

## Contemporary Theatrical Creation in Spain – Genesis and Context

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The approval of the Spanish constitution in 1978 marked the beginning of the democratic era that provides the framework for the artistic production that will be discussed in this paper. In the world of the stage, the change of regime had major consequences. The most visible of these were the end to censorship, the opening up to the outside world, the creation of new public institutions and the substantial increase in public subsidies that affected both theatre and creative dance.

#### Aspects of the transition

In an international cultural context marked by postmodernist thought, an end to the censorship that had conditioned the work of the previous generation and the growing confidence in the new democratic institutions favoured a progressive inclination on the part of creative artists towards motivations of an aesthetic nature or a much more abstract treatment of political questions. One of the great successes of Spanish independent theatre in 1978 was *Antaviana* by Dagoll-Dagom, a show based on the tales of Pere Calder that fascinated audiences with its poetic-magical content and the aesthetic quality of the mise en scène. This was a new model that responded to the politics of the day with poetry and imagination and proposed an alternative to the forms of independent theatre of the previous era.

Between 1978 and 1982 independent theatre with its roots in the seventies disappeared from the scene. Some groups tried to turn themselves into stable theatres. Others broke up and their members joined the ranks of the new public theatres or else adapted to the new commercial theatre, which allowed for a certain artistic rigour. However, the independent theatre that had disappeared had worked with verbal drama. Other companies with a focus on visual and corporal theatre art enjoyed an age of splendour in the transition years. On the one hand, their technical training was comparatively better than that of most of the drama schools, and in some cases their participation in international festivals had begun in the sixties. On the other hand, no new institution was looking for their services. So it was precisely in those critical years of the transition that Los Joglars, Comediants, La Claca and La Cuadra, all with varying dates of origin, and quite diverse trajectories and approaches, but with one and the same decision to directly create their shows on stage and not on paper, reached a moment of creative maturity, with shows such as *Mori el merma* (1978), *Sol Solet* (1979), *Andalucía Amarga* (19790 and *Laetius* (1980).

There is one at least one exception worth mentioning, that of the Teatre Lliure, founded in 1976 in the wake of the collaboration of Lluís Pasqual and Fabià Puigserver in *La Setmana tràgica*, written and directed by the former. Both undertook the task of giving spectators in Barcelona "an art theatre for all", following the model that Strehler had begun years before with his Teatro Piccolo in Milan, that is, that of an independent

theatre, and in the case of the Lliure, one with a cooperative structure and public service vocation.

If in Catalonia the presence of Els Joglars, Comediants and La Claca (in addition to the singular contribution of Albert Vidal) assured a certain continuity between the independent theatre of the seventies and the professional companies that took over the stage in the eighties, such as Dagoll-dagom, La Fura dels Baus, Tricicle, Zotal and Vol Ras, on the other hand in Madrid and in the rest of the country, one had to speak more in terms of a rupture: the so-called contemporary theatre rejected all the languages used by groups such as Tábano, Goliardos, and T.E.I., as well as their political and aesthetic tendencies, and preferred to look for its references in music and the plastic arts, retrieving, for example, the legacy of experimental groups, such as Can-non.

At an institutional level, the replacement by the UCD party of the Ministry of Information and Tourism with the Ministry of Culture marked the beginning of a phase of normalisation, which led to the restructuring of the María Guerrero Theatre (National Theatre), which became the National Dramatics Centre, directed successively by Adolfo Marsillach (1978-1979), Nuria Espert, José Luis Gómez and José Tamayo (1979-80) and José Luis Alonso (1980-82). The effervescence of those years brimming over with interest and hope, both at political and cultural level, can be appreciated in the plurality of the CDN programme, that combined the presentation of a quality repertoire (with the presence of international authors and Spanish classics under directors and stage designers backed up with good technical support), premieres of works by Spanish authors (from Alberti to Sanchís Sinisterra), invitations to foreign companies and, perhaps the most surprising from our present-day perspective, the presentation of visual or corporal shows based on existing theatrical works, such as *Wielopole*, *Wielopole* by Tadeusz Kantor, Lindsay Kemp's version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Laetius* performed by Els Joglars, Marcel Marceau's *Evolution of "Pantomimes of Style"* or *Juan sin miedo y antología* by La Claca.

In this context it is not surprising therefore that the Centre Dramàtic of the Autonomous Region of Catalonia, the first replica of the National Dramatics Centre in a regional community, should open its programme with *Nit de Sant Joan* from Dagoll Dagom in collaboration with Jaume Sisa and in subsequent years, under the direction of Hermann Bonnín (1982-1988) would remain open to performances from independent groups, although at the same placing increasing emphasis on the promotion of theatre in the Catalan language.

The permeability of relations between the institutional and independent theatres, between the programming of live dramatists and non-text-based theatre, between national and international productions, is the sign of an era of consensus and a desire to overcome the civil clashes which General Franco's dictatorship had attempted to do away with by the worst possible means. That same permeability is tangible in the major festivals of the time. Probably the most important of these, the festival of Sitges, directed between 1977 and 1986 by Ricard Salvat, along with the International festival of Vitoria (from 1975) the International Fair of Valladolid (from 1979), the Madrid Street Theatre festival (from

1981) and the Festival of Street Theatre in Tárrega (which was inaugurated that same year, and promoted by Eugeni Nadal, with the premiere of *Dimonis*, from Comediants).

The rising popularity of street theatre was another clear sign of the recovery of public space in the early years of democracy. However, here too the shows presented at the various festivals organised in numerous cities around the country, were quite diverse. So it was possible to find followers of the popular line begun by Comediants years earlier, heirs to the so-called third theatre promoted by Eugenio Barba and the Odin, companies with a background in circus and neo-circus technique (who followed an increasingly popular genre in Europe, whose origins go back to the Grand Magic Circus of Jerome Savary), performances with a more political content, such as Bread and Puppet, repertoire companies which incorporated visual and corporal recordings (similar to the model of the Footsbarn Travelling company), or actors trained in mime, clown techniques and acrobatics. Most of these forms of theatre had been developed in an international context during the seventies and whose origins and motivation in many cases coincided with the rebellions of '68, the effects of which had been maturing throughout the following decade.

As occurred within the framework of institutional theatre, it became necessary to catch up with what had happened in previous years. Although one explanation was that the prevailing civic-political enthusiasm that led to the recovery of the urban space as a venue, this is not, however, the only one, and one could also consider that there was another less positive explanation: there were also groups that had no access to any other kinds of venue, simply because such venues did not exist. So, alongside the convinced "street performers", one began to see other artists working in the street, in an attempt to develop other languages radically different from those developed by the independent theatre of former years and no longer had a place in the existing precarious cultural network. Such is the case of La Tartana, directed by Carlos Marquerie and Juan Muñoz, or Lejanía, directed by Ricardo Iniesta in Madrid, Bekereke in Bilbao and La Fura dels Baus in Barcelona.

The expansion of street theatre and the permeability of festivals and public institutions was not to last for very long. The euphoria and confusion of those early years, in which everything was possible, gave way to the need to for greater order and professionalism.

### **Politics of normalisation and contemporary theatre**

The decade of the eighties was understood as a process of normalisation. The victory by absolute majority of the Socialist party, the PSOE, in the elections of 1982 accelerated the process and gave greater resources to policy-making for the theatre. The National Dramatics Centre (directed by Lluís Pasqual between 1984 and 1989) received the addition of the National Centre of New Stage Tendencies (1984) directed by Guillermo Heras and the Classic National Theatre Company (1986) directed by Adolfo Marsillach. A parallel rehabilitation plan was set up for nineteenth century theatres (a controversial decision that continues to determine the development of contemporary creation). The Ministry of Culture's initiative was echoed by the regional governments: the Centre Dramatic of the Autonomy of Catalonia (1981) was followed by the Galician Dramatic Centre (1984), the



Andalusian Theatre Centre (1987) and the Dramatic Centre of the Autonomy of Valencia (1988), funded by the IVAEM.

The task of *normalisation*, in the context of institutional theatre, consisted in offering audiences a national and international repertoire, with productions that could compete with the great theatres of Europe. But it was also a question of employing the same rigour in the recovery of Spanish theatre that had received an unjust treatment at the hands of the dictatorship. Lluís Pasqual explicitly recognised the “abnormality” of the situation, whereby he found himself obliged because of the historic situation to stage the works of authors, who in a “normalised” context would not need to have staged as premieres.

The omnipresence of Valle-Inclán and García Lorca during those years is symptomatic of an obsession to recover the truncated tradition of theatrical creation during the Republic, which was also apparent in other areas of cultural life. Just as the political transition was made possible thanks to an exercise in collective loss of memory (which in a sense was a burden weighing down the democratic institutions), transition in the area of theatrical production went hand in hand with a particular “operation of forgetfulness” which for years meant the banishment of less “normal” creators from the first half of the century and the majority of creators active during the Franco regime, not only playwrights, but also those who had committed themselves to a difficult experiment that seemed incomprehensible from the perspective of the democratic and pro-European Spain of the eighties.

The cultural panorama became progressively more organised: the María Guerrero Theatre concentrated on large-scale repertoire, mainly in-house productions, the National Company of Classical Theatre focused on presenting authors from the golden age; the Centre for New Stage Tendencies premiered young authors and presented independent productions of contemporary theatre and dance; the regional Dramatic Centres from the leading autonomous communities strongly backed their own authors (in many cases subordinating theatrical quality to the defence and promotion of their language), and the regional governments tried to defend some of their stable companies with very disparate policies. International contributions were concentrated in festivals which were also organised: the State looked after the two classical festivals (Mérida and Almagro) and supported regional and municipal initiatives of general interest (such as the Madrid and Barcelona Autumn Festivals) or those with a certain degree of specialisation.

“Normalisation” in the area of information gave rise to the creation of the magazine *El público*, edited from 1984 onwards by the Centre of Theatrical Documentation and directed by Moisés Pérez Coterillo, formerly director of *Pipirijaina*. It provided information on the entire state, critical coverage (with certain limitations, given that it was an institutional publication) to stage production of the day and provided readers with in-depth information on new productions in an international context. Of the different state infrastructures it was probably the one that maintained the most constant level of plurality during its eight years of existence, with first-rate texts on contemporary theatre and dance from critics such as Joan Abellán, Marysé Badiou, Pedro Barea, Xavier Fàbregas, Antonio Fernández Lera and Pérez Coterillo himself.



As for non-institutional theatre, “normalisation” was interpreted as the “professionalisation” of groups and companies and their transformation into businesses. Within this process the creation in 1985 of the INAEM and the publication of the norms for theatre subvention played a decisive role. The State promoted the professionalisation of the sector by means of “harmonisation”, a formula that was also applied at regional level (and especially in Catalonia) and gave rise to a heretofore unimaginable stability and medium-term production planning. This formula, which in the long run was beneficial to commercial producers to the detriment of creative groups, permitted certain contemporary theatre and dance companies in the eighties to produce without too much anxiety, in spite of the limited internal circuit. This was the framework for a new phase of production for Els Joglars, Comediants, La Cuadra, Albert Vidal and Carles Santos and in which Gelabert y Azzopardi began to work, as did Mudances, La Fura dels Baus, La Cubana, Zotal, Danat Danza, La Tartana, Bekereke, Cambaleo, Teatro del Norte, La Zaranda, Atalaya, Arena Teatro and Mal Pelo.

Democratic consolidation meant that the political urgency that affected the independent theatre and the elation and civic responsibility that the theatre of the transition enjoyed was to disappear from the scenario. Following the failed coup d'état of 1981 (headed by Lt Col. Tejero and General Milán del Bosch) and the arrival of the moderate left-wing government after almost fifty years, policy became interiorised in form, faded in private and became a subject for reflection in the media. Aestheticization (not necessarily synonymous with a loss of political conscience on the part of its creator) affected both the institutional and the independent theatre. And at the same time as Lluís Pasqual was putting on aesthetic versions of the Marxist Brecht in the María Guerrero and Flotats Theatres, with the full support of the Catalan autonomous government, giving new life to *Cyrano de Bergerac* in the Poliorama (converted into a public theatre), the Fura dels Baus was focusing on sensorial experimentation while at the same time companies such as Zotal, Brau Teatre and La Tartana were exploring a theatre of the body, voice and image, and Mudances and Danat Danza were following new trends in contemporary dance, in their minimalist or dramatic versions.

In the configuration of the new languages of the stage in Spain, a decisive element was access to international contemporary production provided to spectators and professionals by the various festivals of the period, including the International festival of Vitoria (directed by the cooperative group DENOK in the 1982 and 1983 editions), the Valladolid International Fair (directed by Juan González-Posada from 1983), the International Festival of Granada (the first edition of which took place in 1983 programmed by Manuel Llanes) and the International Festival of Sitges (directed by Ricard Salvat until 1986 and by Toni Cots between 1987 and 1990).

The CNNTE, with its headquarters in the Sala Olimpia, whose political objective was to produce in-house the works of young dramatists, nevertheless, thanks to the efforts of Guillermo Heras, gave coverage and institutional support to a large number of the companies that came into being during those years. In Barcelona it was the Mercat de les Flors, a municipal theatre directed by Andreu Morte with its own programme since 1986,

which became a landmark of contemporary creation, and also for a number of years the Teatre Obert, directed by Toni Cots, a “theatre without theatre”.

This organisation process also affected street theatre. Although there continued to be specialised groups, like Xarxa Teatre (which began in 1983) and festivals that provided them with a scenario (especially in Catalonia), the street was no longer a place of artistic experimentation. Notwithstanding, the street experience had served many groups, as in similar fashion the focus on theatre-circus had served others, to evolve a series of physical and spectacular techniques, unknown to the institutional theatre of the day, that were to later become productive in the elaboration of their own languages. But it had served above all to open a debate on the issue of theatre and non-theatre spaces, so that when street theatre and the circus lost their ground-breaking motivation, due to their assimilation as “spectacles of animation”, and returned once more to the interior of theatre-halls, what had developed was a new and diverse conception of the theatrical stage.

The problem is that during the eighties, construction policy in the theatre had centred on the refurbishment of the nineteenth century theatres, with their rigid structures, and very few of them, given their dimensions, allowed for anything outside the conventional, Italian style, layout. In an attempt to palliate the problem, the Ministry of Culture designed a second rehabilitation plan for old markets or industrial warehouses aimed at creating a network of non-conventional centres. However, this plan never came to fruition and for many years only two multi-use theatres existed with the required dimensions and technical and financial framework: the Sala Olimpia in Madrid and the Mercat de les Flors in Barcelona (apart from the Teatre Lliure).

The lack of suitable premises for exhibition together with an aesthetic evolution of theatre companies gave rise to a decontextualisation of independent stage production in the eighties. On the one hand, shows were being produced where the visual and rhythmical dominated, where the spoken word in general fulfilled a secondary role. In order to continue functioning, companies needed to enter the international circuits and this became their aspiration, because the presence of theatre and dance outside national boundaries formed part of the desire for “normalisation”. The need and the desire of contemporary creators for “Europeanism” brought about another “loss of memory”: ties with the references of Spanish experimentalism and the previous decades were erased in favour of international models, which further widened the gap between creators and the Spanish cultural context.

The incipient success of Spanish contemporary theatre outside our frontiers and the consolidation of some companies that had appeared on the scene in the early and mid eighties encouraged four of them, Zotal, Bekereke, Arena and La Tartana to organise the Contemporary Theatre Encounters of Murcia. On the one hand, the idea was to open up new international markets and at the same time, reflect on stage creation, to which end directors, choreographers, dramatists and managers from different European and America production centres were invited. In successive editions, apart from the promoters, works were presented by Albert Vidal, Atalaya, Cambaleo, CNNTE, Danat Danza, Konik, John Jesurun, La Fura dels Baus, Mal Pelo, Mickery Theatre y Mudances with more than forty artists and directors from Spain and abroad participating in the debates.



Parallel to this initiative, La Tartana founded its own theatre in Madrid, the Teatro Pradillo, which opened its doors in 1990. Its goal was to provide a platform for interdisciplinary creation, favouring cross exchanges with the plastic arts and music, but especially encounters between theatre and dance, and also to establish exchange-relationships with smaller European theatres and dialogue with risk-taking artists. Its foundation could also be viewed as a response to the growing “decontextualisation” of contemporary creation referred to above.

This process of expansion of contemporary theatre and dance continued up to 1992, the year of the celebration of the Olympics, the Seville International Expo and (although of somewhat less importance) the designation of Madrid as European Cultural Capital (at the time governed by an unfavourable mayor). Numerous groups in the years leading up to these events saw their prospects of stability grow and decided to take the risk of producing medium format shows that could tour international festivals, organized encounters and forums of debate and even went so far as to launch other venues to house different productions to those that could be staged in auditoriums such as the Sala Olimpia (headquarters of the CNNTE) or the Mercat de les Flors, already used exclusively for contemporary creation.

At the beginning of the nineties, the situation of contemporary theatre and dance was promising. Nevertheless, what appeared to be a platform for a normalised presence of stage creativity in Spain, with the presentation of some Spanish companies sharing billboards with some of the most prestigious names of the contemporary stage in the Central Theatre of Expo (directed by Manuel Llanes) and in the various events of '92, turned out to be more the end of a dream that eroded without ever having achieved adequate infrastructures for production or exhibition, or the channels of information and documentation, or the training centres required. Outside Catalonia, (even outside Barcelona) the consequences of '92 were disastrous.

### **From normalisation to popularisation**

The normalisation period had come to an end and this was celebrated with a display of fireworks which, once burnt out, showed up the deficiencies. However, as if following a pre-established script, it was felt that with the infrastructures and arrangements already in place, the moment had come to abandon the market to its fate. Contemporary creation was neglected, and not only contemporary creation, but stage productions of an “artistic” disposition and the market (that is, the market of subsidies and public contracts) was gradually eaten up by commercial initiatives, including those of companies like Anexa, Focus, Pentación and Calendas.

In this new context, a manifest hostility towards contemporary theatre and dance was unleashed. In 1993 the Ministry of Culture endeavoured to organise a tour of contemporary theatre and dance companies in the recently formed National Network of Theatres and Auditoriums, that ended in failure, because of the inadequacy of the infrastructures for what was proposed, (most were nineteenth century theatres), their lack of contextualisation and the disinterest of local management. The following year, the

CNNTE was dismantled and contemporary creation was left devoid of an institutional anchor venue.

In those years, for varying reasons many companies that had enjoyed strong institutional support in previous years disappeared or underwent their own crises: Atalaya, La Tartana, Bekereke, Arena... Albert Vidal went into exile (between his native Masía de la Plana and Mongolia) and La Fura del Baus changed tack, after the departure of Antúnez Roca (Andreu Morte had already left), to adapt to the new conditions of production. Only the Catalan contemporary dance companies survived thanks to a continued dual coordination pact (with the Ministry and the Generalitat): thus, Gelabert and Azzopardi, Mudances, Lanónima Imperial, Danat Danza and Mal Pelo were able to maintain their rhythm of production, despite the fact that their performance circuit was reducing progressively, both in Spain and in Europe.

This impoverishment affected not only independent but also institutional creativity. Lluís Pasqual's move from the CDN to the Odeon in Paris marked the end of an "exceptional" period and opened another new phase in which the María Guerrero Theatre was transformed under successive directors into a repertoire theatre that became provincial in scope. The new public theatres in the regions contributed very little during this period.

One of the causes of this new situation was in fact the maturity of the development of the regional autonomies. The relative majority obtained by the Socialist Party, the PSOE, in the elections of 1993 forced a pact with the Catalan nationalists, that in turn forced a weakening of the Ministry of Culture, with evident consequences in policy-making for theatre. Only Catalonia maintained a substantial level of activity in the field. In the rest of Spain, including Madrid, contemporary creation (both production and exhibition) was impoverished. The decentralisation of the regional autonomies produced a restructuring of the system, which led to isolation. The network of public theatres favoured, from its creation in 1992, the circulation of major productions or shows with a commercial focus, but inevitably did not include more risky forms of production.

On the other hand, the multiplication of local and regional infrastructures gave rise to an increase in the number of managers, many with little experience and without sufficient background and training, more concerned with figures than aesthetics and more with entertainment than discourse. Also at this level there was rising disinterest, even hostility, for contemporary art in its staged versions. This lack of training was not only to affect management. The so-called professionalisation of the sector, outside Madrid and Barcelona, had been minimal: the technical levels of many alleged professionals remained very low and the rhetoric of creators and critics, precarious.

This lack of interest in debate was epitomised by the demise in 1993 of the magazine that had served as a point of reference in the previous decade: *El público*. Nothing replaced it. *Primer Acto*, which had been published continually since the sixties, had no resources to fill the void left behind by the magazine. The same is true for the *ADE* magazine. And the contribution of critical reviews and historical-geographical material of great interest for peripheral initiatives, failed to bring about a circulation of information and critique at state

level. Naturally enough, the lack of information most especially affected contemporary creation, and this was added to by the demise of festivals such as Granada and Valladolid, and a reduced presence of international companies in seasonal programming, with two exceptions: Barcelona and Seville. In Barcelona, thanks to the programme of the Mercat de les Flors in the first instance and the Tallers del Teatro Nacional. In Seville, thanks to the work of Manuel Llanes as director of the Teatro Central, albeit with certain irregularity.

International isolation not only impeded exchanges of information, but also the promotion of new artists abroad and their participation in international circuits. In general, in the mid-nineties, many of those who had been the protagonists of the efflorescence of contemporary theatre had to return to the sidelines or invent formulas of survival. Etelvino Vázquez and Ricardo Iniesta resorted to a combination of teaching and creation, the latter with a successful initiative known as TNT, which allowed him to continue to produce at professional level, while reducing the risk factor in his repertoire. The formula was not dissimilar to that chosen by José Luis Gómez (one of the few protagonists of "normalisation" who did not succumb to "popularisation") to set up his little art theatre, the Abadía theatre, reactivating a formula that is a hundred years old.

Outside Catalonia those who were determined to take risks had to assume the need to work with in-house production plans from an impoverished theatre and face grave difficulties in the presentation and distribution of their shows, especially outside the limits of their own regional autonomous communities. The scarcity of resources gave rise to small-format productions. And the impossibility of maintaining professional companies gave rise to unstable associations without their own venues for rehearsals.

In such conditions Carlos Marquerie (Lucas Cranach Company), Sara Molina (Q Teatro), Rodrigo García (La Carnicería), Óskar Gómez (Legaleón T. y L'Alakran), Ana Vallés (Matarile Teatro), as well as Olga Mesa, Blanca Calvo, Mónica Valenciano and La Ribot continued their work. With institutional theatre gone and access to the Network of Public Theatres almost closed, these artists found support in occasional local government initiatives or university theatre and dance halls, notably those of Salamanca (directed by Alberto Martín, one of the first to discover the talent of the new Madrid choreographers), Cantabria (which under the direction of Francisco Valcarce, organised a Contemporary Theatre Fair) or Malaga (directed by Francisco Corpas, who has maintained a constant forum for debate since 1994).

Nevertheless, alternative venues constituted the principal refuge for these artists. Some had begun functioning in the mid-eighties, such as the Triángulo in Madrid (1983) or La Fundición in Bilbao (1985); others were created at the end of the eighties or early nineties, such as the Beckett Theatre in Barcelona (1988), the Galán in Santiago de Compostela and the Cuarta Pared in Madrid (created in 1986 and transferred to Ercilla street in 1992). All these share the fact that they came into being as the result of an expansion of the activities of a company and, with the exception of the Pradillo and Beckett theatres, had in their early days embraced works from companies who were finding difficulties in signing agreements and getting onto international circuits. When those difficulties affected contemporary quality creation, the so-called alternative venues, whose numbers increased

notably during the early nineties, embraced in equal measure real alternatives and alternatives by default. Obviously the precarious nature of the prevailing technical conditions, the limited social impact and the minimal or total absence of economic benefits, impeded the appearance of a new generation of creators.

### Alternative Discourse

New conditions of production had consequences for the definition of formats, aesthetics and discourse. La Ribot felt comfortable in a small format: she minimised to the maximum and thus gave rise to the “distinguished pieces” (1993). Monica Valenciano used her experience in marginal theatre and exploited it creatively in her solos and small format dances, some in such unique venues such as the bull pen of the Madrid Bull-ring (Miniatures, 1994). Olga Mesa abandoned her idea of creating a company and composed one of her greatest shows of the age of cruelty, *Este no es mi cuerpo* (1995). Oskar Gómez following some initial shows more in line with what had been called the Spanish contemporary theatre of the eighties, a theatre of rhythm and imagery, decided to devise a spectacle for bars. Thus *El silencio de las Xygulas* (1994) came into being, followed by *Mujeres al rojo vivo* by Edurne Rodríguez (1995). And that same year, Rodrigo García, after several attempts, composed one of his classics, *Notas de cocina* (1995), premiered in the Teatro Pradillo in Madrid.

This theatre, directed by Carlos Marquerie, was the point of reference for contemporary creativity between 1992 and 1996. Almost all the artists that have been named were premiered or presented there. In some cases necessity gave rise to forms of communication characterised by humour and urgency and the aesthetics of mixing, of pollution. In others, having taken on board the impossibility of reaching the wider public, their poetic or expressive discourse became radicalised. These were always ground-breaking works, as if they wished to escape from the theatre-space that was banned to them in Spain. Some headed in the direction of action and the visual arts. Others in the direction of cabarets or the street... The body became reinforced. And so it was that the prevailing scarcity of means obliged them to work with the bare minimum, a return to the essential that favoured the encounter of theatre with dance and dance with corporal art. The use of small formats gave greater fluidity to communication between the media and from discipline one moved on to transdiscipline and even indiscipline.

Things evolved differently in Barcelona, where public theatres were not closed to contemporary creation, and the support of the Catalan Autonomous community to companies continued to be more generous than that of the other autonomous regional governments. This enabled some artists with consolidated backgrounds to maintain their line of production in medium and large format. Not only the by now commercial (through public acceptance) Els Joglars, Comediants or Fural dels Baus (the latter two through their rejection of rhetoric), but also more radical creative artists such as Carles Santos, Angels Margarit, María Muñoz and Pep Ramis, who in the nineties produced their large format shows (although large format does not always favour these creators and only Carles Santos was capable of growing in all senses without any apparent limit to this growth to date).



This did not prevent the existence in Barcelona of an alternative stage. The departure of Marcel.Í Antúnez from Fura dels Baus , apparently under pressure from his colleagues , resulted from his disagreement with the derive of the company and his need to continue more radical forms of research and interdisciplinary formats. Out of this came a miniature piece, undoubtedly his best work, called *Epizoo* (1994), which coincided with a move from creators in Madrid towards body performances. In those same years and equally interested in themes of pollution and the exploration of a discourse from the fringes, Txiki Berraondo and Magda Puyo directed their productions of *Metadones: La Bernarda es calva* (1997) y *Medea Mix* (1997), while Simona Levi opened a clandestine venue in the Raval quarter known as *Conservas* (1993) (although its impact was not felt for a few years).

A singular aspect of the Catalan context derives from the fact that the excessive growth of public infrastructures (especially in recent years, with the inauguration of three new National theatre halls and those included under the so-called Ciudad del Teatre, where the new Teatro Lliure has been installed along with the Mercat de les Flors and the Institut del teatre) has permitted some of the more alternative productions to be presented by one of the public or semi-public theatres and even produced by them, or that some directors have been able to work alternatively within the institution or independently.

Meanwhile the growing impoverishment of the circuits and the production centres obliged directors and choreographers to look for new forms of organization. On the one hand the alternative venues increased their levels of coordination and managed to achieve greater presence at state level, which was epitomized in the rise in quality and in audience reached by the International Festival of Alternative Theatre of Madrid (directed in 200 by Javier Yagüe, before it changed its name to that of the Contemporary Stage) and in the presence of some productions out of these theatres on national and international circuits. Nevertheless, theatres continued to be dogged by a lack of funds, the impossibility of paying fees to companies outside of festivals, limitations of space and minimal technical staff.

Other forms of organization became necessary. In Madrid Blanca Calvo, La Ribot, Mónica Valenciano, Olga Mesa, Ana Buitrago y Elena Córdoba set up a research workshop called U.V.I. (Urgent Bonding of Ideas), to which dancers, actors and artists from other disciplines had access and which once a month offered improvisation sessions open to the public. All of the founders shared a common commitment towards the search for languages radically suited to the expressive and communicative needs of our time and a resistance to stick to the codes already established by the so-called contemporary dance. With less aesthetic radicalism but with similar concerns at the growing isolation of choreographic creation and the need to strengthen communications with other countries and new generations, seven companies of the second generation of Catalan dance joined together to rent a venue that was to become a centre of research and exhibition: La Caldera.

In 1996 Carlos Marquerie gave up his post as director of the Teatro Pradillo and of the group that had founded the theatre, La Tartana, to create a new company: Lucas Cranach, with which he developed his interest in the plastic and dramatic arts, as well as working

more closely with corporal performance. In a short space of time, the Teatro Pradillo was no longer a point of reference within the Madrid contemporary creative scene, which had found another venue: the Cuarta Pared (Fourth Wall), which had arisen (as its name indicates) from interests very different to those of the directors and choreographers that became involved there ((Rodrigo García, La Ribot, Blanca Calvo, Olga Mesa, Carlos Marquerie, Antonio Fernández Lera, Mónica Valenciano), but that managed to achieve a faithful public, thanks in part to the plural scope of its programme.

The consolidation of new forms of aesthetical discourse fostered in the alternative theatres led to the conquest of cultural venues of greater social impact and greater presence in the context of international creation. It was in 1997 when Blanca Calvo and La Ribot tired of isolation and incomprehension and having exhausted the U.V.I. experience, decided to launch Desviaciones, a cycle conceived to contextualize their own creations, both through programming international artists and the organization of conferences and debates, whose role was not so much to explain the shows, but to defend the fact that this was not merely another form of entertainment, but artistic experience, creative debate... Desviaciones began to function thanks to the collaboration of the cultural services of the embassies and a timid institutional support, which was not sufficient to guarantee its continuity beyond five years.

In Catalonia, a little later than Madrid, certain interesting reactions took place from 1999 onwards, parallel to that of the Desviaciones, such as the General Electric project or the festival *In motion*, organized by Simona Levi, which provided continuity to the Conservas programme, a project in which Levi had tried to respond to the false incorporation of contemporaneity into public structures. Also in 1999, Cuenca Situaciones was born, a multidisciplinary festival generated by the Castille-La Mancha University, which for three years embraced some of the most interesting productions of latter years and which in its second edition (2001) organized an International Forum of scenic Arts, from which emanated the document entitled "the Cuenca Declaration".

In spite of these and other initiatives, there were some exceptional creators who (outside Barcelona) managed to maintain quality production without giving up on their aesthetic and rhetorical interests. Óskar Gómez and La Ribot were the first to leave (to Geneva and Switzerland respectively). Rodrigo García y Olga Mesa have produced 21st century works with international support. Their circuit is European with a limited presence in Spain. María Muñoz and Pep Ramis, together with Toni Cots, have opted for exile at home, by creating a research centre in a small village close to Gerona, L'Animal a l'esquena, an island of interdisciplinary and international dialogue in the midst of nationalist autism. As for Marta Oliveres, one of the few distribution and production agents, who combines professionalism and aesthetic commitment, has continued to strive to maintain creators such as Carles Santos, Marcel.í Antúnez and Roger Bernat within the international circuit and guarantee their growth, in spite of the precarious nature of touring within Spain.

All this has placed enormous difficulties in the way of generating models and generational changes. The generations following the previously mentioned creators have enjoyed few enough opportunities of success, let alone possibilities of attracting audiences. Those who centre their work on the body and image (Cuqui Jerez, Ion Munduate, Juan Domínguez...)

have had greater facilities for working with external support , but those who insist on returning the spoken word (Angélica Liddell, Marta Galán...) continue to experiment with the absence of adequate contexts and references for the presentation of their works.

There have been some indications of change, however, in the past two years: a new boost from Magda Puyo and Mateo Feijoo for the festivals of Sitges and the Contemporary Stage (Madrid), the reincorporation of Andreu Morte to the Mercat de les Flors, the creation of new cultural infrastructures such as la Casa Encendida (Madrid) or new festivals such as Escena Abierta (Open Scene) in Burgos, Valencia Escena Oberta or Panorama in Olot, the stimulus of the Festival Mira! La otra España in Toulouse, and the ground-work of professionals such as Laura Etxebarria (La Fundición, Bilbao) or Manuel Llanes (Teatro Central in Seville). Finally one has to add the implementation of new cultural policies as a result of the latest general and regional elections, with major changes especially in Catalonia and the central government. We cannot be too optimistic, but we can trust in a minimal coordination of all these initiatives into a network, which together with the ever greater facilities for European mobility, will contribute towards the enrichment of stage and theatrical creation in Spain.

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