transcript based on real interviews of the author with protagonists of the so-called new economy.

not only German) theatre and that, thanks to their intrinsic performativity, are able to make some of the mechanisms underlying the contemporary working world not only representable and thus visible on the stage, but even tangible for the their 'audience'. When thinking of such performative theatre, one name comes inevitably to mind: that of *Rimini Protokoll*, a theatre collective formed by Helgard Haug, Stefan Kaegi und Daniel Wetzel. In their plays the representation, or rather: the performative re-enactment of work (also theatrical work) constitutes undeniably a common thread, so that their 'theatre' proves particularly interesting for an analysis aimed at exploring contemporary and innovative ways of representing work on the stage. In the following, therefore, we will firstly investigate the role that the working world takes on within the general aesthetic and theatrical praxis of *Rimini Protokoll* (2) and then delve more into the topic through the examination of a single case study, namely the performance *Gesellschaftsmodell Großbaustelle* (*Society under Construction*, 2017) (3).

2. The theatre 'work' of *Rimini Protokoll*

After having met at the *Institut für Angewandte Theaterwissenschaft* (Institute for Applied Theatre Science) at the University of Gießen⁹, Haug, Kaegi and Wetzel initiated the *Rimini Protokoll* project in 2000. The chosen name, deriving from a now-forgotten memorandum on the use of fossil combustion sources presented in the early 2000s by Colin Campbell, founder of the ASPO (*Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas*)¹⁰, not only reveals right from the start an entirely postmodern and parodic taste by comparing the group's work with much more well-known, but as a matter of fact useless, protocols, such as the infamous Kyoto Protocol, but also functions as «a label, a brand» (Fiorentino 2014) which identifies rather a new way of doing theatre than the three founding members of the collective¹¹. The theatrical work of *Rimini Protokoll* namely distinguishes itself from that of other contemporary theatre groups not only by being

⁹ The only academic institute of theatre studies in Germany with an explicitly practical vocation.

¹⁰ Bardi 2005.

¹¹ Indeed, not all of *Rimini Protokoll*'s works are based on the collaboration and cooperation of all founders: script and direction – which despite everything remain a pillar of this apparently unconventional theatrical practice (cf. Shin 2009: 129) – can often be by only one or two of them and/or in cooperation with other external authors or groups.

participative¹² or, better still: 'participa(c)tive', but also by its dialectical relationship with the (German) theatre tradition: while incorporating the lessons of Brecht's epic theatre, that of the documentary theatre of the Sixties as well as that of post-dramatic theatre à la Heiner Müller by preserving some of their fundamental traits¹³ – such as the epicity of the action, the use of factual and research materials and the fragmentary structure –, it also detaches itself from them by seemingly recovering – though programmatically denying them – some aspects of the theatre of identification. In short, the work of *Rimini Protokoll*, which can't be summarised in a few lines¹⁴, doesn't respond to a classical notion of theatre but articulates itself rather in performances, site-specific installations, interventions; it deprecates a 'magical' theatre of pure fictional mimesis and empathy, but at the same time plays on the biographical and personal substrate of the figures it brings onto the stage and requires – by its creators' own admission – both 'actors' and 'spectators' to play a very precise role and to identify with it (Käppeler 2018); it does not want to «enlighten» the public (*Rimini Protokoll* 2012: 160), yet its performances are often referred to as «'enlightening' in the best sense of the word» (Krumbholz 2017). Therefore, the theatre of *Rimini Protokoll* could be regarded as a contradiction in terms, a theatrical aporia that, conversely, brings other aporias to the stage, particularly those of our contemporary society.

Amongst these, one that particularly fascinates the collective, perhaps also because of those osmotic-symbiotic relationships presented earlier, is undoubtedly that embodied by the world of contemporary work and economic production with its constantly growing reification of the subject, which, on the other hand, is being counterbalanced by a de-materialisation and digital virtualization of the production processes of objects and services (Lazzarato 1998: 39-40). A distinctive feature of many of the group's performances is indeed the desire to undertake a «discursive exploration» (Roselt 2015: 76) of the working world. Such exploration takes place on the stage mainly thanks to the epic-discursive contribution offered by the so-called «experts of the everyday», i.e. «people who have none or, at most, trifling experience in the theatrical field, but who, nevertheless, by virtue of their profession or their biography are experts in the subject with which

¹² Pedullà 2021.

¹³ Bronzini 2022.

¹⁴ For more on the eclectic aesthetics of *Rimini Protokoll*, see Dreyse - Malzacher 2007 and Birgfeld *et al.* 2015.

the play deals» (Dreysse 2011: 134) and are hence called upon to share their expertise with the public. Through monologues directed at the audience, reminiscent of the monodrama tradition¹⁵, the “experts” describe not only the peculiarities of their profession, but also its influences and effects on their private lives as well as on society as a whole and vice versa. The spectrum of professions and related personnel that have found their way onto the stage over the years is extremely broad: it ranges from the MPs and parliamentary clerks of *Deutschland 2* (2002) to pilots, stewards, and ground workers of the former Belgian national airline Sabena, who retrace the national and individual consequences of the company’s bankruptcy in *Sabonation. Go home & follow the news* (2004); from the caregivers of *Qualitätskontrolle* (2013), who actually work in shifts on stage, as the protagonist of the pièce is a paralysed woman in constant need of assistance, to the interpreters who, as shown in *Breaking News* (2008), make the almost immediate passage of news from one end of the world to the other possible; from the workers in the automotive industry in *Volksrepublik Volkswagen* (2014) to the actors, make-up artists, costume designers and theatre technicians who, although not physically present, are evoked in *Black Box* (2020), a post-pandemic homage to the art (and craft) of theatre. Furthermore, the “experts of the everyday” sometimes even turn into experts of the theatre art: this is what happens, for example, in *Call Cutta* (2005), in which some Indian call centre operators go from being mere tools of the companies to which they are subcontracted as if they were objects to becoming ‘directors’, who with a simple telephone call are able to give precise instructions to the ‘audience’, which is thus remote-controlled in its movements on the open stage of the city of Berlin.

The use of such “experts” is nonetheless not the only way *Rimini Protokoll* employs to investigate and re-enact the world of work in its plays: the process of de-objectification of the workers – which in cases like *Call Cutta* is also accompanied by significant ethical implications as well as postcolonial claims – is at times counterbalanced by a forced alienation and reification of the individual, who from being an acting subject becomes a cog in a mechanism – for example in *Gesellschaftsmodell Großbaustelle*, where the smoke extraction system of the new Berlin airport is recreated by asking the audience to wave large cardboard panels. Finally, work is also represented in his spatiality: sometimes both the “experts of the everyday” and the public are asked to move on a stage that recreates a work environment;

¹⁵ Birgfeld 2015.

in some cases, even a real workplace can become the setting for a guided performance-visit, e.g. the Beethovenhalle restoration site in Bonn in *Bauprobe Beethoven* (2020).

The working world is hence undoubtedly the protagonist of a large part of the projects or, better, 'works' of the collective: work, understood as a dimension of development, (self)realisation and assertion of personal identity, but also as a realm of de-personalisation and precariousness of the subject, is brought onto the stage through its discursive-performative and physical personification in the "experts of the everyday". However, thanks also to the participa(c)tive structure of the plays, these are never reduced to victims of circumstances or mere objects exposed to the voyeuristic gaze of the spectators (Dreyse 2011: 136), thus experiencing a re-evaluation of their professional and above all human role. This re-evaluation is in fact made possible by the medium of theatre itself, which becomes a public forum for self-affirmation and self-determination involving all the participants in the performance: 'doing' theatre – in the sense of actively taking part in theatrical practice – becomes work in the deepest and most positive sense of the term, that is, a concrete attempt to (re)define the human with all its intrinsic contradictions.

3. How to (re)build mankind: *Gesellschaftsmodell Großbaustelle*

A performance in which all the above-mentioned strategies of performative representation of work – theatrical and otherwise – come together with the aim of emulating the organisation and functioning of a precise work setting, i.e. a so-called "mega construction site", is the aforementioned *Gesellschaftsmodell Großbaustelle*, conceived and directed by Stefan Kaegi¹⁶. The performance is part of the series *Staat 1-4*: together with other three plays, dealing respectively with the world of secret services (1: *Top Secret International*, 2016), the total control and digitisation of citizens' data (3: *Träumende Kollektive. Tastende Schafe*, 2017) and the realm of global economy as epitomized by the Davos Forum (4: *Weltzustand Davos*, 2018), *Gesellschaftsmodell Großbaustelle* was envisioned as a 'tool' to urge the public – which has to be considered here in the etymological sense of the term as an active part of the state organisation – to reflect on «the na-

¹⁶ A recording of a staging of the play (Vimeo 2018) as well as excerpts of the script in English (E-Flux 2019) can be found online.

ture of those powers whose separation used to structure the mechanisms of state control in the past» and «how these [...] are still able to regulate the critical impulses to transformation to which societies are nowadays exposed» (“Staat 1-4”).

As one can guess from the title, the stage setting – which occupies the whole theatre building with no distinction whatsoever between actual stage and audience – is structured, both figuratively and concretely, as a mega construction site, such as those deputed to the realization of public projects, which are often condemned to suffer delays, unforeseen trials and sometimes even to fail altogether, thus causing huge losses of public money. Precisely the reality of such mega construction sites with their own rules and functioning, which are unknown to the majority of people, is suggested by *Rimini Protokoll* as a ‘model’, i.e. as a plastic representation of contemporary society, dominated at all levels by ruthless mechanisms of competition and prevarication which, although they couldn’t have developed without a truly democratic system, now undermine it at its very foundation. In the performance, however, these mechanisms are simultaneously transformed into collaborative practices that do not lead to failure but rather to the construction of something that can be genuinely called public as it is has been realised by the public community, so that the term ‘Modell’ takes on a different meaning, that of a positive ‘exemplum’. *Gesellschaftsmodell Großbaustelle* can therefore also be interpreted as a contemporary ‘Produktionsstück’ which, in the wake of Heiner Müllers oeuvre¹⁷, intends to ‘show’ the operating conditions of the construction site as a (real and at the same time also utopian) mirror of society, albeit not only by means of mimetic representation but also by concretely (re-)enacting them on the stage through the labour – not only theatrical – of the “experts of the everyday” and even of the audience itself, so that in the end «the representation of the world [...] is replaced by its production» (Scherer 2018: 15).

That’s why the performance, just like the division of labour within a real mega construction site, foresees that the action – which can also be read as ‘Aktion’ in the Beuysian sense of the word – takes place simultaneously at nine “stations”, each of which concretises an essential aspect of the organisation of the mega construction site-system and is supervised by its

¹⁷ Echoed in the choice of the construction site as a setting as well as in the structure of the play are also some of Heiner Müller’s reflections on the need to renew theatre in the face of an increasingly scientific reality, in particular those contained in *Sechs Punkte zur Oper* (Müller 1997: 117-8).

own “expert of everyday life”, ranging from the illegal labourer to a real estate finance expert¹⁸. Moreover, the nine stations are so arranged as to recreate the structure of a real construction site, consequently allowing the interaction of one with the other; in the middle of the scene stands a huge crane, a metonymic instrument of panoptic control and direction of those «hidden choreographies» (Rimini Protokoll 2018: 37) that regulate the construction site’s functioning, thus embodying, as is typical in contemporary theatre focused on the working and production world, that invisible enemy that is the capitalist and particularly post-Fordist system (Schroeder 2014: 35). The capital, which in fact replaces the state, hence symbolically controls not only the “experts” who embody the microcosm of a mega construction site, but also the public that actively participates in the performance: the ‘spectators’ are in fact divided into nine groups, each of which begins its journey – and consequently the play – at a specific station, where they are not only invited to carefully listen to the professional and personal story of the respective expert, but also engaged in activities that reproduce, concretely or allegorically, the work field that is being “discursively explored”. Besides being transformed, as mentioned before, into a human smoke extraction system, participants are also asked to carry construction material – which will then be arranged by an another group – from one side of the stage space to the other, or to wear protective boxing helmets and simulate a fight¹⁹, hence evoking the no-holds-barred and sometimes

¹⁸ The following nine professionals act as “experts”: Sonja-Verena Breidenbach, real estate investment expert; Alfredo Di Mauro, engineer and building technology planner; Dieter Läßle, professor emeritus of urban development; Fang-Yun Lo, Chinese dancer who, in the play, takes on the role of a *Wandarbeiterin* (migrant worker); Jürgen Mintgens, construction lawyer; Marius Ciprian Popescu, Romanian labourer; Reiner Pospischil, pest control expert; Andreas Riegel, anti-corruption control manager at public and private institutions.

¹⁹ In the performance, the German term used to indicate the fight is ‘Kampf’, thus creating a clear reference to Marx’s *Capital*, where the idea of ‘Kampf’, in addition to being fundamental in the perspective of the famous battle of the working class against the capitalist entrepreneurs, also encapsulates the struggle of “free scientific inquiry” against economic private interests, which, in this case, can also be read as the battle of contemporary theatre against its prevailing economisation: « In the domain of political economy, free scientific inquiry meets not merely the same enemies as in all other domains. The peculiar nature of the material it deals with, summons as foes into the field of battle the most violent, mean and malignant passions of the human breast, the Furies of private interest» (Marx 2010: 10).

even beyond-legal battles that characterise tendering procedures of large public works; or even they are encouraged to bet on future trends in the real estate market around an imaginary roulette table.

Guided by the commands of the “experts”, who actually also become stage-directors of the micro-site they are in charge of, the audience members perform small tasks that require a physical effort and are at the same time urged to follow what is being told to them: on the one hand, they are induced into a situation of passivity while, on the other, their attention is focused, through the exploitation of the epic medium of biographical narration, on learning notions and pieces of information that are often hidden but actually reveal the true essence of those constructive – and also destructive – relationships that regulate the functioning of a mega construction site. The ‘audience-workers’ are thus consciously subjected to a condition that is in itself aporistic, which highlights the profound alienation caused by modern work and, concurrently, the “immateriality” of those jobs resulting from the transformations of the post-Fordist era (Lazarato 1998: 39). Such circumstance is not accidental but rather envisions a specific ‘Wirkungseffekt’ that, in the words of *Rimini Protokoll* themselves, is intended to be of «overload and stress» (Leibold 2018) and should act as an impulse for critical reflection.

The idea of alienation and passivity of the ‘working’ audience – puppets of the capital, which, not coincidentally, is embodied, as already mentioned, by a tall crane that stands in the centre of the stage and symbolically pulls all the strings – is also evoked by other aspects of the performance: not only do the individual groups move within the various stations as well as from one to the next in an absolutely precise and orderly manner without ever giving the idea of wanting to evade the tasks entrusted to them²⁰, but the whole play actually follows the principle of shift work, as emphasized by the siren that signals the moment when it is time to move on to the next station and make room to the next group, that is to say, the following shift. Thus, the structure of the performance not only echoes the Expressionist ‘Stationendrama’, thereby extending its meaning as a «dramatic staging of a multiple subjectivity» (Oehm 1993: 131), but also the functioning of an assembly line, where each group is called upon to fulfil its role, while

²⁰ This aspect, which has also been emphasised by some critics (Käppeler 2018; Leibold 2018), emerges especially thanks to the overhead view of the complete stage space provided by the recording of the performance; see, for instance, at minute 22:40 (Vimeo 2018).

remaining in the dark as to that played by their 'comrades' as well as even to the final product that is being collaboratively created.

However, since all nine groups work simultaneously, all kinds of traditional hierarchies between the different professions are overridden, hence giving equal right of expression to the labourer as to the big capital investor (Käppeler 2018); at the same time, by being embedded into the typical theatre situation, which «forms a whole made up of evident and hidden communicative processes» (Lehmann 2006: 17), the participants become both «involuntary promoter[s]» (Marx - Engels 1988: 222) and conscious subject of the mechanisms that regulate the so-called structure. This paradoxical situation is also reinforced – and, as will be seen, ironically eluded – in the finale of the performance, which sees all the groups reunited in a 'Vollversammlung', a sort of popular assembly where the “experts of the everyday” offer concrete proposals on how to improve the functioning of the mega construction site as well as the condition of the individual workers and also of society as a whole, exhorting those involved in its building and shaping to find points of mediation and conciliation between the various positions and interests at stake. It is only at this point that the final product of the labour of the participants is revealed: beside creating, as a matter of fact, the play itself, they also materially contributed to the construction of a brick and wooden shack, which could be metaphorically interpreted as the 'home' of a possible new model of collaborative society.

Beyond this – one might say: utopian – perspective, the finale can also be read as the point of crystallisation of a *Leitmotiv* that accompanies the entire play and that, although in a very different sense, finds its roots in Schiller's *Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Indeed, it is undeniable that the overall structure of the play reflects that *Zerstückelung* («splitting up») of man caused by the advent of modern society, as underlined in the famous 6th letter:

Then [...] enjoyment was separated from labour, the means from the end, the effort from the reward. Man himself eternally chained down to a little fragment of the whole, only forms a kind of fragment; having nothing in his ears but the monotonous sound of the perpetually revolving wheel, he never develops the harmony of his being; and instead of imprinting the seal of humanity on his being, he ends by being nothing more than the living impress of the craft to which he devotes himself, of the science that he cultivates. (Schiller 1910: 222)

Such alienation of the individuum brought about by the (proto-)industrial division of labour is however counteracted at another level: since *Gesellschaftsmodell Großbaustelle* also enacts a personification of labour, the unique and personal biographies of the “experts” do not remain a mere «living impress of the craft to which [they] devotes [themselves]» but rather become a form of participatory – as it is shared with the public – denunciation of the instrumentalising power of the capital²¹. Furthermore, the shifting of the groups through different workstations and tasks effectively removes – in the sense of a performative ‘Aufhebung’ – any kind of fragmentation of work and therefore seems to enable a symbolical recomposition of the lost unity of mankind. The fact that such recomposition takes place through a theatre performance where, as seen, the boundaries between the reification of the subject that originates because of modern work and the claim of a creative force, both aesthetic and social, inherent in it, are extremely labile as well as consciously overstepped, also seems to allude at the “reunifying” function of the instinct of play as postulated yet again by Schiller in his *Letters*: «The sensuous instinct wishes to be determined, it wishes to receive an object; the formal instinct wishes to determine itself, it wishes to produce an object. Therefore the instinct of play will endeavor to receive as it would itself have produced, and to produce as it aspires to receive» (*ibid.*: 248). In the simultaneous active and passive participation of the audience in the realisation of the performance, which has to be understood as a play in both senses, that is, as a theatrical representation and also as a playful emulation of work situations that are in reality anything but pleasant, the famous Schillerian dictum «man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and *he is only completely a man when he plays*» (*ibid.*: 252) is thus realised, as long as “play” is intended as a working activity that contributes to the self-affirmation of the subject as an individual and as an equal member of the human community.

This playful-human aspect, which appears, at least at first glance, to confer dignity back to the workers as subjects (and not as objects), is also enhanced by the closing act of the performance, when another form of

²¹ This is particularly evident in the case of Alfredo Di Mauro, who recounts how he became the scapegoat for the failure of the new Berlin airport project: since he was in charge of the smoke extraction system, its – alleged, according to Di Mauro himself – malfunctioning eventually led him to be the one blamed for the huge delays in the opening of the airport, even if other problems were to be addressed.

artistic expression is added, namely dance²², as the participants are asked to imagine, in the wake of the already mentioned utopian sentiment that permeates the whole situation, the end of a working day at the construction site as a party with dancing and music: to crown their performative simulation of such a day, they are namely invited to dance to the rhythm of a music that blends techno beats with oriental melodies²³, whilst imitating typical gestures of manual labour such as shovelling, using a jackhammer and painting. This dance hence unites, as a sort of ironic *Gioca jouer*²⁴, play and manual activity, leading the participants to develop a 'Haltung' that is not so much 'kritisch' but rather 'emotional', which acts as a liberating catharsis.

Yet at the same time this closing act also ironically (in the Romantic sense of the word) questions the formative – as Schiller would say – value of such an experience. Indeed, as already pointed out, *Rimini Protokoll's* theatre does not in any way want to set itself up as a «moral institution» or endow the stage with its own «jurisdiction» (Schiller 1962: 92), for the spectators are neither to be thought as dwelling in a «state of minority» nor the theatre is to be seen a «healing institution», but rather as a «museum in which things and people seem to be elevated above frenetic causality» (Rimini Protokoll 2012: 160). Thus, as an interactive museum of modern labour under the aegis of post-capitalism, the performance reveals its true purpose: through participation in this choral but despite all autistic²⁵ dance, the participants in the performance should perceive on their own skin – since, as Kaegi himself emphasises, «what one experiences through the senses, one remembers differently» (Leibold 2018) – the glaring contrast between the dimension of *divertissement* with which labour is cloaked

²² Here, too, it is possible to discern a further reference to Schiller, namely to his reflections on dance in *Kallias, or, On the Beautiful*, where a «well performed English dance» is depicted as the «the most suitable emblem of the asserted self-freedom and the spared freedom of the other» (Schiller 1992: 56), as well as to those in the poem *Der Tanz*, which, in the second version of 1800, revives the main themes of the *Letters* (cfr. Ring 2022: 66-91).

²³ Ending the working day by dancing is, in fact, a traditional custom of Chinese workers who move from the countryside to the cities to find employment.

²⁴ Italian song and group dance by Claudio Cecchetto, where the lyrics consist of simple actions, such as to eat, to sleep and so on, that are to be carried out while dancing to the rhythm of the music.

²⁵ Note that the “autism” of mega construction sites is highlighted within the performance itself as one of their greatest problems.

in this final act and the contradicting principles and mechanism that often lead to painful consequences for the workers themselves, as earlier demonstrated by the accounts of the “experts of the everyday”²⁶, inherent in the mega construction site-system and, in general, in the condition of the (post)modern *homo laborans*. Through a distancing effect that ironically – and aporistically – takes place through emulative identification, the participants/workers/dancers are, however, in no way led either to become the subject of an aesthetic education or to experience *Mitleid*, but rather feel once more a cunning distress, thanks to which they are urged not only to observe «almost like an alien» (Bayraktar 2019) their own everyday life, but also to reconsider critically both the tendency towards the fusion of materiality and immateriality, reification and subjectivation of the individual, productive labour and creative play, which increasingly characterises contemporary reality and in fact represents nothing other than a new form of control by the capital (Lazzarato 1998: 41-43); moreover, they are invited to reassess their own possible role in the construction of a new social order, that is, their own role as ‘construction workers’ of society – as also stressed by the projection of the image of an anthill at the end of the performance²⁷.

In conclusion, it is therefore possible to read *Gesellschaftsmodell Großbaustelle*, as well as other works by *Rimini Protokoll*, as a ‘Theaterarbeit’ in the very sense of the word, i.e. not only as an exemplification of a particular theatrical practice, but as a performance that, through the blending of theatre and work, sheds light on the aporias inherent in both and, by extension, on the functioning – understood as a process itself of work and production – of our society. By transforming work into a play, a ‘game’ but also an act of acting, in which the audience takes part as a puppet moved by invisible strings, and at the same time making clear, through the support of the “experts”, how these strings do indeed correspond to precise rules of the organisation of work and post-Fordist production, *Gesellschaftsmodell*

²⁶ One should note, moreover, the contrast between the act of identification and mimetic performance typical of classical dramaturgy, as embodied by the final dance, and the epicism of the speeches of the “experts”, which act as a «demonstration» in Brecht’s sense (Brecht 1966).

²⁷ To what extent this effect, understood not so much as a moral *Wirkung* but rather as an ‘Aktion’ – in the political sense of the term –, can really be produced in an audience that comes from a left-wing culture and tends at times to feel already ‘enlightened’ on the issues at stake is difficult to say and would require an empirical analysis of the reception of the spectacle itself, which cannot be carried out here.

Großbaustelle only apparently leads to a synthesis of pleasure and work, of emotion and rationality; rather it creates a series of short circuits that circumvent the offer of a pre-packaged and harmonic solution and that instead of aesthetically educate the public, aim to *diseducate* it in order to «free [it] from the typical consumer [and classic spectator, A.G.] attitude» (Leibold 2018) and make him once again a real worker, i.e. the real producer of himself, of society and of meaning as well.

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