

STUDIO CARUSO – SPRING SEMESTER 2025

THE VILLAGE

A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS

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PLAY IN 5 ACTS

the village as a theatre

In recent years, Switzerland has seen a steady rise in the elderly population, prompting the construction of new senior housing facilities. But the architectural response tends to follow a single script: anonymous, generic buildings built from scratch, often removed from their local context and relationships.

The Salem residence in Ennenda is an other example. An efficient, functional structure—but entirely disconnected from the place it occupies. An infrastructure designed to “host” old age, not to inhabit it.

This project proposes a different speculation: instead of building further away, we return to the village—to its core. The focus shifts to the old town center, filled with underused or inaccessible homes, still rich in memory, character, and connection. The model is not that of a retirement home, but of an *albergo diffuso*: a network of independent living units with shared spaces woven directly into the fabric of the village. The fountains, the squares, the scenes.

The project unfolds across five public squares, each tied to a local fountain—spaces that hold both urban centrality and emotional weight. Each square becomes a stage for a different layer of community life: care, conflict, safety, solitude, and proximity.

And each intervention combines theater and architecture, archival research and irony, memory and speculation.

An inhabited theater

The methodology behind the project is neither neutral nor detached. It draws on artistic practices that embrace conflict, memory, and contradiction as tools of construction. From Mike Kelley, it inherits a performative and irreverent approach—where everyday objects, community rituals, and memories become raw material for new narratives.

The process began with deep archival research into local traditions, parades, and associations—mapping not just architecture, but the social and symbolic life of the village.

Scenographically, the project borrows from the world of theatre—especially the uncanny realism of Anna Viebrock, where domestic interiors feel strangely off, unsettling in their familiarity.

Each space is built with disturbing precision: nothing is invented, but everything is slightly wrong. The result is not a set, but a condition: a place suspended between inside and outside, public and private, past and present, fiction and documentation, where the viewer must constantly renegotiate their role. The elderly are not passive subjects to be protected, but active figures, capable of observing, commenting, inhabiting, and participating.

Levels of audience

In this diffuse theater, the public is everywhere.

Some live inside the scene.

Some pass through and watch.

Some stand outside and witness it like a performance.

The roles collapse into each other.

Every inhabitant is also a spectator. Every spectator becomes a performer.

And the entire village of Ennenda turns into a living scenographic machine.

This is not a utopia.

It's a concrete proposal—ironic, emotional, and rooted.

A theater where no one acts, but everyone is on stage.



JUXTAPOSITION OF DOMESTIC PROPS

Mike Kelley, *Confusion: A Play in Seven Sets, Each Set More Spectacular and Elaborate Than the Last*, 1982/1983



SCENOGRAPHIC VILLAGE, GRUSS AUS ENNENDA
Postcard, 1902



WHERE IS THE ROOF?

Anna Viebrock, Stage Design

ACT 1

dear neighbor, go to hell

„A house like a village. It is quiet, but it listens. The floorboards creak, each wall holds back unspoken words. Every room is a home. Every collective space, a street or a square. Outside, something cracks, the Landsgemeinde becomes an argument.“

Interior view: Warm, filtered lights. Dry silence. The audience enters a house that is no longer just a house. The wooden walls whisper stories, the green tiled stove is still in place. The ceiling, white, reflects a soft light. Details disturb the illusion of an historical room: walls made of exterior-style cladding slats, a window opening onto the corridor, names engraved on each door like village street signs. At the entrance, darker inlays in the parquet form pedestrian crossings. A red bench, like those on the square, waits quietly. In the dining room: a long table rests against the windows. A pair of binoculars are ready to be used.

Exterior view: Gemeinde square, beside the fountain. A new wall has been built and a mailbox is embedded in it. Here, one can leave thoughts, frustrations, or gentle messages to neighbours. But today, something has gone wrong – a message appears on the wall: *“Dear neighbour, go to hell.”*

Overturned chairs, scattered notes, voices raised too high. A quarrel, born from too much closeness. Inside, someone hears. First, they open the inner window. Then move to the dining room. They pick up the binoculars. They watch.

The scenography occupies the old Gemeindehaus in the center of the village. The aim is to reinterpret housing for the elderly not as a retreat, but as an active continuity – within spaces that retain identity, scale, and memory.

Each private room is treated like an individual home, while shared spaces become external landscapes:corridors as streets, wooden inlays as signage, public benches in private living rooms.

The dining table stretches along the windows, facing the square. It symbolizes the possibility of being present, even from a distance.

The intervention on the square transforms the Landsgemeinde into an everyday ritual: a mailbox for complaints, reflections, anonymous notes. But also the risk of friction. The graffiti and the disorder are not signs of failure, but evidence of a community that is alive – and not always in harmony.

The final scene is minimal but telling: a small gesture – opening a window, looking through binoculars – is enough to remain part of something.



COMMUNAL VOTING PROCESS, LANDSGEMEINDE GLARUS

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, Bildarchiv / Ans_06842



NEIGHBOR CONFLICTS, HEIMATSCHUTZBÜHNE GLARUS
Landesarchiv des Kt. GL / Schönwetter Film Nr. 725



FOOTPRINTS IN THE MORTAR, FORMER GEMEINDEHAUS ENNENDA

Own Image

ACT 2

bulletproof sanctuary of memories

"It looks like a stable. But it hums faintly – a hidden core beneath stone and wood. Inside, a vault of letters and ghosts. Security systems flicker under balconies of flowers and antennas.

You were never meant to see this, but it was built exactly for people like you."

Interior view, cold, artificial light. External muffled sound. The lower half of the space is lined entirely with mailboxes. Not six or twelve, but hundreds. Standard-sized, metal, slightly dented. A bureaucratic wall. Fluorescent lights buzz overhead – pale office neon, never quite stable.

Each mailbox is a miniature vault. Some open. Inside: a garden gnome, a Bosch drill. Above, small balconies overlook the space. Towels, antennas and flower pots.

At the far end: a steel bunker door, imposing and silent. It opens and a spotlight turns on: an ironing board shows.

This intervention references the hidden bunkers embedded in Swiss rural architecture – often masked beneath stables, invisible until revealed.

The base of the structure (stone, heavy) is transformed into a fictional safety vault. Instead of traditional lockboxes, the walls are covered with standard domestic mailboxes. These contain objects of personal or communal significance: not high-value, but deeply familiar – absurd, nostalgic, useful.

The space operates both as a scenographic fiction and a proposed program: a "library of objects", where villagers can borrow tools or contribute belongings. A community memory vault disguised as a secure archive.

Lighting is deliberately sterile – neon office strips – contrasting the warmth of typical alpine domesticity.

The upper half of the stable plays with domestic codes: balconies, flowers, towels, antennas.

The contrast between bunker and balcony reflects broader oppositions – inside/outside, safety/exposure, control/clutter, public/private.

A tension builds, between security and absurdity, between utility and intimacy.



FALSE DOOR LEADING TO A HIDDEN BUNKER, ENNENTBERGE
Kessel und Züger Architekten / Alessandro Mattle



POSTBOX ON WOOD, ENNENDA
Own Image



KITSCH COLLECTIONS, ENNENDA
Theaterkollektiv Niemand war schon immer da

ACT 3

the village plays itself

„An empty stable like a time machine. Inside, one waits, as if looking out of a window.

It's an ordinary day, but something is about to happen. The audience watches, unsure if they are remembering or living.“

Interior view, warm lighting.

The audience enters and sits on small wooden chairs facing two large dark green lacquered doors.

A background murmur, with outside sounds clearly audible.

The lights dim, the murmur stops.

Only the sound of the fountain's water remains.

The doors slowly open.

A blade of natural light invades the stable.

Outside: the Fridlibrunnen square framed like a stage. Clean laundry flutters in the wind, an iron appears on the right.

The scenography is set inside an old stable on Dorfstrasse: a solid stone base framed by classical elements. An ambiguous green theatrical wallpaper reveals glimpses of the original stone. The wooden structure is preserved. The interior floor is made of cobblestones typical of public squares. Chairs are sourced from the Lichtspieltheater Schwanden.

The question arises: is the viewer inside or outside?

The scenographic intervention plays with the irony of the „elderly observer behind the window.“ The doors open onto the Fridlibrunnen square, transformed into a stage. Everyday life becomes the spectacle.

The action stems from an archival photograph: women bent over, washing clothes in the fountain.

Today, the water still flows, but the gestures are suspended in time, evoked by everyday objects and intentional silences.



REMEMBERING LAUNDRY DAY, ENNENDA
ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, Bildarchiv / Ans_12329



OBSERVING AND BEING OBSERVED, HEIMATSCHUTZBÜHNE GLARUS
Landesarchiv des Kt. GL / Schönwetter Film Nr. 725



NOSTALGY FOR ANCIENT ORNAMENTS, LICHTSPIELTHEATER SCHWANDEN
südostschweiz

ACT 4

bovine dreams in thermal times

"A stone trough, a bikini, and the mountain air. A sauna breathes in the dark, while cows pass outside. Someone has just stepped out, or is about to enter."

Outside, it's midday.

A bright square opens to the sky, surrounded by grass and grazing cows.

Tiles cover the crossing. A bikini lies on the fountain. An old towel flutters. Two rubber sandals rest beside.

Interior view, darkness.

A person enters a small stable transformed into a sauna.

The wooden walls breathe and exhale light: sunrays pierce through narrow gaps in the slats, drawing slow, golden lines across the benches.

The interior is silent, warm, and humid.

This scenography is located on the edges of the old town, near the pastures.

A historic fountain surrounded by two V-shaped stone walls is reimagined as a site of regeneration.

Inside the nearby stable, a sauna has been built. Light filters in through the structure's joints, creating a flickering, almost sacred atmosphere.

Outside, the public square becomes unexpectedly intimate. A cold pool has been dug next to the fountain. Other bathtubs are purposed for hand and foot bathing. The outdoor shower mimics a typical Swiss streetlamp.

Archival references include photos of children bathing in village fountains and the everyday use of farm infrastructure. Here, irony and tradition intertwine.

The body appears through absence: a bathing suit, wet footprints, a pair of sandals.

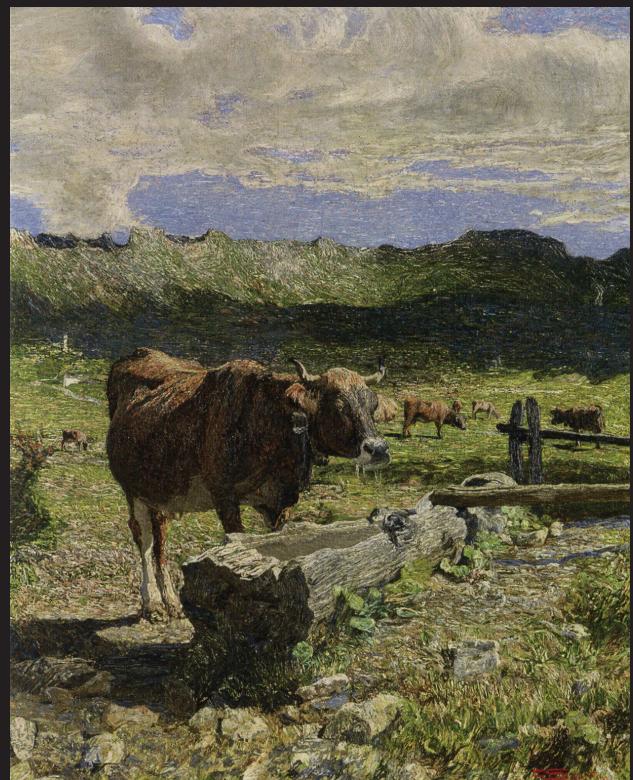
The scenographic tension plays with opposites – private / public, interior / exterior, animal / human – while gently reactivating collective memories.



BATHING WITH A SCENIC VIEW, SCHWIMMBAD GLARUS
Landesarchiv des Kt. GL / Schönwetter Film Nr. 119



FOUNTAIN BATHING, ENNENDA
Landesarchiv des Kt. GL



BOVINE DREAMS
Giovanni Segantini, Braune Kuh an der Tränke, 1892

ACT 5

exit if you can't handle dessert

"You are invited. The table is set, the wine is poured, the air already too thick.

There are no voices, but everything speaks. Plates shift, candles flicker, silverware prepares for war.

Somewhere behind the dresser: an escape route, just in case."

Interior view, double-height volume, filtered daylight. The space is an old industrial pump station: tall, raw walls stained with time. Wooden beams cross under the ceiling. Exposed pipes trace the edges. A large industrial fan hangs overhead, barely turning. The floor is tiled in green and white paving.

At the center: a long wooden dining table, carefully set for 8. Ceramic plates, silver cutlery, embroidered napkins. Candles, already melting. Wine glasses filled to the brim. But something is wrong.

The wine spills – slow and purposeful. A fork rotates, scratches a plate. One chair falls backwards. A napkin flutters to the floor. No one is seen. But the dinner unfolds like a storm.

Behind the table, an enormous wooden dresser dominates the wall. A green curtain divides the cabinet – slightly parted, suggesting passage. A small illuminated sign: emergency exit.

Backstage: a narrow corridor of enfilade rooms – kitchen, dressing area, bathroom. On the other side a door opens to a collective garden. Baroque hedges, fountains, the illusion of peace.

The intervention is set inside the pump station of Ennenda a tall, once-functional structure now reimagined as a theatrical kitchen and communal dining stage.

The room's double height and raw industrial shell contrast sharply with the intimate, bourgeois table setting and floor.

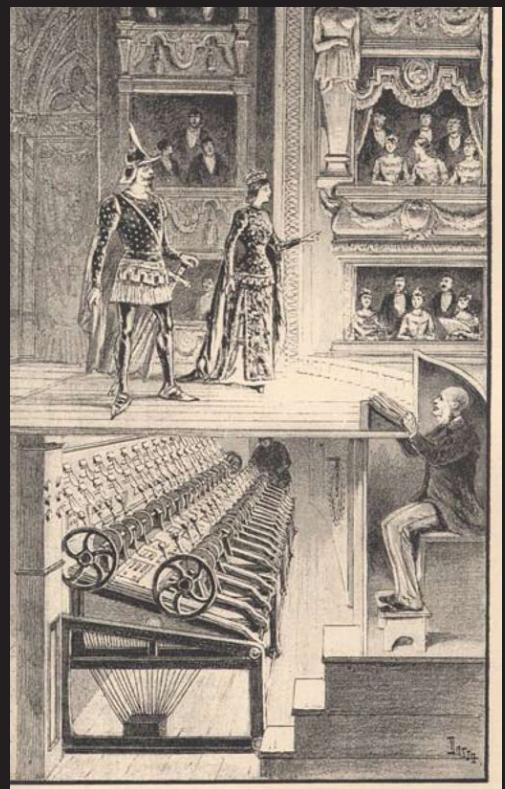
The central scenography revolves around a family dinner in permanent tension – captured through the movement of objects. The drama is relayed through visual choreography: spilled wine, collapsing silverware, candle decay.

A massive wooden sideboard, drawn from archival interior photos, becomes the key threshold. It marks the passage to the backstage. The exit through the dresser opens into a collective baroque garden, mimicking the architecture of urban palaces but ironically transplanted into rural domestic space. This garden becomes the potential "escape room" for guests who can't take the family tension – or for the audience itself.

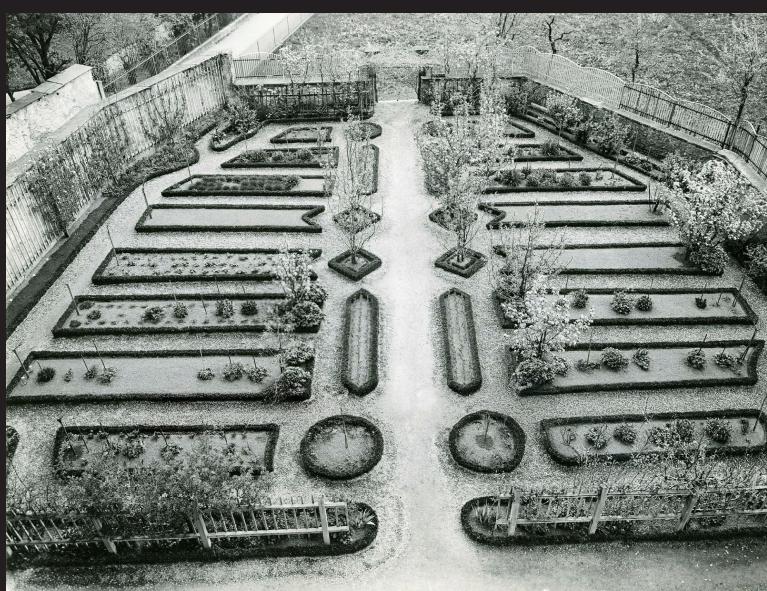
The piece critiques the performativity of domestic rituals, and the pressure to belong. Hospitality and hostility collapse into one another. And somewhere, offstage, someone breathes out, free.



MEMORY PORTAL CABINET, GASTSTUBE RESTAURANT STERNEN, ENNENDA
ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, Bildarchiv / Com_Ex-BA01-0141-0009-0001



SOUFFLEUR – IF YOU FORGET WHAT TO SAY
Georges Moynet, *Trucs et décors*, 1893



RESERVED SCALE PALACE GARDEN, GARTEN VON HAUS ZUR WIESE
Landesarchiv des Kantons Glarus / FOT 1.9.9-7