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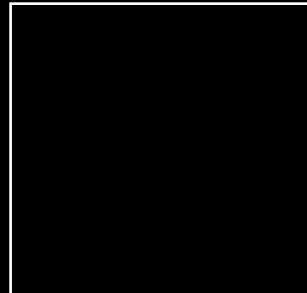


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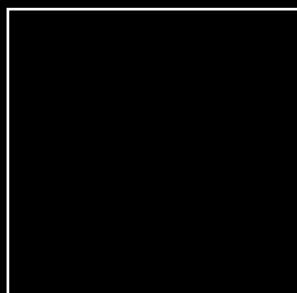
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VARIATION
ON THE
UNACCOUNTED:
A *TRIPTYCH*,
BY
MAPA TEATRO

José A. Sánchez

Die un- /
bestatteten, un gezählt, droben,
die Kinder,
sind absprungbereit.

– Paul Celan (1999, p. 244)

The un- /
buried, unaccounted, up there,
the children,
are ready to jump.

Unaccounted, or *incontados*, does not exist as a noun in Spanish. And its very inexistence performatively reflects not only the absence of the disappeared and murdered, but also the silence of witnesses and survivors, the victims that cannot be accounted for, who were never given a voice to tell their story. ‘The Unaccounted’ expresses the difficulty of representing violence, while also denouncing the reasons for which certain facts are declared irrepresentable, thus justifying censorship or waiving the responsibility of representation.

Heidi and Rolf Abderhalden rose to the challenge, as artists, taking on the role of active witnesses of conflict (Celan 1999, p. 235). In the Anatomy of Violence trilogy, paramilitary violence, narco violence and guerrilla violence were poetically confronted in three successive performances: *The Holy Innocents* (2010), *Discourse of a Decent Man* (2012) and *The Farewell* (2017). The idea was to chart an historic period that roughly coincided with the biographic timeline of the Mapa Teatro

founders. Hence, it comes as no surprise that *The Holy Innocents* superimposes the birthday celebration of Heidi Abderhalden (as a watching body) on the carnivalesque delirium of the dancing bodies in *Guapi*. And that *The Unaccounted: A Triptych*, a synthesis of the trilogy, begins with a *tableau vivant* that reinterprets *A Ventriloquist at a Birthday Party in October 1947* (1990), by Jeff Wall.

Variation on The Unaccounted: A Triptych was presented in the Pavilion of the 31st São Paulo Biennial in September 2014 and acquired by the Reina Sofía Museum. It translates the staged work *The Unaccounted: A Triptych*, first performed at the Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Bogotá in April of 2014 in the home of Mapa Teatro, into installation. The staged work lasts approximately an hour and includes five actors, a magician, three musicians and eight children from a school in Bogotá. Structurally, the installation is almost identical to the staging of the piece, while on the inside the children are replaced with automatons and the actions of actors and guests are replaced with mechanical devices to create a unique and complex Baroque magic box that includes video screenings, sound and a music band, lighting and smoke; it is made up of three wooden cubes (as well as the one reserved for spectators), which in turn contain three spaces, one for each part of the trilogy, now transformed into visible plastic layers: the house, the street, the jungle.

When presenting this *Variation* as part of the exhibition titled “Apparatus 92: Can History Be Rewound?”, from the Reina Sofía Museum’s permanent collection, we asked ourselves how to emphasise the dual nature of the work and therefore the memory of the live event.

The Fiesta

Tell him not to make any noise. ... To stand firm in the face of the enemy and not to move. Tell him that if he doesn’t move, they’ll disappear by magic. And to be cheerful. Because the revolution is a fiesta. ...



Jeff Wall, *A Ventriloquist at a Birthday Party in October 1947*, 1990, transparency in lightbox,
229 x 3524 cm. Courtesy of the artist



Mapa Teatro, *The Unaccounted: A Triptych*.
Bogota, 2014. Courtesy of Mapa Teatro

These are the words heard in the first part of *The Unaccounted*, emerging through the smoke and the tricks performed by the magician (who replaces the ventriloquist) for the expectant children who make up the ‘war band’ (frequent in the working-class schools of Colombia). The voice represents that of Camilo Torres Restrepo (1929–1966), a priest who championed the best option for the poor, by “Liberation Theology”, who took part in the foundation of the Frente Unido del Pueblo and died in his first military action against the army in 1966, the same year the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was created. At this time, the choice of violence to destabilise power and aspire to social justice was enjoying newfound justification in the anti-colonial fight, supported by the recent Cuban revolution. The guerrilla *fiesta* lasted over fifty years and this first part is dedicated to it, the part that unfolds in the house and is subsequently further elaborated in *The Farewell*.¹

The second *fiesta* refers to the celebration of a peculiar carnival held every 28 December (the feast of the Holy Innocents) in Guapi, an essentially Afro-Colombian town located close to the Pacific Ocean. On this day, the young men dress up as women and hide behind rubber masks to go out onto the streets and whip their neighbours in memory of the punishment doled out in times of slavery – a ritual that subverts racial and class domination, gender identity and religious belief. Superimposed over this remembrance of violence is the most recent outbreak triggered by the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, a paramilitary group created in the early 1980s (with the tolerance or connivance of the state) to illegally fight the guerrillas who, like the latter, turned to drug trafficking for financing. Evil is singled out in the figure of HH, ‘Hernán Hernández’, ‘El Mono Veloza’, active from the mid-1990s, who has confessed to committing over 3,000 crimes, many against farmers, indigenous people, trade unionists and community leaders.

The alias *patrón del mal* (master of evil), however, is reserved for Pablo Escobar, the most celebrated drug trafficking boss, who



Mapa Teatro, *The Unaccounted: A Triptych*.
Bogotá, 2014. Courtesy of Mapa Teatro



Mapa Teatro, *The Unaccounted: A Triptych*.
Bogotá, 2014. Courtesy of Mapa Teatro



Mapa Teatro, *The Unaccounted: A Triptych*.
Bogotá, 2014. Courtesy of Mapa Teatro

went so far as to become a senator and even dreamed of being president of the republic. His intended inauguration ‘speech’, supposedly found in his shirt pocket when he was riddled with bullets on a rooftop in Medellín in 1993, provides the title of the trilogy’s second part, set in the third space of the installation, dominated by tropical vegetation. The elaboration of the discourse shows clear use of the ‘ethno-fiction’ resource, central to the latest projects by Mapa.² The *fiesta* (which could equally be a birthday) is reminiscent of the celebrations organised by Escobar in Hacienda Nápoles, his luxurious pad spread over 3,000 hectares in Puerto Triunfo, a municipality of Antioquia. At this *fiesta* the coca plant is a living character, natural and poor, demanding its rights from those who profit from trafficking and corruption at the expense of so many deaths.

As per usual at parties, there is music; it is provided by Danilo Jiménez, the leader of a band that survived a failed attempt on Escobar’s life, but in which his wife died and he lost his hearing, in addition to other serious injuries. In *The Holy Innocents*, it was provided by Don Genaro, a marimba player who is both musician and witness. There is no music in the first space, just voices, and magic, performed by Santiago Nemirowski (a figure reminiscent of Rolf and Heidi’s friend, Hernando Pizarro Leongómez, who led a secret life as commander of the National Liberation Army, ELN. And like in all parties, there are also guests: the children and ghosts of the past from the first space, the celebrants of the Guapi ritual (visible only in the video) and Jeihhco Caminante, a rapper from Medellín who founded the hip-hop group La Élite in 2002 to promote a culture of peace and non-violence. They all share the space with the figures created by the actors, who embody the fun and occasionally humourous dimension: Heidi as a coca plant and playing herself, Agnes Brekke as a TV presenter (in reference to Virginia Vallejo, Escobar’s lover), Santiago Sepúlveda and Andrés Castañeda as participants at the *fiesta* and Julián Díaz as the syncretic figure of the masked man who voices Maiakovski’s dream (imagined

by Antonio Tabucchi): a witness obsessed with washing his hands. The clean and tidy space of the house, copied from a middle-class interior photographed by Jeff Wall, has been invaded by the chaos of the carnivalesque street and the kitsch exuberance of the tropical hacienda and the jungle. When the *fiesta* ends, the ruins are left.

Theatre and the Live Arts

In 1984, the Mapa Teatro founding coincided with the start of one of the most violent phases of Colombia's armed conflict. The successive storming of the Palace of Justice by M-19 and the brutal reprisals (1985), the terror and massacres in rural areas at the hands of the different armed groups (guerrillas, drug traffickers, paramilitary and army), the political attacks and assassinations, the kidnappings and torture all once again abolished the very idea of human dignity and fundamental rights (Hylton 2003). It was a decade that saw an escalation of the conflict that would not subside until the mid-1990s, following the execution of Pablo Escobar.

In these years, violence could not be represented because it penetrated the bodies, precluding any distance. During the rehearsals of *De Mortibus: Requiem para Samuel Beckett* (1990), the sound of bombs exploding was recurrent in Bogotá. On stage, bodies said as much as words, in a performance exercise that manifested the experience of violence without representing it. The Beckett model urged theatre to use figures rather than characters and non-representative acting enabled an approximation to reality without resorting to interposed fiction, unfolding instead through work with the bodies and the materials. In subsequent projects, this allowed for figures played by professional actors to be played by people unconnected to the world of the arts, as guests, experts or witnesses. This happened in *Horacio*, by Heiner Müller (1994), directed by Heidi Abderhalden in the Penitenciaría Central la Picota and subsequently presented in the Camarín del



Mapa Teatro, *De Mortibus: Réquiem for Samuel Beckett*. Bogotá, 1990. Photo: Ettore Gaffurri



Mapa Teatro, *Horacio*. Bogotá, 1994

Carmen in Bogotá. The violence that was happening on the streets and in the fields of Colombia was rendered present on stage without resorting to virtuous representation techniques, in such a way that the bodies of criminals, invaded by violence, became poetic bodies accepting their vulnerability as actors.

Heidi and Rolf Abderhalden were very close to the artist Doris Salcedo, who was working on her furniture trapped in cement series in the early 1990s, the same material Mapa chose to steep the costumes of *De Mortibus in*, thus conferring its figures with a semi-fossilised appearance and a movement slowed by the weight of the garments. And they lived alongside José Alejandro Restrepo and María Teresa Hincapié, who produced their first collaborations, combining video, installation and live action. The members of Mapa allowed themselves to be influenced by these new practices and were very mindful of the way the stage medium was being redefined on the global scene in the final decades of the last century, which marked the group's trajectory in the second half of the 1990s, resulting in the project *C'úndua* (2001–05). The will to experience the formats is present in the heart of the Mapa Teatro foundation itself and has translated into works conceived for museum exhibitions created in parallel to the stage productions. The video installations *Camino* (1997) and *Dormitorio* (1998) and *Lo demás es silencio* (1999), by Rolf Abderhalden, pre-empt research into this medium, which was integrated into his works in multiple ways in the decade of two thousand, but also gave rise to successive museum versions of the staged works themselves, which Mapa has termed *Variations*.

When, in 2010, Rolf and Heidi Abderhalden (along with Ximena Vargas, Adriana Urrea and José Alejandro Restrepo) decided to open a specialised course at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia (using the University Museum in Bogotá as one of the workspaces and as a location for the presentation of the final degree projects), they called it a Master's Degree in Theatre and Live Arts. The 'live arts' category does not replace that of 'theatre', which continues to be Mapa's core

medium, but extends the conception of theatre in an exercise of constant delocalisation. As Rolf himself states in his essay “Live Arts?” that this is a ‘non-category’ that asserts the centrality of the ‘laboratories of bodies, voices, texts and textures, images and sounds’ in the production of ‘poetic events’; the human bodies, not necessarily present or visible, do not constitute the privileged means of expression, but are rather conceived as ‘the live matter of thinking and the live thinking of matter’ (Abderhalden 2018, pp. 801–4). Underlying this proposal is the idea of ‘life’ as a central value in the political thinking of Suely Rolnik, who conceives micropolitical action as a will to assert and preserve the ‘creative power of life’, in all of its multiplicity and complexity, as opposed to the current forms and values that smother desire, but also materially attack mere survival (Abderhalden 2018, p.20). Thus, the adjective ‘live’ goes far beyond the idea of what happens live or in a situation of co-presence and must be interpreted in the context of the physical and symbolic acts of violence that continue to mark our global everyday existence and history, in addition to the persistence of a deeply rooted narco-power implemented in Latin America’s state forces, armed groups and organised crime.

The Gesture and the Trace

In its interpretation of live arts production, Mapa uses the term ‘gesture’ to refer to the live action or performance and the term ‘trace’ to refer to the material memory of this gesture, which may have different formats: installation, story, publication, etc. The space pertaining to ‘trace’ indicates that ‘something happened here’. Like other *Variations* by Mapa, *The Unaccounted: A Triptych* constitutes both a trace of the staged piece and an autonomous work in the shape of an animated installation. This dual dimension stems from the expanded concept of theatre generated by the *live arts*: the work of theatre is one of the formats that momentarily fixes the live flow that unfolds in every open

laboratory around an interest or an affect (Rolnik 2018b, p. 20), and each variation is not merely a trace, but another possible formal materialisation, which offers an independent account of processes that also converge in the performance.

A unique characteristic of this Variation is that the work of the-atre did not precede the installation, but rather occurred parallel to it. In fact, the point of departure for *The Uncounted: A Triptych* was the set design consisting of three cubes, which gave rise to the idea of the ‘triptych’, and the photograph by Jeff Wall, which became first a *tableau vivant* and later a stage. Moreover, the potential of that material as a visual installation was detected before the elaboration of the drama, and the invitation to present it independently at the São Paulo Biennial was received at a very early stage of the creative process. The activation of the installation as a ‘trace’ of the ‘gesture’ that was the performance to some degree implies the conception of a ‘variation on the variation’, a new layer of sensitive material to continue the poetic unfurling of the materials, insisting on the project’s live core.

One of the key images to inspire *Variation on The Unaccounted: A Triptych* was the reflection of the audience at the end of the performance on the proscenium glass that separates spectators from the space of action (which is kept the same in the installation). The bodies of the spectators are virtually incorporated into the stage space through their reflection on the glass. The integration of the installation visitors into the work itself is one of the first means of activation, a first sign of latency. An idea already implemented by Mapa in the presentation of *Variation on Witness to the Ruins* in the Museo Reina Sofía in 2016. For the spectators of the installation, a ‘trace’ is provided by the physical bodies of the other visitors who are figures that evoke the latency of the live bodies that at other times make the ‘gesture’; each visitor is therefore both spectator and vicarious figure, inhabitant of the ‘trace’ and inhabitant, through evocation, of the ‘gesture’.

Variations³

To think about the presentation of *Variation on The Unaccounted: A Triptych* in its dual dimension implies an intention to preserve the poetic gesture that was the staged piece. The multiplicity of mediums that Mapa Teatro has worked with and the specific reflection on how to translate the event and the gesture for the museum setting provide a basis to understand this challenge.

- a) 'Variations' are translations of the poetic gesture into the installation format. This is what Mapa did when it produced the *Variation*. Hence an independent presentation of the same would be sufficient.
- b) 'Gestures' are partial activations of the materials. Mapa has produced some installation proposals with the presence of actors, such as the *Variation on the Holy Innocents* in the 2011 Prague Biennale, which isolates the action of 'whipping' and had a mechanical version in the Museo de Antioquia in 2015; or *La balsada* (Zurich 2021), which salvages an unused material also from the research for this same work. In both cases, they are enormously powerful productions in the style of *tableaux vivants*. But they present a problem: they mobilise only part of the triptych's representative complexity and, as mentioned above, also result in independent works, not merely traces.
- c) 'Archives' are presentations of the materials used to construct the piece in an exhibition format, rendering them independent from their representative function. This is what was done in *Des/Montaje: Variation #2 on Discourse of a Decent Man* (Medellín, 2016), where, along with other materials, the image and text of the discourse itself were highlighted, offering visitors the possibility of intervening in the installation by reading the same from a radio booth.







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d) ‘Live Archives’ are performative lectures that reconfigure the materials used in one of various previous works. In *Live Archive* (based on *Witness to the Ruins*, San Francisco, 2011) in addition to Heidi and Rolf Abderhalden, Antanas Mokus (former mayor of Bogotá) and Juana Ramírez (resident of El Cartucho; the demolition of this neighbourhood motivated the project) also participated. In *Live Museum* (based on *The Farewell* and *Of Lunatics or Those Lacking Sanity*, 2019) the actors Andrés Castañeda and Santiago Sepúlveda and the miner Rubén Darío Rotavista participated in addition to the directors.

The options we took into consideration were b) ‘Gestures’ and c) ‘Archives’. Mapa made some proposals in relation to the same:

1. Production of a series of *tableaux vivants* or short sequences on the different spaces of the installation performed by the actors from the original work: Heidi Abderhalden, Julián Díaz, Agnes Brekke, Andrés Castañeda and Santiago Sepúlveda. Would a transmission be acceptable? What criteria would be used to select the actors to whom these sequences would be transmitted? On the other hand, the guests are, in principle, irreplaceable: the children (who are no longer children), Don Danilo (the musician), Jeihhco (the hip-hop activist), Santiago (the magician). But does the same not apply to the actors themselves in their role as active witnesses and not merely figures? And does this reintroduction of the human not contradict the function conferred on the spectators themselves?
2. Exhibition of archives parallel to the presentation of the *Variation*. These would be materials projected on the actual staging. They could be recordings of the work represented, documents or materials that form part of the process or that were relevant during the creation process. The possible materials to be used



Mapa Teatro, *The Unaccounted: A Triptych.*
Bogotá, 2014



Mapa Teatro, *Variation on The Unaccounted*, 2021
Museo Reina Sofía, Permanent collection



Mapa Teatro, *Variation on The Unaccounted*, 2021
Museo Reina Sofía, Permanent collection

would include: Pablo Escobar's speech, the documentary video on the Guapi carnival, fragments of the video recording of the performance in Athens, images of the live statues from *The Farewell*.

New questions arise: How do we show the dual nature of *The Unaccounted* when the activations are not happening? Would it suffice to tell this story through an independent audio-visual method, perhaps offered through a QR code? Would it be possible to consider a more extensive archive, including the documentation from the process, work notebooks, etc.? Would it make sense to gather witness accounts from the other participants in the staged work or people close to the process?

And a concern, raised by Rosario Peiró, emerges: the representation of historical violence referred to in *The Unaccounted* is more intensely expressed in the work of theatre than in the installation. Should the work of the representation not be directed in this direction?

Representing *The Unaccounted*⁴

The challenge would lie in activating the affects that the performance generated but which are not generated in the same way in the visit to the *Variation*. Would it be possible to introduce new presences or documents capable of mobilising without altering the poetic gesture that the *Variation* itself comprises?

The representation of violence in the staged work was rendered effective through the use of different materials and actions, two of which do not unfold with same intensity in the installation.

1. The action of the festive bodies which, by exiting themselves (through the masking, the dance and the pleasure), make themselves present in their vulnerability, evoking the actual victims,

but also as an echo of those other bodies outside themselves seen to be carried away by the delirium of violence to become the perpetrators of massacres and destruction (however abstract and rational these strategies may seem).

2. Textual fragments, visual documents and oral tales that make it possible to position the different sequences explicitly in relation to Colombia's history of political and criminal violence of the last fifty years, as well as the traces of other acts of violence.

On the other hand, it would also be worth recovering the witness experience of the most intense years of violence, in the early 1990s, and reviewing the poetic responses presented in *De Mortibus* and *Horacio* in relation to performance, representation, musicality and visual art. Taking these reflections into consideration and, on the basis of the ideas already expounded, two more specific proposals were made:

1. Execution of a *tableau vivant* in each one of the three spaces. The recording of the *tableaux* could be projected onto the actual installation, now converted into a stage, during the pauses in the loop programmed for the activation of the device.
2. Installation of three monitors, containing the following materials:
 - a) Recording of the first scene of *The Unaccounted: A Triptych* in Athens (2018), in which the children listen in silence to the text of Camilo Torres on a radio broadcast that justifies and urges armed conflict.
 - b) Documentary of the Guapi carnival filmed by Heidi Abderhalden. It is, after all, these festive bodies who take unto themselves the colonial violence, the capitalist violence and the paramilitary violence.
 - c) Pablo Escobar's speech in the logograph by Camilo Uribe. This document condenses the delirium of violence in Colombia and



reveals the ‘ethno-fiction’ method, which combines fiction and reality to mirror the combination of reality and fiction that constitutes Colombia’s social and political history.

These proposals would not exclude other activations or singular gestures. Nonetheless, at one point in the conversation, a question that has accompanied us from the start of the process and throughout this text was raised: Would it not be redundant to try and dramatise what in itself is already dramatic? Is it not obvious to anyone visiting the *Variation on the Unaccounted: A Triptych* that they are entering a theatre contained in a museum?

This question could be answered by evoking the participation of Cacique Juárez Munduruku at a round table that followed the last work by Mapa, *The Moon Is in the Amazon* (2021), in Kaserne, Basel.⁵ Cacique, who had sat in silence for almost two hours, asked to be given the last word and, after taking off his feathered headpiece (as a gesture of respect), expressed his perplexity about the term used to refer to what they had just witnessed: ‘Stück’ / ‘piece’. ‘¿Peça?’, he asked in surprise. For him a ‘peça’ is a material object with a specific function, and what they had just seen was something very different, an event which he felt faithfully reflected his reality and his experience in the Amazon. The visual and verbal references to the border, the credibility of the videos and the tales of destruction of what he recognised as his territory had particularly affected him: that succession of texts, images and material choreographies very effectively represented what he knew and what mattered to him. ‘But to me this is not a piece,’ said Cacique. His complaint could have been diluted by the translation process, but Rolf wanted to know more and asked him: ‘And what would you call it in your language? If it is not a piece, then what is it?’ Without any hesitation, Cacique: ‘Theatre! This is theatre.’

ENDNOTES

- 1 Jaime Bateman, leader of M-19, who brought to Caribbean culture V.I. Lenin's philosophy that revolution is a party: 'La revolución es una fiesta'.
- 2 *Project 24* (2018), at LACMA, Los Angeles, or *Of Lunatics, or Those Lacking Sanity* (2019), Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid.
- 3 Based on a digital conversation with Heidi and Rolf Abderhalden and Ximena Vargas (Mapa Teatro), the following people from the Collections Department of the Museo Reina Sofía: Rosario Peiró (head of collections), Lola Hinojosa (head of performing and intermedia arts) and Carolina Bustamante (permanent exhibition coordination) and José A. Sánchez on 4 March 2021.
- 4 Based on a conversation with Heidi and Rolf Abderhalden on 12 October 2021.
- 5 The [round table took place on 30 September 2021](#) with the participation of Rahel Leupin, Alessandra Korap Munduruku, Daniel Maselli and Rolf Abderhalden.

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L'Internationale is a confederation of seven modern and contemporary art institutions. L'Internationale proposes a space for art within a non-hierarchical and decentralised internationalism, based on the values of difference and horizontal exchange among a constellation of cultural agents, locally rooted and globally connected.

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Barcelona (Spain); Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium); Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie (Warsaw, Poland), SALT (Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey) and Van Abbemuseum (VAM, Eindhoven, the Netherlands). L'Internationale works with complementary partners such as HDK-Valand Academy of Art and Design (HDK-Valand, Gothenburg, Sweden) and the National College of Art and Design (NCAD, Dublin, Ireland) and together with them is presenting the programme Our Many Europes.



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