

Inserts in Real Time
Dora García
Performance Work
2000–2023

The Tunnel People
Inserts in Real Time
Proxy
The Glass Wall
The Notebook
Forever
All the Stories
The Crowd
The Messenger
The Possible
Coma
The Kingdom
The Black Veil
One Minute Silence
The Human Factor
The Sphinx
Heartbeaters
Quarry Jeans
The 60 Minute Zoom
The Prophets
Instant Narrative
CCL, Cellule Cité Lénine
Real and Fake (Drunk)
The Game of Questions
(A performance with printed matter)
The Beggar's Opera
Rezos/Prayers
Just Because Everything Is Different It
Does Not Mean that Anything Has
Changed: Lenny Bruce in Sydney
What a Fucking Wonderful Audience

The Romeos
William Holden in Frankfurt
Where Do Characters Go When
the Story Is Over?
The Artist Without Works:
A Guided Tour Around Nothing
Rehearsal/Retrospective
Insulting the Audience
Steal this Book
Real Artists Don't Have Teeth
Best Regards from Charles Filch
Locating Story
Die Klau Mich Show
News from Outside
The Sinthome Score
The Hearing Voices Café
Imposed Words/Palabras impuestas
Artificial Respiration
Performance
O interrogatório de uma mulher
(The Interrogation of a Woman)
Two Planets Have Been Colliding
for Thousands of Years
Translation/Exile
The Drawing on the Floor: A Monologue
The Labyrinth of Female Freedom
Little object <a>
Révolution,
I libri sono corpi (possono essere
smembrati)/Books Are Bodies
(They Can Be Dismembered)



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She Has Many Names

Dora García

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ALP

Anna Livia Plurabelle is the heroine of *Finnegans Wake*; she is the wife of Mr. Earwicker, HCE, the hero. She is Everywoman, Everygoddess, Everyriver. She is Artemis.¹ She is especially Dublin's little, winding, brown-red, polluted river, Anna Liffey, which rises in the Wicklow hills and meets salt in Dublin Bay at Island Bridge. She is Sarah.² The old name of the river Liffey was "Ruir tech" meaning "swift running." The river then took the name of the place whereupon it was running, called Magh Liffé, or "plain of life." Liffey-Leafy, alive, live, life. This ties Anna Livia with Eve, meaning "life" in Hebrew. Ana is also Dana, mother of the Irish gods.³ Anna means "grace" in Hebrew, relating then to the Virgin Mary, and to Joyce's mother, Mary Murray, and his daughter, Lucia Anna Joyce. Robert Graves says in *The White Goddess* that if you need a single, simple, inclusive name for the Great Goddess, Anna is probably the best choice.⁴ Plurabelle is an addition to the river names, connecting with the plurality of persons that is Eve, mother of all living, and connects with names such as Belle, Isabel, Elisheba, Laura/Daphne, Laura Belle, Rain (*pluie*, in French). Liffey connects with life and with Livia, spouse of Augustus, but especially, with Livia, the wife of Italo Svevo, Livia Veneziani Schmitz (the real name of Svevo was Aron Hector Schmitz).

When Joyce met Livia Veneziani Schmitz, she was a beautiful middle-aged woman notable for her finely drawn face, her small perfect nose, and famously long, thick blond-reddish hair. Italo Svevo received private English lessons from James Joyce in Trieste. In the eyes of the Triestine merchant class, Joyce was a member of a lower class, and his wife, Nora, had to work. Livia was thankful to Joyce for encouraging her husband Ettore to continue writing and helping him to publish. Well aware of the terrible economic troubles at the Joyce household, *Signora* Schmitz employed both Nora and

Joyce's sister, Eileen, as domestic help. In 1924, Livia Veneziani discovered that Joyce had given her name to the female heroine of his new novel, still called "Work in Progress." Joyce told this to Svevo in a letter dated 20 February 1924:

A propos of names, I have given the name of *Signora* Schmitz to the protagonist of the book I am writing. Ask her however not to take up arms, either of steel or fire, since the person involved is the Pyrrha of Ireland (or rather of Dublin) whose hair is the river beside which (her name is Anna Liffey) the seventh city of Christendom springs up, the other six being Basovizza, Clapham Junction, Rena Vecia, Limehouse, S. Odorico in the vale of Tears and San Giacomo in Monte di Pietà. Reassure your wife with regard to Anna Livia. I have taken no more than her hair from her and even that only on loan, to adorn the rivulet which runs through my city, the Anna Liffey, which would be the longest river in the world if it weren't for the canal which comes from far away to wed the divine Antonio Taumaturgo, and then changing its mind goes back the way it came.⁵



Portrait of Livia Schmitz; courtesy Museo Sveviano, Trieste, Italy

- 1 The Greek goddess of the hunt, the wilderness, wild animals, the Moon, and chastity. The goddess Diana is her Roman equivalent.
- 2 In the biblical narrative, Sarah is the wife of Abraham. Knowing Sarah to be a great beauty and fearing that the Pharaoh would kill Abraham to be with Sarah, Abraham asks Sarah to tell the Pharaoh that she is his sister.
- 3 In Irish mythology, Danu; modern Irish Dana is a hypothetical mother goddess of the Tuatha Dé Danann (Old Irish: "The peoples of the goddess Danu"). Though primarily seen as an ancestral figure, some Victorian sources also associate her with the land.
- 4 Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999), 378: "[M]asculinized in two out of the three mentions of her, she is principally celebrated as the mother of Aholibamah ('tabernacle of the high place'), the heiress whom Esau married on his arrival in the Seir pastures. (Ana's alleged discovery of mules in the wilderness is due to a scribal error.) James Joyce playfully celebrates Anna's universality in his Anna Livia Plurabelle. And indeed, if one needs a single, simple, inclusive name for the Great Goddess, Anna is the best choice. To Christian mystics she is 'God's Grandmother.'"
- 5 Niny Rocco-Bergera, "James Joyce and Trieste," *James Joyce Quarterly* 9/3 (Spring 1972): 346–47.

If between Italo Svevo and James Joyce there had been a real, deep friendship, recognizing each other as intellectual equals, with Joyce being invited many times to Svevo's house as a friend, there was no such friendship between Nora Joyce and *la Signora Schmitz*, who had always taken good care of underlining their class difference.

When Ellmann interviewed Livia Schmitz for Joyce's biography, she told him that when she "heard that Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* was using her flowing hair as a symbol of the lovely river Liffey, she was flattered, but when she heard that in the river there were two washerwomen scrubbing dirty linen, she was disgusted."⁶

She seems to have been a bit of a snob. John McCourt writes, "More than Schmitz she attached importance to class, and more than once she ignored Nora on the street even though they had known one another from the time Nora had, in desperation, taken in washing and ironing for her."⁷

If Anna Livia Plurabelle took from *Signora Schmitz* the name and the hair, she took from Nora the quasi-illiteracy, and her being a laundress. And perhaps her way of writing, too: "Do you notice how women when they write disregard stops and capital letters?" Joyce asked Stanislaus after a brief unpunctuated interpolation by Nora in one of his letters.⁸



Coatlicue, as seen in Dora García, *Amor Rojo*, 2023; film still courtesy the artist and Auguste Orts

COATLICUE

She has this fear that she has no names that she has many names that she doesn't know her names She has this fear that she's an image that comes and goes clearing and darkening the fear that she's the dreamwork inside someone else's skull She has this fear that if she takes off her clothes she shoves her brain aside peels off her skin that if she drains the blood vessels strips the flesh from the bone flushes out the marrow She has this fear that when she does reach herself turns around to embrace herself a lion's or witch's or serpent's head will turn around swallow her and grin She has this fear that if she digs into herself she won't find anyone that when she gets "there" she won't find her notches on the trees the birds will have eaten all the crumbs She has this fear that she won't find the way back⁹

In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Chicana feminist and scholar Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004) dramatically vindicates feminine cultural figures that were at one or other moment in history labeled as defectors from the community. Anzaldúa analyzes the figures of Malintzín (La Malinche), La Llorona, and Coatlicue (identified as the Guadalupe Holy Virgin). All are figures of transition and syncretism.

La Llorona, the phantasmatic female figure crying for her lost (drowned) children, is an incarnation or version of Cihuacoatl,¹⁰ who abandoned her child at a crossroads (and could never find it again, finding instead a sacrificial knife). Cihuacoatl is the deity presiding over childbirth and is associated with Eve or Lilith of Hebrew mythology.

La Malinche was the translator, negotiator, and lover of Hernán Cortés, mother of the first mestizo, Don Martín (as son of a Spanish man, Cortés, and a Nahua woman, Malinche). La Malinche was *the* key figure in the unlikely and amazing conquest of the Aztec empire; she made it possible. Forever shadowed by the great mystery of her relation to Cortés and

⁶ Peter Crisp, "A Photo of Anna Livia's Hair," From Swerve to Shore to Bend of Bay (personal blog), peterchrisp.blogspot.com/2016/09/a-photo-of-anna-livias-hair.html. The quoted paragraph is a reference to one of the most popular—and sublimely beautiful—chapters of *Finnegans Wake*, "Chapter 8 of Book I," starting with the famous words "O, tell me all about Anna Livia! I want to hear all about Anna Livia. Well, you know Anna Livia? Yes, of course, we all know Anna Livia. Tell me all. Tell me now. You'll die when you hear."

⁷ Peter Crisp, "A Photo of Anna Livia's Hair."

⁸ Letter to Stanislaus Joyce, 3 October 1906, in *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 2, ed. Stuart Gilbert and Richard Ellmann, (New York: Viking Press, 1966), 173; quoted in Derek Attridge, "Molly's Flow: The Writing of 'Penelope' and the Question of Women's Language," *Modern Fiction Studies* 35/3 (1989): 543–65, jstor.org/stable/26283002

⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 43 (chapter "The Coatlicue State").

¹⁰ Meaning "Snake Woman," one of a number of Aztec motherhood and fertility goddesses.

her long-lasting shaming as "traitor" to her people, perhaps one of the most reasonable narratives of her life is the one speaking of revenge and protection. Enslaved at the age of fourteen, she had been in bondage for ten years when she met Cortés; her ability with languages elevated her to the category of translator, acquiring a power that no woman ever before had among the Aztecs. She used this power to protect her people from what she saw as unavoidable (the Spanish domination) and to seek revenge on those who had enslaved her. Her name "Malinche" is a Hispanicization of the name Malin-tzin, meaning, "Lady (Tzin) Marina" (the Aztecs could not pronounce the "r"); and Marina was the Christian name the Spanish conquistadores gave her through baptism: her real name is unknown.¹¹

Coatlicue¹² was the Mother Goddess of the Aztec pantheon, her name meaning "snake skirted." A gigantic, two and a half meter sculpture of Coatlicue was accidentally rediscovered in 1790 in the Plaza Mayor of Mexico City, located above the ancient ruins of the Aztec Great Temple, when workers were constructing an underground aqueduct. The vision of the decapitated Goddess, two snakes coming out of her neck, with a necklace made of hearts and hands, pendulous breasts, skirt of intertwined rattlesnakes, was so monstrous that they decided to bury her again,¹³ under the patio of the university, to preserve the Mexican youth from what they perceived as ghastly and in utter defiance of all European preconceptions of femininity. To interpret Coatlicue's body as monstrous is to fall into the pattern of European patriarchal fears that have been projected onto the New World. Furthermore, in Christian imagery, the snake represented the devil, or the temptation of Eve and the Fall of man. For the Aztecs, snakes were sacred animals representing, through the shedding of their skin, a vision of cyclical time, rebirth, and renewal.

The iconography of the snake and the female archetype goes back to the beginning of culture. One example especially worth mentioning is the figure of Mami Wata, or Yemayá, a water spirit venerated in West, Central, and Southern Africa

as well as in the African diaspora in the Americas: Haiti, Cuba, Brazil. A large snake wraps itself around her, laying its head between her breasts. Mami Wata often carries a mirror in her hand, representing a movement through the present and the future. In her form of Yemayá, she is one of the most powerful "Orishas," or African spirits; her name comes from the Yoruba *Yeyé omo ejá*, "Mother of fish children," and she is connected to rivers and river mouths, female fertility, the genesis of the world, and the continuity of life. Yemayá, goddess of water and the sea, was syncretized by the African diaspora with the image of the Mother Mary. They are both dressed in blue and white; however, Mother Mary is white, and Yemayá is black; Mother Mary is motherly and demure, Yemayá exhibits an opulent sexuality. But Mother Mary has a relation to the serpent as well: in the book of Genesis (3:15), shortly after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the garden, God cursed the serpent who tricked them and foretells its ultimate destruction: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel."



Mami Wata figure, 1950s; courtesy The Norman Gabrick Endowment for African Art, Minneapolis, USA

¹¹ She was one of twenty enslaved women given to the Spaniards by the natives of Tabasco in 1519.

¹² Ann De León, "Coatlicue or How to Write the Dismembered Body," *MLN* 125/2 (2010): 259–86, jstor.org/stable/40606256

¹³ The statue was disinterred again in 1803, so that Alexander von Humboldt could make drawings and a cast of it, after which it was reburied. It was again dug up for the final time in 1823, so that William Bullock could make another cast, which was displayed the next year in the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, London, as part of Bullock's *Ancient Mexico* exhibition. The statue remained on the patio of the university until the first national museum was established.

Following Anzaldúa, the vindication of such figures underlines the transitional, mutable character of Mestiza feminism, transfeminism, lesbofeminism—and its dispossession:

As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. *Soy un amasamiento*, I am an act of kneading, of uniting, and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings. We are the people who leap in the dark, we are the people on the knees of the gods. In our very flesh, (r)evolution works out the clash of cultures. It makes us crazy constantly, but if the center holds, we've made some kind of evolutionary step forward. *Nuestra alma el trabajo*, the opus, the great alchemical work; spiritual mestizaje, a "morphogenesis," an inevitable unfolding. We have become the quickening serpent movement.¹⁴

HER DEATH: A WAY A LONE A LAST A LOVED A LONG THE

"Yet is no body present here which was not there before. Only is order othered. Nought is nulled.

Fuitfiat!"

(FW, IV, 613)

"What has gone? How it ends?"

...

Forget! remember!

...

Forget!"

(FW, IV, 614)

¹⁴ Gloria Anzaldúa, "La Consciencia de la Mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness," in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 102–3.

"If I lose my breath for a minute or two don't speak, remember! Once it happened, so it may again."

(FW, IV, 625)

O

Tell me all about

Anna Livia! I want to hear all

(FW, I, 8, 196)

Finnegans Wake by James Joyce is a book that contains all books and a story that contains all stories. Multiple threads can be picked up to lead our way through the *Wake* maze. The one thread I would like to pick up now is one of the characters, Anna Livia, and the final part of the book, Book IV. Among many other things, *Finnegans Wake* is the story of a family, the Earwicker family (or sometimes the Porter family), composed of a father, a mother, two sons, and a daughter. Characters, in *Finnegans Wake*, are principles. And so, the father, HCE or Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, is every father, everybody's father, every male figure of authority, ascendent or fallen; and a mountain. The mother, ALP or Anna Livia Plurabelle, is all mothers, the mother of everyone, the stem mother, and a river, the river Liffey. The children are Shem and Shaun, twins, one a writer and man of observation, the other a postman and a man of action, one a tree and the other a stone, one time and the other space: and Issy, the daughter, every pubescent female, and a cloud. The book is structured in four parts that correspond to the cyclic theory of history envisioned by Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), consisting of three phases separated by thunder: the first is the age of the gods, a primitive society producing language, religion, and the family; second is the age of the heroes, with endless wars; and third is the democratic age, of people, where everyone is equal after several revolutions. After these three ages follows a period of chaos and collapse whereupon we return (*ricorso*) to the age of the gods.

Book IV, Chapter 1 (FW, IV.1), is the section of the *ricorso*, leading back to the beginning of the book. It is also the phase of the death of ALP, the river Liffey reaching the sea.

This initial chapter of a four-section book is also structured into four parts. The first three parts, pages 593 to 619, are

representative of the rest of the book, with this language that appears to be English but is in fact *Wakese*, a language where all languages are present simultaneously, where every word has multiple meanings.¹⁵ But the fourth part is different. It begins with a signature: "Alma Luvia, Pollabella."—"Alma" ("soul," in Spanish, Italian, Latin) "Luvia" ("rain," in Ladino or Old Spanish), "Pollabella" (multiple meanings: hen, multitude, many people, beautiful).

On page 619, we learn that ALP is signing all preceding pages, that the whole book is a letter that now she signs. She did not write it, as she is illiterate. She dictated it to her son Shem, the scrivener; her other son, Shaun the postman, will deliver it. This is done and finished.

What follows, pages 619 to 628, will be the slow death of Anna Livia Plurabelle, and her farewell. The language is different: these are the true sounds of the wind, of breathing, of lips, of whispering, of the rustling of leaves, of language, of murmurs, of memory, of the "harseyard" (621), of the "traumschrift" (dreamscript, 623).

These are the final words of Anna Livia (Liffey) Plurabelle:

... Yes, tid. There's where. First. We pass through grass behush the bush to. Whish! A gull. Gulls. Far calls. Coming, far! End here. Us then. Finn, again! Take. Bussoftlhee, mememormee! Till thousandsthee. Lps. The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a long the

Ending in "the," to connect immediately from this final page 628 to the first page of the book, page 3: "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, ..."

The time of *Finnegans Wake*, the eternal death and resurrection of Anna Livia (the river into the sea and then back to the young cloud and the spring and the tiny stream...) is a dream time, a mythic time, a cyclic time, an eonic time, the breakdown of linear time, the time of "Yes."¹⁶ Freud repeatedly stressed that the unconscious knows neither negation nor time.

The statue of Coatlicue had been ordered to be destroyed by the Spaniards after the capitulation of Tenochtitlán.¹⁷ The inhabitants did not dare to destroy the Mother of All Things and instead buried her. When she was uncovered again, the devotion to her was intact, and the people of Mexico rushed to bring flowers and offerings, to the exasperation of the Catholic priests. The people referred to her as "Tonantzin," meaning "Our Sacred Mother" in the Nahuatl language, the same name they used for the Virgin of Guadalupe, that syncretic figure who was a Catholic sugarcoating over the persistent cult of Coatlicue. They did not only have serpents in common: both had also been impregnated by a "ball of feathers," or a bird. Through the ear. They both gave birth to their sons without male intervention: Jesus and Hutzilopochtli. Both will weep bitterly for the death of their sons.

The cult and legends of the Mother Holy Virgin Mary, Coatlicue, and the Pietá/La Llorona converge in the cult of the Holy Death or La Santa Muerte. The Holy Death is celebrated on October 31st (the traditional *Día de Los Muertos*, Day of the Dead) and is a modern cult (dated 2001)¹⁸ with very ancient roots: the sacred feminine in pre-Hispanic Mexico was associated

¹⁵ One does not read *Finnegans Wake* but rather deciphers it, unravels it, knowing that the maze is ultimately unsolvable, a bottomless pit of language. One can read *Finnegans Wake* as the narration of a dream, a night of endless interconnected nightmares, a journey into the unconscious. We will refer to Jacques Lacan here, because it is very pertinent: the unconscious is structured like a language in the sense that it is a signifying process that involves coding and decoding, ciphering and deciphering. That's how you read *Finnegans Wake*.

¹⁶ "Yes" is the fundamental word in the final soliloquy of Molly Bloom, the predecessor of Anna Livia, closing the book *Ulysses*: "I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes." James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Paris: Shakespeare and Company, 1922; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1968), 704.

¹⁷ According to Wikipedia: "The Fall of Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec Empire, was a decisive event in the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire. It occurred in 1521 following extensive manipulation of local factions and exploitation of pre-existing divisions by Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés, who was aided by the support of his indigenous allies and his interpreter and companion La Malinche." See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Tenochtitlan

¹⁸ "The clandestine cult of La Santa Muerte became public in Mexico City in 2001 when Mrs. Enriqueta Romero installed a six-foot-tall figure of La Niña Blanca in an altar built especially for her in Calle Alfarería, in the Tepito neighborhood of Mexico City." From Patrizia Granziere, "Coatlicue and the 'Holy Death': Two Terrible Mothers of the Mexicans," *Researcher: European Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences* 4/2 (2019): 39–52.

with blood, dismemberment, decapitation, and death (the sacrificial knife or *tecpatl* of Cihuacóatl). La Santa Muerte is a semi-clandestine cult of a deity of the night; she helps taxi drivers, mariachis, bartenders, policemen, soldiers, gays, prisoners, prostitutes.¹⁹ She has been associated with criminal gangs and narco-traffickers.



Image of the Holy Death or La Santa Muerte, Dora García, *Amor Rojo*, 2023; film still courtesy the artist and Auguste Orts

Sayak Valencia notes in her fundamental book *Gore Capitalism* that if, according to Marx, wealth—in societies dominated by the capitalist mode of production—is presented as an immense accumulation of products, this process is subverted under Gore Capitalism and instead the *destruction of bodies* becomes the product, or the merchandise.²⁰ The accumulation now is defined by the number of dead, since *death has become the most profitable business*. This accumulation of bodies is the result of the explosion of unlimited and overspecialized violence, in the interstices of official capitalism. Life is not important anymore, there is nothing to lose, and there is no future that can be anticipated. This is the result of neoliberalism, unable to generate belonging, community, or a believable future. Neoliberalism cannot propose any model of social integration unless it is based in consumerism and the distortion of the concept of labor. The border/*frontera* city of Tijuana shows the symbiosis of violence as an object of consumerism, of death as a spectacle and a way of life—perhaps inherited in part from pre-Hispanic culture.

Mother Holy Virgin Mary, Coatlicue, the Pietá/La Llorona, La Santa Muerte, are not fiction. Myth is the very basis of the human, an infrastructure that goes beyond the biological but also determines it: dreaming, stories, songs.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Sayak Valencia, *Gore Capitalism* (Cambridge: Semiotext(e), 2018).

²¹ Gloria Anzaldúa, “A Letter to Third World Women Writers,” in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 26. (This text was originally written for Celeste West, ed., *Words in Our Pockets: The Feminist Writers’ Guild Handbook on How to Gain Power, Get Published & Get Paid* [San Francisco: Booklegger Press, 1985]).

A WOMAN WITH POWER IS FEARED. HEARTBREAK

In the text, *Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers*, written by Gloria Anzaldúa on 21 May 1980, we read:

Writing is dangerous because we are afraid of what the writing reveals: the fears, the angers, the strengths of a woman under a triple or quadruple oppression. Yet in that very act lies our survival because a woman who writes has power. And a woman with power is feared.²¹

The long production process of the film *Amor Rojo* (2023)—which took four years, mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic—was mostly a process of reading the public texts and private correspondence of Marxist feminist, Soviet revolutionary, and sexual activist Alexandra Kollontai, guided by Mexican historian and Kollontai scholar Rina Ortiz. The film is a documentation of this reading process and of the tracing of its infinite connections with the present and the future of feminisms. It is both heartwarming and heartbreaking to discover the intricate relation between the private and the public life of Kollontai, her energy, her determination, her enthusiasm, her disappointment, and her own rebirth from her “ashes”—a term used by Kollontai in her letters. *Enthusiasm, disappointment, and reawakening* were the three phases we established in her life, phases that could just as well be applied to 100 years of feminisms, and in fact to any struggle for justice. Kollontai’s big heartbreak due to the collapse of her marriage to Pavel Dybenko runs parallel to her defeat and subsequent ostracism as part of The Workers’ Opposition in the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1921. Kollontai, the fighter and the adamant, forceful writer, whose pamphlets were printed and read by the thousands, described her defeat as follows:

It was painful to sense this wall of hostility between us and the committee, as we spoke, Shliapnikov and I. Radek spoke so impertinently against us, mainly against me, saying: “Here I do not polemicize with a lady, but with an enemy of our party.” And no one,

no one protested! My old friend Clara (Zetkin), even she remained silent! How widespread has servility become, cowardice of the soul! ... At least someone dared to tell the truth. And it won’t just slip away, it will make them realize that it can’t continue like this. And most importantly, it will become easier for workers. They have not decided what to do with us²²

In a more intimate tone, she writes:

Interventions ended. I cross the room to the exit. Nobody pays attention to me. I knew this would happen, but it hurts. I feel gloomy and full of grief. There is nothing more painful than disagreeing with the party.²³

And, to close the full circle of heartbreak:

It is sad to admit that I will never return to my favourite job, between women workers. I know that in my new destiny the ties so dear to me will be broken, the ties with the thousands of Soviet women citizens, who greeted me with enthusiasm: “Here is our Kollontai.” I will no longer be “our Kollontai.”²⁴



Dora García, *The Breathing Lesson*, 2001; film still courtesy the artist

THE END, AGAIN: SEGUNDA VEZ AND AMOR ROJO

In the year 2001, I made my first video/ videoperformance, *The Breathing Lesson*, barely one year after having started to work with performance (*The Tunnel People*, 2000). It started with a simple idea, a sentence, like all the sentences that were the instructions or micronarratives at the origin of the performances titled *Inserts in Real Time* (*Proxy*, *The Glass Wall*, *The Notebook*...). For *The Breathing Lesson*, this sentence was something like “an adult woman teaches a child woman to breathe.” I understood videoperformance at that time as a *controlled* performance, where I had control over the frame, what was *hors-champ*, what was in the frame, control over duration, control over what the spectator got to see. This was much more control than what I had in the off-screen performances. But it was still much less control than what you have in “conventional” cinema. I felt it was necessary to respect the documentary form. Before the filming, the actors were instructed about the “situation”: you are this character, and this is what you do. Once this was understood, we began filming, and whatever happened was the right thing to happen. We could do second takes, but no cuts. All takes would be different and unrepeatably.

Sequence shot was my first important cinematic term, and this went from a static shot such as the one in *The Breathing Lesson*, to a follow-the-character shot as it happened in my second video, *The Glass Wall*, which was the straightforward filming of the performance of the same name.²⁵ The duration of sequence shots was once determined by the length of the celluloid roll; but in digital media, it is only determined, like reality itself, by the variable attention span of the viewer. And this had an important consequence: when the camera records nonstop, one tends to forget the camera, and the self-awareness produced by being filmed disappears ... and reappears. Those who are on-screen step in and out of character, as they remember or forget that they are, after all, on camera, that they are part of a representation.

Subjective camera was the second cinematic term I was very occupied with in my process. I was obsessed with the

²² Unpublished handwritten pages, as found in the RGASPI archives, dated 12 March 1922 (translated for the film from the original Russian by Polina Akhmetzyanova).

²³ Quoted by Mijaíl Trush, *From the Politics of the Revolutionary Struggle to Victories on the Diplomatic Front: The Path of Alexandra Kollontai* (Moscow: Librokom, 2010), 158; referenced in Rina Ortiz, “Algo hice por las mujeres,” in *Amor y revolución (Kollontai)*, ed. Dora García, (Barcelona: Arcàdia and MACBA, 2020), 47–102.

²⁴ Alexandra Kollontai, *Diplomatic Diaries, 1922–1940*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Academia, 2001), 45; references in Rina Ortiz, “Algo hice por las mujeres.”

²⁵ See *The Glass Wall* entry, pp. 82–85 in this book.

first four minutes of *Halloween* (1978) and with the film *The Message* (1976, a biopic of prophet Mohammed where the prohibition to represent the prophet is solved by turning the camera into the prophet himself). Subjective camera makes the spectator into an accomplice, an ally, someone who participates in the action, someone who is, also, *morally* co-responsible for what is happening on screen.

Surveillance camera is the last cinematic term that came to determine how I understood videoperformance, and later, film itself. I had to rethink the term “documentation” in the performances I did between 2000 and 2003. Having much to do with the “invisible theater” of Augusto Boal, the presence of a visible camera in those created situations would completely disrupt the relation between “those in the know” (actors, a certain part of the public) and “those who do not know” (the passers-by, the “captive public”), giving away immediately the scripted character of the said situations. To avoid this, there were two options—at that time when phone cameras were not yet omnipresent—to film nothing, or to film everything. This last option, to film everything, was the one chosen for performances such as *Proxy* and *The Kingdom*.²⁶ To film everything through a surveillance camera: with surveillance cameras, there is no choice, there is no filter; *everything* is equally important, everything is filmed. The choice, the judgement, the decisions, or the scripting is left to those who analyze a posteriori, to those “expert eyes” (the term used by the East-German Stasi to refer to the agents who would analyze the endless hours of dull spy filming) who will decide what is significant and what is not. A film that is exemplary of this Surveillance camera concept was my work *Zimmer, Gespräche* (Rooms, Conversations, 2006),²⁷ in which one of the characters says:

What seems normal, futile, or banal, is indeed full of messages, that only the experienced eye can decrypt.
Everything means.
Each book carries a secret message.
Every gesture in the street means something.
Every deviation from the complex choreography of the good citizen means something.²⁸

²⁶ See *Proxy* and *The Kingdom* entries, pp. 76–81 and 114–19 in this book.

²⁷ Dora García, *Zimmer, Gespräche*, 2006, 28' 47", color, German spoken.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Macedonio Fernández, *The Museum of Eterna's Novel* [1967], trans. Margaret Schwartz (Rochester: Open Letter Books, 2010).

Surveillance camera (everything, even the most ordinary, is loaded with meaning to the expert eye) + subjective camera (the one watching is part of the situation, not only action-wise but also shares responsibility) + sequence shot (the question of duration, when does a situation begin, when does it end, when are we camera-conscious, when not)—these three cinematic elements are the main parameters in later, more complex film exercises, such as *Segunda Vez* (2018) and *Amor Rojo* (2023).

In *Segunda Vez*, four situations are intertwined.



Dora García, *Segunda Vez*, 2018; film still courtesy the artist and Auguste Orts

Two are repetitions of happenings by Argentinian author Oscar Masotta, each with their own scopic paradoxes and tensions. In *To induce the spirit of the image* (happening first in 1966), the viewer is accomplice of the class-conscious-guilt gaze of a bourgeois-public endurance-staring at “the poor”—all of them, bourgeois-public and “the poor,” being actors for the camera, some professional actors, others not. *The Helicopter* (happening first in 1967), which I understand partly as a superego archetypical representation, and partly as an angelic representation (The Helicopter mirroring *The Annunciation*), exposes the role of the event or happening, the roles of being witness and bearing witness, and the role of transmissible narrative in the process of community creation.

The other two situations in *Segunda Vez* are metafictional inspired by two metafictional novels. I understand “metafiction” as an equivalent of “camera awareness, being in and out of character intermittently,” which I referred to above. In the first metafiction, named *La Eterna* (after the prodigious novel by Macedonio Fernández),²⁹ a group of people gathered in

a library comment on the film they are themselves in. In so doing, they contextualize the two repetitions—*To induce the spirit of the image* and *The Helicopter*—against the background of the Argentinian dictatorship and Lacanian theory. The second metafiction—named *Segunda vez* after the short story by Julio Cortázar—³⁰ places (real) self-conscious and willing actors inside a situation of (fictional) extreme violence, filmed in subjective-camera and sequence-shot.



Dora García, *Segunda Vez*, 2018; film still courtesy the artist and Auguste Orts

Two female characters are especially important in *Segunda Vez*. One is the “famous actress” waving sweetly to the audience who has been patiently waiting for the helicopter.³¹ She is both an angel and the birds'-eye view of the superego. The second one is the character of Rita in the *Segunda vez* episode. Rita is a twenty-two year-old woman who has been summoned by mysterious authorities (*The Annunciation*, again) and who engages in a casual, coquettish conversation with a young man in the waiting room. Once the young man disappears, and she is called into the scary room at the back, the same conversation happens a second time with the authority figure of the interrogator. The conversation is strikingly similar, but what the first time was joyful, is now dark and violent, a cat and mouse game, a good cop bad cop routine, suspended at the end when the subjective camera leaves the room, leaving Rita behind. Whereas Our-Lady-in-the-helicopter sees everything and changes the everyday life of the viewers with her “injection of meaning,” Rita is a sacrificial lamb, lured first into the lion's den, and then, sacrificed. In both cases, we are caught in mythical time, once and again, second time around: *riverrun*.

In *Amor Rojo*, these two archetypes—the goddess and the victim—are fractalized, or exploded. That is, various protagonists together create a collective, transtemporal,

³⁰ Julio Cortázar, *Second Time Around* [*Segunda vez*, 1976], trans. Gregory Rabassa, *Books Abroad* 50/3 (Summer 1976): 517–21.

³¹ In the original 1967 happening, it was Beatriz Matar; in the repetition for the film *Segunda Vez*, it was Itsaso Arana.

and transnational protagonist, composed of 100 years of class-conscious feminism, European socialist feminisms, and Latinoamerica transfeminisms, an heir to atavic figures (Coatlucue, the stone female deities), historical figures (A. Kollontai, C. Zetkin, R. Luxemburg), and generational figures (Ana Victoria Jiménez and her feminist archive). This collective protagonist shatters the fallacy of the biological female, the “essential” female, to crown instead, and as central characters, two transsexual women: La Havi and La Bruja de Texcoco (*We love you, Bruja! Queen of queens!* the enthusiastic audience shouts as a generous gesture of complicity and sorority with La Bruja).



Dora García, *Amor Rojo*, 2023; film still courtesy the artist and Auguste Orts

La Havi is the woman who cries—among many other crying women in *Amor Rojo* (La Llorona)—sobbing uncontrollably as she remembers the violence she has been subjected to throughout her life. But she is also the defiant, adamant, empowered queen, showing us her tattoo of “Te quiero” on her right cheek, for all to read, in response to the hate that heteropatriarchy has been throwing at her for as long as she remembers, she says, *I love you*.

Penelope is not waiting anymore. Together with Mexican feminist Margarita Robles de Mendoza, we can say, *the woman question* is not the woman question anymore, it is every oppressed collective question. That question cannot stay unanswered any longer. The disappointment will not be tolerated; we have lost patience and we will take it; we will not wait for it to be given. “It is not going to fall, we are going to tip it over,” they chant in the demonstrations.

Now, after two million years, two thousand years, two hundred years, a hundred years, ten years, one year ... revolution, fulfill your promise.

Amor Rojo: Film Stills

Dora García



Margarita Robles
de Mendoza,
1936; courtesy
Casasola archive,
INAH, Fototeca
Nacional, Mexico

SRA. MARGARITA ROBLES DE MENDOZA



GLORIETA DE LAS
MUJERES QUE
LUCHAN



BUENAS NOCHES
S. OR. JUANA DE
WALLE EMPARELLO
AMPARO OCHOA 143 FAMILIAS
RESPIRADOR
ROSALBA CASTELLANO TIERRA
AURORA REYES F. COP
DE FOPPA
DE DERO

WILHELMINA
FRANCISCA
YAGIRA BONTAZ Z
SARA BERNARDEZ
ROSELY ROMAN
JUN 03/11
WILHELMINA PRIMERAS
CLAUDIA SUZBETH
PONCHA LOPEZ
FRANCISCA LIZ
SARA JIMENEZ
FRANCISCA VARGAS
MAYRA LOPEZ
ANDREA SUAREZ
CATHY COLLA

TANIA
YOSELIN
2004-01

MARCELA ESCOBAR
LIDIA
LONER
MIRIAM
KATIA

MARCELA ESCOBAR
GLORIA DE LA FUENTE
FELIX
MARCELA ESCOBAR
MARCELA ESCOBAR



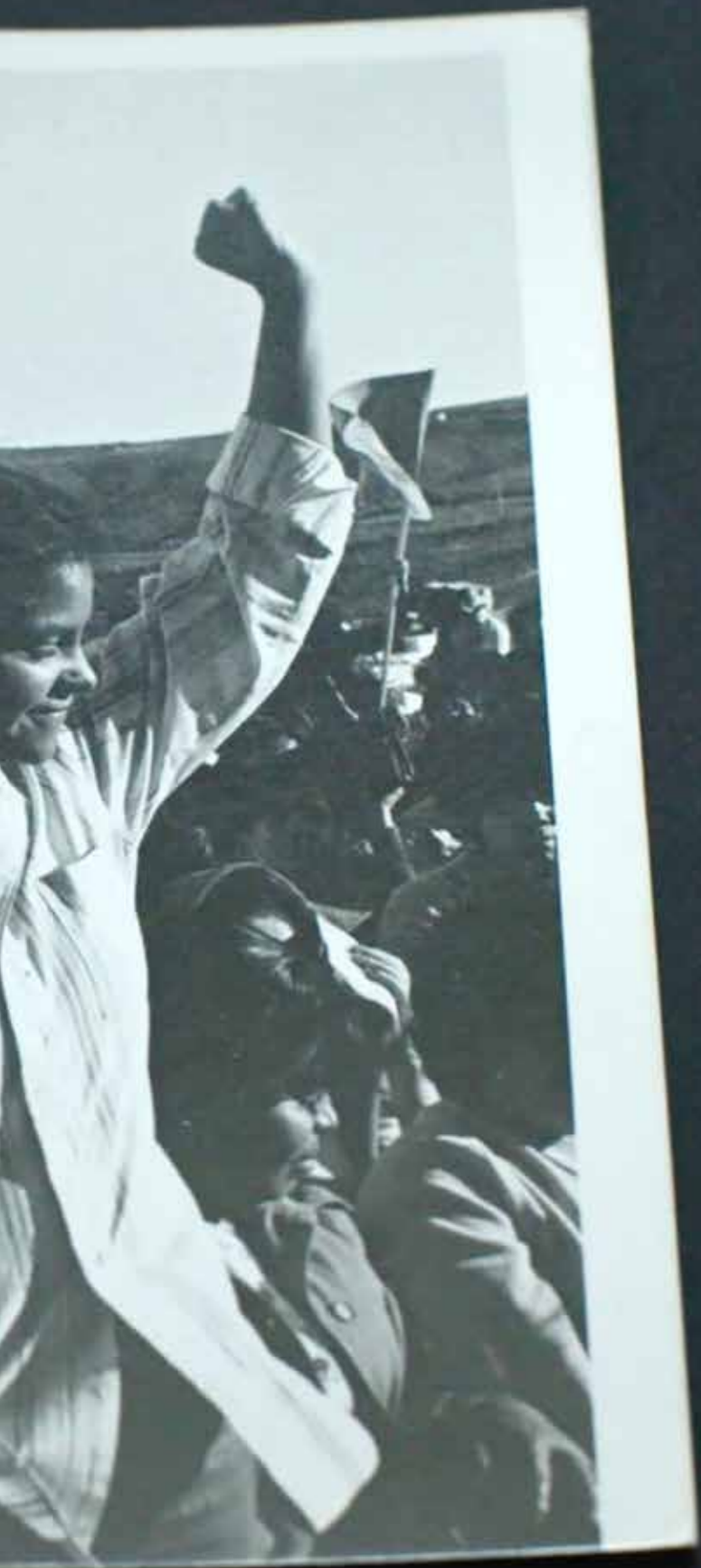






11









Redeem the Present: Stage Your Intercessor

Bojana Cvejić

Bojana Cvejić is author of several books, including *Choreographing Problems* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) and *Toward a Transindividual Self: A Study in Social Dramaturgy* (co-written with Ana Vujanović, Oslo National Academy of the Arts, 2022). As a dramaturg, she has contributed to many performances and collective self-organized platforms for artistic production, critical theory, and education in Europe and former Yugoslavia.

This text is about *Amor Rojo* (2023), a product of Dora García's recent artistic research, which is two-pronged. The film inquires, on the one hand, into the ideological and political work of Bolshevik Alexandra Kollontai, and the impact her writings and reforms in the (pre-)Stalinian USSR have had on socialist feminism until this day, in Mexico in particular. On the other hand, it joins a sequence of massive protests against femicide and anti-abortion laws that have taken place in Mexico City since 2020, zooming in to give a portrait of transfeminist communities that belong to the multitude of actors driving this struggle.

García has already investigated these two apparently remote histories in a documentary diptych, taking, in each part, a distinctive approach: sifting through Kollontai's archive and reading her texts, in García's edited book, *Love with Obstacles: Amor Rojo*, from 2020, and recording live actions, the street demonstrations of women, and a rehearsal with La Bruja de Texcoco, in another book, *If I Could Wish for Something*, from 2021.¹ The two histories were disposed to run parallel in a two-room installation, under the project title taken from an old song, "If I Could Wish for Something," about which I will comment below. In *Amor Rojo*, the film, their entwinement exceeds the documentary medium of artistic research. Between a political experiment and a political essay, the film (re-)stages the encounter between Kollontai, who served as the Soviet ambassador in Mexico from 1926 to 1927, and the current transfeminist movement in Mexico whose lineage from the 1970s and 80s suggests that Kollontai's radical imagination might have planted time bombs in its historical present. The film's power lies in arranging a *rendez-vous retardé* between two politically distant prospects, thereby allowing the past a deferred action onto the present, and in showing where historical figures and many activists with divergent positions become affectively bound protagonists who speak truth from lived experience.

My decision to focus mainly on this project out of many works in the exhibition *She Has Many Names* comes from the political passion of this film, and its vast artistic research. I take *Amor Rojo* as a call for rethinking political solidarity across multitudinous alliances and coalitions that rest on the strength of comradesly love. The questions

Amor Rojo poster, featuring La Havi, designed by Alex Gifreu for Auguste Orts, 2023

this work raises seem crucial for social movements on the left today, even if they are not so easily answered. Can a transindividual "we" be forged that would make comrades of people engaged in a struggle against heteropatriarchy, racism, and neoliberal capitalism? Which social affect has the power to rally divergent political subjects beyond their divisive differences and clashing positions? How can this affect bear the name of "love" in contrast to the more negative and destructive feelings of rage and indignation, disappointment and hate, which seem more abundant and more potent motors of insurgency? And in what sense of the notion and practice does "love" hold the promise of a means for acting out political solidarity? In the following sections, I will patiently gather bits of possible orientations around these questions by retracing them from the words, images, and gestures of *Amor Rojo*.



¹ Dora García, ed., *Love with Obstacles: Amor Rojo* (Berlin: K. Verlag, 2020); Dora García, ed., *If I Could Wish for Something* (Aalst: Netwerk Aalst; Oslo: Fotogalleriet, 2021).

1

“WE ARE ESSENTIALLY STILL TALKING ABOUT
THE SAME THINGS.”
(ANA VICTORIA JIMÉNEZ)

Leafing through photos, newspaper articles, and pamphlets from an archive, a woman in her eighties recalls the protests and other communist youth movements. Ana Victoria Jiménez was active in the struggle for women’s rights in Mexico and participated through several organizations in the international actions of the socialist feminist movement of the late 1970s and 80s. As a young member of the Mexican struggle for women’s rights she took charge of the propaganda and documentation. From the research García undertook with Carla Lamoyi (among others),² but also from Jiménez’s photography now exhibited in the digital archive of the Hammer Museum, we learn that her personal trajectory also marks the history of the women’s movement in Mexico and its critical stance toward Western bourgeois feminism. Sceptical of the liberal core of feminism, the struggle for women’s rights was first embedded in the communist workers’ movement, centering on the questions of social reproduction, like maternity and childcare. When these issues were dismissed by their male comrades, Jiménez and others distanced themselves from the Communist Party and joined other, more militant feminist organizations.



Dora García, *Amor Rojo*, 2023; film still courtesy the artist and Auguste Orts

In *Amor Rojo*, Jiménez revisits the slogans from the demonstrations from then, commenting how beautiful they were and how we are essentially still talking about the same things for 50 or even 100 years on. “Abortion is not a whim, it is a last resort,” “My body is mine,” “No political freedom without sexual freedom.” A mixture of wistfulness and weariness in her gestures and words chimes with the song that pierces the film several times, in German and

later in Spanish. A popular song from the Weimar republic (1930), the moment right before the Nazis came to power, composed by Friedrich Holländer and famously sung by Marlene Dietrich. Its words go like this:

No one had asked us, when we were still faceless whether we’d like to live, or rather not. Now I’m wandering around alone in a large city, and I don’t know if it cares for me. I am looking into living rooms through doors and windows and I’m waiting for something. If I could wish for something I’d feel awkward. What should I wish for, a bad or a good time? If I could wish for something I’d want to be only a bit happy because if I were too happy I’d long for being sad.

As a leitmotif, this song stings us with the many meanings it acquires in this film across various contexts, from the dangers that women, queer, and transgender people experience walking in public spaces in Mexico to the neoliberal ills of individual loneliness and the illusory imperative of happiness. And, still its conclusion impinges on us through a feeling shared transgenerationally from veteran activists like Jiménez with the younger women protesting today. The scandal of the countries rolling back abortion rights, together with the high rate of femicides and gender violence specific to Mexico, is comparable with the disappointment that befell Marxist feminists in the 1930s and 70s alike. The promises of the revolutionary past haven’t been fulfilled and *we are still waiting*. While some dose of contentment is needed to sustain the struggle, and excitement and happiness exude from the massive mobilizations, sadness still pervades the activist zeal, making for a conflicting blend of feelings. This splitness is dialectical and inherent in the critical historical consciousness of leftist politics.

2

MEET YOUR INTERCESSOR(S)

A recurrent scene in the film, first appearing in the prologue in which many conceptual threads of the film are tied in, shows a young woman (Lilian Cuervo) reading excerpts from key texts in which Alexandra Kollontai advocated her political program, as well as some sentences from Kollontai’s diary during her time in Mexico. The image of enunciating these

words into a radio microphone is like a wished-for hyperbole of the influence and traction Kollontai has had wherever her ideas reached (in Sweden, for example, where she was a popular figure), or in those countries, like Mexico, in which they arrived or echoed with a delay. I am enticed to imagine what it would mean to hear on air today her ruminations on solidarity as a kind of comradesly love, on the abolition of the (nuclear) family and self-enclosed coupledom as individualistic (or anti-social, as Michael Hardt proposed)³ and obsolete institutions of relationship, or on the difference between revolts and revolution with respect to socio-political progress. Cuervo’s ventriloquism of Kollontai is resolute, reminding me of the political power of wireless agitation in Lizzie Borden’s 1983 sci-fi separatist feminist political satire *Born in Flames*. But, unlike the looking-you-straight-in-the-eye performances of Isabel or Honey on Radio Ragazza/Radio Phoenix, Lilian’s eyes are downcast. The counterpoint between Kollontai’s lucid remarks and the scenes from the anti-abortion protests in Mexico City in 2021 is precise, fast-forwarding to the contemporary possibilities of the same ideas, and poignant. As García says, “Kollontai’s vision has not yet happened.”⁴ Not in Mexico, or Russia, or anywhere to my knowledge.

Amor Rojo, borrowing a bastard English translation of a novel title by Kollontai (originally called *Great Love*) and revamping this inadequate translation into its own broad variety of meanings (which I will unfold next), carefully retraces Kollontai’s presence in Mexico. From speaking with the feminists who first encountered her writings in as late as the 1970s (Jiménez), and from opening the Mexican and Soviet archives with Rina Ortiz, the researcher of Kollontai’s work in Mexico, Kollontai’s episode in Mexico (1926–27) highlights the political ambiguity of the Mexican government, which welcomed her and at the same time feared her and attempted to curb her influence in face of its own more radical adversaries (including Emilio Zapata and other Mexican revolutionaries). Ortiz offers these remarks in passing, while she is carefully unfolding copies of newspaper articles in her private archive. In retrospect, for the socialist and “third-world” feminists, Kollontai appears as the precursor of intersectional thinking when she underlined the difference between proletarian and bourgeois women’s positions in the 1909 essay, “The

Social Basis of the Woman Question.” This is comparable to Chicana or African American lesbo-feminists (e.g. Gloria Anzaldúa or Audre Lorde, read by the protagonists in the film), as well as transfeminist thought (e.g. Sayak Valencia), for whom struggle is never only about gender because it always intersects with racism and colonial history, poverty, class, and sexual desire and dissidence. Predating Italian and German Marxist feminists (e.g. Silvia Federici or Maria Mies), from whose genealogy she is significantly missing, as the People’s Commissar for Social Welfare Kollontai managed to achieve several socialist reforms in the 1920s, including state provisions for a free choice on abortion, maternity leave and benefits, and childcare.

Twice in *Amor Rojo* a scene from the Soviet footage returns, where in a maternity ward (or a nursery) a few women in the working clothes of public servants are sitting on a bench to breastfeed the babies handed to them. The scene zooms onto a bright-eyed infant who stares clearly into the camera and for a moment stops suckling, only to resume the activity with its little hand pushing swiftly under the breast. The infant’s gaze is penetrating as it looks back at us, and the realism as gripping as in Vertov’s *kino-oko* (cine-eye) style. A poignant cadenza, this repetition turns a watchful eye from its own time, our repressed history, toward its future, or our present.

To bring these cinematic observations into a more synthetic argument, García stages Alexandra Kollontai in such a way that she becomes an *intercessor*—for the other protagonists of *Amor Rojo* in their present revolt, and tentatively, perhaps also for García herself. With this word, translated into English as “mediator,” I am drawing on a figure for the kind of collaboration Gilles Deleuze considered generative. “You’re always working in a group, even when you seem to be on your own. ... Whether they’re real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, you have to form your intercessors. It’s a series. If you’re not in some series, even a completely imaginary one, you’re lost. ...”⁵ For me, intercessorship is less a figure of creative genesis than a political intervention. Artists are often asked to share their influences so as to inscribe themselves in a genealogy or archive, while a politically sharper question would be: who is it that you consider intercedes, that is, intervenes politically, on your behalf?

² Carla Lamoyi, “Si tocan a una, respondemos todas,” in Dora García, ed., *Love with Obstacles: Amor Rojo*, 210–39.

³ Michael Hardt, “Red Love” in *Red Love: A Reader on Alexandra Kollontai*, ed. Maria Lind et al. (Stockholm: Konstfack and Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020), 63–92.

⁴ García told me in a conversation in November 2022.

⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 125.

Intercessorship is the concept I have chosen to further consider *Amor Rojo*. By contrast, García uses “interception” when she describes her trajectory into the research and film project centered on the Argentine psychoanalyst, artist, and critic Oscar Masotta in *Segunda Vez* (2018). A public talk and its place “intercepted” her into the discovery of the largely unknown work of Masotta, who introduced Jacques Lacan’s theoretical psychoanalysis in Argentina, as well as happenings in the 1960s. The word connotes being caught and stopped, as a suspect or in a language slip; interception is an apt choice for the narrative web woven in *Segunda Vez*: 1966 happenings that summon people on stage and in audience and police hearings that interpellate citizens, performances that bear the political unconscious as they stage images that anticipate the state terror in Argentina in the 1970s.

García’s research into Kollontai, as with other conceptual personae in her oeuvre (like Masotta, Félix Guattari, and James Joyce), is never motivated by a fascination with a genius-like individual. It is not about the person, or their life and times, but about their work, word, or deed, through which a field of conversation with multiple voices opens, re-cuts, and re-hallucinates a context (in a manifold sense: socio-political, artistic, intellectual, sentimental) for us in our historical present.

3

REPETITIONS: THE SECOND TIME AROUND, AND AGAIN

The film *Segunda Vez*—which precedes the film *Amor Rojo*—approaches repetition as an onto-historical problem of genesis, and as that which animates and dramatizes an intricately constructed film. While repeating two happenings and one anti-happening by Masotta from 1966—repeating but not re-enacting them, because re-enactment would falsely promise the same effect in an entirely different context, that of 2015–16—García revealed an instance in which an art performance could be a lucid presentiment of political reality. A happening in which a group of middle-aged “lumpen” lower-middle class people are lined up against a wall and exposed to a disturbing high-pitched sound and the gaze of the audience like a firing squad; a helicopter roaming above the sea; two people searching for a place to deposit a body wrapped up as if dead. In this brief description, Masotta’s

happenings, whose creation, Masotta explains, carefully repeats yet politically revamps elements he witnessed in La Monte Young’s happening in New York, were created some years before Argentina entered its bloodiest period of military dictatorship (1976–83). By juxtaposing a repetition of happenings while following closely Masotta’s script, with the documentary images and references of the ensuing executions (where bodies were often thrown into the ocean from the air) from the 1970s, García’s film stages “crystals of time,” images which condense the duration of possible meanings. Here performance flickers in the double register of art and politics, and in the double tense of appearance, which anticipates, and re-appearance, in which the disappeared return.



Dora García, *Segunda Vez*, 2018; film still courtesy the artist and Auguste Orts

Zooming out of repetition in *Segunda Vez*, the concept of performance owes its wide purchase in cultural theory to citationality, the characteristic established for language but also for almost any other material act, or behavior, in everyday life and art alike. Richard Schechner famously wrote that, “performance means: never for the first time. It means: for the second to the nth time. Performance is ‘twice-behaved behavior.’”⁶ And, as is well-known, when she theorized the performative constitution of gender and queer identity, Judith Butler showed how performance of gender entails reiteration based on a prior normative ritualization, thanks to which the act can reassert or disrupt the norms that make it possible in the first place.

Now we will take the principle of iterability in the opposite direction of *Segunda Vez*, which showed the powers of presentiment in dictatorship, and observe the movement of a historical socialist revolution into an open-ended present. For this, we need to go back to Kollontai in the 1920s and Mexico in the 2020s. If we follow Walter Benjamin’s redemptive vision of utopian promises of the past arriving latent into

⁶ Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 37.

the future, the delayed effects of the revolutionary ideas of the past, which have been betrayed and crushed ever since—⁷ such as Kollontai’s pursuit of sexual freedom of women—can never merely repeat and restore that which was negated without forging differences that might even change those historical ideas in retrospect. Hence, if *Amor Rojo* centralizes Kollontai’s revolutionary principles against women’s oppression, we ought to look for the considerable variance in both the ideological thrust and the lived experiences of protest between the Soviet (1920s) and the Mexican neoliberal capitalist context today. These divergences are even more important if we are to gauge how the method of political and social organization and insurgency is changing today.

Thinking in a historical-materialist key, Kollontai believed that the oppression of women rested on the capitalist relations of production and if those were to change by way of the communist revolution, women would be liberated from social reproductive labor and would become independent from, and equal with their male comrades. From that perspective, she placed her trust in the state, whose provisions would, among other reforms against gendered housework, collectivize child-rearing. Her gravest concern was to protect working class mothers and children who, in her words, were dying “like flies.” “Society, that big happy family, will look after everything,” Kollontai wrote in 1916.⁸

The attitude toward the state and the site and extent of necropolitics in contemporary Mexico are entirely different. When *Amor Rojo* brings us into the circle of a feminist lesbian and trans commune in Mexico City, its members, coming from a varied make-up of identities, degrees of oppression, and political involvement, are disillusioned about their chances of survival outside of their commune. Their *casa colectiva* isn’t just a place where they find discursive support and resonance in a community, it is literally a shelter in which they are protected from the relentless onslaught of sexism, femicide, homophobia, and transphobia, multiplied with racist violence against Mestiza and Indigenous women. The Mexican government’s inaction when faced with the

highest rate of femicides in the world makes it complicit with gender-related killings. As it refuses to protect their bodies and lives, which makes the central demand of women’s protests not to be murdered, the Mexican State is their enemy.



Comunidad Lencha Trans in Dora García, *Amor Rojo*, 2023; film still courtesy the artist and Auguste Orts

Achille Mbembe’s thesis on necropower, which determines whose lives matter and whose are disposable, and how necropower creates death-worlds—those “new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the *living dead*”⁹—acquires a specific meaning here. Read together with Sayak Valencia’s thesis about the neoliberal trade of death in the third-world countries like Mexico,¹⁰ it reveals that the death-world in Mexico is populated by women and other victims of gender-based murder. Here again, the intersectional bent is far more complicated than in Kollontai’s time as the identities of this group are diverse and moreover differ in the degree of destruction. As Valencia writes, the bodies of Mestiza and Indigenous women resurface from the void of failing infrastructure, from the earth and monuments under which they are concealed.¹¹ The situation in which women (including trans women, of course) in Mexico are dispossessed of the control over their bodies and live under a high risk of death is so dire that the massive uprisings against femicide and abortion bans are not surprising. A protest sign captures this sadness: “I march for those who are not here anymore. Because I am alive, but I don’t know for how long.” Another relays hope: “We are resisting because the world can be healed.”

⁷ Sami Khatib, “Where the Past Was, There History Shall Be: Benjamin, Marx, and the ‘Tradition of the Oppressed,’” *Anthropology and Materialism: A Journal of Social Research* Special Issue 1 (2017), journals.openedition.org/am/789.

⁸ Alexandra Kollontai, “Working Woman and Mother” (1916), marxists.org/archive/kollontai/1916/working-mother.htm

⁹ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 92.

¹⁰ Sayak Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, trans. John Pluecker (New York: Semiotext(e), 2018).

¹¹ Sayak Valencia, “Transfeminism Is Not a Genderism,” in *If I Could Wish for Something*, ed. Dora García, 112–37.



Dora García, *Amor Rojo*, 2023; film stills courtesy the artist and Auguste Orts



to the housework.”¹⁴ The same argument is further revised in a decolonial-transfeminist perspective by Sayak Valencia: “Violence in its different forms (physical, symbolic, economic, psychological, mediatic) has been used against us as a kind of pedagogy of subalternization applied to racialized, poor, feminized, or non-binary bodies.”¹⁵ Given the extent of violence against women and all the subjects and bodies that oppose binary sexual difference and racism, these viewpoints are worth mentioning for they have made “love” unlikely to act as a political ideal in feminist critique. After all, the Mexican protesters are fiercely chanting: “I burn everything down, I tear it all down... I’m the girl you raped, the mother who cries for the dead...” We would rather think militancy along with rage and resentment in response to the centuries-long oppression of women; to connect militancy with love, the notion of love needs be rescued from its heteronormative legacy within capitalist patriarchy.¹⁶

Kollontai’s critique was milder than that of later Marxist feminists (e.g. Dalla Costa). It targeted possession in love relationships, which she directly associated with private property in capitalism. Monogamous couples and the nuclear family are based in “property-love,” to use Hardt’s phrase for Kollontai—and act as isolated units of a bourgeois society, damned by the “loneliness of the spirit” and gender inequality. By contrast, motherhood must not be confined to the affection and care of one’s own children solely, but should extend to all “our children” of the “great proletarian family.” It is not inconceivable to substitute “community” for “family” here, and think of the alternative arrangements to blood kinship, for example, in the queer communities of today, in which children are reared by a village of adopted aunts and uncles. Yet alternativism is not the only or the main destination of Kollontai’s legacy. In 1923, she is determined to expand “free love” into a broader social concept bound up with comradeship and solidarity. Above romantic-love relations and sexual freedom (placing sex among the basic needs), Kollontai recognized the psychological and social dimensions of affects that play a significant role in forming collective solidarity. She considered it a part of the

4

LOVE: A PLEA FOR SOLIDARITY

In one of her radio announcements in *Amor Rojo*, Lilian reads a passage from “Make way for Winged Eros: A Letter to Working Youth” (1923), in which Kollontai revisits her notion of “free love” in an argument against reducing it to promiscuity, or what she dubbed the “wingless eros.” In her first piece about the “woman question” (1909), she had launched her thesis about love free from possession, which would liberate women from moral and physical subordination to men.¹² We can find a politically sharper and more bitter version of this argument in Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa’s text *Un lavoro d’amore* (1978).¹³ Dalla Costa takes love to be an ideological mystification of capital in order to justify unpaid housework. When the woman breaches the agreement that conflates marriage with love, then the man’s love turns into physical violence. She writes, “The violence has twofold origin: as venting (extending) the daily violence he is exposed to at work and as terror directed against the woman’s resistance

¹² Alexandra Kollontai, “The Social Basis of the Woman Question” (1909), marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1909/social-basis.htm

¹³ Giovanna Francesca Dalla Costa, *Un lavoro d’amore* (Milano: Edizioni delle donne, 1978).

¹⁴ I translated this into English from the Croatian edition of Dalla Costa’s book. Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa, *Rad ljubavi*, trans. Mia Gonan (Zagreb: Multimedijalni institut, 2019).

¹⁵ Sayak Valencia, “Transfeminism Is Not a Genderism,” 120.

¹⁶ Besides Kollontai, other feminist writers have explored love. For example, Chela Sandoval, self-identified as Chicana feminist, proposed love as “a hermeneutic, as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen-subjects, regardless of social class, toward a differential mode of consciousness and its accompanying technologies of method and social movement.” See Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis University Press, 2000), 140.

ideological education of the workers to cultivate empathy, or in her own words,

... to be capable of responding to the distress and needs of other members of the class, of a sensitive understanding of others and a penetrating consciousness of the individual’s relationship to the collective. All these “warm emotions”—sensitivity, compassion, sympathy and responsiveness—derive from one source: they are aspects of love, not in the narrow, sexual sense but in the broad meaning of the word. Love is an emotion that unites and is consequently of an organising character.¹⁷

In her vision of communist morality, “love-comradeship” stands above the passion of two individuals: love-duty to the collective is a more “powerful emotion,” “more complex and organic.” Such a hierarchy of emotions subsumed under “love” presupposes a strong sense of political belonging, which in Kollontai’s world wasn’t hard to vie for, she was clearly addressing the working class. This colors her winged eros *red*, dedicated to the unabating struggle of the proletarian revolution, but what could “red love” mean in our neoliberal societies, in which individualism and fragmentations of bounded communities reign?

5

COMRADE, LISTEN

Prior to *Amor Rojo*, love as a political force already appears in several projects by Dora García. In *Army of Love* (2017), which she produced collectively, García probes the hypothesis that love is a common good. If love is a basic human need, then it ought to be enjoyed by everyone. Social justice commands it to be re-distributed against countless prejudices and exclusions, political and intimate alike, and the love soldiers are those performers and “activists of altruism, conviction, solidarity”¹⁸ who endeavor to share love and receive it from anyone who needs it. The discussions, during which they share their experiences of encounters, must be a treasure for the public, as much as for everyone involved.

¹⁷ Alexandra Kollontai, “Make Way for the Winged Eros” (1923), marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1923/winged-eros.htm

¹⁸ Dora García in conversation with Joanna Warsza and Michele Masucci, “The Same Thing, And and Again,” in *Red Love*, 233.

¹⁹ Gilbert Simondon, *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020). On Simondon’s theory of individuation I have elaborated in Ana Vujanović and Bojana Cvejić, eds., *Toward a Transindividual Self: A Study in Social Dramaturgy* (Oslo: Oslo National Academy of the Arts, 2022).

As a prelude to *Amor Rojo*, *Army of Love* inverts the common understanding of love as a peak of relationality by instead positing love as something more basic and equal, marking a preindividual level of our species-being which we are endowed with as a natural, historically evolved faculty and potential. If we are to unfold this line of thinking alongside Gilbert Simondon’s theory of individuation,¹⁹ love becomes an unlimited source of multiple individuations, which transpire beyond individuals, and thus well beyond any individualistic, self-interested exchange between two (or more) persons. The wager of the premise that love could be used as a weapon against social injustice might lie in its capacity to transindividuate, that is, to instill a collective process of individuation in which the “we” always changes precisely because it repeatedly exercises the capacity of what “we” can do together. That said, I am not suggesting this is a smooth process, based on a nominal agreement as in a performance in which we will feign a love encounter. Nor am I reviving the New-Age conception of love as fusion where differences disappear. For love to act as a means of transindividuation, it has to retain the double movement of connecting while exacting and furthering relations of mutual difference and shared respect. Transindividuation that forges the political sense of solidarity implies a set of reciprocal relations of transformation. It seems to me that in its portrait of transfeminist communities and protests in Mexico, *Amor Rojo* harbors this question: could love transindividuate and empower political struggle against gender-based violence from the perspective of diverse feminist positions?



Army of Love, presentation at Casco Art Institute, Utrecht, NL, 2017-18

The visit, in *Amor Rojo*, to the lesbian trans commune of women and sexual dissidents shows us how a circle operates transindividually on a micro-social relational scale. Each member introduces themselves, while invoking the place they fled and the position they are carving out communally. Queer, lesbian, cisgender heterosexual, transgender, immigrant, one who abandoned sexist communists to join a feminist anarchic community, and another who seeks to understand what feminism can do for her maroon lineage—their differences matter in so far as they disclose singular stories about different kinds and degrees of oppression and affirm the identity they self-determine rather than being negatively assigned to it.²⁰ The women listen to one another. A particularly poignant moment occurs when Havi, a trans woman, describes the aggressions that forced her out of the public space; she is not welcome in any public space in Mexico. Filmed from a side-view angle that captures her cheek, tattooed with the phrase “Te quiero,” she explains the erotic nature of machismo-transphobia: first physically attracted to her, when they realize her trans identity, men threaten to kill her.²¹ This episode is filmed entirely through the faces of the storyteller, Havi, and her listeners. For a moment, all cisgender women who are listening to Havi’s vivid account of a slice of her daily burden are given the occasion to “world-travel,” in María Lugones’s sense: “Through travelling to other people’s ‘worlds’ we discover that there are ‘worlds’ in which those who are the victims of arrogant perception are really subjects, lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant perceiver and are pliable, foldable, classifiable.”²²

The chance of the gathered women to forge an alliance and to last in a common struggle (until victory)²³ rests on their ability to overcome, or more precisely, to listen to “world-travel” and endorse the differences in their attachments to a collective struggle against heteropatriarchal racist society.

In the history of feminist activism, love has been recognized as a vital force for making durable relations as it can build solidarity upon a web of entrusted relationships of difference.²⁴ Lately, this hasn’t always seemed plausible; the leftist activist culture in Europe and the US has instead been embroiled in disputes over moral legitimacy and whose pain or oppression is more politically relevant. When lived experience is the main criterion for the legitimacy of a political stance, is love in a social form capacious enough to admit allies, those witnessing the suffering of others, as comrades? In *Comrade, An Essay on Political Belonging*, Jodi Dean revives the figure of the comrade beyond the opposition “survivor”/“ally.” She insists, “To say comrade is to announce a belonging and the sameness that comes from being on the same side.”²⁵ Reclaiming the communist legacy of comradeship, she takes comrade to be generic, that is, to exceed any particular identity. In my view, without accounting for singular stories as the real, lived, and individuated stakes of the common that we stand upon, we wouldn’t be able to act as comrades. A more stringent yardstick for collective, comradely solidarity lies in the willingness to share the risk in taking part in the struggle. In this case, it means that the “allies,” those who are not in danger (hopefully this allyship will soon also include cisgender men), stand by the most vulnerable whose sheer presence provokes *machista* feelings of fear and hate.

One of the signs protesters are carrying says: “They are shocked by those who fight but not by those who died.” Another demands: “Sir, Madam, do not remain indifferent. Women are being killed before our eyes.” Kollontai also believed that her pamphlets shouldn’t leave women indifferent, that they will say to themselves, “There is strength in unity,” and would join working women in protest.²⁶ By intersecting and coalescing these two dissimilar histories, *Amor Rojo* makes a case for trans feminism as a blueprint for transindividual solidarity as a constituent force driving social movements today.

20 Maroons are descendants of enslaved Africans in the Americas who escaped from slavery and formed their own settlements. One of the members of the trans commune recounts her skeptical attitude to white feminism before she understood what it could specifically mean in relation to her ancestors.

21 Havi told García that she decided to make this tattoo because she received so much hate each day, so that her aggressors would have to confront a face, saying “I love you.” From an email correspondence with Dora García, 12 January 2023.

22 María Lugones, “Playfulness, ‘World’-Travelling, and Loving Perception,” *Hypatia* 2/2 (1987): 3–19 (3).

23 But what would that be? Where are they to stop? Legalizing abortion seems to be one formal demand; the machista violence seems vast, including many other forms apart from femicide as an extreme necropolitical facet of it and entails systemic antisexist work.

24 I am referring to the practice of relations and *affidamento* (entrustment) developed by the women from the Milan’s Women’s Bookstore, a feminist cooperative dating from the 1970s. Honoring differences and asymmetries, the women of this cooperative committed themselves to friendship and political partnership, where each one respects the other by allowing her authority on the subject of her own knowledge. The artist Alex Martinis Roe studies this practice in depth in her book *To Become Two: Propositions for Feminist Collective Practice* (Berlin: Archive, 2018).

25 Jodi Dean, *Comrade: An Essay on Political Belonging* (London: Verso, 2018), 64.

26 Alexandra Kollontai, “Working Woman and Mother” (1916), marxists.org/archive/kollonta/1916/working-mother.htm

PERFORMATIVE JUXTAPOSITIONS: INSERTS AND INTERVENTIONS

To conclude, I would like to say something about the form of research and film-making in *Amor Rojo* and *Segunda Vez* that prompted this reading. Both films are composites of several shorter films, each one representing a “prong” of research in the whole process of several years. They are paralleled with one or several collections of texts in which various voices and styles abound, and from which I have also drawn here. These include writings and documents by the studied figures, by García herself, her numerous collaborators and other researchers, about artistic, social, and political movements, practices and concepts, often illuminating untold stories, events, and people while criss-crossing scholarship, activism, artistic writing, and personal testimonies. Rich sourcebooks—cahiers more than catalogs (even if they serve that latter purpose, too)—these publications generously guide us through multiple trajectories and histories of each project.

What binds this research—and most of her oeuvre—is a predilection for leftist politics, and a stance from which García chooses which histories should be redeemed and which particular moments in those histories can help to re-hallucinate artistic or socio-political contexts today. Film becomes an indispensable medium because it enables the staging of unlikely encounters and resonances across geographies and histories, where songs, literary parables, performances, public signs and slogans, and historical documents are composed in order to speak to and through each other. In the film, the artist’s intervention is fully manifest as it inserts, juxtaposes, and intercuts times, places, performances, figures, and events, sometimes more legibly, and other times more furtively, with a Joycean bent for sharp, and sometimes cryptic details. The composition is charged and held by a problem: the problem of political history is probed in the present, which in turn provokes those contemporary subjects we call the audience. This provocative probing involves rehearsal (*Probe* in German), but also testing, trying, putting to work a politically repressed or overlooked image, text, song, or performance. While attending a public rehearsal of Vladimir Maiakovsky’s play *The Bed Bug* in an exhibition at De Singel (this work of García is known as *The Bug*), I looked around and saw many young artists, performers, writers, and cultural workers who were reading Maiakovsky’s play with García. I wondered: will Dora García be their intercessor?



Kööt Juurak performing in Dora García and guests, *EL BICHO* (*The Bug*, after Mayakovsky), Centro de Cultura Contemporánea Conde Duque, Madrid, 2022



Nothing Can Be Repeated

Joanna Zielińska in conversation with Dora García

Joanna Zielińska is an art historian, writer, and performance curator. The ideas of performative exhibition and performative artwork are fundamental in her curatorial research. Her practice is centered around theater, performance, performative literature, and visual arts. She works as a senior curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp (M HKA).

JOANNA ZIELIŃSKA

You realized one of your first performances when you lived in Brussels. What was the connection between your early works and your early performances?

JZ

Which of your performance works was the first to be sold to a public collection? Maybe you can speak about the acquisition and this moment in your practice.

DORA GARCÍA

I started my work as an artist doing sculpture, then sculpture became performance, and then film. Performance began at the point I realized I did not need to perform myself, and that the performance did not need an audience or at least not a called-for audience. I have always done delegated performance and durational performance (even before those terms appeared). Since my performances did not have a public, at least in the conventional sense of the word, the issue of how to communicate these performances was immediately raised—and so the narrative of performance became central, feeding back into the type of performance itself, and this narrative of performance often adopted the form of videoperformance, videoperformance of the surveillance-camera type. From there came the first films: *The Glass Wall* (2002), *Burning Post-its* (2005), *Sleep* (2000).

DG

The first time I ever sold a performance was in 2001, it was titled *Proxy/Coma*. It was sold following an exhibition in Barcelona at a place that doesn't exist anymore, Sala Montcada, and curated by Chus Martínez. Someone who was to be very important in my professional life, Béatrice Josse, then the director of FRAC Lorraine in Metz, saw the exhibition and then contacted me because she was interested in acquiring *Proxy/Coma*, which is in fact two performances in one. And I was surprised because I didn't consider this performance something that could be sold and so it was with her that I found out how to do this. The collection of FRAC Lorraine is famous because it literally fits in a folder, in a *classeur*—it is just papers with instructions. Béatrice focused on acquiring works by female artists (a terminology I hate, but to clarify) and immaterial works—so it was very fitting, this collection. Yet, at that time it was also completely new to me as I did not know what it was that you sold when you sell a performance. I was familiar with the practice of selling photographs, or else, videos of the performance, and really learned with her what the protocol was—or what she called “protocol.” In fact, it is a sort of score, something that would allow an institution to *repeat* the performance whenever they want.

JZ

Can you explain what the performance was about, and how this work was modified to fit an institutional protocol?

DG

Actually, there were no modifications to the performance to fit the protocol: the protocol fit the performance. The question was how *Proxy/Coma* could be repeated, thus happen again, how it could be transmitted for future generations, surviving me, and surviving Béatrice Josse. The performance *Proxy/Coma* consists of two elements. One is the presence of a female, a woman (I have great difficulties with these terms), of my age at the time, because she is supposed to substitute for me. She has to be in the exhibition space for as long as the exhibition space is open to the public. A camera determines the area where she can stay, meaning she has to stay within the territory or the scope that the camera could film. She cannot be off-camera, she mustn't step out of the camera. At the time this was created, two VHS tapes were recorded for four hours each, and the tapes were stored in what was called *Coma*—the archive of *Proxy*.

Therefore, you had an image of the performance, projected or on a monitor, and an archive of all the days that the performance had been presented. And there was no way you could know whether the image on the projection or on the monitor of the *Coma* archive was live or was recorded. That was this idea of “Coma” at the time. So that's what the performance was, and the protocol described is more or less exactly what I just told you, but expressed in a clearer manner. The protocol was signed by me and this was delivered to the institution, as the way of transmitting and preserving the piece.

JZ

You are referring to a very interesting moment in contemporary art, that is, the emerging moment of collecting live art. As you said, performance was entering collections mostly through documentation but, at the beginning of the 2000s, or the end of the 1990s, choreography and other forms of performance art were presented in institutional spaces. Artists had to somehow adapt to the existing institutional framework. How has the process of acquiring performance work changed since then? Institutions have their own discourse, and there is an ongoing academic debate on collecting performance, but I wonder whether artists also benefit from the experience of other artists. Do you see any development, and changes in the institutional approach, when institutions ask you to sell?

DG

Well, I have often given advice to other artists who sold performances and didn't know how to tackle this. The 2000s was also the time when video or films started to be sold as artworks to collections. I think it took after the idea of *editions*, so that you would often make editions. It took me a long time to make editions of the performance because at the beginning I always considered them unique pieces, but it was more practical for me to make editions because this allowed me to lower the price of the performance. It also allowed me a bit of freedom because I ran into quite some trouble with, for instance, loans from collections, from performances—which was a contradiction in terms because when you loan a performance you don't loan anything, there is nothing physical, so you can perfectly well loan the same performance to five places at the same time—exactly the same as with films—so it took some time for the institutions to understand that this was possible. And I often discussed with other artists how to do this. But ultimately it did not change that much from the discussion I had with Béatrice Josse. When I sell performance (and I sell, for my standards, quite a large number of performances) it is always the same. It is this certificate that is basically me saying they are the owners of this performance. Because of course, anyone can do the performance anytime. It's a kind of contract—it is a contract with the collector, by which I declare that they own this performance. Then there is a little booklet, the protocol, in which I explain what the performance consists of. Often the protocol must be updated because of a new practice of the performance, or new developments. For instance, the practice of recording on VHS I mentioned before. Technologies change performances, so that you have to update protocols; this is actually quite a fascinating thing to do. When I started doing performances with *Inserts in Real Time*, I had the very clear intention to use the web as a space of documentation and realization of the performances that would allow me to be independent from museums and galleries. I could distribute my work through the web without having to ask the permission and the approval of the art institution. Now, twenty years later, institutions want to show and buy performance—although they are not always ready to accept the implications this has, in terms of both the labor and conservation required. The web presence of my performance work, and books like the one you are now holding, allow anyone to carry out any of the performances. Collectors, institutional or not, are not buying exclusivity—this would go against what I believe art should be—they are buying their right to conserve, to take care of the legacy of that performance, and transmit it, potentially forever.

JZ

Do institutions ask you to update these protocols?

DG

They don't ask me, but they ought to [laughs]. Sometimes it's painful, sometimes it's very painful because there are some institutions—I won't say any names—who buy a performance and never show it because they consider it too complicated to show but, of course, there are people who will ask to exhibit it. And the institution has no idea what they need to instruct, so they write me, and then I have to say to whoever wants to show it, what exactly this performance consists of because maybe it was sold ten years ago and many elements have changed (for instance, if there are some computer elements or if there are some telephone elements). So, in ten years they're just not the same anymore. So, I have no idea ... this should be the job of the institution, as it is the job of the institutions to update video formats or to update a lot of other things. They should also take care of updating performance protocols.

JZ

This is very interesting. It's unlike sculptures and paintings. It's a different approach towards conservation.

DG

Yes, but it's not that different from big installations, or any installation ... there are a lot of technical elements that become obsolete and eventually cease to exist. Most things don't work after five years, so you have to update the technical aspects.

JZ

What does it mean to work with a body and a performer in the context of the institution and the exhibition? What kind of care is required to have performance in the museum, and is care practice included in the protocols?

DG

I always had the conviction that everything was *collectible* ... you can collect anything, there is no such thing as a work that can't be collected. This is one thing. Another thing occurred when many artist-choreographers started to work in the visual arts: how to keep taking care of the work over time. But, you know, what is funny is that in theater and dance there are some parameters of care as well as labor that are already well established. So, in that sphere there is no discussion about fees and payments. Fees are well established because theaters have unions: it is so much for rehearsals; it is so much for the presentation. But, of course, the theater and dance system is different from the visual arts institution because nobody owns a theater play, nobody owns a dance performance. In this case, when you enter the world of the visual arts, an institution owns the piece and there is no tradition and there is no roadmap and there are no performers' unions. In the 2000s, and even in the 2010s, it was really chaotic.

At the Venice Biennial between 2005 and 2015, for instance, some performers were paid four euros per hour—not my performers! But others' performers. They were paid extremely badly. And, I have to say, they were paid in undeclared money, and there was no insurance for accidents, it was really bad. The performers were mostly students coming from art schools, etcetera.

Eventually this became untenable. First, the performers acquired a kind of class consciousness; second, the institutions became ashamed, because there were accidents and stuff, and you could not maintain this. I think probably in the 2010s a serious discussion started—not so much on care—but on labor rights for performers and the idea to determine—establish—paying money for rehearsals, to pay for all this. But, I have had an enormous amount of trouble with this because most of the institutions and museums cannot directly hire performers due to their own labor structure—they cannot that easily hire people temporarily just for a project. They delegate to another structure, I don't really know the official names of these structures, but they were employment agencies, and they were the ones who were going to pay the social security and insurances of these performers. And, in the end, because it must be done through this mediation, there is not so much money left for the performers themselves. This has created a lot of trouble for me. Now I always say how much money the performers need to receive—and if these funds don't exist then there is no performance. But this is only when people contact me directly. I know, however, of a performance of mine being loaned to a museum by another institution and its performers, again, are getting paid very badly. It is hard for an artist to control it, but there must be a raised awareness of the fact that labor and care must be regulated. Because of course next to labor rights, you also have basic care needs, you also need to have a place where you can rest. You also need to have pauses between performances. All these kinds of things!

JZ

When I started to work with performance, I didn't think about many of those factors. By now I know how important it is to create resting spaces and the possibility that the performers can feel comfortable. But I also had some problems in the past with the invigilation of the space. Museum guards might not be aware of the character of a performer's work, so they often need to be trained. In the exhibition space, the audience can get really close to the performance artist, so it could happen that someone crosses a boundary. There are certain potential accidents that are less likely to happen in a theater space where the audience and the stage are more separate.

JZ

Let's say, people who join these kinds of experimental theater performances belong to a specific type of audience...

JZ

It's interesting to bring different notions of care that need to be developed at an institutional level.

DG

Yeah, but you do find this problem in experimental theater, too.

DG

That's right.

DG

Yes, but I think that there is no turning back—only forward. Presenting performance in museums and visual art institutions is complex. It requires considering a lot of things. One of them is that the artist needs to have a conversation with everyone, from the cleaning ladies (or cleaning *messieurs*) to the guards, everybody who is going to be in the space: they need to be briefed on what is going to happen. But there is no turning back in the sense that there is no alternative such as: "Maybe it's better not to present performances in art institutions." Because performance is there to stay—people really love performances, so much so that they seem to be very disappointed when nothing happens in an exhibition space. [Laughter] "That's all? Like, those paintings and that's it?!" So, like photography, like film, performance is a format that has entered this institutional space and it cannot be pushed out. So it's the institution that has to adapt to it.

JZ

Performance work is changing the experience of the exhibition space. I like the idea of space that is in a state of constant transformation. How does this dynamic influence your own practice? How has a performative approach changed your way of working and the way you see an artwork as something that's in progress?

DG

Well, I could say that I started working with performance as a sort of revolt against the idea of the white cube: white cube art had to be understood by everybody independently of their background, independently of their class, gender, race (that's also not an accurate word but, you know what I mean): independent of the intersectional frameworks that shape who you are; and, as something that didn't change with time; and, as something that was somehow abstracted from the real world, so that once you enter the museum it's as though the real world is suspended, and then when you go back into the street... there was all this absurd talk of taking art to the streets, etcetera.

This is absurd because the truth is that reality doesn't stop at the museum door and there are very heavy, real conflicts inside the museum concerning everyday reality: concerning class, and concerning labor situations, and concerning money, etcetera. And everyone who comes into the museum is different, everyone sees a different play, a different artwork, depending on where they come from. It was very clear that by the way museums were organized, they addressed a very specific segment of the population and they were leaving out a lot of the population. Therefore, I started to do performance as a response to this, indicating that actually, what is interesting is everything that happens *around, despite, and because of* the white cube situation, everything that breaks the white cube situation. *Proxy* is exactly that: bringing the idea of duration and gender into the white cube.

In considering the performances, sometimes they come very close to installations, to permanent or frozen situations, *tableaux* or images. And sometimes they come very close to street theater. There is a wide variety of situations which have to do with this notion that nothing is permanent, that everything changes and, almost in Marxist terms, that everything is subject to history and to the conditions of materialism.

JZ

In that sense, your work is very complex. Making films is connected to performance work, the same as using printed matter and drawing. All these elements are linked through the idea of the performative gesture. For me, performance has this potential: of creating different kinds of spaces inside the dead white cube spaces where bodies are choreographed in different ways and, sometimes, they might be taken out of their comfort zones. Do you believe in the transformative potential of performance?

DG

I don't think performance in general has transformative power. Some performances do and some others don't. What does that mean? Let's say live events that happen in an art institutional frame (or outside of it, or around it), having as important identity marks the notions of presence and duration, we use that to define performance. Of course, performance questions these very things, like for instance the notion of duration: what is it to be present inside/outside/around an institution? Also, the question of "address" is very important: to whom are you talking, to whom are you addressing yourself, and by whom do you want to be seen? This is already changing something. But it's not going to change the arts system, performance per se, in the sense that it can stay very much within the limits of this system: it starts now, it ends then, this is the person who is performing, you are safe as a visitor if you don't get too close. The fourth wall can be very much present in a visual arts institution.

So, I would say that, of course, performance has the capacity to put many things into question. It's probably more flexible than other formats—but you need the will to transform the institution. It's not enough to have the format, you need the *will* to transform the institution. And, in what sense do you want to transform the institution? I believe performance has changed institutions, for instance, the notion of the situated museum, which we are discussing now as a confrontation with the classical museum. This is Manolo Borja Villedo's classification of museums: the corporate museum, the classical museum, and then the situated museum.¹ I think this notion of the situated museum has a lot to do with performance. And when I say performance, it also has a lot to do with the notion of audience and how you deal with the territory you're in. It has to do with duration, as something you present one time as a sort of spectacle or show. But it's really dealing with a specific situation of that institution, of the specific community in which that institution operates, and the specific publics: not only publics as spectators but the public in the sense of being public, that this institution has to do with. I would establish that they certainly align; performance as I understand it cannot be presented identically in different places, cannot be generic, cannot rely on universal understandings; it has to work its way through the specific circumstances of the place where it is presented, taking very much into account the political, social, historic situation, and who are the people that are bound to engage with the performance.

¹ Manuel Borja Villedo, *Campos magnéticos: Escritos de arte y política* (Barcelona: Editorial Arcàdia, 2020).

JZ

It also has to do with this idea of the audience as performers when the audience becomes a part of performances. You work with different groups and communities, and these communities are included in various processes. The idea of the site-specificity of performance is fascinating because it depends on the context and clearly connects to the widely-discussed idea of situated knowledge and the situated museum. It's interesting to reflect on this: whether the site-specificity has to do with the places in which you are showing the performances. Some performances might not fit certain contexts. Do you have this problem?

DG

Yes, of course. As I said, there is a spectrum from works that are not completely site-specific to works that are extremely site-specific and there are some performances that can never happen anywhere else, for instance, the performance of *The Beggar's Opera* (2007), which was made for Skulptur Projekte Münster and could never happen anywhere else, nor in any other time. But, it has generated a second performance, which is called *Best Regards from Charles Filch*, as its spinoff. "Spinoff" is a sitcom term which I like because it refers to the possibility that one of the characters of one show has a second life somewhere else, like Frasier from *Cheers*, for instance. Charles Filch from *The Beggar's Opera*, has a second life in *Best Regards from Charles Filch*, but *The Beggar's Opera* will only happen in the context of Münster and the context of Münster's Skulptur Projekte. It was the same with a piece called *Die Klau Mich Show* (2012) for Documenta 13. That one was really a (very entertaining) institutional critique precisely of this exhibition happening at that time and in that place in 2012. It's not always the case, but there are a few others which are strictly site-specific like that. *Translation/Exile* (2017), for instance, is a performance that was made for an island in Anafi, for a very specific commission by very specific collectors for a very specific situation. I thought it could never happen anywhere else. And yet, it has been possible to adapt it to other situations. So, 100 percent site-specific works do exist, but they are the minority.

JZ

How is this idea attached to a specific body or performer? You work with a group of people that is maybe closer to a theater production. How flexible is this idea of developing performances with a specific performer?

DG

The performer is central in the work I do. It would never be a good performance if the performer wasn't good, but then you have to define what "good" means, and actually it's not a very common criterion for me to work with. For instance, I've had very bad experiences with professional actors, and I often work with artists—people who have their own practice. And we have a certain relationship: their production and my production have a certain affinity. I don't do castings. I find casting a horrible practice, really embarrassing for everybody, so I prefer to do it through a certain network that I have managed to weave, and we widen this net through recommendations which are really based on personal affinity. That's how it works because you know in my performances the performer has a lot of agency and has to make—take on—a lot of decisions. And, for instance, from very early on, already in *The Beggar's Opera*, the rehearsals are never really rehearsals. They are conversations on what the work is, why the work makes sense, what kind of situations might come up. Rehearsals become a practice of brainstorming on a very simple idea and it's really given shape *with* the performers—it does not pre-exist. Many performances are, when first presented, almost half-cooked—they only become mature and full when the performer practices them, for a certain amount of time, drives them, runs them, and tests them. The performance at the beginning is a very simple idea, and then you just perform, and so the performance takes shape through the feedback that the performer gives. This is how it works. Sometimes I do work with professional actors, but this is the exception. These kinds of actors I do work with are exceptional people—Geffrey Carey, James Borniche, for instance. What I mean is that it's not that I say: I don't work with actors. There are some actors I've worked with for many years, and they have almost *become* the performance in the sense that if I present that performance I will always do it with that actor because I can't really imagine it performed by someone else.

JZ

So how does this connect with the idea of collecting your performances?

DG

Well, it only makes it more difficult. [Laughter] But in the end, you know, you deliver the protocol—let's call it the protocol. I also want to say that it's a special type of collector who collects performances, and my performances, certainly. I think everything can be sold, but not to everybody. Especially private collectors, or private people, who have bought performances. They are very close to me and in that sense, I would say they have an idea of what kind of performer could do this. I encountered this recently in Lisbon, where we performed *Little object <a>* (2021), with performers who I didn't know at all (with one exception, João dos Santos Martins). But I felt at ease because I trusted the judgment of the collector in the sense that I knew that they had spent time with the work, and they understood what the work was. So, I hope that a responsible person from the collection will solve that question.

JZ

The notion of repetition and rehearsal has a special meaning in your work. How does this change the way the work is created and presented?

DG

It has importance in my work in a negative way, my whole interest in the subject comes from one of the eleven rules Allan Kaprow lists in *How to Make a Happening*:

Perform the happening once only. Repeating it makes it stale, reminds you of theatre, and does the same thing as rehearsing: it forces you to think that there is something to improve on. Sometimes it'd be nearly impossible to repeat anyway—imagine trying to get copies of your old love letters, in order to see the rain wash off those tender thoughts. Why bother?²

The texts of Allan Kaprow have had a big influence in my work and in my teaching, and I fully agree you cannot repeat not only a happening but nothing, nothing can be repeated. Going into psychoanalytic mode and quoting the Argentinian psychoanalyst Jorge Jinkis: “Whoever is familiar with the temporality of trauma and the theory of repression, knows that in psychoanalysis the second time is, in fact, the first.”³ So, for me, repetition has importance in relation to performance (how one thing happens always anew, following certain parameters/scores/rules, which are what is repeated, not the happening—but not even these things are repeated as they also constantly acquire new meanings) in relation to psychoanalysis (see Freud’s “Repeating, Remembering and Working Through”⁴) and in relation, above all to history, the idea of a cycle, and how the repetition happens but it is never the same, and how each new repetition changes all the preceding ones. Nothing is new, and everything is new.

² Allan Kaprow, *How to Make a Happening*, rule no. 10 (lecture from 1968), see transcript published at primaryinformation.org/files/allan-kaprow-how-to-make-a-happening.pdf

³ Jorge Jinkis, “An Intellectual Passion,” in *Segunda Vez: How Masotta Was Repeated*, ed. Dora García (Oslo: The National Academy of the Arts and Torpedo Press, 2018), 45–63.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, “Weitere Ratschläge zur Technik der Psychoanalyse (II): Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten,” *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* 2/6 (1914): 485–91. English translation: “Further Recommendations in the Technique of PsychoAnalysis: Recollection, Repetition, and Working-Through,” trans. Joan Riviere, *c.P.* 2 (1924): 366–76.

JZ

The act of drawing and “writing in the space” becomes part of your practice. Can you explain this special relationship you have with drawing also in the context of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Robert Walser?

DG

The origin of my drawings in space has a very anecdotal origin: my friend and curator Guillaume Désanges once told me that in my artistic work only a small part of my research and practice was visible and that this was a pity. So, I started to draw diagrams that connected all the different parts and paths of the work and I loved them and thought they were the best drawings I had ever made. So I started to develop this, and now it is a super important part of my practice. But of course, it is also part of my enormous interest for graphomania, or, compulsive writing, and how this compulsive writing in fact is not really addressed to anyone; it does not want to transmit a message, to say something, but on the contrary is about the act of writing itself, what is important is the act, the practice of writing—and drawing is a form of writing, an incision in the surface, poking through the surface. Here we can find Artaud, Lacan, and Walser, the latter with his micrograms, made to escape self-censorship, his voices; Derrida, I have not really read. We also find Heidegger—I know, not a very popular figure—but his text “Language” (*Die Sprache*, 1950) with the sentence: “No one speaks, Language speaks,” is a marvel.⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa—who is the one giving the name to the exhibition *She Has Many Names* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp—is a very important figure as well, in this writing-on-walls adventure.

⁵ “Language speaks” [in the German original, “die Sprache spricht”] was a saying by Martin Heidegger. Heidegger first formulated it in his 1950 lecture “Language” (“Die Sprache”), and frequently repeated it in later works. The lecture was first published in Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Tübingen: Verlag Günther Neske Pfullingen, 1959).

JZ

One theme in your work is particularly intriguing: chalk circles. The classic geometric shape speaks of the traditions of theater and performance, inner and public space, in/out situations, and the notions of movement and gesture. It is very Brechtian in that it relates to the concept of “defamiliarization.”

DG

Yes, in the chalk circle we find Brecht indeed, but also Ian Wilson, and this story:

In 168 B.C., the Seleucide King Antiochos IV Epiphan marched on Alexandria with his troops. The Roman senator Gaius Popilius Laenas goes to meet him and enjoins him to leave Egypt. With his stick, he traces around Antiochos a circle in the sand, “a closed cut”: “You will not get out of this circle, as long as you have not responded by yes or no to my injunction to leave Egypt.” The episode ends with the retreat of Antiochos.

This story is told by Lacan somewhere, I cannot remember where exactly,⁶ to explain how symbolic limits can be as impenetrable as the hardest physical barriers. I use my chalk circles as a way of marking territory symbolically, marking territory for the performance, almost like in a football field or tennis court. I also found lately this wonderful poem by Brecht written on the occasion of the death of Walter Benjamin:

After eight years of exile, observing the rise of the enemy
Then at last, brought up against an impassable frontier
You passed, they say, a passable one.⁷

⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Object of Psychoanalysis, 1965–1966*, lectures as found at lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/13-The-Object-of-Psychoanalysis1.pdf (see p. 65).

⁷ Bertolt Brecht, “Zum Freitod des Flüchtlings W.B.” (1941), in *Gedichte—Werke, Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe: Gedichte und Gedichtfragmente 1940–1956*, ed. Klaus-Detlef Müller, Jan Knopf, Werner Hechte, and Werner Mittenzwei (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1993). The English version was copied from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 36.

JZ

What is the role of language in your work? Your practice is situated on the intersection of visual arts, theater, and literature. What does it mean?

DG

I consider there is nothing outside language and that language is really the only way we have to understand the world—it is a system. And, of course, it is much more than verbal language, much more than speech. I am completely fascinated by this paraphrasing of Lacan’s philosophy: “The subconscious is structured like a language, but it is the language of someone else, imposed on us.” This is the idea around which all my work turns—by wanting to understand how this imposition works, who really speaks (language speaks), and how language permeates all of our waking and subconscious life, how slips of the tongue work, how power is exerted through language, and how language transforms reality (the old text of J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*). I do not think the work I do is situated on the intersection of visual arts, theater, and literature, it is visual arts, in the sense that it functions in the visual arts circuit. I do not think disciplines are determined by their materiality, but by their distribution circuits.

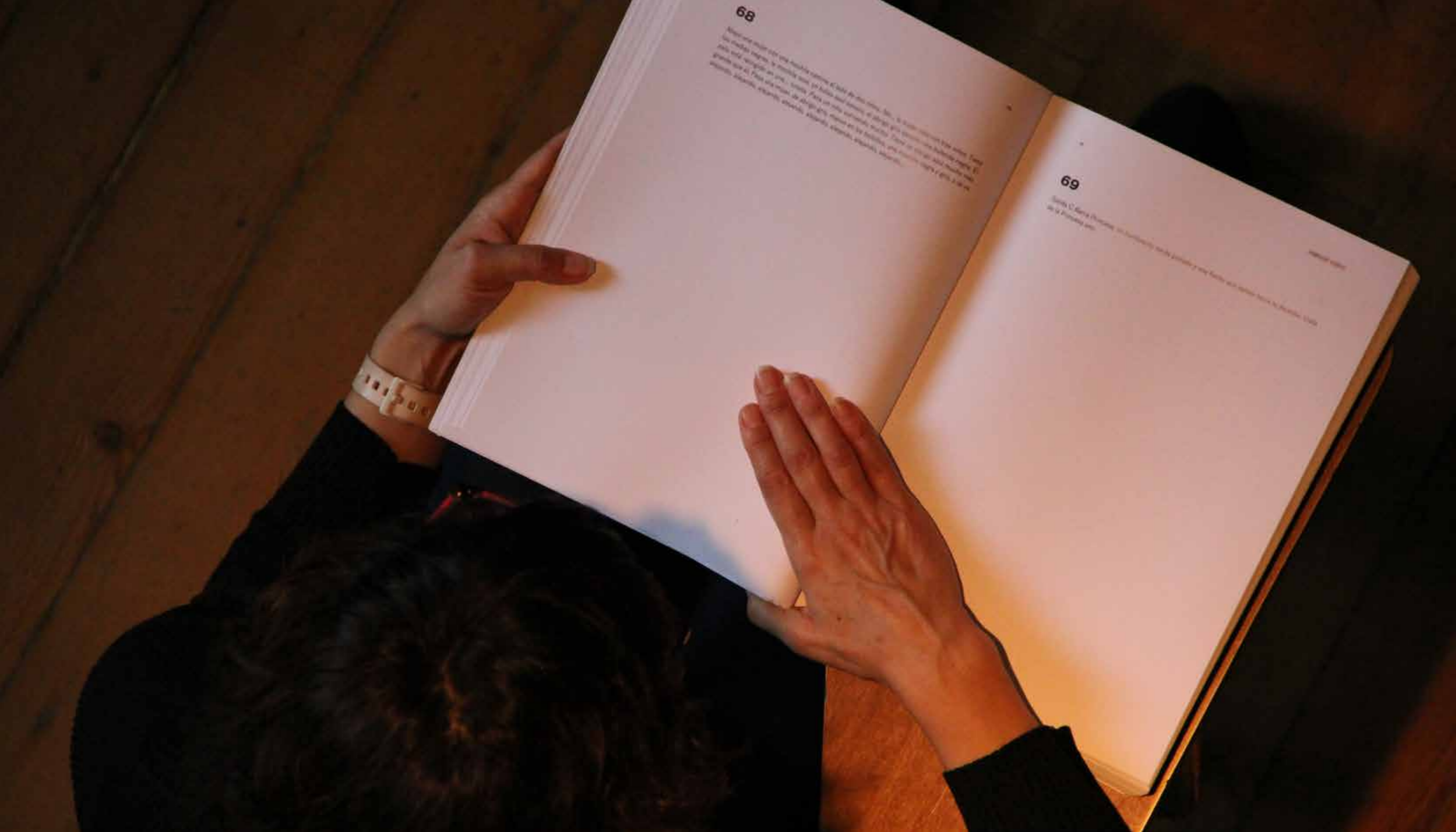
JZ

What does it mean that your practice is a study?

DG

It means exactly what it says: my everyday activity as an artist consists of studying. I read, I take notes, I make diagrams, I explain things and things are explained to me, I analyze, I synthesize, I write summaries and develop summaries into bullet points, I recite, I memorize, I paraphrase, I quote ... all things related to study. Also, the more I learn, the happier I am with my work.

This conversation between curator Joanna Zielińska and artist Dora García first started as a discussion during the workshop *Collecting the Ephemeral: The Legal Perspective*, which took place in the framework of a research project at the Lucerne School of Art & Design in Switzerland. It was then expanded during the preparations for García’s exhibition *She Has Many Names* at M HKA in January and February 2023 and edited for publication.



Chronology

Inserts in Real Time: Performance Work 2000–2023

Keywords

audience
collective authorship
experimentalism
filmed theater
guided tour
invisible theater
micronarrative
monologue
printed matter
public
public space
radicality
reading-as-action
real time
role play
social practice
surveillance systems
temporality
videoperformance

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Keywords public, audience, temporality, invisible theater, public space

Short description Invisible performance (after the “invisible theater” by Augusto Boal) in public space

Performed at *Metro>Polis*, Brussels 2000, cultural capital, exhibition parcours, Brussels

The Tunnel People, 2000

The performance *The Tunnel People* involves three performers and was realized during the exhibition *Metro>Polis*, in the Brussels underground, in the year 2000. This was Dora García’s first performance, and it was designed to become invisible (after “invisible theater” by Augusto Boal). Three characters used one of the subway lines (always the same itinerary, same day, same hour) of the Brussels underground with no identification whatsoever indicating that we might be witnessing a representation or performance. Each of the performers had distinctive character traits. A woman, performed by Barbara Manzetti, adopted certain everyday positions, movements, and actions that progressively became stranger and moved back to the everyday as soon as she felt she was attracting too much attention. A man, dressed in a suit, performed by Peter Vandembemt, adopted “professional, corporate” behavior and speech, such as walking up and down the wagons as if checking that everything and everyone was OK, finally inviting the subway users to choose between continuing towards their destination or following him as he stepped off. A third character, a man, performed by Youri Dirx, would select individual subway riders and start a conversation with that person, abruptly interrupted as one of the two had to step off the train. There was no visual documentation (just some furtive photographs taken with a mobile phone) but there was documentation in the form of text. Each day *The Tunnel People* was performed resulted in a diary entry, written by the artist together with the three performers in conversation. It still can be read here: doragarcia.org/tunnelpeople/index.html

The starting point for *The Tunnel People* was a hypertext written by the artist about the analogy of the subway with the subconscious of a city and the possibility that certain “ghosts” might live in it.

“Souls have gone underground, one floor under reality. *The Tunnel People* are the suppressed elements of the city conscious.”





Keywords

audience, collective authorship, experimentalism, filmed theater, handwritten text, invisible theater, micronarrative, printed matter, public, public space, radicality, real time, role play, surveillance systems, temporality, videoperformance

Short description

See the individual ten entries that follow (pp. 76–119) and doragarcia.org/inserts/index.html

Inserts in Real Time, 2000 to present

In the year 2000, ten short stories (micronarratives) formed the basis of ten performance protocols under the title *Inserts in Real Time*. These protocols were completed in 2003 with *Forever*. All continue to be performed to this day. This is how they were defined at the time:

I have called this project “insert” or “inserts in real time.” This name translates the intention these works have of interrupting, upsetting, questioning, or twisting real situations in real time. All inserts are played by actors (professional or non-professional, actors in the sense that they act following certain instructions) and function in several contexts, not necessarily art exhibition contexts.

These works could not properly be named “actions” since there is no action in particular or the action has such a time extension that it is virtually undifferentiated from a real situation. The name “performance” would not suit them either, because there is not a specific event at a given time that the public can come to see. This “event” happens all the time (potentially) and a clear line between actor (exposed) and public cannot be established.



Two questions are central to this project: the duration of an artwork (if a performance would last a lifetime, how could we draw the line between performance and life?) and the roles in the perception of art (could we exchange the roles of public, author, and artwork?)

The documentation of these works needs as well a slight re-adjusting of the notion of documentation. First, the event extends so much in time that there is never a “special moment” to document. Then, the action is so contained that nothing happens, or at least, nothing happens at a given moment. What to photograph, what to film, then? everything or nothing. You have to choose either for a surveillance camera or for no camera at all. It might as well be that the narration of the event is the best possible documentation (and even the final form of the project, such as this internet site).

The documentation of *Inserts in Real Time* was meant to happen only online and in the form of text, supported by some small, clandestine images taken “in secret”—or the direct opposite, long hours filmed by a surveillance camera. As said in the definition on the web page, the intention of *Inserts in Real Time* was to modify the everyday, to blur the lines between representational and non-representational, and to create an atmosphere of doubt about reality; as Philip K Dick would say, *reality is, after all, not very real*.

What follows are the ten performance protocols. These do not appear in chronological order but match the order of the web page (linked above), which reflects the order in which they were conceptually developed.

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|----------------------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| Inserts in Real Time | Dora García | Performance Work 2000–2023 | Inserts in Real Time | Dora García | Performance Work 2000–2023 |
| Short description | Durational performance in institutional space | | | | |
| Collection | FRAC Lorraine, Metz, France | | | | |
| First performed at | Booth of Juana de Aizpuru gallery at ARCO MADRID, Madrid, 2001 | | | | |
| Most recently performed at | <i>SOMEWHERE, TWO PLANETS HAVE BEEN COLLIDING FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS. (The Thinker as Poet)</i> at La Verrière, Brussels, 2017 | | | | |
| Also performed at | Galerie Jan Mot, Brussels, 2001; Sala Montcada Fundació “la Caixa”, Madrid, 2001; Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Sint-Martens-Latem, Belgium, 2002 | | | | |
| Defined by this micronarrative | “After a severe selection procedure, a woman is chosen to substitute another woman.” | | | | |

Proxy, 2001

This is how H el ene Guenin wrote about the project in 2001, when the work was bought for the collection of the FRAC Lorraine:

“Life can only be understood by winding it back.”¹

How is power exercised? What are the control mechanisms and how do they operate? To what extent are we willing to submit to rules?

The devices proposed by Dora Garc a are so many laboratories, experiments for observing behaviour and testing the moving borderline of power and “its effects of domination [attributed] to dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings.”²

Influenced by Conceptual art, notably the work of Dan Graham, Dora Garc a reflects on the parameters and conventions governing the presentation of art, on the question of time (real and fictional) and on the boundaries between representation and reality. The series of projects *Inserts in Real Time*, begun in 2001, raises the question of the definition of art and the limits between a performance and a real-life situation. The name inserts “translates the intention these works have of interrupting, upsetting, questioning or twisting real situations in real time. All inserts are played by actors (professional or non-professional, actors in the sense that they act following certain instructions) and function in several contexts, not necessarily art exhibition contexts.”³

Proxy/Coma is one such experiment, and takes place in the context of the institution, introducing the notion of surveillance. In one room, a woman, going by the generic name of *Proxy*, lives in the space, moving around among the visitors. For the duration of the exhibition during opening hours, *Proxy* is filmed: her deeds and gestures, and those of visitors present in the area, are recorded each day by a camera onto two four-hour cassettes. Each cassette is then carefully dated, catalogued under the name “Coma”, and stored in a library housed in the second room. Each minute, each day of the exhibition is thus systematically documented and filed away, thereby supplying a physical measurement of the duration of the exhibition. In an adjoining room of the same size, a video projector plays a cassette picked off the shelves at random, thereby producing a staggering, a disturbance of the time cycle. Past, present and future become entwined, opening up “an infinite series of times, in a growing, dizzying net of divergent, convergent and parallel times.”⁴

Dora Garc a sees the exhibition as an experimental protocol: namely a unit of time within which visitors and works meet. The artist brings these parameters together and transforms the place where the works are shown into a place where the work suddenly appears. The video recordings document this time spent together. However, this definition is self-subversive for Dora Garc a deliberately throws her viewers, who lose their bearings in time, being placed in a present that splits into two (the visitor’s own present, that of the performance), and the random and deferred present of the video being played back. She also instils in them doubt as to their involvement in the exhibition, making the public both unwitting actors in a performance and spectators of an event that has already taken place according to set parameters. In thwarting and toying like this with the public’s expectations, she forces people to question the very concept of the exhibition and their own role in it. By introducing the permanent control dimension into the rules of the game and suggesting the existence of this surveillance, she brings *Proxy* and with it the visitor to address the question of the limits to what can be accepted, the limits to their submission both to the rules laid down by the artist and to the institution.⁵

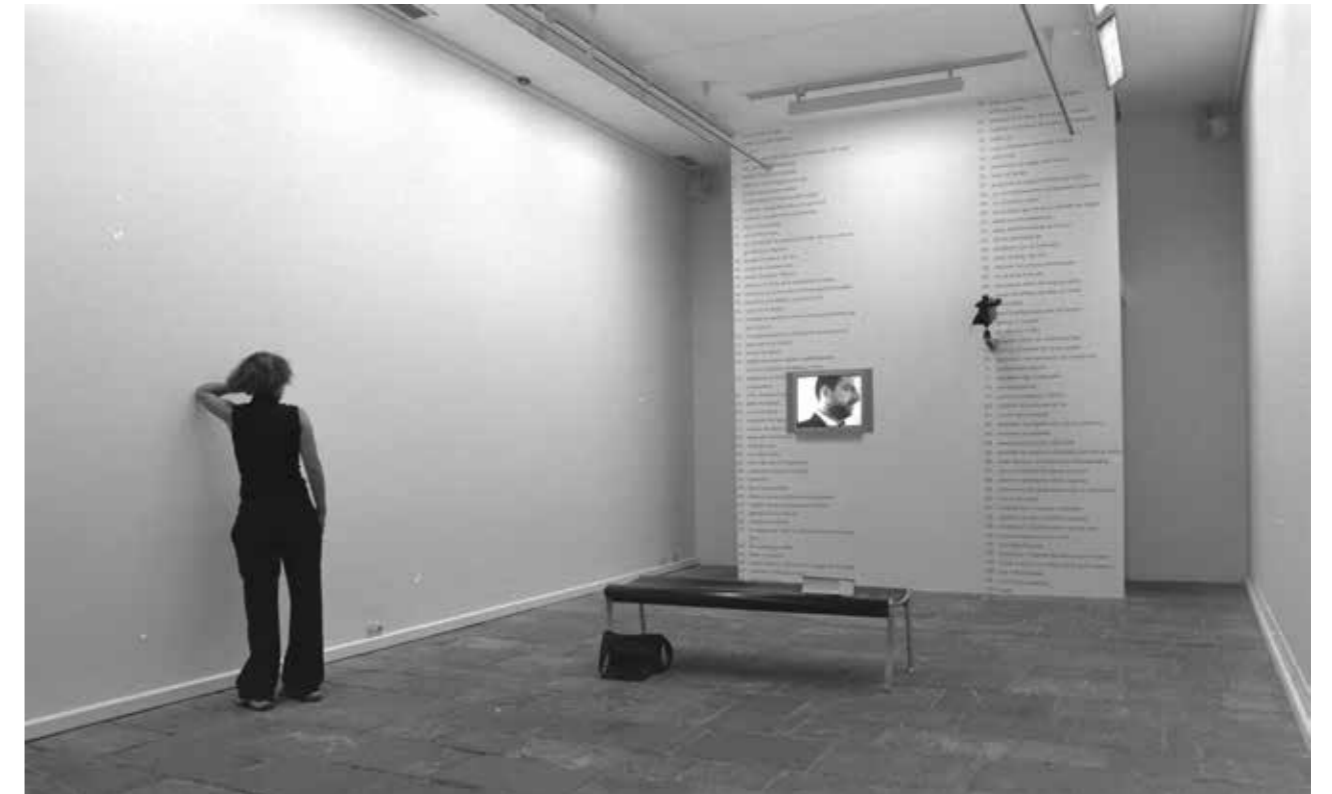
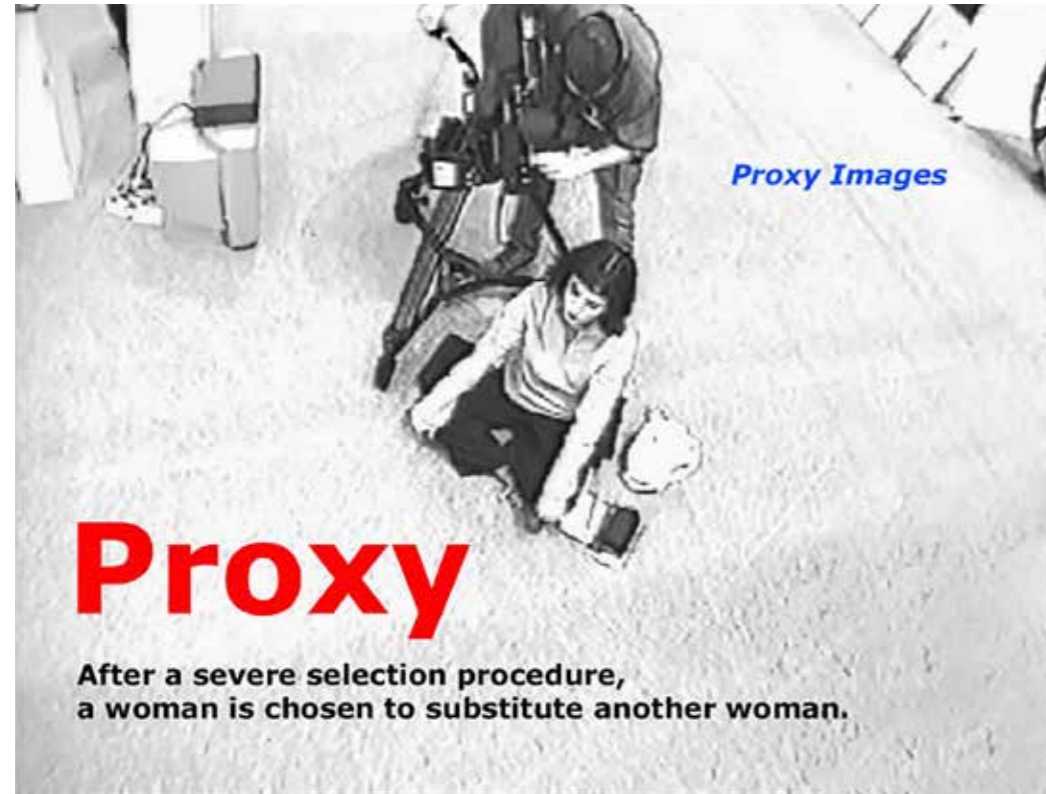
¹ Dora Garc a, *Le futur doit  tre dangereux, 1991–2005*, Musac, Museo de Arte Contempor neo de Castilla y Le n/FRAC Bourgogne, Dijon, France, 2005.

² Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 35.

³ See doragarcia.net/inserts/intro.html

⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, “The Garden of Forking Paths,” in *Labyrinths* (London: Penguin, 1974), 53.

⁵ H el ene Guenin, “Proxy/Coma,” collection.fraclorraine.org/collection/print/268?lang=en





| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Short description | Durational/invisible performance in public space/performance in institutional space |
| First performed at | House of Games, Festival a/d Werf, Utrecht, Netherlands, 2002 |
| Most recently performed at | <i>Dora García, Festival de Performance y Vídeo</i> , Espacio Uno, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2005 |
| Defined by this micronarrative | “Two people are permanently connected through an electronic device.” Based on this micronarrative, the performance can take variable durations (one day, two weeks, months) and positions (two floors of the same building, two different parts of the city, two different cities as close or as far apart as wished). |

The Glass Wall, 2001

Two people are connected to each other through an electronic device (a telephone, or a radio) that allows them to hear each other's voices but not see each other. The behavior of the one is determined by the other, and vice versa. Each one commands the other with a series of orders or commands that must not be refused but may be negotiated.

As the performers cannot see each other, they do not know the exact effect their command may have: for instance, if one says “jump” this might not have much effect if the other performer is in the street, but can be very disturbing if they are, for instance, in a silent room with people, such as a lecture situation. A similar awkwardness can result from commands such as “scream,” “smoke,” or “laugh.” Cruel commands are better avoided, as the other performer can exert revenge in the next command—which means, there is a permanent negotiation between the two performers, trying to push each other's limits while at the same time not wanting to expose the other too much, or push her/him into too difficult situations. The performance can virtually last forever, as the performers negotiate food as well as sleep and when to recharge the electronic device. All of this has had unforeseen effects. For instance, months after the performance was concluded, each of the performers kept the feeling that their dreams, their food, and when going to the bathroom had in fact been commanded by the other performer.





Short description

Performance in institutional space

Performed at

In public and private spaces on different occasions, 2003–2008

Defined by this micronarrative

“A person writes in a book. She writes down absolutely everything that happens while she is writing it, from the minute sounds of the clock to her own, confusing, stream of thoughts. Obviously, this maniacal recording of everything hinders her own actions and reactions, her own physical needs, her relation to others. Then she decides to stop writing.”

The Notebook, 2001

The Notebook is an important performance because it prefigures *Instant Narrative*, *Prayers*, *Artificial Respiration*, and *Imposed Words* (see pages 142, 164, 236, and 236). *The Notebook* as performance is perfectly described in the micronarrative above. Often, the performance is presented within a very simple installation consisting of a table, a chair, and a number of blank notebooks, inviting members of the public to freely choose one of them and to take turns sitting at the table and writing in the chosen notebook, in one single session with no pauses, however long it lasts. All the written notebooks are left on the table or next to the table for people to read.





Short description

Performance in institutional space, permanent installation

Performed at

FRAC Lorraine, Metz, France

Forever, 2004

Forever exists by virtue of the convention that ties the artist to FRAC Lorraine in Metz, France. This is how the work is described:

Forever is a permanent work made possible by an agreement between the artist Dora García and the FRAC Lorraine. *Forever* is mainly about two issues:

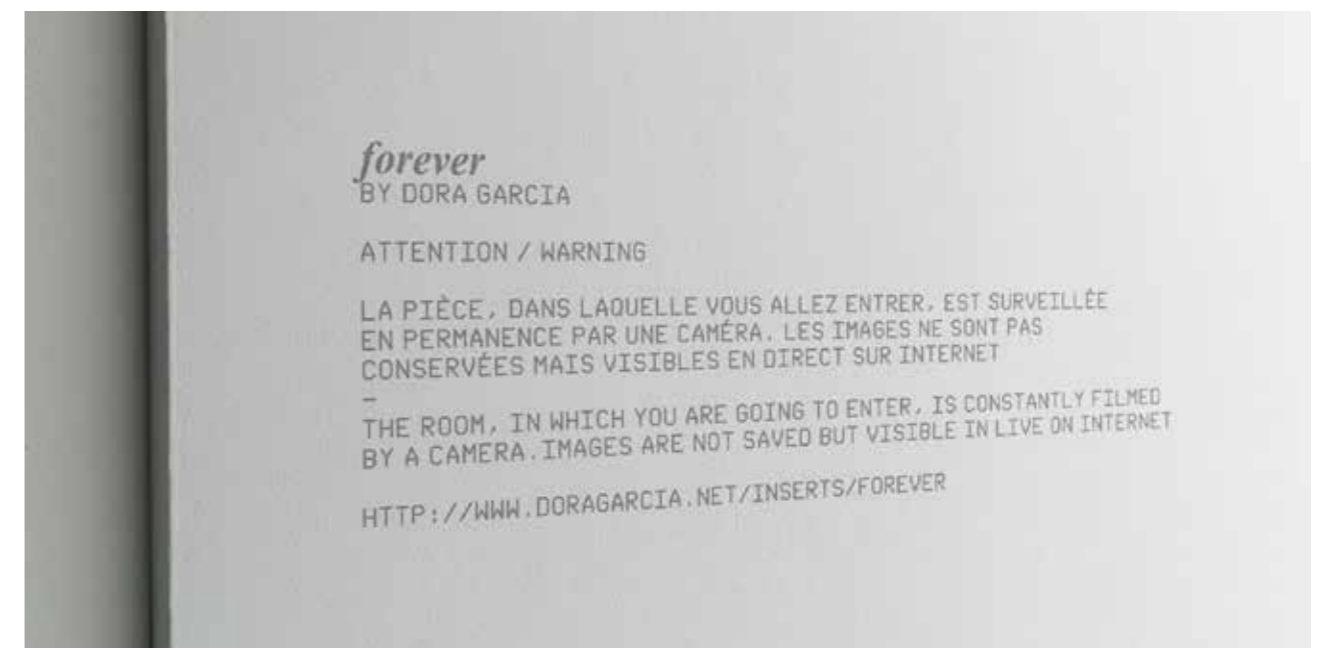
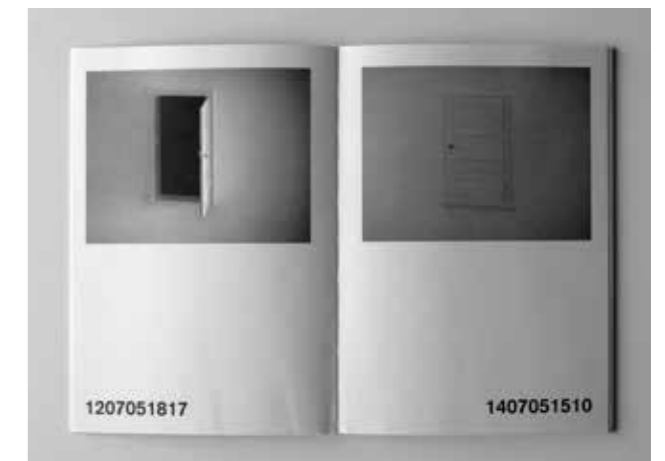
One, what does it mean forever for an artist, for an institution, and for an artwork? *Forever* is a webcam installed in one of the exhibition rooms of the FRAC Lorraine, potentially allowing the artist to observe continuously, and during a period of time still to be determined (forever) the interior of the FRAC Lorraine.

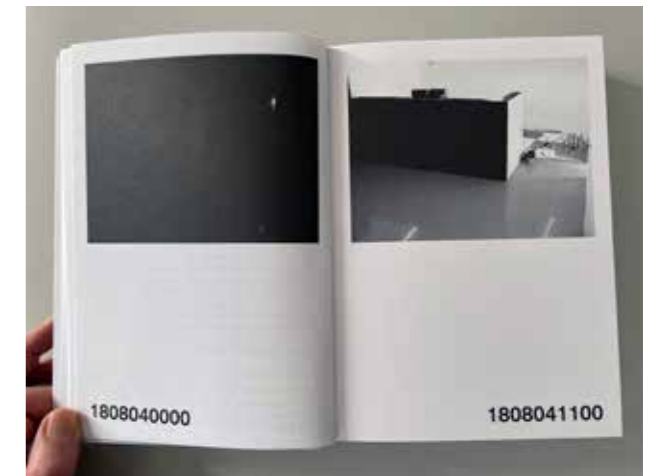
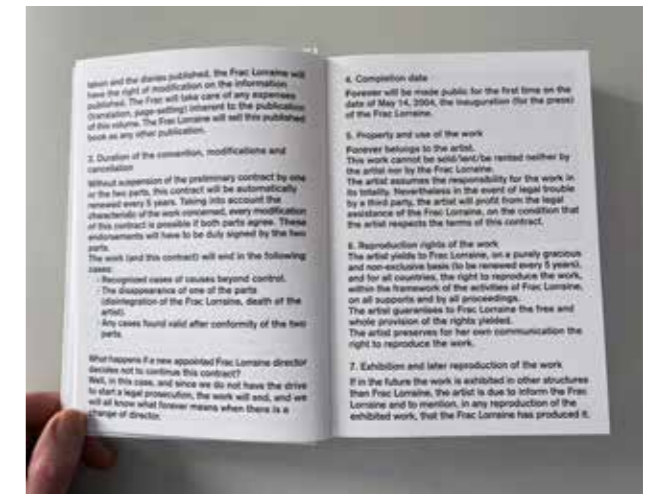
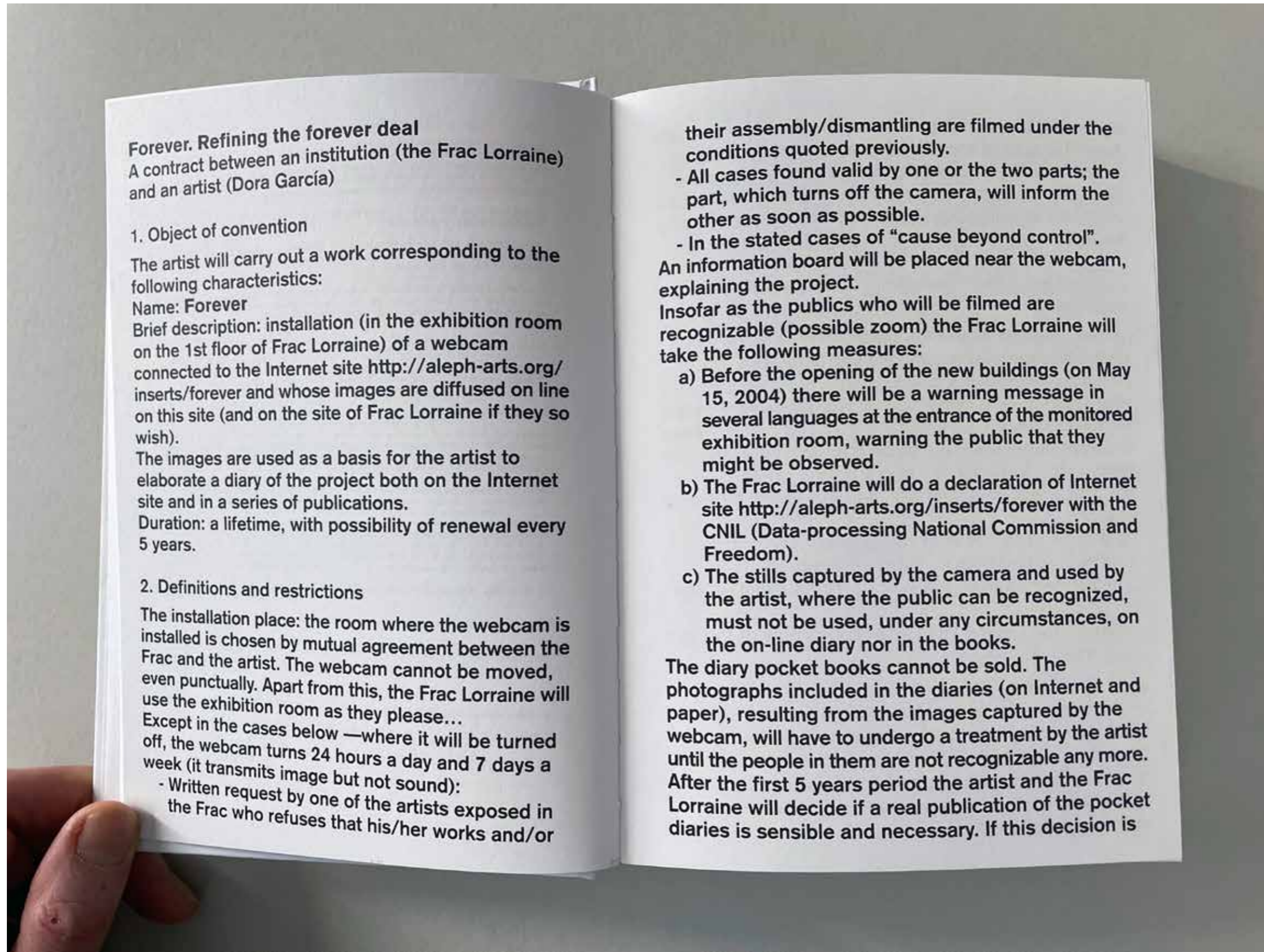
Two, could we invert the conventional story-line artist>artwork>institution>public, to make it into public>institution>artwork>artist?

In *Forever*, it is the institution and the narratives it generates (personal, institutional, public) what becomes the subject matter of the artist's work. These narratives are presented to the public by means of an on-line diary (forever read me) and a series of unique books available at the FRAC Lorraine library.¹

The books that constitute one form of how this work has been documented were produced as *cahiers* over the course of eight years (2004–12) and finally bound together in one limited-edition publication. The volume also contains the contract signed in 2004 between the artist and the institution as well as different photographs taken by the artist through the webcam. Each of these includes the date and time of the picture.

¹ Quoted from doragarcia.org/inserts/forever





| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Short description | Collective performance, potentially everywhere |
| Performed for the first time at | dedonderdagen #4, festival, De Singel, Antwerp, 2004 |
| Also performed at | <i>Narrative Show</i> , Eastside Projects, Birmingham, UK, 2011 |
| Defined by this micronarrative | “A man/woman recites all the stories of the world in a loud voice. By the time she is done, all the stories, all men and women, all time and all places will have passed through her lips.” |
| Evolved to | <i>All the Stories Weblog</i> , 2004 doragarcia.org/allthestories <i>Twenty-three Million Stories</i> , 2018 twentythreemillionstories.org |

All the Stories, 2001

All the Stories is a collection attempting to collect all the stories of the world condensed in four to five lines. The stories are found, not created. The collection can be presented as 1) a website doragarcia.org/allthestories, or 2) a performance (one person reading a printout of the stories collected on the website), or, 3) a publication, which in turn can become a performance tool.

What started as a personal collection in 2002 later evolved into a blog (2004), which allowed the visitors of the site to contribute their own narratives that were then edited by the artist and incorporated into the collection (with the name of the author if they so wished) at doragarcia.org/allthestories. The blog is defined as follows: “*All the Stories Weblog* is born as a new format for the collection *All the Stories*, online since 2001. This weblog wants to add a clear time structure to the original collection (the rhythm of the story writing) and to give to the readers of *All the Stories* the possibility to be as well its writers and commentators.”¹

In 2013, *All the Stories Weblog* evolved into *Twenty-Three Million Stories*, which is defined as follows:

Artist Dora García was commissioned to work with creative technologist Henry Cooke to develop this project for the London Bookshop Map iPhone app. The stories that users create by pressing a button in the app become part of Dora García, *Twenty-three million, five hundred and eighty-six thousand, four hundred and ninety stories* (2013–ongoing) and are posted automatically to this tumblog twentythreemillionstories.tumblr.com.²

¹ Quoted from doragarcia.org/allthestories

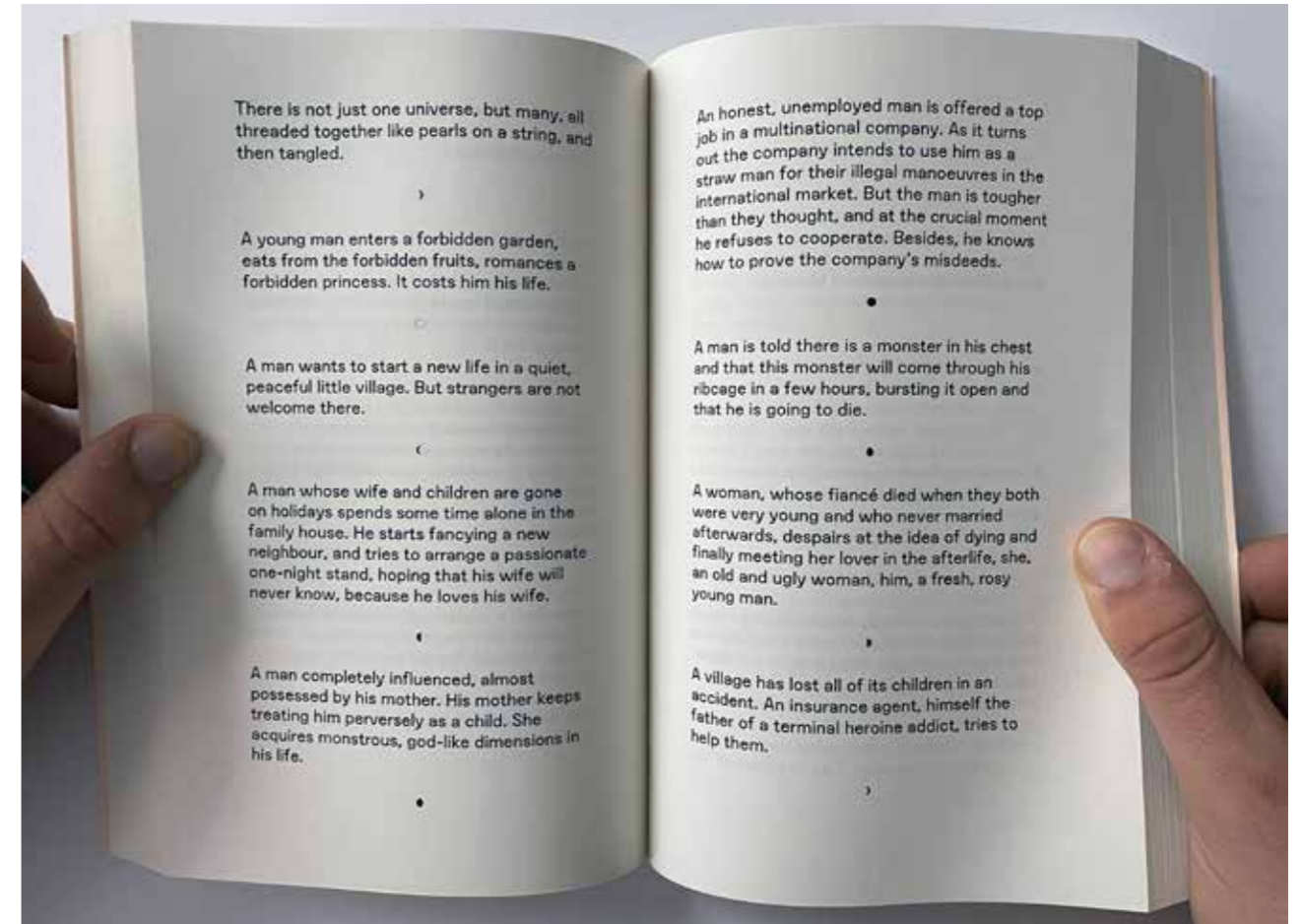
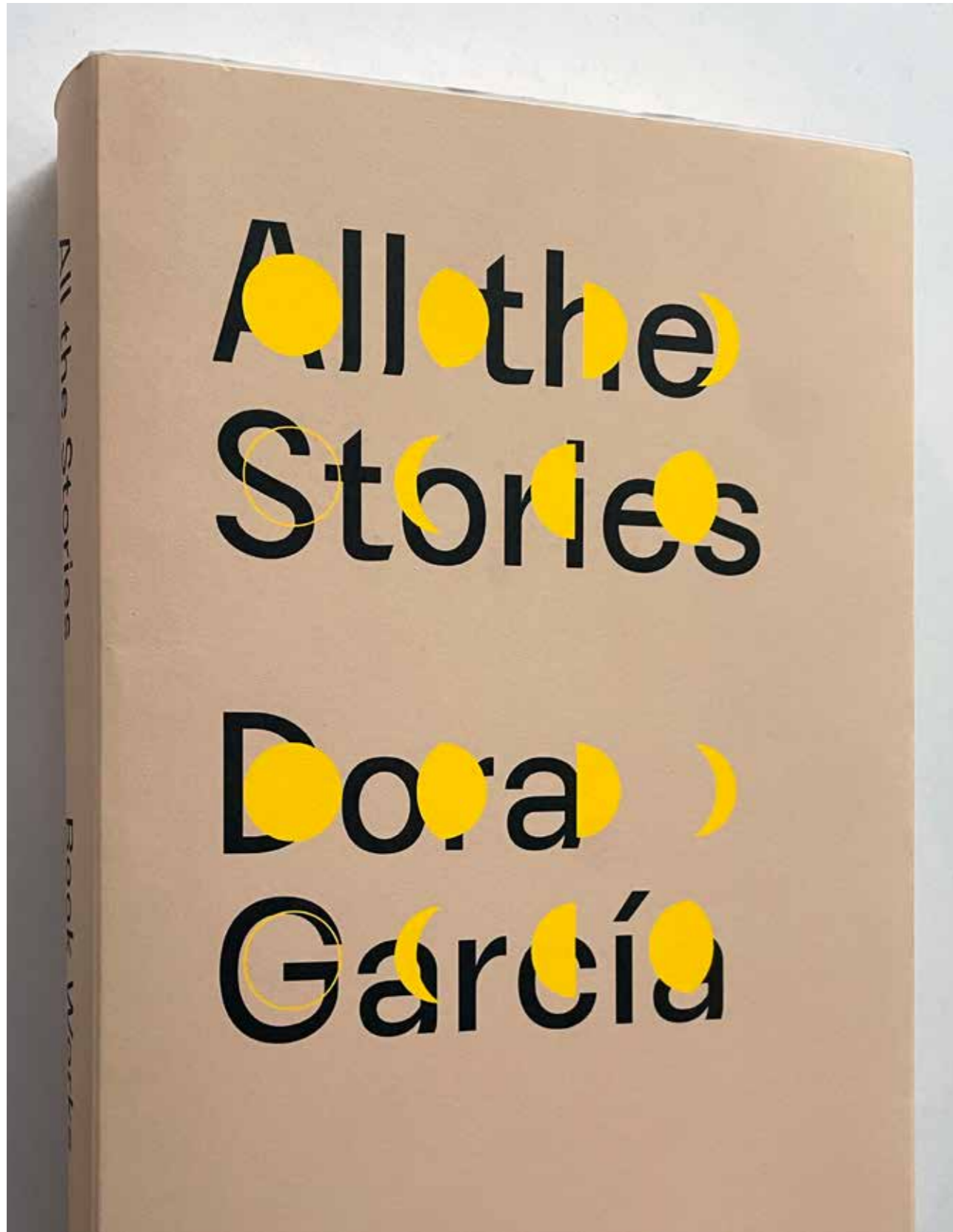
² twentythreemillionstories.tumblr.com/about

A potential 23,586,490 stories can be generated by the program/bot, which uses and randomly combines sentences from the original *All the Stories* project. Since 2018, *Twenty-Three Million Stories* has a webpage and generative system independent from the London Bookshop Map, here: twentythreemillionstories.org

Every time this page is visited, a new story is generated. As we write this, the number of stories generated are:

#143,982 — Actors try to leave the stage where they have successfully performed a theatre piece. When shameful stories about his daughter surface, rather than determine whether the stories are true, he bans her from his house.

The first 2,512 stories were published as a book (*All the Stories*, published by Book Works and Eastside Projects, 2011).





Short description

Performance in institutional space

Performed for the first time at

House of Games, Festival a/d Werf, Utrecht, Netherlands, 2001
(in collaboration with David Hernandez)

Also performed at

Dora García, Festival de Performance y Vídeo, Espacio Uno, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2005

Defined by this micronarrative

“A crowd. Some among them start to perform certain actions, apparently at random. The meaning of these random actions is unclear to the rest of the crowd, but one thing they do know: if they belong together, they do not belong with us.”

The Crowd, 2001

This performance functions as a “parasite,” that is, it parasites the public that came to see something else. In the context of a festival or a performance program, the public who has come to see another show or who just saw another show, is informed that another performance just entitled *The Crowd* will take place in a certain space, a large room. The public enters this room and waits. At a certain moment, they expect something to happen, as the room is full and no one else is entering. Then some “undercover” performers who have also entered the room while pretending to be public, begin performing certain actions (although it is always possible that the public performs similar actions as well). These actions include dropping something, looking for something in their bag, laughing, or photographing/looking at pictures/showing pictures of other people in the room. When these actions reach a certain degree of strangeness, the public separates from the performers, which creates a space between them and what they think is the performance. But after a while this impression disappears as there is no follow up. After twenty minutes (even though there was no sign for it to be time to leave the room, it always happened after twenty minutes) the public begins to exit the room, tired of waiting. However, some people at this point have realized that the performers are among the public and typically linger around until they can identify them. The performers, with clear instructions never to reveal their performer condition nor abandon the room before the last person from the public does, wait as well. The performance ends only with the moment when the last person from the public has left the space. Inevitably, some performances of *The Crowd* ended up lasting a very long time, with long, tense moments of silence.





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| Short description | Durational performance in private, public, and institutional space |
| First performed | Brussels, 2002 |
| Also performed at | <i>She Has Many Names</i> , M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023 |
| Defined by this micronarrative | “A messenger must deliver a message of vital importance. But first she must find the one person able to understand the message.” |

The Messenger, 2002

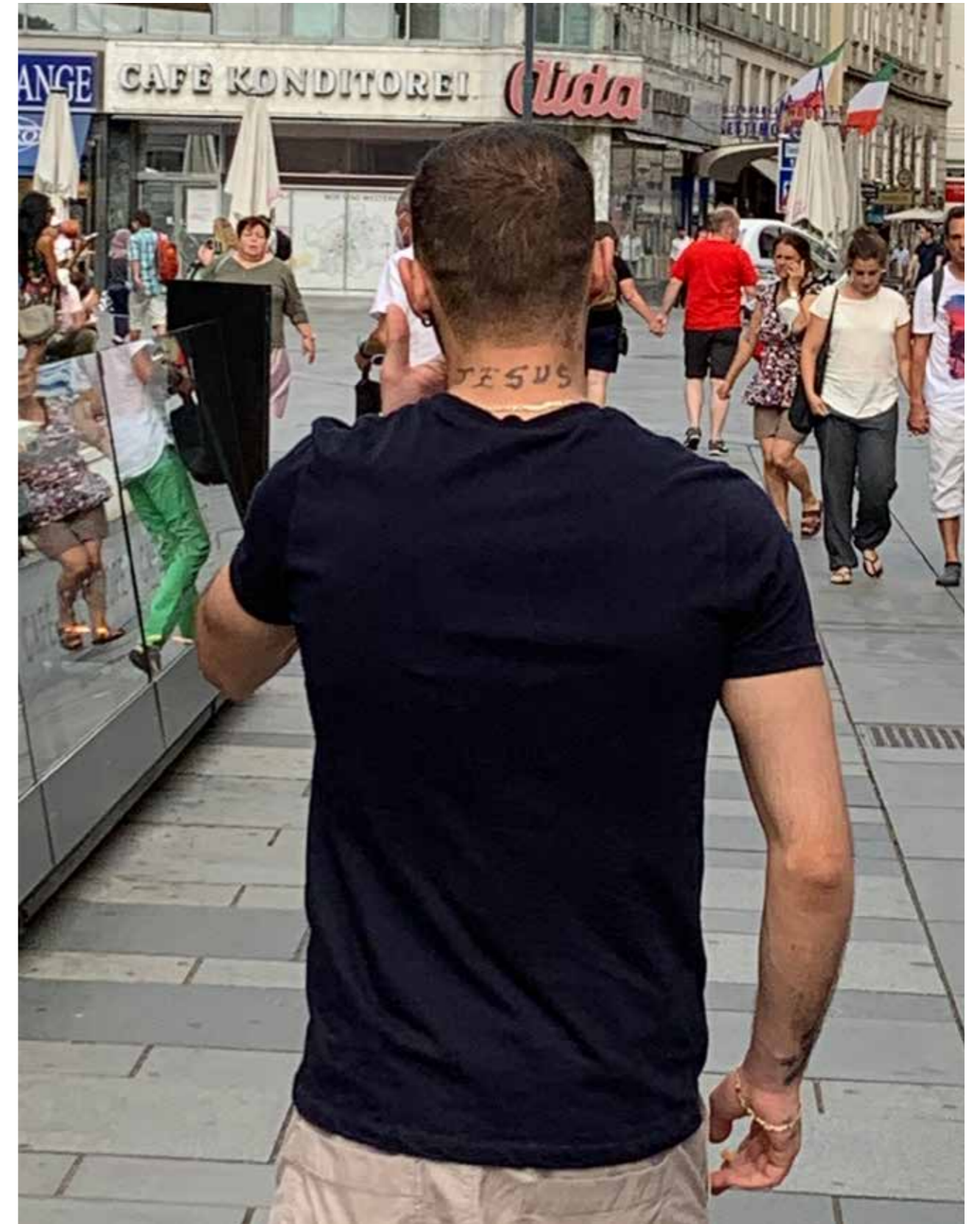
The Messenger revolves around a performer who learns by heart a message that she does not understand, in a language she cannot identify—a message delivered to her in audio. The performance will last until she has found someone who can tell her what she is saying.

The performance *The Messenger* exists in two formats:

1 — As a public space/private space format it can potentially last a lifetime. The performer integrates the task of searching for the meaning of the message into her everyday life. Every time she sees a possibility to discover the meaning of the message, she will follow that thread as intensely as possible given her own circumstances of life and work. The language of the message is chosen by the artist (never revealed to the performer), but there is a strong chance the performer can find a community speaking that language in the same city where the performance takes place.

2 — The other format is a “museum format” (institutional space) in which a performer, with a printed copy of the message, tries to find someone from among the visitors of a museum or art space who will understand the message or who at least has some leads towards the language and the meaning of the message. The duration of the performance in this format is limited to certain times agreed between the art institution and the performer. It also includes one additional condition: even if the language of the message is spoken by several million people, there is little chance to find one of them in the art institution—even though this chance of course exists—given the eurocentrism and the class component of the regular public of an art institution.





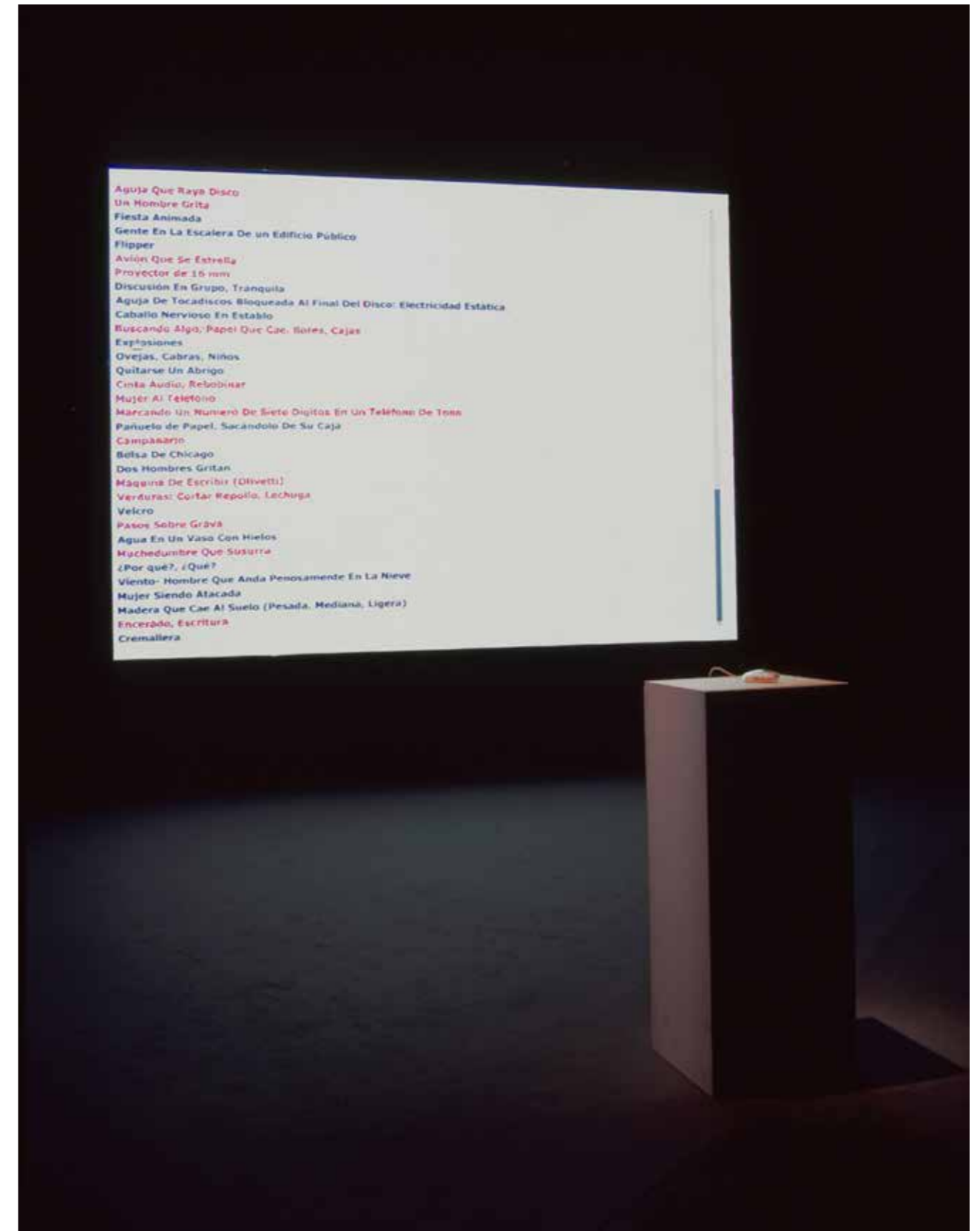
| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Short description | Collective performance. <i>The Possible</i> is a sound bank, that allows the visitor—whether on the web or in a museum—to construct an audio landscape by combining ad infinitum the sound entries of this sound bank |
| Collection | MUSAC, León, Spain |
| First performed | Online, since 2003 |
| Also performed at | <i>Vibraciones</i> , solo exhibition at MUSAC, León, 2005 |
| Defined by this micronarrative | “The Possible is an endless list of all possible things, each of them represented by the sound it produces. You can choose the items you prefer and combine them, thus creating an infinite number of different situations, or you can enrich your own life with (the looped sound of) one or several of the listed incidents: an earthquake, a geisha singing, barefoot steps and heavy breathing in the room next to you” |
| Link | doragarcia.org/inserts/thepossible |

The Possible, 2003

The work is described as follows when presented as installation:

The Possible is a sound installation that comprises a computer program with which the public is intended to interact. It includes different sounds that Dora García has compiled from the Internet, emitted exactly as they were encountered by the artist. The public uses a mouse to select sounds from a long list. These are then reproduced and gradually overlap, until the viewer decides to switch them off or progressively activate others. The resulting sound syntax of this action gives the public the chance to compose their own narrative using the sounds. The interaction between the work and the public, which accentuates the most active aspect of the aesthetic experience (in this case through sound, emphasised by a powerful acoustic installation in a dark space), recurs in the work of Dora García. The work also recovers the spirit of musical experimentation of the mid-twentieth century when chance predominated the constructive experience of the work, which took shape not as a result, but rather as an open process that appears infinite because of the options of action to which the title refers.¹

¹ See musac.es/#coleccion/obra/lo-possible



Short description

Installation, archival performance in institutional space. *Coma* is the recording and archiving of the performance *Proxy*, see page 76

Collection

FRAC Lorraine, Metz, France

First performed at

1101001000infinito, Sala Montcada Fundació “la Caixa,” Barcelona, Spain, 2001

Also performed at

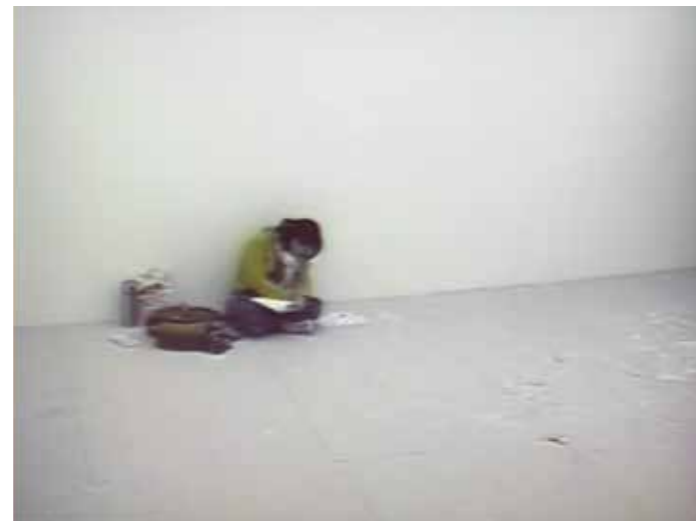
SOMEWHERE, TWO PLANETS HAVE BEEN COLLIDING FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS. (The Thinker as Poet), solo exhibition at La Verrière, Brussels, 2017

Defined by this micronarrative

“A woman lives in one of two adjacent rooms. A camera films uninterruptedly the space she inhabits. The woman feels flattered, thinking that this permanent recording is proof of the value of her existence. But panic seizes her when she realises that the amount of recorded time is inversely proportional to the time she has left to live.”

Coma, 2001





| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Short description | Site-specific performance in institutional space |
| Collection | MACBA, Barcelona, Spain |
| First performed | MACBA, 2003, ongoing |
| Link | doragarcia.org/thekingdom |

The Kingdom, 2003

Quoting from the web page of MACBA:

In 2003, Dora García proposed a suggestive artistic intervention to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona. Juxtaposing the MACBA's physical and symbolic space, the artist ingeniously transformed its monumentality, turning it into a kingdom-church in which one could cultivate and profess a different vision of Art. García used the metaphor and irony of predicting and organizing the future to de-institutionalize and to critique the way museums appropriate history to organize the present. The project included the construction of a website and the publication of a novel that includes a detailed chronicle of the museistic construction of the Kingdom. A "futurist installment," it also includes notes by Chus Martínez, Emiliano Battista, Maureen Mooren, and Daniel van der Velden.¹

Quoting from the introduction on MACBA's website:

The Kingdom by Dora García is an extended performance that was held at MACBA from 20 February to 30 March 2003. Conceived as an unconventional performance, it lasted a month and a half and was presented to the public as a novel available in the Atrium of the Museum: a novel containing a performance agenda and a prophecy [her term] of the events due to take place in the Museum for the duration of the performance.²

And from the text introducing the novel *The Kingdom*:

The Kingdom thinks of the Museum as a complex, a very complex network of relationships. The complexity of the Museum is such that it has to be governed by a strict set of rules. This set of rules allows the Museum to foresee the future.

A system cannot survive without projecting itself into the future. This anticipation of the future is calculated by the detailed observance of a set of rules (learned from experience, from the past) and allows the system to adapt itself on time to the circumstances to come.

The future is no more than a group of possibilities, a group of possibilities designated by the set of rules. The system has to choose one of them, officially call it "the future", and adapt to it.

¹ Quoted from macba.cat/en/learn-explore/publications/reino-kingdom

² Quoted from macba.cat/en/art-artists/artists/garcia-dora/reino

So we have the possibility of choosing the future. Whether this is called clairvoyance or prevision is not so relevant. What really matters for the Kingdom is how much this choice of the future affects the events to come. Did we really foresee what was going to happen or did it happen because we foresaw it?

Once the future is chosen, we can force the future to happen. This presents a curious paradox between past, present and future. We choose the future now (present: we make a prophecy) according to a series of rules we use because they have proved efficient in the past (the agenda), and we wait for the future to adapt to our choice, or were we the ones who had to adapt to the future?

Whatever the case may be, the future happens and becomes past: prophecy and agenda turn into a novel.

The Kingdom chooses a future for the Museum based on a wide amount of information collected from the past and from the daily agenda of the Museum. The Kingdom writes a story (The Future) which precedes the events it describes; it is a prophecy.

This story is a plot, a construction of characters who play out the plot, and a description of the events (live performances) that are going to happen in the Museum.

The Kingdom players, the performers of the live performances, make sure that all these events happen according to the prophecy (the novel).

As time passes, the novel is confronted with the Contingent, the Unforeseen, and with reality as we know it. Accidents happen, and things turn out differently than expected.

The Kingdom will adapt quickly to these and continue its course. Or could it be that those accidents had been foreseen as well?

As time passes, The Kingdom's future, present and past mix together in the dream of memory. The novel is concluded.³

And, as we read on the cover of the novel *The Kingdom*:

Imagine a museum taken over by another entity. Imagine a conspiracy of unknown dimensions. Imagine yourself as a Kingdom player. Nothing is true. The strange, hand-painted signs, the billboards, the advertisements in style and art magazines. Classify your life events. Is The Kingdom the MACBA, Barcelona? *The Kingdom*, by Dora García, with many players ... 2003⁴

³ Quoted from macba.cat/thekingdom/intro/intro.html

⁴ Quoted from Dora García, *The Kingdom* (Barcelona: MACBA, 2003).



EL REGNE
PER DORA GARCÍA

*Imagina un museu controlat per una entitat desociada
Imagina una conspiració de dimensions insospitades
Imagina que eres un jugador del Reino.*

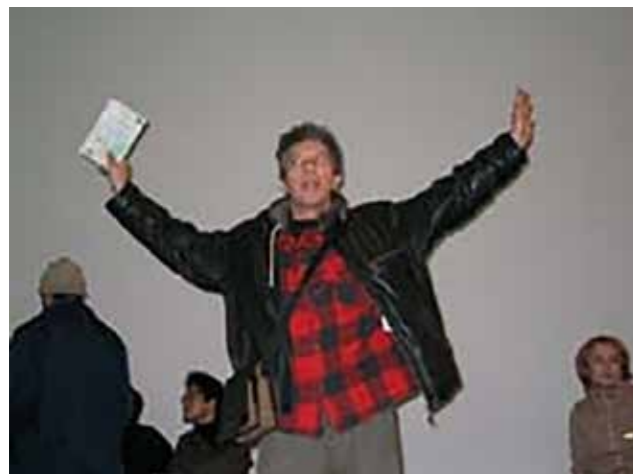
EL REINO
POR DORA GARCÍA

*Imagine a museum taken over by another entity.
Imagine a conspiracy of unknown dimensions.
Imagine yourself as a Kingdom player.*

THE KINGDOM
BY DORA GARCÍA

MACBA, BARCELONA, 2003

www.macba.es/elregne
www.macba.es/elreino
www.macba.es/thekingdom



| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Keywords | public space, temporality |
| Short description | Durational performance in institutional space and public space |
| First performed | Brussels, 2000 |
| Most recently performed at | <i>She Has Many Names</i> , solo exhibition at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023 |
| Also performed at | <i>In the beginning was the deed!</i> , exhibition curated by Post Brothers and Katarzyna Rozniak, Arsenal Gallery in Białystok, Poland, 2021 |

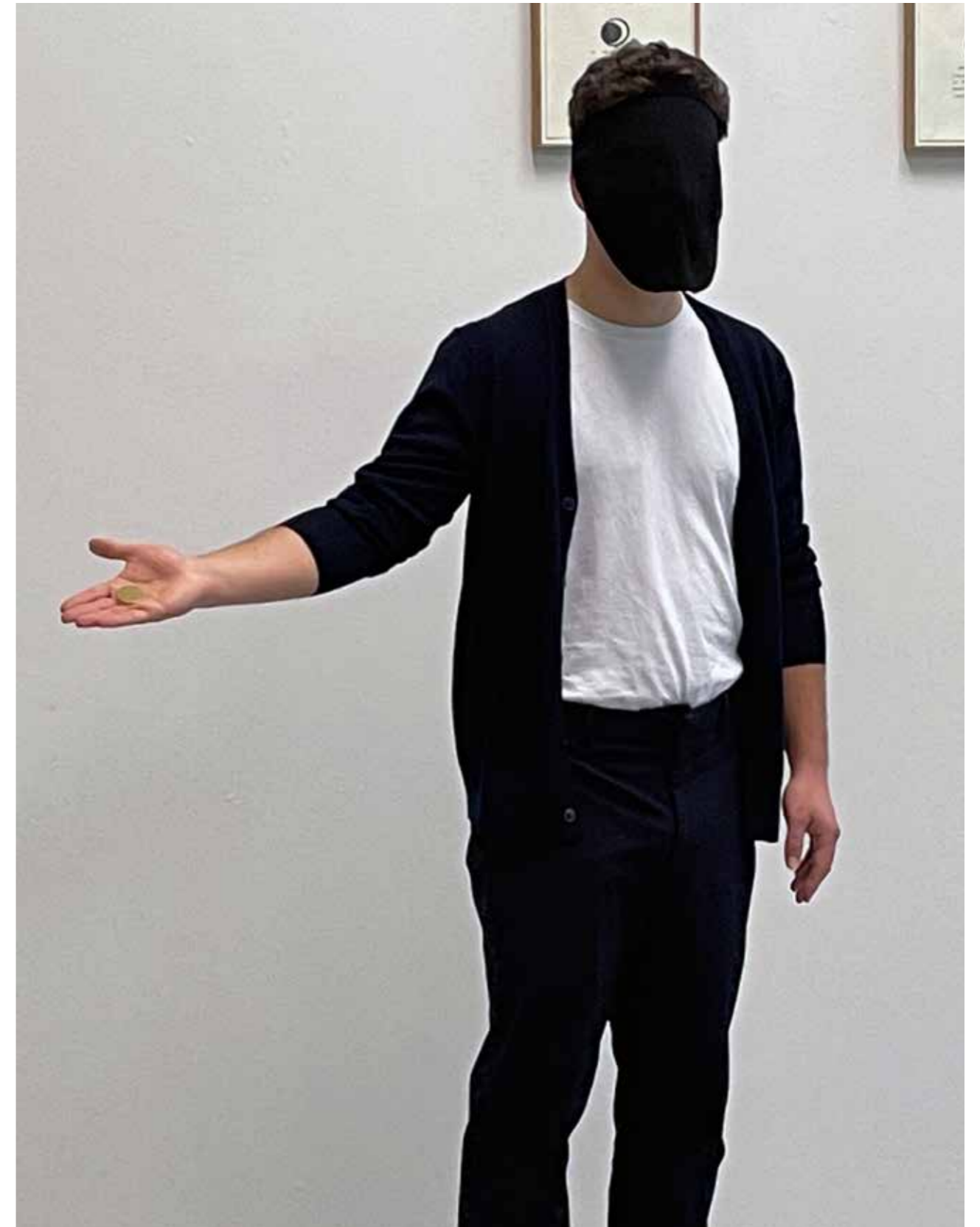
The Black Veil, 2000

This performance was created after the short story *The Minister's Black Veil* (1836) by Nathaniel Hawthorne, specifically this passage:

“Elizabeth, I will,” said he, “so far as my vow may suffer me. Know, then, this veil is a type and a symbol, and I am bound to wear it ever, both in light and darkness, in solitude and before the gaze of multitudes, and as with strangers, so with my familiar friends. No mortal eye will see it withdrawn. This dismal shade must separate me from the world: even you, Elizabeth, can never come behind it!”

The performers cover their faces with a black veil (and while they are performing other performances). Sometimes in public space, sometimes as an added layer to other performances. Often, the dates of the performance are coincident with tragic dates in history, underlining the mourning character of the performance.

1 Nathaniel Hawthorne: *The Minister's Black Veil* (1836) as found in pdcrondas.webs.ull.es/fundamentos/HawthorneTheMinistersBlackVeil.pdf





| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Keywords | audience, public, public space, temporality |
| Short description | Site-specific interruption of the information flow of a museum |
| Performed just once at | <i>Lost Past</i> , exhibition at In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres, Belgium, 2002 |

One Minute Silence, 2002

The In Flanders Fields Museum is a museum dedicated to the memorialization of the massacres that occurred in Ypres, Belgium during World War I when about 250,000 civilians and 76,000 soldiers from the Commonwealth were killed. The museum was and is an interactive museum full of films, sounds, music, voices, recreating the different scenarios of the battle of Ypres. *One Minute Silence* was the interruption of all this information for one minute, every day at 12 pm. The videos froze, the many sounds were interrupted, and the lightshows went dark, for one minute, every day, after which the whole sound and light show restarted.

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Keywords | audience, collective authorship, public, public space, roleplay, temporality |
| Short description | Collective, durational, invisible performance in public space |
| Performed just once at | <i>P_O_ [processos oberts]</i> , Terrassa, Spain, 2004. The exhibition included interventions by different artists to take place across the city. |

The Human Factor, 2004

The Human Factor is a web and public space performance project, developed for P_O_, which took place in May/June/July 2004 in the city of Terrassa (Spain). A series of “agents” (performers, volunteering participants), all of them citizens of Terrassa, established during those three months a secret webmail correspondence with the author, Dora García. No one, except Dora, knew who those agents were and how many of them were active. During the month of May 2004, the agents sent to the author all kinds of information about themselves and their city. Using that information as a starting point, the author designed a group of performances in public space (happening in June/July 2004). As these unfolded they gradually revealed, both to the people following on the web and the public in the city, as well as to the various agents involved, the identities and number of the agents. But what once was top secret, is now fully disclosed, and you can read here all those secret letters between author and agents, so being able to reconstruct the very exciting story of *The Human Factor*. UNFORTUNATELY, all that correspondence is in Spanish, and either you understand Spanish, or you start now to learn it (a very worthwhile enterprise) or you can use the recommended link to translate the letters: translate.google.com.¹



¹ Quoted from doragarcia.org/elfactorhumano/english/index.html

Keywords

audience, experimentalism, public

Short description

Durational performance in institutional space

First performed at

Luz Intolerable, exhibition at Patio Herreriano, Valladolid, Spain, 2004

Also performed at

I know of a labyrinth which is a single straight line, solo exhibition at Mattatoio, Rome, 2021–22, performed by Ilaria Genovesio

Most recently performed at

She Has Many Names, solo exhibition at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023

The Sphinx, 2004

In the performance *The Sphinx* a woman selects a visitor (seemingly ignoring all the others) and proposes a game that centers on the idea of answering a set of questions with either a “yes” or a “no.” If the answer is correct the next question is asked, but if the answer is incorrect the game ends. The twist is that only the sphinx knows the answers, and how and why she decides whether a given answer is correct or not remains an enigma.





| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Keywords | audience, collective authorship, public space, social practice |
| Short description | Site-specific collective durational performance in public and institutional space Based on the artist’s hypertextual “Heartbeat.” |
| Performed just once at | <i>Vibraciones</i> , solo exhibition at MUSAC, León, Spain, 2005 |
| Links | doragarcia.org/heartbeat heartbeaters.net (no longer active) |

Heartbeaters, 2005

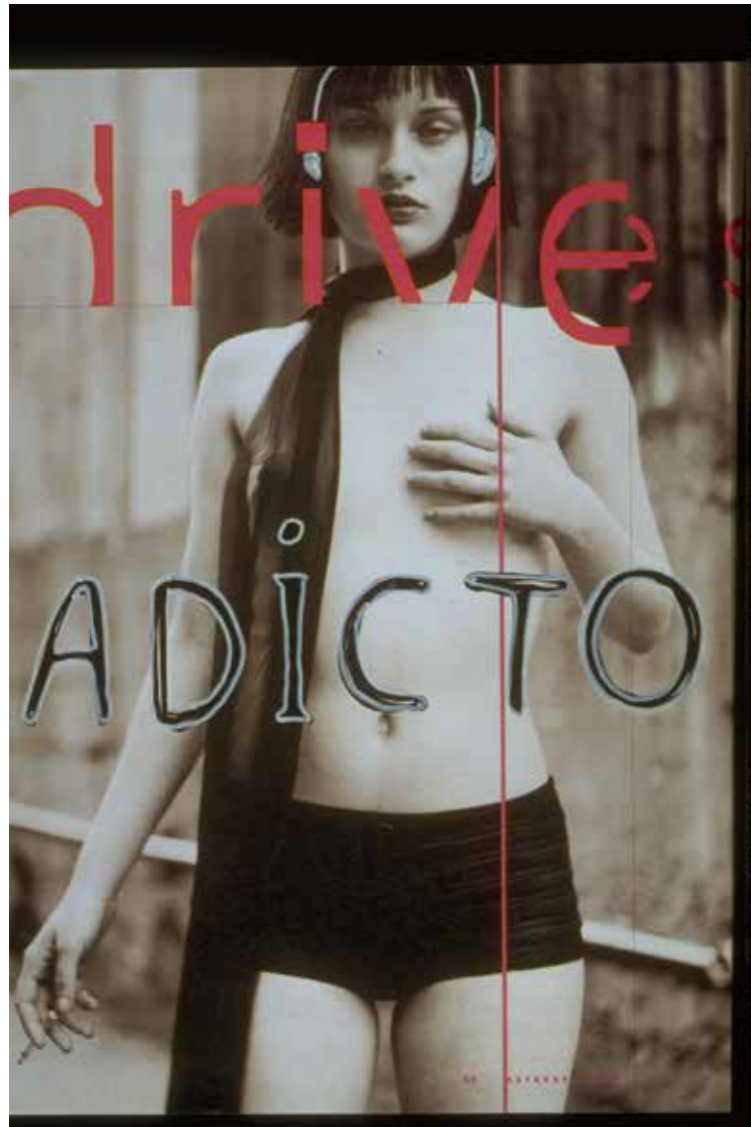
Art theorist Theo Reeves-Everson wrote about it as follows:

Intimate Percussion

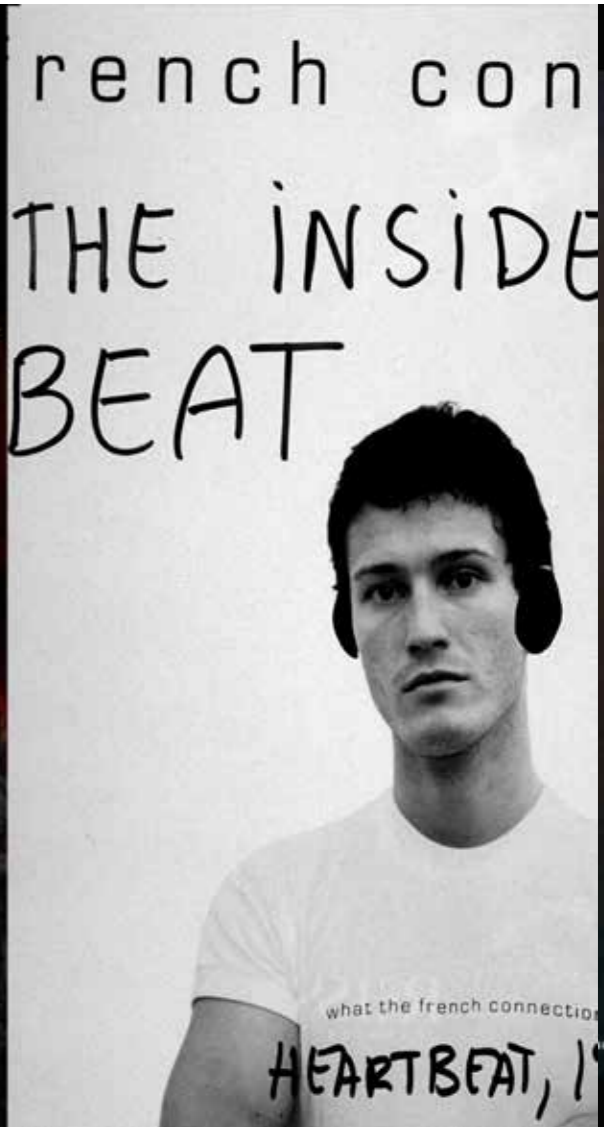
In 2005, a strange rumour spread through the Spanish city of León. Groups of young people were increasingly turning their back on conventional music in preference for the sound of their own heartbeat, which was said to have addictive properties. Personal music devices were being modified to amplify the heartbeat of the user and prolonged exposure had the capacity to induce a trance-like state. Signs of this nascent trend seemed to be materializing all over the city: graffiti and posters appeared in public places carrying slogans such as ‘intimate percussion’, special events were held at local venues, and the story seemed to be gaining traction in the local media as well, with an interview broadcast on radio León and scattered articles in the local press. When the record label ‘Musique Camus’ gathered together several bands in order to record an album of music entirely inspired by the heartbeat—later reviewed by the music critic Carlos del Riego –, it seemed that the private practice had suddenly developed into a full blown subculture, further bolstered by the website heartbeaters.net, which functioned as an online portal for the growing community. Although outwardly extreme, the rumour was lent some credibility by a number of existing media narratives. Studies into the effects of repetitive audio on the listener’s heartbeat were quoted and circulated as factoids that fed into the rumour. The practice of ‘heartbeating’ also resonated with a number of technologically alarmist voices that had previously lamented the decline of face-to-face interaction. This decline was linked to familiar narratives of a generational disconnect between a selfobsessed youth culture and an older generation that looked on in dismay. To the latter it might have been understandable for music itself to give rise to a new subculture, but the onanistic nature of a youth culture that preferred to get high on their own heartbeats seemed to symptomize a greater range of underlying social ills. For many, the revelation that the rumour was in fact a work of art by Dora García, who made the announcement on the occasion of her exhibition opening at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León (MUSAC), did not come as much of a surprise. This is because many of the participants were enlisted as collaborators some three months before García revealed the work’s fictional content.

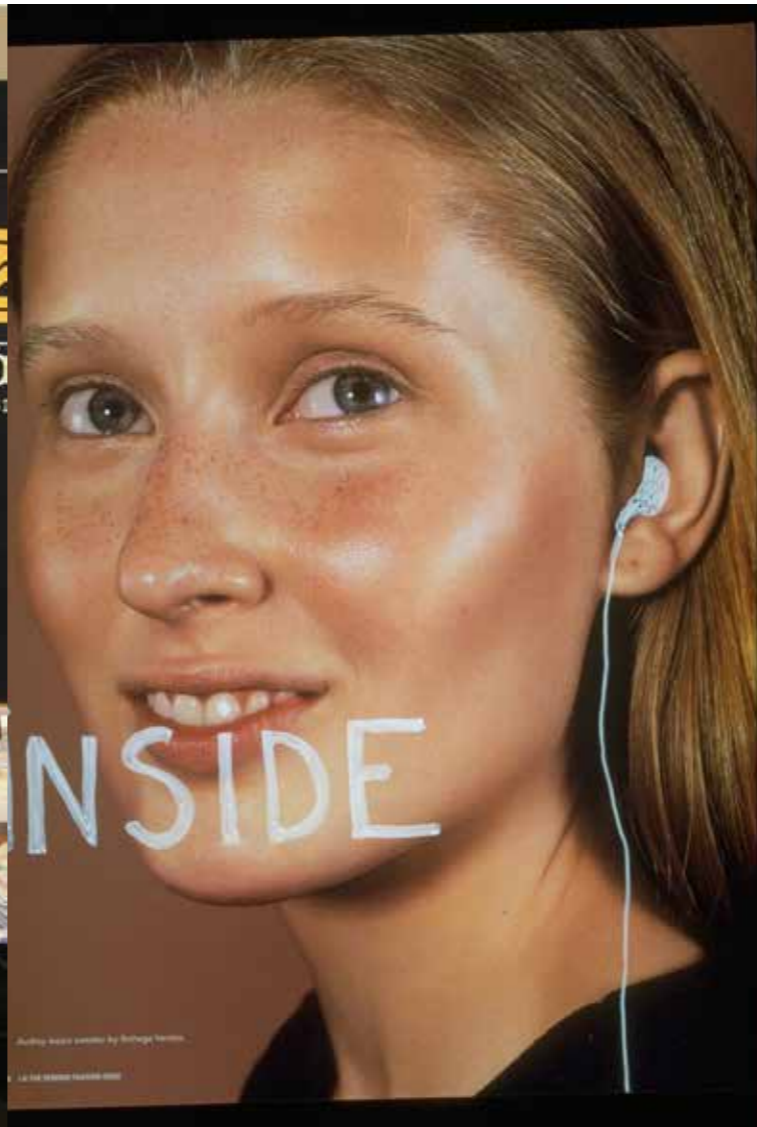
A second group of disbelievers may have had doubts after seeing García’s name on the heartbeaters.net website. There, a previous work by the artist on the same theme—*Heartbeat* (1999), first exhibited at the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo in Andalucía—was posited as an originary fiction, which precipitated the real life spread of the practice to urban centres across Spain and beyond. For a surprising number of others, the fiction had become a reality, and many of those who contributed material to the website heartbeaters.net did so of their own volition, presumably in the belief that just such a subcultural form was in fact emerging. The project’s success lay not only in its ability to play on existing social anxieties but also made use of particular circuits of distribution. García was quick to involve professionals in the fields of music, radio, and TV, who made use of both official channels of communication in the broadcast and print media and propagated the fiction by means of word-of-mouth or ‘word-of-web’. Like all rumours, the source of the heartbeater stories in León was obscure and at the beginning lacking in empirical validation. In this way, the rumour existed as an artefact of unofficial speech that once released into the wild began to mutate and have real effects. Here the proximity of *Heartbeaters* to commercially driven campaigns of a similar character is significant: both seek to insert stories into pre-existing social networks as if they had occurred spontaneously, ultimately with the aim of greater market/audience penetration. Obvious brand authorship notwithstanding, what distinguishes *Heartbeaters* from such PR practices is that the anonymous, distributed deception was ultimately reigned in and assigned to a specific author with a specific motive. The lie was in effect terminated, only in García’s case, at this very moment it assumed the status of a fiction. Here it is interesting to consider the difference between lies and fiction. While the former claim to describe reality, the latter suspends all claims to this effect, either implicitly or explicitly. The suspension of these claims frees the work of fiction from any social obligation to be truthful. Just as lies need to take the listener into account, the fictional status of an object is worked out in a dialog between an author, an artwork and its audience according to a shifting set of conventions that change overtime. *Heartbeaters* played with such conventions, suspending them at a temporal juncture that caused the project to exist at one stage as a lie and at another one as a fiction. As a term that covers both practices at the same time, here the word ‘fabulation’ could be used to describe the project as a whole. In order to consider the effects *Heartbeaters* generated it will be useful to look at the sequential nature of the piece in greater detail. For many participant-viewers the temporal makeup of *Heartbeaters* involved three stages. In the first stage, elements of the story were allotted a space within a material network of signs and relayed via circuits of distribution. Here the object of deception had the capacity to be registered as factual and bleed into other epistemological inscriptions and change their experiential qualities, for example bolstering moral panic. During this stage, the antecedent myth of a previous artwork aimed to reinforce the veracity of the piece. During the second stage, some aspect of the lie was revealed to be factually inaccurate or false. This was set in motion by an element of the artwork itself, and here it could be argued that García’s termination of the fictional content can be considered part of the overall choreography. The initial deception subsequently started to unravel and the experiential quality of the object of deception changed. The final stage would seem to have involved two different processes, which are not mutually exclusive. One allowed the viewer to critically revisit the site of the original deception, in the process reflecting on the range of truth-framing devices that made it possible for the work to be perceived as truth in the first place. The final manifestation of García’s project consisted of various didactic elements chronicling events in the life of the artwork, thereby facilitating a critical return to these very devices. In this way *Heartbeaters* created a discourse on deception, as well as deception itself. This aspect closes the work back on itself, but it also encourages a critical literacy that may be transferred to other objects, giving the unsuspecting participant a crash course in the arts of rhetoric. Nevertheless, and this is the other process involved at this stage, some residue of the original lie may still remain. Even though the lie has been unravelled, it may have slightly changed the objects of knowledge it came into contact with during the first stage.¹

¹ Theo Reeves-Everson, *Ethics of Contemporary Art: In the Shadow of Transgression* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 175–76.



ue festivales, como el de este año
do Purple; y se vio a un represen-
tante de las instituciones que han
apoyado Otros Mundos Pop afir-
mando contundentemente la in-
tención de trabajar para el regre-
so de tan recordado y púrpura
festival. Además de ese síndico,
hay que señalar que en los luga-
res que han acogido OMP se han
visto muchos tipos verdadera-
mente raros, algunos con indu-
mentarias verdaderamente cho-
cantes. Entre estos hay que des-
tacar a unos que no se quitaron
los auriculares ni un segundo, ni
cuando la música golpeaba cere-
bros de forma impía. ¿Qué ha-
cían? ¿Escucharían el fútbol o a
Juanito Valderrama? ¿Los lleva-
rían para no oír nada o para oírse
exclusivamente a sí mismos?
Enigmático.





| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Keywords | audience, public |
| Short description | Site-specific performance in institutional space |
| Performed just once at | <i>Vibraciones</i> , solo exhibition at MUSAC, León, Spain, 2005 |

Quarry Jeans, 2005

Quarry Jeans was a crossover between a guided tour and a professional street vendor act. The public was received in the exhibition by a young man with a microphone who described the exhibition and its catalog in the most laudatory terms, highly recommending some of the artworks and looking for interaction with the visitors in a similar manner as street vendors do, welcoming them, asking them about their impressions of the show, and waving them goodbye.

As we read in MUSAC's online exhibition announcement:

The performance *Quarry Jeans* (2005) has its origins in a talking man-advertisement that the artist saw atop a windowsill in the city of Mexico promoting Quarry Jeans—a jeans brand. This performance, which was done specifically for the show, is also a homage to Felix González Torres and his go-go boy. *Quarry Jeans* will be represented in the entrance of the exhibition space during the three months' duration of the exhibit. This work is a reflection on the role of the public in the communication process of artistic work and the capacity of influence that communication media exerts on them.¹



¹ Quoted from kunstaspekte.art/event/dora-garcia-2005-09?hl=en

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Keywords | audience, institutional space, reading-as-action, public, real-time narrative |
| Short description | This performance consists in the reading of the short story <i>The 60 Minute Zoom</i> (1976) by J.G. Ballard. The reader-performer selects people from the audience to play the different characters of the story |
| Performed just once at | Galerie Michel Rein, Paris, performed by Geoffrey Carey |

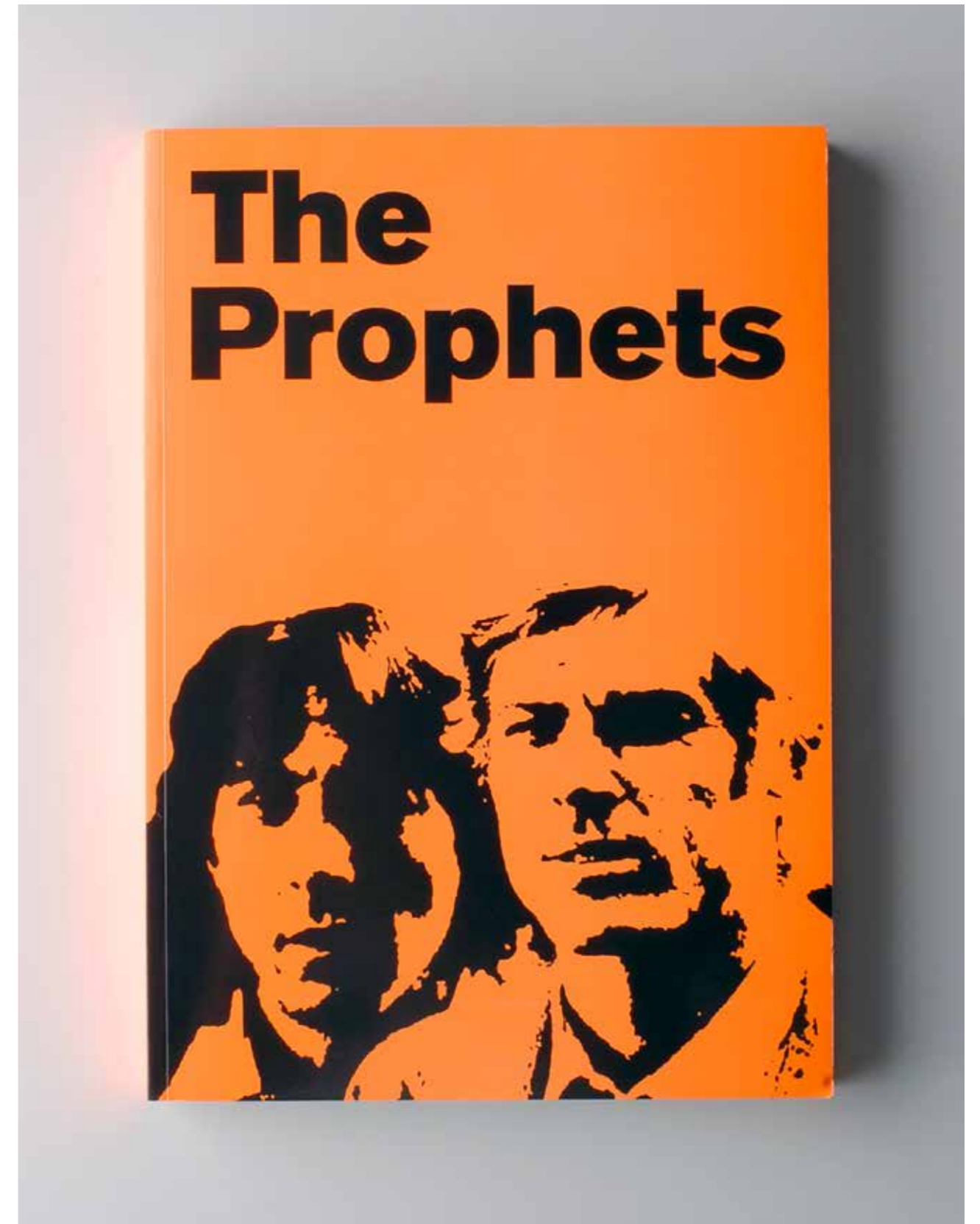
The 60 Minute Zoom, 2005

The 60 Minute Zoom by J.G. Ballard is a brilliant example of real-time narrative in fiction. In the performance developed by the artist from the original story, and performed by Geoffrey Carey, the central interest was self-awareness-as-cinema, a sort of “cinema without camera.” The reader, Carey, selected members of the audience as characters appeared in the text he was reading, to represent those characters. The members of the audience chosen as actors behaved in a way that came from the awareness of being integrated in a (real-time) narrative. The two things, real-time narrative and real-time acting, are a thrilling short-circuiting of reality and fiction and, as methods, prefigure the work *Instant Narrative* (page 142). But while in *Instant Narrative* the short-circuited pair are the performer and the audience, in this Ballard-inspired performance the short-circuit was produced by the audience-actors doing their best to perform what they were supposed to be doing/thinking in simultaneity to the reader's recital of the story. This ties back directly to the ending of *The 60 Minute Zoom* as written by Ballard, when the story's omniscient narrator also appears as a character that is being observed, in a type of short-circuiting that is common in meta-fictional novels but also in Japanese ghost stories.

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Keywords | audience, printed matter, public, temporality |
| Short description | Performance in institutional space |
| First performed at | <i>Dora García, Festival de Performance y Vídeo, Espacio Uno, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2005</i> |
| Also performed at | <i>Actions and Interactions, Tate Modern, London, 2007</i> |
| Most recently performed at | <i>I Always Tell the Truth, Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm, 2019</i> |

The Prophets, 2005

“Two young and attractive men”—represented by a still of Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford in *All the President's Men* (1976, Alla J. Pakula)—hand out A4 photocopies to the visitors of the museum. These photocopies relate to events that are going to happen over the next twenty-four hours—they are prophecies, ranging from the very mundane (the timetable of urban buses, today's menu at the museum's restaurant) to the very exceptional (earthquakes, eclipses, heartbreaks). In addition, these A4s may specify instructions, guidelines, or scores for the two performers to carry out that day.

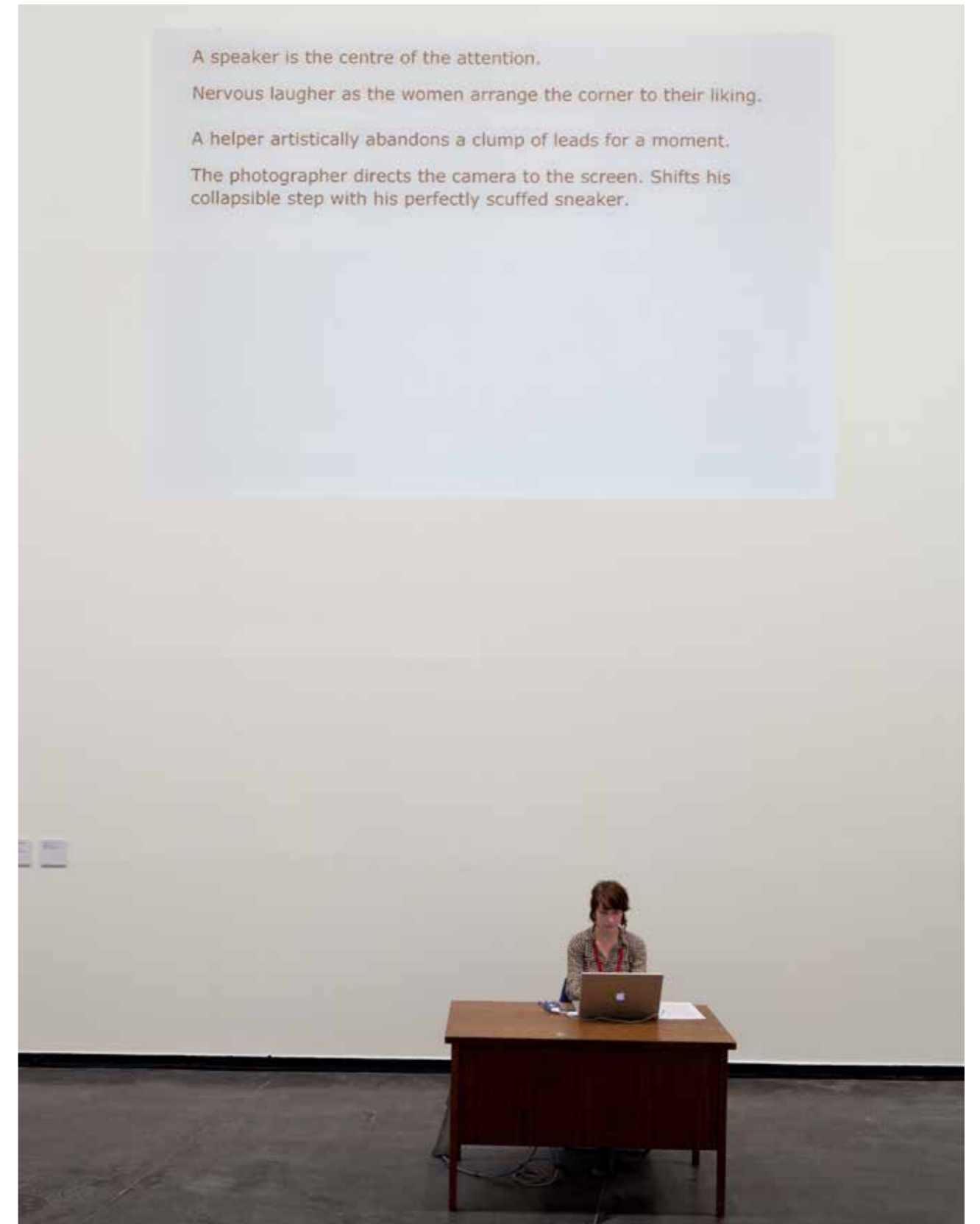


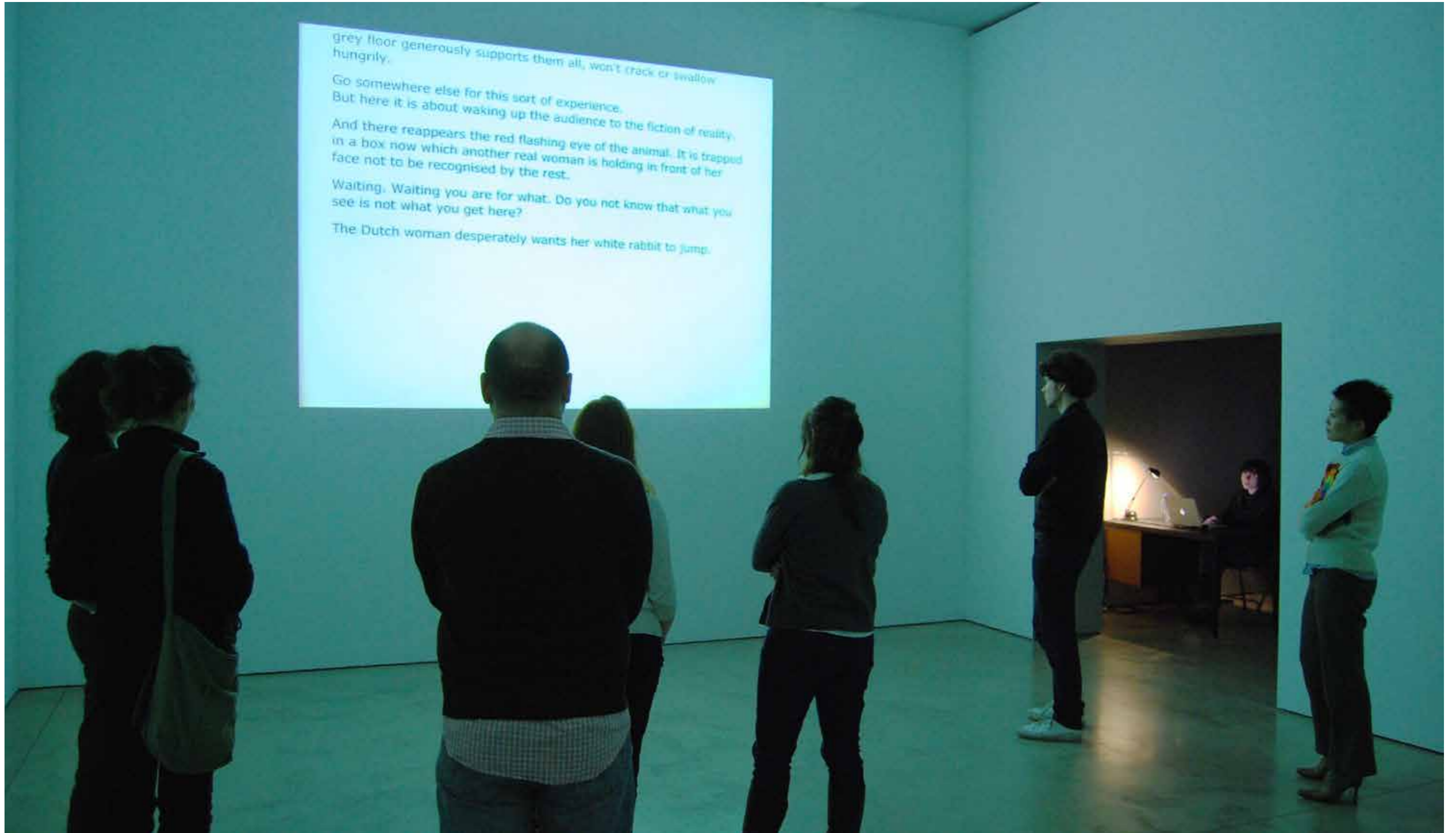


| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Keywords | audience, collective authorship, experimentalism, public, radicality, real time, temporality |
| Short description | Performance in institutional space |
| Collection | Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain |
| First performed at | Michel Rein/Ellen de Bruijne galleries, artissima, Torino, Italy, 2006 |
| Most recently performed at | <i>Segunda Vez</i> , solo exhibition at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2018 |

Instant Narrative, 2006

Instant Narrative is a performance involving an observer in an exhibition space typing on a laptop computer, writing everything she sees and hears—mostly the appearance and behavior of the visitors to that exhibition. This developing text is projected on a screen somewhere in the exhibition room, with no obvious connection to the writer. When the public is confronted with the projected text, they realize that someone has been/is looking at them, and they become self-aware, turning from audience into actor. They see themselves through the eyes of that other person, which is sometimes funny and sometimes unpleasant for the visitor/reader. In the moment that the visitor begins to be aware that their behavior will influence the text a complex feedback is generated. The duration of the exhibition produces a potentially infinite text. This text is saved on the computer and has sometimes been printed and made available to visitors. On average, the performance produces 1,000 pages per month.





Keywords audience, collective authorship, experimentalism, printed matter, public, public space, radicality, real time, social practice, temporality

Short description Site-specific, invisible performance in public space and publication

Performed just once at Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, Aubervilliers, France, 2006, performed by Karim Rouillon

CCL, Cellule Cité Lénine, 2006

This is a project that the artist designed at the invitation of Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers for the contemporary art biennial Art Grandeur Nature. It took place in one of the most emblematic residential buildings of the city of Aubervilliers, the Cité République, also known as Cité Lénine: a place whose very name evokes a host of fantastic stories and mysterious rumors. With the desire "to listen to the inhabitants, to learn from them, and to transmit to a potential audience the stories that I could have heard,"¹ Dora García established a protocol for collecting and transmitting information. In the spring of 2006, a new inhabitant joined the Cité, with the mission of watching and listening. García had recruited a collaborator, Karim Rouillon, to enter the community of Cité Lénine as a new neighbor and with the mission to collect the stories being told about the building. Following García's instructions, Karim acted as a resident, listening to the rhythms, the breathing, the schedule, the stories, the events, the opinions, the thoughts of the building and their inhabitants. He was an attentive and engaged observer, but remained an outsider. The performance is accompanied by the publication *CCL*, which was made after the artist posted texts from Karim's day-to-day journal on a blog that moreover gathered reactions from residents. *CCL* thus acts as both a chronicle of the performance and a portrait of the state.²

¹ Quoted from the announcement by Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, cnap.fr/dora-garcia-chambres-conversations-cellule-cité-lénine

² Dora García, *CCL: Cellule Cité Lénine* (Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, 2006), macba.cat/en/aprendre-investigat/arxiu/ccl-dora-garcia-cellule-cite-lenine





Keywords

audience, invisible theater, public, temporality

Short description

Invisible performance in institutional social space (i.e. the bar at a performance festival)

Performed just once at

dedonderdagen #11, festival, De Singel, Antwerp, Belgium, 2006

Real and Fake (Drunk), 2006

Dora García explores the boundary and connection between reality and fiction. She is interested in situations and settings that question the traditional relationship between the artist, the work of art and the viewer. In these performances, which she herself directs, the distinction between the spontaneous and what is imposed becomes blurred. Their basis is often the impossibility of clear communication. For *dedonderdagen*, Dora García is creating several performances that open up the sheltered environment in which one can experience art. The boundary between the performer (active) and the audience (passive) is eliminated so that the line dividing art and life fades.¹

Real and Fake (Drunk) was performed by Peter Connelly and Daan Goor. They sat together at a table in the bar of De Singel during the festival *dedonderdagen*, each of them with a bottle of vodka—whereas one actually contained vodka and the other water. They both had to look very drunk, but only one of them really was drunk (maybe not as much as he played) while the other one was pretending to be drunk. It was impossible to tell the difference even for the small number of people in the audience that knew there was a difference. However, as soon as the performance was over, Daan jumped up from his seat, fresh as a lettuce, saying “I have a train to catch!” while Peter mumbled incoherently “Oh you son of a b...,” stumbled, and had to sit back down (still playing perhaps?).

1

Quoted from desingel.be/en/programme/dedonderdagen/dora-garcia-e-you-cant-be-there-beggar-real-and-fake-drunk





Keywords audience, experimentalism, invisible theater, printed matter, public, social practice, temporality

Short description A performance based on the audience's awareness of a certain information distributed via printed matter. This knowledge "contaminates" their perception of everyday reality

First performed at dedonderdagen #12, festival, De Singel, Antwerp, Belgium, 2007

Most recently performed at Casa Tabarelli, Bolzano, Italy, on November 28, 2010

The Game of Questions (A performance with printed matter), 2007

The main idea behind *The Game of Questions* is to raise the level of awareness of the public about certain (urgent) social matters and to question conventions about reality and representation; and then using for all this the most sober of means, barely discernible from real life.

A flyer is printed stating that at a given space and time the questions also listed on this flyer will be asked. This knowledge, distributed by the flyer, means that the public¹ will be alert to the possibility of hearing those questions, perhaps going to answer them, or they will decide to ask them themselves—the message of the flyer is ambiguous.

Parallel to this, the artist contacts some "accomplices." These accomplices will attend the event where *The Game of Questions* was announced to take place. Once there, they will volunteer themselves to ask at least one of the questions from the flyer, at least once, and in

the circumstances of their choosing and the language of their choice.

¹ Those who will be present at the given space and time and who are given access to the flyer.

The Game Of Questions A collective performance by Dora García

Gallery one one one
111 Great Tichfield Street
W1W 6RY London
Thursday 16 October
6.30 - 8.00 p.m.

one one one

Tonight, between 18:30 and 20:00
the following questions will be asked:

- Are you waiting for someone?
- Do you remember me?
- Did you ever play in a movie?
- How old were you in 1984?
- What is your biggest goal in life?
- Are you single?
- Are you under 40?
- What happened?
- How are you feeling about all of this?
- Do you have right now as well a feeling of *Déjà vu*?
- Are you apprehensive about walking outside after dark?
- Do you think prostitution is a crime?
- If a person steals a loaf of bread because he needs to feed his starving family, should he be punished?
- How fast can you type?
- Don't you feel well?
- What's the most expensive piece of clothing you have ever bought?
- Are dreams messages sent from our unconscious, predictions of the future, or the brain's way of cleaning out information?
- Do you consider yourself a good artist?
- Does it annoy you when people kiss in public?
- Who do you think would mourn for you after your death?
- Can robots tie shoes?
- Can you name some notorious criminals ?
- What's your earliest memory?
- Could you write down your address?
- Can you play a musical instrument?
- Are you aware of a new, younger generation of professionals?
- Do you work here?
- Did you have any heroes when you were a teenager?
- What did you say?

The Game Of Questions a collective performance by Dora García

dedonderdagen
deSingel, Antwerp
April 26 2007



Tonight, between 19:00 and 23:00
the following questions will be asked:

- Are you waiting for someone?
- Do you remember me?
- Did you ever play in a movie?
- How old were you in 1984?
- What is your biggest goal in life?
- Are you single?
- Are you under 40?
- What happened?
- How are you feeling about all of this?
- Do you have right now as well a feeling of *Déjà vu*?
- Are you apprehensive about walking outside after dark?
- Do you think prostitution is a crime?
- If a person steals a loaf of bread because he needs to feed his starving family, should he be punished?
- How fast can you type?
- Don't you feel well?
- What's the most expensive piece of clothing you have ever bought?
- Are dreams messages sent from our unconscious, predictions of the future, or the brain's way of cleaning out information?
- Do you consider yourself a good artist?
- Does it annoy you when people kiss in public?
- Who do you think would mourn for you after your death?
- Can robots tie shoes?
- Can you name some notorious criminals ?
- What's your earliest memory?
- What's your address?
- Can you play a musical instrument?
- Are you aware of a new, younger generation of professionals?
- Do you work here?
- Did you have any heroes when you were a teenager?
- What did you say?

EL JUEGO DE LAS PREGUNTAS

UNA PERFORMANCE COLECTIVA

Dora García

III BIENAL DE JAFRE
11 AGOSTO 2007
E-17143 JAFRE (GIRONA)

EL JUEGO DE

Las siguientes preguntas serán formuladas en algún momento del día de hoy, una o varias veces:

- ¿Estás esperando a alguien?
- ¿Te acuerdas de mí?
- ¿Has actuado alguna vez en una película?
- ¿Cuántos años tenías en 1984?
- ¿Cuál es tu meta en la vida?
- ¿Tienes pareja?
- ¿Has estado llorando?
- ¿Tienes menos de cuarenta años?
- ¿Qué ha pasado?
- ¿Qué te parece todo esto?
- ¿Tienes también la sensación de haber vivido todo esto antes, de tener un "déjà vu"?
- ¿Te da miedo andar solo por lugares oscuros?
- ¿Crees que la prostitución es un crimen?
- Si una persona roba pan para alimentar a su familia, ¿Debería ser castigado por ello?
- ¿Puedes escribir a máquina sin mirar el teclado?
- ¿Te duele algo?
- ¿Qué es lo más caro que has comprado nunca?
- ¿Crees que los sueños son mensajes enviados por el subconsciente, predicciones del futuro, o la manera que tiene el cerebro de limpiar información?
- ¿Te consideras un buen artista?
- ¿Te molesta cuando una pareja se besa en público?
- ¿Quién crees que sentiría más tu muerte?
- ¿Puede un robot atar los cordones de los zapatos?
- ¿Recuerdas el nombre de algún criminal famoso?
- ¿Cuál es tu recuerdo más antiguo?
- ¿Dónde vives?
- ¿Puedes tocar algún instrumento musical?
- ¿Eres consciente de la llegada al mercado laboral de una nueva generación de profesionales?
- ¿Trabajas aquí?
- ¿Quiénes eran tus héroes cuando eras adolescente?
- ¿Qué has dicho?

The Game Of Questions a collective performance by Dora García

*November 28, 2010,
from on 12:30
Casa Tabarelli,
Strada Belvedere,
13,
39057, Cornaiano.
Invited by:*

*"Chartreuse jeune"
di Chef Nicolai*

Today, between 12:30 and 15:00,
the following questions will be asked:

- Are you waiting for someone?
- Do you remember me?
- What are you doing?
- How old were you in 1984?
- Are you an actress?
- Are you single?
- What would you like to do now?
- Do you have psychic powers?
- Can you remember your dreams?
- How are you feeling about all this?
- How do I look?
- Are you a day or a night person?
- Do you have right now as well a feeling of *déjà vu*?
- Are dreams messages sent from our unconscious, predictions of the future, or the brain's way of cleaning out information?
- Have you ever thought you were going mad?
- Do you think murder can be justified in some cases?
- Can robots tie shoes?
- What's your earliest memory?
- Are you leaving?
- Can you play a musical instrument?
- If a person steals a loaf of bread because he needs to feed his starving family, should he be punished?
- Do you think prostitution is a crime?
- Do you work here?
- Could you repeat that?

Keywords audience, collective authorship, experimentalism, invisible theater, printed matter, public, public space, social practice, radicality, real time, temporality

Short description Place and time-specific, real-time durational performance in public space; in collaboration with Samir Kandil, Jan Mech, and Peter Aers

Performed at skulptur projekte münster (Münster Sculpture Projects), June 16 to September 30, 2007

The Beggar's Opera, 2007

STIMME HINTER DER SZENE:
Denn wovon lebt der Mensch?

To create a character who inhabits public space and who deals with it in a half improvised, half scripted way. A character marginal enough to be able to talk to everybody, to say whatever he pleases, and be there without really being noticed—like servants and madmen. He functions as a catalyst: he distributes information, and he provokes events that create a narrative, in the form of a conversation or an action.

It was only logical to use the figure of the beggar. *The Beggar's Opera*, the eighteenth-century opera by John Gay adapted by Bertolt Brecht under the title *The Threepenny Opera*, is the model we adapt and adopt, as an homage and as a leading thread, to create the character of The Beggar. The Beggar is Filch, the apprentice beggar in both Gay's and Brecht's plays. It goes without saying that reference to such works underlines the parallels between beggar/poet/actor/player/critic.

This internet site is The Beggar's diary, which generates a narrative every day. In addition to that, some of Muenster's citizens and visitors will be lucky enough to come across him in person, *live*. And in addition to that, as a third format of presentation, he will have his own monologues at Muenster's well-known Metropolis Theater.¹

When the artist created *The Beggar's Opera* as her contribution to skulptur projekte münster in 2007, she worked with three actors who all (at different times) played the character of a beggar who, for the duration of the exhibition, wandered the streets of Münster interacting with citizens and tourists as a kind of undercover agent. These actors functioned as catalyzers, collecting and distributing information, as well as entering into dialogue with people or triggering actions. *The Beggar's Opera* was a continuation of the line of work carried out in earlier pieces such as *CCL: Cellule Cité Lénine* (2006, see above page 147), *Inserts in Real Time* (2001–2006, see pp. 74–119), or *The Tunnel People* (2000), performances, which all centered around durational representations in public spaces, happening throughout continuous periods of time, while blurring the line between fiction and real life.

As can be read on skulptur projekte münster's website:

In 2007, the Spanish artist Dora García used the public space in the centre of Münster as a stage for a theatrical performance. The work was based on *The Beggar's Opera*, a ballad opera by John Gay, made famous in Germany through Bertolt Brecht's adaptation *The Threepenny Opera*. García reduced the number of cast members to the single figure of Filch, the apprentice beggar in both Gay's and Brecht's politically committed stage works. Played in turn by three different actors, while nothing in Filch's appearance identified him as a fictional character, his actions set him apart from local beggars. He didn't ask passersby for money or food but tried to engage them in conversation, offering advice, information and anecdotes. Whoever missed Filch as he wandered the city's streets had a chance to experience him live in one of his performances at Metropolis cinema. On the occasion of *The Beggar's Evenings* he assumed other roles. On 25 July 2007 Filch performed in Metropolis as Hamlet; barely four weeks later he presented *The Beggar's Aria No. 1*. On other evenings, he discussed themes with the audience that included the tactile qualities of sculptures and his relationship to Joseph Beuys. Filch's experiences could be followed in *The Beggar's Diary*, an internet blog which was updated and commented on from day to day.²

While *The Beggar's Opera* was specific to the context and place of skulptur projekte münster 2007, in 2011, the character Charles Filch had a comeback with the performance *Best Regards from Charles Filch* (see page 206). A spin-off of *The Beggar's Opera*, the character meets the audience again after his life has moved on in the realm of fiction, just like the life of the audience has also continued on since 2007. *The Beggar's Opera* also initiated *The Beggar's Evening*, a series of stand-up-theater-like performance monologues where the Münster public could meet Charles Filch. Those performances prefigured future works such as *Lenny Bruce in Sydney* and *The Artist Without Works* (see pages 166 and 186).

¹ Quoted from thebeggarsopera.org

² Quoted from skulptur-projekte-archiv.de/en-us/2007/projects/133

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

www.thebeggarsopera.org

A WORK BY DORA GARCÍA FOR MÜNSTER SCULPTURE PROJECTS 07

EIN KUNSTWERK VON DORA GARCÍA FÜR SKULPTUR PROJEKTE MÜNSTER 07

The Beggar's Opera is a theatre play in real time and public space. A theatre play with no clear beginning or ending, where scripted plot is hard to distinguish from the natural course of events, and with just one character, The Beggar. How to find The Beggar, a marginal character wandering endlessly through the city of Münster? Only chance or luck can help you; although he spends his days inhabiting public space, he does not have any fixed point to be found, just some favourite places.

Die Bettleroper ist ein Theaterstück in Echtzeit, aufgeführt im öffentlichen Raum. Es ist ein Drama ohne eindeutigen Anfang oder Ende, dessen textlich vorgesehene Handlung sich nur schwer vom spontanen Verlauf der Ereignisse unterscheiden lässt. Es gibt nur eine Figur: Der Bettler.

Wie findet man den Bettler, diese marginale Figur, die ständig durch die Stadt Münster streift? Nur Zufall oder Glück helfen Ihnen dabei. Es gibt keine bestimmte Ecke wo man ihn finden kann, doch bevorzugt er gewisse Orte. Siehe Rückseite.

SEE INFORMATION ON THE BACK

The actors Samir Kandil, Jan Mech and Peter Aers bring The Beggar to life at the Metropolis Theatre in Münster. "The Beggar's Evenings" is the name given to a series of monologues that are a mixture of institutional criticism, slice of life, and pure absurd theatre.

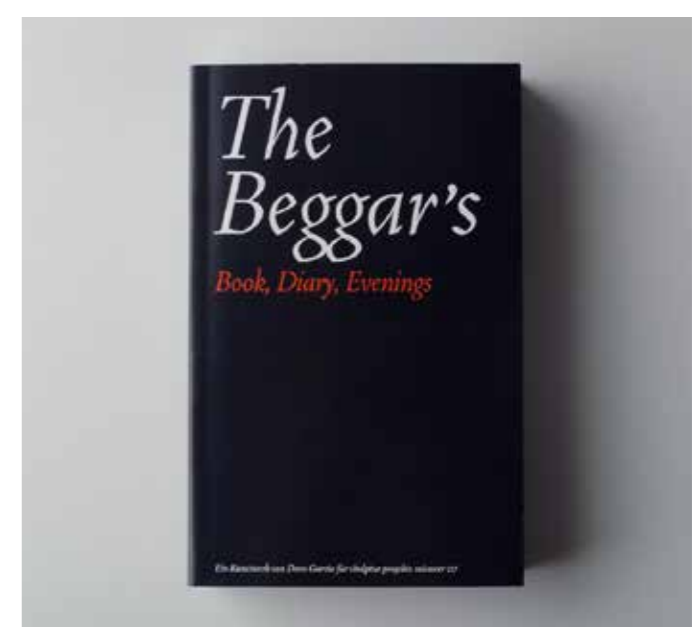
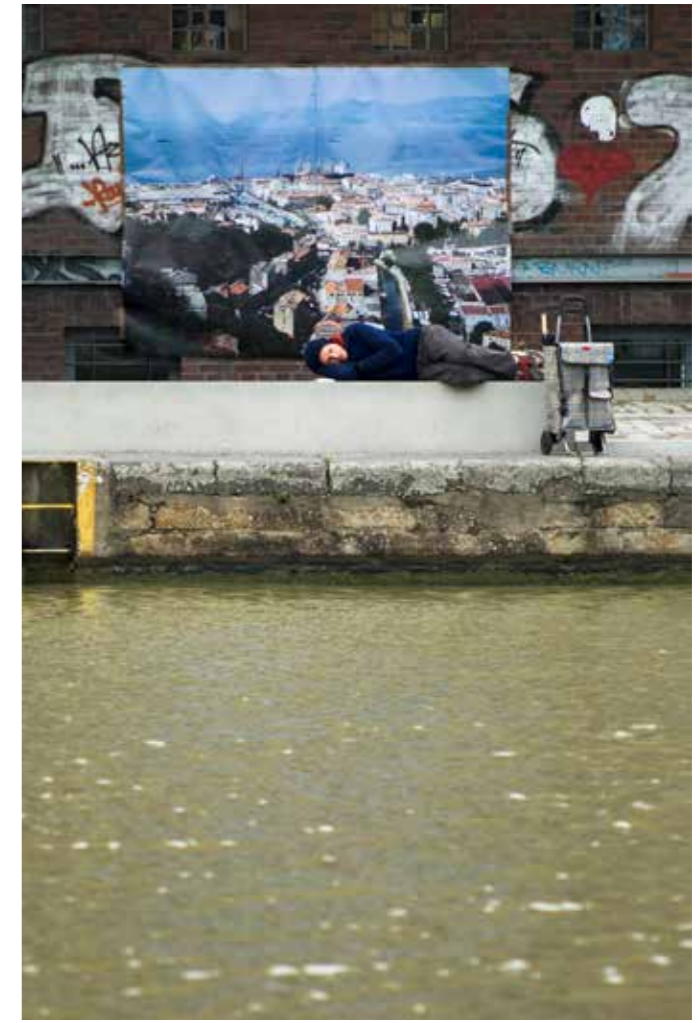
Der Bettler, eine für die Skulptur Projekte Münster konzipierte Figur im öffentlichen Raum, arbeitet überwiegend verdeckt und tritt mit dem Publikum unmittelbar und individuell in Kontakt. Um breiter sichtbar zu sein, tritt der Bettler zudem regelmässig als Stand-up-comedian in den sogenannten "The Beggar's Evenings" im Metropolis Theater in Münster auf. Zum Leben erweckt wird er durch die Schauspieler Samir Kandil, Jan Mech und Peter Aers; seine Monologe sind eine Mischung aus Institutionskritik, Alltagsbeobachtungen und absurden Theater.

LOCATION / ORT:
Metropolis Cinema - Metropolis Kino
 Berliner Platz, 48143 Münster, 0251/55474

Time: on the following Wednesdays 5-7 p.m.
Termine: jeweils Mittwochs 17-19 Uhr

27.06 SAMIR KANDIL
25.07 JAN MECH
08.08 PETER AERS
22.08 SAMIR KANDIL
05.09 JAN MECH
26.09 PETER AERS

ADMISSION FREE / EINTRITT FREI





| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Keywords | audience, collective authorship, public, public space, real time, temporality |
| Short description | Two formats: durational performance in museum/institutional space and performance in public space with a collective web performance component |
| First performed at | <i>Madrid Abierto</i> , festival, Madrid, February 1–28, 2007 |
| Most recently performed at | <i>A City of the People</i> , performance series at MOAD MDC, Miami, USA, December 15–22, 2019 |
| Links | doragarcia.org/rezos/madrid doragarcia.org/rezos/cartagena doragarcia.org/rezos/jerusalem doragarcia.org/rezos/miami |

Rezos/Prayers, 2008

The “museum” version of *Rezos/Prayers* consists of a performer who walks around in the exhibition/institutional space and periodically approaches a certain person that she has selected from among the museum visitors. Once close enough to that person, the performer begins a monotonous, whispering, in-your-ear description of the person he/she has approached. What aurally resembles a prayer consists of the descriptions of the appearance and behavior of that person.

As a combined public space and web version, *Prayers* sends out a number of performers to wander specific areas of a city on a given date and at a certain time. These performers then incessantly describe everything they see and hear producing an uninterrupted recitation, like a prayer, of which they each also record an individual forty-five-minute audio archive.

The descriptions address people, situations, attitudes, events, buildings, structures, itineraries, activities, routines, objects, atmospheres, circumstances, sounds, and smells as well as covering the impressions, deductions, and intuitions of the perceiving/narrating subject or “player.”

Uploaded to the web, the audio tracks created by the performers may be heard, downloaded, and combined by using a structure (see URLs above). The online visitor can thus to some extent reproduce the complexity of the recording of the performer’s experience.¹

¹ In this sense, there is a connection between this performance and *The Possible* (2003; see page 108). There is also a resonance with *Artificial Respiration* (2016; see page 236).



Keywords audience, filmed theater, monologue, public, videoperformance

Short description A one-off 60-minute performance in institutional space and a real-time, one-hour long film of the same title documenting the former

Collection CA2M, Móstoles, Spain

Performed at Sydney Opera House, during 16th Sydney Biennial, Sydney, 2008

Just Because Everything Is Different It Does Not Mean that Anything Has Changed: Lenny Bruce in Sydney, 2008

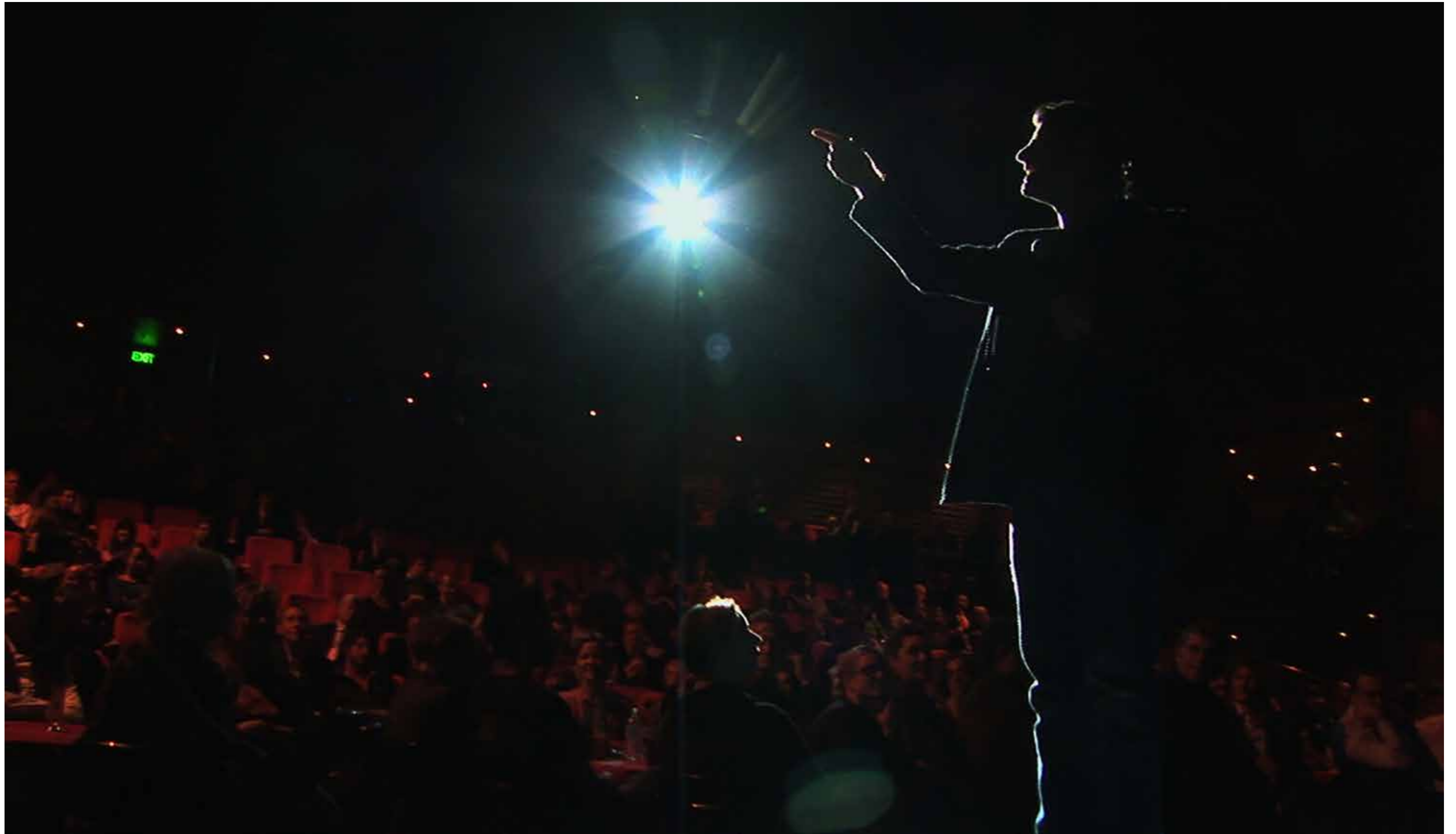
A description of *Lenny Bruce in Sydney* appears in Dora García's book *Steal this Book*:

The stand-up comedian Lenny Bruce, one of the most fascinating and tragic personalities of the revolutionary Sixties, visited Sydney on 6 September 1962. He was able to deliver only a one-sentence performance: after saluting the public with the words: "What a fucking wonderful audience!" he was promptly arrested on the grounds of obscenity. Richard Neville, a young Australian who would become the guru of London's counterculture, saw this brief performance and, understanding the importance of Bruce's position within the generational revolution that was about to start, attempted to organise a new performance at the University of New South Wales. The Australian authorities would not allow Bruce to perform and he was asked to leave the country, never to return. García has imagined the performance that never took place and for the Biennial of Sydney 2008 she "lets" Lenny Bruce finally speak in Sydney.

This one-time, one-hour long monologue performance, performed by Australian actor Ali Ammouchi, is the result of García's two years of work studying the monologues of counterculture icon Lenny Bruce and using them as a method to understand the concepts of offence, artistic freedom, the audience/performer relationship, satire, marginality, acceptance, outrage.¹

¹ Quoted from Dora García, *Steal this Book* (Paris: Castillo/Corrales, 2009).





Keywords

audience, guided tour, public

Short description

Site-specific performance in institutional space

Collection

Kadist Foundation, Paris, France and San Francisco, USA

Performed for the first time at

Museum of Contemporary Art Australia in Sydney, 16th Sydney Biennial, 2008

What a Fucking Wonderful Audience, 2008

What a Fucking Wonderful Audience adopted the format of a guided tour at the MCA in Sydney. A performer acted as a traditional museum guide offering visitors a guided tour that commented on several controversial works from art and film history like *Cosmococa* by Oiticica, *Kunst Kick* by Chris Burden, and *The Society of Spectacle* by Guy Debord. Scripting the tour, the artist focused on drawing out connections between these works in the museum collection and various other authors whose approach was to question the position of the viewer and the artist within the institution. This performance is a direct precedent to *The Artist Without Works* (see page 186).

See the script of *What a Fucking Wonderful Audience* in this book's "Appendix," page 285.





Keywords audience, experimentalism, invisible theater, printed matter, public

Short description A performance, which is mostly based on the awareness of the audience that a performance is taking place, an awareness established through information provided through printed matter (a poster). That is, the audience is expecting the performance and on the lookout for it, whether people truly experience it or not. It enhances the potential of experiencing everyday events as a performance; triggered by printed matter.

First performed at Frieze Art Fair, London, 2008

Most recently performed at *She Has Many Names*, solo exhibition at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023

The Romeos, 2008

The Romeos starts with a poster, which depicts a group of young men—striking a pose between a boy band and an artists' group portrait—and disseminates the following information to the audience:

Drawing inspiration from that extraordinary Cold War-era spy strategy known as “The Romeos” invented by GDR spymaster Markus Wolf, a group of young men will infiltrate the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp. Their mission is to engage visitors to the museum in a friendly, individual and seemingly casual way. Their behaviour is impeccably respectful and polite, however they are always moving towards more intimate contact—a longer conversation, a shared joke, a confession, a flattering remark—if the interlocutor is willing. It might end there, or it might lead to another rendezvous, to a new friendship. Maybe even to a love affair.

Now that you know this, how will you regard any attractive young man who appears to seek contact with you in one way or another? Will you trust his gentle demeanour? Being aware that he is acting, will you go along with the interplay and enjoy it as long as it lasts and as far as it goes?

Whatever the case, you may rest assured: true to their absolutely suave style, The Romeos will never tell, and no one will ever know, what you did or what you said.¹

Besides informing the audience about what is going to take place, this text is also almost the complete instructions given to the performers to accomplish their task. From that moment on, every affable, kind young man will be suspected to be part of *The Romeos* and every moment in the lives of the performers is susceptible of turning into a Romeo situation. The awareness of this contract, by which a group of young men (unclear who they are and how many) are paid to show kindness and interest towards the visitors of an exhibition, is enough for the performance to take place, regardless of any real encounters that may or may not happen.

As described Aichi Triennale, Aichi Prefecture, Japan in 2019:

Stylish posters on the wall which seem as if from a fashion magazine or an *Ocean's Eleven* film are part of the work entitled *The Romeos*. Photographed in June in Aichi exclusively for the exhibition, you may see some of the men in the posters in person—the photographed men actually walk around the exhibition venues kindly and politely offering conversation, company and advice to visitors.

[...] The similarities between the performance and the Cold War strategy are not only the name, but also the possibility to activate real affection among strangers. Would you still believe in your destiny, even when you are aware that the relationships you are in are all somehow intentionally fabricated? *The Romeos* prove that it is possible to generate authentic care and fondness even if the other person in the relationship has entered it as part of a contract or as a job.²

¹ This is the text that appears on *The Romeos* poster in the exhibition *She Has Many Names*, M HKA, Antwerp, 2023.

² Quoted from aichitriennale2010-2019.jp/en/artwork/A01b.html



THE ROMEOS

Drawing inspiration from that extraordinary Cold War-era spy strategy known as “The Romeos” invented by GDR spymaster Markus Wolf, a group of young men will infiltrate the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp. Their mission is to engage visitors to the museum in a friendly, individual and seemingly casual way. Their behaviour is impeccably respectful and polite, however they are always moving towards more intimate contact—a longer conversation, a shared joke, a confession, a flattering remark—if the interlocutor is willing. It might end there, or it might lead to another rendezvous, to a new friendship. Maybe even to a love affair.

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| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Keywords | audience, collective authorship, experimentalism, invisible theater, monologue, public, public space, radicality, real time, social practice temporality |
| Short description | Site-specific, invisible performance in public space; performance in institutional space |
| Performed just once at | <i>Playing the City</i> , performance exhibition at Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 2009, performed by Jan Mech |
| Link | williamholdeninfrankfurt.org |

William Holden in Frankfurt, 2009

William Holden in Frankfurt is Dora García's own version of *The William Holden Company*, a work by Martin Kippenberger from 1991. In this work, Kippenberger had delegated the execution of the art piece to one of his students from Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main, by encouraging this student to undertake a 5,000-kilometer journey across Africa, from where, while covering a certain distance each day, he was to collect and send back per post certain things. These objects were then included in the exhibition *The William Holden Company*. Fascinated by the author William Holden, and believing himself to be his doppelganger, Kippenberger had created the William Holden Company in 1991.

García was attracted to these constructions of masculinity and the myth of the artist, the student, and the assistant, and created her own version. For two weeks, an "ideal man"—William Holden—roamed the streets of Frankfurt, met people, and convinced some of them to accompany him in this one-time performance, in which he shared with the public his vision and stories of the city (as seen from a foreigner's POV) and the voices of those Frankfurt citizens who agreed to accompany him in his presentation. The question of belonging was established from the onset of the performance as he asked the audience to stand up for the national anthem, yet without specifying which nation he was talking about.





Keywords audience, filmed theater, public, role play, videoperformance

Short description Performance in institutional space

First performed at Exhibition of the same title at CGAC, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 2009

Most recently performed at *Per/Form*, exhibition at CA2M, Móstoles, Spain, 2014

Where Do Characters Go When the Story Is Over?, 2009

Where Do Characters Go When the Story Is Over? is a series of performances which enact, in the form of an unscripted and spontaneous conversation, the unlikely meeting between a well-known fictional or historical character (played by an actor, or rather a role-player, not necessarily a professional actor) and a real person (playing themselves). The aim of the piece is to disintegrate the distinction between fictional and real characters through the actuality of the conversation. As the two characters meet and discuss their biographies they get to know each other in what sounds like a casual chat.

2009

Charles Filch and François Piron

William Holden and Geoffrey Carey

CGAC, Santiago de Compostela

Jan Mech and Lenny Bruce

The Clifford Irving Show

Ciné 13, Paris

2013

Lenny Bruce and Darius Miksys

FIAC, Paris

Gertrude Stein and Virginija Januškevičiūtė

Rupert, Vilnius

2014

Pier Paolo Pasolini and Dora García

Per/Form, exhibition at CA2M, Móstoles



| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Keywords | audience, public |
| Short description | Performance in institutional space |
| Collection | Collection Yves Monlibert, France |
| First performed at | Fondation Ricard, Paris, 2009 |
| Most recently performed at | <i>She Has Many Names</i> , solo exhibition at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023 |

The Artist Without Works: A Guided Tour Around Nothing, 2009

The Artist Without Works: A Guided Tour Around Nothing is exactly what the title says it is: a guided tour around the work of an artist who does not produce any works. It centers on a monologue formatted as a guided tour in five stops, addressing artistic unproductiveness as the ultimate form of resistance while circling empty places in the gallery space. García's starting point for this piece was the 1997-book *Artistes sans oeuvres: I would prefer not to* by Jean-Yves Jouannais, which grapples with the impossible question: How to perform the radical artistic act par excellence, that is, producing nothing, and remain at the same time within artistic practice?

Conceived as a guided tour of nonexistent artworks, the monologue is structured as five "discourses" (or "stations") and four breaks, whereby the last "station" is also the same as the first, thus forming a circle. The monologue is sometimes performed by two people speaking in two different languages. The tone is clearly one of interpellation of the audience—an allusion to Peter Handke's play *Publikumsbeschimpfung (Insulting the Audience)* from 1986.

See the script of *The Artist Without Works: A Guided Tour Around Nothing* in this book's "Appendix," page 288.





| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Keywords | audience, public |
| Short description | Performance in institutional space |
| First performed at | Théâtre National de Chaillot, Paris; commissioned by Le Centre national des arts plastiques (CNAP), Paris, 2009 |
| Most recently performed at | <i>She Has Many Names</i> , solo exhibition at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023 |

Rehearsal/Retrospective, 2009

Rehearsal/Retrospective is a performance that takes the shape of a rehearsal session. One of the performers plays the role of the director, or teacher, while the others act as “pupils,” rehearsing four performances from Dora García’s repertoire: *The Artist Without Works*, 2009; *The Sphinx*, 2005; *Prayers*, 2007; and *The Messenger*, 2002.

Rehearsal/Retrospective is engaging and makes the audience part of the same staging. Four different performances are performed simultaneously under the guidance of a director, who, as the fifth performer, gives orders and marks the actions of the other protagonists like an orchestra conductor. Among the four performers, the messenger moves frantically from visitor to visitor, while looking almost desperately for the person who can understand his/her cryptic message with no apparent meaning: a sequence of incomprehensible words punctuated like a love verse. Discreetly, another performer stands next to some of the people present, describing them thoroughly as they appear at that moment, using a monotone tone of voice, as a prayer, like whispers in the ear of a confessor. A woman of piercing gaze, with calm movements and an expressionless face, selects one of the visitors and proposes a game of questions that may only be answered with “yes” or “no”: a questionnaire with an unknown logic according to which an exact answer exists, but which is known only to her, *The Sphinx*. The artist without works, finally, delivers a manifesto in a full voice: that of an artist who does not produce any artwork—a revolutionary text that proclaims the death of the work, in favor of a renewed interest in its producer.

Rehearsal/Retrospective fills the space with a disorienting feeling, a short-circuit that feeds the desire to be overwhelmed by the compulsive whirlwind of actions.





| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Keywords | audience, monologue, public |
| Short description | Performance in institutional and private space |
| Collection | Collection Sylvio Perlstein, Paris, France |
| First performed at | Lyon Biennial, Lyon, France, 2009 |
| Most recently performed at | Collection Sylvio Perlstein |

Insulting the Audience, 2009

Insulting the Audience is an adaptation of the famous piece of the same title by Peter Handke. This monologue piece is designed as a parasite, that is, the audience of this performance is “captive” as people have come to attend something else and are taken by surprise. During the Lyon Biennial, the “hacked” structure was an official guided tour of the biennial. The actor joined this official guided tour and when the time came to present *Insulting the Audience* as part of the exhibition, the actor separated from the guided tour group he was so far part of, faced the group, and delivered his monologue. Since this performance has become part of the Sylvio Perstein Collection the piece has been delivered during social occasions, where the performer is undercover, behaving as one more guest until, at a given moment, he stands up, confronts the rest of the guests, and delivers the monologue.





| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Keywords | audience, collective authorship, experimentalism, printed matter, public, public space, radicality, surveillance systems |
| Short description | Sculpture-as-performance in institutional space, triggered by printed matter; publication for sale in selected bookshops worldwide |
| Collection | Collection CNAP, Paris |
| First performed at | Lyon Biennial, Lyon, France, 2009 |
| Most recently performed at | <i>Permit yourself to drift from what you are reading at this very moment into another situation...</i> , Arts Libris, Centre d'Art Santa Mònica, Barcelona, Spain, 2016 |

Steal this Book, 2009

Steal this Book is an unlimited edition book (published in collaboration with Castillo/Corrales, Paris) that is modelled after the original 1971-counterculture classic of the same title by Abbie Hoffman. A variable number of copies of the publication is presented at an art space. With the imperative “Steal this Book,” printed on the cover, the work sends a clear message that forces visitors to face a dilemma: should they indeed *steal a book*, albeit knowing full well that stealing is not something one is supposed to do, especially not in art exhibitions—and thus risk the scolding of the guards and the embarrassment in front of other visitors? Would it be possible to reason with the guards and the other visitors, explaining that the imperative of the work ought to be observed, in keeping with the potential intention of the artist? And, what is going to prevail, the social imperatives “do not steal” and “behave properly” or the artistic imperative “this is the performative demand: steal this book”?

But *Steal this Book* is more than a command. The printed book, presented in the form of many copies or as a single one, contains the correspondence between Dora García and the different performers that have carried out her work, since the early 2000s, accomplishing it. By reading that correspondence we may realize that the authorship of the works often belongs more to the performers than to the alleged “author.”

The book’s introduction begins by contextualizing the theft:

If you have this book in your hands, you are probably in an exhibition, in a room dedicated to the artist Dora García. Not far from you must be a label indicating that this book, or rather a certain quantity of copies of it, constitutes the work exhibited. Not far from you, too, there must be a guard, who from time to time glances in your direction and watches your comings and goings. If you have opened this book and are reading these lines, you have also glanced in the direction of this guardian and looked for a sign of authorization or censure from her. If you continue reading now, you will not know if the absence of an explicit sign in return to your mute interrogation signifies her total indifference, her tacit consent, or if she is approaching you now and will yell at you in a moment.¹

¹ Dora García, *Steal this Book* (Paris: Castillo/Corrales, 2009).



If you look up online the printed matter, *Steal this Book*, that triggers this performance, you will likely find the next information:

A tribute to Abbie Hoffmann’s pamphlet of the same name, *Steal this Book* documents eleven recent performative projects by Spanish artist Dora García. Edited by the artist together with François Piron, the book presents the private correspondence of the artist with the various interpreters of the situations she sets up in the public space. It proposes a documentation of a body of work without an overview, nor an official line, since it takes neither the artist’s point of view nor the critic’s. Instead, it discloses questions, misunderstandings and arguments, making this book part suspense story, part user’s manual, part script for a stand-up comedy.²

² Quoted from castillocorrales.fr/steal-this-book



Keywords audience, monologue, public, role play

Short description Performance in institutional space

Collection Kunsthaus Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland

First performed at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2010

Most recently performed at *She Has Many Names*, solo exhibition at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023

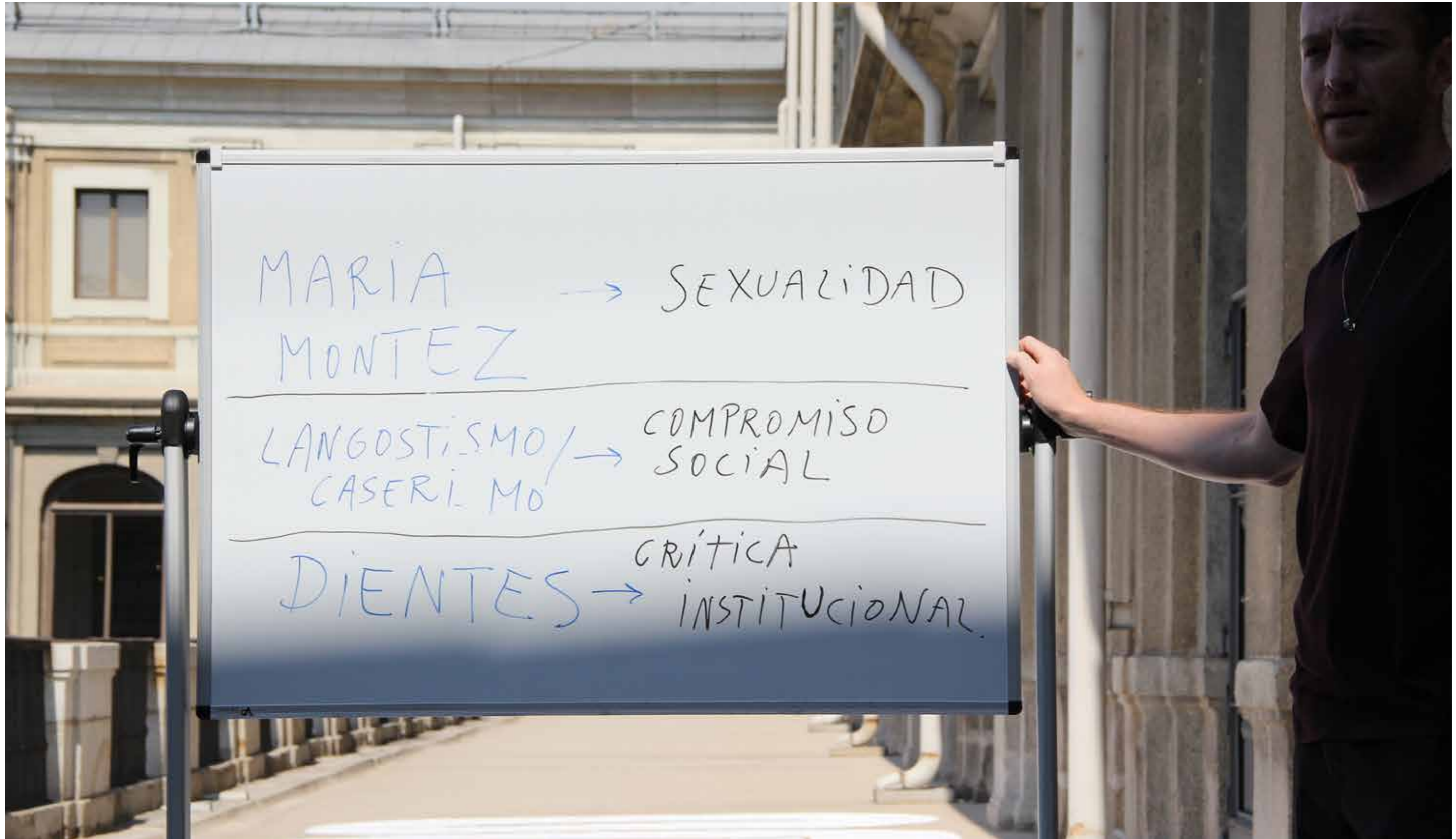
Real Artists Don't Have Teeth, 2010

Real Artists Don't Have Teeth is a follow-up piece to *The Artist Without Works* (see page 186). Whereas the latter monologue took the form of a guided tour, this one adopts the format of a lecture, with a whiteboard as its prop. The peculiarity here is that the performer(s) experience(s) “transformations” as they “get under the skin” of the toothless artists who are discussed in the script—Jack Smith, Lenny Bruce, and Antonin Artaud—by imitating their voices and bodily postures. Besides the lamentable states of the teeth of these role-played artists, they also had in common that their practices “changed course,” respectively turning to underground cinema, stand-up comedy, theater, art, and psychiatry. By focusing on these artists we are confronted with another set of fundamental questions: Is art an effective medium for transforming reality? (Perhaps a misleading question from the start since it implies art is not reality?) Or, to put it more precisely: Do artists pose a danger to the status quo? The monologue ends with the sentence: “Let us then conclude: real artists don't have teeth, and therefore, they cannot bite.”

Tinted by the artist's characteristic dark humor, the script of *Real Artists Don't Have Teeth* examines the complexity of issues related to censorship, the involvement of artists with their audience, and the meaning of mainstream and marginality. The ironic moral of the story seems to be that the real artist should always remain marginal to be safe from so-called mainstream “wolves.” The contradictions of such a position point to the concept of counterculture, defined by psychiatrist and researcher Franco Basaglia as “the culture of the deviant.” So, what then is the contract between the so-called *normal* and the deviant, and what are the political and cultural implications of this agreement?

See the script of *Real Artists Don't Have Teeth* in this book's “Appendix,” page 290.





Keywords

audience, monologue, public

Short description

A performance spin-off of *The Beggar's Opera*, the place and time-specific performance from 2007 for Münster Sculpture Projects (see page 158). In *Best Regards from Charles Filch*, the character of Charles Filch reappears after the end of a "novel" (*The Beggar's Opera*, 2007) to encounter the audience again and tell them about the new adventures that have befallen him. The format of this performance is close to stand-up comedy.

First performed at

The Inadequate, solo project for the Spanish Pavilion of the 54th Venice Biennial, Venice, Italy, 2011

Most recently performed at

She Has Many Names, solo exhibition at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023

Best Regards from Charles Filch, 2011





Keywords audience, collective authorship, experimentalism, public, public space, real time, temporality

Short description Invisible performance with Twitter documentation

First performed at During *Blow-up*, a program for the virtual space hosted by Jeu de Paume, Paris, 2012

Most recently performed at EMERGENT, Veurne, Belgium, 2015

Link twitter.com/locatingstory

Locating Story, 2012

Locating Story is a project combining Twitter, a geolocation software, and performance. A performer monitors a person as this person moves through the city, i.e. from their home to work, from work to their friends. The performer does not know that person (although of course, the person has accepted collaborating with the artist on this project). Like a detective, the performer is only given a very brief description and an image and the first task now consists in determining who that person is and what their daily routine looks like. All the gathered observations are transmitted via Twitter posts ([@locatingstory](https://twitter.com/locatingstory)) to the blog doragarcia.org/locatingstory

The project draws on concepts pertaining to the “situationist drift” as well as on actions traditionally related to performance (such as description in real time, the pursuit of someone, and repetitive or obsessive behavior). These concepts and actions are broadcast live through various interactive platforms. *Locating Story* aims to account for notions of surveillance and obsession, emphasizing the transition between the private and the public, the anecdotal and the (ir)relevant.

← **Locating Story**
1.719 Tweets

Locating Story
@locatingstory

FROM ON FEBRUARY 2012: a project combining twitter ([@locatingstory](https://twitter.com/locatingstory)), geolocation software and performance. doragarcia.org/locatingstory

📍 Francia doragarcia.org/locatingstory/ 📅 Se unió en enero de 2012

1 Siguiendo 141 Seguidores

👤 gerard cuartero, chus martinez y Bòlit, Centre d'Art siguen a este usuario

Tweets Respuestas Fotos y videos Me gusta

Locating Story @locatingstory · 17 sept. 2015
today was very rainy and impossible

Locating Story @locatingstory · 16 sept. 2015
i'll try to start a meaningless elevator conversation tomorrow. i've been told we have more than 5 days after all

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Keywords | audience, collective authorship, experimentalism, filmed theater, public, public space, radicality, real time, social practice, temporality, videoperformance |
| Short description | Site and time-specific performance in institutional space; TV program |
| Performed just once at | Documenta 13, Kassel, Germany, 2012 |
| Link | dieklaumichshow.doragarcia.org |

Die Klau Mich Show, 2012

Klau Mich Radicalism in Society Meets Experiment on TV

by Dora García¹

Authority, the Institution, has been challenged in many battles across numerous fields, but especially in those where it chokes the most: the courtroom, the school, the museum, the government, the army, the prison, the asylum, the family.

When I was in Trieste, at the ex-psychiatric hospital of San Giovanni, where Venetian psychiatrist Franco Basaglia carried out his process of de-institutionalization of the mental hospital—successful in so many ways—I saw this old graffiti on the walls of the asylum (it’s written in French: for a brief moment, I had a vision of Félix Guattari with a spray can): “Caserne = Asile = Prison = Famille. Le Feu Partout” [Barrack = Asylum = Prison = Family. Fire to it all]. Radicalism (Fire) against the institution. What is an institution? In Basaglia’s words: that which cannot change. What is radicalism? The quality of being very different from the usual or traditional; fundamental; favoring extreme change.

KLAU MICH (Steal Me), takes its name from the book by Kommune Eins members Rainer Langhans and Fritz Teufel, following their 1967 trial in Berlin, known as the Arsonist’s Lawsuit and “Klau Mich” case. Kommune Eins was the first politically motivated commune in Germany, created in 1967, and had distributed flyers encouraging people to burn down warehouses so as to experience that “Vietnam feeling.” After groundbreaking debate and strong support for Langhans and Teufel from intellectuals, the court ultimately ruled in their favor: the flyers were defined as art, and therefore innocent.

Anti-institutional movements spread all over the world in the aftermath of 1968. In Germany, they had a special significance because of the strong authoritarian tradition in politics and society. The “Klau Mich” case presented a new form of dissent in the courtroom, full of sarcasm and nerve.

KLAU MICH: Radicalism in Society Meets Experiment on TV is a television talkshow broadcast every Friday from the Ständehaus in Kassel through Offener Kanal Kassel, a permanent theater rehearsal that can be followed in real time every day online, and a video and blog archive. The project aims to recover the atmosphere of true public debate and new forms of narrative, experimental theater and means of challenging the audience that were once to be found on public-access television; while making a very conscious use of this “license to kill” or censorship emancipation that art has seemed to enjoy at some glorious moments in time.

¹ Quoted from dieklaumichshow.doragarcia.org





| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Keywords | audience, collective authorship, experimentalism, filmed theater, public, public space, radicality, real time, social practice, temporality, videoperformance |
| Short description | Site and time-specific performance in institutional space, TV program |
| Performed just once at | Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool, UK, 2012 |
| Link | newsfromoutside.doragarcia.org |

News from Outside, 2012

As we read on the project's website:

***Outside!* — A street TV and talk show project for Liverpool Biennial**

The title of the project, *Outside!*, refers to the essence of street TV, but also, to the porous nature of the “fourth wall”, in this case referred to the television screen. In *Outside!*, the people who are on television are the same who watch television and are the same who make television—the interface between actor, medium and audience is porous—they go through the screen, as it were, they are exchangeable.

The talk show, on the other hand, is the symmetrical opposite of street TV; the set often reproduces a domestic atmosphere, a living room, full of fake books and fake chimney and fake sofa and door; it is a make-believe of coziness. But again, the TV screen becomes a mirror of the audience watching it: a similar sofa, a similar door and similar (sometimes even fake as well) books. As it has been often said (about Ikea), we are living in TV sitcom sets.

So *Outside!* wants to take the best of both worlds—the street, and the living room. Street TV and Talk Show. *Outside!* street TV, which is perhaps more strongly related to the notion of community TV—television made by citizens—feeds, as much with people as with subjects of debate, the talk show part of *Outside!*.

Following a tradition taken to its best expression in my opinion with Troppolitani (Reza and Mastrella), a very small crew, made of camera, sound, and interviewer, will walk the public space(s) of Liverpool. Public space is not only “the street” but it is certainly public buildings, schools, museums, malls, cafeterias, bars, and supermarkets... The small crew of *Outside!* will do their best to establish a natural conversation with the users of public space, starting with the very simple question: What would you like to talk about if you were on television? Whether it goes to the very private (“I’d like to talk about my children and how much I love them.”) or the political (“I’d like to talk about censorship.”), or the very negative (“I hate television and do not want to be on it.”) the conversation rolls. When the interviewer judges the interviewee as engaged and passionate enough, he will invite him to come over to the *Outside!* talk show. It is possible as well to improvise, and when meeting someone somewhere that seems like an interesting character, the *Outside!* crew can just invite him or her straight away.

Therefore, each day guests are different and somehow improvised in the *Outside!* talk show. And even when the guest have come and are sitting and talking, the interviewer, now turned into the front man of the *Outside!* talk show, might go to the street and fetch a voice that was missing in the discussion—the big windows of the Bluecoat gallery help him to locate and approach the improvised guest.

The main idea is to create a performative structure that allows the citizens of Liverpool to narrate their own story of the city and its undercurrents. Street TV and the talk show are the well-known formats employed. The reference to the interface/surface between audience and entertainer/broadcaster is central. The name of the program, *Outside!* clearly alludes to the porous nature of such a surface (the audience is constantly moving from entertainer to audience, and so is the entertainer/presenter) and to the capacity of the audience/public/spectator to generate its own spectacle.

The space where the talk show is going to happen, Bluecoat gallery and urban surroundings, allows the project to happen in the best possible circumstances: architectonically (big transparent windows, access to the street), institutionally (oldest art gallery in England, the relation it already has built in all that time with the city and its inhabitants) and geographically (center of the city).

The collaboration with Toxteth TV—not only for the recording, but also for the editing and distribution of the audiovisual material resulting from *Outside!*—places a group of citizens of Liverpool in the position of editors, directors and producers of the work. Toxteth TV will provide the manpower to record the program both in the street as in the talk show stage, and to edit the rushes. The resulting material will be uploaded to this site.¹

¹ Quoted from newsfromoutside.doragarcia.org



| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Keywords | audience, collective authorship, public, reading-as-action, temporality |
| Short description | Durational collective performance in institutional space |
| Collection | Collection Castelo di Rivoli, Torino, Italy |
| First performed at | KUB Arena, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz, Austria, 2013 |
| Most recently performed at | <i>I know of a labyrinth which is a single straight line</i> , solo exhibition at Mattatoio, Rome, 2021–22 |
| Link | thesinthomescorevenice.tumblr.com |

The Sinthome Score, 2013

The Sinthome Score is a performance project conceived for a museum/institutional context. It consists of two elements: a performance designed for two or more performers and a score describing and directing the elements of the performance, potentially enabling anyone to join.

The performance is continuous (durational), happening in the presence or absence of an audience, in correspondence with the times the museum is open to the public. It is also a duo performance, where one performer reads and the second performer moves; the roles are interchangeable, but essentially the roles of speaker and listener are turned into those of reader and dancer.

Both performers follow a score, composed of a text score and a choreographic score.

The text score is inspired by the “unofficial” transcription and translation¹ of Jacques Lanca’s Seminar XXIII, entitled “The Sinthome” (1975–76), a series of ten lectures that draw from the writings of James Joyce to elaborate on language, the unconscious, and a reconsideration of the Borromean knot. Meanwhile, the choreographic score corresponds to positions found in contemporary choreography but could correspond as well to daily movements and positions. Both scores mutually contribute and affect each other, very much in following with one of the sentences that can be found in the text score: “The Unconscious is the body pierced by language.” The performance has an effect as much on the audience as on the performers, creating a state of enhanced perception of each other: performer one, performer two, and performative audience. Here, the two performers determine the rhythm, cadence, and speed of the performance. The artist’s score and choreographic notation is prepared in such a way as to welcome new participants, accidental stutters of the body, or slips of the tongue. It is left to the visitors to decide if, how, and when to enter the conversation.

¹ At this moment in 2023, the score exists in German, English, Italian, and Spanish.

As we read in a short online text by Alasdair Duncan in *Lacanian Review Online*:

We often suppose that an artwork has a meaning—that it carries a knowledge for the question we bring to it, and most particularly when such knowledge is withheld the audience makes knowledge, imputing the artwork as its cause. Psychoanalysis has long sought for art to produce new knowledge of civilisation, in advance of the clinic. And indeed *The Sinthome Score* with its withdrawal of extraneous interpretative framework seems like it might offer this possibility. What we have are two elements which play against each other, we can question whether the movement of the body interprets the text or vice versa, and if so what emerges? Perhaps some meaning emerges, or perhaps it is lost between the two sides of the work, neither here nor there. Perhaps something of the encounter of a body with speech offers something of the relation between body and speech, perhaps on the side of meaning, or otherwise. We may perhaps come up with a chain of interpretations—the work certainly lends itself to this possibility. We may ask what of this enactment is connected to the work of Lacan’s seminar? Is there something sinthomatic for García in this? After all we know that Joyce’s writing, a key reference for the seminar, is a magnet for interpretation, read more in the university than beyond it, but is also singular and sinthomatic, there’s no contradiction in that. Whereas a sinthome is something found in Joyce’s escabeau, it is something here forced as a subject matter, an S1 for a potential chain of blah blah blah, more or less interesting or useful, about what is singular in the relation of body and speech as an S1 all alone. Lacan could be a key in García’s work in a way that may be contrary to the singularity of what might be sinthomatic—but then again meaning too has its non-sense. If belief in the artwork crumbles, the viewer might perhaps wonder whether García has read a bit of Lacan (and we suppose at least Seminar XXIII) and understood that she can make an artwork which appears to have qualities in common with what’s been read as it might be given as a subject of understanding. It could be something akin to a certain kind of academic Lacanianism coolly applied with the blank reflexivity of contemporary art, but on the side of good faith, perhaps that is harsh. It is not clear whether the indeterminacy is of the order of a not-all, an ‘it doesn’t work’, which might be sinthomatic, or whether it works towards the idea of indeterminacy which has become a central device of contemporary art as an institutional practice, firmly on the side of “it works”. Perhaps the mode of interpretation that such artwork might produce would be too much on the side of “it works” to offer any resistance in a society modelled on a certain efficiency. You may believe or not in the artwork, and thus it may work for you or not in one way or another. The work seems to lend itself to support along the lines of belief.

Jacques Alain Miller has on occasion sought to use the English expression make believe in the place of the French semblant. Something of the direction of semblance, as can be sensed in making an adjective of it—semblantize—moves in the direction of a dissolution of belief, whereas make believe operates the same axis in the other direction. Miller refers to the semblant as the crossover of appearance and Being. Being in so far as Being is an effect of language and always incorporates a want of Being. If there is Being there must be a lack of Being otherwise everything would Be and the word would lack the differential characteristic of signification, and as such there would be no Being. Being includes its lack, it is never quite entirely Being, although we may cover this inconvenience over such that that Being can appear to be whole. Being in so far as it is defined here in its logical differential quality in relation to not Being is symbolic, whereas appearance may be more towards the imaginary—in this sense a make believe, in so far as we believe, can be something which is a holding together of the symbolic and imaginary, if not quite a sinthome, working in this regard as an at least ad-hoc and impermanent solution to making the world liveable, when guarantees of meaning aren’t what they used to be and compensations are of use. It is quite possible that even if it were to offer only a semblance of a kind of Lacanianism, there may be in *The Sinthome Score* a make believe which if not a sinthome, might at least be something to be going on with.²

² Quoted from thelacanianreviews.com/the-sinthome-score





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|----------------------------|--|
| Keywords | collective authorship, experimentalism, public space, radicality, social practice |
| Short description | Collective mutual support project |
| First performed at | <i>Krankheit als Metapher: Das Irre im Garten der Arten</i> , exhibition at Traumzeit Café, Hamburg, Germany, 2014 |
| Most recently performed at | Colomboscope Festival, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2022 |
| Link | thehearingvoicescafe.doragarcia.org |

The Hearing Voices Café, 2014–present

As we read on the project website, referring to the first iteration of *The Hearing Voices Café* in Hamburg:

The Hearing Voices Café¹

To hear oneself speak is maybe the minimal definition of consciousness.

The designation “Hearing Voices Café” actually applies to every well-patronized coffee shop. At the same time, the phrase “hearing voices” is also associated with the phenomenon of hearing inner voices. Drawing on the ambiguity of the term, the Spanish artist Dora García is installing a gathering place for people who hear voices, hosted by the Traumzeit Café in Hamburg.

The point of departure for this work is the artist’s interest in the voice-hearers’ movement, which has its roots in the anti-psychiatry groups of the 1970s and conceives of itself more as a civil rights movement than as a form of therapeutic self-help. The first joint activities came about in Holland in 1987 with the mission of challenging the medical model of mental illness, and from there spread rapidly to other countries. What is presumably the most active branch of the movement has been in existence since 1988 in the English Hearing Voices Network.

In 1997, the national associations moreover joined to form Intervoice, a group of voice-hearers and otherwise involved persons who organize the annual World Hearing Voices Congress in a different country every year.

Voice-hearing is not only a widespread phenomenon, but also a cultural-historically significant one. From Socrates to Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross to the American avant-garde writer Hannah Weiner, famous philosophers, believers and poets have regarded voice hearing as a rare talent and a special gift. Other artists have had less positive experiences with this phenomenon, but it nevertheless strongly influenced their work: Sarah Kane, Robert Walser, Virginia Woolf or Philip K. Dick, to name just a few examples.

García’s *The Hearing Voices Café* project revolves primarily around exchange, research and destigmatization. Structurally it is composed of various offers including detailed information material, a regularly updated newspaper and an audio work. There will also be a number of events on the history and current activities of psychiatry-related resistance and civil rights movements as well as on the relationships between language, mental idiosyncrasies, capitalism and art. Within the regular and bustling operation of the host establishment Traumzeit, *The Hearing Voices Café* will function as a public meeting place for voice-hearers and their friends, people interested in the phenomenon, and coincidental guests. To point out which guests hear voices and which ones don’t, is irrelevant for the community gathering there.

¹ Quoted from thehearingvoicescafe.doragarcia.org



Keywords audience, collective authorship, experimentalism, handwritten text, public, radicality, temporality, videoperformance

Short description Durational performance in institutional space

First performed at *I See Words, I Hear Voices*, solo exhibition at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto, Canada, 2015

Most recently performed at *SOMEWHERE, TWO PLANETS HAVE BEEN COLLIDING FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS. (The Thinker as Poet)*, solo exhibition at La Verrière, Brussels, 2017

Imposed Words/ Palabras impuestas, 2015

The performance *Imposed Words/Palabras impuestas* involves a performer who is connected via headphones to a monitor on which “historical” interviews with Spanish-speaking writers (Julio Cortázar, Jorge Luis Borges, Juan Rulfo, a.o.) are screened. The performer may or may not understand Spanish, but she writes whatever she thinks is worth noting into a series of notebooks. These notebooks and the written interpretations, drawings, or diagrams left in them by the performer, are available to the public and constitute the only “channel” for the public to gather insights into what those writers are saying. The longer the performance goes on the more notebooks there will be—even if the source material remains the same, the interpretations multiply.





Keywords audience, collective authorship, printed matter, public, reading-as-action, temporality

Short description Durational performance in institutional space, printed matter

First performed at *Respiración artificial, Performance, Eco oscuro*, IVAM, Valencia, Spain, 2016

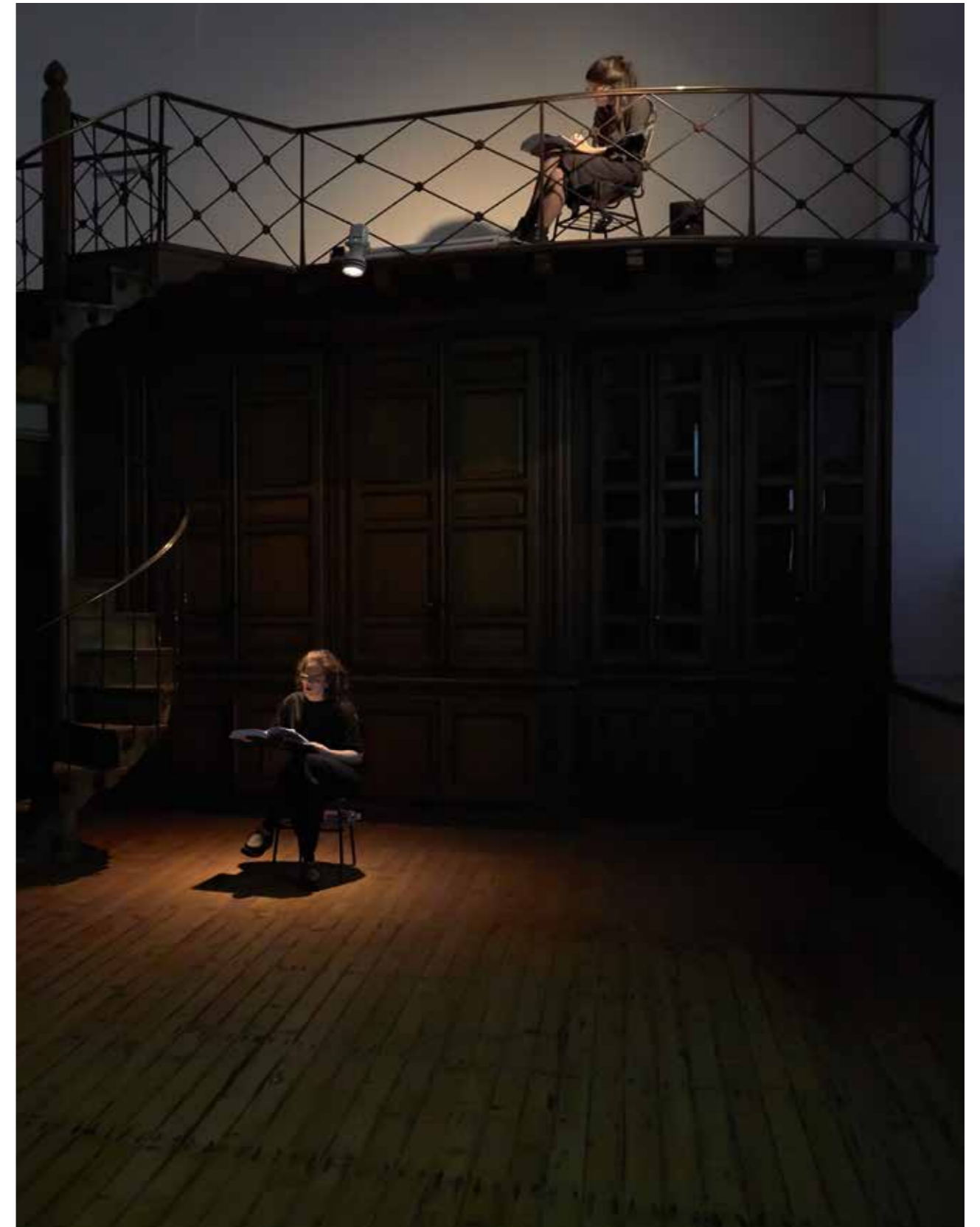
Most recently performed at *Segunda Vez*, solo exhibition at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2018

+

Artificial Respiration, 2016

The performance *Artificial Respiration* consists of two performers who read together short pieces of text, numbered, like Bible versicles, taking turns, one first, then the other. The text consists of short descriptions of different situations observed in the city where the performance takes place, produced by a group of local observers in the weeks before the performance. This material is then edited and printed by the artist in the form of a book, *Artificial Respiration*, which is subsequently used in the readings.¹

¹ Notice the similarities with *Rezos/Prayers* (2008), page 164.





Keywords audience, experimentalism, public, radicality, real time

Short description Script written by Peio Aguirre, based on a series of conversations Aguirre and García had between 2010 and 2016

First performed at *Respiración artificial, Performance, Eco oscuro*, IVAM, Valencia, Spain, 2016

Most recently performed at *Segunda Vez*, solo exhibition at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2018

Performance, 2016

Performance is a collaborative work with Basque Country based curator and author Peio Aguirre. The text is founded on the ongoing dialogue (since 2009) between the artist and Aguirre on performance, acting, actors, representation, characters, and fiction. The script itself is written for five characters and a narrator who are based on the characters in the British film *Performance* from 1968, starring James Fox, Anita Pallenberg, Mick Jagger, and Michèle Breton. The performance takes the form of a staged reading, with six characters each reading their parts.

See the script of *Performance* in this book's "Appendix," page 294.





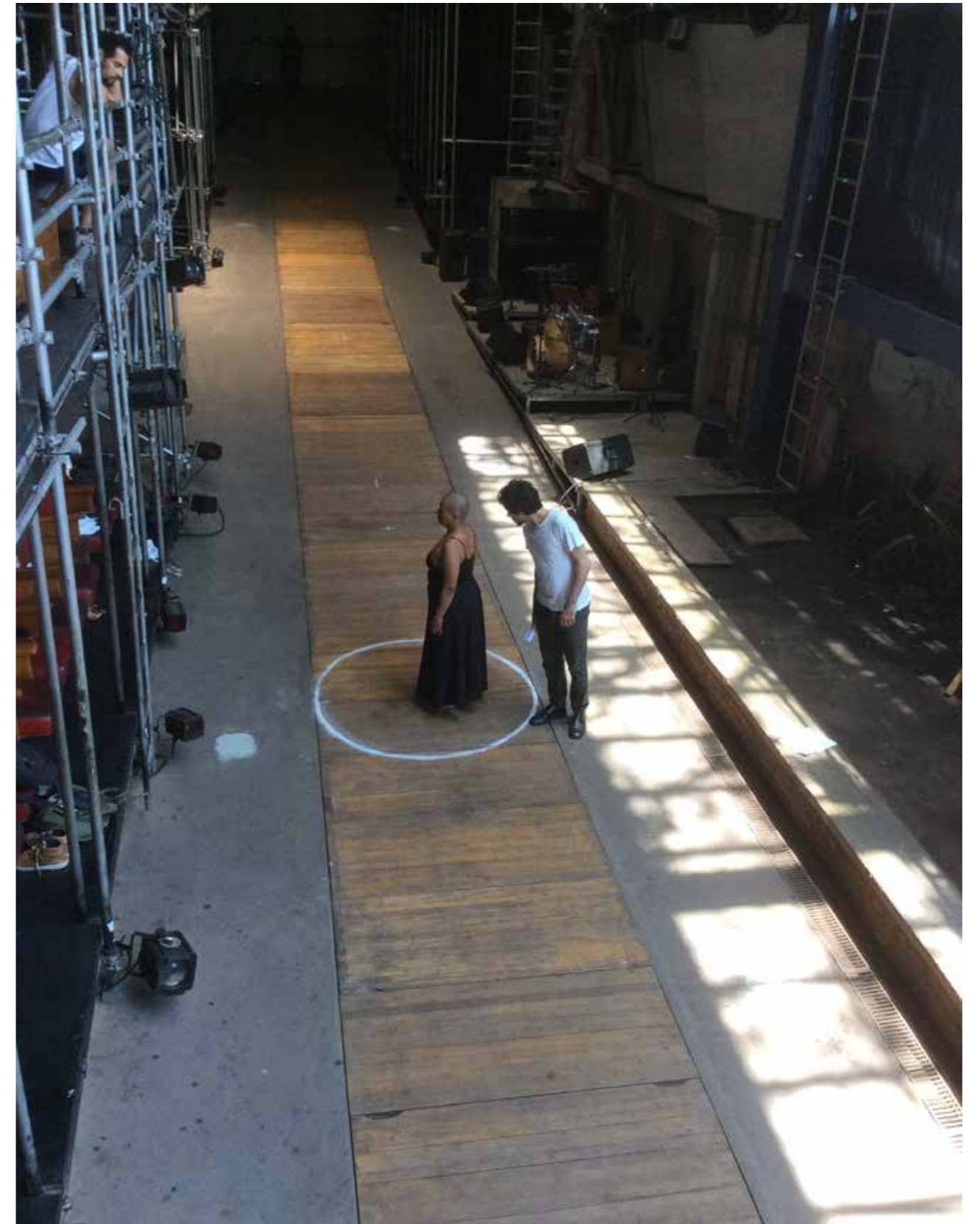
Keywords audience, experimentalism, radicality, role play, public

Short description Performance for three characters, following a theater format, stage design

Performed just once at Teatro Oficina, São Paulo, within the festival Performando oposições at Casa do Povo, São Paulo, Brazil, 2016. Performed by Carlota Joaquina (woman interrogated) and Juliana Perdigão, Rodrigo Andreolli (interrogators)

O interrogatório de uma mulher (The Interrogation of a Woman), 2016

O interrogatório de uma mulher is a semi-improvised, semi-scripted theater play around the construction of three characters and a situation: a woman who is being interrogated (with the violence and the nature of the violence of this interrogation itself remaining always ambiguous) and two interrogators. The interrogated woman remains enclosed inside a chalk circle, and the two interrogators walk up and down the stage-corridor of Teatro Oficina, free to move, along the corridor, among the audience, even outside the theater space. The public needs to (and does) make choices regarding this situation.





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|----------------------------|--|
| Keywords | audience, public, temporality |
| Short description | Durational performance in institutional space; installation |
| Collection | Collection Iordanis Kerenidis & Piergiorgio Pepe Collection SF MOMA, San Francisco, USA Collection MACBA, Barcelona, Spain |
| First performed at | <i>SOMEWHERE, TWO PLANETS HAVE BEEN COLLIDING FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS. (The Thinker as Poet)</i> , solo exhibition at La Verrière, Brussels, 2017 |
| Most recently performed at | <i>She Has Many Names</i> , solo exhibition at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023 |

Two Planets Have Been Colliding for Thousands of Years, 2017

In *Two Planets Have Been Colliding for Thousands of Years* two performers face each other, their gazes interlocked. Each is positioned inside one of two non-concentric circles. As one performer moves, the other must alter their position to maintain a constant distance which they agreed to keep between them at the beginning of the performance. All of this happens while the performers maintain eye contact. At some point, however, this becomes impossible as the circles are not concentric any longer. When this happens, the performers must start over in an endless game of continual negotiation.





Keywords

audience, handwritten text, printed matter, public, temporality

Short description

Performance in public space

First performed at

Phenomenon 2, Anafi, Greece, 2017, performed by Giannis Patiniotis and Lou Foster

Second time performed at

Kunst Vardo, Interculturelt Museum, Oslo, 2018, performed by Gorm Guttormsen and Sayed Hasan

Most recently performed at

Tongue on tongue, nos salives dans ton oreille, La Cité internationale des arts, Paris, 2019, performed by Guillaume Désanges and Alpha Mamadou

Translation/Exile, 2017

Two performers, one a local, and one a foreigner/visitor; one an insider, one an outsider; one familiar with the territory and the language, one unfamiliar with both the language, the social relations, and the community stories: they criss-cross a given territory (an island, a neighborhood) and exchange knowledge through questions, translations, and notes. The result will be two very personal handwritten dictionaries, which will be shared during a public conversation about the walk. And, in the end, a citizen will have become a bit of a stranger and a stranger will have become a bit of a citizen.

The performance *Translation/Exile* was specifically conceived for the biennial exhibition *Phenomenon 2* (phenomenon.fr) and took place for the first time on 5 July 2017 in the Greek island of Anafi. A publication documenting the exchange was produced by the artist and Phenomenon Anafi, documenting these exchanges.





Keywords

audience, monologue, public, temporality

Short description

Performance in institutional space

First performed at

Galeria ProjecteSD, Barcelona, Spain, 2018, performed by Geoffrey Carey

Second time performed at

Picasso et L'Exil, exhibition at Les Abattoirs, Toulouse, 2019, performed by James Borniche

Most recently performed at

She Has Many Names, solo exhibition at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023, performed by Geoffrey Carey and James Borniche

The Drawing on the Floor: A Monologue, 2018

The Drawing on the Floor: A Monologue guides the spectator through the dangerous implications of a contemporary reading of Albert Camus's *The Plague*. As he performs, the actor points repeatedly to different parts of a drawing on the floor representing the structure of Camus's text and, perhaps, of life, history, and the world itself.

See the script of *The Drawing on the Floor* in this book's "Appendix," page 312.



Keywords audience, public, reading-as-action, temporality

Short description Durational performance, installation, books

First performed at *Love with Obstacles*, solo exhibition at Rose Art Museum, Waltham, USA, 2020

Most recently performed at *She Has Many Names*, solo exhibition at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023

The Labyrinth of Female Freedom, 2020

In *The Labyrinth of Female Freedom*, a performer reads poems written by female poets, modulating her voice between public proclamation to private whisper. The decisions of the performer about the volume of her voice determines the space occupied by the performance.

This performance consists of the following three elements, next to the action of reading: a white circle on the floor, a growing library of female poets (in each performance iteration, new poetry books are added, trying to include texts written in the language spoken by most visitors of the exhibition), and an image (presented in different supports adapting to each exhibition space's circumstances) of a dismembered female figure framed by a circle (inspired by Aztec goddess Coyolxāuhqui).





| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Keywords | audience, public, temporality |
| Short description | Performance in institutional space |
| First performed at | <i>I know of a labyrinth which is a single straight line</i> , solo exhibition at Mattatoio, Rome, 2021–22 |
| Most recently performed at | <i>She Has Many Names</i> , solo exhibition at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023 |

Little object <a>, 2021

In *Little object <a>* a performer walks around the exhibition space with a closed fist. From time to time, he might look intently at one of the visitors, approach, and open their fist, briefly displaying a gold coin-like object on the palm of his hand, before quickly closing it again, walking away. Or the performer might freeze position, extending the palm like offering or begging, showing to everyone the shiny object, looking to the object, looking to the audience, looking away.

As described in the instructions to performers:

Little object <a> is a performance that consists of holding a golden coin in the palm of your hand and showing it to others, clearly implying that they cannot have it.

The performance must be executed calm and slow. You have to be certain of your territory and you have to walk around like a cat, silent, but tense. You walk around the space with the golden coin inside your closed fist. You will choose someone among the visitors, and that person must notice you before them knows why you are looking at them—in the past I have used the expression of “cruising” as a way to make clear to someone that you have an interest without everyone noticing. Once you have chosen the person, you will get close to them, locking gazes if they are willing to lock gaze with you, and then you will open your palm and show the coin. If they try to catch it you will close your palm into a fist and walk away. If they don’t, you will continue showing the coin until you feel it’s a good moment to leave—definitely before they get bored and leave themselves.

You will give no explanation about what you are doing, nor engage in conversations about why or the meaning of it.

From time to time, you will choose a spot in the space, create a space of respect around you, and open your palm and show the golden coin to no one in particular and to everybody. You will stay like that for a while, as if you were posing for a picture or a painting; and after a while you close your hand and you continue walking.

In fact, when I look at pictures of the performance, the position and the attitude are very similar to the one of a beggar; but it also reminds me of religious paintings and the gesture of showing the palm of your hand meaning welcome, or thanks.



Keywords audience, public, temporality, printed matter

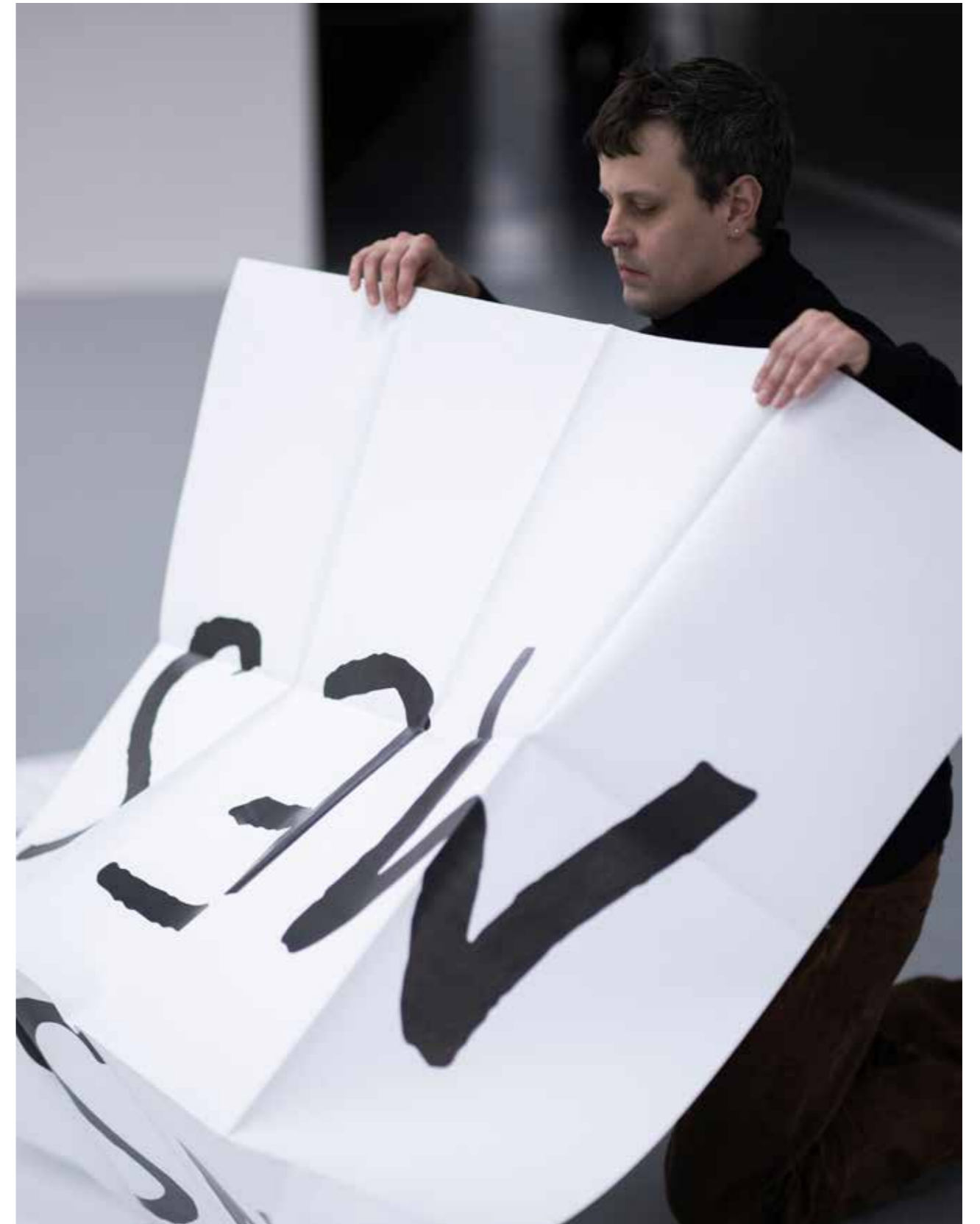
Short description Performance in institutional space

First performed at *Tout dans le cabinet mental*, exhibition at Le Crédac, Ivry-sur-Seine, France, 2022

Most recently performed at *She Has Many Names*, solo exhibition at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023

Révolution, 2022

In *Révolution*, a performer arrives in the exhibition space with a very large, folded poster under their arm (or the poster might already be folded somewhere in the space and be picked up by the performer). The poster is divided in three parts so the performer spends a considerable amount of time unfolding it so the public can read it once it is finally spread out on the floor: *Révolution, tiens ta promesse!* Once the poster is displayed in this way, the performer “guards” it for forty-five minutes and then folds it back up and leaves. The poster erodes with each folding and unfolding, meaning that, as the performance is repeated several times through several days, the poster might consist progressively of more parts than the original three parts, as it breaks here and there.





Keywords audience, public, reading-as-action, temporality

Short description One-off site-specific performance for two performers

Performed just once at Salone Monumentale, Biblioteca Casanatense, Rome, September 28, 2022; performed by Brianda Carreras and Maria Elena Fantoni, as part of Hidden Histories 2022 – *Trovare le parole/Finding the words*, curated by LOCALES (Sara Alberani, Marta Federici, with Valerio Del Baglivo)

I libri sono corpi (possono essere smembrati)/Books Are Bodies (They Can Be Dismembered), 2022

Books Are Bodies (They Can Be Dismembered) is a performance inspired by and developed around the history, collection, and architectural characteristics of Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome. The artist worked on a selection of censored, cancelled, or dismembered books from the library collection: tracing their connections and reconstructing their silenced stories, analyzing their potential for subversion. A script was developed from this research, which was used as the basis for a half-scripted, half-improvised performance adapted to the architecture of the Casanatense, where two performers crisscrossed the three levels of the library, exchanging books and comments.





Enacting Red Relations: On Dora García and Performance

Sven Lütticken

Sven Lütticken is associate professor at Leiden University's Academy of Creative and Performing Arts, Netherlands, and teaches art history at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. He recently published *Art and Autonomy: A Critical Reader* (Afterall, 2022) and *Objections: Forms of Abstraction, Volume 1* (Sternberg Press, 2022).

“A sideways step, a faulty move.”¹ Dora García does indeed practice the art of stepping sideways. Her work is marked by a proliferation of media and formats, and by collaborations that may involve the use of collective heteronyms. It remains an open question whether this practice can or should be mapped in its entirety with an eye to constructing the coherent *oeuvre* on which so much art history rests. Here, I will attempt what one could term a situated, subjective mapping of García's work. The point is not to indulge in anti-intellectual subjectivism, but instead to take my experience as a point of departure—or, in some cases, even my interest in some pieces that I only know through documentation, and through my imagination working with those documents.

Against the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* and its long afterlife in Western epistemology, philosopher Isabelle Stengers maintains that we need to effect a shift from “I think” to “something makes me think.”² In this essay, Dora García's work serves as that *something* for me—concatenated, of course, with other artworks, readings, and experiences. What García's work makes me think and rethink, time and again, are matters of performance and enactment, collaboration and relation. Some of her works may be labelled performance art but more broadly, and more fundamentally, García engages with the modalities and antinomies of performance beyond the confines of any particular medium-specific label or genre of art.

1

OUT OF THE MATRIX

“Performance” is a polysemic and multivalent term. As García herself notes, in a conversation with Peio Aguirre, it is practically impossible to limit the term to art, or the

arts: in addition to theatrical performance and performance art, there's performance in the economic or organizational sense, for starters (workers get *performance reviews*).³ The term *acting* would at first appear to be more specific and precise. García and Aguirre discuss various styles of acting (Stanislawski, Brecht), Hollywood films and actors, and her preference for actors who (almost) don't act at all—which betrays her interest in 1960s happenings by artists such as Allan Kaprow.⁴ Michael Kirby, who published an early volume on happenings, noted that whereas *acting* presupposes forms of feigning and impersonation, there are types of theater that use non-acting, where the performer “is merely himself and is not imbedded, as it were, in matrices of pretended or represented character, situation, place and time.” Kirby called this “non-matrixed performance.”⁵

García's term *Inserts in Real Time*—a “series title” that loosely groups together many of her performance pieces—suggests a particular approach to the problems of non-matrixed performance and the blurring of art and life. Perhaps the performers are not exactly “embedded,” but they are *inserted* into contexts, into various matrices. In *The Messenger* (2002), a performer needs to identify someone who can help them make sense of a handwritten message; depending on the version of the piece, this could be out on the street or in a museum. In *The Crowd* (2001), some of the people constituting the crowd start performing seemingly random actions; here, some performers have been smuggled into the crowd. Indeed, García's performers are sometimes placed in the position of spies or (double agents). This reference is made explicit with *The Romeos* (2008), in which young men strike up conversations with museum visitors in a nod to GDR intelligence chief Markus Wolf's “Romeo spies.”⁶

- 1 Dora García, “In an Old House,” in Dora García, ed., *Second Time Around, which is in fact the first* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2018), 31.
- 2 Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, trans. Andrew Goffey (London: Open Humanities Press; Lüneburg: meson press, 2015), 131.
- 3 In conversation with Peio Aguirre, García comments on performance in the sense of “success at work” and on “the performatization of everything.” See “Conversation Between Peio Aguirre and Dora García, 2013,” in *Respiración artificial* (Valencia: Institut Valencia d'Art Modern, 2016), 167, 170. Referencing the film *Performance*, Aguirre and García add the criminal meaning of the term performance, as a crime well executed (p. 167). Performance in art indeed has to be seen in the context of a more general culture of performativity in which the theatrical and economic meanings of the term “performance” become conjoined. See for instance Sabeth Buchmann, “Feed Back: Performance in the Evaluation Society” *Texte zur Kunst* 110 (June 2018), 34–51, as well as my essay “General Performance” *e-flux journal* 31 (January 2012), e-flux.com/journal/31/68212/general-performance
- 4 See in particular, “Conversation Between Peio Aguirre and Dora García, 2009,” 154.
- 5 Michael Kirby, “On Acting and Not-Acting,” in *TDR: The Drama Review* 16/1 (March 1972), 4. For an earlier version of Kirby's concept of non-matrixed performance, see “introduction” in *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, ed. Michael Kirby (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1965), 13–17.
- 6 García's 2006 film *Zimmer, Gespräche* (Rooms, Conversations) shows a meeting in an East-German apartment between an informant and an officer of the Staatssicherheit—the powerful intelligence agency whose foreign branch was run by Markus Wolf.

In her 2009 performance *Real Artists Don't Have Teeth*, García has a performer enact the discourse—and the pathological outbursts—of Jack Smith, Antonin Artaud, and Lenny Bruce. These non-matrixed performances thus become the basis for a script that is then acted out in a highly controlled performance—not in an act of conservative normalization, but in one of reflexive questioning. Part of her larger project *Mad Marginal*, which takes as its point of departure Franco Basaglia's anti-psychiatric writings on the “culture of the deviant,” *Real Artists* seeks to recapture the potential of practices that, taken as productive deviancy instead of as pathology to be cured, liberate the symptom from clinical (or indeed art-historical) disenfranchisement. This should not be mistaken for traditional art-historical “psychobiography” and its reduction of the artwork to manifestation of the artist's inner struggle and traumas. García's return to antipsychiatry is much more pointed than that. With her performer shifting from “regular” lecture-style performance to convulsive twitches and outbursts, we are watching a virtuoso performance that stages the loss of control in a highly-controlled manner.

Allan Kaprow presented his development of the happening as a radicalization of Jackson Pollock's work, taking cues from Harold Rosenberg's writings on “action painting.”⁷ Rosenberg habitually played with a fundamental ambiguity baked into the term acting: it has real-world as well as theatrical meanings.⁸ Theatrical performers may reenact actions by historical figures. But what is the status of *artistic* acts? How tight and secure is the framework of fiction? The Kaprowian organizer of happenings could stage strange or mundane goings-on in art spaces, but also in public space—something Kaprow increasingly resorted to as the 1960s progressed, when he let his happenings “blend into” urban daily life. With happenings having become the latest media hype, Kaprow staged distributed performances during which passers-by could happen to come across (non-)actors wrapped in tinfoil. In projects such as *The Beggar's Opera* or *William Holden in Frankfurt*, García has actors roam the streets of Münster and Frankfurt, respectively, as Charles Filch from the *Beggar's Opera* and as the classic Hollywood actor. As fictional characters and long-deceased actors take a new and seemingly autonomous lives, performance styles clash or become enmeshed.⁹

It is telling that the figure from the 1960s happenings movement that García has engaged with the most extensively has something of an “eccentric” position: the Argentine writer, artist, and psychoanalyst Oscar Masotta. Informed by pop art and semiology, as well as by psychoanalysis, Masotta critiqued what he saw as Kaprow's and Jean-Jacques Lebel's romantic craving for authenticity, for merging art with life.¹⁰ The happenings and “anti-happenings” organized in Buenos Aires in 1966–67 at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella embraced mediatization. In this milieu, the group Arte de los Medios organized a famous *Anti-Happening* that consisted of only press materials, without an actual event, while Masotta created a recursive media (anti-)spectacle in 1967 with *El*



7 Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 1–9. There are no direct references to Rosenberg in this essay, but Kaprow's debt to the Rosenbergian (as opposed to Greenbergian) reading of Pollock is unmistakable. In the later essay, “Happenings in the New York Scene,” Kaprow would make his debt explicit. See Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene” (1961), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 47, 50.

8 See Sven Lütticken, *History in Motion* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 59–89.

9 “Conversation Between Peiro Aguirre and Dora García, 2009,” 148–49.

10 Kaprow's struggle with the spectacularization of the happening is evident from a number of 1965–67 texts; see *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, 59–69. Even while critical of the mass media, Kaprow did not reject modern communication technology altogether: instead of using it to “mediate art,” he was inspired by systems theory to employ it in quasi-sociological and pedagogical projects. On this, see Catherine Spencer, *Beyond the Happening: Performance Art and the Politics of Communication* (Manchester University Press, 2020), 31–80. Spencer's study also contains sections on Masotta and the Argentine milieu that resonate with García's work.

mensaje fantasma (*The Phantom Message*): a poster in the city announcing that this poster would be broadcast on TV at a given time, which it was.

García recreated this piece, as well as two more elaborate Masotta happenings from 1966: *El helicóptero*, in which two groups of people go through simultaneous but spatially disparate events (with one group, sent to a cinema, missing the titular helicopter, and having to hear from the group about it), and *Para inducir el espíritu de la imagen* (*To Induce the Spirit of the Image*), in which a director makes a group of shabby-looking and aged extras stand in a row in glaring lights, to be ogled by a middle-class art audience.¹¹ These Masotta reenactments were incorporated into the feature-length film, *Segunda Vez* (2018), which also contains the films *La Eterna*, which shows people in a library discussing Peronism, psychoanalysis and Masotta, and a short film—likewise titled *Segunda vez*—that is based on a story by Julio Cortázar and depicts people waiting in line to be questioned by the “security” apparatus of a totalitarian state. In *Segunda Vez*, García follows footage of her *To Induce* reenactment and photos of the original happening with a 1972 photograph of sixteen political prisoners about to be executed by a firing squad in Trelew, Argentina—desublimating the optical and aural violence of Masotta's dispositif in *To Induce*, and invoking his later emigration from Argentina under the military junta.¹² More generally, García tries to tease out the political overtones of Masotta's pieces, for instance, by filming a shrouded, wrapped body that was shown in the cinema part of *El helicóptero*, which García likewise recreated, and which evokes Kaprow's 1965 happening *Calling*, as well as mob killings and political “disappearances.”¹³

García's repetitions constitute a knot of anachronisms and continuities. As she notes in her essay “How Masotta Was Repeated,” for Freud repetition was an avoidance of remembering, making the traumatic event persist in a perpetual present.¹⁴ Obviously, her repetitions take place not in a pathological bubble but in cultural contexts that

11 For a particularly insightful reading of *Para inducir el espíritu de la imagen*, taking cues from Masotta's Lacanianism, see Peio Aguirre, “Wrapped Up in Books,” in *Dora García: Second Time Around*, 41–42.

12 The same photo is on pp. 76–77 of Dora García, ed., *Segunda Vez: How Masotta Was Repeated* (Oslo: Oslo National Academy of the Arts and Torpedo Press, 2018).

13 Dora García, “Lazarus,” in *Segunda Vez: How Masotta Was Repeated*, 30–34.

14 Dora García, “How Masotta Was Repeated,” in *Dora García: Second Time Around*, 141.

15 Dora García, “How Masotta Was Repeated,” 151, 147.



Dora García, *Segunda Vez*, 2018; film stills courtesy the artist and Auguste Orts

come with institutional memory, as well as with institutional amnesia and hidden continuities. As García also notes, the French *répétition* also means “rehearsal.”¹⁵ The question is: what does the repetition rehearse?

Here Andrea Fraser's discussion of the term *enactment* is useful. Informed by psychoanalysis, Fraser uses it as an extension of the notion of transference: “enactment”

indicates that structures of relationships “are produced and reproduced in all kinds of activity.” For her, enactment—which includes linguistic as well as physical elements—implies “that in the production and reproduction of these relationships there is *always* an investment, and that the meaning of the enactment, its significance, function, and effect, is intimately and inseparably tied up with that investment.”¹⁶ What kinds of (psychological, social, economic) investments inform our enactments, and can performative strategies of reenactment foreground—and challenge—such investments? Fraser’s own 2001 performance piece *Kunst muss hängen* (*Art Must Hang*) makes for an intriguing comparison with García’s *Real Artists Don’t Have Teeth*. Fraser here reenacts a long, rambling speech by Martin Kippenberger—whose *William Holden Company* project informed García’s *William Holden in Frankfurt*. Both *Real Artists* and *Art Must Hang* are reenactments of “non-matrixed” performances by extreme self-performers, and their rambling speech acts become scripts that are in turn memorized and re-performed: “after reading comes speech, the performed text.”¹⁷

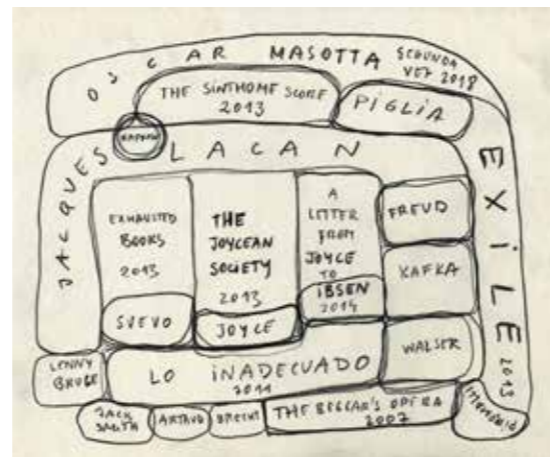
Just how non-matrixed *is* the presentation of self in everyday life, to use sociologist Erving Goffman’s terminology?¹⁸ And what can we learn from replaying our roles, from writing scripts on the basis of transcripts, from reenacting our—or others’—enactments? Can repetitions be rehearsals that introduce difference in our roles, placing us beside ourselves? When *Real Artists Don’t Have Teeth* was performed (on certain days, as part of a schedule of alternating pieces) in García’s show at the Spanish Pavilion of the 2011 Venice Biennial, the piece acted in a dialogue with other works, especially her *Instant Narrative* (2006)—a work in which the visitors see a description of themselves and their movements, perhaps with added literary speculations about them, appear in real-time on a screen, typed by a writer behind a laptop elsewhere in the space. This uncanny doubling foregrounds the viewer’s role as an actor of sorts, looking for ways out of the matrix, or just for ways to perform various matrices with a certain degree of composure and grace.

16 Andrea Fraser, “Performance or Enactment,” in *Performing the Sentence*, ed. Carola Dertnig and Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 127.
 17 Peio Aguirre, “Wrapped Up in Books,” 40.
 18 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh University Press, 1956).
 19 Mårten Spångberg, *Spangbergianism* (Stockholm: self-published, 2011), 121.

2
 PROPHETIC SINTHOMES

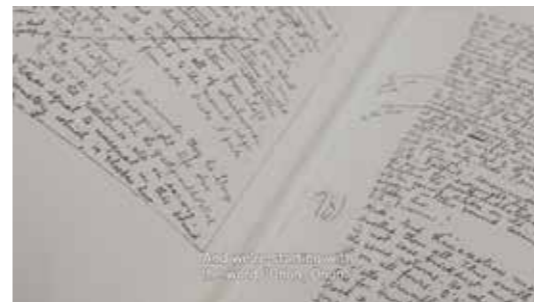
If García returns to historical practices and positions, it is because they constitute moments of breakdown when language becomes visible as a hole in the real; events that were deferred and never fully took place, or that echo from an alternate future. It would be a mistake to cast the artist in the role of a naïve romantic, glorifying mental illness and disabled marginals, longing for the days of bohemianism and *poètes maudits*. *Real Artists*, and *Mad Marginal* in general, is no mere contemporary simulation of the “authentic” symptoms of yesteryear, an exercise in psychiatric nostalgia for the real. What matters is “the invention of somatic practices,” to use a phrase by choreographer Mårten Spångberg.¹⁹ But the somatic and the linguistic are closely entwined in many of the modernist or avant-garde practices that interest García, and in her own work: the invention of semio-somatic practices.

Dora García, *Genealogías*, 2018, pencil on paper, 20 x 26 cm; courtesy the artist



A 2018 drawing from the *Genealogías* series provides a mapping of the critical modernists and transgressive avant-gardists whom García counts as forbearers who (in)form her work—figures ranging from Joyce, Walser, and Kafka to Freud, Lacan, and Brecht, as well as Kaprow and Masotta (and, obviously, Artaud, Jack Smith, and Lenny Bruce). As García notes, the names are not limited to art, but include psychoanalysis and activism. Like some kind of doodled

mind map, together the names sit next to one another in such a way that establishes no linear progression and no clear (let alone hierarchical) relations, though there is a clear emphasis on modernists and avant-gardists from the 1910s–30s and from the 1960s–70s. As for the former: the 2013 film, *The Joycean Society*, shows a group of (mostly elderly) participants painstakingly going through *Finnegans Wake* sentence by sentence, which they have been doing since 1983. They are now in their third “lap.” Their doyen, Fritz Senn, notes that the reading is a kind of benevolent fanaticism that functions as “a substitute for pleasures that are denied to some of us for some reason,” as “a substitute for people who usually are not very successful in life, like me.” Joyce’s layered and multilingual punning means they will never run out of material; you cannot step into the same *Finnegans Wake* twice.



Dora García, *The Joycean Society*, 2013; film stills courtesy the artist and Auguste Orts

20 David Dorenbaum, “The Place of the Word in the Work of Dora García,” in *Dora García: Second Time Around*, 69–70. On “Mallarmé’s dancer,” see also Jacques Rancière, “The Moment of Dance,” in *Modern Times*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London/New York: Verso, 2022), 65–93.

With his constant feedback between the oral and the written, Joyce is one of the great modernist de- and reconstructors of language, of the linguistic symbol itself, which becomes not so much a symptom as a *sinthome*: a Lacanian neologism that stands for a symptom that is not decodable, not waiting to be made legible in the manner of Freud. It is not the pathological manifestation of thwarted and detoured desires but rather an autonomous form—pure *jouissance*. García used the text of Lacan’s *Seminar XXIII: Le Sinthome*—illustrated with his topological diagrams—for *The Sinthome Score* (2014–16), which is performed in the exhibition. One performer reads the score, while the other performs postures based on drawings that García derived from Lacan’s text. This is indeed an affirmation of the somatic—“as if the moving body had internalized the topology of the text,” as David Dorenbaum put it—further relating the movements to the figure of “Mallarmé’s dancer who does not dance, but with the graphism of her body writes what the written work could only express through multiple paragraphs of dialogue or descriptive prose.”²⁰



Dora García, *The Deviant Majority*, 2010; film still courtesy the artist and Auguste Orts

García has a profound investment not only in Lacan but also in forms of antipsychiatry, and the work of Franco Basaglia in particular. Some antipsychiatric genealogies are traced in the video *The Deviant Majority: From Basaglia to Brazil* (2010), which, in the artist’s 2018 Reina Sofía retrospective, was shown around the corner from the *Sinthome Score*; at one point in the video, the psychiatric nurse Carmen Roll disses Félix Guattari as an arrogant bastard who hated to mingle with the disabled. The 1960s–70s nexus of neo-avant-garde activity, counterculture, and antipsychiatry is in fact key to García’s practice—for instance, in the Documenta 13 project *Die Klau Mich Show*, which took its title from a book by Fritz Teufel and Rainer Langhans; in that context,

she notes that the antipsychiatric movement has had a much greater impact on politics and on culture than on psychiatry. In general, García’s work has overtones of an antipsychiatric intervention in the institutional field—or an institutional analysis, in the Guattarian sense.


In siding with the symptom as autonomous sinthome, either linguistically or somatically—or semio-somatically—García is attentive to those moments when language stutters and lalts and “approach[es] the unspeakable.”²¹ In this, radical modern literary and artistic practices resemble prophetic speech; in fact, García notes that specific practices in Kafka or Joyce have been read as announcing the holocaust or the atom bomb, respectively. The artist also notes that Masotta has literalized the artwork-as-prophecy with *El mensaje fantasma*, where the poster was broadcast as announced—“It’s hard to imagine a more literal articulation of the proverbial ‘writing on the wall.’” And in fact, “it wasn’t long after *El mensaje fantasma* that the Triple A [the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance] took to the media, and Triple A groups, sent by the government’s Press Secretary, occupied channels 9 and 11, and later channels 7 and 13 as well, and used these channels to announce the names of future victims and to justify abductions and assassinations already carried out.”²² Both this and other works, such as *Para inducir el espíritu de la imagen* and *El helicóptero*, can thus be seen as uncanny anticipations of the dictatorship, as emphasized by García’s montage in *Segunda Vez*.

In one of her “insertions,” García has repeatedly smuggled a duo of *prophets* into the twenty-first-century art institution.²³ “Two young and attractive men”—represented by a still of Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford in *All the President’s Men*—hand out sheets of A4 paper. On the one hand, these are the scores for their performance, often specifying some particular task that García has given them for that day, but

they also announce events that are going to take place over the next twenty-four hours. The “score” for *The Prophets*’ appearance at the SMAK in Ghent on 8 April 2006 specifies that on that day, the prophets will discuss eschatology. The backside gives some astronomical/astrological data (Mercury is at its greatest elongation).²⁴ However, more often than not the score sheets “prophesize” scheduled events: a train will leave a railway station at a certain hour; a concert by a certain artist will take place; a state visit will commence. A concert by two Dutch singers gets a literal English translation of a press release: “The Amsterdam diva and the Nijmegen singer/songwriter are truly kindred souls: for both music is as basic as breathing or making love.”²⁵

Dora García,
The Prophets,
2005, prophecy
corresponding to
April 8, 2006

The Prophets



S.M.A.K. April 8 2006

The following will take place between Saturday, April 8, 14:00h, and Sunday, April 9, 14:00h.

14:00 - Two young and attractive men distribute photocopies among the visitors of the S.M.A.K., like the one you have right now in your hands. Today, the prophets will deliver a lecture on **Eschatology, the science of the last things, of death and final destiny**. The lecture will adopt the form of a conversation between the two; to act out the conversation, the prophets use the information below. With great zeal, they will defend the different theses below, while walking through the museum and handing over copies of this paper.

Prophet 1: Eschatology is that branch of systematic theology which deals with the doctrines of the last things (its eschata). The Greek title is of comparatively recent introduction, but in modern usage it has largely supplanted its Latin equivalent, De Novissimis. As a preliminary introduction to the subject-matter, a distinction may be made between the eschatology of the individual and that of the race and the universe at large. The former, setting out from the doctrine of personal immortality, or at least of survival in some form after death, seeks to ascertain the fate or condition, temporary or eternal, of individual souls, and how far the issues of the future depend on the present life. The latter deals with events like the resurrection and the general judgment, in which all men will participate, and with the signs and portents in the moral and physical order that are to precede and accompany those events. Both aspects—the individual and the universal—belong to the adequate concept of eschatology.

Prophet 2: From the very beginning of culture there was a belief in some kind of existence after death. Some primitive people seem to limit existence after death to the good (with extinction for the wicked), as the Nicaraguans, or to men of rank, as the Tongas; while the Greenlanders, New Guinea aboriginals, and others seem to hold the possibility of a second death, in the other world or on the way to it. The next world itself is variously located—on the earth, in the skies, in the sun or moon—but most commonly under the earth; while the life led there is conceived either as a dull and shadowy and more or less impotent existence, or as an active continuation in a higher or idealized form of the pursuits and pleasures of earthly life.

Prophet 1: In the ancient Babylonian religion, retribution is confined almost, if not quite, entirely to the present life, virtue being rewarded by the Divine bestowal of strength, prosperity, long life, numerous offspring, and the like, and wickedness punished by contrary temporal calamities. Yet the existence of a hereafter is believed in, a kind of semi-material ghost, or shade, or double (ekimmu), survives the death of the body, and when the body is buried (or, less commonly, cremated) the ghost descends to the underworld to join the company of the departed.

²¹ David Dorenbaum, “The Place of the Word in the Work of Dora García,” 72.

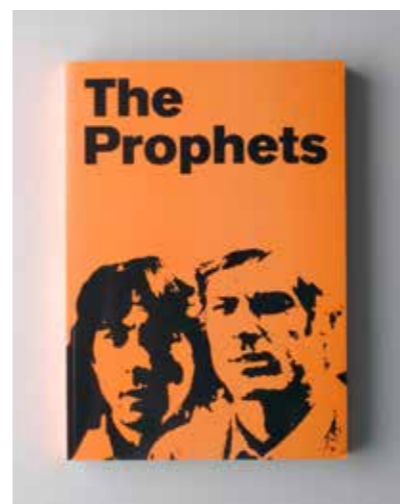
²² Dora García, “Lazarus”, in *Segunda Vez: How Masotta Was Repeated*, 41. See also a passage on the preceding page that is relevant for her piece *The Prophets*: “There is a line of thought that imagines artists and poets as prophets, as beings with special subjectivities that allows them to foretell the catastrophes to come.”

²³ See Dora García, *The Prophets* (Santiago de Compostela: Xunta de Galicia/Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, 2006). This is the catalog documenting three iterations of *The Prophets* in 2005–2006, at MNCARS in Madrid, at the SMAK in Ghent, Belgium, and at CGAC in Santiago de Compostela. It is perhaps in keeping with the nature of this piece that my thoughts on *The Prophets* were referenced before they were ever published. In her essay “Hope Is Guaranteed for Nothing: Processing Political Impotence” in *Dora García: Second Time Around* (118–31), Doreen Mende refers to the draft of an article of mine that would eventually be published in the volume *Futurity Report*. However, this published text no longer contained the section on *The Prophets*—a segment I am finally sharing here!

²⁴ Score for April 8, 2006, SMAK, Ghent, Belgium, in *The Prophets*, n.p.

²⁵ Score for April 14, 2006, SMAK, Ghent, in *The Prophets*, n.p.

García thus squarely positions her project in the context of the contemporary culture of the announcement. In the context of art, we can think of e-flux announcements, but also more generally the pre-announcement culture of social media. The piece thus stages a dialectic of secular announcement and religious prophecy. Perhaps not surprisingly, the performers struggled with their role, with the prophet persona. In addition to all the score sheets for the days during which García’s piece was performed in museums in Belgium and in Spain, the book documenting the 2005/2006 versions of the piece also contains reports by the performers on the “the events” of some of these days. These reports give some insight into the reality of the performance. “We’re supposed to misbehave today, but the truth is that everyday since we have performed in the museum, not a single visitor we have encountered while doing this job has considered our behavior as proper or at least as acceptable for the occasion.”²⁶ The prophets are thus seen as an unacceptable micro event in the spacetime of the museum; part of the reason may be precisely their uneasy oscillation between different futures.



Dora García,
The Prophets,
CGAC, 2006

On at least one occasion, García also staged a version of *The Prophets* in which the two young men did not limit themselves to announcing or predicting the next twenty-four hours, but in fact predicted various ends of the world or ends of time

²⁶ Daan [Goor], “On the Events of April 9,” in *The Prophets*, n.p. See also the score for April 9, 2006, SMAK, Ghent, in the same publication.

²⁷ This is from an iteration of *The Prophets* that was part of the *Playground* festival at STUK in Leuven, Belgium, November 4–10, 2010. The reference is to the score sheet for November 12th.

²⁸ Score for April 22, 2006, SMAK, Ghent, in *The Prophets*, n.p.

²⁹ See thearmyoflove.net

according to religions, mystics, and science—including the Mayan Calendar.²⁷ On the other hand, the Prophets also celebrate Earth Day.²⁸ Expectations about the future tend to infiltrate and influence the present; in a museum or exhibition space conceived as a space of encounter and exchange, competing and conflicting scenarios can start conversations and perhaps, at times, social mutations. In a feedback process between hoped for or dreaded futures and the present moment, the latter can make the planned event morph into something beyond what was announced.

3
ARMY OF RED LOVE



Army of Love
seminar at PEI,
MACBA, Barcelona,
Spain, 2017

García’s 2016–17 participation in the project *Army of Love*, initiated by Ingo Niermann, shows her attentiveness to contemporary forms of subjectivation, especially in the art world and field of culture, where historical radicalisms and alternative lifestyles have morphed into forms of networked affectivity that promise a precarious liberation.²⁹ García (co-)led various workshops revolving around enacting, or sketching the possible enactment of, “a fiction: the existence of a community named Army of Love, based on a credo named completism. [...] It is a fiction; the workshop consists of seeing together how this fiction can be made coherent, believable, structured, and fit to go into reality, because... even if reality has no logic, steel logic is asked from fiction to be accepted as reality. This is therefore a workshop of

debate and brainstorming, but not only: We are supposed to imagine together and practice together exercises and actions that might bring credibility and efficiency to the Army of Love.”³⁰

While García frequently uses the term character in the theatrical sense, with Filch or Holden becoming “autonomous” characters beyond the fictional frameworks in which they emerged, one could consider *Army of Love* as a campaign against actually existing character(s) in the Reichian sense. In the early 1930s, Wilhelm Reich developed the analysis of negative transference by homing in on character as a site of resistance to analysis, and as a source of pathologies. If “every social organization produces those character structures which it needs to exist,” then clearly patriarchal capitalism needs and produces stunted and mangled characters.³¹ In a post-68 gloss on Reich, Jean-Pierre Voyer argued that “In contrast to a symptom—which must be considered as a production and concentration of character and which is felt as a foreign body, giving rise to an awareness of illness—a character trait is organically embedded in the personality. Unawareness of the illness is a fundamental symptom of character neurosis.”³²

Character thus has a certain degree of autonomous existence, being identified with a self that has to be maintained at all costs. This is precisely the problem. As a kind of armor, it is “a defense against communication, a failure of the faculty of encounter,” resulting in “damaged individuals, as stripped as possible of intelligence, sociability and sexuality, and consequently truly isolated from one another; which is ideal for the optimum functioning of the automatic system of commodity circulation.”³³ Character thus is complicity in oppression. Today, it produces boys who are in thrall to Andrew Tate or Jordan Peterson. When García writes that the “[Army of Love] community is being formed right now as the most radical possible answer to neoliberalism, capitalism, winners/losers’ dichotomy, and yes, fascism and its many metamorphoses,”³⁴ there are clearly resonances

with such avant-garde visions in yet another repetition with a difference, as the context is now that of neoliberal precarity, and indeed of the latest mutations of fascism.

Rose Hammer, *Grini and the Futures of Norway*, Oslo Biennial, 2019



Having discontinued her involvement with *Army of Love*, García co-founded Rose Hammer together with Per-Oskar Leu and a number of (former) students of the art academy in Oslo. Rose Hammer is “a collective persona” who evokes sources ranging from the old communist and socialist hammer emblem to the post-war social-democratic rose symbol, as well as the hammer engraved on Ibsen’s gravestone, and the Brecht passage: “Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it.” As the group states, “So, we are socialists, we are agitprop, we are Brechtians, we go for a dialectical, didactic, and collective approach. We back formal experimentation meeting radicalism in thought.”³⁵ Once again, then, a turn to Brechtian acting in

30 Dora García, presentation text for *Army of Love* workshops, unpublished (parts and variations of the texts can be found on various websites).

31 Wilhelm Reich, “Preface to the First Edition” (1933), in *Character Analysis*, trans. Vincent R. Carfagno (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), xxii.

32 Jean-Pierre Voyer, “Reich: How to Use” (1971), trans. Ken Knabb, bopsecrets.org/PS/reich.htm

33 Jean-Pierre Voyer, “Reich: How to Use.”

34 Dora García, presentation text for *Army of Love* workshops.

35 “Rose Hammer 1,” quoted from Sven Lütticken, “The Name of the Rose—Fragments from a Conversation with Rose Hammer,” 171, oslobiennalen.no/app/uploads/2019/11/Sven-L%C3%BCtticken-THE-NAME-OF-THE-ROSE-FRAGMENTS-FROM-A-CONVERSATION-WITH-ROSE-HAMMER.pdf

the context of *Lehrstücke* that forge links between fascist and emancipatory imaginaries and practices then and now. Rose Hammer is well aware that many left-wing aesthetic devices from the inter-war era seem hopelessly dated in the era of Facebook, but they choose, precisely, to opt out of a certain arms race: “Pleasure, if anything, will bring down the system. We are working for pleasure. The pleasure of being together, the pleasure in referring to the authors we love, the comfort of poetry, the pleasure of constructing a solid, believable, well structured, formally coherent, self-assured, beautiful performance. That is our job. It is not our job to turn Fascists into Communists or propose an alternative to neoliberalism.”³⁶

Rose Hammer is an example of what can be termed *organizational aesthetics* in contemporary art.³⁷ This should not be seen in abstract opposition to *relational* art practice. Organizational labor here clearly stands in the service of changing human relations. In evoking the history of socialist and communist movements and parties, Rose Hammer focuses on the affective and libidinal bonds fostered through solidarity. The aim is to enact relations differently, via a reenactment of historical emancipatory practices that become a *preenactment* of future social forms.



Dora García, *Love with Obstacles*, 2020; film still courtesy the artist and Auguste Orts



Dora García, *If I Could Wish for Something*, 2021; film still courtesy the artist and Auguste Orts

36 “Rose Hammer 1” in Sven Lütticken, “The Name of the Rose—Fragments from a Conversation with Rose Hammer,” 174.

37 See my article “Organizational Aesthetics,” *October* 183 (Winter 2023): 17–51.

38 Bini Adamczak, *Beziehungsweise Revolution: 1917, 1968 und kommende* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017). García first developed her *Red Love* project in the context of a research project on Kollontai by Tensta Konsthall and Konstfack’s CuratorLab; Bini Adamczak is represented in the resulting publication alongside García. See Maria Lind et al., eds., *Red Love: A Reader on Alexandra Kollontai* (London: Sternberg Press, 2020).

Love and comradeship have become central to García’s thinking and work—and above all their integration in the kind of relation that Alexandra Kollontai called comradely love. There is a parallel here with the theoretical work of Bini Adamczak, who has written insightfully on the specific *Beziehungsweise*—the relational mode—of revolutionary activity.³⁸ For both Adamczak and García, Kollontai is a key figure because of her emphasis on sexuality and gender: arguing that the revolution would have to entail a revolution in affective and sexual relations, and require a liberation of women, Kollontai was attacked and marginalized by patriarchal and masculinist Bolsheviks. The 2020 film *Love with Obstacles* is García’s anachronistic love letter to Kollontai—which includes her 1922 story about a commune in 1970, in which a “Red Grandmother” looks affectionately at the young generation, who will follow up the older generations’ taking-control of society by “subduing nature.” Here the anthropocentric perspective could suggest that Kollontai was all too rooted in a Leninist and industrialist imaginary—unless one were to read “subduing nature” in terms of a questioning and overcoming of “natural” gender roles.

Kollontai’s sting as Soviet ambassador to Mexico links *Love with Obstacles* (the film as well as the book *Love with Obstacles: Amor Rojo*, both 2020) to *If I Could Wish for Something* (2021). Here, in a rhythmically rich montage, footage of women’s protests in Mexico City alternates with scenes in which the trans singer La Bruja de Texcoco writes a new song loosely inspired by Friedrich Hollaender’s “Wenn ich mir was wünschen dürfte” (1930). In a country ravaged by femicide, protests with rousing chants are thus interwoven with far more melancholic tones; for García, there is also political strength in sadness. This is a polyphonic film conjuring up a feminist and queer army of comradely love. In these works, and in the feature-length film *Amor Rojo*, (2022), which functions as a synthesis, what matters is not “performance art” but the performance of roles and relations. What matters is disidentification with reified characters and the questioning of habitual enactments. What matters is pleasure and melancholy; what matters is red love.



Appendix Scripts

What a Fucking Wonderful Audience (2008)¹

INTRO

WHAT A FUCKING WONDERFUL AUDIENCE

Hello to all and thanks for walking with me in this *What a Fucking Wonderful Audience* tour. I believe a little introduction is necessary, especially about the word “fucking” accompanying the word “wonderful.” The word “fucking” in this context is not offensive. It is a popular way of saying “very,” “extremely,” “exceedingly.” In some contexts, the word “fucking” loses all possible edge, becomes, so to say, “de-semantized,” sidesteps its original meaning, related to sexual intercourse. This is one of these contexts. “What a fucking wonderful audience” just means “What an exceedingly wonderful audience.” But, of course, it does not sound as cheesy. According to legend, the sentence “What a fucking wonderful audience” was the only sentence comedian Lenny Bruce was able to deliver in his one-time, one-sentence performance in Sydney in 1962; he was arrested immediately after uttering it. Apparently, the word “fucking” kept its full meaning in that context.

So, we use this troubled sentence, so much more tame now than then, to indicate the complex nature of the relation between artist and audience: say fucking audience in Australia in 1962 and you’ll be jailed; say it now and you’ll get a cough and a leer, if that.

Shock the audience! Shocking the audience is not an artistic amusement, but a legitimate artistic strategy. An artist meets an audience and just wants to shake it. Shake it awake!

SHOUTS

This guided tour discusses only three of the works in this exhibition, all of them highlights of audience shaking. Please feel free to interrupt the tour at any time if you have a question or wish to make a comment.

¹ See “Chronology,” page 170.

² In case *La société du spectacle* is presented as a projection the performer should stop just outside the projection room, give her spiel about the piece, then usher in the audience, and wait for them outside.

1

THE SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE BY GUY DEBORD

SHE WALKS TO THE FILM *LA SOCIÉTÉ DU SPECTACLE* BY GUY DEBORD,² LOOKS INTENTLY AT THE AUDIENCE, AND SAYS, HISSING WITH HATE:

You wax figures. You impersonators. You bad-hats. You troupers. You tear-jerkers. You potboilers. You foul mouths. You sell-outs. You deadbeats. You phonies. You educated gasbags. You cultivated classes. You befuddled aristocrats. You rotten middle class. You lowbrows. You people of your time.

SHE SMILES AND QUOTES PEEVISHLY:

Peter Handke, *Offending the Audience*, 1970.

The audience, these poor wage-earners who see themselves as property owners, these mystified ignoramuses who think they’re educated, these zombies with the delusion that their votes mean something.

SHE SMILES AND QUOTES:

Guy Debord, *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*—We turn in the night, consumed by fire, 1978.

Insulting the audience is a good way of describing the work of Guy Debord, core artist of the Situationist movement. The film shown here, *The Society of the Spectacle*, is barely more than a series of Marxist deliriums in monologue form delivered over found TV footage and excerpts from movies as fundamental as Johnny Guitar, Rio Grande, Shanghai Gesture, or They Died with Their Boots On. Intoxicated by Marx and Lukàcs, Debord’s monotone voice carries on for eighty-seven minutes, during which time he reads passages from his 1967 book *The Society of the Spectacle*. This is a summary of the thesis proposed by Debord: the reduction of reality to images, to a spectacle to be contemplated by a passive audience is part of the strategy of capitalism to annihilate any possible opposition. The spectacle is a “language without answer,” a unilateral communication, a monologue [SMILE]. According to Debord, the specialists in

the power of the spectacle find the spectator a despicable creature. But so does he.

Debord's first book, *Mémoires*, had covers made of sandpaper, so that it would destroy other books placed next to it.

“There is no film. Cinema is dead. No more films are possible.” In such statements, we recognize the beauty of the “no future.” A sort of PUNK *avant la lettre*, Debord despises his public and despises his medium, film. He tries to place his films above and beyond any possible cinematic criticism; they are indifferent to the opinion of the public and the critics: “I pride myself on having made a film out of whatever rubbish was at hand; and I find it amusing that people will complain about it who have allowed their entire lives to be dominated by every kind of rubbish.” If the public does not understand Debord's work, so much the better: this is a proof of the work's quality and of Debord being outside general mediocrity. *What a Fucking Wonderful Audience*: in Debord's words, “nothing of importance has ever been communicated by being gentle with the public.”

Fire. In his 1978-film *We turn in the night, consumed by fire*, Debord describes the only audience he was ready to accept, the other Situationists, as: “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.” The few, the happy few, the band of brothers, they were people quite sincerely ready to set the world on fire just to make it shine. This civilization is on fire; the whole thing is capsizing and sinking. What splendid torpedoing!

“It was a pleasure to burn.” Ray Bradbury, first sentence of *Fahrenheit 451*, 1951.

Not only does Debord despise film and audience; he identifies himself with the criminal, the outlaw, the marginal (here we have PUNK again), and takes great pride in it: “I have merited the universal hatred of the society of my time, and I would have been annoyed to have any other merits in the eyes of such a society.” He fancies himself as a disciple of the Assassin Sect (or Hashishin, because of their addiction to Hashish), whose motto was: “Nothing is true, everything is permitted.” The Assassin Sect, which is at the origin of the word assassin and pioneer of what is known today as suicide terrorism, shared Debord's pantheon, along with people like Arthur Cravan, deserter of seventeen nations,

and the cultivated bandit Lacenaire. He took pride in having as friends “a certain number of thieves and occasionally a few murderers.” But crime is not the activity they were proudest of, but indolence. “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers” did no productive work whatsoever, and Debord was probably right in this: nothing could offend the establishment more than that.

Ne travaillez jamais. Never work. Debord's milieu was not only opposed to any form of paid work, but regarded even unpaid work as undesirable. They even said they made revolution in their spare time. What are your hobbies? Revolution is my hobby.

Please have a look at the movie. I'll wait for you till you're ready.³

2

HÉLIO OITICICA AND NEVILLE D'ALMEIDA,
QUASI-CINEMAS/COSMOCOCA 5, HENDRIX WAR, 1973

Cara de Cavalo (Portuguese for “horse face”) was twenty-two years old when they shot him dead in a shower of over 100 bullets. His body was then covered with a sort of flag with a skull and two shinbones, the symbol of the death squads. Cara de Cavalo was a friend of Helio Oiticica, and also a friend of many people in the favelas of Rio. Helio Oiticica said that, apart from their personal friendship, Cara de Cavalo represented for him an “ethical moment.” He was the symbol of the individual rebellion against the system of repression and oppression, he was the bandit. Crime is, like art, a desperate search for happiness and completeness, a defiance of the destiny embossed upon someone by society. By those lights, the artist is a criminal as well, someone who must take distance from their expected audience of correct leftists and compassionate right-wingers, someone who has to push the limits of the audience's paternalist tolerance towards what cannot be tolerated any more. Audiences are tolerant with artists—to a point, anyway. And this tolerance irritates artists: “I don't want any break in the world, I want justice,” said Lenny Bruce to the judge. Justice! Probably that word was in Helio's mind when he made the *Box Bolide 18* in 1966, “a homage to Horse Face.” Oiticica wrote about this work: “this homage reflects upon

individual rebellion against social conditions. Violence is legitimate as a means of revolt, but never as a means of oppression.” *Box Bolide 18*, which is not exhibited in the Biennial, contains several images of the outlaw's corpse and a sealed bag, filled with the red soil of Brazil bearing a text that reads: “AQUI ESTÁ, E FICARÁ! [Here he is and will remain!] ... CONTEMPLAI SEU SILÊNCIO HERÓICO” [Contemplate his heroic silence]...

A 1968 concert in Rio featuring Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, and the radical group Os Mutantes was censored by the authorities because of the inclusion of a banner, made by Oiticica, reading “Be an outlaw/Be a hero.” Subsequently, Veloso and Gil went into exile in London. The banner bore an image of the shot down corpse of Cara de Cavalo.

Waiting for the musicians in London was Helio himself, who was preparing his exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery. From there he went to New York with a Guggenheim Fellowship. Although a well-established artist, he had a lot of difficulties surviving in the New York art circuit, and, whether out of necessity or out of conviction, he decided to abandon the art world and go underground. He was living from translation work and, according to some sources, selling cocaine.

The story goes that the *Cosmococas* were invented when Helio was sniffing cocaine in his New York apartment and using as a surface for the spreading of the lines a record by Frank Zappa and The Mothers of Invention (curiously, this group shared the stage with Lenny Bruce during his last performance, organized by Phil Spector in 1966). In any case, the record was called: *Weasels Ripped My Flesh*. The beauty of the pattern made by the lines of cocaine on the record sleeve suddenly struck him.

The *Cosmococas* were created together with film director Neville D'Almeida. D'Almeida embellished the bodies and faces of the original printed images—the portraits of Monroe, Hendrix, Buñuel, and others—with generous tracings of cocaine. Oiticica took the pictures. He treated cocaine as a pigment, and therefore the drawings made with cocaine were, above all, drawings. The cocaine medium progressively vanished from the surfaces, presumably by being snorted, and was therefore regarded by Oiticica also as a radical expression of the dematerialization of the object of art (already back then a widely shared concern of the art

world). Next to that, the white cocaine on the white cover of John Cage's *Notations* is obviously also an explicit and sarcastic reference to Malevich.

However sublimated, the substance Oiticica had chosen as his transgressive medium remained illegal, and consequently the *Cosmococas* languished, virtually unknown, until the advent of an important catalogue and touring exhibition in 1992. But even in their first public show, the word “cocaine” was nowhere to be found.

The *Cosmococas* were a logical outcome of previous works celebrating pleasure and leisure. As is the case with Debord, Oiticica considered pleasure, leisure, and creative indolence as forms of political stance, of resistance. But the *Cosmococas* were also part of a darker desire to disappear, go underground, and become a *poet maudit*. As in his homage to Cara de Cavalo, Oiticica vindicated the marginal position as the only honest one. Criminals and loafers, as Debord says, were the only ones in the position of doing the revolution, of resisting and hitting where it hurts the most. In his writings, Oiticica made fun of the figure of the artist, as mainstream audiences understood it: a hard-working, sweaty heterosexual male, a careerist dying to see his work hanging in museums. To this figure Oiticica opposed the bandit, the addict, the idler, the sexually complex underground hero.

3

EPILOGUE

THE PERFORMER WALKS TO THE PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRIS BURDEN, *KUNST KICK*, 1974

Audience, be reassured, the great men we have discussed in this short, guided tour paid for their insults to the audience. Lenny Bruce committed suicide—or died of an overdose—in 1966; Guy Debord shot himself when alcoholism made his life hell. Oiticica died of a stroke when he was forty-three years old.

Chris Burden's 1973 performance 747—“At about 8 am at a beach near the Los Angeles International Airport, I fired several shots with a pistol at a Boeing 747”—seems to revive the poet André Breton's definition of “the simplest Surrealist act” in his *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*: “going into the street, revolver in hand, and shooting at random into the crowd.”⁴

³ The guide waits for the audience. When the audience stops watching the film and while they walk to the second piece, she has an animated chat with them about how they liked it.

⁴ The performer mimics Burden shooting the plane, then Breton shooting the audience.

Although *747* is not exhibited at this Biennial, I'd like to end this tour paying my respects to *Kunst Kick*, a performance by Chris Burden from 1974. The performance consists of the artist being kicked down the stairs of the Basel Art Fair, two or three steps at a time.

This is the end of our tour. Thanks for listening to this performance, *What a Fucking Wonderful Audience*. Goodbye.

The Artist Without Works Works: A Guided Tour Around Nothing (2009)⁵

FIRST POSITION OR STATION 1

SMILING BROADLY, A NEWSPAPER ROLLED UP IN HIS HANDS, THE PERFORMER BEGINS TO SPEAK, ADDRESSING THE AUDIENCE AS A TOUR GUIDE WOULD DO:

Hello to all and thanks for walking with me in this guided tour around nothing: *The Artist Without Works*.

You have come here hoping for what most artists are ready to give you, a generous flow of artworks being displayed in front of your eyes. I'd like to tell you about this artist that will let you go empty-handed and empty-eyed.

The Artist Without Works: A Guided Tour Around Nothing is exactly what the title says it is: a guided tour of the works of an artist who doesn't produce any. This artist's rejection of the game's most fundamental rule—which is to show something—is an attempt to get beyond Francis Picabia's evil, atrocious, and supposedly exhaustive alternative: “Artists can be divided into two categories: the failed, and the unknown.”

We shall never know much about the unknown ones, but, like Picabia, I am tempted to classify all those we do know as failures.

Why failures?

THE PERFORMER IS POINTING TO HIMSELF AS HE ASKS THE QUESTION, TO INDICATE THAT HE, TOO, IS ONLY A SHADOW OF WHAT HE HAD HOPED TO BE.

One reason is that every finished product, in every domain—I am sure you agree with me on this point—is by nature only a shadow of what it wanted to be. [THE PERFORMER MOVES THROUGH THE AUDIENCE]. But, mainly, they are failures because the drive behind the productive artist is dangerously close [THE PERFORMER BECOMES A BIT MORE PASSIONATE] to the drive behind the efficient provider of products, or that of the diligent vendor eager to keep the clientele satisfied.

⁵ See “Chronology,” page 186.

Please, walk with me. We will start the tour.

THE PERFORMER MOVES TO A DIFFERENT POINT IN THE SPACE. HE STOPS, AS IF THEY HAD ARRIVED AT THE POINT HE WANTED TO SHOW THE AUDIENCE. HE WAITS FOR EVERYONE TO ARRIVE TO THAT POINT BEFORE HE STARTS TALKING.

SECOND POSITION OR STATION 2

But we could, perfectly, imagine an artist without works, an artist who refuses to produce anything. An artist who never gives the audience what the audience wants.

The artist without works is not a tragic figure. He doesn't refuse to produce because he's afraid to fail, because he is afraid the work will not live up to his own ambitions. Nor does he refuse to produce because he is afraid that he will not be saved from anonymity and oblivion, or simply from misunderstanding. The source of his refusal is not fear, but the will to create another possibility: the possibility of not being here, not wanting this, not making something ... and yet, against all odds, the work is there. It is there in all its beauty, the beauty of not done.

Not being here... Time to go to the next stop. Please follow me.

THE PERFORMER MOVES TO A DIFFERENT POINT IN THE SPACE.

THIRD POSITION OR STATION 3

The artist without works wants to assert an ideology, not build a career. The ideology would not trade on objects but on deeds. Or, rather, on un-deeds. The artist without works practices the radicalism of the refusal: I am not there. I would prefer not to.

What does he exactly refuse?

First of all, he refuses to make sense. The desire to make sense is the stock and trade of the good merchant, who pretends to comfort an audience thirsty-for-sense with a product falsely full-of-sense. There is no cheating here: the artist without works refuses to deliver, to inject sense onto a reality that has no obligation whatsoever to make any sense or have any meaning. The artist without works is no author, that idiot trying to inject sense—at whatever cost!—into everything.

Authorship must be eliminated. The only way to preserve truth, elegance, beauty, is to find, not to make. One has to act as if those artworks [THE PERFORMER POINTS TO SOMEWHERE, TO THE ARTWORKS THAT MIGHT BE PRESENT IN THE ROOM AT THAT MOMENT] were always there, as if they had not been made, but found! [THE PERFORMER STARTS SPEAKING IN THE FIRST PERSON.] I found it. I didn't make it. So, I don't have to answer for it ... it is enough simply to comment on it, study it, to quote it briefly and precisely ... [TRIUMPHANTLY] to tour guide it!

Please, follow me to the next work in our tour.

THE PERFORMER MOVES TO A DIFFERENT POINT IN THE SPACE.

FOURTH POSITION OR STATION 4

By renouncing authorship, the artist frees himself, first of all, from responsibility. Secondly, it allows him to establish a relationship with his audience that is untroubled by issues of self-esteem. And, thirdly, it enables him to invest his unmade, concise, found work with the authority of an archeological reconstruction [POINTS TO ONE OF THE ARTWORKS IN THE ROOM].

As Balzac once asked: Where will you find better literature than this? [THE PERFORMER PRESENTS FRONTALLY, CONFRONTATIONALLY, TO THE AUDIENCE THE NEWSPAPER HE'S BEEN CARRYING AND READS A CHOSEN HEADLINE]. Please, follow me to the last stop on our tour.

THE PERFORMER LEADS THE AUDIENCE TO THE EXACT SAME POINT WHERE THE PERFORMANCE STARTED.

FIFTH POSITION OR STATION 5

Perhaps you are wondering what this unproductive artist, this artist freed from the constraints of producing, does with his time? “Our best artwork is the use of our time.” [THE PERFORMER LETS EVERYONE UNDERSTAND THIS IS A QUOTATION, BUT DOES NOT SAY WHO IT IS FROM.] The artist who refuses to produce must face the anger of the audience: nothing can offend an audience more than an indolent and unproductive artist, one who probably lives on welfare. That is what the artist without works does: he offends the audience. Do you remember *Offending the Audience*, by Peter Handke? The opening goes like this [THE PERFORMER RECITES THE FOLLOWING WORDS, HISSING WITH HATE AS HE/SHE MOVES AROUND THE PUBLIC]:

You wax figures. You impersonators. You bad-hats. You troupers. You tear-jerkers. You potboilers. You foul mouths. You sell-outs. You deadbeats. You phonies. You educated gasbags. You cultivated classes. You befuddled aristocrats. You rotten middle class. You lowbrows. You people... of your time.

The audience, these poor wage-earners who see themselves as property owners, these mystified ignoramuses who think they’re educated, these zombies with the delusion that their votes mean something.

THE PERFORMER SMILES AND QUOTES: This quote is by Guy Debord, *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni—We turn in the night, consumed by fire, 1978*:

The surplus of time makes of the artist without works a hobo, a walker, a demonstrator, a dissident, a trouble-maker, a terrorist, a striker, a radical, a drug-dealer, a drug user, an outsider, an outcast, a sexual degenerate, a deviant, a surrealist, a banalyst, a situationist.

And pleased to meet you,

THE PERFORMER SMILES BROADLY AS IN THE BEGINNING OF THE PERFORMANCE, AND KINDLY BOWS.

Thank you.

⁶ See “Chronology,” page 202.

Real Artists Don’t Have Teeth (2010)⁶

Real artists don’t have teeth.

An obsessional man in an obsessive age, Jack Smith divided his dazzling, hallucinatory mind between Maria Montez, Landlordism/Lobsterism, and teeth.

Needless to say, the three subjects were inextricably linked, and could be equated to the trio of sexuality/ social engagement/ institutional criticism.

Any contemporary artist would agree with this trinity of subjects; it’s what occupies all our time.

But why are we talking about Jack?

What is really interesting about Jack Smith is that, contrary to some, he seemed to have an innate inability to conform, the inability to accept acceptance—even from his own apostles. This refusal is nothing but “a certain superior idea of human honor.”

The toothless Antonin Artaud said it [IMITATION OF ARTAUD’S VOICE]: “a man who has chosen to go mad rather than renounce a certain superior idea of human honor.”

[IMITATION OF ARTAUD’S VOICE] A certain superior idea of human honor.

[NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] Maria Montez. Maria Montez was Jack Smith’s personal Dulcinea. Jack Smith titled his notorious essay and manifesto published in *Film Culture* in 1962 “The Perfect Film Appositeness of Maria Montez”—apposite: a cult term for relevant. “The Perfect Film Relevance of Maria Montez, Queen of Technicolor.” Who could read this without smiling? Maria Montez was sometimes referred to as “a poor man’s Dorothy Lamour.” Jack would have probably rebuffed such an offensive epithet.

Montez completely pervaded Jack’s fantasy world, his creative topos, Montezland, and became the solution to every problem troubling Jack. He seemed to be forever lost in a constant reverie centered on her, the composed, nasal tone of his voice clearly a childish impersonation of the dancer Scheherazade. He built an altar for her and prayed to “the Holy One,” “the Miraculous One.” He granted her attributes like the ones assigned to furious ancestral deities: [IMITATION OF SMITH’S VOICE] “The Miraculous One was raging and flaming. Those are the standards for art.” [NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] In this strange syncretism of Hollywood kitsch, colonialism, and Santeria, Maria Montez took on all the attributes of Yemayá, lulled by the Exotica and Afro-desia of Martin Denny. Moreover, she became the final solution for a troubled (“rented,” in Jack’s jargon) world: [IMITATION OF SMITH’S VOICE] “O Maria Montez, give socialist answers to a rented world!”

[NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] You see, there is nothing strange in a young gay man’s fascination with the Diva, even if Montez was, agreed, a very peculiar choice, the “normal” ones being Bette Davis or Marlene Dietrich.

The choice of Montez had much more to do, in my view, with her capacity to incarnate [IMITATION OF SMITH’S VOICE] failure, trash, and despair. [NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] Failure, trash, despair, qualities all highly appreciated by the anti-hero, the marginal artist Jack had no choice but to become. He was that, standing fully behind the Ridiculous Diva, the pathetic 24-hour-a-day star (Ms. Montez was famous for her spectacular entrances at nightclubs and social functions; once, when her arrival at the Universal Studios failed to attract attention, she turned on her heels and left the room, returning moments later with a huge entourage and accompanying din.)

Sublime ridicule, the faux desert, the powdery lace, the draped bikini tops, the sheikh, the pharaoh: [IMITATION OF SMITH’S VOICE] “THIS IS A SCIMITAR. A rare blade... The scimitar is curved and uh... covered in uh... very expensive, rare and precious jewels, how do I look?” [NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] he’d say.

Failure, trash, despair, destitution, quixotism, and the antihero. The portrait of the artist as a suffering Christ, or, again, the artist refusing and being unable to accommodate bourgeois morality—but paradoxically, with a LOT to say about it—the MORALIST. [IMITATION OF LENNY BRUCE’S VOICE] “I don’t want any break in the world, I want justice!” [NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] said Lenny Bruce to the paternalistic judge who was ready to let him go... this one time.

More than that: not only does the moralist artist set himself (or herself) apart from petty norms, he considers the “general public” (read: politically correct leftists and compassionate right-wingers) to be unworthy of his art. [IMITATION OF SMITH’S VOICE] “I don’t want the scum of Baghdad. I want only uh... the best.” [NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] said Jack Smith when everybody had left, tired of waiting hours for his performance to start. Why that cruelty, Jack, why let them wait for hours? [IMITATION OF SMITH’S VOICE] “Something had to be done... uh... in order to keep them from becoming sofa-roosting cabbages.”

[IMITATION OF ARTAUD’S VOICE] “You are mad, Mr. Artaud! Raving mad!” [NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] says toothless Artaud to Artaud in *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*.

Self-deprecation is vital for the Artist-Without-Teeth. Jack Smith used to accompany his cult-status performances with constant signs of embarrassment, boredom, and despair. [IMITATION OF SMITH’S VOICE] “What a horrible story!” [NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] he would exclaim during his own performances, and then refuse to go any further with it (until his powdered and wiggled out friends begged and insisted). Jack was always the first to say that he deserved poverty and rejection, that he was a failure in life and in art.

Of course, this exhibitionism as detritus provided him with enormous satisfaction. [IMITATION OF ARTAUD’S VOICE] *The Pursuit of Fecality*: “There where it smells of shit / it smells of being. / Man could just as well not have shit, / not have opened the anal pouch, / but he chose to shit / as he would have chosen to live / instead of consenting to live dead. / Because in order not to make caca, / he would have had to consent / not to be, / but he could not make up his mind to lose / being, / that is, to die alive. / There is in being / something / particularly tempting for man / and this something is none other than / CACA [ROARING HERE]” —[NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] toothless Artaud, in *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*.

CACA, the four-letter word. SNOT, by Lenny Bruce. [IMITATION OF LENNY BRUCE’S VOICE] “I have been often condemned and lynched for saying the four-letter word. But NOTHING will stop me tonight, ladies and gentlemen, from saying it: SNOT! SNOT! SNOT!” ...

[NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] The diva (Maria Montez) is a decomposing corpse, detritus, feces, caca, snot, sperm, and a kind of sexual limpness that seems the only sexuality capable of adjusting to “a certain superior idea of human honor.” [IMITATION

OF SMITH'S VOICE] “Ali Baba comes today! Ali Baba comes today!” [NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] shouted Jack Smith during the opening sequences of *Flaming Creatures*. Ali Baba? Is Ali Baba an erotic dream (in Jack’s films, the plot seems reduced to posing supra-female figures being waylaid by male predators of all kinds), or the umpteenth incarnation of the Super-Ego? Apparently, Jack used the topos of courtship—innocent female rejecting the voracious advances of a horny male—as the archetypical situation of heterosexuality [IMITATION OF SMITH'S VOICE] “uh... the evil side of homosexuality”), [NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] and then, heterosexuality as a symbolical figure for THE SYSTEM. The System, the Lobster, Landlordism, and so we encounter the second element in our trio of María Montez, Landlordism/Lobsterism, and teeth.

The Lobster. Did you know that Sartre dreamed of a giant Lobster chasing him through Montmartre?

Landlordism. The landlord is a fearsome presence in the apartment at 36 Greene Street that Jack Smith had transformed into an elaborate stage set for his never-to-be-filmed epic “Sinbad in a Rented World.” How is one to beat the Lobster? Could Jack Smith, mad marginal artist, count on his marginal peers to triumph over the Evil Lobster?

No, he could not. Smith was far too marginal to become a cult figure in the gay subculture. [IMITATION OF SMITH'S VOICE] “Uh... Bull-dyke conspiracy” “Yes, uh... the lesbians are trying to control the world.” [NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] One wonders if this was Jack Smith’s way of thanking Susan Sontag for her defense of *Flaming Creatures*. Jack Smith’s comment on Sontag’s text was, for many years to come: [IMITATION OF SMITH'S VOICE] “Uh... The horror of it!”

[NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] Jack Smith believed Susan Sontag had been hypnotized by the vampire Jonas Mekas into writing something like: [IMITATION OF SUSAN SONTAG'S VOICE] “Smith’s film is strictly a treat for the senses,” [NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] thus depriving his film of any political edge. Smith also charged Mekas with stealing the careers of young filmmakers by imprisoning them in his vaults, only letting them out at night, and then only rarely. The toothless hero has no friends. And here we find our third element: TEETH.

Teeth. Jack Smith talked endlessly about his landlords and renting, bad teeth and failures. [IMITATION OF SMITH'S VOICE] “Artists aren’t allowed to have teeth. They simply can’t...

uh... AFFORD them.” [NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] The truth is, in Jack’s depictions, one of the surreal attributes of the Big Landlord Lobster is that he is full of teeth (just as María Montez was often depicted in Jack’s drawings with three breasts, all of them fitting into a special three-cupped bra). When Jack confronted his well-meaning advocates, Jonas Mekas and Susan Sontag, he could very pointedly express his scorn for them by saying: [IMITATION OF SMITH'S VOICE] “There they were, *both* of them with *teeth*.”

The liaison between the toothed Lobster and its toothless prey is complex, to say the least. It is a mix of fascination, repulsion, and absolute refusal to let go.

The predator refuses to deliver the prey either to freedom or to death; the prey refuses to flee.

The prey:

Artaud said that his suicidal urge was just the consequence of realizing the impossibility of strangling his therapist (read Lobster where it says therapist). Smith said that the presence of police (read: Lobster) was enough to [IMITATION OF SMITH'S VOICE] “make everyone look queer.” [NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] And Lenny Bruce said the “forces of law and order” (read: Lobster) were his most faithful audience.

The toothless artist sees in the Lobster, the Insect, and the Bug a father figure for whom he cannot help but feel a certain affection. Jack Smith’s apartment was a dark maze of clutter, trash and objects piled to the ceiling. There was little room to move. Cockroaches appeared everywhere—and Jack would go looking for a club or can of poison aerosol... [IMITATION OF SMITH'S VOICE] “O what if GOD is a cockroach?” “O GOD, O GOD, WHAT AM I DOING? IF I KILL GOD, I’M GOING TO BURN IN HELL! THIS COCKROACH OVER HERE, THIS COULD BE GOD! YOU COULD BE GOD!”

[IMITATION OF ARTAUD'S VOICE] Because, laugh if you like, what has been called microbes

is god,

and do you know what the Americans and the Russians use to make their atoms? They make them with the microbes of god.

— You are raving, Mr. Artaud. You are mad.

— I am not raving. I am not mad. I tell you that they have reinvented microbes in order to impose a new idea of god.

[NORMAL VOICE AGAIN] Yes, a certain affection for the Bug. The toothless artist Lenny Bruce never lost hope of a final happy reunion with the Lobster: [IMITATION OF LENNY BRUCE'S VOICE] “But here’s how it ends. One day I’m going to get an order to appear in court: ‘Oh, shit, what is it this time?’” But when I get there the courtroom will be all decorated, dig, with balloons and streamers and confetti, and when I walk in they’ll all jump up and yell “Surprise!!” And there’ll be all the cops that busted me, and the judges and DA’s who tried me, and they’ll say, “Lenny, this is a surprise party for you. We’re giving you a party because even after everything that happened you never lost respect for the law.”

The predator:

The Lobster understands the toothless artist like a father understands a child (all psychoses originating in the family)... because the Lobster-daddy has been through all of it before, and the crustacean father knows the rebellious son can go nowhere. The repression of the rebellious son has nothing to do with ideology, ethics or morals, it just has to do with power; in fact, the Lobster finds the ideology of the toothless artist quite amusing and entertaining to watch.

The repressive system takes pleasure in dissent (something that echoes certain accounts of Cold-War Eastern Europe). Eight years after Lenny Bruce’s death, his inexorable prosecutor, his unrelenting bulldog, the man who drove him to death according to many, his Lobster, judge Richard H. Kuh, was appointed district attorney of Manhattan. Kuh had a reporter over for dinner for yet another profile of the man-of-the-moment. To break the ice, the judge casually asked the reporter: [IMITATING RICHARD H. KUH'S VOICE] “Would you like to see my collection of Lenny Bruce records?”

To conclude this... vision on the lives and deeds of a few outcasts, I have to say, there is really nothing to talk about. The toothless artists die young and their work only interests a few oddballs, because, as The Lobster says, their work is difficult, and they are mad.

So, real artists don’t have teeth, and therefore cannot bite.

⁷ See “Chronology,” page 240.

Performance (2016)⁷

Script written by Peio Aguirre, based on a series of conversations Aguirre and García had between 2010 and 2016

A script that circles around the slippery notion of performance in all its possible permutations: action, situation, live action, scripted reality, narrated experience, interpretation, appropriation of characters, role playing.

SITUATION

Four characters are discussing the limits of representation, acting, and performance. Over the course of the discussion the borders between reality and fiction intertwine. A fifth character eventually joins the conversation.

CHARACTERS

TURNER – A writer interested in contemporary art and in the possibilities of fiction and meta-narrative.

PHERBER – An artist. She collects videos and a variety of references. Multidisciplinary, she aspires to filter her entire referential world into her visual work.

LUCY – An actress, performer. Trained as a ballerina. Reader of feminisms. Is part of a reading group. Distinguishes the training of the ballet dancer from that of the choreographer and questions it openly.

CHAS – A researcher of the very sort prized by academia today. Would like to write a book entirely of quotations, like Walter Benjamin and Ricardo Piglia. Reads fragments from books out loud. “Re-searches” on Google.

FLOWERS – A member of the audience. A journalist maybe. Someone who does not have in-depth knowledge of the subject, but is intelligent, cultured, and curious. Asks questions. A blog reader and active in social media.

* * * * *

TURNER

I think there is a maxim of contemporary art that says that in the future all art criticism will belong to the art-fiction genre.

PHERBER

And how will that be? Will art critics be recognized as full-blown authors in their own right? Will they be inducted into the illustrious history of literature? Or will they continue to be servile pawns in the system of editorial and institutional relations and publicity campaigns?

CHAS

It's a rule of literature: the minute you start to write something down everything becomes fiction.

LUCY

That's what they teach at all those creative writing workshops.

CHAS

Could it be in the places themselves where they have creative writing workshops ...

LUCY

Yes.

TURNER

I don't know. What I see is a situation where criticism has dissolved into discourse and everything has become "multi-genre," if I may. I'm trying to get back to my origins. To be every inch a "writer." That's all.

PHERBER

I can agree with that. Just turn on the TV; the series, the documentaries, ... genres soften until they dissolve. Cinema has been postmodern for quite a while. As for the new artistic genres, performance is the new-old art. Performance art.

TURNER

I try to write a lot, by whatever means necessary—I drink coffee and consume other substances that stimulate the circulation and produce a fleeting sensation of euphoria. My work is on the way up.

PHERBER

Sure, but you also devote yourself to wasting time on the internet, just like Chas.

TURNER

Wasting time on the internet is the new work.

CHAS

Personally, I'd argue that that's the new creative attitude. Something to ... do. You can't distinguish consumption from production any more.

TURNER

Un-creative writing. A reaction to the mythologized classes in the US where good writing is encouraged.

PHERBER

My problems with writing are well known to all of you.

LUCY

You mean your doctoral thesis?

PHERBER

Yes.

LUCY

Perforate the thesis with pleasure and desire. That's what Barthes used to say.

CHAS

But did we get together to talk about performance, or literature?

TURNER

The two are related. Hence the performativity of writing. Actually, I think of writing as something that must be performed, enacted, so it can reach a natural level of truth. Pretend that what's written is what's thought so that it might seem true. What's certain is that the written word doesn't precede thought. It comes afterwards. It's like criticism: it never happens ahead of the work. It happens in a deferred and postponed space-time. Writing, I mean criticism, gestates in the mind for days before it is transferred to paper. The hard task of joining words.

LUCY

So, it's not a writer, then, but a "wordjoiner."

TURNER

You approach writing by copying, transcribing, underlining, by writing things out by hand and drawing the letters. Acts of writings.

PHERBER

Concentration, productivity ... Who here did their homework, by the way?

LUCY

Not me.

CHAS

Well, I've been reading texts that talk about all sorts of things, but especially about acting and the history of performance, contrasting it with the Hollywood golden age. About the art of film. In classic Hollywood films, now there you saw some great acting ...

PHERBER

Actors and actresses. Umm ... I see.

LUCY

Don't you believe it! Our descendants will look at today's actors the same way that our parents' generation looked at William Holden and Robert Mitchum.

TURNER

But that's because of the technical refinement, of the condensing of the whole history of acting. Actors today can also cite—not with words, but with gestures and movements, with roles that are reminiscent of other roles ...

PHERBER

To start talking about performance from the actor's craft ...

TURNER

Actors who cite other actors. Not with words, but with gestures. That's inescapable. And I like it.

CHAS

In a word, split in two: post-modernism.

PHERBER

I wonder what it is that they teach at theatre and film schools.

TURNER

What's the interpretative technique? What are the acting bodies? Is there a discipline in acting?

LUCY

Well, as an actress trained in classical dance, I know something about that. And it has a tragic point; first you're initiated into

the discipline you need to develop a disciplined body that the choreographer can use; later on, you're traumatized by the training and you have to forget everything you learned and, what's worse, you have to dance without letting the training that went into it show—you dissimulate, act.

TURNER

Unlearning.

CHAS

A trending concept.

LUCY

Contemporary dance is curious. It abandons virtuosity and presents normal people on the stage, all while feeding off the disciplined bodies that have to deny what they are. I remember the moment when it became fashionable for ballerinas to be a bit chubby, or very tall, or graceless. Disciplined bodies induced nausea, and had to be avoided like the plague. Cunningham had a preference for tall, lanky dancers—though, be it said, with amazing skeletal coordination.

PHERBER

I remember, when Geraldine Chaplin left classical dance she said that a dancer had to be half boxer, half nun. A story of discipline and violence.

LUCY

For me, it's been important to observe the work of my contemporaries. The negation of the mind-body connection, or the powerful reflections about how the museum and the architecture of the theatre condition practice, the deconstruction of the semiotics of dance and theatricality as a tool to disarm identity. It's enriching to feel part of a generation of choreographers and artists who are thinking about new approaches to find satisfaction and enjoyment in the work and in the politics of the body.

TURNER

That's all very French. A crystal prison. What's interesting is to define the point of acting, and of overacting. The thing is, post-dance and current cinema give us a new paradigm: underacting. The rule seems to be: above all, don't act! Speaking torsos or mute bodies. What does that leave us with?

LUCY

It's more about a flight from virtuosity. A quarrel with technique. About throwing representation into crisis. It's

about exploring a dance without qualities. A zero degree of restriction (for example: place the performers in room and that’s all). A post-conceptual minimalism promulgated and developed with a motley group of dancers, actors, singers, improvisers. A micro-dance and a theoretical soliloquy. That’s what it consists of, basically ...

TURNER

If you look at it closely, underacting should be a national minimum wage for actors. But inverted: the more you act, the less you earn, and vice versa.

PHERBER

That’s perfect for the actor’s union.

[THE CONVERSATION APPEARS TO UNFOLD ALONG INTELLECTUAL PATHS WHOSE JARGON EVERYONE SEEMS TO COMMAND FULLY. IT IS AT THIS MOMENT THAT FLOWERS ENTERS THE ROOM; THE OTHER FOUR KNOW HIM FROM PAST WORKSHOPS.]

FLOWERS

I know you weren’t expecting me so soon. On my way here I was reading Piglia’s *Artificial Respiration*. He wrote it in the late seventies, and I’m interested in it because of its temporal structure. It’s a utopian novel that develops over the course of human history, jumping backwards and forwards in time; a work of science fiction, but without the scientific apparatus. An epistolary novel in which the characters read letters, documents, and decipher messages sent from the future. I’m sure you’d like it, Turner, and you too, Chas. Anyway, what are you all discussing?

LUCY

We just started. A bit of everything, really: acting, dance, performance. The crisis of the space of representation! And whether technique is a concept to be championed in artistic work.

TURNER

One of the keys to performance is the fact that anyone and everyone can do it. Anybody can do a performance. It’s the absence of a technique.

FLOWERS

You’ll forgive me for not following your jargon, since in my line of work technique is valued quite highly. It’s essential to know how to write ... well.

TURNER

Writing well—that mythology.

LUCY

Classical ballet and dance have done a lot of harm. But we have to reconcile them to the contemporary.

PHERBER

Dance, or dancing, is a form—or, better said, a social act.

TURNER

So is dancing a text?

FLOWERS

It sounds very serious when you put that way. [EMPHASIS ON “THAT.”]

TURNER

Lucy, you are a trained dancer who now works as an actress and doing performances. What difference do you see between the discipline of dance and the discipline of acting?

LUCY

Dance is all about stretching the body to the extreme while being careful enough not to break it in the process. The body has to be like a reed that bends but doesn’t break. That’s the secret. Actors, on the other hand, cultivate their personalities more, they play at projecting: their voice, pose, gaze, what they wear ... They’re more introspective, and a whole lot more self-conscious. Actors, much more than dancers, are in danger that they’ll be stuck doing it their whole life.

FLOWERS

But every actor has to have charisma.

TURNER

Not just that. They must also have some sort of talent, right?

LUCY

The talent of being who he is, of doing what he does ...

TURNER

The art of persuasion, maybe? Knowing how to be convincing.

CHAS

Silent film actors actually knew how to be convincing. But then the talkies arrived and they had to speak. And that led to a conflict in the profession of the actor. Actors didn’t

know how to memorize and recite. And so the profession was gripped by an identity crisis. Suddenly, the gaze wasn’t everything anymore. An actor or actress now had to convince with the word. The voice had to have a grain, a texture.

TURNER

But the profession is constantly evolving, even if we don’t notice it much.

CHAS

Trades or callings, artistic ones in particular, are either sacralized or mocked. There’s no middle ground. Actors are either placed on an altar or are egged off the stage.

PHERBER

We’re blinded by the star system. Personally, I prefer when the actors in a film are unknown, or are all amateurs.

LUCY

The actors I like the most are the ones who have had their moment of glory, and now return in TV series or minor films. I’m thinking of William Hurt, James Spader, or Cusack ... And Winona Ryder, with her kleptomania.

TURNER

Cusack is Cusack. He was in *Being John Malkovich*. A monument to meta-fiction.

LUCY

And a whole artifice about the film industry and the art of acting. Malkovich, Malkovich.

CHAS

Postmodern cinema, postmodern acting.

TURNER

That is: not acting.

LUCY

How would you define postmodern acting, or distinguish it, from, let’s say, modern acting?

CHAS

The postmodern character presents itself as in crisis—though, in a certain way, it’s a very bland crisis. It’s porous and malleable. The modern, on the other hand, made complex allusions to the star system, even if these remained purely formal.

TURNER

So, you’re saying that the postmodern actor is stuck in an unresolved identity crisis. It’s a split figure, a schizo almost. Is that it?

CHAS

More or less. Let me read you one of the many fragments I jotted down for today. Homework, remember? It’s relevant. I quote: “The protagonist, William Hurt, is one of a new generation of film ‘stars’ whose status is markedly distinct from that of the preceding generation of male superstars, such as Steve McQueen or Jack Nicholson (or even, more distantly, Brando), let alone of earlier moments in the evolution of the institution of the star. The immediately preceding generation projected their various roles through and by way of their well-known off-screen personalities, which often connoted rebellion and nonconformism.” [HE PAUSES AND LOOKS AT THE PEOPLE LISTENING.]

LUCY

Go on, go on.

CHAS

Ok: “The latest generation of starring actors continues to assure the conventional functions of stardom (most notably sexuality) but in the utter absence of ‘personality’ in the older sense, and with something of the anonymity of character acting (which in actors like Hurt reaches virtuoso proportions, yet of a very different kind than the virtuosity of the older Brando or Olivier). This ‘death of the subject’ in the institution of the star now, however, opens up the possibility of a play of historical allusions to much older roles—in this case to those associated with Clark Gable—so that the very style of the acting can now also serve as a ‘connotator’ of the past.”

TURNER

That’s all from *Postmodernism*, isn’t it?

CHAS

Yeah.

LUCY

That’s a history of masculinity and domination.

CHAS

Isn’t that the very history of modernity?

TURNER

Postmodernity: to ensure that nothing of modernity changes.

CHAS

Modernism.

TURNER

What that passage suggests is the hyper-conscience of the actor. The way technique accumulates, like a palimpsest, over decades. The accumulation of historical performances in the consciousness of the actor.

CHAS

I have here something about classic Hollywood films that addresses that. I quote: “I respect the art form of acting. I like the fact that we’ve seen performances change over generations, over years. One of the great artists who changed the whole idea of screen acting was Marlon Brando. When his first film, *The Men*, came out, people said ‘What kind of acting is that? He can’t act!’ I wish I had worked with Brando. He was a unique person, beautiful and more than handsome—rather like some godlike person.”

LUCY

His secret was his gaze and his beauty. Getting into the skin of the characters. Super-conscious.

FLOWERS

Marlon Brando’s gaze, yes.

PHERBER

But Brando himself didn’t think his gifts as an actor were any better than those of others. He used to say that everything was acting and that we’re all subjected to the laws of representation, that is, of acting. But it’s heretical to think of Brando as a “performance” artist.

LUCY

Don’t be too sure. I like that idea. I like it.

CHAS

The concentration of the gaze may be able to say: “I am, therefore I think.” Or the opposite: “I’m thinking—check it—therefore I am.” This whole thing about the concentration and depth of the gaze is what’s so seducing for us.

TURNER

But he came to be recognized as one of the first to break with the public image of the actor, to rebel against the industry and the system where the studio has total control of the actor’s image. He chose roles where he could be himself, rather than someone else. He was super cautious about representation.

LUCY

Performance. Everything seems flooded by that word these days. Performance has been the cool thing for the past two years or so. But now, it doesn’t have the draw that it used to, when any and every “performance” was in-dissociable from the idea of effort and the recognition of that effort—be it criminal, social, or artistic. My work is about historicizing performance through practice, through doing rather than saying.

TURNER

You’re referring to sweat ... to the body, words, discourse.

LUCY

Not necessarily to sweat, but to doing something that’s at once deep and intelligent, something that’s removed from fads but still contemporary.

PHERBER

“Performance,” that clear object of desire. Museums and biennials the world over, have surrendered to a discipline that was born as a criminal outlier and is today stalking a public thirsty for strong emotions. Among other things, we’ve shown that it can be attractive and sexy. We’re doing it, all the time ...

CHAS

I’ve heard that now there are even galleries dedicated exclusively to performance. Recently, someone responsible for cultural policy said that one of his missions is to ensure that performance is included in the cultural agenda of the city ...

LUCY

In English, “performance” encompasses almost every artistic action, and studying it makes it easier to see how some art forms are contaminated by others. Also, the expression durational performance was introduced not too long ago to speak about a performance or action that unfolds uninterruptedly in a museum ... But this performance that goes on and on, who is it aimed at?

TURNER

Well, at everyone and no one! Build a public, educate it, and so on and so forth. Imposture is almost an attitude; the impostor is a figure on the rise. It pretends to be what it isn’t. That’s the contemporary drama, and the contemporary attitude—all very literary, by the way. The imposture of the impostor is that of the person who doesn’t find a position, who doesn’t take a position, but pretends to be doing just that all the time. Today’s impostor is yesterday’s chameleon.

PHERBER

There have been moments when I’ve thought of myself as an artist and an actress of the disguise. I don’t distinguish them anymore. To be an artist means to cannibalize everything that isn’t art and turn it into art.

TURNER

The absence of definition is a way of being.

FLOWERS

The word artist lends itself to many interpretations, many meanings. That’s an artist!

CHAS

For some—including for the cultural policy person I just mentioned—the natural habitat of action is our surroundings, the street. That’s an idea, and people are open to what’s happening. Performance happens somewhere, without warning, and people see it. One of the goals is to continue pushing this, and maybe, in a few years, performance, just like films and exhibitions, will be in the cultural agenda of cities everywhere. That doesn’t seem to me a bad political agenda. It’s way more interesting than the question of fashion. If we follow this logic, then any everyday event can now be a performance, or have a performative character: carnivals, parades, processions—the old made new. A whole new conception of public space.

FLOWERS

But wouldn’t that simply banalize the term “performance”? If everything is performance, then nothing is!

CHAS

It would socialize it, it would turn performance into something quotidian. Not just something glamorous and star-studded.

LUCY

Quite the opposite: it would give a shiny, a golden luster to the everyday. Glitter, paillettes. [PRONOUNCED IN FRENCH; PRACTICE THE PRONUNCIATION.]

TURNER

If you’ve been keeping up with the media, you’d know that the most “in” celebrities, including some Hollywood actors, want to be performance artists.

LUCY

Jaaammmeesss Fraaanncccooo. Shhhiiiaaa LaBeeeoouufff. Ouf!

PHERBER

They’re clear examples of a profession subjected to enormous publicity in which the actor pretends to explore the limits of his public persona. His rebellion against the system or the industry consists of a frenzied activity in and out of the space 2.0, and that generates a whole stream of publicity.

LUCY

It’s an economy of attention, actually. And it’s not just their problem, but ours too. It’s epochal, I’d say. There is huge pressure from the Internet—Facebook, Twitter, Google—for everyone to find their real SELF. It’s becoming harder and harder to distinguish between the private self and the professional self, and that goes for everybody, not just for celebrities.

TURNER

It’s curious, Franco and Shia are well-known actors, but what’s new about them is that they present themselves, not just as artists, but as performance artists.

FLOWERS

I can see that all you here share the same references.

CHAS

That’s the novelty of it. For an actor to get to where he is, he will have had to pass through many, many creative processes in the course of his training and studies. Art may be one of them. Many actors have a side practice: they photograph, paint, play music, whatever. And this extension of their activity helps them to give their creativity free rein. It also happens that some actors and actresses come from a familiar, let’s say bohemian, background: maybe one of their parents is a painter, or they encourage existential angst or spiritual exile. That builds character.

PHERBER

Yeah, and it just so happens that they are all now turning to performance. That’s the novelty.

TURNER

The creative reinvention must be commensurate with the expectations it generates. A life always in the crosshairs.

FLOWERS

I have no idea what you are talking about. Actors have always had that other side. And not just with art and creativity. There have always been actors and actresses who were politically engaged, militant even. Like Jane Fonda, before she turned to aerobics, of course. The militant Jane. And that French actor, what’s his name?

CHAS

Montand?

FLOWERS

Right. Brando himself was quite militant in his fight for actor’s rights. He was an activist, and he almost always worked for United Artists, the production company most respectful of the rights of film workers.

LUCY

In other words, every actor and actress has to have a secret agenda, a parallel activity.

PHERBER

Yes, they have to. Their other side is almost more important than the face they show.

FLOWERS

That way they appropriate an identity. They have a suit made to measure. But what are these actors doing now?

LUCY

That’s a long story.

PHERBER

Shia attended the premiere of a film wearing a brown paper bag on his head, with the words ‘I’m not famous anymore’ written on it. And then he closed himself in an art gallery with other people, admirers, to have an intense experience ... I don’t know, they spent hours and hours closed in there.

TURNER

It was for the premiere of Von Trier’s *Nymphomaniac*. I haven’t seen it, actually.

LUCY

That’s right! He even said that a woman had raped him!

CHAS

Publicity, publicity, nothing more than publicity.

PHERBER

That’s the long and short of it.

LUCY

Just a way of generating buzz. And to think I developed a soft spot for this weirdo ...

TURNER

It’s a circular thing. You generate buzz because of how you behave outside the film. You confuse your fans. You behave erratically. Do weird things. And you air them out on blogs and social media. Polemics flare up. And then you publicize the polemic!

CHAS

Bin-go.

TURNER

And then, enter James Franco, who had been doing the same kind of stuff just before Shia, and suddenly he appears saying that all the “weird” stuff Shia is doing is “performance art.” And in the process, of course, he stakes his claim to being there first ... [WITH A SLIGHT LAUGH]

LUCY

Someone like Shia LaBeouf connects with new fans. Divide and conquer. Have any of you seen the motivational video Just Do It? Dooo ittt, Just DOOO ittt! Yes, yooouu caannn! [THE ACTRESS PLAYING LUCY SHOULD SEE THE VIDEO ON YOUTUBE AND IMITATE SHIA LABEOUF: YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=ZXSQAXX_A00]

CHAS

I have it. It goes like this: “Do it. Just do it. Don’t let your dreams be dreams. Yesterday, you said tomorrow. So just do it. Make your dreams come true. Just do it. Some people dream of success, while you’re gonna wake up and work hard at it. Nothing is impossible. You should get to the point where anyone else would quit, and you’re not gonna stop

there. No, what are you waiting for? Do it! Just do it! Yes you can. Just do it. If you’re tired of starting over, stop giving up.” [HERE THE ACTOR, NOW TRAINED AFTER HAVING SEEN SHIA’S VIDEO, TRIES TO IMITATE HIM AS CONVINCINGLY AS POSSIBLE.]

TURNER

In the video, Shia LaBeouf is parodying the various positive messages spewed by neoliberals and self-help gurus. With humor and excess, he finds a way to hook the “user” or occasional spectator. It went viral. The thing lasts a minute against the Chroma key background, so as to allow other users to make memes with it, to superimpose Shia onto other films, like the one with Wolverine, or onto wrestling matches. He’s definitely lost the sense of the ridiculous ... [HE SAYS THIS WITH A SENTENTIOUS TONE.]

LUCY

It recognizes itself as a product and doesn’t shirk from the evident, the “obvious.” He takes and combines the stereotyped sentences of the market and politics. Nike’s *Just Do It*, Obama’s slogan ...

PHERBER

I think Shia takes things much further than Franco, really. Like when he locked himself in to see all the films he had ever been in, including Von Trier’s, one after the other. Binging.

TURNER

It’s a very Warhol moment.

PHERBER

Yes, it is.

FLOWERS

What you are saying is that the secret of these new actors isn’t that they are the best at their craft? That they make the best films?

CHAS

Yes and no. They know they can’t reach the heights of, let’s say, “modern” actors. Like Brando. But, then again, they’re not interested in that. They want to play with expectations and with their own image. Widen the limits, scrutinize the industry ...

FLOWERS

Maybe rebel against that same industry? That’s pure Brando.

TURNER

It’s the type, the play with the stereotype. That’s what they’re trying to do. But is it possible to overcome the stereotype, instead of destroying it?

LUCY

What actors like Shia show is an identity crisis in the profession of the actor. And they show as well the culture or selfishness and narcissism that is totally widespread in contemporary society, and that finds its greatest expression in tele-reality.

PHERBER

Yes, but Shia fits as a connector of distinct realities and worlds. He connects with young people and teenagers. He is a sort of motivational guru for a varied group of people. He’s a subject-product of the SELF era. Neoliberal.

FLOWERS

Are you trying to say that this is an example of the connection between the intelligentsia and the sphere of art? Is that it?

PHERBER

I’m not sure I’d go that far. All I know is that that connection did exist once, that it was normal in the sixties and seventies. I wonder at what point in history it got lost?! The instant when the mainstream was intellectual!

TURNER

You mean the moment when someone well-known, someone who moves people, brought art to people that would never have seen it, that point ... But of course, that distorts it somewhat ... Art into spectacle, spectacle into art!

PHERBER

Shia is a positive thing from that angle: he brings people closer to art and performance.

LUCY

There are other chapters to this whole story about the identity crisis of actors. I’m thinking of *I’m Still Here*, the fake documentary where Joaquin Phoenix walks away from acting and dedicates himself to hip hop.

CHAS

That’s just brutal. Really good.

PHERBER

Yeah, and in fact both Shia and Franco recognize that moment as a ..., what’s the word?, yes, as a turning point in the history of acting.

FLOWERS

Antecedents, I want antecedents. [HIS TONE IS SERIOUS, BUT ALSO IRONIC.]

LUCY

Pherber should tell you, since she knows it by heart.

PHERBER

It’s a documentary with Joaquin Phoenix, River’s brother, whom no one remembers, young people least of all. The thing is that Joaquin feels like a puppet of the system. He’s done nothing else in his life besides being an actor, starring in films, and he’s fed up with it, he wants to give it all up, change his life. He wants to be himself, he doesn’t want to be subjected to the straightjacket of his public image. So, he starts to cultivate a new image: he puts on weight, grows a beard, and just looks totally out of it. Hipster before hipster became regular fodder for the cover of newspapers’ Sunday magazines. He surprises his fans by announcing the end of his career as an actor. And he starts to look for his real self and for hip hop. He’s a total disaster, has no talent for it at all. He appears on David Letterman acting the part of the idiot and just goes on sinking deeper and deeper into a hole.

TURNER

I was living in New York when he appeared on Letterman’s show. I saw it live. No one had a clue what was happening.

LUCY

It’s good, actually. He made a documentary with his usual friends, but the media craze was real. The documentary combines media images with those recorded by Joaquin’s friends.

PHERBER

But the good thing is that it isn’t true, it’s all montage, a play with appearances. Joaquin playing Joaquin is unbearable. Pathetic. Addicted. Misogynistic. Neurotic. A dirty pig.

FLOWERS

Come on, it’s an act.

PHERBER

Exactly. And there is a scene with one of my favorite actors, Ben Stiller. He’s Joaquin’s friend, but at a gala event he walks onto the stage imitating the new “Phoenix”, with a fake beard and a look that says: “What am I doing here?”

CHAS

[HE HAS BEEN GOOGLING THIS WHOLE TIME.] I found Joaquin Phoenix’s monologue at the start of *I’m Still Here*, which is from 2010, by the way. He says: “I’m just fucking, like, stuck in this ridiculous, like, self-imposed fucking prison of characterization, you know, and it happened to me young. It’s like the chicken and the egg: I don’t know what came first, whether they said that I was emotional and intense and complicated, or whether I, or whether I was truly complicated and intense and then they responded to it. Then, like, once they responded to it then I responded to what they were saying. Yeah, I utilized it in some way and I am embarrassed about that and that’s what a lot of this is about. I guess that’s why I agreed to do this documentary, it’s because I don’t want to, ah, I don’t want to play the character of Joaquin anymore. Like, I want to be whatever I am. And my artistic output thus far, when I’m really fucking honest with myself, has been fucking fraudulent, and now for the first time I’m doing something that is, whether you like it or not, it really represents me. And maybe that’s fucking stupid, to want to be represented, to care, I don’t care. It’s not that. But I don’t want to be—think what you think about me, hate me or like me, just don’t misunderstand me. That’s it.”

PHERBER

The film is a great example of the mixture of private and public in the construction of every actor.

TURNER

I’m interested in the genre of that film.

PHERBER

Genre—and gender.

TURNER

Documentary is the new fiction. There’s nothing more innovative than the documentary.

FLOWERS

It’s like in politics. The whole thing is a spectacle. The best fiction today is being made by the TV programs purporting to reveal the “human side” of the presidential candidates.

LUCY

Are they performers as well?

CHAS

They have to be—more than anyone, actually.

FLOWERS

The distance between the art of acting and the art of politics is short, really short. I mean, the Canadian Prime Minister looks like an actor!

TURNER

Let’s not get lost here. We got together to talk about performance and acting. I’m eager to get back to Shia, and what he exemplifies.

LUCY

Wait, I have a question. Where do we put Marina Abramovic? Is she the “origin,” or just the beneficiary? [FINGER QUOTES AT “ORIGIN.”]

CHAS

Both. Without *The Artist Is Present* the whole thing wouldn’t have taken off the way it did.

TURNER

Yes. Look at Shia, for example. His #I’MSORRY is copied from Abramovic’s durational performance. Lock yourself up with people for x-many hours.

PHERBER

It’s not as simple as all that. In Marina, you have the awareness of powers at once transcendental and ultra-sensory, you have the synergy of minds. It’s more mystical, a therapy of the mind. Mystification. The other has to do with the experience of locking yourself up with an actor and seeing what happens.

CHAS

Shia reinterprets a good many themes of performance. Like duration. But he doesn’t abuse the phony shamanistic blabber. It’s pop.

LUCY

Nakedness, silence, and the passing of time have always been pillars of performance. The same themes are interpreted and reinterpreted through new postulates.

FLOWERS

But why do you think actors make films?

PHERBER

Joaquin says it clearly in his film: what matters is the experience. You make films for the experience of making them.

CHAS

Maybe to be able to unfold another part of yourself?

TURNER

Ok, fine. But my question, my doubts, turn on what happens to the characters once the novel is done. What becomes of them? Why do they stop inhabiting our dreams at that point? One of the actors wants to look like, wants to simulate, someone he is not—but so does the other one, the one who represents himself. It’s all about living a thousand, nay, two thousand, lives. The imposture of acting is a form of hiding until the cover is blown ... Acting is repeating, is repeating oneself.

LUCY

Performance and repetition. That’s it! Repetition is one of the ways of escaping neurosis and is also synonymous with rehearsal in some languages. Repeat to know.

PHERBER

An artist once taught me something. Noticing how scared I was to speak in public, this “artist” always insisted that the secret to the whole thing was to change the chip.

TURNER

What do you mean?

PHERBER

This artist distinguished between performance and rehearsal. When you perform, you’re subjected to the pressure of an audience. It’s like in a music concert; either you have the whole auditorium to yourself, or you perform for an audience, in which case you can’t flub a note because YOU, and only YOU, are the center of attention. When you rehearse, on the other hand, you’re doing it for yourself. You’re doing it to learn a text or a song. The trick, then, is to convince yourself that you’re rehearsing, that this thing you are doing is not a performance but a test, a rehearsal, a run-through, that you’re still training, probing, approximating, still trying things out. It’s not a test or exam, but a RE-HEAR-SAL. You follow me?

TURNER

Sure, I see the difference between rehearsing in your garage and facing an audience.

PHERBER

If that’s how you want to see it, fine. But I see it differently. It’s about thinking in the third person, living in the third person. About taking refuge in that voice, about not acting in the first or even in the second person, but in the third. It’s about being able to say: “I’m a he or she, not a you.”

CHAS

Exactly. Would the third person, by the way, be the figure of citation? I’m interested in the indistinction between an interpretation and a citation. For example: when a dancer dances, is she interpreting or citing? I see a dancer’s body like a gigantic archive of the history of dance and performance. The performer or dancer doesn’t interpret a score, as a musician would: she cites it. Anyway, that’s how I like to think of it.

TURNER

Because the citation is itself a literary form that belongs to the past?

CHAS

To cite without quotation marks is the new way of doing fiction. Hiding your sources. A while ago, when you were talking about the figure of the impostor as an artistic character on the rise, I was trying to think about what literary ruse such a character would use. I’ve a fragment here that says: “parody had stopped being [...] the signal of literary change, and had turned into the very center of modern life. [...] parody has been displaced and [...] now it invades all gestures and actions. Where there used to be events, experiences, passions, now there are nothing but parodies. [...] parody has completely replaced history. And isn’t parody the very negation of history?”

TURNER

The art of distanciation. It’s good to not to get too far away from ourselves, though. There is the risk that we’ll never find ourselves again.

PHERBER

A parody is an ill-used citation, a parodic citation. Still ...

CHAS

The new objectivity is the so-called new sincerity. To tell all, hide nothing, to make the effort at sincerity that could distance us from postmodern irony. That’s the point at which sincerity and exhibitionism meet.

TURNER

Citation as a tool of distanciation. But a citation is a citation; you can’t use it well or badly—all you can do is copy it out more or less faithfully.

LUCY

I can’t tell what interests you more, fiction, or a certain sense of the tale, the narrative. There’s narrative in any literary artifact, including in news reports, television.

PHERBER

Let’s get back on track here, please. Let’s talk about performance art and the art of performance.

CHAS

That is what we’re talking about. Sometimes you need to circle around a bit to come to the point. We go from one point to the other in circles. We meander.

LUCY

There where the performer of yesterday used to say—“Here I am and this is my face and this my body”—the performer today distrusts that and, in its stead, presents us, not with a mediate version of herself, but with a version of herself that’s mediated by technology and social networks.

PHERBER

I see. What you’re saying is that the new performer actualizes the nude, but he or she is influenced by tele-reality and the exhibitionism of the world 2.0. It’s about overcoming direct confrontation, camouflaging oneself in the apparatus, in the mediated.

LUCY

I’d say that, in a classic way, for a lot of people performance art and acting are about forging empathic connections with spectators. Provoking them, inciting them. A form of aggression, even.

FLOWERS

In my imagination, performance is an action that unfolds in real time. A body confronted with a gaze, an audience.

LUCY

I think the action of a performance develops around a temporal, as well as a physical, scenario. Every text is also a context.

CHAS

In some cases it is “only” context.

LUCY

For some people—though not for me, even if I practice it—performance represents artistic creation in its purest essence. It goes beyond the limits of all the arts, and with this almost limitless openness of codes it invades that which is not artistic, the everyday, that which is not apropos. And it presents these in an unconventional, sometimes even bizarre, way.

FLOWERS

What is it for you, then?

LUCY

A way of being. I don’t sacralize it, though. I’m interested in the non-immediacy of performance. Not the cliché of presenting yourself “naked” in front of an audience. I’m interested in the why of performance within the neoliberal subjectivity. I heard recently that Allan Kaprow associated happenings with adventure sports and risk. And these are very in right now, as are extreme sports, marathons and triathlons, where, above all else, the body expresses its need to perform, to be performative. Endurance—that is, durational—art. That’s a request I see more and more: to be present, to appear as a present body, to be here and there and to present our name as artists with a body and a face. Life looks more and more like an ultramarathon with stimulating substances.

TURNER

Art also demands presence. Present bodies. There’s a whole mobility of operational agents, circulating nonstop. To stop is to stop running inside the wheel that gives our existence meaning. Like a hamster on the wheel, turning and turning, and that turning is what keeps the animal in balance. If the hamster stopped it’d fall, and it’d be hard for it to get going again. It’s tragic, but real. True.

PHERBER

Coming back to what you were saying, Lucy, performance used to generate conflict in me: I really wanted to make performance pieces, but I didn’t like to have people looking

at me. It dawned on me that I could ask someone else to perform. A lot of people thought it was cowardly not to do it yourself. Even so, the delegated performance became the solution that I and other artists of my generation hit upon. Instead of showing myself, I got other people to participate in my performances. I felt liberated all of a sudden.

TURNER

Good, we’re specifying, circling, speculating ... Good. Let’s keep the wheel spinning.

PHERBER

A “performance” also refers to what one is supposedly asked to do in a museum; a presentation, a fulfillment of your end of the bargain, a service, an effort ... effort especially: you have to work hard.

TURNER

Yeah, you have to sweat. Again. Performance, repetition, character, acting, durational performance, imposture, infiltration, refuge, threshold ... all those things.

PHERBER

Montage. Separate, split, crack, dissociate, fragment, divide. And start anew.

CHAS

Let’s get back to the heart of the matter. The absence of technique. That anyone can do performance. It’s a question of self-consciousness, of empowerment. The possibility of breaking hierarchies and of feeling strong in front of others. Like having seen Shia’s video five times and saying to yourself: you can.

[THE ACTORS/PERFORMERS MOVE AROUND THE ROOM AND CHANGE PLACES. THEY RETURN TO THE TEXT A COUPLE OF MINUTES LATER.]

PHERBER

There is something we haven’t talked about yet. The dispositif, the apparatus. It’s interesting to reproduce cinema’s filmic “apparatus,” to bring it to the framework of the institution, the museum. To establish a collaborative model, like in a film; one can be a scriptwriter, an adapter of “content.” CON-TENT.

CHAS

We’re jumping from one art to another a bit too quickly. Film now, so: do we miss film directors or actors?

TURNER

There’s a lot here of *Fahrenheit 451*—not Bradbury’s novel, but the film adaptation of it. A curious thing is that it seems that the script for *Fahrenheit* was written in French, then translated into English, then back into French, then back again into English, so that the language would be very clearly projected, strange, artificial. Truffaut says he wanted to make a film of images in which language had become completely alien.

LUCY

That’s why they communicate so strangely. Even if the telephone is a totally cinematic apparatus, central to Hollywood’s golden age, in that futuristic film the characters communicate using a tiny transmission system incorporated directly into the ear.

CHAS

All the protagonists find themselves caught in the final scene of the film; they wander through the woods and inhabit a specific book, which they must each commit to memory so as to preserve it. As for being an actor or performer, I have this passage here: “Besides Bowie, I’ve also worked with Mick Jagger and Art Garfunkel. Performers. There’s a very fine line between actor and performer. Performers have to have an extraordinary gift of projection or personality. You can learn certain things like voice projection or to always look at someone and then vary it—but there’s something odd about the art of performance. In the Hollywood bowl, there were something like 60,000 people for Mick Jagger. How many straight actors have had 60,000 people turn up for a single performance? Mick gives a performance unlike anyone else. It’s an extraordinary piece of acting art.”

LUCY

There’s an unwritten rule by which the dancers we discussed earlier can now work as actors. I know a couple that has decided to do everything, to embark on an artistic adventure that consists of taking risks, of putting themselves in the line of fire.

FLOWERS

But, am I following you right? Are you saying that Shia and Phoenix are the Bowie and Jagger of our time?

PHERBER

No, never. Actors want to be artists, not “just” actors. They’ve usurped our medium. They do it all the time.

TURNER

It’s like that actor who says that being an artist is a profession in which you can wake up and say: “What do I want to learn today? What do I want to participate in? Can there be anything more fun than that?”

PHERBER

When you put it that way it almost sounds like an ad for pads ... it’s obscene. It’s always been interesting to me that in English you have gender and genre, while in Spanish and French, for example, you use “género” and “genre” for both.

TURNER

Try to pronounce genre in English—it sounds like French.

CHAS

About gender, I quote: “there’s a tremendous difference between male and female actors, apart from the obvious ones. By that I mean that women are prepared to take a much broader look at parts than men. Men are very cautious, much more cautious about their ‘image’ than women—there’s masculine fear of being thought weak or emasculated—they are very careful about those parts. Women are much more daring. A handsome man, when he becomes a star, doesn’t really like to change his image or act outside the image that’s been created—these are general rules—but I find that women are quite excited by changing their image, maybe because they act much more in life.”

TURNER

Life is acting, representation. It’s like when we read in silence because we don’t want others to notice we’re thinking. Reality is scripted.

LUCY

Not everything is in the script. Sometimes the best stuff is in the mistake, in unrehearsed moments. Off-camera. Hors-champ.

TURNER

For the writer, that’s the margins of the book. Write on the margins of the notebook. The margins are the only place left for us to leave our imprint, our personal and non-transferable mark.

CHAS

It’s like that film director who didn’t want anyone on the set to know when the scene was supposed to end. Actually, he

wouldn’t allow anyone other than himself to shout: “Cut!” He liked it when scenes would come to the end naturally; that’s how he’d capture what was not in the script, the return of reality ... When the lead actor would whisper—“Is this scene done or do we go on? What’s happening?”—the director would say “Shhhh” while the camera kept going ... and some seconds later, he’d yell: “Cut!”

TURNER

That way he imitated life!

CHAS

If you say so. The fact is that he allowed magic—the unexpected, the unforeseen—to enter the story. That’s important for any artist or creative person: to be always on the lookout, to have an open disposition at all times.

PHERBER

Let’s get back to the third person, the third voice. What I aspire to in my work is to be able to talk, to express myself, from more than one point of view, always more than one. And this plurality is what I want to find in a new definition of performance. More than one.

TURNER

At the root of what we were talking about when we started, John Malkovich and all that, I just remembered *Adaptation*, a slightly conventional comedy about a writer who decides to write himself into the script he’s trying to adapt, and reality and fiction start mixing in the most unexpected ways.

CHAS

A play of doubles, the idea of the double. I remember that Nicolas Cage plays Charlie Kaufman, the film’s actual screenwriter, and that Cage’s character has a twin brother who decides to move in with Charlie, who’s experiencing total writer’s block. And his twin brother is also a screenwriter ...

TURNER

Until the script comes alive by changing the course of events and of everyone in contact with it.

CHAS

I remember when the twin brother arrives at his house and tells him: “I’m gonna be a screenwriter! Like you! I know you think this is just one of my get-rich-quick schemes. But I’m doing it right this time. I’m taking a seminar!” And in another moment he says: “Suspense is my genre. What’s yours?”

FLOWERS

Suspense, or whodunit?

CHAS

The theme is being stuck, like Turner in *Performance*, the state of anxiety and impotence that the screenwriter is suffering, and which is also the feeling articulated more generally by the narrative as a whole, and by the nature of the characters. It’s not one but three different stories about three characters that eventually intertwine and are joined in a common end: the screenwriter with writer’s block played by Cage, the author of the book he is adapting, played by Meryl Streep, and the orchid thief—I don’t remember who plays him. Twins have a tendency towards neurosis, and that’s common in artistic work.

TURNER

In literary fiction, twins are a meta-narrative archetype because they exemplify the writing that’s endless. It’s the perfect doubling. It’s not a merging, like in Roeg and Cammell’s *Performance*. Twins are two ones that never quite make ONE. They’re a TWO.

CHAS

Two merge in one, one splits in two. Sounds Hegelian.

PHERBER

One, two, three. One, two, three. Start again. More than one.

LUCY

Just like Turner, half masculine, half feminine. Or like me, half feminine, half masculine. Funny Little Frog.

FLOWERS

All of this is starting to sound very abstract. I imagine a writer, alone in his room, trying to think in performative terms. The films by Kaufman and Jonze are ...

CHAS

Postmodern?

FLOWERS

Could be. Call them whatever you like.

LUCY

Maybe we are being confronted with postmodern performance much as the eighties were confronted with postmodern dance? A multimedia performance that doesn’t necessarily depend on presence, the body, and surprise.

TURNER

Adaptation, in any case, talks about the neurosis of contemporary society. The impossibility of developing a “normal” creative activity, in which if no one knows you ... you don’t exist. Time, the tattered present, out of joint.

CHAS

The capitalism of anxiety that incubates inside each of us. The competitive gene that in the medium- or long-term erodes us from within.

PHERBER

The impossibility of being satisfied with our work. The demand for more. The omnipresent system.

TURNER

The institutionalization of experience. The domestication of terms like “empowerment,” the submission to new figures of authority, mainly theoreticians and thinkers, the profusion of various “cultural turns,” the banalization of the so-called “master class.”

LUCY

Yeah, and there is of course the performative turn, or the choreographic turn, which wants to explain that fads aren’t fads, but symptoms.

PHERBER

Everything today is a symptom of something else. Symptomatology is a new science. And to speak in terms of symptoms rather than in terms of accomplished deeds is to speak metaphorically.

CHAS

Enjoy your symptom. Have fun with it till you’re satiated.

TURNER

Sign, spirit of the times. What used to be called the *Zeitgeist*.

PHERBER

That’s right. An epochal sense.

TURNER

But what does it mean to be a double, a partner? A pair? Adaptation and other postmodern films remind me of the fact that the viewing of any film is always infused with the memory of other films. We should see films in pairs, one alongside the other. One for the left eye and the other for the right.

[THE CONVERSATION IS GETTING THICK, THE ATMOSPHERE CHARGED, SO WE SHOULD TAKE A BREAK. WE COULD SAY THAT THIS CONVERSATION IS NOT VERY PERFORMATIVE AT ALL. OR IS IT RATHER THAT, INSTEAD OF SETTING BODIES, IT SETS CONSCIENCES IN MOTION? THE NAMES OF THE CHARACTERS ARE NOT PURELY THE INVENTION OF THIS SCRIPTWRITER, BUT BELONG IN FACT TO THE FILM *PERFORMANCE* BY NICOLAS ROEG AND DONALD CAMMELL (1968/70). IN THIS FILM MIRRORS, REFLECTIONS, AND THE FUSION OF IDENTITIES SUCCEED ONE ANOTHER WITH SINGULAR PRECIOUSNESS AND EXUBERANCE. TURNER AND CHAS. CHAS AND TURNER. PHERBER AND LUCY. AND HARRY FLOWERS TOO, A FICTIONAL FIGURE THAT ECHOES (“REPEATS AN ECHO”) THE KRAY TWINS, WELL-KNOWN GANGSTERS WHO WERE ALL OVER THE PAPERS IN THE UK IN THE SIXTIES. THE LIFE OF THESE TWIN BROTHERS INSPIRED THE FILM *PERFORMANCE*, A MASTERPIECE OF BRITISH CINEMA. THE CHARACTERS OF THIS SCRIPT, ALSO CALLED *PERFORMANCE*, DON’T KNOW WHERE THEIR NAMES COME FROM, BUT THEY CAN IN A SELF-CONSCIOUS TURN WAKE UP AND BE THEMSELVES: TURNER, CHAS, PHERBER, LUCY, AND HARRY FLOWERS. AND IF WE THINK ABOUT THE SHOOT? MICK JAGGER, JAMES FOX, ANITA PALLENBERG, MICHÈLE BRETON, AND JOHNNY SHANNON.]

[THE CHARACTERS OF THIS SCRIPT CONTINUE THEIR CONVERSATION WITHOUT NOTICING THE BAGGAGE OF THEIR FICTIVE CHARACTERS, UNAWARE OF THE CHANGE OF ACTORS, SINGERS, MODELS, AND REGULAR PEOPLE THAT APPEAR IN *PERFORMANCE*.]

TURNER

We’ve done an intellectual tour. The conversation is intellectual. We started out at a table and we’re now pacing backwards and forwards in this room.

FLOWERS

I’ve joined your group.

CHAS

I’m tired, but animated.

LUCY

Tiring yourself out too much is something positive, energizing. Today’s performance is a tribute to tiredness. It wears out the tired soul.

CHAS

Exhaustion and exuberance, as someone said. I don’t remember who it was, though; a critic, I think.

PHERBER

A poet dedicated a poem to exhaustion.

FLOWERS

When you’re really overtired you reach a scintillating degree of lucidity, a supreme awareness.

LUCY

When you’re really tired, you find in inactivity a haven for enjoyment.

FLOWERS

And actors? What do they do to fight off exhaustion?

TURNER

Change identity? Mutate? Talking about twins as a metaphor for infinite production made me think of another film where the double, the split, plays a fundamental role. *Performance*, *Adaptation*. But what can we say about that gem, *Lost Highway*?

CHAS

“Where was it you think we met?” “At your house. As a matter of fact, I’m there right now.”

LUCY

Exuberance. Pleasure. Blackness.

CHAS

I’d add: unclassifiable, erotic, sinister, strangely serene, and also deceitfully frenetic, hallucinated, or hallucinating, gothic.

[THE SCRIPT’S NARRATOR NOW RECALLS THAT HE’D WOULD LIKE TO CONSTRUCT HIS SCRIPTS THE WAY DAVID LYNCH CONSTRUCTS HIS, WHATEVER THAT MIGHT MEAN.]

TURNER

There are no metaphors in that film, only images. You just have to believe enough in them. Here we have a perfect example of merging. A repressed sax player murders his wife and in prison mutates into another person, who then has an affair with the girlfriend of a sinister gangster, and she looks a lot like the murdered wife. The actress who plays both roles is the same, Patricia Arquette. The transformation of the two masculine roles is like a Bacon painting.

PHERBER

Two, one, two, one, two, one.

CHAS

There’s a sense to transcendence. Overcoming binaries, dualities. The film has the feel of a temporal loop, a sort of Moebius strip, with the narrative turning in a circle. The psychoanalytic side, Lacanian even if you want, is in the fact that Lynch is able to construct ridiculous moments, and we have to take their brilliance, lie, and effectiveness entirely

seriously. There’s something ridiculous and sublime about it, heightened by the pleasure produced by the amplifying power of the metal music by Rammstein.

FLOWERS

Noir genre or a psychoanalytic point?

TURNER

Flowers doesn’t miss a beat. Psycho Genre Noir, or: genRenoir.

CHAS

Criminality has inspired almost all the arts, painting even. Rammstein’s rock music reminds me of painting in Germany in the thirties, before Nazism. The New Objectivity. Like an anticipation of punk, or the purest form of enjoyment of the Superego.

TURNER

The noir genre, the detective novel, is the genre for psychoanalytic interpretation.

LUCY

The gangster as artist.

TURNER

The marginality of crime. Until the seventies, pornography was clandestine, underground, and even had its artistic side. That same decade saw its massification. Criminality and pornography used to go hand in hand.

PHERBER

Well, I think about another influential work, John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* from 1728, about the London underworld at the start of the eighteenth century—Brecht and Weil drew on it for their *Threepenny Opera*. One of its most famous representations.

TURNER

Brecht and the underworld: the beggars, anarchism, and terrorism. Great themes. The marginality of the underworld as a creative space. The Kray twins were in *Performance*.

[A LOOP SEEMS TO SOLIDIFY ITSELF IN THE FACE OF THE THREAT THAT THE ACTORS OF THIS SCRIPT AND THE CHARACTERS OF ROEG AND CAMMELL’S *PERFORMANCE* SHOULD MIMIC ONE ANOTHER.]

CHAS

Were the Kray brothers the inspiration for the Harry Flowers character?

FLOWERS

Harry Flowers.

PHERBER

Harry Flowers. Flowers. Flow-ers. [SHE SAYS IT VERY SLOWLY.]

CHAS

There is a real character, someone who actually existed. Harry Flowers was based in a real person: David Litvinoff worked as a consultant to the British film industry, and he charged a pretty penny for his knowledge of the underbelly of London’s East End. He was a man for whom there were very few trustworthy deeds. It’s not all that clear just how genuine his experience really was, even though there is no doubt that he knew the Kray brothers and was on particularly friendly terms with one of them, Ronnie. He would host his showbiz friends while continuing his activities with the twins. He was a sort of court jester for wealthy intellectuals in Chelsea and a leech in the ambient of the spectacle and villainy.

TURNER

So, he was the “real” artist?

CHAS

“In cinema, the only idea more overused than serial killers, is multiple personality, since it explores the possibility that cop and criminal are really two aspects of the same person. See every cop movie ever made for other examples of this.”

PHERBER

That means that the actors are not in fact the authentic artists, but delinquents. Being a gangster seems more like a fantasy lodged somewhere in the male unconscious.

CHAS

The criminal-artist, like the traitor, would occupy the position of the utopian hero. The person from nowhere whose loyalty is split, the one who lives in the double entendre and whose life is and is not a disguise. He must fake, dwell in the wasteland of perfidy, and be sustained by impossible dreams of a future in which his vileness will be rewarded, at long last. But how will it be rewarded, exactly?

PHERBER

Are you talking about Jean Genet?

CHAS

Could be. There is a fairly sublime aesthetics of delinquency in *The Thief’s Journal*. The slightest hint of Vaseline. Bresson’s *Pickpocket* is also an artist.

PHERBER

I read in the paper that good-looking delinquents are given lighter sentences. Does the same thing happen to artists?

FLOWERS

I’m sure. Physical beauty is always a destabilizing factor, in any profession or realm.

LUCY

My question then is: are jugglers also artists? I’m talking about entertainers in the world of spectacle? The juggler has been a central figure since the Middle Ages. Man-spectacle, tragi-comic mime, reciter, singer-songwriter, musician. In sum, performer.

TURNER

Maybe only professional jugglers are.

CHAS

Jugglers, troubadours, and jesters. Let me remind you that Litvinoff did exist. The best stories are based on reality. But—as we were reminded earlier—the minute one starts writing everything becomes fiction. Does that mean that the minute one starts filming, everything becomes fiction?

TURNER

It’s not fiction so much as narrative. A tale told, or narrated, by ...

PHERBER

The narrated performance. That’s what it is about. That’s what I aspire to in my work.

CHAS

Performance is also made for fiction.

TURNER

Criticism and fiction.

THE END

[THE SCRIPT ENDS AND THE LOOP BEGINS. THE CHARACTERS RETURN TO THE FIRST SENTENCE OF THIS SCRIPT, IN WHICH TURNER SAYS: “I THINK THERE IS A MAXIM OF CONTEMPORARY ART THAT SAYS THAT IN THE FUTURE ALL ART CRITICISM WILL BELONG TO THE ART-FICTION GENRE.”]

[ALL THE CHARACTERS CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION, PICKING IT UP ANEW FROM THE TOP.]

* * * * *

The passages cited in this script are taken from: Nicolas Roeg, *The World is Ever Changing* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013); Ricardo Piglia, *Artificial Respiration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994 [1980]); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); from the film *I’m Still Here* (2010), with Joaquin Phoenix and directed by Casey Affleck; and from the *Adaptation* (2002) screenplay by Charlie Kaufman, directed by Spike Jonze. Some of the citations were adapted for the purposes of fiction.

This script was written by Peio Aguirre following conversations, email exchanges, and chats with Dora García, some of them recorded in writing, and some committed to memory; it also includes heterogeneous origins, such as the press, emails from third parties, conferences, a variety of workshop situations, as well as the very act of writing.

Translated from the Spanish by Emiliano Battista.

8 See “Chronology,” page 256.

5 The Drawing on the Floor: A Monologue (2018)⁸

The real can only be represented by the unreal. We have no means of apprehending reality, other than narrative, fiction, the fantastic. A narrative structure is not real, but it does represent the real in a way that makes it accessible to us.

But, because the structures of fiction are limited, we find ourselves applying a limited number of structures to an infinite number of realities, the same map to similar territories, the same pattern to unpatterned surfaces that we imagine related to each other. We apply structure to chaos, unreal structure to real chaos.

It is quite interesting to analyze the limited number of structures that we apply to an unlimited number of realities. It is sometimes the case that we apply identical narrative structures to realities that are very distant in time and space. We apply the pattern of the Paris Commune to events in Asia—for example, the Gwangju Uprising, which took place about 100 years later. We apply the pattern of the rise of Fascism in Europe in the 1930s to the success of Trump in the US today. We see the Israeli occupation through the lens of South African Apartheid. Such structure-transfers are not always helpful for understanding. And yet, we insist in applying those well-known structures, perhaps because we find it easier to see similarities, and we love nothing more than to recognize and apply a pattern.

Albert Camus published *The Plague* in 1947, and his book was immediately hailed as an ardent exaltation of the resistance to Fascism—Fascism being, in the allegorical novel, the plague. It was also, like all good novels, prophetic: it shows us the pattern of an isolated Europe. The quite straightforward symbolism Camus employs in *The Plague* drew some sarcastic rebukes from the sophisticated literary avant-garde, both upon publication, and later on. Chances are, though, that this was not the readership Camus had in mind while writing *The Plague*, and that the reader he was thinking about as he wrote it was the teenage youth who had been seduced by Fascism a decade or so earlier.

These were the closing words of the work, as translated by Stuart Gilbert:

And indeed, as he listened to the cries of joy rising from the town, Rieux remembered that such joy is always imperiled. He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good: that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city.

The fictional structure of the *The Plague* is very familiar, almost biblical: we have seen it hundreds of times. A prosperous community, a city, is assaulted by an evil that is much larger than they can compass, comprehend or manage. It is, so to speak, unimaginable and, therefore, impossible to accept. But reality cannot be denied for long, and the evil's name is eventually pronounced. To fight it, the many individuals of the community turn into a collective persona, an archetype of humanity, and the hierarchies that had ruled the city are suspended. Moreover, as a collective persona, they isolate themselves from the exterior; after great suffering, it emerges victorious, and triumphantly reunites with the exterior world, the rest of humankind.

When the nightmare is over and everyone can rejoice, only the gloomy hero knows that the joy is temporary, because evil has been defeated, but not destroyed.

That is one of the most interesting features of *The Plague*: the story is circular, it predicts its own return, the *ricorso*. The axis of the *ricorso* is the hero, a somewhat melancholic person, detached from his own happiness: “For nothing in the world is it worth turning one's back on what one loves. Yet that is what I'm doing, though why I do not know.”

The hero is the one observing and telling, while, all around him, the events unfold, find closure, and then repeat.

The narrative structure of *The Plague* could be depicted as a wheel: The Plague Wheel. In the middle of it, a hole. But not any hole, a hole through the chest:

Have you ever seen a man shot by a firing-squad? No, of course not; the spectators are hand-picked and it's like a private party, you need an invitation. The result is that you've gleaned your ideas about it from books and pictures. A post, a blindfolded man, some soldiers in the offing. But the real thing isn't a bit like that. Do you know that the firing-squad stands only a yard and a half from the condemned man? Do you know that if the victim took two steps forward his chest would touch the rifles? Do you know that, at this short range, the soldiers concentrate their fire on the region of the heart and their big bullets make a hole into which you could thrust your fist?

The Plague Wheel is a ten-spoked wheel. Numbered 1 to 10. These are each of the spokes of the circular, ever-repeating story:

1

Prologue. A city. ORAN. Not especially beautiful, maybe even an ugly city. Everyone is busy; the activity is well regulated and constant; money is the motor. Reality for the citizens is what happens each day. They are convinced that nothing can harm them. Normalcy protects them. A happy city.

2

Rats! This is the sign Camus uses in *The Plague*—but it would be reasonable to substitute that sign with any other. The important thing is that there are signs, everywhere. But they are perplexing signs, signs without meaning, signs that cannot be interpreted, because there is no pattern yet with which to understand them, and to react to them. Still, it is clear that something has been broken in the normalcy: trouble is coming. Some people speak of prophecies, as a way to give meaning to those signs. In other similarly-structured stories—and there are many: revolutions, guerrillas, pogroms, crackdowns, etcetera—this is the moment when damage, brutality, violence, betrayal, accusations, erupt from the invisible into the visible.

3

The signs are revealed: all of a sudden, they acquire meaning. In *The Plague*, the first death, the death of the concierge, is the first revealed sign. But comfortable normalcy has a hard time accepting the meaning of the signs, and the citizens cast about for alternative explanations: maybe this is a nightmare, a temporary disruption that is not even actually happening. Inevitably and inexorably, though, truth finds

its way, and the future starts to fade. Plans are pointless, projects futile. And, as the future fades, so does love, because love needs the future as its horizon. The clear awareness that nothing will be the same again digs its roots.

4

At long last, the symbolic, the law, the authorities, give a name to the real: PLAGUE. The evil is identified and named: it is THE PLAGUE. In a different city and time, it might have been named REVOLUTION. Or WAR. “There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise.” The law does not pronounce the name willingly; its hand is forced by an unbearable situation: “Some minutes later, as he was driving down a back street redolent of fried fish and urine, a woman screaming in agony, her groin dripping blood, stretched out her arms toward him.”

5

The law reacts to the real and decisions are made. Evil must be contained, its contagion cannot be allowed to spread, it must be cut off from the wide world, because evil naturally wants to expand. Firewalls are erected, the city gates are closed: families and couples who thought they would reunite in a few hours or a few days, are now severed with no prospect of an eventual reunion. The city goes into an interior exile. Cut off from the future, the severed city finds itself dispossessed of its past as well. Memories are useless:

Thus, too, they came to know the incorrigible sorrow of all prisoners and exiles, which is to live in company with a memory that serves no purpose. Even the past, of which they thought incessantly, had a savor only of regret.

As activities are suspended, the city turns into an enormous waiting room. Old hierarchies crumble and new ones take their place. The crowd is constantly self-examining, trying to identify the corrupt, the sick, the infected, the guilty ones.

6

Evil is now in full force. How to count the corpses? “But what are a hundred million deaths? When one has served in a war, one hardly knows what a dead man is, after a while. And since a dead man has no substance unless one has actually seen him dead, a hundred million corpses broadcast through history are no more than a puff of smoke in the imagination... Ten thousand dead made about five times the audience in a biggish cinema.” It is Judgment Day, when who is saved and who perishes is

decided. DIES IRAE, Day of Wrath: “Qui salvandos salvas gratis / Salva me, fons pietatis.” Which is to say: “You who freely savest those that are to be saved, / save me, O font of mercy.”

Do you know there are some who refuse to die? Resist.

7

Ubi sunt? Where are they? Where have all the flowers gone? The Dead. The society of the dead, and the atrocious possibility that it will overpower the society of the living: “... and the town would see in public squares the dying embrace the living in the frenzies of an all too comprehensible hatred or some crazy hope.”

It is startlingly beautiful that Camus chooses to end this part of the book with an opera, Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice*. The opera was performed night after night in Oran—until the night when the plague claimed Orpheus too:

Not until the big duet between Orpheus and Eurydice in the third act, at the precise moment when Eurydice was slipping from her lover, did a flutter of surprise run through the house. And as though the singer had been waiting for this cue or, more likely, because the faint sounds that came to him from the orchestra seats confirmed what he was feeling, he chose this moment to stagger grotesquely to the footlights, his arms and legs splayed out under his antique robe, and fall down in the middle of the property sheepfold, always out of place, but now, in the eyes of the spectators, significantly, appallingly so.

Death on the stage.

8

Only a great sacrifice can save the city. An exemplary death that, symmetrical with the first death, is also the last—symbolically, at least. This exemplary death must, in addition, be the death of an innocent: the scapegoat, the sacrificial lamb. In Camus' book, that is the death of little Jacques, the magistrate's son. His cruel, slow, senseless death will save everyone else. It is a crucifixion that, as such, redeems all of us. We strive to see the same pattern of sacrifice (the last death) and redemption (peace) in mafia wars, independence struggles, terrorist attacks, occupations, and pogroms.

9

“Each of us has the plague within him; no one, no one on earth is free from it.” We might be talking about original sin, or about Fascism. Or about violence, domination, cruelty. After the death of an innocent, after the last death, evil is vanquished: it is the end of the plague, a time of liberation, freedom, deliverance, and great joy! Open the gates! Exile is over; people, reunited, embrace and kiss; the future returns and, with it, love. Still, there is a little melancholy in the air—the memory of the society of the dead has not quite faded—and bitterness, too: things will never be as before. But that does not keep the city from proclaiming: “I who have died, I am alive again today.”

Resurrection.

10

Epilogue. The present day, which returns us to the first spoke of the wheel, and to the hero, who, with a hole in his chest, is pondering:

And indeed, as he listened to the cries of joy rising from the town, Rieux remembered that such joy is always imperiled. He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city.



Image Captions

FRONT COVER

Cover image: *Little object <a>* (2022), as performed by Adriano Wilfert Jensen in the exhibition *She Has Many Names* at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023. Photo: Nathan Ishar; courtesy the artist and M HKA

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Genealogías (2018), pencil on paper, 20 x 26 cm

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The Drawing on the Floor: A Monologue, as performed by Geoffrey Carey at ProjecteSD, Barcelona, Spain, 2018. Photo: Roberto Ruiz; courtesy the artist and ProjecteSD

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I libri sono corpi (possono essere smembrati)/Books Are Bodies (They Can Be Dismembered), at Salone Monumentale, Biblioteca Casanatense, Rome, 2022. Commissioned and curated by LOCALES for the Hidden Histories 2022 festival – *Trovare le parole/Finding the Words*. Performed by Brianda Carreras and Maria Elena Fantoni. Photo: Davide Palmieri; courtesy the artist and LOCALES

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Amor Rojo, HD film, 91', 2022; film stills courtesy the artist and Auguste Orts

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Amor Rojo, poster, featuring La Havi, designed by Alex Gifreu for Auguste Orts, 2023

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Translation/Exile, as performed by Giannis Patiniotis and Lou Foster during Phenomenon 2, Anafi, Greece, 2017. Photo: Alexandra Masmanidi; courtesy the artist and Phenomenon

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Artificial Respiration (2016), as performed by Geoffrey Carey and Ana Serna in the exhibition *Segunda Vez* at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2018

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The Tunnel People (2000), with performers as appearing in the description in “Chronology,” page 70

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Inserts in Real Time (2000 to present), screenshot of the website doragarcia.org/inserts/index.html

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Proxy; 1 and 4, at ARCO Madrid, booth of Juana de Aizpuru gallery, 2001; 2, at Galerie Jan Mot, Brussels, 2001; 3, in *1101001000infinito* at Sala Montcada, Fundació La Caixa, 2001; with the performers Barbara Manzetti (Juana de Aizpuru) and Berta Tarragó (Montcada)

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The Glass Wall, as performed by Kassys (kassys.nl) and presented in Stromereien Open Performance Days, Zurich, Switzerland, in 2001

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The Notebook (2001), at ARCO Madrid, booth of Juana de Aizpuru gallery, 2003. Photos and courtesy: Juana de Aizpuru gallery

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Forever, the book, photographed by Francesc Daniel and Dora García, and wall text as seen in FRAC Lorraine, Metz, France, 2004. All images courtesy the artist, ProjecteSD, and FRAC Lorraine

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All the Stories (2001), book, published by Book Works and Eastside Projects, 2011

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All the Stories (2001), as performance in *The Narrative Show* at Eastside Projects, Birmingham, UK, 2011. Photo: Stuart Whipps; courtesy the artist and Eastside Projects

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The Crowd, as performance at Marres, Maastricht, Netherlands, 2001 (in collaboration with David Hernandez)

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The Crowd, as performance at House of Games, Festival a/d Werf, Utrecht, Netherlands, 2001 (in collaboration with David Hernandez)

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The Messenger (2002), as performed by nick von kleist in the exhibition *I know of a labyrinth which is a single straight line* at Mattatoio, Rome, 2021–22. Photo: Edoardo Brunetti; courtesy the artist and Mattatoio

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The Messenger (2002), as performed by nick von kleist in the exhibition *Segunda Vez* at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2018. Photo 1: Dora García. Photo 2: Rocío Gutiérrez. Photo 3: Dora García; courtesy the artist and MNCARS

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The Messenger (2002), as performed by Sebastiano Sing for European Kunsthalle, Vienna, 2021, doragarcia.org/inserts/themessenger/vienna. Photo: Sebastiano Sing

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The Possible (2003), installation in the exhibition *Vibraciones* at MUSAC, León, Spain, 2005. Photo and courtesy: MUSAC

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Coma, as presented in *1101001000infinito* at Sala Montcada, Fundació “la Caixa”, 2001

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Top image: *Coma* (2001), as presented in the exhibition *Two Planets Have Been Colliding for Thousands of Years. (The Thinker as Poet)* at La Verrière, Brussels, 2017. Photo: Isabelle Arthuis; courtesy the La Verrière and the artist. Bottom images: *Coma* (2001), photographed in the collection of FRAC Lorraine and courtesy 49 Nord 6 Est, FRAC Lorraine, Metz, France

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The Kingdom, MACBA, Barcelona, Spain, 2003. Photo: Dora García; courtesy the artist and MACBA

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The Black Veil (2000), as performed by Thomas Birzan in the exhibition *She Has Many Names* at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023

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The Black Veil (2000), as presented in the exhibition *In the beginning was the deed!* at Galeria Arsenal, Białystok, Poland, 2021. Photos: Maciej Zaniewski; courtesy the artist and Galeria Arsenal

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The Human Factor (2004), screenshot of the website

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The Sphinx (2004), as presented in *These books were alive, they spoke to me!* at The Tetley, Leeds, UK. Photo: Jules Lister; courtesy the artist and The Tetley

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The Sphinx (2004), as performed by Ilaria Genovesio and interrogating Antonella Broglia, in the exhibition *Segunda Vez* at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2018

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Heartbeaters, photo collages by Dora García in the exhibition *Vibraciones* at MUSAC, León, Spain, 2005. Courtesy the artist and MUSAC

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Quarry Jeans, as performed in the exhibition *Vibraciones* at MUSAC, León, 2005. Photo and courtesy the artist and MUSAC

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The Prophets (2005), photo of the book *The Prophets* in *Where Do Characters Go When the Story Is Over?* at CGAC, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 2009. Photo: Francesc Daniel; courtesy the artist and ProjecteSD

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Images 1 and 3: *The Prophets* (2005), as performed by Peter Connelly and David McCusker in *Actions and Interruptions*, Tate Modern, London, 2008. Photo: Sheila Burnett; courtesy the artist and Tate Modern. Images 2 and 4: *The Prophets* (2005), as performed by Alice MacKenzie and Pär Andersson in the exhibition *I always tell the truth* at Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm, 2018. Photo: Jean-Baptiste Beranger; courtesy the artist and Bonniers Konsthall

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Instant Narrative (2006), as presented in the exhibition *Power to the People: Contemporary Conceptualism and the Object in Art* at ACCA, Melbourne, Australia, 2011. Installation photographs courtesy the artist and ACCA, photographer unknown

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Instant Narrative (2006), as performed by Anna-Sophie Springer in the exhibition *Double Agent* at the ICA, London, 2008. Photo: Lyndon Douglas; courtesy the artist ICA, London

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CCL, Cellule Cité Lénine, book and installation, as presented at Les Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers, Aubervilliers, France, 2006. Photograph of the book by Francesc Daniel. Installation photographs courtesy Les Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers, photographer unknown

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Real and Fake (Drunk), as performed by Peter Connelly and Daan Goor, dedonderdagen #11, festival, De Singel, Antwerp, Belgium, 2006. Photo: Rudy Wilderjans; courtesy the artist and De Singel

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The Game of Questions (2007), flyers

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The Beggar’s Opera, as performed in 2007 by Jan Mech, Samir Kandil, and Peter Aers. Flyer designed by Alex Gifreu. Photos: Roman Mensing, Juergen Prasse, Charles Filch and Dora García; courtesy the artist and Münster Sculpture Projects

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Rezos/Prayers for The Jerusalem Syndrome at Al-Ma’mal foundation, Jerusalem, Israel, 2009. Courtesy the artist and Al-Ma’mal foundation

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Just Because Everything Is Different It Does Not Mean that Anything Has Changed: Lenny Bruce in Sydney, as performed by Harli Ammouchi, for 16th Sydney Biennial at Sydney Opera House, Sydney, Australia, 2008. Film stills from *Just Because Everything Is Different It Does Not Mean that Anything Has Changed: Lenny Bruce in Sydney*, 2008, 61’; courtesy the artist and CA2M, Madrid

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What a Fucking Wonderful Audience, as performed by Heidi Lupprian and Kate Blackmore. Performance for the 16th Sydney Biennial at the Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney, Sydney, Australia, 2008. Photo: Clare Willcox; courtesy the artist and Ellen de Bruijne Projects, Amsterdam

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The Romeos (2008), as performed in the exhibition *She Has Many Names* at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023. Photo: Nathan Ishar; courtesy the artist and M HKA

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William Holden in Frankfurt, as performed by Jan Mech for the exhibition *Playing the City* at Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 2009

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Where Do Characters Go When the Story Is Over?, as performed by Jan Mech (William Holden) and Geoffrey Carey for *The Clifford Irving Show* at Ciné 13, Paris, 2009

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The Artist Without Works (2009), as performed by Markus Schoettl and Nora Jacobs, for *Unrest of Form: Imaging the Political Subject* at Secession, Association of Visual Artists in Vienna, 2013. Photo: Oliver Ottenschlager; courtesy the artist, Vienna Secession, and Oliver Ottenschlager

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Rehearsal/Retrospective (2009), as performed by Michelangelo Miccolis, Geoffrey Carey, nick von kleist, and Paulina Lara for the exhibition *Segunda Vez* at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2018

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Insulting the Audience, as performed by Alain Blazquez for the Lyon Biennial, Lyon, France, 2009. Photos: Lyon Biennial; courtesy the artist and Lyon Biennial

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Steal this Book, the book, published by Castillo/Corrales in 2009. Photo: Francesc Daniel; courtesy ProjecteSD

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Steal this Book, as presented in *Where Do Characters Go When the Story Is Over?* at CGAC, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 2009. Photo: Francesc Daniel; courtesy the artist and CGAC

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Real Artists Don’t Have Teeth (2010), performed by Michelangelo Miccolis, nick von kleist, Lincoln Diniz, Geoffrey Carey, for the exhibition *Segunda Vez* at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2018

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Best Regards from Charles Filch, performed by Peter Aers for *The Inadequate*, exhibition at the Spanish Pavilion, 54th Venice Biennial, Venice, Italy, 2011

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Locating Story (2012), screenshot of Twitter account

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Die Klau Mich Show, as presented in Documenta 13, Kassel, Germany 2012

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News from Outside, as presented in the Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool, UK, 2012

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The Sinthome Score (2013), as performed by Adriano Wilfert Jensen and Simon Asencio for the 56th Venice Biennial, Venice, Italy, 2015. Photo: Giovanni Pancino

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The Sinthome Score (2013), as performed at Ellen de Bruijne Projects, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2014. Photo: Ellen de Bruijne; courtesy the artist and Ellen de Bruijne

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The Hearing Voices Café (2014–present), as set up for Colomboscope Festival, Sri Lanka, 2022. Photo: Lojithan Ram; courtesy the artist and Colomboscope Sri Lanka

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Imposed Words/Palabras impuestas (2015), as presented in the exhibition *Two Planets Have Been Colliding for Thousands of Years. (The Thinker as Poet)* at La Verrière, Brussels, 2017. Photos: Isabelle Arthuis; courtesy the artist and La Verrière

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Artificial Respiration (2016), as performed in the exhibition *Segunda Vez* at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2018

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Artificial Respiration, as performed in the exhibition *Respiración Artificial: Performance. Eco Oscuro* at IVAM, Valencia, Spain, 2016. Photo: Elisa Bermejo; Courtesy of the artist and IVAM

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Performance, as presented in the exhibition *Respiración Artificial: Performance. Eco Oscuro* at IVAM, Valencia, Spain, 2016. Photo: Elisa Bermejo; Courtesy of the artist and IVAM

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Performance (2016), as performed in the exhibition *Chalk Circles* at REDCAT, Los Angeles, USA, 2017, Photo: Brica Wiltox; Courtesy the artist and REDCAT

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O interrogatório de uma mulher (The Interrogation of a Woman), as performed by Carlota Joaquina, Juliana Perdigão, and Rodrigo Andreolli in Teatro Oficina, São Paulo, Brazil, during the São Paulo-based festival Performando oposições at Casa do Povo

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Two Planets Have Been Colliding for Thousands of Years (2017), as performed by Andrea Zavala Folache and Maria Elena Fantoni in the exhibition *She Has Many Names* at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023. Photo: by Nathan Ishar; courtesy the artist and M HKA

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Translation/Exile, scans of the notebooks written into by the performers, Giannis Patiniotis and Lou Foster, when it took place during *Phenomenon 2*, Anafi, Greece, 2017. Bottom right: *Translation/Exile*, the book, published by Phenomenon Association in 2018. Photo: Francesc Daniel

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Translation/Exile, as performed by Giannis Patiniotis and Lou Foster during *Phenomenon 2*, Anafi, Greece, 2017. Photo: Alexandra Masmanidi; courtesy the artist and Phenomenon

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The Drawing on the Floor: A Monologue, as performed by Geoffrey Carey in ProjecteSD, Barcelona, Spain, 2018, Photo: Roberto Ruiz; courtesy the artist and ProjecteSD

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The Labyrinth of Female Freedom (2020), as performed by Stine Sampers in the exhibition *She Has Many Names* at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023. Photos: Nathan Ishar; courtesy the artist and M HKA

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Little object <a> (2022), as performed by Adriano Wilfert Jensen in the exhibition *She Has Many Names* at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023. Photo: Nathan Ishar; courtesy the artist and M HKA

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Révolution, (2022), as performed by Adriano Wilfert Jensen in the exhibition *She Has Many Names* at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023. Photos: Nathan Ishar; courtesy the artist and M HKA

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I libri sono corpi (possono essere smembrati)/Books Are Bodies (They Can Be Dismembered), at Salone Monumentale, Biblioteca Casanatense, Rome, 2022. Commissioned and curated by LOCALES for the Hidden Histories 2022 festival – *Trovare le parole/Finding the Words*. Performed by Brianda Carreras and Maria Elena Fantoni. Photo: Davide Palmieri; courtesy the artist and LOCALES

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Performance, as taking place in the exhibition *Respiración Artificial: Performance. Eco Oscuro* at IVAM, Valencia, Spain, 2016. Photo: Elisa Bermejo; courtesy the artist and IVAM

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Steal this Book, as presented in the exhibition *Permit yourself to drift from what you are reading at this very moment into another situation... Imagine a situation that, in all likelihood, you’ve never been in* at Arts Santa Mònica, Barcelona, Spain, 2016. Photo: Roberto Ruiz

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Two Planets Have Been Colliding for Thousands of Years (2017), as performed by Mate Jonjic and Leen Van Dommelen in the exhibition *She Has Many Names* at M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium, 2023. Photo: by Nathan Ishar; courtesy the artist and M HKA

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Genealogías (2018), pencil on paper, 20 x 26 cm

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She Has Many Names

M HKA
10 February to 21 May 2023

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Dora García would like to thank:
Auguste Orts
Peio Aguirre
Moritz Küng

Special thanks to:
Galería Juana de Aizpuru, Madrid
Diana Ghivnici
Galerie Michel Rein, Paris and Brussels
Samuel Mestre
Jan Van Iwaarden and **Aukje Westra**
Auguste Orts, Brussels
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M HKA would like to thank the artist
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This publication was co-published with
M HKA – Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp
 to accompany the exhibition

Dora García
She Has Many Names

M HKA
 10 February to 21 May 2023

Curator

Joanna Zielińska

M HKA

Leuvenstraat 32
 BE-2000 Antwerp
muhka.be

This publication's production was aided by



KUNSTHØGSKOLEN I OSLO
 OSLO NATIONAL ACADEMY OF THE ARTS

OCA Office for
 Contemporary
 Art Norway

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 ACCIÓN CULTURAL
 ESPAÑOLA

An earlier version of the essay “She Has Many Names” by Dora García was published in the book Dora García, ed., *If I Could Wish for Something*. Aalst: Netwerk Aalst; Oslo: Fotogalleriet Oslo, 2021. 26–55.

Dora García would like to thank: **José Luis Brea**, **Moritz Küng**, **Auguste Orts**, **Michelangelo Miccolis**, and all the performers who dedicated their time and talent to carry out the performances chronologically listed in this book.

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This book is distributed by IDEA Books, Amsterdam (ideabooks.nl) and available directly via muhka.be and k-verlag.org

Printed in the European Union

© 2023, Dora García, M HKA, and K. Verlag

Published and distributed by

K.

K. Verlag
 Herzbergstr. 40–43
 D-10365 Berlin
info@k-verlag.org

ISBN

978-3-947858-53-8

