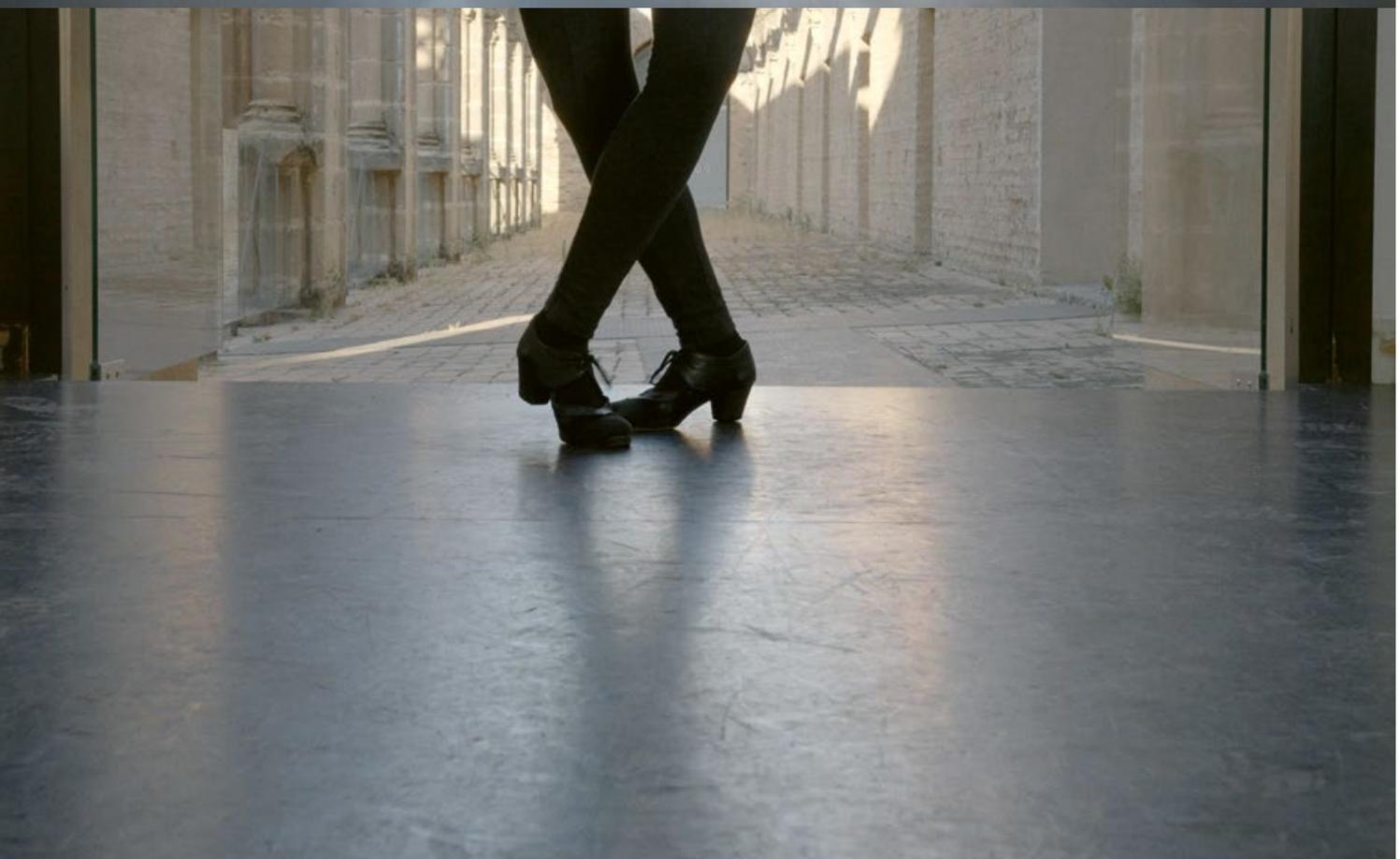




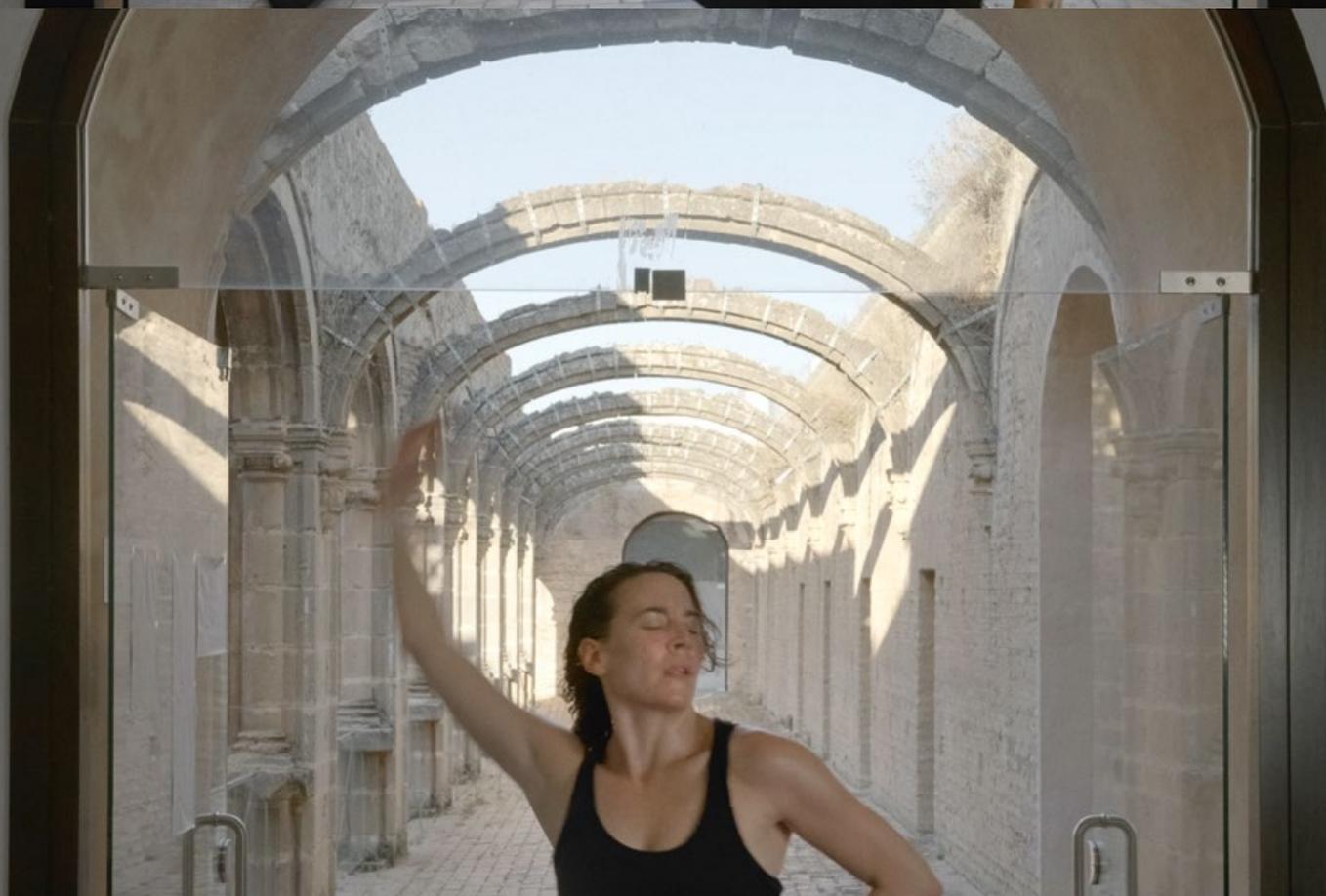
# Versifying Machines

INDICES, DISPOSITIVES, APPARATUS

PEDRO G. ROMERO



















# Versifying Machines

PEDRO G. ROMERO

*Las trabajadoras (Arriba-Al medio-Abajo)*

2021

(with Lucía Álvarez La Piñona, Javiera de la Fuente,  
and Fuensanta La Moneta)

Video, color, sound, 40:36 min.

àngels barcelona gallery



# Versifying Machines

INDICES, DISPOSITIVES, APPARATUS

PEDRO G. ROMERO





To put together a retrospective on an artist like Pedro G. Romero is undoubtedly a complex challenge. The Museo Reina Sofía has bravely taken it on in *Versifying Machines*, an exhibition that looks back over Romero's nearly forty-year career, highlighting the various aspects of his multidisciplinary practice and his singular and unclassifiable artistic "way of doing/making"—and of being. It is a practice that has revolved around generating multifaceted spaces of reflection and production in which "the collective," in the profound sense of the term, has a central role, and "modern art jargon," as he puts it, intertwines with critical theory, cultural studies, and flamenco. Pedro G. Romero addresses a range of issues that vary greatly, although they are all linked to the ideological use of images. He explores the interests that determine the visibility or invisibility of images, and the potential for activation in the political management of images by what he calls the "cultural classes."

This exhibition, which is both retrospective and creative, charts a chronological and discursive path through Pedro G. Romero's career. It ranges from the projects he produced in the second half of the 1980s and early 1990s to his current research and *dérives*, which are strongly influenced by his interest in the imaginaries of flamenco and popular culture, and it culminates with a new work created specifically for the occasion.

Based on the conviction that the aesthetic and political power of his "artistic operation" can only be understood through the lens of the dense network of relationships he has established, the exhibition also examines his work as critic, editor, producer, and curator, with special emphasis on his collaborations with key figures from the new generations of flamenco artists: from Israel Galván to Rosalía, by way of Rocío Márquez, Niño de Elche, and Tomás de Perrate.

Thus, *Versifying Machines* allows us to discover the different dimensions of Pedro G. Romero's body of work. It sheds light on the main themes that run through all his works and highlights the tools, strategies, and alliances that he draws on to bring it into being.

Finally, it should be noted that the exhibition has been produced as a result of an interinstitutional alliance, in which the Museo Reina Sofía has enjoyed the invaluable collaboration of the Comunidad de Madrid, and the support of the Biblioteca Nacional de España and the Museo Nacional del Prado. We would like to publicly express our sincere gratitude to these institutions.

Miquel Iceta i Llorens  
Minister of Culture and Sport



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## The Artist-Connector

*Manuel Borja-Villel*

Over the last few decades, there has been a proliferation of artistic practices based on the concept of community, the defense of the local, multidisciplinary creation, working with the archive, and activist assemblage. But in the tension between rupture and self-absorption that has taken hold in contemporary art since the middle of the twentieth century, these practices have often ended up functioning as preestablished positions stripped of their original critical power. One of our main reasons for presenting this retrospective exhibition—although as we shall see, this is not an entirely apt description of what we aspire to in *Versifying Machines*—is precisely Pedro G. Romero’s ability to work with all these elements while maintaining a political, methodological, and discursive complexity that allows him to circumvent this loss of critical power.

Active as an artist since the mid-1980s, Romero has developed a particular way of making/doing art that is radically “ex-centric” in its heterodoxy and its peripheral condition and intent, and that incorporates collective participation organically, in the sense that it accepts and integrates participatory dynamics and particularities. In his projects, collaborative work and an interdisciplinary approach are constituent elements rather than instrumental strategies or mere tools for (self-)legitimization. And he himself does not settle into a predefined position, but dialogues and openly negotiates with the very diverse agents with whose collaboration he carries them out. As such, Romero avoids falling into a sense of security, as sometimes happens with creators who work in the realm of community without bringing about any kind of real shift that would allow them to abandon and move beyond their role as artists.

On the other hand, the vernacular also plays a key role in Pedro G. Romero’s practice, which absorbs and explores a certain popular tradition—“that of folk singers and flamenco”—which has a distinct, albeit flexible, territorial dimension and is inseparable from his own personal history. The growing trend in contemporary art of generating projects rooted in local contexts, which call for a sort of politics of proximity, all too often ends up giving rise to a certain reactionary logic. This is not the case in Romero’s work because his focus on the vernacular over considerations of identity is based on a defense of jargon (of the notion of jargon itself, not of a particular jargon), in other words, of a way of speaking that evades the normative and deliberately situates itself on the margins, in a position of voluntary clandestinity.

Pedro G. Romero’s critical recovery of the vernacular entails a radical contestation of modernity itself. And thus also of the colonial machinery. It is a machinery that began to take shape with the arrival of Christopher Columbus in America in 1492, the very year—and this is no coincidence—in which Antonio de Nebrija published the first grammar of the Castilian language. Romero’s understanding of jargon could be

described as that which resists the standardization resulting from the implementation of a general grammar. And he works precisely in these spaces of resistance, of which flamenco is a paradigmatic example, generating completely new combinations between them—as when, in *A Throw of the Dice*,<sup>1</sup> he sets up a dialogue between Israel Galván’s flamenco dance and the conceptual art of another *flamenco*,<sup>2</sup> the Belgian Marcel Broodthaers, based on a poem by Mallarmé—and trying to loosen the dichotomous thought separating the popular and highbrow, the hegemonic and marginal, iconoclasm and iconophilia, as if they were irreconcilable realities.

Organized around the creation of process-based and designedly transdisciplinary hybrid artistic dispositives, Pedro G. Romero’s work rebels against not only aspirations to a fully autonomous art but also formalist relational aesthetics. In Romero’s case, relationality is about what Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, and other thinkers who are linked to so-called speculative realism or materialism<sup>3</sup> associate with theatricality. In other words, it is about activating artistic artifacts that establish an open interrelation with the reader/spectator and are conceived as works in progress, open to continual reworking and modification.

In this respect it should be noted that just as the collaborative-relational approach (often with an explicitly activist dimension) plays a fundamental role in Romero’s work, so does working with the archive. This is reflected in the two large-scale dispositives he has set up since the late 1990s: Archivo F.X., which revolves around the phenomenon of iconoclasm, and Máquina P.H., the matrix coordinating his research on the imaginaries of flamenco and popular culture. Steering clear of fetishistic or rhetorical uses of the archive (another of contemporary art’s new comfort zones), Romero is well aware of the arbitrary nature of any attempt at taxonomic classification. And this allows him to not shy away when creating the opaque—in the sense given to this term by French Antillean essayist Édouard Glissant<sup>4</sup>—endowing it with a certain enigmatic component. In ancient Greece, enigma was essentially a question answered with another question, which is in turn answered with another question... and so on and so forth, without ever reaching closure. This is, in a sense, what happens in Pedro G. Romero’s work. His defining condition is the *dérive*—indeed, Guy Debord is one of his touchstones—and as such he cannot ultimately be circumscribed or contained. This was very much on our minds as we imagined and designed this exhibition at the Museo Reina Sofía. For this reason, rather than a retrospective exhibition—which implies a certain linearity, a teleological reading that provides (or aspires to provide) a comprehensive overview of an artist—*Versifying*

<sup>1</sup> *A Throw of the Dice...*, Israel Galván, Pedro G. Romero, Filip Tacq, Museo Reina Sofía, 6 April 2019. An activity organized as part of the project *The Book to Come*, curated by Bulegoa z/b for *Corpus*, a network of performance practices, co-funded by the EU’s Creative Europe program (2014–17).

<sup>2</sup> A play on words, based on the fact that “flamenco” is also Spanish for “Flemish.”—Trans.

<sup>3</sup> Graham Harman, *Art and Objects* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

*Machines* has been conceived as a survey of Pedro G. Romero's work from a situated, specified present. To borrow the term used by Catherine David in Documenta X, it is a "retro-perspective,"<sup>5</sup> in which the logic of the *dérive* is integrated into the exhibition narrative.

In addition, in line with an idea that Pedro G. Romero himself foregrounds through his strong commitment to a decompartmentalized practice—in which his work as researcher, editor, producer, and curator is inseparable from his artistic practice—that is consciously connected to the social and cultural context it forms part of, we began with a firm conviction that it was necessary not to generate a mythologizing view of his work and his figure. To avoid reintroducing the notion of the artist as an individual genius through the back door, involuntarily contributing to its resacralization, we have adopted the idea proposed by Moroccan critic and writer Driss Ksikes of the artist as "connector."<sup>6</sup> An idea that ties in with the Deleuzian notion of "minor art"—which at this time of systemic crisis the art institution cannot and should not disregard—reveals the aesthetic and political power of Romero's particular way of doing/making, his determination to weave together and establish a hundred and one complications, "apparatus" for reflection and critical production—"versifying machines"—that are connected to the art field.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-François Chevrier and Catherine David, eds., *Politics-Poetics: Documenta X—The Book* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Driss Ksikes, "L'indisciplinarité de l'art," intervention

presented on September 16, 2020, at "Méditerranée, traits d'union?," a series of roundtable discussions held at the Institut d'Études Avancées d'Aix-Marseille (IMÉRA) as part of Manifesta 13 (Marseille).

Tomás de Perrate  
*Coplas de la defensora  
de Parla*. Unknown  
artist from Madrid, 1979.  
(*Canciones de la guerra  
social contemporánea*,  
2020)



Gabriel de la Tomasa  
*Coplas de las barricadas  
de Cádiz*. Unknown  
artist from Cadiz, 1977  
(*Canciones de la guerra  
social contemporánea*,  
2021)



EXCERPT FROM *THE METAPHYSICS*  
 OF JUAN DE MAIRENA  
 IN ANTONIO MACHADO'S  
*APOCRYPHAL SONGBOOK*

*Mairena:* So, my dear Meneses, what do you foresee for the future of lyric poetry?

*Meneses:* Soon the poet will have no choice but to put away his lyre and devote himself to other things.

*Mairena:* Do you think so?...

*Meneses:* I am talking about the lyric poet. Individual feeling, better still: the individual core of feeling, which is in every man's heart, is starting to lose its appeal, and it will continue to do so. From the Romantic decline to our own times (the age of symbolism), modern lyric poetry has become a somewhat excessive luxury of Manchester man, of bourgeois individualism, based on private property. The poet parades his heart with the boastfulness of the newly wealthy man flaunting his mansions, his carriages, his horses, and his mistresses. The poet's heart, so rich in tones, is almost an insult to the tone-deaf ear of the masses who are enslaved by mechanical labor. Lyric poetry always originates in the central area of the psyche, which is where feelings are located. There is no true poetry without feeling. But feeling must be general as well as individual, because even though there is no such thing as a generic heart that feels on everyone's behalf, and each man carries his own heart and feels with it, all feeling is directed at values that are, or aspire to be, universal. When the radius of feeling is reduced and confined to the isolated, bounded self, off-limits to others, it becomes impoverished and ends up ringing false. Such is bourgeois feeling, a failure, it seems to me; such is the result of romantic sentimentalism. Ultimately, there is no true feeling without sympathy; mere sentiment does not have a heartfelt function, or an aesthetic one. A solitary heart—as someone or other said, Mr. Platitude perhaps—is not a heart; because no one feels anything unless he feels with another, with others... why not with everyone?

*Mairena:* With everyone! Careful, Meneses!

*Meneses:* Yes, I understand. Like a good bourgeois, you believe in the myth of the elite, which is the most plebeian myth of all. You are a snob.

*Mairena:* Thank you.

*Meneses:* You think that if you feel with everyone, you will be swallowed by a crowd, by an anonymous mass. The opposite is true. But let's not digress. There is a crisis of feeling that will affect poetry, and its causes are very complex. The poet tries to sing of himself because he finds no themes of universal communion, of true feeling. Concomitant with the collapse of romantic ideology, a whole world of feeling has been destroyed. It is very unlikely that a new generation will continue to listen to our songs. Because what goes on in the little corner of your heart that feels, which is starting to be incommunicable, will end up being nothing. A new poetry requires a new type of feeling, which in turn requires a new set of values. A patriotic anthem will move us provided our homeland is something we value, otherwise the anthem will seem empty, false, trivial, or tacky. We are starting to attribute insincerity to those declamatory romantics, men who pretend to feel things that they have perhaps not experienced. But we are being unfair. It is not that they do not feel these things, but that we cannot feel along with them. I don't know if you can understand this, my dear Mairena.

*Mairena:* Yes, I understand. But don't you believe some form of intellectual poetry is possible?

*Meneses:* That seems to me as absurd as the idea of sentimental geometry or emotional algebra. Perhaps it is what the disciples of French Symbolism might achieve. Mallarmé already had within himself the dark scholar who could attempt it. But this road leads nowhere.

*Mairena:* So what is to be done, Meneses?

*Meneses:* We must wait for the new values. In the meantime, to pass the time, as a little game, I will start up my poetic mechanical organ, my "versifying machine." The purpose of my modest apparatus is not to substitute or supplant the poet (although it could easily replace and improve on the teacher of rhetoric), but to objectively measure the emotional or affective state of a human group, large or small, just as a thermometer registers the temperature, or a barometer registers atmospheric pressure.

*Mairena:* You mean quantitatively?

*Meneses:* No. My device does not use numbers or translate the ambient poetry into quantitative language. Rather, it gives us its entirely objective, unindividuated expression in the form of a sonnet, a madrigal, a *jácara*, or a *rondeau*, which the machine composes and recites to the astonishment and applause of all who hear it. All who are listening will recognize the song produced by the machine as their own, even though none would have been capable of composing it. It will be the song of any human group before which the machine operates. For example, at a gathering of drunks, lovers of *cante jondo*, in the somewhat serious revelry of Andalusian men on a night out, the device will register the dominant emotion and translate it into four essential lines, which are its poetic equivalent. At a political assembly or a meeting

of soldiers, moneylenders, teachers, or sportsmen, it will produce a different but no less essential song. What the machine will never give us is an individual's song, even a very typified individual, as in: "the executioner's song." On the other hand, it will give us, if we choose, the song about those who enjoy watching capital executions, etc., etc....

*Mairena:* And how does this poetic mechanical organ or singing machine work?

*Meneses:* It is very complicated and difficult to explain without a visual aid. Besides, that is my secret. Be content, for now, to know what it does.

*Mairena:* What about its operation?

*Meneses:* It is easier to operate than a typewriter. This kind of phonograph-piano has a keyboard divided into three sections: positive, negative, and hypothetical. Its phonograms are words, rather than letters. The group for which the machine is operating chooses, by majority vote, the noun which it considers to be most essential at that moment. For example, *man*, and its logical, biological, emotive, or whatever, counterpart, in this case, *woman*. The verb used in all three sections—except when the operator deliberately replaces it—is always the verb *to be* in its three forms: *to be*, *to not be*, *to be able to be*, or rather: *is*, *is not*, *could be*. In other words, the verb in its positive-ontological, negative-divine, and hypothetical-human forms. So you see that the machine already has the crucial elements for creating a stanza: *is a man*, *is not a man*, *could be a man*, *is a woman*, etc., etc. The most logical words to rhyme (in Spanish) are *hombre* (man) and *mujer* (woman), which rhymes with *puede ser* (it could be). Only the word *hombre* remains without a rhyme. So, of the consonants, the operator chooses the phonogram that sounds most similar to *hombre*, which is *nombre* (name). Combining these elements, the operator tries out one or more stanzas, by trial and error, with the help of his audience. And it starts like this: *They say* (the subject is usually impersonal) *a man is not a man*.

This inherently contradictory statement is produced mechanically as a result of the noun *man* moving from the first to the second section of the keyboard. My device is not a thinking machine like Lull's is. It registers life experiences, feelings, and desires, and its contradictions can only be solved psychologically, not logically. That is how the operator must approach it, using the only two elements that are still available to him: *name* and *woman*. And this is when the noun *name* comes into play. The operator must place it in the most essential relation to *man* and *woman*, which could be either: the *name of a man* spoken by a *woman*, or *the name of a woman* spoken by a *man*. We now have the structure of two possible lines of poetry to express a very basic feeling in a male gathering: the absence of the woman, which gives us the psychological reason that explains the logical contradiction of the first line. A man is not a man (he is insufficiently so) for a group that defines manliness in terms of the sexes, either because of the lack of a woman's name—the name of the beloved, which each man can speak—or the absence of a woman on whose lips each man's name can be heard.

## RUNNING HEAD

For the sake of brevity, let's say that the mechanical organ gives us this stanza: "They say a man is not a man / until he hears his name / from a woman's lips. / It could be."

This "it could be" is not mere padding, a pointless afterthought, or an empty end of the stanza. It comes from the third part of the keyboard, and the operator could have omitted it. But he leaves it in, at the urging of those present, who, after a moment's introspection, find in these words an expression of their feeling. Once the stanza is produced, it may be sung in unison.

\* \* \*

In the prologue of his *Mechanical Verses*, Mairena heaps praise on Meneses's device. According to Mairena, the mechanical instrument is one way, among others, to rationalize lyric poetry without lapsing into baroque conceptualism. The sayings, reflections, and aphorisms contained in his verses are inevitably linked to human feeling. The poet, inventor, and operator of this mechanical device is a researcher, a collector of basic emotions. He is a kind of "folklorist," an impassive creator of popular songs, never lapsing into a pastiche of the popular. He disregards his own feelings but records those of his fellow man, and then (seeing them recorded objectively on his device) he recognizes in himself the same human feeling. His machine is neither long-winded nor pedantic, and it can even be full of surprises, registering strange emotional phenomena. It goes without saying that its value, like that of other mechanical inventions, is more didactic or pedagogical than aesthetic. In short, the *versifying machine* can entertain the masses and start teaching them to express their own feelings, while awaiting the arrival of the new poets, the singers of a new sensibility.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN  
*JOAQUÍN VÁZQUEZ &*  
*PEDRO G. ROMERO*

ANNOTATED BY  
*ANDREA SOTO CALDERÓN,*  
*VALENTÍN ROMA &*  
*ISABEL DE NAVERÁN*

# THE POPULAR

*(On Songs of the Contemporary Social War,  
The New Babylonians, and What Exile  
Teaches Us)*

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* In times of social and political emergence, the people make their presence felt and there is a surge of popular culture. But given that the people and popular culture cannot remain in a permanent state of heightened tension and activity, to what extent does your work seek to highlight, reinstate, and above all activate those moments by replicating, reclaiming, and recontextualizing the one-off explosions that released energies and produced fractures and new openings? Is it in this sense that your work can be read as anachronic?

I

*Pedro G. Romero:* I prefer the term anachronistic, that is, the condition of being able to inhabit or occupy several times simultaneously: a condition inherent to the work of art, which sets art apart from other ways of doing things, such as those of the sciences or of history, for example. In fact, art—what we have taken to be art at least since Giotto—has to do with acknowledging the anachronistic potential in certain signs and ways of doing. In this sense, what you refer to in your question may even have to do with a clash between the two notions of “the people”: the major one, which equates the people with the nation, and a minor one, which refers to excluded groups, minorities, the plebs. It isn’t that I intentionally set out to do what you suggest in your question, but rather that so-called popular arts—particularly what I know about flamenco—do just that, maintaining the minor tone, a constant breaking and opening up. Deleuze thought of it as resistance. It actually uses a strange strategy, there is resistance, but also dissolution, camouflage, discretion, secrecy... I’m thinking of marranism, in which we clearly see the workings of many of the gestures of what we still call popular culture, and yes, of flamenco too. Of course, I can only hope that some of this way of doing things has rubbed off on my work, if only!

### Andrea Soto Calderón:

To contest history itself as a hegemonic agent of the management of the past, of our personal and collective memories, and of the servitudes this creates, presupposes a staging of its material culture. In other words, a staging of the clash with the contradictions of the time in which the events took place. A creator, says Gilles Deleuze, twists language and makes it vibrate, seizes it and rends it in order to wrest the percepts from perceptions, the affect from affections, the sensation from opinion.<sup>1</sup> He creates for “a people to come.”

To distort history is to break the illusion of a continuous link. Michel Foucault argued that the “problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits.”<sup>2</sup> The idea is to question the unstable ground on which our knowledge is built, to show that this “positive ground” or alleged foundation is in reality a ground made up of rifts, instabilities, and flaws, and that “it is this same ground that is once more stirring under our feet.”<sup>3</sup> In fact, quite a few cultures still enjoy narratives that are not meaning-oriented.<sup>4</sup> The recovery of those creative energies also entails exploring the role images may play in interrupting the continuum that is supposedly the natural order of things: the image as a point of resistance to time. And this work also consists of shaking up the structures that imaginaries have settled into. Images are a mode of organization of everyday life and it is no accident that institutions—to constitute their own power—need to regulate the power of images, by both banning them and controlling their production. The desire to see and to show is inseparable from the desire to know and to create. As Marie-José Mondzain says, when you control images, you control desire.

### Valentín Roma:

We should perhaps think of the political emergence not just as an epiphany at which the popular appears, but also as a kind of “settling of scores” between the symbolic and its representations. Think of Pasolini’s literature, for example, his fetishization of the people as the great custodians of what we could call a dysangelic mission that consists of embodying pain first, then truth, and finally, revolution. And compare this “poetics” to some later writers who were part of the cycle of dissent of 1977. For instance, Nanni Balestrini’s books, especially *We Want Everything* (1971)<sup>1</sup> and even *Blackout* (1980),<sup>2</sup> in which he tries to bring a kind writing—not literature—to the working class, creating a rhapsodic, interrupted expository device, which emerges from newspaper headlines, assembly proclamations, and police reports.

If we compare Pasolini’s literary images of the people with the militant speech that Balestrini puts into the mouths of workers, we see that something is being adjusted in both cases: two political emergences giving rise, on the one hand, to an imaginary of “the popular,” and, on the other, to a cacophony that leads to a portrayal of the people. And for the record, I am not accusing Pasolini of literaturizing the proletariat. Nor am I suggesting that Balestrini’s position is laudably genuine. I am only trying to say that whenever literature has taken the people as its protagonist, it has not only had to come to terms with a language, but, above all, it has had to ask itself what it means to use that language. To put it in ideologically melodramatic terms: when literature paid attention to the people, it had to face up to the public responsibilities that a writer takes on when speaking on behalf of the popular.

<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 167; originally published as *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 3; originally published as *L’archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961).

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xxiv; originally published as *Les Mots et les Choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

<sup>4</sup> Rather than attempting to find the origin and inscription of linear descriptions, origin can be understood as a fissure, an “efficient abruptness” capable of opening up an event. The past loses its stability as a temporal parameter, revealing that it actually relies on a memory—that is, on an impure organization of time—and on knowledge. See Jacques Rancière, “Le concept d’anachronisme et la vérité de l’historien,” *L’Inactuel*, no. 6 (1996): 53–68.

<sup>1</sup> Nanni Balestrini, *Vogliamo tutto* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1971); Eng.: *We Want Everything*, trans. Matt Holden (London: Verso, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Nanni Balestrini, *Blackout* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1980); Eng.: *Blackout*, trans. Peter Valente (Oakland: Commune Editions, 2017).

*Isabel de Naverán:*

## [Anachronism]

During a public conversation I heard Pedro say that, in his work, “flamenco is a medium for seeing.”

It left me thinking about the coincidence of the use of the word “medium” in another statement that was on my mind at the time, in this case by Walter Benjamin: “Memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium.”<sup>1</sup> It appears in a short essay entitled “Excavating and Remembering,” which Benjamin did not publish in his lifetime. I had recently noticed that some translations<sup>2</sup> had chosen the word “theater” instead of “memory,” as in: “Memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theater.” Consequently I thought, “flamenco is a theater for seeing.”

I was ordering these ideas in my mind as I listened to Pedro talk about what he calls the “anachronistic hole” that runs through everything he does. And what he does is both centrifugal and centripetal, spinning inward like a vortex while also expanding, sweeping, integrating, and drawing in other meanings (and many people) that adhere and circle around it, in order to decenter it, to move it off its axis, giving rise to a kind of productive dizziness. An indisputably physical state, dizziness, that entails a restructuring of the senses, but does not necessarily entail disorientation.

This way of doing things with the past and the present, with the periphery and the center, is not out of step with the times, and it is not random. Rather, it follows an

intentionally anachronistic method, in the sense that, as Pedro himself notes above, he tries to inhabit several times simultaneously. And, I would add, to see in-between-times, the flow of ideologies through ways of staging and learned gestures.

To observe the theater of the past, the theater of memory, “must therefore yield an image of the person who remembers, in the same way a good archaeological report not only informs us about the strata from which its findings originate, but also gives an account of the strata which first had to be broken through.”<sup>3</sup> It is sometimes said that the body does not lie, as if to say that the body (which is understood to be separate from the mind) holds a truth. And perhaps it does hold a truth, or at least it establishes a fact: the fact that we are made up of history, of techniques, of apprehended, incorporated relationships, and that the body is a place of emergence of history and ideology, an ideology that circulates in our movements, because we are bodily archives, *somatheques*. So, remembering implies distancing oneself, acknowledging the theater of memory, and accepting the ground shifting beneath one’s feet as a result.

This is where the power of the capacity to blur one’s edges, to inhabit the boundaries of appearance and disappearance, becomes apparent. Theater, not as a metaphorical window or as the framing of a fixed, visible scene, but as the possibility of activating an anachronistic approach that allows us to enter a state from which to see, to look. And to stop seeing too: to perceive through other senses. To see and to stop seeing, to occupy an edge. Similar to what is happening with the Neanderthal footprints that recently appeared<sup>4</sup> on Matalascañas beach, in the province of Huelva.

Scientists are trying to figure out what a group of people, apparently made up mostly of women and children, were doing there. Their footsteps come and go along a particular stretch of seashore. Footprints that only became visible after the forced lockdown of spring 2020, when no one looked at or set foot in that geographical area. The geology of this landscape was revealed unseen, and is now being covered up to the rhythm of the tides, which are hindering the work of paleontologists. The articles published speak of the difficulty of studying these footprints due to the erosive action of salt water and sand. As a result, some of the footprints that had been detected and classified are being hidden for a time under the water and sand, transforming them, while others that had not been taken into account are discovered anew. It is as though they were alive. As though those who made the footprints thousands of years ago were still calmly coming

<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Excavation and Memory” (ca. 1932), in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 2: 1927–1934, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 576; originally published as “Ausgraben und Erinnern,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4.1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin included this same reflection on the relationship between language, memory, and medium or theater in two texts: “Excavating and Remembering” and “Berlin Chronicle.” I found the reference to theater in the English translation of “Berlin Chronicle”: “Language shows clearly that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theater.” See Walter Benjamin, “Berlin Chronicle,” in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: New Left Books, 1979), 314. I find it interesting the way it was translated into Spanish in the 1996 Alianza edition: “El lenguaje ha supuesto inequívocamente que la consciencia no sea un instrumento para explorar el pasado, sino su escenario.” (Language has unequivocally meant that consciousness is not an instrument for exploring the past but its stage.) See Walter Benjamin, “Crónica de Berlín,” in *Escritos Autobiográficos*, trans. Teresa Rocha Barco (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin, “Excavation and Memory,” 141.

<sup>4</sup> In June 2020; see David Miranda, “Los neandertales pisaron Doñana hace 106.000 años,” *National Geographic España*, March 24, 2021, [https://www.nationalgeographic.com.es/ciencia/neandertales-pisaron-donana-hace-106000-anos\\_16365](https://www.nationalgeographic.com.es/ciencia/neandertales-pisaron-donana-hace-106000-anos_16365).

and going, indifferent to the studies that are trying to place them at a specific moment in the historical timeline. Coming and going, calmly. Indeed, photographs show that the footprints do not follow a clear path, they wander here and there, aimlessly, or in multiple directions. There are different degrees of pressure and weight, the impact on the ground varies. Sometimes only a heel can be made out, other times it looks like a toe. Heel-toe, heel-toe, forward-back, to the side, apparently in pairs or groups. They appear to have been engaged in something that seems precise but does not resemble the functional trajectories of nomadism, traveling, or hunting. Or at least not exactly, it doesn't quite fit. And the fact that they are so near the sea, just on the shore, precisely at the line that joins and separates sea from land, swimming out of walking; and the fact that alongside these hominid footprints scientists have discovered the tracks of different types of animals, of land and air, suggests that they many have coexisted in an inter-species, inter-environment world, from salt water to sand, from sand to air and to surf. Just as the coastline shifts and changes shape, these bodies come and go, letting themselves be seen and unseen.

Many press reports and scientific articles have been published on this recent discovery. A particularly evocative one ventures to suggest that the footsteps belong to a group of children dancing on the shore. Dancing happily, I imagine them laughing, the kind of laughter that can be heard up and down the beach, that merges with the sound of seagulls. Children jumping in the foam, getting their feet wet or splashing each other, as children do. I imagine them playing and dancing. Going from dance to play, and from play to dance.

The geology of a similar beach near this one, San Miguel beach in Almería, may have inspired Federico García Lorca to write his poem "San Miguel" in which he says, "the sea dances on the beach."<sup>5</sup> The sea, on the shore, affects the rock surface, turning it into sand. Made of water and salt, it seems to continue to ripple on solid ground, just as our bodies navigate between surfaces and forms of life, opening up the space of time, provoking a choreography of anachronistic inscriptions and connections that speak to us.

We must read the marine composition of these corporealities in order to attend to the water that flows through the veins of history and invites us to immerse ourselves in it. Or, instead, listen when "[the water] turns cold / so no one touches it," as a line of the same poem says.

The poem resonates as do the footprints at Matalascañas, which appear to have come to speak. They come to reveal and be seen, to veil and be unseen, in a to-ing and fro-ing. Like the dance that, in its apparent joy and happiness, refuses to be pinned down and fixed by chronology. Instead it moves through times that do not correspond, but do seem to respond to each other, to overlap, to contain each other. Dancing can be read as an act that disposes bodies to contagion, to disrupting the established continuity and molecular transformation, generating a multiplicity of edged spaces, full of life and uncertainty.

Dance, like song, is shaped like a story, the tale of a people that passes from one body to another, and is learned through imitation and repetition. A minor history that is incorporated and that is not just movement, as it is not just sound.

<sup>5</sup> Federico García Lorca, "San Miguel (Granada)," in *Romancero gitano* (Madrid: Edición de la Revista de Occidente, 1928).

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* In issue 5 of the publication *Desacuerdos*, of which you are the editor, you included a text by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, translated to Spanish for the first time. Do you agree with their claim that “what is socially peripheral is so frequently symbolically central”?<sup>1</sup> Did this conviction give rise to your interest in studying and understanding popular cultures, particularly in applying their ways of doing and operating to your own work, given that it is there that their force and their power of seduction resides?

II

*Pedro G. Romero:* That is certainly a brilliant text. I often speak about the status of flamenco as something that can be both marginal and hegemonic, how do they manage it? In Spain—obviously in Andalusia—on the one hand, it is a kind of badge displayed by politicians who like to brag: flamenco as an element of national identity. And, at the same time, it is the excluded *gitanos*, junkies and criminals, the migrant lumpen, subaltern bohemia, intellectual precariat, circulating through this purportedly central imaginary. So I think, also, that the *modus operandi* of flamenco—and if you like mine too—can, or should be able to, dissolve that idea of there being a territorial center and periphery. Deterritorializing sometimes involves intensifying that tension, keeping alive the contradiction of being center and periphery at the same time, until it gives, holes appear at various points, and it becomes possible to act without a precise center and periphery.

<sup>1</sup> Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 5.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

The history of sensible perception—of *aisthesis*—is a materialist history. In other words, the way in which human perception is organized—the medium in which it takes place—is not only conditioned by nature but also by history. In fact, the very events that are left out of political representation, out of the semantic side of meaning, are often the ones that, through concrete material gestures, construct modes of experience and nonexistent sensible communities

The tension imposed by the life force opens up an undefined capacity that confers form and at the same time remains formless. The performances of care are geologically related fields, modes, and extensions that are conditioned by their uses, not by what they represent. This is what gives rise to their symbolic power.

For the people, no power is a given. They are expected in certain places: in the repetition of the same thing over and over. The greater the stabilization through regulation, the greater the subordination. However, their fight for survival takes place in their ability to blur boundaries. In their material imagination, which is always a reworking of remains, of fragments, of accidents that arise in new forms of contact: from the edges of appearance that are always also the edges of the threat of disappearance; from the moments of indecision and indeterminacy that exist in every situation.

The capacity to express the vibration or force of deindividuation gives the power of fiction back to the impersonal power of the imagination. Imagination does not belong to me, I do not create or emit it, it exists between us. Fiction is not the opposite of the real, or somewhere to project a meaning, but an exercise, sometimes a game, that enables a place of existence through which to enter a legitimized order. And then go beyond it, creating its own scene. That is why Marx says the lumpen is what proliferates as virtuality that cannot be subsumed by modes of production. Being immanent to them, it does not belong to any of them, but rather grows among them and destabilizes them.

*Valentín Roma:*

The categories of center and periphery, with their respective semantic fields, seem to be a thing of the past, or at least they appear to be clearly integrated into the literary system. Consider the Spanish case. There were fears over how the 15-M movement would affect the state of fiction. It was said that society was returning to ideology, that young people—as consumers and producers of literature—would perhaps modify the book market, where entropy was trending. But in retrospect, if there is such a thing as post-15-M literature, it is nothing other than the most indulgent autofiction! In other words, the transformation of the self into a commodity, the apotheosis of middle-class sentimentality, the launching of a thousand rhetorical questions without a single political response. There are hundreds of books that recount what is happening on the streets, the *cani* aesthetic, and all the rest. But they rarely portray people who work in a factory, as security guards, or caring for the elderly. And if they do, it is because they are picturesque, or amusing, or for their slang. I honestly don't think there has ever before been as much writing about “the people” and the periphery in Spain, even though the protagonists of all these novels are university students parading their woes in metropolitan settings.

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* Did your interest in popular cultures lead to your fascination with the important role played in them—in their construction and development—by classes, groups, and communities that have no political interaction or representation, such as bohemians, *flamencos*, queers, *gitanos*, internal and external exiles, and so on?

*Pedro G. Romero:* Yes, that's right, and it has to do with what I said earlier. In that tension, there is an inversion of symbolic capital and political capital. This question is never far from my mind, and it disturbs me. In modern republics, in representative democracies, symbolic capital emerges from groups with no political representation. This is evident in cases of popular representation: Black culture in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States; the Roma in Spain, Hungary, and Russia. But it also applies to the lumpen, criminal cultures, prostitution, non-normative sexuality. All the things that lack political representation hypertrophy with an excess of symbolic representation. So what happens when they become emancipated? What changes should occur during emancipation when these "minority" agents achieve political representation? It is happening with feminism, with the expansion of the LGTBI acronym..., etcetera. The culture wars that are taking place within these minorities/majorities also have to do with this loss of symbolic representation in pursuit of greater political effectiveness. It is the opposite of what is thought to happen when they are symbolically abused in institutional propaganda, advertising, fashion, etcetera. This paradox tends to explode. It is a very interesting tension that shakes certainties, rightness, safety. At least I believe we need to figure out how to operate with this permanent earthquake under our feet.

III

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

We should also consider the extent to which it may be necessary to challenge the distinction between popular culture and highbrow culture, or high and low culture, because it implies that there are ways of doing things that are characteristic of the popular classes. It is, in a sense, an essentialization of “the popular.” It is as though the working class, the peripheries, the lower classes, had some kind of ontological lack in their impossible stability, recognizing themselves as a group in that lower-middle-class stratum that watches television, listens to popular music, and knows itself to be part of the largest sociological sector of the population.

As if there were certain tastes, forms of life, and languages that do not belong to the so-called popular classes, that are not theirs. As if there is a way of being, of looking, and of speaking that is natural and typical of the people. Historical excess has always resulted in a backlash of the authenticity of the popular. As a subject, the popular is locked into a circle: things can no longer be anything other than what they already are, those who are dominated cannot lose their identity because they would run the enormous risk of being declassed. But worker culture has always refused to embrace the culture supposedly assigned to it by dint of social position. Cornelius Castoriadis writes, “From 1800 to 1840, the English proletariat *achieved literacy almost entirely on its own*, cut short its already brief evenings and its Sundays in order to learn how to read and write, and cut into its miserable earnings in order to buy books, newspapers, and candles.... They read Thomas Paine, Voltaire, or Volney.... Through its own making/doing, the working class took up the tools and contents of the existing culture, and they conferred upon them a new signification.”<sup>1</sup> Here, Castoriadis describes the cultural, sensible, and aesthetic struggle by which the English proletariat subverted its material impoverishment.<sup>2</sup> In the 1930s, Antonio Gramsci in Italy and José Carlos Mariátegui in Peru explored the reactionary side of popular culture. Gramsci showed us that popular forces contain impulses that are both reactionary and emancipatory.

*Valentín Roma:*

I don’t know how to put it without sounding reactionary, but when I read certain literary works that appeal prescriptively to “the dispossessed,” one of the questions that comes to mind is how much vulnerability some people need to prove a theory to themselves. Because although there is a political attack on misnamed “minority sectors,” in seizing ideological centrality they leave in their wake a series of stories that sometimes have a heroic and quite traditional literary structure, with their corresponding dose of happy endings, their handbook of quick fixes. The usual cheap holidays in other people’s misery, to borrow the title of the book published by Julián Rodríguez in 2004.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Question of the History of the Workers’ Movement,” in *Political and Social Writings*, vol. 3: 1961–1979, trans. and ed. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 190; originally published as *L’Expérience du mouvement ouvrier*, vol. 1: *Comment lutter* (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> For more on this reflection on a critique of class-based cultural essentialism, see Antonio Gómez Villar, *Los olvidados. Ficción de un proletariado inexistente* (Barcelona: Bellaterra, forthcoming).

<sup>1</sup> Julián Rodríguez, *Unas vacaciones baratas en la miseria de los demás* (Barcelona: Caballo de Troya, 2004).

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* In his text for this catalogue, Georges Didi-Huberman suggests that flamenco music can perhaps be associated with the persecution of the Roma people. If music is understood as an emblematic, constituent element of racial difference, to what extent do you think this recognition serves as a mechanism that compensates for the exclusion of that community? To what extent does the recognition of this language by a community as its own make up for its exclusion from others—such as writing and the visual arts—and even from modern political society?

*Pedro G. Romero:* The thing is that flamenco was actually constructed at a time of *gitanophilia* rather than *gitanophobia*. The persecution of the Roma people is certainly true, and it is true that every era has found ways of excluding and persecuting them. But I'm referring to the time when the meaning of "the people" and the populace was incorporated into the symbolic imaginary—after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic invasions—at that very emergence, "emprinciando"<sup>1</sup> the nineteenth century, as José Manuel Gamboa says, when what we would end up calling flamenco was born. And there, in a current of *gitanophilia* related to what in France and England would become bohemia—a term that, incidentally, referred to the Roma gypsy way of life—the gypsies in the Roma sense of the word and in the Germanic sense of the word, that is, the petty criminal classes and the lumpen classes (as the Marxists used to say) made up the social base of what would become flamenco. Again, an interesting contradiction, with the two opposing operations, *gitanophilia* and *gitanophobia*, operating at the same time.

On the other hand, the fact that popular, non-written types of music are assigned to these "minority" groups has a lot to do with what Pepe Bergamín wrote about in "La decadencia del analfabetismo" (The Decline of Illiteracy).<sup>2</sup> And their relationship with the real, with the truth—unmediated by writing that represents them—leads to a certain naturalization, closer to wildness, closer to the song of the nightingale than to a Bach score.

It is a very specific historical phenomenon that progressed and became enmeshed in the development of the cultural industries, in the technical reproduction of music and its central role in the consumer and leisure industry. But it also conceals the fact that these methods of making music were accompanied by visual imagery, literature, theatricalities, urban rituals, and so on. Rewriting art history also involves taking this silenced legacy on board.

## IV

<sup>1</sup> A play on words combining the Spanish words *empezar* "to start" and *principiar* "to commence."

<sup>2</sup> José Bergamín, "La decadencia del analfabetismo," *Cruz y Raya* (Madrid), no. 3 (June 1933).

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

- So you advise me to listen to music as one listens to the rain falling?
- That's right: with the utmost attention.

José Bergamín, *El cohete y la estrella*  
(The Rocket and the Star)<sup>1</sup>

“The reason with which our feet dance.... Music was one of those rare ways of constructing thought that could move freely.”<sup>2</sup>

*Valentín Roma:*

Along these lines, an image that may contribute something: a poem by C. K. Williams (who was fascinated by flamenco and even wrote a somewhat mediocre poem about it, although he is exceptional poet). In “The Singing” (2003),<sup>1</sup> C. K. Williams—who spent some time living in Spain and studied guitar—wrote about his encounter with a young Black man who was rapping as he walked along the street. When he noticed the poet, he said the word “Big,” and C. K. Williams, thinking he was referring to his height, smiled at him. The young man’s song changed: “I’m not a nice person’ he chanted ‘I’m not / I’m not a nice person,’” and C. K. Williams realized that there was in fact no concord between them—“In the duet we composed the equation we made the conventions to which we were condemned.”

<sup>1</sup> José Bergamín, *El cohete y la estrella* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Índice, 1923).

<sup>2</sup> Jorge Sanz Barajas, “Como quien oye llover. El pensamiento musical de José Bergamín,” in “José Bergamín, el esqueleto de la paradoja,” *Revista Archipiélago*, no. 46 (2001): 47–48.

<sup>1</sup> C. K. Williams, “The Singing,” in *The Singing* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 4–5.

# Versifying Machines

INDICES, DISPOSITIVES, APPARATUS

(Freedom of movement) *I often say that I don't know what freedom is, but as in so many other things, my strongest argument is no more than an allegory, that of puppet strings: the more there are, the greater the freedom.*  
Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, *Campo de retamas*, 2012–15

Since Pedro G. Romero (b. 1964, Aracena, Huelva) began to work as an artist in the mid-1980s, his projects have assumed a particular, singular, even eccentric place, although he has not by any means sought to stand alone or follow an individual path. His *modus operandi*—beyond simple labels such as collective, cooperative, and sociable—has consisted of contriving indices, dispositives, apparatus, in short, machines associated with the field of art.

This exhibition presents a compilation of many of these machines, the models of which are the cyborg, Wolfgang von Kempelen's chess-playing automaton—"The Turk," in which, according to Walter Benjamin, theology was hidden within historical materialism—and, principally, Jorge Meneses's "versifying machine," described by Juan de Mairena in *Coplas mecánicas* (Mechanical Verses), a magnificent explication by Sevillian poet Antonio Machado. This versifying machine is a modern, avant-garde machine, in the tradition of Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés* and of the experiments and experiences of the Futurists and the Dadaists. Machado links it to a certain popular approach to culture, typical of troubadours, of flamenco, and of the songbook of Manuel Balmaseda, the unschooled, illiterate author who carried in his memory hundreds of flamenco lyrics and made them appear at will using his own mnemonic method.

Thus, since the late 1990s Pedro G. Romero has worked on two of these large apparatus: the Archivo F.X. and the Máquina P.H. Through them, he carries out projects in which he explores historical events, the life and circulation of images, sacramental iconography, the iconoclastic gesture of the twentieth-century artistic avant-gardes and of modern art, flamenco, ideas and imaginaries of popular culture, the economy, cultural policies, forms of urban speculation, etcetera.

The intention is not simply to revisit a series of commonplaces such as Conceptual Art, relational art, and lumpen productivism. It is all of that, but it is also an attempt to break away from the modern art academy, not by excluding it, but by incorporating other idioms: those of critical theory, cultural studies, and flamenco. The works presented here show that there is no natural, original, or national voice, but only ways of speaking, ways of looking, and ways of doing, and that all these ways are interconnected, entangled, and intertwined.

*Versifying Machines* is a chronological overview of Pedro G. Romero's work that moves backward from the present—*El Sacco* (2019–21), *Los nuevos babilonios* (The New Babylonians, 2019–21), and *Lo que el exilio nos enseña* (What Exile Teaches Us, 2018–21)—to his first exhibitions of the 1980s—*El almacén de las ideas* (The Storehouse of Ideas, 1987–90), *La sección áurea* (The Golden Section, 1989–92), and *Un mundo r.a.r.o.* (A Strange World, 1990–93). It considers the popular turn in the works from the 1990s, *El tiempo de la bomba* (Time of the Bomb, 1993) and *¿Llegaremos pronto a Sevilla?* (Will We Reach Seville Soon? 1999), and charts a course through twenty years of the Archivo F.X. (2000–2020) on iconoclasm and the image. Also on display are some of the works he made for Documenta 14 in Kassel and Athens (2017); the large-scale installation of the Archivo F.X. at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in 2006, entitled *The Empty City: Community*; and some of the works that were part of *El Sueño Imperativo* (The Imperative Dream), curated by Mar Villaespesa in 1990, and *Before and After the Enthusiasm*, curated by José Luis Brea in 1989.

Also included is a project created specifically for the occasion, *Canciones de la guerra social contemporánea* (Songs of the Contemporary Social War), a large installation and scenography conceived as a kind of public square and documentation space. It will host a series of performances, restoring the *détournements* compiled by Alice Becker-Ho and Guy Debord, which Pedro G. Romero has invited several composers and artists to perform.

At the same time, particular attention is given to what Pedro G. Romero calls “The Knee,” “The Kneecap,” and the “The Patella”: activities carried out

with communities, collaborations with magazines, artist groups, and university institutions, such as his work with the magazine *Arena*, in the collective Juan del Campo, and in *La Situación*, *Carta de Ajuste*, BNV Producciones, Arteleku, UNIA arteypensamiento, Plataforma de Reflexión de Políticas Culturales (PRPC). Also, as part of the research of the Máquina P.H., his activities in the pie.fmc (Plataforma Independiente de Estudios Flamencos Modernos y Contemporáneos), which have allowed him to work on the artistic direction of dancer Israel Galván, and to collaborate with Niño de Elche, Rosalía, Rocío Márquez, Inés Bacán, Tomás de Perrate, and others. It is in these spaces where the works find articulation and scope, works that in this exhibition appear, disappear, and reappear, polyphonically, filling the whole space, in rhythmic cadence. Lastly, there is also an “exhibition within the exhibition” that in a sense reflects Pedro G. Romero’s work as curator: *Máquina de Goya* (Goya Machine). It is a partial presentation of an almost lost generation, that of the nineteenth-century artists (such as Leonardo Alenza, Francisco Lameyer, and Lucas Velázquez) who, in the wake of Goya—especially *Los Caprichos* and *Los Disparates* (The Follies)—connected *Conceptismo* with the force of popular culture at the dawn of contemporary Spain.

The whole setup is conceived as a kind of optical theater, in which each work, of a markedly anachronistic nature, unfolds, necessarily, as a gesture, as a moment of the present.

Against the backdrop of Walter Benjamin’s contention that when fascism aestheticizes politics, the response is to politicize art, Pedro G. Romero’s work reveals a true struggle between the notion of aesthetics writ large and art that is always approached as a minor art. Art that is—according to the teachings of Ángel González García—above all, the invisible. But the invisible is not ideas, concepts, the spirit, credit, or surplus value. It concerns relationships, ties, magnetic fields that connect—as language does—certain things with other things: human beings, animals, landscapes, journeys, times, spaces, in short, things. Spinoza used to say that an image is only an image if it is connected to other images. These interwoven warps, wefts, lines—like the puppet strings in Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio’s example at the start of this text—are the strings that move the versifying machine, and this is what we discover in this exhibition.

Soleá Morente  
*Canción a la insurrección de Parla*. Unknown  
artist from Madrid, 1979  
(*Canciones de la guerra  
social contemporánea*,  
2021)



# 1. WHAT EXILE TEACHES US

*(Songs of the Contemporary Social War)*

Like the projects *El Sacco* and *Los nuevos babilonios* (The New Babylonians), this cycle of works revolves around the figures of alienation, the foreigner, and the exiled, not just as a political or economic fact leading to forced displacement, but also exile as a condition of life, as described by María Zambrano and José Bergamín in relation to the Republican exile after the defeat in the Spanish Civil War. Or, going further back in history, associated with the expressions of marranism after the expulsion of the Jews and Moors from the Kingdom of Spain. Or, finally, as the condition of life of certain groups of Spanish Roma, such as the *andarrios* and *canasteros* who still live a nomadic existence but are excluded from the constant mobility demanded by the new global capitalism.

*Lo que el exilio nos enseña* (What Exile Teaches Us) began in 2017, first with Leire Vergara through various works presented at the Dutch Art Institute's Roaming Academy, most notably at the Bauhaus Dessau in 2019, and then with María García Ruiz through the *Political Parties* project for the Bergen Assembly in 2019 and *Una forma de ser* (A Form of Being or Life) at the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart in 2020. At the original heart of the project lies the question of the condition of the so-called cultural or creative classes—like those who toil in art—which, as Martha Rosler reminds us, emerged from the nineteenth-century bohemia, who took their name from the gypsies or Bohemians then believed to have come from that part of what is now the Czech Republic. This explains many of the founding characteristics of the life of the modern artist as social outsider—precarity, flexibility, relativism, debauchery, nomadism, etcetera—in perpetual exile, very closely linked to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's idea of a "minor literature": deterritorialization, the connection between the individual and the political, and the collective assemblage of enunciation.

## SONGS OF THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL WAR

*Canciones de la guerra social contemporánea* is based on the songbook of the same title, compiled and prepared by Guy Debord, Alice Beker-Ho, and other Situationists, and published anonymously as a pamphlet in 1981 under the pseudonym “Some iconoclasts.” The project involved disseminating the documents, performing selected parts of the songbooks, and compiling historical documentation of the new lyrics or found *détournement*. It is based mainly on the songbook written by

Federico García Lorca for the dancer La Argentinita in 1931, together with folk and flamenco *coplas* and recordings by political singer-songwriters. Participants include Samuel Mestre and Victoria Sacco, as well as the artists Rodrigo Cuevas, Niño de Elche, Pollito de Graná, Gabriel de la Tomasa, Oier Etxeberria, Julio Jara, Soleá Morente, Christina Rosenvinge, and Le Parody, as well as the choirs El CoroFón, Coro de Mujeres Malvaloca, and Coro Intercultural Voces de Ida y Vuelta. The twelve songs presented here—as in the original pamphlet—are a sort of chronicle of the Spanish political transition from the point of view of autonomism.

## 2. EL SACCO

(*Moneta, Rome/Romá*)

The scope of this series of works, which have been carried out in Rome since 2018, extends beyond the historical event that their title refers to. The Sack of Rome in 1527 by the troops of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, the desecration of churches, the looting, and the murders committed, serve as a backdrop for two of Pedro G. Romero’s interests: iconoclastic violence and the emergence of popular culture. His historical analysis cuts across various periods, from legendary events in the city during the Roman Empire to the current *mafia capitale* in which mafia powers are in league with capitalist entrepreneurs to plunder the municipal coffers, speculate with land, and trade in basic resources. Exploring this monstrous *something*, part profanation and part populism, that always reappears in times of crisis is what drives *El Sacco*. The work consists of bringing together small assemblages or teams of collaborators, such as Matteo Binci, Ludovica Manzetti, and Massimo Mazzone for *El elefante blanco* (The White Elephant), or Bruno Alviani, Riccardo Ascani, Ciro Biasutto, and Maria Doriana Casadidio for *La peña flamenca Silverio Franconetti de Roma*. These assemblages reflect the fluctuations of a certain plebeian administration or baroque economy—as Verónica Gago calls it—

given that there are over one hundred collaborators in total, including Institutions such as the Academia de España en Roma and the Ippica Nerone/Roma River Ranch; collectives such as El Dorado-Sociedad Flamenca Barcelonesa and Goroka; and individuals such as Isaki Lacuesta and María Marín. The film *Los caballos* (The Horses), still in production, has taken *El Sacco* to Vienna and Antwerp. Two works from the series, *Roma/Romá* (2019) and *Moneta* (2019), are presented here.

## MONETA

The first conversations with the Nacheinander were on the economy of art: a critical view of the system, but also a search for survival strategies. In 2019, Salvator Rosa Gallery—of which Pedro G. Romero formed part and which was run by Zbyněk Baladrán, Jiří Kovanda, Juan Pablo Macías, and some other artists—in association with Carico Massimo in Livorno, presented the exhibition *Arte, Magia e Capitalismo*, where *Moneta* (Coin) was presented for the first time. Produced in collaboration with Matteo Binci, the machine perfectly illustrates a scene from Ermanno Olmi's film *Il mestiere delle armi* (*The Profession of Arms*, 2001), in which lead from one of the first firearms is turned into coins.

## ROME/ROMÁ

The titles of the seven sound pieces listed on this poster refer to a series of recordings made in Rome with *gitano* artist Juan Jiménez “Bobote”—flamenco dancer, *palmero*, and occasional singer—and Austrian sound artist Stefan Voglsinger. The sound pieces are still awaiting final mixing. The titles are a fairly accurate expression of the itineraries and actions recorded in Rome in the summer of 2019 and of the incidents that took place along the way, such as being thrown out of the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls by the Vatican police, or being denied permission by Fendi to record inside the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, an iconic fascist building that is now the headquarters of the Roman luxury fashion house.

# 3. THE NEW BABYLONIANS

(*The Swords, The False Coin,  
Nine Seviles*)

This term is used to refer to certain human groups from which the Situationists could be said to have learned: Maghrebi migrants, bohemian barflies, and the autonomist left, to name a few. *Nueva babilonia* (New Babylon) is a utopian

project—consisting of scale models, architectural plans, writings, films, collages, etcetera—developed by Dutch artist Constant on the basis of his design for a gypsy camp in the Italian town of Alba. The title, suggested by Guy Debord, was based on the direct imaginary of the 1929 film *Novyi Vavilon*—inspired by Karl Marx’s and Émile Zola’s writings on the Paris Commune—made by the Factory of the Eccentric Actor (FEKS—Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg). And it also reflected the historical appeal of New Babylon for cities such as Rome and Seville that aspired to be the New Jerusalem. Constant’s project includes a direct reference to the *soleá de Triana* sung by Pepe de la Matrona, “Se hundió la Babilonia” (Babylon Has Fallen). Under the name New Babylonians, Pedro G. Romero embarked on a new approach to three human groups he had been working on for some time: the Roma, flamenco artists, and Spanish libertarian exiles. An extensive array of works consequently appeared in 2013, synthesizing his two main cycles of projects in progress at the start of the twenty-first century—the Archivo F.X. and the Máquina P.H.—on popular culture, especially flamenco. It is not just about research or activism or a work of political emancipation. Once again, the idea is to form an assemblage with these groups and their points of view, highlighting the intersections and forms of lumpen productivism that are inherent to them, and likewise with exemplary figures such as the libertarian communist, *gitano flamenco*, and avant-garde realist Helios Gómez.

## THE SWORDS

The premise was simple: to devise a group dance along the lines of the *Ezpata-dantza* or sword dance practiced in the Basque Country and other parts of the Iberian Peninsula. The origins of this dance are unknown, although the use of swords suggests different ways of negotiating violence in so-called times of peace. In this project, however, the festive ritual violence was transferred to the particular gestures of the eleven collaborating artists in 2016 and 2017: Miguel Benlloch, Marco de Ana, Niño de Elche, Javiera de la Fuente, Ines Doujak, Israel Galván, Isaías Griñolo, Juan Jiménez “Bobote,” Sonia Sánchez, Mónica

Valenciano, and Idoia Zabaleta. The project began to take shape with the Archivo F.X. works for the *Peace Treaty* project (2013–17, Donostia-San Sebastián European Capital of Culture 2016).

## THE FALSE COIN

A project created with Niño de Elche and Israel Galván for Documenta 14 (2017), held in Athens and Kassel under the artistic direction of Adam Szymczyk, with the collaboration of Paul B. Preciado, among others. *La farsa monea* (The False Coin) revolved around the “subaltern economy” associated with the *gitano* and

flamenco underclass, and ended with a series of events and performances that took place in the two cities. Earlier works that formed the base of this program include the production of coins (*La sevillana*, *La padremare*, *La perra gorda y chica*), the *Atenas/Antena* recordings made with José Jiménez “Bobote” and mixed by Raül Refree, and the expanded theater piece *Los Pintas*, based on excerpts from Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*.

## NINE SEVILLES

Made in collaboration with filmmaker Gonzalo García Pelayo, *Nueve Sevillas* (Nine Sevilles) is an updating of the legacy of his 1978 masterpiece *Vivir en Sevilla* (Living in Seville). It also draws on the expanded theater piece *Las sabias* (The Scholars), which served as the graphic image in the form of posters for the 20th Bienal de Flamenco de Sevilla in 2018. Part experimental fiction and part documentary, *Nueve Sevillas* is committed to polyphony through the voices of its protagonists (Javiera de la Fuente, Yinka Esi Graves, Pastora Filigrana, Gonzalo García Pelayo, José Jiménez “Bobote,” Vanesa Lérica Montoya, Rocío Montero, David Pielfort, and Rudolph Rostas “Janek”) and performances by guest artists (Inés Bacán and Raül Refree, Raúl Cantizano, Niño de Elche, Tomás de Perrate and Proyecto Lorca, Israel Galván, Alfredo Lagos, Leonor Leal, Rocío Márquez, Sílvia Pérez Cruz and Rocío Molina, and Rosalía). The film, masterfully edited by Sergi Dies, is also a lumpen-productivist assemblage of the classic studio system of film production.

*Canciones de la guerra  
social contemporánea  
2020–21*  
12 display cabinets,  
documents, sound, and  
video  
Pedro G. Romero Studio





Julio Jara  
*A la memoria de Gladys del Estal*. Unknown  
Roma artist, 1979  
(*Canciones de la guerra social contemporánea*,  
2021)

*Romance del  
prendimiento y muerte  
de Oriol Solé Sugranyes  
(Canciones de la guerra  
social contemporánea)*  
2020–21  
12 display cabinets,  
documents, sound, and  
video  
Pedro G. Romero Studio



*Todo el poder a las  
asambleas  
(Canciones de la guerra  
social contemporánea)*  
2020–21  
12 display cabinets,  
documents, sound, and  
video  
Pedro G. Romero Studio



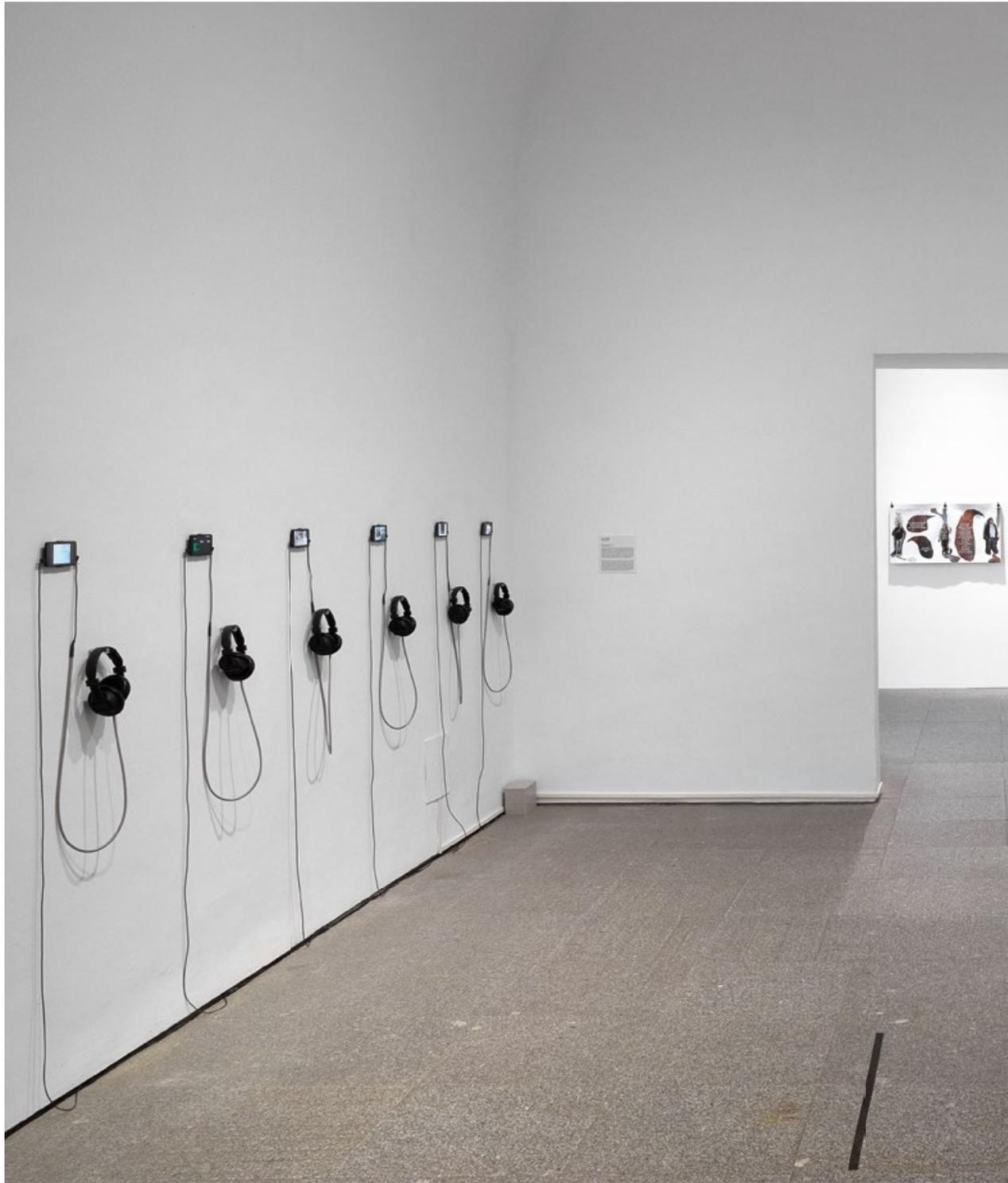


*Todo el poder a las asambleas*  
 (Canciones de la guerra social contemporánea)  
 2020–21  
 12 display cabinets,  
 documents, sound, and  
 video  
 Pedro G. Romero Studio



*Coplas de las barricadas de Cádiz*  
 (Canciones de la guerra social contemporánea)  
 2020–21  
 12 display cabinets,  
 documents, sound, and  
 video  
 Pedro G. Romero Studio

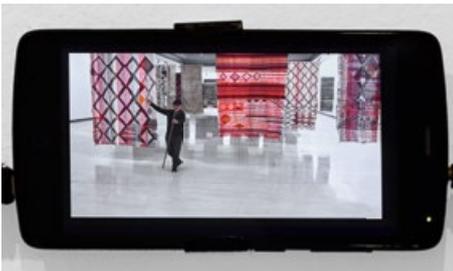
*Las espadas*  
2017  
Video, mobile phones, and  
router  
àngels barcelona gallery



*Los Pintas*  
2017  
Digital print on PVC canvas  
Pedro G. Romero Studio



*Moneta* (detail)  
2018–20  
Minting machine and bullets  
Salvator Rosa Gallery



*Las espadas* (detail)  
2017  
(Sonia Sánchez, Idoia Zabaleta, Mónica Valenciano,  
José Jiménez "Bobote," Israel Galván, Ines Doujak)  
Video, mobile phones, and router  
àngels barcelona gallery



*La sevillana*  
2019  
Coins  
Pedro G. Romero Studio



*Las espadas (detail)*

2017

(Javier de la Fuente, Niño de Elche, Marco de Ana,  
Miguel Benlloch, Isaías Griñolo)

Video, mobile phones, and router  
àngels barcelona gallery







*Los Pintas*

2017

(with Israel Galván and Niño de Elche)

Digital print on PVC canvas

Pedro G. Romero Studio



Pedro G. Romero and  
Gonzalo García Pelayo  
*Nueve Sevillas*  
2019–20  
Video, color, sound, 157 min.  
Elamedia Estudios

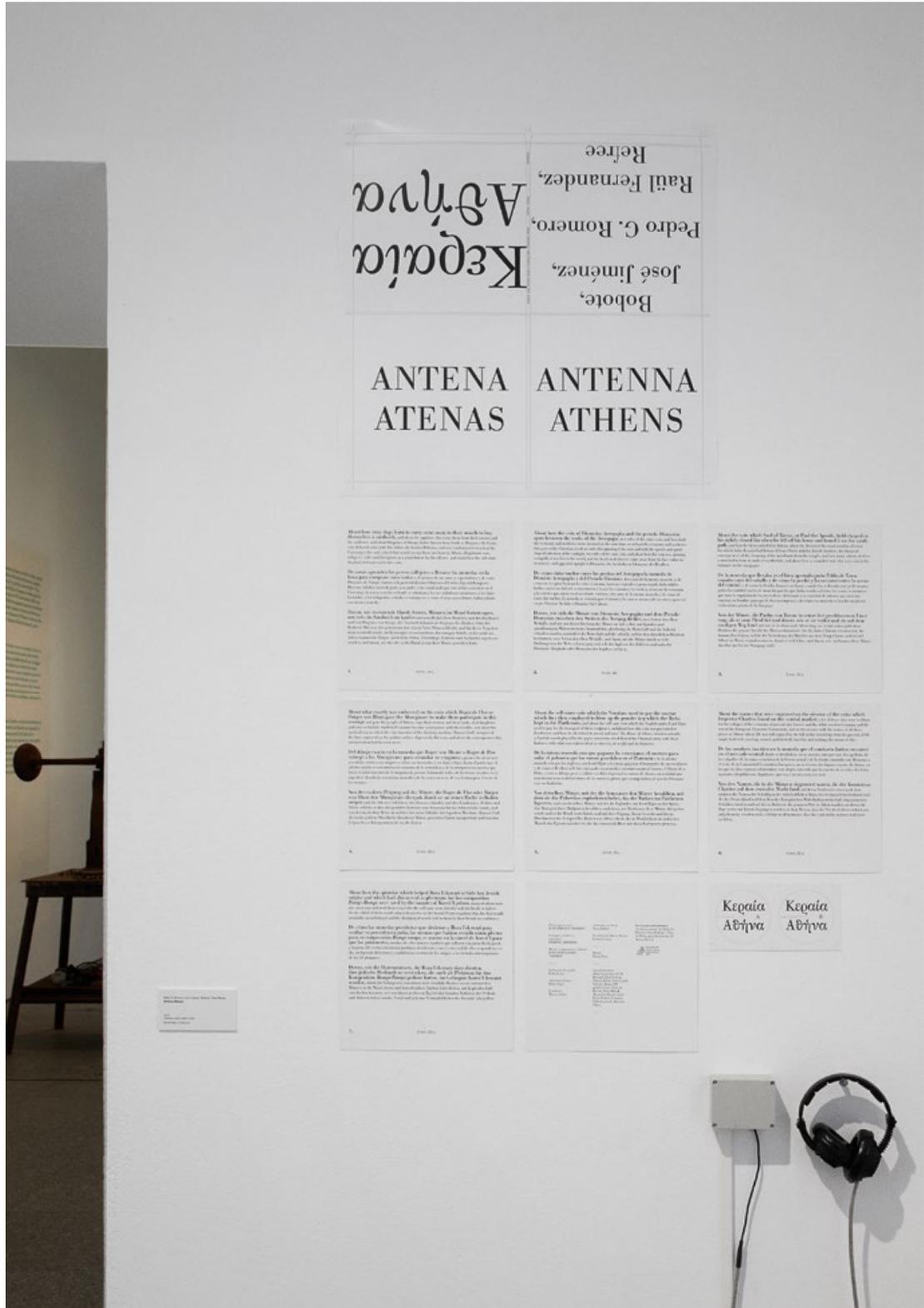




Pedro G. Romero,  
José Jiménez “Bobote,”  
and Raúl Refree  
*Antena/Atenas*  
2019  
Printed ink on paper and  
audio  
Pedro G. Romero Studio

*Roma/Romá,*  
2018–20  
Printed ink on paper  
Academia de España en  
Roma

*Moneta*  
2018–20  
Minting machine and bullets  
Salvator Rosa Gallery



Κεραία  
Αθήνα

Raúl Fernandez,  
Pedro G. Romero,  
José Jiménez,  
Bobote,

ANTENA  
ATENAS

ANTENNA  
ATHENS

Μετά την επίσημη έναρξη της έκθεσης, η οποία είναι ανοιχτή στον κοινό, θα πραγματοποιηθεί μια σειρά από εκδηλώσεις, όπως η παρουσίαση του βιβλίου «Αντένα/Αθήνα» που θα κυκλοφορήσει τον επόμενο μήνα. Η έκθεση θα κλείσει με μια μεγάλη έκθεση φωτογραφίας που θα πραγματοποιηθεί τον επόμενο μήνα.

Η έκθεση «Αντένα/Αθήνα» είναι η πρώτη έκθεση που διοργανώνει η Ακαδημία της Ισπανίας στην Αθήνα. Η έκθεση αποτελεί μια σημαντική στιγμή στην ιστορία της Ακαδημίας και είναι η πρώτη φορά που πραγματοποιείται στην Αθήνα.

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Κεραία  
Αθήνα

Κεραία  
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Μονητα

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* While still on the subject of music, which seems appropriate given that the exhibition opens with *Canciones de la guerra social contemporánea* (Songs of Contemporary Social War): to what extent are you interested in working with and around music? Is it perhaps because, as Adorno says, even if a country's music has become a political ideology by highlighting national characteristics and confirms the national principle, it also, more than any other artistic medium, expresses the antinomies of that national principle?

V

*Pedro G. Romero:* In many ways, I am more interested in working with songs than music. With songs and their tensions: not so much the written music, but rather with the sound. This is what has always interested me. I think that, unwittingly, what interested me about flamenco from the start is that peak of tension between song and sound, as in the free jazz of Albert Ayler and Matana Roberts, or Mikel Laboa's *lekeitios*, or the player-piano music of Conlon Nancarrow, to mention a few examples. This makes Adorno's comments on so-called musical nationalism—which is not strictly speaking the musical nationalism of the nineteenth century but also includes associations such as that of Wagner and Germany—even more pertinent. And of course I have to go back to flamenco as my field of work and point out its capacity to be both deterritorialization and the voice of the community. It is a minor art, in Deleuze and Guattari's sense. Flamenco is a thing of "foreigners," as Ortiz Nuevo says, and not only because of the so-called romantic travelers from Théophile Gautier to Guy Debord. Indeed, the status of foreigner was also bestowed on the Roma people and on Silverio Franconetti: the first *flamenco*, an Italian! To be "flamenco" is to be foreign, enemy, as well as from Flanders.<sup>1</sup> A contradiction

<sup>1</sup> "Flamenco" is also Spanish for "Flemish."—Trans.

is at work once again, and worse still, it is unresolved. What I mean is that often when knowledge of something appears to have stabilized, the contradictory principle comes into play and rekindles that shifting ground I spoke of earlier. Nietzsche himself used flamenco—African music, he called it—to attack Wagner’s religion of music as the total art form. I often think that thanks to the *gitanos*, flamenco could never become entirely Spanish, or entirely Andalusian. And when it seemed that it might become entirely *gitano*, Black African culture appeared: the Afro-Andalusian Caribbean community that also ended up shaking the ground under its feet.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

Music contains traces of the ancientness of other lives that resist, an insurgent force that lives on in the voice and the breath. Interruptions that occur in sound, noises, movements, and speech. Zones where an imbalance occurs. Federico García Lorca said that memory never stands still, that it has a temperature and a temperament, and that songs are able to shelter the emotion of history, both as it has been and as it could be. Sounds—rather than lyrics or texts—determine geographic character, sharply highlighting moments that have been erased by time but can throb with the voice. While a cathedral is anchored in its own era, giving a constant expression of time, a song suddenly leaps out, alive and quivering like a frog,<sup>1</sup> creating an ever-shifting landscape. In this movement between continuity and disruption, the ability to interrupt the course of history is at stake. The voice vibrates over a rhythm that opens up a specific truth. In the movements and voices that have no musical notation, communities that have existed dance, and communities to come are forged in them. The politics of speech mark out a clear-cut social division between those who speak well and those who speak poorly, between those with the right to a voice, and those who are left out of the distribution of the word. It is, as the poet María Salgado says, a hierarchy that culturally classifies illiterate subjects based on their incorrect way of speaking. But it is precisely in so-called poor verbal constructions that a richer, denser, more singular signification emerges. A slow shaping of other figures of community, not just social organization, but also love, relationships, and desire. A minimal infrastructure that welcomes bodies for which the hegemonic order has no place.

On the other hand, as Adorno pointed out, the critical power of music relies on its relationship to reality being unreconciled, hence “thinking with his ears,” the famous phrase with which he began “Cultural Criticism and Society” (1949).<sup>2</sup> He was not only following the Nietzschean idea of music as a way of thinking through the body that refutes traditional thought, but also displacing the body, opening it up to an encounter with

that which cannot be resolved in a subjective synthesis. Because music is a product of a society, yet, at the same time, it is something different to it. It opens up an irresolvable difference, where the echo of the multiplicity of what exists can always be heard. *One sings of what is lost.*

<sup>1</sup> Federico García Lorca, “Canciones de cuna españolas,” in *Obras completas*, vol. 3: *Prosa* (Barcelona: Galaxia de Gutenberg, 1997), 113.

<sup>2</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society,” in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 19; originally written in 1949, and published as “Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft,” in *Soziologische Forschung in unserer Zeit*, ed. Karl Gustav Specht (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1951).

*Valentín Roma:*

I'd like to say something that is obvious, but not always apparent: literature is one of the tools used by society to create its identity, that is, to tell itself its own story. There are of course many other mechanisms that seek or are involved in this same undertaking, but the main singularity of literature is that it uses materials that are quite similar to those we use to construct ourselves as individual and social beings: talking, thinking, being silent, imagining. In this same sense, but with regard to the nationalist aspect of music, Alexander Kluge, paraphrasing Adorno, reminds us that opera houses are worldly churches, and that the two hundred or so operas written between the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries describe practically each and every bourgeois sentiment, all the class passions that allow us to understand modernity.

*Isabel de Naverán:*

[Song]

Ever since I heard it, I can't get it out of my head, the song. Ever since I heard it, it has stayed with me as a kind of background sound, finding its way into everything, from the simplest thing to the most important, without distinctions. It regulates part of my body's attention, like a presence flowing beneath specific activities, almost imperceptible, almost silent. And yet it's there, it seems to me that I hear it—in fact, that only I hear it—the song, inside me.

Sometimes I hum the melody, or sing it quietly to myself, for no apparent reason, I hum the music, mmm, mmm, but I also repeat the lyrics, “este galapaguito no tiene mare, aaá aaá, no tiene mare sí, no tiene mare, no, aaá aaá” (this little tortoise has no mother...).

That's the thing about popular songs, they get into your head, they stay with you, and you keep hearing them, it's a physical thing. At least for a few days, or weeks, or sometimes years, you keep hearing the music and the lyrics. Popular songs are not just melodies that stick, they are, above all, stories. And in being sung—that is, in being music—their narratives unfold. They are also the tension between sound and lyrics, about to snap. What's more, they change as they are sung, moving by word of mouth, from one body to another. Song lyrics change us, they get inside us and shape us, but we also change them, sometimes unwittingly. There's a part you can't remember properly, a word you couldn't quite make out, and you replace it with a more familiar one, or one that sounds better to you. And so there are often various versions of a single story, because songs are like folk tales, they adapt to different situations. I like the fact that it works in both directions, that the song gets inside you without asking permission, and, at the same time, its tonality changes, it adapts to you.

This has happened with the song about the *galapaguito*, long vowels stretching out as I go about my day-to-day life, like arms reaching to pick things up or put them away, or a neck stretching to tilt and look, or receive a kiss. And so the song stretches like a limb, remaining the same, but becoming something else. With its music and lyrics, the song operates like a dance, creating a tradition that is also bodily technique, a certain mode of relation.

I knew a *galapaguito* (little tortoise) was a water animal, and at first the word *calamarcito* (little squid) came to me instead. *Calamarcito* instead of *galapaguito*, and *mar* (sea) instead of *madre* (mother). As I allowed the song to ripple along and do its thing, I thought of the little squid who had no sea. No sea in which to live, swim, survive. Even

though it actually says *mare*, it clearly means *madre*, mother. But here, with the song seeming to play inside my body, swimming with the blood in my veins, in the sea of neural connections, this little tortoise was an aquatic animal and the mother was a sea. Perhaps, I thought, this happened because the song is a lullaby, and babies are wet when they are born, they are expelled from liquid into another environment, where there is no sea, no mother, which is a pity. It seemed to me a sad song.

This switch from *galapaguito* to *calamarcito* in the lyrics was a result of having heard the version of “Nana de Sevilla” (Sevillian Lullaby) recorded by La Argentinita and Federico García Lorca in 1931, after listening to the “Nana de esta pequeña era” (This Little Era Lullaby), a version of the same song recorded by poet María Salgado and composer Fran MM Cabeza de Vaca in 2019, at Pedro G. Romero’s invitation.

Although Romero proposed revisiting “Nana de la Zarzuela” (Zarzuela Lullaby)—Guy Debord’s 1981 version of “Nana de Sevilla”—María Salgado and Fran MM Cabeza de Vaca went back to the latter and used it to create a contemporary lullaby that intercepts and questions the current sociopolitical context: the humanitarian crisis of the summer of 2018, reflected in the critical situation of the hundreds of migrants picked up by the rescue vessel *Aquarius*, which had no harbor, no *mare* (mother/sea). In their video, the new lyrics are written, not sung, but we still hear it. We hear the synthesizer, reading a midi file based on the original 78 rpm recording by Lorca and La Argentinita. In “Nana de esta pequeña era,” the then and the now are somehow present through sound (her voice singing) and touch (his fingers playing), as well as the little noises typical of shellac records, the fragility of a recording system that comes and touches us. It actually does touch us, or so it seems, as if, in Fran MM Cabeza de Vaca’s words, “in its transduction, the voice and the piano thus contribute time and its grain.”<sup>1</sup>

The sound of the piano played by Lorca is isolated, modified, and diverted, becoming a faltering sound, which works as a memory. It permeates, adheres to the skin inside the ears, not as something you hear but as something you touch, something that touches you. In 1928, a few years before recording the “Nana de Sevilla,” Federico García Lorca had given a lecture in Madrid on lullabies, based on the study and recovery of popular Spanish songs and dances.<sup>2</sup> In the lecture, among other things, he reminded listeners that lullabies are sung to children who are not sleepy. To encourage the child who cannot sleep, who is probably afraid of the night, of the darkness in which one can easily lose sight of one’s out-

line, of the human form, the shape that sets one apart from other beings and turns one into an individual, into this child, this person with a life that begins at birth and ends with death. The night and the darkness of the room fuel the child’s fear of dissolving into a state beyond their control, far from their sea, their environment, their mother. The fear of losing that shape, their shape, of disintegrating, letting go. This is something that the same child may yearn to do later on, in a different darkness, in a different night, driven not by fear but by a desire to cease to be. The fear of losing the sense of their own bodily contours may coincide with the desire to do just that: to break the rules by which delineated bodies are individualized, differentiated, separated. Ultimately, this fear and this desire coincide, both taking place in the darkness, in the night, not as the opposite to the day but because it is in the night that this possibility lies in wait with uncompromising certainty. A night without sight, so that we see in a different way. A darkness darker than darkness itself, which is more akin to descending underground, in which instead of opening our eyes we must close them, roll them backward.

Apparently there is a technique for singing lullabies. It consists of repeating the song, slower and slower, and inserting silences, first short and gradually lengthening, without losing the tempo of the melody, without losing the lyrics either, but slowly, gradually, saying only some of the words. The others, memorized, are somehow still heard by the listener and the singer too, as the singing gets softer, until it is just a whisper. Sometimes the listener’s lips will move unintentionally, in imitation or reflex. A gradual, almost indiscernible transition, unperceived, with the song resonating in the room until finally there is silence, and just a slight swaying of the body.

1. “[W]hen the lyrics appear in writing rather than being sung but they can still be heard, as you said, it is because the synthesizer is reading a midi file based on the original 78 rpm recording of La Argentinita and Lorca (it is very beautiful to think that there are recordings of his piano playing, if not his voice). This midi file is deliberately ‘pixelated’ and very uneven, because it includes the sound of the shellac. The unevenness of the old system of recording sound is also transcribed in the raw, contemporary timbre of the synth, which is why the melody is there but it is ‘dirtied’ by the sound (what [Jonathan] Sterne would call the ‘external’ sound) of the tool that recorded it. In its transduction, the voice and the piano thus contribute time and its grain.... Later we hear Lorca’s piano. As you rightly say in the paragraph, its loop elongated, in order to then locate and eventually isolate that single note of the two that Lorca said would make the perfect lullaby. Just two notes, rocking to and fro. We add the other note in the present.” Fran MM Cabeza de Vaca, from an e-mail conversation with María Salgado and Isabel de Naverán. I thank them both for their openness and clarifications.
2. “La nanas infantiles” (Children’s Lullabies), a lecture given by Federico García Lorca on December 13, 1928, at the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid.

Lorca said that two rhythms are needed: the physical rhythm of the cradle or the chair (the rocking of the body), and that of the melody. The two intertwined, the to-and-froing of the body produces a gestural, sometimes audible sound, the constant creaking or the clatter of the wheels of the baby carriage on the paving stones.

This idea of transmission—of the existence of a memory that moves from one body to another through the voice (and the other voices it contains, as if creating a tradition), that is inscribed and written when it is spoken-sung-rocked—is what interests me about the lullaby as a form of writing and dance, but above all as transition and resonance between-bodies. And also as solace.

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* How do you explain the fact that although the origins of many forms of popular music, such as flamenco, date back to the social relations that emerged in the late eighteenth century, they have been relegated by the ethnocentric premises of modernity to be thought of or considered primitive? How do you interpret the fact that a form of popular culture that enjoys malleability and is transnational in nature has ended up being seen as the expression of an essence?

## VI

*Pedro G. Romero:* I was referring to this when I mentioned Bergamín's assertion. In reality, popular music is thought to be pure terror, something absolutely naturalized. Jean Paulhan draws a distinction between terror and rhetoric that I find extremely interesting. Terror is the idea that a work of art is natural, like a rock or a tree along the path. Rhetoric is the act of representing that same thing by means of language. The *Volk* movements—the movements of the people, of folklore—sought natural languages and expressions in the songs of illiterate communities. This tension is still evident in debates over whether flamenco is creation or variation of other musical forms, for example. Of course, the great novelty is finding that these songs are popular insofar as they are not exactly *Volk*, in that they are mediated by Roma, Blacks, Jews, whatever you want to call them. In my obsessive interest in operations that appear to be “terror” and are actually “rhetoric,” and vice versa, flamenco crops up. And it does so in connection with the bohemian vanguard, with the modernist avant-garde, and with the countercultural resistance. That is when role reversal begins, but I'm not interested in suddenly shifting flamenco from “terror”—that idea of the primitive—to “rhetoric,” as when it is championed as a great national tradition that simply has no written form, no graphic expression, but is nonetheless an art of composition. No, what interests me is how it maintains that tension between “terror” and “rhetoric” without resolving it. What's more, intensifying that tension gives rise to greater figuration.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

“Kant does not like children,” writes Adriana Cavarero in a critical text against the verticalizing geometry of modernity in which she analyzes the effects of these discursive figurations of truth, of community, and of power relations in an exploration of the costs of depicting the human being as upright. The vertical figuration of the human being, she suggests, obscures a more natural figuration: inclination. Vulnerability rarely appears in Western philosophy, dominated by a conception of the subject as autonomous, erect, violent: the warrior, for whom what is vulnerable is killable. Against this Cavarero considers the inclined geometry of the unprotected body, not of the warrior but of the mother who leans over the infant she holds in her arms. “Kant does not like children. He laments the fact that, because children still lack reason and intellect, they ‘disturb the thinking section of the community.’”<sup>1</sup> From there, we could trace a whole genealogy of bodies that are excluded because they do not allow themselves to be taught and do not allow themselves to be vertical. Not so much because of a conscious decision or a strong intentionality, but because the practice of their forms of life does not allow it. In the case of women, because for centuries birth and early childhood have almost entirely belonged to their universe. What these children are in need of is a proper education. A good instructor would not reward the lack of rationality inherent in jabbering. Dependence is thus categorized as the lack of autonomy of someone who is not in control of their inclinations. But Cavarero argues that the power of a form that is yet to come lies precisely there, in the inclinations, understood as sensible appetites that bodies cannot refuse. In the contours of a radical questioning of humanity and its actions. In the gesture of letting one’s body go, of no longer submitting to that rigidity, a whole politics of contact comes into play.

*Valentín Roma:*

Besides the codification of the monstrous in fantasy and horror fiction, there is also what we might call political writing that is rooted in the horrific. I am thinking for example of books such as Robert Antelme’s *The Human Race* (1947),<sup>1</sup> Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947),<sup>2</sup> and even Marguerite Duras’s *The War: A Memoir* (1985),<sup>3</sup> which includes one of the most terrible descriptions of the Holocaust, as Duras devotes several pages to recounting what her husband’s shit was like when he returned from the concentration camp, the consistency and smell of that putrefying matter expelled from a body. But, still with Duras, there can be no doubt that the terrible borders on the erotic. We could say that it is the means by which it makes itself repulsive and attractive at the same time. I think there is a literary lineage—which inventive critics call “probing the sewers of the human soul”—that links Marguerite Duras, William Faulkner, and Juan Carlos Onetti, among others, through a moralistic rhetoric, a voyeurism that does not let go of the safety belt of the ethical. If I had to choose between monstrous writings, I would be inclined to look to the pendulum that swings from Pierre Klossowski, with his sometimes endearing obscenity, to what I consider one of the great narrators of aberration, none other than Osvaldo Lamborghini, whose book *El fiord* (*The Fjord*, 1969)<sup>4</sup> abjectly resembles, as Roberto Bolaño said, hell itself.

1. Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinations: A Critique of Rectitude*, trans. Amanda Minervini and Adam Sitze (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 26; these words first appeared in “Inclinaciones desequilibradas,” in *Cuerpo, memoria y representación. Adriana Cavarero y Judith Butler en diálogo*, ed. Begonya SaezTajafuerce (Barcelona: Icaria, 2011), 17–38.

1. Robert Antelme, *L'Espèce humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947); Eng.: *The Human Race*, trans. Jeffrey Haight and Annie Mahler (Bennettsville, SC: The Marlboro Press, 1992).

2. Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1947); Eng.: *Survival in Auschwitz*, trans. Stuart Woolf (New York: Collier, 1959).

3. Marguerite Duras, *La Douleur* (Paris: Éditions P.O.L., 1985); Eng.: *The War: A Memoir*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York, Pantheon Books, 1986).

4. Osvaldo Lamborghini, *El fiord* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Chinatown, 1969).

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* Turning back to Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, “Cultural categories of ‘high’ and ‘low’ ... are never entirely separable.” What they call “transcodings” and “displacements” occur between the two fields. This brings to mind your almost obsessive interest in the learned, in knowledge as a way of operating. How far can learned and popular knowledge coexist? To what extent can popular knowledge give rise to epistemologies that contribute to the advancement of knowledge and the transformation of the world as we know it?

## VII

*Pedro G. Romero:* I like to sum it up in one of Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio’s emblematic phrases, which comes from an old treatise on crotalogy: “playing the castanets is not important, but if you do, it is better not play them badly.” Incidentally, what a coincidence, it was in my hometown, Aracena, that the art of playing *palillos* began to be called castanets. The fact is that I have always felt that knowledge—its operations—is important for what I do, for the things that I operate with. Beyond categories such as Conceptual Art—which I’ve always countered with *Conceptismo*—it is true that I operate with a way of working that is no longer painting or sculpture or video installation. It is none of those. It is perhaps exhibition, the exposition of things (which is both to explain and to show). Of course, in my interest in so-called popular culture and flamenco, it is necessary for me to know about the operations and refutations of that specialist subject—scholarly knowledge and the popular knowledge generated by *flamencos* themselves: folklore, flamencology, *mairenismo*, etc. In Fine Arts we learned, or we were supposed to learn, how to mix colors; we learned about oils, pigments, techniques, etcetera. This is the same thing. In flamenco, that knowledge takes the form of parody, competition, and the refutation of knowledge that is erudite, scholarly, scientific, and so on. That marvelous figure of the encyclopedic *cantaor* or *cantaora*, almost a contradiction

in terms, is certainly a model I look to. And of course there is Juan de Mairena, heteronym of Antonio Machado, and his Escuela Popular de Sabiduría Superior (Popular School of Higher Wisdom). That was precisely where Jorge Meneses's Versifying Machine emerged, in *Coplas mecánicas* (Mechanical Verses), the text in which Machado introduced Juan de Mairena to the world. The reading of this short text has been with me for years, and it is latent in almost everything I have said in these lines. That is what we are doing, in this same mechanical conversation that is nothing other than another contrivance of the versifying machines.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

In his *Prison Notebooks* Antonio Gramsci criticized the European intellectuals of his time,<sup>1</sup> focusing fundamentally on three aspects: the fact that intellectuals form an elite disconnected from the roots of national popular life, that they are incapable of critical thought, and that this prevents them from fighting the idealist hegemony of culture, turning them instead into direct agents of the dominant class. This threefold approach could be said to be based on the structural premise that it is impossible to separate thought and action. If one wants to modify a system of relations, it is imperative to constantly look for a different form of action; for a philosophy that contains the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting in order to transform that set of relations. The property of being alive is emergent, and that which emerges needs to create its own ways of thinking that embrace the formative power, to think about those shifting, ambiguous, and ever-changing fields, made up of affects and skins that require their inalienable (and also alien) artifacts. Knowledge is never abstract, but it is rather a series of operations in which the meanings that structure us are at stake and compete.

If a passage is to open up, both knowing and not-knowing must be involved. This is why the notion of play is so important: play knows nothing of knowledge. As Cornelius Castoriadis wrote in "Done and To Be Done" (1989), "It is not what is, but what could be and should be, that has need of us."<sup>2</sup> How to go beyond our own ground, and give ourselves the means to do so.

*Valentín Roma:*

One of the most complicated things about novels—and poetry too, but in a different way—is the shifting between ideas, descriptions, and dialogues. These three narrative reins are not always in step with each other. A novel can get bogged down in the idea, sometimes the description slows down the plot, or the dialogue trivializes the action. And then there is someone like Horacio Castellanos Moya, who was able to write *Revulsion* (1997),<sup>1</sup> in which a character starts speaking on the first page and does not stop until the end of the book, producing as he goes a diagnosis of violence in San Salvador and a parody of Thomas Bernhard and his exaltation of manias. It is a monologue that could easily appear in a Coen brothers film, a treatise on laughter in literature, and an essay on confession as a literary genre. In my opinion, Castellanos Moya is the finest *conceptista* working today.

1. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, 6 vols., ed. Felice Platone (Turin: Einaudi, 1948–51); Eng.: *Prison Notebooks*, 3 vols., ed. and trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg with Antonio Callari (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992–2007).

2. Cornelius Castoriadis, "Done and To Be Done," in *The Castoriadis Reader*, trans. and ed. David Ames Curtis (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), 417; initially published as "Fait et à faire," *Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales*, no. 86 (December 1989): 457–514.

<sup>1</sup>. Horacio Castellanos Moya, *El asco* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1997); Eng.: *Revulsion*, trans. Lee Klein (New York: New Directions, 2016).

*Isabel de Naverán:*

[Anachronism as Method]

Pedro's attitude is anachronistic because he turns to anachronism as a method by which to access the images of history, and also the history of images. He works with images of art and history as a form of resistance to time, in the sense of linearity. A position before time, as suggested by the title of Georges Didi-Huberman's book *Devant le temps* (Before Time, 2000),<sup>1</sup> in which he describes anachronism as a "rhythmic beating of method" that "cuts across all contemporaneities."<sup>2</sup>

But in addition to its effects on method in relation to images (correlating them, that is, generating between-images and between-times), I think this beating can also be read as a physical palpitation, as something that takes place in the body and between bodies, a self-pacing of the palpable, palpitating relations of those who look, compile, and revise when they look into the images of history. Another account of history is possible, based on the seemingly insignificant details in which—mostly—bodies act, modulating their intensities, moving closer and further away. Bodies understood as a substance that is correlated, sometimes imperiled, on coming into contact with the consistency and materiality of images, with their moist and vibrant zones. Seen in this light, anachronism as means of access creates links between temporal and geographic thens and nows, and establishes an almost choreographic relationship between bodies. In other words, unlike historiography, anachronism operates in relationships. And in Pedro's work it appears to be a method that invites us to approach choreographically—or better still, with the body—so that when we are close, sensing its rhythm and *compás*, we discern the movement operating beneath.

At least three different ways of doing can be divined in this tension between historicity and anachronism, almost like three actions: diversion, unveiling, and touching.

The first is a direct reference, almost a quotation, of the Situationist *détournement*, which involves a diversion of the given meaning of an element or work. The resulting effect—a critical distance as well as revision and defamiliarization—is a distortion of the accepted reading of the past, which always challenges the present and unsettles it. The action of diversion consists of first taking something and then turning it around, bending it, so as to reveal its edges, its boundaries, the folds through which its meaning can be reassessed.

The second action, unveiling—in relation to the tensions between memory and history—is the gesture of revealing the extent of the staging of the past, in the sense of Walter

Benjamin's notion of a theater of the past, when he writes that "memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theater."<sup>3</sup> This statement invites a double reading, one in which memory is an instrument for examining the theater of the past, that is, its representation in terms of staging, and another in which the act of activating or mobilizing memory, is, in itself, a form of staging, of turning that action into theater of the past, which is to say, memory is its own theater. Because "theater" can be understood in both of these ways, as a place or space of representation, the stage, and as an action, as when people talk about "making a scene," for example. I wonder if the (nonlinear) anachronistic recovery of images can operate in theatrical terms: a reading based on the spatial distribution of relationships with respect to the gaze that occurs in the present, which is where we may be able to read other intentions contained in them. I am referring to those scenes that are yet to come, that may have already been or happened, and that exist, in fact, in a state of latency. The theater of the past shows us the ideology implicit in the staging of events and in the shaping of tradition in relation to bodies and images. This second kind of action consists of unveiling the inner workings of this theater, and at the same time allowing other representations to play out on its privileged stage.

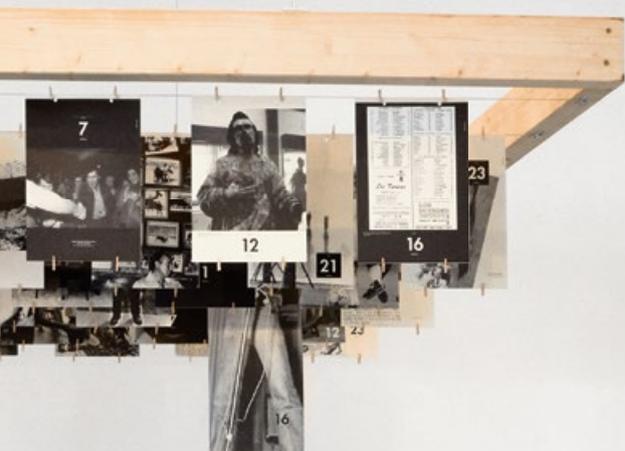
The third action has to do with the materiality of both images and the gaze, with the body and bodies that contemplate them or find them—where, how?—or that pick them up—how much do they weigh, what size are they?—because even if they are digital images, they have a physicality, because even if they are mental images, they have a physicality, and because even if they are memories, they are material. So when Benjamin writes of the indispensable "probing of the spade in the dark loam"<sup>4</sup> to explore the buried past, he is like a child digging holes in the sand, a gesture that requires crouching, making an effort, reaching out with one's hands and arms, putting them inside, bending one's knees, perhaps getting muddied or dirty. In any case, it is not—or not only—an act of the gaze, but rather of the body. And the body is also an archive of knowledge, in the sense of the tactility and materiality of the archive, its physical and embodied aspect, beyond the metaphor of excavation. The idea that the archive is not—or not only—a warehouse full of files that have been classified, where you go looking for something, but rather that the archive is already acting.

<sup>1</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps. Histoire de l'art et anachronisme des images* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–22, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin, "Excavation and Memory," 576.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



## MÀQUINES DE VIURE

Flamenc i arquitectura  
en l'ocupació  
i desocupació d'espais



“Fa uns anys, passejava amb Falla per Granada. Ell parlava de la degeneració que començava a afectar les nostres velles cançons i, just quan protestava, d'una finestra va sortir una cançó antiga, pura. Ens hi vam acostar i, a través de la gelosia verda, vam veure una habitació blanca, asèptica, sense cap quadre, com una màquina de viure de l'arquitecte Corbusier.”

—Federico Garcia Lorca

23.02 – 20.05.2018

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 ...s, Roberto Casaris, Marja Garcia Ruiz,  
 ...l, Pablo, Gatlif, Hatos Gomez,  
 ...olo, Jilko Jara, Hlwa K,  
 ... Mario Suijders, Delanie lo, Bra  
 ...o, Deana, Oltu Paulok, P. B. H.  
 ...que Sander, Franz W. Sauer,  
 ... Maria Olava y Teatro Girano  
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# A. THE KNEE

*With a special introduction by José Luis Ortiz Nuevo*

The section entitled “La rodilla” (The Knee) covers numerous activities, materials, and documents that are key to understanding Pedro G. Romero’s work beyond the strict role assigned to the artist. The works in this first articulation range from his early collaborations with Israel Galván for the show *Los zapatos rojos* (The Red Shoes) in 1998, to the recent creation of pie.fmc (Plataforma Independiente de Estudios Flamencos Modernos y Contemporáneos) in Seville together with Chema Blanco and Joaquín Vázquez, in conjunction with the Alarcón Criado gallery. It is a diverse program of theater shows, publications, publishing houses, exhibitions, records, performances, posters, films, and educational activities that are centered on flamenco and popular culture.

Many of the tools, attitudes, and situations in Pedro G. Romero’s work stem from experiences and experiments with flamenco and popular culture. The attempt to move between the center and periphery is both a commonplace of Spanish cultural identity and an approach determined by marginal *gitano* shantytowns. It thus has the power of a practice that charts a course between ethnographic spontaneity and specialized academic knowledge. Hence the paradox of its elitist and also populist focus, and of its ability to manage the coexistence of a closed text or score with the constant unfolding of performative creation, in a single gesture.

*La rodilla* begins with Romero’s pedagogical collaborations with French group 4taxis, followed by his ongoing projects with Pepa Gamboa and José Luis Ortiz Nuevo; the activities organized for Carta de Ajuste with Mar Villaespesa and BNV Producciones; twenty years of collaborations with the Israel Galván Company, spilling over into projects with A Negro Producciones; recordings of *lekeitios* for projects by Horacio Fernández, Juan José Lahuerta, and Patricia Molins; collaborations with Carmen

4taxis  
*Un an à Séville (pour  
toujours)*  
1992–2015  
Universal calendar  
Pedro G. Romero Collection

Hermanos Berenguer  
*Máquinas de vivir.  
Flamenco y arquitectura  
en la ocupación y  
desocupación de espacios,*  
2018  
Banner  
Pedro G. Romero Studio

*La rodilla*  
2021  
(with José Luis Ortiz Nuevo)  
Video, color, sound, 57:16 min.  
Alarcón Criado Gallery

Alexander Sowa  
*Actually, the Dead Are  
Not Dead / Una forma  
de ser, Stuttgart*  
2020  
Printed ink on paper

Linares and Enrique Morente; radio theater pieces for the Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Cádiz, especially “H, una zarzuela, un musical, un flamenco...” with La Chirigota del Selu; the exhibition *The Spanish Night: Flamenco, Avant-Garde, and Popular Culture, 1865–1936*, curated with Patricia Molins at the Museo Reina Sofía; collaborations and conversations with José Manuel Gamboa; the *Inflamable* film programs; the various shows and productions by Niño de Elche, Rocío Márquez, Tomás de Perrate, and Fernando Terremoto, often with Raúl Refree; works with *bailaoras* such as Isabel Bayón, Javiera de la Fuente, Pastora Galván, Leonor Leal, Tamara López, Úrsula López, Rocío Molina, Lucía Álvarez La Piñona, and Rosario Toledo; the *Vivir en Sevilla* project on the work of Gonzalo García Pelayo and the Andalusian counterculture of the 1970s; the ongoing cycle of Máquina P.H. works; Proyecto Lorca and Sistema Tango; his work as editorial director of the “Flamenco y cultura popular” collection for Athenaica Ediciones; his projects on 4taxis, Vicente Escudero, Helios Gómez, Ocaña, José Val del Omar, and Darcy Lange; the five years of the *Máquinas de vivir* (Machines for Living) project; his active ongoing involvement with El Dorado – Sociedad Flamenca Barcelonesa; the creation of pie.fmc with the support of UNIA arteypensamiento; in short, the continuous reading of Antonio Machado’s *Coplas mecánicas* to this day, in this versifying machine by way of Juan de Mairena.









# ACORDARSE<sup>1</sup>

*With a special guest appearance by  
José Luis Ortiz Nuevo*

*If I were an object I'd be objective, but as I am a subject, I am subjective.*  
José Bergamín

The actor is outside. He can be seen from the library, separated by a big picture window and a large pane of glass. In the foreground there are books, a work table, and boxes of video tapes and records. Outside, a small, half-empty slime-covered pool and the kind of lemon tree that grows in Sevillian patios, entangled with a jasmine vine in bloom.

He is wearing one of Pedro G. Romero's loose-fitting guayaberas. On the previous day, during rehearsals, in the afternoon, he couldn't button up the shirt. Miraculously, after half a bottle of whiskey and several marijuana joints, the garment started to adapt to the actor's body, or vice versa, the actor began fitting into the parody of Pedro G. Romero that he was to perform. The actor, who in this case is a comedian rather than an actor, is in many ways a teacher to Pedro G. So the parody, this idea of incorporating Pedro G. as a character, resonates with the Taoist tradition of transmission from master to disciple. Pericón is the great character created by José Luis Ortiz Nuevo based on the flamenco singer Pericón de Cádiz. It is often Pericón who speaks here, sometimes Pedro G. Romero, and, less often, José Luis Ortiz Nuevo himself, actor and language comedian.

Standing with arms akimbo, he turns, shows his profile, bows his head, and admonishes with his finger. He pulls himself together and begins his dissertation:

1. The Spanish *acordarse* has been kept in the translation because although it's an injunction to "remember," its meaning and traditional use in flamenco culture

is not captured by this English word, nor is it possible to translate the play of words as the text progresses: *¡Hay que acordarse! ¡Acordarse! Cordarse.*—Trans.

[the text, starting to speak in a very high voice, dancing in concentric circles]

*Hay que acordarse!*  
*The boy had written FLA.CO.MEN. and CO.*  
*MEN.FLA. and FLA.MEN.CO., three very*  
*strange and very consequential patterns.*

[still moving in concentric circles, reading, text in hand, with an exaggerated anti-naturalistic delivery]

*Hay que acordarse!*  
*That French pair, Danielle and Michel—*  
*4taxi—I don't know what it was that they*  
*taught G., but a whole world opened up to*  
*him in that laboratory in Seville. Time has*  
*passed precisely as they said it would.*

[moving left and right, pacing here and there while shouting out a text that he is obviously reading]

*Hay que acordarse!*  
*Arahal and the Gamboas and cousin José*  
*Manuel and myself, José Luis Ortiz Nuevo,*  
*who picked him up at those performances of*  
*mine at the Maestranza with Carmen Linares,*  
*with Chano Lobato, and, oh! with Estrella*  
*Morente.*

[suddenly solemn and grandiloquent, so that his words sound even more like parody]

*Hay que acordarse!*  
*Chano Lobato asked him, "Son, why would*  
*I go to Planta Baja? my cousin in Granada*  
*told me it's a dive for drug addicts, hipsters,*  
*and faggots." But he insisted, and Gamboa*  
*helped, and Chano Lobato went there, to*  
*Granada, and gave a memorable concert*  
*surrounded by drug addicts, hipsters, and*  
*faggots.*

[still doing a little dance, his body following the rhythm marked by his belly, joking around more than before]

*Hay que acordarse!*  
*Pepa Gamboa had told him, "You have to see*  
*that boy dancing." And he saw Israel, he saw*  
*Galván, and he came out saying, "Yes, with*  
*this one, with this one, yes!" And something*  
*about a yellow shirt that had danced soleá*  
*por bulerías, and that he was Mayakovsky to*  
*him, that he had seen Mayakovsky dance,*  
*brought back to life!*

[with the humorous tone rising eight notches. Even the pitch of his voice is higher, and he has a teasing, mocking tone toward everything he says]

*Hay que acordarse!*  
*The work that ended up being called The Red*  
*Shoes. It was a turning point. Manuel Soler*  
*was there, giving his all. And what had G.*  
*done apart from the music, the set design,*  
*choosing the choreography, some dances,*  
*the dramaturgy, the texts, and the posters,*  
*apart from collaborating with the director*  
*and the choreography, apart from introducing*  
*Conlon Nancarrow, Bauhaus, Sonic Youth,*  
*and Lydia Lunch into flamenco? Well,*  
*nothing, he'd done nothing. Nothing at all.*

[starts roaring with laughter and continues in a similar vein]

*Hay que acordarse!*  
*The Espárrago Rock festival when a chirigota*  
*drew the punks away from Albert Pla, to this*  
*band from Cádiz. The guys came out reading*  
*newspapers, sitting on a toilet with their*  
*pants down, half shitting themselves, and the*  
*chorus said, "Felipe! Gonzalez! Go fuck*  
*yourself! Go fuck yourself! Go fuck yourself!*  
*Without anesthesia..." Certainly not subtle,*  
*not subtle at all.*

[getting bombastic and histrionic, like Fernando Fernán Gómez in the famous "señoriiiiitooo!" scene in *Voyage to Nowhere*]

*Acordarse!*

*Algeciras bullring, half-empty for an extraordinary concert. Kiko Veneno with La Chirigota del Selú and Víctor Nubla's piece with the Algeciras Municipal Band. And at daybreak, Muslimgauze was still playing with a group of gnawas. A new day was dawning in the Strait of Gibraltar.*

[walking with comical gait of Cádiz lineage]

*Acordarse!*

*Those recordings or collages or lekeitios, mixing music and sounds and songs and animals bellowing, as Mikel Laboa said, as if music were also a way of talking. The ones he made for Horacio Fernández's Fotografía pública with Helios Gómez getting them to play "Amarguras" at Durruti's funeral. The ones he made for Patricia Molins's 500 años de la Universidad de Valencia, with Papillón remarking on how easy democracy is with so much police. The ones he made for Juan José Lahuerta's Gaudí, where anarchists burned the doors of the chapel to the sound of Russian Orthodox music.*

[this man really struggles to read out lists of names!]

*Acordarse!*

*ABECEDARIO, it was called, and flamenco artists sang and danced Borges, and some astonishing things happened there: Manuel Soler dancing "The House of Asterion" read by Pepe Luis Vázquez; a tiger moving on the screen for ten minutes to the sound of Japanese drums; Israel Galván doubling Falla's farruca in Farrrrrrrrruca, and Eva La Yerbabuena recogiendo to Marcel Duchamp and Don Antonio Chacón. Juan Antonio Maesso, Pepa Gamboa, and Nonio Parejo were there, and María Kodama who told G. that yes, it was true, Borges always believed that Silverio Lanza was an invention of Ramón Gómez de la Serna.*

[chaotic enumeration]

*Acordarse, acordarse, acordarse!*

*Ah! "La milonga del forastero," with Carmen Linares and Gerardo Núñez on guitar, still with Borges, and how obstinately G. insisted that it had to be done, droning away, pestering, and what came out was so wonderful! There, from the throat of that woman from Linares!*

[saying everything to the rhythm of soleá por bulería]

*Acordarse!*

*Fui piedra y perdí mi centro, I was stone and I lost my center, Enrique, we repeated that line over and over. And Enrique was Enrique Morente and he gave us that gift, with Estrella Morente and Lagartija Nick, which was initially called La transformación, thanks to the advice of Jordi Llovet, and which opened Metamorphosis by the Israel Galván Company.*

[in a voice mimicking the kind of comic horror film where the scary bits make you laugh]

*Acordarse!*

*There was Inventario, based on Bernardo Atxaga's Inventario de Henry Bengoa, in which I myself—he who is addressing you—was an actor, an actor, with Inma la Bruja and Arcángel and Isabel Bayón, on that boat designed by Antonio Marín, where the Ancient Bizoc was playing, an impressive trumpet solo heralding the failure of a work that was almost a masterpiece. And it wasn't even for political reasons, it simply wasn't understood, it was made long before something like it could be understood, its excellence went unnoticed.*

[joking around]

*Acordarse!*

*By land, sea, and air, Pericón de Cádiz, myself, myself—he who is speaking—playing Pericón de Cádiz in the theaters, Por dos letras, on the radio, Pericón y los animales, even on television, Pericón, Pericón. G. says that the book was a masterpiece, he says it and I confirm it, embodying him up and down, here and there. He even turned up in Modos de hacer as a key tool for the 15-M generation that occupied the squares.*

[getting caught up in the branches of the lemon tree as he speaks]

*Acordarse!*

*The countless conversations, discussions propping up the bar, at El Mago, in the artists' dressing rooms at flamenco festivals, the endless chats with José Manuel Gamboa, inexhaustible, talking and talking nonstop, about this and that and the other, which is to say, always about flamenco.*

[emphasizing exaggerations to the point of absurdity]

*Acordarse!*

*What G. called the máquina p.h., written like that, in lower case, a minor art, with the p.h. to see if something is acid or alkaline, all these projects that were provided for with the continued and continuous reading of the Coplas mecánicas, by Juan de Mairena, Jorge Meneses, and Antonio Machado, because we no longer know who is who.*

[a syncope, reading as though he is about to faint]

*Acordarse!*

*There was the Farruca del 11 de septiembre, with Israel Galván doing forty-three llamadas in his dance and Gerardo Núñez urging him on with the guitar, and the finale, The End, with Marc Ribalta and Julio Jara, and that no, they didn't let us rain down*

*pamphlets onto the audience at the Teatro Central in Seville.*

[suddenly changing tone, with a constant little shake from left to right and right to left]

*Acordarse!*

*The Spanish Night, sharing research and curatorship with Patricia Molins all over Europe, Paris and London, and in Russia, Moscow and Saint Petersburg. What a thrill it was to discover Fedorovsky's red square, which had crowned the stage in a performance of Carmen two years before Malevich's black square in Victory over the Sun! How important that was, even if the work couldn't travel to Madrid in the end! Suddenly, the importance of flamenco in the arts before World War II was turning out to be true, like rock and roll in the second half of the twentieth century. And art history had kept it hidden from us! Our sponsor Ángel González didn't believe it until he saw the exhibition, until he touched the cigarette butt that Manet's The Spanish Singer was going to put out with his foot.*

[returning to the bizarre reading style]

*Acordarse!*

*Its title was H and its subtitle was Una zarzuela, un musical, un flamenco... a radio piece for the FIT in Cádiz, with La Chirigota del Selú creating coplas from G.'s compilation of carnival lyrics about the atomic bomb. Amazing what you can learn from a chirigota! Cañamaque, El Beni de Cádiz, and El Masa.*

[and the dialectical joking]

*Acordarse.*

*Pastora Galván playing Carmen in La francesa with Mikel Laboa's "Baga, biga, higa."*

[dialect and *jerga*, *juerga*?<sup>2</sup>]

*Acordarse.*

*Arena, which was already a success, and Israel Galván became a star, yes, with six bulls that when alive had killed their respective bullfighters in the bullring.*

[throwing the papers into the air, so that they fall into the pool]

*Acordarse.*

*An unprecedented crowd turned up at the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo to see *Vivir en Sevilla*, not the film—although that too—but the exhibition on the lumpen productivism in film, music, and theater that fueled Seville's counterculture from the end of the 1960s. It was a side of culture that had been pushed into the background by official modernity, which incidentally had much less in common with New York and cosmopolitanism than these people who came from below, from the barrios, the Roma themselves.*

[suddenly speaking softly]

*Acordarse.*

*There was *Tabula rasa* with Inés Bacán, Diego Amador, and Israel Galván. Each performed solo, coming on stage and dancing over the atmosphere left behind in the empty space after the previous dancer. It was then that I really understood what Deleuze called *minor art*, and how it is embodied in flamenco.*

[returning to the grandiloquent discourse]

*Acordarse.*

*Inflammable, that was the name of the film programs on bohemia and flamenco, on*

2. A play on words that finds a connection between *jerga* "jargon" and *juerga* "party" or "revelry."—Trans.

*the avant-garde and flamenco, on the counterculture and flamenco. Screening Basilio Martín Patino's *Desde lo más hondo*. Silverio and Gonzalo García Pelayo's *Vivir en Sevilla*.*

[whispering, resting his head on the glass]

*Acordarse.*

*Isabel Bayón playing *Conchita* in *La mujer y el pelele* and myself—I who am delivering this vulgar speech—behind her, quite crazy, like Don Mateo, roaming the streets.*

[continuing to move his head against the glass, using his bald patch as pivot]

*Acordarse.*

*La Molina, Rocío Molina, doing turns on a stool with impossible veils, to the sound of "Mambrú se fue a la guerra." Her turning in the midst of such weightless materials was terribly moving. A revelation then: be capable of the sublime with the lowest, with kitsch, camp, cheesy materials.*

[now his hand rests on the window]

*Acordarse.*

*When Fernando Terremoto sang "Luz en los balcones" to us for the first time, at six in the morning, I thought it sounded like a song by Alejandro Sanz, one of the good ones, in a hotel in the south of France, on one of the tours of *La edad de oro*, when I thought that *tonás* was the proper thing to sing at that time of day, with the sun coming up.*

[a certain teasing tone returns]

*Acordarse.*

*El final de este estado de cosas at the *Teatro de Mijas*, four hours of total chaos in a state of grace. Excess in every sense, the excess of the senses.*

[is it possible to describe this as solemn jesting?]

*Cordarse.*

*Finally, LO REAL/LE RÉEL/THE REAL, an all-out production by the Teatro Real in Madrid during Mortier's time as director, and the scandal of the premiere. Flamenco saying goodbye to one era and entering another, and there was a price to be paid. I remember José Manuel Caballero Bonald crying near the exit and I still don't know exactly what he was mourning.*

[almost sentimental, picking up one of the branches of the jasmine vine entangled in the lemon tree and rocking it]

*Cordarse.*

*Rocío Márquez, I've seen few people sing as perfectly as Márquez and how she tailed off Lorca's petenera with Shostakovich's music at the Teatro Real, and how she sang, almost angry, with such perfection, the sweet tyranny of beauty...*

[now violently flinging a branch laden with lemons]

*Cordarse.*

*Leonor Leal and her invention of the performative flamenco lecture, what a mind! What a stylish haircut! The dancing of La Argentina and Mario Maya and Vicente Escudero had never been so well explained.*

[walking backward and becoming falsely grandiloquent]

*Cordarse.*

*Juan Jiménez and Antonio Moreno, Proyecto Lorca, Sistema Tango with Perrate in Oporto, what an incredible concert, "To Arms, Citizens!" Juan was an adherent of palio paso in Holy Week, Antonio of the Christ, but we could talk about contemporary*

*music, about Crumb and Nancarrow, but also about flamenco. I've learned so much with them.*

[jumping! jumping!]

*Cordarse,*

*and I was there as referee, but in that giant called Israel Galván versus Las Tres Mil Viviendas, in the midst of Bobote, El Ruso, El Bizco Eléctrico, and El Dientes, all in their boxing shorts, tiny bodies and rolls of fat showing, in the midst of that carnivalesque scene, Caracafé came out, also wearing shorts, scrawny body, guitar at the ready, and started to play a moving seguriya, in the midst of the spectacle, in the midst of the representation of the most lowly, and, as I said, it was moving, it cut through the air, the atmosphere.*

[laughing, but he has been doing nothing else the whole time!]

*Cordarse.*

*About Paco, Niño de Elche, my daughter used to ask how he could be the man sparking so much controversy when he was such a sweetheart, a guy with a heart of gold. The complexity of the artist Niño de Elche was there from the beginning. To understand so early on that the voice is not just an instrument, an organ of the body, but the opposite: that the voice is a body without organs and the voice has as many implications as there are genders, races, social classes, landscapes, animals, fields, and cities in the world.*

[starts reading very fast]

*Cordarse.*

*Javiera de la Fuente between Hungary and Slovakia, in the middle of a gypsy camp, they even wanted to buy her from me to marry one of their sons! I have never seen such deeply*

*gypsy dancing as the dancing that took place among the bicycle wheels, the batteries, some coins, some silver curtains like Andy Warhol's, and the voices of Rudolf Rostas's sisters, all those Roma women singing and crying.*

[speaking on tiptoe]

*Cordarse.*  
*Ah! López sisters, Úrsula and Tamara. Do you know what it means to love el baile, to love dance? They are well aware that there's no difference, but Úrsula is baile and Tamara is dance. I've never seen anybody work so hard or so well. It may not have turned out well for many reasons, but not because they hadn't worked at it.*

[gesturing pompously, lending weight to his words and joking at the same time]

*Cordarse.*  
*Raül Refree with Sílvia Pérez Cruz at the tribute to Morente at the Maestranza bullring, and how they brought the house down, "Pequeño vals vienés," "Ramón Sijé," "Que nos van aniquilando." The flamenco aficionados asked me, "Who are these guys?!" and Kiki Morente, "You expect me to go out there after these two." The electric storms, the throat open like sex, the expression "a thunderous success" was never so apt.*

[with much histrionics, much nonsense]

*Acordarse también,*  
*Fiesta, La Fiesta, G. tells me that he only pushed things along, that everything was already galvanic, and he tells me to say that he hasn't seen anything as good by Israel Galván, and it is him saying so, and he seems authoritative.*

[thrown for a loop]

*Acordarse también,*  
*Going around with Tomás de Perrate, singing all through Utrera, in the houses of his cousins, with Gamboa, with his compadres, perfecting the soleá that his father, the great Perrate de Utrera, had sung. And everything that was talked about, that thing flamencos so rightly call "the truth," which Tomás sets so much store by, although he knows that "the truth" is an *infundio*, but also that an *infundio* can, absolutely, be that which—truly!—flamencos call the truth.<sup>3</sup>*

[like saetas but mucking around, proclaiming]

*Acordarse también,*  
*The people at Athenaica and their editorial invitation to direct a collection of books, which ended up being on flamenco and popular culture, but I think those books are important for a general understanding of language, culture, and probably the new regime of the arts that is on the way.*

[a bit like a troubadour answering himself]

*Acordarse también,*  
*because it was with the "athenaicos" that I published *El ojo partido*, which gave rise to so many projects and places, so much learning, from working on Helios Gómez, Vicente Escudero, José Val del Omar, Ocaña, 4taxis, and Darcy Lange.*

[going through the names and becoming affectionate]

*Acordarse también,*  
*that Máquinas de vivir changed my life. Five years spent working on Architecture and Flamenco in the Occupation and*

3. *Infundio* in the context of flamenco culture is a kind of tall story, when someone tells a story that cannot possibly be true, but the listeners respond as though it were. That interplay is an *infundio*.—Trans.

*Vacation of Spaces, but it was more than that, in a sense, it turned my life around.*

[with diction that is funereal rather than just solemn]

*Acordarse también,  
Pedro Barragán and the Sociedad Flamenca  
El Dorado in Barcelona, where I never  
expected that I would find a home, a family.  
All sorts of things happened there, meeting  
Raoul Vaneigem, Paco Ibáñez, Paco Aroca,  
not everything is flamenco in flamenco.*

[speaking in a voice that is getting tired but not without humor]

*Acordarse también,  
that thing we do in libraries, Filiep Tacq, Israel  
Galván, and G., myself, A Throw of the Dice,  
where so many things become clear...*

[his pants are falling down!]

*Acordarse también,  
Ah! Lucía La Piñona, what a great human! It  
was like love at first sight, how I love the way  
she dances, in her own way, her  
determination to dance in a certain way  
without exhibitionism, without mannerism,  
without racism, to dance there, like this,  
here!*

[putting one of the sheets of paper on his head!]

*Acordarse también,  
Rosario Toledo, who is speed, is it possible to  
learn so much from speed? Contradicting all  
the laws of progress, of course you can stop  
in the middle of the vortex of velocity.*

[laughing too, without knowing why]

*Acordarse también,  
the creation of pie.flamenca, first as part of  
UNIA arteypensamiento and then in*

*association with Joaquín Vázquez and  
Chema Blanco, and with Carolina and Julio  
from Alarcón Criado gallery, and with  
Enrique Fuenteblanca, and with more people,  
I hope, well, with the people who are making  
this video.*

[unsatisfied with his tone, repeating over and over until he achieves the tone he wants]

*Acordarse, acordarse, acordarse también*

[thank goodness I'm wearing underpants today!]

The actor stands in the middle of the patio. His underpants are down and he is holding a blank sheet of paper on top of his head. He removes the paper like a hat, in greeting. He exits the patio already commenting on his performance under his breath.



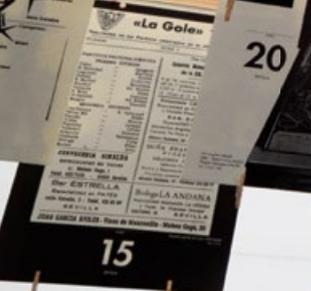
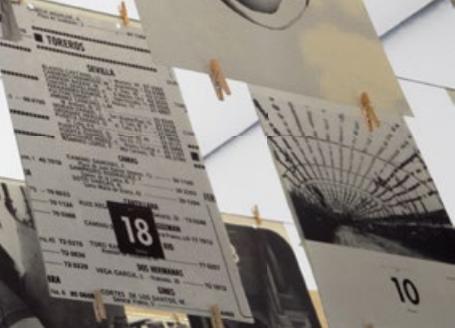
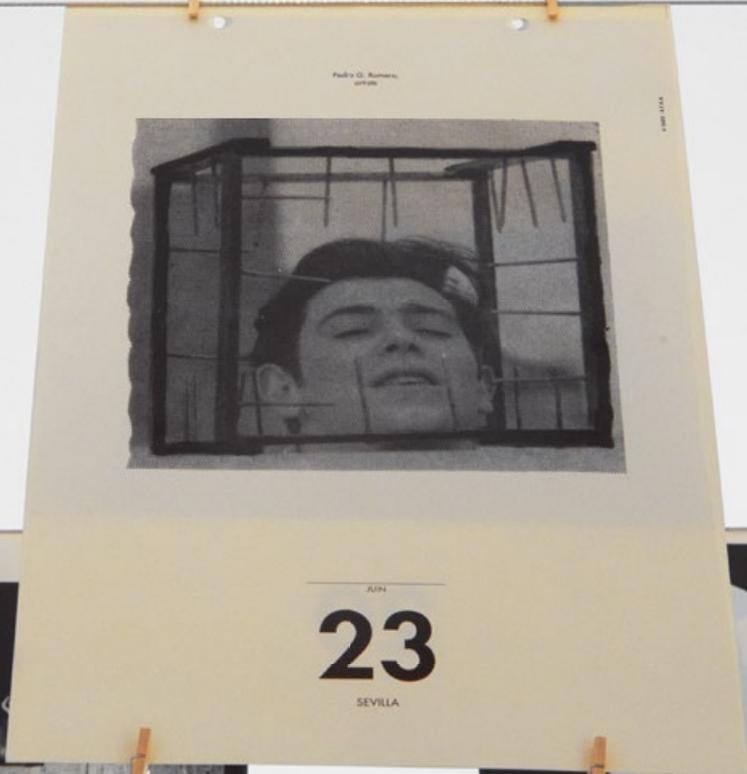














# Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead

## Una forma de ser

Gerd Arntz, Daniel Baker, Caricatures de la guerra social contemporánea, Joy Charpentier, Ines Dautak, El Solitario / Francisco Lameyer, Toto Estirado, Flo 6x8, Robert Galbris, María García Ruiz, Gonzalo García-Pelayo, Israel Galván, Tony Galif, Helios Gomez, Francisco de Goya, Isaias Gribolo, Julio Jara, Hiwa K, Teresa Lanceta, Hans Lange / Maria Snijders, Delaine La Bar, Los Putrefactos, Miquelmas de Oro, Okaña, Otto Pankok, PLEIN, Ragel, Pedro C., Romero, August Sander, Franz W. Seiwert, SEM/EN, Siskin, Vera Stepan, María Maya y Teatro Gitano Andaluz, Luis Vicens, Rosario Vicens etc. / et al.

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Francisco de Goya, Luis Buñuel, etc. (18th c. - 19th c. - 20th c.)

# THE ARCHIVE AND THE IMAGE

(On *Archivo F.X. [Esthesis, Iconomy,  
Politics]*)

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* Does the archaeology of knowledge—which would seem to obsess you and run through all your artistic activity—explain what led you to think about the archive as a subject of labor, given its taxonomical and ordering nature?

I

*Pedro G. Romero:* Not exactly. It actually began with the conviction that the space of art was already institutionally colonized. Experience told me that regardless of what one did, the system of curators, museums, exhibitions, and so on, would supply the meaning. We were operating under the museum apparatus—the museum is nothing more than a modality of the archive—and no other exteriority was possible, except perhaps the one I was learning through flamenco, which is both hegemonic and peripheral. But I think that experience came later. It was then that I started to believe in the need to operate in the same way, as if I were an institution. I think some texts by Mary Douglas<sup>1</sup> were decisive in this. There is no gesture that does not become an instituent gesture, it is a question of persistence. Though the size, type, and function of the institution is another matter. This gesture is always a beginning, a principle [in a sense now obsolete—Trans.], an *arkhē*. The word “archive” comes from here, and “anarchy” literally means *an-arkhē*. So, based on that desire to bring about a collision of opposites—an institution of the “destituting,” an archive of anarchy—fortune conspired to give the name “Archive” to my work on images of iconoclasm—another pair of opposites. Then came the archive fad, and I’m afraid the proliferation of work that came my way basically had to do with that frivolous circumstance. Because it is in fact the *arkhē* or taxonomic principle that makes something an archive, not a collection of things.

<sup>1</sup> For example, Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986); and *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of*

*Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

In “Archive Mania” (2009),<sup>1</sup> Suely Rolnik writes, “The globalized art world has been overtaken in recent decades by a true compulsion to archive—a compulsion that includes anything from academic research into preexisting archives or those still to be constructed, through exhibitions fully or in part based on them, to frantic competition among private collectors and museums in the acquisition of these new objects of desire.” She thereby introduces what she sees as the urgent question of inventory politics, although the work that is activated in an archive has less to do with the politics of inventories and collections than with transitions of certainty: when knowledge swivels and opens up to non-knowledge, in order to emphasize precisely that which cannot be organized, but can nevertheless be thought. Thus the importance of talking not about methods, but about ways of doing/making [*hacer*],<sup>2</sup> about sensible processes with the capacity to destabilize spheres of representation.

A certain way of acting originates and forms an image in itself. In other words, it opens up a space between images, a space of direct imaginal action, at the edge where images touch each other. As such, it is performative rather than representational. It opens up the exposition of the thing in its very act, which appears primarily in its “lapse,” in Walter Benjamin’s sense of the term, in its interstitial residue. How are images archived? How are gestures, rhythms, experiences *arkhē*?

One of Pedro G. Romero’s most fruitful contributions to thinking about and through images is undoubtedly that of knowledge through montage, in which events are not shaped by a convergent movement or a perspective, but are fueled by narratives bursting with distractions. *There is no gesture that does not become an instituent gesture, it is a question of persistence.*

*Valentín Roma:*

In his book *Snapshots* (1962),<sup>1</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet tries something that functions like a literary archive of pure surface: he describes certain settings with incomparable thoroughness, while the narrative action goes nowhere. This writing was of course compared to photography, to film, to a machine that documents whatever it looks at, without opinion. But perhaps we should consider that what is really being written—what is being told—in these “recordings” is a choreography of the eye as filter. And its “blinking” also expresses that which escaped words and went unnoticed, that which lacks a descriptive taxonomy. It is curious to note the extent to which the archive entered literature as a fantastic figure in the experiments of Raymond Queneau and the pataphysicists, in Adolfo Bioy Casares’s stories, in Jorge Luis Borges’s lists, and in so many other examples. A few years ago I read Rodrigo Rey Rosa’s *Human Matter* (2009),<sup>2</sup> which mostly consists of the notes made by a writer who consults a chaotic police archive, where he discovers horrific documents and files on the recent history of Guatemala. Rey Rosa peppers the text with references to his friendship with Miquel Barceló, and to a dinner with his editors at Gallimard for an awards ceremony at which they serve delicious canapés. The truth is that I found these jumps from the archive to more mundane literary life disconcerting. For a moment I seemed to glimpse a suspicious link between the archive and teenage diaries, which start by typifying evil and end up gloating over the adventure of one’s own sensibility, to put it nicely.

<sup>1</sup> Suely Rolnik, “Archive Mania,” trans. Pablo Lafuente, in Rolnik, *Archive Mania | Archivmanie*, ed. Documenta and Museum Fridericianum (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 4; originally published as “Furor de arquivo,” *Arte & Ensaio*, no. 19 (2009): 97–105.

<sup>2</sup> The Spanish construction *modo(s)/manera(s) de hacer* can be read indistinguishably as either “way(s) of making” or “way(s) of doing,” and this ambiguity is inherent in the construction. This ambiguity is maintained throughout this conversation with the English “doing/making.”

<sup>1</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Instantanés* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1962); Eng.: *Snapshots*, trans. Bruce Morrissette (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Rodrigo Rey Rosa, *El material humano* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2009); Eng.: *Human Matter*, trans. Eduardo Aparicio (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019).

*Isabel de Naverán:*

[Archaeology of Knowledge / The Body as Archive]  
 There is Pedro talking about Stéphane Mallarmé and his links to some *flamenco* (Flemish)<sup>1</sup> poets, about the idea of flamenco, about rhythm and silence, about the Flemish artist Marcel Broodthaers, and how in 1969 he modified one of Mallarmé's books—or rather, his poem par excellence, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance), published in 1914 by Gallimard. There is Pedro, talking about the flamenco-like overflowing of the boundaries of the page, about how the words—Mallarmé's words, I mean—were modified by Broodthaers, who manually placed black bars over them, one by one, and then pressed them all together, the words, in the introduction to the book, which is meant to be seen rather than read. Or perhaps sung, because it looks like a score with the black bars placed over the words like that. But even before this, it could already be sung, because reading it was more difficult, there were a lot of gaps, spaces that are not exactly empty, not really. Just before Pedro started to talk we heard from *flamenco* (Flemish) designer of artists' books Filiep Tacq, who has done a great deal of work on the other *flamenco* Marcel Broodthaers, and although he considers himself an amateur (as Broodthaers used to say) in that space of constantly learning that is amateurism, he talked about the importance of the space of the book, of the page, the fold, and the detail, of how a book is something one holds in one's hands, something one opens. He says that a book is not a book because we can read it, but because it displays its power to overflow. It is a device, better still, a display, and that means you have to open it up, leaf through it, look closely at its stitching. Then Filiep handed over to Pedro, who is there, talking about Mallarmé, of course!, and about the links with Antonio Machado and his heteronym Juan de Mairena and his Jorge Meneses and his versifying machine and so on. There he is, talking, when suddenly there is a loud sound, a bang, a thump. We look up at the ceiling. And he keeps talking, trying to follow the thread of his speech, the words of the poem. But the crossing-out—the thumps—are becoming more frequent, increasingly so, and the loud-silent dance, which is the stuttering tapping and stamping and clapping of the flamenco dancer Israel Galván imposing itself over the discursive speech of Pedro's words, which are, by now, incomprehensible, imposing itself like a black bar, manually, or at least bodily, placed over them. For Stéphane Mallarmé it was a poem, for Marcel Broodthaers it was images, for

Israel Galván it is dance. But the same power is activated in each of them.<sup>2</sup>

In his text “The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances” (2010),<sup>3</sup> André Lepecki draws on Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* to develop the idea of a “will to archive” that has to do with choreographic work or dance, with the dancer and the question of returning as experimentation. It is a reactivation of the past as an experimental exercise or an experience, rather than through a nostalgic lens. Lepecki refers to Foucault's idea that the archive is, above all, “a system of *transforming simultaneously* past, present, and future—that is, a system for recreating a whole economy of the temporal.” The “will to archive” reflects the capacity to “identify in a past work still non-exhausted creative fields.”<sup>4</sup>

Israel Galván does this through dance. He does it with dance. In dance. Dancing. He does not, however, dance in order to enter the archive of the poem par excellence, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*, but in order to allow the archive to enter his body. Literally. To allow it to permeate, to enter and do battle with the archive of techniques and traditions that is his body, to dance and do battle with his carnal dispositive, because, although he does not say so, he seems to know that he can only do it choreographically, for, as Lepecki reminds us, “if choreography knows something, it is that an archive does not store: it acts.”<sup>5</sup>

1. The Spanish *flamenco* means both flamenco and Flemish.—Trans.

2. Israel Galván, Pedro G. Romero, and Filiep Tacq, *A Throw of the Dice...* was conceived and produced in 2017 and 2018 as part of the project *The Book to Come*, curated by Bulegoa z/b for Corpus, network for performance practice, co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union (2014–17). It was presented in the reading room at the Museo Reina Sofia Library and Documentation Centre in April 2019.

3. André Lepecki, “The Body as Archive: Will to Re-enact and the Afterlives of Dances,” *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 28–48.

4. *Ibid.*, 63 (italics in the original).

5. *Ibid.*, 71.

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* The *Versifying Machine* inspires much of your work, especially the Archivo F.X. Could we say that the Archivo F.X., like a versifying machine, seeks to work in a deindividuated way? That it presents itself as a countermodel, which, unlike a traditional archive, is open and capable of producing compositions in which many people can recognize themselves and through which it is possible to connect the experiences of different human groups?

## II

*Pedro G. Romero:* Only in a very broad sense of versifying machine, which would include the half-parodic, half-real experiences that the avant-garde adopted as its *modus operandi*. There is Tristan Tzara's way of making a poem—which Machado parodies—and those other machines that are not exactly modern. I am thinking of Raymond Roussel and this text *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*,<sup>1</sup> which I took as a model for all my pieces in the series *El trabajo* (Work), for example. My interest in these procedures and in the absolute decentering of the Archivo F.X.—which I'd describe as verging on nonsense rather than “open”—has to do with testing my hypothesis of creating an archive that is not policial. I have always been very conscious that the circulation of art is not just politics but also policial, in my loose reading of the distinction established by Jacques Rancière. As well as operating in the thesaurus, the core, the indexing mandate of the project, I also wanted this decentering or deterritorialization, if you will, to operate in the institution that all archives establish. So in that sense the idea was, as you suggest, to open up, to perforate, to be porous and

<sup>1</sup> Raymond Roussel, *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Lemerre, 1935); Eng.: *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*, trans. John Ashbery (Boston: Exact Change, 2005).

permeated by many experiences. I have in fact found that this is also possible in an institution, even without opening up its DNA—or thesaurus, or main index—even while it remains policial. But what may be strange is to maintain that idea of *institutio* while making not just the institution porous but also its mandates, its orders, its thesaurus. As Nuria Enguita once told me, this can only be achieved through work, a lot of work, reconfiguring the elements over and over again. It's been twenty years, yes, and it's not done yet.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

When opening up to the reality of images and imaginaries, and more broadly to the knowledge that art makes possible, one does not really work with one's own ideas or will, but rather influenced by the collective sphere that can profoundly shape a work. Knowledge through art does not "give something," it resituates, it creates other scenes that produce a well from which they forge the conditions for their emergence and break with the institutionalized logic of the scene.

The structure of images is not shaped all at once but develops within a complex economy that creates its own epistemological categories and operates, as Susan Buck-Morss said, from an understanding of the transience of things, uniting with its potentiality of the *now*. One approach can be to seek out devices that make us aware of our own clumsiness—as Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui calls it—and thus prevent us from projecting a preexisting meaning onto them. This practice requires a particular disposition, one that looks for mechanisms of disorientation, a certain clearing of Western thought built upon a paradigm that pervades all domains of experience: the individual being. This is why it is so problematic to analyze phenomena such as, for example, how to move from the individual to the collective, from the personal to the social, from particular experience to knowledge, etcetera. *Making-being* implies "listening," as Jean-Luc Nancy would say, to our relational space, a question that had already been expressed in other ways in Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Bergson.

Deindividuating creation does not so much involve the conditions by which a relationship is established, but rather a kind of evolving genesis in which singularities shape its form through friction, through multiple communications and also through that which throbs indistinct in its oblique shadows. And also an open economy that is not guided by a line of continuity but rather circumnavigates it, embraces its excess, approaching from multiple perspectives, laying siege to it, withdrawing. As Mani Kaul says, "It was evident that the sensuousness of an object would manifest itself at a given moment from a single angle of view. But if you go around an object, incorporate aspects of different perspectives and heap them upon the object, you destroy the sensuous relation with the object."<sup>1</sup> The possibility of unregulated experience opens up

here. The thinking that takes place through art is an exposed, fragile thinking, only thus can it remain open to its *institutio*.

<sup>1</sup> Mani Kaul, "The Rambling Figure," in *Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures, 1998–2001*, ed. Larry Sider et al. (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2003), 212.

*Valentín Roma:*

Everything Rancière says about politics and police is also expressed by Nicanor Parra—rather less pompously—in his artifact-book *Chistes parra desorientar a la policía poesía* (Jokes to Confuse the Police, 1983).<sup>1</sup> Because, ultimately, the idea of art is to confuse, to throw into disarray, to disobey any entity that looks down on us from above. Incidentally: When will we give gossip “instituent” status? When will we have an epistemology that does not consider gossip to be a lack of truth? Although come to think of it, Slavoj Žižek published a divertimento entitled *Žižek’s Jokes: (Did You Hear the One about Hegel and Negation?)* (2014),<sup>2</sup> which brought together some of the Slovenian thinker’s bland, terribly *payo* jokes. Apart from being awful, the text exemplified the extent to which we lack the basic foundations from which to think up a literary ideology of laughter.

*Isabel de Naverán:*

[Having a Doing/Making]

In conjunction with the presentation of the performance *A Throw of the Dice...* at the Museo Reina Sofía, I invited Pedro to lead a seminar in the Masters in Arts Practice and Visual Culture at the museum’s Study Centre.<sup>1</sup> I urged him to speak as an artist. And so he started the first day of the seminar declaring, “I don’t have a doing/making.”

Recently, during the Punto de Vista film festival in Pamplona, Portuguese choreographer Vera Mantero, who had just met Pedro, asked me, intrigued, “What is Pedro’s work, what does he do?” The friend who was with us and I remained silent as we watched Pedro walking a few meters ahead, talking to a few people in that group. He saw his back move away from us down the darkened street. Walking and talking, gesturing with his hands.

I don’t have a doing/making, he said at the seminar that day, referring to the fact that what makes him an artist is not that he is particularly good at drawing, or making sculptures, or filming, painting, dancing, or any of that. That he is not skilled in a specific discipline, that there is nothing he “does/makes” in the conventional sense of doing/making art. He said it with some regret, as if he had missed out on something. He says, “when I write, I do writing, I set out to write, I act as if what I do is writing.” To do. To write. To set out to do/make, in short, to do as if he does. Not in the sense of pretending, or simulating, or deceiving, but of doing, in the literal sense of working, operating. Operating a doing. Having a know-how, a knowing-how-to-do.

I said to him, “Well, we could say that your doing/making is conversing. That particular doing is very characteristic of what you do, you converse. You set out to converse, to do/make conversation.” Because to converse is not just to talk and say things, but to listen. Above all, to listen. Even if that sounds unlikely because when we, who were behind him, looked up as if searching for an answer to the question, “What is his work, what does he do?” we saw that in the group in front of us, that night, just before curfew, Pedro was clearly talking and walking flanked by two or three others who also appeared to be talking and walking. It is possible that they were listening. In any case they were immersed, caught up in the middle of a conversation.

In an article entitled “Telling Is Listening,” Ursula K. Le Guin compares her model for communication by

<sup>1</sup> Nicanor Parra, *Chistes parra desorientar a la policía poesía* (Madrid: Visor, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Žižek’s Jokes: (Did You Hear the One about Hegel and Negation?)*, ed. Audun Mortensen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).

<sup>1</sup> The MA in Arts Practice and Visual Culture is organized by ARTEA, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, and Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid, in collaboration with Azala Espacio de Creación.

speech—conversation, the way people speak and listen to each other at the same time—to the way amoebas have sex, “to exchange genetic ‘information.’” Two amoebas get together, she says, “and reach out to each other and meld their pseudopodia into a little tube or channel connecting them ... they literally give each other inner bits of their bodies, via a channel or bridge which is made out of outer bits of their bodies.”<sup>2</sup> What is evocative here is, firstly, that the amoeba has to reach out, that is, deform itself in an elastic plasticity, stretching into a tube that did not exist before. And secondly, the coming and going of particles that merge and fuse, in a transformation.

Conversation can be thought of as an exchange between inner bits that speak and listen to each other, in which speaking and listening are the same thing. It is a merging, when it arises, when it happens, which is not always or often, a listening while speaking. Speaking, not in order to say something but as a means of entering a relation of transfers, an alternation. To speak is to listen, to allow oneself to be altered. And “listening,” as Andrea Soto Calderón notes, is to allow oneself to be affected by the collective and opens up “the possibility of unregulated experience.” I like this idea of understanding listening as allowing oneself to be infiltrated, a kind of porosity or permeability.

And then there is the fact that you never know how long it will last. The conversation. Because it is not a dissertation or a discourse or a monologue or a dialogue. To meet up with Pedro, or to enter into what he does, is to be prepared for the machine to start working without knowing where it will take you. Sometimes, as you walk with him, you are waylaid by people who latch on and unceremoniously join the conversation, stay for lunch. It happens in a way that seems natural or improvised, but if you think about it afterward, it is like a machine starting up. And many hours can go by, if you choose to stay, a whole day, a night, and the following day, people coming and going, or you yourself leave and come back, or you don’t. And then there is the walking, strolling, moving around in a car, eating, drinking, visiting bookshops, chancing upon a flea market, talking to someone nobody knows. And in this wandering people latch on, as I said, it is a latching-on of many voices, sometimes there are heated discussions, or laughter, or someone offers to buy a few beers. Other times you go and see something, go into a theater, talk about it, artists pass by and always stop, there is enough time, that is, they make time, they stop and make time, and space opens up. Well, everything opens up, the mind, the senses. That is a kind of doing/making. Speaking, and above all listening, is a form of deindividuation, of

creating community, of, as Le Guin says, “physically getting in time and in tune”<sup>3</sup> with others. A doing/making that requires space, and requires time.

It requires you to become part of a movement that moves, and that moves you. It does not displace you but it resituates you in the sense of making you high, altering sensory perception. And note that there is no difference between sensory and intellectual sense. To make sense, or better still, to enter, with the hands and feet and mouth. To enter with the mouth. To speak. To savor without knowing (*savoir*), like entering the sea. Being high on the sea. Learning to swim, as Gilles Deleuze wrote, referring to Spinoza. An alteration. It is not about confronting the water and fighting the waves, but being engulfed, becoming part of it, merging, so that the so-called characteristic relations are composed and decomposed. That is how I see it, Pedro’s doing/making. Or rather his know-how, which is both sensual and intellectual. To explain this and explore Spinoza’s thought, Deleuze puts forward the image of learning to swim, as I was saying. He establishes the difference between dabbling—which implies the collision of differentiated bodies in “extrinsic relations” that are buffeted without knowing anything about the relations that are composed or decomposed—and having learned to swim, a state in which “I learn how to compose my characteristic relations directly with the relations of the wave. This doesn’t occur any longer between the wave and me, that is, it doesn’t happen between the extensive parts, the wet parts of the wave and the parts of my body. It occurs between relations.”<sup>4</sup>

It does not happen between bodies, it occurs between relations.

2. Ursula K. Le Guin, “Telling Is Listening,” in *The Wave In The Mind: Talks and Essays on the Writer, the Reader, and the Imagination* (New York: Random House, 2004), 188–89.

3. *Ibid.*, 197.

4. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Velocities of Thought*, seminar at the Université de Paris, Vincennes-St. Denis, 1980–81, lecture 13, March 17, 1981, trans. Charles J. Stivale, Purdue University Research Repository, <https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/seminars/spinoza-velocities-thought/lecture-13>.

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* The Archivo F.X. has taken on a life of its own. Do you think this is what has made it possible for something that began as a vast archive of images of political iconoclasm to end up becoming a tool, an operational framework from which to engage with other institutions horizontally and initiate art processes and projects in which participating agents are jointly responsible for its functioning and development?

### III

*Pedro G. Romero:* Yes, that's what I would like to think, perhaps overly optimistically. But in any case, I think that the dispositive has allowed me to practice a way of doing/making, of producing, and of interacting with various fields, spaces, and times, that certainly goes beyond the Archivo F.X. That experience—which was also an experiment—was also my way of approaching my operations in the field of popular culture, of flamenco. It gave me a better understanding of its functioning and a desire to operate in that same field. In the exhibition *The Empty City: Community*, which the Archivo F.X. presented at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona,<sup>1</sup> I remember someone saying that they had gone expecting to see anarchists burning churches and they found a whole lot of Andalusians, *gitanos*, and *flamencos*. Leaving aside the fact that Badia del Vallès—a new city created for migrants from the south of Spain to Catalonia in the 1970s—was the place explored in the project, the idea of making those distinctions was of no consequence. The dispositive that already interested me back then—the dispositive of distrusting images—was generated by a kind of doing/making that could be called popular, or “flamenco,” to give a kind of ownership to a certain way of doing/making of the masses or the lumpen. Even republican legitimacy had warned of the excesses of the lumpenproletariat! Even Federica Montseny had persecuted *flamencas* as prostitutes! So yes, the modern iconoclastic dispositive coincided—as in Meneses's versifying machine—with the *fandango* tradition—iconophilia!—of a group of *aficionados* having a drink in a bar.

<sup>1</sup> Nuria Enguita Mayo (curator), *F.X. Archive: The Empty City. Community*, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, January 27 to April 16, 2006.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

It's one thing to understand the mechanics of the machine, but it's quite another to grasp its underlying economy. Both kinds of knowledge are important, but remaining exclusively in one does not allow us to produce compositions that respond to the institutions that have organized certain specific imaginary significations. Introducing disruptions into the logic of images requires starting up another machine that is made up of small systems. A game that expands through the incorporation of relationships or even a bodily choreography, as Isabel de Naverán suggests. She introduces the possibility of bodies in an attempt to establish a critical sensibility that activates another force, which, through its movement, takes on meaning and becomes embedded in other organisms.

*A-logon* is that which appears without warning. I would say that images containing imagining vestiges activate the potential of this gesture in its capacity to make the subject leave the sphere of representation. That is why I think it is crucial to put in place mechanisms that do not simply repeat the traditional hostility toward images, and instead explore their roles in the organization of our everyday life. The encounter with the "unlived" that they carry. There is no better affirmation of the power and value of images than their destruction.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty pointed out that we do not look at images as we look at objects: how we look depends on the image. He also said that "vision happens among, or is caught in, things—in that place where something visible undertakes to see."<sup>1</sup> Pedro likes to consider that same operation from another source: Antonio Machado's "the eye that you see is not an eye because you see it; it is an eye because it sees you."<sup>2</sup> It seems to me that this thinking-through-montage is a practice that connects images through an assemblage of links, that is, by giving rise to modes of being. This *making-be* of images sometimes requires us "to make holes, to introduce voids and white spaces, to rarefy the image, by suppressing many things that have been added to make us believe that we were seeing everything."<sup>3</sup> To resist aspirations to stable economies of meaning, it must be possible to move them without submitting to their forms.

*Valentín Roma:*

Being simultaneously distrustful of and seduced by the image we project in the social field is one of the great themes of what we could call *déclassement* novels. A paradigmatic case is Jack London's *Martin Eden* (1909),<sup>1</sup> in which an illiterate young man falls in love with a bourgeois girl and tries to educate himself in order to make her fall in love with him, and catapult himself into higher social strata. It is an egalitarian epic, an adventure that tells of how class mobility always ends dramatically, just before it crystalizes. Such stories have sometimes been analyzed in terms of sacrifice: any attempt to mix "those at the bottom" with "those at the top" ends with corpses in the gutter. They have also been interpreted as confirmation that social Darwinism does indeed exist. Reading books and being cultured provides a means—especially from those who come from backgrounds where it does not rate highly—to introduce exchange values that pay off in the construction of a certain attractive identity. People start reading for entertainment and continue for self-aggrandizement, from a mixture of social climbing aspirations and naivety.

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*, trans. Carleton Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 163; originally published as *L'Œil et l'Esprit* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> Antonio Machado, "Proverbios y cantares," no. 1, in *Campos de Castilla* (Madrid: Renacimiento, 1912; 2nd ed. 1917).

<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London and New York: The Athlone Press, 1989), 21; originally published as *L'Image-temps. Cinéma 2* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985).

<sup>1</sup> Jack London, *Martin Eden* (New York: Macmillan, 1909).

*Isabel de Naverán:*

[La película]

To start talking and to start versifying, in the sense of composing verses that rhyme, assonating, as a way of relating to archival images and to popular culture.

That is how Pedro operates in *La película* (2005), superimposing a soundtrack made up of the reflections and voices of seven attuned women thinkers who “versify” over images from José Antonio de la Loma’s film *Perros callejeros* (*Street Warriors*, 1977). This operation increases the tension between what we hear and what we see. It is not immediately obvious, because the superimposed audio seems to be critical commentary on the images we are seeing, which are an icon of a specific representation of the relationship between the body, the city, and cars; between the *gitano*, male, *flamenco* body, the new city in Transition-era Spain, and cars as an extension of that particular idea of masculinity and also as a means of arousal and a reflection of sexual potency. The idea is not to achieve a kind of “class mobility”—in the sense Valentín Roma spoke about—with regard to the original movie, but rather a clash, a coexistence. I think this gesture of *détournement* or rerouting of Pedro’s, nevertheless, and for the better, generates an interesting excess. What I mean is that the constant presence of these voices, their insightful critical observations that we hear as we watch the original images, do not just invite reflection. They also bring about a saturation of the images and the discourse, which was probably not the original intention of the commission but rather the fruit of the inevitable excess of the use of versifying machines in Pedro’s work. The attention required by the intellectual and theoretical reflections prevents viewers from uncritically enjoying the film. They are instead plunged into a different kind of pleasure: swept away by a kind of hurricane or, better still, a tornado. The discourse flows like a mental noise that also transmits excitement and potency, and eroticism in its own way. And in this adventure, the voices and the thoughts end up merging at times with the persistent sound of the car’s engine. Both the sound of the car and of the thought end up functioning the same, due to the excess and superimposition of the two.

But in this versifying [*trovar/tropare*] there is a trope, which is to compose, or to find. Or at least a doing/making that is like a seeking, like that “fandango tradition.”

## 4. ARCHIVO F.X.: ESTHESIS

(*Goya Machine, Entry: The Living Currency,  
Entry: On Sculpture, The Blasphemies*)

The Archivo F.X. began as a reflection on art’s “end” in the sense of both its goals and its conclusion. A large number of works on iconoclasm and the image, structured into different cycles—*Política* (Politics), *Iconomía* (Iconomy), *Esthesis*—gradually redefined its modus operandi. The works were never intended to form part of the “archival” trend or the rise in so-called historical memory, although they did benefit from being topical. Instead, the Archivo F.X. aimed to be a great parody—in the true sense of the term—of the art institution writ large. The ways of doing, looking, and speaking—*poiesis, esthesis, phronesis*—gradually aligned. *Esthesis*, the third cycle of works from the Archivo F.X., blurred the boundaries between its own work and the exhibiting, illustrating, and teaching so typical of the institutions that manage visual arts. While *Politics* looked behind the scenes of the art institution and *Iconomy* focused on both in front of and behind the curtain, in *Esthesis* the Archivo F.X. merged with the institution, the exhibition, space, the museum, the hegemonic system of art. It was not a conclusion of aesthetic theory, but just the opposite: a commitment to the “minor” work that art does as opposed to the “major” work we call aesthetics.

*Archivo F.X. Esthesis* includes projects such as *Sacer. El martirio de las cosas* (ICAS, 2016), *Peace Treaty* (Donostia-San Sebastián European Capital of Culture 2016, 2013–17), and *Aplicación Murillo* (ICAS, 2017–19), as well as *Habitación* (CA2M, 2018; La Nau – Universitat de València, 2018; Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya, 2019), based on three of the *chekas* designed by Alphonse Laurencic. *Habitación* was the first attempt to take stock of the Archivo F.X., which ceased to operate as an archive in 2020.

### GOYA MACHINE

To acknowledge Pedro G. Romero’s work as curator or “commissioner”—in Spanish the words *curador* and *comisario* are used interchangeably, though the political or police resonances remain—which he has always approached as a collective

undertaking in various frameworks and institutions, it seemed appropriate for him to present an exhibition—*Goya Machine*—within the exhibition *Versifying Machines*.

What is presented here is a fragment of what could be a larger exhibition, featuring works from the Archivo F.X. alongside historical artworks. It is not a dialogue but

a juxtaposition, both a montage and a setup (*montaje*), allowing us to see the inner workings of the Archivo F.X. The generation of Goya's followers—including Leonardo Alenza, Asensio Julià, Eugenio Lucas Velázquez, Francisco Lameyer, and José Zapata—neglected by the academy and the canon has been a lost generation. Modernity in Spain can hardly be understood without addressing these missing figures, not just their work but also their lack of institutional recognition. Among other things, their absence has meant the disappearance of representations of the people and of popular culture, with all their difference. Ignored, many of them have been relegated to the status of illustrators of facile discourses on tourism or orientalism. This exhibition focuses on a particular point: a look at how Goya's *Los Caprichos* went from moral and philosophical reflection to the portrayal of the so-called underclasses, working classes, and criminal classes. As the Archivo F.X. sees it, this shift allows us to see the legacy of *Conceptismo* in the *Caprichos* and their possible development into what we call "conceptual" approaches. There is a genealogy in which the modernity of Juan de Mairena and Ramón Gómez de la Serna reaches back to Goya via the curious writer Silverio Lanza and, through him, to the *Fumisme* of Alphonse Allais, Alfred Jarry, and Raymond Roussel.

The Archivo F.X. series *Las piedras* (The Stones) continues this tradition from *Conceptismo* to Conceptual Art, highlighting the paradigm of Goya's *Los Caprichos*, beyond expressionist or oneiric readings.

## ENTRY: THE LIVING CURRENCY

The entries in the main index of the Archivo F.X. are structured according to a kind of homophony between images. In many cases there is a correspondence between an image, an iconoclastic act, and an artwork, artist, artistic movement, or gesture that resembles it or "sounds" the same even if the meanings differ. This method—inspired by Raymond Roussel and other *conceptista* wordplay—is applied systematically. Naming in this sense is somehow magical, irrational, "capricious" in the Goyaesque sense of the word. Like the correspondence between one of the women in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and the image of the charred bust of the Virgen de la Hiniesta.

## ENTRY: ON SCULPTURE

In the archaeology of the Archivo F.X., the *chekas* (prison cells) built by Alphonse Laurencic in various churches and convents that had been desecrated during the Spanish Civil War mark a point of intersection between the rhetoric of modern art and the fear inspired by the iconoclastic gesture. Laurencic drew inspiration for his *cheka* designs from the Bauhaus and from Dadaist and Surrealist techniques, as well as from the Gothic horror of the Inquisition, in an incredible collision of signifiers. The *chekas* were unofficial places of detention and imprisonment—there were also blue *chekas* on the Falangist side—that took

their evocative name from the first Soviet secret police organization.

## THE BLASPHEMIES

This work, *Las blasfemias*, encapsulates many of the paradoxes, contradictions, and “nonsense” used in the Archivo F.X. Antonio Machado described blasphemy as a true prayer to God, and it is in this sense

that the term is used in this archive. In Seville, for example, *pasos* (processional sculptures) were burnt by the same people who had carried them in processions not long before. Similarly, images that are pulled down are also a hypertrophied exaltation of the vilified symbol. It is interesting to note that the real deactivation of sacred images actually begins when they enter museums.

# 5. ARCHIVO F.X.: ICONOMY

*(Libidinal Economy, The Men Workers,  
Entry: Georges Bataille)*

The main working hypothesis of the Archivo F.X. is that when images are pushed to a state of hypertrophy—to maximum exposure—they are then attacked, mutilated, destroyed. Baruch Spinoza said that an image is only an image by virtue of connections that lead to other images. When an image refers only to itself, cut off from its own nature as an image, when it is no longer reproduced within the commons, then, yes, it is attacked. Based on this hypothesis, the Archivo F.X. has developed a whole economy of art that tries to understand how this paradox—the fact that an image disappears when it reaches its greatest power—can be likened to classical economic values such as use value and exchange value.

Accordingly, a series of mechanisms was devised to try to explain a certain libidinal economy of art. For example, use value affects freedom, while exchange value has to do with building the commons. What the Archivo F.X. does is establish correlations, magnetic fields, relational spaces: it is not about self-expression or information or beauty, but about “critique,” in the sense of “critical” or “crisis,” and of “capitulate.” Something like what Marie-José Mondzain refers to as “iconomy.”

The *Iconomía* (Iconomy) section of the Archivo F.X. is represented here by works from projects such as *Economy: Picasso* (Museu Picasso, Barcelona, 2012), *Wirtschaft, Ökonomie, Konjunktur* (Württembergischer Kunstverein

Stuttgart, 2012), *Silo* (Museo Reina Sofía, 2009), and *La comunitat inconfessable* (Catalan Pavilion, 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009); presentations at the Bienal de Medellín (2011), Manifesta 8 (Murcia, 2011), the 31st Bienal de São Paulo (2014), the 1st Kyiv Biennial (2015), and the Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art (2017); and the exhibition series *Don Dinero* (Casa sin fin, Cáceres, 2011–13).

## LIBIDINAL ECONOMY

The (contradictorily) theological and nihilistic nature of contemporary capitalism as defined by Jean-François Lyotard is among the things that inform the economy presented in the Archivo F.X. Affects do not create just desires but also images, political organizations, and forms-of-life. Likewise along the lines of Georges Bataille's *The Accursed Share* and Pierre Klossowski's *Living Currency*, images and their destruction generate a "general economy." From concrete gestures—for example, the coins issued by anarchist municipalities during the Spanish Civil War and the Social Revolution of 1936—to abstract notions—like the particular forms produced by certain economic systems such as slavery.

## THE MEN WORKERS

The dance *Los trabajadores* (The Men Workers) performed by Israel Galván—conceived as a diagram of the modus operandi of the Archivo F.X.—becomes what the ideal human proportions described by Vitruvius were to Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* and to the classical era. Or what Le Corbusier's

Modulor was to our modern age: a kind of ratio or distribution of the sensible, of the things of the world. The economy does not just involve the quantification and sale of things and affects, but also their distribution. Galván shows how his body parts work separately and together: his feet, ankles, knees, eventually reaching his head, fragments and all at once, *organom* and body without organs.

## ENTRY: GEORGES BATAILLE

A flamenco version of Fernando Pessoa's *The Anarchist Banker* on the one hand, and the machine dispensing small coins with the effigy of La Virgen de la Macarena in a minimalist box on the other, give rise to the *Georges Bataille* entry in the Archivo F.X. Both explore what lies beyond the contradiction that is like a combustion engine driving the economy of the real world. It is not logic but irrational faith that sustains our economic system. In G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the police chief is also the leader of the terrorists. According to Ludwig Wittgenstein, without this faith the world economy would collapse.

## 6. ARCHIVO F.X.: POLITICS

(*La pel·lícula, The House, Entry: Capital, Thesaurus: La Setmana Tràgica*)

The Archivo F.X.—a collection of works on images and iconoclasm—began as an institution that has to interact with other institutions on an equal footing, within the hegemonic apparatus of the current art system. Art is not activated by a group, artist, curator, or critic, but by an assemblage of things. The acronym F.X. has different meanings—*fx*, as in special effects; *file x*, or declassified files; and *f(x)*, the function of *x*—based on the belief that it doesn't matter what art is, but only how it works.

The first cycle of works grew out of the development of a “politics” linked to Walter Benjamin's idea that capitalism spreads like a religion. In other words, a politics that is keenly aware of the function of art within this new church. This *Política* took the city as its model, and began as a toolbox with which to urbanize the province of nihilism. The methodology of the Archivo F.X. is based on three ambitious projects: Aby Warburg's *Atlas Mnemosyne*, Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*, and Carl Einstein and Georges Bataille's legendary journal *Documents*.

This first installment of *Archivo F.X.: Política* is represented here by cycles of works linked to projects such as *Antagonisms: Case Studies* (MACBA, 2001), *Capital de la República* (Universitat de València, 2002), *La Setmana Tràgica* (Centre d'Art Santa Mònica, 2002), and *Lo viejo y lo nuevo, ¿Qué hay de nuevo, viejo?* (EspaiZero, Olot, 2004), culminating in *F.X. Archive: The Empty City; Community* (Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2006) and *Politics: Heterotopias, di/visions (from here and elsewhere)* (1st Thessaloniki Biennale, 2007), and their epilogue, *Sevilla-Se ville* (Weber-Lutgen, L'Iselp, and MIAM, 2014).

### LA PEL·LÍCULA

In these two *détournements*—the version of José Antonio de la Loma's 1977 film *Perros callejeros* (*Street Warriors*) produced by the Archivo F.X. (with the collaboration of Paul B. Preciado, Valeria Bergalli, Deborah Fernández, Marina Garcés, Marisa García, Pamela Sepúlveda, and Eva Serrats), and

an excerpt of Carlos Saura's *Deprisa, deprisa* (*Hurry, Hurry!*, 1981)—iconoclasm is the main sign for examining a society in upheaval, hypertrophied desire, the center-periphery tension in our cities, and the life of the “dangerous classes” during the Spanish political transition in the mid-1970s.

## THE HOUSE

The first major cycle of works from the Archivo F.X.—presented at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona, then under the direction of Nuria Enguita—*La casa* revolved around the Catalan city of Badia del Vallès as a particular place, like an urban Yoknapatawpha County or a singular Macondo. In this crossover between fiction and document, Israel Galván was filmed psychogeographically measuring the only apartment in Badia—a city built solely as social housing—that had passed into private hands. In reality, there was very little difference between this specific apartment expropriated from public ownership and all the others. Nonetheless, Galván’s dance and Aleix Gallardet’s camera picked up the differences, large and small.

## ENTRY: CAPITAL

The famous section of Karl Marx’s *Capital* entitled “The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret” is presented here through an excerpt from Fernando Mignoni’s film *Nuestro culpable* (Our Guilt, 1938), produced by the CNT during the Civil War. Digital software was used to break down the scene—showing the adventures of a small religious idol believed to contain a secret treasure—into individual frames that were then printed on paper, which ended up weighing a total of 257 kilograms. One of the tasks of the Archivo F.X. is to reduce ideas, ghosts, and specters to mere material culture.

## THESAURUS: LA SETMANA TRÀGICA

The Archivo F.X. describes the contents of *La Setmana Tràgica* (The Tragic Week) as “a collection of images of anti-sacramental political iconoclasm from 1868 to 1945.” The interesting thing about the iconoclastic phenomenon in Spain is the fact that it is a Catholic phenomenon, with the burning of images and desecration of spaces carried out as a form of administration: the elimination of the sacred surplus that crushes the social body. The motifs and rituals of worship are Catholic, but so too are those of profanation. This is not about religious tension with Protestants, Muslims, or atheists. Anticlericalism is as Catholic as the vilest clericalism.



*Tesouro: Tratado de paz*  
2014  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

Anonymous (Copy after  
Francisco de Goya y  
Lucientes)  
*Serie Copias de los  
Caprichos de Goya.*  
*Colección*  
*Martín Rico*  
ca. 1850  
Wash, pencil, pen, Indian ink,  
gray ink, brown ink, and iron  
gall ink on laid paper  
Museo Nacional del Prado,  
Madrid

*Entrada: Picasso/*  
*La moneda viviente*  
2004  
Wood paper  
Archivo F.X.

Anonymous (Copy after  
Francisco de Goya y  
Lucientes)  
*Serie Copias de los  
Caprichos de Goya.*  
*Colección*  
*Martín Rico*  
ca. 1850  
Wash, pencil, pen, Indian ink,  
gray ink, brown ink, and iron  
gall ink on laid paper  
Museo Nacional del Prado,  
Madrid

*El cuarteto*  
2005  
DVD video, color, sound,  
35:07 min.  
Archivo F.X.

Conde de la Viñaza,  
Cipriano Muñoz y  
Manzano  
*Goya, su tiempo, su vida,  
sus obras*  
1887  
Printed ink on paper.  
Madrid: Tipografía de  
Manual G. Hernández  
Biblioteca Nacional de  
España

Francisco Javier Sánchez  
Cantón  
*Los caprichos de Goya y  
sus dibujos preparatorios*  
1949  
Printed ink on paper.  
Barcelona: Tipografía  
S.A.D.A.G.  
Biblioteca Nacional de  
España



*Las piedras II (a)*  
2017  
Photograph, stone, and digital  
print on foam board  
Archivo F.X.



**José Zapata**  
*12 dibujos*  
 First third of the 19th century  
 Wash, white lead, pencil, pen, gray ink,  
 black ink, and brown ink on laid paper  
 Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

*Hojas de libre  
 circulación 1, 2, 3*  
 2001  
 Printed ink on paper  
 Archivo F.X.

**Leonardo Alenza y Nieto  
 and Isidoro Rosell y Torres**  
*Caprichos de Alenza*  
 1878  
 Engravings on paper  
 Museo Lázaro Galdiano

*Tesouro: Se ville*  
 2011  
 Printed ink on paper  
 Archivo F.X.

*Las blasfemias*  
 2011  
 Wood, printed ink on paper,  
 and video screening  
 Archivo F.X.

**Filiep Tacq**  
*Tratado de paz (1813)*  
 2013  
 Display  
 Archivo F.X.



*Caprichos de Alenza*  
(versión Metropolitan Museum)

2021

Ink, wash, pencil, and digital print on paper  
Archivo F.X.



Anonymous (Copy after Francisco de Goya y Lucientes)

*Serie Copias de los Caprichos de Goya.*

*Colección Martín Rico*

ca. 1850

Wash, pencil, pen, Indian ink, gray ink, brown ink,  
and iron gall ink on laid paper

Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid



José Zapata  
*12 dibujos*  
 First third of the 19th century  
 Wash, white lead, pencil, pen, gray ink,  
 black ink, and brown ink on laid paper  
 Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid



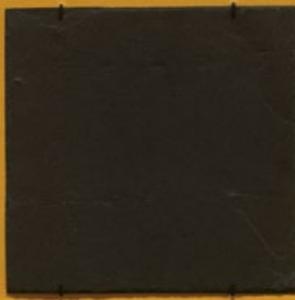
Leonardo Alenza y Nieto  
 and Isidoro Rosell y Torres  
*Caprichos de Alenza*  
 1878  
 Engravings on paper  
 Museo Lázaro Galdiano

Francisco de Goya y  
Lucientes  
*Disparate puntual*  
1815-19  
Etching, aquatint, and dry  
point on ivory laid paper  
Museo Nacional del Prado,  
Madrid



Francisco de Goya y  
Lucientes  
*Disparate de bestia*  
1815-19  
Etching, aquatint, burnisher,  
and dry point on ivory laid  
paper  
Museo Nacional del Prado,  
Madrid





**pedra** [petra] f. sustancia mineral, más o menos dura y compacta; g. bar, *herrandada, herrandada, barra*; g. la, *bara, garin, pan y vino*; f. m. cálculo (l. Concreción anormal en la vejiga); f. moneda (l. Disco de piedra para moler); *piarra negra del Montseny*; (*diccion: piedra negra de Xistena*).

1. f. am. piedra de moler, piedra rectangular, plana o ligeramente cóncava, usada para triturar granos con la ayuda de otra en forma de codillo; 2. cat. *pedra, roa, còdol*; no poner los codos en la mesa; 3. tragar piedras, conlugar con piedras de molino; *ze erres Pedra*; 4. Mascar piedra, dientes, pilos; 5. a la roca, (redan.) *gallipeds plancha*; 6. (lit.) perrejil, *petruillhon*, perrejil de roca; 7. bar, barra del bar; (fig.) *traso de piedra buena, para comestible*; 8. barón, varón; (fig.) *pasar por la piedra, barradere, mayordomo*; 9. *yabrisón, fondar, naclote*; 10. roca, El Celler de Can Roca; 11. *pedra*, romper el escaparate del restaurante; (fig.) *robaron, se llevaron las viandas para matar el hombre*; 12. *barandai, baranda, valiente, fantoche, todo escaparate*; 13. (fig.) *de la calle hombre de piedra, (sic.) don Tancredo, el pariente pobre, convalido de piedra, vividor, hombre en el bar*.

DE LA PIEDRA SALE EL TRIGO: *Día y noche en la molindad el cuerpo estremecida jay, de la piedra sale el trigo.*



**pedra** [petra] f. sustancia mineral, más o menos dura y compacta; g. bar, *herrandada, herrandada, barra*; g. la, *bara, garin, pan y vino*; f. m. cálculo (l. Concreción anormal en la vejiga); f. moneda (l. Disco de piedra para moler); *piarra negra del Montseny*; (*diccion: piedra negra de Xistena*).

1. f. am. piedra de moler, piedra rectangular, plana o ligeramente cóncava, usada para triturar granos con la ayuda de otra en forma de codillo; 2. cat. *pedra, roa, còdol*; no poner los codos en la mesa; 3. tragar piedras, conlugar con piedras de molino; *ze erres Pedra*; 4. Mascar piedra, dientes, pilos; 5. a la roca, (redan.) *gallipeds plancha*; 6. (lit.) perrejil, *petruillhon*, perrejil de roca; 7. bar, barra del bar; (fig.) *traso de piedra buena, para comestible*; 8. barón, varón; (fig.) *pasar por la piedra, barradere, mayordomo*; 9. *yabrisón, fondar, naclote*; 10. roca, El Celler de Can Roca; 11. *pedra*, romper el escaparate del restaurante; (fig.) *robaron, se llevaron las viandas para matar el hombre*; 12. *barandai, baranda, valiente, fantoche, todo escaparate*; 13. (fig.) *de la calle hombre de piedra, (sic.) don Tancredo, el pariente pobre, convalido de piedra, vividor, hombre en el bar*.

DE LA PIEDRA SALE EL TRIGO: *Día y noche en la molindad el cuerpo estremecida jay, de la piedra sale el trigo.*



**pedra** [petra] f. sustancia mineral, más o menos dura y compacta; g. bar, *herrandada, herrandada, barra*; g. la, *bara, garin, pan y vino*; f. m. cálculo (l. Concreción anormal en la vejiga); f. moneda (l. Disco de piedra para moler); *piarra negra del Montseny*; (*diccion: piedra negra de Xistena*).

1. f. am. piedra de moler, piedra rectangular, plana o ligeramente cóncava, usada para triturar granos con la ayuda de otra en forma de codillo; 2. cat. *pedra, roa, còdol*; no poner los codos en la mesa; 3. tragar piedras, conlugar con piedras de molino; *ze erres Pedra*; 4. Mascar piedra, dientes, pilos; 5. a la roca, (redan.) *gallipeds plancha*; 6. (lit.) perrejil, *petruillhon*, perrejil de roca; 7. bar, barra del bar; (fig.) *traso de piedra buena, para comestible*; 8. barón, varón; (fig.) *pasar por la piedra, barradere, mayordomo*; 9. *yabrisón, fondar, naclote*; 10. roca, El Celler de Can Roca; 11. *pedra*, romper el escaparate del restaurante; (fig.) *robaron, se llevaron las viandas para matar el hombre*; 12. *barandai, baranda, valiente, fantoche, todo escaparate*; 13. (fig.) *de la calle hombre de piedra, (sic.) don Tancredo, el pariente pobre, convalido de piedra, vividor, hombre en el bar*.

DE LA PIEDRA SALE EL TRIGO: *Día y noche en la molindad el cuerpo estremecida jay, de la piedra sale el trigo.*

*Las piedras I*  
2017  
Photograph, slate from Bierzo,  
and digital print on paper  
Tinta Invisible Edicions

*Entrada:*  
*Posmodernismo*  
 2009  
 Watercolor on paper  
 Archivo F.X.

*Racional/Orgánico*  
 2000  
 Printed ink on paper  
 Archivo F.X.



*Tesoro: Habitación*  
 2018  
 Printed ink on paper  
 Archivo F.X.



*Archivo F.X. y reproducción de la checa del SIMV (Servicio de Inteligencia Militar) del convento de la calle Zaragoza de Barcelona en 1937*

2009  
Pine wood, acrylic, light bulbs,  
audio player, and loudspeakers  
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte  
Reina Sofía

*Tesouro: Se ville*  
2011  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

*Leonardo Alenza*  
*El mono ermitaño*  
1840-45  
Oil on board  
Museo Nacional del  
Romanticismo, Madrid

*Las piedras II (a)*  
2017  
Photograph, stone, and  
digital print on foam board  
Archivo F.X.

*Racional/Orgánico*

2000  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

*Los Mairena*

2018  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

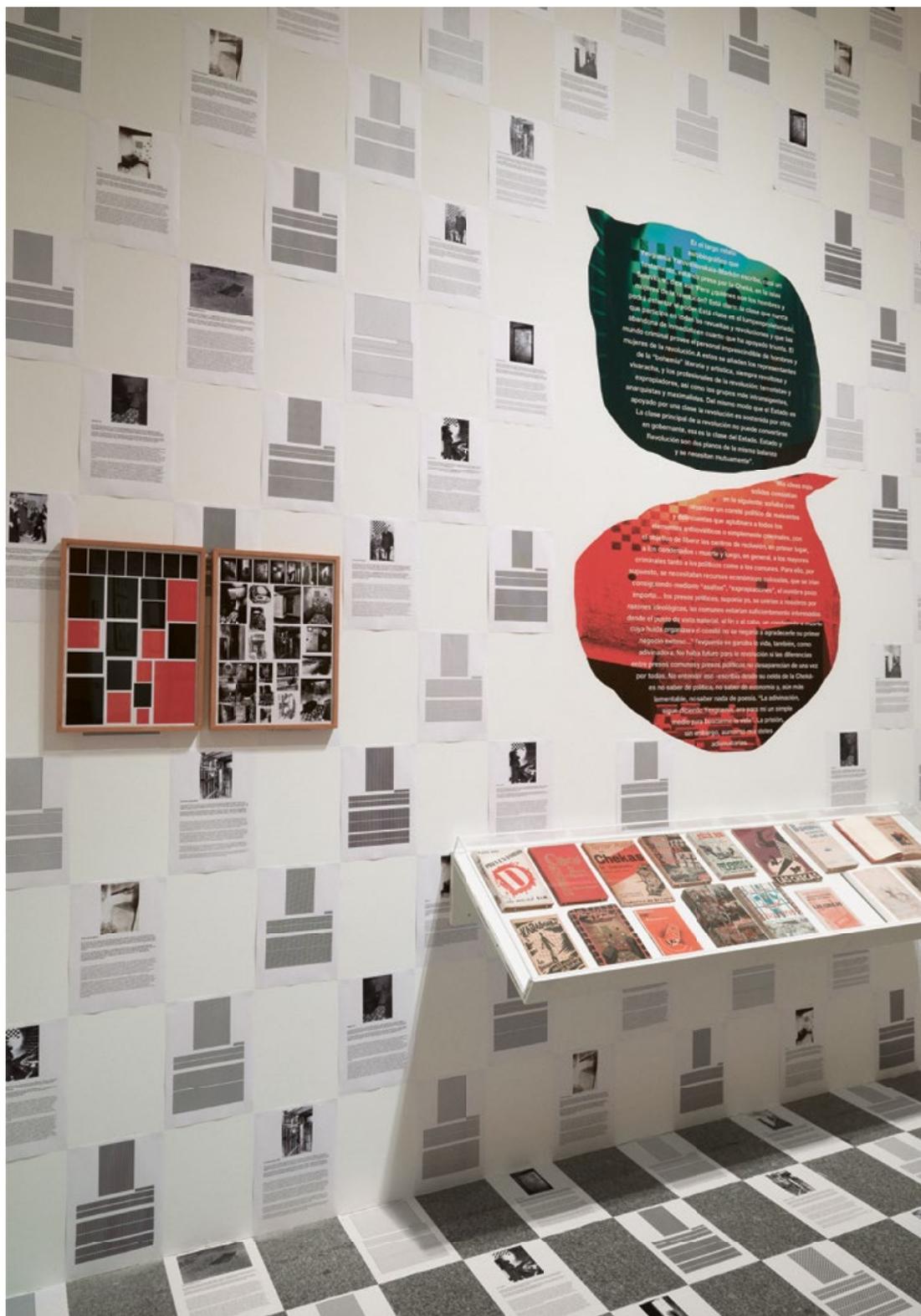
*Tesouro: Habitación*

2018  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

*Libros de las chekas*

Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

1. Félix Ros, *Preventorio D, ocho meses en el SIM*, Barcelona: Editorial Yunque, 1959
2. Alberto Flaquer, *Checas de Madrid y Barcelona*, Barcelona: Ediciones Rodegar, 1965
3. Federico de Urrutia, *¡Terror rojo! Las checas de Barcelona. Historia de la barbarie marxista*, Barcelona: Editorial FE, 1959
4. Mauricio Karl, *Técnica del Komintern en España*, Badajoz: Gráfica corporativa, 1957
5. Félix Ros, *Preventorio D, ocho meses en la cheka*, Madrid: Editorial Prensa española s.a., 1959-74
6. Rodolfo Vistabuena, *Las checas. Temas españoles*, Madrid: Publicaciones españolas, 1959.
7. Antonio Guardiola, *Barcelona en poder del soviet*, Barcelona: Editorial Maucci, 1959
8. G. Popoff, *La Inquisición Roja (La Cheka) El Estado dentro del Estado*, Madrid: M. Aguilar editor, 1925





*Archivo F.X. y reproducción de la checa del SIMV (Servicio de Inteligencia Militar) del convento de la calle Zaragoza de Barcelona en 1937*

2009  
Pine wood, acrylic, light bulbs, audio player, and loudspeakers  
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

9. *¡Karaganda! La tragedia del antifascismo español*, Toulouse: Ediciones del MLE -CNT, 1948
10. Rafael López Chacón, *Por qué hice las "chekas" de Barcelona. Laurencic ante el consejo de guerra*, Barcelona: Editorial Solidaridad Nacional, 1939
11. *Cómo funcionaban las checas de Barcelona GPU-SIM*, Barcelona: Publicaciones del C.I.A.S. Acción contra la III Internacional. Relieves Basa y Pagés, ca. 1940
12. José Peirats, *La C.N.T. en la revolución española*, Madrid: Editorial Madre Tierra, 1952
13. El Campesino (Valentín González), *Yo escogí la esclavitud. Homenajes en España. Torturas en Moscú*, Venezuela: Ediciones Maracay, 1940
14. Mateo Lladó, *... forjaremos una sociedad más justa, más humana... Las Chekas*, Barcelona: Editorial Alas, 1939
15. Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, *No comas célebre Torregiano*, in *Cuaderno C. Francisco de Goya*, Madrid: Skira; Museo del Prado, 2020



*Hojas de libre circulación 1, 2, 3*

2001  
Printed ink on paper  
MACBA, Barcelona



*Las blasfemias*

2011  
Wood, printed ink on paper,  
and video screening  
Archivo F.X.



*Tesouro: Se ville*  
2011  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

*Tesouro: Capital de la República*  
2002  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

*Tesouro: La ciudad vacía*  
2005  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

*Los Banqueros*  
2016  
HD video, color, sound,  
27:47 min.  
àngels barcelona gallery

Attributed to Francisco de Goya y Lucientes  
*Mendigo ciego con un perro*  
ca. 1824  
Ink on laid paper  
Museo Lázaro Galdiano, Madrid

Rosario Weiss  
*Mendigo tendiendo su sombrero*  
ca. 1824  
Lithograph  
Biblioteca Nacional de España

Sem  
*Los Borbones en pelota*  
1868–70

Drawings, watercolor, and  
gouache on paper  
Biblioteca Nacional de España

Eugenio Lucas  
Velázquez  
*Capricho alegórico:  
la avaricia*  
1852  
Oil on board  
Museo Lázaro Galdiano,  
Madrid



1. *Entrada: Papel-Máquina*  
Printed ink on paper

2. *Entrada: Anti-globalización*  
Copper coin and print on paper

3. *Tesoro: La comunidad  
inconfesable*  
2009  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.



Sem  
*Los Borbones en pelota*  
 1868–70  
 Drawings, watercolor, and gouache on paper  
 Biblioteca Nacional de España

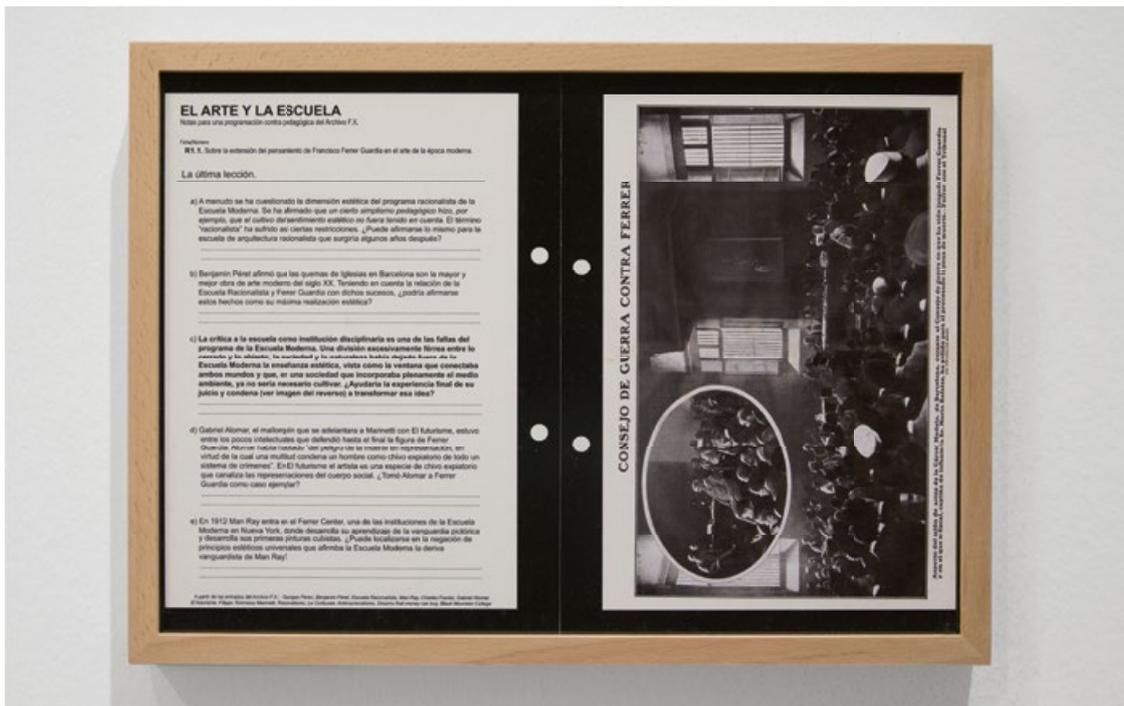
Attributed to Francisco de  
 Goya y Lucientes  
*Mendigo ciego con un perro*  
 ca. 1824  
 Ink on laid paper  
 Museo Lázaro Galdiano, Madrid

Rosario Weiss  
*Mendigo tendiendo su  
 sombrero*  
 ca. 1824  
 Lithograph  
 Biblioteca Nacional de España



Sem  
*Los Borbones en pelota*  
 1868-70  
 Drawings, watercolor, and  
 gouache on paper  
 Biblioteca Nacional de España





*El arte y la escuela*  
2001–19  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.



*Tesouro: La comunidad*  
*inconfesable*  
2009  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

*Los Esclavos*  
2012  
(with Niño de Elche)  
Printed ink on paper and  
audio  
Archivo F.X.

*Entrada:*  
*Georges Bataille*  
2013  
Coining machine,  
galvanized and lacquered  
sheet, press, plexiglass,  
coins, gears, and printed  
ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.





*Los Banqueros*  
2016  
HD video, color, sound,  
27:47 min.  
àngels barcelona gallery

*Tesouro: Capital de la República*  
2002  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

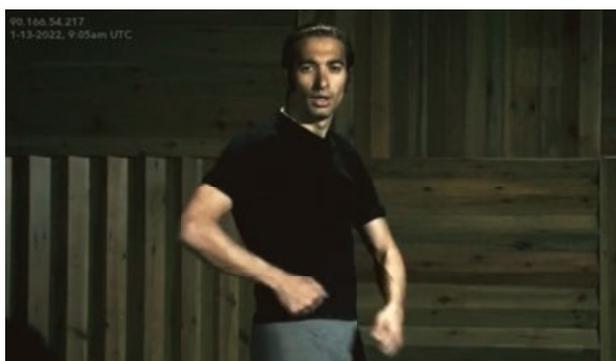




*Entrada: les 400 coups*  
2001–19  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

*Entrada: Zero en conduit*  
2001–19  
Video, B&W, sound, 1:07 min.  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

*Tesouro: Capital de la República*  
2002  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.



*Los trabajadores*

2012

Video, color, digital sound, 17:40 min.

"la Caixa" Collection of

Contemporary Art



Sem

*Los Borbones en pelota*

1868–70

Drawings, watercolor, and

gouache on paper

Biblioteca Nacional de España



*Tesouro: Capital de la República*  
2002  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

*Tesouro: La ciudad vacía*  
2005  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

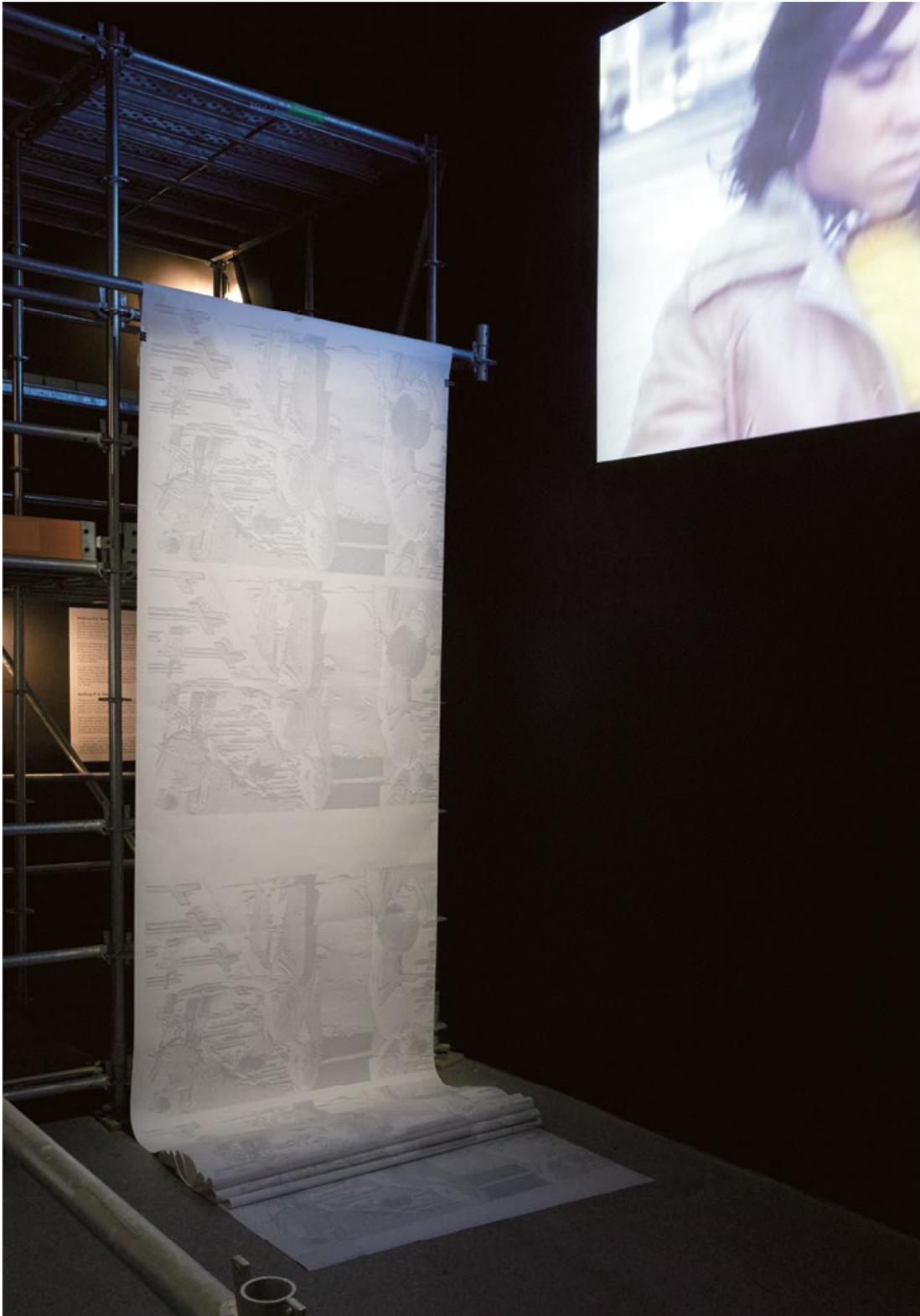
*Los Banqueros*  
2016  
HD video, color, sound,  
27:47 min.  
àngels barcelona gallery

*Los Esclavos*  
2012  
Printed ink on paper and  
audio  
Archivo F.X.

*UR-VANTAS*  
2005  
Print on banner  
Archivo F.X.

*Tesouro: Lo nuevo y  
lo viejo*  
2004  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.





*La película*

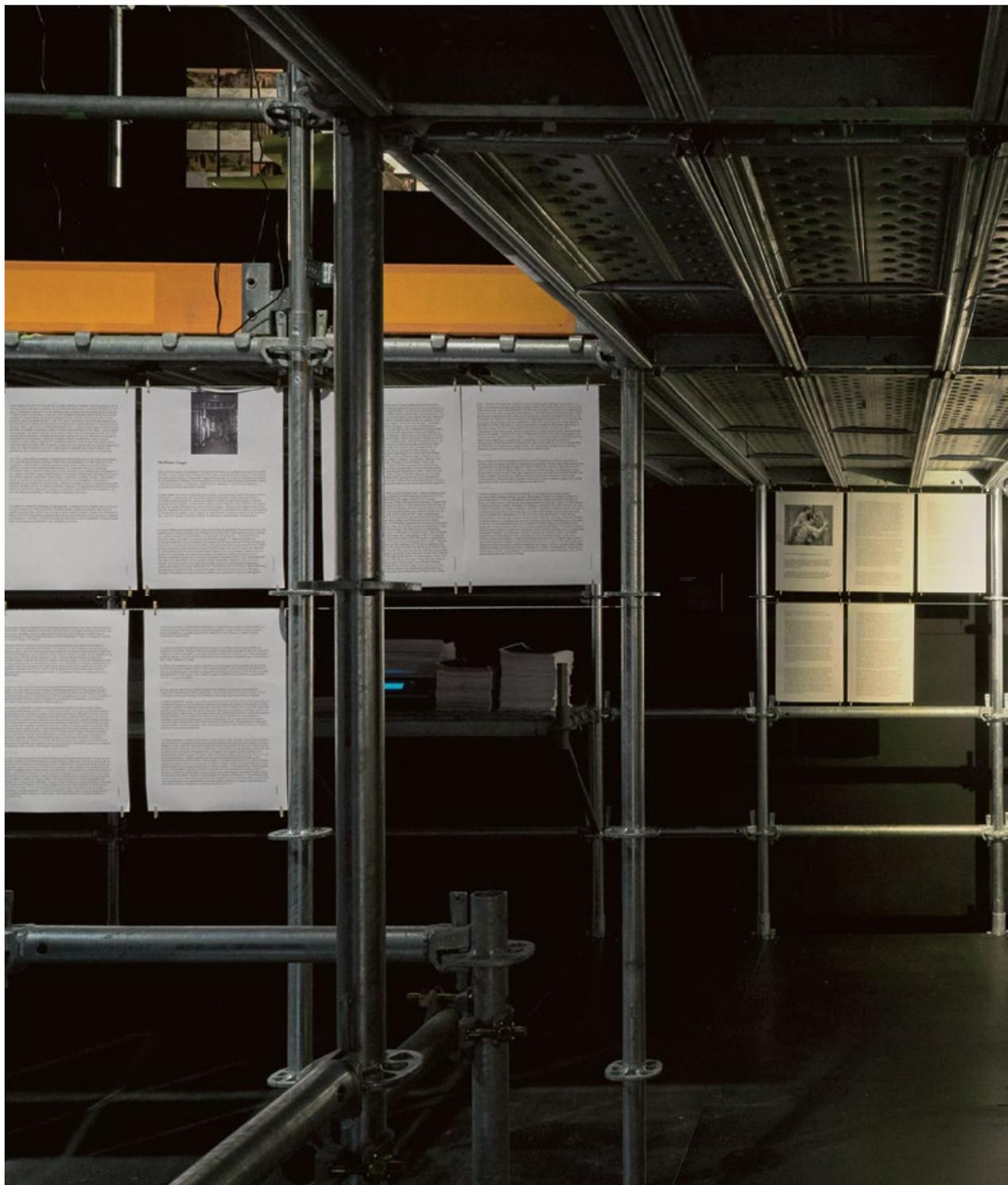
2005  
 (with Paul B. Preciado, Valeria Bergalli, Deborah Fernández, Marina Garcés, Marisa García, Pamela Sepúlveda, and Eva Serrats)  
 Video, color, sound, 87 min.  
 Archivo F.X.

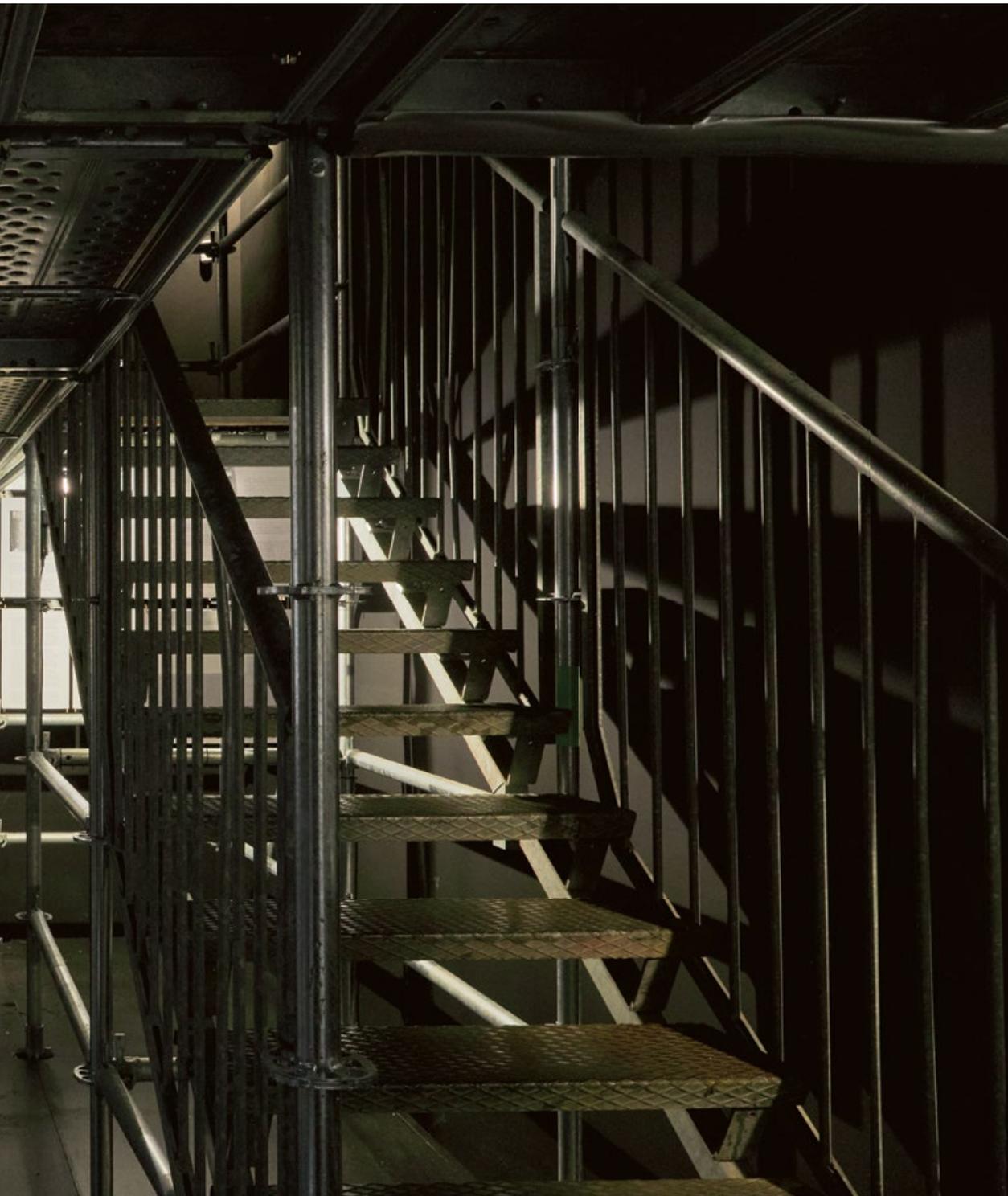
*Entrada: Ute Meta Bauer*

2005  
 Printed ink on continuous paper  
 Archivo F.X.

*Tesouro:*  
*La Setmana Tràgica*  
2000  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

*Tesouro: Lo nuevo y  
lo viejo*  
2004  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.



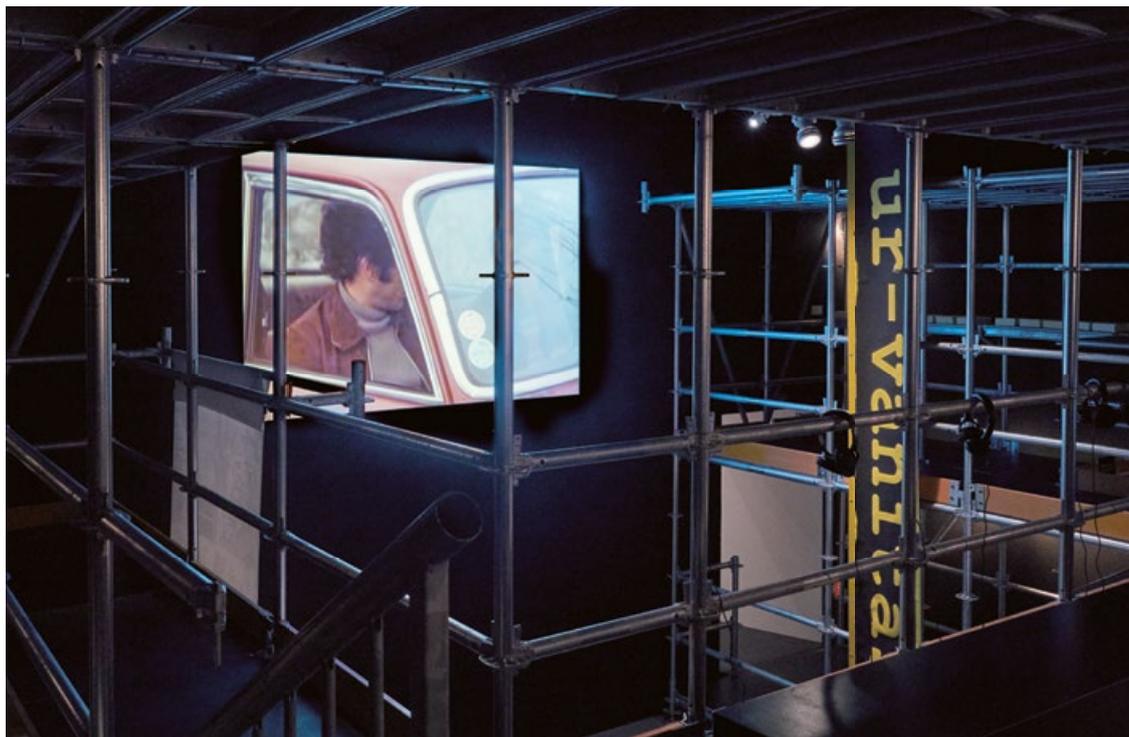


*Tesouro: La ciudad vacía*  
2005  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

*La película*

2005

(with Paul B. Preciado,  
Valeria Bergalli, Deborah  
Fernández, Marina Garcés,  
Marisa García, Pamela  
Sepúlveda, and Eva Serrats)  
Video, color, sound, 87 min.  
Archivo F.X.

*UR-VANTAS*

2005

Print on banner  
Archivo F.X.

*Archivo F.X.: La ciudad vacía: La Casa*

1999–2007

(with Israel Galván)  
Video (DVCAM and DVD),  
color, sound, 20:37 min.  
Museo Nacional Centro  
de Arte Reina Sofía





*Los excéntricos*  
2018  
Single-channel video, color,  
sound, 6:57 min.  
Archivo F.X.

*UR-VANTAS*  
2005  
Print on banner  
Archivo F.X.



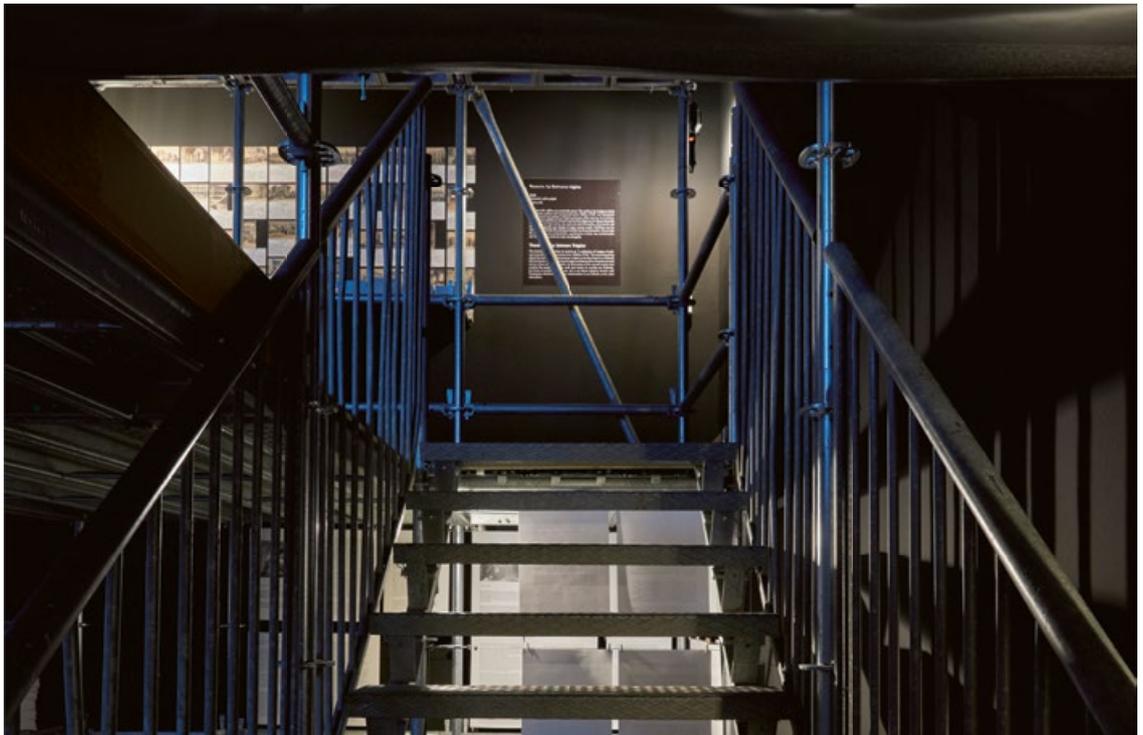
*Tesouro: La ciudad vacía*  
2005  
Printed ink on paper  
Archivo F.X.

*Entrada: El Capital*  
1999–2009  
Computer, prints, scales,  
screen, and printed ink on  
paper  
Kells Collection

*Tesouro:*  
*La Setmana Tràgica*  
 2000  
 Printed ink on paper  
 Archivo F.X.



*Tesouro:*  
*La Setmana Tràgica*  
 2000  
 Printed ink on paper  
 Archivo F.X.



*Tesouro: La ciudad vacía*  
 2005  
 Printed ink on paper  
 Archivo F.X.

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* The passive contemplation of images—especially those chosen by others—takes the place of living, and it is at the root of alienation. Does this explain why a large part of your work in the Archivo F.X. has been to find and unravel the way the creation of images works? To what extent does the Archivo F.X. reflect your interest in exploring the functioning of art rather than its function: your interest in figuring out its economy, that is, in identifying the relationships established between the actors involved in the creation, reception, and exchange of images and artworks?

## IV

*Pedro G. Romero:* But who contemplates images in that way, passively? Spinoza said that an image is an image only if it refers to another image, which in turn refers to another image, and so on ad infinitum. In other words, only insofar as it is relational, set in motion, doing politics. If that interrelation does not occur, the image hypertrophies and somehow seeks to be destroyed, annulled. Bear in mind that I was interested specifically in the forms iconoclasm took in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on the Iberian Peninsula, in Catholic countries that attacked images by following their liturgies to the letter. They did not oppose them to the texts—sacred scriptures against images—but dealt with images against images, like an administration of images. It was not a Jacobin, Jewish, or Muslim iconoclasm, it was not governed by the Enlightenment principle. As I have often said, in Seville the people who carried the statues in the Holy Week processions were the same ones who burned them in their churches. There came a time when those images lost their interrelation, their multiplicity, they became unique again. They lost their links, and so, yes, they had to be burned. Manuel Delgado has studied this thoroughly

in his three or four treatises on the subject.<sup>1</sup> So it is not so much the nihilist caricature of nothingness, a poor portrait of the alienated iconoclast, but rather, I would say, a true negative dialectic, and one created by the plebs, which would surely cause Adorno some irritation. I like to think that when Spinoza talked about that need for an image to refer to another, he was already talking about function, a few centuries before the Russian formalists. In the iconoclasm of cultures that accept images—not in those that deny them—a different, truly political relationship operates. That tension between images and their destruction is what interests me, obviously. Iconoclasm as a form of interrelation of images. Guy Debord is often misinterpreted. We mustn't forget that, in the end, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1973)<sup>2</sup>—for once the film is much better than the book!—is a critique constructed from images.

<sup>1</sup> Manuel Delgado, *De la muerte de un dios. La fiesta de los toros en el universo simbólico de la cultura popular* (Barcelona: Península, 1986); *Las palabras de otro hombre. Anticlericalismo y misoginia* (Barcelona: Muchnik, D.L. 1993); *La ira sagrada. Anticlericalismo, iconoclastia y antiritualismo en la España contemporánea* (Barcelona: Humanidades, 1992); and *Luces*

*iconoclastas. Anticlericalismo, espacio y ritual en la España contemporánea* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Guy Debord, dir., *La Sociéte du spectacle*, 88 min. (France, 1973). Guy Debord, *La Sociéte du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1967); Eng.: *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Fredy Perlman and friends (Detroit: Black & Red, 1970; rev. ed. 1977).

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

To actively intervene in the surface of ideology means to avoid the deception that alienated people find themselves in and to dispute the physical ground of the spectral, where other forms of life can be imagined: it is about that which seduces us, not that which deceives us.

Imagination is often conceived as a spontaneous act, located in a space of possibility that has not yet been attained and may in fact be difficult to attain. A kind of dream that inspires us but does not actually generate a reality in the strict sense, and is therefore not suitable for processes of emergence that require a strategic vision. In fact, it is usually seen as a potential rather than an action, a kind of miraculous arrival of a significant form. It would therefore be unwise to surrender to it during critical processes of transformation of political tension. Not only because at moments of great conflict the temperature of what is understood as politics demands an economy that favors the tactics requiring the least effort for the greatest impact, but also because it would seem that the engine of the imagination runs away when its presence is expected for management. Inspiration, creation: it must come, it must take place.

Thus imagination is never understood as a kind of agency. At best, it is understood as that which makes-doing, not as a specific kind of doing. But we can shift this usual understanding of the imagination and consider it instead not so much as what could-be, but rather as ways of doing/making that connect modes of planning, desiring, affecting, and inhabiting reality; as something that raises figurations, specters, interferences, and remains that introduce thresholds of variation—not as an image of something that already exists, but establishing its being-there. We must then rethink our tools for imagining, our methodologies for configuring other, nonrepresentative poetics and politics. We must rethink the operations that allow us to attend to interruptions so they can form a structure; so they can recover a piece of language, an image, or a memorable gesture that generates a vibration or introduces a difference in the sensible that cannot be reabsorbed, either as lack or as excess. Jacques Rancière has paved the way for us here, arguing that although an event cannot be planned, it can be worked on. An event is not the result of astonishment, but of an alteration.<sup>1</sup> To which I would add that the act of imagination exceeds the moment. The imagination feeds off images, sensations,

sounds, noises, and experiences that are already there, and expands toward relations without relation.

The capacity to express the vibration or force of deindividuation will return the power of fiction to the impersonal power of the imagination.

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Rancière, *En quel temps vivons-nous? Conversation avec Eric Hazan* (Paris: La fabrique, 2017); Eng.: *What Times Are We Living In? A Conversation with Eric Hazan*, trans. Steve Corcoran (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2020).

*Valentín Roma:*

One of the great books on alienation is Leslie Kaplan's *Excess—The Factory*.<sup>1</sup> When it was published in 1982, Maurice Blanchot and Marguerite Duras praised it enthusiastically, considering that at last there was a text in which the sounds and images of industrial work were incorporated into the novel, that it was not necessary to write beautifully—like Duras—or obscurely—like Blanchot—about the settings where the life of the proletariat takes place. It is certainly a story that readers hear and see at the same time, and I like to think that it contains something like a translation of Plato's allegory of the cave into the realm of literature. The factory is described as a kind of parallel micro-world in which tools, machines, and work equipment are figurations, gloomy ideas that copy and seize what is happening outside. In this sense, there are parts of *Excess—The Factory* that are reminiscent of Peter Handke's play *Kaspar* (1967),<sup>2</sup> especially those in which the protagonist learns the names of various everyday objects, says them, and makes them appear. For some reason, however, this typically creative gesture of naming becomes a complete closing down, a semantic end. Sometimes literature shows us the extent to which words are not only germinal but also epigonal. Words serve to destroy. That is life-knowledge that we should be very mindful of.

*Isabel de Naverán:*

[To Have Rhythm]

This is what Deleuze, referring to Spinoza, calls having a sense of rhythm, “rhythmicity,” being able to swim. I would speak of keeping in step, entering a rhythm, dancing. Le Guin speaks of oscillating and “phase locking, or entrainment.”<sup>1</sup> Two clock pendulums that oscillate at a similar interval, if they are physically near each other, will end up swinging in unison, that is the example she gives. I am not sure that this synchronization is comparable to the way Pedro's—or Meneses's—versifying machine works; I don't think it moves in harmony or concord, let alone in unison! It would be more like a dissonant machine, but one that is based on listening to the rhythm of others, prepared to participate in the collective rhythm. More like a good *jaleo*, which is made up of a multiplicity of changing rhythms, of disagreements. And sometimes, of course, there may be a meltdown, an unexpected adjustment, but above all a transformation of relations. In any case, it is a question of rhythm.

In a letter to Vita Sackville-West,<sup>2</sup> Virginia Woolf says that her work, her writing, is a matter of rhythm, of finding the right rhythm. A process that requires her to physically enter a mode of deep observation that she compares to the movement of a silent wave, which begins out at sea, in the middle of the ocean, and gradually approaches the shore. In writing, she says, one has to capture the movement of this wave as it approaches, breaks, and tumbles into foam. Only then does the writer recognize the rhythm underlying the words. Only then, not before. Only then does the writer find the words. A silent wave is produced when something makes an impact on us. It heads toward a shore, toward an edge, it is happening. “The one essential quality of a wave is that it moves,”<sup>3</sup> writes Lucy R. Lippard in reference to sexual desire, to excitement. For how long depends on the conditions. Lippard's wave of desire and Woolf's wave in the mind seem to me to be the same wave. This mind is not in the brain, it is not in the head.

<sup>1</sup> Le Guin, “Telling Is Listening,” 195.

<sup>2</sup> “A sight, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to fit it; and in writing (such is my present belief) one has to recapture this, and set this working (which has nothing apparently to do with words) and then, as it breaks and tumbles in the mind, it makes words to fit it.” This extract from a letter to Vita Sackville-West, dated March 16, 1926, appears in *Love Letters: Vita and Virginia* (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, *I See / You Mean* (Los Angeles: Chrysalis Books, 1979), 29.

<sup>1</sup> Leslie Kaplan, *L'excès – L'usine* (Paris: Hachette; P.O.L., 1982); Eng.: *Excess—The Factory*, trans. Julie Carr and Jennifer Pap (Oakland: Commune Editions, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Handke, *Kaspar* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967); Eng.: *Kaspar and Other Plays*, trans. Michael Roloff (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969).

Choreographer Yvonne Rainer said it in 1968, that the mind is a muscle.<sup>4</sup> Dance once again gives us a clear answer.

[To Unravel]

In his question Joaquín used the verb “to unravel” [in Spanish, *desentrañar*, literally to disembowel, and figuratively to get to the bottom of something]. I’ve been thinking about what it means to *entrañar* something. According to the Real Academia Española, to *entrañar* is to insert deep inside. To contain, carry something within oneself. To connect, to become intimately, wholeheartedly close to someone.

To plunge into the depths. To sound out: to explore the depths with a sounding line, to remove cargo from a ship.

To insert and to remove: *desentrañar*.

The *entrañas* (entrails), the various organs contained in the main cavities of human and animal bodies. The fleshy heart [*la entraña corazón*] that María Zambrano wrote about, the only organ that makes a sound, the heartbeat. Its tissue is muscle. One that explodes in the center.

Zambrano uses the metaphor of dance to talk about how the heart is “the centre which shelters the flow of life not to retain it, but rather so that it may take place in the form of dance, keeping step, approaching.”<sup>5</sup>

*Desentrañar* the heart, got to the bottom of it, see its operation.

<sup>4</sup> In 1968, Yvonne Rainer presented *The Mind is a Muscle*, a multipart performance for seven dancers, interspersed with film and text. At that time, Rainer was exploring ways of making that would show the body thinking for itself, through the body, in dance.

<sup>5</sup> María Zambrano, “The Metaphor of the Heart,” trans. John Kraniauskas, *History of European Ideas* 44, no. 7 (2018): 987; originally published as “La metáfora del corazón,” in *Claros del bosque* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1977).

V

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* There seems to be no denying the collusion between the radical political projects of fascism, communism, and capitalism, and the aesthetic excesses of the artistic avant-gardes: dehumanization, disruption, obliteration of memory, the growth of uninhabitable cities, neighborhoods, and worlds, etcetera. Do you think it is important, in spite of this, that we should not be content to let failed political and aesthetic revolutions be finite moments, that we should see them as traces of a better world? Is this where the Archivo F.X.'s particular rereading of the avant-gardes and their recovery comes from?

*Pedro G. Romero:* Those are two separate issues, connected, but different. Of course we have to rethink the legacy of the avant-garde, of the heroic avant-gardes. There has been a deliberate falsification by academia, and through the narrative of the third way, so to speak. The first thing is to realize that there is no break with tradition, but rather a radical acceptance of it. Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings are a singular example. They were involved in the founding of the Cabaret Voltaire and were among the detonators of Dada, but in reality they had a revolutionary, anarcho-Catholic project, whose nihilism had more to do with cracking seed hulls than with scorched earth, to borrow a metaphor from Silverio Lanza. The point is that we don't have to buy the whole blow-by-blow account as it is presented to us: a succession of isms, progress, shock effect. It is no coincidence that Alfred H. Barr Jr.'s narrative is still the hegemonic thesaurus. Think for a moment of the dialectic Hugo Ball sets up with Carl Schmitt, with Walter Benjamin, with Herman Hesse... in other words, fascism, socialism, liberalism, in a sense. In reality, the avant-garde is the possibility of these tensions, not its dissolution. The avant-garde is Lorca, Buñuel, Dalí, Maruja Mallo, Giménez Caballero, María Zambrano, José Bergamín, all the possibility of tension contained there. It is not its dissolution, either

through the war of Falangists and communists or through its pacification under the national-Catholic or liberal-bourgeois regimes. The avant-garde was not actually very ideological; Mayakovsky ended up committing suicide, Pound in a cage, Lorca executed... Although in reality, the avant-garde is not principally authors but works: *The Revolt of the Objects*, *With Usura*, *Poet in New York*. In this sense, yes, just as the Archivo F.X. repositions iconoclasm, not against images but in their favor, it also tries to operate in the same way with the more radical avant-garde. Yes, that is probably so.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer argue that “The regression of the masses today lies in their inability to hear with their own ears what has not already been heard, to touch with their hands what has not previously been grasped.”<sup>1</sup> We could say that the avant-garde creates modes of existence for *a people to come*, but above all it takes the power of play very seriously. Art becomes *deartified*,<sup>2</sup> as Adorno said in “Perennial Fashion,”<sup>3</sup> when it adapts to that which contradicts its own principle, which is none other than to attain utopia, an appeal to change the world. When art becomes standardized it fails to reach its concept. The possibility of knowledge, of that nondiscursive, nonconceptual truth that art brings, is thereby lost. Perhaps the failure of the critical project of the avant-garde had less to do with the radicalization of formal languages or the destruction of the aesthetic canon than with ideas of the new in general, and with the new being linked to a radical logic of progress in art. But this does not mean that we should renounce the plurality of aesthetic processes, which was decisive in modern art and which can always reignite its danger.

Maurice Blanchot said that “when what is seen imposes itself upon the gaze, as if the gaze were seized ... the gaze gets taken in, absorbed by an immobile movement.”<sup>4</sup> We must ask in what senses a critical movement can be activated by art today.

*Valentín Roma:*

In a wonderful interview on his anthology *Lenin. El revolucionario que no sabía demasiado* (Lenin: The Revolutionary Who Didn't Know Too Much, 2012),<sup>1</sup> the great editor and essayist Constantino Bértolo said something to the effect that one cannot keep insisting on the need for revolution while intellectually blushing at the revolution. I think this idea, which is useful for communism, is also valid for a kind of literature that appeals—with a kind of mechanical insistence—to the urgency of political radicalism. Nobody would have expected that the next rung on the literary ladder after postmodern cynicism would be a mainstream that is embarrassed by its hegemonic status and offers us instant recipes for global transformation, all the paraphernalia of “re-”—rereading, reinterpreting, redefining, etcetera. We have acquired an unlimited capacity to decode the system, although I am not convinced that there is a project for a revolutionary novel beyond the article of adolescent exaltation. It seems that a mixture of self-help, disruption, and neologism dominates the production of literature at this time in history, as if the style manuals that academically categorized the avant-garde had made the leap into reading habits. The problem comes, too, when we choose to continue to cling to low-voltage irony or to petulant nihilism, or even when we applaud nostalgia, a literary humor directly linked to the kitsch and reactionary.

<sup>1</sup> Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 28; originally published as *Philosophische Fragmente* (New York: Social Studies Association, Inc., 1944), and in revised form as *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Amsterdam: Querido Verlag, 1947).

<sup>2</sup> Translation introduced by Gerard Vilar, in his book *Desartización. Paradojas del arte sin fin* (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2010), 77.

<sup>3</sup> The German *entkunstet*, translated as “deprived of its aesthetic dimension” in Theodor W. Adorno, “Perennial Fashion—Jazz,” in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 130; originally published as “Zeitlose Mode. Zum Jazz,” in *Prismen. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1955).

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 31; originally published as *L'espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955).

<sup>1</sup> Constantino Bértolo, *Lenin. El revolucionario que no sabía demasiado* (Madrid: Catarata, 2012).

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* For a long time now—you already mentioned it in the catalogue for the exhibition *El Sueño Imperativo* (The Imperative Dream)<sup>1</sup>—you have expressed a distrust of the relationships and simplifications that are often established between aesthetics and politics. To what extent do you think that there is and should be a degree of incompatibility, a radical confrontation and struggle between the two systems, a certain opposition, untranslatability, and autonomy between the laws that govern these different entities? Why do you think it is so difficult to arrive at some kind of fruitful encounter or common space between aesthetic and political radicalism?

*Pedro G. Romero:* As on other occasions, Benjamin formulated the problem well: to counter the aestheticization of politics with the politicization of art.<sup>2</sup> It is a key question and it resonated more powerfully than ever in those years of terrible violence that dragged Benjamin himself to the grave.

The wars of the twentieth century—the Spanish Civil War and the world war that ended in 1945, for example—were also wars between those two factions, a dialectical battle between those two conceptualizations. And unfortunately I must say that the aestheticization of politics won out over the politicization of the arts. On all fronts. In reality, I think that the crux of the matter—which is very difficult to resolve with precision, because language is of course ambiguous—lies in the fact that if we read Benjamin's words carefully, we find that there is a confrontation between aesthetics and art, two different regimes of doing/making. I cannot enter here into categorical definitions of these two concepts—in reality they

## VI

<sup>1</sup> Mar Villaespesa (curator), *El Sueño Imperativo*, exh. cat. Círculo de Bellas Artes (Madrid, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Chitussi, *Immagine e mito. Un carteggio tra Benjamin e Adorno* (Milan: Mimesis, 2010).

both create broad semantic fields—but I think what I am trying to say becomes clear in their opposition. For example, when I write that for me *aesthesis*—a way of seeing—and *poiesis*—a way of doing/making—are the same thing, I am referring to this war. When I use Deleuze and Guattari’s terminology and argue in favor of a “minor art,” I am referring to this same war. I would go as far as to say that all the strategies I have tried over the years—the neutrality of the art object, punishment of the art commodity, defense of amateur crafts, defense of the virtue of not doing, defense of power, and so on—have to do with this war between aesthetics and art. Politics is simply the place where this war takes place, and no, that is no small thing.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

To speak of the political realm, says Jacques Rancière, would seem to evoke no precise or current reality. Legend invariably has the political begin at one boundary, be it the Tiber or the Neva, and end up at another, be it Syracuse or the Kolyma: riverbanks of foundation, island shores of refoundation, abysses of horror or ruin. There must surely be something of the essence in this landscape for politics to be so stubbornly represented within it. To shield politics from the perils that are immanent to it, it has to be hauled on to dry land, set down on terra firma. The whole political project of Platonism can be conceived as an anti-maritime polemic. The *Gorgias* insists on this: Athens has a disease that comes from its port, from the predominance of maritime enterprise governed entirely by profit and survival. Empirical politics, that is to say the fact of democracy, is identified with the maritime sovereignty of the lust for possession, which sails the seas doubly threatened by the buffeting of the waves and the brutality of the sailors. The great beast of the populace, the democratic assembly of the imperialist city, can be represented as a trireme of drunken sailors. In order to save politics it must be pulled aground among the shepherds. The sea smells of sailors, it smells of democracy. The task of philosophy is to found a different politics, a politics of conversion which turns its back on the sea. In the first place, it is a matter of *mise-en-scène*, of shifting images around: cave and mountain instead of sea and land. Before taking us down into the famous cave, Socrates tells us a lot about triremes, incorrigible sailors and helpless pilots. Entering the cave we bid farewell to this fatal and seductive seascape. The cave is the sea transposed beneath the earth, bereft of its sparkling glamour: enclosure instead of open sea, men in chains instead of rows of oarsmen, the dullness of shadows on the wall instead of light reflected on waves. The procedure whereby the prisoner is released and offered conversion is preceded by another, by that first metaphoric act which consists in burying the sea, drying it up, stripping it of its reflections and changing their very nature. In response to these assaults we know, however, that the sea will take its revenge. The primary aim of this non-committal declaration—this declaration without promises—might therefore be to indicate a few places or pathways conducive to reflection upon the figure of the boundary which has always accompanied thinking about the political.<sup>1</sup>

It seems to me that this landscape in which Rancière locates his reflections on politics—a kind of humid, unstable structure—is key to understanding the inseparable relationship he posits between aesthetics and politics. Not only because of the methodology of boundaries that he introduces, but because the successive attempts to haul aesthetics and politics onto dry land are efforts to regulate the anarchic presence of the multiple. To silence the noisy animals that are always moving, the infinite turbulence of the collective that resists attempts to subject it to the law of the One. As such, critique or critical art is not based on denunciation, but on an exploration of the conditions of possibility that embrace the multiple. Aesthetics understood not as “a discipline that would have as its purpose the properties of artistic practice or the judgment of taste,”<sup>2</sup> but rather with forms of life, the ways in which it appears, the exercise of the imagination for a nonexistent community, passages that take place on the border where the dynamics of the construction of a certain communality are disputed. A configuration that is both a machine of power and a machine of vision. The task of political action is aesthetic insofar as it requires the reconfiguration of the conditions of sense perception. The distribution of the sensible is the vulnerable dividing line that creates the perceptual conditions for a political community and its dissensus. It is the fabric in which these experiences take place, the conditions that make possible words, shapes, movements, rhythms.

1. Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1995), 1–2 (with the exception of the first, introductory phrase, this is a direct citation of the book); originally published as *Aux Bords du politique* (Paris: Osiris, 1990).
2. Jacques Rancière, “Le ressentiment anti-esthétique,” *Magazine littéraire*, no. 414 (November 2002): 18.

*Valentín Roma:*

I think that writing in general—and some moments of it in particular—present authors with a dilemma that may have something to do with the links between aesthetics and politics. What I mean is that when one writes, one sometimes has to choose between style and a problem, between unconditional adherence to the literary and acceptance that what you want to say begins when the strategies offered by literature end. It may seem that I am talking about merely formal aspects, but that is not the case. There are magnificent writers—Flaubert would be one example—who teach us to read and at the same time invite us to write, but who are extremely reluctant to make us think, much less to make us think politically. The famous quote from Stendhal—saying that politics in literary work is like a pistol shot in the middle of a concert, vulgar, but, on the other hand, impossible to ignore—remains valid in dominant literary discourses, which add the magic ingredient of psychism to ward off any non-sense about ideologization. In any case, one of my favorite writers on the tensions between aesthetics and politics is María Moreno, who, in my opinion, has an admirable capacity to take fiction from dissidence to frivolity and vice versa. It may be sacrilege to say so, but I think that without a certain degree of self-parody, ideology turns stories into fables and reaffirms exemplifying positions.





# B. The Kneecap

*With a special introduction by Juan Loriente*

This second articulation, “La rótula” (The Kneecap), presents works spanning from those organized by Carta de Ajuste (1994)—an art agency that Mar Villaespesa and BNV Producciones already formed part of—to, on the one hand, the projects carried out under the umbrella of the UNIA arteypensamiento program (2001–17), where Pedro G. Romero was on the editorial board alongside Nuria Enguita, Santiago Eraso, Yolanda Romero, Mar Villaespesa, and BNV Producciones, and, on the other, the projects coordinated by the PRPC (Plataforma de Reflexión sobre Políticas Culturales) in Seville, again with Mar Villaespesa and BNV Producciones, as well as Isaías Grifólo, Inmaculada Salinas, Zemos98, and a long list of occasional participants and activists. This section also includes Pedro G. Romero’s work as curator of various exhibition series, also produced by BNV Producciones, such as *Peace Treaty* (2013–17), for Donostia-San Sebastián European Capital of Culture 2016, and *Aplicación Murillo* (2017–19), for the Instituto de la Cultura y las Artes de Sevilla (ICAS).

Many of the tools, perspectives, and situations in Pedro G. Romero’s research arise from his experiments with agency and the institutional fabric, including the tensions in the interstices between them. The idea of a “machine” emerged from these experiences and from an awareness of how things develop in social institutions, beyond the contributions of individuals and groups. From the idea that all ways of doing are instituent practices, regardless of whether they compose or depose institutions, relationships, forms of life, and ways of being. And also from a sense of the “police” status of any “political” gesture, and what that means for the social body and the actual work done by art. And finally, from an understanding that any *poiesis/esthesis/phronesis* fertile for the field of art is “outside” of politics, while a political dimension is necessary for it to circulate in any of its media, markets, institutions, and artistic circles, and also for the production of artworks, films, theaters, literatures, music, dances, etcetera.

PRPC (Plataforma  
de Reflexión sobre  
Políticas Culturales)

*BIACS NO.*  
*ARTE TODOS LOS DÍAS*  
2006

Placard  
PRPC Archive

Manuel García  
*UNIA arteypensamiento*  
2001–17  
Leaflets and program  
displays  
UNIA arteypensamiento

*La rótula*  
2021  
(with Juan Loriente)  
Video, color, sound, 22:05 min.  
Alarcón Criado Gallery

Filiep Tacq  
*Tratado de paz (1813)*  
2013  
Display  
Archivo F.X.

Remembering some of what happened: the Carta de Ajuste video and music programs for Espárrago Rock in Granada; the Arteleku laboratory for the project *F.E. El fantasma y el esqueleto. Un viaje, de Fuenteheridos a Hondarribia, por las figuras de la identidad*, consisting of nine months of seminars, trips, and discussions; the concert at the Algeciras bullring as part of the Carta de Ajuste/Carta Blanca project; collaborations with the Seville Social Forum for the anti-globalization rallies and in support of the shantytown El Vacie on the outskirts of Seville; a collaboration with Julián Ruesga for the magazine *Artefacto*; participation on the editorial board of UNIA arteypensamiento in general, and in the Archivo F.X. seminars *Laboratorio Rojo*, *Laboratorio Blanco*, *Laboratorio Sevilla*, and *Laboratorio T.V.*, as well as *El sol cuando es de noche*, in conjunction with the exhibition *The Spanish Night* at the Museo Reina Sofía; the projects produced in the pie.fmc platform, including publications, seminars, and the genesis of *Máquina de vivir* (Machines for Living); the *S.I. Sevilla imaginada* project and accompanying publication, as part of Armando Silva's *Urban Imaginaries*; *Sacer. Fugas sobre lo sagrado y la vanguardia en Sevilla*, which began as a book published by UNIA arteypensamiento and became an exhibition and publication at ICAS with the subtitle *El martirio de las cosas* (The Martyrdom of Things); collaborations with the project *Desacuerdos. Sobre arte, políticas y esfera pública en el Estado español* (Disagreements: On Art, Politics and the Public Sphere in Spain), produced by Arteleku, Centro José Guerrero, MACBA, Museo Reina Sofía, and UNIA arteypensamiento; the actions organized by the PRPC against the International Biennial of Contemporary Art of Seville, and the platform's participation in the exhibition *The Potosí Principle: How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?* at the Museo Reina Sofía and Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin; the project *...de rasgos árabes* at the Spanish cultural centers in Buenos Aires, Mexico City, São Paulo, San Salvador, and Santiago de Chile; the work on *Periférica* and *Casa sin fin* editorial and visual projects with Julián Rodríguez; *Barrutik/Dentro* in the Archivo F.X. as part of the *Peace Treaty* project; participation on the editorial board of the magazine *Concreta* in Valencia; and the participation as artist and member of the curatorial platform on projects such as *Utopian Pulse—Flares in the Darkroom* at the Vienna Secession, and *Actually, the Dead are Not Dead* at Bergen Assembly, Norway.









# REMEMBER

*With a special guest appearance by  
Juan Loriente*

*If I were an object I'd be objective, but as I am a subject, I am subjective.*  
José Bergamín

The actor is in the library. He is crouching down in the middle of a U-shaped bookcase full of books. A mask covers his face, and a monkey's skull hangs from it. He is wearing a guayabera, like the author and subject of this false memoir. There is a kind of parsimony that echoes him, not just in the way the shirt hangs, but also in a certain awkwardness of gesture.

In the foreground there is a headless skeleton of the kind used in anatomy lessons. On the left, the section of books on flamenco. On the right, a glass cabinet with many of the first editions belonging to the Archivo F.X. On all sides there are boxes, paintings, papers of various kinds. There is a borrowed ladder. Ines Doujak's *wichi-wichi* hangs on the shelf dedicated to theater, bullfighting, and Tropicália. The actor chooses several masks hanging in Pedro G. Romero's library, like his parodical counter-figure. We can think of parody as mimicry, but also, in the strict sense, as a true understanding of the object of parody.

The actor is crouched down like a ghost or a small goblin. When he starts speaking it is as if air were being released from a wineskin. The inflatable doll slowly gets up and starts walking:

[the puppet appears to be exploring the space, the high shelves full of books. His body sways comically and he lifts his head—and the monkey's skull too—upward, toward the light, imitating the gesture of illumination]

*Remember, in Madrid, at Casa Ricardo, eating croquettes with the fragility of Nancy Spero, and the creaking plaster at the Círculo de Bellas Artes in Madrid because of Chris Burden's Samson, celebrating with slices of jamón, and Wodiczko's mayhem with the Iraq War, celebrating his projection with the botellona at Puerta de la Moncloa, and the Arriba España! Spanish flag that was stolen and vandalized by some fachas<sup>1</sup>—or perhaps some radical Leninists—stolen from the elevator while you drank champagne at the opening, and remember that all of this was during El Sueño Imperativo, where Mar Villaespesa and Joaquín Vázquez and Miguel Benlloch from BNV Producciones showed us, taught us, that there is a different way of working, a certain democracy, a certain equality, camaraderie; we all had a say there, it was more, much more, a case of "curar" than "comisariar,"<sup>2</sup> more politics than police, and, remember, those lunches, those rounds of beers, that friendship, gave rise to many things.*

[Stepping out of the ring of books, the actor approaches the camera and emphasizes every word he says, with distance and irony. He removes his shoes and starts to take off his pants. He turns his back on us and returns to the book-lined den. In his underpants and bare legs, he starts climbing up the bookcase]

1. Derogatory name derived from "fascist" in the Spanish context.—Trans.

2. In Spanish, *curar* and *comisariar* can be used interchangeably for "curate," though one shares roots with "care" and the other has police/power resonances.—Trans.

*Remember, Carta de Ajuste, which tried to do so many things, with Mar and Joaquín and Miguel, and I think Alicia was already there, I think, remember, I think it was the first time, at Espárrago Rock, that the Spanish translation of Dan Graham's Rock My Religion was launched, and remember those sessions at Planta Baja with Bernardo Atxaga, Chano Lobato, and Ramón Corominas, and in Almadraba with Corinne Diserens and her Carta Blanca, between Tangiers, Tétouan, Algeciras, Tarifa, Ceuta, Melilla, and Gibraltar, and, remember, remember, yes, the importance of the conversations, the connections, the plans, we spoke more about "the impossible because about the possible too much had already been said."*

[perching on top of the bookshelf, the actor begins to climb down, using the shelves as steps. He picks up a ghost skeleton puppet and moves it comically, addressing the camera. The monkey skull and the cranium seem to strike up a dialogue under the watchful eye (*sic*) of the headless skeleton in the foreground]

*Remember, the nine-month laboratory with El fantasma y el esqueleto, with Santi Eraso's Arteleku, traveling all over Spain, from Fuenteheridos ("Source of the Wounded")—near my hometown, Aracena—to Hondarribia, Fuenterrabía ("Source of Anger"), because the poet José Bergamín had been wounded in Fuenteheridos, where his daughter had picked him up, and he had gone to Hondarribia in a rage, and there he became an anti-Spanish Abertzale; all that which seemed to hide one of the most lucid poets and perceptive essayists restored to us by exile. And remember, under this literary pretext, you went with twenty-one others, actually, I don't know how many others because people kept leaving, and in the end thirteen were left, thirteen! BNV produced*

*this too, we traveled through Donosti, Gasteiz, La Rábida, Seville, Cuenca, Granada, and Hondarribia and Fuentehieridos, and it all came to nothing, to that precise mixture of experiment and experience that amounts to nothing and leaves everything.*

[inside the bookcase/library, the actor takes out some large pieces of paper from his pocket and pretends to read them, as if he were following a map. He folds and refolds the paper, and starts dancing nervously, jumping in and out of the book-lined ring]

*Remember, the meetings of the Seville Social Forum and the rallies against capitalist globalization, against the World Bank, and that nobody, nobody in the organization understood anything you said, and that you navigated all that commotion with a very rudimentary little map that was full of contradictions and paradoxes, and that they told you it was not the time for contradictions and paradoxes, as if contradictions and paradoxes were an obstacle to action, when in fact they are the main engine of real actions, and those who followed your map wandered away from the demonstration, losing themselves in the city.*

[the actor jumps to the top of the bookshelf, sits down, bends his body in a reflective pose. In the middle of his speech, he jumps to the floor and continues speaking, as if unrolling the words]

*Remember, working with the support network for El Vacie, a shantytown near the cemetery in Seville, and not knowing how to help except by ceasing to make art and working with those people in some way, and that you didn't know what to do and you failed in the attempt to make it visible without turning it into an issue, without paternalisms, without appearing charitable, with so many precautions that, well, you failed. It was*

*impossible to go through that without contradictions, without getting dirty, because causes leave their mark, the poor leave their mark, it is true that they leave their mark.*

[opening a glass door that closes off the room, and that now encloses him, the actor, in the bookcase/library. His face, with the Filipino mask with the monkey's skull, is hidden by some geometric shapes that decorate the glass. He speaks from there, hiding]

*Remember, yes, you and Julián Ruesga made a magazine that had the density and scope of an Argentinean magazine, but those Artefactos—as the magazine was called—also opened you up to confront and collaborate with other ways of making art that were taking place in the city, in Seville, and to consider arts and crafts, for example, to consider handicrafts, the need for profession-building without being professionals.*

[opening the glass door again, almost closing off the room, but leaving it ajar so there is a crack of air. He tries out various Oriental poses, at one point he seems to be praying, although he sprinkles his speech with chuckles and dissonant exclamations that vehemently emphasize the text. His gestures and movements are somehow cartoonish]

*Remember, yes, what it was like to think up UNIA arteypensamiento, that editorial board with Mar Villaespesa and Joaquín and Miguel and Alicia from BNV Producciones, together with Santiago Eraso, Nuria Enguita, and Yolanda Romero, and all those entanglements, the discussions, the tensions with the institution, all that doing in which all things, even the coffee breaks, were instituting practices, and it was possible to*

*do things while talking, with jokes, with humor, you could be working and laughing about what you were working on, remember. How could we ever have created that atmosphere, except through friendship? Remember that they called us mafiosi or endogamic because we were friends, but that core group, that family, maintaining that care of friends, of laughter, that was not just a job, that was life, what Foucault called an artistic life, which has nothing to do with the fetishist equating of art with life.*

[changing the tone of his voice. He puts the ladder down and places it, open, across the bookcase. He climbs onto its sides, struggling to keep his balance. His body and his voice wobble. There's something nervous and stuttering in what he says. About to fall, he grabs hold of the glass door he'd left ajar]

*Remember, the enormous possibility of doing things, of coming up with modes of doing, ways of doing, the things that you were able to invent through UNIA arteypensamiento, in those laboratories—Laboratorio Rojo, Laboratorio Blanco, Laboratorio Sevilla, and Laboratorio T.V.—the number of experiences amassed there, the number of archive viewing hours that you've never watched again, the number of recorded conversations that you've never listened to again, the miscellaneous printouts that you've barely had time to read, but, as Isidoro Valcárcel Medina says, it's not what you take notes on that matters, it's what remains, and, remember, that gestures and adverbs remain more than sentences and nouns.*

[still on top of the ladder, which is lying on the ground, but no longer losing his balance. He speaks as if on a pedestal. In a kind of grotesque monument, he does a little jig, returns to his unstable position, and grabs the bookcase, arching his body slightly backward]

*Remember, everything that happened around The Spanish Night, the seminars, Flamenco, Avant-Garde, and Popular Culture, and Flamenco, un arte popular moderno, which were more or less the same, with Agustín García Calvo and Isabel Escudero and Giorgio Agamben and Georges Didi-Huberman and Gerhard Steingress and José Luis Ortiz Nuevo and Enrique Morente and Belén Maya and Israel Galván and Gerardo Núñez, they all came, and remember how exciting the whole thing was. Remember, I didn't know if the people all knew how important it was to have them there, all of them together, working with us, but I thought that in itself explained many things, no matter what they said in their panels, conversations, dissertations, just the fact that they were all there together, that alignment, said many things.*

[the ladder is still on the floor, but the actor gets off it and straddles it. He picks up a painting, a framed drawing by Ignacio Tovar that was on the floor and holds it up to the camera in various positions. It is a drawing of a stone axe, but also a woman's hair, and a shape that is both phallic and vaginal. He makes little squeaks, rather ad hoc]

*Remember, Sacer, which later became an exhibition at Santa Clara, which was an in-depth reflection on why the avant-garde had chosen Seville to speak of the sacred, a city where the sacred still mattered, where the distinction between secular and profane still held. A city that, when all is said and done, worshiped idols, and where, for that very reason, it was easy to be iconoclastic; a city that engendered all your contradictions and I remember shutting myself away in Isleta del Moro in Cabo de Gata for an intense week that produced a daughter and a book.*

[continuing his speech while holding the framed drawing in the air, sometimes the front and sometimes the back. He lifts his arms so high that the drawing moves out of the frame. He kneels down and keeps talking, then he jumps up, puts the picture aside, and approaches the camera, making admonishing gestures with the index finger of his left hand]

*Remember, again, with UNIA arteypensamiento, Armando Silva and his Urban Imaginaries and that memorable discussion, or even fight, between the Colombian philosopher and Manuel Delgado, and how it was resolved in the best possible way, with the two opposing positions holding up, keeping the tension alive, the unresolved debate, and how you worked for three years and came up with S.I. Sevilla imaginada, with the people of Olavide university, with the groups of researchers, remember what it meant to write that book, to know that Sevillians were more interested in Expo '92 than in what happened during the coup d'état that triggered the Spanish Civil War. To try to work with that, yes, as I said before, the people leave their mark, you get dirty, and to end up understanding how a city operates, how it makes us, how little we do, when it is that other thing that is operating, that other thing that here is called, exactly, Seville.*

[lifting the ladder, which now leans against the middle of the bookshelf. The actor turns around, and he is wearing another mask on the back of his head, a handcrafted Mexican mask of a dog or wolf. He walks backward toward the camera, it looks like the head of the wolf/dog is approaching the camera. He moves the mask up and down]

*Remember, how a different kind of UNIA arteypensamiento, the flamenco kind, made its home in UNIA arteypensamiento, I mean*

*pie.flamenca (plataforma independiente de estudios flamencos modernos y contemporáneos), abbreviated pie.fmc, all in very small letters, very minor, which is precisely what it aimed to be. And it opened itself up to all voices, and in the end it was cacophony rather than polyphony, even though Gamboa and Ortiz Nuevo and Patricia Molins and Georges Didi-Huberman were there as supporters and, remember, that the pie or pie.fmc, ended up getting involved in Máquinas de vivir, five years toing and froing, which changed many things in my life, it gave me seven journeys, five exhibitions, two books, and a son.*

[still with his back to the camera, wearing the Mexican mask. Now he is on the lower rungs of the ladder. His whole recital is full of animal howls and panting, and ends somewhat histrionically]

*Remember, UNIA arteypensamiento, which came by way of Santiago Eraso's Arteleku in Disagreements. On art, politics, and the public sphere in Spain—that was the name of the whole affair—which also included the Centro José Guerrero in Granada and MACBA, which organized it, and later the Museo Reina Sofía—in other words, Manolo Borja, with Jorge Ribalta and Marcelo Expósito—and the only thing, and it was no small thing, that came from having UNIA arteypensamiento there was the fact that it was not just them alone, there were other people, more people, even the people, and that's no small thing.*

[taking off the mask and climbing down the stairs. He goes back to speaking through the improvised mask with the Filipino cap and the monkey skull emphasizing these colonial attributes. He exits, enters, re-exits, and re-enters the cubicle of books]

*Remember,  
yes, yes, remember the PRPC (Plataforma de Reflexión sobre Políticas Culturales), we did always like grandiloquent names, particularly when dealing with grandiloquent institutions, but it is also the prpc, as a name, not an acronym, a David against the Goliath of the BIACS – Biennial of Contemporary Art of Seville, and there was even treachery, like when Juan Carlos Marset and José Lebrero supported us at first and then sold us out, but we were prpc, remember, with BNV and Mar Villaespesa and Inmaculada Salinas and Isaías Griñolo and José Luis Tirado and Zemos98 and so many people, so many, who came and went, intermittently, with their joys and sorrows, and, mind you, when we participated in The Potosí Principle at the Museo Reina Sofia and the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, ah! Remember, the prpc got lost amongst all those acronyms and letters, it didn't disappear completely, it's still there, like a fungus, like a sleeper cell.*

[picking up the *wichi-wichi* like a tassel that he swings, dong-like, between his open legs. His words follow the rhythm of the swinging of the tassel and are in time with it. There is lots of mocking laughter in what he says, or rather in his way of saying it]

*Remember,  
yes, yes, remember Catherine David who brought Nuria Enguita to UNIA arteypensamiento with Contemporary Arab Representations and how she later enlightened you for ...de rasgos árabes, a crazy project in Buenos Aires, Santiago e Chile, São Paulo, Mexico City, and San Salvador on the subject of Arabic culture in Latin America. Remember, a crazy project, pure decolonization of the unconscious, and everything you learned there, on those trips, with those people, from those experiences, a methodology even, a way*

*of doing things, a way of being there, of participating, "somos moros, estamos negros."*

[walking forward, out of the library. He arranges the pants and shoes he had left behind earlier, the colored *wichi-wichi*, and the Mexican mask into a curious still life, an extravagant set. He talks as if his mind is on other things]

*Remember,  
running into Julián Rodríguez again, and picking up the conversation that time had interrupted at the various Don Dinero exhibitions at his gallery, Casa sin fin, and at Periférica, with those two little books, Las Correspondencias and Los Países, each of which brought joy and they made an impact, which had nothing to do with the copies sold, which Julián knew was something else altogether and he knew that it was worthwhile, and the joy it gave me to leave things in his care, in Julián's care.*

[kneeling down, appearing to recite words whispered in his ear. One of his arms seems to take on a life of its own and turns into an elephant's trunk, swinging up and down. Continuing with this, as if the hand/trunk were pulling him up, he stands up and approaches the camera like a pachyderm]

*Remember,  
Barrutik/Dentro, the little insides of the Archivo F.X. in the elephantine Peace Treaty project; the project's threads and connections, the two great cycles of exhibitions in 2013 and 2016, and the implications of working with institutions, with the European Cultural Capital, with the state, with the state of things, with the police and the terrorists at the same time, as Chesterton said in The Man Who Was Thursday, with the miseries of both, Saint Peter's denials and Judas's thirty pieces of silver, in the Basque Country, which is such*

*a vibrant scene, so guerracivlista<sup>3</sup> in the positive sense of the word, because it does have one, remember, like an elephant in a china shop, remember, in a scenario that is truly political in both senses of the word, to take sides and to take a position, ah, blessed contradictions! José Bergamín: "Paradox is what fools call truth."*

[the elephant is still lurching. The words are interspersed with guttural interjections. The actor pulls himself together and seems to take a normal pose. He looks at the books with a mischievous glint]

*Remember, that you're there, on the editorial board of Concreta magazine in Valencia, and that a couple of issues have come out in your spirit, the one dedicated to flamenco, to gitanos and to the Roma people, which is almost like a guide to what your work is about, your field, this idea of gatekeeping in a field with no keys.*

[jumping up and climbing onto the bookcase, hanging by his elbows, which are wedged into the shelves on the left and right. He swings his bare legs, or rather he is almost kicking. He jumps forward and smugly moves into the foreground of the frame]

*Remember, sharing, being there, in projects based on autonomy, on connected autonomy, projects that are not really defined, projects in which what matters is being there, and being is doing, in a certain sense: Uma Certa Falta de Coerência in Oporto and Salvator Rosa in Livorno and The Nacheinander nowhere.*

[leaving the ladder on one side of the bookcase/ library. He moves papers and books out of the

way and sits on the floor. He gradually places books on his legs as he continues his speech]

*Remember, Aplicación Murillo, with Joaquín Vázquez and Luis Montiel, which aspired to be so many things, a paradigm shift in arts policy in your city, and ended up being reduced by municipal shortsightedness to some festivities, just another event, a mere pronouncement of culture in the age of tourist reproduction, but we are sure that we shifted something, that it will end up having some effect, that their ignorance cannot be so great, the ignorance of the institutions cannot be so great, and I mean ignorance in the derogatory sense of the word, because in the other, real sense, ignorance and stupidity are ours.*

[still burying himself in books. He stops, gestures with his arms in the air, from his prone position. He adds a few more books to the pile covering him. He gestures again. He continues to pile books on top of his body]

*Remember, participating as an artist and member of the curatorial platform in projects like Utopian Pulse, at the Vienna Secession, and Actually, the Dead are not Dead, at the Bergen Assembly, Norway, around the great hegemonic and counterhegemonic Europe, around the world, without even speaking English, "which is more worthy of admiration," as Pastori Filigrana says, or as Didi-Huberman says, "I assure you I've never heard him speak any language other than Spanish with a strong Andalusian accent," and precisely for this reason, absolute deterritorialization and, remember, at the same time, being able to make a voice heard there that is not your own, perhaps that of a certain community, an unavowed community.*

3. Civil Warist, creating or promoting (or in this case not ignoring) the state of civil war.—Trans.

[we see the actor lying on the floor, his head peeking out from behind the pile of books covering his body. As he continues to speak, his head and shoulders slip under the tower of books. His arm disappears, his shoulders disappear, his face, with the mask and the monkey skull, disappears under the pile of books]

*Remember,  
and then, remember, UNIA  
artepensamiento, which we mentioned  
before, a little while ago, UNIA  
artepensamiento came to an end, and what  
followed was the pie.flamenca, which is being  
relaunched, right now, under these very  
words, with Joaquín Vázquez, with Chema  
Blanco, with the art gallery Alarcón Criado,  
with Enrique Fuenteblanca, combining our  
enthusiasm, and there will be more people,  
because we are doing it, as I said, this very  
thing, this very thing we are doing right now  
is the pie, this very thing, this recording,  
here with Aneri and Juanma, this, this doing-  
as-possibility, this potency, this footnote,  
this very thing, remember is the pie  
flamenca.<sup>4</sup>*

The body buried under the books remains in the frame. There is something comical about the two skinny legs, naked but wearing socks, stretched out in front, over the still life of the *wichi-wichi*, the shoes, the pants, and the Mexican mask. It's a final gesture like kicking the bucket. As the song says, "estiró la pata, arrugó el hocico y con el rabo tieso decía ¡adiós, Perico!"<sup>5</sup>

4. In addition to being the acronym, pie also means foot, so that the acronym allows for untranslatable word games, foot notes, flamenco foot...—Trans.

5. To "estirar la pata" is to "kick the bucket" or die: "he kicked the bucket, wrinkled his snout, and, with his tail stiff, he said, goodbye, Perico!"—Trans.















2013ko ekainaren 29tik 2014ko urtarrilaren 7ra  
Del 29 de junio del 2013 al 7 de enero del 2014

Untzi Museoa

# San Telmo Museoa

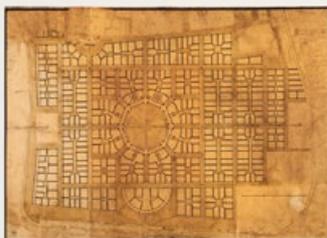
«Bake-ituna»

«Tratado de paz»

# 1813

Bake-ituna Donostia 2016, Europako Kultur Hiriburuaren proiektua da. *1813. Donostiaren setioa, sutea eta berreraikitzea*, bere lehen aurkezpena.

*Tratado de Paz* es un proyecto de San Sebastián Capital Europea de la Cultura 2016. *1813. Asedio, incendio y reconstrucción de San Sebastián*, su primera presentación.



A



D



F

# 1813

*Donostiaren setioa, sutea eta berreraikitzea*  
*Asedio, incendio y reconstrucción de San Sebastián*



B

- A. Pedro Manuel Jagarlamenda, Donostia berreraikitzeo plana. Lehenera proiektua. Donostiarako proiektu berria, ordez publiko eta pribatu guztien bantatzean adierazten duena, 1814.
- B. Francisco de Coya y Lucientes, Desastres de la guerra senario estampak, 1810-1815. 79 or. Muntz la Verdad © Bilbao Arte Ederren Museoa.
- C. Salvador Dalí, sartu peniketa horietarako estampak: Les charniers de Maldoror, hitzorde dukasoa, La última orkestra kopetas, 1934. © Viegas.
- D. Anónimo, The Siege of San Sebastián, XIX. mendea.
- E. Joseph Beuys, Kunst-Kapital, 1979.
- F. 1813an mokatutako basera.



C

- A. Pedro Manuel Jagarlamenda, Plan para la Reconstrucción de San Sebastián. Primer proyecto. Planta de un nuevo proyecto de la Ciudad de St. Sebastián en que se manifiesta la distribución de calles por sistema público y particular, 1814.
- B. Francisco de Coya y Lucientes, estampas de la serie Desastres de la guerra, 1810-1815. N° 79. Muntz la Verdad. © Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao.
- C. Salvador Dalí, estampas para Les charniers de Maldoror de hitzorde dukasoa, ordezko du Lucharmont, 1934. © Viegas.
- D. Anónimo, The Siege of San Sebastián, siglo XIX.
- E. Joseph Beuys, Kunst-Kapital, 1979.
- F. Vajilla fundida en 1813.

Bake-ituna Donostia 2016 Europako Kultur Hiriburuaren proiektua da. *1813. Donostiaren setioa, sutea eta berreraikitzea*, bere lehen aurkezpena. DSS2016 Fundazioak eta San Telmo Museoa-ekin batera, ondorengo lehiaketaren bidez. Donostia Untzi Museoa eta Asedioa eta Giza Eskubideen Erara, eta Ormaiztegui Zuzendaritza Museoa; eta ondorengo laguntzarik: Baitako Euzal Museoa, Madrilgo Kallegrafia eta Liburutegi Nazionala, Piztu Museoa eta Reina Sofia Arte Zentro Museo Nazionala.

*Tratado de Paz* es un proyecto de San Sebastián Capital Europea de la Cultura 2016. *1813. Asedio, incendio y reconstrucción de San Sebastián*, su primera presentación, está realizada por la Fundación DSS2016 y Museo San Telmo; coproducida con Museo Naval y Casa de la Paz y los Derechos Humanos de San Sebastián, y Museo Zuzendaritza de Ormaiztegui; con la colaboración del Museo Vasco de la historia de Bayona, Caligrafía y Biblioteca Nacional, Museo del Prado y Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía de Madrid.



# THE SACRED, TIME, AND VIOLENCE

*(On Work, The Ghost and the Skeleton,  
Theater of Theaters, Will We Reach Seville  
Soon?, and Time of the Bomb)*

I

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* Spain can be considered a sacred state, “a state as sacred and irrational as the sacred state of the Akan in the African jungle,”<sup>1</sup> as Richard Wright said. Your interest in the sacred and its inherent connection with profanation—two forces that, you tell us, cannot break free from each other, your view of secularization as the means by which the modern world has been theologized, and your belief that religion is the key to finding the passage from tradition to modernity: are these the reasons for your constant references to writers with a strong theological bent, such as Bergamín, Benjamin, and even Agamben, and for their influence in your work?

*Pedro G. Romero:* And María Zambrano and Simone Weil, and Marie-José Mondzain... It was an eccentric hypothesis that led me to read them, just as the decision to start reading Agamben systematically was eccentric: we could say that my interest in reading Pepe Bergamín and Guy Debord with equal passion was not readily understood, and then suddenly I discovered Agamben, who is a reader of both and moreover lends coherence to their joint reading. But going back to theology, the eccentric hypothesis had to do with God’s return to the world after Hiroshima. The atomic bomb represented, I don’t know how to put it, a kind of constraint to political action and thought, say. Later there have been others, such as climate change and pandemics, from AIDS to coronavirus. All my work on the bomb had to do with this. From the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution to nineteenth-century colonialist capitalist slavery, Hitler, and Stalin, it all took place in a godless world. And suddenly, the bomb. It did not bring back the Christian or mythological god, but it did establish a

<sup>1</sup> Richard Wright, *Pagan Spain* (New York: Harper, 1957), cited in Paul Gilroy, *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London and New York: Verso Books, 1993), 162–63.

framework, a ceiling, a limit perfectly suited to the work of thinkers who accepted the theological tradition, accepted Jerusalem and Rome, not just Athens. In fact, utopian socialism and atheist anarchism are steeped in theology. Curiously, one of the categories that was challenged in this context, for this very reason, was History—the grand narrative of history—precisely as a result of messianism’s relativization of time, as theorized by Benjamin, for example. The end of history not as a finale but as a finality, a task. The *Archivo F.X.* appeared as project on the end of art in that same sense, as being an ending and having a finality, a purpose. This end of history had to do with the anachronism we spoke of at the beginning, and in that sense tradition turns out to be very much our contemporary. Moreover, these writers place more emphasis on liturgy than theology, on the much vaunted “performativity” of ideas and images. Whether it came from heterodox Catholicism or Jewish Illuminism, thinking was a “performative” act that does not just abide by concepts, but also by a certain liturgy, a certain way of doing/making.

It was a time of much reading, that’s true. I suppose due to a certain crisis, when I realized that what I was doing by operating as an artist—that kind of routine that involves moving between the artist’s studio, the commercial gallery, and the cultural institution—failed to satisfy me. And at the same time I could see how it operated hegemonically, even legitimizing radical attitudes that were supposedly outside of that almost bureaucratic triangle. I may be expanding too much on this, but yes, that was when I started to assemble a kind of edifice that, I must say, I soon set fire to, perhaps, as Kafka said, in order to better understand its structure.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

The different types of religious experience, as set out by Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational* (1917),<sup>1</sup> have been extensively studied from their irrational side. But perhaps it is more to the point to think about religious experience not in terms of its irrational content but as Mircea Eliade did in *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*,<sup>2</sup> a rigorous study of the sacred in its complexity. In this sense, the sacred has to do with the expression of difference that does not arise from personal perceptions or impressions but from something else, from a reality that does not belong to our world as we know it. Indeed, as Victoria Cirlot writes in *Imágenes negativas* (Negative Images, 2017), “the divine darkness is the inaccessible light. Its dazzling brightness makes it invisible.”<sup>3</sup> Benjamin approaches this experience of the sacred when he writes about messianism without a messiah, an opening of that which has not been. The underpinnings of modern Western reason are not comfortable with certain theological forms, especially theologies without *telos*. For pre-modern societies, the sacred is equivalent to a *power*. From the perspective of the capitalist mode of production and its inherent rationalism, all that is not calculable, predictable, or probable is myth or appearance. But this is only possible if there is an uncoupling of concrete experiences. Thus, in a brief fragment entitled “Capitalism as Religion,”<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin writes that the essence of capitalism is the fact that it is a religion rather than a system of production. In fact, he says, it is the most extreme religion of all, because it does not have a specific form of worship, a body of dogma, or theology, and moreover it never stops, it demands constant veneration. Capitalism is the first instance of a non-expiatory cult, since it knows no possible redemption. It is a cult that only creates indebtedness and guilt, that universalizes this debt, this guilt. Giorgio Agamben took this up later in his short text “What Is an Apparatus?” (2007),<sup>5</sup> in which he questioned how capitalism as cultural religion can be profaned. The only way to break that infinite chain of debt, Benjamin would say, is revolutionary violence, which is the only expression of the divine in the profane. In this sense, artistic practice can be an experience of the sacred, of the open, of that which *has not been*. It can interrupt a common sense, explore the bodily innervations that capitalism brings about, and discover the margins, where a revolutionary energy can emerge.

*Valentín Roma:*

If we allow that there is a sector of literature with an anti-normative drive that mirrors the biblical Way of the Cross—I am thinking of the strong Catholic component in Tiquun, of the fact that Cristina Morales and Ray Loriga approached Saint Teresa of Jesus by describing mystical ecstasy as a form of visceral antagonism, and of Paul B. Preciado showing the extent to which a narrative of the body immolated under certain Christian procedures can run through a transgender epic—it is possible that the redemptive imaginary may contain a power that can be linked to *polemos*, to the struggle for possession of words. I would say that, with the bringing of truth having been scorned by part of the literary world, perhaps we are now witnessing the advent of the struggle to find it. This is by no means new. María Zambrano is here too, to name an example close to home. And so it seems that, from William Burroughs to Alejandro Jodorowsky, pharmacology and magic may operate as theological vehicles. That the only dogmatic institution that was not deconstructed in Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge turns out to be the church.

1. Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Breslau: Trewendt und Granier, 1917); Eng.: *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1924).
2. Mircea Eliade, *Das Heilige und das Profane. Vom Wesen des Religiösen* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957); Eng.: *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. from the revised French edition by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, 1959).
3. Victoria Cirlot, *Imágenes negativas. Las nubes en la tradición mística y la modernidad* (Viña del Mar: Mundana Ediciones, 2017), 15.
4. Walter Benjamin, “Kapitalismus als Religion” (1921), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 100–103; Eng.: “Capitalism as Religion,” trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 1: 1913–1926, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004): 288–91.
5. Giorgio Agamben, *Qu’est-ce qu’un dispositif?* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2007); Eng.: “What is an Apparatus?,” in *What Is an Apparatus and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

*Isabel de Naverán:*

[Liturgy]

Fernando Pérez, the current director of Azkuna Zentroa – Alhóndiga Bilbao, once told me that when he was working at the city’s municipal archives, during the usual empty hours of a Friday afternoon, a man walked in with a photograph in his hand. He said he was looking for photographs of the wooden carving of Christ that is carried in the Holy Week processions organized by the Town Hall every year. The man told Fernando that his father, now deceased, had posed for the sculptor who carved those figures, that he thought he might have made several preliminary versions, he didn’t know, and that he was looking for one of them, the one corresponding to the sculpture that his father posed for. Fernando told me how they spent the whole afternoon looking at photos documenting the wooden sculptures, comparing the features of the depicted Christ with those of the man in the photo. And how they were surprised to discover that he did in fact look like him. It looked like him. The face of the wooden Christ was just like the face of that man, the face of a stranger who posed for the sculptor, giving up his singular features, surrendering them to a collective representation. Fernando, not just the son, was so astonished that in an unprecedented act for the archivist, who had no special fondness for or interest in theology, he embarked on a kind of ceremony consisting of scanning every procession, year after year, not for the mystery, but for the face of the man in the photograph. Because if he had posed for one sculptor, he may have posed for others. Or the sculptor himself may have reused the man’s face in Holy Week carvings for other towns, cities, and villages. And Fernando told me that, after the unexpected encounter on that Friday afternoon, his liturgy (Fernando’s) consisted in looking for him, of trying to reencounter a man whom he had not even met, but who had remained with him, and whose presence he recognized.

With Pedro, we reflected on the feminized image of the allegory of the Republic, depicted with a woman’s face and body, sometimes holding a laurel branch, raising one arm like a dancer. I wondered about the identities of the many women who had posed for the many paintings and representations of the allegory. Mainly anonymous women who spent a little time, a few hours, posing for a painter and being transformed from one into all, into a collective image.

One of these women was the dancer and flamenco *baï-lora* Antonia Mercé y Luque, known by her stage name La Argentina. She did pose for some artists, but those

paintings were not allegorical representations. However, she could be considered the living allegory of the ideas of the Second Republic, as she was the first artist to receive the order granted by the Spanish government in 1931, from the hands of Manuel Azaña. The circumstances of her death, from shock, from heart failure, on July 18, 1936, on learning of the uprising of Franco’s troops that would bring about the end of the Second Republic and give rise to the Civil War, add weight to this idea.

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* Does the link you establish between religious belief and Western culture account for the attention and importance you give to tradition? Can we say that it is impossible to enunciate without the past? In other words, would you say that tradition is not just a cultural substratum but also a source of resistance, a convergence that gives rise to paradoxes, “operators in a profound sense of language,” which are fundamentally your modes of being/doing and your way of being in the world?

## II

*Pedro G. Romero:* Well, you’re aware of my fondness for Benjamin’s image of the chess-playing Turk automaton with an expert “Capablanca” dwarf hidden inside: theology is the dwarf inside the machine of historical materialism. Of course, when we talk about tradition or about histories as opposed to the grand narrative of History, we are taking a political position. I should say “traditions” too, as opposed to one grand Tradition. But let’s situate ourselves: I live and work in Seville, where tradition is obviously a subject, a material at hand. It is a living thing, as they say. I don’t know if you remember when Terry Berkowitz came to Seville during Holy Week one year and I accompanied her to record on video the sculptures of Jews in the processions: Caiaphas, Barabbas... In fact, apart from the Romans, they were all Jews, even the Virgin of Hope of Macarena! I told Terry that I saw Holy Week as the reverse of Benjamin’s image: historical materialism was the dwarves, the *costaleros* who carry the floats in the procession, who were moving the machine of theology. In this sense, my interest against the grand narrative of History, my interest in histories—Benjamin says this too—has to do with using the same hegemonic materials, with taking the knowledge that History administers and turning it against its single, univocal narrative. That is why I often disagree with so-called historical memory or other alternative histories, even though I am interested in uchronia and science fiction. In any case, it is not a question of justifying the burning of churches in Seville because of the pressure of the war, or the Jacobin enlightenment, or nihilist irrationalism, or by blaming Moscow. The point is that the same people who carried the floats in the Holy Week processions, the same people who cheered the images in the street, were the same people who burned the images, destroyed the churches, desecrated their rites. I was trying to understand that.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

“Doesn’t a breath of the air that pervaded earlier days caress us as well? In the voices we hear, isn’t there an echo of now silent ones?”<sup>1</sup>

Marie-José Mondzain says that the “being-in-relation-to” that images and experiences of the sacred give rise to—this possibility of taking-place in an image—often emerges from the ashes. In *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience* (1978),<sup>2</sup> Agamben writes that contemporary man is unable to have experiences, and that this inability comes down to the fact that the modern subject can only experience the world through knowledge based on evidence. This form of understanding is incompatible with the kind of experience that opens up on the edge of the unintelligible. The encounter with this edge—which Benjamin called the abyss, and which we must learn to play with—is the primary condition of all experience. An experience in the strong sense of the term cannot be reproduced, calculated, or predicted, and as such it has nothing to do with certainties. It is about the suspension of what we take to be knowledge, and even of language. It is necessary, then, to produce these gaps between what is seen and what is said, what is known and what is encountered, so as to begin another history.

Talking is a way of taking care of time.

*Valentín Roma:*

In *Children of the Mire* (1974),<sup>1</sup> Octavio Paz coined the concept of a “tradition of rupture” or “tradition against itself,” which was intended, I imagine, to both admonish and praise authors such as Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Apollinaire. Paz is one of those writers—like John Berger, Thomas Bernhard, and even Susan Sontag—who are first venerated and then abhorred or challenged, only to come back “later.” I can’t pin down what I mean by later, hence the quotation marks. Reading *Children of the Mire*, I think I understood that if tradition is conceived as continuity and rupture is seen as the negation of tradition, does that not suggest that tradition is precisely what interrupts the continuum with the past?

An anecdote attributed to Baudelaire may illustrate the grotesque disputes between memory and its dysfunctions. It seems that from 1844 to 1853 it was quite common to find the poet strolling arm in arm with Jeanne Duval, the famous mulatto dancer whose exoticism adorned the vaudeville at the Parthenon theater. The two walked silently and very slowly, towed along by a long diamond-encrusted collar encircling the neck of a huge tortoise. Once, when asked about the reason for this outlandish habit, Baudelaire replied that of the various ways of escaping the persecutions of history, the most effective was, of course, to be dragged along by an age-old animal.

<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4: 1938–1940, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 390; originally published as *Walter Benjamin zum Gedächtnis* [“Über den Begriff der Geschichte”] (Los Angeles: Institut für Sozialforschung, 1942).

<sup>2</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Infanzia e storia. Distruzione dell’esperienza e origine della storia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978); Eng.: *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Hero (London and New York: Verso, 1993).

<sup>1</sup> Octavio Paz, *Los hijos del limo. Del romanticismo a la vanguardia* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1974); Eng.: *Children Of The Mire: Modern Poetry From Romanticism To The Avant-Garde*, trans. Rachel Phillips (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

*Isabel de Naverán:*

[History Administers]

We were still on the subject of female representations of the allegory of the Republic when Pedro mentioned the possibility of interviewing a woman who had posed for Ignacio Díaz Olano, a painter from Vitoria-Gasteiz who was commissioned by republican mayor Teodoro González de Zárate to paint an allegory of the Republic, which is currently in the city's Museo de Bellas Artes. We wanted to know who the model had been and to find out why, all these years later, in 2015, when she was over ninety, she was still reluctant to recognize herself as the woman in the painting, the one who had lent her face and hand to the body of ideology. Because it was just a face and one hand, her son told us in an e-mail exchange, only the hand and the face are my mother's, that's what he said. A hand and a face, I thought, so who does the rest belong to? It is a fragmented beast, made up of various parts of other bodies taken from here and there: a pair of legs, a torso, a red tunic, an idea of a woman. I wondered how much time, how many hours or days she had posed for the painter, this woman who would have been fifteen or sixteen years old. Her son also told us that Díaz Olano had seen her in a parade on the first anniversary of the Second Republic, in 1932. That she was on the main float and the painter saw her, and that was when he asked the father's permission. Her father's, I mean, because she was only fifteen or sixteen. Her body was probably changing, because you change at that age, you fill out and lengthen too. But he only took her facial features, a broad, serene face—recognizable I'm afraid—and a hand, either the one holding the sword or the book, we don't know which, but one of the hands was like that, exactly like hers.

This painting is mounted vertically. In the center stands the figure holding a large sword that she thrusts into the ground with one hand, and carrying the Constitution in her other hand or arm. On the lower right, a seemingly domestic scene shows a young mother holding a baby in her arms and bending her head over it in a gesture of intimacy and absorption, of tenderness and care: a scene depicting the reproductive work of life. On the other side, below and to the left of the central figure of the allegory, we see some men engaged in what appears to be physical labor, in a factory or similar, in a scene representing production: the machinery that moves the superstructure. If we look carefully, we see that the men are straining to erect or hold up a kind of diagonal pole, which, on closer inspection, seems to continue behind the central figure, the female figure representing the allegory of the

Republic. It keeps going behind the body whose face and hand were borrowed from the model's real face and hand. This pole seems to lift the figure, it moves her from behind because, behind her, the men are holding up a diagonal pole.

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* In the work of Georges Didi-Huberman, the concept of “phantasm” is not an exact synonym for “image,” but refers to “that which appears,” which could be closer in meaning to presentation than representation. Does your work constitute, as Didi-Huberman’s suggests, a search for the phantasms that have been excluded from the annals of history due to the political construction of overly rigid historical narratives?

### III

*Pedro G. Romero:* My experience with Didi-Huberman was a bit like my encounter with Agamben, which I told you about earlier. I began to read him systematically when I learned of his fondness for flamenco. Aby Warburg and flamenco in the same book, and my friends told me I was crazy! I had read his book on hysteria,<sup>1</sup> on the recommendation of Pepe Espaliú, and I remember being impressed even when I read it badly, in French. My idea of what a ghost is—which comes from Bergamín and the Spanish tradition—does in fact have a lot to do with that which appears, disappears, and reappears. That is what a ghost is. Bergamín was fascinated by these subtle nuances, between a ghost or specter and a phantom, for example. A ghost or specter has a historical life, which is why it is not a spook or a hobgoblin that haunts Europe, even though the translation from the German would allow those meanings. Didi-Huberman also happens to be a great reader of Bergamín, of course. A key work for me is the film Bergamín made with Michel Mitrani, *Los ángeles exterminadores* (The Exterminating Angels). As I said earlier, it is not only a question of looking for heterodox history, although that too, as mudejarism and

<sup>1</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l'hystérie. Charcot et l'iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (Paris: Macula, 1982); Eng.: *Invention*

*of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, trans. Alisa Hartz (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

marranism are very important tools for me. But Bergamín rereads Calderón de la Barca and Lope de Vega, who were, in turn, hegemonic for National Catholicism. The Spanish Civil War was also a culture war, which is an aspect that has not received much attention. Cervantes' *Numantia*, as a play and as myth, was used both by supporters of the fascist coup and by the Republican government. I think the same war plays out in *Guernica*, it is another version of *Numantia*. The film critic Luis E. Parés, for example—whose reading is very nuanced—argues that the best versions of flamenco, bullfighting, popular religious expression, and mysticism—the elements used by National Catholicism to consolidate its regime—can be found in films made in exile. We are still in this battle, in this culture war as they call it now.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

Aristotle said, “and for the thinking soul the phantasms are like sensations.... This is why the soul never thinks without phantasm.”<sup>1</sup> In the tradition of modern Western thought, every proposition of truth has been founded on a radical differentiation from appearances, so much so that we could call this an era defined by spectral hygiene. In this case, Pedro explores other senses of the dimension of ghosts, such as excess that cannot be absorbed as signification. A ghost that appears and disappears, a historical ghost that inscribes a memory in accumulated time. Every order of appearance carries an excess that it appears with, but that excess is not added on, it is structural, it is what enables its most intimate composition. This may be why Pedro’s many creative practices do not eschew excess or that which overflows, but, as Val Flores said in *Desmontar la lengua del mandato, criar la lengua del desacato* (Dismantle the Language of Command, Cultivate the Language of Defiance),<sup>2</sup> they operate from a certain *demasia* (superabundance).

*Valentín Roma:*

António Lobo Antunes tells that while he was serving in Angola, his wife used to send him books to read in his free time. These were mostly by Latin American authors, and he remembers reading, in the trenches, Ernesto Sabato—who he considered a whining, insufferable narrator—Cabrera Infante—too intellectual for his taste—Borges—“a bloody fascist,” in his words—and Juan Rulfo, whose *Pedro Páramo* (1955)<sup>1</sup> he did not understand until years later when someone told him that all the characters in the book were dead, they were ghosts. It is a curious anecdote because the characters in Lobo Antunes’s own short stories lack physical peculiarities, they are voices, states of consciousness. And I am struck by the fact that the father of the author of *Boa Tarde Às Coisas Aqui Em Baixo* (Good Evening to the Things from Here Below, 2003)<sup>2</sup> was João Alfredo Lobo Antunes—assistant to António Egas Moniz, the inventor of the lobotomy—and that many of his stories take place in psychiatric institutions, given that he has spent much of his life practicing psychiatry. Lobo Antunes is a true master when it comes to distorting the expectations of interviewers. Some time ago, Enrique Vila-Matas recalled that in response to a question about the novel he was presenting at the time, Lobo Antunes answered, categorically, that he had forgotten the contents of his book and could remember absolutely nothing of what was told in it.

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *De anima* III 7, 431a16–17. The subject of *phantasmata* is discussed further in 427b15–16; 462a2–8.

<sup>2</sup> Val Flores, *Desmontar la lengua del mandato, criar la lengua del desacato* (Santiago de Chile: Colectivo Utópico de Disidencia Sexual, 2014).

<sup>1</sup> Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1955); Eng.: *Pedro Páramo*, trans. Margaret Sayers (New York: Grove Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Boa Tarde Às Coisas Aqui Em Baixo* (Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2003).

*Isabel de Naverán:*

[Ghost]

I read that on his way back from New Guinea the Japanese dancer Kazuo Ohno saw jellyfish in the sea. He was traveling on a ship from which the corpses of those who died of starvation and disease were thrown into the sea.

His first dance, performed a year later, in 1950, was entitled *Jellyfish Dance*. It could have been an experimental practice through which to test something physically, to dance like a jellyfish, putting the body in jellyfish mode. Perhaps it was this, considering the strong spirit of experimentation at the time, the desire to move away from learned dancing of any kind, the crisis of representation and the crisis of truth with regard to ways of narrating the world after the war, through dance. Perhaps “jellyfish dancing” was something of a declaration of principles. We don’t know much more about this dance, but we do know that Kazuo Ohno had been a prisoner of war in New Guinea and that he had fought as a soldier in China before that. And that he had previously been a student at the Japan Athletic College.

We also know it was then that he went to the Imperial Theatre in Tokyo, at the invitation of one of his teachers, and he saw Antonia Mercé y Luque “La Argentina” dance. The image captivated him. It was then that, as Pedro says, his body “was twisted” for dance. Apparently, La Argentina’s qualities as a dancer—that which issued from her and in spite of her, that which permeates and remains—had an impact on the body of a young athlete before the war.

The way La Argentina moved, Kazuo Ohno would later tell choreographer Tatsumi Hijikata, the way she moved, those movements of her hands in the air, the way she played the castanets, it stayed with him, the way she moved her arms upward, which is how she moved them. They say she did it for one reason or another, but whatever the reason, she moved them like that, and the fact is that her arms were large, if you look at the photographs, they are very long, longer than normal. It is true that there are interviews in which she says that she did not have the body of a dancer, at least not a ballet dancer, which is what her father initially trained her for, ballet and singing, especially singing, because he wanted her to be a singer. But she wanted to dance even though she did not have the body of a dancer, she said, because her body was monkey-like. I am not saying that, she said it in an interview, that her limbs were too long and a bit ungainly, her features too strong for a dancer, but she wanted to dance.

And she had green eyes. They called her the green-eyed dancer. And I don’t think she looks ungainly, but it is true, if you look carefully, that her arms are like the branches of a tree, with large, strong hands, like leaves. They seem to move on their own, as if she were wearing gloves, and in some photos she is in fact wearing gloves, but even so they look too big. And when she danced it must have been spectacular. Not just her arms, of course, but also her hips and back, how she arched her back, jerking forward, contracting her solar plexus, and backward, arching her spine, arms bent and hands on her hips, hitching up her skirt to free her legs and feet, because she made sounds with her feet, not only with her castanets but also with her heels and even clicking with her mouth. That clicking that only *flamencos* can do.

She did not have the delicate look of an ethereal, weightless dancer, feet off the ground. No. It was something more rhythmic and syncopated, more precise, something that seemed to cut through the air. And her huge arms reaching up and back. And yet she played the castanets delicately, as if they were part of her hands, those pieces of wood. And she moved forward with them, capturing the space as she went, capturing something in the air with her pincer-hands, as if the oxygen in the empty space generated other figures, other bodies, in her wake and under her hands, conjuring up presences in the form of condensations of air. Like when you are in a room and you notice that the air becomes denser, as if someone else has entered the space.

In his book *Mi baile* (My Dance, 1947),<sup>1</sup> Vicente Escudero writes about the incredible range of sounds that La Argentina produced, and about how he urged her to reveal the secret of the sounds she managed to bring out from those “bits of wood,” because, he says, she looked like a “magician constantly pulling new castanets out of the air, nobody could tell where they were coming from.”

Perhaps that was what struck Kazuo Ohno in 1929, when he saw La Argentina, and again later, after other experiences and other impacts, after the two great bombs, after the freezing and resetting of the clocks, then, in 1949, when he was returning to his homeland and he saw the aquatic, gelatinous bodies of the jellyfish alongside the dead bodies of his shipmates. It must have been something like that, a certain condensation of the air, a conjuring trick, bringing up others from the past, floating memories, or others who are still to come, physically-becoming. Because one is never alone when one dances, because every gesture passes through other gestures, because,

<sup>1</sup> Vicente Escudero, *Mi baile* (Barcelona: Montaner i Simón, 1947).

as Georges Didi-Huberman says, even when dancing alone or dancing a so-called solo, this solitude is always a “partnered solitude ... populated by images, dreams, ghosts, memories.”<sup>2</sup> A sort of mixture.

In his book *The Life of Plants* (2016), Emanuele Coccia writes about immersion and mixture, about how we are immersed in our surroundings, in a relationship of constant mutation between the organic and inorganic, plant, animal, and mineral, in which the composition of the sea, the earth, and the air is the same. In fact, Coccia uses jellyfish as an example of this idea of immersion. He calls them a thickening of water, and it is possible to think like this because they are 95 percent water, and only 5 percent solid matter. Depending on the geographical area, jellyfish are also called living water, bad water, curdled water, and the ocean’s tears. Taking the image of jellyfish as beings whose inner materiality differs in degree but not in nature from the surrounding materiality, Coccia invites us to “imagine being made of the same substance as the world that surrounds you,” in a state of mutual permeability. The idea of an interpenetration, as he puts it, a state in which breathing, moving, acting, observing, and feeling are inseparable to the immersed being, he says, who understands that “Life as immersion is one in which our eyes are ears.”<sup>3</sup>

[Thinking with the Ears]

Andrea Soto Calderón, quoting Adorno, brought up this idea of “thinking with his ears,” not just “as a way of thinking through the body ... but also displacing the body, opening it up to an encounter with that which cannot be resolved in a subjective synthesis.” To think with the ears and through the ears, through listening, allowing rhythm, the resonance of a sound in space, to produce thought.

La Argentina told how, at the age of five or six, she used to hide in the furthest room of the family home so as not to hear the harsh knocks of castanets being played by other hands. She told how, as a child, she practiced a different way of playing, playing more softly, as lightly as possible, until she produced a sound that did not “hurt her ears.” This playing, just touching almost without touching, matched the curve of the palms of those little hands that perhaps, probably, moments before, had covered her ears. The concavity of those palms was later transferred to the wood that shaped the castanets that, as an adult, she had custom made, which made her the Queen of Castanets. Perhaps in a sense her secret was to hide those little hands, from when she was a child, beneath her hands, so that a play of hands opened out in each dance.

Federico García Lorca had signed La Argentina’s copy of *Gypsy Ballads* (1924–27),<sup>4</sup> drawing the branch of a lemon tree with two lemons that echo the shape and suggest the sound of castanets, the castanets that she had made to the measure of her hands, which had previously covered her ears. The gesture of covering your ears removes you from the ambient noise. You cover your ears to think with your ears, removing you and taking you into another space, perhaps imaginary, but also sensorial. Hands give off heat, the shelter of a silent sound that you do not hear but feel, the way you feel two lemons if you hold them in your hands like this, one in each hand, two small volumes that take up your whole hand and that now cover your ears. One lemon in each ear. Smell through the ear, see through the sense of smell. It is not surprising that the lemons Lorca drew in his dedication are so similar to castanets, because the poet seemed to know that it is other senses that take you into the heaviness that besieges the body when it tries to blur its boundaries. That is why, years later, he began his tribute to La Argentina by saying, “In the art of dance, the body struggles against the invisible mist that envelops it.”<sup>5</sup>

To penetrate the invisible fog with your fingers, to risk falling into an abyss, to feel its moistness as resistance to the threat of ambient noise. In this case, in both their cases, to the threat of fascism.

2. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Le Danseur des solitudes* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2006).

3. Emanuele Coccia, “*Tiktaalik roseae*,” in *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. Dylan J. Montanari (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 33; originally published as “*Tiktaalik roseae*,” in *La vie des plantes. Une métaphysique du mélange* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2016).

4. Federico García Lorca, *Romancero gitano (1924–1927)* (Madrid: Edición de la Revista de Occidente, 1928); Eng.: *Gypsy Ballads*, trans. Gloria García Lorca and Jane Duran (London: Enitharmon Press, 2011).

5. Federico García Lorca, “In Praise of Antonia Mercé, *La Argentina*” (New York, 1930), trans. Christopher Maurer, in *In Search of Duende* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1955; repr. 1998), 63; published in Spanish as “Elogio a Antonia Mercé, ‘La Argentina,’” in *Obras completas*, ed. Miguel García Posada, vol. 3: *Prosa* (Madrid: Circulo de Lectores, 1997).

## IV

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* Time and work are also constants in your work. Do you think that value in art (given that the materials, time, and labor that go into creating art in no way determine the value of the finished product) is produced when something that starts out as a mental abstraction becomes what Paolo Virno calls “real abstraction” in reference to the general intellect, and you call “thing,” object, or commodity that can be shared? Is it in this sense that you sometimes speak of the radically democratic, almost utopian aspect of the commodity?

*Pedro G. Romero:* Yes, that’s right. You see, when we, like so many others, talk about Marx and *Capital*, our readings are probably confined to the chapter on “The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret.” But the fact is that the labor of art is perfectly summed up in that dancing table. That is our trade, it is our labor, it is the mine we work in: making tables dance. And it is profoundly materialist labor, we know that too. Even ghosts and the spirit world have been subjugated in our practices, in the broadest possible definition of so-called Conceptual Arts. A ghost is pure matter there, it is not just attributable to psychoanalytic, religious, spiritual, or scientific readings. It is something that can be touched through sensible experience. From this perspective, the experience of the commodity is shared, not just at the level of production—making the table dance—but also in its use, its usufruct, the sharing of the table that dances, dancing with it. In this sense, I have always thought that the black-and-white simplification of capitalism’s regard for everything relating to the surplus value of commodities—to the table’s dancing—is a mistake. A puritan mistake that Max Weber clearly slipped into his work on Protestantism and capitalism,<sup>1</sup> and that Hugo Ball, for example, also looked at in his *Critique of*

<sup>1</sup> Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr Siebeck, 1905); Eng.: *The Protestant Ethic and the*

*Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1930).

*the German Intelligentsia*.<sup>2</sup> If this whole space of desire, the expression of desire and the experience of pleasure in relation to the commodity, to the other, is criminalized and reduced to capitalism, consumerism, and so on, of course the masses will not understand. The lumpen will feel disparaged for enjoying these perversions: designer clothes, gold chains, mobile phones with impossible screens. What interests me about discourses such as Bataille's low materialism,<sup>3</sup> Lyotard's libidinal economy,<sup>4</sup> and what Verónica Gago calls "baroque economies,"<sup>5</sup> is the attempt to remove capitalism from the stranglehold of the realm of the commodity. Democratizing commodities is not about cheapening, trivializing, or ridiculing them in order to squeeze more profit out of them. A battle is being waged there. An economy of what gets lost, the bazaar, the junk dealer, this is why it has always interested me. I can make coins—one sings of what is lost—and give them out for free, anybody can carry around a metal sculpture in their pocket like a fetish object, mere superstition, like a memory, like humming a Top 40 song. In all of these operations, financial capitalism loses its hegemony over materialist pleasures, over the hedonistic enjoyment of things. Desire is not the only battleground; we must also fight to democratize pleasure. That is probably utopian, but utopia and anachronism are more closely related than they appear to be.

<sup>2</sup> Hugo Ball, *Zur Kritik der deutschen Intelligenz* (Bern: Der Freie Verlag, 1919); Eng.: *Critique of the German Intelligentsia*, trans. Brian L. Harris (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Georges Bataille, *La Part maudite* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1949); Eng.: *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Économie libidinale*

(Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974); Eng.: *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Continuum, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Verónica Gago, *La razón neoliberal. Economías barrocas y pragmática popular* (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2014); Eng.: *Neoliberalism from Below: Popular Pragmatics and Baroque Economies*, trans. Liz Mason-Deese (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

Thinking about the gestures that can be generated by artistic practices and subaltern economies, I recalled an image that Ticio Escobar introduces in this book *Aura latente* (2021),<sup>1</sup> that of *escamoteo*, a Spanish term that I consider very fruitful because it means “conjuring trick,” as in the double act of cunningly making things appear and disappear, and also “lifting” in the sense of skillful stealing. And it also means “to shirk responsibility,” as a way of minimizing the time and life that is lost at work. In the book Escobar also uses it to refer to the circumventions of art, to a certain oscillatory progress of appearances and disappearances. We could say that it is in these interstices that events open up, although it is also worth noting that any work involving contingency is inevitably risky, even that of following those ghosts into unknown fields.

The notion of labor is extremely interesting here. Can we talk about labor without disrupting its meaning when it touches artistic practice? What would the status of labor be in a “factory of the sensible”?

*Valentín Roma:*

Many of the stories about yuppies that were written in the 1980s and 1990s—from Bret Easton Ellis’s “canonical” novel *American Psycho* (1991)<sup>1</sup> to Luz Casal’s saccharine song “Rufino” (1985) (which, paradoxically, was written by Carmen Santonja of the group Vainica Doble)—tend toward a Proustian wallowing in the luxury of objects, in suits and ties, in high-class perfumes and the quality of haircuts. Revisiting them today, one has the sense that rather than ushering in a gnoseology of consumerism and opulence, they were sketching out a certain landscape, a handful of still lifes, on the commodity from the point of view of literature.

I don’t know if you have read Camila Sosa Villada’s *Las malas* (2019),<sup>2</sup> which recounts the experiences of a group of transvestites (including the author herself) who work as prostitutes in a district of Córdoba, Argentina. The book is exquisite and terrible, and for some reason I felt that it responded to the mercantilist narrative simply by shifting the perspective to the commodified body. There seemed to be a subtle, radically political move that involved invoking another kind of value, a value that ranged from the narcissistic inflation of things to subjects devoid of identity.

<sup>1</sup> Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Camila Sosa Villada, *Las malas* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 2019); Eng.: *Bad Girls*, trans. Kit Maude (New York: Other Press, 2022).

<sup>1</sup> Ticio Escobar, *Aura latente* (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2021).

## 7. THE GHOST AND THE SKELETON

(*L.C.D.M.*, *L.S.D.A.*)

The poet and essayist José Bergamín served as a guide for rethinking many of the hegemonic representations operating in the field of art in this complex project titled *F. E. El fantasma y el esqueleto* (The Ghost and the Skeleton) and subtitled *Un viaje, de Fuenteheridos a Hondarribia, por las figuras de la identidad* (A Trip, from Fuenteheridos to Hondarribia, Through Representations of Identity). It was organized by BNV Producciones with the support of Arteleku/Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa, Sala América/Diputación Foral de Álava, and twelve other institutions, including the Universidad Internacional de Andalucía, the Diputación de Granada, INJUVE, and the municipalities of Fuenteheridos (Huelva) and Hondarribia (Gipuzkoa). This long list reflects the project's complex institutional architecture, which was a learning experience for Pedro G. Romero and the group of artists who accompanied him, including Alberto Baraya, José Domínguez, Oier Etxeberria, Virginia García del Pino, Antonio Marín, Blanca Montalvo, and Antonio Orihuela. It was not a typical workshop or laboratory in which the organizer imparts knowledge, but rather a physical and intellectual journey that also provided the groundwork for the two works produced in the project: *L.C.D.M.* and *L.S.D.A.*

Isabel Escudero, Federico Guzmán, Juan Luis Moraza, Agustín Parejo School, El Refractor (Quico Rivas), and Isidoro Valcárcel Medina gave workshops; Violeta C. Rangel and Eva Forest were tour guides in Fuenteheridos and Hondarribia, respectively; Bernardo Atxaga and Enrique Vila-Matas took part in conversations; there was a seminar comparing José Bergamín and Walter Benjamin, and also a course called “Máquinas E. Imágenes,” with the participation of Giulia Colaizzi, José Díaz Cuyás, Horacio Fernández, Ángel González García, José Luis Gutiérrez Molina, Juan José Lahuerta, and José Luis Pardo, among others. The year 1999 closed with an intervention by Agustín García Calvo.

The journey is based on an anecdote involving José Bergamín—recounted by Giorgio Agamben, speaking of his teacher—who had broken his leg and traveled to Fuenteheridos (or “Source of the Wounded”), where his opposition to the monarchy deepened. Furious, he went into exile in Hondarribia (Fuenterrabía, or “Source of Anger”), a final adventure and an occasion for a poem.

## L.C.D.M.

*La Caja Del Muerto* (The Box of Death), or *L.C.D.M.*, is the title of a series of actions recorded in Granada, small performative gestures that portray a kind of very intense afterlife for some of the city's emblematic figures-monuments: from Saint Caecilius and the Lead Books of Sacromonte to Federico García Lorca and the secret cemeteries of the Muslims, by way of Fernández de Córdoba, Juan Latino "El Negro," Mariana Pineda, and Ángel Ganivet. This work, which draws on the concerns, discussions, and contributions of the *F. E. El Fantasma y el Esqueleto* laboratory, consists of the videos presented here, the *Hoja de Libre Circulación*, and the original soundtrack, published on CD, containing *Codas* numbers one to ten.

## L.S.D.A.

*La Soga Del Ahorcado* (The Hangman's Noose), or *L.S.D.A.*, is the title of a series of situations recorded in Vitoria-Gasteiz based on the effigy of a hanged man, a figure that appears repeatedly in relation to the city, from Heraclio Fournier tarot cards to the character of Celedón. The action consisted of hanging a performer from some of the city's public monuments: the statues of Francisco de Vitoria and Manuel Iradier, and the monuments to the *Fueros*, the Constitution, and the Battle of Vitoria, designed by Eduardo Chillida, Agustín Ibarrola, Juan Luis Moraza, and Jorge Oteiza. Many of the actions were devised on the basis of material from the *F. E. El Fantasma y el Esqueleto* laboratory. A video was produced, as well as an *Hoja de Libre Circulación* and a CD recording of *Acordes* numbers one to ten.

## 8. WORK

(*Translation/Treason/Tradition*)

*El trabajo* (Work) is the title of a book published by Pedro G. Romero as part of the *Almadraba* (1998) project curated by Corinne Diserens and Mar Villaespesa in conjunction with BNV Producciones, which addressed the problems of the Strait of Gibraltar in the Gibraltar-Tarifa-Tangier triangle. The title emphasizes the material idea of labor underpinning many of the works in the project, the most significant of which may have been the series *Traducción/Traición/Tradición* (Translation/Treason/Tradition). Pedro G. Romero implemented a methodology consisting of small laboratories called *Cómo escribí algunos de mis libros* (How I Wrote Certain of My Books) in a clear reference to Raymond Roussel's methods of composition, which Michel Foucault summed up so well. The idea was to present a kind of symbolic unconscious of a series of cities. Participants who attended the laboratories—in Seville, photography workshops

organized by the provincial council; in Gibraltar, workshops with a group of artists including María Cañas, Pepa Rubio, and Inmaculada Salinas; in Santo Domingo, an artists' workshop organized by AECID; in Badajoz, a group of soldiers attending photography classes imparted by their sergeant—were asked to follow a complex system of semiotic equivalences in the tradition of Charles S. Peirce—father of one of the most important traditions of contemporary semiotics—that involved reducing the group of words contained in a street name to something like Japanese kanji. The new concepts derived from this game were then documented in the form of photographs, thus creating different signifiers, although each photograph included a caption with the name of the original street. The result—a series of collages with enigmatic image associations connected by a street name—ended up making the city speak in a new way. Perhaps the most significant aspect was the polyphony of perspectives summoned up in the process.

#### TRANSLATION/TREASON/ TRADITION

The *Sevilla* (1997) series of the work *Traducción/Traición/Tradición* explored the uses of different parts of the body, but it also revolved around the city. The others—*Gibraltar* (1998), *Santo Domingo* (1998), *Badajoz* (1999), and the versions made in Barcelona, San Juan de Puerto Rico, Veracruz, and Valencia—used street names and other signage as captions. The aim of

all of this work—substantial in quality and quantity—was to produce a visible result that could be considered a work of art. In reality, all works of art come into being as a result of these kinds of linguistic mix-ups connected to inspiration or craftsmanship. Think for instance of Ezra Pound's *traduttore traditore*, or the sign with the words "Traición-Tradición" that Enrique Morente wanted to display on the doors of his studio.

## 9. THEATER OF THEATERS

(*Puerta Osario/Puerta la Carne, Great Power*)

Before systematically questioning the nature of his work as an artist, on the verge of breaking with the studio-gallery-museum paradigm that was the only possibility offered by the art system, Pedro G. Romero made a series of decidedly theatrical works called *Teatro de Teatros* (Theater of Theaters). Conceived as plays, they were based on a written text, a specific dramaturgy,

and an awareness of the exhibition space as theatrical space. As well as in his early work in the theater group El traje de Artaud, he made his intentions clear in a review (under his pseudonym Jota Gracián) of *Teatrojardín Bestiarium*, an exhibition based on an idea by Rüdiger Schöttle, curated by Chris Dercon and presented in Seville by Kevin Power in 1989; and in his text for the catalogue of the exhibition *A Theater Without Theater*—which he participated in—curated by Bernard Blistène and Yann Chateigné at MACBA in 2007. A key aspect of this series of works is the ambiguity in the use of Michael Fried’s idea of “theatricality”—a harsh critique of minimalism denounced as theatrical, which the next generation took up with gusto, because it was, in fact, theater; and also in Walter Benjamin’s formulation of production in “The Author as Producer,” which names theater and film as clear examples of this collective enterprise. One of the characteristics of these works is the fact that they relied on the text, the dramaturgy, the nature of the space, the technological means, the actors, and the audiences they addressed, and as such they could be presented as performances even in the complete absence of the artist.

### PUERTA OSARIO/ PUERTA LA CARNE

The two pieces from *Teatro de teatros* presented here are linked to the series *El trabajo* and its representation of the city: the idea of the city as a theater of operations. *Puerta Osario/Puerta la Carne* (1991) accompanies the videos *Al golpe* and *Corrido de la Puerta Osario y la Puerta la Carne*, which were presented at Planta Baja in Granada as part of the Carta de Ajuste program in 1994. And it is also connected to the book *La vida cotidiana entre la Puerta Osario y la Puerta la Carne*, published by Pedro G. Romero in 1997 with an introduction by Mar Villaespesa. José Martínez El Poeta and José Miajones, Chano Lobato and Salvador Távora, and David González Romero and Diana López Gamboa were

among those who participated, via interviews and interventions, in the conception of these two works.

### GREAT POWER

Directly linked to *Traducción/Traición/Tradición: Sevilla* (1997)—in which photographs of signs printed on neon were used as captions—the 1991 work *Gran Poder* (Great Power) is a psychogeographic portrait of Seville. Sculpture is present in the icon of *Jesús del Gran Poder* by the sculptor Juan de Mesa, a powerful presence in the city of Seville. This work extends the attributes of the human body, its system of proportions, to the city, with all the ambiguities of meaning that this entails. The tension between “power” and “potency” dominates the wordplay.

## 10. WILL WE REACH SEVILLE SOON?

*(Dances and Ballads, Esqueletomaquia)*

In the series *El trabajo*, the city—specifically Seville, where Pedro G. Romero lives and resides—became the center of a string of operations carried out between 1993 and 1997. The many works presented under the title *¿Llegaremos pronto a Sevilla?* (Will We Reach Seville Soon?)—the question Antonio Machado’s mother asked him on the road to exile in France and death—found their final expression in a collection of books of the same name: the aforementioned *La vida cotidiana entre la Puerta Osario y la Puerta la Carne; Cofradía y hermandad del Monte de Piedad: estructura, simbolismo e identidad*, with a prologue by Esteban Pujals; *Los fondos de arquitectura de la cultura barroca sevillana*, with a preface by Estrella de Diego; *Los comienzos del espectáculo en Sevilla*, with an introduction by Horacio Fernández; and the unpublished *Ferías de Enrique Guillén Carcajosa*.

Seville and its people are the protagonists of this work, both in abstract terms and through specific participants such as Reiji Nagakawa, José Luis Ortiz Nuevo, and Perico Romero de Solís. The performers featured in each dance of this great fresco produced in 1997 by BNV Producciones, which goes from *Balada* number one to twenty-five, are (in order of appearance): Miguel Benlloch, Luis Medina, José Antonio Carrillo “Piju,” Terry Berkowitz, Federico Guzmán, Manolo López Serrato, Pilar Colino, Salvador S. Mundo, Pepa Gamboa, Javier Han “Boy,” Belén Candil, Pilar Albarracín, Marcos Vargas, Francisco “Montanera,” Carlos Gómez, Manuela N. B., Manolo Vázquez, Misrahim Utria Pompa, Manolo Rubio, Diana López Gamboa, Javier Andrada, Francisca Guzmán, Mercedes Carbonell, Rosa Mel Rose, and Salvador González-Barba Capote. These indices—because each dancer with the skeleton stood for a kind of affect—also included the place, the festivity, and the music performed for each dance. This project was polyphonic in the sense given to the term by Mikhail Bakhtin at the dawn of modernity: the author or editor is simply the agent who enables a diversity of voices to speak through the work.

## DANCES AND BALLADS

The subject at hand is the dance of death. It was the time of AIDS, and it invited reflection on the links between the anguish of the disease and the distant epidemics of plague, typhus, and cholera that permeated the iconography of Seville. The question then as now is why these stories of pandemics are left out of the grand historical narrative, which is dominated by political agreements and wars. The project called for a “polis”—a city in the political sense of the term—adding the command inherent in the city’s name: Sevilla, *sé villa*, the imperative to “be a city.”

## ESQUELETOMAQUIA

Coexistence with death underpins these works titled *Esqueletomaquia* (“Skeleton-machy”), both in their political dimension and their appeal to everyday life. The old medieval and Baroque idea of death as the great equalizer, the vanity of worldly things, the democratizing effect of death’s scythe, the obliteration of narcissism represented by the skull, and so on. Juan de Mairena’s reading of Jorge Manrique’s *Coplas a la muerte de su padre* was at the heart of this reflection. *In ictu oculi*. Nothing more, nothing less. *Finis gloriae mundi*.

## 11. THE TIME OF THE BOMB

(*The Bomb Fandango, Saetas*)

Aside from their shared theme, the cycle of works under the title *El tiempo de la bomba* (The Time of the Bomb) all reconsider the material role of the artwork in Pedro G. Romero’s practice. It is most irrefutably a political turn, although reviews of the time—the early 1990s—spoke of an ethnographic turn and of the construction of individual mythologies. The burden of the commodity, a preference for nonprofessionalized modes, and the shift from arts and crafts to domestic manual labor are some of the entries that resulted from reflecting on the world after Auschwitz and Hiroshima. It was a shift from the art of protest and propaganda that had addressed these issues in the past to the exploration of everyday life, of how the technological capitalism stemming from World War II affected things like the siesta, eating, sleeping, sex, and afternoons spent laughing with friends in bars. Time left its mark: a new chronological time that started on August 6, 1945, and secretly governed our lives. The building of nuclear power stations, the Palomares bomb, and cancer-causing radioactivity were all linked to that new era. The series presented here emphasize this new way of keeping time, comparing the new computerized forms to traditional ways of counting. This idea of time

also breaks down individual consciousness, the strict construction of an individual subject, and the need to understand oneself in one's own space. A transformation has since been sweeping us along: changing, nomadic, always open to becoming.

### THE BOMB FANDANGO

With the work *Fandangos de la bomba*, the idea was to compare official ways of keeping time. A comparison between the new chronology that began with the Hiroshima event—nuclear, computer, and digital technologies—and other traditional, local ways of understanding the flow of time, such as the “X number of days to go” written on the chalkboards in Seville’s bars to count down the time remaining until the start of a particular Holy Week procession: La Macarena, or the Virgen del Rocío. In this case, it is a record of the time between the taking of the photographs—sourced from newspaper yearbooks or the photo album from a town like Valverde del Camino—and August 6, 1945.

### SAETAS

This work looked at how references to the coming of catastrophe within Sevillian popular culture—be it the coming of the Messiah or the apocalyptic Last Judgment—already spoke of the atomic bomb, such as the *saeta* lyrics: “Se rompió el velo del templo / Roma tembló de espanto / se desplomaron los cielos” (The veil of the temple was torn / Rome trembled with fear / The heavens collapsed). There is something terrible in the spectacle of these images, not just in Guy Debord’s sense of the term but also that of Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio’s abhorrence for those who are fascinated by the image of lava from a volcano, without heed to the damage it will cause.

*L.C.D.M*  
1999  
Photographic collage  
Colección de Arte,  
Diputación de Granada



*L.S.D.A.*  
2000  
Betacam video, color,  
sound, 81 min.  
Colección Museo Artium,  
Vitoria-Gasteiz



### El Espanto y el Esqueleto

Este artículo describe los eventos de la matanza de estudiantes en la noche del 18 de octubre de 1968 en la ciudad de Toluca, México. Se describe cómo los estudiantes de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) se organizaron para protestar contra el gobierno de Gustavo Díaz Vialázar, y cómo el gobierno respondió con la fuerza. Se describe también el papel de los medios de comunicación en la difusión de la información sobre los eventos.

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### The Ghost and the Skeleton

This article describes the events of the massacre of students in the night of October 18, 1968, in the city of Toluca, Mexico. It describes how the students of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) organized to protest against the government of Gustavo Díaz Vialázar, and how the government responded with force. It also describes the role of the media in the dissemination of information about the events.

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L.S.D.A.  
2000  
Photographic collage  
Colección Museo Artium,  
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*L.S.D.A.*  
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Betacam video, color,  
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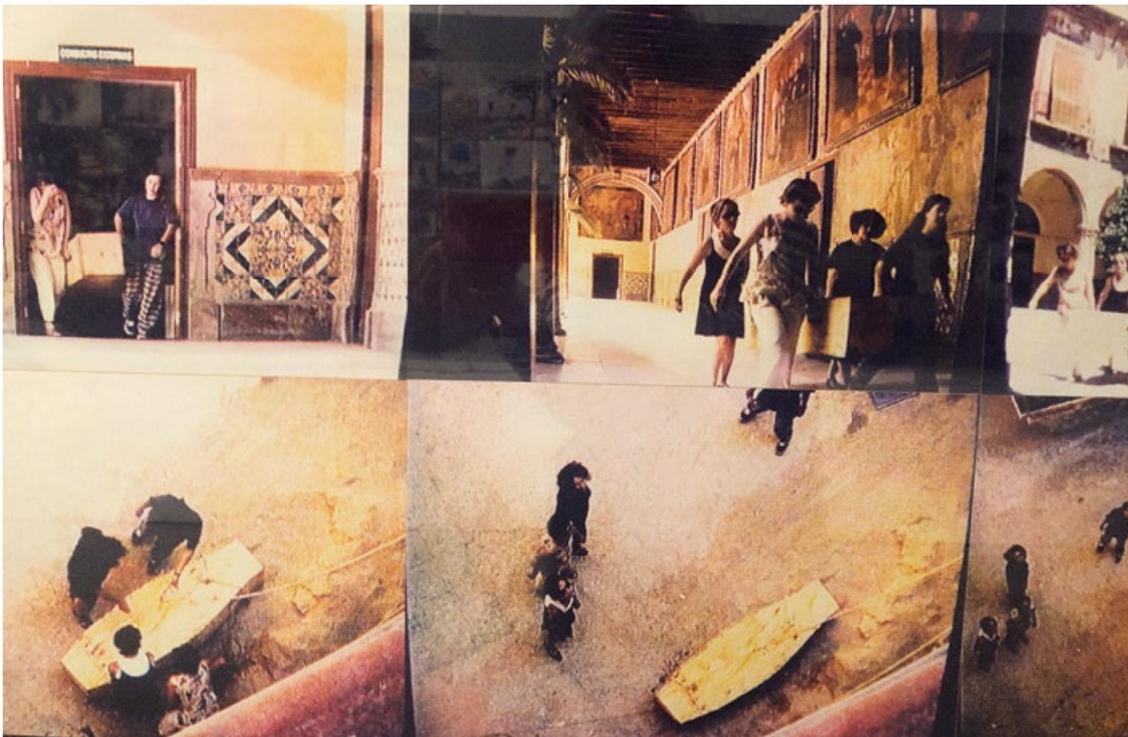


*L.S.D.A. (detail)*  
2000  
Photographic collage  
Colección Museo Artium,  
Vitoria-Gasteiz





*L.C.D.M.*  
1999  
Betacam video, color,  
sound, 94:36 min.  
Colección de Arte,  
Diputación de Granada



*L.C.D.M. (detail)*  
1999  
Photographic collage  
Colección de Arte,  
Diputación de Granada

*Traducción/Traición/  
Tradicón: Badajoz*  
1997  
Photographic collage  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery



*Traducción/Traición/  
Tradicón: Santo  
Domingo*  
1998  
Photographic collage  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery



*Puerta Osario*

1991

Bone remains and varnish  
on wood door  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery

*Puerta la Carne*

1991

Organic remains and  
varnish on wood door  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery

*Traducción/Traición/  
Tradicón: Gibraltar*

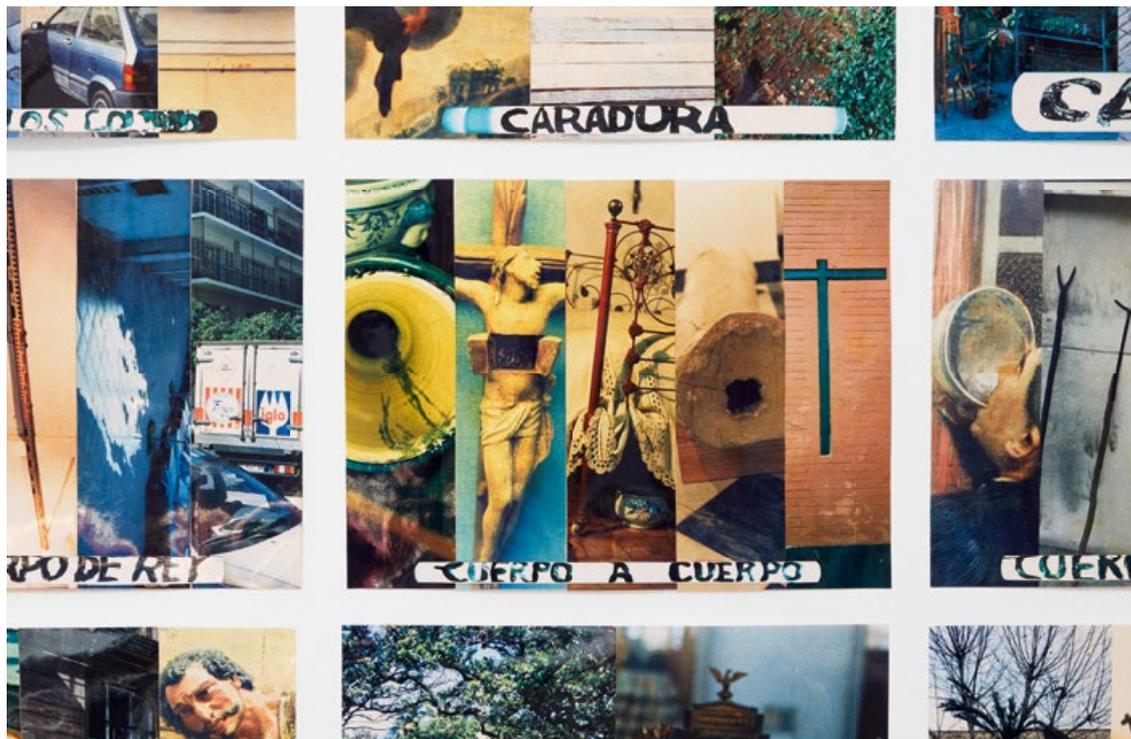
1998

Photographic collage  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery

*Gran Poder*

1992

Fluorescent tubes and audio  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery



*Traducción/Traición/  
Tradición: Sevilla*  
(detail)  
1998  
Photographic collage  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery



*Traducción/Traición/  
Tradición: Badajoz*  
(detail)  
1997  
Photographic collage  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery



*Traducción/Traición/  
Tradición: Santo  
Domingo (detail)*  
1998  
Photographic collage  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery



*Traducción/Traición/  
Tradición: Gibraltar  
(detail)*  
1998  
Photographic collage  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery

*El tiempo de la bomba*  
Photocopied paper and  
white glue on wood

*Sin título (Cero)*  
1996  
Centro Andaluz de Arte  
Contemporáneo. Junta de  
Andalucía

*Sin título (Counter)*  
1995  
Centro Andaluz de Arte  
Contemporáneo. Junta de  
Andalucía



*Sin título (Traspaso)*  
1995  
Centro Andaluz de Arte  
Contemporáneo. Junta de  
Andalucía

*Sin título (Fandangos  
de Huelva)*  
1996  
Centro Andaluz de Arte  
Contemporáneo. Junta de  
Andalucía

*Sin título (Traspaso)*  
1995  
Centro Andaluz de Arte  
Contemporáneo. Junta de  
Andalucía



*El Fandango de la Bomba/Fandangos de Valverde/Faltan*

1993-95  
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid  
Donation of the Fundación ARCO, 1996

*Sin título (Traspaso)*

1995  
Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo. Junta de Andalucía

*Sin título (Saetas)*  
1995  
Colección Museo Artium,  
Vitoria-Gasteiz

*Sin título (Traspaso)*  
1995  
Centro Andaluz de Arte  
Contemporáneo. Junta de  
Andalucía

*Sin título (Timer)*  
1994  
Centro Andaluz de Arte  
Contemporáneo. Junta de  
Andalucía

*Sin título (Fandangos  
personales y locales)*  
1996  
Centro Andaluz de Arte  
Contemporáneo. Junta de  
Andalucía

*Sin título  
(Conmemoración)*  
1996. Centro Andaluz de  
Arte Contemporáneo. Junta  
de Andalucía



*Sin título (Counter)*  
1995  
Centro Andaluz de Arte  
Contemporáneo. Junta de  
Andalucía



*Sin título (Traspaso)*  
(detail)  
1995  
Centro Andaluz de Arte  
Contemporáneo. Junta de  
Andalucía

*Sin título (Fandangos de Huelva)*  
(detail)  
1996  
Centro Andaluz de Arte  
Contemporáneo. Junta de  
Andalucía



*Sin título (Saetas)*  
(detail)  
1995  
Colección Museo Artium,  
Vitoria-Gasteiz



*El Fandango de la Bomba/Fandangos de Valverde/Faltan*  
(detail)  
1993-95  
Museo Nacional Centro de  
Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid  
Donation of the Fundación  
ARCO, 1996



*Sevillanas solteras*  
1995  
Photographic collage  
Pedro G. Romero Studio



*Ripio*  
1996  
Photographic collage  
Pedro G. Romero Studio



*Ni en la vida ni en la muerte (detail)*  
1996  
Photograph and PVA on wood  
Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo. Junta de Andalucía



*Balada n° 1 / Balada n° 25 (detail)*  
1997  
Photographic collage  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery



*Danza n° 1 / Danza n° 10 (detail)*  
1996  
Photograph and alkyl on wood  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery

*Sevillanas solteras*  
1995  
Video 8, color, sound,  
2:40 min.  
Photographic collage  
Pedro G. Romero Studio



*Ripio*  
1996  
Video 8, color, sound, 2 min.  
Photographic collage  
Pedro G. Romero Studio

*Balada n° 1 / Balada n° 25*  
1997  
Video 8, color, sound, 65:45 min.  
Photographic collage  
On loan to Alarcón Criado Gallery



*Ni en la vida ni en la muerte*  
1996  
Photograph and PVA on wood  
Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo. Junta de Andalucía

*Danza n° 1 / Danza n° 10*  
1996  
Video 8, color, sound, 50 min.  
Photograph and alkyl on wood  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery

*Sevillanas solteras*  
1995  
Video 8, color, sound,  
2:40 min.  
Photographic collage  
Pedro G. Romero Studio

*Ripio*  
1996  
Video 8, color, sound, 2 min.  
Photographic collage  
Pedro G. Romero Studio

*Balada n° 1 / Balada  
n° 25*  
1997  
Photographic collage  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery



*Balada n° 1 / Balada  
n° 25*  
1997  
Video 8, color, sound,  
65:45 min.  
Photographic collage  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery

*Danza n° 1 / Danza  
n° 10*  
1996  
Video 8, color, sound, 50 min.  
Photograph and alkyl on  
wood  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery



*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* One possible point in common among philosophy's many formulations of the notion of "event" may be the idea that the event is a "break in continuity," a mutation of existence. The Hiroshima bomb is a subject that recurs in many of your early works, reminding us not only of the overwhelming horror of the dropping of the bomb but also of the break it entailed from the preceding order. Can you expand on your way of approaching this event? Could we say that when you were making this extensive series of works you were not principally concerned with exploring the collapse of the scientific, political, and economic equilibrium that made it possible; that you wanted to explore and identify the cuts and mutations that the bomb—and the emergence of radioactivity as a new, unfamiliar threat—introduced in religiosity, in the popular imaginary, in the new ways of perceiving and interacting with the world?

V

*Pedro G. Romero:* I touched on this before, but yes. On the one hand, the obviousness of the historical event, of how it weighs on us like an unbearable burden and how we accept it, too, just as we continue to make poetry after Auschwitz and Hiroshima. In fact, a chain links Auschwitz and Hiroshima. I don't know, we can think about how statistics and cybernetics were boosted by those events, and we now talk about algorithms and virtual reality as if their logic was unrelated to them. I was less interested in the apocalyptic dimension of these episodes than in their messianic nature, in a complex reading that ranged from Benjamin to Agamben, but had a lot to do with the acceptance of catastrophic time that we find in Simone Weil in a sense, but also in Natalia Ginzburg, for example. The work I was doing had to do with the profound disruption of everyday life, of everyone's life, of anyone's life. That idea of setting all the clocks to 8:15, the time when the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, or of thinking that

all time measurements referred to Hiroshima, not just the atomic clocks that now govern how we count time, but also the time of myth, the number of days until the Gran Poder is taken out in the Holy Week procession, and the number of religious pilgrimages counted from El Rocío. Of understanding the whole liturgical conception of life through that, through the Advent, through God's return to earth, through the incarnation that is no longer Christ or Dionysus but Little Boy and Fat Man, the bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I was moved when I heard Beni de Cádiz singing the "Tanguillo de La Bombita." Later I found out that it had been written by Cañamaque, a musician known for composing songs for the Cádiz carnival, just a year after Hiroshima. That brutality, truth, and black humor, comparing skin burned by radioactive agents to a bowl of pork rinds. There was obscenity, yes, no more and no less than in Pasolini's *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, but there was also the possibility of laughter, if not joy. I know they are not the same thing. Laughter is a bodily reflex that probably has to do with fear. But to politicize laughter—to me, that is what Spinoza's whole body of work is about—to me, that is joy.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

“Those sentenced to death are free to choose whether they want the beans to be served for their last meal sweet or sour,” quotes Günther Anders at the start of *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, volume 1: *Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution* (The Outdatedness of Human Beings: On the Soul in the Age of the Second Industrial Revolution, 1956),<sup>1</sup> an epochal diagnosis in which he sharpens previous reflections that essentially revolve around three theses: that we are not equal to the perfection of our products, that we produce more than we can imagine and tolerate, and that we believe we are bound to do all that which we can and are allowed to do. It is an analysis that looks at the destruction of humanity, especially after the experience of the Hiroshima bomb, and concludes that it is not enough to change the world. We do that in any case. We must also interpret those changes so that the world will not continue to change without us, so that it does not end up transforming into a world without us. What I find interesting—although it somewhat perturbs me every time I read it—is the sort of cruel joke that Anders chooses to begin his study of the loss of freedom and of the absolute danger that opens up with the bomb. In this sense, I find Pedro’s call for the politicization of laughter so that it turns into joy, drawing out another spirit from life, very evocative. As Henri Bergson says, there is something elusive in laughter, something slippery and impertinently destabilizing. Perhaps therein lies the possibility that can open out in a moment of danger.

“What does laughter mean? What is the basal element in the laughable? What common ground can we find between the grimace of a merry-andrew, a play upon words, an equivocal situation in a burlesque, and a scene of high comedy? What distillation will yield us invariably the same essence from which so many different products borrow either their obtrusive odor or their delicate perfume? The greatest thinkers, from Aristotle downward, have tackled this little problem, which has a knack of baffling every effort, of slipping away and escaping only to bob up again, a pert challenge flung at philosophic speculation.... Can it then fail to throw light for us on the way that human imagination works, and more particularly social, collective, and popular imagination?”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Günther Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, vol. 1: *Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1956), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: Macmillan, 1911), 1–2; originally published as *Le Rire. Essai sur la signification du comique* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1900)

*Valentín Roma:*

Among the many letters exchanged between philosopher Günther Anders and American Air Force officer Claude Eatherly—who gave the famous “go ahead” to drop the first atomic bomb on the civilian population of Hiroshima—there are two enigmatic statements that really ring true. One is, “Indulgence always comes from exhaustion, never from forgetting.” The second says, “What is the point of forgiveness unless it goes hand in hand with an reawakening of our humanity in its most irascible whole?”

Recounted in the collection of letters *Burning Conscience: The Case of the Hiroshima Pilot Claude Eatherly, told in his Letters to Günther Anders* (1961),<sup>1</sup> Eatherly’s story is a sobering corrective to the historical simplification and sensationalism with which grand ecumenical words—peace, humanity, sorrow, etcetera—are sometimes pronounced.

In Claude Eatherly’s refusal to accept any tribute after the war, in his committing of petty crimes such as forging checks and holding up establishments without taking anything, and then demanding to be tried and found guilty of participating in atomic genocide, Anders saw an opportunity to redefine the meaning of responsibilities, pacifism, and benevolence. But the embodiment of evil and repentance at the same time is too abrasive for general grammars, as the pages of this dialogue seem to suggest. The mechanisms of global outrage need images, individuals, and events through which to multiply. They need perimeters of media suffering to absorb the foulest parts of history.

The correspondence between Eatherly and Anders appears to revolve around what to do with those who have caused tragedies, how to learn from mistakes of such magnitude that even the most basic social understanding recoils from them. However, on another less obvious level, the book presents a collision between two forms of life based on speculation—in the philosopher’s case—and recapitulation—in the case of the pilot. For a

<sup>1</sup> Günther Anders, *Burning Conscience: The Case of the Hiroshima Pilot Claude Eatherly, Told in His Letters to Günther Anders, with a Postscript for American Readers by Anders* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1961); originally published in German translation as *Off limits für das Gewissen. Der Briefwechsel zwischen dem Hiroshima-Piloten Claude Eatherly und Günther Anders 1959–1961* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1961).

moment, the men personify two opposing solitary figures, for Eatherly's demands are "inadmissible," while Anders's arguments are "unacceptable." However, to deepen our understanding of this conflict, it must be said that urgencies of guilt are by no means the same as metaphors of diagnosis.

*Isabel de Naverán:*

[Event, Break in Continuity]

"The work I was doing had to do with the profound disruption of everyday life, of everyone's life, of anyone's life." (Pedro G. Romero).

"The shivering, tense nerves of her body—like those of a guitar—shattered when they felt the tremendous revolutionary storm. And that night, her heart broke forever." (Regino Sainz de la Maza on the death of La Argentina).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Regino Sainz de la Maza, "Antonia Mercé, la Argentina," *Vértice. Revista Nacional de Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las JONS*, no. 24 (July 1939): 35. Sainz de la Maza was officially recognized during Franco's regime.

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* To what extent can we establish a continuity between your works on the bomb and later ones in which you explore the representation and regulation of violence? Also, what connects these studies with the research you carried out at the Academia de España en Roma on *El Sacco*? And with your research on writers and actors, groups and associations that suffered and sometimes also perpetrated what Benjamin called “pure immediate violence,” that is, that which does not aspire to be a means to an end, that does not establish new law.<sup>1</sup>

VI

*Pedro G. Romero:* I think the continuity is there, without being teleological, I hope. There is repetition, the same thing over and over again. Oddly enough, repetition gives us a notion of time, even though we are talking about events that change or alter the continuity of time. I think it is actually about violence, about war. I don't know. That friction that Heraclitus already described as essential, which is war, fire, that which burns, that which lives. I remember that I began to understand—if you can call it that—something of Benjamin's “Critique of Violence” when I read it in the light of the anti-bomb movement, of pacifism, of Bertrand Russell's writings, for example, which are so different from Wittgenstein's in terms of thinking about violence. The only way to reduce violence is to understand it. It is the lion's nature to devour the gazelle, that is its language game. But language is play, this is what makes the various language games possible. Just think of love, love is a language event that has transmuted violence, sex, reproduction into something else, without violence disappearing—and I'm not talking about scourges such as gender violence, etcetera, I don't want to distort words—what I mean is without that sort

<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Zur Kritik der Gewalt,” *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 47, no. 3 (August 1921): 809–32; Eng.: “Critique of

Violence,” in *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 277–300.

of war disappearing, that necessary friction of living. Placing a carnation in the muzzle of a gun is a tremendously sexual act. This operation of love over sexual violence Benjamin tries to understand in the social body, in the political operation of law, the monopoly of violence, and so on. It's complicated, I'm afraid. In those subaltern groups, those without political representation, those who were outside of politics, outside the law, in the marginalized classes, what the Marxists called the lumpen-proletariat—petty criminals, homosexuals, *gitanos*, prostitutes, slaves, vagabonds, lunatics, which is essentially, as I said earlier, the world flamenco emerged from—it is in these “outsides” that what Benjamin calls “pure immediate violence” and what Simone Weil and María Zambrano call “pure love” operates. And hey, I'm afraid it is also what aficionados call “pure flamenco”! Think of Val de Omar's *sin fin* (without end), which did not just mean that the film did not end. Think of all those projects about the end of images that wound up as the Archivo F.X., in which finality and ending overlap. That, Benjamin would say, can only take place in a life without a relationship to law. And Benjamin is far from any form of idealism, it is about understanding law and its influence and the way it administers power, violence, etcetera. Being aware of this, taking it into account, allows an outside to exist. It is not about going to live on the island of Tortuga with the pirates, but about sensing what a real life can live in that inside-outside relationship with the law.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

“The eye ... is the last to shut down when the body is falling asleep. It stays open when the body is stricken with paralysis or death. The eye keeps registering reality even when there is no apparent reason for doing this, and under all circumstances. The question is: Why? And the answer is: Because the environment is hostile,” writes Joseph Brodsky in *Watermark* (1992).<sup>1</sup> I find it very interesting to connect this idea of the environment to the eye, the innervation of the gaze, and Benjamin’s messianic perspective to consider these complex relationships, their frictions, and the emergence of new forms of sensibility in the midst of the hostility of modern forms of life, full of stimuli ranging from factory work to war, the crowded boulevards that we have adapted to and that have caused a kind of shock, atrophying our imaginative power, in which experience and memory dissolve. How to create openings is a question that runs through Benjamin’s work: how to pierce meaning, how to break bourgeois ideology, not so as to understand critique in terms of judgment or censure, but to allow another desire to flow. One in which thought and experience are not connected by the primacy of instrumental reason.

The modern conception of language is an impoverishing one because language is reduced to an instrument of communication, a means to an end. We do not speak language, we are spoken by language. We do not communicate by means of language, but in and through language. Language is in sculpture, painting, and poetry. The question is how to come in contact with certain forms of the language of things, with the material community of things. Thus the challenge is also how to organize practices that resist the co-opting of languages as an expressive medium, in short, to allow intemperate thought to ignite.

Nietzsche says that our writing implements shape what we think. It is not only a question of how a thought is represented, the medial—the *how*—that marks each thing also matters. We must find a way into the abysmal element in each language, the impersonal power of language that can exercise its creative violence, the only expression of the divine in the profane, through the conflict that plays out within every language. In this sense, these so-called

subaltern forms are in themselves a radical critique of the normalizing aesthetic, narrative, and linguistic foundations of a given era.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Brodsky, *Watermark: An Essay on Venice* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc. 1992), 106.

*Valentín Roma:*

I have a vivid memory of my first experience as reader of the violence of storytelling. It was sparked by an anodyne fragment, an unremarkable description of a burned fly that appeared in Rosa Chacel's *Dream of Reason* (1960).<sup>1</sup> I must have been about twelve years old, and as I read the novel I saw with absolute clarity that my family, and above all myself, where not just poor, but also fundamentally bad, afflicted people lacking in empathy for others, vindictive and arrogant.

I mention this anecdote because I believe that in many books there is a violence that comes from understanding, that there is a level of reading comprehension—not necessarily more advanced—that makes our worldviews neurotic. Thus, given the epiphany of literary revelations—but also against the trivialization of violence—I find that certain ways of narrating cast us into a harsh place, a symbolic and linguistic space devoid of protective protocols, in which reading means negotiating convictions and knowledge.

For example, I find Natalia Ginzburg's *Family Lexicon* (1963)<sup>2</sup> far more disturbing than William Faulkner's *Sanctuary* (1931),<sup>3</sup> and Mario Levrero's *Diario de un canalla. Burdeos, 1972* (Diary of a Scoundrel: Bordeaux, 1972)<sup>4</sup> more unsettling than Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969).<sup>5</sup> What I mean is that when literature breaks free from undue prosopopeia, when it commits to verbal precision, a strongly ideologized rupture occurs: writing no longer creates realities, it destroys something we thought we had experienced.

Because to destroy while avoiding an apocalyptic style, by means of a kind of gentle execution, a distant point, is the aspiration I most value in literature. It is proof that a writer has finally reached an enclave from which to struggle with something much murkier than words or vanities.

<sup>1</sup> Rosa Chacel, *La sinrazón* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1960); Eng.: *Dream of Reason*, trans. Carol Maier (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Natalia Ginzburg, *Lessico familiare* (Turin: Einaudi, 1963); Eng.: *Family Lexicon*, trans. Jenny McPhee (New York: New York Review Books, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> William Faulkner, *Sanctuary* (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931).

<sup>4</sup> Mario Levrero, *Diario de un canalla. Burdeos, 1972* (Barcelona: Literatura Random House, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint* (New York: Random House, 1969).

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* Foucault rounds off the power/knowledge binomial with a third element: space. Space is configured as the point where the visible and the sayable merge. In this sense, I would like to ask you a few questions that touch on different aspects of your work. The first and most obvious is the question of the extent to which Seville is not only the place where you live and work but also the starting point and the subject of your work. Then, I would like to ask you about your interest in creating and generating spaces, be they archives, platforms, scenarios, and even maquettes and set designs. To what extent does this interest reflect your conviction that epistemological mutations and transformations in artistic disciplines are only possible if they occur in parallel to new ways of understanding specialization? How does this conviction influence your determination to occupy, force, and distort the space of the museum, gallery, or art center, and also to expand it into other spheres? And lastly, to what extent does your faith in exhibitions and in the power of exhibitions determine your work as a curator?

*Pedro G. Romero:* Earlier we talked about commodity fetishism and about the utopian possibility that may lie within this way of understanding commodities. In many senses, it means introducing an idea of time into objects: an idea of time that dismantles the obvious buying-selling relationship that commodities are made for. Along these lines, I think of space as the materialist condition of time, a category that is too evanescent, too wont to be spiritual, idealistic. The materialist condition of time is a moment in space, and this condensation of time in space is, indeed, event. When I

## VII

was talking about the inadequacy of categories such as “conceptual,” “installation,” and “relational” in contemporary artistic practice, I was referring to the very thing you bring up in your question. It is really about providing, organizing, connecting spaces. An exhibition is a specific space-time, everything that is presented there happens. The banalization of contemporary art has to do with its inability to address the complexity with which space and time interact. It takes refuge in its ways of making/doing, which is almost a contradiction because a way of making/doing is always modal, it always opens up. Let’s say that it is simply space without event. The way of making/doing is decisive. This idea of working on an idea of space-time probably has to do with the fact that I am, after all, a sculptor. The fact that for me space-time is an image, a cluster of images and their relationships, probably does have to do with working in Seville in every sense. In Seville, a sculptor is a maker of religious images. Here, academic bias means religious sculptures are still interpreted as monuments. There is a pathetic indifference to their “performative” nature, which includes but goes far beyond ritual and liturgy. In this sense, event is liturgical rather than theological. I guess that’s why I read Agamben more than Badiou. The theatrical nature of space-time, its choreographic dimension, would also explain why theater, dance, film, and flamenco appear in my work. Also important questions. I don’t know, I guess for me materialism is an experience, a conviction that certainly doesn’t come as strongly to me through reading Marx or Marxists. When, on Holy Saturday, in front of the Soledad de San Lorenzo, people whisper (in reference to Holy Week), “This ends here; there is no resurrection of Christ,” that is a

difficult experience to convey. But it is probably the source of my conviction that materialism is the only understanding of the world that allows for the continuity of joy.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

This encounter with the places, the relationships, and the time of objects that resist commodity fetishization reminds me of the presentation of the Spanish edition of Marie Bardet's book *Penser et mouvoir. Une rencontre entre danse et philosophie* (Think and Move: An Encounter Between Dance and Philosophy, 2011). Entitled "The Patient Influence," it includes a reflection on a particular category of activity that is able to "support-sustain" an encounter, both in its internal resonance and its range of movement. It seems to me that part of the thinking that touches us in these reflections has to do with the fact that it determines an intensity or tone, which, combined with the movement of dance, would allow us to think about appropriate action in an encounter. To the question, "'What is it that makes you move?' [the author] answers curtly: That which is concrete, a line in space, changing light, a body falling, there are many imbalances, being decentered, the internal feeling of a joint, the speed with which I approach somebody or with which I move away."<sup>1</sup> That which is latent brings about an encounter with a continuous, multiple duration, she says, in which the difference between perception and action, activity and passivity, is only one of degree. A kind of attention that is at the same time unfocused attention.

*Valentín Roma:*

At what point did laughter lose its literary status? When did it cease to be an end in itself and become a kind of expendable garnish, an accessory genre? During the launch of Belén Gopegui's book *Quédate este día y esta noche conmigo* (Stay With Me This Day and This Night, 2017),<sup>1</sup> Ignacio Echevarría—who is very familiar with her work—asked her why humor is so scarce in her novels. Was he right to think that there is something circumspect in her writing? Gopegui answered that she strongly disagreed, that hilarity played an important role in that and other books. And if not a strident role, certainly a distinct presence.

I think that the people attending the event, or at least a certain majority of them, thought that it was the typical answer of someone too sophisticated to accept vulgarity. Many of them would have thought that Gopegui was probably referring to a different kind of humor, a subjective, "intelligent humor" that is not always immediately discernible. I am mentioning this as a springboard from which to bring up the fact that laughter, or a section of joy, gradually shifted due to the uses of writing and habits of reading into an increasingly secondary role. As if it were a mere extra to be timidly mentioned on the promotional blurb. The split between serious or important or self-referential literature and literature that "also" makes readers laugh speaks too of the functions attributed to writing and reading, of the ideological zones that texts enable, of where the potential for transformation and recognition of any creative writing works lies, and what it sidesteps and avoids as it develops, what it deems fundamental and circumstantial. Incidentally: I have laughed a great deal reading Belén Gopegui's novels.

<sup>1</sup> Marie Bardet, *Pensar con mover. Un encuentro entre danza y filosofía*, trans. Pablo Ires (Buenos Aires: Editorial Cactus, 2019), 10; originally published as *Penser et mouvoir. Une rencontre entre danse et philosophie* (Paris: Éditions l'Harmattan, 2011).

<sup>1</sup> Belén Gopegui, *Quédate este día y esta noche conmigo* (Barcelona: Literatura Random House, 2017).

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* “Will we reach Seville soon?” is apparently the question Antonio Machado’s mother asked her son as they crossed the mountain pass near Portbou into France. Walter Benjamin crossed the same mountain pass in the opposite direction, fleeing from the Nazis, before committing suicide in Portbou. Two of the writers who have most influenced you practically crossed paths in a two-way path of escape. Of course this may be of no consequence, but for someone like you, who assembles many of your texts, works, and narratives from anecdotes, coincidences, paradoxes... have you given some kind of value to these events? Could we establish a link between these facts and the succession of series you have worked on, such as the *Auras* and *¿Llegaremos pronto a Sevilla?* (Will We Reach Seville Soon?)

*Pedro G. Romero:* Yes, and José Bergamín, in Hondarribia, on the other side of the Pyrenean border, who, as you know, is a key figure in the whole *F.E. El fantasma y el esqueleto* (The Ghost and the Skeleton) project. And the case of Goya in Bordeaux, who was buried in exile and whose skull is still missing. And the images of María Zambrano that are haunting me now, one apocryphal—the philosopher as a young woman wearing a militia uniform and placing a gun on her teacher José Ortega y Gasset’s table, appealing for his signature in support of the Republic—and another, actual, image of her going into exile, again, from Rome, with her sister and the eleven cats she did not want to get rid of, resulting in this latest expulsion order. I think it is important to understand that these examples are images, true images, for my work. The research, development, exhibitions, and so on come later, in conjunction with my understanding of these images. The combination of images, gestures, and sensations have a nodal value for me, they are image nodes that help me do just that, establish relationships between images. I think that is actually what my work

consists of. Then again, in the case of Benjamin and Machado, I have also done the same journeys—Machado’s by car to Collioure, and Benjamin’s on foot, in the opposite direction, crossing the border—in order to understand them better. I had a certain need for that real experience, to pass through the spaces you are asking me about. And although I am not sure whether they came before or after the projects you mention, they do connect them. They turn them into a flow of images, enabling them to open up to experimentation and experiences. Understanding the function of images as lenses or nodes, apprehending images as the material with which I think and operate, was crucial for all my later works. And I am sure the affection Machado and Benjamin inspire contributed to this. Another interesting aspect is the figure of exile, which links all these nodes we have mentioned. The title of one of my projects in progress is *Lo que el exilio nos enseña* (What Exile Teaches Us). And rather than going into the question of why the exile is a common denominator, I would simply like to say that these figures of exile have taught me the most. If we consider the exiled status of *gitanos*, for example, we discover much of what I also care about in flamenco.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

In “Exile and Creativity” (1984–85),<sup>1</sup> Vilém Flusser puts forward a rather counterintuitive hypothesis, namely that in familiar surroundings, change is recognized, but permanence is not. Change appears to be informative, but permanence seems redundant. On the other hand, exile requires the constant creation of a certain permanence to prevent unraveling. I am unsettled by this perspective because I had always imagined exile as a state of uprootedness that places one in a constantly exposed situation, in which creation is a question of survival. But I had never considered the tensioning in which exile is also a constant attempt to fix one’s surroundings, to put down roots, in an almost plant-like process, to generate certain permanence that will never be one’s own. A situation that draws attention to the fact that not having roots may in fact be the most human condition, and invites us to create a different kind of permanence with whatever comes to hand, or with the necessities that must be found.

*Valentín Roma:*

Coincidences are not a highly frequented area of literature these days. I suppose that after Paul Auster founded a style and body of work that is substantially based on them, they lost their appeal. They are deemed a worn-out strategy, like interpreting a dream within a story, or using second person plural point of view, or overusing adverbs. Auster’s maxim in *The Locked Room* (1986),<sup>1</sup> “No one wants to be part of a fiction, and even less so if that fiction is real,” has its counterpart in the fact that many writers fictionalize our realities in an absolute way, because it is easier—and more sensationalist—to remember than to invent. This irritates “big game” literature, while encouraging hipsters to supplement craft beer and vegan food with the reading of fiction that is not fiction at heart. Jokes aside, I think we are seeing a split (not necessarily negative) in how realism is managed in contemporary literary practices. So the zero impact of the “reality effect” is followed by the unknowns generated by special effects. The oscillation between narrative journalism that is already obsolete and writing that transforms shamelessness into fireworks has made chance obsolete. The fact that people out there claim that the writers of *The Wire* are the twenty-first-century Shakespeare, or that Spanish literature is vibrant, are signs that there are more bad years on the way, that they will make us blinder. Times are coming—if they are not already here—in which we will surrender to recaps and predictions, in which the problem will be created and its solution sold, all in the same sentence.

<sup>1</sup> Vilém Flusser, “Exil und Kreativität,” *Spuren*, no. 9 (December 1984–January 1985); Eng.: “Exile and Creativity,” in *Vilém Flusser: Writings*, trans. Andreas Ströhl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 104–9.

<sup>1</sup> Paul Auster, *The Locked Room* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1986).

*Isabel de Naverán:*

[Will We Reach Seville Soon?]

I am still moved by the fact that Antonio Machado's mother died only three days after he did. I have thought about it many times, and it still moves me.

When I saw the grave in Collioure one summer, years ago, it took me by surprise. I hadn't known, or I hadn't been aware of that particular detail, and I was very moved by that difference of only three days. Exactly three days. How curious, I thought, how... I thought, well, I guess she might have died of grief. That's what I thought then, when I saw the gravestone shared by Antonio Machado and Ana Ruiz, "the poet's mother," it says, written on the stone. As well as being Antonio's mother, and the mother of his siblings, she was also a woman from Triana, and more things too I imagine, because one is never just a mother. But here, in those three days that set her apart, here she is the poet's mother. The impression it made on me to discover that a difference of only three days, exactly three days, had separated one death from another, that impact has come back to me at certain moments over the years. How can it be? I can't say that I understand it. I mean, I don't think that it was just the understandable grief of losing a son, the poet's mother is not just that. I was struck by seeing two names on the same gravestone, mother and son. I thought of those two small beds in the boarding house where they were staying. The beds with the wrought iron headboards, in the same room—I imagined or I knew—one bed next to one wall, and next to the other wall the other bed, I thought that was how the beds must have been. Sharing a room like siblings. The age difference wasn't that great really, she had him when she was twenty-one. That was normal then, but now they could be brother and sister. I'm referring to their closeness in age, and also the other closeness, the fraternity between them, because that kind of companionship seems fraternal to me. It seems as if the mother survived the son and that is strange. I don't know if survive is the word. It is certainly tender, there is tenderness in the way the bodies accompany each other in the dampness that I imagine in Collioure, which is a very damp place. Even in summer, when I was there, I found it quite humid, at night your t-shirts end up kind of soaked, and when you wake up the grass is wet for quite a while, even the sand on the beach is damp until midday. So imagine January, when they arrived there. They didn't last a month, of course, even though they had finally made it across the border. Or perhaps for that very reason, possibly. Or it could be the exact opposite, that is, perhaps the mother

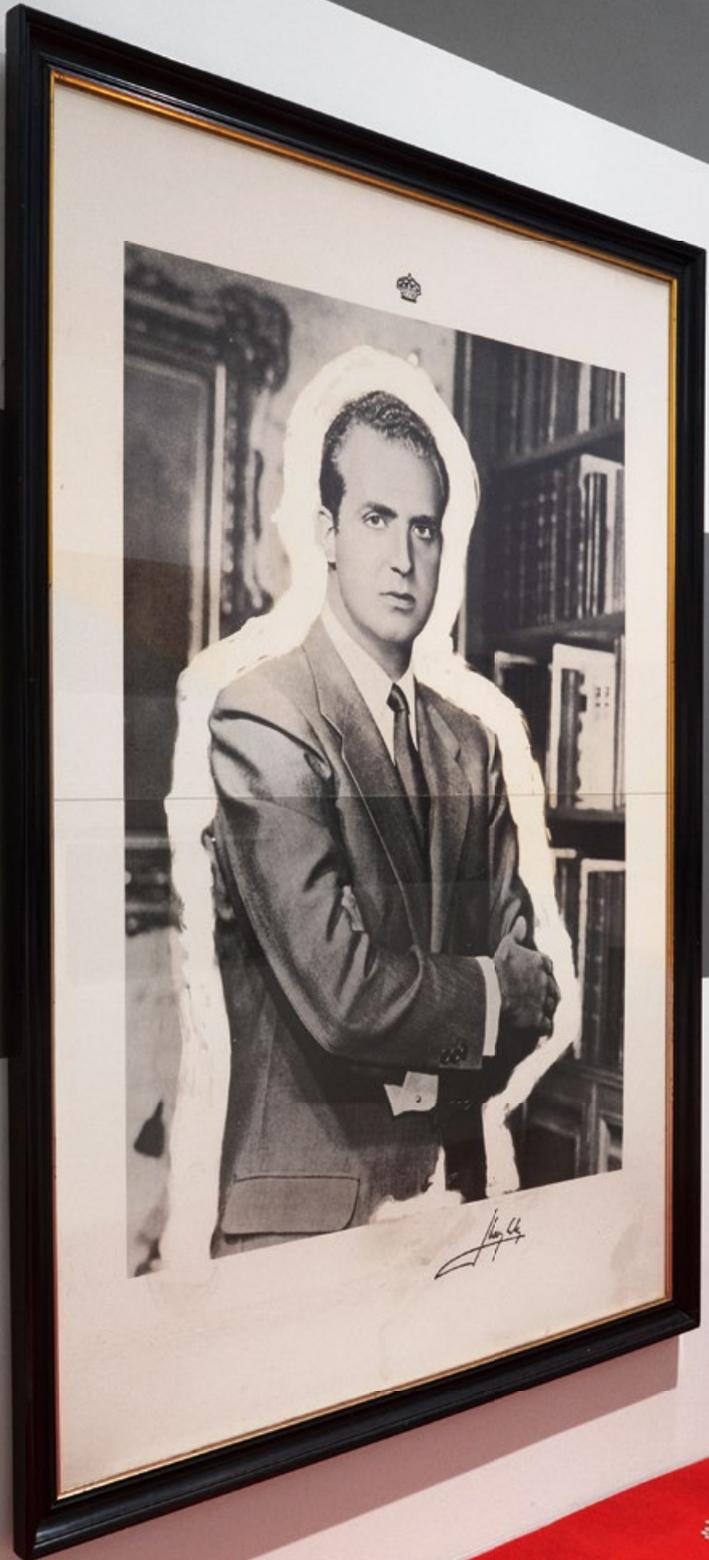
thought they had finally reached Seville, as she wanted, or as she wanted to imagine, because several sources state that, during the train journey from Barcelona to Collioure, fleeing fascism, the mother asked whether they would soon reach Seville. I don't think it was a senile question. She was calling for home, for a place in which to rest and protect her son. Perhaps she was waiting for that, holding her son in her arms, cradling him. And then the three days she spent dying. That is how long dying takes, how long the body materially takes to turn off, zone by zone, each organ shutting down. Seventy-two hours, what the body, which is matter, needs to cease to be in this form. The material aspect of dying, time on flesh and entrails, lasts precisely three days and three nights.

I think of this process as a kind of companionship, a way of cradling each other, one body in the other, swaying and becoming sleepy, rocking. There is singing in the background, something sung softly to go to sleep, like the sound of the wind. It is a smooth breathing, a breath, the stream of air touching the skin as it flows from inside out and from outside in. You feel it go in cold and come out warm, and then come out cold, shorter each time, and then not come out and not go in.



"nosotros  
 los que no somos  
 nadie,  
 los que no  
 somos nada,  
 los que no tiene-  
 mos personalidad,  
 los que no tenemos  
 cultura, nosotros,  
 tenemos una deuda"





# C. THE PATELLA

*With a special introduction by David Montero*

This third articulation (which is chronologically the first), “La patella,” includes some art criticism by Pedro G. Romero’s first heteronyms, José Luis Borja and Jota Gracián, as well as his contributions to two major exhibitions, *Before and After the Enthusiasm, 1972–1992*, at the KunstRai in Amsterdam, curated by José Luis Brea in 1989, and *El Sueño Imperativo*, at the Círculo de Bellas Artes in Madrid, curated by Mar Villaespesa in 1991. It also looks at his collaboration with the journal *Arena Internacional del Arte*, edited by José Luis Brea, Kevin Power, and Mar Villaespesa, and his membership in the collective Juan del Campo—with Chema Cobo, Abraham Lacalle, and Luis Navarro—between 1986 and 1993.

Many of the tools, perspectives, and situations in Pedro G. Romero’s work stem from his experience in these various participatory platforms. His fascination withonyms and heteronyms led him to question the romantic figure of the individual creator, to recognize the pathological aspects of genius, and to take an interest in how “total social facts” generate the utterances that are expressed in art and vice versa; that is, how these utterances enable situations that we then call the “social fact” or allow us to understand that neither individuals nor groups are the protagonists of any artistic utterance. His early participation in the two aforementioned exhibitions—because of the intensity of the debates and discussions that they grew out of, not just his role as an artist—taught him how the art system was developed in Spain and Europe.

*Rey del Sueño*  
1991  
Photograph with  
chlorine  
BNV Producciones

*La patella*  
2021  
(with David Montero)  
Video, color, sound, 16:28 min.  
Alarcón Criado Gallery

Juan del Campo  
*Donostipaparra*  
1990  
Pedro G. Romero Studio

Juan del Campo  
*Gorroeta*  
1990  
Pedro Lacalle, Madrid

Juan del Campo  
*Nosotros*  
1992  
Textile with studs  
Pedro G. Romero Studio

*Sábanas de Holanda*  
1989  
Turmeric, ink, lead white,  
and gouache on board  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery

We can mention other events that were key to this learning process, such as the founding of the theater group El traje de Artaud, for which he wrote the plays *El tambor futurista* and *M.A.T.E.M.A.T.I.C.A.*, and of the musical group Intonarumori; the creation of the magazine *R.A.R.O.* and the ensuing editorial platform; contributions to José María Giro's *El muerto vivo*; participation in *La Situación en Cuenca*, directed by Ángel González García and Horacio Fernández; the planning of *Manifiesto*, with Julián Rodríguez and Antonio Cervera Pinto, in Beja, Portugal; and the collaborations with *Sub Rosa* magazine and with the project *Espectáculo, Disseminação, Deriva e Exílio* centered on Guy Debord at Metalúrgica Alentejana.









# REMEMBER

*With a special introduction by  
David Montero*

*If I were an object I'd be objective, but as I am a subject, I am subjective*  
José Bergamín

The actor enters. He walks through the library to the patio, which, being inside, is also outside. From this threshold he surveys the scene.

He is wearing a guayabera, the signature garment of the main subject of his speech, the artist known as Pedro G. Romero. The shirt is, of course, ample. It is too big for him, far too big. The aforementioned G. is fat, and this ampleness, which someone could mistake for his ego, is quite obvious from the meters of excess fabric in the shirt. David starts mumbling the text. He raises his eyebrows as if in forewarning, what he is about to say consists of the arbitrary, subjective, perhaps even capricious opinions of this Pedro G. Romero. His eyebrows don't just rise, they stand on end, because opinions are wont to spatter others here and there. David knows part of the story and he is skeptical.

He takes a step, raises his arm, hunches his body, and, under the lemon tree, begins his speech:

*Remember,  
Gabriel Ureña, communist and unpaid  
teacher exiled in Alcaudete, who was your  
high school teacher and gave you his two  
books on art and architecture in Francoist  
Spain.*

[pointing his finger]

*Remember,  
Ureña wrote the dedication: "Transform  
society, said Marx; change life, said  
Rimbaud..." and what followed was mere  
adulation for the education of an  
adolescent artist.*

[swinging his arms exaggeratedly]

*Remember,  
founding the experimental group  
Intonarumori, in Arahá, almost a  
contradiction in terms, noise in the  
middle of the flamenco countryside.*

[lowering his arms to the ground]

*Remember,  
the creation of El traje de Artaud, I mean,  
that you started a theater group with Pepa  
Gamboa, Paco Lozano, Antonio Marín,  
Federico Guzmán, and Victoria Gil, later  
joined by the law faculty theater group,  
Belén Candil, Antonio Álamo, and so  
many others.*

[gesturing at the sheet of paper, ironically  
reading the aforesaid metadiscourse]

*Remember,  
that the members of El traje de Artaud  
staged El tambor futurista and  
M.A.T.E.M.A.T.I.C.A., two plays, by you,  
by me, by Pedro G. Romero.*

[making karate-like gestures with hands]

*Remember,  
that you saw yourselves as a group of  
young Futurists, and your predilection for  
the anarchist Boccioni, the traditionalists  
Larionov and Goncharova, the fascist  
Giménez Caballero, and the communist  
Mayakovsky.*

[placing hands on chin, suggesting melancholy  
or toothache]

*Remember,  
your drawings, which were rejected by the  
magazine Figura Internacional, and which  
were signed Juan del Campo.*

*Remember,  
the little machines by comic book  
Professor Franz from Copenhagen.*

[punctuating with his finger]

*Remember,  
that you started writing texts under the  
name of José Luis Borja, the clumsy  
enthusiasm of a Borges reader.*

[making a fist and raising it for no apparent  
reason]

*Remember,  
Juana de Aizpuru calling you Pedro G.  
Romero, which would, from then on,  
be our name.*

[as if striking the ground with arm]

*Remember,  
the friends who saved you from Art  
History, yes, writ large.*

[gesturing like an orchestra conductor]

*Remember,  
Paco Loma-Osorio and his glass theory,  
and how you considered him the true  
artist.*

*Remember,  
reading Wittgenstein's philosophical diary  
and his personal diary, comparing entries  
for the same days and thinking they could  
not possibly have been written by the same  
person.*

[emphatically to the point of caricature]

*Remember,  
the large desván, the arched attic of your  
house in Aracena, almost up in the roof,  
where you put your studio and placed  
a street-facing sign that said "The  
Storehouse of Ideas."*

[in the pose of an ape or monkey philosopher]

*Remember,  
your determination to call Conceptual Art  
"conceptista" art.*

*Remember,  
the seminar at El Escorial, where you  
were accredited as "Curro Romero,"  
with Ángel González and María Vela,  
and the gin and tonics and literature into  
the wee hours.*

[pointing finger at the horizon]

*Remember,  
Chema Cobo and Mar Villaespesa's house  
in Tarifa, one of the ends of the world, with  
a kitchen and library.*

*Remember,  
visiting Paul Bowles in Tangiers, when Rey  
Rosa looked after him, and asking him if  
Duchamp liked cous-cous*

[gets up and goes to the library door, imitating  
Chiquito de la Calzá]

*Remember,  
the show Cuña Roja, on Radio Comisiones  
Obreras, and that they threw you out for  
dressing up as Falangists at TiMenDasTa,  
which was a carnival party!*

*Remember,  
when you started to work at the magazine  
Figura Internacional and, later, Arena  
Internacional del Arte.*

[less vehement]

*Remember,  
you used to sign your art reviews with  
the name Juan Gracián, and then Jota  
Gracián.*

[Crouching, in fecal rather than fetal position]

*Remember,  
yes, that fight in the arena, Mar Villaespesa,  
José Luis Brea, and Kevin Power, you'll  
never forget, at Arena magazine.*

[moving up and down, up and down]

*Remember,  
before the fight, the editorial board of  
Arena Internacional del Arte, with Mar,  
Kevin, and Brea, of course every comma  
that moved there mattered!*

[turning body to one side]

*Remember,  
that Arena was under attack by enemies,  
the Department of Fine Arts, the funding  
bodies that backed it, the wretched  
competition of Lápiz magazine, we didn't  
need a civil war of our own!*

*Remember,  
La sección áurea, and how Alberto  
Marina helped you with the idea that your  
works should be made, de facto, by other  
artists, that you would provide the  
proposals and they would provide the  
craftmanship.*

[taking the position of a goalkeeper bracing for  
a penalty shot]

*Remember,  
when 4taxis invited you to spend some time  
with their students, to work with them, and  
that they, the four-taxiists, showed you  
what Seville really is.*

[taking a step forward and entering the library]

*Remember,  
Before and After the Enthusiasm,  
1972–1992, with José Luis Brea at an art  
fair in Amsterdam and how Spinoza's coat  
hung from the very dagger that tried to kill  
him.*

[swinging puppet-like, this way and that]

*Remember,  
Amsterdam, Valcárcel Medina and Juan  
Hidalgo were alive, alive and kicking,  
and that Dutch artist who had turned his  
studio into a kitchen ten years before  
Tiravanija.*

[emphasizing the word “Amsterdam” every  
time, like the Jacques Brel song]

*Remember,  
Amsterdam and Pablo Escobar and Pepe  
Cobo, and remember also understanding,  
at that moment, the financial and symbolic  
capital that moves around art.*

[hands moving like a pinwheel, parodying the  
text]

*Remember,  
El Sueño Imperativo at the Círculo de  
Bellas Artes in Madrid, the first possibility  
of a critical left, eventually financed by a  
UGT property scandal.*

[pausing to catch his breath and pretending to  
look for something among the papers]

*Remember,  
curated by Mar Villaespesa, the long  
conversations on utopia, the impossible,  
collective action, the construction of a  
critical subjectivity and El Sueño  
Imperativo.*

[emphatic! solemn! ludicrous!]

*Remember,  
the horizontality of El Sueño Imperativo,  
sitting at the table with the installers from  
BNV Producciones, looking like a real  
democracy.*

[lowering his voice with exaggerated  
confidentiality]

*Remember,  
The furious criticism of El Sueño  
Imperativo, and how the same critics later  
surrendered to its power.*

*Remember,  
a certain disintegration of authorship  
that was evident there, diluted in the  
exhibition rooms, it was one's own work  
and it wasn't, the real author was El Sueño  
Imperativo.*

[jokingly]

*Remember,  
Juan Hidalgo at the Cock writing his poem  
of names.*

*Remember, remember,  
the reality of Ciudad invadida, and why you  
decided that Juan del Campo should act in  
Ciudad invadida II.*

[comically prancing about]

*Remember,  
that your studio in San Vicente burned  
down with forty paintings and Juan del  
Campo was born, a rogue territory with  
Abraham Lacalle and Chema Cobo.*

[recoiling and voice becoming serious while  
making faces]

*Remember,  
the silly scandal over the painting of  
Carmen Giménez and how María Corral  
stood by you at first and then turned  
against you for a similar parody at La  
Situación, in Cuenca.*

[Chiquito de la Calzá returns]

*Remember,  
that Juan del Campo had professional  
experience, and Luis Navarro joined too and  
it became Diga 93, and how the video La  
muerte de Juan del Campo came about.*

[Stopping again and pretending to look for the  
exact words he is about to say]

*Remember,  
“We, we who have no personality, we who  
have no culture, we who have no name.  
We have a debt, and that debt was paid...”  
and the Liberation Music Orchestra  
was playing.*

[rhythmically, moving in time with the music]

*Remember,  
it was from a film by Basilio Martín Patino,  
and that Basilio himself told you the details  
just before his Alzheimer's.*

*Remember,  
reading all of Borges and his Personal  
Library, and there was the Prólogo a la  
obra de Silverio Lanza signed by Ramón  
Gómez de la Serna.*

[approaching the camera, marking out the text  
in the air with his finger]

*Remember,  
Agustín García Calvo's school of rhetoric  
on Radio3, and how you listened devotedly  
every Saturday.*

[touching his head, as if remembering]

*Remember,  
there was Agustín Parejo School,  
Estrujenbank, Preiswert, EMPRESA,  
Industrias Mikuerpo, El muerto vivo, and  
Juan del Campo.*

[impracticable position, arm bent toward the  
camera]

*Remember,  
Dionisio Cañas gave you José Bergamín's  
La decadencia del analfabetismo to read,  
and Pepe Espaliú gave you Georges Didi-  
Huberman's Invention of Hysteria in  
French.*

[leaning back]

*Remember,  
the “disaster” of your New York exhibition.*

[in a schoolish, old-school pose, almost like a preaching little priest]

*Remember,  
a workshop in Montesquiu, near Vic,  
your first exercise for fourteen or fifteen  
students, who were to do exactly the  
opposite of what they wanted to do,  
desire turned inside out like a sock.*

[very much in the foreground, as if using a pointer]

*Remember,  
having created a magazine and publishing  
platform called r.a.r.o., an acronym that  
didn't stand for anything.*

[turning the sheet of paper over, looking for something]

*Remember,  
the collaborations with José María Giro's  
El muerto vivo.*

[in the position of the dwarf inside the chess automaton The Turk]

*Remember,  
that Mar Villaespesa, mentor, told you  
about the exchange of books and food that  
she had read about in Bruce Chatwin.*

[collapsing onto the camera]

*Remember,  
your hangover theory, that moment you  
always found so productive precisely  
because it annulled your will, hopelessly  
suspending it.*

*Remember,  
a week in Zurich with John Cage, who  
made us a kind of green homeopathic soup  
every day, which was supposed to cleanse  
our majestic self.*

[tilting to one side, making a listening face, and punctuating with lackadaisical hand gestures]

*Remember,  
Ángel González, who said to you,  
"Methodology? put one thing down and  
from that thing comes another thing and  
then another and another and another  
and it doesn't matter if meaning escapes."*

[in an artificial position, whole body leaning back]

*Remember,  
the short-lived magazine Sub rosa and  
the "marranos" conversations with Julián  
Rodríguez, with the persistent presence of  
Walter Benjamin and Baruch Spinoza.*

[managing to get into the position that 4taxis call "hacer Giralda"]

*Remember,  
the meetings in Cuenca called La Situación,  
overviews of art organized by Horacio  
Fernández and Ángel González García, and  
the disappointment.*

[much moving of his little head, much circling of arms]

*Remember,  
the caricature of La Situación, how power  
becomes paranoid and how they tried to  
get rid of Juan del Campo, to get rid of  
the dissident voices in Juan del Campo.*

[another artificial, possibly military stance]

*Remember,  
the Casa de Velázquez grant and your  
observation post to keep watch on Felipe  
González at La Moncloa opposite the back  
door, and that it was discovered by the  
Civil Guard.*

*Remember,  
the library at Casa de Velázquez and what  
the bar Candela was like.*

[prancing, with a loud voice, merry shoulders]

*Remember,  
Pina Bausch sitting at Candela with your  
cousin Gamboa and Juanito Verdú.*

[placing hand on head like a cockscomb]

*Remember,  
Enrique Morente trying to convince you of  
the merits of Pepe Blanco's song "Cocidito  
madrileño" in a toilet at Candela, at about  
five in the morning.*

[something like a stuttering memory]

*Remember,  
how Manifesto was made, again with  
Julián Rodríguez, in Beja, with Cervera  
Pinto, Simeón Saiz, and Carlos Vidal... ah!  
it was basically Portugal.*

[pompous and sardonic]

*Remember,  
That trip to Metalúrgica Alentejana, Guy  
Debord, Espectáculo, Disseminação,  
Deriva e Exílio, which was the beginning  
of a long road, one might say a derive, but  
that would seem redundant here.*

[bringing back the little phallic finger]

*Remember,  
penniless, the five porn scripts you wrote  
for the new phone services: Pedro Pollas,  
can a doorjamb be eroticized?*

[moving into the foreground]

*Remember,  
that Ángel González gave you two first  
editions of Raymond Roussel.*

*Remember,  
reading Eugenio Cobo's Andanzas del  
Bizco Amate, a striking portrait of nihilism  
even though everything was a wonderful  
lie, a brilliant invention by Juan El Camas.*

[and Chiquito de la Calzá returns]

*Remember,  
that Quico Rivas confirmed that everything  
4taxis had taught you was true, and showed  
you what doorways to go through in order  
to experience it.*

[fingers moving like salt and pepper shakers]

*Remember,  
that lost book, a comedy you wrote in  
which Juan de Mairena compiled  
statements by Wittgenstein and flamenco  
lyrics, connecting them.*

[more salt and pepper]

*Remember,  
Ángel González saying that the only art, the  
last situation left to us, is a good meal and  
a few drinks with friends.*

[speeding up speech, almost like rap]

*Remember,  
that your studio on calle Sánchez Bedoya  
was the poorhouse in Benito Zambrano's  
Solás, and that you built that rustic  
bathtub with your own hands.*

*Remember,  
that Chema Cobo used to say it shouldn't  
be left to artists to make bathtub stoppers  
and you said yes it should.*

[finishing in a somewhat teasing tone]

*Remember,  
that Federico Guzmán asked you to point  
to your favorite book, and you somewhat  
randomly decided to point to the one by  
Juan de Mairena.*

The scene is now empty, from the library, with  
the patio in the background, the green lemon  
tree shading a patio in Seville.













HOLANDA  
HOLANDA

FERIA ESPAÑOLA  
FURIA ESPAÑOLA

FLORES  
FLORIN

LA SALIVA PARA PODER ESCUPIR EN HOLANDESA  
LA SILABA PARA PODER ESCRIBIR EN HOLANDESA

FELIPE  
PHILIPS

~~LA BENDICION DE BREDA~~  
LA BENDICION DE BREDA

SPINOZA  
SPINO LA

los que no tenemos  
personalidad,  
los que no tenemos  
cultura, nosotros,  
tenemos una duda



THE AURA,  
COMMUNITY,  
THE MACHINE, AND  
LANGUAGE

(On *The Golden Section*, *A Strange World*, and  
*The Storehouse of Ideas*)

I

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* If, as Beatriz Sarlo says, “unraveling the cracks in a text or memory leads us to encounter new cracks,”<sup>1</sup> we can now move on to examine your early works in relation to the more recent ones we have mentioned. In this sense, I would like to know what you mean by the aura and why, in the 1980s, you took on this complex and in a sense confusing subject in a very long photographic series on “the aura.” Could you expand on how you thought about it then, how you think about it now, and the reasons for your early interest in this notion?

*Pedro G. Romero:* It seems clearer looking back from here and now, but everything was probably more tentative back then. Benjamin talks about distance with respect to the aura, and now that I have a certain distance, of course some contours stand out. At the time I was actually trying to address a range of different issues. I was almost comically determined to replace the use of “conceptual” in the making of art with “conceptista,” as in the poetry and painting of Seville’s golden age. *Conceptismo* to me does not just refer to the literature of the time—from Fernando de Herrera to Baltasar Gracián—but also to painters like Francisco Pacheco, Diego Velázquez, Francisco de Zurbarán, Juan de Valdés Leal, and Bartolomé Esteban Murillo. I had this underlying idea, then and now, of not differentiating what we do, today’s artistic practice, from the one that existed then. What connects those ways of doing/making is more important than the social, economic, and political circumstances that separate us. When I read Benjamin’s seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936)<sup>2</sup>—which was published in Spain by a priest, Jesús Aguirre—I was also reading what had been said during the Golden Age about the depiction of saints’ halos. It all has to do with presence. In fact,

<sup>1</sup>. Beatriz Sarlo, “Verdad de los detalles,” in *Siete ensayos sobre Walter Benjamin* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 33, 34.

<sup>2</sup>. Walter Benjamin, “L’œuvre d’art à l’époque de sa reproduction mécanisée,” in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 5, no. 1 (1936); Eng.: “The Work

all portraits contemplate this relationship between light/dark and the aura. There have been suggestions that Benjamin's knowledge of theology gave rise to the question of the aura. But although he did have this knowledge, I think his interest—and mine—sprung from the complete opposite. I mean, the point was to understand that the spiritualist, conceptualist, or idealist qualities of the work of art—whatever you want to call them, that which sets them apart transcendently, if you like—is also material production. Benjamin sets the aura against mechanical reproduction in order to find out what gets lost and what is salvaged in this democratic operation. A French commentator has said that Murillo wanted to depict everyone as if they were saints, with an aura of light, distinguished. I had not heard this quote at the time, but it was essentially what I wanted to do in that untitled series on auras: to photograph everyone and reveal their aura. It had something of Beuys and direct democracy—of his dictum that everyone is an artist and that this is what distinguishes our lives—and something of what Foucault called the artist's life, as the quality of any good life, a life lived with care. As I said, I wanted to photograph everyone, that was the idea, but I didn't make it past 5,000 people, I believe, although 5,000 people is a world in itself. What I am interested in now is systematically photographed environments or ecosystems. The familiar setting of Aracena and Arahál, where I was born and where I lived, childhood friends, etcetera; on the other hand, the art world, my friends and colleagues from Seville, Madrid, and Valencia, at art fairs and galleries, etcetera; anonymous strangers, with no direct link, tourist excursions to Seville, school groups, locals from Jauja, a village on the road to Granada. Benjamin was interested in the persistence of the aura in the context of mechanical reproduction, mass society, and democratic

of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,”  
 in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York:  
 Schocken Books, 1969), 217–51.

populism. But—especially when he wrote about film—he also questioned how the aura persists in the secularized world of industrial production, how it is produced while simultaneously appearing to become pure commodity. His texts on Baudelaire are illuminating. The form-of-life of the aura survives in the worst, the purest banalization of what art does. Even in kitsch, in children’s naivety, in toys, in the stuff in an attic. I remember how important reading Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* (1968)<sup>3</sup> at Mar Villaespesa and Chema Cobo’s house in Tarifa was to my understanding of the materialist operation Benjamin was attempting. That is to say, that the quality that sets the art-thing apart from other things does not just operate under the variable of “difference” but also of “repetition.” The variable of time, of history, of Benjamin’s well-known concept of distance. What I did was subject my own work, the things I was doing, the things that operated as art, to various techniques and procedures—through the long series of photographs you mentioned, but also by giving that aura-form to other artists to represent in my name, for example—in order to see the extent to which that quality could be quantified or expressed in material terms. Some of the halos/auras were made with iodine, bleach, and other industrial solvents. And that had a meaning, it was a material expression of that evanescent aura that the worst artistic literature still persists in seeing as something transcendent or spiritual, something from beyond. What interested me then and now is what is on this side of the aura, of ghosts, of the uncharted, of the unseen and unknown. It is all on this side, not beyond.

<sup>3</sup>. Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968); Eng.: *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul R. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

"I write to you:  
 Have you seen my face in any of your dreams? Do I appear in your dreams untroubled or reproaching you for the overwhelming wants contained in the past? Do you suffer upon waking or do you surrender to invading unconsciousness? Oh, you and I inhabit a dispersed land, with fissures so deep they thwart our meeting. Who could I tell that the angel refuses to bear me on his back and despises me and abandons me at the most difficult crossroads that the routes present. No shadow is mightier, more ravaging than that cast by an angel's flight." After a photograph by Paz Errázuriz, these words open Diamela Eltit's novel *Soul's Infarct* (1994).<sup>1</sup> We could say that, in a sense, it introduces a new purpose for the aura: to liberate not just other areas of writing but also other zones, other beginnings, a different value for that which is original and unrepeatable and emerges, for example, from a bond of love. A proto-aura, as Ticio Escobar would say,<sup>2</sup> linked to more complex ritual forms that sustain the social. The aura as libidinal energy, as a bonus of desire that illuminates a thing—time—and maintains a minimum distance. As Benjamin says, if this distance is removed, desire disappears. In reference to Escobar, Arístides Ortega says that art, like love and thought, reinvents distance relative to its object: it does not fetishize it, or stop looking at it.

*Valentín Roma:*

There is a wonderful quote by José Lezama Lima, "the impossible, on colliding with the possible, generates infinite possibility." But note that the writer pins the opening up of unforeseen possibilities on the gesture of an impact, a collision, as the start of new, not yet bureaucratized situations.

The image is certainly very beautiful, although its meaning may seem a little too lyrical. Even so, I wanted to bring it up to refer to something fundamental in literature, a "no why" that explains writing. I am talking about the idea of obstinacy, about the fact that one writes without weighty reasons, a bit because it is hard to stop doing so.

In this sense, perhaps the first thing that gets lost when a writer enters the literary system is the lightness of megalomaniacal principles in conjunction with a fierce insistence on writing just because. At the same time, when we read books like those of Clarice Lispector and Jaroslav Seifert, poems like those of Marina Tsvetaeva and Raymond Carver, "despite everything" we can still see the quality of something that has no purpose but cannot be abandoned by any means. I think that when you read those kinds of texts you feel that there is something, perhaps a kind of freedom that even literature cannot completely tame.

Grace Paley said that her best stories were those which were most unrecognizable to her, those that reminded her of the extent to which a writer does not only read her or himself but is naive enough to jump from the inconsequential to the undetectable, from the unimportant to that which no one, not even the writer her or himself, would consider crucial.

<sup>1</sup> Diamela Eltit and Paz Errázuriz (photography), *Soul's Infarct*, trans. Ronald Christ (New York: Lumen Books, 2009), 6; originally published as *El infarto del alma* (Santiago de Chile: Francisco Zegers Editor, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Ticio Escobar, *Aura latente* (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2021).

## II

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* Still on the subject of Benjamin, Susan Buck-Morss says that “Walter Benjamin’s understanding of modern experience is neurological. It centers on shock.”<sup>1</sup> In your new film project, *Los caballos* (The Horses), equine optics play a key role. “Horses see out of each eye separately and process the information in two distinct parts of the brain,” you say that you are interested in “the optometry of their organs ... the horses’ gaze as outside-the-frame ... that double perspective, which is dialectics.”<sup>2</sup> Given that you have been rereading Benjamin’s famous essay for over twenty-five years, to what extent would it be fair to say that you are revisiting it in this new work? And if you are, what are the consequences of the fact that you used a photographic camera in *La sección áurea* (The Golden Section) and a film camera in *Los caballos*? Do you think that the fragmented multiple image created by a film camera is more conducive to that shock-awakening that makes it possible to “restore the instinctual power of the human bodily senses,”<sup>3</sup> as Benjamin demanded.

*Pedro G. Romero:* Benjamin talks about the nature of the aura as something like a looking-back. In other words, the fact that the work of art is able to look, as well as be looked at. It is an almost biological—neurological, as Buck-Morss says—biographical quality, the quality of the thing being considered a living thing. Juan Antonio Ramírez published a wonderful text<sup>4</sup> about the treatment of images as living things in Sevillian religious art. The film you ask me about, *Los caballos*, opens with Machado’s words, the eye you look at is not an eye because you see it, it is an eye because it looks back; or, more accurately, “The eye you see is not / an eye because

<sup>1</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin’s Artwork Essay Reconsidered,”

*October* 61 (Fall 1992): 16.

<sup>2</sup> In conversation with Pedro G. Romero.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Juan Antonio Ramírez, *Arte y arquitectura en la época del capitalismo triunfante* (Madrid: Visor, 1992).

you see it; / it is an eye because it sees you.” In reality, this film explores what Benjamin described as a privileged technique in art: film. In reality, the whole operation of *Los caballos* gave rise to itself. I mean, I go about my work here and there, and suddenly a whole series of images gives rise to certain meanings, counterparts, similarities, repetitions... That happened with *Los caballos*, and naturally the questions that have always interested me came up again, with all their differences. That which looks at us. That is the aura, the thing’s capacity to look at us. The fact that horses look at us is self-evident. The fact that film can look at us is self-evident too! It’s obvious! And yet it is a “thing,” an apparatus made up of objects and materials, even in the midst of digital, virtual, cybernetic, or whatever new spiritualist mumbo jumbo you want to call it, production. In *Los caballos* there are certain shifts—lenses, cameras, tripods, the overlapping of sound and image, as filmmaker María Pérez was saying the other day—between these human animals (curiously, horses survived the great glaciation because of their domesticity; even most wild horses today come from “domesticated” horses, although the idea of domestication is a rather thorny subject and I don’t think I’ll go into it here) and the construction of film, of film production, of the film apparatus. On the other hand, what does it mean to look? In *On Certainty* (1950–51),<sup>5</sup> Wittgenstein implied that our looking—the guarantee of seeing, knowing things—has to do with a kind of constitutive biological function. This “direct” seeing—without the rhetoric of language that allows us to operate with that knowledge and at the same time prevents “direct” knowledge—Wittgenstein suggests, is in God, in children, in animals. It is in us, in our original and ultimate animal nature. Well, the work of art also has this ability to look. That’s

<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (*Über Gewissheit*), ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969–75).

what I think now, that's what Benjamin called "aura." I would like to point out that Wittgenstein went to great lengths to draw a distinction between this "animal gaze" and questions such as wildness, the primitive, instinctive, basic, brutish, etcetera, aspects that are also at work when language operates. At the time I was—and I still am—influenced by what Spinoza said about images: an image is an image only if it refers to another image. In other words, to put it simply, if it reproduces itself. Beatriz Herráez invited me to participate in a modest but I think important project, which touched on many of my interests: *Soy el final de la reproducción* (I Am the End of Reproduction), in which the "end" is both ending and purpose. This double theological and teleological sense of "the end" obviously operates through contradiction, as paradox. I often repeat Pepe Bergamín's phrase "paradox is what fools call truth" because of all this. The "truth" Bergamín speaks of is of course this direct looking.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

horses' gaze  
 outside the frame gaze  
 the double perspective of the dialectic gaze

At times I have wondered, what is this thing about the responsibility of having eyes? The responsibility of seeing?

Perspective was a political operation of stabilizing the gaze, fixing it to one or several vanishing points, and establishing a visual field from there. It was a calculated coercion that made the gaze available to see whatever is shown to it, and at the same time introduced a specific notion of horizon. As Michel Foucault admirably puts it, "Discipline is a political anatomy of detail,"<sup>1</sup> a calculation of openings, a spatial organization of the gaze, and thus also of bodies. The routine of linear perspective was implemented in public space through urban planning, architecture, and the management of flows, at the service of surveillance. Which is why although ocularcentrism is problematic, it is less so than the ways in which the eye is fixed. Not just in relation to what we see, but also what looks at us.

How can we somehow include the horse's perspective in our gaze? Horses have two sides, dual vision, two distinct hemispheres that work separately and are somehow coupled through sound. Playing with long shots, and seeing how the focal points change, make it possible for the focus and the perspective to change during a sequence. Two different points of view in the same movement, in the same gesture of looking. There are always at least two different vanishing points. Exploring this gesture is a way of exercising the undiscipline of the gaze.

*Valentín Roma:*

For some reason, this conversation is making me remember a delightful book by John Steinbeck called *Travels with Charley* (1962),<sup>1</sup> which depicts a very long road trip around the United States made by Steinbeck in the company of his old blue standard poodle Charley. They travel 10,000 miles through thirty-four states, in a camper called "Rocinante," no less. Although everything would seem to suggest a parody or a homage to Don Quixote, the text tells a very different story, which does not even have much to do with the road novel genre. I have always associated this book with two others from around the same time with a similar approach, which are usually described as foundational. I am talking about Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957)<sup>2</sup> and Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1958).<sup>3</sup> However, unlike these, which each in their own way attest to the already famous photogenic qualities of the wild side of America—all the paraphernalia of the easy rider and the harsh, deep, moral, heroic landscape of the United States—*Travels with Charley* has a lightness of touch. I think it is a kind of reversal of how literature transcendentalizes the way it looks at certain natural environments. I myself am bored by the narrative prattle about the all-seeing eye that can dwell just as fruitfully on a cork tree as on a long confessional diatribe, the narrator who presents images at the right moment, who discloses and does not disclose, who plays with rhythms of transparency and concealment. In other words, the kind of writing possessed of a resonant voice and a wonderful eye seems insufferable to me. I find it too erotic for my taste, as though it were deliberately postponing some kind of consummation in favor of refined, aristocratic verbosity.

<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 139; originally published as *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

<sup>1</sup> John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* (New York: Viking, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Viking, 1957).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Frank, *Les Américains* (Paris: Robert Delpire, 1958); Eng.: *The Americans* (New York: Grove Press, 1959).

*Isabel de Naverán:*

[The Horses]

During that seminar with students from the Masters in Arts Practice and Visual Culture at the museum, Pedro showed us some fragments of the film *Nueve Sevillas* (Nine Sevilles), which was still in post-production. Sometimes details get mixed up in memory, and he might have showed us footage from *Los caballos* too. Many things were discussed and many images were seen. *Nueve Sevillas* presents nine artists, each with an animal of their choice. They walk and talk. And only one of them, the female bullfighter Vanesa Lérica Montoya, chose a horse. But the way I remembered it, after the seminar, perhaps because the film was in progress and we saw very little of it, I thought all the animals chosen were horses. The memory was very strongly etched in my mind, because when I saw the footage it seemed to me that all the people were blind. Their eyes were open, sure, but from their expressions it seemed that they were not being guided by sight but by something else, as if their gaze were located in some other part of the body. I thought of the horses' gaze, it was that kind of gaze.

Pedro told me that a few weeks earlier, at another seminar, in Portugal, he had gone with students to a place where there were horses. An equestrian center or a space where horses are kept. And how when they got there, they were all struck dumb. Not the horses but the students, and Pedro himself. They were left speechless, he said.

I think that when Pedro takes an interest in horses, or in chickens, it is not because he wants to see as they do, to put himself in their place. Instead, he wants to disrupt one's way of perceiving. A strong perception that is not equivalent to what is sometimes considered "animal"—wild, authentic, spontaneous, brutish. Rather, to look from a blind spot, to place himself there, and see what happens.

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* Raymond Williams coined the concept of “structures of feeling,”<sup>1</sup> which is something like the tone, the drive, or the dynamic of an era. Of all your early works, perhaps *La sección áurea* is the one that most accurately expresses a common genre, era, and style that prevailed at the time it was produced. While it is true that other elements such as “interruption,” “reverie,” “montage”..., which you develop in later works, are latent in this piece, you also explore certain ways of doing/making—commissioning and incorporating original works from the community you were part of—that you never took up again. In this sense, having discussed what this important work initiated—and perhaps having spent too much time dwelling on it—I would like to know what you discarded, what made you veer toward ways of working that still involved bringing together numerous collaborators, but as participants, and in a very different way.

### III

*Pedro G. Romero:* Yes, that happened immediately after the series of works that I called *La sección áurea*, those works of art commissioned mechanically, asking third parties to act as seconds, commissioning them to make works with precise instructions, to paint a picture or take a photograph according to the rules I dictated, thus approaching collaboration in a way that was almost automatic, almost robotic, a kind of homemade cybernetics, without connection or affect. In the end, it started to seem a bit rhetorical, like a merely rhetorical operation, that could be linked to trends such as appropriationism, the cybernetic disappearance of the author, and the art business, and other conceptual operations on that spectrum that did not interest me. That all wore me out, it seemed insufficient. Working

<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128.

in collectives in the tradition of productivism or anarchist cooperatives may have seemed interesting to me, but that wasn't exactly it either. I don't know why, that idea of solitary action peopled by others, that Spinozist idea that even when we are alone, acting alone, even outside of the city and politics, the common, collective voice is still there. That always seemed fundamental to me. But to develop this idea through those overt operations, be it the capitalist company or the communist union, all seemed too obvious, a repetition of historical markers, the Industrial Revolution, the republican political revolution, and so on. It was only a few years ago that I began to see that there were interesting things in that impulse, things that go beyond the language with which it all operated, and that something of that direct gaze—what Jean Paulhan calls “terror”—had slipped in as if from below. Paulhan draws a distinction between two paths: “terror,” or the direct gaze we have been talking about, for which his example was Rimbaud; and “rhetoric,” accepting that we can only operate through language, in this case Mallarmé. I have been interested in what Paulhan writes about in *The Flowers of Tarbes* (1941)<sup>2</sup> since I heard it from Agamben in that seminar I attended in Seville in the mid-1990s. Not so much as two separate paths, but as the tension between them. I think “terror” and “rhetoric” intertwine in all the works that interest me, from Velázquez's *Las meninas* to Mauricio Amster's *Cartilla escolar antifascista* (Antifascist School Primer), to name two supposedly very different examples. As I said, I thought there was something of that direct gaze in *La sección áurea*, but then, at a certain point, the works seemed mere rhetoric. And I needed to test it in different ways, because something about it left me particularly [...]

<sup>2</sup> Jean Paulhan, *Les Fleurs de Tarbes ou La Terreur dans les lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941); Eng.: *The Flowers of Tarbes, or Terror in Literature*, trans.

Michael Syrotinski (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

## 12. R.A.R.O.

*(A Strange World)*

The *r.a.r.o.* project—an acronym without a fixed meaning, although the word *raro* means “strange” in Spanish, and the letters stand for something like “Revista de Arte, etc.” (Art Magazine etc.)—was a magazine of art and thought. In the late 1980s there was an economic boom in the Spanish art market, and galleries not only set up the ARCO art fair but also published catalogues and paid artists salaries. Instead of taking this opportunity to publish a catalogue on his work, *r.a.r.o.* became a magazine giving voice to other artists and things that reflected Pedro G. Romero’s concerns. At the heart of that decision was the need to present a different account of the art of the time, specifically the art produced in this part of southern Europe. This work could not be done alone. It had to be a narrative bringing together many other voices, especially because restoring polyphony was an integral part of reclaiming the narrative. The first challenge was to put an end to the hegemonic idea of the canon, a kind of affirmation of the history of art according to the New York MoMA model, conveniently applied to every province of the empire. In the face of this, *r.a.r.o.* did not seek to affirm a local identity but sought a kind of standardized Andalusian art, a critical, polyphonic internationalism that, at the very least, disrupted Romero’s own work. The exhibitions organized under the name *r.a.r.o.* were affected by the tension described here, and Romero was caught up in a radical questioning of what he does and its meaning.

### A STRANGE WORLD

The forty works in the exhibition *Un mundo r.a.r.o.* (A Strange World) did not express one particular meaning. They proliferated in multiple combinations, giving rise to over one hundred and fifty narratives depending on the configuration. The forty paintings did not change, but different sequences gave rise to one meaning or another. Accordingly, the works lost their status as commodities,

because it was impossible to have all the narratives—all the possibilities of the artist’s work—at once. *Espejo de tinta* (Mirror of Ink) changed meaning depending on whether it was next to *Aura* or *Puerta del Tiempo* (Door of Time), and changed again with the added presence of *Nuclear* or *Atómica*.

## 13. THE GOLDEN RATIO

*(The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction)*

The divine proportion or golden ratio sought to express a perfect model of the human body by means of numbers, geometrical calculation, and perspective. Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* was its prime example. In this spirit, and not without jest—or *guasa*, a popular Spanish term that mixes humor, irony, parody, and critique—Pedro G. Romero set out to portray all of humanity according to this perfect representation. On the one hand, he used a neutral portrait style; on the other, by applying iodine to the surface of the developed prints he achieved the effect of a certain “halo of holiness” typical of Christian representations. In many ways he followed the advice of Francisco Pacheco—painter, theoretician, and early exponent of the *Conceptismo* movement in painting in sixteenth-century Seville—in an attempt to connect the processes we know as Conceptual Art to the old forms of Sevillian *Conceptismo*: Murillo, Velázquez, Zurbarán, etcetera. After considerable reflection on the studio painting of Spain's Golden Age, Romero decided to calculate a golden ratio of his own, and to commission numerous fellow artists of his generation—Rafael Agredano, Javier Baldeón, Juan del Campo, Pepe Espaliú, Victoria Gil, José María Giro, Curro González, Federico Guzmán, Manolo Lacalle, and Agustín Parejo School—to create paintings that strictly adhered to these considerations. The resulting works are nobody's: there is no author, in that tension between studio works, the master's rules, and the commissioning director. Early on, this obsession with proportion and representation was linked to attempts to automate—in the sense that Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia used the term—the making of art, beyond personal taste, the impulse of the spirit, or the need for self-expression. There is a suggestion that the birth of perspective, the invention of courtly love, and financial assets emerged together and at the same time as the modern idea of art.

### THE WORK OF ART IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION

The reading of Walter Benjamin's famous essay has its own nuances in Seville, not

just because its first editor and translator into Spanish was Jesús Aguirre—first a priest and then the Duke of Alba—but also because of unusual early interpretations such as those by Sevillian rock musician Pive Amador in the 1970s. In line with these bastard readings, this

work forces a correspondence between Benjamin's aura and the aureole of saints. It was Hegel who wrote that Murillo sought to portray the whole of humanity as if they were gods, saints, or angels. It is

an attitude not far removed from the series of 1,900 portraits with aura, half of which were treated with iodine, that Pedro G. Romero began in the late 1980s.

## 14. THE STOREHOUSE OF IDEAS

(*M.A.T.E.M.A.T.I.C.A., Fla-Co-Men*)

Some thoughts on the double or the dialectic—often with nonacademic digressions—came to Pedro G. Romero from his reading as a young man of the philosophical notebooks and *Secret Diaries* of Austrian Jewish philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. The different types, affects, and moods of notes made on a single day introduced Romero to the divided nature of language.

These early *conceptista* works titled *El almacén de las ideas* (The Storehouse of Ideas) are based on the phonetic pairing of two words that sound the same but have different meanings. One is covered with a particular material—sulfur, cement, iodine, ink, copper, etc.—and the other is painted in an acrylic that mimics the color of that material. With the passage of time, the material erodes in contact with the air, and its appearance changes. Meanwhile, the color—in reference to Wittgenstein's thoughts on color—remains stable. Romero paired the propositions of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (early Wittgenstein) with those of *Philosophical Investigations* (late Wittgenstein) in a playful spirit that combines Baltasar Gracián's *Conceptismo*, Roussel's writing read by Marcel Duchamp, and language games. At the same time, it has a strong materialist aspect and does not spiritualize, idealize, or leave art to the buffeting of aesthetic ideas. When he made these works Pedro G. Romero believed, rightly or wrongly, that the artist as emitter—producer of artifacts—is always impersonal and that whatever he does depends on the exterior, on language, not on himself; while the receptor—reader, viewer, listener—has the mistaken sensation that things and words issue from them, that they have something to do with an individual consciousness or a ghostly sense of subjecthood. The materialist implementation of this idea gave rise to many of Romero's convictions and his understanding of the work of art as the creation of different “versifying machines.”

## M.A.T.E.M.A.T.I.C.A.

Under this enigmatic title, the theater group El traje de Artaud premiered Pedro G. Romero's second play, which deals with mathematics and the paradoxical or absurd conditioning imposed on the real by arithmetical reductionism. The hallmark of the "theater group" is pivotal for understanding the artist's work embedded in a particular production system. From this point of view, taking into account the journey from medieval comedians to the present day, it makes sense that the split between individual and collective creative work always struck Romero as a false dichotomy.

## FLA-CO-MEN

In this pattern of letters (which sometimes appears as Co-Men-Fla) created in 1987, there is a hint of some of what later became Pedro G. Romero's work with flamenco. It was even the title of one of Israel Galván's major works. It is not just the result of a clichéd view of Derridean deconstruction, but an example of the *ars combinatoria* that was the underlying principle of Dada poetry and machines—including the Spanish ones: Ramon Llull's language machines and the young Jorge Meneses's versifying machine.

# 15. THE WOMAN WORKERS

Three video works, *Las trabajadoras* (The Women Workers), made expressly for the exhibition *Versifying Machines*, following the model of *Los trabajadores* (The Men Workers), which is also presented here.

This work is what the ideal human proportions described by Vitruvius was to Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* and to the classical era, or what Le Corbusier's Modulor was to our modern age: a kind of ratio or distribution of the sensible, of the things of the world. With the participation of Javiera de la Fuente, Fuensanta La Moneta, and Lucía Álvarez La Piñona, it is a considerable expansion of the initial unique proposal. The images and the choreography show the workings—separately and together—of the feet, hips, and head, all the way up to the sky. Fragments and all at once, *organom* and body without organs. Also, importantly, the various works serve as a medium, a vehicle, making it possible to name in the credits all the people who have worked on the *Versifying Machines* project.



*Sin título F-226/F-297*  
1988–90  
Photograph on iodine  
Fundación Mediterráneo  
Collection. On loan to  
MACA, Museo de Arte  
Contemporáneo de Alicante

*Sin título F-19/F-225*  
1988–90  
Photograph on iodine  
Fundación Mediterráneo  
Collection. On loan to  
MACA, Museo de Arte  
Contemporáneo de Alicante

SODOMA Y GOMORRA  
NUCLEAR+LOT+PUERTA DEL INFIERNO

*Nuclear*  
1989  
Altered photograph  
"la Caixa" Collection of  
Contemporary Art

*Lot*  
1989  
Altered photograph and wax  
"la Caixa" Collection of  
Contemporary Art

*Puerta del infierno*  
1989  
Wood, sulfur, and wax  
"la Caixa" Collection of  
Contemporary Art

*Sin título*  
1988–90  
Photograph on iodine  
Pepe Cobo y cía.

POR UN ARTE Y UNA SOCIEDAD DE MUJERES  
CONSUELO+GIOCONDA

*Consuelo*  
1989  
Altered photograph  
Meana Larrucea Collection

*Gioconda*  
1989  
Ink, lacquer, varnish, and  
iodine on board  
Meana Larrucea Collection





NOVA EXPRESS

ÁNGEL+BEGINNING TO SEE THE LIGHT

SODOMA Y GOMORRA  
NUCLEAR+LOT+PUERTA DEL INFIERNOEL FIN DEL MURO DE BERLÍN  
FANTASMA+PUERTA DEL SILENCIO*Fantasma*

1989

Photograph altered with iodine  
and bleach

Pablo Leal Serrano

*Gates of Perception*

1989

B&W photograph and wood  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery*Ángel*

1989

Oil on canvas

Colección Museo Artium,  
Vitoria-Gasteiz*Beginning to See the Light*

1989

Oil on canvas

Colección Museo Artium,  
Vitoria-Gasteiz*Nuclear*

1989

Altered photograph

"la Caixa" Collection of  
Contemporary Art*Lot*

1989

Altered photograph and wax

"la Caixa" Collection of  
Contemporary Art*Puerta del infierno*

1989

Wood, sulfur, and wax

"la Caixa" Collection of  
Contemporary Art

Pedro G. Romero and  
Javier Baldeón  
*Sin título*  
Javier Baldeón  
1989  
Altered mixed media  
àngels barcelona gallery

Javier Baldeón  
1989  
Altered photograph  
àngels barcelona gallery

Pedro G. Romero and  
Federico Guzmán  
*Sin título*  
Federico Guzmán  
1989  
Ink on canvas  
Pedro G. Romero Studio

Curro González  
1989  
Altered photograph  
àngels barcelona gallery





*Sin título F-226/F-297*  
1988–90  
Photograph on iodine  
Fundación Mediterráneo  
Collection. On loan to  
MACA, Museo de Arte  
Contemporáneo de Alicante

*Sin título F-19/F-225*  
1988–90  
Photograph on iodine  
Fundación Mediterráneo  
Collection. On loan to  
MACA, Museo de Arte  
Contemporáneo de Alicante

*Puerta de las estrellas*  
1989  
Wood and lacquer  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery

*Espejo de Wittgenstein*  
1989  
Paper, ink and varnish on board  
Private collection, Madrid

*White Light, White Hate*  
1989  
Lead white on canvas  
Ignacio Tovar Collection  
Castilleja de la Cuesta, Seville

*Sin título*  
1988–90  
Photograph on iodine  
Pepe Cobo y cía.  
and MACA, Museo de Arte  
Contemporáneo de Alicante

*Sin título F-19/F-225*  
1988–90  
Photograph on iodine  
Fundación Mediterráneo  
Collection. On loan to  
MACA, Museo de Arte  
Contemporáneo de Alicante



*Sin título*  
1988–90  
Photograph on iodine  
Pepe Cobo y cía.



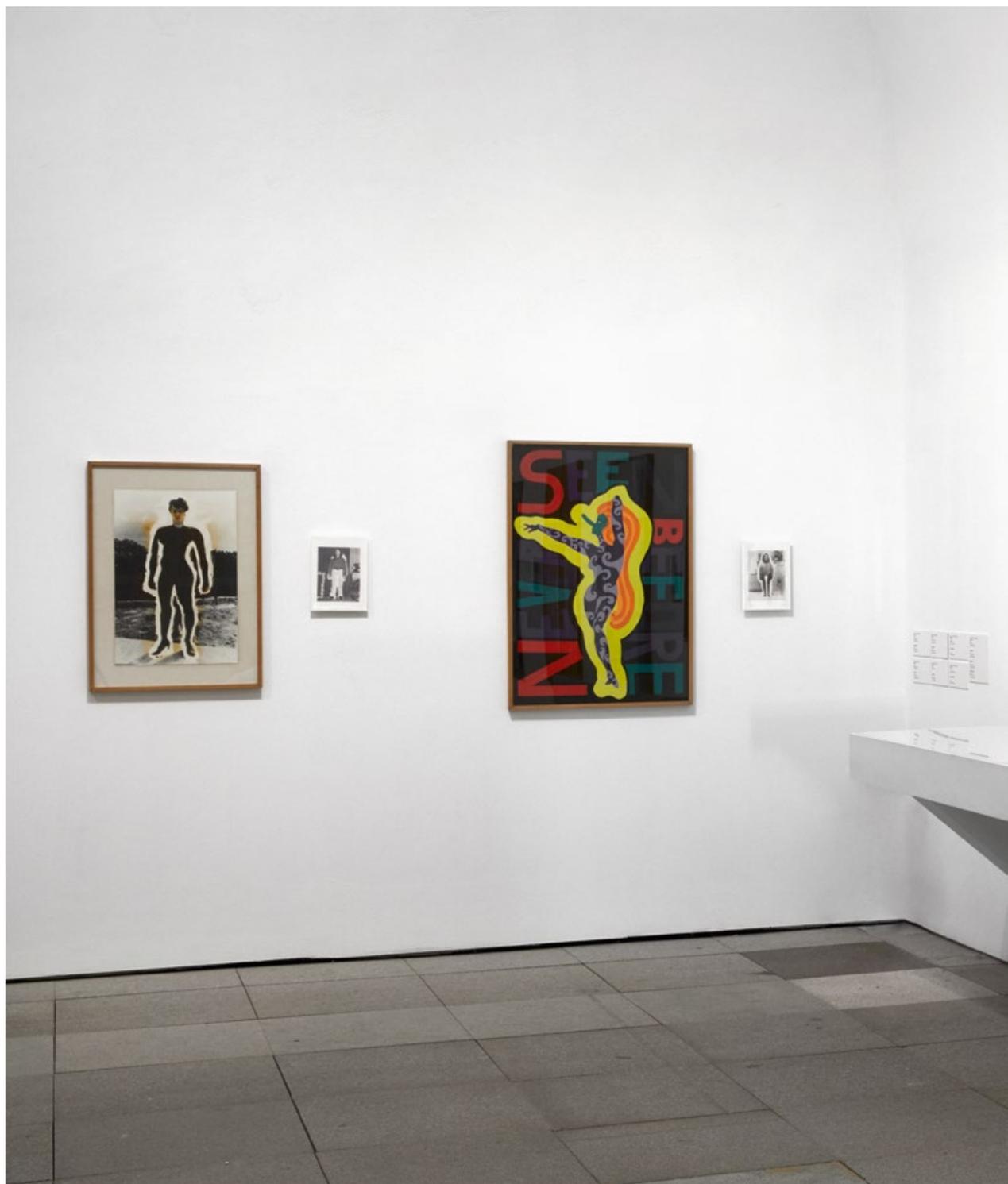
*Sin título F-19/F-225*  
1988-90  
Photograph on iodine  
Fundación Mediterráneo  
Collection. On loan to  
MACA, Museo de Arte  
Contemporáneo de Alicante

Pedro G. Romero y  
Victoria Gil  
*Sin título*  
Victoria Gil  
1989  
Altered photograph  
àngels barcelona gallery

Victoria Gil  
1989  
Altered photograph  
àngels barcelona gallery

Pedro G. Romero and  
Rafael Agredano  
*Sin título*  
Rafael Agredano  
1989  
Gouache on paper  
àngels barcelona gallery

Rafael Agredano  
1989  
Altered photograph  
àngels barcelona gallery





Pedro G. Romero and  
Pepe Espaliú  
*Sin título*  
*Pepe Espaliú*  
1989  
Altered drawing  
àngels barcelona gallery

*Pepe Espaliú*  
1989  
Altered photograph  
àngels barcelona gallery

Pedro G. Romero and  
Javier Baldeón  
*Sin título*  
*Javier Baldeón*  
1989  
Altered mixed media  
àngels barcelona gallery

*Javier Baldeón*  
1989  
Altered photograph  
àngels barcelona gallery

Pedro G. Romero and  
Federico Guzmán  
*Sin título*  
*Federico Guzmán*  
1989  
Ink on canvas  
Pedro G. Romero Studio

*Curro González*  
1989  
Altered photograph  
Pedro G. Romero Studio

*Fantasma*

1989  
 Photograph altered with  
 iodine and bleach  
 Pablo Leal Serrano

*Gates of Perception*

1989  
 B&W photograph and wood  
 On loan to Alarcón Criado  
 Gallery

*Espejo de tinta*

1980  
 Ink and lacquer on board  
 Pepe Cobo y cía.

*AURA*

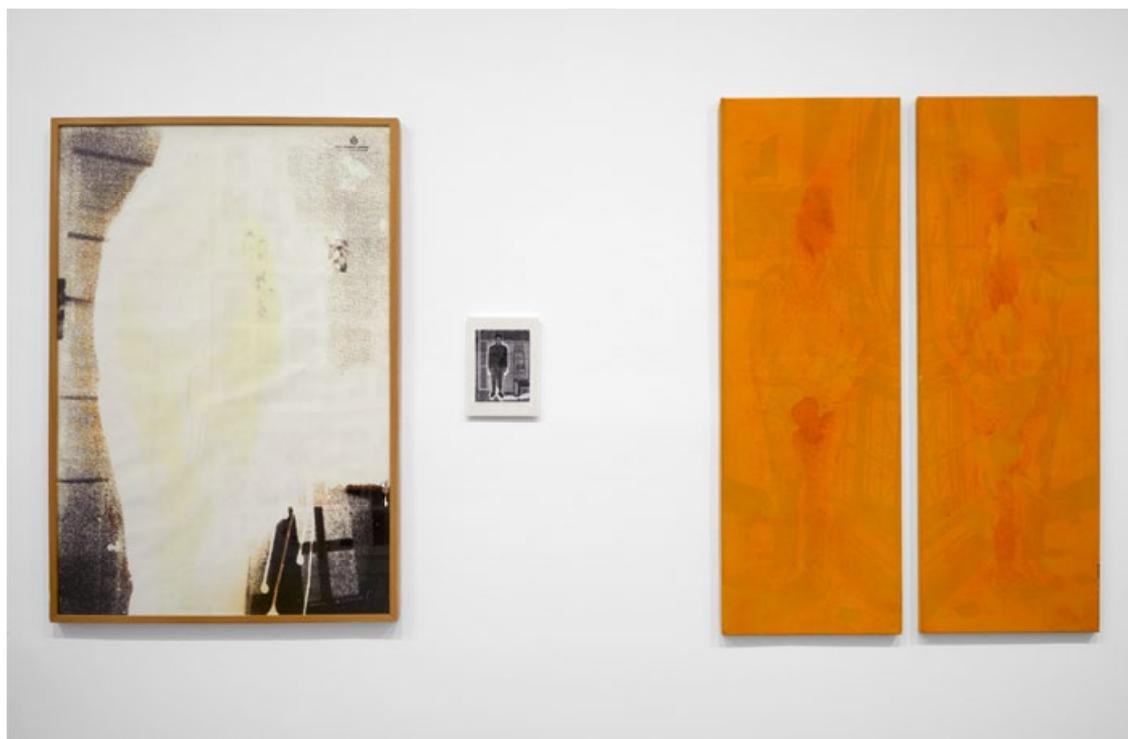
1990  
 Altered photograph  
 Fundación Mediterráneo  
 Collection. On loan to  
 MACA, Museo de Arte  
 Contemporáneo de Alicante



Pedro G. Romero and  
 Federico Guzmán  
*Sin título*  
*Federico Guzmán*  
 1989  
 Photograph with iodine  
 Pedro G. Romero Studio

*Curro González*  
 1989  
 Altered photograph

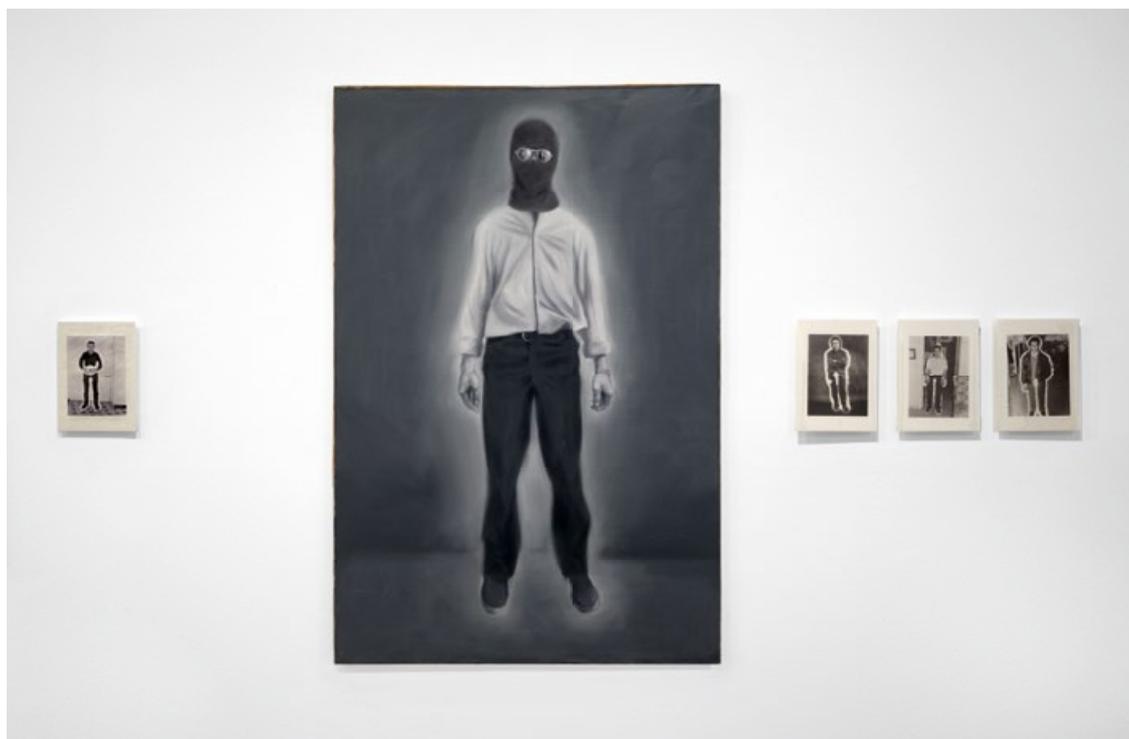
Pedro G. Romero and  
 Curro González  
*Sin título*  
*Curro González*  
 1989  
 Ink on canvas  
 Pedro G. Romero Studio





Pedro G. Romero and  
Pepe Espaliú  
*Sin título*  
*Pepe Espaliú*  
1989  
Altered drawing  
àngels barcelona gallery

*Pepe Espaliú*  
1989  
Altered photograph  
àngels barcelona gallery



*Curro González*  
1989  
Altered photograph  
Pedro G. Romero Studio

Pedro G. Romero and  
Juan del Campo  
*Sin título*  
*Juan del Campo*  
1989  
Oil on canvas  
àngels barcelona gallery

*Luis Navarro*  
*Chema Cobo*  
*Abraham Lacalle*  
1989  
Altered photographs  
àngels barcelona gallery

*Cartel n° 2*  
1988  
Concrete and gouache on  
board  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery

*Cartel n° 7, Cartel n° 11*  
1988  
Sulfur and gouache on board  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery



*Mueble C and Mueble S*  
1988  
Mixed media  
"la Caixa" Collection of  
Contemporary Art

*Cartel n° 5*

1988  
Iodine and gouache on board  
Nathalie Trafford Collection

*Cartel n° 9*

1988  
Iodine and gouache on board  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery

*Cartel n° 14*

1988  
Concrete and gouache on  
board  
Rafael Ortiz Gallery  
Collection, Seville-Madrid

*12 libros*

1988  
Mixed media  
"la Caixa" Collection of  
Contemporary Art

*Sin título (Instalación)*

1989  
Mixed media  
Meana Larrucea Collection

*Mueble I*

1988  
Mixed media and irregular  
books  
Rafael Ortiz Gallery  
Collection, Seville-Madrid

*Folletos Almacén de las ideas*

1987–88  
Printed ink on paper  
Madrid: Galería Fúcares; Barcelona:  
Fundació Caixa de Pensions  
Library and Documentation Centre of  
Museo Reina Sofia  
Pedro G. Romero Studio

*M.A.T.E.M.A.T.I.C.A.*

1986  
Video, photographs, and texts  
Video recording: Miguel Ferrer Blanco  
Photographs: Chema Castelló  
Pedro G. Romero Studio

*Cartel n° 5, Cartel n° 9*  
1988  
Iodine and gouache on board  
Nathalie Trafford Collection  
On loan to Alarcón Criado  
Gallery

*Mueble I*  
1988  
Mixed media and irregular  
books  
Rafael Ortiz Gallery  
Collection, Seville-Madrid





*12 libros*  
1988  
Mixed media  
"la Caixa" Collection of  
Contemporary Art

*Sin título*  
1989  
Mixed media  
Meana Larrucea Collection

*Fla-Co-Men*

1987

Ink, iodine, and gold leaf  
on canvas

Pedro G. Romero Studio

*Folletos Almacén de las ideas*

1987–88

Printed ink on paper

Madrid: Galería Fúcares,  
Barcelona: Fundació Caixa  
de PensionsLibrary and Documentation  
Centre of Museo Reina Sofía  
Pedro G. Romero Studio



*M.A.T.E.M.A.T.I.C.A.*  
1986

Video, photographs, and texts  
Video recording: Miguel  
Ferrer Blanco  
Photographs: Chema Castelló  
Pedro G. Romero Studio



*M.A.T.E.M.A.T.I.C.A.*  
1986  
Video, photographs, and texts  
Video recording: Miguel  
Ferrer Blanco  
Photographs: Chema Castelló  
Pedro G. Romero Studio



*Luminoso n° 5*

1989

Matte ink and bright varnish  
on board

Private collection



*Fla-Co-Men*

1987

Ink, iodine, and gold leaf on  
canvas

Pedro G. Romero Studio

Pedro G. Romero and  
Federico Guzmán  
*Esta es la torre más alta  
de todos los museos*  
1985  
Nogaline on wood  
Pedro G. Romero Studio



[...]

unsatisfied. I often think that the “success” (*éxito*) of young artists in the late 1980s, that “exit/éxito” or exit to success explored by José Luis Brea in *Before and After the Enthusiasm*<sup>3</sup> and by Mar Villaespesa in *El Sueño Imperativo* (The Imperative Dream),<sup>4</sup> seemed unsatisfactory to me. The studio-market-museum cycle that was on offer could not be the experience of art. I turned away in many ways, but among those many there were a few that continued Benjamin’s reflections on the aura, or that were based on them. As for working with others, I don’t know. Juan del Campo—the collective or whatever it was that I started with Abraham Lacalle and then with Chema Cobo and Luis Navarro—and my participation in La Situación and in Carta de Ajuste—where I already worked with you, with BNV Producciones, as I still do—had to do with understanding how productivism works—sometimes constructivist and sometimes Dadaist, as Benjamin put it—in that idea of the work of art, of the way of doing/making that we needed to redefine. Obviously my work with flamenco was in many ways a consequence of all that: Benjamin’s distance, anachronisms, work against History with a capital H. But also the punishing of the commodity, the hegemonic means of the appearance of art since the development of its way of doing at the start of the modern age (at the same time as financial capital and romantic love, incidentally). Subject matter aside, during those years I always presented my artworks as damaged, scorned, even punished goods, in an attempt to see how much of the “aura” survived all this, to continue using Benjamin’s terms. In other words, could artworks continue to look at us from that damaged state? What did happen when I lowered the standard of the formal qualities and finishes of the commodity—damaged it, undermined it, reduced its market value, the

<sup>3</sup> José Luis Brea, *Before and After the Enthusiasm*, 1972–1992, KunstRai 89, Amsterdam, May 24–28, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Mar Villaespesa, *El Sueño Imperativo*, Círculo de Bellas Artes de Madrid, January 22–March 3, 1991.

absolute operation of artwork as money—what happened then, when I punched holes in the material, is that relationships and connections appeared. This began to take place more often and in increasingly complex ways between images and also between ways of doing/making, groups, works, interests, disciplines, a whole complex nervous system that gave me a sense of working with a living being. And I guess it was a living being, right? If the thing looks at you, it has a life of its own, even a biography, vicissitudes, afflictions. There is almost a biological quality to the artwork. My hostility to artworks becoming mere biographical pretexts for the artist, a mere continuation of the artist's life story—in works such as *Auto(de fe)biografia* (Auto[-da-fe]biography)—is precisely that parasitism. An artwork is supposed to have a life of its own, which is not the same as autonomy, because, as we know, there is no absolute autonomy in our own lives either: living is always living-with. I don't think that Foucault's "artist's life" or Beuys's "everyone is an artist" has anything to do with the "lives of saints," although parody is certainly at work there. That working together, that collective voice, it all adds to the work. Authorship is important as itself, as participation. An image is exactly that, a participation, part of the sensible, one of the expressions of the sensible. When an image does not generate other images it hypertrophies and becomes an idol and then, yes, it has to be destroyed.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

Jacques Rancière argues that the loss of the real is in fact a loss of appearance. Indeed, he claims that the political artist's task does not consist of suppressing the number of images but of countering them with a different kind of selection, another way of seeing that is taken into account. Of course, his notion of appearance does not fall within the philosophical constellation of phenomenology, Situationism, Structuralism, critical sociology, and visual studies. Rather, his reflections fall within a materialist tradition in which appearing is not to be understood as a demand to "be seen" but as a capacity to disrupt accounts of power. Appearance is not opposed to the real or to the true, it is part of their makeup. It is an instant of disparity, of asymmetry, of litigation, an interval that allows another relationship. Through how the visible can be changed, through the capacity to incorporate foreign elements that cannot be categorized by concept or determination, appearance basically introduces a new form of experience. Thus Benjamin's phantasmagoria has to be considered in conjunction with notions such as figurability (Lyotard, 1979),<sup>1</sup> plasticity (Malabou, 2010),<sup>2</sup> and materiality (Althusser, 1982).<sup>3</sup> It is possible that the excess of images in our time leaves no room for the uncountable, the unrepresentable, the inapparent. This calls for a persistent effort to recover appearances, remnants, the insignificant, the archives of those who are left out of History, their minimal and intermittent gestures. You can try to eliminate appearances, but they persist and turn up in unexpected places. Between disappearance and substitution, that liminal zone that takes on consistency relationally.

<sup>1</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971); Eng.: *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Malabou, *La plasticidad en espera*, ed. and trans. Cristóbal Durán and Manuela Valdivia (Santiago de Chile: Palinodia, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Louis Althusser, "Le courant souterrain du matérialisme de la rencontre" (1982), in *Écrits philosophiques et politiques*, vol. 1 (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1994), 539–79; Eng.: "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter," in *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–1987*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2006), 163–207.

*Valentín Roma:*

It seems to me that one of the most essential questions in literature is not who we write for, but who we write with. Because in effect, the shift from teleology to accompaniment, from the ineffable archetypal reader to language as the *raison d'être* of writing, entails a whole series of adjustments, a set of commitments—not tedious, not pompous—that one acquires when one writes. I am finding literary heroics, those spiels about what spending hours and hours making up stories adds to people's lives, increasingly ridiculous and trivial. I felt very at ease—and at the same time completely uneasy—on reading an interview with Constantino Bértolo in which he said that we are much better than the books we write. He also said that, conversely, by writing, one accepts certain responsibilities as a result of asking for people's attention, of using our common heritage, language. I am not objective about the things Bértolo says and writes because I consider him my teacher. I go to him to resolve epistemological and political doubts that have to do with being a writer. I have sometimes fantasized about drafting an essay with the title "From Berger to Bértolo; from Symphonic Literature to The Internationale," in a kind of attempt to explore a kind of personal "trip" common to some writers and artists in and around my generation, who started out wanting to "sound good" and have ended up—or are working on it—trying to adapt a practice of writing or art within a complex system of things we do to pay the bills, to make friends, to find partners, to produce something that has no great value or repercussions. I say all of this because, as I write, I feel closer and closer to these contingencies. I notice that who I write with, where I enter and leave, is not the authorial genealogies of Antonio-Prometeo Moya or Margo Glantz, of my esteemed Juan Cárdenas, or of the indispensable Sharon Olds. Rather, who writes with me is a kind of chaotic pattern, a backdrop in which the wretched meets exaltation, where one feels something like a duty to tell, a duty that of course nobody demands from you, nobody is waiting for, but for some reason cannot be put off.

Between dictionaries and salaries, between synonyms and mortgage repayments: that is where

I write and who accompanies me as I write. And I hope it is clear that I am not justifying any artistic worldliness, nor am I belittling the sophistication of literature.

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo*: According to Alain Robbe-Grillet, Raymond Roussel “has the additional advantage of being located entirely in the domain of language.”<sup>1</sup> Robbe-Grillet made this statement with regard to the importance that Roussel attaches to very slight modifications in words that are similar but whose meanings are totally without connection. Through the simple displacement of a vowel, an altered letter, Roussel not only changes the meaning of a sentence but also expresses a profound change in the order, in the composition, in “what the world—and language—means.” *El almacén de la ideas* (The Storehouse of Ideas) and *r.a.r.o*—the works with which you end or begin the exhibition, depending on how you look at it—work in a similar way, as does the series *El trabajo* (Work). Do you think the importance of these works lies in the fact that in them you began working with a mechanism that, as in Roussel, is “simultaneously a reproduction-machine and a modification-machine”?

## IV

*Pedro G. Romero*: I am reminded for a moment of Silverio Lanza, who is a minor writer but very important to my work, for understanding the position from which I operate. Corpus Barga recounts his views on what we could call “the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction.”<sup>2</sup> Silverio Lanza came up with a series of arithmetical calculations to estimate the amount of experience—the aura—emitted by a reproduction of *Las meninas* compared to that emitted by the actual painting. It is a text both crazy and lucid. The way Silverio sees it, the spectator knows what they are looking at and in their consciousness works out these sums that relativize, add, and subtract what they see, be it the original painting or a copy in a magazine. Thus,

<sup>1</sup> Alain Robbe-Grillet, “Riddles and Transparencies in Raymond Roussel,” in *Snapshots and Towards a New Novel*, trans. Barbara Wright (London: Calder and Boyars, 1966), 101; originally published as “Énigmes et transparence chez

Raymond Roussel,” in *Pour un nouveau roman* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> Corpus Barga, *Los pasos contados. Una vida española a caballo en dos siglos* (Barcelona: Edhasa, 1963).

Silverio concludes, the experience is always the same. Naturally there is humor, parody, and laughter, and we work with language knowing that it is, of course, insufficient to explain the world. It is elementary to be suspicious of language—not in the sense of language as something that falsifies the world, but of language as something that could coincide with the world, point for point. Silverio is in the tradition of the French humorists, of Alphonse Allais, who later gave rise to Alfred Jarry and the wayward case of Raymond Roussel. If that is the Duchampian tradition, I certainly fall within that tradition. I discovered Silverio through Jorge Luis Borges's playfully perverse attribution of his work to an invention of Ramón Gómez de la Serna and his inclusion of it among his hundred great works of world literature. But it turned out that it was not a fiction, Silverio Lanza really exists, his work is not mere invention. It was as if a work of art had suddenly taken on those attributes of life, biography, and experience that I have been talking about. Silverio Lanza certainly worked with humor in the *Conceptismo* style of Gracián, of Goya, of Mariano José de Larra. He established his own tradition. It is curious, for instance, that Debord sees that tradition in Ramón, something that Spanish critics find very hard to do. They have made Ramón the main advocate of Silverio Lanza, a kind of *castizo*, a costumbrist. This is another of the problems of our inability to understand our own peripheral version of what the modern age was. It may not seem so, but I'm getting to the crux of your question: the use of language outside of its meaning, making openings in its own meaning, or creating secondary and tertiary meanings, multiplying its meaning. That is certainly true of Roussel, whose method from *How I Wrote Certain of My Books* I borrowed for all the works in the series *El trabajo*, which were carried out in groups, laboratories, and workshops. To continue under Benjamin's auspices, I have always been very interested in his use and suspicion of the dialectic. In fact, Benjamin is the practical precedent of Adorno's negative dialectic, which as Derrida pointed out has its roots in

marranism, and in Benjamin's theological knowledge of Jewish traditions such as that of the Sabbatians. To use dialectics and at the same time distrust it, consider it inadequate. I think it was Mary Douglas who said that the dialectic emerged simply because we have two eyes and two hands. Roussel's duplicity of language, the double in Artaud—the name of the theater group I was part of during those early years, *El traje de Artaud* (Artaud's Suit), was almost a contradiction in terms because Artaud was always associated with the naked or raw, dance and theater works in which everyone immediately got naked—all these operations interested me almost as parodies of the dialectic. And indeed, these operations do not just transform language, they also transform the world.

*TRADICIÓN* (tradition) for *TRADUCCIÓN* (translation) for *TRAICIÓN* (betrayal). I was in fact interested in that mechanical operation: you swap a word in the natural order of a sequence, *SOCIEDAD* (society) for *SUCIEDAD* (dirt), for example, and the world is transformed. We often talked about this, the fact that working with people leaves a stain, you get dirty, it was the artist's fear of leaving the ivory tower. Although all of that was not a stain and it was not exactly dirt, it was a group of affects, contact, and touch that obviously change you. The subject of mechanics, of the machine, has always interested me as a schematic way of understanding the body. I still hope that cybernetics will advance as far as to create cyborgs that match our bodies point for point—they are still to embrace the importance of imperfection and the incompleteness of data strings—and thus put an end to all the chatter about progress and technological advances. As the nineteenth-century humorists and Goya himself realized early on, the machine creates its own parodic responses. In this Duchampian sense, yes, the machine is at the very heart of my work in which there is no person author, there is, in effect, a machine author.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

For Gilles Deleuze, creation means tearing images from all the clichés, turning images against them. Creation requires a certain disposition of experience, a disposition that, in Rita Segato's words, is not utopian but topical, practical rather than bureaucratic. It requires a need to be there, to inhabit, to share knowledge, so that ways of sustaining life that were embers are slowly rekindled.

A kind of attention that follows the power produced in bastard movements. To think through the skin and remember—as Michel Serres said—that before the word, there was noise. Noise that earlier philosophies had closed their ears to. Not only do we have the possibility of language, but also of its interferences.

According to the analysis of Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe,<sup>1</sup> poetry had to become mythology in order to resist abstraction, to create its own forms of sensible consciousness. An aesthetic-political artifact does not consist of making up characters, it creates an architecture—or anarchitecture, to use Gordon Matta-Clark's term. A surface that does not erase the porosity of appearances and does not submit to the tyranny of transparency as if it were something to pass through, but learns to bear the weight of its contradiction and continues to delve deeply into its ghosts.

*Valentín Roma:*

Your comments have made me think again of *Hamletmachine* (1977),<sup>1</sup> in which the great Heiner Müller thoroughly deconstructs Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, thereby launching a fierce attack on the very structure of what we could call Western stories. Müller's text and above all its staging have been seen as a portrayal of the decadence of Europe, an updating of the indomitable dictum advocated by writers such as Antonin Artaud, Eugène Ionesco, and Samuel Beckett. However, Müller repeatedly claimed to be short-circuited by constructing stories with a beginning and an end (the classic tale) that no longer withstand the meaninglessness of reality. Thus, the machine as Hamlet ("I am the solider in the gun turret, my head is empty under the helmet, the stifled scream under the tracks. I am the typewriter. I tie the noose when the ringleaders are strung up, I pull the stool from under their feet, I break my own neck. I am my own prisoner. I feed my own data into the computers") takes its place within a whole "machinic" trend, if we can call it that, which has one foot in the realm of literature—led by William Burroughs—and the other in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard, and later in Paul Virilio, that is, in a section of French thought from the 1960s and 1970s. Returning to Müller's words above, I am interested in that almost concrete, almost video game-like image in which traditional narrative structure undergoes a sudden change when it comes up against the overflow of the present. As if the symbolic combat between a codified form of storytelling and an unstructured expression issuing from the world—between a vision of reality based on parameters and a torrent of inapprehensible messages—resulted in the sudden mechanization of the codes of the story, in a machine appearing in the space where a tale had been, where henceforth there will be chaos or nothingness.

<sup>1</sup> See Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Le mythe nazi* (La Tour-d'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 1991); Eng.: "The Nazi Myth," trans. Brian Holmes, *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 2 (Winter 1990): 291–312.

<sup>1</sup> Heiner Müller, *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage*, trans. Carl Weber (New York: PAJ Publications, 2001).

*Joaquín Vázquez Ruiz de Castroviejo:* I suggest that we now bring to a close this long back-and-forth of questions and answers, which we cannot call a conversation because we have done it in what could also be called a “mechanical” way. I formulated my questions without knowing any of your answers, and instead of your answers being followed by new questions in the usual way of a conversation, other voices have joined in, opening it up to different realms. One could say we have done what Beatriz Sarlo describes as a “*mise en abyme* in which each fold refers to another fold.” Why did you invite Andrea, Isabel, Valentín, and me to write this? Is it because you wanted this choral text to be, like Mairena’s *La Máquina de trovar*, “not just a thinking machine, but one that records vital experiences”?<sup>1</sup> Or because you still believe, as you say in *F. E. El fantasma y el esqueleto* (The Ghost and the Skeleton), that “for an artist, the principal explosive device or artifact to be disabled is his own image, his constitution as image, and his existing and subsequent links with reality”?

V

*Pedro G. Romero:* Many writers think that the character of Silverio Lanza (pseudonym of Juan Bautista Amorós) inspired certain fictional figures such as Pío Baroja’s Silvestre Paradox, and even heteronyms such as Antonio Machado’s Juan de Mairena. Incidentally, Silverio Lanza’s house in Getafe was automated. This was in the early twentieth century, and when Ramón visited him, a doorbell system activated doors and desks throughout the house. There are also his texts on anthropometry and physical education, parodically expressing those mechanical forms of technology. It is intelligent humor that the writer takes very seriously: they are proper serious games, not inconsequential little games. I have already

<sup>1</sup> Antonio Machado, *Juan de Mairena (sentencias, donaires, apuntes y recuerdos de un profesor apócrifo)* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1936).

spoken of the importance of Juan de Mairena's *Coplas mecánicas* in my work. Jorge Meneses's *La Máquina de trovar* has the capacity to assimilate the avant-garde tradition—from Mallarmé to Tristan Tzara—and the anonymous work of flamenco, a model precisely personified by Manuel Balsameda, an illiterate artist who kept the lyrics of thousands of fandangos, *soleares*, and coplas in his head, simultaneously ordering and assembling them using a complicated mnemonic system. That assimilation was decisive for my work. The meat of this text explains this clearly. In this mechanization of ways of doing/making, that is, in the course of understanding its most schematic, concise, fundamental operations, in the course of all of this, unexpected things appear, unforeseen paths are taken, new meanings emerge. And yes, I guess in other ways too, through academic knowledge, through hard work, through talent, intuition, craftsmanship, I don't know. There must be many other ways. Mairena thought that mechanical work, a true *deus ex machina*, included all these ways of doing things. But ultimately the fact is that the mechanics of the machine, if you'll excuse the repetition, is the direction, the *dérive*, that my work took. EXPERIENCE and EXPERIMENT is another of those word pairs that organized my work early on. Many people are surprised to learn that some of the religious sculptures that are taken out in Holy Week processions in Seville are automatons, more like articulated dolls than noble sculptures. So much so that, for example, the monument to Juan de Mesa—the sculptor of the Jesús del Gran Poder—in Plaza de San Lorenzo in Seville, is pure imposture, and seeks to resemble the famous block of wood in which the artist found truth. There is no such block, it is all pieces, bits assembled by a bricoleur, a veritable doll. This is what happens with the author, with the author's voice, be it myself or, as in this case, also that of my conversational partners. Local art historians' efforts to equate the religious imagery with so-called great art, with the German understanding of the great work

of art as the work of the spirit are truly pathetic. For example, one of the things that religious imagery does, as Felipe Pereda rightly shows, is to place the concept of the image—in the modern sense of the word, after mechanical reproduction—ahead of that of the sculpture. Of course, religious imagery considers its works to be living beings, they are taken out in processions, but more than that, they are treated as venerable family members all year round. Everyone knows that there is a composite of things, wood, strands of hair, garments, gold and silver, with no other alchemical value than that of being part of images. These, yes, these are alive. They look at you, and not only with their orthopedic glass eyes. La Macarena sees us, that is clear, that is what is at work in her veneration, to a much greater extent than Catholic transcendence. For example, Michael Taussig, also in the tradition of Walter Benjamin, tries to recover all that magical knowledge and pull it down to mere materialistic experience. In many ways, what I mean is that these operations of magic and mechanization—the magical realm is also a mechanical form of knowledge, as anthropologists know—in this automation, in these mechanisms, in their cracks, their gaps, their randomness, their encounters, and their flaws, in all of this, something escapes, some meaning, other voices, scraps, flotsam. Experience is only in experiment.

*Andrea Soto Calderón:*

To begin from further back.

With Pedro, writing becomes testing speech.

“You will look at what you see. But you will look at it absolutely. You will try to look at it until your sight fails, until it makes itself blind, and even through this blindness you must try again to look. Until the end.”<sup>1</sup>

Yes, experience is only in experiment, only in the in-between, in community.

*Valentín Roma:*

One of the funniest and also most accurate definitions of the book’s status as an artifact is the advice that Osvaldo Lamborghini used to give to budding novelists and poets: “Publish first, then write.”<sup>1</sup> It seems to me a wonderful statement of defense for questions regarding the dilemmas of authorship. In the three volumes of *The Diaries of Emilio Renzi* (2015–17),<sup>2</sup> Ricardo Piglia presents a fabulous structure, a true monument to understanding the construction of the literary question of the author/character. Which is, let’s face it, the moment when the writer lies on the couch of his work and finally dialogues directly with his own vanity and the bitter pill of what happens beyond it.

It is increasingly difficult to sustain the art-life equivalence without embarrassing the spectator or oneself. Every detail invented is preceded by the question of whether there is in fact any verisimilitude, and seconded by the childish and dishonest question: “Can you imagine?”

As for what absolves us, I remind you of this passage from a poem by Antonio Gamoneda entitled “Exentos I” (Exempt I).<sup>3</sup> It goes like this: “To be desperate, / to be chemically desperate, / is neither fate nor truth. / It is horrible and simple / and more than death. Mother: / give me your hands, wash / my heart, do something.”

<sup>1</sup> Marguerite Duras, “The Atlantic Man,” in *Two by Duras*, trans. Alberto Manguel (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1993), 32; originally published as *L’Homme atlantique* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1982).

<sup>1</sup> Osvaldo Lamborghini, “El cantón de Uri,” en *Poemas 1969–1985* (Buenos Aires: Mondadori, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Ricardo Piglia, *Los diarios de Emilio Renzi* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2015–17); Eng.: *The Diaries of Emilio Renzi*, trans. Robert Croll (Brooklyn, NY: Restless Books, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Antonio Gamoneda, *Cecilia y otros poemas* (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica de España, 2007).



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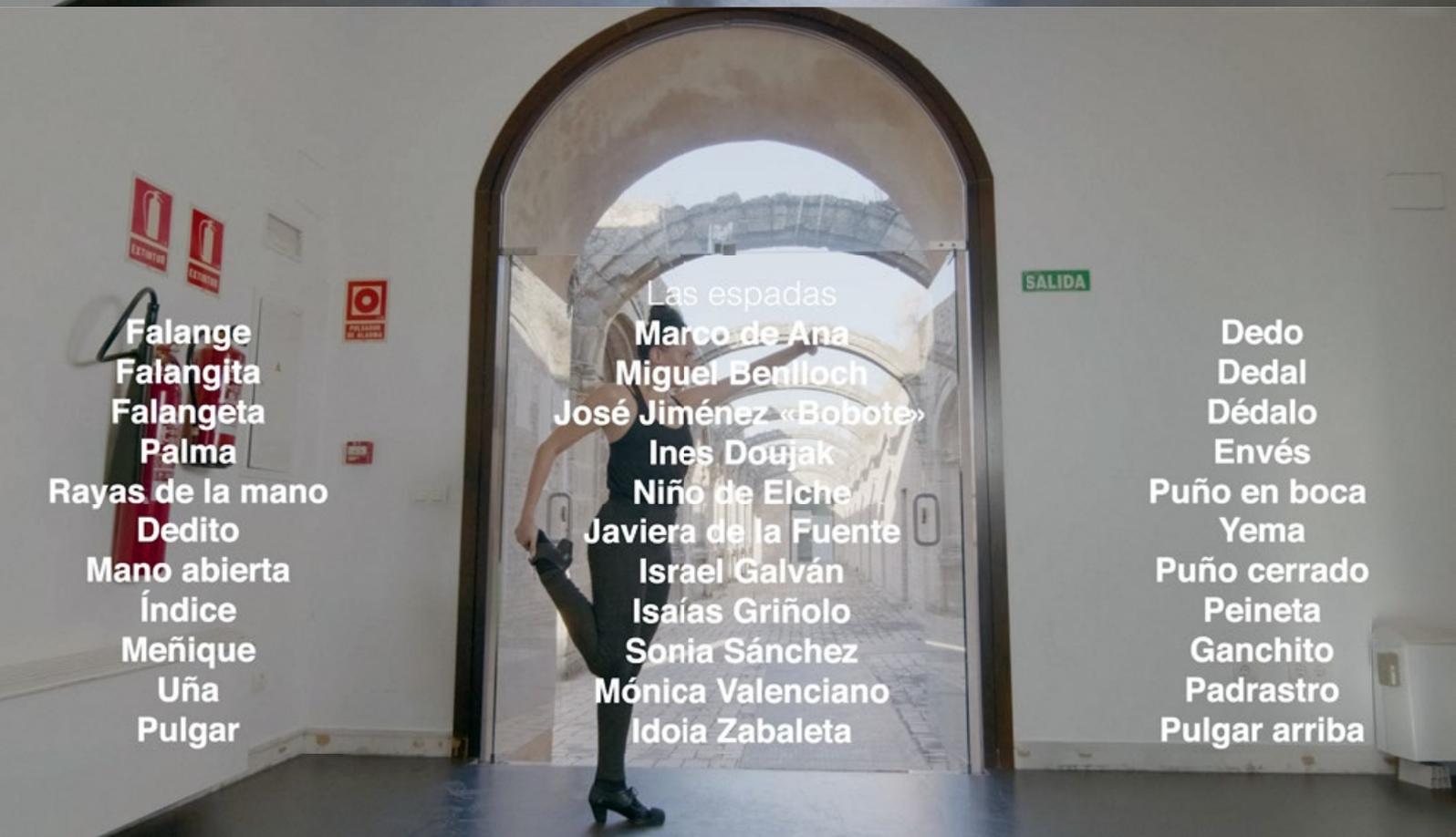
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**Resurrección**  
El muerto vivo  
Los ángeles  
El cielo mismo  
Celeste

Restauración  
**Teresa Díaz Fernández**  
Patricia Montesinos Palomares  
Ana Iruretagoyena  
Juan Sánchez  
Begoña Juárez Marcos

**Enterramiento**  
Zombies  
Fantasmas  
Purgatorio son  
Nada



**Mensajero**

Realización y edición  
**Joaquín Aneri**

**Comunica**



**Las rayas**

Diseño gráfico  
**Filiep Tacq**

**Las flechas**

**Cambia**

Subdirectora artística  
**Mabel Tapia**

**Sitúa**

**Baré**  
**Blanca**  
**Cala**  
**Cangrejo**  
**Perra chica**  
**Perra Gorda**  
**Cuartos**  
**Dos reales**  
**Duro**  
**Dinero**  
**Gamba**  
**Guita**  
**Legaña**  
**Lenteja**

Vigilantes del museo  
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**M<sup>a</sup> Teresa Acosta Visida**  
**Gemma Alcántara Aldomar**  
**M<sup>a</sup> Soledad Aparicio Ortega**  
**Azucena Arellano Sacristán**  
**Cristina Areste Martín**  
**M<sup>a</sup> de las Mercedes Arrojo Parra**  
**Julián M. Baena Calderón**  
**Susana Barnes Pérez**  
**Montserrat Briceño Sánchez**  
**Marta Cañero Rodríguez**  
**Óscar Luis Cañero Rodríguez**  
**Gema Carrasco Sáez**  
**Dolores Conde Durán**

**Vellón**  
**Dolar**  
**Dolor**  
**Rubia**  
**Talego**  
**Valor**  
**X**  
**Yermo**  
**Ziber**  
**WWW**  
**Wandlung**  
**Trabajo vivo**  
**Trabajo abstracto**  
**Propiedad personal**

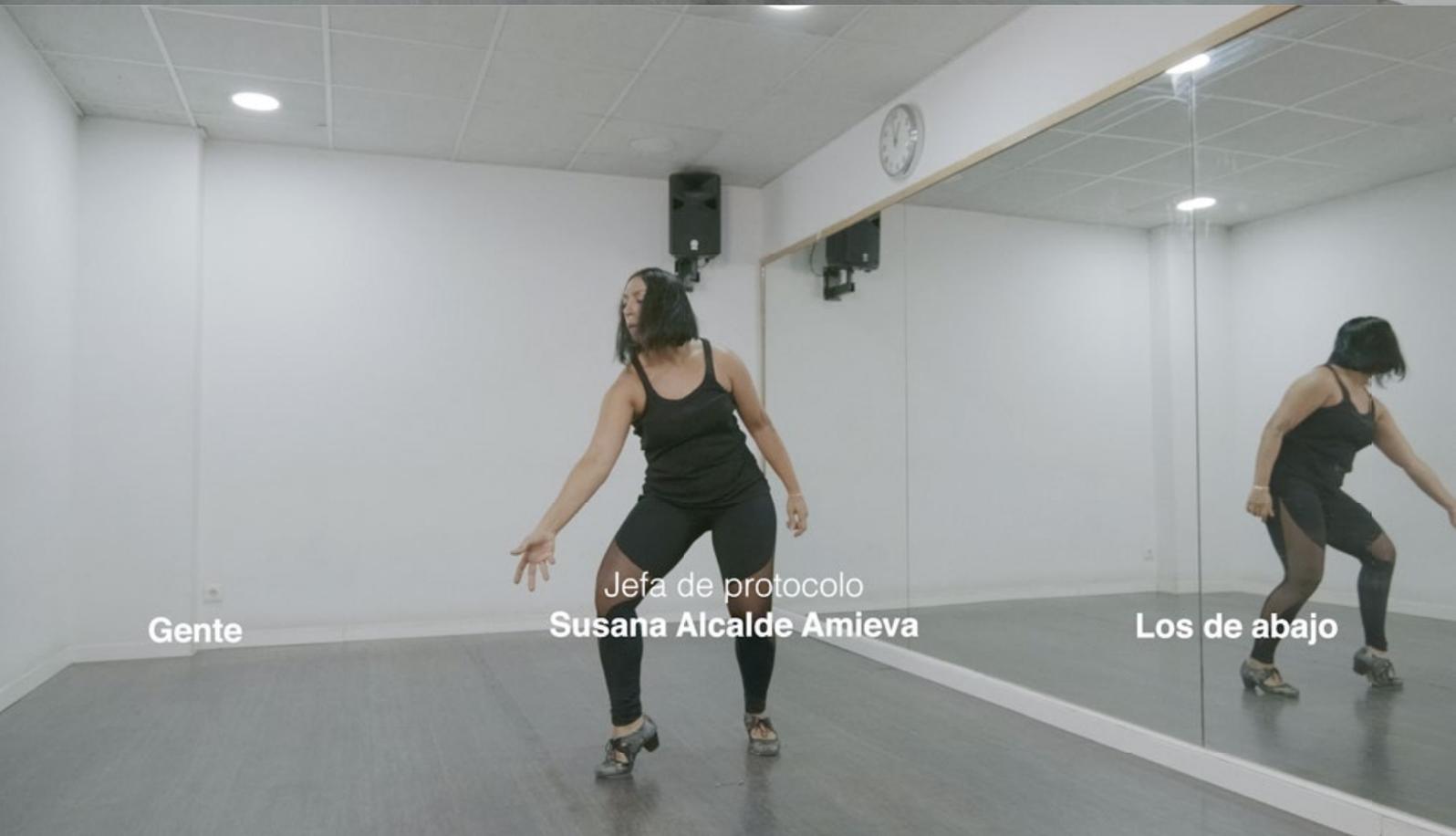


**Fla Co Men**

Baile

**Fuensanta, «La Moneta»**

**Lo flamenco**



**Gente**

Jefa de protocolo

**Susana Alcalde Amieva**

**Los de abajo**

**Atopía**

Jefa del área económica  
**Alba Pérez Cadenas**

**Utopía**

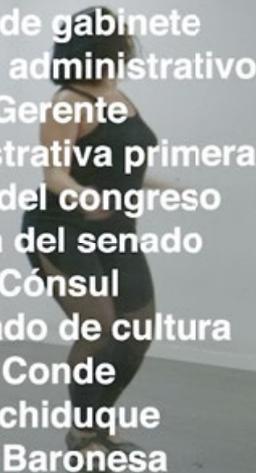


**Taquilleros**

**Amparo Castaño García-Porrero**  
**M<sup>a</sup> Teresa Ceva Yebrá**  
**M<sup>a</sup> Mercedes Cordovilla Molero**  
**M<sup>a</sup> Dolores Esteban Ramírez**  
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**Isabel Mora Mejías**  
**Thierry Pierre Robert Mulenders**  
**Dolores Pérez Anos**  
**Sabina Rodríguez Lopez**  
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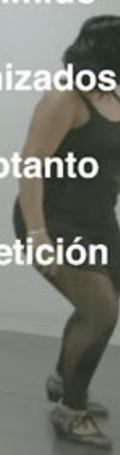
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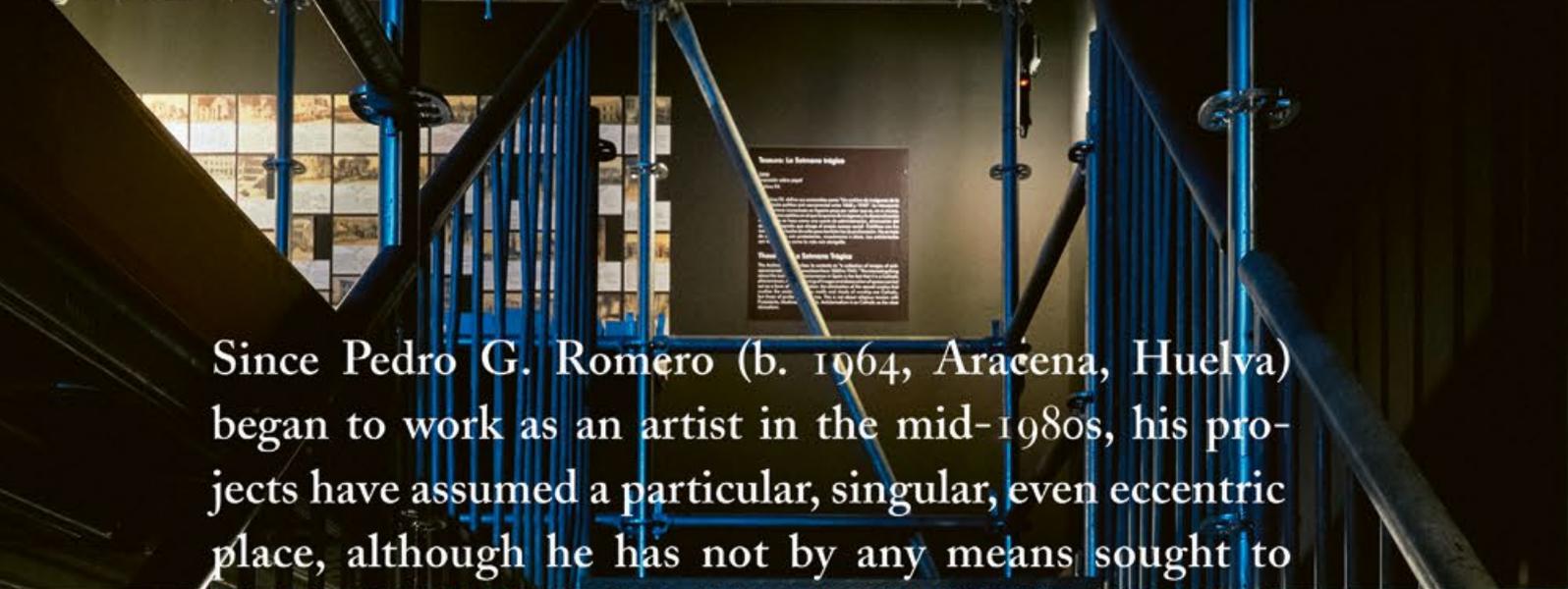
**Diferencia**

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**Repetición**

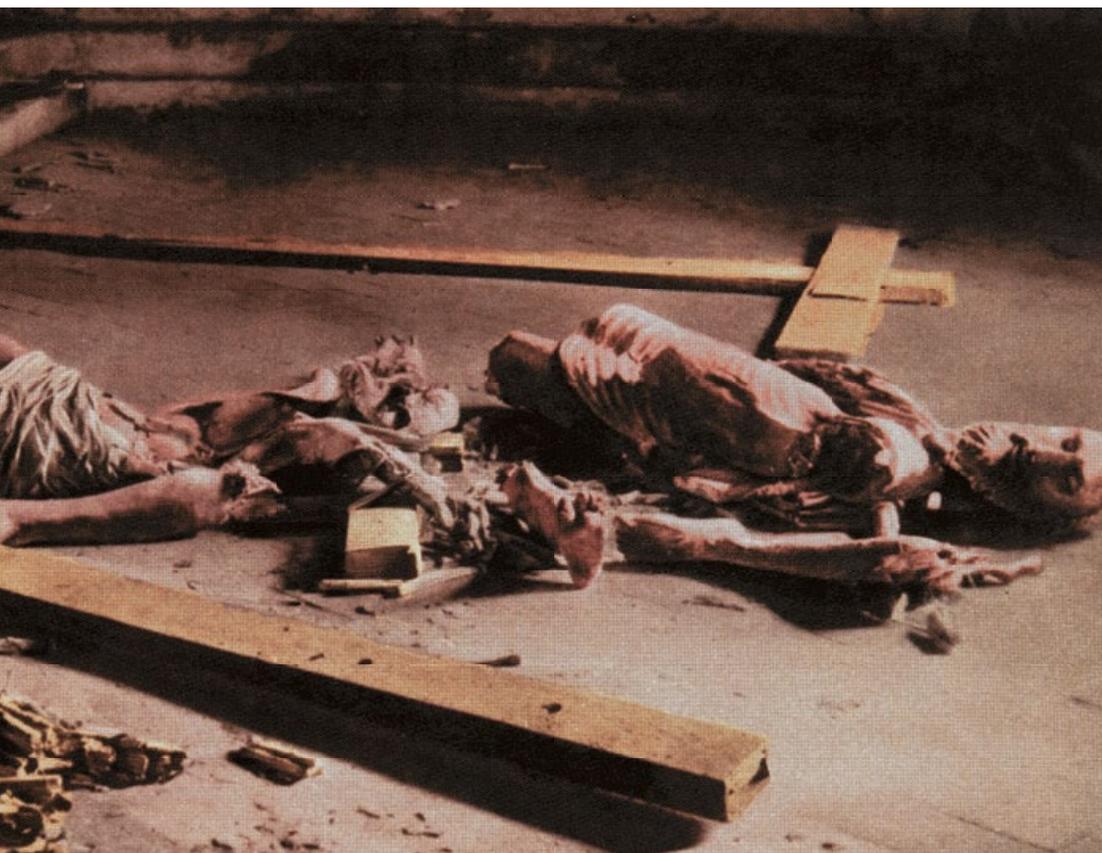




Since Pedro G. Romero (b. 1964, Aracena, Huelva) began to work as an artist in the mid-1980s, his projects have assumed a particular, singular, even eccentric place, although he has not by any means sought to stand alone or follow an individual path. His modus operandi—beyond simple labels such as collective, cooperative, and sociable—has consisted of contriving indices, dispositives, apparatus, in short, machines associated with the field of art.



*fig. 10*



*fig. 8*

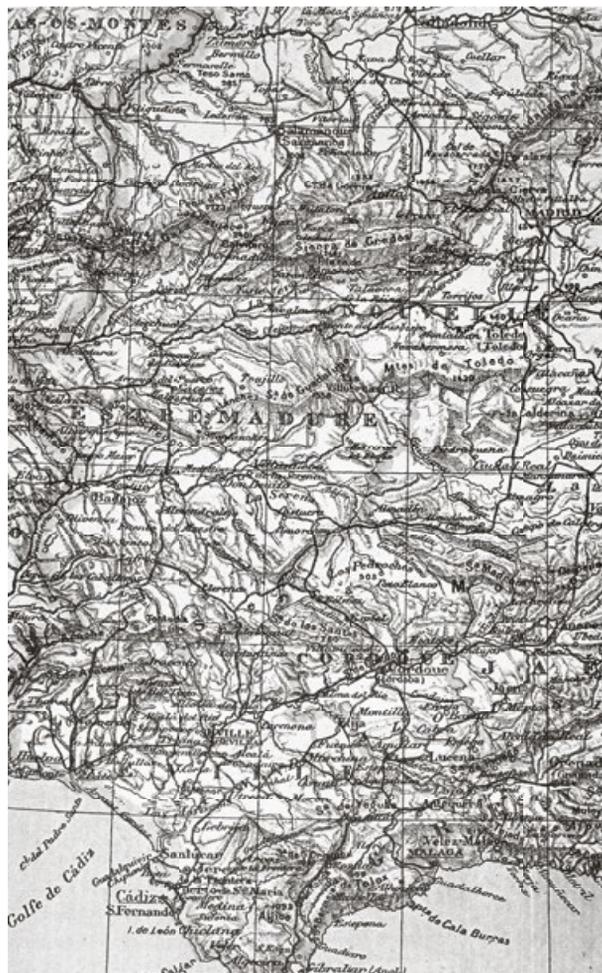


fig. 1

*Georges Didi-Huberman*

## POLITICS OF WANDERING

THE WORK AND THOUGHT of Pedro G. Romero arises from what we might call a politics of wandering. It arises from the close connection with “Situationism,” among other things. And it can be seen in the map of Andalusia near the opening of the essay for *La noche española / The Spanish Night* (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> This map did not show how a native of Seville might assert his or her *territorial* identity: “Here is my space, my home, my domain.” Quite the opposite: coming from a foreigner, the Frenchman Guy Debord, it showed that sort of dis-identification particular to any journey, to any *wandering* when it is properly understood: “This is the open space of my *dérive* (my drifting), my not-home, my possibility of extravagance.” We are touching here on a conscious *afición* of one’s own foreignness, or strangeness, yet open to a deeper understanding of *flamenco* intensity itself: as a *poetics of wandering*. Pedro G. Romero therefore offered an overview of his own poetics of flamenco—which he acquired from a ready source and developed “in the home of that source” as such, in Seville... well, no, it was not only, not exactly, “in the home of that source”—by *taking the detour* that situationists had already taken in Spain: and that is why he evokes the links between Asger Jorn and the Spanish Republic in 1938, the *afición* of Constant who was a guitarist and who often painted

<sup>1</sup> Pedro G. Romero, “El sol cuando es de noche,” in *La noche española. Flamenco, vanguardia y cultura popular 1865–1936*, exh. cat. Museo Nacional de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid: MNCARS, 2008), 49;

essay reprinted, without illustration, in *El ojo partido. Flamenco, cultura de masas y vanguardias* (Seville: Athenaica Ediciones Universitarias, 2016).



fig. 2

themes inspired by the *Fiesta gitana* (fig. 2);<sup>2</sup> or the literary passions of Guy Debord for Federico García Lorca or for the *coplas flamencas* in general.<sup>3</sup>

If there is a *poetics of wandering* inherent in the work of an intellectual and artist from Seville like Pedro G. Romero (whom I have never heard speak any other language than his very intensely Andalusian Spanish, as though it were his perpetually witty statement of provincial difference), then he owes it no doubt to the theory of the *dérive*. In Guy Debord's famous text from 1956, the ideas of "journey" and "stroll" were beaten back by a true *politics of wandering*, according to which, he said, "the difficulties of the *dérive* are [indeed] those of freedom."<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Situationist International, from 1958 to 1969, had shown a particular interest in Spain (less developed than for Vietnam, for example), mainly because this country lived under the yoke of a fascist dictatorship and because the memories of the civil war—compared to the struggle of the Berlin

<sup>2</sup> See Maurice Fréchuret and Thierry Davila, eds., *Constant: une rétrospective*, exh. cat. Musée Picasso, Antibes (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2001), 101–13 and 127–30.

<sup>3</sup> Romero, "El sol cuando es de noche," 49–54; reprinted in *El ojo partido*, 13–21.

<sup>4</sup> Guy Debord, "Théorie de la *dérive*" (1956), in *Œuvres*, ed. Jean-Louis Rancçon (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 257.

pagne comme ailleurs, l'Université Critique a fait son temps de jongleries relatives et de contorsions contingentes. Déjà les éléments radicaux se sont regroupés autour du mot d'ordre « Fin de l'Université », en joignant tout naturellement l'allumette à la parole. Tout comme le moindre comité d'action français, ils ont su définir l'alternative fondamentale : « Université-bidon qui fournit des alibis à tous ceux qui poursuivent d'autres études, ou solution définitive au « problème de l'Université » anticipant sur la solution définitive aux problèmes de classes. A Madrid, le groupe des *Acratas* a su mieux que tout autre, tout en rompant avec l'illusion d'un syndicalisme révolutionnaire, exprimer des positions radicales et leur donner une réalité scandaleuse. Constitué en octobre 1967, ce groupe n'est pas sans analogies, qui en disent long sur l'époque que nous vivons, avec celui des Enragés de Nanterre : même terrain, même programme, mêmes formes d'action. L'initiative de la violence qui appartenait trop souvent à la police, est devenue sous leur influence le fait quasi quotidien des « étudiants ». En Espagne, toute assemblée finit littéralement par des chansons et une émeute. Les *Acratas*, qui traduisaient et diffusaient des textes de l'I.S., sont à l'origine des malheurs ibériques de J.-J. Servan-Schreiber, crève-vite-salope, qu'ils ont chassé sans ménagements de la Faculté de Droit où il avait la

prétention de vouloir parler, et l'illusion de trouver un public qui se contente de rire. L'emploi critique de la violence a évité aux *Acratas* la récupération inhérente au terrorisme traditionnel. Si la police, les automobiles, le matériel scolaire et les vitrines ont servi à vérifier leur critique de l'idéologie, de la hiérarchie, de la marchandise, c'est en précipitant la croix d'une classe, qu'ils avaient envahi, sur les flics, qu'ils ont su le mieux défier l'histoire figée du franquisme. Par ce geste ils renouaient avec la grande tradition révolutionnaire qui n'a jamais vu d'autre préliminaire à l'instauration du pouvoir absolu des Conseils Ouvriers dont, bien sûr, les *Acratas* se réclamaient.

Si les *Acratas* ont disparu en juin 1968, ils ont laissé le vivifiant souvenir d'un groupe aussi proche de Marx que de Durruti et aussi loin de Lénine que de Proudhon. Ne voit-on pas jusqu'aux quatre bureaucrates de la F.U.R. risquer la peine capitale pour avoir voulu brûler l'Université et, faute de mieux, incendié le meilleur couvent de Madrid où deux bonnes sœurs auraient péri ? A Barcelone, et que Grappin-la-Matraque en apprécie mieux notre modération, les étudiants qui brûlaient une porte de la faculté ont arrosé d'essence le doyen qui tentait d'intervenir. La police l'a éteint de justesse. Le 20 janvier, c'est le recteur de la même Université qui échappait de peu à la défenestration. Le processus de ferme-



« Y EL CRISTO EN LA MIERDA »

Crucifix défenestré par les «Acratas» à l'Université de Madrid (janvier 1968).



Spartacists—called for a rebuilding of insurrectional forces drawing their memory from the prestigious history of Andalusian anarchism.<sup>5</sup> In a text entitled “Notes sur l’Espagne,” which appeared in the twelfth edition of the journal, there appeared a photograph entitled “Y el Cristo en la mierda” (And Christ in Shit), which showed a wooden crucifix thrown out of a window by Acratas—the anarchists—at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid in January 1968, not far from images showing the Spartacist barricades in 1919 or the streets of “unpaved Paris” in May 1968 (fig. 3).<sup>6</sup> I can easily imagine how Pedro G. Romero became interested in such a document of anti-Catholic vandalism, since he knew all about the *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) of Seville (he was an extreme iconophile) and of the *Setmana tràgica* (Tragic Week) of Barcelona (and an extreme iconoclast<sup>7</sup>) (fig. 4).

In July 1964, Guy Debord had written a tract—in Spanish and in French—following his proven technique of diverting erotic photographs, while all of this circulated clandestinely in Franco’s Spain under the title *España en el corazón*. Here one read that “it is not about changing master or employer [but] changing the employment of life.”<sup>8</sup> Then, in 1979, Debord published his translation, with Alice Debord, of an anarchist text from 1937, before writing a political call to the Spanish “libertarians,” accompanied with “songs” composed ad hoc for the liberation of the anarchists imprisoned in Segovia.<sup>9</sup>

In his extensive biography of Guy Debord, Jean-Marie Apostolidès devoted two chapters to the Situationist thinker’s links with Spain.<sup>10</sup> There was the publication in French, for Éditions Champ libre, of the *History of the War in the*

<sup>5</sup> *Internationale situationniste. Édition augmentée* (1958–69) (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 247, 400, 39–44, 653–54, etc.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 595, 610, and 654.

<sup>7</sup> Pedro G. Romero, *Los comienzos del espectáculo en Sevilla* (Seville: RARO, 1999); P. G. Romero, ed., *Sacer. Fugas sobre lo sagrado y la vanguardia en Sevilla* (Seville: UNIA-Arte y Pensamiento, 2004); P. G. Romero, *La Setmana Tràgica* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya-Departament de Cultura, 2002); P. G. Romero, *En el ojo de la batalla. Estudios sobre iconoclastia e iconodulia, historia del arte y vanguardia moderna,*

*guerra y economía, estética y política, sociología sagrada y antropología materialista* (Valencia: Universitat de València, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Guy Debord, “L’Espagne au cœur” (1964), in *Œuvres*, 676.

<sup>9</sup> Guy Debord, trans., “Protestation devant les libertaires du présent et du futur sur les capitulations de 1937” (1979), in *Œuvres*, 1477–90; G. Debord, “Aux libertaires” (1980), in *Œuvres*, 1511–20; G. Debord, “Chansons – Canciones” (1980), in *Œuvres*, 1521–32.

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Debord, le naufrageur* (Paris: Flammarion, 2015), 404–40.

*Peninsula* by General Napier;<sup>11</sup> there was the careful reading of *The Spanish Revolution* by Burnett Bolloten, from which Debord took and translated the aforementioned anarchist text from 1937;<sup>12</sup> there was his keen interest in figures like Buenaventura Durruti, George Orwell, but also Jean de la Croix, Quevedo, Cervantes, Baltasar Gracián, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, and Antonio Machado; there were his poetic translations of Jorge Manrique and of Federico García Lorca,<sup>13</sup> translations regarding which Debord intended to situate himself as a *wanderer* in the Spanish language and in Spain itself: “The translator, who never considered it worthwhile to frequent the universities, is in no way a specialist of Spanish culture. Only a few circumstances in his wandering life, and in some of his occupations that were perhaps less valued socially, have brought the translator to know the basics of one or two foreign languages.... When one has had the joy of knowing the real Spain, through one or other of the admirable figures it has shown in the history of this century, and before that, one must also have appreciated its language and its poetry.”<sup>14</sup>

It is understandable, then, in this poetic and political context, that Debord became an *aficionado* of deep song (*cantejondo*), if not in a directly and lastingly festive manner, at least from his familiarity with poetry, and with the *coplas*. His translation of García Lorca’s “La casada infiel” (The Unfaithful Wife) gave the following rendition: “Tel que je suis, je dois vivre: / Comme un Gitan authentique”<sup>15</sup> (As I am, I must live: / Like a real Gypsy). His great admiration is well known for the recompilations of *coplasflamencas*, translated by Guy Lévis Mano, between 1949 and 1964, entitled *Coplas, poèmes de l’amour andalou*.<sup>16</sup> Love was also

11. William Francis Patrick Napier, *Histoire de la guerre de la Péninsule, 1807-1814* (1828), trans. Mathieu Dumas (Paris: Éditions Champ libre, 1983).

12. Burnett Bolloten, translated into French as *La Révolution espagnole. La gauche et la lutte pour le pouvoir* (1961), trans. Élisabeth Scheidel-Buchet (Paris: Ruedo Iberico, 1977); the definitive edition of this book is *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

13. Jorge Manrique, *Stances sur la mort de son père* (1477-78), trans. Guy Debord (Paris: Éditions

Champ libre, 1980); reprinted in *Œuvres*, 1491-1507; Federico García Lorca, *Trois arbres ils ont abattus. Suivi de: Romancero gitan*, trans. Alice Becker-Ho and Guy Debord (Bordeaux: William Blake & Co., 2004), 40-43; reprinted in *Œuvres*, 1654-55.

14. Guy Debord, “Note” (1980), in *Œuvres*, 1507.

15. Guy Debord, trans., “La mariée infidèle,” in *Œuvres*, 1655.

16. *Coplas, poèmes de l’amour andalou* (1949-64), trans. Guy Lévis Mano (Paris: Éditions Allia, 1993).

an issue in this *afición* itself: Debord's love for the Andalusian Antónia Lopez-Pintor.<sup>17</sup> Having died prematurely at the end of 1988, she would become, in *Panégyrique* (*Panegyric*) in 1989, a typical figure of the romantic "passerby": "The young Musset drew attention to himself long ago for his thoughtless question: 'In Barcelona, did you see / an Andalusian with sun-bronzed breast?' Well, yes! I've had to say ever since 1980. I had my share—and perhaps a very large share—in the extravagances of Spain. But it was in another country that that irremediable princess, with her wild beauty and that voice, appeared. 'Mira como vengo yo,' went the rather accurate words of the song she sang. That day, we listened no more. I loved that Andalusian for a long time. How long? 'A time commensurate with our vain and paltry span,' as Pascal says."<sup>18</sup>

This Andalusian passion led Debord, in 1982, to plan a film project entitled "De l'Espagne," of which only an outline remains, written for the contract signed with the cinematographic production company of his friend Gérard Lebovici. There, Debord claimed, somewhat pretentiously, it concerned a "film that would account for, completely and definitively, the spirit of modern Spain itself, from the fifteenth century to today. While avoiding any *espagnolisme* at all, what should be translated to the screen is, not what foreigners (Europeans, Americans, Japanese, etc.) might think regarding this subject, nor what the Spanish might think, but what Spain really *is*.... For many evident historical and cultural reasons, it is now agreed that the film should be centered on Andalusia."<sup>19</sup>

The same goes, however, for both the politics of wandering and politics alone. No one can take a position that is highly solitary and, at the same time, certain it is the only one that is right; and this goes for "foreigners" as much as it does for the "Spanish." While this position is remarkable for what it *demand*s, it is destined to be sterile with regard to what it *states*—something I like to call, regarding Debord himself, a form of "thinking like vinegar" (a caustic substance that is nonetheless unsuitable for good old revolutionary drunkenness) and a thinking of the Hegelian "beautiful soul."<sup>20</sup> It is not surprising, from this

<sup>17</sup> See Apostolidès, *Debord, le naufrageur*, 416–23.

<sup>18</sup> Guy Debord, *Panégyrique*, vol. 1 (1989), in *Œuvres*, 1674; Eng.: *Panegyric*, vol. 1, trans. James Brook (London: Verso, 2004), 41.

<sup>19</sup> Guy Debord, "De l'Espagne" (1982), in *Œuvres*, 1864–65.

<sup>20</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *Désirer désobéir*, vol. 1 of *Ce qui nous soulève* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2019), 121–35.

perspective, that Debord's address to the Spanish anarchists<sup>21</sup> resulted in a misunderstanding and a failure: "I believe that the action undertaken in the last two years [in Spain] has essentially failed," wrote Debord in 1982, without explaining whether he was blaming the responsibility for this failure on others, or on himself.<sup>22</sup>

\*

A demand—the desire formulated on the level of a thinking that engages everyone—leads us to movement. An assertion, when it begins to listen only to itself, brings us, on the contrary, to a standstill. We must be able to hear the wandering *demands* from others and ourselves—and be wary of *assertions* that are peremptory, immobile on the promontory of their own certainty. It seems to me that the *politics of wandering* adopted by Pedro G. Romero—who was not a political strategist in the strict sense of the term—is up to this dual task: it recognizes the political ambivalence or ambiguities of the flamenco *afición* while noting the desire inherent in the "gypsyism" of Guy Debord or Giorgio Agamben, of Alice Becker-Ho or Darcy Lange (Lange being exemplary for going back and forth between John Cage and Dan Graham on the one hand, and Diego del Gaster and the *cante gitano* of Morón de la Frontera on the other).<sup>23</sup>

Pedro G. Romero placed the question of Gypsies—while it was an extremely complex question, he preferred to say "lo gitano"—at the heart of the matter, at the heart of his "politics of wandering." He did this, however, according to a historiographic awareness situated well outside or beyond the rigid, unilateral frameworks of the old *quarrel of origins* about whether "authentic" flamenco was (or even *is*, for all time) "primarily Gypsy" or "primarily Andalusian."<sup>24</sup> No one is more "authentic" with regard to art than anyone else. Authenticity is an ontological rather than an aesthetic categorization: Antonio Chacón, the

<sup>21</sup>. Debord, "Aux libertaires," 1511–20.

<sup>22</sup>. Cited by Apostolidès, *Debord, le naufrageur*, 414.

<sup>23</sup>. Romero, "El sol cuando es de noche," 54–59 and 74–95; reprinted in *El ojo partido*, 22–28 and 49–63. Pedro G. Romero, "Antípodas," in *La noche española*, 48–89; reprinted in *El ojo partido*, 225–43.

<sup>24</sup>. See, for the gypsist viewpoint, Ricardo Molina and Antonio Mairena, *Mundo y formas*

*del cante flamenco* (Madrid: Revista de Occident, 1963; repr. Seville: Ediciones Giralda, 2004). Bernard Leblon, *Gitans et flamenco. L'émergence de l'art flamenco en Andalousie* (Toulouse: Centre régional de Documentation pédagogique de Midi-Pyrénées; Paris: Centre de Recherches tsiganes, 1994; rev. ed. 2001). Pedro Peña Fernández, *Los gitanos flamencos* (Córdoba: Almuzara, 2013).

*payo* de Jerez de la Frontera, was neither more nor less “authentic” than Manuel Torre the *gitano* from the same town. It was both of them, together, in their dialogues or their musical back and forths so to speak, who in fact—dialectically—“made the history” of the flamenco of their time. It is also for this reason that the fraternity between Paco de Lucía, the *payo* of Camarón de la Isla the *gitano*, gained, for the history of contemporary flamenco, such an exemplary status.

The Gypsies are part of what Hannah Arendt called the *pariah peoples*. In the crucial question that she asked in 1959—what, then, could a possible, thinkable humanity be when “dark times” reign?—she opened a few important doors to understanding what the status of pariahs did to different groups of people (pariahs themselves, or the privileged, the property owners, who did not fear being displaced). We must not forget the *idas y vueltas* between the two, because they contain the principle of fundamental ethical and political decisions. What seems characteristic—or even vitally necessary here—among these pariah peoples, writes Arendt, is their sense of *fraternity*. It has to do with a sentiment that is much less appropriate for “property owners”: the latter only reach this feeling in general through *compassion*. Thus, “the warmth of pariah peoples cannot rightfully extend to those whose different position in the world imposes on them a responsibility for the world and does not allow them to share the cheerful unconcern of the pariah. But it is true that in ‘dark times’ the warmth which is the pariah’s substitute for light exerts a great fascination upon all those who are so ashamed of the world as it is that they would like to take refuge in invisibility.”<sup>25</sup>

A politics of wandering appears—among those subjected less to the existential condition than to the choice of a spiritual condition—when the experience undergone by pariah peoples or wandering peoples arouses shame, anger, and critique. It is the shame of Kafka, the anger of Baudelaire. It is the critique by Walter Benjamin who, regarding Baudelaire, noted the ignominy of racist hygienists in the nineteenth century like Honoré-Antoine Frégier, who placed the category of “wanderers” between those of fraudsters and streetwalkers, in a work that was highly praised at the time, entitled *Des classes dangereuses de la*

<sup>25</sup> Hannah Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing,” in *Men in Dark Times*, trans. Clara Winston and Richard

Winston (New York and London: Harvest, Harcourt Brace, 1993), 16.

*population dans les grandes villes et des moyens de les rendre meilleures* (Regarding the Dangerous Classes Among the People in the Big Cities and Ways to Better Them).<sup>26</sup> It is at the heart of such *pariah classes* that some remarkable linguistic and musical innovations were employed as responses to general ostracizing by the surrounding society.

The most famous of these inventions, studied by Debord's partner Alice Becker-Ho in her book *Les Princes du jargon*, is the slang or "secret language" used within the "uprooted" world of the "dangerous classes."<sup>27</sup> Here she wished to show that many utterances in European slang had a gypsy etymology, which was more *romani* than Latin (the Italians themselves refer to slang with the expression "linguaggio zingaresco").<sup>28</sup> The politics of wandering, among the Gypsies, begins then with a linguistic wandering that, in view of its vast inventiveness, should perhaps be named a *poetic wandering*, full of *survivals* and *migrations*. It can be seen in the "gypsyism" of the Spanish language studied, among others, by Carlos Calvería, and of course in the *caló* lexicon inherent in the vocabulary of flamenco song.<sup>29</sup>

Yet, what Daniel Heller-Roazen called in his wonderful book "the art of robbers and poets" is not limited to the invention of "dark tongues" alone.<sup>30</sup> There is song too, that *cante jondo* in which the metrical inventiveness of the *letras* (poems) finds its rhythmic shape and changes in the *compás* and vocal modulation. In the continuation of his work *Mundo y formas del cante flamenco*, co-written with the Gypsy singer Antonio Mairena, poet Ricardo Molina spoke of this invention as a "mystery" of an "anthropological" nature.<sup>31</sup> Does singing not, already, constitute a "total anthropological fact"? This is why it remains legitimate and

26. Honoré-Antoine Frégier, *Des classes dangereuses de la population dans les grandes villes et des moyens de les rendre meilleures* (Paris: Baillière, 1840), vol. 1, 192–200. See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, 1999), 382 and 703–4.

27. Alice Becker-Ho, *Les Princes du jargon* (Paris: Gérard Lebovici, 1990; new ed. Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 46.

28. *Ibid.*, 142–43.

29. Carlos Clavería, *Estudios sobre los gitanismos*

*del español* (Madrid: Revista de Filología Española, 1951; new ed. Seville: Athenaica Ediciones Universitarias, 2017). Pedro G. Romero is the editor of this collection. Miguel Ropero Núñez, *El léxico caló en el lenguaje del cante flamenco* (Seville: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla, 1978; repr. 1991).

30. Daniel Heller-Roazen, *Dark Tongues: The Art of Rogues and Riddlers* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2013).

31. Mairena and Molina, *Mundo y formas del cante flamenco*; Ricardo Molina, *Misterios del arte*

fruitful to approach the Gypsy musical festivity—with its traditions and inventions—on the basis of an anthropological inquiry, as Arcadio de Larrea Palacín, Caterina Pasqualino, Nancy Thede, or Cristina Cruces Roldán all succeeded in doing.<sup>32</sup>

The *afición* of Pedro G. Romero has a more specifically political basis. And so the question he asks—following Guy Debord or Alice Becker-Ho—concerns a “Gypsy politics,” to be understood in different senses, as an “objective genitive” or a “subjective genitive.” Regarding the objective genitive, from the perspective that the Gypsies have long been the *objects of a certain politics*—Pedro G. Romero kept alive the historical memory of the social conditions to which these people were subjected since their arrivals in Spain. In 1841, it was possible for George Borrow to take account of this, before Bernard Leblon told of this evolution from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>33</sup>

Bitter is the contradiction by which an essentially mobile, diasporic people—since what has been called the “great migration”<sup>34</sup> of the Middle Ages—a people that in France is still given the name “gens du voyage” (“travelers” in English, “saltimbanquis” in Spanish), had to experience the great Gypsy roundup of 1749, or that systematic confinement in the *prisión general* in Seville, a phenomenon recognized as one of the historical components in the development of flamenco.<sup>35</sup> It led Alfredo Grimaldos to say, in his *Historia social del*

*flamenco. Ensayo de una interpretación antropológica* (Barcelona: Sagitario, 1967; new ed. Seville: Editoriales Andaluzas Unidas, 1985).

<sup>32</sup> Arcadio de Larrea Palacín, *El flamenco en su raíz* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1974; new ed. Seville: Signatura Ediciones, 2001). Caterina Pasqualino, *Dire le chant. Les Gitans flamencos d'Andalousie* (Paris: CNRS Éditions-Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1998); reprinted as *Flamenco gitan* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2008). Nancy Thede, *Gitans et flamenco. Les rythmes de l'identité* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999). Cristina Cruces Roldán, *Más allá de la música. Antropología y flamenco, I. Sociabilidad, transmisión y patrimonio* (Seville, Signatura Ediciones, 2002). C. Cruces

Roldán, *Antropología y flamenco. Más allá de la música, II. Identidad, género y trabajo* (Seville: Signatura Ediciones, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> George Borrow, *The Zingali or, an Account of the Gypsies of Spain, with an Original Collection of their Songs and Poetry and a Copious Dictionary of their Language* (London: John Murray, 1841; new ed. Mairena del Aljarafe: Extramuros Edición, 2007). Bernard Leblon, *Les Gitans d'Espagne: le prix de la différence* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985).

<sup>34</sup> See Claire Auzias, *Les Funambules de l'histoire: les Tsiganes, entre préhistoire et modernité* (Quimperlé: La Digitale, 2002), 13–39.

<sup>35</sup> See Antonio Gómez Alfaro, *The Great Gypsy Round-up* (Madrid: Gypsy Research Center;



fig. 5

*flamenco*, that this came out of a condition of persecution for which music became a sort of “slang” response: a “dark tongue” invented in response to this imposed suffering.<sup>36</sup>

It seems then that the “Gypsy politics”—the politics imposed on the Gypsies, those “travelers” so defensive of their freedom of movement—consisted either in dispersing them against their wishes, or in imprisoning them against their wishes. This process continued for a long time throughout Europe: it was a process that began, like for the Jews, with an “ordinary,” daily ostracizing, which had become “the norm,” to the creation of the concentration and then the extermination camps (figs. 5, 6).<sup>37</sup> Just as the Jews of North Africa escaped

Editorial Presencia Gitana, 1995). Antonio Zoido Naranjo, *La prisión general de los gitanos y los orígenes de lo flamenco* (Mairena del Aljarafe: Portada Editorial, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> Alfredo Grimaldos, *Historia social del flamenco* (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 2010), 25–68.

See also William Washabaugh, *Flamenco: Passion, Politics and Popular Culture* (Oxford and Washington, DC: Berg, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> See Hans-Joachim Döring, *Die Zigeuner in nationalsozialistischen Staat* (Hamburg: Kriminalistik-Verlag, 1964); Donald Kenrick

the Nazis' "Final Solution" only because the Einsatzgruppen SS were stopped in their efforts by the military defeat of Rommel, the Gitanos of Spain had every reason to feel concerned by the fate of the Gypsies throughout Europe, from Greece to Holland and to the camps in the South of France.

This is precisely the kind of concern that traverses—or perhaps even supports—the drama project of the spectacle entitled *Lo Real / Le Réel / The Real*, choreographed by Israel Galván in 2013. Starting in 2000, in *La metamorphosis*, Pedro G. Romero and Israel Galván burst open the *flamenco* family circle, making the horrible insect of Kafka's story dance just as he is rejected by the father and mother. With *Lo Real*, it was no longer about the family, nor about the area of the town, about the village, or the region. Nor was it about the Spanish nation. Flamenco simply no longer had any *territory* to claim as its own, indeed to own, or turn into folklore. It was crystalized and diffracted at the same time in a *history* that was wandering itself, wandering throughout Europe, a tragic history here, and a highly comic or ironic history there. The politics of wandering became anchored, in an unprecedented way, in the history of the persecutions carried out against pariah peoples: Gypsies, Jews, or Greeks chased by the Turks from Asia Minor (we know that after the diaspora *rebetiko* was invented, about which Tomás de Perrate sang a melody in *Lo Real*). We could say that the image of the young Gypsy Settela Steinbach—seen in the wagon that deported her to Auschwitz-Birkenau (fig. 6)—crossed, like a specter, the entire duration of *Lo Real*, just as she was the object of a very documented moment in the admirable film-essay *Aufschub (Respite)* by Harun Farocki.<sup>38</sup>

Here, then, the Gypsies themselves—and the *flamencos* in general—take on their own politics. They do so by *raising their voices* in order to sing, of course,

and Grattan Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies* (London: Chatto, Heineman Educational for Sussex University Press, 1972). Christian Bernadac, *L'Holocauste oublié: le massacre des Tsiganes* (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1979; new ed. Paris: Le Livre de poche, 1982); Guenter Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Lydia Chagoll, "Zigeuners". *Sinti en Roma onder het hakenkruis* (Berchem: Epo, 2008); Ilse About

et al., eds., *Mondes tsiganes. Une histoire photographique, 1860–1980*, exh. cat. Musée national de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, Paris (Arles: Actes Sud, 2018).

<sup>38</sup> See Georges Didi-Huberman, "Ouvrir les temps, armer les yeux: montage, histoire, restitution" (2009), in *Remontages du temps subi*, vol. 2 of *L'Œil de l'histoire* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2010), 69–195.



fig. 6

but also to speak and to place themselves in, or even against, the discourse that too often enclosed them or colonized them. This “Gypsy politics” should be understood, then, in the “subjective genitive” sense of the term. In 1935, for example, Fernando “El de Triana,” a Gitano from Seville, son of a blacksmith and guitar *tocaor*, took up a pen and collected photographic documents to depict the state of the society of the *flamencos*. His work, presented in a rather modest format, brings together an extraordinary gallery of portraits, the last of which is a photograph of the author himself. For the occasion, he wore a three-piece suit, a tie, showing his breast pocket; he polished his shoes, and posed in this “noble” or “intellectual” attitude of a writer in front of his sheet of paper; but the sheet of paper was not placed on a table or a desk, but rather on the back of his guitar, placed between his knees, for this is how he composed his *letras* for song.<sup>39</sup>

There are many other examples of this “Gypsy politics,” from the recording by El Lebrijano of the album *Persecución* in 1976, to the book by Pedro Peña entitled *Los gitanos flamencos*.<sup>40</sup> (I can also confirm that Pedro Bacán, a guitarist from a great Gitana family, the Pinini clan in Lebrija, told me, a few weeks

<sup>39</sup>. Fernando [Rodríguez] El de Triana, *Arte y artistas flamencos* (Madrid: Imprenta Helénica, 1935; new ed. Seville:

Editoriales Andaluzas Unidas, 1986), 281.  
<sup>40</sup>. Peña Fernández, *Los gitanos flamencos*.

before his death in 1997, that he wished to write a book to clarify his notion of deep song, a book that would have been written in the form of a dialogue between us.) Beyond any sociology of the relation to the powers that be,<sup>41</sup> “Gypsy politics” is expressed first of all in the *gesture of uprising* that the singers—with their lips tightened, hands outstretched as though to catch a breeze, a time that always gets away—manifest with their entire body. “The song signifies revolt,” wrote José Luis Ortiz Nuevo: it would be akin, then, to a *lyrical form to bring about the possible*, an alterity in the space of our constrained lives.<sup>42</sup>

But deep song does not constitute a uniform or unitary territory: it has nothing to do with a unique thought, or a kind of political party or “invisible committee.” It is crossed through with deep faults and vivid contradictions. In his essay for *La noche española*, Pedro G. Romero underlined the ambiguities and the conflicts, found particularly in the great *cantaor* Manolo Caracol.<sup>43</sup> He was committed to *taking position* in a context marked by extremely contradictory forces of attraction. He took position in a current of thinking that included, notably, the historical book by Carlos and Pedro Caba on the “libertarian communism” of the *cante jondo*, or the more recent collection edited by Paco Espínola, *Flamenco de ley*, of which the anarchist *cantaor* Paco Moyano gave remarkable interpretations of some of the most significant *letras*.<sup>44</sup>

It should be no surprise that Pedro G. Romero considered Enrique Morente the paradigm of this flamenco “politics of wandering” that he had examined from the beginning. It is enough to recall the innumerable *idas y vueltas* of that wonderful *cantaor*, between continued traditions and the contact established with the avant-gardes: this is seen in his tributes to Don Antonio Chacón or to Pepe de la Matrona, and his incursions in front of contemporary works from

<sup>41</sup> See Francisco Aix Gracia, *Flamenco y poder: Un estudio desde la sociología del arte* (Madrid: Fundación SGAE, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> José Luis Ortiz Nuevo, *Alegato contra la pureza* (La Puebla de Cazalla, Seville: Ediciones Barataria, 2010), 183. See J. L. Ortiz Nuevo, *Pensamiento político en el cante flamenco. Antología de textos desde los orígenes a 1936* (Seville: Editoriales Andaluzas Unidas, 1985).

<sup>43</sup> Romero, “El sol cuando es de noche,” 81–85; reprinted in *El ojo partido*, 57–63.

<sup>44</sup> Carlos and Pedro Caba, *Andalucía, su comunismo libertario y su cante jondo (tentativa de interpretación)* (Madrid: Biblioteca Atlántico, 1933; new ed. Seville: Editorial Renacimiento, 2008). Paco Espínola, ed., *Flamenco de ley* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2007) (with a recording of the *cantaor* Paco Moyano accompanied on guitar by Paco Jarana). See Andrés Ruíz, *Coplas de la emigración* (Madrid: Ediciones Demófilo, 1976).

the Fondation Beyeler in Basel or the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid. As José Luis Ortiz Nuevo recalled, the *coplas* sung by Enrique Morente created multiple new horizons for poetry and thinking in the world of deep song.<sup>45</sup> We find, here and there, Al-Mu'tamid (the last Abbadid sultan of Seville, author in exile of remarkable poetry) and Ibn Hazm of Córdoba (eleventh-century poet), Saint Juan de la Cruz and José Bergamín, Lope de Vega and Pablo Picasso, Luis de Góngora and María Zambrano, to mention only a few. The richness of his experimentations in music was considerable, and can be seen in the range of instrumentalists with whom he was able to work: his friend Pepe Habichuela, of course, but also Miguel Ochando and Paco Cortés, Juan Carlos Romero and Niño Josele, Manolo Sanlúcar and Ramón de Algeciras, Rafael Riqueni, Vicente Amigo and Juan Manuel Cañizares, not to mention the great Sabicas, in 1990, on the album entitled *Nueva York-Granada*.

Perhaps this is why the face of Enrique Morente—singing—dominated the prologue of *Arena*, a performance danced in 2004 by Israel Galván after a dramaturgy by Pedro G. Romero (fig. 7). Romero recognized a movement in the poetics of the great singer capable of *going from the roots to the rhizomes*, just like the interlaced writings and motifs endlessly unfurling on the walls of the Alhambra in Granada.<sup>46</sup> This does not mean that a movement of opening like this points to a “postmodern” character in this kind of flamenco, as Gerhard Steingress would like to believe.<sup>47</sup> It means that the *roots have begun to move*, like a rhizome that has no “beginning” and no “end,” but which is nonetheless a kind of atypical root. This is what we see constantly in the choreographic experimentations by Israel Galván and the dramaturgies by Pedro G. Romero: wandering roots. There is no question, in these exploratory movements, of “trans-humanizing” deep song, nor of filling it with prostheses, or of including it in a globalized aesthetic for which everything is equal to everything else. Instead it is a question of maintaining certain values and of constituting in the

<sup>45</sup> José Luis Ortiz Nuevo, “Enrique Morente, Singer of *coplas*,” in *Morente’s Universe: Enrique Morente’s Life and Work*, ed. Amaranta Ariño, exh. cat. Palacio Carlos V, Alhambra (Granada: Alhambra and Generalife Trust; Madrid: TF Editores, 2014), 35–41.

<sup>46</sup> Pedro G. Romero, “Don Enrique Morente’s

Gift,” in *Morente’s Universe*, 47 and passim (43–61).

<sup>47</sup> Gerhard Steingress, *Flamenco postmoderno. Entre tradición y heterodoxia. Un diagnóstico sociomusicológico (Escritos 1989–2006)* (Seville: Signatura Ediciones, 2007), 267–85.

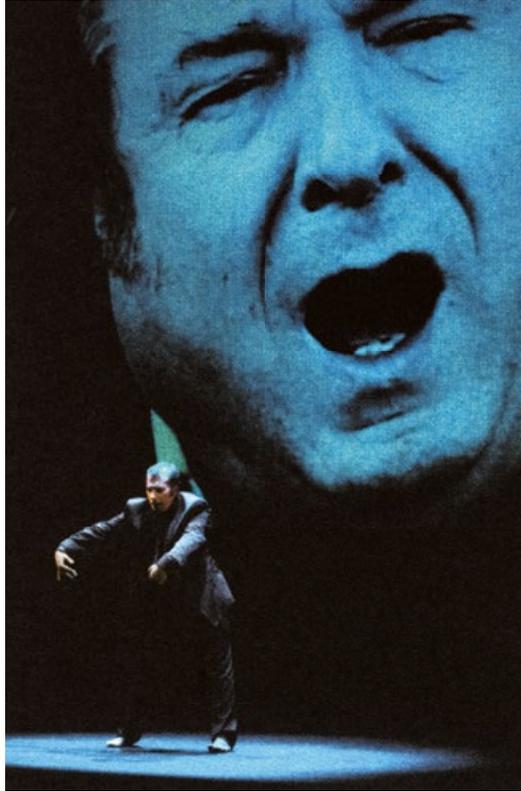


fig. 7

musical world of contemporary flamenco what other musicians in the twentieth century—I am thinking of Luciano Berio, Luigi Nono, or Helmut Lachenmann—attempted under the form of “sound utopias,” which were so many *forms for resisting* or for giving movement once again to certain fundamental desires of a historical, ethical, or political kind.<sup>48</sup>

\*

The *becoming-wandering* aspect of flamenco is not a sign, then, of its dissolution in the “globalized world”—which tends toward the uniformity to which the empires want to subject us—but instead the sign of an anamnesis, a *reminiscent escape*. It is through the memory of what has persisted in history, albeit underground, that

<sup>48</sup>. See Laurent Feneyrou, ed., *Résistances et utopies sonores. Musique et politique au XXe siècle* (Paris:

Centre de Documentation de la Musique contemporaine, 2005).

flamenco starts wandering again beyond its own moments of academic glaciation (false autonomies) and opportunistic negligence (false openings). It is quite coherent, then, that Pedro G. Romero should refer to the paradigm of the rhizome: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari asserted, under this title opening their book *A Thousand Plateaus*, a desire for “surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come.”<sup>49</sup> This—traveling to *other places* as to *times to come*—cannot be achieved except by “rereading” history, by *remembering or recalling* many things that we perhaps thought, through carelessness or by submitting to fashion, we had left behind us forever.

It is from this perspective that Deleuze and Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, worked toward a sort of *archaeology of wandering*: their development led to a drifting, a “*dérive*” according to Debord—and to its insurrectional power—of the new philosophical and anthropological depths. The real “war machines” against the powers were described as mere nomad war machines from the fifth or sixth century BCE with which the section “Treatise on Nomadology” in *A Thousand Plateaus* opened.<sup>50</sup> “Vortical organizations” are valued more by Deleuze and Guattari than controlled spaces, and “nomad science,” or eccentric science, is valued more than “royal science” or concentric science.<sup>51</sup> Then, suddenly, there appears the ancestral figure of the blacksmith, presented as a paradigm for the “first itinerant”—albeit for an “internal itinerancy” whose troglodytic habitat was a good example. All of this leads us to think of the *cuevas* of the Sacromonte in Granada, as well as the singers of *martinets* from Gypsy and blacksmith genealogies.<sup>52</sup>

The “nomad line” affirmed by Deleuze and Guattari described simply a political and poetic principle: it is political because it placed, at the center of civilizational questions, the question of *migrations*; and poetic because it gave the notion of *wandering* the dignity of a work to be done by every artist on his own (social) milieu and his own (technical) medium: the voice for the singer, the gesture for the dancer, the language for the writer. “How many people today live in a language that is not their own? Or no longer, or do not yet, even

49. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 2003), 5.

50. *Ibid.*, 351.

51. *Ibid.*, 399, 405–8.

52. *Ibid.*, 512–17. See Caterina Pasqualino, “Naissance d’un peuple. Les forgerons-chanteurs d’Andalousie,” *Social Anthropology* 5, no. 2 (1997): 177–95.

know their own and know poorly the major language that they are forced to serve? This is the problem of immigrants, and especially of their children, the problem of minorities, the problem of a minor literature, but also a problem for all of us: how to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language and making it follow a sober revolutionary path? How to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one's own language?"<sup>53</sup>

If we take a serious approach to the philosophy of time first developed by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* or his readings of Nietzsche, we begin to understand that the expression "nomadic becoming" is almost a pleonasm, other than the fact that *becoming* speaks about time and *nomadic* speaks about space. But isn't every becoming fundamentally *nomadic* insofar as it escapes the control of time in a history that it was abusively "prescribed"? This is exactly what was said, in 1990, in the wonderful dialogue between Gilles Deleuze and Antonio Negri entitled "Control and Becoming": "Men's only hope lies in a revolutionary becoming [and not in the future of prescribed revolutions]: the only way of casting off their shame or responding to what is intolerable."<sup>54</sup> We might be tempted to say—because at certain privileged moments we have the impression that we are touching it—that *flamenco* is a name for a people that is equal to what Deleuze said of that *resistant people*, of its political power and its poetic becoming: "A people is always a creative minority."<sup>55</sup>

To create something, however, it is necessary to implement this kind of *movement* that will lead to the defeat, the ruin of one *monument* or another. Any intense form destroys—but always partially—any conformity that preceded it. "The history of art is the struggle of all experiences ... of invented spaces and of figurations," wrote Carl Einstein in 1929, in the journal *Documents*; he spoke also of creation, a "traumatic accentuation" as a "murder" of forms by other forms; and he concluded: "Works of art only acquire their genuine meaning thanks to the insurrectional force that they enclose."<sup>56</sup> That is why the one who

<sup>53</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 19.

<sup>54</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," in *Negotiations, 1972–1990*, trans. Martin

Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 171.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>56</sup> Carl Einstein, "Aphorismes méthodiques," *Documents*, no. 1 (1929): 32; C. Einstein, "L'enfance néolithique," *Documents*, no. 9

implements all of this can be called, as Walter Benjamin proposed, a “destructive character.”

Like the little boy who wanders amidst the ruins of Berlin in the film *Germany, Year Zero* by Roberto Rossellini—but with more distance, and, therefore, more irony and play—Pedro G. Romero has navigated a lot, or better still, *wandered amidst the ruins* of Spanish history. He has drifted, he has taken note of the damage, has found thousands of paths in the rubble. He had great interest in the anarchist vandalism of the *Setmana tràgica* of Barcelona when, between July 26 and August 2, 1909, the general strike brought about the unprecedented wave of destruction of religious buildings. In close connection to the historical and bibliophilic work of his friend Juan José Lahuerta<sup>57</sup>—and the spirit of deep impertinence of José Bergamín on this very subject: “We burn churches to liberate God”<sup>58</sup>—Pedro G. Romero conceived a large documentary installation on this subject in 2001, continuously susceptible to modifications like the version exhibited in 2010 in the context of the exhibition entitled *Atlas*.<sup>59</sup>

Atlases are indeed what Pedro G. Romero often creates. But we should perhaps refer to them as *wandering atlases*, atlases adrift. This is what we see, for example, when we flick through the pages of the “catalogue”—an artist’s book, rather—published for the project on the *Setmana tràgica* (fig. 4).<sup>60</sup> Or when we open the fascinating book on iconoclasm in the Spanish Civil War, entitled, with reference to Georges Bataille, *En el ojo de la batalla* (figs. 42–45 and 50). Pedro G. Romero *meticulously* linked the very detailed historical legend with an image, but also returned *freely* to references taken from the visual

(1930): 479 and 483; C. Einstein, *Georges Braque* (1931–32), trans. E. Zipruth (Paris: Éditions des Chroniques du jour, 1934), 17. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps. Histoire de l’art et anachronisme des images* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2000), 159–232.

<sup>57</sup> Juan José Lahuerta, “‘Los trabajos de restauración del capitalismo’. La tentación del hombre. ‘Ruinas inmortales’” (2002), in *Humaredas. Arquitectura, ornamentación, medios impresos* (Madrid: Lampreave, 2010), 80–123. J. J. Lahuerta, *Destrucción de Barcelona*

(Barcelona: Mudito & Co., 2004).

<sup>58</sup> José Bergamín, *Las ideas liebres: aforística y epigramática, 1935–1981* (Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1998), 48. See J. Bergamín, *Detrás de la cruz: terrorismo y persecución religiosa en España* (Mexico City: Séneca, 1941).

<sup>59</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, ed., *Atlas: How to Carry the World on One’s Back?*, trans. S. Lillis and M. D. Aguilera, exh. cat. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid: TF Editores, 2010), 320–21.

<sup>60</sup> Romero, ed., *La Setmana Tràgica*.

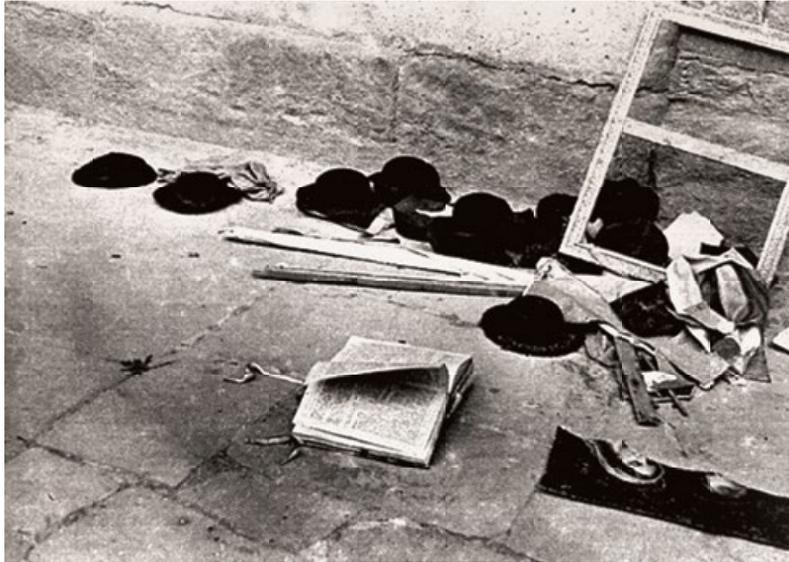


fig. 9

avant-gardes of the twentieth century: the butchered statues of Christ with Hans Bellmer (fig. 8); a floor strewn with hats, books, and a fragment of the Virgin with Max Ernst (fig. 9); a pile of cult objects in disorder with Kurt Schwitters; a pile of reliquaries with Daniel Spoerri; or a dismembered Christ against a black background, upside down, with the work of photographer Eli Lotar (fig. 10).<sup>61</sup>

There was no doubt about the Dadaist and Situationist character of these *wandering montages*. It was presented explicitly in the appellation of the Archivo F.X. that presented itself as “F.X. sobre el fin del arte.”<sup>62</sup> The “end of art”? Not its dissolution, nor its oblivion, but its vocation to *reach the limits* where something might appear, on the edge of *forms of art*, like the glow or the trace of certain *forms of life*. That is why it seemed, to me, to cohere with the spirit of Pedro G. Romero, in the context of the exhibition entitled *Sublevaciones / Uprisings* when it was presented in Buenos Aires in 2017, to confront the installation on

<sup>61</sup> Romero, *En el ojo de la batalla*, LXXVI–LXXVII, <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.I. CXIV–CXV, CXCII–CXCIII, CXCVIII–CXCIX, and CLXVI–CLXVII.

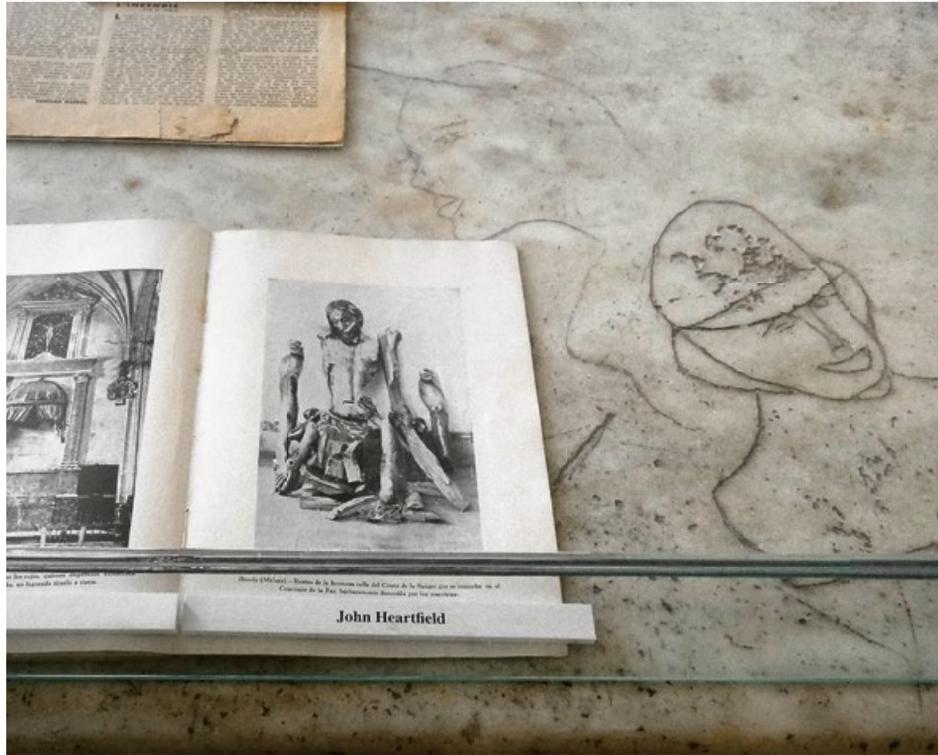


fig. 11

iconoclasm with the materiality of the graffiti-covered tables of the Hotel de Inmigrantes, the architectural complexes constructed at the beginning of the twentieth century to welcome and to assist thousands of immigrants who fled their countries of origin to settle in Argentina (fig. 11).<sup>63</sup>

There is no question that, in coherence with his *afición flamenco* and his political interest in the history of the Gypsies, Pedro G. Romero leaned toward the more general issue of what could be called the *wandering communities*, which appears in a number of his works on the questions of *idas y vueltas* between the past and the present (*¿Que hay de nuevo, viejo?*, 2004), between solitude and solidarity (*Las correspondencias*, 2010), the world of art and the world of economics (*Economía: Picasso*, 2012), or the political-“psychotechnical” confinement and

<sup>63</sup> See Georges Didi-Huberman, ed., *Sublevaciones* (Buenos Aires: UNTREF; Paris: Jeu de Paume, 2017).

the question of habitation in general (*Habitación*, 2018).<sup>64</sup> All of this was to bring to the surface, from a poetics of images, spaces, and times, that *politics of wandering* in which it becomes existentially engaged: always there, always gone, always on the way.

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A wanderer never walks in a straight line. He constantly finds himself at forks in the road. For him, everything that takes place does so at an intersection. Everything that takes place balances on the line above an abyss, or on the edge of a landslide, on the crest of an obstacle, or on a crest line that seems lost between different territories. The wanderer comes and goes, goes away, and comes back. His “fists in [his] pockets are clenched”—that is, the rhythm of his steps accompanies a certain anger and a certain poverty—as Arthur Rimbaud sang, aged sixteen, in his famous poem entitled “Ma bohème.” A *copla* whose fall dared to compare the laces of his old slippers with lyre strings (or, let’s say, guitar strings):

As I strummed the laces of my devastated boots  
Like lyre-strings, one foot by my heart.<sup>65</sup>

It was a question of “Wanderers” too in Rimbaud’s *Illuminations*: “and so we wandered, living on the wine of caverns and the crusts of travellers, as I stepped up my search for the place and the formula.”<sup>66</sup> But the wanderer never finds the “place,” just as the poet never stops at—or is never content with—“the formula.” I am thinking here of the famous poem by Miguel Hernández entitled *El rayo que no cesa* (Unceasing Lightning) that many *flamencos* know, as it recalls how much the wanderer is merely an “instrument” or the plaything of his zigzagging way:

<sup>64</sup> Pedro G. Romero, ed., *Lo nuevo y lo viejo. ¿Que hay de nuevo, viejo?*, exh. cat. Espai Zero1 (Olot: Espai Zero1, 2004). P. G. Romero, *Las correspondencias* (Cáceres: Editorial Periférica, 2010). P. G. Romero, *Economía: Picasso* (Barcelona: Museu Picasso, 2012). P. G. Romero, *Habitación. El Archivo F.X., las Chekas psicotécnicas de Laurencio y la función del arte*, exh. cat. Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya, Barcelona, et al.

(Madrid et al.: Comunidad de Madrid, Consejería de Cultura y Deportes et al., 2018).

<sup>65</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, “My Bohemia (Fantasy),” in *Selected Poems and Letters*, trans. Jeremy Hardin and John Sturrock (London: Penguin, 2004), 49.

<sup>66</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, “Tramps,” in *Selected Poems*, 209.

*Me llamo barro aunque Miguel me llame.  
Barro es mi profesión y mi destino  
que mancha con su lengua cuanto lame.*

*Soy un triste instrumento del camino.  
Soy una lengua dulcemente infame  
a los pies que idolatro desplegada.*

I am called clay though my name is Miguel.  
Clay is my profession and my destiny  
it stains with its tongue whatever it licks.

I am a sad instrument of the road.  
I am a gently infamous tongue,  
spread out at the feet I idolize.<sup>67</sup>

It is more than anything as a *poetic wanderer*—celebrated in so many traditional *coplas* of deep song, including the famous album *Solo quiero caminar* recorded by Paco de Lucía in 1981—that flamenco passes through us and penetrates us so intensely. José Bergamín spoke of this as a “thought deepened into song.”<sup>68</sup> But he added that “music is the blood of the wind”<sup>69</sup>... Does this not mean that in a deep song everything circulates and breathes, exhales, penetrates and passes through, rises and descends, swirls, comes and goes, comes to touch us only to go far away again? And is it not such a condition of restiveness, of perpetual coming and going, that gives the very power to this song and to its material: a material capable of mocking all the other materials? If, when he sings his *carceleras*, the rogue in his prison cell in Seville can be heard by the other prisoners, it is because his song possesses the power to pass through walls.

<sup>67</sup>. Miguel Hernández, *El rayo que no cesa* (Madrid: Héroe, 1936; repr. Madrid: Austral, 2017), 99–100; Eng.: *Unceasing Lightning (El rayo que no cesa)*, trans. Michael Smith (Sandymount, Dublin: Dedalus, 1986), 34.

<sup>68</sup>. José Bergamín, “La decadencia del analfabetismo,” *Cruz y raya* 3 (June 15, 1933): 63–94; reprinted in *Obra esencial* (Madrid: Turner, 2005), 22.

<sup>69</sup>. Bergamín, *Las ideas liebres*, 104.

Through its own medium, deep song therefore asserts its poetics as *wandering politics*. It is to be understood as a manner of singing, of dancing, or of playing that shows a way—an often paradoxical way—to be free. It is striking that at the very time of the famous *cante jondo* competition in Granada in 1922, Ernst Bloch revised his book *The Spirit of Utopia*, published originally in 1918, in (the somber) light of a Spartacist revolution that had by then been violently crushed by an irresistible ascension of fascism. It was a matter, however, in this desperate political environment, of creating a new philosophical foundation for the possibility of *political hope*. How? On the one hand, by redistributing all of the details of orthodox Marxism, and, on the other, by calling upon a *musical paradigm*, something quite surprising in the context of a political anthropology, and yet claimed by Bloch to be highly necessary and even urgent.

For the worst thing, he said, would be to hear only oneself and, therefore, to be deaf and blind to others, to the world, and even to the otherness within us. But this is where poetics reconnected with politics: the *potentiality of forms*, Bloch proposes, is generally to produce “a stuff, an alien experience”;<sup>70</sup> in short, *to open being to the other*. A form that comes about is already a gesture, a movement toward elsewhere or alterity, toward time previous or imminent: it is already to wander toward another space and it is to see another time coming. In this way “artistry may again appear as a displaced prophetic gift” (al seine versetzte seherische Begabung) writes Bloch.<sup>71</sup> But it is on the condition, he explains, that “everything . . . be pushed to [their] upper limit, toward the leap [*Sprung*].”<sup>72</sup> Is this not precisely what music does when it displays a particular intensity?

The musical event, from this perspective, is both a “leap” or “jump” (that is, a radical *beginning*) and a “return” (“reminiscence” or a *survival*). The “leap” without the “return” would be a mere illusion; and the “return” without the “leap” would be mere nostalgia: no consequent desire without memory, no genuine memory without desire. There must always be an *ida y vuelta*. In the fifth part of *The Principle of Hope*, devoted to what he called “wishful images” (*Wunschbilder*), Ernst Bloch returned to this fundamental theme of music as “venturing beyond.” But why venture beyond? So that the world might be

<sup>70</sup> Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, trans. Anthony A. Nassar (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 34.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

as intensely human as possible, according to the philosopher.<sup>73</sup> Where Rimbaud had sought “the place and the formula,” Bloch saw music as something that opened a space toward a perpetual *exodus* and language toward the “shaping of a—call,”<sup>74</sup> a call that is understood as a “death, contra-death, utopia.”<sup>75</sup>

Exodus and call are the destiny of the wanderer, that perpetual foreigner. No doubt it is a cause of suffering. But it is also a political principle (among other possibilities, of course), a principle of freedom. Not freedom in the Hegelian sense—the “freedom of being (at home) with oneself”—but freedom as *freedom of the foreigner*, freedom of passage and of wandering. It is the freedom that Jacques Derrida spoke of in his seminar *Of Hospitality*.<sup>76</sup> Yet, this freedom to be (at home) with oneself, embodied in the citizen Socrates—in Plato’s *Sophist*, commented by Derrida—should perhaps be accompanied by a more wandering position: the position of Aristippus in the dialogue of Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*.<sup>77</sup> Aristippus is a character known for his hedonistic position: what he seeks above all—not unlike the Barber of Seville—is simply the pleasure of life. Socrates, with whom he is in dialogue, does not see things this way at all; and he asks his interlocutor something that seeks to bring the whole question back to the political.

Socrates asks, “Shall we then consider whether the rulers or the ruled live the pleasanter life?”<sup>78</sup> Aristippus accepts this: it is pertinent, in his eyes, to place the question of pleasure of life in a political perspective. “Or take the Greeks, of whom you yourself are one; do you think that the controlling [*kratountes*] or the controlled communities [*kratoumenoi*] enjoy the pleasanter life?” The response of Aristippus is remarkable in that it demands a shift away from the split line established by Socrates: “For my part I am no candidate for slavery; but there is, as I hold, a middle path in which I am fain to walk. That way leads neither through rule [*oute di’ arches*] nor slavery [*oute dia douleias*], but through liberty [*alla di’ eleutherias*], which is the royal road to happiness.”<sup>79</sup>

<sup>73</sup>. Ernst Bloch, *Principle of Hope* (1938–59), 3 vols., trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 3:1057, ch. 51: “Venturing Beyond and Most Intense World of Man in Music.”

<sup>74</sup>. *Ibid.*, 3:1067.

<sup>75</sup>. *Ibid.*, 3:1099.

<sup>76</sup>. Jacques Derrida (with Anne Dufourmantelle), *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques*

*Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>77</sup>. Xenophon, *Memorabilia. Oeconomicus. Symposium. Apology*, trans. E. C. Marchant, O. J. Todd, revised by Jeffrey Henderson, Loeb Classical Library 168 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>78</sup>. *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>79</sup>. *Ibid.*, 89.

Initially, Socrates does not understand at all. How can we refuse to choose between power and powerlessness? How can one not choose to reject powerlessness, which, inevitably, causes us misfortune? Aristippus, however, holds his position, but on one condition, which is fundamental: “Yes, but my plan for avoiding such treatment is this. I do not shut myself up in the four corners of a community, but am a stranger in every land [*xenos pantakhou eimi*].”<sup>80</sup> Such is the utopian politics of the wanderer: to be the stranger, the foreigner everywhere. To accept to live on the margins. It is a very *flamenco* way of envisioning liberty: to nourish oneself along the way from the “wine of caverns”—or rather, from fresh water sources—and constantly to seek “the place and the formula,” instead of staying at the center of the city, paying for one’s liberty by drinking hemlock.

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<sup>80</sup>. Ibid., 89.



## Illustrations

- fig. 1* Guy Debord, “Panégyrique,” in *Œuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 1735.
- fig. 2* Constant Anton Nieuwenhuys, *Fiesta gitana* (Gipsy Celebration), 1964, Centraal Museum Utrecht.
- fig. 3* Unknown photographer, “‘Y el Cristo en la mierda’. Crucifix défenestré par les ‘Ácratas’ à l’Université de Madrid (Janvier 1968),” from *Internationale situationniste*, no. 12 (September 1969): 86.
- fig. 4* Pedro G. Romero, “Atlas de la destrucción de edificios religiosos,” from *La Setmana Tràgica* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya-Departament de Cultura, 2002).
- fig. 5* Christian Guy, “Montreuil-Bellay, capitale de guerre des Gitans” (detail), *Toute la vie*, no. 148-49, June 29, 1944, 4.
- fig. 6* Rudolf Breslauer, *Settela Steinbach dans le train de déportation de Westerbork vers Auschwitz-Birkenau où elle sera gazée*, 1944. NIOD Instituut voor Oorlogs-, Holocaust- en Genocidestudies, Amsterdam.
- fig. 7* Israel Galván, *Arena*, dramaturgy by Pedro G. Romero, Teatro de la Maestranza, Sevilla, 2004.
- fig. 8* Unknown photographer, “Documento iconográfico de la iconoclastia durante la guerra civil española,” from Pedro G. Romero, *El ojo de la batalla. Estudios sobre iconoclastia e iconodulia, historia del arte y vanguardia moderna, guerra y economía, estética y política, sociología sagrada y antropología materialista* (Valencia: Universitat de València, 2002), LXXVI.
- fig. 9* Ibid., CXIV.
- fig. 10* Ibid., CLXVI.
- fig. 11* Pedro G. Romero-Archivo F.X., *Tesouro: Vandalismo*, 2005-16 (detail). View of the exhibition *Sublevaciones*, MUNTREF-Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Buenos Aires, 2017.