

## **Delineating a Defiant Identity: Space, Body, Audience and *Música Ruido* in La Fura dels Baus's First Trilogy (1983- 1989)**

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**Abstract.** La Fura dels Baus's first trilogy is formed by the seminal works of *Accions* (1983), *Suz-o-Suz* (1985) and *Tier Mon* (1989). The interdisciplinary approach to theatrical experimentation found in these artistic products was articulated, codified, and delivered by the group after the *Manifiesto Canalla* and the *lenguaje furero* were established and put into practice; consequently proposing these three works as *Furan* spectacles. In the trilogy, the nexuses between space, body, and music moved away from theatrical established canons, becoming explorative identitary elements. The mutability of their spatial settings, use of sonic and human sounds, and the performers' bodies, generated a multiplicity of reactions in the audience, encapsulating the spectrum of human response found in contemporary signifieds. In a logocentric world, La Fura's compromised and iconoclast stance produced three extraordinary artistic products, delivered in precise time and space. The representation of social hegemonic forces and social groups in the spectacles emulated the confrontational world we live in; while contesting the Cartesian's view that privileges mind over body, the rational over the sensorial. In isolation, the trilogy defined La Fura dels Baus as a unique interdisciplinary group whose members created artistic products with no fixed referent. The spectacles forming the first trilogy anticipated radical socio-cultural changes in thought and representation ahead of their time, branding the group's kinetics as revolutionary. Indeed, it was the particularism set in La Fura's extraordinary cross-disciplinarity what made the group a global product, as the universality found in individual motifs (loss, death, diaspora, submission) was addressed in their spectacles via the elements of the human body, *música ruido* and space.

**Keywords.** Space, Body, Audience, *Música Ruido*, First Trilogy and La Fura dels Baus.

**Resumen.** La primera trilogía de La Fura dels Baus está compuesta por los trabajos seminales de *Accions* (1983), *Suz-o-Suz* (1985) y *Tier Mon* (1989). El enfoque interdisciplinario en experimentación teatral que estos productos artísticos poseen fue articulado, codificado y distribuido por el grupo después de que el *Manifiesto Canalla* y el *leguaje furero* fuesen establecidos y puestos en práctica; consecuentemente proponiendo estos tres trabajos como espectáculos fureros. En la trilogía, los nexos entre espacio, cuerpo y música se separaron de

los cánones teatrales establecidos, convirtiéndose en elementos explorativos de identidad. La mutabilidad de los espacios utilizados como escenarios, el uso de sonidos humanos y de efectos sonoros, y el cuerpo de los actores, generaba una multiplicidad de reacciones en el público; encapsulando el *spectrum* de respuesta humana que se encuentra en significados contemporáneos. En un mundo logocéntrico, la actitud iconoclasta y comprometida de la Fura generó tres productos artísticos extraordinarios, producidos en tiempo y espacio concisos. La representación de fuerzas hegemónicas sociales y de grupos sociales en los espectáculos emulaban el mundo confrontacional en el que vivimos; rebatiendo al mismo tiempo el punto de vista Cartesiano que favorece a la mente en detrimento del cuerpo, a lo racional por encima de lo sensorial. Por sí misma, la trilogía definió la Fura dels Baus como grupo interdisciplinario único cuyos miembros crearon productos artísticos sin referente fijo. Los espectáculos que forman la primera trilogía anticiparon cambios socio-culturales radicales en términos ideológicos y de representación, y fueron adelantados a la era a que pertenecían; marcando la cinética del grupo como revolucionaria. De hecho, fue la particularidad establecida en la extraordinaria mezcla de disciplinas que se cruzan en la Fura lo que convirtió al grupo en un producto global; mientras que la universalidad que se encuentra en motivos individuales (pérdida, muerte, diáspora, sumisión) fue tratada en sus espectáculos a través de los elementos del cuerpo humano, la *música ruido* y el uso del espacio.

**Palabras clave.** Espacio, Cuerpo, Público, *Música Ruido*, Primera Trilogía y La Fura dels Baus.

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La Fura dels Baus's first trilogy, composed by the seminal works of *Accions* (1983), *Suz -o- Suz* (1985) and *Tier Mon* (1989), is the most striking and compromised contingent opus emerging in the course of the theatrical revolution happening in Spain and Catalonia during the 1980s. The three ensemble products enclosed as the first trilogy used alternative spaces as physical backdrop for their unique interdisciplinary approach to the relationship between space, body, *música ruido*, and audience. The diverse artistic fields exercised by their members took the disciplines themselves beyond their own boundaries, transforming their meaning, multiplying their reading, and regulating their interface in a much more complex interdisciplinary way. To La Fura dels Baus, the way in which bodies and objects' signifiers were altered in these pivotal works was done through compromised theatrical experimentation, performed in precise chronotope.

The complex trajectory of the group spans over thirty years and encapsulates diverse hybrid forms of theatrical performance. In *Contemporary Catalan Theatre*, Mercè Saumell argues the theatrical heritage found in La Fura dels Baus. To her, La Fura's attempts to breaking conventional theatrical canons can be traced to the influence of groups like the Living Theatre and the Odin Theatre

in the Spain of the Transition<sup>1</sup>. The impact of such groups ensued because they embodied “a form of performance which altered the habits governing relations between actor and audience”<sup>2</sup>. As such, Saumell argues the imprint of Antonin Artaud’s work found in the artistic products emerging from Catalonia during the complex years of the Transition. In this peculiar chronotope - constructed by the socio-cultural anthropological changes brought into being by a dramatic political change-, cohabiting theatrical groups “appropriated the voice, together with the mythical and cathartic aspects of the space, recuperating a sensory space”<sup>3</sup> for performers and audience. Amid the different aesthetic and conceptual offers found in some Catalan groups – such as Els Joglars, Dagoll-Dagom or Els Comediants -, La Fura dels Baus’ non-static proposal favoured the traversing of interdisciplinary frontiers through physical experimentation based on the gendered body; in FdB’s particular case, the male body. The trilogy’s masculinity articulated by the ensemble crystallised in iconic images from FdB spectacles, populated by dominating bodies. The physical capital embodied by La Fura was illuminatingly exemplified in the emblematic photo of the group taken in 1983, the year the *Manifiesto Canalla*<sup>4</sup> and *Accions* were delivered. The white and black photograph of ten young muscular men<sup>5</sup> wearing suits and narrow ties, their feet bare, was in itself an unnerving lynchpin of male identity. The photograph became an iconographic image of the *fureros*, as the bodies of the performers were transformed - through a process of embodiment – into a representation of the ensemble’s defiant stance against the presupposed rational found in conventional aesthetics, in particular those related to beauty canons and harmony. Embodiment to FdB meant a lived experiment, as they evaluated the body as an essential performative component of their identity. To La Fura, gender is performative for the reason that sexual difference refuses being given just binary biological attributes as the characteristics of gender are - ultimately - a body-product of both, culture and nature.

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<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to consider the phase of the Transition as a static period, encapsulated in definitive years; however, we can argue 1975 -1981 as the most realistic years, since the exulting democratic Spain enjoying the flavours brought in by freedom of speech and choice had started to settle. Those were also the years before the PSOE’s victory in 1982, which opened the door to new political and cultural legislations. Additionally, we cannot ignore the extraordinary step the advent of the *Constitución* in 1978 – and more specifically the *Artículo 2* - meant for the whole of the Countries striving for independent autonomy.

<sup>2</sup> SAUMELL, Mercè: “Performance Groups in Catalonia”, in *Contemporary Catalan Theatre. An Introduction*, ed. David George & John London, The Anglo-Catalan Society, Sheffield, 1996, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> *La Fura dels Baus: veinticinco años (1979- 2004)*, Electa, Barcelona, 2004, p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> The Rascals Manifest was written by Andreu Morte and delivered in 1983. The *Manifiesto* established the *lenguaje furero* as the expressive articulating of FdB’s artistic idiom.

<sup>5</sup> The nine members and the manager of the group: Hansel Cereza, Pere Tantiña, Carlos Padrissa, Miki Espuma, Jürgen Müller, Andreu Morte, Marcel.lí Antúnez, Pep Gatell, Jordi Arús and Álex Ollé.



(*La Fura dels Baus*. Photograph by Lluïsa García)

The fundamental artistic role of the *Manifiesto Canalla* delineated even further the group's provocative performance art. As Mercè Saumell argues, their work articulated 'a cry against dramatic text and conventional space, a proposal for a collective dramaturgy'; namely, 'a justification for the intense physical theatre practiced by FdB'<sup>6</sup>. Additionally, the surfacing of a codified *lenguaje furero*<sup>7</sup> – with its own set of rules –, developed into a socio-ideological understanding of the world. *Lenguaje furero* became the language of a social group and consequent diverse groupings, which in turn assimilated it and made it their own, like in the case of De la Guarda. But *lenguaje furero* is also essential in terms of semiotic activity. In FdB's spectacles, the bodies of the performers and the audience's response shaped an organic narrative, creating a performative dramaturgy beyond the boundaries imposed by written text. The aims stated in the *Manifiesto*<sup>8</sup> – and the establishing of the *lenguaje furero* –, signalled FdB's striking corporeality. To the group, embodiment was the organic way to construct identity. Accordingly, in the first trilogy, biological and physical difference metamorphosed into tools of representation, contesting our

<sup>6</sup> *La Fura dels Baus: veinticinco años (1979- 2004)*, Electa, Barcelona, 2004, p.15.

<sup>7</sup> Furan Language.

<sup>8</sup> The Manifesto was essentially condensate in five rules which were established as follow:

1.- The members of the group were not only actors, but also writers, directors and technicians. This stabilised the group as a self-sufficient ensemble 2.- The ensemble rejected conventional theatrical spaces and seek to explore unconventional architectural spaces. 3.- In their spectacles, performers and audience would share the performance space. 4. - The ensemble embraced the practice of hybrid disciplines. 5.- The group denied the past as their members did not acknowledge the influence of any previous theatrical canons in their work.

conceptualization and imaginal of the civilized body which is –fundamentally - ‘enmeshed with social forces and social relationships’<sup>9</sup> found in the social field of production. The physical and ideological mapping of the group’s character compelled FdB to experiment with the brutal performing of controlled chaos in a confrontational manner, applying to their spectacles a deliberate dehumanization and mechanization of observed human behaviour. La Fura’s world-view produced a visually disturbing performance art, in which physical strategies provided the audience with chaotic surreal imagery through the relishing of destructive energy. In this case, performance itself was the surest way to systematically deride the imperative Cartesian dualism which privileges mind over body. This disruptive stance was impeccably executed by the ensemble formed by FdB’s members, impatient with the limitations found in established artistic forms.

Sharing borders with Antonin Artaud’s *Theatre of Cruelty*, La Fura accepted theatre should affect the audience in a more compromised way. This compromise could only be attained by moving beyond the political correctness found in the conventional binomial of stage and audience. Like for Artaud, FdB aimed to shatter the false reality nurtured by dramatic works performed on a conventional theatrical space. Artaud’s main accusation against what he considered contemporary theatre was its rupture with ‘its immediate and painful efficiency’; to him, theatre ‘has broken up with danger’<sup>10</sup>. Concomitant with this belief come the elements of contingency permeating La Fura’s first trilogy and the response found behind the catharsis prompted in the spectator attending their performances. The individual reaction engendered in the spectator was both, physical and emotional. The ravishing brutality of the images unfolding in front of the audience could easily convey a sense of physical danger in the spectator, but they could also awake the emotional demand placed by FdB onto the individual; inducing the *público* into assessing the performance as a non-static unbiased product, unique in its deformed depiction of semiotic activity. As the uncomfoting effect of the group’s performative stance took hold, La Fura dels Baus became representative of the Catalan and Spanish *avant-garde*, moving far beyond the nurtured heritage left by the *Panic Movement* heralded by Fernando Arrabal, Alejandro Jodorowsky and Roland Topor in the France of the early 1960s.

In isolation, we can solidly argue the trilogy’s experimental journey created a new aesthetic taste, manufacturing a subsequent new cultural taste in the game of culture, set apart from legitimated theatrical stylistic forms. Concurrently, the identification of recurrent visual features became - in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms -, the ‘supreme manifestation of (the) discernment’<sup>11</sup> experimented by the spectator’s sense of distinction. Along the process, identification contributed to the legitimating of a delineated set of recognizable signs, carriers of cultural

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<sup>9</sup> SHILLING, Chris: *The Body and Social Theory*, Sage, London, 2006, p.82.

<sup>10</sup> ARTAUD, Antonin: *El teatro y su doble*, Gallimard, Barcelona, 1983, p.45.

<sup>11</sup> BOURDIEU, Pierre: “The Aristocracy of Culture”, in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge, London, 2007, p.11.

capital. This major localized cause – distinction - determined the structure of objective position which constructed the specific form and force found in La Fura dels Baus' uniqueness. The crafting of audience's judgement of taste ushered the establishing of a determinative social group (FdB itself) and provoked the assembling of subsequent social groupings, held together by an interrelated set of semiotic systems.

The extraordinary significance encapsulated in La Fura dels Baus's first trilogy embodied the explosion of creativity sweeping the Spain of the early 1980s; in turn defining the Catalan milieu's cultural core in particular not as a set of inescapable doxas – the assumed residual socio-cultural characteristics and historical consequences encapsulated in a post-dictatorship era- , but proposing it instead as a set of practices: practices anticipated as irreverent, defective, destructive, eclectic, anarchic and utterly different to anything performed before on a public space. This defiant positing underlined La Fura's disposition towards any attempt made by hegemonic agents (critics, academics) of enclosing their work within the parameters of any fixed theatrical dogma. To FdB, the heterogeneity found in cultural hybridity was a force necessary to fully challenge hegemony; in particular, hegemonic cultural forces attempting to classify defiant identities. To La Fura, the hegemonic cultural domination exercised by social groups in possession of symbolic power was 'the final product of the combination of consent and coercion'<sup>12</sup>, a result of the conflict between dispositions and positions found in a multiplicity of forms and modes of production. Their stand reiterated the belief cultural criteria should not be 'permanently fixed by tradition and authority', but take place instead 'subject to constant revision'<sup>13</sup> non-dependant on the construction of discursive meaning. La Fura made their disposition a definitive stance during the marketing process of *Suz-o-Suz*, when one photo of the group dressed in tribal clothing was leaked to the press. The photo was a fake, as the supposed experience of FdB with the Mesakin tribe of the village Bir Okwork in Dar Nouba was an intentional scam. The photo shot – orchestrated to incite a reaction from critics and academics- , was not taken in a Sudanese remote village but in the private garden of a house in Barcelona. This way La Fura challenged the absolute sovereignty attributed to academics and critics, questioning the way these groups can manipulate the legitimating process of artistic groups.

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<sup>12</sup> BENTON, Ted: *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism. Althusser and his Influence*, Macmillan, Hong Kong, 1984, p.102.

<sup>13</sup> TURNER, Terence: "Anthropology and Multiculturalism: What is Anthropology that Multiculturalism Should Be Mindful of It?", in *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, Ed. David Theo Goldberg, Blackwell, London, 1994, p. 406.



(*Suz-o-Suz*. Photograph by Gol)

Yet, cultural phenomena cannot be understood in abstraction from socio-historical context. The complex first years of freedom after the dictatorship was over had seen political disillusionment permeating the end of the Transition. This political malaise demanded a need for radical and absolute change. The change was deemed not only as a rupture with the past, but also as a new honest beginning. This basis marked the end of the Transition era and opened 1980s cultural explosion. The blast created by the appearance on the theatrical sphere of artistic groups, film and theatre directors, artists, performers, playwrights and actors, produced a huge volume of artistic offers totally different from the previous post-hippy aesthetics of *contestataria* Spain. In addition, the sudden availability of freedom of speech and expression, combined with the possibility of access to institutional funding, permitted the opening of social spaces as potential performing ground. It is in the midst of this variable milieu wherein we find the roots of FdB's radical deconstructive performance art as extrinsically different. In *La Fura dels Baus: veinticinco años*, Mercè Saumell argues the group shared with other Catalan groups certain theatrical tendencies, like 'the improvisation, the prominent role of rhythm' and the idea of 'theatre outside a purpose-built building'<sup>14</sup>. However, with historical hindsight, we can argue that

<sup>14</sup> *La Fura dels Baus: veinticinco años (1979- 2004)*, Electa, Barcelona, 2004, p.13.

the ephemeral value attached to many of the random rebellious artistic experiments produced in the Spain of the 1980s - which took shape by means of multidisciplinary *happenings* and via the spatial practice found in the midst of available social spaces- , did not encompass La Fura's meticulous dissection of primeval forces and deconstruction of set of beliefs. The reason was simple, as in their case, the artistic rule of concept must precede percept –a basic contextual theory of meaning-, was nullified through explorative performance. In addition, La Fura dels Baus' disposition compelled the group to avoid cross-fertilisation with their contemporaries' works. This individualistic posing allowed FdB to consciously craft their spectacles in an unbiased way, making the spectator to re-evaluate the times we live in through visualization of apocalyptic dystopian visions of social action and interaction. Their graphic visions provided the stunned audience with a new set of meanings, alien to the non-*furero* spectator. Conversely, against the odds, despite avoiding classification and definition, the trilogy did not become a set of marginalised artistic products – consumed by a marginal audience- , but instead went on to develop into the foundation for La Fura's exceptional theatrical body and to become an extraordinary recognizable global product.

To understand the process, it is absolutely vital to historically contextualize La Fura dels Baus's embryonic stage, developed in Transition Spain. Already by the late 1960s and early 1970s, a weakened dictatorship had seen the re-surfacing of street-performances, the establishing of the *teatros independientes*, and witnessed the *teatros universitarios* taking hold of *avant-garde* dramatic works. This critical political phase, encompassing the years following Franco's death up to the end of the 1970s decade, crafted La Fura's desire for a radical approach to theatrical experimentation. The period previous to the deliverance of *Accions* in 1983 was labelled by La Fura dels Baus's members as *Prehistoria*. This tagging established a clear line separating the 'before and after'; dividing their artistic journey in time and space into two phases: the one preceding the *Manifesto* and the succeeding period, composed by the spectacles produced after the *lenguaje furero* was established. This *Prehistoria* was constituted by spectacles devised as street performance. Street performance in Spain is deeply rooted in the rituals of the Spanish *fiesta* and - during the delicate historical period of the 1970s - it had strong political connotations as variations of the genre had been muzzled or suppressed during Franco's time. The role of street performance was significant as the invalidation of the *Franquista* censorship resulted in the sudden availability of social spaces previously deemed as forbidden, inadequate or inaccessible. In this particular political and cultural context, it was the diversity of the *fureros*'s artistic backgrounds - and their curiosity- what crafted their migration from streets and square village's locations to city and post-industrial landscapes. With the deliverance of *Accions* La Fura dels Baus leaved behind their previous trajectory and embarked on a completely different and radical aesthetics.

In the spectacles forming the first trilogy, La Fura's *détournement* of unconventional spaces and the shaping of a new spatial relationship with the audience are paramount notions to understand FdB's kinetics. As the



performance unfolded, the speed of the actions, the mobile and fixed sets, the continuous traffic of bodies and objects in an unconventional performance space, and the constitutive expressive power of the *música ruido*<sup>15</sup>, manufactured specific chronotopic artistic products. Hence, given that performativity itself requires ‘the power to effect or enact what one names’<sup>16</sup>, the deconstructive anomaly found in the *música ruido* signalled absorption, consequently rendering it as performative.

Music<sup>17</sup> constantly frames La Fura’s work and has an important role in their spectacles. The *música ruido* employed as performative tool by FdB in the first trilogy poses a density rooted in ritual and rhythm. Rhythm is one of the essential components of music and it is our need for harmonic, contrapuntal, rhythmic and motivic functions found in recognized musical canons what instigates human agency to construct evidence of genre in both, time and space. As such, the complexity of the performative *música ruido* underlined its structural simplicity, as its attractiveness was precisely not having pre-ordained objectives. In a way, music is a constitutive element of our way of perceiving the world. In FdB’s first trilogy, the changing circumstances in which the *música ruido* was produced, circulated, envisioned and heard, were material conditions refusing to accept music as a formless abstraction. Its practice was a participatory activity as it was consumed by an audience; while enmeshed in representational activity as the *música ruido* itself was produced by the performers themselves, performing either as actors or as musicians.

The music found in the first trilogy is fundamentally based on rhythmical percussion. The sounds produced by hitting empty metallic drums, banging together metallic planks, or the rattle made by an electric saw, cohabited in the spectacle in combination with recognized musical instruments, such a saxophone or synthesizers. This mishmash of elements – together with the human voice- configured La Fura’s post-industrial rhythmical landscape. As such, rhythm was presented to the audience not as a combination of metre, stem, accent, beat and time, but as rhythm in performance, as the state of flux found in the spectacles’ dynamic critically manufactured a chonotopic score of beating music. To La Fura, the surface complexity of the *música ruido* employed in their spectacles had to be inherently resistant to precise and definitive formulation. The feeling experimented by the spectator during the performance was akin to the one experienced by the individual dancing in a nightclub, wherein music is, essentially, reduced to a pounding beat to make bodies move in space. By itself, the mere conscious decision taken by FdB of calling the soundtrack of their performances *música ruido* rendered the name as definitive trope, putting the spectator in a position of anticipated unexpectedness. The

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<sup>15</sup> Noise Music.

<sup>16</sup> KOSOFKY SEDGWICK, Eve and PARKER, Andrew. ed.: *Performativity and Performance*, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 204.

<sup>17</sup> La Fura has its own recording company, but it has also worked with big corporations like Virgin. Their musical catalogue include fifteen recordings: *Accions*, K7; *Suz/o/Suz*, LP; *ERG*, CD; *MTM*, CD/CD-Rom; *KRAB*, CD; *MANES*, CD; *Ajöe*, maxi-single; *SIMBIOSIS*, CD; *FMOL*, CD/CD-Rom; *FAUST 3.0*, CD; *Accions*, CD; *Ombra*, CD; *ØBS*, CD; *XXX*, CD and *NOUN*, CD.

curious anomaly found in the performative objects used as instruments reinforced the sense of experimentation in the spectators, conveying the audience's communication or reproduction of visceral emotions. This interaction endorsed the distinctiveness of the mutable resulting artistic product, validating its identity and contributing to its distribution.

In the trilogy, the relationship between human bodies, audience and space was enmeshed in ritualistic acts of transformation and purification. The spectacles destroyed the traditional binary composition formed by the interrelationship between space and audience, while questioning the intellectual validity of plural meanings. To La Fura dels Baus, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction is 'at the core of the body seen as the bearer of symbolic value'<sup>18</sup>. Although the human body has been constructed by civilized societies as a biomedical universal category, the substance of it depends on processes of social constitution completed by human agents, either as producers or as consumers of social practice. This post-structuralist approach underlined La Fura's disposition to explore the body as a chronotopic product, dependant on contextual historical and social variables.

Looking closely at the elements of violence, aggression, and fear permeating the first trilogy – wherein the body 'dissociated from itself to be able to punish or absorb punishment'<sup>19</sup>-, the audience could acknowledge the brutal process experimented by the performers in these spectacles as the spectator witnessed the body stop 'being a biological entity, metamorphosing into a highly malleable and unstable product'<sup>20</sup>. The bodies populating the spectacles' distorted universe were continuously responsive to their own eventuality, inhabiting a space in which the threatening unknown situations unfolded before the audience's eyes. This menacing world provoked in the characters played by the performers a series of seemingly guttural reactions, rooted in the human primeval need for survival and communication with others. The volatile setting defined FdB's dominating bodies as categorical since to these bodies the 'medium is force, the model of which is war'<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, the hefty physical element in the spectacles was – in anthropological terms – a scrutinizing outcome of the relationship between human self and habitus; per se an 'act of intervention' in possession of 'investment of meaning'<sup>22</sup>, bestowed on it by both, spectator and performer.

In post-Franco Spain, the visualization of a human body as a 'dangerous other' meant the total rupture with nearly forty years of hegemonic Christian notions of the human body; a deconstruction of the definitive gendered civilized body postulated by the Regime and the Catholic Church as a 'temple of temperance, order and emotional control'<sup>23</sup>. This feeling of 'otherness' was reaffirmed by

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<sup>18</sup> SHILLING, Chris: *The Body and Social Theory*, Sage Publications, London, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 85.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> SHILLING, Chris: *The Body and Social Theory*, Sage Publications, London, 2006, p. 85.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 89.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 49.

the overbearing presence of dominating bodies in the spectacles; bodies visually recognized and classified as corporeal, male, muscular, and mesomorph. The uninterrupted vision of these bodies triggered a sense of continuous threat in the spectator, inciting a feeling of spatial constraint in the audience. This interaction reaffirmed the exercising of the human body – a bridge between daily practices and the organization of power - as essential to La Fura's Foucaultian explorative relationship with space and audience. The practice of this relationship had to be measured in time and space; but also in terms of the distance and the proximity existing between the bodies of the performers and the bodies of the spectators.

In the trilogy, human traffic (performers and audience) was determined by architectural space and action. The apparently brutal chaos reigning in La Fura dels Baus's first trilogy deserves an explanation for those unfamiliar with their live performances, particularly since behind the apparent chaotic randomness of movement of bodies and objects in their spectacles there was an intelligent devising process. The diagrams prepared for *Accions* shown a meticulous study of the space available for each performance as it had to change every time the spectacle arrived to a new architectural space. At the beginning of each performance, a voice-off informed the spectator of areas forbidden to the audience, clearly delimitating a performance space set apart from the area wherein the technicians were operating. FdB also signalled a 'neutral space', designated for those spectators who didn't want to interact with the action occurring on the changeable performing space.

In terms of architectural space, the *détournement* of urban, post-industrial, unusual, disused, derelict architectural spaces, into performance space, rendered the original physical space as performative, changing its historical meaning forever. In La Fura's case this was obvious in the carefully chosen spaces for their performances: a derelict building, an abandoned morgue, a disused wholesale food market, a building-site left unfinished, an old flower market and so forth. These vacant spaces were essential for La Fura's spatial practice since they used the architectural landscape as backdrop for the symbolic representation of human agency's practice, which in turn reproduces social structures and relationships. Hitherto, La Fura's trilogy kept their spectacles site-specific, delivering artistic products in time and space; or to be more specific, in 'time in a precise space'<sup>24</sup>.

The concept of *détournement* - argued by Henri Lefebvre as a practice of diversion- was intimately related to this practice, as the rupture of conventional space was done via the use of vacant spaces, with no theatrical history attached to them. This diversion made the existing space to outlive its original purpose since it was 're-appropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one'<sup>25</sup>. The trilogy played the performativity of the buildings and refused the

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<sup>24</sup> SHEVTSOVA, Maria: "Dialogism in the Novel and Bakhtin's Theory of Culture", in *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 23. 3, 1992, p. 750.

<sup>25</sup> LEFEBVRE, Henri: *The Production of Space*, Blackwell Oxford, 2007, p. 167.

semiotic value attached to a purpose-built performance space. Consequently, performance was unique, as the space was always a new experience, shaped by audience's reaction and by architecture. In a sense, the dichotomy between appropriated and dominated spaces is not limited to a partial level of discourse or signification, since the diversion and re-appropriation of any space produces a variety of new spaces. In the trilogy, La Fura's spatial practice comprised the production of determinative spatial settings, crafted by each spectacle's needs. Conversely, these spatial settings framed the social groups being represented in each production, demonstrating how the 'spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space'<sup>26</sup>. But to fully comprehend the full scope of the concepts of body, space, music and audience - dismembered throughout La Fura dels Baus's practice- , we must analyze in isolation some of the elements configuring each of the spectacles forming the first trilogy.

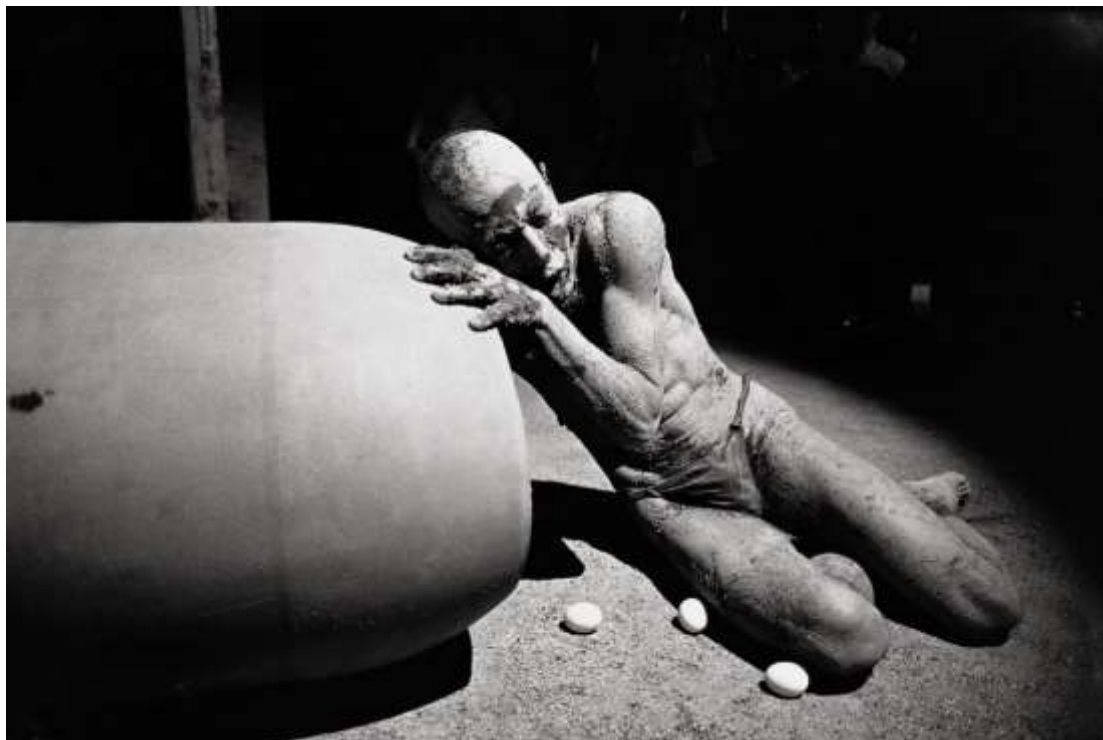
*Accions* (1983) was, arguably, the most compromised piece of the trilogy, gestated in the post-*contestataria* Spain of the early 1980's. The spectacle was presented to an audience for the first time in the context of the Cicle de Teatre Obert in Catalonia, opening their artistic experiment for distribution; although it was the screening of one part of the spectacle in the edgy TVE programme *La Edad de Oro* which truly helped the group to build their name in the sphere of *alternativa* Spain. *Accions* is about the birth of man, a symbolic exploration of the origin of mankind. In the spectacle, the use of organic elements (rice, flour, pasta, clay, eggs, water) and chemical material (glue, paint) played a distinct performative role in the way we understand the bodies and the space, crafting a hellish vision of a dehumanized future. The first linguistic utterance in the performance is '*¡Mira!*' (Look!), in itself a perlocutionary act compelling the audience to open their senses to different actions played at the same time, in the same architectural space.

The spectacle was split into isolated dramatic *accions*<sup>27</sup> non-linked by a dramaturgical conventional devices – like plot development -, but assembled instead via a sense of joined visual-stylistic actions and by musical rhythm. The surreal imaginary of the independent actions was delineated by single pieces of *música ruido* performed during the spectacle. The action *¡Mira!* opened a multiplicity of spaces employed by the performers whilst a group of actors-musicians played a diversity of elements: a saxophone, synthesizers, metallic drums and planks of metal, employing the voice of the actors as additional instruments. The human voice uttering the imperative *¡Mira!* commanded the action unfolding in front of the audience. In the spectacle, the splendid *Faquirs* (Fakirs) was a cathartic explosion of savage human behaviour. Two men in black suits, branding construction hammers, began the action by smashing a car into pieces. The sound produced by the combination of hitting metallic drums, broken glass and yelling voices, exploited into a blast of merciless drumming and disturbing shouting; while the actors-musicians kept counting aloud, marking a tempo of destruction.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> *¡Mira!*; *Homes de Fang*; *Faquirs*; *Home Blanc*; *Bips*; *Cordes* and *Lona*.



(*Accions*. Photograph by Gol)

The science fiction feeling of *Home Blanc* (White Man) was exacerbated by the intelligible litany chanted by this vision of a man, tottering on top of forty centimetres high platform boots, his body covered in glue dyed with white pigment. This surreal vision was followed by *Bips*, an apocalyptic vision of human evolution which in two western-clothed men aggressively covered two muddy-men with blue paint; the action's score punctuated by *música ruidos*' pitiless percussion. The stunning *Cords* (Ropes) was the most performative action in the whole of the spectacle, in itself a superb example of performance art. In *Cordes*, the unstoppable beat produced by drums gave the action a decisive rhythm as two men covered in cling film, plastic bags filled with coloured liquids attached to their bodies, were moved from one extreme of the performing space onto the other side hung by ropes from the ceiling. Visually disturbing, the contorting bodies resembled abnormal foetus just born, their bodies moving towards a massive white canvas against which the bodies repeatedly crashed into as they were slowly lowered onto the floor. The banging of the bodies against the canvas was continuous and repetitive. As the bags attached to their bodies exploited, the bodies left a smeared trail of red and brown pigments on the plastic, a remainder of the colours of blood and body waste. *Lona* (Canvas) marked the end of the spectacle. At the end of the performance, the hose-pipe used to clean the plastic canvas and the actors – performed by a futuristic vision of men dealing with a chemical attack-, played a distinctive role in the scene's semiotics: the two-dimensional blank space was returned to the spectator to be filled with their own emotional response, visual memories and 'cosmic energy'. This action was performed in silence. As the

action finished and the actors moved out of the space, a blackout finished the spectacle. The applause of the audience didn't bring the performers back onto the performing space; instead, an imperative voice-off informed the audience that the spectacle was over, ending the message with the imperative utterance *¡Váyanse!* (Leave!), repeated several times. The fact that FdB decided against acknowledging the audience after the finale reinforced the unrulier individuality of their spectacle and that of the group itself; delineating a defiant identity in a theatrical world governed by artistic canons. *Accions* ended in 1987 after 143 performances and was performed at the same time the group devised their second work, *Suz-o-Suz*. As the selling of their performance art brought in institutional funding - incrementing their access to previously restricted experimental paths-, the pressure put onto FdB for delivering a work of equal or superior quality increased.



(*Accions*. Photograph by José Luis Prieto)

*Suz-o-Suz* (1985) is a spectacle developed around the idea of mankind. At its core lies the relationship between man and structures of power, framing man's discovery of language. The spectacle was created as a rite of initiation, as the confrontation between two tribes. It proposed a spectacular approach to primitive rituals, creating iconic images of dominating bodies in abstract spaces, away from realistic settings. The image of the two men (used as *Suz-o-Suz*'s poster) is deeply anchored in the Catholic mind as it brings to our imagination sacred iconography: the crucifixion of St. Paul and the descending from the cross of dead bodies after martyrdom has taken place. In this photograph, two male bodies - stained by flour, water and paint- constructed a most powerful image of dominating bodies in an abstract space. As such, the corporeal element of this photograph turned out to be a visual premonition of the ritualistic and rhythmical performance the audience was going to experiment.

In *Suz-o-Suz*, rhythm was essential for the structure of the performance as in this production it reinforced a more recognizable narrative. During the performance, the group produced exclusive terrifying pieces of *música ruidó*, shaped in precise time and space. The combination of post-industrial elements like supermarket trolleys, electromechanical machines, empty industrial metallic drums and the range found in the sounds produced by the human voice produced a splendid ritualistic score. Among the six pieces<sup>28</sup> composing the spectacles, the musical concert of *Ajöe* and the rite of initiation called *Ulele* are the most striking pieces in terms of *música ruidó*, as their performative composition demonstrated the groups' meaningful and explorative relationship with live music. On assessing *Suz-o-Suz*, we recognize how far La Fura dels Baus's journey had taken their members since the deliverance of *Actions*, since in this production the developing dramaturgy of the spectacle granted the characters individual attributes. These dramatic attributes placed two demands on the performers: first, a controlled internalization of character's features and second, a physical awareness of audience's response to plot developing in a mutable space. The spectacle also signalled the group's embryonic delineation of what will become intrinsic features found in their artistic products, like in the case of the organic element of water. In *Suz-o-Suz* the performative element of water was given a symbolic role in *Piscines* (Swimming Pools), becoming since then part of the group's recognizable kinetics. The signified element of water differs in a diversity cultures: it can represent birth, rites of purification, rites of initiation, the ritual of baptism. In *Suz-o-Suz*, two acolytes are taken out of the water by their masters in a frenzied series of actions linked by music. The ritualistic emergence of the actors from water reinforced the polarized role of the characters; in isolation a rite of initiation emphasizing the interaction between man and structures of power. The careful devising process of this *uran* spectacle signalled a step forward towards a more recognizable dramaturgy, as its main argument evolved around the ritualistic journey of man through the passing of life. The performative journey started by La Fura dels Baus in *Accions* took the group even further in *Suz-o-Suz*, consolidating the *lenguaje furero* as

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<sup>28</sup> *Automatics; Irrupció; Ajöe; Combat; Piscines* and *Ulele*.

the matrix of their interdisciplinary performance art. *Suz- o-Suz* ended in 1991, after 301 performances in Europe, Latino-America, Israel, Australia and Japan.

*Tier Mon* (1989) broke the barriers of the group even further, stepping into a more recognizable and fluid narrative. In *Tier Mon*, the antagonistic figures of the *Déu Blanc* (the White God), the *Nan* (the Dwarf), and the *Inútil* (the Useless) were allegorical entities, as the abused symbolic power exercised by the characters mirrored the dysfunctional division of power occurring in a dystopian society. This performative analysis of the journey of man sees armies, battles, death and diaspora, but it proposes a cyclical re-birth. However, the re-birth was to build up – again- a state of war. The eight actions<sup>29</sup> forming the spectacle of *Tier Mon* began with musicians playing on four towers, placed in the four corners of the area delimited as performance space. The building up of visceral energy played the performative of the post- apocalyptic landscape via the use of industrial elements: drums, electric guitars and wholesale wooden boxes. In addition, the guttural screeching emerging from the dominating bodies during the spectacle produced agonizing thudding noise, explicit background to a spectacular brutal world. This multidisciplinary work sees the *Nan* and the *Inútil* as possessors of symbolic power, but physically disable since birth. This results in a dysfunctional relationship with the other performing members because of the *dys* in their bodies. In *The Body and Social Theory*, Chris Shilling argues that this *dys*-appearance of the body re-appears in a 'pathologically or socially deviant form'<sup>30</sup>. In *Tier Mon*, the spectator was shocked by the brutal *dys* of an otherwise dominating body because of the cut legs of the characters, trampling furiously in crouches. As bodies are very much part of our identity, La Fura's brutal erasing of the body seen as an 'absent presence' was visually disturbing. In the astonishing *Ritual*, the *Déu Blanc* reinforced the rules of the dystopian society depicted by FdB as the ritualistic death of the *Nan* and the *Inútil* were ordered and executed, the two figures dying in a bath of blood. The symbolic violence seen by the spectator was accentuated by the semiotic values of the post- industrial elements used during the performance: cranes, wooden boxes used for carrying goods, supermarket trolleys and industrial cranes. *Tier Mon* closed the spectacular emotional and experimental journey of La Fura dels Baus's first trilogy after 146 performances, signalling the end of this period.

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<sup>29</sup> *Robots; Inici; Exodo; Pertigas; Menjadora; Gras and Ritua.l*

<sup>30</sup> SHILLING, Chris: *The Body and Social Theory*, Sage Publications, London, 2006, p.184.





(Tier Mon. Photograph by Gol)

At the end of each performance the audience was left with charged layered images: a collage made of what they saw, smelt, touch, heard and felt in precise chronotope. To FdB's members the experience provoked a catalysis due the physical and psychological exhaustion suffered by the entire ensemble after the first trilogy was over. Changes in the original ensemble and a latent wish for branching out into diverse forms of theatrical experiences meant the closing of a chapter. An engineered restructure within the group began to take shape and during the 1990's the rest of the founders will, more and more, band together in duets or trios to either devise or direct artistic proposals on multidisciplinary realms; reaffirming FdB as a metamorphosing unit delivering specific chronotopic artistic products

The deliverance of *Noun* in 1990 signalled the beginning of a new trilogy and the inclusion - for the first time- of the female body in their spectacles. Over the years, there was a progressive evolution in La Fura dels Baus towards the inclusion of text in their theatrical experiments and an increasing sophisticated use of audio and digital technology, echoing their artistic concern with a globalized world, brutalized by uninterrupted media access. The group's contribution to how we view the contemporary body and space architecture is major and undisputable. Humankind, gender and class struggle, sex, life, death, are all ebullient issues shaping the world we live in, and must be addressed by the interdisciplinary theatrical world. La Fura dels Baus's continuous evolution and chameleonic approach to artistic expression can provoke fear, disgust, guilt, contempt, identification, rejection, surprise, questions, terror, or just a simple rush of adrenaline, but it should never, never, incite indifference.