

## **El suicidio / La última noche de la humanidad [The Suicide / The Last Night of Mankind], 2002.**

Produced in parallel, these two projects evolved from proposals from the Theater der Welt festival and the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen). Tasked with taking on the two productions, El Periférico divided into working teams to undertake the projects.

*El suicidio* presented a series of suicides, in a documentary style, showing cases such as a young woman deciding to take sleeping pills. One photo showed the face of a young man who had shot himself in the mouth, another showed a toy lamb that, abandoned by its owners on the side of the road, opted to commit suicide. The macabre atmosphere of the piece extended to the performers, who theorised darkly about suicide, either speaking in an unrecognisable language or remaining silent, or allowing themselves to be swallowed up by the sound that enveloped the theatre. Individual cases were accompanied by collective dramas, that is, the suicide of the country, symbolised through the use of national iconography, such as the cow, as a suicidal animal, and even a farmer, who hesitated between shooting the animal or himself. Filled with dreamlike images and a surrealist halo, the piece portrayed slaughterhouses as factories of death, using miniature farm animals, projected images of the countryside, and masks in the form of horses and sheep. Ultimately, the performance turned on itself, assembling and dismantling the stage set, enacting its own demise.

Meanwhile, *La última noche de la humanidad* was based on the *The Last Days of Mankind*, the colossal play (over six hundred pages and featuring a thousand characters) by Austrian Karl Kraus, written during the First World War and published once it ended, in 1919. El Periférico created a piece in response to Kraus' impossible-to-stage work, who had imagined a scathing, gruesome apocalypse for the society of his time, in the face of the imminent war. This new production took the form of a play in two acts, complete with an intermission. The first act, titled 'Opereta apocalíptica e hidrocefálica' ['An Apocalyptic and Hydrocephalic Operetta'], evoked the end of time, a post-war scenario in which the actors and dolls, naked and covered in mud, sang a naive and carefree tribute to a now extinct species.

The second act, 'White Room', took place in a white, ascetic and orderly cube. In it, five actors (perhaps survivors) responded with forced actions to a sadistic theatrical experiment in which a mechanical voice directed them and forced them to speak in English, as if whatever had survived the war, under the traumatic rubble of history, were like something out of George Orwell, like a Big Brother watching and exercising his power over a group of prisoners through projections, videos and a libidinal voice. In this dystopia imagined by El Periférico, people were slaves and objects had reclaimed power.