

TEMPLE OF ALTERNATIVE HISTORIES AT STAATSTHEATER KASSEL DURING DOCUMENTA 15

A COSMIC TOUR TO NURTURE ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES FOR THE FUTURE

by Vanina Saracino

While on Friedrichsplatz during the preview days of documenta 15, one could spot blindfolded humans exiting the Staatstheater Kassel wearing white goggles and headphones, guided by the hands of a choreographer. The theater is temporarily renamed “Temple” with small lettering that surfaces below the huge theater signage of the Staatstheater (state theater). The title transformation mirrors to what extent the spiritual, the energetic, and the intangible are today under the vigilant control of materialism and reason. Inhabiting the mutated building is the *Temple of Alternative Histories*: a multifaceted and evolving organism initiated by Anna Rún Tryggvadóttir and Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson in collaboration with Cassandra Edlefsen Lasch. The theatrical piece will actively question history and its metaphysics by enabling a space where time and matter are felt differently and experienced through diverse modes of storytelling and meditation. Participants will play a fundamental role in activating the space until September 24.

In Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson’s view, the void is central to this project. All but inert nothingness, the void is an active force that allows opposites to move, matter to evolve and life to exist. Under this premise, the Temple has now activated only the foyers (those spaces that are usually of transition), thus aiming at overcoming the space hierarchy in theaters which Arnarsson argues is defined by functionality, and attempting to reverse the center-periphery narrative. The stage, still empty, is surrounded by diverse activities such as performances, talks and guided interventions as part of the extended program that will flow into a play premiering on July 9, which is still under creation.

Extending across both theater floors, Anna Rún Tryggvadóttir’s audio work *Reflecting Materials* (2022) invites us to sense the architecture’s material components through our porous bodies. Aware of the vast extraction that was carried out to source the building’s materials, the work ponders on the potential of our molecular entanglement with the marble, the lightning bolts and the oaks beyond the theater windows (planted by Joseph Beuys for documenta 7, 1982). The transparent glass surface we look through is made of liquid sand. The matter is not what it seems. In fact, it is mostly empty space. What we sense as touch involves no contact – only electromagnetic repulsion between the electrons of the atoms that make up our body and those that make up the rest.¹ Revealing the controlled illusions of human senses we experience is an invitation to realign our intelligence with that of the planet – both its living and non-living matter.

In Lundahl & Seidl’s installation *Symphony of a Missing Room* (2009–ongoing), the voice of a narrator guides through a site-sensitive experience with headphones and blindfolding goggles. Accepting to be temporarily deprived of the sense of sight is an act of trust in the other, and becomes a process of self-discovery. Other senses become sharper: focus enhances, breathing deepens. Hands pull me in directions slowly around the rooms of the Temple, and I learn to trust them after a few minutes of clumsy alertness. The inner dimension of the cosmic matter I am experiencing now is quiet, and I focus on my breathing, somehow relearning to be in the now. Suddenly, the temperature changes and I can sense the sunlight on my skin is activating some

process on a molecular level. The voice in the headphone says “you can now slowly take off your goggles.” The Temple is behind me, and something has shifted in my way of perceiving the square. While my vision refocuses, I am briefly left to wonder whether I have just accessed another dimension.

The *Temple of Alternative Histories* succeeds in enabling a space where time and the materiality of our surroundings can be felt differently. As the activities unfold and the project incorporates new voices, their stories attempt a reconfiguration of other possible worlds that will soon pulse across the foyers and on stage, and will hopefully resonate beyond the Temple’s walls. **VS**

¹ Karen Barad, “On touch: the inhuman that therefore I am (v1.1)” in *Power of Material / Politics of Materiality*, Suzanne Witzgall and Kerstin Stakemeier (eds.), diaphanes: Zürich – Berlin, 2014

THE TEMPLE OF ALTERNATIVE HISTORIES
WILL RUN 5 JUNE – 24 SEPTEMBER 2022.

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Temple of Appropriated Histories, work in progress scenography (2022), Staatstheater Kassel. Photo Sebastian Hannak