

Nobody. Unclenching the fist.

by

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Abstract

Nobody. Unclenching the fist. is an assemblage of different media (photography and drawing) and materials (wood and soil). In this Frankenstein-esque architectural intervention, readings collide with materials, and actual geopolitical events collide with images of spectacularization.

Keywords: architectural intervention; installation; assemblage; photography; drawing; feminism; gendered violence

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Defence Statement

Nobody. Unclenching the fist.

Although every generation faces problems unknown to previous ones, artists are artists because they spend their lives in conversation with ... what they know they don't know in both terror and wonder. —Joan Retallack

ABSTRACT

My interdisciplinary research during the two years of the program comprises the following meandering trajectory through modes of gendered violence and bodily fragmentation. The figure I first worked with was the Coyolxauhqui. This dismembered Aztec figure, which represents a myth turned sculpture (and architecture) has guided me through a series of drawings¹. I then turned to stage magic tricks commonly known as “sawing a woman in half”, especially focusing on how the performed gesture enacts violence by alternating bodily presence and absence. I finally came to contemporary examples of brutal violence inflicted on female, transgender and gender non-conforming bodies particularly in Mexico² and Latin America. Rita Laura Segato has referred to these forms of terror as “pedagogy

¹ Here you can see five of the drawings of this series of seven, called *Untitled (in process)*, started in 2016 and not yet finished: http://majmajmaj.info/english/untitled-in-process_ing.html

² Here you can see the map of femicides in Mexico (MFM), an independent, civic, and open data initiative that locates with coordinates and causal factors the femicides since 2016. To date 2,355 cases have been reported through it: https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=174IjBzP-fl_6wpRHg5pkGSj2egE&ll=20.691275551116515%2C-107.4819231875&z=5

of cruelty.” Silvia Federici commented, not long ago, that the increase in violence against women, especially women of color, was due to globalization, which is “a process of political recolonization” that aims to control natural resources and all human labour, and it “cannot be achieved without attacking women, who are directly responsible for the reproduction of their communities.” In each of these examples—the figure, the performance, and then the act itself—I came to see how it is through the dismemberment and disappearance of gendered bodies, that systems of colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and racial capitalism (Byrd, Goldstein, Melamed and Reddy 2) reproduce themselves in all their murderous splendour.

Not a monument.

I’d rather like to think of the fake wall and/or billboard-on-wheels in my work titled *Nobody. Unclenching the fist.* as an assemblage of contrasting perspectives on this pressing issue. In this Frankenstein-esque architectural intervention, readings collide with materials, and actual geopolitical events collide with images of spectacularization. The more-than of this assembled mixed media work intends to actively exhibit a continuous movement of rescaling and reframing of “phenomena that cannot be expressed or contained by the term *the woman problem*” (Segato 616) in the context of ongoing structural violence and its material consequences for gendered bodies.

DESCRIPTION

Even though its presence is slim, and its most visible part is the large photograph of my neck—printed on textured vinyl—*Nobody. Unclenching the fist.* is not only an image. It has spatial depth and needs to be walked around to get inside the gallery.

Because of its location right at the gallery's entrance, its angled position within the space, and its apparent mobility, I labeled it as architectural intervention. It is a shy one, since it does not alter any given procedure of the space. It is not at all a monument despite its monumental dimensions, but rather alludes to landscape, and considers topography by dissecting and mixing geometrical and narrative elements. Assemblage seems to be a more appropriate term than sculpture or installation.

What the audience sees first could easily be considered the back of the piece, which resembles a scaffold or gantry. Its measurements echo proportions of the actual architectural space, but introduce variation. In between the wall's two outer frames—panels with photograph, and open structure—the false wall houses a long window box filled with soil. The cut-outs in the photograph show a line of soil, either a horizon or a fissure, and a drawing. This drawing is the second of the series called *Untitled (in process)*. It relates to my current place of residence, Vancouver, and shows the left arm of the Coyolxauhqui. Both the line of soil and the drawing function as graphic elements while simultaneously permitting depth to show itself. These grafts—soil and drawing—allow for an unexpected and unsettled relation between place and space, and the body. What has been assembled is not the same for every one. What has been assembled does not only take place here, does not happen for the first time, and yet it transforms my relation to this space and to this place (this page, the gallery, the school, the city, this country). What I have assembled connects this space to this place, this place to other places, my body to other bodies, these other bodies and my body to this space.

Scattered remains are put together.

INTRODUCTION

If I could, I would ask you to join me and become attuned to a specific frequency. We could take the metro in Mexico City from Chilpancingo to Chapultepec station, hit the Zócalo, and then see the Coyolxauhqui stone at the Templo Mayor, and finally visit Melquiades Herrera's retrospective at the MUAC and learn about *No-Objetualismo* (Non-Objectualism) and humour in Mexican art. We could talk about the impact of these impressions: the social and cultural context, the political climate, the state of alert one assumes, and the artistic practices that such a saturated environment brings about.

And I do not mean to exoticize.

But it is with all these experiences that I am still conversing. Even though I am here in Vancouver now, I am still in dialogue with all that happened and happens in Mexico City and in Mexico in general. So I actually need you to open up to a different set of references.

And I do not mean to be capricious.

I am trying to understand rapidly how difference is different here. I am trying to distinguish between the act of identifying and the act of witnessing. I should also specify that in my thinking in visual form, I am trying to echo my thinking in written form (more often in the texts that accompany my works); its fragmentary nature and its abrupt shifts—from quotes to anecdotes to analysis. It is through my thinking in visual form that I want to set up an image that isn't just an image, but an assemblage of different media, which cannot be seen and discerned from one single spot all at once, and instead reveals its content(s) partially and gradually. Meaning should therefore come from the act of engaging with its different parts.

PROCESS AND CONTEXT

The organizing motif of the explorations I have been doing in these two years is the fragmented female body, however, when I say female, I have the following in mind:

If femininity is a sex which is not one in multiple senses, and if what queers femininity, as I am often told, is anything and everything that does not equate it with the reproductive, white, respectable, heterosexual approximation to womanhood that nobody embodies, and if femininity is nothing but an idealized form that bodies of flesh and knowledge migrate towards and from, then critical femininity studies is a queer and open-ended science that concerns femininity as a genre (Berlant 2008) in all its variations, representations, and materializations... (Dahl 61).

Working with the Coyolxauhqui—as a pattern to follow—taught me that I was neither invested in completeness nor in the reconfiguration of a supposed unity. Instead I found myself drawn to the possibility of connecting personal, social and cultural histories by exploring sequence, and narrative—delving into or neglecting the narrative. This path resulted in a series of seven drawings³ and a performative installation⁴. In both works the different parts of the fragmented Coyolxauhqui body are connected to the places in the world and the moments in recent history in which I have found my body. It is through my body—as site of empathy and difference—that I explore, experience and exchange

³ This is the above-mentioned series of drawings called *Untitled (in process)*, started in 2016 and not yet finished.

⁴ Here you can find an edited extract of the performative installation called *from the left hand to the right foot (traversing the navel)*: <http://www.majmajmaj.info/from-the-left-hand.html>

intensities and perspectives. How I act them out or work through them, on the one hand in image(s) and on the other hand in text(s), has always seemed too disparate or distant from one another. This consideration of the relationship between text and image also led to the understanding of my long-term intentions, the search for a praxis, in which research and artistic practice are kept interconnected. By that I do not simply mean that I want to keep doing both, but rather would I want them to behave the same way and fuel one another. I would even want them to be capable of doing what the other one has been doing for the most part, “it [is] not a matter of applying” one to the other, but “going straight from” one to the other as Gilles Deleuze puts it (48).

Let’s use the short fragmented and assembled text that is the title of this work—*Nobody. Unclenching the fist.*—as an example of a text that behaves like an image. It is composed of two parts that do not even make a complete sentence when together. It starts with a term that devalues a person by cancelling out the word body and ends with the descriptive image of a corporeal action, the release of tension in a fist. It is the encounter of two disparate motions that quickly transform their meaning by shifting contexts, in other words, there is an abstract subject, there are actual gendered bodies, a civil society coming together, a new relation and commitment to struggle under and against colonialism and racial capitalism. The encounter of all of them means something completely different here and there.

REFERENCES

One of my earliest findings within this process was *Los Teatros De Saturno* (Saturn’s Theatres) (2014) by Adrián Villar Rojas. This piece allowed me to think of my architectural intervention as an assemblage of materials (soil, wood, plastic, acrylic glass, etc.) and

things (photograph, framed drawing, wheels, lights, etc.) that is in dialogue with its space, and thus needs to figure out its exact limits and dimensions.

This work was done for the Galería Kurimanzutto in Mexico City by covering the entire space with soil—in the inner courtyard of the gallery we additionally find watermelons and pumpkins, inside the gallery small-scale colourful objects. The gourds are arranged somehow fortuitously. The objects form paths we should walk on. Every object is carefully assembled out of an organic and a manufactured part. These delicate objects need a stage, so the space was transformed for them. One could also think of his work as an intervention for the ground was raised and the acoustics of the space were changed.

It is as if we could see a certain type of landscape through a science-fiction lens. It is as if we could wander around and have a look at the very aesthetic leftovers of our present moment. Not actually an archaeological site of the future, but something else, maybe, an abandoned plot; a marvellous but also decaying one.



Los teatros de saturno. Art work by Adrián Villar Rojas, 2014. © Galería Kurimanzutto. [i]

The audience of María Teresa Hincapié's 12-hour-long performance *Una cosa es una cosa* (A thing is a thing) in 1990 in Bogotá, witnessed the emptying of dozens of cardboard boxes, and the silent and slow one-by-one placement of all the artist's belongings on the floor, forming a square spiral, a common motif in pre-Columbian imagery, that gradually covered almost the entire space.

Although the piece clearly shows the artist's theatrical roots, it also migrates proportionally towards drawing and installation. Noteworthy to me is the way the piece turns sequence into unspoken narrative through the simple action of placing dresses, screws, carrots, towels, brushes, buns, etc. They form a trajectory of attention, a map, and dwell on the floor as if we would have acquired an aerial view. That seemingly wide gaze is gradually and assertively being attuned to difference, the differences of the objects as well as the extreme socio-economic disparities found in the Colombian context of thirty years ago (when the performance was presented for the first time). In that same headspace I surprise myself pondering what the small shift in focus, from the autobiographical to the material, did to the artist's subject position, and if that shift opened up possibilities for the present audience?



Una cosa es una cosa. Performance documented in photographs (and video). Art work by María Teresa Hincapié de Zuluaga, 1990. Collection Museo Nacional de Colombia. Reg. 6063 © Museo Nacional de Colombia / Juan Camilo Segura. [ii]

I chose Gianfranco Baruchello's *Interiority Complex* (1966/1976) mainly because I can relate its unstable three-dimensional nature to *Nobody. Unclenching the fist*. Baruchello's piece resembles the anatomical model of a torso that can be opened. But this very classic motif is unexpected in its treatment. The interior that gets revealed is flat and "only" offers cartoonlike drawings. There is a spatial disappointment in Baruchello's piece that is immediately transformed by the encounter of a complex cartography of textual and visual signs. Moreover words are in different languages. This glossary is made up of a multitude of details and fragments—arrows and body fragments, prosthetic fingers, noses, and penises. Our challenged attention encounters grand narratives broken down into non-linear speculative and humorous thought. There is no doubt that the intimacy of this kind of work is demanding.

The bodily awareness and more so the pleasure of the movement between an overall view in which you miss details and a detailed view in which you miss the complete

picture is present in the large works of Baruchello, and it also happens in my architectural intervention, which starts by being a two-dimensional photograph of a neck (taken vertically and shown horizontally) and gradually and partially displays spatial perspectives.



INTERIORITY COMPLEX. Indian ink, watercolor, enamels on paper on wood, metal joints, knob. Art work by Gianfranco Baruchello, 1966/1976. © MASSIMO DE CARLO GALLERY. [iii]

Ana Mendieta's intimate and site-specific performance practice is relatively known, especially the *Siluetta series* (Silhouette series), however, what might not be as obvious in a world flooded by selfies and self-portraits, is the kind of intervention that comes with the apparently simple piece *Imagen de Yagul* (Image from Yagul) (1973). In this photograph Ana Mendieta's naked body is covered with tiny white flowers, and it lies in a soil pit. Although Ana Mendieta works with the entirety of the body, and I am looking at body fragments, I consider that my work can speak to the kind of intimacy that sustains her work.

In utter awareness of the struggles that were played out through the representation of the female body, she found a way to comprehend and present a (naked female) body that is neither essentialist nor abject. Her work discloses an understanding of the possibilities of assembling cross-cultural references. In an environment dominated by Minimalism, she managed to bring Antillean mythology, Santería rituals, and feminism of colour into the contemporary conversation.

The photographic documentation of this silent scene bears witness to the connection of the life cycle of the human body to the time of the world, by making presence and absence flutter. *Imagen de Yagul* is particularly compelling to me because of the relationship between verticality and horizontality. The vertical photograph shows the artist lying within the open rectangular space of a pre-Hispanic tomb, with her head at the top of the photograph and her feet at the bottom. The camera looks from above and the side, and thus the body appears to be floating. The soil surrounding the body creates a frame that bears the weight.

The soil in *Nobody. Unclenching the fist.* is placed within a container and can only be reached by the gaze. It is there as an ambiguous material presence that stands in for disappearance, dispossession and theft, at the same time, it can speak to possibility and reproduction. Similar to the Mexican proverb so often used in demonstrations: They wanted to bury us, but didn't know we were seeds. On another banner: What harvests a country that sows bodies?

The objects, materials, and representations in my site-specific architectural intervention piece together a fluttering account, each of the parts of the fragmented and imagistic narrative was entrusted and handed over to one of them as to be now spread in silence. The drawing, for example, functions as footnote that describes a place, Vancouver, and

the cedar brings—through its scent—the environment into the space, and with it colonial history as well as indigenous political resurgence.

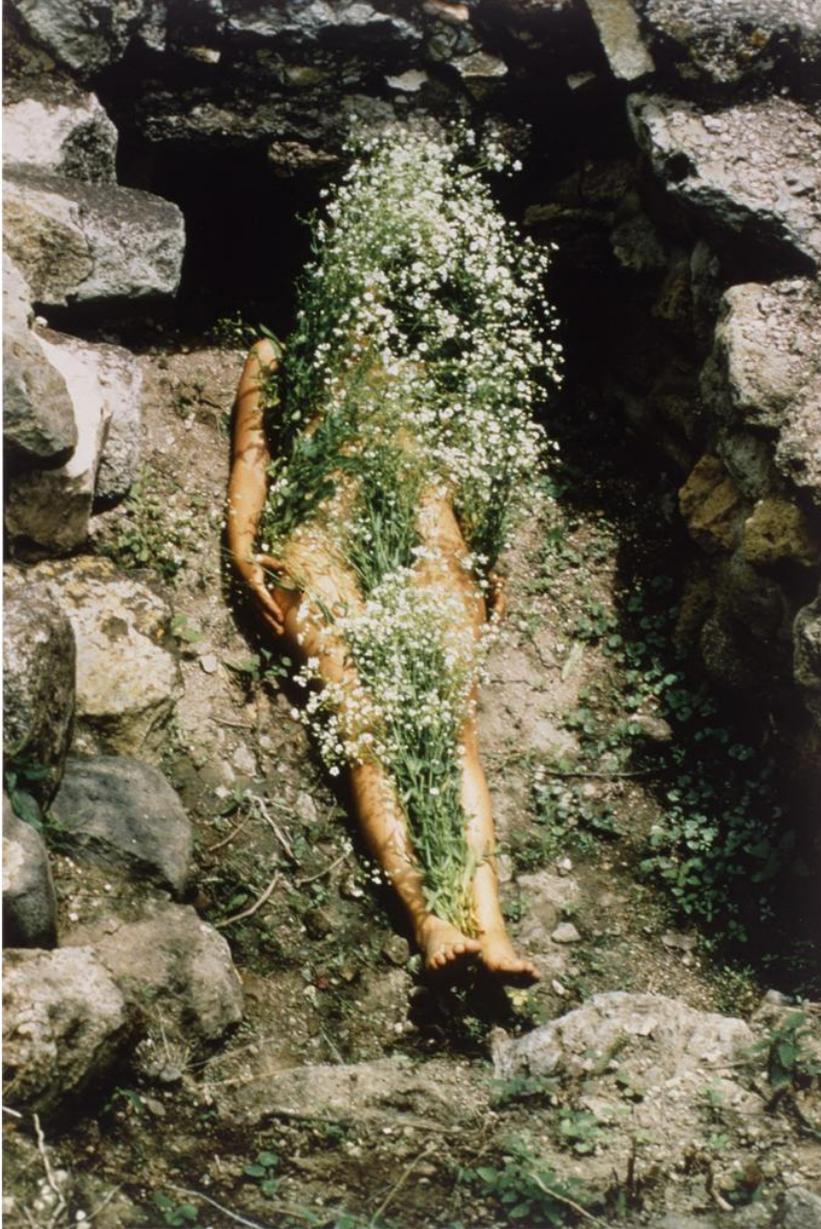
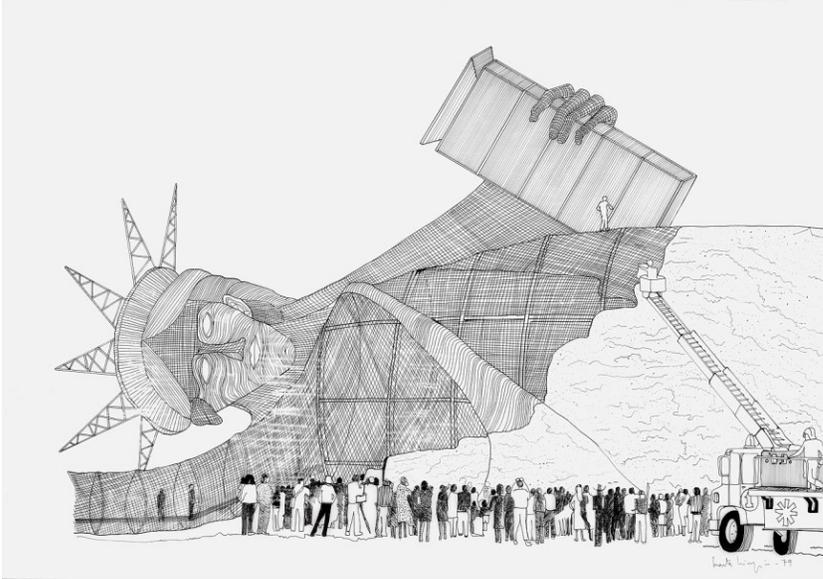


Imagen de Yagul. Colour photograph. Art work by Ana Mendieta, 1973. Source: Artstor. [iv]

Nobody. Unclenching the fist. is not at monument as it does not commemorate. I'd rather like to think of it as a hodgepodge of questions and glimpses, whispered and roared ones, tiny and blown up ones.

Marta Minujín is an Argentinian artist, pioneer of happenings and performance art. Her *Statue of Liberty lying down* (1979) was never actually carried out. The images I am looking at are drafts that were part of a conceptual proposal. After reading the title, you already have an idea of Marta Minujín's intended intervention, which can be understood as "part Dada action and part grand feminist gesture" (Butler 43). Had she been granted permission, she would have constructed a full-scale three-dimensional copy of the statue, made out of wire mesh. Her irreverent gesture places the statue on the ground, and completely covers it with hamburger patties, ready to be grilled and eaten by the attending public.

Rather than too quickly dismissing this humorous gesture as horseplay, I would like to have a second and closer look at the way the notion of monument is being twisted. The monument is torn down and made accessible. A public organization [the fire brigade] is required to perform the slightly unusual task of grilling. The symbolic idea of enlightenment and freedom that is related to the fire of the torch is demystified by connecting it ambiguously to the act of ingestion and consumption. This monument would have been a critique to US foreign policy—in this case especially regarding Latin American countries—but it would also have been a public event.



Statue of Liberty Covered in Hamburgers. Ink on paper vellum. Art work by Marta Minujín, 1979. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund, 2014. © Marta Minujín. [v]

The negotiation between figuration and abstraction is as crucial for *Nobody*. *Unclenching the fist*. as it is for Roni Horn's series called *Bird* (1998-2008). In my piece the negotiation is done through perspective, proximity, but mainly through size.

Bird consists of twenty paired photographs, in which the artist thoroughly portrayed taxidermal Icelandic wildfowls. Her compositions are simple and very precise. In each of them we see the colourful back of a bird's head and neck, in front of a white background. This formal constant recalls the classic framing of busts, as well as permitting us to notice how the motif oscillates between subject and (abstracted) object. The size of the prints seems to correspond more or less to the animal's natural size, and thus offers a mirror-like surface, in which we can explore the distance between ourselves, and the other on the portrait. To me Roni Horn very skilfully designs this active space for our perception to bounce off.

In a recent interview she said, “she had always preferred not to be anything.” This refusal of determination can be found in her treatment of the subject as landscape, and the object as subject. She introduces nature to establish relationality, and time to prove change. What the images evoke—ambiguity and difference—happens gradually, and in between one repetition or variation and the other. When talking about Italo Calvino’s idea of a hypernovel, Joan Retallack says, “it doesn’t say ‘things are complex’ but [it] is a complex system that embodies a method of knowing how to operate in [this] ‘impossible’ situation... [of taking] oneself beyond one self’s single-point perspective” (Retallack 37).

In front of *Nobody. Unclenching the fist.* the place chosen to stand and look determines which of the encounters of fragments the viewer able to see. Fragmentation happens on various levels: as the fragmentation (or framing) of the body, as the perforation of the image that leads to the possibility of traversing surfaces with the gaze, as overlapping transparency or opacity, and as the togetherness and grafting of media. Each medium is a shift in frequency and a separate question; however, they do not turn into a coherent inquiry. What evolves out of their coexistence in difference is a material topography of connections.



Bird. Photographs by Roni Horn. Text by Philip Larratt-Smith. Steidl/Hauser & Wirth, 2008. Hardcover with Cloth-wrapped Boards & Debossed Title. 36 pp., 20 color illustrations, 11x12". © Steidl/Hauser & Wirth. [vi]



Untitled#167. Chromogenic print. Photography. 60 x 90 inches. Work of art by Cindy Sherman, 1986. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Purchased with funds contributed by the International Director's Council and Executive Committee Members, 1997. [vii]

I relate *Nobody. Unclenching the fist.* with Cindy Sherman's *Untitled#167* (1986) through the necessity of a gradual and thoughtful removal of the subject. I tried to find the moment in the *Disasters* series when she absented herself from the image. Her photographs

started to show landscapes, scenes that could be taken from horror films; crime scenes or abject landscapes, in which we can encounter something that looks like a body part or fluid. *Untitled#167* does not allude, it depicts, what remains out of reach is the sequence of events that led to this violent debris. What we gradually recognize between the soil and the fake sticks and branches are a prosthetic nose, lips, and fingers with painted fingernails, teeth, blond hair, a ring, and a pocket mirror, in which a mask-like face is reflected. Although the print is large, its predominant element and material is dark, and its surface is glossy, challenging us to distinguish fragments and details.

For me the most interesting aspect of the composition is the dialogue between the two “faces”. The first one is the one hidden under the soil, the artist decided to maintain the nose above of the lips, and together, which gives us enough information as to complete a face. The second one is the one trapped in the mirror. They are both incomplete, so instead of having one subject that is placed at the centre, we find two fragmentary and prosthetic, scattered facades that orbit around that empty position.

CLOSURE

Borrowing from Sara Ahmed, I will call the method I used to organize and set up this statement: “feminist roundtable.” This additive and agglutinative method enables a polyphony of voices and perspectives as well as a decentering of the author.

So I would like to invite Joan Retallack to my “feminist table” (Ahmed 4). She coined the term ‘poethics’ in the late 1980s, and works on the sustenance of “a poethics of a complex realism” (Retallack 26). That is an investigative commitment to imagination and exploration, not an isolated apolitical activity, on the contrary, a process-based thinking that seeks to find new conceptions of “the relation between discipline[s] and extradisciplinary experience, new recognitions of the degree to which these projects are

complicated by their positions in multiply intersecting and overlapping socio-political and cultural constellations” (Retallack 27).

Fragmented, intimate and ambiguous are the material results of a practice of uprootedness and empathy that committed itself to quick and consistent changes in position, and to exposure. I permit the art work to be mobilized by events and places. And while I work—think, do and make decisions as artist—I keep the following notions close to the work: dis/placement and dis/memberment.

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[vi]https://www.photoeye.com/magazine/reviews/2009/11_09_Bird.cfm?

[vii]<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/4382>

Project Documentation



Figure 1. *Nobody. Unclenching the fist.*, 2018. Installation view.



Figure 2. *Nobody. Unclenching the fist.*, 2018. Installation view.

Critical inner experience(s) |

[...] You and I know how essential it is that you sit down and draw: glue, cut, illuminate at a table, in a spot with good light, in front of a window, even if broken, and outside, the traffic, and the negative energy of the people that shout at each other, and push one another, even if they are all alone.⁵

[IN THE GREAT GREEN ROOM]⁶

How does one jump from one continent, country, place, context, field, discipline, medium, material, language, author, or thought to the other without flattening the discourse of interdisciplinarity? How and when does the body appear into the context of such a jump? How can I, a German-born, Colombian-raised, Mexican-educated artist, speak to diverse textual and visual fragments without becoming the unifying subject? Do such assemblages allow for a becoming with critical thought?

Every voyage can be said to involve a re-siting of boundaries. The traveling self is here both the self that moves physically from one place to another, following 'public routes and beaten tracks' within a mapped movement; and, the self that embarks on an undetermined journeying practice, having constantly to negotiate between home and abroad, native culture and adopted culture, or more creatively speaking, between a here, a there, and an elsewhere. (Minh-ha 27)

⁵This is from an email written to me on August, 22 2017.

⁶Brown, Margaret. *Goodnight Moon*. New York, Harper, 1947. All the following titles that indicate the beginning of a new section are sentences taken from this text. They appear in their original order, and are marked with an asterisk. I chose this text structure to introduce an additional layer of text, one that is much more immediate and imagistic, and that encounters the analytical part of text through chance and by surprise, and thus challenges it.

I have been a foreigner for most of my life, therefore partial understanding, cultural translation and mediation—not consensus—are crucial to me.

[THERE WAS A TELEPHONE]*

This project is the search for a conception of practicing interdisciplinarity that goes beyond the institutionalized and increasingly commodified form of it.

Let's take this Interdisciplinary Studies program as an example. The webpage's description suggests that interdisciplinarity enables the school to accept different types of students. Three types are enlisted: the ones that want to be around artists of other disciplines—the purpose of this is not made explicit—the ones that fuse two or more practices, and the ones that want to develop a theoretical frame for their practice—why would an interdisciplinary environment be a good place to frame someone's disciplinary practice? Interdisciplinarity seems to be here—at its best, the blending of disciplines. From what I have seen, students are happy to have dancers dance in their performance art, musicians make music for their dances or visual artists make the scenographies for their performances without having to reach out to these communities. Nobody seems to have expected more than this kind of professional labour exchange.

Alliances have made it possible for me to navigate institutional waters from within, but I had hoped for an ethicopolitical approach. What I imagine to be an alternative form of practicing interdisciplinarity would permit the cultivation of a critical relationship between knowing and doing, as well as not knowing, using feminist, intersectional, and decolonizing methodologies for it. Denise Ferreira da Silva would call this kind of praxis radical. Such radical praxis would enable the rehearsal of a new kind of subjecthood, "a subject who is in a state of constant ethical reflection and practice in relation to her own constant ethical becoming," (Povinelli 456) and "willing to be on the outside." She would need to "[...] refuse to repair a familial rift on the bodies cast out as not kin. [...] Rend the fabric of kinship narrative. Imagine otherwise. Remake the world." (Sharpe, "Lose Your Kin") The subjecthood that emerges out of such an experience would be politicized—anti-racist, anti-colonial, feminist, queer, and trans* inclusive—and it would embrace partial knowledge, fragmentation and wonder.

The understanding of knowledge as partial and experience as critical would enable responsibility by consciously refusing totalizing frameworks and forms of enclosure and fixity. It would also require the commitment to not reproduce or perpetuate racial, colonial and gender violence. Blending and moving between disciplines of art and other forms of knowledge then allows for the transformation of the posed questions. By entering another field, perspectives shift, and observation takes place through a different lens.

[AND A RED BALLOON]*

Knowing at the limits of justice is at once a kind of knowing and doing; it is a praxis, one that unsettles what has become but offers no guidance for what has yet to become. Knowing the limits of justice, nonetheless, is an ethical-political praxis; it acknowledges all the effects and implications as well as the presuppositions informing our accounts of existing with/in one another. Knowing at the limits of justice, as an ethicopolitical praxis, requires ontoepistemological accounts that begin and end with relationality (affectability)—that do no more than to anticipate what is to be announced, perhaps, a horizon of radical exteriority, where knowing demands affection, intention, and attention. (Ferreira da Silva 44)

I have developed the concept of critical inner experience as a tool—in this essay and in the forthcoming graduate project—to explore and generate ethical and political becomings and contemporary meaning—and nonsense—making. I want my work to establish spaces where such an experience can happen. But what are the parameters or conditions of such an experience? An experience that is inner and critical? How would we know it happened if one of its characteristics is its refusal of clarity and evidence? What does it have to do with art? With education? With psychoanalysis? With other kinds of therapy? With reading and writing? With speaking and listening? Is there a limit to self-knowledge? Self-understanding? Is this limit something nameable, palpable, blameable? Is this limit the reason for Denise Ferreira da Silva’s call for “radical exteriority” (Ferreira da Silva 44)? Is it a much needed disposition towards the others? The world?

The desubjectification of the “inner” is certainly in a relation of dialogue and exchange—“sensuously feeding back into” (Taussig 7)—the “radically exterior” and porous, but I would clearly want to avoid to link them through any kind of enlightening curve. This process of undoing the difference(s) between the “inner” and the “exterior” is and will always be incomplete.

[AND A PICTURE OF THE COW JUMPING OVER THE MOON]*

During this past year I have worked on keeping my interdisciplinary artistic practice (drawing, video, installation, and performance) as close to my research and writing practice as possible. The figure I started working with is the Coyolxauhqui.

After more than five centuries of having been deposited in the place, where it was found, the Coyolxauhqui was seen for the first time on February 21, 1978 by a group of workers of Luz y Fuerza del Centro (LyFC)—the company that transmitted, distributed and commercialized electric power in the central area of Mexico, who gave notice of the find to the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH). (Matos Moctezuma 33)

This Aztec figure represents the myth turned sculpture (and architecture). The one with the bells on the cheeks lies decapitated and dismembered at the foot of the temple after her brother had thrown her down the stairs. I chose to engage with her fragmented body in the series of drawings that I am doing, inter alia, because Gloria Anzaldúa—queer Chicana poet, feminist writer and thinker, and author of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and the essay “La Prieta”—worked with her through the notion of the Coyolxauhqui imperative. As to be found in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, “drawing from the story of Coyolxauhqui, Anzaldúa developed this concept to describe a self-healing process [...]” It was her way to comprehend the intertwined nature of struggle and imagination in artistic processes while braiding her intercultural conjuration into it, “the path of the artist, the creative impulse, [...] is basically an attempt to heal the wounds. It’s a search for inner completeness.” (Anzaldúa 320)

What is this 'inner'? While I am not invested in completeness, which Anzaldúa considers the purpose of art, nor am I invested in the reconfiguration of a supposed unity, I welcome her notion as opportunity to be in dialogue with ourselves and the various sociopolitical contexts we inhabit.

Fragments interest me as the cryptic and ambiguous events they are. They seem true to experience precisely by reflecting partially and simultaneously. They evoke desire to know more, they require effort, and they enable association, alternation, alteration, and assemblage. "From [...] racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization, an "alien" consciousness is presently in the making—a new *mestiza* consciousness [...]. In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries." (Anzaldúa 77-78)

[AND THERE WERE THREE LITTLE BEARS SITTING ON CHAIRS]*

In the first chapter of his book called *The Nervous System* the Australian anthropologist Michael Taussig is connecting two or even more places on the map—Australia, the United States of America, and Colombia. He also might be blending academic writing and fieldwork, but he is definitely speaking of a politics of affect that changes the weighting of the set of relations that are at stake in anthropology. Transgressing them. He might be stepping away from the subject that was converted or turned into an object of study, but he is also introducing himself into the text as the nervous system of a thinking subject that reflects critically about his own practice, and shares those thoughts openly. "What needed to be brought out was the curious activity wherein mine became but the latest, contiguous, link in a chain of narratives sensuously feeding back into the reality thus (dis)enchained." (Taussig 7)

The work of the Brazil-born Swedish multimedia artist Öyvind Fahlström, his *World Map* (1972)⁷ is—what its name indicates—a world map. However, the first thing one might notice when looking at it is the amount of text. This painting happens in the intersection of comic and newspaper. The

⁷Fahlström, Öyvind. *World Map* (1972). Acrylic on vinyl and board, 91.5 x 183 cm. Godula Buchholz Collection, Munich, Germany. New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1982.

text and the images come together to depict and chronicle the social injustices of this world without ever permitting the development of a narrative. This is due to the composition. The borders of this map's countries are, as the American artist Mike Kelley says, "produced by pictorial necessity." (Kelley 158) They were defined by the amount of information that needed to be there. The reduced colour palette, and its symbolical use—each colour stands for an ideology—reinforce the encyclopedic labor, and by that I do not only mean the amount, also the rigour and the intention to achieve a clear set of political relations.

[AND TWO LITTLE KITTENS]*

Georges Bataille says that "a dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks." (Bataille 31) Thus he makes clear that words are tools (and instruments of power?), and there to be used. And something meanwhile quite obvious—that meaning and function are not to be mistaken. That means that Bataille points out and opens up the space he himself will use to destabilize some ideas. Therefor he shines light upon the fact that language is a set of relations. In its use intentions and purposes lie hidden—"for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape" (Bataille 31). He then takes a closer look at the word *formless*, at its duty. It designates, but it designates a bunch of things. Not only things that do not have form, but things that were left out or resisted inclusion into systems of rational thought. It makes a bunch of intangible things tangible, materializes them, so we can deal with them, name, organize them or put them to the side. Those things are brought into our system of hierarchy and dimensions. Our system of framing and reframing, measuring, demarcating, possessing, and labeling, including and excluding, separating and comparing. This logic can be toppled and undermined by changing the perspective and playing with distances and dimensions, by using a palette of notions that shape a world excluded from rationality, or only connected through a few entry points (Psychology and Sexuality?).

In this short chapter Bataille equals the formless, intangible things to a spider, and then later again to the universe. When first using the analogy he says spider or earthworm, and then later he says spider or spit, establishing a completely different symbolical environment and/or set for the scene. The first image emphasizes the lack of importance given to formless things so as to be mixed up, and thus indiscernible from all kinds of other topics. Eventually associated to the ground. The second image says that going so far as to say that the universe has no form would mean to reduce

it to the size, and importance of some expelled bodily fluid, ejected by a human body through its mouth. A sticky, indiscernible, disorganized mishmash.

[AND A PAIR OF MITTENS]*

The ancient's intercourse with the cosmos had been different: the ecstatic trance [Rausch]. For it is in this experience alone that we gain certain knowledge of what is nearest to us and what is remotest from us, and never of one without the other. This means, however, that man can be in ecstatic contact with the cosmos only communally. It is the dangerous error of modern men to regard this experience as unimportant and avoidable, and consign it to the individual as the poetic rapture of starry nights. (Benjamin 58)

Working against Enlightenment categories that seek to name, divide, order, and know definitely, I have been using fragments as incomplete pieces that can be assembled into a combined practice that refuses settlement and closure, and conveys multiple points of view at the same time by staging a polyphony of feminist voices.

This was the case in *From the left hand to the right foot (traversing the navel)*,⁸ a performative installation, in which a suspended and movable large canvas, covered with tiny holes through which the changing coloured light could go, permitted the audience's lying bodies to look up into a starry sky whilst listening to a text spoken live. This text had been assembled out of different textual fragments considering the expressive shifts between the spoken text and the light phenomena, and within the text, between memories and anecdotes, between descriptions and factual data, and repeatedly coming back to quotes by feminist thinkers. It is not only that through their thought I managed to come to understand, and thus wanted to share their lucidity, but that the points of view they express always already include a tangible awareness of their own positionality within the situations and contexts they are talking of. Two perspectives in one. Sensing that willful distance is part of a critical inner experience. In *From the left hand to the right foot (traversing the navel)* the

⁸Jensen, Maj Britt. *From the left hand to the right foot (traversing the navel)*. 2017, colour pencils and graphite on paper.

encounter of my double distancing—positioning, and continuous repositioning—and the double distancing of the multiple feminist voices, created a kind of kaleidoscope that echoed the diffraction of light produced by the light traversing the holes of the canvas. The aforementioned expressive shifts happened as well on this other level: between textual polyphony and visual kaleidoscope.

[AND A LITTLE TOY HOUSE]*

While the audience's lying bodies were re-scaled through a visual evocation, which shifted between landscape and outer space, they were simultaneously evacuated and forced into exteriority by a narrated learning process and its cadence, laid both bare. Is this constant audiovisual repositioning and removal akin to Denise Ferreira da Silva's "radical exteriority"? Why "horizon of radical exteriority" (Ferreira da Silva 44)?

Michael Taussig positions himself with regard to the notion of the individual subject—stepping away from it—assigning the nervous system, rather than the subject, the ownership and control over experience, interpretation, and analysis. The nervous system could then be that which traverses inner and outer by activating sensory processes that bring the outside in and extend the inside out. It could also be that it has the capacity to map onto other bodies—the social, the biological, the animal and abstract—that are made through these forms of tentacularity.

Many of my formal interests are to be found in Samuel Beckett's *Not I*. One of them, and this is very obvious—on stage visible is only a mouth, only a part of the body. It is also a monologue, but a monologue spoken in the speed of nervous thought. Urgent, fast, and in unfinished sentences. It is as if the mouth had permitted us to enter the space of the head. But, do those fragments—of thought and speech—manage to outline an identity? As for us to talk about performativity? Or do they precisely do the opposite? Do those fragments blueprint a state? State of affairs? State of emergency? An emotion? An altered perception? A distance to the self? At the very least, a change. Mouth takes the floor, and speaks, regardless of her usual silence.

Where does that space we mean when saying 'inner' actually start? *Not I* starts with the following words: "... out... into this world ... this world... tiny little thing [...]." (Beckett 403) So right from the beginning, with the first word, a play on dimensions, and with spaces—inner and outer spaces—is established. Having only a mouth being illuminated on a huge, dark stage, that mouth opens up, and becomes an entry, an entry into the space of thought, and by speaking—the word "out"—it turns into an exit too, an exit that expels.

[AND A YOUNG MOUSE]*

Michael Taussig's nervous system takes possession insofar as to be capable of staring at the author who feels completely overwhelmed, and speechless, when reading of the actual social and political history of the southwest of Colombia—where most of his researches take place. Staggering between believing it all or nothing. Faith and incredulity. Through his writing Taussig makes all the involved notions shake and vibrate until everything flutters, and we start doubting of our perception. The upheaval goes from hierarchy and control to the soul and the self. Taussig demonstrates that associations concerning body and mind are toxic. Not really reasonable, neither isolated nor separated. Taussig maps the human body, shows how the Nervous System crosses it lengthwise, how it connects, bundles, translates, and transmits between tangible, and intangible matter. It is "a centerfold." (Taussig 2)

When Taussig says that the nervous system is "always a jump ahead" (Taussig 2) he is opening up the space between the biological reception of an impulse and the understanding and/or interpretation of it—Hermeneutics/Reflexivity. But that fluid process was dichotomized, hierarchized, and dissected. Although those two moments happen both of them in/through the nervous system—a system overly sensitive to fear. Is it in that moment that the nervous system falls for itself? Is that space Taussig opens up "the Nervous System's side stepping?" The moment where the system translates without being aware of doing so? The moment where "[...] without warning, the referent bursts through into the representation itself?" (Taussig 3) The understanding of the representation and the thing being represented are in contact, adjacent, one and the same thing. Two moments of the same thing? But what does that mean? That the system is anxious, and wants certainty? That it buys its own subjectivity? Being mistaken as objectivity? Misjudging images for real things? The capitalist universe "flip-flops from spirit to thing and back again." (Taussig 5)

The nervous system could be the conceptualization of certain practices performed by the state. It could also be the conceptualization of a new way of practicing anthropology.

[AND A COMB AND A BRUSH AND A BOWL FULL OF MUSH]*

Let us consider that Marcel Duchamp was performing an artistic method that was undermining conventional appreciations regarding the binary scientific and artistic, rational and irrational—"If a straight horizontal thread one meter long falls from a height of one meter onto a horizontal plane twisting as *it pleases* [it] creates a new image of the unit of length." (Duchamp, *3 Standard Stoppages*) Repetition made difference appear for just a moment, before being fixed. Because he decided to convert the lines into patterns that allow the lines to be repeated afterwards. Nowadays this seems all too simple, even though precise and witty. Marcel Duchamp's exercise is critical, but the space where his unscientific method was performed seems too isolated from socio-political and historical realities.

Still an unscientific method. By which Christina Sharpe—associate professor of English at Tufts University and the author of *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* and *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*—nowadays means something much more challenging and relevant, namely, a conscious relationship to colonialism, not as past but as ongoing, "a method along the lines of a sitting with, a gathering, and a tracking of phenomena that disproportionately and devastatingly affect Black peoples any and everywhere we are." (Sharpe 13) The sitting with is a call out.

In Donna Haraway's recent book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* the notion of "response-ability" can be found. She says, what is needed is from us is that we "stay with the trouble," "not in the existentialist and bond-less, lonely, Man-making gap theorized by Heidegger and his followers." (11) "What kind of caring and response-ability could such a collaboration evoke? Who would render whom capable of what?" (22) Still an unscientific method?

[AND A QUIET OLD LADY WHO WAS WHISPERING "HUSH"]*

I am with her in the claim for responsibility towards others. But responsibility can also take the form of responsibility to the thinking (of responsibility itself), as it can be read about in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's article "Responsibility" when citing Jacques Derrida's words: "This is perhaps one way of being responsible to the thinking of responsibility, that whatever is formalizable remains in a sort of intermediary stage. The rest cannot be *purely* formalized. These steps must be formally taken *and* experienced as limits before the usual beginnings can be made. Full formalization itself must be seen not as impossible but as an experience of the impossible, or a figure for the impossible, which may be to say the 'same thing'." For him thought relies on the awareness of it being unfinished, in process, "experienced as limits," (Spivak 22) and impossible to achieve.

Later on, Spivak positions herself towards his definition adding: "My readings will insist that (the thinking of) responsibility is also (a thinking of) contamination." (Spivak 23)

What does contamination stand for? It might be related to the ways in which borders of disciplines expand, and thus overlap? It might be related to the fact that other voices stain our thoughts. It might also be speaking to the fact that by being in dialogue, contamination will happen.

This is a move against essentialism, and it makes me think of overlapping 'points of view'. Considering that, let us go back to the Coyolxauhqui for a moment, and pay attention to the way the monolith was placed in the Templo Mayor of the past, and how it is placed in the Templo Mayor Museum of today. Its placement is significant to its analysis. It completed the story by being where it was. It marked the place where the Coyolxauhqui's body laid—or would have laid—after her brother had pushed her down the stairs. The temple's monolith functioned as material reality to the story or myth. Nowadays in the Templo Mayor museum the monolith is placed in a similar manner. It lays on the ground and can be seen from above. The positioning ends up being an empty gesture that the audience might take as a merely practical decision. Would this kind of gesture not need a re-contextualization? Isn't this a meaty entry point to unfold the complex relationship between myth and matter in Aztec cosmogony as well as the possibility to craft our own perspective? Could the museum have made good use of this learning opportunity of sitting with?

[GOODNIGHT ROOM]*

The visual, textual, sonorous and performative topologies assembled with the intention of instigating a critical inner experience can cut across fields, disciplines and cultures, and travel through time and space. In Karen Barad's words: "[...] past, present, and future, not in a relation of linear unfolding, but threaded through one another in a nonlinear enfolding of spacetime mattering, a topology that defies any suggestion of a smooth continuous manifold." (Barad 244) The notion of time travel—a "beyond Spacetime" (Ferreira da Silva 91)—should act as second umbrella term to my research. To arrive in the present, where the research-based art practices, and feminist and intersectional texts —relevant to me— are to be found, I will start by revisiting those who "were attempting to think at the limit of the human. [...] using a double strategy of debasement and excess" (Rabaté 56): Bataille and Beckett.

Their writing practices had the "experience of impotence, dispossession and unknowing" (Rabaté 63) in common. The poet and multi-disciplinary scholar Joan Retallack still considers that as artists we need to engage in precisely those conversations that cross the line, "I believe we learn the most about what it can mean to be human from border-transgressive conversations." (Retallack 2)

[GOODNIGHT MOON]*

What if Women Ruled the World? is a film as well as a theatre project by the Israeli artist Yael Bartana—who works in film, installation and photography, and is author of the film trilogy *And Europe Will Be Stunned* presented in 2011 at the Polish pavilion of the Venice Biennale.

The starting point of this collaborative work—five other creative people beside the artist worked on its development; a performance director, a writer, a set designer, a lighting designer, and a sound designer—commissioned by the Manchester international festival, is a scene in Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove*. The piece is a set in which the scene of reference is flip-flopped, in this case, it is all women that are discussing urgent global topics—climate change, systemic violence, mass migration. Some of them are actors using a script, the rest invited experts from different fields, scientists, politicians, artists and thinkers. The invited guests change every night, the topic is given, the event is recorded, and the time is limited.

[GOODNIGHT COW JUMPING OVER THE MOON GOODNIGHT LIGHT AND THE RED BALLOON GOODNIGHT BEARS GOODNIGHT CHAIRS GOODNIGHT KITTENS AND GOODNIGHT MITTENS GOODNIGHT CLOCKS AND GOODNIGHT SOCKS GOODNIGHT LITTLE HOUSE AND GOODNIGHT AND GOODNIGHT MOUSE GOODNIGHT COMB AND GOODNIGHT BRUSH GOODNIGHT NOBODY GOODNIGHT MUSH AND GOODNIGHT TO THE OLD LADY WHISPERING “HUSH” GOOD NIGHT STARS GOODNIGHT AIR GOODNIGHT NOISES EVERYWHERE]*

These temporal stagings enable us to think of other timelines—the timelines of climate change, of racial, colonial, and gendered violence—, how they accumulate, and how they could have been different if we accounted for them in ways outside of a linear and categorical Enlightenment model. These temporal stagings push us to try and wrap our heads around an image of radical change, which here and now comes from the encounter, cross-pollination, and reciprocal contamination of afro-pessimism and indigenous thought. Afro-pessimism’s refusal of the value of the category of the human—constructed to exclude certain gendered and racialized others—, and Indigenous critique of settler colonialism’s ongoing exploitation and expropriation of land and resources.

If we believe Nelly Richard “the more-than of the arts and the never-completely of sexual difference and democracy, and the always-incomplete of the feminist demand” are together able to address and litigate. On a different scale, but not less complicated to achieve, “affection, attention, and intention” (Ferreira da Silva) are necessary for “responsible freedom” (Weheliye, Spillers).

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