

ENCUENTRO



MANIFESTA
JOURNAL
around
curatorial
practices

OS AIRES

#13

FUNGUS
IN THE
CONTEM-
PORARY

1968

EBATE

INVITAN

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FUNGUS
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Introduction to Manifesta Journal Series 3

Hedwig Fijen, Director of Manifesta

The format of *Manifesta Journal* (MJ), like the Manifesta biennial, is a changing model. Every six editions, a new Editorial Team from diverse areas of Europe and beyond are invited to develop a different concept for the series; to reflect on contemporary Europe and the world. Initiated by the Manifesta Foundation, the *Manifesta Journal* is an independent project. It aims to be critical and self-reflective toward the theory and practice of international curatorship and biennials in general, but also towards its own functional mechanisms.

We are very proud of the realization of the second series of the *Manifesta Journal* in which the MJ editorial team sought to establish a comprehensive manual, comprised of a wide-reaching sequence of both theoretical and pragmatic articles, often produced by up-and-coming writers, curators and artists in addition to theoreticians and practitioners from marginalized areas of Europe and the world. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the editorial team of the second series of the *Manifesta Journal*—Viktor Misiano, Nathalie Zonnenberg, Filipa Ramos and Lisa Mazza—for their invaluable contributions.

Following the spirit and model of the Manifesta biennial, we have appointed a new editorial team for the third series of the Manifesta Journal (2011–2013), with Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez as chief editor and Virginie Bobin as associate editor. In this third series, *Manifesta Journal* intends to reconsider the notion of contemporary curatorship and focus on its (geo)political, social and controversial potentials, its ability to instigate fresh discussion; to observe its past and comment on its possible future. As a response to the consolidated understanding of the notion “curatorial”, the subtitle of this series of *Manifesta Journal* will be *Manifesta Journal—“Around Curatorial Practices”*.

Another major change in the *Manifesta Journal* will be its transformation from a printed publication into a free online magazine. As ever, we stand for the open exchange of knowledge. With this development, the MJ intentionally deviates from the selectiveness of many academic journals to become a widely available source tool in which a reciprocal relationship with our audiences is established. We are thus pleased to announce that from MJ #13 onwards, the *Manifesta Journal* will be freely accessible worldwide. This will enable us to communicate with greatly expanded and previously disconnected audiences.

With this new series, the *Manifesta Journal* will become more integrated with other projects developed by the Manifesta Foundation. To this effect, the guest editors of the present first issue of the third series, *MJ #13*, is the curatorial team of Manifesta 9: Cuauhtémoc Medina, Dawn Ades and Katerina Gregos. Entitled "Fungus in the Contemporary", the issue metaphorically addresses the re-activation and re-contextualisation of the 1960s in contemporary art practices. It takes the form of artistic or historical suppositions that can be seen as spying on, fictionalizing or causing delays in the contemporary condition.

The following three issues, *MJ #14-16*, will be guest edited by Lebanese film curator Rasha Salti, and will explore the "politics of time" as a crucial approach to both art and society.

I would like to extend a special thanks to Lisa Mazza, *MJ* managing editor, as well as Diana Hillesheim and Georgia Taperell for their valuable support and input into the multi-faceted *Manifesta Journal* project. In a time of tumultuous social, political and economic change, the contextualization of contemporary curatorial practices and theory shall no doubt be a great challenge, with its own rewards. I therefore wholeheartedly support the new team and wish them success in their new undertaking.



Editorial Statement

Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez
and Virginie Bobin

After the comprehensive grammar and manual for contemporary curatorship that the editorial alchemy of the greatly-missed Igor Zabel and Viktor Misiano established in the first six issues of *Manifesta Journal*, and which Viktor Misiano, Nathalie Zonnenberg and Filipa Ramos then prolifically continued in the series of six issues that followed, we are honoured to take over the editing of *Manifesta Journal*. Proposing several mutations of previous editorial endeavours, we intend to use *Manifesta Journal* as a porous platform to reconsider the meanings and the effects of curatorial practices today. In the current state of socio-political, economical and ecological emergencies, in the context of rapid changes affecting the Global South and North, in the midst of the protests and upheavals borne from the Arab Spring and the “Occupy” movement that is spreading around the world, we wish to emphasize our viewpoint on contemporary artistic and curatorial practices as being negotiations between objects (images, texts, gestures, presences), situated knowledges and subjectivities.

We have deliberately chosen the encompassing subtitle “Around curatorial practices” in order to mark the trajectory from the previous subtitle, “Journal of contemporary curatorship”. If we were to visualise our editorial logic, concentric circles would be most appropriate as they have in common one centre—curatorial practices, in our case. Thus the preposition “around” should be devoted to what actually moves subjectivities when they adopt the notion of curating as responding to their practices. We wish to look at the practices in the global art world that reassess this notion today and focus on its urgent (geo)political, humanistic, instigating and controversial potentialities; practices that are informed by subjective drives, subversions, opacities, risks, desires, beliefs and solidarities. Through them we will investigate the past history of curating, speculate on its future, and allow its relationships to the sensorial and the discursive to unfold, all the while offering space up to the powerful real and to the equally powerful imaginary.

We wish to reflect on current practices of reading, researching, publishing and curating that have been enabled by the internet and its social technologies, while exploring new formats and advocating the open circulation of knowledge. We therefore present here a new online and downloadable *Manifesta Journal*, with most of its texts licensed through Creative Commons. Every two months, we invite a blogger-in-residency to share with us their research in progress: their reflections on, assessments of, and reactions to a specific subject. As our first resident for December 2011–January 2012, we are very pleased to host Adnan Yildiz, the artistic director of Künstlerhaus Stuttgart.

Manifesta Foundation is recognised for its having embraced progressive curatorial positions as well as for its understanding of curatorial practices as political agencies. The Manifesta Biennials have given a special emphasis on the collaborative, negotiating, affective, political, and groundbreaking aspects of what the unprecedented curatorial federations, exhibitions and mediations have relayed to them.

This is a point of inspiration. Furthermore, we are motivated by recent attempts to go beyond social cynicism by establishing once more the capability to act and resonate in the public sphere. We thus wish to bring forward with each issue those potentialities that enable us to think what we think, feel what we feel and do what we do when we say that we curate.

We are most delighted to inaugurate the new series of *Manifesta Journal* with Cuauhtémoc Medina, Katerina Gregos and Dawn Ades, the curatorial team of Manifesta 9, as guest editors for this issue, where ghosts from the past prove to interact very actively with our current preoccupations. Engaging in a dialogue with these persistent spirits is a way for us to open the door to the pressing questions that we would like to unfold with you through the next five issues of *Manifesta Journal*.

The new sections of *Manifesta Journal* include:

SPECULATION (Syn.: cogitation, conjecture, contemplation, deliberation, hypothesis, meditation, reflection; Ant.: fact, information, reality, truth)
In-depth theoretical texts offering investigations of, reflections on, and even diversions from the journal's core issues.

STATEMENT (Syn.: affirmation, allegation, announcement, articulation, charge, comment, manifesto, proclamation, testimony, utterance; Ant.: question, request)
Contributors are invited to express their position through a short text, optionally accompanied by visual or audio material.

CONVERSATION (Syn.: chat, colloquy, debate, dialogue, discussion, exchange, palaver, tête-à-tête; Ant.: silence)
Unexpected or long-awaited encounters between artists, curators, critics, theoreticians, or people from other fields than art.

PROJECTION (Syn.: extension, fantasy, forecast, project, prediction, prognosis; Ant.: depression)
Studies of past exhibitions/events or reflections on potential future exhibitions/events that constitute a history of curatorial forms, offering space up to fiction.

ETUDE (Syn.: analysis, cogitation, comparison, contemplation, deliberation, examination, inquiry, investigation, meditation, musing, questioning, reflection, reverie, scrutiny; Ant.: idleness)
Critical studies written in response to an image or a sound chosen by the author.

EXHIBITION ROOM (Syn.: exposition, display, narration, position, presentation allowance, area, capacity, chance, occasion, opening, opportunity, place, play, scope, space, territory, volume; Ant.: dissimulation zone)
Curators are invited to devise an exhibition for the specific space of both the journal's online and printed versions.

MATERIALS (Syn.: being, body, component, constituent, documents, elements, evidence, goods, paraphernalia, stuff; Ant.: absence)
Exploration of archival materials that have not yet widely circulated.

GAME (Syn.: adventure, amusement, occupation, pastime, play, recreation, undertaking; Ant.: immobility)
Artists whose practices encompass scores, instructions or games are invited to share them with the readers of *Manifesta Journal*.



Guest Editorial: The Fungus in the Contemporary

Cuauhtémoc Medina

Chronological art categories have an idiosyncratic density. They do not point so much to established fixed lines in the time continuum as to the opaque horizons and conventions of the narratives we inhabit by turning them, either subtly or confrontationally, into battlefields of meaning.

Behind the relative neutrality of the term “contemporary art”, differing accounts, casts of characters and plots are constantly deployed, both from within the texture of our works and texts and in terms of their institutional condensations. In fact, “the contemporary” is, more than a moment in history, the interlocking of geographical, temporal, poetic and political elements around which the different parties of the global art networks constantly dispute the relevance and urgency of different—if not opposed—practices, along with the relative significance of a number of genealogical lines.

In that sense, “the contemporary” ought to be understood as one of the most powerful instances of what Mikhail Bakhtin described with the concept of the *chronotope*: it is a concept where “Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.”¹ “The contemporary” is not an adjective describing recentness, but a time-space narrative that structures different views on culture and, therefore, also propagates among its consumers modalities of agency within culture and in the world.

What makes this chronotope especially sensible in the field of art is, however, its function as judgment. As it used to be with the notion of “new” and “modern”, to argue for the contemporariness

of certain works, artistic devices or curatorial / critical operations involves in fact some kind of dictate on their right of existence. Indeed, despite the claim of the anti-historicism of several forms of postmodern thinking, terms like “anachronistic”,

“regressive”, “belated”, “outmoded” and “reactionary” remain critical puns. It is for this reason that the battles of inclusion and the geopolitical transformation of the artworld in the recent decades has, to a great extent, behaved in reattractive mode. No surprise, the so-called process of globalization of art has also been the imaginary time-space where curating involves art historical operations as a central part of its political agenda.

The experience of the culture of “the contemporary” has in the recent years, however, involved a particular paradox inherent to its turning into a historical category. “The contemporary” is constantly defined in terms of the fixed and standardized annexation of a certain moment of the past. As if reforming the Nietzschean dictum that history was born from the yearning of “the man of action” unable to find examples and guidance from his contemporaries,² both in terms of the institutional policies of collecting and scholarship, and also in the operative demarcations of marketing of art, we are witnessing a moment where the narrative stands still fixated in the medusa effect of a constant mirroring and testing of what is current, in relation to the 1960s and 1970s. Through an increasing number of exhibitions and scholarly accounts, if not also in the shaping of the memory of the participants and the way they organize their growing archives, “the contemporary” is increasingly growing white hair. In particular, in the need to remap the formerly marginalized histories of art of the so-called periphery, but also in the policies of museums and in the parlance of the marketplace, there is a tendency to understand “the contemporary” as having started sometime in the 1960s. A particular date stands behind this seeming reluctance to clear out the refrigerator. An inordinate number of our initiatives and narratives stand still, as if caught with the sight of a ghost, in and around the failed or aborted revolutions of 1968.

1 M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, tr. by Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981, p.84

2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 67.

It is in terms of underlining that unwritten global convention of constantly making exhibitions that reflect on the present state of art's looking back into the borderline between the 1960s and 1970s, that this issue of *Manifesta Journal* has chosen for its title the image of the "fungus of the contemporary". We are conscious of the ambiguity of this figure, for it both suggests a certain concern with the way that the circularity of that narrative is in danger of allowing our reading of contemporary art to turn stale, and of the extraordinary proliferation of moments of dissidence and creativity involved in the concentration of those contemporary-historical curatorial and artistic operations.

The experiences, texts and images that this issue of the *Manifesta Journal* contains attest both to the unlikely coincidence of curatorial efforts around the world to intervene in the historical narratives of contemporary art in terms of a manifold of ways to widen its fables, restore (and frequently reinvent, alter and even remake) the artworks that stand as its referents, and introduce a wealth of intellectual and sensible complexity to counter the hegemonic academic and commercialized standard narratives that the academic industry of the North fashions as global histories. We would like to imagine that, among the truffles, magic mushrooms and *huitlacoche* that the curatorial

and artistic projects selected have all gathered in this journal, the reader may also find some strains of *pennicilum fungi* growing, so to speak, on the corpse of recent "contemporary history"-based curatorial projects. Rather than documenting the historicist leanings of the contemporary art world, we have chosen projects that activate production of the social memory of art as a means to politicize, complicate and even question its radical or even revolutionary myths of origin.

For what is characteristic of the trope of "the contemporary" is, again, as Bakhtin argued, that the author of the narrative appears dialogical to the time structure of his or her narratives, feigning a certain distancing and exteriority from which the fable emerges, at the same that that the author specifies his or her "tangential"³ role in the account. It is in terms of reflecting on the complex coming and goings of the mushrooming of "the contemporary" that this *Manifesta Journal* would like to let its spores spread.



With Uneasiness as the Starting Point

From February to July 2011, in the *Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía* (MNCARS) in Madrid, the multifarious and elusive work of Argentine artist and sociologist Roberto Jacoby was exhibited for the first time, under the title *Desire Rises from Collapse*. In the face of a praxis that overlaps the most diverse fields—experiments with mass media and technologies, social research, festive celebrations, lyrics, experimental communities,

networks, literary, essayistic and theoretical writing—what was shown there, rather than a body of work, was an ever-insufficient series of montage and narration experiments, archiving modalities and exhibition strategies. Here follows a dialogue, between an artist who seldom defines himself as an artist and an “emergency curator”, in which they offer a review of what happened there.

Roberto Jacoby: I might be said to belong to a tradition of practices that try to dissolve into social life, practices of an inapprehensible, ephemeral, discontinuous, immaterial and context-specific character: experiments with mass media and technologies now outdated, social research, festive celebrations, lyrics, political interventions, subjectification operations, experimental communities. Consequently, a museographic review of my work presents, from the start, contradictions and difficulties. I believe both you and I have an ethical attitude towards these dilemmas. Neither of us have felt that the proposal of this exhibition was a moment like any other.

Ana Longoni: I’d dare say we suffer from exacerbated ethics!

RJ: The same dilemma could arise with Dadaism and other historical avant-gardes. But we are used to going to a museum and seeing a Tatlin, and we don’t say, “Tatlin in a museum! That’s preposterous!” That no longer shocks us.

AL: I think that that’s an effect of time. Enough time has elapsed for us to be able to codify those irruptions in a museum and even have at our disposal encyclopaedias that help us understand them as art. I have the feeling that the same thing is beginning to happen with what took place in the 1960s. We already have codes to read those radical experiments as an art that can be seen in a museum. I think that that’s the difference. What they have in common, I agree, is their “revulsive” condition.

RJ: Those avant-gardes were constitutionally against museums. They wanted to burn them down, because art was somewhere else... if such a thing we call “art” existed.

AL: They felt a calling to dissolve art into its autonomous statute, to go out into the streets and abandon institutional spaces. That’s something Dadaism shares with the Argentinian avant-garde of the 1960s.

RJ: Exactly. That’s why the invitation to exhibit my work in a museum such as the Reina Sofía became an ethical dilemma, as well as a logical one. The attempt to show something that from the moment it is shown it is betrayed can be a sort of denaturalization.

Roberto Jacoby
and Ana Longoni

AL: Once faced with the dilemma of this exhibition, we turned this uneasiness into our starting point.

RJ: An uneasiness that is ethical, intimate, personal, and not just rational or historiographic.

AL: We were running the risk of going against the inherent potency of those manifestations, those ideas, that past.

RJ: Sure. We weren't talking about the concerns of an alert and savvy curator, of a self-demanding curator. Our discomfort didn't originate in the intrinsic dilemmas of curatorship.

AL: Rather, in the interrogation about what it meant that your experiences were finally being displayed in a museum...

RJ: I'm not speaking only about myself, but about certain "practices" in general. And about your work too, both as a historian and a researcher, since you, who don't define yourself as a curator, but who have acted as an "emergency curator", also share this feeling that your relationship with those modes of doing and understanding art has a political meaning that you don't want to renegade.

AL: We didn't want to naturalize the appearance of your works in the museum, as if that had always been the place expected and most likely to receive your practices, but rather as a place to put in evidence our uneasiness and make it visible. That was the experiment.

RJ: Something like starting from angst and turning it into a reparative act.

AL: When faced with the MNCARS invitation to make this exhibition, our answer could have been a simple "no", or we could have attempted a reconstruction; a conventional display of documents without turning the operation into a problem. Our intention, on the contrary, was to make the difficulty that the restitution of those practices entailed all the more apparent. Your works are too far away from the standards of visibility suitable for a museum, and they run the risk of a total deactivation once they are exhibited there, and of becoming mere...

RJ: ... Exhibition devices. There's a very delicate, critical point between an exhibition device and its fidelity to the experiences it intends to reconstruct. I think that herein lies the artistic as well as the erotic aspect of a curatorship of this kind. In the gap between a theoretical strategy and its effective realization, an idea can go down. A good approach doesn't automatically imply a good outcome. True experiments must be able to fail.

AL: A curatorial experiment such as this also has to disturb other people's expectations. Our aim of making the exhibition not just a memory of the past but a powerful actual experience was a political wager: to generate in the public the kind of experience that might also be shocking in the present.

RJ: By definition, past cannot be restored. What matters is having a critical relationship with the past, being aware of the procedures used to represent it. In my case, this also means going beyond hermetism, making sure the work doesn't yield an erudite result, but one accessible and "friendly" to the public.

AL: One of the signals of that “friendly communication” was the relationship we established with the guardians of the exhibition rooms, who are unemployed people on transit toward better jobs. These guardians, who spend a lot of time in the museum, have no training as guides but simply look after the rooms. They established a very strong complicity with the exhibition, giving their opinions and getting involved. As we came back, months later, they would say, “People stand here”, “*This* and *that* happens”, “Have this fixed”... very involved, indeed. Manuel Borja-Villel, the MNCARS director, says that that kind of affinity is a thermometer that indicates an exhibition may work. It was something remarkable in a museum with those characteristics.

RJ: Yes. So gigantic and complex.

AL: Touristic and massive.

RJ: We couldn’t have made it without the spirit that prevails in the MNCARS. They haven’t got the kind of bureaucratized staff you find in other institutions. They were so patient with us.

AL: Really, having to suffer a curator and an artist who change their minds all the time is something unusual for them.

RJ: ... And putting up with a gang of Argentines! It’s normal for us to improvise, to reinvent, to falter, to decide what to do as we go along, to take advantage of difficulties. Otherwise, we wouldn’t have survived in a country like ours.

AL: In this exhibition, as in all your projects, the team work—the blurring of hierarchies and the enhancement of collective intelligence—was crucial. Your way of working activates a sort of multiple brain; each one with his/her abilities, his/her sensibility, his/her power in the encounter with the others. It isn’t a mere aggregate or assembling of parts; rather, it produces an unexpected and nutritious concoction.

RJ: I like polyphony as well as playing different chords. I think energy is generated only when there are differences. The rooms weren’t similar to each other either.

AL: There were some common resonances, however. Each space implied a different experiment, but it was precisely in their contrast that the almost- invisible threads uniting those parts appeared.

RJ: Definitely: we escaped the horror of the white cube and homogeneity. Each room in itself was an installation.

AL: I think that’s also due to the fact that we worked with the specificity of MNCARS spaces: Space One, then the Vault Room and finally the Protocol Room. That’s why it is impossible to reproduce the exhibition, as it took place in Madrid. With the exception, perhaps, of *1968, el culo te abrocho*, your 2008 installation that can be read independently of its context, because, to a certain extent, it is self-contained.

RJ: It’s true; there is something in that work that makes it accessible to audiences who have no information about the 1968 in Argentina.

AL: I think that the overprinting of poetic and theoretical texts of different moments of your career over documents of your own mythology

in the Argentine 1968 can be understood anywhere as an irreverent, ironic gesture. For instance, the documents of the mythical *Tucumán Arde* in 1968, as a backdrop for an erotic song of the 1980s, set off by themselves a buzz of temporalities and meanings.

RJ: In fact, it was anger that moved me to make that installation.

AL: Anger?

RJ: Yes, anger—not in the result but in the motivation. The celebrations for the fortieth anniversary of French May that included the President of France, the most reactionary newspapers and the most despicable journalists, were a trivialization of that rebellious feat. It was impossible to know whether they were celebrating May 1968 or its demise.

AL: Yet, besides debating with those trivial readings of the French May, you were also responding to the myths of the Argentine May. In the last decade and a half, events such as *Tucumán Arde* have suffered a remarkable distortion.

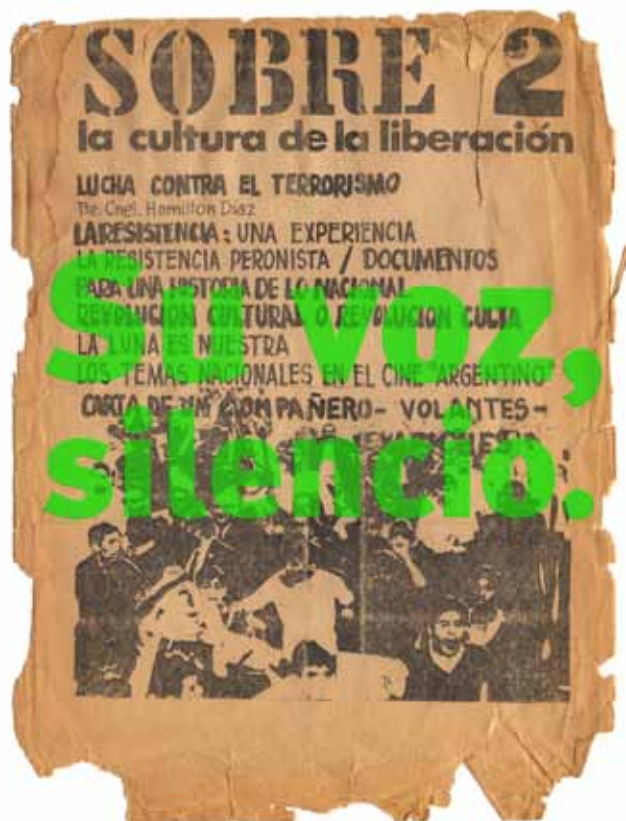
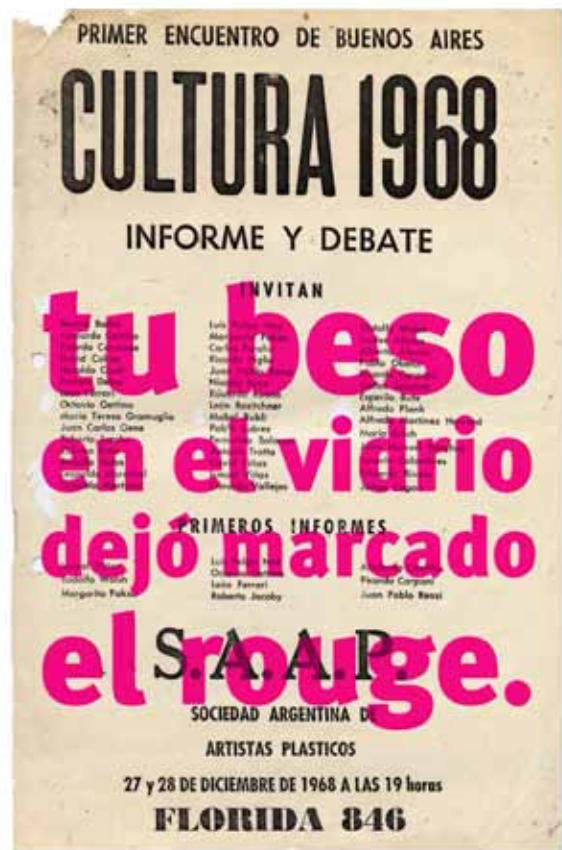
RJ: That's why I decided to start from my own experience, without lecturing about or historicizing the events. I endeavoured to study the history refraction on myself. There is a procedure of contemporary DJs, the "mash-up", that consists in blending two or more songs together. An operation different from collage, from the cut-and-paste. With *1968, el culo te abrocho*, I tried to proceed as a DJ, using history as a background over which to overlay another text.

AL: It was the first time we relied on archive materials, since you've always had a very detached relationship with the documents of your own past. As a matter of fact, I remember that when you did *1968...*, you didn't even have the documents with you. You had to borrow material from other archives.

RJ: Yes, my archive has a very weak memory.

AL: Another archive experiment took place in the exhibition area we called the *Cabinet of Curiosities*, in the Protocol Room. The same documents that appeared modified in *1968, el culo te abrocho*, were exhibited here in showcases but in their original versions. Thus, what had been seen in the other room reverberated here, but at the same time that residue was treated in a radically different way, and that difference produced a shock. The exacerbated fetish-like treatment of the document in one showcase, highlighted by a spot, in a catacomb atmosphere, restored its aura. A mausoleum in shadows, in which the documents appeared as if they were floating in mid-air.

That aural exhibition of documents also contrasted with what we called the *Archive in Use*. This archive was available for public manipulation through two computers. People could dive into the lyrics you wrote for the pop/rock group Virus in a sort of karaoke or search what productions you had made in a certain year or together with such and such person or based on a series of key concepts. This generated a playful contact with the documents that contrasted with what happened in the other room, where the almost sacral solemnity prevented all use. As a matter of fact, we employed three clearly distinct archive treatments.



Roberto Jacoby,
1968, *El Culo te
Abrocho*, series,
2008

RJ: The *Cabinet of Curiosities* was distantly inspired by a seventeenth century artefact collection. There we treated the archives as a distant presence, deliberately rendering them inaccessible. The objects or documents were before everybody's eyes but at the same time appeared to be distanced. There were recordings nobody could hear, films nobody could see, miniature slides, texts that were impossible to read. We weren't after the legibility of the material; what we wanted was to display it as a series of cult objects.

AL: Yes, the *Cabinet of Curiosities* worked with the elusiveness of experience, while the *Archive in Use* established an opposed logic. In it, documents were socialized through digital images available to the exhibition public and also for consultation in different points of Latin America and Spain. For the cabinet, we functionalized a gigantic wardrobe from the time when the building housed a hospital, in the sixteenth century. That huge wooden piece of furniture, extending from the floor to the ceiling, was used to keep the hospital linen. Today it is called the *Protocol Room* and is usually employed for sound installations, since the wardrobe presence is too imposing for visual works. When they offered us that space, we chose to take advantage of its materiality, instead of trying to mask it. It was like a ready-made cabinet of curiosities.

RJ: Those who saw the space for the first time thought the wardrobe was a structure created by us.

AL: That would have sapped the museum's annual budget!

RJ: Besides, it had a sort of mortuary connotation. When the building served as a hospital, it was there that the sheets were kept that may have been used to cover the dead...

AL: Or sick people, or the war wounded.

RJ: There is something macabre to those shelves.

AL: Like a crypt. But with the material exhibited there, we allowed ourselves some humour or equivocation. The first showcase displayed an apocryphal manifesto, written by you in 2004, in the fashion of the 1960s proclamations, but with a mocking caustic tone. That means to say that we started with a false clue; a fake. Then followed the showcases containing the few remaining documents of the so-called *Arte de los Medios* group, the first oral literature experiences, *Tucumán Arde*, and the research work on the 1969 social conflict. Each object, each document, was accompanied by a typewritten label such as those used in ethnographic museums.

In the next room, we operated with the same logic of showcases in shadows, but the fetish objects exhibited there were from the 1980s to 2010, to the *Brigada por Dilma* in the São Paulo Biennial, or to the party you held, also in 2010, as a materialization of the 1966 *Anti-happening* exhibited in the cabinet room. Once again, the resonance of a historical work overlaid a contemporary one.

The phantasmic rest of the 1960s had the same weight as the works you made a few months before the MNCARS exhibition. It is as if what is incorporated today in the museums collections and the art market, once transformed into "historical pieces", corresponded to a procedure that could be extended even to last week's experiences.

RJ: We brought into play the key questions implicit in the notion of archive: authenticity and falsification, copy and original, the arbitrary and interested nature of the selection, the flattening of time, legibility and legality, sacralisation and profanation.

AL: At this point, I'd like to mention the use of the wall texts. These showed texts written by you, operated as a counterpoint for that phantasmic atmosphere. I'd like to quote them literally. The first one is an excerpt from a manifesto written in 1968:

"Aesthetic contemplation has ended, because aesthetics is dissolving into social life. The work of art has also ended, because life and the planet itself are becoming art. The future of art is linked not to the creation of works but to the *definition of new life* concepts, and the artist becomes the propagator of these concepts. 'Art' has no importance. It's life that counts."

That is: your call to transform art into the invention of new ways of life appeared strikingly negated or contradicted in the middle of that mournful atmosphere. Also in the second room, a recent passage, in which you express your perplexities in the face of the contemporary demand to turn your life traces into museum pieces:

"What remains to be shown of practices now over forty years old, which took place in a distant context and that escape the art world? Certainly,

those yellowed papers full of writing, those photographs and artefacts are not, and can never be, 'The Works'. Are they, consequently, fetishes of a historical recuperation? Memorabilia of fleeting moments? Researches of recent archaeology? The opening of inaccessible archives? How to infuse life into these maimed and defective records? The 'authentic' documents are exhibited as inaccessible, aural and even illegible fetishes, as archaeological remains of a too-distant past that interpolates us from the shadows, forcing us to relativize our supposed absolute dominion over history."

Your text, set over an abyss, juxtaposed to the material spoils of your actions, stresses the impossibility of coping with the uneasiness of communicating that which cannot be communicated.

RJ: It was like archaeologically counterbalancing the caducity of the immediate past and, what's more, of the present. The very idea of "contemporary art" is paradoxical, since what we usually call "contemporary" is nothing but a past, a not-so-recent past that is at least fifty years old. Artefacts like typewriters, slide projectors, cassettes, or even computer diskettes establish a distance almost as remote as Guttenberg's press. Where are we? Where am I?

AL: You are talking about the acceleration in the obsolescence of representation techniques that contemporary art faces today, and that was also staged in the exhibition of those archive materials. Many of those records are nowadays inaccessible because they have become technically outdated, although we used them only ten years ago.

RJ: Conservators, who are used to restoring paintings or papers, have the same nightmare. Today, to get a telex, a tape recorder or an electric typewriter running is a technological challenge!

AL: The vertigo and strangeness produced by technologies also points to the world's brutal changes over these last fifty years. The discourses of the 1960s can also sound truly obsolete.

We still have to speak about the rest of the spaces. *Living Here* was one of the spaces we discussed the most. Its constructive principle was one used by you in most of your projects: working in collaboration with other people, usually artists, to build a space that simulated your living room: The place where you and your friends meet daily to conceive projects. The starting point was our certitude that it was impossible and pointless to accurately reconstruct an experience of the mid 1960s: the action you called *Living Here* and that consisted in moving your studio and home to a gallery for twenty four hours.

RJ: *Living Here* was certainly the space I had the greatest number of doubts about, because it was the only space that aspired to exist in the actual temporality of the present; to be a living space, a pleasant meeting place, vibrant at the same time with art.

AL: I think that while we were in Madrid, at least, the exhibition space was a place people inhabited; a very vital one as well. Even on the opening day, there were music recitals and hundreds of people wearing t-shirts with the phrase "I have AIDS". Obviously, the museum regimen is to be taken into account, and as long as this isn't activated, it becomes a mere backdrop. However, people felt inclined to linger there.

RJ: Yes. Longer than in any museum room. That, in spite of the fact that we couldn't serve coffee and cookies! It's true: people sat in the armchairs, stopped to look at the books and listen to songs, rested.

AL: However, I've been told that the most visited spaces were those of the Vault Room, a damp subterranean vault as huge as a pharaonic tomb. It is said that lunatics used to be confined there, when the building served as a hospital. Our original project had been to reproduce the *Darkroom* performance, in which twelve blinded performers played in utter darkness for a sole viewer. In the end, though, we had the good sense of showing the video records on small monitors. In that dark atmosphere, the characters appeared as presences, more disturbing than they would normally have been if we had reconstructed the play.

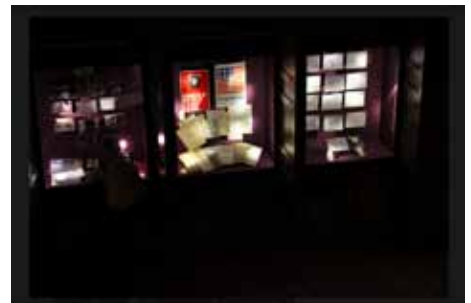
RJ: That proves that sometimes a record can be more faithful than the original.

AL: Finally, people could leave the exhibition, taking with them a poster that was really an anti-poster: Che Guevara's typical image saying "A guerrilla fighter doesn't die so he can be hung on the wall", a work you

made in 1969. So they left, taking home this uneasiness: what to do with a poster that asks not to be used as such? Dozens of thousands of samples of that uneasiness that haunted us were thus scattered around the world.

RJ: A paradox.

AL: An object that rebels against its own being; that revolts against itself.



Exhibition view of Roberto Jacoby. *Desire Rises from Collapse* at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, 2011

Back to *No-Objetualismo*: Returns of Peruvian Artistic Experimentalism (1960s / 1970s)



Exhibition view of *La Persistencia de lo Efímero* at Spanish Cultural Centre, Lima, 2007, Photo Eduardo Hirose

1 Curated by Miguel A. López and Emilio Tarazona, the exhibition was presented at the Spanish Cultural Centre in Lima from 15 March to 30 April 2007. Some of the ideas in this text were presented by the curators at the symposium “Recargando lo Contemporáneo: Estrategias de Recuperación del Arte Reciente”, organized by Olivier Debrouse and Cuauhtémoc Medina in the framework of the exhibition *The Age of Discrepancy: Art and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1968–1997*, in Mexico D.F., September 2007. The text of this conference was recently published: Miguel A. López y Emilio Tarazona, “Re/montar la historia. Intervenir los 60, 40 años después”, in: William Alfonso López Rosas (ed.), *Arte y Acción Política - I Cátedra Latinoamericana de Historia y Teoría de las Artes*. Alberto Urdaneta, Bogotá, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2011, pp. 51-71.

2 See: Marta Traba, *Dos décadas vulnerables en las artes plásticas latinoamericanas, 1950-1970*, Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1973, pp. 9-32. A counter argument is provided by the Peruvian critic Juan Acha, see: Juan Acha, “Vanguardismo y subdesarrollo”, *Mundo Nuevo*, Paris, September–October 1970, pp. 73-79.

The aesthetic flustering of the 1960s returned to Lima in 2007. For a month and a half, between March and April, some thirty instances of dematerialized art were brought back to the public discussion after forty years of silence. Through photographs, documents, objects and installations, the exhibition *La Persistencia de lo Efímero. Orígenes del no-objetualismo peruano: ambientaciones / happenings / arte conceptual (1965–1975)* [*The Persistence of the Ephemeral. Origins of Peruvian “No-Objetualismo”: Environments / Happenings / Conceptual Art (1965–1975)*] presented a baffling panorama of local artistic practices that were completely peripheral to the historical discourses which had hitherto described the period.¹ Such was the shock that some suggested the possibility

that we, the curators, were retrospectively inventing a fictitious and artificial scene. Had there really been such a radical and critical Peruvian experimentalism during the 1960s and 1970s as the one seen in these galleries? Why hadn’t that conceptualism transcended its time, its generation, or even its borders? And why no photographs, works or documents had been published or exhibited afterward? Where were these belligerent artists today?

Decentred

For some reason not entirely explicable for the metropolitan perspectives, some of the most daring attacks on the art object in the region had emerged in Peru. However, these had never been recorded properly in the continental discussions, and much less preserved in the memory of their own local context. Unlike the international impact had by cosmopolitan countries such as Argentina and Brazil during those years, the experiences of another group of Latin American countries, strongly marked by their colonial heritage, had remained in the shade. This, perhaps, under the hypothesis that in certain “closed countries” (or “undeveloped countries”, as imperial discourse decreed shortly after the Second World War), the avant-garde and all forms of artistic experimentalism were nothing but blatant signs of U.S. domination and of cultural submission.² A bias easy to endorse in the midst of the fierce ideological struggles spanning Latin America, during which art became a major weapon of the Cold War.

That assumption is clearly wrong, however. On the contrary, it was the unexpected collision of parochial concerns and spectres of globalism that channelled some of the most unusual (and least addressed) aesthetic processes of alternative modernity, which exceed the models of social identification and artistic recognition that would have been expected at the time. If there was a primary drive to *La Persistencia de lo Efímero*, it was in making clear that the forms of cultural radiation and influence—and their effects—are anything but unidirectional or predictable. The exhibition itself was the result of detective work: the decision to exhibit the traces of a scene that had been completely suppressed necessarily meant drawing from the imagination, while combining rigorous historical research strategies and the always risky tasks of artwork reconstruction, in close collaboration with the artists. Our initial question was whether or not it would be possible to conceive this fading as a central historico-political issue of the present. And admitting it were, to what extent would it be possible to resize the effects of something that does not seem to have taken place, in order to alter the origins and the scope of so-called critical art?

By 2007, an additional situation made such kind of curatorial recovery particularly important. Since the turn of the millennium, the emergence of an accelerated phenomenon of transnationalisation of young Peruvian art was felt in Lima, alongside the concomitant consolidation of a previously nonexistent art scene: new galleries, new collectors and even unseen museum projects. Widespread enthusiasm seemed to signal the definitive arrival of the “forms” of the “contemporary” and the acquisition of the coveted passport for aesthetic exchange — granted by globalism — embracing the fantasy of living synchronous times. However, once more, this sudden “currency” was divorced from internal historical reflection, ignoring those other aesthetic forms of “micro-globality” that had emerged in the country for over four decades. Could the delayed arrival of these works from the 1960s and 1970s alter the parameters of the “contemporary” in the country? Contemporary to whom? Contemporary in which way?



Exhibition view of *La Persistencia de lo Efímero* at Spanish Cultural Centre, Lima, with photographic documentations of works by Felipe Buendía, Gloria Gómez Sánchez, Teresa Burga and Rafael Hastings, 2007, Photo Eduardo Hirose

Exhibition view of *La Persistencia de lo Efímero* at Spanish Cultural Centre, Lima with work by Luis Arias Vera, *Ah! Y el Chino de la esquina*, 1965 / 2007, Photo Eduardo Hirose



Persistence

The exhibition surveyed ten years of experimental practices (1965–1975) recurring to non-historicist modes of articulation, generating temporal intersections and overlaps. Our objective was clear: installing an exhibition set to recuperate the hostility of the early instances of a hitherto despised dematerialised art, in order to intercept and re-politicise the course of certain genealogies. It was necessary to attest that, in the face of the familiar flow of dominant pictorial trends raised and preserved during those years by the market, there was also an insubordinate and non-collectable artistic wager that vindicated *attitude* over the mere objectness heralded by the prevailing taste; an offence that had meant its loss.

3 Translator's note: Traditionally, in Lima, it was common for Chinese immigrants to work as shopkeepers of corner shops.

4 On the emergence of the first happenings and environments in Peru in 1965, see: Miguel A. López and Emilio Tarazona, "Erosion and Dissolution of the object in the Peruvian art of the 1960s. A first, barely- perceptible tracking coordinate", *Papers d'Art* 93, 2007, pp. 189-192.

5 In recent years we found this work almost in its entirety in the house of the artist. It was exhibited in her recent retrospective in Lima and in Stuttgart, as well as in the 12th Istanbul Biennial (2011). See: *Teresa Burga. Informes. Esquemas. Intervalos. 17.9.10*, Lima: ICPNA, 2011.

Exhibition view of *La Persistencia de lo Efímero* at Spanish Cultural Centre, Lima, with work by Teresa Burga, *Autorretrato. Estructura. Informe. 9.6.72*, 1972 / 2007, Photo Eduardo Hirose



La Persistencia de lo Efímero was basically divided into one large room, presenting a copious photographic record of happenings, actions and early environments, and six other rooms where objects, conceptual pieces and partially or completely rebuilt installations were displayed. This task of spatial reactivation seemed decisive: we could only imagine conveying certain episodes through the experience of the body. The effect was great. One of the most striking works was *Ah! Y el Chino de la esquina?* [*Ah! And the Chinese from the corner shop?*],³ by Luis Arias Vera, one of several ephemeral environments originally presented by the artist in a solo show in 1965. The work, reconstructed following the artist's blueprints and instructions, consisted of a sign emblazoned with the title phrase hanging at 65 centimeters from the ground, from which yellow arrows guided the viewer from the gallery to a grocery store in a street corner, run by a Chinese immigrant and his family. The piece made of the viewer's path the work itself, and it was a scathing reference to those migration processes that had turned the Chinese community into a group of prosperous merchants.⁴ Another important piece was *Autorretrato. Estructura. Informe. 9.6.72* [*Self Portrait. Structure. Report. 9.6.72*] by Teresa Burga, an installation often cited but never seen after its 1972 exhibition, until 2007. The work uses the notion of "self portrait" to present sound and light pieces, as well as medical documents and charts of the artist's face, body and blood taken on a single day (6 June 1972). During 2005 we only found fragments of the work at the artist's home, for which it was decided to reconstruct the missing elements on the same date, albeit thirty-four years later (6 June 2006), to be exhibited the following year.⁵

Works done in diaspora were also shown. It was amazing to see in Lima Rafael Hastings's installation *L'Espace*, originally exhibited at the Yvon Lambert Gallery in Paris in 1970: six diagrams that summarise the ruptures in the modes of representation in Western art — criticized back then for voicing a comment about European art from the mouth of a South American. Different internal migrations were also included, such as the subversions of metropolitan categories such as "conceptual

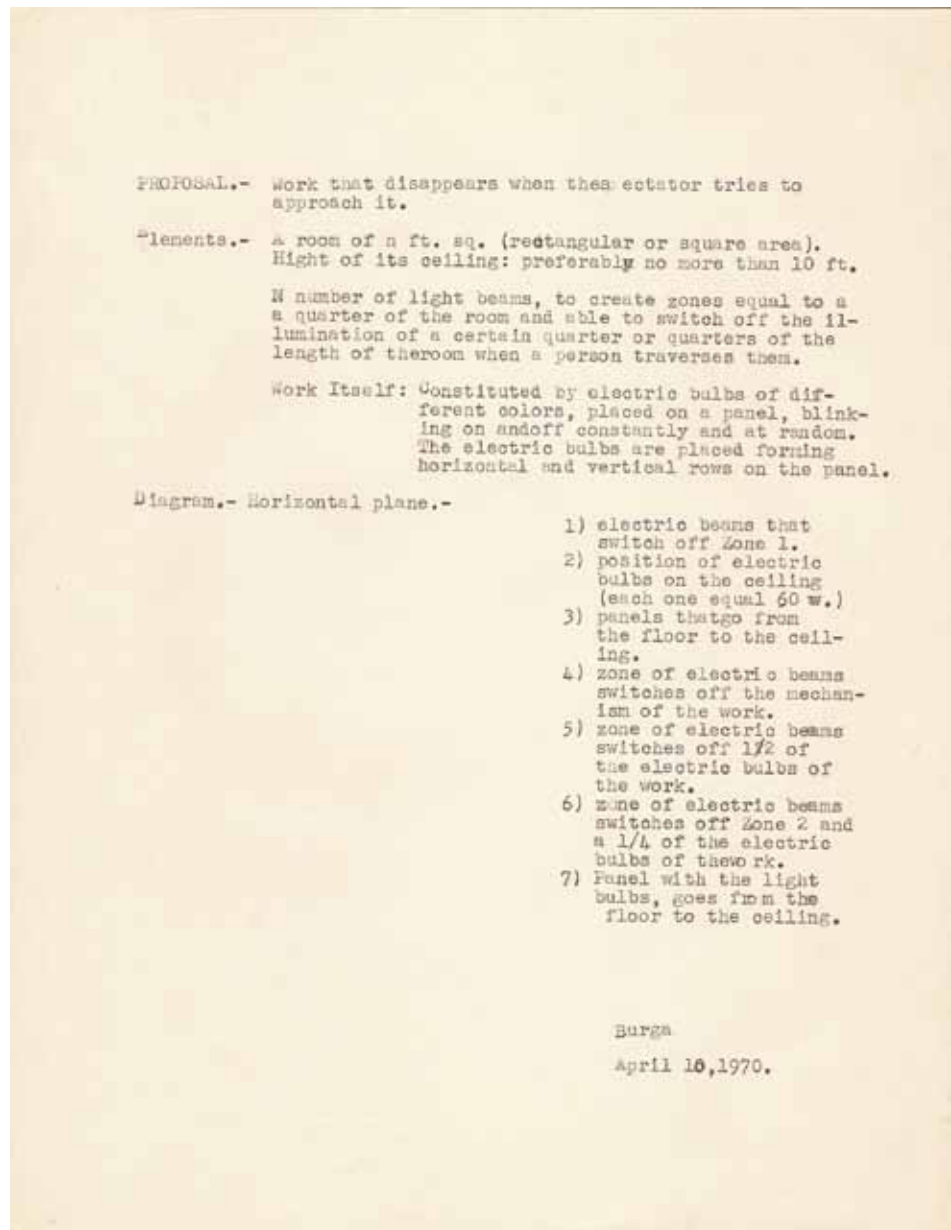
art" or "idea art" (and its proclamation of the "dematerialization" of the art object) to propose festivals of interdisciplinary and plural art that combined indigenous and urban aesthetics with other cultural expressions, in the context of a nationalist military dictatorship.

Another issue opened up by the project was how art history was beginning to be written, increasingly so, *from* curatorial practice rather than from academia. In that sense, *La Persistencia de lo Efímero* worked effectively as a critical provocation of the meta-narratives of Peruvian art, but also against interpretive axes that were operating since the 1990s in the transnational construction of so-called "Latin American art" (from which Peru and other "Andean countries" were obviously excluded).

Non-Objectual

A controversial aspect was how to name what was being recovered. Could one inscribe it in the hegemonic rhetoric of "global conceptualism", even though these experiences forged autonomous concepts and spaces of discussion? The opportunity appeared as the perfect occasion to bring back a "minor concept" to the debate, one almost vanished in the pro-cess of standardisation of transnational vocabulary: *no-objetualismo*, a Marxist theoretical concept formulated by the Peruvian critic Juan Acha in Mexico, circa 1973, as part of his approach to the counter-cultural protest and performative artistic production of the so-called Mexican "groups" of the 1970s, but also in reference to indigenous aesthetics such as popular arts, crafts, and design, which put in crisis the modern/colonial perspectives of Western art history.⁶

Exhibition view of *La Persistencia de lo Efímero* at Spanish Cultural Centre, Lima, with work by Teresa Burga, *Work that Disappears When the Spectator Tries to Approach It*, 1970, Courtesy the artist



6 See: Juan Acha, "Teoría y Práctica No-Objetualista en América Latina" in: Juan Acha, *Ensayos y Ponencias Latinoamericanistas*, Caracas: GAN, 1984, pp. 221-242.

The recovery of this concept to think about the emergence of unorthodox art forms, as Acha did in the 1970s and the 1980s, was thus a curatorial gesture of political vindication for a category that had played an important role in Latin America. Even though the concept had sometimes been misunderstood as merely a Latin version of the “dematerialisation of art”, its scope is largely more complex, and impossible to exhaust in one exhibition. For us, it was necessary to register the fact that in that subaltern theoretical presence underlies a latent struggle for other ways of living and constructing the contemporary.⁷



Coda

To think the *persistence* of that which was meant to be ephemeral did not imply being anchored to the “immateriality” of the works, but recovering the blaze and the intensity of their effects — of that which is *to come*. It was not about altering the “content” of the discourses, but modifying the margins from which these very discourses could be perceived. Beyond questioning history, we were interested in spreading the *desire* for *another history*: reinstating the inconsistencies and conflicts, fostering a transfusion of intensities and emotions, and enabling those arrested explosions to inscribe new openings in the present. Certainly there was a degree of curatorial fiction: to put together all of these experiences could give the impression of cohesion when the scene was actually scattered, anachronistic and disjointed. Yet fiction also produces reality. Our intention was never to mirror the period, but to provide evidence of a passionate movement to restore to these radical practices the furious public impact that was partially taken away from them during their time.

Exhibition views of *La Persistencia de lo Efímero* at Spanish Cultural Centre, Lima, with work by Rafael Hastings, *L'Espace*, 1970 / 2007, Photo Eduardo Hirose

⁷ There are several other concepts coined by artists or theorists in Latin America to name their practices during the 1960s through to the 1980s. See: Miguel A. López, “How De We Know What Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?”, *Afterall* 23, Spring 2010, pp. 5-21.

Salón Independiente

Organizado con premura en medio de la represión al Movimiento Estudiantil, el Primer Salón Independiente abrió sus puertas en el Centro Cultural Isidro Fabela (la Casa del Falso) en San Ángel dos semanas después de Tlatelolco. A pesar de que no se han encontrado registros fotográficos de este montaje, es muy probable que las obras que combates fueran sólo aquellas creadas en la producción de sus artistas. En 1968, el Segundo Salón se basaría a todo en el verso, y a partir de ese momento la disidencia política se traduciría en disidencia formal.

Organized under pressure in the midst of government repression of the Student Movement, the First Salon Independiente opened to the public only two weeks after the Tlatelolco massacre. The venue was the Centro Cultural Isidro Fabela, also known as the Casa del Falso, but as we know, there are no visual records of the exhibition, though one can assume the artists showed examples of their current production. In 1969 the Second Salon was held at the Casa América, another high point in public dissent became visual dissent.



La toma del Balmori Taking Over the Balmori

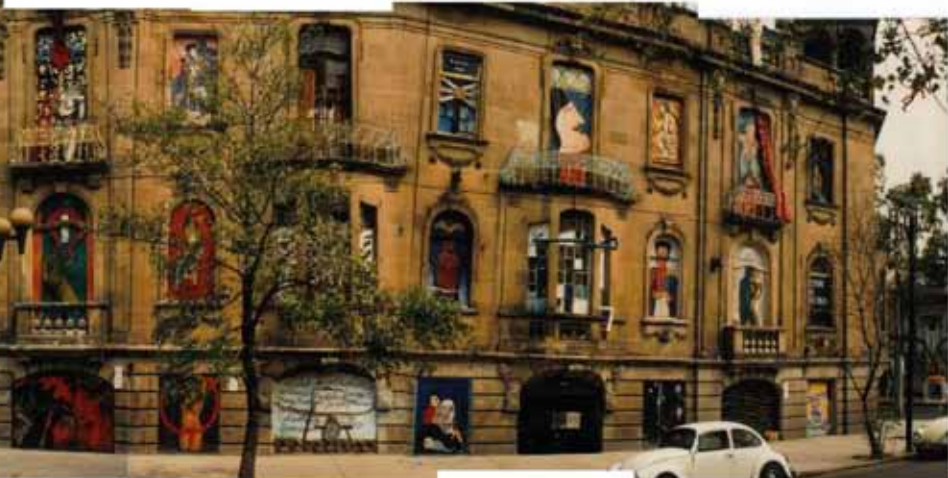


La acción más importante del Salón dos Aztecas fue "La toma del edificio Balmori", en la esquina de Orizaba y Avenida Álvaro Obregón. En marzo de 1969, ante la amenaza de que este elegante edificio ahincado fuera demolido a lo pretexto del deterioro producido por el terremoto, el Taller hizo una convocatoria abierta para que miles de los artistas de diversas generaciones, desde Philip Borge hasta los integrantes de La Ollintecuera, se congregaran artísticamente del otro para poner la escena pública de la amenaza que se cernía sobre la arquitectura histórica. La acción fue extraordinariamente exitosa, además de ser considerada como uno de los actos del arte de los años sesenta. "La toma del Balmori" logró salvar al edificio, que sobrevive, ahora restaurado, en un entorno que poco a poco se fue poblando de galerías y centros culturales. Aldo Flores explicó el operativo un par años más tarde, esta vez en un intento de recuperar el edificio Ruíz, en el Eje Central. A partir de "La toma del Balmori", Flores organizó también varios festivales anuales tipo un torneo a un día del artista.

Restauración, para la historia y el arte, del Edificio Balmori en la Roma

■ este edificio es la donación de los señores Camacho Azules, cuyo terreno fue un regalo de la época mexicana por momento (Aldo Flores).

The most important action sponsored by the Taller dos Aztecas was the occupation of the Balmori, a once elegant French-style apartment building at the corner of the Calle Orizaba and Avenida Álvaro Obregón. In March 1969, while the building was threatened with demolition after being damaged in the earthquake, the Taller issued an open call to over one hundred artists of different generations, from Philip Borge to members of La Ollintecuera, who agreed them to appropriate the place artistically in order to warn the public of the danger of threatening the city's historic architecture. The action was an enormous success. It was a collective moment in Mexico's contemporary art history and also saved the building. (Aldo Flores) Even today, it is a centerpiece of the Colonia Roma, a neighborhood welcoming generations. Flores explained the operation had been like attempting to take over the building. Ruiz de la Cruz, adjacent to the Torre Latinoamericana. Following the takeover of the Balmori, Flores also organized several annual festivals planned around the idea of "a day of the artist."



Retroactive Vampirism: On The Age of Discrepancies

Cuauhtémoc Medina

In memoriam Olivier Debroyse, 1952–2008

1. Institutionalized amnesia

From the moment we conceived of it far back in the mid-1990s, those of us involved in *The Age of Discrepancies: Art and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1968–1997*¹ understood the project to be a curatorial intervention into the texture of cultural memory, and not as a mere exhibition. *Discrepancies* was part of the set of critical and intellectual operations to which we had been committed since we worked in the *Curare* group, in the sense that it demanded that we operationalize in practice as well as in discourse a different institutional, intellectual and affective inscription for contemporary art in Mexico as a crucial component of public life. For all those reasons, we understood the exhibition to be a political intervention, directed at several planes simultaneously.

2. Institutional critique

Discrepancies was conceived as a sort of Museum of Contemporary Art project; as the practical refutation of objections that could have been raised against the presence of permanent representations of recent art in Mexico city museums. We were reacting to a near-total absence of public and private collections, historical research and archives dedicated to the artistic period after 1968. We imagined this project as a gesture that demanded to be inserted within society and its cultural institutions. Indeed, we wanted to advance a kind of institutionalization. To this end, our intervention had to be vigorous and ambitious: it was necessary to create a *fetish*, which would imply, in addition to an epistemological project, a circulation of values.

3. Temporary museum

The Age of Discrepancies sought to be a sort of temporary museum; an exhibition about exhibitions. The show was linked to two other initiatives that the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) was undertaking at the time: the creation of the collections, the physical building and the 2008 museological project of the MUAC (Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo)², and the reconstruction of Mathias Goeritz's Museo del Eco³.

The project was inscribed in a strategy of reorganizing the fabric of local artistic politics whereby the university comes, as in many other places, to amend

1 *La Era de la Discrepancia: Arte y Cultura Visual en México, 1968-1997*, curated by Olivier Debroyse, Álvaro Vázquez, Pilar García de Germeños and Cuauhtémoc Medina, was organized for the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, from 18 March to 30 September 2007. Afterward it traveled to the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano in Buenos Aires, Argentina (MALBA) and the Pinacoteca do Estado in São Paulo, Brazil. The website compiles texts, reviews and images of the exhibition: <http://servidor.esteticas.unam.mx:16080/~discrepancia/>

2 <http://www.muac.unam.mx/webpage/index.php>

3 <http://www.eleco.unam.mx/sitio>

the catastrophic failures of the state structure, snatching away the monopoly of institutional artistic control from the federal government and its agencies.

4. Critical hypothesis

Instead of subscribing to a history of art conceived as an unfolding of personalities and styles, we adopted a reading that, in a certain way, shares much with the anthropological definition of certain visual subcultures or “tribes”. The groupings into which the show was divided operated as differentiations: not according to their contributions to culture or art in general, as gestures that claim a particular field of practice. We wanted to convey the notion that there is no single shared cultural trajectory, but rather different adventures whose concurrence owes to their wanting to combat each other mutually without managing to become complementary. We aimed to convey the idea that to intervene artistically and culturally is to produce a differentiation, a split, a bias. In this sense, we sought to mine the prestige of general constructions: painting, national culture, the hollow notion of “the cultural” itself.

5. Politics of temporality

Choosing to begin the exhibition in 1968—with the origin of the *Salón Independiente* (1968–1971), the result of artists’s refusals to participate in the official events of the Olympics in Mexico, which coincided with the repression of the student movement—was no countercultural whimsy, as many of our critics have suggested, and much less a desire to subsume artistic genealogies within a political narrative. It supposes, rather, assumes the task

of addressing the fact that after 1968 the framework of the conditions of art and culture underwent a fundamental alteration, whereby an important subset of those social projects that could not be brought to the state’s field of constitution reverberated within the field of “the cultural”. On one hand, one of the decisive hypotheses of our exhibition was to discern in the genealogy that leads from the *Salón Independiente* to the movement of the urban strategies of Los Grupos in the 1970s—by way of the experimental circuits of the artists’ books inspired by Ulises Carrión—a continuous re-elaboration of collective and self-generated utopias that had begun gestating in 1968. In retrospect it would be more convenient to have said that a portion of the energy of experimentation of the Left’s subjectivities was translated into art, and that even this failure made evident the complexity of pinpointing the formation of a new historical subject beyond the party / proletarian, avant-garde / guerrilla model. In the same way it seemed crucial that we suggest a series of moments of a virtual “visual Left” that, throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, would seek to reorient the radical imaginary toward new referents: from Central American guerrillas to suburban subalterns, passing through the fracture of the notions of national identity to formulate a micropolitics of identity. The way in which diverse forms of artistic production confronted both the programmatic artistic vacuum and the programmatic political vacuum does not seem at all foreign to the era’s trajectory. This preference for a particular affective political intensity also explains our clear indifference to those forms of artistic practice that did not have a radical subjective or intellectual project. Visitors

to the exhibition could not have failed to recognize that, on some level, the chronicle that we were proposing had to do with understanding the end of the twentieth century as illuminated by Godard's phrase in *masculin/feminin*: "The children of Marx and Coca Cola". Likewise, our decision to conclude the exhibit with the economic and political crises of 1994 and 1995 would have had to suggest the assumption that, with the end of the regime of single party rule in Mexico, a new political stage had begun, wherein the politically intense contents of the twentieth century had become a crucial part of artistic production—visibly, commercially, in the mass media, and institutionally. The collusion of market and politicization did not bring us to despair, in part because it was hard for us to imagine how radical culture could operate under late, revitalized capitalism without making use of the commodity form as a mode of dissemination. To study the dynamic between culture and society in the present would require another theoretical apparatus. We imagined that the recuperation of history depended on performing a kind of *retroactive vampirism*: to re-read the prestige of contemporary art back onto its obliterated past.

6. Currents of dissemination

Cultural contagion is anything but academic and territorial. All those present here can testify to the effect of the bottle lost at sea that decided our involvement in a given cultural field. It is indeed because of sporadic contamination or indirect transmission that we gain access to the crucial references in our lives: the photocopy of a counter-relief by Tatlin seen at just the right moment,

the fragment of a film by Jodorowsky that gives us the key to question our progressivism, the good fortune of having been taken by a friend to an homage to Sergey Kuryokhin, the unexpected discovery of a work at a museum that, despite the museographic narrative in which it is inscribed, stands out as a unique and unrepeatable moment, designed *ex professo* for each of us. Every purist argument against the incorporation of art and radical culture to the museum or to historiography that hopes to salvage its anti-systemic character is an expression of a strange religiosity that effectively collaborates with repression through the control of supposedly orthodox information. In *Discrepancies*, by contrast, we wanted to activate the greatest space of dissemination that had been possible for us, above all through a type of catalog-book that attempted to excite a continuous uncovering of references, cases and examples, rather than to provide a closed and systematic recounting of a period.⁴ The very decision to conceive the book of the exhibition as a sort of scrap-book had a very specific purpose: to create a publication that we ourselves would have consumed when we were twenty-three years old, to the degree that it would offer an account of culture as a field of adventures and promises, and not as a body of ominously finished works. Cultural memory should be preserved not out of a sense of fidelity to the past, but with the ambition of facilitating future explosions. To think otherwise is to desire that

4 Olivier Debroise, ed., *The Age of Discrepancies: Art and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1968-1997*, Mexico City, UNAM / Turner, 2006, 426p. ISBN 978-970-32-38293. Preview available online at <http://books.google.com.mx/books?id=So-i03PG1xQC>

radicalism be transformed into esotericism, with all of the advantages that come with controlling a field of secrets.

7. The motives behind a title

That a project such as *The Age of Discrepancies* could have come to fruition had a lot to do with the good fortune that the exhibition was adopted by the cultural project of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in 2003. Insofar as museums in general exercise a productivist criterion that focuses curatorial efforts on producing, in the most spectacular way possible, the traditional art exhibition's Aristotelian unity of time, narrative and place, operating within the UNAM made it easy to convey the idea that this was a project centered on research, and that the anthological show was just one of its instantiations. For four years we enjoyed (and maliciously abused) all the advantages that are supposed to obtain in a truly extraordinary academic institution, which allowed us to mobilize the resources of the country's premiere film archive, various libraries and the only center of research on artistic materiality and technique in Mexico, the Laboratorio de Obras de Arte at the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, which oversaw the reconstruction of works using a scientific degree of investigation. Finally, we had the enormous advantage of using the space of instruction itself as a field on which to test out our arguments, tastes and elaborations. For two years, in tandem with the weekly curatorial meetings that arbitrated the team's coordination, we colonized graduate seminars in Art History at the Department of Philosophy and Letters, covering our own reading lists by way of holding discussions with the graduate students there.

From this perspective, the title of the show came about naturally. *The Age of Discrepancies* recalls and memorializes one of the most notable gestures in Mexican political history: a declaration by the University dean, Javier Barros Sierra, who proclaimed in 1969—just over a year after the massacre at Tlatelolco—"Long live discrepancy!" after pointing out that the university had been attacked for fulfilling its function of being discrepant. After challenging the president of the Republic by defending the right of democratic assembly during the battles of the movement of 1968, dean Barros Sierra proposed a vision of a new republic, based on a novel relationship between authority and society that, instead of fearing disagreement, would place it at the center of the functions of its educational apparatus and its academic class. In opposition to all hegemonic visions of culture, Barros Sierra's phrase seemed to us more than appropriate to describe an age when, despite the establishment's disdain, cultural producers opted for a creative dissensus with an intensity that would be hard to compare to other sectors of culture.

Nevertheless, here it is worthwhile to specify, dictionary in hand, that "discrepancy" is not synonymous with "opposition" or "subversion". One of the elements that attracted us to the concept of discrepancy was the way the term is used in the scientific field to refer not so much to contrariness, but rather to the idea that two or more pieces of data differ from each other, and thus suggest an inconsistency. Being discrepant meant curating a show based on clashes, frictions, and disagreements, but also on indifferences, lateral displacements, and the cultural space for dreams, irresponsibility and reticence.



Exhibition view of *The Age of Discrepancies*.
Art and Visual Culture in Mexico 1968-1997 at
 the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano, Buenos
 Aires, 2008

8. The mechanisms of the local are already the framework for the global.

Of all the arguments that have arisen around the exhibition of *The Age of Discrepancies*, there is one that particularly surprised us: the complaint made by certain reviewers that our point of departure should have been an analysis defined out of “our own ideas” and stories, and the taking up of an endogenous self-consciousness.⁵ We curators of *The Age of Discrepancies* understood ourselves to be part of a context that, in the last two decades, has occurred in the North as well as the South, whereby the art, counterculture and visual production of the last third of the twentieth century have demanded their insertion into the museum’s discourse because the notion of “contemporary art” has changed social valence. This is also why we expected our program of sending the show abroad to mobilize exchanges and vibrations within the global South. Although we did fail to send the exhibition to the United States and Europe—where central institutions choose not to accommodate shows defined geographically unless they resonate with their own interests in producing national stereotypes—the show’s itinerary was aimed more

energetically at South America. By presenting it at the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano in Buenos Aires and the Pinacoteca Do Estado in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 2008, we wanted to occasion a contagion of tactics.

Today, perhaps for the first time, there is a *contemporary art* in two senses: the work

of art interacts with its social moment in a direct, unmediated way, without modern art’s biases, delays, advances or its cult of untimeliness. With this, the hostility between production and reception has largely disappeared. However distressing it may seem to those who feel nostalgia for the avant-garde’s critical function of tension, contemporary art has an increasingly fluid relationship with its host society: collections, capitals, museums, publics, educational apparatus and textual attention spill over into the production of contemporaneity with a disposition that would have been unthinkable for the modernists. In this sense, art is *contemporaneous* with its society in an immediate, vigorous way that has not been possible since 1793.

But the assumption that geography implies delays and advances has also disappeared: no longer does anyone openly maintain that the periphery follows, imitates or re-elaborates the center’s innovations according to a diffusionist schematic. Rather, different latitudes occupy the same temporal horizon, even as asymmetries of power and visibility persist. Resistance to this multi-polarity survives, nevertheless, in the shared account of the history of art that is still the narrative of modern art that centers on the region of the old NATO.

It is in these terms that we must acknowledge that many of the curatorial operations with the recent past around the globe have involved the common—and not entirely conscious—task of constructing a multi-focal account irreducible to the narrative of the metropolis, one that seeks to reveal a geographical framework of cultural genealogies that no longer bears any relation to the mainstream notion of modernism. Indeed, there is no “principal current”: only routes that crisscross each other, in an uneven

⁵ Mónica Mayer, “Artes Visuales”, *El Universal*, Mexico City, 8 June 2007. Available online at <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/columnas/65618.html>



Exhibition view of *The Age of Discrepancies*.

Art and Visual Culture in Mexico

1968-1997 with reconstruction

of SUMA group, *El Desempleado*, 1978

at the Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo, Brasil,

2008

weave of operations of power that makes the historical account increasingly complicated. But it is no longer possible to trace in this dimension of complexity a local or national history of art that would establish its developmental logic and its own temporality “internally”, inasmuch as artistic genealogies, too, undergo an almost instantaneous process of globalization.

Indeed, as we proposed in the introduction to the catalog, *The Age of Discrepancies* originated in a feeling of unease that several Mexican curators and art historians had experienced as a result of the superficial rewriting of local accounts that accompanied the visibility that the country’s contemporary art acquired in the mid-1990s.⁶ We were alarmed at the possibility that the production of various generations of artists between muralism and the global emergence of artists like Gabriel Orozco or Francis Alÿs would end up completely erased.⁷ It seemed clear to us that the insertion of an artistic scene within the global territory would involve a renegotiation of peripheral genealogies. It is at the level of these interactions that the disputes over insertion are produced, which also operate because of retroactive transfusions of prestige and contemporaneity.

In any case, there was an affective motive that obliged us to think this show outside of any “national culture” scheme. We wanted to imagine an exhibition that would do justice to a range of works

⁶ Olivier Debroise and Cuauhtémoc Medina, “Genealogy of an exhibition”, *The Age of Discrepancies*, pp.25-31.

and gestures that had occurred amidst disinterest or disdain from local institutions and audiences. *The Age of Discrepancies* wished to be a catalog of passions and productions that occurred *despite* Mexico.

⁷ In particular, Olivier Debroise and I were reacting to the argument in the press releases for Gabriel Orozco’s project for the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1993, which suggested that the work of Orozco had derived from rejecting the tradition of Mexican muralism. On top of the falsehood of this assertion, the argument assumed the total eradication of six decades of local anti-muralist reactions, polemics and rejections, which were invisible to the MoMA precisely as a result of their own politics of exclusion. Cf. Olivier Debroise, “Mexican Art on Display”, in *The Effects of the Nation: Mexican Art in the Age of Globalization*, Carl Good and John V. Waldron, eds., Temple University Press, 2001, p.35 n.11 and Cuauhtémoc Medina, “Delays and Arrivals”, *Curare* 27 (July–December 2006), pp.113-117. See also *The Age of Discrepancies*, p.26.

Is The Past Another Country?

Katerina Gregos

If there are two defining and symbolic dates in recent history that have marked the world and collective memory for subsequent years, one would be 1989, and the other, 2001. For many people, the day on which the Berlin wall fell was one of perceived optimism and hope; the day on which the twin towers collapsed was dystopian as it was shocking, and marked the beginning of a period of regression and counter-Enlightenment policies in the name of "safety and security". It is now twenty-two years after the demise of "real socialism" and ten years after 9/11; post-1989 euphoria has evaporated and post-9/11 fear and pessimism persists, fuelled by the banking crisis (2008 is also a key date in this respect, and may prove to be much more momentous than 9/11 in the long run), economic instability, continuing conflict in the Middle East and Afghanistan, and the rise of the right wing in Europe. In these last twenty years, momentous political and ideological shifts have taken place, from the demise of socialism and the collapse of ideological "certainties", to the consolidation of global capitalism and neo-liberalism, and in some cases, the rise of nationalism and xenophobia.

At the same time, Western consumerist culture has increasingly become the desirable norm in the "planetary casino" of the global market economy (to borrow an expression by philosopher and economist Cornelius Castoriadis) and there has also been a momentous shift in the representation and perception of reality itself; technology having dramatically altered the way in which we conduct our lives and experience reality. But has there been time to truly evaluate and understand that which is our elusive present? Do we possess the clarity to anticipate the future aside from the usual blind

optimism or rhetorics of catastrophology? According to the recently deceased historian Tony Judt, we are living in an unpolitical age of forgetting, one in which there is a prevalent belief that "the past has nothing of interest to teach us. Ours, we insist, is a new world; its risks and opportunities are without precedent";¹ it is a world where we seek "actively to forget rather than to remember, to deny continuity and proclaim novelty on every possible occasion".² He goes on to say: "In the wake of 1989, with boundless confidence and insufficient reflection, we put the twentieth century behind us and strode boldly into its successor swaddled in self-serving half-truths: the triumph of the West, the end of History, the unipolar American moment, the ineluctable march of globalization and the free market... The problem [with all of this] is the message: that all of that is now behind us, that its meaning is clear, and that we may now advance—unencumbered by past errors—into a different and better era."³

A generation of politicians and citizens who are oblivious to history are turning the twentieth century into a "moral memory palace", he argues, sacrificing history to both myth making and denial over memory. This not only has disturbing implications for the future of democratic governance but also leads to what he calls the "misidentification of the enemy".⁴ Burgeoning ignorance and amnesia is proving, he argues,

1 Judt, Tony, "The World We Have Lost" in *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century*, Walter Heinemann, London 2008, p. 2.

2 Ibid.

3 Judt, Tony, "What Have We Learned, If Anything?", *The New York Review of Books*, Volume 55, Number 7, May 1, 2008.

See also: www.nybooks.com/articles/21311

calamitous, with the clear prospect of worse to come. A fairly recent case in point would be the war in Iraq. During his time as Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in his drive to defend his motion to authorize the war in Parliament, failed to mention Britain's previous invasion of Iraq in 1914, which was carried out in order to protect its oil interests in the region. Had

4 Ibid.

5 For more on this repressed history see: Jack Bernstein, *The Meso-potamia Mess*, InterLingua Publishing, 2008. Bernstein argues that the similarities between the British invasion and occupation in 1914, and the current U.S. experience are remarkable and that there were many lessons that U.S. politicians and military could have—and should have—learned before the 2003 invasion.

6 Tosh, John, *Why History Matters*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2008.

the British public been informed of Britain's previous adventure there, the situation would have been better illuminated and would or might have brought sharply into focus the risk of insurgency and continuing instability after the invasion, quite possibly changing public opinion and the political consensus on the war.⁵ In his book *Why History Matters*,⁶ historian John Tosh argues that New Labor's whole political machine was built on amnesia; amnesia that facilitated this very dangerous venture. He warns of the precariousness of hiding historical facts for political purposes, using oversimplified historical analogies to justify public policy decisions, or hand picking arguments to suit courses of action, and advocates the return of the function of history in the public sphere. He goes on to say that "active citizenship in a deliberative democracy stands in much greater need of historical knowledge

than is generally recognized"⁷ and that "thinking historically has a crucial part to play in the intellectual equipment of the active, concerned citizen".⁸ Finally he suggests that our world would be better governed and administered if a better understanding of the past were available to decision makers and the public.

While acknowledging the problems that history as an academic discipline is plagued by, as well as the problematics of historiography and the fact that history may be abused, manipulated or distorted, this paper advocates the importance of history as a tool for furthering knowledge and awareness, supporting the belief in the social use of history, as well as the important role it has to play in battling amnesia, selective memory, forgetfulness, and our culture's short attention span.

The speed with which events occur, are transmitted, consumed and then brushed aside nowadays entails that our understanding of the present is now, perhaps more than ever, temporary and ephemeral, not to mention partial. How do we cope in today's hurried, information overloaded, perpetually networked, Blackberried, i-Phoned and i-Padded society which ceaselessly demands instant gratification? One could say that to a great degree, our culture seems dominated by "presentism" or "short-termism" — the tendency to focus on the narrow conditions of the moment — and to uncritically embrace modernity, technology and progress as being a boon to society. This no doubt fosters amnesia and selective memory, not to mention ignorance. In the maze and wake

7 Tosh, John, "Why History Matters," transcript of speech at Birkbeck College, London, 28 May, 2008, www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-79.html

8 Ibid.

of information overload and global event saturation, it now seems even more important to recall history and past events as a key to unlocking contemporary identities and psyches, and positing visions of the future. As the veteran Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (arguably one of the greatest historians of our time) has unequivocally put it, "History alone provides orientation and anyone who faces the future without it is not only blind but dangerous, especially in the era of high technology".⁹

Though the present is often envisaged as being utterly divorced or cut off from the past, we tend to forget that, in reality, the past is a "collective continuity of experience".¹⁰ In the continuum that constitutes time, "The past is a permanent dimension of the human consciousness... to be a member of any human community is to situate oneself with regards to one's past, if only by rejecting it... For the greater part of history we deal with societies and communities for which the past is essentially the pattern for the present".¹¹ It now appears that for the first time, we have begun moving further and further away from this idea.

The Cambridge University historian Christopher Andrew has termed this increasing prevalence of historical denial "Historical Attention Span Deficit Disorder" (HASDD).¹² He maintains that this disrespect for the long-term past produces two serious intellectual disorders. First, the delusion that what is newest is necessarily most advanced—not a proposition which anyone with even an outline knowledge of the thousand years which

followed the fall of the Roman Empire would take seriously... And second, the belief that interpreting the past and forecasting the future require an understanding only of the recent past... This kind of intellectual parochialism has, for example, led to the common belief that globalization is an off-shoot of American capitalism rather than a product of a long and complex interaction between the West and other cultures.¹³

In light of this situation, it is thus perhaps an opportune moment to reiterate what in fact should be obvious: that the concept of history plays a fundamental role in human thought. It invokes notions of human agency, change, the role of material circumstances in human affairs, and the putative meaning of historical events. It raises the possibility of learning from past events. And it suggests the possibility of better understanding ourselves in the present, by understanding the forces, choices, and circumstances that have brought us to our current situation.

Indeed, as numerous thinkers have maintained over time, it is necessary to understand what has come before in order to understand the present as well as posit visions for the future. An understanding of history—or histories, as is perhaps more correct a term—is paramount as it entails an understanding of social and cultural being. David Cannadine, professor of history at Princeton University, explains the function of history

12 Andrew, Christopher, "Intelligence analysis needs to look backwards before looking forward", in *History and Policy* www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-23.html

13 Ibid

as a discipline that “makes plain the complexity of human affairs, the range and variety of human experience, which teaches proportion, perspective, reflectiveness, breadth of view, tolerance of differing opinions and thus a greater sense of self knowledge”.¹⁴ By extent, it is a truism to say that one can only really know who one is, if one knows where one comes from; it is no coincidence that so many people who have suffered displacement due to personal circumstances customarily try to trace back their origins or find their roots; like the adopted child who eventually wants to find out who his or her true parents are.

The Hegelian notion of history as an inevitable form of progress or development that, in turn, is related to the idea of the perfectibility of humanity—was shattered by the violence and “Total War” of the twentieth century, to borrow the title of Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint’s homonymous, germinal book. Moreover, those who were quick to proclaim “the end

14 Cannadine, David, “Making History Now”, *History Today*, Vol. 49, July 1999.

See also: www.questia.com/googleScholar.qst?docId=5001275704

For further reading: Cannadine, David, *Making History, Now and Then: Discoveries, Controversies and Explorations*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2009.

of history” (Francis Fukuyama included) and who hastened to announce the victory of Western liberal democracy as the final form of government have had to adopt a more moderate, reserved stance about their sweeping declarations in the light of the rise of authoritarian non-democratic powers (even if they appear in “quasi-capitalist” guise), nationalism, xenophobia, and radical Islam. These are also reasons why John Tosh advocates “that we need to pay more attention

to teaching people to think historically. That is to say, to grasp what is the nature of understanding the past in a historical sense, and the ways it could be useful, in an open-ended way” because the difficulty with all these agendas whether national, religious or otherwise is that they are “closed agendas” with only “one outcome in mind, and that’s a denial of what history can primarily offer”.¹⁵

Apart from the fact that arguing in favour of the “end of history” seems a rather myopic view to take, as it does not take into account the passage of time and historical circumstances beyond our own lives, it also completely ignores the unpredictability of historical events. Who could have possibly imagined what happened on 9/11, for example (except for Hollywood blockbuster action film directors?) It also does not take into account the millions of people all over the world who do not enjoy the comfort and relative security of a secular free market democracy. True, it can be argued that democracies are probably better at dealing with poverty but, on the other hand, as Jacques Derrida has pointed out (in response to Fukuyama), never have violence, poverty and inequality affected as many human beings in the history of humanity as now.

One cannot speak of history in such absolute, mono-theoristic terms as those of “the end of history” simply because, to quote Alexander Herzen, the father of Russian socialism, “History has no Libretto”. The future, Herzen maintained, was the offspring of accident and willfulness. There was no libretto or destination, and there was always

15 Lawless, Andrew, “History Matters: Interview with John Tosh”, November 2008, www.threemonkeysonline.com/als/why_history_matters_john_tosh_interview.html

as much in front as there was behind.¹⁶

In light of these developments it hardly seems a coincidence that, in recent years, an increasing number of artists are trying to recapture this historical sense, to re-claim its importance and are making work that refers back to history, dealing with notions of time, memory, and bygone events. The work of these artists, such as Yael Bartana, Lene Berg, Matthew Buckingham, Andreas Bunte, Chto Delat?, Omer Fast, Johan Grimmonprez, David Maljković, Vincent Meessen, Deimantas Narkevičius, T. J. Wilcox among others, demonstrates a keen desire to connect with and understand the past in order to make sense of the present. As a result, historical and archival research and representation are now a prevalent tendency in some areas of contemporary art. This use and re-use of documents and archives not only sheds new light on important or overlooked aspects of historiography, but also makes cultural and historical attributions shift, highlighting the variable mechanisms of memory and reception.

Likewise, in film and video practices, many strands of historical reference have emerged, as these media are among the most appropriate for the deployment of narrative strategies that historical subject matter invariably relies upon, and because lens-based practices are, in any case, records of things that were registered in the past tense. Perhaps it is the collapse of erstwhile steadfast ideologies, belief

systems or political certainties, and the demise of the utopian quest that has caused artists to look back in time, to search for “sheltering perspectives”. In the early and mid-twentieth century there seemed to be a vision of how to advance

in the future, in art as well as in politics, something that cannot be said of today.

In Eastern Europe the “return of history”¹⁷ — to borrow the title of Robert Kagan’s recent book—in art practice probably relates to the fact that history was violently repressed and historical representation was banished during Communist times, whereas in the Western world the renewed interest perhaps comes from the critical realization that history has tended to be increasingly tied to the leisure agenda, and the entertainment and culture industries and hence has been subjected to commodification, romanticization, nostalgification, and spectacularization (as opposed to being seriously studied).

Despite the abundance of “history as light entertainment” and its consumption in the form of theme parks, museums, heritage sites, and costume dramas on TV and in cinema, it is doubtful whether these forms contribute to historical knowledge or awareness; moreover they clearly have been inadequate to forge a historically well-informed public. Historian and art

¹⁷ Kagan, Robert, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2008. Kagan argues against “the end of history” and the idea that liberal democratic ideals and market economics have proved illusory stating instead we are witness to the re-emergence of the great autocratic powers, along with the reactionary forces of Islamic radicalism, forces which threaten to weaken the world order.

See also: Sanger, David “Democracy, Limited”, *New York Times*, May 18, 2008, www.nytimes.com/2008/05/18/books/review/Sanger-t.html

¹⁶ Stoppard, Tom, “The Forgotten Revolutionary”, *The Observer*, Sunday 2 June 2002 (“Features”, p. 5).

historian Ludmilla Jordanova suggests that, “if we want to change public cultures connected with history, the ways in which it is presented currently need to be reconsidered”.¹⁸ It is within this light that “the artist as historian” has a role to play.

This interest in history and historiography stems from a need to formulate an understanding of the present, from a demand to find meaning in the present and, in some cases, from a desire to imagine the future. Walter Benjamin talked about the “vanishing point of history” as always being in the present moment: “The past carries a secret index with it, by which it is referred to its resurrection. Are we not touched by the same breath of air which was among that which came before? Is there not an echo of those who have been silenced in the voices to which we lend our ears today? ... If so, there is a secret protocol

between generations of the past and that of our own”.¹⁹ So, in effect, this retreat to the past is not an escape from the present but rather a way in which to confront or comprehend it. Like Benjamin’s view of the historian, many contemporary artists “record the constellation” with which their “own epoch comes into contact with that of an earlier one”²⁰ with a view to addressing present day realities and concerns.

For some, contemporary art history may in retrospect appear “frivolously, irresponsibly obsessed with the past” and that the current interest in historiography is escapist indicating art’s “inability to grasp

or even look at the present, much less to excavate the future”.²¹ I argue the opposite. It is extremely irresponsible not to be interested in the past, for if we are to be able to “grasp or even look at the present” or “think or simply imagine the future” we can only do so with the benefit of hindsight. We need more history, not less, and it is careless and dangerous to disregard it. In contemporary art we all-too-often see this problem emerge in the shortcomings of art education, for example — the ignorance of students who don’t have a past knowledge of art history that they should; works being blindly churned out without knowledge of their genealogy and what has been done before. The current interest in history is not something we can dismiss as one of those “trends” that occur in contemporary art; it is a serious intellectual pursuit of diachronic value.

The importance of history is of course inextricably tied to the importance of memory. This “historiographic turn” in art is not a mere trend as I have suggested above, but something that is rooted in the historical circumstances of our recent past. Nor is it an entirely new phenomenon that arose in the post-1989 era. In his essay, “The Artist as Historian”, Mark Godfrey points out that already at the end of the 1970s, “There are an increasing number of artists whose practice starts with research in archives, and others who deploy what has been termed an archival form of research”.²² He goes on to elaborate on the two strands

18 Jordanova, Ludmilla, “How history matters now”, *History and Policy*, www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-80.html. The paper is an expanded version of a speech given by Ludmilla Jordanova at the launch of John Tosh’s book, *Why History Matters* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) at Birkbeck College, London, on 28 May 2008.

19 Benjamin, Walter, “On the Concept of History”, www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm

20 Ibid.

21 Roelstraete, Dieter, “After the Historiographic Turn: Current Findings”, *e-flux Journal* #6, May 2009. www.e-flux.com/journal/view/60

that exist within this genre of artists using history: on the one hand, there is a preoccupation with the “history of mediums and forms” but more importantly, his main point about the “artist as historian” concerns methodology. To that I would add the freedom to engage in what Roland Barthes called “the constant opposition between the discourses of poetry and the novel, the fictional narrative and the historical narrative”.²³

Artistically speaking, to borrow images, stories, practices and aesthetics from the past is often to create different narrative methodologies and build bridges with the present, but also to raise awareness of alternative or marginalized narratives; narratives that have been swept aside in the wake of History with a capital “H”. As Fernand Braudel—the foremost French historian of the post-war era—has observed,

this “*histoire obscure de tout le monde*” is the history towards which all historiography tends at present.²⁴ This is no coincidence given that for the most part History has always been written by those in power; the “winners”; or those at the forefront of ruling class politics.²⁵ These so called “grand” or “master” narratives — and the myths and “barbarism” they often perpetuate and sustain have not only been promulgated by ruling class politics but also, in modern times, by the media and culture industries. In that respect, Braudel’s contribution to post-war historiographic practices, like that of the Annales school, has been

indispensable, as it has helped to further the study of history on those aspects of it, which have been brushed aside, repressed or left unsaid.

While historical events are often seen as being perpetually consolidated, one never knows what the outcome will be further down the road. Braudel therefore argues that it is only through study of the *longue durée* that one can discern structure, the supports and obstacles, the limits man and his experience cannot escape.²⁶ The *longue durée* is “an experimental approach

to the theoretical reconstruction of long-term, large-scale historical change” which “represents a temporal rhythm so slow and stable that it approximates physical geography.”²⁷ He used the *longue durée* approach to argue in favour of historical social science and the plurality of historical time, as well as to stress the slow—and often imperceptible—effects of space, climate and technology on the actions of human beings in the past. The media in particular and political opportunists of sorts have been oblivious to the long-term effects of various historical parameters, promoting instead the idea of “event history” which Braudel finds lacking in time density. The Annales historians, grass roots history, and “history from the bottom up”²⁸ have, to a certain extent, alleviated this “barbarism” of omission that Benjamin refers to.

24 Braudel, Fernand, “Une Parfaite Réussite”, reviewing Claude Manceron, « La Révolution qu’il lève », 1785–1787 (Paris, 1979), in *L’Histoire* 21 (1980), p.109.

25 Benjamin, Walter, “On the Concept of History”, www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm.

26 Braudel, Fernand, *On History*, translated by Sarah Matthews, University of Chicago Press/Wiedenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1980.

22 Godfrey, Mark, “The Artist as Historian”, *October*, vol. 120, Spring 2007, p. 143

23 Barthes, Roland, “Discourse of History”, translated by Stephen Bann. *Comparative Criticism*, 3 (1981): pp. 7-20.
See also: <http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/barthes.htm>.

The other problem that plagues the historical scholar is the persistence of deep-held myths about the past, selective memory and the effects of these on collective consciousness. These can be better

27 Tomich, Dale, "The Order of Historical Time: The *Longue Durée* and Micro-history". Paper presented at "The *Longue Durée* and World Systems Analysis", Colloquium to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Fernand Braudel's *Histoire et Sciences Social: La Longue Durée*, Annales E.S.C., XIII 4, 1958, 24–25 October 2008, Fernand Braudel Centre, Binghampton University, Binghampton, New York, p. 2-3.

28 For further reading: Hobsbawm, Eric, "On History From Below", in *On History*, Abacus, London 2007, pp. 266-286.

grasped on the micro-level, in terms of family and personal life, for example. "When it comes to families, there is frequently little consensus on the key story and their interpretations. There may not even be a shared account about the nature and timing of key events. People constantly make myths that take deep roots and use existing myths that relate to their past."²⁹ The practice of writing history is indeed not an easy one, as it is marked by questions epistemological as well as moral; from the authoritative or subjective voice of the historian to the voiceless position of the subject may stem a whole host of misunderstandings and misrepresentations. How "objective" can the recounting of history be anyway, and whose "History" is it? At what point does truth collapse and fiction take over?

Roland Barthes posed the very important question: "Does the narration of past events... really differ from imaginary narration, as we find it in the epic, the novel and the drama?"³⁰

True, the historian must organize her own discourse and in doing so may sacrifice objectivity. Barthes defines the historian not so much as a "collector of facts" as a collector and relater of signifiers; that is to say, "s/he organizes them with the purpose of establishing positive meaning and filling the vacuum of pure, meaningless series".³¹ Braudel, on the other hand, pointed out that history does not exist independently of the historian's perspectives and that the historian intervenes at every stage in the making of history. All these considerations are in one way or another related to two fundamental questions in the philosophy of history: Is there a fixed historical reality, independent from later representations of the facts? Or is history intrinsically constructed, with no objective reality independent from the ways in which it is constructed? Whether one subscribes to the objectivist, empiricist, positivist or structuralist view, in this writer's opinion, there is truth in both the aforementioned statements. The event did happen but we get different stories of it. There is an outside reality outside the reality of language and what

29 Jordanova, Ludmilla, "How history matters now", *History and Policy*, www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-80.html. The paper is an expanded version of a speech given by Ludmilla Jordanova at the launch of John Tosh's book *Why History Matters* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) at Birkbeck College, London, on 28 May 2008.

30 Barthes, Roland, "Discourse of History", translated by Stephen Bann. *Comparative Criticism*, 3 (1981): pp. 7-20. See also: <http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/barthes.htm>.

31 Ibid.

is in our heads. To illustrate my point: the twin towers did collapse; there is no doubt about that. How this fact is subsequently interpreted by different parties is another matter altogether. History, therefore—as well as the study of it—is a matter of maneuvering slippery, complex concepts. History does not only mean the past but it is also an account of the past, for we do not just want to know what happened, but also how and why. We might ask, what is the purpose of history? Do we study it for its own sake; do we try to find out the truth about the past; do we try to comprehend where we came from; do we try to understand why a particular event happened; do we want to discover historical laws, or do we wish to justify present actions? While historical events are occurrences, history is manmade. It involves matters of authorship, availability and reliability of source material, the interpretation of it, personal interpretation and bias. Historical knowledge is real, because there is material evidence that certain events did occur. But it can be relative as well, because the evidence might be interpreted differently by different historians and in different times. It is objective insofar as there is physical proof of the existence of a past, and it is subjective in so far as there is an historian involved who establishes the narrative. History, much like artistic practice, “is not a cut-and-dried set of arguments and facts; it lives through debate and argument”.³² The “End of History” has ended, if it ever began.

32 Lawless, Andrew, “History Matters: Interview with John Tosh”, November 2008, www.threemonkeysonline.com/als/why_history_matters_john_tosh_interview.

A Place Out of History

EXHIBITION ROOM

Magali Arriola

1.The Facts (Just a Few)

In 1939, Carmen Ruiz Sánchez, formerly known as Tina Modotti, disembarked at the port of Veracruz. As a final gesture, the actress-turned-photographer abandoned her spot behind the camera, alleging other kinds of political priorities.



Tina Modotti at an exhibition of her work
at the National Library in Mexico City, 1929
Courtesy Galerie Bilderwelt/Getty Images

Around 1943, a young Pavel Gubchevsky offered a guided tour through the empty galleries of the Hermitage Museum for the Soviet soldiers who had helped safeguard its treasures against the imminent danger of plundering by the Nazi army that was then advancing on Saint Petersburg.



Melvin Moti, *No Show*, 2004 Courtesy
of the artist

Many of the stories surrounding Tina Modotti, photographer and agent of the Communist Party, have been based on the letters she exchanged with Edward Weston as well as on newspaper articles. Modotti first became a public figure when she was linked, in 1929, to the murder of Julio Antonio Mella, founder of the Cuban Communist Party. She would later be absolved of this crime when suspicion would fall on the then-Cuban government, and on Communist agents from Moscow.

Some of those who have written her story have done so in order to slant it to clear their own names, as did Vittorio Vidali, Modotti's last partner, who worked for different agencies of the Soviet Communist Party. It was he who accompanied Modotti on the boat that took her to Europe after being implicated in the attempted murder of President Elect Pascual Ortiz Rubio in 1930, a crime for which she was later thrown out of Mexico. Modotti then settled briefly in Berlin and, following Vidali's advice, moved to Moscow in 1931. There she gave up photography in order to pursue her activities as an International

Red Aid agent,
a Soviet
organization
that supported
persecuted or
jailed communists
around the world.



Vittorio Vidali on
the ship, 1930
Courtesy Museo
Nacional de Arte,
INBA-Conaculta

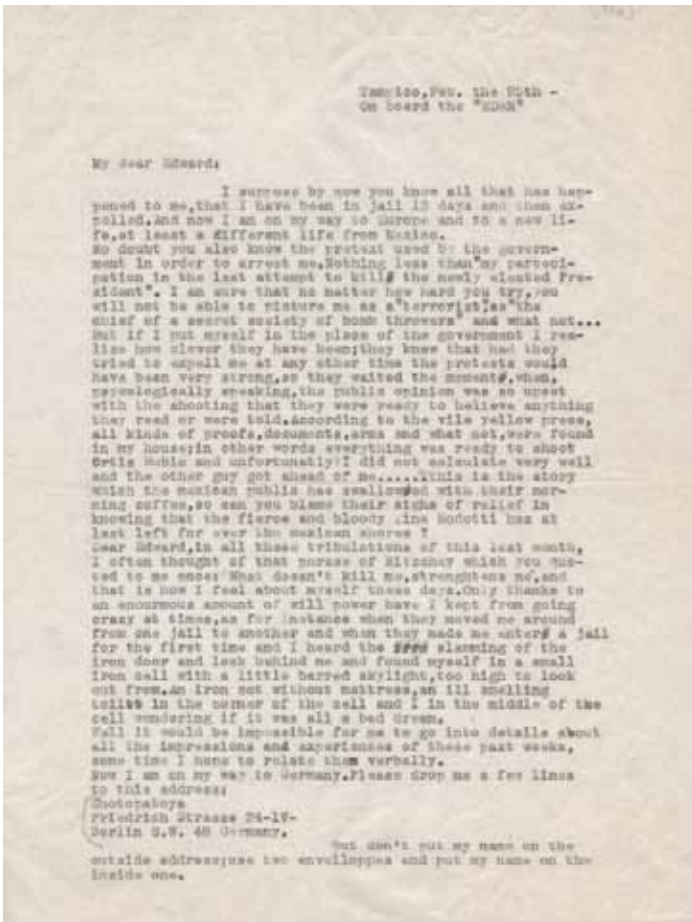


Julio Antonio Mella's typewriter, 1928

Courtesy Museo Nacional de Arte, INBA-Conaculta



Tina Modotti during the reconstruction of Mella's assassination, 1929, Casasola Archive © 46373 Conaculta.INAH.Sinafo. fn.Mexico



Letter from Tina Modotti to Edward Weston, February 25, 1930
Courtesy Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona

On October 29, 1947, Dutch painter Han van Meegeren was tried for collaborating with the Nazis—a crime that was punishable by death in postwar Netherlands—and sentenced to a year in prison for forgery.



Han Van Meegeren's trial, 1947
Courtesy Yale Joel/Time & Life Pictures Editorial/Getty Images

Sometime in 1967, the writer and famous hoaxer Clifford Irving is reported to have irrupted, impersonating an FBI agent, into La Falaise, the Ibiza residence of the eccentric millionaire and indefatigable jetsetter, the art dealer, arms trafficker, Ambassador-at-Large for Haiti, Nicaragua, and Liberia (among others), and long-time CIA agent: Fernand Legros.



Fernand Legros in front of his Rolls-Royce (no date)
Courtesy Foundation Réal Lessard, Hong Kong

In 1979, Sir Anthony Blunt, a member of the British intelligence service, a respected art historian and the surveyor of Queen Elizabeth II's Pictures, was removed from his post and stripped of his knighthood when Margaret Thatcher revealed him to be the fourth man in the "Cambridge Five"—a group of spies that had worked for the Soviet Union during the Cold War.



Film stills of Simon Starling, *Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima)*, 2010

Courtesy of the artist and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

In the spring of 1990, amid all the political changes brought about by the fall of the Communist regime, Nedko Solakov exhibited his work *Top Secret* for the first time, to great controversy, as it constituted a kind of public confession detailing his collaboration with the Bulgarian Secret Police.



Nedko Solakov, *Top Secret* (1989–1990)

Courtesy of the artist

Upon not achieving recognition for his own artistic work, Van Meegeren chose to forge and sell paintings by great Dutch masters of the seventeenth century in order to silently devote himself to his talent. In 1932 he painted *Man and Woman at Spinnet*, a work similar to the compositions and themes of Johannes Vermeer, which was claimed by art historian Abraham Bredius to be one of Vermeer's greatest works but nonetheless managed to raise suspicion among specialists. Van Meegeren reassessed his strategy and decided to create a series of paintings that would fill a void in the religious period that specialists maintained had existed in Vermeer's work. Among others, he painted *Christ with the Adulteress* (1930–1944), which he sold to Hermann Göring at the beginning of the Second World War.

After the end of the war, Van Meegeren was accused of looting Dutch cultural heritage in order to benefit Nazi officers when *Christ with the Adulteress* was found in Göring's possession. The painter thus confessed to having forged the work, along with several others. During the trial, in view of the disbelief that he could create a Vermeer, he painted a new piece which absolved him of the accusation of being a Nazi collaborator. He was, however, charged with forgery and fraud.

Recovered painting
of *Christ and
the Adulteress* with
American soldiers,
1945

Courtesy National
Archives and Records
Administration,
Washington



Two people
studying *Christ and
the Adulteress* by
Han Van Meegeren,
November 1, 1947
Courtesy Yale Joel/
Time & Life Pictures
Editorial/Getty
Images





Han van Meegeren,
*Man and Woman at
the Spinet*, 1934–
1938
Photo Ramiro
Chavez

In 1998, Andrea Wolf (alias Sehî Ronahî), a friend of Hito Steyerl's who starred in one of her early films combining feminism and the martial arts, was killed in action as she fought for the Kurdistan liberation movement.



Video still of Hito Steyerl, *November*, 2004
Courtesy of the artist



Han Van Meegeren's trial. The artist is painting to prove he was able to forge a Johannes Vermeer, October 1, 1947
Courtesy Yale Joel/Time & Life Pictures Editorial/Getty Images

Between 2005 and 2008, the artist Jill Magid interviewed several undercover agents from the Dutch Secret Service, after receiving an invitation from that country's Security and Intelligence Service (AIVD) to create a work of art that would "give the agency a human face".



Jill Magid, *Hacked Novel*, 2009
Courtesy of Yvon Lambert, Paris

On January 25, 2009, Milo Rau asked a certain Walter Benjamin, the self-proclaimed official spokesperson of the Museum of American Art (MoAA), "If there is a place out of History (even if it is just the history of art), what kind of stories are told there?"¹



Installation view of Museum of American Art (MoAA) at Museo Tamayo, Mexico D.F.

Photo Ramiro Chavez

2. The Scene

Each of the characters assembled in this exhibition has a story of his or her own to tell—in some cases narrated, analyzed or distorted multiple times depending on the era and the author on duty. *A Place Out of History* emerges as a kind of platform or stage set where a whole series of stories converge, most of them told from the corridors of history, and whose central figures each seem to demand their turn in the spotlight. In these stories, false identities, secret agendas, official versions and half-baked truths all played an active role—though almost always from behind the scenes—in the definition of specific political scenarios and movements. However, their narrative reconstructions and mediatic restitutions reveal a series of historical coincidences and ideological divergences which have blurred the lines that divide the inside from the outside of history, and fiction from reality.

¹ Walter Benjamin: Places of Re-remembering," consulted at <http://www.althussers-haende.org/walter-benjamin-places-of-re-remembering>, June 21, 2010

In 1939 Henry Moore installed *Reclining Woman* (1930)... in the garden of the architect Ernő Goldfinger's newly completed home at 2 Willow Road, Hampstead. The modernist home proved unpopular with many residents, most famously with the writer Ian Fleming whose wrath led him to recast Goldfinger as the Cold War villain par excellence. In Toronto, however, Moore's connection to international espionage was far more real: his work was first introduced to the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the AGO) by Anthony Blunt, the Director of the Courtauld Institute, Keeper of the Queen's Pictures, now infamous spy. In 1955 Blunt, an advisor to the Toronto museum, had proposed Moore's *Warrior with Shield* (1953–1954) for acquisition.

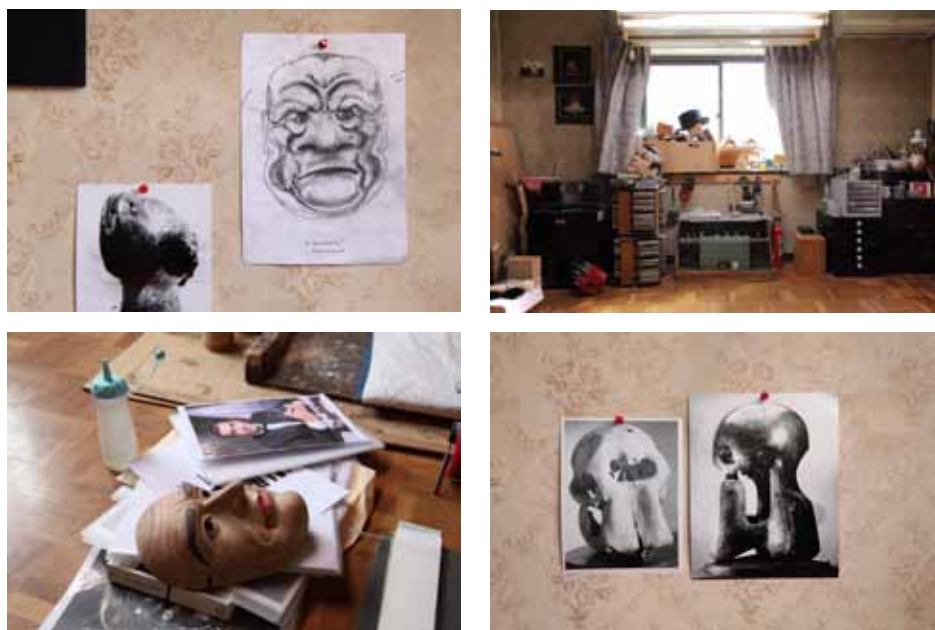


Simon Starling,
Musselled Moore,
2007

Courtesy of the artist
and The Modern
Institute/Toby
Webster Ltd, Glasgow

While Moore was no doubt oblivious to the latter's connection to international espionage, this most international of artists was not untouched by the machinations of global politics and appears to have become adept at balancing his interests with those of people with money and power. While Moore was a public sponsor of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, he was also happy to receive a commission for a sculpture (*Nuclear Energy*, 1964–1966) to commemorate Enrico Fermi's first self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction in Chicago in 1942. Even before that commission had been completed, Moore had, much to the distress of Chicago University, made an edition of a smaller working model of the sculpture under the title *Atom Piece* (pun clearly intended—one of which he later [controversially] sold to the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (...)). Further still, it was observed that Moore had amassed a considerable fortune from his association with Joseph Hirshhorn, whose own vast fortune had in turn come from the phenomenally profitable sale of uranium deposits in Canada, a sale bolstered by the frenetic activities of the Atomic Energy Commission during the 1940s and 1950s (Simon Starling, *Redeploying Moore*—excerpt).

Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima): A sixteenth century Japanese play of personal reinvention, double identity and disguise restaged as a cold war drama. With James Bond, Joseph Hirshhorn, Enrico Fermi, Anthony Blunt, Colonel Sanders and the multifaceted *Atom Piece* as Ushiwaka, the exiled son of the defeated Lord Yoshitomo, flying from incarceration with the help of Henry Moore as a hat maker, who fashions his disguise.



Film stills of Simon Starling, *Project for a Masquerade (Hiroshima)*, 2010
Courtesy of the artist and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

The Museum of American Art (MoAA) in Berlin is an educational institution dedicated to assembling, preserving and exhibiting memories of the Museum of Modern Art and its circulating exhibitions in Europe during the 1950s. Curated by Dorothy Miller, these exhibitions first introduced Gorky, Motherwell, Pollock, Gottlieb, Rothko, Kline and de Kooning into the museum context. These artists constituted the most attractive and radical segment of the works promoted by the International Program of Circulating Exhibitions, established by the MoMA, and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation with the aim of “promoting greater international understanding and mutual respect”.

Those were strange years in art and politics. On the one hand, Modern Art had to be defended from the criticism from the right (see Alfred Barr Jr., “Is Modern Art Communistic?”). On the other, it became apparent, especially to people like George Kennan (North American diplomat, political scientist, and historian, known as “the father of containment” during the Cold War), that American Modern Art could be used in the “cultural Cold War” as an expression of Western creativity and freedom. Nevertheless, these exhibitions helped establish the first postwar common European cultural identity, based on Modernism (abstract art), Internationalism and individualism, finally establishing Barr’s narrative—constructed in the mid 1930s, as defined through his famous diagram and later through the MoMA permanent exhibit—as the dominant history of Modern Art until today (MoAA, Mission Statement).



Installation view of Museum of American Art (MoAA)
Courtesy of MoAA, Berlin

3. The Characters

Milo Rau's question to Walter Benjamin regarding the narratives that emerge from the margins of history marks a pause in the chronological and causal unfolding of the facts, and opens up a line of questioning regarding the role played by the protagonists of such narratives. "The main feature of art history," states Benjamin in another recent interview where the question of his identity was addressed, "is the uniqueness of its characters: persons, objects or events. However, from the meta-position, art history becomes just a story and all these unique historical entities are now transformed into the characters in this story, like the characters in a theater play." ²

4. The Motive

The dialogue we propose among contemporary artists, historic pieces and archival documents falls into a now-traditional line of research that questions the so-called neutrality and autonomy of artistic expressions, as well as both art history's constructive strategies and its forms of enunciation—and, one should add, those of the curatorial practice; discourse as a reconnaissance tool that contributes to the writing of a historic moment. From this perspective, the works in the exhibition not only address artistic production as an ideological tool that has played an instrumental role in the construction of history but also, and conversely, the fact that art history has so frequently been written according to a political agenda, ultimately evolving into the construction of a system of communication and international exchange. But to return to the original question: Is there (or is there not) an inside and an outside of art history? The answer may vary depending on where the narrator is located. The questions we should be asking then are: How do images travel? What political and discursive economies do they react to? The answers are even more compelling when we consider the need to rethink the format of exhibitions, which, as this one, are obliged to initiate a negotiation between the function of art and the artist's role; between art as the object of desire and as a historical document; between the desire to believe and the right to be fooled.

Once upon a time there was a boy. They say he was a smart and obedient one. He got the highest grades in school, he read books at home and he drew. (...) He particularly liked the books with the adventure stories where the "good guys" won out over the "bad guys". He also liked spy stories. The brave Soviet "Chekisti" and their Bulgarian colleagues Avakum Zakhov and Emil Boev really compelled him. They made him confident that the enemies who were spoken and written about everywhere were not going to intrude upon his socialist fatherland.

The boy was growing up... In the autumn of 1976 (when he was in his second year at the Academy of Fine Arts), he went on a trip to Paris (his loving parents, whom he loved dearly in return, paid for the trip). Everything was wonderful—the Louvre, the Rodin (museum), the Duffy retrospective, a few porn movies. In the middle of the eight-day trip, the tour leader of the group of Bulgarian tourists told him that packages had been left at the reception desk for both him and B. (a kind older man, the brother of a well-known professor). To the boy's surprise, his package contained "enemy" propaganda materials.

The boy read this and that and then handed the materials over to the tour leader with the words: "They are 'spitting' on Bulgaria!" The tour leader got worried and quickly summoned a man from the Embassy to whom the boy gave the package, happy to have carried out his patriotic duty...*

*Nedko Solakov, *The action is on (for the time being)*—excerpt. Text written in 1990. Originally published in *Kultura* weekly newspaper (Sofia), 22 June 1990.

² Walter Benjamin interviewed by Maxine Kopsa, "The Museum is History: The Museum of American Art in the Van Abbe Museum," <http://www.metropolism.com/features/the-museum-is-history/english> (consulted June 22, 2010).

Exhibition credits:
A first version of *A Place out of History* was originally presented at Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City from September 2010 to March 2011.
Curated by Magali Arriola in collaboration with Magnolia de la Garza.

Top Secret, created between December 1989 and February 1990, consists of an index box, filled with a series of cards detailing the artist's youthful collaboration with the Bulgarian state security, which he stopped doing in 1983. In Bulgaria, twenty one years after the changeover, the official files remain closed, and there are no publicly known documents on the artist's collaboration. The work caused great controversy when it was first exhibited in the spring of 1990, at the height of the political changes to the long-standing communist rule. The self-disclosing gesture in this artistic project is still unique in the context of post-communist Europe, and since its appearance, *Top Secret* has become an icon of its time. A forty-minute long video, which shows the artist re-reading the index box's contents, was shot in his studio in Sofia in 2007.



Nedko Solakov, *The action is on (for the time being)*, 1990. Originally published in *Kultura* weekly newspaper, Sofia, June 22, 1990



Index box

In 1969—two years after his intimidatory intervention at La Falaise, Irving would publish *Fake! The Story of Elmyr de Hory, the Greatest Forger of our Time*, a biography detailing the acclaimed forger's complicity with the art dealer Fernand Legros. Legros sued him for defamation while he allowed his friend, the writer and diplomat Roger Peyrefitte, to enthusiastically depict him not only as a collector of art and of exquisite teenage males, but also as an unscrupulous arms merchant and money launderer suspected to be a silent accomplice in various obscure political scenarios such as the kidnapping of Moïse Tshombé and the murder of Ben Barka.

Legros was finally convicted for fraud by the French government in 1979, after twelve years of preparation of a case and several extradition demands, and the intervention of forty one international lawyers—among which Henry Kissinger, who personally oversaw his release from one of his last stopovers in prison four years earlier, by protesting the mistreatment of an American citizen. Having received a two-year sentence, he walked away from the Parisian tribunals scot-free, claiming that he had already spent that time in custody.

"False. Everything that follows is false... Any resemblance to existing persons or to persons who have existed is purely coincidental, and whoever would see any comparison or rapprochement with any real person would be acting against my will."

Fernand Legros, *Faussees histoires d'un faux marchand de tableaux*, 1979, Preface



Fernand Legros coming out from the Palais de Justice, Paris, May 1978
Courtesy Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images



Front cover of *Ici Paris* announcing Fernand Legros' death on April 7, 1983
Courtesy Fondation Réal Lessard, Hong Kong



Jiří Kovanda, *Contact*, Vodičkova Street
in Prague, September 3, 1977
Courtesy of the artist

Several writers have already noticed the similarity between the documentation of performances by Czech artist Jiří Kovanda and the photographs taken by communist secret police of those being followed. In fact, they seem almost identical. The pictures taken by the police using hidden cameras capture the environment of the hard-line communist days of Prague of the 1970s and early 1980s. The secret agent follows an individual who cannot be visibly distinguished from the other citizens. It is only from the records that we learn that this individual, seemingly doing everyday things, is in fact committing acts against the state. Sending letters, meeting with friends in restaurants or picking up visitors from the airport are later viewed as the distribution



Czechoslovak Secret Police, Photos from
Operation Alex, 26 April 1980
 Courtesy Institute for the Study
 of Totalitarian Regimes, Prague

of subversive materials, gathering for counter-revolutionary reasons or establishing contacts with foreign spies. The photograph serves here to document criminal acts, which are not apparent at first glance. It is important that the photograph capture the environment in which the act takes place, and that it include the other individuals in contact with the person followed. It is therefore necessary that the photograph contain information on the place and time, and to assure that the other people appearing in it are identified. Photography only becomes proof of the crime with the additional interpretation of the captured facts, with an analysis of the entire police record. What is most important for a communist court of law is the real or fabricated intention of the acts

of those being followed, and even their class or social affiliation. Many of Kovanda's performances took place at roughly the same time and in the same places in Prague — where people were going about their everyday business. Those passing by never even expected that an artistic performance was being played out around them. Kovanda brushed against people, hid on the sidewalks for no apparent reason, or acted according to a predetermined scenario that did not differ from everyday behaviour. All of these performances were documented by a non-professional photographer. Kovanda then glued the photograph on a piece of paper, and beneath it wrote the title of the performance, its physical location, the time it took place, and described the scenario. Only after reading this "record" is it made clear that the activity was indeed an art action. Brushing against people, hiding and walking back and forth have become the work of an artist, and therefore we must perceive and assess them as art.

Two types of hidden scenarios were thus being played out concurrently in Prague's public spaces: one led by the secret police, the other by unofficial artists. Even though they were based on completely different motivations, their photographs and accompanying texts show a number of similarities. We first have to learn to read the secret police records, just like the language of post-war art. Even though we are familiar with this language, we should be wary of it. Many of those who were being photographed by the secret police knew that they were being followed. They modified their behaviour to prevent being persecuted or to confuse the police in different ways. Kovanda knew that he was being photographed, for he had himself invited his friend to his inconspicuous performances. Nevertheless, he acted as if he were not aware of his friend's existence.

Admittedly, these similarities and discrepancies are for the most part random. The police record was a collective product; Kovanda's documentation was part of the artist's work. Neither were originally available to the public, or if so, only shared with a select group of viewers. Even though Kovanda's work may not appear so, it was an art piece from the very outset. The possible interpretation of the police record as an artwork comes up against a number of essential limits that shift such an interpretation to the level of mere intellectual tightrope walking. The records of the communist police are still quite combustible in Eastern Europe. They continue to be perceived as evidence of individual guilt. Even though the volumes of records are composed of individual, ostensibly authentic records and reports, few people bring themselves to admit that they are, in their essence, a work of fiction in which those who were the objects of interest were viewed in advance through the deformed lens of political interest.

Kovanda himself did not derive his 1970s performances from the secret police's tactics, however. Though from today's perspective it may even seem hard to believe, he considered them to be apolitical and did not consciously react to the events of the day with them. Today we interpret them as individual artistic expressions that arose from the artist's inner needs, as well as an effective metaphor of personal resistance against totalitarianism. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that Jiří Kovanda's work has become so popular.



Narcisse Tordoir in Conversation With the Phantom of Allan Kaprow



Narcisse Tordoir

Narcisse Tordoir, *WORDS*, series, 2007
Courtesy the artist

This conversation between Belgian artist Narcisse Tordoir and the phantom of Allan Kaprow (embodied by Philippe Pirotte) took place on the occasion of the re-invention of Kaprow's *Words* (1962) by Tordoir, for the exhibition *Allan Kaprow: Art As Life* curated by Pirotte (in collaboration with Stephanie Rosenthal and Eva Meyer-Hermann) for the Kunsthalle Bern in 2007. It was originally printed in a newspaper* produced by Tordoir for the exhibition, which can be downloaded here: <http://www.narcissetordoir.com/books.html>.

Narcisse Tordoir: So! What do you think?

Allan Kaprow: Wow! That's a painting?!

NT: Yeah, some big painting. You were a painter too, weren't you?

AK: I was, I was, but...

NT: Wait! Here in the studio it might look like painting but once it is installed it will form what you've called an "environment", consisting of two canvases, a newspaper and some documentary material. You'll be submerged in it. In fact, you are already part of it right now...

AK: Weird though, I don't recognize my own work anymore. Is it really based on one of my strategies?

NT: From where I see it, the "re-invention" of your work is a collaboration, an artistic dialogue, or even an exchange between the two of us.

AK: A collaboration in what sense? I can see that the imagery in these paintings is drawn from documentation of my work, but other than that...

NT: These paintings are not based on the original documentation of your work. Instead I've "re-done" that documentation. You see, there is nothing left but the photographs, so I've had to find all visual clues there.

AK: It's funny that you consider registration and not experience to be the essence of my art.

NT: Experience is influenced by the Zeitgeist. The energy and power in those images is fascinating precisely because they don't bring back the past. They incite something totally different!

AK: When I re-invented my own environments in 1991 in Milan, I added a mural-scale photograph of the original for each reinvention, allowing people to make a visual comparison between then and now. The frozen poses of the participants in these photographs gave clues about how to handle the reinvented environments.

NT: Exactly. We started out by performing acts and movements that were loosely modelled on the ones in the pictures. We tried to physically imitate the poses and behaviour of these historical predecessors, creating mock documents, not necessarily correct or...

AK: "Getting it wrong" is probably getting it right...! Still, these types of documents never hold the promise of a future artwork.

NT: Why not? While studying the score of *Words*, the photographs of your Happenings kept haunting my head. They are lasting images that have become iconic... In the end, they are the only thing that remains, really. Whether or not these remains are art, is of less interest to me. When we deal with experiences of the past, as we do in this case, that kind of essentialism seems valid...



Narcisse Tordoir,
WORDS, series, 2007
Courtesy the artist

AK: Strange. I thought it was exactly the overcoming of the past that pushed art, certainly when considered from an avant-garde logic. It is as if nowadays there were an almost fetishist interest in a vanishing modernism and the gestures of our generation of artists.

NT: Do you know that I almost abandoned this project at one point?

AK: No, for what reason?

NT: As I said, it was hard to separate the score from the photographic documents. The pictures of your "originals", whether artworks or not, came to dominate my mind as the only possible reinvention of the score. I couldn't get rid of those images!

AK: I wanted to create a sort of result without a result. For me, art is pure activity. It is identical to life precisely because in the end I produce documentation rather than art.

NT: ... Identical to life? How can your art be identical to life, when the pictures clearly show you "posing" or strategically overlooking your own orchestrated performances?

AK: “Happenings”, or “activities”! These are not performances. I deliberately used the words “happenings” and “activities” to describe my work. Remember, there is no public. In a Happening, all of the spectators are participants!

NT: Whatever... You threw tires. Pollock threw paint. There is not necessarily that much of a difference.

AK: I agree... Nowadays, life is probably part of a prefabricated reality. But then, how do you explain this project as a collaboration? What did you do with my ideas, besides abandoning them?

NT: My way of working stems from the same ideas you put forth in your text *The Legacy of Jackson Pollock*. You pursued Pollock’s logic by introducing all sorts of materials: the space of everyday life and of our bodies was an extended notion of painting. Involving others to intervene literally or mentally while working on a painting is quite the same for me.

AK: So, you are trying to rehabilitate painting as a medium. Pollock destroyed that, didn’t he? Like some of my colleagues, I considered dropping out of the professional art world myself, in order to deconstruct the artistically hollow professionalization of the field. Didn’t you start in the 1980s, when there was a massive return to painting?

NT: I did start then, but that does not necessarily mean I’m trying to restore the medium. At the end of the seventies, I did a lot of research concerning the reinvention of “my” medium: painting. It would be naïve not to acknowledge that our society is a complex situation; a web of relations between people. Personally, I’ve always seen painting as an interface and I worked in a series of collaborative undertakings.

AK: So for you, artistic activity is not about a final product? It is not about making more art?

NT: No, the art world is omnipresent today and it markets its products accordingly. I prefer to see painting as a way of working. It allows me to articulate cultural dispositions and their transformations. I’ve done a lot of workshops where I’ve tested the possibilities of different relations between people. These workshops might be seen as cultural exchange stations, realised specifically through the medium of painting.

AK: Rauschenberg once said: “Painting is related to art and life. Neither can be made.” Perhaps we try to act in the gap between the two...

NT: I am interested in the “making” of art, in the same way you processed Pollock, his “act” of painting, possibly in trance, and these ritual aspects... and that’s what one can read as a spectator, close to the work, close to life maybe.

AK: For this re-invention, you combined pictures of different environments and happenings. You did not stick to the existing images of Words.

NT: When you sent me the score of Words in order to do a re-invention, I felt reluctant at first, because it seemed to be a bit of an old schoolmaster’s game. It is like teaching a child to swim by asking him or her to swim to the part of the pool where the swimming lesson will start.

AK: You teach art, don't you?

NT: Yes, but I am not interested in the teaching itself; I am interested in what I can gain from it. That is why I have accepted to do this. I want to investigate the limits of artistic collaboration. To put myself in another man's shoes and think and work with him, that is what fascinates me most. In that sense, teaching is a very rewarding activity.

AK: I share your fascination for the collaborative element in art practice. However, it is precisely this fascination that has led me to create my Happenings and invite the public to participate. To a certain extent, the Happening is the place where collaboration is enhanced and stimulated. You, on the other hand, choose to investigate the possibilities of artistic collaboration through painting. Isn't that a contradiction, or isn't painting, at the very least, a medium too stubborn for your said purpose?



Narcisse Tordoir,
WORDS, series, 2007
Courtesy the artist

NT: After art school, I gave up on painting for a while. I focused on "actions". However, the registration of these Actions gradually pushed me back towards painting. When I stopped painting, I did something very similar to, yet different from what you did when you were thinking about Jackson Pollock. I made big, foldable drawings and walked through the city, holding them up in different places.

AK: Like engaging in a conversation on the street?

NT: Yes, but rather as the action of a shy person. Recently, I brought some of my works resulting from the workshops I organised into the public sphere and asked the public to manipulate them. I am too shy though, to go on with performances. Let's just say it was not really my praxis.

AK: I didn't make performances...

NT: Sorry, "Happenings". I think in the 1960s and 1970s one could motivate people, do something personal, perhaps even odd, and that would be called a "Happening". I know you use the term to indicate a very specific type of act. We were not always that precise. We focused on the idea that "doing" things would "change" other things, but the unconscious, even naïve, implicit level of social transformation got lost over the years...

AK: I was conscious about that when I re-invented my own work from the 1980s onward. The space we live in once stood for the body and its functions but all of that has been mediated into semiotic oblivion...

NT: Yes, and on top of it, the government now strongly encourages



Narcisse Tordoir,
WORDS, series, 2007
 Courtesy the artist

participation in cultural actions. It's so boring. Participation and art in general are presented as commodities accessible to all, as a means for social transformation, where in fact, people are merely being kept occupied — "entertained" at best.

AK: And you think returning to painting will challenge that status quo?

NT: Well, no, and besides, it's not just painting. My activities did not bring me a lot, even when I worked together with people from the Behaviour Art Group, Reindeer Werk. We exchanged materials in a kind of parallel economy, or we organised workshops and tried to transgress the borders of art and life, intertwining the two. However, the whole collaboration remained between us. It didn't really "blur" with "life".

AK: Explain that to me.

NT: There, you do that teaching-thing again. Art isn't about confessions. We tried to stimulate social transformation and it didn't work at all. In the end, the whole idea was naïve and as a result I started drawing again: registering actions.

AK: I want to know what art is about, then. How does the registering of actions become art again? My scores and activity booklets are certainly not art.

NT: To tell you the truth, it doesn't interest me that much, just as it wouldn't interest me to take a series of pictures for the sake of taking pictures. When I talk about an artwork, I talk about the "making of" that artwork. How does an artwork come into being and how are its potentialities reactivated? Those are my main concerns.

AK: So how did you use the score?

NT: You gave me the score and trusted me to "re-invent" it, as you say.

I started by reading about it and looking at the remaining pictures. Gradually, working with those pictures became painterly research.

AK: That's a little like what I was doing—I wanted to dissolve the boundaries between art and reality, so that my activities became indistinguishable from real life. That is why I didn't like museums. I liked ordinary life, performed as art or non-art. It was able to charge the everyday with a metaphoric power.

NT: But weren't the scores working documents in the first place? Elaborated sketches? Didn't they become ideas only afterwards? You designed decors for the Happenings and wrote instructions in much the same way as a choreographer or a film director would. From that moment on, I think the Happening has had nothing to do with everyday life anymore. My re-invention of Words started as a Happening and we acted as if we were participating in an unknown Happening of yours, acting in your absent presence.

AK: But then the participants are not the same as the ones experiencing the work?

NT: Not necessarily, but you participate, I participate, we all participate and sometimes others participate. What I mean is that you participate because you are there. You look over my shoulder and see what I am doing. I try to understand you. I reach out for what you mean, even when I just see you smoking a pipe in the background.

AK: The documents provided you with material and incited you to paint. It is not totally unlike compensating for the actual demand for conventional works of mine that amount to art history.

NT: You are your past! You became your own medium and you are your own fiction.

AK: I want to be as absent as possible from these re-inventions by others.

NT: Well, you are very present!

AK: That was not exactly intended but if you insist, I could see my artistic existence functioning in much the same way as an oral history would.

NT: Maybe; I don't know much about that. But yes, why not — like an oral history.

AK: I want my art to function as an integral part of life, not as a foreign body that is buried in a museum, even when it is only kept as a document of the past. By the way, I've wanted to ask you, why did you not use words in this version?

NT: Aren't we blabbing all the time? Our words will be an integral part of this reinvention, perhaps as a counterpoint to the idea of the language imposed upon us in press conferences and discourse.

AK: Ahhh, ok. I did Words as a spontaneous language collage, abandoning philosophy in favour of art. The words in the environment were physically "used" and given a playful significance that went beyond facts and the acquisition of knowledge. Words are both communication and non-communication at once...

NT: Exactly. I liked the notion of organised junk. So I researched the presence of language: what is the equivalent of a random collection of words today? Then I made my own non-narrative collage; a deconstruction of language similar to the one you intended.

AK: The result looks a bit like neo-classicist painting. Jacques-Louis David's Oath of the Horatii comes to mind...

NT: "... You'll live on to tell my story..." Again, words! Hamlet's last ones. There are probably many digested references but if I've understood you correctly that could just be another form of the functioning of oral history. Look at El Greco for example: his clouds glue everything together. I use that in my collage-technique.

AK: Mmmh. "Man thinks in pictures", said Aristotle.

NT: And "A picture is worth a thousand words". Think of it as a big collage wherein everything fits and nothing is right. Language today is used similarly: communication, public relations, news, "infotainment"... All very visual, in fact.

AK: Indeed. In the Words environment, there were no images in the ordinary sense because the words themselves functioned as images. Here there is no play with model and symbol; no confusion between image and meaning.

NT: I am a Belgian. I can't redo Magritte all the time.

AK: True, but your version doesn't incite the beholder to do things involving his or her own subconscious thought patterns and polysemic illusions...

NT: Doesn't it? Maybe it does. People will deal with this newspaper*. It'll be distributed inside and outside the museum. Besides, you even made some fantasies about your own work in the 1990s didn't you? Judging by the photographs, your 1991 version of Words looks like design to me.

AK: Well, it sure didn't look like the original! The expressionism of the 1960s environments gave way to elements, which witnessed the regulated consumerism and corporatism of the 1990s. Some of them even had references to the first Gulf War. You know, I read somewhere that Warhol's "Piss Paintings", with their queer take on the mythical Pollock and his macho acts, were the ultimate Pollock "re-inventions".

NT: It'll become an endless process of mythologization and deconstruction. That is quite a "re-invention" in itself. The museums won't be able to truly ossify your legacy.

AK: But they'll try to, I am afraid.

Edited by Philippe Pirotte

en face
le pire
jusqu'à
ce qu'il
fasse rire

Mirlitonnnades



- Erick Beltrán using the Phantom limb box with Ramachandran, October 2011, San Diego.



- Vilayanur Ramachandran giving Jorge Satorre a Phantom limb box, October 2011, San Diego.

fungus
funlus
fenlus
denlus
denluy
deluy
delay
drelay
dreslay
dreslat
dreslant
preslant
presant
present
phresent
phresont
phreson
phreston
phrestom
phestom
phastom
phantom

Nemebiax: a universe as empty as the words it lacks.

[...] The invention of names. The task of repopulating the world with new entities simply by speaking them into being. Before they appear, in inanimate suspension, in the dream of nothingness, they wait to be called into existence. They arise or wake like someone answering their name. And they say nothing more. They are not yet beings, characters, places, objects, or states. For overcoming nothingness is a minor act, it does not give life, does not send creatures out to walk upon the earth.

If words give shape to a world without form, if 'arm', 'east', 'column', 'flax', 'goodbye', 'goat', 'simplicity', and 'cold' are no more than extreme symbols of an amorphous continuum, footprints unaware of the passages they tread... What would happen if Achilles and the tortoise chose not to run a race against each other, but raced towards one other, relinquishing a letter with every step?:

Achilles
Achillies
Achilies
Aochilies
Aorhilies
Aorhilis
Torhilis
Torhilise
Torhilse
Torholse
Tortolse
Tortoise

After all, isn't every work just a procession of veils? The superimposition of intermediate, provisional, unwanted states of which the work – as a final system, a cleansing regime – rids itself, eliminating them methodically.

Are the *nemebiax*'s inventions thus an incredible Salon des refusés, a hall for those rejected from existence?

An Ars Combinatoria of diverse modes of unbeing?

A chimeric inventory of things that have not come into being, that will not be, but could have been, that can't be, that don't want to be... Do inexistent things not exist in different ways? To what genre does a work like this, which tries to discern the different ways in which things that do not exist failed to achieve existence, belong?

In a world without characters, in intermediate kingdoms, *nemebiax* has failed before it has begun: to clothe this deity expelled from wholeness, armed against emptiness only with a verb, is to confront oneself with one's own failure (and ridicule) as a condition of possibility. From its very conception it is faced with absurdity.

And this is how the model of the paradox is precariously sustained, barely able to stand, on a base so small that we are forced to hop from one foot to another.

How to peel away the flesh of language with the blade of its very words?

Mentioning one failure brings up another: that of withstanding totality. The person whose ambition or recklessness turns them into caricature, the person who cannot set limits, who loses themselves in their own palimpsest, who cannot formalize because time is already the form. One possibility is left: to force this inevitable failure into hyperbole and convert it into its opposite, like someone changing their sign in a single judo move.

Like a colour chart that turns white when spun quickly, a disc containing all of language's sounds that emits silence when it is played, or maybe just a single sound. Or a single symbol for all names: a seed letter. [...]



- Jorge Satorre send Erick Beltrán a possible conversation with Ramachandran, but eaten by Vidocq, September 2011, Amsterdam.

bon bon il est un pays
où l'oubli où pèse l'oubli
doucement sur les mondes innommés
là la tête on la tait la tête est muette
et on sait non on ne sait rien
le chant des bouches mortes meurt
sur la grève il a fait le voyage
il n'y a rien à pleurer

ma solitude je la connais allez je la connais mal
j'ai le temps c'est ce que je me dis j'ai le temps
mais quel temps os affamé le temps du chien
du ciel pâlisant sans cesse mon grain de ciel
du rayon qui grimpe ocellé tremblant
des microns des années ténèbres

vous voulez que j'aile d'A à B je ne peux pas
je ne peux pas sortir je suis dans un pays sans traces
oui oui c'est une belle chose que vous avez là une bien

belle chose

qu'est-ce que c'est ne me posez plus de questions
spirale poussière d'instant qu'est-ce que c'est le même
le calme l'amour la haine le calme le calme

Nearly every man who loses a limb carries about with him a constant or inconstant phantom of the missing member, a sensory ghost of that much of himself, and sometimes a most inconvenient presence, faintly felt at times, but ready to be called up to his perception by a blow, a touch, or a change of wind.

- S. Weir Mitchell, *Injuries of Nerves*

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded,
I do not know whether a man or a woman
- But who is that on the other side of you?

- T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

de rien

de personne

inascible

naît

le diffici

le faci

le

qui m'ex

pulse

toujours

à l'

im

possible

fin

du vide

du vice

et revert

au début

de personne

de rien



Mangelos nos. 1 to 9½

Branka Stipančić

As he himself accurately foresaw, Dimitrije Bašičević Mangelos died in 1987 at the age of 66; in his manifesto *Shid Theory*, published and exhibited in 1978 in Zagreb, he divided his life into nine-and-a-half "Mangeloses", ending in the year of his death. Referring in the manifesto to the "bio-psychological theory" he had learned about as a schoolboy in his native village of Šid in former Yugoslavia — according to which the cells in the human organism are completely renewed within seven years and therefore each human being contains several completely different personalities — Mangelos used it to explain the differences between early and late works of various artists, claiming there were two Rimbauds, two Karl Marxes, three Van Goghs, several Picassos and nine-and-a-half Mangeloses. He also applied this method when categorizing and dating his own works: one Mangelos was a critic and curator, while another questioned it all, claiming that one must start from a clean slate; tabula rasa. One was involved in art institutions, while the other doubted the validity of such systems, prompting the third, and ones that followed, to persevere in the formulation of the artistic project termed "No-art".

Mangelos no.1 was a country boy in Šid; Mangelos no.2 a primary and high school student; Mangelos no.3 wrote poems in his exercise books and commemorated relatives and friends killed in the war with black squares he was later to term "*Paysages de la mort*" and "*Paysages de la guerre*"; Mangelos no.4 inscribed his first alphabets in blackened books and studied history of art; Mangeloses no.5 and 6 were already deeply committed to art, painting tabulae rasae, paysages, anti-peinture, pythagoras, no-stories, and the like, and taking part in the work of the avantgarde group, Gorgona, who based their radical projects on anti-art foundations. Mangeloses no.7, no.8, no.9 and no.9½ formulated theories on art, culture and civilization, writing them down in booklets, cardboard panels, and globes. But no matter how he calculated his life stages, somewhat imprecisely and in various versions, the final entry in his biography always remained the same. This is the year of his death, to which he added his final and eternal resting place: *Les champs du dernier goulag* — the fields of the former Soviet concentration camp as an antipode to the Champs Elysées.

This text by Branka Stipančić has originally been published in 'Mangelos from 1 to 9½. No-art', in Mangelos nos. 1 to 9½, exh. cat., Porto: Fundação de Serralves et. al., 2003, pp. 12–33 (p. 13). Trans. from the Croatian by Maja Šoljan.

Mangelos, *Shid-Theory*, 8 pages, 1978
Courtesy of Galerie Frank Elbaz, Paris

mangelos no. 9

no art

shid-theory

.....

s a g r e b, 21. - 23. nov. 1978

m a n g e l o s
1

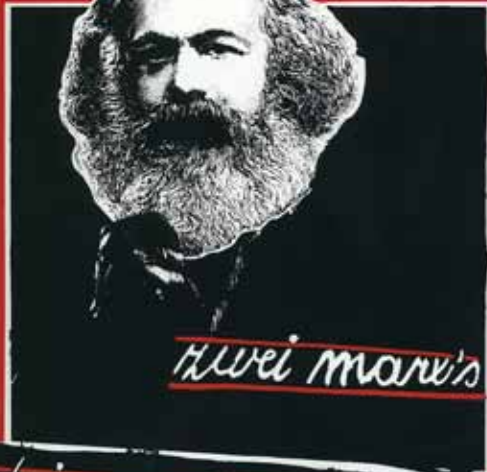
shid-theory

~~marx
van gogh
krljaza
mao
rimbaud
stalin
mangelos~~

=

two marxes
four van goghs
two krljizas
two maos
two rimbauds
two stalins
nine mangelos

DER...EL



Karl Marx's

*der junge marx = 1.
h. marx = 2.*

manifest
šidaki

često se citiraju "dva"marxa"tri"vangogha
"vite"pisama itd.
tako se ukazuje na znatne razlike
između ranih i kasnijih faza autora.
stavovi ranih prvenstveno iznose
mnogo se razlikuju, da sugovornosti.
kao da potiču od različitih jedinki.

objašnjenje te pojave je jednostavno.
radi se o osama različitih subjektivnih
u istoj pravnoj osobi.
materijalne pretpostavke diferenciranja
je totalna promjena (krije u organizme
krije se izmjenjaju svakih sedam godina.

ukoliko su informacije o fiziologiji poznate
koje sam prikupio u šidackoj školi - ponudimo
bilo bi dovoljno angela.

angeli no.1 ... 1921 - 1928
angeli no.2 ... 1928 - 1935
angeli no.3 ... 1935 - 1942
angeli no.4 ... 1942 - 1949
angeli no.5 ... 1949 - 1956
angeli no.6 ... 1956 - 1963
angeli no.7 ... 1963 - 1970
angeli no.8 ... 1970 - 1977
angeli no.9 ... 1977 - 1984 (ukoliko su ted-
angeli no.9"2" - 1984 - 1987 ne izračunava-
nje)

1933-84 - 1987, les champs du dernier goulag

šid-mani 19710

there are often mentioned "two" marx
"three" van gogh"several" picasso etc.
between-and the differences are thus stressed
between early and late phases of authors.
the conclusive attitudes
are often different even opposite
as if they belonged to different entities.

the explanation is simple.
it is in the uniqueness of the subject.
the material presupposition
for the uniqueness of the subjects
is changing of the cells in the organism.
cells renew themselves every seven years.
assuming the physiological information
I was taught at school in mid is correct
I should be the 9 1/2 angels.

angeli no.1 1921 - 1928
angeli no.2 1928 - 1935
angeli no.3 1935 - 1942
angeli no.4 1942 - 1949
angeli no.5 1949 - 1956
angeli no.6 1956 - 1963
angeli no.7 1963 - 1970
angeli no.8 1970 - 1977 /assuming an app-
angeli no.9 1977 - 1984 roximate correc-
angeli no.9 1/2 .. 1984 - 1987 tions calculated./

1933,84 - 1987, les champs du dernier goulag

podroom

zagreb
21-23. nov. 1978

EVERY BOX Raqs Media Collective

“a combination
compound of the
times present of
things past,
the times present
of things present,
and the times present
of things future.”

Time Capsule, 2011
Momentum Biennale, Moss, Norway



Archive for a Work-event:
Activating the body's memory
of Lygia Clark's poetics and its
context / Part 1

Suely Rolnik

***At the very moment
when the artist digests
the object, he is digested
by society, which has
already found him
a title and a bureaucratic
function: he will be
the engineer of the
leisures of the future,
an activity that has
no effect whatsoever
on the equilibrium
of social structures.***

Lygia Clark, 1969¹

The work of Lygia Clark is today recognized as one of the founding gestures of contemporary art in Brazil, and has an important presence in the international scene. Her artistic trajectory occupies a singular position in the critical movement that shook the international art field during the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. But as with many artistic practices of that period, especially in Latin America, her work risks being reduced to an unarticulated set of sterilized legacies.

The need and desire to face this situation triggered the creation of a project, which I undertook between 2002 and 2010: constructing the bodily memory of Lygia Clark's work and the context from which it originated. The result is an archive of sixty-five interviews registered on film, fifty-three of which were selected to be released in a DVD format,² and which have already been the object of diverse unfoldings in different contexts, some of which are still ongoing: an exhibition of the artist at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes (2005) and at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo (2006); a series of exhibitions of the archive in different countries;³ incorporation of the archive in the collections of museums in Latin America, Europe and the U.S., each subtitled in the appropriate official language; and finally, a box that contains a selection of twenty DVDs and a booklet, which has been produced in both France and Brazil.⁴

The project will be the starting point for an attempt to revisit Lygia Clark's work and to problematize the operations of archiving, preserving, collecting and exhibiting this kind of artistic practice, if indeed it should persist as a living experience today. What will be presented here is a stance on the current debate regarding the destinies that are given to this kind of work—destinies that range between its announced death and the vitality of its pulsing in the present.

1 "L'homme structure vivante d'une architecture biologique et cellulaire," in the dossier dedicated to Lygia Clark in the magazine *Robho*, n. 5-6 Paris, 1971. Copies of the magazine are rare, but the reader can make use of the facsimile of the journal, as well as of the first issue that was dedicated to the artist in the 1968 issue of the magazine, published in the exhibition catalogue *Lygia Clark, de l'œuvre à l'événement : Nous sommes le moule, à vous de donner le souffle*, Suely Rolnik and Corinne Diserens, eds, Nantes: Musée de Beaux-Arts de Nantes, 2005. Portuguese version: *Lygia Clark, da obra ao acontecimento: Somos o molde, a você cabe o sopro*, São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, 2006. The Brazilian edition includes the reproduction of both cahiers, which have been translated to Portuguese.

2 The fifty-three DVDs of the archive will be available for free public consultation in the museums and cultural institutions of several countries. In Brazil, they are already available in São Paulo, at the Cinemateca Brasileira, that also makes available for consultation the DVCams of the sixty-five interviews, in their original, unedited version.

3 Exhibitions of parts of the archive, accompanied by a conference by the author of the projects, were presented in the following countries and institutions: in Belgium, as the co-initiative of four institutions: Performing Arts Research Training Studios (PARTS), Extra City—Center for Contemporary Art, Beursschouwburg Theatre, and Gallery Jan Mot, with conferences and workshops of Hubert Godard and Guy Brett, in collaboration with the author (Brussels and Antwerp, 24 March–31 April 2007); in Germany, as part of IN TRANSIT 08 Performing Arts Festival “Singularities”, at Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin, 11 June–21 June 2008); in the United States, at Cage, an experimental gallery that was inaugurated with a one-year-long presentation of the archive (New York, January–December 2012). In Brazil, at the Museu Universitário de Arte of the Federal University of Uberlândia (Uberlândia, 14 March–25 April 2008); at the Centro Cultural Banco do Nordeste (Fortaleza, 17 April–07 May 2010) and at the Museu de Arte Moderna Aloísio Magalhães—MAMAM (Recife, 2011). Other than the exhibitions of the archive, five DVDs of the interviews were presented in Spain, on the initiative of the Ministry of Culture of the Brazilian Government in the edition of ARCO '08, which had Brazil as the guest country (Madrid, 13 February–18 February 2008). Among the exhibitions of this archive, scheduled for 2012, are: In France, at the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers (Paris, June 2012) and in Spain, at MACBA (Barcelona, October 2012).

4 This essay was originally published in a booklet included in the box set. The initiative of the realization of this box set came from a suggestion of the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, in France, after the enthusiastic reception that the exhibition *Lygia Clark, de l'œuvre à l'événement* received in the French and international press. Some of the volumes were freely distributed in libraries, cultural, and educational institutions in both France and Brazil, and the other volumes are being sold in bookshops in both countries.

An unusual territory

Lygia Clark's trajectory began in 1947. She dedicated her first sixteen years of activity to painting and sculpture, which had a surprising early repercussion in Brazil and, already in 1964, represented the beginning of an international presence.⁵ The singularity of the artist's research led her, in 1963, to the creation of *Caminhando (Walking)*.⁶ The origin of this work was a study that Lygia had made for one of her *Bichos (Beasts)*: while cutting a piece of paper as a Möbius strip, the artist realized that the artwork consisted in the very experience of cutting that surface and not in the object that resulted from it. She then decided to transform it into an artistic proposition: the receiver would experience a time without a before or an after, and a space deprived of rear and front, right and reverse, above and below, inside and outside. The work would be accomplished through that *experience*: in the temporality of the gesture of the person who would definitively stop being reduced to the condition of “spectator”, with his or her sterile relation with a supposedly neutral object, situated outside in a supposedly inert space. This experience privileges a living space created through the act that operates between the two; made of the fusion of the bodies of the hand, the paper and the scissors. Simple and powerful, the proposition went beyond the frontiers that delimited the field of art in that period, and allowed Lygia Clark to foresee an unknown territory. This *vision* opened a deep crisis with no return: there would be from then on an inflection in the trajectory of the artist that would lead her to risk the beginning of an international consolidation; to radically follow her new path of research. She would need three years more to start giving body to what was by then only virtual. The first proposition to follow was *Pedra e ar (Stone and air)* (1966),⁷ which inaugurated a series of works that Lygia Clark put together under the title *Nostalgia do corpo (Longing for the Body)*.⁸ Four other series of propositions that mobilized the last twenty-three years of her work followed: *A casa é o corpo (The house is the body)* (1967–1969); *O corpo é a casa (The body is the house)* (1968–1970); *Corpo Colectivo (Collective Body)*—that the artist subsequently named *Fantasmática do corpo (Phantasm of the body)* (1972–1975)—and *Estruturação do Self (Structuring the Self)* (1976–1988).⁹ Those works progressively embodied the virtual territory that she had inaugurated with

5 The text refers to the exhibition of David Medalla and Paul Keeler at Signals Gallery, in London, in which the English critic Guy Brett was involved. Brett was the only person to maintain a dialogue with the work of Lygia Clark from that period until the end of the artist's life, and he did not move away after the inflection of 1963. Mário Pedrosa also remained close to her, and continued to praise her research. His reaction to *Trepante*, the last exemplar of the series of *Bichos*, made of rubber, is widely known. Seeing her first version, he kicked it, joyfully exclaiming: "Finally—we can kick a work of art". However, Pedrosa recognized that he did not know how to think of her work after *Caminhando* (*Walking*). The same happened with Yves-Alain Bois, who explicitly declares so in his text "Nostalgia of the Body", in *October* 96, *October Magazine*, MIT Press, Summer 1994, pp. 85-99.

6 The proposition consists of offering the spectator a strip of any paper, scissors and glue. The objects come with instructions: he or she should twist the strip 180 degrees, then glue the front face of one extremity to the back face of the other, forming a two dimensional single surface (like a Möbius strip). Then choose any point of the strip to start a longitudinal cut, avoiding hitting the initial point every time a lap is completed. The cut generates both spiral and intertwined forms, while the strip narrows and lengthens, until the scissors can no longer avoid the point at which the operation began. At this moment, the strip regains its front and back, and the work is fulfilled.

7 *Pedra e ar* (*Stone and Air*) consists of a plastic bag, a rubber band, a pebble, and air. The receiver must fill the bag with her or his own breath and close it with a rubber band; in one of its exterior angles, facing it up, he or she places the pebble. Then he or she should hold the air balloon with the palm of his or her hand, pressing it with systolic and diastolic movements to make the pebble go up and down. Lygia Clark considered *Pedra e ar* (1966) her first work on the body, the simplest one; and perhaps because of that it was her favorite.

8 "Nostalgia do Corpo" is a phase from Clark's trajectory from between 1966 and early 1967. The following works, among others, are from this phase, and were all created in 1966: *Pedra e ar*, *Livro sensorial*, *Pingue-pongue*, *Desenhe com o dedo*, *Água e conchas*, *Respire comigo*, *Diálogo de mãos e Natureza* (*Estrutura cega*).

9 For further information on the *Objetos Relacionais* and their use in the *Estruturação do Self* (*Structuring the Self*), see: Suely Rolnik, "Breve descrição dos Objetos Relacionais", in *Lygia Clark, da obra ao acontecimento* (catalogue), op. cit., p. 15. In the original French: "Brève description des Objets Relationnels", in *Lygia Clark, de l'oeuvre à l'événement. Nous sommes le moule, à vous de donner le souffle*.

10 "Empty-full" was how Lygia Clark referred to this kind of experience; a conceptual refrain throughout her artistic trajectory.

11 For further information on the presence of this direction of research since the early works of painting and sculpture, see: Suely Rolnik, "Molding a Contemporary Soul: the Empty-Full of Lygia Clark", in Rina Carvajal and Alma Ruiz, eds., *The Experimental Exercise of Freedom: Lygia Clark, Gego, Mathias Goeritz, Hélio Oiticica, Mira Schendel* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999, pp. 55-108). Bilingual edition (English/Spanish).

Caminhando (*Walking*), and in which she would invest her creative power for the remainder of her life.

After the turn that took place in 1963, the artist's research persisted in the creation of proposals that depended on the processes they mobilized on the bodies of people who offered themselves to live them as a condition for the realization of those practices as artworks. The oeuvre was accomplished in the expansion of each one of those persons' sensibilities. It activated his or her *aesthetic experience*, that is to say the capacity to be affected by the forces that shake both the objects created by the artist, and their environment, thereby demystifying the illusory stability of their shape as could be apprehended by perception. The work was completed by the activation of those persons' vulnerabilities to the sensation of the paradoxical disparity between two exercises of cognition—on one hand, perception of the world's shapes, and, on the other, the resonance of the forces that animate it—when its tension reaches a threshold of tolerability. This cognitive approach challenged the experimentalist to sustain him/herself in the "empty-full"¹⁰ zone of otherness that such forces open in his or her own subjectivity. I refer to the zone made by a fullness of sensations of the forces that disturb the layout of ourselves and of the world, producing an emptiness of meaning that pushes us to reinvent both. The opening of this otherness that inhabits subjectivity was the *event* through which the work was accomplished. The wager was that this event would affect the daily life of the people who had experienced the propositions; the opening would impregnate their relation with the forces at play in the different environments of their existence.

Even in her early practice of painting and sculpture, Lygia Clark tried to shift from the reduction of the eye's exercise to its retinal potency (that which apprehends the forms), in search of its resonance potency (that which apprehends the forces) and the paradoxical dynamics between both.¹¹ What changes and becomes more complex after 1963 is that the research of these dynamics is no longer limited to the eye, and is now explored with the other senses, through the creation of objects that appeal to all of them. It is in this aspect that Clark's works are distinct from the exploration of the senses made by the "sensorial experiences" or by the practices of "bodily expression" developed during those decades, most of them limited to perception. The coincidence of such movement with

the sensorial propositions of Lygia Clark simply indicates that they breathed the same *air du temps*, which summoned the question of the body-in-art practices, especially in the research of other senses, towards an overcoming of the primacy of vision, both in artistic creation and in its reception.

Lygia's work would no longer be interrupted in the finitude of the spatiality of the object; it would now be accomplished as temporality, in an experience in which the object would lose its *thingness* to become, once more, a field of living forces that affect, and are affected, by the world, promoting a continuous process of differentiation of subjective and objective realities. If this central aspect of the artist's thinking poetics was part of her pictorial and sculptural strategies, after the shift in 1963, it expanded and became even more radical. It is true that in *Bichos* (*Beasts*)—the last series before the inflection—the gesture of the so called "participant" and, beyond it, the experience it enabled were summoned as part of the work, through the invitation to the manipulation of the object. Yet the work could still exist as such, independent of this experience, and those who approached it could still remain simple participants. From 1963 onward, Clark's works could no longer support themselves on the autonomy of the individual objects—isolated from the experience of the context of the specific dispositive they belonged to, as otherwise, they risked becoming a sort of nothingness. Such is Lygia's strategy to avoid her creations from succumbing to any desire of fetishization (even if the institutional system of art is able to turn anything into a fetishized work).¹² The artist *digested the object*: the work becomes event; an action on reality that transforms it.

It is important to underline that the invitation of Lygia Clark's work to mobilize the body as its decisive element cannot be mistaken with the simple invitation to manipulate the objects created by the artist, as was the case with other works that invited spectator participation, common to the artistic scene at the time. In their missives, both Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica insisted on distinguishing their works from those practices.¹³ It still makes sense to establish that distinction in regard to the contemporary works characterized by a fascination for "interactivity", in which aesthetics is usually qualified—and more recently theorized—as "relational",¹⁴ reduced to a sterile relation between the façade of the objects and that of the body that manipulates them, both turned into *things*. This is very different

12 An example of the fetishization of an object that was part of a proposition, for which such a fate was never imagined, is a large, rectangular piece of plastic with nylon or jute bags stitched at the ends, of the series *Arquiteturas Biológicas*, created by Lygia Clark in 1968 and practiced with variations until 1970. The object was used by a group of people, who inserted either their feet or hands into the bags and went on to improvise movements, each one involving the other person in the plastic. The work was realized through the exploration of approaches between the bodies, different from everyday experiences. This work has been reduced to the plastic with the bags sewn at their edges, resting on a pedestal in the exhibition "Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s", which intended to show forms of conceptual art outside of the North American axis.

13 In one of the letters, Hélio Oiticica writes to his friend (20 June 1969): "[...] for you the most important thing is the discovery of the [body] [...] and not of the 'participation in a given object', because this relationship with the object (subject-object) is overcome [...], while in general the problem of participation keeps this relation." In Luciano Figueiredo org., *Lygia Clark. Hélio Oiticica. Cartas 1964–1974* (Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ, 1996, p.115). Cf. Suely Rolnik, "Afinal, o que há por trás da coisa corporal?", in *Lygia Clark, da obra ao acontecimento*, op. cit., p. 9.

14 See especially Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle* (Dijon: Presses du Réel, 2002). English translation: *Relational Aesthetics* (New York: Random House, 2009). The ideas put forth by this author have been widely disseminated in Latin America, generally isolated from the vast and varied international production of thought in this field. This mode of dissemination characterizes the colonial tradition that is still present in the region, and that consists on the idealized and a-critical consumption of foreign theories, especially those of European and North American provenance.

15 UFR d'Arts Plastiques et Science de l'Art de l'Université de Paris I, Sorbonne.

16 Lygia Clark lived in Paris during three periods of her lifetime. The first one was in the beginning of her artistic trajectory, from 1950 to 1952, when she studied with Árpád Szénes, Isaac Dobrinsky and Fernand Léger. The second one was in 1964, when she frequented the group of Latin American artists of kinetic art, mostly Venezuelans, such as Soto and Cruz-Diez, and the circle of artists at Galerie Denise René in Paris, and Signals, in London. This text focuses on her third and final period, from 1968 to 1976.

17 Lygia Clark's students whose interviews were filmed for the *Archive for a work-event* are Christinne Ishkinazi, Gaëlle Bosser, Claude Lothier, Berndt Deprez, Marie-José Pillet and Didier Vignon.

from the disruptive experience produced by the mobilization of the resonance of the experimentalist's body operated by Lygia's *Relational Objects* and by the dispositives that create the conditions to approach them. Such postures, which tend to belong to the sphere of entertainment, will always remain foreign to this other sphere in which the body and the objects it encounters awaken from their inertia as *things*, in order to exist as *living beings*, in a permanent process of creation that takes place between them, leading both to become *others*.

Lygia followed that path for twenty-six more years, until her death in 1988. Her penultimate step would be taken in the work with her students in the recently created Faculty of Fine Arts at the Sorbonne,¹⁵ where the artist taught from 1972 to 1976.¹⁶ Known as Saint-Charles, the name of the street where it was located, it was the first art faculty of the university, created to answer to the conservatism of fine arts schools, to which art training in France had previously been confined. As a consequence of the movements that shook the country in 1968, Saint-Charles redrew the very field of contemporary art practices, and of the freedom of experimentation that usually characterizes them. Therefore, in order to pursue her artistic research, Lygia Clark chose to exile herself from the institutional and disciplinary territory of art, and to migrate to the university. In that context, it was more feasible to sustain, in her propositions, the *otherness* of the field of forces that destabilises the forms of subjects and objects, hereby dissolving their separation, which belongs to a perceptive, representational and rational approach. This choice strengthened in her work the active presence of otherness that inhabits the body, and the *becomings* that it implies; a presence that tended to be banished from the official art world at the time.

The conditions that the artist encountered in the university allowed her to take a step ahead and to exhaustively explore the experiences propitiated by her dispositives. For the first time, she began closely following the effects of her objects and procedures in the subjectivity of their receivers. With a relatively stable group of people for sufficiently long sessions, an appropriate environment was created for the experimentalists to allow the sensations summoned by the propositions to emerge, to free the images they evoked, and even to verbalize them, if they wanted to. In that setting, the process amplified and unfolded according to the rhythm of the recurrent sessions. Also, Lygia's presence became an essential

element of the experience that the work required to happen. The artist participated in the process: a ritual that she conducted, using the objects in the bodies of her students, and/or offering the conditions of their experimentation.

The new experience of the university work would allow Clark to face the difficulties that most of the students experienced in their attempts to abandon themselves to her propositions, which depended on their possibility to free their aesthetic experience and the poetic capacity they mobilized. Lygia realised then that the subjective event presupposed and mobilised by her objects and dispositives as the condition of their expressivity tended to clash with certain psychic barriers of those who accepted to experiment them. These barriers are built by the phantasms inscribed in the "memory of the body", as the artist herself called it.

This unease can be perceived in the interviews of her Sorbonne students, which are part of the archive.¹⁷ Most of them recognize the germinal importance of these experiences for their lives, and those who became artists admit the strong influence they played in their work. However, many revealed a clear ambivalence when recalling the rage they had felt for the artist, when they were haunted by their phantoms and by the memory of the sensations that convoked them and caused anguish, without having an adequate environment to deal with the body's memory of their traumas and to carry out the work of elaborating it.

Phantasmic barriers—which in this case were manifested through the students' resistance to experience the artist's proposals—are raised as a protection from traumatic memories, caused by failed attempts to live the aesthetic experience and to reinvent oneself through this process. This failure is the consequence of an inhibition of aesthetic experience because it is unable to find an environment that responds to its expression. The micropolitical characteristic of dictatorships, for example, tend to summon and strengthen existing traumas; or to produce them for the first time in those who have had the opportunity to live the aesthetic experience and its expression before the installation of such regimes in their countries (an opportunity that was especially favoured by the countercultural movements that preceded the dictatorships and that continued during their first years, before being repressed). Phantasmic barriers are inscribed in the body's memory as a strategy of defense, alongside

the traumatic experience that unleashed their construction; both the trauma and the defense can simultaneously be mobilized by any context that directly or indirectly evokes the original situation.

It is in relation to this impasse that the artist created *Estruturação do Self (Structuring the Self)*, the last gesture of her oeuvre, which took place after her definitive return to Rio de Janeiro in 1976. To realise it, she dedicated a room of her flat to a sort of installation, where she received each person individually for one-hour-long sessions¹⁸ one to three times a week over a period of months, and in some cases, even a period of years. The *Relational Objects* were the instruments conceived by the artist to touch the bodies of her “clients”, as she referred to those who were available to experience this proposal. Naked,¹⁹ they would lay on one of those objects, the *Grande colchão (Large Mattress)*,²⁰ and the session would begin. Many were the uses of the *Relational Objects*, and they were chosen concerning Lygia’s listening to the requests made by the client’s bodies at each moment of the process. The feeling of an invisible demand oriented her in the selection of the objects, as well as in the sequence of their use and their manipulation during the session.

Traumas and their ghosts inscribed in the memory of the body consequently became the focus of her research, whose mobilization would no longer be a mere collateral effect of her proposals, but rather, the nervous center of their dispositives. Lygia Clark sought to explore the power of the objects to bring this memory to the surface and to *treat it* (an operation she called “vomiting the phantasmatic”). It is therefore the inner logic of the investigation that led her to invent her last artistic proposal, which included a deliberately therapeutic dimension. Her many years of psychoanalysis had prepared her for such experience,²¹ by making her delve into the complexity of her own body’s memory and the work of releasing its entanglements. A new exile of the institutional terrain of art took place, this time toward the field of psychotherapeutics—a far distant region from the boundaries of art, within which was still situated the university context that she had chosen to make her experiments possible.

It is worth recalling that throughout the twelve years in which Lygia worked on *Estruturação do Self (Structuring the Self)*, she insisted in pointing out that it was a psychotherapeutic practice and, at the same time, often repeated that she had neither ever stopped being an artist, nor had become a psychoanalyst (or anything of the sort). How then, can we

understand her exile into psychotherapeutic terrain? Perhaps such a shift was the solution she had found in order to free the exercise presupposed by the word “art” from the determinations that prevailed in the institutional terrain in which the artistic practices were confined at the time; a gesture that was shared by many artists of her generation (those who had made the act of questioning this context the main focus of their aesthetics. From Lygia’s unique answer, through her work, to the challenge of such a state of things, we can assume that what mattered to her was the operation of the artistic practice and the event it promoted, and neither the field in which the event took place nor its name or categorization, and even less so, the place it was assigned inside a pre-established hierarchy of cultural values. In fact, in that moment, the institutional field of art was the least suitable place for such an operation.

Lygia was accordingly obliged to migrate to the terrain of psychotherapy in order to continue and to complete her operation of creating a new territory that she had constructed throughout her artistic trajectory. From the viewpoint of that unknown territory, the polemic surrounding the question of where to situate this specific work is sterile; it is a false problem; a cul-de-sac: it does not matter if it is still in the field of art or already in that of psychotherapeutics. We should thus make an effort to enter the singular territory created by the artist: there where aesthetics and therapeutics reveal themselves as potentials of experience, inseparable in their act of interfering in subjective and objective realities. Such an act is therefore also political, given its disruptive effects on the dominant mode of subjectivation and, specifically, in its power in the institutional field of art. It is precisely the confluence of poetic, therapeutic and politic powers in a single gesture that we need to (re)activate when updating Lygia Clark’s works in the present.

18 She exceptionally worked with a couple.

19 The clients kept their underwear on.

20 *Grande Colchão (Large Mattress)* is the name that Lygia gave to a *Relational Object* that consisted of a "large pillow of transparent plastic filled with polystyrene beads and covered with a loose sheet on which the client was lying during the whole session. Lygia Clark also used it for other purposes, for example, by pressing against this mattress the client's body, demarcating her or his contour in order to 'mould it'—an expression that the artist proposed specially to describe this operation." Cf: Suely Rolnik, "Breve descrição dos Objetos Relacionais", in *Lygia Clark, da obra ao acontecimento*, op.cit., p. 15.

21 Lygia Clark engaged in analysis for a large part of her life, in different periods and with different psychoanalysts, among them Pierre Fédida, during her last period in Paris. I filmed an interview with Fédida for this archive in 2002, before the project received support, because there was a risk of losing the opportunity to record his precious testimony, as the analyst was seriously ill. This was the last interview given by Fédida, who died three months later. The interview is part of the complete archive of 53 films and can also be entirely read in in *Lygia Clark, da obra ao acontecimento*, op.cit., pp. 69–71.

22 The magazine *Robho* played an important role in the opening of France to contemporary art. The discovery of Lygia Clark's work by its editors, Jean Clay and Julian Blaine, triggered the shift of the magazine, so far focused on kinetic art (being the main vehicle in Paris of its divulgation), towards installations, performances, public interventions, etc. An interview with Julian Blaine is included in the archive. As for Jean Clay, we were unable to interview him, as he has refused to talk about Lygia Clark for many years.

23 Exhibition organized by Fundació Antoni Tàpies (Barcelona, 1997), in partnership with MAC de Marseille (Marseille, 1998), Fundação Serralves (Porto, 1998), Palais des Beaux-Arts (Brussels, 1998) and Paço Imperial (Rio de Janeiro, 1998–1999). The publication of the catalogue of this exhibition, conceived by Manuel J. Borja-Villel, then director of the institution, and Nuria Enguita Mayo, co-curator of the exhibition, is a prime source for researchers of the work of Lygia Clark, thanks to the attentive work of investigation, which incorporated the artist's manuscripts hitherto unpublished and inaccessible to the public, and whose reading is essential to the understanding her work.

24 Two small aluminum sculptures of the series *Bichos* from the 1960s were sold in October 2010 for about 700 000 euros each at the 37th International Fair of Contemporary Art (FIAC) in Paris to a French collector. In May that year, in the Art Auction BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China), held in London, an aluminum sculpture of the same series doubled the estimated, reaching half a million dollars. More recently, another work of the same series was sold at the Art Basel art fair for around 1.5 million euros, and the work *Abrigo Poético 3*, from 1964, was sold at the same fair for around 1.8 million euros.

The event fades away

During Lygia Clark's life, and in the ten years that followed her death, her practices dedicated to the bodily experimentation of those who had accepted to involve themselves with her propositions enjoyed no reception in the institutional context of art. The artist was recognised exclusively by her works of painting and sculpture, which only comprise one third of her trajectory. With the exception of a brief period between 1968 and 1971, in Europe, with the retrospective of her work in the Venice Biennale (1968), the dossiers published in two issues of the magazine *Robho*²² (1968 and 1971), and the beginning of her "classes" at the Sorbonne (1971), the attention towards the remaining two thirds of her production only emerged in 1997–1998. Such attention was the result of the successful reception of the small room dedicated to some of her propositions in documenta X, organized by the curator Catherine David, and mainly of the itinerant retrospective organized by Fundació Antoni Tàpies, where for the first time the whole body of works by the artist was exhibited.²³ From that moment onward, the practices dedicated to the body have been recognized as part of her work, which has since been admitted to the exclusive club of the international stars of contemporary art. In recent times, the artist's work has appeared in at least thirty exhibitions globally every year. The experimental period has increasingly been paid attention to; her paintings and sculptures fetching ever-higher prices on the art market.²⁴

In that context, and considering the way in which Lygia's propositions tend to be presented, they are on most occasions drained of vitality—something that also happened to other artistic practices of those decades. Only the objects that participated in those actions are exhibited, and sometimes the actions are remade for an audience of museums and biennials, who observe them with a mixture of curiosity and distraction, without any condition for actualizing the experience that makes them make sense. Such propositions, especially *Estruturação do Self (Structuring the Self)*, are strictly incompatible with the presence of anyone adopting the position of "spectator"; of anyone who is exterior and/or immune to the experience such works require and mobilize—not to mention the silence, the temporal continuity and the mute intimacy between resonant bodies; essential aspects for the realization of the

work. We could say the same to anyone adopting the position of “receptor” in its passivity—as the work doesn’t exist without his or her action—or the position of “participant”. If the artist had made of her work the digestion of the object in order to reactivate the critical power of the artistic experience, the circuit was now digesting the artist, turning her into the engineer of the leisure of a future that was already there, which “in no way affects the balance of social structures”, just as she had predicted more than three decades earlier.

In the best of cases, the objects are presented alongside documents, and sometimes the only thing that is presented is the documentation. Yet, these allow no more than a fragmentary and merely external apprehension of such actions, stripped of their *relational* essence, according to the meaning of the term implied by Lygia Clark’s work. The artist’s poetic gesture is thus emptied out, and her work is turned into a luxury item for the feast of the reification of art that “cultural capitalism” promotes. The epigraphy to this text is a sort of prophecy that confirms the artist’s acute lucidity in relation to the new regime back in 1969, when one could only vaguely discern it in the horizon. This lucidity was already evident in shift of the artist’s work in 1963: by circumventing that instrumentalization, she was laying it bare, even if it was still too early to be able to verbalize it with such accuracy. This was something that could only happen six years later.

The critical forms set in motion by Lygia in her proposals over the two following decades—mainly when she migrated outside the field of art—only found resonance after her death, during the second half of the 1990s, in the extra- or para-disciplinary drift of a new generation of artists. Those young artists began to rethink and activate the movement of Institutional Critique initiated in the 1960s from different conceptual and political grounds.²⁵ Many of those artistic practices that began to proliferate, especially in Latin America, tried to infiltrate the interstices of the urban life, making apparent what was irrupting in the official cartography of the city. The drift outside the official spaces and categories of art undertaken by that third generation of the Institutional Critique did not imply a complete exile, as was required for Lygia in her time. The context had completely changed: the relation of those new artistic practices to the official circuit of art was now marked by a fluid dynamic of comings-and-goings that tended to disseminate micro-movements

of a critical deterritorialization of the established field. That generation was thus moving away from the anti-institutional and anti-disciplinary imagery that had triggered the most radical creations of the 1960s and 1970s, and had also embedded Lygia’s propositions, despite that her drift out of the institutionalized realm was not motivated by an opposition to it but by the very demand of her poetics, which could not be addressed within that context.

The anguish I felt by the way in which the work of the artist had been incorporated within the official circuit found a fertile ground for confrontation in the critical gesture that was reactivated by this new generation of artists, now employing other strategies. For them, the entire act of questioning the value of acting in the institutional terrain of art had become a false problem. A collective support was now offered to my desire to activate the poetic power of Lygia’s work in its recent return to that terrain, which she had deserted in life. In fact, this desire originated much earlier, in the impulse that had initially led me to take her bodily propositions as the subject of my doctoral thesis at Paris VII, in response to a request by the artist herself, who was frustrated by the lack of dialogue with the critics at the time. The thesis was a first step, but the desire to push the task forward and to give more consistency to it remained. I owed it to Lygia and to her work, which thinking poetics contributed—and continued to contribute—to my own work. And so it was that, in 2002, I began to conceive the project of building a body’s memory of her propositions, which resulted in the archive.

...
**To be continued
in Manifesta Journal #14**

25 See Brian Holmes, “L’extradisciplinaire. Vers une nouvelle critique Institutionnelle”, and Suely Rolnik, “La mémoire du corps contamine le musée”, in *Multitude*, n° 28 (Paris, 2007), <http://multitudes.samizdat.net>. An issue produced in collaboration with the multilingual Austrian magazine *Transform*, <http://transform.eipcP.net>.



Ludic Experimentation by the Surrealist Group in Czechoslovakia, 1971–1985

Dawn Ades

Ludikativní experimentace Surrealistické skupiny v Československu v letech 1971–1985

I. Interpretační hry (1971–1974)

Záměrem těchto experimentací s výtvarnými a literárními interpretacemi daného tématu mělo být zjištění, do jaké míry, v jakých souvislostech, funkcích a kvalitách se shodují představové asociace jednotlivých účastníků a jakým způsobem jsou disponování k vzájemné inspiraci.

(V. E.: interpretační hry)

1. Tichá pošta (květen–listopad 1971, námět a metoda: Jan Švankmajer, redaktor Ludvík Šváb)

Interpretační předloha: Vratislav Effenberger: *Nikde nikdo* (scénář z roku 1959).

Pořadí účastníků: Jan Švankmajer, Eva Švankmajerová, Andrew Lass, Vratislav Effenberger, Martin Stejskal, Ludvík Šváb, Martin Michal, Ladislav Novák, Albert Mareš, Pavel Rezníček, Karol Baron.

Pravidla: První ze stanoveného pořadí účastníků vypracuje svou vlastní verzi určené předlohy a předá ji následujícímu s vyznačením několika situací, které následující je nucen převzít a zapojit do své varianty. Tento následující účastník smí znát pouze verzi svého předchůdce. Jinak je jeho obrazotvornost ponechána volné pole za předpokladu, že neztratí se zřetel interpretační předlohy.

Během realizace této interpretační řady se zřetelně projevil vzájemná komunikace, a to nejen už ve formě kolektivní součinnosti, nýbrž přímo v podobě jakéhosi imaginativního dialogu, který mistry zabíhal až do polemiky. Pokud jde o tento komunikační aspekt, který se odráží už v přístupu ke hře, lze mezi jednotlivými versemi rozeznat dost podstatné rozdíly. Bylo by možné rozdělit je na *kommunikativní* (většina, 8 verší), *podmíněně komunikativní* (3 verše: E. Švankmajerová, L. Šváb, K. Baron) a *nekommunikativní* (P. Rezníček).

(V. E.: cit. práce)

Vrtná dolina - Autobus

Úzkým žlabem Vrtné doliny vleče sa zvolna ošarpaný autobus. Pomalú jazdu si vynucuje hrbolatá cesta s množstvom serpentín, ale zrejme aj čodokárska sprievodkyňa Eva Švankmajerová, ktorá cestujúcim každý detail v krajine obšírne komentuje po spôsobe turistických cicerónov.

- Keď sa pozrite vľavo, vidíte skalné útesy, ktoré som pôvodne našiel ako pozadie pre *Liečenie frigiditu na Slovensku*. Potom som však zistila, že by sa k tomu lepšie hodilo niečo lahodnejšie, tak som to pre-

I. Interpretační hry (1971–1974)

1. Tichá pošta
2. Vyšivačky
3. Dobrý den pane Gauguine
4. Jistota
5. Budoucí letci

II. Panorama (1975)

III. Restaurátor (1979)

IV. Přízraky a fantomy (1979)

V. Hádky v kompasu (1981)

VI. Ilustrovaný sen (1982)

VII. Hledání Žugoně (Hra o Žugoně - 1982)

VIII. Jedním uchem dovnitř (1984)

IX. Potřeba příběhu (1984)

X. Ostrov mrtvých (1983–1984)

XI. Analogické these (1985)

maľovala - ...Lenže Slováci to poplietli a realizovali oba projekty, pravda, so značnou dávkou nevku. A to je výsledok: vľavo pôvodná škica, vpravo definitívna verzia. Ako celok to pôsobí veľmi gyčovitě, ale im sa to páči a zahraniční turisti si to tiež pochvaľujú... Tak som to nakoniec nechala tak...

(A. M.: *Cesta na hrad*, ukážka ze hry)

Metamorfosa se téměř ve všech variantách projevuje jednak v rovině syrové reality (prostorové koláže, proměny postav a situací) a jednak v rovině snové či básnické hyperboly, přičemž obě tyto polohy se vzájemně střídají a prolínají... Tato imaginativní dialektika je až na výjimky společným jmenovatelem všech variant, i když se vzdaluje od proměny obrazu, založené na principu analogie k přímeru vyplývajícímu z principu identity.

(V. E.: cit. práce)

„Hrdina (vlastně Werich a Já) se ve žlabu přibližuje k mlýnu pod lopatky, před kterými stačí hrdina uhnout do strany, zatímco Werich se dostává pod lopatky. Hrdina se dostává do haly. Vše je starší a připomíná spíše sběrnou surovinu. Ale je to mlýn. V pozadí buchary. Uprostřed lidí z autobusu točí mlýnským kolem. Za stolem spí několik Effenbergerů (Švábů) a v pozadí hraje na kytaru Šváb (Effenberger), či to tak odtud vypadá. Jistě je, že se v pozadí na práci soustředí Standa Dv., který pucuje jakési dárce prs. Jako čistidla používá prášku z mlýna. Stojím v popředí s řezačkou na fotografie a krájím kousky Wericha, které ode mne vozi Roman Erb.: „Člověče, včera mně vytrhl poslední zub, hrozně to bolelo a celou noc mně krvácela huba, plival jsem krev...“ Cítím mokrě mezi nohama: „Vidiš, zase jeden hemeroid, to je ta daň Skutečnosti.“ Vráta Eff., zaslechnuvši tento můj výrok, se počne vžadu hrozně smát, s úšklebkem: „Asi si to budete muset ještě jednou přemílit.“ Utíkám. Hrdina utíká; ztěžka se dostává ven do lesíka, který ze začátku v sobě ještě uchovává kousky mlýna (...) Na cestě stojí autobus, který je jako zpočátku v normálním stavu. (...) Všichni nastupují do autobusu. (...) Autobus ujíždí dál. Hrdina sedí na svém místě. Pojednou zahlédne venku několik mužů, nesoucích na zádech igelitové pytle s krvavou vodou, v níž plavou jakési kosti, maso, šatstvo, snad dokonce... Jsou to pytle cementu. Autobus pomalu ujíždí po níž cestou...“

(A. Lass: *Nikde nikdo*, ukážka ze hry)

„Proud splášků míří k velkému mlýnskému kolu, které ve žlabu šrotuje mrtvé Werichy. S vypětím všech sil Andy začne šplhat po lopatkách kol, které se točí v protisměru. Pod proudem splášků z lopatek musí šplhat stále rychleji, aby alespoň pomalu vystupoval nahoru. (...)“

Ludic Experimentation by the Surrealist Group in Czechoslovakia, 1971–1985

Jan Švankmajer, whose film *Down to the Cellar* will figure in Manifesta 9 next year, is a member of the long-lived Prague surrealist group. In the 1970s, at a time when the group had had to cease publication temporarily of its journal, *Analogon*, games became a major part of their activity. Games—group activities combining the poetic and the experimental—had been integral to surrealism since the beginning. The games invented by the Czech surrealists, some of which were published in *Analogon* 6 iii, 1991, add a critical dimension to the poetic and experimental. We present here a small selection of these games, which were generously provided by Bruno Solarik, member of the Prague group.

Dawn Ades

Prague surrealist group, Game instruction, re-published in *Analogon* 6 iii, 1991

I. Interpretation Games (1971–1974)

These experiments in artistic and literary interpretation on a given theme aim to determine the extent to which the functions and qualities of each participant's associations concur and the ways they dispose them toward mutual inspiration.

(V.E.: interpretation games)

Good Day, Mr

Gauguin (conception and instructions: Martin Stejskal)

Item for interpretation:

Gauguin's eponymous 1889 painting

Order of participants:

Martin Stejskal, Eva Švankmajerová, Vratislav Effenberger, Andrew Lass, Jan Švankmajer, Ladislav Novák

Rules: In this interpretation game each artist in succession had to examine two different interpretations at the same time. They used Gauguin's celebrated painting, on one hand,

and an interpretation of it—the work of the previous participant—on the other. Each participant was free to decide which of the two points of departure would predominate.

(V.E.: ibid.)

Each participant knew before the game began of the condition involving two interpretational aspects; nonetheless, most of them preferred to react to the work of the preceding interpreter. This demonstrates—once again, as in *Chinese Whispers*—that the inclination toward an internal imaginative dialogue between the players was given preference over the inclination toward abstract experimentation. This strange form of pictorial dialogue outside the bounds of language indicates a possible approach to a certain deeper layer of intersubjective communication whose symbolic functions are broader and more dynamic than those of language, which is too closely bound

up with conventional rationality.

(V.E.: idem)

The conflict between the romantic spirit and the rational mind in their past and present forms (and the resulting erotic appeal) are two of the most important problem areas dealt with in this game.

(M.S.: Closing commentary on game)

II. Restorer (1975)

(Collective experiment in tactile interpretation)

Conception, instructions, adaptation: Jan Švankmajer

The idea of the experiment was to find out:

1. If the sense of touch is able to arouse associative thinking and become a subject matter for the imagination.
2. Whether particular objects, forms and

structures, placed in certain imaginative circumstances (with a tactile object) can, after being "read" by touch, be connected consciously in a continuous perceptual experience.

3. To which extent a subjective tactile objectification is possible.

4. If touch, isolated from the other senses, is capable of transmitting "aesthetic arousal".

5. Whether the visualisation of the tactile perception takes part in the transmission.

Rules: The participants in the experiment were presented with an object I created which was a tactile interpretation of "Restorer at Work", a picture cut out from a magazine. No one, aside from me, had seen the original image. The participants were required to:

1. Insert their arm(s) in a cotton sleeve and identify the object, describing it and giving their first impressions
2. Connect the tactile impressions acquired and the associations or analogies that might arise into an imaginative whole
3. Try to determine which of ten pictures served as the inspiration for the artist's tactile interpretation.

(J.Š.: commentary on game)

Participants: M. Bounourová, V. Effenberger, A. Marenčin, E. Medková, J. Mojžiš, A. Nádorníková, M. Stejskal, L. Šváb

"I see here similarities not only in form, but in actions. A bearded Christ, whose mouth has, remarkably, been stepped on, leaving the impression of a shoe (I subsequently ascertain by touch that the shoe is also *real*.) The tenacious restorer is trying to eliminate the 'decoration' by injecting it. [...] The syringe seems to come directly out of his eyes, which I have symbolised in tactile form as a pair of little hanging balls. The needle is represented here as a corkscrew and the body of the syringe as an antiseptic phallus made of Bakelite (hard plastic). Two sacks to the right of the tactile object humorously symbolise, in my reading,

the entire complex of his consciousness, the 'creative potency' hidden in old stockings."

(M.S.: commentary on his own participation in the experiment)

The game is included in the collection titled *Otevřená hra* [Open Game].

III. Quarrel in a Compass (1981)

Original conception and instructions: Gilles Dunant, Naila Attia, Michel Dubret, Vince

Adaptation: F. Dryje

Participants: N. Attia, M. Dubret, G. Dunant, Vince, F. Dryje, J. Koubek, M. Stejskal, J. Švankmajer

Rules: 1. Each participant in the game wrote down that day's experiences and impressions (from the morning till the beginning of the game); 2. Five cards with pictures were taken and each player described it in writing; 3. Each player composed an artificial dream (using the method of dream logic) integrating the elements in 1. and the characteristics of the cards in 2.; 4. Each player took a "trip" around Prague, sharing only the beginning and end points with the others, and eventually wrote them down; 5. Connections between the contents of the artificial dream and the "trip" were sought (analogies, correspondences, and so on).

The written record of the game was to be supplemented with a commented evaluation by the artists.

Trip

Fragments of reality:

1. A truck loaded with lard and covered with a red tarp (I encountered them twice that day).
2. A limping lawyer (Mr Michálek) and a clerk at the tribunal (an acquaintance of ours, Mrs Kaiserová).
3. Pieces of polished agate and a strange horn (from a hairy rhinoceros) at

a second-hand shop in Celetná Street.

4. Looking for Martin's studio (went into no. 5 instead of no. 15, as usual).

5. Waiting with full bladder for Martin to arrive.

Cards:

19. Sun in window

20. Carriage-ride

47. Work in rice field

69. Stone column in middle

of room

70. Geminl (twins)

Dream:

I'm feeling drowsy with pressure in the belly area. I know already from experience that I'm in for a fretful dream. Nonetheless, I fall asleep rather easily:

I'm racing along on a road at a breakneck speed behind the wheel of a (rather large) *sort of car*. I'm driving so fast because I need to get home in time. Our toilet is flooding. The flushing lever has broken off. However, I can't concentrate on driving, because of the *sun shining* in the rear view mirror, blinding me. I tilt the mirror every which way, forward and backward. Suddenly the truck bed of the vehicle I'm driving in the mirror. I see that I'm transporting a pile of raw lard. A red tarp has been thrown over the lard. Michálek, the lawyer, sits on the pile with a bandaged leg. Mrs Kaiserová sits next to him. *They are holding hands* and looking in each other's eyes amorously. It disgusts me, so I tilt the mirror back. Suddenly, out of the blue, a *massive stone column* appears in the middle of the road. I clearly won't be able to stop in time or swerve around the column. I let go of the steering wheel and cover my eyes. The truck slams into the column, which breaks up into small pieces of agate-stone and one rhinoceros horn. Everything is tumbling along the road. *People come running and collect the pieces of polished agate from the paving stones*. I rush out of the mangled car and run along the road. It's Slavikova Street. I search for

the building containing Martin's studio. I can't find it. First I enter no. 5, but it's not there. Some people send me on to no. 15. Finally, I find the studio. I bang on the door, but nobody opens. I wake up with a strong desire to urinate.

The fictional dream came out of me in one sitting; actually, all I did was put the events of the day and the card symbols in order and joined them in my own self. The card symbols related to the day's events in an eerie manner:

Carriage-truck loaded with lard
Stone column-pieces of agate
Mr Michálek, the lawyer, and Ms Kaiserová-the Gemini (twins)

The magic of this game lies in the expectation. Like a shaman who has just finished his dance and is waiting for the rain, I-when I had finished writing down the dream and walked out into the street-couldn't rid myself of the idea that I had just brought some misfortune down on myself or, in the best of cases, I would witness some misfortune I would be responsible for-if only unconsciously. I shuddered at the thought that at any moment I might hear behind me the tinkling of broken glass and the sound of crumpling of metal from a car accident. But I eventually realised that the connection between the dream and reality didn't have to play itself out at the identity level and I started to worry about falling roof tiles. "Worry" isn't the right word for the feeling, though, because at the same time I was secretly hoping for the "dream" to come true. This ambivalent feeling accompanied me the whole way. Another feeling accompanied me: a feeling of some sort of secret mission that elevated an ordinary walk to a meaningful undertaking with a higher purpose. I looked on other people as mere marionettes or moving props in a secret play of circumstances they were completely unaware of. They were

there only to carry out, unawares, a sort of magical mission I had set in motion by writing the "dream". In Martin's cellar, where we had picked our cards and then written down our dreams, I had a general sense that we were involved in a great conspiracy against all of humanity.

The first thing that caught my attention was a bunch of odd pipes sticking out of the ground in Vinohrady Park; pipes about 20 cm on average were protruding from the ground and returning again without reaching it. The pipes reminded me of a bent-over figure in the rice field on card no. 47. At that moment, I didn't realise it, however. Instead, they gave me the impression of being some sort of dark link with the underworld. I remembered card no. 47 once in the course of my walk, as I watched a group of people waiting meekly for a hot dog. When I left the park, an asphalt truck zoomed by me, incredibly caked over with asphalt. The white lard thus became black asphalt. On my walk I noticed several times that I was walking in the middle of the road. I was reminded of card no. 70 (Gemini) twice by two railroad workers I met, the two towers of Týn Church and two girls sitting across from each other behind a café window.

I'm walking along Vinohradská Street and decide to enter a book shop; the first thing that catches my gaze is the *Atlas of Precious Stones*, published about a month before, which I'd been looking for with no success. I buy it. I take the pedestrian underpass to Wenceslas Square. The columns in the underpass seem to beckon me to walk into them. Autosuggestion? A conscious attempt at dream fulfilment? At the second-hand shop in Celetná Street I buy a box of polished agate stones which I saw in the morning (I don't buy the hairy rhinoceros horn).

In the course of the walk, the passive expectation turns into a sort of wringing out of connections from reality. I take notes as I walk. I meet Dr.

Drvota, but I avoid him; I don't want to be drawn from the "dream". In one of the alleys leading away from the Old Town Square I'm suddenly blinded by sunlight; I swerve over into some shade to finish taking down my notes. Progressively, I find fatigue sets in, my feet start to hurt and I need to urinate. About two hours later I come home. I'm the third. Martin's already there.

So, the whole journey took place in quite a normal, banal manner, uneventfully, with no exciting chance encounters. The connections between the "dream" and reality are minimal, rather insubstantial. Still, I can't say I'm disappointed with the game. The afternoon filled with magical expectation-despite being constantly held back by a rational scepticism-suffused the game with an unrepeatable atmosphere in which I had some sort of personal superiority, a sort of detached view of reality from above, which gave me the feeling I was in control, in charge of it, and to a certain extent liberated me from a fear of it. For the first time I was fully cognizant of the fact that I was a member of a cult, with all the positive and negative aspects that go along with such a membership.

(J.Š.: excerpt from game)

Key to abbreviations

K.B.	– Karol Baron
F.D.	– František Dryje
V.E.	– Vratislav Effenberger
J.K.	– Jiří Koubek
A.L.	– Andy Lass
A.M.	– Albert Marenčin
E.M.	– Emila Medková
A.N.	– Alena Nádvorníková
M.S.	– Martin Stejskal
L.Š.	– Ludvík Šváb
E.Š.	– Eva Švankmajerová
J.Š.	– Jan Švankmajer

Compiled by František Dryje

On Re-Act Feminism

Bettina Knaup,
Beatrice Ellen
Stammer

re.act.feminism #2—a performing archive

In the context of the current trend of the historicization and institutionalization of performance art, our goals are:

>> To investigate feminist, gendercritical and queer strategies within performance art from the 1960s to the early 1980s as well as the “return” of this artistic practice in the form of re-enactments, re-formulations and archival projects.

>> To go beyond current strategies of canonisation and stress the diversity of performative practices beyond Western normativity.

>> To create a critical and thematic cartography to promote a transcultural and cross-generational dialogue.

>> To highlight the complex relationship between live performances, their traces and documents, and their reception.

re.act.feminism #2—a performing archive is a continually expanding temporary and living performance archive travelling through six European countries from 2011 to 2013.¹ In its current version it presents feminist, gendercritical and queer performance art by 125 artists and artist collectives from the 1960s to the beginning of the 1980s, as well as contemporary positions in the form of videos, films, photographs and texts. The research focus is on artworks from Eastern and Western Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the U.S. and countries in Latin America. On its route through Europe—starting in Spain and continuing through Croatia, Poland, Estonia, Denmark and ending in Germany—this temporary archive will continue to expand through research of the partner institutions and cooperation with various art academies and universities. It will also be “animated” through exhibitions or screenings or performances or workshops along the way, which will continuously contribute to the archive.

The works have been chosen based on their potential and relevance for today’s feminist and queer debates and artistic strategies. They allow us to see the power relations inscribed in the body as well as its potential for resistance and for pleasure, and the discovery of singular subjectivities and connections between life and art.

The project is based on the idea of a living archive. We do not stress the artefacts and documents as such, and we do not focus primarily on the archival function of preserving and conserving. On the contrary, we emphasise their use, re-use, appropriation and reinterpretation. In other words, we are interested in the “productivity” of the document: What effect does it have in the moment of its reception, what does it do? What kind of relationship does it create between the past and the future, between its author and its recipient? What types of references and interpretations are offered by the archive?

re.act.feminism is a manner of time travel that invites us to engage in a lively dialogue beyond the limits of time and space. Our focus is not on historical reconstruction, but rather on infectious gestures and productive translations.

1 Centro Cultural Montehermoso, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain (October 7, 2011–January 15, 2012); Instytut Sztuki Wyspa, Gdansk, Poland (March 23 – April 22, 2012); Galerija Miroslav Kraljević, Zagreb, Croatia (May 5-26, 2012); Museet for Samtidskunst, Roskilde, Denmark (June 16 – August 19, 2012); Tallinna Kunstihoone, Tallinn, Estonia (August 27 – September 23, 2012); Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, Spain (November 15, 2012 – February 15, 2013); Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Germany (June 21 – September 1, 2013).



Pauline Boudry & Renate Lorenz, *Charming for the Revolution*, 2009, Performer Werner Hirsch, Photo Andrea Thal

What do you think about it?

I don't have an opinion, really, since I didn't participate in the investigation. But I think it's a case of human error. The pilot—probably a Swede, since everyone in the plane was Swedish—must have gotten N'dola and N'dolo confused. N'dolo is in Léopoldville, on the edge of the river, whereas N'dola is in Rhodesia, and not on the edge of the river. No traces of an explosion, which would suggest an attack, were found. There were theories at the time that the Katangese shot the plane down, but that makes no sense: what happened was actually quite bad for Katanga, Dag Hammarskjöld didn't want an armed conflict, and a meeting had been arranged with Tshombe, who was for his part ready to find an agreement and avoid conflict. Tshombe understood that he wasn't holding the cards he had had three months earlier. There was no Katangese Gendarmerie anymore. There were mercenaries, yes, but they were not up to challenging well-trained regiments like the Indians. In other words, we were aware that things were not looking pretty. In this context, Hammarskjöld's death was a catastrophe—a personal one, of course, but also a catastrophe for the Katangese. And for Tshombe. It was over after that. The UN put an end to the secession by force. For Léopoldville, it was a way of recapturing the Katanga without having to do anything at all. They just let the UN do the work, and the UN was happy to do it.

During our trip to Elisabethville, you visited the pine cemetery, and you looked for the tomb of a Belgian woman ...

... who had been assassinated in December of 1961 by Ethiopian Blue Helmets. She was stopped with two others, plus some Congolese. They were working for the Katangese Red Cross, and they were on their way by ambulance to help the wounded on the city limits of Elisabethville. The Ethiopian Blue Helmets stopped them and executed them on the side of the road. Their bodies were only found fifteen days later.

Who was she, exactly?

Her name was Nicole Vronen. She was a beautiful woman.

There was also someone from the Union Minière, no?²⁴

Every evening, we wired news to Brussels

la mort d'Hammar skjöld a été une catastrophe, pour lui-même bien entendu, mais aussi pour les Katangais. Et pour Tshombe. Parce qu'après c'était fini. L'ONU a mis fin à la sécession par les armes. Et pour les gens de Léopoldville c'était une manière de récupérer le Katanga sans avoir à faire quoi que ce soit. Ils ont fait faire leur travail par l'ONU, qui était tout à fait disposée à le faire.

Pendant notre visite à Élisabethville, tu as visité le Cimetière des sapins, et tu as cherché la tombe d'une femme belge...

... qui a été assassinée en décembre 1961 par des Casques bleus éthiopiens. Elle était avec deux autres, plus des Congolais. C'étaient des gens de la Croix Rouge katangaise qui allaient récupérer des blessés à la limite d'Élisabethville en ambulance. Ils ont été arrêtés par des Éthiopiens et exécutés au bord de la route. C'est seulement quinze jours après qu'on a découvert les cadavres.

C'était qui exactement ?

Elle s'appelle Nicole Vronen. C'était une belle femme.

Et il y avait aussi quelqu'un de l'Union Minière ?³³

C'est Monsieur Derricks. Lui, sa maman et son *boy* ont été assassinés par des Éthiopiens dans leur maison.

Tu étais proche des gens de l'Union Minière ?

L'Union Minière ce n'était pas notre tasse de thé. On les connaissait, les patrons. Mais pas de liens d'amitié. L'Union Minière poursuivait ses objectifs : l'extraction du cuivre. Elle a payé les taxes d'exportation au gouvernement katangais, ce qui a permis la sécession, soyons tout à fait clairs là-dessus. C'est grâce à l'Union Minière que Tshombe a pu tenir

33. L'Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK), fondée en 1906, figura dès 1922 parmi les cinq plus grands producteurs de cuivre au monde, jusqu'à la perte de ses mines africaines en 1967, suite à leur nationalisation par Joseph-Désiré Mobutu.

Mr. Derricks. The Ethiopians assassinated him, together with his mother and *boy*, at their home.

Were you close to the Union Minière people?

The Union Minière was not our cup of tea. We knew the people, the high ups, anyway. But there were no ties of friendship or anything. The Union Minière attended to its business, which was to extract copper. It paid export taxes to the Katangese government, and this made the secession possible—let's be clear about that. It's thanks to the Union Minière that Tshombe was able to hold out for three years, financially speaking, of course. Every time I returned from holidays back home, I would stop by, say hello, and give news to the head of the Union Minière. I was in the movement, so I knew a lot of things he didn't know. But to tell him thing he didn't know already, that no, I never did that. In any case, we never spoke about Lumumba, or about the Union Minière.

No?

No, never.

I know now that you are catholic. Back then, did you go to the cathedral in Elisabethville?

I went there whenever Belgian officials were killed. I went to a good many funerals ...

So, January 1963 brings an end to the secession. Is that when you returned to Belgium?

No, I had returned earlier.

24. The UMHK, or Union Minière du Haut-Katanga, was founded in 1906; from 1922 onwards, it figured among the five largest producers of copper in the world. This changed, though, in 1967, following the loss of its African mines as a result of Joseph Mobutu's nationalization programme. It is worth mentioning that one of the experts of the Lumumba Commission noticed that the UMHK's files and records for January 1961 are missing.

trois ans – au point de vue financier bien entendu. Quand je revenais du congé, j'allais dire bonjour au patron de l'Union Minière pour lui donner des nouvelles. J'étais dans le mouvement [de sécession], je savais des tas de choses qu'il ne savait pas. Mais lui apprendre des choses qu'il n'avait jamais entendues, ça non. Dans tous les cas, jamais on n'a parlé de Lumumba ni de l'Union Minière.³⁴

Non ?

Non, jamais.

Je sais maintenant que tu es catholique. A l'époque, allais-tu à la cathédrale à Élisabethville ?

J'y suis allé pour les officiers belges qui ont été tués. Je me souviens être allé à pas mal d'enterrements...

Donc, janvier 1963, c'est la fin de la sécession. Tu rentres en Belgique à ce moment-là ?

Non, j'étais déjà rentré avant.

Et quand est-ce que Tshombe t'a donné le drapeau du Katanga ? C'est à ce moment-là ?

Non, c'est en décembre 1960, quand mon épouse était venue un mois à É'ville. Il m'a donné le drapeau, et il a donné une peau de léopard à ma femme.

Tu rentres en Belgique... Qu'est-ce qui était prévu à ton retour ?

Je rentre en Belgique et je deviens – c'est assez étonnant – chargé de recherche à l'Université de Liège. Ce qui va me permettre de retourner

34. À ce sujet, il est à mentionner que, lors de la commission d'enquête parlementaire, un des experts a constaté l'absence des dossiers du mois de janvier 1961 de l'Union Minière du Haut-Katanga.

Gbadolite,²⁸ to show everything he had built there, while I insisted that this was out of the question, that the King was not interested in that. The fact that our relations were already not that good didn't help ...

What did you think of the official relation between Belgium and Mobutu? Between the King and Mobutu?

Up and down. It didn't stop fluctuating. But we can say that, starting in the 90s, Mobutu was no longer in the odour of sanctity.

*The fall of the Berlin Wall, the massacres at the University of Lubumbashi ...*²⁹

Yes, the Palace cut short every semblance of interest, despite the fact that Mobutu wanted to re-establish ties, since he knew the Belgians. Things would be going well, then they would sour, and then they'd go well again, and then sour again. The relationship was like a saw.

Was he invited to the funeral of King Baudouin?

Of course not!

But let's come back to your research. When did you start researching Lumumba's death?

The 18.

You mean 18 January 1961?

28. Joseph Mobutu's native village, which he transformed into a luxurious city that earned the nickname: 'the Versailles of the jungle'. He had a dam and a hydroelectric plant built on the Ubangi River, a Concorde-capable international airport, and three enormous palaces.

29. During the nights of 11 and 12 May 1990, the DSP (Mobutu's Presidential Guard) rounded up and cut the throats of more than fifty students. These incidents, and the echo that resounded worldwide, led the Belgian government to demand the establishment of an international investigation commission. In retaliation, Mobutu expelled Belgian aides, effectively putting an end to the structural cooperation between Brussels and Kinshasa.

voir à Gbadolite⁴⁰ ce qu'il avait construit là-bas. Moi, je disais qu'il n'en était pas question, que ça n'intéressait pas le Roi. Alors là, déjà que mes relations étaient mauvaises...

Qu'est-ce que tu pensais de la relation officielle entre la Belgique et Mobutu ? Le Roi et Mobutu...

Up and down. Ça n'a pas arrêté, mais on peut dire que, dès le début des années 90, Mobutu n'était plus en odeur de sainteté.

*La chute du Mur de Berlin, les massacres à l'Université de Lubumbashi...*⁴¹

Oui, le Palais a coupé court à toutes les velléités, malgré le fait que Mobutu ait voulu renouer, parce qu'il connaissait les Belges. Ça va très mal, puis ça va très bien, et puis ça va de nouveau très mal, et puis ça va de nouveau très bien : des relations en dents de scie.

Il n'était pas invité aux funérailles du roi Baudouin ?

Il n'en était pas question !

Mais revenons un peu à tes recherches. Quand est-ce que tu as commencé à faire des recherches sur la mort de Lumumba ?

Le 18.

Le 18 janvier 1961.

40. Hameau natal de Joseph-Désiré Mobutu (ici désigné par son titre de « Maréchal »), que le président transforma en une ville luxueuse surnommée « le Versailles de la jungle ». Il y fit construire un barrage et une centrale hydroélectrique sur la rivière Ubangi, un aéroport international qui pouvait accueillir le Concorde, et trois palais immenses.

41. Dans la nuit de 11 au 12 mai 1990, des dizaines d'étudiants furent égorgés à l'Université de Lubumbashi par la Division spéciale présidentielle (DSP) de Mobutu. Ces incidents et l'écho qui en avait été donné à l'étranger conduisirent le gouvernement belge à exiger la mise sur pied d'une commission d'enquête internationale. En représailles, le président zaïrois Mobutu renvoya les coopérants belges, entraînant la fin de la coopération structurelle entre Bruxelles et Kinshasa.

Look, on 18 January I decided that I would try to gather all the information I could about Lumumba's death. I knew already that it would become important. Some papers did pass through my hands at the time, but very little. There just wasn't that much then. I saw everything that we had at the consulate, since I was there, but it wasn't much, really. I have a telex from d'Aspremont to Tshombe saying that he must accept Lumumba. But he was not saying to accept him so as to kill him—well, that is what the debate of the Lumumba Commission was all about.³⁰ At that time, I had two or three pieces of information. I had the report of the Katangese Security Forces, in which was noted the hour the plane landed and things like that. A handful of papers, basically, and then: total *blackout*. Asking anyone questions was out. I could ask Clemens questions, but he knew even less than I did. If anyone knew something, it was Vandewalle. He did tell me a few things, but nothing major. We were really in the dark. We had no idea of what happened. Vandewalle didn't want to know, for he understood that there would be trouble for us if we started poking our noses into it, so we only talked about it a couple of days later, but even then there was only silence on every tongue. And so I said to myself: 'I will anyway try to do something so I can someday write about what really happened'. And so it has come to pass. Indeed, it took nearly thirty years, or at least twenty or twenty-five, for bits and pieces of what really happen to become available to me. Why? Because the people I could question of course would tell me nothing so long as they were still in office. The military, along with everyone else, said nothing. They were only willing to speak when they retired. Captain Julian Gat was especially forthcoming; I met with him one, two, three times. He agreed to meet, he told me what he knew, and he signed his deposition. From that moment on, I had access to a large pool of information, and that allowed me to write my dissertation, which is quite long.

30. The parliamentary investigation commission set up in 1999 to determine the possible involvement of Belgian state officials in Lumumba's assassination; it delivered its report in 2001. Julien Joannes Gaty (1929-2005), or Captain Julian Gat, as he is called below, was a General and the Captain of Katanga's Military Police. Lumumba, Okito, and Mpolo were handed over to him when they arrived in Katanga on 17 January 1961, and they were under his watch until they were executed later that day. He was subpoenaed by the Lumumba Commission in 2001, but had to give his testimony behind close doors.

Every evening, we wired news to Brussels

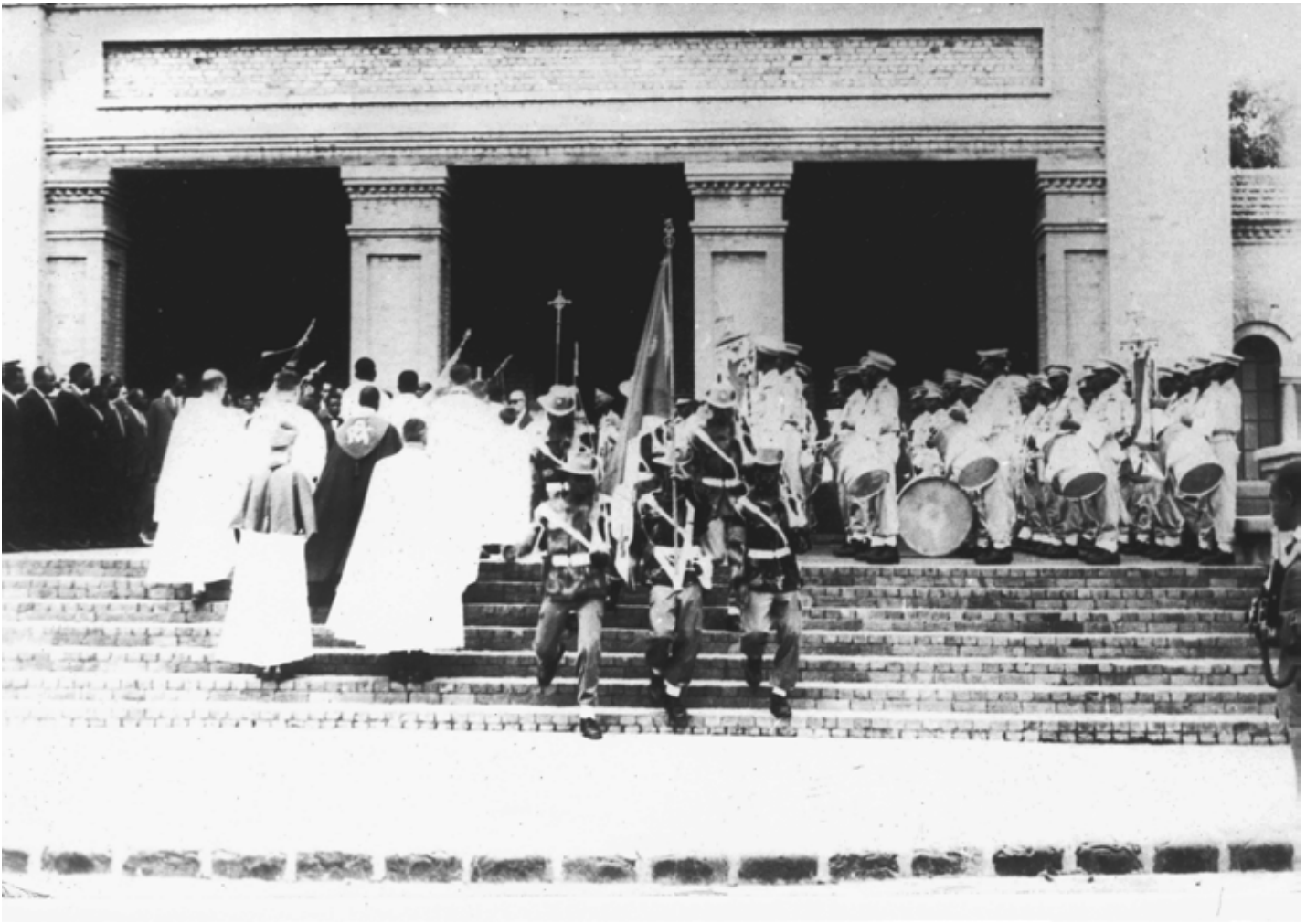
Two excerpts from "Every evening, we wired news to Brussels", an interview with Jacques Brassinne de La Buissière, conducted by Sven Augustijnen in Bossière (Belgium), on 3 February 2011, published in *Spectres*, pages 76, 78, 90, and 92 (Brussels, ASA Publications, 2011), accompanying the film with the same title.

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Écoute, le 18, j'ai décidé dans ma tête d'essayer d'avoir un maximum d'informations sur la mort de Lumumba. Parce que je savais que ça allait prendre des proportions importantes. Et, très honnêtement, à l'époque j'ai eu quelques papiers en main, mais très peu. Parce que, d'abord, ils n'étaient pas très nombreux. Tout ce qui est au consulat, je l'avais, parce que j'étais là. Mais au consulat il y a eu peu de chose. Il y a un télex de d'Aspremont, que j'ai, qui dit à Tshombe qu'il faut qu'il accepte Lumumba. Mais pas l'accepter pour le tuer, évidemment ; mais enfin, ça a été tout le débat à la Commission Lumumba.⁴² Donc, j'ai à ce moment-là deux ou trois renseignements. J'ai le bulletin de la Sécurité katangaise, dans lequel on donne l'heure d'arrivée de l'avion et des trucs de ce genre, donc j'ai quelques petits papiers. Et puis : le black-out complet. Il n'est pas question de poser des questions à qui que ce soit. Je peux poser des questions à Clemens, mais Clemens en sait encore moins. Si quelqu'un savait des choses, c'était Vandewalle. D'ailleurs, Vandewalle me dit des petites choses ; mais on est vraiment dans le noir. On n'a aucune idée. Lui, parce qu'il ne veut pas le savoir, parce qu'il se rend bien compte que si on met notre nez là-dedans on va avoir des ennuis, et donc, c'est un sujet qu'on aborde plus après deux ou trois jours. Et on continue à se taire dans toutes les langues. Donc, à partir de ce moment-là je me dis : « Je vais quand même essayer de faire quelque chose pour un jour écrire ce qui s'est réellement passé. » Ce qui est advenu. Et en fait, il a fallu une trentaine d'années, ou au moins vingt, vingt-cinq ans, pour que je commence à avoir des bribes de morceaux ce qui s'était passé. Pourquoi ? Parce que les gens que j'ai interrogés, tant qu'ils étaient en activité, ils se taisaient évidemment. Les militaires se taisaient, tout le monde se taisait. Ce n'est qu'à partir du moment où ils sont partis en retraite qu'ils ont accepté de parler. Notamment le capitaine Julien Gat.⁴³ Je l'ai vu une, deux, trois fois. Il a accepté, il m'a tout raconté et il a signé sa déposition. Donc, à partir de ce moment-là j'ai pu avoir des tas de renseignements, ce qui m'a quand même permis d'écrire cette thèse qui fait pas mal de pages.

42. L'enquête parlementaire sur le meurtre de Lumumba. Voir aussi note 19.

43. Julien Joannes Gatty (1929-2005), général et chef de la Police militaire du Katanga qui surveilla Lumumba, Okito et Mpolo lors de leur arrivée au Katanga jusqu'à leur exécution dans la brousse. Auditionné à huis clos par la commission d'enquête parlementaire en 2001.



Photograph by unknown author taken the morning of 18 January 1961 at the entrance of the Ss. Peter and Paul Cathedral of Elisabethville on the occasion of the singing of the Requiem Mass for four Belgian officers who had served for the Katangese Gendarmerie and who had fallen in the Katanga Secession War — Major Collet, Major Van Damme, Capitan Smets, Lieutenant Williquet and Under-Lieutenant Randour. More precisely, it depicts the moment that the five coffins were carried inside the cathedral by soldiers of the Katangese Gendarmerie, followed by the chaplain, Father Pierre Adam, and his entourage. In the middle, the flag bearer of the Katangese Gendarmerie is walking out of the cathedral with the Katangese flag, with the fanfare of the Katangese Gendarmerie on the right. On the left stand the president of Katanga, Moïse Tshombe and his ministers, Jean-Baptiste Kibwe, Godefroid Munongo, and Gabriel Kitenge, amongst others. Jacques Brassinne de La Buissière would state in his doctoral dissertation, "Enquête sur la mort de Lumumba" in 1991, that the president and these ministers — as well as some of the soldiers of the Katangese Gendarmerie, including five Belgians — were present during the execution of Patrice Lumumba, Joseph Okito and Maurice M'Pololo on the evening of 17 January in the Katangese savannah.

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