

Occupy The theaters , give them back to the people

Is occupy dead? The strategy of the occupation is not and lives on. Out of squares , but in the theaters . In Italy, many endangered theaters were occupied by groups of artists and citizens who want to democratize culture radically. And recently also Liege has an occupation . All of them are stories of how the cultural sense of crisis not only destructive, but also works as a creative impuls.

Early October. While the prestigious new building of the Théâtre de Liège is festively declared opened, a number of young actors on the other side of the river perform a theatre piece around the Paris Commune . This historical story is well known . In 1871 the french capital Paris managed to free her self from her government for three months. Democratically, a new board was installed . Separation of church and state and a redistribution of wealth were some of the important agenda items. Gustave Courbet called on French artists to join the movement and for three months the smell of revolution and endless possibilities hung in the air. Eventually the "bloody week " made an abrupt end to ' la nouvelle Paris .

Occupancy Théâtre de la Place , Liege

The show is played in the old Théâtre de la Place , the building that shall be demolished in the spring of 2014. The story of the commune is not randomly chosen as the subject . The actors who do it explained on stage , they all live and work since September 6 in the squatted building in Outremeuse . Their stay is tolerated by the Liege city council , as long as they do not oppose the demolition , because a lot of money is involved with it.

Now Zuccotti Park in New York is once again just one of the few places where you can exhausts your dog, in Lower Manhattan and the Indignado 's have disappeared from the streets , it seems the action of the malcontented have moved . Artists get started with their ideas and continue the fight even further, into cracked theaters and other cultural centers , with the Teatro Valle in Rome as known example . In Liege they look up to the Romans , whose occupation in the legendary theater - Pirandello rewrote theatre laws there - now already two years they make a difference there . Time to analyse the motives of these cultural activists from Liege.

Entreprise terrorist

‘Vous devez savoir, enfin vous pouvez savoir, que ce que nous entreprenons ici est prémédité. On y a pensé, quoi. Un peu. La volonté de faire pression, de contraindre un état ou un organisme public à prendre en compte notre action, action nuisible à ses structures établies, était prémédité. Ce qui pourrait classer notre action dans la case des entreprises terroristes.’

(excerpt from prologue Fausse Commune de Paris)

Upon entering the old Théâtre de la Place immediately the eye catches dozens of posters, banners and flyers that make it clear that entering the space means a form of ' complicity '. Once passed the threshold ,an active participation in the further shaping of this place is a requirement . Gabriel , one of about fifteen initiators of the occupation , makes it clear that the renamed Théâtre à la Place will benefit from the contribution of occupants and visitors .

With the construction of the new theater on the other side of the river this immense theater was abandonnd: an empty shell that can be renamed and its function reinterpreted . Given the precarious state of the arts, in Liege as everywhere else, the availability of money and space is scarce, the Group decided to claim the place under the motto " Les théâtres sont à nous , les théâtres sont à tous '. Theatre as a common good and idea, or an act of "terrorism" , as it is called jokingly in the prologue of Fausse Commune .

Occupation Teatro Valle , Rome

Also at the Teatro Valle Occupation in Rome , the illegal nature of the endeavor is stressed . On the 1th October , a few days after Berlusconi once again shakes Italy is on its its foundations , actress Sylvia De Fanti tells in a Skype call about the model of Teatro Valle . She also acknowledges that the occupation still occurs on a non- legal basis , despite the recent institutionalization of the organization . " Under the veil of legality have in Italy and abroad throughout history the most horrific things occurred . When we occupied this theater two years ago , we were fully aware of the revolution that we wanted to bring about , and it could not have growth potential legally.

We write June 14, 2011 when the Teatro Valle in Rome's center is occupied by a number of a hundred people , all active in the arts or entertainment industry . Days before the Italians in a referendum massively opposed the privatization of the Italian tap water . The slogan for the occupation quickly found: above the entrance of Teatro Valle in the slogan 'Like water , like air , let's reclaim culture'. It is more than a place . Originally intended as an occupation of three days from the cultural sector to protest the cut backs, after two years teatro Valle became a national symbol and the first institutionalized 'foundation for commons' in Italy . The theater itself is more and more as a microcosm where art and society are engaged in a mating dance where the potential of new models of sustainable living (together) is examined .

Complexity as a virtue

The theater itself shows itself more and more as a microcosm in which to examine new models of sustainable living (together)

Meanwhile Valle became the ' Teatro Valle Bene Comune . The idea of a maximum availability of goods and services from the need of the people , is the main thread within the operation of the Teatro . A team of fifteen lawyers , including influential politician Stefano Rodotà , engages in the careful formulation of ideas and proposals of the ' common ' aim . Free access to water and culture , but also the Internet, are high on the agenda. The Teatro Valle gave the status of ' Bene Comune ' and , as De Fanti proudly points out, that the occupied theater is the first revolutionary institution of Italy .

The Valle concept has since spread to just about every major Italian city , where theaters and cinemas are occupied to save them from developers with a minimal interest in culture . S.a.l.e. Docks and Teatro Marinoni in Venice , Asilo della Creatività e della Conoscenza in Naples , Teatro Coppola in Catania , Cantieri Arsenale and Teatro Garibaldi Aperto in Palermo , Macao in Milan : all of them are part of this broad occupation movement .

Teatro Valle Bene Comune

The way they try to make a difference in Rome is diverse. People are trained in debating, actors and theater technicians learn together political essays in English studied to achieve a better understanding of ideas in the lingua franca and every evening there is a concert or a performance which the audience can contribute financially, the price is your choice . When there is a political march through the streets of Rome, in advance there is being debated about how the organization of the manifestation wishes to participate . Teatro Valle is in the middle of town and country and wishes to transcend the normal politics.

And a special way of governance is part of it. Anyone who wishes can help manage Teatro Valle, and De Fanti , stresses the importance of ' elastic relationships . Autonomy and active participatory democracy are crucial elements . Every day there is a meeting where everyone is welcome and new items can make the agenda . To make decisions they are using a consensus model : this system is

also used in Liege . If only one person has a different opinion, it is still heard and persuasion can do its job .

The Fanti likes talking about a diagonal structure . Everyone has right to decide and may interfere with a debate , but it is also focused on individual strengths simultaneously. Complexity and a non-linear way of thinking and working are inherent in the way Valle functions . This has everything to do with the pluralistic approach of the group, where the arrows are always directed simultaneously on different domains. This also makes that there is sometimes frustration and inertia, associated with the choice of an open structure. To make decisions and seek to influence the society takes time , an idea that is against the general voice of conventional politics and media , where hasty decisions are often made based on snapshots .

Young and willing

The manifesto of the activists who occupy the Théâtre à la Place , opens as follows :

‘Nous constatons qu'un théâtre est vide. Nous nous ruons sur l'occasion pour expérimenter une pratique de l'art à coté des contraintes dictées par le marché, la profession, la poursuite d'une carrière, l'exercice d'un métier, la production.’

Gabriel tells they want to gain from the power of the individual, visitors and artists come together in a common challenge and join forces . The theater should be freed of big money and from a small elite. The group sees it as its duty to experiment.

The occupiers are young , most of them just graduated from the Conservatory of Liege , and at the beginning of a artistic parcours. Gabriel sees this more as an opportunity than a burden . Not (yet) be tied to the ' goodwill ' and the producers of large institutions allows them to determine how it can be to look for alternative production and presentation methods . They do want to be accountable to the people of Liège, the theatre is intended as 'their' house. It should not be solipsistic research bastion .

In the fiery city they are at the beginning of a process in which the search is still to where the power of the project may be. How can an empty building in the middle of a city say something essential about the same city , and by extension the world ? The completely diseased cultural climate in Italy that led to action, is missing here . The City of Liege leaves the squatters be , mainly because they do not oppose the demolition of the building . Will the grand plans change in anyway? Probably not. Gabriel counterattacks the ephemeral nature of the project by trying to get the positive elements across : " We are forced to act quickly in the short term which creates a certain dynamic that suits us perfectly . The normal theatre process, between idea and show takes a long time (up two years time) - finding rehearsal space , funding , etc. - but can be reduced to two days ' with us.

The hyper professional method must give way to a more direct approach. An approach closer to the amateur circuit practice, without throwing away all knowhow. This way of working provides not only a fairer result , says Gabriel . " It also ensures that " passers by " can more quickly identify themselves with what we stand for and what direction we envision . Professionalism that is closer to the elite is replaced by a theater of the street , but please note , without wanting to be streettheater.

Against the culture of complaint

The occupiers shoot with sharp on the City of Liège , which they consider to have too little attention to the needs of smaller companies and artists, the fertile layer of the rich cultural life in the city . Liege rather focuses on major international prestige projects that should provide the city with some

a fake shine. culture and city marketing is often seen as inseparable , but not only the city is to blame. Also the artist have their part. 'the only time people sit together, is when there is something to complain about.'

Slam at Théâtre à la Place

There is lack of guts too, is heard

Socio- cultural projects rise like mushrooms from the ground, and often with noble intentions , but a turnaround in thinking is needed. People tell stories they dont believe in.

With a group of fellow students Gabriel put together a series of interventions under the title " Four Minute Men " during the recent Festival de Liège . When they had realized that the slogan of the festival 'question the the present ' barely covered the essence of the festival , they decided to cancel the last performance

With the Théâtre à la Place, the occupiers ' return ' the theater to the man in the street who bought a share for the construction of these temples and other culture , without ever putting a foot inside. n. Big words , but as yet they have not yet found the right way to make them true. The people who make this place what it is now , come all from the Liège artistic environment. But the initiatives are democratic with concerts and performances for (almost) nothing

In Rome , the Teatro Valle was originally threatened by privatization . In 2011, the Ente Teatrale Italiano was shut down,(the body responsible for the operation and communication between the various cultural centers in Italy) . According to De Fanti this is one of the more important examples of a regime that views culture as an unnecessary evil that only amount to more money being spent .

The 'public' theater should be freed of a small all decision-making elite

The winding up of the EIT and the almost completely shutting off the cultural money tap are some of the deadly kicks the Italian arts sector had to deal with in recent years . The lack of money and public places where people can come together to produce culture , with the contemporary theater as the main victims . Even big names like Romeo Castellucci and Motus come domestically barely get to play .

Since the government threw the gauntlet of cutbacks Teatro Valle was forced to take many tasks on itself . But To ensure that in the future more people than just artistic individuals find their way to the theater , for example, investing in education. Children from schools in Rome and beyond come and learn about theater codes. A new and critical audience is prepped . Money for these programs comes from a public that believes in the concept ,not from corporations

it Is al focused on the delicate relationship between art and society . Both in Liege and Rome. The Roman story is poignant and encouraging at the same time . Out of sheer poverty a movement is born that wants to write a new story that starts from the art, but also transcends it , In that capacity, she starts to transmit signals that no longer can be Ignored. In Liège the occupiers can mirror themselves to the great Roman example. How can they continue to write their story , later in 2014 , in a different context , however, is to wait . Also if they can find their wanted audience Anyway know both organizations add to debate on the importance of art in times of crisis . Art is needed to give subtitles to reality, or better even, put clouds of thought with it. It doesnt matter they come after the fact. Slowness is a virtue to cherish.

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