

Rimini Protokoll: Migration, Artificiality, and the City on the Axis of Time.
Bodenprobe Kazachstan and *Remote Milano*

Annamaria Cascetta

An outstanding example of performative theatre is the work of the Swiss German collective, the now well-known and award-winning Rimini Protokoll.¹ Here we will be analysing two of their performances: *Bodenprobe Kazachstan* and *Remote X*, the latter articulated as *Remote Milano*. They were given respectively at the Venice Biennale (2011) and in Milan (2014), the former being presented on a traditional frontal stage and the later on routes leading through the urban setting.

Produced by a collective, the work of the Protokoll holds to a flexible idea of authorship. The artists are responsible for devising, selecting and editing the whole work, but the scoring of a performance is devised in close collaboration with the performers or 'experts'. Its development is not dramatic but narrative, being produced by a combination of all the dramatic codes, treated as equivalent and functioning synaesthetically. They embody a constant dialectic between presence and representation, between reality and symbol. The public are involved in various ways, themselves becoming performers. The media interface with the live presence without distorting it, but strengthening, revealing or problematizing it.

¹For general information on the work of this theatre group, see: M. Dreysse, F. Malzacher (eds.), *Experts of Everyday. The Theatre of Rimini Protokoll*, Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2008; A. Fournier, P. Gilardi, A. Harder, C. Mader (eds.), *Rimini Protokoll*, MIMOS, Schweizer Theater-Jahrbuch, 77-2015, Peter Lang Verlag, Bern, Berlin, Brussels, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford, Vienna.

*Bodenprobe Kazachstan.*² Reality in the circle of art

The Structure.

The audience enters the theatre before the start of the performance and sees a large illuminated map representing Central Asia with Kazakhstan, a former Soviet republic, now independent, and its neighbouring countries, the Ural River and Caspian Sea. They see the floor of the **stage** covered with a coarse mud-grey carpet and hear in the background the sound of pumping and the generators of a drill searching for oil. Scattered on the stage, under the mats, which are raised in the course of the action, or at the sides, are the few **props** that will gradually be revealed and used by the experts/characters as synecdoches or metaphors: a can of oil, exercise equipment, musical instruments, audio-video devices, a treadmill, walking sticks, a stepper, an exercise bike, a stone platform, an exercise bike, a balalaika, a second traditional stringed instrument, a hula hoop, a gimbal rig or rotating double wheel used to train astronauts to cope with weightlessness, a mini video camera, rubber boots, squares where the characters simulate walking in muddy water, snow or ice, a photo and plaque commemorating the astronaut Gagarin, the 'miraculous' golden hand of the President of Kazakhstan, today's modern version of the notorious cult of personality, a model of the city in miniature, a bottle of whisky, a stump and an axe for splitting logs. They accumulate on the stage, the debris of a life, a history and a period.

The performance begins. Five '**experts**' speak in their own persons, telling us about themselves. They are the true protagonists of the stories. They were chosen in a preliminary phase of the creation of the performance for their articulacy, the exemplary nature of their stories and the scope for interweaving them. They are the 'samples' of humanity, like the soil samples ('Bodenprobe') taken from the ground when drilling for oil and alluded to in the title of the work. Just as test drilling reveals the hidden oil, so the characters reveal that the profound significance of their shared experience is migration. They reveal it to themselves and the

²Devised and directed by Stefan Kaegi/Rimini Protokoll. Performers: Elena Panibratowa, Gerd Baumann, Heinrich Wiebe, Helene Simkin, Nurlan Dussali. Music by Christian Garcia. Production design by Aljoscha Begrich. Dramaturgy by Aljoscha Begrich and Juliane Männel. Lighting design by Sven Nichterlein. Videos by Chris Kondek, Technical director Sven Nichterlein. Assistant director Jessica Paez. English translation by Amanda Crain. Production manager Juliane Männel. Production Rimini Apparat, HAU-Hebbel am Ufer Berlin in coproduction with Schauspiel Hanover, Wiener Festwochen, Goethe Institute Almaty, le Maillon – Théâtre de Strasbourg/Scène Européenne, NET(New European Theatre) Festival Moscow, BIT Teatergarasjen. Supported by Capital Cultural Fund and the Governing Mayor of Berlin–Senate Chancellery for Cultural Affairs. First performance: Berlin, Hebbel am Ufer, 27 April 2011
Duration 100 minutes

The analysis is based on my viewing of the performance at the Venice Biennale presented on 15 October 2011 at the Teatro Piccolo Arsenal, supplemented by a video recording and the unpublished text in English translation, kindly supplied by the theatre company, together with photographic material and the press release provided by the Press Office of the Venice Biennale. The video recording was made available by the theatre company.

A rigorous analysis of the performance can be found in Roberta Carpani, *Performing History. Presence, Testimony and Theatre* in 'Bodenprobe Kazachstan' by Rimini Protokoll, in Annamaria Cascetta (ed.), *Il teatro verso la Performance*, "Comunicazioni sociali", January-April 2014, pp. 81-92.

audience gathered in the theatre, sharing a route of excitement and knowledge that goes far beyond the documentation of a problem in a given historical-political period, in a specific geographic area. These 'experts' express themselves in German, in Russian, in Kazakh. They express themselves in monologues, in pseudo-dialogues, in denotative language with a simple, paratactic structure.

Gerd is a petroleum engineer in eastern Germany. He talks about his experience of drilling with the cold detachment of the highly skilled, professional technician, but increasingly voices his pride in his work, the feverishness of the search and the impatience with which he waits for the birth of a well as if it were a child, followed by the last ultrasound scan, looking forward to its completion.

So we know, there is oil, but we know nothing about the temperature,
pressure or composition or network of porous rock.

(...)

Then they measure over 500 meters
and when they make
a reservoir plan and a detailed acoustic picture,
not of a foetus, but of an oil field,
they put out their cables at intervals of maybe 50 metres.

The story marks the stages of life, organising it as a circle. Gerd is drilling in the steppe in Kazakhstan. He has been doing this work for over twenty years, has always worn the same jacket, and is utterly absorbed in his job. The drill moves from the upper strata, only a few thousand years old, to deeper strata between two to three million years old, and so to the deepest layers formed 130 million years ago. His great-grandfather was a general decorated in 1943 for holding the strategically important Dnieper line, but he was later tried and convicted in the Nuremberg trials. The process of drilling is his life: the conquest of depth, from one geological layer to another by choosing the right bits and their replacements. He operates the oil rig with conservative methods, not destructively in the Soviet style, descending meter by meter with watchful prudence.

Gerd has finished the job and is now in Berlin, but a colleague calls him back. He leaves the city and starts drilling in Kazakhstan, the new Eldorado, the new Houston. Here the resources are large, wages high, taxes low, the food and living conditions have improved and at least his passion for drilling can be satisfied. In the final phase, the tension grows, the safety rules are strictly applied, the work proceeds slowly with tense concentration: the gas must not be allowed to leak out and cause destructive explosions. As his account draws to an end, without ever departing from technical precision, we sense within it a subterranean existential reflection that is polarised around two key expressions: 'migration' and 'babies born'. Migration connects oil and men by analogy. Hydrocarbons, generated by organic matter that is abundant in the seas and has lain buried underground for millions of years, migrate upward. They pass through porous areas and form a reservoir in an oil trap, a hard, impermeable layer which prevents the petroleum's dispersal. The oil extracted migrates through pipelines across borders from country to country. Gerd's self-control slips when he evokes the 'exciting moment', normally at night, when oil is detected in drilling, his voice

betraying an emotional vibration as he associates it with the image of childbirth occurring at night.

Again Gerd responds to the call of Kazakhstan, taking him to Atyrau, a region where black gold is rampant and new businessmen and executives are hunting for specialised technicians. Presidential political ambitions, financial speculation, capital flight, corruption, the long arm of the CIA, megalomaniacal urban projects and new capitals sparkling with glass, gold and concrete but without a history: these are the fabric of the modernity to which Gerd is again invited. Meanwhile his drilling rig has reached the 5,200-metre level. The work is done. The team packs up and moves on to the next drilling station.

Heinrich is a truck driver. He speaks calmly, humbly, with dignity, aloof and resigned. He is a German born in Ukraine, to parents descended from Germans who immigrated to Russia under the reign of Catherine the Great and never integrated. Wartime events forced them to leave the village and follow the retreating Wehrmacht back to Germany, where they hoped to start life again in a village in Silesia, but they were suspect to both the Americans and the Russians. They were not sent home to Ukraine, but to the slums of Arkhangelsk, just outside the Arctic Circle. They fell into disgrace under the Soviet regime, because they belonged to the Baptist community of believers and preachers. Their father was imprisoned and the family was starving. Heinrich was sent to an orphanage and then emigrated to Kazakhstan, where one-tenth of the population consists of ethnic Germans. He lived there for thirty years and learned to drive petrol tankers. The ever closer relation to oil logically links him to Gerd. He defended the tanks from the cold by artisanal means, ensuring nothing leaked out of them during those gruelling journeys in temperatures well below freezing, driving a truck that lacked the comforts of modern vehicles, where it was impossible to sleep and he had to keep singing to keep himself awake at the driving wheel. Now at fifty-five he has retired and is happy. But the memory of explosions continues to surface in his thoughts (conceptually linking him to another 'expert', Helena). These explosions, frequent in Semipalatinsk, spread insecurity and terror: they were not explosions in space but atomic explosions. Now he lives in Germany, where he works as a caretaker, and his wife, who had studied, is a cleaner. Neither would return to Kazakhstan.

What is the conclusion? He split wood to keep warm when it was -40° C, he kept doing it under all the different regimes. Then he installed heating in his house and ran it on oil siphoned off from his tanker. 'I did not even consider it stealing. / But the house was warm 24 hours a day, and my family were happy.'

Lena is a pleasant young woman born in the midst of the Kazakhstan steppe. Her ancestors were ethnic Germans, from Ukraine. She emigrated to Germany, settling in Hanover, where she was a member of the ground staff assisting flights leaving for Kazakhstan with a Russian airline that eventually folded. She speaks quietly, in a warm voice and her smile a very human and endearing. Her gestures are calm and confident. She moves naturally, inspiring sympathy. Her story, recounted with restrained emotion and tenderness, recalls her feelings and dreams. She speaks of the school for pioneers in Kazakhstan, where she excelled in songs and manual dexterity; young people were trained to war, as if it were a game; she evokes the smell and taste of the copper mines in her land, her mother, her grandmother, her brother, and the fascination of the rockets being launched into the air over the Baikonur cosmodrome, which everyone looked at in ecstasy, their noses pointing skywards, dreaming

of becoming cosmonauts; the radioactive tanks which one came across and handled as if they were harmless; the distance from her only relative, her brother who has remained in Kazakhstan so as to be able to visit and honour their dead in the cemetery. The director of the museum of astronautics, full of pathetic relics, in her small town on the steppe connected by video candidly urges her to return and fulfil her dream of becoming a cosmonaut. She can start by doing the training sessions, which are significantly displayed as exercises in the gym with rotating equipment.

An orphan in the world, as the song plays and she sings along, she hopes for a lucky break naively, like many inhabitants of the steppe. She tries to attract fortune by putting her hand into the President's lucky gold hand. He has been elected several times, without an alternative, because, says Nurlan ironically, the people of Kazakhstan enjoy stability. But Lena's real aspiration is only to find a new job.

Nurlan is an energetic young consultant. He was born in Kazakhstan in the old capital of Almaty and has now emigrated to Germany because of his work. He wears a suit and tie. He moves easily, casually; he has a pleasant, open face. He shows his sample can of oil and reels off figures confidently and ironically: how hard Gerd works to produce the petrol that served to fuel his car for the journey to the theatre tonight! His grandparents want him to return to Kazakhstan and there he can marry a lovely tall blonde girl from those parts. His grandfather fought bravely against the fascists with the Red Army and, in accordance with the law of war, he killed many of them, though he is so mild. But Nurlan is a citizen of the world now and he is confident there will be no more wars. The film clip of his grandparents and the song he sings, accompanying himself on the stringed instrument of his country, shows that though he moves confidently in the world, he remains attached to his roots. But his world is now an office with computers, charts and a display showing price trends that enable him to 'make money with oil' in real time. Nurlan is not an ethnic German, he is a Kazakh, but his passport is German because he has studied and worked in Germany. Now he has a passion for solar energy and sells it with the same resourcefulness and professionalism with which he sold oil. He manoeuvres a gleaming model representing Astana in miniature and dreams of conquering the new capital with his product.

Helene, finally, is a self-assured, restless girl from Tajikistan, neighbouring on wealthy Kazakhstan and far less fortunate. While Kazakhstan has grown rich Tajikistan has been engulfed by civil war for many years. She emigrated to Germany. Her family were recognized as ethnic Germans, because their ancestors had arrived from Alsace two hundred years earlier. She has learned German and forgotten her own language, but when she sings it comes back to her. She has done various jobs: she's been a secretary and a beautician, but her dream is to dance and sing. There is something resentful and aggressive in her words. The urge to be independent, adventurous, to sing and dance, have taken her to Dubai, a city that resembles Astana. Here she is an entertainer for the new rich and American soldiers: she dances frenzied modern dances, tells aggressive, coarse jokes (like how to make them drink from their boots), and performs as a fakir (with a fire-eating routine).

The lives of the experts/characters converge indirectly only because for some reason they are all connected with Kazakhstan (Gerd is an oil driller, Heinrich an oil transporter, Lena and Nurlan were born there and Helene sees it as a rich and more fortunate neighbour of her homeland); and then in various ways they are all related to Germany, as their homeland or a

place they have returned to as ethnic Germans or Germans by adoption. But physically they converge on the stage where the audience watches and listens to them as each relates his or her story in the form of monologues and simple paratactic pseudo-dialogues, and where each projects his or her movie made up of scenes of realistic exteriors or interiors. The formal convergence reveals the substantial analogy of a condition and a destiny.

The **montage** consists of interlacing lengths of text fluidly and naturally to reflect chronological coincidences (e.g. Gerd speaks of her great-grandfather, who was a general, after Heinrich says he left the Ukraine in the wake of the Wehrmacht, because they are both referring to events in 1943), ethnic analogies (e.g. Heinrich speaks after Lena mentions her origins as an ethnic German in the Ukraine), or shared memories of sounds or places (e.g. Heinrich speaks when Lena's reference to explosions connected to the space experiments acts as an acoustic *madeleine* and recalls the atomic explosions in his village; Helene speaks evoking Dubai after Nurlan and Lena have described Astana), or the affinity of emotions evoked by similar habits, such as the songs that associate Heinrich with Lena.

Singing, accompanied by ethnic instruments punctuates the stories. Remote from the Brechtian function of estrangement, which it invokes technically, it has an evocative, epic, existential function of reflection, of projection in time. Heinrich sings a song of fear and loneliness of as he drives across the steppe; Lena, who learned to fly, sings the song of the young eagles; young Nurlan, who wants to be a citizen of the world, sings vigorously; Helene sings a song in honour of her Tajikistan, a withered flower between China and Afghanistan; and Lena sings the orphan's song. Musical chords and sound effects repeated with discretion, as if they were metronomes, accompany the migrations of the five mimed by their movements on the exercise equipment.

The **stories recounted live interface with media images** used skilfully and with restraint. Across the screen scroll old family photos, group photos of communities and soldiers, images of astronauts and technicians, snow-packed roads with antiquated trucks or modern oil tankers driving along them, films of life in the family or at school, films of the characters' native villages and their houses, the cemetery where all their loved ones lie buried, their graves visited by the only family member who has stayed behind. They give us insights into the local traditions with a portrait of a pair of grandparents; we hear the language and the songs of Kazakhstan and watch an ancient marriage service. The roads of the world flow past while Nurlan sings 'I am a citizen of the world'. We see cars driving along the roads of a rampant Kazakhstan, with colleagues or new businessmen hiring the most talented technical specialists for challenges that are always new and always the same ('challenge' being the key word). There is a film clip of the museum of the old space experiments; another clip of new oil derricks being erected; images of the rigs after work ends, maps of pipelines crossing borders, the flare of the new oil well as it is brought online.

At times the video images serve as a support and backdrop to the story, while at others they are presented in Brechtian antiphrasis with it (for example, when the projection of a miniature Astana, gleaming with modernity, is the backdrop to Lena singing a melancholy song live:

A bird sang in the green garden
And the bird had a nest
With baby birds in it

But I am an orphan in the world
In my sorrow I'll enter a nunnery
And pray to God
Weeping in front of the saints
So God will send me luck.

At times a pseudo-dialogue is established between the images on the video screens and the experts talking live (Gerd with his colleagues, Nurlan with his grandparents, Lena with a museum director who was her teacher when she was young).

The combination of story, song, video and all the codes of stage writing are the perceptual analogue of the process of reworking memory and imagination, which records not just by photographing facts, but facts bound up with emotions, feelings, judgments, decisions, insights, so constructing an identity organised around steady fulcrums of subjective consciousness. One is reminded of the great lesson of Tadeusz Kantor, though seen in a completely different perspective. The scrolling of media images make sense only when supplemented by the other elements: namely, the movements of the five 'experts' live on stage: all their movements go nowhere (on the treadmill, the exercise bike, the stepper, the hula-hoop, or in the gimbal rig for training astronauts). This is a brilliant technical device, but also a sign of clear and incisive significance: almost a distant echo of the Nietzschean 'eternal recurrence of the same'. Other elements are the sounds of voices and instruments and the myth of petroleum, which overwhelms everything else.

From document to symbol

The whole performance is focused on the guiding theme of **migration**, a perpetual movement that ends in entrapment, driven by the illusion of a liberating movement that is circular and repetitive, and common to the oil cycle, the life cycles of individuals and history itself. Through the **guiding image of immobility/movement**, articulated in the complex yet lucid structure of the performance, the basic idea inspiring the work unfolds. This is **time**, which could be described as an obsession of the artist. It accompanies his 'experts' taken from real life and helps them make a journey of reflection and knowledge with him. Starting from the biography of each, it grows with profound sadness to comprise the history of the generations, of traditions, of Germany and the Eurasian lands, and becomes a philosophy of life. It unites the life of humanity and the life forms of geological eras before humanity existed, in a connection that recalls the horizon of ancient Greek tragedy. It is not the semblance of linear time, as in Leopardi's scathing reference to the century's 'magnificent progressive destinies', but a circular and iterative pattern of time which continues to churn out life.

This work, presenting itself as the modern performative version of documentary theatre, is capable of touching radical layers of experience and moving our deepest chords. It does so with a touch that is light, even humorous, but also seriously and lucidly, shaking us to open our eyes and avoid deceiving ourselves. Philosophically and existentially, there is an undeniable pessimism in the sense of the work, but on the plane of civic commitment and its meaning for the younger generations, represented here by Helena and Nurlam, it also seems

to convey a constructive and combative message: you can avoid being taken in by appearances and falling into the same trap.

The staging is adroitly interwoven and naturally paced by a skilled director, being unobtrusively and simply adapted to the protagonists, the performers, experts in life but not of art and theatre.

*Remote Milano*³

An important example of performance, *Remote X* by Rimini Protokoll, in its Italian variant *Remote Milano*, is remarkable on the formal plane for its expressive research in the field of performative theatre, while on the plane of symbolic significance it touches on the three central themes of modernity: the relation of humanity to the artificial, the anthropology of the city and the philosophy of time. We can now recapitulate the performance by bearing these in mind these guidelines.

The route

In each performance the fifty participants (it would be wrong to call them an audience) converge on the starting point, the terrace of Milan's Monumental Cemetery. Each equipped with a headset and guided by a recorded female voice, of the kind familiar from electronic navigators, they automatically become performers, individually isolated in their direct relationship with the voice, but at the same time united by it, as they all receive the same instructions and move together as a collective character: the horde.⁴ The female electronic voice of the navigator is persuasive, irritatingly and falsely polite, monotonous and impersonal, like a recorded hold-the-line message, a talking GPS navigator or the voices emitted by tollbooths. The sentences it utters are simple, their linguistic functions being purely referential or denotative, phatic and appellative. Emotional, expressive and poetic

³*Remote Milano*: devised, written and directed by Stefan Kaegi. Co-directed by Jörg Karrenbauer. Sound design by Nikolas Neecke. Dramaturgy by Juliane Männel, Alijoscha Begrich. Assistant director Ilona Marti. Voices by Acapela Group. Production manager Caroline Gentz. *Remote X* is a production by Rimini Apparat in coproduction with HAU Hebbel am Ufer in Berlin, Maria Matos Teatro Municipal and the Goethe-Institut Portugal, Festival Theaterformen Hannover/Braunschweig, Festival d'Avignon, Theater Spektakel, Zurich, Kaserne Basel. With the support of Hauptstadtkulturfonds Berlin, Pro Helvetia, Schweizer Kulturstiftung and Fachausschuss Tanz und Theater Kanton Basel-Stadt; in coproduction with House on Fire and the support of the Culture Programme of the European Union.

For Milan: assistant director: Federica Di Rosa; production management and translation by Valentina Kastlunger (ZONA K).

Remote X has been presented in many cities in various parts of the world, including Berlin, Avignon, Lisbon, New York, Paris. This analysis is based on the performance in Milan on 29 October 2014.

⁴*Horde* is a term used in ethnology for a group of nomads who are all equal and without leaders. Historically it has a military connotation. In its development it has taken on the pejorative connotations of a throng or mob ranging across a territory. In the performance the term appears to be left ambiguous, just as the group's response to the electronic voice that calls it 'my horde' is undetermined.

connotations are excluded, as are all metalinguistic functions. The poverty of the language is not a limitation in the text, but a necessity in keeping with both the speaker, a disembodied automated voice, and with the kind of dramaturgy that the German performative collective practises: it envisages no hierarchy between codes but the integration and equivalence of all codes (spatial-temporal, visual, auditory, of movement and reception) in producing meaning, and above all, as we shall see, despite everything it envisages an open scoring. At the start the voice says to its horde of performers: 'But the score is not in my hand alone. Your every observation is a part of it.' The voice gives instructions/orders, presented as guidance. It asks trivial questions, offers advice about the service or promotes links, as well as radical questions about existence. Equally denotatively, without emotion and without empathy, the voice compares itself to the humans it is guiding. It comments on its present shortcomings, but observes that future algorithms will be programmed so as to increasingly depersonalise people and enable it to take their place, as if it was their best friend, making up for all their needs while flattening them. 'But in future I will be your best friend, and we will go shopping together. I will tell you which shoes fit you best, and what colour suits you. I'll tell you what to eat and when to drink, what to say and what to think.' This voice has no feelings, never knows sadness, never suffers from tiredness, hunger or thirst and does not understand what people call pleasures. Its intelligence is quantitative. If it tries to understand its 'listeners' it translates them into numbers, such as weight, height, IQ, percentages of genes, rates of increase in life expectancy with health-conscious practices, amount of energy to be saved or wasted. It lacks lips and a mouth; its identity is a set of four syllables. It is not a human being but presents itself as a friendly helper which also has a flesh-and-blood 'assistant', recognizable by a red shawl. The roles are reversed: the physical presence 'assists' the electronic prosthesis.

Being a voice, when it ceases to speak it simply ceases to exist. And it is never bored at having to repeat something. With absolute and seemingly innocuous naturalness, it presents itself as the most powerful potential store of memory (a memory god, one might call it) that will finally satisfy humanity's greatest obsession: to survive, to see its memory perpetuated, storing people thoughts and ideas on its hard drive after death, but without pain, without doubts, and especially without the presence of others. First, though, it will replace them in everything. It will choose for them. It will give them the coordinates of the city. The voice accompanies the horde through the stages into which the performance is divided. But the performers have no idea of the route that lies ahead or what will happen, and they have no say in the matter. In this respect they are like the audience in an art theatre and unlike a motorist with a GPS navigator.

The first stop is inside the **Cemetery**, 'a sea of dwellings of the dead', of bodies that have ceased to function, and where the members of the horde will lie one day. The horde moves amid the monuments where 'life is petrified'. It passes by the wall of deaths for which no one has built a monument, that no one remembers, as appears by the plastic flowers. Was it perhaps because 'their death was cheap'? Their faces fade on the photographs, just as the faces of the members of the horde are faded and blurred when, before leaving the cemetery, they position themselves for a group photo in front of a convex traffic safety mirror suspended from a pole. 'Do you recognize the faces? They are blurred and faded like the faces on the photos of the dead. Are you sure you are with the living here? Are you already disappearing?'

The questions are asked in a level tone, without a trace of harshness. The voice has no passions, no complex thoughts, no fears, no impulses and knows no tiredness.

After the outing in the city, on crossings regulated by traffic lights and signs, the little exercises of automated dictatorship, the horde is led to the second stage: the **car park**, a museum of status symbols. Here, as in front of the burial places in the cemetery, the performers are invited to express a minimal form of identification or false freedom between given options, to choose the car that best suits each of them, just as in the cemetery they had to choose the face closest to each of them, and as later they will be asked to hold up the object they have with them that best represents them. Always 'things'. At another point they will be asked to choose the route but the choice will prove wrong when they are blocked at the turnstiles. Was it a joke to reinforce dependency? To reiterate the superiority of the programme?.

After walking for a stretch in another non-place through an underground passage, compared by the voice (which seems to proceed by automatic associations and references to internet) to the unconscious with its instincts, fears and complex thoughts.

Now we are on the third leg of our journey: **Garibaldi railway station**: the rails and platforms of meetings and separations, the atrium where the comedy of life is played out. To make this metaphor clear, what happens next has to be staged. The horde is invited to sit down, like the audience in a theatre with its back to the window of a Tezenis store and stare silently before them. 'The stage is densely populated by actors and extras (...) It's a contemporary multimedia installation. There are screens suspended everywhere.' Some appear indifferent, some flaunt their condition as travellers, some adopt poses, others strive to understand, but 'most of them enact waiting (...). Will they also enact their deaths sooner or later?' Of course the electronic voice has no moods: what is this irony? Has the sadism and arrogant superiority of its programmer-stage director become stuck to it?

Then the roles are reversed and now it is the horde that performs, allowing each to display some distinctive accessory. Again the voice, detachedly or ironically, comments: 'And now you are a small discontinuous mass ... a potential.'

There follows a new walk through another non-place: a flight of steps, with shop windows that 'look like great terrariums for humans'. The voice commands the group to characterize the non-place: they pose on the railing as if it were the bar in a ballet school. In thought it is transformed into a science-fiction place: 'Will you be displayed here, one day? So creatures of the future will be able to admire you?' The voice makes them play, playing with them.

The next stop is **Piazza Gae Aulenti**, Milan's new business centre at Porta Nuova. The horde enters 'a future of chrome and glass' and is guided to experience the piazza in three ways. The first is to spread out along the edge of the lake with its small fountains, mirroring themselves in the water and looking at each other, linking their thoughts in an association as immediate and elementary as it is profound. The individual droplets disappear into the water as a whole, but the face of each cannot merge into the group. Does individuality remain, despite everything? But individuality becomes an eye that is composed with all the eyes of the horde when everyone turns round, making the gesture of binoculars and embracing the 360° skyline of skyscrapers in the neighbourhood.

The second mode is the game of table football behind a newsstand. The individuality of the horde is again expressed in the pointless competition of the game prepared for it.

The third mode is the visit to a store selling luxury shoes, like works of art. Individuality is expressed in the choice of apparent variants prepared within the range of a single brand.

The voice issues another challenge. So far it has guided its horde 'amicably' along what is almost a tourist route, but it gradually becomes ominous and menacing. First the voice engages the horde in a tiring race, then halts it at the railing of the protected parapet of a bridge. It offers a view of the pulsating heart of the city, with the vehicles circulating like its life blood. 'Is this the heartbeat of the city? Or is it like an intravenous drip, to which the city is attached?' Why are there still so many drivers alone in that sea of machines? Soon there will only be machines and she, the voice, will coordinate the complex reality of the city. People seem to disappear. Besides, they have not yet appeared in those new, spectral buildings, despite the simulation of a 'forest in the city', designed for the city of the future.

The next stop is **the city of the past**. The horde reaches it by walking backwards, physically mimicking its journey in time. Beneath the **Arch of Porta Nuova**, one of the city's oldest gateways, the voice launches the horde into a modern dance, dividing the group up with slightly different instructions, breaking its compactness and introducing a source of discomfort and embarrassment. The voice displays increasing signs of aggression. After a rapid transit to another non-place, a pedestrian crossing, this emerges in the next stage: **the chapel of San Giovanni di Dio e San Vincenzo de' Paoli** in the Fatebenefratelli Hospital.

Here, in the place of the ultimate questions ('Who am I? Where do I come from? Why am I here? What will become of me? How long have I got left? And what comes next?'), we hear the voice of faceless power. The speaker is Vittorio, who has replaced the first female voice, Fabiana. His imperious voice dominates and dictates in accordance with the age-old system: *divide and rule*. The headphones of the horde now give instructions to different performers, all seated in the pews of the little chapel. The horde is turned into flocks. One flock, which remains seated, is flattered by the voice, which describes it as the shrewder group, while denigrating the other one as an assault team of elite defeatists, risking their lives. The second flock, flattered by the voice which depicts it as the elite, gets up and moves about. Greetings and responses to the greetings are also differentiated so as to create misunderstandings and conflicts: one responds to the wave of a hand with a bow; another responds to a bow by putting a finger to his head as if to imply the other is crazy.

The last stop is the **Fatebenefratelli Hospital**. The flocks reach the radiology department through the courtyard with the statue that is the emblem of the hospital. Symbolising loving care, it is mentioned by the voice with cold indifference. The voice speaks with terrifying objectivity. Here people are suspended in time. They are forgotten, waiting while time never passes. 'Which of them will sit on a wheelchair first? Which of them will get cancer first? Which of you will be fed artificially first? Which brain will need my help first?' This end has not been planned for any of the flocks by the voice, yet the end and the final dissolution are approaching.

This is the finale. On the parapet of the terrace a voice orders them to gaze at the skyline of the city, the future and its inhabitants, with the promise of progress. But the horde, brought together again, is growing ever more weary. And if the voice were to tell them to jump? A shudder.

However, the first stage is ended. Have they left any traces?

The voice rises above them:

'You have lent me your body / I will come back and ask to borrow your soul. / In the sea, the drops melt away. / With the heat, they evaporate, become clouds and disperse, just as you will, within a few minutes (...) No one will remember your names. / But I will be there to tell you. / Prepare to dissolve... 3,2,1 ... '

A cloud of vapour surrounds the group.

The route is accompanied discreetly and ironically by a soundtrack of music and noises, at times subtly mocking. Electronic effects (lively hammering, deep noises, whistles and disturbing sounds like nocturnal animals, as in the sequence in the underground passage) mingle with popular catchy songs, like one by Paolo Conte sung on the station platform. The electronic music of the base mingles with songs from the host country. The sounds are recorded mostly live and the particular audio technique creates the impression of a three-dimensional space.

The characteristic elements of **performative theatre**, largely present in the works of the Rimini Protokoll, as they emerged in the analysis of *Bodenprobe Kazachstan*, are heightened in the *Remote X* project by the presence of 'reality', with the mediation of a weaker convention and a weaker theatrical pact. This is the real space-scenario of the city and the performer-audience, the true 'experts', called on to build themselves up gradually as characters and to fill what they are guided to meet with content and meaning, in accordance with their different levels of expertise depending on their age, culture, places of origin, expectations and sensibility. In short, they are required to give the event the consistency of experience.

The modern formula of performative theatre, combined in contemporary theatre culture with recent experiments with 'immersive theatre', found mainly in the English-speaking world, still draws its sap from traditional forms present in varying degrees in the collective memory. These include the processional pattern of theatricality and the mediaeval rituals that passed into the mode of sacred theatre, still practised throughout Europe; the meditative-penitential path of the Stations of the Cross performed in the Sacri Monti; the Good Friday processions at the Colosseum, broadcast worldwide, which have long introduced modern words and secular presences drawn from everyday reality into the scriptural and clerical scheme. It is also connected with forms of the theatre of movement experimented with in the outstanding theatrical research in the last decades of the twentieth century that have proved seminal. Examples of this are Bread and Puppet, the Living Theatre, the paratheatre of late Grotowski and his heirs in Pontedera, or some 'festive' Italian experiments, including those organised in the eighties in Milan by the Centro di Ricerca per il Teatro (CRT) directed by Sisto Dalla Palma. The theme of the performer and the theatrical experience has been the subject of study and experimentation for years. The Protokoll's work has made a brilliant and profound contribution to it.

What knowledge?

What are the performers directed to focus on? What is the symbolic plane on which the performers are required to live the experience and interpret it? Firstly, the person-artifice

relationship. The performers are placed mimetically in a state common today,⁵ dislodged from the solitude of computer and desk, but left in a desired and now habitual isolation even in the midst of a crowd or a network. The performers' relationship is with an electronic voice, from which they cannot dissociate themselves without losing touch with the rest of the horde or flock. We have seen above how the pre-recorded voice is configured and acts on the performers. The voice is the **artificial** exerting its power, but also the voice of the artist, who uses it to reach the audience and stir them. It has two different aspects. Given its characteristics, as described above, it seems to be a Trojan horse that enters modern life and dominates humanity. It is the symbol of the instruments of a modern strategy of subtly menacing regulation of power, as prophesied by Foucault in his influential text *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, by which the machine initiates a new, cunning, devious and seemingly soft dictatorship, which is also increasingly invasive. Yet given the connotations of openness to the outer world and stimulus to inwardness that the voice, the correlate of the artist, acquires in the course of the performance, it is the symbol of a space of art that is mimesis and alarm at a threatening reality. And as the aesthetic of the Frankfurt School has taught us, staged in a free horizon (that of art), it is the voice of what is missing and is consigned to the project or utopia directed at reality. The voice is open to the **city**. It prompts us to look at what we normally see or ignore. Certainly it suggests the hurried progress of a tourist tour or a journalist reporting a news story, but it also conveys awkwardness and dissatisfaction with superficiality, the need to know more, to pause and take a deeper look, to understand. To understand what? To understand that the city is history written in stone, a place of the utmost human concentration, a living form, in continuous movement. Here people meet, connect and communicate in the various forms of social life, and the dialogue with the past and present is projected onto the future, the interior faces the exterior, in tension with each other, even when the global seems to engulf the local, while the local is entrenched on itself. The point is to understand that the city is an 'oeuvre', a dynamic community. It is the right of an active citizenry to decide its own environment. Planners and philosophers of urbanism have written important pages on this point.⁶

The choice of the locations in Milan traversed by Rimini Protokoll is especially apt. Within a relatively small area, which can be covered on foot, there is an extraordinary intersection and condensation of different periods: the city gate, despite rebuilding and demolition, is there to remind us of one of the oldest entrances to the city, set in the city walls, originally medieval, then Spanish. The hospital built starting in 1836, a complex that embodies the remains of a great social and civil commitment, has in its name an echo that associates it with the old Cinquecento hospital of which it was the heir when the city was ruled by the Spaniards and the Borromeo family. The Monumental Cemetery, described as an 'outdoor museum', built in Milan after unification, offers a synchronic and diachronic path between the excellences of culture, production and art in the city. And then the great project of the New Business Centre

⁵Hasn't the theatre always been, within the limits of the possible, a mimesis of reality in Aristotelian terms?

⁶See for example: L. MAZZA, *Planning and Citizenship*, New York-London, Routledge 2015, in particular Chapter 7, pp. 132-144.

of Porta Nuova, with its plan to connect tradition and ultra-modernity, the past and future, on a what was once a brownfield site, with the most daring projects, the small-scale sociability of the 'Isola' district and the horizon of the global, the classes and the generations. All this documents humanity's tireless effort to create, defend, tend, and perpetuate the memory of its physicality, its energy, as beautiful as it is frail and ephemeral. It is the triumph of physicality, but the voice of the artificial, talking relentlessly in the ear of the performers who traverse this reality insinuates with persuasive arrogance a superiority ready to supplant it.

So what remains to be understood? At a further level, the voice, perhaps in spite of itself, stimulates a process of meditation, rather like – allowing for the obvious differences – the words spoken during the pauses in a religious procession or during the paths of study at major sites of art and archaeology .

The central theme is the one on which Stephen Kaegi seems to insist, as we have already seen in *Bodenprobe*: **time**. Around this core theme a cluster of issues is organized. What is life? What is memory? What does it rest on: a metaphysical idea, to which the visit to the church alludes, a stratification of the times crystallised in stone, in an electronic prosthesis that will preserve it beyond the limits of the lifetimes of those who have known us and live on after us, but also beyond the limits of the material of the headstone in a cemetery? The navigator, irritating, entertaining and threatening by turn, but always ambiguous, shakes the lethargy of the performers.